

Insights on Church Leadership

Marcus H. Martins, Ph.D.
Brigham Young University - Hawaii

Copyright © 1993, 1999, 2001 (web edition)
by Marcus H. Martins
All Rights Reserved

This text may be printed or copied for incidental home or Church use
This is not an official publication of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Chapter 2

The Prayer of Faith

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the first principle of the gospel. In most religions, faith is equated with belief. The prophet Joseph Smith defined faith as a principle of power, far more than simple belief:

"... faith is the assurance which men have of the existence of things which they have not seen, and the principle of action in all intelligent beings. ... [Faith] ... is the moving cause of all action ... without it both mind and body would be in a state of inactivity, and all their exertions would cease, both physical and mental. ... Faith, then, is the first great governing principle which has power, dominion, and authority over all things; by it they exist, by it they are upheld, by it they are changed, or by it they remain, agreeable to the will of God. Without it there is no power, and without power there could be no creation nor existence!"¹

The idea that "... faith ... is the moving cause of all action ..." suggests to our minds a dynamic process, and that is probably the reason why the Apostle James stated that the true faith is manifested through works, and that without works faith is dead².

The term "dynamic process" reminds me that it is possible for us to go about our lives asking the Lord whatever blessings we need to our survival or welfare, without ever considering that the bestowal of some of these blessings depends in part of our actions. True faith requires much more than a simple belief in God's ability to help us combined with a formal request made through mechanical, repetitive prayers that sometimes offered mindlessly.

True faith requires a "partnership"³ between us and the Lord. This "partnership" starts with a sharing of ideas; it develops with the design of a plan for solving problems or achieving blessings, and at last, it reaches its maturity with the performance of the accorded actions. This "partnership" is what I understand by "the prayer of faith", a process used to accomplish things that we may consider beyond our natural ability

¹ Lectures On Faith, p.7,10. Brackets added.

² James 2:17-26

³ The idea of a "partnership" implies that a covenant must be established between us and the Lord.

to achieve. The Apostle Paul wrote: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."⁴ Ammon, a great Nephite missionary, testified similarly: "Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things ..."⁵ Like many others, I also have a testimony that there are no limits to what we can accomplish if we have faith and pray in faith.

One of the chief examples of a prayer of faith was given by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Through the Book of Mormon we learn the pattern Christ and his prophets used to minister and administer using the prayer of faith.

Prayers Offered by a Member of the Godhead

The prophet Abinadi prophesied about Christ's mortal ministry saying: "... God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people."⁶ When ministering among the Nephites and Lamanites, Christ introduced himself by saying: "... I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth ..."⁷

In the Book of Mormon we find an extremely summarized⁸ account of the Lord Jesus Christ's ministry among the Nephites and Lamanites. There we learn that during that ministry he prayed several times to the Father. I found very interesting the fact that Jesus Christ, a member of the Holy Trinity, the God who created worlds without number⁹, still prays. I suppose he did so both to give us an example, and to show us how to approach the Father and develop a personal relationship with Him¹⁰.

Another particular aspect that always catches my attention is the fact that Jesus always acknowledged the Father's hand in all things. For example, he by himself gave to his new Nephite-Lamanite¹¹ disciples the power to give the Holy Ghost; on the next day, when the disciples received the actual manifestation of the Holy Ghost, Jesus prayed: "Father, I thank thee that thou hast given the Holy Ghost unto these whom I have chosen ..."¹²

I feel inclined to write more about the prayers that the Lord Jesus Christ offered during his ministry. However, since my purpose here is to write about prayers of faith offered by his mortal servants, I will not discuss this point in greater length. But read the account of his ministry as recorded in Third

⁴ Philippians 4:13

⁵ Alma 26:12

⁶ Mosiah 15:1

⁷ 3 Nephi 11:14

⁸ 3 Nephi 26:6-11

⁹ Moses 1:33

¹⁰ 3 Nephi 13:9; 18:16-21,24-25

¹¹ We don't know whether all the disciples were Nephites. By the same token, we don't know if the so-called "Three Nephites" were actually Nephites. Mormon and Moroni referred to them simply as "three disciples."

