

THE TRUE PATH TO Happiness

As we pursue the true path to happiness in our families and professions, I pray we will use our knowledge and influence to bring greater righteousness, peace, understanding, and freedom to people all over the world.

The recipe for “the good life” has been debated for centuries. When the Apostle Paul was in Athens on Mars Hill, he encountered “philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks” (Acts 17:18). The Stoics believed that the highest good was virtue, while the Epicureans believed that the highest good was pleasure. Many Stoics had become proud and used the philosophy as “a cloak for . . . ambition and iniquity.” Many Epicureans had become hedonists who took as their motto “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.”¹

Many in the academic world have long pointed to Aristotle’s advocacy of “intellectual contemplation” as a blueprint for “the good life.” A reviewer writing in the *New York Times Book Review* asserted that modern philosophers “have concluded that there is no single right balance of elements that constitutes ‘the good life for man.’”²

An article in the *New York Times* asserted, “Marital happiness is far more important than anything else in determining personal well-being.” The author challenged colleges

to spend less time “preparing students for careers” and more time “preparing them to make social decisions.”³

As I read these statements, I reflected on what 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, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God.”⁴

In the spirit of the statement in the *New York Times* about marriage and the Prophet’s optimistic declaration, I am confident that we can have the happiness that we desire and that God wants for us. What must we do to attain it?

Be Grateful for Your Heritage

Always be grateful for your blessings, especially your heritage. When we are blessed with goodly parents, we should be grateful. This is the debt each of us owes for our heritage.

An old Chinese proverb reads, “When you drink the water, don’t forget the well from whence it sprung.” It is clear from the



**By Elder
Quentin L. Cook**
Of the Quorum of the
Twelve Apostles

scriptures that we are to honor our parents. A proverb reads, “My son, keep thy father’s commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother” (Proverbs 6:20). The great German philosopher Goethe put it this way:

*What from your fathers’ heritage is lent,
Earn it anew, to really possess it!*⁵

It is clear that we need to be grateful for our parents and take positive action to acquire that

which they would hope to bestow upon us. This is a step toward personal happiness.

Commit Yourself to the Family

Second, commit yourself to the eternal institution of the family as the foundation for happiness. In the world at large, many are choosing not to get married or are delaying marriage. The family is an eternal institution ordained of God from before the foundation



I assure you that the joy, love, and fulfillment experienced in loving, righteous families produce the greatest possible happiness we can achieve.



of the world. Most people will marry and be blessed with children. There is no greater blessing in this life than having children. Some of the most poignant passages in all of scripture capture the sublime significance of children in our Heavenly Father's plan. They are truly "an heritage of the Lord" (Psalm 127:3).

When I was in my 20s, President David O. McKay (1873–1970) gave a prophetic message about marriage and children. He was 95 years old and in the last year of his life. He taught that the pure love between a man and a woman "is one of the noblest things on earth, and the bearing and rearing of children the highest of all human duties."⁶

President McKay then shared his concern about the increasing acceptance of divorce. In 1969 California was the first state in the United States that allowed what has been called "no-fault divorce." Prior to that time, there had to be a reason for the termination of a marriage,

such as infidelity or other extreme conditions. President McKay was obviously concerned that the institution of marriage was in trouble. He stated, "The increasing divorce rate in the United States today is a threatening menace to this nation's greatness."⁷

When we look back at what President McKay taught, it was truly prophetic. The current editor-in-chief of *U.S. News and World Report* has chronicled the history and consequences that have occurred since then. He reports that "divorce rates have more than doubled since the 1960s," and births to unwed mothers "have risen from 5 percent in 1960 to about 35 percent today." He explains the results and the adverse impact on children. He makes it clear that "the stable family of two biological parents . . . turns out to be the ideal vessel for molding character, for nurturing, for inculcating values, and for planning for a child's future."⁸

The *New York Times* article concludes, “Modern societies . . . have an affinity for material concerns and a primordial fear of moral and social ones” and, as a result, they have a “spiritual blind side.”⁹ Isn’t this what President McKay prophesied?

Let me assure you that the vast majority of marriages between faithful members of the Church are happy and successful. For those not yet married, you should move forward with faith and confidence toward the ultimate goal of marriage and family. I would counsel you to find a righteous spouse

whom you admire and who will be your best friend. I assure you that the joy, love, and fulfillment experienced in loving, righteous families produce the greatest possible happiness we can achieve. That happiness is the foundation for a successful society. Those who are righteous and are not able to accomplish this goal are entitled to every blessing that our Father in Heaven has for His children.

Be Involved in a Positive Way

Third, be involved in the world in a positive way and be a powerful

force for good. A significant challenge is to adhere to the scriptural injunction to live in the world but not of the world (see John 17). President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972), as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, taught that though we are in the world, “we are not of the world in the sense that we are under any necessity to partake of . . . evil customs, . . . fashions, . . . follies, false doctrines and theories.”¹⁰ In addition, your contribution to the place where you live is part of your challenge to be an example, share



the gospel, and live according to the truths you have been taught by parents and prophets.

