

STUDY NOTES

Lesson 1: Enos 1

*But without faith it is impossible to please Him:
for he that cometh to God must believe that He is,
and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.
Hebrews 11:6*

Enos is unlike any other book of scripture. Its beginning is so personal that we feel as if we are reading the private journal entry of a young man describing the search that led him to find God for himself. It is the intimate character of this book, and the ordinariness of the writer—a young man who is hungering for something more in his life—that invite us to identify ourselves with his struggle.

A PARENT'S INFLUENCE

To begin to understand the story of Enos, one must note that his father, Jacob, was a prophet and one of the great writers of the Book of Mormon. Jacob's sermons are powerful and filled with testimony. Often his message is a "no holds barred" call to repentance. He says of himself, "I had heard the voice of the Lord speaking unto me in very word, from time to time; wherefore, I could not be shaken." (Jacob 7:5) His dramatic confrontation with the anti-Christ Sherem (see Jacob 7) shows his powerful speaking abilities and fearlessness in the Lord's cause. His writings express yearning toward God and a loneliness that comes from knowing oneself to be a pilgrim and a wanderer in the earth, whose soul was created for a better place and who delighted above all else in His Lord. He says, "Our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream, we being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers, cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation, in a wilderness, and hated of our brethren, which caused wars and contentions; wherefore, we did mourn out our days." (Jacob 7:26) He was not a person, at least in his writings, whom you would describe as cheerful.

Enos certainly knew his father had a strong testimony. He doesn't seem to have been a rebel. Like many 19-year-old boys before their missions, they had heard it all their lives. Perhaps Jacob thought all his admonitions were going in one ear and out the other with this son. Enos had been born in the environment of the new world. Jerusalem and its ways would have seemed unreal. The mountains and forests of what we call Mesoamerica were his home. Perhaps he was content there and not "mourning out his days." That he went out to hunt in the forest tells us that this was familiar territory to him. There are many forces pulling on a youth in the years when he becomes a man. It is a time of proving oneself and finding oneself. Like many young men who grow up with faithful parents who love the Lord, Enos had observed his father's (and probably his mother's) faith. But that faith was not yet his own.

BECOMING HIS OWN MAN

How fascinating to contemplate what one thing finally got through to him—registered—like a little piece of lint stuck to his thinking and tickling him. It was not the fear of damnation, though if you read through Jacob's sermons you will see that he was not afraid to liberally salt his words with "warning[s] against fornication and lasciviousness, and every kind of sin, telling them the awful consequences of them." (Jacob 3:12) But it was not these fiery calls to "loose yourselves from the pains of hell" (Jacob 3:11) that triggered his son's own search. It was his father's words about joy.

Jacob, the sometimes harsh, melancholy prophet, had told his son about his own experience of joy. The gospel of Jesus Christ—no, more accurately—Jesus Christ himself, (for Jacob had talked with Him) had brought a joy into his heart and life that made every hardship and trial seem insignificant in comparison. There was a reality and intensity of joy that came from knowing, loving and serving Christ that nothing else came close to. This calls to mind Alma's prayer that "your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son." (Alma 33:23) Jacob had experienced this. We have no record of any sermon of Jacob on this subject. But we can know for certain that he did let his son know what this powerful gift of the spirit called joy felt like, because of the result in the young man's life.

THE POWERFUL PULL OF JOY

We don't know exactly how old Enos was at the time he prayed and sought God. But probably old enough to have tried the things young men do to make their way in the world, find satisfaction and prove their manhood. He would have enjoyed friends and hunting and tests of his skills. Perhaps in his culture he was already battle tested. But Enos had not found the thing his father had told him about. He had not found joy in these things.

The first step to his personal growth was that he *believed* his father. He believed Jacob was telling the truth when describing his feelings. One day, while he was alone in the forest all these things “sank deep into his heart” and “his soul hungered.” He wanted what he knew his father had and he finally wanted it badly enough to do something about it. Oh the blessings that flow from a hungry soul!

The obvious question for us to ask ourselves as we read this man's story is, “Have I felt this joy?” And if the answer to that question is yes, have we testified of it to those coming up behind us on the path--to our children, to the young people we teach and influence and to our sisters in Relief Society? Do they know the gospel brings us JOY? Or do they see us only burdened like an animal in a harness behind a plow heading down a furrow that looks more and more like a rut. Do we seem to our family to be duty bound or joy filled? And if they see only the duty, the pressure and the stress of the to-do lists, if they see only the burden of our callings, will their soul hunger for that? The angel who announced Christ's birth said, “Behold, I bring you tidings of great joy!” When our lives reflect that joy we will attract others to the light.

THE SEED OF ENOS' FAITH

Enos did not doubt the words of his father. He seemed to believe in God and in the plan of salvation his father had taught him. He just hadn't had the experience himself. He needed that. We *all* need that. “This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3) The scripture does not say, “This is life eternal, to know about God ...”

There is really only one way to initiate the process. And it is Enos' way. For precisely this purpose, to show us the way, this little book was included in the Book of Mormon. The way to make personal contact with God is to struggle, to persevere in prayer until that relationship is “born,” as it were, through the labor.

