

# Our Search for Happiness

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**M**y beloved brothers and sisters, to be on this campus and in your presence is always a joy. I must confess, however, that I feel overwhelmed at the prospect of addressing so many of you and saying something that justifies taking you away from your studies. I do not have the answer to all of life's questions. I don't even know all the questions!

I feel a bit like the college professor who asked a student during an examination: "Does the question embarrass you?"

"Not at all, sir," replied the student; "not at all. It is quite clear. It is the answer that bothers me!" (From *10,000 Jokes, Toasts, and Stories*, eds. Lewis and Faye Copeland [Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965], 375 [#3842].)

My beloved companion of 56 years is here with me today, and I express appreciation to her. She has walked with me in a joint search for happiness that, on my part, has exceeded my fondest hopes and expectations. Indeed, it is our search for happiness that I wish to discuss today. Having lived quite a few years now, I have concluded that since we don't always desire that which is good, having all our desires granted to us would not bring us happiness (see Alma 41:3–7). In fact, instant and unrestrained gratification of all our desires would be the shortest and most direct route to

unhappiness. The many hours I have spent listening to the tribulations of men and women have persuaded me that both happiness and unhappiness are much of our own making.

As 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. [Teachings, 255–56]*

The more faithfully we keep the commandments of God, the happier we will be.

Although men are "that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25), this does not mean that our lives will be filled only with joy, "for it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things" (2 Nephi 2:11). Happiness is not given to us in a package that we can just open up and consume. Nobody is ever happy 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Rather than thinking

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in terms of a day, we perhaps need to snatch happiness in little pieces, learning to recognize the elements of happiness and then treasuring them while they last.

Pleasure is often confused with happiness but is by no means synonymous with it. The poet Robert Burns wrote an excellent definition of pleasure in these lines:

*But pleasures are like poppies spread—  
You seize the flow’r, its bloom is shed;  
Or like the snow falls in the river—  
A moment white, then melts forever;  
Or like the borealis race,  
That flit ere you can point their place;  
Or like the rainbow’s lovely form  
Evanishing amid the storm.  
[Tam o’ Shanter (1793), lines 59–66]*

Pleasure, unlike happiness, is that which pleases us or gives us gratification. Usually it endures for only a short time. As President McKay once said, “You may get that transitory pleasure, yes, but you cannot find joy, you cannot find happiness. Happiness is found only along that well beaten track, narrow as it is, though straight, which leads to life eternal” (*CR*, October 1919, 180).

We are enticed daily to pursue worldly pleasures that may divert us from the path to happiness. But the path to true and lasting happiness is, repeating the Prophet Joseph Smith’s words, “virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God” (*Teachings*, 255–56). Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Rectitude is a perpetual victory, celebrated not by cries of joy but by serenity, which is joy fixed or habitual” (“Character,” *Essays: Second Series* [1844]).

Your presence here today indicates that since the beginning you have shared the desire to be happy with all mankind. Obviously there is a great difference between feeling happy at a given moment and being happy for a lifetime, between having a good time and leading a good life. Most

of you, being Americans, claim the pursuit of happiness among your inalienable rights, as set forth by our Founding Fathers. This concept was not introduced by them, however, as early philosophers like Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, Locke, Aquinas, and Mill opined that happiness is the most fundamental of all human searches.

In Tolstoy’s book *War and Peace*, the Russian writer had his character Pierre Bezúkhov learn “that man is created for happiness, that happiness is within him, in the satisfaction of simple human needs, and that all unhappiness arises not from privation but from superfluity” (Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1942], 1176; see also Constance Garnett translation, book 14, chapter 12). So often we find ourselves striving for the superfluity. We are not content with what we have and think that happiness comes from having more or acquiring more or being more. We look for happiness but go in the wrong direction to find it.

The story is told of Ali Hafed, a wealthy ancient Persian who owned much land and many productive fields, orchards, and gardens and had money out at interest. He had a lovely family and at first was contented because he was wealthy, and wealthy because he was contented.

An old priest came to Ali Hafed and told him that if he had a diamond the size of his thumb, he could purchase a dozen farms like his. Ali Hafed said, “Will you tell me where I can find diamonds?”

The priest told him, “If you will find a river that runs over white sands, between high mountains, in those white sands you will always find diamonds.”

“Well,” said Ali Hafed, “I will go.”

