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Three Lessons on Love, Joy, and Peace

Following these three steps can make a big difference in your life and help you feel the fruits of the Spirit.

When I was a college student, I thought a lot about my future. Once I got to the future—meaning life after college—I learned three critical lessons that made a big difference in my life. I want to share these lessons with you with the hope that you don't take as long as I did to learn them. They can help you find greater joy in life—and ultimately obtain exaltation with your Heavenly Father.

1. Seek Happiness, Peace, and the Holy Ghost

I met my wife, Melinda, during my sophomore year of college, about six months after I had returned from my mission. I knew immediately that I wanted to marry her. Melinda, however, did not have the same experience. It wasn't until five years later that she finally received an answer that it would be “OK” if she married me.



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During those five years, I had one of the more difficult trials of my life. I knew whom I was supposed to marry, and the Spirit urged me on, but I couldn't seem to reach that goal.

Shortly after I graduated, Melinda decided to go on a mission—in part, I am convinced, to get away from me. There were times while she was on her mission when I was miserable because I focused on what I didn't have. However, I was studying the scriptures and praying daily, serving in the Church, and striving to do the things that brought the Holy Ghost into my life.

One early, very cold Sunday morning in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, while I was driving to a Church meeting, I thought, "I should be really miserable right now. Nothing seems to be going the way I want. But I'm not miserable. I feel unbelievably happy!"

Now, how could I be happy if I was going through what, for me, was a difficult trial?

The answer is found in Galatians 5:22–23: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."

Because I was doing the things that brought the Spirit into my life, I felt God's love. I felt joy and peace. I could suffer long and still be happy.

Having love, joy, and peace in our lives, our families, and our marriages does not come from having a big house, nice cars, the latest clothing, career success, or any of the other things the world says bring happiness. In fact, because feelings of

love, joy, and peace come from the Spirit, feeling them doesn't have to be connected to our temporal circumstances at all.

Please understand that I am not saying that we will always be happy or that our temporal circumstances never affect our happiness. In fact, if we do not taste the bitter, we cannot know the sweet (see Doctrine and Covenants 29:39; see also Moses 6:55).

We need to struggle at times. Furthermore, some physical and emotional conditions can cause us great suffering and make it very difficult for us to feel the Spirit. But if we are striving to have the Spirit in our lives and are trusting God, we can, in general, be happy.

I testify from personal experience that this is true. Since my experience while Melinda was on her mission, I have noticed that if I am doing the things that bring the Spirit into my life, including choosing to believe and accepting that things will work out as God intends, I am usually happy (see Jacob 3:2).¹

2. Don't Fall for the Counterfeits

Satan offers counterfeit alternatives to all that God does in an attempt to confuse and deceive us. Despite Satan's attempts to convince us otherwise, the Savior teaches us that "a corrupt tree [cannot] bring forth good fruit" (3 Nephi 14:18). Because Satan is a corrupt tree, he cannot cause us to feel "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, [and] temperance" (Galatians 5:22–23). Rather, Satan wants to make us miserable (see 2 Nephi 2:27).

So what does Satan do? He tries to deceive us.

A friend of mine, one of the elect, was deceived. My friend served a mission and was an outstanding missionary. When she came home from her mission, she intended to do all the little things that had brought the Spirit into her life and had strengthened her on her mission. And for a time, she did.

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However, she saw friends, many of whom were returned missionaries, come to church each Sunday but outside of church live as the world lives. They seemed happy. They were doing “fun” things. And their lifestyle didn’t seem to require as much work as hers did.

Slowly she stopped doing the little things that had brought her spiritual strength on her mission. She still had a testimony, but she told me that she had concluded, “If I was just attending my Church meetings, I was OK—I was on track.” Nevertheless, she said, “Spiritually, I was inactive.”² As she lived as the world lives, one bad choice led to another, and soon she became pregnant.

Her unrighteous choices eventually caught up with her. She wasn’t happy, and she knew it. Fortunately, my friend recognized that she had been deceived, and she repented.

Her story highlights that even the best of us can be deceived. Furthermore, her story points out that we must constantly guard against deception. We accomplish this by doing the little things that bring the Spirit into our lives.

I am happy to report that today my friend is happy, is striving to keep the commandments, and is physically and spiritually active in the gospel.

Satan’s deceptions come in many ways. I will only mention a few.

Satan tries to convince us to prioritize temporal things over spiritual things. We can tell if our priorities are out of place by noticing how often we say, “I’m just too busy or too tired right

now to _____.” Fill in the blank: attend the temple, minister, study and ponder the scriptures, fulfill my calling, or even say my prayers.

One reason we feel so busy is that Satan works hard to distract us. He uses the smartphone in our hand, the radio in our car, the televisions in our home, and myriad other things to keep us distracted almost all the time. As a result, we feel busier than we actually are.

Another result of this distraction is that we are pondering less and less. Satan works to distract us because he knows that pondering, especially the scriptures, leads to greater conversion and revelation.

Another of Satan’s deceptions comes through the idea that our outward actions matter more than our inward motivations. When we lack the proper motivation for doing spiritual things, we fail to experience the joy of the gospel. As a result, keeping the commandments starts to feel like drudgery, and Satan knows that if he can get us to feel this way, we are likely to stop doing what we know we should be doing.

