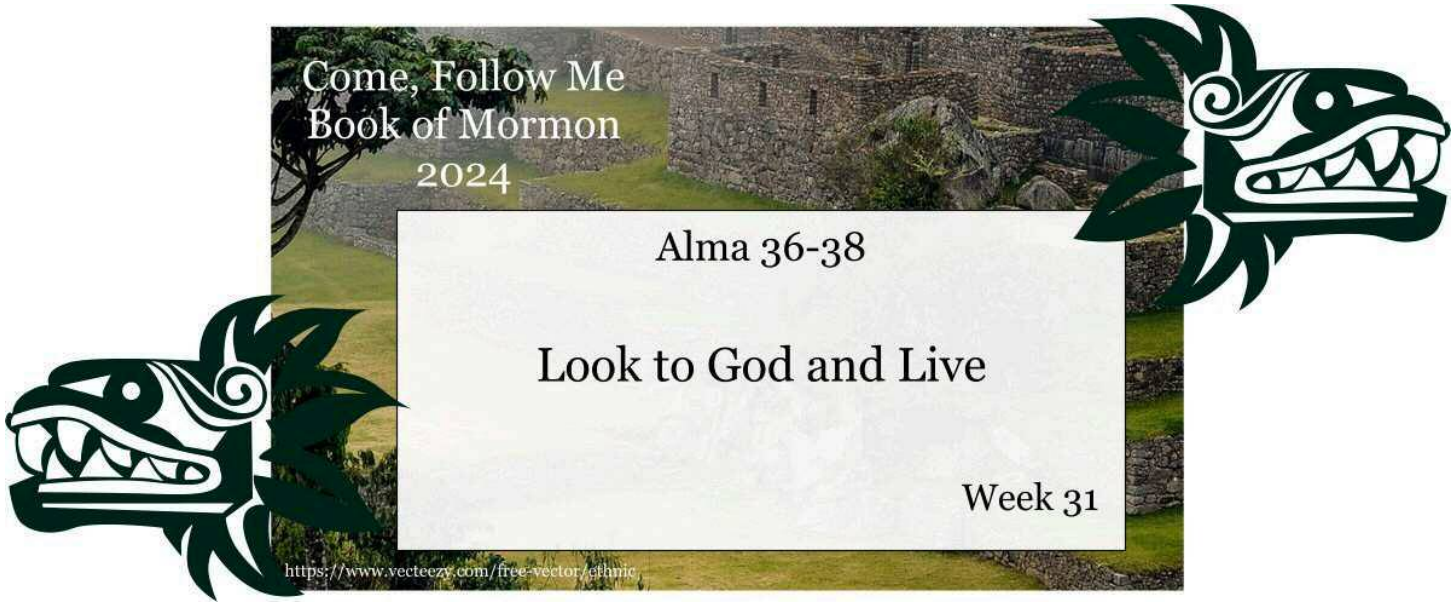

Week 31 is scheduled for study July 29-August 4, 2024. The title of this week's lessons is "Look to God and Live." When we look to Christ in all things we gain eternal life.

Day 1

Alma 36; 38:5-6 - I can be born of God.

This concept of being born again is an interesting one, because this "newness of life" is something over which we have complete control. Normally a birth into a new life is something that we just witness, because we have no control over it. Yet in this case we are commanded to be born again. It is impossible to obey that commandment if we have no control over how or when this birth happens.

Obviously being born again has nothing to do with becoming a literal baby again. This process of being born again is a transformation from one who lives and exists in the mortal world, thinks in terms of mortality, and has all the attitudes of those who only know of mortality, into one who lives, eats, breaths, and thinks on life in the eternities. It is a complete shift from being a solely carnally or mortally minded person to one who lives to keep the commandments of God. When we are born again we are more concerned with how a choice will affect our soul in the life after this one, and not so concerned with how it will affect our life here and now. We are living for the future instead of for today.

The carnally minded person cannot see past this life. All attitudes and decisions are based on how I behave in the here and now is going to affect me tomorrow. But the vision of life doesn't go beyond a few years into the future. Carnally minded people frequently get to the last third or quarter of their life and begin to realize that they won't live much longer. They have no idea what will happen to them at death. This is accompanied by a feeling of helplessness and sometimes hopelessness. Everything they have ever done in life was to promote getting ahead in this life. It is like playing a game. During the game we are only concerned with the moves that progress us along the path to winning. Many treat life in just this way. They never consider what comes after this life until they see they are running out of time and losing their abilities to do what they once found so effortless.

