

Introduction

Because of their demonstration of love and their understanding of the worth of a soul, Ammon and his companions are models for servants of the Lord everywhere. Through their experience you will see the importance of personal preparation, the power of setting a righteous example, and the need to build meaningful relationships with those you serve. Furthermore, Ammon and his brethren understood that those they served held strong beliefs. Look for ways they found to share gospel truths concerning the Spirit, love, and testimony. By emulating their example, you can be a powerful servant in the Lord’s hands to help bring others to Christ.

Commentary

Alma 17:2. Those Who Serve Together Develop a Bond of Friendship

- Those who labor in the Lord’s vineyard share a bond of love that comes from laboring in the “harvest” together. This bond is deepened by



common experiences of faith and testimony. Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles shared a personal example of meeting his first missionary companion after several years had passed:

“I had an experience a few years ago of receiving a call from my son, Lee. He told me that my first missionary companion was in his neighborhood, and he wanted to spend a few minutes with me. . . . We had a special experience of being together after many years of not seeing one another.

“As missionaries we were given the opportunity of opening up a new town in Ohio to missionary work. Because of this assignment, we were allowed to labor together for 10 months. He was my trainer, my first companion. . . . It was difficult for me to keep up with him, but as we served together we drew close together as companions.

“Our companionship did not end with the 10-month assignment. World War II was raging, and when I returned home I had only a short time to adjust before

I was drafted into military service. On my first Sunday in boot camp, I attended an LDS service. I saw the back of a head that was very familiar to me. It was my first missionary companion. We spent most of the next two and a half years together.

“Although circumstances were very different for us in military service, we tried to continue the practices of missionary service. As often as we could, we prayed together. When circumstances allowed, we had scripture study together. . . .

“We were both set apart as group leaders, and we again had the opportunity to serve and teach together the glorious gospel of our Lord and Savior. We were more successful in the military than we had been as full-time missionaries. Why? Because we were experienced returned missionaries.

“My visit with my first missionary companion was the last opportunity I had to be with him. He was suffering from an incurable disease and died only a few months later. It was a wonderful experience to relive our missions together and then tell about our lives following our missionary service. We recounted our service in bishoprics, high councils, and stake presidencies, and, of course, we bragged about our children and our grandchildren. As we sat and thrilled at the opportunity of being together again, I couldn’t help but think of the account in the 17th chapter of the book of Alma” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 94–95; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 77).

ALMA 17:2–3

What did Ammon and his brethren do to prepare to share the gospel with power and authority? What can you do to implement these principles?

Alma 17:2. They “Searched the Scriptures Diligently”

- The sons of Mosiah searched the scriptures as an essential part of their missionary preparation. Likewise, Hyrum Smith received counsel from the Lord to prepare for missionary service by first seeking to

obtain His word (see D&C 11:21–22). The missionary handbook *Preach My Gospel* emphasizes the importance of seeking the Holy Ghost, having a strong desire to learn, and putting what we learn into action as key components of effective gospel study:

“Your gospel study is most effective when you are taught by the Holy Ghost. Always begin your gospel study by praying for the Holy Ghost to help you learn. He will bring knowledge and conviction that will bless your life and allow you to bless the lives of others. Your faith in Jesus Christ will increase. Your desire to repent and improve will grow.

“This kind of study prepares you for service, offers solace, resolves problems, and gives you the strength to endure to the end. Successful gospel study requires desire and action. ‘For he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well as in these times as in times of old’ (1 Nephi 10:19). Like Enos, as you hunger to know the words of eternal life and as you allow these words to ‘[sink] deep into [your] heart’ (Enos 1:3), the Holy Ghost will open your mind and heart to greater light and understanding.

“Learning the gospel is also a process of receiving revelation (see Jacob 4:8)” ([2004], 18).

