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The first day's lesson in the Come, Follow Me lessons for Alma 32-35 asks "how you prepare to hear the word of God." My first thought was, "I don't prepare myself to hear it. Am I supposed to do something to prepare myself?" Evidently this preparation has to do with our state of humility, which we are also supposed to be able to control.

Two questions

Somehow we need to connect these two questions asked by the lesson: "What does it mean to humble yourself because of the word?" and How do you prepare yourself to hear the word of God?" The lesson is assuming a tight connection between these two questions. What follows is me thinking out loud to myself as I try to answer each question and figure out how I think they are connected.

Humble yourself

The poor referred to in the verses of Alma 32 were compelled to be humble/teachable because of their extreme poverty. But I don't think it was just a matter of not having money. I have written before about the sin of the proud or greedy poor. I, myself, was once in that category. Despite having no money it is still very possible for a person to be lifted up in pride, and to feel entitled. So just the lack of funds doesn't mean a person is

humble. Their circumstances may be called humble, but that is not the same as being humble.

The only clue we have to what humbled these people and helped to prepare them to listen to God's word when it was brought to them was their bitter disappointment over having worked so hard to build places of worship, only to be rejected by their own priests, and cast out as though their very presence sullied the rest of the congregation. It wasn't they, themselves that were unacceptable. It was their clothing. These priests were proud and only wanted that which would socially impress inside their synagogues. These people were so poor that their clothing "detracted" from the feeling the priests wanted in their church, so the poor were shown the door and told they were not good enough to worship there. How humiliating for the poor. How shameful for the rest of those who worshiped there, but the focus on self was the hallmark of the Zoramite way of worshiping.

The poor who came to Alma for advice were desirous of being able to worship. They were humbled by their circumstances. They couldn't help that they were poor, but they weren't lazy, and they didn't feel entitled. They just wanted to be able to pray to God. I believe this is why Alma decided they were prepared to hear the word.

What does it take for us to be humble?

Being poor isn't enough to make us humble. We can be beaten down by life and become humble, but the Lord says we can also choose to be humble, without having to be "compelled" to be humble. What, besides shame, abject poverty, loss, or other calamities, can cause us to become humble? What can we do to become humble willingly and deliberately?

Pride

I think the first thing we need to get into check is our pride. The world glorifies pride as a good thing, yet President Ezra Taft Benson taught that in the scriptures there is no such thing as good pride. Pride, by his definition is enmity, willfulness, and self-centeredness. It is where we pit our will against God's will. It is difficult for the proud to be happy for someone else's success, for they wanted that success for themself. The proud can't allow others to get ahead in life, for there is an inner need to have it all for themself. Everyone else becomes a competitor needing to be conquered.

A proud person can't bring themself to be a good samaritan. They feel the person deserves what happened to them, or they are not willing to part with the time, effort, or resources to help someone else, because they need all those things for their own purposes. With the proud there is little care or concern for the welfare of others.

To overcome pride in any degree, we must first recognize and acknowledge when we see it in our self. A sin not recognized or acknowledged cannot be repented of. Once we recognize and acknowledge a source of pride in our life, we must deliberately choose to find a way to overcome it. This means we must label pride in our life as something unattractive and undesirable, and hence something we want to get rid of.

When we teach someone how to obtain a testimony of the Book of Mormon, our instructions always include reading and praying about it, and often we also include going to church and paying tithing. We should also include fasting and pondering in that list. Gaining a change of heart, which is what it will take to get rid of pride, also requires all these steps. Remember that a change of heart is not an overnight event. Changes usually take months to achieve, and during that whole time we must be praying, pondering, reading scriptures (which includes asking questions and searching for answers), and fasting regularly for what we want. This is a request to change a very basic and often times pervasive part of our personality. Only God can take away something as strong as pride.