When we are given the commandments to be born again, the Lord is telling us that it is deadly to our soul to be caught up in this life as the be all and end all of existence. We need to be looking forward to the rest of eternity, not just the next few years. When we begin to see life here in mortality as just a blip on the radar screen of eternity, we can begin to plan for the changes we need to experience that will prepare us for that much longer life that follows this one.

To prepare for eternity requires us to focus on changing our priorities from how can I advance financially now to how can I advance spiritually forever. That is all that matters. Why? Because we can't take anything from this world with us when we die except for the person we have become. That is the real focus of the spiritually minded person. When we focus on becoming more loving, more obedient to God, more hopeful, kind, more service oriented, and more humble, we begin to lose our fixation on the mortal concerns of gaining and collecting, and instead begin to be more concerned with our relationship with God and with others.

Mortality is supposed to be about becoming a celestial person who is able to be that way even while living in a telestial world where wickedness abounds. We must learn to see ourselves as being in a world that we cannot be part of temporarily, because we are preparing to return to God and live with Him for eternity. This is the birth, the change, the becoming that is referred to when Christ tells us we must be born again. He is hoping we choose to become like him, and not continue on in our earthly concerns that will shortly come to a permanent end for all of us.

I am finding that as I seek to do God's will more often than I follow my own, I begin to lose the desire to follow my earthly inclinations. My pleasure in following the Spirit and in seeking to do good increases as my desire to break God's commandments decreases. Only rarely is someone born again quickly. The majority of us spend our whole lives making this change from being carnally minded to being spiritually minded. The good news is that as fast as we choose to make these changes, we experience increasing joy in being more like Christ. He becomes our goal, our support, our focus. And while this is happening the cares and the ways of the world quietly fall away and slip into just a memory of when life was more difficult. This is the joy found in the process of being born again.

Day 2

Alma 36:12-24; 38:8-9 - Jesus Christ replaces sorrow with joy.

I'm sorry, but I feel the need to challenge the manual's assumptions in today's lesson. This is what the manual says, "... contrast what Alma's life was like before he repented ... with his description of himself after he repented." The manual makes it sound like Alma was miserable during his years of rebellion and relieved after he repented. I disagree with that assumption. Alma was on a mission to destroy the church. His life was filled with and ruled over by anger. He took great delight and satisfaction in leading those who belonged to the church to sin as he did, and evidently he did a lot of deliberate sinning. I think he had some serious "daddy" issues. If his father stood for something, Alma was all about tearing it down and stomping on it. His father was the leader of the church of God, so Alma and his band of ne'er do wells sought to destroy the church.

Guilt and misery for how he behaved didn't enter into the picture until Alma was confronted by the angel. Suddenly an authoritative source Alma couldn't deny was validating everything his father had taught him. He suddenly realized that his behavior was an afront to God, and that he was going to be held accountable for all the damage he had done to others in his tirade against his father's beliefs. This is when Alma became miserable. Sinning doesn't always make us miserable when we are sinning. The misery often comes after the fact when we begin to see how offensive our behavior has been to God, and how much we will have to answer for at some point in the future. This

kindles the guilt within us, and the fires of hell ignite to make us suffer for our sins. Until this time we had no idea how much it could hurt to do whatever it was we chose to do.

To me, the point of repentance is to get rid of the guilt, the shame, the awful sense of dread of having to look God in the eye and know that He knows every thought and emotion that you experienced, in addition to every action you took. Repentance wipes the slate clean and brings us relief, joy, and gratitude that God is willing to act as though the sin was never committed, and treat us as though we are square with His laws and entitled to all the blessings He longs to pour upon us.

Repentance is not meant to have as its end result a misery of the soul. The end result of repentance leads us through the pain of paying for our wrong doing so that we can be forever forgiven of that wrong doing. Repentance is the only path to rid our souls of the inevitable guilt, shame, and sorrow that sinning always produces. Repentance brings peace and harmony with the laws of God. It uplifts our soul and grants the ability to experience true joy in being in harmony with God.

