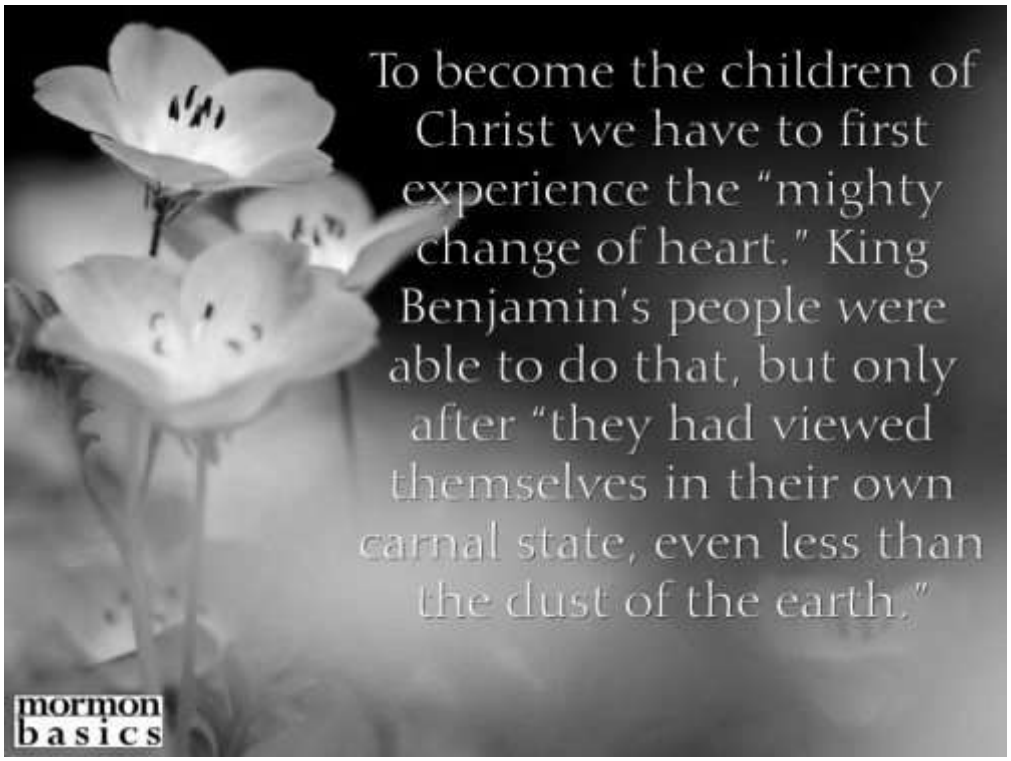

This is an awkward lesson. The immediate conversion of King Benjamin's people in one day is held up as an example to us all on how quickly the mighty change of heart can take place. We automatically compare ourselves to them and wonder what is wrong with us. Most people are not converted, and have the change of heart we are looking for, in a day. It usually happens over the course of months, years, or decades. But don't be confused. Whether the change happens all at once or over the course of decades, the process and the decisions required for the change are the same.

Reading Assignment: Mosiah 4-6.

How the process begins

Chapter 3 of Mosiah was in last week's lesson, but it contains the material that leads up to this week's beginning event. The people, in chapter three were told about the fall of man and how Christ would come to atone for the sins of all mankind. The nature of man was described by the king and the innocence of children was taught.

When chapter four begins the people have caught the vision that the Lord keeps trying to help us see. They recognize the true nature of their relationship with God. They are no longer willing to deny their sinful and polluted state before God. They confess that the Lord's atoning sacrifice is all that stands between them and eternal misery, and the want with all their hearts to be forgiven. They are willing to follow Christ in all things.

Because of this the Holy Ghost is able to change their hearts so they no longer have a disposition to do evil.

Let's step back through some details of what just happened so we can see more specifics about how this process works. I think the statement that "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" works pretty well here.

We have all spent the eternity of our existence in a spiritual form, first as intelligences and then as spirits. We were compliant with the commandments of God. His will ruled all things. But mortality is a completely different ballgame. Flesh lives for pleasure and comfort. This total focus on the creature comforts, physical satisfaction and pleasure, is what makes our bodies enemies to God. We come to earth and are born into an earthly, physical frame, and if it doesn't get what it wants we suffer for it.

