

Books of Third and Fourth Nephi

Contents

How Immovable Are You? (3 Nephi 1).....	3
Selective Memory (3 Nephi 2)	5
God is Not a Rubber Stamp (3 Nephi 3).....	7
Feed Me! (3 Nephi 4).....	9
A Disciple of Jesus Christ (3 Nephi 5)	11
Getting Away With Murder (3 Nephi 6).....	13
Raising the Dead (3 Nephi 7).....	15
When the Lights Go Out (3 Nephi 8)	17
A Broken Heart and a Contrite Spirit (3 Nephi 9)	19
Compared to Who? (3 Nephi 10).....	21
How to Perform a Baptism (3 Nephi 11).....	23
But I Say Unto You (3 Nephi 12).....	25
Sorry, I Have to Take This (3 Nephi 13).....	27
Do You Know the Way? (3 Nephi 14).....	29
Sometimes It Is All About You (3 Nephi 15)	31
10 Ways Our Lives Would be Different If We Were Unbelievers (3 Nephi 16) ...	33
The Blessing of Little Children (3 Nephi 17)	35
Worthy to Partake (3 Nephi 18).....	37
Why Do You Travel So Far for Church? (3 Nephi 19)	39
How to Have Beautiful Feet (3 Nephi 20).....	41
City Building (3 Nephi 21)	43
Heritage of Servants of the Lord (3 Nephi 22).....	45

Used by God for Great Things (3 Nephi 23).....47

Open the Windows of Heaven (3 Nephi 24)49

God’s Recycling Program (3 Nephi 25)51

A Loose Tongue (3 Nephi 26)53

More Than Just a Name (3 Nephi 27).....55

On Special Assignment (3 Nephi 28)57

One Good Spurn Doesn’t Deserve Another (3 Nephi 29).....59

This Chapter Is Just Two Verses Long (3 Nephi 30).....61

Things Can Change Quickly and Dramatically (4 Nephi)63



How Immovable Are You? (3 Nephi 1)

A congregation of Christian believers was holding a worship service in a country where Christianity is illegal. They kept the location of their meeting secret due to the risk involved. Suddenly, the door swung open and four men with rifles entered the room. The leader of the men announced to the room, “We are prepared to execute every Christian believer in the room. If you don’t want to be shot to death right here, you need to denounce your belief in Christ by leaving this room right now. All who remain will be killed”.

Immediately, several people in the room got up and left the room. When the last of these had departed, the leader looked at those who were left and said, “Last chance – anybody else want to leave and save their lives?”. Nobody else moved – they each prepared themselves to die for their faith. The leader nodded his head and the four men put down their rifles. He then announced, “OK, now we know who the true believers are. Let’s continue with our worship of the Lord”.

The story above may or may not have actually occurred. However, the believers in the story who remained in the room – the immovable ones – give us an example of great faith. Nobody could move them from their faith in the Lord – even threatening their lives couldn’t make them denounce their belief in Christ.

In 3 Nephi 1, a similar scenario unfolds. It’s been about 5 years since Samuel the Lamanite prophesied that there would be a day, a night and a day with no darkness to signify the birth of Jesus Christ. Although disappointed that the sign has not yet been given, the believers are unshaken and immovable in their faith that Christ will be born and they cling to the hope that the sign will appear any day. The unbelievers, however, grow weary of hearing about this sign – they want everyone to acknowledge that the prophecy is false and forget about it. They decide on a very harsh condition:

“There was a day set apart by the unbelievers, that all those who believed...should be put to death except the sign should come to pass, which had been given by Samuel the prophet” (3 Nephi 1:9)

The believers now have a choice – they can renounce their belief and save their lives or they can stand firm and risk being executed if the sign doesn’t appear in time. Although some might advise someone in this position to just say what has to be said to not be killed, it’s not quite that simple. If you truly believe in God, you know that denying your faith, even to save your life, puts your

soul in jeopardy. Jesus said, “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:25). Although this statement typically refers to holding back on your life here rather than giving it to Christ, the literal interpretation of losing your life for the cause of Christ can also apply.

It so happens that the lives of the Nephites are spared as the sign does appear in time, signifying the birth of Jesus Christ. However, even if the sign had not appeared by the date set by the unbelievers, the Nephites were prepared to be killed rather than deny their faith.

Are we that immovable? Hopefully, you never find yourself in a position where you are forced to choose between denouncing your belief in the Lord or being killed. However, if you ever are in that unenviable position, consider the outcomes carefully. If it means giving up eternity in the kingdom of God just to pick up a few extra years on earth, that is not a good trade for you. Even if the enemy threw in a few extras – even the whole world – it still wouldn’t be a good deal. As Jesus said, “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Matthew 16:26).

Don’t wait until your faith is put to the test – examine it right now. How immovable are you? What can the enemy offer you to denounce your faith? The right answer is “Nothing!”. If there is anything that is threatening to move you away from your faith, dig your heels in – be immovable!



Selective Memory (3 Nephi 2)

It happens in our homes when someone is able to recall – perhaps in great detail – things that happened a year ago but can't remember that you asked him yesterday to take out the trash.

It happens in politics when people enthusiastically cheer their favorite politician's position on a certain issue, somehow forgetting that the same politician espoused the exact opposite view on that same issue just a few years ago.

It can even happen in our own recall of certain events in our lives as we remember our own role in a much more favorable light than what actually occurred.

It's called "selective memory" which is defined as the ability to remember some facts while apparently forgetting others, especially those that are somehow inconvenient at the current time.

In 3 Nephi 2, the Nephites employ selective memory in recalling the events of just four years earlier when the miraculous sign of a day, a night and a day had been given to signify the birth of Jesus Christ. With a desire to lead a more sinful lifestyle, the Nephites now conveniently forget what they all experienced:

"The people began to forget those signs and wonders...they began to be hard in their hearts, and blind in their minds, and began to disbelieve all which they had heard and seen – Imagining up some vain thing in their hearts, that it was wrought by men and by the power of the devil...and thus did Satan...lead them away to believe that the doctrine of Christ was a foolish and a vain thing" (3 Nephi 2:1-2)

We need to be careful not to fall into the same trap that the Nephites did!

We have been privileged to witness many marvelous things as part of our service to God. Perhaps the Lord has spoken to you. Perhaps you have seen visions. Perhaps you have experienced a miraculous healing or some other miracle in your life. At the time these things occurred, you were likely as firmly rooted in your faith as you could possibly be.

However, our personal situations can change over time. Perhaps you've been offended by someone who attends church with you. Perhaps you've become involved in other activities that have reduced your time and/or desire to focus on the things of God. Perhaps you've read or

heard something that has caused you to question your beliefs. Any of these events can cause you to make a change in your beliefs and/or your dedication to the church.

The only little niggling problem is – What do you do with all those experiences you had? At the very least, it could be termed “inconvenient” to dwell on those events now. If you do, you could easily feel like you’re now doing something wrong or displeasing to God. So, the easy way to handle it is to remember them differently:

- When I thought God was speaking to me, it could have been just a thought in my own mind
- My “vision” was probably due to the power of suggestion
- My “healing” was just the doctors doing their job

There were likely other things happening at the time of your experiences that convinced you of their validity at the time but those other things are easily forgotten when selective memory kicks in. As a result, it becomes much easier to walk away, convinced in your own mind that you never had a calling or that God never worked in your life.

It may be somewhat funny to talk about selective memory when it involves someone forgetting to take out the trash but it’s not funny when it’s used by the enemy to move us away from God. Do your best to hang on to the accurate memories of your spiritual experiences. Write them down if you can, including the surrounding circumstances. Then, when the trials of life come, you’ll be able to lean on accurate memories to keep you close to God as opposed to being a victim of selective memory.



God is not a Rubber Stamp (3 Nephi 3)

The use of a rubber stamp as a business tool dates back to the late 1800's. Such stamps had raised rubber letters that spelled out words and could be pressed onto an inkpad and then pressed on a piece of paper such that the words would then appear on the paper. One typical use would be to have a rubber stamp with the word "Approved" which could then be used to indicate approval of a written request.

The process was simple – stamp on inkpad, stamp on paper, next request, stamp on inkpad, stamp on paper, etc. Using this method, many requests could be quickly approved and sent on their way. As you can imagine, the ease of the process made it tempting to just approve a bunch of requests without even reading them – stamp on inkpad, stamp on paper, next request, etc. This must have happened fairly frequently since the process gave birth to an idiom that still exists today – a person is referred to as a "rubber stamp" if he is responsible for approving requests and just does so automatically without paying much attention to what is actually being requested.

In 3 Nephi 3, the Nephites are preparing to do battle with the Gadianton robbers. They approach their leader Gidgiddoni, a great prophet, and tell him, "Pray unto the Lord, and let us go up upon the mountains and into the wilderness, that we may fall upon the robbers and destroy them in their own lands" (verse 20). In other words, they want to tell God, "OK Lord, this is how it's going to go – we're going to the land of the robbers to attack them. Your job is to approve our plan by helping us destroy them".

Recognizing the foolhardiness of telling God the "plan" and expecting Him to just be a rubber stamp, Gidgiddoni replies, "The Lord forbid; for if we should go up against them the Lord would deliver us into their hands" (verse 21). In other words, "God is not a rubber stamp. We should be asking Him what to do instead of telling Him what we're going to do and expecting Him to automatically approve of it". Gidgiddoni then tells them God's plan which is to gather all of the Nephite armies together in one place and then wait for the robbers to attack what will be a very strong army. The battle is described in the next chapter but you can guess the outcome.

It's very tempting for any of us to try to use God as a rubber stamp. It's probably not unusual for us to pray and say something like, "OK Lord, this is what I'm going to be doing", followed by a request for Him to bless our actions and make them successful". Have we asked the Lord how He wants us to do whatever it is we're preparing to do or whether He even wants us to do it at all? If we have and/or if the Holy Ghost is prompting us to do it, then it's safe to proceed and ask

for God's blessing. If not, we need to wait for His approval rather than assuming He will automatically approve of what we're doing and make it successful – God is not a rubber stamp. For example:

- Rather than asking God to help you get a specific job, ask Him to direct you to the job He wants you to have.
- Rather than telling God you're relocating to another city and that you want Him to bless you there, first ask Him where He wants you to live.
- Rather than asking God to help you marry a specific person, ask Him to direct you to the person He's chosen for you and even be open to the possibility that marriage may not be part of His plan for you at all.

In the above cases and any others in which decisions and plans are being made, seek God's approval first. If He approves, He will bless you as you move forward. If you move forward without seeking His approval, you may face some bumps in the road. Don't assume that God's blessings will automatically accompany whatever you decide to do. God is not a rubber stamp.



Feed Me! (3 Nephi 4)

Some years ago, I went to see a stage play that was later made into a movie. It was a silly story about a nerdy florist who has a Venus Flytrap in his shop that eats people. The more it eats, the bigger it gets. It also develops a voice and starts demanding that the florist bring more victims, forcing the florist to take appropriate action. The most memorable part of the show is hearing the plant shouting, “Feed me! FEED ME!!”.

In 3 Nephi 4, the Gadianton robbers come into the Nephite land to do battle. The Nephites have followed the plan that God revealed in the previous chapter so they have gathered together in one location with all of their armies and all of their supplies. When the robbers arrive, they are horrified to find that most of the Nephite lands are completely deserted, including all flocks and herds and anything that could have been used for food.

