



By Bishop
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Follow the Path of Happiness

FAITH

My assignment as a member of the Presiding Bishopric is exciting and inspiring. However, this experience is very different from what I had planned in my youth.

As a child, I wanted to be an archaeologist. My grandmother gave me a book on the young pharaoh now known as King Tut, and from that I developed a passion for ancient civilizations. I spent many weekends creating drawings of ancient battles, and the walls of my room were covered with these pictures. I had a dream of one day going to Egypt to participate in the digs of ancient Egyptian temples and the tombs of the pharaohs.

Four decades later, I am still not an archaeologist and likely never will be. I have never been to Egypt, and my last job before becoming a General Authority was in food distribution. Not much to do with my plans of childhood!

Youth is, in general, the perfect time to make personal plans. As a young adult, you should still have dreams for your future. Perhaps it's the hope of an athletic achievement, the creation of a great work of art, or the acquisition of a diploma or professional position. Perhaps you even have a precious image in your mind of your future husband or wife—his or her physical appearance, character traits, eye and hair color—and the beautiful children that will bless your family.



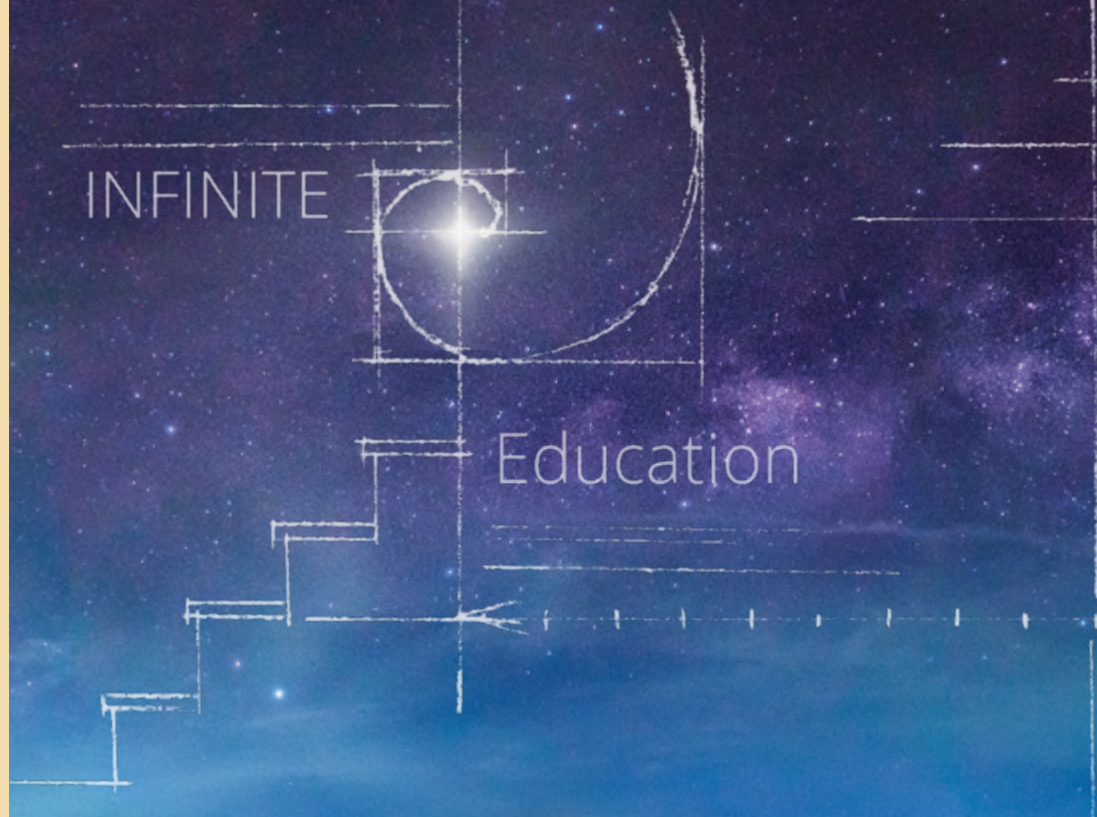
Spiritual vision and righteous principles will bring you happiness regardless of life's unexpected challenges and surprises.

Life is full of uncertainty. Surprises will pop up all along life's path. Who knows what will happen tomorrow, where you will be in a few years, and what you will be doing? Life is like a suspense novel whose plot is difficult to guess.

