



"Plant This Word in Your Hearts"

Show Notes & Transcripts

Podcast General Description:

Follow Him: A *Come, Follow Me* Podcast with Hank Smith & John Bytheway

Do you ever feel that preparing for your weekly *Come, Follow Me* lesson falls short? Join hosts Hank Smith and John Bytheway as they interview experts to make your study for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' *Come, Follow Me* course not only enjoyable but original and educational. If you are looking for resources to make your study fresh, faithful, and fun--no matter your age--then join us every Wednesday.

Podcast Episode Descriptions

Part 1:

Can we approach gaining and keeping a testimony using the Scientific Method? Dr. S. Michael Wilcox weaves science, faith, and testimony together while examining Alma's treatise on faith.

Part 2:

Dr. Wilcox continues to explore the blessings of repentance, the immediacy of forgiveness, and the power of the Book of Mormon in helping the Saints understand Jesus Christ's love.

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Part 2

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- 1:01:52 Alma 34:41 - Rest in the Lord
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- 1:11:42 End of Part II– Dr. Michael Wilcox

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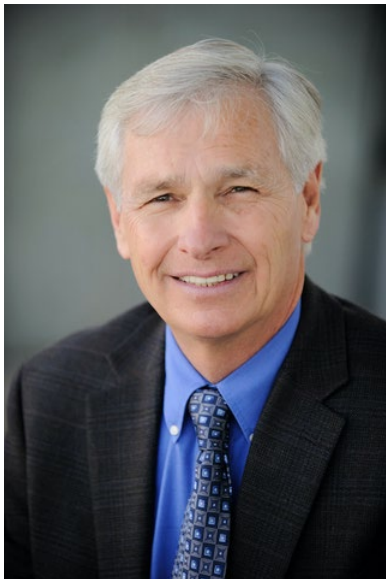
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Biographical Information:



S. Michael Wilcox received his PhD from the University of Colorado and taught for many years at the LDS Institute of Religion adjacent to the University of Utah. He has spoken to packed crowds at BYU Education Week and has hosted tours to the Holy Land, to China, to

Church history sites, and beyond. He has served in a variety of callings, including as bishop and counselor in a stake presidency. He has written many articles and books, including *House of Glory*, *Sunset*, *10 Great Souls I Want to Meet in Heaven*, *Twice Blessed*, and *Finding Hope*. He and his late wife, Laurie, are the parents of five children.

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Alma 32-35 Part 1



GUEST: S. MICHAEL WILCOX

Hank Smith: 00:00:04 Hello my friends. Welcome to another episode of followHIM. My name is Hank Smith. I'm your host. I'm here with my planted and rooted co-host and our wonderful guest, Dr. S. Michael Wilcox.

00:00:15 John, let's start with you. This is Alma 32 through 35, Alma's with the Zoramites. I know this is one of your favorite blocks of scripture. Tell me what you're looking forward to.

John Bytheway: 00:00:27 I did a lot of weeding as a teenager. My dad thought that should be part of my training. And I feel like I probably learned more about these agricultural parables working in a garden than just reading about them and thinking about them, so I'm excited to see how the ground, the seed, the season, the supper, all work together here.

Hank Smith: 00:00:53 We have our guest here, John, he's been with us before, Dr. S. Michael Wilcox. Mike, what are we going to do today? How do you want to lay this out?

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:01:02 I love these chapters. Alma 32 is one of those chapters where you're laying in the scale against all the anti Book of Mormon things you want to lay in and it's going to weigh down. You just don't write something like this without being a prophet. It has a prophetic stamp on it or just a profoundly prophetic stamp. And it addresses something that's very, very relevant to us all, how do you gain and maintain faith?

00:01:33 John likes the agricultural sense of it, and you can key off some other words in Alma 32 and use a whole different image. You can key off the word experiment. And now I'm in the world of modern scientific research. It's amazing for people to say, "Look, I can give you a scientific formula how to learn spiritual truth." If you're in that chemistry, physics, biology, reason world, Alma's for you. You can key off the word exercise and now you're in the Olympics and sports. Or you can key off the

word tree and agriculture, so you've got a lot of metaphors to do here.

00:02:17 And then the Amulek is going to help us understand two words I love in terms of the Savior, His redemption, His atonement. It's infinite. What does that really mean? Infinite? Atonement? And what I call the immediacy of Jesus's mercy. That's a whole theme. It is the major theme of the Book of Mormon. Amulek deals with it there a little bit. We'll just have fun.

Hank Smith: 00:02:51 Like you said, Mike, this is one of those chapters where you think if Joseph Smith just gives us this chapter. And I've said that before in 2 Nephi 9, Moses chapter 1, where you think, "If it was just this chapter," but yet there's dozens and dozens of them.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:03:06 There are, yeah. It's rich.

Hank Smith: 00:03:08 John, Mike has been with us before. But just in case there's someone out there who's thinking, "Wait, who's this?" Will you introduce him?

John Bytheway: 00:03:15 Absolutely. We're so happy to have Dr. S. Michael Wilcox with us. He got his PhD from the University of Colorado, taught for many years at the Institute of Religion up adjacent to the University of Utah. He's spoken at BYU Education Week. Have you even counted how many tours to the Holy Land?

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:03:34 Oh, no. I'm moving probably towards a hundred.

Hank Smith: 00:03:39 Yeah.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:03:39 A lot. A lot.

Hank Smith: 00:03:39 Yeah, a lot.

John Bytheway: 00:03:41 And to China and to church history sites and to Europe. We were talking about some of it beforehand. He's quite the world traveler. I mean, really a world traveler. He has served a variety of callings, including as a bishop and a counselor and a stake presidency. He's written many articles and [books](#) including House of Glory, 10 Great Souls I want to meet in Heaven, Twice Blessed, Finding Hope. I have one that I love right here about Holding On in the Latter Days. Thank you for joining us again. I remember last time taking a ton of notes, and really excited to have you back.

Hank Smith: 00:04:19 John, I have to tell you my favorite Mike Wilcox story from my experience. I've known Mike for a long time now. It had to be 5:00 in the morning. We were taking a taxi in California. It was me and Mike and Whitney Permann and a taxi driver. I thought, "Oh, it's about 45 minutes to an hour ride to the airport." And I thought, "It's 5:00 in the morning. I'll just close my eyes," so I sat in the back behind Mike, and Mike talked to this taxi driver about yo-yos. The taxi driver loved yo-yos and Mike talked to him the entire way. This taxi driver was feeling so energized and I could tell he felt so important.

00:05:01 I've made it a point, John, honestly from that time forward to talk to my driver if they want to talk. Sometimes they're like, "Why are you talking to me?" Help people feel how important they truly are.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:05:14 And I don't know anything about yo-yos, so I'm not sure what I said.

Hank Smith: 00:05:18 Yeah, it was a blessing to watch. It really impacted me, the fact that I still remember it.

John Bytheway: 00:05:24 I love Uber drivers because they want a good rating and you can talk to them about anything. That's a really great place to talk to folks, even share your testimony because they want a good rating.

Hank Smith: 00:05:39 Yeah. And they're stuck in the car with you, right?

John Bytheway: 00:05:41 Yeah.

Hank Smith: 00:05:42 "We've got 30 minutes. Want to hear about the gospel?"

00:05:45 Mike, let's read from the [Come, Follow Me manual](#). It says, "For the Zoramites, prayer consisted of standing where all could see and repeating empty self-satisfied words. The Zoramites had no faith in Jesus Christ --even denied his existence-- and persecuted the poor. By contrast, Alma and Amulek taught that prayer has more to do with what happens in our hearts than on a public platform, and if we do not show compassion toward people in need, our prayer is vain and availeth nothing. Most important, we pray because we have faith in Jesus Christ who offers redemption through his infinite and eternal sacrifice." Mike mentioned those words. Such faith, Alma explains, starts with humility and a desire to believe. "Over time, with constant nourishment, the word of God takes root in our hearts until it

becomes a tree springing up unto everlasting life." Well-written first paragraph there of the Come, Follow Me manual.

00:06:39 Mike, where do you want to go from here?

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:06:42 Let's build a pyramid first. Both Alma and Amulek do talk about prayer in the context of how you gain faith. And just in terms of an introductory thought, the Book of Mormon is always relevant. The Book of Mormon is the story, if you think about it, of two peoples who can't live next to each other. That's the problem we have in a lot of parts of the world. The Book of Mormon begins and ends with a destruction of a people.

00:07:12 What do societies do that cause their downfall, their weakening? It's relevant. One of those things is the central government falls. People lose confidence in it and they break up into tribes. You're going to go next week into another great theme of the Book of Mormon, parenting. You want to know how to be a good parent? The best manual I know of you can read is the Book of Mormon. There are so many parent-child relationships. So many. Like I say, next week it starts up. We'll maybe hit one great parenting thing in chapter 35 of Alma. There are these themes, principles of just war. You're going to come to that here pretty quick, all the war chapters. You want to know how to assess any war in history or going on, the Book of Mormon will tell you.

00:08:00 And it's going to tell us how to build and maintain faith. That's where we're going to kind of go today. This is probably the finest chapter of how to do that. And then we'll talk as we get into Amulek, in particular, the single greatest theme of the Book of Mormon, what I call the immediacy of Jesus in one's life.

00:08:26 So if we would just visualize a pyramid, a pyramid is the most stable structure you can build on earth. That's why they're still in Egypt. They're in Central America. In the Book of Mormon, you find various, I call them faith-shakers, interrupters. Korihor is an interrupter. He wants to interrupt people's rejoicing. Sherem and Nehor, they're faith-shakers. So you want a testimony that you can't shake. I visualize it as a pyramid.

00:09:01 Now we're going to take that pyramid and we're going to divide it into three sections, the top, the middle, and the bottom. On the top we're going to write faith, what I believe. This is what I affirm or attest to. This is the part that I say, "I believe Jesus is the Christ. I know that God lives. I have faith that Joseph Smith was a prophet." Whatever it is you're affirming, you're going to

put it in that top third of the pyramid. This is what I am attesting.

00:09:35 But faith has to have a foundation underneath it. Paul is going to use a couple of words in Hebrews 11. Alma's going to use one of those words. Maybe you talked about it last week in Alma 30, evidence. If you think that faith testimony is based on emotion, emotion isn't a very stable foundation. And I think a lot of people feel that faith is based on kind of emotional things. Joseph Smith said that the ministers were trying to stir up religious feeling. That's not a real solid foundation. Faith is based on evidence. Paul also uses the word substance. And in the footnote, the Greek could also give it assurance.

00:10:33 So in that second section of the pyramid, I'm going to write the words evidence, substance, assurance. Now in the lower one, what does evidence, substance and assurance rest on? So the foundation of my pyramid of faith that Alma is going to help us build. Nobody helps us build it as good as Alma. I'm going to write three things. Faith, evidence is assurance. Substance is based on reason and authority and experience. So I would say my experience tells me, provides me the evidence that what I believe or affirm is true. I haven't had the experience, but I trust the authority. We all have to trust the authority of other people that things exist and that things work well. And I haven't had it, but I trust others' experiences. My reason tells me.

00:11:38 A classic example of that in Alma, you would've talked about last week, when he's talking to Korihor. And Korihor asks for a sign and Alma effectively lays his pyramid out and says, "Look, I know some things. I know Christ will come. I know there is a God. And I know why I know." That's the important thing. If the top part of our pyramid we're saying, "This is what I know or believe," the second and the third layer says, "And I know why I know." It's often important for people to just sit down and say, "Okay, this is what I have a testimony of. Why? What's the evidence in my life? What substance? What assurances hold that up, so that when things shake, it's not going to fall?" Yeah, you can roll a few stones off a pyramid. There are some things on our testimonies that don't belong there anyway. So you can roll a few things off, but the building is going to stand because I not only know, I know why I know.

00:12:43 He gives four reasons. And if you think about it, you're going to get experience, authority, and reason in all of them. He says, "You have the testimony of all these thy brethren." This is the fact that if I sat in a classroom and I said, "I want you all to think of an experience in your life that told you God was there and

was aware of you. I'm going to give you 15 minutes." In almost every LDS class, probably Catholic, other religious classes, certainly in ours, I could say, "I'm going to call on one of you randomly, four or five of you, to share those experiences." And they would have them. The little things that you could say, "Well, maybe yours is coincidental." But there are millions of them. And Alma is saying, "The experiences of all my brethren is evidence that he's there." Then he says, "You have the prophets. That's authority. I haven't seen God, I haven't talked to him, but I trust the consistency in the message of those who say they have."

00:13:52 Then he says, "The scriptures are laid before you." That's his third. Well, Scriptures involve all three of them, but the very fact they exist and that they work when you live them as Alma's going to tell us. And then the last one is the stars, the earth and its movement and its motion testifies there's a God. That's reason. My reason tells me there is something intelligent and benign and good behind all these things. He's got a really good pyramid. Do you understand what I mean by when I say we want to build a pyramid? He knows not only what he knows, but he knows why he knows it.

