

MAKING THE MOST OF WHAT WE HAVE

By Mindy Anne Selu

Church Magazines

It really wasn't a typical Friday night, although it may have looked like it to an outsider. My fellow interns and I were having dinner with the Farrer family of Cypress, California, USA. We had met them coming out of the Newport Beach California Temple one night, and when they found out we would be traveling around the country and living in hotels all summer, they graciously invited us—a group of nomadic but friendly interns—over for dinner at their house the following night. We gladly accepted.

After some delicious homemade pizza, we sat down with Brother and Sister Farrer and their teenage children for a rousing game of cards. It was a game I'd never played before, but I quickly caught on and began winning every hand. I was on fire. With every round, each player was left with either negative or positive points. After several rounds I had the most points by far, but unfortunately for one of my friends, she

couldn't seem to get out of the negative.

At the end of one round, Brother Farrer announced my ever-growing score and then looked to my friend, who had actually played a decent round, and said with laughter in his voice, "You're still at negative ten." She accepted her lot with equal laughter, and our game night continued in a spirit of fun and friendly competition.

In the Negative

I've since thought about that phrase a lot: "You're still at negative ten." It became somewhat of an inside joke between my fellow intern and me, but I often thought that her attitude translated into a good life lesson.

So many times, we as young adults find ourselves lamenting the hand we have been dealt in life. We wish we had received the marriage cards, the children cards, the good-health cards, or the successful cards in the first round. It can be so easy to compare

our cards with those of our friends and acquaintances—especially when it seems that they always hold the winning cards and we can't seem to get out of the negative! And yet, so often we fail to see the good in the cards we are already holding in our hands. And we forget that no matter what our cards are—the experiences and opportunities we are given in life—we can still have a good attitude about them.

The thing about cards is that they change. During that game night I happened to luck out on almost every hand, and I handily finished the game with the highest score. However, we've all seen how any type of game, card or otherwise, can change in an instant. The cards we hold now are not the cards we will have in two months, in two years, in ten.



We aren't always dealt the hand we want or the hand we think we deserve in life, but we can make the best of the cards in our hands.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, reminded us that “what [we] see and experience now is not what forever will be. [We] will not feel loneliness, sorrow, pain, or discouragement forever. We have the faithful promise of God that He will neither forget nor forsake those who incline their hearts to Him [see Hebrews 13:5].”¹ In short, he reminds us that even if we feel that our hand is putting us in the negative right now, it won’t always be that way.

Playing Your Best Game

So what, then, do you do with the not-so-great hand at hand? The first step is to take a good, hard look at what you have in your hands. Take stock of all the good in your life and all the positive cards you (metaphorically) hold. Being grateful for what we do have will help us overcome the pain and bitterness we are prone to feel for what we don’t have. President Uchtdorf also said, “Those who set aside the bottle of bitterness and lift instead the goblet of gratitude can find a purifying drink of healing, peace, and understanding.”²

Once we recognize the blessings we do have, we can begin to accept

Trusting in the Lord’s timing is paramount if we are to stay optimistic while the game of life doesn’t seem to be going our way.

our lives as they are, continuing on faithfully and cheerfully, independent of the hope that our hand will improve.

We’re all going to experience hard things in life. We’re going to experience trials and heartache that we wouldn’t have chosen for ourselves, had we been given the choice. We’re going to be hurt by others’ choices and by our own. And we’re going to wish at times that our circumstances, our weaknesses, our challenges—our cards—were different. But the less time we spend lamenting over what we don’t have and instead focus on what we do have, the more we’ll be able to progress and become what Heavenly Father wants us to become. And we may discover that our growth is made possible by the very life circumstances that we find ourselves (not really wanting to be) in.

By recognizing and accepting what we have already been given in this life, we can start to build upon our strengths and talents, developing different aspects of ourselves and making the most of our circumstances. We can make the best of what we have. And more importantly, in doing so, we won’t be allowing the cards we don’t have to hold us back.

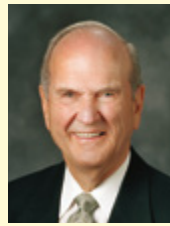
Changing Our Luck

It's clear that wishing we had a different hand in life is not a problem unique to this generation, or even this dispensation. In the Book of Mormon, Alma the Younger wished that he had been given different opportunities, different abilities, but he finally came to the realization that "[he] ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto [him]" (Alma 29:3). Nephi the son of Helaman wished that his cards looked a bit more like those of Nephi the son of Lehi:

"Oh, that I could have had my days in the days when my father Nephi first came out of the land of Jerusalem, that I could have joyed with him in the promised land; . . .

"Yea, if my days could have been in those days, then would my soul have had joy in the righteousness of my brethren" (Helaman 7:7–8).

I had a missionary companion who often wished that her hand included the knack to talk and relate to people easily, but it just wasn't an innate aspect of her personality. She recognized and accepted her limited (or just underdeveloped) capacities in those areas; however, I saw her time and time again work to overcome that situation and develop the



FOCUS ON JOY

"The joy we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives.

"When the focus of our lives is on God's plan of salvation . . . and Jesus Christ and His gospel, we can feel joy regardless of what is happening—or not happening—in our lives. Joy comes from and because of Him. He is the source of all joy."

President Russell M. Nelson, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Joy and Spiritual Survival," *Ensign*, Nov. 2016, 82.

ability to converse easily with others. By the end of her mission, she was fearless in talking to even the most unlikely prospective investigators. Her motivation was to become more like the Savior and better able to share His gospel, and she was successful in changing. She saw a card she didn't have and worked hard to attain it.

Sometimes we are able to change our circumstances, and sometimes we just have to say, as did Nephi, "I am consigned that these are my days" (Helaman 7:9)—or "these are my trials" or "these are my limitations" or whatever the case may be. The power to change all our cards is not always up to us. There will be times when we just have to be patient and wait on the Lord's timing for the winds to change and our hand to improve. Trusting in His timing is paramount if we are to keep that optimism and positive attitude while the game of life doesn't seem to be going our way.

Finding Joy (Enjoying the Game)

No matter our cards in life, as children of Heavenly Father, we have the divine capacity for joy, regardless of circumstances. "Men are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25). Notice how the scripture gives no caveats on that—it doesn't say that men are to have joy only when things are going their way or when times are easy or when they have everything they want in life. We are just simply to have joy. We shouldn't let the cards we hold keep us from enjoying the game or those we're playing it with. It would be wise to learn, as did the Apostle Paul, "in whatsoever state [we are], therewith to be content" (Philippians 4:11).

With that lesson learned, even if you feel like "you're still at negative ten," you can laugh and know that the game isn't over yet. ■

NOTES

1. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "You Matter to Him," *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 22.
2. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Grateful in Any Circumstances," *Ensign*, May 2014, 70.