- In addition, *Preach My Gospel* recommends the use of a scripture journal as one way to increase the power of your scripture study. By recording your thoughts and impressions while studying your scriptures, you open new avenues of receiving personal revelation:

“A study journal [can] help you understand, clarify, and remember what you are learning. Elder Richard G. Scott taught, ‘Knowledge carefully recorded is knowledge available in time of need. Spiritually sensitive information should be kept in a sacred place that communicates to the Lord how you treasure it. This practice enhances the likelihood of your receiving further light’ (‘Acquiring Spiritual Knowledge,’ *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 86). Review your study journal to recall spiritual experiences, see new insights, and recognize your growth.

“Your study journal may be a bound journal, a notebook, or a binder. Record and organize your

thoughts and impressions in a way that fits how you learn. Develop your own system to easily access key information in the future. Use it often to review, access, and apply what you have learned. Use your study journal to take notes and record impressions” (p. x).

Alma 17:3. The Benefits of Prayer and Fasting

- Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles illustrated the power of fasting and prayer in the Lord’s service with the following story: “Some years ago a faithful convert, Brother George McLaughlin, was called to preside over a small branch of 20 members in Farmingdale, Maine. He was a humble man who drove a milk delivery truck for a living. Through his fasting and earnest prayer, the Spirit taught him what he and the members of his branch needed to do to help the Church grow in their area. Through his great faith, constant prayer, and powerful example, he taught his members how to share the gospel. It’s a marvelous story—one of the great missionary stories of this dispensation. In just one year there were 450 convert baptisms in the branch. The next year there were an additional 200 converts” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2003, 39; or *Ensign*, May 2003, 38–39).

Alma 17:9. Pray and Fast for Those without the Truth

- President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) counseled every member to work and pray for missionary opportunities:

“Let there be cultivated an awareness in every member’s heart of his own potential for bringing others to a knowledge of the truth. Let him work at it. Let him pray with great earnestness about it” (“Find the Lambs, Feed the Sheep,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 106).



- Elder M. Russell Ballard admonished us to pray for guidance in doing the Lord’s work: “In gospel-sharing homes we pray for guidance for ourselves, and we pray for the physical and spiritual well-being of others. We pray for the people the missionaries are teaching, for our acquaintances, and for those not of our faith. In

the gospel-sharing homes of Alma's time, the people would 'join in fasting and mighty prayer in behalf of the welfare of the souls of those who knew not God' (Alma 6:6)" (in Conference Report, Apr. 2006, 88; or *Ensign*, May 2006, 85).

ALMA 17:11, 21-29

What was the commission and the promise the Lord gave the sons of Mosiah?

Alma 17:11. "Show Forth Good Examples"

- Ammon and his brethren learned to live in peace with the Lamanites before they were able to share the gospel with them. Elder M. Russell Ballard suggested three important things we can do to be better neighbors to those not of our faith:

"First, get to know your neighbors. Learn about their families, their work, their views. Get together with them, if they are willing, and do so without being pushy and without any ulterior motives. Friendship should never be offered as a means to an end; it can and should be an end unto itself. . . .

". . . Let us cultivate meaningful relationships of mutual trust and understanding with people from different backgrounds and beliefs.

"Second, I believe it would be good if we eliminated a couple of phrases from our vocabulary: *nonmember* and *non-Mormon*. Such phrases can be demeaning and even belittling. Personally, I don't consider myself to be a 'non-Catholic' or a 'non-Jew.' I am a Christian. I am a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. That is how I prefer to be identified—for who and what I am, as opposed to being identified for what I am not. Let us extend that same courtesy to those who live among us. If a collective description is needed, then 'neighbors' seems to work well in most cases.

"And third, if neighbors become testy or frustrated because of some disagreement with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or with some law we support for moral reasons, please don't suggest to them—even in a humorous way—that they consider

moving someplace else. I cannot comprehend how any member of our Church can even think such a thing! Our pioneer ancestors were driven from place to place by uninformed and intolerant neighbors. They experienced extraordinary hardship and persecution because they thought, acted, and believed differently from others. If our history teaches us nothing else, it should teach us to respect the rights of all people to peacefully coexist with one another" (in Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 45; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 37–38).