Think about how difficult it was to learn to fast. I'm assuming you have overcome that aversion most people have to going hungry (wink wink). What about the passions of the flesh like anger, rage, lust, greed, etc? Whatever degree we felt these in the spirit they are nothing compared to what we feel in the flesh. The body, left unattended, lives only to satisfy itself.

So here we have obedient spirits that are put into bodies that only seek to violate everything the Lord stands for. The flesh is selfish and self serving. In simple terms, this is what it means when the Lord refers to the carnal man as an enemy to God. It's the person who lives to satisfy the desires of the flesh.

The commandments are given to us to teach us how to tame the natural man and bring our desires into subjection, once again, to the spirit. The spirit is generally willing, unless we have succumbed to the desires of the flesh and have begun to serve the will of our temporal form instead of our eternal form, the spirit. Now that we are merged with a body we have to forge a new will, one that has mastered the temporal desires and obeys the eternal will of God once again.

Don't get me wrong. The body is not a bad thing. We must have one in order to be resurrected and exalted. But we must learn to submit our will to the Father in all things, becoming like we used to be as spirit children, meek, humble, and willing to submit ourselves to Him in all things, like a child submits to his father.

This is the realization shared by the people of King Benjamin. They saw themselves as disobedient, willful, and committers of sin. They willingly believed, with all their

hearts, what King Benjamin was teaching them about the mission of Christ and his atoning sacrifice that enables those who repent and follow his example to return to our Father in Heaven to be exalted one day.

It starts with belief

Because the people had such implicit trust in their king, when he told them about their carnal or natural state, and told them what living in that state would end up doing to their souls, they believed him completely. That is an important point. Too often what takes us so long to become completely converted to the Lord and his plan of happiness for us is that we have reservations. We are still committed to parts of our carnal state that we are reluctant to give up. The reason why we are reluctant isn't so important as that we are still unwilling to surrender to the will of the Lord.

Without complete acceptance and belief in our own state of disobedience, our own nothingness before the power of God, our own inability to save ourselves from the predicament the Lord and His servants keep telling us we are in - without complete acceptance and belief in these things, we will continue to hold on to our cherished parts of our carnal nature.

The power of the Holy Ghost

The scriptures teach us that we are not able to change the loyalties or disposition of our hearts by ourselves. We cannot change our own desires. It is not within our ability to do so. But the Holy Ghost can. He is able to do it only if we choose to believe. The more we believe and act on our belief in that which the Lord has taught us, the more He is able to increase our faith or trust in God's word, and in Him as our Father. That is the pattern for conversion.

We choose to believe and act on what little we can believe in, the Holy Ghost gives us knowledge and assurance that what we believed in and acted upon is a true principle, and that increases our ability to believe in more things and do more good things. Over time this pattern leads to our complete conversion from a completely carnal person to a Saint, someone who is willing and desirous to obey God in all things. We control how fast our conversion happens. The more we choose to seek out the Spirit in all things and obey His promptings, the faster we change and the more deeply rooted our conversion becomes.

This is how we become worthy of exaltation. Is it a simple process? The pattern is simple, but the practice and trials are not simple. We have many lessons to learn as we overcome whatever weaknesses the Lord sent us here to overcome. Some weaknesses will linger with us our whole lives, while some can be completely converted into strengths because of the power of the Holy Ghost to change us from the inside out.

Final Thoughts

Okay, now that we have looked at what led up to today's lesson, and we have looked at the process of conversion from being carnal to spiritual in nature, go back and reread the three assigned chapters. I think you may have a greater appreciation for what the people of King Benjamin accomplished in one day.

We may know the process and the methods for conversion, but for each of us it always comes down to how much we are willing to choose to believe, and how much we are willing to do to live what we have chosen to believe. After all, the devils know that Jesus is the Christ. They certainly believe, but they were not willing to obey.

For most of us the mighty change of heart is a gradual process. It happens as we give in to the promptings of the Spirit to do good, to read the scriptures more, to believe more, to practice what the prophets have taught us. The more we do these things the softer our hearts will become, and the more joy we will find in living the gospel of Christ.