

BOM_015_1_Nephi_15

Hello again, my friends. It's good to be with you again this day as we continue our studies in the Book of Mormon. As a reminder, the Spanish translations with the Spanish transcripts of these Book of Mormon podcasts can be found at mstroudspanish.podomatic.com. The Portuguese translation and recordings, accompanying transcripts are being prepared as we speak. They are not yet upon a Podomatic site but will be soon. The Portuguese translation of the Book of Mormon lessons with its accompanying transcripts will be found at mstroudportuguese.podomatic.com.

The first two podcasts, *Angels and the Aaronic Priesthood*; and the second one, *Accessing the Power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ* are on the Spanish site and ready to listen to. If you know any Spanish speakers who would benefit from these lessons, please refer them to the Spanish Podomatic site.

Also, again, I would ask those of you who have served missions in Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries, if you still have contact to the brothers and sisters in the mission field where you served, please contact them and make him aware of this site. Since we made this announcement, thank you for your efforts in helping us get this message out to our Spanish and Portuguese speaking brothers and sisters.

1 Nephi 15:1

[1] And it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had been carried away in the Spirit, and seen all these things, I returned to the tent of my father.

This formally ends Nephi's vision of his father's dream and vision of the tree of life. There were many other things that Nephi saw and heard while he was on the mountain that are not recorded in the record that we have. As he returns home, there's a dispute that's taking place in verse two.

[2] And it came to pass that I beheld my brethren, and they were disputing one with another concerning the things which my father had spoken unto them.

I'm glad to see that they're not disputing with Lehi and Sariah. They've taken the words which they've heard from their father and are disputing amongst themselves. It appears that at least there is some semblance of respect for mother and father among these older brethren and sisters at this time. Some kind of an argument, disagreement or a debate going on between these brethren. Verse 3:

[3] For he truly spake many great things unto them, which were hard to be understood, save a man should inquire of the Lord; and they being hard in their hearts, therefore they did not look unto the Lord as they ought.

It's a part of the natural man fallen state to seek for allies, to seek for information from other flawed mortals, instead of going to the very source of all truth. It's something all of us have to pass through on our journey here in this world. We measure our understanding, our intellect, our intelligence against other mortals and seek to gain from their wisdom and understanding, when the majority of what they possess are the philosophies of man mingled with scriptures, the traditions of their fathers handed down to the children, and false philosophical concepts and precepts -- of the which there is no end in the telestial world.

It is a mighty step forward when each of us realize that relying on these resources only adds to confusion, misunderstanding, and the perpetuation of our own traditions. How glorious it is when we finally can come to a point where we believe that we can go to the source of all knowledge – God our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ – and received directly from them, and bypass the nature of this world. Verse four:

[4] And now I, Nephi, was grieved because of the hardness of their hearts, and also, because of the things which I had seen, and knew they must unavoidably come to pass because of the great wickedness of the children of men.

Each of us at one time, have, or will, experience this grief because of the hardness of the hearts of our loved ones. Those who are awakened to the greater portion of the word and are seeking the face of the Lord while in this life are frustrated and grieved at the closed minds and hard hearts of our family members -- our parents, our brothers and sisters, other extended family members, our own children. One of the things I hear over and over from people, who are listening to the podcast lessons and are awakened and aware and have arisen to the greater portion of the word, is how lonely this place is, and how they long for someone that they can talk to about these things. Fear not, for the Lord knows the intents and the desires of your heart, and as you progress forward will gently and steadily lead you to those of like minds that you can discuss these things with freely and openly and rejoice in the truth. Verse 5:

[5] And it came to pass that I was overcome because of my afflictions, for I considered that mine afflictions were great above all, because of the destruction of my people, for I had beheld their fall.

I can't even imagine what that must have been like for Nephi, to not only see the great propagation of his seed that would come after him over a thousand year period, to see the glorious and beautiful things that took place among them as well as the sad and degenerated state of many of his posterity and to witness the ultimate extinction of the Nephite people -- people called after his name at the end of this record. For in his vision he had seen it all. Verse 6:

[6] And it came to pass that after I had received strength I spake unto my brethren, desiring to know of them the cause of their disputations.

Part of the strength of the Lord that we've talked about in the past is to be able to see things around you, circumstances and people as he sees them. Nephi's nature has been changed dramatically from before he went up on this mountain to where he is now. He sees things different. He has a different view of things. That's the term that the Book of Mormon uses -- a different view of things. He's able to see his brethren Laman and Lemuel and the rest of the extended family who are in a state of rebellion and hard heartedness, the way the Lord sees them. And even though it becomes frustrating at times for him, it still enables him to stay in tune with the Holy Spirit and have the companionship of the Holy Ghost so that he can address these family members the way the Lord wants him to do it and not slip into addressing them out of frustration and anger.