¹² 3 Nephi 19:20

Nephi; until we receive other accounts in greater detail¹³, this is the best source available to learn how the God of the whole earth prays. While reading those chapters, note how the Lord often used prayer either to acknowledge the Father's hand or as a means to increase the spirituality of the people, thus preparing them to receive greater light and knowledge. By analyzing the Lord's prayers we may learn how to use our prayers to achieve the same purposes.

The Prayer of Faith and the Remission of Sins

In the scriptures we find examples of how the Lord's servants in past ages, some of them acting in capacities that resemble modern-day church leadership callings, used the prayer of faith as a powerful tool.

One of these examples we find in the experience of Enos¹⁴. His words suggest that he did not get his blessing (the remission of his sins) as result of a single, mechanical, 30-second long late-night prayer. By using the words "wrestle" and "mighty prayer" (or their equivalents in the ancient Nephite language), Enos suggested that he had to employ all his mental and spiritual capacity to reach up to the throne of grace; in his own words, he had to "pour out [his] whole soul¹⁵".

The process is indeed long and Enos's experience suggests that it took him some time to get the Lord's answers to all his petitions. Only after he had gone through this process many times he finally felt his faith becoming unshaken. At this stage he was then ready to ask greater blessings, even for one specific blessing that would take more than 2,000 years to be bestowed¹⁶. This was probably the same type of faith Enos's father had achieved, by which he and others could even command the elements and be obeyed by them¹⁷.

Other examples in the scriptures show leaders pleading with the Lord for a remission of their people's sins. Moses described how he asked the Lord to forgive the ancient Israelites after their affair with the golden calf:

"... I fell down before the Lord forty days and forty nights, as I fell down at the first; because the Lord had said he would destroy you. I prayed therefore unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, destroy not thy people and thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; look not unto the stubbornness of this people, nor to their wickedness, nor to their sin: Lest the land whence thou broughtest us out say, Because the Lord was not able to bring them into the land which he promised them, and because he hated them, he hath brought them out to slay them in the wilderness. Yet they are thy people and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest out by thy mighty power and by thy stretched out arm.¹⁸"

¹³ 3 Nephi 26:6-12

¹⁴ Enos Chapter 1

¹⁵ Enos 1:2,4,9; brackets added.

¹⁶ Enos 1:11

¹⁷ Jacob 4:6; remember the experiences of Enoch, Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and the miracles of Jesus and His Apostles (and this list could be much longer).

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 9:24-29; I believe that Moses' action was motivated by pure love, or charity, and I will propose this idea in chapter 4.

This was another passage of scripture that left me deeply impressed, because Moses spent almost a month and a half reasoning and pleading with the Lord not for a personal blessing, but for the forgiveness of his people. Even though the people were clearly guilty, instead of asking the Lord to execute a quick judgment against the sinners, Moses acted the role of the Savior, who is our advocate before the Father, and pleaded the people's cause by asking the Father to spare them.¹⁹ Moses speaks with the Lord as if he were speaking to a friend, reminding the Lord how much negative publicity the destruction of the people would receive from the Egyptian press, and how much power and resources the Lord had already invested in releasing that people from bondage.

We find a similar example in the Book of Mormon, where Lehi, after learning that Jerusalem would be destroyed, "... prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people."²⁰ Again, notice how Nephi qualified the type of prayer Lehi offered by using the words "even with all his heart". This suggests not a "theatrical representation," but genuine feelings.

