

# *The Pursuit of Happiness*

W. MACK LAWRENCE

**G**reetings to all! What a great blessing to me personally to be here, to share a few thoughts with you, and to express my testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I have so many blessings—all too many to enumerate here. My family, as with most of you, is at the top of my list. Another great blessing, which we take for granted all too often, is this outstanding school of higher education. This is a blessing. It is also a blessing to be a student here. (And, by the way, it's okay to lose once in a while to that school to the north.)

When first asked if I would accept this invitation to be with you today, the thought rushed through my mind: What could I say that would be helpful, that would cause students to pause and to think?

One of my outstanding teachers—an English teacher, incidentally—once said that the only goal we had all year long was to learn to think.

In this quest, and after prayerful consideration, it came to me that we're all looking for happiness and joy—wherever we are, whatever our past. The pursuit of happiness has been a dream of all people from the time of Adam and Eve. It's a founding principle of this great country of ours. The Declaration of

Independence declares that among our inalienable rights are "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

How would you define happiness?

President David O. McKay stated, "Happiness is not an external condition, it is a state of the spirit and attitude of the mind" (CR, October 1934, p. 93).

Dale Carnegie said, "Happiness doesn't depend on outward conditions. It depends on inner conditions. It isn't what you have or who you are or where you are or what you are doing that makes you happy or unhappy. It is what you think about" (*How to Win Friends and Influence People* [New York: Pocket Books, 1981], p. 71).

In simple terms, a righteous life is the way—the only way—to happiness, joy, and peace. As one of our hymns reminds us, "Choose the right! There is peace in righteous doing" ("Choose the Right," *Hymns*, 1985, no. 239).

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*W. Mack Lawrence was a member of the Second Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 13 June 1995.*

If there be a theme to my remarks, it is found in the Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 2:25: “Men are, that they might have joy.”

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin taught in his general conference address in October 1989:

*Our Heavenly Father knows the way for you [and me] to enjoy happiness and peace; the principles of the gospel mark the way. They are [his] gift to [each of us].*

*On the other hand, Satan will try, at every step of the way, to lead [us] off course. His objective is to make you [and me] unhappy and miserable like he is. (See 2 Ne. 2:27.) [Maybe that’s the source of the oft-heard phrase “Misery loves company.”] Vast sums of money are spent each year to package and disguise sin and evil to make them appear enticing, attractive, even harmless. However, regardless of appearances, “wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10) and never will be. Never find yourselves in the position of the Nephites just a few years before the birth of the Savior. They “sought . . . for that which [they] could not obtain; . . . for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head.” (Hel. 13:38.) You cannot find happiness in sin and iniquity.*

*The Lord has given [us] the gift of agency (see Moses 7:32) and instructed [us] sufficiently to know good from evil (see 2 Ne. 2:5). [We] are free to choose (see 2 Ne. 2:27) and [we] are permitted to act (see 2 Ne. 10:23; Hel. 14:30), but [we] are not free to choose the consequences. With absolute certainty, choices of good and right lead to happiness and peace, while choices of sin and evil eventually lead to unhappiness, sorrow, and misery. [Joseph B. Wirthlin, “Running Your Marathon,” Ensign, November 1989, p. 75; emphasis added]*

My first point of emphasis: Place the Lord Jesus Christ at the center of all you do. Only by so doing can you find true and lasting happiness.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught:

*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, and holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God. [Teachings, pp. 255–56]*

Another prophet, President Ezra Taft Benson, taught:

*You cannot do wrong and feel right. It is impossible! Years of happiness can be lost in the foolish gratification of a momentary desire for pleasure. Satan would have you believe that happiness comes only as you surrender to his enticements, but one only needs to look at the shattered lives of those who violate God’s laws to know why Satan is called the Father of Lies. [“A Message to the Rising Generation,” Ensign, November 1977, p. 30]*

To assist you in finding and keeping true happiness, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are placing renewed emphasis on some very basic instructions: namely, to pray daily—petitioning our Heavenly Father for guidance and direction and at the same time expressing thanks and appreciation; and to read our scriptures daily also—not necessarily so many pages per day but, instead, to ponder, study, and review verses by a subject or a principle of doctrine. This, combined with loving, Christlike service to others, leads us to place the Lord Jesus Christ at the center of our lives. This is the means of obtaining true and lasting happiness.

My second point of emphasis, which I have already touched on, is to know that enduring happiness comes from what we really are—our thoughts, our deeds of service, the decisions we make—and not from possessions, positions, or prominence.

In this world of ours, society places an undue emphasis on the wrong things. As a result, we sometimes seek to measure success—even happiness—by material goods.

This is *not* a true measure! It is so temporary. What matters most is the happiness and joy that comes from living the gospel of Jesus Christ. The laws of God are given for our happiness.

