

(Talk given in Sacramento Meeting in November 2025 by Clarke Chapman)

Footprints in the Sand

“One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with my Lord.
Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.
For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,
one belonging to me and one to my Lord.

After the last scene of my life flashed before me,
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.
I noticed that at many times along the path of my life—
especially at the very lowest and saddest times
there was only one set of footprints.
This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.

“Lord, you said once I decided to follow you, You’d walk with me all the way.
But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life,
there was only one set of footprints.
I don’t understand why, when I needed You the most, You would leave me.”
He whispered, “My precious child, I love you and will never leave you;
Never, ever, during your trials and testing’s.
When you saw only one set of footprints, It was then that I carried you.”

Brothers and sisters, I think this poem isn’t just beautiful, I think it’s true. There have been times in my life when I didn’t understand how I was still standing, or how I was still functioning, or how I was still breathing, and I look back now and I realize I wasn’t standing. I was being carried.

I want to talk about joy—not after the storm, not after life gets easy, not after everything is resolved—but joy in Christ through difficult times, meaning joy that can be felt while the storm is still going. Because if the only time we’re allowed to feel joy is when everything is finally peaceful and figured out, then most of us would only experience joy about 12 minutes a year.

President Russell M. Nelson taught:

“Joy has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives.”

Doctrine that I’ve seen in real life—

in construction sites, in courtrooms, in Suburban’s full of kids, in quiet prayers in the dark, in holidays I didn’t know how to navigate, and in the beautiful chaos of being a father.

Joy from Christ is different. It’s quieter. Deeper. More stable. It’s a warmth that doesn’t depend on circumstances; it depends on Him.

I want to share some experiences, and all of these are absolutely real, that have taught me how the Savior gives joy right in the middle of life’s hardest moments.

As a general contractor, I’ve learned that construction is a spiritual training ground. You don’t remodel homes for decades without learning patience, prayer, and humility. Sometimes you walk into a room,

look at what the previous builder did, and wonder how on earth it's still standing—while quickly exiting the structure some might call a house.

I've opened walls to find wiring that physically hurt my feelings. I've found plumbing choices that I'm convinced were made by someone with a blindfold. I've seen framing that looked like the gospel principle of "endure to the end."

A few weeks ago, at my current project, everything landed at once: weather changing, inspections looming, design adjustments, supply issues, time pressure, and the kind of day when you can feel your chest tightening. I walked out into that addition and stood there, taking it all in—the sawdust, the tools, the half-built structure—and I just said inside:

"Lord, I'm doing everything I can. I need your help." And He helped. Not by magically finishing the job... but by steadying me.

I felt calm. Just enough. Just enough to breathe. Just enough to take the next step. Just enough to keep going.

Mosiah 24:14 says:

"I will ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs."

Our burdens are not removed but eased. He lifts with us, and I felt that lift.

But the deepest joy I've ever felt hasn't come from construction. It's come from being a father. Raising five kids—Lizzy, Kenny, Rachel, Samuel, and Emma—is the greatest calling of my life, and also one of the hardest responsibilities I've ever carried.

Co-parenting, long drives to Logan, missed schedules, tight communication, emotional dynamics—it's work. It's real work. It's sacred work. And it has often brought me to my knees.

There was one night I'll never forget. The kids were finally in bed. I was sitting on my bed, feeling so exhausted that I didn't even have energy to pray with words. I was just done.

Then sweet little Emma walked in. Tiny footsteps, soft voice, climbed up beside me, looked at me sincerely and asked: "Daddy, are you tired? It's okay. We still love you."

And brothers and sisters, I could have cried on the spot. Because it wasn't just her saying it. Christ was speaking through her. That was joy. Not after the fatigue, but right in the heart of it.

Another experience:

We were driving home from Utah on one of those post-parent-exchange road trips. The Suburban was filled with; bags, snacks, shoes, coats, emotional tension, and children talking and crying and arguing like a well-trained debate team.

I was exhausted. But then something shifted. Rachel helped Emma with something. Lizzy talked gently to Kenny. And Samuel, as only Samuel can, said something so unexpected and hilarious that everyone burst out laughing.

Suddenly the car became peaceful—almost holy. And I thought, “Even in the chaos, Christ is here with us. He is teaching them how to love.”

That moment was joy. Real joy.

Sometimes late at night, I’ve sat in my truck after the kids are asleep and prayed tired, simple prayers: “Heavenly Father... I can’t do this.” And once, I will never forget, the Spirit said clearly: “You don’t have to. We can.” From that moment on, I have never been alone in fatherhood. Or in anything else.

2 Nephi 22:2 says:

“The Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song.”

Strength is joy. Being carried is joy. Being known is joy.

Now, we’re heading into Thanksgiving and Christmas—seasons of warmth and nostalgia—but also seasons where schedules become complicated, families stretch across geography, traditions try to survive new realities, and emotions run deep.

There have been holidays where I didn’t know how things were going to work. Times where Christmas had to be planned around transportation. Times where I didn’t know where the kids would be for Thanksgiving dinner. Times that felt unsettled.

But the Lord has taught me:

The center of our holidays is Christ, not the logistics.

Christ fills the spaces where traditions break.

Christ brings joy even when circumstances don’t.

Christ makes the holiday holy.

And even in those years when I wondered if I was giving the kids “enough,” I saw joy in their faces, in their smiles, in their laughter, and I realized: they don’t need perfection— they need presence. And I’m not talking about gifts; I’m talking about time together.

The Church has often reminded us, referring to our kids, “give them your time.” It can be hard to do with all that we have going on in our lives, but the only real importance is our kids and families.

Christ magnifies what we offer.

We sometimes think joy is loud—like fireworks or cheering or celebration—but often Christ gives joy quietly; through a child’s voice, through a peaceful moment in a car, through a prayer answered in the dark, through strength to take one more step.

Alma 36:3 teaches that those who put their trust in God will be supported in their trials, their troubles, and their afflictions. Supported. Not spared. Supported.

Construction has taught me one more thing: broken homes can become beautiful ones. And broken lives can become beautiful ones.

Jesus Christ is the Master Builder.
He tears out rot.
He reinforces structure.
He realigns framing.
He repairs foundations.
He makes things square again.
He gives “beauty for ashes.” (Isaiah 61:3)

I want to share one more little thought: I genuinely believe the Lord wants us to laugh. I think He likes joy and humor. Maybe even drywall humor.

Like when you say to the kids, “Get in the car, we’re leaving,” and they respond as if you just requested they build the Nauvoo Temple by hand. Or when a perfectly measured board still doesn’t fit, because the wall decided to express its individuality.

Laughter is spiritual.
Joy is divine.
Christ is the source of both.

Brothers and sisters: I testify that Jesus Christ walks with us through the hardest times of our lives. And when we cannot walk, He carries us.

I have felt Him carry me—
as a father,
as a contractor,
as a single parent,
as a man trying to do his best.

I have felt Him in courtrooms.
In work boots.
In prayer.
In holidays.
In family chaos.
In peace.
In the car at night.
On my bed when I’m tired.
In every burden I have ever carried.

He has been there—often unseen, but never absent.

And that is where joy comes from. Not because life gets easier, but because Jesus Christ stays close. I know He lives, and I know He loves us. I know He carries us. I say this in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.