

Blessed and Happy Are Those Who Keep the Commandments of God

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The barriers established by the Lord create for us a safe harbor from evil and destructive influences.

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.”

As we stood on that beautiful beach, our perspective had suddenly changed. A barrier that had seemed rigid and restrictive—that seemed to curtail the fun and excitement of riding the really big waves—had become something very different. With our new understanding of the danger that lurked just below the surface, the barrier now offered protection, safety, and peace.

As you and I walk the paths of life and pursue our dreams, God’s commands and standards—like the barrier—can sometimes be difficult to understand. They may appear rigid and unyielding, blocking a path that looks fun and exciting and that is being followed by so many others. As the Apostle Paul described, “We see through a glass, darkly,”¹ with such a limited perspective that we often cannot comprehend the great dangers hidden just below the surface.

But He who “comprehend[s] all things”² knows exactly where those dangers lie. He gives us divine direction, through His commands and loving guidance, so that we may avoid the dangers—so that we may set a course in our lives that is protected from spiritual predators and the gaping jaws of sin.³

We show our love for God—and our faith in Him—by doing our very best every day to follow the course that He has laid out for us and by keeping the commandments that He has given to us. We especially manifest that faith and love in situations where we don’t fully understand the reason for God’s commands or the particular path He is telling us to take. It is relatively easy to follow a course inside the barrier once we know there are sharp-toothed predators swarming just outside of it. It is more difficult to keep our course within the barrier when all we can see are thrilling and tantalizing waves on the other side. And yet it is in those times—times when we choose to exercise our faith, put our trust in God, and show our love to Him—that we grow and gain the most.

In the New Testament, Ananias could not comprehend the Lord’s command to seek out and bless Saul—a man who literally had a license to imprison the believers of Christ. Yet because he obeyed God’s command, Ananias was instrumental in the spiritual birth of the Apostle Paul.⁴

As we trust in the Lord, exercise our faith, obey His commandments, and follow the course He has charted for us, we become more the person the Lord wants us to become. It is this “becoming”—this conversion of the heart—that is all-important. As Elder Dallin H. Oaks has taught us: “It is not enough for anyone just to go through the motions. The commandments, ordinances, and covenants of the gospel are not a list of deposits required to be made in some heavenly account. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a plan that shows us how to become what our Heavenly Father desires us to become.”⁵

True obedience, therefore, is giving ourselves entirely to Him and allowing Him to chart our course both in calm waters and in troubled ones, understanding that He can make more of us than we could ever make of ourselves.

As we submit ourselves to His will, we increase in peace and happiness. King Benjamin taught that those who keep the commands of God are “blessed and happy ... in all things, both temporal and spiritual.”⁶ God wants us to have joy. He wants us to have peace. He wants us to succeed. He wants us to be safe and to be protected from the worldly influences all around us.

Put another way, the Lord’s commands do not constitute some grueling underwater maze of barriers that we must learn to grudgingly endure in this life so that we might be exalted in the next. Rather, the barriers established by the Lord create for us a safe harbor from the evil and destructive influences that would otherwise drag us down to the depths of despair. The Lord’s commandments are given out of love and caring; they are intended for our joy in this life⁷ just as much as they are intended for our joy and exaltation in the next. They mark the way that we should act—and more importantly, they illuminate who we should become.

As in all things good and true, Jesus Christ stands as the best example. The greatest act of obedience in all of eternity occurred when the Son submitted Himself to the will of the Father. Asking in deepest humility that the cup might be removed—that He might travel some other course than the one that had been marked for Him—Christ submitted Himself to the path that His Father wanted Him to take. It was a path that led through Gethsemane and Golgotha, where He endured unimaginable agony and suffering and where He was totally forsaken as His Father’s Spirit withdrew. But that same path culminated in an empty tomb on the third day, with cries of “He is risen!”⁸ ringing in the ears and hearts of those who loved Him. It included unimaginable joy and comfort centered in His Atonement for all of God’s children throughout eternity. By allowing His will to be swallowed up by the Father’s, Christ gave us the prospect of eternal peace, eternal joy, and eternal life.

I testify that we are children of a loving God. I witness that He wants us to be happy and safe and blessed. To that end, He has charted for us a course leading back to Him, and He has established barriers that will protect us along the way. As we do our best to follow that course, we find true safety, happiness, and peace. And as we submit to His will, we become what He wants us to become. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. 1 Corinthians 13:12.

2. Doctrine and Covenants 88:6.

3. See Boyd K. Packer, “Spiritual Crocodiles,” *Ensign*, May 1976, 30–32.

4. See Acts 9:10–18.

5. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Challenge to Become,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 32; *Liahona*, Jan. 2001, 40.

6. Mosiah 2:41.

7. See 2 Nephi 2:25.

8. See Matthew 28:6; Mark 16:6.