

Joy in the Journey
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As I think of the different characteristics of women and men, I'm reminded of a story I heard not too long ago. A couple's lawnmower was broken and wouldn't run. The wife kept hinting to her husband that he should get it fixed, but somehow the message never sank in. The lawn continued to grow.

Finally she thought of a clever way to make her point. When her husband arrived home from work one day, he found her seated in the tall grass, busily snipping away with a tiny pair of sewing scissors. He watched silently for a short time and then went into the house. He was gone only a few moments. When he returned, he handed her a toothbrush.

"When you finish cutting the grass," he said, "you might as well sweep the sidewalks." The doctors say he will probably walk again but will always limp!

I've always been fond of this statement by American author and historian, Washington Irving. Said he: "There is one in the world who feels, for him who is sad, a keener pang than he feels for himself; there is one to whom reflected joy is better than that which comes direct; there is one who rejoices in another's honor more than in any which is one's own; there is one who hides another's infirmities more faithfully than one's own; there is one who loses all sense of self in the sentiments of kindness, tenderness, and devotion to another. That one is woman."

You, my sisters, are everything described by Washington Irving. You are sensitive and selfless. You are nurturers; you are compassionate. You genuinely care about others, and you form strong relationships. You love and forgive. With good hearts and willing hands, you make a real difference in the lives of others.

There are those of you who are single—perhaps in school, perhaps working—yet forging a full and rich life, whatever the future may hold. Some of you are busy mothers of

growing children; still others are single mothers struggling to raise your children without the help of a husband and father.

Some of you have raised your children but have realized that challenges have only multiplied as your children have had children of their own, and their need for your help is ongoing. There are those of you who have aging parents who require the loving care only you can give.

Wherever you are in life, your individual tapestry is woven with threads common to you and to all women, and it is regarding some of these common threads on which I wish to comment today.

First, each one of you is living a life filled with much to do. I plead with you not to let the important things in life pass you by, planning instead for that illusive and non-existent future day when you'll have time to do all that you want to do. Instead, find joy in the journey—now.

Professor Harold Hill, in Meredith Wilson's *The Music Man*, cautioned: "You pile up enough tomorrows, and you'll find you've collected a lot of empty yesterdays." There is no tomorrow to remember if we don't do something today. Let us not procrastinate those things which matter most.

A few years ago I read the account of a man who, just after the passing of his wife, opened her dresser drawer and found there an item of clothing she had purchased when they visited the Eastern part of the United States nine years earlier. She had not worn it but was saving it for a special occasion.

Now, of course, that occasion would never come.

In relating the experience to a friend, the husband said, "Don't save something only for a special occasion. Every day in your life is a special occasion."

That friend later said those words changed her life. They helped her to cease putting off the things most important to her. Said she, "Now I spend more time with my family. I use crystal glasses every day. I'll wear new clothes to go to the supermarket if I feel like it. The words 'someday' and 'one day' are fading from my vocabulary. Now I take the time to call my relatives and closest friends. I've called old friends to make peace over past quarrels. I tell my family members how much I love them. I try not to delay or postpone anything that could bring laughter and joy into our lives. And each morning, I say to myself that this could be a special day. Each day, each hour, each minute, is special."

A wonderful example of this philosophy was shared by Arthur Gordon many years ago in a national magazine. He wrote, "When I was around 13 and my brother 10, Father had promised to take us to the circus. But at lunch time there was a phone call: some urgent business required his attention downtown. We braced ourselves for disappointment. Then we heard him say into the phone, 'No, I won't be down. It'll have to wait.' When he

came back to the table, Mother smiled. ‘The circus keeps coming back, you know,’ she said. ‘I know,’ said Father, ‘but childhood doesn’t.’”

If you do something that turns out not quite as you had planned, you can almost always put it right, get over it, learn from it. But once you’ve missed out on something, it’s gone.

Oh, there will be regrets.

There will be the brilliant professor whose class you never took, the relative with whom you never became close, the friend you didn’t call, the thanks you didn’t express, the dress you didn’t buy, the soccer game you missed. Try to keep the list as short as possible.

Send that note to the friend you’ve been neglecting; give your child a compliment and a hug; say, “I love you” more; always express your thanks. Never let a problem to be solved become more important than a person to be loved. Friends move away, children grow up, loved ones pass on. It’s so easy to take others for granted, until that day when they’re gone from our lives and we are left with feelings of “what if” and “if only.”

