

followHim: A *Come, Follow Me* Podcast with Hank Smith and John Bytheway

EPISODE 2: PART 1: JOSEPH SMITH HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

Hank Smith
(00:04)

Welcome to followHIM. A weekly podcast dedicated to helping individuals and families with their *Come, Follow Me* study. I'm Hank Smith,

John Bytheway
(00:13)

. . .and I'm John Bytheway.

Hank Smith
(00:15)

We love to learn.

John Bytheway
(00:16)

We love to laugh. We want to learn and laugh with you as together we followHIM.

Hank Smith
(00:23)

My friends, welcome to Episode 2, John, can you believe it? We came back for Episode 2.

John Bytheway
(00:28)

The longest-running streak ever. Yeah.

Hank Smith
(00:32)

I rarely got a second date in high school. So this is, this is a big deal for me. Thank you for joining us on followHim. We are so excited for our interview today. John and I are going to be

the hosts each week, but we also are going to invite a guest, uh, and our guest is going to be what we would call an expert. This week, we have Dr. Steve Harper.

Dr. Steven Harper

(00:55)

Thanks, gentlemen. It's great to be with you guys.

John Bytheway

(00:59)

I can't remember how many years ago, but I picked up this, uh, *Joseph Smith's First Vision* by Steve Harper.

[\[https://deseretbook.com/p/joseph-smiths-first-vision-steven-c-harper-85529?ref=Grid%20%7C%20Search-1&variant_id=183479-paperback\]](https://deseretbook.com/p/joseph-smiths-first-vision-steven-c-harper-85529?ref=Grid%20%7C%20Search-1&variant_id=183479-paperback)

And, uh, I'll tell you, by the end of it, I was so uplifted, and especially the last chapter called, "Seekers Wanted" was just the mindset of being a seeker seeking truth. I just thought it was beautiful. In fact, I don't know if Steve remembers this, but I wrote him an email just to say, "Thank you for this contribution."

Hank Smith

(01:21)

I cannot say enough about him--that someone should not be that smart and that good looking. It's not fair. Now, before we get started, we should say John, that, uh, our podcast can be found on a regular podcasting channels.

I'm a dad. You're a dad. John's a dad. You know, here I am. I want *Come, Follow Me* to come alive for my family. I want to fulfill what President Nelson has in mind with this.

[\[https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2019/04/46nelson?lang=eng\]](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2019/04/46nelson?lang=eng)

And I come to this Joseph Smith History. And for a lot of people, they'll read these first 26 verses. And they'll say, "I don't know how to take this in my family. I don't know how to make this new. I don't know how to make this exciting." So, um, for just a dad, how have you done it?

Dr. Steven Harper

(02:05)

Well, guys, all I know an answer to that question is how not to do it. I set my kids down and say, we're going to go for 50 minutes, and I'm going to do the professor thing. And you're going to sit reverently and listen and enjoy it.

Hank Smith

(02:24)

And you're going to enjoy it.

And my little eight-year-olds are like . . .

John Bytheway

(02:26)

If you want dinner!

THE SECOND BEST STORY IN THE SCRIPTURES

Dr. Steven Harper

(02:27)

So far, that has never worked--ever. My advice is to get out of Joseph's way.

This is the best story in the scriptures. And by that, I mean, not only that it's true. I mean, the consequential nature of this story is massive. Second, only to the Atonement of Christ, right. His suffering for us, his crucifixion for us, his resurrection for us. Second, only to that, this story is the most consequential. Certainly, it's in the top two for storytelling as well. The last week of the Savior's life is pretty compelling. Well, the story has to have a protagonist. Somebody who's inherently interesting. Somebody who is up against enormous odds, somebody for whom the stakes are high. And then, as the story goes along, they just get raised until they're extremely high. And our blood pressure goes up, and our heart rate increases, forces of antagonism get stronger. And when all is on the line and when the bad guys have closed in, and there's a dark night of the soul, then the hero does something-- makes a choice. Everything depends on the choice. Well, you can tell from that Joseph Smith History, especially these first 26 verses--they are a great story. So, the best thing for a dad to do is to get out of Joseph's way. Let him tell his story.

