
14

HEDONISM, ASCETICISM, AND THE GREAT PLAN OF HAPPINESS

Daniel K Judd

NOT ONLY DOES THE BOOK OF MORMON contain “the fulness of the gospel” (1 Nephi 15:13), including “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8), but within the contents of this sacred volume of scripture are also found prophetic warnings of false doctrines, counterfeit philosophies, and detailed descriptions of the messages as well as the methods of anti-Christ. Included among many such warnings by ancient prophets are the words of Joseph, the son of the patriarch-prophet Jacob. Joseph prophesied that in the latter days the Book of Mormon would “grow together” with the Bible to “the confounding of false doctrines and laying down contentions, and establishing peace” (2 Nephi 3:12; see also JST, Genesis 50:31). President Ezra Taft Benson augments Jacob’s description: “The Book of Mormon exposes the enemies of Christ. It confounds false doctrines and lays down contention (see 2 Nephi 3:12). It fortifies the humble followers of Christ against the evil designs, strategies, and doctrines of the devil in our day. The type

Daniel K Judd is chair of the Department of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University.

Hedonism, Asceticism, and the Great Plan of Happiness 195

of apostates in the Book of Mormon are similar to the type we have today. God, with his infinite foreknowledge, so molded the Book of Mormon that we might see the error and know how to combat false educational, political, religious, and philosophical concepts of our time.”¹

A number of false doctrines, including such deceptive philosophies as *intellectualism* and *materialism* (see 2 Nephi 9:28–30), *dogmatism* (see Alma 30:7), *pluralism* (see Alma 1:4), *empiricism* (see Alma 30:15), *psychologism* (see Alma 30:16), *humanism* (see Alma 30:17), *relativism* (see Alma 30:17), and *nihilism* (see Alma 30:18), to name only a few, are described within the pages of the Book of Mormon. While these counterfeit philosophies have been identified and discussed in some detail by latter-day prophets and scholars alike,² the contents of this chapter are intended to explicate another false philosophy and practice that has not received as much scholarly attention as those aforementioned. As the title suggests, this chapter will focus on the philosophy of *hedonism*—the idea that “pleasure or happiness is the sole or chief good in life.”³ Inasmuch as “the father of lies” (2 Nephi 9:9) has created a sophisticated system of counterfeit doctrines and deceptive practices related to hedonism, the converse philosophy of *asceticism*, the idea that extreme self-denial can lead to spiritual and intellectual strength, will also be discussed.

Consistent with the premise that “most of the vices and errors of the world are distortions of truths,”⁴ this chapter will also discuss the true doctrine of happiness of which hedonistic and ascetic philosophies are distortions. Scripture, particularly the Book of Mormon, the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, and the words of latter-day prophets, will be used to assist the reader in more clearly understanding the dangers of hedonism and asceticism and how these pernicious philosophies differ from the joy and happiness articulated in the Book of Mormon.

While the term *hedonism* is not specifically used in the Book of Mormon, a study of the scriptural text from the writings of Nephi through Moroni reveals that it was a philosophy and practice embraced by the inhabitants of the ancient Americas that profoundly

contributed to their eventual demise. The study of the words of prophets, analysis of research literature, and observation of the popular media reveal that the philosophy and practice of hedonism has persisted to the present and still consumes much of contemporary culture.⁵ Not only is the philosophy of hedonism demonstrated in mankind's lust for wealth and other material possessions, it also includes the placing of man's pursuit of happiness above all else, including the worship of God.

THE DOCTRINE OF OPPOSITION

The necessity of opposites is a principle that provides profound insight into understanding the counterfeit philosophy of hedonism and the true doctrine of happiness. The prophet Lehi taught his son Jacob that happiness can only be found in the context of its opposite—misery: “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my first-born in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility” (2 Nephi 2:11).

