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## The Book of Mormon — A Guide to Religious Living: V. An Experiment with Faith

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# The Book of Mormon — A Guide to Religious Living

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## V. AN EXPERIMENT WITH FAITH

THERE are men described in the Book of Mormon who had faith to move mountains. The bare mention of Lehi, Nephi, and the Brother of Jared brings to mind incidents of faith beyond the capacity of many to believe. Even believers, as they contemplate the power of faith in the lives of these men, will feel to say—"such faith is not for me; it was had only by the prophets."

There is a sermon on faith in Alma, chapter 32, however, which brings this principle within reach of the humblest believer. It is even made inviting to the skeptic who will entertain the least desire to believe, even enough to experiment with the word of God. It is our purpose in this article to develop Alma's concept of faith, to indicate the excellent and quite original reflections he brings to this foundation-principle of the religious life.

### *Faith and Knowledge*

In Alma's introduction, he distinguishes between faith and knowledge.

"And now as I said concerning faith—faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore

if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true."

(Alma 32:21.)

Alma does not identify faith with knowledge. Neither does he place the one in opposition with the other. For him, they are not diametrically opposite things, at war with one another. It is not necessary to choose between them, for each has its role to play in the total life of man. As his sermon unfolds, we see that faith is a power of the mind which can lead us beyond the limits of our present knowledge to new and larger concepts of truth. Once knowledge is gained, then faith in that particular thing becomes dormant. Faith has become knowledge. Since knowledge is never complete nor sufficient for living in the present, we again press on by faith. Thus faith leads to knowledge and knowledge, in turn, may lead to faith. Neither is possible without the other. Both are indispensable to living.

With this distinction made between faith and knowledge, Alma proceeds to elaborate how faith in the word of God can grow into certain knowledge. In so doing he

is not dogmatic. He makes no extravagant claims. In a most reasonable spirit, he invites us to experiment with the word. (To our recollection this is the only chapter in any scripture in which the word experiment is used.)

"But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words." (32:27.)

#### *Experiment*

The word *experiment* we associate with science. It is one of the most effective tools of scientific work—the basis of much discovery and verification. There are many who naively assume that there is no place for experimentation in religion. They feel that religious principles and convictions cannot be verified in experience but are ill-founded in conjecture, feeling and faith—in things far too personal and subjective for verification.

It is true that gospel teachings cannot be established in the same laboratory or with the same tools used in a specific science. In fact, each science has its own specific methods and tools within the general method and spirit of science. Faith, too, will always play a large role in religion, even larger than its role in science. Faith, however, is not the only basis of the religious life. Faith can lead us to experience and this experience can become the

foundation of our certain knowledge about many fundamentals of religion. It is with this thought in mind that Alma invites us to experiment with his words. Let us follow the development of his thought.

"Now, we will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed . . . behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will *begin* to say within yourselves—It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, *for it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me.*" (Vs. 28.)

This change wrought in the inner life, says Alma, would increase our faith but it is not yet a perfect knowledge. We must continue to cultivate the seed of faith until it "swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow." Then we can be sure that this is a good seed, "for every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness."

The word of God when lived, to give Alma's thought, swells the soul, enlightens the understanding, and begins to expand the mind.

"O then, is not this real? I say unto you, Yea, because it is light; and whatsoever is light, is good, because it is discernible, therefore ye must know that it is good . . ." (Vs. 35.)

Religious principles are no less real in life than are the things in nature which we can see and hear and touch. Love is less tangible than

food, but not less real nor meaningful. Hate may destroy one's life more slowly than some poisons, but quite as surely and often more tragically.

There is no principle Jesus taught which cannot be verified in experience, in the sense that it enables a person or a society to live with less conflict and frustration and with more unity and meaning and, as Paul wrote, "with the peace of God, which passeth all understanding . . ." (Phil. 4:7.)

### *The Fruits of Faith*

If we will continue this experiment with faith and nourish the word "with great diligence, and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root; and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life . . . and by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, *which is most precious, which is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst.*" (Vss. 41, 42.)

The fruits of faith Alma promises are not prosperity, a ripe old age, freedom from adversity, sorrow, and misfortune but satisfactions of the spirit—peace of mind, increasing and lasting joy, significant living, the love of God and men—gifts of the spirit, "the enduring satisfactions of life."

That these fruits of experimenting with his words are to be tasted

in this life is implied throughout the entire chapter. Faith is its own reward; religion brings its own satisfaction, here and now as always. This is clearly stated by Amulek in Alma 34:31.

"Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold *now is the time and the day of your salvation*; and therefore, if ye will repent, and harden not your hearts, *immediately* shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you."

Alma's words and point-of-view are reminiscent of Jesus' conversation with the woman of Samaria (see John 4:1-14) in which he told her that whosoever drinketh of this water (in Jacob's well) shall thirst again. But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." They also remind us of the closing words in the Sermon on the Mount, the parable of building one's house upon a rock. (See Matt. 7:24-27.)

### *Nourish the Word with Care*

In Alma's discussion of how faith leads to knowledge, he wisely inserts a bit of caution. Many cast aside religion because the fruit is not good. This is not the fault of religion, Alma points out, but because our own ground is barren.

"If ye neglect the tree, and take no thought for its nourishment, be-

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er" will be humble. She will seek divine guidance. She helps to build the thoughts and lives of those whose ideals will set the pace for the tomorrows. She must have faith in a kind Heavenly Father. She must have loyalty and good will for her fellowmen. She must have respect for herself.

It is to be hoped that from such a discussion all teachers might resolve to become "understanding teachers" so that the beautiful Gospel of Jesus Christ might be more effective in the lives of all members.

*Questions for discussion*

1. How many children can most

profitably be assigned to one teacher?

2. What types of equipment are needed to illustrate a lesson for the young child?

3. How can the teacher and the parent best cooperate in helping the beginning child feel secure in Sunday School attendance?

4. How mature should a teacher in the Junior Sunday School be?

5. How can officers and teachers of the Junior and Senior Sunday Schools cooperate so as to make a unified program?

—Hazel Fletcher

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hold it will not get any root; and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it, because it hath no root it withers away, and ye pluck it up and cast it out.

"Now this is not because the seed was not good, neither is it because the fruit thereof would not be desirable; but it is because your ground is barren, and ye will not nourish the tree, therefore, ye cannot have the fruit thereof."

(Vss. 38, 39.)

*Faith in Christ*

That which largely determines  
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the fruitfulness of one's faith is its object. The distinguishing feature of our faith, as stated in the Fourth Article of Faith, is *faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*. The richness of our religious living will depend largely on what we have faith in because of our faith in Christ.

Faith in Christ is the dominant theme in the Book of Mormon from the fly-leaf to Moroni's last chapter. It is a rich faith too, for it associates with Christ personal immortality, forgiveness of sin, the love of every virtue and good thing, and a deep, abiding love for all men.