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Photo by Brent R. Nordgren

An Invitation to Study the Book of Mormon

CHAD H. WEBB

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My message is for each of you, no matter what your current assignment may be. I would like to extend an invitation that, with the coming of a new school year, we each study again the Book of Mormon and prayerfully consider how we might encourage each youth and young adult within our circle of influence to have a meaningful personal experience studying the Book of Mormon.¹

That's it. That's my message. Will you please do that?

Now, I still have about fifteen minutes, so I'd like to share with you just a few thoughts as to why and how we might complete this challenge. My hope is that each student will take the opportunity to read the Book of Mormon and to form a habit of daily scripture study because I know of the blessing that will be for each of them.

Personal Experience

When I was in my last year of seminary, my teacher asked me to make a commitment to study every day from the Book of Mormon until I had finished

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reading it. I agreed, and I knelt down that evening and promised Heavenly Father that I would keep that commitment. I had previously read it with my family and had made many personal attempts to begin, but I had never kept with it.

After that prayer it seemed that I could not go to sleep until I had read at least a little. Some nights I would arrive home late from an activity and would get into bed not having read. Suddenly the thought would hit me, and I would get up and take a few minutes to complete my commitment. Some nights it was only a few quickly forgotten verses. Other nights it was many chapters, and I not only read but studied and pondered. I read each day until I had finished. It was a good experience, but I can't say that there was one single memorable moment that changed my life forever.

However, years later I read a promise made by President Ezra Taft Benson. He said: "There is a power . . . which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book. You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path."²

As I was pondering that statement, I realized that although these words had not yet been spoken when I was in my last year of high school, the promise of the Lord had already come true in my life. I was able to look back at specific times when I had been blessed with the power to resist temptation and to avoid deception, and I saw clearly that this power was given to me because I had kept my commitment to study the Book of Mormon.

Prophetic Promises

There are other promises that the Lord has made through living prophets for those who study the Book of Mormon. I'll share only a few examples. You can find many others.

President Gordon B. Hinckley promised "an added measure of the Spirit of the Lord, a strengthened resolution to walk in obedience to His commandments, and a stronger testimony of the living reality of the Son of God."³

Elder Richard G. Scott promised it will bring "comfort, guidance, peace, and yes, the companionship of other true friends. . . . [It] will rekindle courage and mark the path to faith and obedience. . . . [It] will lift your vision to the perfect friend—our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus the Christ."⁴

For those who are parents, you will be especially interested in the promise of President Marion G. Romney, who taught that in our homes "the spirit

of contention will depart. Parents will counsel their children in greater love and wisdom. Children will be more responsive and submissive to the counsel of their parents. Righteousness will increase. Faith, hope, and charity—the pure love of Christ—will abound in our homes and lives."⁵

You will find many helpful and appropriate ways to encourage your students to study the Book of Mormon. I believe that one of the most significant is to share with your students the promises made by Heavenly Father's prophets associated with studying this sacred book.

A Way to Approach a Study of the Book of Mormon

This past year I began a new study of the Book of Mormon. A priesthood leader taught me from 1 Nephi 19:22–23 that some of the reasons the Book of Mormon was written were (1) that we might "know concerning the doings of the Lord . . .," (2) that we "might more fully . . . believe in the Lord," and (3) that we might "liken all scriptures unto us" (see also the title page of the Book of Mormon).

The Dealings of the Lord

So I began a new study of the Book of Mormon, reading the first time looking specifically for the dealings of the Lord with his people. What an incredible experience to see the Lord's power and mercy and that his judgments are just. I read in gratitude that we are "in the hands of the Lord of the harvest, and [we] are his; and he will raise [us] up at the last day" (Alma 26:7) and that he is "mindful of every people, whatsoever land they may be in; yea, he numbereth his people, and his bowels of mercy are over all the earth" (Alma 26:37).

Believe in the Lord

Next I began a second reading of the Book of Mormon, this time looking for those things that would help me to better know and love the Lord. This is happening in many ways. As you may know, the Savior is referred to, on average, every 1.7 verses. The Book of Mormon truly is a witness of Jesus Christ. He is referred to by at least one hundred names, each of which teaches us something about his divine role. He is known as the God of Nature, Messenger of the Covenant, Founder of Peace, Advocate, Deliverer, King over all the earth, Keeper of the Gate, Lamb of God, and Holy One of Israel. As Abinadi testified, "He is the light and the life of the world; yea, a light that is endless, that

can never be darkened; yea, and also a life which is endless, that there can be no more death” (Mosiah 16:9).

