

Living After the Manner of Happiness

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Good morning, my beloved young brothers and sisters. Thank you for inviting me to be here with you today.

Nothing reminds me so forcefully of my advancing years as facing an audience of vibrant and wholesome young people like you. For years I gave little credence to the so-called generation gap, but now I'm willing to at least allow that such a social phenomenon exists. Periodic personal encounters with those of your age group reinforce my suspicions that I probably have less and less to say that you may find relevant or interesting. For instance, not many years ago, when our oldest son was a senior in high school, I noticed him one morning in the vicinity of my clothes closet. At breakfast I noted that I had seen him examining my wardrobe and gently inquired whether I really owned something that he would consider worthy of wearing. To my chagrin, but not necessarily to my surprise, he said, "Relax, Dad, we're having nerd day at school tomorrow!"

I sincerely hope my prayers will be answered today so there will be no gaps between what I feel and say and what you feel and understand. There is an old Jewish saying that words spoken from the heart are carried

into the heart. What I wish to say today truly comes from my heart, and I hope it will have meaning and application for you during the wonderful years of your lives that lie ahead.

There are principles and truths that are unchanging, eternal, and timeless. Such are those that bring happiness to our lives. This has been a subject of interest to me for many years because although I am richly blessed and have every reason to be happy, I sometimes struggle with myself and do not always have the natural inclination toward happiness and a cheerful disposition that some people seem to enjoy.

For that reason, several years ago a Book of Mormon passage caught my attention. It's in the first part of the Book of Mormon—the part our family specializes in—and concerns the period of time just after Nephi separated from Laman and Lemuel and departed into the wilderness. There Nephi established a society

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founded on gospel truths; of that society in 2 Nephi 5:27 he says: “And it came to pass that we lived after the manner of happiness.” To paraphrase the Prophet Joseph, “Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine” (JS—H 1:12). I pondered what it could mean to live “after the manner of happiness.” I knew it had to be related to the gospel and God’s plan for our lives. In fact, sometimes his prophets call that plan the “plan of happiness.” I remembered, too, that Joseph Smith said that “happiness is the object and design of our existence” (*Teachings*, p. 255). I wondered, though, what the individual elements of a truly happy society and life might be, and I began to search Nephi’s writings for clues. I wish to share with you today my tentative findings, primarily from 2 Nephi, chapter 5, and invite you to conduct your own personal search. It could be a lifelong and worthwhile pursuit.

Family

I begin with 2 Nephi 5:6 with Nephi’s observation that as he journeyed into the wilderness, “I . . . did take my family . . . and Sam, mine elder brother and his family, and Jacob and Joseph, my younger brethren, and also my sisters.” Here indeed is a significant key to happiness—one’s family.

There was good reason that Nephi took his more righteous siblings with him into the wilderness. He belonged to them and they belonged to him. There is no other organization that can so completely satisfy our need for belonging and provide the resulting happiness that a family can.

Those of you who are away from home for the first time this fall probably left thinking, “Free at last!” Now that you’ve been without parental supervision for a few weeks and are getting used to the idea that you can sleep anytime and eat anything you want, I suspect in some of your quiet moments you have a little queasy feeling in the pit of your stomach

commonly know as homesickness. I’ll bet you’ve even peeked far enough ahead in your day planners to see how many more days there are until Thanksgiving and Christmas breaks! Why is there this yearning for home and loved ones? I believe it is a universal, God-given instinct that all people in all cultures are blessed with. I also believe that a loving Heavenly Father gives it to us, because within the family we experience most of life’s greatest joys. The sights, sounds, and associations of family and home are among our most treasured memories and provide our fondest anticipations.

Sometimes after an enjoyable family home evening, or during a fervent family prayer, or when our entire family is at the dinner table on Sunday evening eating waffles and engaging in a session of lively, good-natured conversation, I quietly say to myself: “If heaven is nothing more than this, it will be good enough for me!”

Keeping the Commandments

For the next ingredient of a happy life, I go to 2 Nephi 5:10. Nephi writes: “And we did observe to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things.”

Here is a simple but powerful truth: living righteously, keeping God’s commandments, makes us happy. The very quotable Alma gave us the all-time best one-liner on this topic when he said: “Wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10). That’s a sound bite worthy of the six o’clock news! As best as I can tell, based on my own experience and my observations of others, Alma’s is as categorical a statement as can be made on the subject, and our chances of proving Alma wrong are about zero.

