

## *What Do You Envision in Life?*

ERICH W. KOPISCHKE

**M**y dear friends, what a privilege it is for Christiane and me to be here with you. As we discuss important and eternal matters today, you soon will recognize that I am German, not only because of my funny accent but also because of my very direct approach. In the German language we refer to the idiom *mit jemanden Deutsch reden*, which would directly translate to “talking German to someone.” It means to express things in a simple, very clear, and direct manner so that no one can misunderstand. So now you know what you will have to put up with today.

The time between Thanksgiving and New Year’s Eve is a very special time of the year. As the days get shorter, the nights grow longer, and the temperatures drop lower, we seek light and warmth. These elements are found in abundance in all the Christmas lighting that surrounds us. It is in these dark months that we enjoy the shining candles in the house, a romantic candlelight dinner with someone we love, or—if we find time—relaxing a little by just sitting and reading a good book close to a crackling fireplace.

Christmas lights, candles, and open fireplaces provide light and warmth. They not only make us feel cozy but also help us to direct our thoughts to the source of all light:

the Light of Life, the Light of the World, even our Savior Jesus Christ. Celebrating His birth and pondering His life remind us of the dependency we have upon His light and the gratitude we feel for the mortal and eternal blessings of His Atonement. This season also helps us realize what matters most in life and often is a time of serious personal reflection and evaluation as we consider the past and contemplate the future.

Sadly and far too often this wonderful season of reevaluation becomes “the time of good intentions,” when our resolutions to be better end in “sudden death” within a few days or weeks into the new year. As a boy I often set New Year’s resolutions with great excitement and enthusiasm. My mother, observing my weaknesses and sometimes my failure to carry out these goals, used to say, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

I suspect all of us fall short in totally living up to our resolutions. But we ought to try to do better—especially those of us who know the

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importance of committing ourselves to follow the real Light of the World. To us the prophet Isaiah said, “Let us walk in the light of the Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

To walk in this light, our lives need a long-term orientation based on knowledge and conviction—knowledge of who we really are and the purpose of our creation as well as a conviction of our eternal destiny. We know that we are sons and daughters of a loving Heavenly Father. As such, we know He wants us to fill “the measure of [our] creation.”<sup>2</sup> He wants us to find joy and happiness in this life and ultimately reach our destination of immortality and eternal life “crowned with glory, even with the presence of God the Father.”<sup>3</sup>

Now I am looking into your eyes and seeing your smiling faces. As I try to envision your dreams and feel your hopes, I think back to when I was as young as you are now. Just having returned from my mission, I was dating a beautiful girl who, after a short period of nervous resistance, fearful investigation, and doubtful anticipation, finally decided to put up with me and give me an honest try. She now is the mother of our seven children, is as beautiful as always, and is sitting here with us on the stand today.

In my youth and young adult years I often asked myself this question: “Erich, where will you be ten years from now?” (Now that I am getting older, I’m not so interested in that question anymore.) I remember well how my dreams and visions for my future had an important impact upon the decisions that I made.

For example, when I was a young boy our extended family often got together to celebrate birthdays. Among the families were nine children, and every birthday was like a mini family reunion. Aunt Anni was my favorite because she seemed to be the never-tiring playmate. She would wrestle with us, play funny games, and just spend time with us. We loved her laugh, her excitement, and her enthusiasm. She never

seemed to be depressed or to have a bad day. I still get excited just thinking about her.

Because of her example I envisioned that my future wife would be like her. I wanted my wife to be lively and full of excitement and enthusiasm. In my dream I even saw her as a grandmother, running around with her grandchildren, never tired, and always happy. Somehow I had internalized that vision so much that this became the model I was looking for, and guess what? This is exactly what I was blessed to receive. Christiane is full of excitement and enthusiasm, and she loves to play with the children and grandchildren. They love her and I love being around her.

The lesson to be learned from this example is that dreams and visions are important. They determine the directions, goals, and priorities we are setting for our lives. The scriptures teach the following: “Where there is *no vision*, the people *perish*.”<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes our understanding of a principle is enhanced if we reverse the phrasing, which in this case would read: “Where there is *a vision*, the people *flourish*.” I truly believe this to be true because I have witnessed it in my own life and in the lives of many others around me.

The scripture then continues, “But he that keepeth the law, happy is he.”<sup>5</sup>

This brings me to ask you two very personal questions: What is your personal vision for your life? and What are you doing to fulfill it?

