

The Joy of the Saints

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Joy comes from keeping Christ's commandments, from overcoming sorrow and weakness through Him, and from serving as He served.

The Book of Mormon prophet Enos, Lehi's grandson, wrote of a singular experience that happened earlier in his life. While hunting alone in the forest, Enos began pondering on the teachings of his father, Jacob. He related, "The words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life, and the joy of the saints, sunk deep into my heart."¹ In the spiritual hunger of his soul, Enos knelt in prayer, a remarkable prayer that lasted through the day and into the night, a prayer that brought him crucial revelations, assurances, and promises.

There is much to be learned from Enos's experience, but today what stands out in my mind is Enos's memory of his father speaking often of "the joy of the saints."

In this conference three years ago, President Russell M. Nelson spoke of joy.² Among other things, he said:

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

"When the focus of our lives is on God's plan of salvation ... and Jesus Christ and His gospel, we can feel joy regardless of what is happening—or not happening—in our lives. Joy comes from and because of Him. ... For Latter-day Saints, Jesus Christ is joy!"³

Saints are those who have entered into the gospel covenant through baptism and are striving to follow Christ as His disciples.⁴ Thus, "the joy of the saints" denotes the joy of becoming Christlike.

I would like to speak of the joy that comes from keeping His commandments, the joy that arises from overcoming sorrow and weakness through Him, and the joy inherent in serving as He served.

The Joy of Keeping Christ's Commandments

We live in a hedonistic age when many question the importance of the Lord's commandments or simply ignore them. Not infrequently, people who flout divine directives such as the law of chastity, the standard of honesty, and the holiness of the Sabbath seem to prosper and enjoy the good things of life, at times even more so than those who are striving to be obedient. Some begin to wonder if the effort and sacrifices are worth it. The ancient people of Israel once complained:

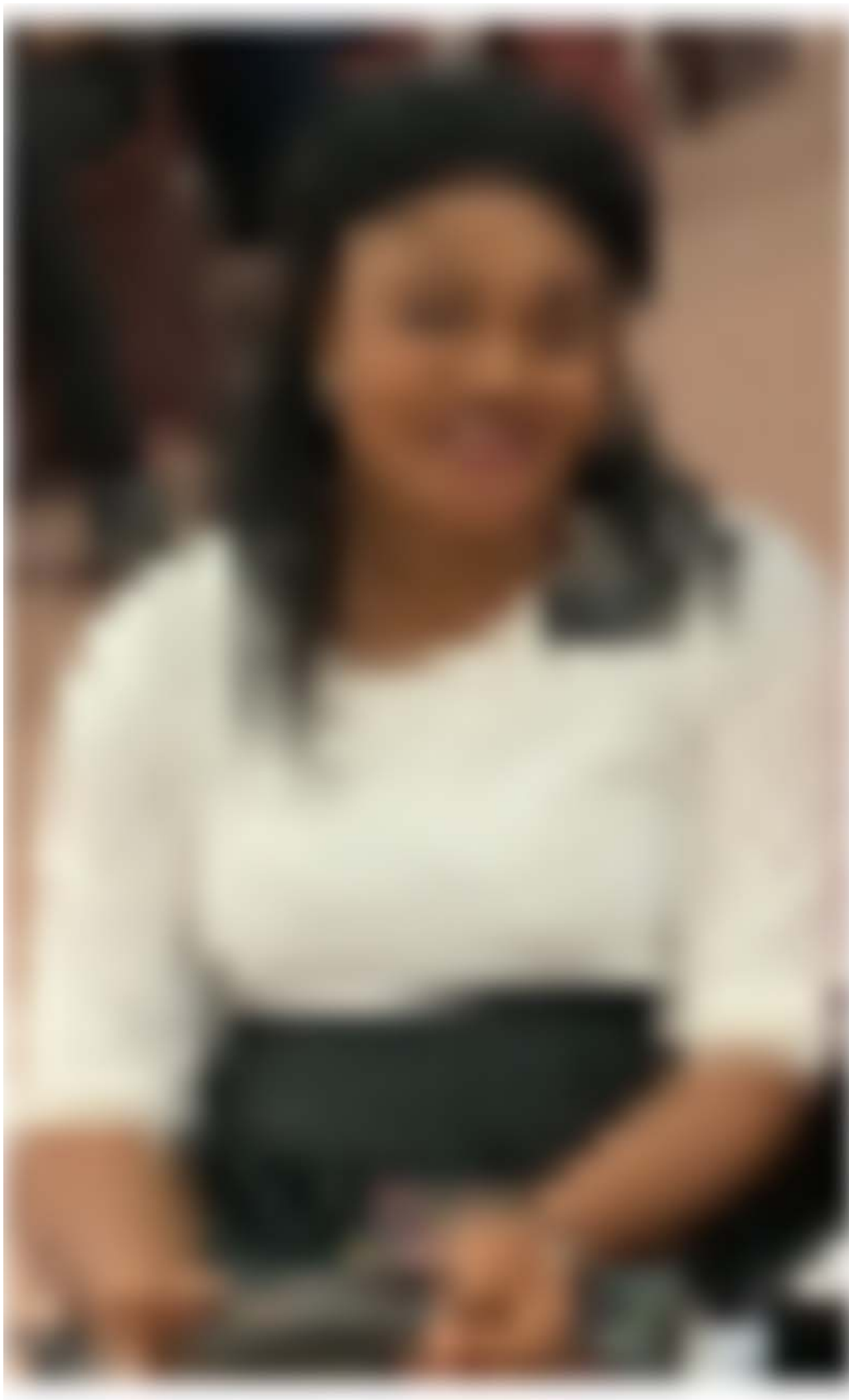
“It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?”