“Therefore, there was no chance for the robbers to plunder and to obtain food, save it were to come up in open battle against the Nephites” (verse 4) – which is the worst strategic move they can make. The leaders of the robbers know that a battle against the full Nephite army is a bad idea but imagine the soldiers approaching them and saying, “Feed me!” – the top priority now has to be to take whatever action is necessary to provide food for the army. So, they go ahead with the attack and are ultimately defeated as was God’s plan.

Even though the action taken by the leaders of the Gadianton robbers in this particular story resulted in their defeat, one point that can be taken is that the leaders took action as a result of seeing that their people were hungry. Providing food where there is a need for it is a powerful motivator.

Early in my ministry as a young elder, I learned something about myself. If I was going to be leading a meeting, seminar, class, etc., I found that my level of preparation was proportional to how high I perceived the expectations of the participants to be – in other words, how spiritually hungry they were.

If I knew that expectations were high, I would spend a considerable amount of time in advance of the event in fasting and prayer, in research, in preparation of presentation materials, etc. If the participants were not that hungry – well, it was easier to just wing it, knowing it wouldn’t take much effort to meet a low level of expectations.

I have since revised my approach. I now try to go into every meeting with the assumption that the participants have high expectations. As I prepare for the meeting, I try to envision the people who will be gathered and imagine them saying, “Feed me!”. This helps provide the incentive to pray for the Lord’s direction, read, research, etc.

I would recommend this approach to any member of the ministry or any church leader. Assume that the members of your congregation or class are coming in with high expectations. Assume they are spiritually hungry. Assume they will go away disappointed if they are not fed spiritually. This should help provide the motivation to take whatever actions are necessary to prepare yourself to be used by God to feed the flock.

And, for the members who participate in church meetings and classes – let your leaders know that you have high expectations. Show your excitement about attending the meetings. Be obviously attentive, indicating that you don’t want to miss a word. These types of actions are the equivalent of saying, “Feed me!”. You don’t have to actually say it (although it would certainly make it clear you have high expectations if you did!).

Providing food where it is needed is a powerful motivator. Church members, let it be known that you are spiritually hungry. Church leaders, recognize the hunger and take the appropriate actions to be used by God to feed the flock. If we all do our part, all will be spiritually well-fed.



A Disciple of Jesus Christ (3 Nephi 5)

In 3 Nephi 5, the narrative continues with the imprisonment of the defeated Gadianton robbers. In a merciful move, the Nephites preach the word of God to the prisoners – all who repent of their crimes and enter into a covenant to serve God are freed and become part of the society; those who refuse to repent are punished for their crimes.

After sharing the above story with us, the editor of the narrative notes that so many things happened during the first 25 years after the birth of Jesus Christ that not even one percent of them can be recorded in this book. He then introduces himself to us:

“Behold, I am called Mormon...I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I have been called of him to declare his word among his people, that they might have everlasting life” (3 Nephi 5:12-13)

Why does Mormon insert information about himself into the narrative at this time? Well, this is the portion of the book that describes events that occurred during the earthly life of Jesus. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, Mormon wants the reader to embrace Christ and hopefully become one of His disciples too.

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? Is it something that any of us can be? In general terms, a disciple is a student and follower of a mentor or teacher. So, if we want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, we need to learn what He taught and follow His examples.

Jesus expressed this to his original twelve disciples during his last night with them. He told them that “ye should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15). On that particular occasion, He had just washed their feet and given them an example of how to be a servant to others. This was just one example of what He wanted them to do in emulating what he had done to them.

In more general terms, Jesus did many things to the disciples during their three years together as part of their training for discipleship. He showed them unconditional love. He forgave them of their shortcomings. As He had done these things to them, He wanted His disciples to do the same to other people now.

There is another thing that Jesus did to His disciples that He wanted them to do to other people – He prepared them to teach others to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Many of the concepts He taught them were not just for their own edification – they were things to be turned around and

taught to other people. So, as the church got underway and the disciples taught new converts how to be disciples, they also in turn prepared these new disciples to make other new disciples. And so on.

Let's not overlook this important part of being a disciple – teaching others how to be disciples. Some people refer to this process as “discipling”; the more common term used today is “mentoring”.

What does it mean to be a mentor? It's more than just teaching, although that is a part of it. It also includes letting disciples-in-training see how you handle various situations such that they can learn how to handle similar situations on their own. It includes letting them see how you get direction from the Lord – this is especially important as you want them to be disciples of Jesus Christ, not disciples of you.

If we do it right, the end result of this process should be fully functional disciples of Jesus Christ who are fully capable of following the Lord's direction and can then also serve as mentors to make other disciples. If we don't do it right, we wind up with people who will always be dependent on other people for direction and will have a hard time making new disciples because they haven't totally grasped the concept themselves.

The final instructions of Jesus to His disciples was to “teach all nations” (some versions of the Bible actually have substituted the words “make disciples of all nations”), “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Don't let new converts flounder in their newfound faith – take them under your wing and show them how to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.



Getting Away With Murder (3 Nephi 6)

In 3 Nephi 6, with the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ drawing nearer, efforts intensify to reach out to the sinful people of the Nephite community:

“There began to be men inspired from heaven and sent forth,...preaching and testifying boldly of the sins and iniquities of the people, and testifying unto them concerning the redemption which the Lord would make for his people” (3 Nephi 6:20)

Not surprisingly, the sinful people do not receive this message well, becoming “exceeding angry because of those who testified of these things” (verse 21). It turns out that some number of these people are associated with the legal profession – lawyers and judges – and they actually use their positions to arrest many of those who are preaching God’s message and then arrange for them to illegally be put to death.

The crimes of these lawyers and judges do come to light but they call upon their friends and relatives in the legal community who all work together “to deliver those who were guilty of murder from the grasp of justice, which was about to be administered according to the law” (verse 29).

So, because the guilty people had a special arrangement with the people who determined the punishment, they got away with murder.

Three years later, in Jerusalem, a man named Barabbas was convicted of murder and sentenced to death. However, the governor gave the people the opportunity to choose to free either Barabbas or Jesus Christ – and the people chose to free Barabbas.

So, because of a special arrangement with the people who determined the punishment – and because Jesus died in his place – a guilty man got away with murder.

Using a couple of verses from the Book of James, I can make a case that you and I have gotten away with murder as well:

“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.” (James 2:10-11)

As far as God is concerned, there is no degree of sin. When people stand before God at the end of their lives, the punishment for one sin will be the same as the punishment for any other. So, if we have committed any sin at all, we are in essence guilty of them all, including murder. And what's the punishment? As the Apostle Paul writes, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). In this case, spiritual death.

Of course, we shouldn't take this as encouragement to go out and start killing people (thinking if I'm guilty of one sin, I may as well be guilty of them all). Different crimes carry different punishments in this life and, although all carry the same ultimate punishment from God, some sins are harder to get forgiveness for. As Alma taught, "whosoever murdereth against the light and knowledge of God, it is not easy for him to obtain forgiveness" (Alma 39:6).

So, why are we able to get away with "murder"? Because we have our own special arrangement with the one who determines the punishment. Similar to what happened to Barabbas in a physical sense, Jesus Christ died in our place and took the punishment for us. When we gave our lives to the Lord through baptism, each of our sins was erased in God's eyes – whether it was murder or anything that carries an equivalent punishment. When we endure to the end, the judgment before God won't consist of punishment – instead, we will be welcomed into His heavenly kingdom because of our arrangement with his Son, Jesus Christ.

As we live the remainder of our lives on earth, let's allow the appreciation for what the Lord has done – along with the Holy Ghost within us – to inspire us to do our best to live a murder-free life. It would be inappropriate to go out and commit more sins just because we think we can "get away with it".

In case we don't fully appreciate what the Lord has done, let's realize that there will be people who don't give their lives to Christ and will receive an eternal punishment from God for actions that are no different than things we have done in our own lives. When we think about it that way, we can appreciate that because of Jesus Christ, we are getting away with "murder". Praise God for His mercy!



Raising the Dead (3 Nephi 7)

In 3 Nephi 7, the government that has been in effect since the time of Mosiah is shut down as the chief judge is murdered once again and the Nephite people split up into various separate communities (or tribes), each with their own laws. Each tribe considers itself an entity unto itself – all other tribes are enemies – and nobody is willing to take direction from anyone else.

Nephi, perhaps assisted by his brother Timothy, goes among the people to preach repentance and faith in Christ to them. Miracles are performed so the people can witness the power of Christ. Yet, they are unmoved and in fact become very angry. They even take Timothy and stone him to death! Nephi responds by raising his brother from the dead!!

Now, it would be a nice ending to say that the people were converted after witnessing such an obvious display of the power of God – someone being raised from the dead. However, that's not what happens. Other than a few who are converted, the people continue down their evil path that leads to their eventual destruction in the next chapter. Sad to see people so enslaved by the enemy that even witnessing the raising of the dead can't free them.

In addition to Timothy as described above, there are 8 other incidents recorded in the scriptures where a person died and was miraculously brought back to this mortal life:

1. Son of Widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17-24)
2. Son of Shunammite Woman (2 Kings 4:18-37)
3. Man whose body was put in Elisha's tomb (2 Kings 13:20-21)
4. Son of Widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17)
5. Daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:49-56)
6. Lazarus (John 11:1-44)
7. Tabitha/Dorcas (Acts 9:36-42)
8. Eutychus (Acts 20:7-12)

As I read through these accounts, one thing that comes to mind is that God has to have a reason to perform such a momentous miracle as raising someone from the dead. Perhaps the person's work on earth isn't finished yet (such as Timothy who was later called by Jesus to be one of the original twelve Nephite disciples). Perhaps He wants to demonstrate His power to certain individuals at that particular time (such as when Lazarus was raised). Perhaps there is some other reason – but there is a reason.

Imagine if this happened to you (we of course don't know the exact mechanics but just imagine for a moment): You pass from this life and your soul arrives at the paradise of God. Oh, happy day! You've made it! And then you're informed that your soul is going back to inhabit your earthly body again. You might be excused at that moment for saying something like, "Um, Lord, I hope you have a good reason for this".

Has God gone out of the business of raising the dead? No, God is the same today as He has always been so he's certainly capable of doing the same things He has always done. Here are a couple of times this type of miracle has happened recently:

- We received a report a few years ago from some of our foreign missionaries who told of a member of the church in India who passed away. Even while some of her family members were digging her grave, ministers of the church prayed over the woman's body in her house and she revived!
- Just a couple of years ago, I was called to the hospital to anoint a daughter of one our church members who was in a coma. A few days later, she was declared brain dead. Her body was to be kept alive on life support for a few more days to allow time for family to come and say their good-byes. At our Wednesday night meeting, we offered special prayer, asking God to perform a miracle and bring her back from the dead. The next morning, her mom was on her way to the funeral home to make arrangements when she was called back to the hospital – her daughter had revived! This girl is a living example of the power of God.

God can still raise the dead, whether because the person's work on earth is not done or just to show His power. It doesn't happen often but nor did it happen very often in the scriptures. If we are privileged to witness this great miracle, let's be sure to spread it around so people can know that God is still on His throne and that His power is still available to us today.



