

“With All the Feeling of a Tender Parent”: Parenting Lessons from the Book of Mormon

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Sharon Samuelson: We are grateful for the opportunity to reflect on some very important lessons we have learned about parenting and families from the Book of Mormon. The primary role of the Book of Mormon is to be another witness for Jesus Christ and His great atoning mission. Central to our Father in Heaven’s great plan of happiness is the Atonement of His only perfect Son, Jesus Christ. And key to the fulfillment of the plan of salvation or plan of happiness is the success of families who are sealed together and can return to the presence of the Father and the Son to experience eternal life. It is not a small wonder then that the Book of Mormon would not only teach and testify of the Savior and His mission, but also give much needed counsel and direction in the vital matters of family life and the essential duties and roles of parents. As we have thought about this dimension of this “most correct book,” we have learned much that we probably did not fully appreciate when we first gained our testimonies of its truthfulness.

Cecil Samuelson: In fact, the lessons taught and available to parents and future parents are so replete and pervasive that only someone looking to avoid them would fail to see their relevance to family life. From the beginning verses in First Nephi to the concluding pages of Moroni, we find remarkable and clear evidence of the centrality of the family in Heavenly Father’s Plan and also much of practical help and example for those wishing to be successful parents in nurturing their children, grandchildren, and other younger people in the ways of the Lord. I have known since my youth that “all the prophets who . . . prophesied ever since the world began” (Mosiah 13:33) testified in one way or another of the Savior, Jesus Christ. It is only as I have gained some maturity, a few gray hairs, and a growing posterity that I realized that the prophets have also promised “that God should redeem his people” (Mosiah 13:33) and that families have a very significant role in bringing each other, and especially children, to Christ.

Sharon Samuelson: Right from the beginning, Nephi, who confessed “having been born of goodly parents” and thus being “highly favored of the Lord” (1 Nephi 1:1), understood how important family was to his father, Lehi. You will remember that Lehi was instructed by the Lord to leave Jerusalem and go into the wilderness because of the danger and wickedness in that great city. Lehi was immediately obedient. Listen to Nephi’s description of his father’s priorities and responsiveness:

“And it came to pass that [Lehi] departed into the wilderness. And he left his house, and the land of his inheritance, and his gold, and his silver, and his precious things, and took nothing with him, save it were his *family*, and provisions, and tents, and departed into the wilderness” (1 Nephi 2:4, emphasis added).

Nephi understood that his father and mother considered their family to be most “precious” and far above anything else. In fact, Lehi and Sariah allowed themselves to bring only those things essential to sustaining their family and their lives.

Cecil Samuelson: The importance of family and the desire Lehi and the Lord shared that Nephi and his siblings should have a righteous posterity led the Lord to instruct Lehi to send his sons back to Jerusalem a second time. Here they were to enlist Ishmael and his family to their cause so that Lehi’s “sons should take daughters to wife, that they might raise up seed unto the Lord in the land of promise” (1 Nephi 7:1).

Incidentally, you will recall that the Lord instructed Lehi to have his sons return to Jerusalem the first time to obtain the scriptures. We will say more about that later; however, we should never forget the significance of the effort required of Nephi and his brethren so that they would be privileged not only to have the word of God with them on their journeys but also as a resource to teach their children.

Sharon Samuelson: Speaking of the scriptures and particularly the Book of Mormon, I did something that I have never done before in preparation for this presentation. I have read the Book of Mormon many times over the years, but this time I made a serious effort to go through the entire Book of Mormon and record all of the lessons I could find that relate to parenting and family responsibilities. I must tell you that there are so many that we will not be able to be comprehensive in mentioning all of the great examples we found. I recommend that you think about taking this same approach because it works with respect to almost any issue, doctrine, problem, or concern you might be wrestling with or wishing to understand better. Thus, it really makes sense to study the Book of Mormon regularly because it gives such important insights to so many significant issues.

Cecil Samuelson: On a personal note, the first application we can remember of finding family answers from the Book of Mormon occurred about thirty-two years ago. As we have mentioned to some before, our children didn’t always come into our family when or how we hoped or planned. At the time in question, we had two sons, ages nine and four, who came into our family in the usual way. We understood it was very unlikely that others would be naturally born to us and so we were thrilled when we learned that we would be able to adopt a newborn set of twins (a boy and a girl) from Guatemala. Further, we knew that their lineage was from father Lehi. As we discussed possible names for our new little ones, the excited big brothers wanted to name their new little brother after King Benjamin, one of their heroes from the Book of Mormon. Our son Ben, as he now likes to be called, might well have been named something else without an understanding of King Benjamin’s great and wonderful example.