### **A Vision of Joy and Happiness**

Something every one of us envisions is to be happy in our lives. One of the divine purposes of our very existence is to experience joy and happiness. Lehi taught, “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.”<sup>6</sup> The prophet Joseph F. Smith saw in a vision that the resurrection of the righteous to eternal life will bring them “a fulness of joy.”<sup>7</sup>

In his famous dream the prophet Lehi beheld that the fruit of the tree of life “was

desirable to make one happy.”<sup>8</sup> This is why Alma described the plan God has for us, His children, as “the great plan of happiness.”<sup>9</sup> Joy and happiness are inseparably connected with choosing the lifestyle God has in mind for us, making covenants with Him, and keeping His commandments with all our “might, mind and strength.”<sup>10</sup>

This joy is not to be confused with the pleasures of the world. Real happiness and joy have little to do with the amount of money in my bank account, the size of my home, the number of expensive (and, of course, German) cars registered in my name, or the most mind-boggling and ever-important question: “My dear, will the new boat fit into our garage?”

True happiness and joy arise from our relationship with the Father and the Son and our knowledge that we are completely in tune with Them. They also stem from the loving relationships we have with the people who surround us. Therefore, “in this life [we] shall have joy, and again in the flesh [we] shall see God.”<sup>11</sup> The quality and congeniality in our relationships with our spouses, children, grandchildren, friends, and associates determine the level of joy in our lives. We will be increasingly happy if we and our loved ones are living “after the manner of happiness.”<sup>12</sup>

My dear young friends, have you already established a clear and strong vision for your life that includes the pillars of real happiness and joy? If not, I invite you to do so; if you have, I invite you to embrace your vision with all your heart. It will inspire and guide you in all the critical decisions that you are making during this wonderful season of your life.

Let me share with you a doctrine that will help you reach your righteous desire and yearning for happiness more than anything else. If clearly understood and applied, it will bring joy and tremendous security into your life, independent from any circumstances you may face. This doctrine reaches far beyond

this earthly life right into eternity. I am talking about the doctrine of the family.

### **The Doctrine of the Family**

The concept of family and family life as a true source for happiness has been terribly hollowed out in recent decades. The traditional family is under attack from many different sources worldwide. But there are other pitfalls and risks that even relate to some of us who know about the importance, divinity, and eternal destiny of the family. Influenced by the world and its enticements, the increasing desire for self-centered fulfillment, and the inclination for comfort or for making things easy, we put the family and our happiness under stress. All too often happiness in our life is defined by the quality of our “all-around carefree package,” which we hope to achieve and retain in a “low-investment, high-return” mode.

But life does not work in this way. It was never intended to be easy. The Lord said to Joseph Smith: “For after much tribulation come the blessings. Wherefore the day cometh that ye shall be crowned with much glory.”<sup>13</sup>

The Lord has clearly revealed how to develop and retain strong families. We all are invited to study and apply the principles set forth in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” Additionally, we need to recognize that drawing personal strength and happiness from family life requires some sacrifice and faith.

The family proclamation states “that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.” It further states “that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force.”<sup>14</sup>

Among many, the image and purpose of the family has drastically changed. Increasingly, society is adopting the so-called “soul mate” model of marriage, which focuses on the needs

and feelings of the adults as opposed to those of the children. As a result, many enter marriage after a long-standing relationship rather than moving forward after an appropriate courtship. Finding the perfect match, testing a relationship by cohabitation without the benefit of marriage, or securing a lavish lifestyle that will be backed by a robust prenuptial agreement have become common practices among many before they even consider marriage.

Scripture and modern-day prophets teach us differently. We build our marriages on the foundation of chastity and fidelity, with the intent to establish and rear a family. The prophet of my youth, President Spencer W. Kimball, taught:

*The lighted way, then, brings us to normal, clean courting of young men and women, coming eventually to a virtuous union at an altar where a fully authorized servant of God seals the union for eternity. The Hebrew Saints were properly taught, "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." (Hebrews 13:4.)*

*And to those who might decry marriage or postpone it or forbid it, Paul spoke, condemning them. It is generally selfishness, cold and self-centered, which leads people to shun marriage responsibility.*

President Kimball continued:

*There are many who talk and write against marriage. Even some of our own delay marriage and argue against it. . . . We call upon all people to accept normal marriage as a basis for true happiness. . . . Basically marriage presupposes a family. The psalmist said: "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. . . . Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them." (Psalm 127:3, 5.)<sup>15</sup>*

When Christiane and I were young, these were the words of our living prophet, and

we trusted and followed his advice. We knelt across the altar of the Swiss Temple, being only twenty-two and twenty years of age. We were worthy of the covenant, we had no real clue of what to expect, we had no work experience or finished education, and we were as poor as church mice. All that we had in abundance was our love for each other and a lot of naïve enthusiasm. But we began building our world together. We did not postpone having children, and we needed to support each other in getting our educations. We strongly believed in the Lord's promise that "if ye do keep his commandments he doth bless you and prosper you."<sup>16</sup>

And He did. When we married, Christiane was in nursing school. Our vision included having her finish her degree, but at the same time we also made a conscious decision to begin fulfilling our dream of having a family. As a result, our first child was born about two weeks before Christiane passed her final exam as a certified nurse.

