

BOOK OF MORMON LESSON #28
“THE WORD IS IN CHRIST UNTO
SALVATION”
(Alma 32-35)

QUOTE OF THE WEEK:

[I mean only to] say what so many have said before: that if Joseph Smith—or anyone else, for that matter—created the Book of Mormon out of whole cloth, that to me is a far greater miracle than the proposition that he translated the book from ancient records with an endowment of divine power to do so.

Has anyone here ever tried to write anything? Have you ever, with your degrees and libraries and computers and research assistants, ever tried to write anything anyone could stand to read?

Even if you have my guess is you haven't succeeded at writing anything anyone would read more than once, or say it changed their lives, or say that were willing to leave family and fortune and future for—and then do it. You thought it was tough to have your dissertation committee grill you for a couple of hours. How about tossing your piece of work to the most hostile—and learned—of enemies for, say, 164 years (just to pull a number out of the air). Go ahead. Put that terrific master's thesis of yours out there under a microscope for everyone to kick and gouge and attack for a century or two, and let's see how marvelous that university-produced accomplishment of yours really was. After a little of that are you still standing by the divinity and immortality of your work? Is anybody still reading it?

In light of all this , as it applies to the Book of Mormon which is still changing human lives and still moving moral mountains, and as one who has tried to write a line or two of both poetry and prose and failed miserably, I want to meet the author of this work whoever it is. I want to praise first hand such a remarkably gifted writer.

Furthermore I'd love to read anything else this elusive figure has ever written. I'd love to talk to the whole research team who must have produced it. If

they've got anything else they've ever put their pen to, I'll pay any amount of money to get hold of it. This is writing that moves millions so more of it could certainly make millions. Let's talk contracts. Surely in 164 years there must be someone willing to step forward— you know, the “real” author—claiming credit for such a remarkable document and all that has transpired in its wake. Or at least those descendants of such an author should have come forth by now willing to cashier the whole thing.

Where are they? Well the simple fact of the matter is no other origin for the Book of Mormon has ever come to light because there isn't one. A bad man could not have fabricated such an inspiring book and a good man would not have done so. (Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, CES Symposium, BYU Marriott Center, 9 August 1994)

INTRODUCTION: Suppose you were a farmer looking for a new cash crop and someone gave you a handful of seeds after making the following claims about their potential:

THE PLANTS THAT GROW FROM THESE SEEDS CAN BE USED TO

1. Make flour
2. Speed fryer growth
3. Increase the egg production of hens
4. Make hamburger, pork, ham, or veal substitute
5. Feed cattle
6. Make salad dressing, margarine, shortening, etc. with the oils
7. Make green salads
8. Make snack foods like peanuts or corn nuts
9. Make noodles
10. Create lecithin to help heart patients
11. Stop amoebic dysentery
12. Make cream cheese, crackers, waffles, cookies
13. Make bread
14. Make highly resistant plastic steering wheels and car bodies
15. Make glue for plywood and paneling
16. Make paint
17. Make caulk
18. Make an ice cream substitute
19. Make wallpaper

20. Make gasoline
21. Make tires
22. Create foam for fire extinguishers
23. Lubricate printing presses
24. Make baby, dog, and rabbit food
25. Make sauce for steak and spaghetti
26. Make cardboard
27. Feed people by being shredded, sliced, deep fried, smoked, etc.
28. Enrich the soil in which they are grown

You would have some choices in this matter. You could take the seeds and plant them, nourish them and harvest them, or you could plant them and ignore them, or you could shake your head in disbelief and throw them away.

Of course there is such a plant. One of the most remarkable and beneficial seeds ever to come to this country evidently came first as ballast on ships from China. The seed was the soy bean, of which the USA is now the largest producer in the world.

But there was a time for farmers, just as there was a time for the poor Zoramites, when no one really knew what this *seed* would do. Alma 32-34 is the lesson of Alma and Amulek on spiritual agriculture to Zoramite *farmers* and *modern farmers* who have been experiencing spiritual crop failure.

1. ALMA TEACHES THE HUMBLE ZORAMITES TO EXERCISE FAITH AND GIVE PLACE IN THEIR HEARTS FOR THE WORD OF GOD

Alma 32:1-27

Alma and his companions, “after much labor” among the Zoramites, “began to have success among the poor . . .” (Alma 32:2). A “great multitude came to inquire of him” (32:4).

