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**Abstract** When Christ was with the Nephites, the Savior felt it was important to take the time to call children around him, bless each of them one by one, and pray to the Father for them. Christ's actions provide an example of loving, blessing, and instructing children. We must not overlook the children among us. The children that the Savior blessed were to become the second generation of the Zion people that he was forming; as such, their preparation was vital.



*The  
Savior  
and the  
Children  
in  
3 Nephi*



*M. Gawnin Wells*





**T**HE VISIT OF THE RISEN JESUS to the people of Nephi was a personal and sacred event without parallel in scripture.

In the scant space of a few days, Christ prepared a people to live as a Zion community in righteousness for nearly 200 years. As survivors of the great destruction, those to whom he ministered were the more righteous part of the inhabitants (see 3 Nephi 10:12); yet the specificity of his instructions and warnings against contention suggest that they still had much to learn (see 11:28–30; 18:34).

We may assume, therefore, that the Savior’s activities were highly efficient as well as effective. Yet of all that he might have done to teach and otherwise prepare the people and his chosen disciples, the Savior took the time to call children around him, bless each of them one by one, and pray to the Father for them (see 17:11, 21). On the second day of his ministry, he taught and ministered to the children again (see 26:14). The record does not indicate that Christ was present with the children on the third day; however, he had prepared the children such that on that day “even babes did open their mouths and utter marvelous things; and the things which they did utter were forbidden that there should not any man write them” (26:16).

What might we learn from Christ’s repeated focus on the children? The question is intriguing because his initial attention to them might appear to have been the result of a compassionate change of plans whereby he agreed to remain longer than he had intended (see 17:4–6). His subsequent teaching of the children, however, is evidence that his focus on them was an essential element of his mission and thus likely not a change of plans at all.

As we consider the Savior’s interaction with the children and its purposes and modern applications, it will be helpful to first review the context and narrative of the events themselves and then focus on his purposes from several points of view—that of the children themselves, their parents and others

in attendance, the disciples, and finally ourselves as recipients of the sacred record. Although such divisions are artificial in some respects (e.g., the disciples were likely parents as well), the different perspectives they afford help us to better appreciate the range and overall impact of the messages explicit in the Savior’s teachings and implicit in his ministrations. For example, the disciples were to bear responsibility for the progress of the church as a whole, so they were likely attentive to the ecclesiastical as well as parental implications of the Savior’s teachings. Moreover, in the larger context it is important to distinguish between those instances when the Savior is speaking to the children as his audience and those when he may be using them as examples, with adults or disciples as the audience.

### Context and Narrative

The image of Jesus blessing little children directly or pointing to them as living metaphors of what disciples should become is not new. Biblical commentators have written extensively about the lessons to be gleaned from such events. However, in 3 Nephi the central importance of believers becoming as little children is emphasized dramatically by Christ when he speaks amid the darkness caused by the great destructions preceding his appearance in the New World (see 9:22). His initial teaching following his appearance declares characteristics that are foundational requirements for discipleship:

I say unto you, ye must repent, and *become as a little child*, and be baptized in my name, or ye can in nowise receive these things. And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and be baptized in my name, and *become as a little child*, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them. (3 Nephi 11:37–39)

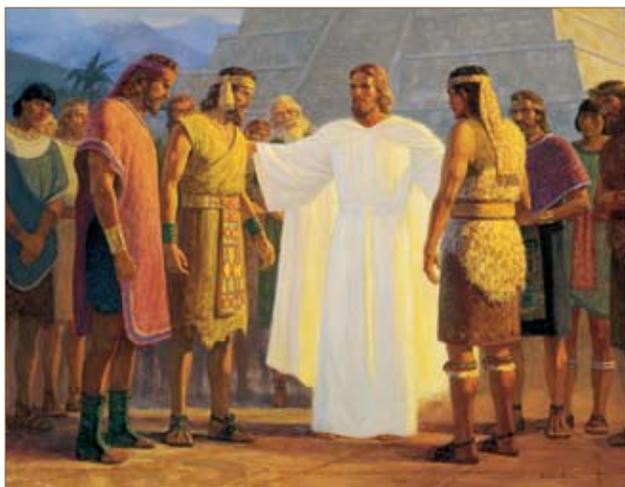
Thus the Savior calls his followers to emulate the characteristics of children, to become “as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father” (Mosiah 3:19).

