

The Virtue of the Word

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There is virtue in the words of ancient and modern prophets precisely because their words are the Lord's words.

In the Book of Mormon, we read of a vital decision made by the prophet Alma in a beloved verse of scripture. Prior to reviewing those familiar words, please consider with me the difficult circumstances under which that decision was made.

A faction of people, calling themselves Zoramites, had separated from the Nephites¹ and gathered in the borders of the land near the Lamanites.² The Nephites had recently defeated the Lamanites in an unprecedented battle in which tens of thousands were killed,³ and it was “greatly feared that the Zoramites would enter into a correspondence with the Lamanites, and that it would be the means of great loss.”⁴ Beyond the concerns of war, Alma had learned that the Zoramites, who “had had the word of God preached unto them,”⁵ were turning to idol worship and “perverting the ways of the Lord.”⁶ All of this weighed heavily on Alma and was “the cause of great sorrow.”⁷

Finding himself in these complex and challenging circumstances, Alma pondered what should be done. In his decision we read words that were preserved to inspire and instruct us as we navigate the complex and challenging circumstances of our day.⁸

“And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should *try the virtue of the word of God.*”⁹

Among many possible solutions, Alma's faith led them to rely on the power of the word. It is no coincidence that some of the most powerful sermons found anywhere in scripture were preached immediately following that decision. In chapters 32 and 33 of Alma, we read his masterful discourse on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in chapter 34 we find Amulek's seminal teachings on the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Illustrations of the Virtue of the Word

Indeed, throughout scripture we read of miraculous blessings poured out upon those who have chosen to try the virtue of the word of God in their lives.¹⁰ I invite you to ponder three examples with me as we turn our focus to the Book of Mormon—a book that President Russell M. Nelson described as “our *latter-day* survival guide.”¹¹

First, reminding his people how the Lord delivered their fathers, Alma taught: “Behold, he changed their hearts; yea, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God. Behold, they were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, *their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word.*”¹² Perhaps you are feeling as though you were in the midst of darkness. Does your soul ache for illumination? If so, please try the virtue of the word of God.

Second, reflecting on the Lord’s conversion of the Lamanites, which he witnessed as a missionary, Ammon said, “Behold, how many thousands of our brethren has he loosed from the pains of hell; and they are brought to sing redeeming love, and *this because of the power of his word which is in us.*”¹³ Brothers and sisters, there are so many among us who are yearning for someone we love to be brought to sing redeeming love. In all our efforts, let us remember to try the virtue of the word of God, which is in us.

Third, in the book of Helaman we read, “Yea, we see that whosoever *will* may lay hold upon *the word of God, which is quick and powerful*, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man [and woman] of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery ... and land their souls ... at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁴ Are you seeking to cut through all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil so prevalent in the philosophies of our day? Do you desire to disperse the clouds of confusion caused by an overabundance of information in order to focus more singularly on the covenant path? Please try the virtue of the word of God.

As one who has been changed by the power of the word, I personally testify of this truth so beautifully taught by our beloved prophet, President Russell M. Nelson: “To me, the power of the Book of Mormon is most evident in the mighty change that comes into the lives of those who read it ‘with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ.’ Many converts forsake much that they once held dear in order to abide by the precepts of that book. ... It will be your most effective instrument in bringing souls unto Jesus the Christ.”¹⁵

The Source of Virtue

In these and other illustrations, we witness the virtue of the word of God in the lives of His children. We might ask, what is the source of that virtue or power?

As we consider this question, it is essential to remember that the phrase “the word,” as used in scripture, has at least two meanings. Elder David A. Bednar recently taught that “one of the names of Jesus Christ is “The Word”” and that “the teachings of the Savior, as recorded in the holy scriptures, also are ‘the word.’”¹⁶

The prophet Nephi illustrated the relationship between these two meanings when he wrote: “Hearken unto these words and believe in Christ; and if ye believe not in these words believe in Christ. And if ye shall believe in Christ ye *will* believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me.”¹⁷ Thus we learn that there is virtue in the words of ancient and modern prophets *precisely* because their words are the Lord’s words.¹⁸ My dear friends, accepting this eternal truth is critical to our spiritual survival in the latter days¹⁹ when, as prophesied, there is “a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.”²⁰