But placing a petition before the Lord is not all. The prayer of faith requires actions from both members of the "partnership". In the three cases that we have just considered, Enos, Moses and Lehi worked diligently²¹ after they had prayed so that their people could understand how to achieve--and retain--the remission of their sins. In a revelation through the Prophet Joel, the Lord gave the following charge and promise:

"Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: ... Then will the Lord be jealous [or zealous] for his land, and pity [or have compassion on] his people. Yea, the Lord will answer and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith: and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen"²²

It is interesting to notice what the Lord promises to send, besides national "self-esteem:" corn, wine, and oil. This promise could be seen both as a temporal blessing (i.e. food,) and as a spiritual blessing. If we assume that corn could be used to make bread, we would see here symbols of the ordinance of the sacrament in its ancient form--i.e. bread and wine²³--and of the Holy Spirit--the oil²⁴. The ordinance of the sacrament and the Spirit of the Lord are fundamental in obtaining a remission of our sins, a preparatory step to enter in the presence of the Lord. According to this scripture, it is the responsibility of those who minister to intercede in favor of the people, thus helping them in their eternal journey.

The Prayer of Faith in the Ministry

Another example of the prayer of faith can be found when Alma, the younger, prayed for himself and his missionary companions. After having seen the iniquity of the Zoramites, he realized the enormity of the task and of the obstacles ahead of his team of missionaries. Instead of balking from the responsibility

¹⁹ D&C 45:3-5

²⁰ 1 Nephi 1:5

²¹ Deuteronomy 10:1,5; 1 Nephi 1:18; Enos 1:19-20

²² Joel 2:17-19; brackets added with footnote information.

²³ See Genesis 14:18; JST Genesis 14:17; D&C 27:1-4

²⁴ See Matthew 25:1-4,8-10; D&C 45:56-57

(perhaps by rationalizing that the people had developed their own religion and that he should not bother them), he sought the Lord:

"... O Lord, wilt thou give me strength, that I may bear with mine infirmities. For I am infirm, and such wickedness among this people doth pain my soul. O Lord, my heart is exceedingly sorrowful; wilt thou comfort my soul in Christ. O Lord, wilt thou grant unto me that I may have strength, that I may suffer with patience these afflictions which shall come upon me, because of the iniquity of this people. O Lord, wilt thou comfort my soul, and give unto me success ...²⁵"

Then, probably perceiving that his missionary companions would be experiencing the same concerns, he asked for the same blessings in behalf of his companions. Notice how in his prayer he mentions each of his companions by name:

"... and also my fellow laborers who are with me--yea, Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner, and also Amulek and Zeezrom and also my two sons--yea, even all these wilt thou comfort, O Lord. Yea, wilt thou comfort their souls in Christ. Wilt thou grant unto them that they may have strength, that they may bear their afflictions which shall come upon them because of the iniquities of this people.²⁶"

Now, why was Alma asking these blessings? Was he, by any chance, concerned only with the political or military benefits of having the Zoramites converted²⁷? Although the Nephites in general had these worries in mind, Alma was more concerned with their eternal welfare, and the next words in his prayer state this fact:

"O Lord, wilt thou grant unto us that we may have success in bringing them again unto thee in Christ. Behold, O Lord, their souls are precious, and many of them are our brethren; therefore, give unto us, O Lord, power and wisdom that we may bring these, our brethren, again unto thee.²⁸"

After having prayed for these blessings, was Alma finished? No. Remember that we are comparing the prayer of faith with a partnership; thus it requires action on our part as well as on the part of the Lord. Since Alma had requested certain blessings, and according to the word of the Lord "... without the ordinances ... and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh²⁹", his share of this partnership with the Lord led him to use his priesthood, as one of the Lord's stewards, to guarantee that those blessings would be bestowed by the Lord:

"Now it came to pass that when Alma had said these words, that he clapped his hands upon all them who were with him. And behold, as he clapped his hands upon them, they were filled with the Holy Spirit. ... And the Lord provided for them that they should hunger not, neither should they thirst; yea, and he also gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of afflictions,

²⁵ Alma 31:30-32

²⁶ Alma 31:32-33

²⁷ Alma 31:4

²⁸ Alma 31:34-35

²⁹ D&C 84:21

save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ. Now this was according to the prayer of Alma; and this because he prayed in faith.³⁰"