Hank Smith

(03:55)

I could start that with my kids. What's your favorite movie? Why, why? What's a great movie got to have?

Dr. Steven Harper

(04:01)

I had a boss when I was working on the Saints project. Uh, Rick Turley was my boss in Salt Lake at the church history library. And he said, "We want to write something that will feel like you're in an engrossing movie. And the worst thing we could do is come out onto the stage while the movie's playing and tell the good people, "Now, I'm going to give you a lecture about what's happening in this movie."

Hank Smith

(04:23)

One thing I would say, uh, as a parent that I've tried to do, at least for my older kids is, I've tried to use these first 26 verses as kind of a recipe to having your own experience with God. Let's look at what he does. What can we also do? Right. I can read scripture. I can pray. I can attend my meetings. I can, you know, reflect and ponder. You know, Joseph, it seems to me was always saying, "You need to have your own experience with God, right? You need to . . . you need to do this." And this seems to me that it could be a recipe for having your . . . your own experience.

John Bytheway
(05:00)

I just love the fact that we can emphasize that he was a boy. He was a young man. I mean, a lot of adults just don't ask questions, and here he is. "Well, which one of these is right? They can't all be right. Or can they?"

Dr. Steven Harper
(05:13)

The reason that was a big problem for him is he said, "I had become convicted of my sins."

[\[https://byustudies.byu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/59-2Final.pdf\]](https://byustudies.byu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/59-2Final.pdf)

Harper, Steven J., *Raising the Stakes: How Joseph Smith's First Vision Became All or Nothing.*]

So he was looking for the place to find forgiveness, and he couldn't find it. And, um, that, that resonates with a lot of teenagers. Right. They're looking for forgiveness. They want to know if, uh, if they've done something so heinous that God will not love them anymore. And if they can possibly find forgiveness, where is it? How do they get it? When I learned that myself, it was . . . really connected me to Joseph Smith. In many ways, it's a very typical family, right? They didn't know that they were going to be the first family of the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ. They had no idea.

Hank Smith
(05:53)

Well, they're sitting around, "Can't you wait? This is so exciting!"

THE SMITH FAMILY CHOOSES A CHURCH (OR NONE)

Dr. Steven C. Harper
(05:58)

Nobody would have necessarily thought that of them either. Although Grandpa Asael Smith, uh, thought there was something that was going to be pretty special about one of his descendants. Um, but they didn't know what that was until they looked in the rearview mirror after the First Vision. But in the meantime, uh, one of the most interesting things about them is that they are the first generation--that is, Joseph's mom and dad--the first generation in their families for a long time that is unchurched. Neither of them belong to a church. And I think it's common for us to think that all people back in the old days were more religious and church folks. And they're

actually not. They're Christians. They believe in Christ. Uh, they believe that redemption will come through Christ, but they don't agree with each other, Joseph, Sr., and Lucy, about how that will come and whether you need a church to mediate that salvation through Christ. So there's a fair amount of agreement between them--and then there's a fair amount of disagreement. And both of those things are actually quite important to, uh, the circumstances that lead to the First Vision.

Hank Smith

(07:06)

I've read before that it was Lucy who felt. Yeah, and I think Steve, I actually, this comes from you. To Lucy, any church was better than no church. To Joseph Smith, Sr., it's the opposite.

Hank Smith

(07:22)

It's better to not go to any church than to pick the wrong church. What do we know about the siblings?

Dr. Steven Harper

(07:25)

Joseph has two older brothers, an older sister. And then, as you can see, several younger siblings. He idolizes his big brother Alvin--thinks the world of him. And Alvin is that responsible cool-headed self-sacrificing brother that every family ought to have. Listeners may know if they've read *Saints* that Joseph and William don't always get along real great. William comes to see Joseph as a kind of a bossy big brother. They actually have a fistfight in 1835.

[<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v1?lang=eng>]

Hank Smith

(07:55)

Isn't Joseph Smith the President of the Church at that point?

Dr. Steven Harper

(07:55)

Yeah. Oh yeah.

Hank Smith

(07:59)

To me, personally, this is important. This is not a perfect family. They don't get together and say, "Let us pray." Right. Every moment of the day. And I think this might make a Latter-day Saint family feel a little like--breathe a sigh of relief. These adult brothers got in a fistfight. So you imagine that the chi--in the childhood, there's gotta be some things like that happening.

