

# *“In This Life I Shall Have Joy”*

## *(Moses 5:10)*

ELAINE S. MARSHALL

I was with three of my dearest friends, who asked about the title of this talk. As I struggled to remember, they tried to help: “Finding Joy Today”; “Joy in This Life”; “Joy Today, Gone Tomorrow”; “Where is Joy? Joy Who?”

My friend Madlyn finally said, “There’s No Joy in Mudville.”

“That’s it!” I said. “That’s the title! ‘There’s No Joy in Mudville.’”

I have learned that, regardless of circumstance, for some people there is no joy; for others there is *only* joy. Some of us experience catastrophe in our lives; others *create* catastrophe in our lives. For some, there are a few bad days; for others there are *only* bad days.

This week I was reminded of one of those Mudville days. Honestly, I don’t remember if all of these things happened on the same day—they all blur together in a fog on the joyless treadmill. But they really happened in proximity close enough to count as a bad day. I had finished long hours at work with a steady stream of student problems, faculty conflicts, and overdue reports. At home kids needed help with school problems, friend problems, and romance problems. We were living in our basement, ten months into a six-week remodeling project. We were out of cat food, so the cat was mad. But we were also out of what my son calls “human food,” so the cat had to get in line.

I mistakenly dropped a tax-refund check in the trash, which had gone to the street for the next day’s collection, so the neighbors got to watch me rummage through my own garbage like a vagrant bag lady. Then, at the worst moment, the right front tire on my car was flat to the rim.

Sometime during all this, I made some soup for a family in our neighborhood. It was now after 10 at night, but I decided this was the only time I could deliver my pot of compassionate service. I convinced my husband that he should help me take it to a family where the father was very ill. I knew someone would still be up. So I held the soup in my lap while my husband drove the car, with the tire now repaired by AAA. (You think I am going to say that I spilled the soup, don’t you? Well, I didn’t! For this talk, there has to be some joy in the story.) I tiptoed to the porch and nudged my shoulder against the front door and knocked gently. I cautioned my husband to be quiet, thinking that a quiet interruption in the middle of the night somehow was more like charity.

From inside I thought I heard the doorbell ring and chided my husband, “I told you, don’t

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*Bio here Elaine S. Marshall was dean of the BYU College of Nursing when she gave this Women’s Conference address at Brigham Young University on 30 April 2004.*

ring the doorbell!" Then I heard it again. "Stop it," I said. He just looked at me with a blank face. I thought I could hear the doorbell ringing again and again. Finally, the granddaughter came to the door. "Hi," I whispered. "Sorry we are so late; we won't come in. We just wanted to let you know that we are thinking about you. I hope we didn't disturb you."

"Thank you," she said patiently, as she nudged me away in what I thought was going to be hug. As she pushed, she said, "You are leaning on the doorbell!" It was the end of a perfect day according to my personal mission statement, "No good deed goes unpunished—there's no joy in Mudville."

I also know of the days when washes of grief or despair nearly drown you; when it is all you can do to wake up and breathe one more time. I have had days like that. Following a turbulent marriage and the loss of my son, we had months and years of days filled with pain and stress and hassles.

Are you willing to pull your own handcart, but some days it feels like everyone else has climbed into it? The whole burden is yours, with everyone depending on you to pull and no one to share? You wonder, "Where is the joy in this life?"

On those days, whether bleak with despair or just full of last straws like leaning on the neighbor's doorbell, "there is no joy in Mudville." Do you feel like Casey at the bat, when the whole town waits with baited breath? It's the last inning; the score is 4 to 2; two men are on base; and two strikes are already against you. Everything depends on you, and, like Casey, you are poised to swing one more time to hit the ball with a crack. But instead the ball passes, and you swing with futility at the wind. Ernest Thayer's poem ends:

*Oh, somewhere in this favored land the sun is  
shining bright;  
The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere  
hearts are light,*

*And, somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere  
children shout;*

*But there is no joy in Mudville—mighty Casey has  
struck out. ["Casey at the Bat"]*

Do you feel like you have "struck out"? Are there days when you feel like joy is a doctrine that pertains only to the hereafter? How do we sustain a joyful life? How does one live every day joyfully and keep any semblance of sanity? I have discovered a few principles of finding joy.

### **Joy Is an Act of Courage**

First, to live joyfully you must be brave. True joy is not for the fainthearted. You must decide to be happy. Joy is an act of courage. Joy will not abide until you make a conscious decision to treasure it. Ten years ago one evening in March, I was in the ward kitchen putting pink mints on glass plates for my niece's wedding reception. The organdy lace wedding apron was barely holding my soul together. I was quietly just hanging on spiritually and emotionally. It was a time in my life of little joy. My mother and her sister were talking together nearby. I heard my aunt ask my mother, "How is Elaine?" Mom responded, "I believe she has made a decision to be happy. She has a garden and flowers in her yard. She sews and writes, and she works hard. She keeps a clean house and plays beautiful music. Her children are doing well. I think she has decided to be brave and to be happy."

