

Harmony of Body and Spirit: A Key to Happiness

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My dear brothers and sisters, I am thrilled to be with you today on this magnificent campus with my dear wife, Valérie. We express our love to President and Sister Worthen and to each of you. For the Presiding Bishop of the Church, these types of speaking occasions are fairly rare, so I feel greatly honored and very blessed to have this opportunity to address you.

Today I want to share some thoughts on how to build harmony between our bodies and our spirits, which is key to finding true happiness both in our mortal existence and in the life to come.

I recently rewatched the movie *Beauty and the Beast*. I really enjoy this movie—and not only because it takes place in France or because I can easily relate to Lumière’s funny accent!

I believe Belle is a lot like you. She is bright and independent, an avid reader, and anxious to learn about the world. At the same time, she often feels different from those around her. She is blessed to have a generous and compassionate spirit. She likes authenticity and has no taste for worldly affectations or for what the Book of Mormon calls

“the vain things of the world,”¹ whether it be power, material wealth, or obsession with physical appearance.

Belle is taken prisoner in a haunted castle by a hideous and repulsive beast. He is none other than a young prince who, because of a spell, is trapped in the body of a terrifying monster. Belle does not judge the Beast and is able to see beyond his repugnant appearance. She understands that his embittered character, his rude manners, and his fits of anger are only a façade that hides a tortured soul who only desires to love.

Under the soothing influence of Belle, an astonishing transformation takes place in the Beast—one that begins in the very depths of his soul and eventually results in a complete physical transformation. Because of Belle’s love, the spell is broken and the young prince regains his original appearance, to the great delight of the people who come to hail their new king and queen.

I love the underlying message of the film, which can help us as we search for genuine and enduring happiness. Each of us is made up of two

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elements—the physical body and the spirit. And these two parts of every human being are closely connected and have a very intimate and reciprocal relationship. The Beast’s physical body, with which the prince had been encumbered, made him grumpy and asocial, but when his heart changed and he was able to recover his joyful and sociable nature, his physical appearance also changed.

This applies to all of us. Our physical condition can profoundly influence our spiritual wellness. Conversely, our spiritual strength and the feelings of our hearts deeply affect our physical well-being. In other words, the beautiful harmony that can exist between our physical and spiritual natures is an important condition for finding true happiness in our mortal journey and in the eternities to come.

This important principle is at the core of the doctrine taught by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and is explained in section 93 of the Doctrine and Covenants:

For man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy;

And when separated, man cannot receive a fulness of joy.²

The scripture refers to the joy we can all experience at the time of our resurrection, when our bodies and spirits are united again. I believe it also applies to our mortal existence and the joy and fulfillment we may experience when there is complete harmony between the spiritual and temporal sides of our natures—which results from being in harmony with the Lord.

In the Christian world, some believe that our bodies are a hindrance to the elevation of our spirits. Those with this view feel that we should keep our lives free from the contamination of physical elements, which they see as fundamentally carnal and evil. Certainly, as Alma taught his son Corianton,

all men that are in a state of nature, or I would say, in a carnal state, are in the gall of bitterness and in the

bonds of iniquity; they are without God in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore, they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness.³

But just because we are physical beings does not mean we are consigned to be carnal and evil.

Modern revelation, as expressed by former First Presidency member Hugh B. Brown, clarifies “that matter is not essentially evil but that its purpose is to serve [the] spirit. . . . There is a beneficent and eternal relationship between spirit and element.”⁴ In reality, the spirit cannot be made perfect without the body. President Joseph F. Smith said, “The spirit without the body is not perfect, it is not capacitated, without the body, to possess a fullness of the glory of God, and, therefore, it can not, without the body, fulfil its destiny.”⁵

God and His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, are both immortal and glorified beings endowed with bodies of flesh and bones. And it is through that same condition of the perfect and everlasting union between body and spirit that we, too, can one day become exalted beings. The purpose of our lives, therefore, is not to disavow our physical natures but to bring them in harmony with our spirits.

My dear brothers and sisters, I invite you to do a little introspection. What is the relationship between your physical and your spiritual natures? How do they influence each other? How can you build harmony between these two sides of yourselves?

Let’s review a few principles I believe will guide you in answering these important questions.

