

“That They Might Have Joy”

DAVID A. BEDNAR

My beloved brothers and sisters, there is an understandably subdued spirit on the campus of Brigham Young University today. I have thought about you and the student involved in the incident yesterday without ceasing since I learned of this episode.

This morning I arose very, very early, and I would like to share with you briefly just a few thoughts that may be of some assistance to all of us. I invite you to consider and to connect four things.

First, consider the titles used to describe the Lord Jesus Christ by Isaiah: “Wonderful, Counsellor [please note the word *counsellor*], The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”¹

Connect that title of Counsellor to this verse from Alma: “Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good.”²

Connect those verses to these lyrics in the hymn “Where Can I Turn for Peace?” from Sister Emma Lou Thyane:

*Where can I turn for peace?
Where is my solace
When other sources cease to make me whole?*

*When with a wounded heart, anger, or malice,
I draw myself apart,
Searching my soul?*

*Where, when my aching grows,
Where, when I languish,
Where, in my need to know, where can I run?
Where is the quiet hand to calm my anguish?
Who, who can understand?
He, only One.*

*He answers privately,
Reaches my reaching
In my Gethsemane, Savior and Friend.
Gentle the peace he finds for my beseeching.
Constant he is and kind,
Love without end.*³

Last, connect those lyrics to Alma’s description of the Savior:

David A. Bednar, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this devotional address on December 4, 2018.

And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.⁴

With all the energy of my soul, I bear witness that the Lord Jesus Christ lives. These are not words on a page in a book. These are literal, actual spiritual truths. And as His servant and in His name, I promise you will receive the counseling you need from the Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace.

Susan and I are grateful to be here with you. We love you, and we love Brigham Young University.

I desire and pray for the assistance of the Holy Ghost for you and for me as we focus now together on things of eternal worth during this devotional.

Learning from the Lord’s Servants at BYU

An important time of learning for me started on this campus in 1970. I attended San Leandro High School in the East Bay Area of California from 1967 to 1970. It was a turbulent time with anti-Vietnam War protests, political assassinations, and social upheaval. The Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco and Telegraph Avenue near the campus of the University of California at Berkeley were two major epicenters of dramatic drug, music, sexual, and cultural revolutions. Only a few Latter-day Saints attended my high school, and my ward had a very small group of youth.

I moved into Helaman Halls in August 1970 and quickly became acquainted with many diverse and faithful young men and young women. That fall semester was a life-changing time for me because of spiritually powerful sacrament meetings and service in my student ward, stimulating

academic classes and supportive teachers, and a strong brotherhood that developed with my dorm friends as we played intramural sports, talked late into the night, and perpetrated typical but harmless freshman pranks and practical jokes.

My experience at BYU was “spiritually strengthening,” “intellectually enlarging,” and a preparation for “lifelong learning and service.”⁵ And most important of all, I met Susan Robinson on this campus after I returned home from my mission in 1973. She has been the love of my life for almost forty-four years.

As I started to think about and prepare for this opportunity to speak with you, I reflected on the devotional experiences I had as a BYU student. I am so old that I remember attending devotionals as a freshman in the Smith Fieldhouse before the Marriott Center was constructed. And I have wonderful memories of being in the Marriott Center as a student listening to and learning from Presidents Harold B. Lee and Spencer W. Kimball; Elders Ezra Taft Benson, Boyd K. Packer, Thomas S. Monson, Bruce R. McConkie, and Neal A. Maxwell; and many other inspired and inspiring leaders. Their teachings and testimonies have influenced every aspect of my life, and the Smith Fieldhouse and the Marriott Center became two of my most important classrooms while I was attending BYU.

