



Finding Joy in Christ

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The surest way to find joy in this life is to join Christ in helping others.

The Lord does not ask our Aaronic Priesthood youth to do everything, but what He does ask is awe-inspiring.

A few years ago, our little family went through what many families face in this fallen world. Our youngest son, Tanner Christian Lund, contracted cancer. He was an incredible soul, as nine-year-olds tend to be. He was hilariously mischievous and, at the same time, stunningly spiritually aware. Imp and angel, naughty and nice. When he was little and was every day bewildering us with his shenanigans, we wondered if he was going to grow up to be the prophet or a bank robber. Either way, it seemed that he was going to leave a mark on the world.

And then he became desperately ill. Over the next three years, modern medicine employed heroic measures, including two bone marrow transplants, where he caught pneumonia, requiring him to spend 10 weeks unconscious on a ventilator. Miraculously, he recovered for a short time, but then his cancer returned.

Shortly before he passed away, Tanner's disease had invaded his bones, and even with strong pain medicines, still he hurt. He could barely get out of bed. One Sunday morning, his mom, Kalleen, came into his room to check on him before the family left for church. She was surprised to see that he had somehow gotten himself dressed and was sitting on the edge of his bed, painfully struggling to button his shirt. Kalleen sat down by him. "Tanner," she said, "are you sure you are strong enough to go to church? Maybe you should stay home and rest today."

He stared at the floor. He was a deacon. He had a quorum. And he had an assignment.

"I'm supposed to pass the sacrament today."

"Well, I'm sure someone could do that for you."

"Yes," he said, "but ... I see how people look at me when I pass the sacrament. I think it helps them."

So Kalleen helped him button his shirt and tie his tie, and they drove to church. Clearly, something important was happening.

I came to church from an earlier meeting and so was surprised to see Tanner sitting on the deacons' row. Kalleen quietly told me why he was there and what he had said: "It helps people."

And so I watched as the deacons stepped to the sacrament table. He leaned gently against another deacon as the priests passed them the bread trays. And then Tanner shuffled to his appointed place and took hold of the end of the pew to steady himself as he presented the sacrament.

It seemed that every eye in the chapel was on him, moved by his struggle as he did his simple part. Somehow Tanner expressed a silent sermon as he solemnly, haltingly moved from row to row—his bald head moist with perspiration—representing the Savior in the way that deacons do. His once indomitable deacon's body was itself a little bruised, broken, and torn, willingly suffering to serve by bearing the emblems of the Savior's Atonement into our lives.

Seeing how he had come to think about being a deacon made us think differently too—about the sacrament, about the Savior, and about deacons and teachers and priests.

I wonder at the unspoken miracle that had impelled him that morning to respond so bravely to that still, small call to serve, and about the strength and capacities of all of our emergent youth as they push themselves to respond to a prophet's call to enlist in God's battalions and join in the work of salvation and exaltation.

Every time a deacon holds a sacrament tray, we are reminded of the sacred story of the Last Supper, of Gethsemane, of Calvary, and of the garden tomb. When the Savior said to His Apostles, "This do in remembrance of me,"¹ He was also speaking through the ages to each of us. He was speaking of the unending miracle

that He would provide as future deacons, teachers, and priests would present His emblems and invite His children to accept His atoning gift.

All of the sacramental symbols point us to that gift. We contemplate the bread that He once broke—and the bread the priests before us are, in turn, now breaking. We think of the meaning of the liquid consecrated, then and now, as sacrament prayers solemnly pass from the mouths of young priests into our hearts and into the heavens, renewing covenants that connect us to the very powers of Christ's salvation. We may think about what it means when a deacon carries the sacred emblems to us, standing as he does where Jesus would stand if He were there, offering to lift our burdens and our pain.

Fortunately, young men and women do not have to get sick to discover joy and purpose in serving the Savior.

Elder David A. Bednar has taught that to grow and become as missionaries *are*, we should do what missionaries *do*, and then, “line upon line and precept upon precept, ... [we] can gradually become the missionary ... the Savior expects.”²

Likewise, if we desire “to be like Jesus,”³ we should do what Jesus does, and in one astonishing sentence, the Lord explains what it is that He does: He said, “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”⁴

The Savior's mission has always and forever been to serve His Father by saving His children.

And the surest way to find joy in this life is to join Christ in helping others.

This is the simple truth that inspired the Children and Youth program.

All Children and Youth activities and all Children and Youth teachings are about helping young people become more like Jesus by joining with Him in His work of salvation and exaltation.

Children and Youth is a tool to help every Primary child and youth to grow in discipleship and to gain a faith-filled vision of what the way of happiness looks like. They can come to anticipate and yearn for the way stations and signposts along the covenant path, where they will be baptized and confirmed with the gift of the Holy Ghost and soon belong to quorums and Young Women classes, where they will feel the joy of helping others through a succession of Christlike acts of service. They will set goals, large and small, that will bring balance to their lives as they become more like the Savior. For the Strength of Youth conferences and magazines, the *Friend*, and the Gospel Living app will help center them in finding joy in Christ. They will anticipate the blessings of holding limited-use temple recommends and feel the spirit of Elijah through the influence of the Holy Ghost as they pursue the blessings of the temple and family history. They will be guided by patriarchal blessings. In time, they will see themselves going into temples to be endowed with power and to find joy there as they are eternally connected, come what may, with their families.

Against headwinds of pandemic and calamity, bringing about the full promise of the new Children and Youth program is still a work in progress—but there is urgency. Our youth cannot wait for the world to right itself before they come to know the Savior. Some are making decisions even now that they would not make if they understood their true identities—and His.

And so the urgent call from God’s battalions in fateful training is for “all hands on deck!”

Moms and dads, your sons need you to support them now as passionately as ever you have in the past when they have been about lesser things like badges and pins. Mothers and fathers, priesthood and Young Women leaders, if your youth are struggling, Children and Youth will help bring them to the Savior, and the Savior will bring them peace.

Quorum and class presidencies, step up and take your rightful place in the Lord’s work.

Bishops, link your keys with those of quorum presidents, and your quorums—and your wards—will forever change.

And to you of the rising generation, I testify, as one who knows, that you *are* beloved sons and daughters of God and He has a work for you to do.

As you rise to the majesty of your stations, with all of your hearts, might, mind, and strength, you will come to love God and keep your covenants and trust in His priesthood as you work to bless others, beginning in your own homes.

I pray that you will strive, with redoubled energy worthy of this time, to serve, exercise faith, repent, and improve each day, to qualify to receive temple blessings and the enduring joy that comes only through the gospel of Jesus Christ. I pray that you will prepare to become that diligent missionary, loyal husband or wife, loving father or mother that you have been promised you may ultimately become by being a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

May you help prepare the world for the Savior’s return by inviting all to come unto Christ and receive the blessings of His Atonement. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.