1. Our Spiritual Strength Influences Our Physical Well-Being

To suffocate, to feel oppressed, to be a bundle of nerves, to have a knot in one’s stomach, to jump for joy, or to be tickled pink—all these expressions rightly reference the constant interrelationship between the spirit and the body. Our inner thoughts, feelings, and emotions translate most often into physical sensations—whether positive or negative.

Like me, you may have noticed that goodness radiates a certain kind of beauty. Is it not remarkable that our noble feelings become reflected in our physical appearance? Those with pure and charitable hearts have a lovely countenance that is charming, is attractive, and draws people to them. I am not speaking about beauty as defined by the world, which values only the perfection of the outward form and disregards the inner spirit. Rather, I am speaking of the beauty people radiate because of their inner wholesomeness.

I like what Victor Hugo said:

*No external grace is complete unless it is vivified by interior beauty. The beauty of the soul is spread like a mysterious light over the beauty of the body.*⁶

A few years ago, our family spent a few days at the Domaine des Écureuils. It is a bed-and-breakfast establishment situated in the heart of a beautiful park in Dordogne, a picturesque region in southwest France. When we arrived, we were captivated by the beauty that flowed from the old stone structure surrounded by majestic trees and fragrant flower beds. We immediately felt peaceful and happy—as though we were in the middle of a little paradise.

The next day, in looking more closely at the place, I began to see some imperfections. Some walls were falling apart, the alignment of stones was imperfect and rickety, and here and there the vegetation had come out of the pots to climb along the walls and stairs. Despite everything, a peaceful spirit and an amazing light flowed from the scene—making it a harmonious, almost idyllic setting. The true beauty was not in the perfection of the physical forms; rather, it was in the purity, the harmony, the radiance, and the light that emanated from them.

In our journey through life, we must be careful not to give in to the norms the world wants to impose upon us. True beauty is the result of a subtle alchemy and a delicate balance, which in large part comes from our personal inner light, rather than from aesthetic or physical criteria alone.

I recently read the remarkable account of the life of the French writer Jacques Lusseyran.

At the age of seven, Jacques fell while at school, striking the corner of his teacher's desk. The violent blow caused serious injury to his eyes, leaving him completely and permanently blind.

Jacques later wrote:

Being blind was not at all as I imagined it. . . . People . . . told me that to be blind meant not to see. Yet . . . I saw. Not at once, I admit. Not in the days immediately after the operation. . . .

*. . . [But in time] I was aware of a radiance. . . . Light was there [along with joy].*⁷

As Jacques grew, he acquired, because of his blindness, what he called a “sense of human beings.”⁸ This sense helped him see people through the tone of their voice.

This gift became vital when he was fifteen years old and the Nazi regime occupied Paris in June 1940. Although very young, he and his friends formed an underground resistance movement. The group chose Jacques to be their leader.

Of that time, Jacques wrote:

*Every day, including Sunday, I got up . . . before it was light. The first thing I did was to kneel down and pray: “My God, give me the strength to keep my promises. . . . Now that twenty young men . . . are waiting for my orders, tell me what orders to give them. By myself I know how to do almost nothing, but if you will it I am capable of almost everything.”*⁹

All who were nominated to join the movement had to first meet with “the blind man.”¹⁰ Jacques would listen not so much to their words as to their souls. In one year this organization of twenty grew to more than six hundred.

There was just one man he admitted to the movement of whom he was not absolutely sure, and it was that man who later betrayed them. Jacques and his companions were arrested by the Gestapo in 1943. They were shipped to Buchenwald with two thousand other Frenchmen. Only thirty of those two thousand were alive when the camp was liberated. Jacques was twenty years old.

Jacques had suffered through one of the darkest periods in modern history and had been on the brink of death. Nevertheless, he wrote:

I have not a single evil memory of those three hundred and thirty days of extreme wretchedness. I was carried by a hand. I was covered by a wing. . . . I [became] free now to help the others. . . .

I could try to show other people how to go about holding on to life. I could turn toward them the flow of light and joy which had grown so abundant in me.¹¹

Jacques was like those of whom Isaiah spoke: “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.”¹² We can all learn to live by that light, for, as the Savior taught, “And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things.”¹³

Like Jacques, we all can find within ourselves the spiritual resources needed to develop and magnify our physical abilities. Some of us may be suffering from sickness or other physical adversity. Many, if not most of us, look at ourselves in the mirror and see something we do not like.