I wept a few tears as I eavesdropped on my mother's conversation. I was lonely, tired, and grief stricken. I didn't know if I had made a conscious decision to be happy. But hearing my mother's hopeful description of me, I wanted it to be true. So I did decide to be happy. I decided that night to find joy in every day. It has been difficult. But I was brave. I am not so brave every day, but I do try to remember that joy is a decision that requires courage.

In the book of Moses, we learn that after being driven out of the Garden of Eden, Adam

and Eve made the decision upon entering this lone and dreary world to have joy. They had lived in a kind of paradise, having no needs, no hassles, no evil. But they learned that in order to have joy, they must know pain. More than that, they learned that to know joy in the face of pain requires courage. They wanted that experience for themselves and for us, their posterity. We read that Adam “blessed God and was filled, and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth,” blessing the name of God as he said, “in this life I shall have joy” (Moses 5:10). “And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad” (Moses 5:11). When Adam and Eve realized the cost of obedience, of enduring sorrow to meet God again, they decided that they would have joy. They made a decision. They were brave. When we learned of the divine plan of salvation before we came to earth, “when the morning stars sang together,” we joined “the sons of God,” and we too “shouted for joy” (Job 38:7).

### **To Have Joy You Must Be Grateful**

After you find the courage to make a decision for joy, the next step is to be grateful. Gratitude is the gateway to joy. How presumptuous we are to question the trials of our lives. We are blessed to be born with the greatest daily comforts of any time or place in history. We are blessed to be here on this day to share in the feast of the word of God. This very morning my eyes caught the photograph of my healthy grandson. I walked past my nostalgic lilacs now in full bloom and watered my pots of new geraniums and daisies. Here in this room are people that I love. Surely I have reason enough for gratitude to open my heart to joy!

On 1 January 2002, I began a daily gratitude journal. (OK, I admit I got the idea from Oprah!) Every day I wrote five things for which I was grateful. I did not miss a day until Easter morning in April. On that morning I was called to be the ward Relief Society president. I believe that the act of being grateful, of thinking every day

of five specific things for which I was thankful, helped me to be open to invite the Spirit, to freely love, and to accept the calling with joy.

I found that my gratitude journal filled nearly every day with little things, mostly with daily joys of my family. I began to ponder the memories of small moments of joys past. The more I meditated on things for which I was grateful, the more my heart became flooded with moments of joy—funny things my children had said, my Mom making goulash, my husband’s pride at finding tickets to the sold-out opera, spreading with a kiss my ward’s sisters quilt on a dear friend who was dying. From a daily focus on gratitude sprung a daily dose of joy.

### **Joy Requires Forgiveness**

Even in the face of such daily joys, some of us suffer chronic sorrow or anger toward others who have hurt us. Joy requires forgiveness. Has your life been changed by pain of an event, loss, or action of your own or another? Is there a moment or a decision that you regret, that you want to take back and start again? Go to the Lord, forgive yourself, and let it go. Has someone hurt you? Take it to the Lord, find help to heal, forgive, and let it go.

Forgiving is not forgetting. The memory of the pain will always linger. It is because you remember that you must forgive, in order to allow joy into your life. Forgiving is not excusing or tolerating wrong or sin or living with hurtful behavior. Hold the person appropriately accountable, take appropriate action—then forgive. Do it for yourself. Give it to the Lord, find faith in the Atonement, and let it go. To forgive is not easy. It extracts all the strength you have. It requires practice over and over. But there is healing comfort in forgiving, and it frees the soul to welcome joy.

### **Joy Comes from Service**

It is not enough simply to forgive others. Joy requires that we take the next step to serve others. I feel like I am on 24-hour call to serve

others at the moment. I am a wife, mother, grandmother, ward Relief Society president, nurse, and dean. My friend Martha recently sent me a note that asked, “If it’s true that we are here to help others, then what exactly are the *others* here for?” The “others” in my life expect me to be wise, helpful, organized, professional, and to have all the answers. May I share a secret? I don’t have a clue! You know how it is. I make it up as I go!

My sister introduced me to *The Daffodil Principle*, by Jaroldeen Asplund Edwards. It is an enchanting story of a woman who planted 50,000 daffodil bulbs on a hillside over 35 years. She says she did it “one at a time. One woman, Two hands, two feet, and very little brain” until she filled five acres of a San Bernardino mountainside. Every spring it is a gift of joy: given one bulb at a time (*The Daffodil Principle* [Salt Lake City: Shadow Mountain, 2004], 23).

I know that you know, only too well, that when you take the time to serve another in time of need, when you unexpectedly wave and smile to the jerk who cut you off in traffic, when you surprise your daughter by cleaning her room, when you make those carbohydrate-killer potatoes for the funeral, you nearly always feel a little burst of joy, a sense that God is in His heaven and all is nearly right with the world.