In our own controversies and concerns with family members it would be well for us to pray to the Lord and receive at least this portion of his strength which is for us to view things as the Lord views things. This automatically results in a greater portion of patience, long-suffering, meekness, and humility -- all elements that are necessary in order for us to commune with and help our brothers and sisters who are struggling at any given time. Verse 7:

[7] And they said: Behold, we cannot understand the words which our father hath spoken concerning the natural branches of the olive tree, and also concerning the Gentiles.

Now, I think all of us relate to this. Not coming from a middle eastern environment it's difficult for us to understand the parables and similes that they used which would've been common for them but very difficult for us to understand. It also becomes obvious that Lehi's family are not **olive husbandmen** but are merchants, and probably the closest they got to the process involved in the olive orchard would be to market the end product and distribute it out to the consumers.

The Jews also had a very limited view of what a Gentile was in their days and so the discussion that Lehi has with his family is much more extensive and beyond what the ordinary view of the Jews would've been concerning Gentiles and their relationship with the house of Israel. You can see how expensive that is when you read the allegory that Lehi is teaching to his children found upon the plates of brass that we will study in detail later in Jacob 5. You want to see why these men are struggling with understanding of this allegory, just slip on up to Jacob 5 and take a look -- 77 versus quoted by the great prophets of Joseph's descendancy.

This particular prophecy mentioned in Jacob 5, and referred to this early in 1 Nephi 15, was recorded by the prophet's Zenos. It is expansive in view and takes in the whole history of the house of Israel from its very beginnings on up to the establishment of Zion and the second coming of the Lord, including the great millennial reign. No wonder Laman and Lemuel and others were disputing on this. If you have not seen in vision or received information direct from the Lord on this, it would be very difficult for you to understand at that time. And for that matter, in our time, unless we inquire of the Lord. And that's exactly what Nephi asked them in verse 8:

[8] And I said unto them: Have ye inquired of the Lord?

Look at their answer in verse 9:

[9] And they said unto me: We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us.

My question for them is, *how much time have you put into, and how much effort have you expended in seeking to know the things of the Lord?*

It's a good question for us in our day. We hear of others who are having wonderful experiences with the Lord and with angels and through the Holy Spirit, and we become frustrated because we're not having the same kinds of experiences. The problem here comes within the comparison. These kinds of experiences with the Lord are highly intimate and individual. They are one-on-one. And since no two sons and daughters of God are exactly alike, how can we expect that the experiences of each son and daughter of God would be alike?

There are some general commonalities between **seeking the face of the Lord** and **penetrating the veil**. But, when it comes right down to it, the results of our seeking, our asking, and our knocking, are extremely individual and specific to each person. It's a trap set up by the devil to get you to make comparisons with your progress and where you're at, with someone else and their progress and where they're at. This always results in pride. There is the pride of those looking down and then there's the pride of those looking up. Within the pride is always the competition and the comparison.

Train yourselves, Brothers and Sisters, to not compare you to anyone, for it leads to you making a similar statement, *the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us*. If there's going to be any comparisons, it should be a comparison with where you were and where you are. And the comparison should be kept strictly within the confines of your own personal experience. There's no room for growth when you compare and compete with others in spiritual things. It is a snare set by the devil to deflect and distract us from our course. It also is tied in with us spending too much time in the past and too much time in the future. We need to train ourselves to stay in the present. Verse 10:

[10]...I said unto them: How is it that ye do not keep the commandments of the Lord?

Let me give you one of those commandments. Go to section 101 and look at verse 38:

D&C 101:38

[38] And seek the face of the Lord always, that in patience ye may possess your souls, and ye shall have eternal life.

Do you see the principal there involved in that verse? *Seek the face of the Lord always*, and then inferred is, if you do, you will *possess your soul in patience and obtain eternal life*. There's your principle. A short statement of truth, accompanied by glorious promises and results. This is a commandment that you seek the face of the Lord always. This is one of the themes of our podcasts is that in our asking, seeking and knocking, the end result, while in this life, is for us to stand in the presence of God -- first spiritually and then physically -- and obtain from Him all that He has in store for us while still here in the flesh.

Do you think that they knew about this opportunity to obtain the face of the Lord in Nephi's time? And in the Lehi colony? Do you think that it was one of the things that Nephi admonished his brethren to do? Especially after he had obtained that glorious promise? Verse 10:

[10] ...How is it that ye will perish, because of the hardness of your hearts?

Go over to Jacob chapter 6 and look at verse six. Here is the ultimate question:

Jacob 6:6

[6] Yea, today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts (here's the question); for why will ye die?