Ultimately, the virtue of the word of God *is* the Lord Jesus Christ.²¹ As we comprehend this more fully, we can make an eternally significant connection between the role of His prophets and the Redeemer Himself. Our love for Him, our desire to draw closer to Him and to abide in His love,²² will motivate us to try the virtue of the word in our lives—both the virtue that flows from Him as our personal Savior and Redeemer²³ and the virtue that flows from Him through the words of “the chosen vessels of the Lord.”²⁴ We will come to discern that, as helpful as other sources may be in our study of the Savior and the words of His prophets, they must never become a replacement for them. We must drink deeply and often²⁵ directly from the source.²⁶

I express my love to each of you, my brothers and my sisters. In that love, I plead with you to experience the virtue of the word of God, particularly through the Book of Mormon, every day of your life. As you do so, you will experience this prophetic promise from President Russell M. Nelson: “I promise that as you prayerfully study the Book of Mormon *every day*, you will make better decisions—*every day*. I promise that as you ponder what you study, the windows of heaven will open, and you will receive answers to your own questions and direction for your own life. I promise that as you daily immerse yourself in the Book of Mormon, you can be immunized against the evils of the day.”²⁷

I testify that our Heavenly Father has given us the word because He loves us perfectly and wants each of us to return home to live with Him

forever. I testify of “the Word ... made flesh,”²⁸ even Jesus the Christ, and of His power to save and to redeem us. I know that His virtue flows through the words of His prophets, both past and present.

It is the prayer of my heart that we may possess the wisdom and meekness to hold fast²⁹ to the word of God and stay on the covenant path that leads to exaltation and eternal life.³⁰ May we continually experience the mighty change available to each of us through the virtue of the Word.³¹ In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Alma 30:59.
2. See Alma 31:3.
3. See Alma 28:2.
4. Alma 31:4. Please note that Alma and his people previously experienced such a “correspondence” between the Amlicites and Lamanites, which led to great sorrow and loss (see Alma 2:21–38; 3:1–3).
5. Alma 31:8.
6. Alma 31:1.
7. Alma 31:2.
8. See Mormon 8:34–35.
9. Alma 31:5; emphasis added.
10. See, for example, 1 Nephi 15:24; Alma 32:41–43; 36:26; 37:8, 44–45.
11. Russell M. Nelson, “Embrace the Future with Faith,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2020, 75.
12. Alma 5:7; emphasis added.
13. Alma 26:13; emphasis added.
14. Helaman 3:29–30; emphasis added.
15. Russell M. Nelson, “The Book of Mormon: A Miraculous Miracle” (address given at the seminar for new mission leaders, June 23, 2016), quoting in part Moroni 10:4.
16. David A. Bednar, “But We Heeded Them Not,” *Liahona*, May 2022, 16.
17. 2 Nephi 33:10; emphasis added.
18. See Doctrine and Covenants 1:38.

19. See Doctrine and Covenants 1:14–18.
20. Amos 8:11.
21. See Alma 34:6.
22. See John 15:10.
23. See Mark 5:25–34.
24. Moroni 7:31.
25. “There is a better way to prepare, because great faith has a short shelf life. We could decide to persist in studying the words of Christ in the scriptures and the teachings of living prophets. This is what I will do. I will go back to the Book of Mormon and drink deeply and often” (Henry B. Eyring, “Spiritual Preparedness: Start Early and Be Steady,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2005, 39).
26. “For me, the reading of the scriptures is not the pursuit of scholarship. Rather, it is a love affair with the word of the Lord and that of his prophets. ...

“I do not concern myself much with reading long commentary volumes designed to enlarge at length upon that which is found in the scriptures. Rather, I prefer to dwell with the source, tasting of the unadulterated waters of the foundation of truth—the word of God as he gave it and as it has been recorded in the books we accept as scripture. Through reading the scriptures, we can gain the assurance of the Spirit that that which we read has come of God for the enlightenment, blessing, and joy of his children” (Gordon B. Hinckley, “Feasting upon the Scriptures,” *Ensign*, Dec. 1985, 44, 45; *Tāmbuli*, June 1986, 2, 4).
27. Russell M. Nelson, “The Book of Mormon: What Would Your Life Be Like without It?,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2017, 62–63.
28. John 1:14.
29. See 1 Nephi 8:30.
30. “The covenant path is the *only* path that leads to exaltation and eternal life” (Russell M. Nelson, “The Power of Spiritual Momentum,” *Liahona*, May 2022, 98).
31. See Alma 5:11–13.

