

Happiness is a Choice

Lesson Outline

- 1) Happiness is the **purpose of our existence**
- 2) Happiness is a **state of being**—God’s natural state
- 3) This life is the time to **practice being happy** (due to **law of restoration**)
- 4) Happiness is a **choice** and **flows from righteousness**
- 5) Reasons happiness can be **hard to maintain**:

- Uncertainty
- Commandments feel restrictive
- Comparisons
- Discouragement
- Happiness is hard work
- Hopelessness
- Other people’s poor choices
- Perfectionism
- Satan’s counterfeits
- Sense of entitlement
- We look for it in the wrong places
- Trials are hard
- We get tired of waiting
- Worldly desires overcome us

- 6) **Strategies** for becoming happier:

- Focus on the positive
- Be flexible
- Be grateful
- Be humble
- Be faithful to your covenants
- Trust in the Lord & His timing
- Push out the darkness by filling your life with light
- Love and serve others

- 7) Ways to **overcome discouragement**:

- Remember Heavenly Father loves you
- Remember there is purpose in opposition
- Remember adversity is temporary and sadness will end
- Remember the principle of compensation
- Remember that angels will help

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As I have pondered the relationship between adversity and happiness, and worked to cultivate more happiness in my life during times of adversity, I have learned the following things:

- 1) **Happiness is the purpose of our existence:** “Adam fell that men might be; and *men are, that they might have joy*” ([2 Nephi 2:27](#)).
- 2) **Happiness is a state of being:** “We often use the word *happy* to describe a momentary mood, feeling, or emotion. Although characterizing these bursts of positive emotion in this way may not be inaccurate, the Lord and His prophets present a broader view of happiness: it is both the reason for our existence and something we can experience in a much more lasting, constant, and enduring way. *Happiness can be a state of being*” ([Craig P. Wilson, April 2014, Lasting Happiness, Ensign](#)).
- 3) **It is important to learn to be happy here in mortality:** It is important to learn how to be happy now because of the law of restoration. Our state of being (happy or unhappy, or in other words, the person we have become) will be restored to us in the resurrection. This life is the time to practice being happy.

“Therefore, my son, see that you are merciful unto your brethren; deal justly, judge righteously, and do good continually; and if ye do all these things then shall ye receive your reward; yea, *ye shall have mercy restored unto you again; ye shall have justice restored unto you again; ye shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again; and ye shall have good rewarded unto you again. For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored;*” (Alma 41:14-15)

“And then cometh the judgment of the Holy One upon them; and then cometh the time that he that is filthy shall be filthy still; and he that is righteous shall be righteous still; *he that is happy shall be happy still; and he that is unhappy shall be unhappy still*” ([Mormon 9:14](#)).

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- 4) **Happiness is a choice.** This is a hard doctrine to embrace because it means that I am responsible for my own happiness. I can't really blame my unhappiness on my circumstances, other people's choices, or the Lord. Each small, individual choice we make has eventual consequences that result in both short- and long-term happiness or unhappiness. Additionally, we can choose to be happy in spite of our circumstances.

"Cheerfulness in the scriptural context connotes a divinely assured optimism, 'a deep trust in God's unfolding purposes,' a grounded conviction that God will always keep His promises.² When Christ proclaims, 'Be of good cheer,' He is not requesting a naïve, Pollyanna-like response to life's cruel twists and turns. Nor is He promising a pain-free life of constant bliss. Trial is no respecter of persons. Tragedy and hardship do not discriminate. Our world sees opposition among rich and poor, men and women, the righteous as well as the wicked. The Savior specifically prayed that God would not take us 'out of the world' ([John 17:15](#)). 'In this world your joy is not full,' He taught, 'but in me your joy is full' ([D&C 101:36](#)). True happiness and satisfaction are found only by turning away from the world and coming to Christ" ([Camille Fronk Olson, July 2011, Be of Good Cheer: Choosing Happiness, Ensign](#)).