John Bytheway: 00:14:33 When we look at the prayer of the Zoramites, wouldn't you guys say it's an anti-Christ prayer? They say twice in there, "Our beliefs are not bound down to Christ, and thou hast made it known unto us there will be no Christ." I like where Alma goes in trying to plant this faith in Christ in their hearts.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:14:52 Responding on that, notice how he answers Korihor. He goes on the offensive and he says, "What evidence?" There's that word. "What evidence do you have there is no God? You don't have any evidence. It's just your word only." And if I were Korihor at that point, I'd say, "Wait a minute, Alma, you stole my line. That's my line. That's the line that I, the unbeliever, the challenger gives. What evidence do you have there is a God? You only have your own word." And Alma is saying, "You don't have any evidence, but I do have evidence. And here are my four evidences."

00:15:33 So he's built a really good one. The Rameumptom, if it was pyramid shaped, was not very stable. What's holding up their beliefs isn't very stable. It's not based on evidence. Alma 32 becomes Alma's way of teaching all of us, "I'm going to show you how to build the foundation underneath what you are believing, affirming. And we're just going to get it stronger and stronger and stronger." You go to Central America, they would build those pyramids over one another. They just got bigger and

bigger and bigger, so that's what we're going to do with faith. We're going to just get them bigger and bigger and bigger and all the earthquakes in the world aren't going to knock them down. And that's what Alma wants to help us do in Alma 32.

John Bytheway: 00:16:24 We'll make them so big that tourists aren't allowed to climb on them.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:16:28 So big that even if the tourists climb on them, it won't knock them down, okay? He does use an agricultural because he's with an agricultural people, metaphor. We are in a more scientific world. I'm going to shift to just a little bit, and John, because you talked about agriculture and growing and weeding and things, you come in anytime you want. I'll come back to the tree idea. It's also important what tree we're trying to grow. Alma does specifically tell us what tree we're going to grow and we'll get there when we get to that verse.

00:17:04 There's always so many truths in any chapter. One of the truths of Alma, if you want to say, okay, missionaries, we're going to get some lessons out of here, is be sensitive to your audience and know which audience is willing to listen to you. You don't have time to talk to an audience that won't listen to you or is not prepared. And so what does he do? He turns his back on the one audience and goes to the one immediately that he feels is prepared. There are times, within three or four minutes, you kind of know, "I'm not going to get anywhere with this person." So politely, tactfully, respectfully, you turn your back, although it seems like that's what Alma does. You focus on the audience that is listening and that's prepared.

00:17:50 And we'll see a key word in the first part of Alma 32 here in just a minute. Go to verse 27 for a second. I'm going to come back to some others. He says, "If you will awake and arouse your faculty," sometimes people don't have faith or testimony because they're too lazy, they don't want to put the work into it or they're apathetic, so he's saying, "awake and arouse and try an experiment." I can see Alma saying, "Look, I know you modern people like experiments and you like science, and that's your world and you like empirical reasoning. You're not quite as attuned to nature as we were in my time. Let me talk your language."

00:18:36 Now what is the basic formula for experiments? Well, you start with a what? A hypothesis. Then you gather data, you experiment, you observe, and then you come to conclusions. And then you take those conclusions back up to your hypothesis and you say, "Do I have to change this hypothesis? Does it work

or, well, it looks like it's true, but I'm not going to quit and I'm going to do another round. You see, I'm going to keep doing it." So let's take that particular way and let's look at it. There are sometimes in math and science what we call givens, so there's some givens. Before I plant this seed... If you want to go back to the agriculture image, before I do my experiment, I gather my data, I check my hypothesis, there are some givens. And there are four givens that he gives to us here.

00:19:41 The first given really goes through about the first 21 verses. The given is, if you're going to find out spiritual truth, you start from a position of humility. If you were to count and look at how many times he talks about humble... Now the poor people are humble because they've kicked them out of their synagogues and they have coarse apparel. There are reasons that they're humble. And Alma's going to say, "Look, I don't care whether you're compelled to be humble by your life or you are humble of your own choice. You recognize some things and that makes you humble." But look at how many times... We won't go into great detail. Verse 6, "He beheld their afflictions had truly humbled them." They were in a preparation to hear the word. [C.S. Lewis](#) said, "A proud man will never find God." I'm paraphrasing somewhat. Why? Because a proud man is always looking down on everything. And in order to find God, you have to look up. You have to recognize that there is something greater than you are in order to find him. So their humility prepares them.

00:21:02 If we go down to verse 12, you'll see that word again. "It is well that you are cast out of your synagogue." Sometimes trials in our lives are good things. Why? Because they humble us. And a humble person is usually much better placed to receive understanding and spiritual truth, that you may learn wisdom. Into verse 12, "You are necessarily brought to be humble." So there's that phrase again. You go to verse 13, "Sometimes if a man is compelled to be humble, he seeks repentance." Whatever causes you to be humble is okay. Sometimes I think in a very appropriate prayer for a parent or someone who's worried about a child who's disaffected with the church. Or maybe the prayer isn't answer their prayers, maybe the prayer should be, "Lord, humble them. Because they're not prepared, because there's not humility in them." That's an appropriate prayer. Bring some humility to them like the prodigal son, he got humbled first.

John Bytheway: 00:22:14 This is Jesus's parable of the four kinds of soil. Alma turned his back on the hard soil, as you said, and now that their soil has been prepared because of their humility. Matthew 13 is part

one of this story and now we're in part two. Good soil has just walked up and said, "What about us? What do we do?"

- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:22:35 Right. Yeah. Humility is a plow.
- John Bytheway: 00:22:40 Yeah, harrowing experiences, we might say.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:22:43 And Alma knew something about harrowing because that's the word he uses of his own experience. You can certainly apply the parable of the sower in Alma 32. Very easy to do that.
- John Bytheway: 00:22:53 Yeah. In fact, it comes up in the footnotes in a bit.
- Hank Smith: 00:22:57 It's like Alma saying to them, "You've been treated like dirt. That's wonderful."
- John Bytheway: 00:23:01 Exactly.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:23:02 Yeah, that's good. Yeah, yeah. That's right.
- John Bytheway: 00:23:03 He's like, "Oh, good!"
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:23:04 Yeah. So they've been harrowed. We don't have to go through all of them, but you'll see humble twice in verse 14. You'll see it twice in verse 15. You'll see it again in verse 16. You see it twice in verse 25.
- 00:23:19 Given number one, before I ever plant the seed, if you're going to use that metaphor, before you ever try the experiment, you start from the position of humility, the foundation that you're going to build your pyramid on. You're going to clear whatever's in the way. A building needs ground cleared. So we're clearing the ground, and humility is the cleared ground I'm going to build my faith on.
- 00:23:50 Verse 21, you have echoes of Paul, as I said, concerning faith. "Faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things." That's my fourth given. I'm going to come back to that. If you have faith, you have hope for things which are not seen, which are true.
- 00:24:08 My second given is in verse 22, before I tried the experiment or go to God to try and find out truth, I need to remember something. And so he says, "I say unto you, I would that ye should remember God is merciful to all who believe on His name." He desires in the first place that you should believe even on His word. That's the second given. God wants me to know truth. He wants me to have a tree, realize that my hypothesis is

truth, becomes a law in my soul. He wants me to believe. That's the second given.

00:24:53 The third given is in verse 23. "Not only does he desire me to believe in Him and on goodness and truth, but He imparts his word by angels unto men. Yeah, not only men but women and little children." Third given is it doesn't matter who you are, He will answer, He will speak truth to you. Men, women, children because He wants you to know it.

00:25:23 Now, the fourth one, we go to verse 26, and this is such an important given for people. Sometimes people think that faith is, "I have it or I don't have it." And because we use the word know in our testimony so much, it gives the impression that it's, "I got it or I don't have it." Alma gives us a very important fourth given, verse 26 and verse 21 up there. "Now, as I said, concerning faith, that it was not a perfect knowledge. Even so it is with my words. Ye cannot know of their surety at first unto perfection any more than faith is a perfect knowledge."

00:26:13 You're going to grow a tree, you don't pull the fruit off it the day after you plant it. If we're going to do an experiment, you don't turn a hypothesis into a law and say, "Look, I've discovered one of the great laws of truth, of science, of nature" after one round of experimentation. You don't pull off the word exercise. He's going to say, "Exercise a particle of faith." You don't go to the Olympics after you've lifted weights one or two days. And sometimes people get the idea, "I have it. I'm going to pray. I'm going to get an answer and I've got the perfect knowledge." And Alma's trying to warn us of that. And there's a word that he's going to use again and again, humble. This is a grand chapter to really focus on repetitive words. He's going to use the word and I'll show you some of those, begin and beginneth. So you can't know of a surety.

00:27:16 I remember my daughter coming to me when she's 14 and "I don't think I have a testimony" she said. The parent in you tries not to panic. And so I started talking to her. She had this idea that you had to have a perfect knowledge right at the beginning. And so I said to her, "How do you feel about your Father in heaven and the Savior and Joseph Smith and different things?" And she had all kinds of positive feelings about them, but she had this impression that you know it all at once.

00:27:49 A testimony is a living thing. That's what I like about the tree. It's constantly growing. I go back to our Central America pyramids, you're making them bigger and bigger. That's our four givens. Start with humility. God wants you to know. He will tell

you. It's not going to come all at once. He's going to come to you as we say line upon line, precept upon precept.

00:28:15 Now, I think the Alma says at this point or God says, "Can you accept those four givens?" And if we say, "Yes, I can accept those four givens, Lord," then Alma says, "Okay, we go back to verse 27." Let's exercise a particle of faith. That's where we're going to start, particle or a seed or one brick in our pyramid, one stone at the bottom. What is the particle? "Even if you can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you even until you believe in a manner that you can give place for a portion of my words."

00:29:02 If we go back to the science idea, metaphor, a hypothesis normally, I'm not the great scientific genius of the world, but usually you state it in positive terms. You are not trying to disprove something. A lot of people when they want to examine spiritual truth, they come to it from a position of, "I want to disprove it." You start positive. You can't be absolutely objective about anything. People like to say, "Well, I'm unbiased. I'm absolutely objective." If you're dead, you're probably objective, okay? But if you're a living thing, there's probably a bias.

00:29:46 We have accepted in law and science, innocent until proven guilty. So if I can't get right exactly on an objective line, we have assumed that you're going to lean to the positive. That's all. Just desire to believe. Don't desire to disbelieve. It's a big difference in people's lives. And don't be apathetic. Don't say, "Well, I don't care." Awake, arouse, desire to believe. Now he starts his seed thing. "Now we will compare the word unto a seed." Verse 28 is such a magnificent... I'd put verse 28 alone in the scale of truthfulness. It's just so well written.

John Bytheway: 00:30:34 I loved what you said about that idea of letting something grow. You can't know of a surety at first, which is one of the reasons I love the agricultural metaphor. If you plant an apple tree, how many years is it before you actually get an apple? I think it's four or five or something like that. Later on he's going to talk about faith and diligence and patience. And so I appreciate you mentioning that this is an ongoing process that requires patience.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:31:03 And you can kill the tree as we're going to find out if you're not careful. It's a living, growing thing. It's time we're looking at here.

00:31:16 28, he says, "Give place that a seed may be planted in your heart if it be a true seed or a good seed." I love words. He's

going to drop one of those two words in the rest of the chapter. Which word do you think he's going to drop? True or good?

John Bytheway: 00:31:37

He's going to drop true.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:31:39

In our culture, our LDS culture today, when we bear testimony of something, what word do we prefer? We prefer the word true. Alma is going to drop that. And so is there a difference if I said, "I trust this church is good. I believe the Book of Mormon is good"? And we don't want to eliminate true, it's just that that's the word he drops. From now on, it's good, and he's going to use it a lot. Sometimes it's easier for people who are trying to build their pyramid of faith or grow their tree, test their hypothesis or strengthen their spiritual muscles. Sometimes it's easier to say, "I need to decide if this is good." The ability to say, Yes. I see goodness here is sometimes a little easier than true seems to be all or nothing."

00:32:43

So now four things we're going to observe. If this is a good thing, if my hypothesis and the hypothesis that he is testing here is, is Jesus the Christ, is he the divine son of God, is the word I'm going to plant is have faith and believe in Christ. That's the word. We're testing that hypothesis. Does God live? Does He answer prayers? Are we led by living prophets? He is saying, "If it's good, if your seed is good, if what you're trying to decide is true and is good, you're going to observe four things. The truth or goodness will impact you four ways."

00:33:36

Way number one. So he said, "If you do not cast it out by your unbelief that you will resist the spirit of Lord, behold it will," one, notice, "begin. It will begin to swell within your breast. And when you feel these swelling motions, you will begin to say within yourselves, 'It must needs be that this is a good seed'."

00:34:03

So let me stop right there. This is the language we often use for understanding truth or believing a testimony, something in the heart. So I am saying number one, you are going to have a spiritual, I don't even mind the word physical reaction to goodness and truth. "If the Book of Mormon is good and true, if the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is good and true, if Jesus is the divine son of God," we're going to see how you plant it. That's what 33 and 34 is about. How do you plant this thing? If it's good and true, you're going to have a spiritual, physical, I don't mind the word emotional response to it. I'm just not as comfortable with emotional response to it because you can manipulate emotion.

