

Jesus Christ Is the Way – Happiness and Joy

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“Stand Forever” Episode 11

The Prophet Joseph Smith told us, “Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God.”¹

Hello, my name is Larry Corbridge, and this is Episode 11 of the *Stand Forever Series*. In the last episode, we considered purpose, direction, and destination. We concluded that the destination you were born to reach is to choose to receive the gift of God’s Son, the gift of God’s Spirit, the gift of God’s life, and help others do the same. But what about happiness and joy? Aren’t they the ultimate objective?

Some scriptural and prophetic statements suggest happiness and joy are an important part of the destination, if not the whole of it. Consequently, they must be considered in any discussion about the destination you were born to reach.

The clarion scriptural statement is from Lehi: “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.”² Happiness and joy, however, are difficult subjects to address for several reasons. First, happiness and joy are complicated and nuanced. If you ask a hundred people about happiness and joy, you will get a hundred different opinions and answers. Second, most people (maybe everyone) experience dark times. Some are clinically depressed for a myriad of reasons, including genetics and chemical imbalances. The last thing they need is to feel guilty about not being happier. Third, you don’t achieve happiness or joy by aiming at them. Fourth, a library of books has been written on point in recent decades, and this entire series could be dedicated to that end.

But let’s consider what the Lord has said about both happiness and joy. If you consider only what the Lord has revealed about happiness, if you gather every scripture that speaks to happiness and distill the essence of each, this is what you will find:

Happiness is known by those who trust in the Lord, acquire understanding, keep God’s commandments, face adversity, serve others, help the poor and needy, desire good, and never give up or give in.

¹ *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (1976), 255-256

² 2 Nephi 2:25

If you think a bit about that scriptural summary, you will see happiness is not exclusive to active, contributing members of the Church. There is nothing in that description that says that. Joy, however, is another matter.

Joy is different, particularly what President Russell M. Nelson refers to as “enduring joy.” Joy is more than a sense of well-being. It is more than contentment. It is not just a feeling, nor is it a constant state of euphoria—even God weeps.³ Joy is more refined, more elevating, transforming, and all-consuming than happiness. **Joy is a fruit of the power and glory of God.**

If you consider only what the Lord has revealed about joy, if you gather every scripture that speaks to joy and distill the essence of each, this is what you will find:

Joy is given to those who worthily enter the presence of God, gain knowledge, have faith in Christ and are redeemed of their sins, keep the commandments, suffer tribulation and know misery, trust in the Lord, are endowed with the Spirit of the Holy Ghost, receive the ordinances of the temple, are faithful and wise stewards (using their talents), give everything, ask God, serve with the Lord to build His kingdom with all their might, are fruitful in their labors, and unconditionally and totally surrender to the Lord’s will.

Now compare the two. If you compare what the Lord has said about happiness with what He has revealed about joy, you see that while all the principles of happiness are also essential to joy, several additional principles are necessary for joy. Joy includes all that happiness requires and more.

What principles are necessary for joy that are not related to happiness? Faith in Christ and redemption of sin, the Spirit of the Holy Ghost, the presence of God, ordinances of the temple, faithful and wise stewards, a willingness to give everything, ask God, tribulation and misery, serve with the Lord to build His kingdom with all one’s might, unconditional and total surrender.

One of the most significant scriptural statements about joy was made by Paul who said: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace.”⁴ Ask any group of people what the best of all human conditions is and those three will surface—“love, joy and peace.” **They**

³ Moses 8:28-33

⁴ Galatians 5:22

are all gifts of the Spirit of God, which is the best of all human conditions and the source of almost all good things. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit of God.

Mormon said the Spirit of the Lord fell upon all those who heard the teaching of King Benjamin, and they were filled with joy: “And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy.”⁵

On the same occasion, King Benjamin told the people they were filled with great joy because of the outpouring of the Spirit of God: “And behold, even at this time, ye have been calling on his name, and begging for a remission of your sins. And has he suffered that ye have begged in vain? Nay; he has poured out his Spirit upon you, and has caused that your hearts should be filled with joy, and has caused that your mouths should be stopped that ye could not find utterance, so exceedingly great was your joy.”⁶

David is recorded to have said, “I have set the Lord always before me Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is a fulness of joy.”⁷ In this life, the presence of the Lord is His Spirit which is the fountain from which joy flows. **The most important truth to understand about joy is that it is a fruit of the Spirit of God.**

A woman’s siblings and all her children left the Church. They say they are happier now. She watches them and they seem to be happy. She is not so happy, and yet she is trying to keep the commandments unlike her friends and family. She asks: “If a person can be happy without the gospel, then what’s the use?” How would you answer that question? What would you say?