- 5) **Happiness and righteousness go hand in hand.** "A true fulness of joy comes only through God (see [D&C 101:36](#)). As we turn to Him, our hearts will change. Keeping our focus on God is not a one-time occurrence. We must make and *consistently* keep covenants, such as worthily partaking of the sacrament every week" (<https://www.lds.org/ensign/2016/01/we-believe-in-being-positive?lang=eng>)

Happiness is God's natural state (see Alma 41:11). As we progressively make righteous choices, we receive an increased measure of the Spirit, and the natural result of that is happiness. "22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)).

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As we make good choices, we also become more like Heavenly Father & Jesus Christ—more consistently happy. Finally, all of the good things we do will be “restored” to us in the resurrection, so it is to our advantage to make good choices now so that we can be “restored” to a state of happiness then. However, unhappiness doesn’t necessarily mean we are doing anything wrong, just that we may be focusing only on the negative in our lives.

6) Here are some of the things that have helped me to be happier:

- **Focus on the positive.** The scriptures tell us that in mortality, there is opposition in all things and that all things are “compound in one.” This means that in general, positives will be mixed with negatives. We get to choose which we focus on, and what we focus on is what we tend to see and how our lives will feel. Try to choose to find what is positive in difficult situations.

“So much in life depends on our attitude. The way we choose to see things and respond to others makes all the difference. To do the best we can and then to choose to be happy about our circumstances, whatever they may be, can bring peace and contentment. ... We can’t direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails. For maximum happiness, peace, and contentment, may we *choose* a positive attitude.”

(President Thomas S. Monson, Jan. 2012, Living the Abundant Life, *Ensign*, p. 4).

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- **Be flexible.** Unhappiness is often the result of inflexibility. When things don't go as had hoped or planned, try to accept the situation as it is, and find a way to "maximize the moment" or "make the best" of what IS possible.

"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. *I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound*: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*" ([Philippians 4:11–13](#)).

- **Be grateful.** Sometimes it is hard to see what is positive in a situation, but when we focus on what we are grateful for, it makes the positives easier to see. So if it is snowing, we can be grateful for the moisture, the way the snow creates beautiful outlines on the trees, the uniqueness of each snowflake, the warm clothes we are wearing that day, etc.
- **Be humble.** The more grateful we are, the more humble we tend to become and the more connected we feel to the Lord. The more connected we are, the more easily we can feel the Spirit. The more we feel the Spirit, the happier we are and the less our external circumstances seem to matter because we are internally at peace.
- **Be faithful.** Sometimes it is really hard to continue to want to make good choices when it feels like everything is going wrong despite our best efforts. However, the more faithful we are in keeping the commandments and our covenants (i.e., loving and serving others), the more faith we will be given to endure and overcome our difficult circumstances.

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“Any choice not to keep the Lord’s commandments can cause the Spirit to withdraw from our hearts. With that loss, happiness diminishes” ([Pres. Henry B. Eyring, January 2016, Happiness for Those We Love, Ensign](#)).

“Your happiness depends more on the principles you choose to follow than on the external circumstances of your life. Be faithful to these principles. God knows you and loves you. If you live in harmony with His eternal plan and if you have faith in His promises, then your future will shine!” ([Bishop Gérald R. Caussé, Jun. 2014, Follow the Path of Happiness, Ensign](#)).

“Faith is a gift of God bestowed as a reward for personal righteousness. It is always given when righteousness is present, and the greater the measure of obedience to God’s laws the greater will be the endowment of faith” (Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Feb. 2016, Trust in Heaven’s Timing, *Ensign*.)

- **Trust in the Lord and His timing.** Believe that He loves you, wants what is best for you, and is knowledgeable and powerful enough to make that happen. This is HARD to do, but Christ tells us it is a key piece of his mission on earth: “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come *that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*” ([John 10:10](#)).

“If things don’t turn out the way you had hoped or expected after you have done all in your power, be ready to accept the will of your Heavenly Father. He will not inflict upon us anything that is not ultimately for our good. Listen for that calming voice that whispers in our ears: ‘All flesh is in mine hands; be still and know that I am God’ ([D&C 101:16](#))” ([Bishop Gérald R. Caussé, Jun. 2014, Follow the Path of Happiness, Ensign](#)).