Alma apparently gave his companions a special priesthood blessing so they could endure the rigors of the assignment they had received. We will not always be present to perform these ordinances; nevertheless, we still can bless and strengthen those who are associated with us by other types of actions. The Apostle Paul, for example, used his prayers and his letters; and only when possible, his personal visits. He once wrote:

"... I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power ...³¹"

As leaders we must follow this same pattern in every assignment in the Church of Christ: pray with all our heart, and then administer, write, exhort, visit, etc., and after doing these things offer another prayer, this time to thank for the opportunity given us to perform those labors and for the blessings received.

The Prayer of Faith in the Performance of Assignments

Another common use of the prayer of faith is in the performance of our several duties in the Church, especially in those assignments that constitute a personal challenge. One of the first examples that may come to our minds is the experience of the great prophet and seer Mahonri Moriancumer³², the younger³³ brother of Jared.

Moriancumer received a commandment to build special ships and cross the ocean with his people. After he had built them he saw that there was no way to renew the air inside the ships, and also that they had no light. Upon asking the Lord for instructions--something Moriancumer might have gotten used to during the construction--the Lord answered only one of the questions, and told Moriancumer how to provide for the renewal of the air. As to the question of the light, Moriancumer asked again the Lord for guidance; however, this time the Lord's answer was puzzling:

"And the Lord said unto the brother of Jared: What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels? For behold, ye cannot have windows, for they will be dashed in pieces; neither shall ye take fire with you, for ye shall not go by the light of fire.³⁴"

³⁰ Alma 31:36,38

³¹ Ephesians 1:16-19

³² The name of the brother of Jared was revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith. See Elder Bruce R. McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine*, p.463

³³ Ether 1:33-34. We have this additional piece of information thanks to the translation of the Book of Mormon into Thai, the official language of Thailand. I will refer to that in my discussion on diversity, in chapter 9.

³⁴ Ether 2:23

I don't believe that the Lord was being insensitive with one of His servants. Just as Moriancumer had previously been chastened because he had forgotten "... to call upon the name of the Lord³⁵," it is possible that this time he was being reminded that that information was already available to him³⁶. In his concern over the construction of such unusual ships (at least for his days,) it is possible that Moriancumer did not set aside enough time to the study and ponder on a solution, by which process he might find (and whereby he apparently did find) an idea to solve his problem.

What we have today as the Book of Ether, as part of the Book of Mormon, is just an abridgement, a condensed version of about 1,600 years of Jaredite history and prophecies made by Moroni. Since we do not have the details of what happened, we may assume that it probably took the Brother of Jared some time to figure out what to do. How long? Perhaps hours, or even days. After he had developed an idea of what to do, he had to find the necessary materials, and build a furnace. He had to find the right type of mineral, and who knows whether the mountain upon which he finally found it was nearby or far? Who knows how high it was³⁷? In those days, to achieve the high temperatures needed to melt³⁸ that mineral he and his associates probably had to work very hard, perhaps blowing the fire with bellows for many hours, or perhaps day and night, until the right temperature was reached, and then they had to continue working hard to maintain that temperature until the mineral was completely liquefied. Besides that, who knows whether the process worked in the first attempt? Who knows whether the temperature was correct; whether he found the right type of mineral at first; whether the clear stones didn't break in pieces while solidifying?

By these suppositions I am not trying to find out exactly what happened in the experience of the Brother of Jared; I am just trying to suggest that besides praying, Moriancumer had to work very hard to solve his problem. The important part of this discussion is that in order to solve some of our most difficult problems we have to follow the same process.

Whenever I read these chapters in the Book of Ether, I ask myself how many times we pass through situations in which the Lord ask us "... What will ye that I should do ...?". It is interesting to notice that after asking this question the Lord pronounced a series of "don'ts": don't make windows and don't take fire. I wonder how many times we have asked the Lord for guidance and instead of the direct answer to our inquiry we have received (either from the Lord directly or through one of his authorized servants, it is the same³⁹) a list of "don'ts". Perhaps in these situations we might even have gotten close to being angry with the Lord (or with his servants), instead of considering this an opportunity for learning and development that would eventually bring us nearer to the presence of the Lord.

