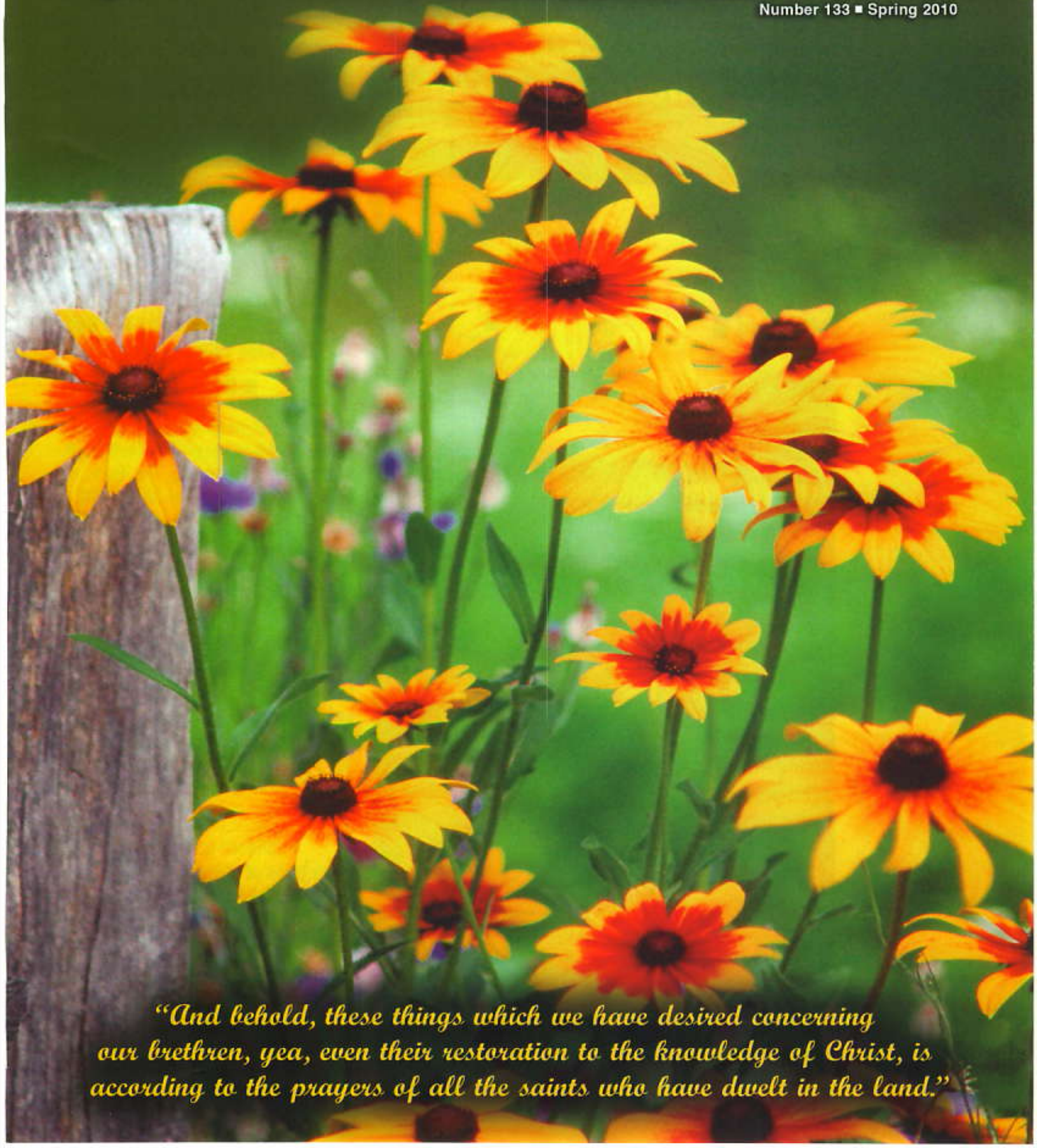




THE WITNESS

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“And behold, these things which we have desired concerning our brethren, yea, even their restoration to the knowledge of Christ, is according to the prayers of all the saints who have dwelt in the land.”

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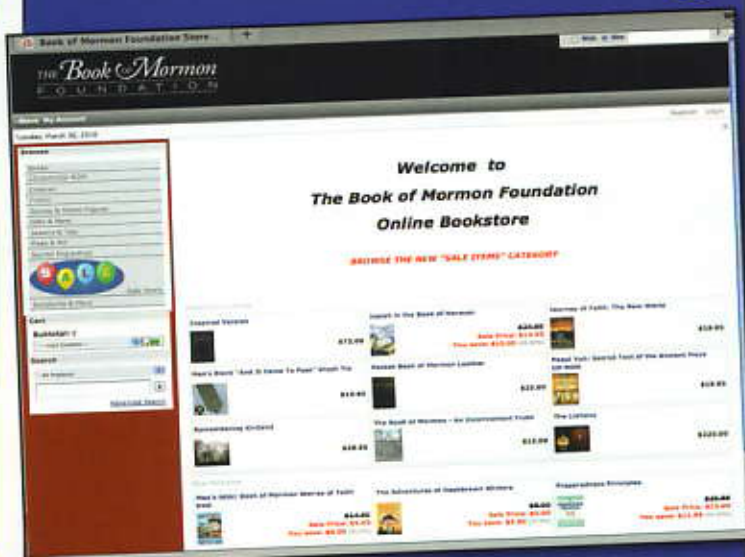
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The Rise and Fall of Nations