If the most important instructions and experiences are presented first in 3 Nephi, then the most





important knowledge for the people gathered at the temple was that Jesus is the Christ, the very Son of God. He was introduced by the Father himself, he declared his own witness of who he is, and he personally demonstrated his identity by inviting each person to “arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world” (3 Nephi 11:14). Following that ineffable learning experience and the audience’s unified declaration of their witness, the Savior turned to reestablishing the church organization. He called Nephi and 11 other disciples, teaching them the order of baptism and emphasizing



*Three Nephites*, by Gary Kapp. © 1996 Intellectual Reserve Inc.

(Right) *The Resurrected Christ Blesses the Nephite Children*, by Robert Barrett. © 1996 Intellectual Reserve Inc.

the importance of unity of understanding and the pitfalls of contention. He then declared the essential elements of his doctrine, which, as mentioned, include the opportunity and responsibility to become as little children.

During that first day of instruction, Jesus both prepared the disciples for their responsibilities and taught the multitudes. When one considers all that had transpired by the close of 3 Nephi 16, it might be said that the day had been long and very full. The Savior, perceiving the weakness of his listeners, encouraged them to go home, ponder and pray, and come again on the morrow prepared for further

instruction. Notwithstanding their weakness, the people loved being with Jesus so much that they could only look upon him in tears, hoping he might stay longer. He did. The Savior of the world, Creator of the heavens and earth, remained with them because, we believe, he loved the people so much that he would not deny their longing. He called for them to bring their sick and afflicted, their dumb and blind to him, and he healed each of them. They all worshipped him, kissing and bathing his feet in their tears (see 17:1–10).

In that context of teaching and training, and then loving and healing, Jesus called for the children to gather around him. He commanded the adults to kneel down, and he began to pray. At first he groaned and admitted to the Father his sorrow and concern for the house of Israel. He then knelt and prayed with such exalted communication that words could not describe either what the people saw and heard or the joy they experienced in participating with him. At the conclusion of his prayer he arose, but the people’s joy was so great that they apparently could not arise, and he declared that his joy was now full because of their faith (see 17:11–20). He was so touched that he wept, . . . and he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them. And when he had done this he wept again; and he spake unto the multitude, and said unto them: Behold your little ones. And as they looked to behold they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven





as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them. (3 Nephi 17:21–24)

We will return to this supernal event later for more analysis, but let us now finish the narrative in which the little children were involved. Mormon tells us that

the Lord truly did teach the people, for the space of three days; and after that he did show himself unto them oft, and did break bread oft, and bless it, and give it unto them. And it came to pass that he did teach and minister unto the children of the multitude of whom hath been spoken, and he did loose their tongues, and they did speak unto their fathers great and marvelous things, even greater than he had revealed unto the people; and he loosed their tongues that they could utter. And it came to pass that after he had ascended into heaven—the second time that he showed himself unto them, and had gone unto the Father, after having healed all their sick, and their lame, and opened the eyes of their blind and unstopped the ears of the deaf, and even had done all manner of cures among them, and raised a man from the dead, and had shown forth his power unto them, and had ascended unto the Father—Behold, it came to pass on the morrow that the multitude gathered themselves together, and they both saw and heard these children; yea, even babes did open their mouths and utter marvelous things; and the things which they did utter were forbidden that there should not any man write them. (3 Nephi 26:13–16)

In an initial reading, Christ’s involvement with the children on the first day would appear to be a late change of plan, leading eventually to a natural unfolding of his love for the people and their “little ones.” Further examination, however, suggests that his loving, blessing, and teaching the children must have been an integral part of his mission to people in the New World, a sacred element that touches the

hearts of those who read of it even today. Attempting to “liken all scriptures unto us . . . for our profit and learning” (1 Nephi 19:23), we now consider the possible purposes of his three-day ministry from the points of view of the children themselves, the parents and other adults, the disciples, and the students of the record.

