

Living After the Manner of Happiness (Holland)



Elder Jeffrey R. Holland
BYU-I Devotional

1. I am thrilled to be with you today as you begin a new school year at BYU-Idaho. I realize you actually started a few weeks ago but this is the first opportunity President Clark would give me to set foot on campus. He wanted to make sure things got underway properly and therefore requested that I not come in any sooner.
2. I realized while sitting here that this is my first opportunity to be in this beautiful conference center. As some of the very, very senior faculty and staff will remember, I used to come to devotionals in the Hart Building and lead the student body in a stirring cheer to the four R's of the neighborhood--Rexburg, Ririe, Rigby and Roberts. Those were the good old days. You have now gotten so global that cheer would have to be Rome, Raleigh, Raratonga, and Russia--a cheer not appropriate in this hall. My how you have grown. I love this school with all my heart and I certainly love President and Sister Clark with all their administrative, faculty and staff associates here. Thank you, President Clark, for the invitation to be with you.
3. In a phrase I am sure you have heard many times, the Prophet Joseph Smith once said that "Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it."¹
4. It is that worthy quest for happiness that I wish to speak today. Note that I said "quest for happiness," not happiness itself. Remember the Prophet Joseph's choice of language: He spoke of the path that leads to happiness as the key to realizing that goal.
5. By the way this is not a new quest that only started with the creation of Family Home Evening

groups in Rexburg. No, this has been one of the fundamental pursuits of humankind down through the ages of time. One of the greatest intellectual minds the Western world has ever known once said, "Happiness is the meaning and purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence."² That was Aristotle, but note how presciently his statement parallels that of the Prophet Joseph--almost the exact phrasing. In those opening lines of the Declaration of Independence Thomas Jefferson immortalized both our personal and political quests by forever linking (at least in America) the three great inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. But notice in that magnificent troika it is not happiness that is a right (like life and liberty), but specifically the pursuit of happiness.

6. So how do we "pursue" happiness, especially when we are young and inexperienced, maybe a little fearful, and life lies ahead of us as a challenging mountain to climb? Well, we know one thing for sure: happiness is not easy to find running straight for it. It is usually too elusive, too ephemeral, too subtle. If you haven't learned it already, you will learn in the years ahead that most times happiness comes to us when we least expect it, when we are busy doing something else. Happiness is almost always a by-product of some other endeavor. One of my favorite writers from my university days said, "Happiness is like a butterfly; the more you chase it, the more it will elude you, but if you turn your attention to other things, it will come and sit softly on your shoulder."³ This is one of those great gospel ironies that often don't seem to make sense, like "the last shall be first" and "lose your life to find it." The gospel is filled with such ironies and indirections, and I think the pursuit of happiness is one of them. So how do we optimize our chance for happiness without pursuing it so directly that we miss it? Let me go to a most remarkable book for some answers.
7. The first 30 years of Book of Mormon history do not present a pleasant story. After the abrupt necessity of abandoning their entire earthly fortune, leaving Jerusalem hastily on the eve of international conflict, crossing the Arabian peninsula in the most adverse of circumstances, building a boat without any prior experience in doing so, crossing an ocean with would-be fatal conflicts breaking out repeatedly and landing in a primitive, unknown new land with all the hardship such a settlement would entail, the hostility within the family of Lehi and Sariah became so intense that the two halves of their family split asunder, with one group fleeing yet farther into the wilderness, fearing for their lives lest they fall victim to the bloodthirsty quest of the other. As they plunged into unsettled terrain to seek safety and fashion a life for themselves as best they could, the prophet-leader of this Nephite half of the family says they now tried to live "after the manner of happiness."⁴
8. In light of what they had just been through for thirty years and with what we know yet lay in store for them in the trials almost constantly ahead, such a comment seems almost painful. How could any of this be described as anything remotely like "happiness"? Ah, my young Rexburg friends, there is the rub. Nephi does not say they were happy, though it is evident they actually were. What he says is, they "lived after the manner of happiness." Today I would have you understand that that there is a wonderful key in that phrase that can unlock precious blessings for you the rest of your life.
9. I do not think God in his glory or the angels of heaven or the prophets on earth intend to make us happy all the time, every day in every way, given the testing and trial this earthly realm is intended to provide. As President James E. Faust once phrased it: "Happiness is not given to us in a package that we can just open up and consume. Nobody," he said, "is ever happy 24 hours a day, seven days a week."⁵ But my reassurance to you today is that in God's plan we can do very much to find the happiness we do desire. We can take certain steps, we can form certain habits, we can do certain things that God and history tell us lead to happiness with the confidence that if we live in such a manner that butterfly is much more likely to land upon our

shoulder.