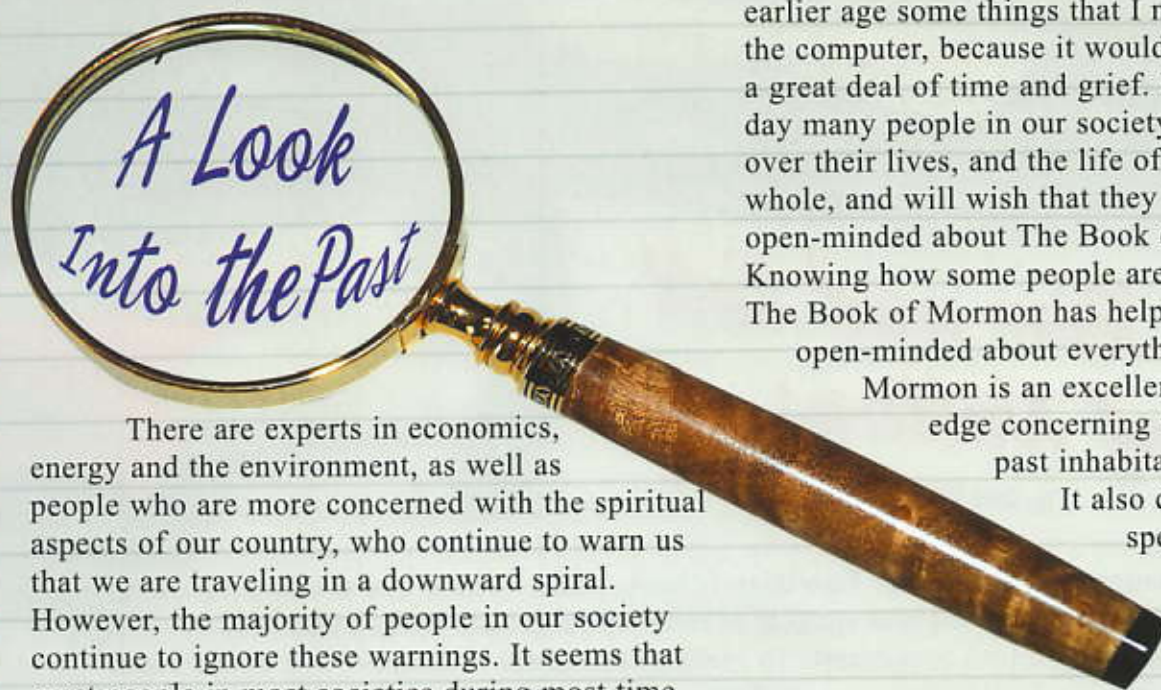
By Dale Gilmore

The senior class officers at Tate High School, where I teach in Cantonment, Florida, invited me to be the guest speaker at their baccalaureate service last May. It would have been my fourth opportunity to speak at this event in the past five years. I said it would have been my fourth time to speak because I actually did not speak. A school in our neighboring county is in trouble with the American Civil Liberties Union because, in the eyes of the ACLU, there is too much school-sponsored, religious-oriented activity going on there. Because of the involvement of the ACLU in that county, Escambia County school district officials asked their attorney to review their baccalaureate and graduation ceremony policies. As a result of this review, it was decided that school district employees should not participate in the baccalaureate service, nor should any prayers be given at the graduation exercise. Great decision! We certainly do not want our young people corrupted by ideas of religion and morality.

Actually, I do have some mixed feelings about this issue. When people, especially here in the South, think of religious beliefs they do NOT think of The Book of Mormon and Mormon beliefs. I am not sure how many people in my school and community realize I am a Book of Mormon believer, but most of my friends know. For the most part, they seem to accept me in spite of my unique religious beliefs rather than because of them. My point is that, as a Restorationist, my religious beliefs would not be the beliefs represented in our schools if we were allowed to mention them. This is one reason I do not care to see much religious indoctrination in our schools. Also, students are considered by the courts to be a "captive audience." In other words, they are required by states, up to a certain age, to attend school. They have no choice in the matter. Therefore, school officials should not be able to take advantage of this situation by forcing children to listen to the prevailing idea of "the correct version of Christianity." I feel strongly that we should be diligent in spreading the good news of Christ, but it should never be forced on anyone.

But why must we impose these same rules to an event that is not mandatory? Voluntary attendance at events such as football games and baccalaureate services is not the same as mandatory classroom attendance. These extracurricular activities should be allowed to begin with a Christian prayer, concluding in the name of Jesus Christ. I could argue why the prayer should be Christian in nature, but that argument is beyond the scope of this paper. However, a number of organizations and groups have dictated that religion must be excluded from all school-sponsored activities. As a society, we seem to have outgrown our need for God.

We are acting in a manner similar to the Nephite and Lamanite societies during their periods of spiritual decline. If we are not careful, we could end up like them.



There are experts in economics, energy and the environment, as well as people who are more concerned with the spiritual aspects of our country, who continue to warn us that we are traveling in a downward spiral. However, the majority of people in our society continue to ignore these warnings. It seems that most people in most societies during most time periods become so consumed with everyday life that they fail to discern major problems destroying their society until it is too late. Societies do not seem to learn very well from the mistakes of earlier collapsed societies. Earlier societies are studied and analyzed but...“Hey, that won’t happen to us.”

Book of Mormon societies were no exception. At best, they ignored the holy prophets who had come to them in order to set them back on the correct path, but at other times, they actually killed those who were giving of themselves in an effort to promote the truth. Our situation is a little different in that I know of no contemporary prophets who have the primary purpose of speaking to our society with words of admonition and warning. That is not to say there have been no words of warning from God through various individuals. We must also be aware of messages purported to be of a divine origin from well-meaning persons which, in reality, may not be true or from God. Nevertheless, God communicates with us in numerous ways such as the inspired written Word and in nature itself.

