

1 NEPHI 8 AND 11: STAYING AT THE TREE — LEARNING TRUTH FROM THE FRUIT

1. Darkness Can Begin Revelation

1 Nephi 8:8: “And after I had traveled for the space of many hours in darkness, I began to pray unto the Lord that he would have mercy on me, according to the multitude of his tender mercies.”

Lehi’s dream does not begin at the tree. It begins with movement through darkness. Before there is fruit, before there is a rod, before there is a building full of mocking voices, Lehi sees “a dark and dreary wilderness” and follows a man in a white robe until he finds himself in “a dark and dreary waste.”¹ The opening scene is not passive. Lehi is already choosing. He follows, travels, endures, and continues for many hours in darkness before finally turning his distress into prayer. His plea for mercy does not erase the significance of those earlier choices. It reveals their limits. Faithful effort keeps the disciple moving; mercy lightens the burden, broadens the view, and makes the way visible. Only after Lehi asks the Lord for mercy does the landscape open, and he sees “a large and spacious field” and, at its center, “a tree.”²

The First Answer Is Mercy

The order teaches something essential about spiritual knowledge. Lehi’s prayer is not a demand for information or a performance of spiritual confidence. It is a plea for mercy. The first act of knowing truth in the dream is not decoding symbols. It is dependence on God. Darkness does not always mean revelation has failed to come. It may be the condition in which the soul learns to seek revelation more honestly.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught that “before great spiritual moments, there can come adversity, opposition, and darkness.”³ Lehi’s dream gives that teaching scriptural shape. Darkness is not a verdict against the disciple. It is not proof that God is absent, the path is wrong, or an earlier witness has expired. Darkness can make prayer feel harder, not because faith is absent, but because confidence feels out of reach. Lehi’s dream shows that prayer does not require settled confidence. Prayer can begin where certainty has run out. The disciple does not have to wait until the darkness makes sense before praying through it. In the Book of Mormon’s way of knowing, spiritual knowledge often begins when the soul admits need and turns toward tender mercies it cannot create for itself.

2. Christ Is Revealed Before Fear Has a Voice

1 Nephi 8:10: “And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy.”

Lehi’s plea for mercy is answered not with a warning, but with the tree. The opened field

does not begin by showing him the rod he must hold, the mist he must survive, the river he must avoid, or the building he must ignore. It begins with the tree. Before any danger is named, the love of God is placed at the center of Lehi's view. Christ is not introduced after fear. He is revealed before fear has a voice.

Nephi Sees the Savior Behind the Symbol

Nephi's vision affirms order by refusing to treat the tree as a puzzle solved apart from the Savior. When Nephi desires to see what his father saw, the Spirit does not begin by explaining objects. Instead, the Spirit begins with God's condescension—the Savior coming down to walk with us. Nephi sees a virgin in Nazareth, an infant in arms, a baptized Savior, a healing Lamb, and the Son of God lifted up and rejected by the world.⁴ Only after Nephi beholds the Savior's condescension, ministry, and sacrifice does the angel ask, "Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?"⁵ This order makes the connection clear: the tree is understood through the Savior it reveals. Nephi answers, "Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men," and the angel adds, "Yea, and the most joyous to the soul."⁶

The tree, then, is not a vague emblem of goodness. It is the love of God revealed through Jesus Christ. Elder Kevin W. Pearson stated the connection plainly: "The tree represents Christ, who is the clear manifestation of the love of God. The fruit is His infinite Atonement and is great evidence of God's love."⁷ The order is the doctrine. The dream does not begin with danger and then introduce Christ as a remedy. It begins by revealing Christ as the center from which every other image must be understood. The mist is real. The river is dangerous. The building is loud. Yet none of them receives first place in the vision. The tree comes first because Christ comes first. A reading of Lehi's dream that becomes more absorbed in the hazards than in the Savior reverses the dream's own way of revealing truth.