Sharon Samuelson: The boys were not as determined about naming Ben's twin sister from the Book of Mormon lexicon, but we all agreed that we very much liked the name Rebecca with its scriptural associations. Interesting to us, upon reflection after these many years, is that our study of the Book of Mormon from the very beginning with our two oldest sons—as imperfect and incomplete as it always has been—was never focused on finding the names for future children or siblings. In fact, for several years before the twins arrived, we were quite sure that there would not be others. In so many ways, this example teaches the principle that the Lord and the scriptures will reveal important answers to vital questions we have not been smart enough or wise enough to recognize or ask. Thus, while targeted study is essential, as we have mentioned, important insights also come by regularly immersing ourselves in the scriptures.

One of my favorite accounts about the complexities of teaching, loving, helping, and holding children accountable while also honoring their individual agency is Nephi's description of Father Lehi as he dealt with Laman and Lemuel. After his vision of the tree of life in the early years following their escape from Jerusalem, you will remember that Lehi saw the future of his family and rejoiced over what he saw for his wife, Sariah, and his sons Sam and Nephi. He was distressed, however, by the evidence that Laman and Lemuel were likely to refuse to partake of the fruit of the tree of life or to hold onto the iron rod, which symbolized safety and the correct path to eternal life. I hope you will think about this entire eighth chapter of First Nephi because many insights and principles are articulated. Let me just recount what Nephi reports his father said to the two rebellious sons:

“And he did exhort them then with all the feeling of a tender parent, that they would hearken to his words, that perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them, and not cast them off; yea, my father did preach unto them.

“And after he had preached unto them, and also prophesied unto them of many things, he bade them to keep the commandments of the Lord; and he did cease speaking unto them” (1 Nephi 8:37–38).

Cecil Samuelson: Father Lehi loved all of his children equally and felt strongly about teaching, counseling, and correcting them. He also understood that they had their own agency and would ultimately need to make their own choices, which they did. While he was deeply and profoundly saddened by the poor choices made by some of his sons, his grief over those going in improper directions did not deflect his joy from the good choices made by other family members. Certainly Lehi was not tempted to violate his own covenants or criticize the Lord for the failings of others. Likewise, while he did his best with Laman and Lemuel and the outcome was not what he had hoped, worked, and prayed for, he also did not find fault with himself for the failings of others.

In both the scriptures and in life, it is very rare to find situations where there are not at least some small family disappointments or choices that someone wished might be different. Think of Alma, himself an adult convert, and his son Alma the Younger. Young Alma and the four sons of Mosiah—all five from righteous families who taught their children the gospel and where parents modeled faithful lives—went about seeking to destroy the Church. These young men considered themselves to be non-believers and at least Alma the Younger is described by the scriptures as “a

very wicked and an idolatrous man” (Mosiah 27:8). Although the record doesn’t give much detail to this particular point, I would suggest that these young men were a source of great embarrassment to their parents and church leaders. I’m also sure that these faithful mothers and fathers developed calloused knees from their continual prayers because the angel of the Lord who appeared to them to call them to repentance said:

“Behold, the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father; for he has prayed with much faith concerning thee that thou mightest be brought to the knowledge of the truth; therefore, for this purpose have I come to convince thee of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith” (Mosiah 27:14).

Sharon Samuelson: Some of you have likewise uttered vocal and silent prayers for your errant children. Our hope is that we pray for all of our children and families regularly, daily, and even continually. We don’t need to wait for them to have problems, difficulties, sins, shortcomings, illnesses, or any other worry. An added dimension is that not only do we need to pray for them, they need to know and understand that we pray for them. Why is that important? Let’s return to the experience of Alma the Younger and jump forward a generation.

We know that after his dramatic interview with the angel, Alma and the sons of Mosiah repented and became exemplary young men and missionaries. Likely some of you have had or will have similar wonderful conversion experiences in your own families, although almost all will not have angelic visitations or visions.

