

To My Grandchildren

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There is one overarching commandment that will help us to meet the challenges and lead to the heart of a happy family life.

This year our first two grandchildren will be married. Within a few years as many as 10 of their cousins are likely to reach a point in their lives where they will follow into the wonderful world of family creation.

That happy prospect has caused me deep contemplation as they have asked me for advice. Essentially they have asked, “What choices could I make that will lead me to happiness?” And on the other hand, “What choices are likely to lead me to *unhappiness*?”

Heavenly Father has made each of us unique. No two of us have exactly the same experiences. No two families are alike. So it is not surprising that advice about how to choose happiness in family life is hard to give. Yet a loving Heavenly Father has set the same path to happiness for all of His children. Whatever our personal characteristics or whatever will be our experiences, there is but one plan of happiness. That plan is to follow all the commandments of God.

For all of us, including my grandchildren contemplating marriage, 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. It is repeated throughout the scriptures and in the teachings of the prophets in our day. Here is the Bible wording of the Lord’s advice to all who want to live together forever in loving happiness:

“Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,

“Master, which is the great commandment in the law?”

“Jesus said unto him, 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.

“On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”¹

From that simple statement it is not hard to summarize all I have learned about what choices lead to happiness in families. I start with the question, “What choices have led me toward loving the Lord with all my heart and soul and with all my mind?” For me it has been to choose to put myself where I felt the joy of forgiveness

through the Lord's Atonement.

Years ago I baptized a young man in Albuquerque, New Mexico, whom my missionary companion and I had taught. I put the young man down into the water and brought him up. He must have been nearly as tall as me because he spoke directly into my ear. With water from the font and tears running down his face and with joy in his voice, he said, "I'm clean, I'm clean."

I have seen those same tears of happiness in the eyes of someone who recounted the words of an Apostle of God. He had said to her, after a searching and tender interview, "I forgive you in the name of the Lord. He will give you the assurance of His forgiveness in His own time and in His own way." And He did.

I have seen why the Lord can say that when sins are forgiven, He can remember them no more. By the power of the Atonement, people I know well and love became new, and the effects of sin were wiped away. My heart has been filled with love for the Savior and the loving Father who sent Him.

That great blessing has come by encouraging people I care for to go to the Savior for relief from pain, a relief only He can give. That is why I urge those I love to accept and to magnify every calling offered them in the Church. That choice is one of the great keys to family happiness.

The pressures at every stage of life can tempt us to reject or neglect calls to serve the Savior. That can put us in spiritual peril for ourselves, our spouse, and our families. Some of those calls may seem unimportant, but *my* life, and my family, was changed for the better by my accepting a call to teach a deacons quorum. I felt the love of those deacons for the Savior and His love for them.

I have seen that happen in the life of a former stake and mission president in his call to him to advise a teachers quorum. I know of another who has been a bishop and then an Area Seventy who was used by the Lord to succor a boy in a teachers quorum who was hurt in an accident. The miracles from that service touched many lives, including mine, and increased their love for the Savior.

While serving others, we are most likely to plead for the companionship of the Holy Ghost. Success in the Lord's service always produces miracles beyond our own powers. The parent facing a child in serious rebellion knows that is true, as does the visiting teacher approached by a woman seeking comfort when her husband told her he was leaving her. Both servants are grateful they prayed that morning for the Lord to send the Holy Ghost as a companion.

It is only with the companionship of the Holy Ghost that we can hope to be equally yoked in a marriage free from discord. I have seen how that companionship is crucial for felicity in a marriage. The miracle of becoming one requires the help of heaven, and it takes time. Our goal is to live together forever in the presence of Heavenly Father and our Savior.

My father and my mother were very different from each other. My mother was a singer and an artist. My father loved chemistry. Once at a symphony concert, my mother was surprised when my father stood up and began to leave before the applause began. My mother asked him where he was going. His response was, in all innocence: "Well, it's over, isn't it?" Only the gentle influence of the Holy Ghost got him there with her in the first place and brought him back to concerts time and time again.

My mother lived in New Jersey for 16 years so that my father could support the family by doing research and

teaching chemistry. To her it was a sacrifice being separated from her widowed mother and her unmarried sister, who had cared for her in the old family farmhouse. They both died while Mother was far away in New Jersey. Those were the only times I ever saw my mother cry.