### The Children

First, the simplest response to the question of the reason for Jesus’s attention to the children is that he loved them and desired to heal them. Perhaps Jesus’s loving reciprocation of the longing that he felt from his hearers was to turn and bless those most vulnerable—the sick and afflicted, *and the children*. Those innocents had lived through the trauma of the cataclysmic events marking Christ’s crucifixion, terrifying in and of themselves, from which their parents could do little to protect them and for which the children had no shade of responsibility or understanding. Children could not have been among those crying out, “O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and



*First Contact*, by Jorge Cocco Santangelo





then would our brethren have been spared, and they would not have been burned in that great city Zarahemla” (8:24). They nevertheless experienced the cataclysm, followed by three days of utter darkness attended by “great mourning and howling and weeping among all the people continually” (8:23).

We need not dwell on the awesome destruction witnessed by all those who survived the maelstrom. They would have observed that the whole face of the land was deformed (see 8:17), and if they had not seen it themselves firsthand, they would have heard their parents describe the loss of life in so many cities. From a mental health consideration,

Inasmuch as Jesus was at first so troubled by the wickedness of the house of Israel, would it be presumptuous to suggest that inviting little children to gather around him was a source of comfort to him as well, somewhat like the solace he sought in the presence of Mary and Martha? (see Luke 10:38–42; John 12:1–3). Little children are a delight to be with, and he who had “not where to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20) may have turned to them out of his own joy in their company.

Hugh W. Nibley suggested a profound purpose in the Savior’s gathering the children around him: his prayer for them was, in essence, a prayer circle.



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How better might he have responded to the longing of his hearers  
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these children—and their parents—were likely to have been a wounded population, now experiencing difficulties associated with post-traumatic stress disorder: depression, feelings of numbness to the environment, and, alternately, hypervigilance to sounds, smells, or sights associated with the disaster, inability to sleep restfully, and so on. Although the Savior’s appearance among the people may not have occurred for some months after the destruction (compare 8:5 and 10:18), the nature of post-traumatic stress is such that some of the symptoms would be increasing in debilitating effect rather than abating. There, in what we suppose still must have been the beautiful and calming temple setting of Bountiful, they “were showing one to another the great and marvelous change which had taken place” (11:1) when the Savior came, he who is the balm of Gilead. He blessed and healed each of them one by one. How better might he have responded to the longing of his hearers than to comfort, bless, and heal their children of both the physical and emotional traumas they had experienced? We hear his love even in the tender call for the parents to “Behold your little ones” (17:23).

Having iterated three times that no one can draw near unto the Lord except as a little child, perhaps he drew the children around him for his prayer as a visual demonstration of this sacred practice. The effect of the prayer was marvelous, too wondrous to describe.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, John W. Welch posits that this “Sermon at the Temple” was closely related to the temple ordinances themselves. He suggests that when the Savior said, “Behold your little ones,” these children were now more truly *their parents’* little ones than ever before, sealed to them as eternal families.<sup>2</sup>

The Savior’s previous demonstrations of love for little children in the Holy Land may serve as a useful context here. Mark recorded that when some people (we assume mothers) brought their children to Jesus so he could touch them, the disciples rebuked those people (see Mark 10:13). One biblical commentator, Vincent Rossi, suggests that the disciples would certainly have thought they were helping Jesus.<sup>3</sup> There was always a crowd around him, and perhaps the disciples thought themselves responsible to protect him from the press of people. Quite naturally then, the disciples must have felt





that the children would be a hindrance to the work of their Master.

Jesus was “much displeased.” He rebuked the disciples, saying, “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14). He wanted the little children to come to him, and he apparently wanted the disciples to know how essential children are in—and to—the kingdom of God. The Psalmist asserts that children are a fundamental source of happiness to righteous parents:

in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them” (Mark 10:16). Children have a deep need to know they are loved. Those children knew that they were loved by Jesus Christ.