Please do not allow perceived physical imperfections to define you. Strengthening your inner light should be your focus. By doing so, you will develop an inward beauty that radiates in your outward appearance, improves your physical well-being, invigorates your natural senses, and makes you a happier person.

2. Our Physical Appearance Impacts Our Spirituality and That of Those Around Us

The popular belief is that “clothes don’t make the man.” However, our outward appearance is not insignificant. The manner in which we take care of our bodies, the way in which we dress, and how we behave all have a significant influence on our personal spirituality and thus impact those around us.

It is no coincidence that we have everyday guidelines in the Church to help us preserve our spirituality in connection with our physical appearance. For example, missionaries and Church university students like you are given guidelines pertaining to the way you dress and your physical appearance. The youth of the Church are encouraged to follow principles in *For the Strength of Youth* that deal with multiple

practical issues such as dress and appearance, language, music and dancing, and physical health.

In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul wrote:

Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you . . . ?

. . . Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.¹⁴

To glorify God in our bodies is to put our external appearance and behavior in tune with our highest spiritual desires. By so doing, we allow the Spirit of God to reside in us. The Spirit enlightens us, and we become lights for others.

I was touched by the personal story told to me by Shawn, a former ministering brother to our family. Shawn grew up in a family of Church members who were less active, and during his youth he almost never attended church. After graduating from high school, he began attending the University of Utah and living the carefree lifestyle of a worldly young man. He was blessed to get a part-time job cleaning windows in an office building every night. The building was located on South Temple Street, right across from the Salt Lake Temple.

While he was cleaning the windowpanes, Shawn often had a view that looked down over the temple, and he started observing and paying attention to the individuals who came out of the temple. He became impressed with the countenances of those individuals. They were all dressed in their very best Sunday clothes and had peaceful expressions on their faces. They seemed filled with joy and with light. Often he asked himself what they were doing inside the temple that made them so joyful when they came out.

In contrast, Shawn got in the habit of going to a student nightclub several evenings each week. This club was not a calm or serene place. The ambiance was often rowdy, filled with the odor of alcohol and dominated by the boisterous conversations of its patrons. One evening while he was sitting at a table with friends, the group came up with the idea to pin a photograph of the Salt Lake Temple on the wall. They started throwing darts at the image, accompanied by their insults and hateful words. Shawn began to feel extremely

uncomfortable. Something inspired him to stand up and leave that unhallowed environment.

When his friends asked him why he was leaving, without hesitation he said, “Someday I hope to have a family. And if I am ever blessed to have daughters, I hope that none of them will ever marry guys like you!”

One more question came: “Where do you think you are going?”

He turned back to the group, pointed to the picture of the temple on the wall, and said, “I’m going there.”

Then he left the club while they hurled insults and jeers at him. When he got into his car, he took a deep breath, and at that very moment he knew exactly what he needed to do and where he needed to go. Within a few weeks he came back to the Church and decided to serve a full-time mission.

Today, Shawn is the happy father of a family deeply anchored in the gospel. When his friends ask what gave him the courage to leave his previous lifestyle, he replies without hesitation, “It is the Spirit that I felt when I looked at the house of the Lord and watched the dress and countenances of the people who came out of it.”¹⁵

My young brothers and sisters, I encourage you to pay careful attention to the physical image and appearance that you present to the world. It may directly influence your spiritual life and the lives of those around you.

3. The Lord Recognizes the Importance of Both Temporal and Spiritual Principles

Because of the constant interaction that exists between the temporal and spiritual aspects of our lives, it is no surprise that the Church not only teaches spiritual principles but also provides counsel with respect to the most practical aspects of our daily lives.

Church teachings include many commandments and principles that are both spiritual and temporal in nature, such as the Word of Wisdom, tithing, the law of the fast, the need for education and employment, proper handling of family finances, emergency preparedness, food storage, and many others. Section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants even includes counsel on how we

should manage our sleep, stating, “Cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated.”¹⁶

Allow me to emphasize two important gospel principles that pertain to the way we respect our bodies. These principles can have a huge impact on our mortal well-being and eternal destiny.

