

“There Can Be Nothing So Exquisite and Sweet as Was My Joy”

By Elder Craig C. Christensen
Of the Seventy

Repenting daily and coming unto Jesus Christ is the way to experience joy—joy beyond our imagination.

Throughout His mortal ministry, the Savior showed great compassion for all of God’s children—especially for those who were suffering or had fallen away. When criticized by the Pharisees for associating with and eating among sinners, Jesus responded by teaching three familiar parables.¹ In each of these parables, He emphasized the importance of seeking out those who had strayed and the joy that is felt when they return. For example, in the parable of the lost sheep, He said, “[Great] joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.”²

My desire today is to strengthen the connection between joy and repentance—more specifically, the joy that comes when we repent and the feelings of joy we experience as we invite others to come unto Christ and receive His atoning sacrifice in their lives.

We Are That We Might Have Joy

In the scriptures, the word *joy* typically means much more than passing moments of contentment or even feelings of happiness. Joy in this context is a godly attribute, found in its fulness when we return to dwell in the presence of God.³ It is more profound, elevating, enduring, and life-changing than any pleasure or comfort this world can offer.

We were created to have joy. It is our intended destiny as children of a loving Heavenly Father. He wants to share His joy with us. The prophet Lehi taught that God’s plan for each of us is that we “might have joy.”⁴ Because we live in a fallen world, enduring joy or everlasting joy often seems beyond our reach. Yet in the very next verse, Lehi continues by explaining that “the Messiah [came to] ... redeem [us] from the fall.”⁵ Redemption, by and through the Savior Jesus Christ, makes joy possible.

The gospel message is a message of hope, of “good tidings of great joy,”⁶ and the means whereby all can experience peace and occasions of joy in this life and receive a fulness of joy in the life to come.⁷

The joy we speak of is a gift for the faithful, yet it comes with a price. Joy is not cheap or casually given. Rather, it is bought “with the precious blood of [Jesus] Christ.”⁸ If we really understood the value of true, godly joy, we would not hesitate to sacrifice any worldly possession or make any necessary life changes to receive it.

A powerful but humble king in the Book of Mormon understood this. “What shall I do,” he asked, “that I may be born of God, having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast, and receive his Spirit, that I may be filled with joy ... ? Behold, said he, I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy.”⁹

In response to the king’s question, the missionary Aaron said, “If thou desirest this thing, ... bow down before God ... [and] repent of all thy sins.”¹⁰ Repentance is the pathway to joy¹¹ because it is the pathway that leads to the Savior Jesus Christ.¹²

Joy Comes through Sincere Repentance

For some, to think of repentance as the pathway to joy might seem contradictory. Repentance, at times, can be painful and difficult. It requires admitting that some of our thoughts and actions—even some of our beliefs—have been wrong. Repentance also requires change, which, at times, can be uncomfortable. But joy and comfort are not the same thing. Sin—including the sin of complacency—limits our joy.

As stated by the psalmist, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”¹³ As we repent of our sins, we must focus on the great joy that follows. The nights may seem long, but the morning does come, and oh, how exquisite is the peace and resplendent joy we feel as the Savior’s Atonement frees us from sin and suffering.

There Can Be Nothing So Exquisite and Sweet

Consider the experience of Alma in the Book of Mormon. He was “racked with eternal torment,” and his soul was “harrowed up” because of his sins. But once he turned to the Savior for mercy, he “could remember [his] pains no more.”¹⁴

“And oh, what joy,” he declared, “and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, ... there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.”¹⁵

This is the kind of joy available to those who come unto Jesus Christ through repentance.¹⁶ As President Russell M. Nelson has taught:

“Repentance opens our access to the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. ...

“When we choose to repent, we choose to change! We allow the Savior to transform us into the best version of ourselves. We choose to grow spiritually and receive joy—the joy of redemption in Him. When we choose to repent, we choose to become more like Jesus Christ!”¹⁷

Repentance brings joy because it prepares our hearts to receive the influence of the Holy Ghost. To be filled with the Holy Ghost means to be filled with joy. And to be filled with joy means to be filled with the Holy Ghost.¹⁸ Our joy increases as we work daily to bring the Spirit into our lives. As taught by the prophet Mormon, “Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in [their] faith [in] Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation.”¹⁹ The Lord promises all who work to follow Him, “I will impart unto you ... my Spirit, which shall enlighten your mind, which shall fill your soul with joy.”²⁰

The Joy of Helping Others Repent

After we have felt the joy that comes from sincere repentance, we quite naturally want to share that joy with others. As we do, our joy multiplies. That’s exactly what happened to Alma.

