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Tom Lovell, *Mormon Abridging Plates*, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

Mormon implores his son to rise above the difficulty by simply stating, “My son, be faithful in Christ.”

## *Dear Son: Lessons from Moroni Chapter 9*

EZRA GWILLIAM

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Mormon and Moroni “supply the epilogue to the Book of Mormon, the son drawing freely on his father’s notes and letters.”<sup>1</sup> These notes and letters include fervent testimony, explicit doctrinal teachings, and description of decadence and dissolution. Compared with chapters 8 and 10, Moroni 9 is rather foreboding. The careful doctrinal epistle in chapter 8 turns to a father explaining the horrors of war in chapter 9 as the plight of a family is matched against the predicaments of an era. President Ezra Taft Benson suggests that while reading scriptures we reflect on the purpose and the context of the writers by saying: “If they saw our day and chose those things which would be of greatest worth to us, is not that how we should study the Book of Mormon? We should constantly ask ourselves, ‘Why did the Lord inspire Mormon (or Moroni or Alma) to include that in his record? What lesson can I learn from that to help me live in this day and age?’”<sup>2</sup>

This paper aims to contextualize Moroni chapter 9 and develop applications that may help teachers in any setting sequentially teach Moroni 9 in a powerful way that leads to understanding and edification.<sup>3</sup> The context is readily established by using the footnotes and other teaching resources, and the given applications are not exhaustive, but rather important principles that lead students and teachers to understand and feel the importance of the doctrine. Ideally, putting the context and content succinctly in this paper will help teachers and students understand the powerful lessons held in Moroni 9.

### The Context of Mormon and Moroni's Scriptural Writing

Near AD 385, Mormon commences to “finish out [his] record” (Words of Mormon 1:9) under the “whisperings” and “workings” of the Spirit (see Words of Mormon 1:7) “according to the knowledge and understanding” (Words of Mormon 1:9) which God revealed to him. Near the completion of the abridgment, Mormon understands the prophecies of Christ, “knowing that many of them have been fulfilled” (Words of Mormon 1:4). Additionally, Mormon believes in other prophecies that “go beyond this day” and “must surely come to pass” (Words of Mormon 1:4). Mormon's capacity for prophecy and testimony, coupled with inspiration from God, direct his writing. Thus it was under these spiritual conditions that Mormon was led to choose to write about “these things” (Words of Mormon 1:5).

Moroni begins his scriptural writing in Mormon chapter 8 by introducing himself. When reporting the death of his father, he simply states, “I am alone. My father hath been slain in battle, and all my kinsfolk, and I have not friends” (Mormon 8:5). Moroni chooses to be lonely because the Lamanites put to death any person who will not deny Christ and Moroni asserts, “I . . . will not deny the Christ; wherefore, I wander” (Moroni 1:3). The next chapters include information concerning ordinances and church government (chapters 2–6), and chapter 7 is written from “a few of the words of my father Mormon which he spake . . . unto the people as he taught them in the synagogue” (Moroni 7:1), verses 2–48 being a direct quotation from Mormon's teaching. Moroni chapter 8 is similarly written, with Moroni clarifying that it is “an epistle” written to him soon after his “calling to the ministry” (Moroni 8:1) to teach against abominations that some members had been practicing by having infant children baptized.

Thus Moroni chapters 1–8 provide a compilation of introductory material and doctrinal treatises from Mormon and Moroni to certify, improve,

and teach order in the church. Moroni 9, however, begins intimately. It is not called an epistle but starts simply, “My beloved son, I write unto you” (Moroni 9:1). This communication is different. It isn't a doctrinal treatise and it lacks the didactic nature of specific priesthood protocols in earlier chapters. This personal letter from father to son is heart-wrenching as it talks about the horrors of war and heart-rending (see Joel 2:13) in its application.

It appears that Mormon died sometime around the age of seventy-four in AD 385<sup>4</sup> after being fatally injured in the last great Nephite-Lamanite battle. Before Mormon's death, he entrusts Moroni with the gold plates (Mormon 6:6) and delivers other writings to Moroni which now constitute Moroni 7–9, perhaps knowing “they will be choice unto my brethren” (Words of Mormon 1:6). Some scholars believe that the book of Moroni was written near AD 420–21.<sup>5</sup> If these estimates are accurate, Moroni kept the letters from his father for thirty-seven years before transcribing them in the gold plates.