It might be useful while in occasions like these to remember that obstacles, problems, diseases, or the acknowledgment of weaknesses, may be given to stimulate our mental and spiritual faculties, and to

³⁵ Ether 2:14

³⁶ According to a footnote in Genesis 6:16 (King James Version of the Bible published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1979), "... some rabbis believed it was a precious stone that shone in [Noah's] ark." In Ether 1:3,6 Moroni states that the Jaredite prophet Ether knew about the early history of the world. If we assume that Moriancumer probably had a more detailed scriptural account of the flood than the one found in the current version of the Bible, we may then suppose that he did find in that part of the scriptures the idea to use shining stones to illuminate the ships.

³⁷ Ether 3:1

³⁸ Notice that the English translation of the Book of Mormon uses the verb "molten" in Ether 3:1, suggesting that the stones were not ready to be used when the Brother of Jared got them on the mountain. I don't know whether editions in other languages use a verb with similar meaning.

³⁹ D&C 1:38

make us draw nearer to the Lord in order to receive greater blessings⁴⁰. By so doing, we will receive the blessing the Lord intended to give us--in general, something much greater than we originally wanted or expected--and he will also provide a solution to the problem, by now turned into a secondary matter.

Two additional points we learn in the Brother of Jared' experience are to acknowledge the Lord's omnipotent power and to ask for something very specific, instead of some unclear, generic blessing:

"... I know, O Lord, that thou hast all power, and can do whatsoever thou wilt for the benefit of man; therefore touch these stones, O Lord, with thy finger, and prepare them that they may shine forth in darkness; and they shall shine forth unto us in the vessels which we have prepared, that we may have light while we shall cross the sea. Behold, O Lord, thou canst do this ...⁴¹"

Moriancumer did not ask the Lord something vague or uncertain like "please, make these stones shine", or "if possible, make them shine". Instead, he said: "... thou hast all power ... [thou] can do whatsoever thou wilt for the benefit of man ... touch these stones ... with thy finger ... thou canst do this ..."

Perhaps some of us might say: "Well, this experience happened with the Brother of Jared, a great prophet and seer of old; maybe that would not happen with one of us, simple ordinary persons ...". In answer to this concern I would say that first, prophets, seers and revelators are also "simple" persons; the difference between us and them is in the breadth of the callings they have received in comparison with ours. Secondly, the scriptures have also examples of persons who even though did not have such broad callings they still used the same process we have just seen.

Let's consider the experience of one of Abraham's servants, while on the errand of finding a wife for Isaac. After arriving in Haran, the land where Abraham's relatives lived, he offered a prayer and established the following "partnership" with the Lord:

"And he said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast showed kindness unto my master.⁴²"

Abraham's servant was very specific in his petition, to the point of agreeing beforehand with the Lord on what specific sentences he and the chosen lady would utter. It is not recorded in our current version of the Old Testament, but this man was surely expecting the Lord to use the power of his Holy Spirit to make the lady pronounce those exact words. He studied in his mind, he developed a plan and presented it before the Lord; he agreed with the Lord on what to do, specifying what exactly he would do and asking what he thought only the Lord could do. Then, having had from Abraham the assurance that the Lord would send messengers before him⁴³, he acted as he had planned.

⁴⁰ Ether 12:27-28; D&C 88:63

⁴¹ Ether 3:4-5

⁴² Genesis 24:12-14

⁴³ Genesis 24:7

We cannot affirm that the Lord will in every occasion respond in such a detailed manner as He did with Abraham's servant; since the Lord works with us according to our faith⁴⁴, He will measure the strength of each individual's faith to determine how He will choose to respond⁴⁵. And we should emphasize that these spiritual manifestations come not because we want, but according to the Lord's will⁴⁶. However we can affirm--and in fact testify--that the Lord will always respond at some point in some way, according to His infinite wisdom and mercy.

