

# *Elements of Happiness*

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Good morning. I think I am glad to be here. I have been thinking a lot about this assignment. Last week, after Bishop Clarke was here, I asked him how he got along and how he felt about what went on. He said, "Well, they gave me every chance to be a success, and if I wasn't, it wasn't their fault." My favorite people are, of course, women because I have five daughters and no sons. And then to have the Women's Chorus sing one of my favorite numbers ["The Wintry Day, Descending to Its Close"] has thrilled me. Over the years our daughters have learned to play several numbers on the piano that are my favorites and this is one of them. I have told them that those are the numbers I would like to have them play at my funeral, and this may be it.

After Bishop Clarke spoke last week, my secretary, in a very casual but concerned way, said, "Bishop, I think that they may call from the Y and want to know what you're going to talk about." You see, she had only taken a couple of notes at that point and was not sure I knew my subject either. She was trying to help me get something in my mind. Rather quickly I told her, "I think I'll talk on how to be happy and enjoy it."

I have thought since then about what I said to her. I am one who believes that happiness is

kind of a do-it-yourself project. It is home made. I have had some interesting conversations over the years with many people, and I have found we vary in degree of happiness. Some of us are up here, and others down here, and many fall in the range between. Happiness and peace are not always constant; but we have our peaks and our valleys. I have found some who are always waiting for happiness to happen. They are always waiting for it to come, and waiting for the right conditions and circumstances so that they can be happy.

Over the years I have talked with many married couples who have had or are having marital problems. I have had many of them tell me, "Well, I guess if we just weren't married we might be happier." And then I have talked with hundreds of young people who get to be a certain age and tell me, "If we could just be married, I know we'd be happy." And I have had others tell me, "Oh, if I could just get out of school and get to work I'd be happy." And then

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I have had others who are out of school and working tell me, “Oh, for the good old days! To be back in school, where I was really happy!” I have had some say, “If I just had more money I would be happy.” (I have not had many tell me, “If I didn’t have so much money I would be happy.”) Some have said, “If I were just a little taller I could be happier,” or “If I were just a little shorter I could be happier,” “If I were just a little bigger . . . a little smaller. . . .” It seems that many of us are constantly waiting for something to happen so that we can enjoy happiness. That is why I said, “how to be happy *and enjoy it*.”

Interestingly enough, there are those who have found the secret to happiness. And, may I say, we must understand this eternal principle: Happiness does not mean our lives are void of problems—that does not mean happiness, and those who understand that recognize problems as blessings. Life is filled with blessings that are made up of problems—our mountains to climb that we might be even happier than we may think we are. But those who have found this secret have found a secret that will bring happiness to them in this life and through the eternities. There are two or three steps that I would like to talk to you about this morning. They are rather simple steps; you will not even have to make any notes because I think you will be able to remember them.

First I would like to refer to the scriptures to what I think is one of the cardinal principles of success as it relates to happiness. I am going to read to you out of the eighteenth chapter of Mosiah, starting with the seventh verse—these words are not new to you, but maybe I can expand them in a way that might bring a little more meaning in your lives. This is Alma speaking:

*And it came to pass after many days there were a goodly number gathered together at the place of Mormon, to hear the words of Alma. Yea, all were gathered together that believed on his word, to hear*

*him. And he did teach them and did preach unto them repentance, and redemption, and faith on the Lord.*

*And it came to pass that he said unto them: Behold, here are the waters of Mormon (for thus they were called) and now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God [now he gives the secret; as we read this he is giving the secret elements of happiness], and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light;*

*Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, . . . [then he goes on a bit further and says this:] Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts [now the desire again, the desire to “bear one another’s burdens,” the desire to “mourn with those that mourn,” the desire to “comfort those that stand in need of comfort,” the desire to “stand as witnesses of God,” he said], what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you? [Mosiah 18:7–10]*

In that last passage I read, there was the secret word, the first of the secrets to happiness: serve. As you review again, sometime, those elements that Alma talked about, you will recognize that he is talking about service, that being one of the key elements of happiness. There are several other scriptural references which let us know how important this point of service is and what it can do for someone who believes it. True disciples of Christ, brothers and sisters, are those who serve. Some of us may not understand what we really mean by service—remember the experience that two of the brethren had after the Savior had been crucified. It is found in Acts. Remember that Peter and John went to the temple past the Gate Beautiful, and as they went by the gate into the temple, there sat a man who had been lame since

he was born. He had his hand out and was asking for alms; he was begging. Peter and John came by and the man looked up at Peter and held his hand out.

*And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said [speaking to the lame man], Look on us.*

*And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said [now these are some more secrets], Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he [meaning Peter] took him by the right hand, and lifted him up. [Acts 3:4–7]*

Peter gave us another secret there. Remember the words, “Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee,” as you think of service to others.

