

# *How to Be Happy Now—and Forever*

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**A**lthough I am delighted to be with you, it is a humbling experience to look out at each of you from right here in front and then continue that gaze all the way up to the top rows of this vast building! From this perspective, though, the thing that catches my eye is the light in your faces, which indicates such great potential for future happiness and success.

Perspective is an interesting phenomenon. Depending on our position or on what instruments we use, what we are looking at seems to change, often dramatically. For instance, when we look at the moon with our naked eye, it appears to be a smooth, flat, silver disk that glows softly and seems to either expand or get smaller night after night. Viewed through a powerful telescope, however, the moon looks much different. We discover that the part that seems to be missing is actually hidden in shadow and can now be seen to

complete the spherical shape. We can see that it is full of craters and dark spots and does not radiate with its own light but reflects light from the sun.

Microscopes provide an even different perspective. These instruments let us look at something very closely—so close that unless you know what you are looking at, the object might be hard to identify. This perspective is useful in discovering very small details that can make a very great difference to the whole organism or system.

How about an overhead perspective? A view from high above can make a landscape look much different than the same location viewed at eye level—or even foot level. And then there is the train-track perspective. Straight lines seem to converge as they stretch farther into the distance. Artists use this technique to make our brains “see” distance, depth, and position in their representations of objects actually drawn on a flat surface.

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Speaking of seeing with our brain, I have always been intrigued by the famous Penrose stairs that seem to ascend and descend at the same time in a never-ending sequence. In high school I practiced drawing another optical illusion called the impossible trident on the edges of my note-paper until I could do it without looking at the reference. I was fascinated with the figure, which presents two perspectives at once—an impossible scenario for the brain to readily accept.

Perspective can also be a particular attitude toward something, or a point of view. Looking at a situation through the lens of our own experiences, we tend to suppose that our perspective is the “right” one and discard other viewpoints as flawed or incomplete. Even the choice of ice cream flavors can have us shaking our head in disbelief at the incorrectness of our friend’s judgment. What, you don’t think roasted almond fudge is the best flavor *ever*?!

The viewpoint that makes all things clear is an eternal perspective: the perfect, all-encompassing perspective of our Heavenly Father. With His ability to see and know and understand all things past, present, and future in a higher and broader and deeper way than we possibly can, His perspective is complete.<sup>1</sup>

From His vantage point, God sees us and everything around us “as they really are, and . . . as they really will be.”<sup>2</sup> His viewpoint is long term rather than being limited to the here and now, allowing Him to see our divine potential rather than just our present or past condition. And He looks at all His creations through the lens of love. As if using a powerful microscope, He sees into the heart and mind of each of His children from a perspective of loving mercy and eager support rather than hope-crushing criticism. And with a range more complete than the most powerful telescope, He sees the big picture, viewing progress in individuals as well as galaxies from all eternity to all eternity.

Back on our current, everyday earth, daily challenges can sometimes seem overwhelming. As prophesied, today the whole earth is “in commotion.”<sup>3</sup> Trouble is on every side, in every city and community. Wars and rumors of wars, famines

and earthquakes, and false prophets and ubiquitous iniquity<sup>4</sup> are our everyday news. The reports we hear are colored by the opinions of those who shout the loudest or desire power above all else. It can be difficult to feel secure in this world with its ever-present dangers to spirit, mind, and body.

And then there are our own personal challenges. Getting that project done with excellence *and* by the deadline, finding answers to relationship questions, living with the consequences of poor choices made by you and by others that impact you, dealing with health issues and financial constraints, and wrestling with a host of other problems—both those shared by all who are here *and* those challenges unique to you—can distract and discourage.

### Keys to Keeping an Eternal Perspective

How does having an eternal perspective help us overcome these here-and-now personal challenges? How do we find joy while experiencing these daily and sometimes hourly trials and tribulations? Embracing an eternal perspective can play a large part in a successful earthly journey. Beginning with a knowledge of and faith in God’s plan of happiness, having trust and confidence in Jesus Christ’s Atonement, and planning, prioritizing, and then acting in faith—and patience—are keys to keeping an eternal perspective that allows us to progress and be happy regardless of circumstances.