### Cultural Context

The scene in which Mormon and Moroni are gripped is one complete revolution of wickedness (see Mormon 2:8, 18–19), a time filled with horror seemingly impossible to describe (see Mormon 4:11–12). Mormon reports on several occasions that he experiences staggering sorrow (Mormon 2:13, 15, 19, 27; 5:9, 11; 6:20), and at one point the sorrow is cut short as he dares “not to give a full account” of what he saw, fearing that others “might not have too great sorrow because of the wickedness of the people” (Mormon 5:9). The pervasive wickedness simply leaves Mormon “without hope” (Mormon 5:2). Under these circumstances, Mormon writes the now-canonized letter to his son.

Moroni chapter 9 is a grisly description of Moroni's time period. “My beloved son,” Mormon writes, then quickly reports that he is “yet alive” (Moroni 9:1). After the report (which must have comforted Moroni) the letter turns to an awful description of darkness and depravity. Mormon recites the death and destruction of warriors, the thirst for blood and revenge, and complete hatred between warring parties. He also reports the spiritual destruction coinciding with the moral decay: Satan stirring people up in anger, the removal of the Spirit of the Lord, and the absence of love for one another (see Moroni 9:2–5).

Mormon adds to the sickening tale of war, explaining that prisoners taken from the tower of Sherizzah are fed by the flesh of their executed fathers with

minimal amounts of water (see Mormon 9:7–8). Those who remain in abandoned Sherrizah were left with little or nothing for sustenance, forcing the widows and children to forage and wander for food and water, “and many old women do faint by the way and die” (Mormon 9:16). Mormon also concedes that the depravity of his people has left him incapable of enforcing commands and that the people are weak, perverted, brutal, merciless, without civilization, wicked, without principle, and past feeling—“yea, the tongue cannot tell” (Moroni 9:11–19) the awfulness of the situation.

Sadly the events of Sherizzah “doth not exceed” (Mormon 9:8) the actions of Nephite warriors in Moriantum. As a token of bravery, these inhumane soldiers captured many daughters of the opposition and “depriv[ed] them of that which is most dear and precious above all things, which is chastity and virtue” (Moroni 9:9). Inexplicably, as if that “token of bravery” were not enough, the daughters were brutally tortured “in a most cruel manner” (Moroni 9:10). Finally, the soldiers would then “devour their flesh like unto wild beasts” (Moroni 9:10). Thus Mormon reports, “My heart cries” (Moroni 9:15).

### Mormon and Moroni to the Reader

The scene produced by Mormon pushes the boundaries of imagination. It is here that Mormon and Moroni bridge millennia and use the cultural context to teach doctrines and principles of the gospel. Moroni states that future readers were shown to him by Jesus Christ in such detail that he simply explains, “I know your doing” (Mormon 8:35). Moroni knew what our day would look like (see Mormon 8:36), and much of the pervasive wickedness may have been similar to his own time period. Like us, Moroni grew up in an era with large population centers and buildings (see Mormon 1:7), a time when governments had enormous numbers of soldiers (see Mormon 1:11), a time when sorceries and magic were in the land (see Mormon 1:19), and a time when society seemed to be in one continual round of wickedness (Mormon 8:8). Though today’s reader of the Book of Mormon and Moroni lived millennia apart, cultural demise occurs regardless of the era, as Elder Neal A. Maxwell explains. He teaches, “Cultural decline is accelerated when single-interest segments of society become indifferent to general values once widely shared. This drift is facilitated by the indifferent or the indulgent as society is led carefully down to hell.”<sup>6</sup> Moroni not only saw our day but also lived in a time that was very similar in terms of wickedness. Mormon and

Moroni aptly understood the difficulty of living in trying times and therefore wrote to future readers who must endure the same. Within this cultural and spiritual context, at least three powerful principles and applications emerge from Mormon’s letter to his son.

