





By President  
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# ONE KEY TO A Happy Family

The great Russian author Leo Tolstoy began his novel *Anna Karenina* with these words: “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”<sup>1</sup> While I do not have Tolstoy’s certainty that happy families are all alike, I have discovered one thing that most have in common: they have a way of forgiving and forgetting the imperfections of others and of looking for the good.

Those in unhappy families, on the other hand, often find fault, hold grudges, and can’t seem to let go of past offenses.

“Yes, but . . .” begin those who are unhappy. “Yes, but you don’t know how badly she hurt me,” says one. “Yes, but you don’t know how terrible he is,” says another.

Perhaps both are right; perhaps neither.

There are many degrees of offense. There are many degrees of hurt. But what I have noticed is that often we justify our anger and satisfy our consciences by telling ourselves stories about the motives of others that condemn their actions as unforgivable and egoistic while, at the same time, lifting our own motives as pure and innocent.

## The Prince’s Dog

There is an old Welsh story from the 13th century about a prince who returned home to find his dog with blood

dripping down its face. The man rushed inside and, to his horror, saw that his baby boy was missing and his cradle overturned. In anger the prince pulled out his sword and killed his dog. Shortly thereafter, he heard the cry of his son—the babe was alive! By the infant’s side lay a dead wolf. The dog had, in reality, defended the prince’s baby from a murderous wolf.

Though this story is dramatic, it demonstrates a point. It opens the possibility that the story we tell ourselves about why others behave a certain way does not always agree with the facts—sometimes we don’t even want to know the facts. We would rather feel self-justified in our anger by holding onto our bitterness and resentment. Sometimes these grudges can last months or years. Sometimes they can last a lifetime.

## A Family Divided

One father could not forgive his son for departing from the path he had been taught. The boy had friends the father did not approve of, and he did many things contrary to what his father thought he should do. This caused a rift between father and son, and as soon as the boy could, he left home and never returned. They rarely spoke again.

## TEACHING FROM THIS MESSAGE

“As you prepare each lesson, ask yourself how the principle is like something family members have experienced in their own lives” (*Teaching, No Greater Call* [1999], 171). Consider inviting family members to share positive experiences they have had or observed with forgiveness. Discuss these experiences, emphasizing the blessings of forgiveness. Conclude by bearing testimony of the importance of forgiving one another.

Did the father feel justified? Perhaps.

Did the son feel justified? Perhaps.

All I know is that this family was divided and unhappy because neither father nor son could forgive each other. They could not look past the bitter memories they had about each other. They filled their hearts with anger instead of love and forgiveness. Each robbed himself of the opportunity to influence the other's life for good. The divide between them appeared so deep and so wide that each became a spiritual prisoner on his own emotional island.

Fortunately, our loving and wise Eternal Father in Heaven has provided the means to overcome this prideful gap. The great and infinite Atonement is the supreme act of forgiveness and reconciliation. Its magnitude is beyond my understanding, but I testify with all my heart and soul of its reality and ultimate power. The Savior offered Himself as ransom for our sins. Through Him we gain forgiveness.

### No Family Is Perfect

None of us is without sin. Every one of us makes mistakes, including you and me. We have all been wounded. We all have wounded others.

It is through our Savior's sacrifice that we can gain exaltation and eternal life. As we accept His ways and overcome our pride by softening our hearts, we can bring reconciliation and forgiveness into our families and our personal lives. God will help us to be more forgiving, to be more willing to walk the second mile, to be first to apologize even if something wasn't our fault, to lay aside old grudges and nurture them no more. Thanks be to God, who gave His Only Begotten Son, and to the Son, who gave His life for us.

We can feel God's love for us every day. Shouldn't we be able to give a little more of ourselves to our fellowmen as taught in the beloved hymn “Because I Have Been Given Much”?<sup>2</sup> The Lord has opened the door for us to be forgiven. Wouldn't it be only right to put aside our own egotism and pride and begin to open that blessed door of forgiveness to those with whom we struggle—especially to all of our own family?

In the end, happiness does not spring from perfection but from applying divine principles, even in small steps. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have declared: “Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, *forgiveness*, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities.”<sup>3</sup>

Forgiveness is positioned right in the middle of these simple truths, founded on our Heavenly Father's plan of happiness. Because forgiveness connects principles, it connects people. It is a key, it opens locked doors, it is the beginning of an honest path, and it is one of our best hopes for a happy family.

May God help us to be a little more forgiving in our families, more forgiving of each other, and perhaps more forgiving even with ourselves. I pray that we may experience forgiveness as one wonderful way in which most happy families are alike. ■

#### NOTES

1. Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. Constance Garnett (2008), 2.
2. “Because I Have Been Given Much,” *Hymns*, no. 219.
3. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129; emphasis added.



## Prayer and Peace

By Lauren W.

One evening I argued with my mom and felt pretty bad. So I decided I would pray. Although I was in a bad mood and didn't want to be "spiritual," I knew praying would help me feel happier and less argumentative. After my mom left the room, I started my prayer. "Dear Heavenly Father, I've come to Thee tonight because . . ." No. I opened my eyes and unfolded my arms; that sounded awkward. I tried again. "Heavenly Father, I need . . ." That also sounded strange. I felt Satan urging me to give up my prayer of asking Heavenly Father for help.

Suddenly I had a prompting to say thank you! So I did, and thoughts started spilling from my mind of all the many things I could thank my Father in Heaven for. When I was done thanking Him, I discussed the problem at hand.

Afterward I felt a wonderful peace inside me, the warm spiritual feeling that I know our Heavenly Father and my parents love me and that I am a child of God. I was able to apologize to my mother and accept her apology.

## Forgiveness Brings Happiness

President Uchtdorf teaches that we should forgive our family members. See how Joseph's and Anna's choices affect their family.



Joseph and his little sister, Anna, are playing together. Anna snatches Joseph's toy away from him. What should Joseph do?

**Joseph gets angry at Anna.** Anna cries. Joseph's mother disciplines him for fighting with his sister. Joseph is sorry that he made a poor choice.

**Joseph forgives Anna and finds another toy to play with.** They play together happily. Their mother is glad that Joseph was kind to his sister and kept peace in the family. Joseph feels happy for choosing to forgive.



Later, Joseph and Anna need to help their mother prepare dinner. Joseph doesn't help. What should Anna do?

**Anna complains to her mother.** Anna argues about having to do the work alone. At dinner everyone is unhappy because of the arguing.

**Anna forgives Joseph and helps with dinner.** Their mother is grateful for Anna's help. The family enjoys being together at dinner. Anna feels good that she chose to forgive.

How do *your* choices to forgive affect your family's happiness?