

The Nature of Happiness

**Moving Beyond
Surviving to Thriving**


Why So Important to Me

- It's not because I'm a religion prof who thinks he has all the answers...I don't.
- But I truly believe Christ Does...
- I'm not gay nor do I experience gender dysphoria
- I have a deep and abiding love for my LGBTQ friends and family...
- Junior High / BISHOPING/Voices of Hope / EF / North Star Board Member
- Primary Area of Research



Background and Purpose

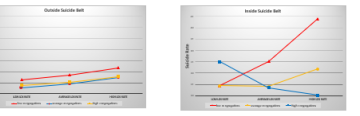
- Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States and one of only 3 causes that are rising. It is the second leading cause of death for adolescents. ~6,000 people age 10 and older committed suicide in 2016.
- The intersection west region has the highest suicide rates in the United States. This area is further defined as the suicide belt or Corridor. Again, there has been an exponential increase in suicide for adolescents in the same area.



Analysis

	Outside Suicide Belt	Inside Suicide Belt
Suicide Rate	16.13*** (1.41)	17.76*** (1.53)
LDS Congregations	NS	NS
LDS Rate	2.76** (21)	NS
LDS Congregations (equal)	NS	-1.85* (79)
LDS Congregations (subsid)	NS	0.75*** (17)
LDS Congregation*LDS Rate	NS	-2.25*** (47)
LDS Rate (equal)	NS	0.61** (17)
Elevation	NS	1.22** (38)
Rural/Urban	0.84** (27)	NS
Barriers/Degree	-0.55** (23)	-2.12** (54)
Cost Overlap	1.00*** (24)	NS
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Black	-1.55*** (23)	-12.20** (3.54)
Hispanic	-0.39** (17)	-2.02** (55)
Single Parent Households	52* (22)	NS
Single Parent Households*LDS Cong	NS	-95*** (25)

Results



Data and Methodology

Data Sources

- The Family Foundations of Youth Development Study. This study is the largest national study of youth in the US. We have just completed our second round of data collection.
- Sample

 - 1196 parents and adolescents at wave one, 114 parents and adolescents at wave two in Utah and Arizona. A 7% retention rate.
 - 861 members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS).
 - Adolescents +50% Female and 45% percent Male / Average Age +13.1 ranging from 11 to 15. 8% White
 - 238 (20%) had "heretofore considered suicide" (17% n=71) had made a plan to kill themselves. 41 (n=18) had attempted suicide in the past year or more. [Click a chart from this for the results on this link](#)

Research Questions

- We explored the relationship between religion, family and suicidality. Specifically, we want to know how parental mental health, feelings of abandonment by God, and church support impact adolescent suicidality, with a special emphasis on LGBTQ youth.

Methodology

Using MPlus, we took a cross-lagged path model to wave one and


LDS Church and Suicidality: A Multi Data-Set Analysis

Religion, family and mental health are important aspects of adolescent development. This study explored the relationship between religion, family and suicidality. Specifically, we want to know how parental mental health, feelings of abandonment by God, and church support impact adolescent suicidality, with a special emphasis on LGBTQ youth.

Further study is needed to understand the relationship between religion, family and suicidality. Further research is needed to understand the relationship between religion, family and suicidality. Further research is needed to understand the relationship between religion, family and suicidality.

Adolescent Suicidality: The Moderating Role of Faith on Harsh Parenting

W. Justin Dyer, Ph.D.
 Cassidy Ogletree
 Sharlene Nauta
 Michael Goodman, Ph.D.




Suicidality: Faith, Family and Other Correlates

Michael Goodman, Ph.D., Justin Dyer, Ph.D., Jeremy Grubbs, Brian Phillips, Haley Smith, Holli Sperry, Alyssa Parsons

The LDS Church and Suicidality: A National Study
 Holli Sperry, Jeremy Grubbs, Brian Phillips, Haley Smith, Alyssa Parsons
 Mentored by: Michael Goodman, Justin Dyer

Background and Purpose

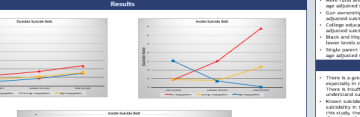
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Helping our Youth In relation to Suicide & LGBTQ Issues



Guest opinion: The church and LGBT youth suicide: Inaccurate claims may do more harm than good

By Deontae News 1 May 2019, 8:00pm MDT
 Michael Goodman and Justin Dyer, for the Deontae News

Opinion | **Home** | **Faith & Thought**

Most Read

Concerns: 7 ways you may be parenting wrong

Editor's note: This commentary by Brigham Young University professors Michael Goodman and Justin Dyer is part of an ongoing Deseret News opinion series exploring ideas and issues at the intersection of faith and thought.

Adolescent Suicidal Ideation: The Role of Family and Faith

Michael Goodman, Justin Dyer, Jeremy Grubbs, Holli Sperry


Background and Purpose

- Adolescent suicidal ideation (ASID) is a common mental health concern. It is the second leading cause of death for adolescents. ~6,000 people age 10 and older committed suicide in 2016.
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Religion, Sexual Orientation, an Adolescent Suicide

Sam A. Hardy
 Michael A. Goodman
 W. Justin Dyer
 Mark D. Ogletree
 Brigham Young University

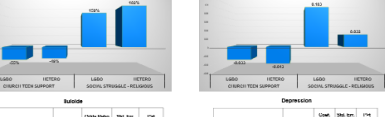
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LGBTQ Adolescent Depression and Suicide: The Role of Family and Faith

