

Alma's Counsel to Shiblon: The Faithful Middle and Continuing in Christ

Fifteen verses sit between two of the most-quoted chapters in the Book of Mormon, and almost no one stops there. When Alma gathered his sons for his final counsel, he did not say the same thing three times. Helaman was entrusted with the sacred records, while Corianton received extended correction and doctrine. Between them stands Alma 38, a chapter of only fifteen verses addressed to Shiblon. Alma spoke to each son according to what that son needed.

Readers may assume that Alma had less to say because Shiblon mattered less. But Alma's few words are carefully chosen. Shiblon's life had already established a pattern of trust, so Alma did not need to correct a serious transgression or transfer a major stewardship. He needed to prepare his son to continue. The instruction is brief because it is proportionate, not because Shiblon's discipleship is complete.

Alma 38 answers a question the other two addresses do not: What do you say to a son who does not need a rescue or a new stewardship? Shiblon receives counsel for the long stretch of discipleship after conversion, when the work is to keep choosing Christ. Alma honors what his son has already become while identifying what still requires care. Read slowly, the chapter becomes a carefully ordered account of continuing in Christ. For the disciple whose faithfulness has settled into a pattern no one particularly remarks on, this is the chapter that was written. If your own discipleship has settled into a faithfulness no one particularly remarks on, this is the chapter written for you.

1. The Faithful Middle

Alma 38:1-2: "Give ear to my words . . . as much as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land . . . I trust that I shall have great joy in you, because of your steadiness and your faithfulness unto God."

"Middle" here names a position, not a grade. It describes where Shiblon stands in the record and the kind of discipleship his counsel represents, not a life that is half-committed, spiritually average, or interchangeable. His life has not become a crisis requiring prolonged correction, and Alma does not give him the visible responsibility assigned to Helaman. Shiblon's shorter chapter refuses the conclusion that less narrative attention means less divine interest.

Much of covenant life is lived in this faithful middle. It is neither a public crisis nor a conspicuous stewardship. Disciples worship, repent, keep covenants, teach children and classes, care for people within reach, accept needed assignments, and return to Christ after ordinary failures. Because these acts are repeated, they can begin to look small to the people performing them. Alma 38 gives such lives a different measure.

Alma had already stated the principle to another son. Charging Helaman with the records,

he promised that “by small and simple things are great things brought to pass” (Alma 37:6). What Helaman receives as doctrine, Shiblon’s life demonstrates. His chapter is short, his record brief, and most of his service went unrecorded; Alma treats none of that as a measure of its weight.

Religious narratives naturally linger over dramatic conversion and visible leadership because both create an obvious story. Steadiness is harder to describe. Its decisive moments are often separated by months or years of choices that no one records. Alma notices that history in Shiblon. He remembers when his son began to look to the Lord, names his faithfulness under persecution, and recognizes that repeated trust has become part of his character. Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles described this kind of service as a “steady, quiet, and typically unrecognized sustaining influence” that may be fully understood only in eternity.¹

Alma’s praise does not flatter Shiblon or excuse him from further growth. The command to “continue” shows that God treats steadiness as a living covenant rather than a completed credential. Shiblon still needs instruction about diligence, temperance, pride, boldness, prayer, and mercy. The faithful middle is faithful, but it is never finished.

That unfinished quality is not meant to produce anxiety. The word Alma attaches to Shiblon’s steadiness is joy, and he speaks of joy he has already received rather than joy withheld until some final performance. A disciple who hears “continue” as a demand that can never be satisfied has misheard it. Gratitude for what God has already done in an ordinary week comes nearer to Alma’s meaning than restless searching for the next thing that might finally count. A disciple who can name one mercy from the past seven days is reading the verse as Alma intended it. If you can name one mercy from the past seven days, you are reading the verse the way Alma intended.

2. Neither Overlooked nor Outdone

Alma 38:1: “As much as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land.”

Steadiness also carries pressures that are easy to miss. A dependable disciple may grow weary of being the person who is assumed to be fine. A life with few visible emergencies can feel spiritually unremarkable, especially when callings, recognition, or dramatic experiences appear to give other lives greater consequence. If you have ever measured your life against someone with a larger calling or a brighter season and come out short, Shiblon’s chapter disputes the arithmetic. It corrects that comparison without turning quiet service into another source of pride. His worth does not come from being better than Corianton or less visible than Helaman. It comes through Jesus Christ, in whom every son must learn to trust.

