

A Joyful Heart

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What I will say to you today will only have meaning as you make room in your heart for the Spirit. You surely have many things on your mind as you come to this devotional. Our time together will quickly pass. You probably will not remember much of what was said. As the Spirit prompts you with a feeling or thought to attach to your life, please don't let it pass you by.

Our message today is simple: God wants you to find and keep joy in this world and in the world to come. You have been specially endowed with a celestial nature that is to grow into a fullness of joy. That thought can get lost too easily in today's world.

These are turbulent times. There is not much of good report on the six o'clock world news these days. The former prophets practically wrote the six o'clock world news for you in prophecies. They are signs of our time. The kingdom of God on earth and the kingdom of the adversary are on a collision course of great proportions. You can hardly be blamed for putting on your headphones and turning up your MP3 players to block out the realities around you. However, *God has a work for you to do!* Within that work—and because of it—you are promised great joy.

You are principle players in this great contest between good and evil. How we pray

for you that you will be heavily armed with the standard of truth and righteousness! In the circle of the General Authorities, we frequently comment among ourselves that you are the best prepared of any former generation. You pray more; you study the scriptures more; you are more obedient to the commandments of God. You have a great destiny ahead of you. Although this will become more important to you as life moves on, how great the need is *now* to develop yourself into the peaceable followers of Christ. How much this world, your future family, and the people around you need the strength of your righteous influence and your joyful countenance.

So let's discuss today how to obtain lasting joy in your life.

On June 24 of this year, Laurel and I will have been married for 44 years. Over these years we have found some very helpful tools in working toward a joyful life, even during the challenging times. We share our experiences with you, hoping that you will think

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on these experiences and, where appropriate, apply them to yourselves.

From our experience, developing joy brings emotional rewards of inner peace and the healing of pains that often can beset you. Let's see if we can understand how this works doctrinally.

Undergirding the gospel of Jesus Christ is the concept of eternal and permanent happiness. Joseph Smith stated the doctrine in very few words:

Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God. [Teachings, 255–56]

That is the essence of the religion you have embraced. The Book of Mormon contains more than 150 references to joy. To quote an early reference in the Book of Mormon: "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25).

I am indebted to Elder Bruce Hafen for a thought he left us in the last general conference:

*So if you have problems in your life, don't assume there is something wrong with you. Struggling with those problems is at the very core of life's purpose. . . . If you're seeing more of your weaknesses, that just might mean you're moving nearer to God, not farther away. [Bruce C. Hafen, "The Atonement: All for All," *Ensign*, May 2004, 97]*

There is great peace of mind in that thought. Trials and tribulations are part of the formula for getting us back to God. In this mortal life He does work within you, moving you into position to face and overcome your personal challenges. I have been a witness to that process many times. You are to grow your happiness here in mortality, primarily by being nurtured and enlightened by the good word of God. This doctrine lays out a pathway toward

happiness markedly different from that of the world.

President David O. McKay clarifies a significant difference between our doctrine of happiness and that of the world:

*It is true that wealth and friends and material success may make [happiness] the brighter when it is already shining within, but when it is not in the heart, all outward contributions are like paint and powder on the sallow cheek, the mere semblance of the thing desired. [David O. McKay, *Pathways to Happiness*, comp. Llewelyn R. McKay (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1957), 107]*

We are to look primarily within ourselves to build joy.

True doctrines bring joyful hearts to an intensity unknown to the world. Alma the Younger may have conveyed it best: "And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!" (Alma 36:20). That's quite a range of emotion!

Alma holds out great hope to you. There is joy to be felt exceeding the greatest of pains. He also implies that you can build for yourself high pain thresholds through understanding the Atonement. He describes how he was caught up in great emotional pain: "I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death" (Alma 36:18).

He sounds pretty hopeless, doesn't he? But he goes on to say:

And now, behold, when I thought this [speaking of the teachings of his father, Alma, concerning the Atonement of Jesus Christ], I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more. [Alma 36:19]

This is a very practical doctrine for you to lay hold of. Alma is telling you that the Savior's Atonement holds full power to grant mercy sufficient to completely cleanse the mind and soul. What is profoundly crucial to you is to understand that this mercy holds sufficient power for you to achieve complete peace and healing.

