

Five Keys to Happiness

**by
Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin
Quorum of the Twelve**

**A keynote address delivered at
LDS Business College Commencement
May 5, 2005**

I am delighted to have the opportunity to share this wonderful occasion with you. It is a significant one for you, and it is a meaningful one for me as well. My mother's sister, Ardella taught at this school. My aunt's step sister, Ada also taught here. Ada, you may know, was President Hinckley's mother.

In addition, my personal secretary, Ann Pickrell, graduated from this college. If these wonderful people are representative of those who are graduating today, then the world will be a much better and kinder place as a result.

I have two purposes in speaking with you today: the first is to congratulate you on attaining this milestone in your life. The second is to offer a few words of advice that may be of use as you continue your life journey from here.

Of course, it is easy to congratulate, but something else to give appropriate advice that may be of use to you. Out of the hundred things I could talk with you about, I have decided to narrow my focus to five things. These five keys have been a blessing to me in my life. I believe that if you will apply them, they will be a blessing to you as well.

Key number 1: Don't be Afraid.

When I was a young boy I had a dog we called Ruff. He was a free-spirited animal and liked to chase people on motorcycles and bikes that rode past our home. One day, Ruff decided to chase a policeman.

This turned out to be one of the more unfortunate decisions of his life. Ruff started nipping at his heels and the policeman drew his gun and fired. He shot my dog in the foot and poor Ruff came limping home.

After that day, he was never the same. Whenever he heard a loud noise, he would tuck in his tail and run like the wind. He used to come to my father's business and hang out around the store. Sometimes he would bother the customers. Soon, we learned that all we had to do to get old Ruff to leave was to take out a paper sack, blow air into it and

then pop it. When Ruff heard that pop, he'd dash away making a beeline for home. I never saw a dog run so fast.

I've noticed something over the years. People can sometimes act like old Ruff. Fear can do that to you. Sometimes, fear makes us run away from things—things like setting and achieving goals, developing relationships that last a lifetime, or becoming the people we know we should become. Sometimes fear can even paralyze us to the point where we don't even try. Fear can be a thick fog that smothers our dreams. It can be a cage that restrains us from reaching our destiny. It can be a weight that restrains our every step.

The difference between human beings and my dog, Ruff, is that you and I have the power of reason. I'm not sure Old Ruff was capable of telling the difference between the sound of a pistol and the sound of a paper bag being popped, but we do. Our Heavenly Father has given us the capacity to think, because we are His children, we each have a spark of divine courage within us. We may not be immune to being afraid, but we do not have to succumb to it.

There are some who give up on the great goals of their lives because of fear. They don't apply for the perfect job, they don't put in the necessary effort to really become successful with their families, Church assignments, or in their work.

Remember, the kind of fear that paralyzes us and keeps us from acting in our best interest is not of our Heavenly Father. Paul taught this when he wrote, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."¹ You don't have to allow your fears to hold you back. Your Heavenly Father is with you and will support you.

But, you ask, how do we overcome our fears? One way is through –

Key number 2: Have Faith.

During the reign of the Judges, all Israel was afraid. The enemy nations of the Midianites and the Amalekites made their lives a nightmare. Every time the Israelites harvested crops, the Midianites took everything: sheep, oxen, and food. As conditions continued to worsen, the Children of Israel remembered their God and pleaded for deliverance. At long last, the Lord heard their prayers and sent an angel to a man called Gideon.

You remember the story. The angel instructed Gideon to muster an army. Gideon did and 32,000² men rallied around him. That's not bad, you might think, until you understand that the opposing forces numbered 135,000 men³ -- a four to one margin.

When Gideon went before the Lord to explain this, the Lord told him something remarkable. “The people that are with thee are too many,” He said. He told Gideon that if Israel fought and won, they’d simply believe they were mighty warriors. They would not know that it was the Lord who had delivered them. Therefore, the Lord instructed Gideon to do something he didn’t expect: “Whosoever is fearful and afraid,” He said, “let him return and depart.”⁴

When Gideon explained this to his army, 22,000 men went home. That left him with only 10,000. The odds against him now were 13 to 1. But even at that, the Lord told Gideon he still had too many men. The next cut left Gideon with only 300 men.

What were the odds now? For every one of Gideon’s men, there were 450 enemy soldiers. How did the story end? That’s one of the reasons we have scriptures—so we can read about such things at our leisure. The important thing to know is that, in the end, Gideon’s story is one that demonstrates the power of faith. The Apostle Paul taught that, “If God be for us, who can be against us?”⁵

With faith, all things are possible. Mountains can be moved, fear overcome, doors opened. With faith, miracles can occur. One way to increase our faith is to spend time communicating with our Heavenly Father. As we reach out to Him in prayer, He will draw near to us. Lift up your hearts in supplication to your Father in Heaven; ask for His guidance and for His assistance. Ask that your faith will increase and your confidence not waver.

But faith alone is not enough, not without—

Key number 3: Work.

From the days of Adam and Eve until now, Heavenly Father has commanded that we work. Even so, there are some who go to great lengths to avoid work. In fact, a few work exceptionally hard to get out of it. This is something I have never understood. My father was a hard worker and he taught me to do the same.

I have heard about a professor of psychology from the University of Chicago who spent 25 years studying the answer to one question: “What makes people happy?” He wanted to find out what distinguishes those who live fulfilling and joy-filled lives from those who live lives of quiet desperation. Throughout a quarter of a century, he surveyed artists and cab drivers, physicians and farmers. After 25 years, he published his findings in a book he entitled, “Flow.”

