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Shipshape and Bristol Fashion: Be Temple Worthy—in Good Times and Bad Times

Adherence to sacred gospel principles will allow us to be temple worthy, enable us to find happiness in this life, and lead us back to our heavenly home.

The prophet Lehi declared, “If there be no righteousness there be no happiness.”¹

The adversary has been successful in planting a great myth in the minds of many people. He and his emissaries declare that the real choice we have is between happiness and pleasure *now in this life* and happiness in a *life to come* (which the adversary asserts may not exist). This myth is a false choice, but it is very seductive.²

The ultimate noble purpose of God’s plan of happiness is for righteous disciples and covenant families to be united in love, harmony, and peace in this life³ and attain celestial glory in the eternities with God the Father, our Creator; and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior.⁴

When I was a young missionary assigned to the British Mission, my

first area of labor was in what was then the Bristol District. One of the local Church leaders emphasized that missionaries serving in that area needed to be “shipshape and Bristol fashion.”



Initially I didn’t understand the point he was making. I soon learned the history and meaning of the nautical phrase “shipshape and Bristol fashion.” At one time Bristol was the second busiest port in the United Kingdom. It had a very high tidal range of 43 feet (13 m), the second highest in the world. At low tide when the water receded, the old ships would hit bottom and fall on their sides, and if the ships were not well built, they would be damaged. In addition, everything that was not carefully stowed away or tied down would be thrown in a chaotic fashion and ruined or spoiled.⁵ After I understood what that phrase meant, it was clear that this leader was telling us that, as missionaries, we must be righteous, follow rules, and be prepared for difficult situations.

This same challenge is applicable to each of us. I would describe being “shipshape and Bristol fashion” as being temple worthy—in good times and in bad times.

While the fluctuation of the tide in the Bristol Channel is somewhat predictable and can be prepared for, the storms and temptations of this life are often unpredictable. But this we know: they will come! In order to overcome the challenges and temptations that each of us inevitably faces, it will require righteous preparation and the use of divinely provided protections. We must determine to be temple worthy regardless of what befalls us. If we are prepared, we shall not fear.⁶

Happiness in this life and happiness in the life to come are interconnected by righteousness. Even in the period between death and the Resurrection, “the spirits of those who are *righteous* are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace.”⁷



Above: Just as for the old ships in Bristol Harbor, there will be times when the tide goes out and everything keeping us afloat disappears. Amid such trials, living and maintaining temple-worthy lives will hold together all that really matters. Right: Exercising self-control and living righteously strengthen our ability to resist temptation.

At the commencement of the Savior's earthly ministry in Israel and later among the Nephites, the Savior addressed the issue of happiness both in this life and in eternity. He stressed ordinances, but He also placed great emphasis on moral behavior. For example, disciples would be blessed if they would hunger and thirst after righteousness, be merciful, be pure in heart, be peacemakers, and follow other basic moral principles. Clearly, our Lord Jesus Christ emphasized, as a foundational doctrinal message, both righteous attitudes and conduct in day-to-day living. His teachings not only replaced and transcended elements of the law of Moses⁸ but also were a rejection of the false philosophies of men.

For many centuries the gospel of Jesus Christ has inspired beliefs and established standards of conduct as to what is righteous, desirable, and moral and results in happiness, felicity, and joy. However, the principles and basic morality the Savior taught are under serious attack in today's world. Christianity is under attack. Many believe that what is moral has basically changed.⁹

We live in difficult times. There is an increased tendency to "call evil good, and good evil."¹⁰ A world that emphasizes self-aggrandizement and secularism is cause for great concern. One prominent writer, not of our faith, has put it this way: "Unfortunately I see little evidence that people are actually happier in the emerging dispensation, or that their children are better off, or

that the cause of social justice is well-served, or that declining marriage rates and thinning family trees . . . promise anything save greater loneliness for the majority, and stagnation overall."¹¹

As disciples of the Savior, we are expected to plan and prepare. In the plan of happiness, moral agency is a central organizing principle and our choices matter.¹² The Savior emphasized this throughout His ministry, including in His parables of the foolish virgins and



the talents.¹³ In each of these, the Lord commended preparation and action and condemned procrastination and idleness.

I recognize that, despite the overwhelming happiness embodied in God's divine plan, sometimes it can feel far away and disconnected from our current circumstances. It may feel beyond our reach as struggling disciples. From our limited perspective, current temptations and distractions can seem attractive. The rewards for resisting those temptations, on the other hand, can feel distant and unattainable. But a true understanding of the Father's plan reveals that the rewards of righteousness are available right now. Wickedness, such as immoral conduct, is never part of the answer.

