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Family

THE FOUNTAIN OF HAPPINESS

The concept of family and family life as a true source for happiness has been terribly weakened in recent decades. The traditional family is under attack from many different sources worldwide. (On page 18 of this issue, Elder Quentin L. Cook discusses some of those attacks.) But there are other pitfalls and risks that relate even to some of us who know about the importance, divinity, and eternal destiny of the family.

Influenced by the world and its enticements, the increasing desire for self-centered fulfillment, and the inclination for comfort or for making things easy, we put the family and our happiness under stress. All too often, happiness in our life is defined by the quality of our “all-around carefree package,” which we hope to achieve and retain in a “low-investment, high-return” mode.

*Ponder the doctrine
of eternal families,
and come to know
for yourself what
really matters most.*

But life does not work this way. It was never intended to be easy. The Lord said through the Prophet Joseph Smith: “For after much tribulation come the blessings. Wherefore the day cometh that ye shall be crowned with much glory” (D&C 58:4).

Ordained of God

The Lord has clearly revealed how to develop and retain strong families. We all are invited to study and apply the principles set forth in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” Additionally, we need to recognize that drawing personal strength and happiness from family life requires sacrifice and faith.

The family proclamation states “that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.” It further states “that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force.”¹

For many people, the image and purpose of the family has drastically changed. Increasingly, society is adopting the so-called “soul mate” model of marriage, which focuses on the needs and feelings of adults as opposed to those of children. As a result, many enter marriage after a long-standing relationship rather than moving forward after an appropriate courtship. Finding the perfect match, testing a relationship by cohabitation without the benefit of marriage, or securing a lavish lifestyle that will be backed by a robust prenuptial agreement have become common practices among many before finally deciding to marry.

Scripture and modern-day prophets teach us otherwise. We build our marriages on the foundation of chastity and fidelity, with the intent to establish and rear a family. President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) taught: “There are many who talk and write against marriage. Even some of our own delay marriage and argue against it. . . . We call upon all people to accept [traditional] marriage as a basis for true happiness. . . . Basically marriage presupposes a family.”²

When my wife, Christiane, and I were young, these were the words of our living prophet, and we trusted and followed his advice. We knelt across the altar of the Bern Switzerland Temple, being only 20 and 22 years of age, respectively. We were worthy of the covenant, we had no

real clue of what to expect, we had no work experience or finished education, and we were quite poor.

All we had in abundance was our love for each other and a lot of naïve enthusiasm. But we began building our world together. We did not postpone having children, and we needed to support each other in getting our education. We strongly believed in the Lord’s promise that “if ye do

keep his commandments he doth bless you and prosper you” (Mosiah 2:22).

And He did. When we married, Christiane was in nursing school. Our vision included having her finish her degree, but at the same time we also made a conscious decision to begin fulfilling our dream of having a family. As

a result, our first child was born about two weeks before Christiane passed her final exam as a certified nurse.

Now, nearly 40 years later, we are grateful that we could build our family together. Our faith in God and our relationship with each other have become unshaken as we have seen the hand of the Lord guiding us through the process of building our kingdom in mortality. This kingdom will continue to grow forever and ever.

Be Willing to Sacrifice

For our vision of happiness, we both were ready and willing to sacrifice. We accepted the divinely appointed roles of the father “to preside” and “to provide” and of the mother to provide “for the nurture of their children.”³ Julie B. Beck, former Relief Society General President, stated: “The priesthood role of fathers is to preside and pass priesthood ordinances to the next generation. The priesthood role of mothers is to influence. These are essential, complimentary, and interdependent responsibilities.”⁴

Helping one another in a marriage and family as equal partners does not mean we always do the same things or do everything together or in equal shares. We understand and accept different roles given to us by divine design as outlined in the proclamation on the family. We are not

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following the world in what is described as “emancipation,” in which both husband and wife live only to fulfill their own self-interests. We are living the principles of the gospel; husbands and wives complement one another, and families strive for unity and unselfishness.

Some of you may say: “Well, our situation is different. The world today is not ideal. There must be room for exceptions.” True, but I am attempting to teach the rule or the divine ideal and let you deal with exceptions as you walk the course of your life.

In the vision we had for our family, we wanted Christiane to stay home to rear our children. This meant sacrifice. Shortly after we learned that a baby was on its way, Christiane reminded me of the mutual decision we had made even before our wedding day that she would immediately stop working outside the home as soon as a baby was born. I tried to escape what I knew would be additional responsibility by mentioning that she was contributing one-third of our family income. She answered simply, “I will take care of the children, and you take care of putting food on the table.”

I knew she was right; we had discussed it long before. It was in tune with our vision of family life, it was in tune with the words of the living prophets, and it felt right. So she gave up her well-paying career as a nurse to be close to the children and to meet their daily needs, and I had to get my act together to provide food and shelter. The Lord blessed us to be able to fulfill this aspect of our vision.

Other important matters, such as parenting, teaching, mentoring, cleaning, or even diaper changing, we did together as often as circumstances allowed. This division of labor occurred because it had always been part of how we envisioned our family life.

