

Patterns of Prayer

in the Book of Mormon

How the scriptures taught me to offer more meaningful prayers.

Once I watched a teacher instruct teenagers to chant the word “pots.” They shouted, “Pots, pots, pots, pots, pots.”

Then the teacher asked, “What do you do at a green light?”

“Stop!” everyone shouted.

The teacher laughed and said, “That’s why there are so many accidents with teenage drivers.”

The teacher then pointed out that mindlessly chanting, “pots, pots, pots” (which is “stop” spelled backward) had primed the students to say “stop,” even though it was obviously the wrong answer. If the students had taken time to think, they would have said something different. He then asked, “Are you just chanting in your prayers, or do you really stop to think about what you are saying?”

This question gave me pause. At times I have found myself slipping into prayer routines where I just say the same things and don’t put effort into meaningful prayer. As I pondered on how I could improve the quality of my prayers, I decided to see how people prayed in the Book of Mormon. I was surprised to find that in addition to teaching about prayer, the Book of Mormon also gives many examples of prayer.

I found several patterns as I studied the prayers offered in the Book of Mormon. And as I’ve reflected on my own experiences with

prayer, I have realized that my most powerful prayers have followed these same patterns. For me, five Book of Mormon patterns of prayer have been especially impressive. Implementing these patterns can change the way we pray and consequently change our lives.

Go to a Private Place to Pray

One pattern that consistently appears in the Book of Mormon is that people often go to a private place to pray. We read:

“I arose and *went up into the mountain*, and cried unto the Lord” (1 Nephi 17:7, emphasis added).

“[Nephi] *went out* and bowed himself down upon the earth, and cried mightily to his God in behalf of his people” (3 Nephi 1:11, emphasis added).

“The brother of Jared . . . *went forth unto the mount . . .* and cried again unto the Lord” (Ether 3:1, emphasis added).

When I was in my early 20s, I had to make an important decision about graduate school. I found a secluded place in nature and poured out my heart in prayer. I can still remember the powerful answers that came. There was something about going to a private place to pray that made all the difference. Praying and listening are possible anywhere, but they are best done where one can be alone, such as in a quiet room of one’s house.



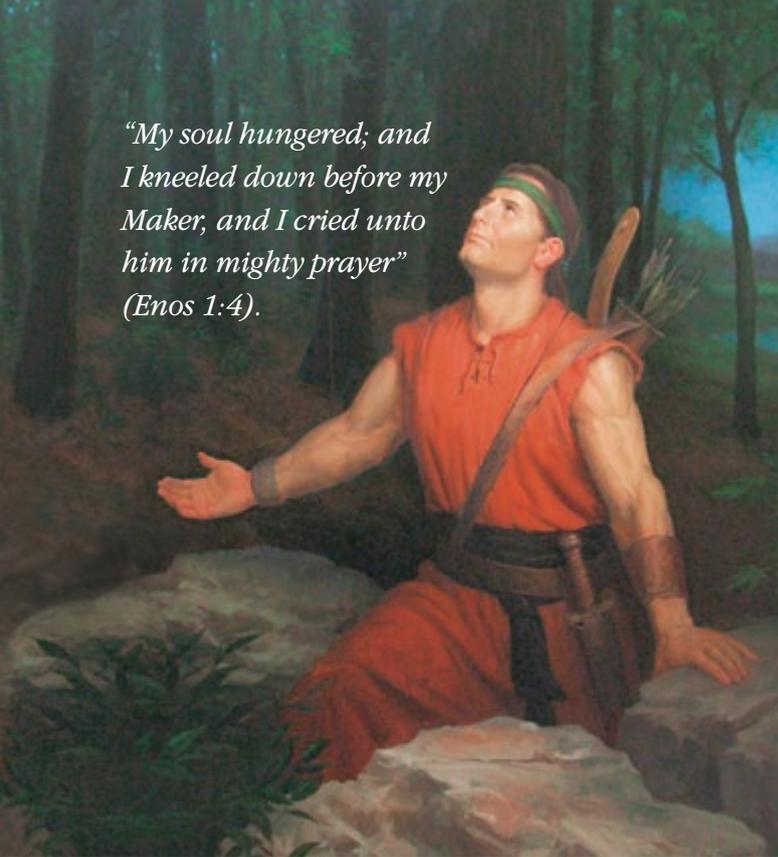
As we study examples of prayer in the Book of Mormon, we can learn to make our own prayers more powerful.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Note how these doctrines are applied in this article:

- The Book of Mormon gives us teachings for our day.
- Through prayer we can speak with our Heavenly Father.
- Jesus Christ set the example of how we come unto God.

“My soul hungered; and I kneeled down before my Maker, and I cried unto him in mighty prayer” (Enos 1:4).



Kneel to Pray

Often when people pray in the Book of Mormon, it explicitly states that they kneel or bow as they pray. Consider these three examples:

“[Moroni] *bowed himself to the earth*, and he prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren” (Alma 46:13, emphasis added).

“Nephi had *bowed himself* upon the tower which was in his garden” (Helaman 7:10, emphasis added).

“*They knelt again* and prayed to the Father in the name of Jesus” (3 Nephi 19:8, emphasis added).

