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Gayle O. Brown

As we come to understand the gospel, we find that we are continually reminded of the principle of love. From the time we are very small, we are taught both to love God and to love one another. In actuality, we observe that some members of the Church seem to radiate and to demonstrate love very naturally. Others pass through a real struggle in order to display love. For these, loving constitutes a principle that requires understanding, nurturing, and work. While one's love generally increases with maturity, it is also possible to become less loving as one grows older. But most of us, it is to be hoped, use our lifetimes to assimilate the facets of love and to learn to be givers of love as well as recipients of God's love.

For those who desire and need to learn more about love, a study of the Book of Mormon can deepen their understanding and, I believe, enhance their ability to share that love. In this sacred book, we find examples of not only how we can be filled with love, but also what some results of love can be. In addition, it explains suitable and unsuitable objects of love. It further tells us whom God loves and whom we should love, and deals in depth with the aspects of charity, or the love of Christ. But before

Gayle O. Brown is an Arabic translator.

turning to a general discussion of these features of the message of the Book of Mormon, let me draw attention to three important aspects of love which are highlighted only briefly.

First, a point is made that love can have a consuming effect. We all recall Nephi's stirring lamentation in which, as he bemoans his own weaknesses, he exclaims, "O wretched man that I am!" (2 Nephi 4:17). Then, almost as a response to his despair, he recalls God's support in the past and declares, "[The Lord] hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh" (v. 21). From what Nephi says, it appears that the love of the Lord had come to him as a totally overwhelming feeling. Such, Nephi learned, was the *power* of love.

The second concise principle is described as a feasting, or banqueting, on the love of the Lord. In this connection, we read Jacob's brief but teeming statement that the pure in heart may feast upon the love of God if their minds are firm forever (see Jacob 3:2). Note that being allowed to partake of love in this manner requires not only that the participant be pure in heart but also possess a firm resolve to remain so. To such, the love of God is abundantly available.

Third, the Book of Mormon tells us that love can dispel all fear. One can think of few promises in modern life that are more welcome. It is in Mormon's important letter to his son Moroni that he affirms that he does not fear what man can do, for "perfect love casteth out all fear" (Moroni 8:16). In this connection, one is struck by a similar concept in 1 John 4:18 which states: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."

It is clear from these impressive cameos that love can feel like a consuming of one's flesh, is available to the pure and steadfast of heart, and drives out fear. But the Book of Mormon has much more to say about love.

In introducing the topics which the Book of Mormon discusses at length, I want to observe that at times we are faced with trying to love someone who is difficult to love. Perhaps it is a child who has caused many problems. Perhaps it is a teacher who is unfair. It may be someone

who has cheated us or harmed us in some way. We can all think of examples in our lives of people who are difficult to love. Nephi had faith in the Lord when he said, "I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them" (1 Nephi 3:7). Because the Lord has commanded us to love, he will prepare a way for us to learn to love. Some of the ways are explained in the Book of Mormon in scriptures which refer to being "filled with love."

King Benjamin taught his people "to *keep the commandments of God*, that they might rejoice and be *filled with love* towards God and all men" (Mosiah 2:4; emphasis added). It appears that to be filled with love entails keeping the commandments of God. When we keep the commandments, it is easier to love God, ourselves, and all mankind.

He further stated that "the natural man is an enemy to God . . . unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit . . . and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, *full of love*, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father" (Mosiah 3:19; emphasis added). This tells us, then, that if we do not become full of love we are, in reality, enemies to God.

Alma instructed his brethren to *humble themselves before the Lord*, to *pray continually* about temptation, and be *led by the Holy Spirit*. And if they did these three things, they would become "humble, meek, submissive, patient, *full of love* and all long-suffering" (Alma 13:28; emphasis added). In sum, basically, Alma instructs us to humble ourselves, to pray, and then to listen as we are led by the Holy Spirit. Following these three steps will assist us in acquiring the ability to become full of love.