An unmarried son says to his father he has many single friends who are happy and other married friends who are not. He mentions Lehi’s statement, “Men are that they might have joy” and asks a similar question, “Why then is marriage so important?” How would you answer either one?

First the question is not a new one. We find the same thinking among all of Israel, when the Lord declares:

Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken *so much* against thee? Ye have said, It *is* vain to serve God: and what profit *is it* that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked

⁵ Mosiah 4:3

⁶ Mosiah 4:20

⁷ Psalms 16:8, 11

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.

Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard *it*, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.”⁸

You don’t have to look far to find examples of people who appear to be proud but “happy,” unrighteous and yet “set up,” doing better than you and, you may ask, “What’s the use?” This is the “eat-drink-and-be-merry crowd” which Nephi said would be prevalent/predominate in our day. “Yea, and **there shall be many** which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us.”⁹ Who can deny their merriment? Otherwise, there would be no attraction, no point.

It should not be surprising that when people shed the high expectations of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ or avoid the challenges and stresses of married and family life, they feel free and yes even a temporary sense of happiness on an easier path. A student who drops out of a rigorous educational program to sell cappuccino at Starbucks may feel happier for a time, but the long-term consequences are a much different story.

Do you want the happiness of the world, or do you want to become a polished jewel?

Anyone who is not fallen-down-dead drunk knows you can’t become a polished jewel on the path of the free and easy. You know deep within your soul that fire, suffering—and, yes, even misery—are necessary to mold and temper a godly soul and experience joy. You know joy cannot be won without opposition and misery to prove you will be faithful in all things no matter what. You know those things from long before. No one need teach you that. They are written in your heart.

When Christ revealed to His disciples they would be shunned and ultimately killed, they were understandably sad. He said, “But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart.” He then promised that the Comforter would come and said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall

⁸ Malachi 3:13-18

⁹ 2 Nephi 28:7, *emphasis added*

rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and **your joy no man taketh from you.**"¹⁰ That is probably what President Russell M. Nelson refers to as "enduring joy."

Happiness is not the exclusive domain of active, contributing members of the Church. Joy, however, is another matter.

President Russell M. Nelson taught, "If we look to the world and follow its formulas for happiness, we will never know joy. The unrighteous may experience any number of emotions and sensations, but they will never experience joy! Joy is a gift for the faithful. It is the gift that comes from intentionally trying to live a righteous life, as taught by Jesus Christ."¹¹

Happiness and joy are not dependent on any external condition or circumstance. As important as what the Lord has revealed about happiness and joy is what He has not said. What is not mentioned by God in either instance? Popularity, recognition, money, security, beauty, health, no problems, ease or avoiding stress, positive attitude, having control, and extraversion to name a few.

Circumstances may make you sad, but they will not make you happy. You may feel blue because it is raining but that does not mean you will be happy when the sun shines. You may be saddened by the death of a loved one, contraction of an illness, the loss of a limb, the destruction of your home by an earthquake or fire, or when you lose your job, but that does not mean you are happy when the sun does shine, and all of your loved ones are alive, and you do not have cancer, you have all your limbs, and your house is still standing?

You may not agree with that. You may think you are happier when the sun shines, with loved ones, when you are well, your house is still standing, and you have a job. If those things make you happy, may I suggest it is not because of those things, rather because you are aware and grateful for them. **Gratitude, one of God's commandments, is what leads to happiness, not the circumstances.**

Happiness and joy also do not require perfection or near perfection. They are within the reach of everyone. They depend on us alone. We are responsible. **We are given**

¹⁰ John 16:2, 6, 20, 22

¹¹ Russell M. Nelson, *Joy and Spiritual Survival*, General Conference October 2016

this life to learn to live happily. Now it is a test, but some day the test will end but if successful we will continue to live in the same way, not as a test, but as a way of life.

