

Finding Your Way

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We live in some challenging times. More than fifty years ago President Thomas S. Monson said:

*Today, we are encamped against the greatest array of sin, vice, and evil ever assembled before our eyes.*¹

I thought to myself that whatever the conditions were fifty years ago, there is a greater array today. The war between good and evil is raging and intensifying. Satan is busy radicalizing and recruiting. You are needed. You must gain the skills, convictions, courage, wisdom, and confidence to help make a difference for yourself and others. I am grateful for the inspired leadership of the Twelve and the First Presidency to help us be prepared.

Most of you are at a significant transition point in your lives. You are making life-changing decisions about your education, careers, marriage, and family as well as your religious practice after schooling and missions. You are making decisions as you transition from being dependent on goals set by others to being independent and self-reliant, setting your own goals and making your own way. Many of those decisions are not as clear or as easy to make as you would like them to be. Trying to find your way is a challenge.

Today I would like to share a few lessons I have learned that may help you find your way. I invite you to take notes of any “actionable takeaways.” Later you can decide how to act on what you hear.

Set Your Destination, Prepare, and Act on Your Plan

After graduating from BYU, I took a job with the Boeing Company in Seattle, Washington. I was soon called as an assistant Scoutmaster in our ward. One year we spent the summer taking hikes, including a fifty-miler around Mount Rainier. The early hikes prepared us physically and helped us develop the skills needed for the ultimate hike. We learned how to use maps and the compass and also to set checkpoints along the trail to find where we were and how to get where we wanted to go. It was a wonderful time for us.

For the Scouts, a hike in the Cascades was an exciting adventure and an end in itself, but for us, as leaders, it was an opportunity to teach

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them the skills, character traits, and testimony needed for life's journey.

Our journeys of life are like these hikes. We each choose our destination and path. However, after the judgment at the end of this life, we will be assigned a place to live and things to do based on our decisions and actions here. Choose wisely the best path as described by the plan of salvation. Map your course by learning as much as you can, setting your checkpoints, and following your plan.

You Have a Royal Heritage

Throughout literature there are stories told of individuals who were destined for greatness or were of royal birth who were sent away from their homes. They did not know who they were, their heritage, or their destiny. You know about Harry Potter, Luke Skywalker, and perhaps a few others.

Luke Skywalker was sent away and hidden. He only gradually learned who he was. Being “chosen” did not eliminate his trials or tribulations. They were important in developing the character and skills needed to achieve his ultimate destiny.

You were sent away from a royal court without memory of who you are or what your final role and responsibility will be. Each of you are of a royal birth and heritage. You are a son or daughter of heavenly parents. You are destined to become a king or a queen, to have a family and royal responsibilities. God is the author of the plan to qualify you for this royal birthright. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is here to help us.

President Boyd K. Packer has said:

The ultimate end of all activity in the Church is that a man and his wife and their children might be happy at home, protected by the principles and laws of the gospel, sealed safely in the covenants of the everlasting priesthood.

Every law and principle and power, every belief, every ordinance and ordination, every covenant, every sermon and every sacrament, every counsel and correction, the sealings, the calls, the releases, the service—all these have as their ultimate purpose the perfection of the individual and the family.²

Just as your life to this point has been preparing you for the rest of your life, your time on earth is preparing you for what you will be doing in the eternities. To qualify, you must be worthy. God has counseled, “I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance”³ and “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived.”⁴

The plan is designed for every human being to qualify for exaltation. All can qualify. All can succeed.

While everyone can qualify, each must earn it individually. There is no entitlement or option to delegate this to someone else. No one else can do it for you, not even the Church. It is hard work, but it is worth it.

President Russell M. Nelson said:

Only as an individual can you keep the commandments of God. Only as an individual can you repent. Only as an individual can you qualify for the ordinances of salvation and exaltation.⁵

Elder D. Todd Christofferson recently taught the following:

God will not live our lives for us nor control us as if we were His puppets, as Lucifer once proposed to do. Nor will His prophets accept the role of “puppet master” in God's place.⁶

You are not expected to be a puppet of God, the Church, or anyone else, but you are expected to take responsibility for your future. You are the only one who can earn your exaltation.

Making Decisions

There are important decisions to be made. President Packer said:

*The crucial test of life . . . does not center in the choice between fame and obscurity, nor between wealth and poverty. The greatest decision of life is between good and evil.*⁷

The Book of Mormon teaches us that “men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil.”⁸ The Holy Ghost will help you know all things you need to know and do.⁹

Some people delay making important decisions by waiting for perfect conditions. It could be waiting to find a “perfect” companion, waiting until the outcome is guaranteed, or waiting until job or income is secure. Some are afraid of making a mistake. The greatest mistake may be failing to act.

Most important relationships and achievements do not come ready-made off the shelf. You must pay the price to achieve the outcome you desire.

While serving as a counselor in a bishopric here at BYU, I once interviewed a freshman sister at the beginning of the year. I asked why she had come to school, to which she responded, “I am here to marry a General Authority.” I happened to know at the time that all the General Authorities were taken.