Children certainly were important recipients of the Savior’s teaching. On the second day of his ministry among the Nephites, Jesus “did teach and minister unto the children of the multitude” (3 Nephi 26:14). While we understand that they were whole and incapable of committing sin, as are all children before the age of accountability (see Moroni 8:8–12),

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Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate. (Psalm 127:3–5)

Moreover, children are “the rising generation” (Mosiah 26:1) upon whom the future of the kingdom depends. Early in 3 Nephi, the writer laments:

And there was also a cause of much sorrow among the Lamanites; for behold, they had many children who did grow up and began to wax strong in years, that they became for themselves, and were led away by some who were Zoramites, by their lyings and their flattering words, to join those Gadianton robbers. And thus were the Lamanites afflicted also, and began to decrease as to their faith and righteousness, because of the wickedness of the rising generation. (3 Nephi 1:29–30)

According to Mark’s account, the Savior did more than just touch the children; “he took them up

they were capable of growing in faith and understanding to a degree that we may not recognize. These children were to become the second generation of the Zion people that the Savior was forming; as such, their preparation was vital. The Savior’s actions in loving, blessing, and instructing them again suggests that his loving focus on little children was an integral part of his mission to his sheep in the New World.

Indeed, the Savior’s teaching of the children was so effective that they served as teachers of the adults, those of the first generation. Having their tongues loosened by Jesus, these children “did speak unto their fathers great and marvelous things, even greater than he [the Savior] had revealed unto the people” (3 Nephi 26:14). The next day the multitude gathered and were pupils even to babes who taught such marvelous things that the adults were forbidden to write them (see 26:16).

Other scripture suggests that this event was not the first time that children taught adults such marvelous things, nor will it be the last. Note Alma’s comment to the poor Zoramites: “And now, he imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, not only men but women also. Now this is not all; *little*





children do have words given unto them many times, which confound the wise and the learned” (Alma 32: 23). Joseph Smith, unfolding the doctrine of the salvation of the dead, similarly declared: “And not only this, but those things which never have been revealed from the foundation of the world, but have been kept hid from the wise and prudent, *shall be revealed unto babes and sucklings* in this, the dispensation of the fulness of times” (Doctrine and Covenants 128:18).

Scripture, as well as modern commentary, suggests that the characteristics of these and other little children made them apt pupils. After all, of such is the kingdom of God. Biblical commentator Hans Urs von Balthasar, writing about Jesus’s praise of children, suggested that children are more open to any possibility implanted by adults whom they trust and are more willing than at any other age to do only that which is the will of the beloved adult. Therein, he proposed, lies the affinity of the child toward its parents and, in a reflected way, the Heavenly Father. Each of us as adults, he suggests, “thick with adulthood and maturity,” must be led back to that innocent, unquestioning obedience that would make us apt pupils for heavenly instruction.<sup>4</sup>

In Matthew 21, following Jesus’s cleansing of the temple and then healing of the lame and blind, the children recognized him for who he was, the Son of David. Judith Gundry-Volf has commented that the scene was ironic.<sup>5</sup> Of all people, the learned scribes who had spent years studying should have recognized the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies. Yet they not only denied him, but they were incensed by the children’s acclamations of the Savior. The children, those least learned in religious matters, cried their hosannas to him. Gundry-Volf rightly asserts that the children knew him not of themselves but of God. Indeed, earlier in Matthew, Jesus explicitly thanked the Father for the revelation of his divine identity to “babes,” meaning both children and those with unsophisticated but open minds (see Matthew 11:25). President Thomas S. Monson similarly spoke of the prescience of children: “In our daily experiences with children, we discover they are most perceptive and often utter profound truths. . . . Children seem to be endowed with abiding faith in their Heavenly Father and his capacity and desire to answer their sweet prayers.”<sup>6</sup>

We recall that King Benjamin’s marvelous discourse at the close of his life was so effective for the

multitude that, as a community of Saints, they were given a new name, “the children of Christ” (see Mosiah 5:7). They had, indeed, each become “as a little child.” We note that every one of those present was converted *except the little children* who had “not been taught concerning these things,” presumably because they were too young to understand Benjamin’s message (Mosiah 2:34; see 6:2). Sadly, this exception can be seen as foreshadowing what can happen when children, for whatever reason, are not included as a focus of gospel teaching:

Now it came to pass that there were many of the rising generation that could not understand the words of king Benjamin, being little children at the time he spake unto his people; and they did not believe the tradition of their fathers. They did not believe what had been said concerning the resurrection of the dead, neither did they believe concerning the coming of Christ. And now because of their unbelief they could not understand the word of God; and their hearts were hardened. And they would not be baptized; neither would they join the church. And they were a separate people as to their faith, and remained so ever after, even in their carnal and sinful state; for they would not call upon the Lord their God. (Mosiah 26:1–4)