#### *1. Have a Knowledge of and Faith in God’s Plan of Happiness*

Let’s think about these keys. First, *understanding our divine identity is foundational to our progress and happiness*. When we know *who* we are, *why* we are here, and *where* we want to go, we can make choices that bring the greatest happiness and avoid the most pain and anguish, both now and in the eternities.

When you know that “ye were also in the beginning with the Father,”<sup>5</sup> you realize you are an eternal being—and one who is literally the offspring of God. Think of that! What a glorious spirit-hood we must have had in that premortal time! Your divine worth is absolute because of

your divine parentage. Knowing that God's perspective is based on "knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come,"<sup>6</sup> you have an assurance of your unchanging value. Because of the choices you made premortally, you have an essential role in God's plan of happiness at a very significant time in the history of the world. Your Heavenly Parents prepared you to come to earth with those truths embedded in your spirit,<sup>7</sup> and you and I were excited to try to become like Them. We saw Their happiness and instinctively wanted that same joy. After all, that is what we were created for: "Men [and women] are, that they might have joy."<sup>8</sup>

President Russell M. Nelson noted that joy is

*a principle that is key to our spiritual survival. It is a principle that will only become more important as the tragedies and travesties around us increase. . . .*

*. . . The joy we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives.*

*When the focus of our lives is on God's plan of salvation . . . and Jesus Christ and His gospel, we can feel joy regardless of what is happening—or not happening—in our lives. Joy comes from and because of Him. He is the source of all joy.<sup>9</sup>*

## **2. Have Trust and Confidence in Jesus Christ and His Atonement**

Having trust and confidence in Jesus Christ and His Atonement is the second key: *When we trust the Savior and the reality of His infinite Atonement, we can progress eternally.*

Even after we get started on the covenant path, all of us have a tendency to meander to the edge of the road or to step or stumble off. In some manner we might lose our way for a time. The joyful truth is that because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, none of us is eternally lost! Knowing that our Savior has atoned for our sins and provided a perfect example of how to live in this mortal period of existence gives us great hope and reassurance that we can, indeed, become more like Him, feel joy in this life, and eventually return to our heavenly home. His redemptive power is total because "he descended below all things"<sup>10</sup> and took upon

Himself the pains, afflictions, temptations, sicknesses, infirmities, and sins of every one of us.<sup>11</sup> He understands how to lift and strengthen each of us in our individual challenges because He has felt every single one of them.

Not only is Jesus Christ willing to help us, but He is waiting and wanting to help us! Remember the parable of the prodigal son? The prodigal son's father did not wait for him to arrive all the way home; as soon as he saw his son coming, he ran out to meet him. Our Savior has a "distance view" too. He sees us "yet a great way off"<sup>12</sup> and meets us there, ready to heal and forgive, comfort and encourage, as we come to Him in our difficult trials. With His help we can overcome adversity, withstand temptations, and progress on the path back to our Heavenly Parents.

## **3. Plan**

However, in order to really progress, we must be intentional. You have heard it said that if you don't have a plan, you will be part of someone else's plan by default. So the third key is to *plan*. You ask, "Where do I start?" Start at the very beginning—with your divine identity and purpose.

Some of you have already had really difficult experiences in your young lives. Given the negative messages you may have received from others about your divine worth through those experiences, you may wonder if you really *are* a cherished son or daughter of Heavenly Parents and if it is even possible to become like Them after all you have experienced. The answer is an emphatic yes! In scriptural language, I would "exhort" you—which means to invite you with all the fervent sincerity of my heart—to learn about and rejoice in your eternal identity and purpose.

Make a plan—just like you plan your study of chemistry or literature or statistics or music theory—to understand your divine identity and to realize your true potential. Read and study the scriptures, both ancient and modern. Read and study the words of living prophets; accept their invitations to act. Regularly attend the temple, where you will be reminded of Heavenly Father's plan of happiness and your potential for eternal

progress. Serve others, both as assigned and in your daily interactions with strangers as well as family and friends. Following the example of Jesus Christ in this simple way will expand your ability to recognize blessings from heaven. Honor the Sabbath and partake of the sacrament with humble purpose. Keep the commandments and the promises you made in baptismal and temple covenants. And, most of all, pray to your Father in Heaven often, tell Him how you feel, ask for His help, and watch and listen for His answers in your daily life.

