

LIGHT REFLECTIONS

Justin Collings

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Good Cheer

On a recent flight to London, I alternated between two books: one on artificial intelligence, the other *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Gordon B. Hinckley*, our third-hour manual from a few years back.

As with much of my reading about artificial intelligence, I found the AI book by turns fascinating and frightening. After one particularly unsettling section, I turned with some relief to the teachings of President Hinckley. The title of the next chapter—“Cultivating an Attitude of Happiness and a Spirit of Optimism”—felt like a message from heaven. The chapter’s epigraph felt even more pointed: “Be believing. Be happy. Don’t get discouraged. Things will work out.”¹

I have always felt fortified by the cadence and conviction of President Hinckley’s prose. And so it was on that transatlantic flight, as I reread his call to let “optimism replace pessimism” and “let our faith replace our fears.”² I felt chastened in the best way—called out of fretfulness and back into faith—by his rebuke of cynicism and gloom. “You can’t, you don’t, build out of pessimism or cynicism,” he said. “You look with optimism, work with faith, and things happen.”³

President Hinckley’s counsel mounted, line by line, toward a great prophetic call to be of good cheer:

There is no place in this work for those who believe only in the gospel of doom and gloom. The gospel is good news. It is a message of triumph. It is a cause to be embraced with enthusiasm. . . . This is the work of the

*Almighty. . . . This is His work. Never forget it. Embrace it with enthusiasm and affection.*⁴

As I read these words, I felt my lack of faith corrected and my hope renewed. This is the Lord’s work. We have been called to help BYU become, ever more completely, His school. Ours is a cause that will not fail. This is a time to be of good cheer.

I once heard President Jeffrey R. Holland suggest that the scriptural command to “be of good cheer” may be one of the most universally disobeyed. It is certainly one with which I struggle. Perhaps part of our trouble is that the elegant but somewhat archaic English phrase tempts us to think that the Savior is speaking merely of our surface mood. But when the Savior commands us to be of good cheer, He is not asking us to be chipper, jaunty, or artificially upbeat. Such moods are surely pleasant when they come, but the Savior is demanding something deeper. He is calling us to courage.

The Greek verb behind the charge is *θαρσέω* (*tharseō*), which in the New Testament usually appears as an imperative and means “take courage,” “take heart,” or “be confident.” Other languages preserve the same sense: *Coraggio!*, *Sei guten Mutes!*, *Prenez courage!*

This is not a suggestion to feel jolly; it is a command to be resolute—to place our confidence in a power higher than ourselves. Saint Jerome’s Latin translation employs the verb *confidere*—to trust. The command to “be of good cheer” is, in

¹ *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Gordon B. Hinckley* (2016) 68.

² *Ibid* 70.

³ *Ibid* 71.

⁴ *Ibid* 76.

the end, a call to trust God—an invitation to deeper faith and sturdier hope. We can answer that call no matter our mood.⁵

How? We begin by turning to the Lord and clinging to His promises. Those promises encompass our classrooms and labs as well as our homes and chapels. President Dallin H. Oaks has written that the Lord’s promises “are precious and remind each of us to be of good cheer and to have joy in the fulness of the gospel as we press forward through the challenges of mortality.”⁶

I love that President Oaks links “good cheer” to “joy” and “the fulness of the gospel.” He anchors that joy not in passing circumstance but in eternal doctrine:

There is boundless power in the doctrine of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Our unshakable faith in that doctrine guides our steps and gives us joy. It enlightens our minds and gives strength and confidence to our actions. . . . By understanding and conforming our lives to that doctrine, including the divine gift of repentance, we can be of good cheer as we keep ourselves on the path toward our eternal destiny.⁷

May we heed the call of the Savior and His prophets to be of good cheer. And may we help our students do the same—not by denying the difficulties of our day, but by bearing witness, in word and deed, that Christ has triumphed and His cause will prevail.

“In the world ye shall have tribulation,” He said, “but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

⁵ I am grateful to Kerry Hull and Shon Hopkin, faculty colleagues from Ancient Scripture, for insights on the etymology of “be of good cheer.”

⁶ Dallin H. Oaks, *Learning the Great Fundamentals: Jesus Christ, Priesthood, and the Plan of Salvation* (2026) 30.

⁷ *Ibid* 32.