

## Elder W. Eugene Hansen

### The search for happiness

From the beginning of recorded history, mankind has been constantly searching for happiness. I believe it's fair to say that most of us are influenced greatly in our daily lives by what we perceive will result in happiness or joy for ourselves, as well as for others.

I submit this is certainly a laudable pursuit. The Lord has said, "Men are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25).

The founding fathers of our nation considered happiness to be of such importance that it was ranked with life and liberty. I refer to the Declaration of Independence:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

### The source of real happiness

What is happiness? Where do we find it? How do we obtain it? I remember reading the results some time ago of a national survey which attempted to summarize the responses as to what brings happiness.

While I don't remember all the details of that survey, I do remember that most people felt money was a significant part of happiness. The author's research, however, indicated that money alone seldom, if ever, resulted in true happiness.

Two thoughts come to mind here. I recall a talk given by President David O. McKay. He made reference to a statement by John D. Rockefeller—then one of the world's richest men—who apparently had stomach trouble and had purportedly said, "I would rather be able to enjoy a good meal than have a million dollars." Then with a wink of the eye, President McKay re-

marked, "Of course, he had a million dollars when he said that."

I readily concede that it's important to have sufficient money for our needs, but beyond that, money has little to do with true happiness. Often it is the work and sacrifice one experiences in obtaining money for a worthwhile purpose that produces the most satisfaction.

In my father's personal history he tells about Grandmother's experiences growing up in Brigham City, Utah, in the late 1800s. Their family was very poor, having emigrated from Denmark with little more than the clothes on their backs. She wanted so much to have a pair of shoes she could wear on special occasions. To accomplish this worthy desire took a full summer's work of picking berries and tending children, since money was very scarce and labor was cheap. But the joy Grandmother felt as she obtained those shoes is indescribable, for not only was she able to wear them, but her mother did also. In fact, they had it arranged so Grandmother would wear the shoes to Sunday School in the morning, and then her mother would wear them to sacrament meeting in the evening.

The words of William George Jordan are instructive here:

"Happiness does not always require success, prosperity or attainment. It is often the joy of hopeful struggle, consecration of purpose and energy to some good end. Real happiness ever has its root in unselfishness—its blossom in love of some kind" (*The Crown of Individuality*, 2nd ed. [New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1909], pp. 78–79).

### The difference between happiness and pleasure

One of the most critical challenges mankind faces today is to recognize the difference between happiness and mere pleasure. Satan and his forces have be-

come extremely effective in their effort to convince people that pleasure should be the most sought-after objective. He slyly promises that wherever found, pleasure will bring happiness.

Our television and movie screens are filled with not-so-subtle messages that encourage and persuade young and old alike to unbridle their passions and they will experience happiness. The results of this reckless course should be so apparent as we watch the tremendous social and psychological costs continue to mount. The increasing incidence of teenage pregnancy, abortion, rape, child molestation, sexual harassment, assault, drug addiction, disease, alcoholism, and broken homes are all influenced by this persuasion. And the alarming statistics continue to testify, but with little if any effect.

Some years ago Elder James E. Talmage so aptly described what is taking place that it's almost as if he were writing for our day. I quote:

"The present is an age of pleasure-seeking, and men are losing their sanity in the mad rush for sensations that do but excite and disappoint. In this day of counterfeits, adulterations, and base imitations, the devil is busier than he has ever been in the course of human history, in the manufacture of pleasures, both old and new; and these he offers for sale in most attractive fashion, falsely labeled, '*Happiness*.' In this soul-destroying craft he is without a peer; he has had centuries of experience and practice, and by his skill he controls the market. He has learned the tricks of the trade, and knows well how to catch the eye and arouse the desire of his customers. He puts up the stuff in bright-colored packages, tied with tinsel string and tassel; and crowds flock to his bargain counters, hustling and crushing one another in their frenzy to buy.

"Follow one of the purchasers as he goes off gloatingly with his gaudy packet, and watch him as he opens it. What finds he inside the gilded wrap-

ping? He had expected fragrant happiness, but uncovers only an inferior brand of pleasure, the stench of which is nauseating" ("A Greeting to the Missionaries," *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1913, pp. 172-73).

How significant that Elder Talmage, writing several years ago, could so eloquently capture the conditions of this age in a way that it is perhaps even more descriptive today than it was then. Some may propose we take comfort from hearing the concerns of yesteryear and reason that things were as bad then as they are now. I choose not to regard it in that light. I suggest Elder Talmage's words should have served as a warning from which we could have learned much more than we did as a nation.

### **The gospel is the pattern for happiness**

Real joy and happiness come from living in such a way that our Heavenly Father will be pleased with us. In section 52 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord tells us he will give us "a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived; for Satan is abroad in the land, and he goeth forth deceiving the nations" (v. 14).

That pattern is the gospel of Jesus Christ in its fulness, the gospel which we are so blessed to have.

### **Learn with joy rather than sorrow**

In order to be happy there are lessons we must invariably learn while in this life. We can either learn them with joy or with sorrow. I think of the words of Jacob, the brother of Nephi, as he wrote many centuries ago:

"Now in this thing we do rejoice; and we labor diligently to engraven these words upon plates, hoping that our beloved brethren and our children will receive them with thankful hearts, and look upon them *that they may learn with joy and not with sorrow*" (Jacob 4:3; italics added).