If done consistently, these small yet simple behaviors will yield great spiritual and even temporal benefits. They will help you know who you really are and help you avoid the traps of the adversary, who tells you that you are merely the product of your past environment or that you cannot change or that your worth is determined by your mistakes or the effects of others' mistakes on you. These ideas are false but can sound convincing when you are feeling discouraged—and if you neglect to connect to heaven. Without these foundational activities, your eternal perspective will be clouded, and it will be difficult to remember who you are, why you are here, and where you want to go.

The impossible trident reminds me of worldly philosophies that try to present two opposing concepts as truth. At first glance we accept these as real. Then, when we take a closer look, we realize there is a problem. As we look again, we can begin to think the juxtaposition is pretty clever or appealing and try to reconcile the false idea with the true one. In the back of our minds we recognize that both concepts can't be correct, but we convince ourselves that there is a way to "make it so." Just like I practiced duplicating the drawing of the impossible trident until I could do it without looking at the original, we repeat the erroneous philosophy until we become convinced that it can be true.

For instance, we have been told by ancient as well as living prophets as an absolute truth that keeping the law of chastity will bring happiness now and in the future, yet the world says any number of varying degrees of noncompliance are preferable and possibly even healthier for expressing sexuality. Another falsehood competing with

eternal truth is that worthiness requirements take away our individual agency. We have been taught that being worthy to be in the temple blesses and protects us in a myriad of ways, yet some strain at the strictness of those requirements and rationalize that personal "freedom" is more important than obedience to God's laws.

Somehow we convince ourselves that we know better and more than our Heavenly Father when we ignore His entreaties to "come unto Christ, and be perfected in him,"<sup>13</sup> preferring to go our own way. That inevitably results in learning through sad experience. My former father-in-law used to say with wry humor, "Good judgment comes from experience, and experience comes from bad judgment." Mistakes can be learning opportunities *if* we choose to change. In every case the adversary wants us to concentrate on an earthly perspective, thereby limiting our ability to progress eternally. And progression is the purpose of this mortal experience!

How many of you are adults? If the show of hands means that you are eighteen years of age or older, you are correct: you are a legal adult. However, recent articles suggest that many people your age do not consider themselves an adult. They think that because they don't own a home or don't have three children under the age of five or are not on a fast track in their desired career, they are not yet "grown up." Let me tell you a secret: no matter how old you get, you will still feel the need to grow up!

*Adulting*—one current term for "growing up"—does not necessarily mean progressing by the world's definition of success. Some say becoming an adult includes indulging in behaviors that are clearly damaging to children but somehow have been accepted in the world as appropriate for those of legal age. That criterion is not a godly one! Becoming an adult *does* mean taking responsibility for your actions, looking to contribute to the happiness of others rather than just focusing on yourself, and keeping commitments to God and man. This is what Helaman, the great prophet in the winding-up days before the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, taught his sons Nephi and Lehi as "they began to grow up unto the Lord."<sup>14</sup>

Unlike our growing physically, we do not mature spiritually unless we are willing to change and move to a higher, holier way of living. President Nelson has observed that we have to walk away from the world's false philosophies and let go of some things that "may seem harmless"<sup>15</sup> in order "to grow up unto the Lord." Are there some activities or pursuits that curtail your progress spiritually, physically, socially, or intellectually? What did Jesus do in His mortal life to grow "from grace to grace"<sup>16</sup> and to increase "in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man"?<sup>17</sup> He was humble—willing to learn—and obedient, acted with love, and used His gifts and abilities to serve others. He focused on doing His Father's will and kept an eternal perspective. As He learned and served in this way, He also lifted and strengthened others and experienced a deep joy that will last through the eternities. We can never go wrong in choosing to follow the example of Jesus Christ.

#### 4. Prioritize

So make a plan, and as you plan, *prioritize*, which is the next key. Regardless of the nature of your challenges, looking at them with an eternal perspective will help you understand the right priorities. Putting things in perspective is a valuable skill that allows us to progress in the midst of sometimes confusing information or conflicting viewpoints. It helps us understand what is important and what is not. Rather than being paralyzed by uncertainty, we can use an eternal perspective as a tool to determine our direction when worldly signs may be pointing the wrong way.