We have lamented the fact that it took the affliction of persecution by the rich to humble these Zoramites, but Alma’s response was one of “great joy.” (32:6) They were truly penitent and therefore teachable, and he did not seem to care very much why they were penitent. What events had induced

the lowliness of heart? (See Alma 32:5,ff) Does the Lord ever fashion events in and around our lives to make us humble and teachable? How do we usually respond to such divine tutoring?

In this setting, Alma begins his lesson on spiritual horticulture.

What must we have in order to be willing to experiment with this incredible seed Alma has offered? (Alma 32:31–Hope; Alma 32:37–Desire) We must want the promised harvest enough to try the experiment (32:27). If we have this hope and desire, then we can proceed. But there are certain fundamental principles we ought to note—principles that will cause this experiment to work.

1. The first is the humility mentioned above. We must be “truly penitent” (32:7).
2. We must recognize that God wants us to believe (see 32:22).
3. God gives his word to men women and even little children (32:23)
4. We cannot know the truth of things unto perfection in the beginning of our efforts (32:26).

The first thing Alma tells his listeners they must do in order to obtain the fruit of the tree of life is *give place* (32:27) for a portion of the words of Alma. What does it mean to “give place?” What must we do to “give place” for the seed or the word to be planted in our own lives? How would one who wanted to be a follower *give place* for Family Home Evening? How would he or she *give place* for family prayer or family scripture study or personal prayer? Before the seed can germinate, it must be planted, but before it can be planted we must find a place for it in the busy, busy fields of our lives.

In the matter of Family Home Evening, the Church has rendered us great assistance by giving us a place unencumbered in any way by church responsibilities. “Here it is,” the prophets have said. “Monday night is your place to plant the seeds of family togetherness and family gospel study and family unity.” Do we use the *place* for that, or have we planted other crops there instead? I have often wondered if the appearance of Monday Night Football was a coincidence.

I did a little research on this matter. You might be interested in what I about Family Home Evening:

The designation of Monday night for family home evening came in September 1970. The Priesthood Bulletin announced that “in a recent meeting the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve approved the setting aside of Monday night for holding family home evening throughout the entire Church. Encouragement is now given to stakes, missions, wards, and branches to reserve Monday evening for family home evening. ... Families [should] be left free from Church activities so that they can meet together in family home evening” (Rex W. Allred, “I Have a Question,” Ensign, Jan. 1987, 52)

And what I learned about Monday Night Football:

Monday Night Football first aired on ABC on September 21, 1970, with a match between the New York Jets and the Cleveland Browns, in Cleveland, Ohio. The show has run ever since, and the NFL has obliged by scheduling its best teams and biggest stars for that night, so as to gain maximum exposure
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monday_Night_Football)

What are the chances that that was a coincidence? What have you planted in the place the Lord has given you?

To plant other seeds we must find our own places, and to do so we must have at least a “particle of faith” (32:27), enough to pull the weeds and resist the temptation to plant something else instead.

2. ALMA TEACHES THE PEOPLE TO NOURISH THE WORD OF GOD IN THEIR HEARTS

(Alma 32:28-43)

Once the place is prepared, we plant the seed. Where does Alma tell us it is really planted (32:28)? Some will not plant the seeds. In spite of the promised blessings associated with this kind of gardening effort, some will throw the seeds away in favor of a more worldly harvest. To such people Alma warns, “Do not cast it out by your unbelief . . .” (32:28)

Alma tells us that we will “begin” to notice four things in our lives if the seed we have planted is good. The key words used in his description are SWELLING, ENLARGE, ENLIGHTEN, and DELICIOUS. (32:28) Notice what the first letters of those four words spell . . .

Ponder the ways in which the truths of the gospel cause swelling, enlargement, enlightenment, and become delicious to you as you first become acquainted with them.

What does Alma suggest we will know if we have these experiences in our lives? (Alma 32:30-35) Even though we do not have a “perfect knowledge” at this time, these feelings and experiences strengthen faith and “are real” and “discernible.” They are meant to assure us that the seed we planted was a good seed, and to give us the courage to continue in the process of nurturing the plant.

In a very practical sense, what we have happening here is the very thing that happened when the first soy seeds were planted in this country. After a little time and a little water, tiny green shoots came through the soil reaching for sunlight. The farmers, seeing the seedlings, at least knew that the seeds were good—that *something was growing*. They had not seen chicken feed or steering wheels yet, but they had seen something. Their faith in the seed must therefore have increased.

