

## Knowing the Book of Mormon

When I was a teenager I remember hearing in General Priesthood Meeting a speaker who challenged the young men to “Let these scriptures become worn and used so they will feel as comfortable in your hands as well-worn tennis shoes do on your feet.”<sup>1</sup> I remember nothing about that talk but that one sentence, but it exercised a powerful impact on my thoughts for many years thereafter. I have made a special effort to make the Book of Mormon as well known to me as possible, thinking frequently of the tennis shoes image.

I first read the Book of Mormon in preparation for my baptism at age eight. I remember that it seemed to stretch on forever. I tried to make myself not look at the verse numbers as I read so that I wouldn't keep track of where I was in each chapter. I don't know how much I retained, but I achieved my goal.

Later, when we studied the Book of Mormon in seminary, we started the year with a “Book of Mormon Marathon” where we proposed to read the Book of Mormon as a group in one day. We had probably 20 of us from the seminary class together in a room at the church. We started reading aloud at about 7:00 in the morning, each person reading one page. We kept reading during meals, as others slept, and even when we had to evacuate because of a tornado warning. At one point I remember reading aloud to a room full of sleeping bodies. By about 10:00 the next morning we read aloud, in unison, Moroni chapter 10. By then the book was starting to mean a lot more to me.

When I left on my mission I got to speak in church, and I spoke about the Book of Mormon. I spoke about how I had grown in my understanding from finding the sermons to be boring, but the battles exciting, to where I felt I was starting to appreciate the sermons ever more. By this time I had identified 2 Nephi 9 as my favorite chapter in the book.

On my mission I set a goal of reading the Book of Mormon 20 times. I finished it 22 times in two years. On one of those times I went through with a set of index cards and created my own index of the Book of Mormon. At the end of my mission I could identify almost any verse in the Book of Mormon. My companions would test me, and if I couldn't identify one verse, I always could after two.

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1 J. Thomas Fyans, “Prepare Now for Your Mission”, *Ensign*, May 1977, p39

Since my mission I have continued to read the book, although not as voraciously. I have managed to read it about twice a year since then. I only tell the primary kids the exact number of times I have read it, but it is more than 50 and less than 100<sup>2</sup>. I have found that it fires their imagination and encourages them to read. One young man asked me if I didn't get tired of reading the same book so many times. I thought for a moment, then asked him "Do you get tired of talking to an old friend?"

Why do I share all this? Maybe for the same reason I tell the primary kids how many times I have read it. I love the Book of Mormon. As I have come to know the book better and better, I have come to know the gospel – the Good News of Jesus Christ – better. As I have been excited, discouraged, scared, or spiritual, the Book of Mormon has spoken to me to uplift, encourage, reassure, and strengthen. I want all to be able to share that experience.

I have read numerous articles criticizing the Book of Mormon on one basis or another. To such I can only say that if they will take the time to learn what the book is, instead of concentrating on one piece or another, they will find more than enough answers to ease their doubts and strengthen their souls.

I am grateful to God for the Book of Mormon. I know my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ better because of the Book of Mormon. I am a better person because of the Book of Mormon. I hope that I can live up to the teachings and challenges of that book so that I can greet my Savior with joy, and hear the words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter into the rest of your Lord."

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2 If, after my descriptions of my actions, you come to the conclusion that I am neurotic, I can only say that I am not responsible for your conclusions.