

Faith and Joy

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Look above you and you will see the massive beams of the Marriott Center roof structure. This collection of steel beams weighs over 4,000,000 pounds. We occupy the building today with no fear that the roof will collapse, because it was designed by licensed engineers. The chief engineer was BYU professor Arnold Wilson. His job was to analyze how much force each beam would carry and then design the beams to be large enough to bear the force. When completed in 1972, the Marriott Center was the nation's largest on-campus basketball arena. It seats more than 23,000 people—definitely overkill for today's devotional assembly. The roof is 340 feet wide and 380 feet long—big enough to cover four Salt Lake Tabernacles. The distance from the playing floor to the top of the roof is the height of a 10-story building. Some of those steel beams sustain forces of up to 2,000,000 pounds.

The statistic that astonishes me most, however, is the number *one*. That's how many basic engineering principles Dr. Wilson said he relied on in designing this large structure. Think of it! One basic principle. If you are interested, the basic principle I refer to states that the forces acting on any part of a structure must sum to zero.

That principle, though easily stated, takes years to master. Engineering students are introduced to it in their freshman year, and they learn to apply it to simplified problems. In later courses they learn how to use the principle in a wide variety of real-world situations. They grow confident in their own ability to successfully apply it to design any structure. When confronted with a new, unfamiliar problem, they instinctively resort to that basic principle. They know that to ignore or violate it when designing an actual building could imperil themselves and others who will occupy the building. They enjoy the satisfaction of acquiring a skill with which they can serve mankind.

Many parallels can be drawn between this basic engineering principle and the basic gospel principle of faith. Faith is so simple a concept that a child can understand and practice it. As our lives unfold we learn how to apply the principle of faith to an ever-broadening range of experiences. Our confidence in the principle of faith grows, along with our confidence in our own ability to exercise faith. When challenges arise, we learn to instinctively rely on

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the principle of faith for guidance and strength. To ignore or violate the principle of faith will hamper our own progression and diminish our spiritual influence on others. The mastering of faith gives us joy as we become more effective instruments in doing the Lord's work.

In one of the first devotional addresses I attended in this building as a BYU student, Elder Gordon B. Hinckley spoke on the topic of faith. He said:

If there is any one thing you and I need in this world it is faith, that dynamic, powerful, marvelous element by which, as Paul declared, the very worlds were framed (Hebrews 11:3). We need it in our studies. We all know that university work, as it is structured, is a grind. Our academic pursuits are spoken of as disciplines, and so they are. But somewhere out there for you seniors and away out there for you freshmen is a field to be cultivated, and you are here today to learn to use the necessary tools. [Gordon B. Hinckley, "God Shall Give unto You Knowledge by His Holy Spirit," Speeches of the Year, 1973 (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1974, 109]

The new guidebook for missionaries, entitled "Preach My Gospel," reads:

Faith is a principle of power. God works by power, but His power is usually exercised in response to faith. . . .

Your faith will increase through diligent study, prayer, dedicated service, and obedience to the promptings of the Holy Ghost and the commandments. ["Preach My Gospel" (D&C 50:14): A Guide to Missionary Service (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 116]

I will now elaborate on these five ways whereby we can increase our faith and will point out how each of these activities can bring rich joy into our lives.

Diligent Study

First, faith is strengthened through diligent study of both the scriptures and the teachings of Church leaders. Study that is diligent invites the companionship of the Holy Ghost, and the Lord told Adam that when we have the Holy Ghost with us, we can and should "enjoy the words of eternal life" (Moses 6:59).

Nephi enjoyed the words of eternal life. He said, "My soul delighteth in the scriptures . . . ; and my heart pondereth continually upon the things which I have seen and heard" (2 Nephi 4:15–16).

One way that diligent scripture study can help us to enjoy the words of eternal life is by providing a private setting in which the Spirit can gently point out our weaknesses and strengthen us (see Ether 12:27). In the Lord's preface to the Doctrine and Covenants, He declared:

These commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness. . . .