The next step in my preparation to speak with you this morning was to study the devotional and commencement messages presented on this campus in 2018 by four of my Brethren from the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

In March, Elder Ronald A. Rasband emphasized the importance of personal integrity. Of particular importance was his instructive invitation to each of us to assess how we understand and exercise the principle of integrity in our individual lives. Elder Rasband asked:

When you leave this sacred school setting, what will you be known for? The time to decide your epitaph is not at the end of your career but at the beginning. Right now. Will you be moral, ethical, and honest?⁶

Elder Neil L. Andersen in April described and discussed “a holier approach to ministering.” He highlighted:

*There is a unique and supernal gift of ministering that can come from someone who loves God with all his or her heart; who is settled, grounded, steadfast, and immovable in his or her faith in Jesus Christ and in the restored gospel; and who keeps the commandments with exactness.*⁷

Elder Andersen also identified many potential situations that would require courageous ministering in a holier way.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland spoke to the graduating students and their families at the April commencement ceremony. As both a member of the Twelve and a past president of BYU, he reminded the graduates of two vital truths. First, each of us must bridle our personal ambition and focus our talents and energy on accomplishing God’s will. As only Elder Holland could declare:

*Go out there and light a candle. Be a ray of light. Be your best self and let your character shine. Cherish the gospel of Jesus Christ and live it. The world needs you, and surely your Father in Heaven needs you if His blessed purposes for His children are to prevail. You have entered to learn. Now go forth to serve and strengthen. If correcting all the world’s ills seems a daunting task, so be it. Go out there and be undaunted. If we cannot look to you to change the world, tell me to whom we should look.*⁸

Second, Elder Holland admonished us to be “secure in the promise of God’s unfailing love for [us] and the redeeming blessings that flow forever from the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁹

And in October, Elder Gerrit W. Gong encouraged us to look back from the future as “a remembrance of things to come.”¹⁰ He asked us to go with him to the year 2040 and look back with gratitude on four things we had learned as students in 2018:

*May we learn how to learn by the Spirit; may we choose and decide in time how best to prepare for eternity; may we offer global experience and training to contribute to every nation, kindred, and tongue; and may we seek and rejoice in spiritual strengthening.*¹¹

Elder Gong counseled us to prepare now for a future that will be here tomorrow.

What an extraordinary spiritual curriculum has been presented in 2018 by these four servants of the Lord. Many other inspired devotional speakers also have shared experiences and insights that strengthen faith in our Heavenly Father and His eternal plan and in Jesus Christ and His infinite Atonement. Devotionals constitute an important class at BYU that no one should miss.

I pray that you are taking full advantage of the remarkable opportunities you have as a student or employee at BYU to learn from the inspired leaders of the restored Church of Jesus Christ. You likely will never again in your lives enjoy the frequency of personal teachings from and the close proximity to the men and women the Lord has called to direct the affairs of His Church. Please do not become casual or apathetic about or ungrateful for the unique blessings available to you on this campus.

I know well Elders Holland, Andersen, Rasband, and Gong. I was with them ninety minutes ago in a meeting of the Quorum of the Twelve. On an almost daily basis, I am blessed to pray with them, study with them, counsel with them, and learn from them. I witness that they are prophets, seers, and revelators. I personally relish every chance I have to hear my Brethren teach the doctrine of Christ and feel the power of their apostolic testimonies of our living Savior. You have been and will continue to be blessed throughout your entire life by the teachings of the Lord’s servants.

Our Redeemer has declared:

What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but

*shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same.*¹²

Enduring Joy

I recently was in a spiritually powerful testimony meeting and listened intently as a devoted sister declared, “I have great joy because of the Father’s plan of salvation.” Immediately obvious to me was the fact that this woman was not simply speaking familiar words. The light that shone in her eyes, the spiritually dignified tone of her voice, her bright and peaceful countenance—everything about her affirmed the truthfulness of what she was saying. She was filled with joy. She radiated joy. Indeed, she was becoming more like the Savior and receiving His image in her countenance,¹³ a part of which was becoming joyful.

Her expression of faith caused me to remember the lyrics of several familiar hymns:

*With faith, we hold the iron rod
And find in this our joy.*¹⁴

*Come, come, ye Saints, no toil nor labor fear;
But with joy wend your way. . . .
'Tis better far for us to strive
Our useless cares from us to drive;
Do this, and joy your hearts will swell—
All is well! All is well!*¹⁵

*Oh, sweet the joy this sentence gives:
“I know that my Redeemer lives!”*¹⁶

And in this Christmas season, we will sing:

*“Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To you and all mankind.”*¹⁷

and

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King!*

. . .

*Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.*¹⁸

Since becoming president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, President Russell M. Nelson frequently has extended an invitation to the people of the world that includes the promise of joy:

*Our message to the world is simple and sincere: we invite all of God’s children on both sides of the veil to come unto their Savior, receive the blessings of the holy temple, have **enduring joy**, and qualify for eternal life.*¹⁹

What exactly is this joy about which we sing and teach and which we have the obligation to offer to all humankind? And how is it obtained? Let us now consider together answers to these two important questions.

What Is Joy?

A common dictionary definition of joy is “a feeling of great pleasure [or] happiness.”²⁰ In comparison, the Guide to the Scriptures describes joy as “a condition of great happiness [that results] from righteous living.”²¹ Interestingly, our gospel perspective helps us to understand that joy is more than a fleeting feeling or emotion; rather, it is a spiritual gift and a state of being and becoming. For this reason I described the sister who bore her testimony as filled with and radiating joy.

As a wise and loving father, Lehi taught his son Jacob that the very purpose of mortal life is for all people to have joy:

But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things.

*Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.*²²

Adam and Eve summarized the vital lessons they learned from the Eternal Father and from their own experience. Adam declared:

*Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life **I shall have joy**, and again in the flesh I shall see God.*²³

And Eve said:

*Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and **the joy of our redemption**, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient.*²⁴

The Father's plan of happiness enables His children to obtain a physical body and gain mortal experience, to choose righteousness in the presence of evil and temptation, and to assist Heavenly Father with His great plan through honorable marriage and parenthood.²⁵ Ultimately, at the time of our resurrection, "the spirit and the body [are] to be united never again to be divided, that they might receive a fulness of joy."²⁶

How Is Joy Obtained?

I believe the contrast between righteous joy and worldly fun is instructive and helps us better understand the nature of true joy. Joy comes from exercising faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, worthily receiving and faithfully honoring sacred ordinances and covenants, and striving to become deeply converted to the Savior and His purposes. Fun is the result of "amusement," "playful [and] often boisterous action or speech," or pleasurable diversion.²⁷ A day on the rides at Disneyland is fun. Worthily preparing for and participating in the ordinance of the sacrament is joyful.

Joy primarily is spiritual; fun primarily is temporal. Joy primarily is enduring; fun primarily is temporary. Joy primarily is deep and rich; fun primarily is shallow. Joy primarily is whole and complete; fun primarily is partial. Joy primarily pertains to mortality and eternity; fun pertains only to mortality.

How important it is for us to never confuse or trade the enduring, deep joy of devoted discipleship for temporary and shallow fun.

The Redeemer is the ultimate and only source of enduring and eternal joy. The prophet Jacob testified:

But, behold, the righteous, the saints of the Holy One of Israel, they who have believed in the Holy One of Israel, they who have endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame of it, they shall inherit

*the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world, **and their joy shall be full forever.***²⁸

Because of Heavenly Father's plan and the Savior's Atonement, sincere repentance invites us to turn to and depend upon Jesus Christ, the true source of joy. Please consider carefully the response of King Benjamin's people to his teachings about the Savior's Atonement:

And now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had made an end of speaking the words which had been delivered unto him by the angel of the Lord, that he cast his eyes round about on the multitude, and behold they had fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them.

And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men.

*And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words 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, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come.*²⁹

Because of Heavenly Father's plan and the Savior's Atonement, obedience invites us to follow Jesus Christ, the true source of joy. The Savior declared to His disciples:

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

*These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and **that your joy might be full.***³⁰

And no man receiveth a fulness unless he keepeth his commandments.

*He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things.*³¹

Because of Heavenly Father’s plan and the Savior’s Atonement, service invites us to emulate the character of Jesus Christ, the true source of joy. I recently read a statement by President Kevin J. Worthen about deep joy. He said, “I have come to believe that one measure of our eternal progress is how much joy we derive from service.”³²

Alma the Younger told his son Helaman:

*I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.*³³

Recall the rejoicing of Ammon as he recounted his missionary work among the Lamanites:

Behold, my joy is full, yea, my heart is brim with joy, and I will rejoice in my God. . . .