See, that's the question that Nephi's asking, "How is it that ye will perish?" Now we're not talking about physical death. We're talking about perish and die as to things of the spirit. Verse 11:

[11] Do ye not remember the things which the Lord hath said?

Now, here we have a formula for inquiring of the Lord and receiving information from him. This formula is coming off the plates of brass, which to them was the equivalent of the Book of Mormon to us, more or less, unadulterated scripture that had been carefully preserved by those who had stewardship to do so. Look at the formula in verse 11. We can list four things here – it's what I call a Book of Mormon list. The Book of Mormon is the foremost scripture of all scriptures in giving us these lists that if will follow we can obtain the promised results. Number one:

[11] ...If ye will not harden your hearts...

We've talked at some length about what it means to harden your heart. It's where you refuse to heed the promptings and the impressions that come to us in a steady flow through the light of Christ. The light of Christ in this world can be likened unto sunlight, sunshine. There is a steady flow of sunshine that comes to this earth. If we find ourselves out of the direct flow of that sunshine, it's because we placed something between us and that source -- whether it's a shade tree or we've come from the sunlight into the house--at any rate, the effects of the sunlight are lessened because we placed things between us and the source of its power. It's the same with the light of Christ. There is no ebbing and flowing of the light of Christ as it flows in and through all things throughout the immensity of space. It is a constant flow of revelation, knowledge, wisdom, intelligence, light and life and truth and love that gives life and light to all things on this earth. If we're not accessing it is because we've placed something between us and that source, which is Christ. This by definition is **hardening your heart**. Number two:

[11] ...and ask me in faith...

And number three:

[11] ...believing that ye shall receive...

There's a difference between faith and belief. The belief part comes down directly to you. You can have faith in a broad-based spectrum of truth. For example, you can believe that the priesthood heals and has healed others and you've witnessed that, and you've been a part of that healing, but you may not believe that it can happen to you. You have faith that angels minister to the children of men because it's abundantly clear that they do in the scriptural record. But to believe that they would minister to **you** is a different aspect of this formula. Faith has to precede this belief in order for you to believe that it can happen to you, you first of all have to believe that it's happened and does happen and is happening to others. But there is a difference where the Lord says, "Ask me in faith, and then believe that **you** will receive," which is exactly the wording that Nephi uses here. Number four:

[11] ...with diligence in keeping my commandments (then, notice here's the principal – if you'll do one, two, three, four – then) *surely these things shall be made known unto you.*

Notice the wording in item number four, *diligence in keeping my commandments*. The opposite of diligence is apathy and complacency. I believe it's these two weaknesses that the **clingers** of the iron rod had in place in their makeup, but which was absent from those who held fast to the rod continually. The day for a casual approach to the gospel of Jesus Christ **has** passed, Brothers and Sisters. The day of diligence, steadfastness and unwavering devotion to our Father and his Son are absolutely critical and required now to successfully move through the days that are upon us. What a beautiful list and a godly principle is found in verse 11. Read those things carefully in this verse and apply them directly to you. Make no comparisons with others. Stay in the present and see what that verse brings to you. Verse 12:

[12] Behold, I say unto you, that the house of Israel was compared unto an olive tree, by the Spirit of the Lord which was in our father...

You might want to ask yourself this question, “Why with all of the other trees that are found in the Middle East culture and throughout the world, why the Lord uses the olive tree to teach these principles?”

There are probably many reasons, and the Internet could teach you much more than I could, but I would say that one of the abilities of the olive tree is to regenerate itself from its roots. Not all trees, when they’re cut down, can produce a new tree from the roots -- the olive tree can. The same with its ability to lose a branch in a graft and to have that branch grafted into another separate tree. Even though there are many trees that can do that, not all can. And so, when we see the terms broken off and grafted in, this is something that these people were familiar with from the culture that they came from.

The olive, actually, is also the most potent part of the symbolism. The olive was used not only for food, but its oil is also combustible and was used for light. So right there in the olive you have light and life represented. Later on, we’ll speak a little more in detail about the processing of the olive and its great symbolism to the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 13:

[13] And now, the thing which our father meaneth concerning the grafting in of the natural branches through the fulness of the Gentiles, is, that in the latter days (there’s a key part), when our seed shall have dwindled in unbelief (and he’s including both Nephite and Lamanite because he speaking to Laman and Lemuel right here), yea, for the space of many years, and many generations after the Messiah shall be manifested in body unto the children of men

All of this is on the plates of brass. They knew about this; they know his name, they know that he’s the Messiah, they know when he’s coming, they know the purpose of his coming, and they know his return at the end of the world when Zion is established and we’re about to enter the millennial reign. They know about all of this; it’s all coming off the plates of brass. Laman and Lemuel know about these things.