Michael Goodman & Justin Dyer

Background and Purpose

- LGBTQ youth experience higher rates of depression and suicidal ideation compared to their peers. It is the second leading cause of death for adolescents. ~6,000 people age 10 and older committed suicide in 2016.
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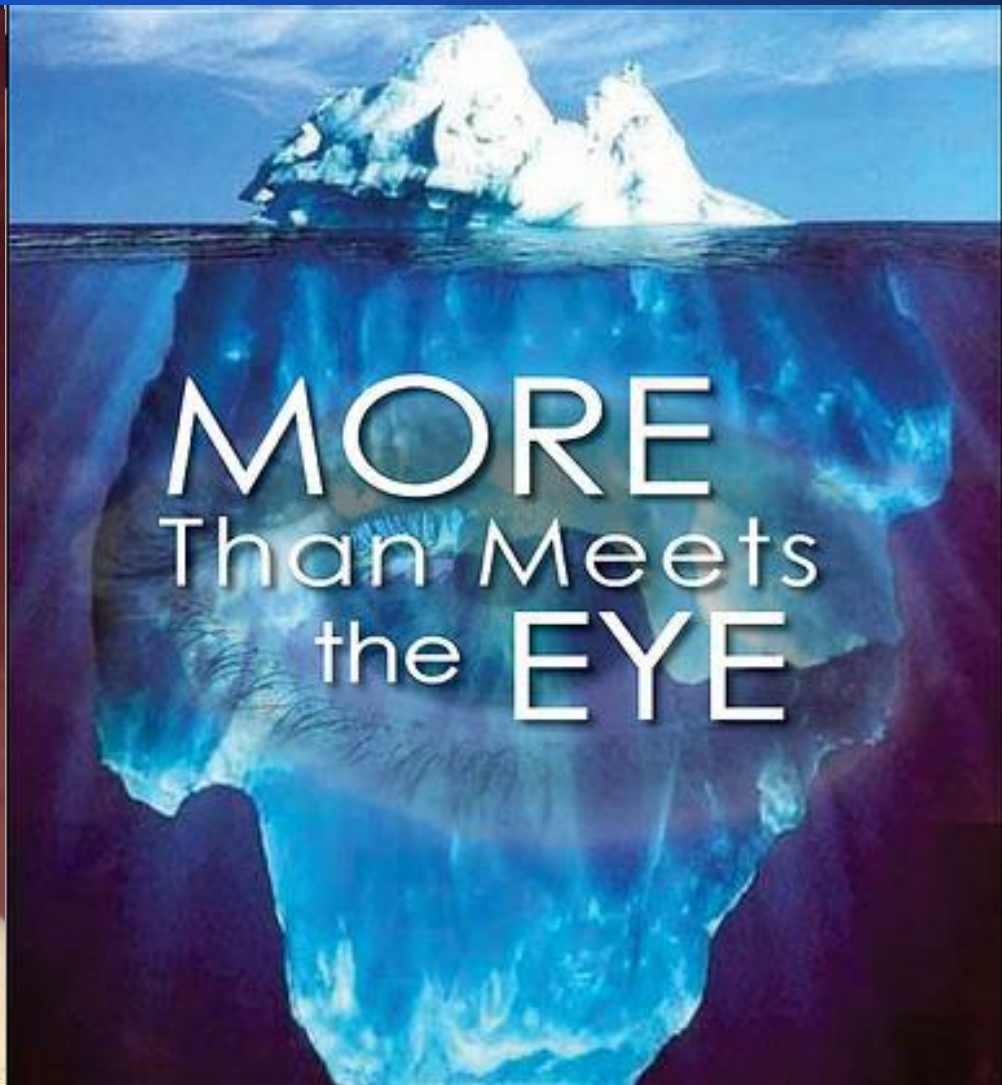
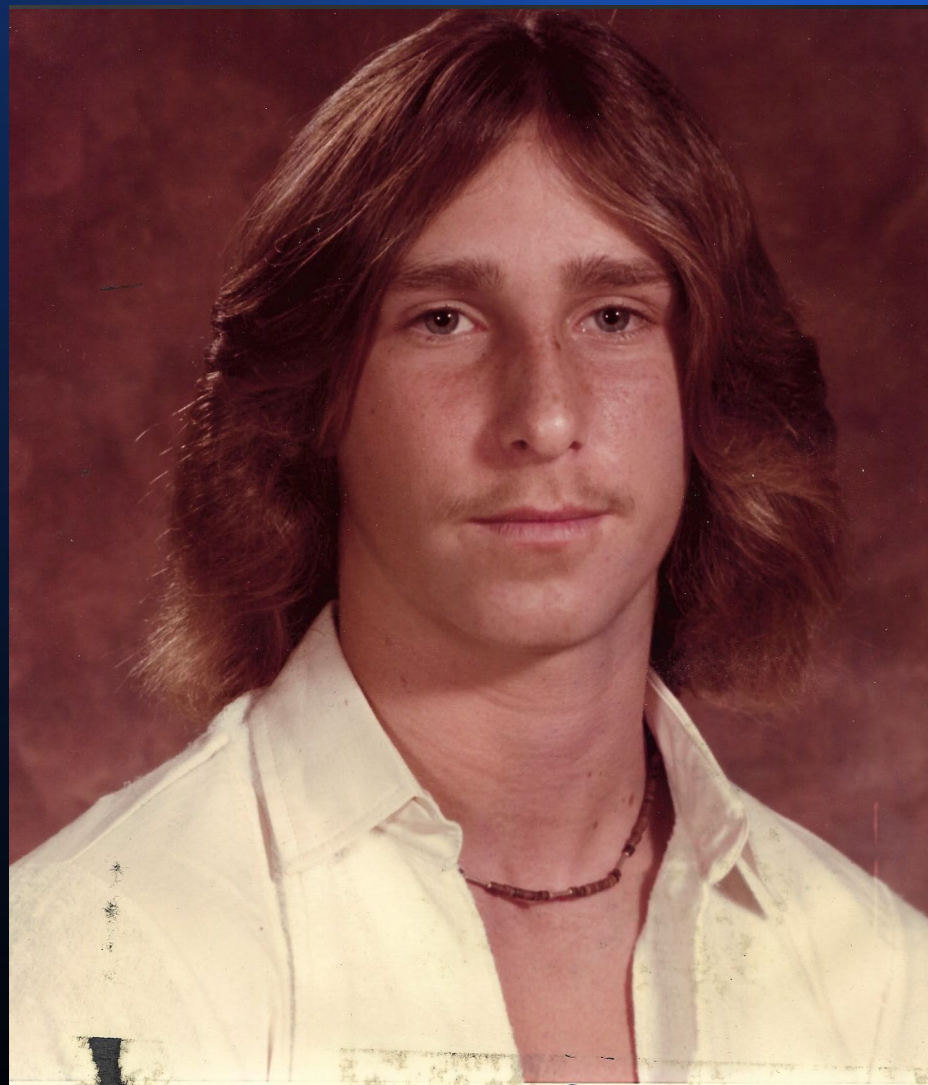
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Is happiness now and in eternity only for those currently living the “ideal”?