### Joy Requires Your Presence

In order to know joy, you have to *be* there. Joy requires presence. My friends know that if I were not too stingy to buy personalized vanity license plates for my car, I would choose my favorite word. The word is *vivace*. *Vivace* is an Italian word used in music. It *sounds* like music. It means life, lively, quickening. It sounds alive. It reminds me to wake up, to be acute and sensitive, alert, alive. It means vitality, *la joie de vivre*, vibrance, vigor. It reminds me to touch the palpable gift and reality of life.

Joy often lights in little fairy twinkles. I call them angel gifts. They are fleeting moments of sparkling enlightenment, like gentle kisses

of meaning when everything comes together. They are little heavenly glimpses of eternal joy. Joy can happen quickly, so you have to pay attention.

If you are not present in your life today, you will miss the joy as it happens. We cannot change the hurts of the past, but we can let go of the grudges and reflect today on past joys. We won’t recognize joy in the future if we don’t practice noticing it today.

I once heard Annie Dillard say, “Grace happens anyway; the least we can do is be there.” The least we can do is be there in our own lives. It is not enough to simply take breath. We must *live* every moment of life. We must find the joy that is there to be had anyway. This life today is part of our eternal life and a time to practice knowing eternal joy.

### The Message of the Atonement Is a Message of Joy

The message of the Atonement is a message of joy. Our Savior knows our suffering. He took upon Himself our suffering that we might have joy. Joy is life. To have joy is to live life fully. The meaning of the Resurrection in our own daily lives is that He lives! He lives, and because He lives, we live. This truth brings meaning, purpose, and joy to our lives. It gives us a reason to get up every morning even in times of despair, to laugh with abandon, to embrace life. The good news of the gospel is for each of us to live. To live is to know joy in our own personal lives, every day, every now.

We don’t live only after we die. We don’t find joy only in the hereafter. We live today because of His gift of the Atonement. To live anew, repent, and begin again are gifts from our Savior. We can live again every day. Some days are exhilarating; some days are exhausting. Some days are full of pain and others are full of grace. I get up every day and say aloud, “OK, I am going to try this just one more time . . .”

The Atonement allows us every day to try one more time. For a while after the death of

my son, this principle did not matter to me. It didn't matter if I died. I might have wished it. All I knew was his absence. The void without him was all there was. I had no sense of where he was or if he was. All I knew was that he was gone.

But the greatest gift of the Atonement is that it is real and there for us regardless of the state of our testimony. Whether we believe it or not, it is true. The Savior lives. His Atonement allows us to try again, to repent, to have hope, and to live. He suffered, died, and rose again for us, regardless of where we are in our belief or doubt about that reality. Sorrows and losses will come. We will sin and regret and need to try again. We will be hurt and need to forgive again. We will grieve and need to find joy again. We must help each other to remember the gift of life, that “men [and women] *are*, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25; emphasis added). Our very existence today is to know joy.

That night with the wedding mints, hearing my mother's conversation, I made a decision. Perhaps it was not a decision but a gift. But I decided that since I cannot die, then I must live. If I must live, then I am going to live fully, embrace life, and engage in each moment. I have little patience for those who are not engaged. I have little patience for those who see some hassles of daily life as matters of life or death (unless, of course they are my own hassles). I have little patience for those who don't understand my favorite word: *vivace*.

The Savior lives, and because He lives, we live. It is this life, one day at a time now to forever, in which we find joy. We learn that with Martha on the path to the house of her brother Lazarus as she grieved his death, when the Savior said, “I am the resurrection, and *the life*” (John 11:25; emphasis added). We learn it with the disciples on the road to Emmaus (see Luke 24:13–32), with Paul on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9:3–5), and with Mary Magdalene at the empty sepulcher (see John 20:17). How many times need He tell us?

The truth, the sacred truth, and our gift of joy is that He lives. Because of the Atonement, we can repent of sin and give up our fears and all of those mortal burdens that diminish our life. Because He lives, we must live every day of our eternal life. That includes today. We must live to bear vibrant testimony. We must live in joy. If we, who know the truth of salvation and the truth of the mission of Christ, if we are not the very model of joy in this often thankless world, who is left to show the world what is joy? If we do not have joy, who will?

Let's move out of Mudville. Let's practice the joy described so many times in the Psalms: to “be glad and sing for joy” (Psalms 67:4), to “make a joyful noise unto the Lord” (Psalms 100:1; see also Psalms 81:1, 98:6), to “make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation” (Psalms 95:1). With Isaiah, let us say, “With joy shall [we] draw water out of the wells of salvation” (Isaiah 12:3), and “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness . . . as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels” (Isaiah 61:10).

In the Book of Mormon, King Benjamin blessed his people with a promise and assurance we may receive today:

*For the Lord hath heard thy prayers, and hath judged of thy righteousness, and hath sent me to declare unto thee that thou mayest rejoice, and that thou mayest declare unto thy people, that they may also be filled with joy. [Mosiah 3:4]*

I take this as permission and assurance from God Himself that in this life I may have joy, that joy is a divine principle whose eternal implications may be beyond our understanding but are significant to God Himself. I pray that today and always we may all find the courage, gratitude, forgiveness, service, and presence to honor our divine gifts of joy. “In this life [let us] have joy” (Moses 5:10).