John Bytheway: 00:34:58 And I like that That's not the only thing that he's going to keep going with other possibilities, which is why this is such a great verse.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:35:06 Yeah, it's such a wonderful one. That's the first, I'm going to feel something. There's different ways of describing it. Alma's going to use motion metaphors. We sometimes use burning. That's a heat metaphor. Burning in the bosom. That's a heat metaphor. Somebody says, "Well, I don't know if I've ever felt a burning in my bosom." Well, have you ever felt a swelling? You try and find the metaphor that works for you.

00:35:33 Now, second thing it's going to do, I'm going to have a physical, spiritual reaction to it. He says, "It beginneth to enlarge my soul." And I'm going to stop. That's number two. We're guessing a little bit sometimes on what these things mean. To me number two is you're going to have a behavioral response to truth and goodness. "If the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is good and true, if the teachings of Jesus are good and true, if the Book of Mormon is good and true, it ought to produce better people. It ought to make me a better person." I should look at Latter-day Saints and say, "These are really good people, not perfect, but these are really good people." And if you examine members of the church or believing people of other faiths, that's exactly what you find.

00:36:36 Now we have our problems. We can be self-righteous, we can be judgmental. We're trying to be as good as we can, but the soul is being enlarged. Mercy is enlarging you. Selflessness is enlarging. Your soul is getting bigger and bigger. You are kinder, you are more hospitable, you are more courteous, you are more loving, you are more forgiving because your soul is being enlarged by your examination and understanding of the teachings of the Savior. So spiritual response number one. Behavioral response number two.

00:37:14 "This is what I'm observing as I do my experiment. I'm observing this, I'm gathering this data. I'm trying to decide what it's doing in my own heart and life." What's the third thing? It beginneth, again that word, to enlighten my understanding. If I go to verse 34, at the bottom line in verse 34, I get the movement in the mind response also. Enlightened there, that's a light image. That's a senses image. But at the bottom of verse 34, he says, "Again, your understanding doth begin to be enlightened and your mind doth begin to expand." That's just such good writing. I wish I could write this well.

- 00:38:07 The mind expands, so now I'm having an intellectual response to truth. Questions should have answers, wisdom should be imparted. Jesus says, "Serve me with all of your heart, might, mind, and strength." We want really smart people. A testimony should make you smarter. That's the third thing. It'll enlighten or expand the mind.
- 00:38:38 And the last thing, "For yea it beginneth," There's our word again, "beginneth to be delicious to me." Now delicious, I've got two sense perceptions here he is using, light and taste. He's going to combine them in just a second in a marvelous literary technique in just a second here. Delicious would mean you don't have to choke it down. If somebody says to you, "Joseph Smith got a revelation that marriage is eternal. This woman that I love, the woman that you love will always be with you." When somebody says that, you shouldn't say, "Oh, that's a horrible idea. I can't choke that down." You ought to say, "Wow, that tastes good." Joseph Smith once said the truth tastes good. It's easy to eat.
- 00:39:33 "Now I'm ready. I've done my experiment. I've gathered, observed data. I've planted the seed and I can see that it's green. It's growing, it's pulling out of the ground. Now I'm ready for conclusions." If I'm going back to my science one, I'm letting Alma talk to the modern world.
- John Bytheway: 00:39:53 I wonder if this would be a good place to talk about people who have never felt a burning in the bosom and therefore don't think they have a testimony. And maybe we could help some people if they've never felt that.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:40:07 The four things, I'll give you an example. We'd like a combination of all four, but for me, I'm more mind-oriented than heart. Some people are going to be more behavior. Some people are going to say, "I believe the church is good because look at the wonderful people that are in it." Occasionally we say, "Well, maybe that's a social testimony. You just like the people and the culture." And Alma's saying that's absolutely fine. That is a testimony that you like that the people are good and you feel comfortable with them and that's part of it. We focus too much on the swelling, burning thing.
- 00:40:49 I remember a woman coming up to me after a class and she's worried about her husband. She said, "My husband's never had an answer to his prayer, a burning in his heart, a swelling." Now I knew the man. He was very intellectual, a brilliant man. And I asked her some questions about him. If you asked him why do you believe in the gospel, his answer would've been, "Because it

makes perfect sense." Now, that is an enlightened mind response. So it's okay to have a mind testimony and it's okay to have a behavior testimony and it's okay to have a burning in your bosom testimony. We're trying to provide evidence. And all these, there's different kinds of experience, authority, reasons, substance that we put underneath it. Some of it is mental, some of it is behavioral and it's okay. You just have to know a little bit about yourself.

00:41:54 Some people are going to have more swellings and some people are going to have more enlightenings and some people are going to have more enlargings and some people are going to have more deliciousness. And maybe at different points in your life, one or the other will become dominant. I don't know if that answers what your concern is, but I think 28 addresses that for people who say, "I've never had a burning. I've never had a swelling."

John Bytheway: 00:42:21 I appreciate you talking about this. And I love that Alma lists all of them. That first one, a physical reaction. This is what then [Elder Dallin H. Oaks](#) said in March of '97. He said, "I have met persons who told me they have never had a witness from the Holy Ghost because they have never felt their bosom burn within them. What does a burning in the bosom mean? Does it need to be a feeling of caloric heat like the burning produced by combustion? If that is the meaning, I have never had a burning in the bosom. Surely, the word burning in this scripture signifies a feeling of comfort and serenity. That is the witness many receive. That is the way revelation works. Truly, the still small voice is just that, still and small."

00:43:07 And [Elder Jay E. Jensen](#) said once, "As I have traveled throughout the church, I have found relatively few people who've experienced a burning in the bosom. In fact, I've had many people tell me that they become frustrated because they have never experienced the feeling even though they have prayed or fasted for long periods of time."

00:43:26 So I'm glad we're talking about this, and I'm glad that Alma talks about these different ways and some of us lean more towards one than another.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:43:36 One of the things that swells is joy. It's an expansive kind of a thing. If you want some other words, what is it that's swelling? Well, maybe it's peace is a word that we often use, but for me, joy is probably the best word that causes that swelling in the heat of it. But we all are different people and we respond to truth and goodness in different ways. Instead of focusing on

always true and always burning the bosom, Alma has given us some other things to assess as evidence as we try and build our pyramid, we grow our tree. We're trying to find eternal laws.

- Hank Smith: 00:44:30 The burning in the bosom verse is in Doctrine and Covenants section 9, I frequently tell missionaries, "Keep going over to section 11." There's a great description here to Hyrum Smith of exactly what we're talking about, verse 12, "And now verily, verily, I say unto thee, put your trust in that spirit, which leadeth to do good, to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously. This is my spirit. I say unto you, I will impart unto you of my spirit which shall enlighten your mind, which shall," you just said this, Mike, "fill your soul with joy."
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:45:11 Yeah. And you've got two of those in that thing. You've got the behavior one and you have the mind one. You're going to respond to truth and goodness. It should make you a better person and it should give you wisdom and understanding.
- Hank Smith: 00:45:29 And fill your soul with joy.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:45:31 And fill your soul. And swell... You actually got three. And it's going to swell it. What's going to swell it? The joy and the happiness is going go up.
- John Bytheway: 00:45:40 A question that Alma could be asking here, how do you know if a seed is good? What is the only way to know if a seed is good? Well, you have to plant it. And I feel like the long answer is verse 28 and the short answer is verse 32. Verse 32, "If a seed grows, it is good. If it grows not, it is not good."
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:46:00 Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 00:46:02 The wonderful long answer, verse 28, is about this specific seed.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:46:08 Now he gives a few warnings so that you don't get to verse 32, you're going to throw it away because you started with a desire not to believe. So he says, "Don't start there." And even in verse 28, "Don't resist it." Some people can resist. You have to wake, arouse. And once it's growing, he's going to say, "Don't neglect it." It's growing. It's not all at once. You've got to care.
- John Bytheway: 00:46:36 This phrase that Alma uses twice, at least where I'm looking twice, is, "Will you give place? Will you open up?" I mean here he is saying, "Okay, I heard the prayer on the Rameumptom and I'm going to plant something new that you have not heard or don't currently believe. Please don't resist this. Will you give

place?" I love that little phrase, a willful suspension of disbelief idea.

- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:47:06 Well, it's also time. Give it a little time. Give some place. Sometimes our hearts go, "Well, I've got so many other things in my life, and religion's not important." And that's a problem more and more in the world. "No time, no desire to give place for eternal truth in my life. I've got too many other things I'm worrying about."
- John Bytheway: 00:47:30 And that's why the good soil just walked up to him because they knew they needed something. Those that were humbled. The others may be saying exactly, "I don't need religion. I don't have time for that."
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:47:41 And that's why maybe a proper prayer for ourselves or somebody else is, "Lord, something needs to humble me, or someone I love so they're prepared." Because if you're not humbled, you're not prepared. That's one of the givens.
- John Bytheway: 00:47:54 Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 00:47:56 As you both have been talking about soil and seeds, the phrase comes to my mind is, "A broken heart and a contrite spirit." So I've got this hard heart and the Lord says, "You've got to come to me with a broken heart or open soil."
- John Bytheway: 00:48:12 Give place.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:48:13 Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 00:48:13 Yeah.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:48:13 Yeah, that's good.
- Hank Smith: 00:48:14 There's got to be a crack in that soil to put the seed in.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:48:17 Yeah. That's a good observation. Well, he's ready to make some conclusions now. I've got my hypothesis. Jesus is the Christ. God lives. I've planted it. It's beginning to do these things in my life. I come to my conclusions. He says, verse 29, "Now behold, would not this increase your faith? I say unto you, yea." Then the warning, "Nevertheless, it hath not grown up to a perfect knowledge." He's going back to what he said before, "This is a process. But behold, as the seed swelleth and sprouteth and beginneth to grow, you must need say," here's my conclusion, "the seed is good."

- 00:49:02 There is something in this Book of Mormon. There is something in this Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. There is something in this man from Nazareth, whatever it is I'm trying to find out the goodness and truth of. Why? Because it sprouts and begins to grow. "Now behold, will not this strengthen your faith? Yea. It will strengthen your faith, for you will say," conclusion, "I know this is a good seed. There's something here. There's something good in it. Now, it's not perfect knowledge. It's beginning. It can die very quickly, but I see there is goodness here."
- 00:49:42 Verse 31, "Are you sure this is good? I say unto you, yea. Every seed bringeth forth unto its likeness." Then the verse you looked about, "If it's not good, it's not going to grow." You're not going to have mental, behavioral, physical, spiritual, you're not going to have those responses to it if you truly were humble and you gave place and you didn't start with a desire to disbelieve and you didn't resist what was happening.
- 00:50:10 I think Alma is saying, "Look guys, I know what it's like to resist and be apathetic and not do this because that's what I did as a young man. So I'm trying to tell you don't do what I did because I killed my seed at one point in my life. So don't do that." And then 33. "Now behold, because you have tried the experiment, planted a seed, it swells and sprouts and begins to grow. You must need to know the seed is good. Is your knowledge perfect? Yes, your knowledge is perfect in that thing. In your first round of experimenting, in the scene of the seed sprout up, in the laying of your foundation of your pyramid. Your faith is dormant and you know it has swelled your souls. It's your mind,
- 00:51:05 he mentioned some of those things in 28, "Your understanding begins to be enlightened. Your mind begins to expand. Is not this real? I say unto you, yea, because it is light. And whatsoever is light is good because it is discernible." You can discern these things. This is not some nebulous spiritual thing. You can see it. You can see it in people's lives. You can understand it in your own life. And then he gives this wonderful, again, this is the English major in me, "After you have tasted this light..." Now there is an actual word, synesthesia. Okay? It's an actual literary term. Synesthesia, when you mingle senses.
- 00:51:55 So there's a poem that talks about the silent sun. Usually it's a source of light, so he's mingling. You don't taste light, you see light. And that's good writing. I just have to say that's good writing, okay? When you see it in poetry and other places, you see it all over, synesthesia. Here's a great example. "You've tasted the light.

Hank Smith: 00:52:23 That's what you call the pen of heaven.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:52:25 The pen of heaven. Yeah. God's a good writer, okay? He inspires. There are places in the Book of Mormon that as a person who likes to read good writing, I say, "This is really, really well done. It's well done in what it teaches. It's well done in its execution. It's well done in its choice of words. It's well done in its repetition of important words like good and beginneth as we're going to see take root and nourish. I love good writing.

John Bytheway: 00:52:58 That short point he makes, "This is discernible. You can tell." I love that point. There's a different feeling after a general conference talk than after the third quarter in a football game. It's different. It's discernible. And sometimes it's nice to point out, "Can you tell how different this feels like being in the temple as opposed to going bowling?" It's discernible. And so I love the phrase. I hope to point out to my kids, "Can you tell how different this feels right now?"

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:53:33 Yeah. The phrase that goes with that, "Is not this real." So you have both of those. Well, now he's going to give his last final thing on this, 36. "After you've tasted this light, is your knowledge perfect?" That's the end of 35. "Behold, I say unto you, nay", you know something, but you don't know all that you need to know because this isn't enough to take you through life. This isn't going to get you through life. There's going to be, if we go to the parable in Jesus, there's going to be some hot days that are going to come. There's going to be some shaking that are going to knock your stones down. You can't lay aside your faith. You only exercised it to plant the seed to see if there was goodness in it. "But behold," 37, "as the tree..." Now we know what kind of a plant it is for the first time. It's a tree.