Alma’s opening promise speaks to the other side of that comparison. He tells Shiblon that as he keeps the commandments he “shall prosper in the land,” but the prospering Alma has in

¹Elder David A. Bednar, “In the Path of Their Duty,” Liahona, November 2023, 6–8.

view is covenant standing rather than visible advantage. It is not a scale on which one disciple outranks another by circumstance, and its apparent absence is not evidence of divine neglect. A life that looks plainer from the outside may be prospering precisely as Alma means the word.

God's measure is therefore different from the measures disciples may apply to themselves. Alma looks for covenant direction: whether Shiblon trusts the Lord, receives correction, governs his strength, remembers others in mercy, and continues to teach the word. What may seem repetitive from the outside can be the precise work through which a soul becomes dependable in the hands of Christ.

Shiblon's counsel reveals what God says to people who are already trying, whose discipleship does not need to be rescued or publicly distinguished in order to matter. Alma begins by naming the trust Shiblon's life has earned, then speaks carefully about the grace and discipline that will allow that life to continue.

3. Trusted Before He Is Warned

Alma 38:2–4: “I trust that I shall have great joy in you . . . I have had great joy in thee already . . . thou wast in bonds . . . thou wast stoned . . . the Lord was with thee . . . the Lord did deliver thee.”

Alma begins with trust. Before warning Shiblon, he tells his son what he has already seen in him. By placing confidence before correction, Alma makes clear that he is not trying to awaken a rebellious son or recover a lost testimony. He is speaking to someone whose life has already given him reason for confidence, and that confidence shapes the conversation from its first sentence.

Alma's movement between future and present tense is especially revealing. He first says, “I trust that I shall have great joy in you,” then adds, “I have had great joy in thee already.” His expectation is not wishful. Future joy grows out of a history that has already been tested. Shiblon had “commenced in [his] youth to look to the Lord,” and that early direction had matured into a constancy formed by repeated choices over time.

Alma praises the history through which Shiblon became faithful. That consistency has made him useful in the places and relationships entrusted to him.

The Zoramite mission revealed that pattern under pressure. Alma recalls that Shiblon had been bound and stoned “for the word's sake,” yet he does not linger over the cruelty of the experience. He directs attention to what Shiblon learned within it: “the Lord was with thee,” and “the Lord did deliver thee.” Suffering was not the final truth about the experience. It became the setting in which Shiblon came to know the Lord's sustaining power.

Shiblon's own life keeps Alma's promise from becoming a shallow assurance that faithfulness will remove hardship. Trust did not keep him from prison or stones. The Lord's companionship and eventual deliverance became more enduring than the violence itself. Alma asks Shiblon to remember not only what happened to him, but what God did for him there.

President Henry B. Eyring taught that remembering God's kindness builds testimony because deliberate remembrance allows the Lord to show us what He has done.² Before extending new instruction, Alma restores Shiblon's attention to grace already received. That memory becomes evidence for future trust and prepares a faithful heart to hear counsel without mistaking it for rejection.

4. Trust in God and the Centering Power of Christ

Alma 38:5–9: “As much as ye shall put your trust in God . . . ye shall be delivered . . . I know these things . . . by the Spirit of God . . . I did cry unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy . . . there is no other way or means whereby man can be saved, only in and through Christ.”

Having reminded Shiblon of past deliverance, Alma turns memory into instruction: “As much as ye shall put your trust in God even so much ye shall be delivered.” Alma extends deliverance all the way to being “lifted up at the last day.” The horizon is eternal. Some deliverance comes in this life; the rest waits for the resurrection.

The phrase “as much as” places the emphasis on the direction of Shiblon's trust, not his control of the outcome. Alma is not teaching him how to guarantee the life he wants, but where to stand when life does not yield to expectation. Trust rests in who God is and in His power to save, even when His timing remains unseen.

Before continuing, Alma carefully identifies the source of his certainty. “I would not that ye should think that I know these things of myself,” he says. His authority does not come from an impressive past or from his position as Shiblon's father. The Spirit of God has made these things known to him. Alma acknowledges that spiritual knowledge is received before he recounts the angel or the three days of anguish. His humility prepares Shiblon for the later warning against self-trust disguised as spiritual strength.

