“Happiness,” as the Prophet Joseph Smith stated, “is the object and design of our existence” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938, p. 255.) “Men are, that they might have joy” is a great affirmation in the Book of Mormon. (2 Ne. 2:25.) It would seem that with all the guidance and counsel given to us by the Lord and his prophets through the ages, we should know the course of action that would result in happiness for us. Unfortunately, there are those who may have spent a large portion of a lifetime pursuing a goal that has not brought happiness but rather discontent and unrest. Perhaps the fault lies not with the person but with the goal itself. Maybe it is not attainable for that person.

As an example, we are taught in the Church that one of the highest goals of our lives should be to achieve eternal marriage and to bear and rear children. It is not uncommon, therefore, for single women to long for this blessing and to feel that our happiness cannot fully be achieved without marriage and parenthood. We may even develop feelings of inadequacy or a sense of failure because we are not married; or being married, we are childless; or having been married, we are divorced or widowed. We build a mental barrier against happiness, reserving that state for a future day when the goals of being married and having children may be realized.

As worthy and as desirable as marriage and children are, for some, they may not be possible. This is not because LDS single women are too selective or independent or because they choose a career or a life alone rather than marriage and family. Far from it—marriage and parenthood are the fabric of their dreams and the deepest desires of their hearts! But for some, there is no suitable opportunity, or they are single for other reasons beyond their control.

**Prophetic Counsel**

Several of the prophets have said some very comforting things on this subject. President Joseph Fielding Smith said:

“You good sisters, who are single and alone, do not fear, do not fear, do not feel that blessings are going to be withheld from you. You are not under any obligation or necessity of accepting some proposal that comes to you which is distasteful for fear you will come under condemnation. If in your hearts you feel that the gospel is true, and would under proper conditions receive those ordinances and sealing blessings in the temple of the Lord; … and that does not come to you now; the Lord will make it up, and you shall be blessed—for no blessing shall be withheld.”

Please do not misunderstand. The doctrine of eternal marriage and the importance of children and the family should be emphasized and taught to every Latter-day Saint woman and man. It is a part of the Lord’s plan for our salvation. This, however, does not alter the realities of the situation in which many women find themselves today. Statistics alone indicate that many of them will not be able to marry. Are they simply marking time here on earth? No! By all means, no!

**Pursuit by the Right Path**

Joy and happiness and fulfillment are as possible for single members of the Church as for those who are married, if happiness is pursued in the way that invites the right outcome.

My life as a married woman was joyous, as is my life now, but my married life was different from the life I lead as a widow. Much of the happiness in marriage comes when each partner is concerned with the well-being and happiness of the other and takes responsibility for helping to achieve it for his or her companion. This kind of support is largely missing in a single person’s life. Achieving happiness is a more individual concern and, in some ways, takes a little more effort.

There are a number of conditions most people say are requisite to the “good life”: interesting, satisfying work to do and sufficient income to take care of daily needs; opportunities for education, personal development, and growth; satisfactory social contacts, particularly within our families; a little beauty in our lives and some opportunity for exposure to culture and art; good causes for which to work; and opportunities for service to others.

In this day and in our society and in our Church, these things can be achieved by most of us. But they all take real personal effort on our part.

More and more, women need to become better prepared in education, training, and experience, if for no other reason than that they can expect to live an average of eight years longer than men. Thus, most women, including those who marry, will be alone for a while during their lifetimes.

An Ensign profile article, “Stena Scorup—First Lady of Salina” (March 1976, p. 29), told of the productive life this single woman had as she dedicated herself to inspired teaching. “Teach students—not subjects” was her philosophy. She was a homemaker, Church worker, civic worker, member of the city library board, and mayor of her town.

What is the worth of a Stena Scorup and single women like her who are making significant contributions to society? Much of the education, the nursing, the office work, the merchandising—professions related to consumerism and home economics—is carried on by these women. They also contribute significantly to the work of the Church, to community services, and to their own families.

**What about Children?**
One of the most troubling barriers to happiness for single or childless women is that they feel they have no opportunity to experience the role of a parent.

Must these women rule out having the opportunity to work with and influence children? No! I speak from experience when I say that there are children all about us who long for attention, love, service, example, and teaching that can be given by single or childless women.

For many years in my early married life I felt unfulfilled, knowing that the blessing of children was not possible for me. Gradually, however, I realized that I could influence children within my own extended family and be a special friend to other children. Hardly a week goes by without a loving reminder in the mail of a tremendous relationship I enjoy with children I have not borne. Just as with natural parents, building such a relationship involves giving attention, carefully exploring feelings and needs, and learning how to communicate. It takes careful timing and mental receptivity.