John Bytheway: 00:54:31 It's not tomatoes. It's not cucumbers. It's a tree.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:54:34 It's not the sower or parable where it's grain. It's a tree. And we're going to find out what tree it is in a minute. "As the tree begins to grow, you will say, 'Let us'," I like the us, "let us nourish it with great care that it may get root, that it may grow up and bring forth fruit unto us. Now behold, if you nourish it with much care, great care, much care, it will get root."

00:55:03 If I go back to my science analogy, you don't turn your hypothesis into a law after one experiment. The scientific community would throw you out. What do you do? You do it again and again and again and you have other people duplicate what you've done. And after you've gone a few rounds, you begin to say, "Maybe my hypothesis is a theory that's a little

stronger." Now, I don't want a theory testimony. I want a law testimony. And I've got to experiment a lot and observe a lot and gather a lot of data before I begin to say, "I've discovered a law. There isn't anything I'm going to observe that's going to change my assumption that I made at the very, very beginning that I have found something true and good."

00:55:57 If Alma's correct in this, at 74, my faith ought to be a lot stronger than it was at 18, shouldn't it? And at 25 and at 38 and at 57 and at 92. I'm at the point in my life now where I've gathered enough data, observed enough, experiment enough, watch the tree grow enough that I would say, "There isn't anything you can show me or tell me that is going to shake this. I'm in law territory."

00:56:33 Now, I ought to be even better at 85, shouldn't I? Now, in a sense, as we look at the church, who probably ought to have... I'm making comparisons here. I'm doing this for fun. But in a sense, because he's continued to observe and gather data and water and nourish his tree, who probably has the strongest tree in the church? A man who's in his 100th year.

00:57:01 Okay, I think that's what he's saying. You never quit. You don't neglect it. If you do, it'll wither away. And 39, "It's not that it wasn't good. It's not that the fruit wouldn't have been desirable, it would've made you happier and fulfilled your life, but it's because your ground was barren and you wouldn't nourish it, so you can't have the fruit."

00:57:24 There's a wonderful quote by [Henry David Thoreau](#), who wrote in a letter to a friend so I can pull it out, of his testimony of his life and how he felt about a God and truth and things that in his life he had been looking into. He said, "I know that I am. I know that another is who takes an interest in me, who knows more than I do, who's creature I am, and yet in some sense whose kindred I am. I know the enterprise is worthy. I know that things work well. I have heard no bad news."

00:58:18 And that's the way I feel about Christ and God and my faith and life. We're human. People are human, but I've heard no bad news. "Hey, the enterprise is worthy. Things work well. There is a God who takes an interest in me. I am his kindred." Now, I suppose I could neglect it and the tree would die even at 74, but I don't anticipate at this age in my life of anybody saying anything or scaring me out or shaking. I have enough evidence. Now I want to continue to produce evidence. You do reach a point where you're starting to pull the fruit off the tree if you want.

- 00:59:03 And now he tells us what the tree is in verse 40. What tree is this? "If you will not nourish the word looking forward with an eye of faith to the fruit thereof, you can never pluck of the fruit of the tree of life." So if we asked Alma, "Where does the tree of life grow?", his answer would be in the human heart the tree of life grows. We each grow our own tree of life that we will feed on for eternity.
- 00:59:38 When we get to Amulek in 34, he is going to say, "There are four purposes of life, and the answer to every one of them is..." I'm jumping the gun a little bit, but the answer to every one is grow a tree. Why? Because if you don't, you're going to starve when you get into heaven because you're going to eat the fruit off your own tree. And even in this life, we begin to pull the fruit off our own tree. "If we", keywords again in 41, "nourish it, nourish the tree," here's our begin, "it begins to grow. Nourish it by your faith," which means you continue to experiment and observe and gather data and "great diligence, patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof. It will take root. And behold, it will be a tree springing up unto everlasting life."
- 01:00:32 What is the food that will keep me in everlasting life? The fruit of the tree of life. Where does it grow? In my heart. So I'm going to feed myself. I'm not going to pull off your fruit. I'm going to pull off mine. And because of your diligence, your faith, your patience with the word in nourishing it, it may take root in you. By and by, you'll pluck the fruit thereof.
- 01:01:01 Now, I'm going all the way back to Lehi's dream, because the Book of Mormon is building. Lehi's dream gives six adjectives to describe the fruit of the tree of life, sweet, white, desirable, joyous, precious, beautiful. These are coming from Nephi, Lehi, and the angel. There are seven of them. Alma gives one. He's going to repeat some here. And if you go back and you look at 1 Nephi 8 and 11, you'll see that every time one of those words describing the fruit of the tree of life is used, it's couched in a comparative phrase. And Alma does the same thing here. He's read as Lehi and he's read as Nephi. The fruit isn't just precious. It's most precious. There's nothing more precious than it. And it's not just sweet. We have an expression how sweet it is. Okay, well, you want to know what the sweetest thing. It's the fruit of the tree of life. It's God's love. "It's sweet above all that is sweet. And it is white above all that is white." Those are all repeated from one Nephi.
- 01:02:17 And now Alma adds, "Pure above all that is pure." We could add beautiful, "exceeding all beauty, most joyous to the soul. And you'll feast upon this fruit until you are filled. You'll hunger not,

neither shall you thirst." We're all looking for a fulfilled, happy, joyous life, and Alma would say to you, and I, as my mother used to say to me when I was growing up, she would say, "Michael, you were born with the fruit in your hands. Don't go out on some search out there thinking that you're going to find greater happiness or greater joy or greater peace, something more precious, something more desirable out there than you already have. You have the most sweet, joyous, beautiful, desirable, precious, purest thing. And don't waste time. Nurture it. Let it grow in your life. You'll not hunger, you'll not thirst. Your needs will be fulfilled."

01:03:21 "Then my brethren," she would say to me, "Then my son, you shall reap the rewards of your faith and your diligence and your patience and your long-suffering, waiting for the tree to bring forth fruit unto you."

01:03:35 We don't need great searches in life. Alma's directing us to maybe because he wasted time in his own life. He's trying to say, "I'm going to give you the sweetest, whitest, purest, most precious, beautiful, desirable, joyous thing."

Hank Smith: 01:03:54 Wow.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 01:03:55 That's Alma 32. I base my whole testimony of the Book of Mormon on that chapter alone.

Hank Smith: 01:04:01 So good. I love it when we find sister chapters. 1 Nephi 8, Alma 32. You can take them both and put them side by side. John, one of the first times I heard you speak live, we were speaking together. It was a best of EFY if you remember those. You were speaking first. I was speaking second. I was hoping that you would stick around to hear me speak. You didn't. But the talk was [Weed Your Brain, Grow your testimony](#). Is that right?

John Bytheway: 01:04:33 Yes.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 01:04:34 That's a good way of saying it.

John Bytheway: 01:04:36 We use the word gain for testimony a lot, which is, a stock market term and a really good smelling laundry detergent. But I feel like the scriptures use grow a lot more with metaphors like this. I had four S words, and I still wish the last one were better, so maybe you guys can help me. But I feel like the process here is, first, prepare the soil, and that's the parable of the four types of soil in Matthew 13. That's the poor among the Zoramites were good soil. Alma asks them to plant this seed, which is this

word. He compares to a seed. The word is Christ and His mission. And then there's a season, that it needs time to grow roots. And that's where you have to nourish it with faith and diligence and patience.

- 01:05:23 And then lastly, we just talked about it, the supper. I wish I had a better S word than the supper, but that's the tree of life, soil, seed, season, supper. Like you said, Hank, those are sister chapters. It sounds like they're all related because Alma talked about the tree of life, and that's the supper. And in verse 39, he said, "Your ground is barren." And the footnote says, "Oh, go to Matthew 13. Your soil's not prepared." And Hank, you showed me something in verse 42 where it says, "Ye shall feast upon this fruit." And you showed me 1 Nephi 8:28 is contrasting.
- Hank Smith: 01:06:04 And Mike, I'd love to hear your comment on this. The group that makes me nervous in Lehi's dream are those who come to the tree, partake of the fruit and then see the building and walk away. But it says in there, I think it's 1 Nephi 8.
- John Bytheway: 01:06:21 8:28. I have it in my notes.
- Hank Smith: 01:06:24 That they taste of the fruit. Alma points out, "You feast upon this fruit until you are filled that you hunger not. Neither shall you thirst." So I take that to mean you no longer care about the building because you're full.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 01:06:40 I think that's really good. If we're looking at the Lehi's dream, there's a number of lessons. One of the main ones is, there isn't anything more desirable than the fruit, so don't waste your time looking. Grab onto the rod, get through the mess and get there because the building is empty. They haven't got anything to do in there. That's why they're all looking out the windows making fun of everybody because they're bored.
- 01:07:04 But Nephi and Lehi are saying, "Never underestimate the power of the building in its ability to pull you away or to distract you because it's powerful." Nephi says, or Lehi said, "We heeded them not." You don't listen. Even in Korihor, you're taught how to deal with the distractors of the faith shakers. The anti-Nephi-Lehies and Jerushon, they basically say, "Look, we know moral nonsense when we hear it, so we're not even going to listen." They don't listen. Again with Korihor, he doesn't make reply.
- 01:07:50 So one of the ways you sometimes deal with it is not cowardice. It's sometimes depending on who it is out there that's trying to shake the faith, whatever, Zoramite or Korihor, or Sherem or

Nehor, you got a number of them, sometimes the wisest strategy is you don't need to listen and you don't need to reply. Even Jesus at his trial was silent. Sometimes the best thing is silence. The building's powerful. That's the world. It represents the world.

01:08:30 When Jesus is at Caesarea, Philippi, remember he asks His disciples two questions. "Whom do men say that I am? And who do you say?" Why that first question? Well, the first question's there because we are so darn concerned. We are herd animals. That's just what we are. We don't like to stray too far from the herd. We don't mind being in the left lane or the right lane of a six lane highway. We don't want to be in the borrow pit. We don't want to get pushed off that much. We are constantly adjusting and looking and saying, "What does the world say and think?" no matter what age we are. And sometimes you have to not heed the world.

01:09:16 Be aware it's powerful. Be aware that it's powerful. It can even pull people away who have tasted the most precious, beautiful, most desirable, sweetest, purest thing they've had in their life. But I think your point is well taken. They haven't feasted on it yet. They took a taste of it. The building's powerful enough to pull you away even after you've tasted. They will cause you to doubt that you ever thought it was sweet. So beware. Alma's got lots of warnings in here. He's the best person to do it. Why? Because of his own youth. He knows something about resisting the Spirit. God didn't speak to Him in a still small voice. He made the earth thunder and shake. He had to knock him over to get his attention.

Hank Smith: 01:10:12 In today's world, Mike, it seems that you can poison the tree faster than before. You can go out and almost search for poison that kills the tree.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 01:10:23 Yeah, you can pull into your life. This is a pretty good instrument to find things that you do have to be a little careful. Now, we don't shy away from... Alma didn't. He goes out and does all he can to bring people to him. He does know what audience to talk to though that is a point that you see in there. People can put the wrong kinds of things in their tree and kill it. Be careful of what you're bringing into your life. What are you reading? What are you watching? What environments are you in? Those are all very, very important things in today's world.

John Bytheway: 01:11:05 I have a test question for Alma 32 and 33. I ask my students, "What is the seed Alma asked them to plant?" And I always warn them, "If you say faith, the only thing wrong with that

answer is it's incorrect." The seed is not faith. He answers it in Alma 33, verse 22 and 23, and I'll edit a little bit. "Begin to believe in the Son of God that He will redeem, atone, resurrect, and judge." Verse 23. "Now my brethren, I desire you plant this word in your hearts. And as it beginneth to swell, even so nourish it by your faith and behold it will become a tree springing up in you." The word he's asking them to plant is exactly what the Zoramites said they did not believe in their prayer. He's asking them to plant Christ and His mission in their hearts and nourish it with their faith.

- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 01:12:02 Yeah, that's the hypothesis he's wanting them to prove to be true. 33 and 34 is how you do that.
- Hank Smith: 01:12:11 What about my primary song, John? Faith is like a little seed.
- John Bytheway: 01:12:16 Faith is like a little seed, but what Alma specifically is talking about here is plant Christ and his mission, in your hearts. The give place for this testimony of Christ... Something that according to what I just heard that caused me to be astonished beyond all measure that you don't believe in. "Give place that I can plant Christ and his mission, in your hearts and see if it doesn't swell." And then requires faith to plant it, but the seed isn't faith. Not here anyway.
- Hank Smith: 01:12:48 So it's a testimony of Christ that is a little seed. And if planted, it will grow.
- John Bytheway: 01:12:53 Yeah. The word is, "Christ," oh, I love it, "the son of God will redeem, atone, resurrect and judge. Plant this word in your hearts."
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 01:13:03 If we go to 33 and 34, we start to get a little bit practical. Sometimes you read Alma 32 and you would say, "Okay, plant the seed, do the experiment. Talk to me in practical terms. What do I do to plant the seed or to test the hypothesis that Jesus, faith is in Him? Both Alma and Amulek are going to give us some things that are practical that I can do.