When Alma repeats his conversion account, he does not make the angel the center. The decisive moment comes when he cries “unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy.” His pain ends not because he has finally analyzed his condition correctly or disciplined himself out of despair, but because he turns toward the Savior. Alma's story becomes testimony rather than autobiography: he tells it so that Shiblon “may learn wisdom,” and the wisdom is that salvation is found “only in and through Christ.”

That declaration is the center of the chapter. Everything before it leads toward Christ, and everything after it depends upon Him. Shiblon's faithfulness and future obedience cannot become achievements offered in place of grace. They are covenant responses made possible by the One Alma calls “the life and the light of the world.”

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles described the enabling

²President Henry B. Eyring, “O Remember, Remember,” *Ensign*, November 2007, 67.

power of the Atonement as strength “to do and be good and to serve beyond our own individual desire and natural capacity.”³ The same Christ who brings a sinner back also carries a faithful disciple from good to better. He governs strength and sustains that disciple when continuing becomes tiring.

5. Continue: The Lifelong Work of Faithful Discipleship

Alma 38:2, 10–12: “Continue in keeping the commandments of God . . . be diligent and temperate in all things . . . see that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love.”

The first command in Alma’s address appears in verse 2 and quietly governs everything that follows: “continue.” Alma does not ask Shiblon to reinvent his discipleship or pursue a more impressive path. He asks him to remain oriented toward the Lord. The word carries more weight than simple persistence because Shiblon must keep choosing the direction he began in youth.

Beginning often attracts attention. Continuing rarely does. Conversion stories center on decisive turns, but a covenant life is built through thousands of later decisions that receive little notice. After the first commitments are made, faith can be weakened by distraction or weariness. Shiblon has endured persecution; now he must endure the quieter work of remaining teachable.

Alma makes “continue” concrete through diligence and temperance. Diligence resists drift by favoring dependable effort over intensity that cannot be sustained. Temperance keeps even good desires within wise bounds. Together they describe a disciple whose strength has become reliable enough to be trusted.

The instruction to “bridle all your passions” develops the same idea. A bridle does not erase a horse’s power; it makes that power responsive to direction. Alma is not asking Shiblon to become less fully human. He is teaching that desire must be governed by covenant purpose. Alma then gives the reason for such restraint: “that ye may be filled with love.” Self-government is not the final virtue; charity is. Passions are bridled so that love can govern the disciple’s actions. The goal is not a smaller life but one increasingly capable of carrying the Savior’s love without distorting it.

King Benjamin describes a similar transformation when he teaches that the natural man yields to the Holy Spirit and becomes a saint “through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19). Alma’s counsel shows how that transformation may look in an already faithful life. It appears quietly as strength comes under the direction of love. Sister Bonnie L. Oscarson invited disciples to ask, “Who needs me today?”⁴ Those questions turn attention from comparison toward the life immediately within reach. For Shiblon, continuing means consecrating what is already his to give.

³Elder David A. Bednar, “The Atonement and the Journey of Mortality,” *Ensign*, April 2012, 40–47.

⁴Sister Bonnie L. Oscarson, “The Needs before Us,” *Ensign*, November 2017, 27.

Alma's command reaches beyond survival. To continue is to keep becoming. Maturing discipleship must also be guarded. That need explains why Alma's next words are warnings rather than additional praise.

6. Governing Strength Without Pride or Overbearance

Alma 38:11–12: “See that ye are not lifted up unto pride . . . do not boast in thine own wisdom, nor of thy much strength . . . use boldness, but not overbearance.”

Alma's warnings make sense after such generous praise. Trust does not remove the need for caution; it makes the caution more precise. Shiblon's virtues are real, but strength can become distorted when it stops answering to Christ. Alma therefore warns him about pride, boasting, and overbearance.

Boldness is necessary when a disciple must speak truth under opposition. Shiblon has already shown that kind of courage by remaining faithful while bound and stoned among the Zoramites. Yet Alma distinguishes boldness from overbearance. Boldness trusts the truth enough to speak it; overbearance trusts the speaker's force more than the Spirit. Alma is not weakening Shiblon's courage. He is teaching him how courage remains usable in the hands of God.