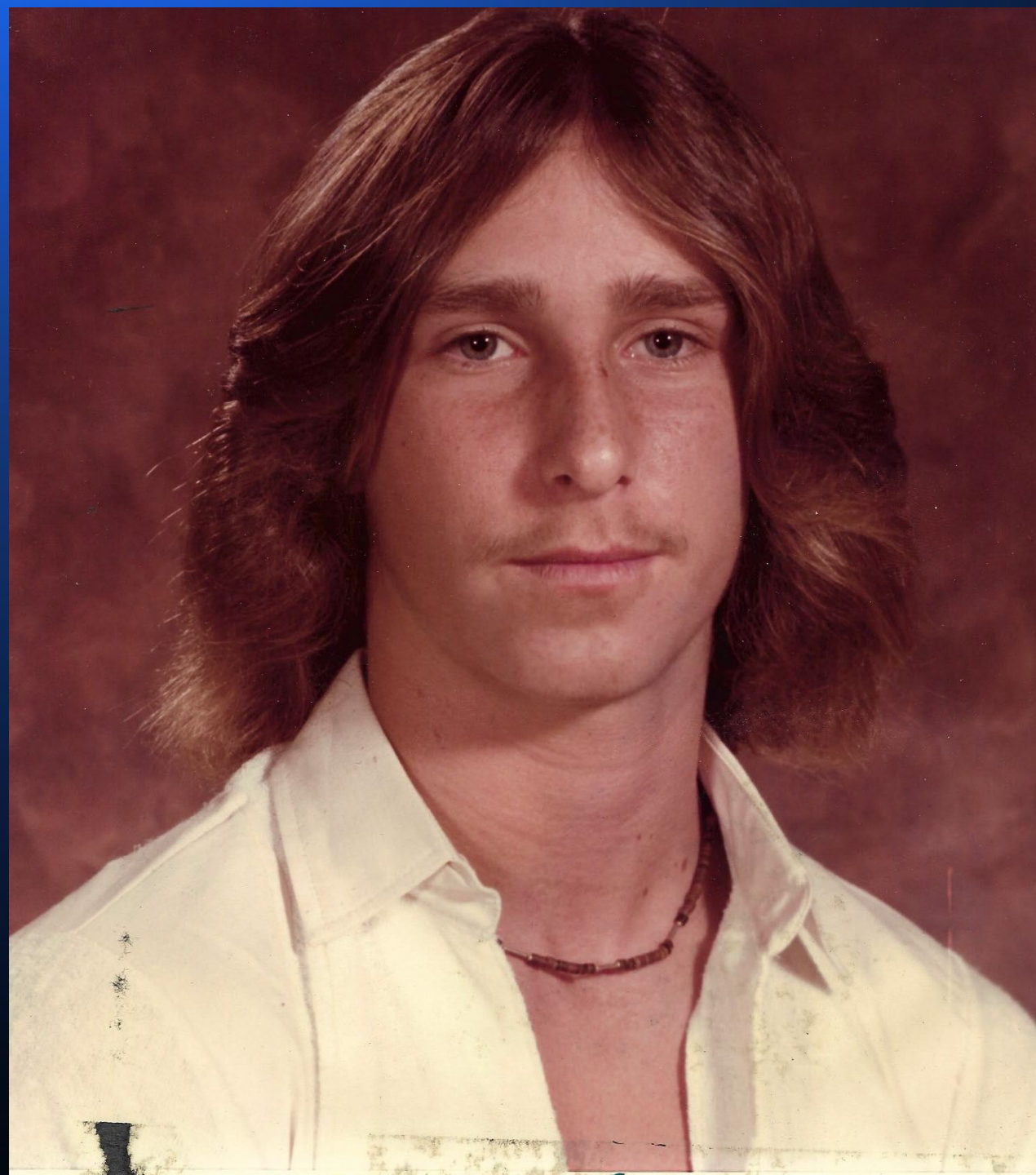




Am I This Person?

- 18-year-old convert
- Very “Non-LDS” lifestyle...
- Loving and very broken home
- Caring and alcoholic parents
- My Great Grandfather committed suicide then his daughter, my Grandmother committed suicide
- Lot’s of drug and alcohol use in our home
- Siblings in and out of jail...

Yet we love each other fiercely



Or This Person?

- 18-year-old convert
- Married to heaven with two children and 6 grandchildren
- 18 Years as a Seminary and Institute Teacher
- 15 Years as a BYU Religion Professor
- Past Bishop, EQP, YMP, HC, WML, etc...
- Missionary and Mission President in the glorious Bangkok Thailand Mission
- Several general church committee assignments
- 10 years on the church's Correlation Committee...
- ...



Or This Person?

- Over a dozen surgeries in the last 15 years
- Three-time cancer survivor
- Current Leukemia/Lymphoma (9 years)
- Spinal and nerve damage from 1st cancer treatment
 - Just found continued damage and want to fuse more levels of my spine
- Chronic Headaches as a result
- Auto-Immune disease joys on top of the cancers (notice my more aerodynamic appearance)...
- Three failed ankle surgeries in the last three years – no good options left



Yes...

And it is important to realize that we are all like this...There is always more to each of us than is plain to see

AND...

Comparison is the thief of ???