However, we knew that even in our marriage there would be stumbling blocks, challenges, and some difficulties. But we had a simple oral agreement, which we often repeated with smiles on our faces: "If difficulties approach, no manslaughter and no divorce."

Now, thirty-six years later, we are grateful that we could build this family together. Our faith in God and our relationship with each other have become unshaken as we have seen the hand of the Lord guiding us through the process of building our kingdom in mortality, which at present consists of seven children and six grandchildren. This kingdom will continue to grow, forever and ever.

### **The Importance of Sacrifice**

For this vision of happiness we both were ready and willing to sacrifice. We accepted the divinely appointed roles of the father "to preside" and "to provide" and of the mother to

“nurture.”<sup>17</sup> Sister Julie B. Beck, former general Relief Society president of the Church, stated:

*The priesthood role of fathers is to preside and pass priesthood ordinances to the next generation. The priesthood role of mothers is to influence. These are essential, complimentary, and interdependent responsibilities.*<sup>18</sup>

Helping one another in a marriage and family as equal partners does not mean that we always do the same things or do everything together or in equal shares. We understand and accept different roles given to us by divine design as outlined in the proclamation on the family. We are not following the world in what is described as “emancipation,” in which both husband and wife live only to fulfill their own self-interests. We are living the principles of complementariness and completion with respect to each other and to our children.

In a BYU devotional address given almost thirty years ago, President James E. Faust counseled the sisters to be careful not to do everything at once and to do first what is most important for the family, and then other desires can follow. He said, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.”<sup>19</sup> Then he said:

*It seems that the new roles of women have not decreased their responsibility because, while the new roles are challenging, the old roles of wife and mother are in the soul and cry out to be satisfied. . . . Fortunately [in most cases, I would like to add], women do not have to track a career like a man does. A woman may fit more than one career into the various seasons of life. She cannot sing all of the verses of her song at the same time.*<sup>20</sup>

### **Striving for the Ideal**

My young friends, some of you may say: “Well, our situation is different. The world today is not ideal. There must be room for exceptions.” With regard to making exceptions,

President Boyd K. Packer once told the following story:

*As mission president, I attended a mission Relief Society conference. Our mission Relief Society president, a relatively recent convert, announced something of a course correction. Some local societies had strayed, and she invited them to conform more closely to the direction set by the general presidency of the Relief Society.*

*One sister in the congregation stood and defiantly told her that they were not willing to follow her counsel, saying they were an exception. A bit flustered, she turned to me for help. I didn’t know what to do. I was not interested in facing a fierce woman. So I motioned for her to proceed. Then came the revelation!*

*This lovely Relief Society president, small and somewhat handicapped physically, said with gentle firmness: “Dear sister, we’d like not to take care of the exception first. We will take care of the rule first, and then we will see to the exceptions.” The course correction was accepted.*

President Packer continued:

*Her advice is good for Relief Society and priesthood and for families. When you state a rule and include the exception in the same sentence, the exception is accepted first.*<sup>21</sup>

Therefore I am attempting to teach you the rule or the divine ideal and let you deal with exceptions as you walk the course of your life. In the vision we had for our family, we wanted Christiane to stay home to rear our children. This meant sacrifice. Shortly after we learned that a baby was on its way, Christiane reminded me of the mutual decision we had made even before our wedding day that she would immediately stop working outside the home as soon as a baby was born. I tried to escape what I knew would be additional responsibility by mentioning that she was contributing one-third of our family income. Her

simple answer was: “That is your problem. I will take care of the children and you take care of putting food on the table.”

I knew she was right. We had discussed it long before, it was in tune with our vision of family life, it was in tune with the words of the living prophets, and it felt right. So she gave up her well-paying career as a nurse to be close to the children and to meet their daily needs, and I had to get my act together to provide food and shelter. The Lord blessed us to be able to fulfill this aspect of our vision.

Other important matters, such as parenting, teaching, mentoring, cleaning, or even diaper changing, we did together as often as circumstances allowed. This division of labor occurred because it had always been part of how we envisioned our family life.

