

Personal Strength through the Atonement of Jesus Christ

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Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, each of us can become clean and the burden of our rebellion will be lifted.

Recently I was blessed to meet with a most impressive group of youth from the state of Idaho. One virtuous young woman asked me what I feel is the most important thing they should be doing in their lives right now. I suggested they learn to recognize the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ in their lives. Today I expound on one aspect of that power, which is the personal strength we can receive through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

In the Book of Mormon we read of Ammon and his brethren teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to a people who were “a wild and a hardened and a ferocious people.”¹ Many of the people were converted and chose to leave behind their sinful behavior. So complete was their conversion that they buried their weapons and covenanted with the Lord that they would never use them again.²

Later, many of their unconverted brethren came upon them and began to slay them. The now-faithful people chose to succumb to the sword rather than risk their spiritual lives by taking up arms. Their righteous example helped even more people to be converted and to lay down their weapons of rebellion.³

Through Ammon, the Lord guided them to refuge among the Nephites, and they became known as the people of Ammon.⁴ The Nephites protected them for many years, but eventually the Nephite army began to wear down, and reinforcements were gravely needed.⁵

The people of Ammon were at a critical moment of their spiritual lives. They had been true to their covenant never to take up arms. But they understood that fathers are responsible to provide protection to their families.⁶ That need seemed great enough to merit consideration of breaking their covenant.⁷

Their wise priesthood leader, Helaman, knew that breaking a covenant with the Lord is never justified. He offered an inspired alternative. He reminded them that their sons had never been guilty of the same sins and therefore had not needed to make the same covenant.⁸ Though the sons were very young, they were physically strong and, more important, they were virtuous and pure. The sons were fortified by the faith of their mothers.⁹ Under the direction of their prophet-leader, these young men took their fathers’ place in defense of their families and homes.¹⁰

The events surrounding this critical decision demonstrate how the Atonement of Jesus Christ brings personal strength to the lives of the children of God. Consider the tender feelings of those fathers. How must they have felt

to know that the rebellious actions of their past prevented them from protecting their wives and children at that moment of need? Knowing personally of the atrocities their sons would now face, they must have privately wept. Fathers, not children, are supposed to protect their families!¹¹ Their sorrows must have been intense.

Why would their inspired priesthood leader fear their consideration to retrieve their weapons, “lest ... they should lose their souls”?¹² The Lord has declared, “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.”¹³ These faithful fathers had long since repented of their sins and become clean through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, so why were they counseled not to defend their families?

It is a fundamental truth that through the Atonement of Jesus Christ we can be cleansed. We can become virtuous and pure. However, sometimes our poor choices leave us with long-term consequences. One of the vital steps to complete repentance is to bear the short- and long-term consequences of our past sins. Their past choices had exposed these Ammonite fathers to a carnal appetite that could again become a point of vulnerability that Satan would attempt to exploit.

Satan will try to use our memory of any previous guilt to lure us back into his influence. We must be ever vigilant to avoid his enticements. Such was the case of the faithful Ammonite fathers. Even after their years of faithful living, it was imperative for them to protect themselves spiritually from any attraction to the memory of past sins.

In between the many battles, Captain Moroni directed fortification of the weakest cities. “He caused that they should build a breastwork of timbers upon the inner bank of the ditch; and they cast up dirt out of the ditch against the breastwork of timbers ... until they had encircled the city ... with a strong wall of timbers and earth, to an exceeding height.”¹⁴ Captain Moroni understood the importance of fortifying the weak areas to create strength.¹⁵

These Ammonite fathers were much the same. They needed taller and wider fortifications between their faithful lives and the unrighteous behavior of their past. Their sons, who were blessed with righteous traditions, were not as vulnerable to the same temptations. They were able to defend their families faithfully without compromising their spiritual well-being.

The joyful news for anyone who desires to be rid of the consequences of past poor choices is that the Lord sees weaknesses differently than He does rebellion. Whereas the Lord warns that unrepented rebellion will bring punishment,¹⁶ when the Lord speaks of weaknesses, it is always with mercy.¹⁷

Undoubtedly, there is some allowance that the Ammonite fathers were taught the false traditions of their parents, but all of Father in Heaven’s children come to mortality with the Light of Christ. Regardless of the cause of their sinful deeds, the effect was the development of a spiritual vulnerability that Satan would attempt to exploit.

