

## 356: January 12, 19: Pay Attention. Follow Through. (Book of Mormon Weeks 2-3)

### Reading:

January 6-12:           1 Ne 1-7  
\*January 13-19:       1 Ne 8-10

There is so much to dig into in these chapters! I delight in how rich and satisfying the Book of Mormon is. Truly a feast. This is one of the greatest gifts of scripture study... we can notice where our attention goes with each reading.

An internet phrase I like is “This is everything.” Well, this is everything. What do we pay attention to? What do we attend to? Where is our focus? What do we follow through on? Attention and investment. (won't surprise any of you to hear that focus is precisely what I most struggle with. Super driven, super efficient.... But holding to a task and following through? Needs improvement)

I want to focus on attention and focus, because I think that is one of the most important lessons from Lehi's vision. Appropriate for the New Year. Our brains cannot understand negatively worded goals, and at the same time are powerfully impacted by negatives (risk aversion; we are over twice as motivated by negatives as positives). The answer is to follow the example of Lehi: Start with compassionate acceptance with where we are. Focus on what we value. Focus on what we want. Press forward toward that. So much of who we are, who we become, flows from where our attention is. Attention is the currency of consciousness. Deeper down the rabbit hole is the fact that our perception is literally hallucination. Our senses can only take in a tiny bit of the data in our environment. One of the most mind blowing things I've ever learned is about our “predictive brain”, which refers to the fact that our brains take in just enough data to help us survive. The way we focus and process literally changes the reality we notice, then impacts how our bodies process and integrate that information.

### Start with the Tree of Life

- Pay attention to Lehi's attention! Right target. Right order. A favorite verse of mine: “so much was his mind swallowed up in other things that he beheld not the filthiness of the water” (kind of delightful Laman and Lemuels' minds immediately went to the water)
- Notice what he notices:
  - Note that Lehi is speaking to Laman and Lemuel. They stop listening (or perhaps even leave!) between verses 16 and 17.
  - Follow Lehi's flow of attention: Dark and dreary wilderness (4) → man in a white robe (5) → dark and dreary waste (7) → God! (8) → large and spacious field (9) → tree → fruit (10-12) → his family (12) → river of water (13) → Sariah, Sam,

Nephi (14) → Head of river/Laman and Lemuel (17-18) → rod of iron (19) → path (20) → numberless multitudes (21) → mist of darkness (23) → great and spacious building (26)

- The key: “But we heeded them not” (33)
- We will get Nephi’s key in the next few chapters, but for now, let’s dig in on our own
  - Tree of Life as Heavenly Mother (Daniel Peterson)
  - The importance of darkness (From Carol Lynn Pearson’s Holy Week: “Do not fight the darkness. Saturday of darkness is holy too”)
  - Role of feelings “feeling their way” Feelings are like children in a car. Don’t stuff them in the trunk, but don’t let them drive either. (Name, notice, feelings in my body, relationship with my emotions. Thoughts and feelings are safe. Be accountable for actions)
- Historical Setting (Between 597 and 587, Don’s discussion)
- Focus of Lehi’s prophetic calling and vision: God’s mercy and Messiah’s redemption.
- Focus of the Book of Mormon. JOY. And gratitude.
- Notice the repetition and focus of Lehi’s obedience and sacrifices. “And my father dwelt in a tent” “These things occurred while my father dwelt in a tent”
- Understanding Nephi: Nephi as unreliable narrator. Remember that Nephi is writing all this toward the end of his life, after wars and disappointment and betrayal. Be like Nephi? Perhaps, but don’t trust him necessarily. Nephi gives us our initial window into the entire narrative. Our whole framing that we teach from primary is based on Nephi’s description. My proposal is that he is an unreliable narrator and that we should read his account carefully, even skeptically. Laban (I love Elder Holland’s description: <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/jeffrey-r-holland/will-father/>)

For that matter, why didn’t Nephi just leave this story out of the book altogether? Why didn’t he say something like, “And after much effort and anguish of spirit, I did obtain the plates of Laban and did depart into the wilderness unto the tent of my father?” At the very least he might have buried the account somewhere in the Isaiah chapters, thus guaranteeing that it would have gone undiscovered up to this very day.

But there it is, squarely in the beginning of the book—page 8—where even the most casual reader will see it *and must deal with it*. It is not intended that either Nephi *or* we be spared the struggle of this account.

I believe that story was placed in the very opening verses of a 531-page book and then told in painfully specific detail in order to focus every reader of that record on the absolutely fundamental gospel issue of obedience and submission to the communicated will of the Lord. If Nephi cannot yield to this terribly painful command, if he cannot bring himself to obey, then it is entirely probable that he can never succeed *or* survive in the tasks that lie just ahead.)

Lessons from Laban: Show up to what is required by life. I still wonder whether Nephi saw Laban passed out, got scared, killed him, then rewrote it in his brain.

Another example: The “rebellion in the wilderness. It seems it started with just a disagreement, then Nephi is the one who escalated!

- Sariah and experiential knowledge. There is nothing more valuable than experiential knowledge. That’s why we are here! “Now I know of a surety...” We can’t know what we will be called to experience. But experiential knowledge that we can do hard things. That makes all the difference. Challenge is invitation.
- Lehi and the prophetic perfect “I have obtained a land of promise” (5:5). Lehi as Moses. Nephi as Joseph, then Nephi as Joshua. (Thus the names of his brothers!) Again, focus and attention. I can bear witness of this, that we can hold in our mind, FEEL what is going to happen, which then helps us commit and follow through.
- Why didn’t God send them with a better grocery list? “Please come back with plates. Also wives. Thanks” (Because they likely would not have been ready. We can’t rush the experience and growth gives us. Surrender and commit to the process of growth and becoming)
- Laman and Lemuel. Note that Nephi says that if God didn’t intervene, he likely would have rebelled! Did he admire them? Want to be like them? God “did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers” (2:17) and then Nephi shares with Sam and they become closer. The thing that strikes me the most about Laman and Lemuel is they always respond \*just enough\* to get to the next step. Pain and effort avoidance. Nephi comments that they want to avoid working (hard thing in 3:5, didn’t want to build the ship).
- Brass Plates! Will we get them? (5:18) “These plates of brass should go forth until all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people who were of his seed”
- Bonus: Joseph Sr’s Vision:  
<http://www.ldsliving.com/Joseph-Smith-s-Father-Saw-the-Tree-of-Life-19-Years-Before-t-he-Book-of-Mormon-Was-Published/s/80997>
- Conclusion: Scripture as urim and thummim, focus of attention and becoming. Attention and investment.

<https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/what-does-the-virgin-mary-have-to-do-with-the-tree-of-life>