I’ve not been alone in my efforts to look for the Savior in the Book of Mormon. I would like you to read a few experiences from some of our students who have been studying—specifically looking for the Book of Mormon’s teachings that help them to more fully believe in and come to know Jesus Christ.

Female 1: When I read the Book of Mormon, I try to know the character of Jesus Christ: How he really is. When he talked to the prophets, how he shows his character. I also always look for his words. Every time that Jesus Christ speaks, I pay attention to it because it’s his very words.

Male 1: It’s true. There’s no book that testifies more plainly of Jesus Christ than the Book of Mormon. And as Nephi says in his last chapter of 2 Nephi, he talks about how he pleads that if you don’t even believe in the Book of Mormon, believe in Jesus Christ. If you don’t even believe in my words, believe in Christ. And if you believe in Christ, you’ll believe in these words because they testify of Christ.

Male 2: I always knew that he was the author of the Book of Mormon. I always knew that it was about him and that it’s another testament of him. But as we go and look for him, we realize how prominent he is. He’s all the prophecies that they have. He’s the hope that they have. He’s the base of their faith, he’s the foundation upon which they build themselves, and he’s the word of God. I just love that, and now I can see exactly how he relates to every single doctrine, every single idea, because he’s prominent in everything.

Male 3: It’s as if almost every verse I almost have to reread because I think, “Oh, did that mention him, or is that something that he did?” because I’m trying to not just look for his name but perhaps his hand being involved in everything.

Female 2: I wish you guys could see my book because it is totally highlighted. And it makes me realize that I need to live honorably because I need to point my life toward Christ and that everything about our gospel is centered on Christ. And I make my life centered on him. I’m so glad I’ve come to learn that, because it’s changed the way I’ve thought about myself, about others, and how I hold my self-esteem. I just want to serve him every day and every chance I get.

Male 4: After I read the Book of Mormon and know the promises, that’s when I think he helps me or gives me the desire to improve and be with him because it tells you how merciful he is and how much love he has for his children. It makes my desire grow for being with him some day.

Liken unto Us

I’m now excited to begin yet another study of the Book of Mormon, looking for the third reason given by Nephi as to its purpose. I will be looking for ways to liken and apply the scriptures to my life. As the vision of Lehi instructs, we arrive at the fruit of the tree not by holding to the iron rod alone, but by walking the path. Or, as the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, it is by abiding by the precepts of the Book of Mormon that will get us nearer to God, not merely reading from its pages.⁶

It’s interesting to note that the prophet Nephi commanded the writers of the Book of Mormon to “not occupy these plates with things which are not of worth unto the children of men” (1 Nephi 6:6). And Moroni added, “Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Mormon 8:35). We can be certain that everything that was included in the Book of Mormon is of great worth and is applicable to us today. It is remarkable in its ability to speak to individual needs while at the same time offering answers to the difficulties and challenges faced by nations and the world.

Recently, I had the opportunity to travel to a number of countries where Seminaries and Institutes of Religion serve the youth of the Church. In one of those countries, I was in a car with one of our coordinators. He said, “The biggest challenge in our country is corruption in our government. It makes it very difficult for our people to progress.” He then said, “I have been studying the Book of Mormon, and I have come to understand that the answers to our nation’s problems are found in the Book of Mormon.”

The next day I was in the car in another country and with another coordinator. Without me having referred to the previous day’s conversation, this coordinator said to me, “The biggest problem we face in our country is false traditions. It will be very difficult for us to progress as a nation until we overcome that challenge.” He then added, “I have been reading the Book of Mormon, and it is clear that the Lord has given us the answers as to how to overcome our nation’s challenges.”



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Help your students to know that the answers to their real questions can be found in the Book of Mormon, and that the true miracle of the Book of Mormon, to change lives, will come about in their own individual lives.

Both of these good men understood that the writers of the Book of Mormon had seen our day and that the answers that we need are there for us if we will but search.

