

"Remember, my brethren [and sisters], that whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself; and whosoever doeth iniquity, doeth it unto himself; for behold, ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free" (Helaman 14:30).

The Lord has revealed His sacred standard to guide people in a troubled world. You and I were born free to follow His divine guidance. We may choose for ourselves. Those choices may bring addiction or freedom. For freedom and joy, choose to "be faithful in Christ." He will lift you up. May "the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever" (Moroni 9:25), I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. *The Health Consequences of Smoking: Nicotine Addiction*, Public Health Service [U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988], pp. 262-63.

2. *Cigarette Smoking and Cardiovascular Disease 1985: Special Report to the Public*, American Heart Association (50-075-A).

3. Office of Technology Assessment, U.S. Congress Staff Memorandum, Sept. 1985, p. 2.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

5. *Utah Hospital Leaders Digest*, 15 July 1988, p. 2.

6. *The Health Consequences of Smoking: Nicotine Addiction*, Public Health Service [U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988], pp. 14, 334.

7. Among them are Nigel Gray, director, Anti-Cancer Council, Victoria, Australia; David Simpson, director, Action on Smoking

and Health, U.K.; Pamela Taylor, spokesperson, British Medical Association, U.K.; Andrew Pipe, University of Ottawa Heart Institute, Canada; Roberta Ferrence, Addiction Research Foundation, Canada; Bernice McKay, secretary, Commonwealth Department of Health, Australia. *Times and Seasons*, Documentary on Tobacco, July 1988.

8. "Coming to Grips with Alcoholism," *U.S. News and World Report*, 30 Nov. 1987, pp. 56-57.

9. *Healthy People: The Surgeon General's Report on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention*, Public Health Service [U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979], p. 125.

10. *Accident Facts*, Annual Report of the National Safety Council, 1975, confirmed by telephone conversation 20 July 1988.

11. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, April 1983, pp. 69-72; or *Ensign*, May 1983, pp. 54-55. Spencer W. Kimball, in Conference Report, Apr. 1974, p. 8; or *Ensign*, May 1974, p. 7. Joseph Fielding Smith, in Conference Report, Apr. 1971, p. 47; or *Ensign*, June 1971, p. 49. Heber J. Grant, J. Reuben Clark, Jr., David O. McKay, "Message of the First Presidency," in Conference Report, Oct. 1942, pp. 8-10.

President Hinckley

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Council of the Twelve Apostles has just spoken to us.

The chorus and congregation will now join in singing "Praise to the Man." After this, Bishop Robert D. Hales, Presiding Bishop of the Church, will address us.

The chorus and congregation sang "Praise to the Man."

Bishop Robert D. Hales

How to make good choices

The scriptures teach us that an important part of mortal probation will be making the right choices. How do we make the right choices when there are so

many temptations and so many people telling us what they think we should do with our lives?

There are three important elements that will allow us to make good decisions:

First, we must have an eternal *plan* with objectives that we are committed to achieve.

Second, we need to *study and pray* on a daily basis about our decisions for feelings of spiritual guidance, courage, and commitment.

And third, we need to *examine our motives* each time we make a decision.

Have an eternal plan

We need an eternal plan. Life's plan and the challenge to be successful are demonstrated in an Aesop Fable, "The Man, the Boy, and the Donkey." The objective of the man and the boy was to journey to the city marketplace and sell the donkey for winter provisions. As they started to town, the father rode the donkey. In the first village, the villagers said, "What an inconsiderate man, riding the donkey and making his son walk!" So the father got off the donkey and let his son ride.

In the next hamlet, the people whispered, "What an inconsiderate boy, riding the donkey and making his father walk!"

In frustration, the father climbed on the donkey; and father and son rode the donkey, only to have the people in the next town declare, "How inconsiderate of the man and the boy to overload their beast of burden and treat him in such an inhumane manner!"

In compliance with the dissident voices and mocking fingers, the father and son both got off the donkey to relieve the animal's burden, only to have the next group of onlookers say, "Can you imagine a man and a boy being so stupid as to not even use their beast of burden for what it was created!"

Then, in anger and total desperation, having tried to please all those who offered advice, the father and son both rode the donkey until it collapsed. The donkey had to be carried to the marketplace. The donkey could not be sold. The people in the marketplace scoffed, "Who wants a worthless donkey that can't even walk into the city!"

The father and son had failed in their goal of selling the donkey and had no

money to buy the winter provisions they needed in order to survive.

