

And so with the sheep we earnestly
plead

For the sake of the lambs today,
For when sheep are lost, what a ter-
rible cost

The lambs will have to pay!

["The Echo," C. C. Miller, quoted in
Hugh B. Brown, *The Abundant Life*
(1965), 166-67]

The Lord said, "My sheep hear my voice" (John 10:27). Likewise, your children respond to your voice. No one can effectively take your place as father and mother. The story is told of "the six-year-old who got lost from his mother in a large supermarket [and] began to call frantically, 'Martha, Martha.' When the mother was found and they were reunited, she said, 'Honey, you should not call me Martha; I am "Mother" to you,' to which the little fellow rejoined, 'Yes, I know, but the store was full of mothers and I wanted mine'" (Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* [1972], 117).

What a blessing it would be to your family if you would harmonize your life with the gospel. The decision to change your life and return to activity and come unto Christ is the most important decision you could make in this life.

Each soul is precious

In conclusion, a final word to those who shepherd the flock. The Savior Him-

self in a revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith tells us in very personal terms how valuable each soul is:

"Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God;

"For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him.

"And he hath risen again from the dead, that he might bring all men unto him, on conditions of repentance.

"And how great is his joy in the soul that repenteth!

"Wherefore, you are called to cry repentance unto this people.

"And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!" (D&C 18:10-15).

The Good Shepherd willingly gave His life for His sheep, for you and me—yes, for all of us, that we might live eternally with our Father in Heaven. I pray that we will all follow the admonition our Savior Jesus Christ gave to Peter three times: "Feed my lambs. . . . Feed my sheep. . . . Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Sister Sharon G. Larsen

Importance of using agency wisely

As we left our Father in Heaven's presence and entered this world, we brought with us a priceless, sacred, pre-mortal, and eternal gift. It is this gift, the gift of agency, about which I wish to speak.

Agency is the power to think, choose, and act for ourselves. It comes with end-

less opportunities, accompanied by responsibility and consequences. It is a blessing and a burden. Using this gift of agency wisely is critical today because never in the world's history have God's children been so blessed or so blatantly confronted with so many choices.

Life was simpler years ago in my hometown on the Canadian prairie. Our

phone number was one digit—3. We had one black-and-white movie that came from the larger town of Cardston every Thursday night. Mail came Monday, Wednesday, and Friday—unless it snowed hard.

There was one main road. Three miles west was our farm, and 20 miles east on that same road was the Cardston Alberta Temple. There weren't many other roads to choose or places to go.

Today there are infinite telephone numbers, movies of all kinds and colors, e-mail at our fingertips 24 hours a day, and many roads that relentlessly call for our judgment. Our environment is flooded with choices. But our purpose for being here on earth has never changed.

Agency is necessary for our growth

The Lord told Abraham that He sent us to earth to see if we would do what He asked us to do (see Abraham 3:25). Choice becomes inescapable. The world's two opposing forces seek our commitment. On the one hand, there is the reality of Satan, and on the other, the more powerful love of the Savior.

Lehi teaches us that if there were no opposition, there would be no righteousness nor wickedness, neither good nor bad. We can't act for ourselves if there is no choice (see 2 Nephi 2:11, 16). To become a committed follower of Christ, we must have the option to reject Him. So Satan is permitted to exercise his power, and yielding our will to God can sometimes become difficult. Yet it is in this exercise of acting for ourselves that we grow.

C. S. Lewis said: "Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. . . . You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later." Lewis goes on, "Christ, because He was the only man who never

yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means" (*Mere Christianity* [1960], 109–10).

Choices have consequences

I remember asking my parents if I could do certain things. Their response never varied: "You have been taught. You know how we feel about that, but you will have to decide for yourself." Yet deciding for oneself dictates consequences, which are not always what we want. We want the freedom without consequences. And so, too often, we try to stand neutral, undecided, and uncommitted. It is in this atmosphere that we become vulnerable to the influence of Satan.

King Ahab and his people in northern Israel tell us about neutrality and indecision. The Lord's hand was stayed because the people would not decide whom to worship—Jehovah or Baal. Baal is another name for Satan. The Lord sent Elijah the prophet with this clear message: "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him." The scriptures say, "The people answered him not a word" (1 Kings 18:21). They didn't want the responsibility of making a commitment. You remember the story: Elijah challenged them to a test to see who is God. They would each pray to their god to see which would burn up the offering on the altar. When the priests called mightily to their idol, they were left unheard and unsupported.

In stark contrast, one lone prophet of the true and living God was not only heard, he was magnified in his efforts. When Elijah petitioned his God, the fire of the Lord came down and consumed everything—the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust—and it licked up the water in the trench. Following this exhibition, the people said, "The Lord, he is the God" (1 Kings 18:39), and then the

scriptures say the priests of Baal were killed. There were no unbelievers still alive in northern Israel that day! Choices would not be a dilemma if good were rewarded as quickly and spectacularly as was Elijah or if wrongdoing meant immediate death. But it is not that simple when our work is to increase our faith.