Dr. Steven Harper

(08:20)

For sure, there is. This is a family that's typical. They're pious, God-fearing, but they also believe in pop culture stuff. They believe in what the most critical people would call occult and what others of us would just call folk magic and so forth. They're like other people of their time and place. They get along well, and then they don't always get along well. Right. Even mom and dad, as we've seen, the tension is quite an important catalyst for Joseph. If everything is perfect in your life, you don't typically work very hard to seek and receive revelation. Joseph had a set of problems, and that set of problems led to the Sacred Grove. And that set of problems comes from the particular family. He lives in a particular time and place where he lives.

Hank Smith

(09:11)

My kids get along *perfectly*. Uh, they, they never fight. They never argue. Um, that's, and that's when they're asleep. Man, it seems like sometimes the moment my kids wake up, especially the younger ones, they're at each other, and I'm going, "What am I doing wrong?" I like to hear that our first family was a normal family, and I bet Sophronia pushed Katharine. And I bet, you know, Hyrum said something mean to Joseph or to William and said, you know, "Don't be so lazy!" And I like to picture Lucy Mack saying, "Don't, don't say that to him! You got to say-- Hey, stop yelling! Hey, everybody, just go outside!"

JOSEPH AND LUCY AS PARENTS AND A NECESSARY MOVE

Dr. Steven Harper

09:47

One thing you noticed from reading Lucy's memoir is that she's an anxious person, right?

[\[https://www.amazon.com/History-Joseph-Smith-His-Mother-ebook/dp/B0027FF150\]](https://www.amazon.com/History-Joseph-Smith-His-Mother-ebook/dp/B0027FF150)

For those of you who have, have an anxious mother, and you can imagine how that might contribute to Joseph, pay close attention to his words. "Great anxiety," for example. And that's just one of many times where he uses words like that to describe this situation. Well, some of that is inherited from his mom, and I don't just mean in the DNA. His mom is a worrier. She worries very much about how they're going to pay the bills and whether they're going to be respected by their neighbors. And whether they're going to find salvation. She's a mom. She's a great mom, and she's a worrisome mom. And some of that worry gets reflected in Joseph for better or worse. And . . .and Joseph also inherits a lot from his dad. He's . . . he thinks in some ways more like his father thinks. He is an interesting mix of the two. His father is anxious, too, though. We shouldn't think mom's anxious and his dad's not. Dad has anxious dreams, and he worries all the time about whether he's going to be able to provide well for his family and whether he's going to be able to lead them to salvation or not.

Hank Smith

(10:57)

What we've done here, and I love this, is we've made them very relatable. And I think this is the real story is that you've got a dad who's . . . who's uh, "How am I going to pay the bills?" Cause that's a lot of the moving, right. You gotta pay the bills--

John Bytheway

(11:10)

--ginseng root investment--or whatever.

Hank Smith

(11:13)

And they lost a lot of money early on.

Dr. Steven Harper

(11:15)

And you know, like many of us, it's, it's an up or down thing. It's a rollercoaster ride. When they're on the verge of . . . of having everything work out great, it all falls apart. And that happens over and over again. Devastating diseases, uh, come through and, and afflict a family and bankruptcy, right? A few times, then there's a volcanic eruption on the other side of the planet that they don't even know about. And the whole Northern Hemisphere--the temperatures drop.

Hank Smith

(11:42)

So, is that the reason they move? It snows in June--it's Rexburg!

Dr. Steven Harper

(11:48)

Yeah and the crop in their part of the world are very devastated by it

Hank Smith

(11:55)

Can you imagine that? Losing three years in a row of losing all your income. My family couldn't survive. We'd have to do something else.

Dr. Steven Harper

(11:58)

Now, you think we'll, where is the grass greener? And the reports are in . . . in Western New York. The grass is greener--literally. And it's easier to grow wheat on it. So let's go there.

Hank Smith

(12:11)

And it's cheaper, right? Isn't the land a little cheaper out there?