What this sister did not know is that she had to fall in love with a young man with the potential and then, together, help him become a person who could be a General Authority, if called.

Moving forward in life requires faith. That is part of the plan. President Packer shared this experience:

Shortly after I was called as a General Authority, I went to Elder Harold B. Lee for counsel. He listened very carefully to my problem and suggested that I see President David O. McKay. President McKay counseled me as to the direction I should go.

I was very willing to be obedient but saw no way possible for me to do as he counseled me to do.

I returned to Elder Lee and told him that I saw no way to move in the direction I was counseled to go. He said, “The trouble with you is you want to see the end from the beginning.” I replied that I would like to see at least a step or two ahead. Then came the lesson of a lifetime: “You must learn to walk to the edge of the light, and then a few steps into the darkness; then the light will appear and show the way before you.” Then he quoted these 18 words from the Book of Mormon:

“Dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith” [Ether 12:6].¹⁰

Deciding on the most important things first will help make other decisions easier. The scriptures teach to seek first the kingdom of God. From the scriptures we read, “Before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God.”¹¹ We also read:

But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.¹²

The Scriptures, the Brethren, and the Holy Ghost Are the Maps, Guides, and Compass

Before each hike with the Scouts, we studied the guidebooks, the maps, and the trails we would hike. We asked or talked to those who had already hiked the trails. Over time we learned which books and people were most accurate and gained confidence in using and following them. Knowledge of the areas in which we would be hiking led to better decisions and outcomes. You must do the same with your journey of life.

Nowadays Google is the go-to source of information when someone has a question, but it is not necessarily an automatic source of reliable and trustworthy information. The information returned to a query is ranked by

how much someone paid for it or the frequency with which something has been referenced. The order of information is not recommended by its accuracy, its value, or the reliability of its source. There are many sources that will give you false information. This is one of Satan's tactics.

The gospel of Jesus Christ—"the plan"—is found in the scriptures, in the words of the living prophets, and through the Holy Ghost. These are the reliable maps, guides, and compass you need for life's journey. Our regular and continuous study of the scriptures and the words of the living prophets will lead to confidence and trust in the Lord's plan. The Holy Ghost will help you develop a testimony. Continued study, prayer, and experience will expand your knowledge and understanding of the principles and deepen your conversion.

God's plan provides the First Presidency and the Twelve and other leaders as guides and resources for us. They are called by prophecy and revelation.¹³ The Brethren hold the priesthood and have the delegated keys to perform needed ordinances that we cannot get in any other way.

The role of the Brethren is to represent God to His people, as all prophets have done in the past. These men, past and present, are the first to say they are not perfect, but, like all members, they are striving to become as the Savior commanded.¹⁴ Some people will hold up a yardstick of perfection to them and find them wanting. That measure is just a distraction from the real question. Christ, after all, was the only perfect person who lived on the earth. The real question is, "Did these men have and fill a divine mission?"

The fact that these men are not perfect does not bother me. It actually gives me hope in my quest for exaltation to know that the Lord does bless, guide, and honor them. Following the teachings of the prophets is our test, not theirs.

Like a compass, the Holy Ghost is a source that can teach us all things we need to know

and do¹⁵—even when our minds are dark or foggy, when we are alone or with a crowd, or when we are in trouble.

Our decisions and lives will be better by understanding and living the gospel as taught by the Brethren and witnessed by the Holy Ghost. This is the quest of a lifetime.

Connect the Dots—Keep Things in Context

The gospel of Jesus Christ "includes the eternal truths or laws, covenants, and ordinances needed for mankind to enter back into the presence of God."¹⁶

Sometimes I have found it helpful for people to understand the gospel by comparing it to a connect-the-dot diagram. Think of the individual dots as the doctrines or principles. The lines of the diagram are like the relationships between principles. The picture that is revealed when the lines are added is the image of the gospel. The quality of the image depends on the number of dots and lines that we know and understand.

In the gospel there are some fundamental principles that are foundational. They include the mission of the Savior, commandments, ordinances, judgment, forgiveness, faith, repentance, baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, the Creation, the Fall, the Atonement, the Resurrection, the Restoration, prophets, and the priesthood. With fundamental principles we have a basic understanding of the gospel and the plan of salvation. These are enough to gain a testimony. As we grow in understanding, we learn of additional principles and are able to see a much richer image of the gospel and of our loving Heavenly Father.

Principles of the gospel do not stand alone but have connections with other principles. For example, the principles of justice and mercy, sin and the Atonement, and death and the Resurrection each have a relationship. The principles of justice and mercy illustrate the need for a connection between the two. If the connection between the two was eliminated, the plan

would be destroyed. Both the principles and the relationships are needed.

In a connect-the-dot diagram, each dot holds a position needed for the creation of the image. If the dots are moved around and reordered, the image will change. The resulting image will be distorted, obscured, and possibly not represent anything at all. The same is true with the principles of the gospel. God established each principle to achieve His work in bringing “to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”¹⁷

Individual principles cannot be fully understood without being placed in the gospel context. That would be like trying to see a picture with only one dot. For example, some people have contended that Jesus Christ’s teachings of love are inconsistent with His teachings of keeping the commandments. But when considered in the full gospel context of qualifying for exaltation, God’s insistence on keeping the commandments actually shows a greater love for His children. Parents call this tough love. Any parent would keep a child from running in front of a car in spite of the child’s complaining about the parent being mean or unloving.