Key moments may change the course of your life in an instant. Such a moment may consist of no more than a look or a conversation, an unplanned event. Valérie and I still remember the exact moment we fell in love with each other. It was during a choir practice of our young adult ward in Paris. This was completely unexpected! We had known each other since childhood, but we had never had romantic feelings for one another. That evening I was at the piano and she was singing in the choir. We caught each other's eye and something happened. A second for all eternity!

Sometimes, course changes in our lives come from unexpected challenges or disappointments. I have learned through experience that we only partially control the circumstances of our life. And yet most people dislike the unknown. The uncertainty of life creates in some a lack of confidence, a fear of the future that manifests itself in different ways.

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Some young people hesitate to make commitments out of fear of failure, even when good opportunities present themselves. For example, they may delay marriage, education, starting a family, or getting established in a stable professional activity, preferring to just “hang out” or remain in the cozy comfort of their parents’ home.

Another philosophy that will limit us is illustrated by this maxim: “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die” (2 Nephi 28:7). This phrase suggests that because we don’t know what will happen tomorrow and we all will eventually die, we should indulge ourselves in the present moment. This philosophy favors indulging in immediate pleasures, regardless of their future consequences.

You Determine Your Happiness

My message is that there is a different path than those of fear and doubt or self-indulgence—a path that brings peace, confidence, and serenity in life. You can’t control all of the circumstances of your life. Things both good and challenging

will happen to you that you never expected. However, I declare that you have control of your own happiness. You are the architects of it.

“The older we get, the more we look back and realize that external circumstances don’t really matter or determine our happiness,” declared Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He added, “We determine our happiness.”¹

Your happiness is much more the result of your spiritual vision and the righteous principles upon which you base your life. These principles will bring you happiness regardless of the unexpected challenges and surprises you will inevitably face during your journey on earth.

I would like to review some of these essential principles.

1. Recognize Your Personal Worth

A few summers ago, my family and I spent some relaxing days in Provence, a magnificent region in southern France. One evening, just after darkness had enveloped the surrounding countryside, I began to examine the heavens. At first they were an impenetrable black. Suddenly, a light appeared in the sky like a spark—then two, then three. Progressively, as my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I found myself admiring myriad stars. What I had thought was a dark sky transformed into the Milky Way.

I thought: “This is a bit like our personal relationship with God. How many people believe that He is far away or nonexistent? Those people find that life is very dark and black. They don’t take the time or make the effort to examine the heavens to see that He is there, so close to us.”

PATH

Confidence

HAPPINESS

I reflected on the immensity of the universe and on my own physical insignificance, and I asked myself, “What am I before such grandeur and magnificence?” A scripture came to my mind:

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

“What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Psalm 8:3–4).

Immediately follows this comforting phrase: “For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour” (Psalm 8:5).

This is the paradox and the miracle of the Creation. The universe is immense and infinite, yet each of us has unique worth and is glorious and infinite in the eyes of our Creator. My physical presence is infinitesimal, yet my personal worth is of immeasurable importance to my Heavenly Father.

Elder Uchtdorf has declared: “Wherever you are, whatever your circumstances may be, you are not forgotten. No matter how dark your days

may seem, no matter how insignificant you may feel, no matter how overshadowed you think you may be, your Heavenly Father has not forgotten you. In fact, He loves you with an infinite love.”²

2. Become Who You Are

The phrase “become who you are” is attributed to Pindar, one of the most celebrated Greek poets.³ It sounds like a paradox. How can I become who I already am?

A few years ago, I saw a film called *Age of Reason*. It tells the story of Marguerite, a prosperous banker who leads a hectic life filled with travels and conferences in the four corners of the earth. She is married and thinks she doesn’t have time for children.

The day she turns 40, she receives a mysterious letter that says: “Dear me, Today I am seven years old and I’m writing you this letter to help you remember the promises I made when I was seven, and also to remind you of what I want to become.”

Marguerite suddenly understands that the author of the letter is none other than herself when she was seven years old. What follows are several pages on which the little girl describes in detail her life’s goals.