**So...Are We All Broken...
or
In Process?**

**Perhaps it starts by seeing
Happiness and the Challenges of Mortality
As God Sees Them...**

An Eternal Perspective

When we understand the great plan of happiness, we are gaining an **eternal perspective**, and the commandments, ordinances, covenants, **and the experiences, trials, and tribulations can be seen in their true and eternal light...**

Remember, however, that Satan will dim the brightness of hope and eternal perspective **by the dark, compelling urgency of now.** (October, 2003)



Teleios / Telos

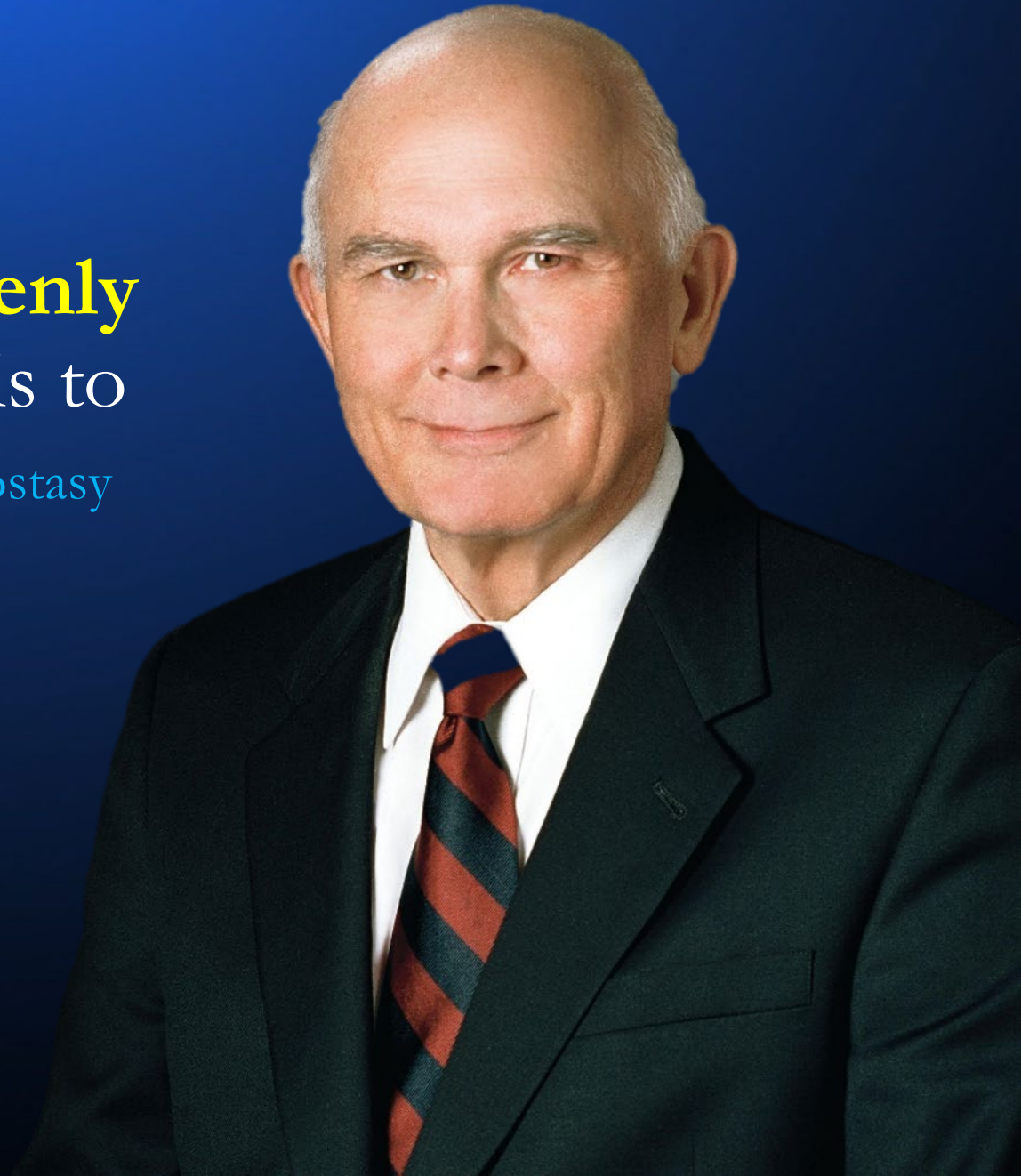
What is the ultimate destiny God desires for His children? The Savior taught his disciples in the Americas “Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect.” (3 Nephi 12:48). Though at times mistakenly interpreted as flawless, the Greek adjective in that verse (teleios) actually means being complete, mature, fully grown. Teleios is derived from the noun telos meaning complete or a consummated goal. Hence, Christ was asking us to strive to reach our ultimate goal. Moses 1:39 clearly articulates that goal: immortality and eternal life.

Τελος

End or Ultimate Purpose

Our Theology

“Our theology begins with **heavenly parents**. Our highest aspiration is to be like them.” (Elder Dallin H. Oaks, *Apostasy and Restoration*, Ensign, May 1995, 84)





The Long View...

Remember that God is more interested in your eternal happiness than He is your current comfort...He loves us too much to rob us of eternal joy by sheltering us from all difficulty

Faith-filled and stress free?



**There's no comfort in
the growth zone, but
there's no growth in
the comfort zone.**





Ye cannot behold with your natural eyes, for the present time, the design of your God concerning those things which shall come hereafter, and the glory which shall follow after much tribulation.

For after much tribulation come the blessings..

(Doctrine and Covenants 58:3)

**So was the Lord Confused
when He gave 2 Nephi 2:25?**

Adam fell that men might be; and
men are, that they might have...

Misery

Sooo...How Does it Work?