So, what about it? Is joy the destination or at least part of it? The answer is “yes and no.” Joy is one of the consequences and maybe the greatest consequence of receiving the gifts of God’s Son and His Spirit that we may receive the greatest gift of His life, including a fulness of joy. It isn’t, however, attained by aiming at it.

Happiness and joy are very elusive, and the harder you chase them, the more you focus on them, the more elusive they become. This is counterintuitive because we generally think the clearer the objective, the greater the focus and the harder you work, the more likely you will succeed. I’m not sure, however, that holds true for happiness and joy. My experience is, you stumble on them while focusing on other good things. Yes, “men are that they might have joy,” but I’m not at all convinced that joy is achieved by chasing it.

Some of the most unhappy people are the most focused on their own happiness. It is not only that they look for it in all the wrong places but preoccupation with one’s own happiness is fundamentally egocentric and will never lead to happiness. Oddly, you hit it by not aiming at it. The less stressed and focused you are about your own happiness, the happier you will be. This is like the Lord’s statement that “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, he shall save it.”¹²

As important as they are, happiness and joy should not be the North Star; Christ should be. He did not say, “What manner of men ought ye to be? Verily, I say unto you a happy people.” Rather He said, “Even as I am.”¹³ He did not say, “Thou shalt have no other gods before happiness and joy.” Rather, “no other gods before me.”

Again, President Nelson, speaking to this subject, said, “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. 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. He is the source of all joy.”¹⁴

¹² Mark 8:35, 36

¹³ 3 Nephi 27:27

¹⁴ Russell M. Nelson, *Joy and Spiritual Survival*, General Conference October 2016

Finally, there have been dark times in my life which have taught me much including about joy in misery.

Two periods were especially dark and unhappy despite my efforts to live righteously. I learned and wrote much during those very dark times, which I cannot include here, but this journal entry provides a glimmer of the light in the dark:

I have felt oppressed in words I cannot begin to express. I have been in the depths of despair. There have been times at work when I have felt close to a meltdown. I have had to get up, away from the desk, walk outside into the parking lot and the sunlight, and pace back and forth, praying, of course, all the while.

I have and am experiencing the whole range of human emotions particularly on the dark side of the scale, deep sadness, fear, and foreboding. I feel weak and ineffective. My confidence is shaken to the core.

Another journal entry reveals what I learned about joy in misery:

About two weeks ago I went to sleep troubled about one thing or another. I had a dream. Oddly enough it was not a vision. There were no images, only music. In my dream I heard a song. I heard a group singing a simple melody and simple lyrics. It was not a large, glorious heavenly choir, rather more of a smaller folk group. I think that the big choirs were probably already booked for someone more important that night and this little group of folk singers were all that were available to be sent to me. In any event I am glad they came. I awoke with the song in my heart. I have since forgotten the melody, but I remember the simple, yet profound refrain: "There are good times, and there are bad times, but the good times and the bad times are all good."

The Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith: "Thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment If thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over thy foes ... and all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good Therefor, hold on thy way."¹⁵ I love those word: "hold on thy way". It is more than "hold on." It presupposes you are in the way, on the path, and if so, "hold on thy way." Everything—everything good, everything bad—will "be for thy good".

¹⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 121:7, 8; 122:7, 9

What a precious truth! This is a true principle. It is profoundly important. Few principles provide a greater sense of security. Whatever happens, whatever life may bring, it will all work to your good if you endure it well. How marvelous to understand that! What a sense of security, control, and autonomy that comes when you realize that in a world of such great uncertainty and threat absolute certainty and protection is always within your reach. You have little control over what happens but absolute control over how it will affect you. You are wholly and absolutely within control of your destiny.

“There are good times, and there are bad times, but the good times and the bad times are all good.”

In the next episode (Episode 12) we will continue our exploration of Jesus Christ as the Way considering a series of questions, including these:

- If you were to sum up life in two words for your posterity what would you say?
- What is the hallmark, the defining characteristic of intelligence?
- What is the supreme expression of intelligence?

I hope you will join me then.