

## President Boyd K. Packer

### The keystone of our religion

Joseph Smith said, “I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book” (Book of Mormon introduction; see also *History of the Church*, 4:461).

The first edition of the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ came off the press in Palmyra, New York, in March of 1830. Joseph Smith—an uneducated country boy—had just passed his 24th birthday. The year before he had spent a total of about 65 days translating the plates. Almost half of it was after he had received the priesthood. The printing had taken seven months.

### Receiving a spiritual witness of the book

When I first read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover, I read the promise that if I “would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if [the things I had read were] true; and if [I would] ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he [would] manifest the truth of it unto [me], by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 10:4). I tried to follow those instructions as I understood them.

If I expected a glorious manifestation to come at once as an overpowering experience, it did not happen. Nevertheless, it felt good, and I began to believe.

The next verse has an even greater promise: “By the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of *all* things” (Moroni 10:5; italics added). I did not know how the Holy Ghost worked, even though the Book of Mormon explains it a number of times in a number of ways.

I studied and learned that “angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost;

wherefore, they speak the words of Christ.” It said, as well, that one is to “feast upon the words of Christ,” with the promise that “the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3).

And it says plainly that “if ye cannot understand . . . it will be because ye ask not, neither do ye knock” (2 Nephi 32:4).

I also read, “If ye will enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:5). I had already done that when I was confirmed a member of the Church by the “laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Articles of Faith 1:4).

If I had expected in my little-boy innocence some special spiritual experience, it had not happened. Over the years as I listened to sermons and lessons and read in the Book of Mormon, I began to understand.

Nephi had been very badly treated by his brothers and reminded them that an angel had spoken unto them, “but ye were past feeling, that ye could not feel his words” (1 Nephi 17:45). When I understood that the Holy Ghost could communicate through our feelings, I understood why the words of Christ, whether from the New Testament or the Book of Mormon or the other scriptures, carried such a good feeling. In time I found that the scriptures had answers to things I needed to know.

### Learning to liken the scriptures

I read, “Now these are the words, and ye may liken them unto you and unto *all* men” (2 Nephi 11:8; italics added; see also 1 Nephi 19:23–24; 2 Nephi 6:5; 11:2). I took that to mean that the scriptures are likened to me personally, and that is true of everyone else.

When a verse I had passed over several times took on personal meaning, I thought whoever wrote that verse had a deep and

mature understanding of my life and how I felt.

For example, I read that the prophet Lehi partook of the fruit of the tree of life and said, “Wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit” (1 Nephi 8:12). I had read that more than once. It did not mean much to me.

The prophet Nephi also said that he had written “the things of my soul . . . for the learning and the profit of my children” (2 Nephi 4:15). I had read that before, and it did not mean all that much to me either. But later when we had children, I understood that both Lehi and Nephi felt just as deeply about their children as we feel about our children and grandchildren.

### **Plain and precious insights**

I found these scriptures to be plain and precious. I wondered how young Joseph Smith could have such insights. The fact is I do not believe he had such penetrating insights. He did not have to have them. He just translated what was written on the plates.

Such plain and precious insights are everywhere in the Book of Mormon. They reflect a depth of wisdom and experience that is certainly not characteristic of a 23-year-old.

I learned that anyone, anywhere, could read in the Book of Mormon and receive inspiration.

Some insights came after reading a second, even a third time and seemed to be “likened” to what I faced in everyday life.

#### *Insight about war and defending the family*

I mention another plain and precious insight that did not come with the first reading in the Book of Mormon. When I was 18 years old, I was inducted into the military. While I had no reason to wonder

about it before, I became very concerned if it was right for me to go to war. In time I found my answer in the Book of Mormon:

“They [the Nephites] were not fighting for monarchy nor power but they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church.

“And they were doing that which they felt was the duty which they owed to their God; for the Lord had said unto them, and also unto their fathers, that: Inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies.

“And again, the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed. Therefore for this cause were the Nephites contending with the Lamanites, to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands, their country, and their rights, and their religion” (Alma 43:45–47).

Knowing this, I could serve willingly and with honor.

