

Joy Through Covenant Discipleship

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Of the Seventy

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Empty
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As we bind ourselves to act as covenant disciples, our relationship with the Father and Son is enriched, our joy enhanced, and our eternal perspective expanded.

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One day in 2023, Uyanga Altansukh was at work in the northern Mongolian city of Darkhan when the Mongolian mission president entered her workplace. In her words:

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“I saw him and thought he had this bright light in his countenance. He was very kind and fun to those around him, and I felt warmth. Before he left, I asked him some questions. A few days later, he came into my work again and asked if I could attend his church. I thought it might be helpful. I was worried for my children’s future, as society seemed to be full of stress and darkness. I wanted my children to be like this man with a light in their countenance, spreading joy to others around them.

“One day the missionaries taught us the law of tithing. My children said with excitement, ‘We must pay our tithing, Mom.’ I could see my children’s faith at that moment. Before I joined the Church, I watched general conference and listened to President Russell M. Nelson speak. He announced new temples all over the world and said that a new temple would be built in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. I rejoiced and shed tears, even though I did not understand why. With this joy, I could tell that my faith and testimony were growing.”

Uyanga, like millions of others, is part of the great gathering of Israel in preparation for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. She has begun her journey along the covenant path and has become a disciple of Christ. What does it mean to

be a disciple of Christ? I appreciate the Japanese word for disciple—*deshi*—demeaning younger brother, and *shimeaning* child.

Jesus Christ declared, “I was in the beginning with the Father, and am the Firstborn.” Because of who He is and what He has done, we worship Him, we revere Him, we give glory to Him, and we follow Him. Christ has redeemed us, and we are forever grateful for His infinite and atoning sacrifice.

We have a Heavenly Father, who loves us as His children. His love for us is perfect. Jesus Christ and His mission illustrate God’s love for us. As John wrote, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

In our quest to understand what we do not know, we might sometimes rely on our familiar mortal experiences, or things we do know. For example, we can learn somewhat of God the Father through our own parenthood and mortal family relationships. However, we should be careful in applying these comparisons too far in our attempt to understand our Heavenly Father. The attributes of God the Father transcend any less-than-perfect attributes of a fallen man. God the Father is the perfect Father. He is perfectly loving, kind, patient, and understanding and is perfectly glorious. We can trust Him perfectly. The love of Christ reflects the love of God the Father and is a representation of that love.

Jesus Christ is both the example and the means. In Christ, we can understand better the perfect attributes of the Father and His plan. Through Christ, we are given the enabling power to overcome the tendencies of natural men and women so that we might become more like the Father.

Just like our Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ is perfectly merciful and just. These divine attributes of justice and mercy are not in opposition. They are complementary. Both justice and mercy illustrate God’s perfect love for His children. We can trust God the Father and Jesus Christ because They are just and fair with all of us.

God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, are perfectly aligned in purpose and love. Because God and Jesus Christ love us, we are given the opportunity and privilege as true disciples to make covenants with Them. By our doing so, our relationship with Christ is expanded: “And now,

because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters.”

As disciples, when we make and keep sacred covenants, we are blessed with spiritual power. We are connected to Christ and God the Father in a special relationship and can experience Their love and joy in a measure reserved for those who have made and kept covenants. Our ability to sense a full measure of God’s love, or to continue in His love, is contingent upon our righteous desires and actions.

In John chapter 15, verse 9, we read, “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you.” And then we are given an invitation: “Continue ye in my love.”

In the next verse, we are given the way to continue in His love: “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.”

We then see the purpose of keeping the commandments in verse 11: “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.”

Through true covenant discipleship, we can begin to understand better the nature of God and the joy that He wants all of His children to experience. We can also begin to understand some principles that at first might seem confusing. For example, how can God have a fulness of joy when some of His children are suffering so much? The answer lies in God’s perfect perspective and in His perfect plan. He sees us from the beginning to our glorious potential future. He has provided a way, through His Son, Jesus Christ, for all of us, His children, to overcome the pains, suffering, sins, guilt, and loneliness of our mortality. God has provided for us the way and the choice.

Examples of those who have experienced joy through discipleship might help us to better understand this concept. Perhaps you have heard the phrase that we are only as happy as our most unhappy child. I have seen that this does not need to be the case. My 94-year-old mother has over 200 living descendants. At any given point, at least one of the 200 is going to be unhappy. If this statement were true, my mother would be in a perpetual state of unhappiness, which she isn’t.

Those who know her know how joyful she is.

I now would like to share another experience. In January of 2019, my wife, Debbie, and I were invited into the office of President Nelson. He had positioned a chair close to us, and we sat almost knee to knee. After extending to us our current calling, President Nelson turned to Debbie and focused on her. He was kind, loving, gentle, and full of joy, like the perfect father or grandfather. He held Debbie's hand and patted it, reassuring her that it would be OK and that our family would be blessed. It seemed to us at that moment that we were the most important people to him and that he had all the time in the world for us. We left his office that Friday afternoon feeling reassured, loved, and joyful.

On Monday we saw the news. During that same day that President Nelson had spent with us, one of his daughters had passed away from cancer. We were stunned. Our hearts were full as we mourned for him and his family. Our hearts were also full of gratitude for his Christlike attention to us while mourning for his daughter who was suffering.

As we pondered this experience, we asked ourselves, "How could he be so kind, loving, and even joyful at such a difficult time?" The answer is because he knows. He knows that Christ has been victorious. He knows he will be with his daughter again and will spend an eternity with her. Joy and eternal perspective come through being bound to the Savior by making and keeping covenants and through Christlike discipleship.

President Nelson has taught: "Just as the Savior offers peace that 'passeth all understanding' [Philippians 4:7], He also offers an intensity, depth, and breadth of joy that defy human logic or mortal comprehension. For example, it doesn't seem possible to feel joy when your child suffers with an incurable illness or when you lose your job or when your spouse betrays you. Yet that is precisely the joy the Savior offers."

As we make and keep covenants, we will naturally turn outward and have a desire to help others feel the measure of joy and love we feel in our covenantal relationships. We can be part of the greatest cause on the earth today—the gathering of Israel. We can help to bring God's children to Christ. As the prophet Jacob taught, "And blessed art thou; for because ye have been diligent in laboring with me in my vineyard, and

have kept my commandments, and have brought unto me again the natural fruit, ... ye shall have joy with me because of the fruit of my vineyard.”

As we bind ourselves to act as covenant disciples, in whatever our level of capacity, our relationship with the Father and the Son is enriched, our joy enhanced, and our eternal perspective expanded. We then are endowed with power and can feel joy in a measure reserved for God’s true covenant disciples. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.