The context for this statement is significant. At least in part, Lehi is helping Jacob comprehend what modern philosophers have described as “the problem of evil,” or phrased differently, “why bad things happen to good people.” From earlier in Lehi's discourse, we learn that both he and his son Jacob had experienced opposition of varying kinds. As a child, Jacob had “suffered afflictions and much sorrow, because of the rudeness of [his] brethren” (2 Nephi 2:1). In modern vernacular, Jacob was a victim of abuse at the hands of his brothers. While we know that Lehi's afflictions included rebellious children (see 2 Nephi 1:17), Sariah's complaints (see 1 Nephi 5:2–8), his own murmuring (see 1 Nephi 16:20), and perhaps the ailments of age (see 2 Nephi 1:14), Lehi described his personal challenges simply as “tribulation in the wilderness” (2

Hedonism, Asceticism, and the Great Plan of Happiness 197

Nephi 2:1). After acknowledging his personal trials as well as Jacob's afflictions, Lehi offered hope to his son and all who desire happiness but suffer tribulation and affliction: "Nevertheless, Jacob, my first-born in the wilderness, thou knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain. Wherefore, thy soul shall be blessed, and thou shalt dwell safely with thy brother, Nephi; and thy days shall be spent in the service of thy God. Wherefore, I know that thou art redeemed, because of the righteousness of thy Redeemer; for thou hast beheld that in the fulness of time he cometh to bring salvation unto men" (2 Nephi 2:2-3).

Lehi's counsel contained several important truths that were directly applicable not only to Jacob but also to all who face affliction or suffer tribulation. Lehi taught that (1) God would bring good from the evil Jacob had experienced, (2) Jacob would live safely with Nephi, (3) his life would be spent in God's service, and most importantly, (4) his healing and redemption would come through the atonement of Christ. The mention of Lehi's tribulation, the more detailed description of Jacob's afflictions, and the promise of redemption through the Redeemer are personal illustrations of the broader doctrines of the Fall and the Atonement taught later in the same discourse: "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy. And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given" (2 Nephi 2:25-26).

Lehi taught Jacob that just as the fall of Adam and the atonement of Christ were necessary in God's eternal plan, so were the afflictions and sorrows he had suffered if he ever hoped to experience the joy spoken of in scripture. Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has written: "Life was made for struggle; and exaltation, success, and victory were never meant to be cheap or to come easily. The tides of life often challenge us. To

understand why it has to be this way, we should maintain our understanding, our faith, and our courage by a constant rereading of Second Nephi, chapter two, the substance of which is set forth in this excerpt: ‘For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things’ (2 Nephi 2:11).⁶ Lehi’s counsel to Jacob eloquently explains the necessity of trials, tribulations, and afflictions in coming to understand the “nature of happiness” (Alma 41:11).

HAPPINESS AND JOY VERSUS ASCETICISM

In another discourse from father to son, the prophet Alma provided a powerful description of the contrast between the pain he experienced because of his own sins and the joy he obtained through Christ: “Yea, I say unto you, my son [Helaman], that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy” (Alma 36:21). One does not have to experience the pain of sin in order to experience the joy described by Alma, but one cannot truly know and comprehend joy without first experiencing some kind of misery or sorrow. Lehi taught Jacob that if Adam and Eve “would not have fallen . . . they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery” (2 Nephi 2:22–23). Once we understand that opposition, pain, and sorrow are a part of the Lord’s plan, we are better prepared to understand the doctrine of happiness.

The writings of ancient as well as latter-day prophets do not appear to make any significant differentiation between joy and happiness. These terms seem to be used synonymously throughout all scripture and describe a dimension of life the Lord wants His children to experience both on earth and in the world to come. King Benjamin taught: “And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may

Hedonism, Asceticism, and the Great Plan of Happiness 199

dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness” (Mosiah 2:41).

During His ministry to the inhabitants of the Americas, the Savior stated that He had received a “fulness of joy” from the Father and promised others that they could receive the same blessing: “And for this cause ye shall have fulness of joy; and ye shall sit down in the kingdom of my Father; yea, your joy shall be full, even as the Father hath given me fulness of joy; and ye shall be even as I am, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one” (3 Nephi 28:10).

