

## Joy as a Theme of the Book of Mormon

Steve Bullock – June 14, 2009

At the risk of starting out my talk on a less spiritual note, I thought it would be useful to explain how I arrived at the subject of my talk. For the last several months, I have been trying to figure out a way to jump start my gospel study which had slowly fallen into neutral, most likely due to us welcoming a second child into our family and the fact that work has been really busy. At work, I spend at least half of my time staring at an excel spreadsheet, generally trying to tease out useful investment takeaways from large datasets. I ride the 73 bus home every day and one day, I was thinking about how to extract certain information from a dataset I had been looking at, when a gospel-related crosscurrent of thought hit me, flowed into my current train of thought, and merged into an idea that went something like, “Wouldn’t it be cool to download the entire standard works into an excel spreadsheet and see what I could learn?” I imagined things like rank ordering the most commonly used words and key phrases, and comparing frequency between books of scripture. That night I started copying and pasting chapters from the Book of Mormon from the church website into an excel spreadsheet.

Meanwhile, Randy Peterson called me up a couple weeks ago to ask me if I could speak in church and said I could choose the topic. I knew that I would likely end up choosing one of my same favorite gospel subjects that I always pick unless I did something different. I decided to finish the Book of Mormon analysis and pick a subject from the findings. I learned a lot of interesting, but likely useless facts such as the word “Lamanites” appears about twice as much as the word “Nephites” and 16% of the verses in the Book of Mormon start with the phrase, “And it came to pass”. Nephi, son of Lehi, favoring the phrase the most at 30% of verses in 1 Nephi. I’ve concluded the Book of Mormon is a “glass half full” book as the word “heaven” appears more than “hell” and the word “can” appears more than the word “cannot”. The most common word in the Book of Mormon is “the” at 19,076 occurrences. If I eliminate prepositions, conjunctions and adverbs the word “people” is the most common at 1,747 occurrences which wasn’t really helping me out as far as getting a topic for my talk. Finally, I rank ordered the most commonly cited principles of the gospel and on a serious note I would like everyone to pay attention as I read the top 20 and think about which one or two surprise you the most as being included in this group. From most commonly used word to least...

- |                |               |
|----------------|---------------|
| 1) Commandment | 11) Righteous |
| 2) Heart       | 12) Prepared  |
| 3) Power       | 13) Pray      |
| 4) Repent      | 14) Salvation |
| 5) Believe     | 15) Gathered  |
| 6) Faith       | 16) Covenant  |
| 7) Desire      | 17) Mercy     |
| 8) True        | 18) Teach     |
| 9) Prophet     | 19) Baptize   |
| 10) Remember   | 20) Joy       |

Which one surprised you the most? For me it was “joy”, used 142 times in the Book of Mormon, nearly twice as much as the words pride, humility, and truth and three times as much as revelation, hope, and worship. Most of words in the top 20 such as repentance, faith, and baptism I would have expected, but the fact that joy was used so commonly was a real surprise to me. So I decided the topic of my talk today would be “Joy as a Theme of the Book of Mormon”.

In the scriptures, joy comes in varying degrees, sometimes used to simply mean “glad”, but more often described as a peace of conscience or in the fullest sense of the word means to be continually filled with the love of God. Joy can be a powerful feeling. Alma describes the joy he felt as exquisite and sweet, a marvelous light. (Alma 36:20) The Nephites at one point had their “hearts swollen with joy, unto the gushing out of many tears, because of the great goodness of God.” (3Nephi 4:33) Ammon felt joy “so great that he was full; yea, he was swallowed up in the joy of his God, even to the exhausting of his strength; and he fell ... to the ground.” (Alma 27:17). Sometimes joy is used to describe how we will feel after this life if admitted to the kingdom of God, but I was pleased to see that while many scriptures promised joy in the life to come, most

scriptures described examples of joy here on earth. In other words, the promise of joy is meant to be enjoyed right now, here on earth.