Said author Harriett Beecher Stowe, “The bitterest tears shed over graves are for words left unsaid and deeds left undone.”

Let us relish life as we live it, find joy in the journey and share our love with friends and family. One day, each of us will run out of tomorrows. Let us not put off what is most important.

I turn next to the threads of adversity, which are woven into the tapestry of all our lives. Nearly thirty years after marrying, a very distraught mother sat in the back of her ward Relief Society room, waiting for Relief Society to begin. She was really discouraged, and as she thought about her problems, the tears began to flow. She realized that her life was far from what she had envisioned as a young bride.

This day in particular, she was concerned about her only daughter, who had gradually stopped attending Church. That morning, the young woman had announced to her mother that she was going to attend another church with a friend of hers. Never in the mother’s wildest dreams had she thought that any of her children would lose their testimonies.

She felt that she had, in some way, failed.

“Why is my life so hard?” she wondered, as more tears came.

The room began to fill with other sisters. She looked through those tears and realized that each of the women there had her own set of problems. One was facing life in a wheelchair, having endured several painful and unsuccessful surgeries on her ankle. Another had recently lost her husband to leukemia. Another woman’s son was in drug rehabilitation once again. And yet another’s husband had lost his job just after the couple

bought a new home in the ward.

As she watched the women enter the room, she realized that there wasn't one of them who hadn't faced adversity of one kind or another—and these were only the problems of which this mother was aware. She could see how faith had helped each one endure her particular challenges. Although her problem did not disappear—and would, in fact, probably be ongoing—the mother resolved that she would attempt to follow the examples she had seen that day, examples of faith and endurance.

As with this woman, some of you may at times have cried out in your suffering, wondering why our Heavenly Father would allow you to go through whatever trials you are facing.

On one occasion, a father accompanied his small daughter to nursery school and watched through a one-way glass window as she and her friends played with the toys provided. More than once this father was ready to enter the room, eager to save his daughter from the dangers of choice and discovery.

His desire to protect her, however, was tempered by the instinct of a loving father, who knows that scraped knees, tears, and bruised feelings are often necessary parts of growth and development.

We all have treasured memories of certain days in our lives—days when all seemed to go well for us, when much was accomplished or when relationships were pleasant and loving. It's not difficult to be happy on such perfect days. We wish all days could be so memorable for their perfection.

Our mortal life, however, was never meant to be easy or consistently pleasant. Our Heavenly Father, who gives us so much to delight in, also knows that we learn and grow and become refined through hard challenges, heartbreaking sorrows, and difficult choices. Each one of us experiences dark days when our loved ones pass away, painful times when our health is lost, feelings of being forsaken when those we love seem to have abandoned us. These and other trials present us with the real test of our ability to endure.

A fundamental question remains to be answered by each who runs the race of life: Shall I falter, or shall I finish? To finish life's race involves enduring through challenges and trials to the very end of life itself.

You may have heard the account of an elderly jeweler who proudly showed his grandson how to polish gemstones by placing them in a tumbler where repeated exposure to abrasive materials revealed each stone's true beauty. He pointed out to the boy that, as with the stones, we can become better, more polished and more beautiful by those things we suffer, endure and overcome.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell, my beloved colleague and friend, said: “With enduring comes a willingness to press forward even when we are bone weary and would much rather pull off to the side of the road.”

Someone else put it this way: “When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on.”

Some clouds in life are so dark that we fail to see their silver lining. Of such difficult circumstances, Orson F. Whitney said:

No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience, is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God and it is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire and which will make us more like our Father.

No matter how carefully we plan our lives, we cannot avoid all the storms that come our way. Winds of adversity blow around us and bring with them challenges that can strengthen our souls. The strongest timber grows where the storm beats the hardest. The poet wrote:

*Good timber does not grow with ease,
The stronger the wind the stronger the trees.
The further the sky, the greater the length,
The more the storm, the more the strength.
By sun and cold, by rain and snow,
In trees and us, good timbers grow.*

Only the Master knows the depths of our trials, our pain and our suffering. He alone offers us eternal peace in times of adversity. He alone touches our tortured souls with His comforting words:

*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and
ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Finally, woven into the tapestry of your lives are threads of service, of love, of kindness to others. Sometimes, my dear sisters, you feel inadequate and ineffective because you can't do all that you feel you should. Rather than continually dwelling on what still needs

to be done, pause occasionally and reflect on all that you do and have done. It is most significant. The good you have done, the kind words you have spoken, the love you have shown to others, can never be fully measured.

