



By Bishop
Gérald Caussé

First Counselor in the
Presiding Bishopric

Follow the Path of HAPPINESS

Youth, in general, is the perfect time to make personal plans. As a young adult you should have dreams for your future. Perhaps your dream is 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.

How many of your wishes will come true? Life is full of uncertainty. There will be key moments for you that may change the course of your life in an instant. Such a moment may consist of no more than a look, a conversation, or an unplanned event. There will be new opportunities, such as the recent declaration by President Thomas S. Monson concerning the age of missionary service.¹ Sometimes course changes in our lives come from unexpected challenges or disappointments.

Most people dislike the unknown. The uncertainty of life can create a lack of confidence, a fear of the future.

Some hesitate to make commitments out of fear of failure, even when good opportunities present themselves. For example, they may delay getting married, seeking an education, starting a family, or getting established in a stable profession, 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 philosophy favors indulging in immediate pleasures regardless of their future consequences.

The Path of Happiness

There is a different path than the paths of fear or doubt or self-indulgence—a path that brings peace, confidence, and serenity in life. You can't control all the circumstances of your life, but you have control of your happiness. You are the architect of it.

Your happiness is more the result of your spiritual vision and the principles upon which you base your life

Your happiness depends more on the principles you choose to follow than on the external circumstances of your life.

than of anything else. These principles will bring you happiness regardless of unexpected challenges and surprises. Let me review some of these essential principles.

1. Recognize Your Personal Worth

Recently my family and I spent a few relaxing days in southern France. One evening, just after the sun had set and darkness had enveloped the surrounding countryside, I decided to lie down on a lounge chair outside the house. My eyes 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 a myriad of stars. What I had thought was a dark sky transformed into the Milky Way.

As I reflected on the immensity of the universe and on my own physical insignificance, 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 at the same time, each of us has unique worth that

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.

Knowing that God knows us and loves us personally is like a light that illuminates our life and gives it meaning. Whoever I am, whether I have friends or not, whether I'm popular or not, and even if I feel rejected or persecuted by others, I have an absolute assurance that my Heavenly Father loves me. He knows my needs; He understands my concerns; He is eager to bless me.

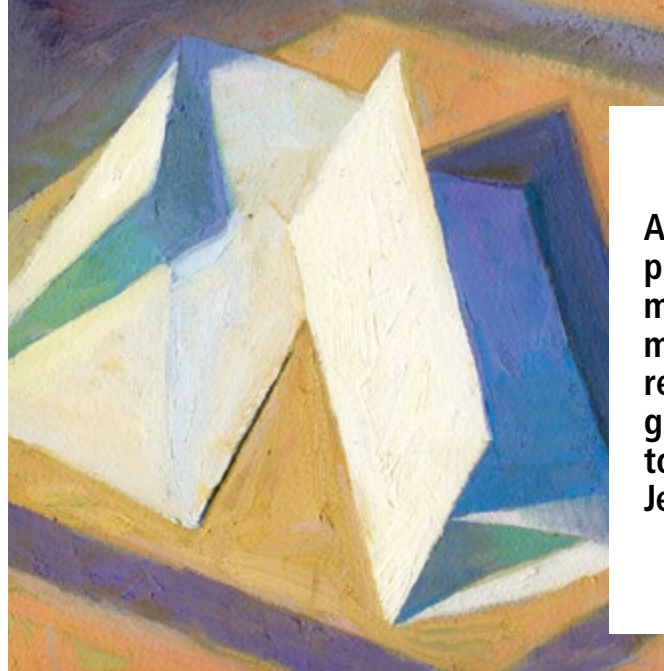
Imagine what it would mean to you if you could see yourself as God sees you. What if you looked at yourself with the same benevolence, love, and confidence that God does? Imagine the impact it would have on your life to understand your eternal potential as God understands it.

I testify that He is there. Seek Him! Search and study. Pray and ask. I promise that God will send you tangible signs of His existence and His love for you.

2. Become Who You Are²

Becoming who you really are sounds like a paradox. How can I become who I already am? I will illustrate this principle through a story.

The film *The Age of Reason* tells the story of Marguerite, a prosperous banker who leads a hectic life filled



A letter from your premortal self might say, "Dear me, I hope you will remember that my greatest desire is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ."

with travels and conferences. Even though she has an adoring suitor, she says she doesn't have time for marriage or 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." The author of the letter is none other than Marguerite when she was seven years old. What follows are several letters in which the little girl describes in detail her life's goals.