Christiane and I found that as we have acted in faith and have trusted the Lord, He has helped us to do His will in His way and according to His timing. Now, I have to say that His way did not mean that everything turned out immediately the way we thought it would. Sometimes we had to be patient, sometimes we had to put in extra effort, and sometimes it even seemed that the Lord was testing our seriousness. However, our vision always has inspired us and has been the foundation of our most

important decisions.

One thing Christiane and I always envisioned was to be with our children in the celestial room of a temple as a prelude for the eternal joy and glory we hope one day to experience. Over the past several years we have taken one child after another to receive temple ordinances, symbolically returning them to our Heavenly Father after teaching them the principles of righteousness. We have accompanied three of our children to temple altars as they have married their sweethearts, and we anticipate more temple weddings to come.





Nothing has provided more happiness and satisfaction in our lives than the joy we have found in one another and in our posterity. Once we understood that these are just the beginnings of our eternal progression and therefore only the very first levels of our joy and happiness, we were—and are—willing to sacrifice all we have to live the doctrine of the family and to see our vision fully realized.

I invite you to ponder this doctrine and to come to know for yourself what really matters most. This type of happiness is at the heart of our existence. And the happiness that stems from congenial relationships among husband, wife, and children always grows.

Implement Your Vision

After you have studied the doctrine of the family and have established a vision for your happiness, you have to become serious about implementing your vision.

The initial rejections I received in my courtship with Christiane made me a little discouraged. I had just about

decided to begin a fruitful career as a young single adult in the Church, but one day I had a special spiritual impression. I was participating in an ordinance in the Swiss Temple when I heard a voice in my heart saying something to this effect: “Erich, if you do not seriously strive to marry and enter into the new and everlasting covenant, all these teachings and promised blessings really make no difference for you.” It was a wake-up call that I received at the young age of 21, and from that moment I tried even harder to be worthy of that blessing.

I invite you to set personal goals regarding your vision. In *Preach My Gospel* we read: “Goals reflect the desires of our hearts and our vision of what we can accomplish. Through goals and plans, our hopes are transformed into action. Goal setting and planning are acts of faith.”⁵

Do not trifle with sacred things. Once you reach a marriageable age, don’t just date for fun. Never compromise your eternal birthright by doing anything that would deprive you of making the most important covenants in

the temple. As you treat every date as a potential eternal companion, you will never do inappropriate things that would physically or spiritually harm your date or compromise your own worthiness and darken your vision. As you remain worthy, your spiritual perception will never be dimmed, and you will always be entitled to the whisperings of the Spirit. The Holy Ghost will encourage you and confirm the correctness of these most important decisions in your life, even if at times you are scared to death.

Hold yourself accountable to the Lord with respect to your vision and goals in life. If there is something you need to repent of, don't hesitate a second to do so. Both this life and eternal life are too important to "procrastinate the day of your repentance" (Alma 13:27; 34:33). Follow the invitation of a prophet of God, who encouraged us to "ask the Father in the name of Jesus for what things soever ye shall stand in need. Doubt not, but be believing, and begin as in times of old, and come unto the Lord with all your heart, and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling before him" (Mormon 9:27).

I recognize that some of you, given your circumstances, may need to adapt the ideal vision of a family to fit your personal situation. But I have learned that the Lord will help us as we act in faith and follow the ideal to the extent possible.

The Principle of Finishing

The gospel of Jesus Christ includes a most comforting component. It is the *finishing* or *completing* aspect of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Moroni admonished us to always stay on the right way, "relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who [is] the author and the finisher of [our] faith" (Moroni 6:4).

Because of our faith in Jesus Christ, we can pursue the course in life we need to take. But if we stumble because of weakness or missed opportunities, He will reach out to us, fill in the gap, and become the finisher of our faith. He

stated, "For I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts" (D&C 137:9).

From *Handbook 2* we read, "Faithful members whose circumstances do not allow them to receive the blessings of eternal marriage and parenthood in this life will receive all promised blessings in the eternities, provided they keep the covenants they have made with God."⁶

I testify that the Lord meant what He said when He stated that "it is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18) and that His ultimate desire for all of His children is that they receive "a fulness of joy" (Moses 7:67). Therefore, always keep your vision before you and "strive for the ideal of living in an eternal family. This means preparing to become worthy spouses and loving fathers or

mothers. In some cases, these blessings will not be fulfilled until the next life, but the ultimate goal is the same for all."⁷

I know there are as many different life circumstances as there are people in the world. I know there are differences in cultures, traditions, and expectations. However, these doctrines and principles are eternal and true, and they stand independent of our personal life situations.

I have every confidence that as you sincerely ponder and prayerfully consider these doctrines and principles, you will be able to develop a personal vision for your life that will be pleasing to the Lord and lead to your greatest happiness. ■

From a devotional address, "What Do You Envision in Life?" delivered at Brigham Young University on December 2, 2014. For the full text in English, visit speeches.byu.edu.

NOTES

1. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129.
2. Spencer W. Kimball, "Guidelines to Carry Forth the Work of God in Cleanliness," *Ensign*, May 1974, 6.
3. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," 129.
4. Julie B. Beck, comments made during general conference training, Oct. 2009.
5. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), 146.
6. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 1.3.3.
7. *Handbook 2*, 1.3.3.