However, the sad fact is the best warning system available to us has been rejected. My students have taught me most of what I know about

the computer. It is a mutual relationship. I learn without having to read an instruction manual, while they enjoy teaching and making fun of the teacher. I often regret not having learned at an earlier age some things that I now know about the computer, because it would have saved me a great deal of time and grief. I believe that one day many people in our society will look back over their lives, and the life of our country as a whole, and will wish that they had been more open-minded about The Book of Mormon. Knowing how some people are not open to The Book of Mormon has helped me be more open-minded about everything. The Book of Mormon is an excellent source of knowledge concerning this land and its past inhabitants.

It also contains specific and timely warnings to those who live here today. One example of this is found in 3 Nephi:

And thus commandeth the Father that I should say unto you, At that day when (*note “when,” not “if”*) the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fullness of my gospel, and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations; ... I will bring the fullness of my gospel from among them; (3 Nephi 7:34, 35 RLDS) [3 Nephi 16:10 LDS] (*italics added*)

Carefully reread the above verse and make a list of the aforementioned sins that our society is NOT guilty of today. If we continue down this precarious path, God will not have to punish us. We will probably be able to take care of that ourselves. Every past civilization seems to have fallen, at least in part, because of pride. This is not a humble pride that one has for a job well done, but an arrogant pride that conveys a

message of superiority over others. This arrogant pride comes from a belief that, for some reason, a particular civilization is unconditionally blessed by God and will never fall. No civilization seems to be immune to it — not the Chaldeans (Daniel 5), not the Greeks, not the Romans... not the Americans. It is with remorse that I write these words even though they are true. WE are falling in the world rankings in one area after another, yet many of us continue to believe we are immune to failure. “God, guns and guts” will save the day. We especially rely on the latter two items but do not seem to need God any longer. However, possibly out of courtesy, we still keep Him on the list. Another warning comes to us from the Book of Ether:

And this cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, that ye may know the decrees of God, that ye may repent, and not continue in your iniquities until the fullness come, that ye may not bring down the fullness of the wrath of God upon you, as the inhabitants of the land have hitherto done.
(Ether 1:34 RLDS) [Ether 2:11 LDS]

There are a number of verses in The Book of Mormon filled with advice to the inhabitants of this land for these last days. But, as a society, we have rejected this wonderful source of knowledge. Without this moral standard that we can relate to and understand, we become susceptible to the relative moral values of contemporary society. Not only is this where we are today, but it was also the situation the Nephites, Lamanites and Jaredites found themselves in during their periods of moral decay. Laman and Lemuel were both afflicted with “relative moral value syndrome.” Because of their wickedness, they were unable or unwilling to see the wickedness in others who had the same affliction. They told Nephi that... *we know that the people who were in the land of Jerusalem, were a righteous people;* (1 Nephi 5:98 RLDS) [1 Nephi 17:22 LDS] (italics added)

The people in Jerusalem who had become so wicked God was about to bring judgment upon them were considered righteous by Laman and Lemuel. These two men belong to that

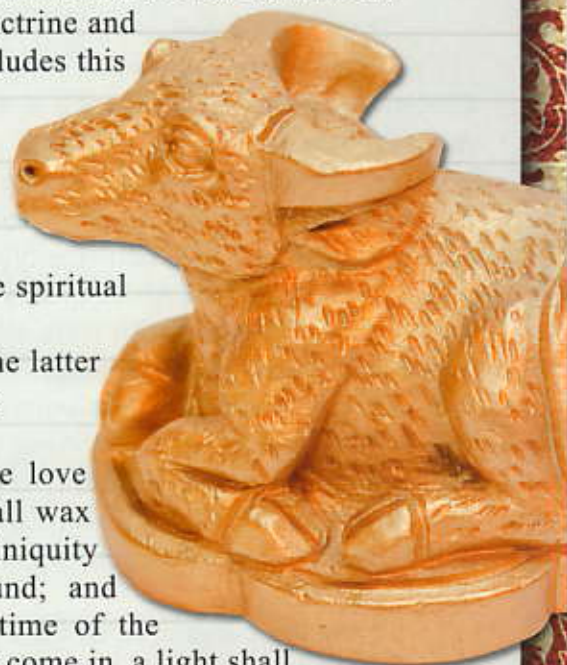
category of people who have had the opportunity to be enlightened, and yet they turned away from that good Spirit.

I fear that we, as a society, fall into that same category. God has blessed us in many ways, but we seem to take those blessings for granted, believing we have some inherent right to them without having to assume any of the responsibilities. I would not be surprised to find that many of us belong to the Lost Tribes of Israel. There is now evidence that descendants of these tribes exist. We are also acting in a similar way to the actions of the Hebrew children while Moses was on the mountain. Both groups have been greatly blessed by God, and both quickly turned to their own idols. The Israelites turned to their golden calf, while we have turned to the gods of materialism and secular humanism.

The Doctrine and Covenants includes this portion of a discourse by Christ to His disciples. He is telling them about the spiritual condition of the world in the latter days. He says:

And the love of men shall wax cold, and iniquity shall abound; and when the time of the Gentiles is come in, a light shall break forth among them that sit in darkness, and it shall be the fullness of my gospel; but they receive it not, for they perceive not the light, and they turn their hearts from me because of the precepts of men;
(Doctrine and Covenants 45:4b-c RLDS)
[Doctrines and Covenants 27-29 LDS]

The “fullness of the gospel” came to the Gentiles in 1830 when The Book of Mormon was first published. Two scriptures help to verify that the “fullness of the gospel” is in The Book of Mormon. First ...then *shall the fullness of the*



gospel of the Messiah come unto the Gentiles, and from the Gentiles unto the remnant of our seed; (1 Nephi 4:16 RLDS) [1 Nephi 15:13 LDS]

Most members of the various groups in the Restoration movement will agree that one of our primary purposes is to take The Book of Mormon, containing the fullness of the gospel, to the posterity of the Lamanites. The Doctrine and Covenants makes it even more clear about what the “fullness of the gospel” refers to.

