



# INLAID WITH INNUMERABLE INSIGHTS

by Neal A. Maxwell

One of the relevant functions of an ancient religious record is to provide readers not only with doctrinal purity but with a longitudinal look at a society or a culture as it falls short or measures up to the demanding standards of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Along with the Old Testament, the Book of Mormon gives us a special span of time and history which is inlaid with innumerable insights bearing on today's world. Some of these insights deal with the interplay of feelings and behavior.

## People "Past Feeling"

C. S. Lewis put it well when he wrote:

*The more often a man feels without acting, the less he will ever be able to act, and in the long run, the less he will ever be able to feel.*

Our capacity to feel controls our behavior in many ways. It was Jesus' striking sensitivity to the needs of those about him that made it possible for him to respond in action.

At the other end of the spiritual spectrum are individuals depicted in the Book of Mormon as being "past feeling." Nephi's reproof to his erring brothers notes their increasing insensitivity to things spiritual: "[God] hath spoken unto you in a still small voice, but ye were *past feeling*, that ye could not feel his words." (1 Nephi 17:45.)

When we become too encrusted with error, our spiritual antennae atrophy and we slip beyond reach. This can happen to virtually whole peoples. In his

lamentation to his son Moroni, Mormon notes the deterioration of Nephite society in a citation of symptoms, among which was a wickedness so profound that Mormon's people were described by him as being "*past feeling*." (Moroni 9:20.) The Apostle Paul likened the destructive lasciviousness of church members in Ephesus with their having developed such insensitivity in their satiation that they were "*past feeling*." (Ephesians 4:19.) The celebration of sensation merely robs us, ironically, of the capacity to feel. A sex-saturated society cannot really feel the needs of its suffering members because instead of developing the love that looks outward, it has turned selfishly inward. Imperviousness to the promptings of the still, small voice can put us among those who have ears but cannot hear.

One of the great services rendered to us all by the Church—in addition to bringing us pure doctrine and the ordinances of salvation—is the subtle and direct pressure to perform as Christians ought; the Church keeps us feeling and acting so that conscience and conduct coalesce in a blend of exhortation and experience.

Sick societies seldom suffer from just one disease, but rather have several sicknesses simultaneously. Mormon, in Moroni, chapter 9, notes, in addition to his people's being "past feeling," the following symptoms: "They have *lost their love*, one towards another" (verse 5). "[They] *are without civilization*" (verse 11). "They are *without order* and *without mercy*" (verse 18). "They have become *strong in their perversion*" (verse 19). "They are *without principle*" (verse 20). Decay at several levels had engulfed this people, and while one must be careful

For the general use of Course 12; for Course 17, lesson 46 (August 23), "Further Study of the Scriptures"; for Course 28, lessons 1 and 5 (September 6, October 4), "Purpose and Value of Scriptural Records" and "The Peoples of the Book of Mormon"; for Course 29, lesson 39 (August 2), "Christ Guides His Church and People"; and of general interest.