These statements, representative of God’s desire “for the welfare and happiness of his people” (Helaman 12:2), may simply confirm the obvious to some, but others view them as antithetical to the teachings of Christianity. Statements made by Jesus such as “Blessed are the *poor* in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3; emphasis added) have been interpreted by some to mean that happiness and joy are not intended to be a part of Christian life. Some readers of the biblical text have interpreted the phrase “poor in spirit” to be descriptive of a virtue one should seek through ascetic suffering and self-denial. The following statement by a fourteenth-century priest represents this perspective: “If any one of you will know whether or not he is really poor in spirit, let him consider whether he loves the ordinary consequences and effects of poverty, which are hunger, thirst, cold, fatigue, and the denudation of all conveniences. See if you are glad to wear a worn-out habit full of patches. See if you are glad when something is lacking to your meal, when you are passed by in serving it, when what you receive is distasteful to you, when your cell is out of repair. If you are not glad of these things, if instead of loving them you avoid them, then there is proof that you have not attained the perfection of poverty of spirit.”⁷ Earlier we learned from Lehi’s writings that happiness and misery are necessary pairs, but is misery something that should be sought? Scripture and latter-day prophets clearly teach that while suffering is a necessary part of the Lord’s plan, it is not something that should be pursued. The Book of Mormon and the Joseph Smith Translation of Matthew 5:3 add four words to the text that change

the meaning in a significant and meaningful way. Observe the comparison between the versions of Matthew and 3 Nephi:

Matthew 5:3	3 Nephi 12:3; JST, Matthew 5:3
“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”	“Yea, blessed are the poor in spirit <i>who come unto me</i> , for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

From this comparison we learn that the Savior’s answer to being “poor in spirit” is to come unto Him (see also Matthew 11:28). While suffering, pain, sorrow, and other forms of opposition are all a part of the Lord’s plan for His children, there is no virtue in seeking to be poor, sad, or in despair. To seek to be “poor in spirit” or to seek out temptation or trial in order to prove your virtue is to be deceived by the adversary’s philosophy of *asceticism*. While possessing some element of truth, asceticism is a counterfeit of the righteous self-denial asked of us by the Lord (see Matthew 10:38–39; Alma 38;12). The philosophy of asceticism has been defined as “the doctrine that through the renunciation of the desires of the flesh and of pleasure in worldly things and through self-mortification or self-denial one can subdue his appetites and discipline himself so as to reach a high spiritual or intellectual state.”⁸

While disciplined discipleship includes practices such as fasting, sexual abstinence outside of marriage, obeying the Word of Wisdom, paying tithing, attending meetings, and so forth, an overzealous approach to these commandments could border on asceticism. As President Boyd K. Packer wisely counseled: “A virtue when pressed to the extreme may turn into a vice. Unreasonable devotion to an ideal, without considering the practical application of it, ruins the ideal itself.”⁹ Asceticism is indeed such a practice. Individuals who have been seduced by the philosophy of asceticism generally feel guilt when they experience any form of prosperity or happiness, and they experience vain pride through various kinds of deprivation. One fifth-century Christian, Simeon Stylites, lived on the top of a fifty-foot pillar for some thirty-six years as a supposed expression of his devotion to God.¹⁰ This and other forms of asceticism, including

Hedonism, Asceticism, and the Great Plan of Happiness 201

exceptionally long periods of fasting, celibacy, self-mutilation, a rigid dietary code, taking vows of silence or poverty, and so on, have been revered as saintly by some but as symptoms of spiritual instability by others. President Spencer W. Kimball warned: “You ask if asceticism is a virtue. No. Not as asceticism. But I am sure that most of the vices and errors of the world are distortions of truths. As I see it, asceticism is but a terrible extreme and distortion of the truth: Thou shalt know and control thyself.”¹¹

It is important to note that the Book of Mormon does not countenance the practice of asceticism in any form. None of the prophets submitted themselves to anything like those practices mentioned earlier in this text. None of the righteous leaders and teachers were hermits or monks who secluded themselves from family and friends. Celibacy was not viewed as a virtue. Nor are there any examples in scripture of faithful individuals who abused their bodies as a means of attaining some kind of spiritual enlightenment. Asceticism is the counterfeit of the counsel expressed in Alma’s words to his son Shiblon: “See that ye are not lifted up unto pride; yea, see that ye do not boast in your own wisdom, nor of your much strength. Use boldness, but not overbearance; and also see that ye *bridle all your passions*, that ye may be filled with love; see that ye refrain from idleness” (Alma 38:11–12; emphasis added).

