

# *Crying With the Saints*

GLENN L. PACE

Several years ago I heard a popular song that contained the line “I’d rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints.” My immediate reaction was anger. The next day I heard the song again, and I laughed at myself because in the interim I had figured out why the line made me so mad. It was because it *sounded* so true!

In grade school, while others went to the movies, my parents made me go to church. In junior high school, I collected fast offerings while others slept until noon. In high school, I passed up working on Sunday and earning double time at a grocery store so I could keep the Sabbath day holy. During my mission, for two years, I walked down the streets on Saturday nights with my companion while everyone else our age drove past us with their dates, laughing, pointing, and asking, “What’s with those guys?” As a young married couple, we attended church with our squirming children. On Super Bowl Sunday, while the world ate, drank, and cheered, we could be found pulling the hair and flipping the heads or ears of our children and encouraging them to listen to the words of a member of the stake high council. While traveling in our old clunker of a station wagon, we would pull up alongside a

Mercedes-Benz. The occupants, with their national average 1.7 kids dressed in designer jeans, would point and laugh at my six kids dressed in their Toughskins. Now do you see why that line made me so mad?

My frustration peaked last year when my college-age kids prevailed in getting me to attend a concert in this very facility (no sacrifice is too great for my kids). When the singer announced the song from which this line is taken, the crowd went wild. He said, “I’m not trying to convert anyone, I just want to provide you with an alternative.” I thought the roof was going to come off this place. I wanted to race down the steps, grab the microphone, and give my opinion on the subject. Of course, my kids would have been horrified, and you would have thought me tacky.

The statement “sinners laugh and saints cry” is a simplistic generalization at best. We Saints definitely have our share of laughter, and some sinners leave a trail of broken lives

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and buckets of tears. For saints as well as sinners, all that is meaningful in life doesn't have to be funny. However, to brush aside the meaning of the line in the song with this equally simplistic argument would be to ignore a reasonable question. At a given point in time, don't many who make no effort to live the Church standards appear to be enjoying life more than those who do? Our lives seem to be controlled by inhibitions, constraints, service, sacrifice, guilty consciences, and financial obligations.

### **"For Thy Good"**

In the world we see people with none of these so-called restrictions who are home with their kids on more than just Monday night. And they have ten to fifteen percent more of their gross income to spend. By the time we meet our financial obligations, it seems we can't afford to do anything wrong. Let's be honest with ourselves: the Saints do a lot of crying. However, nothing worth having is free.

The celestial happiness we seek does not come without a price. We obtain celestial joy the old-fashioned way—we earn it. The vogueish phrase "no pain, no gain" applies equally well to things of the Spirit.

Sometimes we cry out, "What have I done wrong to deserve this?" Often trials and tribulations are allowed to come into our lives because of what we are doing right. We are striving for the purification and sanctification that will lead us to exaltation. We all must pass through a certain amount of sacrifice that makes our spirits pliable in the hands of the Lord.

Joseph Smith's life helps us understand this principle somewhat. By all outward appearances, there was probably not a darker period in his life than the winter of 1838–39 when he was imprisoned in Liberty Jail. The Saints were being persecuted, robbed, and murdered, and there were dissension and apostasy in the ranks.

We may be inclined to underestimate Joseph's suffering. I don't speak of the coldness and dampness of the jail, but of his discouragement. We may think his anguish would be mitigated by his memory of seeing the Father and the Savior, by his memory of the visits from Moroni, John the Baptist, Peter, James, and John, and a host of other heavenly messengers. In reality, this knowledge may have intensified the pain. After all, he had a perfect knowledge that God could free him.

It was in this setting that Joseph cried unto the Lord, "O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?" (D&C 121:1).

To this agonized plea came the Lord's answer, "My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment" (121:7).

"Know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good" (D&C 122:7).

For thy good? What possible good could come from that experience? B.H. Roberts gave his insight when describing Joseph's reaction to a similar experience in 1842.

*But what is most pleasing to record of this period of enforced seclusion while avoiding his enemies, is the development of that tenderness of soul manifested in his reflections upon the friends who had stood by him from the commencement of his public career. . . . No act of kindness seems to go unmentioned. No risk run for him that is not appreciated. Indeed he gathers much benefit from those trials, since their effect upon his nature seems to be a softening rather than a hardening influence; and the trials of life are always beneficial where they do not harden and brutalize men's souls; and every day under his trials the Prophet seems to have grown more tender-hearted, more universal in his sympathies; his moments of spiritual exaltation are superb. No one can read them and doubt that the inspiration of God was giving this man's spirit understanding. [HC, vol. 5, introduction, p. xxviii]*

After the Lord told Joseph, "These things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good," he said, "The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?" (D&C 122:7, 8).

