

# Ensign



## How Do We Find Joy and Happiness?

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THE  
CHURCH  
IS HERE

# Bangkok Thailand







Here are a few facts about the Church in Thailand:


**1**  Temple under construction in Bangkok

Church members  **22,100**

**41**  Congregations

Mission  **1** 

**74**  Languages and dialects spoken in Thailand

Letters in the official name of Bangkok when written in Thai  **168**

**1854** First missionary sent to Thailand (known as Siam at that time).

**1966** Thailand District organized; President Gordon B. Hinckley dedicated the country for missionary work; first native convert baptized.

**1995** Bangkok Stake created.

**2018** President Russell M. Nelson visited Bangkok.

**2019** Groundbreaking for the Bangkok Thailand Temple on January 16.



Learn more about the Church in various locations at [history.ChurchofJesusChrist.org/GlobalHistories](https://history.ChurchofJesusChrist.org/GlobalHistories).





**Jesus Christ: The Source of Enduring Joy**  
Elder David A. Bednar

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# How Do We Find Joy and Happiness?

For me and many others, there is sometimes an added wrinkle of complexity when it comes to feeling joyful or happy—even after choosing to live righteously. I've occasionally wondered, "If I'm keeping the commandments, why am I having such a hard time feeling happy?"

Many factors can upend our sense of happiness or well-being, such as loss of employment, the death of a loved one, or interrupted physical and/or mental health. Still, I've come to believe that no matter the valley you're trudging through, better days are ahead! In my article, "The Hunt for Happiness," on page 38, I share gospel perspective alongside scientific research with the goal of pursuing happiness, especially when it feels out of reach.

Elder David A. Bednar's article on page 16, "Jesus Christ: The Source of Enduring Joy," teaches us about true and lasting joy. Full of scriptural and prophetic insights, his article is packed with crucial instruction important to our eternal welfare as well as finding joy during mortality. Two more articles—"Be of Good Cheer" by Cristina B. Franco (page 24) and "Follow the Path of Happiness" by Bishop Gérald Caussé (page 52)—provide additional insights on seeking joy.

"Adam fell that men might be," the scripture says, "and men are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25). After the darkest nights, light always returns in the morning.

David Dickson  
Church Magazines



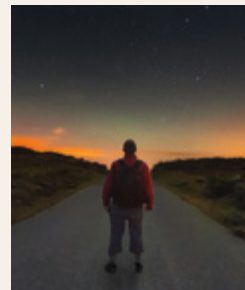
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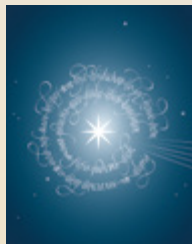




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Read chapter 5, "Bowed Down to the Grave," in the digital version of this issue (available in the Gospel Library app or at [ensign.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://www.ensign.ChurchofJesusChrist.org)). The book will be released in early 2020.



## December Digital-Only Articles

Available in the Gospel Library app or at [ensign.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://ensign.ChurchofJesusChrist.org)



## Come, Follow Me

### *Support Articles and Activities*

To discover articles, videos, and other resources that coincide with your family's study of the New Testament this month, see the digital version of this issue in the Gospel Library app or at [ensign.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://ensign.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).



### Members Share Blessings from *Come, Follow Me*

By Chakell Wardleigh

Read how studying the New Testament has affected the lives of members this year.



### Bearing Testimony: More Prepared Than You Think

By Aaron L. West

Can you share the gospel at a moment's notice? Of course. You've been preparing a long time. (Supports *Come, Follow Me* lesson on 1 and 2 Peter.)



### 5 Tips to Enjoy Christmas When You're Far from Home

By Alexandra Palmer

Here's how you can feel at home when you're far from home.

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## THE MANY FACES OF HAPPINESS

**H**ere are a few thoughts on what makes for a happy life. On page 38, we explore this topic in-depth, including nine strategies to be happier.

"In African villages, one would ask in greeting, **'HOW ARE WE?'**

This understanding sees that someone else's achievements or happiness is in a very real way our own."

Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, South Africa, in 14th Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World* (2016).



**"WITHOUT GOOD THOUGHTS THERE IS NO PEACE,** and without peace there is no happiness."

Mahatma Gandhi, *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: The Voice of Truth* (1968).

"It is not happiness that makes us grateful. It's **gratefulness** that **makes us happy.**"

David Steindl-Rast, Catholic Benedictine monk, "Want to Be Happy? Be Grateful," TEDGlobal 2013 (video), June 2013, ted.com.



"If you want others to be happy, practice compassion; and if you want yourself **to be happy, practice compassion.**"

Dalai Lama, in Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler, *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living* (2009).

**"Happiness is the purpose and design of existence.**

'Men are, that they might have joy' [2 Nephi 2:25]. Virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping the commandments of God lead to a happy life."

President David O. McKay, *Pathways to Happiness* (1964).









## Fatu Gamanga

Eastern Province, Sierra Leone



*Through the gospel literacy program, Fatu not only learned to read and write but also learned about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Before joining the Church, Fatu struggled to support her family. Now she has developed skills of self-reliance and runs her own business making and selling beautiful handmade rugs. She also serves as the Relief Society president in her branch.*

CHRISTINA SMITH, PHOTOGRAPHER

Before I joined the Church, I tried to make money selling handmade rugs, but I didn't have money to buy material. I used to tell people, "If you want a rug, go buy your material and bring it to me; then I will make it for you. You can pay me when I'm done."

Now that I'm here in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I have learned about self-reliance. The Church has given me more endurance to learn to read, write, speak, and try to do something for myself to be self-reliant. Now I go to the tailor's shop and ask for the leftover scraps they cut from the clothes and leave on the floor. I buy the scraps for a small price and use them to make my rugs. I now sell more than I ever have before.

Since I joined the Church, my life has changed. I have gone from zero to hero! I'm proud of Jesus Christ and I'm proud of His Church. I'm so thankful for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

### DISCOVER MORE

See more about Fatu's journey of faith, including more photos, in the digital version of this article in the Gospel Library app or at [ChurchofJesusChrist.org/go/E12196](https://ChurchofJesusChrist.org/go/E12196).

Learn about the practical and spiritual benefits of self-reliance at [ChurchofJesusChrist.org/self-reliance](https://ChurchofJesusChrist.org/self-reliance).



# Ministering Principles

## What the Christmas Story Teaches Us about Ministering

*“This is the season beloved of the year. Sing a rhyme; Christmastime soon will be here. Tell the true story of Jesus’ birth, when, as a baby, he came to the earth”*  
(*“The Nativity Song,”* Children’s Songbook, 52).

Christmas is a wonderful time when sheep, shepherds, mangers, and stars suddenly take on new meaning. They become important players in the retelling of one of the most important events in human history: the birth of Jesus Christ. Many families display a nativity scene in their homes. Others make a point to read the story of His birth or participate in a pageant. Like all stories of Christ, the story of His birth is filled with lessons we can learn about ministering, about sharing His light to light the world. “The story of Christmas is a story of love,” said President Henry B. Eyring, Second Counselor in the First Presidency.

“... In the stories of Christ’s birth, we can see and feel who He was and who He is. That lightens our load along the way. And it will lead us to forget ourselves and to lighten the load for others.”<sup>1</sup>

### **“There was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7)**

The innkeeper failed to make room for the Savior, but we don’t have to make that mistake! We can make room for the Savior in our hearts by making room for our brothers and sisters at our tables, in our homes, and in our traditions. Many family traditions can be made sweeter and even more memorable by including other people. Daiana and her family have a tradition of





inviting someone to share Christmas with them. Every December, they discuss and decide who they would like to invite.<sup>2</sup> Maybe your family could start a similar tradition. Perhaps someone you minister to would like to join your family in singing favorite Christmas songs together. You might also make room at your Christmas dinner for someone who might not have family in the area.

What better way to celebrate the Savior than to follow His example of inclusion? Remember that He invites “all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile” (2 Nephi 26:33). Make room and create inclusion.

**“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night” (Luke 2:8)**

It seems fitting that shepherds would be among the first to greet the infant Savior. Prophets of old referred to Jesus Christ as the “Shepherd of Israel” (Psalm 80:1) and the “Shepherd over all the earth” (1 Nephi 13:41). And Christ Himself said, “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep” (John 10:14). Knowing our sheep and keeping watch is a key part of shepherding and ministering as the Savior does.

With the glimmering lights and ornate decorations, there is a lot to look at during Christmastime. But perhaps the greatest beauty of the season can be found when we remember to turn our focus to those we minister to and keep watch over our own flocks. Keeping watch can be noting someone’s favorite treat or asking



about someone's holiday plans. We keep watch when we see and meet others' needs—both the obvious and the not so obvious.

When Cheryl suddenly lost her husband, Mick, she was devastated. As her first Christmas without him drew closer, the loneliness grew. Thankfully, one of her ministering sisters, Shauna, was there. Shauna and her husband, Jim, invited Cheryl on many holiday outings. They noticed Cheryl's worn coat and decided to do something about it. A few days before Christmas, Shauna and Jim brought Cheryl a Christmas present: a beautiful new coat. They were aware of Cheryl's physical needs for a warm coat but also of her emotional needs for comfort and company. They stepped up to fulfill those needs as best they could and set a beautiful example of how we too can keep watch over our flocks.<sup>3</sup>

**"The shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem" (Luke 2:15)**

"Let us now go" is an exuberant invitation! The shepherds didn't assume that their friends would be too tired to make the trek. They didn't quietly head to Bethlehem on their own. They joyously turned to each other and said, "Let us now go!"

While we might not be able to invite our friends to come see the infant Savior, we can invite them to feel the spirit of Christmas (or the spirit of Christ) by serving with us. "The way to increase the Christmas spirit is to reach out generously to those around us and give of ourselves," said Bonnie L. Oscarson, former Young Women General President.<sup>4</sup> Imagine you're holding a candle. Others can certainly see and benefit from the light from your candle, but imagine the warmth they can feel if you use your candle to light their candle and allow them to hold the light for themselves.

Christ Himself taught that those who follow Him will have the light of life (see John 8:12). Serving as He did is one way we can follow Him and enjoy that promised light. So share the light by inviting others to serve with you! How can you and those you minister to serve together? Together you can prepare your favorite food or surprise someone with a small gift or note. Together you can both feel the light that comes from following Christ's example of service.





### **“They made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child” (Luke 2:17)**

It’s easy to imagine the joyous excitement of the shepherds as they shared the amazing news of Christ’s birth with as many people as they could. Heralded by angels, the prophesied Messiah had come! He was here! In fact, sharing the good news of the Savior is a big theme of the Nativity story. The angels sang. The star pointed the way. And the shepherds made it known abroad.

We can add our voices to the Christmas story by sharing the good news and testifying of the Savior. “As you have the privilege to represent the Savior in your ministering efforts, ask yourself, ‘How can I share the light of the gospel with this individual or family?’” taught Sister Jean B. Bingham, Relief Society General President. “What is the Spirit inspiring me to do?”<sup>5</sup>

Here are a few suggestions for you to consider as you seek to know how you can share your testimony of the Savior and His gospel:

- Find a scripture that captures your feelings about the Savior or expresses why you are grateful to Him. Share it with those you minister to.
- Send a text or a social media message with a Christmas video. There are some amazing ones on [ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://www.ChurchofJesusChrist.org)!
- Tell a friend about a special memory or tradition that reminds you of Christ.

Have faith that the Holy Ghost will bear witness of the truth of your testimony, just as He bore witness to Simeon and Anna that the baby Jesus was the Savior (see Luke 2:26, 38).

“To truly honor [Jesus Christ’s] coming into the world, we must do as He did and reach out in compassion and mercy to our fellowmen,” said Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. “This we can do daily, by word and deed. Let this become our Christmas tradition, no matter where we are—to be a little kinder, more forgiving, less judging, more grateful, and more generous in sharing our abundance with those in need.”<sup>6</sup> ■

#### **NOTES**

1. Henry B. Eyring, “Christmas Stories” (First Presidency Christmas devotional, Dec. 6, 2009), [broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).
2. See Daiana Melina Albornoz Díaz, “Sharing Christmas,” *New Era*, Dec. 2007, 8.
3. See Cheryl Boyle, “He Would Have Bought It for You,” *Ensign*, Dec. 2001, 57.
4. Bonnie L. Oscarson, “Christmas Is Christlike Love” (First Presidency Christmas devotional, Dec. 7, 2014), [broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).
5. Jean B. Bingham, “Ministering as the Savior Does,” *Ensign*, May 2018, 104.
6. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Scatter Your Crumbs” (First Presidency Christmas devotional, Dec. 3, 2017), [broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).

#### **SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES**

Send us your experiences as you have ministered to others or have been ministered to. Go to [ensign.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://www.ensign.ChurchofJesusChrist.org) and click “Submit an Article or Feedback.”



# Family Study fun

Consider these activities during family scripture study or home evening.



## Ancestor Academy

**November 25–December 1 (1 Peter 3:18–20; 4:6)**

Peter taught that those who did not hear the gospel in this life will have it preached to them in the next (see 1 Peter 3:18–20; 4:6).

- 1 Log in to [FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org) (or create a new account).
- 2 Identify one or more deceased ancestors who did not have the opportunity of accepting the gospel in this life. Or, find an old-timey photograph of people online.
- 3 Talk about which principles of the gospel might be most appealing to them (temples? eternal families? prayer?). Consider their time period and life circumstances.

**Discussion:** How is this principle—that deceased ancestors can hear the gospel—evidence of Heavenly Father’s mercy? What more can we do as a family to prepare names for temple ordinances?



## Pass-Along Love Cards

**December 2–8 (1 John 4:7)**

The Apostle John says, “Let us love one another: for love is of God” (1 John 4:7).

- 1 Have the family sit in a circle.
- 2 Give everyone an index card with their name at the top.
- 3 Have everyone pass their card to the left. Instruct family members to silently read the name and write on the card how that person shows love in the family.
- 4 Keep passing the cards to the left until everyone has written on each card.
- 5 Read the cards aloud.

**Discussion:** How do you feel inside when you show love to others? How do acts of love strengthen our family?





## Symbol Sketch-and-Guess

**December 9–15 (Revelation 1–22)**

To better understand the book of Revelation, we must first understand the symbols.

- 1 Write one word per slip of paper: *Lamb, candlestick, stars, dragon, bride, sword.*
- 2 Pass out the papers and take turns drawing the object while the family guesses what it is.
- 3 When the family guesses correctly, read aloud the scriptures to learn the symbol's meaning.
  - Lamb = Christ (Revelation 5:6; 7:13–14)
  - Candlestick = branch of Christ's Church (Revelation 1:12, 20)
  - Stars = Christ's servants or leaders (Revelation 1:16, 20 [footnote b])
  - Dragon = Satan (Revelation 12:3, 9)
  - Bride = Church of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7–8)
  - Two-edged sword = word of God (Revelation 19:21; Hebrews 4:12)

**Discussion:** Why is a lamb a frequent symbol of Christ? Why are symbols sometimes used in scripture?



## Christmas Sing-Along

**December 16–22 (Christmas)**

Open the Sacred Music app and sing the following hymns joyfully after reading each scripture.

- Luke 2:4 ("O Little Town of Bethlehem," no. 208)
- Luke 2:7 ("Away in a Manger," no. 206)
- Luke 2:8 ("While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks," no. 211)
- Luke 2:9–10 ("Joy to the World," no. 201)
- Luke 2:13–14 ("Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," no. 209; or "Angels We Have Heard on High," no. 203)
- Luke 2:16 ("Silent Night," no. 204)
- Luke 2:17 ("Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful," no. 202)
- Luke 2:20 ("Far, Far Away on Judea's Plains," no. 212)
- Matthew 2:1–11 ("With Wondering Awe," no. 210)

**Discussion:** How can we praise God and Jesus Christ each day without actually singing?



## Life-Changer Film Festival

**December 23–29 (Revelation 14:6)**

The Book of Mormon is the means by which the angel (Moroni), as prophesied in Revelation 14:6, will preach "the everlasting gospel . . . to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people."

- 1 Go to [ChurchofJesusChrist.org/go/change1219](https://www.ChurchofJesusChrist.org/go/change1219) (or scan the QR code below).
- 2 Watch any of the short films featuring people whose lives have been forever changed by the Book of Mormon.

**Discussion:** How has your own life been blessed and changed by studying the Book of Mormon? What goals can we set as a family regarding studying the Book of Mormon in 2020?



*Selected activity ideas contributed by Mitzi Schoneman and Margot Hovley*





By President  
Russell M. Nelson

# Four Gifts

## FROM THE SAVIOR

**M**y beloved brothers and sisters, what a treasured season this is! Let us consider together the blessings that come to us as we focus on the life, mission, doctrine, and Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.

During this season I invite you to consider your own desires. Do you really want to become more and more like Jesus Christ? Do you really want to live with Heavenly Father and with your family forever and live as He lives? If you do, you will want to accept many gifts offered by the Lord to help you during your mortal probation. Let us focus on *four* of the gifts Jesus Christ gave to all who are willing to *receive* them (see Doctrine and Covenants 88:33).

**First,** He gave you and me an unlimited capacity *to love*. That includes the capacity to love the unlovable and those who not only do *not* love you but presently persecute and despitefully use you (see Matthew 5:44–45).

With the Savior's help, we can learn to love as He loved. It may require a change of heart—most certainly a softening of our hearts—as we are tutored by the Savior how to *really* take care of each other. My dear brothers and sisters, we can truly minister in the Lord's way as we accept His gift of love.



A **second** gift the Savior offers you is the ability *to forgive*. Through His infinite Atonement, you can forgive those who have hurt you and who may never accept responsibility for their cruelty to you. The Savior will grant you the ability to forgive anyone who has mistreated you in any way.





A **third** gift from the Savior is that of *repentance*. The Lord invites us to change our minds, our knowledge, our spirit, even our breathing. For example, when we repent, we breathe with gratitude to God, who lends us breath from day to day (see Mosiah 2:21). And we desire to use that breath in serving Him and His children. Repentance is a resplendent gift. It is a process never to be feared. It is a gift for us to receive with joy and to use—even embrace—day after day as we seek to become more like our Savior.

A **fourth** gift from our Savior is actually a promise—a promise of *life everlasting*. Everyone will be resurrected and experience *immortality*. But eternal life is so much more than a designation of time. Eternal life is the kind and quality of life that Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son live. When the Father offers us everlasting life, He is saying in essence, “If you choose to follow my Son—if your *desire* is *really* to become more like Him—then in time you may live as we live and preside over worlds and kingdoms as we do.”

These four unique gifts will bring us more and more joy as we accept them. They were made possible because Jehovah condescended to come to earth as the baby Jesus. He was born of an immortal Father and a mortal mother. He was born in Bethlehem under the most humble of circumstances. Jesus Christ is God’s transcendent gift—the gift of the Father to all of His children (see John 3:16).

With our thoughts and feelings so focused on the Savior of the world, what, then, do *we* need to do to receive these gifts offered to us so willingly by Jesus Christ? What is the key to loving as He loves, forgiving as He forgives, repenting to become more like Him, and ultimately living with Him and our Heavenly Father?