Dr. Steven Harper
(12:15)

Well, you can get it on good terms. That is, you can get it over time. What do you have to invest? You don't have a lot of cash but you have some strong backs. You got some boys, some, uh, mom and sisters and brothers, and a father who all know how to work--hard. Listen to Joseph, tell you that part of the story. "We knew how to work hard, and we did work hard."

[\[https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/accounts-of-the-first-vision\]](https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/accounts-of-the-first-vision)

And so that's what they have to invest. So, a little bit of money and a lot of hard work can turn into a hundred acres and a good house in Western New York. And that's why they go, that's what lures in there.

Hank Smith
(12:47)

They're not thinking, "Well, we got to get over there, because there's plates." Look at the Lord, working with their everyday lives, to put them in the place they need to be.

Steven Harper
(12:57)

You know, it might give us a bit of insight into opposition, right? I tend to view every bad thing that happens to me as a negative. Where if I look at it the way you're talking about it, it might be that I could see that the Lord is causing me to grow.

THE SMITH FAMILY MOVES TO NEW YORK

Hank Smith
(13:13)

And not only is he moving me somewhere I need to be, but He's also shaping me into the person I need to be when I get there. Right. So He could just tell him, "Hey, I need you to move to Western New York" in a dream, but you're not going to be the person you need to be when you get there. Sometimes it was my students. I say, "The Lord is playing chess with the Smith family, and he's just moving the pieces--exactly right. And they're going, "All right." You know, and they have no idea until He goes, "Checkmate!" And, and the First Vision occurs.

We didn't talk about the leg operation at all. It's not in this part of the story, but you did talk about diseases that come through the family.

Dr. Steven Harper
(13:51)

In Lucy's memoir--the mom's memoir tells us that Sophronia is saved by the family's great faith.

[\[https://www.amazon.com/History-Joseph-Smith-His-Mother-ebook/dp/B0027FF150\]](https://www.amazon.com/History-Joseph-Smith-His-Mother-ebook/dp/B0027FF150)

They pray and seek and receive God's blessing of healing . . . Sophronia and . . . Lucy is a major part of all that, of course. And that's the story of her life. She's learned to pray in faith. And she's devastated when her sisters are killed by tuberculosis, and nearly Lucy herself. And she promises God early and often in her life that she will seek His ways and His Church--if He will preserve her life. And Lucy wants to be saved. Right. She's anxious and desperate to not meet God, not having been saved by Christ. And Joseph inherits that. This is where you can see where the disease and the concerns about salvation come together. Right. These people know people who die. Death is everywhere and it will take you tomorrow, if not today. And that's the world they live in, and they don't want to meet God, not having been redeemed by Christ. That's a major pressure that is working to get Joseph into the Grove as well.

John Bytheway

(14:59)

There's a lot of mortality all the time when everything's perfect in your life. You don't go seeking for help. I imagine Joseph often heard his mother expressed that idea of, "Am I prepared to meet God?"

TYPHOID FEVER

Hank Smith

(15:10)

So the same disease that goes through the family with Sophronia, Joseph gets it. And that's what results in the leg surgery.

Dr. Steven Harper

(15:18)

The disease is typhoid fever, and it killed like hundreds of people in the Connecticut River Valley, where they were living. It's not long after Sophronia's life is spared from typhoid-- Joseph gets a bone infection that a doctor's today called osteomyelitis. It lodges in his shin. And it's excruciating. An interesting thing to notice here is this is not in his History. Right. And there is . . . here is an Appendix to Joseph Smith History. There's in the Manuscript History Book--A1, if we were looking at the actual record book, this is taken from Joseph Smith History taken from, we'd turn all the way to the back of the book.

[\[https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/doc/introduction-to-history-1838-1856-manuscript-history-of-the-church\]](https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/doc/introduction-to-history-1838-1856-manuscript-history-of-the-church)

And we'd notice that Joseph's clerk wrote in a version of the story about the leg surgery. Well, this tells us a couple of things. It tells us that it wasn't the most important part of the story to Joseph.

Hank Smith

(16:12)

Right? And I remember hearing it a lot from my Primary teachers as to why not to drink alcohol, which I just think maybe that wasn't the whole purpose of telling this story, but . . .

Dr. Steven Harper

(16:20)

That's not the purpose of it at all.

