

STRENGTHENING MARRIAGES THROUGH FAITH AND PRAYER

6

IDEAS FOR APPLICATION

According to your own needs and circumstances, follow one or both of these suggestions.

- Decide on one thing you can do to strengthen your faith in Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.
- Establish a time each day to pray with your spouse.

READING ASSIGNMENT

Study the following article. If you are married, read and discuss the article with your spouse.

FINDING JOY IN LIFE

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Variety amid Constancy

Recently I stood on the north shore of a beautiful Pacific island gazing out to sea at daybreak. I was fascinated by the regularity with which the gigantic waves consistently moved forward to break on the shoreline. It reminded me of the constancy of the plan of the Lord, with its fixed, eternal law, and the security of enduring justice and the tenderness of mercy when earned by obedience. I noticed that each wave would crest at a different point on the horizon to find its unique path to shore. Some cascaded over rocks, leaving rivulets of foaming, white water. Others burst on the shore in individual patterns. They slid up the moistened sand with playful frothy edges, then bubbled and swirled as they receded.

I thought of the unending variety of possibilities the Lord has provided for us. We have so much freedom, so many opportunities to develop our unique personalities and talents, our individual memories, our personalized contributions. Since there would be no further opportunity to observe the majestic sea, I tried to imagine the glorious panorama the brilliant sun would later create. As I watched this magnificent scene in reverence, a window formed in the clouds; the glistening rays of the rising sun broke through the overcast sky, transforming everything with its luminescence, its color, its life. It was as if the Lord wanted to share an additional blessing, a symbol of the light of His teachings that gives brilliance and hope to everyone it touches. Tears of gratitude formed for this wondrous world in

which we live, for the extraordinary beauty our Heavenly Father so freely shares with all who are willing to see. Truly, life is beautiful.

Appreciate the Beauty of Life

Do you take time to discover each day how beautiful your life can be? How long has it been since you watched the sun set—the departing rays kissing the clouds, trees, hills, and lowlands good night, sometimes tranquilly, sometimes with exuberant bursts of color and form?

What of the wonder of a cloudless night when the Lord unveils the marvels of His heavens—the twinkling stars, the moonlight rays—to ignite our imagination with His greatness and glory?

How captivating to watch a seed planted in fertile soil germinate, gather strength, and send forth a tiny, seemingly insignificant sprout. Patiently it begins to grow and develop its own character, led by the genetic code the Lord has provided to guide its development. With care it surely will become what it is destined to be: a lily, crowned with grace and beauty; a fragrant spearmint plant; a peach; an avocado; or a beautiful blossom with unique delicacy, hue, and fragrance.

When last did you observe a tiny rosebud form? Each day it develops new and impressive character, more promise of beauty until it becomes a majestic rose.

You are one of the noblest of God's creations. His intent is that your life be gloriously beautiful regardless of your circumstances. As you are grateful and obedient, you can become all that God intends you to be.

Joy in Life Depends on Trust in God

Sadness, disappointment, and severe challenge are *events* in life, not life itself. I do not minimize how hard some of these events are. They can extend over a long period of time, but they should not be allowed to become the confining center of everything you do. The Lord inspired Lehi to declare the fundamental truth, "Men are, that they might have joy."¹ That is a conditional statement: "they *might* have joy." It is not conditional for the Lord. His intent is that each of us finds joy. It will not be conditional for you as you obey the commandments, have faith in the Master, and do the things that are necessary to have joy here on earth.

Your joy in life depends upon your trust in Heavenly Father and His holy Son, your conviction that their plan of happiness truly can bring you joy. Pondering their doctrine will let you enjoy the beauties of this earth and enrich your relationships with others. It will lead you to the comforting, strengthening experiences that flow from prayer to Father in Heaven and the answers He gives in return.

