

attitude and your actions invite the Spirit, and the Spirit enables us to understand the things that are important. What I want to convey to you is that through your love, you are imparting the love of God. You are a treasure of this Church. I am so very thankful to all of you for your sacrifice and your dedication.

I also would like to talk to you future missionaries. In my own family, four of our children have served missions, and our fifth missionary will enter the Provo Missionary Training Center at the end of this month. Next year our youngest is planning to serve a mission after graduating from high school.

So I speak to my sons and to all of you preparing to serve missions. It is necessary to bring three things with you on your mission:

1. A desire to preach the gospel. The Lord wants you to search for His sheep and seek them out.² People all over the world are waiting for you. Please go quickly to where they are. No one strives harder than missionaries to go to the rescue of others. I am one of those rescued.
2. Develop your testimony. The Lord requires your “heart and a willing mind.”³

3. Love others, just like Elder Swan, who brought his father’s coat and his father’s love for Japan and its people with him on his mission.

And for those of you who don’t know how to prepare to serve a mission, please go and see your bishop. I know that he will help you.

Expressions of gratitude

I am thankful that missionaries are called by the Lord, that they respond to that call, and that they are serving throughout the world. Let me say to all of you beloved returned missionaries: I am truly thankful for all your efforts. You are a treasure of this Church. And may you always continue to be missionaries and act like disciples of Christ.

I testify that we are our Father in Heaven’s children, that He loves us, and that He sent His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, so that we can again return to His presence. I say these things in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Isaiah 52:7.
2. See Ezekiel 34:11.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 64:34.

Elder Randall K. Bennett

Captured by an ocean current

Years ago, while at the beach with my family, I noticed signs and flags warning us of a strong current flowing away from the shore into deep, turbulent water. Invisible to my untrained eyes but easily detected by lifeguards on a nearby watchtower, the powerful current posed a danger to all who left the safety of the shore and entered the water. I remember rationalizing, “I’m a strong swimmer. Swimming will be great exercise. I’ll be safe in the shallow water.”

Ignoring the warnings and feeling confident in my own judgment, I entered the water to enjoy a “refreshing” swim. After a few minutes I looked up to locate my family on the nearby beach, but the beach was no longer nearby! The deceptive current I had been warned of had captured me and was quickly pulling me away from my family.

Confidently at first and then desperately, I tried to swim toward shore, but the unforgiving current dragged me farther and farther into deeper, rougher water. I became exhausted and began choking on

inhaled water. Drowning became a real possibility. My energy gone, I frantically and finally called out for help.

Miraculously, it seemed, a lifeguard was immediately at my side. I wasn't aware that he had watched me go into the water. He knew the current would capture me, and he knew where it would take me. Avoiding the current, he swam around and just beyond where I was struggling; then he patiently waited for me to call for help. Too weak to swim to shore alone, I was and still am grateful for his rescue. Without his help I never could have made it back to my family.

That day I made a poor choice that produced potentially serious consequences for me and for my family. As we now consider together the gift of choice, I pray that the Holy Ghost will help each of us individually evaluate the choices we are making.

Are we choosing eternal life?

Our beloved prophet, President Thomas S. Monson, has taught: "I can't stress too strongly that decisions determine destiny. You can't make eternal decisions without eternal consequences."¹

Each of you—as we have been taught this conference—is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents. You do have a divine nature and destiny.² During your premortal life you learned to love truth. You made correct eternal choices. You knew that here in mortality there would be afflictions and adversity, sorrow and suffering, tests and trials to help you grow and progress. You also knew that you could continue making correct choices, repent of incorrect choices, and through the Atonement of Jesus Christ inherit eternal life.

What did the prophet Lehi teach about choice? He counseled that we are "free to *choose* liberty and *eternal life*, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according

to the captivity and power of the devil." He then instructed, "Ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and *choose eternal life*."³

Brothers and sisters, in what we choose to think about, feel, and do, are you and I *choosing eternal life*?

Two eternal choices

Our grandchildren are learning that when they make a choice, they also choose its consequences. Recently one of our three-year-old granddaughters refused to eat her dinner. Her mother explained, "It's almost bedtime. If you choose to eat dinner, you are choosing ice cream for dessert. If you choose not to eat dinner, you are choosing to go to bed now, without ice cream." Our granddaughter considered her two choices and then stated emphatically, "I want *this* choice—to play *and* eat only ice cream *and* not go to bed."

Brothers and sisters, do we wish we could play, eat only ice cream, never go to bed, and somehow avoid consequences like malnutrition and exhaustion?

In reality we have only two eternal choices, each with eternal consequences: choose to follow the Savior of the world and thus choose eternal life with our Heavenly Father, or choose to follow the world and thus choose to separate ourselves from Heavenly Father eternally.

We cannot successfully choose both the safety of righteousness and the dangers of worldliness. Wading or dabbling in worldliness may seem harmless, but so did my "refreshing" swim!

Like the current that could have changed the course of my family's lives, today's currents of worldliness, deceptive philosophies, false teachings, and rampant immorality seek to drag us away and eternally separate us from our families and from our Heavenly Father.