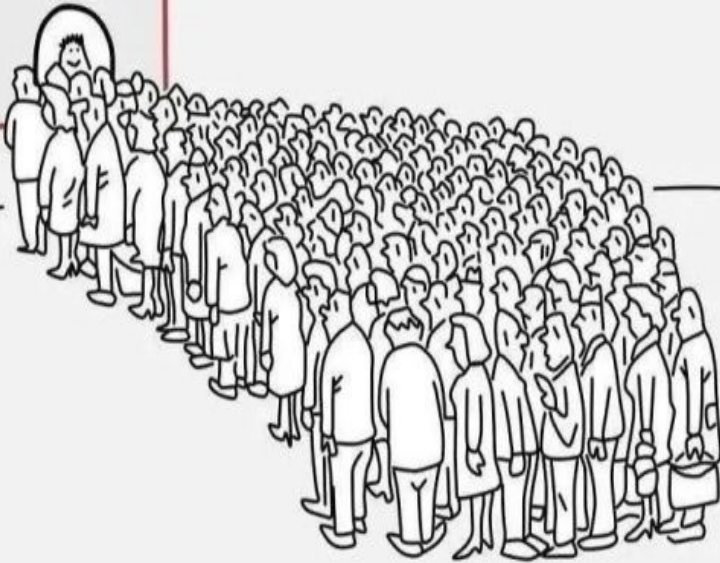
**How can we experience joy in
this world and a fulness of joy in
the world to come?**

We will seek to avoid two errors...

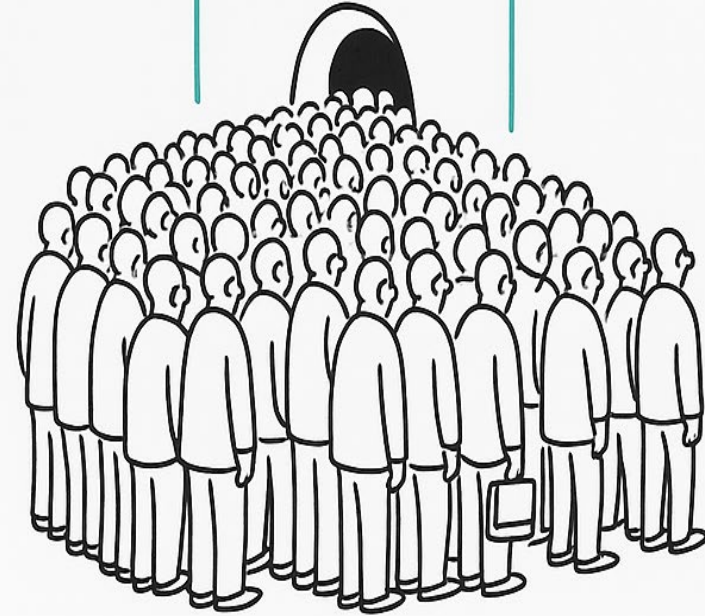
WORK
HARD



LIFE
HACKS



SIMPLISTIC
ANSWERS



SOUND
PRINCIPLES





True...but HOW???

“The Answer is Always Jesus Christ”
(April 2023)

“My dear brothers and sisters, the joy we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives. When the focus of our lives is on God’s plan of salvation...and Jesus Christ and His gospel, we can feel joy regardless of what is happening—or not happening—in our lives. **Joy comes from and because of Him. He is the source of all joy... For Latter-day Saints, Jesus Christ is joy!**” (October 2016)



True...but HOW???

By Taking a
Developmental,
Relational
Approach to the
Covenant Path

Two Examples...

“Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect.” (3 Nephi 12:48)

&

“Fundamental to us is God’s revelation that exaltation can be attained only through faithfulness to the covenants of an eternal marriage between a man and a woman”. (Dallin H. Oaks, *Liahona*, 2022, 102–3)

How do Parents feel watching their children learn and grow???



How about when they fail and fall???





So do we really think
God is less loving
and encouraging
than we are when
His children make
mistakes?

Do we really think
He is angry and
disappointed with us
when we try and
fail?

What if we rediscovered the joy in trying and growing???



Sooo...How Does it Work?

**How can we experience joy in
this world and a fulness of joy in
the world to come?**

Two Keys...

- 1. Learn and live in accordance with the “nature of happiness”
- 2. Stop trying to do it on our own – Invite Christ to Help



**Living according to the
“Nature of Happiness”**

**Who does Happy
better?**

Us or God?

The Nature of Happiness

“If I were to ask you who is the happiest being in all the universe—the one with the most joy—you would no doubt respond, “God.” **Accordingly, God wants us to become perfect like Him so we can experience His quality of joy and thus best fulfill the measure of our existence.** That is why His plan for us is sometimes called “the plan of happiness” (see Alma 42:8, 16). (Tad R. Callister, *Our Identity and Destiny*)