After young Alma became a father, he fully understood the vital role of teaching and example. Although he was not proud of his sinful youth, he felt it important to explain to his own sons in some detail—but importantly not fully—the foibles of his younger years. There is a rather complete summary of the significant details in Alma chapter 36, but the point about his father’s prayers and teaching during the time of his rebellion is found in verse 17 of that chapter. Here Alma describes the horrible experience of going through the painful, cleansing repentance process after his interview with the angel. Said he, “And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world” (Alma 36:17).

It would seem likely that Alma the Elder probably felt that his teaching, testimonies, and prayers were falling on deaf ears, at least in the case of his son. Perhaps you have felt like this yourself. We must never underestimate the influence our behavior and faith will ultimately have even in the face of apparent rejection or lack of appropriate immediate response.

Cecil Samuelson: Another important point for us to glean from the scriptures and one we must never forget is that our children are not all alike. In fact, every person is absolutely unique. What influences one may not faze or touch another. What inspires one might discourage another. What tempts one child might repel a sibling, and so forth. That means our praying, our counseling, our correcting, our teaching, and even our encouraging and complimenting must be customized not

only to the person but to the time, the circumstances, and the rapidly changing and varying needs of each person.

You will know that Lehi and Sariah dealt with their sons differently according to their needs and circumstances. Coming back to Alma the Younger, we see that he also did the same with his three sons, Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton. Try reading and studying chapters 36 through 42 in the Book of Alma. The instruction was carefully and uniquely crafted for each son. Apparently, both Helaman and Shiblon were largely exemplary in their devotions.

On the other hand, Corianton was in need of very direct correction and his father left no doubt, I'm sure, about what was bothering him. I'm also quite sure that prior to this interview, Corianton was fully aware of his father's love and expectations for him. These are the words of Alma:

“And now, my son, I have somewhat more to say unto thee than what I said unto thy brother; for behold, have ye not observed the steadiness of thy brother, his faithfulness, and his diligence in keeping the commandments of God? Behold, has he not set a good example for thee?

“For thou didst not give so much heed unto my words as did thy brother, among the people of the Zoramites. Now this is what I have against thee; thou didst go on unto boasting in thy strength and thy wisdom.

“And this is not all, my son. Thou didst do that which was grievous unto me; for thou didst forsake the ministry, and did go over into the land of Siron among the borders of the Lamanites, after the harlot Isabel” (Alma 39:1–3).

Although there is much more to the story, I think you get the picture, and I'm sure Corianton was not confused about his father's disappointment. Nevertheless, even in Alma's tremendous disappointment, he took care to teach his son specifics about his frustrations. The following example is among the many you will identify and find useful as you study the complete account:

“And now, my son, I would to God that ye had not been guilty of so great a crime. I would not dwell upon your crimes, to harrow up your soul, if it were not for your good.

“But behold, ye cannot hide your crimes from God; and except ye repent they will stand as a testimony against you at the last day” (Alma 39:7–8).

Sharon Samuelson: Alma continues to give Corianton much more corrective advice but does not end his conversation on the needed, negative tone of the direct call to repentance. He goes on to be very encouraging to this wayward young man by testifying to him of the surety of the coming of Christ and the healing power of the Savior's Atonement. He then also makes absolutely sure that Corianton understands fully what is expected of him. After reminding him of the mission and reality of the Redeemer, he then reminds him of his particular responsibilities in this way, “And now, my son, this was the ministry unto which ye were called, to declare these glad tidings unto this people, to prepare their minds; or rather that salvation might come unto them, that they

may prepare the minds of their children to hear the word at the time of his coming” (Alma 39:16).

Again, there was more instructive and helpful counsel, but think of a faithful father’s lesson to his somewhat immature son when he tells the young man that his job is to help those he was to teach “prepare the minds of their children to hear the word at the time of [the Savior’s] coming.” That tells us not only about this specific correction and counsel but also the clear understanding that our teaching needs to be so good and so focused on the ability of those being taught that they in turn can appropriately teach their own children. We will come back to this vital point with another example shortly.