When the Lights Go Out (3 Nephi 8)

Today, we're going to go over some steps you need to take in the event of a power failure in your home. What do you do when the lights go out?

Step #1 – Determine whether there has been a power failure

Look around you. What do you see? If nothing, you can be reasonably certain there has been a power failure.

Step #2 – Seek an alternative source of light

If you have candles and/or flashlights in your home, now is the time to use them. If you don't have any of these – well, think about the parable of the five wise virgins and the five foolish virgins (Matthew 25) and decide which of those you're identifying with right now.

Step #3 – Find out how long the power will be out

The electric company (or whoever provides your power) can usually give an estimate of how long it will be until the power is restored.

Step #4 – Deal with potential collateral damage

If you have a basement with a sump pump, your basement will soon be taking on water such as the disciples' ship did in Mark 4. If you have Jesus sleeping down there, no further action is required. If not, you may need to bail water.

Step #5 – Wait for the lights to come back on

Use the information obtained in Step #3 and hope (and pray) for something better.

In 3 Nephi 8, the Nephites experience a power failure of their own. Jesus Christ – the Light of the World – has been crucified in Jerusalem. There is a great destruction in the Nephite land and then total darkness. Using the five steps listed above for when the lights go out:

Step #1 (Darkness?) – “And it came to pass that there was thick darkness upon all the face of the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof...could feel the vapor of darkness” (verse 20).

Step #2 (Alternative source of light) – Unlike any power failure any of us have ever experienced, there was absolutely no source of light available to the Nephites, “neither candles, neither torches,...neither fire, nor glimmer, neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars, for so great were the mists of darkness which were upon the face of the land” (verse 21-22).

Step #3 (How long) – The source of all power (God) had informed the Nephites some years ago – through His prophet Samuel the Lamanite – that there would be three days of darkness at the time of the crucifixion.

Step #4 (Collateral damage) – The great destruction had killed many Nephites so the survivors now consider their role in the tragedy, “saying, O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and then would our brethren have been spared” (verse 24).

Step #5 (Wait) – The next two chapters record what the people experience as they wait out the three days of darkness.

When the lights go out, we realize that we are not the ones in control. Most modern conveniences disappear the moment the lights go out. Even the rising of the sun is dependent upon our God. As servants of God, let’s always remember that He is in control of every aspect of our lives at all times. If He were to remove His light – as happened with the Nephites above – we would be left in a most miserable condition.

Speaking of power failures (and being miserable), my family had one here recently that was projected to last 48 hours. At the 29-hour mark, it was 11:00 at night and I found myself in my basement, bailing out the pit that the sump pump typically empties. Unfortunately, I was losing the battle – as quickly as I could fill a bucket with water from the pit, an equal amount of water flowed into the pit. Was I really going to have to bail water for the entire night?

As I realized how helpless I was at this moment, I looked to the Lord for His assistance. Immediately, I heard a whirring sound – the sump pump came to life and quickly sucked all of the water out of the pit and all the lights came on throughout the house! Praise God!

This was a nice visual example of who provides the light in our lives and a reminder that when we acknowledge our helplessness before God, that’s often the time that we see answers to our prayers. And how much more helpless can we be than when the lights go out?



A Broken Heart and a Contrite Spirit (3 Nephi 9)

In 3 Nephi 9, the Nephites deal with the aftermath of the great destruction that occurred at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. As they sit in total darkness, the voice of Christ is heard across the land by all of the people. Jesus points out that all of the destruction is the result of the sins of the people – He then tells them how they need to proceed at this point in order to be forgiven of their sins. Now that Jesus has served as the final sacrifice, the law of Moses has been fulfilled and sacrifices will no longer be necessary. Instead, the people are now instructed to make a different type of sacrifice:

“And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 9:20)

What are a broken heart and a contrite spirit and what do they have to do with serving God?

Broken Heart

Speaking in general terms, a broken heart is a way of describing the condition we are in when something has happened that has changed our path in life and we mourn what we previously had or what we could have had if we had stayed on the original path.

A common example of the above occurs when someone you love is removed from your life, whether through the breakup of a relationship or through death. Your heart is broken as you miss what you had with that person.

But there are other ways our path in life can be altered. Our own mistakes or sins can change the course of our life. Sometimes, the consequences of our sins can put us in a place that is vastly different from where we could have been otherwise.

There are various ways we can react when this happens. We can try denying that we’re in a bad place or assume that there’s nothing that could have been done to prevent it. We can try blaming others or bad luck for our situation. None of these reactions constitute a broken heart.

On the other hand, when we recognize that our life has gone off the rails to some extent and that our own choices or actions have caused the condition, then we’re in a position to truly miss

(mourn for) the life we had or could have had and realize we could have it now if not for our own actions. This is the broken heart that Christ is referring to.

It's when we have this type of broken heart that we're ready to turn to the Lord. When we do, it doesn't mean everything magically gets fixed but the Lord does forgive us for our sins and gives us the comfort of knowing that God is now in control of our life. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).

Contrite Spirit

A contrite spirit typically follows the type of broken heart described above. People who are contrite accept guilt for their actions and are willing to do whatever it takes to make up for it in some way. Another word for "contrite" is "repentant". People who carry a contrite spirit are in the right frame of mind to repent of their sins and to make a promise to serve God for the remainder of their lives – thus, they are able to truthfully answer "Yes" to these two questions as they enter the waters of baptism.

A broken heart and a contrite spirit – these constitute the "sacrifice" that the Lord expects from sinners. They're a necessary combination to be converted and embark on the path of serving God.

**The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart;
and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit
(Psalms 34:18)**



Compared to Who? (3 Nephi 10)

Perhaps you're familiar with the story of Gulliver's Travels. If I asked you whether Gulliver was a tall man or a short man, a reasonable response would be, "Compared to who?". In Part 1 of the story, Gulliver travels to a land called Lilliput where all of the people are six inches tall so, in that land, Gulliver is a giant. However, in Part 2 of the story, he travels to a land called Brobdingnag where all of the people are over 70 feet tall – in that land, he is tiny.

There are many ways we can describe ourselves that take on different meanings depending on who we compare ourselves to. For example, if I (as a 60-year-old) compare my athletic abilities to a group of 90-year-olds, I can make myself sound like I'm ready for the Olympics – I'd be the fastest, strongest and able to jump the highest of everyone in the group. On the other hand, if I make the same comparisons to a group of 21-year-olds, I'll feel like I'm ready for an old age home.

In 3 Nephi 10, three days of darkness have passed since the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The darkness disperses and now everyone can see which of the people survived the destruction. It is noted that the "more righteous" were spared. Hearing this phrase by itself, we're tempted to think of these survivors as the "cream of the crop" – not just simply righteous but MORE righteous such that they received special protection from God.

However, we need to ask the same question about the more righteous as we did about Gulliver above – "Compared to who? Who are they more righteous than?". Here is how the record actually describes these people:

"And it was the more righteous part of the people who were saved, and it was they who received the prophets and stoned them not; and it was they who had not shed the blood of the saints, who were spared" (3 Nephi 10:12)

Based on the above, the more righteous are defined as the people who did not stone the prophets and did not shed the blood of the saints. So, they're more righteous than murderers and terrorists – not exactly a level of righteousness to be proud of. It would be more accurate to describe them as being just somewhat less sinful than the worst of the sinners. No wonder the Lord urges them to repent!

As servants of God, we are called to be righteous people. Are we living righteous lives? If we answer yes, it might be fair to ask, "Compared to who?". I've heard people claim to be good people by saying things like, "I don't kill anybody", "I don't cheat on my wife", etc. In other words,

they're more righteous than murderers and adulterers so they're doing OK. Surely, God is looking for a little higher level of righteousness than that from His people.

Comparing ourselves to other members of the Church may be a more valid comparison but that has its pitfalls too. Pride can enter in if we decide we're doing "better" than fellow servants of God. Also, as in the example above, we can easily choose a group that is not fully serving God to compare ourselves to – then we'll feel like we're doing a great job of serving God when we're in fact the best of the worst.

If we want to do our best to be as righteous as we can be, here's who we can compare ourselves to:

- **People in the scriptures** – The accounts of the various people that are included in the scriptures are there for a reason – so we can model our own behavior after the good things they did and avoid the bad things they did.
- **Ourselves** – Hopefully, we are growing spiritually. If so, we should see a favorable comparison between how we are doing now and how we were doing in the past. Also, I should strive to be the best me that I can be rather than worrying if I'm better or worse than anyone else.
- **Jesus Christ (who was without sin)** – If you feel like you've reached the pinnacle of righteousness, try comparing yourself to Jesus. Then you'll see that you still have plenty of room for further growth.

It's great to want to be more righteous. But focus on being more righteous than you yourself were yesterday rather than worrying about whether you're more righteous than other people. Comparing your righteousness to others can yield potentially misleading results depending on whether your comparison group is six inches tall spiritually or 70 feet tall.



How to Perform a Baptism (3 Nephi 11)

In 3 Nephi 11, the resurrected Jesus Christ appears to the Nephite people in spectacular fashion, descending out of heaven before their eyes. After the people have time to react to the appearance of their Savior, including touching His nail prints and the place where the sword pierced His side, Jesus begins to teach them things that are important for them to know.

Jesus begins with teaching them how to baptize. For those of us who are called to perform baptisms, this knowledge is invaluable. For any member of the Church – and anybody considering becoming a member of the Church – it’s great to know that the instructions of the Lord are followed exactly when a baptism is performed.

OK, someone has expressed a desire to repent of their sins and be baptized. We’re gathered at the water’s edge. What happens next?

Before proceeding into the water, the elder performing the baptism needs to ask the person two questions:

Question #1 – Do you repent of all your sins?

As Moroni later records, people who were to be baptized “came forth with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and witnessed unto the church that they truly repented of all their sins” (Moroni 6:2).

Repentance is a requirement to be forgiven of sins. Expressing this repentance in front of the other church members allows the new convert to be viewed as a forgiven sinner (and therefore one of us).

Question #2 – Do you promise to serve God for the rest of your life?

“And none were received unto baptism save they took upon them the name of Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end” (Moroni 6:3)

Part of repentance is having a determination to change your ways and do better going forward. Expressing this determination in front of the other church members holds the new convert

accountable and identifies him as a member of this body in which we are all doing our best to serve God for the rest of our lives.

Assuming both of the questions are answered “Yes”, the baptism proceeds, following the directions of Jesus from this chapter.

Enter the Water (verse 23)

“Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water, and in my name ye shall baptize them”

The Words to Say (verses 24-25)

“And now behold, these are the words that ye shall say, **calling them by name**, saying:”

“Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen”

This may be the only instance in the Church where we ask someone to say exact words. Since Jesus said to say these words, a minister performing a baptism should call the convert by name and then say these exact 26 words, including every “and”, “of” and “the”. It’s only 26 words – we can memorize this sentence.

Immersion (verse 26)

“And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water”

The convert needs to be fully immersed in the water. The recommended way to do this is to instruct the convert to keep his feet on the ground, bend his knees and tip backward until he is fully immersed. The minister assists in the process by having the convert hold on to his one arm while the other arm is behind the convert’s back to guide him into the water and assist him in standing up afterward. If done right, a convert of any size can be immersed with relative ease.