The key is to make and keep sacred covenants. *We choose* to live and progress on the Lord’s covenant path and to stay on it. It is not a complicated way. It is *the* way to true joy in this life and eternal life beyond.

My dear brothers and sisters, my deepest desires are for all of Heavenly Father’s children to have the opportunity to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and to heed His teachings. And I desire that we will believe and receive the love the Savior has for each of us. His infinite and perfect love moved Him to atone for you and me. That gift—His Atonement—allows all of His other gifts to become ours. ■

*From the 2018 First Presidency Christmas devotional.*





By Elder  
David A. Bednar  
Of the Quorum of  
the Twelve Apostles



# Jesus Christ

## The Source of Enduring Joy

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Every member of the Lord's restored Church who is striving to remember and honor sacred covenants and keep the commandments can receive the gift of enduring joy.

I recently was in a spiritually powerful testimony meeting and listened intently as a devoted sister declared, "I have great joy because of the Father's plan of salvation." Immediately obvious to me was the fact that this woman was not simply speaking familiar words. The light that shone in her eyes, the spiritually dignified tone of her voice, her bright and peaceful countenance—everything about her affirmed the truthfulness of what she was saying. She was filled with joy. She radiated joy. Indeed, she was becoming more like the Savior and receiving His image in her countenance (see Alma 5:14), a part of which was becoming joyful.

Her expression of faith caused me to remember the lyrics of several familiar hymns:

*With faith, we hold the iron rod  
And find in this our joy.<sup>1</sup>*

*Come, come, ye Saints, no toil nor labor fear;  
But with joy wend your way. . . .  
'Tis better far for us to strive  
Our useless cares from us to drive;  
Do this, and joy your hearts will swell—  
All is well! All is well!<sup>2</sup>*

*Oh, sweet the joy this sentence gives:  
"I know that my Redeemer lives!"<sup>3</sup>*



And in this Christmas season, we will sing:

*“Glad tidings of great joy I bring  
To you and all mankind.”<sup>4</sup>*

And

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come;  
Let earth receive her King! . . .  
Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.<sup>5</sup>*

Since becoming president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, President Russell M. Nelson frequently has extended an invitation to the people of the world that includes the promise of joy: “Our message to the world is simple and sincere: we invite all of God’s children on both sides of the veil to come unto their Savior, receive the blessings of the holy temple, have *enduring joy*, and qualify for eternal life.”<sup>6</sup>

What exactly is this joy about which we sing and teach and which we have the obligation to offer to all humankind? And how is it obtained? Let us now consider together answers to these two important questions.

## WHAT IS JOY?

A common dictionary definition of joy is “a *feeling* of great pleasure [or] happiness.”<sup>7</sup> In comparison, the Guide to the Scriptures describes joy as “a *condition* of great happiness [that results] from righteous living.”<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, our gospel perspective helps us to understand that joy is more than a fleeting feeling or emotion; rather, it is a spiritual gift and a state of being and becoming. For this reason I described the sister who bore her testimony as filled with and radiating joy.

As a wise and loving father, Lehi taught his sons that the very purpose of mortal life is for all people to have joy:

“But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things.

“Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:24–25).

Adam and Eve summarized the vital lessons they learned from the Eternal Father and from their own experience.

Adam declared: “Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life *I shall have joy*, and again in the flesh I shall see God” (Moses 5:10; emphasis added).

And Eve said: “Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and *the joy of our redemption*, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient” (Moses 5:11; emphasis added).

The Father’s plan of happiness enables His children to obtain a physical body and gain mortal experience, to choose righteousness in the presence of evil and temptation, and to assist Heavenly Father with His great plan through honorable marriage and parenthood.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, at the time of our resurrection, “the spirit and the body [are] to be united never again to be divided, that they might receive *a fulness of joy*” (Doctrine and Covenants 138:17; emphasis added).

## HOW IS JOY OBTAINED?

I believe the contrast between righteous joy and worldly fun is instructive and helps us better understand the nature of true joy. Joy comes from exercising faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, worthily receiving and faithfully honoring sacred ordinances and covenants, and striving to become deeply converted to the Savior and His purposes. Fun is the result of “amusement,” “playful [and] often boisterous action or speech,” or pleasurable diversion.<sup>10</sup> A day on the rides at Disneyland is fun. Worthily preparing for and participating in the ordinance of the sacrament is joyful.

Joy primarily is spiritual; fun primarily is temporal. Joy primarily is enduring; fun primarily is temporary. Joy primarily is deep and rich; fun primarily is shallow. Joy primarily is whole and complete; fun primarily is partial. Joy primarily pertains to mortality and eternity; fun pertains only to mortality.





How important it is for us to never confuse or trade the enduring, deep joy of devoted discipleship for temporary and shallow fun.

The Redeemer is the ultimate and only source of enduring and eternal joy. The prophet Jacob testified: “But, behold, the righteous, the saints of the Holy One of Israel, they who have believed in the Holy One of Israel, they who have endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame of it, they shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world, *and their joy shall be full forever*” (2 Nephi 9:18; emphasis added).

#### THE TRUE SOURCE OF JOY

Because of Heavenly Father’s plan and the Savior’s Atonement, sincere repentance invites us to turn to and depend upon Jesus Christ, the true source of joy. Please consider carefully the response of King Benjamin’s people to his teachings about the Savior’s Atonement:

“And now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had made an end of speaking the words which had been

*Because of the  
Savior’s Atonement,  
challenges and  
afflictions invite us  
to lift up our eyes  
to Jesus Christ, the  
true source of joy.*



delivered unto him by the angel of the Lord, that he cast his eyes round about on the multitude, and behold they had fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them.

“And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men.

“And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, *and they were filled with joy*, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come” (Mosiah 4:1–3; emphasis added).

Because of Heavenly Father’s plan and the Savior’s Atonement, obedience invites us to follow Jesus Christ, the true source of joy. The Savior declared to His disciples:

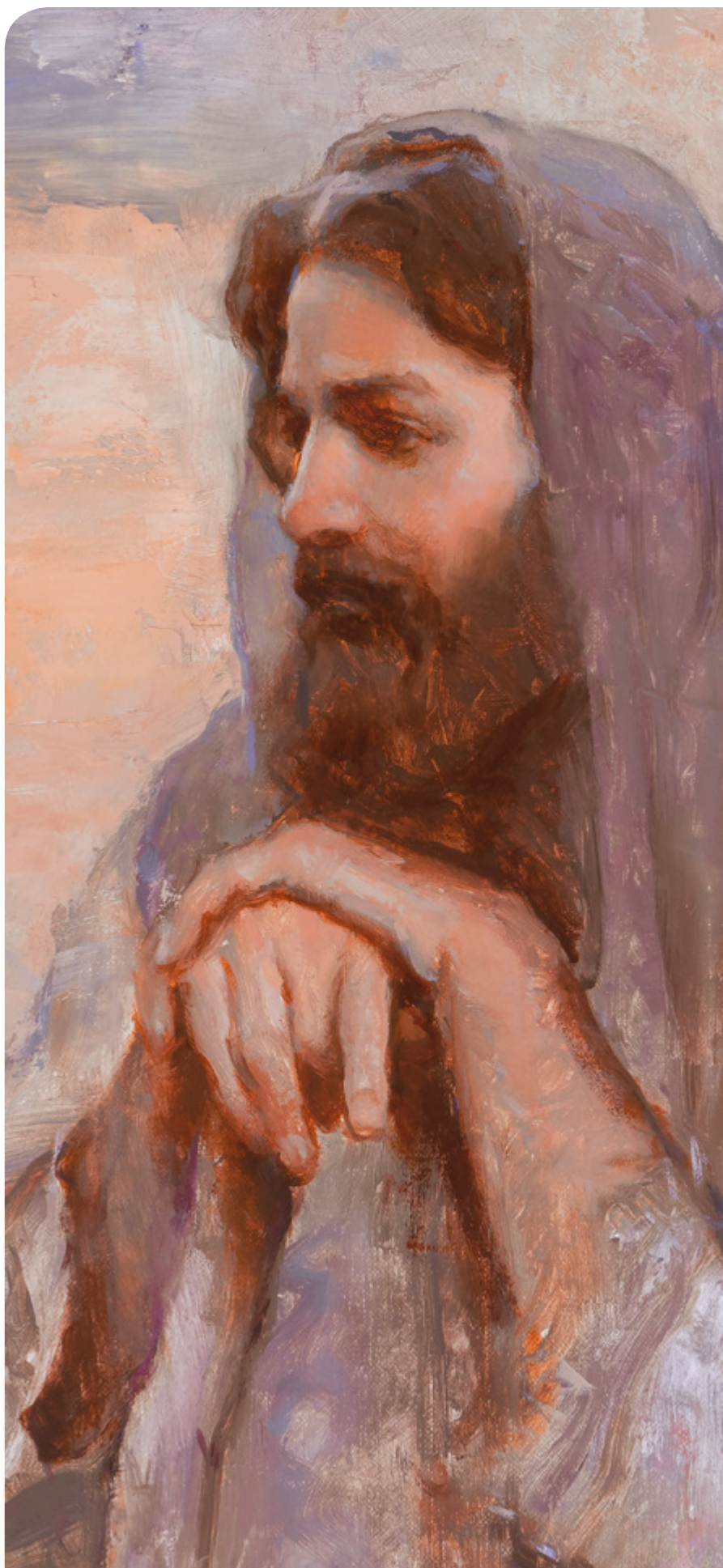
“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.

“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and *that your joy might be full*” (John 15:10–11; emphasis added).

“And no man receiveth a fulness unless he keepeth his commandments.

“He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:27–28).

Because of Heavenly Father’s plan and the Savior’s Atonement, service invites us to emulate the character of Jesus Christ, the true source





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*The Redeemer  
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of joy. I recently read a statement by Kevin J Worthen, president of Brigham Young University, about deep joy. He said, “I have come to believe that one measure of our eternal progress is how much joy we derive from service.”<sup>11</sup>

Alma the Younger told his son Helaman: “I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the *exceeding joy* of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (Alma 36:24; emphasis added).

Recall the rejoicing of Ammon as he recounted his missionary work among the Lamanites:

“Behold, *my joy is full, yea, my heart is brim with joy*, and I will rejoice in my God. . . .

“Behold, how many thousands of our brethren has he loosed from the pains of hell; and they are brought to sing redeeming love, and this because of the power of his word which is in us, therefore have we not *great reason to rejoice*? . . .

“. . . Now *this is my joy*, and my great thanksgiving; yea, and I will give thanks unto my God forever” (Alma 26:11, 13, 37; emphasis added).

Because of Heavenly Father’s plan and the Savior’s Atonement, challenges and afflictions invite us to lift up our eyes (see Isaiah 40:26; Psalm 123:1–2) to Jesus Christ, the true source of joy. The precious perspective provided by the restored gospel allows us to learn lessons that prepare us for eternity through the adversities of mortality. Our suffering and misfortunes can be “swallowed up in the joy of Christ” (Alma 31:38) and consecrated for our gain (see 2 Nephi 2:2), “that [our] performance may be for the welfare of [our] soul” (2 Nephi 32:9). Thus joy endures in times and through experiences that are both good and bad because of our knowledge of the Father’s plan and of the Savior’s Atonement.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, obedience, service, and a gospel perspective about the trials we encounter in mortality all invite us to come unto the source of enduring joy—Jesus Christ. I invite you to identify, study, and prayerfully ponder additional principles that enable us to receive this important spiritual gift of joy.

### A JOYFUL PROMISE

Enduring joy is not a blessing reserved for a select few. Rather, every member of the Lord’s restored Church who is striving to remember and honor sacred covenants and keep the commandments can receive this gift, according to God’s will and timing. In this Christmas season, may each of us strive to appreciate more fully the supernal gift of joy. As we do so, may we begin to see with new eyes and hear with new ears as “Saints and angels sing,” as we “repeat the sounding joy,” and as we “ever worship God.”<sup>12</sup>

I joyfully declare my sure witness of the living reality and divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. ■

*From a devotional address, “That They Might Have Joy,” delivered at Brigham Young University on December 4, 2018.*

### NOTES

1. “As Zion’s Youth in Latter Days,” *Hymns*, no. 256.
2. “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” *Hymns*, no. 30.
3. “I Know That My Redeemer Lives,” *Hymns*, no. 136.
4. “While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks,” *Hymns*, no. 211.
5. “Joy to the World,” *Hymns*, no. 201.
6. Russell M. Nelson, “Let Us All Press On,” *Ensign*, May 2018, 118–19; emphasis added.
7. English Oxford Living Dictionaries, “joy,” [en.oxforddictionaries.com](http://en.oxforddictionaries.com); emphasis added.
8. Guide to the Scriptures, “joy,” [scriptures.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](http://scriptures.ChurchofJesusChrist.org); emphasis added.
9. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, May 2017, 145.
10. *Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (2003), “fun,” [merriam-webster.com](http://merriam-webster.com).
11. Kevin J Worthen, “Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Serve” (Brigham Young University commencement address, Aug. 16, 2018), 3, [speeches.byu.edu](http://speeches.byu.edu).
12. “Joy to the World.”

# Mary, Mother of the Savior

By Margot Hovley  
Church Magazines

*Mary possessed the great characteristics of a soul submissive to the Father.*

At Christmastime, as I set out the small statuettes of our family's Nativity scene, my eyes are always drawn to Mary tenderly admiring her newborn Son lying in a manger. We obviously don't know if the artist's depiction of this scene is accurate, but I appreciate how it invites me to consider Mary and the enormous responsibility placed on her shoulders. Surely she must have been one of Heavenly Father's very elect to be chosen for her unique role as the mother of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world (see 1 Nephi 11:15–21; Mosiah 3:8).

## Royal Lineage

Many scriptures suggest that Jesus was of the royal lineage of King David (see Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; Matthew 1:1, 6, 17; Luke 1:32; Acts 2:29–30; Romans 1:3), but from whom did that lineage come? Mary or Joseph?

Elder James E. Talmage (1862–1933) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles wrote, “That Mary was of Davidic

descent is plainly set forth in many scriptures; for since Jesus was to be born of Mary, yet was not begotten by Joseph, who was the reputed, and, according to the law of the Jews, the legal, father, the blood of David's posterity was given to the body of Jesus through Mary alone.” Elder Talmage also explained, “Luke's record is regarded by many . . . as the pedigree of Mary, while Matthew's is accepted as that of Joseph.”<sup>1</sup>

## Submissive

We know little about Mary's life, but what we do know gives us an example of humble submissiveness (see Luke 1:38). When the angel appeared to her, he informed her that she was “highly favoured” and that “the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women” (Luke 1:28). Mary, being troubled by these words (see verse 29), was reassured by the angel: “Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God” (verse 30).

It's worth noting that for a woman in Jewish culture to become pregnant before marriage would have created a dire situation. Would Joseph, her espoused husband, now refuse to marry her, believing her to have broken Jewish law by having a relationship with another man? Would she be ostracized from Jewish society? Or worse, stoned? Would her own family think her sullied and disown her?

We don't know if these concerns flashed through Mary's mind in that moment, but in her brief, humble response, we see precisely why she was chosen in the first place: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38).

I'll do it, says Mary. Whatever is asked of me, however difficult it may seem, whatever the consequences may be to me personally, I'll do it.

## Courageous

When Mary was expecting, she sought out family for support, facing her



*As the mother of the Savior, Mary fulfilled her role with confidence and courage. Not only did she nurture and care for Him as a child, but she was with Him at the very end, witnessing His Crucifixion.*



duty with confidence and courage. Her interaction with her cousin Elizabeth is a testament to that strength. Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught:

“As the expectant mother of Jesus, Mary sought comfort and peace in the home of her cousin Elisabeth. Elisabeth greeted her: ‘Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb’ [Luke 1:42]. Mary responded with a beautiful, inspired psalm . . . :

“My soul doth magnify the Lord,  
“And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. . . .

“For he that is mighty hath done to

me great things; and holy is his name’ [Luke 1:46-47, 49].”<sup>2</sup>

Rather than think of her unanticipated pregnancy as a burden, Mary glorified God and rejoiced.

### Faithful

Mary’s example of obedience and faithfulness continued throughout her life. The scriptural account suggests that she became a devoted disciple of her holy Son and was with Him from time to time throughout His mission. She was also with Him at the very end, witnessing His Crucifixion. After the Ascension, she continued in prayer

with the Apostles (see Acts 1:14).

That example is one for all of us to follow—a life of faithfulness.

Christmas is a season of giving, and Mary, as a central figure in the scriptural account, shows us the one gift that matters more than all others: the gift of ourselves, the gift of aligning our will to God’s, humbly accepting His mission for us and fulfilling it to the utmost. That’s what Christ did, as did Mary, His mother before Him. ■

### NOTES

1. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 3rd ed. (1916), 86.
2. D. Todd Christofferson, “For He That Is Mighty Hath Done to Me Great Things” (BYU Women’s Conference address, May 3, 2019).



# BE OF Good Cheer







**By Cristina B. Franco**

Second Counselor in the Primary General Presidency

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## We can still find joy, even when things don't seem to be working out for us.

**E**ver since I was six or seven, I have loved to draw. My mother was talented that way, and she encouraged me to improve my skills. I don't have as much time now, but I still love to sketch and paint. When I'm stressed out, I look for a piece of paper so I can relax by drawing. I do it for the joy of doing it—it makes me happy to create beauty.

There is another who loves to create—our Father in Heaven. He created the perfect plan for us to be happy. His great plan of happiness allows us to come to earth from our pre-mortal life, obtain a body, use agency to make choices, walk the covenant path, and return to live with Him and His Son, Jesus Christ, eternally.

Unfortunately, sometimes we have to face hard things along the way. But we can still find joy, even when things don't seem to be working out for us. We can find happiness in our relationship with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. Remember, the Savior overcame the world for us. He invites us to be of good cheer and to live without fear, even though our crazy world is full of uncertainty, wars, rumors of wars, crime, terrorism, tragedies, and disappointments.

Fortunately, the world is also full of beautiful creations and inspiring individuals who are determined to serve, keep the commandments, and live with joy through adversity. We have temples, the priesthood, a living prophet who communicates with God, scriptures, repentance, and gratitude. And we must always remember that blessings continue to pour from heaven even when we're suffering through times that take us to our knees.

President Russell M. Nelson said, "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."<sup>1</sup>

Let us take comfort in this promise from the Lord: "Wherefore, be of good cheer, and do not fear, for I the Lord am with you, and will stand by you; and ye shall bear record of me, even Jesus Christ, that I am the Son of the living God, that I was, that I am, and that I am to come" (Doctrine and Covenants 68:6).