Cecil Samuelson: Before we do so, let’s focus for a few minutes on the importance of multigenerational teaching. One of the great lies of the adversary is that “when I sin, I’m only hurting myself.” If only all young parents could somehow immediately know what all of us who are grandparents fully understand. That is, that we are always teaching and our youngsters invariably pick up attitudes, habits, biases, traits, and perspectives from their parents and other influential adults whether or not such transmission was intended. The old saying, “Do as I say and not as I do,” never has had much influence on young minds. Sending children to church in no way resembles taking them with you. So it is with prayer, honesty, payment of tithes, kindness, generosity, and every other virtue as well as with most vices.

Think how short the Book of Mormon would be if the first Alma had heard Abinadi, but while agreeing with what was taught, felt that faithfulness was too risky and therefore remained in conformance with his old friends, the priests of King Noah. Happily, for his posterity and the rest of us, he chose the better part and we have the faithful and remarkable contributions not only of Alma himself, but of his son Alma, his sons, and so on for the generations. How and what we teach our children and how we model our faith before them matters ever so much more than any of us can really understand or appreciate in the midst of the toil and trials of daily life.

Sharon Samuelson: While it is so important to teach each child or young person in ways that best meet his or her individual needs and circumstances, there are also some core concepts and values that need to be taught to everyone. One of our favorite chapters of parenting advice comes from King Benjamin as he educates his three sons on some fundamental principles. This wonderful example is presented in Mosiah, Chapter 1.

King Benjamin’s great concluding address to all of his people was preceded by the counsel and teaching he provided for his own sons. As I review these verses, please think of the applications they have for each of us in our own situations with our children, grandchildren, and other young people in our charge:

“And it came to pass that [King Benjamin] had three sons; and he called their names Mosiah, and Helorum, and Helaman. And he caused that they should be taught in all the language of his fathers, that thereby they might become men of understanding; and that they might know concerning the prophecies which had been spoken by the mouths of their fathers, which were delivered them by the hand of the Lord.

“And he also taught them concerning the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, saying: My sons, I would that ye should remember that were it not for these plates, which contain these records and these commandments, we must have suffered in ignorance, even at this present time, not knowing the mysteries of God.

“For it were not possible that our father, Lehi, could have remembered all these things, to have taught them to his children, except it were for the help of these plates; for he having been taught in the language of the Egyptians therefore he could read these engravings, and teach them to his children, that thereby they could teach them to their children, and so fulfilling the commandments of God, even down to this present time.

“I say unto you, my sons, were it not for these things, which have been kept and preserved by the hand of God, that we might read and understand of his mysteries, and have his commandments always before our eyes, that even our fathers would have dwindled in unbelief, and we should have been like unto our brethren, the Lamanites, who know nothing concerning these things, or even do not believe them when they are taught them, because of the traditions of their fathers, which are not correct.

“O my sons, I would that ye should remember that these sayings are true, and also that these records are true. And behold, also the plates of Nephi, which contain the records and sayings of our fathers from the time they left Jerusalem until now, and they are true; and we can know of their surety because we have them before our eyes.

“And now, my sons, I would that ye should remember to search them diligently, that ye may profit thereby; and I would that ye should keep the commandments of God, that ye may prosper in the land according to the promises which the Lord made unto our fathers.

“And many more things did king Benjamin teach his sons, which are not written in this book” (Mosiah 1:2–8).

Cecil Samuelson: Let me summarize for us the important points of the verses just read.

1. The wise father felt that education generally was very important. He made sure that his sons were, in a broad sense, well-taught and would be men of understanding.
2. He made sure that his sons knew of the prophecies made by the prophets.
3. He taught them about the scriptures and from the scriptures.
4. He reminded these boys that without the scriptures, even faithful parents could not remember enough of the sacred doctrines to teach their children adequately.
5. As we mentioned earlier, King Benjamin understood that he had to teach his sons well so that they could in turn teach their children clearly and thoroughly.
6. He bore powerful testimony to his sons that the things he was teaching them from the scriptures were true.
7. He reminded them that knowing the gospel was not enough. They also needed to keep the commandments of God if they wished to achieve the promised blessings.

Sharon Samuelson: King Benjamin was a great prophet-leader and a tremendous father who also understood the power of his personal example. Obviously, this is a typical characteristic of many prophets and leaders but it is also characteristic of faithful, unsung, and relatively unknown disciples of the Master—like most successful parents.