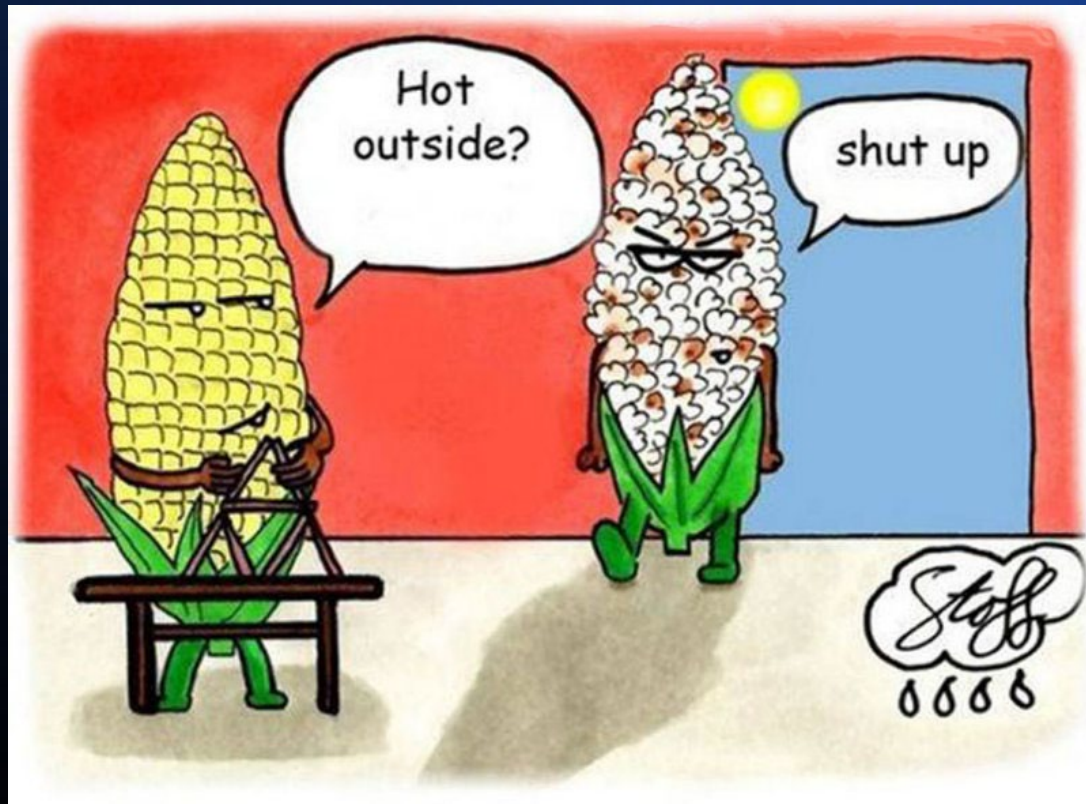
Nature of Happiness

Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy (2 Nephi 2:25)

Do not suppose, because it has been spoken concerning restoration, that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness.

And now, my son, all men that are in a state of nature, or I would say, in a carnal state, are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity; they are without God in the world, and **they have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore, they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness.** (Alma 41:10-11)

Physical and Spiritual Natures



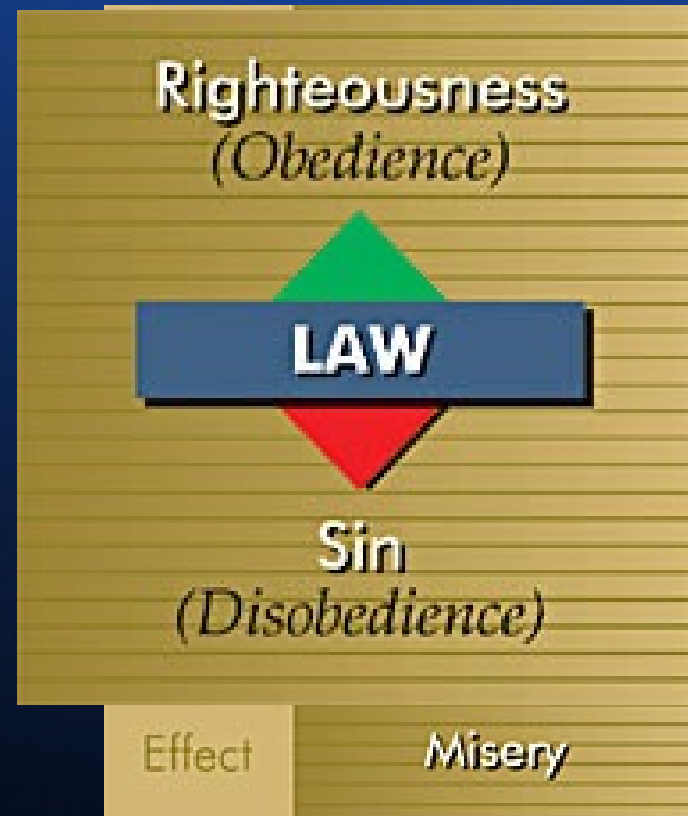


- 1.** God lives according to eternal truth and reality **(the nature of happiness)**
- 2.** God is a being who is made whole through relationships

two distinct aspect of God's nature

1

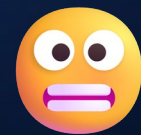
2 Nephi 2:13



(From D. Todd Christofferson – Justification and Sanctification – June 2001)

**So all we gotta do is keep
all the commandments**

  And we'll be happy???



No No No No No!!!

For verily I say unto you, they (spiritual gifts and power) are given for the benefit of those who love me and keep all my commandments, **AND HIM THAT SEEKETH SO TO DO...**(D&C 46:9)

BEHOLD, THE LORD REQUIRETH THE HEART AND A WILLING MIND; and the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days (D&C 64:34)