Many scriptural evidences demonstrate that the Atonement gives healing to both body and soul. Think on the miracles performed by the Savior wherethrough He healed physical infirmities, at the same time forgiving the repentant sinners and bringing peace to their souls. Of particular note is Alma's comment to Helaman, "But behold, my limbs did receive their strength again, and I stood upon my feet, *and did manifest unto the people that I had been born of God*" (Alma 36:23; emphasis added). Both body and soul were healed in his conversion.

In our day the Lord has entrusted you with His power to heal by faith and by the power of the priesthood to bring about this peace and healing.

Time isn't sufficient today to name all the ingredients for bringing peace and healing to the soul. Certainly the power of the Atonement, coupled with our true and full conversion, is the greatest ingredient in finding joy.

Allow me to mention other patterns in your lives to build joy. These patterns have greatly helped Laurel and me in our journey through life together.

You always have to keep humor as a significant part of your lives. We often reflect on humorous moments. Our family has grown up with humor. Home movies attest to the joyful times, particularly during family gatherings. These moments we treasure; they lift us when we are apart. We encourage you to keep humor and the memories of good times as a part of dealing with the everyday vicissitudes of life.

One caution: Don't ever use humor at the expense of someone else! I learned that lesson early in life, to my constant remorse. To tell the story quickly: My growing-up years were in Southern California. My parents socially traveled with the then "elite" of Hollywood. Although I had "goodly parents," they took on the social customs of the world for a time. When I was about seven years of age, my father planned a birthday celebration for my mother. He invited the important people of Hollywood, particularly a number of the leading actors of that day. My older brother and I came into the kitchen during preparations. We saw champagne poured into glasses to toast my mother. I said to my brother, "This is not right!" When no one was looking, we poured the champagne down the sink and refilled the glasses with vinegar. In my moment of self-righteousness, I thought we needed to teach an object lesson. Besides, we thought it would be funny to watch everyone swallowing vinegar at the same time. Big mistake. *I hadn't considered that my older brother could run faster than I could!*

You may not know that there is occasional humor mixed into our work at Church headquarters. The General Authorities and officers are typically happy, optimistic people. Humor shows up at times in unexpected ways. Here are some graphics of recent examples intended to highlight challenges that you may deal with. Here we have a busy bishop. [A slide photo of a bishop with a cell phone at each ear was shown.] Here we have a bishop's mail coming from Church headquarters. [A slide photo of a donkey cart loaded with mail was shown.] Here we have a priesthood leader chasing down a priest on Sunday morning. [Slide photos were shown of (1) a priesthood leader awaking a young man in bed, (2) the priesthood leader greeting the young man as he comes out of his house on the way to the beach, and (3) the priesthood leader, in water up to his Sunday shirt and tie, with his hand

on the shoulder of the boy as they walk out of the ocean.] The senior Brethren really do emulate a quality noted about Joseph Smith: having a “native cheery temperament” (JS—H 1:28).

Let me recommend another ingredient of joy. I was fortunate to marry a girl with music in her soul. As she sits at the piano playing the classics and hymns, it brings a great sense of peace and enjoyment. Incidentally, she could step up to this pulpit and sing almost every popular song written in our time—excluding grunge, hip-hop, and rap, of course! To keep our relationship harmonious, I won’t ask her to receive your requests now.

Each of our children—and now our grandchildren—has learned to play musical instruments. Our experience leads us to recommend that you steer your children away from learning to play drums. Let them take that up when they move into their own homes!

Recently I saw this quote at our granddaughter’s violin recital: “Music washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life.” I believe that. I have come to recognize much later in life the importance of bringing into my soul the melodies and words of our hymns and other uplifting music. Now as I sing sacrament hymns, they become my words, my prayers, and my thanksgivings.

