

# *Crossing the Street of Life*

JANET G. LEE

Rex and I warmly welcome you back to this beautiful fall semester. Now that you are somewhat settled in your classes and are just about finished adding and dropping, we hope that your frustrations are beginning to subside. We have two students of our own at BYU who have given their father plenty of advice about how to make things run more smoothly. So by next semester, registration should be a piece of cake.

I have been thinking a lot about your happiness lately, about how to obtain it and how to hold onto it. I have come up with a foolproof method. Let me begin with this story.

My niece Mollie was playing at her grandmother's house one day when she asked if she could cross the street to visit a favorite aunt. The street was not a busy one, but because Mollie was only four, she was cautioned to look carefully both ways before crossing. Always an inquisitive child, she questioned this procedure, so her grandmother replied, "Such a little girl could easily get hit by a car, and I love you so much that I don't want anything to happen to you."

Before long Mollie was back: "You lied to me! You said I would get hit by a car if I didn't look both ways. Well, I closed my eyes and ran

over and back lots of times, and a car never hit me, so you didn't tell me the truth!"

Today I would like to talk about obedience—specifically, obedience to the Lord's commandments. Just as a loving grandmother cautioned a four-year-old child to look both ways before crossing the street, a loving Father in Heaven has given us detailed instructions to ensure our happiness and safe arrival at our ultimate destination. Yet we often question the consequences or think we can get away with taking chances. We close our eyes to some of God's commandments and cross the street of life. At such times it appears that we might not get hurt if we obey only some of God's laws. Our minds don't comprehend answers to some of the "whys" of the commandments and, like questioning children, we disobey. The Lord has said, "Keep my commandments." He didn't say, "Look this list over, pick out what you think pertains to you or try to work on part of these some of the time." His instructions were simple, yet direct and unqualified: "Keep my commandments."

---

*Janet G. Lee, wife of Rex E. Lee, gave this devotional address at Brigham Young University on 15 September 1992.*

My three-year-old granddaughter Jordan asks “why” after almost everything I say. I recognize her need to understand, and I explain as much as possible. But there are occasions when no amount of explaining can penetrate her level of understanding. And so it is with us. Our mortal minds are limited, but the Lord is limitless in his understanding. How tedious it must become when we continue to question what we cannot comprehend. Many of God’s commandments are clearly seen as being worthy of our obedience, but often the consequences of our actions are not immediately visible and our obedience requires some faith. Elder Neal A. Maxwell has said:

*Obedience, among other things, provides us with a grace period. During this period, we go forward out of a sense of duty, doing what we should do before we have all the answers as to why.*

Many of us wish we could counsel with the Lord concerning situations in our lives. What we sometimes fail to realize is that we can! We have been given personalized counsel in the form of a perfect road map detailed specifically for us in ancient scripture and modern-day revelation. Just tune in to general conference in a couple of weeks. You will be astounded at the solutions to your own problems that you will hear from the Lord’s chosen leaders.

We have also been given the ultimate visual aid. The Savior’s life is the perfect example for us to follow. As a teacher I am constantly amazed at the variety of methods our Heavenly Father uses to instruct his children. How well he understands that each of us learns in different ways. And if our footsteps falter, we again have been given divinely directed instructions. Because of the Atonement, and through our own repentance, we are welcomed back to the pathway of righteousness.

Tucked inside our own personal road map, we have been given a promise concerning our willingness to follow the commandments of

the Lord. We are told that the Lord is bound when we do what he says. And then we are given a caution. When we do not do what he says, we have no promise (see D&C 82:8–10).

It is pretty clear, isn’t it? We cannot afford to be selectively obedient. We need to be steadfastly obedient. In the Doctrine and Covenants we are told, “When we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (D&C 130:21).

If we are willing to put our trust in the Lord and keep his commandments, we have been promised that we will be blessed. The blessing might not come in the form of straight A’s, having a date every Friday night, or inheriting a lot of money. But we will grow in capacity, experiencing joy along the way as we keep more and more of the commandments and eventually become prepared for a celestial existence.

We must understand that “God is not arbitrary. He is not anxious to punish his unruly children or burden them with unnecessary commandments. Rather, he is a loving parent who wants his children to avoid the negative consequences of breaking eternal laws. He wants them to receive the promised blessings of complying with righteous principles” (“Obedience: A Matter of Love,” Spiritual Living Lesson 7, Relief Society Personal Study Guide 1 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989], p. 40).

The catch in all of this is that our level of obedience determines the outcome. Whether we are studying music or microbiology, we all know that success hinges on how thoroughly we study or how hard we practice. Does it really surprise us that God operates in this cause-and-effect manner when all around us we see the results that come from following natural law? Perhaps natural laws were given to us as an example to follow.

Douglas Smoot, dean of the College of Engineering and Technology, explains, “It is impossible to leap from the top of a building

and disobey the law of gravity. Placing one's finger in an electric outlet will cause an electrical flow through a person's body irrespective of intent. . . . Fundamental laws of nature cannot be disobeyed."

I thought about Dean Smoot's comments and about how we as humans constantly try to push the laws of nature as well as the laws of God when I read what happened to a young man a few days ago who was celebrating his twenty-fifth birthday at a Salt Lake hotel. He and his friends had been drinking and were probably not thinking clearly when the boy celebrating his birthday decided to jump from one tenth-floor balcony to the next. He made the first leap, but not the second. "We were just out having a good time," said his friend, "[but now] I realize how quickly life can be taken away."

I use this tragic story to illustrate what happens when our judgment is impaired and we refuse to obey the laws God has given us—both physical and spiritual. In this case, the consequence of leaping from one balcony to the other—that high up—seems pretty obvious to me. But there will be times when we will feel physically or spiritually impaired and will not realize what could happen if we choose to disobey or if we walk too close to the edge of disobedience. Why is it that we sometimes question, as Mollie did, the preliminary warning or instruction given to help avoid the next crucial brush with something that could cause us harm? If only we could realize that the momentary pleasure we might feel by an act of disobedience can never be equal to the feelings

of peace and happiness that result from obedience.

Joseph Smith assured us, "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" (*Teachings*, p. 256).

Sometimes we are tempted to test the law, as Mollie did, and even question the wisdom of the lawgiver. We may feel that we find freedom in disobedience as we dash across life's highway with our eyes closed. But, as Elder Boyd K. Packer has said,

*Obedience—that which God will never take by force—he will accept when freely given. And he will then return to you freedom that you can hardly dream of—the freedom to feel and to know, the freedom to do, and the freedom to be, at least a thousandfold more than we offer him. Strangely enough, the key to freedom is obedience. ["Obedience," Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year (Provo, 7 December 1971), p. 4]*

That we may find fulfillment and joy through obedience, that we may see the relationship between happiness and obedience, that we may understand that we are exercising our free agency in the most effective way by choosing to be obedient to all that is outlined on God's road map leading to our eternal destiny is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.