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# The Book of Mormon is Relevant Today: Inlaid with Innumerable Insights

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# INLAID WITH INNUMERABLE INSIGHTS

bu 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.

about developing an indicator list that is cavalierly and simplistically applied to modern conditions, the relevancy of key symptoms should not escape us today.

### Unchastity

At another time in Nephite history the Prophet Jacob denounced unchastity, which was apparently widespread. Noting the wives with broken hearts, the children who had lost confidence in their unchaste fathers and whose young but shattered and sobbing hearts moved the prophet to great anguish, Jacob observed how the consequences of unchastity included a condition in which "many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds." (Jacob 2:35.) There are clearly psychological scars left in the wake of unchastity, however sophisticated the society may believe itself to be, which can cause a kind of inner death with resultant bitterness or equally disabling and profound passivity. The children pay a price. Witness what might be called the "Sayonara syndrome" which is reflected in many thousands of young Japanese men and women now coming of age who were fathered by American servicemen and abandoned—cruelly stranded between two cultures without fathers! Time and time again the harsh consequences of a heedless "eat, drink, and be merry" life-style are underscored by the Book of Mormon in the longitudinal look it gives to us of a real people under the real pressures of real life. We must not lose our capacity for love, our order, our civilization, our morality, the confidence of our children, or our capacity to feel!

### Sorrowing of the Damned

Another major insight in Nephite scripture that can help us understand the plight of people trying to extricate themselves from the emotional entanglements of sin is found in Mormon 2:12-14. Again, a large number of people appear to be repenting, but only superficially. Mormon describes their regret as "the sorrowing of the damned" because they have found themselves in a psychological no-man's-land, shorn of old behavior patterns but without the real contrition that could bring them renewal, spiritual support, and joy. Often we see those who cannot take pleasure any longer in sin, but who cannot sorrow unto full repentance. As Thomas Merton observed, it is not enough just to leave Egypt; one must also travel to the Promised Land. Too many of us simply leave our "Egypts," thinking that act by itself is enough—only to find ourselves in a vast wilderness. God can put us on the path to the Promised Land—home—if we are really serious about changing our lives.

The above insights show the interplay of feelings and behavior in individuals and in large groups in such a way that our awareness of these truths validated centuries ago can help us to be more effective teachers, leaders, parents, and followers—today!

Library File Reference: BOOK OF MORMON; EMOTIONS; SEX; SIN.

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