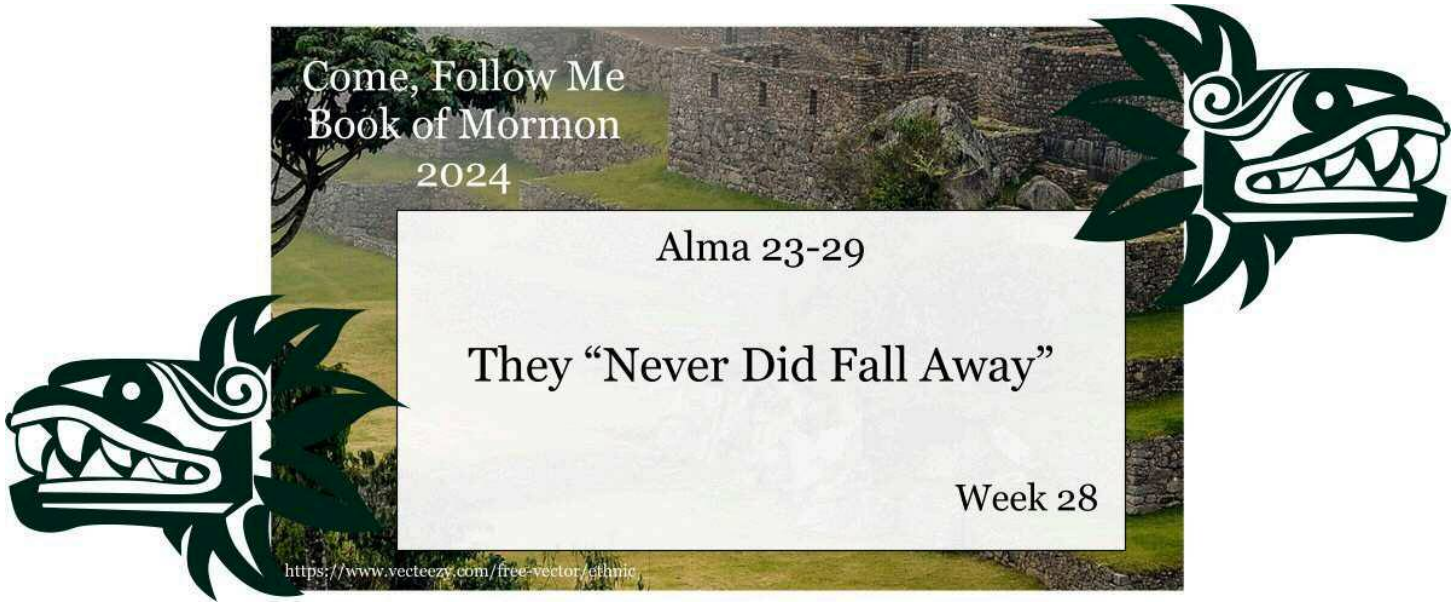

Week 28 is scheduled for study July 8-14, 2024. If we don't want to fall away, we must work on our conversion. This week the lessons are all about strengthening ourselves to stay strong.

Day 1

Alma 23-25; 27 - My conversion to Jesus Christ and His gospel will change my life.

The title of today's lesson is a strong statement. It says my conversion to Jesus Christ "will" change my life. It doesn't say it "can" change my life, but "will." This is the beginning of my thought processes for considering today's doctrine. I listened to the two Conference talks recommended by the lesson. Both are incredible talks and bear multiple reads or listens to. The first one is by Elder David A. Bednar - Converted unto the Lord. In this talk he separates out testimony from conversion and talks about the relationship between the two.

Here is how Elder Bednar describes testimony.

> Testimony is the beginning of and a prerequisite to continuing conversion. Testimony is a point of departure; it is not an ultimate destination. Strong testimony is the foundation upon which conversion is established.

> Testimony alone is not and will not be enough to protect us in the latter-day storm of darkness and evil in which we are living. Testimony is important and necessary but not sufficient to provide the spiritual strength and protection we need. Some members of the Church with testimonies have wavered and fallen away. Their spiritual knowledge and commitment did not measure up to the challenges they faced.

If all we needed was a testimony then reading the scriptures, praying for knowledge from God, and listening to the Spirit would be the end of our search and efforts. But conversion begins with testimony and leads us the rest of the way home. Referring to Alma 23:6-8 Elder Bednar says this.

> Two major elements are described in these verses: (1) *the knowledge of the truth,* which may be interpreted as a testimony, and (2) *converted unto the Lord,* which I understand to be conversion to the Savior and His gospel. Thus, the powerful combination of both testimony and conversion unto the Lord produced firmness and steadfastness and provided spiritual protection.
>
> They never did fall away and surrendered "the weapons of their rebellion, that they did not fight against God any more." To set aside cherished "weapons of rebellion" such as selfishness, pride, and disobedience requires more than merely believing and knowing. Conviction, humility, repentance, and submissiveness precede the abandonment of our weapons of rebellion. Do you and I still possess weapons of rebellion that keep us from becoming converted unto the Lord? If so, then we need to repent now.

