

By Divine Design

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The Lord's hand is guiding you. By "divine design," He is in the small details of your life as well as the major milestones.

Brothers and sisters, as I stand here in this inspiring worldwide general conference and feel your strength and your spirits, I cannot help but think of the words of the Apostle Peter: "[Lord], it is good for us to be here."¹

That is not exactly what Alma said after preaching to the people in Ammonihah. Alma left the city due to the wickedness of the people. Soon an angel appeared to Alma and called him to "return to the city of Ammonihah, and preach again unto the people of the city."²

Alma did so "speedily," entering "the city by another way."³

"As he entered the city he was an hungered, and he said to a man: Will ye give to an humble servant of God something to eat?

"And the man said unto him: I am a Nephite, and I know that thou art a holy prophet of God, for thou art the man whom an angel said in a vision: Thou shalt receive."⁴

The man was Amulek.

Now, did Alma just happen upon Amulek? No, it was no coincidence that he went into the city by the way that would lead him to this faithful man who would become his missionary companion.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell once explained: "None of us ever fully utilizes the people-opportunities allocated to us within our circles of friendship. You and I may call these intersectings 'coincidence.' This word is understandable for mortals to use, but *coincidence* is not an appropriate word to describe the workings of an omniscient God. He does not do things by 'coincidence' but ... by 'divine design.'"⁵

Our lives are like a chessboard, and the Lord moves us from one place to another—if we are responsive to spiritual promptings. Looking back, we can see His hand in our lives.

We can see such heavenly intervention when Nephi returns to get the plates from Laban. He "was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things [that he] should

do.”⁶ Laban was soon before him in a drunken stupor, and Nephi slew him, retrieved the plates, and fled back to his brothers. Was he fortunate to just happen upon Laban? Or was it by “divine design”?

Significant events unfold in the gospel and in the Church that further the kingdom of God on earth. They are not by accident but by God’s plan. He who fashioned this world can calm the seas with His word and can steer both Alma and Amulek and Nephi and Laban to be at the right place at precisely the right time.

Likewise, events and associations unfold in each of our lives that further God’s work on earth.

Dear Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin spoke of an occasion when President Thomas S. Monson said to him: “There is a guiding hand above all things. Often when things happen, it’s not by accident. One day, when we look back at the seeming coincidences of our lives, we will realize that perhaps they weren’t so coincidental after all.”⁷

Most often, our good works are known to only a few. They are, however, recorded in heaven. One day, we will stand as a witness of our whole-souled devotion to works of righteousness. No trial or calamity can derail God’s plan of happiness. Indeed, by “divine design,” “joy cometh in the morning.”⁸ “I came into the world to do the will of [the] Father,”⁹ Jesus taught. Dear brothers and sisters, so have we.

Through the experience of my own life’s journey, I know that the Lord will move us on that seeming chessboard to do His work. What may appear to be a random chance is, in fact, overseen by a loving Father in Heaven, who can number the hairs of every head.¹⁰ Not even a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father’s notice.¹¹ The Lord is in the small details of our lives, and those incidents and opportunities are to prepare us to lift our families and others as we build the kingdom of God on earth. Remember, as the Lord said to Abraham, “I know the end from the beginning; therefore my hand shall be over thee.”¹²

The Lord placed me in a home with loving parents. By the world’s standards, they were very ordinary people; my father, a devoted man, was a truck driver; my angel mother, a stay-at-home mom. The Lord helped me find my lovely wife, Melanie; He prompted a businessman, who became a dear friend, to give me an employment opportunity. The Lord called me to serve in the mission field, both as a young man and as a mission president; He called me to the Quorum of the Seventy; and now He has called me as an Apostle. Looking back, I realize I did not orchestrate any of those moves; the Lord did, just as He is orchestrating important moves for you and for those you love.

