

**Conclusion to Alma 36-42**

1 Not long after we were married, we built our first home.... The first of many trees that I planted was a thornless honey locust....It was so supple that I could bend it with ease in any direction. I paid little attention to it as the years passed.

Then one winter day,... I chanced to look out the window at it. I noticed that it was leaning to the west, misshapen and out of balance.....I went out and braced myself against it as if to push it upright. But the trunk was now nearly a foot in diameter.... It seemed to say, "You can't straighten me. It's too late. I've grown this way because of your neglect, and I will not bend."

Finally in desperation I took my saw and cut off the great heavy branch on the west side. The saw left an ugly scar, more than eight inches across....I had cut off the major part of the tree, leaving only one branch growing skyward.

More than half a century has passed since I planted that tree...The other day I looked again at the tree. It is large. Its shape is better.... But how serious was the trauma of its youth and how brutal the treatment I used to straighten it.

When it was first planted, a piece of string would have held it in place against the forces of the wind....

I have seen a similar thing, many times, in children whose lives I have observed. The parents who brought them into the world seem almost to have abdicated their responsibility. The results have been tragic. A few simple anchors would have shaped their lives. Now it appears it is too late.

*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley, pp. 419-420.*

2 President J. Reuben Clark Jr., a former member of the First Presidency, reminded the teachers of youth in the Church that our children have a much greater capacity for spiritual instruction than they are oftentimes given credit: "Our youth are not children spiritually; they are well on towards the normal spiritual maturity.... You do not need to disguise religious truths with a cloak of worldly things; you can bring these truths to [them] openly, in their natural guise.... There is no need for gradual approaches,... for coddling, for patronizing, or for any of the other childish devices used in efforts to teach those spiritually inexperienced." (Cited in Boyd K Packer, *Teach Ye Diligently*, p. 317)

3 When the full measure of Elijah's mission is understood, ... the hearts of the children will be turned to the fathers, and the fathers to the children. It applies just as much on this side of the veil as it does on the other side of the veil. If we neglect our families here in having family home night and we fail in our responsibility here, how would heaven look if we lost some of those through our own neglect? Heaven would not be heaven.... So, the hearts of you fathers and mothers must be turned to your children right now, if you have the true spirit of Elijah, and not think it applies merely to those who are beyond the veil. Let your hearts be turned to your children, and teach your children; but you must do it when they are young enough to be properly schooled. And if you are neglecting your family home evening, you are neglecting the beginning of the mission of Elijah just as certainly as if you were neglecting your research work of genealogy."

*Teachings of Harold B. Lee, p. 281.*

4 Sometimes as I go throughout the Church, I think I am seeing a man who is using his church work as a kind of escape from family responsibility. And sometimes when we've talked about whether or not he's giving attention to his family, his children and his wife, he says something like this: "Well, I'm so busy taking care of the Lord's work that I really don't have time." And I say to him, "My dear brother, the greatest of the Lord's work that you and I will ever do is the work that we do within the walls of our own home." Now don't you get any misconception about where the Lord's work starts. That's the most important of all the Lord's work. And you wives may have to remind your husbands of that occasionally.

Harold B. Lee, Address to seminary and institute personnel at Brigham Young University, July 8, 1966.

5 There are those today who say that man is the result of his environment and cannot rise above it.... Surely the environmental conditions found in childhood and youth are an influence of power. But the fact remains that every normal soul has its free agency and the power to row against the current and to lift itself to new planes of activity and thought and development.... It is within his power to lift himself by his bootstraps from the plane on which he finds himself to the plane on which he should be.... In other words, environment need not be our limit. Circumstance may not need to be our ruler.

Spencer W. Kimball, *Ensign*, July 1978, pp. 3-7.

6 No one was foreordained to fail or to be wicked.... Let us remember that we were measured before and were found equal to our tasks.... When we feel overwhelmed, let us recall the assurance that God will not over-program us; he will not press upon us more than we can bear.