What are the dangers that Alma warns against even after the seed has begun to grow? (Alma 32:36-39—“lay aside your faith;” “neglect the tree;” “take no thought for its nourishment.” If we neglect the tree or fail to nourish it, what will happen? Alma 32:38,39) What events in our lives are comparable to the scorching of the sun?

How many times does Alma speak of “nourishing” the tree in order that it may “take root” in Alma 32:37-42? What does he suggest we do to “nourish” the tree in Alma 32:40-43? Why are faith, diligence, and patience necessary even after the plant has begun to grow? What kind of “care” does Alma suggest this process requires? (Alma 32:37)

In a magazine I received several years ago, I read about Jesse Hiatt, the

man who discovered the *Delicious Apple*. He sold the rights to the tree to a nursery for some serious money and the new owners began to market that variety of fruit. You can read an excellent history of this apple—a history that has application to the process we are discussing here—at this web address: <http://www.cascadel.org/flora/Hiatt.htm>

If you were to plant this kind of tree, how long would it take before you were certain that your investment was a good one? You would need to give years of patience and diligence and great care, all of this sustained by the faith you had that the fruit would be worth the effort. By the way, I just ate a beautiful, red delicious apple, and my faith was reaffirmed: it was all worth it. A lot of folks have called the Delicious apple the best in the world. They might be right.

I have a feeling that there are many among us who have planted the seed and nourished the seedling, and who are now in possession of lovely green trees— shade trees! Of course there is nothing wrong with shade trees, unless you planted fruit trees, but it appears to me that in some cases our efforts have fallen short of the fruit we originally sought.

A shade *tree* would consist of gospel-like things: paying tithing, attending meetings, going on missions, saying prayers, marrying in the temple, etc.

The Savior taught about trees during his ministry (see Matthew 12:33; 21:19). There is only one way to evaluate a fruit tree, and that is by the fruit. Where there is no fruit, or only bitter fruit, what is a fruit tree good for? Shade and fuel.

The fruit of the tree comes into our lives from such experiences as receiving or increasing our testimony, having our marriages sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise, receiving answers to prayers, having power in the priesthood, receiving revelation, and the fruits mentioned in Galatians 5:22.

If you are not eating the fruit, this chapter suggests four steps. They are

1. Give place
2. Plant the seed
3. Nourish the seedling

4. Eat the fruit

3. ALMA CITES PROPHET'S TESTIMONIES OF JESUS CHRIST AND EXHORTS THE PEOPLE TO PLANT THE WORD OF GOD IN THEIR HEARTS (Alma 33,34)

Reflect on experiences you have had which have strengthened your faith because you applied the principles below suggested by Alma and Amulek. These are principles worth marking in your own scriptures—principles that teach us how to exercise the faith mentioned in Alma 32:27. They are also seeds which, if given place and planted and nourished in lives will bring forth wonderful fruit.

- # How do Alma and Amulek suggest we exercise faith in Alma 33:3-11; 34:18-27? (Prayer)
- # How do Alma and Amulek suggest we exercise faith in Alma 33:12-18; 34:30? (“Believe” and “read” the scriptures)
- # How do Alma and Amulek suggest we exercise faith in Alma 33:19-23; Alma 34:5-10? (Look to Christ or make him the focus of our life)
- # How does Amulek suggest we exercise faith in Alma 34:14-17, 30? (Exercise “faith unto REPENTANCE;” bring forth “fruit unto repentance”) Why is it important that we repent now if we need to? (Alma 34:31-36)
- # How does Amulek suggest we exercise faith in Alma 34:28,29? (Charitable service)
- # What additional suggestions does Amulek give for strengthening faith in Alma 34:37-41?
- # What is the ultimate reward of nourishing the tree? (Alma 33:23)

Conclusion

The purpose of growing fruit trees is to be able one day to partake of the fruit. How does Alma describe the fruit in Alma 32:42? Look for an opportunity to bear testimony of the influence and sweetness of the gospel in your own life. Reflect on experiences in which you have found the fruit of the gospel to be as Alma described it.

reserved. No part of this text may be reproduced in any form or by any means for commercial gain without the express written consent of the author. Digital or printed copies may be freely made and distributed for personal and public non-commercial use.