

Alma 53:4-7**1** *Fortification*

Resisting the temptations of today’s electronic media is not easy. It takes focused courage and effort. In the small town where I grew up, one had to drive at least an hour to find trouble. But today on the Internet, trouble is just a few mouse clicks away. To avoid such temptations, be like Captain Moroni of old; set up “fortifications” to strengthen your places of weakness. Instead of building walls of “timbers and dirt” to protect a vulnerable city, build “fortifications” in the form of personal ground rules to protect your priceless virtue (see Alma 53:4, 7). When you’re on a date, plan to be in groups and avoid being alone. I know men, young and old, who have simply determined not to turn on the TV or surf the Internet anytime when they are alone. Fathers, it is wise to keep computers and televisions in the family room or other high-traffic areas in your home—not in children’s bedrooms. I know of fathers who, while on business trips, wisely choose not to turn on the hotel television.

Remember, such “fortifications” are not a sign of weakness. On the contrary, they show strength.... Remember Moroni’s “strongholds” (see Alma 53:4-5), were the keys to his success. Creating your own “strongholds” will be the key to yours.

David E. Sorensen, *Ensign*, May 2001 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001], 41-42.

Alma 53:8**2** *West sea south*

When the Nephites first landed in the promised land, they gave names to some of the seas and lands around them. At that time the sea to the west of their landing place was evidently called the “west sea.” Later, Nephi left this land, took his followers, and went northward where they settled in the land of Nephi. The descendants of Nephi and his group lived there for several hundred years. Then Mosiah, under the inspiration of the Lord, led a group of Nephites even farther north to the land of Zarahemla. The major group of Nephites is now located in the land of Zarahemla, far north of the original landing place. Thus, the original “west sea” is actually far to the south of where they are now living, and they refer to the “the west sea, south.” (Alma 53:8.)

Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon*, pp. 236-37.

Alma 53:8-9

- 3 *Gained some ground over Nephites*
 All the water in the world,
 However hard it tried,
 Could never sink the smallest ship
 Unless it [gets] inside.
 And all the evil in the world,
 The blackest kind of sin,
 Can never hurt you the least bit
 Unless you let it in.

Quoted by Elder Boyd K. Packer in “The Spirit of Revelation,” *Ensign*, November 1999, p. 24

- 4 So it was a blessing to the Nephites after all to have the Lamanites on their doorstep to stir them up to remembrance.... No matter how wicked and ferocious and depraved the Lamanites might be (and they were that!), no matter by how much they outnumbered the Nephites.... They were not the Nephite problem. They were merely kept there to remind the Nephites of their real problem, which was to walk uprightly before the Lord.
 High Nibley, *Since Cumorah* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976], 376

Alma 53: 9-23

- 5 *What we learn from Ammonite Warriors*

To our young men who go into service, no matter whom they serve or where, we say live clean, keep the commandments of the Lord, pray to Him constantly to preserve you in truth and righteousness, live as you pray, and then whatever betides you the Lord will be with you and nothing will happen to you that will not be to the honor and glory of God and to your salvation and exaltation. There will come into your hearts from the living of the pure life you pray for, a joy that will pass your powers of expression or understanding. The Lord will be always near you; He will comfort you; you will feel His presence in the hour of your greatest tribulation; He will guard and protect you to the full extent that accords with His all-wise purpose. Then, when the conflict is over and you return to your homes, having lived the righteous life, how great will be your happiness—whether you be of the victors or of the vanquished—that you have lived as the Lord commanded. You will return so disciplined in righteousness that thereafter all Satan’s wiles and stratagems will leave you untouched. Your faith and testimony will be strong beyond breaking. You will be looked up to and revered as having passed through the fiery furnace of trial and temptation and come forth unharmed. Your brethren will look to you for counsel, support, and guidance. You will be the anchors to which thereafter the youth of Zion will moor their faith in man.

Heber J. Grant, J. Reuben Clark, Jr., David O. McKay in *CR*, Apr. 1942, p. 96.

Alma 53: 10-18**6** *Importance of Promises, Oaths, and Covenants*

Fellow members of the Priesthood, do you so esteem your word? In all sincerity I ask it, tonight. You and I have given our words, our covenants. Do we hold them as sacred as did the people of Ammon. The story of whom you find in the Book of Mormon, who made an oath that they would never shed blood, and the time came when their benefactors were being punished, persecuted, killed, and the people of Ammon thought they would break that oath, but Heleman said no. And so those good men and women preferred death, if necessary, rather than break their word, violate their oath.