- Elder L. Tom Perry illustrated how our example can lead others to draw nearer to the Lord:

"A nineteen-year-old missionary . . . would never forget his first day in the mission field, for it taught him a great lesson about using his talents to teach the gospel.

"He and his senior companion were assigned to open a new city some distance from the mission headquarters. As they arrived in this new city and walked down the street, they passed a church with a minister standing at the front door. As they walked by the church, the minister went in and called to his whole congregation to follow him out into the street. There they followed the missionaries and started calling them names; then they became more violent and started to throw rocks at them.

"The young elder was excited about this experience—his first day in the mission field and already he was being stoned, he thought. Then, a big rock suddenly hit him squarely in the middle of the back, and his feeling changed to anger. Before entering the mission field he had been quite a baseball pitcher; and in the flush of anger he wheeled around, grabbed the first rock he could find on the ground, reared back in his famous pitching pose, and was just ready to let the rock fly at the crowd when suddenly he realized why he was there. He had not been sent all the way to Brazil to throw rocks at people; he was there to teach them the gospel. But what was he to do with the rock in his hand? If he dropped it to the ground, they would think it a sign of weakness and probably continue to throw rocks at them. Yet he could not throw it at the crowd. Then he saw a telephone post some distance away. That was the way to save face! He reared back and let the rock fly directly at the telephone post, hitting it squarely in the middle.

“The people in the crowd took a couple of steps back. They suddenly realized that that rock probably could have hit any one of them right between the eyes. Their mood changed; instead of throwing rocks at the missionaries, they began to throw them at the telephone post. After this incident, every time the elder went down that street he was challenged to a rock-throwing contest. The rock-throwing contests led to discussions of the gospel, which led to conversions, which led to the establishment of a branch of the Church in that community” (“Prophecies, Visions, and Dreams,” in *1979 Devotional Speeches of the Year* [1980], 3).

Alma 18:3–9. Service Softens Hearts

- President Henry B. Eyring of the First Presidency explained how temporal service can soften a heart and lead to a miracle:

“When the other servants brought the evidence of what Ammon had done, King Lamoni said, ‘Where is he?’ They said, ‘Oh, he is in the stables. He is doing every little thing to serve you’ (see Alma 18:8–9).

“Isn’t that odd? He was called to teach the doctrines of salvation, but he was in the stables. Don’t you think he should have been praying and fasting and polishing his teaching plan? No, he was in the stables.

“King Lamoni had been brought up with a belief that there was a God but that whatever the king did was right. He had been specifically taught false doctrine that might have made him impervious to feelings of guilt. Do you remember that when he heard where Ammon was, a feeling of guilt, of fear that he had done wrong in the killing of the servants, came over him (see Alma 18:5)? . . .

“I have always focused before on how mixed up Lamoni was in his doctrine, without seeing the miracle. The miracle was that a spiritual need was created in a man, that he might be taught the gospel of Jesus Christ. His heart was broken. He felt guilt. And it came from the temporal things that Ammon had done. . . .

“. . . Never, never underestimate the spiritual value of doing temporal things well for those whom you serve.

“. . . Be their servants, and you will love them. And they will feel your love. And more important, they will

feel God’s love” (“The Book of Mormon Will Change Your Life,” *Ensign*, Feb. 2004, 13–14).

ALMA 18:10

What can you do to respond more like Ammon in this regard? How do Alma 17:25 and 18:3 relate to 18:10?

Alma 18:24. Ammon Began to Speak with Boldness

- Many members of the Church feel concern about how to begin gospel conversations. Ammon’s approach was to ask Lamoni questions about his belief in God. Others have found it natural to simply talk about their “Church life” with their friends. Elder M. Russell Ballard gave valuable counsel about starting gospel conversations with our friends:



“Creating a gospel-sharing home does not mean that we are going to have to dedicate large amounts of time to meeting and cultivating friends with whom to share the gospel. These friends will come naturally into our lives, and if we are open about our membership in the Church from the very beginning, we can easily bring gospel discussions into the relationship with very little risk of being misunderstood. Friends and acquaintances will accept that this is part of who we are, and they will feel free to ask questions. . . .

