

Joy in the Divine Roles of Men and Women

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I appreciate very much the opportunity to participate in this session with my wife, Sharon, who always does so well in expressing her, and our, thoughts. Her counsel is most appreciated because some of her best perceptions, while usually complementary, are often different than my own. Thus, while we enjoy doing much together, we have learned that some differences can be enriching and very helpful, rather than competitive or conflicting. Largely because of my career and callings, we have also learned to do some things on our own without feeling any minimization of our love or relationship. This is clearly a matter of attitude and choice. Let me give you just one example. Years ago when I had regular responsibility for groups of medical students, I would ask Sharon to speak to their spouses. She did a wonderful job, as she has today, and her counsel always seemed to be very helpful. In fact, on occasion I still have these former student families mention how helpful her advice and example have been.

She would say something to the effect that being married will either make you a better or worse student, and it depends on your attitude. She would also say that the potential opportunities and traumas of school and training could be either joyful or depressing. One frequent example was that if you are focused on how terrible and lonely it is to be alone (and young doctor's spouses are alone a lot!), then you will often be sad. On the other hand, if you choose to focus on how wonderful it is to have some time together and not really expect that you will have too much or that it will occur too often, then those moments, however few, can be most joyful. I can report that her reactions to me over almost forty years have almost always been positive but also always truthful!

Even bad news or difficult counsel is better received in an atmosphere of optimism and positivity. Necessary changes and adjustments will lead to more joyful living in a generally happy environment when it is nonthreatening and supportive.

Our family has had wonderful and touching experiences at Martin's Cove and traveling over Rocky Ridge. These gave us much more insight into our responsibilities and opportunities to find joy even in the face of almost overwhelming adversity. It also gave us renewed and enhanced appreciation for courageous ancestors who traveled with handcarts, wagons, and on foot, as well as other pioneer Church members who understood the principles of real joy in the face of the daunting disappointments and challenges of mortality.

This trip also demonstrated for me again the principle that those of us who are married can find joy and satisfaction in doing things together even when we might contribute in different ways or see some of the particulars with divergent perspectives. As we went over Rocky Ridge in our aged family vacation vehicle, I took great pleasure in the capacity of our 4-wheel drive to navigate up and over the very rough terrain. Sharon took equal pleasure in carefully and frequently directing and correcting my driving.

We have done other things together—differently. When we built our home thirty years ago, I delighted in drawing plans, pouring concrete, framing, and doing other carpentry work. Sharon used her talents in selecting and staining much of the finish woodwork and cabinetry. I enjoyed calculating the electrical circuits and stringing the wires, and she assumed the heavy task of choosing the light fixtures and other finishes and furnishings. She was wise enough not to counsel me much about the sizes or routes of the plumbing pipes, and I happily left to her entirely the choice of basins and sinks.

We even have gardened together over the years. Sharon has a green thumb, and I have green stains on the knees of my jeans. She knows for sure what shrubs to plant and where, and I know how to dig the holes the right depth! I installed the sprinkler system, but she is the one who understands the timer and when the water should come on and go off. We have even found joy in gourmet cooking! Sharon prepares it with great enthusiasm, and I, with equal glee, eat it. This could go on and on, but I think you get the point. We enjoy being together and also enjoy our differences, which we believe are real but also are compatible and complementary. Thus we, with you, can understand the doctrinal and scriptural basis, as well as the experiential, for finding joy in the God-ordained differences between men and women, husband and wife.

It does seem important to understand that within the framework of the gospel, which includes the priesthood and sacred roles unique to women and men, considerable room exists for individual choice and preference as well as capacity to adapt to necessary personal and family circumstances. For example, I know devoted and exemplary Latter-day Saint women who are able to hang sheetrock, lay beautiful wood flooring, and program their VCRs! Likewise, I know a wonderful priesthood leader, father, and patriarch who enjoys knitting. I have never felt that a man who can sew on a button, iron a shirt, or run a vacuum cleaner is demeaned in any way.

Understanding these joyful differences is also possible and necessary for those without companions or those yet to be married. Again, the combinations of preference and necessity are given great latitude in God's plan for His children when we understand who we really are.