What went wrong? How could those children have failed to gain a testimony of the gospel similar to that of their deeply committed parents? We may never know, of course, but it is possible that the children were overlooked and not taught the gospel even after they were old enough to understand. Perhaps their parents were so preoccupied with other concerns that they solipsistically assumed their children believed as they did, felt the same joy and reverence about the doctrines as they did. Writing of his concern for the spread of atheism in South Africa, religious writer A. O. Nkwoka wrote that Jesus’s blessing of the children in the Bible “lays an irresistible incumbency on the [Christian] Church. . . . God’s and Jesus’ predilection for little children calls on us to have a very committed concern for their place in the community. . . . The atheistic catastrophe befalling the Church today is traceable to her neglect of children. . . . The best provision is a kind of keep-them-from-disturbing-us Sunday School.”<sup>7</sup>





Prophets and leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have similarly written of the centrality of children as recipients of the Savior's words. Speaking of Christ's example in 3 Nephi, President Spencer W. Kimball urged church members to follow Christ in reaching out to children: "He loved them; He took them in His arms and blessed them. Children today need to be taught as Jesus taught—with love, understanding, compassion, and patience. No effort is too great; no labor more worthwhile."<sup>8</sup> And former Primary general president Michaelene P. Grassli, recounting the Savior's appearance to the people as recorded in 3 Nephi, observed: "Because of miraculous instructions, blessings, and attention they and their children received, righteousness was perpetuated by their children's children for many generations. Let us not underestimate the capacity and potential power of today's children to perpetuate righteousness. No group of people in the Church is as receptive to the truth, both in efficiency of learning and with the greatest degree of retention."<sup>9</sup>

### Parents and Others Responsible for Children

The message for parents and other adults to be taken from Jesus's attention to children must primarily come from his example. We are not given specifically what he taught the children. As mentioned earlier, it is also true that the influence of Jesus's blessing and teaching was so purifying that he could then use them as instruments to teach their parents: "They did speak unto their fathers great and marvelous things, even greater than [Jesus] had revealed unto the people; and he loosed their tongues that they could utter" (3 Nephi 26:14). And on the third day, "even babes did open their mouths and utter marvelous things; and the things which they did utter were forbidden that there should not any man write them" (v. 16).

While we do not learn what the children may have taught the adults when their tongues were loosened, the parents could not have escaped noticing how precious the children were to Jesus or how much these children needed to be taken into account. It would have been difficult indeed for adults to ever overlook these children, having been witnesses of the events of those three days. Even if only offered a brief glimpse, Jesus's hearers were privileged to see how children should be prized and instructed.

Moreover, to observe Jesus's teaching and then to be taught by children may have focused the parents' attention on the qualities of the children that made them such ready pupils. Their unabashed openness, tenderness, and desire to please Jesus were tangible models to emulate. The adults could see what it looked like to become, as mentioned earlier, "as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him" (Mosiah 3:19). S. Kent Brown has noted the significance of the concentric circles of those surrounding Christ during his prayer and ministrations to the children. Brown's query is this:

If we understand that the Risen Jesus was the most holy Person in this setting, and that holiness somehow diminishes as one moves away from the Savior, then the children sat in the next most holy place, namely, next to Him. Next to them were the angels who "did minister unto [the children]" (3 Nephi 17:24). Beyond them was the celestial fire; beyond the fire, the adults. Was there not a visual message to the adults about the special status of children in Jesus' eyes? Is there not a message for us?<sup>10</sup>

Surely some of the lessons for the adults had to do with the place of children and other vulnerable members of the community in the minds and hearts of the society. While we have no record that speaks to the treatment of children (or of women and disabled persons) at that time, we recall that the entire colony had been, until the destruction, part of a wicked society. It may have been that the stain of evil in the community had affected even the righteous to some degree. Peter spoke of such contamination upon Lot and his family:

For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; . . . and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; and delivered just Lot, *vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked*: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, *vexed his righteous soul* from day to day with their unlawful deeds). (2 Peter 2:4, 6–8; emphasis added)