What should you be looking for in your own life? What are God’s miracles that remind you that He is close, saying, “I am right here”? Think of those times, some daily, when the Lord has acted in your life—and then acted again. Treasure them as moments the Lord has shown confidence in you and in your choices. But allow Him to make more of you than you can make of yourself on your own. Treasure His involvement. Sometimes

we consider changes in our plans as missteps on our journey. Think of them more as first steps to being “on the Lord’s errand.”¹³

Some months ago our granddaughter joined a youth group to tour several Church history sites. The final itinerary noted that she would be passing through the very area where her missionary brother, our grandson, was serving. Our granddaughter had no intention of seeing her brother on his mission. However, as the bus entered the town where her brother was serving, two missionaries could be seen walking down the street. One of the missionaries was her brother.

Anticipation filled the bus as the youth asked the bus driver to pull over so she could greet her brother. In less than one minute, after tears and sweet words, her brother was back on his way to fulfill his missionary duties. We later learned that her brother had been on that street for less than five minutes, walking from an appointment to his car.

Heavenly Father can put us in situations with specific intent in mind. He has done so in my life, and He is doing so in yours, as He did in the lives of our dear grandchildren.

Each of us is precious and loved by the Lord, who cares, who whispers, and who watches over us in ways unique to each of us. He is infinitely wiser and more powerful than mortal men and women. He knows our challenges, our triumphs, and the righteous desires of our hearts.

Over a year ago, as I was walking through Temple Square, one of the sister missionaries approached me and asked, “Do you remember me? I am from Florida.” She told me her name, Sister Aida Chilan. Yes, I remembered meeting her and her family. Her stake president had suggested we visit her family. It became apparent that we were there for their daughter Aida, who had not been baptized. After our visit and more than a year of teaching and fellowshiping, Aida was baptized.

After we visited on Temple Square, she wrote me a letter. She said: “I know with all my heart that Heavenly Father knows each of us and that He continues to place us in each other’s paths for a reason. Thank you for being one of my missionaries, for reaching out to me and finding me five years ago.”¹⁴ Aida also sent me her conversion story recounting the “divine coincidences” which have taken place in her life that have led to her baptism and confirmation, serving a mission on Temple Square, and her recent temple marriage.¹⁵

Was it a mere coincidence that the stake president had steered us to the Chilan home or that she and I would later meet on Temple Square? Aida’s testimony bears record that this was all part of God’s “divine design.”

The Lord loves to be with us. It is no coincidence that when you are feeling His Spirit and acting on first promptings that you feel Him as He promised: “I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up.”¹⁶

We all have similar things happen in our lives. We may meet someone who seems familiar, renew an acquaintance, or find common ground with a stranger. When those occur, perhaps the Lord is reminding us that we are all truly brothers and sisters. We are really engaged in the same cause—in what Joseph Smith called “the cause of Christ.”¹⁷

Now, where does our agency fit in a “divine design”? We have a choice to follow or to not follow our Savior and His chosen leaders. The pattern is clear in the Book of Mormon when the Nephites had turned away from the Lord. Mormon lamented:

“And they saw ... that the Spirit of the Lord did no more preserve them; yea, it had withdrawn from them because the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples —

“Therefore the Lord did cease to preserve them by his miraculous and matchless power, for they had fallen into a state of unbelief and awful wickedness.”¹⁸

Not all that the Lord asks of us is a result of how strong we are, how faithful we are, or what we may know. Think of Saul, whom the Lord stopped on the road to Damascus. He was going the wrong direction in his life, and it had nothing to do with north or south. Saul was divinely redirected. When he was known later as Paul, his apostolic ministry reflected what the Lord already knew he was capable of doing and becoming, not what he had set out to do as Saul. In the same manner, the Lord knows what each of us is capable of doing and becoming. What did the Apostle Paul teach? “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”¹⁹

When we are righteous, willing, and able, when we are striving to be worthy and qualified, we progress to places we never imagined and become part of Heavenly Father’s “divine design.” Each of us has divinity within us. When we see God working through us and with us, may we be encouraged, even grateful for that guidance. When our Father in Heaven said, “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man,”²⁰ He was talking about all of His children—you in particular.

The Lord’s hand is guiding you. By “divine design,” He is in the small details of your life as well as the major milestones. As it says in Proverbs, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; ... and he shall direct thy paths.”²¹ I testify that He will bless you, sustain you, and bring you peace. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