It says, And again, the elders, priests, and teachers of this church shall teach the principles of my gospel which are in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, in which is the fullness of the gospel; (Doctrine and Covenants 42:5a RLDS) [Doctrine and Covenants 42:12 LDS] (italics added)

I am concerned about our society because, (1) we have historically proclaimed to be a Christian nation, yet we do not conduct ourselves in a way that is pleasing to Christ and (2) we, as a society, have rejected The Book of Mormon. My first point does not mean there are not individuals living the covenant lifestyle — hopefully, you are. The Book of Alma speaks concerning the condition of those who were once spiritually enlightened but had fallen away. These were the Amalekites and the Amulonites who were apostate Nephites. After receiving the Holy Spirit, they turned away from it and thus placed themselves in a worse position than they were in before the Holy Spirit began to guide them.

Now the Lamanites, of themselves, were sufficiently hardened, but the Amalekites, and the Amulonites, were still harder; therefore they did cause the Lamanites that they should harden their hearts, that they should wax strong in wickedness, and their abominations.

(Alma 13:3 RLDS) [Alma 21:3 LDS]

I find it rather interesting that, in this same chapter of Alma, Aaron asked King Lamoni if he believed there was a God.

And the king said, I know that the Amalekites say that there is a God, and I have granted unto them that they should build sanctuaries, that they may assemble themselves together, to worship him. (Alma 13:39 RLDS) [Alma 22:7 LDS]

The interesting part of the verse quoted above is that the Amalekites were allowed to build sanctuaries to worship God, but in Alma 13:3 we find the Amalekites and Amulonites had hardened themselves against the truth. Should this lead me to believe that a big, impressive sanctuary does not necessarily equate with a true covenant relationship with Christ? I would not usually quote such a lengthy scripture as the one below, but I think it is a very important scripture that says much about our society today.



For it shall come to pass in that day, that the churches which are built up, and not

...the Holy Spirit began to guide them.

unto the Lord, when the one shall say unto the other, Behold, I, I am the Lord's; and the other shall say, I, I am the Lord's. And thus shall every one say, that hath built up churches, and not unto the Lord; And they shall contend one with another; and their priests shall contend one with another; and they shall teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance. And they deny the power of God, the Holy One of Israel; and they say unto the people, Hearken unto us, and hear ye our precept; For behold, there is no God today, for the Lord and the Redeemer hath done his work, and he hath given his power unto men. Behold, hearken ye unto my precept: if they shall say there is a miracle wrought, by the hand of the Lord, believe it not; for this day he is not a God of miracles; he hath done his work. Yea, and there shall be many which shall say, Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die: and it shall be well with us. And there shall also be many which shall say, Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God, he will justify in committing a little sin: yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this. And do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God. Yea, and there shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false, and vain, and foolish doctrines, and shall be puffed up in their hearts, and shall seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord; and their works shall be in the dark; and the blood of the saints shall cry from the ground against them. Yea, they have all gone out of the way; they have become corrupted. Because of pride, and because of false teachers, and false doc-



trine, their churches have become corrupted; and their churches are lifted up; because of pride, they are puffed up. They rob the poor, because of their fine sanctuaries; they rob the poor, because of their fine clothing; and they persecute the meek, and the poor in heart; because in their pride, they are puffed up. They wear stiff necks and high heads; yea, and because of pride, and wickedness, and abominations, and whoredoms, they have all gone astray, save it be a few, who are the humble followers of Christ; Nevertheless, they are led, that in many instances they do err, because they are taught by the precepts of men.

(2 Nephi 12:3-17 RLDS)

[2 Nephi 28:3-14 LDS]

This is a very long quotation, but I feel it portrays an extremely accurate picture of our country today. There are many religions under the Christian umbrella that, as organizations, are unable to provide their people with the type of covenant relationship with God required for the establishment of Zion. It will be a sad day for many when we realize the wonderful blessings that could have been ours simply by accepting and obeying the fullness of the gospel.



There is certainly no one person or group that should be given all of the blame for our society's slide into a spiritual and moral abyss. There is blame enough for all. However, in both our own contemporary society and in the stories of Book of Mormon societies, changes in the interpretations of the spiritual and civil laws seem to provide the impetus for decline. There is one profession, more than any other, which dominates the legislative and judicial branches of our federal government. One article tells us that "...although the percentage of lawyers in Congress has been diminishing over the last several decades, lawyers continue to dominate by a wide margin over other professions." Not only is the law-making branch of our government dominated by attorneys, but the judicial branch, that branch of government which interprets our laws and constitution, is almost a monopoly of lawyers. According to Cornell University Law School's Legal Information Institute, every Supreme Court justice on the bench today holds a law degree. One government publication says, "Most judges have first been lawyers. In fact, federal and state judges usually are required to be lawyers, which means that they have attended law school and passed an examination." Okay — point made. But what is the purpose of this information? In terms of ethical behavior, the profession of lawyer is probably very similar to that of most other professions — many honest,

hard-working individuals interspersed with a small percentage of attorneys whose moral and ethical values leave much to be desired. Every profession has members who try to exploit loopholes or gray areas in policy for self-advancement. The unique aspect of the profession of lawyer is the ability to have a major impact on our governmental system.