Baptism is one of the most correct things we do in The Church of Jesus Christ. There’s no excuse to do it wrong – Jesus told us exactly how to perform a baptism. All we have to do is follow His instructions.



But I Say Unto You (3 Nephi 12)

During the visit of the resurrected Jesus Christ to the Nephite people in the Americas, the Lord shares many teachings, including the equivalent of the “Sermon on the Mount” as recorded in Matthew 5-7. 3 Nephi 12-14 lines up almost exactly with the three Matthew chapters although there are several differences – I would recommend comparing the chapters yourself when you have some time and take note of the differences.

One of the key differences is that the version of the sermon delivered to the Nephites occurs after the resurrection of Christ so it is noted that the Law of Moses has now been “fulfilled” such that the followers of the Lord are now guided by the Holy Ghost within them rather than by a series of laws.

Some might say, “Yay! No more laws! Now we can do whatever we want!”. This would be the reaction of people who desire to sin and do evil – they’re admitting that it’s only the law that stops them from doing so (if it even stops them at all).

On the other hand, someone who is being led by the Holy Ghost should have no desire to sin – therefore the law is unnecessary. Such people will steer clear of sin and evil because that is their desire rather than because there is a law that says not to do these things.

In His sermon, Jesus encourages the Nephites (and all of us) to examine our desires. If our desires are to commit sin, we are not following the direction of the Holy Ghost and therefore we have sinned already. The actions corresponding to these desires – while sinful or even evil in themselves – are actually the fruit of our sinful desires.

In this way, we are actually held to an even higher standard than the people were who were living under the law. It’s a great advantage to have the Holy Ghost to lead us but we must make sure we are following what the Holy Ghost tells us to do.

A few of the examples Jesus uses are discussed below. For each, he begins by saying “It is written” (in the law) and then follows up with a statement that begins, “But I say unto you” (to examine your actual feelings and desires).

Murder

Jesus urges us to examine our feelings regarding other people, stating that the anger that it takes to actually commit murder is the sin to be avoided. If we never get that angry, we will never commit murder so a law forbidding murder becomes meaningless to us.

Adultery

Similar to His teaching on anger and murder, Jesus states that lusting after someone to the point of desiring to commit adultery is the real sin. Actual adultery is then the fruit of that sin. Under the law, someone could lust all they wanted or even attempt to approach someone inappropriately – the law wasn't violated unless actual adultery occurred. Under the teaching of Christ, the desire of the heart defines the sin, regardless of what action follows.

Divorce

In an age when women were considered property, the Law of Moses simply gives the procedure for ridding yourself of a wife. The Lord's statements about how such desires and actions bring about adulterous situations is His way of encouraging people to focus on preserving their marriages rather than being concerned about how to end them.

Eye for an Eye

The oft-quoted statements in verses 39-42 can sometimes be difficult to understand. After all, if someone hits you in the face, will you really invite them to hit you on the other cheek? If someone forced you to walk a mile, would you say let's go two? These statements only make sense in the context of not seeking revenge ("an eye for an eye"). Jesus is saying it would be better from a spiritual perspective to let someone hit you a second time than to let the sinful desire for revenge enter your heart.

Love Your Neighbor, Hate Your Enemy

Jesus ends this section with a real challenge – to love our enemies. While this sounds impossible, it's again a question of desire. Someone who is your enemy will be trying to hurt you in some way and may not even want you to love them. However, if we have a desire to love our enemies rather than a desire to hold grudges or seek revenge, we will not take actions that make things worse and we will be open to possible opportunities to reconcile. Jesus loved all people – friends and enemies – enough to die for their sins. Our goal should be to love all people as well, including those who look and act differently than us and even those who are currently our enemies.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we have the Holy Ghost to lead us in all things. As long as we follow the direction of the Holy Ghost, we have no need of the law. If the law is the only thing preventing us from doing something wrong, we need to correct our desires before they get us into real trouble.



Sorry, I Have to Take This (3 Nephi 13)

It happens from time to time. I'm talking to someone and their cell phone rings – after they glance at the screen to see who's calling, I get the inevitable, "Sorry, I have to take this", and the person who was talking to me is now talking to someone else.

Now, there's not necessarily anything wrong with my former conversation partner talking to whoever is calling – it could be their spouse, parent, boss, someone they've been trying to get in touch with, etc. Regardless, the point is that the person was focused on talking to me and has now chosen to turn their focus elsewhere.

Considering how automatic the above actions are for most anybody today, how would I feel if you and I were talking and you refused to look at your phone when it rang or even went as far as turning it off so it wouldn't be a distraction? I would feel quite honored and respected that you would be willing to focus on me for that period of time.

In 3 Nephi 13, Jesus expresses God's desire for us to stay focused on Him:

"If...thine eye be single (focused on God), thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil (not focused on God), thy whole body shall be full of darkness" (3 Nephi 13:22-23)

What does it mean to be focused on God? It means that you seek the Lord's direction for each part of your life and then follow that direction. Where you live is where God wants you to live. Where you work and what you do is what God has inspired you to do. The people in your life were placed there by God. Your days are managed by God's direction such that you have time on a regular basis for church, prayer, reading the scriptures, serving others, etc.

Living your life as described above can be referred to as dwelling in the kingdom of God on earth. Your entire life is focused on God.

OK, so you're dwelling in the kingdom of God as described above. Unexpectedly, an opportunity arises for a new job. The job sounds exciting with the potential to earn significantly more money. Is it God's will that you take the job? Maybe it is. Or, maybe it's something to distract you from being focused on God. Make sure to determine whether it's God's will or a distraction before moving forward. You don't want your conversation with God to go like this:

“Lord, I know this job will force me to make compromises in my service to God. But think about all the good I can do with more money. Sorry, I have to take this – it’s just too much money to turn down”.

Jesus warns us about this distraction, referring to money as a potential “master”:

“No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.” (3 Nephi 13:24)

Money is not the only thing that can distract us from our service to God. Here’s another potential conversation with God:

“Lord, I know this woman doesn’t share my faith and I won’t be able to be as active in serving God if I’m with her. But I love her. Sorry, I have to take this – I’ll never find another one like her”.

Whenever we feel the need to explain to God why we are doing something, it’s likely something that we know will be a distraction from our service to Him. It’s as if we’re communing with God and a ringing phone causes us to say, “Sorry, I have to take this” and we turn away to focus on something else.

It does need to be emphasized that the types of things we’re talking about are not necessarily bad things in and of themselves – they just become a problem when we allow them to distract us from being focused on God. If, on the other hand, these things are provided by God as part of our dwelling in the kingdom of God, they are very good things. As Jesus puts it:

“Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” (3 Nephi 13:32-33)

Stay focused on God in all things! He can provide all of your needs. Don’t be distracted by what the world is offering – it’s not better than what God is providing.

And one more thing. Wait, what’s that ringing? Oh...Sorry, I have to take this.



Do You Know the Way? (3 Nephi 14)

It still amazes me that this GPS app on my phone knows how to direct me anywhere that I want to go. I identify my desired destination and it maps out the best way to get there.

It wasn't that long ago that I had to rely on other sources to know the way to get somewhere. I used to keep printed maps in the glove compartment of my car but those weren't very detailed and they became outdated as roads changed over time. So, my preferred method for finding my way to get somewhere I hadn't previously been was to get directions from someone else who knew the way.

In 3 Nephi 14, as Jesus concludes the version of the Sermon on the Mount that He delivered to the Nephites, He addresses the two possible destinations that we are all headed to and describes the way that leads to each:

“Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, which leadeth to destruction, and many there be who go in thereat; Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (3 Nephi 14:13-14)

Human tendency may sometimes cause us to question our beliefs since so many other people do not agree. However, based on Jesus' statement above, if we were to find ourselves going the same way as the large majority of people, we would have to conclude that we are on the “broad way” which is not the way we want to go. Only few will find the narrow way that leads to eternal life – we are blessed to be among the few that have found that way.

On the one hand, this should bring us comfort. On the other hand, this knowledge puts us in the position of being the people who know the way and we should therefore feel somewhat obligated to show others the way to go. Are we willing to do this or are we content to let others stay on the broad way that leads to destruction?

Some years ago, I was standing at the top of the driveway of our church in Levittown and someone who had visited the church that day came driving up the driveway with his left turn signal on. The man rolled down his window as he reached me and I asked him where he was going. He told me he was going to a large store at the end of Levittown Parkway to the left. I told him, “You can't do that”.

The man immediately got defensive, thinking I was judging him in some way for going to this store at this time. I replied, “No, actually, Levittown Parkway is a one-way street. If you turn left into the oncoming traffic, you’ll be killed. To get to that store, you need to turn right and then make a U-turn at the first opportunity”.

I could have kept quiet to not create an awkward situation. However, I don’t think I could have lived with myself if the man was killed and I could have prevented it by telling him the way that led to continued life.

Do you know the way that leads to eternal life? If you are on that narrow way, make sure you stay on the path. But, look for the opportunity to show others the way too. No matter what GPS app they use, it won’t show them the way to eternal life – only people who already know the way can do that.



Sometimes It Is All About You (3 Nephi 15)

You sometimes encounter people who are completely wrapped up in themselves. Whatever happens, their first thought is, “How does this affect me?”. For example, you fall and break your leg and the other person says, “Oh no, now I’m going to have to take you to the hospital and we’re going to be there for hours and I had so much I wanted to get done tonight” – and meanwhile you’re lying on the ground, writhing in pain. Or, you come home and tell your family you’ve lost your job and your teenager says, “You’re still buying me a new cell phone, aren’t you?”.

If you want to show off your vocabulary, you could call this type of person a narcissist. Or, the phrase that’s often used today is, “I guess it’s all about you”.

In 3 Nephi 15, Jesus explains to the Nephites the meaning of a statement he made to the Jews in Jerusalem when he said, “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (John 10:16).

Perhaps it would be narcissistic for someone to hear a prophecy of the Lord and say, “He’s talking about me”. Just imagine the reaction of others – “Yeah, right, it’s all about you”.

However, if any of the Nephites were thinking that this particular statement of Christ was all about them, they would have been correct this time! Jesus explains:

“And verily I say unto you, that ye are they of whom I said, Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (3 Nephi 15:21)

So, Jesus had told the Jews in Jerusalem that He had other sheep to visit and here He is among the Nephite people, doing exactly that! How special the Nephites must feel – not only do they get a personal visit from the Savior but He had been thinking ahead about this visit such that He announced it while He was teaching in Jerusalem.

Although God has created billions of people, He has a way of making each of us feel special when we have a relationship with Him:

- When you are in need, He may send someone or orchestrate events specifically to assist you

- He may send a specific communication – words, thoughts, dreams, visions, etc. – directly to you to provide direction
- He may call you to a specific work or ministry, giving you the exact gifts and talents that you need to be successful in that calling

It's been said that even if you were the only person who ever accepted Christ, He still would have gone to the cross and died just for you.

So, sometimes it is all about you. Or, at least, God makes you feel that way.



10 Ways Our Lives Would be Different if We Were Unbelievers (3 Nephi 16)

In 3 Nephi 16, Jesus describes to the Nephites some of the consequences that will come about as a result of the unbelief of the House of Israel (of which the Nephites are a part). Specifically, He mentions the following:

- The House of Israel “shall be scattered forth upon the face of the earth because of their unbelief” (verse 4). History show that this did occur and the House of Israel remains in a scattered state as of today, even as we look forward to the time when they will be gathered together again.
- “In the latter day shall the truth come unto the **Gentiles**, that the fulness of these things shall be made known unto **them**” (verse 7). Because of the unbelief of Israel, God turned to the Gentiles in the bringing forth of the Book of Mormon and He continues to use them today to share the gospel with the House of Israel.