Simply having fun is not lasting happiness. Living the gospel brings happiness. So does being a good neighbor, a devoted parent or child, and a valiant disciple of Christ. That is how we create living art that colors our lives for good and brings us eternal joy. ■

### NOTE

1. Russell M. Nelson, "Joy and Spiritual Survival," *Ensign*, Nov. 2016, 82.



# WHAT CHILD IS THIS?

Words by William C. Dix

Duet or Two-part Choir

English folk song  
Arranged by Sally DeFord

*Gently* ♩ = 90-100 *Women unis. mp*

1. What Child is this \_\_\_\_ who,  
2. Why lies He in \_\_\_\_ such

laid to rest, \_\_\_\_ On Ma - ry's lap \_\_\_\_ is sleep - ing? Whom  
mean es - tate, \_\_\_\_ Where ox - en now \_\_\_\_ are feed - ing? Good

an - gels greet \_\_\_\_ with an - thems sweet, \_\_\_\_ While shep - herds watch \_\_\_\_ are  
Chris - tians, fear, \_\_\_\_ for sin - ners here \_\_\_\_ The si - lent Word \_\_\_\_ is

keep - ing? This, this \_\_\_\_ is Christ the King, \_\_\_\_ Whom  
plead - ing. Nails, spear \_\_\_\_ shall pierce Him through, \_\_\_\_ The

*Men unis. mf*





13

shep - herds guard and an - gels sing; Haste, haste to  
cross be borne for me, for you; Hail, hail, the

13

16

bring Him laud, The Babe, the Son of Ma - ry.  
Word made flesh, The Babe, the Son of

1.

16

19

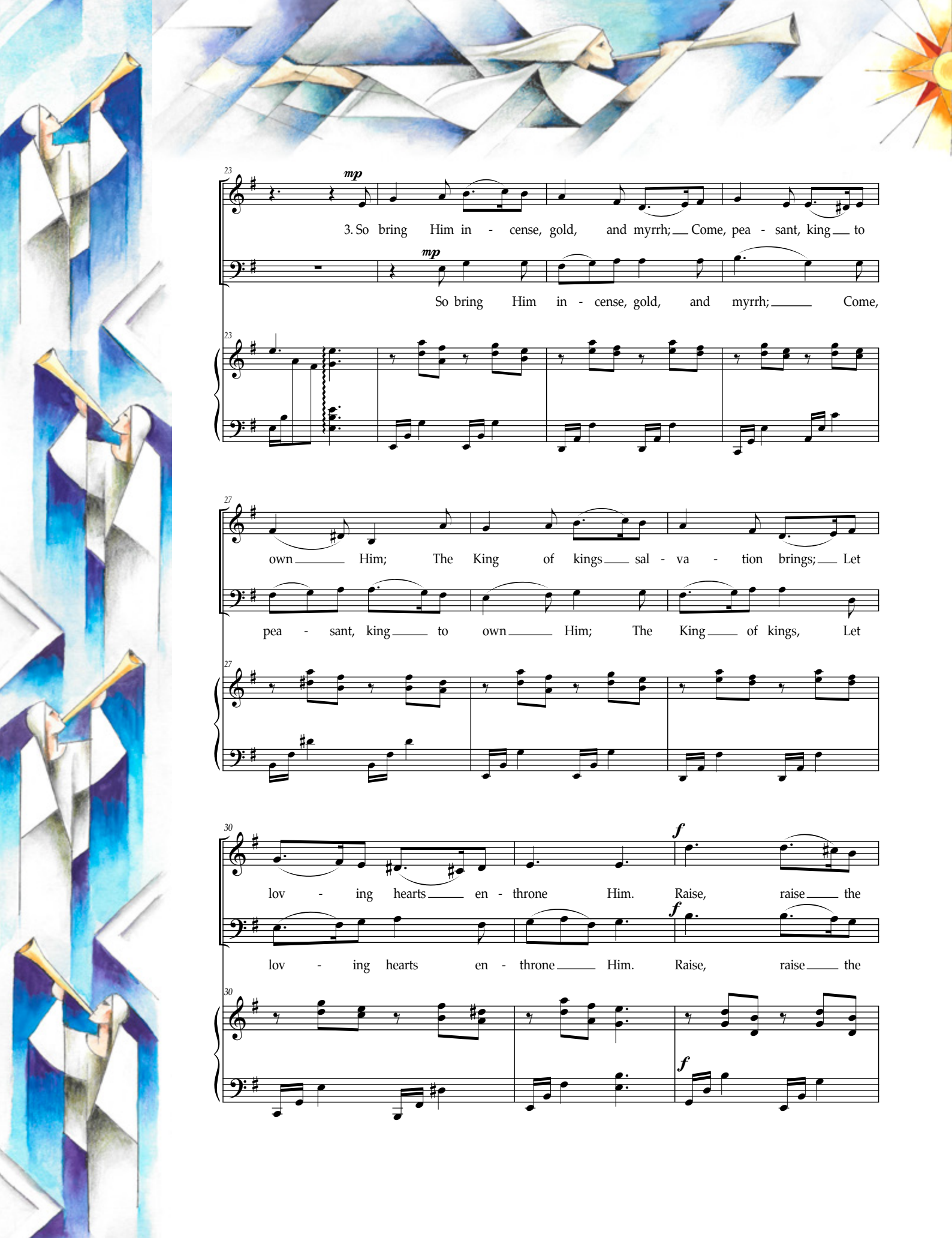
Ma - ry.

2.

19

*mp*





23 *mp*

3. So bring Him in - cense, gold, and myrrh;— Come, pea - sant, king— to

*mp*

So bring Him in - cense, gold, and myrrh;— Come,

23

27

own— Him; The King of kings— sal - va - tion brings;— Let

pea - sant, king— to own— Him; The King— of kings, Let

27

30 *f*

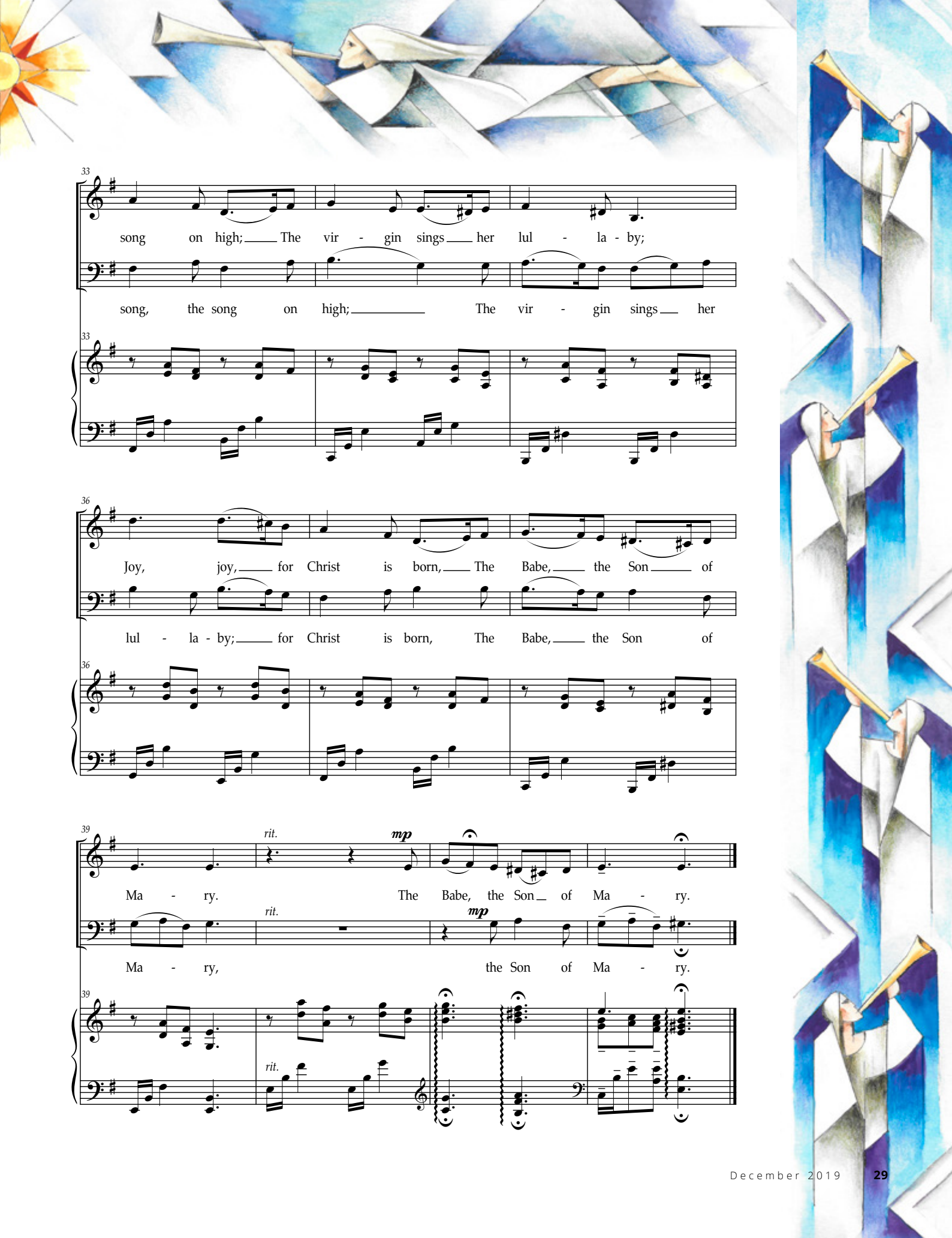
lov - ing hearts— en - throne Him. Raise, raise— the

*f*

lov - ing hearts en - throne— Him. Raise, raise— the

30 *f*





33

song on high; — The vir - gin sings — her lul - la - by;

song, the song on high; — The vir - gin sings — her

33

36

Joy, joy, — for Christ is born, — The Babe, — the Son — of

lul - la - by; — for Christ is born, The Babe, — the Son of

36

39

*rit.* *mp*

Ma - ry. The Babe, the Son — of Ma - ry.

*rit.* *mp*

Ma - ry, the Son of Ma - ry.

39

*rit.*

# Jesus Christ

## A MODEL OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Children and Youth encourages young people to follow the pattern set by the Savior.

By Charlotte Larcabal  
Church Magazines

When it comes to Jesus Christ's early years as a child and youth, we don't have much information. We know he "continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness" (Doctrine and Covenants 93:13), and we have a story of Jesus teaching in the temple and going "about [His] Father's business" (Luke 2:49), but beyond that, all we have is one sentence from Luke: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52).

Those few words of scripture may not seem like much, but they actually give us a clear pattern to follow. To become like Jesus Christ, we should develop spiritually, socially, physically, and intellectually. Children and Youth will show how this can be done through gospel learning, service and activities, and personal development.

### Increase in Favor with God (Spiritual)

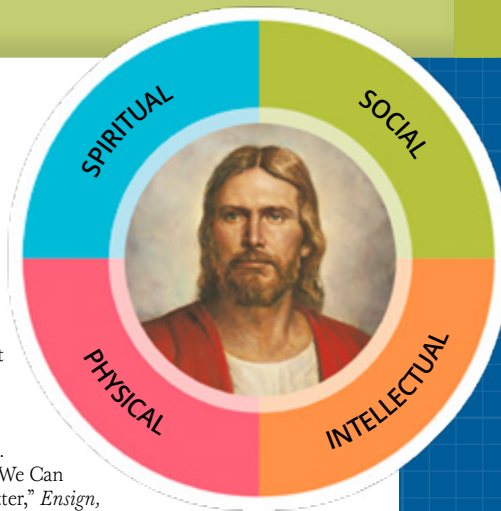
As we grow in obedience to God, making and keeping sacred covenants, we will feel a greater measure of His love. We will find it easier to recognize His influence in our lives, and our relationship with Him will grow. President Russell M. Nelson has taught, "When you know your life is being directed by God, regardless of the challenges and disappointments that may and will come, you will feel joy and peace."<sup>1</sup>

### Increase in Favor with Man (Social)

Instead of seeking approval and chasing popularity, we can follow the Savior's example of loving more fully, strengthening genuine relationships, and serving others. As President Dallin H. Oaks, First Counselor in the First Presidency, taught, "Our Savior teaches us to follow Him by making the sacrifices necessary to lose ourselves in unselfish service to others."<sup>2</sup> Doing so helps us develop more charity and become a more positive influence on those around us.

#### NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, "Hope of Israel" (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), [HopeofIsrael.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](http://HopeofIsrael.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).
2. Dallin H. Oaks, "Unselfish Service," *Ensign*, May 2009, 96.
3. Russell M. Nelson, "We Can Do Better and Be Better," *Ensign*, May 2019, 68.
4. Ezra Taft Benson, "Your Charge: To Increase in Wisdom and Favor with God and Man," *New Era*, Sept. 1979, 42.
5. Russell M. Nelson, "Youth of the Noble Birthright: What Will You Choose?" (Church Educational System devotional for young adults, Sept. 6, 2013), [broadcasts.lds.org](http://broadcasts.lds.org).
6. L. Tom Perry, "And Jesus Increased in Wisdom and Stature, and in Favour with God and Man" (Brigham Young University devotional, Feb. 11, 1992), 4, [speeches.byu.edu](http://speeches.byu.edu).
7. M. Russell Ballard, "Return and Receive," *Ensign*, May 2017, 62.



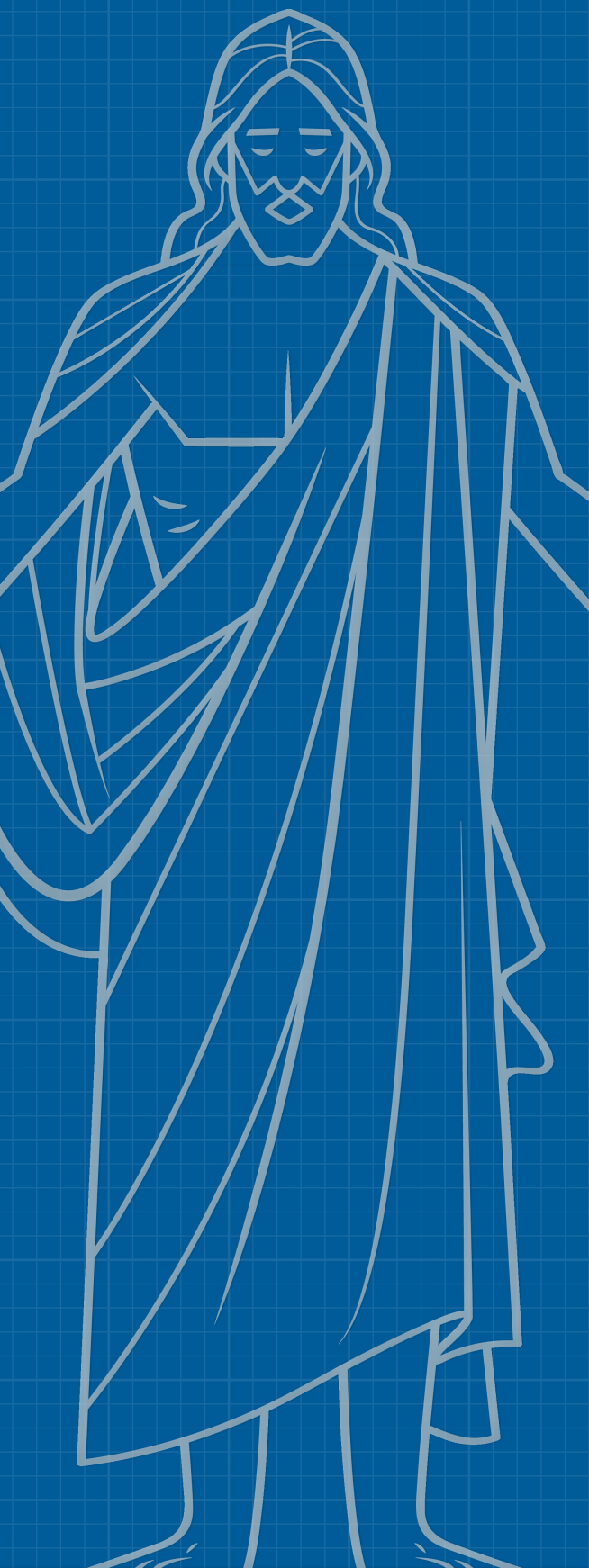
SPIRITUAL

SOCIAL

ILLUSTRATION BY BRYAN BEACH

LEFT: DETAIL FROM "THE LORD JESUS CHRIST" BY DEL PARSON





## PHYSICAL

### Increase in Stature (Physical)

Remember that your physical body is one of God's crowning creations. President Nelson has said: "I stand in awe of the miracle of the human body. It is a magnificent creation, essential to our gradual ascent toward our ultimate divine potential. We cannot progress without it. In giving us the gift of a body, God has allowed us to take a vital step toward becoming more like Him."<sup>3</sup>

To foster that growth and physical development, we must care for our bodies by eating right, obeying the Word of Wisdom, exercising, and adopting other healthy practices. Physical development can also include serving others through physical labor and taking care of your home, neighborhood, and the things around you. "A clean mind in a healthy body will enable you to render far more effective service to others," said President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994).<sup>4</sup>

## INTELLECTUAL

### Increase in Wisdom (Intellectual)

President Nelson has taught: "Wherever you are, develop a deep desire to learn. For us as Latter-day Saints, gaining an education is not just a privilege; it is a religious responsibility. The glory of God is intelligence. Indeed, our education is for the eternities."<sup>5</sup> Growing intellectually can mean acquiring new knowledge, learning new skills, or refining our ability to apply the knowledge we have. This pursuit need not begin or end in schools and has eternal consequences. As Elder L. Tom Perry (1922–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said: "Learn to appreciate the power and potential in your heads. Get out of your comfort zone! Expand your vision!"<sup>6</sup>

### A Vision and a Plan

President M. Russell Ballard, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, taught, "Those who accomplish the most in this world are those with a vision for their lives, with goals to keep them focused on their vision and tactical plans for how to achieve them."<sup>7</sup>

Following the Savior can give you and your children the clearest vision for growth. As you work together to learn the gospel and participate in service and activities, you will feel inspired and directed on how to become more like Him. ■

# ONE-A-DAY MINI Christmas Devotionals

Get in the Christmas spirit a little more each day by sharing these brief messages with family, friends, or those you minister to.



## December 1

**L**et us make Christmas real. It isn't just tinsel and ribbon, unless we have made it so in our lives. Christmas is the spirit of giving without a thought of getting. It is happiness because we see joy in people. It is forgetting self and finding time for others. It is discarding the meaningless and stressing the true values. It is peace because we have found peace in the Savior's teachings. It is the time we realize most deeply that the more love is expended, the more there is of it for others."<sup>1</sup>

—President Thomas S. Monson (1927–2018)

Find ways to give of your time to show others that you care. Scan the QR code below or visit [LightTheWorld.org](http://LightTheWorld.org) to sign up to receive daily text or email service prompts throughout December.



## December 2

**T**he sweetest gift given at Christmas will always be the one our Savior Himself gave us: His perfect peace. . . . Even in a world where peace seems far off, the Savior's gift of peace can live in our hearts regardless of our circumstances. If we accept the Savior's invitation to follow Him, lasting fear is forever banished."<sup>2</sup>

—Elder L. Whitney Clayton of the Presidency of the Seventy

Watch the video "Peace in Christ" ([ChurchofJesusChrist.org/go/1219a](http://ChurchofJesusChrist.org/go/1219a)).



