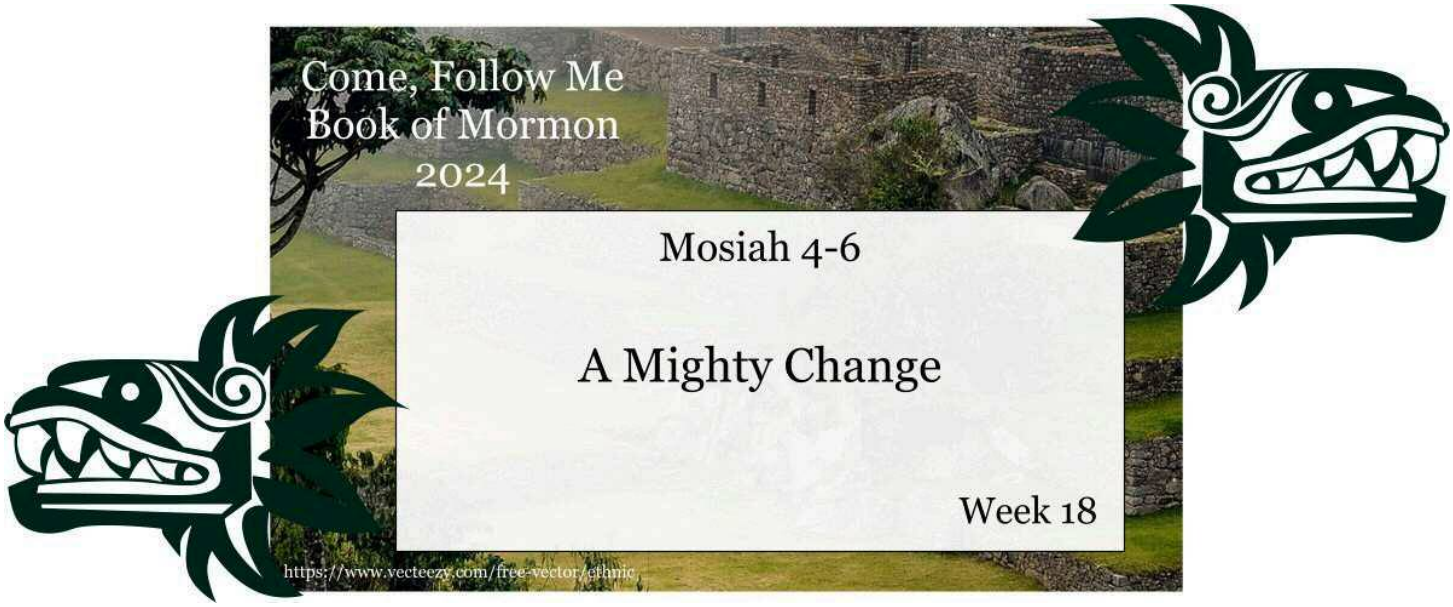

Week 18 is scheduled for study April 29-May 5, 2024. Only by coming to believe in the true character of God can we find the trust we need to be saved by Him. With trust comes forgiveness.

Day 1

Mosiah 4 - Through Jesus Christ, I can receive and retain a remission of my sins.

Today is one of those days where you can't read the chapter or verses in the scriptures then just remember their gist (main points). In order to truly answer the questions in the three sections that follow, you need to have your scriptures open and refer to them line by line. Today's lesson is a true study session in the scriptures. There is no way to cheat our way through this exercise. Today requires both self reflection and a seeking for the bigger picture.

Remember that everything in these three sections should be contributing to your understanding of how we receive then keep a remission of our sins. That is the ultimate goal of today's lesson.

Verses 1-8 - Under what conditions does God grant us a remission of our sins? Let's bullet point verses 5-7.