Throughout my life I've been influenced for good by many wonderful women. One who always comes readily to my mind is a woman by the name of Lucy Gertsch who was my Sunday School teacher when I was a young boy in the 6th–7th Ward of the Pioneer Stake.

The ward population was rather transient, which resulted in an accelerated rate of turnover with respect to the teachers in the Sunday School. As boys and girls, we would just become acquainted with a particular teacher and grow to appreciate him, when the Sunday School Superintendent would visit the class and introduce a new teacher. Disappointment filled each heart, and a breakdown of discipline resulted.

Prospective teachers, hearing of the unsavory reputation of our particular class, would graciously decline to serve or suggest the possibility of teaching a different class where the students were more manageable.

We took delight in our newly found status and determined to live up to the fears of the faculty. One Sunday morning, a lovely young lady accompanied the superintendent into the classroom and was presented to us as a teacher who requested the opportunity to teach us. We learned that she had been a missionary and loved young people.

Her name was Lucy Gertsch. She was beautiful, soft-spoken, and interested in us. She asked each class member to introduce himself or herself and then asked questions which gave her an understanding and insight into the background of each. She told us of her girlhood in Midway, Utah, and as she described that beautiful valley, she made its beauty live within us, and we desired to visit the green fields she loved so much.

Those first weeks were not easy. Boys don't become gentlemen overnight. Yet she never raised her voice. Somehow rudeness and boisterousness were incompatible with the beauty of her lessons.

She made the scriptures actually live. We became personally acquainted with Samuel, David, Jacob, Nephi and the Lord Jesus Christ. Our gospel scholarship grew. Our deportment improved. Our love for Lucy Gertsch knew no bounds.

We undertook a project to save nickels and dimes for what was to be a gigantic Christmas party. Sister Gertsch kept a careful record of our progress. As children with typical appetites, we converted in our minds the monetary totals to cakes, cookies, pies and ice cream. This was to be a glorious event. Never before had any of our teachers even suggested a social event like this was to be.

The summer months faded into autumn. Autumn turned to winter. Our party goal had been achieved. The class had grown. A good spirit prevailed.

None of us will forget that gray Sunday morning when our beloved teacher announced to us that the mother of one of our classmates had passed away. We thought of our own mothers and how much they meant to us. We felt sincere sorrow for Billy Devenport in his great loss.

The lesson this Sunday was from the book of Acts, chapter 20, verse 35: “Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

At the conclusion of the presentation of a well-prepared lesson, Lucy Gertsch commented on the economic situation of Billy’s family. These were depression times, and money was scarce. With a twinkle in her eyes, she asked: “How would you like to follow this teaching of our Lord? How would you feel about taking our party fund and, as a class, visiting the Devenports and giving it to them as an expression of our love?”

The decision was unanimous. We counted the money carefully and placed the total sum in a large envelope. A beautiful card was inscribed with our names, and we were on our way.

This simple act of kindness welded us together as one. Because of Lucy Gertsch, we learned through our own experience that it is indeed more blessed to give than to receive.

Lucy Gertsch knew each of her students. She unfailingly called on those who missed a Sunday or who just didn’t come. We knew she cared about us.

Many, many years later, when Lucy was nearing the end of her life, I visited with her. We reminisced concerning those days so long before when she had been our teacher. We spoke of each member of our class and discussed what each one was now doing. Her love and caring spanned a lifetime.

The years have flown. The old chapel is gone, a victim of industrialization. We who laughed, who grew under the direction of that inspired teacher of truth, have never forgotten her inspired service or her love for each one of us.

You, my dear sisters, are filled with the same kind of love and caring which Lucy Gertsch exemplified throughout her life. Your hearts are tender and sensitive to the needs of others. Thank you for the selfless service you give so willingly. Such service provides the golden threads which run through the tapestry of your lives.

May “the Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.”