It seems there were lawyers in the Nephite/ Lamanite societies who also used their profession for their own benefit rather than trying to promote the truth. An example is given in the eighth chapter of Alma where Amulek and Alma are being interrogated by lawyers who were willing to go to any lengths to catch them in a snare.

Now it was those men who sought to destroy them, who were lawyers, who were hired or appointed by the people to administer the law at their times of trials, or at the trials of the crimes of the people, before the Judges. Now these lawyers were learned in all the arts and cunning of the people; and this was to enable them that they might be skillful in their profession.

(Alma 8:21, 22 RLDS)

[Alma 10:14, 15 LDS]



I am afraid God will not be very merciful...

However, Amulek knew of their designs and declared,

O ye wicked and perverse generation; ye lawyers and hypocrites; for ye are laying the foundations of the devil; (Alma 8:25 RLDS) [Alma 10:17 LDS]

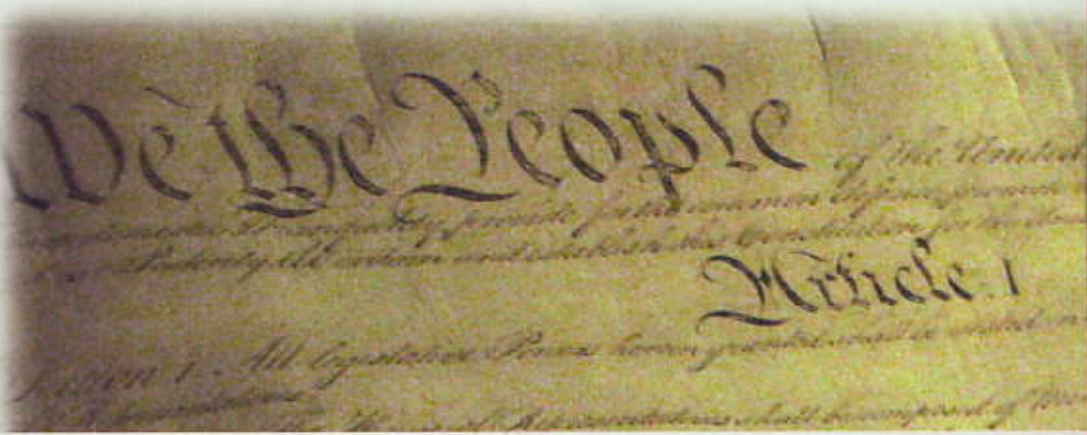
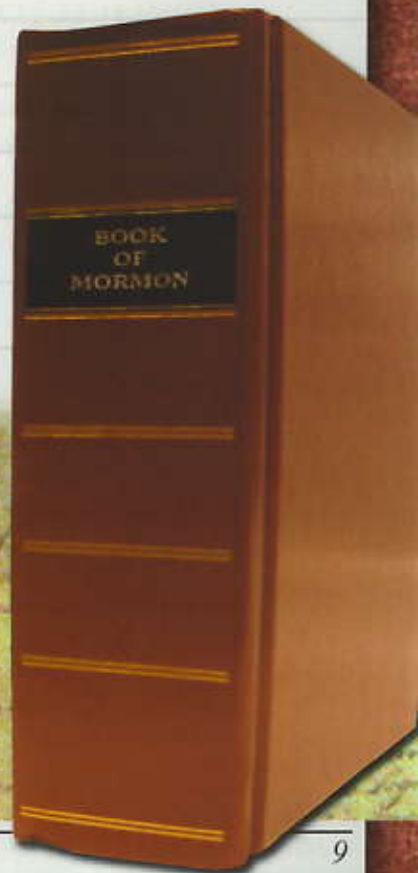
It should be noted, however, that most or all of their society was in spiritual darkness. The lawyers were simply a reflection of where the people had allowed their society to go. *And now it came to pass that the people were more angry with Amulek, and they cried out saying: This man doth revile against our laws, which are just, and our wise lawyers whom we have selected.* (Alma 8:35 RLDS) [Alma 10:24 LDS] (italics added)

Lawyers, or any other profession for that matter, can only accomplish those things that their society allows them to accomplish. There is ample blame to go around, both in Nephite society and in our society today.

Conclusion

I believe the United States Constitution is an inspired document. Many Nephite laws were probably created under that same inspiration. However, constitutions and laws are only as effective as the societies that abide by them and interpret their meanings. Societies that abandon absolute moral and spiritual values and allow their laws to be interpreted without those values run the risk of sliding down the slippery slope of immorality, which leads to despotism and anarchy and eventually culminates in their destruction. I fear our society is well on its way down this road, and it will not be able to get back on the straight and narrow path without a large dose of divine intervention.

Even more disturbing is the fact that parts of the Restoration movement seem to be following the same path. I am afraid God will not be very merciful to a people who cast aside the blessings that come with obedience to the fullness of the gospel in favor of more worldly pursuits. I pray people in the different Restoration sects will turn to God with full purpose and intent so He can pour out His blessings upon His saints in these last days.



Works, Grace and Salvation

by Dale Godfrey

The Book of Mormon Foundation recently received an inquiry asking, *“Does The Book of Mormon teach salvation by works when it says a few times that you have to keep the commandments to be saved?”*

Below is our response.