Alma 32-35 Part 2



GUEST: S. MICHAEL WILCOX

- Hank Smith: 00:00:01 Welcome to part two with Dr. S. Michael Wilcox, Alma 32 through 35.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:00:08 I start in 33 and I'm looking for keywords and ideas. Let me go to verse 1 where they ask the question, how they should plant the seed. See, they're saying, look, get out of the metaphorical world for a second here. Now, would you get into the real world. How do I plant the seed of the word that you've spoken, or in what manner they should begin to exercise their faith? How do I experiment? How do I plant? How do I exercise? Give me the specifics. He begins with prayer. That's one of the things, I'm digging the hole when I pray. Alma's going to do the same thing, verse three, "Remember you have read what Zenos, the prophet of old said concerning prayer worship. You think you have to be in the Rameumptom, but you worship a merciful God. Thou art merciful, you have heard my prayer. Where?"
- 00:01:08 The nice thing I like about this and Amulek's prayer is it's the suggestion one of the ways you plant the seed is you make God a friend, you make him a father, you talk to him all the time. And we do do that: you're driving home, you're walking, he is a companion and he hears you in the wilderness. That's verse four. He's giving different places and different contexts, but the totality of both Alma and Amulek's teachings of prayer is you don't have to do it on the Rameumptom one time a week. You do it all the time everywhere on every subject or issue that you need to. That's the message because that kind of relationship with God, he's my father. He's my friend. I talk to him about whatever I need to talk to him about. I talk to him whenever I want to.
- 00:02:05 A great French philosopher Pascal said, "God gave us prayer so that we would have the dignity of a casual relationship with God," so I talk to him in my wilderness. He said, "I pray concerning those who are mine enemies," I really like this prayer about his enemies. He's going to give another one at the end of it that's almost the opposite, "I prayed about my enemies and thou didst turn them to me. They weren't my

enemies anymore." That's a good prayer, "Oh, God, thou wast merciful when I did cry unto thee in my field, and when I did cry unto thee in my prayer, thou didst hear me. When I did turn to my house, thou didst hear me in my prayer. When I did turn into my closet," closet, it's an old English word, it means bedroom: it doesn't mean where you hang your clothes. If you want it to be where you hang your clothes, he would hear you there too, "And I prayed thou didst hear me. Yea, thou art merciful unto thy children when they cry unto thee to be heard of thee and not of men and thou wilt, hear them wherever, whenever upon whatever subject."

00:03:24 That's one of the ways you plant the seed, you gain that relationship. You heard my cries in the midst of my congregations as I was walking down the street, and I talked to you. Don't you do that? I talk to him all the time. My mother taught me that: you can talk to your father in heaven anywhere, anytime, on any subject that you need. I can get upset with him sometimes and his dignity somehow can handle my wondering who's running the world and how it's being run. Verse 10, "Thou hast heard me when I was cast out and despised by mine enemies," maybe he quotes that because that's the situation of the Zoramites. They've been cast out of the synagogue. Maybe that's why he chooses this particular passage, "Thou didst hear my cries and was angry with mine enemies, and did visit them in that anguish with speedy destruction."

00:04:23 I like what happens with the enemies in verse four better than what happens with the enemies in verse 10, right? Verse four, "He turns them to me," here, they're wiped out. 11, "Thou didst hear me because of mine, afflictions and my sincerity and because of thy son, thou hast been thus merciful unto me. Therefore, I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions for in thee is my joy. Thou hast turned thy judgments away from me because of thy son," which is the seed he wants to plant. He's quoting that for a number of reasons. In answer to the Zoramites' question, "How do I plant this? What do I do? Could you get practical?", and the answer is, you talk to God all times about all things everywhere. That's one of the ways we plant the seed, and we begin to feel the mercy.

00:05:22 Verse 12, what's the second idea he's going to give us? Well, I plant the seed by study and reading the scriptures. Now, the problem is that we say these things so often that we get repetition fatigue. It's almost like we say, "I know what they're going to say. Say your prayers, read your scriptures. Go to church." That's why I like to say talk to God anywhere all the time about all things and search the scriptures there. You're

going to find Jesus in them. I'm going to give three words in just a second. Then, he goes to Zenos verse 14, "Now behold, my brethren, I would ask if you have read the scriptures. If you have, how can you disbelieve I'm the son of God?", I love the way he says it.

00:06:16 If you read the Gospels, how can you not love him? I don't know how somebody can read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and not love Jesus. I don't know how you can read 3 Nephi and not love him. We're going to see when we get to what I call the immediacy of Jesus, you're going to pray and you're going to read the scriptures. But in the scriptures, you are particularly looking for the personality, the character, the attributes of I would say the Father and the Son and his mercy. It's his mercy that Alma really wants us to understand. And then he gives us an example out of the scriptures, and I would call this the third thing in Alma 33 that Alma tells us to do in order to plant the seed, the practical things. I pray all times everywhere about all things. I look for Jesus. I read the scriptures.

00:07:22 And the key word now in verses 19, really through the end of chapter 33, which is a shorter chapter, is, "Look." So, the third thing I'm going to do is I'm going to look and I'm looking for Christ, and he gives the story of Moses in the wilderness and he holds up the bronze serpent and he says, now you start looking for the looks in verse 19, there's two of them, "Whoever would look upon it might live, and many did look and live. Few understood the meaning of those things and this because of the hardness of their hearts, but there were many who were so hardened they would not look. Therefore, they perished."

00:08:12 And he gives us two reasons why they wouldn't look. Why won't I look for the Savior in the scriptures, in my life, in Conference, in the Book of Mormon, whatever? Now, the reason they wouldn't look, they did not believe it would heal them. I don't know how knowing about the life of Jesus is going to solve my problems. And then you think about your problems and that's what some people say, "I just don't believe." Now, if you put yourself in the scriptures, which I think we ought to always do, let's say you've been bitten by the serpents there with Moses, and he makes the bronze serpent, holds it up and says, "This'll heal you. You just have to look," and you say, "I don't believe it," and 20 of your neighbors go and they look and they come back healed and they say, "Look, it's going to work. I'm telling you, it works." You will find in the life for the Savior healing, understanding for whatever comes to you in this case. It's healing that they're looking for.

- 00:09:17 The second reason they don't look is in verse 21, "If you could be healed by merely casting your eyes about," he's putting them in the story that you might be healed, would you not behold quickly? If I was say, "Well, if I were there, I would've gone. I would've crawled up to the tabernacle to at least see, what have I got to lose, my life?", or would you harden your hearts and beyond belief and be slothful that you would not cast about your eyes, that you would perish? What are the two reasons people don't look? They don't believe, and they're too lazy, "I don't believe it. I'm not interested. Takes too much effort."
- 00:09:55 "If so, woe shall come upon you, but if not so, then cast about your eyes." Look at all those casts about your eyes, behold, look, look, look. That's the key idea here is look. John starts the gospel in John 1 with some of the first words Jesus ever speaks in the Gospel of John. The very first words are, "What seek ye?", which is a pretty good question. And they say, "We want to know where you live," and then he gives what I call the invitation and he gives it to all of us. He says, "Come and see," and all through the Gospel of John, you're being invited to look at him.
- 00:10:43 Pilate at the last very end says, "Behold the man," see, I'm looking at him. The woman at the well in John, "Come, see a man that told me everything I did." You are healing of the blind man, you are constantly being invited and Alma is doing that over and over again: look, look, look, cast your eyes about behold, cast your eyes about don't be slothful, don't disbelieve, he is merciful, he will heal you, John's four words, "He will redeem, atone, resurrect, and judge you," I want you to plant that in your heart.
- 00:11:21 I have then in the New Testament the invitation, "Come and see." In the Doctrine and Covenants, I call them the three Ls, I put them together, one's in section six, beautiful thing: at the very end of section six, he says, "Fear not, little flock. Do good. I don't condemn you. Go your ways, sin no more, perform the work with soberness," and then the invitation, "Look unto me in every thought, doubt not, fear not." That's another place where I say, "Boy, you hit the nail on the head, Joseph, with that one right there."
- 00:12:05 "Look unto me in every thought," all day, anywhere, whenever you need. And then I go to section 19 and I get my other two in verse 23, "Learn of me. Listen to my words and then do something," look, learn, listen, and then walk in the meekness of my spirit and you will have peace. So, all my life long, I'm looking, learning and listening in every thought. I come home

from work, I'm tired, I'm a little impatient, and my kids want to play. And the Lord says, "Mike, let me heal you. You're a little sick right here. You just want to go and read the newspaper. Look unto me in that thought, learn of me. Listen to my words. Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for such is the kingdom of heaven. Now, walk as I did."

00:13:15 Now, what do I do? I put the paper down and I play with the kids. You have a commandment that you can't keep, or it's hard. It's difficult. And the Savior says, "Look unto me in that thought. Learn of me. Listen to my words. Father, if it would be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done. Now, walk as I walked." You're having trouble forgiving somebody, and the Savior says, "Look unto me in that thought. Learn of me. Listen to my words. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

00:13:58 It doesn't matter what thing is happening in our life, what challenge, what joy, what fear, Alma's words, Jesus's words, Alma's, "Look, cast your eyes," Jesus', "Come and see," the Doctrine and Covenants, look, learn, listen. He's always giving us that invitation, "Look, look, learn. Listen, and you will find an answer in my life that will heal everything you need healed, that will fulfill everything you need fulfilled, that will bring you any kind of peace or any kind of joy you want."

00:14:42 Believe it because other people around are going to tell you that's what's going to happen to you. Don't be unbelieving, don't be apathetic. Don't be slothful. Don't be too lazy to do it. Look and learn and listen and come and see, and I think that's what he's doing here in the context of what he's doing here. And when you get into 34, what is it that I need most from him? I need forgiveness. I need mercy. I do need answers, I need peace, but the greatest peace and forgiveness that he wants to give us is, "Let me take your shame away, let me take your guilt away and let me take your sorrows away. Let me take your regrets away. I can do that, but you have to look."

Hank Smith: 00:15:32 I love how specifically Alma and Amulek tailor their remarks based on what they heard in the prayer. It's so good because they don't say it, but we all see it, "Oh, according to the Rameumptom philosophy, you say the same prayer, you say it in the same place, and then you go home and never speak of God again until you come back," and it's fun to see how they address things. And coming up in 34, "You have elected us to be saved while all else are thrust by thy wrath down to hell for which holiness, oh God, we thank thee."

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:16:13 Yeah.

Hank Smith: 00:16:14 But Alma 34 is, actually, he doesn't save arbitrarily this group and this group, he atones and he's willing to forgive. That's what you're saying Alma 34 is going to be.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:16:28 Final thought in 33: the word redeem, we like the word atone and atonement, we can look at that word in just a second, 22, he says, "He will come to redeem his people." Redeem means to regain possession in exchange for a payment, he's going to redeem us. It's a financial.

Hank Smith: 00:16:52 Like, to buy them back.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:16:54 Yeah. The Savior uses different metaphors to say what he did for us: he's a lawyer who pleads for us, he's a physician who heals us, he's the banker who pays the redemption, the price. But I like that: regain possession in exchange for a payment. Now, we know what the payment was. It's what he called his hour, his whole life. I think he was doing that. And there is a question we ask each other, certainly husbands and wives do and Jesus's relation often in the Old Testament in particular, but also in the New is that he's the bridegroom, and we're the bride.

00:17:38 Just before I proposed to Laurie the day before I was at her house, and I was so in love with this girl, the first time I saw her, my heart went out of me, I could never call it back. We dated for a while. We were up here visiting her parents, and I was sitting in the chair alone, and she walked into the room and I pulled her onto my lap

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:18:01 Hoping her father wouldn't see it, and I asked her a three word question, "Are you mine?" Now, that's a question a bridegroom asks his bride often, isn't it? She's gone now. I can't ask her, but I do still, I look to heaven and I say, "Laurie, are you still mine?" Now the word redeem suggests that you gain possession in exchange for a payment and sometimes I think I can hear the Savior say to us, "Are you still mine? Are you still mine?" What answer do I want out of Laurie? I will always be yours. What answer does Jesus want out of us as his role as a redeemer who's paid a price for us to be his? I think he often asks us in the poignancy of the bridegroom, "Are you mine? Are you still mine?" And we want to always answer, "I will always be yours, Lord, I will always be yours because I understand the price that you paid for us."