- We need to gain a sense of our own nothingness, which means we need to become humble and penitent before God. Pride needs to be swept aside in our realization of God's greatness and power and our own inability to do what is necessary to save ourselves.
- We need to come to a knowledge of, and an acceptance of, the doctrine that God has matchless power, wisdom, patience, and longsuffering towards us. The atonement was prepared for us from before the creation of the world that those who trust the Lord and are diligent in keeping His commandments to the end of their days will receive salvation.
- This proffered salvation is available to every person who has and who ever will live on earth. The only requirement is applying their faith in the saving ability of Christ. In other words, how is your belief in the saving ability of Christ going to be demonstrated in what you choose to do each and every day of your life?

I notice in these verses that the requirements to be forgiven of my sins and to receive salvation in the kingdom of God is very simple. No formal education is required, no mental hoops need jumping through, no moral gymnastics, nothing difficult that requires special training of any kind - just believe and live according to what you have been taught. Period.

So why don't I feel forgiven more often? Personally, I think it is because I emotionally or mentally complicate the process. I forget that Christ wants it to be as simple as 'Just trust me." I forget that belief is a choice. At any time, place, or situation I can choose to believe Christ and his promises to me. No one can take that ability to choose to believe away from me. Only I have that ability to make that choice. Others can mask that truth, hiding the simplicity of it from me, causing me to become confused and misdirected. But the ability to make that choice is always mine to make when, where, and how I choose. I think this is why we can't just make the choice once and are saved by that one choice. This choice must be made continually for the rest of my life. This is what it means to endure to the end. Only by making this choice over and over again in the actions I choose to perform for the rest of my life can I endure in that choice to the end.

Verses 11-16 - For this section let's cherry pick some key phrases from verses 11-12. I have taken the key elements of these two verses and strung them together to form the following thought.

> If ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, … which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, … and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, … and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, … I say unto you that if ye do this ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins.

The above "verse" answers the question from the manual - "What happens to our lives if we do the things described in verse 11?" I have included part of verse 12 in that answer. I know. I am such a rebel!

Compare the made up verse above with the description of the natural man below from Mosiah 3:19.

> 19 For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, …

Have you personally experienced the process of putting off the natural man and becoming, even if just a little bit, a saint through the atonement of Christ? Remember that last week we talked about how a saint means one who is set apart from the rest of the world. When we are forgiven of our sins and strive to keep God's commandments each day, we must set ourselves apart from the ways of the world. We can't embrace the lifestyle and philosophies of the world and embrace Christ and his teachings as well. We must choose between them. It is this "fence sitting" that gets us into trouble every time. When we fall off the fence it is always into the ways of the world. No one ever accidentally falls of the fence and into the arms of Jesus. That must be a choice we deliberately make. Think of those who "fall off the wagon." That action is never a helpful or beneficial thing.

The remaining verses in this section describe the kinds of things people do who choose to live according to the love of God they have experienced in their own life.

Verses 16-30 - There are too many questions posed in this section for me to tackle without writing a lengthy article along the way. I will address some important points that strike me as needful instead.

This section describes the attitude of a disciple of Christ, meaning one who is deliberately learning to be like Christ. As mortals we are prone to being judgmental. Christ is constantly trying to help us be less judgmental and more accepting of others

where they are at. Yes, there are times when we must make a judgment, but it is rarely a judgment that requires us to put ourselves above one another by condemning someone else's behavior. This kind of judgment assumes they are not behavior as well as we are. Christ prefers that we choose instead to be loving and let him worry about their judgment.

When the scriptures in today's lesson talk about a person's "wants," translate that into the word "needs." Wants is an old fashioned term for what a person is lacking in life. Now we use the word "need" to describe that. Our definition of want is that which we wish we could get, but don't necessarily need it. Big difference. We are instructed to evaluate a person's needs and supply what they need, not just what they want to have. Christ expects us to provide for each other's needs. That is a requirement of being a Christian or a follower of Christ. This is why the Church is giving help to the poor and needy all over the world, no matter their religion.