In May of 1957, at the invitation of President David O. McKay, Cecil B. DeMille, renowned producer of motion pictures, gave the commencement address here at BYU. His latest production, *The Ten Commandments*, which has become a classic, had been filmed with some

technical advice from President McKay; and in the course of its production a close friendship had formed. Following a tender introduction by President McKay in which he praised the nobility and character of his friend, Cecil B. DeMille stunned the BYU graduates with a masterful and wonderfully brief address on the purpose of God's laws. Drawing on the lesson of the orgy of the golden calf from chapter 32 of the book of Exodus, Mr. DeMille noted that the children of Israel had been freed from the bitter bondage of Egypt and had seen the wonders of God in the desert and in the divided sea. They were free, they thought. Then Moses left them to go up the mountain to receive the law. As Mr. DeMille observed:

No sooner was he gone the short space of forty days and nights, when, in spite of all his teaching, in spite of all the marvels they had seen God work, the children of Israel became slaves again—not this time of a tyrant like Pharaoh, but slaves of their own passions and their own fears. [BYU Speeches of the Year, 31 May 1957, p. 6]

Then, in perhaps the emotional high point of his address, Cecil B. DeMille imparted this powerful insight concerning the keeping of God's laws:

Some, who do not know either the Bible or human nature, may see in the orgy of the Golden Calf only a riot of Hollywood's imaginations—but those who have eyes to see will see in it the awful lesson of how quickly a nation or a man can fall, without God's Law.

If man will not be ruled by God, he will certainly be ruled by tyrants—and there is no tyranny more imperious or more devastating than man's own selfishness, without the law.

We cannot break the Ten Commandments. We can only break ourselves against them. [p. 6]

From the depths of my soul today I testify to you, my young friends, that we cannot

break God's laws; we can only break ourselves against them. Satan wants us to believe we are an exception to God's rules, that somehow our transgressions are more noble, more justifiable, than anyone's have ever been, but that is a lie. And not only do we offend God by breaking his laws, we also offend ourselves and others and thereby experience heartache, suffering, and misery—the exact opposites of happiness.

There is no more poignant description of the contrast between the pain of rebellion and the joy of obedience to divine law than the one given by Alma to his son Helaman:

Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy. [Alma 36:21]

One of the keys to a truly happy life is to learn this lesson as early as possible—preferably vicariously—and to never forget it.

Planting and Harvesting

Next, in 2 Nephi 5:11, Nephi observes that “we did prosper exceedingly; for we did sow seed, and we did reap again in abundance.” Now, before you go accusing me of really living in a little house on the prairie, let me read to you from a general conference address of President Spencer W. Kimball given in April of 1978:

With the arrival of spring we hope all of you will put in your gardens and prepare to enjoy their produce this summer. We hope you are making this a family affair, with everyone, even the little ones, assigned to something. There is so much to learn and harvest from your garden, far more than just a crop itself. [“Becoming the Pure in Heart,” Ensign, May 1978, p. 79]

I cannot tell you logically why something as simple as planting a garden, however

modest, and harvesting and enjoying the fruits of one's labors is the source of great happiness, but I know it is. In the case of our own family, we've been blessed not only with our own little garden plot, but we've also had grandmothers on both sides who understand these principles and have showered us annually with a stream of fruits and vegetables. There is "far more than just a crop itself" to be gained, and it can come from a flowerpot, a window box, or a single tomato plant, as well as from an entire garden or field.

Animals

Also in 2 Nephi 5:11, Nephi records that "we began to raise flocks, and herds, and animals of every kind." I think you will be able to readily relate to this element of a happy life.

Why is it that animals—be they horses, dogs, cats, hamsters, turtles, or an occasional boa constrictor—touch us so deeply and provide such a rich source of happiness? I can only share with you my own feelings and thoughts, based on a lifelong association with a variety of cats, dogs, horses, and cows.

As a young boy I experienced the value of pouring out my wounded heart to a loving and understanding collie named Ranger, and of feeling the love and acceptance of a blue-ribbon 4-H calf named Daisy. Neither they, nor a host of their successors, have ever questioned my goodness or scolded me in my weaknesses. Given affection and care, they have returned affection and care generously and consistently. They have taught me much about love, forgiveness, loyalty, and trust. Like little children, they hold no grudges. They are totally honest and forthcoming in all their relationships.

