

President Thomas S. Monson

My dear brothers and sisters, both within my view and assembled throughout the world, I seek an interest in your faith and prayers as I respond to the assignment and privilege to address you. First, however, I should like to extend a personal welcome to Elders Dieter Uchtdorf and David Bednar, our new members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Choose you this day

I have been thinking recently about choices and their consequences. It has been said that the gate of history turns on small hinges, and so do people's lives. The choices we make determine our destiny.

Joshua of old declared, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."¹

All of us commenced an awesome and vital journey when we left the spirit world and entered this often challenging stage called mortality. We brought with us that great gift from God—our agency. Said the prophet Wilford Woodruff:

"God has given unto all of His children . . . individual agency. . . [We] possessed it in the heaven of heavens before the world was, and the Lord maintained and defended it there against the aggression of Lucifer. . . . By virtue of this agency you and I and all mankind are made responsible beings, responsible for the course we pursue, the lives we live, the deeds we do."²

Brigham Young said, "All must use [this agency] in order to gain exaltation in [God's] kingdom; inasmuch as [we] have the power of choice [we] must exercise that power."³

The scriptures tell us that we are free to act for ourselves, "to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life."⁴

A familiar hymn provides inspiration in the choices we make:

Choose the right when a choice is placed before you.
In the right the Holy Spirit guides;
And its light is forever shining o'er you,
When in the right your heart confides. . . .

Choose the right! There is peace in righteous doing.
Choose the right! There's safety for the soul.
Choose the right in all labors you're pursuing;
Let God and heaven be your goal.⁵

Guides to help us make correct choices

Do we have a guide to help us choose the right and avoid dangerous detours? Positioned on the wall of my office, directly opposite my desk, is a lovely print of the Savior, painted by Heinrich Hofmann. I love the painting, which I have had since I was a 22-year-old bishop and which I have taken with me wherever I have been assigned to labor. I have tried to pattern my life after the Master. Whenever I have a difficult decision to make, I have looked at that picture and asked myself, "What would He do?" Then I try to do it. We can never go wrong when we choose to follow the Savior.

Some choices may seem more important than others, but no choice is insignificant.

Some years ago I held in my hand a guide which, if followed, will never fail in helping us to make correct choices. It was a volume of scripture we commonly call the triple combination, containing the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price. This book was a gift from a loving father to a pre-

cious daughter who followed carefully his advice. On the flyleaf page, her father had written in his own hand these inspired words:

“To my dear Maurine,

“That you may have a constant measure by which to judge between truth and the errors of man’s philosophies, and thus grow in spirituality as you increase in knowledge, I give you this sacred book to read frequently and cherish throughout your life.

“Lovingly your father,

“Harold B. Lee”

Staying on the path to our eternal destiny

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, our goal is to obtain celestial glory.

Let us not find ourselves as indecisive as is Alice in Lewis Carroll’s classic *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. You will remember that she comes to a crossroads with two paths before her, each stretching onward but in opposite directions. She is confronted by the Cheshire cat, of whom Alice asks, “Which path shall I follow?”

The cat answers: “That depends where you want to go. If you do not know where you want to go, it doesn’t matter which path you take.”⁶

Unlike Alice, we all know where we want to go, and it *does* matter which way we go, for the path we follow in this life surely leads to the path we will follow in the next.

Each of us should remember that he or she is a son or daughter of God, endowed with faith, gifted with courage, and guided by prayer. Our eternal destiny is before us. The Apostle Paul speaks to us today as he spoke to Timothy long years ago: “Neglect not the gift that is in thee.” “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust.”⁷

At times many of us let that enemy of achievement—even the culprit “self-defeat”—dwarf our aspirations, smother

our dreams, cloud our vision, and impair our lives. The enemy’s voice whispers in our ears, “You can’t do it.” “You’re too young.” “You’re too old.” “You’re nobody.” This is when we remember that we are created in the image of God. Reflection on this truth provides a profound sense of strength and power.

Seeking heavenly help

Mine was the privilege to know rather intimately President J. Reuben Clark Jr., who served for so many years as a member of the First Presidency. As I assisted him in the preparation for printing his monumental books, priceless lessons were learned. One day while in a somber, reflective mood, President Clark asked if I could arrange for the printing of a picture suitable for framing. The picture was to feature the lions of Persepolis guarding the ruins of a crumbled glory. President Clark wished to have printed with the picture—between the decaying arches of a civilization that was no more—a number of his favorite scriptures, chosen from his vast knowledge of holy writ. I felt you would wish to know his selections. There were three—two from Ecclesiastes and one from the Gospel of John.