### *Lesson 1: “My Son, Be Faithful in Christ” (Moroni 9:25).*

After reporting the horrific time in which Mormon and Moroni live, Mormon implores his son to rise above the difficulty by simply stating, “My son, be faithful in Christ” (Moroni 9:25). By describing the atrocities in Moroni chapter 9, youth and young adults (along with their teachers, leaders, and parents) should take heart and square their shoulders, knowing that being faithful is possible even (or especially) when societies and cultures are engrossed in sin. As Hugh Nibley taught, “The picture that these two [Mormon and Moroni] paint of their world, which in their minds has a significant resemblance to our own, is one of unrelieved gloom. The situation is unbelievably bad and, in view of the way things are going, quite without hope.”<sup>7</sup> In the latter days, though society and culture become “unbelievably bad” and “without hope,” Saints can still remain unbelievably good and possess strong hope for the future. The question is not how bad society will become, rather, the interrogatory Mormon wishes upon all readers is “How good can I be?” The battle-hardened Mormon writes of the deplorable nature of war, yet keeps the intensity of a father teaching in the conclusion of his letter: “My son, be faithful in Christ” (Moroni 9:25).

The difficulty in Mormon’s appeal is all the more stunning as the reader knows Moroni must be faithful while being all alone. In this isolation, Moroni never gives in or gives up. Like Moroni, President Thomas S. Monson was a soldier and has reflected on the wartime necessity of seemingly solitary righteousness. On a Sunday in boot camp an officer separated soldiers by religion to attend worship services. President Monson was left alone at the front, standing at attention after soldiers in the Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant religions were excused. President Monson reflected: “Monson, you are not a Catholic; you are not a Jew; you are not a Protestant. You are a Mormon, so you just stand here! I can assure you that I felt completely alone. Courageous and determined, yes—but alone.”<sup>8</sup> In essence, Mormon teaches his son years ago through writing, and President Monson teaches Latter-day Saints today, that “there will be times when you will face challenges which might jeopardize your testimony, or you may neglect it as you pursue other interests. I



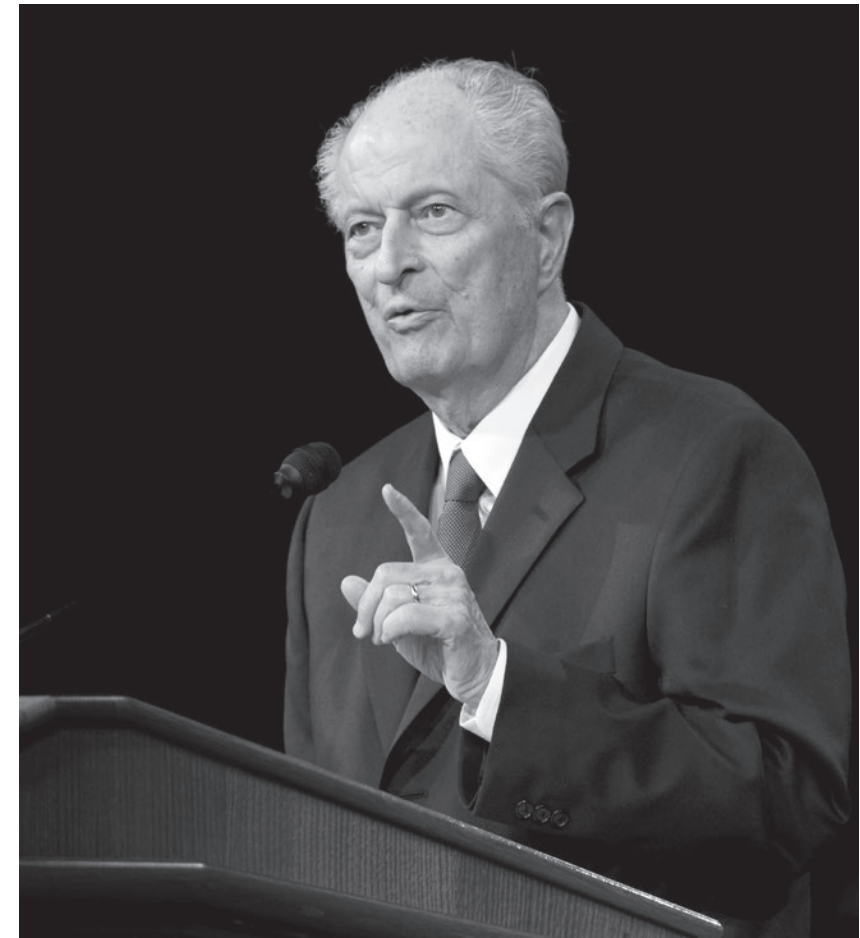
plead with you to keep it strong. It is your responsibility, and yours alone, to keep its flame burning brightly. Effort is required, but it is effort you will never, ever regret.”<sup>9</sup> A first lesson from Moroni 9 inspires the introspective question “Do we have the moral courage to stand firm for our beliefs, even if by so doing we must stand alone?”<sup>10</sup>