Alma later spoke to his son Shiblon about love, counseling him to bridle his passions so that he could be filled with love (see Alma 38:12). We need to control those passions that are not conducive to loving others.

Mormon urged his people to "*pray unto the Father* with all the energy of heart, that ye may be *filled with this*

love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are *true followers* of his Son, Jesus Christ” (Moroni 7:48; emphasis added). Note that both Alma and Moroni coupled prayer with the gaining of love. Could it be that the reason we may not feel love for others is that we have not really prayed for it—or, if we have, it has not been a prayer with all “energy of heart”? The latter part of the passage just quoted mentions love as something that is bestowed upon the “true followers” of Jesus Christ. If we do not feel the whole power of love, perhaps we have not prayed enough for it or are not yet true followers of Jesus Christ.

Mormon further discoursed on love in Moroni 8:26: “And the *remission of sins* bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter *filleteth with hope and perfect love*, which love endureth by *diligence unto prayer*, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God.” Here another aspect of love is highlighted: the remission of sins. Through the remission of sins we are given qualities that make us people whom the Holy Ghost can visit and fill with perfect love. The qualities that lead to this are meekness and lowliness of heart.

Thus we glean from the pages of the Book of Mormon that, if we desire to become filled with love, we must keep the commandments of God (Mosiah 2:4), pray continually (Alma 13:28), bridle our passions (Alma 38:12), become true followers of Jesus Christ (Moroni 7:48), and meekly be led by the Holy Ghost (Moroni 8:26).

We can also find in the Book of Mormon specific mention of the results of love. It appears that, in part, Christ was able to endure persecution because of his loving kindness. We read in 1 Nephi 19:9, “Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men.” It is apparent that his suffering could be borne because of loving kindness. They scourged him and he suffered it, they struck him and he suffered it, they crucified him and he said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

On the other hand, God naturally shows mercy to

those who love him. Abinadi taught the people of King Noah that the Lord is merciful to those who love him, “showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments” (Mosiah 13:14).

In another vein, Alma taught the people that “every man should love his neighbor as himself, that there should be no contention among them” (Mosiah 23:15). Naturally, if every man were to love his neighbor, there would be no contention.

In recounting his missionary experiences, Ammon attributed great love to those Lamanites who were converted. The fruits of his labor were abundant because of his love for the people and their love of him (see Alma 26:31). In fact, their love for their brethren was so great that they would not take up arms against them. The converted Lamanites refused to retaliate even when many of their numbers were slain. They would rather sacrifice their lives than to take the life of an enemy. They “buried their weapons of war deep in the earth, because of their love toward their brethren” (Alma 26:32). Because they had previously sinned so much in their battles against the Nephites, they wanted now to be free from the stain of killing again. Since their love for their brethren prevented them from killing even in self-defense, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies who were slain were thus able to return to God because of their love and because of their corresponding hatred of sin (see Alma 26:34).

With another concern in mind, Moroni tells us that when God’s grace is sufficient for us, we may become perfect in Christ. We are promised that if we “love God with all [our] might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient” (Moroni 10:32).

Though the word “love” is not mentioned in connection with the events at the waters of Mormon, I believe that the words of Alma describe a loving people when he says, “Ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light, yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times” (Mosiah 18:8-9). When we love others, we want to help, comfort, or share their grief.

The Book of Mormon is explicit in naming whom we should love, and even in identifying objects that are not worthy of our love. Let us consider first whom we should love. Alma reminds us “that *every* man should love *his neighbor as himself*, that there should be no contention among them” (Mosiah 23:15; emphasis added). The word “every” means that *all* of us should love all our neighbors, without exception. Sometimes those who are called to particular leadership positions have a gift for loving those over whom they hold a stewardship. For example, a bishop usually has a great love for all the members of his ward. But “every” person could have as great a love for all the members of the ward. One might not have the stewardship a bishop has, but there are no limitations to whom one can love.