First, from Ecclesiastes: “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.”⁸

Second, “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.”⁹

Third, from John: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”¹⁰

An earlier prophet, even Moroni, writing in what is now the Book of Mormon, counseled, “And now, I would commend you to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written, that the grace of God the Father, and also the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of them, may be and abide in you forever.”¹¹

President David O. McKay counseled: “The greatest battle of life is fought within the silent chambers of your own soul.’ . . . It is a good thing to sit down and commune with yourself, to come to an understanding with yourself and decide in that silent moment what your duty is to your family, to your Church, to your country, and . . . to your fellowmen.”¹²

The boy prophet Joseph Smith sought heavenly help by entering a grove which then became sacred. Do we need similar strength? Does each need to seek his or her own “Sacred Grove”? A place where communication between God and man can go forth unimpeded, uninterrupted, and undisturbed is such a grove.

Choosing to follow the Savior

In the New Testament we learn that it is impossible to take a right attitude toward Christ without taking an unselfish attitude toward men. In the book of Matthew, Jesus taught, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”¹³

When the Savior sought a man of faith, He did not select him from the throng of self-righteous who were found regularly in the synagogue. Rather, He called him from among the fishermen of Capernaum. While teaching on the seashore, He saw two ships standing by the lake. He entered one and asked its owner to put it out a little from the land so He might not be pressed upon by the crowd. After teaching further, He said to Simon, “Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets.” Simon answered:

“Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

“And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes. . . .

“When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”¹⁴

Came the reply, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”¹⁵

Simon the fisherman had received his call. Doubting, disbelieving, unschooled, untrained, impetuous Simon did not find the way of the Lord a highway of ease nor a path free from pain. He was to hear the rebuke, “O thou of little faith.”¹⁶ Yet when the Master asked him, “Whom say ye that I am?” Peter answered, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”¹⁷

Simon, man of doubt, had become Peter, Apostle of faith. Peter made his choice.

When the Savior was to choose a missionary of zeal and power, He found him not among His advocates but amidst His adversaries. The experience of Damascus’s way changed Saul. Of him the Lord declared, “He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.”¹⁸

Saul the persecutor became Paul the proselyter. Paul made his choice.

Service of a stalwart grandson

Acts of selfless service are performed daily by countless members of the Church. There are many which are freely given, with no fanfare or boasting, but rather through quiet love and tender care. Let me share with you the example of one who made such a simple yet profound choice to serve.

A few years ago, Sister Monson and I were in the city of Toronto, where we once lived when I was the mission president. Olive Davies, the wife of the first stake president in Toronto, was gravely ill and preparing to pass from this life. Her illness required her to leave her cherished home and enter a hospital which could provide the care she needed. Her only child lived with her own family far away in the West.

I attempted to comfort Sister Davies, but she had present with her the comfort she longed to have. A stalwart grandson sat silently next to his grandmother. I

learned he had spent most of the summer away from his university studies, that he might serve his grandmother's needs. I said to him, "Shawn, you will never regret your decision. Your grandmother feels you are heaven-sent, an answer to her prayers."

He replied, "I chose to come because I love her and know this is what my Heavenly Father would have me do."

Tears were near the surface. Grandmother told us how she enjoyed being helped by her grandson and introducing him to each employee and every patient in the hospital. Hand in hand, they walked the halls, and during the night he was close by.

Olive Davies has passed on to her reward, there to meet her faithful husband and together continue an eternal journey. In a grandson's heart there will ever remain those words, "Choose the right when a choice is placed before you. In the right the Holy Spirit guides."¹⁹

Such are foundation stones in building one's personal temple. As the Apostle Paul counseled, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"²⁰

A simple formula

May I leave with you today a simple yet far-reaching formula to guide you in the choices of life:

Fill your minds with truth.

Fill your hearts with love.

Fill your lives with service.

By doing so, may we one day hear the plaudit from our Lord and Savior, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."²¹

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Joshua 24:15.
2. *Deseret Weekly*, Sept. 21, 1889, 393.
3. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1954), 54.
4. 2 Nephi 10:23.
5. "Choose the Right," *Hymns*, no. 239.
6. Adapted from Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1992), 76.
7. 1 Timothy 4:14; 6:20.
8. Ecclesiastes 12:13.
9. Ecclesiastes 1:2.
10. John 17:3.
11. Ether 12:41.
12. In Conference Report, Apr. 1967, 84–85; or *Improvement Era*, June 1967, 80.
13. Matthew 25:40.
14. Luke 5:4–6, 8.
15. Matthew 4:19.
16. Matthew 14:31.
17. Matthew 16:15, 16.
18. Acts 9:15.
19. *Hymns*, no. 239.
20. 1 Corinthians 3:16.
21. Matthew 25:23.

Elder Robert D. Hales

Finding faith in Jesus Christ

I too would like to express our love and the thoughts and prayers that we had this morning in our family for Elder Uchtdorf and Elder Bednar. We look forward to their association and to hearing their faith and their testimony.

Believing in the Savior and His mission is so essential that it is the first principle of the gospel: "Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."¹ What is faith? In his epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul taught that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence