

Meeting the Challenges of Today's World

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The choices you make—mission, education, marriage, career, and service in the Church—will shape your eternal destiny.

Much has been written and said about today's generation of young adults. Research shows that many resist organized religion. Many are in debt and unemployed. A majority like the *idea* of marriage, but many are reluctant to take that step. A growing number don't want children. Without the gospel and inspired guidance, many are wandering in strange paths and losing their way.

Fortunately, young adult members of the Church lag behind in these troubling trends, in part because they are blessed with the gospel plan. That eternal plan includes holding fast to the iron rod—cleaving to God's word and the word of His prophets. We need to tighten our grip on the rod that leads us back to Him. Now is the “day of choosing”¹ for all of us.

As a boy, when I was about to make a poorly considered choice, my father sometimes would say, “Robert, straighten up and fly right!” You have been there. In the spirit of his plain talk, I would like to speak specifically to the youth—the noble youth—and noble young adults, for “my soul delighteth in plainness ... that [we] may learn.”²

You are living through a critical period of your life. The choices you make—mission, education, marriage, career, and service in the Church—will shape your eternal destiny. This means you will always be looking ahead—looking to the future.

As a pilot in the air force, I learned this principle: never deliberately fly into a thunderstorm. (I won't tell you how I found that out.) Instead, fly around it, take another route, or wait for the storm to clear before landing.

Beloved young adult brothers and sisters, I want to help you “fly right” in the gathering storms of the last days. You are the pilots. You are responsible to think about the consequences of every choice you make. Ask yourself, “If I make this choice, what is the worst thing that could happen?” Your righteous choices will keep you from getting off

course.

Think of it: If you choose not to take a drink of alcohol, you will not become an alcoholic! If you never choose to go into debt, you will avoid the possibility of bankruptcy!

One of the purposes of the scriptures is to show us how righteous people respond to temptation and evil. In short, they avoid it! Joseph ran from Potiphar's wife.³ Lehi took his family and left Jerusalem.⁴ Mary and Joseph fled into Egypt to escape Herod's wicked plot.⁵ In every instance, Heavenly Father warned these believers. Similarly, He will help us know whether to fight, flee, or go with the flow of our unfolding circumstances. He will speak to us through prayer, and when we pray, we will have the Holy Ghost, who will guide us. We have the scriptures, the teachings of living prophets, patriarchal blessings, the counsel of inspired parents, priesthood and auxiliary leaders, and, above all, the still, small voice of the Spirit.

The Lord will always keep His promise: "I will lead you along."⁶ The only question is, will we let ourselves be led? Will we hear His voice and the voice of His servants?

I testify that if you are there for the Lord, He will be there for you.⁷ If you love Him and keep His commandments, you will have His Spirit to be with you and guide you. "Put your trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good. ... By this shall you know, all things ... pertaining unto things of righteousness."⁸

With those principles as a foundation, may I give you some practical counsel?

Many of your generation are facing crushing debt. When I was a young adult, my stake president was an investment banker on Wall Street. He taught me, "You are rich if you can live happily within your means." How can you do it? Pay your tithing and then save! When you earn more, save more. Don't compete with others to have expensive toys. Don't buy what you can't afford.

Many young adults in the world are going into debt to get an education, only to find the cost of school is greater than they can repay. Seek out scholarships and grants. Obtain part-time employment, if possible, to help pay your own way. This will require some sacrifice, but it will help you succeed.

Education prepares you for better employment opportunities. It puts you in a better position to serve and to bless those around you. It will set you on a path of lifelong learning. It will strengthen you to fight against ignorance and error. As Joseph Smith taught: "Knowledge does away with darkness, suspense and doubt; for these cannot exist where knowledge is. ... In knowledge there is power."⁹ "To be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God."¹⁰ Education will prepare you for what is ahead, including marriage.

Again, may I speak frankly? The track that leads to marriage passes through the terrain called dating! Dating is the opportunity for lengthy conversations. When you date, learn everything you can about each other. Get to know each other's families when possible. Are

your goals compatible? Do you share the same feelings about the commandments, the Savior, the priesthood, the temple, parenting, callings in the Church, and serving others? Have you observed one another under stress, responding to success and failure, resisting anger, and dealing with setbacks? Does the person you are dating tear others down or build them up? Is his or her attitude and language and conduct what you would like to live with every day?