In this connection, the Savior commands us to love our enemies. “But behold I say unto you, love *your enemies*” (3 Nephi 12:44; emphasis added). The Lord was certainly an example in this. Some of us have very difficult lives, but our plights do not often reach the magnitude of those which befell the early Saints, the Ammonites or Christ. Their love of God and others superseded their temporal agonies.

Reflecting love’s matchless reach, King Benjamin told his people that it was possible for them to “be filled with love towards *God and all men*,” thus reminding us to love God and *all* men (Mosiah 2:4; emphasis added). A little later he mentioned children and cautioned parents against allowing them to fight, quarrel, and serve the devil. Rather, they should be taught “to love one another, and to serve one another” (Mosiah 4:15).

On the other hand, Moroni noted that some loved their substance more than they loved the poor and needy, or the sick and afflicted (see Mormon 8:37). At times, we too may feel that we have neither the time nor the resources to love or care for such people. Those individuals who live in poverty and want, or who are ill or suffer afflictions could very well be in these circumstances as a result of lack of love either of or for others or themselves. Demonstrations of love, expressed or made visible, can sometimes make the difference between life and death. We

must learn, somehow, not to be so concerned with our own problems that we fail to observe that those around us need love.

In summary, we have been admonished to love our neighbors, ourselves, our enemies, the poor, the needy, the sick and afflicted, God, and all men. This list appears to be all-inclusive, does it not?

By contrast, we are cautioned about placing our love on riches, vain things of the world, and glory. For instance, in the confrontation between Amulek and Zeezrom, Amulek accused Zeezrom of loving lucre more than God (see Alma 11:24). Further, we are often cautioned about the improper use of riches. It may be easier to be more humble and dependent on God if we do not possess great wealth. For example, those who followed Nehor loved the vain things of the world. "They went forth preaching false doctrines . . . for the sake of riches and honor" (Alma 1:16). In another instance, Moroni accused Pahoran of being iniquitous because of his love of glory and vain things (see Alma 60:32). Even though it turned out that Pahoran had not been iniquitous, Moroni's caution still stands. We simply cannot do right if we place love of glory or wealth ahead of being righteous. Christ warned the Nephites that the hypocrites loved to pray so as to be "seen of men" and observed that "they have their reward," that is, they were seen of others (3 Nephi 13:5).

All of these examples concern people during the Book of Mormon era. But the prophet Moroni summons us who live today to the forefront and addresses us directly on the matter. He begins: "Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing. . . . Ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted" (Mormon 8:35, 37). He obviously perceived our generation and the temptations that exist. Several practical questions naturally arise. How many of us would willingly give our hard-earned possessions to those who need them more than we do? How many of us could get along without our surplus substance? When my husband was in graduate school, we could rather

easily have given up any of our possessions because we didn't have very much of value. Now we find ourselves with surplus possessions. How easily can we give them up? Will our love be tested by whether or not we are willing to share them?

In looking for examples, we find love stories in the Book of Mormon. The scarcity of the mention of women eliminates the romantic love story. But we do not doubt the love Sariah had for Lehi and her family, as reflected in the loyalty she displayed in following her husband into the wilderness and to the promised land. Only one incident is recorded in which her troubles so weighed her down that she temporarily lost confidence in her husband and complained, calling him "a visionary man." She feared that her sons had been lost and that they had perished in the desert. Lehi admitted to being a visionary man, but not in a negative sense. Moreover, he assured her that the Lord would bring her sons back safely from Jerusalem. After her husband comforted her and her sons returned, she had the faith and courage to endure the coming difficult journey (see 1 Nephi 5:1-8).

Nephi earned the love of his people. "The people having loved Nephi exceedingly, he having been a great protector for them, having wielded the sword of Laban in their defence, and having labored in all his days for their welfare" (Jacob 1:10), they wanted his name to be remembered, and thus named successive rulers after him. Further, we do not doubt that Nephi loved God and his fellowmen. For instance, his love for his family was severely tested. He labored for and with his brothers throughout his life, and though they tormented and ridiculed him, he hoped for their salvation and tried to convince them of their errors. In a very personal glimpse into the soul of Nephi in 2 Nephi chapter 4, one cannot help but be filled with tender emotion for him as he revealed himself, in both his weaknesses and his strengths, his joys and his temptations. One senses that Nephi was trying to brace himself to face whatever was before him and to rededicate himself to the service of God. He says, "[My God] hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh" (2 Nephi 4:21).