Isn't that true? Aren't there certain basic principles and truths that we must learn if we are to get along in this life and be happy? And we either learn them with joy by doing what's right, or we learn them with sorrow or through experiences that bring sorrow. One cannot break God's commandments and be happy. We should remember the scripture referred to earlier during this conference, "Wickedness never was happiness" (Alma 41:10).

I recall as a child hearing my father say, just prior to administering some well-deserved corporal punishment to one of his children, namely me, "If you won't hear, then you'll have to feel."

If we would all listen more, it would not be necessary to have to feel so often in that sense.

### Youth, heed parents' warnings

Now may I speak to the youth for a few moments. We want you to be happy. As parents, grandparents, priesthood leaders, and advisers, we have great concern as we witness the moral laxness that is becoming so prevalent and apparently so accepted in this and other countries of the world.

Consequently, those concerns are translated into more frequent discussions with you; requests for more details about dating, activities, and parties; and in some cases, even restrictions with respect to certain locations, plans, and associations.

It may seem to you that we come on too strong with the counsel to bridle your passions, to avoid all forms of pornography, to keep the Word of Wisdom, to avoid unwholesome locations and situations, to develop and maintain your own high moral standards, to adopt a keen sense of personal accountability, to keep your eyes above the crowd and be willing to stand alone when principle requires it.

Yes, we may seem too concerned, but let me ask you this: Suppose you

saw a little brother about to trade his wagon for a popsicle on a hot summer day. Or suppose you saw a child toddling toward a busy boulevard or swift-running stream, not fully realizing the dangers that are so apparent to you because of your age and experience. Of course you would immediately offer aid in both cases. Failure to do so would be irresponsible.

Likewise, your parents and youth leaders feel a great responsibility to counsel and warn you of dangers you may not fully appreciate, which could have disastrous consequences—physically, mentally, and spiritually.

### Definition of true happiness

What is happiness, then? How does it differ from mere pleasure? Again I go to the words of Elder Talmage:

"Happiness is true food, wholesome, nutritious and sweet; it builds up the body and generates energy for action, physical, mental and spiritual; pleasure is but a deceiving stimulant which, like spirituous drink, makes one think he is strong when in reality enfeebled; makes him fancy he is well when in fact stricken with deadly malady.

"Happiness leaves no bad after-taste, it is followed by no depressing reaction; it calls for no repentance, brings no regret, entails no remorse; pleasure too often makes necessary repentance, contrition, and suffering; and, if indulged to the extreme, it brings degradation and destruction.

"True happiness is lived over and over again in memory, always with a renewal of the original good; a moment of unholy pleasure may leave a barbed sting, which, like a thorn in the flesh, is an ever-present source of anguish.

"Happiness is not akin with levity, nor is it one with light-minded mirth. It springs from the deeper fountains of the soul, and is not infrequently accompanied by tears. Have you never been

so happy that you have to weep? I have” (*Improvement Era*, Dec. 1913, p. 173).

Oh, that we could become as a people like those referred to in the Book of Mormon:

“And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.

“And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the

hand of God” (4 Nephi 1:15–16). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Hinckley

Elder W. Eugene Hansen of the Presidency of the Seventy has just spoken to us.

We shall now be pleased to hear from Elder Ronald E. Poelman of the Seventy, and he will be followed by Elder Richard G. Scott of the Council of the Twelve, who will be our concluding speaker.

## Elder Ronald E. Poelman

### How to obtain divine forgiveness

The Savior of the world, the Redeemer of all God’s children, Jesus of Nazareth, has power to forgive sins. His own witness of such power is recorded in the New Testament (see Matthew 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:20, 24). His Apostles Peter and Paul testified of this truth (see Acts 5:31; 13:38–39; Ephesians 1:7), as did also the prophets of the Book of Mormon (see Enos 1:5; Mosiah 4:3; Moroni 6:8) and of modern times (see D&C 61:2).

Through the centuries, many have received great joy and peace of mind through understanding and accepting the Lord’s forgiveness. Yet many others apparently continue to bear the burden of guilt, remorse, and self-doubt because of an incomplete understanding and testimony of the doctrine of Christ.

Recently I was in private conversation with one who, having committed a serious transgression, had also made intense effort to repent and receive forgiveness from those personally offended, from the Church, and from the Lord. When I asked, “Do you feel forgiven by your Heavenly Father?” he answered hesitantly with an affirmative but quali-

fied response. “How do we obtain divine forgiveness?” I asked.

He spoke of how he had forsaken his transgressive behavior of the past, confessed to proper priesthood authorities, and attempted to make restitution to those offended. He further described his efforts to live according to gospel principles and Church standards.

The Savior and his atoning sacrifice were not mentioned. The underlying assumption seemed to be that divine forgiveness is obtained through those steps of repentance limited to changing one’s behavior. Despite the brother’s earnest efforts to repent, he appeared to be burdened still by remorse and regret and to feel that he must continue to pay for his sins.

Unfortunately this is not an isolated case. Others, to my knowledge, are burdened by past mistakes, large and small, because of an incomplete or incorrect understanding of our Father’s plan of redemption and mercy. Those so burdened may unnecessarily struggle through life without the joy and peace of mind which are the intended result of true repentance and divine forgiveness.

One who assumes that he can or must pay the price for his sins and