That said, none of us marry *perfection*; we marry *potential*. The right marriage is not only about what I want; it's also about what she—who's going to be my companion—wants and needs me to be.

Speaking plainly, please don't date all through your 20s just to "have a good time," thus delaying marriage in favor of other interests and activities. Why? Because dating and marriage aren't final destinations. They are the gateway to where you ultimately want to go. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife."¹¹

Your responsibility now is to be worthy of the person you want to marry. If you want to marry a wholesome, attractive, honest, happy, hardworking, spiritual person, *be* that kind of person. If you *are* that person and you are not married, be patient. Wait upon the Lord. I testify that the Lord knows your desires and loves you for your faithful devotion to Him. He has a plan for you, whether it be in this life or the next. Listen to His Spirit. "Seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand."¹² In this life or the next, His promises will be fulfilled. "If ye are prepared ye shall not fear."¹³

If you don't have abundant resources, don't worry. A wonderful Church member recently told me, "I didn't raise my children on money; I raised them on faith." There is a great truth to that. Begin exercising your faith in every area of your life. If you don't, you will suffer what I would call "faith atrophy." The very strength needed to exercise your faith will be diminished. So exercise your faith every day, and you will "wax stronger and stronger ... and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ."¹⁴

To be ready for marriage, make certain you are worthy to take the sacrament and hold a temple recommend. Go to the temple regularly. Serve in the Church. In addition to serving in Church callings, follow the example of the Savior, who simply "went about doing good."¹⁵

Now, you may have serious questions about the choices ahead. In my young adult years, I sought counsel from my parents and from faithful, trusted advisers. One was a priesthood leader; another was a teacher who believed in me. Both said to me, "If you want my counsel, be prepared to take it." I understood what that meant. Prayerfully select mentors who have your spiritual well-being at heart. Be careful about taking advice from your peers. If you want more than you now have, reach *up*, not across!¹⁶

Remember, no one can reach upward on your behalf. Only *your* faith and prayers will cause you to lift yourself and have the mighty change of heart. Only *your* resolve to be obedient can change your life. Because of the Savior's atoning sacrifice for you, the power is in you.¹⁷ You have your agency, you have strong testimonies if you are obedient, and you can follow

the Spirit that guides you.

Recently, a young filmmaker said he felt he was part of a “generation of prodigals”—a generation “looking for hope and joy and fulfillment, but looking in all the wrong places and in the wrong ways.”¹⁸

In the Savior’s parable of the prodigal son, the son had many blessings awaiting him, but before he could claim them, he had to look closely at his life, his choices, and his circumstances. The miracle that happened next is described in the scriptures with a simple phrase: “He came to himself.”¹⁹ May I encourage you to come to yourself? In the Church, when important decisions must be made, we often hold council meetings. Family councils serve a similar purpose. You may want to conduct what I’ll call a “personal council.” After praying, spend some time alone. Think about what is ahead. Ask yourself: “What areas of my life do I want to strengthen so that I can strengthen others? Where do I want to be a year from now? two years from now? What choices do I need to make to get there?” Just remember, you are a pilot, and you are in charge. I testify that as you come to yourself, your Heavenly Father will come to you. By the comforting hand of His Holy Spirit, He will help you along.

I bear my testimony that God lives. I bear my special witness that the Savior loves you. “Shall we not go on in [His great] cause? Go forward and not backward.”²⁰ As you follow Him, He will strengthen and uphold you. He will bring you up to your highest home. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. Doctrine and Covenants 105:35.

2. 2 Nephi 25:4.

3. See Genesis 39.

4. See 1 Nephi 2.

5. See Matthew 2.

6. Doctrine and Covenants 78:18.

7. See Doctrine and Covenants 88:63.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 11:12, 14.
9. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 265.
10. 2 Nephi 9:29.
11. Genesis 2:24.
12. Jacob 4:10.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 38:30.
14. Helaman 3:35.
15. Acts 10:38.
16. See Boyd K. Packer, *Teach Ye Diligently* (1975), 145.
17. See Doctrine and Covenants 58:28.
18. Nathan Clarkson, in Emma Koonse, “Confessions of a Prodigal Son’ Writer Says ‘We Are All Prodigals,’ Modern Retelling of Story Aimed at Millennials,” *Christian Post*, Jan. 26, 2015, christianpost.com.
19. Luke 15:17.

20. Doctrine and Covenants 128:22.

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