David O. McKay, Conference Report, October 1952, p. 89.

7 Sometimes we are tempted to let our lives be governed more by convenience than by covenant. It is not always convenient to live gospel standards and stand up for truth and testify of the Restoration... But there is no spiritual power in living by convenience. The power comes as we keep our covenants.

M. Russell Ballard, in Conference Report, Apr. 1999, 113; or *Ensign*, May, 1999, 86.

8 Keep your covenants and you will be safe. Break them and you will not...

...We are not free to break our covenants and escape the consequences.

Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, Oct. 1990, 107-8; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, 84.

Alma 53:16

9 About sixty years ago, F. M. Bareham wrote the following:

A century ago [in 1809] men were following with bated breath the march of Napoleon and waiting with feverish impatience for news of the wars. And all the while in their homes babies were being born. But who could think about babies? Everybody was thinking about battles.

In one year between Trafalgar and Waterloo there stole into the world a host of heroes: Gladstone was born in Liverpool; Tennyson at the Somersby Rectory; and Oliver Wendell Holmes in Massachusetts. Abraham Lincoln was born in Kentucky, and music was enriched by the advent of Felix Mendelssohn in Hamburg.

Quoting Bareham further:

But nobody thought of babies, everybody was thinking of battles. Yet which of the battles of 1809 mattered more than the babies of 1809? We fancy God can manage His world only with great battalions, when all the time he is doing it with beautiful babies.

When a wrong wants righting, or a truth wants preaching, or a continent wants discovering, God sends a baby into the world to do it.

While most of the thousands of precious infants born every hour will never be known outside their own neighborhoods, there are great souls being born who will rise above their surroundings.

...

... One mother gives us a Shakespeare, another a Michelangelo, and another an Abraham Lincoln, and still another a Joseph Smith.

When theologians are reeling and stumbling, when lips are pretending and hearts are wandering, and people are 'running to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord and cannot find it'—when clouds of error need dissipating and spiritual darkness needs penetrating and heavens need opening, a little infant is born.

Faith Precedes the Miracle [1972], 323-24

10

Opportunity

They do me wrong who say I come no more
When once I knock and fail to find you in:
For every day I stand outside your door,
And Bid you wake, and rise to fight and win.

Wail not for precious chances passed away,
Weep not for golden ages on the wane!
Each night I burn the records of the day;
At sunrise every soul is born again.

Laugh like a boy at splendors that have sped;
To vanquished joys be blind and deaf and dumb;
My judgments seal the dead past with its dead,
But never bind a moment yet to come.

Though deep in mire, wring not your hands and weep;
I lend my arm to all who say "I can!"
No shame-faced outcast ever sank so deep,
But yet might rise and be again a man!

Dost thou behold thy lost youth all aghast?
Dost reel from righteous retribution's blow?
Then turn from blotted archives of the past,
And find the future's pages white as snow.

Art thou a mourner? Rouse thee from thy spell!
Art thou a sinner? Sins may be forgiven.
Each morning gives thee wings to flee from hell,
Each night a star to guide thy feet to heaven!

Walter Malone

Alma 53:1711 *Allegiance to their Sovereign*

The First Presidency of the Church stated: “Members must give allegiance to their sovereign and render it loyal service when called thereto” (Grant, Clark, McKay, in Conference Report, Apr. 1942, p. 92). This allegiance includes military service. The attitude of Latter-day Saints should be “fully to render loyalty to that country and to free institutions which the loftiest patriotism calls for”.

Grant, Clark, McKay, in Conference Report, Apr. 1942, p. 993

Alma 53:19-21

12 The 2,000 Stripling warriors not only made covenants, they kept them.... Very simply, they did what they said they would do. They weren't always looking for ways to straddle the line between right and wrong.

After President Hinckley was interviewed by Mike Wallace for *60 Minutes*, I had occasion to talk with Mr. Wallace about their conversation. Do you know what Mike Wallace seemed most impressed with? That President Hinckley had done everything in connection with the interview that he had promised to do. When I later offered to show Mr. Wallace how I intended to quote him in President Hinckley's biography, he replied, “That's not necessary. You're a Mormon, I trust you.”... His expression was not a reflection of me; it was a reflection of his experience with President Hinckley. In effect, he was saying, “If you are associated with *that* man, then I assume that you, too, will do what you have said you will do.”