Mercifully, they were taught the gospel, repented, and through the Atonement of Jesus Christ became spiritually much stronger than Satan’s enticements. It is likely they had not felt the temptation to return to their brutal past, yet by following their prophet-leader, they didn’t give Satan the chance to “[cheat] their souls, and [to lead] them away carefully down to hell.”¹⁸ The Savior’s Atonement not only cleansed them from sin, but because of their obedience to the counsel of their priesthood leader, the Savior was able to protect them from their weaknesses and strengthen them. Their humble, lifelong commitment to forsaking their sins did more to protect

their families than anything they could have done on the battlefield. Their submission did not deprive them of blessings. It strengthened them and blessed them and blessed future generations.

The end of the story illuminates how the mercy of the Lord made “weak things become strong.”¹⁹ These faithful fathers sent their sons off under the care of Helaman. Though the sons fought in fierce battles where all received at least some injury, not one life was lost.²⁰ The young men proved to be a vital boost to the weary Nephite army. They were faithful and spiritually stronger when they returned home. Their families were blessed, protected, and strengthened.²¹ In our day, countless students of the Book of Mormon have been edified by the example of these pure and righteous sons.

Each of us has had times in our lives when we have made poor choices. We are all in desperate need of the redemptive power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Each of us must repent of any rebellion. “For I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance.”²² He cannot because He knows what it takes to become like Him.

Many of us have allowed weakness to develop in our character. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we, like the Ammonites, can build spiritual fortifications between ourselves and any past mistakes that Satan attempts to exploit. The spiritual protections built around the Ammonite fathers blessed and strengthened themselves, their families, their country, and future generations. The same can be true with us.

So how do we build these eternal fortifications? The first step must be sincere, thorough, and complete repentance. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, each of us can become clean and the burden of our rebellion will be lifted. Remember, repentance is not punishment. It is the hope-filled path to a more glorious future.

Father in Heaven has provided us tools that help to build the fortifications between our vulnerabilities and our faithfulness. Consider the following suggestions:

1. •Make covenants and receive ordinances for yourself. Then steadily and consistently work to provide ordinances in the temple for your own ancestors.
2. •Share the gospel with nonmember or less-active family members or friends. Sharing these truths can bring a renewed enthusiasm into your life.
3. •Serve faithfully in all Church callings, especially home teaching and visiting teaching assignments. Don't be just a 15-minutes-a-month home or visiting teacher. Rather, reach out to each individual member of the family. Get to know them personally. Be a real friend. Through acts of kindness, show them how very much you care for each of them.
4. •Most important, serve the members of your own family. Make the spiritual development of your spouse and children a very high priority. Be attentive to the things you can do to help each one. Give freely of your time and attention.

In each of these suggestions, there is a common theme: fill your life with service to others. As you lose your life in the service of Father in Heaven's children,²³ Satan's temptations lose power in your life.

Because your Father in Heaven loves you profoundly, the Atonement of Jesus Christ makes that strength possible. Isn't it wonderful? Many of you have felt the burden of poor choices, and each of you can feel the elevating power of the Lord's forgiveness, mercy, and strength. I have felt it, and I testify that it is available to

each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Alma 17:14; see also Alma 17–27.

2. See Alma 23:4–7; 24:5–19.

3. See Alma 24:20–27.

4. See Alma 27.

5. See Alma 53:8–9; 56:10–17.

6. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129.

7. See Alma 53:10–13.

8. See Alma 53:14–16.

9. See Alma 56:48.

10. See Alma 53:17–22; 56:3–10, 30–57.

11. See *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129.

12. Alma 53:15.

13. Doctrine and Covenants 58:42.

14. Alma 53:4.

15. See Ether 12:27.

16. See 1 Samuel 12:15; Isaiah 1:20; 1 Nephi 2:23; Mosiah 15:26; Alma 9:24; Doctrine and Covenants 76:25; Moses 4:3.

17. See Proverbs 28:13; 1 Corinthians 2:3; 15:43; 2 Corinthians 13:4; James 3:17; 2 Nephi 3:13; Jacob 4:7; Alma 34:17; 3 Nephi 22:8; Ether 12:26–28; Doctrine and Covenants 24:11; 35:17; 38:14; 62:1.

18. 2 Nephi 28:21.

19. Ether 12:27.

20. See Alma 57:25; 58:39.

21. See Alma 58:40.

22. Doctrine and Covenants 1:31.

23. See Matthew 16:25; Doctrine and Covenants 88:125.