Take Care of Your Health

The Church *General Handbook* states:

*The Lord has commanded members to take care of their minds and bodies. They should obey the Word of Wisdom, eat nutritious food, exercise regularly, control their weight, and get adequate sleep. They should shun substances or practices that abuse their bodies or minds and that could lead to addiction. They should practice good sanitation and hygiene and obtain adequate medical and dental care.*¹⁷

Some of you might think that as young people you are immune to physical troubles. On the contrary, the habits you establish now pertaining to your personal well-being will impact you both temporally and spiritually for the rest of your lives. Your focus should not be on following the vain trends of the world. It is not simply a question of losing some fat here or there or weight lifting an additional twenty pounds to appear as buff as your roommate! The goal is to feel better and to find a temporal and spiritual equilibrium. This will give you the best chance to have a lifetime of good health, which in turn will bring you joy and confidence in your mortal abilities and a better awareness of your eternal potential.

Be Sexually Pure

My young friends, your bodies have been blessed with the sacred power to give life. As President Boyd K. Packer so marvelously put it:

The capacity to kindle other lives is a supernal blessing. . . . This power is not an incidental part of the plan of happiness. It is the key—the very key.

*Whether . . . this power [is used] as the eternal laws require . . . will forever determine [who one] will become.*¹⁸

Physical intimacy between a man and a woman can be a beautiful and marvelous experience when it takes place within those bonds of marriage established by the Lord. However, few earthly experiences require more effort than this: to keep natural physical impulses in harmony with the profound aspirations of the soul.

No one can state, “I will follow the Lord with all of my heart,” and at the same time maintain, “I can do whatever I want with my body.” These two things are intimately connected. The manner in which you use or abuse the sacred power of procreation will be a key factor in determining your happiness and your spiritual progress both in this life and in the eternities to come.

I plead with you to always remain sexually pure and to channel your natural, God-given passions into the service of your highest spiritual aspirations. No immediate pleasure warrants jeopardizing the eternal promises you hold so dear. No fleeting satisfaction is worth compromising the trust placed in you by your Heavenly Father and by your current or future spouse.

Please remember that one of the essential objectives of our earthly existence is for our spirits to take control of the physical elements of our lives so both can work in harmony to serve higher and eternal purposes. It is one of the conditions we must fulfill to find true happiness in this life and inherit eternal glory.

At the end of the written tale of *Beauty and the Beast*, when the Beast changes into a handsome prince, a fairy appears and whispers to Belle these marvelous words:

*“Beauty, . . . come and receive the reward of your judicious choice; you have preferred virtue before either wit or beauty, and deserve to find a person in whom all these qualifications are united: you are going to be a great queen.”*¹⁹

I know that God and His Son, Jesus Christ, live and love us with an infinite love. In choosing virtue as the standard by which you bring into harmony your physical and spiritual inheritances,

you will qualify yourselves to one day become kings and queens in the eternal kingdom prepared by our Father in Heaven and receive “of his fulness, and of his glory.”²⁰ This is His greatest desire for you. To this I testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Alma 5:53.
2. D&C 93:33–34.
3. Alma 41:11.
4. Hugh B. Brown, in *CR*, April 1957, 104.
5. Joseph F. Smith, in *JD* 19:259–60 (11 April 1878).
6. Victor Hugo, in *Victor Hugo's Intellectual Autobiography (Postscriptum de Ma Vie [1901])*, trans. Lorenzo O'Rourke (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1907), 397.
7. Jacques Lusseyran, in “Revelation of Light,” chapter 2 in *And There Was Light: Autobiography of Jacques Lusseyran, Blind Hero of the French Resistance*, trans. Elizabeth R. Cameron (New York: Parabola Books, 1998), 15–17.
8. Lusseyran, in “The Plunge into Courage,” chapter 10 in *And There Was Light*, 169.
9. Lusseyran, in “The Plunge into Courage,” 162.
10. Lusseyran, in “The Plunge into Courage,” 169.
11. Lusseyran, in “The Living and the Dead,” chapter 15 in *And There Was Light*, 282.
12. Isaiah 9:2.
13. D&C 88:67.
14. 1 Corinthians 6:19–20.
15. Personal conversation.
16. D&C 88:124.
17. “Health,” *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, July 2020* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ, 2020), 22.1.1.1 (p. 159), ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
18. Boyd K. Packer, “Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” *Ensign*, November 2010.
19. Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, *Beauty and the Beast (La Belle et la Bête [1756])*, last paragraph.
20. D&C 76:56.