Sheri Dew, “Living on the Lord's Side of the Line,” *BYU Speeches of the Year*, 21 Mar. 2000 [Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 2000], 4

13 Who can help but be inspired by the lives of the 2,000 stripling sons of Helaman who taught and demonstrated the need of courage to follow the teachings of parents, the courage to be chaste and pure?...

In our lives... we will face fear, experience ridicule, and meet opposition.... Courage, not compromise, brings the smile of God's approval.... A moral coward is one who is afraid to do what he thinks is right because others will disapprove or laugh. Remember that all men have their fears, but those who face their fears with dignity have courage as well....

Someone has said that courage is not the absence of fear but the mastery of it (see Mark Twain, in Gorton Carruth and Eugene Ehrich, eds., *The Harper Book of American Quotations* (1988), 111). At times, courage is needed to rise from failure, to strive again.

Thomas S. Monson, *Ensign*, May 2004 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004], 55-56.

14 Thankfully we have a tremendous army of latter-day sons and daughters of Helaman, stripling “Saturday's warriors,” who are not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ....

Steve Hawes is the student body president at New Canaan High School in Connecticut. Of its twenty-three hundred students, only twenty-four are Latter-day Saints. Steve ran unopposed

in a landslide election. This is impressive. But even more impressive is Steve’s moral courage—his commitment to living the principles of the gospel.

The Hawes family lived for a time in Tampa, Florida. Steve played junior high football and basketball. When his family was preparing to move to Connecticut, the coach told Steve’s father how much he appreciated and admired Steve, not just because he is a fine athlete, but because of his deep religious convictions.

“He doesn’t preach sermons, he just quietly lives his religion each day. I remember,” said the coach, “a group of us were in the squad room, and one of the boys pulled out a copy of *Playboy* magazine. They opened to the center-fold and began to make some vulgar comments.

“I noticed Steve walk away, so I followed him and asked if anything was wrong. He said, “I’m okay, Coach, but that just isn’t my kind of thing.”

The coach said, “Steve made us all better people. When he joined us, most of the guys were swearing. Then they stopped swearing around Steve, and after a while, they pretty well stopped swearing altogether.”

J. Richard Clarke, in Conference Report, Apr. 1985 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985], 95-96.

15 That is a great story (Alma 53:20), and an inspiration to young men in all the world.

Now, the application—Do you realize that we made a promise, a covenant at the water’s edge? You and I are pretty well along in years, some of you, but we remember our baptism on our eighth birthday. There was a sense that came to us that we would not swear after that baptism, that we would do whatever our parents asked us to do, that we would do our part, or render service in the Church when called upon to do it. We were only children at eight year of age, that is true, but I can remember those feelings and sentiments as clearly as though they were yesterday. Don’t you?

Later we realized what that covenant is. We buried the “old man,” with all of his weaknesses, his jealousies, his tendency to slander, that we might come forth and walk in the newness of life. We refer to it now as the covenant made at the water’s edge.

You made it, you gave your word. Is your word your bond? I ask the Church, and especially the men who hold the Priesthood.

Again, every Sunday in Sacrament meeting we give our word of honor, that we are willing to take upon us the name of the Son, that we will always remember him, that we will keep his commandments which he has given us, that we may have his Spirit to be with us. What a covenant! And we make it in the presence of God whom we are worshipping that day.

Another promise: do you remember what you said when you took your sweet wife through the Temple, your confidence in her, her purity, her worthiness was supreme—as pure as a snowflake, as spotless as a sunbeam, as worthy of motherhood as the purest of virgins. And she had that same confidence in you, as a husband and father; and together you stood in the House of the Lord and covenanted with each other that you would be true.

Is your word your bond? If so, then there should be no divorces, and the man who, because of his tendency to drink, abuses his wife and severs that connection, the man who, through desire

to gratify his passion, becomes untrue to his wife, violates his word. There is not other explanation for it.

David O. McKay, CR, Oct. 1952, 89-90.

