

Personal Peace in Challenging Times

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It has never been more important to seek personal peace.

I was recently assigned to dedicate a portion of historic Nauvoo. As part of the assignment, I was able to visit Liberty Jail in Missouri. As I viewed the jail, I contemplated the events that make it such a significant part of Church history. The lives of the Saints were threatened as the result of an extermination order issued by the governor of Missouri. In addition, the Prophet Joseph and a few choice associates had been unjustly imprisoned in Liberty Jail. One of the reasons for the violent opposition to our members was most of them were opposed to slavery.¹ This intense persecution of Joseph Smith and his followers constitutes an extreme example of the unrighteous exercise of agency that can impact righteous people. Joseph's time in Liberty Jail demonstrates that adversity is not evidence of the Lord's disfavor nor a withdrawal of His blessings.

I was deeply moved as I read what the Prophet Joseph Smith declared as he was confined in Liberty Jail: "O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?"² Joseph inquired how long the Lord's people would "suffer these wrongs and unlawful oppressions."³

As I stood in Liberty Jail, I was deeply touched as I read the Lord's answer: "My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; and then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high."⁴ It is clear that opposition can refine us for an eternal, celestial destiny.⁵

The Savior's precious words "My son, peace be unto thy soul"⁶ resonate with me personally and have great significance for our day. They remind me of His teachings to His disciples during His mortal ministry.

Prior to Christ's suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, He commanded His Apostles to "love one another; as I have loved you"⁷ and subsequently comforted them with these words: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be

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Notwithstanding this vision of the millennial reign, we know that world peace and harmony are not prevalent in our day.¹¹ In my lifetime, I have never seen a greater lack of civility. We are bombarded with angry, contentious language and provocative, devastating actions that destroy peace and tranquility.

Peace in the world is not promised or assured until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The Savior instructed His Apostles that His earthly mission would not achieve universal peace. He taught, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth.”¹² Universal peace was not part of the Savior’s initial mortal ministry. Universal peace does not exist today.

However, *personal* peace can be achieved despite the anger, contention, and division that blight and corrupt our world today. It has never been more important to seek personal peace. A beautiful and beloved new hymn, written for today’s youth by Brother Nik Day, titled “Peace in Christ” declares, “When there’s no peace on earth, there is peace in Christ.”¹³ We were blessed to have this hymn just before the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic.

This hymn reflects in a beautiful fashion the aspiration for peace and appropriately emphasizes that peace is anchored in the life and mission of Jesus Christ. President Joseph F. Smith declared, “There never can come to the world that spirit of peace and love ... until mankind will receive God’s truth and God’s message ... and acknowledge his power and authority which is divine.”¹⁴

While we will never retreat from efforts to achieve universal peace, we have been assured that we can have personal peace, as Christ teaches. This principle is set forth in the Doctrine and Covenants: “But learn that he who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come.”¹⁵

What are some of the “works of righteousness” that will help us deal with disputations and lessen contention and find peace in this world? All of Christ’s teachings point in this direction. I will mention a few which I believe are particularly important.

First: Love God, Live His Commandments, and Forgive Everyone

President George Albert Smith became President of the Church in 1945. He had been known during his years as an Apostle as a peace-loving leader. In the preceding 15 years before he became President, the challenges and trials of a

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all Latter-day Saints should seek to possess if they hope some day to stand in his presence and receive at his hands a glorious welcome home.”¹⁶

Second: Seek the Fruits of the Spirit

The Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Galatians, sets forth the dichotomy between works of righteousness that qualify us to inherit the kingdom of God and works that can, without repentance, disqualify us. Among those that qualify us are the fruits of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, [and] temperance.”¹⁷ Paul also includes bearing one another’s burdens and being not weary in well-doing.¹⁸ Among those works that are not righteous he includes hatred, wrath, and *strife*.¹⁹

One of the great lessons in the Old Testament period relates to Father Abraham. Abraham and Lot, his nephew, were wealthy but found they could not dwell together. To eliminate strife, Abraham allowed Lot to choose the land he wanted. Lot chose the plain of Jordan, which was both well watered and beautiful. Abraham took the less fertile plain of Mamre. The scriptures read that Abraham then pitched his tent and built “an altar unto the Lord.”²⁰ Lot, on the other hand, “pitched his tent toward Sodom.”²¹ To have peaceful relationships, the lesson is clear: we should be willing to compromise and eliminate strife with respect to matters that do not involve righteousness. As King Benjamin taught, “Ye will not have a mind to injure one another, but to live peaceably.”²² But on conduct relating to righteousness and doctrinal imperatives, we need to remain firm and steadfast.

If we want to have the peace which is the reward of the works of righteousness, we will *not* pitch our tents toward the world. We will pitch our tents toward the temple.