Now let's look at some quotes from Elder Dale G. Renlund of the Twelve Apostles - Unwavering Commitment to Jesus Christ. He is referring to the Saints living in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

> Individuals who enter the Kinshasa Temple see an original painting entitled *Congo Falls*. It uniquely reminds temple-goers of the unwavering commitment required to anchor themselves to Jesus Christ and to follow the covenant path of our Heavenly Father's plan. The waterfalls depicted in the painting call to mind a practice that was common more than a century ago among early converts to Christianity in Congo.
>
> Before their conversion, they worshipped inanimate objects, believing that the items possessed supernatural powers. After conversion, many made a pilgrimage to one of the countless waterfalls along the Congo River, such as the Nzongo Falls. These converts threw their previously idolized objects into the waterfalls as a symbol to God and others that they had discarded their old traditions and accepted Jesus Christ. They intentionally did not throw their objects into calm, shallow waters; they threw them into the churning waters of

a massive waterfall, where the items became unrecoverable. These actions were a token of a new but unwavering commitment to Jesus Christ.

God invites us to cast our old ways completely out of reach and begin a new life in Christ. This happens as we develop faith in the Savior, which begins by hearing the testimony of those who have faith. Thereafter, faith deepens as we act in ways that anchor us more firmly to Him.

Now, it would be nice if increased faith were transmitted like the flu or the common cold. Then a simple “spiritual sneeze” would build faith in others. But it does not work that way. The only way faith grows is for an individual to act in faith. These actions are often prompted by invitations extended by others, but we cannot “grow” someone else’s faith or rely solely on others to bolster our own. For our faith to grow, we must choose faith-building actions, such as praying, studying the scriptures, partaking of the sacrament, keeping the commandments, and serving others.

Covenants anchor us to the Savior and propel us along the path that leads to our heavenly home. The power of covenants helps us maintain the mighty change of heart, deepen our conversion to the Lord, and receive Christ’s image more fully in our countenance. But a half-hearted commitment to our covenants will not guarantee us anything. We may be tempted to equivocate, throw our old ways in calm water, or bury our weapons of rebellion with the handles sticking out. But an ambivalent commitment to our covenants will not open the door to the sanctifying power of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.

Lessons learned

Our testimony is our starting point. It is the testimony that brings us to the point of baptism, but it is conversion that enables us to endure to the end as faithful Saints. Conversion requires change. That change has to be deliberate and intentional. As these apostles have stated, conversion happens a little at a time, and comes from service, study, deliberately demonstrating faith, and constant prayer and repentance. Our covenants link us to the Savior and give us strength to make the changes needed to become people who are truly holy in our behavior and attitudes. To be holy is to be good in pure ways.

My initial question about the use of the word "will" versus "can" has been answered to my satisfaction. Conversion absolutely requires that we seek to change our nature, our behaviors, and our attitudes. We do that through repentance and practice. When we do these things we truly will change and become converted to Christ and all that he represents in our life.

Day 2

Alma 24:7-19; 26:17-22 - Because God is merciful, He forgives me as I repent.

It is important that we remember that it is the nature of God to be merciful, not vengeful. His punishments are only meted out after all efforts to extend mercy have been rebuffed and rejected. Mercy is always the first, and ever the consistent offer made by God. Any evidence that we are willing to turn from our old ways and embrace the joy He is offering us is met immediately with forgiveness and mercy. That is just the kind of man He is.

Alma 24:14-15 is part of the speech Anti-Nephi-Lehi gave to his people, the people who became known as the people of Ammon.

> 14 And the great God has had mercy on us, and made these things known unto us that we might not perish; yea, and he has made these things known unto us beforehand, because he loveth our souls as well as he loveth our children; therefore, in his mercy he doth visit us by his angels, that the plan of salvation might be made known unto us as well as unto future generations.
>
> 15 Oh, how merciful is our God! And now behold, since it has been as much as we could do to get our stains taken away from us, and our swords are made bright, let us hide them away that they may be kept bright, as a testimony to our God at the last day, or at the day that we shall be brought to stand before him to be judged, that we have not stained our swords in the blood of our brethren since he imparted his word unto us and has made us clean thereby.

Alma 26:17-20 is Ammon glorying in the Lord and in the mercy that was extended to the sons of Mosiah when they finally decided to turn from their rebellion and embrace Christ's gospel.

> 17 Who could have supposed that our God would have been so merciful as to have snatched us from our awful, sinful, and polluted state?
>
> 18 Behold, we went forth even in wrath, with mighty threatenings to destroy his church.
>
> 19 Oh then, why did he not consign us to an awful destruction, yea, why did he not let the sword of his justice fall upon us, and doom us to eternal despair?

> 20 Oh, my soul, almost as it were, fleeth at the thought. Behold, he did not exercise his justice upon us, but in his great mercy hath brought us over that everlasting gulf of death and misery, even to the salvation of our souls.