Jesus adds, however, that after God has allowed the Gentiles to be used to smite some of the House of Israel (such as the Native Americans), if the Gentiles then become unbelievers, He will use the House of Israel to “tread them down” (verse 15). Without dwelling too much on what is meant by being “tread down”, the tone of this prophecy makes me glad I’m not an unbeliever.

If you’re reading this article, you’re most likely not an unbeliever. Be glad. Be very glad. Be thankful that you have a relationship with God and that you believe in His Son, Jesus Christ. But, just for a moment, imagine what it would be like to be an unbeliever. How different would your life be?

To help us reflect on this question, I have assembled a list of “10 Ways Our Lives Would Be Different if We Were Unbelievers”. The list is presented in the popular #10 through #1 format (although the relative importance of many of them are not that different so the order could easily be different). Here’s the list:

10 Ways Our Lives Would Be Different if We Were Unbelievers

#10 – Nothing to say when someone sneezes

#9 – Stuck Defending Lame Theories – Without accounting for God as the creator of all things, we would be forced to try to explain how the universe created itself or how monkeys turned into people.

#8 – Loneliness – Having people in our lives can help with loneliness but only the Lord can be our constant companion. Without Him, it would often be me and nobody.

#7 – No Need for Morality – Without the scriptures, it's only about what's legal. Drunkenness, adultery, sexual deviancy – any of these could be your way of life and others would support you living that lifestyle.

#6 – Just Hope to be Lucky – We wouldn't have anyone to rely upon for protection throughout the day or when we travel so we would just have to hope that nothing bad happens. We wouldn't be blessing our meals so hopefully there's nothing harmful in the food. Miracles? Hey, that was just good luck or a coincidence.

#5 – Better Have a Great Doctor – Imagine being sick and not having the option of prayer. Medical people are talented and can be used by God but not being able to pray for a miracle? – Unthinkable.

#4 – No Meaningful Plan/Purpose for Life – The only plans for our lives would be the ones we make ourselves – and how do those typically work out? A temporal purpose in life is – by definition – temporary. When God puts purpose in your life, it can have eternal effects.

#3 – No Forgiveness – Any guilt that we carry would always be there. Also, there would be no reason to forgive people who have wronged you – holding grudges and seeking vengeance would be ok. Of course, others would treat you the same way.

#2 – No Holy Ghost – Without the insight and discernment provided by the Holy Ghost, we would have to rely solely on our own intelligence and wisdom in making decisions. Sometimes, this may work out fine. Other times, not so much.

#1 – No Hope of Eternal Life – Imagine the despair and depression as end of life draws closer if this is all there is. With our hope in this life only, we would be “most miserable” (1 Corinthians 15:19).

We should all be very grateful to God that we are not numbered among the unbelievers. Let's do our best to help others to also shed that label – and the 10 things above that come with it.



The Blessing of Little Children (3 Nephi 17)

Babies and little children are innocent in the sight of God. They have no sin and therefore have no need for repentance or baptism while they are in that innocent state. Later, when they reach an age of understanding and are able to comprehend sin and the commitment associated with being baptized, they are then able to consider taking that step and giving their lives to the Lord.

For children who have not yet reached an age of understanding, The Church of Jesus Christ offers the opportunity for a baby or little child to be “blessed” by a minister of the Church. This blessing consists of a prayer that is offered by the minister, asking God to watch over that child until he or she is old enough to be capable of making his or her own decision about serving God.

The process used for the blessing of children is based on the following scripture:

“Jesus...said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.” (Mark 10:14,16)

If you’ve been part of the Church for some period of time, you’ve probably witnessed several occasions when a child was blessed in this manner. Perhaps you were even blessed yourself when you were young. Did you ever wonder whether anything is happening in heaven when a child is blessed?

When an adult sinner repents, the scriptures say that the angels in heaven rejoice (Luke 15:10). Does anything comparable occur when a child is blessed? 3 Nephi 17 gives us a possible glimpse into what occurs:

The Nephites have enjoyed a blessed but emotional day with Jesus in their midst. He has shown compassion to them by healing all of their sick people. He has prayed for them with words so great and marvelous that they can’t even be written down. Finally, He gathers together all of the little children who are there. Here’s the description of what happens next:

“He took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them. And when he had done this he wept again; And he spake unto the multitude, and said unto them: Behold your little ones.

And as they looked to behold they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them.” (3 Nephi 17:21-24)

This had to be a glorious sight! It’s difficult for us to comprehend just how the Lord accomplishes His mighty works but the above gives us one visual. It may or may not work exactly that way today when a child is blessed but we can be comfortable that the Lord is putting in place some type of plan for the child. Here are a few scriptural references that give some hints as to how that plan might proceed:

- When a child is blessed, the Lord is petitioned to provide guidance, protection and influence for the child. Based on how quickly the Nephites saw the angels dispatched from heaven to encircle the children and minister unto them (help them), we can assume that God puts an immediate plan in place for a child who is blessed. It may even work in the way that the Nephites saw.
- The entire heavenly “team” that is used to protect children – including the angels – take their direction from God. When speaking about little children on another occasion, Jesus said that “in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 18:10).
- When the child reaches the age of understanding and gives his life to the Lord, there is joy in heaven (Luke 15:7). You can almost envision the entire heavenly team giving each other high-fives and saying, “Another success for Jesus! The child is now grown up, his name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life and the Holy Ghost will lead him from here”.

We may sometimes think of the blessing of little children as just something nice that we do for families – a way to help them celebrate in church when a child is born. But when you look at the scriptures mentioned above, it takes on significant spiritual meaning as a “call to arms” as the Lord applies heavenly resources to be involved in the child’s life. What a blessing it is!



Worthy to Partake (3 Nephi 18)

In 3 Nephi 18, Jesus instructs His twelve disciples to obtain bread and wine and then instructs them to distribute it to the multitude in remembrance of His body and His blood. This of course corresponds to what we do today which we refer to as communion, sacrament or “The Lord’s Supper”.

When the above is complete, Jesus further instructs His disciples to continue to do the same thing on an ongoing basis, distributing bread and wine to “those who repent and are baptized in my name” (verse 11). Jesus emphasizes the importance of not giving the bread and wine to those who have not repented and been baptized – He refers to them as being “unworthy” to partake of His flesh and blood and that “whoso eateth and drinketh my flesh and blood unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to his soul” (verse 29).

Although it may feel uncomfortable to think of anyone as being unworthy to partake, it helps if we remember that **none of us** are worthy to partake in and of ourselves. It’s only the blood of Christ that makes us worthy to partake and that is applied when we repent and are baptized. Jesus makes this clear to His disciples as He adds that someone who is currently unworthy to partake of His flesh and blood can become worthy to partake:

“Nevertheless, ye shall not cast him out from among you, but ye shall minister unto him and shall pray for him unto the Father, in my name; and if it so be that he repenteth and is baptized in my name, then shall ye receive him, and shall minister unto him of my flesh and blood” (3 Nephi 18:30)

In The Church of Jesus Christ today, we follow the above instructions of Jesus as we only offer the bread and wine to the baptized members of the Church. Not everybody who visits the church will agree with this – some think the communion should be given to everyone. If anyone ever asks you why we do it this way, the simple answer is that Jesus said to do it this way so the Church does it this way. No further elaboration is necessary. (You could try telling them they’re unworthy but I suspect it won’t be received too well).

By the way, when you invite someone to attend church, it will help make the process go more smoothly if you can inform them that the communion is only distributed to the members of the church. Otherwise, your visitor won’t find out how it works until the presiding elder makes the announcement just before the distribution of the Lord’s Supper which may result in disappointment if they were expecting to receive it.

Even as we follow Christ's commandment regarding the exclusivity of the communion, we should not lose sight of the other part of his instructions – to not “cast out” the person who is currently unworthy to partake. We would never do this intentionally but if someone feels unwelcome or not part of the congregation, the end result is the same.

Let's be sensitive to the fact that visitors and non-members are being passed by with the communion which has to make them feel unworthy (even if we don't actually call them that). Let's love them and pray for them such that they can be called into the church also. No matter how unworthy someone may be to partake of Christ's body and blood today, they just need to repent and be baptized to become worthy to partake – the same way it worked for each of us.



Why Do You Travel So Far for Church? (3 Nephi 19)

For quite a few years, my family lived in the town of Thorndale, Pennsylvania and we attended church services in the town of Levittown, Pennsylvania. If you look on a map, you will see that these two towns are both located in eastern Pennsylvania but they are in fact 60 miles apart! Yes, every Sunday, my parents and my sister and I dutifully piled into the car by 8:45 AM to make the hour-plus trip to Levittown for Sunday School and the worship service and then traveled the same distance to return home, arriving home sometime in the mid-afternoon.

Every so often, one of us would be in a conversation with someone about the church and when we mentioned where the church was, the same question would be asked – Why do you travel so far for church? Isn't there a church in this area that you can attend?

Many of you have probably experienced something similar to this at one time or another (perhaps you still do) – traveling farther than what would be considered “normal” to attend church services.

So, what do you say when someone asks you why you travel so far for church? Why not select a church the way you select a favorite grocery store? Would anyone travel 60 miles to buy groceries? I doubt it. So, why do you do it for church?

In 3 Nephi 19, Jesus ascends into heaven after His day with the Nephites but indicates that He will return the next day. The people are filled with excitement. The word passes quickly even before it's dark – Jesus is coming back tomorrow! The homes of many of the people are a great distance from where Jesus will be. Do the people say it's inconvenient to travel or they'll just worship the Lord near their home? No, their response is – If Jesus is going to be there, I'm going to be there too!

“Even all the night it was noised abroad concerning Jesus; and...there were many, yea, an exceeding great number, [who] did labor exceedingly all that night, that they might be on the morrow in the place where Jesus should show himself unto the multitude” (3 Nephi 19:3)

If you found out today that Jesus was going to be in a specific place tomorrow, wouldn't you do your utmost to make your way to the place where He would be?

Years ago, a sister in the church had a dream in which she was speaking to Jesus and He said in her dream that He attends all of the meetings of The Church of Jesus Christ. To the extent that that's true, why would we want to attend church anywhere else?

Yes, there's a certain level of comfort in worshipping at the church we've always attended – but we could likely become comfortable somewhere else. Yes, we love to be together with the brothers and sisters – but that probably wouldn't be enough of a draw to travel great distances on a regular basis (sorry, folks). No, the primary reason that we make the effort – even if it is a great distance – is because we want to commune with Jesus Christ. If the Lord is going to be there, that's where we want to be too!

Perhaps, you may ask, “What if I don't feel the presence of the Lord at church?”. If that's how you feel, the solution is clear – Bring Him with you! The Spirit of the Lord is within each of us so any of us can help bring the Lord's presence into our worship services. It doesn't always have to be about what kind of blessing I'm receiving but it can also be about what kind of blessing I'm bringing to church.