Part of the reason for the Savior's suffering in Gethsemane was so he would have infinite compassion for us in our trials and tribulations. He also qualified himself to become the perfect judge. Not one of us will be able to approach the Savior on Judgment Day and say, "You don't know what it was like," because he "descended below them all."

### Tears in Gethsemane

As a loving Father in Heaven viewed his beloved son suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Savior cried out to him: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as *thou wilt*" (Matthew 26:39; emphasis added).

Can you imagine the tears in the eyes of the Father when he had to deny his son's request? Can we comprehend the sacred tears shed by the Father when he had to abandon the Savior on the cross and then hear him say, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). And yet, even as God the Father and his son Jesus Christ wept, the sinners laughed.

So that we can know the Savior, each of us must pass through our own Gethsemane. Ella Wheeler Wilcox wrote a beautiful poem by that name:

*In golden youth when seems the earth  
A Summer-land of singing mirth,  
When souls are glad and hearts are light,  
And not a shadow lurks in sight,  
We do not know it, but there lies  
Somewhere veiled under evening skies  
A garden which we all must see —  
The garden of Gethsemane.*

*With joyous steps we go our ways,  
Love lends a halo to our days;*

*Light sorrows sail like clouds afar,  
We laugh, and say how strong we are.  
We hurry on; and hurrying, go  
Close to the border-land of woe,  
That waits for you, and waits for me —  
Forever waits Gethsemane.*

*Down shadowy lanes, across strange streams,  
Bridged over by our broken dreams;  
Behind the misty caps of years,  
Beyond the great salt fount of tears,  
The garden lies. Strive as you may,  
You cannot miss it on your way.  
All paths that have been, or shall be,  
Pass somewhere through Gethsemane.*

*All those who journey, soon or late,  
Must pass within the garden's gate;  
Must kneel alone in darkness there,  
And battle with some fierce despair.  
God pity those who can not say,  
"Not mine but thine," who only pray,  
"Let this cup pass," and cannot see  
The purpose in Gethsemane.*  
["Gethsemane," by Ella Wheeler Wilcox,  
in *Poems of Power* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey  
Company, 1903), pp. 147–48]

There is probably no greater Gethsemane for saint or sinner than the grief felt over the death of one's child. I am going to read a portion of a letter written by a father to his ten-year-old daughter just minutes after he learned of her accidental death. Note how this good man's Gethsemane became a sanctifying experience because of his knowledge of the gospel and because of the gift of the Comforter. Contrast his reaction with what it may have been without the light of the gospel. I read it with his permission.

*If you may be permitted to listen, these are some thoughts your "Dear Ol' Dad" would like to express in his and your mom's hour of joy and sorrow.*

*You have been an angel of light in our home. Even in your passing you have sanctified the experience by the sweet sorrow of this temporary parting. As I sit in this hotel room many miles from home and only moments after hearing of your passing, I have confidence that you are really home. It's pleasing to know that you are now unencumbered by the mild, but troublesome physical limitations you accepted and lived with in such an adorable noncomplaining way.*

*Mom and I and your seven brothers and sisters are better because you came to our house. Soon after your day of birth you helped us to accept fear and the unknown; to better love others with physical, emotional, or mental challenges; to accept the disappointment accompanying an unknown prognosis and to query and plead with our Father, who today you know better than we do. As you grew older, we learned determination from you, who had every right to spill your milk but never did, who royally beat your mom and dad in tetherball, who averaged ninety-seven percent in spelling for an entire year and by sheer grit struggled with math, and who without ever a complaint sat with your mom every night—summer and school months—to read and understand what you had read. Yes, we did our best to help you learn, but what we learned from you cannot be printed in books—cannot be written because it is almost too sacred to rehearse.*

*We pray for all of us who the Lord expects to stay here on the job for yet awhile. Our prayers are that we will be worthy to be reunited with you and to see you whole and perfect. Oh, how we would have loved to have you stay. How we would love to hear your ever so spontaneous "I love you." How we'd thrill to feel that clinging embrace. Oh yes, especially today.*

As you shed your tears in Gethsemane, while others laugh with the sinners, don't curse the purifying mold in which you have been placed. Your crucible is divine and will lead you to perfection and ultimate exaltation. We don't seek the unpleasant things of life. We don't look for pain and suffering. However, we

recognize the sanctification that occurs when the trials and tribulations of life are met and turned into spiritual stepping-stones.

### **Tears of Joy**

We have been speaking of tears of sorrow and pain. I shall now speak of a different type of tears. They are unique to the Saints and will never be shed by the sinners. I speak of the tears of spiritual joy.

