

Holiness and the Plan of Happiness

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Greater happiness comes from greater personal holiness.

My dear brothers and sisters, I have prayed for the power to help you in your personal search for happiness. Some might feel happy enough already, yet surely no one would reject the offer of more happiness. Anyone would be eager to accept a guaranteed offer of lasting happiness.

That is what Heavenly Father; His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Ghost have offered every spirit child of Heavenly Father who now lives, will live, or ever has lived in this world. That offer is sometimes called the plan of happiness. It was so called by the prophet Alma as he taught his son, who was mired in the misery of sin. Alma knew that wickedness could never be happiness for his son—or for any child of Heavenly Father.¹

He taught his son that increasing in holiness was the only path to happiness. He made it plain that greater holiness is made possible through the Atonement of Jesus Christ cleansing and perfecting us.² Only by faith in Jesus Christ, continuing repentance, and keeping covenants are we able to claim the lasting happiness we all yearn to experience and retain.

My prayer for today is that I may help you understand that greater happiness comes from greater personal holiness so that you will act upon that belief. I will then share what I know for myself about what we can do to qualify for that gift of becoming ever more holy.

The scriptures teach us that among other things, we can be sanctified or become more holy when we exercise faith in Christ,³ demonstrate our obedience,⁴ repent,⁵ sacrifice for Him,⁶ receive sacred ordinances, and keep our covenants with Him.⁷ Qualifying for the gift of holiness requires humility,⁸ meekness,⁹ and patience.¹⁰

One experience of wanting more holiness came for me in the Salt Lake Temple. I entered the temple for the first time having been told little of what to expect. I had seen the words on the building: “Holiness to the Lord” and “The House of the Lord.” I felt a great sense of anticipation. Yet I wondered if I was prepared to enter.

My mother and father walked ahead of me as we entered the temple. We were asked to show our recommends, certifying our worthiness.

My parents knew the man at the recommend desk. So they lingered a moment to speak with him. I went ahead alone into a large space where everything was sparkling white. I looked up at a ceiling so high above me it seemed an open sky. In that moment, a clear impression came to me that I had been there before.

But then, I heard a very soft voice—it was not my own. The softly spoken words were these: “You have never been here before. You are remembering a moment before you were born. You were in a sacred place like this. You felt the Savior was about to come into the place where you stood. And you felt happiness because you were eager to see Him.”

That experience in the Salt Lake Temple lasted only a moment. Yet the memory of it still brings peace, joy, and quiet happiness.

I learned many lessons that day. One was that the Holy Ghost speaks in a still, small voice. I can hear Him when there is spiritual peace in my heart. He brings a feeling of happiness and assurance that I am becoming more holy. And that always brings the happiness I felt in those first moments in a temple of God.

You have observed in your own life and in the lives of others the miracle of happiness coming from growing holiness, becoming more like the Savior. In recent weeks, I have been at the bedside of people who could face death with full faith in the Savior and with happy countenances.

One was a man surrounded by his family. He and his wife were chatting quietly as my son and I entered. I had known them for many years. I had seen the Atonement of Jesus Christ work in their lives and in the lives of their family members.

They had together chosen to end medical efforts to prolong his life. There was a quiet feeling as he spoke to us. He smiled as he expressed gratitude for the gospel and its purifying effects on him and the family he loved. He spoke of his happy years of service in the temple. At this man’s request, my son anointed his head with consecrated oil. I sealed the anointing. As I did, I had a clear impression to tell him that he would soon see his Savior, face-to-face.

I promised him that he would feel happiness, love, and the Savior’s approval. He smiled warmly as we left. His last words to me were “Tell Kathy I love her.” My wife, Kathleen, over many years had encouraged generations of his family to accept the Savior’s invitation to come unto Him, make and keep sacred covenants, and so qualify for the happiness that comes as a result of that greater holiness.

He died hours later. Within weeks of his passing, his widow brought a gift to my wife and me. She smiled as we talked. She said pleasantly, “I expected that I would feel sad and lonely. I feel so happy. Do you think that’s all right?”