This statement may mean either that God abundantly granted his love to Nephi or that he gave Nephi the power to love as God himself loves. In either case Nephi experienced this gift as a consuming power. Those of us who have felt either of these kinds of love can begin to appreciate what a force or power love can be. When we have a consuming love, we want to be faithful to God. We desire to please him and to do his will. We want others to feel of his love. We are saddened by others' inability to recognize his love. We are strengthened and have power to do things we otherwise might think impossible. Likewise, when we feel consuming love for others, we are able to do all things for them that love requires. A consuming love for all men would be the zenith which Christ was able to attain.

Another example of love was that shown to Lamoni by Ammon. Perhaps the key to the change of heart experienced by King Lamoni's father, aside from the fact that his life was being threatened, was the great love Ammon had for his son: "And when he also saw the great love [Ammon] had for his son Lamoni, he was astonished exceedingly" (Alma 20:26). One recalls that Ammon had initially shown his love for Lamoni by offering to be his servant. By serving him well and saving his flocks, Ammon achieved a position of trust. Lamoni was then willing to listen to Ammon and thus began his conversion. When they later met Lamoni's father, Ammon saved Lamoni's life.

Christ showed great love to the Nephites. Compared to his time in Jerusalem, he spent very little time with the Nephites. But he felt great compassion for them and showed great love to them as he taught them things too sacred to be recorded, blessed their children, and healed their sick. All of these were acts of love. We can feel the emotion of the moment when we read: "And it came to pass that when Jesus had thus spoken he cast his eyes round about again on the multitude, and beheld they were in tears, and did look steadfastly upon him as if they would ask him to tarry a little longer with them. And he said unto them: Behold, my bowels are filled with compassion towards you" (3 Nephi 17:5-6). The Nephites knew that Christ would be with them only briefly. The one whom

they loved would soon be gone. Yet how could they ask the Son of God to remain longer? He perceived this and a feeling of compassion welled up within him; and he was able to stay and minister to them a bit longer. He then asked that all the afflicted be brought to him, and he healed them. He also paid special attention to the children, blessing each one of them, one by one, and prayed to the Father for them. Any of us who have had to leave those whom we love, or have had loved ones leave us, can identify with this passage. As we spend time in one place or another, we grow to love those whom we meet. While we know that there will be others to love in other places, leaving remains difficult. Perhaps we are asked to speak in a sacrament meeting when we are about to move out of a ward and, as we look over the congregation, we are saddened by leaving and wish that we could tarry longer.

Jesus visited the Nephites as he had those in Jerusalem, and there were yet others to whom he must show himself after departing from the Nephites. "But now I go unto the Father, and also to show myself unto the lost tribes of Israel" (3 Nephi 17:4). Even so, because he loved the Nephites and because they reciprocated that love, he tarried.

Another example of one who loved was Mormon. He had become deeply discouraged by the wickedness of his people and consequently refused to lead the Nephite armies for a period. Yet he recorded, "Behold I had led them, notwithstanding their wickedness I had led them many times to battle, and had loved them, according to the love of God which was in me, with all my heart; and my soul had been poured out in prayer unto my God all the day long for them; nevertheless, it was without faith, because of the hardness of their hearts" (Mormon 3:12). Few of us are tried in our love for others as severely as was Mormon.

Whom does God love? "He loveth those who will have him to be their God" (1 Nephi 17:40). He has loved the world, even unto the laying down of [his] life for the world" (Ether 12:33). "He loveth his children" (1 Nephi 11:17). He also "loveth our souls" (Alma 24:14). Each of us, then, can be blessed by and with his love.