How much different the outcome would have been if the father and son had had a plan to follow. Father could have said, "I'll ride the donkey one-third of the way; Son, you ride the donkey one-third of the way; and we'll both walk the last third of the way. The donkey will arrive at the marketplace fresh and strong, ready to be sold."

Then, as they received confusing advice while traveling through each hamlet and village along their way to the city, they could look at each other, give a reassuring wink of the eye, and say, "We have a plan."

Eternal life is our goal

Indeed, you and I have a plan to guide us in our lives—the eternal plan that was given to us in the premortal world and that will bring us back into the presence of our Heavenly Father. During our mortal probation on earth, we will be tested with enticements and opposition in all things. But if we are obedient and faithful to the laws, ordinances, and covenants which we accept with our free agency, of our own free will and choice, we can attain eternal life.

To attain eternal life is why we came to earth. Eternal life is our goal. The definition of eternal life is to be able to live in the presence of our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ with our families for all eternity.

Every time we make choices in our lives, we should weigh the ultimate effect our decisions will have on our goal of attaining eternal life.

Study and pray

That is why we must study and pray. Having the eternal plan as a goal in our lives, we will make eternal choices. However, we will not make the right eternal choices based solely on our pure intellectual deduction and factual analysis from our own understanding: Prayer and study must be used together to build knowledge and wisdom.

First, we start with the intelligence with which we were born. To our intelligence we add knowledge as we search for answers, study, and educate ourselves. To our knowledge we add experience, which should lead us to a level of wisdom. In addition to our wisdom, we add the help of the Holy Ghost through our prayers of faith, asking for spiritual guidance and strength. Then, and only then, do we reach an understanding in our hearts—which motivates us to “do what is right; let the consequence follow” (*Hymns* [1985], no. 237). The feelings of an understanding heart give us the sweet spirit of assurance of not only knowing but doing what is right no matter what the circumstances. The understanding in our hearts comes from a close interdependence of study and prayer.

“Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me.

“But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right” (D&C 9:7–8).

After we have attained knowledge and understanding, it is important to feel that our decision is right. Then when we act, we will do what is right.

“Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding” (Proverbs 3:13).

“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding” in your heart (Proverbs 4:7).

Stories about prayer

Last Saturday, I had the experience of visiting Joe and Linda in their home in Boise, Idaho. They gave me permission to share their story with you in the hope that it might help someone who had to make a similar decision in his or her life. About three to four years ago, Joe was an alcoholic. Linda, while she did not drink, was codependent emotionally on the

behavior of an alcoholic husband. She was nearing a nervous breakdown. She had made the decision to save herself and the children from the manipulative behavior of a husband suffering from alcoholism. So she left home, taking the children, except for a fourteen-year-old son.

Joe related to me the depression and despair he felt the night Linda left him. Somewhere in the middle of the night, about 2:00 or 3:00 A.M., Joe awoke. He reached out in prayer to his Heavenly Father and prayed until dawn. It was his Gethsemane. He cried out to the Lord and asked for help with his affliction and expressed love for his caring wife, who had confronted him with his abusive behavior.

When Joe arose in the early morning light, he made a commitment not to take another drink of alcohol. Joe has lived up to that commitment. His testimony as he talks with others in Alcoholics Anonymous is that God lives and answers prayers.

There is another story about a little boy named Josh who was having terrible nightmares that were frightening him. He asked his father to kneel down and have a prayer with him to ask Heavenly Father to stop the dreams and nightmares.

Josh opened his prayer by thanking Heavenly Father for the blessings that were his. He then asked his Heavenly Father to have the nightmares stop and send him a confirmation through his feelings during the prayer. He said no more. He waited about a minute, said “thank you,” and closed the prayer. He had had his confirmation and comfort that his prayers were answered—that he would not have any more nightmares. What an important lesson for a young man to learn!

Each time a stake president is chosen, members of the Council of the Twelve and the First Quorum of the Seventy have feelings similar to those Josh and Joe had. What an important lesson to learn about prayer and the feelings of reassurance that come when we ask in faith, with nothing wavering (see James 1:6), as the Prophet Joseph did!

Seek wise counsel

Along with study and prayer, we must seek wise counsel.

"A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels" (Proverbs 1:5).

When seeking wise counsel, turn to those who have exhibited obedience to the commandments and willingness to follow the promptings of the Spirit in their lives.

You will know you have a true friend and counselor when the advice you are given makes it easier to live the commandments and when you are not asked to choose between a wayward friend's ways and the Lord's ways.

Even though we counsel with others, we must take the responsibility for our actions. Some try to go through life without making their own decisions and blame others when all does not go as well as expected.