Perspective and Patience

A pebble held close to the eye appears to be a gigantic obstacle. Cast on the ground, it is seen in perspective. Likewise, problems or trials in our lives need to be viewed in the perspective of scriptural doctrine. Otherwise they can easily overtake our vision, absorb our energy, and deprive us of the joy and beauty the Lord intends us to receive here on earth. Some people are like rocks thrown into a sea of problems. They are drowned by them. Be a cork. When submerged in a problem, fight to be free to bob up to serve again with happiness.

You are here on earth for a divine purpose. It is not to be endlessly entertained or to be constantly in full pursuit of pleasure. You are here to be tried, to prove yourself so that you can receive the additional blessings God has for you.² The tempering effect of patience is required.³ Some blessings will be delivered here in this life; others will come beyond the veil.

The Lord is intent on your personal growth and development. That progress is accelerated when you willingly allow Him to lead you through every growth experience you encounter, whether initially it be to your individual liking or not. When you trust in the Lord, when you are willing to let your heart and your mind be centered in His will, when you ask to be led by the Spirit to do His will, you are assured of the greatest happiness along the way and the most fulfilling attainment from this mortal experience. If you question everything you are asked to

do, or dig in your heels at every unpleasant challenge, you make it harder for the Lord to bless you.⁴

Your agency, the right to make choices, is not given so that you can get what you want. This divine gift is provided so that you will choose what your Father in Heaven wants for you. That way He can lead you to become all that He intends you to be.⁵ That path leads to glorious joy and happiness.

Live with Joy amid Adversity

Learn from inspiring individuals who have made peace with their challenges and live with joy amid adversity. A lovely woman with an aggressive terminal disease consistently found joy in life. She understood the plan of happiness, had received the temple ordinances, and was doing her best to qualify for the promised blessings. Her personal journal records:

"It is a beautiful fall day. I picked up the mail and sat down on the swing. I was so happy and content in the warm sun, the sweet smell of nature and the trees around me. I just sat and gloried in the fact that I am still alive on this beautiful earth. . . . The Lord is so good to me. How I thank him that I am still here and feeling so good. I am soooooo happy I just want to shout and dance through this beautiful house as the sun streams into the big windows. I love being alive."

A valiant mother courageously fighting a debilitating illness spent untold hours laboriously completing a large, challenging needlepoint work of art. It was a gift to a couple experiencing trials. For the couple it is a priceless treasure, a constant reminder of the precious fruits of resolute effort in the face of adversity, an enduring message of hope bound in the bonds of pure love and willing sacrifice.

Find Joy in What You Do Have

Children teach us how to find joy even under the most challenging circumstances. Children haven't yet learned to be depressed by concentrating on the things they don't have. They find joy in what is available to them. I remember a small boy playing along a riverbank. He had tied a piece of fishing line to the ends of two discarded soft-drink cans. He threw one can over a limb, then filled it with water. He would pull on the other can, then let it go. The weight of the first can would draw the second one up as it fell. He laughed and danced with glee.

Simple, rejuvenating experiences surround us. They can be safety valves to keep the tension down and the spirit up. Don't concentrate on what you don't have or have lost. The Lord promised the obedient to share all that He possesses with them.

You may temporarily lack here, but in the next life, if you prove yourself worthy by living valiantly, a fulness will be your blessing.

Find the compensatory blessings in your life when, in the wisdom of the Lord, He deprives you of something you very much want. To the sightless or hearing impaired, He sharpens the other senses. To the ill, He gives patience, understanding, and increased appreciation for others' kindness. With the loss of a dear one, He deepens the bonds of love, enriches memories, and kindles hope in a future reunion. You will discover compensatory blessings when you willingly accept the will of the Lord and exercise faith in Him.⁶

To the afflicted people of Alma, the Lord said:

"I will also ease the burdens . . . that even you cannot feel them upon your backs . . . ; and this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses for me hereafter, and that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions.