- 00:19:36 We can get into 34. Amulek is doing a similar thing. He has what I call the three greats. He refers to preparing yourself again, verse three at the bottom. I will go a little faster here. "Prepare your minds. Remember, humility prepares the mind. Your afflictions prepared you." So he is reminding us some things that Alma did back in 32. He uses the word experiment again in verse four, and the word goodness, Amulek's been listening. He brings it back. Prepare your minds. You've tried the experiment. You want to know if it's goodness. Now you have a question. See, now, here's the first of the three greats in Alma 34 verse five, "We have beheld that the great question which is in your minds is whether the word be in the Son of God or whether there shall be no Christ. The great question for all of our lives has to do with our relationship and our belief in the Son of God."
- 00:20:43 That's the great question. He says, we've got three witnesses that he is actually, for my brother, Alma has testified that the word is in Christ. That's one witness. Zenos is two witness that redemption comes. Zenock is three, Moses is four. Why not five? The fifth witness is in verse eight. Amulek gives his own now, I will testify Alma, Zenos, Zenock, Moses meaning the bronze serpent where you look to be healed and I do because Amulek might say just like Alma, I used to be like you. I needed forgiveness, I needed healing. The second great is in verse nine. It's the great plan. What's the great plan of the eternal God? It's an atonement. Now we have changed the word atonement. Here it's an atonement. It's a verb back in chapter 33 verse 22, "He shall suffer and die to atone." That's a verb. Here it's a noun.
- 00:21:59 An atonement should be made according to the great plan. The great plan is the answer to the great question. The great question. The great plan is an atonement must be made. Now we've changed it to the atonement. Atonement, it comes from a Latin word, adunamentum. It means to unite or to bring unity. What is the atonement? It comes from that at one, it was never used until the 16th century. William Tyndale is the one who makes atonement a religious word because it's used in the 16th century. I could make an atonement between two friends. We don't use it that much anymore. It's the word that certainly for LDS people that is belongs to Jesus and we've made it the thing that he did instead of the consequence of what he did. I've pondered that quite a bit. I'll hit it again a little bit here in just a second.
- 00:23:08 Originally, atonement meant to unify. We're going to be one with God, one with Jesus, one with each other. And his whole

life he was doing that. He was trying to bring an atonement to make us one with God. That's the great plan of God. The answer to the great question. And how was this unifying us with God and Jesus and one another going to be done, verse 10, the third great by a great and last sacrifice. The answer to the great question is the great plan. The great plan depends on the great sacrifice and that sacrifice now we come to a really important word in 10, so let's go there. "It is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl. It shall not be a human sacrifice, but it must be an infinite and an eternal sacrifice."

00:24:17

Verse 11, "Now, there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood, which will atone for the sins of another. The man murders will our law, which is just take the life of his brother? I say unto you, nay, that will be an unjust act. How can justice be satisfied with an unjust act? But the law requires the life of him and that murder. Therefore, there can be nothing which is short of an infinite atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world." And you're going to see that word again. You see it again in verse 14. "This is the whole meaning of the law. Every wit pointing to that great and last sacrifice and that great and last sacrifice will be the son of God. Yea, infinite and eternal." So one of the things I love about Amulek, I say the two big words for me in Amulek are the infinite nature of Christ's mercy and we'll get to the immediacy of his mercy.

00:25:24

Infinite, does that mean infinite in time? Does it mean infinite in space? Does it mean infinite in number? I ponder this a lot. Infinite by definition, if you go online or dictionary, Oxford Dictionary, you're going to see these words. Think of it in terms of Christ's mercy, unlimited or unmeasurable in extent of space or time, unbounded, endless, extending indefinitely, inexhaustible. Now, if I think of the atonement as something that happened in Gethsemane, which is okay to think.

00:26:20

If I think of the atonement as something that happened at a specific time and place, part of my brain says, "I've made it finite." I don't want it to be finite. It has to be infinite meaning right now as you and I talk, the mercy of Christ is doing what the mercy of Christ does. It is infinite. It is infinite in space and number. As I try and apply it to myself, I might say it this way, I actually prayed this before I got here this morning, "Lord, I know you told Peter that we forgive 70 times seven, but that's a very small number because your mercy is infinite and that's a much larger number than 70 times seven." And I don't know about your life, but seven times 70 is not enough for me. It's not enough. What do I need? I need an infinite atonement.

- 00:27:42 He will always forgive again and again and again and again and again. He is always forgiving. Well, then I go to Gethsemane, I say, "Then what happened in Gethsemane? What is this?" Alma 5, you've already talked about it where he says he had to come to earth and undergo afflictions and sickness and death, and so he would know how to succor his people. I think his whole life was his atonement. I ask the question this way, did Gethsemane create in Jesus, did his life living here on earth and before this earth, did Gethsemane give Jesus infinite mercy? Did it create something in him so that he could forgive and forgive and forgive and forgive and forgive? The atonement is not something that he did, but it is something that was created in him so that his mercy would never end.
- 00:28:52 I don't know if I'm explaining this well enough because I'm pondering and think it through a lot. In order for it to be infinite, it has to keep going. There's that wonderful moment in Moses 7 with Enoch when he sees God weeping, and I love that, I love Moses, and he sees him weeping over the sins of the world and it's the Father he's looking at and the Father says, "I'm going to send the Son," and then Enoch understands the heart and the mind of God. And in verse 41, it says, "It came to pass that the Lord spake unto Enoch and told Enoch all the doings of the children of men, wherefore Enoch knew and looked upon their wickedness and their misery and wept and stretched forth his arms and his heart swelled wide as eternity and his bowels yearned and all eternity shook," shook means to overflow.
- 00:29:52 That's the greatest verse in all scripture to understand Jesus, to understand Gethsemane and the atonement and his whole life, if we read it and it came to pass that the Father spake unto the son and told the son all the doings of the children, of the men, all the doings of Michael Wilcox, wherefore Jesus knew and looked upon their wickedness, their failings, their humanity and their sadness and misery and guilt and shame and wept over them. And he stretched forth his arms literally on the cross and his heart swelled wide as eternity and his bowels yearned for us and all eternity overflowed with his mercy, his compassion, his forgiveness. That's there. It's still there. That's what it means. An infinite atonement, he still weeps. He's still in Gethsemane in that sense. I don't want him to suffer forever. But as long as you look at humanity and love them, he is going to weep.
- 00:31:09 Something happened in his existence life, pre-mortal, post-mortal, but probably a lot of it according to the Book of Mormon and himself, something that happened in his life and in his hour that created, I believe empathy. I can't come up with a word strong enough, infinite empathy that will enable him to

forgive and forgive and forgive and forgive and forgive each of us all the time. An infinite atonement goes on. It's a powerful word. Amulek is helping us understand the unlimited, going back to my definition, unlimited or unmeasurable in extent of space or time I would add, or number of individuals and number of things they do. So that unbounded... endless. It wasn't something that happened in Gethsemane, "Okay, it's done now and we all get to cash into the atonement." It was the creation of a heart that stretches wide as eternity. It's a creation of a mind of a soul, just like his fathers that can forgive and forgive and forgive and forgive and forgive and will go on doing it for all eternity, for every world he ever creates, for any soul, whoever asks for it because the heart was created.

00:32:46 Our goal in life, what we want to do somehow in life and in our existence is get there too. There's a beautiful moment in The Brothers Karamazov where Alyosha Karamazov comes to understand the mercy of Christ. He goes out and throws himself on the earth and weeps and loves the earth and loves every being on the earth, and he feels the light of all the stars coalescing in his soul, filling it with love and compassion and empathy and mercy, and he prays for forgiveness. Now, when you and I pray for forgiveness, probably not you, you're better people than me. But when I pray for forgiveness, who am I thinking about? I'm usually thinking about me. Forgive me Lord. But in Alyosha's dream, Dostoevski says he prayed for forgiveness. Oh, not for himself, but for all creatures, for all creation he prayed, believing that they would be praying for him.

00:34:03 So somehow one day in our existence, you and I want to get there. We want to get to the point where something is created in our hearts that was created in Christ's heart, that exists in the father's heart that allows one to infinitely bring atonement, infinitely bring forgiveness, compassion, understanding that flows over the edges of the universe because the universe isn't big enough to hold it all. It shakes with it. It pours out. It yearns. I love the infinite sense of atonement as not happening once, but happening all the time forever. I want it. I want the heart of Jesus. I'm not there, but we want it.

John Bytheway: 00:35:09 Thank you so much. The idea of the atonement being an event or series of an event. I mean, we can point to those few days, but the outcome, the effect is, as you said, infinite. It's still happening. He's still weeping. One of the things that I heard you say once, I don't remember where, "Have you ever noticed that whenever someone in the Book of Mormon asks for forgiveness, they get it?"

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:35:40 Yeah. That's the net we're going there right now. That's what I call the immediacy of Christ's atoning grace and forgiveness.

Hank Smith: 00:35:53 There's a portion of the manual that I wanted to read. This ties into what you just said, John. It's under the Alma 34. It says, "Even when we know Jesus's power to save is infinite and eternal, we might sometimes doubt that it applies to us or to someone who has sinned against us. Elder Bednar once spoke of people who seem to have faith in the Savior, but they do not believe his promised blessings are available to them. And then this question, what might keep us from fully receiving the Savior's power?" That fits really well, that somehow everyone else's sins can be forgiven, but I'm some sort of special sinner that's outside of the realms of infinite somehow.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:36:38 Yeah, he uses a phrase... If we go back to our idea of, "Okay, practically what do I do?" Well, I look at the Savior and the more I look and understand about him, the more I begin to understand the infinite nature of his mercy. And that gives me, in verse 15, he says, "Faith unto repentance." For me, it will work, in response to your comment. If I understand the infinite nature, now I have faith in him that I can do it. I'm included. And then this beautiful phrase, "Thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice." But I like the second phrase better, "Satisfy justice." That's the legal metaphor. I like this one. And encircles them in the arms of safety. Now, that's not somebody pleading at the bar for me. That's somebody holding me in his arms. That's mom, that's dad. This is my big brother who wraps his arms around you and keeps you safe. We all know that feeling, don't we? To have somebody just hold you. It's a beautiful image. Encircles them in the arms of safety. Then he repeats that, "Faith unto repentance." He repeats it two more times in that 16th verse. I'm in the arms of safety. I'm encircled by the infinity, the unlimited, unmeasurable, unbounded by time, space or number of Christ's and my father in heaven's mercy. Now with that, I get the prayer again. Okay, now he's going to tell me what I specifically can pray for. We go back to that and he uses that phrase, "Faith unto repentance," again. I can get that faith unto repentance by understanding his love. So now verse 18, what do I cry for? First of all, cry unto him for mercy. He is mighty to save. Humble yourselves and continue in prayer unto him.

00:39:05 And now he gives the same thing that Alma taught. You can pray to God anywhere, over anything, any time, any environment. Cry in your fields, over your flocks, into your houses in the morning, in the midday, in the evening, against your enemies, against the adversary, over your crops, over your

flocks. But this is not all, 26. You must pour out your souls in your closets and your secret places and in your wildernesses. I love that expression. Prayer we use so much that it takes some of the power out of it, but we pour out, we pour out. God says to us sometimes, "What's in your heart today, Michael?" I say, "Well, Lord, I'm sad today. Well, pour it out. I'm worried today. I have anxiety about my grandchildren. Well, pour it out. I'm full of joy and gratitude. Pour it out. I love to hear of your joys and gratitude. My soul is full of guilt today. Pour it out. Pour it out."

00:40:17 There's nothing you can't tell him. And when you do not cry unto the Lord, your God, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for the welfare and also for the welfare of those who are around you. You are walking down the street, you're in the middle of a class, you're... whatever. You don't have to kneel down. You just talk to me because I will always listen. And that is one of the ways that we plant the seed and we nourish the plant. And by having that kind of a relationship with God. Now he gives us something else. 28. Again, remember the context of this is how do I plant the seed? Well, give me some doable things. Well, you're going to look, study the scriptures, you're going to pray in all things and now you're going to be charitable.

00:41:15 In verse 28 and 29, he says, "After you've done all these other things, you're praying, you're reading the scriptures, you're looking, you're humbling yourself, if you turn away the needy and the naked and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance if you have it, to those who stand in need, I say unto you, 'If you do not any of these things, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing. You're as hypocrites. Therefore, if you do not remember to be charitable...'" So that's the next thing. Be charitable. One of the ways we plant the seed is to be charitable. And I am going back to The Brothers Karamazov. Sorry, it's the most Christian novel ever written. And there's an old Russian Orthodox father named Father Zosima. He is asked by a woman in the village who's lost her faith. She used to believe as a child, she doesn't anymore, and she wants him to prove to her there is a God and he's loving and to give her back that innocent childhood faith.

00:42:21 And he says, one cannot prove anything here, but it is possible to be convinced how by what? Now our whole conversation today has been trying to answer that question, right? How to be convinced of the truth of things. This is Dostoevsky answer. With all due respect to Amulek, Dostoevsky does better because he's going to tell us what charity will do in terms of increasing your faith and understanding the knowledge of God. Here he's

saying, "Look, if you're praying for something, you need to be charitable." Dostoevsky is saying, "The very act of your being charitable will grow your tree, will build your faith." So she says, "It's possible you convinced how, by what?" By the experience of active love. Try to love your neighbors actively and tirelessly. The more you succeed in loving, the more you'll be convinced of the existence of God and the immortality of your soul.