And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known;

And inasmuch as they sought wisdom they might be instructed;

And inasmuch as they sinned they might be chastened, that they might repent;

And inasmuch as they were humble they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge from time to time. [D&C 1:24–28]

Another way the Spirit helps us enjoy the words of eternal life is by simply teaching what the words mean.

My wife and I taught our then two-year-old son and three-year-old daughter to recite by heart Matthew 5:9. One day the children got into an argument that escalated into a fight. Sensing a teaching moment, I asked, "Now children, what does Matthew 5:9 say?"

They both recited, “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.”

I then asked, “And what does a peacemaker do?”

They looked at me with puzzled expressions, and finally the two-year-old ventured, “Make pieces of gingerbread?”

I gave my children a simple definition of *peacemaker*, but I realize now that my own understanding of the word is growing.

For example, it is written of King Benjamin that

he had somewhat of contentions among his own people. . . .

For behold, king Benjamin was a holy man, and he did reign over his people in righteousness; and . . . did speak the word of God with power and with authority. . . .

Wherefore . . . king Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, . . . did once more establish peace in the land.
[Words of Mormon 1:12, 17–18]

When I ponder this, or when I reflect on the Prince of Peace, I realize that the concept symbolized by the word *peacemaker* is far deeper than I currently understand. Diligent study, aided by the Spirit, will broaden our understanding of specific words of eternal life such as *peacemaker* or *faith*. It will etch them in our hearts.

Another aspect to enjoying the words of eternal life is the promise that if we will “treasure up” the scriptures in our minds, “it shall be given” us in the very moment what we shall say (D&C 84:85). Years ago one of our family home evenings got off to a rough start. A young son was playing with a pencil, and it flew out of his hand, striking a sibling in the face. Immediately the whole family chastised the boy. Didn’t he know he could put someone’s eye out? What a foolish act. How thoughtless.

At that moment a scripture popped into my mind. I scooped the little boy up in my arms and said, “Okay, everyone. We have reproved with sharpness. The scriptures tell us that now we need to show forth an increase of love” (see D&C 121:43).

The Spirit quickly returned to our family home evening, and my son snuggled up to me. That night my wife tucked the boy into bed. He looked up at her and said, “Mom, do you know what my favorite month is?”

She said, “December? Because of Christmas?”

“No.”

“How about July, because it’s your birthday?”

He answered, “No, it’s August, because that’s Dad’s birthday.”

Great enjoyment of the words of eternal life comes when we use them to serve others.

Prayer

Second, we can increase our faith through prayer.

Several years ago I had a student from Kyrgyzstan and a visiting professor from China. We worked for over two years on a challenging and, for us, important research problem. We made good progress the first year, but then we hit a wall. For the entire second year we looked at the problem from every angle and focused all of our combined mental exertion on the problem; yet it refused to yield.

One evening as I drove to campus to work with my colleagues, I wondered if we ought to give up on the problem. I felt mentally exhausted, and the thought of yet again grappling with the problem seemed pointless. We desperately needed help! We needed the Lord’s help. So when I got to my office, I suggested that we begin with a prayer, which we did. We then rolled up our sleeves and worked hard on the problem for several hours. As we worked, a few small but promising insights occurred. I felt encouraged, and as we were leaving for

the night, I enthusiastically remarked that it had been a very fruitful evening. We had made more progress than we had in a long time. My Kyrgyz student quickly reminded me, “Of course, Tom, it was because of the prayer.”

We decided that from then on we would begin each research session with a prayer. My colleagues also took their turns, even though prayer was not a part of their respective backgrounds. Within a few weeks an astonishingly simple and elegant solution to our problem emerged. We were filled with joy and amazement.

In that devotional President Hinckley taught:

This is one university where students can be told that faith—the kind of faith that moves one to get on his knees and plead with the Lord and then get on his feet and go to work—is an asset beyond compare, even in the acquisition of secular knowledge. I do not minimize the need for study and labor. I would add to these faith and prayer, with the sacred promise that “God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost.” [Hinckley, “God Shall Give,” 109]

Dedicated Service

Third, dedicated service strengthens faith.