Just like the telescope, which gives additional information about things that seem very far removed from the here and now, an eternal perspective gives us a more complete picture based on truths that do not change with time. And similar to a microscope, an eternal perspective encourages us to do a deep dive into self-evaluation. That up-close-and-personal check will help you know where you need to change, which in turn will focus you on the most important and most impactful choices that will bring you closer to your eternal goals.

When Jesus was twelve years old, He traveled to Jerusalem for the feast days with His family. As the group departed for home, they discovered that He was not with them. Joseph and Mary searched for three days until they found Him teaching in the temple. His response to why He had not come with them is instructive. He replied, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"<sup>18</sup> He understood the focus of His life and prioritized accordingly.

Have you ever asked God, "What should I be about?" His answer will no doubt be instructive to you. Take the time to ask and ponder, discover what is of highest priority, and then use your time accordingly. The Lord has promised that when we do the most important things first, the other things will be accomplished in the right time and order. Elder David A. Bednar encouraged us

*to not allow the concerns of this world to so dominate our time and energy that we neglect the eternal things that matter most. . . . Sometimes we try to run so fast that we may forget where we are going and why we are running.*<sup>19</sup>

Praying, studying the scriptures, ministering to others with love as the Savior did, honoring the Sabbath, and attending the temple—those small and simple things actually "elevate our vision from the things of the world to the blessings of eternity"<sup>20</sup> and will yield astonishing results when we keep them in the foreground.

Just a couple weeks ago, I met two delightful women in Rome, Italy. One is single and in her thirties; the other has been married for twenty years and has not been able to have children. You might expect both to be unhappy and to be pining for what they most wish for in the world. However, they have each chosen to focus on their current blessings and are living full lives of peace and joy, despite not having all their eternal goals met—yet. Literally every person I met who knew them enthusiastically expressed their love, deep admiration, and appreciation for these wonderful women, commenting that their consistent contributions to others' happiness were invaluable. Each of them has chosen to see her life with an eternal

perspective and has prioritized those elements she does have control of with that perspective.

Brandon, another remarkable friend, has chosen to live with that same perspective.<sup>21</sup> Paralyzed in an accident at age eighteen, just before he was supposed to leave on a full-time mission, he has spent as many years living with a lack of physical mobility as he did with a fully functioning and highly athletic body. Brandon will be the first to tell you that the change was excruciatingly difficult to accept, yet he has chosen to use his considerable gifts and talents to bless others, rather than dwell on what he wishes he still had. As he serves in a bishopric, his sensitivity to the Spirit allows him to understand, comfort, and encourage those with whom he counsels. Again, choosing to prioritize those things over which he does have control allows him to experience unexpected joy and to progress eternally.

Life is certainly not “fair” or “equal” when individual circumstances are considered. Yet the Lord gives each of us what we need if we are willing to accept it. Trials and challenges not only are inevitable, but they are *required* for improvement. It is true, as the author of Hebrews wrote:

*No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.*<sup>22</sup>

And when we make poor choices, we must live with and hopefully learn from the consequences. The book of Proverbs gives us the eternal perspective on those consequences:

*My son [or daughter], despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction:*

*For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son [or daughter] in whom he delighteth.*<sup>23</sup>

Because He loves us, our Heavenly Father helps us see the errors we have made. When we recognize and own those errors, we can choose to change and improve and thereby actually be happier than if we had continued down the original easier but damaging path.

### 5. Act in Faith

Planning and prioritizing give us direction. *Acting in faith* is the next step. You may be hesitant to move forward, thinking that you will make mistakes—and you are right! But stepping forward is the only way we can progress. In this past general conference, Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf said, “Remember that discipleship is not about doing things perfectly; it’s about doing things intentionally.”<sup>24</sup>

Mistakes and even failures happen to all of us. When something doesn’t work out as planned, it can be discouraging. Let me tell you about a failure experience of mine. Each year my family looks forward to a special treat at Christmastime: lemon tarts made from a recipe of Emma Jane Eastham Ratcliffe, my faith-filled English great-great-grandmother. These delicious morsels are a palm-sized cup of delicate flaky crust filled with intensely flavored, buttery, sweet lemon curd.