Alma said it clearly to his son Corianton: “Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness.”¹⁴

Our doctrine is clearly stated by Amulek in Alma 34:32: “Behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors.”

How, then, do we prepare in such a difficult time? In addition to being temple worthy, there are many principles that contribute to righteousness. I will emphasize three.

First: Righteous Self-Control and Conduct

I believe that sometimes our loving Father in Heaven must view us with the amusement we feel when we watch our own small children as they learn and grow. We all stumble and fall as we gain experience.

I appreciated the conference address President Dieter F. Uchtdorf gave in 2010¹⁵ about the famous marshmallow experiment conducted at Stanford University in the 1960s. You will remember that four-year-olds were given a single marshmallow. If they could wait for 15 or 20 minutes without eating it, they would receive a second marshmallow. Videos have been produced showing the contortions that many children used to avoid eating the marshmallow. Some did not succeed.¹⁶

Last year the professor who conducted the original experiment, Dr. Walter Mischel, wrote a book in which he said the study grew in part out of his concerns about self-control and his own addiction to smoking. He was particularly concerned after the U.S. Surgeon General’s report of 1964 concluded that smoking caused lung cancer.¹⁷ After years of study, one of his professional colleagues reported that “self-control is like a muscle: the more you use it, the stronger it gets. Avoiding

something tempting once will help you develop the ability to resist other temptations in the future.”¹⁸

A principle of eternal progression is that exercising self-control and living righteously strengthen our ability to resist temptation. This is true both in the spiritual realm and in temporal matters.

Our missionaries are an excellent example. They develop Christlike attributes and emphasize obedience and spirituality. They are expected to adhere to a rigorous schedule and spend their days in the service of others. They have a modest, conservative appearance instead of the casual or immodest manner of dress so prevalent today. Their conduct and appearance convey a moral, serious message.¹⁹

We have approximately 230,000 young people who are currently serving as missionaries or who have returned from missionary service in the last five years. They have developed remarkable spiritual strength and self-discipline that need to be continually exercised, or these qualities will atrophy just like muscles that are not used. All of us need to develop and demonstrate conduct and appearance that declare we are true followers of Christ. Those who abandon either righteous conduct or a wholesome, modest appearance expose themselves to lifestyles that bring neither joy nor happiness.

The restored gospel gives us the blueprint of the plan of happiness and an incentive to understand and exercise self-control and avoid temptation. It also teaches us how to repent when violations have occurred.

Second: Honoring the Sabbath Will Increase Righteousness and Be a Protection for the Family

The early Christian Church changed observance of the Sabbath from

Saturday to Sunday to commemorate the Lord’s Resurrection. Other basic sacred purposes of the Sabbath remained unchanged. For Jews and Christians, the Sabbath symbolizes the mighty works of God.²⁰

My wife and I, and two of my colleagues and their wives, recently participated in a Jewish Shabbat (Sabbath) at the invitation of a dear friend, Robert Abrams and his wife, Diane, in their New York home.²¹ It commenced at the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath on a Friday evening. The focus was honoring God as the Creator. It began by blessing the family and singing a Sabbath hymn.²² We joined in the ceremonial washing of hands, the blessing of the bread, the prayers, the kosher meal, the recitation of scripture, and singing Sabbath songs in a celebratory mood. We listened to the Hebrew words, following along with English translations. The most poignant scriptures read from the Old Testament, which are also dear to us, were from Isaiah, declaring the Sabbath a delight,²³ and from Ezekiel, that the Sabbath “shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God.”²⁴

The overwhelming impression from this wonderful evening was of family love, devotion, and accountability to God. As I thought about this event, I reflected on the extreme persecution that the Jews have experienced over centuries. Clearly, honoring the Sabbath has been “a perpetual covenant,” preserving and blessing the Jewish people in fulfillment of scripture.²⁵ It has also contributed to the extraordinary family life and happiness that are evident in the lives of many Jewish people.²⁶

For members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, honoring the Sabbath is a form of righteousness that



will bless and strengthen families, connect us with our Creator, and increase happiness. The Sabbath can help separate us from that which is frivolous, inappropriate, or immoral. It allows us to be in the world but not of the world.