Years later my father was offered a job in Utah. He asked my mother, again in all innocence, “Mildred, what do you think I should do?”

She said, “Henry, do whatever you think is best.”

He turned down the offer. The next morning she wrote him a letter that I wish I still had. I remember that she told him, “Don’t open it here. Go to the office and open it there.” It began with a rebuke. He had promised her years before that if he ever could, he would take her to be near her family. He was surprised by her expression of irritation. He had not remembered the desire of her heart. He immediately sent a message accepting the job offer.

He said, “Mildred, why didn’t you tell me?”

She said, “You were supposed to remember.”

He always spoke of that choice to move to Utah as his own, never as a sacrifice of his professional career. They had received the miracle of becoming one. It would have been better if Dad had been reminded by the Holy Ghost of the promise he had made years earlier. But he did allow the Holy Ghost to soften his heart so that her choice became his.

Heavenly Father has perfect foresight, knows each of us, and knows our future. He knows what difficulties we will pass through. He sent His Son to suffer so that He would know how to succor us in all our trials.

We know that Heavenly Father has spirit children in this world who sometimes choose sin and great unhappiness. That is why He sent His Firstborn to be our Redeemer, the greatest act of love in all creation. That is why we must expect that it will take the help of God and time to polish us for eternal life, to live with our Father.

Life in families will test us. That is one of God’s purposes in giving us the gift of mortality—to strengthen us by passing through tests. That will be especially true in family life, where we will find great joy and great sorrow and challenges which may at times seem beyond our power to endure them.

President George Q. Cannon said this about how God has prepared you and me and our children for the tests we will face: “There is not one of us but what God’s love has been expended upon. There is not one of us that He has not cared for and caressed. There is not one of us that He has not desired to save, and that He has not devised means to save. There is not one of us that He has not given His angels charge concerning. We may be insignificant and contemptible in our own eyes, and in the eyes of others, but the truth remains that we are the children of God, and that He has actually given His angels—invisible beings of power and might—charge concerning us, and they watch over us and have us in their keeping.”²

What President Cannon taught is true. You will need that assurance, as I have needed it and depended on it.

I have prayed with faith that someone I loved would seek and feel the power of the Atonement. I have prayed with faith that human angels would come to their aid, and they came.

God has devised means to save each of His children. For many, that involves being placed with a brother or a sister or a grandparent who loves them no matter what they do.

Years ago a friend of mine spoke of his grandmother. She had lived a full life, always faithful to the Lord and to His Church. Yet one of her grandsons chose a life of crime. He was finally sentenced to prison. My friend recalled that his grandmother, as she drove along a highway to visit her grandson in prison, had tears in her eyes as she prayed with anguish, "I've tried to live a good life. Why, why do I have this tragedy of a grandson who seems to have destroyed his life?"

The answer came to her mind in these words: "I gave him to you because I knew you could and would love him no matter what he did."

There is a wonderful lesson for us all. The way for loving parents and grandparents and all of God's servants will not be easy in a decaying world. We cannot force God's children to choose the way to happiness. God cannot do that because of the agency He has given us.

Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son love all of God's children no matter what they choose to do or what they become. The Savior paid the price of all sins, no matter how heinous. Even though there must be justice, the opportunity for mercy is extended which will not rob justice.

Alma expressed that hope to his son Corianton in these words: "Therefore, according to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance of men in this probationary state, yea, this preparatory state; for except it were for these conditions, mercy could not take effect except it should destroy the work of justice. Now the work of justice could not be destroyed; if so, God would cease to be God."³

My message then to my grandchildren, and to all of us trying to forge eternal families, is that there is joy guaranteed for the faithful. From before the world was, a loving Father in Heaven and His Beloved Son loved and worked with those who They knew would wander. God will love them forever.

You have the advantage of knowing that they learned the plan of salvation from the teachings they received in the spirit world. They and you were faithful enough to be allowed to come into the world when many others were not.

With the help of the Holy Ghost, all truths will be brought to our remembrance. We cannot force that on others, but we can let them see it in our lives. We can always take courage from the assurance that we all once felt the joy of being together as a member of the beloved family of our Heavenly Father. With God's help we can all feel that hope and that joy again. I pray that may be so for all of us in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Matthew 22:35-40.

2. George Q. Cannon, "Our Pre-existence and Present Probation," *Contributor*, Oct. 1890, 476.

3. Alma 42:13.

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