It is important to remember that as uncomfortable as repentance may be, the fact that it is possible at all is due entirely upon the kindness and love of our Savior, Jesus Christ. We are able to repent only because he has already paid the full price of our sin to God, our Father. The suffering we experience is only a small part of what he had to endure. He has us go through the process to demonstrate our true sorrow for the sin we have committed. He knows we cannot pay the full cost to repair our relationship with God, so he stepped in and paid that for us. This payment on our part is only a token to show our sincerity that we want to accept his payment on our behalf. Jesus is all too happy to have us accept his payment, for he knows it saves us a world of hurt in the eternities to do it now while we still have the chance.

We also need to remember that repentance is only available to us for a limited time. By the time we reach the day of judgment we will never be able to accept Christ's offer to pay for our sins. He did it anyway, yes. But in the day of judgment we will no longer be able to pay our token payment for our sin. In that day, if we haven't already repented of our sins through Christ's atoning sacrifice, we will be responsible for everything we have done in full measure. That means we will be cut off from God's presence forever, because we can't ever pay the price Jesus paid for us. This is why we are told time and

time again in the scriptures that now is the time, and today is the day to repent and follow Christ. We don't want to get to that final day and have it be everlastingly too late to decide to change. You might say the countdown clock is ticking away.

Day 3

Alma 37 - The scriptures have been preserved "for a wise purpose."

Sometimes we think of the Book of Mormon scriptures being preserved for future generations as meaning us, in our day. But Alma takes great pains to point out how the scriptures they had already had blessed future generations by being preserved from the time of Nephi many hundreds of years earlier for use in Alma's day. The Lord had promised that their scriptures would one day bring the Lamanites to a knowledge of the truth, and it was fulfilled in Alma's day through the missionary work of Ammon and his fellow missionaries. But, like the prophecies of Isaiah, the Lord intended His promises to be fulfilled more than in just one period of time. So Alma told his son to preserve them, because the Lord wasn't finished with them yet.

All through the Book of Mormon the prophets are kept in every stage of anticipation. Some of them had no idea how the Lord would use the record they were preserving. Others had an idea as to how they might be used in the future. Still others were shown some of the ways in which the scriptures they had would be a blessing to future generations. We don't really know how many of the prophets had a more or less full knowledge of how important those scriptures would be to the people in the last days.

The Book of Mormon is a monumental undertaking that took more than two thousand years to complete. The record then rested in the earth for almost another two thousand years (about 1400 years) before it was translated and put to use showing the world the works of God among His people in the ancient Americas. No work of man can match this task. The construction of the record outlasted two full societies from inception to total destruction, the Jaredites and the Nephite people. God even gave them special interpreters to use in the form of the Urim and Thummim. Joseph Smith used the Urum and Thummim to translate much of the Nephite record into English.

Day 4

Alma 37:1-14 - "By small and simple things are great things brought to pass."

This topic is addressed more fully in the article Where Is the Greatness in Small Things.

Day 5

Alma 37:35-37 - "Counsel with the Lord."

Let's connect the instructions of these verses to our baptismal covenant. The covenant we make at baptism is found in Mosiah 18:8-10. Here is a part of that covenant.

> 9 ... and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life—
>
> 10 Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you?

We covenant to remember him (Jesus Christ) "at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in." If we are going to stand as a witness of him we by default are remembering him. To stand as a witness of Christ is to put him up as an example for others to follow. If anyone deserves to be put on a pedestal for all to see and look up to, it is Christ. Alma promises the people getting baptized that remembering Christ every day of their lives and living to serve him and his do his work will earn him pouring "out his Spirit more abundantly upon" them.

Each week when we renew our baptismal covenant we hear and agree to the words of the sacramental prayer. The prayer on the bread reads, in part, like this (Moroni 4:3):

> ... that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he hath given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them.

Again, in Moroni 5:2 we read:

> ... that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son, which was shed for them; that they may witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they do always remember him, that they may have his Spirit to be with them.

So far all these scriptures are in complete harmony in showing us how to have the Holy Spirit be with us and promising that He will lead us to have eternal life.

Now add Alma the Younger's counsel to his son, and we have a complete sermon on what it means to remember the Lord. I especially like the notion that we are to place all our affections on Christ. Our love of him must be first and foremost among all our loves, for nothing is more important to the welfare of our soul. Not even the love of our spouse and family is as important as our love of Christ (Alma 37:36-37).

> 36 Yea, and cry unto God for all thy support; yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest let it be in the Lord; yea, let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever.
>
> 37 Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

Each person expresses themself in their own way, but the doctrine is the same in each case.

Day 6

Alma 38 - Sharing my testimony of Jesus Christ can strengthen people I love.

