

LIGHT REFLECTIONS

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Learn with Joy

The story is told—too good *not* to be true—of leaders in the Missionary Department who submitted missionary materials for review by a senior leader of the Church. When the materials were returned, the senior leader’s response comprised just three words: *Add. More. Joy.*

Apocryphal or not, I believe that there’s a lesson in this tale for us at BYU. Part of that lesson is that we of all people ought to be joyful. An angel told King Benjamin that the tidings of Christ’s coming should leave His people “filled with joy” (Mosiah 3:4). At October’s general conference, President Nelson sounded the glad tidings of the Savior’s *second* coming.¹ We regard the Messiah’s millennial advent as Alma awaited His mortal birth: “Would to God that it might be in [our] day; but let it be sooner or later, in it [we] will rejoice” (Alma 13:25).

As we anticipate the return of the King, we are blessed to labor in an incomparable corner of His vineyard—a sacred plot of hallowed ground, nestled at the feet of majestic mounts, graced by consecrated colleagues, quickened by peerless students.

Another lesson is that joy is active—something we can add, something we can cultivate, something we can choose. Joy is a verb as well as a noun. It is a virtue of the heart as well as a state of the soul. It is a choice of the will as well as a gift of grace.

For much of her mission, our daughter Julia has been focusing during each transfer on one of the Christlike attributes highlighted in Chapter 6 of *Preach My Gospel*. She recently completed her journey through this list of virtues, but because she extended her mission, she still has one transfer to

go. She has decided in these final weeks of her mission to focus on the virtue of joy.²

I’m proud of Julia for her wisdom, as well as her desire to follow this counsel from President Nelson: “The joy we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives. When the focus of our lives is on God’s plan of salvation,” he continued, “. . . and Jesus Christ and His gospel, we can feel joy regardless of what is happening—or not happening—in our lives.”³

I hope to remind myself of this when circumstances seem suboptimal, or my labor feels less than joyful. At such times, I hope to focus on the works of joy, even when the feelings seem elusive.

I like this insight from the psychologist and philosopher William James⁴: “Action seems to follow feeling, but really action and feeling go together; and by regulating the action, which is under the direct control of the will, we can indirectly regulate the feeling, which is not.”⁵ The works of joy, I submit—like the works of faith, hope, and charity—call forth, in time, the fruits of feeling joyful.

“We all know,” observed Professor Truman G. Madsen, “that the Spirit brings joy. The revelation to me is that joy brings the Spirit.”⁶ In support of this insight, Brother Madsen invoked the complementary testimonies of Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball.

From Brother Brigham:

You that have not passed through the trials, and persecutions . . . , but have only read of them . . . may think how awful they were to endure, and wonder that

*the Saints survived them at all. The thought of it makes your hearts sink within you . . . , and you are ready to exclaim, "I could not have endured it." I have been in the heat of it, and I never felt better in all my life; I never felt the peace and power of the Almighty more copiously poured upon me than in the keenest part of our trials. They appeared nothing to me.*⁷

And from Brother Heber:

*Often when I have been in the presence of brother Brigham, we would feel such a buoyant spirit that when we began to talk we could not express our feelings, and so, "Hallelujah," says Brigham, "Glory to God," says I. I feel it and say it.*⁸

In a small and modest measure, I have experienced a similar divine sweetness in our university leadership councils and in my interactions with faculty colleagues. I have felt buoyed by the Lord's Spirit, even when grappling with weighty issues and vexing challenges. I have

been lifted by the goodness, compassion, and faith of the stalwart souls among whom I labor.

Toward the end of his life, the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob hoped that his posterity might "learn with joy . . . concerning their first parents" (Jacob 4:3).

Learn with joy. It's hard to imagine a more concise and compelling summary of our BYU Mission and Aims.

May we add more joy to our relationships and our craft.

May we always look to Christ and "rejoice with exceedingly great joy" (Mosiah 3:13).

May we learn with joy forever.

"For Latter-day Saints," said President Nelson, "Jesus Christ is joy!"⁹

May we find everlasting joy in Him.

¹ Russell M. Nelson, "The Lord Jesus Christ Will Come Again," *Liahona*, November 2024.

² Before last week's Forum, I had the chance to discuss our missionaries' efforts to cultivate virtue with our speaker, Jeffrey Rosen. We talked about *Preach My Gospel*, Chapter 6, as well as Section 4 of the Doctrine and Covenants. That brief conversation led to the stirring experience of watching our students rise in response to Professor Rosen's invitation and recite Section 4 in unison.

³ Russell M. Nelson, "Joy and Spiritual Survival," *Liahona*, November 2016.

⁴ A contemporary described James as "the humorist who writes on psychology, not his brother [Henry], the psychologist who writes novels." Anonymous (1899), quoted in Jacques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life* (2000) 660.

⁵ William James, "The Gospel of Relaxation," 25 *Scribner's Magazine* 499, 500 (1899).

⁶ Truman G. Madsen, "'The Joy of the Lord Is Your Strength' (Nehemiah 8:10)," *BYU Devotional*, November 21, 2000, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/truman-g-madsen/joy-lord-strength-nehemiah-810/>.

⁷ *Journal of Discourses*, 1:313.

⁸ *Journal of Discourses*, 4:222. Directly following these expressions, Brother Kimball added the following, more familiar observations: "I am perfectly satisfied that my Father and my God is a cheerful, pleasant, lively, and good-natured Being. Why? Because I am cheerful, pleasant, lively, and good-natured when I have His Spirit That arises from the perfection of His attributes; He is a jovial, lively person, and a beautiful man."

⁹ Nelson, "Joy and Spiritual Survival."