3. Fruit Is Tasted Before Life Is Resolved: Gift, Not Wages

1 Nephi 8:12: "And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy."

Joy Before Resolution

When Lehi reaches the tree, he does not receive an explanation before he receives the fruit. He partakes. That joy comes before the dream is resolved. Sariah, Sam, and Nephi have not yet come to him. Laman and Lemuel have not yet refused. The mist, the building, and the mocking crowd have not yet entered the scene. Lehi finds joy even as the story is still unfinished. The order reveals a truth easily forgotten in mortality: joy in Christ need not wait for every circumstance to change. Faithful disciples may come to believe that joy will come only after a loved one returns, an illness lifts, a question settles, grief softens, or a prayer is answered as expected. Lehi's dream places joy earlier. The fruit fills his soul before the rest of the dream becomes peaceful, because the fruit does not depend on peace around the tree. It depends on the tree itself. President Russell M. Nelson taught, "The joy we feel has little to do with the

circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives.”⁸

Grace, Not Accounting

The dream is equally clear about how the fruit is received. No one reaches the tree by accident. Disciples must seek, pray, press forward, catch hold of the rod, hold fast, fall down, and partake.⁹ Yet the fruit is never priced. Lehi does not purchase, produce, or earn the power to create it. He receives it from the tree. The fruit is a gift, not a paycheck. Elder Dale G. Renlund said it plainly: “You do not earn a blessing—that notion is false—but you do have to qualify for it.”¹⁰

Weariness can turn obedience into accounting. A tired disciple may begin measuring prayers, service, temple attendance, scripture study, and sacrifice as if enough effort will finally purchase peace. Lehi’s dream rejects that math. A disciple who treats the fruit as payment will end up working to earn love. A disciple who receives the fruit as a gift receives love and acts from that love. The work of discipleship is not to earn the fruit. It is to remain near the One whose love has already been given.

4. Love Beckons but Never Coerces

1 Nephi 8:15: “And it came to pass that I beckoned unto them; and I also did say unto them with a loud voice that they should come unto me, and partake of the fruit, which was desirable above all other fruit.”

Joy Turns Outward

Lehi’s first thought is not to keep the joy but to share it. “It filled my soul with exceedingly great joy; wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also.”¹¹ The fruit turns him outward. Truth tasted at the tree does not make Lehi self-satisfied or superior. It makes him a witness. His joy immediately becomes an invitation. The fruit does not make him look down on those still wandering; it prompts him to call to them.

Agency Still Matters

The dream is equally careful about agency. Sariah, Sam, and Nephi appear “as if they knew not whither they should go,” and Lehi calls to them, and “they did come unto me and partake of the fruit also.”¹² Laman and Lemuel occupy the more painful part of the vision. Lehi sees them, calls to them, and still reports that “they would not come unto me and partake of the fruit.”¹³ The wording is merciful yet devastating. The dream does not say they cannot come. It says they would not. Some stand away from the tree because they do not know where to go, while others do not come. Some souls need invitation and direction, while others must be allowed the dignity and consequences of choice.

Here the dream offers one of its tenderest truths. A faithful parent, spouse, sibling, friend, or leader cannot taste the fruit on another soul’s behalf. Love may beckon, pray, mourn, wait, and keep calling, but it cannot coerce without ceasing to be love. Sister Tamara W. Runia

showed what that looks like in a family: “You stay where you are and call them. You go to the tree, stay at the tree, keep eating the fruit, and, with a smile on your face, continue to beckon to those you love.”¹⁴

Lehi’s posture matters. He does not leave the tree to chase his sons through the wilderness. He remains where the fruit is real, calling from that ground. Staying at the tree is not giving up on loved ones. It is staying close to Christ, so the invitation remains rooted in truth.

5. The Rod Is Already There, and the Grip Must Be Personal

1 Nephi 8:19: “And I beheld a rod of iron, and it extended along the bank of the river, and led to the tree by which I stood.”

The Rod Comes Before the Mist

Lehi sees the rod before he sees the mist. Only after describing the path and the rod does he report that “there arose a mist of darkness,” causing some who had entered the path to “lose their way.”¹⁵ The timing teaches mercy. God does not wait for the fog to roll in before giving His children something to hold. The rod is not an emergency device introduced after darkness arrives. It is already there, extending along the riverbank and leading to the tree. Nephi later interprets the rod as “the word of God” and promises that those who hearken to it and hold fast “would never perish.”¹⁶ The word of God does more than identify the path. It steadies the soul when the path can no longer be clearly seen. Daily scripture, daily prayer, weekly sacrament, and regular temple worship are not decorative religious routines. They train the hand to recognize the rod before the mist thickens. Lehi’s dream offers the better pattern: hold early, hold steadily, and let the word of God keep the body moving toward Christ when sight narrows.