If you are asking if The Book of Mormon teaches that you may be saved by works alone when it says we have to keep the commandments to be saved, the short answer is *“No.”* If you are asking if The Book of Mormon teaches that works are a component and integral factor in our salvation, the answer is *“Yes.”* A number of scripture references were provided to further explain the basis for the question. Those references included:

And may God grant, in his great fullness, that men might be brought unto repentance and good works, that they might be restored unto grace, for grace according to their works. (Helaman 4:71 RLDS)
[Helaman 12:24 LDS]

Wherefore, if ye shall be obedient to the commandments, and endure to the end, ye shall be saved at the last day.
(1 Nephi 7:69 RLDS) [1 Nephi 22:14 LDS]

For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.
(2 Nephi 11:44, 13:20 RLDS)
[2 Nephi 25:23, 31:15 LDS]

For verily I say unto you, that except ye shall keep my commandments, which I have commanded you at this time, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.
(3 Nephi 5:68 RLDS) [3 Nephi 12:20 LDS]

And whosoever doeth this, and keepeth the commandments of God from thenceforth, the same will remember that I say unto him, yea, he will remember that I have said unto him, he shall have eternal life, according to the testimony of the Holy Spirit, which testifieth in me. (Alma 5:28 RLDS)
[Alma 7:16 LDS]

And behold, all that he requires of you, is to keep his commandments; and he has promised you that if ye would keep his commandments, ye should prosper in the land; And because he dwelleth in flesh, he shall be called the Son of God:
(Mosiah 1:55, 8:29 RLDS)
[Mosiah 2:22, 4:12 LDS]

In 1 Nephi 3:174-192 (RLDS) [1 Nephi 13:29-40 LDS], we find an explanation that many of the plain and precious things which have been taken away from the message of the Bible shall once again be made known via The Book of Mormon. In 1 Nephi 3:192 (RLDS) [1 Nephi 13:40 LDS], we find this prophesy:

*And the angel spake unto me, saying, These last records (**Book of Mormon**) which thou hast seen among the Gentiles shall establish the truth of the first (**Bible**), which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them;*



I believe the question regarding the relationship between works and grace is a perfect example of a plain and precious understanding being restored through The Book of Mormon. While the answer is in the Bible, the numerous and ongoing debates theologians have had over the subject bears witness to the fact that the answer, as found in the Bible, is far from "plain."

A plan of salvation which depended solely on grace as the basis for salvation, requiring nothing from the person being saved, would dictate a plan of salvation in which all would be saved, given that God is no respecter of persons. (Helaman 4:72 RLDS) [Helaman 12:25 LDS] makes it clear that this is not the case:

And I would that all men might be saved. But we read that in that great and last day, there are some who shall be cast out; yea, who shall be cast off from the presence of the Lord;

A plan of salvation which was totally dependent on the works of the individual would negate the need for a Savior and deny the purpose for which Jesus Christ hung on the cross. Nephi makes it clear that the Messiah's sacrifice was essential to our salvation.

Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the holy Messiah: for he is full of grace and truth. Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered. Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the holy Messiah, (2 Nephi 1:71-73 RLDS) [2 Nephi 2:6-8 LDS]

Rather than either of the inadequate options described above, The Book of Mormon makes clear the interdependent role of works and grace in the plan of salvation.

For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. (2 Nephi 11:44 RLDS) [2 Nephi 25:23 LDS] By this scripture we know that we must do all that we can (works) to seek salvation by repentance, obedience, and enduring to the

end, etc. After all we can do, grace is ultimately required for our salvation. It is implicit within this scripture, however, that absent our doing all we can do, grace would not save us, for it is only after we do all we can that grace works to our salvation.

Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in no wise deny the power of God. And again, if ye, by the grace of God, are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father, unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy without spot.

(Moroni 10:29-30 RLDS)

[Moroni 10:32-33 LDS]

Denying ourselves ungodliness, loving God and not denying his power are all works which we must each individually perform, and this scripture indicates that after we do these works, then his grace is sufficient for us.

Therefore blessed are they who will repent and hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; for these are they that shall be saved. And may God grant, in his great fullness, that men might be brought unto repentance and good works, that they might be restored unto grace, for grace according to their works.

(Helaman 4:70-71 RLDS)

[Helaman 12:23-24 LDS]

Again, this scripture illustrates the interdependent nature of works and grace in the plan of salvation.

Salvation comes only after a person has done all he or she can do and thereafter receives something which no person can do for themselves – an eternal payment for their sins through the sacrifice and grace of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Winter Retreat 2010

~ Testimonies

This year, the Book of Mormon Retreat focused on the blessings Alma gave his sons Helaman, Shiblon and Corianton (found in Chapters 17, 18 and 19 of Alma). We focused on the unique character of each of these young men and the specific direction and counsel their father gave them. Everyone was encouraged to consider which son they most related to and reflect on how that son's testimony applied to their life. Also, if we had been in those shoes and our father's blessing were going to be made available to the world for generations to come, would it be something we would have been anxious to share? All of us arrived at the campground having traveled our individual life's path to get there and, because of this, each of us found strength from different classes, testimonies and small group sessions that composed our weekend. For some, it was the steady and solid lives of Helaman and Shiblon that encouraged us to continue on the straight and narrow path. For others, it was the gentle reminder from the life of Corianton that no matter what path we have traveled or what sins we have partaken in, forgiveness and full restoration is promised to us as we humbly repent of our transgressions. (These principles are highlighted in Chapter 19, verses 12-14 and 64-69. We also noted from Alma 21:185 that the church achieved a period of "prosperity" because of the teaching and preaching of a group of men, which included Corianton. Thus, we concluded that, based on this record, Corianton did repent of his sins, make restitution for his wrongdoing and became FULLY restored in the eyes of God and the church.)

The results of our weekend were a recognition that we are loved beyond understanding and that the personal revelation of Jesus Christ in our lives is necessary to guide us through our inimitable life journey.