Knowing how much she loved her husband and how both of them had come to know, love, and serve the Lord, I told her that her feelings of happiness were a promised gift because she had, by her faithful service, been made more holy. Her holiness had qualified her for that happiness.

Some listening today may be wondering: “Why do I not feel the peace and happiness promised to those who have been faithful? I have been faithful through terrible adversity, but I don’t feel happiness.”

Even the Prophet Joseph Smith faced this test. He prayed for relief when he was confined in a jail in Liberty, Missouri. He had been faithful to the Lord. He had

grown in holiness. Yet he felt happiness had been denied.

The Lord taught him the lesson of patience we all will need at some time, and perhaps for long periods, in our mortal testing. Here is the Lord's message to His faithful and suffering prophet:

“And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.

“The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?

“Therefore, hold on thy way, and the priesthood shall remain with thee; for their bounds are set, they cannot pass. Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever.”¹¹

That was the same instructive lesson the Lord gave Job, who paid a heavy price to allow the Atonement to make him more holy. We know that Job was holy, from the introduction we have of him: “There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.”¹²

Then Job lost his wealth, his family, and even his health. You might remember that Job doubted that his greater holiness, gained through greater adversity, had qualified him for greater happiness. It seemed to Job that holiness had brought misery.

Yet the Lord gave Job the same correcting lesson He gave Joseph Smith. He let Job see his heartbreaking situation with spiritual eyes. He said:

“Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.

“Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.

“Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?

“Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof;

“When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”¹³

Then, after Job repented of calling God unfair, Job was permitted to see his trials in a higher and holier way. He had repented.

“Then Job answered the Lord, and said,

“I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.

“Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.

“Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.

“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.

“Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”¹⁴

After Job repented and so became more holy, the Lord blessed him beyond all he had lost. But perhaps the greatest blessing for Job was to have increased in holiness through adversity and repentance. He was qualified to have greater happiness in the days he had yet to live.

Greater holiness will not come simply by asking for it. It will come by doing what is needed for God to change us.

President Russell M. Nelson has given what seems to me the best counsel of how to move along the covenant path to greater holiness. He pointed the way when he urged:

“Experience the strengthening power of daily repentance—of doing and being a little better each day.

“When we choose to repent, we choose to change! We allow the Savior to transform us into the best version of ourselves. We choose to grow spiritually and receive joy—the joy of redemption in Him. When we choose to repent, we choose to become more like Jesus Christ!”

President Nelson went on to give us this encouragement in our efforts to become holier: “The Lord does not expect perfection from us at this point. ... But He does expect us to become increasingly pure. Daily repentance is the pathway to purity.”¹⁵

President Dallin H. Oaks, in an earlier conference address, also helped me see more clearly how we grow in holiness and how we can know we are moving toward it. He said: “How do we achieve spirituality? How do we attain that degree of holiness where we can have the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost? How do we come to view and evaluate things of this world with the perspective of eternity?”¹⁶

President Oaks’s answer begins with greater faith in Jesus Christ as our loving Savior. That leads us to seek forgiveness every day and to remember Him every day by keeping His commandments. That greater faith in Jesus Christ comes as we feast daily on His word.

The hymn “More Holiness Give Me” suggests a way to pray for help in becoming more holy. The author wisely suggests that the holiness we seek is a gift from a loving God, granted over time, after all we can do. You remember the last verse:

More purity give me,
More strength to o'ercome,
More freedom from earth-stains,
More longing for home.
More fit for the kingdom,
More used would I be,
More blessed and holy—
More, Savior, like thee.¹⁷

Whatever our personal circumstance, wherever we may be on the covenant path home, may our prayers for greater holiness be answered. I know that as our petition is granted, our happiness will increase. It may come slowly, but it will come. I have that assurance from a loving Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

I testify that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, that President Russell M. Nelson is our living prophet today. God the Father lives and loves us. He wants us to come home to Him in families. Our loving Savior invites us to follow Him on our journey there. They have prepared the way. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.