16 What does it mean to be true to the faith? That word *true* implies *commitment, integrity, endurance, and courage*. It reminds us of the Book of Mormon's description of the 2,000 young warriors: [in Alma 53:20-21]. In the spirit of that description I say to our returned missionaries—men and women who have made covenants to serve the Lord and who have already served Him in the great work of proclaiming the gospel and perfecting the Saints—are you being true to the faith? Do you have the faith and continuing commitment to demonstrate the principles of the gospel in your own lives, consistently? You have served well, but do you, like the pioneers, have the courage and the consistency to be true to the faith and to endure to the end?

Dallin H. Oaks, *Ensign*, Nov. 1997 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997], 73

17 *Their Mothers Had Taught Them*: I am thinking of the experience of the Nephites, when they were having their perilous troubles, and how just two thousand and sixty boys, striplings as Helaman called them, were brought face to face with men of experience and training in warfare, and they went forward, without any question, and when they were gathered from the battlefield, everyone of them having been wounded, after a series of battles, two hundred of them having fainted from the loss of blood, not one had lost his life. When the question was asked, "How could you do it? How could you have the faith?" Those boys, like the ones that are going out now, no doubt, eighteen years and a little older, smilingly remarked, "We knew, our mothers knew" (see Alma 57:19-22).

I think that is one of the greatest tributes that has ever been paid to motherhood—that in circumstances such as they were experiencing, when they were surrounded by enemies, they could train their children to have that faith in God that would carry them through and would bring them home without losing their lives.

I have been asking myself the question, "Have the mothers of Israel been preparing their sons?" Have they been teaching these boys that must represent us on the battlefield, that they too, can be preserved; that God will take care of them if they are in the line of their duty, and I want to say that if our mothers have, the fathers have much to be grateful for, because some fathers do not take much time to teach these children things like that in these days.

George Albert Smith, CR, April 1943, 89-90.

18 My husband, Stephen, wrote about an experience he had with a group of young men:
It was Sunday morning, and there, about twenty-five feet up in the top of the very large tree in our front yard, was a big, strong, eighteen-year-old boy. He was wearing his Sunday clothes—white shirt, tie, nice pants. He was surrounded on the nearby limbs by six or seven

others in similar attire. Their most prominent features were the big grins they had on their faces. I have no idea what our nonmember neighbor friends thought. I suppose it looked like a flock of very strange birds had swooped out of the sky and landed in our tree. They were having just as much fun taking the fifteen rolls of toilet paper out of the tree as they undoubtedly had putting it in the trees the Saturday night before.

This was not our first experience with that particular flock of priests. I had been the Young Men president and their quorum advisor for several years and had come to know them as an energetic, playful, and an altogether typical group of sixteen- to eighteen-year-old boys. Indeed, as I looked at the boy highest in the tree, I remembered a remark I had made to Margaret several years earlier—something about why didn't this boy's parents do a little better job with him? Of course, our own boys were then three and four years old, so we were in the best possible position to render an expert opinion on these matters. Now that Margaret and I had seven teenage sons of our own, you can only imagine how many times I have eaten those words.

In 1997, nearly twenty-five years later, we saw that flock of priests again. One of them organized a reunion for us all at general conference time. There was the former bishop and his wife, Margaret and I, and eighteen of the nicest Melchizedek Priesthood holders you have ever seen! They came from California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Louisiana. They were Scoutmasters, bishops, and elders' quorum presidents, fathers, and husbands. They loved the gospel and they loved the Lord, and oh, how they loved their families.

The boy highest in the Tree? The ringleader? The one about whom I had said to Margaret: "I think he's a nice-looking boy, honey, but I think he's just a scatter-brained football player!" Yes, he was there. I knew he would be. Three years before, I had visited a stake conference in Louisiana with the assignment to reorganize the stake presidency. I had been told about a wonderful young counselor in the stake presidency who would have made a great stake president had he not just moved. He had been a professor at the university, had a national reputation in his field, and had been recruited by other universities around the country. I asked his name. I asked it again. "Naw, it couldn't be," but it was! That big bird, the football player, had his Ph.D., was a nationally renowned scientist, and had served in a stake presidency. Oh yes, he was there with his wife and family. I threw my arms around him and he hugged me so hard it about broke my back. Gratefully, some things never change!

What a joyous reunion we had! It was a grand celebration. We celebrated Aaronic Priesthood boys becoming Melchizedek Priesthood men. We celebrated a bishop who never gave up. We celebrated parents who really had taught correct principles. We celebrated Leo, who had driven all night from California and parked his eighteen-wheeler the full length of our residential lot.