John Bytheway

(16:24)

So, a lot of Primary kids out there drinking alcohol--so we need that lesson for the Primary.

Dr. Steven Harper

(16:53)

We're worried about the CTRs tipping behind the Church.

Hank Smith

(16:32)

Talk about mixing up storylines. Because someone said, "He didn't want to drink alcohol because it was against the Word of Wisdom."

Dr. Steven Harper

(16:38)

It's quite a good clarification for us to make because it can lead to feeling disillusioned. And we sometimes have taught it as if it was a cautionary tale about the Word of Wisdom, but it's not in Joseph's History for that reason. Joseph never makes the point about not drinking alcohol. That's not relevant to him. It's his mom and her memoir who says, "You know, that good boy of mine was so faithful, wouldn't even take brandy to dull the pain of his leg surgery. He just said, 'Let dad hold me and I'll be okay.' " She was telling us about her and her family and about her husband actually even. Right. One of the differences between Lucy and Joseph, Sr. is that Joseph, Sr. drinks to avoid the pain from the hard work and the struggles of life. We're talking about the reason we know is because he told us in a patriarchal blessing that he gave to Hyrum to his son.

He said, "I'm thankful to you for being good to me when I have, in the past, been out of the way through wine." Right. Some people think that Joseph, Sr. that means he's an alcoholic. It doesn't mean he's an alcoholic. People are confusing a disease of alcoholism--that is debilitating if the person who drinks--with someone who has drunk too much alcohol from time to time. Yeah, not the same thing. No evidence whatsoever that Joseph Smith, Sr. or Jr. are alcoholics, but there's evidence, that both of them give to us that they both drink from time to time. And that, as you noted, it was before the Word of Wisdom.

Hank Smith

(18:10)

And how common is drinking there?

Dr. Steven Harper

(18:12)

Ah--you would be weird if you didn't.

Hank Smith

(18:14)

Yeah, if you put it in that Latter-day Saint lens, of course, you're going, "Oh, dad drinks . . . this is . . . the ward is going to be . . . so concerned." Right. "And, and the Bishop's going to want to come over and see our family," but completely different contexts.

Dr. Steven Harper

(18:29)

There's no Word of Wisdom for 20 more years. And then it'll be a hundred years after that before we think of it in the way we think of it now. And some people are troubled by that, but it's just because they haven't learned to think about change over time, the way a historian does.

Hank Smith

(18:44)

We do the same thing within my New Testament classes. "Jesus didn't drink real wine, did he? It was more like juice?" And I'm like, "Well, no, it was real wine. It was alcoholic wine."

Dr. Steven Harper

(18:58)

They didn't pasteurize it.

Hank Smith

(18:59)

And I talk them through it--like it's a different time, different contexts.

Dr. Steven Harper

(19:02)

It's good to realize that the Word of Wisdom is an unusual revelation. Many of the revelations were given for a problem--then. The Word of Wisdom says, yeah, "I'll address the problem you're having here, but the real value of this is to warn you and forewarn you about 'evils and designs, which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men' in the future" (D&C 89:4). You don't have tobacco company executives manipulating nicotine levels in 1833 and '34, but you do now. And by the time Hebrew J. Grant is the prophet, to really tell us, "We've got to get to work

on the Word of Wisdom. We need it--now!" He was the right prophet at the right time to give us emphasis on a revelation that was good for us in 1833, but we really didn't need the full effects of it until the 20th century.

Hank Smith
(19:50)

And I think we're going to see that throughout our study this year is the Lord getting things in place long before they're needed. And then, when they're needed, they're there. Yeah.

THE SMITH FAMILY MOVES TO NEW YORK

John Bytheway
(19:57)

One of the things historically that I've enjoyed showing teenagers, I found at Barnes & Noble, this fold-out book, that's gotta be like 10-feet wide called, "The Wall Chart of World History." It was so fun to show here's the time of Christ. Here's the Meridian of time. Here's a time where the Apostasy begins, and here's this long period of apostasy. And why didn't the Lord restore the Church in the 1500s during the time of Martin Luther? Then, show how all of the United States of America is set up and, "Oh, here's the Declaration of Independence. Here's the Constitution finally ratified 1791." And there are these long stretches of time. And then it's like 14 years later, Joseph Smith born: Sharon, Vermont. And to show how quickly once religious freedom was sort of guaranteed that, uh, how quickly the Lord had things in place.