Another time in the New Testament, the Twelve were gathered together with the Savior just before he was to be crucified, and he was instructing them; I suppose they were having quite a conversation about instructions. At one point in the conversation James and John, who were, as you know, brothers, asked the Savior if he would grant unto them their wish, and as the Lord asked them, “What would ye that I should do for you?” they said simply, “Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.” They wanted to be lifted up above the crowd, so to speak, and the Savior told them, “To sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give” (see Mark 10:35–40).

Then we read in Mark this account: “And when the ten heard it [this is the other ten of the Twelve], they began to be much displeased with James and John” (Mark 10:41). You see, they saw James and John as wanting to be lifted up, in a sense, above the others.

*But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule*

*over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them.*

*But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:*

*And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.*

*For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. [Mark 10:42–45]*

Some time ago I was attending a stake conference in another state. The stake president met me at the airport, and we had about an hour’s drive to the stake center. As we were driving we talked about many things, and the conversation began to center on an individual who lived in the stake. The stake president told me about a young lady who had gone on a mission about twenty years ago, and while she was there she contracted polio. She walked into the hospital in this New England city to take some tests, and she never walked again. She was paralyzed. And he said, “For twenty years she’s been paralyzed from her neck down; she’s not able to move any muscles below her neck, except a few in her fingers. But she’s an unusual young lady. She has a spirit that is something wonderful.” Well, before stake conference I always get very nervous—not quite as nervous as before I come to BYU, but just about—and I said, “I need to be built up, President; let’s go by and see the young lady.”

So we went by her home; she was living with her parents. We went into her room, and there she lay on a bed, surrounded by the things that would keep her interested and busy during the day. As I walked into the room, I saw this physically pitiful sight, but I felt a spirit that I have felt in very few places. I was overcome by her spirit. I began to ask her some questions. As she lay there I saw that she could move a few fingers on one hand and a few on the other, but she could not raise or lower her arms. She had an air pump on a table by her side. She would hold the tube in her hand and

every few minutes put it into her mouth. It would blow air into her lungs. She would then turn away and her lungs would deflate. She did this several times an hour to keep the air moving into her body. And I said, "Tell me what you do during the day. Here you have lain for twenty years with this physical condition."

And her parents said, "We'll show you what she does during the day."

So they brought a typewriter and put it in front of her on her bed. Her mother laid one hand on the typewriter keys, and then she took the other and laid it on the typewriter keys. She then showed us how with these few fingers she would type. She said, "During the day I find those who are sick and discouraged and write poetry and letters to them and send them good wishes that will make them happy. I try to help those who are less fortunate than I am." There she lay with hardly anything physical going for her, but with a spirit that could perform miracles.

Then her parents brought a phone and put it in her hands and moved it up to her ear and mouth, and then she, with two fingers, punched the telephone dial. And in this way she called those who are not as well off as she is and cheered them up during the day. Remember what Peter said: "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee." This is also what Alma was talking about. If you have a desire to bear one another's burdens, if you have a desire to comfort, these are the acts that bring happiness in spite of physical conditions that, maybe, are not the best.

Now let me give you a second suggestion. The first is service, or thinking of others before you think of yourself; now the second. In my conversation over the years with husbands and wives, parents and children who make up family groups, I find that if we would read this, believe it, and practice it, we would have very few problems in marriage relationships, or in relationships between children and parents or between brothers and sisters or with each other.

It is a very simple eight-word passage contained in 1 John, the fourth chapter, and is recorded in verse nineteen: "We love him, because he first loved us," the secret being, "*He first loved us.*"

Many of us seem to be waiting for others to give an expression. I am not talking particularly of a dating situation, so be careful there; but I am talking about marriage and family situations. Many of us in our homes, many of us in our relationships with brothers and sisters, many of us in our dealings with people seem to be constantly waiting for them to say something that would let us know that they feel good about us. But the lesson is, "We love him, because he first loved us."

Many of us have committed ourselves, I suppose, to the proposition that we will go fifty percent of the way when there is a problem situation: "I'll go halfway if you go halfway." The problem is that we get mixed up and there are not too many who know what fifty percent is. Sometimes instead of going fifty percent we may find later it was only forty-nine and a half percent. If one of the parties goes forty-nine and a half percent, there is still a narrow slit there before we get together. And that is where the important things drop through the crack—the important things that cause happiness to occur. So may I suggest to you in your pattern of life, as you get into marriage situations, that the girls particularly ought to go eighty percent of the way in making things happy in the home. And then, to you brethren I would suggest that you especially ought to go eighty percent of the way. When you each go eighty percent of the way, you do not have to worry about that little narrow area that the problems occur in because you have both gone over enough, so that there is no room for error. If you happen to miss by one percent you still do not blow the marriage out of the water. There is still room for those kinds of mistakes.

