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Find the Joy Heavenly Father Wants for You

While serving a mission in Brazil, I attended the baptism of a man who had been preparing for eight months to be baptized. He told me that one night, while partying and drinking with friends, he had decided to change his life after this thought came to him: “Is this what you want your life to be?”

It can be difficult to make wise choices in the world in which we live. Sometimes we feel lost and alone as we strive to choose the right, but we are never alone. We have family and friends who love us, leaders who teach us, and a Father in Heaven who is always there to help us if we will just listen.

I’d like to talk about three choices that can help us find the joy Heavenly Father wants for each of us.

1. Share the Gospel

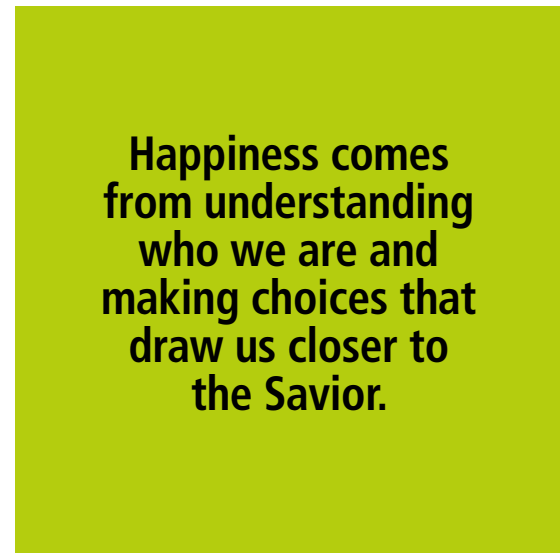
Sharing the gospel will bring a sweet spirit into our lives. When we

testify of the truth, our testimonies are strengthened. Sometimes we get discouraged because every experience doesn’t end with what we see as success. But all the Lord expects is that we do our part.

We should remember that those we share the gospel with are precious sons and daughters of our Eternal Father and deserve respect and understanding. We should never abandon people because they don’t respond to or accept our invitation.

Recently I flew to some area council meetings. On the way home, I committed to share the gospel with the person sitting next to me on the plane.

On my first flight, I sat next to a young man who had no interest in hearing about the Church. On the second flight, I waited eagerly to meet my next flight companion. He was from Germany. He spoke English, and I talked to him about the Church. He



said he had never heard of the Church and changed the subject. I asked where he was staying and offered him a ride to his hotel when we arrived in Idaho Falls, Idaho, USA. He explained that he was going to ride horses and herd cattle at a nearby ranch. He had been told that he needed a hat.

“That’s a good idea,” I said. “It’s hot there. You’ll get a sunburn without one.”



“How about cowboy boots?” he asked.

“If you buy new boots and wear them for five days straight, you’ll probably never walk again,” I said. “But I have a pair of boots in my closet at home that are a little too small for me. They are in good shape, and you can have them if you want.”

When we arrived at his hotel, he said, “When can I get the boots?”

“I have church tomorrow,” I replied, “so after church I’ll . . .”

Then I thought to myself, “You big chicken!” Then I said, “Or, if you’d like, you can go to church with me, and I can give you the boots then.”

“OK,” he said.

I was shocked and pleased. The next morning, I picked him up and we headed for church. When we arrived, I introduced him to a few members of my ward. Everyone who spoke one word of German, had ever seen a German movie, or had even eaten sauerkraut surrounded him. He really seemed to enjoy his time there.

As we drove back to the hotel, he thanked me and said, “I go to church almost every Sunday in Germany, but I have never felt what I felt today.”

And to think that I almost missed this wonderful opportunity to share the gospel.

2. Be Clean

A missionary who had been sent home early from his mission told me

in an interview that he had never once in his life felt clean. It made me sad to think that, with the Atonement of Jesus Christ available to all of us, he had never felt the peace and strength that come from being forgiven.

In contrast, I once interviewed a young man for a temple recommend as he prepared to be married. I asked him if he lived the law of chastity. He told me that he had never violated any part of that commandment.

“That’s wonderful,” I said. “How did you do it?”

He told me that as a young deacon, he was taught the Lord’s moral code and had decided to live it. He succeeded because he had decided what he wanted his life to be.