Alma does some really good things in his talk with Shiblon. He acknowledges all that Shiblon has been through, especially recognizing that he had been in bonds and stoned for the truth's sake. He expressed how pleased he was with the choices Shiblon had made in life and encouraged him to continue on in that course of living. When we bear our testimony to our loved ones, acknowledging anything they have done that is good and praiseworthy is a great way to get them to listen to and accept your words.

Alma can wax long at times, but chapter 38 is only 15 verses. He keeps his counsel to Shiblon short and sweet. After expressing his own witness of God's goodness and how it

affected his own life, Alma counsels Shiblon with just a few personal points that will help Shiblon live a happier life. There was no sermonizing in this chapter. It is a great example of how to express one's testimony to someone we love with great effect.

Personal Study

Why we aren't worthy

This is a short doctrinal point I have pondered over for years, and just thought I ought to share what I have learned. Since it is short, and the manual doesn't give us anything for this section of the lesson, I figured this is a good place to talk about it.

Our personal unworthiness

I want to connect Alma's closing advice to Shiblon with a statement Christ makes several times in the scriptures. Here is Alma 38:14

> 14 Do not say: O God, I thank thee that we are better than our brethren; but rather say: O Lord, forgive my unworthiness, and remember my brethren in mercy—yea, acknowledge your unworthiness before God at all times.

This is interesting advice from a father to his son. Alma is about to be translated. The assumption in all translations throughout the scriptures is that they must be extraordinarily righteous and worthy people to qualify for such a blessing. Elijah and Moses were both translated. I am thinking they qualified as extremely righteous people. Yet Alma, who is just about to be translated himself is telling Shiblon to always acknowledge his own unworthiness before the Lord. I also assume that if he is giving this advice to Shiblon that Alma also acknowledges his own unworthiness before the Lord.

Alma was worthy enough to be translated, but he was still unworthy before the Lord? Is there ever a point where we become "worthy" before God? Now we can get to the second half of this discussion.

Jesus Christ is worthy

Here are some verses where Christ's worthiness is made the point of the verse.

3 Nephi 21:9

> 9 For in that day, for my sake shall the Father work a work, which shall be a great and a marvelous work among them; and there shall be among them those who will not believe it, although a man shall declare it unto them.

For Christ's sake and not for our sake?

3 Nephi 27:7

> 7 Therefore, whatsoever ye shall do, ye shall do it in my name; therefore ye shall call the church in my name; and ye shall call upon the Father in my name that he will bless the church for my sake.

Again we see that God blesses the church for the sake of Jesus, not us.

Doctrine and Covenants 93:46

> 46 I called you servants for the world’s sake, and ye are their servants for my sake -

Christ is telling Joseph Smith that he was called to be a servant to the world for his (Christ's) sake.

3 Nephi 12:11

> 11 And blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake;

Again, it is all about Christ, not us.

My point

There is a physical fact I have been missing my whole life. It is as true as light makes things discernable and darkness obscures things. The reason Jesus is our Christ, our Messiah is because he is the only one of all of God's children who is worthy of all the blessings and power God has to bestow upon His children. Jesus is worthy, completely and fully in every sense of the word. He never broke a commandment, never acted in a selfish manner, never acted for his own interests, never did anything that might detract from his personal perfection. He is completely in harmony with everything God has ever stated or put into place in the universe. Therefore he is the only one who is actually worthy to ask anything he wants and expect a positive answer from God, our Father.

We can't say the same about ourselves. We are in constant need of repentance, which we have to do through the atoning sacrifice Jesus made for us. We are never worthy of God's blessings. So why does He bless us? He blesses those children who Christ asks Him to bless, because Christ is worthy to ask what he wants. This is why we do all things in the name of Jesus, for Jesus is the only worthy child of God. All our prayers are answered in the affirmative (when they are answered in the affirmative) because Christ, as our intercessor pleads for us with the Father, and because of Christ's worthiness God grants our prayers. We owe everything we get from God to Christ.

When Alma tells Shiblon to always acknowledge his unworthiness before God, he is just stating a fact. None of us are capable of being worthy before God to ask Him anything and expect a positive reply. Everything we do must be done through the name of God's only worthy son, Jesus the Christ. Alma was admitting to Shiblon that Alma recognized his own place in the universe. He was acknowledging to his son his own dependence upon the Savior for all things. We all live with this same dependence.

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