The ways by which two groups of Nephites were rescued from Lamanite bondage reveal a little bit of how the Lord works according to the faith of the people. The first group was composed by King Limhi's people. After a period of repentance⁴⁷ they were delivered by means of a stratagem⁴⁸. The other group, who had followed Alma, was delivered from bondage by the Lord's direct intervention⁴⁹. So we learn that at times the Lord allow us the opportunity to use the wisdom we have already received from him and find a solution for ourselves, while in other circumstances He may answer our requests by direct intervention.

If we feel that the Lord is apparently not answering our prayers, we should not be alarmed or discouraged⁵⁰. In some occasions the plan of action we presented before the Lord may have flaws that we have not noticed, and in these cases all we have to do is to ponder a little more and present either an updated or a completely new version of our plan before the Lord.

The Lord may also at times try our faith, and withhold answers and blessings for some time, just as He did with the people of Alma⁵¹. It is rather easy to be faithful and to show love for God when things are going well. Part of our mortal test involves proving ourselves to be faithful and loving when things are going against our desires. When heaven seems closed to us, when we cannot feel the sweet influence of the Spirit of the Lord, and we just don't feel the desire to pray or to attend church--circumstances like these are excellent opportunities to show how much we are devoted to our Heavenly Father. When all we have is the remembrance of how good it was when we used to feel the Spirit of the Lord, we should allow that thought to occupy our minds, to drive us to faithfulness in the middle of uncertainty. Soon, after days, weeks, or months--only the Lord knows--heaven will open again and "angels [will come] and [will minister] unto [us]."⁵²

The Prayer of Faith and Our Skills

When performing our part of the action in a "partnership" with the Lord, we must strive to use those tools we are most familiar with. We can see the importance of this in the experience of the young king-

⁴⁴ 2 Nephi 26:13; 27:23; D&C 10:47,49,52

⁴⁵ We should not try to measure who among us has more or less faith, because only the Lord can accurately evaluate the strength of one's faith. See 2 Chronicles 16:9; Nahum 1:7; D&C 33:1; 38:2,7.

⁴⁶ D&C 63:9-12

⁴⁷ Mosiah 21:13-15,32-34

⁴⁸ Mosiah 22:5-8

⁴⁹ Mosiah 24:16-23

⁵⁰ We may also incur in the Lord's displeasure because of sin; but that is still not a reason to be discouraged because except for the unpardonable sin (Alma 39:6) repentance is always available.

⁵¹ Mosiah 24:12-15

⁵² Matthew 4:11; brackets added

to-be, David. After accepting Goliath's challenge, and expressing his vigorous faith that the Lord would deliver him out of Goliath's hands⁵³, David was prepared by King Saul to battle in the most logic way (according to the wisdom of the world):

"And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail. And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved it. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him. And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine.⁵⁴"

There are occasions when the most logic way of doing something, according to the wisdom of the world, is not the most appropriate way of doing it according to the wisdom of the Lord. In David's experience, using an armour, a helmet, a coat of mail and a sword was something he apparently had not done so far; therefore, when he tried for the first time he apparently did not feel confident or comfortable because he was not accustomed with the weight of that military apparatus. At that moment, the most effective way for him to participate in a "partnership" with the Lord against Goliath and the Philistines was to adhere to those gadgets he was familiar with: stones and a sling⁵⁵. In the examples we have considered so far, the tools used were rocks and a furnace (the Brother of Jared), a specific dialogue (Abraham's servant), preaching (Moses, Enos, and Paul), and priesthood ordinances (Alma).

In our assignments, as well as in our lives, we need not only to use those tools available to us at the moment we need, but also develop the ability to use other tools. Going back to our previous example, David could not be effective using the military apparatus at the time he defeated Goliath; however, he later learned to use those weapons, and in time he became as skilled in their use as he had been with the sling.