What did he find? “The best moments in our lives,” he wrote, “usually occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile.”⁶

What makes a person happy? One of the key ingredients is the simple thing we call work. Some of the most fulfilling moments of our lives are when we establish worthwhile goals and work to achieve them. I know that some roll their eyes when they hear about goal setting. Perhaps they think it's useless or, worse, depressing. I have found it to be exhilarating.

You don't need an expensive system in order to set goals. My goal setting system costs less than a half a cent every day. Each night, I think about the goals I have set and the things I need to accomplish the next day. And then I write down on a 3 by 5 card the key things I can do the next day that will bring me closer to my goals.

It's surprising how much you can accomplish if you simply set goals, write down the things you must do to get you closer to achieving them, and then work at them a little at a time. If you consistently work towards righteous ends, the Lord will bless you as you work and you will find satisfaction, joy, and a sense of confidence and accomplishment. I have found that many of the best moments of my life have been when I have immersed myself in worthy and worthwhile work.

Yet, although, many understand the importance of work, they still feel unfulfilled because they never understood the importance of:

Key number 4: Do What is Right.

It is not enough to do things. We must do the right things—the things our Heavenly Father would want us to do. One way we discover what the right things are is through the scriptures and the words of latter-day prophets. Some people feel that the commandments of our Heavenly Father are restrictive and hold us back in some way. The truth is, they are a handbook to happiness. Every aspect of the gospel of Jesus Christ—the principles, the doctrines, and the commandments—is a part of our Heavenly Father's plan to help us obtain peace and happiness not only in this life but worlds to come.

The ancient Nephite King Benjamin taught that we should, "Consider . . . 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."⁷

Those who see the Lord's commandments as restrictive or limiting are like travelers who consider maps a nuisance. They cannot understand that the map provides critical direction that could—if only they would follow it—lead them from where they are to where they want to go. Instead, they wander meaninglessly, often ending up lost or without having made much progress at all. And when they do, they typically blame the map instead of themselves, for their predicament.

We obey the commandments not only because we should, but because they are the map that shows us the road we must travel to find happiness and peace in this life and glory throughout the ages to come.

But while doing the right thing is important, there is one more thing we must understand and that is—

Key number five: Persevere to the End.

In the parable of the Sower, the Savior spoke of the folly of those who start well and finish poor. In order to reap the great blessings the Lord has in store for us we must persevere.

One of the things I learned playing sports was that no matter how many times you were knocked down, you had to pick yourself up and keep going. Especially when you felt beaten, you kept going. The harder you were hit, the quicker you got up. The more helpless things looked, the harder you worked. You never gave up.

A recent issue of the *Ensign* Magazine highlighted the life of Emily Anne Jensen who, when she was 16-years old, was in a devastating accident that sent her into a coma and changed her life forever. Before the accident, Emily played sports, danced, and dreamed of becoming a doctor. After she awoke from the coma, it was apparent that her life would be very different from the one she had imagined. Emily had to relearn everything—from sitting up, to eating, to walking. It took 6 months of rehabilitation before she could leave the hospital.

Even though it was difficult, Emily returned back to school. For the first six months, her mother accompanied her to class and helped her with her assignments. After graduating from high school, she enrolled at college. She had a new vision of what she wanted to do—become a recreational therapist and help others who were going through what she had. This process has been a long and grueling one. I suppose it is unimaginable to the rest of us what Emily and her family have had to endure and how they have worked to achieve what they have. Emily's mother said, "I think people who struggle with challenges need to know that the battle goes on every day and must be fought with courage and honor and faith. We need to remind ourselves that God is allowing our faith to grow as we reach and stretch for Him."⁸

That is good counsel, not only for Emily, but for all of us. I have been told that Emily Jensen is among those who will graduate from the LDS Business College today. I congratulate her and her family for this remarkable achievement.

A fundamental quality of heroes is that they persevere to the end. Some of the most memorable characters from literature as well as life have this in common: they never give up. Those who do are often forgotten. But those who fight on, sometimes despite tremendous odds, these we respect, revere and remember.

Now, my friends, I want you to take a moment to celebrate the accomplishment of this day— but don't take too long. For this is not a day of rest and comfort. It is a day for great and mighty deeds. It is a day for noble and visionary thoughts. It is a day for compassion, understanding, and charity.

Today, you launch out into the great unknown of a new life and a new beginning. Like the great explorers of ages past, you travel into unknown waters, pioneers on the grand path of this mortal existence. I extend to you my love and my confidence. I embrace you with all the hopes of my heart. I fervently wish that you may live to see all your righteous desires realized. I feel impressed to leave with you a blessing.

To those who instruct, administer, and support this program, I bless you with increased compassion, love, and joy. I bless you that you will know of the great worth of the work you perform and that you will find joy in your labors.

To the families of those who graduate—to those who have sacrificed, sometimes more than the students themselves—may the Holy Spirit rest upon you and reward you in ways you cannot comprehend for your noble sacrifice.

To those who graduate. I bless you that you will be able to confront your fears and not be limited by them. I bless you with faith, and with the desire to give your best efforts to your Heavenly Father, your families, and your careers. I bless you with the desire to live righteously and follow faithfully the commandments of your Lord. And, finally, I bless you with the mental determination to never give up and always press on.

I bear my witness of the divinity of the Savior, of the mission of The Prophet, Joseph Smith, and the great truths of restored Gospel. In our day, the Lord guides His Church through his prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley.

Of these truths I bear humble witness, in the majestic name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, amen.