I don't know how many millions of dollars must be spent every year on psychotherapists to provide humankind with the self-respect and self-esteem that relationships with animals are now increasingly seen as producing. There is a growing body of evidence that pets make a difference in our lives at every age and that

they have a measurable effect upon our health and well-being (see *Science & Society, U.S. News and World Report*, 24 February 1992, pp. 64–65). I've sensed this for years in my own life and just last week continued my personal mental health program by acquiring an English shepherd pup to replace our beloved collie, Wanda, who died more than a year ago of cancer. I'm noticeably happier again and know that, for me at least, heaven will not be heaven unless the animal kingdom is part of God's kingdom.

Scriptures

Next, in 2 Nephi 5:12, Nephi mentions that he "had also brought the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass." Nephi brought the then-existing scriptures along as he and his family founded their society.

Why would having access to the scriptures be a consideration in a happy lifestyle? Anyone who reads scripture regularly develops a clearer perspective, purer thoughts, and has more sincere and thoughtful prayers. Our lives are bound to be happier when we use the scriptures to answer our very personal questions and needs.

There are other uplifting influences the scriptures can have in our lives. They can cleanse us from evil thoughts and fortify our resolve to resist temptation. They can give comfort in times of need, such as when a loved one dies or during other personal tragedies. Reading them can put us in tune with the Spirit of the Lord so that our depression and self-doubts will flee and our confidence will "wax strong in the presence of God" (D&C 121:45).

A powerful expression of the happiness that can come from immersing ourselves in the scriptures comes from Parley P. Pratt's autobiography, in which he describes his first encounter with the Book of Mormon, which he called "that book of books":

I read all day; eating was a burden, I had no desire for food; sleep was a burden when the night came, for I preferred reading to sleep.

As I read, the spirit of the Lord was upon me, and I knew and comprehended that the book was true, as plainly and manifestly as a man comprehends and knows that he exists. My joy was now full, as it were, and I rejoiced sufficiently to more than pay me for all the sorrows, sacrifices and toils of my life. [PPP, 1994, p. 20]

I understand that in some Jewish families when a son starts Torah studies, a drop of honey is placed on the page to indicate this duty is also a great joy. I find that symbolism very appealing and testify that there is great constancy and happiness to be had from a daily study of the Bible and the Restoration scriptures.

Preparedness

The next element of a happy life mentioned by Nephi is in verse 14 of 2 Nephi 5. It is the quality of preparedness. Nephi illustrates it by saying that he “did take the sword of Laban, and after the manner of it did make many swords, lest by any means the people who were now called Lamanites should come upon us and destroy us.” Nephi was preparing for battle, and in a figurative sense that is what we must do if we are to be ready and qualified for life so that we can be happy with life. My own experience is that if we are prepared, we not only do not fear (see D&C 38:30), but we actually enjoy and derive considerable happiness from the events of our daily lives.

Those of you who have tests scheduled for this afternoon will relate to this principle on a very practical level. If you have prepared well you will probably do well and will have a feeling of well-being and satisfaction that will be denied those who are at this very moment reviewing their class notes instead of absorbing my very fascinating talk!

My children and I have been blessed and made very happy by my wife’s preparations for marriage and motherhood. She came with the fundamentals of cooking, sewing, gardening, reading, music, game playing, and a college degree all in place. I would probably have loved her just as much without all these credentials, but I doubt that our children and I would have been as happy! Those who have had some savings and a little food storage during a period of unemployment or who had been consistently “treasuring up the words of life” (see D&C 84:85) and were called on to speak extemporaneously in stake conference will know the happiness (and relief) that comes from being prepared. The Boy Scouts and their motto—“Be prepared”—have it right. Someone once asked Baden-Powell, the founder of the Boy Scouts, “Be prepared for what?”

“Why,” said Baden-Powell, “for any old thing.” That’s just the idea, and Nephi knew it, too.

Work

Nephi’s next comment on his happy society has to do with the principle of work. In verse 15 of 2 Nephi 5 he says:

And I did teach my people to build buildings, and to work in all manner of wood, and of iron, and of copper, and of brass, and of steel, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious ores, which were in great abundance.

In verse 17 he adds: “And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did cause my people to be industrious, and to labor with their hands.”