Marguerite realizes that the person she has become is nothing like the person she wanted to become when she was a young girl. As she decides to reclaim the person she envisioned as a child, her life is turned upside down. She reconciles with her family

and determines to consecrate the rest of her life to serving people in need.³

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 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 finding out who we really are and where we came from and then consistently living in harmony with our true

identity as children of God and with the purpose of our existence.

3. Trust in God's Promises

A teaching from the prophet Malachi is at the heart of the Restoration of the gospel: "And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers" (Joseph Smith—History 1:39). Thanks to the Restoration, you are the children of the promise. You will receive as an inheritance the promises made to your fathers.

Reread your patriarchal blessing. In this blessing the Lord confirms that you are tied to one of the twelve tribes of Israel, and because of this, through your faithfulness, you become an heir to the immense blessings promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God

promised Abraham: "For as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father" (Abraham 2:10).

These promises are tangible, and if we do our part, God will do His. On the other hand, these promises do not ensure that everything that happens in our lives will be in accordance with our expectations and desires. Rather, God's promises guarantee that what happens to us will be in accordance with His will. The greatest thing we can desire in life is to align our will with God's will—to accept His agenda for our lives. He knows everything from the beginning, has a perspective that we don't have, and loves us with an infinite love.

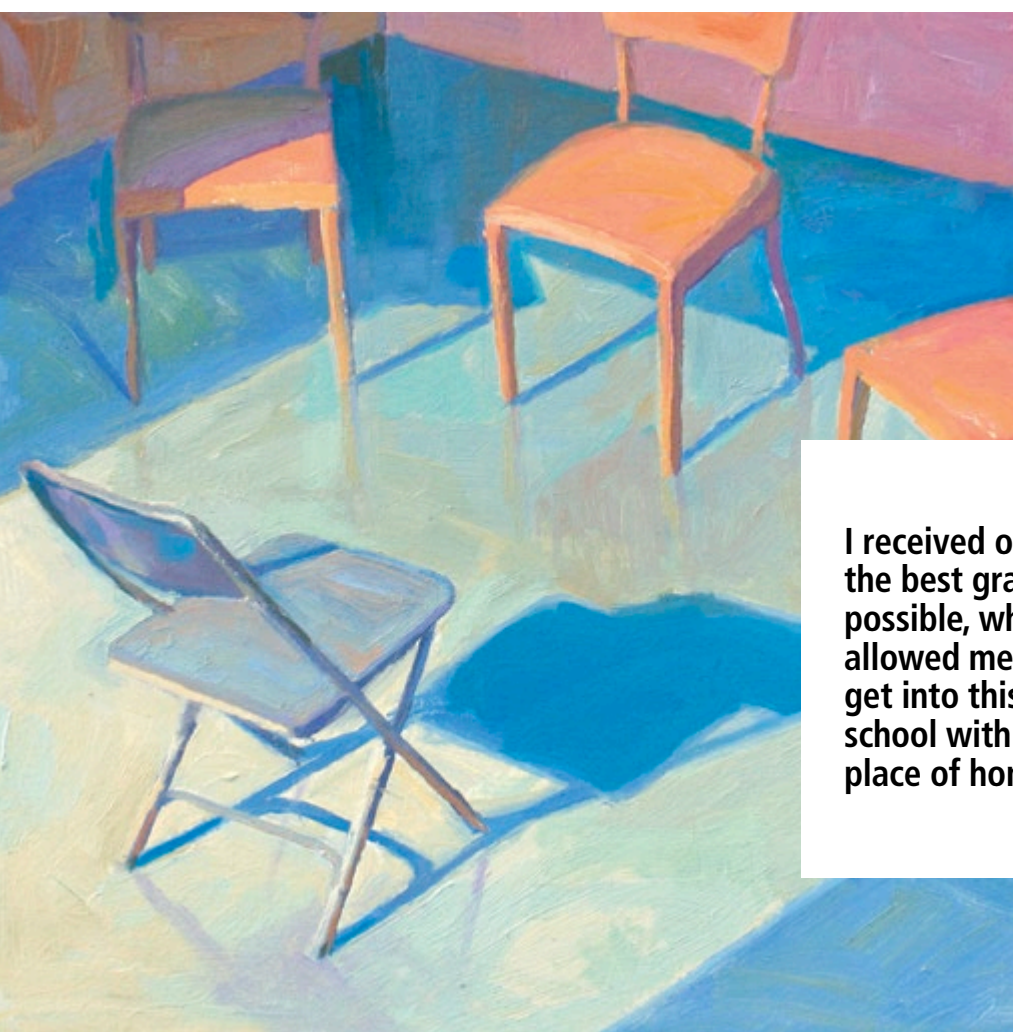
I illustrate this principle with a

personal experience. When I was young, I decided to prepare for the entrance exam to the best business schools in France. This preparation, which lasted a year, was very challenging. At the beginning of the year I decided that whatever the heaviness of the task, I would never let my studies prevent me from attending my Sunday meetings or from participating in an institute class once a week. I even accepted a call to serve as the clerk in my young adult ward. I was confident that the Lord would recognize my faithfulness and would help me accomplish my objectives.

At the end of the year, when exams approached, I felt that I had done my best. When I arrived for the examination at the most reputable school, I had full confidence that the Lord would answer my desires. Unfortunately, the oral exam in my strongest subject was an unexpected disaster—I received a grade that prevented me from getting into this highly coveted school. I was distraught. How could the Lord have abandoned me when I had persevered in my faithfulness?

When I presented myself at the oral exam for the second school on my list, I was filled with doubt. In this school

the exam that was weighted the heaviest was an interview with a jury presided over by the director of the school. The



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beginning of the interview was normal—until I was asked a seemingly insignificant question: “We know that you studied a lot to prepare for this exam. But we would be interested to know what your activities were outside of your studies.”

