

Place the Book of Mormon in Your Heart— Not on Your Bookshelf

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Today I would like to speak with you on a subject that has been close to my heart for many, many years—a subject you are familiar with: the Book of Mormon.

In its introductory pages, we find this profound statement:

After Mormon completed his writings, he delivered the account to his son Moroni, who added a few words of his own and hid up the plates in the hill Cumorah. On September 21, 1823, the same Moroni, then a glorified, resurrected being, appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith [who, incidentally, was younger than most of you in this audience] and instructed him relative to the ancient record and its destined translation into the English language.

In due course the plates were delivered to Joseph Smith, who translated them by the gift and power of God. The record is now published in many languages as a new and additional witness that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God and that all who will come unto him and obey the laws and ordinances of his gospel may be saved.

Currently the Book of Mormon is published in 100 languages with approximately 6 million copies distributed each year. (Full translation in 66 languages; selections in 34 languages.)

The Book of Mormon is one of the greatest sources of spiritual power given to men and women on earth to guide us on our quest for eternal life. We have a challenge with our neighbors, family, and friends to help them overcome misinformation, prejudice, doubts, misunderstandings, rumors, falsehoods, and incorrect traditions that keep many from reading or understanding the Book of Mormon. Most people in the world and many in the Church do not realize that the Book of Mormon will help a person get nearer to God “than by any other book” (Joseph Smith, *HC* 4:461). It will help us obey the laws and ordinances of His gospel. It shows us how, through grace, we can be saved in His kingdom, “after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23), and helps us endure to the end (see 2 Nephi 31:15–21).

When we read the Book of Mormon, do we pray about it? (See Moroni 10:4.) Do we ponder on it and take it into our hearts? When we take the Book of Mormon into our hearts,

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we have more love for our Father in Heaven and His Only Begotten Son, our Savior. This love of God can dispel the contentions that come into our personal life with family members, friends, loved ones, or neighbors: “And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people” (4 Nephi 1:15).

A great Russian writer, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, said, “Only the heart knows how to find what is precious” (in *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett [New York: Random House, 1950], part II, book VI, chapter 1, 346). It is important that the Book of Mormon be precious in our hearts.

Let me illustrate. Some years ago I was working with the missionaries in Korea. We walked into a furniture store in downtown Seoul and were soon introduced to the proprietor. He was very kind to the elders. I listened to them encouraging him to accept a copy of the Book of Mormon. I do not speak Korean, but I understood enough to know the proprietor was friendly and open to the missionaries. In a few moments he invited us upstairs to his apartment. He walked over to what we thought was a window, where he drew back the curtain to reveal a bookshelf. It held at least 12 copies of the Book of Mormon in the Korean language. Obviously, someone had been there before us. My thought at that time was, “We need to place a copy of the Book of Mormon in this man’s heart, not on his bookshelf.”

Psalm 28:7 says, “My heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth.” It is not easy. People have preconceived notions and ideas about the Book of Mormon. Even our own members start reading the Book of Mormon with good intentions, but often, when they get to 2 Nephi and run into “the Isaiah wall,” many never complete this spiritually powerful book.

To help us place a copy in our own heart or in the heart of a friend, neighbor, or loved

one, let us turn again to the introductory page, which is often overlooked. Notice the third paragraph: “The crowning event recorded in the Book of Mormon is the personal ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ among the Nephites soon after his resurrection.” Do you know of any other book, independent of the Bible, which does not take its reference from the Bible, that talks of Jesus Christ after His resurrection? Except for a few brief sentences in the New Testament, I am not aware of any, and yet the crowning event in the Book of Mormon “is the personal ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ among the Nephites soon after his resurrection. It puts forth the doctrines of the gospel.”