[13] ...then shall the fulness of the gospel of the Messiah come unto the Gentiles, and from the Gentiles unto the remnant of our seed—

Notice five lines down in verse 13 where he refers to *when our seed shall have dwindled*, and then by the time we get to the end of verse 13, we’ve gone from *our seed* to the *remnant of our seed* – remnant meaning the remaining portion of something larger -- that’s a definition of remnant. Any the indigenous people that are upon the face of the Americas at this point, unless they are members of the church, have no idea of their descendancy and of their heritage and their ancestors. Part of the purpose of the restoration and gathering of Israel is to bring them to a knowledge of who they really are, what covenants and promises are available to them because of promises made to their righteous fathers, to gather them into a land of their inheritance, and to bring them to the knowledge of their true Shepherd, Lord and Redeemer.

Again, all of this is mentioned in verse 14 which is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant to this remnant of Jacob yet in a future day. Verse 14:

[14] And at that day shall the remnant of our seed know that they are of the house of Israel, and that they are the covenant people of the Lord; and then (see the principle) shall they know and come to the knowledge of their forefathers, and also to the knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer...

The primary instrument in bringing them to a knowledge of their forefathers is the Book of Mormon. This is one reason why we are seeking, with the Lord's help, to take this Book of Mormon podcast messages to as many of the seed of Lehi and Nephi as we possibly can. Never has there been a time in the history of the world when the knowledge and message of the Book of Mormon can be taken to so many people in a short period of time as it can now through the Internet. Back to the rest of verse 14:

*[14] ... and also to the knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer which was ministered unto their fathers by him; wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer (this part right here) and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know **how** to come unto him and be saved.*

This harkens unto the same message in section 93, verse 19. The Lord said:

D&C 93:19

*[19] I give unto you these sayings that you may understand and know **how** to worship, and know **what** you worship...*

Two elements of knowledge, how to worship and what you worship, for what purpose:

[19]...that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness.

This is the purpose of the Book of Mormon--is to restore to those in a lost and fallen condition the very points of the doctrine of Christ that they may know **how** to come unto him and be saved. And once they learned **how** to come unto him; they may learn **what to do** in order to access the full power of His atoning sacrifice, which redeems them from death and hell and restores them to His presence. Verse 15:

1 Nephi 15:

[15] And then at that day will they not rejoice and give praise unto their everlasting God, their rock and their salvation? Yea, at that day, will they not receive the strength and nourishment from the true vine? Yea, will they not come unto the true fold of God?

John 15:1-8

[1] I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

*[2] Every branch in me (branches that are connected to Christ) **that beareth not fruit he** (the Father) **taketh away**...*

It's the husbandman that observes the fruit, measures the harvest, and prunes away those parts of the vine that are not productive.

[2]...and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

Purge means to be trimmed. It means to be pruned. Now in verse three the Lord makes reference to being clean.

[3] Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

Meaning they are a branch that has been pruned by the husbandman, by the Father, they've come to a certain point where their sins are forgiven, they have the fullness of the Lord's spirit operational in them, and as a result the fruits that they bring forth, the characteristics and attributes of godliness that are manifest in them to bless their other brothers and sisters around them, are doing the very things that these fruits are intended for. It's interesting that the fruits that are brought forth on the vine are intended to bless others. Verse 4:

[4] Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

The branch bearing the fruit has to remain attached to the main vine, otherwise there's no successful production nor harvest. Verse 5:

[5] I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him (remain connected to the source and strength of growth and power), the same bringeth forth much fruit (and then this last part): for without me ye can do nothing. Verse 6:

[6] If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

As I prune my grapes I take the burnings and put them in a pile, out in the corral, and burn them. Verse 7:

[7] If ye abide in me (remain connected to the Savior), and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Great promise. Verse 8:

[8] Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

This parable of the vine, that we see in John 15, was undoubtedly also recorded upon the plates of brass. Not something that originated in the New Testament time but an eternal principle that has probably been taught to all of God's children from Adam. Verse 16:

1 Nephi 8:16

[16] Behold, I say unto you, Yea; they shall be remembered again among the house of Israel; they shall be grafted in, being a natural branch of the olive tree, into the true olive tree.

We'll talk more about this in detail later. 17:

1 Nephi 15:

[17] And this is what our father meaneth; and he meaneth that it will not come to pass until after they are scattered by the Gentiles...

We looked at that in Nephi's dream, 1 Nephi 13.

[17] ...and he meaneth that it shall come by way of the Gentiles, that the Lord may show his power unto the Gentiles, for the very cause that he shall be rejected of the Jews, or of the house of Israel.