Let me quote again from the Prophet Joseph Smith:

*But in obedience there is joy and peace unspotted, unalloyed; and as God has designed our happiness—and the happiness of all His creatures, he never has—He never will institute an ordinance or give a commandment to His people that is not calculated in its nature to promote that happiness which He has designed, and which will not end in the greatest amount of good and glory to those who become the recipients of his law and ordinances. Blessings offered, but rejected, are no longer blessings, but become like the talent hid in the earth by the wicked and slothful servant; the proffered good returns to the giver; the blessing is bestowed on those who will receive and occupy. [Teachings, pp. 256–57]*

A third point I should like to emphasize is that we should be cheerful in the face of adversity. Just think of these words Joseph Smith wrote to the persecuted and suffering Saints while he himself languished as a prisoner in Liberty Jail: “Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power” (D&C 123:17).

The Saints had been driven from the comforts of their homes and were scattered on the plains of Missouri. The Prophet himself was in jail, facing death—a time in his life when he may have been discouraged, concerned, unhappy. But what did he say? “Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power.”

This leads to my next point of emphasis. Happy people are of a cheerful countenance. The Lord has frequently admonished us to “be of good cheer” (John 16:33, D&C 61:36). The Lord has also declared, “Wherefore, lift up

thy heart and rejoice, and cleave unto the covenants which thou hast made” (D&C 25:13).

Commenting on this verse, President Gordon B. Hinckley said:

*I believe he is saying to each of us, be happy. The gospel is a thing of joy. It provides us with a reason for gladness. Of course there are times of sorrow. Of course there are hours of concern and anxiety. We all worry. But the Lord has told us to lift our hearts and rejoice. I see so many people, . . . who seem never to see the sunshine, but who constantly walk with storms under cloudy skies. Cultivate an attitude of happiness. Cultivate a spirit of optimism. Walk with faith, rejoicing in the beauties of nature, in the goodness of those you love, in the testimony which you carry in your heart concerning things divine. [“If Thou Art Faithful,” Ensign, November 1984, pp. 91–92]*

This inspired counsel from our prophet reminds me of the words of the song we sang as children: “No one likes a frowning face. Change it for a smile. Make the world a better place By smiling all the while” (“Smiles,” *Songbook*, p. 267).

The next point I would like to emphasize is that it is important to distinguish between the pursuit of happiness and the pursuit of pleasure. Sometimes we get so mixed up in our pursuit of happiness that we settle for pleasure. Pleasure is so short-lived. It is here one moment and gone in almost the next breath.

In this respect, consider these observations on the difference between pleasure and happiness by the scholar and apostle Elder James E. Talmage:

*The present is an age of pleasure-seeking, and men are losing their sanity in the mad rush for sensations that do but excite and disappoint. In this day of counterfeits, adulterations, and base imitations, the devil is busier than he has ever been in the course of human history, in the manufacture of pleasures, both old and new; and these he offers for*

*sale in most attractive fashion, falsely labeled, Happiness. . . .*

*Happiness includes all that is really desirable and of true worth in pleasure, and much beside. Happiness is genuine gold, pleasure but gilded brass. . . . Happiness is as the genuine diamond, which, rough or polished, shines with its own inimitable luster; pleasure is as the paste imitation that glows only when artificially embellished. Happiness is as the ruby, red as the heart's blood, hard and enduring; pleasure, as stained glass, soft, brittle, and of but transitory beauty. . . .*

*Happiness leaves no bad after-taste, it is followed by no depressing reaction; it calls for no repentance, brings no regret, entails no remorse; pleasure too often makes necessary repentance, contrition, and suffering; and, if indulged to the extreme, it brings degradation and destruction. [Jesus the Christ (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1916), pp. 247–48; emphasis in original]*

Furthermore, there is an even higher level of happiness. Lehi declared, “Men [speaking generically to include women] are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25).

Elder Dallin H. Oaks has stated:

*Joy is more than happiness. Joy is the ultimate sensation of well-being. It comes from being complete and in harmony with our Creator and his eternal laws.*

*The opposite of joy is misery. Misery is more than unhappiness, sorrow, or suffering. Misery is the ultimate state of disharmony with God and his laws. [“Joy and Mercy,” *Ensign*, November 1991, p. 73]*

I’d now like to share with you a potpourri of thoughts regarding happiness by some anonymous writers:

- Someone observed, “People so often play up the bad side of things. Nobody ever puts out a sign that says, ‘Nice Dog.’ ”

Each night on the TV news, we hardly ever hear good news. It’s the bad side of life we hear about—death, accidents, floods, wars, violence. Even so, there are great things happening each and every day—untold stories of love and charity. Help comes here and there and everywhere. It may not be news, but it is uplifting and character building.

- Another said, “Now and then it’s good to pause in our pursuit of happiness and just be happy.”

Be yourself. Don’t be “uptight.” Don’t be phoney in your doings.

Let me share an experience I had as I graduated from “that other school.” We were in the process of job interviews, and most of the people in my class had interviewed with a particular company and with a particular person. All of my associates had reported to each other all of the questions the interviewer would ask and also shared thoughts as to what answers he was looking for. Can you imagine? Talk about phoney!