The first time I made them, they looked beautiful cradled in the muffin tins, but as I attempted to remove them, each one crumbled into a mess. Virtually none of them came out intact. My first thought was, “I am never doing this again!” However, with the encouragement of my family, who thought the piles of gooey lemon crumbs tasted great even though they weren’t at all beautiful, I tried again. These many years later, most of the tarts come out whole. In the process I learned that it takes a lot of time and careful attention to detail as well as patience and persistence to make something that is of high quality.

Spiritual progress also takes time and attention to detail, as well as patience and persistence. And no matter how many mistakes we make, the Savior is there to help us learn how to do and be better. We don’t have to be perfect all at once; what matters is our effort. Our Heavenly Father doesn’t expect perfection from us in this life, but He does expect us to keep trying.

Think again of train tracks. The perspective seems to narrow as they stretch into the distance, but acting with an eternal perspective is actually the opposite: the more completely we live the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the more expansive our future becomes.

Recently I met a woman who had spent the last four years in jail. As a young adult she listened to the philosophies of the world and convinced herself that she could exercise all the options offered. Yet as time passed, she eventually lost the power to choose for herself. Only when she became humble and trusted in God's ability to heal her was she then able to walk away from the enticing behaviors and attitudes she had adopted. Now she is filled with faith, confident in the Lord's ability to help her fulfill her divine potential. She has a world of possibilities open to her and rejoices in her freedom to make those choices that will lead her back to her heavenly home.

And what about that bird's-eye view compared to standing on the street or looking up from below? An eternal perspective gives us the ability to see the big picture, as well as to see our fellow travelers as the potential-rich individuals they really are, while also reminding us of the need to be humble—because we all stumble at times, and we all need help to reach our goal of eternal life.

Like a simple magnifying glass that brings things into focus using the light of the sun, the gospel of Jesus Christ will bring your life into focus with light from the Son of God, our Savior and Redeemer. He looks at all His creations with the light of love, knowing that love melts differences, softens heartache, lessens pain, lifts spirits, and empowers progress.

So, as King Benjamin taught:

*Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend.*<sup>25</sup>

Believe that you are, indeed, a child of Heavenly Parents, that you were loved and taught eternal truths by Them. Believe that keeping God's commandments and following the guidance of our prophet will help you become what you really want to become.

I promise that as you plan, prioritize, and act with humble faith in God's love and in the

Atonement of Jesus Christ, you will develop an eternal perspective that will help you overcome the challenges of your life and you will feel unexpected, even indescribable, joy. You will be guided and blessed, lifted and strengthened to follow the covenant path that leads to becoming your very best eternal self. Of this I testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. See Isaiah 55:8–9.
2. Jacob 4:13.
3. D&C 45:26.
4. See Matthew 24:6–7, 11–12.
5. D&C 93:23.
6. D&C 93:24.
7. See D&C 138:56.
8. 2 Nephi 2:25.
9. Russell M. Nelson, "Joy and Spiritual Survival," *Ensign*, November 2016.
10. D&C 88:6.
11. See Alma 7:11–13.
12. Luke 15:20.
13. Moroni 10:32.
14. Helaman 3:21.
15. Russell M. Nelson, "Spiritual Treasures," *Ensign*, November 2019.
16. D&C 93:13.
17. Luke 2:52.
18. Luke 2:49.
19. David A. Bednar, "Exceeding Great and Precious Promises," *Ensign*, November 2017.
20. Bednar, "Exceeding Great and Precious Promises."
21. See "Push Forward in Life: A Survivor's Story," Hope Works video, Inspiration, the Church of Jesus Christ, [churchofjesuschrist.org/inspiration/latter-day-saints-channel/watch/series/hope-works/push-forward-in-life-a-survivors-story-hope-works](http://churchofjesuschrist.org/inspiration/latter-day-saints-channel/watch/series/hope-works/push-forward-in-life-a-survivors-story-hope-works).
22. Hebrews 12:11.
23. Proverbs 3:11–12.
24. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Your Great Adventure," *Ensign*, November 2019.
25. Mosiah 4:9.