Principles must be considered in the context of the full gospel.

Surely you can see that neither God nor His Church leaders would change the principles at the fancy of individuals, groups, governments, or nations. To change them would put God’s children at risk and destroy the plan that was created to save mankind.

So study the principles and their relationships to other principles and the gospel. Learn as much as you can. Help others to do the same. This will help strengthen testimonies. A testimony of the gospel is made up of testimonies of individual principles. Collectively they combine to create a powerful testimony of the gospel and the Church. This testimony will sustain us. If there is a trial of faith about one principle, we can rely on our testimonies of other principles and our testimony of the gospel as a whole.

The scriptures teach:

Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection.

*And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come.*¹⁸

Learning is a continuous process during our lives.

There will come a time when you will be confronted with something you have not learned that causes you to question. To have a question is good and is an opportunity to learn. So learn with faith. I have a few suggestions:

1. Take time to fully study it out. Gather and learn all the facts with faith by study, discussion, and prayer. Spiritual things are only learned through spiritual methods, not mortal means. Develop the spiritual skills before trying to judge.

2. Do not abandon everything you already know. Learn how the new information fits in to the doctrines and things you already know.

3. Use trustworthy sources. The scriptures, the teachings of the Brethren, and the Holy Ghost are trustworthy sources. Bishop Krister Stendahl, a former dean of the Harvard Divinity School, has counseled seekers of truth to ask questions of those who believe rather than those who don’t believe.¹⁹

4. Put things in context. Evaluating something in isolation—independent of surrounding principles, conditions, or facts—leads to incorrect conclusions. Events of the past should be considered in the context of the past, not in the context of present-day social norms, laws, or conditions. Words can have different meanings in different time periods; words spoken in 1830 can have different meanings and implications than they have today. Use the right yardstick to measure and judge.

5. Allow for the possibility that when there is a question, there may not be enough information available to readily answer it right now.

In this case, you will have to exercise faith and patience and trust in your testimony that you have of other principles in the gospel—and of course, trust in God.

These lessons have helped me and others follow the path. They will help you find your way in these challenging times. Prepare yourselves.

Just as with my hikes with the Scouts, we can safely travel life’s journey by relying on the maps of the scriptures, the words of the living prophets, and the compass of the Holy Ghost. God’s plan and desire is that all be successful in reaching their destination. Rise up and qualify for your heritage and destiny. You can do it!

I wish to bear solemn witness that God does exist, that Jesus is the Christ, and that the Holy Ghost can guide, teach, and sustain us. I know the plan. It will help us achieve our heritage and our destiny. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Thomas S. Monson, “Correlation Brings Blessings,” *Relief Society Magazine* 54, no. 4 (April 1967): 247.
2. Boyd K. Packer, “The Power of the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, May 2010.
3. D&C 1:31; see verses 31–33.
4. 1 Corinthians 6:9.
5. Russell M. Nelson, “Personal Priesthood Responsibility,” *Ensign*, November 2003.
6. D. Todd Christofferson, “Free Forever, to Act for Themselves,” *Ensign*, November 2014.
7. Boyd K. Packer, “The Choice,” *Ensign*, November 1980.
8. 2 Nephi 2:5.
9. See 2 Nephi 32:5.

10. Boyd K. Packer, “The Edge of the Light,” BYU fireside address, 4 March 1990; adapted in *BYU Today* 45, no. 2 (March 1991): 22–24, 38–43; see also Boyd K. Packer, *The Holy Temple* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 184.

11. Jacob 2:18.
12. Luke 12:31–32; emphasis added.
13. See Alma 6:8; 8:24; 43:2; see also Articles of Faith 1:5.
14. See Matthew 5:48.
15. See 2 Nephi 32:5.
16. Guide to the Scriptures, s.v. “gospel,” [lds.org/scriptures/gs/gospel?lang=eng&letter=g](https://www.lds.org/scriptures/gs/gospel?lang=eng&letter=g).
17. Moses 1:39.
18. D&C 130:18–19.
19. Krister Stendahl was

a former dean of the Harvard Divinity School and a bishop in Sweden whose scholarship opened new ways of interpreting the Apostle Paul and whose activism pushed churches toward unity and tolerance. [Douglas Martin, “Krister Stendahl, 86, Ecumenical Bishop, Is Dead,” *New York Times*, 16 April 2008]

Stendahl gave some rules for investigation. His rules are as follows:

1. *When you are trying to understand another religion, you should ask the adherents of that religion and not its enemies.*
2. *Don’t compare your best to their worst.*
3. *Leave room for “holy envy.” (By this Stendahl meant that you should be willing to recognize elements in the other religious tradition or faith that you admire and wish could, in some way, be reflected in your own religious tradition or faith.)* [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krister_Stendahl]