Stephen says of that occasion,

I don't know how they did it. I didn't help them. But that Saturday night as I sat on the stand in the tabernacle looking out, there they all were, seated on the front row. I wondered where those ingenious boys had gotten tickets! What a special sight! Who could have imagined

that that group of boys would one day all be together, we embraced, we cried, we hugged, we talked, we ate together, and prayed together.

The morning after they left we awoke still basking in the glow of such an experience. We walked out on our front porch and there on our little new trees that could hardly hold leaves, we saw that each had been delicately and lovingly adorned with one carefully placed strand of white toilet paper.

From that experience and others like it, we have learned how important it is for leaders and parents to believe in our youth and to share with them a vision of who they really are and the great contribution they can make as they become the future leaders of the Church.

Taken from *A Mother's Influence*, by Margaret D. Nadauld, pp 50-55

Alma 53 Conclusion

Testimony of Stella Oaks:

19 We were living in Twin Falls, Idaho, at the time of my husband's death. I had the serious concern of my ability to meet the needs of our three children, Dallin, aged seven, Merrill, three and a half, and Evelyn, fourteen months. I wondered how I would even be able to drive the car 250 miles in the move back to Utah County. How would I be able to earn enough to educate the children as Lloyd and I had planned?

Then there was the problem of making the adjustment back to a career of teaching when all my dreams, expectations, and careful preparations were geared to the rearing of a large family and my role as a wife. I knew I could not perform my responsibilities alone, but my spirit was disciplined to covenant with the Lord. I would do all things he desired of me. This decision was also helped by the phrase my husband had uttered so many times during our family prayers: "We dedicate all our time, talents, and energies to Thy service." I felt sealed within this promise.

But it takes great spiritual effort to walk constantly by faith, and I had much learning to do as I was trying to meet the demands of daily survival and decision making. The words of my blessing came vividly to my consciousness: "Cry unto the Lord and he will hear thee and what seemeth a mountain shall become a molehill because of thy faith and integrity."

Several distinct blessings came to me at that very time of communion with the Lord. I was able to drive the car back to Utah with great ease; previously I had not driven farther than Burley, some forty miles away. Contrary to my former needs, I was now able to feel completely invigorated after only five to six hours' sleep. My Father in heaven had also blessed me with three choice spirits to raise, and I discovered in them a strong sense of our family mission. They were equally dedicated to the goal of a happy, cooperative home. Another great blessing was the arrival of an unexpected insurance policy, which enabled me to pay off my husband's medical school expenses.

Before leaving to take up my new life and doubled parental responsibility, I sought a blessing from our stake patriarch, L.G. Kirkman, who promised me specific blessings. I was promised, depending on my faith, that my children would be able to have all the education they would desire. I was promised the strength to maintain a strong united home. I was also told that I would be able to make a personal contribution in both my profession and in my community. Let me explain the fascinating ways these promises have been fulfilled to the letter.

In his senior year at Brigham Young University, Dallin came home one day to tell me that he had been awarded the first University of Chicago Law School scholarship ever to be awarded to a BYU student. I was overjoyed and thought back to the blessing I had received fourteen years before. On another occasion the blessing was brought back to my mind when late one afternoon I arrived home from the school board office and found a letter addressed to my son Merrill. He opened it later in the evening and we were thrilled to discover that he had been granted a scholarship from the National Health Foundation, providing his fees for a full medical school education. He was accepted at five medical schools. I later discovered that this was their only scholarship awarded in Utah. As Evelyn was beginning college, she received the highly competitive Elks scholarship, providing her with books and tuition fees for the duration of her undergraduate degree. Later she was awarded a scholarship from the BYU College of Family Living, which enabled her to attend the Merrill Palmer College of Family Living in Detroit.

Remarkable Stories from the Lives of Latter-day Saint Women, vol. 2, Hartshorn, Leon R.

20 And may God enable us to perform our vows and covenants with each other, in all fidelity and righteousness before Him, that our influence may be felt among the nations of the earth, in mighty power, even to rend the kingdoms of darkness asunder, and triumph over priestcraft and spiritual wickedness in high places, and break in pieces all kingdoms that are opposed to the kingdom of Christ, and spread the light and truth of the everlasting Gospel from the rivers to the ends of the earth.

Joseph Smith HC 2:375