I pointed out this pattern in a class I was teaching and invited class members to consider kneeling to pray. A few days later, a student wrote me a note that said, “I have been kneeling for the first time and my prayers have been a ton better.” While there are times that we will not be able to kneel as we pray, in many instances we can. As President Thomas S. Monson stated, “Kneel down to pray.”¹

Pray Vocally

Another pattern of prayer that appears throughout the Book of Mormon is people praying out loud. One of the definitions of the word “cry” is “to utter a loud voice, by way of earnest request of prayer.”² Consider these examples of vocal prayer:

“My soul hungered; and I kneeled down before my

Maker, and *I cried unto him* in mighty prayer . . . ; and all the day long *did I cry unto him*; yea, and when the night came *I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens*” (Enos 1:4, emphasis added).

“The king did bow down before the Lord, upon his knees . . . and *cried mightily, saying*: O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; . . . Wilt thou make thyself known unto me” (Alma 22:17–18, emphasis added).

“[Alma] lifted up his voice to heaven, *and cried, saying*: O, how long, O Lord, wilt thou suffer that thy servants shall dwell here below in the flesh, to behold such gross wickedness?” (Alma 31:26, emphasis added).

Joseph Smith’s First Vision burst upon him after his first vocal prayer (see Joseph Smith—History 1:14).

As I thought about my prayers, I realized that the majority of them were silent prayers. Unfortunately, my mind tends to wander, and these silent prayers often turned into rambling thoughts not particularly related to prayer. As I began praying vocally, I found that I was able to concentrate more on what I was saying, and my prayers were more meaningful. Perhaps this is part of the reason President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) said, “I hope that not too many of our prayers are silent, even though when we cannot pray vocally, it is good to offer a silent prayer in our hearts and in our minds.”³

Express Gratitude

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles shared an experience of when some loved ones had experienced a tragedy. That night, he and Sister Bednar wanted to pray for those who were suffering; however, a General Authority visiting their home, not aware of this tragedy, invited Sister Bednar to express only gratitude in her prayer. She did so. Elder Bednar recounted, “Our family learned from that experience a great lesson about the power of thankfulness in meaningful prayer.”⁴ This same pattern of expressing gratitude in prayer is found in the Book of Mormon. We read:

“Yea, and in the valley of Alma *they poured out their thanks to God*” (Mosiah 24:21, emphasis added).

“Alma ate bread and was filled; and he blessed Amulek and his house, and *he gave thanks unto God*” (Alma 8:22, emphasis added).

“The brother of Jared did sing praises unto the Lord, and *he did thank and praise the Lord all the day long*” (Ether 6:9, emphasis added).

In each of the above situations there was much that the people could have complained about. Alma and his people were not yet completely safe from the Lamanites, Alma had recently been persecuted by the people of Ammonihah, and the Jaredites were stuck on barges for almost an entire year. Yet they still focused on gratitude.

Pray for Others

While I sometimes have a tendency in my prayers to focus on my own needs, several people in the Book of Mormon show through their example the importance of praying for others. We read:

“Laman and Lemuel would not hearken unto my words; and being grieved because of the hardness of their hearts I cried unto the Lord *for them*” (1 Nephi 2:18, emphasis added).

“They began to fast, and to pray to the Lord their God *that he would open the mouth of Alma, that he might speak, and also that his limbs might receive their strength*” (Mosiah 27:22, emphasis added).

“My soul had been poured out in prayer unto my God all the day long *for them*” (Mormon 3:12, emphasis added).

Focusing on praying for others was at first a little difficult for me to apply in my life. I had become accustomed to focusing on my needs during prayer. As I have worked to more frequently pray for others, I have felt that my prayers are more meaningful. I feel a deeper connection with God when I pray for others.

The Savior Set the Example

The Savior’s prayers in the Book of Mormon include all of these five patterns:

“And it came to pass that Jesus departed out of the midst of them, and *went a little way off* from them and *bowed himself to the earth*, and *he said*:

Father, *I thank thee* that thou hast given the Holy Ghost unto these whom I have chosen; and it is because of their belief in me that I have chosen them out of the world. . . .

“And now Father, *I pray unto thee for them*” (3 Nephi 19:19–20, 23, emphasis added).

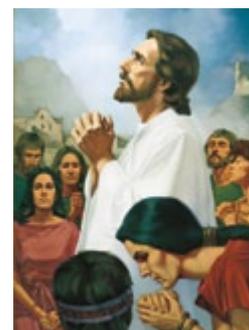
The teacher who had his students chant “pots” later had them chant the word “roast.” After the students repeated it several times, the teacher asked, “What do you put in a toaster?”

Some students said, “toast,” but many paused to think and correctly said, “bread.” The teacher commended those who had stopped to think about what they were saying.

I have found that implementing these five patterns—going to a private place to pray, kneeling, praying vocally, expressing gratitude, and praying for others—has helped me to pause and ponder on what I say in my prayers and has made the experience more meaningful. The Book of Mormon teaches other patterns of prayer as well, including being consistent and giving sufficient time to prayer and meditation. As we search the Book of Mormon and implement the patterns of prayer it teaches, we will reap great blessings in our lives and in our families. ■

NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “Heavenly Homes—Forever Families,” *Ensign*, June 1986, 3.
2. *Noah Webster’s First Edition of an American Dictionary of the English Language*, 9th ed. (1996), “cry.”
3. Spencer W. Kimball, “We Need a Listening Ear,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 4.
4. David A. Bednar, “Pray Always,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 42.



The Savior’s prayers in the Book of Mormon give us the perfect example of how to communicate with our Father in Heaven.