#### *Insight about walking by faith*

Another example: We once had a major decision to make. When our prayers left us uncertain, I went to see Elder Harold B. Lee. He counseled us to proceed. Sensing that I was still very unsettled, he said, “The problem with you is you want to see the end from the beginning.” Then he quoted this verse from the Book of Mormon: “Dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith” (Ether 12:6).

He added, “You must learn to walk a few steps ahead into the darkness, and then the light will turn on and go before you.” That was a life-changing experience from one verse in the Book of Mormon.

#### *Insight about weak things becoming strong*

Haven’t you felt at times like Nephi, who said, “I was led by the Spirit, not

knowing beforehand the things which I should do"? (1 Nephi 4:6). Haven't you at times felt very weak?

Moroni felt weak and afraid that they "shall mock at our words [because of our weakness].

“. . . The Lord spake unto [him], saying: Fools mock, but they shall mourn; and my grace is sufficient for the meek, that they shall take no advantage of your weakness;

"And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for *all* men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them" (Ether 12:25–27; italics added).

Life moves all too fast. When you feel weak, discouraged, depressed, or afraid, open the Book of Mormon and read. Do not let too much time pass before reading a verse, a thought, or a chapter.

### **Testimony of the book may come gradually**

My experience has been that a testimony does not burst upon us suddenly. Rather, it grows, as Alma said, from a seed of faith. "It will strengthen your faith: for ye will say I know that this is a good seed; for behold it sprouteth and beginneth to grow" (Alma 32:30). If you nourish it, it will grow; and if you do not nourish it, it will wither (see Alma 32:37–41).

Do not be disappointed if you have read and reread and yet have not received a powerful witness. You may be somewhat like the disciples spoken of in the Book of Mormon who were filled with the power of God in great glory "and they knew it not" (3 Nephi 9:20).

Do the best you can. Think of this verse: "See that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength. And again, it is expedient that he

should be diligent, that thereby he might win the prize; therefore, all things must be done in order" (Mosiah 4:27).

### **Miracles have not ceased**

The spiritual gifts described in the Book of Mormon are present in the Church today—promptings, impressions, revelations, dreams, visions, visitations, miracles. You can be sure that the Lord can, and at times does, manifest Himself with power and great glory. Miracles can occur.

Mormon said:

"Has the day of miracles ceased?

"Or have angels ceased to appear unto the children of men? Or has he withheld the power of the Holy Ghost from them? Or will he, so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved?

"Behold I say unto you, Nay; for it is by faith that miracles are wrought" (Moroni 7:35–37).

Pray always—alone and with your family. Answers will come in many ways.

### **The Book of Mormon gives protection**

A few words or a phrase in a verse, such as "wickedness never was happiness" (Alma 41:10), will tell you of the reality of the evil one and how he works.

"For after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him" (Moroni 7:17).

Generations of the prophets taught the doctrines of the everlasting gospel to protect "the peaceable followers of Christ" (Moroni 7:3).

Mormon saw our day. He issued this warning: "Except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him" (Helaman 12:3).

## Naming the Lord's Church

When the Lord visited the Nephites, they asked what they should “call this church; for there [were] disputations among the people concerning this matter.

“. . . The Lord said unto them: . . . why is it that the people should murmur and dispute because of this thing?

“Have they not read the scriptures, which say ye must take upon you the name of Christ, which is my name? For by this name shall ye be called at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:3–5).

## Central purpose is to testify of Christ

The central purpose of the Book of Mormon is its testament of Jesus Christ. Of more than 6,000 verses in the Book of Mormon, far more than half refer directly to Him.

So, “we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:26).

## An endless treasure of wisdom

The Book of Mormon is an endless treasure of wisdom and inspiration, of counsel and correction, “adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest [among us]” (D&C 89:3). At once it is rich in nourishment for the most learned if they will humble themselves (see 2 Nephi 9:28–29).

From the Book of Mormon we learn about:

The plan of salvation, or “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8; see also Alma 42:5, 12, 30).