Marguerite realizes that the person she has become is nothing like what she wanted to be when she was a young girl. As she decides to reclaim the person she envisioned as a child, her neatly planned and organized life is turned upside down. She reconciles with her family and determines to consecrate the rest of her life to serving people in need.⁴

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If you were to now receive a letter from your past, what would it say? What might you have written to yourself on the day of your baptism when you were eight years old? I'll go back even further. If it were possible for you to receive a letter from your premortal life, what would it say? What impact would such a letter from a forgotten but very real world have on you if you were to receive it today?

This letter might say something like: “Dear me, I am writing to you so you will remember who I want to become. I shouted for joy at the chance to go to earth. I know that life on earth is an essential passage to enable me to grow to my full potential and live forever with my Heavenly Father. I hope you will remember that my greatest desire is to be a disciple of our Savior, Jesus Christ. I support His plan, and when I am on earth I want to help Him in His work of salvation. Please also remember that I want to be part of a family that will be together for all eternity.”

One of the great adventures of life is that of finding out who we really are and where we came from, then living consistently in harmony with our identity and the purpose of our existence. Our happiness and ability to find balance in life will occur as we find, recognize, and accept our true identity as a child of our Heavenly Father and then live in accordance with this knowledge.

3. Trust in God's Promises

I love these motivating words of President Thomas S. Monson (1927–2018): “The future is as bright as your faith.”⁵ Our success and happiness in life depend in great part on the faith and trust we have that the Lord will lead and guide us to fulfill our destiny.

The men and women who accomplish remarkable feats in life often have great confidence in their future from the earliest years of their youth. An example of such a young person is Winston Churchill, the celebrated British statesman. As a young man, he had an unshakable confidence in his future. While he served in a cavalry regiment in India at age 23, he wrote to his mother, “I have faith in my star—that I am intended to do something in this world.”⁶

What a prophetic thought! He, in effect, envisioned that he was going to become a key person in the history of his country, and he became the man who led Great Britain to victory during World War II.



I believe that each of you young members of the Church of Jesus Christ has far more than a star in the sky to guide you. God is watching over you and has made promises to you.

Many of you count noble pioneers among your ancestors, great souls who helped establish the restored Church through their courage and sacrifice. Generations of valiant Saints have preceded you. Others of you are the pioneers of your own families and in your own lands. You are the first link in what will become an eternal chain. Whatever your story or your heritage, as members of the Church you are linked to a spiritual family. Your spiritual genealogy makes each of you a descendant of the fathers, as foretold by the prophets, and heirs to God's promises to them.

The fulfillment of God's promises is always tied to obedience to the laws attached to them. The Lord said, "I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise" (Doctrine and Covenants 82:10).

On the other hand, these promises do not ensure that everything that happens in our life will be in accordance with our expectations and desires. Sometimes unexpected trials will present themselves that we must overcome; sometimes promised blessings will be long delayed. But the time will come when we will know that these trials and these delays can be turned for our good and our eternal progression. What more can we ask?

Aligning Your Will with the Lord's Will

One of the greatest things we can desire in life is to align our will with the will of the Lord—to accept His will for our lives. He knows everything from the beginning, has a perspective we don't have, and loves us with an infinite love.

The itinerary for each of us will vary according to the foreknowledge of God. Our circumstances may change, unexpected events may occur, challenges may arise, but the promises of God to us are assured through our faithfulness.

The circumstances of my life today are, obviously, very different from what I had planned when I was young. However, I don't believe I've ever been so happy. If one had given me, when I was 20 years old, the account of my life up to the present, I think I would have signed without any hesitation on the dotted line!

You have dreams and goals? That's good. Work with all your heart to accomplish them. Then let the Lord do the rest. He will lead you where you cannot lead yourself; He will make you into what you cannot make of yourself.

At all times, accept His will. Be ready to go where He asks you to go and to do what He asks you to do. Become the men and women He is nurturing you to become. ■

From a Church Educational System devotional, "We Are the Architects of Our Own Happiness," delivered November 4, 2012. For the full address, go to broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.

NOTES

1. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Of Regrets and Resolutions," *Ensign*, Nov. 2012, 23.
2. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Forget Me Not," *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 122–23.
3. See Pindar (ca. 518–443 B.C.), *Pythian 2*, line 72.
4. *L'âge de Raison* (France, 2010); *With Love . . . from the Age of Reason* (USA, 2011).
5. Thomas S. Monson, "Be of Good Cheer," *Ensign*, May 2009, 92.
6. Winston Churchill, in Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life* (1991), 76.