In an elders quorum presidency, we worked with several less-active families. In a personal interview with one couple, I asked, "Isn't it about time you went to the temple with your family?" I couldn't believe their answer—they said, "Yes." We cried. They were asked to speak of their "conversion" in a Saturday evening session of stake conference, and as they expressed their love, I cried. I thought I was all cried out by the time we went to the temple—until I saw them with their beautiful daughters kneeling at the altar, being sealed for time and all eternity.

Shortly after my call to the Presiding Bishopric, I received a letter from one of my uncles. "Dear Glenn: I saw you on television last Sunday. Do you realize what an accomplishment it was to get your old reprobate of an uncle to watch general conference?"

That summer he and his wife celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary. After the reception I walked them to their car and said, "You know, with this calling, I have received the sealing power. If you will commit to a temple marriage, I'll tell you what I'll do for you. I'll perform the ceremony for free."

A year passed, and as I arrived home late one night, a message awaited me. "Please call your uncle no matter what time you get home." I called and he said, "Glenn, I'm calling to collect on your golden wedding anniversary offer of a free marriage sealing in the Salt Lake Temple." I asked, "Are you serious? When?" He said, "My bishop thinks I can be good enough by December."

A year ago I sealed them to each other and then sealed two of their sons to them. After fifty-one years of marriage, my uncle and aunt received their crowning glory and blessings. The entire family cried.

Just ten days ago President Ezra Taft Benson stood before the General Authorities of the Church in the monthly temple meeting. He has been ill, and this was the first time we had been together with him since general conference two months ago. He expressed his love to us and said, "Brethren, it is so good to be with you again." And then, the prophet cried.

At the conclusion of the Savior's visit to the people of Nephi, he felt their love and faith and was deeply touched. He had just announced that he must leave, but as he looked at the people he

*Beheld they were in tears, and did look steadfastly upon him as if they would ask him to tarry a little longer with them.*

*And he said unto them: Behold, my bowels are filled with compassion towards you. [3 Nephi 17:5–6]*

Then he healed the sick, and those who were now whole did "bow down at his feet, and did worship him; and . . . bathe his feet with their tears" (v. 10).

And then Jesus "commanded that their little children should be brought. So they brought their little children and set them down upon the ground round about him" (vs. 11–12), and he said,

*Blessed are ye because of your faith. And now behold, my joy is full.*

*And when he had said these words, he wept, . . . and he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them.*

*And when he had done this he wept again. [vs. 20, 21–22]*

Elder Bruce R. McConkie spoke of tears in general conference just a few weeks before his death. In one of the most powerful testimonies I have ever heard, that special witness, with full and complete knowledge that his passing was near, said,

*I testify that [Jesus Christ] is the Son of the Living God and was crucified for the sins of the world. He is our Lord, our God, and our King. This I know of myself independent of any other person.*

*I am one of his witnesses, and in a coming day I shall feel the nail marks in his hands and in his feet and shall wet his feet with my tears. ["The Purifying Power of Gethsemane," *Ensign*, May 1985, p. 11]*

Those of us who witnessed the delivery of this magnificent address can testify that those tears were flowing even as he stood at the pulpit. They were not tears of sorrow relative to leaving this mortal existence, but tears of joy at the anticipation of the blessing awaiting him.

Just one day before Elder McConkie's address, I received my call to the Presiding Bishopric. One day after his address, on Easter morning, at 5:00 a.m., I was writing my remarks to be delivered that afternoon. As I reflected on Elder McConkie's beautiful oration, I was overcome with the knowledge of my own weaknesses and inadequacies. However, as I began to comprehend what had taken place in my own life, self-doubt was replaced with peace, confidence, and eternal joy. I wept.

I penned the words that seem appropriate to repeat at this time: I love the Lord Jesus Christ. I love the transformation his atonement has wrought in me. I once was in darkness, and now see light. I once lost all of my confidence, and now know all things are possible in the Lord. I once felt shame and now am "filled . . . with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh" (2 Nephi 4:21). "I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love" (2 Nephi 1:15).

I feel the same at this Christmas season as I did on that Easter Sunday two and a half years ago. That knowledge brings tears.

Would I rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints? Not for one moment. Once one has felt the joy of the gospel there is no going back to a frivolous world. Try as we might, travel where we may, there is an emptiness all the laughter the world has to offer cannot fill. That emptiness can be filled only by placing ourselves in tune with eternal truths and living according to the prescribed laws of God.

As our understanding increases, we realize that tears of sorrow can be exquisitely beautiful, and they ultimately give way to tears of eternal joy.

Throughout the world at this season, congregations will sing, “Joy to the world, the Lord is come” (*Hymns*, 1985, no. 201). Little does the world know of true joy. I thank God for the restoration of the gospel which gives that understanding. I pray that each of you will discover the majesty of crying with the Saints, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.