"And . . . the burdens . . . were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord."⁷

Being Creative Will Help You Enjoy Life

Attempt to be creative for the joy it brings. After their noble husbands were called home, Sisters Camilla Kimball, Amelia McConkie, and Helen Richards learned to paint. They not only leave legacies of art, but they will never see a sunset, a face, or a tree the same again. They now perceive subtle nuances of color and form and rejoice in the abounding beauty around them.

Select something like music, dance, sculpture, or poetry. Being creative will help you enjoy life. It engenders a spirit of gratitude. It develops latent talent, sharpens your capacity to reason, to act, and to find purpose in life. It dispels loneliness and heartache. It gives a renewal, a spark of enthusiasm, and zest for life.

Service: A Key to Happiness

Willing service to others is a key to enduring happiness. President Spencer W. Kimball said: "God does notice us, and he watches over us. But it is usually through another mortal that he meets our needs. Therefore, it is vital that we serve each other."⁸

I know of a woman who was joyously happy. Each morning she would ask her Father in Heaven to lead her to someone she could help. That sincere prayer was answered time and again. The burdens of many were eased and their lives brightened. She was

blessed continually for being an instrument directed by the Lord.

Difficulty Can Be Turned to Growth

I know that every difficulty we face in life, even those that come from our own negligence or even transgression, can be turned by the Lord into growth experiences, a virtual ladder upward.⁹ I certainly do not recommend transgression as a path to growth. It is painful, difficult, and so totally unnecessary. It is far wiser and so much easier to move forward in righteousness. But through proper repentance, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and obedience to His commandments, even the disappointment that comes from transgression can be converted into a return to happiness.

Make a list of things you can do for happiness, such as:

- Ponder the scriptures to understand the plan of happiness.
- Pray with faith in Jesus Christ.
- Love and serve others.
- Receive the temple ordinances. Return to bless others.
- Listen to the prophet and obey his counsel.
- Be grateful for what you have.
- Smile more.

Your list will provide keys to contentment and joy.

Challenge Is Temporary but Happiness Is Eternal

A famous Brazilian song repeats a falsehood many believe: Sadness never ends, but happiness does. I witness that with faith in the Savior and obedience to His teachings, happiness never ends, but sadness does.

No matter how difficult something you or a loved one faces, it should not take over your life and be the center of all your interest. Challenges are growth experiences, temporary scenes to be played out on the background of a pleasant life. Don't become so absorbed in a single event that you can't think of anything else or care for yourself or for those who depend upon you. Remember, much like the mending of the body, the healing of some spiritual and emotional challenges takes time.

The Lord has said, "Be patient in afflictions, for thou shalt have many; but endure them, for, lo, I am with thee, even unto the end of thy days."¹⁰ As you are patient, you will come to understand what the statement "I am with thee" means. God's love brings peace and joy.

Your faith in Jesus Christ gives life enduring meaning. Remember you are on a journey to exaltation. Sometimes you have experiences that yield more happiness than others, but it all has purpose with the Lord.¹¹

As a witness of the Savior, I exhort you to forgive any you feel may have offended you. If there is transgression, repent of it, that the Master may heal you.

Thank your Father in Heaven and His Beloved Son for the plan of happiness and the gospel prin-

ciples upon which it is based. Be grateful for the ordinances and the covenants they have provided. I solemnly testify they have power to crown your life with peace and joy, to give it purpose and meaning. You will learn that sadness and disappointment are temporary. Happiness is everlastingly eternal because of Jesus Christ. I solemnly witness that He lives, that He loves you, and that He will help you.

From an address by Elder Scott in the April 1996 general conference of the Church (see Conference Report, Apr. 1996, 31–35; or *Ensign*, May 1996, 24–26).

NOTES

1. 2 Nephi 2:25.
2. See Abraham 3:25.
3. See Mosiah 3:19.
4. See 1 Nephi 3:7.
5. See Doctrine and Covenants 58:26–32.
6. See Orson F. Whitney, quoted in Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (1972), 98.
7. Mosiah 24:14–15.
8. *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (1982), 252.
9. See Isaiah 40:31.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 24:8.
11. See Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (1939), 177.