Dr. Steven Harper
(20:50)

The beginning of the American Revolution is between the birthplace and the birthdate of Joseph Smith, Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith.

Hank Smith
(21:01)

George Washington is a mere couple of hundred miles away.

How did they move? Like how do you move in 18-? What year did they move?

Dr. Steven Harper
(21:08)

1816 and '17. I say it that way because it takes a while. Dad goes first, and uh, he's got to go find the place and try to make the contract. If it's not a good idea, he'll send word back and say, "Nevermind." If it is, he'll send word back and say, "Come on."

Hank Smith
(21:27)

When we talk like, Oh, they're going to go from Vermont to New York. This is not a two-hour jump in the Hyundai Sonata. I'm going to zip over there and call ya.

Dr. Steven Harper
(21:35)

Yeah. Uh, weeks of . . . of travel. You can walk it. You can ride a horse. You can take a cart. Or as Joseph's family will do, they'll load a wagon with most of their stuff, and then most of them will walk all or part of the way. The wagon is for taking the stuff in. There's not a whole lot of passenger space in it. Joseph is still hobbled at this time from the leg surgery. It's still tough for him to walk, and he walks a good chunk of the way. It's a hard trip. Mom leads the group. The family has contracted with a teamster. What we would today think of as like somebody to drive the truck that our stuff is in and get it to the place where it was supposed to go-- load it up and unload it. And, and the guy's a bully. And she finally fires him partway into it.

Hank Smith
(22:20)

And she's little, isn't she little?

Dr. Steven Harper
(22:21)

Yeah. Yeah. She's not a great big woman.

Hank Smith
(22:23)

She's five foot, probably.

Steven Harper
(22:26)

Right. And Joseph gets pushed down, uh, by the guy and the family that are there with him. He gets picked on and and they finally get to where they're going and meet dad. And it's a happy reunion, and they decide, "This we're gonna make it. We're gonna . . . we're going to get ourselves a hundred acres in the woods." They're going to move south out of Palmyra within a couple of years. And it's south a few miles south, in Manchester where the Sacred Grove is. This is an important thing for students of the First Vision. For some reason, we have Palmyra fixated on our brains as Latter-day Saints.

Hank Smith
(22:59)

They moved there. They're clearing their own land right there. They've got to build their own house. This is a Build Your Own House Time Period. There's not a guy there saying, "Okay, what do you, what kind of floors do you want? What kind of sinks do you want?"

Steven Harper

(23:10)

Uh, "Do you like the travertine and so forth?" They are going to hire a guy later to build them a middle-class house. Right. They're aspiring to middle-class respectability, but for right now, you better build some shelter, and it better be not very time-consuming, and a better be made out of the same stuff that you're cutting down to make yourself room for a cash crop. In other words, they got to get a cash crop in the ground as fast as they can. And Lucy says, "In about a year, we cut 30 acres of hardwood trees down." I don't know if any of the listeners have ever done that. I think I may have cut one hardwood tree down over the course of my life. And it is hard.

Hank Smith

(23:53)

With a chainsaw

Dr. Steven Harper

(23:55)

It is hard--hard work.

Hank Smith

(23:57)

And then they're pulling stumps out too? Right. Some of these trees are--

Dr. Steven Harper

(24:00)

Yeah. Sometimes they'll just leave them, but still, sometimes, they'll pull them out or burn them or whatever it takes. They'll split the trunks into rails. They'll haul, they'll burn as much as they can. They'll haul the ash to an ashery. They're, they're incredibly industrious people.

Hank Smith

(24:13))

I'm going to use this on my . . . on my boys, right? When they're like, "Dad, I want to play the Switch. I cleaned my room. I want to play." I'll be like, "No, we're going to be like the Smiths. We're putting in 18-hour days. Right. We're going to go outside and cut down trees."

Dr. Steven Harper

(24:30)

Sounds good.

THE FAMILY CHOOSES METHODISM, PRESBYTERIANISM, OR NONE OF THE ABOVE

Hank Smith

(24:31)

Now, he starts attending church meetings. I assume that's with his mother.