The Mist Changes Sight, Not Truth

The mist itself is real, and its target is precise. Nephi identifies the mists as “the temptations of the devil, which blindeth the eyes, and hardeneth the hearts of the children of men.”¹⁷ The mist blinds eyes and hardens hearts. It does not move the tree. This distinction is one of the dream’s strongest protections, because spiritual fog can make the center feel altered: the gospel less true, covenants less binding, the Savior less near, and earlier witnesses less reliable. The dream says otherwise. The tree remains where it was. The path still leads to it. The fruit is still sweet. The mist changes what the traveler can see; it does not change what is true. When sight is dim, the disciple does not need a new tree. What is needed is a surer hold on the rod already given.

Borrowed Faith Cannot Replace a Personal Grip

Finally, the dream distinguishes between those who move near the path and those who endure on it. The path is crowded with “numberless concourses,”¹⁸ yet endurance is not inherited from the crowd. The difference is not being near the rod but how it is held. Elder David A. Bednar distinguished between clinging and holding fast: those who hold fast rely on “the

prayerful, consistent, and earnest use of the holy scriptures” as “a sure source of revealed truth.”¹⁹ Church attendance, family habit, ward belonging, and borrowed testimony can place a disciple near the rod, but they cannot replace a personal grip. Nephi hears Lehi and then seeks to “see, and hear, and know” for himself.²⁰ A secondhand witness may invite the search, but it cannot replace it. Every disciple must eventually move from being carried by others’ faith to holding the word of God in their own hand.

6. The Building Cannot Produce Fruit

1 Nephi 8:26: “And I also cast my eyes round about, and beheld, on the other side of the river of water, a great and spacious building; and it stood as it were in the air, high above the earth.”

Height Without Roots

The great and spacious building enters the dream only after the tree, the fruit, the river, the path, the rod, and the mist have already been described. It stands high above the earth, filled with people who “mock and point their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit.”²¹ Look at how it is built. It is elevated but not grounded. It is crowded but not fruitful. It is loud but not nourishing. Nephi later identifies the building as “the world and the wisdom thereof” and “the pride of the world,” and he sees that it eventually falls.²² The building has height, fashion, noise, and numbers. It does not have fruit. It can mock what the tree gives, but it cannot give what only the tree can give.

President Boyd K. Packer made the vision immediate: “You may think that Lehi’s dream or vision has no special meaning for you, but it does. You are in it; all of us are in it.”²³ The building is not merely ancient scenery. It represents the pressure to let outside voices reinterpret what God has already made known. The building does not have to disprove the fruit. It only has to persuade the partaker to feel ashamed of what once filled the soul with joy.

Mockery Cannot Rename Revelation

The deeper doctrinal point is not only that the building represents pride. It is that the building cannot produce fruit. It can only point, scoff, and rename. Its power is interpretive, not generative. It cannot falsify the tree, remove the sweetness from the fruit, or undo the witness already received. It can only pressure disciples to distrust the meaning of what they know. This is why Lehi’s response is so brief and so powerful: “But we heeded them not.”²⁴ A faithful soul who has tasted the fruit is not obligated to surrender the meaning of that taste to people standing in a building that has never grown a single piece of it. This is not about refusing to think. It is about keeping our footing. Questions deserve patience, study, humility, and reverence. Mockery deserves no throne. The building’s verdict is loud but not authoritative. The fruit remains true even when the crowd decides to laugh.

7. The River Reveals Separation Without Moving the Tree

1 Nephi 15:28: “And I said unto them that it was an awful gulf, which separated the wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God.”

Sin Separates, but Christ Remains

Lehi first notices “a river of water” near the tree.²⁵ Nephi later learns that “the water which my father saw was filthiness” and that “a great and a terrible gulf” separates the wicked from the tree of life.²⁶ He links the gulf to “the justice of the Eternal God” and to “the word of God,” which “divideth the wicked from the righteous.”²⁷ The interpretation is sobering. Sin separates. Justice divides. Filthiness is not harmless.

