

That We Might Have Joy

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We are taught that “Adam fell that men might be; and men [and women] are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). The second half of that truth makes clear that we are all here on earth to learn from our experiences and especially to learn how to have joy in our lives. However, the word *might* in that equation indicates that having joy in our lives is not a given. It says that we *might* have joy, not that we *will* have joy.

Joy is something we have to choose. I believe that how we approach that choice, rather than the circumstances in which we find ourselves, is the key factor in whether we will have joy. I believe that most of us have much more control over whether we are joyful than we may think. Let me illustrate.

The story is told of a gentleman named Harvey Mackay, who

was waiting in line for a ride at the airport. When a cab pulled up, the first thing Harvey noticed was that the taxi was polished to a bright shine. Smartly dressed in a white shirt, black tie, and freshly pressed black slacks, the cab driver jumped out and rounded the car to open the back passenger door for Harvey. He handed [Harvey] a laminated card and said:

“I’m Wally, your driver. While I’m loading your bags in the trunk, I’d like you to read my mission statement.”

Taken aback, Harvey read the card. It said:

Wally’s Mission Statement:

To get my customers to their destination in the quickest, safest and cheapest way possible in a friendly environment.

This blew Harvey away. Especially when he noticed that the inside of the cab matched the outside. Spotlessly clean!

As he slid behind the wheel, Wally [asked Harvey if he would like something to drink. Wally had a variety of beverages to choose from. Harvey was quite surprised by the offer and the variety and chose a soft drink]. . . .

Handing him his drink, Wally said, “If you’d like something to read, I have The Wall Street Journal, Time, Sports Illustrated and USA Today.”

As they were pulling away, Wally handed [Harvey] another laminated card. “These are the stations I get and the music they play, if you’d like to listen to the radio.”

And as if that weren’t enough, Wally told Harvey that he had the air conditioning on and asked if the temperature was comfortable for him. Then he advised Harvey of the best route to his destination for that time of day. He also let him know that he’d be happy

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to chat and tell him about some of the sights or, if Harvey preferred, to leave him with his own thoughts.

“Tell me, Wally,” [Harvey] asked the driver, “have you always served customers like this?”

Wally smiled into the rearview mirror. “No, not always. In fact, it’s only been in the last two years. My first five years driving, I spent most of my time complaining like all the rest of the cabbies do. Then I heard [a] personal growth [expert] on the radio one day.

... [The expert] said that if you get up in the morning expecting to have a bad day, you’ll rarely disappoint yourself. [The expert] said, ‘Stop complaining! [Distinguish] yourself from your competition. . . .’

“That hit me right between the eyes,” said Wally. “[The expert] was really talking about me. I was always . . . complaining, so I decided to change my attitude [and think about my job in a different way.

Not just as a cab driver but as someone whose role, as the mission statement says, is ‘to get my customers to their destination in the quickest, safest and cheapest way possible in a friendly environment’]. I looked around at the other cabs and their drivers. The cabs were dirty, the drivers were unfriendly, and the customers were unhappy. So I decided to make some changes. I put in a few at a time. When my customers responded well, I did more.” [Wally proceeded to tell Harvey that since he had made these changes, his business had prospered.]¹

Wally was able to recognize that he needed to change his attitude, and he chose to do something about it. By implementing a plan and making incremental changes, he was able to make significant improvements in his life and work. And he made life more pleasant for himself and his customers.

President Gordon B. Hinckley suggested “that we accentuate the positive” and “look a little deeper for the good.”² Wally decided that he wanted to change his situation, and he overcame his negativity and pessimism by looking “deeper.”