We possess particular hymns especially written to bring peace and healing to our souls. Let’s listen for a moment as the Tabernacle Choir sings to lift our souls. [Music was played.] “Peace Like a River” and “Deep River,” both with arrangements by Mack Wilberg, use rivers as metaphors for our constancy of hope and faith. Did you feel a sense of peace? Uplifting music is designed to bring peace into our lives.

Another lesson about happiness occurred while I was serving as a mission president in Venezuela. The assistants came into my office one day and said, “President, there are two types of missionaries in our mission: those who use most of their week preparing for P-Day

and those who use their P-Day to plan their week.” There is a message here. You returned missionaries know what I am talking about. We notice a great difference in those who come into the mission prepared to work hard because they have had earlier experiences of working hard. They gain satisfaction in life from accomplishing worthwhile goals.

President David O. McKay commented on the importance of work in bringing happiness:

One source of happiness springs from the realization of having accomplished something worth while. . . . The accomplishing of a fixed determination in the quest for truth and nobility of soul always produces happiness. [Pathways, 107]

That is why effective missionaries do not want to leave their missions and always look back on mission life with satisfaction. When you look back from the other side of the veil, will you feel likewise? Remember President McKay’s counsel: “The accomplishing of a fixed determination in the quest for truth and nobility of soul always produces happiness.”

Has it occurred to you that sincere and heartfelt prayer brings discovery, and discovery brings joy? Of all the challenging times in our lives, I think Laurel would agree with me that our three-year mission in Venezuela would count high on the list. We had our young family with us. Their happiness and well-being were an ever-important issue balanced with the everyday challenges of the missionaries, culture, language, illness, crime, political turmoil, and so forth.

I remember so well a particular day on the island country of Trinidad and Tobago. We were trying to gain official recognition for the Church. After many failed attempts I remember falling to my knees in my hotel room in the capital city, Port of Spain. I poured out my heart to God, saying, “Heavenly Father, I can’t do this alone! The obstacles are too great.” I remember feeling waves of peace coming

over me. A voice came to my mind saying, “Be patient. I will open the pathway to establish my Church here.” The Spirit spoke to my mind, bringing great peace and consolation to my heart. Prayer indeed brings peace, healing, and a sense of joy.

Please consider prayer as an active and open channel to a loving and listening Heavenly Father. It helps at times to have the image of His countenance before you, the Savior at His side advocating on your behalf. He does listen. I testify of that. He always listens to the prayers of your heart.

Peace and joy come from pondering scripture. You can sense the joy that prophets describe within themselves. It is a marvelous thing to contemplate the joys coming to Joseph Smith as revelation after revelation poured upon him from heaven. What joy he expressed in receiving visits from the Savior and the great prophets of old! Just one example in his life can give you a flavor:

Immediately on our coming up out of the water after we had been baptized, we experienced great and glorious blessings from our Heavenly Father. No sooner had I baptized Oliver Cowdery, than the Holy Ghost fell upon him, and he stood up and prophesied many things which should shortly come to pass. And again, so soon as I had been baptized by him, I also had the spirit of prophecy, when, standing up, I prophesied concerning the rise of this Church, and many other things connected with the Church, and this generation of the children of men. We were filled with the Holy Ghost, and rejoiced in the God of our salvation. [JS—H 1:73; emphasis added]

President Spencer W. Kimball also commented on the importance of the scriptures, saying:

I find that when I get casual in my relationships with divinity and when it seems that no divine ear is listening and no divine voice is speaking,

that I am far, far away. If I immerse myself in the scriptures the distance narrows and the spirituality returns. I find myself loving more intensely those whom I must love with all my heart and mind and strength, and loving them more, I find it easier to abide their counsel. [In TSWK, 135]

There is a great spiritual enrichment in pondering scripture—not just reading nor just studying but truly pondering. When you get it fixed right in your minds, your hearts begin to open up to feelings that bring lasting joy. Pondering scripture also stores up great knowledge useful throughout life in solving the everyday problems that vex you. It helps keep a pure conduit to heaven, allowing joy to replace indecision and lack of direction. Pondering scripture is a discipline to learn early in life and insist on maintaining throughout.