## December 3

**C**hristmas is . . . a time of generosity. Inspired by that spirit, we sometimes spend hours looking for the perfect gift to give our friends and families. . . . We are prompted to spend a little more time with those we love. We become more aware of those in need, and often we extend ourselves more generously to aid them. All of this is our imperfect but heartfelt echo of the generosity of our Savior, whose birth we seek to honor."<sup>3</sup>

—Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Sing "Angels We Have Heard on High," *Hymns*, no. 203.





#### December 4

**I** invite you to find one person before Christmas to bring to Church by being kind and by helping and inviting that person to learn more about Jesus Christ. That may be the best gift you can give to the Savior this Christmas!”<sup>4</sup>

—**President M. Russell Ballard, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles**

Prayerfully think about someone you can invite to learn more about Jesus Christ.



#### December 5

**I**f you desire to find the true spirit of Christmas and partake of the sweetness of it, let me make this suggestion to you. During the hurry of the festive occasion of this Christmas season, find time to turn

your heart to God. Perhaps in the quiet hours, and in a quiet place, and on your knees—alone or with loved ones—give thanks for the good things that have come to you, and ask that His Spirit might dwell in you as you earnestly strive to serve Him and keep His commandments.”<sup>5</sup>

—**President Howard W. Hunter (1907–95)**  
Sing “A Child’s Prayer,” *Children’s Songbook*, 12–13.

#### December 6

**A**t this Christmas season . . . let us give the gift of love, the gift of service to those around us, and the true gift of forgiveness. For as we repent, the Holy One of Israel forgives us. I testify that He lives. He is the King of kings, the Prince of Peace, our Savior, our Redeemer, and our Friend.”<sup>6</sup>

—**Cristina B. Franco, Second Counselor in the Primary General Presidency**

Watch the video  
“The Reason Behind Christmas”  
([ChurchofJesusChrist.org/go/1219b](http://ChurchofJesusChrist.org/go/1219b)).



#### December 7

**T**he account of the first Christmas in the Book of Mormon helps us to learn and more fully understand that Jesus Christ is the ‘light which shineth in darkness’ [Doctrine and Covenants 10:58]. In every season of our lives, in all of the circumstances we may encounter, and in each challenge we may face, Jesus Christ is the light that dispels fear, provides assurance and direction, and engenders enduring peace and joy.”<sup>7</sup>

—**Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles**

Read Helaman 14:2–7.

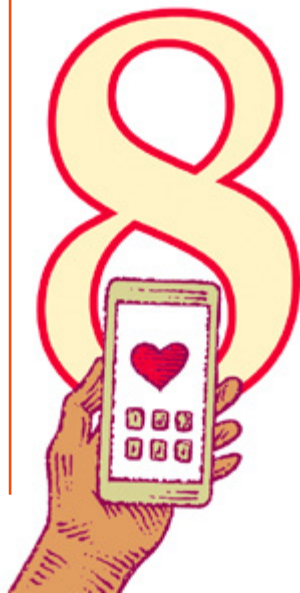


#### December 8

**W**hen times are difficult, we can make the choice to turn away from [the Savior] and struggle through our afflictions alone, or we can make the choice to turn to Him and the Father’s plan, finding that we will ‘suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ’ [Alma 31:38].”<sup>8</sup>

—**Linda K. Burton, former Relief Society General President**

Text or call a family member and let them know how much you care.





### December 9

“Children invite the magic of Christmas into our hearts. We miss something if we don’t see Christmas through a child’s eyes, for children see the lights, they hear the music, and they smell the fragrance of Christmas trees and candy canes with real anticipation. . . .

“... Through Christlike and childlike faith we seek [the Savior] and we feel His influence.”<sup>9</sup>

—**Rosemary M. Wixom, former Primary General President**

Watch the video “Kids and Christmas” ([ChurchofJesusChrist.org/go/1219c](http://ChurchofJesusChrist.org/go/1219c)).



### December 10

“Of all things of heaven and earth of which we bear testimony, none is so important as our witness that Jesus, the Christmas child, condescended to come to earth from the realms of His Eternal Father, here to work among men as healer and teacher, our Great Exemplar. . . .

“At this time of Christmas, this season when gifts are given, let us not forget that God gave His Son, and His Son gave His life, that each of us might have the gift of eternal life.”<sup>10</sup>

—**President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008)**

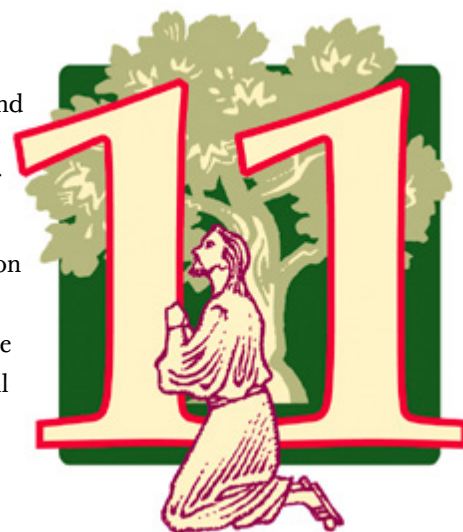
Read 1 John 4:9–11.

### December 11

“As we prepare for [the Savior’s] Second Coming, and as we stand in holy places, we persist in observing Christmas not just as a season of ‘Greetings’ or ‘Happy Holidays’ but as a celebration of the birth of the Son of God and a time to remember His teachings and the eternal significance of His Atonement. I pray that we will be faithful in doing so.”<sup>11</sup>

—**President Dallin H. Oaks, First Counselor in the First Presidency**

Read John 8:12; 2 Nephi 25:26.



### December 12

“Each member of Jesus’s earthly family—Mary, Joseph, and Jesus—stands as supernal examples of God’s Christmas gift to all mankind. . . . This family was unified in seeking God’s glory; unified in serving one another; unified in fulfilling God’s will; and unified in sacrifice, obedience, and love. This holy family provides us a pattern of attributes that, when emulated by our own families, will enable us to enjoy the same blessings of unity and love they enjoyed.”<sup>12</sup>

—**Elder Richard J. Maynes of the Seventy**

Sing “Families Can Be Together Forever,” *Hymns*, no. 300.



### December 13

**A**t the birth of the Savior, a multitude of the heavenly host praised God and proclaimed, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth *peace*, good will toward men’ [Luke 2:14; emphasis added]. . .

“The Savior is the source of true peace. Even with the trials of life, because of the Savior’s Atonement and His grace, righteous living will be rewarded with personal peace.”<sup>13</sup>

—Elder Quentin L. Cook of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Read John 14:26–27.

### December 14

**H**ow happy I am for this Christmas season to sing songs that have a special message from the Savior of the world for those with aching hearts. . . . If you think about the words you sing this season, you will find a divine message tailored especially for you that will lift and comfort you.”<sup>14</sup>

—Sharon Eubank, First Counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency

Share a Christmas carol with a friend or family member and explain why it is meaningful to you.



### December 16

**H**ow will we worship Him this season? Endlessly shopping? Hustling about and adorning our homes? Will that be our tribute to our Savior? Or will we bring peace to troubled hearts, goodwill to those in need of higher purpose, glory to God in our willingness to do His bidding?”<sup>16</sup>

—Elder Ronald A. Rasband of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Watch the video “He Is the Gift” (ChurchofJesusChrist.org/go/1219d).



### December 15

**W**ithout Christ, there would be no Christmas. Without Christ, there can be no fulness of joy. Without His birth and His Atonement, we would have no Intercessor, no Advocate with the Father, and no Mediator who makes it possible for us to return to the presence of our loving Heavenly Father and live together as eternal families.

“I celebrate with you the beautiful and miraculous reality of the birth and mission of the Son of God.”<sup>15</sup>

—Elder Gary E. Stevenson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Read Alma 7:10–12.





### December 17

"On this Christmas I send my love to every missionary, every man or woman in the military, every student, and every employee and traveler who won't 'be home for Christmas,' as the carol says. Keep your faith. Look for the good in your situation. Do something kind for someone. Seek Christ devoid of wrapping and tinsel. You will find that despite external circumstances, Christmas—like the kingdom of God—is 'within you' (Luke 17:21)." <sup>17</sup>

—Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Write a letter to someone to let them know you care.

### December 18

"Considering all that the Savior has done—and still does—for us, what can we do for Him? The greatest gift we could give to the Lord at Christmas, or at any other time, is to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, worthy to attend His holy temple. And His gift to us will be the peace of knowing that we are prepared to meet Him, whenever that time comes." <sup>18</sup>

—President Russell M. Nelson

Share your favorite quote or scripture about Christ.



### December 19

"Our hope is to capture the true spirit of Christmas for ourselves and for those we love. That spirit is characterized by peace. . . . The peace of Christmas is 'the peace of God, which passeth all understanding' [Philippians 4:7]. It is the peace that the Apostle Paul promised would 'keep [our] hearts and minds through Christ Jesus' [Philippians 4:7]. And Paul was right. That peace we seek is only through and because of Jesus Christ." <sup>19</sup>

—President Henry B. Eyring, Second Counselor in the First Presidency

Read Doctrine and Covenants 19:23–24.



### December 20

"As a child, I thought Christmas came just one day a year. As an adult, I now realize it is Christmas every day. Because of the benevolence of a loving Heavenly Father and a beloved Savior, Jesus Christ, we are the recipients of a continuous flow of heavenly gifts—every day. Heavenly gifts too numerous to mention." <sup>20</sup>

—Elder Kevin R. Duncan of the Seventy

Read Moroni 10:8–19 and consider how you might use your spiritual gifts to serve others.



### December 21

"The story of the Savior's birth represents only a part of why we feel the Spirit during the Christmas season. Christmas is not only a celebration of *how* Jesus came into the world but also of knowing *who* He is—our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—and of *why* He came." <sup>21</sup>

—Elder Craig C. Christensen of the Seventy

Invite a friend or family over to watch *The Christ Child* (LightTheWorld.org).





## December 22

**I** think it's appropriate this time of year to just think about that baby in the manger. Don't be too overwhelmed or occupied with what is to come; just think about that little baby. Take a quiet, peaceful moment to ponder the beginning of His life—the culmination of heavenly prophecy but the earthly beginning for Him.”<sup>22</sup>

—**Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles**

Sing “Away in a Manger,” *Hymns*, no. 206.



## December 23

**I**t seems appropriate that giving and receiving gifts is a central part of Christmas. After all, we are celebrating the matchless gift of God's Son, the Savior Jesus Christ. Of course, our gifts to each other will never compare to this gift, but I believe that the joy of giving and receiving gifts can turn our hearts toward the ‘gifts of God’ [Moroni 10:8].”<sup>23</sup>

—**Douglas D. Holmes, First Counselor in the Young Men General Presidency**

Read Matthew 7:7–11.



## December 24

**A**s we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ this season, let us also celebrate all that His birth symbolizes, especially the love. When we see shepherds, may we remember to be humble. When we see wise men, may we remember to be generous. When we see the star, may we remember the Light of Christ, which gives life and light to all things. When we see a tiny baby, may we remember to love unconditionally, with tenderness and compassion.”<sup>24</sup>

—**Bonnie L. Oscarson, former Young Women General President**

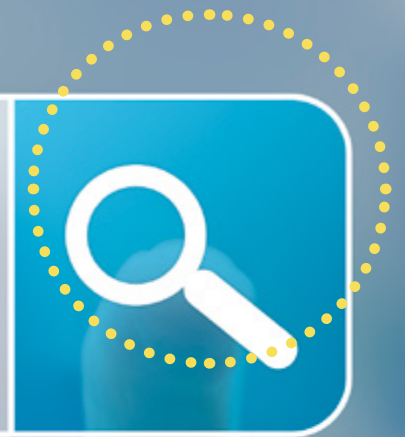
Read Luke 2:1–20 (consider acting out the Nativity story with your family).

*Except where indicated, all references in the notes below are to talks from First Presidency Christmas devotionals (listed by speaker, title, and year of the devotional). Find the full talks at [broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](http://broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).*

### NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “Christmas Is Love” (2012).
2. L. Whitney Clayton, “Fear Not” (2015).
3. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “The Generous One” (2015).
4. M. Russell Ballard, “Questions and Answers” (Brigham Young University devotional, Nov. 14, 2017), 4, [speeches.byu.edu](http://speeches.byu.edu).
5. Howard W. Hunter, “The Real Christmas,” *Ensign*, Dec. 2015, 80.
6. Cristina B. Franco, “Christmas—a Season to Love, Serve, and Forgive One Another” (2017).
7. David A. Bednar, “The Light and the Life of the World” (2015).
8. Linda K. Burton, “Oh, Come, Let Us Adore Him—and the Plan!” (2015).
9. Rosemary M. Wixom, “What Happened Next?” (2013).
10. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Son of God,” *Ensign*, Dec. 1992, 6.
11. Dallin H. Oaks, “Prophetic Announcements of Christ's Birth” (2016).
12. Richard J. Maynes, “The Christmas Story Is a Family Story” (2014).
13. Quentin L. Cook, “Personal Peace: The Reward of Righteousness,” *Ensign*, May 2013, 32, 35.
14. Sharon Eubank, “Silent Night, Love's Pure Light” (2018).
15. Gary E. Stevenson, “The Reality of Christmas,” *Ensign*, Dec. 2014, 25.
16. Ronald A. Rasband, “Glory to God” (2013).
17. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Christmas within You,” *Ensign*, Dec. 2012, 12.
18. Russell M. Nelson, “The Peace and Joy of Knowing the Savior Lives,” *Ensign*, Dec. 2011, 21.
19. Henry B. Eyring, “Gifts of Peace” (2016).
20. Kevin R. Duncan, “Heavenly Gifts” (2017).
21. Craig C. Christensen, “The Fulness of the Story of Christmas” (2016).
22. D. Todd Christofferson, “Be at Peace,” *Ensign*, Dec. 2015, 30.
23. Douglas D. Holmes, “The Gift of the Holy Ghost” (2016).
24. Bonnie L. Oscarson, “Christmas Is Christlike Love” (2014).

# The Hunt for **HAPPINESS**





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## I was living the gospel. Why was happiness still so elusive?

**By David Dickson**

Church Magazines

It's the middle of the night. My eyes snap open as my restless sleep is cut short. "Oh no," I pray. "Not again."

But the tremors begin almost immediately. In a terrifying burst of trembling that's as baffling and foreign as it is debilitating, my entire body begins to jerk up and down as if in a seizure. My hands and feet burn with heat from an unseen source. My wife jerks awake and holds me tightly, reassuring me with her quiet presence.

Happiness, what I had once considered my default state of being, is nowhere in sight.

If I had one question that dark night—other than to wonder what was going on physically (which I later learned)—it would have been to ask why I was feeling so unhappy when I was striving to live the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There are many potential obstacles to happiness. Wickedness is certainly one of them (see Alma 41:10). Yet even for the faithful, happiness can feel out of reach at times.

We all have moments when we need to hear that happier times are ahead. Maybe you're living through one right now. If so, please allow me to say with all sincerity that brighter days *are* indeed coming your way. I hope you'll be willing to stick with me a bit longer before dismissing such a sweeping statement as foolish or naive.

I truly believe, no matter what you're going through, that greater happiness can be yours to claim.

Please allow me to explain why.

### What Is Happiness?

What *is* happiness, anyway? Is it the feeling you get when someone sneaks a favorite treat into your lunch box? Is it a raise at work? Marrying your eternal companion? Feeling cleansed from sin through the power of Jesus Christ's Atonement?

Is it all of the above?

This discussion will look at what the gospel, as well as psychological science, can each teach us about happiness. Beginning on page 16 of this issue, Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles teaches us the critical truth that true joy is a life centered in Jesus Christ.

Similarly, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: “Ultimate happiness, true peace, and anything even remotely close to scriptural joy are found first, foremost, and forever in living the gospel of Jesus Christ. Lots of other philosophies and systems of belief have been tried. Indeed, it seems safe to say that virtually every other philosophy and system has been tried down through the centuries of history.”<sup>1</sup>

If *every* other philosophy has been tried, an exhaustive list would be impossible to include. Even so, let’s consider a few worldly myths regarding how to be happy.

According to the world, lasting happiness is found by:

- Achieving financial prosperity, especially if it’s *more* than those around you.
- Being popular.
- Living a life of ease, leisure, and excitement.
- Traveling extensively and experiencing many of the world’s wonders firsthand.
- Achieving a position of power or authority in your career, community, or any other setting.
- Changing your body to look a certain way.

What do those various strategies have in common? For one thing, they’re all linked to circumstances. But as President Russell M. Nelson taught, “The joy we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives.”<sup>2</sup>

Again, what should our focus be on to find that joy? President Nelson taught, “For Latter-day Saints, Jesus Christ is joy!”<sup>3</sup>

Joy is not an emotion that’s merely nice to have if you can get it. No, President Nelson described joy as “a principle that is key to our spiritual survival.”<sup>4</sup>

So joy and happiness are clearly worth the struggle. And

most of us are willing to work at it. Why, then, do so many—including the righteous—continue to struggle?

For one thing, that very struggle is key to why we’re here in the first place.

## Here to Grow

Sometimes we think of happiness as a life without problems or hardships. However, a life without struggle would not allow us the growth we came here to experience.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles once taught: “One’s life . . . cannot be both faith-filled and stress-free.

“ . . . How can you and I really expect to glide naively through life, as if to say, ‘Lord, give me experience, but not grief, not sorrow, not pain, not opposition, not betrayal, and certainly not to be forsaken. Keep from me, Lord, all those experiences which made Thee what Thou art! Then let me come and dwell with Thee and fully share Thy joy!’”<sup>5</sup>

Clearly we need struggles in life in order to grow, and being righteous plainly doesn’t spare us suffering. Examine the lives of Joseph Smith, Job, the people of Alma, and especially of our Savior Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

No, righteous living does *not* spare us from all trouble and trials. None are spared. Yet you can also expect God’s help and healing (see Alma 36:3, 27). Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, “For you, the righteous, the Healer of our souls, in His time and His way, will heal all your wounds.”<sup>7</sup>

If you are feeling wounded, healing is within reach. Of that you can be certain (see Mosiah 14:4–5).

## Happiness and Genetics

One item to consider early on: research has shown that a significant portion of our baseline mood, mental health, and corresponding happiness in terms of day-to-day functioning can be influenced by genetics.

Not everyone has the same body type or hair color. Similarly, not everyone has the same naturally cheerful disposition. But that’s only one piece of the puzzle.



Brigham Young University professor Hank Smith wrote, “What if you happened to get a really bad hand of cards in the DNA game? Does that mean you’re dead in the water—that you’ll never be happy and there’s nothing you can do about it? Absolutely not. . . . If the chemicals in your brain are just not working the way they’re supposed to because

of inherited tendencies (aka depression, anxiety, etc.), there are medications and practices that can get those chemicals to healthy levels.”<sup>8</sup>

Let’s examine some of the intentional strategies—some from the gospel, and others from scientific study—that can increase our opportunities for happiness.