Neal A. Maxwell, 1978 *Devotional Speeches of the Year*, p. 156.

7 This teaching is to be done before the child reaches the age of accountability, and while innocent and sin-free. This is protected time for parents to teach the principles and ordinances of salvation to their children without interference from Satan. It is a time to dress them in armor in preparation for the battle against sin. When this preparation time is neglected, they are left vulnerable to the enemy. To permit a child to enter into that period of his life when he will be buffeted and tempted by the evil one, without faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and an understanding of the basic principles of the gospel, is to set him adrift in a world of wickedness. During these formative, innocent years, a child may learn wrong behavior; but such is not the result of Satan's temptations, but comes from the wrong teachings and the bad example of others. In this context, the Savior's harsh judgment of adults who offend children is better understood wherein he said, "It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones." (Luke 17:2.)

We offend a child by any teaching or example which leads a little one to violate a moral law; causes him to stumble, or go astray; excites him to anger; creates resentment; or perhaps even leads him to become displeasing and disagreeable.

Elder Merlin R. Lybbert, *Ensign*, May 1994, pp. 31-32.

8 Another story is told of the great Mahatma Gandhi, who was approached by a woman who had been told by her doctor that her son should not eat sugar. "I am deeply concerned about his health," she said, "He looks up to you. If you would suggest to him to stop eating sugar, I'm confident that he would follow your advice." After pondering her request, Gandhi determined that he would attempt to help her son. He asked her to bring her son to him no sooner than in two weeks. A few weeks later the mother returned with her child, and Gandhi visited privately with the son. The boy agreed to follow the words of his leader. The mother, overwhelmed by her son's decision, inquired of Gandhi why he had insisted on the two-week delay. He replied, "I needed to go two weeks without eating sugar myself."

(Cited in Al Gore, *Earth in the Balance*, p. 14.)

9 One Saturday my father had to go to town to attend a conference, and he didn't feel like driving, so he asked me if I would drive him into town and bring him back in the evening.... Since I was going into town, my mom gave me a list of groceries she needed, and on the way into town, my dad told me that there were many small chores that had been pending for a long time, like getting the car serviced and the oil changed.

When I left my father at the conference venue, he said, "At 5 o'clock in the evening, I will wait for you outside this auditorium. Come here and pick me up, and we'll go home together."

I said, "Fine." I rushed off and I did all my chores as quickly as possible—I bought the groceries, I left the car in the garage with instructions to do whatever was necessary—and I went straight to the nearest movie theatre. In those days, being a 16-year-old, I was extremely interested in cowboy movies.... I got so engrossed in a John Wayne

double feature that I didn't realize the passage of time. The movie ended at 5:30, and I came out and ran to the garage and rushed to where Dad was waiting for me. It was almost 6 o'clock when I reached there, and he was anxious and pacing up and down wondering what had happened to me. The first question he asked me was, "Why are you late?"

Instead of telling the truth, I lied to him, and I said, "The car wasn't ready; I had to wait for the car," not realizing that he had already called the garage.

When he caught me in the lie, he said, "There's something wrong in the way I brought you up that didn't give you the confidence to tell me the truth, that made you feel you had to lie to me. I've got to find out where I went wrong with you, and to do that," he said, "I'm going to walk home—18 miles. I'm not coming with you in the car." There was absolutely nothing I could do to make him change his mind.

It was after 6 o'clock in the evening when he started walking. Much of those 18 miles were through sugarcane plantations—dirt roads, no lights, it was late in the night—and I couldn't leave him and go away. For five and a half hours I crawled along in the car behind Father, watching him go through all this pain and agony for a stupid lie. I decided there and then that I was never going to lie again.

I think of that episode often. It's almost 50 years since the event, and every time I talk or think about it I still get goose bumps.... Anything that is brought by fear doesn't last. But anything that is done by love lasts forever.

Told by Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, *Brigham Young Magazine*, spring, 2000, pp. 37-43.

10 The measure of our success as parents, however, will not rest solely on how our children turn out. That judgment would be just only if we could raise our families in a perfectly moral environment, and that now is not possible.