Six thousand years ago Father Adam received the commandment “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (Genesis 3:19). Today it is more socially acceptable to “persepire” than to “sweat,” and we have lost more than just moisture in that transition.

I realize that work can be mental, spiritual, or physical effort, but Nephi’s emphasis is on

laboring with our hands or manual labor. No matter what our life's work turns out to be, I know we'll be happier if we regularly labor with our hands. This can take many forms: yard work, sewing, quilting, cooking, baking, auto repair, home repair—the list is endless and so is the happiness and sense of accomplishment such activities produce.

I think it is a regrettable sign of our times that most family activities today take place in a recreational, rather than a work setting. I'm grateful I was able to work alongside both my grandfather and father and in turn am able to work with our sons and daughters. There is something inspiring to me about Elder Bruce R. McConkie's declaration on this vital element of a happy life: "We are here on earth to work—to work long, hard, arduous hours, to work until our backs ache and our tired muscles knot, to work all our days" ("Stand Independent Above All Other Creatures," *Ensign*, May 1979, p. 93).

The Temple

Nephi's next observation about his society is most interesting. In verse 16 of 2 Nephi 5 he says, "And I, Nephi, did build a temple." Nephi's temple may have differed in some ways from our latter-day temples, but its central purpose was likely the same: to continually teach and orient God's children concerning his plan for their happiness and to provide the ordinances and covenants essential to the attainment of that happiness.

After living on this good earth for fifty-three years, I can honestly say that the most spiritually mature and happy people I know are ardent temple-goers. There is good reason for that. It is in the temple that the full sweep of God's program for us is told and retold, each telling bringing greater understanding and commitment to living life His way.

What images does the word *temple* call to our minds? Listen to Elder Boyd K. Packer's expression of feelings about this:

When we say temple I would list what in essence are Latter-day Saint synonyms for the word: Marriage, family, children, happiness, joy, eternal life, resurrection, redemption, exaltation, inspiration, revelation. [The Holy Temple (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), p. 260]

A good test of how well we are doing in our quest to come unto Christ may be how we personally feel about the temple and our experiences there. *Temple* can be synonymous with *happiness* and *joy*. It was for Nephi and his people.

Church Service

The final element of Nephi's society, recorded in 2 Nephi 5, concerns the role our Church callings and service play in a happy life. Nephi notes in verse 26 that he "did consecrate Jacob and Joseph, that they should be priests and teachers over the land of my people." Of course, true Christian service can't be provided exclusively through institutional means. Random acts of personal service motivated by our feelings of charity are necessary for our salvation. But the organized Church as established by God, in which we look after and serve others and are looked after and served by others, provides a wonderful source of happiness for all of us. Nephi himself epitomizes this ethic of caring and service. He wrote: "For I pray continually for [my people] by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night, because of them" (2 Nephi 33:3).

In my own case, I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am for the countless opportunities for growth, service, and happiness that activity in the Church has provided. It is not by accident that in God's plan for us we have been given a church that "hath need of every member" (D&C 84:110). Because we are needed and encouraged and enabled to serve, we are much happier.

Other Elements

If we go beyond 2 Nephi 5 in Nephi's writings, we discover even more about the patterns of life that enabled Nephi and his people to live so happily. For instance, we learn he was a faithful keeper of a journal—we've been reading this morning from a portion of it! We learn that he was an avid student and teacher of the doctrines of the gospel and a sensitive follower of the Spirit of the Lord.

We also learn that he looked "forward with steadfastness unto Christ" (2 Nephi 25:24). The Savior and his teachings were the focus of Nephi's energies:

And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins. [2 Nephi 25:26]

Nephi knew and taught, as have all the prophets, that true peace and happiness can only ultimately come through a remission of our sins. The Savior's teachings—in large doses—are the only sure antidote for unhappiness!

Conclusion

Since first making my personal discovery about "living after the manner of happiness," I have thought deeply about the principles involved and about how timeless and universal they are. The same patterns and elements of daily life that enabled Nephi and his people to be happy 560 years before Christ work equally well today. And they fit comfortably at every stage during our lives (including our years at a university) and in every culture. In a time when "diversity" is so frequently touted as something desirable, it's interesting to note the uniformity and unchanging nature of these principles. Perhaps every purveyor of "new lamps for old" ought not to be heeded.