Likewise, we can improve our abilities, learn new skills, acquire more knowledge and use these for the benefit of those under our responsibility: our families, our church, our communities. To refuse to do so, in my opinion, is comparable to denying our own divine origin, and according to the principle suggested by the Lord in the Parable of the Talents⁵⁶, we will be held accountable if we do not fully use our capacity.

The Prayer of Faith and the Will of the Lord

The Apostle James wrote: "... The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.⁵⁷" Yet, we should remember that in order to receive according to our desires one important condition must be met: whatever we are requesting must be in accordance with the will of the Lord. Because of our limited understanding of the ways of the Lord, there will be occasions when we will ask certain blessings that the Lord will see fit not to bestow upon us at that time.

⁵³ 1 Samuel 17:26,32,36-37

⁵⁴ 1 Samuel 17:38-40

⁵⁵ Under a worldly logic, David's action could be considered suicide: a young man fighting against an experienced warrior who was about 10 feet (or about 3 meters) high, whose spear's head weighted about 20 pounds (or about 9 kilograms)! No wonder Goliath ridiculed David in front of the armies, "... Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves?" (1 Samuel 17:42-43)

⁵⁶ Matthew 25:15-30

⁵⁷ James 5:16

For example, after many years on the Lord's errand Moses humbly asked for a very simple blessing: an opportunity to cross the river Jordan and enter the promised land⁵⁸. Remember that Moses was a man to whom God had spoken "... face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend ...⁵⁹", and that through him the Lord had performed mighty works that even after 3,000 years still astonish the world. And yet, when asked to grant this great prophet the blessing of planting his feet on the land about which he had preached for about four decades, the Lord said: "... thou shalt not go over this Jordan."⁶⁰

Thus we see that not all our desires will be granted--even those that we may consider as righteous desires. But how can we know what to ask for in our prayers? In a revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord specified the conditions to learn what we should ask:

"... ye shall call upon me while I am near--Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me; ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name it shall be given unto you, that is expedient for you; And if ye ask anything that is not expedient for you, it shall turn unto your condemnation ... He that asketh in the Spirit asketh according to the will of God; wherefore it is done even as he asketh."⁶¹

The word "expedient" means "tending to promote some proposed or desired object; a means to an end; proper under the circumstances; appropriate; advisable." Thus, something expedient for us is something that can help us accomplish our purpose (or end) on this earth, which purpose Amulek identified as our preparation to meet God⁶².

Let us refer once again to the Parable of the Talents⁶³: in that parable, the talents that the servants received belonged to their lord, and the increase that the first two servants acquired was also given back to their lord. Thus, it seems that those talents, far from possessions that belonged exclusively to the servants, belonged to their lord, and the servants were mere stewards handling those talents.

The same pattern appears in the examples we have considered so far. None involved any selfish desire; none included anything that could be considered a personal possession of the persons involved. In those examples the establishment of the Lord's kingdom was behind the blessings requested. Enos wanted remission of sins to him, to his people and even to his enemies; the retaining of this remission of sins brings eternal life, which is part of the work and glory of God⁶⁴; such was also the case with Moses, Lehi, and Alma the younger. Abraham's servant was seeking an elect lady who, with Isaac, would perpetuate the Abrahamic covenant, through which all the families of the earth would be blessed⁶⁵. David was restoring the faith in

58 Deuteronomy 3:23-25

59 Exodus 33:11

60 Deuteronomy 3:27; for Moses' ages, see Exodus 7:7 and Deuteronomy 34:7

61 D&C 88:62-65; 46:30

62 Alma 34:32

63 Matthew 25:15-30

64 Moses 1:39

65 Abraham 2:11

God and paving the way to magnify Israel in its position as a covenant people⁶⁶. And if these examples were not enough, we still find the one of Hannah, who prayed for a son and soon became the mother of Samuel, a prophet of such a caliber that the Israel of his time had not seen so far⁶⁷.