## NINE STRATEGIES OF HAPPY PEOPLE



### **Strategy 1: Live the Gospel**

As President Nelson, Elder Holland, Elder Bednar, and others teach, true happiness comes from living the gospel. The gospel of Jesus Christ is also referred to as the “plan of happiness” (see Alma 42:8). The scriptures are full of counsel about righteousness being requisite for true happiness (see 2 Nephi 2:13 and Mosiah 2:41 for two examples among *many*).

It’s simple, it’s powerful, and it’s foundational. Fully embracing and living the gospel of Jesus Christ is the most important step you can take in finding greater joy and happiness in this life and the life to come.

### **Strategy 2: Spend Your Days “Engaged in a Good Cause” (Doctrine and Covenants 58:27)**

Inheriting a fortune that allowed you to lounge on the beach forever would almost certainly be detrimental to your happiness—even though worldly logic shouts otherwise. The truth is, we need to stay engaged in meaningful work to be happy.

“Franklin D. Roosevelt had it right: ‘Happiness lies not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort.’”<sup>9</sup>

Meaningful work creates a satisfaction we can’t get any other way.

Elder Ulisses Soares of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that “achieving happiness typically involves a long-sustained effort for something more important in life.”<sup>10</sup> Such meaningful work may extend beyond a sort of job or career. It includes raising kids, serving in the Church, or volunteering your time and talents.

### Strategy 3: Choose Gratitude

The power of choosing to live with gratitude is so transformative to everyday thinking that the practice is often referred to as a way to “rewire your brain.”

Let’s be honest—even when life is running smoothly, a piercing eye can still detect something to complain about. The reverse, however, is also true: no matter how hard things become, we can *always* find something to be thankful for.

And that’s where something beautiful happens.

Here’s a simple but powerful experiment: try keeping a gratitude journal. Every day for at least three weeks, write down three things you’re grateful for that happened *that day*. In addition, feel free to add a few general things you’re thankful for such as flowers, family, or food.

Soon you’ll find that you not only notice more easily those things you can add to your list, but you actually start expecting to find them. Living with more gratitude helps you better find joy in your current circumstances, which has a significant and direct effect on your happiness.<sup>11</sup>

*Forbes* magazine reports, “Cultivating gratitude doesn’t



cost any money and it certainly doesn’t take much time, but the benefits are enormous.”<sup>12</sup>

What are you thankful for today?



### Strategy 4: Spend Time Outside

Spending time outdoors, especially in nature, offers all sorts of benefits, like lowering stress and heart rate, or clearing your thoughts.

*Time* magazine reported on a study about nature’s ability to revitalize us. According to the study, “People began to feel psychologically restored after just 15 minutes of sitting outside in both the park and forest.”<sup>13</sup>

It’s hard to feel happy if we feel constantly drained and stressed. Try to get outside for a half hour or so most days of the week, more if you can manage it. Why not get out and enjoy it a little more often?



### **Strategy 5: Limit Screen Time**

Too much screen time isn't good for our happiness. The time you spend staring at a TV screen, computer, tablet, or phone adds up and can have negative effects on our mental health, especially when it comes to social media. Best-selling author Jean M. Twenge, who studied this topic extensively, explains: "The more time [people] spend looking at screens, the more likely they are to report symptoms of depression."<sup>14</sup>

President Nelson has said, "If you are paying more attention to feeds from social media than you are to the whisperings of the Spirit, then you are putting yourself at spiritual risk—as well as the risk of experiencing intense loneliness and depression."<sup>15</sup> So go ahead, give yourself some time away from your screens. You'll thank yourself later.

### **Strategy 6: Be Present**

If you're human, there's a roughly 100 percent chance you've said or done something you wish you hadn't. Most likely, a lot of somethings. What's odd, though, is how often most people choose to relive such moments in their mind.

Latter-day Saint author John Bytheway writes about the problems of dwelling on the past: "Miserable people have a recycle bin full of past mistakes. Every day they rethink their regrets and recycle their remorse. Their language is full of phrases like, 'I should've,' 'I would've,' 'I could've,' 'Why didn't I?' and 'If only.' They never look where they're going because they can't take their eyes off where they've been."<sup>16</sup>

He also writes about the complementary problem of dwelling too much on the future: "Miserable people look for some outside event to make them happy. 'As soon as I graduate, I'll be happy.' After they graduate, they say, 'Well, as soon as I get a job, I'll be happy.' After they get a job, they say, 'Okay, as soon as I get married, I'll be happy.' . . . If you're determined to be miserable, then think of life as a waiting room, and happiness as your doctor."<sup>17</sup>

We tend to find the greatest happiness and well-being when we live in and focus on what's happening in our lives right now.

In mental health and psychiatry circles, the term "mindfulness" is a shorthand way of describing being fully engaged in the moment.

Mental health experts advise, "Fears and insecurities about the past and the future can make it difficult to fully enjoy the present."<sup>18</sup>

Here are a few tips to practice living with mindfulness:

1. Keep a gratitude journal (see strategy 3 above), especially listing several things you are grateful for from that day.
2. Spend time meditating daily. Find a peaceful spot to sit without distractions. Close your eyes and pay attention to your breathing. If thoughts come, acknowledge them, release them, then return to focusing on your breathing. This may sound odd, but it's great mental practice for focusing on the present.
3. Pay closer attention to mundane tasks you normally do on auto-pilot, like washing the dishes, driving, or even eating. Feel the soapy water over your hands. Observe the trees, people, and buildings as you drive. Savor the taste and texture of each bite.
4. Pray to notice people who need your help that day. Then pay close attention and be prepared to act.
5. Switch up your routines from time to time and truly experience a new route home, the unfamiliar layout of a different grocery store, or a change in your typical evening activities.

### Strategy 7: Connect with Others

In terms of happiness and overall health, focusing on meaningful relationships is vital.

Emma Seppälä, PhD, writes that “strong social connection:

- leads to a 50% increased chance of longevity
- strengthens your immune system . . .
- helps you recover from disease faster.”

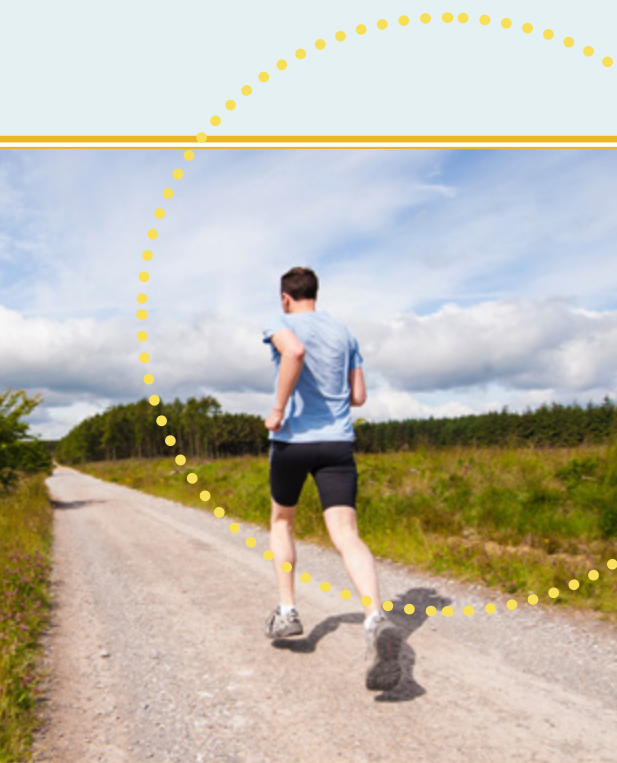
She continues, “People who feel more connected to others have lower levels of anxiety and depression.”<sup>19</sup>

When it comes to meaningful relationships, a few deep ones are probably better than many shallow ones. We needn’t

overschedule our free time with constant social events, but we desperately need human connection. Even for introverted personality types, there are many ways to deepen connections among your circle of friends and family.

With regard to family, Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles once taught, “In family relationships *love* is really spelled *t-i-m-e*, time.”<sup>20</sup>

Since you’ve already carved out extra time by cutting back on screen use (hint, hint), consider replacing some of it with face-to-face interactions. Ministering visits, sports leagues, stamp-collecting clubs . . . or anything that lets you connect with others can help increase your happiness and well-being.



### Strategy 8: Take Care of Your Temple

Giving your body quality sleep, proper nutrition, and adequate exercise can yield big happiness gains. Our emotions are centered in our brain, which, like any other organ in your body, benefits greatly from improved health practices.

The steps you take to improve your physical health ultimately includes improving your brain, which is part of your physical body. This can help you think more clearly, focus more readily, and stabilize your emotions.

With health habits, a good rule of thumb is to start slowly and make one change at a time. Start with small things like walking more or improving what you eat, when possible. Small changes add up.

### Strategy 9: Look Outward

The previous eight strategies might seem more obvious than this final one, but happiness is often found when you’re not focused on it directly.

Elder Holland has taught: “Happiness is not easy to find running straight for it. It is usually too elusive, too ephemeral, too subtle. If you haven’t learned it already, you will learn in the years ahead that most times happiness comes to us when we least expect it, when we are busy doing something else. Happiness is almost always a by-product of some other endeavor.”<sup>21</sup>

By all means, do everything possible to cultivate strategies and habits for happiness. After doing all we can, though, it’s time to turn outward and let happiness find us as we seek to help others.



## Happiness and Mental Illness

When it comes to medical conditions like depression and anxiety, happiness becomes a more complex creature. The late-night tremors I mentioned earlier turned out to be symptoms of anxiety brought on by clinical depression.

In my life, when I've been in the full throes of darkness and uncertainty that is clinical depression, I could no more "choose to feel happy" than choose my height or eye color.

What I can *always* choose, however, is to fight back against the darkness. I can reach up to God. I can use all the tools at my disposal, from faith and prayer to modern medicine.

For me, emerging successfully from depressive episodes over the years always involves a multifaceted approach. I must look to my physical health (exercise, nutrition, sleep), my medical health (medication, vitamins, consultations with doctors), my emotional health (counseling, connecting with others), and my spiritual health (prayer, scripture study, serving in the Church, time in the temple) in balanced measures.

Despite some of the painful lows I've experienced over the years from depression, I am blessed to experience happiness and positivity *most of the time!* I feel deeply for those of you more strongly and more persistently affected by mental illness than I, but even for you, I fully believe that the Prince of Peace will heal all your sorrows (see John 14:27).

Depression tells many lies when it comes to happiness. It asserts that things won't ever improve. One potent antidote to this particular lie—for me, at least—is found in my favorite hymn, "Be Still, My Soul."

*Be still, my soul: Thy God doth undertake  
To guide the future as he has the past.  
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake;  
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.*<sup>22</sup>

Beautiful truths, aren't they? As I look back over my life, I have no doubt that God has blessed, strengthened, and guided me all along the way. Thus, I know He will be there for me in the future, just as I know God will guide you along your path to happier days.

Through Him, your happiness will someday be made complete. ■

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December 9–15, 23–29 (Revelation 1–22)

# The Book of Revelation: A Testament to the Lamb of God

The key to understanding the book of Revelation is to simply remember why it exists: to testify of the mission, mercy, and majesty of Christ.

By **Nicholas J. Frederick**

Assistant Professor of Ancient Scripture, Brigham Young University

**T**he book of Revelation is certainly one of the more daunting books of scripture in our canon. Before they have even finished the opening chapter, readers encounter a blur of cities with strange names, stars and candlesticks, and a mysterious figure variously identified as “the Son of man” (verse 13), “the first and the last” (verse 11), and “Alpha and Omega” (verse 8), out of whose mouth appears “a sharp twoedged sword” (verse 16).

By the time readers cross the finish line of John’s vision 21 chapters later, they will have encountered—among other things—colored horses, a terrifying dragon, beasts from both the land and the sea, and scores of angels blowing trumpets and emptying vials upon the people of the earth.

Readers of the book of Revelation can come away anxious and fearful as they discern between both the literal and figurative depictions of what awaits those who live in the final days prior to the Lord’s Second Coming.

## The Key to John’s Revelation: Jesus Christ

It is understandably easy to get caught up in the supernatural frenzy that runs through so much of John’s vision. After all, all of these symbols (wings, horns, eyes) and numbers (3½, 6, 7, 12, 144,000) beckon the reader to “crack the code” and decipher mysterious secrets hidden within John’s lengthy vision. However, to read the text of the book of Revelation as a

sort of intricate puzzle that must be solved risks going beyond the mark and missing the vision’s central message. After all, Joseph Smith once said that “the book of Revelation is one of the plainest books God ever caused to be written.”<sup>1</sup>

A simple “key” that readers can use to understand the book of Revelation comes in the first five words of John’s record: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:1). When we read about the dragon, the beast, the vials, the trumpets, and so forth, we need to do so within the context of the work and mission of our Savior, Jesus Christ. All that comes after verse 1 needs to be read through the lens of “What does this tell me about Jesus?” This mind-set actually goes to the heart of what the term *revelation* in the title means. In the original Greek, the word for “revelation” is *apocalypsis*, from which we get our word *apocalypse*. But unlike the modern use of *apocalypse* to refer to the end of the world, *apocalypsis* means “to unveil something that is hidden.” What John’s vision





*When we read about the dragon, the beast, the vials, the trumpets, and so forth, we need to do so within the context of the work and mission of our Savior, Jesus Christ.*





*What can we learn from Revelation 5, where Christ is represented by both a lion and a lamb?*

serves to do, then, is to “unveil” Jesus Christ—to *reveal* his true nature, character, and mission.

Thus the book of Revelation is a vision that gradually “unveils” elements of the Savior and His atoning mission through the use of various images and symbols. One of the most important of these is the image of Jesus as a “Lamb,” a symbol that appears near the beginning of John’s vision and is a continual presence (although not always in the foreground) throughout. By the time John reaches the climactic end of his vision, the true nature and character of the Lamb will be revealed.

### **Revelation 5: Jesus as the “Conquering Lamb”**

One of the most vivid of these unveilings comes in Revelation 5. Here John stands before the throne of God. The Father, sitting on the throne, holds a sealed book (really a scroll) in His right hand, and a “strong angel” asks the question, “Who is worthy to open the book?”—that is, break the seals (verse 2). John weeps as he beholds that no person is found worthy to open and read the book (see verse 4).

John is informed by one of the elders that “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath

prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof” (verse 5). Yet when John finally sees this “Lion,” it is no lion at all. Rather, what John sees is a “Lamb as it had been slain,” who approaches the throne and takes the book from the Father.

Those gathered round the throne begin to sing praises to the Lamb:

“Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

“And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth” (verses 9–10).

Some see in this episode Jesus accepting the divine role of Savior in a premortal setting, while others understand it as Jesus returning to the presence of the Father following His sojourn in mortality.

What fascinates me as a reader of the book of Revelation is the paradox used to represent Jesus as two contrary animals, a lion and a lamb. It is difficult to think of two more different animals to pair together. Lions represent strength and regality, and they had a particular connection with the tribe of Judah (see Genesis 49:9; 1 Kings 10:19–20), from which it was prophesied the Messiah Himself would descend. A lamb, on the other hand, is an animal often associated with docility and meekness, in every way the antithesis of the lion. As if to emphasize the meekness of the Lamb even further, this particular Lamb is slain, or sacrificed, and it is the shedding of the blood of the Lamb that sets in motion the events that John will view next.

Revelation 5, with its images of Jesus as both a “Lion” and a “Lamb,” presents its readers with a riddle of sorts: Can victory be obtained through



submission? Can one conquer through meekness? Can life be obtained through death? John's vision will be, in large part, an attempt to provide answers to these riddles.

### Revelation 7: Jesus as the “Redemptive Lamb”

In Revelation 7, the scene shifts to a group of 144,000 (12,000 from each tribe of Israel) who are “sealed” in their foreheads. In conjunction with this scene, John also sees a crowd of people, so many that “no man could number” them (verse 9). This group, clothed in white, stands before the Lamb and collectively praises the Lamb. John is then told that these people represent those “which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (verse 14). Here in Revelation 7 John learns that the blood of the Lamb plays a further important function—namely, to cleanse the innumerable host who stand before the Lamb.

John's vision again presents its readers with a riddle. When blood touches clothing, the blood typically stains it. An article of clothing that is “washed” in blood should turn red. But, in this case, the blood of the Lamb turns a stained article of clothing white, signifying the redemptive power of the Lamb. This serves as an inspiring and hopeful symbol of Jesus's Atonement; He is able to take those who repent and transform them into something that they never could be on their own.

### Revelation 13: Jesus and the “Parodied Lamb”

In Revelation 12, John sees a dragon cast out from heaven. The dragon, he learns, is “that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan” (verse 9). In

the next chapter, John learns that this dragon is associated with two beasts, one from the sea and one from the earth (see 13:1, 11). John describes the first beast in terms that are eerily similar to the conquering and redemptive Lamb that John has witnessed thus far:

“And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.

“And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast.

“And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast” (verses 2–4).

What John witnesses here is a parody or counterfeit of the true Lamb. Like the true Lamb, this beast was critically wounded and should be dead yet isn't, and like the true Lamb who serves at the behest of God sitting upon His throne, this beast serves the dragon.

With this scene, John's vision warns readers that they have reached a crisis of decision—each of us must choose which being, the beast or the

*The blood of the Lamb cleanses the innumerable host, symbolizing how our Savior's Atonement can cleanse those who repent.*





*The Church is compared to Christ's bride, reminding us of the love the Savior has for us.*

ILLUSTRATION OF CHURCH BY JUSTIN KUNZ

Lamb, we will align ourselves with. The adversary is quite adept at taking truth and reconstructing it in a way that serves his needs while still appearing to be true. Only by a close examination, only through additional witnesses, can we be confident that we have chosen wisely.

### Revelation 19–22: Jesus as the “Divine Lamb”

In Revelation 19, the scene shifts once again to a large wedding banquet, celebrating the marriage of the Lamb to His bride, “arrayed in fine linen, clean and white” (verse 8). It is from this scene that the true nature of the Lamb is finally made known, as John witnesses “heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True” (verse 11). The Savior, now fully revealed as “King of Kings, and Lord of Lords” (verse 16), falls upon the beast, slaying its followers with the “sword” that “proceeded out of his mouth”—the word of God (verse 21). Evil is conquered, and the New Jerusalem is established upon the “new,” celestial earth (see 21:1–2). In the midst of this scene rests “the throne of God and of the Lamb” (22:3).

For a dark and at times horrifying vision, the book of Revelation ends with one of the most beautiful and poignant images in all of scripture:

“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

“He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son” (21:6–7).

### Choosing to Follow the Lamb

While the book of Revelation can feel intimidating and appear dark and foreboding, with its chaotic imagery and intense scenes of violence, focusing

on the Lamb allows us to keep John’s central theme front and center—this is “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” What is revealed is Jesus’s sacrifice, His patience, and His love for each of us, that we are all “lambs” seeking our shepherd.

John’s vision reminds us that the stakes are as high as they can be and that the day when we must, in Joshua’s words, “choose you this day whom ye will serve” (Joshua 24:15) is here. Will we choose the Lamb, who has given us everything, or will we choose the dragon, who seeks only to make us as miserable as he is? (see 2 Nephi 2:27). The choice may seem, at first glance, a difficult one, as the world can be an alluring arena. But the ultimate message of Revelation, the one that John desires that we remember long after we finish his record, is simply this: Jesus wins! ■

#### NOTE

1. Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 5:342.