“And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.”⁵

Just wait, said the Lord, until “that day when I make up my jewels. ... Then shall ye ... discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.”⁶ The wicked may “have joy in their works for a season,” but it is always temporary.⁷ The joy of the Saints is enduring.

God sees things in their true perspective, and He shares that perspective with us through His commandments, effectively guiding us around the pitfalls and potholes of mortality toward eternal joy. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained: “When His commandments teach us, it is in view of eternity; for we are looked upon by God as though we were in eternity; God dwells in eternity, and does not view things as we do.”⁸

I haven’t met anyone who found the gospel later in life who didn’t wish it could have been earlier. “Oh, the poor choices and mistakes I could have avoided,” they will say. The Lord’s commandments are our guide to better choices and happier outcomes. How we ought to rejoice and thank Him for showing us this more excellent way.



As a teenager, Sister Kalombo Rosette Kamwanya from the D.R. Congo, now serving in the Côte d'Ivoire Abidjan West Mission, fasted and prayed for three days to find the direction God wanted her to take. In a remarkable night vision, she was shown two buildings, a chapel and what she now realizes was a temple. She began to search and soon found the chapel she had seen in her dream. The sign said, "The

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” Sister Kamwanya was baptized and then her mother and her six brothers. Sister Kamwanya said, “When I received the gospel, I felt like a captured bird that had been liberated. My heart was filled with joy. ... I had the assurance that God loves me.”⁹

Keeping the Lord’s commandments enables us more fully and more easily to feel His love. The strait and narrow path of the commandments leads directly to the tree of life, and the tree and its fruit, the sweetest and “most desirable above all things,”¹⁰ are a representation of the love of God and fill the soul “with exceedingly great joy.”¹¹ Said the Savior:

“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.”¹²

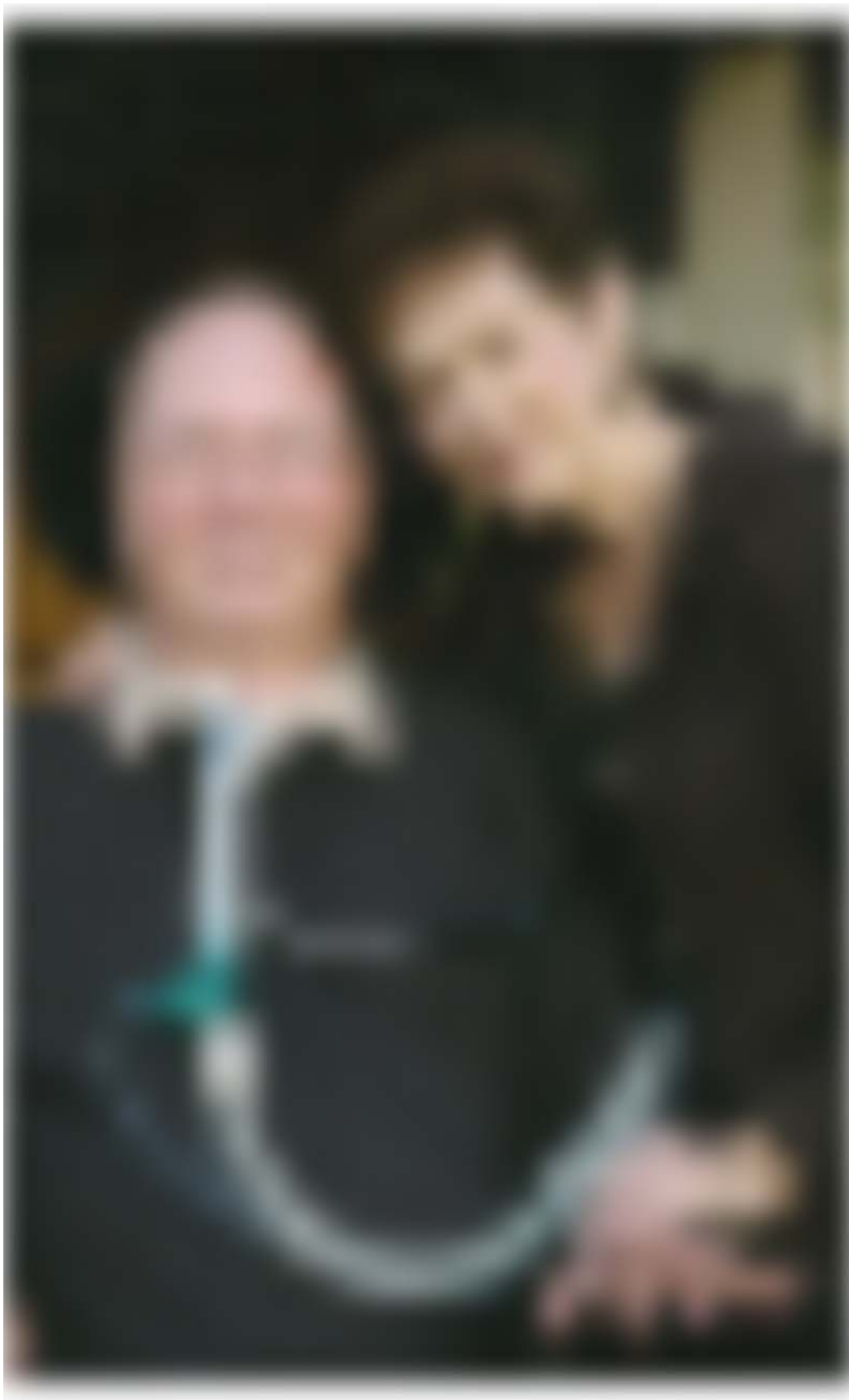
The Joy of Overcoming through Christ

Even when we are found faithfully keeping the commandments, there are trials and tragedies that could interrupt our joy. But as we strive to overcome these challenges with the Savior’s help, it preserves both the joy we feel now and the joy we anticipate. Christ reassured His disciples, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”¹³ It is in turning to Him, obeying Him, binding ourselves to Him that trial and sorrow are turned to joy. I mention one example.