Pride can grow inside tested goodness. Failure exposes dependence quickly, while success can conceal it. A disciple who has endured well may begin to treat grace as evidence of superiority. Alma interrupts that movement before it begins: “See that ye are not lifted up unto pride; yea, see that ye do not boast in thine own wisdom, nor of thy much strength.” Shiblon's wisdom and strength are not denied, but neither belongs to him independently of God.

“Do not boast” carries the warning into speech. Alma does not forbid honest gratitude for God-given gifts. He forbids using goodness to enlarge the self. Boasting treats stewardship as possession and turns admiration into a spiritual reward. Shiblon's life has already shown a quieter pattern, and Alma asks him to preserve it as his influence grows.

Alma does not ask Shiblon to choose between courage and humility. One protects the other. Boldness remains useful only while it serves truth rather than the disciple's need to be heard, admired, or obeyed.

7. Remember My Brethren in Mercy

Alma 38:13–14: “Do not pray as the Zoramites do . . . O Lord, forgive my unworthiness, and remember my brethren in mercy.”

Alma then moves from public conduct to private prayer. Shiblon has already witnessed the worship of the Zoramites, whose prayer was offered from an elevated stand and repeated in the hearing of others. Their words declared that they were chosen while everyone else was

condemned. Prayer had become a performance of spiritual rank. Alma warns Shiblon not to imitate what he encountered there: “Do not pray as the Zoramites do, for ye have seen that they pray to be heard of men, and to be praised for their wisdom.”

The contrast between the two prayers is exact. The Zoramite prayer says, “We are better than our brethren.” Alma teaches Shiblon to say, “O Lord, forgive my unworthiness.” One prayer establishes distance from sinners; the other acknowledges continued dependence upon mercy. Shiblon may be steady, diligent, and trusted, but his faithfulness does not place him beyond the need for grace.

Alma’s next words deepen the contrast: “Remember my brethren in mercy.” The word “brethren” refuses the distance created by spiritual comparison. Shiblon is not to define other people only by their errors or by what they have done to him. He asks God to remember them with the same mercy he seeks for himself. Humility before God therefore changes how a disciple regards people who are mistaken, sinful, or hostile.

Shiblon’s experience among the Zoramites gives this prayer added force. Members of that community had bound and stoned him, yet Alma teaches him to pray for his brethren in mercy. The request does not excuse cruelty or deny the need for justice. It prevents suffering from becoming a reason for spiritual superiority. Shiblon’s wounds do not give him permission to reproduce the Zoramites’ pride in another form.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that submitting one’s will is the uniquely personal offering placed on God’s altar.⁵ Alma’s counsel moves toward that offering. Strength, judgment, courage, and desire are not rejected, but none is permitted to become sovereign. Shiblon can be trusted with influence because he is being taught to remain humble enough to receive mercy and charitable enough to seek it for others.

Faithfulness must not become comparison. Prayer keeps Shiblon aware that every virtue still depends upon Jesus Christ. The faithful disciple continues not by rising above the need for mercy, but by receiving mercy and remembering his brethren within it.

The sequence becomes important when Alma turns next to Corianton. One brother needs grace to return, and the other needs grace to continue.

8. When Quiet Discipleship Becomes Another’s Guide

Alma 39:1–2: “Have ye not observed the steadiness of thy brother, his faithfulness, and his diligence in keeping the commandments of God? Behold, has he not set a good example for thee? . . . For thou didst not give so much heed unto my words as did thy brother, among the people of the Zoramites.”

Alma’s language to Corianton shows what merciful influence looks like. Before

⁵Elder Neal A. Maxwell, “Swallowed Up in the Will of the Father,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 22–24.

identifying the conduct that requires correction, Alma places a faithful example within Corianton's sight.

The word "observed" matters. Alma does not simply tell Corianton that Shiblon is faithful; he asks whether Corianton has paid attention to the example his brother's life provides. Shiblon's discipleship has taken a visible form. It can be recognized in the choices he makes, the way he serves, and the consistency with which he keeps God's commandments. A life almost no one remarks on may still be the one someone else steers by.