#### DISCOVER MORE

For additional insights, read “Messages of the Book of Revelation for Latter-day Saints” by Richard D. Draper in the digital version of this issue in the Gospel Library app or at [ensign.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://ensign.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).



## SYMBOLISM IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The book of Revelation is filled with symbolism that can be difficult to interpret. The following charts can be used as a tool to help you study and understand John's vision. The information comes from a variety of sources, including from scholars both inside and outside the Church.

### Numbers

- **7:** completion; a number often taken to represent God and His divine Creation (Revelation 5:6).
- **3½:** incomplete; half of 7 (Revelation 11:9); sometimes expressed as 1,260 days (3½ years; Revelation 11:3), 42 months (3½ years; Revelation 11:2), or "a time, and times, and half a time" (Revelation 12:14).
- **4:** pertaining to the earth; four corners/four directions (Revelation 7:1).
- **6:** divine counterfeit; a number that is close to 7 but comes up short.
- **666:** likely representing the counterfeit trinity of the dragon and the two beasts—they are a "false godhead"; historically it likely referred to the Roman emperor Nero (Revelation 13:18).
- **12:** pertaining to Israel; twelve tribes of Israel; New Jerusalem measures 12,000 stadia (Revelation 7:5–8).
- **1,000:** a number signifying "a lot" of something (Revelation 5:11).
- **144,000:** (12 x 12 x 1,000), the number of the elect, perhaps signifying that there are a lot of them (Revelation 7:4).

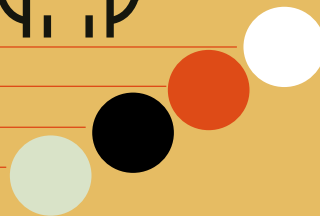
### Beings

- **Lamb:** Jesus Christ (Revelation 5:6).
- **Dragon:** Satan (Revelation 12:3).
- **Beast from the sea:** false Messiah (Revelation 13:1).
- **Beast from the land:** false prophet or false Holy Spirit (Revelation 13:11).
- **Harlot:** Babylon, the great and abominable church (Revelation 17:3; see also 1 Nephi 13:5–6).
- **Bride:** the Church of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7).

### Other

- **Eyes:** knowledge or wisdom (Revelation 5:6; Doctrine and Covenants 77:4).
- **Horns:** power or authority (Revelation 5:6).
- **Wings:** motion or speed (Revelation 4:8; Doctrine and Covenants 77:4).
- **White:** righteousness or conquest (Revelation 6:2).
- **Red:** violence or bloodshed (Revelation 6:4).
- **Black:** ominous foreshadowing (Revelation 6:5).
- **Pale:** light green color; sickness or death (Revelation 6:8).
- **Trumpets:** warnings of judgment (Revelation 8:2).
- **Vials:** judgment (Revelation 16:1).
- **Seals:** belonging to someone (Revelation 7:3–4).
- **Scroll/book:** God's plan of redemption (Revelation 5:1).

3 1/2





By Bishop  
Gérald Caussé  
Presiding Bishop

# Follow the Path of Happiness

FAITH

**M**y assignment as a member of the Presiding Bishopric is exciting and inspiring. However, this experience is very different from what I had planned in my youth.

As a child, I wanted to be an archaeologist. My grandmother gave me a book on the young pharaoh now known as King Tut, and from that I developed a passion for ancient civilizations. I spent many weekends creating drawings of ancient battles, and the walls of my room were covered with these pictures. I had a dream of one day going to Egypt to participate in the digs of ancient Egyptian temples and the tombs of the pharaohs.

Four decades later, I am still not an archaeologist and likely never will be. I have never been to Egypt, and my last job before becoming a General Authority was in food distribution. Not much to do with my plans of childhood!

Youth is, in general, the perfect time to make personal plans. As a young adult, you should still have dreams for your future. Perhaps it's the hope of an athletic achievement, the creation of a great work of art, or the acquisition of a diploma or professional position. Perhaps you even have a precious image in your mind of your future husband or wife—his or her physical appearance, character traits, eye and hair color—and the beautiful children that will bless your family.





Spiritual vision and  
righteous principles will  
bring you happiness  
regardless of life's  
unexpected challenges  
and surprises.

Life is full of uncertainty. Surprises will pop up all along life's path. Who knows what will happen tomorrow, where you will be in a few years, and what you will be doing? Life is like a suspense novel whose plot is difficult to guess.

Key moments may change the course of your life in an instant. Such a moment may consist of no more than a look or a conversation, an unplanned event. Valérie and I still remember the exact moment we fell in love with each other. It was during a choir practice of our young adult ward in Paris. This was completely unexpected! We had known each other since childhood, but we had never had romantic feelings for one another. That evening I was at the piano and she was singing in the choir. We caught each other's eye and something happened. A second for all eternity!

Sometimes, course changes in our lives come from unexpected challenges or disappointments. I have learned through experience that we only partially control the circumstances of our life. And yet most people dislike the unknown. The uncertainty of life creates in some a lack of confidence, a fear of the future that manifests itself in different ways.

**Y**ou can't control all  
of the circumstances  
of your life. However, you  
have control of your own  
happiness. You are the  
architects of it.



Some young people hesitate to make commitments out of fear of failure, even when good opportunities present themselves. For example, they may delay marriage, education, starting a family, or getting established in a stable professional activity, preferring to just “hang out” or remain in the cozy comfort of their parents’ home.

Another philosophy that will limit us is illustrated by this maxim: “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die” (2 Nephi 28:7). This phrase suggests that because we don’t know what will happen tomorrow and we all will eventually die, we should indulge ourselves in the present moment. This philosophy favors indulging in immediate pleasures, regardless of their future consequences.

### **You Determine Your Happiness**

My message is that there is a different path than those of fear and doubt or self-indulgence—a path that brings peace, confidence, and serenity in life. You can’t control all of the circumstances of your life. Things both good and challenging

will happen to you that you never expected. However, I declare that you have control of your own happiness. You are the architects of it.

“The older we get, the more we look back and realize that external circumstances don’t really matter or determine our happiness,” declared Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He added, “We determine our happiness.”<sup>1</sup>

Your happiness is much more the result of your spiritual vision and the righteous principles upon which you base your life. These principles will bring you happiness regardless of the unexpected challenges and surprises you will inevitably face during your journey on earth.

I would like to review some of these essential principles.

### **1. Recognize Your Personal Worth**

A few summers ago, my family and I spent some relaxing days in Provence, a magnificent region in southern France. One evening, just after darkness had enveloped the surrounding countryside, I began to examine the heavens. At first they were an impenetrable black. Suddenly, a light appeared in the sky like a spark—then two, then three. Progressively, as my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I found myself admiring myriad stars. What I had thought was a dark sky transformed into the Milky Way.

I thought: “This is a bit like our personal relationship with God. How many people believe that He is far away or nonexistent? Those people find that life is very dark and black. They don’t take the time or make the effort to examine the heavens to see that He is there, so close to us.”





PATH

Confidence

HAPPINESS

I reflected on the immensity of the universe and on my own physical insignificance, and I asked myself, “What am I before such grandeur and magnificence?” A scripture came to my mind:

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

“What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Psalm 8:3–4).

Immediately follows this comforting phrase: “For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour” (Psalm 8:5).

This is the paradox and the miracle of the Creation. The universe is immense and infinite, yet each of us has unique worth and is glorious and infinite in the eyes of our Creator. My physical presence is infinitesimal, yet my personal worth is of immeasurable importance to my Heavenly Father.

Elder Uchtdorf has declared: “Wherever you are, whatever your circumstances may be, you are not forgotten. No matter how dark your days

may seem, no matter how insignificant you may feel, no matter how overshadowed you think you may be, your Heavenly Father has not forgotten you. In fact, He loves you with an infinite love.”<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Become Who You Are

The phrase “become who you are” is attributed to Pindar, one of the most celebrated Greek poets.<sup>3</sup> It sounds like a paradox. How can I become who I already am?

A few years ago, I saw a film called *Age of Reason*. It tells the story of Marguerite, a prosperous banker who leads a hectic life filled with travels and conferences in the four corners of the earth. She is married and thinks she doesn’t have time for children.

The day she turns 40, she receives a mysterious letter that says: “Dear me, Today I am seven years old and I’m writing you this letter to help you remember the promises I made when I was seven, and also to remind you of what I want to become.”

Marguerite suddenly understands that the author of the letter is none other than herself when she was seven years old. What follows are several pages on which the little girl describes in detail her life’s goals.

Marguerite realizes that the person she has become is nothing like what she wanted to be when she was a young girl. As she decides to reclaim the person she envisioned as a child, her neatly planned and organized life is turned upside down. She reconciles with her family and determines to consecrate the rest of her life to serving people in need.<sup>4</sup>

One of the  
greatest things

we can desire in life

is to align our will with

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our lives.



If you were to now receive a letter from your past, what would it say? What might you have written to yourself on the day of your baptism when you were eight years old? I'll go back even further. If it were possible for you to receive a letter from your premortal life, what would it say? What impact would such a letter from a forgotten but very real world have on you if you were to receive it today?

This letter might say something like: "Dear me, I am writing to you so you will remember who I want to become. I shouted for joy at the chance to go to earth. I know that life on earth is an essential passage to enable me to grow to my full potential and live forever with my Heavenly Father. I hope you will remember that my greatest desire is to be a disciple of our Savior, Jesus Christ. I support His plan, and when I am on earth I want to help Him in His work of salvation. Please also remember that I want to be part of a family that will be together for all eternity."

One of the great adventures of life is that of finding out who we really are and where we came from, then living consistently in harmony with our identity and the purpose of our existence. Our happiness and ability to find balance in life will occur as we find, recognize, and accept our true identity as a child of our Heavenly Father and then live in accordance with this knowledge.

### 3. Trust in God's Promises

I love these motivating words of President Thomas S. Monson (1927–2018): "The future is as bright as your faith."<sup>5</sup> Our success and happiness in life depend in great part on the faith and trust we have that the Lord will lead and guide us to fulfill our destiny.

The men and women who accomplish remarkable feats in life often have great confidence in their future from the earliest years of their youth. An example of such a young person is Winston Churchill, the celebrated British statesman. As a young man, he had an unshakable confidence in his future. While he served in a cavalry regiment in India at age 23, he wrote to his mother, "I have faith in my star—that I am intended to do something in this world."<sup>6</sup>

What a prophetic thought! He, in effect, envisioned that he was going to become a key person in the history of his country, and he became the man who led Great Britain to victory during World War II.





I believe that each of you young members of the Church of Jesus Christ has far more than a star in the sky to guide you. God is watching over you and has made promises to you.

Many of you count noble pioneers among your ancestors, great souls who helped establish the restored Church through their courage and sacrifice. Generations of valiant Saints have preceded you. Others of you are the pioneers of your own families and in your own lands. You are the first link in what will become an eternal chain. Whatever your story or your heritage, as members of the Church you are linked to a spiritual family. Your spiritual genealogy makes each of you a descendant of the fathers, as foretold by the prophets, and heirs to God's promises to them.

The fulfillment of God's promises is always tied to obedience to the laws attached to them. The Lord said, "I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise" (Doctrine and Covenants 82:10).

On the other hand, these promises do not ensure that everything that happens in our life will be in accordance with our expectations and desires. Sometimes unexpected trials will present themselves that we must overcome; sometimes promised blessings will be long delayed. But the time will come when we will know that these trials and these delays can be turned for our good and our eternal progression. What more can we ask?

### Aligning Your Will with the Lord's Will

One of the greatest things we can desire in life is to align our will with the will of the Lord—to accept His will for our lives. He knows everything from the beginning, has a perspective we don't have, and loves us with an infinite love.

The itinerary for each of us will vary according to the foreknowledge of God. Our circumstances may change, unexpected events may occur, challenges may arise, but the promises of God to us are assured through our faithfulness.

The circumstances of my life today are, obviously, very different from what I had planned when I was young. However, I don't believe I've ever been so happy. If one had given me, when I was 20 years old, the account of my life up to the present, I think I would have signed without any hesitation on the dotted line!

You have dreams and goals? That's good. Work with all your heart to accomplish them. Then let the Lord do the rest. He will lead you where you cannot lead yourself; He will make you into what you cannot make of yourself.

At all times, accept His will. Be ready to go where He asks you to go and to do what He asks you to do. Become the men and women He is nurturing you to become. ■

*From a Church Educational System devotional, "We Are the Architects of Our Own Happiness," delivered November 4, 2012. For the full address, go to [broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).*

#### NOTES

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# Your Christmas Mission: **Light the World** One by One

A new Church film and initiative invite us all to carry the light of Jesus Christ to everyone around us.

**By Onnastasia Cole**  
Church Magazines

**I**n the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, as we scurry about buying gifts and hanging tinsel, it can be easy to forget what we're celebrating in the first place.

Jesus Christ. The Son of God. The Savior of the world—who descended below all things to offer Himself a sacrifice for sin (see 1 Nephi 11:16; 2 Nephi 2:7; Doctrine and Covenants 88:6; 122:8). He is the reason for the season. And one of the greatest ways we can honor Him and celebrate His birth is to emulate Him and serve those around us just as He would.

Lovingly, kindly, one by one.

As He told the Nephites, “Hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do” (3 Nephi 18:24).

To help us do just that, the Church has launched a new Light the World initiative for 2019 with exciting new ways for us to bless others, both in our immediate circle and across the globe.



**Light**  
The  
**World**  
**ONE BY ONE**







### 1. Invite friends to view *The Christ Child* in your home.

To remind the world of the miracle of Christ's birth and to give members an opportunity to share the Christmas message, the Church has produced a new film, about 18 minutes long, titled *The Christ Child*, released on November 24.

Shot through the eyes of those who experienced the sacred events surrounding Christ's birth, the film is a powerful witness of Christ's divinity.

Working in consultation with scholars, the filmmakers behind *The Christ Child* included

several possible cultural and historical details in the film in addition to the details found in the scriptures.

To make the most of this new cinematic experience, invite someone to come and see the film in your home and consider sharing it on social media. *The Christ Child* can be streamed or downloaded at [LightTheWorld.org](http://LightTheWorld.org) and is a perfect way to celebrate the Savior's birth with friends and family of other faiths.

### USE LIGHT THE WORLD RESOURCES

"Christmas is a time when people of all faiths strive more to emulate the love of Christ and show compassion for others. Use the resources in Light the World as opportunities to bring up your faith with people in natural and normal ways, both in person and online."

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf  
of the Quorum of the  
Twelve Apostles



#### DISCOVER MORE

Read a behind-the-scenes article about the film *The Christ Child* in the digital version of this issue in the Gospel Library app or at [ensign.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](http://ensign.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).



### 3. Invite someone to a special worship service on December 22.

One of the culminating Christmas experiences of every member of the Church happens in sacrament meeting, as we sing praises to the Savior, partake of the sacrament to remember Him, and hear the beautiful messages of His gospel.

While we should invite others to come and join us every week, Christmas provides a unique opportunity to invite someone to come and worship with us on December 22. Perhaps your invitation is all that a friend, colleague, or acquaintance needs to come and see what The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is all about.

If you already have someone in mind, follow that prompting and act. If you're drawing a blank, prayerfully consider some of the people in your day-to-day life whom you can lovingly invite to come and see.

If the person doesn't live near you, make sure to direct them to the Church location tool found on [LightTheWorld.org](http://LightTheWorld.org), where they can enter their address or zip code to find a special worship service near them. Then, with the person's permission, use the referral feature in Member Tools to give the missionaries in the person's area a heads-up that they may be coming to church.



### 2. Sign up to receive daily service prompts.

If you sign up for alerts at [LightTheWorld.org](http://LightTheWorld.org), you can receive daily text and email prompts starting December 1. These daily prompts provide ideas for serving those around you, one by one. You can decide to try all of the ideas or just the ones that inspire you. Sample service prompts include: "Cheer someone on! Make plans to attend an event to support someone you know," and "Make a list of all the things a mentor or teacher has done for you. Send it to them with a note of thanks."

Remember: it's not about checking off a list of service ideas; it's about finding ways to bless those around you as Christ did, one by one.

Check out the "Connected" video on [LightTheWorld.org](http://LightTheWorld.org) to learn how quick and easy it is to sign up. Or, if you prefer, download and print the 25-day service calendar and post it in your home.

As you consider these service prompts, watch for ideas that can include others, and invite your friends, family, and neighbors of other faiths to come and help. Then share your experiences on social media with the hashtag #LightTheWorld.



To help everyone feel welcome at church:

- Reassure guests that visitors and questions are always welcome.
- If your guest is apprehensive, share the "What to Expect" resources found on [LightTheWorld.org](http://LightTheWorld.org) to help them feel at ease.
- Offer a friendly smile and hello to everyone who walks through the door.
- For Church leaders: Center the service on Christ. Select songs and sermons that focus on the Savior, invite the Spirit, and edify all.

For additional ideas, see "5 Do's (and 2 Don'ts) When Inviting Friends to Church" (digital-only article), *Ensign*, Dec. 2018 (found online or in the Gospel Library app).





#### 4. Visit a Giving Machine.

You've no doubt bought a candy bar from a vending machine before. But have you ever used a vending machine to buy a live chicken? or a pair of shoes for someone in need? or a soccer ball for an impoverished child? That's the genius behind the Church's Giving Machines—vending machines with a Christmas twist.

Located in select cities in the United States, Great Britain, and the Philippines, Giving Machines contain a variety of charitable contributions to choose from. These items and services, determined and requested by local and global charity partners, include livestock, like goats and chickens; clothing and household needs; nutrition and meals; and educational and recreational materials. Last year, the Giving Machines collected more than \$2 million in donations in 38 days.

Using the machines is easy, and 100 percent of donations will be used to purchase the items donors select (or similar items or services of greater need). If there isn't a Giving Machine located near you, prayerfully consider donating to other charities in your area or at [LatterDaySaintCharities.org](http://LatterDaySaintCharities.org).

#### 5. Follow promptings from the Spirit.

The service prompts from this year's Light the World initiative provide great ways to serve others around you, but you don't have to stop there. The Holy Ghost can prompt you to bless and serve others in unique ways only you can, so if you get a spiritual prompting, follow it. Serve, lift, and love just as the Savior would.

One by one.