To accomplish this challenge, you will want and need to be involved in the world in a positive way. We must be tried and tested and found worthy of a greater kingdom. As President Thomas S. Monson has taught, “Decisions determine destiny.”¹¹

This is not an easy life; it was not meant to be. Nevertheless, we know that the Lord will cause our trials to bless us and be for our good. He will give us the strength to stand firm despite opposition. Righteousness is its own reward, and the scriptures promise us that the reward for righteousness is “peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come” (D&C 59:23). I counsel you to be involved in the world in a positive way.

Live and Communicate Your Standards

Fourth, live and communicate your standards to those you interact with. Challenges will come to many of you as you seek employment. You will need to be wise. My recommendation would be to let potential employers know you have high ethical and moral standards, including a commitment to your family.

I learned the significance of this early in my career. After finishing my education at Stanford Law School, I focused on working for a particular law firm. No members of the Church were

associated with the firm, but its lawyers were individuals of character and ability. After a morning of interviews, the most senior partner and two other partners took me to lunch. The senior partner inquired if I would like a pre-lunch alcoholic drink and later if I would like wine. In both cases I declined. And the second time, I informed him that I was an active Latter-day Saint and did not drink alcoholic beverages.

I received an offer of employment from the firm, and a few months later the senior partner told me that the offer of alcoholic beverages was a test. He noted that my résumé made it clear that I had served a Latter-day Saint mission. He had determined that he would hire me only if I was true to the teachings of my own church. He considered it a significant matter of character and integrity.

In my years in San Francisco, California, USA, I knew some members who avoided letting their associates know they were Latter-day Saints. Invariably, they were drawn into compromising situations that could have been avoided had they forthrightly declared what they believed.

Be a Light

Finally, be a light to the people where you live. When my wife and I were starting out as a newly married couple in the San Francisco Bay Area in the mid-1960s, the Latter-day Saint population was relatively small. In addition, the San Francisco Bay Area had become a magnet for drug abuse

and all manner of promiscuous and sinful conduct. A concerned stake president back then asked the leadership of the Church if leaders should encourage Church members to remain in the San Francisco Bay Area.

President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973), then a senior member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, was assigned to address the issue. He met with a group of priesthood leaders and told them that the Lord had not inspired the construction of a temple in our area only to have the members leave. His counsel was to:

1. Create Zion in our hearts and homes.
2. Be a light to those among whom we live.
3. Focus on the ordinances and principles taught in the temple.

If we will follow President Lee’s counsel today, we can successfully be in the world but not of the world. However, we must each determine whether we will look to the world or focus on the temple.

Over our lifetime we will face many worldly challenges. One of these challenges is that we will find that the Church and its teachings are not understood and are sometimes misrepresented. A few years ago Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles called on Church members to let their voices be heard in defending the faith and correcting false information. He pointed out that it is particularly important for us to participate in the “‘new media,’ made

possible by the Internet.”¹² In a world with diverse communications and with members spread all over the globe, there is a need for Latter-day Saints to respond to and defend against irresponsible and inaccurate descriptions of the Church when they occur. We are grateful for what has transpired since Elder Ballard’s article, and I reiterate his challenge.

I am confident that we can attain the happiness we desire and that God wants for us. It is my prayer that as we pursue the true path to happiness in our families and professions, we will use our knowledge and influence to bring greater righteousness, peace, understanding, and freedom to people all over the world. ■

From an address delivered at Brigham Young University–Hawaii on April 10, 2010. For the full text in English, visit <http://devotional.byuh.edu/node/416>.

NOTES

1. Frederic W. Farrar, *The Life and Work of St. Paul* (1902), 1:535–36.
2. Jim Holt, “A Word about the Wise,” *New York Times Book Review*, Mar. 14, 2010, 12.
3. David Brooks, “The Sandra Bullock Trade,” *New York Times*, Mar. 30, 2010, p. A23.
4. Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 5:134–35.
5. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Bayard Taylor (1912), 1:28.
6. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, Apr. 1969, 9.
7. David O. McKay, Apr. 1969, 8.
8. Mortimer B. Zuckerman, “Family-Unfriendly Policies,” *U.S. News and World Report*, Oct. 5, 2007, 72.
9. David Brooks, “The Sandra Bullock Trade,” p. A23.
10. Joseph Fielding Smith, in Conference Report, Oct. 1916, 70.
11. Thomas S. Monson, “Invitation to Exaltation,” *Tambuli*, Sept. 1993, 4; *Ensign*, June 1993, 4.
12. M. Russell Ballard, “Sharing the Gospel Using the Internet,” *Liahona*, June 2008, N1; *Ensign*, July 2008, 60.



Be involved in the world in a positive way and be a powerful force for good.