

LESSON 20

Strengthening Our Faith and Testimony

Introduction

Faith in Jesus Christ and His gospel brings strength and spiritual protection to God's children. The Book of Mormon illustrates attitudes and behaviors that can lead individuals to

dwindle in unbelief. Book of Mormon prophets warned of these behaviors and attitudes and taught gospel principles that will fortify and strengthen our faith and testimony.

Background Reading

- Neil L. Andersen, "Spiritual Whirlwinds," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2014, 18–21.
- L. Whitney Clayton, "Choose to Believe," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2015, 36–39.
- Larry S. Kacher, "Trifle Not with Sacred Things," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2014, 104–6.

Suggestions for Teaching

2 Nephi 1:10–11; 9:28; Mosiah 2:36–37; 26:1–4; Alma 12:9–11; 31:8–11; 46:7–8; Helaman 4:11–13; 13:24–26; Mormon 9:7–8

Attitudes and behavior that can undermine faith and testimony

Display the following question and invite students to briefly respond:

- How is it possible for those who have experienced the blessings of the gospel to lose their faith and testimony?

Remind students that the prophet Lehi warned that his posterity would one day lose faith in Jesus Christ and His gospel. Invite a student to read 2 Nephi 1:10–11 aloud, and ask students to look for the effect that unbelief ultimately had on Lehi's posterity. (It may be helpful to explain that the phrase "dwindle in unbelief" means to degenerate spiritually because of unbelief.)

- What effect did unbelief ultimately have on the descendants of Lehi?

Point out that while there were many factors that led to the destruction of the Nephite civilization, the root cause of the Nephites' decline was their loss of faith in Jesus Christ and His gospel. For this reason, the Book of Mormon writers repeatedly warned of behaviors and attitudes that weaken faith in the Lord and continually taught how to build and strengthen testimony.

Ask a student to read Mosiah 26:1–4 aloud, and encourage the class to look for attitudes and behaviors that undermined the faith of some individuals during the reign of King Mosiah.

Invite students to identify a principle taught in these verses about what happens to people who choose not to believe and act upon truth. Among the principles students may identify is the following: **When people choose not to believe and**

act on the truths they are taught, their hearts become hardened and they cannot enjoy the blessings of faith and testimony.

- When people choose not to believe and act on truths they are taught, why do you think their hearts become hardened to the Spirit?

To help students identify additional attitudes and behaviors that can lead to a loss of faith and testimony, write the following scripture passages on the board. Assign each student to read one or two of the passages, and make sure each passage is assigned. Ask students to search their assigned passages for attitudes or behaviors that can lead people to lose faith and testimony.

2 Nephi 9:28

Mosiah 2:36–37

Alma 12:9–11

Alma 31:8–11

Alma 46:7–8

Helaman 4:11–13

Helaman 13:24–26

Mormon 9:7–8

After sufficient time, ask students to share the attitudes or behaviors they have identified and explain how these can weaken faith and testimony. Summarize the students' responses on the board next to the corresponding passages.

- Which of these attitudes or behaviors do you think are most dangerous for young adult members of the Church today? Why?

Ask students to select an attitude or behavior listed on the board and explain what we can do to guard against that attitude or behavior.

Give students a moment to ponder which of the attitudes or behaviors have threatened their own faith and testimony and what they can do to strengthen themselves.

2 Nephi 28:21–23; Mormon 5:16–18

The consequences of losing faith and testimony

Remind students that as the prophet Mormon led the Nephite armies, there came a time when he observed the wicked and hopeless condition of his people. Ask students to study Mormon 5:16–18, looking for Mormon's description of the spiritual condition of his people.

- What do you think it means to live "without Christ and God in the world"?
- What principle can we learn from Mormon's words about those who lose faith in the Lord and refuse to repent? (Although they may use different words, students should identify the following principle: **If we allow ourselves to lose**

faith and we refuse to repent, the Spirit will withdraw from us and we will lose the Lord’s guidance.)

- According to verse 18, what did Mormon warn would be the effect of losing the Lord’s guidance?

Explain that Nephi taught that the process of losing the Spirit and being led captive by the devil is often slow and gradual. Invite a few students to take turns reading aloud from 2 Nephi 28:21–23, and ask the class to identify words and phrases that describe this gradual spiritual decline.

- What attitudes did Nephi identify that can lead to a person’s spiritual decline?
- Why do you think these attitudes are particularly dangerous to our faith?