The Prophet Joseph gave us an intriguing glimpse into a time that predates even the Council in Heaven:

God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself. [Teachings, 354]

The Book of Mormon says of the Savior:

He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that

they shall not partake of his salvation. [2 Nephi 26:24]

Notice how those two statements beautifully support the following teaching of President Marion G. Romney:

Service is not something we endure on this earth so we can earn the right to live in the celestial kingdom. Service is the very fiber of which an exalted life in the celestial kingdom is made.

. . . Oh, for the glorious day when these things all come naturally because of the purity of our hearts. In that day there will be no need for a commandment because we will have experienced for ourselves that we are truly happy only when we are engaged in unselfish service. [Marion G. Romney, “The Celestial Nature of Self-Reliance,” Ensign, November 1982, 93]

In a 1995 BYU devotional address, President Hinckley counseled:

I know that you are engrossed with your studies. This is important, but in a sense it is a selfish pursuit. Take a little time, now and again, to reach out to help others—there are those right around you, students in need of a little kindness, a little attention, a little appreciation. You who are extremely able, you who learn with comparative ease, reach down to those who have greater difficulty in mastering academic material that is relatively easy for you. In so doing you will bless your own life as you bless the lives of those you help. A little tutoring can do wonders for someone who does not quite comprehend. It will do wonders for you as you give of yourself and your knowledge to bless another. [Gordon B. Hinckley, “To a Man Who Has Done What This Church Expects of Each of Us,” BYU 1995–96 Speeches (Provo: BYU, 1996), 54]

Obedience to the Commandments

Fourth, obedience to the commandments strengthens faith.

You are now at an age when you face some of life's most important decisions. An invaluable gospel principle for you is that obedience invites the guidance of the Lord. Nephi learned through experience that the pointers on the Liahona worked "according to the faith and diligence and heed which [he gave] unto them," and the writing on the Liahona "changed from time to time, according to the faith and diligence which [they] gave unto it" (1 Nephi 16:28–29).

Using a different metaphor, the Lord reiterated to Nephi the connection between obedience and guidance:

And I will also be your light in the wilderness; and I will prepare the way before you, if it so be that ye shall keep my commandments; wherefore, inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall be led towards the promised land; and ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led. [1 Nephi 17:13]

Joseph Smith put it this way:

God has created man with a mind capable of instruction, and a faculty which may be enlarged in proportion to the heed and diligence given to the light communicated from heaven to the intellect; and that the nearer man approaches perfection, the clearer are his views, and the greater his enjoyments. [Teachings, 51]

While obedience to the commandments strengthens faith, disobedience diminishes faith, for the Lord declared, "That wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men" (D&C 93:39). The Internet is a powerful technology that can greatly assist us in fulfilling gospel responsibilities such as family history work. On the other hand, when misused, it can be highly destructive of faith. A worrisome statistic is that currently 58 of the top 100 most common Internet search terms—the

words we type into Google—are pornographic (see wordtracker.com).

When Henry Eyring's father crossed the border from the Mexican colonies to the United States, the customs man asked him, "Son, do you have any pornography in your suitcase or trunks?"

He responded, "No sir, we don't even own a pornograph." (In Vaughn J. Featherstone, "One Link Still Holds," *Ensign*, November 1999, 13–14.)

People who do use a "pornograph," be it desktop or laptop, are sampling the river of filthiness spoken of in Lehi's dream. Interestingly, Lehi described the rod of iron as extending along the very banks of the river of filthiness. Thus, in Lehi's dream, the rod of iron and river of filthiness are in close proximity. The Internet has narrowed that distance. The two are now separated by a mere mouse click.

Feel the power with which Nephi encouraged his brothers:

And they said unto me: What meaneth the rod of iron which our father saw, that led to the tree?

And I said unto them that it was the word of God; and whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction.

Wherefore, I, Nephi, did exhort them to give heed unto the word of the Lord; yea, I did exhort them with all the energies of my soul, and with all the faculty which I possessed, that they would give heed to the word of God and remember to keep his commandments always in all things. [1 Nephi 15:23–25]

Obedience to the Promptings of the Holy Ghost

Fifth, obedience to the promptings of the Holy Ghost strengthens faith.