Our experience with joy started with the fall of Adam. “And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen... And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin... Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.” (2 Nephi 2:23, 25). Unfortunately, having joy in this life doesn’t mean the absence of trials and hardships, to the contrary, we could not have joy without them “for it must needs be that there be an opposition in all things.” (2Nephi 2:11) Our trials work to refine our character, slowly chipping away our rough edges and bringing us closer to the type of people that can live with Heavenly Father. So we must be able to find joy in this life despite our afflictions and the Lord has promised to lighten our burdens if we come unto him. “And now, my brethren, I desire that ye shall plant this word in your hearts, and as it beginneth to swell even so nourish it by your faith. And behold, it will become a tree, springing up in you unto everlasting life. And then may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son. And even all this can ye do if ye will.” (Alma 33:23)

Adam and Eve wouldn’t have been able to have children without the fall and a key theme of joy in the Book of Mormon is related to family relationship. Lehi and Sariah were filled with great joy upon the safe return of their sons from Jerusalem, Nephi felt joy when his brothers repented of their sins and Alma said he had great joy because of the faithfulness and diligence of his son Shiblon. My patriarchal blessing counsels me to be a good husband and father and says the greatest joy in my life will be from raising righteous children.

In a funny sort of way, I sometimes have to remind myself that I should be feeling joy. For example, Lindsay was out of town on Friday and Saturday with the young women which gave Spencer and me the opportunity to pal around for the weekend. We had lots of fun going to the splash park, watching the movie “Cars”, and going down to the Cambridge Art Festival on the Charles River. It was a beautiful day yesterday and at one point Spencer and I were sitting on the banks of the Charles River, sharing an ice cream sundae and watching the boats go by. Spencer was so excited, pointing at every boat that went by and exclaiming “big boat!” or “small boat!”. For a moment I found my thoughts drift back to a project I have been working on at work, my blood pressure started to rise as I thought about the stress, deadlines, and pressure that came with it. I actually started desiring and wanting to go home to work on the project rather than be at the festival when I realized just what a ridiculous feeling that was. Life doesn’t get much better than spending time with family on a beautiful, relaxing day and if I couldn’t find joy in that moment, then there probably weren’t many times in life where I would feel joy. It’s useful every once in a while to step out of ourselves and try to evaluate our life from an objective point of view and ask ourselves why we are feeling the way we do. I believe that much of being happy is a choice and sometimes we get in our own way of feeling joy.

One topic the brethren have spoken about a lot recently, which likely gets in the way of feeling joy, is the tendency for some members to be overcome with guilt and worry that they don’t do enough and aren’t good enough. For these President Packer has said, “Some worry endlessly over missions that were missed, or marriages that did not turn out, or babies that did not arrive, or children that seem lost, or dreams unfulfilled, or because age limits what they can do. I do not think it pleases the Lord when we worry because we think we never do enough or that what we do is never good enough.” In the same talk he spoke about a faithful early latter-day saint named Oliver Granger. Pres. Packer continues, “The Lord did not expect Oliver to be perfect, perhaps not even to succeed. In D&C it says, “When he falls he shall rise again, for his sacrifice shall be more sacred unto me than his increase, saith the Lord.” D&C 117:13. We cannot always expect to succeed, but we should try the best we can.” (General Conf. Oct. 2004) As it says in Mosiah, “And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength. And again, it is expedient that he should be diligent, that thereby he might win the prize.” Mosiah 4:27

Joy is commonly used in conjunction with the topics of obedience and gaining a remission of our sins. One of the primary manifestations and blessings of joy is a peace of conscience. In fact, in Mosiah it says we are given according to our desire “good or evil, life or death, joy or remorse of conscience.” Repentance and receiving a remission of our sins is one of the primary methods the scriptures suggest for obtaining joy. After listening to King Benjamin give his final address, “The spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of

conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ.” (Mosiah 4:3) This remission of sins is only possible through the Atonement of Jesus Christ and thus it’s not surprising that this act is referred to many times in the scriptures as the “glad tidings of great joy”.

As I said before, the scriptures cite several levels of joy such as joy, great joy, exceedingly great joy, and joy so great to the exhausting of physical strength. Some of the strongest descriptions of joy are used in conjunction with missionary work and service to our fellowman. I think Ammon was the most joyous person in the entire Book of Mormon on his return from preaching the gospel to the Lamanites. The word joy is used 17 times in two chapters. Ammon was so happy that Aaron rebuked him for boasting. Ammon said, “I do not boast in my own strength, nor in my own wisdom; but behold, my joy is full, yea, my heart is brim with joy, and I will rejoice in my God... Behold, how many thousands of our brethren has he loosed from the pains of hell; and they are brought to sing redeeming love.” (Alma 26:11,13) In the D&C it says, “And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father! And now, if your joy will be great with one soul that you have brought unto me into the kingdom of my Father, how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me!”

