

was a light to those around her. Her family gravitated toward her and looked to her as their leader. She was happy; he was miserable. (See Steve Dunn Hanson, *Ensign*, Feb. 1981, pp. 54-55).

Service gives capacity to endure own trials

I would offer one key to maintaining your happiness in spite of adversity. Christ said, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:24). If you would find happiness and joy, lose your life in some noble cause. A worthy purpose must be at the center of every worthy life. President Stephen L. Richards noted that life is a mission, not a career. (See *Where Is Wisdom* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1955], p. 74.) As Church members, our mission should be the greatest, noblest mission in the universe—the salvation of souls. President David O. McKay was fond of quoting the poet Robert Browning, who said, "There is an answer to the passionate longings of the heart for fullness, and I knew it, and the answer is this: Live in all things outside yourself by love, and you will have joy. That is the life of God; it ought to be our life. In him it is accomplished and perfect; but in all created things it is a lesson learned slowly and through difficulty" (quoted in *Stepping Stones to an Abundant Life*, comp. Llewelyn R. McKay [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1971], p. 119).

Service helps us forget our own travails; it enlarges our souls and gives

us greater capacity to endure our own trials.

"Are we having fun yet, experiencing true happiness?"

Now, I have spoken of our Father's plan of happiness by which he guides us into eternal joy. I have talked about overcoming sin through repentance and self-mastery, and I have spoken of taking the edge off adversity through selfless service. Self-mastery and service are keys to our Father's plan. Christ told his disciples:

"If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love. . . .

"These things I have spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:10-11).

The commandments are guides to happiness. I implore you to follow them.

"Are we having fun yet, experiencing true happiness?" I certainly am. I find great joy in life in obeying and serving. I pray that you may also discover the elusive treasure of true happiness through the means that were ordained by our Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Benson

Elder Jack H. Goaslind, a member of the Presidency of the First Quorum of Seventy, has just spoken to us.

Elder Boyd K. Packer, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, will now address us.

Elder Boyd K. Packer

I speak to those who have never read the Book of Mormon. This includes many members who have started to read it several times, but, for one reason or another, have never finished it.

My message may help those as well who have read the Book of Mormon once but have not returned to it.

I have chosen as a title "The Things of My Soul."

The Book of Mormon

Perhaps no other book has been denounced so vigorously by those who have never read it as has the Book of Mormon.

Because of that, I hope to introduce the book in such a way that, in case you decide to read it, you will know beforehand what awaits you.

Except for the Bible, the Book of Mormon is different from any book you have read. It is not a novel. It is not fiction. For the most part, it is not difficult to read. However, like all books of profound value, it is not casual reading. But if you persist, I assure you that it will be the most rewarding book you have ever set your mind to read.

The Book of Mormon is not biographical, for not one character is fully drawn. Nor, in a strict sense, is it a history.

Writers of the Book of Mormon

While it chronicles a people for 1,021 years and has the record of an earlier people, it is in fact not a history of those people. It is the saga of a message, a testament. As the influence of that message is traced from generation to generation, more than twenty writers record the fate of individuals and of civilizations who accepted or rejected that testament.

The saga began in Jerusalem six hundred years before Christ. King Zedekiah ruled the doomed kingdom of Judah.

The prophet Lehi was warned in a dream to take his family and leave Jerusalem before that destruction which soon was to be recorded by the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah. (See Jeremiah 44:1-8.)

Lehi was commanded of the Lord to obtain and take with them a record of their people. It is with that record, the brass plates of Laban, that the saga of the Book of Mormon began.

Lehi's son Nephi obtained the record for his father and said, "It is wisdom in God that we should obtain

these records, that we may preserve unto our children the *language* of our fathers" (1 Nephi 3:19; italics added).

They found that the record contained—

- "The five books of Moses, which gave an account of the creation of the world, and also of Adam and Eve, who were our first parents" (1 Nephi 5:11).

- And "the *words . . .* of all the holy prophets, which have been delivered unto them by the Spirit and power of God" (1 Nephi 3:20; italics added).

- "And also a record of the Jews from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah";

- And "a genealogy of [Lehi's] fathers" (1 Nephi 5:12, 14).

Lehi's little band left Jerusalem with the record. In time, they were separated from their homeland by an ocean. But they had that precious spiritual record.

