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The Safety and Peace of Keeping the Commandments

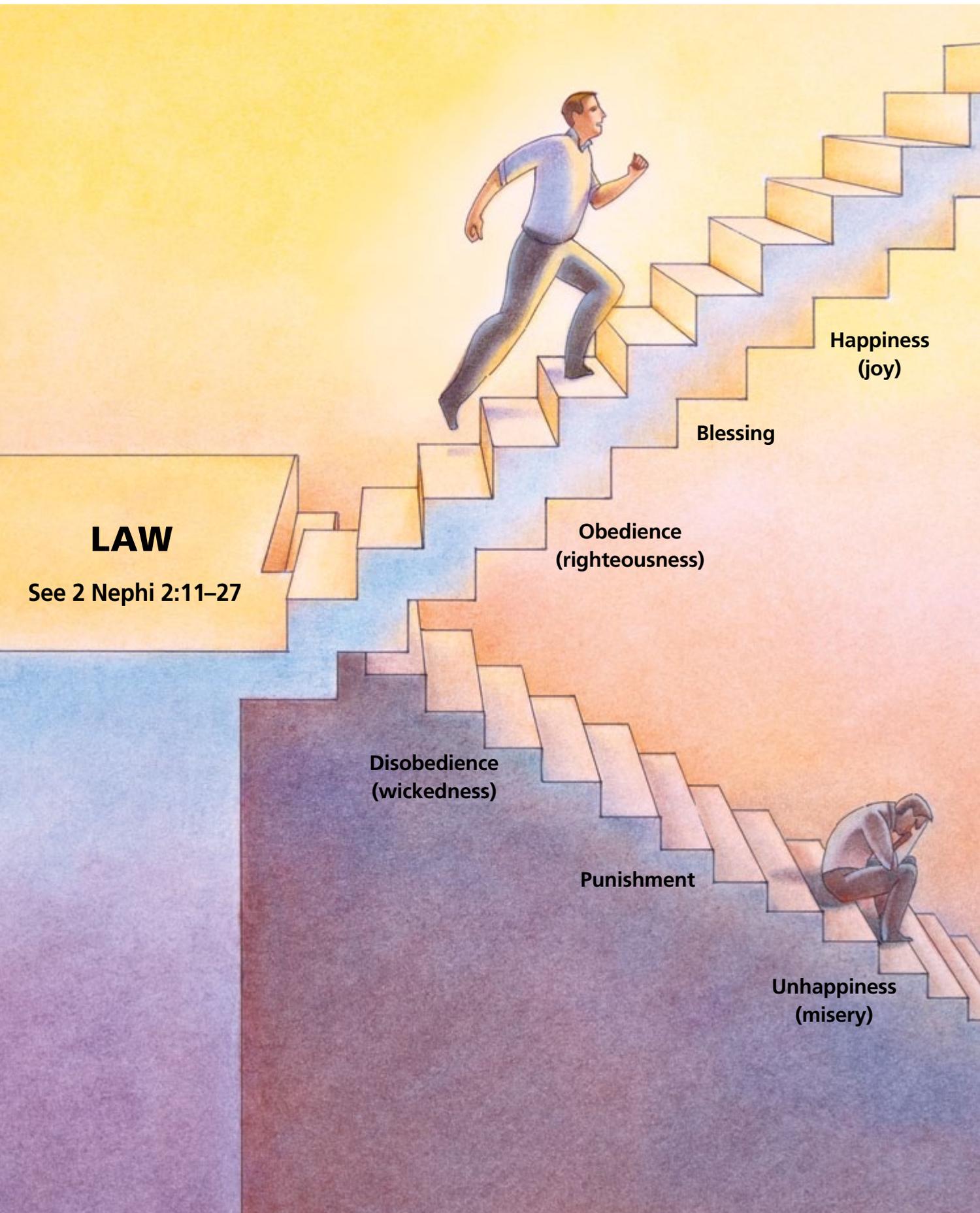
*The patterns and truths found in the Book of Mormon
are clear and instructive, plain and precious.
When we begin with righteousness and obedience,
we will end with blessings and joy.*

In our digital information age, it seems that a 24-hour news cycle cannot pass without the chapters of a familiar story being played out over and over. The characters of the well-worn plot have usually earned celebrity and prominence through extraordinary talent as actors, athletes, politicians, or business leaders. Years of practice or dedicated service and sacrifice—vehicles to the pinnacle of their success in a particular craft or profession—are dashed to pieces in the midst of scandal.

The final scene is often the somber image of the characters making a tearful plea to a judge, shareholders, or constituents or to family, friends, or fans for forgiveness for their misguided actions. The outcome usually casts a broad net of unintended consequences—including heartache, shame, and misery—over them, their loved ones, and their associates.

The plain yet profound words of the ancient Book of Mormon prophet Alma in exhortation to his son seem as relevant in the 21st century as they were more than 2,000 years ago: “Wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10).