Yet the river and the gulf do not move the tree. The path still runs along the rod and reaches the tree. Lehi’s dream does not depict a Savior who withdraws whenever a disciple falters. It shows what separates souls from the tree and a path that still leads home. Repentance, then, is not humiliation before an unwilling God. It is a return to a Savior who has not moved.

Repentance Is a Return

The contrast between the river and living water deepens the truth. Jeremiah calls the Lord “the fountain of living waters,” and Jesus promises living water that becomes “a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”²⁸ Lehi’s river offers the opposite image: water as filth, separation, and danger. The dream chooses sides without pretending the choice is meaningless. The Savior does not move, but souls can move away from Him. Those who have wandered, sinned, stalled, or become distracted need not conclude that the tree is gone. The work is to turn again, take hold again, and receive again from the Christ who remains.

8. Remembered Peace and Hidden Growth

Doctrine and Covenants 6:23: “Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God?”

Remembered Peace Is Still Evidence

One group in the dream reaches the tree, partakes of the fruit, and then becomes ashamed after looking toward the building.²⁹ Their tragedy is not that they never tasted. Their tragedy is that mockery was allowed to reinterpret what the fruit had already made known. The Lord’s question to Oliver Cowdery assumes that earlier revelation can carry a disciple through later uncertainty. He does not always repeat a witness simply because the building has grown louder. Often, He invites His disciples to remember what He has already given.

President Henry B. Eyring taught about the saving power of remembered evidence. After receiving the impression, “I’m not giving you these experiences for yourself. Write them down,” he recorded daily evidence of God’s hand and came to see that God had been very close to his family.³⁰ In this sense, remembering is not sentimentality; it is how we keep our covenants alive.

Remembered peace is not a lesser form of revelation. It is evidence. Fruit once tasted can feed the soul later.

Alma 32:41: “But if ye will nourish the word . . . by your faith with great diligence, and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root; and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life.”

Roots Are Not Failure

Alma turns Lehi’s tree image inward. A person may “give place” for the word to be planted like a seed in the heart.³¹ When the seed is not cast out by unbelief, it swells, sprouts, and grows. Yet Alma does not let the first evidence mark the end of the experiment. Faith must continue to nourish the word with diligence and patience until fruit may be plucked that is “most precious” and “sweet above all that is sweet.”³² Lehi’s tree and Alma’s tree belong together. One stands before us as the love of God in Jesus Christ. The other grows within us as the word is received, nourished, and allowed to transform the soul. Both point to Christ. Both require patience. Both produce fruit in the Lord’s time rather than on demand.

Alma describes a quiet kind of discipleship that is easy to dismiss: studying while tired, praying while distracted, repenting while discouraged, serving without dramatic emotion, and keeping covenants when growth feels slow. None of those efforts means the seed has failed. Roots are not failure. Hidden growth is still growth. The building cannot measure roots. The mist cannot disprove them. Impatience cannot cancel them. Lehi’s tree shows what the fruit is. Alma’s tree shows how patiently Christ grows that fruit within the soul.

9. Remaining at the Tree

1 Nephi 8:30: “. . . and they did press forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth and fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree.”

Arrival Must Become Remaining

The final truth of the dream is not simply that disciples can arrive. It is that arrival must become remaining. Lehi reports that the people in the great and spacious building pointed “the finger of scorn at me and those that were partaking of the fruit also; but we heeded them not.”³³ That small word matters. They are not only people who once partook. They are “partaking.” The dream holds them in present-tense nearness.

Nearness to Christ Is Safety

Lehi’s dream does not promise an easy life at the tree. The mist still rises. The building still mocks. The river still runs. Laman and Lemuel still refuse. Safety in the dream is not the absence of trouble. It is nearness to Christ. Scripture, prayer, sacrament, repentance, temple worship, ministering, and obedience are not the price of admission to a tree Christ has already made available. They are the practices that keep disciples close to Christ as He strengthens,

steadies, and forms them. The covenant path starts and ends with Christ because covenant life is a relationship with Him.

