The Book of Mormon and Healing

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As counselors and therapists, we are dedicated to the process of healing our clients. That process not only includes our time directly spent with our clients, but also our effort in preparing to assist them. Consequently, we expend a great deal of time, energy, and means in research, study, and training so we are equipped with the skills, techniques, and concepts which will enhance our ability to influence and persuade those who seek our guidance. Not only do we often encounter resistance in our clients, but we experience inertness in ourselves. Many situations occur where we face impasses in facilitating change. These blockages occur professionally. They also occur personally—both within ourselves and between ourselves and our own family.

As a counseling practitioner, I seldom believe I have tapped the incredible power of the gospel in dealing with my clients. In searching the scriptures, I noted the Bible’s focus on physical healing. The blind were able to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk. All of these miracles of changing a situation of handicap into a situation of ability were brought on by the power of combined faith. With few exceptions, however, when the Book of Mormon focuses on healing, it draws our attention, not simply to the healing of the body, but to the healing of the mind and the soul also. We will explore several examples. In the 27th chapter of Mosiah, we learn of the miraculous change of Alma the Younger. He had once been a rebel against the Church. But upon seeing an angel, he “could not open his mouth and he became weak and he was carried helpless” to his father (Mosiah 27:19). As he later described the experience, he was changed through a type of intensive self-focus that magnified his ability to perceive his weaknesses. This self-scrutiny led him directly to the understanding that he could change for the good only if he
established a relationship with the Savior (Alma 36). This potent process enabled Alma to become one of the gospel’s chief advocates.

Ammon’s conversion experience was similar to Alma’s (Mosiah 27). In turn, King Lamoni was powerfully influenced by Ammon because of Ammon’s ability to relate to him. Specifically, upon hearing Ammon’s discourse about the plan of salvation, Lamoni was awe struck and “fell unto the earth, as if he were dead” (Alma 18:42). Ammon recognized the process and “knew that the dark veil of unbelief was being passed away from his mind” (Alma 19:6). Upon coming back to consciousness, Lamoni indicated that he had seen the Savior. His wife also went through a similar experience in a trance-like state. Though they were previously entrenched in the traditional iniquities of their people, the king and his wife became determined to focus on the positive aspects of the gospel—for “their hearts had been changed . . . They had no more desire to do evil” (Alma 19:33).

Aaron, Ammon’s brother, administered the gospel to Lamoni’s father—the king of all the land (Alma 22). After hearing Aaron’s sermon, the old king desired to “have this wicked spirit rooted out of [his] breast.” (Alma 22:15). Like his own son before him, when he supplicated the Lord in prayer, “he was struck as if he were dead.” (Alma 22:23). As a result of his consequent conversion, this corrupt king changed his negative administration to one having a positive gospel orientation.

Ammon and Aaron’s affect on individual but influential Lamanite leaders is reminiscent of the impact of a powerful discourse delivered by their grandfather, King Benjamin. This king’s sermon was so potent and the faith of his subjects was so substantive that they declared: “[We have had] a mighty change . . . in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). It is interesting to note, therefore, that these brothers, the sons of Mosiah, the grandsons of King Benjamin, set out on their missionary quest to the Lamanites to “cure them of their hatred. . . . That there should be no more contention in the land” (Mosiah 28:2).

Two brothers, Nephi and Lehi, also went among the Lamanites. They had astounding success converting 8,000 to the gospel (Helaman 5: 19). However, when they entered the land of Nephi, they were cast into prison. After a few days some of the soldiers returned to the prison to kill them. But by miraculous intervention, Nephi and Lehi were protected. In the process, some 300 witnesses of the event experienced “joy which is unspeakable”
These witnesses changed their focus of attention, and by vocalizing their experience to others, “the more part of the Lamanites were convinced . . . . And did lay down their weapons of war and also their hatred and traditions of their fathers” (Helaman 5:44-51).

Other Book of Mormon examples of healing conversions may be covered in significantly less detail than the above illustrations, yet they are equally affirming of the nature of healing which comes through conversion. The changes to the lifestyles of Amulek (Alma 8) and Zeezrom (Alma 15) are two examples.

As these examples from the Book of Mormon point out, it is possible that contentious, hateful, fearful and selfish lifestyles can be transformed to lifestyles which are full of joy, obedience to God, compassion and service. Moreover, as each of the above samples show, the individuals instrumental in facilitating these profound changes were endowed with powerful attributes.

As practitioners of health care services, we too are interested in influencing change in our clients. Our task is to bring healing to others, whether that healing be mental, physical, spiritual, behavioral or relational. We should anxiously seek the most powerful tools.

Truly, the Book of Mormon gives powerful examples of changes in the lives of individuals, but are these examples pertinent to our day and circumstances? I have a strong belief that Mormon made no mistakes in compiling the records that comprise the Book of Mormon. He edited the Book of Mormon by the power of inspiration. Of the hundreds, even thousands, of possible anecdotes that he could have included, he chose, through divine guidance, many illustrations of the miraculous change of heart, attitude and mind. Mormon gave us examples of intense and dedicated care-givers, who suspended frills and tangents in their own lives so they could intensely focus their unfailing faith on the spiritually feeble. The end result was healing. His examples are not in the Book of Mormon by accident. The book was written for our day and for our circumstances. Each character and each story was carefully chosen by Mormon and Moroni as examples to us, so we could apply the lessons and processes in our own personal situations (see Mormon 3:16–22; 8:34–35).