~ David Gilmore



Directing Us For Good

by Judi Smith



In preparing to serve at the Book of Mormon retreat, I became excited as I found many good thoughts to bring to the class I had been asked to present. This class would be based on the situation from Alma 19 where Alma is sharing with his son, Corianton. Corianton had allowed his own desires to cause him to fall into sexual sin with a woman named Isabel. As a result, his actions affected his ministry among the Zoramites. His father, Alma, said, "When they saw your conduct, they would not believe in my words."

In the weeks leading up to the retreat, I found many testimonies that supported the idea that God wanted women to have lives that were pure, and that He created us to value our femininity. I even found some miniature tiaras to give to everyone as a visual reminder that they were daughters or princesses of our God, the King.



I wanted our young women to recognize that many times we try to squeeze God into our lives instead of building our time and our schedules around God. (Alma 17:68-69 RLDS) [Alma 37:35-36 LDS] says it another way.

O remember my (daughters), and learn wisdom in thy

youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God; yea, and cry unto God for all thy support; Yea, let all thy doing be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest, let it be in the Lord; yea, let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord for ever; counsel the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good:

I wanted to share with the women the blessings that could come from realizing that God is their king, they are his daughters, his princesses, and they are special. Their femininity is special and their relationships with men they would date, or become engaged to would be blessed if they honored the Lord in these aspects of their lives. Instead of asking the question, "how far is too far?" I encouraged them to ask instead, "how far can we go to honor God in this relationship?"

Finally, it was the Friday of the retreat. The class was the next afternoon. After studying, reading, and narrowing down hours of information into a 30-40 minute class, I felt tired and stretched. The presentation I had prepared so far needed some organization and a few extra changes. Without God's help, I could never bring a message that would cause these women to change the way they looked at themselves, the way they acted around men, and the way they viewed physical relationships with guys. So, with a weary head and heart, I prayed together with my husband for help in bringing all these ideas together. I prayed the message would touch each one in a meaningful way. I prayed that He would help me finish it the next morning so that it would make sense.

When I woke the next morning, I felt refreshed and clear-headed. I returned to the computer to finish the last-minute details and arrange the presentation into an organized message. Everything seemed to fall easily into

place. Finally, I was ready to preview the class and, as I came to the last slide, tears began to well up in my eyes, as I felt the Holy Spirit's conviction that this was a message of truth and encouragement that all our young women needed to hear. It was a message I was excited to share. I felt buoyed up and joyful, thanking Him for the reassurance I felt.

You might be asking, "What about the class?" In times past, I've always had trouble with nervousness and feeling tongue-tied, but that morning I felt free from even worrying about those things. When I arrived at the campgrounds, I felt joyful to see everyone. I felt so ready to share! Even when we found ourselves squished into the

basement office of the caretaker's house, my joy didn't diminish! As everyone got into character by donning their tiaras, I began to speak, taking my cues from the Powerpoint presentation. I was able to share everything God had impressed on my heart, and the presentation was finished all too soon. I had everyone divide into discussion groups to talk about a list of questions I had prepared, and sharing took place in earnest. As I listened to the hum of voices, a promise I had just shared now nourished my faith. (It was the words of Alma that he had shared with his son Helaman.) "Cry unto God for thy support....counsel the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good."

Beauty in Restoration

by Nicole Capps

"My prayer is that all of us can recognize that the Church is not a building or a place; the Church is His people, and the sins we hide only hurt ourselves and those around us."



In preparation for the Book of Mormon Retreat, all those attending were encouraged to complete an online survey of temptations they struggled with and whether those temptations were still present. Filling out this survey made me really stop and think about the choices and life I had been living. I had fallen countless times in my past, and yet I was still alive and standing on two feet – thanks to the grace of God. The retreat echoed what I needed to hear – that we all struggle and we all have the tendency to try and hide sin and weakness, but I realized that we are on the brink of something new. The older youth attending were not afraid to discuss those difficult topics: sex, alcohol, drugs, hatred, pornography, pain, etc. I recognized a change of heart – one that is not fearful of looking into the past to see where I have been and how God helped me find victory, but now I live in the present. I am not hesitant to live in the restoration that God has given my soul! By simply being at the Book of Mormon Retreat, my faith in God's truth and the love He has for His Church grew to unimaginable heights. My prayer is that all of us can recognize that the Church is not a building or a place; the Church is His people, and the sins we hide only hurt ourselves and

those around us. I am free in my God, and the renewal is beautiful.

Over Christmas break, I found myself sitting on the proverbial fence once again. The past semester had been one of growth and determination. I worked diligently to stay true to God, and our relationship grew to heights I never knew existed. So when I found myself lonely and angry over break, I did not know how to handle it. If ever faced with this same situation before, I would find myself giving in to my worldly pleasures.

Five nights in a row I drank, I gave in to my weaknesses and justified every minute of it. This may sound blunt to many, but I firmly believe that restoration only comes when we are honest and share our strengths and weaknesses. My bad decisions affected me greatly, and I held that guilt tightly. This was not the person that I ever wanted to be, but here I was.

The night I moved back to my apartment in Warrensburg, I arrived tired, guilt-laden, and wishing I could just forget everything that happened. I went to bed that night, woke up at 1:30 a.m. to get a glass of water and went back to bed expecting to sleep soundly. Nothing could have been more wrong.

I fell asleep, but in my sleep I had a dream. In my dream, I saw myself from above and it was as if my body was possessed. I blinked my eyes and then saw my own demon in front of me. Immediately, fear washed over me, and I begged my two friends standing across from me to get rid of it. They called out in the name of Jesus Christ for it to leave me, but she just laughed until my friends disappeared. When they were gone, I tried the same tactic of releasing myself from this evil by telling it to leave in Jesus' name. She glared at me and blatantly told me that I didn't want her to leave. She said I wanted her right there with me in my life.