HEDONISM AND IDOLATRY

Likening the deceptions we have discussed to a counterfeit coin, we would put asceticism on one side and hedonism on the other. British philosopher C. S. Lewis wisely warned that false doctrines often come in pairs: “He [Satan] always sends errors into the world in pairs—pairs of opposites. And he always encourages us to spend a lot of time thinking which is the worse. You see why, of course? He relies on your extra dislike of the one error to draw you gradually into the opposite one.”¹²

Some of us have known men or women who were so repulsed by another’s hedonistic behavior, including a disregard for anything reli-

gious, that they responded by becoming fanatically self-disciplined and self-righteous. I have often wondered if wicked King Noah's licentiousness was in any way influenced by his father Zeniff's being "over-zealous" (Mosiah 7:21; 9:3).

Fortunately, the Lord also sends *truth* into the world in pairs of opposites: justice and mercy, confidence and meekness, heart and mind (to name a few) and for the purposes of this discussion, happiness and sorrow. While happiness has a requisite opposite in sorrow, it also has a counterfeit—hedonism. Most students of the Book of Mormon will recognize the following descriptions of hedonism recorded by the prophet Nephi:

"Yea, and there shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us.

"And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God.

"Yea, and there shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false and vain and foolish doctrines, and shall be puffed up in their hearts, and shall seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord; and their works shall be in the dark" (2 Nephi 28:7–9). Most readers quickly reject the nihilistic argument that what we do today has no eternal consequences, "for tomorrow we die," but many believe in the notion that "committing a little sin" is something that is expected and even approved of by God. After all, we reason, aren't we all entitled to a little "happiness"? Many, like the Nephites of old, seek "for happiness in doing iniquity" (Helaman 13:38).

C. S. Lewis described how many of us, while acknowledging the importance of keeping the commandments, view our service to God much like the paying of our taxes—we hope that "what is left over will be enough for [us] to live on."¹³ In other words, while recognizing the importance of being good people, we want to serve God, our

Hedonism, Asceticism, and the Great Plan of Happiness 203

families, our neighbors, the church, and the community only as much as we absolutely have to, hoping there will be some time left over to pursue a little self-interested pleasure. While recognizing that the person who seeks to balance their “needs” with the will of God is at least attempting to be more virtuous than one whose life is focused singly on themselves, Lewis describes a third possibility: centering our lives on Christ. “These people have got rid of the tiresome business of adjusting the rival claims of Self and God by the simple expedient of rejecting the claims of Self altogether. The old egoistic will has been turned round, reconditioned, and made into a new thing. The will of Christ no longer limits theirs; it is theirs. All their time, in belonging to Him, belongs also to them, for they are His.”¹⁴ Lewis also taught: “Our real selves are all waiting for us in Him. The more I resist Him and try to live on my own, the more I become dominated by my own heredity and upbringing and natural desires. . . . It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own.”¹⁵

The fundamental difference between hedonism and happiness is that hedonism is centered in the self, while the happiness described in scripture comes only as one centers his or her life in Christ. Elder James E. Talmage provides a description of other differences:

“Happiness is true food, wholesome, nutritious and sweet; it builds up the body and generates energy for action, physical, mental and spiritual; pleasure is but a deceiving stimulant which, like spirituous drink, makes one think he is strong when in reality enfeebled; makes him fancy he is well when in fact stricken with deadly malady. Happiness leaves no bad aftertaste, it is followed by no depressing reaction; it calls for no repentance, brings no regret, entails no remorse; pleasure too often makes necessary repentance, contrition, and suffering; and, if indulged to the extreme, it brings degradation and destruction. True happiness is lived over and over again in memory, always with a renewal of the original good; a moment of unholy pleasure may leave a barbed sting, which, like a thorn in the flesh, is an ever-present source of anguish. Happiness is not akin

with levity, nor is it one with light-minded mirth. It springs from the deeper fountains of the soul, and is not infrequently accompanied by tears.”¹⁶