The whole Gentile era began in the New Testament because the house of Israel had rejected their true light, their Messiah and their Lord. Therefore, putting the parable in place, the first shall be last in the last shall be first. Well, the Jews who had the gospel first at the beginning of Christ's ministry will not receive it until the very end of the latter-day period, after the day of Gentiles. Verse 18:

[18] Wherefore, our father hath not spoken of our seed alone, but also of all the house of Israel, pointing to the covenant which should be fulfilled in the latter days; which covenant the Lord made to our father Abraham, saying: In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

You see all of these parables of the olive tree, all of these remnant discussions, all of the Gentile discussion, everything is tied back to the original Abrahamic Covenant that was given to Abraham and renewed in Isaac and again in Jacob. Remember the Abrahamic Covenant discusses lands of inheritance, posterity, and the gospel and priesthood blessings. When we have ahold of that foundation, then all of what's discussed concerning the house of Israel and remnants of that house, branches broken off and scattered, then restored to their true mother tree, etc., all makes more sense when we understand the basics of the Abrahamic Covenant. Verse 19:

[19] And it came to pass that I, Nephi, spake much unto them concerning these things; yea, I spake unto them concerning the restoration of the Jews in the latter days.

We can get a little feel for that in another place by going to section 133, verse 34, speaking of the blessings of God upon the tribes of Israel and the richer blessing upon the head of Ephraim and his fellows. Then the Lord says this:

D&C 133:35

[35] And they also of the tribe of Judah, after their pain, shall be sanctified in holiness before the Lord, to dwell in his presence day and night, forever and ever.

So, these instructions concerning the restoration of the house of Israel and their various tribes and branches, with emphasis in the latter days being placed on the tribe of Joseph and Judah is very interesting and unique. But it makes sense when you understand that Joseph's posterity had the blessings of priests in the holy order and that Judah's posterity had the blessings of kings and monarchs. You can see that to this very day when the majority of the monarchs of Western Europe are the descendants of Judah. So, within these two tribes, Joseph and Judah, you have the elements of the Holy Order – kings and priests, queens and priestesses, ministries and monarchies. Verse 20:

1 Nephi 15:

[20] And I did rehearse unto them the words of Isaiah, who spake concerning the restoration of the Jews, or of the house of Israel; and after they were restored they should no more be confounded...

One of the ancient meanings of the word confounded is to pour together and mix up. So, the house of Israel in its scattered state is in a mixed-up condition, not knowing their true identity nor having access to the promises made to them by their fathers. The gathering of Israel then would remedy that in that they are restored to their true knowledge of their Redeemer, understand who they really are, and have access to the promises made to their fathers concerning them. Verse 21:

[21] And it came to pass that they did speak unto me again, saying: What meaneth this thing which our father saw in a dream? What meaneth the tree which he saw?

[22] And I said unto them (Verse 22): It was a representation of the tree of life.

Verse 23:

[23] And they said unto me: What meaneth the rod of iron which our father saw, that led to the tree?

Now the answer to this question is one of the great hidden mysteries and blessings of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We read over it so quickly that we miss what's really there. Verse 24 is one of the great principle statements of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Remember the **if...then** process of determining principles and separating them from doctrine. Verse 24:

[24] And I said unto them that it was the word of God...

Now, here we go with this great formula: if we will do this:

[24] ... (if we) would hearken unto the word of God, and (number two) would hold fast unto it...

That second part is a reference back to the tree of life and the difference between the **clingers** who make it to the tree and fall away in shame and those who **hold fast** to the rod of iron continually. These two items are the **if** part of the principle statement in this verse. Harken is more than just hear, even though most definitions in dictionaries will define hearken as listening, in the scriptural usage of this word, you can see more than listening, there is also the **doing**. Let me show you a couple of examples of harkening in the scriptures.

Section 84, verse 57, talking about the church being under condemnation because they have treated lightly the things which they have received from the Lord, which he calls vanity and unbelief. Then in verse 57 the Lord says:

D&C 84:57

[57]...they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them (watch this part right here), not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written—

There's your two elements that I believe are a part of harkening, especially the **doing** part. If I ask something of someone and they acknowledge that they've heard my request, they've listened, but unless they actually act, they haven't hearkened. This kind of thing falls within the category of vanity and unbelief which places a condemnation upon us in regards to heavenly things. Go with me to Matthew chapter 7 and let's look at verse 20 and 21.