Dr. Steven Harper

(24:34)

It's hard to know for absolute certainty. Um, the chronology here is difficult to pin down. Part of the reason for that is we don't know when Lucy and some of the family joins the Western Presbyterian Church. Those records are not available. We know when they get out of it, uh, later in the 1820s--well after the First Vision--but we don't know when they get in. So, what we have are just a few scraps of people remembering that Joseph, for example, "caught a spark of Methodism on the road to Vienna," which seems to be a reference to him attending the Methodist Campground--Methodist, uh, meetings that were held along the roadside. The Methodists are gaining ground on the Presbyterians rapidly here.

Hank Smith

(25:18)

Okay, so Methodism is a kind of a new idea. Methodism with Presbyterian being kind of the solid--

Dr. Steven Harper

(25:24)

Presbyterian then is the old church--the respectable church. And actually, they have two churches in town--brick buildings. This is what Lucy's family--this is her tradition that she comes from. This is what she sort of aspires to in a social sense. And the Methodists, in some ways, are new kids on the block, and they're aggressive. Uh, and they're plain. And they emphasize a lot more sort of personal responsibility and ability.

Hank Smith

(25:52)

The difference between Presbyterianism and Methodism, at least in this time, was Presbyterianism is . . . is God choosing you? Or have you been saved because God wants you? And so you can't really do anything. You just kind of wait until you feel God choosing you versus Methodism, which is you can choose God. You can go out and be saved by, you know, not by your own works, but because you're seeking Him.

Dr. Steven Harper

(26:14)

It's definitely an idea whose time has come. The Americans are saying, "We should represent ourselves, and we should have our own representatives. And we should have a say in our government." Methodism comes on the scene and says, "That's true for our religion, too."

Hank Smith

(26:28)

Brigham Young seems to lean towards Methodism. John Taylor seems to lean toward it. I think Wilford Woodruff as well, seems to lean toward it. Uh, so some are going to church, and some aren't. This is an interesting thing because there are Latter-day Saint families just like this. Some are going to church and some aren't. Mom is going to church with, uh, Hyrum, Samuel, Sophronia, uh, and everybody else is staying home, right?

Dr. Steven Harper

(27:50)

Yeah. Alvin stays home. Dad stays home. Joseph stays home. They're the more freethinking ones.

Hank Smith

(26:58)

I don't want any kid hearing this going, "See, mom, I don't have to go to Church." Right. "Joseph, didn't go to church with his mom." Uh, but that's interesting that half the family is heading to town, and it's a long walk. Right. That's a long ways to go to Church.

Dr. Steven Harper

(27:12)

You've got to work hard to get to Church. And it would be superficial to say, "Well, Joseph, Sr. and the boys are lazy or not as devoted" or something. It's really a misreading. They are just as much concerned about the salvation of their souls as the rest of the family. But they are super frustrated at the narrowness of the Presbyterian God, especially. And of the hypocrisy that they see in the clergy.

Hank Smith

(27:39)

Yeah, he says this here. He says, "their feelings were more pretended than real." Was Joseph Smith . . . was he a big-time Bible reader? Because he says, "I was one day reading the epistle of James." And I've always thought that means that's not the first time he picks up this book.

Dr. Steven Harper

(27:54)

Mom says in her memoir, "He never read the Bible through." And I think the first time he ever read the Bible through was in the mid-1830s when it was the new translation.

Hank Smith

(28:03)

Tony said that to us. He said, "Here we are starting this church, and he's thinking, 'I better read this thing all the way through.' "

Dr. Steven Harper

(28:11)

He lives in a biblically saturated culture. There's no way around it, but he's not himself, a systematic reader. Joseph is a deep reader. He is a thoughtful reader, and he'll dwell on it. Right. You can tell that from the way he talks about James 1:5, "Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of a man. And this had this time to mine. I reflected on it again and again." That's characteristic of Joseph's bible reading.

Hank Smith

(28:41)

He's one of these, um, students that I've, I've had these, that grab onto a phrase, and it stays with them forever. Versus some students who are going line by line because they want to finish the book.