THE VALUE OF STRUGGLE

Why, some may wonder, would God make us work so hard to establish contact with Him? Why not make it easy, like plucking fruit from a low hanging branch. Because of course, we don't value what comes too easily. Cheaply gotten—soon forgotten. We value that which we struggle for.

There is a story in the Old Testament that seems a companion piece to the Enos account. It is the story of Jacob, son of Isaac, the son of Abraham. This was the patriarch of old whose 12 sons became heads of the 12 tribes of Israel. His name was changed to Israel after an unusual experience in which he “wrestled” all night with an angel. We read in Genesis 32:28, “Your name no longer shall be called Jacob, but Israel: because you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed.” (Literal Hebrew translation) Why was Jacob wrestling with an angel? Because he desperately wanted a certain blessing from God. In his particular case, he was moving back to the land of his birth after many years, with his wives and children, herds and servants. The only catch was that, years before, he had fled for his life from a brother who vowed to kill him. Now as he returns, Jacob wonders, will Esau still seek revenge? Esau is now a powerful leader. How can he ensure the safety of his family?

He can not ensure their safety. Only God can do this. In desperate humility he goes to God in prayer the night before he is to enter the land, and pleads for the Lord to help him. There he lays out all his fears and begs for help. While praying a man in white, a heavenly being, appears and “wrestles” with him. Apparently, the “wrestle” happened because Jacob held on to the man and wouldn't let go. “Let me go,” the man finally says. “It is daybreak.” “No. I will not let you go until you bless me.” This is the heart of the matter. Jacob is determined to get the blessing he needs. And for his refusal to give up, he is given a new name. The Lord approves of his spirit of faithful determination and calls him Israel, a name that means, “Thou hast persevered with God.”

MIGHTY PRAYER

In Enos we see this same spirit of determined struggle. We get the same sense of “not letting go until you bless me.” By praying for hours—something the scriptural text frankly calls a “struggle,” Enos both shows his faith and grows his faith. He perseveres like Jacob of old and receives the blessing he “hungered” for. Perhaps Enos originally was driven into the forest to hunt by hunger, by the need to find food. How much are men willing to do to get food for their bodies. When they begin to hunger in like manner for spiritual food, God will provide it.

What can we take away from such stories? Sometimes we must show our faith simply by not giving up. The theme scripture for this set of notes is Hebrews 11:6, “He that cometh to God must believe that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” Enos “prayed and labored with all diligence.” We must not become discouraged when our prayers seem not to be answered immediately. For all of those who pray for hours or months or years, faith means not quitting. It means knowing that God is listening and is working in His way for our good. True Israelites are those who persevere in prayer. If you look, you will find this theme in the temple.

Do you ever wonder how God must feel when His children get on their knees and ask for a closer relationship with Him, only to jump up 2 minutes later, glad “to have that over.” It is in the struggle to

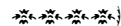
persevere that we come to know God. And knowing Him is the greatest answer to prayer of all, because it is the source of joy. All eight scriptural reference to “mighty prayer” are in the Book of Mormon or D&C. For example, Alma 8:10 says, “Nevertheless Alma labored much in the spirit, wrestling with God in mighty prayer, that he would pour out his Spirit upon the people who were in the city...” It is too bad that this powerful principal has been lost from the Bible, but we should be grateful to have this understanding restored, for it holds such a key to the blessings we seek for our families and ourselves.

THE POWER OF PRAYER

One of the great themes of the book of Enos is to testify of the power of prayer. Enos says that God spoke to him as he prayed, telling him, “Whatsoever thing ye shall ask in faith, believing that ye shall receive in the name of Christ, ye shall receive it.” Similar language is found in the New Testament. Having learned this principle, Enos says “my faith began to be unshaken in the Lord; and I prayed unto him with many long strugglings for my brethren, the Lamanites.” It is as if Enos had found a powerful weapon, and was now going to use it against all the challenges facing him.

Satan knows how powerful a weapon against him “mighty prayer” can be. That is why we learn in the Book of Mormon that “the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray. But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint.” (2nd Nephi 32:8—These are the words of Enos’ uncle, Nephi.) If you ever hear the thought in your mind, “Oh you can’t pray about *that!*” you will know exactly where it is coming from.

Note that after the very personal story of his mighty prayer in the forest, Enos switches to a rather impersonal tone, describing in a few sentences the whole rest of his life—a life that consisted of becoming a man much like his father had been, a preacher and teacher of righteousness among the Nephites, “stirring them up continually to keep them in the fear of the Lord.” (Enos 23) He had found the way to God and was content to spend the remainder of his days trying to help others find the same way. We have to assume, that like his father before him, Enos made his peace with the challenging life of his Nephite world by enjoying the fruit of the tree of life: “that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal.” (D&C 42:61)



Some Additional References on the Theme of Joy: There are 68 references to the word “Joy” in the Book of Mormon. This is one of the books great themes.

“And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw? 22 And I answered him, saying: Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things. 23 And he spake unto me, saying: Yea, and the most joyous to the soul.” 1 Nephi 11:21-23

Now the joy of Ammon was so great even that he was full; yea, he was swallowed up in the joy of his God, even to the exhausting of his strength; and he fell again to the earth.

Now was not this exceeding joy? Behold, this is joy which none receiveth save it be the truly penitent and humble seeker of happiness. Alma 27:17-18