Does this mean that to be a follower of Christ we need to bankrupt ourselves or put ourselves into poverty trying to give everything someone else needs to them? No, of course not. This is why we are told that we need to use wisdom in what we do for the benefit of others. If we put ourselves in harms way then we haven't taken care of ourselves and those we love. This is why Benjamin tells his people that if they have it to give then give it freely. But if you don't have it to give then make sure you aren't giving it because you fully would, if you had the means to do so.

If we refuse to give, because we don't have the ability to do so, but even if we did, we wouldn't give, then Benjamin says that we are coveting what we don't even possess, because even if we had it we wouldn't share. That's a pretty serious accusation. One of the prophets in a General Conference talk referred to being like this as being part of the proud poor. Pride is never a good thing. Just check your scriptures. You won't ever see pride, in any form, described as a good thing. Instead, it is always roundly condemned by God. Be aware that the world has changed the meaning of the word into one that is a good thing. So you won't find a worldly definition of pride that doesn't describe it in glowing terms. Stick to the scriptures on this one.

Day 2

Mosiah 4:5-10 - I believe and trust in God.

I am more impressed with today's manual material than any other day's lesson I can think of. At first I wondered why they were focusing on my belief and trust in God. Isn't that a given? But as I read the list of scriptures from the various books of scriptures then watched (not read) Elder Jeffrey R. Holland deliver his talk "The Grandeur of God" from the October 2003 Conference, my mind was opened and I saw things like I have never seen them before. I will probably be studying this material for the next two or three days before I will feel like I have a handle on it personally.

I mentioned in Day 1 this week that God has kept the requirements simple for being able to return home to Him. As Elder Patrick Kearon talked about in his April 2024 Conference address, God's intent is to get us all home, not keep us out. It appears that the single most difficult thing for us mortal children is to find reasons to believe Him when He makes us promises. Today's lesson focuses on why we should believe in and set our sights on living with God.

As you read today's lesson, focus on His character. One of the most impressive things the scriptures talk about, but don't really discuss, is that God doesn't say anything unless He plans on it happening. And anything God declares will happen does happen, just the way He declared it to. His power is in His words. He speaks and the elements of the universe obey Him. He covenants and nothing can break the promise He made. He directs and it comes to pass. His will is absolute throughout the cosmos. His character is so pure and constant that there is nothing that we can ever learn of Him that would cause us to doubt His sincerity, His loyalty, His truthfulness. All truth, all goodness, and love originates from Him. He is the ultimate source for them.

God is trying to get us to recognize that we can put our trust in Him and live our lives according to His commandments, for when we do we are guaranteed a place at His right hand in the day of judgment. His promises are sure, meaning they cannot be broken or altered. If He promises us destruction then nothing can stop it. If He promises us exaltation then when we do as commanded there is nothing that can prevent us from being exalted. His love for us is absolute, no matter what we have done in the past. All we need to do is turn to Him and decide that we will accept His law and ways for the rest of our life, and all will be forgiven in exchange for our obedience. His happiness will then become our happiness, and His life will become ours to enjoy for eternity. I hope you enjoy studying this lesson.

Day 3

Mosiah 4:29-30 - I must watch my thoughts, words, and deeds.

I find it interesting to know that there is no such thing as sinning without thinking. Every deliberate action we take in life must be thought of first. So sin becomes a choice we make in our thoughts before we commit it through our actions. This is why we are told we will be judged on our thoughts, as well as our actions. Evil is a two-step process. The evil words that proceed from our mouths have first been thought in our mind. We choose to say them. Considering that God speaks and all things come to pass according to His word, it is so important that we learn to bridle our thoughts as well as our spoken words.

It is easier to watch our actions than it is to watch our thoughts. Others will most likely see or discover our actions, but no one will ever (in mortality) know our thoughts. In our mind we are completely private. Only us and God know what thoughts go through our head. Learning to bridle our thoughts takes great integrity and discipline of character. We must repent of our thoughts and pray for help in controlling the thoughts we dwell upon.