Choose which way to face

Our faith and commitment are tested when the world offers tempting and enticing alternatives that can turn our faces from the Lord's kingdom. Some would like to live in that eternal city and still keep a "summer home" in Babylon. If we are not consciously and deliberately choosing the kingdom of God, we will in fact be moving backward as the kingdom of God moves forward "boldly, nobly, and independent" (Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:540). Choosing which way we face will determine our blessings or our burdens. The Psalmist invites us to cast our burdens on the Lord, and He will sustain us (see Psalm 55:22), while Mormon warns, "The devil will not support his children" (Alma 30:60).

A young man I love with all my heart said to me: "No one can tell me what to do. I am in charge of my own life." He has the mistaken idea that to be independent and free, he must oppose God's will. Where, then, will his strength come?

Commandments are evidence that God cares

Brother James E. Talmage says of Jesus: He "was all that a boy should be, for His development was unretarded by the dragging weight of sin; He loved and obeyed the truth and therefore was free" (*Jesus the Christ*, 3rd ed. [1916], 112).

Making right choices frees us and blesses us, even in choosing what may appear trivial in our lives. A friend thought the Lord was too involved in his life. He said, "I can't take all those absolutes in

the Church that tell me I must do this, I can't do that." My friend did not see that those absolutes are evidence of our Father's vigilant care.

Isn't it incredible? There are six billion people on this planet, and Heavenly Father cares what I watch for entertainment, and He cares what I eat and drink. He cares how I dress and how I earn and spend my money. He cares what I do and don't do. Heavenly Father cares about my happiness.

Our Father's caring comes in so many ways, and we have only to listen and live for it. Someone has said, "If [we] have not chosen the Kingdom of God [first], it will make in the end no difference what [we] have chosen instead" (William Law, 18th-century clergyman).

Gifts to help us use our agency wisely

Because our purpose here on earth has not changed, nor will it ever, our Father steadily and regularly supplies additional gifts to make our world safe and strengthen our wise use of agency. Think about the gift of prayer—opportunities to be heard and understood. Think about the gift of the Holy Ghost, who will show us all the things we should do (see 2 Nephi 32:5). Think about sacred covenants we have made, the scriptures, priesthood and patriarchal blessings. Think about the ultimate gift of the Atonement and its reminder in the sacrament, which blankets us with love and hope and grace. These gifts help us use our agency wisely so we can return back to our heavenly home, where "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Only one main road

Today there are many roads, but like my hometown, there is only one main road, the strait and narrow.

Acknowledging our tendency to wander in strange roads (see 1 Nephi 8:32), we plead to the Lord through this hymn:

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it;
Seal it for thy courts above.
["Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," *Hymns* (1948), 70]

I close with the prayer of Nephi speaking for you and for me: "O Lord, wilt thou not shut the gates of thy righteousness before me, that I may walk in the path of the low valley, that I may be strict in the plain road" (2 Nephi 4:32), in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Elder Ben B. Banks of the Presidency of the Seventy has spoken to us, followed by Sister Sharon G. Larsen, second counselor in the Young Women general presidency.

The choir and congregation will now sing "High on the Mountain Top." Following the singing, Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone of the Seventy will speak to us. He will be followed by Elder Neil L. Andersen, also of the Seventy.

The choir and congregation sang "High on the Mountain Top."

Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone

The Church will never waver on sin

Alexander Solzhenitsyn referred to short-sighted concessions: "A process of giving up and giving up and giving up and hoping and hoping and hoping that perhaps at some point the wolf will have had enough."

My wonderful young friends, let me promise you, the wolf will never have enough.

Oliver Wendell Holmes said: "Where the spirit invades the heart, there can be no rest. For even in the dark of night, one link of the chain still holds, one light that will not go out."

Doesn't it make you deeply grateful to belong to a church with apostles and prophets at the head—knowing that one link will always hold, one light will never go out? As the world moves deeper and deeper into sin, this wonderful Church stands like a giant granite boulder.

Aren't you proud that the Church teaches us the truth? We don't have to wonder about earrings for boys and men, tattoos, spiked hair, the four-letter

words, and obscene gestures. We have prophets who model the standards. They teach that the Ten Commandments are not outdated. The word of the Lord has thundered down through the generations: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain" (Exodus 20:7). Profaning God's name is a great offense to the Spirit, and to do so is Satan's great ploy to mock our God.

Jehovah also declared, "Thou shalt not steal" (Exodus 20:15). Stealing is an affront to God. This commandment is one of only ten. Cheating, lying, bearing false witness are all types of stealing.

Beloved youth, aren't you thankful to God that the apostles and prophets never waver on sin? No matter how strong the winds of public opinion may blow, the Church is immovable. "God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife."¹

Those who espouse perverse principles and deviant behavior are living in sin. Laws, consensus, consenting adults