It is not uncommon for responsible parents to lose one of their children, for a time, to influences over which they have no control. They agonize over rebellious sons or daughters. They are puzzled over why they are so helpless when they have tried so hard to do what they should.

It is my conviction that those wicked influences one day will be overruled.

"The Prophet Joseph Smith declared—and he never taught a more comforting doctrine—that the eternal sealings of faithful parents and the divine promises made to them for valiant service in the Cause of Truth, would save not only themselves, but likewise their posterity. Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold. Either in this life or the life to come, they will return. They will have to pay their debt to justice; they will suffer for their sins; and may tread a thorny path; but if it leads them at last like a penitent Prodigal, to a loving and forgiving father's heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain. Pray for your careless and disobedient children; hold on to them with your faith. Hope on, trust on, till you see the salvation of God." (Orson F. Whitney, in Conference Report, Apr. 1929, p. 110.)

We cannot overemphasize the value of temple marriage, the binding ties of the sealing ordinance, and the standards of worthiness required of them. When parents keep the covenants they have made at the altar of the temple, their children will be forever bound to them.

Boyd K. Packer, *The Shield of Faith*, pp. 125-26.

11 It is an interesting question—shall the youth of Zion falter? The hymn protests vigorously, "No!"

Collectively, of course, you will not, you cannot; but individually I have seen them do it—falter and fall away...

How can one be unfaltering? First, be alert enough to know that the challenge when it comes is individual. While the youth of Zion will not falter, *you* might.

Many of you mistakenly imagine that if a modern-day [Johnston's] Army threatened the very existence of the Church you would be in Echo Canyon, enlisted as a defender of the faith. You fail to understand that the challenge comes not as an army against the Church, but as the Adversary against your individual testimony.

I came to quite a realization years ago after our family had weathered the great economic depression. I was but a boy, but I could see that for some reason it didn't let go of us as soon as it let go of the nation. That and subsequent experiences taught me that it wasn't necessary to stage a whole national depression. We were quite able, we found, to create our own.

The challenge is *individual*. There need not be the great battle of God and Magog for any youth to falter and fall in mortal combat in defense of his faith.

Boyd K. Packer, *Shall the Youth of Zion Falter? Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year, [Provo, 12 Apr. 1966], pp. 3, 7-8.*

## Follow-up to Alma 36-42

### Hope for Parents of Wayward Children

#### **Joseph Smith**

(1805-1844)

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#### **Brigham Young**

(1801-1877)

Let the father and mother, who are members of the Church and Kingdom, take a righteous course, and strive with all their might never to do a wrong, but to do good all their lives; if they have one child or one hundred children, if they conduct themselves towards them as they should, binding them to the Lord by their faith and prayers, I care not where those children go, they are bound up to their parents by an everlasting tie, and no power of earth or hell can separate them from their parents in eternity; they will return again to the fountain from whence they sprang. (Quoted in Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [1954-56], 2:90-91).

#### **Lorenzo Snow**

(1814-1901)

If you succeed in passing through these trials and afflictions and receive a resurrection, you will by the power of the Priesthood, work and labor as the Son of God has, until you get all your sons and daughters in the path of exaltation and glory. This is just as sure as that the sun rose this morning over yonder mountains. Therefore, mourn not because all your sons and daughters do not follow in the path that you have marked out to them or give heed to your counsels. Inasmuch as we succeed in securing eternal glory, and stand as saviors and as kings and priests to our God, we will save our posterity. (in *Collected Discourses*, comp. Brian H. Stuy, 5 vols. [1987-92], 3:364.)

#### **Boyd K. Packer**

Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

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Discipline is probably one of the most important elements in which a mother and father can lead and guide and direct their children. It certainly would be well for parents to understand the rule given to the priesthood in section 121. Setting limits to what a child can do means to that child that you love him and respect him. If you permit the child to do all the things he would like to do without any limits, that means to him that you do not care much about him. (*Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], 340-41).