As we study our problems out in our minds, patience and pondering should have an important place in our decision-making process. We should reflect on our eternal goals and not make hasty and unwise decisions.

President Joseph F. Smith gave these sobering words of advice to leaders and members of the Church to help us when making decisions. It is a statement I have had displayed in my office since becoming Presiding Bishop.

"In leaders undue impatience and a gloomy mind are almost unpardonable, and it sometimes takes almost as much courage to wait as to act. It is to be hoped, then, that the leaders of God's people, and the people themselves, will not feel that they must have at once a solution of every question that arises to disturb the even tenor of their way" (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1939], p. 156).

Examine motives

And lastly, we must examine our motives. A good check and balance in decision making is to look at our motives

for making our decisions. We should ask ourselves, "Are my motives selfish, or is there charity in the decision I am about to make? Is this decision in keeping with the commandments, both in the spirit and the letter of the law? Is my decision basically right, honorable, and compatible with the golden rule? Have I considered the impact of my decision on others?"

"Let all your [decisions] be done with charity" (1 Corinthians 16:14).

Beware of fear and greed. Be aware of your true motives.

We make poor and irrational decisions if our decision is motivated by greediness: greed for monetary gain; greed that results in a conflict of interest; desire for power, titles, and recognition of men.

"He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live" (Proverbs 15:27).

Likewise, we make poor and irrational decisions if we are motivated by fear: fear of man, fear of not being popular, fear of failure, fear of public opinion.

As Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice" (1 Samuel 15:24).

The poet Robert Frost, in the poem "The Road Not Taken," gives us a vivid, visual image of standing at the crossroads of life, having to make a decision:

Two roads diverged in a yellow
wood,
And sorry I could not travel
both . . .
Yet knowing how way leads on
to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood,
and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

When we stand at the crossroads of life and must make a decision whether to go to the great and spacious building of the world's ways or to walk the straight and narrow path that leads to eternal life,

we must realize that we cannot travel *both* roads—although sometimes we try. It is difficult to come back, but we can; and our greatest satisfaction will more than likely come from taking the lonelier road which is less traveled.

May the Lord bless us as we make our decisions in life to constantly keep our goal of eternal life in view. That we may study and pray each day to *know* and *understand* what is right but, more importantly, to *do* what is right; that we may have those who stand by us say, “Thee lift me, and I’ll lift thee, and we’ll ascend together,” is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder James E. Faust

My dear brothers, sisters, and friends, sixteen years ago I was called to be a General Authority of this church, and ten years ago this conference I was sustained as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. These years have been challenging and, in many ways, difficult, but they have also been fulfilling. My wife and I have been trying humbly to serve the Lord as best we know how. We have traveled over much of the earth in my ministry. This has afforded us opportunity to bear witness of the Savior in many countries.

Testimony of Jesus Christ

During those years, having worn as a spiritual cloak the knowledge that Jesus is the Christ, I feel led today to give my personal witness concerning Jesus of Nazareth and His mission. I wish to testify of the mediation, the atonement, and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. I speak of these transcendent events in light of my spiritual knowledge that Jesus is the Redeemer and the Son of God. I also testify of His divinity and of those events in the office, the priesthood, the calling, and the authority of the holy Apostleship with which I and my Brethren are charged.

The chorus sang “Hallelujah” from *The Mount of Olives* without announcement.

President Hinckley

Bishop Robert D. Hales, Presiding Bishop of the Church, has spoken to us, followed by the Mormon Youth Chorus singing “Hallelujah” from *The Mount of Olives*.

Elder James E. Faust of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will be our next speaker.

Jesus’ mediation and atonement

Through the Atonement and those singular events surrounding it, all of the terrible individual and collective sins of all mankind were taken upon the Lord’s shoulders. The marvelous result of this great suffering was that He was able to redeem from physical death the believers and the obedient as well as the unbelieving and disobedient (see D&C 46:13–14, Acts 24:15, 1 Corinthians 15:22). Every person ever born or yet to be born is the beneficiary of both the mediation and the atonement of the Savior (see Alma 11:42).

The act of the Atonement is, in its simplest terms, a reconciliation of man with his God. The word *atonement* means to be at one. “It is literally *at-one-ment*” (James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, 12th ed. [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1924], p. 75). Because of their transgression, Adam and Eve, having chosen to leave their state of innocence (see 2 Nephi 2:23–25), were banished from the presence of God. This is referred to in Christendom as the Fall, or Adam’s transgression. It is a spiritual death because Adam and Eve were separated from the presence of God and given agency “to act for themselves and not