That does not mean that we should not ask for our daily necessities. Amulek taught some repentant Zoramites that they should ask for temporal blessings as well; but he added that those prayers should be accompanied by service rendered unto others⁶⁸ (a way of administering temporal salvation, also a part of the Lord's work.) And the Savior taught that we should not use vain repetitions, because our Heavenly Father knows all our necessities "before [we] ask him."⁶⁹ In my opinion, this admonition means that we may ask our Father in Heaven for food, clothing, and other necessities; but even during a time of adversity, we should exercise our faith in such a way as to not make our requests for temporal necessities become the only topic of our prayers.

Perhaps one of the most powerful examples of asking according to the will of the Lord was given by John, the Beloved Disciple. During the Lord's ministry, John, his brother James, and their mother, approached the Lord and asked for a very unusual blessing: "... She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand and the other on the left, in thy kingdom."⁷⁰ By their words (Mark recorded that James and John also expressed this desire) it is clear that they had faith. They really believed that Jesus was the Christ, and that eventually he would ascend again to his throne in the courts of glory. However, instead of a benevolent answer like "... great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt"⁷¹, he said: "Ye know not what ye ask ... to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give ..."⁷².

Later, after his resurrection, the Lord offered his disciples the opportunity of asking for anything they wanted. This time, John knew what to ask for: "And the Lord said unto me: John, my beloved, what desirest thou? For if you shall ask what you will, it shall be granted unto you. And I said unto him: Lord, give unto me power over death, that I may live and bring souls unto thee."⁷³ But this time John was not asking for a blessing that would satisfy any desire of self-aggrandizement; he did not want to have power over death just to remain on the earth as a supernatural being⁷⁴; he wanted to remain on the earth to work in the Lord's vineyard. This time, the Lord's answer was positive: "And the Lord said unto me: Verily, verily, I say unto thee, because thou desirest this thou shalt tarry until I come in my glory, and shalt prophesy before nations, kindreds, tongues and people."⁷⁵

⁶⁶ 1 Samuel 17:45-47; 24:20; 25:28

⁶⁷ 1 Samuel 1:11; 2:26; 3:1,19-20

⁶⁸ Alma 34:17-29

⁶⁹ Matthew 6:7-8; 3 Nephi 13:7-8. Brackets added.

⁷⁰ Matthew 20:21; Mark 10:35-37

⁷¹ Matthew 15:28

⁷² Mark 10:38

⁷³ D&C 7:1-2

⁷⁴ 3 Nephi 28:19-22; D&C 7:6

⁷⁵ D&C 7:3

With the help of the Lord, obtained through the prayer of faith, we can also achieve much. However, we must always remember that these mighty works are must be for the purpose of establishing the kingdom of God, and that all the glory belongs to the Lord, not to us.

About the Author



Marcus Helvécio Tourinho de Assis Martins is a native of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in July, 1972. In August of 1978 he became the first black member to serve as a full-time missionary for the Church in the 20th century, serving in the Brazil São Paulo North Mission.

Since then, brother Martins served as bishop, counselor in branch presidencies, member of stake high councils, stake and ward executive secretary, high priests group leader, ward mission leader, temple officiator, stake and ward sunday school president, and teacher in primary, sunday school, and institute of religion. In the early 1980's he also translated the “Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ” into Portuguese.

Brother Martins has worked over the years as a systems analyst and independent consultant for the Brazilian government and a number of private corporations. He holds a Ph.D. in Sociology of Religion, Race and Ethnic Relations, a Master's degree in Organizational Behavior, and a bachelor's in Business Management. He taught religion and sociology classes at Brigham Young University, Ricks College, and currently serves as chair of the department of religious education at Brigham Young University-Hawaii.

He and Sister Mirian Barbosa Martins, herself a native of Petrópolis, Brazil, and a returned missionary with several years of leadership experience, have four children: Flávio, Natália, Felipe, and Cristina.