If you want to know and understand the doctrines of this Church, read the Book of Mormon. It “outlines the plan of salvation.” If you want to understand salvation, read the Book of Mormon. It “tells men what they must do to gain peace in this life.” Would you like to have a little peace in your life “and eternal salvation in the life to come”? Read the Book of Mormon. What a powerful thing to have eternal salvation in the life to come. If you want eternal salvation, read the Book of Mormon and then follow the rest of the formula outlined in Moroni 10:4. Pray about it, ponder it, take the book into your heart!

Just to illustrate this a little further, let’s turn to 2 Nephi 3:12. We understand the record left by Judah to be the Bible and the record left by Joseph to be the Book of Mormon. We recognize the two shall grow together to enlighten us. There are five powerful things mentioned in this verse that can happen as a result of studying these books together.

1. “The confounding of false doctrines.” What a comforting thing to know that false doctrines of the world will be confounded by studying the Book of Mormon.

2. The “laying down of contentions.” As I travel the world and listen and read about the contentions among the various religions

of the world, I marvel that, along with the Bible, the Book of Mormon is available to us so that the contentions in the world over religion can be settled.

3. "Establishing peace among the fruit of thy loins." What a wonderful thing that there can be peace in the world. Not only is it to be established among Joseph and Judah, but also among the nations of the earth that have been at war with one another for so long.

4. "And bringing them to the knowledge of their fathers in the latter days." There is nothing that will bring us to an understanding of God and our forefathers like studying the Book Mormon and the Bible.

5. And also bringing them "to the knowledge of my covenants, saith the Lord." The saving covenants that the Master has made with His people are outlined in the Book of Mormon.

Here are five things in just one verse to help us understand ourselves and our place and purpose in this life.

Now I know that the challenge of placing a copy of the Book of Mormon in the heart of a person is not easy. Some years ago Sister Sorensen and I were preparing to go to Eastern Canada on a mission. We were in a restaurant in Salt Lake City just prior to going to the airport. A young man walked up to us and called me by name because he had seen my missionary badge.

He said, "I see you are going to the Canada Halifax Mission. Let me introduce myself. I am John Gaetz. I lived in Halifax. When I was a young boy I left home and made my way to Calgary. There I eventually found the Church, was baptized, and accepted the gospel in its fullness. My wife and I have a small family and have since moved here to Salt Lake City. My father, Raymond C. Gaetz, lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He is not a member of the Church. He does not understand the Church. He does not seem happy with me for having joined the Church. I would like to help him. I have sent him books, records, and materials—all kinds

of information over the years. Some of them he has read, others he has sent back either unopened or marked "not interested." I have here a copy of the standard works in a recently published quad. I have taken the liberty of having my father's name engraved in gold on this book. I think he might accept it if you would take it to him.

"Now, I want you to know that before I left home, my mother passed away. My father remarried a faithful, devout, Catholic lady. She is very committed to her own church. She has no interest in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She lives according to the light she has received. I do not wish to come between my father and stepmother in any way. So please be careful and delicate in how you present this book to my father. I'm his only son."

We accepted the challenge. When we arrived in Halifax, I called Mr. Raymond Gaetz and told him who I was and that I had a gift from his son. I asked if I could present it to him. He asked me a little about his son and then said, "I have no interest whatsoever in the Book of Mormon. Please pass it on to someone else."

I told him I couldn't; it had his name engraved on it. I asked if he would please accept it from his only son.

He said, "No," and hung up.

Soon thereafter I decided to pay Mr. Gaetz a visit. I went to his lovely apartment. When I arrived I was met at the gate by a guard and, of course, electronic security equipment. However, the guard was kind enough to connect me with Mr. Gaetz on the intercom. I told him I would like to give the gift to him and bring him greetings from his fine son. He said I could leave the book with the guard but not to bother him further.

A few days later he called me and said, "I noticed this is an expensive book. I'm a frugal Scotsman, and I can't stand to see it go to waste. Please come and get it. We can

have my name removed and you can give it to someone else.”