Cecil Samuelson: One of the most impressive object lessons in the Book of Mormon is the account of the sons of Helaman. Let me mention as an aside my belief that many of the successes and positive traits I see in our own children and grandchildren are the result of the influence of their mother and grandmother. If we had time, I could give you numerous examples of each of the principles King Benjamin taught by precept that my wife Sharon teaches by example. But back to the Book of Mormon and the impressive devotion and courage of the two thousand young men who had been appropriately taught.

You will remember that Ammon, the son of Mosiah and friend of Alma the Younger, went on his many-year mission to the Lamanites and found himself among the people of King Lamoni (see Alma 17–26). After much sacrifice and suffering, multiple miracles led to the conversion of thousands of these good people who previously had never been taught of the Savior who was to come and the saving principles of His gospel. Because these newly minted Christians had accepted the faith, they were persecuted even unto death by the unconverted Lamanites. Through another series of miracles, they were able to escape and were given lands and protection by the then-righteous Nephites. As a sign of their conversion, the adults of this group of new converts covenanted with God that they would never again go into battle or be willing to kill anyone even if it meant sacrificing their own lives (see Alma 27).

Sharon Samuelson: In the following two or three decades, wars and confrontations between the Lamanites and Nephites were almost constant. The situation became so dire that the sons of these righteous Lamanite converts, who themselves had never made the covenant not to bear arms, volunteered to join the Nephite armies with Helaman as their leader. They were valiant in their military achievements and were often miraculously spared from death even when the carnage around them on all sides was extreme. Helaman recorded his affection, admiration, and appreciation for this group of young men in a letter to his military commander (see Alma 56–58). The entire account is interesting and deserves careful study, but these words are particularly impressive as we think about how these young warriors were taught by both precept and example:

“And now I say unto you . . . that never had I seen so great courage, nay, not amongst all the Nephites.

“For as I had ever called them my sons (for they were all of them very young) even so they said unto me: Father, behold our God is with us, and he will not suffer that we should fall; then let us go forth; we would not slay our brethren if they would let us alone; therefore let us go, lest they should overpower the army. . . .

“Now they never had fought, yet they did not fear death; and they did think more upon the liberty of their fathers than they did upon their lives; yea, they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them.

“And they rehearsed unto me the words of their mothers, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it” (Alma 56:45–48).

It is very instructive to understand that these young men, in a time of serious crisis, not only remembered the specifics of what their mothers had taught them, but also knew that their mothers “knew it.” We can only imagine the consistent goodness of these wonderful mothers who probably had no previous insight about what their sons would be called upon to do except they knew instinctively that teaching their children properly by both precept and example was necessary.

Nowhere do the scriptures teach that these mothers were perfect or never made a mistake. The Book of Mormon doesn’t tell us that these remarkable women and mothers never became frustrated or disappointed or that they dusted the furniture every day. It doesn’t tell us that they made sure that every one of their children was enrolled in every music lesson, dance class, sports camp, or were dressed in the latest fashions. What we can learn and must understand is that they were only perfect in the most important things. They taught their sons so very well because they lived their lives completely consistent with what they believed and knew to be true. Children of all ages and times are very astute judges of authenticity and character, and these mothers had both.

Cecil Samuelson: As we speak of teaching children, one of the most impressive tutorials is found in Third Nephi when the Savior appeared to the people on this continent “soon after the ascension of Christ into heaven” from Jerusalem (3 Nephi 10:18). His visit among these faithful people is recorded in chapters 11 through 26 of Third Nephi. All of what He taught to the people at that time is an essential curriculum for those of us with responsibilities to teach the rising generation now. Particularly, in addition to facts and doctrine, our testimonies must be included as well.

It is touching to know that Jesus’ teaching of the people brought them to tears and they pled with Him not to leave them. He sent them home to ponder on the things He had told them and taught them. He then asked them to return the following day. He healed their sick, He lifted up the depressed and discouraged, and as He did so, they bathed His feet with their tears as they kissed them (see 3 Nephi 17). And then Jesus did this:

“And it came to pass that he commanded that their little children should be brought.

“So they brought their little children and set them down upon the ground round about him, and Jesus stood in the midst; and the multitude gave way till they had all been brought unto him.

“And it came to pass that when they had all been brought, and Jesus stood in the midst, he commanded the multitude that they should kneel down upon the ground” (3 Nephi 17:11–13).