No one can prevent evil thoughts from entering our mind. Even Jesus had those try to push their way into his thinking. But we can control what we choose to stop and think about, look at and dwell upon, or pause and consider. When we don't immediately cast out those thoughts that are unworthy of us is when we open ourselves to temptation and ultimately shame. Sometimes such unworthy thoughts require repeated repentance to learn to keep them at bay permanently.

Our thoughts are the gateway to our final destiny. Only those thoughts we allow to linger in our minds become our common conversation and determine our daily deeds. Our source for godly behavior and talk begins with our striving for godly thoughts.

Day 4

Mosiah 5:1-5 - The Spirit of the Lord can cause a mighty change in my heart.

The key word in the title of today's lesson is "can." God cannot make a change in our heart for the better unless we are actively seeking for a change to take place. No one is converted against their will. Even Alma the Younger sought relief from the guilt he was experiencing by seeking relief from Jesus whom his father had talked about. One of the laws of our moral agency is that not even God will ever interfere with our ability to make our own moral choices.

When you choose to believe God will not answer your prayers then you have just prevented Him from doing so. God will answer only those who choose to believe in Him and His willingness to answer our prayers. And when we put our belief and faith in God's words then nothing can prevent Him from answering our prayers.

Once I recognized that I needed to have a change of heart in my marriage. I was being judgmental of my wife and I knew that nothing short of God changing the disposition of my heart would fix the problem. I prayed for a change of heart so I could love my wife more purely, and in a more unrestrained and guarded way. It took three months of praying and fasting for this change. One day we were talking, and that thing she always did happened again. I suddenly realized it no longer offended me. It didn't bother me at all! I have no idea when my heart and disposition had been changed, but I no longer felt as I once had. What a witness to me that consistency in praying does bring answers and changes into our lives.

What kind of change you seek for is up to you. The extent of the changes you want are up to you. But whatever you seek for will come to pass, so be careful of what you ask God. He is famous for giving us exactly what we want in life.

Day 5

Mosiah 5:5-15 - I take upon myself the name of Christ as I make covenants with Him.

Covenants are more than just an exchange of vows. Those vows we make are for the express purpose of becoming a member of the family of Christ. We take upon ourselves his name. Just like when I adopt a daughter she becomes a member of my family, has my last name, and is now identified as one of my children, so too does making covenants with God make Christ our spiritual father. We become a member of his

family, are blessed to become his heir, and to receive all that he has at the last day. To be worthy of such blessings requires us to be obedient to his every commandment, just like we would be obedient to our mortal parent who has adopted us. We are expected to hold up and live by all of the family codes of conduct, adopt all of the beliefs of the family, and to live a life worthy of the family's final inheritance.

Only those who take upon themselves the name of Christ through the authorized priesthood authority are able to claim the blessings only available to the members of Christ's family. Anyone else can mimic the process, but legally they cannot claim an inheritance, because they have not been adopted with the proper authority.

Personal Study

Sharing sacred experiences

Sacred experiences are just that, sacred. To treat them as common, public, or casual dishonors them. God will not allow such dishonor of what is sacred to take place without reprisal or punishment. If you aren't sure if an experience is appropriate to share, seek the direction of the Spirit then seek carefully to speak of your experience in as reverent a manner as possible.

Choose your audience wisely. There are reasons why we don't publicly read our Patriarchal blessings out loud. That blessing is a private communication between our Father in Heaven and you. Sharing in appropriate circles a thought or two or a quote from such a blessing is one thing, but care must be given that it is treated with the utmost sacredness.

If someone starts to share a sacred experience in a casual, public, or in a way that dishonors its sacred nature, you can always walk away, pray for the Lord to help that person treat their experience with greater humility and care in the future, or you can speak up and ask that they not continue, because you feel uncomfortable. You have that right.

I understand that we all live for such special experiences and statements in the gospel. They are usually faith promoting and inspiring. But if someone's telling of a story makes you feel uncomfortable then it probably shouldn't be shared, and no one has the

right to make you listen to what you feel is too sacred to share openly. Privately perhaps. As a rule, private sacred experiences are not meant to be shared publicly in places like books and social media.

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