The doctrine of Christ and the Atonement (see 2 Nephi 31:2–21; 32:1–6; 3 Nephi 11:31–40; 27:13–21).

Why death is necessary (see 2 Nephi 9:4–6; Mosiah 16:8–9; Alma 12:25–27).

Life after death in the spirit world (see Alma 40:11–14).

The workings of the evil one (see 2 Nephi 2:27; Alma 28:13; 3 Nephi 2:2).

The order of the priesthood (see Mosiah 29:42; Alma 4:20; 5:3, 44; Alma 13:1–10).

Sacramental prayers (see Moroni 4:3; 5:2).

A sure way to judge between good and evil (see Moroni 7:16).

How to retain a remission of your sins (see Mosiah 4:26).

Clear, prophetic warnings and many, many other things pertaining to the redemption of man and to our lives. All are parts of the fulness of the gospel (see D&C 20:9).

The Book of Mormon confirms the teachings of the Old Testament. It confirms the teachings of the New Testament. It restores “many plain and precious things” (1 Nephi 13:28) lost or taken from them (see also 1 Nephi 13:20–42; 14:23). It is in truth another testament of Jesus Christ.

## A powerful defense of the Prophet Joseph

This year we celebrate the 175th anniversary of the organization of the Church and the 200th anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith. In the Church, much will be written and said to honor him.

As usual there will be much said and written to discredit him. There always were, are now, and ever will be those who stir into 200-year-old dust, hoping to find something Joseph is alleged to have said or done in order to demean him.

The revelations tell us of “those that shall lift up the heel against mine anointed, saith the Lord, and cry they have sinned when they have not sinned before me, saith the Lord, but have done that which was meet in mine eyes, and which I commanded them” (D&C 121:16). They face very stern penalties indeed.

We do not have to defend the Prophet Joseph Smith. The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ will defend him for us. Those who reject Joseph Smith as a prophet and revelator are left to find some other explanation for the Book of Mormon; and for the second powerful defense, the Doctrine and Covenants; and

a third, the Pearl of Great Price. Published in combination, these scriptures form an unshakable testament that Jesus is the Christ and a witness that Joseph Smith is a prophet.

And I join the millions of others who have that testimony, and bear it to you in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Bishop Richard C. Edgley

### **A professor's excitement for the gospel**

In 1995 I was invited to give a welcome and some opening remarks at a scientific seminar in Salt Lake City on the subject of child nutrition. Ninety-six scientists from 24 countries attended. As I surveyed the audience during my remarks, I was impressed by the many nations represented, as evidenced by their dress, skin color, language, and other distinguishing features.

Three or four months later I attended a stake conference on the East Coast of the United States. As I sat on the stand in preparation for the priesthood leadership session, an African man entered the chapel and sat down by the aisle. He looked vaguely familiar, but I couldn't remember where I might have seen him. I leaned over and asked the stake president who the man was. The stake president answered, "Oh, he is not a member of the Church. He is a visiting professor from Africa teaching at a prestigious university in the area. A few months ago he attended some kind of scientific seminar in Salt Lake City. He picked up a pamphlet about the Church, which led him to read everything he could find about the Church. He now attends every meeting possible." Half in jest, the stake president then said, "I would be surprised if he were not attending Relief Society meetings."

After the priesthood leadership meeting, I reintroduced myself to the visiting professor. He affirmed his excitement for this newly discovered source of truth. He explained that his family, still in Africa, was studying with the missionaries and would be joining him in America in about four weeks, at which time they would all be baptized together.

At the conclusion of the Saturday evening adult session, this man came rushing to the podium and, thumping his chest, excitedly declared, "My heart is throbbing just like this. I can hardly contain it in my body. I don't know if I can wait the four weeks for my family to be baptized." I suggested he ought to slow down his heart and wait for his wife and children so all could be baptized together.

### **A still, small voice and a throbbing heart**

When Elijah was fleeing for his life from the wicked Phoenician princess Jezebel, the Lord directed him to a high mountain, where he had a most unusual experience. As Elijah stood upon the mount before the Lord, he felt "a great and strong wind . . . ; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice" (1 Kings 19:11–12).