And then He and the entire multitude knelt down and the Savior prayed for them to the Father. Although it was not possible for anyone to record specifically what Jesus said in His prayer, it is recorded that “The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and

marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father” (3 Nephi 17:16). Likewise, it was impossible to even conceive of the joy they felt when they heard the Redeemer pray to the Father for them. Then, after the prayer was uttered, Jesus did this remarkable thing:

Sharon Samuelson: “And it came to pass that Jesus spake unto them, and bade them arise.

“And they arose from the earth, and he said unto them: Blessed are ye because of your faith. And now behold, my joy is full.

“And when he had said these words, he wept, and the multitude bare record of it, 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.

“And the multitude did see and hear and bear record; and they know that their record is true for they all of them did see and hear, every man for himself; and they were in number about two thousand and five hundred souls; and they did consist of men, women, and children” (3 Nephi 17:19–25).

If Jesus felt this way about children, and we testify that He did and does, then what does this tell us about the responsibilities we have in our relationships with our little ones? Think of what He did and how He did it. Although no task has ever been too big for Him, He took the children “one by one.” Even with big families or large classes, every child needs and deserves individual attention. Likewise, the attention they require also must be customized to their needs.

Cecil Samuelson: Certainly, the Savior was exemplary in all He did and His focus on the children is no exception. But what of those of us who fall short on occasion or who may struggle with the family challenges we encounter? Since I believe every parent falls into this category at least some of the time, what solace or direction does the Book of Mormon provide for us? I think there are a number of examples, but the one I want to mention briefly is both poignant and relevant.

Sariah, the wife of Lehi and the mother of a family of sons, had, I’m sure, a rather long litany of challenges and frustrations. While little detail is provided except in one example, I have wondered about her feelings and reactions to the developments in her life. We know nothing of her youth, her courtship and marriage, and early family situation in Jerusalem. We do know that she was willing to support her prophet-husband Lehi when he was instructed to leave Jerusalem and essentially all of the comforts and conveniences of their circumstances there. She apparently

went willingly into the desolate desert and endured various hardships that we can only vaguely imagine.

There came a time, however, when the aggregated pressures just became too much for her. You will recall that Lehi sent their four sons back to Jerusalem for the brass plates. They were delayed on their return to the family camp in the wilderness and Sariah did not know why, but feared the worst—as mothers often do. She mourned for them and criticized her husband for exposing them to this serious danger.

When the sons finally rejoined their parents and the rest of the family, great joy was expressed and testimony borne by Sariah of Lehi's calling and revelations. In pondering this account found in First Nephi 5, I found several lessons that are both comforting and instructive.

First, Sariah made no pretense of perfection and she let her husband know of her concerns. Likewise, while Lehi confirmed his vision and reasons for sending his sons on their errand, he did not overly react to his wife's frustrations. Second, while they had both been open, honest and candid, they were careful not to violate their fundamental trust of each other and so, when their sons returned, they were able to experience immediately the joyful occasion together. Third, Sariah confessed that she had learned something from this episode and willingly described that it had strengthened her convictions about the correctness of her husband's charge from Heaven. In addition, she also bore her testimony of the Lord's protection for her sons as they were on His errand (see 1 Nephi 5:8). Lastly, both Sariah and Lehi shared their feelings and insights with their sons in ways that these young men could also profit from their parents' experiences. Remember, it was Nephi who recorded the details of this instructive episode.

Sharon Samuelson: I also love this account. Of course, there are other great examples of good parenting and parental counsel in the Book of Mormon. We talked about the marvelous examples of Jesus and His teaching and blessing of children, but the sacred text also gives us wonderful insights into how God the Father interacts with His children. We all know that our own children are also His spirit children and therefore we need to do our very best to make sure that we follow His example as closely as we are mortally able to do. Let me mention just one example that ought to influence our teaching and rearing of children perhaps more than it sometimes does.

You will likely remember many of the lessons Alma and Amulek taught as they interacted with—and corrected—Zeezrom. He opposed the message of the prophets and preached against the then-future coming of the Savior. Sometimes, as was the case on this occasion, teaching or counseling intended for one child or person is observed by many (see Alma 12:2). Thus, we must be careful that what we say and do—as well as what we don't do—may make an unintended impact on the larger audience.