These words she spoke took me aback; I felt so powerless. I also had feelings of anger toward God for not saving me from this. So, instead of crying out for God's help, I decided I would stick this out and deal with it myself. I began conversing with the demon, and she introduced herself as the demon of lust and loneliness. I asked her why demons were showing themselves and why she was in my life, only to be answered with a mocking laugh. She confronted me on my stance on modesty, and she mockingly made gestures that I was not strong in this area and that I lacked any modesty. After we had conversed for what seemed like minutes, she began taunting me with another one of my weaknesses and pressured me to join her. I refused. Instantly, I awoke in fear that enveloped my entire body. I was lying on my back in the position of someone to be buried with my arms crossed and was extremely tense. My entire body felt like it was on fire. I rolled to my side and began breathing heavily. I knew I needed God, and I knew I needed the ministry of prayer and priesthood. I was scared it was too early to call anyone, but when I looked at my phone, the time said it was 7:30 a.m. I called my dad, who is an elder in the church, and begged him to pray for me. When he asked me what was wrong, all I could say was that I needed him to

pray first, and then I would talk to him. He prayed for me, and then he encouraged me to pray as well. Immediately after he prayed, my body began to relax, and peace filled the room.

After our prayers, I described what had happened, and I stayed on the phone with him for 30 minutes as he made the drive from my family's house to my apartment. On his way to me, he gave me specific scriptures to look up and read aloud. The one scripture that stood out was Mark 16:16, which said if Christ's followers believe, then they could cast out demons, heal the sick, etc. Dad asked me why I no longer believed. That was such a hard question to answer, because admitting my weakness was no small task. He also told me that the demons would never leave me alone. I will always be tempted and will always have weakness. When one demon is gone, another one will take its place. It has to be a daily choice to live in God's grace.

Dad also told me how much of a blessing this experience was in my life. I thought he was crazy at first for saying that, but the more I thought about it the more I came to believe in the truth of his statement. God tried so many ways of bringing me back to Him, and every time I would fall right back into the same temptations. This experience changed my life. Recently, I was reading my Scriptures and came across Job 33. This chapter now means so much to me. The introduction to the chapter says, "God calleth man to repentance by visions, by afflictions, and by His ministry." I know now that God is working with passion and vigor in the lives of His people, but the adversary also has a great hold on many of our hearts. I cannot live on the fence. I refuse to justify my sin. God restored my heart and me. My sins are truly forgiven, and I have no reason to hide in shame. God truly "[brought] back [my] soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living!" (Job 33:30 IV/KJ).



~ Testimonies cont'd. from p.15

"The hush, hush topics of the church."

When I was getting ready for the Book of Mormon Retreat, I had extremely high hopes of the outcome of the retreat and what kind of growth would be found there. About a week or two before the retreat, an old friend and I saw each other and, in trying to figure out how we could get together to catch up and chat, the only time he had open in the immediate future was the Friday evening and Saturday morning of the retreat. So I decided to go see him and then get to the retreat when I could. My hope was to be able to share with him about what I was going to be doing later on in the week-end. When we began to talk, I discovered that he knew much more about the restoration movement than I had assumed. We had a rather nice discussion that evening and the next morning.

When I got on the road, I was going to be arriving at the retreat at about one o'clock in the afternoon. As I realized I was going to be missing most of the "meat" at the retreat, I began to focus not so much on how the rest of the retreat would be going, but let all of the cares of the world bear down on me. As I was making the 3½ hour trip to Odessa, I realized where I was spiritually and knew I needed to do something about it. So I prayed on the way up and asked God to fill me with His love and bless the retreat. As I drove onto the grounds, my prayer was that I would not hinder or offend the Spirit and be able to slide right into the retreat without causing commotion.

I arrived half-way through a class (which I later discovered was the first class for the day) and had the wonderful opportunity to sit through and glean much from the classes the rest of the day. In sitting through the classes, I realized the topics (Alma 19) were ones that were not discussed much in the church today or, as I like to call them, "The hush, hush topics of the church." From the time I arrived, I noticed there seemed to be an overall solemn look on everyone's faces as if we were drawn deep into ourselves, reviewing where we had been and how these issues had, are and will affect us. There were a lot of old wounds coming to the

surface of our minds, which was hard to know except for looking into people's eyes. I wasn't quite sure what to expect from Sunday morning's service, and so we gathered that morning without knowing what to expect.

As I looked about the circle, there were a lot of heavy hearts and troubled minds. When the morning service began, we discovered we would be breaking into our cabin groups and doing as a cabin what is typically done for a dedication service. In my group, we discussed many of the difficulties we were having and prayed for those concerns. We shared about old wounds and future concerns. By the end of the group breakout session, when I looked around the circle; I began to see a difference in the eyes of those there. Then, as the opportunity was opened to pray and share, I began to be very overwhelmed with thoughts and where I was at and where I needed to be. It came to the point where I could no longer sit, and so I stood and shared with the group. The gist of what I shared was that I was sorry for wearing a mask and trying to survive my life without asking for their help. We need to be willing to help and be helped and really work to fix wounds instead of ignoring them and hoping they will fix on their own. We need each other to accomplish the work ahead of us. As the service drew to a close that day, and then as the week progressed, I realized what exactly had happened that weekend. We came expecting to be fed, and we received so much more. Old wounds and nasty scars (which had not healed correctly and still had intense pain) were opened, cleaned and put on the path to heal correctly. New battle plans for the things that so easily beset us were implemented and new and old friends were brought on board to help stay on the path that leads to Christ. With spirits renewed and a hope for the future and what will be, we left with a much greater joy in our hearts than what we came with.

~ Greg Bendorf