10. In short your best chance for being happy is to do the things that happy people do. Live the way happy people live. Walk the path that happy people walk. And your chances to find joy in unexpected moments, to find peace in unexpected places, to find the help of angels when you didn't even know they knew you existed, improves exponentially. Here are at least a couple of ideas about how one might live "after the manner of happiness."
11. Above all else, ultimate happiness, true peace, and anything even remotely close to scriptural joy are found first, foremost, and forever in living the gospel of Jesus Christ. Lots of other philosophies and systems of belief have been tried. Indeed it seems safe to say that virtually every other philosophy and system has been tried down through the centuries of history. But when the Apostle Thomas asked the Lord the question young people often ask today, "How can we know the way?" (and at your age in life that really translates, "How can we know the way to be happy?") Jesus gave the answer that rings from eternity to all eternity, "I am the way, the truth, and the life . . . And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do. . . . If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."⁶
12. What a promise! Live my way, live my truth, live my life--live in this manner that I am showing you and teaching you--and whatsoever you ask will be given, whatsoever you seek you will find, including happiness. Parts of the blessing may come soon, parts may come later, and parts may not come until heaven but they will come--all of them. What encouragement that is after a blue Monday or a sad Tuesday or a tearful Wednesday! And it is a promise the realization of which cannot come any other way than by devotion to eternal truth! In the words of then newly ordained Elder David O. McKay just short of a full century ago, "[Unlike gratification or pleasure or some kind of thrill, true] happiness is found only along that well beaten [gospel] track, narrow as it is, . . . [and] straight [as it is], which leads to life eternal."⁷ So love God and each other, and be true to the gospel of Jesus Christ.
13. Second, learn as quickly as you can that so much of your happiness is in your hands, not in events or circumstances or fortune or misfortune. That is part of what the battle for agency was over in the pre-mortal councils of heaven. We have choice, we have volition, we have agency, and we can choose if not happiness per se then we can choose to live after the manner of it. Abraham Lincoln had plenty to be unhappy about in the most difficult administration a President of the United States has ever faced, but even he reflected that "folks are usually about as happy as they make up their minds to be."⁸ Happiness comes first by what comes into your head a long time before it comes into your hand. Joseph Smith was living "after the manner of happiness" in a very unhappy situation when he wrote from Liberty Jail to those on the outside who were also the victims of great injustice and persecution:
14. "Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; . . .
15. "The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth."⁹
16. Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly. That is not only good counsel against the modern plague of pornography, but it is counsel for all kinds of gospel thoughts, good thoughts, constructive thoughts, hopeful thoughts. Those faith-filled thoughts will alter how you see life's problems and how you find resolution to them. "The Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind,"¹⁰ the revelations say. Too often we have thought it was all up to the heart; it is not. God expects a willing mind in the quest for happiness and peace as well. Put your head into this. All of this takes effort. It is a battle but a battle for happiness that is worth waging. In her popular book of a year or so ago, Elizabeth Gilbert wrote:
17. "Happiness is the consequence of personal effort. You fight for it, strive for it, insist upon it,

and . . . look for it. You have to participate relentlessly in the manifestations of your own blessings. And once you have achieved a state of happiness, you must never become lax about maintaining it. You must make a mighty effort to keep swimming upward into that happiness . . . , to stay afloat on top of it.”¹¹

18. I love that phrase of hers: “Participate relentlessly in the manifestations of your own blessings.”¹² Don’t be passive. Swim upward. Think and speak and act positively. That is what happy people do; that is one aspect of living after the manner of happiness.
19. Here is another. In anticipation of giving this talk, I sat in my study for a long time trying to think if I had ever known a happy person who was unkind or unpleasant to be with. And guess what? I couldn’t think of one, not a single, solitary one. So learn this great truth early in life while you are at such a happy place as BYU-Idaho: You can never, worlds without end, build your happiness on someone else’s unhappiness. Sometimes, maybe especially when we are young and insecure and trying to make our way up in the world, we think if we can tear someone else down a little, it will somehow miraculously lift us up. That is what bullying is. That is what catty remarks are. That is what arrogance and superficiality and exclusiveness are. Perhaps we think if we are negative enough, or cynical enough, or just plain mean enough, then expectations won’t be too high; we can keep everyone down to a flaw-filled level and therefore our flaws won’t be so glaring.
20. Happy people aren’t negative or cynical or mean so don’t plan on that being part of the “manner” of happiness. If my life has taught me anything, it is that kindness and pleasantness and faith-based optimism are characteristics of happy people. From the words of Mother Teresa, “Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God’s kindness: kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile.”¹³
21. A related step along the path toward happiness is to avoid animosity, contention, and anger in your life. Remember it is Lucifer, Satan, the adversary of us all who loves anger. He is “the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.”¹⁴ After quoting that verse in general conference a few years ago, Elder Lynn Robbins said, “[That] verb stir sounds like a recipe for disaster: Put tempers on medium heat, stir in a few choice words, and bring to a boil; continue stirring until thick; cool off; let feelings chill for several days; serve cold; lots of leftovers.” “Lots of leftovers” indeed.¹⁵
22. Anger damages or destroys almost everything it touches. As someone has said, to harbor anger is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. It is a vicious acid that will destroy the container long before it does damage to the intended object. There is nothing in it or its cousinly vices--violence, rage, bitterness and hate--that has anything to do with living the gospel or the pursuit of happiness. I do not think that anger can exist--or at least can be fostered and entertained and indulged in--in a life being lived “after the manner of happiness.”
23. One last suggestion when there are so many others we should consider; that original verse from Nephi said that in an effort to find happiness in their new land after their 30 years of trouble “I, Nephi, did cause my people to be industrious, and to labor with their hands.”¹⁶ By contrast those from whom they fled “became an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety.”¹⁷
24. If you want to be happy this year in school, or on a mission, or in a marriage--work at it. Learn to work. Serve diligently. Don’t be idle and mischievous. A homespun definition of Christ-like character might be the integrity to do the right thing at the right time in the right way. And the right thing for you to do at BYU-I this year is study. This is a year of education paid for by you, by your parents, and by the tithe payers of this Church. So don’t be idle. Don’t be wasteful. Do the right thing at the right time. “Seek learning, even by study and also by faith.”¹⁸ “Be industrious and . . . labor, including laboring for and serving others, one of the truly great keys