I wasn’t myself in that interview. I answered with what someone else had said. I failed that interview so badly. I tried to tell that man what I thought he wanted to hear instead of what was in my heart and my true feelings. A few more thoughts:

- Happiness is never stopping to think if you are.
- A man was going through some stress in his life and had become rather short-tempered and grumpy. He recognized that he was making life rather miserable for his wife and, comparing himself to the Seven Dwarfs, said to his wife: “I’ve gone from ‘Happy’ to ‘Grumpy.’ What’s next?” His wife quickly replied, “‘Lonely.’ ”
- Even seemingly miserable conditions can be full of happiness. For example, consider the following: Happiness is what is being experienced by a business executive who has left his cool, comfortable, air-conditioned office for a fishing trip and is sitting

in a leaky boat under a blazing sun, wearing woolen socks, musty rubber boots, and fish-smelling pants, sweating profusely as he kicks over a can of worms while untangling a backlash in his fishing line.

We all need a change in our daily routine from time to time so we can really see the big picture.

Arthur Rubinstein, the great pianist, made this observation:

*Most people, in my opinion, have an unrealistic approach toward happiness because they invariably use the fatal conjunction "if" as a condition. You hear them say: I would be happy if I were rich, or if this girl loved me, or if I had talent, or, their most popular "if": if I had good health. They often attain their goal, but they discover soon some new "ifs."*

*. . . As for myself, I love life for better or for worse, unconditionally.* [Arthur Rubinstein, *My Young Years* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), p. 362; emphasis in original]

My good friends, have you ever lost something so important or precious to you that it caused you to lose sleep or has brought you to the point that it was the thing that consumed your thoughts? You may know that it's not really lost but just misplaced, but there is such relief or joy that comes over you when it is found. There is something very special about this feeling of relief, happiness, and joy.

Isn't it like the joy expressed in the New Testament, in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 15?

*What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?*

*And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.*

*And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.*

*I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.* [Luke 15:4–7]

And then, in the same chapter, we read of the joy of the father of the prodigal son, and we also learn a lesson about the brother's feelings of jealousy.

*A certain man had two sons:*

*And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.*

*And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.*

*And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.*

*And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.*

*And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.*

*And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!*

*I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,*

*And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.*

*And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.*

*And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*

*But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:*

*And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:*

*For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.*

*Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing.*

*And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.*

*And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.*

*And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and in treated him.*

*And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:*

*But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.*

*And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.*

*It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found. [Luke 15:11–32]*

There is also happiness and joy that comes from completing our Church callings in a pleasing way to our Heavenly Father.

One of the stake presidents in Phoenix, Arizona, made the following report that really touched me:

*I was humbled to learn that last quarter 100 percent of our single adults and single parents were visited. It is humbling, while also sad, to realize that in many homes the home teacher is considered the father by the children who reside there.*

*This past month I met two families in the stake who shared the same home teacher. They had just learned that their home teacher was moving because of a job transfer.*

*During the last sacrament meeting the home teacher attended prior to his move, several children from the homes he taught sang “Lord, I Would Follow Thee” (Hymns, 1985, no. 220). At the halfway mark in the third verse, the children began to cry and could not continue singing. As a quiet began to rush over the congregation, the words of the song began to be heard from the back of the chapel. It was the remainder of the family members singing from their hearts. As they sang, they stood—a single mother with her other children and another sister and her nonmember husband. It was one of the most moving things I have ever witnessed. As the music stopped, it was as if everyone could still hear a heavenly choir.*

*I later learned that this wonderful home teacher had, for years, visited each of his families once a week. Though he had never held a ward position viewed by others as significant, I had a witness that his work in his call as a home teacher had dwarfed any accomplishment of any leader in his ward or our stake. I came away from that meeting with a better understanding of the Lord’s feelings regarding the call of a home teacher than from any talk I have ever heard.*

Certainly this story illustrates how dedicated, unselfish service brings great joy and happiness to the one rendering the service as well as to the ones being served. What a contrast this home teacher was to the selfish people who think only of themselves.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell observed that “selfish people are forever taking their own temperature, asking themselves, ‘Am I happy?’ ” (*All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1979], p. 60).

In summary, I encourage you to:

1. Place the Lord Jesus Christ at the center of all you do.
2. Know that enduring happiness comes from what we really are and not from possessions, positions, or prominence.
3. Be cheerful in the face of adversity.

4. Have a cheerful countenance.

5. Distinguish between the pursuit of happiness and the pursuit of pleasure.

My brothers and sisters, the gospel is true. Not only that, it truly is “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8). To act contrary to the principles and covenants of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to be “in a state contrary to the nature of happiness” (Alma 41:11).

We are guided and directed by a prophet of God, yes, President Gordon B. Hinckley. The priesthood of God was restored to the earth through the Prophet Joseph Smith. I testify of these things in the name of him whose Church this is, he who beckons us to follow the true road to happiness, even Jesus Christ. Amen.