“This is my glory,” he said, “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; then do I remember what the Lord has done for me, ... yea, then do I remember his merciful arm which he extended [to] me.”²¹

Helping others repent is a natural expression of our gratitude toward the Savior, and it is a source of great joy. The Lord has promised:

“If it so be that you should ... bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!

“And now, if your joy will be great with one soul that you have brought unto me ... , how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me!”²²

How Great Is His Joy in the Soul That Repenteth

I find it helpful to try to imagine the joy the Savior must feel each time we receive the blessings of His atoning sacrifice in our lives.²³ As cited by President Nelson,²⁴ the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews shared this tender insight: “Lay aside every ... sin which doth so easily beset us, ... looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; *who for the joy that was set before him* endured the cross ... and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”²⁵ We speak often of the pain and suffering of Gethsemane and Calvary, but seldom do we speak of the great joy the Savior must have anticipated as He offered His life for us. Clearly, His pain and His suffering were for us, that we might experience the joy of returning with Him to the presence of God.

After teaching the people in ancient America, the Savior expressed His great love for them by saying:

“Now, behold, my joy is great, even unto fulness, because of you ... ; yea, and even the Father rejoiceth, and also all the holy angels. ...

“... In [you] I have [a] fulness of joy.”²⁶

Come unto Christ and Receive His Joy

Brothers and sisters, I conclude by sharing my personal witness, which I consider a sacred gift. I testify that Jesus Christ is the Savior and Redeemer of the world. I know that He loves each of us. His singular focus, His “work and [His] glory,”²⁷ is to help us receive a fulness of joy in Him. I am a personal witness that repenting daily and coming unto Jesus Christ is the way to experience joy—joy beyond our imagination.²⁸ That is why we are here on earth. That is why God prepared His great plan of happiness for us. Jesus Christ truly is “the way, the truth, and the life”²⁹ and the only “name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God.”³⁰ I so testify in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Luke 15.
2. Luke 15:7.
3. See Psalm 16:11.
4. 2 Nephi 2:25.
5. 2 Nephi 2:26.
6. Luke 2:10.

7. See Mosiah 3:13–19.
8. 1 Peter 1:19.
9. Alma 22:15.
10. Alma 22:16.
11. In recent years, several prophets and apostles have emphasized the joy of repentance. See, for example, Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2019, 67–69; Dallin H. Oaks, “Cleansed by Repentance,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2019, 91–94; Dale G. Renlund, “Repentance: A Joyful Choice,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 121–24; D. Todd Christofferson, “The Divine Gift of Repentance,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2011, 38–41.
12. President Nelson taught: “Joy comes from and because of [Jesus Christ]. He is the source of all joy. ... For Latter-day Saints, Jesus Christ is joy!” (“Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 82).
13. Psalm 30:5.
14. Alma 36:12, 19.
15. Alma 36:20–21; see also verses 12–19.
16. See Alma 27:18.
17. Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” 67.
18. See Acts 13:52; Mosiah 4:3.
19. Helaman 3:35.
20. Doctrine and Covenants 11:13.
21. Alma 29:9–10.
22. Doctrine and Covenants 18:15–16.
23. Doctrine and Covenants 18:13.
24. See Russell M. Nelson, “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” 83.
25. Hebrews 12:1–2; emphasis added.

26. 3 Nephi 27:30–31. Three of the Savior’s Nephite disciples desired to remain in mortality with the sole purpose of bringing souls to Him. To these loyal disciples, Jesus said, “For this cause ye shall have fulness of joy; and ye shall sit down in the kingdom of my Father; yea, your joy shall be full, even as the Father hath given me fulness of joy; and ye shall be even as I am” (3 Nephi 28:10).
27. Moses 1:39.
28. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).
29. John 14:6.
30. 2 Nephi 31:21.