Remember what was recorded in John: "We love him, because he first loved us." I remember some years ago listening to a father

bless a little baby, his first child, at a fast and testimony meeting. After the blessing, as you all know, we have time for testimonies, and the father came to the stand and expressed his love for this little baby and his thanks to Heavenly Father for this little child. He said to us something that I have not forgotten: "But you know, this is an interesting experience having a little baby, especially the first one. He doesn't seem to understand anything we say to him. We talk to him and he doesn't talk back, nor does he react. So it seems all we can do is just hold him in our arms and cuddle him and kiss him and squeeze him and tell him we love him, and do things for him that will let him know that we love him." After the testimony, I thought, "I hope that young father never forgets that principle, regardless of the age of his little boy or little girl: Love him first, *love him first*, and then he will love you." I hope that into his adult life the father would feel comfortable in holding that boy or even man in his arms and letting him know that.

I am sure that here among us today there are those of you who have never had someone to express to you, in such a way that you have really felt it, this feeling of love and acceptance. I have met with many, many young people, college-age and younger and older, who have never really known how they stood with their parents or brothers and sisters. I remember not long ago I was touring a mission in a foreign country and while we were there I asked the president, "Are there any particular problems in the mission?"

He said, "Well, we have one missionary that wants to go home. The only reason he hasn't gone home is that I still have his passport." You brethren who have been out know what that is like. "But," he said, "I think I'm gong to have to let him go."

I said, "Can I talk to him? Would I be able to help you in any way?"

He said, "I don't really think so. I think we've done all the talking we can."

I met him before the meeting—I was shaking hands with a group of missionaries and I shook hands with this one young man and did not know who he was, except I felt a little different spirit with him, and afterwards I asked the president who that young man was and he said, "He's the one that wants to go home."

I said, "Do you mind asking him after the meeting if he would come up and let me visit with him?"

He said, "That's fine."

So after the meeting, the elder came up to the stand and I shook hands with him and said, "I appreciate your coming up. I wonder if you'd mind if I visited with you?"

And he kind of shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don't care. It's up to you." You know, as if to say, "It's your nickel; spend it how you want it."

So we went over to the side, and in this particular meeting room in this chapel we were in there was a large stained glass window on one side. I have talked with missionaries before about not going home before they were supposed to go home, so I had a really good talk prepared on that subject—at least I thought it was. And as I talked to him he kept looking out the stained glass window. Never did I get his eye. I kept giving my speech. I was right in the very key part of it where I thought, "If anything will turn him this will."

Then he said to me, "Bishop Peterson, if you look out the window very carefully you'll see it's snowing."

I heaved a sigh and thought, "Oh, boy. He doesn't even know I'm here, except he wants me to see the snow. He hasn't heard a thing I've said." I looked out with him and said, "You're right, elder. It's snowing."

We finished the talk like that, and for the next two days I was around and with him in different meetings. As I was speaking in one meeting he was sitting over at the side reading a newspaper. That unnerved me just a bit. You

can see what his attitude was and how I was developing an attitude toward him.

The last evening we were together in a meeting. After the meeting was over, I was down in front shaking hands with some young people and saw him just a few feet away out of the corner of my eye. Then something happened to me that I had not yet experienced. I had been asking for help; I had been praying about some way to help this young man. And then for a fleeting moment something happened to me that I had not experienced up to that point as it related to this young man. I had a feeling about this young man come over me that almost consumed me. I excused myself from talking to the other folks and went over to him and took hold of his hand, and as he was about three or four inches taller than I was I looked up into his eyes and said, "Elder, I've enjoyed getting acquainted with you. I want you to know that I love you. I really do." And I left him and did not say any more. And he did not say anything.

I walked to the back door, and as I was about to go out, there he was again. I went up to him, put my arm around him, and said, "What I said up in front a few minutes ago is true; I really love you."

And then he held onto my hand a minute and he said, "Bishop Peterson, that's the first time in my life anyone has ever told me they loved me." Now, you see, I could understand why he was discouraged, why he was confused, why he wanted to go home, why he did not know what to do. Remember the principle, brothers and sisters: "We love him, because he first loved us." That is the second secret.

The third is very simple, and that is not to give up. There are those who try and try and then give up; and then there are those who try and try and never give up, and to those comes the success. Remember the story about the fishermen; remember how, after the Savior was crucified, some of the apostles were fishing, and remember how they fished all night and did not find a fish. They cast their nets into the water, brought them back, and every time they brought them back empty. They were tired and discouraged. Morning came and they went toward the shore. As they approached, they saw a man walking on the shore. It was the Savior, but they did not recognize him at that time. And as they got closer to him, he said to them, "Brethren, lower your nets in the water over here." And they put their nets in one more time, and did not question him; they did not say, "We're tired; we've been trying; we've fished all night; there aren't any fish; why should we do it again?" They did not ask him that question, but they listened, obeyed, cast their nets in, and pulled them back, and this time they pulled them back filled with fishes (see John 21:1-6).

May the Lord bless you, my brothers and sisters, to remember these elements of happiness: service, love first, and perseverance. I leave my testimony with you that Jesus is the Christ. I want you to know that I know that he is coming. And I pray that we will all be ready when he comes, that we might enjoy that eternal happiness that is promised to those who are faithful. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.