One way to do the same in our own lives is to be more grateful. One psychologist has noted:

Gratitude is an attitude and way of living that has been shown to have many benefits in terms of health,

happiness, satisfaction with life, and the way we relate to others. . . . Feeling and expressing gratitude turns our mental focus to the positive, which compensates for our brain’s natural tendency to focus on threats, worries, and negative aspects of life. As such, gratitude creates positive emotions, like joy, love, and contentment, which research shows can undo the grip of negative emotions, like anxiety. Fostering gratitude can also broaden your thinking and create positive cycles of thinking and behaving in healthy, positive ways.³

How we choose to view events in our lives greatly affects how we respond to those events and, in turn, how much and the manner in which those events affect our lives. The more we choose to look deeper and recognize the good things in our lives, the more positive we are about things—which in turn has a positive impact on just about everything else in our lives.

We have all had and will continue to have significant opportunities to choose how we will respond to our situations. Hopefully we will choose to follow the counsel of President Thomas S. Monson: “Let us relish life as we live it [and] find joy in the journey.”⁴

As students at BYU, you will have plenty of experiences and opportunities that will be challenging. These opportunities and experiences can all increase your ability to have joy if you view them the right way.

While attending BYU, I had the opportunity of taking four semesters of Spanish and then a few years later four semesters of Norwegian. In my attempt to become proficient in these two vastly different languages, it became quite evident to me that I am not blessed with the gift of tongues, nor with the gift of the interpretation of tongues. I would get somewhat frustrated as I watched my fellow classmates seemingly breeze through these languages with ease.

Early in the first semesters of these courses, I was not enjoying the classes much at all as I focused on the things I couldn’t do and compared myself to the best of those around me. I noticed, however, that although I was not very good at speaking the languages, I greatly enjoyed learning

about the culture, history, and even the syntax of the languages. As I focused more on the things I enjoyed and was grateful for the chance to do those things, the things that were more of a challenge became more tolerable. I started caring less about how I compared with others and more about what I was learning. Although I never became an effective speaker of either language, I found joy in the coursework and in the learning that I gained.

We can choose to be joyful. In order for us to have that choice, “the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by [either good or evil]” (2 Nephi 2:16).

In the recent BYU Campus Education Week devotional, Sister Joy D. Jones stated, “It is what we choose to do with [enticements] when they occur that will make all the difference in our daily lives.”⁵

In 2 Nephi 10:23, Jacob gave us similar counsel: “Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves.” We should be joyous just knowing that we have the freedom to choose joy.

If we want to choose joy in our lives, it is important that we don’t give up when we face difficulties. Remembering that we are free to act for ourselves should give us encouragement even in difficult times. As President Hinckley stated:

We have every reason to be optimistic in this world. Tragedy is around, yes. Problems everywhere, yes. But . . . you can’t, you don’t, build out of pessimism or

*cynicism. You look with optimism, work with faith, and things happen.*⁶

President Hinckley also said, “Do not despair. Do not give up.”⁷

As you encounter the challenges that you will inevitably face this semester, I hope you will choose to be joyful. That is what God wants us to be. That is our destiny. May you do so is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Kenneth H. Blanchard and Barbara A. Glanz, “Great Service Is a Choice,” in *The Simple Truths of Service: Inspired by Johnny the Bagger* ([United States]: Simple Truths, 2005), 48–52.

2. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Lord Is at the Helm,” BYU fireside address, 6 March 1994.

3. Melanie Greenberg, “How Gratitude Leads to a Happier Life,” *The Mindful Self-Express* (blog), 22 November 2015, psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-mindful-self-express/201511/how-gratitude-leads-happier-life.

4. Thomas S. Monson, “Finding Joy in the Journey,” *Ensign*, November 2008.

5. Joy D. Jones, “Look unto Him in Every Thought,” BYU Campus Education Week devotional address, 21 August 2018.

6. Gordon B. Hinckley, quoted in Jeffrey R. Holland, “President Gordon B. Hinckley: Stalwart and Brave He Stands,” *Ensign*, June 1995.

7. Gordon B. Hinckley, “First Presidency Message: The Continuing Pursuit of Truth,” *Ensign*, April 1986.