In 1989, Jack Rushton was serving as president of the Irvine California Stake in the United States. During a family vacation on the California coast, Jack was bodysurfing when a wave swept him into a submerged rock, breaking his neck and severely injuring his spinal cord. Jack said later, “The instant I hit, I knew that I was paralyzed.”¹⁴ He could no longer talk or even breathe on his own.¹⁵

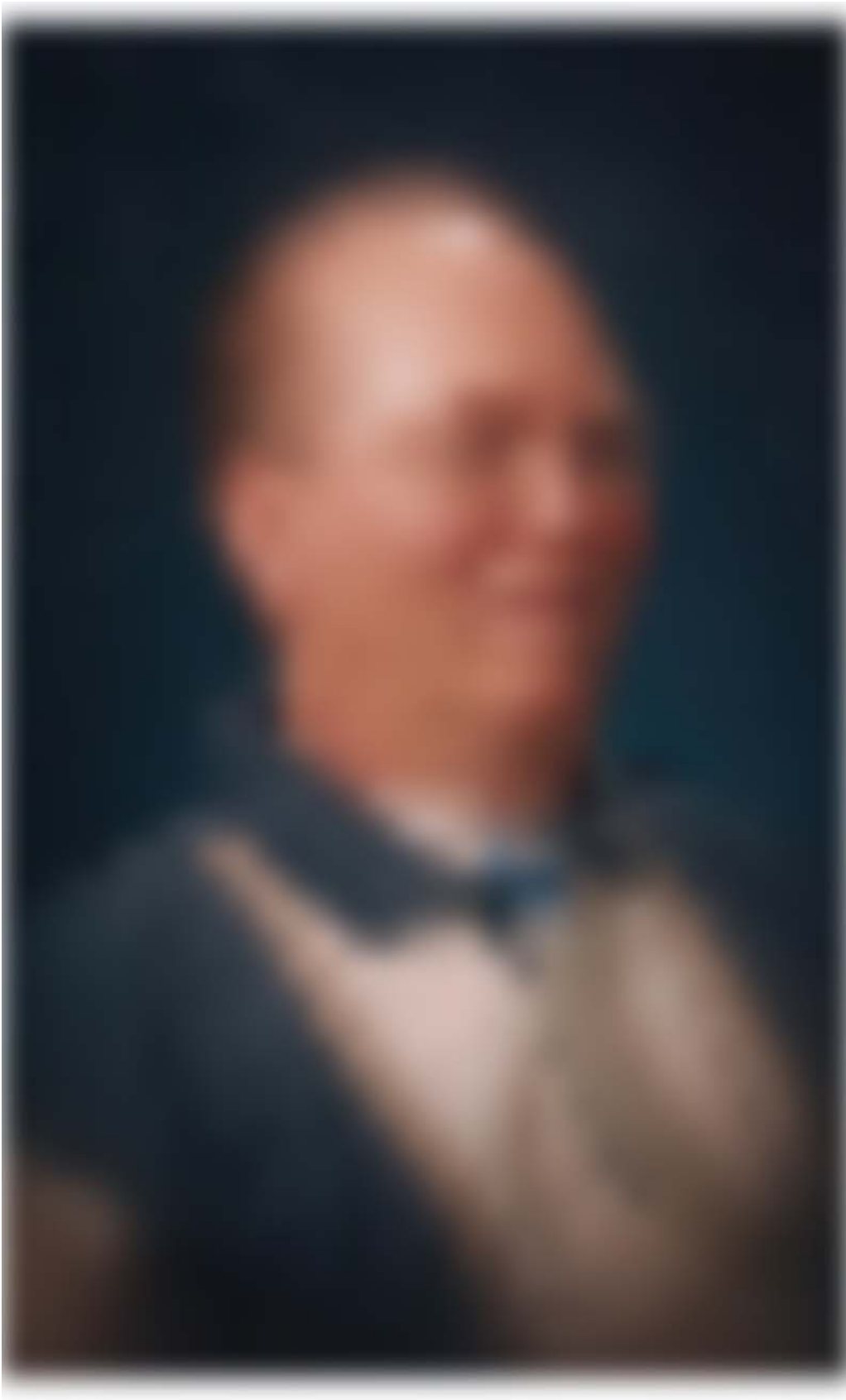


Family, friends, and stake members rallied around Brother Rushton and his wife, Jo Anne, and, among other things, remodeled a section of their home to accommodate Jack's wheelchair. Jo Anne became Jack's principal caregiver for the next 23 years. Referring to Book of Mormon accounts of how the Lord visited His people in their afflictions and made their burdens light,¹⁶ Jo Anne said, "I am often amazed at the lightness of heart I feel in caring for my husband."¹⁷



An alteration to his respiration system restored Jack's ability to speak, and within the year, Jack was called as Gospel Doctrine teacher and stake patriarch. When he would give a patriarchal blessing, another priesthood holder placed Brother Rushton's hand on the head of the person receiving the blessing and supported his

hand and arm during the blessing. Jack passed away on Christmas Day 2012, after 22 years of devoted service.