A later prophet, Benjamin, said of this record:

"Were it not for these things, which have been kept and preserved by the hand of God, that we might read and understand of *his mysteries*, and have his *commandments*, . . . [we] would have dwindled in unbelief" (Mosiah 1:5; italics added).

Large plates of Nephi

A second record joined this saga when Lehi began the chronicles of his little band of sojourners. He kept something of a secular account of their journeys, interspersed with his revelations and teachings and spiritual experiences.

Nephi succeeded his father, Lehi, as keeper of that record, which became known as the large plates of Nephi.

Nephi wrote that "upon [these] *plates* should be engraven an account of the reign of the kings, and the wars and contentions of my people" (1 Nephi 9:4; italics added).

Later, when they grew to be a numerous people, this account was kept by the kings.

No doubt this record contained a great resource of historical information. Generations later, as Mormon abridged this record, he repeated six times that he could not include "a hundredth part" of what was in that record. (See Jacob 3:13; Words of Mormon 1:5; Helaman 3:14; 3 Nephi 5:8; 26:6; Ether 15:33.)

Small plates of Nephi

But it was not the most valuable record, for Nephi was commanded to keep yet another account—not a secular account this time, but a record of the ministry. This record, the small plates of Nephi, was kept by the prophets rather than by the kings.

This account of their ministry became the foundation for what is now the Book of Mormon.

Perhaps the best insight into the purpose for keeping this record is from Jacob, who received the plates from his brother Nephi.

"And he gave me, Jacob, a commandment that I should write upon these [small] plates a few of the things which I considered to be *most precious*; that I should *not touch, save it were lightly*, concerning the *history* of this people. . . .

"For he said that the history of his people should be engraven upon his other [large] plates, and that I should preserve these [small] plates and hand them down unto my seed, from generation to generation.

"And if there were *preaching which was sacred*, or *revelation which was great*, or *prophesying*, that I should engraven . . . them upon these [small] plates, and touch upon *them as much* as it were possible, for *Christ's sake*, and for the sake of our people" (Jacob 1:2-4; italics added).

Did you notice that he was "*not* to touch (save it were lightly)" on *the history* of the people but he *was* to touch upon the *sacred things* "as much as it were possible"!

"The things of my soul"

Nephi explained:

"It mattereth not to me that I am particular to give a full account of all the things of my father, . . . for I desire the room that I may write of *the things of God*.

"For the fulness of mine intent is *that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved*. . . .

"Wherefore, I shall give commandment unto my seed, that they shall *not* occupy these plates with things which *are not of worth* unto the children of men" (1 Nephi 6:3-4, 6; italics added).

"This I do that the *more sacred* things may be kept for the knowledge of my people. . . . I do not write anything upon plates save it be that I think it be *sacred*" (1 Nephi 19:5-6; italics added).

Notice why he did as he did:

"I have received *a commandment of the Lord* that I should make these plates, for the special purpose that there should be an account engraven of the *ministry* of my people" (1 Nephi 9:3; italics added).

And then this verse from which I take my title:

"And upon these [small plates] I write *the things of my soul*, and many of the *scriptures* which are engraven upon the plates of brass. *For my soul delighteth in the scriptures*, and my heart pondereth them, and writeth them for the learning and the profit of my children" (2 Nephi 4:15; italics added).

Vision of the tree of life

Those preachings which were sacred, and the revelations which were great, and the prophesying, all testified of the coming of the Messiah.

Prophecies concerning the Messiah appear in the Old Testament. But the Book of Mormon records a vi-

sion of that event which has no equal in the Old Testament.

After the people of Lehi left Jerusalem, Lehi had a vision of the tree of life. His son Nephi prayed to know its meaning. In answer, he was given a remarkable vision of Christ.

In that vision he saw—

- A virgin bearing a child in her arms,
- One who should prepare the way—John the Baptist,
- The ministry of the Son of God,
- Twelve others following the Messiah,
- The heavens open and angels ministering to them,
- The multitudes blessed and healed,
- The crucifixion of the Christ,
- The wisdom and pride of the world opposing his work. (See 1 Nephi 11:14–36.)

Another testament of Jesus Christ

That vision is the central message of the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon is in truth another testament of Jesus Christ.

It is sometimes introduced as “a history of the ancient inhabitants of the American continent, the ancestors of the American Indians.”