Ask a student to read aloud the following story by President Henry B. Eyring of the First Presidency:



“Just as truth is given to us line upon line and the light brightens slowly as we obey, even so, as we disobey, our testimony of truth lessens almost imperceptibly, little by little, and darkness descends so slowly that the proud may easily deny that anything is changing.

“I have heard the boast of a man who walked away from the Church slowly. At first he just stopped teaching his Sunday School class, then he stayed away from Church, and then he forgot to pay tithing now and then. . . . He could not sense the difference, but I could. The light in his eyes and even the shine in his countenance was dimming. He could not tell, since one of the effects of disobeying God seems to be the creation of just enough spiritual anesthetic to block any sensation as the ties to God are being cut. Not only did the testimony of the truth slowly erode, but even the memories of what it was like to be in the light began to seem to him like a delusion” (“A Life Founded in Light and Truth” [Brigham Young University devotional, Aug. 15, 2000], 3, speeches.byu.edu).

- What do you think are some indications that a person is beginning to lose his or her faith and testimony?

1 Nephi 15:7–11; 2 Nephi 25:28–29; Mosiah 4:11–12; 15:11; Helaman 15:7–8

Strengthening faith and testimony

Display and invite a student to read the following statement by Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:



“In nature, trees that grow up in a windy environment become stronger. As winds whip around a young sapling, forces inside the tree do two things. First, they stimulate the roots to grow faster and spread farther. Second, the forces in the tree start creating cell structures that actually make the trunk and branches thicker and more flexible to the pressure of the wind. These stronger roots and branches protect the tree from winds that are sure to return.

“You are infinitely more precious to God than a tree. You are His son or His daughter. He made your spirit strong and capable of being resilient to the whirlwinds of life. The whirlwinds in your

youth, like the wind against a young tree, can increase your spiritual strength, preparing you for the years ahead” (“Spiritual Whirlwinds,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2014, 18).

- What can we do to gain spiritual strength and withstand challenges to our faith and testimony?

Remind students that the Book of Mormon contains gospel principles that can guide individuals who seek to have stronger faith and a stronger testimony.

Ask a student to read 2 Nephi 25:28–29 aloud, and explain that these verses summarize a powerful sermon Nephi gave to his people about how to be saved. Ask class members to look for what Nephi taught is the most important decision we will make in our lives.

- What did Nephi teach is the most important decision we will make in our lives? (Help students identify the following principle: **If we choose to believe in Jesus Christ and worship Him with all our might, mind, and strength, then we will remain spiritually strong and not be cast out.**)

Display the following statement by Elder L. Whitney Clayton of the Seventy and ask a student to read it:



“Prophets across the ages have encouraged us and even implored us to believe in Christ. . . . The decision to believe is the most important choice we ever make. It shapes all our other decisions. . . .

“Belief and testimony and faith are not passive principles. They do not just happen to us. Belief is something we choose—we hope for it, we work for it, and we sacrifice for it. We will not accidentally come to believe in the Savior and His gospel any more than we will accidentally pray or pay tithing. We actively choose to believe, just like we choose to keep other commandments” (“Choose to Believe,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2015, 38).

- What do you think it means that “belief and testimony and faith are not passive principles”?
- Why do you think that striving to live the principles of the gospel is the best way to strengthen our faith and testimony?

To help students discover some of the ways that we can make efforts to strengthen our faith and testimony, write the following passages on the board and ask each student to read at least one of them silently. Invite them to look for principles that can help us to strengthen our faith in Jesus Christ and His gospel.

1 Nephi 15:7–11

Mosiah 4:11–12

Mosiah 15:11

Helaman 15:7–8

Invite students to share insights that they found in these scripture passages. You might invite students to bear testimony of how they have applied these or other principles in their lives and been blessed with increased faith in Jesus Christ and His gospel. Encourage students to make the efforts necessary to strengthen their faith in the Lord.

Student Readings

- 1 Nephi 15:7–11; 2 Nephi 1:10–11; 9:28; 25:28–29; 28:21–23; Mosiah 2:36–37; 4:11–12; 15:11; 26:1–4; Alma 12:9–11; Alma 31:8–11; 46:7–8; Helaman 4:11–13; 13:24–26; 15:7–8; Mormon 5:16–18; 9:7–8.
- L. Whitney Clayton, “Choose to Believe,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2015, 36–39.