00:43:37 And if you reach complete selflessness in the love of your neighbor, then undoubtedly, you will believe and no doubt will ever be able to enter your soul. This has been tested. This is certain. This is exactly true. Active love is labor and perseverance, and for some people, perhaps a whole science. And in that very moment when you see with horror that despite all your efforts, you not only have not come near your goal but seem to have gotten farther away from it, you want to be even more charitable than you are. You will suddenly reach your goal and will clearly behold over you the wonder working power of the Lord who all the while has been loving you and all the while has been mysteriously guiding you.

00:44:37 Amulek says, "Be charitable, that will help you grow your seed and your faith." Dostoevsky says, "To the extent that you are charitable and love other people and actively serve them, you will come to where you know exactly what God is and no doubt will enter your mind." Why? Because we say God is love and the connection of your loving heart with his loving heart comes together. I do that.

John Bytheway: 00:45:07 In verse 29 where it says, "Therefore, if you do not remember to be charitable, ye are as dross." Well, that struck me once because I thought I've seen that word before. And at the beginning of the story, in Alma 32:3, when the poor of the Zoramites come up, he says, "They were esteemed by their brethren as dross because of their poverty." I think it's the only two times the word appears. Amulek is saying, "You're not dross because you're poor. You're dross if you don't remember to be charitable." You misunderstand what dross is.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:45:43 Yeah, it flips it the other way.

John Bytheway: 00:45:45 I was just reminded of Sister Annette Dennis' talk and general conference where she talked about Kafar. That means to cover and kafat. That means an embrace. And look at that, verse 16, "Mercy can satisfy the demands of justice and encircles them in the arms of safety." There's the kafat, the close embrace. And that's the close word related to Kafar for atonement. While he that exercises no faith unto repentance, and Amulek says, "Is

exposed." I thought how interesting the atone is to cover. Without that we're exposed and we're not in the arms of safety.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:46:27

If we go to 31... I love this word and it's the idea that, John, you had mentioned earlier that there's lots of themes in the Book of Mormon, but the single most important theme has to do with forgiveness. And it's introduced in the title page when he talks about the purposes of the Book of Mormon. I sometimes like to do a larger to smaller thing with it. The Book of Mormon says, "It's to show you what great things God did for your fathers." There's three purposes. To show you what great things God did for the fathers, for people in the past, teach you the covenants and to testify that Jesus is the Christ.

00:47:11

And we cut it short right there. We give half of the purpose. We say the purpose of the Book of Mormon is to testify Jesus is the Christ. I can sometimes hear the Lord say, "Finish the sentence, guys. There's more to it." Comma, the Eternal God, comma, manifesting himself unto all nations. The purpose of the Book of Mormon isn't to testify he's the Christ. The purpose of the Book of Mormon is to testify he's the Christ and he will manifest himself to all nations. So then I say, "Well, what's smaller than a nation?" Well, people. Ammon, when he gets back from his mission with the Lamanites, he says, what did he learn from that whole experience? In Alma 26, "I learned that God is mindful," is the word he uses. Mindful of all people. He will manifest himself unto them. I manifest myself to all nations. I'm mindful of all people.

00:48:07

You go to Alma the younger when he comes out of that coma in Mosiah 27, and he says, what did he learn from it? God remembereth every creature, manifest to all nations, mindful of all people, remembers every person. You go to 3 Nephi 17, the little children. Bless and pray for every child. How? One by one. Now what is the great thing that he did for the fathers that we want him to do for us? We want him to forgive us. And so now we come to story after story after story, and we're going to get the word from Amulek here and then I'll just give you a few examples. You could give them yourselves. He says, in 31, "I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation." You want to be forgiven now, right now, this hour, this day, it's available. Now is the day.

00:49:22

That's how I read that. I don't read it at threatening. I read it, "You want it. Now is the time and the day of your salvation." Therefore, if you repent, harden not your hearts... Love this word. Immediately, shall the great plan of redemption be

brought about unto you. Immediately. The infinite nature and the immediate nature of Christ. So now I say, "Okay, he's going to manifest, be mindful, remember, bless and pray for every one of us. You start looking at the Book of Mormon, it says, I really want them to know that I'm going to forgive them. I really want them to know. I don't care who they are, what they did, whatever circumstances. And I'm going to do it immediately." You could start with Nephi's "Oh wretched man that I am". So let's go to Enos. Enos prays. What does he pray for? Forgiveness. Does he get it?

- John Bytheway: 00:50:24 Yes.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:50:25 Yeah. When?
- John Bytheway: 00:50:26 Immediately.
- Hank Smith: 00:50:26 Immediately.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:50:27 Immediately. And the Lord says, "Boy, I hope they got the message. I better give them another story." So now you go to King Benjamin's people at the beginning of Mosiah. What do they pray for? I mean, we go to the actual words. They pray for forgiveness. Do they get it?
- John Bytheway: 00:50:45 Yes.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:50:45 When?
- John Bytheway: 00:50:46 Immediately.
- Hank Smith: 00:50:46 Immediately.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:50:48 Immediately. The Lord says, "I wonder if they got it. I better give them another example." They might think that I give it to people like Benjamin's who were keeping all the commandments pretty good, or Enos who was a good boy. How about a rebellious person out to destroy the church? Will they get it? So now let's do the sons of Mosiah and Alma the Younger. Do they get it?
- Hank Smith: 00:51:12 Yes.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:51:14 Yes. They asked for it. Do they get it? Yes. When?
- John Bytheway: 00:51:17 Immediately.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:51:18 Immediately. And the Lord says, "I hope they got that. I really want them to get this. I better give them another story." So now we go to the Lamanites. How about the Lamanites? Now I've got King Lamoni. What does he ask for?

Hank Smith: 00:51:36 That his evil spirit will be rooted from him.

John Bytheway: 00:51:39 Rooted out of him.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:51:41 Yeah. You can go to the exact word. They're all asking for forgiveness. Does he get it? Yes. When?

John Bytheway: 00:51:49 Immediately.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:51:51 Immediately. Well, within a couple of days he's out. Right?

John Bytheway: 00:51:53 He's unconscious for a while.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:51:56 He's getting it immediately. How about his father? Does he pray for it?

Hank Smith: 00:52:02 Yeah.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:52:03 Yeah.

John Bytheway: 00:52:04 Give away all my sins. He gets it.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:52:06 I'll give away all my sins. Immediately. How about Zeezrom? How about the Lamanites who come into the prison and Helaman five to execute Nephi and Lehi? And the clouds of darkness swirl around them. They cry out because Amminadab tells them, "You got to cry out to Jesus-"

John Bytheway: 00:52:25 To the voice.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:52:25 ... cry out to God. And they cry out. And what happens? Do they give forgiveness? When?

John Bytheway: 00:52:32 Immediately.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:52:34 Immediately. In the darkness of 3 Nephi, what does the Savior say to the people? All you who were spared, will you now turn to me and let me heal you? Do you not understand the infinite and immediate nature of my atoning grace, my redemption? It is immediate and it is infinite. You need more than 70 times 7? Don't worry.

- Hank Smith: 00:53:03 It reminds me of the sacred grove. Wanted forgiveness of my sins. Almost the first thing that's said, "This is my beloved son. Hear him. Joseph, my son, thy sins are forgiven."
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:53:13 What are the sweetest words we want to hear in our ears? Thy sins are forgiven thee. Now, I know that because of policy and situations that there has to be sometimes... I can't give you a temple recommend for a year. We do these things. But the Book of Mormon testifies again and again and again. You ask for forgiveness, you cry out. You want forgiveness. You are crying out to a being, who however, whenever, in whatever manner he got it, his soul is filled with mercy. It's infinite, unbounded, unlimited, unmeasurable in time, space, and number. And you get it immediately. Now for that, what do I do? I had to do something for that, right? Well, if I go back to Mosiah 25 verse 10, notice the phrase here, "When they thought of the immediate goodness of God and his power in delivering Alma and his brethren out of the hands of the Lamanites, they did raise their voices and give thanks to God." I like that phrase, "the immediate goodness of God."
- 00:54:35 If I go in the Psalms, I chose this Psalm because we all know it. We just don't know the Joseph Smith translation of it. This is Psalm 30, verse five, "His anger endureth, but a moment, in his favor is life. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." We often use that in terms of affliction, but it is specifically dealing in a certain sense with, "Maybe I've got him a little upset at me for something."
- 00:55:09 Now, the Joseph Smith version says it this way, "For his anger kindleth against the wicked, they repent and in a moment, it is turned away and they are in his favor and he giveth them life. Therefore, weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning and he giveth them life." Therefore, you may weep. The implication is you're weeping over your sins, your failings, your humanity, transgressions.
- 00:55:49 What do I do to give back to him for what he's done? Well, at 32 and 33, I like to do it in the context of planting the tree. That was what started this whole thing off, plant the seed. He's going to give you and I four things to do. Don't procrastinate. If I get it immediately, maybe I ought to use that word for myself too. 32, he says, "Behold this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God."
- 00:56:20 What I would ask according to the contact, what is the best way to prepare to meet God? Well, I stand before God one day and the Lord says to me, "Michael, many, many years ago, I gave

you a very, very precious seed. It was a seed from the tree of life and I told you to plant it in your heart and nourish it and grow a seed and grow a tree. I want to see your tree. Show me your tree." And if I say, "Oh, Lord, look at my tree." I'm prepared to meet him. And then he says, "Behold this day, the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors." What's the most important labor I can perform in life? Answer, grow a tree, grow a tree. And then he goes on, "Now, as I have said unto you before, and as ye have had so many witnesses, I beseech you do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end. For after this day of life which is given us to prepare for eternity."

00:57:31 What's the best way of preparing for eternity? Grow a tree. Grow the tree of life in your heart. Now you're prepared. If we do not improve our time, what is the best use of our time while in this life? Grow a tree. I grow the tree. Now I'm prepared to meet him. I've performed the most important labor of life. I'm prepared for eternity. I've improved the time gave me in this life.

00:58:04 You'd almost like to stop here. In some sense, you don't because he then talks about an awful crisis. If I'm not ready.

Hank Smith: 00:58:15 We'll just sum it up like this, procrastinate later.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:58:19 Yeah, that's where you go.

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 00:58:22 He does some final things. It's almost like we all in a talk. I'm just, "Okay, I'm out of time. I'm going to throw a few things out really quick for you because I've talked about the most important ones." If you want some more practical things that you're going to do, he says in verse 37, "I want you to remember." Okay, remember what? Well, one, work. How do you plant the tree and help it to grow and nourish it? Well, you work. It is work, as Dostoevsky said, "it's work."

00:58:52 And then he throws out another one. "Don't fight the Holy Ghost. Receive it and listen to it. Take upon you the name of Christ and be humble. Worship God, wherever and live in thanksgiving daily." You and I all do that. Don't we all do that? You come to the end of a class, "Oh my gosh, I only got five minutes and I had eight more things I want to say," so you throw them out really quick.

00:59:16 Work, take the Holy Ghost, humble yourself, worship God wherever you are, be grateful. 39, "Pray continually." "Be careful of the adversary," verse 40, "don't argue with each

other. Quit reviling against those who disagree with you." We are so full of reviling one another. So don't revile even against those who've treated you bad and cast you out. And then be patient. With patience, bear your afflictions with a firm hope that you'll one day rest.

- 00:59:49 Throws all those things out at the very, very end, which is kind of what I did. I'm in the spirit of Amulek here. You throw them out at the end really, really quickly, Alma 34. It's the infinite and the immediate nature of Christ that I think is most important in that chapter. And then his, as I say, grow a tree, that'll prepare you to meet God. It's the labor you need to perform.
- 01:00:13 It'll prepare you for eternity. It's the best use of your time. You just grow that tree. And then when you meet him with joy, you'll say, "Look at my tree, Lord," and he'll say, "Oh, what a wonderful tree. Look at that tree." I don't want to show some half-dead, dry, shriveled-up thing.
- 01:00:31 The Lord says, "Wow, this is your tree. I can see where you've been spending your time. I mean, you're not prepared for eternity because you know what we eat up here in heaven?" "What do you eat, Lord?" "Well, we eat fruit of the tree of life." The catch is everybody eats the fruit from their own tree. I'm being somewhat facetious.
- John Bytheway: 01:00:52 I love that phrase too. Live in thanksgiving daily. There's some really great Amulek phrases here, aren't there?
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 01:00:58 Yeah. You could spend a lot of time in any of those last ones that he does. Of course, you could spend a lot of doctrinal time in the same spirit that you have here, but it breaks the aura that sometimes Alma 34 gives.
- John Bytheway: 01:01:13 I want to bask in immediately in how you took us through the Book of Mormon and look who asks for forgiveness and look how fast they get it.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 01:01:22 They always get it. Everybody that asks for forgiveness... In the Doctrine and Covenants, same thing. He's forgiving constantly in the Doctrine and Covenants.
- John Bytheway: 01:01:32 Forgiving Joseph Smith over and over again.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 01:01:34 That's the infinite nature. It's a good thing because I need it. There have been times in my life when I have felt God's

forgiveness before I asked. He can forgive faster than I can repent.