Elder Robert D. Hales taught, “In recent decades the Church has largely been spared the terrible misunderstandings and persecutions experienced by the early saints. It will not always be so.”<sup>11</sup> Latter-day Saints have endured and will endure trials that will test their capacity to be “faithful in Christ” (Moroni 9:25). These trials may not come in the form of war and such extreme violence as depicted by Mormon, but they will come, and the same tenacity with which Moroni remained faithful will be required to remain true. A faithful person has the ability to “Look unto [the Lord] in every thought; doubt not, fear not” (D&C 6:36), acknowledging that “The world is moving away from the Lord faster and farther than ever before. The adversary has been loosed upon the earth. We watch, hear, read, study, and share the words of the prophets to be forewarned and protected.”<sup>12</sup> The faithful are safeguarded by adherence to prophets’ words and council, not only under every circumstance in a difficult world but *in every circumstance*.

A sorrowful father who has rehearsed the nightmare of living in the midst of cultural demise, war, and spiritual decline clearly defines the lesson to his son—and by Moroni’s inclusion, to us: “My son, be faithful in Christ” (Moroni 9:25). That is the message. This piece of fatherly council written in a letter, then etched in gold, and ideally written “in the fleshy tables of the heart” (2 Corinthians 3:3) is needed as Saints traverse today’s culture. Thus Mormon’s methodical recitation of evil is turned into a motivational narrative always to remain “faithful in Christ” (Moroni 9:25).

### Lesson 2: “May Christ Lift Thee Up” (Moroni 9:25).

When Mormon reports that he is “without hope” (Mormon 5:2), it is not his “hope in Christ” (Jacob 2:19) that is waning. Thus Mormon writes, “May not the things which I have written grieve thee, to weigh thee down unto death” (Moroni 9:25). To think that Mormon’s writing could lead Moroni to such grief is astonishing. Like Moroni, individuals experiencing the last days may have similar profound grief; however, like Moroni’s time, placing grief in the Atonement of Jesus Christ provides the second lesson: “May Christ lift thee



Courtesy BYU Photo

“In recent decades the Church has largely been spared the terrible misunderstandings and persecutions experienced by the early saints. It will not always be so.”

up, . . . and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever” (Mormon 9:25).

Grief is a companion to mortality. The lesson in chapter 9 is that those who grieve can be lifted up by having hope in Christ and letting that hope take mental precedence over grief. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf explains, “Hope is not knowledge, but rather the abiding trust that the Lord will fulfill His promises to us. . . . It is believing and expecting that our prayers will be answered. It is manifest in confidence, optimism, enthusiasm, and patient

perseverance.”<sup>13</sup> It is this type of hope that fortifies Saints to live the gospel, be productive, and illuminate a despondent world by being “lifted up” (Moroni 9:25) by Christ.

This type of hope is necessary in varying circumstances that life imposes upon us.<sup>14</sup> This hope is indispensable for parents yearning for a wayward son or daughter to come home, or a mother who calls the hospital only to find her child is on a waiting list of several hundred, or a father who is trying to focus on the special rather than all the needs when caring for a special needs child.<sup>15</sup> To be lifted up is not to be rescued from burdens, but rather encouraged and motivated within them. The qualities of optimism, enthusiasm, and perseverance converging and centering in the Atonement of Christ allows individuals to find true and lasting hope.