to true happiness.”

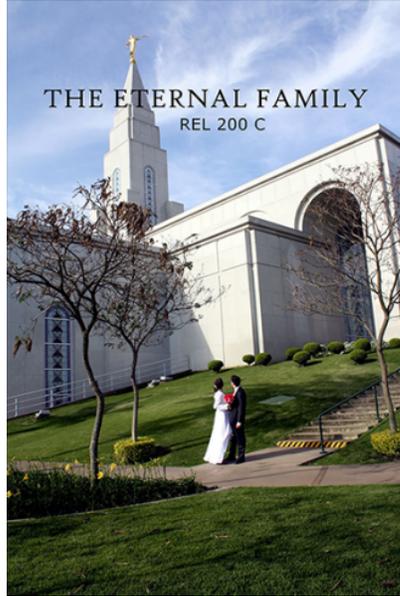
25. Now, let me close by citing again Alma’s straightforward counsel to Corianton:
26. With all the encouragement a father would want to give a son or daughter, he said that in the resurrection the faithful are raised to a state of “endless happiness” wherein they “inherit the kingdom of God.”¹⁹ At that time, he said, we will be “raised to happiness according to [our] desires of happiness.”²⁰ But he also sternly cautions: “Do not suppose . . . that [without repentance] ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness.”²¹ Sin is the antithesis of “living after the manner of happiness.” Indeed those who believe otherwise, Alma says, “are without God in the world, and . . . have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore, they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness.”²²
27. A state contrary to the nature of happiness. That is the worst state I can imagine to live in. As a new school year begins I welcome you from the state of Idaho or Wyoming or Arizona or California. I welcome you from any state in the union or any state on the planet. I invite you to rejoice in any state you have ever been in except the “state contrary to the nature of happiness.” I ask you to reject transgression in order to live consistent with the nature of God, which is the nature of true happiness. I encourage you and applaud you in “pursuing the path that leads to it.” You can’t find it any other way.
28. My testimony to you is that God, your Eternal Father in heaven, is always encouraging and applauding your pursuit even more lovingly than I. I testify that He wants you to be happy, to have true joy. I testify of the Atonement of His Only Begotten Son which provides the right path and, if necessary, a new start on it, a second chance, a change in our nature if necessary. In the power and authority of my office I leave an apostolic blessing on each of you that you will know that Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life”²³--that no one comes to true happiness except by Him. I bless you to know that someday, sometime, somewhere you will have every righteous desire of your heart as you live the gospel of Jesus Christ, thus living “after the manner” that leads to those blessings. I testify and I bless you in the name of Him who is the Good Shepherd, the Chief Cornerstone of this Church, the High Priest of good things to come in your life, even the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Selected by Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 255-56.
2. Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*. With an English translation by H Rackham (1982).
3. Henry David Thoreau, <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/146930-i-am-a-happy-camper-so-i-guessi-m-doing>.
4. 2 Nephi 5:27.
5. James E. Faust “Our Search for Happiness,” *Ensign*, October 2000, 2, italics added.
6. John 14:5-6, 13-14.
7. David O. McKay, Conference Report, October 1919, 180. italics added.
8. Quoted by Dr. Frank Crane, *Syracuse Herald of Syracuse*, New York, January 1, 1914.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 121:45-46.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 64:34.
11. Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*, 2006.
12. Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*.
13. Mother Teresa,
<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/33359-let-no-one-ever-come-to-you-without-leaving-better>.
14. 3 Nephi 11:29.

15. Lynn G. Robbins, "Anger and Agency," Ensign, May 1998, 80.
16. 2 Nephi 5:17.
17. 2 Nephi 5:24.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 88:118.
19. Alma 41:4.
20. Alma 41:5.
21. Alma 41:10.
22. Alma 41:11.
23. John 14:16.

<https://books.byui.edu/-ANPy>



The Eternal Family. https://books.byui.edu/the_etalnal_family