

Understanding the Things of God

In 1Nephi 2:12, 16 there is an interesting contrast of issues. First, verse 12, featuring Laman and Lemuel:

And thus Laman and Lemuel, being the eldest, did murmur against their father. And they did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them.

Then, in verse 16, enter Nephi:

I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers.

The story of Nephi's belief and his oldest two brothers' disbelief is familiar to anyone who has read the Book of Mormon. What strikes me about these two verses is that they go a long way toward explaining why one can believe, and the other cannot. It has to do with understanding.

In the April 2004 General Conference, President James E. Faust made the following observation regarding revelation of the "Burning Bush" variety:

In such an experience the essential nature of something—a person, a situation, an object—is suddenly perceived. We understand this to be inspiration. To be able to perceive by inspiration the common and ordinary things of life in their true meaning is a special gift.

Then I would also direct you to the Lord's own declaration in Doctrine and Covenants 29:34,35:

Wherefore, verily I say unto you that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal; neither any man, nor the children of men; neither Adam, your father, whom I created. Behold, I gave unto him that he should be an agent unto himself; and I gave unto him commandment, but no temporal commandment gave I unto him, for my commandments are spiritual; they are not natural nor temporal, neither carnal nor sensual.

All of these passages suggest to me that what we commonly perceive to

be reality is not very accurate at all. Our senses are too unrefined to be able to perceive reality on their own. In Laman and Lemuel's case, they could not perceive the Lord's intent, so they murmured. President Faust certainly implies that common and ordinary things would not appear so common and ordinary if we could see them as they really are. And the Lord says that the commandments, some of which we consider very temporal, are not to him. In order to get the fullest out of our earthly experiences we need to learn to see things God's way. Indeed, I think that is an important part of the experience of mortality.

In the October 2004 General Conference Elder Groberg states that in order to be able to experience love we need to serve God. He contends that we cannot know this most basic of emotions without receiving it from God. His sermon completed this line of reasoning for me. Not only can we not perceive the world accurately without God's help, but as we learn so to perceive we will be blessed with joy beyond what we can imagine without that help.

Our Father's plan for us is that we might have joy. We are placed in a difficult school where many of the experiences that await us appear to be anything but joyful. We have to deal with sickness, with death, with misuse of agency on the part of others, and with any number of challenges and obstacles that we never could have known in the presence of God. If we turn to God in all these circumstances, they too will be perceived in their true nature, as opportunities for our eternal growth. God's love, expressed in his plan of salvation for us and especially in the Atonement of His Son, is far more pure, far more powerful, far more intense than the natural man can know. We can only know that true love through obedience to the Lord's commandments and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As we exercise those attributes we come closer and closer to God, and we learn more and more of him – and of his love.

This is why faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the first principle of the gospel. This is why we are to persevere in all things. Faith, obedience, and frequent longing toward God will allow us to become like him. He wants us to be like him, and he has established the plan for us so we can achieve that goal, but it is not easy. It requires everything we have, and also a complete acceptance of the Lord's help, which is far more than everything we have. Some perhaps can achieve this quickly, but for most of us it is a long, arduous process. It is arduous because we refuse to let go of those things that bind us to the world, so the things of this world combat against the pull of God's love. The love, the salvation, and the eternal happiness are free gifts, but bringing

ourselves to accept them is the challenge.

And so, we can look to another counsel that the Savior gave us – to become as little children. Have you watched how little children interact? There is a lack of guile, a purity of purpose, and an acceptance of love which is quite different than our “adult” customs. However, it is only by developing that sincerity and genuineness that we can come to be what God wants us to be.

Jacob calls the plan of salvation “the great plan of happiness,” and so it is. Anything we do contrary to the will of God, assuming it will bring us happiness, is a tragic mistake. But every time we follow what the Lord asks of us, we receive blessings so great that they may be beyond our earthly capacity to understand fully. We need the strength of the Lord even to absorb all of the blessings he has for us.