So he sold his farm, collected his money that was at interest, and left his family in charge of a neighbor, and away he went in search of diamonds, traveling through many lands in Asia and Europe. After years of searching his money was all spent, and he passed away in rags and wretchedness.

Meanwhile, the man who purchased Ali Hafed's farm one day led his camel out into the garden to drink, and as the animal put his nose into the shallow waters, the farmer noticed a curious flash of light in the white sands of the stream. Reaching in, he pulled out a black stone containing a strange eye of light. Not long after, the same old priest came to visit Ali Hafed's successor and found that in the black stone was a diamond. As they rushed out into the garden and stirred up the white sands with their fingers, they came up with many more beautiful, valuable gems. According to the story, this marked the discovery of the diamond mines of Golconda, the most valuable diamond mines in the history of the ancient world.

Had Ali Hafed remained at home and dug in his own cellar, or anywhere in his own fields, rather than traveling in strange lands where he eventually faced starvation and ruin, he would have had "acres of diamonds." (Story paraphrased from Russell H. Conwell, *Acres of Diamonds* [Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1960], 10–14.)

We feel only pity for Ali Hafed as we picture him wandering homeless and friendless farther and farther away from the happiness he thought he would find in digging up diamonds in a far-off place. Yet how many times do we look for our happiness at a distance in space or time rather than right now, in our own homes, with our own families and friends?

The Savior of the world taught us to seek that inner peace which taps the innate happiness in our souls. He said, "My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

When we were living in São Paulo, Brazil, a new home was being constructed next to ours. The workmen on the project were paid only a few cents an hour and worked from six in the morning to six in the evening. Yet they whistled and sang all day long. Sometimes it was

more than we wanted to hear! But I never had the heart to tell them to tone it down.

A few years ago I interviewed a relatively young man who was being called as mission president. He had had a very successful career as an investment counselor. Because he had a young family, I was concerned about how he would take care of them when he returned from the mission field. He made it very clear that he was not interested in making large sums of money. He explained that he had worked for the very wealthy. To him, they did not seem happy or fulfilled, and they seemed preoccupied with acquiring more.

That inner peace spoken of by the Savior seems elusive when we are preoccupied with things we have or things we wish we had. In a time when we are both obsessed and consumed with the possession and the acquisition of objects, the counsel of Moses seems more needed than ever: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, . . . nor any thing that is thy neighbour's" (Exodus 20:17).

We are indebted to Dr. Homer Ellsworth for sharing with us many years ago two contrasting stories about the happiness of mothers. Often, in the days when the gender of the child could not be predetermined, expectant mothers were very set upon having a boy or a girl. Sometimes when the baby was not of the anticipated gender, the mother was temporarily disappointed. Of course this disappointment was forgotten as soon as the mother cuddled her newborn for the first time.

Dr. Ellsworth told us that a few new mothers demonstrated their immaturity for a day or two. One who wanted a boy baby and happened to receive a girl baby showed her displeasure by throwing tantrums and objects all over her hospital room for a day or two. One wise old nurse, when feeding time came, took a baby boy born with a small facial deformity from the nursery and quietly slipped him into

the disconsolate mother's arms. The immature mother exclaimed, "This is not my child!"

The wise old nurse said, "Well, it is the right sex. Maybe its mother would be willing to trade babies with you." There followed no more demonstrations of immaturity.

In contrast, some years ago a special child was born to a young mother. This child was born without eyes. It was normal in all other respects except there was nothing to resemble eyes or sockets above the nose. This wise mother might in bitterness have said, "Why did this have to happen to my child?" or "Why did this have to happen to me?" Instead she said, "The Lord must really love us and have confidence in us. We really must be favored to have been given this child. To think the Lord picked our home, knowing how much special love and care this child would need, is very humbling and comforting. We are grateful for this special child and for the blessings it will bring to our home."

In the story *The Little Prince*, the fox was wiser than he knew when he said, "Now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye" (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, trans. Katherine Woods [New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1943], 70). The odyssey to happiness lies in the dimension of the heart. Such a journey is made on stepping-stones of selflessness, wisdom, contentment, and faith. The enemies of progress and fulfillment are such things as self-doubt, a poor self-image, self-pity, bitterness, and despair. By substituting simple faith and humility for these enemies, we can move rapidly in our search for happiness.