That does not reveal the contents of this sacred book any better than an introduction of the Bible as “a history of the ancient inhabitants of the Near East, the ancestors of the modern Israelites” would reveal the contents of the Bible.

The history in the Book of Mormon is incidental. There are prophets and dissenters, and genealogies to move them from one generation to another, but the central purpose is not historical.

As the saga of the message is traced, one writer (Alma) requires 160 pages to cover thirty-eight years, while seven others (Enos, Jarom, Omni, Amaron, Chemish, Abinadom, Amaleki) together use only 6 pages to cover over three hundred years. In either case, the testament survives.

The Book of Mormon is a book of scripture. It is another testament of Jesus Christ. It is written in biblical language, the language of the prophets.

For the most part, it is in easy-flowing New Testament language, with such words as *spake* for *spoke*, *unto* for *to*, with *and it came to pass*, with *thus* and *thou* and *thine*.

You will not read many pages into it until you catch the cadence of that language and the narrative will be easy to understand. As a matter of fact, most teenagers readily understand the narrative of the Book of Mormon.

Prophecies of Isaiah

Then, just as you settle in to move comfortably along, you will meet a barrier. The style of the language changes to Old Testament prophecy style. For, interspersed in the narrative, are chapters reciting the prophecies of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. They look as a barrier, like a roadblock or a checkpoint beyond which the casual reader, one with idle curiosity, generally will not go.

You, too, may be tempted to stop there, but do not do it! Do not stop reading! Move forward through those difficult-to-understand chapters of Old Testament prophecy, even if you understand very little of it. Move on, if all you do is skim and merely glean an impression here and there. Move on, if all you do is look at the words.

Soon you will emerge from those difficult chapters to the easier New Testament style which is characteristic of the rest of the Book of Mormon.

Book of Mormon verifies Bible

Because you are forewarned about that barrier, you will be able to surmount it and finish reading the book.

You will follow the prophecies of the coming of the Messiah through the generations of Nephite people to that day when those prophecies are fulfilled and the Lord appears to them.

You will be present, through eyewitness accounts, at the ministry of the Lord among the "other sheep" of whom he spoke in the New Testament. (See John 10:16.)

Thereafter, you will be able to understand the Bible as never before. You will come to understand much in the Old Testament and to know why we, as a people, hold it in such esteem. You will come to revere the New Testament, to know that it is true. The account of the birth and the life and the death of the man Jesus as recorded in the New Testament is true. He is the Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, the Messiah, the Redeemer of mankind.

The Book of Mormon, another testament of Jesus Christ, will verify the Old and the New Testaments.

Isaiah quoted in New Testament

Perhaps only after you read the Book of Mormon and return to the Bible will you notice that the Lord quotes Isaiah seven times in the New Testament; in addition, the Apostles quote Isaiah forty more times. One day you may revere these prophetic words of Isaiah in both books. The Lord had a purpose in preserving the prophecies of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon, notwithstanding they become a barrier to the casual reader.

Those who never move beyond the Isaiah chapters miss the personal treasures to be gathered along the way. They miss the knowledge of—

- The purpose of mortal life and death,
- The certainty of life after death,
- What happens when the spirit leaves the body,
- The description of the Resurrection,
- How to receive and retain a remission of your sins,
- What hold justice or mercy may have on you,
- What to pray for,
- Covenants and ordinances,
- And many other jewels that make up the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"Ye may know the truth of all things"

It is beyond that barrier, near the end of the book, that you will find a promise addressed to you and to everyone who will read the book with intent and sincerity.

Let me read that promise to you, from the last chapter in the Book of Mormon:

"And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

"And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things" (Moroni 10:4-5).

Direct revelation to you

No missionary, no member can fulfill that promise—neither Apostle nor President can fulfill that promise. It is a promise of direct revelation to you on the conditions described in the book. After you have read the Book of Mormon, you become qualified to inquire of the Lord, in the way that He prescribes in the book, as to whether the book is true. You will be eligible, on the conditions He has established, to receive that personal revelation.

I bear witness that the Book of Mormon is true—that it is another testament of Jesus Christ. I have read the Book of Mormon with a sincere heart, with intent, as a humble serviceman, and thereafter pled with the Lord. I received that revelation. Accompanying that revelation is the revelation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, our Redeemer, and of him I bear witness, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "Press Forward, Saints" without announcement.
