

Come Follow Me Podcast
Elo Viz Production
Week 14
Jacob 1-4

Can you imagine the weight Jacob must be filling now that his brother Nephi is gone and he has the responsibility of leading and protecting this group of people that have a high resemblance to the children of Israel. You can feel the agony and pleading in his writings for his people. Begging them to not fall into the pit of pride. This group has been particularly blessed with many blessings and prosperity that now they are dividing into classes. The rich vs the poor, the powerful vs the lowly.

Jacob records:

“And now it came to pass that the people of Nephi,... began to grow hard in their hearts, and indulge themselves somewhat in wicked practices, such as like unto David of old desiring many **wives** and **concubines**....

Yea, and they also began to search much **gold** and silver, and began to be lifted up somewhat in pride.” (Jacob 1:15-16)

What I find interesting is that Jacob tells us that the Lamanites, even though they were a blood thirsty, wicked people were more righteous than the Nephites because of their pride and specifically their desire to have many wives. Listen to what he says:

“Behold, the Lamanites your brethren, whom ye hate because of their filthiness and the cursing which hath come upon their skins, are more righteous than you; for they have not **forgotten** the commandment of the Lord, which was given unto our father—that they should have save it were **one** wife, and **concubines** they should have none, and there should not be **whoredoms** committed among them.

6 And now, this commandment they observe to keep; wherefore, because of this observance, in keeping this commandment, the Lord God will not destroy them, but will be **merciful** unto them; and one day they shall **become** a blessed people.”

(Jacob 3:5-6)

This is an interesting principle that Jacob is teaching. Don't commit whoredoms and God will not destroy you... But, that is not really the goal in life for most people. I don't think many of us approach the gospel with this kind of attitude: What should I do in order to not be destroyed by God? But rather we are seeking His blessing and His presents in our lives. It is His joy and happiness that we seek. But, here is the question I would like to pose to you today: How are we supposed to be happy when we have so many rules and laws?

Several years ago Elder Von G. Keetch shared this story in General Conference:

“Some time ago while visiting Australia, I traveled to a beautiful horseshoe bay renowned for its surfing. As I walked along the beach, I was enthralled by the magnificence of the large crashing waves breaking just outside the bay and the smaller waves rolling in closer to shore.

As I continued my stroll, I encountered a group of American surfers. They were obviously upset about something, talking loudly and gesturing toward the sea. When I asked them what was wrong, they pointed to just outside the bay where the big waves were breaking.

“Look out there,” one of them angrily told me. “Can you see the barrier?” Looking more closely now, I could indeed see a barrier stretching across the entire mouth of the bay, right where the large, enticing waves were breaking. The barrier appeared to be made of a heavy mesh and was supported by floats on top of the water. According to the surfers, it dropped all the way down to the ocean floor.

The American surfer continued, “We are here on a once-in-a-lifetime trip to surf these big waves. We can surf the smaller ones breaking within the bay itself, but the barrier makes it impossible for us to surf the big ones. We have no idea why the barrier is there. All we know is that it has totally spoiled our trip.”

As the American surfers became more animated, my attention was drawn to another nearby surfer—an older man and obviously a local. He seemed to be growing impatient as he listened to the ever-increasing complaints about the barrier.

Finally he rose and walked over to the group. Without saying anything, he pulled a pair of binoculars from his backpack and handed them to one of the surfers, pointing out toward the barrier. Each of the surfers looked through the binoculars. When my turn came, with the help of magnification, I could see something that I had not been able to see before: dorsal fins—large sharks feeding near the reef on the other side of the barrier.

The group quickly became subdued. The old surfer retrieved his binoculars and turned to walk away. As he did, he said words I will never forget: “Don’t be too critical of the barrier,” he said. “It’s the only thing that’s keeping you from being devoured.””

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2015/10/blessed-and-happy-are-those-who-keep-the-commandments-of-god?lang=eng>

That story teaches us a lot about life and the path we have chosen to walk. No matter how righteous we are, no matter how good we try to be, there will always be that large wave out in the distance that we long to ride, maybe even if it is just once in our life. And when those moments come and those thoughts begin to occupy our minds, might we remember the dangers that lie beneath waiting to devour us during those moments of brief pleasure.

The older I become the more I have realized that as we mature in life, those moments I believe begin to diminish and the desires to cross the line become less frequent. Instead we have walked away from the waters edge and began our pursuit for true happiness, eternal joy. Regarding this path President Holland said:

“So how do we "pursue" happiness? Well, we know one thing for sure: happiness is not easy to find running straight for it. It is usually too elusive, too ephemeral, too subtle. If you haven't learned it already, you will learn in the years ahead that most times happiness comes to us when we least expect it, when we are busy doing something else. Happiness is almost always a by-product of some other endeavor. One of my favorite writers from my university days said, "Happiness is like a butterfly; the more you chase it, the more it will elude you, but if you turn your attention to other things, it will come and sit softly on your shoulder."³ This is one of those great gospel ironies that often don't seem to make sense, like "the last shall be first" and "lose your life to find it." The gospel is filled with such ironies and indirections, and I think the pursuit of happiness is one of them. So how do we optimize our chance for happiness without pursuing it so directly that we miss it? Let me go to a most remarkable book for some answers.”

I bet you can guess where he is going to land with this principle. He goes straight to the writings that we have just been studying. The first two books of Nephi in the book of Mormon. In light of the short time we have together today I will skip his explanation of these chapters and get right to the punch line:

“In light of what they had just been through for thirty years [speaking about the Nephites] and with what we know yet lay in store for them in the trials almost constantly ahead, such a comment seems almost painful. How could any of this be described as anything remotely like "happiness"? [Well] there is the rub. Nephi does not say they were happy, though it is evident they actually were. What he says is, they "*lived after the manner of happiness.*" Today I would have you understand that there is a wonderful key in that phrase that can unlock precious blessings for you for the rest of your life.

I do not think God in his glory or the angels of heaven or the prophets on earth intend to make us happy all the time, every day in every way, given the testing and

trial this earthly realm is intended to provide. As President James E. Faust once phrased it: "Happiness is not given to us in a package that we can just open up and consume. Nobody," he said, "is ever happy 24 hours a day, seven days a week."⁵ But my reassurance to you today is that in God's plan we can do very much to find the happiness we do desire. We can take certain steps, we can form certain habits, we can do certain things that God and history tell us lead to happiness with the confidence that *if we live in such a manner* that butterfly is much more likely to land upon our shoulder.

In short your best chance for being happy is to do the things that happy people do. Live the way happy people live. Walk the path that happy people walk. And your chances to find joy in unexpected moments, to find peace in unexpected places, to find the help of angels when you didn't even know they knew you existed, improves exponentially."

He Also said:

"learn as quickly as you can that so much of your happiness is in your hands, not in events or circumstances or fortune or misfortune. That is part of what the battle for agency was over in the pre-mortal councils of heaven. We have choice, we have volition, we have agency, and we can choose if not happiness per se then we can choose to live after the manner of it. Abraham Lincoln had plenty to be unhappy about in the most difficult administration a President of the United States has ever faced, but even he reflected that "folks are usually about as happy as they make up their minds to be."⁸ Happiness comes first by what comes into your head a long time before it comes into your hand."

<https://ing.byui.edu/devotionals/elder-jeffrey-r-holland>

As one of those that has constantly fought for the pursuit of happiness I can testify that the more we strive to live according to God's will, the more we strive to know Him and follow Him, the more happiness and joy we will have in this life despite the world of wickedness around us. Of this great truth I testify.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.