I made an appointment to see him. When I arrived, I rang the intercom to the Gaetz apartment, but no one answered. The guard had been instructed to tell me I was to take the book with me. I took the book, returned to the office, and put it on my desk to remind me that I had a work yet to complete.

Time marched on. I sent my assistants over to talk to him, but they made no progress. Then some beautiful sister missionaries came to work in the area. I sent them to his door, but he also rejected them.

Sometime later my wife, Verla, came into the office, saw the book on my desk, smiled, and said, “My goodness, what kind of a missionary are you? Haven’t you delivered those scriptures to Mr. Gaetz yet?”

“Sweetheart, I’ve been trying, but without much success.”

She responded with, “Oh, come on now. You’re just too busy.”

I was a little irritated, so I said, “Well, Verla, why don’t you try?”

She said, “All right, I will.”

She took a different approach entirely. She called their home, and fortunately Mrs. Gaetz answered the phone. After a friendly conversation, Verla invited Mrs. Patricia Gaetz and her husband to the mission home for dinner. She accepted Sister Sorensen’s invitation. About halfway through the dinner I was getting anxious to present the book. Sister Sorensen gently nudged me under the table, so I knew better. After the dinner we had a lovely discussion, but we never mentioned the Book of Mormon.

A few days later Mrs. Gaetz called and invited us to their apartment. We had a delicious lunch and talked. This went back and forth for some weeks. Then one day I again mentioned to Raymond, “Remember that wonderful book your son has given you? I surely would like to present it to you. You

will find, on the whole, Latter-day Saint people, those who believe the Book of Mormon, are good and righteous people. They are kind, friendly, and good neighbors. You have a young grandson coming along; you surely want to know something of his beliefs.”

This time Raymond accepted the book.

We continued to meet together socially, and then one day I said, “Raymond, it’s time for you to receive the missionary discussions.”

“No, I’m not interested. But I’ll tell you what I will do. I walk every day at noon in the park for my health, and I would be happy to hear about the Book of Mormon through your lips. We’ll talk religion.”

So I arranged my schedule during the lunch hour to walk in the park two or three times a week with this good brother.

Our friendship deepened during these discussions. I soon asked him to be baptized.

He said, “No, I’m not interested in being baptized.”

“Well, you’ve heard the gospel, you know it’s true, you need to accept it. You’ve been reading the Book of Mormon; now take it into your heart.”

“I haven’t the faith yet to accept the Mormon Church.”

One day a video came to the mission office entitled *How Rare a Possession*. You may have seen it. It’s about a man who found a copy of the Book of Mormon without a cover or introductory pages in a trash can in Italy. The man read the book, accepted it, lived its principles, and spent almost a lifetime trying to find out more about the Church. He eventually found the missionaries, was baptized, and came into full fellowship. The video projects him later in his life going to the temple in Switzerland. It is a true story.

I gave the video to Raymond. A few days later, during our usual walk, it was obvious that he had changed. He said, “You know that man that found the Book of Mormon was not unlike me. Of course he was not married, but I am. I have a wife. I have a son. I have

grandchildren. I do have hope in eternal life. I've changed my mind. I'm ready to be baptized."

"Do you have a testimony of Jesus Christ?"

"You know I have."

"Are you willing to give up smoking?"

"I can do it."

"Are you willing to give up drinking?"

"I will."

"Ray, you're a wealthy man. You're a captain of industry. You're a man of influence, a man of substance and means. Are you willing to pay a full tithe on all that money you make?"

"I certainly am."

"Good. Have you told your wife, Patricia?"

"No. That's your job."

We went right to his home. I told her of his decision and invited her to join him in baptism.

She said, "I can't be baptized. You know I'm a good Catholic. Neither can he. He still smokes and drinks, and he won't pay all that tithing."

You know something; he did. He gave up his coffee, tea, alcohol, and tobacco and he paid his tithing and rejoiced. When he came up out of the waters of baptism, he said, "Now I want to go to that temple."

"Brother Gaetz, the temple is a year away. You'll have to work hard and prepare yourself spiritually."