Love is an essential ingredient in building meaningful personal relationships. I found, even in the marriage relationship, that real love is born of concern for one another and from doing something for one another by “acting out” our vocal expressions of love. It’s a type of love in which each of us can participate.

Opportunities for involvement in the loving process abound in our lives. They are there—not for the asking, but for the doing.

**Priesthood, Family Help**

Many single women feel deprived because they do not have the priesthood in their homes. This, I realize, is a problem. The Lord in his wisdom, however, has not left us alone. In our families, frequently there are fathers, brothers, uncles, brothers-in-law, nephews, or, for some widows and divorced women, sons and sons-in-law who are worthy priesthood holders. They should be given opportunities to exercise it in our behalf. There are bishops, home teachers, and male members of family home evening groups who would exercise the priesthood for us if we would let them.

Perhaps the most difficult of all roles for singles is that of a single parent trying to rear children alone. It is not easy to rear good children alone, but it is not impossible.

Most professionals who work with children agree that youngsters need good models from both sexes. The extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins) often can provide these models if we seek their help. Outside the family, there are usually priesthood leaders, quorum advisers, home teachers, bishops, Scoutmasters or Beehive, Mia Maid, and Laurel teachers. Relief Society Home and Family Education classes can also help mothers who need reassurance and guidance with problems in rearing children.

In a seminar designed particularly for single parents, Dr. Victor L. Cline of the University of Utah pointed out that many single parents are left with feelings of rejection and a sense of failure after divorce. Often, discouragement and lack of self-esteem are by-products.

“If you let yourself wallow in self-pity and think about all the things that were bad, and you keep going over those, it will destroy you,” he said. “You do not have to allow that to happen. You can
either live or you can die. I see too many people who are divorced who are slowly dying [of] bitterness [and] heartache.”

One immediate remedy Dr. Cline recommended for feelings of discouragement is exercise. It is almost impossible to feel discouraged while keeping physically active.

But the gospel also provides long-term remedies for those feelings. These remedies are to be found in constant spiritual activity: seeking out the love of our Heavenly Father and our Savior in prayer and faith, and seeking out the opportunity to do good for others around us in this world.

**A Way of Life**

We are richly blessed to have the gospel of Jesus Christ, which encourages us to acquire knowledge and to exercise our intelligence and every ability with which the Lord has endowed us. The gospel is a way of life. It is a means of growing and improving. It is the key to freedom and independence from despair and fear and loneliness. I realize that there are many challenges and problems for single Latter-day Saints, including the widowed and divorced. But the Lord has given us comfort, guidance, and counsel. He has given us the Relief Society, priesthood quorums, and activity programs for single adults to educate us, to enrich and broaden our lives, and to help us in our eternal roles.

May I tell you of my own testimony concerning the benefits of Relief Society for single women?

After my husband’s sudden death several years ago, I felt put upon by life in a way. I felt a large measure of self-pity and rebellion to think that as a relatively young woman, I was facing the fact that I would probably spend the rest of my life alone. While I was wrestling with these problems, the opportunity came for me to accept a position at the headquarters of the Relief Society and to become a member of its general board. There was but one drawback—it required that I move far from my family and friends to Salt Lake City.

Of course, I accepted the calling and loved my work in it. But as satisfying as it was, I found that I still needed friends and companionship outside my world of work.

In Relief Society I found that I had friends in my ward. My testimony was strengthened as I participated in gospel studies and heard the testimonies of other sisters. It brought out my valuable feminine qualities, and I found opportunities for service, as well as for homemaking activities. It brought relief from some of the pressures of life and from loneliness, and it gave me a fresh point of view.

In my search for a prescription for happiness, I found the following counsel:

“To be happy, a person must (1) love the Lord and keep his commandments; (2) love and serve his neighbor; (3) love himself and develop his talents; (4) love and serve his family. (Relief Society Lesson Manual 1972–3, p. 265.)

“President David O. McKay said this about happiness: ‘The secret of happiness consists not of having but of being; not of possessing but of enjoying. It is a warm glow of the heart that is at peace with itself.’ ” (Pathways to Happiness, comp. Llewelyn R. McKay, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft 1957, p.
That inner peace comes more from concentrating on who we are and what we can become than from a change in our status in life. It would be convenient if every single Latter-day Saint could change that status immediately by marriage to a worthy mate. But the happiness and joy we are promised is not boxed up somewhere waiting for that to happen. It is here to be enjoyed now.