So, the next time someone asks why you travel so far to church, you can say it's because you know the Lord will be there. You don't necessarily have to go so far as to say He isn't anywhere else – we're not the judges of that – but if we know that Jesus is going to be in attendance at The Church of Jesus Christ, why would we want to be anywhere else?



How to Have Beautiful Feet (3 Nephi 20)

Welcome to today's beauty tips column. Here are a few tips for maintaining your feet that come from actual websites on this subject:

- Wear comfortable, well-fitting shoes
- Perform regular self-examination; Deal with problem areas immediately
- Moisturize the skin; Remove dead skin
- Exercise on a regular basis – walking, etc.

In 3 Nephi 20, Jesus describes to the Nephites the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants, specifically the House of Israel. He mentions how the House of Israel has been scattered but will eventually be gathered together again in a place referred to as Zion. He then quotes Isaiah 52:7 which makes reference to those who will assist in bringing about Zion:

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings unto them, that publisheth peace;...that publisheth salvation, that saith unto Zion: Thy God reigneth!” (3 Nephi 20:40)

The above verse contains four actions that workers for Zion will undertake with the House of Israel to help bring them to a knowledge of Christ. These same activities can be undertaken by any of us as part of our Christian walk in the hopes that people we come in contact with can be brought to a knowledge of Christ. Let's see how we can make our feet beautiful upon the mountains in the way this verse describes.

Bring Good Tidings

“Good tidings” is a phrase that means “Good news” – another word for this is “gospel”. How do we bring the gospel to other people? By preaching or teaching? Yes, some people are called to do this. But what about those who don't have this particular calling?

If you have the Holy Ghost within you, you can demonstrate the gospel to others by showing how blessed your life is as a follower of Christ. Many people think that serving the Lord is uncomfortable – you can't do this; you have to do that. Let others see how comfortably your desires fit into the will of God in your life – as comfortable as a good pair of well-fitting shoes.

Publish Peace

With all of the turmoil in the world today, people who can actually promote peace are very valuable indeed. Jesus Christ (aka “The Prince of Peace”) said as much: “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

How do we publish peace in a given situation? First, we need to self-examine and make sure we are not part of the problem – if we are, we need to deal with that immediately so we can instead be part of the solution. Then, let’s seek solutions that honor the Lord – not focusing on personal victories but rather victories for Christ. When the Lord’s will is being done, His peace will permeate any situation.

We can also publish peace by living our lives in a peaceful manner. Even during times of turmoil, we should strive to be at peace with life, trusting that God is in control. Also, we should do our best to be at peace with everyone, treating others with love and respect and fostering that type of environment wherever we go.

“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18)

Publish Salvation

After you were baptized and received the Holy Ghost, you may have experienced people noticing that you were different in some way. Instead of attributing the change to positive thinking or a New Year’s resolution, let’s make sure to let people know it’s because we have been “moisturized” (baptized) and all the “dead skin” (sins) have been removed.

“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Demonstrate that God Reigns

How can we demonstrate to an unbelieving world that God still reigns? Our lives can be the evidence when we exercise our faith, exercise our prayer life and exercise our testimony. Having the faith to pray about important things demonstrates that we believe that God reigns. Recognizing how God has answered a prayer and sharing that testimony with others can help show others that God reigns. Regularly exercising in this way will make a huge difference – for us and for others.

Feeling More Beautiful?

OK, following this spiritual advice won’t really give you beautiful feet. But how beautiful it is when your feet are on the mountain of the Lord and you’re used as an instrument in God’s hand to help bring others there too!



City Building (3 Nephi 21)

For about the past 30 years, there has been a genre of computer games known as “city building” games. These games allow the participants to build virtual (pretend) cities on their computer – designing the individual buildings, laying out the streets, etc. The grandfather of all city-building games was a game called “SimCity” which is considered rather basic today but paved the way (ha ha) for many other games to be created over the years.

The top of the line city-building game available today is one known as “Cities: Skylines”. If you invest enough time in this game, you can build a sprawling metropolis for which you will determine how to run power lines and water pipes, which businesses should be established, how taxes will be collected, what type of transit system to create, etc. By the time you’re done, you will have put in enough effort to have built a real city.

In 3 Nephi 21, Jesus describes to the Nephites a city-building opportunity that will be presented to their descendants as well as others of the House of Israel:

“And [the Gentiles] shall assist my people, the remnant of Jacob, and also as many of the house of Israel as shall come, that they may build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem” (3 Nephi 21:23)

Here’s the Who/What/When/Where/Why/How regarding the building of this city:

WHO

- Seed of Joseph/House of Israel – primary builders of the city, assisted by the Gentiles (verse 23); primary residents of the city (verse 24)
- Gentiles – will assist in the building of the city (verse 23); those who have repented will be able to live there too (verse 22)
- Jesus – will appear in the city (verse 25)

WHAT

A principle city in Zion known as “New Jerusalem”

WHEN

The work begins when the gospel is preached to the descendants of Joseph (verse 26) and other members of the House of Israel (verse 27) – this is underway already!

WHERE

The city New Jerusalem will be built somewhere in the Americas (Ether 13:6)

WHY

The primary purpose of the city (as part of Zion) is to serve as a gathering place for the House of Israel as they are gathered together – after being scattered for many years – to the land of their inheritance (verse 27-28)

HOW

Will we all be grabbing hammers and nails to build the city? Perhaps. Maybe technology will have advanced to the point where software such as described earlier will be capable of not only designing the city but building it too. Regardless, some building process will be involved with the Israelites taking the lead and the Gentiles assisting them.

However, in addition to the physical building part, there are also spiritual components to building this city:

- The gospel needs to be preached to the Seed of Joseph (verse 26) and the House of Israel (verse 27). As mentioned above, this is underway already.
- The Israelites need to accept Jesus Christ as the Son of God (verse 20)
- The Gentiles need to live in righteousness in order to have a role in building the city (verse 22)

ARE YOU A BUILDER?

Whether it's increasing your level of righteousness or sharing Christ with others or even preaching to the House of Israel, you potentially have a role to play in the building of this city to be known as the New Jerusalem. Don't settle for city-building in a computer game – participate in city-building as part of God's great plan!



Heritage of Servants of the Lord (3 Nephi 22)

“Heritage” generally refers to practices or characteristics that are passed down through the years, from one generation to the next.

For example, our family’s recipe for making sauce for pasta (or gravy for macaroni, depending on who in the family you talk to) is part of our Italian heritage. For me personally, the lovely dark tan I get in the summer comes from that same heritage.

Speech mannerisms in different parts of the country – the way yinz or y’all pronounce certain words – are part of the heritage of those geographic areas. Historical landmarks such as the Statue of Liberty or the Liberty Bell are part of the American heritage – these items are not owned by any individual but are collectively owned by the American people and are passed down from one generation to the next.

In 3 Nephi 22, Jesus shares the words of Isaiah (from Isaiah 54) with the Nephites. In this prophecy, God lets the House of Israel know that He will never forsake them and that He will protect them against their enemies. The prophecy ends with these words:

“This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord” (3 Nephi 22:17)

All of the promises that God has made to the House of Israel over time – beginning with the promises made to Abraham and continuing down through the generations via various prophets – apply as much to the House of Israel today as in any previous era of time. All of these promises are part of their heritage, having been transmitted through the generations, and will continue to apply to future Israelite generations who serve the Lord as well.

In The Church of Jesus Christ, we also have a heritage that has been passed down to us. Jesus and His original disciples began the Church with specific practices (such as the ordinances) and characteristics (such as the power of God) which were meant to be passed down through the generations for all who would be servants of the Lord in His Church. As we observe in history, these practices and characteristics were altered for a period of time – a period of time referred to as the “Apostasy” – but God restored these things about 200 years ago such that we in this period of time can be part of that great heritage established by Jesus Christ.

It is now our responsibility to preserve this heritage such that it can be passed on to future generations. God won’t restore it again. How can we do our part to preserve this heritage?

- **BELIEVE IT** – In order to preserve the gospel in its pureness for future generations, we need to believe that it is correct as is. People’s attempts to change things around is what caused the apostasy.
- **TEACH IT** – We won’t live forever so we have to teach the gospel to our younger members and they need to learn it well enough to be able to continue teaching it when we’re gone.
- **LIVE IT** – Words only go so far. The way we live our lives and the decisions that we make in life must illustrate the validity of the gospel. Instead of letting the world change us, let’s do our best to try to change the world.

For any heritage that we enjoy today, we should be grateful to our predecessors for preserving the heritage for us. And, unless we want it to end with us, we should do our best to preserve it and pass it on to future generations.

This is especially true for the gospel of Jesus Christ. By all means, let’s enjoy the blessings that come with the rich heritage we have as servants of the Lord. However, let’s also take our responsibility as stewards seriously and do our best to preserve this heritage for future generations. Prophecy says the Church will be successful in this – let’s be among those who God uses to make it happen.



Used by God for Great Things (3 Nephi 23)

In 3 Nephi 23, Jesus encourages the Nephites to pay special attention to the writings of Isaiah, such as the verses he related to them in the previous chapter. He goes as far as to say, “Great are the words of Isaiah” (verse 1), stating that these writings apply not only to the House of Israel but to the Gentiles as well.

It may seem unusual for Jesus to specifically recognize an individual prophet but He’s not saying that the man is great; He’s saying that the words (which actually come from God) are great.

Isaiah was actually a humble man who referred to himself as “a man of unclean lips”. God sent an angel with a live coal with which to touch the lips of Isaiah, cleansing him from his sins and preparing him to be used to speak the words of the Lord (see Isaiah 6:5-8). After that, Isaiah was used by God for great things, including bringing forth many prophecies of the coming of Christ and also prophecies of the coming of Zion.

Do we have a desire to be used by God for great things? If we have the desire, God will use us in some way. And, when you think about the God of the universe using any of us to accomplish His purposes, that is indeed a great thing.

If you’ve been baptized and received the Holy Ghost, you’ve already taken the first step. Just as when the live coal touched the lips of Isaiah, you’ve been cleansed of your sins and placed in the position of being ready to hear the voice of the Lord, directing you in whatever direction He desires you to go. Hopefully, you’re in the mode of saying, “Speak my Lord and I’ll be quick to answer thee”.

The more open we are to being used by God for any purpose, the more we will have opportunities presented to us to in fact be used by God. Let’s not limit how God can use us – on the one hand, being prideful and saying, “I only want to do great things” or, on the other hand, automatically assuming that we’re “too small for great things”. Let’s leave it up to God to determine how best to use us.

If you want to be used by God – more than you already are – pray for opportunities to be used by Him. The only caution is – if you pray this way, be ready for the opportunities to come!

Even if the opportunity appears small, do your best with it. You’re doing it for God and – who knows? – He may turn it into something great.

Worried about undertaking something that seems beyond your normal capabilities? If the opportunity has truly been provided by God, you can be assured 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).

So, the question isn't whether the opportunity appears to be too great or too small. The question is what will your response be when the Lord wants to use you. Hopefully, your response is “Here I am – send me!”. Then, get ready to be used by God for great things.

Second Verse and Chorus of “Speak, My Lord”

When the coal of fire touched the prophet,
Making him as pure, as pure can be,
When the voice of God said, “Who'll go for us?”
Then he answered, “Here I am, send me”.