Of interest to struggling university students should be the fact that these principles of happiness can be lived virtually without cost. It's almost as if Nephi's little brother Jacob was speaking to this issue as he extended the invitation: "Come, my brethren, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price" (2 Nephi 9:50). This should tell us something about the very minimal role material things play in a happy life. The cost is almost always too high.

It has been interesting, too, to discover that the principles of happiness Nephi shares are found in all of the scriptures, old and modern. I often wonder why we wrestle over the meaning of obscure passages of scripture when what is really important for our happiness and salvation is stated by the Lord over and over again in very plain terms.

It is noteworthy, too, that the prophets of the past fifty years or so have had as the hallmarks of their teachings and service some of the exact principles we've touched on today. Presidents McKay and Lee made powerful statements about the sanctity and importance of the family. President Joseph Fielding Smith and President Ezra Taft Benson pleaded with us to make the scriptures a more significant part of our lives. President Kimball spoke movingly and from his own experience on the value of physical work, journals, gardens, and of being kind to animals. More recently, President Hunter lovingly invited us to make the temple the symbol of our Church membership. All of the prophets have continually reminded us of the blessings of obedience to God's laws and of the need to give ever-greater attention to Christ and his teachings. These chosen men understand better than all the world the sources of true happiness.

Now, as I conclude, I want to make a few final observations. First, I doubt that Nephi intended his list of ingredients in a happy

society to be exhaustive. In fact, he probably didn't intend to give us a list at all. I want to make it clear that I'm not a believer in "checklist happiness" either. There is no foolproof formula for guaranteeing a consistently happy life. There is also evidence that God did not intend for every day to be entirely happy. There is eternal design and purpose to be seen in some suffering, sadness, and adversity.

Second, there will be a tendency, in the complexity of these times, to forget that Nephi gloried "in plainness" and that the principles of happiness he modeled are both plain and simple (2 Nephi 33:6). If we overlook that fact, we may be like the children of Israel at the time of Moses who, when bitten by poisonous serpents, failed to look at the brass serpent Moses held up and thus live. Of these, Nephi says: "And the labor which they had to perform was to look; and because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished" (1 Nephi 17:41). The way to happiness can be just as simple and just as easily missed.

Finally, I invite you to look around you and observe people you feel are genuinely happy. I think you will invariably see the principles we have discussed today at work in their lives. I have done this and want to share my findings concerning two wonderfully modest souls who would shrink from being identified before an audience of this size. They are deeply happy and satisfied with their rather simple life together. They are also very kind and caring people. More than once I have sincerely said to them: "If you go before I do, and you aren't in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom, please drop me a note and I'll quit trying!"

What does a brief inspection of their lives reveal? They love God and each other. Their marriage and family are their priorities. They've had a few heartbreaks with their children, but they keep on laboring and loving. They have a simple but adequate and warm home. I don't think they've ever had a new car. She bakes great bread and cinnamon rolls, and she cans

and stores fruits and vegetables every fall that have been grown in their carefully tended garden. Their family scripture reading program was one of the few I know of that actually got Lehi out of the desert! They are always in the kitchen at ward dinners, and the welfare farm would probably go into bankruptcy without his annual contribution of labor and wisdom. Several times each month they arise early and attend a nearby temple. They seem to love being there, and even though there is admittedly much they do not understand, they are growing in their knowledge. He makes his living with his hands as a skilled craftsman of furniture and cabinets. She has learned to sew almost everything from dresses to curtains. They love and have trained horses, have kept a milk cow for many years, and now have a small fish hatchery and trout farm. They have diligently kept the commandments of God, and any little deviation has been followed by honest and immediate repentance. They are prepared for life—now and hereafter.

If for whatever reasons a life like the one I have just described cannot be duplicated in your circumstances, I know you can have something "like unto it" if you want it. Please think deeply about this subject. Of what use is the gospel, the Church, and its organizations and programs, or the way of life it espouses, if we aren't happy? Moroni stresses the importance of being happy during this phase of our eternal existence by describing the judgment. He says:

And then cometh the judgment of the Holy One upon them; and then cometh the time that he that is filthy shall be filthy still; and he that is righteous shall be righteous still; he that is happy shall be happy still; and he that is unhappy shall be unhappy still. [Mormon 9:14]

Nephi's society wasn't the only happy one of which the Book of Mormon speaks. There was another time and another people of whom it was written:

And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.

And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there

could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. [4 Nephi 1:15–16]

That we may all find this same happiness is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.