What are we left with when pride starts to fade out of our heart? We find we are in possession of greater gratitude, humility, generosity of spirit, and are capable of greater and more frequent kindness. We can now take delight in someone else's success. It is a joyful experience to see someone else succeed or prosper at something. We no longer feel threatened by the good that happens in others' lives. Peace replaces enmity and willfulness. Cooperation overrules our former stubbornness. It becomes easier to get along with others.

Ministering

We may not need to rid ourselves of pride, because pride is not our problem. Many of us have just never learned how to observe others and spot their needs. This is a skill that can be learned, but takes a lot of practice. The gift of discernment is crucial here, and is something we probably should be praying to receive. One of the greatest blessings that comes directly from learning to be a good minister is the ability to recognize just how blessed you personally are. Ministering demonstrates how much

pain and suffering there is all around you, and how deep others' trials go in life. Ministering will build humility and gratitude faster than anything else I know.

People often feel confident about their observational abilities. If they are asked to go check up on a family to see how they are doing, they go to the door and note that the person talking to them seems fine, and that is the report they take back to the ward council. Someone with the gift of discernment will try to get into the house and sit down with them. They think to themself: Is the house clean or a disaster? How many children are there? What are their ages? What is the condition of the furniture? And if possible, they look for tell tale signs to see if they might need food. What is the condition of their yard, if they have one? Is there a feeling of peace in their home, or do you feel uncomfortable?

The gift of discernment is a revelatory ability that Bishops use in spades. The Lord has commanded us to seek after the best gifts, and the gift of discernment is definitely one of the best gifts.

Getting rid of pride and developing the ability to minister to others are only two ways among many to teach us humility. What are some additional things that have come into your mind that you might try to help you be more humble and teachable by the Spirit?

Preparing to hear the word of God

The whole time I was thinking about how to become humble, my thoughts were telling me that these are also ways to be better prepared to listen to and to receive the word of God. Surely there are other things we can do to prepare our soul to be more receptive to the word when it is presented to us.

Study

I have written multiple articles on how to study scriptures. I'll list a couple of them at the bottom of the page for future reference. It isn't enough just to read the scriptures. We need to be seeking for something. If we aren't looking, it will be difficult to recognize when we have "found" something. Here are a few things to try when you read scriptures.

- Look for ways to apply what is in the scriptures to your life. This can be difficult. It can also take a long time to find ways in which the scriptures seem to apply to

what is happening in your life. But the more you look for ways to apply the scriptures, the more ways you will recognize you can do it.
- Grab a dictionary. The scriptures are written in symbolic language. As such many of the words have more than one meaning, and the more you know about what words have been chosen to represent spiritual knowledge, the more your understanding of spiritual things can grow.
- Be consistent. Scripture reading needs consistent application in order to have what they teach always in the forefront of your mind.
- Practice what you learn. The gospel cannot be comprehended through intellect alone. All of our greatest blessings in the gospel come from the changes living the gospel bring into our lives. If we aren't out there living what we learn we are depriving ourselves of all the best parts of the gospel.

I can't emphasize this last item enough. The gospel requires change, and change only comes from living and experiences. What makes a person holy is the kind of life they lead. Holiness has little to do with how many verses you read in the scriptures or how many dollars you put into Fast Offerings. The whole point of the gospel is to change us to become holy people, to prepare us to live in the celestial realm with our Father and our Savior. That is not something that is granted to us as a favor, it is something we grow into because we have become the kind of person who feels comfortable living that kind of lifestyle. Earthlife is our proving ground, our time of testing to see if we really want this more than anything else.

Final Thoughts

We not only can, but need to humble ourselves. If we wait until the Lord has to humble us, not only will it hurt more, but it will take us longer to get to our final destination. It is simply easier if we make the choice to be humble and do those things that create a submissive and teachable spirit.

Humility is a big part of preparing ourselves to hear the word of God. Only when we are humble will we accept the word in the spirit in which it is given. There are many ways in which we can prepare ourselves, our heart and our head to be receptive to the word of God as found in the scriptures and as given by His servants. How many additional ways can you list to help you be prepared to more readily receive His word?

Click the link below for a PDF copy of the article you can print.

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