President Monson teaches that having a hope in Christ and a testimony centered in him provides the guidance and supplies the courage to “be faithful in Christ” and to have “Christ lift thee up” (Mormon 9:25). After giving several examples of scriptural Saints who remained righteous in difficult circumstances, President Monson explains:

Perhaps each of these accounts is crowned by the example of Moroni, who had the courage to persevere to the end in righteousness.

All were fortified by the words of Moses: “Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid . . . for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee [Deuteronomy 31:6].” He did not fail them. He will not fail us. He did not forsake them. He will not forsake us.

It is this sweet assurance that can guide you and me—in our time, in our day, in our lives. Of course we will face fear, experience ridicule, and meet opposition. Let us have the courage to defy the consensus, the courage to stand for principle. Courage, not compromise, brings the smile of God’s approval. Courage becomes a living and an attractive virtue when it is regarded not only as a willingness to die manfully, but also as a determination to live decently. A moral coward is one who is afraid to do what he thinks is right because others will disapprove or laugh. Remember that all men have their fears, but those who face their fears with dignity have courage as well.<sup>16</sup>

Hope centered in Christ provided the necessary courage for Moroni to remain faithful. The same hope and courage must remain in individuals who experience grief in the latter days.

Lesson 2 teaches that despondency, dejection, depression, and a life void of hope will not produce the faith necessary to overcome. Living the gospel requires courage and effort in eras of wickedness; however, the wickedness cannot quench hope placed in the Savior. Mormon’s message rings true: may

the “hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever” (Moroni 9:25).

### *Lesson 3: “May the Grace of God Be, and Abide with You” (Moroni 9:26)*

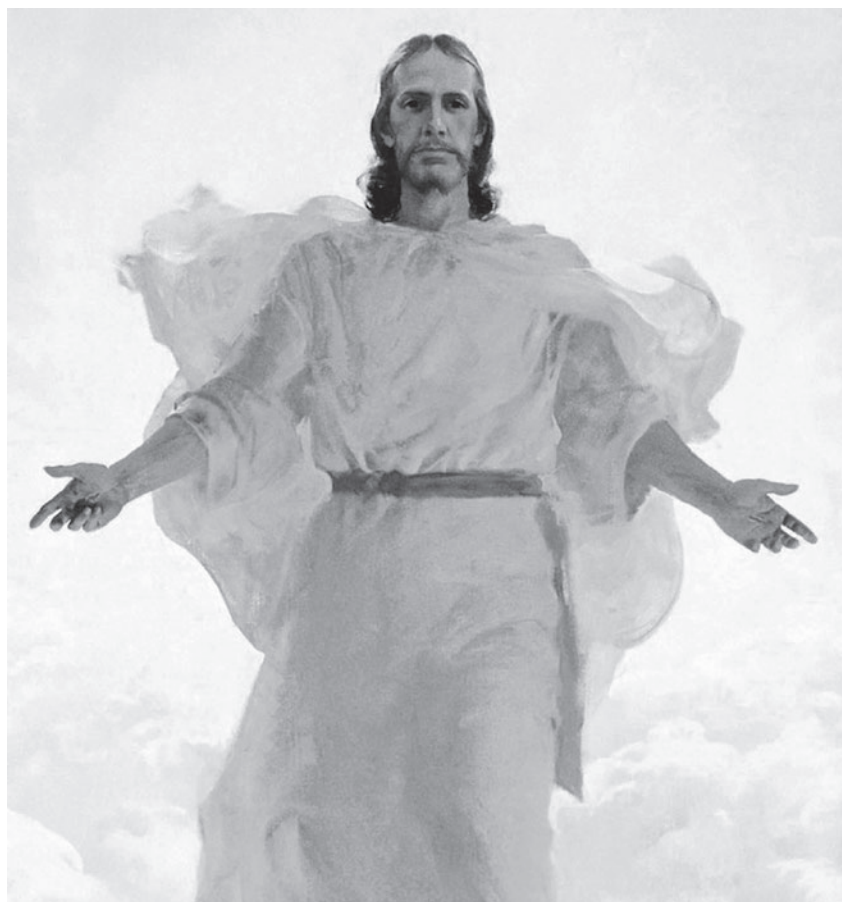
Lastly, Mormon desires that Moroni will have “the grace of God the Father” and for that grace to “be, and abide with you forever” (Moroni 9:26). The last recorded doctrinal gem from Mormon is grace, and it is grace that Moroni needs. The Bible Dictionary says it is through “the grace of the Lord that individuals, through faith in the Atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance of their sins, receive strength and assistance to do good works that they otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to their own means. This grace is an enabling power.”<sup>17</sup> Thus Mormon underscores the importance for Moroni to depend on the “enabling power” of Christ and his Atonement to do good works throughout his life. It is the grace of Christ that allows Moroni and Saints in any era to live righteously in degenerate and dissolute societies. Mormon is a father with implicit and unreserved faith in Christ’s capacity to help his son become what President Marion G. Romney called “a heroic example of one’s continuing unto the end under the most trying circumstances.”<sup>18</sup>