Now let’s talk about love. It seems like such a short time ago that Laurel and I were sitting in your seats listening to similar speakers. We were engaged to be married and very much in love. Over the years we have learned much more about love. We have learned that “being in love” is a wonderfully blissful state. But eternal companionship is much more. The term *being in love* uses the word *love* as a noun, a state of being. The other meaning of love is in its condition as an action verb. To love and be loved transcends “being” in love. Scripture is quite clear on that topic. “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Although you may feel love toward the Savior, feeling love is not enough. You must demonstrate your love in a contractual way. It is the giving of that love that brings true and lasting joy. The same is true in marriage. Paul’s counsel to the Saints in Ephesians underscores this principle:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; . . .

[Here Paul makes an important analogy:]
That he might present it to himself a glorious

church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. [Ephesians 5:25, 27]

Loving others means helping them to become better.

Lasting joy comes from combining the “being in love” with a loving behavior. In the words of C. S. Lewis:

Love as distinct from “being in love” is not merely a feeling. It is a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately strengthened by habit; reinforced by (in Christian marriages) the grace which both parents ask, and receive, from God. . . . “Being in love” first moved them to promise fidelity: this quieter love enables them to keep the promise. It is on this love that the engine of marriage is run: being in love was the explosion that started it. [C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952) 99; emphasis added]

Love is both a noun and a verb in the celestial kingdom. The closing words of the Savior’s great Intercessory Prayer sum it up: “that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:26).

Let us return now to our earlier statement: “Certainly the power of the Atonement, coupled with our true and full conversion, is the greatest ingredient in finding joy.”

Our baptism does not necessarily indicate conversion. Having a testimony does not necessarily indicate conversion. I quote from President Marion G. Romney’s general conference talk given October 4, 1963:

As used in the scriptures, “converted” generally implies not merely mental acceptance of Jesus and his teachings but also a motivating faith in him and in his gospel—a faith which works a transformation, an actual change in one’s understanding of life’s meaning and in his allegiance to God—in interest, in thought, and in conduct. While conversion may be accomplished in stages, one is

not really converted in the full sense of the term unless and until he is at heart a new person. “Born again” is the scriptural term. [CR, October 1963, 23; emphasis in original]

One who walks in a newness of life is converted. President Romney continued:

Conversion . . . is the fruit of, or the reward for, repentance and obedience. . . .

. . . His spirit is healed. . . .

. . . Sometimes there is also a healing of the nervous system or of the mind. But always the remittance of sins which attends divine forgiveness heals the spirit. This accounts for the fact that in the scriptures conversion and healing are repeatedly associated. . . .

“And after their temptations, and much tribulation, behold, I, the Lord, will feel after them, and if they harden not their hearts, and stiffen not their necks against me, they shall be converted, and I will heal them.” (D&C 112:12–13. [Emphasis] added.) . . .

Somebody recently asked how one could know when he is converted. The answer is simple. He may be assured of it when by the power of the Holy Spirit his soul is healed. When this occurs, he will recognize it by the way he feels, for he will feel as the people of Benjamin felt when they received [a] remission of sins. The record says, “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.” (Mosiah 4:3.) [CR, October 1963, 24–25]

President Romney concluded by saying:

Getting people’s spirits healed through conversion is the only way they can be healed. I know this is an unpopular doctrine and a slow way to solve the problems of men and nations. . . . Nevertheless, I know and solemnly witness that there is no other means by which the sin-sick souls of men can be healed or for a troubled world to find peace. [CR, October 1963, 26]

I add a humble second witness to the truths that President Romney taught. True and full conversion is the only way to bring complete peace and healing to the soul. It is the balm of Gilead, the ultimate fount of joy.

Laurel and I find great joy in the great goodness of God. He is merciful. He stands

ready to heal you when you need healing. He offers peace of soul through the Atonement of His Son, Jesus Christ. Truly joy and happiness are the objects of our existence. May you capture the pathway to that happiness, becoming "as a river" in your constancy of pursuit. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.