### **The Importance of Faith**

It requires faith to establish and act upon a vision. But it is only when we move forward in faith that we put ourselves in a position in which the Lord can bless us. A young couple recently shared an experience with me that illustrates this point.

As it had been with Christiane and me, their vision was to begin their family as soon as possible after they were married. They had two criteria for doing so: they needed health insurance and they wanted to be able to care for their baby without using child care.

Not too long after the wife graduated from college, she got a job that provided health insurance and would allow her to work from home. Their plans seemed to have fallen in place exactly as they had hoped, and soon they were expecting their first child. They felt they could both care for the baby between their work and school schedules.

In the summer, the soon-to-be father was looking for an internship in his chosen profession. He had several interviews, but none of them worked out. In October, when his wife

was seven months pregnant, she got a call from her boss. The boss informed her that the federal grant that funded her salary would not be renewed. The agency was happy to offer her another job, but she would not be able to work from home. The couple was heartbroken. They thought they had planned well and that the circumstances were perfect for the wife to be able to stay home with the baby.

Several weeks went by, and they adjusted to the idea that they would need to use some form of day care. About three weeks before her December due date, the husband received a call out of the blue from one of the business owners who had interviewed him in the summer. The man said he had just made some new hires and had put a rejection letter in the mail to the husband. But then he had had a very strong feeling that he should hire the husband. The business owner told the young man to ignore the rejection letter, and he then offered him a full-time position with benefits.

In concluding her account of these events, the wife wrote:

*We were overjoyed. We knew that the Lord had taken a special interest in our desire for me to be a stay-at-home mom. And the Lord’s plan was even better than our plan. If things had gone our way, I would have had to work while caring for our child, but with this new situation I was able to devote my full time and attention to our new baby, which had always been our ultimate goal.*

Like this young couple, Christiane and I have found that as we have acted in faith and have trusted the Lord, He has helped us to do His will in His way and according to His timing. Now I have to say that His way did not mean that everything turned out immediately the way we thought it would. Sometimes we had to be very patient, sometimes we had to put in some extra effort, and sometimes it even was as if the Lord was testing our seriousness.

However, our vision always has inspired us and has been the foundation for our most important decisions.

### **Look to the Temple**

One thing Christiane and I always envisioned was for us to be with our children in the celestial room of a temple as a prelude for the eternal joy and glory we hope one day to experience. Over the past several years we have taken one child after another to receive their temple ordinances, symbolically returning them to our Heavenly Father after teaching them the principles of righteousness.

We just had the last experience of that kind two months ago, when one of our youngest sons entered the temple. We have accompanied three of our children to temple altars as they have married their sweethearts, and we anticipate more temple weddings to come. Nothing has provided more happiness and satisfaction in our lives than the joy we have found in one another and in our posterity. Once we understood that these are just the beginnings of our eternal progression and therefore only the very first levels of our joy and happiness, we were and are continually willing to sacrifice all that we have to live the doctrine of the family and to see our vision fully realized.

I invite you, my dear young friends, to ponder this doctrine and come to know for yourselves what really matters most. This type of happiness is at the heart of our existence. And happiness that stems from congenial relationships among husband, wife, and children is always growing and increasing.

### **Be Serious About What Matters Most**

There is one more thing that you need to do after you have studied the doctrine of the family and have established a vision for your happiness. You have to become serious about implementing your vision. I would like to share an additional lesson from my personal experience.

The first initial rejections I received in my courtship with Christiane made me a little discouraged. I had just about decided to begin a fruitful career as a young single adult in the Church. One day I had a special spiritual impression. I was participating in an ordinance in the Swiss Temple when I heard a voice in my heart saying something to this effect: "Erich, if you do not seriously strive to marry and enter into the new and everlasting covenant, all these teachings and promised blessings really make no difference for you." It was a wake-up call that I received at the very young age of twenty-one, and from that moment I tried even harder to be worthy of that blessing.

I invite you to set personal goals regarding your vision. In *Preach My Gospel* we read:

*Goals reflect the desires of our hearts and our vision of what we can accomplish. Through goals and plans, our hopes are transformed into action. Goal setting and planning are acts of faith.<sup>22</sup>*

I invite you to be serious. Do not trifle with sacred things. Once you reach a marriageable age, don't just date for fun. Never compromise your eternal birthright by doing anything that would deprive you of making the most important covenants in the temple. As you treat every date as a potential eternal companion, you will never do inappropriate things that would physically or spiritually harm your date or compromise your own worthiness and darken your vision. Your spiritual perception will never be dimmed and you will always be entitled to the whisperings of the Spirit. He will encourage and confirm as you make these most important decisions in your life, even if at times you are scared to death.