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“Christ’s enabling power helps us feel happiness and cheer amid mortal gloom and doom. Misfortune and hardship lose their tragedy when viewed through the lens of the Atonement. The process could be explained this way: The more we know the Savior, the longer our view becomes. The more we see His truths, the more we feel His joy” ([Camille Fronk Olson, July 2011, Be of Good Cheer: Choosing Happiness, Ensign](#)).

- **Push out the darkness by filling your life with light.** Darkness cannot exist where light abounds, so try to focus on filling your life with more light (i.e., prayer, scripture study, temple attendance, service, and self-care) so that your spiritual batteries will be charged enough with the Spirit to motivate you to share the light of the Savior’s example (a compliment, a listening ear, a small service, a thoughtful act of kindness) with those around you in ways that push the darkness out of their lives. As you do, you’ll find it pushes the dark out of your own.

“...darkness has no power when light appears...” ([Camille Fronk Olson, July 2011, Be of Good Cheer: Choosing Happiness, Ensign](#)).

“And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever” ([Isaiah 32:17](#)).

“But learn that he who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come” ([D&C 59:23](#)).

Talks to Explore:

[Happiness for Those We Love – Elder Eyring, January 2016 Ensign](#)

[We Believe in Being Positive – President Monson, January 2016 Ensign](#)

[What Can the Book of Mormon Teach Us About Happiness – February 2016 Ensign](#)

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Here are some of the other scriptures and quotes I used in today's Relief Society Lesson:

Why is happiness hard to maintain?: “Though the gospel teaches that all of humanity is engineered for lasting happiness and that virtually all are built to act with the end motive of happiness in mind, many seem to struggle to attain the state of being for which we were created. Why? Does living in an imperfect world, with all its difficulties and challenges, loom as too big a barrier, blocking us from this “blessed and happy state”?” ([Craig P. Wilson, April 2014, Lasting Happiness, Ensign](#)).

- **Constantly changing circumstances and uncertainty of life**
- **Commandments feel restrictive** - Remember that commandments facilitate progression: “At times, some people get confused, thinking that the commandments are restrictions or limitations that complicate life, that take away opportunities or happiness or the pleasures of life. In reality, the commandments protect us and guide us to happiness. They are not to restrict but rather to make possible—to allow us to achieve in this life and in the next—what we truly desire and what our Heavenly Father, who loves us, wants for us.

They are like a flight of stairs. Each step may represent one commandment, and with each commandment that we obey, we can move upward. Then, if we understand the essence of the commandments, we want more. We don't feel resentment regarding the commandments; we want more in order to be able to progress more. And a Heavenly Father who loves us gives unto us according to our desires. If we desire it, He is going to give us more commandments in order to facilitate our progress” ([Elder D. Todd Christofferson, Sept. 2013, Steps to Happiness, Ensign](#)).
- **Comparisons**

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- **Discouragement** - Do what we can, then leave the rest to the Lord: “One morning I remember pulling out a small card and threading it through my typewriter. Among the words that I typed for her were these: ‘The simple secret is this: put your trust in the Lord, do your best, then leave the rest to Him’ ([Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, November 2008, Come What May, and Love It, Ensign](#)).
- **Happiness is hard work** - Remember to keep the commandments: “And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it” ([Mosiah 2:41](#)).
- **Hopelessness** – Recognize that righteousness has a ripple effect: “Righteousness fosters righteousness. The effects of righteous examples are felt for generations to come. Good parenting produces youth who make good parents. Just as many of us have been strengthened by the noble examples of our pioneering ancestors in many lands, so the righteous choices and sacrifices of our day can bless our families and our friends and our nations for all the years to come” ([Elder Dallin H. Oaks, February 2016, How to Find Joy, Ensign](#)).
- **Other people’s poor choices** - Understand the role of choice and help those we love make good choices: “The happiness we want for our loved ones depends on their choices. As much as we love a child, an investigator, or our friends, we cannot force them to keep the commandments so that they qualify for the Holy Ghost to touch and change their hearts. So the best help we can give is whatever leads those we love to watch over their own choices” ([Pres. Henry B. Eyring, January 2016, Happiness for Those We Love, Ensign](#)).