One of the oft-demonstrated symptoms of the great cankering sin of pride creeping in among the Saints of the Book of Mormon was the stratification of society and the haughty justifications for treating people as “less than.” Jacob put it succinctly: “Wo unto the rich, who are rich as to the things of the world. For because they are rich they despise the poor, and they persecute the meek, and their hearts are upon their treasures; wherefore, their treasure is their god. And behold, their treasure shall perish with them also” (2 Nephi 9:30). In similar fashion the Zoramites deluded themselves, thanking God that they and not others were the chosen and holy ones, and with that philosophy they justified the ex-

clusion of the poorer class from worshipping in the very synagogues that the poor had helped build (see Alma 31:17–18; 32:5).

In the Holy Land, Jesus’s example of honoring children, attending to and nurturing them, may have been in contrast to his society. Allan Boesak noted that in Jesus’s time children were relatively unimportant; they were the little people who were not taken notice of until they could begin to become learned.<sup>11</sup> According to rabbinical views, righteousness was highly correlated with learning. It is true that siring and bearing children was seen as a divine gift and a source of great joy (see Psalm 127:3–5), while to be childless was a source of

shame, as we learn from the intense rivalry between the sisters Leah and Rachel in Genesis 29–30 regarding the blessings of bearing children. We presume that Jews did not participate in the harsh practices of abortion or exposure of newborns to the elements—practices common in the Graeco-Roman culture. However, historians are agreed that children in ancient Israel “occupied the lowest rung in the social ladder, and caring for children was a low status activity.”<sup>12</sup> The Savior, a man among male disciples, took little children into his arms to bless them. By his example, he taught the centrality of children in the ministry of those who would be leaders.

Perhaps the place of vulnerable people—widows, orphans, the aged and infirm—is a benchmark of the righteousness and refinement of any culture. Nearly 200 years in the Nephite colony could not have passed without such common social realities and their attendant challenges for society at large. Adversities did not disappear. Yet “there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people. And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier



*Christ Healer*, by Derek Hegsted





people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God” (4 Nephi 1:15–16).

We contrast this image of a joyous and peaceable people with the fear, horror, and rage in the hearts of their descendants only 200 years later (about 400 years after Jesus’s ministry) because of gross wickedness (see Moroni 9:8–12). In their consuming hatred, these descendants harbored a thirst for revenge that blotted out any feeling for those who were innocent. Women and children were

have done. The disciples were to become examples to emulate.

Like their Old World counterparts, the apostles, the Nephite disciples had much to learn. There is no evidence, however, that they experienced the same struggle against pride in seeking positions of importance that occasioned the Savior’s rebuke in Matthew 18, where he used a child to demonstrate the qualities he sought in one who would be a servant of all. The New World disciples paid close at-

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overlooked as people and had become only objects by which to satisfy one army’s desire to wreak vengeance upon its enemy.

The Savior’s example as well as his teachings were indeed powerful. His mission to the people of the Americas prepared them for the life they were to live, provided organizational structure, and positioned them for the whisperings of the Spirit, which guided them for many years. Certainly the proper treatment of children was an important ingredient for keeping the Spirit in their midst.

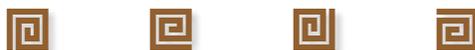
### The Disciples

From the outset of his sojourn, Christ demonstrated the order and structure of the church, devoting considerable time to training the 12 disciples (see 3 Nephi 11). He first called Nephi and then 11 others, giving them power to baptize and instructing them in the process. Like the Sermon on the Mount, part of his address was specific to the disciples. In instituting the ordinance of the sacrament, Christ instructed his disciples to partake first and then give to the multitude. Thus the people were instructed by example that the disciples were Christ’s representatives and would serve them as he would

tention to all that the Savior did. His compassionate focus on individuals must have been a profound lesson in condescension, as defined by President Ezra Taft Benson: “It means to descend or come down from an exalted position to a place of inferior station.”<sup>13</sup> Abinadi’s prophecy that God himself would “come down among the children of men” was now being fulfilled before their very eyes (Mosiah 15:1, see vv. 2, 5). The disciples witnessed Jesus Christ, the God of this world, the Creator of worlds without number, wanting to hold and bless and pray for each individual child present. The Savior’s act of inviting each person in the multitude to come forward and feel his wounds surely left no question in people’s minds that someone might be beneath a busy leader’s notice or concern. What more could be said that would help the disciples know what kind of leaders they would need to become?