These significant but wonderful differences also apply in our Church assignments and experiences. Think of bishops and Relief Society presidents as they attend to the welfare needs of their wards. Neither has the experience nor the insights possessed by his or her counterpart, and both are necessary to bless the members to the fullest. Likewise, we see the wisdom in Heavenly Father's plan, which provides the optimal situation for rearing children under the loving stewardship of both a faithful mother and father who complement and support each other in their unique responsibilities. Gratefully, provisions are often made to compensate when the ideal does not occur or is interrupted. Sadly, in the world today, there are those voices who suggest that the ideal is not possible and also that it is not desirable. More than ever before, we need to understand that the unique roles of women and men are both necessary and joyful.

In our current world, where religion and devotion to God are often thought, if considered at all, to be synonymous with sacrifice and stultifying sobriety, restrictions and restraints, one of the most stunning doctrinal assertions of the Restoration is that "men [and women] are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25). What is this joy and how are we to obtain it?

I believe most of us would not be surprised by a dictionary definition of joy. One of the best describes joy as a feeling of happiness (or contentment) that comes from success, good fortune, or a sense of well-being (*The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 1974, s.v. "joy"). Sadly, none of the dictionaries with which I am familiar seeks to identify the real source of real joy. There are additional words that others may consider to be synonyms but that might not quite match the mark from our perspective. Examples include words like pleasure, fun, gratification, and the like.

The scriptures use a phrase—a *fulness of joy*—that provides clarifying and useful insights. Some general and doctrinal principles seem evident that we might apply to our consideration of finding joy in our unique roles as women and men. Let me mention a few.

The Psalmist said, "In thy presence [meaning the Lord's] is fulness of joy" (Psalm 16:11). A definition of the fulness of joy, then, is being in the presence of the Father and the Son and the promise of the scriptures to us is that we were created to be able to return to them and experience this fulness of joy. Fundamental to the entire plan of salvation is that we might achieve joy—real joy—and experience it in its fulness.

Jesus Himself adds assurance and clarity. As He taught the Three Nephites, who desired to remain on earth until the Second Coming, He commended them for their desires to "bring the souls of men unto me." He also explained, "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, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one" (3 Nephi 28:9–10). The fulness of joy includes not only proximity or propinquity with Deity, it means a oneness with the Father and Son. What a distance in time, place, attitude, and behavior we have yet to go to truly have and experience a fulness of joy!

Through the Prophet Joseph, we receive some additional understanding and clarification that shed light on the essentiality of the Resurrection and its relationship to our potential joy. We are dual beings. Our spirits have existed for a very long time, long before we came to earth in mortality. Our bodies, essential to our progression and return to the Father and the Son, are made of the “elements.” When our bodies and spirits are separated, we cannot receive a fulness of joy, but when our spirits and bodies are “inseparably connected,” or we are resurrected, we can “receive a fulness of joy” if we have otherwise qualified (D&C 93:33–34). Thus, the Atonement is key and even more magnificent when we consider it is really about making a fulness of joy possible for us.

Special Enoch, blessed of the Lord with uncommon and most sacred insights because of his remarkable goodness and almost limitless faith, was privileged to be a witness of a panorama of the plan of salvation from the beginning to the end. Enoch “received a fulness of joy” (Moses 7:67) as he and his people “walked with God” (Moses 7:69) and were taken into His presence.

Clearly, then, joy means more to us than momentary comfort, no matter how comfortable we are or may be! When we understand the basic and broader dimensions of joy, pleasure must be seen in context. Proximate gratifications are often antithetical to real, lasting joy that leads us to a fulness.

One of the wonders of joy is that it can be limitless in the sense that one person’s fulness does not subtract from another’s. In fact, as we were reminded in the examples of Enoch and the Three Nephites, they received a fulness of joy in large part because of their exemplary efforts to bring a fulness of joy to others. Just as Jesus models His love for us by what He has done and continues to do for us, so must we be what we should and do what we must for others to truly achieve the joy that is fully possible for all of us. Think of these encouraging words of the Redeemer as He expresses His love in the context of His instruction: “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” (John 15:10–11). Jesus has joy, and He wants us to have His joy remain with us—to feel it, savor it, experience it, and share it—all to the effect that our “joy might be full.”

What are some other applications of the doctrine of joy that we might consider in our special, unique, and God-given roles as women and men? We know that our individual identities are neither accidental nor unknown to God. Further, our mortal circumstances are a constellation of challenges that may share commonalities with others and also unexpected dimensions unique to ourselves. While we are hopefully willing to acknowledge absolute fairness in the overall plan, most feel at least sometimes, often with apparently good reason, that in the fine print of our lives stark unevenness occurs in advantages and blessings, disappointments and difficulties.