I know that some of the happiest times of my life were on my mission in Brazil. I vividly remember many times walking home at night time when I was so happy and so full of joy because we spent all day long helping people come closer to Christ and his church. Since my mission, I have also felt joy in sharing the gospel with others, but I realize this is an area of my life that I could definitely improve.

I’m going to read one last scripture that talks about those who have received this blessing of great joy and how to keep it for the rest of our lives.

“And again I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have know of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even unto the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken by the mouth of the angel. And behold, I say unto you that if ye do this ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins; and ye shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created you.” (Mosiah 4:11-12)

Now after studying the word joy in the Book of Mormon, I understand why it is used so much. It’s a peace of conscience and the love of God in our lives for being faithful to the commandments and sharing the gospel. It’s a blessing meant to be enjoyed now through the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

I pray that all of us will find some quiet time tonight to pray for forgiveness of our sins, pour out our righteous desires to God, and receive a remission of our sins so that we can be filled with joy, peace of conscience, and the love of God. I also pray that we will help others to feel this joy by sharing the gospel.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Most Commonly Used Principles of the Gospel in the Book of Mormon

Methodology: The definition of "principle of the gospel" is somewhat subjective. For the most part I included words that I felt were fundamental parts of the plan of salvation. I tried to be comprehensive in this list, but may have missed some principles.

Rank	Root Word	Most Common Form Used	All Forms of Word Included	Frequency
1	command	commandment	ed/er/est/eth/ing/ment/s	529
2	heart	heart	s	442
3	power	power	s/ful/fully	427
4	repent	repent	ance/ed/eth/ing/s	360
5	believe	believe	f/d/ing/eth/est/ers	319
6	faith	faith	ful/fulness	300
7	desire	desire	able/ed/es/est/eth/ing/ous	298
8	true	true	th/ly	225
9	prophet	prophet	ecy/ecies/esy/esied/esieth/ying/s	225
10	remember	remember	ed/est/eth/ing/ance	221
11	righteous	righteous	s'/ly/ness	216
12	prepare	prepared	d/eth/ing/atory/ation/s/ator/atory	183
13	pray	pray	ed/er/ers/est/eth/ing	178
14	save	salvation	ed/ ation	169
15	gather	gathered	ed/eth/ing	165
16	covenant	covenant	ed/eth/ing/s	150
17	mercy	mercy	iful/ies	149
18	teach	teach	er/ers/eth/ing	149
19	baptize	baptized	ism/d/ing	145
20	joy	joy	ed/ful/ous	142
21	just	justice	ice/ified/eth/y/ly	139
22	preach	preach	ed/er/ers/ing/ings	134
23	knowledge	knowledge	-	128
24	declare	declare	ed/eth/ing	108
25	eternal	eternal	ly/ ity	104
26	hearken	hearken	ed/eth/ ing	100
27	rejoice	rejoice	ed/eth/ing/ings	99
28	glory	glory	ify/ified/ious	96
29	wise	wisdom	isdom	96
30	resurrection	resurrection	-	81
31	humble	humble	d/eth/ly/ity	80
32	pride	pride	oud/ly	77
33	love	love	ed/est/eth/ing	75
34	bear	bear	bear/eth/ing	69
35	testify	testimony	ied/ieth/ing/mony	69
36	restore	restored	ed/ing/ation	68
37	diligent	diligence	ce/ly	67
38	hope	hope	d/es/eth/ing	61
39	judgment	judgment	-	59
40	serve	serve	ed/eth/ice/iceable	55
41	learn	learned	ed/er/ing	52
42	reveal	revelation	ed/ation/s/ator	51
43	worship	worship	ed/ers/ing	48
44	trust	trust	ed/ing	44
45	happy	happiness	iness/ier	41
46	chosen	chosen	-	38
47	praise	praise	ed/s/ing	36
48	charity	charity	able	28
49	sanctify	sanctified	ation/ied/uaries/uary	27
50	patient	patience	ce	23

## Top 250 Most Used Words in the Book of Mormon

**Methodology:** This is the raw data, rank ordered from most commonly used words in the Book of Mormon. No word forms were combined, for example the word "commandment" and "commandments" are counted separately.