“A sister in France was asked about the secret of her success. She said, ‘I simply share my joy. I treat everyone as if they were already a member of the Church. If I’m standing by someone in line and strike up a conversation, I share with them how much I enjoyed my Church meetings on Sunday. When co-workers ask, “What did you do this weekend?” I do not skip from Saturday night to Monday morning. I share with them that I went to church, what was said, and my experiences with the Saints. I talk about how I live, think, and feel’” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2006, 89; or *Ensign*, May 2006, 86).

Alma 18:24–28. Building on Common Beliefs

- While serving as a member of the Seventy, Elder Loren C. Dunn (1930–2001) spoke on the importance of showing respect for others’ beliefs and building on common ground: “Today we live in times of conflict, dissent, differences of opinion, charges, countercharges, disagreements. There is a need for us, perhaps more than ever before, to reach within ourselves and allow the quality of mutual respect, mingled with charity and forgiveness, to influence our actions with one another; to be able to disagree without becoming disagreeable; to lower our voices and build on common ground with the realization that once the storm has passed, we will still have to live with one another” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 109; or *Ensign*, May 1991, 82).
- The first question Ammon asked when he began to teach King Lamoni was, “Believest thou that there is a God?” (Alma 18:24). When Ammon learned that Lamoni believed in a Great Spirit, he testified, “This is God” (Alma 18:28). Technically, God is not a “great spirit.” But Ammon looked beyond that and focused instead on their common belief in a Supreme Being and taught from that point. Ammon took Lamoni’s fundamental belief in a Creator and added eternal truths that would “light up his mind” (Alma 19:6).

President Gordon B. Hinckley explained how we also should build on the good that others already possess: “We say in a spirit of love, bring with you all that you have of good and truth which you have received from whatever source, and come and let us see if we may add to it. This invitation I extend to men and women

everywhere” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2002, 87; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 81).

Alma 18:36–39; 22:7–14. Teaching the Plan of Salvation

- When Ammon taught Lamoni, “he began at the creation of the world,” then he taught “concerning the fall of man” (Alma 18:36); finally, he “expounded unto them [the king and his servants] the plan of redemption,” particularly “concerning the coming of Christ” (Alma 18:39). Likewise, Aaron taught these important basic principles of the plan of salvation to Lamoni’s father (see Alma 22:12–14). By learning the reality of the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement, one can understand his place in mortality and his potential in eternity.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles called these foundation doctrines—the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement—the “three pillars of eternity” and the “greatest events that have ever occurred in all eternity.” He explained:

“If we can gain an understanding of them, then the whole eternal scheme of things will fall into place, and we will be in a position to work out our salvation. . . .

“ . . . These three are the foundations upon which all things rest. Without any one of them all things would lose their purpose and meaning and the plans and designs of Deity would come to naught” (“The Three Pillars of Eternity,” in *Brigham Young University 1981 Firesides and Devotional Speeches* [1981], 27).

- Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained how each component of the plan is essential: “The plan required the Creation, and that in turn required both the Fall and the Atonement. These are the three fundamental components of the plan. The creation of a paradisiacal planet came from God. Mortality and death came into the world through the Fall of Adam. Immortality and the possibility of eternal life were provided by the Atonement of Jesus Christ. The Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement were planned long before the actual work of the Creation began” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2000, 105; or *Ensign*, May 2000, 84).

Alma 18:41–43; 22:15–18. Our Dependence on Christ

- Ammon and Aaron helped Lamoni and his father understand how much they needed the redemption of Christ in their lives. Understanding our dependence on Christ leads to conversion. Both Lamoni and his father became aware of their fallen nature and of their need for help. They came to know that their only hope for redemption was through the Atonement that Christ had wrought.