Matthew 7:20-21

[20] Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

You need to read the previous verse from verses 15 on, but for our lesson today, look at verse 21:

[21] Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

It's the doing that counts with the Lord. And it's the doing that is the primary component of the word hearken. To hearken always implies activity. Back to verse 24 in 1 Nephi 15:

1 Nephi 15:

[24]...(if they) *would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it...*

Now, let's determine what the word of God is. The most obvious is that it is the written scripture, and that certainly is a part of it. As far as the word of God being the written scripture, holding fast to it would imply that it's more than a casual reading of God's written word. It's more than picking up the Book of Mormon periodically and glancing through it. It's more than carrying your scriptures to church on Sunday and only using them there, if at all, one day of a week. Holding fast to the written canonized word of God, minimum, requires daily involvement. Now, how much you involve yourself daily is left up to you.

I had a little granddaughter this weekend ask me about the ministering of angels. She's just coming 10 years of age. The whole discussion centered around a note that she left in my bedroom that asked if I was disappointed in her because she was not knowledgeable of the scriptures. I told her that I was never disappointed in her and that I loved her dearly and deeply but that I wanted to give her an invitation. And that invitation was -- starting now -- every day in your life, spend time every day in God's written word. I told her I'm not saying how much time, but just begin now to make it a habit to daily be involved in these precious scriptures.

I also told her to ask the Lord to send angels to be her companions, to help her understand the things that she's reading. To help her be able to overcome the temptations of this world. And promised her at age 10, that if she would do this, that sometime in the future she would know the Lord Jesus Christ personally and that he would become her best friend.

If we're not going to **hold fast**, if you're not going to read the scriptures daily, you cannot find yourself in a position of holding fast, at least in this element of the definition, to the word of God. And of all the canonized scripture we have, only one has the promise to bring you nearer to God than any other, and that is the Book of Mormon. Hence, our emphasis in what we're doing here. Now comes the promises:

[24] ... (If you will) hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it (then, number one), they would never perish...

Think about that, Brothers and Sisters. Now, we're not talking about physical death here, even though that ultimately could lead to that you won't even experience the physical death. If it's a part of your life's plan, and it's the Lord's will, harkening to and holding fast to the word of God could even bring you to a point where you would never experience the physical death, but transition from telestial to terrestrial without experiencing death.

So, even there it could fit, but in more general way it's talking about never perish spiritually. Look around us in our own families, all around us, the whole world is perishing spiritually. Every one of us on this podcast know of someone near and dear to us that is perishing spiritually. We can stop that downward spiral and descent if we will simply hearken to the word of God and hold fast to it. The way to start the process of reversing this descent is to simply take out the Book of Mormon, open it, and begin to read its words. That is the beginning.

If it brings you nearer to God than any other book, then why would we not try an experiment -- as Alma says -- and open its cover and begin to read its words. There is virtue in the words of this book.

There is power and light and truth and love in the words of this book. Remember, that every decision you make is either adding to or losing light. Your spirit food is the light of Christ. It is the light of Christ that even gives life to your spirit. Without the light of Christ your spirit would not live. It's obvious to us what happens when we stop taking physical food into our physical body. We experience discomfort, pain, and if you don't remedy that, somewhere down the road you will die. So, it is with the spirit. The spirit needs constant nourishment with the food of the spirit which is the light of Jesus Christ. Back to verse 24, promise number two:

[24] ...neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction.

Think about that promise. The devil has no power over you. If you will hold fast to the word of God and hearken to its message the devil and his temptations can never overpower you with blindness and lead you away to destruction. I can't think of two more precious and powerful promises found anywhere in the Book of Mormon than in verse 24.

[24] ... they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction.

Remember, that in the whole armor of God it's the shield of faith that quenches (look at that word) all the fiery darts of the adversary. Quench is a good word to use when describing something that's on fire. Because one of the main words that we use to put out a fire is to quench it. We know what the temptations of the devil are. What are the fiery darts? Notice that this verse seems to separate them into two categories.

*[24] ... neither could the temptations **and** the fiery darts of the adversary...*

It doesn't say temptations **or**, it says **and**. Which indicates that there's probably a difference here. Let me give you a fiery dart that comes at you every day. When contemplating the things of God, one of the fiery darts that comes to you is, "**You** are not worthy of these things." The fiery darts of the adversary are never worded in our mind thus, "**I** am not worthy of the things of God." They are always, "**You** are not worthy of the things of God." Notice that the dart is not coming from within, **I**, but is coming from without, **you**.

This is a good way for you to recognize these fiery darts. They are always seen as coming from a source outside of us, an adversary, not from within. "**You** are stupid." "**You** are ugly." "**You** have no friends."