Happiness has a price, as President Kimball said in *The Miracle of Forgiveness*:

*"What is the price of happiness?" One might be surprised at the simplicity of the answer. The treasure house of happiness is unlocked to those who live the gospel of Jesus Christ in its purity and simplicity. Like a mariner without stars, like a traveler*

*without a compass, is the person who moves along through life without a plan. The assurance of supreme happiness, the certainty of a successful life here and of exaltation and eternal life hereafter, come to those who plan to live their lives in complete harmony with the gospel of Jesus Christ—and then consistently follow the course they have set.* [Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 259]

Selfish pride and happiness don't go together. Nephi told us that we must "come down in the depths of humility. . . . The things of the wise and the prudent shall be hid . . . forever—yea, that happiness which is prepared for the saints" (2 Nephi 9:42–43). The Lord, speaking through King Benjamin, reminded us:

*I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness.* [Mosiah 2:41]

Many speak these days about the rights of consumers to enjoy products that are "free, perfect, and now"—that is, at low cost, with no defects, and immediate service. The problem is that too many of us try to *consume* happiness rather than *generate* it. Shakespeare expressed a philosophy in *As You Like It* that seems commendable: "I am a true labourer: I earn that I eat, get that I wear; owe no man hate, envy no man's happiness; glad of other men's good" (*As You Like It*, 3.2.65–67). Earning what we eat will make us self-sufficient, but giving back a little by helping our neighbor or our fellow students will bring us something more. For example, if you deliver to an atomic energy breeder reactor the energy of three truckloads of fuel, it will return the energy of four or maybe five truckloads of fuel. Happiness, like the breeder reactor, adds and multiplies as we divide it with others.

I realize that many of you students are not wealthy. One poor man said, "I know that money isn't everything. For example, it isn't mine." And another observed, "Even books on how to be happy without money cost more than I can afford." (Both quotes from Sam Levenson, *You Don't Have to Be in Who's Who to Know What's What* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979], 185.) However, the relationship of money to happiness is at best questionable. An unknown author said, "Money is an article that may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven, and as a universal provider of everything except happiness." Henrik Ibsen reminded us, "Money may buy the husk of many things, but not the kernel. It brings food, but not the appetite; medicine, but not health; acquaintances, but not friends; servants, but not faithfulness; days of joy, but not peace or happiness."

An unknown poet has written:

*Success is speaking words of praise,  
In cheering other people's ways,  
In doing just the best you can  
With every task and every plan.*

*It's silence when your speech would hurt,  
Politeness when your neighbor's curt.  
It's deafness when the scandal flows  
And sympathy with others' woes.*

*It's loyalty when duty calls.  
It's courage when disaster falls.  
It's patience when the hours are long.  
It's found in laughter and in song.*

*It's in the silent time of prayer,  
In happiness and in despair.  
In all of life and nothing less,  
We find the thing we call success.*

In summation, our search for happiness largely depends on the degree of righteousness we attain, the degree of selflessness we acquire,

the amount and quality of service we render, and the inner peace that we enjoy. We also have some external sources of happiness, including those loved ones and friends whose smiles and regard mean so much to us—in my case, the members of my family who are here today. Our destinies are bound by ties of common interest and sympathy to a host of others, unknown to us personally, within and without the Church.

Some of you here today may have detoured from the road to peace and happiness through transgression. With all my heart I urge you to begin the process of clearing up any problem so that you may again enjoy a quiet and a peaceful conscience. When we truly repent of our sins, the Lord has promised, "I, the Lord, remember them no more" (D&C 58:42).

May I suggest a further requisite in the continuing quest to live happily every hour, every day, every month, and every year of our lives. The golden pathway to happiness is the selfless giving of love—the kind of love that has concern and interest and some measure of charity for every living soul. Love is the direct route to the happiness that would enrich and bless our lives and the lives of others. It means that you show love even to your enemies, "bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you" (Matthew 5:44). In so doing you will be fulfilling the greater commandment to love God Himself and to enjoy His love. You will soar above the ill winds that blow, above the sordid, the self-defeating, and the bitter. You have the promise that "your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things" (D&C 88:67).

I wish to bear to you who are gathered here my testimony and witness of the divinity and truthfulness of this holy work in which we are engaged. I have had spiritual confirmations come throughout my life that permit me to say to you that I don't believe—I know, I know. I pray the Lord's blessings to be with all who

are associated with this great institution in any capacity and that peace, joy, and happiness will be ours. I do this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.