Dr. Steven Harper

(28:54)

That's not Joseph. He doesn't care so much about finishing the book because he does about finding the answer to his problem. And it's important to know that there's an assumption in his culture--this is a thoroughly Protestant culture--

Hank Smith

(29:04)

And just real quick for everybody who's listening, Protestant is like a "protester," the opposition to Catholicism.

Dr. Steven Harper

(29:11)

What that means is the Bible, is it. There's not nearly so much emphasis on sacraments or ceremonies-

Hank Smith

(29:19)

-That's Catholicism, yeah?

LOOK FOR ANSWERS IN THE SCRIPTURES

Steven Harper

(29:22)

Right. It's Christ and his word. Your answer will be in the Bible. Notice that that's what Joseph is assuming. Where can I find the scripture that tells me whether the Methodist Church or the Presbyterian Church is right? Where can I find the scripture that tells me where to gain forgiveness of my sins? The big epiphany for Joseph is to come to realize those scriptures are

not there. The book is not closed. It's not the archive of all God said. Instead, it says, "If you lack wisdom . . . in 1820, if you lack wisdom, you can *still* ask God." The Bible is an open book. It's a book of experiences of people who received revelations. It's a book of testimonies of God's work in the lives of His people. And Joseph has to come to realize that can be ongoing. It doesn't just have to be included in the covers of the book. That's a major departure for him. And frankly, that's the genesis of the Restored Gospel.

Hank Smith

(30:19)

My kids come to me with their problems. "Dad, I don't know what to do about this." "This class is killing me." "This friend is really driving me crazy." What do I do to say, "Let's, let's look at the scriptures." We do it so much in our family that it becomes kind of natural, right? That's what it was to Joseph. "I've got an--I've got a problem. Naturally. I'm going to go to the scriptures and try to solve my problem."

Dr. Steven Harper

(30:39)

Yeah, I love that, Hank. The thing that bugs me is when I hear Latter-day Saints cheapen the whole process too, and boil it down to four words, "Just pray about it." That's not what it says, and that's not what he did. He worked intellectually hard. He worked spiritually hard, and that's the inheritance of Latter-day Saints is . . . is to work really, really hard to sort out your problems. And to not just think that the work is with my brain or with my heart, it's both. Uh, "To seek learning by study and also by faith where God will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the power of the Holy Ghost" (D&C 88:11).

[\[https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/88?lang=eng\]](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/88?lang=eng)

That's the legacy of the First Vision.

Hank Smith

(31:23)

Yeah. I think we've done that sometimes with Moroni, Chapter 10. We've said, "Read it and pray about it, and God will give you the answer." Well, there's a little bit more to it--to that. When you come to the Joseph Smith History, he didn't just read it and pray about it. There was a lot of anxiety. There was a lot of pondering in Joseph's time. There's a lot of time to ponder. You're going to walk to town. You're going to walk back. You don't have your headphones in. You're thinking the whole time you're out planting seeds, cutting down hardwood trees. You're probably thinking.

Dr. Steven Harper

(31:51)

In his 1832 autobiography, he says, "Between the age of 12 and 15, I became seriously impressed (*my mind becomes seriously impressed*) with regard to the all-important concerns for the welfare of my immortal soul."

[\[https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/first-vision-accounts?lang=eng\]](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/first-vision-accounts?lang=eng)

He spent years worrying and thinking and studying and working on this problem.

John Bytheway

(32:07)

You go back to Moroni's Promise in Moroni 10:4, and the word is "ask." But you go back to Moroni 10:3, and the word is ponder. "How merciful God has been since the time of Adam until the time you received these things."

["Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom God that ye should read them that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts. And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you by the power of the Holy Ghost." Moroni 10:3-4]

That's a . . . that's a *long* process. That's Enos wrestling. That's uh, it's going to take a while to learn everything that God has done since Adam and ponder it in your heart.

Hank Smith

(32:31)

People have said, "I've done what Merona has promised and I didn't get an answer. Why didn't I get one?" And I think part of it is God's not going to give you an answer your not prepared to actually act on it--but maybe all this pondering prepares you to act.

Narrator

(32:42)

This concludes Part 1: Joseph Smith History. Please join us in Part 2: The First Vision.