Hold yourself accountable to the Lord with respect to your vision and goals in life. If there is something you need to repent of, don't hesitate a second to do so. Both this life and eternal life are too important to procrastinate the day

of our repentance. Follow the invitation of the Savior, who encouraged us to

*ask the Father in the name of Jesus for what things soever ye shall stand in need. Doubt not, but be believing, and begin as in times of old, and come unto the Lord with all your heart, and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling before him.*<sup>23</sup>

### **The Principle of Finishing**

I would like to share a thought with those of you who are trying hard to implement these principles but have not yet succeeded. I recognize that some of you, given your circumstances, may need to adapt the ideal vision of a family to fit your personal situation. But I have learned that the Lord will help us as we act in faith and follow the ideal to the extent possible.

The gospel of Jesus Christ includes a most comforting component. It is the “finishing” or “completing” aspect of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Moroni admonished us to always stay on the right way, “relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who [is] the author and the finisher of [our] faith.”<sup>24</sup>

Because of the faith that we have in Jesus Christ, we can pursue the course in life we need to take, but if we fail because of weakness or missing opportunities, He will either reach out to us or fill in the gap and become the finisher of our faith. It is He who stated, “For I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts.”<sup>25</sup>

And from the Church Handbook we read:

*Faithful members whose circumstances do not allow them to receive the blessings of eternal marriage and parenthood in this life will receive all promised blessings in the eternities, provided they keep the covenants they have made with God.*<sup>26</sup>

I testify that the Lord meant what He said when He stated that “it is not good that the man should be alone”<sup>27</sup> and that His ultimate desire for all of His children is that they

receive “a fulness of joy.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore, always keep your vision before you and

*strive for the ideal of living in an eternal family. This means preparing to become worthy spouses and loving fathers or mothers. In some cases these blessings will not be fulfilled until the next life, but the ultimate goal is the same for all.*<sup>29</sup>

Now, at the beginning of my remarks I promised you the direct “German approach.” So please do not be offended at what I have said. I know there are as many different life circumstances as there are people in this room. I know there are differences in cultures, traditions, and expectations. However, the doctrines and principles outlined today are eternal and true, and they stand independent from our personal life situations. I have every confidence that as you sincerely ponder and prayerfully consider your personal vision in the context of these doctrines and principles, you will be able to develop a vision for your life that will be pleasing to the Lord and lead to your greatest happiness.

I testify of these wonderful truths. God lives; Jesus is the Christ. It is through the plan of the Father and the Atonement of Jesus Christ that we have access to such marvelous opportunities for happiness in this life and promises of a future in which our individual kingdoms will be expanded beyond our current capacity to fully understand. So, once more I ask you: What is your vision for *your* life? and What are you willing to do to achieve it?

I pray the blessings of heaven on you as you ponder these questions and strive to obtain sacred and eternal blessings. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### **Notes**

1. Isaiah 2:5; 2 Nephi 12:5.
2. D&C 88:19.
3. D&C 88:19.
4. Proverbs 29:18; emphasis added.



5. Proverbs 29:18.
6. 2 Nephi 2:25.
7. D&C 138:17.
8. 1 Nephi 8:10.
9. Alma 42:8.
10. D&C 11:20.
11. Moses 5:10.
12. 2 Nephi 5:27.
13. D&C 58:4.
14. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 1995.
15. Spencer W. Kimball, "Guidelines to Carry Forth the Work of God in Cleanliness," *Ensign*, May 1974.
16. Mosiah 2:22.
17. "The Family."
18. Taken from comments on motherhood from Sister Julie B. Beck, general conference training, October 2009.
19. Ecclesiastes 3:1.
20. James E. Faust, "A Message to Our Granddaughters," BYU devotional address, 12 February 1985.
21. Boyd K. Packer, "The Relief Society," *Ensign*, May 1998.
22. *PMG*, 146.
23. Mormon 9:27.
24. Moroni 6:4.
25. D&C 137:9.
26. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 1.3.3, [https://www.lds.org/bc/content/shared/content/english/pdf/language-materials/08702\\_eng.pdf?lang=eng](https://www.lds.org/bc/content/shared/content/english/pdf/language-materials/08702_eng.pdf?lang=eng).
27. Genesis 2:18.
28. Moses 7:67.
29. *Handbook 2*, 1.3.3.