After accurately describing the issues related to Zeezrom's conduct and behavior, Alma sensed that a perfect teaching moment had occurred. Alma resisted what might have been a temptation to rush right into telling Zeezrom what he must do. Listen carefully to this explanation as to how God would handle the situation; "Therefore God gave unto them commandments, *after* having made known unto them the plan of redemption" (Alma 12:32, emphasis added). He was careful to explain the "why" before he instructed them on the "what."

Cecil Samuelson: We have already discussed King Benjamin’s private family teaching. He also was very attentive to these issues as he taught his people generally in his prophetic leadership role. In his famous benedictory address to his flock at the temple, he taught them about their personal duties and then focused on parental responsibilities. Said he,

“And ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked; neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God, and fight and quarrel one with another, and serve the devil, who is the master of sin, or who is the evil spirit which hath been spoken of by our fathers, he being an enemy to all righteousness.

“But ye will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ye will teach them to love one another, and to serve one another” (Mosiah 4:14–15).

Much like our day, in Book of Mormon times some of the children and young people were inspired to live faithful lives because of the teaching of their parents, and others chose a different path in spite of good examples, careful teaching, and other advantages. I find no evidence in the Book of Mormon which suggests that parents who did their very best in teaching and tutoring their children were ever judged by the mistakes and sins of their progeny. Indeed, the Book of Mormon gives us some of the most profound insights to the essentiality of agency in Heavenly Father’s plan. We don’t have space to explore this theme extensively, but I recommend a careful study of Lehi’s instruction to his son Jacob, found in Second Nephi, chapter two.

Jacob’s father emphasized two critical and foundational doctrines. First is the requirement and centrality of the Atonement of the Messiah, and second is the necessity for agency if there is to be the possibility of progression and eternal life. I very much like this summary verse:

“Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself” (2 Nephi 2:27).

Sharon Samuelson: It is interesting to me to wonder if Lehi gave such wonderful instruction to Jacob not only because he was younger than Laman, Lemuel, Nephi, and Sam, but also because Lehi himself had learned more and understood better these important principles in his later years than he had when his oldest children were young. I think my husband, for example, might be an even better grandfather than he was a father.

In that same great chapter we have just been discussing in terms of agency, Lehi also taught Jacob about the fall of Adam and Eve and its necessary role in allowing them to have children and create multigenerational families (see 2 Nephi 2:19–25).

Cecil Samuelson: And as we think about multigenerational families and parents teaching their children so well that they can in turn teach *their* children, think about Jacob’s own teaching. Perhaps nowhere else in scripture is there an account of the directness demonstrated by Jacob as

he chastised and called to repentance wicked Nephite husbands and fathers. I'll not share all that he said, but listen to these words:

“And also it grieveth me that I must use so much boldness of speech concerning you, before your wives and your children, many of whose feelings are exceedingly tender and chaste and delicate before God, . . .

“Wherefore, it burdeneth my soul that I should be constrained, because of the strict commandment which I have received of God, to admonish you according to your crimes, to enlarge the wounds of those who are already wounded, instead of consoling and healing their wounds; and those who have not been wounded, instead of feasting upon the pleasing word of God have daggers placed to pierce their souls and wound their delicate minds” (Jacob 2:7, 9).

This isn't all that he said about their immoral conduct, but it is clear that he was appropriately influenced by his father, Lehi, and his older brother Nephi, both of whom had by then died. What we do, and don't do, as parents and teachers will have a great influence long after we have exited the stage ourselves.

Sharon Samuelson: While we haven't exhausted all that we have learned, we appreciate what we have been able to think about and share. It is clear that the Holy Ghost will help us find answers and solutions in and through the Book of Mormon about families, children, and parenting. I leave you my testimony that the Book of Mormon is true and its truth becomes even more apparent in terms of our needs and concerns when we devote the time and effort, in the proper spirit, to seeking out its counsel and examples.

Cecil Samuelson: I add my testimony to that of Sharon and express my gratitude to belong to a Church that not only values families and children, but is also so helpful in teaching us about their special and essential role in the plan of our Heavenly Father for each of us. Because it is true that families are forever, it is more important than we can currently even imagine that we do all we can to love our children, to teach them all that we can as they learn the essential truths of exaltation, and make sure that they are sealed to us and we to them in all the generations that come before and after our own.

God does live and He really is our Father. Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer and our prophet-leaders of this dispensation are their authorized agents and servants. The Book of Mormon is true and testifies of Jesus and of families.