

Joy & Spiritual Survival

by Russell M. Nelson



The Importance of Joy

My dear brothers and sisters, today I would like to discuss a principle that is key to our spiritual survival. It is a principle that will only become more important as the tragedies and travesties around us increase.

These are the latter days, so none of us should be surprised when we see prophecy fulfilled. A host of prophets, including Isaiah, Paul, Nephi, and Mormon, foresaw that perilous times would come,¹ that in our day the whole world would be in commotion,² that men would “be lovers of their own selves, ... without natural affection, ... lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God,”³ and that many would become servants of Satan who uphold the adversary’s work.⁴ Indeed, you and I “wrestle ... against the rulers of the darkness of this world, [and] against spiritual wickedness in high places.”⁵

As conflicts between nations escalate, as cowardly terrorists prey on the innocent, and as corruption in everything from business to government becomes increasingly commonplace, what can help us? What can help each of us with our personal struggles and with the rigorous challenge

of living in these latter days? The prophet Lehi taught a principle for spiritual survival. First, consider his circumstances: He had been persecuted for preaching truth in Jerusalem and had been commanded by the Lord to leave his possessions and flee with his family into the wilderness. He had lived in a tent and survived on what food could be found on the way to an unknown destination, and he had watched two of his sons, Laman and Lemuel, rebel against the teachings of the Lord and attack their brothers Nephi and Sam.

Clearly, Lehi knew opposition, anxiety, heartache, pain, disappointment, and sorrow. Yet he declared boldly and without reservation a principle as revealed by the Lord: “Men are, that they might have joy.”⁶ Imagine! Of all the words he could have used to describe the nature and purpose of our lives here in mortality, he chose the word joy!

Life is filled with detours and

dead ends, trials and challenges of every kind. Each of us has likely had times when distress, anguish, and despair almost consumed us. Yet we are here to have joy?

Yes! The answer is a resounding yes! But how is that possible? And what must we do to claim the joy that Heavenly Father has in store for us?

“We can feel joy even while having a bad day, a bad week, or even a bad year!”

Joy No Matter the Circumstances

Eliza R. Snow, second General President of the Relief Society, offered a riveting answer. Because of Missouri’s infamous extermination order, issued at the onset of the grueling winter of 1838,⁷ she and other Saints were forced to flee the state that very winter. One evening, Eliza’s family spent the night in a small log cabin used by refugee Saints. Much of the chinking between the logs had been extracted and burned for firewood by those who preceded them, so there were holes between the logs large enough for a cat to crawl through. It was bitter cold, and their food was frozen solid.

That night some 80 people huddled inside that small cabin, only 20 feet square (6.1 meters square). Most sat or stood all night trying to keep warm. Outside, a group of men spent the night gathered around a roaring fire, with some singing hymns and others roasting frozen potatoes. Eliza recorded: “Not a complaint was heard—all were cheerful, and judging from appear-

ances, strangers would have taken us to be pleasure excursionists rather than a band of gubernatorial exiles.”

Eliza’s report of that exhausting, bone-chilling evening was strikingly optimistic. She declared: “That was a very merry night. None but saints can be hap-

py under every circumstance.”⁸

That’s it! Saints can be happy under every circumstance. We can feel joy even while having a bad day, a bad week, or even a bad year!

My dear brothers and sisters, the joy we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives.

Joy in Jesus Christ

When the focus of our lives is on God’s plan of salvation, which President Thomas S. Monson just taught us, and Jesus Christ and His gospel, we can feel joy regardless of what is happening—or not happening—in our lives.

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