Hedonism is closely related to what is referred to in scripture as idolatry (see 1 Samuel 15:23, Acts 17:16; Mosiah 11:6). President Spencer W. Kimball, in a classic discourse entitled “The False Gods We Worship,” observed that “few men have ever knowingly and deliberately chosen to reject God and his blessings. Rather, we learn from the scriptures that because the exercise of faith has always appeared to be more difficult than relying on things more immediately at hand, carnal man has tended to transfer his trust in God to material things. Therefore, in all ages when men have fallen under the power of Satan and lost the faith, they have put in its place a hope in the ‘arm of flesh’ and in ‘gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know’ (Daniel 5:23)—that is, in idols. This I find to be a dominant theme in the Old Testament. *Whatever thing a man sets his heart and his trust in most is his god; and if his god doesn’t also happen to be the true and living God of Israel, that man is laboring in idolatry.*”¹⁷

While most would agree that an undue emphasis on material possessions, physical appearance, political power, or social status can be forms of idolatry, what about more sacred parts of our lives such as church and family? Elder M. Russell Ballard has stated that the Church has been placed on earth as a “scaffolding that helps support and strengthen the family.”¹⁸ Understanding Elder Ballard’s use of the word “scaffolding” as a *temporary* structure is vital in helping us understand that the Church is the Lord’s authorized, earthly *means* of assisting us in creating eternal families and not an *end* unto itself. It is also important to understand that while the family is intended to be eternal, it is possible, in an idolatrous way, to place family before God. The Savior taught: “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:37–39). The moment we reverse the

Hedonism, Asceticism, and the Great Plan of Happiness 205

intended order of the commandments to (1) “love the Lord thy God” and (2) “love thy neighbour” (Matthew 22:37, 39) we are going against the divine order given by God. President Ezra Taft Benson said: “When we put God first, all other things fall into their proper place or drop out of our lives. Our love of the Lord will govern the claims for our affection, the demands on our time, the interests we pursue, and the order of our priorities. We should put God ahead of *everyone else* in our lives.”¹⁹

A description of the Nephite civilization following the ministry of Christ represents the blessings that follow placing God first: “And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God” (4 Nephi 1:16). As one reads the text of 4 Nephi, it is obvious that their focus was not on happiness but on following Christ and His teachings. After two hundred years of “prosperity in Christ” (4 Nephi 1:23), the desires of the people began to change from worshiping God to focusing on themselves. Their prosperous civilization was no more.

Viewing our relationship with God and Christ simply as a means to bring us happiness is also a form of idolatry. One biblical scholar stated that he has seen this phenomenon within the traditional Christian community: “The most basic truths of our faith have fallen victim to [a] self-centered theology. Many modern-day evangelists have reduced the gospel message to little more than a formula by which people can live a happy and more fulfilling life. Sin is now defined by how it affects man, not how it dishonors God. Salvation is often presented as a means of receiving what Christ offers without obeying what He commands. The focus has shifted from God’s glory to man’s benefit. The gospel of persevering faith has given way to a kind of religious hedonism. Jesus, contemporary theology implies, is your ticket to avoiding all of life’s pains and experiencing all of life’s pleasures.”²⁰

Could this practice of religious hedonism exist in the Latter-day Saint community as well? Nephi warned of this latter-day deception in his farewell sermon when he wrote, “And others will he pacify,

and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell” (2 Nephi 28:21). One of the problems with understanding the gospel simply as a means to happiness is that the Book of Mormon plainly teaches that besides the name of Jesus Christ “there is no other name given whereby salvation cometh” (Mosiah 5:8). Our families, as much as we love them, cannot save us. Neither can the prophets or our membership in the Savior’s Church. The Book of Mormon teaches “that only in and through Christ can [we] be saved” (Mosiah 16:13).

