

Like the currents of the sea, God’s divine influence can guide us toward His plan for our life.

ACT UPON THIS LAND as for Years

By Dennis C. Gaunt

Like many children, I dreamed of what I would be when I grew up. In my case, I was *convinced* I would become a firefighter on the moon. In my five-year-old mind, there wasn’t any other way my life could possibly turn out. I suspect most of us had childhood dreams about what our life would be like when we grew up. I also suspect that most of us have, at one point, looked back at our lives and exclaimed, “This isn’t what I thought would happen!”

Two scriptures help us keep our lives in perspective. First:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9).

Second: “[God] doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world;



for he loveth the world” (2 Nephi 26:24).

These scriptures teach us that everything Heavenly Father does is ultimately for our benefit, even if we cannot understand why. And since God’s thoughts and ways are higher than ours, we need to elevate our lives to be more in harmony with His plan for us.

Wondering while Wandering

We sometimes talk about the children of Israel wandering in the

wilderness for 40 years before being allowed to enter the promised land. A cloud or pillar of fire rested above the tabernacle when they were to stop, and when it moved, the camp followed (see Numbers 9:15–18, 21–23). I suspect that they also spent 40 years “wondering” in the wilderness—wondering when they were going to move, when and where they would stop, and when they would eventually reach the promised land.

This story is richly symbolic. As we each journey through our own mortal wilderness, we want to reach the “promised land” of living with God eternally. He has promised to lead us there. Yet while each person needs to wander along the same route—be obedient, repent, receive priesthood ordinances, and endure faithfully—each person’s life is unique.

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said: “The Lord has placed currents of



divine influence in your life that will lead you along the individual plan He would have you fulfill here on earth. Seek through the Spirit to identify it and carefully follow that direction that the Lord has put in your life. Align yourself with it. Choose, willingly, to exercise your agency to follow it.”¹

Consider which was harder for the camp of Israel to endure: spending a year in an unpleasant place or leaving a nice place after two days? I think both scenarios tested their faith.

So it is with us. We may not be satisfied with our circumstances and thus spend time wondering when things will change. Or we may experience an unanticipated change to our pleasant routine. How we choose to respond to these experiences determines, in a large part, our happiness. And if we spend our lives wondering while we wander, we may miss out on wonderful opportunities for spiritual growth.

Go and Do Something Today

In the spring of 1831, the Saints began to gather to Kirtland, Ohio. A member named Lemam Copley agreed to allow a group from Colesville, New York, to stay on his farm in Thompson, a short distance from Kirtland. In May 1831 the Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith:

“And I consecrate unto them this land for a little season, until I, the Lord,

shall provide for them otherwise, and command them to go hence;

“And the hour and the day is not given unto them, wherefore let them *act upon this land as for years*, and this shall turn unto them for their good” (D&C 51:16–17; emphasis added).

Much like the children of Israel following the cloud in the wilderness, these Saints knew they wouldn’t be permanent residents on the Copley farm. At some point they would move

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on. Yet no matter how long their stay would be, they were to act as if they would be there for years.

So why would the Lord give them this counsel? Some may have become discouraged living in a wagon or tent in a muddy field as they saw others living in better circumstances. The Lord’s counsel likely changed their perspective from discouragement to hope.

Likewise, when we see others who have things we dream of—a nice

family, home, job, and a clear direction in life—we may become discouraged. For instance, if we know we won’t be in a ward or branch for long, we may think, “Why bother accepting a calling? Why get to know anyone?” We may still attend church, but we aren’t getting all we could out of the experience. If we spend our lives focusing on what we *don’t* have, we may fail to be truly grateful for what we *do* have.

As we sing in one of our hymns, there *are* “chances for work all around just now, opportunities right in our way. Do not let them pass by, saying, ‘Sometime I’ll try,’ but go and do something today.”²

When we “act upon this land as for years,” we begin to recognize opportunities we may not have seen before. We may also see that some of these opportunities may never come our way again. Then we think, “As long as I’m here, I’m going to get involved, do the best I can, and choose to be happy. I’ll continue to hope for the future, but in the meantime, let me do some good here.” It’s the difference between treading water and actually swimming.

As it turned out, the Saints in Thompson didn’t stay very long. Lemam Copley broke his promise to let the Saints stay on his land. The Lord eventually sent these Saints to Missouri, but they did their best while they lived in that farmer’s field, and the Lord blessed them for it.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, said: “Often the deep valleys of our present will be understood only by looking back on them from the mountains of our future experience. Often we can’t see the Lord’s hand in our lives until long after trials have passed. Often the most difficult times of our lives are essential building blocks that form the foundation of our character and



pave the way to future opportunity, understanding, and happiness.”³

Let Not Your Minds Turn Back

We sometimes get into trouble when we insist on doing things according to our own timetable, rather than trusting in the Lord’s.

Consider the story of Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem from Laman and Lemuel’s perspective. Their comfortable life was suddenly interrupted when Lehi said the family

had to flee because Jerusalem was going to be destroyed. Off they go into the wilderness—only to have to return soon to get the brass plates from Laban. All that time slogging through the harsh desert only to have Laban steal their precious things and try to kill them? I would be upset too!

On top of that, seeing Jerusalem look the same probably added to Laman and Lemuel’s anger. I don’t know if they expected to see a smoking crater when they returned, but I can imagine their thoughts: “Wasn’t Jerusalem supposed to be destroyed? Why are we wasting our time in the wilderness when things are totally normal here?” In any case, all these things quickly resulted in them beating Nephi and Sam (see 1 Nephi 3:29).

When things don’t happen the way we think they ought to; when we think that pillar of fire is never going to move fast enough; when we look around and see only a farmer’s field, we too might become discouraged to the point that, like Laman and Lemuel, we beat up our faith and take out our frustrations with God.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: “When we are unduly impatient with an omniscient God’s timing, we really are suggesting that we know what is best. Strange, isn’t it—we who wear wristwatches seek to counsel

Him who oversees cosmic clocks and calendars.”⁴

Of course life isn’t always easy, and I don’t know of anyone—myself included—who would say that life has turned out exactly the way they imagined. But I also know many people who would say that despite it all, they are happy with their life now—even if they didn’t grow up to be a firefighter on the moon!

That positive perspective comes when we faithfully follow the Lord with optimism through our own wildernesses. As we do, we will one day discover that our wilderness experience wasn’t nearly as bad as we thought. We may even admit that it was totally worth it. To each of us the Lord says:

“Continue in patience until ye are perfected.

“Let not your minds turn back; and when ye are worthy, in mine own due time, ye shall see and know” (D&C 67:13–14). ■

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To learn how to be grateful regardless of your circumstances, see President Dieter F. Uchtdorf’s April general conference talk “Grateful in Any Circumstances” in the May issue or at conference.lds.org.

NOTES

1. Richard G. Scott, “He Lives,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 87.
2. “Have I Done Any Good?” *Hymns*, no. 223.
3. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Continue in Patience,” *Ensign*, May 2010, 58.
4. Neal A. Maxwell, “Hope through the Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 63.