#### Natural and Normal Ways

Speaking of this year's initiative, Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said: "Light the World presents marvelous opportunities to invite friends and neighbors to church and to your homes to learn with you about the Savior. In whatever ways seem natural and normal to you, share with people why Jesus Christ and His Church are important to you. Share with them the suggested ways in which they might serve others one by one. Invite them to come and see; encourage them to come and help. God will do His saving work, and they will come and stay." ■



# Navigating through Transitions

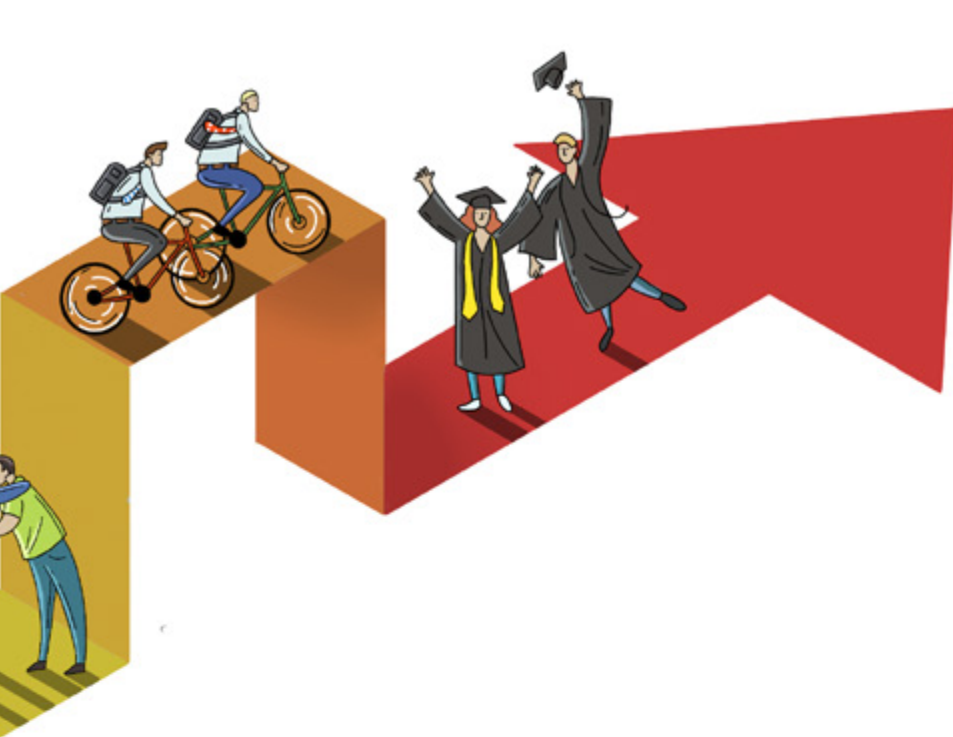
Starting school. Leaving Primary. Going to the temple. Getting a new job. Graduating from high school. Serving a mission.

These are just some of the milestones your children might encounter in life, and they all require special preparation. Changes can be intimidating, but a few tools can help us navigate them successfully. Here are some tips to help you guide your children through life's transitions.

- **Listen to their feelings** about the transition. Ask them what they are excited about and what they are nervous about. Be encouraging but understanding of their worries. Sometimes a sympathetic ear is all they need to feel at ease with the coming change.
- **Give them as much information as possible** about what they can expect with something new. For example, if your child is going to do temple baptisms for the first time, give them a step-by-step overview of what will happen once they are inside the temple. If you are moving to a new city, find out what you can about their new school, ward, and neighborhood. When you minimize the unknowns, you take away sources of anxiety. Their new knowledge can help them understand the new experience they will have.







- **Create a plan** to handle new situations. Anticipate potential problems and brainstorm ways to deal with them. Help children think of solutions to their “what if” questions: “What if I get on the wrong bus?” “What if I get lonely at camp?” “What if I don’t like my new teacher?” Come up with an emergency backup plan so they feel more comfortable: “If you get stressed out, call me.” “If a class is too hard, we can talk to your teacher.”
- **Empower them** by reminding them of the milestones they have passed before and the tools they have now to help them succeed. Use positive, encouraging language: “You made it through that; you can make it through this!” “You can do hard things.” “You have what you need. You are ready.” “I believe in you.”
- **Reassure them** that things will be OK. Many people have overcome similar struggles; chances are they will too! Remind them that they can pray to their Heavenly Father for help anytime, anywhere, about anything.
- **Create a support system** so your children don’t feel alone in their struggle. If you have experienced something similar, tell them about it. How did you feel? How did you adjust? Try to find someone to be your child’s “transition buddy.” Can they find a friend to stick with in their new Primary class? Is there someone you know who could mentor them through their job or class? Who will their college roommates be?
- **Go at their pace.** Your child might need a nudge forward or even a caution to slow down, but try not to change their natural pace too much. Follow their lead. If they want to jump in feet first, make sure they have everything they need to do so. If they don’t feel ready to move on yet, don’t force them into the deep end. Gently encourage them to venture outside their comfort zone, but take it slow. Adapt for your child’s needs, and seek guidance from the Spirit to know how best to help. ■

## FOR TEENS

In the *New Era*:

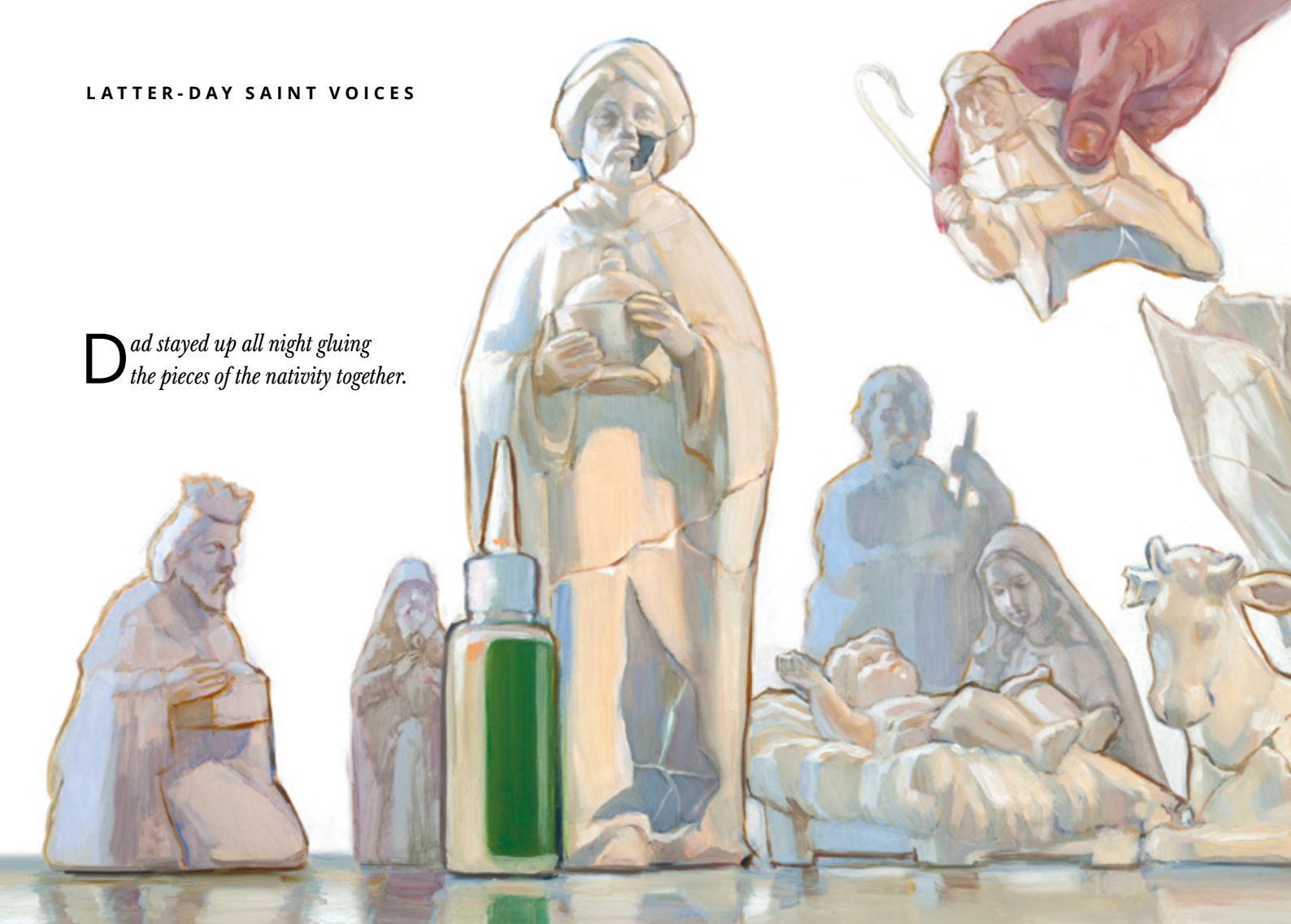
- “Will Relief Society Be Boring?” June 2018, 6.
- “My First Day in Elders Quorum,” June 2018, 8.

In the *Ensign*:

- “Teens and Temple Covenants,” Oct. 2013, 18.

For other resources, visit [youth.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://youth.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).

**D**ad stayed up all night gluing the pieces of the nativity together.



## The Broken Nativity

As a child, I couldn't wait for Christmas. When Mom brought out the boxes of decorations, my five brothers and I knew that Christmas had begun. We would always set up the tree as a family. I still remember the handmade ornaments and the many shiny colored glass balls.

One part of the decorating, however, Mom took care of herself. My grandmother had made Mom a beautiful white porcelain nativity. Every year, Mom would set the nativity on the large mantel in the living room. I loved to sit and watch her put each figure in place. Under each figure, she put a tiny white

light from a string of lights. She taped one end of the lights to the mantel to secure them, and then she plugged them into the outlet behind the chair in the corner. When the mantel lit up, it was a beautiful sight!

One night, close to Christmas, my brothers got a little rowdy. The older ones chased my younger brother. In the midst of the chase, he hid behind the chair next to the mantel. When my brothers found him, he rushed to escape, but his foot caught the string of lights underneath the nativity. The small pieces of tape were no match for the pull of his foot. The delicate

nativity shot down from the mantel onto the red brick below, shattering into pieces.

Mom rushed into the living room. When she saw what had happened, she burst into tears and went to her room. She knew it was an accident, but the damage was done.

That night, after we were all in bed, Dad got out the dustpan and the broom and carefully swept up the broken pieces. Then he stayed up all night gluing the pieces together.

The nativity still bears some scars. The cow is missing an ear. One wise man is missing a piece from his face.





## The Best Gift I Could Give

When my family and I started attending The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I felt in my heart that my mom had guided us there.

Mom had died unexpectedly on Christmas Day two years before. She was an incredibly faithful and humble follower of Jesus Christ, but she had never learned about the restored gospel. After 11 months of learning about the Church, my husband, Navid, my daughter, Katie, and I were baptized on Christmas Day. What had once been a day of sadness because of my mother's passing would now be a day of happiness for our family because of our new life in the gospel.

Many people attended our baptism. I was shocked to see over 100 people there at 10:00 a.m. on Christmas morning! We couldn't have felt more loved.

Before our baptism, the stake temple and family history consultant helped me prepare my mother's name and the names of several other deceased ancestors to take to the temple for baptism.

Twenty-five days after our baptisms, on January 19, 2018, my mom's birthday, we made our first trip to the

Newport Beach California Temple.

I was nervous and didn't know what to expect, but when I walked into the temple, I felt so much serenity. It was like nowhere else I had ever been. Our group gathered at the baptismal font, where the temple president explained the importance of baptism for the dead and the blessing it holds. I sobbed for joy thinking of how these baptisms would bless our family.

After Navid was baptized for some of the male members of my family, he baptized me on behalf of some of the female family members. The first person I was baptized for was my dear, sweet mother. When I heard the words "who is dead," I wept. Hearing it made her death so real that it hurt. But then I thought, what greater gift could I possibly give my mother on her birthday than the gift of baptism in the temple?

I look forward to many more trips to the temple. I am grateful to know that I can help provide blessings to those who have gone before me through the ordinances of the temple. What a wonderful gift! ■

**Diane Davani, California, USA**

One shepherd is more glue than porcelain in some places. But, miraculously, the broken figures were mended.

Grandmother offered to make a new nativity, but Mom declined. She said her nativity means even more to her now. It serves as a symbol of the devotion of her loving husband and as a reminder of our loving Savior.

As we each muddle through this life, we may become broken in some way. We may even feel shattered into irreparable pieces. But we have a Savior, and we can become whole through His loving hands. ■

**Elizabeth Lloyd Lund, Utah, USA**

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Would you like to share a gospel experience that has strengthened you? You can submit it at [ensign.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://www.ensign.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).



# Alone and Grateful at Christmas

For me while growing up, Christmas was the greatest time of year—not simply because of the gifts but also because Christmas was a time to share with those who mattered most in my life, my family.

Family means everything to me, and through the years, Christmas traditions were always a wonderful arrangement of family fun that still carries many cherished memories for me.

But this past Christmas was different. I had a new job that required me to be out of town on Christmas. Up to this point in my life, I had missed only two Christmases with my family—both while on my mission. Before I even left on my business trip, I was already heartsick and homesick. All Christmas Day I thought, “What a waste!” No work

could possibly be worth this!

I decided to watch a movie on TV in my hotel room. In the movie, one of the characters expressed how important it is to give thanks. It wasn’t a major part of the movie, nor was it a particularly moving scene, but nothing could have touched me more.

In that moment I realized that I had never gotten on my knees on Christmas Day to thank Heavenly Father for the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. In all the years I celebrated Christmas, I had really focused only on my family, presents, and games. Despite my parents’ and grandparents’ best efforts to teach me, I never truly appreciated just how important the Savior was to Christmas. As a family, we read the story of His birth in the scriptures, but

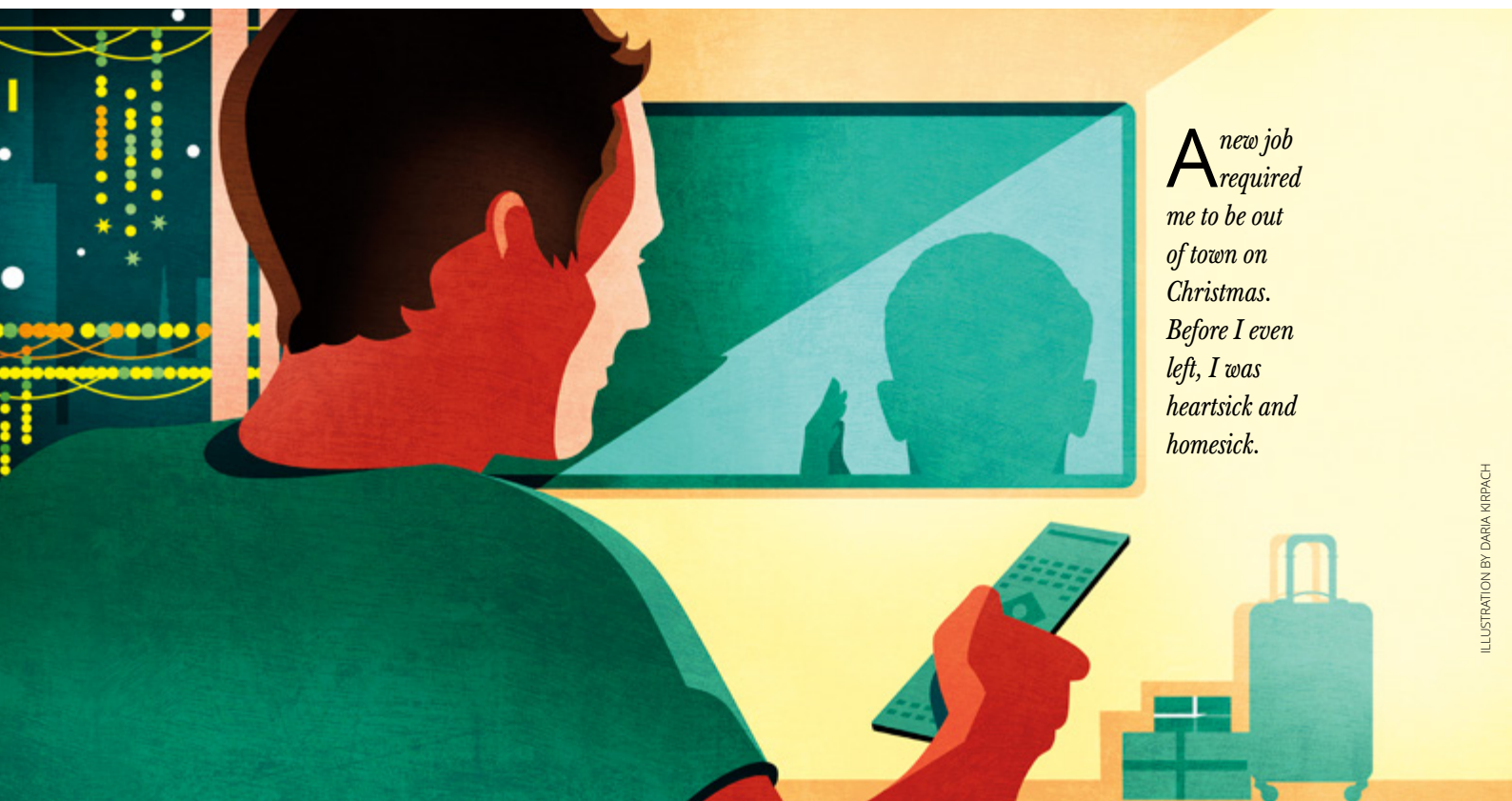
I had never given much thought to the significance of His birth on Christmas.

Tears filled my eyes as I prayed to my Heavenly Father. I thanked Him for the sacrifice He made to have His Only Begotten Son come to earth and for His Son’s wonderful life of sacrifice and kindness.

The fact that I was alone and away from my family on Christmas still made me sad, but it allowed Heavenly Father to teach me a lesson I might never have learned while surrounded by my family: the Savior is the reason I could have a family at all!

I’m grateful that being alone at Christmas brought me just a little better understanding of Heavenly Father’s loving and infinite gift of His Son. ■

**Tyler Collins, Montana, USA**



*A new job required me to be out of town on Christmas. Before I even left, I was heartsick and homesick.*



# Anyone but Him!

When I heard about the Church's "Light the World" Christmas initiative and the worldwide day of service, I thought, "What a nice idea. I'm going to do it."

A couple of days before the worldwide day of service on December 1, a thought popped into my mind of whom I needed to help. Immediately, I thought, "Anyone but him!" This person had hurt me deeply for many years, but the more his name nagged at me, the more I knew that the thought had come from the Spirit.

I told my husband what I was thinking, and he said that serving this man would be good for me. Still, I felt extremely nervous at the thought of helping him. I knew I couldn't do this on my own, so I prayed for strength and for someone to go with me. Eventually, I called the sister missionaries, and they agreed to go with me.

December 1 came, and I was so nervous that I felt shaky while I drove. We prayed together when we got to the apartment. I took a few deep breaths and knocked on the door. The man opened the door, but he didn't seem to recognize me. I asked if he knew who I was. He thought I was just one of the sister missionaries. When I told him who I was, he was surprised but pleased that I had come to see him. An awkward moment arose when I told him that it was a worldwide day of service, and we wanted to help him in any way we could.



*I prayed for strength and for someone to go with me. I called the sister missionaries, and they agreed to go with me.*

I delegated jobs to the missionaries, and we went to work cleaning his apartment. After a couple of hours, we finished and left.

It wasn't until I was driving home that I realized I was laughing and happy. Then it hit me like a ton of bricks: Heavenly Father had taken away all of my hurt, pain, bitterness, and grief. It was gone! And I was free from all the anguish I had carried for

so many years. Heavenly Father had blessed me with the strength to finally forgive this person. It was marvelous how light my heart felt.

