

CULTIVATING  
MEANINGFUL

## CONNECTIONS

By Faith Sutherlin Blackhurst

One Sunday, I found myself alone in my apartment, wrapped up in a blanket and sobbing pathetically into a pillow. I had broken up with my boyfriend the night before, all my roommates were off with their fiancés, and my family was thousands of miles away. I was emotionally exhausted and terribly lonely. I felt disconnected from others, from my purpose in life, and from God. It was difficult to feel happy.

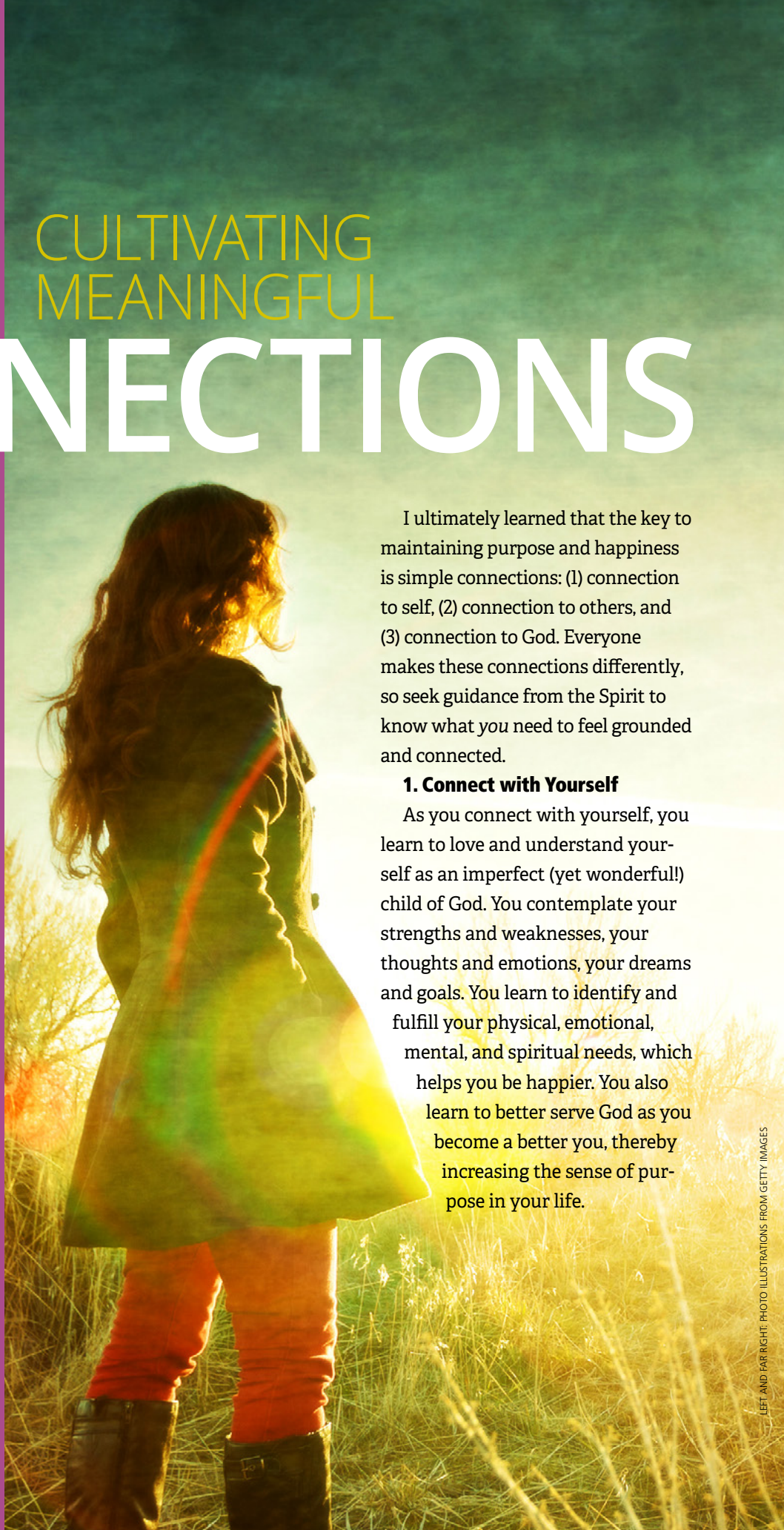
With a prayer in my heart, I turned to my patriarchal blessing for a renewed sense of guidance. As I read it, I received revelation that my circumstances would improve—I just needed to show my trust in my Heavenly Father.

My seemingly bottomless well of tears dried up; I had finally made a connection with God, and it was my first step toward feeling a renewed sense of happiness and meaning in my life.

I ultimately learned that the key to maintaining purpose and happiness is simple connections: (1) connection to self, (2) connection to others, and (3) connection to God. Everyone makes these connections differently, so seek guidance from the Spirit to know what you need to feel grounded and connected.

**1. Connect with Yourself**

As you connect with yourself, you learn to love and understand yourself as an imperfect (yet wonderful!) child of God. You contemplate your strengths and weaknesses, your thoughts and emotions, your dreams and goals. You learn to identify and fulfill your physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual needs, which helps you be happier. You also learn to better serve God as you become a better you, thereby increasing the sense of purpose in your life.



LEFT AND FAR RIGHT: PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS FROM GETTY IMAGES

Just as “the Savior Himself would sometimes withdraw temporarily from the pressing needs of the multitudes”<sup>1</sup> to pray (see Luke 5:16), we too can use time alone to establish methods of connecting with ourselves.