Righteous living is not something that happens without effort on our part. We have to decide to choose the right. Then we can go to Heavenly Father for help. Through faith in the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we can be helped and healed.

It’s our choice. Satan can’t force us to sin. The only power he has is what we give him.

We know when we’re not square with the Lord by the way we feel. We should recognize our sins and weaknesses and be honest with ourselves and not use excuses like, “It’s not my fault,” “I didn’t know it was wrong,” “Everybody is doing it.” This is what Satan wants us to believe and say.

Satan is a master of deception and will do all in his power to impede our efforts to be clean. He will always tempt us and slowly poison us if we listen to his lies. Sometimes he does things so cunningly that we hardly know what’s happening.

One of my childhood friends had a pigpen behind his house. Sometimes we would sit on the fence and watch the pigs. This might seem like odd behavior, but it wasn’t really much different from watching reality TV today.

One day my friend’s father pulled into the yard with his pickup truck



overflowing with doughnuts, bread, and cupcakes that had passed their expiration date. He backed up to the pigpen and shoveled his cargo into the muck. The pigs began to devour the food, wrappers and all. Each mouthful was filled with cupcakes and doughnuts, their plastic wrappers smeared with mud and manure. It was disgusting.

Each time we watched this happen over the next few weeks, it became less repulsive and more entertaining. One day I told my friend that if we could figure out a way to get some doughnuts and cupcakes out of the pigpen without the pigs attacking us, we could have free treats. We took a rake and pulled a large blob of mud, manure, and cupcakes from under the fence. We washed off the wrappers, climbed up on the fence, and ate away with the pigs.

Isn't this exactly how Satan works? He serves up something that is dirty and disgusting, and over time we start to accept it as entertaining, desirable, and good. The next time you think of doing something foolish, imagine yourself sitting on a fence eating cupcakes with the pigs.

3. Choose to Be Happy

Even when we make right choices, our lives don't always turn out as we imagined, planned, or worked to achieve. We might have health trials, our children or spouse might have

a crisis of faith, our marriage might end in divorce, or we might be single when we long to be married.

When we look at the life of Jesus Christ, we see that even though He was perfect, the path He walked took Him through many of the same challenges we face in life. Jesus encountered disappointment, temptation, and pain (see Hebrews 5:8–9).

Some things in our lives are not in our control, so the only thing we can do is try to control how we react to them.

Emily Kingsley wrote an essay that compares her unexpected challenge, having a child with Down syndrome, to getting on a plane for a vacation to Italy, only to have the plane land in Holland. She has the following imaginary conversation:

“Holland? What do you mean, Holland? I signed up for Italy! I'm supposed to be in Italy. All my life I've dreamed of going to Italy.”

The flight attendant replies: “But there's been a change in the flight plan. You've landed in Holland, and there you must stay.”

But then you meet others who are going to and coming from Italy. “And they're all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life you will say, ‘Yes, that's where I was supposed to go. That's what I had planned.’”

“But,” Kingsley concludes, “if you spend your life mourning the

fact that you didn't get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things about Holland.”¹

Accepting the unexpected realities in life can free us from despair and allow us to rejoice in the life we have. Through righteous living, our happiness can be complete as we embrace life in its full, unpredictable way.

Happiness does not come from what we have, what world status we attain, or whether all goes as planned. It comes from understanding who we are and making choices that draw us closer to the Savior. It comes from knowing that our personal weaknesses do not define us. It comes from listening to those who build, lift, and encourage us so we can better understand our divine nature.

I pray that we will have the courage to have faith in Jesus Christ, faith in ourselves and what we can become through His power, faith to be clean, and faith to choose wisely so that we may have eternal happiness. This is what our Father in Heaven wants for all of us. He loves us. He wants us back. He knows we can do it. ■

From a devotional address, “Is This What You Want Your Life to Be?” given at Brigham Young University–Idaho on November 1, 2016. For the full address, visit web.byui.edu/devotionalsandspeeches.

NOTE

1. See Emily Perl Kingsley, “Welcome to Holland,” in Darlene J. Hollingsworth, *Without U: Raising a Child with Down Syndrome* (2011), 14–15.