Alma's list is deliberate: steadiness, faithfulness, and diligence. Steadiness suggests a life that is not easily moved from its foundation. Faithfulness describes loyalty to God and His commandments. Diligence shows that Shiblon's goodness is not passive. His example has been formed through repeated effort. None of these qualities depends upon one heroic moment. Their strength comes from continuing.

Alma's second question, whether Shiblon has set a good example, is direct, but its purpose need not be humiliation. Alma is trying to bring Corianton back. Shiblon becomes evidence that another way of living is possible, even among the same people and under the same difficult conditions. His example gives Corianton something concrete to observe as Alma opens a path toward repentance.

Alma 38 and Alma 39 therefore complete one another. Shiblon first receives counsel about carrying faithfulness forward; his continued discipleship then becomes part of the counsel offered to someone else. Shiblon's service did not need to resemble Helaman's stewardship to matter to God. His steadiness placed him beside a brother Alma was still trying to reclaim. That quiet influence reflects the counsel of President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, then Second Counselor in the First Presidency, that disciples need not wait for a different position before contributing; they can "lift where [they] stand."⁶

Shiblon's example does not prove that he is worth more than Corianton. His steadiness gives Corianton a visible path back. Alma uses comparison not to assign permanent rank, but to place a reliable guide beside a son who has lost his direction.

9. Lifted Up to Sit Down in Peace

Alma 38:5, 15: "Ye shall be lifted up at the last day . . . may the Lord bless your soul, and receive you at the last day into his kingdom, to sit down in peace. Now go, my son, and teach the word unto this people. Be sober. My son, farewell."

Alma closes with two images that seem to move in opposite directions. Earlier he promised that Shiblon will be "lifted up at the last day." In the final verse, he prays that his son will be received into God's kingdom "to sit down in peace." Resurrection's upward movement

⁶President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Lift Where You Stand," *Ensign*, November 2008, 53–56.

ends in rest. Deliverance is complete not when the disciple becomes prominent, but when he is finally at home with God.

The phrase “sit down in peace” suggests more than relief after hardship. Alma imagines Shiblon received. Peace comes through belonging in God’s kingdom, where the faithful disciple no longer struggles against separation, sin, or death. The deepest hope of discipleship is not to prove one’s importance but to be reconciled through Jesus Christ and welcomed into His presence.

Such peace should not be confused with the absence of sorrow or anxiety. Shiblon had known bonds, stones, and long-suffering among the Zoramites, and God’s presence did not prevent every wound. Peace in Alma’s blessing is not emotional insulation from mortality. It is the settled belonging made possible when a disciple continues to trust in Christ.

Alma’s farewell does not allow the promise of future rest to excuse present responsibility. Immediately after blessing Shiblon toward peace, he tells him, “Now go, my son, and teach the word unto this people.” Eternal rest stands beyond faithful service, not in place of it. Shiblon has endured much and earned his father’s trust, but Alma still sends him back into the work.

“Be sober” is Alma’s final instruction before “My son, farewell.” Those two words gather much of the chapter’s earlier counsel. Shiblon must remain steady enough to use boldness without overbearance, influence without pride, and desire under the direction of love. His future faithfulness will depend less on a dramatic reinvention of his life than on the continued government of strengths he already possesses.

The difference between Alma’s counsel to Shiblon and his counsel to Corianton also reveals the reach of Christ’s grace. The same Savior restores one son and sustains the other.

Alma’s closing prayer rests on the conviction that enduring peace originates in Jesus Christ. President Russell M. Nelson, President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, taught that Christ’s gospel is “the only enduring solution for peace.”⁷ Alma does not wish Shiblon a life free from difficulty. He blesses him toward communion with God now and reception into God’s kingdom at the last day.

Alma 38 is brief, but it is not slight. Alma recognizes a covenant pattern already present in his son and teaches him how to protect it. Shiblon is trusted without being flattered and warned without being diminished.

If you recognize yourself in Shiblon, you are not being asked to become more visible. You are being invited to continue in Christ. Such a life may quietly become another person’s guide, but its worth does not depend on being noticed. The God who was with Shiblon, delivered him, and strengthened him to continue will receive the faithful disciple at last into peace. The kind of discipleship Alma 38 describes takes a lifetime.

⁷President Russell M. Nelson, “Preaching the Gospel of Peace,” *Liahona*, May 2022, 6.