"That's what I want to do."

"The nearest temple is 1,200 miles away in Washington, D.C."

"I understand that, and by the time I'm ready to go, your mission will be completed. Would you be willing to meet me there a year from now? You and Sister Sorensen?"

"We certainly will."

So it was. We flew to Washington, D.C., a year later. As we walked out of the temple after several sessions, he looked up at those beautiful spires and made an unusual remark.

"I feel like I'm the last one in and the first one out."

"Brother Ray, what do you mean?"

"Well, recently I have contracted terminal cancer. I don't know how long I have to live. I am just so grateful that I have been able to come here to the house of the Lord. I feel very much like the man that was portrayed in the film who lived out his life and finally found the temple. I'm sorry that my wife, Pat, and my son John and his wife are not here with me. My wife, Pat, lives according to the light she has in her own faith."

Some time passed. Sister Gaetz called me on the phone.

"Brother David, if you want to see Raymond in the flesh, you will have to come."

I flew to Halifax, found the stake president, and together we went to the hospital. We laid our hands upon Raymond's head and gave him a blessing of comfort and peace, releasing him from this life. Shortly thereafter he died, one of the happiest men I have ever known.

This good man who had been a captain of industry, a man of wealth and substance who had spent most of his life pursuing riches and the pride and praises of men, can be likened to this saying:

The elusiveness of happiness is . . . something like a butterfly, which, when pursued, seems always just beyond our grasp, but which, if we sit down quietly, may light upon us. [Quoted from the Sentinel in The Christian Leader's Golden Treasury, ed. Maxwell Droke (Indianapolis: Droke House, 1955), 252]

What of Sister Gaetz? Over the years it has been Sister Sorensen's and my privilege to correspond with her, to encourage her, to bless her. And she has blessed us. Just this Christmas she called to wish us a merry Christmas. She told us her eyes were now too dim to write us a card. Even though she has not yet accepted the fullness of the gospel, she loves the Latter-day Saints. She understands us more fully, and she appreciates the virtues of the Book of Mormon.

Raymond's son John, who was so interested in the salvation of his father, at the funeral spoke of the sweet reunion with John's mother. John testified that his father has gone on to his great and eternal reward. He was firm in the knowledge that the temple is the great garner that completes the gathering of Israel.

Very recently a note written by Ray Gaetz to his young grandson fell into my hands. It is dated October 5, 1989, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada:

My Dear Grandson,

I am sending you this Book of Mormon that I hope will be your lifelong companion. The teachings of this book will have a profound influence on your life. If you follow these teachings, you will be the recipient of many blessings. May our Father in Heaven bless and care for you.

*With love,
Grandad*

So it is, my dear young friends, Brother Raymond Gaetz came to understand that "come unto Christ" is not a nondescript, lovely phrase. It means come unto Christ through the ordinances of the temple. In fact, partaking of the temple ordinances is the only way to permanently come unto Christ. The Book of Mormon teaches us of the power and glory and gift of God and the desire to come unto Christ.

We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins. [2 Nephi 25:26]

We know that all of our sins can be swallowed up in the blood of Christ. We learn this so perfectly in the Book of Mormon.

Make a commitment today that you will not leave this great university without having read the Book of Mormon at least once. You owe it to your parents or spouse—and to this great institution whose mission it is to bring souls to Christ. Most of all, you owe it to yourself.

These comforting, closing words from 2 Nephi 32:3 can mean so much to each of us: "Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do."

Karl G. Maeser, the first president of this great university, said, "Labor with the hand is as honorable as labor with the head, but labor with the heart, when the heart is pure and true, is the noblest labor that can be done" (in Reinhard Maeser, *Karl G. Maeser: A Biography by His Son* [Provo: Brigham Young University, 1928], 78). I pray that you will labor with your heart as you study the Book of Mormon.

To its truths I humbly testify, in His holy name, even Jesus Christ, amen.