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles suggested that you “reduce the rush and take a little extra time to get to know yourself better. Walk in nature, watch a sunrise, enjoy God’s creations, ponder the truths of the restored gospel,

and find out what they mean for you personally. Learn to see yourself as Heavenly Father sees you—as His precious daughter or son with divine potential.”<sup>2</sup>

Find out what it is that helps you feel most like yourself, and it will become easier to find happiness.

One note of caution: connecting to oneself is not self-indulgence, or excessive gratification of one’s desires. For example, if we bury ourselves for hours, even days, in binge-watching a

television show, looking at social media, or surfing the internet, it will likely reduce our ability to make meaningful connections.

## 2. Connect with Others

Connecting with others gives us purpose as we help them through trials and allow them to help us through our own. We become happier as we experience belonging, acceptance, and love with our families, friends, and neighbors and as we give them the same in return.

To find connections with others,



### Connect with Self

- *Get adequate sleep.*
- *Eat healthy foods.*
- *Exercise.*
- *Write in your journal.*
- *Try a new hobby.*
- *Meditate and be still.*
- *Disconnect from social media.*
- *Read a book.*
- *Spend time in nature.*
- *Make a list of your strengths.*



When my loneliness seemed overwhelming, I realized that I had the power to find happiness and meaning in my life.



we don't have to be popular, but we may have to be patient. Finding true friendships and confidences often takes time and effort.

When we do find trusted individuals that we feel comfortable being vulnerable with, we should strive to make lasting connections with them through personal communication, “the wise sharing of emotions, feelings, and concerns.”<sup>3</sup> This can sometimes take courage as we open up to others about our hopes, fears, beliefs, and inadequacies. But through diligent practice, we can learn to be appropriately vulnerable with others.

To develop strong connections, we should also let others be vulnerable with us. “Be[ing] swift to hear, [and] slow to speak” (James 1:19) when others express themselves shows attentiveness and respect for their feelings and thoughts.

Jesus Christ gives us a perfect example of how to connect with others. “His communication with others radiated love, care, and concern. He

spoke gently and loved purely. . . . He listened attentively and demonstrated charity. Likewise, if we want our relationships to improve, we must learn to speak in positive ways that edify and build those around us.”<sup>4</sup>

Following the Savior's example also means reaching out to serve others in Christlike ways, helping us form new connections and strengthen existing ones.

### 3. Connect with God

Connection with God is vital to our sense of meaning in this life. When we build a relationship with God, we better understand the plan He has for us. As we seek to do His will and follow that plan, we find greater direction and purpose. We find happiness as we obey God's commandments and feel that He is pleased with our choices.

The most direct way to connect with God is to converse with Him through prayer. If we pray in faith and listen to the Spirit carry His answers to our hearts, we will find ourselves fully involved in a two-way conversation.

As we study and ponder the scriptures, we better understand the true nature of God and our relationship with Him as His children (see, for example, Romans 8:16; Joseph Smith—History 1:11–17). We know that He is cheering us on and helping us succeed in our righteous endeavors.

We also connect with God through our covenants, which bind us to Him by eternal promises secured by priesthood power. As we receive the ordinances of the gospel, renew covenants through the sacrament weekly, perform temple work, and remember promised blessings, we grow closer to our Father in Heaven. Elder L. Whitney Clayton of the Presidency of the Seventy, calling our connection to God “the most valuable blessing we have and the most important one we can secure,”<sup>5</sup> explained, “These covenantal connections to Him become the guideposts for our lives.”<sup>6</sup> Using these guideposts helps us see that we are being led by a kind and loving Father. It lends a sense of purpose to our daily



### Connect with Others

- *Pray and eat as a family.*
- *Participate in family home evening.*
- *Call an old friend.*
- *Do wholesome recreational activities with others.*
- *Listen to others attentively.*
- *Attend a support group.*
- *Open up to a trusted friend.*
- *Make a new friend.*
- *Serve others.*
- *Do temple and family history work.*
- *Speak positively to others.*





choices as we strive to follow Jesus Christ and seek more spiritual guidance (see Alma 37:38–40, 45).

### **Connections Are the Key**

Here's the amazing thing about learning to make connections with ourselves, with others, and with God: each connection reinforces the others. Through all of these interrelated connections, we gain a richer understanding of God's plan, which helps us find greater happiness and purpose in our daily activities. So as we search for happiness and meaning in our everyday lives, let us remember that good, healthy, righteous connections are the key! ■

*The author lives in Utah, USA.*

#### **NOTES**

1. Brent L. Top, "A Balanced Life," *Ensign*, Apr. 2005, 28.
2. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Of Things That Matter Most," *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 22.
3. Marvin J. Ashton, "Family Communications," *Ensign*, May 1976, 52.
4. Mark Ogletree, "Speak, Listen, and Love," *Ensign*, Feb. 2014, 17.
5. L. Whitney Clayton, "Getting and Staying Connected" (Brigham Young University commencement address, Apr. 21, 2016), 5, [speeches.byu.edu](http://speeches.byu.edu).
6. L. Whitney Clayton, "Getting and Staying Connected," 4.

## **Connect with God**

- *Participate in your Sunday meetings.*
- *Worthily partake of the sacrament.*
- *Obey the commandments.*
- *Pray regularly and participate in fasting.*
- *Read and ponder the scriptures.*
- *Study your patriarchal blessing.*
- *Attend the temple.*
- *Listen to spiritual music.*
- *Self-reflect and repent of your mistakes.*
- *Strive to have the Spirit as your companion.*
- *Attend seminary or institute.*