In the last six months, a most remarkable change has occurred in the Church. This has been in the response of the members to renewed emphasis on the Sabbath by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve and to President Russell M. Nelson’s challenge to make the Sabbath a delight.²⁷ Many members understand that truly keeping the Sabbath day holy is a refuge from the storms of this life. It is also a sign of our devotion to our Father in Heaven and an increased understanding of the sacredness of sacrament meeting. Still, we have a long way to go, but we have a wonderful beginning. I challenge all of us to continue to embrace this counsel and improve our Sabbath worship.

Third: Divine Protections Are Provided When We Are Righteous

As part of God’s divine plan, we are blessed with the gift of the Holy Ghost. This gift “is the right to have, whenever one is worthy, the companionship of the Holy Ghost.”²⁸ This member of the Godhead serves as a cleansing agent if the gospel is first in our lives. He also is a voice of warning against evil and a voice of protection against danger. As we navigate the seas of life, following the impressions of the Holy Ghost is essential. The Spirit will help us avoid

temptations and dangers, and comfort and lead us through challenges. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith.”²⁹

Adherence to sacred gospel principles will allow us to be temple worthy, enable us to find happiness in this life, and lead us back to our heavenly home.

My dear brothers and sisters, life is not easy, nor was it meant to be. It is a time of testing and trial. Like the old ships in Bristol Harbor, there will be times when the tide goes out and it seems as if everything in this world keeping us afloat disappears. We may hit the bottom and even be tipped over on our sides. Amid such trials, I promise you that living and maintaining temple-worthy lives will hold together all that really matters. The sweet blessings of peace, happiness, and joy, along with the blessings of eternal life and celestial glory with our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, will be realized. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. 2 Nephi 2:13. This scripture is part of a parallelism in the Book of Mormon. It is interesting that many of the prophets whose writings and sermons are included in the Book of Mormon used this literary approach to emphasize important doctrinal concepts. See, for example, 2 Nephi 9:25 (Jacob) and 2 Nephi 11:7 (Nephi).
2. See 2 Nephi 28.
3. See 4 Nephi 1:15–17.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 59:23.
5. See Wiktionary, “shipshape and Bristol fashion,” wiktionary.org.
6. See Doctrine and Covenants 38:30.
7. Alma 40:12; emphasis added.
8. See Matthew 5, chapter summary.
9. See Carl Cederstrom, “The Dangers of

Happiness,” *New York Times*, July 19, 2015, Sunday Review section, 8.

10. 2 Nephi 15:20.
11. Ross Douthat, “Gay Conservatism and Straight Liberation,” *New York Times*, June 28, 2015, Sunday Review section, 11.
12. See 2 Nephi 2.
13. See Matthew 25:1–30.
14. Alma 41:10.
15. See Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Continue in Patience,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2010, 56.
16. See Walter Mischel, *The Marshmallow Test: Mastering Self-Control* (2014); see also Jacoba Urist, “What the Marshmallow Test Really Teaches about Self-Control,” *Atlantic*, Sept. 24, 2014, theatlantic.com.
17. See Mischel, *The Marshmallow Test*, 136–38.
18. Maria Konnikova, “The Struggles of a Psychologist Studying Self-Control,” *New Yorker*, Oct. 9, 2014, newyorker.com, citing Roy Baumeister, a professor of psychology at Florida State University who studies willpower and self-control.
19. See Malia Wollan, “How to Proselytize,” *New York Times Magazine*, July 19, 2015, 21. She quotes Mario Dias of the Brazil Missionary Training Center.
20. See Bible Dictionary, “Sabbath.”
21. Elder Von G. Keetch and his wife, Bernice, and John Taylor and his wife, Jan, joined my wife and me for a delightful Shabbat with Robert Abrams and his wife, Diane, on May 8, 2015. Mr. Abrams has served four terms as attorney general for the state of New York and has been a friend of the Church for many years. Mr. Abrams had also invited two of his Jewish colleagues and their wives.
22. The Sabbath table hymn *Shalom Aleichem* (“Peace upon You”) was sung.
23. See Isaiah 58:13–14.
24. Ezekiel 20:20.
25. See Exodus 31:16–17.
26. See Joe Lieberman, *The Gift of Rest: Rediscovering the Beauty of the Sabbath* (2011). Senator Lieberman’s delightful book describes the Jewish Shabbat and provides inspirational insights.
27. See Isaiah 58:13–14; see also Russell M. Nelson, “The Sabbath Is a Delight,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2015, 129–32.
28. Bible Dictionary, “Holy Ghost.”
29. Galatians 5:22.



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