Satan also deceives us into believing that joy and happiness come from having an easy life or from simply having fun all the time. They do not. The truth is that there is no joy or happiness without something to overcome (see 2 Nephi 2:11, 23).

The last of Satan’s deceptions I will mention is that he tries to convince us that wickedness, with its temporary pleasures, really is happiness. Satan knows that, at least in the moment, certain feelings or emotions may (1) make us think we are feeling the fruits of the Spirit, (2) mask our desire for those fruits, or (3) feel like acceptable substitutes.



For example, Satan can tempt us to seek for lust in place of love. He can allure us with excitement instead of enduring joy. He attempts to distract us rather than grant us peace. He would have us be self-righteous, zealous, and politically correct in lieu of selfless, consistently obedient, and appropriately spiritually focused. His temptations can cause us to be confused, which in turn may lead us to think that breaking the commandments will bring happiness.

3. Do the Small Things

It is usually little things that bring the Spirit into our lives, keep us from being deceived, and ultimately help us obtain the strength to keep the commandments and gain eternal life. The Savior taught this principle to the elders of the Church in Kirtland, Ohio: “Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great” (Doctrine and Covenants 64:33).

Why are the small things so important? In the next verse, the Savior explained that “the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind” (Doctrine and Covenants 64:34). Why did the Savior link doing small things with the heart and a willing mind? Because in consistently doing the small things, we yield our hearts and minds to God, which purifies and sanctifies us (see Helaman 3:35).

This purification and sanctification changes our very nature, little by little, so that we

become more and more like the Savior. This also causes us to be more receptive to the promptings of the Holy Ghost, which makes us less likely to be deceived.

In my senior year of high school, my dad taught me seminary in our home. Because the topic that year was the Book of Mormon, my dad decided that we would read it together, verse by verse, and discuss what we learned. As we read, my dad would ask questions that got me thinking about what we were reading, and he would explain things I didn't understand. I still remember learning about the Savior and sensing that He really did visit the Nephites and that I really could be forgiven of my sins because of His Atonement.

I trace my foundation in the scriptures to those sessions my dad and I had together. I felt something as we read. And maybe more important, my desires, motivations, and actions changed. I wanted to be better. I began to see where I was being deceived. I repented more often. By the end of my freshman year of college, I was reading the scriptures every day.

Around this time, President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) asked Church members to read the Book of Mormon daily and apply what they learned.³ So, in addition to whatever else I was reading, I read at least something from the Book of Mormon.

On my mission I learned how to really study and feast upon the scriptures. Not only did I feel the Holy Ghost as I read, but I also started to feel



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joy as I searched the scriptures to find answers to my problems and those of my investigators.

After my mission, I continued to feast upon the scriptures daily. Because this practice invited the Holy Ghost into my life, I received His direction to help me use my time more efficiently. As a result, I did better in school and, later, at work. It became easier to make good decisions. I prayed more and was more diligent in fulfilling my callings. Feasting upon the scriptures daily didn't solve all my problems, but life was easier.

In August 2005, President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) issued a challenge to read or reread the Book of Mormon before the end of the year.⁴ Because I was reading from the Book of Mormon daily anyway, I was already in Ether or Moroni. Consequently, upon finishing a week or two later, I concluded that I had completed President Hinckley's challenge.

But then a faithful home teacher came to visit our family. He asked how I was doing with President Hinckley's invitation.

I told him that I had the good fortune of having started the Book of Mormon before President Hinckley's challenge. Then, with some self-righteousness, I announced that I had completed the task.

Fortunately, my home teacher saw things differently. As he gently corrected me, the Spirit whispered to me that my home teacher was right.

Now I had to read two chapters a day to finish again by the end of the year. As I increased how

much I read in the Book of Mormon, I noticed that even more power came into my life. I had more joy. I saw things more clearly. I repented even more frequently. I wanted to minister to and rescue others. I was less susceptible to Satan's deceptions and temptations. I loved the Savior more.

That November I was called to be the bishop of our ward. Completing President Hinckley's challenge prepared me for that calling. Since then, I have noticed that the busier I become either at work or at church, the more I need to study the scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon.

You can have the same blessings and power in your life if you too will feast upon the scriptures daily. I promise that if you will feast upon the scriptures daily, especially the Book of Mormon, you will invite the Spirit into your life and you will naturally pray daily, repent more often, and find it easier to attend church and partake of the sacrament weekly.

I testify that as you do the small things and trust the Lord, you can find love, joy, peace, and happiness regardless of your circumstances. I also testify that this is made possible because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. All good things come because of Him (see Moroni 7:22, 24). ■

From a devotional address, "Happiness, Deceit, and Small Things," delivered at Brigham Young University on December 5, 2017.

NOTES

1. When we are firm in the faith of Christ, we can feast upon God's love no matter our circumstances.
2. Interview notes and transcript in the author's possession.
3. See Ezra Taft Benson, "A Sacred Responsibility," *Ensign*, May 1986,

77–78; see also "The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion," *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 4–7.

4. See Gordon B. Hinckley, "First Presidency Message: A Testimony Vibrant and True," *Ensign*, Aug. 2005, 2–6.