I think of one that I had here a while back where I was learning to see with the eye of faith and I had a little breakthrough experience. I was so excited. And immediately, interesting enough, off of my right shoulder from behind me I heard the voice say, "**You** are just imagining these things." "This is just **your** imagination." That was a fiery dart to offset and distract from the beautiful experience I just had. Immediately after hearing those words, and they were almost audible, other words came into my mind and I repeated them to the dark voice, saying, "You're right, my sacred imagination." The minute I'd said those words, the other voice was immediately gone. I want to invite you to ponder deeply the principle in verse 24 because verse 24 is one of the great principle statements of the Book of Mormon. Verse 25:

[25] Wherefore, I, Nephi, did exhort them to give heed unto the word of the Lord; yea, I did exhort them with all the energies of my soul, and with all the faculty which I possessed, that they would give heed to the word of God and remember to keep his commandments always in all things.

See, you have reference there to holding fast continually to the rod of iron where Nephi says:

[25] ... remember to keep his commandments always in all things. Verse 26:

[26] And they said unto me: What meaneth the river of water which our father saw?

[27] And I said unto them that the water which my father saw was filthiness; (and we talked about this back in 1 Nephi chapter 8 during Lehi's dream) and so much was his mind swallowed up in other things that he beheld not the filthiness of the water. Verse 28:

[28] And I said unto them that it (meaning the river of water) was an awful gulf, which separated the wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God. Verse 29:

[29] And I said unto them that it (meaning the river which is also the awful gulf) was a representation of that awful hell, which the angel said unto me was prepared for the wicked.

Notice that this river, this gulf, and this hell, separates the wicked from the tree of life and from the saints of God. The saints of God are those who are partaking of the fruit of the tree of life, not the casual Latter-day Saints, not the Latter-day Ain't, but the Latter-day Saint, who's sanctified by the blood of the lamb and have washed their garments in the blood of Christ and are pure and spotless before him. These are the ones who are partaking of the fruit of the tree. Verse 30:

[30] And I said unto them that our father also saw that the justice of God did also divide the wicked from the righteous; and the brightness thereof was like unto the brightness of a flaming fire, which ascendeth up unto God forever and ever, and hath no end.

Listen to some statements of the prophet Joseph Smith concerning this gulf, this hell, the justice of God which separates the saints from the wicked.

"God has decreed that all who will not obey His voice shall not escape the damnation of hell. What is the damnation of hell? (Look at this) To go with that society who have not obeyed His commands. ... I know that all men will be damned if they do not come in the way which He hath opened, and this is the way marked out by the word of the Lord." (History of the Church, Vol. 4, page 554 and 555.)

Another quote:

"The great misery of departed spirits (where they go after death)... is to know that they come short of the glory that others enjoy and that they might have enjoyed themselves, and they are their own accusers." (History of the Church, Vol 5, page 425.)

Again, the prophet said:

*"There is no pain so awful as that of suspense. This is the punishment of the wicked; their doubt (look at this word), **anxiety** and suspense cause weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth."* (History of the Church, Volume 5, page 340.)

The word used more to describe people in our society and the condition of turmoil is **anxiety**. It is a word that is used over and over and over to describe the state of mind and the mortal existence of our brothers and sisters. If I were to pick one emotion that would best describe devils and unclean spirits it would be anxiety.

Look again at this quote, this is the punishment of the wicked:

"...their doubt, anxiety and suspense..."

This quote was found in the History of the Church, Volume 5, page 340.

Another quote by the prophet Joseph:

"A man is his own tormentor and his own condemner. Hence the saying, they shall go into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. The torment of disappointment in the mind of man is as exquisite as a lake burning with fire and brimstone. I say, so is the torment of man."...

"... Some shall rise to the everlasting burnings of God, for God dwells in everlasting burnings, and some shall rise to the damnation of their own filthiness, which is as exquisite a torment as the lake of fire and brimstone." (History of the Church, volume 6, page 314 and 317.)

Well, these are some great quotes by the prophet Joseph Smith that describe what Nephi is teaching his brethren here, when he describes the filthiness of the river of water, the awful gulf in verse 28 which separates the wicked from the tree of life and the saints of God, and that awful hell which is prepared for the wicked that he speaks about in verse 29. Moving on to verse 31:

[31] And they said unto me: Doth this thing mean the torment of the body in the days of probation, or doth it mean the final state of the soul after the death of the temporal body, or doth it speak of the things which are temporal? Verse 32:

[32] And it came to pass that I said unto them that it was a representation of things both temporal and spiritual...

You don't have to wait for a future day to see what hell's like -- you're living in it right here. The telestial world by its very nature of being lost and fallen and being the residence of devils and unclean spirits, is the perfect definition of hell. The place where we reside right now is a one-room schoolhouse where we've had former knowledge, glory, wisdom, and understanding removed and placed behind a veil and come into direct opposition, physically and spiritually, with those who oppose God, hate him, and seek to dethrone him.