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- **Perfectionism** - Even the righteous have trials: “First is the false assumption that, if we are good enough, we can avoid having bad things happen to us and those we love. If we can just keep all of the commandments, pay an honest tithing, and have daily prayer and scripture study, we can assure ourselves of His protection from heartache, accident, or tragedy. But *trials will surely come, including when we are trying to do everything right*” ([Camille Fronk Olson, July 2011, Be of Good Cheer: Choosing Happiness, Ensign](#)).
- **Satan counterfeits happiness** - Deceptions of the media: “Young and old, turn your eyes and your hearts away from the deceptive messages of the media. There is no happiness in alcohol or drugs, only enslavement. There is no happiness in violence, only pain and sorrow. There is no happiness in sexual relations and physical familiarities outside the bonds of marriage, only degradation and increased momentum along the way to spiritual death” ([Elder Dallin H. Oaks, February 2016, How to Find Joy, Ensign](#)).
- **Sense of entitlement** – Possessions don’t bring happiness: “There is no lasting happiness in what we possess. Happiness and joy come from what a person *is*, not from what he or she *possesses or appears to be*” ([Elder Dallin H. Oaks, February 2016, How to Find Joy, Ensign](#)).
- **Sometimes we look for happiness in the wrong places** – We can’t find true happiness in sin: “But behold this my joy was vain, for their sorrowing was not unto repentance, because of the goodness of God; but it was rather the sorrowing of the damned, because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin” ([Mormon 2:13](#)).

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- **Trials are hard** - Our reactions to our circumstances determine our happiness -
“Enduring adversity is not the only thing you must do to experience a happy life. Let me repeat: *how you react to adversity and temptation is a critical factor in whether or not you arrive at your own ‘happily ever after’*” ([Pres. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, May 2010, Your Happily Ever After, Ensign](#)).
- **We get tired of waiting:** “Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy” ([James 5:11](#)).
- **Worldly desires overcome our willpower to seek heavenly things:** “Brothers and sisters, old and young, I plead with each of you to remember that wickedness never was happiness and that sin leads to misery. Young people, do not seek happiness in the glittering but shallow things of the world. We cannot achieve lasting happiness by pursuing the wrong things. Someone once said, ‘You can never get enough of what you don’t need, because what you don’t need won’t satisfy you.’” ([Elder Dallin H. Oaks, February 2016, How to Find Joy, Ensign](#)).

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Why should we try to be happy in the midst of sorrow?: “How can we love days that are filled with sorrow? We can’t—at least not in the moment. I don’t think my mother was suggesting that we suppress discouragement or deny the reality of pain. I don’t think she was suggesting that we smother unpleasant truths beneath a cloak of pretended happiness. But I do believe that the way we react to adversity can be a major factor in how happy and successful we can be in life. If we approach adversities wisely, our hardest times can be times of greatest growth, which in turn can lead toward times of greatest happiness” ([Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, November 2008, Come What May, and Love It, Ensign](#)).

a) Remember that Heavenly Father loves you: “Knowing that God knows us and loves us personally is like a light that illuminates our life and gives it meaning. Whoever I am, whether I have friends or not, whether I’m popular or not, and even if I feel rejected or persecuted by others, I have an absolute assurance that my Heavenly Father loves me. He knows my needs; He understands my concerns; He is eager to bless me” ([Bishop Gérald R. Caussé, Jun. 2014, Follow the Path of Happiness, Ensign](#)).

b) Remember that there is purpose in opposition: “I know why there must be opposition in all things. Adversity, if handled correctly, can be a blessing in our lives. We can learn to love it. As we look for humor, seek for the eternal perspective, understand the principle of compensation, and draw near to our Heavenly Father, we can endure hardship and trial. We can say, as did my mother, ‘Come what may, and love it.’ Of this I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen” ([Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, November 2008, Come What May, and Love It, Ensign](#)).