My mother and I are converts to the Church, and we worked together diligently for many years on our genealogy. Our ancestors emigrated from Scandinavia three or four generations ago. My mother and I had compiled a record of our American-born ancestors, but we failed in repeated attempts to find birth records of any Scandinavian-born ancestors. As a BYU student I drove several times to the Church's Family History Library in Salt Lake City—but to no avail.

As I began my final year as a BYU student, I registered for a full load of classes. On the first day of the semester I was walking up the stairs in the Clyde Building when I felt a clear impression that I should drop one of my classes. I also felt an assurance that if I would devote the time that I would have spent in that class to doing genealogy, the Lord would bless me with success.

So I dropped the class, and a few days later a Norwegian-born friend and I drove to Salt Lake City. We spent several fruitless hours studying microfilms of Norwegian church records, then took a break for supper. As we returned from supper I felt an anticipatory thrill, and within a few minutes of searching a microfilm, the marriage record of my great-great-grandparents, Ole and Agathe Fladebo, seemed to jump off the screen at us. Once that discovery was made, it was relatively easy to find birth records for them and their parents and grandparents.

For the rest of that year I spent 12 hours each week in the Salt Lake City Family History Library—the amount of time I would have spent on the class I had dropped. I found the records of all 16 of my great-great-grandparents, plus hundreds of their ancestors. Those of you who have felt the sweet spirit that comes from searching in solitude for your ancestors will appreciate how profoundly my faith was nurtured by this experience—the result of obeying a prompting of the Holy Ghost.

In the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord instructed:

Put your trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good—yea, to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously; and this is my Spirit.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, I will impart unto you of my Spirit, which shall enlighten your mind, which shall fill your soul with joy;

And . . . by this shall you know, all things whatsoever you desire of me. [D&C 11:12–14]

We have now discussed five ways to increase our faith: diligent study, prayer, dedicated service, obedience to the commandments, and obedience to the promptings of the Holy Ghost. We have observed how each of these five activities leads to joy. We have overlooked a most profound source of joy.

One night many years ago, my wife and I were sleeping soundly when our then five-year-old son, Timothy, entered our bedroom and proclaimed, “Wake up, everybody! Wake up! I’ve got good news! I thought I was smoking a cigarette, and then I woke up and realized it was only a dream!” We hugged Timmy, sent him back to bed, and have cherished this tender incident ever since.

A few months ago I asked Tim if he remembered that dream. He answered that the dream was one of the most poignant of his life, and he still remembered it vividly, even though 13 years had elapsed. He then filled in some details. In his five-year-old mind he was walking in front of our house when he saw a lighted cigarette on the ground. Even though he knew better, he inexplicably picked up the cigarette and took a few puffs. He immediately felt bad about it and went inside to confess his misdeed to his mother. In this surreal dream his mom cried out in bitter anguish, “Oh, Timmy! You have broken a commandment! Now there is no way for you to return to Heavenly Father’s presence!” In his dream Timmy ran over to the kitchen sink and frantically washed his mouth.

But he discovered to his horror that there was nothing he could do to erase the fact that he had transgressed and was therefore cut off eternally from the presence of God.

In his dream Timmy had experienced an imaginary world in which the Atonement did not exist, and he discovered it to be a nightmare of indescribable horror. Little wonder that when he awoke and discovered that it was merely a very bad dream, he simply had to share his good news with his parents, even though it was two in the morning. I imagine he must have felt like shouting his good news to the world! In fact, just last month, Elder Timothy Sederberg began his mission to declare “the good news” to the people of the Dominican Republic.

The angel asked Nephi:

Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?

And [Nephi] answered him, saying: Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things.

And [the angel] spake unto [Nephi], saying: Yea, and the most joyous to the soul. [1 Nephi 11:21–23]

Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, “To partake of the love of God is to partake of Jesus’ Atonement and the emancipations and joys which it can bring” (“Lessons from Laman and Lemuel,” *Ensign*, November 1999, 8).

May you find an ever-deepening joy as your understanding of the glorious truths of the gospel expands; as you build your faith through study, prayer, service, and obedience; and as you press forward in faith to draw nearer to the Savior and partake of His love. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.