The Book of Mormon examples which I have related focus on the miraculous change of mind, heart, and attitudes of various individuals and the processes whereby these miracles took place. As Moroni pointed out, miracles cease because people “dwindle in unbelief” (Mormon 9:20). He also indicated that power to
influence change (repentance) in others and to mobilize angelic or miraculous intervention comes as a direct result of our belief in the Savior (Moroni 7:29–33). We would do well, as therapists, to emulate the examples of change set forth in the Book of Mormon, and to exercise our faith that the end result will be a mighty change in our clients. It is my firm belief that the Book of Mormon is a divine collection of specific examples that are pertinent to our day in general which reach each of our own unique roles. If we, as professionals, rely on the illustrations, study the helper, the person being helped, and the process of helping, we stand to gain a powerful methodology. For example, if we meticulously study Ammon’s approach, we find the following steps of helping which leads to healing:

(1) Ammon got his own life in order, including restoring damage he had created (Mosiah 27:33-35).

(2) He and his brothers developed a plan (Mosiah 28:1-2). The plan conflicted so much with the established pattern of their day that they were mocked for their determination to cure the Lamanites (Alma 26:23-25).

(3) He sought approval from the authorities—his father, King Mosiah (Mosiah 28:5-8)—and confirmation from the Lord (Alma 17:10-11).

(4) Adequate preparation was made for the task (Alma 17:9).

(5) Ammon dedicated his entire resources to serving his supposed enemy (Alma 17:23-25; 18:10).

(6) Through service, dedication and willingness, Ammon earned curiosity, interest, and influence over King Lamoni (Alma 18:1-5, 18, 20).

(7) Ammon used the curiosity that he had created and the influence that he had earned to promote the gospel—the essence of healing and change (Alma 18:36-39).

(8) Ammon facilitated the process of change, but unknown and miraculous powers which he believed in, also fostered the rearrangement of the basic nature of the King (Alma 19:6).

In this scenario, a helper used a healing process (a method generally unknown to conventional professionalism), to assist an individual who wanted help. I cannot fully explain the process due to my own limitations and lack of understanding. However, we can all recognize that the end result—the changing of the basic
focus of a human soul from negative destruction to positive creation—is something that all counseling practitioners seek after. Just because I cannot explain it, or understand it, does not mean that I do not believe in it. Numerous other examples of healing given in the Book of Mormon can be scrutinized. From them we can extract knowledge, process, and case examples that can give us more powerful tools in therapy, which can undergird our already existing professional skills and techniques.

The scriptures are replete with the concept and example of healing. We are told that the Savior would be resurrected with “healing in his wings” (2 Nephi 25:13) and that “with his stripes we are healed” (Mosiah 14:5). The Savior enjoined the Nephites to “be converted that I may heal you” (3 Nephi 9:13)—an injunction which can be specifically applied to our own lives and the lives of our clients. This specific advice given by Alma to Zeezrom—“if thou believest in the redemption of Christ thou canst be healed” (Alma 15:8)—applies to all mankind, including therapists and clients.

Many times during my counseling career I have felt that my own attitude and approach at helping needed to be healed. There are also numerous times when I have labored with difficult clients and have seemed to have had no influence. I feel inept in working with those of God's children who struggle with homosexual orientation, or who are categorized by others as borderline personality disorders, or who have defiant, unChrist-like attitudes. I often seem bereft of ideas or skills to facilitate change. Though my skills are weak and my knowledge is limited, I do know this: When I use as my models and case studies the characters and stories from the Book of Mormon, when I can use the influence that I have to persuade clients to believe in the healing miracles of the gospel (which come through the Savior), and when I convey my own personal excitement about the possibility of “a mighty change of heart” as frequently illustrated in the Book of Mormon, my clients seem to respond more positively and I notice behind the scenes miracles taking place. Although I do not possess the same skills as Ammon, Aaron or Benjamin, I do believe that miraculous changes can take place. Occasionally, I have experienced personally or in therapy the miracle of a mighty change of heart. I have occasionally witnessed hateful and contentious clients develop an attitude of having “no more disposition to do evil.”
President Ezra Taft Benson has told us that it is possible to change human nature. When he was President of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, he said,

The Lord works from the inside out. The world works from the outside in. The world would take people out of the slums. Christ takes the slums out of people, and then they take themselves out of the slums. The world would mold men by changing their environment. Christ changes men, who then change their environment. The world would shape human behavior, but Christ can change human nature.

President Benson then quoted President David O. McKay as saying “human nature can be changed here and now” (Ensign [November 1985]). We need to emulate the miraculous changes that we read about in the Book of Mormon in order to facilitate the type of change that President Benson has discussed.

The Book of Mormon has become my most important text in guiding me to facilitate the healing of my clients. While professional courses, seminars, testing, and other secular approaches are important, I have found that the true power to heal comes forth from a belief that miraculous and profound change is possible through a Christ-centered process. The Book of Mormon gives us many succinct examples of this type of process.

As professionals, our time and attention is often focused on increasing our secular knowledge, research, and skills. Perhaps we need to consider making room for more powerful healing arts and skills—more powerful than our secular instructors and supervisors would even dream possible.

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