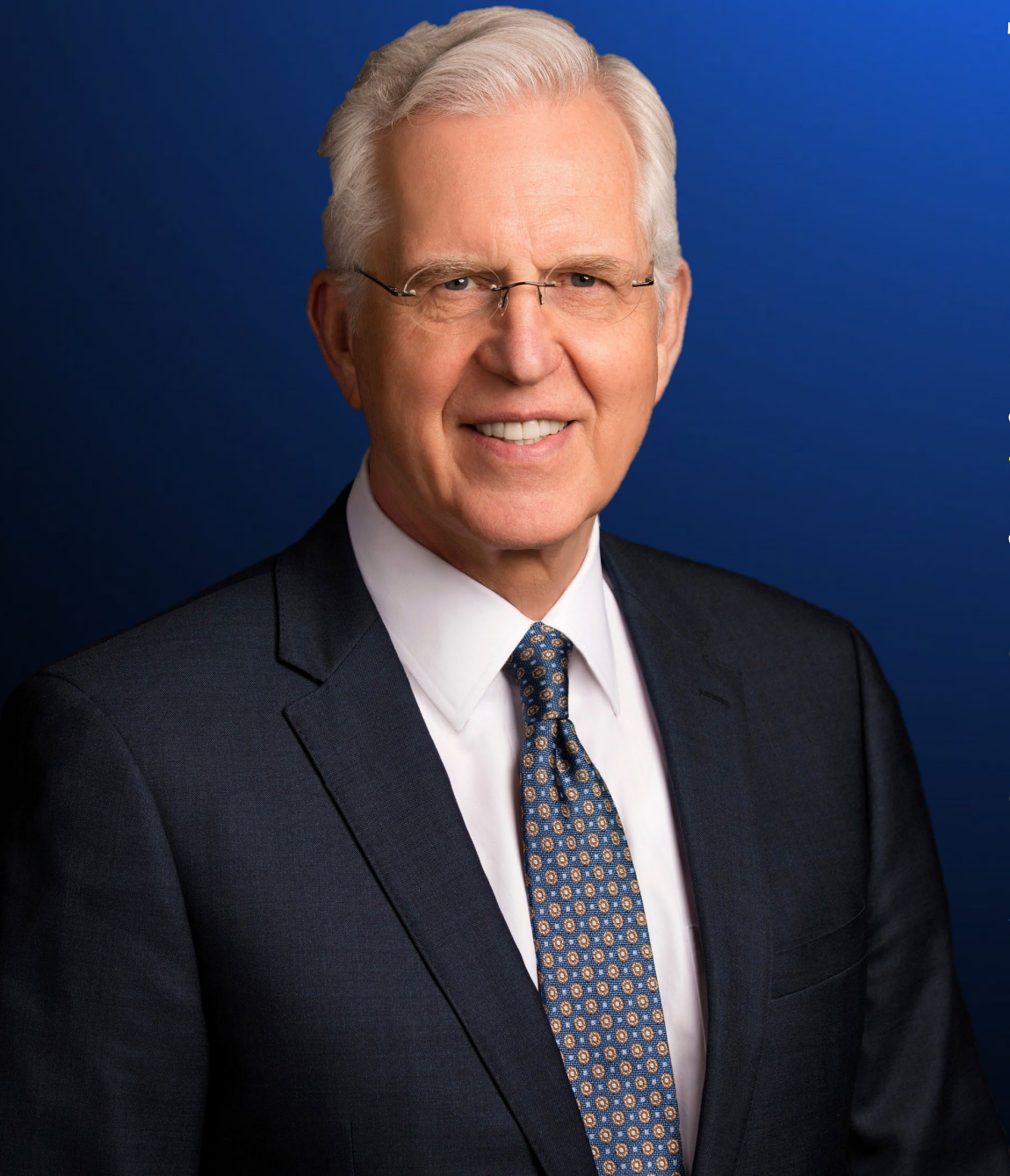
The Grand...Secret???

Could it really be as simple as
progressing along the
covenant path?

(the path to God's nature and the nature of happiness)

YES!!!

But simple doesn't mean
without intentional effort



The Covenant Path is the Path of Happiness

It is the one path that leads to the celestial kingdom of God. We embark upon the path at the gate of **baptism** and then “**press forward with a steadfastness in Christ**, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men [**the two great commandments**] to the end....

Following the principles and commandments of the gospel of Jesus Christ day by day is the happiest and most satisfying course in life.”

Why the Covenant Path, D. Todd Christofferson, April 2021

What if we thought about commandments and obedience in a different way?

It saddens me to admit this, but I used to measure my relationship with the Savior by how perfectly I was living. I thought an obedient life meant I would never need to repent. And when I made mistakes, which was every single day, I distanced myself from God, thinking, "He must be so disappointed in me."

That's just not true.

I've learned that if you wait until you're clean enough or perfect enough to go to the Savior, you've missed the whole point!

What if we thought about commandments and obedience in a different way?

I testify that while God cares about our mistakes, He cares more about what happens *after* we make a mistake. Are we going to turn to Him again and again? Are we going to stay in this covenant relationship?





I love you. I love you

So when the Lord says, “Repent ye, repent ye,” what if you imagined Him saying, “I love you. I love you.” Picture Him pleading with you to leave behind the behavior causing you pain, inviting you to step out of darkness and turn to His light.

2

God is a Relational Being

Our “Spiritual DNA” creates
the same nature in us



Spiritual Genetics

We were born in the image of God our Father; He begat us like unto Himself. There is the nature of Deity in the composition of our spiritual organization. In our spiritual birth, our Father transmitted to us the capabilities, powers and faculties which He possessed, as much so as the child on its mother's bosom possesses, although in an undeveloped state, the faculties, powers and susceptibilities of its parent. *(Tad R. Calister, Our Identity Determines our Destiny)*

Our spiritual DNA is His DNA.

(Russell M. Nelson, AZ Central article, 2/10/2019)



The Grand...Secret???

We were never intended to
walk the covenant path
alone...

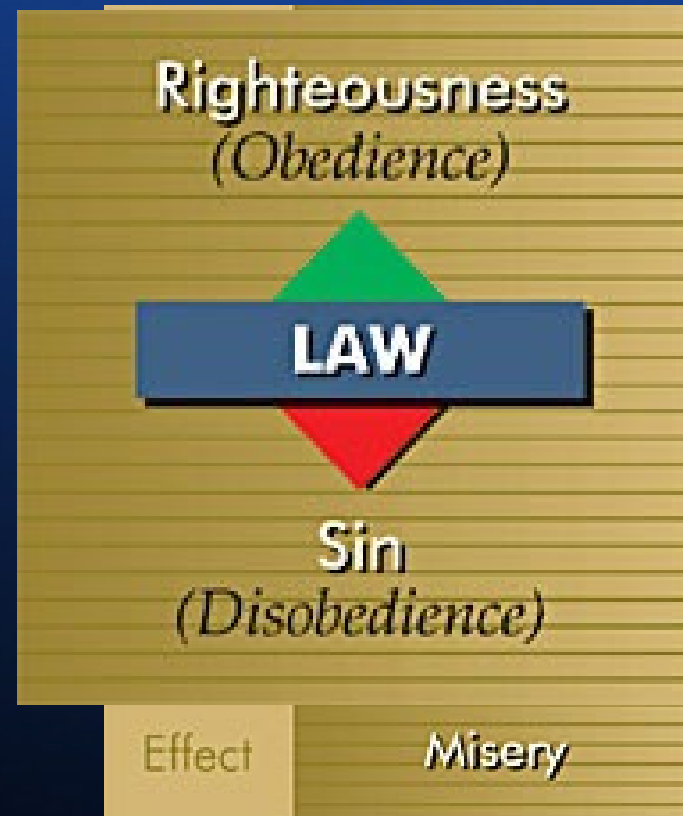
Abide in me and I in you;
therefore...