The doctrine of grace must have struck Moroni with great force, as it remains one of his last parting thoughts to every reader of the Book of Mormon. Moroni teaches:

Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his *grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.*

And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. (Moroni 10:32–33; emphasis added)

It is the same pattern of divine means and assistance that will sanctify and glorify individuals for eternal life with God. To Isaiah the Lord said, “And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you” (Isaiah 46:4). As the gloom of sinful society permeates cultures, Saints must rely on the Savior to carry, bear, and deliver burdens through his grace.



The Second Coming, Harry Anderson, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

Living the gospel requires courage and effort in eras of wickedness; however, the wickedness cannot quench hope placed in the Savior.

## Conclusion

Moroni chapter 9 stands as an unpleasant yet gentle reminder in “the most correct of any book.”<sup>19</sup> The gospel principles and applications discussed in this paper teach that the promise of testimony on page 529 (in the current edition of the Book of Mormon) is an exacting and beautiful reminder that these testimonies must match the faithful fortitude that page 528 demands. In the words of Jeffrey R. Holland, “The reminder is that we cannot sign on for a moment of such eternal significance and everlasting consequence

without knowing it will be a fight—a good fight and a winning fight, but a fight nevertheless.”<sup>20</sup>

These compelling ending chapters of the Book of Mormon portray a culture that is similar to our contemporary society in wicked decadence. Anciently, prophets and parents hoped and pleaded for faithful children, and it remains the same today. The grace of Christ comes to the faithful, extinguishing sorrow and providing hope to the sons and daughters of God who can and will be triumphant in their own personal quest for righteousness. In today’s difficult times, Mormon implores each person and especially his “beloved son” (Moroni 9:1) Moroni to “be faithful in Christ” and have the hope of Christ “lift thee up,” that the “grace of God be and abide with you forever” (Moroni 9:28–29). **RE**

## Notes

1. Hugh W. Nibley, *Since Cumorah: The Book of Mormon in the Modern World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), 436.
2. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, October 1986, 5.
3. See Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, *Gospel Teaching and Learning* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012), 6.
4. Sterling W. Sill, *The Upward Reach* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon Publishers, 1980), 252.
5. H. Donl Peterson, *Moroni: Ancient Prophet, Modern Messenger* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2008), 53.
6. Neal A. Maxwell, in Conference Report, April 1999, 28.
7. Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 496.
8. Thomas S. Monson, “Dare to Stand Alone,” *Ensign*, November 2011, 61.
9. Thomas S. Monson, “Believe, Obey, and Endure,” *Ensign*, May 2012, 128.
10. Monson, “Dare to Stand Alone,” 60.
11. Robert D. Hales, “General Conference: Strengthening Faith and Testimony,” *Ensign*, November 2013, 7.
12. Hales, “General Conference: Strengthening Faith and Testimony,” 7.”
13. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, in Conference Report, October 2008, 20.
14. Neal A. Maxwell, “According to the Desires of [Our] Hearts,” *Ensign*, November 1996, 21.
15. For a perspective on caring for a special needs child, see [www.oursilentprincess.com](http://www.oursilentprincess.com).
16. Thomas S. Monson, in Conference Report, April 2004, 58.
17. Bible Dictionary, “Grace,” 697; emphasis added.
18. Marion G. Romney, in Conference Report, April 1954, 133.
19. Joseph Smith, as quoted in Book of Mormon title page.
20. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Cast Not Away Therefore Your Confidence,” *Ensign*, March 2000, 8.