If our challenges are of a personal nature, regarding our family or our work, or of national or global interest, we should learn to look for the examples in the Book of Mormon of others who dealt with similar problems and how they, with the Lord's help, were able to resolve them.

Conclusion

Now, in conclusion, I would remind you of the countless miracles that occurred in the production of the Book of Mormon. From the work of translation to its printing and distribution, miracles have been associated with the Book of Mormon from the beginning. On March 26, 1830, the first five thousand copies of the Book of Mormon were published and appeared on the shelves of E. B. Grandin's bookstore. I have one of those copies with me. (This particular book is a treasured gift, donated to the first institute program in Moscow, Idaho.) You have heard the miraculous, life-changing stories of Parley P. Pratt and so many others who read those first editions.

The *real* miracle of the Book of Mormon is that it changes lives, and that miracle continues to happen every time a person begins a serious study of its pages. May I share with you just one final example of that miracle from a former institute student, my wife, Kristi?

When Kristi was a young single adult, she was going through a little bit of a difficult time. She had returned home after a frustrating experience at a university. She was seeking for direction as to what to do in her life and feeling unsettled as to her place in the world. As she prayed for direction, she had an impression that she should enroll in an institute class. Following that prompting changed the course of her life. It wasn't so much what the teacher said in that class as it was the way he felt about the scriptures. Kristi noticed that the way he talked about them and even the way he held them in his hands demonstrated a great love and appreciation for them. As she sat in that institute class, she thought, "There must be something in the scriptures that is worth knowing." So she decided to begin a serious study.

Her experience deepened her understanding of the gospel and her love for the Savior. She began to be more involved in her singles ward and in serving the sisters in her Relief Society. That experience led her to have a desire to serve a mission. She now is the greatest influence for good in my life and

in the lives of our six daughters. The decision initiated in an institute class to study the scriptures, including the Book of Mormon, not only blessed her but has blessed me and our children more than I can begin to describe.

Kristi had shared that experience with me early in our married life, and I had not thought to ask her who that teacher was until many years later when I was working in the Church Office Building. When she told me his name, I realized that he was also working in the Church Office Building and his office was just a few doors down the hall from mine. I went to see him and told him of the influence he had on my wife and our family.

He had kept a copy of the roll of every seminary and institute class he had ever taught. He reached over to his filing cabinet, looked up the year and the course, and there in his roll book we saw the name of Kristi Ann Bronson. I will admit that there were some emotional minutes spent together in appreciation for the impact that his love of the scriptures had on Kristi's life—as well as its impact on my life and the lives of our children, who now have been taught by a loving mother who loves the Book of Mormon.

Invitation

The Book of Mormon changed the lives of its first readers; it has changed my life and the lives of people all over the world. How will it change the lives of the precious students who will sit before you? Because of the power of the Book of Mormon to change lives, I again invite you to prayerfully consider how we might encourage each youth and young adult within the circle of our influence to have a meaningful personal experience studying the Book of Mormon.

Help your students look for the lessons that it teaches and for the examples of the purposes for which it was written. Help them to know that it was written for our day, that it was written for them. Help them to know that the answers to their real questions can be found in the Book of Mormon. And most of all, help them come to know and love the Savior as they find him in the pages of this glorious book. As they do, the true miracle of the Book of Mormon will come about in their individual lives. I know that it is true, that Joseph Smith the Prophet translated it by the gift and power of God, and that the Lord will speak through its pages to us today. And I know that its witness is true, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. **RE**

Notes

1. The invitation to study the Book of Mormon this school year is intended for all seminary students and institute students studying the Book of Mormon or attending a non-scripture-based course. Institute students in other scripture-based courses (New Testament, Old Testament, and Doctrine and Covenants) should be encouraged to read the scripture text for that course. They should also be encouraged to include a study of the Book of Mormon as far as possible.

2. Ezra Taft Benson, "The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion," *Ensign*, November 1986, 7.

3. Gordon B. Hinckley, "A Testimony Vibrant and True," *Ensign*, August 2005, 6.

4. Richard G. Scott, "True Friends That Lift," *Ensign*, November 1988, 77.

5. Marion G. Romney, "The Book of Mormon," *Ensign*, May 1980, 67.

6. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 64.