Walk with Me

(Moses 6:34)

1

2 Nephi 2:13



(From D. Todd Christofferson – Justification and Sanctification – June 2001)



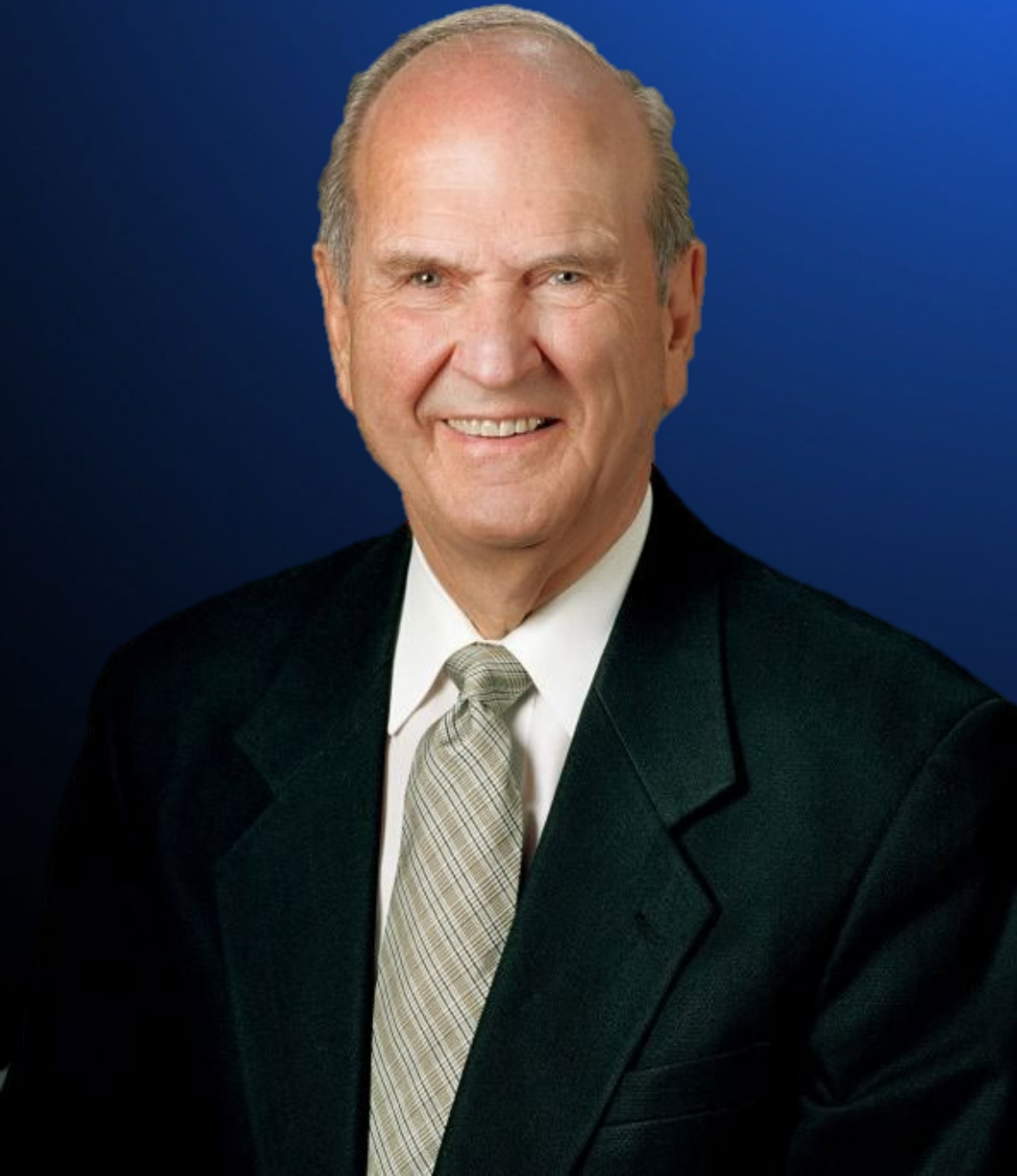
Bound to God...

A...unique aspect of the covenant path is our relationship with Deity. The covenants God offers to His children do more than guide us. They bind us to Him, and, bound to Him, we can overcome all things. (Why the Covenant Path, D. Todd Christofferson, April 2021)



We thereby create a relationship with God...

When you and I also enter that path, we have a new way of life. We thereby create a relationship with God that allows Him to bless and change us. The covenant path leads us back to Him. If we let God prevail in our lives, that covenant will lead us closer and closer to Him. All covenants are intended to be binding. They create a relationship with everlasting ties. Once we make a covenant with God, we leave neutral ground forever. God will not abandon His relationship with those who have forged such a bond with Him. In fact, all those who have made a covenant with God have access to a special kind of love and mercy. [\(The Everlasting Covenant, October 2022\)](#)



The Covenant Path = Covenant Love - Hased

The covenant path is a path of love—that incredible hased, that compassionate caring for and reaching out to each other. Feeling that love is liberating and uplifting. The greatest joy you will ever experience is when you are consumed with love for God and for all His children...The covenant path is all about our relationship with God—our hased relationship with Him. When we enter a covenant with God, we have made a covenant with Him who will always keep His word. He will do everything He can, without infringing on our agency, to help us keep ours. ([The Everlasting Covenant, October 2022](#))



Staying Covenant Connected to Christ is Key

“Your commitment to follow the Savior by making covenants with Him and then keeping those covenants **will open the door to every spiritual blessing and privilege available to men, women, and children everywhere**” (January 2018 News Conference - President Nelson)



Christ is Joy!

“My dear brothers and sisters, the joy we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives. When the focus of our lives is on God’s plan of salvation...and Jesus Christ and His gospel, we can feel joy regardless of what is happening—or not happening—in our lives. **Joy comes from and because of Him. He is the source of all joy... For Latter-day Saints, Jesus Christ is joy!**” (Russell M. Nelson, Joy and Spiritual Survival, October 2016)

You Say...and I Believe