In addition to issues such as health, prosperity, geography, and opportunity, special challenges may occur in matters pertaining to the most significant parts of the plan designed to lead us to a fulness of joy. In spite of best efforts and intentions, some do not have eternal companions or children. Some have horrible difficulties in family relationships that make a future fulness of joy seem so remote as to be inconceivable. Physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual challenges vex

the afflicted and those who love them. You can add many more seeming limitations, but to all—everyone—is the promise that the Savior’s Atonement can fully apply to them and that a fulness of joy is eventually possible for everyone, save those relatively few who have consciously chosen to reject the Redeemer’s gift. Nephi understood this principle as he explained the clear urgency of his own efforts: “For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23).

Our Father in Heaven and Jesus Christ make our personal salvation and exaltation with a fulness of joy possible by their grace through the Savior’s Atonement, “after all we can do,” whatever our limitations. Gratefully, the compensations of the eternities equalize the limitations of mortality when we do what we should and can. While some apparent deficiencies or handicaps are more obvious than others, we all have them to such a significant degree that a large measure of meekness and humility, in addition to unbounded gratitude and faith, should be pervasive in us.

For those of us who are married or who will have the privilege of marriage in this life, the Preacher in Ecclesiastes gives some good counsel in which, incidentally, is couched a significant promise or insight: “Live joyfully with the wife [or husband] whom thou lovest all the days of the life . . . which he [meaning God] hath given thee” (Ecclesiastes 9:9). I admit I do not know exactly how it is that the Lord gives husbands to wives and wives to husbands, except in the temple sealing ordinance. I have, like you, watched the matchmaking process all of my life. I do not believe God makes our choices for us, nor do I believe that He will instantaneously remodel any of us or our mates into that person we fantasized that we would be or marry before we got down to the practical issues at hand. He does help us with attractions, hormones, and opportunities; hopefully, the positive examples of parents, other loved ones, and leaders and, most significantly, the promptings of the Holy Ghost can assist us regarding when to proceed and when to back away. I do know that marriage is sacred, vital to God’s plan and essential to an eventual true fulness of joy in the eternities. Happily, whatever our current circumstances, we are assured that “all things must come to pass in their time” (D&C 64:32).

When we keep in mind what it really means to live joyfully, we will understand that marriage means much more than we or others may have supposed. It is not just a useful or pleasant or convenient arrangement between two people who enjoy being together and who have genuine affection and concern for each other, as significant as this may be. It is, as described in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” that marriage is “ordained of God” and vital to the eventual achievement of a fulness of joy (*Ensign*, November 1985, 102). Anything, however seemingly attractive, pleasant, or useful, that detracts, delays, or derails the pursuit of a fulness of joy must be avoided or discarded if the antonyms of true joy are not to be achieved.

Should we be surprised that so many are apparently confused about these issues or that there is so much effort being made by some to distract people from the path to a fulness of joy? I think not. These dynamics have been in operation for a long, long time and have had an impact on God’s children ever since Lucifer was expelled for his rebellion and began his campaign to make as many others as possible “miserable like unto himself” (2 Nephi 2:27).

Listen to these words of Lehi to Jacob:

For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, . . . righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. . .

And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness there be no happiness. And if there be no righteousness nor happiness there be no punishment nor misery. And if these things are not there is no God. And if there is no God we are not, neither the earth; for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon; wherefore, all things must have vanished away. . . .

Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other. [2 Nephi 2:11, 13, 16]

Clearly, the obtaining of a fulness of joy is not easy work nor an activity for the fainthearted woman or man! Opposition is an essential part of the plan, but so too is the magnificent gift of moral agency. Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught beautifully in a recent BYU devotional that agency is among the greatest blessings a loving Heavenly Father has bestowed upon His children, but it is also unavoidably accompanied by great responsibility. Wonderfully, we can choose to be joyful now and achieve a fulness of joy in the eternities.

Often we hear those making poor choices in their lives say, “I’m only hurting myself.” That is such a great lie that even the adversary should blush, were he able to do so. What we do individually, and this is particularly true in families, has an impact upon those around us to a great degree, whether it be positive or negative. If my path is not leading to a fulness of joy, these nearest and dearest of necessity have their own joy and future possibilities severely impacted negatively.