I am so grateful that I followed the prompting to help this man. My loving Heavenly Father knew I needed to have this experience so I could grow and become more of the person He wants me to be. ■

**Marsha Lang, Pennsylvania, USA**

## BONUS ARTICLE

Read an additional "Latter-day Saint Voices" article in the digital version of this issue in the Gospel Library app or at [ensign.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://ensign.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).

# Young Adults

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## You're Not Alone—Trust Me

By the time I became a young adult, I thought I had loneliness all figured out. I had moved a lot growing up, so I had plenty of experience leaving my comfort zone to make friends. And when I married the nicest guy around, I knew I would never feel lonely again, right?

Wrong.

**Loneliness in young adulthood is pretty much inevitable**, even if it just lasts for a little while. We're inundated by to-dos that keep us running. We're taking on new roles and responsibilities. We're moving away from home and family. We're bombarded with huge decisions. Plus, we're still susceptible to the everyday and not-so-everyday trials of life. All of these things can add up to make loneliness a prevalent feeling among young adults today. Luckily, **there are ways to combat this loneliness**, and that's what this section is all about.

On page 70, Shaila shares how joining the Church ultimately helped her overcome her loneliness. On page 74, Mindy teaches us the way **we can find and value friendship** as Christ did. And on page 76, Chakell gives insights on the many ways we can stop avoiding each other.

In digital-only articles, Bella outlines the effects of good friendships. McKenna shares how she made friends after moving to a new city. Breanna tells how we can remove barriers to friendships. Jess offers **six unique ways to build friendships you might not have tried before**. Kalene helps us realize that instead of waiting for friendships, sometimes we have to make the first move. And I give tips for those who at times feel lonely within their marriages.

There are ways of overcoming loneliness. When we realize that **Jesus Christ is always with us**, when we see that we are never truly alone, we will have the strength to go outside ourselves, forge healthy relationships, and bless the lives of those around us.

From someone who believes in you,  
Alexandra Palmer



Find these articles and more at [ensign.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://www.ensign.ChurchofJesusChrist.org) or in **YA Weekly** (under the Young Adults section in the Gospel Library app).





PHOTOGRAPH OF WOMAN FROM GETTY IMAGES



YOUNG ADULTS





# My Daily Battle against Loneliness

By Shaila Mahabier

For the longest time in my life, I felt as if I was all alone. At first, loneliness was a new feeling for me, because I come from a family of five, so as a kid, I always enjoyed the crowd and noise around me at home. I knew I wasn't alone.

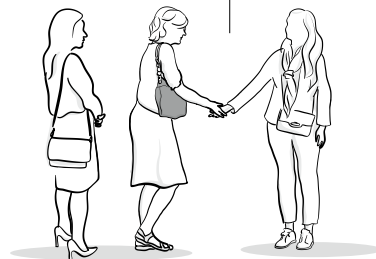
Sadly enough, in my teenage years, my parents split up. After that, I really started to feel alone. I tried to figure out what to do, going out of my comfort zone to make friends at school. I was hoping I could enjoy the familiarity of lots of people at school, like I used to at home. But even though I was surrounded by people, I still felt alone. This feeling lessened a

few years later when I found the Church.

One day the sister missionaries knocked on my door and my mother answered. I remember her telling them, "Well, I am not interested, but my daughter would be. Wait, I will get her."

When I started to talk to them, I could feel the Spirit telling me to listen. After a few months of listening and learning, I knew that this was what I had been looking for. Even though it didn't feel like it to begin with, my decision to be baptized helped me to come not only closer to the Lord and but also closer to ending my ongoing battle against loneliness.

In a lot of ways, joining the Church increased the loneliness I had felt since my parents' divorce. But it also helped me find a way out of my loneliness.



### Feeling Lonely as a Convert

When I decided that I wanted to be baptized, my family wasn't really excited about it. Although my mother and one of my brothers attended my baptism, other family members rejected me because we no longer shared the same religion.

In the beginning, this was quite hard, and I felt more alone than ever. But after a while, one of my cousins decided to become a devout Hindu, which was also different from what the rest of our family practiced. He respected my choice to join the Church because he had made a similar one. Because of his example of love towards me, some of my other family members stopped shunning me.

At school, I realized that I didn't really fit in anymore. And at work, people looked at me in an odd way when I told them I had gotten baptized. I did not feel ashamed—my decision wasn't wrong, and I knew that from the bottom of my heart—but my friends didn't understand my lifestyle changes, and most of them decided to stop being friends with me.

### Making New Friends

Through all these difficult experiences, I kept praying, and I could feel the comfort I was promised by the Spirit in a priesthood blessing I had received. One day I dared to ask the question, in prayer, "Why do I feel so alone?" And I received an answer or, rather, a promise—that I would make new friends, friends who would understand me.

And I did! I made new friends, some who aren't members of the Church but who still respect and love me. I also made friends in the Church who have become like family to me.

Being an introvert and having to talk to people wasn't the easiest thing for me. Most of the time I let people approach me, but in high school there weren't a lot of people who wanted to talk to me. So I was happy that I remembered this old trick I had learned—I smiled. The more someone smiles, the more approachable that person will become. I realized the more I smiled at people, the more they would start talking to me and the easier it became for me to become friends with them.







### **Standing with Heavenly Father**

A better answer to my prayer was President Thomas S. Monson's (1927–2018) talk "Dare to Stand Alone" (*Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 60–67). Over time, this talk has taught me one very essential thing about loneliness: you never stand alone when you stand with the Lord.

There are still days when it is hard for me to stand with Him. The fear of other people mocking me and my beliefs is hard. There have been people telling me that any religion is nonsense and that I am being led like a dumb sheep. After finding out about my religion, some people have treated me as if I had a terrible infectious disease. All of these experiences made me feel a little insecure and lonely. It is a daily battle, but it's one I win every day, over and over again, with the help and full support of the Lord.

On a daily basis, I try to follow the Spirit. Whenever I listen to the Spirit and talk with people, inspiration from the Spirit enables me to serve others. It gives me an opportunity to remember that I am not alone. Most importantly, listen-

ing to the Spirit always gives me the chance to share my testimony. I have realized that sharing my belief this way helps me to be less scared and more understood by others. Before I realized it, I was not alone—talking to whomever I was talking to at that moment—I was standing with the Spirit. With the Spirit on your side, you can never be alone.

Throughout many years and moments of feeling lonely, the Lord has told me repeatedly that I am His beloved daughter and that He loves me. How can I ever feel alone if I have my Father standing with me? How can I feel alone if He is just one simple prayer away?

In my daily battle against loneliness, I call on my Heavenly Father not just to stand by me but to help me always stand by Him. I know that He has never left me to battle anything alone and has always stood by me, loving me. ■

***The author lives in Prague, Czech Republic.***

# The Savior's Example of Making Friends

By Mindy Selu  
Church Magazines

As young adults, we all go through seasons of loneliness—moving away for school, coming home from a mission, going through breakups, being the only Church member in your area, being new in a ward, being single, being married to someone who is away from home a lot, being a new parent, and many more. Some stages of life just don't make it all that easy to make friends.

But that doesn't mean it's impossible. As in all things, the answer lies in following the Savior. Elder Ronald A. Rasband of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles remarked, "In friendship, as in every other principle of the gospel, Jesus Christ is our Exemplar."<sup>1</sup> Here are just a few things we can learn from the Savior's example about making friends.

## Seek Them Out

Jesus valued friendship. He needed the help and support of others (as we all do!) to fulfill His earthly ministry, but instead of waiting for the right people to show up at His door, He went

out and found them! He went to places He might not normally go (see Luke 5:3–10), He walked around (see Mark 1:16; John 1:36), and He even invited people to come and see where He lived (see John 1:39).

We may not need friends for the same reasons the Savior did, but it's still important for us to surround ourselves with good people. If you're in a new stage of life where you find yourself needing friends, seek them out. Participate in church and other activities, introduce yourself, try new things, host a get-together, minister sincerely (whoever you minister to probably needs a friend too!), and you will find yourself more and more surrounded by potential friends.

## Point Out the Good in Others

I love when Jesus met Nathanael and said, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" (John 1:47). Whenever I think about this verse, it reminds me that I should look for and make known the good that I see in others.

"Mister" Fred Rogers, who was somewhat of an expert at making friends, also pointed out how looking for the best in others is a Christlike trait.



"I believe that appreciation is a holy thing," he said, "that when we look for what's best in the person we happen to be with at the moment, we're doing what God does. So, in loving and appreciating our neighbor, we're participating in something truly sacred."<sup>2</sup>

### Pray for Friends

Some of the most memorable earthly experiences with the Savior may have been when He prayed for others. The Nephites recorded that "no one [could] conceive of the joy which filled [their] souls at the time [they] heard him pray for [them] unto the Father" (3 Nephi 17:17). Our prayers might not be as touching as His, but we can still take the time to pray for those we care about.

Besides praying for your friends, you can also pray to have friends. As you "counsel with the Lord in all thy doings" (Alma 37:37)—including your concerns about being lonely and needing friends—He will not only "direct [you] for good," He will also direct you to good—good people who can become good friends.

### Look to the Savior

Jesus knows how we feel when we feel lonely because He too was "acquainted with grief" and loneliness (Mosiah 14:3). So even if we are the best at being a friend, we will likely still have

We all go through seasons of loneliness, but the Savior's example teaches us a few things about making friends.

seasons or moments of loneliness. But loneliness can also be a reminder to us of the divine mandate to love one another (see John 13:34).

If you're struggling through a season of loneliness right now, look to the Savior's example. Above anyone else, make *Him* your friend. He—and our Heavenly Father—will never leave you lonely. ■

#### NOTES

1. Ronald A. Rasband, "True Friendship," *New Era*, Oct. 2016, 5.
2. Fred Rogers, commencement address at Marquette University, May 2001, [marquette.edu/university-honors/honorary-degrees/rogers-speech.php](http://marquette.edu/university-honors/honorary-degrees/rogers-speech.php).







# Why We Should Stop Trying to Avoid Each Other

**By Chakell Wardleigh**  
Church Magazines

While scrolling on Instagram, I saw an amusing meme that said, “I wonder how many miles my thumb scrolls a day.” I smirked at first (and shared the post with my friends, obviously), but then I really thought about it: “How many miles *does* my thumb scroll on social media every day?”

I can’t give you an exact number, but I made an estimate: a lot.

But things have been different ever since the October 2018 general conference, when President Russell M. Nelson invited sisters to fast from social media for 10 days.<sup>1</sup> At first, I was eager to follow his counsel. I thought it would take minimal effort and that the 10 days would just fly by. What I wasn’t prepared for was realizing that I use social media as a sort of

“social-interaction shield” when I’m in public. I was ashamed when I realized that I do it so much more than I thought!

Social media often engulfs me in an impenetrable bubble that keeps me from socializing—which is ironic because it’s supposed to be a means of connecting with others. But when a stranger gets into the elevator with me? I pull out my phone to avoid small talk. When I’m walking down a street filled with people? My eyes are glued to my screen so that nobody makes eye contact with me. And the list goes on—all those times when I’m “at risk” of socializing.

Unsticking myself from social media for 10 days really opened my eyes to how often I and so many of us use all kinds of social-interaction shields to isolate ourselves from others and avoid socializing—which can eventually make us all feel super lonely.

Some young adults are becoming super lonely. But the thing is, we don’t have to be alone.

## Connection Is Powerful

With all the opportunities we have as young adults to build friendships and relationships—college, singles wards, and institute, for example—you would think that we shouldn't be lonely, right? Well, according to some research, we young adults are becoming known as one of the loneliest generations the world has ever seen.<sup>2</sup> But why? Well, it's hard to pinpoint one culprit for this epidemic of loneliness. But technology, fear, busyness, self-doubt, pride, difficult trials, and yes, even social media itself make it so very easy to disconnect ourselves from others—both intentionally and unintentionally.

When it comes to loneliness, everybody is different. For some people, loneliness can spark inspiration to go out and find somebody to lean on. But for a lot of us, loneliness can cause us to even further isolate ourselves from everybody else for a variety of reasons.

Take me, for example. Apart from using social media as a social crutch, I can think of some difficult times in my life when I was overwhelmed, anxious, and feeling terribly alone. And even though I had friends and people to talk to, I chose not to. I pretended everything was fine. I let my fear get the better of me. I don't know if it was out of fear of judgment or of not wanting to be a burden to others because of what I was dealing with, but regardless, I chose to isolate myself. And not connecting with anyone only made my loneliness worse. But the thing is, I've now learned that no matter what we are going through or how different we may be, we all need real-life, face-to-face, genuine connection to thrive. We're wired for it. All of us.

What exactly does connecting with someone entail? Brené Brown, a social science researcher who has spent much of her life studying the value of connection, defines it “as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.”<sup>3</sup>

Connecting with others is one of the reasons we are here on earth! Think about these things we've been commanded to do as disciples of Christ, all of which are only possible through connecting to others: “love one another” (John 15:12); “strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32); “bear one another's burdens” (Mosiah 18:8); “succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees” (Doctrine and Covenants 81:5). And there are so many opportunities to connect to others and to receive love and show love every day. We shouldn't allow busyness to isolate us and prevent us from extending or receiving that love.

## We Don't Have to Be Alone

When I feel lonely, I often think about Moroni in the Book of Mormon. In my mind, his circumstances are the epitome of loneliness. Moroni lost everything—his family, his friends, and everything else in between. (See Mormon 8:5.)

Moroni's final chapters in the Book of Mormon break my heart. He was truly alone. He had no one to turn to, apart from God. My own seasons of loneliness hardly compare with what Moroni went through. And that's just it—I'm sure Moroni would have given anything to have a friend in those last

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days of his life; but unlike Moroni, we sometimes isolate *ourselves* when we don't have to be alone.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: “Because Jesus walked such a long, lonely path utterly alone, *we* do not have to do so. His solitary journey brought great company for our little version of that path—the merciful care of our Father in Heaven, the unfailing companionship of this Beloved Son, the consummate gift of the Holy Ghost, angels in heaven, family members on both sides of the veil, prophets and apostles, teachers, leaders, friends. All of these and more have been given as companions for our mortal journey.”<sup>4</sup>

Heavenly Father doesn't want us hiding behind shields and isolating ourselves, even though sometimes it's easier (and definitely more comfortable!), because doing so makes it difficult for Him to use us to bless and help others. Yes, sometimes things like depression, anxiety, or even fear of leaving your comfort zone can make it difficult to reach out to others—I can relate to that on a personal level. But even when it's scary and you're afraid of making a fool of yourself (trust me, I know the feeling!), I know that if you pray to Heavenly Father for help, He will give you the strength and courage to try. He wants us to

connect with and lift one another and allow others to lift us.

By following Jesus Christ and listening to promptings from the Spirit, we can lower our social shields and connect with those around us, even in small ways. We can show love and acceptance to others just as the Savior did

during His mortal ministry. And that comes full circle, because it reminds us all that we are not alone in this gigantic, unpredictable world, and it helps us become more like Him.

We all belong, and we all deserve love and connection. We can change the reputation of being the loneliest generation! Our Heavenly Father and the Savior can help us do so. And as we do our best to connect with others, we will see heaven's hand in our lives, we will give and receive blessings, we will receive help in our struggles, we will combat loneliness, we will build beautiful relationships, and we will feel peace and love in our lives that we can share with others. I know I have. ■

#### NOTES

1. See Russell M. Nelson, “Sisters' Participation in the Gathering of Israel,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 69.
2. See Fiza Pirani, “Why Are Americans So Lonely? Massive Study Finds Nearly Half of US Feels Alone, Young Adults Most of All,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, May 1, 2018, [ajc.com](http://ajc.com).
3. Brené Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection* (2010), 19.
4. Jeffrey R. Holland “None Were with Him,” *Ensign*, May 2009, 88.



**Chakell Wardleigh** is a writer for the Ensign.

*You can usually find her smelling flowers, taking a long time to tell stories because she keeps getting side tracked, getting sucked into books and podcasts, or being distracted by cute dogs. In fact, she's just easily distracted by the beautiful things in life.*

# INSIGHTS

*from* YOUNG ADULTS

*on dealing with loneliness*



**"Read your patriarchal blessing,** strengthen your relationship with God, and serve others!"

—Nelly Leyva, Puebla, Mexico

**"Reach out to other people** for help and to offer help and love."

—Megan Armknecht, New Jersey, USA

**"Serve others** and magnify your calling."

—Ingrid de Bastian Ortiz, Veracruz, Mexico

**"Forget yourself and trust the Lord with His plan.** And serve others the best way you can!"

—Marjorie Cornillez, Northern Samar, Philippines

*from* CHURCH LEADERS

"We are not and never need be alone. We can press forward in our daily lives with heavenly help. Through the Savior's Atonement we can receive capacity and 'strength beyond [our] own.' As the Lord declared, 'Therefore, continue your journey and let your hearts rejoice; for behold, and lo, I am with you even unto the end' (D&C 100:12)."

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease," *Ensign*, May 2014, 88.

## SHARE YOUR INSIGHTS

What insights have you had about **living the law of chastity?**

Send us your response at [ensign.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org) by December 31, 2019.



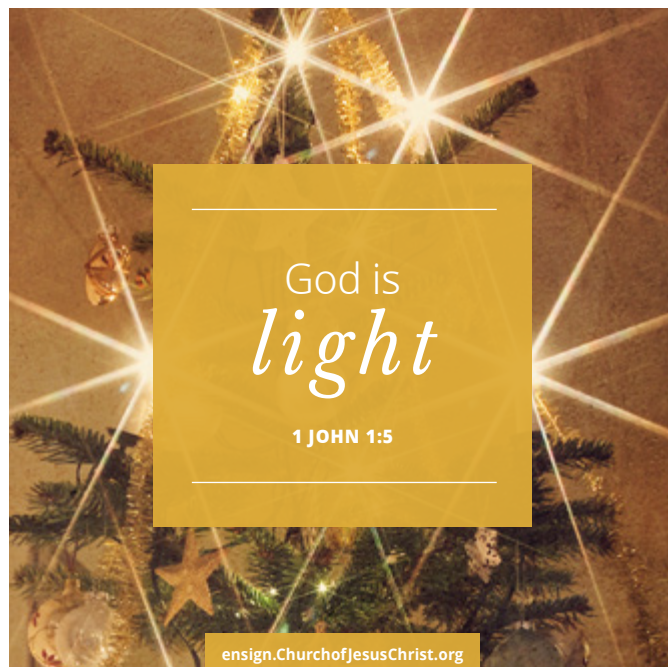
# Come, Follow Me Shareable Scriptures

Download these picture quotes from December's *Come, Follow Me* readings and share them on social media—or send them to those you minister to, your Sunday School class, or your family: [ChurchofJesusChrist.org/go/121981](https://ChurchofJesusChrist.org/go/121981) (find a fifth picture quote, for **December 23–29**, at this same address).

**NOVEMBER 25–DECEMBER 1**



**DECEMBER 2–8**



**DECEMBER 9–15**



**DECEMBER 16–22**





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