Behold, how many thousands of our brethren has he loosed from the pains of hell; and they are brought to sing redeeming love, and this because of the power of his word which is in us, therefore have we not great reason to rejoice? . . .

*. . . Now this is my joy, and my great thanksgiving; yea, and I will give thanks unto my God forever.*³⁴

Because of Heavenly Father’s plan and the Savior’s Atonement, challenges and afflictions invite us to lift up our eyes³⁵ to Jesus Christ, the true source of joy. The precious perspective provided by the restored gospel allows us to learn lessons that prepare us for eternity through the adversities of mortality. Our suffering and misfortunes can be “swallowed up in the joy of Christ”³⁶ and consecrated for our gain,³⁷ “that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul.”³⁸ Thus joy endures in times and through experiences that are both good and bad because of our knowledge of the Father’s plan and of the Savior’s Atonement.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, obedience, service, and a gospel perspective about

the trials we encounter in mortality all invite us to come unto the source of enduring joy—Jesus Christ. Many additional gospel truths could be discussed, but we do not have time today. I invite you to identify, study, and prayerfully ponder additional principles that enable us to receive this important spiritual gift of joy.

Testimony and Promise

Enduring joy is not a blessing reserved for a select few. Rather, every member of the Lord’s restored Church who is striving to remember and honor sacred covenants and keep the commandments can receive this gift, according to God’s will and timing. In this Christmas season, may each of us strive to appreciate more fully the supernal gift of joy.

We typically do not sing a closing hymn in a devotional, but today we will. I invite you to sing “Joy to the World” with both your voice and your heart. As we do so, may you begin to see with new eyes and hear with new ears as “Saints and angels sing,” as we “repeat the sounding joy,” and as we “ever worship God.”³⁹

I declare my sure witness of the living reality and divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. I do so joyfully and in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Isaiah 9:6.
2. Alma 37:37.
3. “Where Can I Turn for Peace?” *Hymns*, 2002, no. 129.
4. Alma 7:11–12.
5. The Aims of a BYU Education (1 March 1995).
6. Ronald A. Rasband, “Integrity of Heart,” BYU devotional address, 13 March 2018.
7. Neil L. Andersen, “A Holier Approach to Ministering,” BYU devotional address, 10 April 2018.
8. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Banishing All Shadows,” BYU commencement address, 26 April 2018.
9. Holland, “Banishing.”
10. Gerrit W. Gong, “We Seek After These Things,” BYU devotional address, 16 October 2018.
11. Gong, “We Seek.”

12. D&C 1:38.
13. See Alma 5:14.
14. “As Zion’s Youth in Latter Days,” *Hymns*, no. 256.
15. “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” *Hymns*, no. 30.
16. “I Know That My Redeemer Lives,” *Hymns*, no. 136.
17. “While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks,” *Hymns*, no. 211.
18. “Joy to the World,” *Hymns*, no. 201.
19. Russell M. Nelson, “Let Us All Press On,” *Ensign*, May 2018; emphasis added.
20. English Oxford Living Dictionaries, s.v. “joy,” en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/joy; emphasis added.
21. Guide to the Scriptures, s.v. “joy,” scriptures.lds.org; emphasis added.
22. 2 Nephi 2:24–25.
23. Moses 5:10; emphasis added.
24. Moses 5:11; emphasis added.
25. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1995).
26. D&C 138:17; emphasis added.
27. Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “fun” [noun], [merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fun](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fun).
28. 2 Nephi 9:18; emphasis added.
29. Mosiah 4:1–3; emphasis added.
30. John 15:10–11; emphasis added.
31. D&C 93:27–28.
32. Kevin J. Worthen, “Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Serve,” BYU commencement address, 16 August 2018.
33. Alma 36:24; emphasis added.
34. Alma 26:11, 13, 37; emphasis added.
35. See Isaiah 40:26; Psalm 123:1–2.
36. Alma 31:38.
37. See 2 Nephi 2:2.
38. 2 Nephi 32:9.
39. “Joy to the World.”