God longs to be merciful to us. His mercy enables us to escape the punishments that the disobedient incur upon themselves. Too often we forget that the laws that govern the universe are the laws of happiness. When we are disobedient to those laws we bring upon ourselves sorrow and suffering. God wants us to live the laws of happiness for our own sakes, not His. He wants us to be happy and avoid the sorrow that comes from disobeying the laws that govern all things. If anyone has a view, understanding, and perspective of all things it is God. We are always offered opportunities to accept bringing our lives into line with the laws of happiness (God's commandments) before any punishments are administered. But the final choice is always ours to make. Mercy is always and forever God's preferred choice of action.

Day 3

Alma 26; 29 - Sharing the gospel brings me joy.

Today's lesson harks back to Monday's lesson (Day 1) about testimony versus conversion. Consider the following quotes as extensions of the doctrine Elder Bednar taught in Day 1. These two quotes are from Elder Dallin H. Oaks - Sharing the Restored Gospel.

> Elder Quentin L. Cook reminds us, “Missionary work is not just one of the 88 keys on a piano that is occasionally played; it is a major chord in a compelling melody that needs to be played continuously throughout our lives if we are to remain in harmony with our commitment to Christianity and the gospel of Jesus Christ.”
>
> *First,* we can all pray for desire to help with this vital part of the work of salvation. All efforts begin with *desire*.
>
> *Second,* we can keep the commandments ourselves. Faithful, obedient members are the most persuasive witnesses of the truth and value of the restored gospel. Even more important, faithful members will always have the Savior’s Spirit to be with them to guide them as they seek to participate in the great work of sharing the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

> *Third,* we can pray for inspiration on what *we* can do in our individual circumstances to share the gospel with others. This is different than praying for the *missionaries* or praying for what *others* can do. We should pray for what *we* can do personally. When we pray, we should remember that prayers for this kind of inspiration will be answered if accompanied by a commitment—something the scriptures call "real intent" or "full purpose of heart." Pray with a commitment to act upon the inspiration you receive, promising the Lord that if He will inspire you to speak to someone about the gospel, you will do it.

To be honest with you, these quotes make me squirm just a little bit. This tells me I am not yet fully converted to the gospel and to Christ. I know that the fully converted person literally joys in being able to share the gospel, and is willing to do so under any circumstances. I love to talk about the gospel, but I know I am timid about opening my mouth because of the fear of men. If I want the joy that comes with sharing the message of salvation I must seek greater conversion. A greater conversion will make the third step above much easier to do, and will open doors of joy currently shut to me. I hope you are more converted than I am, but if not, refer back to Day 1 for a reminder on how to become more converted.

Day 4

Alma 26:5-7 - I can find shelter in Jesus Christ and His gospel.

We are told in Doctrine and Covenants 45 to "stand in holy places." These holy places are our homes, ward/stake houses, and the temples of the Lord. In these places we have control over the amount of the Spirit we can feel. The Holy Spirit brings the peace of Christ into our lives, helping us to have courage to face uncertain times and situations. Here is Doctrine and Covenants 45:31-33.

> 31 And there shall be men standing in that generation, that shall not pass until they shall see an overflowing scourge; for a desolating sickness shall cover the land.
>
> 32 But my disciples shall stand in holy places, and shall not be moved; but among the wicked, men shall lift up their voices and curse God and die.
>
> 33 And there shall be earthquakes also in divers places, and many desolations; yet men will harden their hearts against me, and they will take up the sword, one against another, and they will kill one another.

Until I read the title of today's lesson I hadn't ever considered the phrase to stand in holy places as a means of finding shelter, but that is exactly what it is. As the judgments are released upon the nations of the earth, the only places that can possibly hold peace and solace are those places filled with the Spirit of God. If we are working on becoming increasingly converted to the Lord our homes are becoming places of safety from the storms of life. This doesn't mean there won't be heartache and challenges to face and overcome. What it does mean is that there are places of safety where we can spend time each day or regularly that offer us a respite from the evils of our day.

Personal Study

Look for pattern and themes

Dealing with God isn't like dealing with someone who is completely unpredictable. I've mentioned this several times before, but this looks like a good place to say it again. God IS predictable. He lives in patterns that repeat themselves over and over again. We have seen for ourselves in these lessons how He always prefers to offer mercy over punishment, forgiveness over retribution. As you read the scriptures look for patterns of behavior. These are often indicated by the same descriptions or indicator words.

A good example is the word "heal." Here is 3 Nephi 9:13.

> 13 O all ye that are spared because ye were more righteous than they, will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you?

Many times God performs physically for us in one generation what He will perform spiritually for us in another generation. This is a pattern you can find throughout the scriptures. For example, Moses was commanded to raise a brass serpent. When the Israelites exercised only the tiniest amount of faith and would look at the serpent (that was it, to look) God would heal them of the serpent bite that was killing them. When Jesus was ministering to the masses, what is the miracle we think of the most, but the healings? This is what Christ does for each of us individually. He can spiritually heal us, no matter what our emotional or spiritual infirmity.

These patterns of behavior are meant to bolster our confidence in the Lord and strengthen our resolve to turn to God in all things. The patterns and themes are all around us. It is up to us to find them and learn from them.

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BoM28-2024 - They "Never Did Fall Away"