

Are We Hiding from the Lord?

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In Alma 5:26, during a powerful and spirit filled address to a group of saints, Alma the Younger asks: "...if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?". In other words, if in times past you have had a burning testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but at the present moment that testimony feels to you like it is not as strong as it once was, will you seize the moment right now while the spirit is close to do those things that will help to rekindle the flame of your faith? There may be many reasons for our faith to struggle. Today I will focus my comments on what I feel may be *one* of those reasons, namely: Do we sometimes find that we are attempting to hide ourselves from the Lord because we are afraid that what he will ask of us will be too hard or ask too much of us? From your own personal life experiences, have you ever felt that you have a hard time really believing that the Lord's "Yoke is easy, and his burden is light"?

I believe that to a certain extent we all go through periods where we may try to hide from the Lord. The problem is that if we get too good at it, it may start to have a degrading effect on our testimonies. Because no one wants to feel that they are doing something wrong, if the hiding is significant enough and goes on for long enough, we may start to unconsciously modify our beliefs to match our behaviors. After this has gone on for a while we may eventually find ourselves wondering why our faith is struggling when it was once so strong?

So how can we stop hiding? I would like to suggest that one of the problems may be in how we understand the Lord's statement that "His yoke is easy, and his burden is light." For anyone that has actually tried to follow the Lord, they know that His yoke is anything but easy. In fact, it is quite hard. However, I believe the message of this scripture is *not* that the Lord's way is easy, but that in comparison, His way will *always* be easier in the *long run*, than any other way. The following parable helps to make this point.

There once was a young man that had to pass a very difficult exam to be able to work in his chosen field. He was allowed an unlimited number of attempts, but each time he took the test it cost a fair amount of money. However, for him there was no other option. He *had* to pass this test. He was told by people with much more experience than he, that preparing for this test would require many long months of painful effort and challenging study. However, he thought this might be an exaggeration. Plus, he was not really a big fan of pain. So, on his first attempt he did not put much effort into preparing. Unsurprisingly, he did not pass. On the next try he made a token attempt to learn the material, but still did not pass. This went on for years. Each year he would rationalize that he could pass the test with just a minimum amount of study, but the exam was so difficult that he still would not pass, although he did get closer with each try. Finally, after many years he passed the test. As he received his passing grade and was able to enter into his chosen field of work, he thought on his long journey to get to this point, the many thousands of dollars spent, the slow drawn out effort that had spanned over many years, and he realized that it would have been *so* much easier, exacted *much* less pain, and cost *so* much less money, if he had just paid the price to pass the test in those very first years.

How many of us find aspects of ourselves in this parable? Is there any part of your life where you are hiding from the Lord because you feel it will be too painful? Do you ever find yourself avoiding any of the following activities: scripture study, prayer, fasting, temple attendance, creating and following financial budgets, blaming others and not taking responsibility for our own situations, avoiding uncomfortable conversations with our spouses or loved ones that need to happen? The list could go on and on. Are not all these things the Lord has asked us to do? Is avoiding them a form of hiding from the Lord? Can we not see that putting them off just makes things harder in the long run, rather than easier?

So, if we find ourselves trying to take the harder path in our lives, what is the most powerful thing that we can do to disperse the clouds of doubt, change course, and get back onto the easy path? I believe that the answer is sincere, regular, and heartfelt prayer.

In the book of Heleman, when the Lamanites were surrounded by a cloud of darkness, they asked: “What shall we do, that this cloud of darkness may be removed from overshadowing us?” (Hel 5:40) The answer

they were given was: “You must repent, and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ, ...; and when ye shall do this, the cloud of darkness shall be removed from overshadowing you.” (Hel 5:41)

As mentioned in this scripture, repentance, or change, is certainly part of the answer. But repentance requires motivation. How do we get that motivation, that faith? I feel that the answer is in the statement “cry, ... even until ye shall have faith in Christ.” Being filled with faith in Christ is not a prerequisite we have to possess before we can approach the throne of God. If we will but make sincere and persistent attempts to communicate with Him, we will eventually (and perhaps imperceptibly at first) be filled with faith in Christ’s ability to change our hearts and our motivations.

In a powerful movie called “Shadowlands” about the life of the beloved children’s author and defender of Christianity, C.S. Lewis, there is an especially poignant part where he is discussing his prayers regarding a brief reprieve in the terminal illness of his beloved wife. In the movie his pastor friend says to him: “I know how hard you’ve been praying, and now God is answering your prayer.” C.S. Lewis replies to him: “That’s not why I pray Harry, I pray because I can’t help myself. I pray because I’m helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all of the time, waking and sleeping. ...It doesn’t change God, it changes me.”

It may be that prayer can unlock the flow of blessings that the Lord wants to give us, but are only conditioned upon our asking for them. But what of the case when the Lord knows that it would not be to our eternal benefit to receive what we are asking for? In such cases, why even bother to pray? C.S. Lewis teaches us that such circumstances may be when we *most* need to pray. We pray not to change God, but to change ourselves. Prayer is surely not a tool for us to try to change the mind of our all-knowing and loving Father. I believe that the main point of prayer is that it is the mechanism by which God seeks to change *us* so that *all* circumstances, both good or bad, both tragedy or triumph, both hardship or joy, will turn into blessings upon us. All good circumstances can be a curse to

those that turn from God. All hardships can be turned into a blessing for those that turn *to* God. A gift of a million dollars is as a curse to some and a blessing to others. It all depends on the character of the person who receives it. God is trying to change us into beings with such character that *all* circumstances will be blessings unto us.

In the Book of Mormon, God did *not* directly modify the burdens of the people of Alma when the Lamanites were oppressing them in the land of Helam. Instead, "...the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease." (Mosiah 24:15). I believe that Christ's mightiest miracles are *not* healing the blind or walking on water; I believe that among His *greatest miracles* is the transformation of the *human heart* so that the burdens of life *feel* light because of the peace and strength that we have allowed Him to give us. So, not only is Christ's path always the easiest path in the long run, but if we take it, He will strengthen us so that it *feels* even easier.

Brothers and sisters, all of us take yokes of one kind or another upon ourselves during our journeys through life. This is *especially* true of those that try their hardest to avoid taking *any* yoke of *any* kind upon themselves. In the grand scheme of things, the yokes of selfishness and laziness may be the heaviest burdens of all. I testify that of all of the yokes of life, Christ's yoke *IS* the easiest yoke, and His burden *IS* the lightest burden. I pray that each of us can really come to believe this deep down in our hearts, and that we can all learn how to pray until we are filled with the faith and courage to stop hiding from Him so that He may fully heal us and strengthen us. I testify not only that His way is the *easy* way, but that *He is* the way....and ultimately, the only way.

And I do so in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.