Once in an interview, Jack observed: “Problems will come into all of our lives; it’s part of just being here upon this earth. And some people think that religion or having faith in God will protect you from bad things. I don’t think that’s the point.

I think the point is that if our faith is strong, that when bad things happen, which they will, we'll be able to deal with them. ... My faith never wavered, but that didn't mean that I didn't have depressions. I think for the first time in my life, I was pushed to the limit, and literally there was nowhere to turn, and so I turned to the Lord, and to this day, I feel a spontaneity of joy.”¹⁸

This is a day of sometimes merciless attacks in social media and in person against those who seek to uphold the Lord's standard in dress, entertainment, and sexual purity. It is often the youth and young adults among the Saints, as well as women and mothers, who bear this cross of mocking and persecution. It is not easy to rise above such abuse, but remember the words of Peter: “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.”¹⁹

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were “in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery.”²⁰ Now, as accountable beings, we find joy in overcoming misery in whatever form, whether it be sin, trial, weakness, or any other obstacle to happiness. This is the joy of sensing progress in the path of discipleship; the joy of “having received a remission of ... sins, and having peace of conscience”;²¹ the joy of feeling one's soul expand and grow through the grace of Christ.²²

The Joy of Serving as Christ Serves

The Savior finds joy in bringing to pass our immortality and eternal life.²³ In speaking of the Savior's Atonement, President Russell M. Nelson said:

“As in all things, Jesus Christ is our ultimate exemplar, ‘who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross’ [Hebrews 12:2]. Think of that! In order for Him to endure the most excruciating experience ever endured on earth, our Savior focused on *joy*!

“And what was the joy that was set before Him? Surely it included the joy of cleansing, healing, and strengthening us; the joy of paying for the sins of all who would repent; the joy of making it possible for you and me to return home—clean and worthy—to live with our Heavenly Parents and families.”²⁴

Similarly, the joy “set before us” is the joy of assisting the Savior in His work of redemption. As the seed and children of Abraham,²⁵ we participate in blessing all the families of the earth “with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal.”²⁶

The words of Alma come to mind:

“This is my glory, that perhaps I may be an instrument in the hands of God to bring some soul to repentance; and this is my joy.

“And behold, when I see many of my brethren truly penitent, and coming to the Lord their God, then is my soul filled with joy. ...

“But I do not joy in my own success alone, but my joy is more full because of the success of my brethren, who have been up to the land of Nephi. ...

“Now, when I think of the success of these my brethren my soul is carried away, even to the separation of it from the body, as it were, so great is my joy.”²⁷

The fruits of our service to one another in the Church are part of the joy “set before us.” Even in times of discouragement or stress, we can minister patiently if we are focused on the joy of pleasing God and bringing light, relief, and happiness to His children, our brothers and sisters.

When in Haiti last month for the dedication of the Port-au-Prince Temple, Elder David and Sister Susan Bednar met with a young sister whose husband had been killed a few days earlier in a tragic accident. They wept together with her. Yet on Sunday this dear woman was in her place as an usher at the dedication services, with a soft, welcoming smile for all who entered the temple.

I believe that the ultimate “joy of the saints” comes in knowing that the Savior pleads their cause,²⁸ “and no one can conceive of the joy which [will fill] our souls [as] we [hear Jesus] pray for us unto the Father.”²⁹ With President Russell M. Nelson, I testify that joy is a gift for faithful Saints “who have endured the crosses of the world”³⁰ and who are “intentionally trying to live a righteous life, as taught by Jesus Christ.”³¹ May your joy be full, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.