There are three scriptures that mention “redeeming love” in the Book of Mormon. “The chains of hell . . . were loosed, and [your fathers’] souls did expand, and they did sing redeeming love” (Alma 5:9). Moreover, “I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?” (Alma 5:26). And finally, “[Our brethren the Lamanites] are brought to sing redeeming love, and this because of the power of his word which is in us, therefore have we not great reason to rejoice?” (Alma 26:13). It appears that the people were feeling the redemptive love of the Lord. However they expressed this, whether in song or praise or thanksgiving, they felt the love of their Redeemer.

There are several scriptures in which “the love of God” is mentioned. One can ponder whether this means “love *for* God” or “love *from* God” or the kind of love God possesses. The meaning of some scriptures can be enriched or enhanced by applying different senses to the words. Nephi, in interpreting Lehi’s dream, described the tree as “the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things” (1 Nephi 11:22). Love of God, then, is desirable above all things. Is this love God’s love for us, or our love for God, or the state of being able to love as God does? In 4 Nephi we read that “there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people” (4 Nephi 1:15). Again, did God’s love dwell in their hearts, or did their love for God dwell in their hearts, or was it a general God-like love that dwelt in their hearts? Was there no contention because everyone felt God’s love, or did everyone love God and therefore live peacefully?

Benjamin listed the ways in which we can become filled with the love of God. He taught that humbling oneself and remembering the greatness of God and one’s own nothingness are part of the process (see Mosiah 4:11-12). Alma taught that we should have “the love of God always in [our] hearts, that [we] may be lifted up at the last day and enter into his rest” (Alma 13:29).

Though we have just mentioned the word *love* thus

far, the Book of Mormon makes it clear that *charity* is love and that all men should possess it (see, for example, 2 Nephi 26:30). Occasionally using the word *charity* in place of *love* gives the latter more depth. It is interesting to note that the word for *love* in Arabic (حب; hubb) is composed of the consonants “ح” (h) and “ب” (b). In order to make the word for *charity* (محبة), a “م” (mem) is added to the beginning of the word, which gives it a little more distinction. But in the Arabic Bible, “love” almost always appears to be the same word as “charity.” They appear to be used in exactly the same way for all kinds of love. “محبة” (*mahaba*) is preferred because it sounds more elegant. *Cruden’s Complete Concordance*, under the entry “love,” has a note to the effect that all references to “charity” in the King James Bible should have been translated “love.” Since the modern usage of the word “charity” no longer carries the meaning “love,” “charity” can be misleading as it appears in the King James Bible.

In the Book of Mormon, charity is called “the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47). It is “everlasting love” (Moroni 8:17). We are all familiar with the comprehensive description of charity which Moroni quotes from his father, Mormon:

And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail—but charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him (Moroni 7:45-47).

The fruits of charity are many. Some are mentioned here by Mormon. Alma taught that if one has charity he “will always abound in good works” (Alma 7:24). Moroni taught that charity brings the Gentiles to “the fountain of all righteousness” (Ether 12:28). Those who have charity “shall have talents more abundantly (Ether 12:35). The charitable will “not suffer the laborer in Zion to perish” (2 Nephi 26:30). And “love . . . for the children of men” is identified as charity in Ether 12:34.

If we lack charity, we “cannot inherit that place which [has been] prepared in the mansions of [the] Father” (Ether 12:34). Moroni makes it clear that without charity we “can in nowise be saved in the kingdom of God” (Moroni 10:21). And finally, “If [we] have not charity [we are] nothing; wherefore [we] must needs have charity” (Moroni 7:44). It is imperative that we come to possess this important gift.

Many examples of love and charity are found throughout the pages of the Book of Mormon. Perhaps love can be compared to the seed mentioned in Alma 32. Love is something that can be planted in our hearts; and if we nurture it and are diligent in our prayers concerning it, it will begin to enlarge our souls. It will even begin to be delicious to us, and our understanding concerning it will be enlightened. Alma encourages us to experiment upon the word of God. If we experiment with love and do as the Lord commands us, one day we shall hear the words, “Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth” (Alma 5:16).