Walter Paine, Courtesy of Museum of Church History and Art

Alma 18:42. Dramatic Conversions Are the Exception

- See the statement by President Ezra Taft Benson under the commentary for Mosiah 27:25 (see p. 166).

Alma 20:30. “A More Hardened and a More Stiff-Necked People”

- The record states that Aaron and his companions served among those who were “a more hardened and a more stiff-necked people” (Alma 20:30). Their experience parallels the experience of many who try to teach those who either have no interest in, or who are antagonistic toward the gospel. President Henry B. Eyring explained why we must still try to reach every soul:



“Why should I speak to anyone about the gospel who seems content? What danger is there to them or to me if I do or say nothing?”

“Well, the danger may be hard to see, but it is real, both for them and for us. For instance, at some moment in the world to come, everyone you will ever meet will know what you know now. They will know that the only way to live forever in association with our families and in the presence of our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, was to choose to enter into the gate by baptism at the hands of those with authority from God. They will know that the only way families can be together forever is to accept and keep sacred covenants offered in the temples of God on this earth. And they will know that you knew. And they will remember whether you offered them what someone had offered you” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1998, 41; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 33).

ALMA 22:15–18

What was Lamoni’s father willing to give up to know God? How might such willingness help us draw nearer to God? (see also Omni 1:26).

Alma 22:18. “I Will Give Away All My Sins to Know Thee”

- Like Lamoni’s father, we must be willing to sacrifice all things to be born of God. In the *Lectures on Faith* we learn the importance of sacrifice in our eternal progression: “Let us here observe, that a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation; for, from the first existence of man, the faith necessary unto the enjoyment of life and salvation never could be obtained without the sacrifice of all earthly things. It was through this sacrifice, and this only, that God has ordained that men should enjoy eternal life; and it is through the medium of the sacrifice of all earthly things that men do actually know that they are doing the things that are well pleasing in the sight of God. When a man has offered in sacrifice all that he has for the truth’s sake, not even withholding his life, and believing before God that he has been called to make this sacrifice because he seeks to do his will, he does know, most assuredly, that God does and will accept his sacrifice and offering, and that he

has not, nor will not seek his face in vain. Under these circumstances, then, he can obtain the faith necessary for him to lay hold on eternal life” ([1985], 69).

- While serving in the Seventy, Elder Alexander B. Morrison taught concerning the sacrifices we must make to come unto Christ:

“To take His name upon us means a willingness to do whatever He requires of us.

“Someone has said that the price of a Christian life is the same today as always: it is simply to give all that we have, holding back nothing, to ‘give away all [our] sins to know [Him]’ (Alma 22:18). When we fall short of that standard by reason of sloth, indifference, or wickedness; when we are evil or envious, selfish, sensual, or shallow; we, in a sense at least, crucify Him afresh. And when we try consistently to be our very best, when we care for and serve others, when we overcome selfishness with love, when we place the welfare of others above our own, when we bear each other’s burdens and ‘mourn with those that mourn,’ when we ‘comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and . . . stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places’ (Mosiah 18:8–9), then we honor Him and draw from His power and become more and more like Him, growing ‘brighter and brighter,’ if we persist, ‘until the perfect day’ (D&C 50:24)” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1999, 33; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 27).

Points to Ponder

- How did Ammon prepare Lamoni’s heart to receive the gospel? What could you do to prepare someone’s heart to receive the truths of the gospel?
- What do we learn from the example of Aaron and his brethren when they experienced rejection “and all kinds of afflictions”? (Alma 20:29).

Suggested Assignments

- As Ammon and his brethren approached the land of Nephi, the Lord charged them (1) to establish His word, (2) to be patient in afflictions, and (3) to be good examples, promising them that He would bless them with success (see Alma 17:11). Write these three headings on a piece of paper. Then, as you study Alma 17–22, list examples under each heading that demonstrate their obedience to the Lord’s instruction. Also write how each example you list helped bring the Lamanites to a knowledge of the truth.
- Make a list of principles related to missionary work (see Alma 17–22). Prayerfully identify specific ways you could apply these principles in your life.