Covenant Loyalty in Real Time

Enduring, in Lehi's dream, is not bleak waiting. It is choosing, day after day, to stay in a life already close to Christ. The disciple keeps eating while the building shouts. The disciple keeps calling while loved ones choose. The disciple keeps holding while the mist limits sight. The disciple keeps repenting while the river warns of separation. Staying at the tree is not passive. It is covenanting loyalty repeated in real time. Elder Holland gives that kind of waiting its honest timeline: "Some blessings come soon, some come late, and some don't come until heaven; but for those who embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ, they come."³⁴

The dream is honest about what may remain unfinished. Some loved ones may not come. The mist may return. The building may keep mocking. Blessings may appear uneven, and waiting may feel longer than faith thought it could bear. Yet none of those conditions moves the tree. The Saint who keeps coming to the sacrament table, returning to the temple, opening scripture in a tired house, kneeling beside a bed, repenting again, and refusing to let the building rename the fruit is not forgotten and is not far from the tree of life. Such a Saint is standing by it. God's plan is not merely to reward arrival. It is to form celestial souls through covenant closeness to Christ.

10. Conclusion: The Fruit Is Still True

1 Nephi 8:19: ". . . the tree by which I stood."

Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision do not merely diagnose a fallen world. They reveal Christ. They show a tree. They name the fruit. And they show the disciple where to stand: "the tree by which I stood." The repeated image turns the tree from a destination into a covenant location—not just a place to reach, but a place to stay. Lehi never reports that he left. The dream holds him near the tree, partaking, beckoning, and refusing to grant the building's scorn authority over the fruit he has already tasted.

Truth revealed by the Spirit is meant to be received, remembered, trusted, and lived. Mist, mockery, delay, and the choices of people—those we love cannot take back the fruit once it has been tasted. The Lord taught Oliver Cowdery through Joseph Smith, "I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost."³⁵ Lehi was taught that way. Nephi was taught that way. Modern Saints are taught that way. Truth is received by the Spirit, tasted in covenant, remembered in later fog, and protected by remaining close to Christ.

The final witness of the dream is steady rather than spectacular. The tree still stands. The fruit is still sweet. The witness already given still counts. The disciple who remains at the tree is not wasting time, losing ground, or waiting outside the blessing. The disciple is being formed there, where Christ continues His quiet work of making covenant people celestial. The fruit is still true. The tree is still the point. Remaining there is not wasted waiting; it is covenant

becoming.

Endnotes

- ¹. 1 Nephi 8:4, 7
- ². 1 Nephi 8:9–10
- ³. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Cast Not Away Therefore Your Confidence,” *Ensign*, March 2000.
- ⁴. 1 Nephi 11:13–33
- ⁵. 1 Nephi 11:21
- ⁶. 1 Nephi 11:22–23
- ⁷. Kevin W. Pearson, “Stay by the Tree,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2015.
- ⁸. Russell M. Nelson, “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Ensign or Liahona*, November 2016.
- ⁹. 1 Nephi 8:24, 30
- ¹⁰. Dale G. Renlund, “Abound with Blessings,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2019.
- ¹¹. 1 Nephi 8:12
- ¹². 1 Nephi 8:14–16
- ¹³. 1 Nephi 8:17–18
- ¹⁴. Tamara W. Runia, “Seeing God’s Family through the Overview Lens,” *Liahona*, November 2023.
- ¹⁵. 1 Nephi 8:23
- ¹⁶. 1 Nephi 15:24
- ¹⁷. 1 Nephi 12:17
- ¹⁸. 1 Nephi 8:21
- ¹⁹. David A. Bednar, “Lehi’s Dream: Holding Fast to the Rod,” *Ensign*, October 2011.
- ²⁰. 1 Nephi 10:17
- ²¹. 1 Nephi 8:27
- ²². 1 Nephi 11:35–36
- ²³. Boyd K. Packer, “Lehi’s Dream and You,” *New Era*, January 2015.
- ²⁴. 1 Nephi 8:33
- ²⁵. 1 Nephi 8:13
- ²⁶. 1 Nephi 15:27–28
- ²⁷. 1 Nephi 15:30
- ²⁸. Jeremiah 17:13; John 4:14
- ²⁹. 1 Nephi 8:24–28
- ³⁰. Henry B. Eyring, “O Remember, Remember,” *Ensign or Liahona*, November 2007.
- ³¹. Alma 32:27–28
- ³². Alma 32:41–42
- ³³. 1 Nephi 8:33
- ³⁴. Jeffrey R. Holland, “An High Priest of Good Things to Come,” *Ensign*, November 1999.
- ³⁵. Doctrine and Covenants 8:2