This is the description of the second mortal estate. It is temporal and spiritual. Unless and until we attain unto the spiritual aspect of our existence in the second estate, the physical will always have preeminence, dominate and eventually captivate us until we leave through the portal of death. Our Father and his Son have given us the instruments necessary for us to make this transition while in this flesh to leave behind the fallen nature of the physical world and to have infused within us all of the spiritual power, beauty of their divine nature. This infusion, this transition, takes place through the fullness of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ and we begin to seriously to access this as we decide and commit to spend one hour, minimum, daily, with the Lord Jesus Christ in sacred holy time.

All of the blessings that we studied up to this point in the Book of Mormon are accessed as we have our nature changed. All of the curses, damnations, and judgment spoken of in the Book of Mormon

remain upon us as we stay in our lost and fallen state, a natural man, an enemy to God. Doesn't it make sense that God's enemies cannot, will not, and desire not to access His nature and the blessings associated with that light, love and truth. Verse 33:

[33] Wherefore, if they should die in their wickedness they must be cast off also, as to the things which are spiritual, which are pertaining to righteousness; wherefore, they must be brought to stand before God, to be judged of their works...

Go with me to Mosiah chapter 2 and it would be well for you to read verses 32 through 41. This whole section of King Mosiah's discourse are referring to those who remain and die in their sins. Look at verse 33:

Mosiah 2:33

[33] For behold, there is a wo pronounced upon him who listeth to obey that spirit; for if he listeth to obey him (here we go), and remaineth and dieth in his sins, the same drinketh damnation to his own soul; for he receiveth for his wages an everlasting punishment, having transgressed the law of God contrary to his own knowledge.

Catch that keyword there? Contrary to his own knowledge. In other words, they know better, but in spite of knowing better, they still choose to list to obey the dark one. There are those who list to obey the dark one who don't know better, at least to the degree that we do, who have this light and truth available to us. We'll talk more in detail about these verses when we get to Mosiah 2. Back to 1 Nephi 15:33, the middle of the verse:

1 Nephi 15:

[33] ...and if their works have been filthiness they must needs be filthy; and if they be filthy it must needs be that they cannot dwell in the kingdom of God; if so, the kingdom of God must be filthy also.

Now, there's a difference in being **in** the presence of God and **dwelling** in the presence of God. You can see in verse 33, that the wicked are brought to stand before God to be judged according to their works. That's right there in verse 33. And then later in verse 33 it says, "Those that are filthy cannot **dwell** in the kingdom of God."

According to ancient apocryphal writings and some of the pseudepigraphal writings, and according to what we read in the first two chapters of the book of Job, there is a place in the heavenly realm where wickedness is allowed to appear before Christ to plead their case, make accusations, and to condemn others. In order for God to be perfectly just, those who are the evil ones, need to have a place where they can make an accusation and as a result of that accusation, a hearing is convened. They state their case, they murmur their complaint, but God's justice, truth, equity and judgment always leaves them admitting that, "Thy judgments are just O God and my sins are my own." Verse 34:

[34] But behold, I say unto you, the kingdom of God is not filthy, and there cannot any unclean thing enter into the kingdom of God; wherefore there must needs be a place of filthiness prepared for that which is filthy.

Again, this verse supports the idea that there are places where those who are filthy are brought to stand before heavenly beings but where they stand is not the kingdom over which those heavenly

beings preside and in which they abide and reside. It is a place for the justice of God to be executed, fairly and with equity, so that God can be perfectly just and also perfectly merciful. Verse 35:

[35] And there is a place prepared, yea, even that awful hell of which I have spoken, and the devil is the preparator of it; wherefore the final state of the souls of men is to dwell in the kingdom of God, or to be cast out because of that justice of which I have spoken.

And that justice of God is filled with a perfected fullness of wisdom, mercy, and truth.
Verse 36:

[36] Wherefore, the wicked are rejected from the righteous, and also from that tree of life, whose fruit is most precious and most desirable above all other fruits; yea, and it is the greatest of all the gifts of God. And thus I spake unto my brethren. Amen.

Go with me to Doctrine and Covenants 14:7:

D&C 14:7

[7] And, if you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God.

Well, there you have it my friends, 1 Nephi 15.

I hope that that's a blessing to you and that it will provide insight into your own journeys back to our beloved Father and his son Jesus Christ. May the Lord bless you in your journey, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

References:

1 Nephi 15:1

D&C 101:38

Jacob 6:6

D&C 93:19

John 15:1-8

1 Nephi 8:16

D&C 133:35

D&C 84:57

Matthew 7:20-21

Mosiah 2:33

D&C 14:7