Speak, my Lord; Speak, my Lord,
Speak, and I'll be quick to answer Thee;
Speak, my Lord; Speak, my Lord,
Speak, and I will answer, “Lord, send me”.



Open the Windows of Heaven (3 Nephi 24)

In 3 Nephi 24, Jesus shares some of the words of the prophet Malachi and instructs the Nephites to include them in their records. He begins with the contents of Malachi 3 which includes the following statement from God:

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. (3 Nephi 24:10)

Perhaps you've heard part of the above quoted from time to time in prayers in which the Lord is asked to open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing that we cannot contain. As you can see from reading the full text though, this verse offers the opportunity to open the windows of heaven specifically when tithes are brought into the storehouse of the Lord.

At first glance, it may sound like this verse is saying we have to buy our blessings – as if God is saying, “**IF** you give me money, **THEN** I'll open the windows of heaven to bless you”. But that doesn't really make sense. After all, does God need money? Obviously not. (Who would He buy things from?) And, even if He did need money, He could just create it Himself (see Matthew 17:27).

As discussed in the article “[How God Uses Money](#)”, God's instruction to tithe is not really about the money; it's about the decision to give or not give. Are we willing to give and trust God to provide for us or do we not trust Him that much such that we feel the need to hold back and try to provide for ourselves? There's no reason for God to open the windows of heaven and pour out blessings if we already have things covered ourselves (or think we do).

What type of blessing is one for which there is not room enough to receive it? I like to think of these as the occasions when God intervenes when there is seemingly no way (no room) for us to handle the situation ourselves. For example:

In December 1987, the heat pump at our house stopped working. It so happened that my wife and I had just increased our monthly donation to the church to be more in line with tithing so I thought surely the repairs would be minor. However, the windows of heaven appeared to be shut – the heat pump would need to be replaced at a cost of \$3,000 (for the sake of comparison, a new heat pump today costs about \$10,000). A donation to God is, of course, not an insurance policy against financial setbacks but I admit that I was discouraged at the timing of this event.

The next day, my bank statement came in the mail. OK, another opportunity for the windows to open but, alas, no additional funds had mysteriously appeared in my bank balance. At the bottom of the statement though, there was some verbiage about the bank's stock. Seeing this, I remembered that when the bank had gone public a few years earlier, I had picked up 50 shares for a few dollars, mainly for the thrill of owning stock for the first time. Out of curiosity, I picked up a newspaper to check out the current stock price and stared in disbelief to see that the stock price had jumped to \$60 per share, meaning that the total value of 50 shares was exactly \$3,000! The windows of heaven were open – our new heat pump was paid for.

I believe the same concept of giving our fair share to God applies not only to money but to our personal time as well. You hear people talk about how busy they are and how they don't have time to get everything done in a given week. There's certainly no time (no room) in the schedule to attend church or read scripture or do anything pertaining to God.

My personal experience has been that when we give our fair share of time to God – in church as well as in our personal lives – that God somehow multiplies our time such that everything else we need to do gets done as well. Perhaps something gets done right the first time instead of taking multiple iterations. Perhaps people who commit to do something for you actually do it and don't need to be followed up with. Regardless of how He orchestrates it, God opens the windows of heaven and blesses our time when we give Him a fair share of it – another form of tithing.

So, whether with money or time or anything else, if you think there's no room for Jesus in the "inn" of your life (this is the Christmas season, after all), make room for Him anyway. Give your fair share to the Lord – Open the Windows of Heaven – and that blessing which you thought you didn't have room for will be on its way.



God's Recycling Program (3 Nephi 25)

Most of us are familiar with the concept of recycling. In general, recycling is a process by which materials which we no longer need can be submitted for eventual reuse by someone else, sometime in the future. Participating in this type of program helps ensure that resources will be available for future generations.

What types of resources does God provide to people as His servants? The scriptures outline the various spiritual gifts that are given to the servants of God. Some may receive one gift while others may receive many gifts. Some are blessed with great power from God to do great things in His name.

So, what happens to these gifts and power when someone passes from this life? Do they die too? Do they go in the landfill of the spirit realm to rot away? Or does God grant the same gifts and power to other people for the benefit of each generation?

Now, this is not to say that there is some type of limit on the gifts and power such that God could run out of them at some point. But it is a comfort to know that the attributes found in the greatest servants of God in history can be present in our day if God chooses to "recycle" them and bestow them upon one of His current day servants.

For example, we read in 1 Kings 18 of a time when a single prophet of God – a man named Elijah – challenged 450 false prophets of Baal to a "contest" in which the winner would be the one whose prayer would be answered in front of everyone watching. Elijah's prayer was immediately answered as fire came down from heaven to consume the sacrifices that had been prepared.

The faith and boldness required to stand up for God in this way is certainly admirable. It would be a shame for this spirit and power to have vanished from the earth forever when Elijah left this life.

Some years later, the time arrived for the Son of God to come into the world and begin His earthly ministry. As part of this glorious arrival, God prepared a specific servant named John the Baptist to herald this event. Knowing the opposition that John would face, God decided to reuse the same spirit and power that had been granted to Elijah for this new servant. The angel Gabriel shared this with John's father Zacharias while telling him that his wife would bear a son:

“And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias [Elijah], to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17)

God also spoke through the prophet Malachi (in Malachi 4) to prophesy that this type of recycling of spirit and power would occur. The same words are shared by Jesus in 3 Nephi 25 to confirm this prophecy:

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers” (3 Nephi 25:5-6)

God’s recycling program is still in effect today. The same spirit and power that was granted to Elijah likely resides in other servants of God now. Some may have the faith of Abraham. Some may have the “I will go and do” drive of Nephi. And so on. The gifts granted to those who are considered great people in the scriptures did not die with them – they have been recycled for the benefit of the kingdom of God today.

As we begin a new year, let’s pray that these powerful gifts will come to the forefront. We need this power to defeat the great opposition that stands against us. Perhaps one or more of these gifts may reside within you. Pray for the opportunity to be used by God to help build His kingdom on earth. You may well be part of God’s recycling program.



A Loose Tongue (3 Nephi 26)

Typically, a loose tongue is an undesirable characteristic. It usually means you tend to gossip or can't keep a secret. "Loose tongues sink ships" is a saying meant to depict what happens when people say things that they should keep to themselves. (OK, I know the saying is really "Loose lips sink ships" but "tongues" is more accurate; it just doesn't rhyme with "ships" – work with me here).

Anyway, as Jesus demonstrates in 3 Nephi 26, a loose tongue can actually be a good thing when it means that the person is enabled to speak words from God:

"And it came to pass that he did teach and minister unto the children of the multitude of whom hath been spoken, and he did loose their tongues, and they did speak unto their fathers great and marvelous things, even greater than he had revealed unto the people, and he loosed their tongues that they could utter." (3 Nephi 26:14)

From a young age, we all learn how to use our tongues to say words. However, they are words that come from our own minds or that we hear or learn from others – they're not typically messages from God. As described in the verse above, such messages come forth when the Lord inspires our minds and loosens our tongues to bring forth His words. If it's the Lord speaking, even children can bring forth great messages from Him.

So, can the Lord speak through you? Of course He can. If you have the Holy Ghost residing within you – received via laying on of hands after being baptized – then you already have a channel of communication established with God and you are positioned for Him to potentially loosen your tongue and speak through you.

As a follower of Christ, you probably have the desire to speak to others about your faith. But you may be nervous or afraid that you won't know what to say, that you'll become tongue-tied and wind up embarrassing yourself. Pray for the Lord to loosen your tongue and then give it a try – you may well find that the words that you speak in such situations won't be your own.

"Take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you."
(Matthew 10:19-20)

Although it's a great blessing for any follower of Christ to have a loosened tongue, it's pretty much a requirement for a minister of Christ. When people listen to us speak, they really want to hear the Lord's words – not ours – so we should always be prayerful that the Lord loosens our tongues and brings forth His words when we speak.

Some years ago, when I was a young member of the Church, I was attending a Campout and we were having a meeting in which many young people were coming forward for prayer for various reasons. I then came forward with what must have sounded like an unusual request – I wanted the brothers to pray for me that my tongue would be loosened. At the time, I stuttered very frequently when speaking and I knew that if a calling to the ministry was in my future, then God would have to take this condition away in order to prepare me.

One of the brothers prayed for me and, when he was done, an Apostle who was in the circle raised his arm and spoke in the spirit: "Thus saith the Lord – This day I will loosen your tongue". And, just like that, it was done! OK, I still stuttered once in a while – usually when nervous – but it was so much better that I knew that God had answered the prayer.

A few years later, I was called into the ministry and I have since experienced what it's like to have the Spirit of God speak through me when preaching a sermon. When that is occurring, the words come freely with no hesitation or faltering at all – it's a loosened tongue at work! And, since it's the spirit speaking, there's no reason for me to be nervous – God's got it covered. Praise God for this – I consider this one of His miracles in my life.

So, if you want the Lord to speak through you – whether to groups or to individuals, whether you're a minister or not – pray for Him to loosen your tongue. Then, be ready for opportunities to arise. It's natural to be nervous about this but once you experience how the spirit speaks through you when you're sharing God's words with others, you will see that you don't need to be nervous – God's got it covered.

Don't use a loose tongue to sink ships – use it to sink the enemy by bringing forth the Lord's message!



More Than Just a Name (3 Nephi 27)

3 Nephi 27 is a chapter that's remembered because it's the one where Jesus tells His disciples what to name the church. His logic is impeccable:

- Whatsoever ye shall do, ye shall do it in my name (verse 7)
- If [the church] be called in the name of a man then it be the church of a man (verse 8)
- If it be called in my name then it is my church (verse 8)

Based on the above, it's a no-brainer why our church is called The Church of Jesus Christ. However, it surely has to be more than just a name that defines the Lord's Church. And there is more – Jesus adds the following caveat to the above: "It is my church, if it so be that they are built upon my gospel" (verse 8).

What does it mean to be built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ? Let's go through the characteristics that Jesus lists in this chapter that define what is meant by His gospel:

- Belief that Jesus is the Son of God sent by the Father to do His will (verse 13)
- Belief that Jesus was crucified for our sins (verse 14)
- Belief that Jesus resurrected and thereby enables all people to resurrect (verse 14)
- Belief that all must look to Jesus for salvation (verse 15)
- All must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus (verse 16,19,20)
- The Holy Ghost is given to those who are baptized (verse 20)
- All must endure to the end (verse 16,17,19)

So, is The Church of Jesus Christ built upon the gospel as defined by Jesus Christ in this chapter?

Belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, crucified for our sins? Check

Belief in the resurrection of Christ that provides the avenue for salvation? Check

Repentance, Baptism, Holy Ghost? Check, Check, Check

Endure to the end? Check

We check all the boxes! OK, that's great to know but if it's really the Lord's church, it would be reasonable to expect that the Lord is working in it. Jesus says as much:

“And if it so be that the church is built upon my gospel then will the Father show forth his own works in it” (3 Nephi 27:10)

Or, as Jesus stated to His disciples in Jerusalem:

“And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” (Mark 16:17-18)

Are these signs and wonders part of the church? Yes, they are! When we combine all of our collective testimonies, we see all of these things occurring and more. That’s why we encourage our members to share their testimonies – not only for the blessing of seeing how God helps people but also for the encouragement of knowing that the signs are following us as believers and that the Father is showing forth His works in the church.