Little wonder then that this simple but carefully targeted sentence from 3 John resonates so clearly with those who are beginning to understand what the business of joy is really all about: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 1:4). Likewise, we should experience little surprise when we discover that prophets like Lehi, King Benjamin, and Alma have recognized that their first duties were to their families or that others like the Prophet Joseph and his closest associates have been reprovved by the Lord when they were distracted away from family responsibilities by even very important considerations. (See D&C 93:40–48.)

While we may all be very familiar with these scriptural references, there is a verse following the counsel and rebuke to Joseph Smith that we may usually ignore: “What I say unto one I say unto all; pray always lest that wicked one have power in you, and remove you out of your place” (D&C 93:49). Our place in the Church or in the world can be in jeopardy, but also, and especially, our place in the only precincts where a “fulness of joy” can be experienced.

Emma Smith learned some important things when Doctrine and Covenants section 25 was given, but I suspect that Joseph, her husband, did also! I used to believe the words “this is my voice unto all,” which conclude this section, were to all women or sisters (D&C 25:16). As has often been the case, my view was too constricted. I believe now that it also applies to me and to all men as well as to all women. This section is fully inclusive in its basic message, even in the face of some important details included for Emma alone. I believe that it has some truths or secrets, which if understood and applied, will help us all live more joyfully. Let me mention a few of these. I invite your careful study of these verses, and you will find others.

First, Emma and the rest of us are daughters and sons of God. We need to be very careful about whose relatives we offend!

Second, if we are faithful and “walk in the paths of virtue” (D&C 25:2), our lives will be preserved and we will receive a fulness of joy. This does not tell us how long we will dwell in mortality. It does promise our outcome if we live as we should.

Third, our sins can be forgiven. Each of you sisters, like Emma, can be an “elect lady” (D&C 25:3).

Fourth, the Lord is free with His counsel to bless us if we will listen. Here are two concrete examples that may apply more broadly than just to Emma Smith:

Murmur not because of the things which thou has not seen, for they are withheld from thee and from the world, which is wisdom in me in a time to come.

And the office of thy calling shall be for a comfort unto . . . thy husband [or wife], in his [or her] afflictions, with consoling words, in the spirit of meekness. [D&C 25:4–5]

Fifth, if we are called to teach or serve, we can be set apart and use the scriptures effectively as directed by the Spirit. The best teachers in the home are almost always the mothers—both because of their special endowment as mothers and because they get of necessity the most constant practice! It is also true in my experience that often the best instructors in the ward or branch are the women, whether in the Gospel Doctrine class or in the Primary. For this reason, the Lord has emphasized that for all of us, but especially for women, “thy time shall be given . . . to learning much” (D&C 25:8). This learning does not exclude the scriptures!

Interestingly, as the Lord gives assurance and guidance to the sisters and wives, he also gives direction to husbands—not just prophets or bishops—but to all men and husbands: “And thou needest not fear, for thy husband shall support thee” (D&C 25:9).

Some of the particulars mentioned in this verse apply to the Prophet Joseph, but the direction that husbands need to support their wives is very clear, whatever the unique personal circumstances: “And verily I say unto thee that thou shalt lay aside the things of this world, and seek for the things of a better” (D&C 25:10).

“Things of a better.” Does that sound like a fulness of joy?

I hope that each of us can understand a little better and a little clearer both the possibilities and the promises that lead to a fulness of joy. Joyful living in the here and now is an important antecedent to the complete joy that we know can be ours in the eternities, which is made possible by the presence with us of our families in the company of the Father and the Son. Let me conclude by reading the summary counsel and promises to each of us from section 25:

Wherefore, lift up thy heart and rejoice, and cleave unto the covenants which thou hast made.

Continue in the spirit of meekness, and beware of pride. Let thy soul delight in thy husband, and the glory which shall come upon him.

Keep my commandments continually, and a crown of righteousness thou shalt receive. And except thou do this, where I am you cannot come. [D&C 25:13–15]

It is my conviction and testimony that of what I have spoken is true. I invoke the blessings of heaven upon us all that we might find joy in our sacred roles as women and men and achieve the fulness of joy that the Father has promised His faithful children. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.