Our living prophets, seers, and revelators both see and seek to warn us of

the often subtle but dangerous worldly currents that threaten us. They lovingly invite, encourage, teach, remind, and warn us. They know that our safety depends on choosing to follow (1) the insights we gain during daily scripture study, pondering, and prayer; (2) the guidance of the Holy Ghost; and (3) their prophetic counsel. They know that there is safety and ultimately joy only in and through our Savior, Jesus Christ, and living His gospel. As Elder Dallin H. Oaks just taught, our Savior declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”⁴

During adversity and suffering in post-Soviet Russia, Anatoly and Svetlana Reshetnikov chose righteousness over worldliness. After joining the Church, they were persecuted. He was demoted from his position at work. Valiantly they thought, “Now we have more time to serve God!” They repeatedly received threats, yet they chose to live gospel-centered lives. Elder Anatoly Reshetnikov was called as the first Russian Area Seventy. Through their choices the Reshetnikovs continue to *choose eternal life*.

The importance of repentance

We all face adversity. We all have temptations. We all have made mistakes. It is never too hard or too late to make correct choices. Repentance is one of those critical correct choices.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf has taught:

“Small errors and minor drifts away from the doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ can bring sorrowful consequences into our lives. It is therefore of critical importance that we become self-disciplined enough to make early and decisive corrections to get back on the right track and not wait or hope that errors will somehow correct themselves.

“The longer we delay corrective action, the larger the needed changes become, and

the longer it takes to get back on the correct course—even to the point where a disaster might be looming.”⁵

The Savior’s arms of mercy are always extended to each of us.⁶ When we sincerely and fully repent, we can be completely forgiven of our mistakes and the Savior will remember our sins no more.⁷

Self-evaluation

In evaluating your choices and their consequences, you might ask yourself:

- Am I seeking divine direction through daily scripture study, pondering, and prayer, or have I chosen to be so busy or apathetic that I don’t take time to study the words of Christ, ponder them, and converse with my Heavenly Father?
- Am I choosing to follow the counsel of living prophets of God, or am I following the worldly ways and the opposing opinions of others?
- Am I seeking the guidance of the Holy Ghost daily in what I choose to think about, feel, and do?
- Am I consistently reaching out to assist, serve, or help rescue others?

My dear brothers and sisters, your eternal destiny will not be the result of chance but of choice. It is never too late to begin to *choose eternal life!*

I bear my witness that because of Heavenly Father’s great plan of happiness, each of us can be perfected through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. With our families we can live with our Heavenly Father eternally and receive a fulness of joy. Of these things I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “Decisions Determine Destiny” (Church Educational System fireside for young adults, Nov. 6, 2005), institute.lds.org.
2. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.

3. 2 Nephi 2:27, 28; italics added.
4. John 14:6.
5. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, in Conference Report, Apr. 2008, 59; or *Ensign*, May 2008, 59.

6. See Alma 5:33.
7. See Doctrine and Covenants 58:42.

Elder J. Devn Cornish

Heavenly Father wants to bless us

My beloved sisters and brothers, God our Father is not a feeling or an idea or a force. He is a holy person who, as the scriptures teach, has a face and hands and a glorious immortal body. He is real, He knows each of us individually, and He loves us, every one. He wants to bless us.

Jesus said:

“Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

“Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Matthew 7:9–11).

Prayer for a quarter

Perhaps a personal experience will help to illustrate the point. When I was a young resident physician at Boston Children’s Hospital, I worked long hours and traveled between the hospital and our home in Watertown, Massachusetts, mostly by bicycle since my wife and young family needed our car. One evening I was riding home after a long period in the hospital, feeling tired and hungry and at least a bit discouraged. I knew I needed to give my wife and four small children not only my time and energy when I got home but also a cheery attitude. I was, frankly, finding it hard to just keep pedaling.

My route would take me past a fried chicken shop, and I felt like I would be a

lot less hungry and tired if I could pause for a piece of chicken on my way home. I knew they were running a sale on thighs or drumsticks for 29 cents each, but when I checked my wallet, all I had was one nickel. As I rode along, I told the Lord my situation and asked if, in His mercy, He could let me find a quarter on the side of the road. I told Him that I didn’t need this as a sign but that I would be really grateful if He felt to grant me this kind blessing.

I began watching the ground more intently but saw nothing. Trying to maintain a faith-filled but submissive attitude as I rode, I approached the store. Then, almost exactly across the street from the chicken place, I saw a quarter on the ground. With gratitude and relief, I picked it up, bought the chicken, savored every morsel, and rode happily home.

In His mercy, the God of heaven, the Creator and Ruler of all things everywhere, had heard a prayer about a very minor thing. One might well ask why He would concern Himself with something so small. I am led to believe that our Heavenly Father loves us so much that the things that are important to us become important to Him, just because He loves us. How much more would He want to help us with the big things that we ask which are right? (see 3 Nephi 18:20).

Little children, young people, and adults alike, please believe how very much your loving Heavenly Father wants to bless *you*. But because He will not infringe upon our agency, we must ask for His help. This is generally done through prayer. Prayer is one of the most precious gifts of God to man.