### Students of the Sacred Record

Finally we come to the messages that we should liken to ourselves as students of the sacred record. We are to treasure Christ’s example of loving, blessing, and instructing children. He came to the New World as much for the children as for the adults.





Following his example, we must not overlook the children among us. Especially as parents and as teachers or leaders of children in our church assignments, we must gather our little ones around us to pray with them and for them. We must recognize and respect children as capable learners. And we must recognize that we can learn from children, especially from their childlike qualities.

Let us consider a couple of similar lessons gleaned by modern prophets and leaders of the church. For instance, Elder M. Russell Ballard points to a broader and deeper lesson in the account of Jesus calling upon the multitude to behold their children:

He said to behold them [children, in reference to 3 Nephi 17:23]. To me that means that we should embrace them with our eyes and with our hearts; we should see and appreciate them for who they really are: spirit children of our Heavenly Father, with divine attributes. When we truly behold our little ones, we behold the glory, wonder, and majesty of God, our Eternal Father. . . . They are receptive to the truth because they have no preconceived notions; everything is



Elder M. Russell Ballard, Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



Elder Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

real to children. . . . Their souls are endowed naturally with divine potential that is infinite and eternal.<sup>14</sup>

President Boyd K. Packer calls each of us to ponder the events of those few days:

This is the Church of Jesus Christ. It is His Church. He is our Exemplar, our Redeemer. We are commanded to be ‘even as He is.’ He was a teacher of children. He commanded His disciples at Jerusalem to ‘suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’ In the account of the Savior’s ministry among the Nephites, we can see deeper into His soul perhaps than at any other place.<sup>15</sup>

In his New World ministry, the Master Teacher offered impressive object lessons that have not lost their force and applicability despite the distance of centuries. As we study and ponder the magnificent events of those few days, we too become partakers of the lessons that he intended for all his followers to understand regarding the place of children in our lives and in his church. 



30. Huffmon, "Treaty Background of Hebrew *YÁDA*," 33; emphasis added. The bracketed *for* is our insertion, all other bracketed words are from Huffmon.
31. Mays, *Hosea*, 69 (see note 8 herein for full citation). "Knowing," or making covenants, binds or obliges the suzerain, God, to bless or curse his vassal, the house of Israel, depending upon their recognition of him. Hosea prophesied: "My people [Israel] are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children" (Hosea 4:6; emphasis added; see 5:3–5).
32. Huffmon, "Treaty Background of Hebrew *YÁDA*," 37.
33. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 4:588; emphasis added.
34. The Book of Mormon, trans. Joseph Smith Jr. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), title page; emphasis added.
35. See John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount: A Latter-day Saint Approach* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 77–78.
36. Just as Hosea and Isaiah prophesied destruction or captivity for lack of "knowledge," the opposite, "knowledge," will bring freedom, gathering, and protection. In the words of Nephi, "[God] will bring them again out of captivity, and they shall be gathered together to the lands of their inheritance; and they shall be brought out of obscurity and out of darkness; and they shall know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel" (1 Nephi 22:12). Again, we see a reference to the responsibility of the suzerain to protect and gather his vassals and their responsibility to recognize him as their only source of safety and redemption. Specifically, the children of Israel will learn that their only true source of protection and deliverance comes from God.
37. Howard W. Hunter, "Eternal Investments," *Charge to Religious Educators*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1994), 75.
38. We see that blessings are withheld as a consequence of "not knowing" God. "The reason why [God] ceaseth to do miracles among the children of men is because that they dwindle in unbelief, and depart from the right way, and know not the God in whom they should trust" (Mormon 9:20). The logic put forth here by Moroni is that the creation of heaven and earth and humans is miraculous. Since God does not change, miracles should continue. If miracles are not evident, it is not the fault of an unchanging God but the fault of humans who have changed their beliefs and been unfaithful to their covenants with him (see Mormon 9:17–19; Isaiah 24:5).
39. Abraham also desired to enter into a covenant with God; however, this point is not found in the Old Testament but rather in the Pearl of Great Price (see Abraham 1:2–4). Moses desired his people to enter into a covenant with God, but they were too frightened to do so directly (see Exodus 20:18–21).
40. See Whittaker, "Covenant People," 206 (see note 3 herein for a full citation).
41. George Mendenhall maintains that the similarity of the Sinaitic covenant to Hittite treaties is an argument attesting to the historicity of the Exodus narrative. Along that same line of reasoning, we maintain that the similarity of Book of Mormon covenants to Old Testament covenants is evidence attesting to the historicity of the Book of Mormon. See George E. Mendenhall, "Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 17 (May 1954): 37. Nibley calls these similarities "patterns" and titles a chapter "Old World Ritual in the New World"; see Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964), 295.
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M. Gawain Wells
- Hugh Nibley, "The Early Christian Prayer Circle," *BYU Studies* 19/1 (1978): 41–78.
  - John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount: An Approach to 3 Nephi 11–18 and Matthew 5–7* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999).
  - Vincent Rossi, "Children in Community: The Teaching and Example of Jesus," *Epiphany* 7 (Spring–Summer 1987): 14–17.
  - Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Jesus as Child and His Praise of the Child," *Communio* 22 (Winter 1995): 625–34; the quotation is from p. 632.
  - Judith Gundry-Volf, "'To Such as These Belongs the Reign of God': Jesus and Children," *Theology Today* 56/4 (January 2000): 469–80.
  - Thomas S. Monson, "Precious Children—a Gift from God," *Ensign*, November 1991, 68–69.
  - A. O. Nkwoka, "Mark 10:13–16: Jesus' Attitude to Children and Its Modern Challenges," *Africa Theological Journal* 14/2 (1985): 104–5.
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  - Michaelene P. Grassli, "Behold Your Little Ones," *Ensign*, November 1992, 93–94.
  - S. Kent Brown, *Voices from the Dust: Book of Mormon Insights* (American Fork, UT: Covenant, 2004), 148.
  - Allan Boesak, "Suffer the Children to Come," *The Other Side* 128 (May 1982): 17–18.
  - Gundry-Volf, "'To Such as These,'" 475.
  - Ezra Taft Benson, "Five Marks of the Divinity of Jesus Christ," *New Era*, December 1980, 45; *Ensign*, December 2001, 10.
  - M. Russell Ballard, "Great Shall Be the Peace of Thy Children," *Ensign*, April 1994, 59.
  - Boyd K. Packer, "Teach the Children," *Ensign*, February 2000, 16–17.
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- Hugh W. Nibley, "Freemen and King-Men in the Book of Mormon," in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 343.
  - See Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), s.v. "Zoramites."
  - See Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 8.
  - Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, 8.
  - Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Eden Paul and Cedar Paul (London: Martin Lawrence, 1930), 1.
  - See Rodney Stark, *Sociology* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1998), 227.
  - Ezra Taft Benson, "Beware of Pride," *Ensign*, May 1989, 4.
  - See John L. Sorenson, John A. Tvedtnes, and John W. Welch, "Seven Tribes: An Aspect of Lehi's Legacy," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: The F.A.R.M.S. Updates*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 93–95.
  - Mark Davis and Brent Israelsen point out, however, that because of the frequent assimilation of one ethnic group into another, "the national character became one of culture, religion, and disposition, rather than of race or ancestry" (Mark Davis and Brent Israelsen, "International Relations and Treaties in the Book of Mormon" [Provo, UT: FARMS, 1980], 9). Therefore it is difficult to determine how or on what basis the people at the time of Mormon determined these clans.
  - John L. Sorenson, "The Early Nephites," in his *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 163.
  - See John L. Sorenson, "Religious Groups and Movements among the Nephites, 200–1 bc," in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 168.
  - John L. Sorenson, "Book of Mormon Peoples," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 193.
  - Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 92.
  - See Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, 116.
  - See John L. Clark, "Painting Out the Messiah: The Theologies of Dissidents," *JBMS* 11 (2002): 16–27.
  - See Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, 41.
  - Hugh W. Nibley, "The Real Background of the Book of Mormon," in *Since Cumorah*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 244.