Based on the above, it’s easy to see why we conclude that The Church of Jesus Christ is the Lord’s church. However, this conclusion is not something to be worn as a badge of honor or a reason to feel that we’re better than anyone else. Rather, it means we should be doing our best to live up to the name, “The Church of Jesus Christ”.

The gospel was restored as part of God’s plan to offer salvation to as many people as possible – both Israel and Gentiles – before the end comes. We have a great responsibility as representatives of this gospel. Let’s pray for even more of the power of God to be made evident such that others will be convinced that this is The Church of Jesus Christ. Let’s desire the power of God until salvation for all who will believe.

Let’s show the world that The Church of Jesus Christ is more than just a name!

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16)



On Special Assignment (3 Nephi 28)

When someone is placed “on special assignment”, it means that they’ve been taken away from their regular duties and given something else to do – presumably, a task or project of great importance that requires the person to give it their full attention and focus.

In 3 Nephi 28, Jesus places three of His 12 disciples on special assignment. It all begins when He gives each of the 12 disciples in America the opportunity to make a special request of Him. Nine of them choose to live to the age of 72 and then to leave this life and go immediately to be with Jesus in His kingdom. The other three have an unusual request – they so strongly desire to bring souls to Christ that they want to remain on earth and continue doing this until the time that Jesus comes again.

These three are hesitant to actually make this request – not knowing that the opportunity for such a special assignment even exists – but Jesus discerns their thoughts and grants them this desire. Once the desire is expressed, there is no turning back – their bodies are transfigured or converted into a different form. Their new bodies will never die and they are now free to focus on their special assignment of bringing souls to Christ.

Generally referred to by many of us as “The Three Nephites”, these three beloved disciples of Christ still exist today and are occasionally seen in vision:

“They are as the angels of God, and if they shall pray unto the Father in the name of Jesus they can show themselves unto whatsoever man it seemeth them good” (3 Nephi 28:30)

Based on their special assignment, it is reasonable to assume that when they pray to appear to someone and are then seen, there are souls being called to Christ.

Wouldn’t it be a great honor to be chosen for a special assignment? Well, you have been! If you’ve given your life to Christ:

- You have been chosen and drawn by the Holy Ghost into the Family of God
- You have been converted from a previous form into a new creature in Christ (no turning back!)

- Your soul will never die – when you depart from this life, you will go on to live eternally with God
- You now have a different focus in life – whatever was most important to you before should now be superseded by whatever the Lord is directing you to do

The only differences between you and the three men described above are:

- You only have a short amount of time to accomplish your special assignment on earth
- There are many things in life to distract you from your special assignment

So, how do we make the most effective use of the limited time we have? The “Three Nephites” pray for the opportunity to be involved in situations relative to their special assignment. We can do the same. Praying for opportunities to be used by God to help others will generally lead to such opportunities being presented – we just need to be ready to recognize these opportunities, push aside any distractions in our lives and give the necessary focus to our special assignment.

Be honored to have been chosen for this special assignment of living your life for Christ. As Jesus said on a few occasions, “Many are called but few are chosen”. Make the most of your special assignment and look forward to the day when you will hear the Lord say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy lord”. (Matthew 25:21)



One Good Spurn Doesn't Deserve Another (3 Nephi 29)

SPURN: Reject with disdain or contempt

The word “spurn” is typically associated with being rejected by a member of the opposite sex when you express romantic interest in them. Try to imagine the feeling – or perhaps you’ve sadly had it happen to you – when a person who you find attractive treats you with disdain or contempt. “How could you think I would ever be interested in someone like you? You’ve got to be kidding!” Obviously, it’s not a good feeling.

Now, picture it from God’s perspective. God loves His children and desires a close relationship with them. Some of them – such as you and I – have consented to this relationship and are enjoying the blessing of being part of the family of God. Others have rejected the invitation, some with disdain and contempt – this surely can’t cause a good feeling for God either.

Our own personal reactions to being spurned can vary. If you’re the vindictive type, perhaps you’ll want to bring about some type of punishment for the person – or at least imagine something horrific occurring. Perhaps you’ll just hope that the person in turn gets spurned by someone they care about so they’ll know how you feel. Or, if you’re an optimist, you’ll wait and hope that the person has a change of heart so you can try again.

When God is spurned, He is mostly in the last category. Yes, he may mix in a chastisement here or there to get someone’s attention. He lets people experience various things to understand why a relationship with God is a good thing. But everything that happens is an attempt to have the person have a change of heart. As long as the person remains in this life, there is time for a change of heart and that is what God is waiting for.

Since God is willing to be patient with people in this life, we should do the same when acting on His behalf. It’s not up to us to try to condemn people for not serving God. Spurning them because they have spurned God is not an appropriate way of representing Him. Perhaps the time will come when they will be open to God – we will then be happy to have been the ones who have shown God’s love to them, placing us in a position to bring them to Christ.

In 3 Nephi 29, Mormon expands this concept to the feelings of Gentiles toward the entire House of Israel:

“Ye need not any longer hiss, nor spurn, nor make game of the Jews, nor any of the remnant of the house of Israel; for behold, the Lord remembereth his covenant unto them, and he will do unto them according to that which he hath sworn” (3 Nephi 29:8)

Yes, history does show that Israel – in spite of being God’s “chosen people” – stoned His prophets, rejected Christ as their savior and were eventually scattered throughout the earth. Yet, God has promised to eventually gather them together again so we as God’s people should be willing to participate in patiently helping to bring Israel to a knowledge of Christ until such time as they are ready to accept Him. The Church of Jesus Christ is actively participating in this part of God’s plan, specifically by reaching out to the descendants of Joseph who will be first to come to Christ according to scriptures.

So, whether we’re talking about the House of Israel or your own friend or relative, let’s do our best to be who God wants us to be toward them. We don’t have to worry about dealing out any justice – God will do that Himself at the appropriate time:

“The sword of his justice is in his right hand; and behold, at that day, if ye shall spurn at his doings he will cause that it shall soon overtake you” (3 Nephi 29:4)

Until the sword of justice overtakes someone, there is still time for them to turn to God, even if they are spurning him as of today. Instead of making things worse by spurning such people ourselves, let’s allow ourselves to be the instruments in God’s hands to hopefully bring them to Christ someday.



This Chapter is just 2 Verses long (3 Nephi 30)

If you routinely read this blog series each week, you know that I go chapter by chapter in the Book of Mormon, reading through the chapter and selecting a theme or topic to write about for that week. This week, as I open to the final chapter of 3 Nephi, I see somewhat of a challenge – This chapter is just 2 verses long!

In the original 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, 3 Nephi had only 14 chapters. In a subsequent edition of the book, the text of Chapters 1-13 was broken up differently such that it comprised 29 chapters. The final chapter however (all 12 lines of it) was brought over intact to be Chapter 30 – and so we have a chapter that is just 2 verses long.

Now, I happen to appreciate when someone makes an effort to say something meaningful or important in as few words as possible (verbosity is not a gift in my humble opinion). There are in fact several occasions in the scriptures where concepts that carry very significant meaning are stated in just a few words – perhaps just a verse or two. Just for fun, going along with the title of this article, let's form a few 2-verse "chapters" from the scriptures that say something meaningful.

The Chapter of Commandments (Matthew 22:37,39)

1. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.
2. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Jesus comments, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40). Quite a lot of content squeezed into two verses!

The Chapter of Eternal Life (Matthew 7:13-14)

1. Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:
2. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

The Chapter of Repentance (1 John 1:8-9)

1. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
2. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The Chapter of the Restored Everlasting Gospel (Revelation 14:6-7)

1. And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,
2. Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

The Chapter of the State of the Soul After Death (Alma 40:12-13)

1. The spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow.
2. The spirits of the wicked, yea, who are evil...shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

In 3 Nephi 30, Mormon instructs all of the Gentiles (which includes many of us) that if we repent of our sins and are baptized and receive the Holy Ghost, we will be “numbered with [the] people who are of the house of Israel” (verse 2). Considering that the people of the house of Israel are considered to be God’s “chosen people” and there is a plan in place for them to eventually be gathered in a place called Zion where Christ will appear, it’s quite an honor to be included with them as an added bonus for becoming part of the family of God – a very meaningful message in this chapter that is just 2 verses long.



Things Can Change Quickly and Dramatically (4 Nephi)

On the plates of Mormon, there is one short book with the title of “The Book of Nephi who is the son of Nephi – one of the disciples of Jesus Christ” (imagine trying to reference any verses by that name – or even remember it). In the 1830 edition of The Book of Mormon, the title of this short book is abbreviated to “The Book of Nephi” but it must have been somewhat confusing since there were three other books with the same abbreviation. So, in subsequent editions, a number was added to each “Book of Nephi” such that the book we’re talking about is referred to as “Fourth Nephi” – it’s not the fourth book written by a single man named Nephi but rather the fourth book that would have been abbreviated “The Book of Nephi” (in case you were wondering).

4 Nephi has the distinction of covering the largest time period of any of the 15 books that comprise The Book of Mormon – a total of 286 years. Even though this is a long period of time, it’s still somewhat remarkable to see how dramatically the situation changes among the Nephite people between the beginning and the end of the single chapter that comprises this short book.

For the first half of the chapter, the Nephites – fresh off the visit of the resurrected Christ – live in a Zion-like condition for 166 years:

- All people converted unto the Lord
- No contentions or disputations
- Many miracles – Dead raised, lame walked, blind received sight, deaf could hear
- Natural prosperity
- Met together often to pray and hear the word of the Lord
- New disciples ordained
- Love of God in the hearts of the people – no envying, strife, etc.
- No robbers or murderers

By the end of the chapter, “both the people of Nephi and the Lamanites had become exceeding wicked...there were none that were righteous save it were the [three] disciples of Jesus” (verses 45-46). Things were so bad that, as the chapter ends, the last record-keeper (Ammaron) has to hide the sacred records so they won’t be destroyed.

So, what happened? How did things change so dramatically? One slight shift in year 201 seems to be responsible for putting the people on a different path that leads away from a wonderful

time of being close to God and to each other and toward a period of wickedness, separation from God, increased conflict and eventual war.

Through year 200, things are humming along as described above and then, in year 201, “there began to be among them those who were lifted up in pride, such as the wearing of costly apparel, and all manner of fine pearls, and of the fine things of the world” (verse 24).

What begins as a little bit of pride turns into the people separating into “classes”, churches being established to get gain rather than upholding the actual gospel of Jesus Christ, eventual denial of Christ Himself and attempts to kill the three disciples whose sole purpose was to bring people to Christ.

Most of the above change occurred within a 10-year period with the complete changeover in place by year 230 – things can change quickly and dramatically!

Today, we are not living in a Zion-like condition as described above. However, we are part of the family of God and The Church of Jesus Christ and are presumably enjoying the blessings of God in our lives. Let’s not risk this blessed status by allowing the distractions of life to take our focus away from the things of God.

A seemingly slight shift – a little bit of sin, a little more focus on making money, a little more pride, a little less church attendance, a little less scripture reading, a slight reduction in donations – can result in dramatic changes to your spiritual well-being. Don’t minimize the possible effect of a slight move away from God and/or a slight move toward the world. Maybe you’re still OK for today but be careful – things can change quickly and dramatically!