Rank	Word	Frequency	Rank	Word	Freq.	Rank	Word	Freq.	Rank	Word	Freq.	Rank	Word	Freq.
1	The	19,076	51	We	1,008	101	Or	438	151	Every	227	201	heart	162
2	And	16,294	52	from	1,001	102	before	433	152	church	226	202	sins	162
3	Of	11,664	53	But	993	103	on	422	153	Having	226	203	end	161
4	That	6,870	54	things	908	104	began	418	154	own	226	204	Jerusalem	161
5	To	6,427	55	me	871	105	Wherefore	415	155	Then	224	205	Remember	161
6	They	4,478	56	There	819	106	time	412	156	death	220	206	soul	160
7	In	3,686	57	Because	799	107	power	409	157	save	217	207	fruit	159
8	unto	3,624	58	Our	796	108	earth	397	158	themselves	215	208	wickedness	159
9	I	3,316	59	Come	780	109	At	394	159	cause	214	209	off	156
10	He	3,173	60	Many	745	110	down	391	160	Moroni	213	210	other	155
11	It	3,078	61	These	740	111	away	380	161	house	212	211	See	155
12	Their	2,797	62	been	724	112	Christ	377	162	Israel	210	212	destruction	154
13	them	2,650	63	up	693	113	more	374	163	Give	209	213	keep	154
14	For	2,519	64	Your	693	114	Nephtes	369	164	commandments	208	214	reign	154
15	Be	2,505	65	Lamanites	690	115	Go	367	165	called	207	215	caused	153
16	Shall	2,483	66	Even	687	116	AN	361	166	days	207	216	taken	153
17	his	2,239	67	great	682	117	day	359	167	done	205	217	slain	151
18	Which	2,205	68	into	679	118	So	358	168	repent	205	218	armies	150
19	A	2,140	69	Therefore	663	119	children	349	169	Believe	204	219	himself	150
20	Not	2,071	70	said	647	120	concerning	346	170	until	202	220	kingdom	150
21	were	2,016	71	If	646	121	son	332	171	given	200	221	any	149
22	Ye	2,010	72	words	640	122	over	319	172	am	199	222	sent	149
23	did	1,989	73	Do	634	123	word	314	173	went	199	223	blood	148
24	All	1,780	74	When	631	124	city	312	174	together	197	224	Zarahemla	148
25	Have	1,780	75	would	612	125	name	303	175	hands	196	225	How	147
26	had	1,767	76	forth	606	126	Holy	295	176	hand	195	226	Mine	147
27	people	1,747	77	Thou	600	127	Has	293	177	Can	193	227	thereof	147
28	My	1,700	78	out	588	128	thee	290	178	commanded	191	228	become	145
29	God	1,668	79	among	580	129	could	281	179	saith	187	229	place	145
30	came	1,641	80	against	555	130	hearts	280	180	Neither	185	230	way	145
31	Behold	1,636	81	Father	552	131	made	280	181	Jesus	184	231	part	144
32	was	1,574	82	brethren	543	132	year	280	182	face	183	232	Nor	143
33	Lord	1,562	83	men	531	133	spirit	276	183	law	183	233	thing	143
34	pass	1,525	84	according	519	134	exceedingly	267	184	speak	182	234	life	142
35	With	1,515	85	us	518	135	O	264	185	insomuch	181	235	Gentiles	141
36	This	1,430	86	Say	515	136	faith	263	186	whom	181	236	heard	141
37	Is	1,373	87	Hath	513	137	about	262	187	fathers	178	237	judges	140
38	Yea	1,249	88	May	513	138	being	260	188	What	178	238	like	140
39	land	1,248	89	After	506	139	saw	259	189	Nevertheless	177	239	Blessed	139
40	Now	1,230	90	king	494	140	brought	256	190	Make	176	240	first	139
41	Who	1,195	91	again	478	141	spoken	250	191	written	176	241	hast	139
42	by	1,186	92	those	478	142	Alma	249	192	Ammon	173	242	plates	138
43	you	1,179	93	Thus	478	143	wilderness	249	193	seed	173	243	joy	137
44	should	1,178	94	Know	474	144	must	244	194	Bring	170	244	army	136
45	are	1,164	95	No	473	145	Take	243	195	spake	170	245	battle	134
46	him	1,160	96	Thy	469	146	Saying	233	196	world	169	246	iniquity	134
47	Will	1,118	97	might	462	147	manner	232	197	destroy	166	247	years	134
48	Upon	1,076	98	man	460	148	much	232	198	brother	164	248	evil	133
49	As	1,046	99	one	451	149	good	229	199	voice	164	249	work	133
50	Also	1,029	100	NEPHI	450	150	cast	227	200	sons	163	250	cannot	131