Third: Exercise Agency to Choose Righteousness

Peace and agency are intertwined as essential elements of the plan of salvation. As described in the Gospel Topics article “Agency and Accountability,” “Agency is the ability and privilege God gives us to choose and to act for ourselves.”²³ Thus, agency is at the heart of the personal growth and experience that bless us as we follow the Savior.²⁴

Agency was a principal issue in the premortal Council in Heaven and the conflict between those who chose to follow Christ and the followers of Satan.²⁵ Letting go of pride and control and choosing the Savior would allow us to have His light and

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Atonement of Jesus Christ, He can help us endure our trials, sicknesses, and pain. We can be filled with joy, *peace*, and consolation. All that is unfair about life can be made right through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.”²⁶

Fourth: Build Zion in Our Hearts and Homes

We are children of God and part of His family. We are also part of the family into which we are born. The institution of the family is the foundation for both happiness and peace. President Russell M. Nelson has taught us—and during this pandemic we have learned—that the home-centered, Church-supported religious observance can “unleash the power of families ... to transform [our] home[s] into a sanctuary of faith.”²⁷ If we have this religious observance in our homes, we will also have the Savior’s peace.²⁸ We are aware that many of you do not have the blessings of righteous homes and contend regularly with those who choose unrighteousness. The Savior can provide protection and peace to guide you ultimately to safety and shelter from life’s storms.

I assure you that the joy, love, and fulfillment experienced in loving, righteous families produce both peace and happiness. Love and kindness are at the center of having Zion in our hearts and homes.²⁹

Fifth: Follow the Current Admonitions of Our Prophet

Our peace is greatly enhanced when we follow the Lord’s prophet, President Russell M. Nelson. We will shortly have an opportunity to hear from him. He was prepared from the foundations of the world for this calling. His personal preparation has been most remarkable.³⁰

He has taught us that we can “feel enduring peace and joy, even during turbulent times,” as we strive to become more like our Savior, Jesus Christ.³¹ He has counseled us to “repent daily” to receive the Lord’s “cleansing, healing, and strengthening power.”³² I am a personal witness that revelation has been received and continues to be received from heaven by our beloved prophet.

While we honor and sustain him as our prophet, we worship our Heavenly Father and our Savior, Jesus Christ. We are ministered to by the Holy Ghost.

I testify and provide my personal apostolic witness that Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of the world, leads and guides His restored Church. His life and atoning mission are the true source of peace. He is the Prince of Peace. I bear my sure and

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1. 1. “People in Independence did not like that the Saints preached to Indians and disapproved of slavery” (*Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, vol. 1, *The Standard of Truth, 1815–1846* [2018], 172).
2. 2. Doctrine and Covenants 121:1.
3. 3. Doctrine and Covenants 121:3.
4. 4. Doctrine and Covenants 121:7–8.
5. 5. See 2 Nephi 2:11–15.
6. 6. Doctrine and Covenants 121:7.
7. 7. John 13:34.
8. 8. John 14:27.
9. 9. Isaiah 9:6; 2 Nephi 19:6. The Savior, in His Beatitudes, also taught, “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9).
10. 10. “With judgment and with justice ... for ever” (see Isaiah 9:6–7; 2 Nephi 19:6–7; see also Galatians 5:22).
11. 11. See Doctrine and Covenants 1:35. President Wilford Woodruff declared this in 1894 and again in 1896 (see *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, sel. G. Homer Durham [1946], 251–52; see also Marion G. Romney, in Conference Report, Apr. 1967, 79–82; Ezra Taft Benson, “The Power of the Word,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 79–80; Dallin H. Oaks, “Preparation for the Second Coming,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2004, 9).
12. 12. Matthew 10:34.
13. 13. Nik Day, “Peace in Christ,” 2018 Mutual theme song, *Liahona*, Jan. 2018, 54–55; *New Era*, Jan. 2018, 24–25. The hymn “Peace in Christ” teaches:

When we live the way He lived,
There is peace in Christ.
He gives us hope
When hope is gone.
He gives us strength
When we can't go on.
He gives us shelter
In the storms of life.

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16. 16. See George Albert Smith, in Conference Report, Oct. 1945, 169–70.
17. 17. Galatians 5:22–23.
18. 18. See Galatians 6:2, 9.
19. 19. See Galatians 5:20.
20. 20. Genesis 13:18.
21. 21. Genesis 13:12.
22. 22. Mosiah 4:13.
23. 23. Gospel Topics, “Agency and Accountability,” topics.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
24. 24. We are “free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men” (2 Nephi 2:27). Agency also allows the devastating evil choices of others to cause pain and suffering and sometimes even death. The scriptures make it clear that the Lord God gave agency so that man could choose good or evil (see 2 Nephi 2:16).
25. 25. See Gospel Topics, “Agency and Accountability,” topics.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
26. 26. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2019), 52, ChurchofJesusChrist.org; emphasis added.
27. 27. Russell M. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 113.
28. 28. See Doctrine and Covenants 19:23.
29. 29. I was fortunate to grow up in a home where peace prevailed. This was primarily due to the influence of our mother, who was a faithful member of the Church. My father was outstanding in every way but was less active. Mother honored our father and avoided contention. She taught us as children to pray and attend church. She also taught us to love and serve each other (see Mosiah 4:14–15). Growing up in such a home provided peace and has been a great blessing in my life.
30. 30. Russell M. Nelson graduated from the University of Utah Medical School first in his class at age 22. He had long desired to be a surgeon and received the best training available at major medical institutions. He faithfully fulfilled military commitments in Korea and Japan. For many

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31. 31. See Russell M. Nelson, “Opening Message,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2020, 6; see also Russell M. Nelson, “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 81–84.
32. 32. Russell M. Nelson, “Opening Message,” 6.

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