- Hank Smith: 01:01:52 I like that last phrase in verse 41. One day, you will rest. Yeah, one day, a future day. Mike, thank you for walking us through these chapters. I took so many notes. I think I've filled up every margin.
- John Bytheway: 01:02:08 Me too.
- Hank Smith: 01:02:10 I've started taking notes on a piece of paper over here because I couldn't get them all on the page. Let me ask you a last question. You kind of alluded to this when we started. Here is a well-read teacher for we're going on five decades now of teaching the gospel? Doctorate degree. I think your dissertation was on C.S. Lewis. Pretty good writer.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 01:02:35 Yeah, it was fun. If you're going to do a dissertation, do a fun one, do one you're going to enjoy.
- Hank Smith: 01:02:43 Well-read, well-educated, having taught the gospel and you love this book. How do you come to a love of this book? You've read I would guess hundreds if not thousands of books. How does this one hold up?
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 01:03:00 The teaching of it has been helpful and if there's one thing that I brought away from trying to be wide-read, some of it is I just had thrown into my life the chance to do a lot of travel. To go to many, many places and learn a lot, and I like learning.
- 01:03:20 My mother addicted me to learning when I was young. I've read a lot. I have read a lot. Sometimes I need to teach something. I need to teach Dostoevsky because I'm in Russia, so you read it.
- 01:03:31 I always come back after reading anything else to Joseph Smith, to the Book of Mormon, to the Pearl of Great Price, the Doctrine and Covenants with an increased appreciation, testimony, love confidence in it because it's comfortable in the company of great things I have read. I always come back astonished by the power of the Book of Mormon and the scriptures that we have and the doctrines.
- 01:04:08 I never come back thinking, "Hey, obviously this was written by a farm boy from New York." This is written by men who live long lives. Benjamin's a wise old man. These are people who have had great experiences and you sense that and you see it.

- 01:04:28 And like Thoreau says, I don't anticipate I'm going to ever come back to the Book of Mormon and think, Wow, somehow this thing just doesn't cut it. No matter what I read, look at become acquainted with my appreciation, love, faith in conviction of the goodness if you don't want true, okay, but the goodness, the sheer beauty and goodness of what the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith offers us, what we have in the church is remarkable. We didn't get to 35. Aren't we supposed to get to 35?
- Hank Smith: 01:05:08 I think so.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 01:05:08 35. The Zoramites, gosh, what evil people, the poor go and the anti-Nephi-Lehites accept them and these Zoramites are so mad. "Send those people back to us," probably because they were workers or something for them.
- 01:05:23 I don't know, but you're going to come into starting with chapter 36, a whole new theme that's all over the Book of Mormon, how to be a good parent. Now I get to watch Alma be a good father. You get to watch Benjamin be a father. You get to watch Mormon be a father.
- 01:05:41 You get to watch Alma the Elder be a father. You get to watch Helaman be a father. You get the mothers of the sons of the Stripling warriors. It's got marvelous counsel. You see Jacob as a father. And if you just went through the Book of Mormon and say, "I'm going to pull out I'm going to look at all the parent-child relationships and see what I can learn about being a good parent."
- 01:06:03 I can't think of a parenting book that's going to give you more intelligence, wisdom and knowledge than the Book of Mormon. Here's one quick one. The last verse is a nice parenting verse. When you look at it in the context of the 15th verse, which tells us something about the world Alma's raising his children in. And it's a match to the world you and I are raising our children in.
- 01:06:32 He says, "Seeing the hearts of the people began to wax hard, that they began to be offended because of the strictness of the word." That's a pretty good description. There's a lot of people who are often offended because of some of the exactness of the church's position on various things of what's moral. What's right is right.
- 01:06:59 You are raising your children. I'm all done. I'm worried about grandkids now. Living in a world where people are offended

because of the strictness of the word. Now, we don't like the word strict. I don't like that word. I would've loved to have had a little softer word in there, but that's the word. What does Alma do?

- 01:07:17 He caused that his sons should be gathered together that he might give unto them every one his charge separately concerning the things pertaining unto righteousness. Now, what great key am I being taught about being a good father right there or a good mother? How do you deal with your kids?
- Hank Smith: 01:07:40 Separately. One by one.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 01:07:42 One-on-one because all three of these boys are different and he has different messages and things to say to them. One-on-one time is really important. You seek it. You try and create it. I try and do with my grandchildren.
- 01:07:58 Now I'm blessed, I get to travel and I'll take a grandchild with me, and it's good for mother and daughter, mother and son, father daughter, to bring one grandchild one by one. Now that's in a verse that we didn't really do Chapter 35, almost pass it over.
- 01:08:18 But there is something like that. In every chapter of the Book of Mormon. You're going to find wonderful things that are relevant to your lives and help us learn. If all anybody ever got out of this whole section, you missed all the immediate and the infinite nature and plant your seed.
- 01:08:35 And all you got as you read this chapter of Come, Follow Me, was I need to spend separate one-on-one time with my children. You would've been rewarded for that one single truth, and it is not a major truth in it. It's a subtle, just slipped in there, but it may make the difference in a child's life that will have eternal consequences.
- Hank Smith: 01:09:03 What does that tell you about this book? It's inexhaustible.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 01:09:06 Yeah, that's what it is.
- John Bytheway: 01:09:08 As deep as it is wide.
- Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 01:09:10 Yeah.
- Hank Smith : 01:10:19 Well, we want to thank Dr. S. Michael Wilcox for being with us today. Mike, as usual, mind-expanding, soul-enlarging.

John Bytheway: 01:09:22 My soul has been enlarged, right?

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox: 01:09:24 Yeah. Well, thank you.

Hank Smith: 01:09:25 Yeah, we love having you. We also want to thank our executive producer, Shannon Sorensen, our sponsors, David and Verla Sorensen, and every episode we remember our founder, Steve Sorensen.

01:09:39 Join us next week. Mike introduced us to these chapters, Alma speaking to his sons. Join us for that on followHIM. Before you skip to the next episode, I have some important information. This episode's transcript and show notes are available on our website followhim.co. That's followhim.co.

01:09:58 On our website, you'll also find our two free books, finding Jesus Christ in the Old Testament and Finding Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Both books are full of short and powerful quotes and insights from all our episodes from the Old and New Testament.

01:10:12 The digital copies of these books are absolutely free. You can watch the podcast on YouTube. Also, our Facebook and Instagram accounts have videos and extras you won't find anywhere else.

01:10:22 If you'd like to know how you can help us, if you could subscribe to, rate, review and comment on the podcast, that will make us easier to find. Of course, none of this could happen without our incredible production crew, David Perry, Lisa Spice, Jamie Neilson, Will Stoughton, Krystal Roberts, Ariel Cuadra and Annabelle Sorensen.

President Russell M. Nelson: 01:10:42 Whatever questions or problems you have, the answer is always found in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Turn to him. Follow him.

WEED YOUR BRAIN, GROW YOUR TESTIMONY



- Hank Smith: 00:03 Hello, everyone. Welcome to followHIM Favorites. John and I are sharing a single story to go with each week's lesson. John, we are in Alma 32 through 35, faith, the seed growing into a tree. When I was a new seminary teacher, a wonderful talk was published called Weed Your Brain, Grow Your Testimony by John Bytheway. Still one of my favorite talks of all time, and that's not just because we're friends now. I loved that talk. I heard it given live. I bought the CD. I still think you can get it at DeseretBook.com. It really is a life-changing talk, John. So what stories did you tell there?
- John Bytheway: 00:42 Oh my goodness, there's so many. But let me just tell you, I bought a house in South Provo. I couldn't seem to find a wife. I thought maybe if I get a mortgage, I'll be more attractive. And I wasn't, but now I had a mortgage.
- 00:53 But anyway, I moved to this house, and there's this backyard and the weeds are about five feet tall. I went to Ernst Home Center. That's going back.
- Hank Smith: 01:03 Okay.
- John Bytheway: 01:03 I bought some garden tools, and I thought, "This is going to take me a couple hours." Took me a couple of weeks to get those weeds out-
- Hank Smith: 01:11 Yeah. A couple hours.
- John Bytheway: 01:12 ... because they were deep and oh my goodness. And next door, my neighbors had a Norwegian Elkhound. Don't know why I remember that. He would not stop barking all day long. I'm out there weeding. I'm tried everything. I'm trying to scare him. I'm trying to be nice to him. And finally, I bought some dog biscuits and I chucked one over the fence, and he was quiet for like three minutes, then, so ungrateful, came right back-
- Hank Smith: 01:39 Back to-

John Bytheway: 01:39 ... started barking his head off at me. I thought, "Do you ever get hoarse? Do you ever lose your voice?" Then I thought, "Hey," and I crumpled up the dog biscuits into a fine powder and I chucked it over the fence, and that kept him busy for 20 minutes. He's sniffing around looking for pieces, and it was a great moment in my life when I thought, "I am smarter than a dog."

02:00 But I finally got all those weeds out. And now, Hank, what's going to happen? All those weeds are out. If I just do nothing, what's going to happen?

Hank Smith: 02:10 Oh, absolutely. It won't take long.

John Bytheway: 02:13 They'll come right back again. And I'll tell you, I feel like I learned more lessons thinking about these agricultural stories and parables in the scriptures than I would've just reading them over and over again.

02:25 And so these lessons are going to sound really duh, really elementary, but let me give you some of them I learned from that.

02:32 Number one, if you want good things in your garden or in your life, you have to put them there. After I had cleared that dirt, how come tomatoes and cucumbers didn't come and put themselves in a line? They don't. That's number one. You want good things in your garden, in your heartland, we call it for this chapter, because your heart is compared to soil and you're going to plant the word in your heart, you want the good stuff, you got to put it there.

02:56 Number two, bad stuff will come out of nowhere, uninvited. Do a magic trick for your friends. Just clear some dirt and say in the spring, "Watch this. Dandelion. Boom," and it'll come. I don't know how they know where there's available dirt. They come out of nowhere. They are omnipresent. Hank, I did some research. Somebody brought dandelions over from Europe. They were imported.

Hank Smith: 03:21 Aw.

John Bytheway: 03:22 What were you thinking? Okay, there's a special place in outer darkness reserved for these folks.

Hank Smith: 03:27 The dandelion bringer.

John Bytheway: 03:29 Yeah. I think it was for greens, to make salads or something. But you know how they grow that sphere with the seeds that-

Hank Smith: 03:37 Like with the little parachute people that yeah, that-

John Bytheway: 03:39 Yes. You're trying to plant your grass. You see your kids, "Dad, look," and you're running from the other side, "No." And they blow, and all those little parachutes of destruction go out all over your grass. You're like-

Hank Smith: 03:53 Paratroopers.

John Bytheway: 03:53 ..., "No." Anyway, so the bad stuff will come out of nowhere, uninvited.

04:00 And lastly, the life will be a constant war on weeds. It's just the way it is. They keep coming. You want the good stuff. And this is what Alma teaches us, because he doesn't just say, "Plant the word." He says, "Now you have to give it time to grow roots." And I call this fertilizer FDP in verse 41: faith, diligence, and patience. Did you put FDP on it?

04:22 And then it will take root. Verse 42, "Because of your diligence, faith and patience," now it's DFP, "then you can feast until you are filled and hunger not. Neither shall you thirst." There's a lot of good agriculture metaphors for our hearts. And put the good stuff in there, and put FDP in it, and feast off the tree of life.

04:46 But anyway, now you know, if you got a dog, dog biscuits. Crumple them up, chuck them over the fence.

Hank Smith: 04:51 Crumple them up, throw them over the fence.

John Bytheway: 04:52 Yeah. They'll be busy for days, right?

Hank Smith: 04:56 That was fantastic. What's the one you always tie to this? The parable of the sower. Jesus says, "The seed can't grow in the weeds."

John Bytheway: 05:04 Right. First it's soil and then Alma's seed and then Alma's season, because you've got to prepare it so that it can grow roots. You'll see the word roots all over in here. And then you get to enjoy the supper. So soil, seed, season, supper.

Hank Smith: 05:19 Yeah. I've always been scared of that weedy soil in the Savior's parables. I'm too busy. I got too many other things going on. I can't give time to my testimony.

John Bytheway: 05:31 And it's good soil. It's good enough, because weeds are growing in it. You've just got the wrong stuff in there. You know how there's 613 commandments in the Old Testament? They used to count them. This is one of those.

05:42 Deuteronomy 22:9. Listen for the spiritual lesson. "Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with diverse seeds, lest the fruit of thy seed, which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard be defiled." It's like, "Why would you plant good things and bad things in your heart at the same time?"

Hank Smith: 05:59 Yeah. The good stuff just can't grow. It just can't grow. You've got to weed your life. Often, John, I find out there's an app taking too much of my time. I should be doing better things. So I delete the app. And how many times have I downloaded that app? I went and found the weed and replanted it in my garden, right?

John Bytheway: 06:20 And put FDP on it.

Hank Smith: 06:21 Yeah. I'm like, "Oh, I'm so sorry I got rid of you. I really think you should belong here." Oh, how terrible.

06:28 John, thank you for that. We hope you'll join us on our full podcast. It's called followHIM. You can get it wherever you get your podcasts. We are with Dr. S. Michael Wilcox this week. He waxes eloquent, as he does every time he is on our podcast. And then come back next week. We will have another FollowHIM Favorites.