If we see the gospel as merely a means or a tool to make us happy, and we are not happy, we will begin to question the effectiveness of the tool. I have often witnessed the faulty logic expressed by men or women who want to divorce their spouse on the premise that their partner isn’t “making them happy.” They may change their spouse, their job, their ward or stake, but the Book of Mormon plainly teaches, “He that is righteous shall be righteous still; he that is happy shall be happy still; and he that is unhappy shall be unhappy still” (Mormon 9:14). Happiness, unlike hedonism, does not depend upon circumstance but upon our relationship with God. This is not to say that unpleasant circumstances should not be avoided, but we should do so only when it is consistent with what is right and good. If we put God first, He will tell us what should be second, third, fourth, and so on. Perhaps this is a part of what the Savior meant when He said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (3 Nephi 13:33). We can always depend upon God to tell the truth, for He “cannot lie” (D&C 62:6). All other allegiances are subject to error or dishonesty.

The thoroughfare of hedonism and twisted mountain pass of asceticism are two of the many “strange roads” (1 Nephi 8:32) that lead away from the “strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:18) and to the “fulness of joy” (3 Nephi 28:10) promised by the Savior. In what has become a classic statement, the Prophet Joseph Smith observed, “Happiness is the object and

Hedonism, Asceticism, and the Great Plan of Happiness 207

design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God.”²¹ On occasion, only the first nine words of the above statement are quoted, leaving the hearer with the misconception that the pursuit of happiness has preeminence above all else. It is clear from the Prophet Joseph’s words, however, that mankind’s happiness is God’s “object and design” for us, but to obtain it our focus should be on Christ and the virtues He embodies. The unfortunate reality is that anything we place above God is our god, but the joyous truth is that if we do place God first, all else will eventually fall into place. President Howard W. Hunter provided the following instructive and inspiring statement: “I am aware that life presents many challenges, but with the help of the Lord, we need not fear. If our lives and our faith are centered on Jesus Christ and his restored gospel, nothing can ever go permanently wrong. On the other hand, if our lives are not centered on the Savior and his teachings, no other success can ever be permanently right.”²²

CONCLUSION

From the Book of Mormon we learn that “it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that [we] must build [our] foundation” (Helaman 5:12). However, centering our lives in Christ does not ensure that our lives will be free of pain and full of pleasure, for such is the desire of the hedonist. Similarly, obeying the will of God requires no distorted pursuit of discipline; that is the error of the ascetic. True joy—the joy and happiness described in scripture—escapes the proud and is reserved for the faithful follower of Christ. Jacob, the son of Lehi, taught: “And whoso knocketh, to him will he open; and the wise, and the learned, and they that are rich, who are puffed up because of their learning, and their wisdom, and their riches—yea, they are they whom he despiseth; and save they shall cast these things away, and consider themselves fools before God, and come down in the depths of humility, he will not open unto them. But the things of the wise and the prudent shall be

hid from them forever—yea, that happiness which is prepared for the saints” (2 Nephi 9:42–43).

NOTES

1. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, April 1975, 94–95.
2. See Henry B. Eyring, in Conference Report, April 1997, 33; see also Gerald N. Lund, “An Anti-Christ in the Book of Mormon—The Face May Be Strange, but the Voice Is Familiar,” in *Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), 105.
3. *Merriam-Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*, CD-ROM Version, 2002, s.v. “hedonism.”
4. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 170.
5. See T. Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 1–22.
6. Joseph B. Wirthlin, in Conference Report, October 1976, 36–37.
7. William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (Longmans: London, 1952), 309.
8. *Merriam-Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*, CD-ROM Version, 2002, s.v. “asceticism.”
9. Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, October 1990, 108.
10. Robert Doran, trans., “The Lives of Simeon Stylites,” in *Cistercian Studies Series: Number One Hundred Twelve* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1992).
11. Kimball, *Teachings*, 170.
12. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 160.
13. C. S. Lewis, “Three Kinds of Men,” in *Present Concerns: Essays by C. S. Lewis*, ed. W. Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 21.
14. Lewis, “Three Kinds of Men,” 21.
15. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 189.
16. James E. Talmage, “A Greeting to the Missionaries,” *Improvement Era*, December 1913, 173.
17. Kimball, *Teachings*, 76; emphasis added.
18. M. Russell Ballard, in Conference Report, April 1996, 112.
19. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, April 1988, 3.
20. John MacArthur Jr., *Our Sufficiency in Christ* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991), 154–55.

Hedonism, Asceticism, and the Great Plan of Happiness 209

21. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964), 5:134–35.

22. Howard W. Hunter, *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 40.