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- c) Remember that our trials will ultimately benefit us:** “This is not an easy life; it was not meant to be. Nevertheless, we know that the Lord will cause our trials to bless us and be for our good. He will give us the strength to stand firm despite opposition. Righteousness is its own reward, and the scriptures promise us that the reward for righteousness is ‘peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come’ ([D&C 59:23](#))” ([Elder Quentin L. Cook, June 2011, The True Path to Happiness](#)).
- d) Remember that there will be an end to sadness:** Elder Richard G. Scott (1928–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “I witness that with faith in the Savior and obedience to His teachings, happiness never ends, but sadness does.”³ We can live with joy knowing that our “afflictions shall be but a small moment” ([D&C 121:7](#)).
<https://www.lds.org/ensign/2016/01/we-believe-in-being-positive?lang=eng>
- e) Remember that adversity is temporary:** “There are those among you who, although young, have already suffered a full measure of grief and sorrow. My heart is filled with compassion and love for you. How dear you are to the Church. How beloved you are of your Heavenly Father. Though it may seem that you are alone, angels attend you. Though you may feel that no one can understand the depth of your despair, our Savior, Jesus Christ, understands. He suffered more than we can possibly imagine, and He did it for us; He did it for you. You are not alone. If you ever feel your burden is too great to bear, lift your heart to your Heavenly Father, and He will uphold and bless you. He says to you, as He said to Joseph Smith, ‘[Your] adversity and [your] afflictions shall be but a small moment; and then, if [you] endure it well, God shall exalt [you] on high.’³” ([Pres. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, May 2010, Your Happily Ever After, Ensign](#)).

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- f) **Remember the principle of compensation:** “The third thing we can do is understand the principle of compensation. The Lord compensates the faithful for every loss. That which is taken away from those who love the Lord will be added unto them in His own way. While it may not come at the time we desire, the faithful will know that every tear today will eventually be returned a hundredfold with tears of rejoicing and gratitude” ([Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, November 2008, Come What May, and Love It, Ensign](#)).
- g) **Remember he has promised to send angels to help you:** “I testify of angels, both the heavenly and the mortal kind. In doing so I am testifying that God never leaves us alone, never leaves us unaided in the challenges that we face. ... Always there are those angels who come and go all around us, seen and unseen, known and unknown, mortal and immortal” (Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Nov. 2008, The Ministry of Angels, *Ensign*, p. 31).

How can we cultivate happiness in spite of our trials and sorrows?

- 1) **Remember to express gratitude:** “Yea, and we may see at the very time when he doth prosper his people, yea, in the increase of their fields, their flocks and their herds, and in gold, and in silver, and in all manner of precious things of every kind and art; sparing their lives, and delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; softening the hearts of their enemies that they should not declare wars against them; yea, and in fine, doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people; yea, then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their God, and do trample under their feet the Holy One—yea, and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity” (Helaman 12:2).

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- 2) Rely on the gospel of Jesus Christ:** “The gospel of Jesus Christ has the answers to all of our problems. The gospel is not a secret. It is not complicated or hidden. ... It is not someone’s theory or proposition. It does not come from man at all. It springs from the pure and everlasting waters of the Creator of the universe, who knows truths we cannot even begin to comprehend. And with that knowledge, He has given us the gospel—a divine gift, the ultimate formula for happiness and success” (President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, May 2009, *The Way of the Disciple, Liahona or Ensign*, p. 75).
- 3) Love and serve others:** “There is one overarching commandment that will help us to meet the challenges and lead to the heart of a happy family life. It applies to all relationships regardless of circumstances: ... ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself’ [see [Matthew 22:35–40](#)]” ([Pres. Henry B. Eyring, November 2013, Finding Happiness, Ensign](#)).