My heart skipped a beat! For one year I had done only two things: study and go to church! I feared that the jury would negatively interpret a description of my membership in the Church. But in one second I made the decision to remain faithful to my principles.

For 15 minutes or so, I described my activities in the Church: my Sabbath meetings, institute classes, and responsibilities as the ward clerk. When I had finished, the director of the school spoke.

“You know, when I was young, I studied in the United States,” he said. “One of my best friends was a Mormon. He was a remarkable young man, someone who had great human qualities. I consider Mormons to be very good people.”

That day I received one of the best grades possible, which allowed me to get into this school with a place of honor.

I thanked the Lord for His goodness. It took me several years, however, to understand the miraculous blessing of not getting into the first school. In the second school, I met key people. The

benefits of my association with them became evident throughout the entire length of my career and are still important in my life and in the lives of members of my family.

If things don’t turn out the way you had hoped or expected after you have done all in your power, be ready to accept the will of your Heavenly Father. He will not inflict upon us anything that is not ultimately for our good. Listen for that calming voice that whispers in our ears: “All flesh is in mine hands; be still and know that I am God” (D&C 101:16).

Your Future Is As Bright As Your Faith

The more I contemplate the course of my life with my wife, Valérie, the more I believe that what has made the difference is that we shared a common vision of eternal life in our youth. We wanted to start an eternal family. We knew why we were on earth and what our eternal objectives were. We knew that God loved us and that we had great worth in His eyes. We had every confidence that He would answer our prayers in His way and at the time He deemed good.

I don’t know if we were ready to accept His will in all things because that was something we had to learn—and that we continue to learn. But we wanted to do our best to follow Him and consecrate ourselves to Him.

I testify, with President Monson, that your “future is as bright as your faith.”⁴ Your happiness depends more on the principles you choose to follow than on the external circumstances of your life. Be faithful to these principles. God knows you and loves you. If you live in harmony with His eternal plan and if you have faith in His promises, then your future will shine!

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 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.

I testify that this life is a wonderful moment of eternity. We are here with a glorious goal—that of preparing to meet God. ■

From a CES devotional address, “We Are the Architects of Our Own Happiness,” delivered in the Salt Lake Tabernacle on November 12, 2012. For the full address, go to lds.org/broadcasts.

NOTES

1. See Thomas S. Monson, “Welcome to Conference,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2012, 4–5.
2. This phrase is attributed to Pindar, one of the most celebrated Greek poets. See Pindar, *Pythian* 2.72, in *Olympian Odes, Pythian Odes*, ed. and trans. William H. Race (1997), 239.
3. See *L’âge de raison (With Love . . . from the Age of Reason)*, directed by Yann Samuell (2010).
4. Thomas S. Monson, “Be of Good Cheer,” *Ensign*, May 2009, 92.