In virtually every scandal today, a knowledge of and obedience to the commandments found in the restored gospel would have been enough to avert personal and professional disaster.



LAW

See 2 Nephi 2:11-27

Happiness
(joy)

Blessing

Obedience
(righteousness)

Disobedience
(wickedness)

Punishment

Unhappiness
(misery)

A Formula for Happiness

A formula embodied in the gospel of Jesus Christ reveals the pathway to happiness. It is a plain and precious truth found throughout the Book of Mormon. It is described particularly well in the teachings of the prophet Lehi to his sons as he neared the end of his life. In speaking to his son Jacob, he taught, “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11). A few verses later he added, “Men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25).

Lehi’s teachings in this sermon to Jacob may be summarized simply: Obedience and righteousness lead to blessings, which lead to joy. Conversely, disobedience and wickedness lead to punishment, which leads to sorrow. The Savior is the great Mediator of all mankind and the sponsor of the pathway to happiness and eternal life. The devil is the miserable father of lies and the sponsor of the pathway to captivity and death.

Clearly, the adversary understands that we would not knowingly choose captivity and death, yet because he will be miserable forever, he seeks also the misery of all mankind (see 2 Nephi 2:27). He does this by distorting the consequences of sin and disobedience. That is one reason he is called the father of lies.

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) said: “All of you . . . know of Satan, the father of lies. You know how he turns the truth into a lie. He garnishes evil to make it appear beautiful, pleasing, easy, and even good.”¹

Satan would have us believe that the formula for happiness begins with wickedness and sin. We are warned that his temptations are cloaked so cleverly that sometimes he even appears “nigh unto an angel of light” (2 Nephi 9:9). The Lord described the fall and goals of Satan:

“Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down;

“And he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will” (Moses 4:3–4).

The pathway to happiness begins with righteousness through obedience to the commandments. The commandments have been given to us as a divine playbook to direct us away from many of the calamities of mortality. The Lord proclaimed this in the infancy of the Restoration: “Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, *and gave him commandments*” (D&C 1:17; emphasis added).

Keep the Commandments

Some people find it counterintuitive that the commandments are at the trailhead of the path to happiness rather than something to be carried along the way. The following story from my service as a mission president in Nagoya, Japan, some years ago illustrates this.

My wife, Lesa, and I became acquainted with a young woman soon after she came to church to attend an English class taught by the missionaries. She was outgoing, vibrant, and in control of her life, which included a good job, a longtime boyfriend, and her family. Her association with the missionaries and members through English class piqued her interest in the Church, and she began to receive the missionary lessons. Her testimony of the truthfulness of the restored gospel seemed to blossom each time she met with the missionaries. As she read the Book of Mormon and pondered and prayed about it and the things she was hearing, she knew they were true.

When the missionaries began teaching her the commandments, she knew she must obey. She broke up with her boyfriend and quit her job, which required that she work Sundays. She began observing the Word of Wisdom and accepted the law of tithing. Her faith was so strong that she began keeping the commandments virtually the moment she learned them.

When she announced to her family her interest in the Church and her study of the restored gospel, her parents told her that their relationship with her would suffer as

a result. Within a few weeks of accepting the commandments, she found herself without a job, an apartment, or family support. Clearly, the consequences of her obedience affected her life in what appeared to be a devastating way.

I worried deeply about her situation. Late one night, at the end of a hectic day, Lesa and I left the mission home for a walk, seeking some quiet time together. We were surprised as we came upon a busy intersection at the same time this vibrant young investigator approached on her bicycle. She greeted us with a warm smile and a hug. Surprised that she was out so late, we asked what she was doing.

“I am on my way to my new job working the graveyard shift at the drive-up window of a fast-food restaurant,” she gleefully exclaimed.

This job represented a significant drop in pay, responsibility, and hours from her previous job. Despite significant trials and setbacks in the temporal affairs of her life, happiness exuded from her. She then announced that her baptismal date had been set. As we walked back to the mission home, Lesa and I marveled at how her faith and obedience to newfound commandments had put her on the pathway to true joy.

A few weeks later she was baptized. After some time had passed, she reconciled with her family and found better employment. A few years following her baptism, she was sealed in the Tokyo Japan Temple to a returned missionary she had met at a young single adult activity. Now an eternal family, they were recently blessed with a beautiful baby boy. A short, sweet hymn describes what occurred in her life as a result of keeping the commandments:



Keep the commandments; keep the commandments!

In this there is safety; in this there is peace.

He will send blessings; He will send blessings.

Words of a prophet: Keep the commandments.

In this there is safety and peace.²

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The patterns and truths found in the Book of Mormon are clear and instructive, plain and precious. When we begin with righteousness and obedience, we will end with blessings and joy. ■

NOTES

1. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Blessings and Responsibilities of Womanhood,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1976, 70.
2. “Keep the Commandments,” *Children’s Songbook*, 146–47.