

STEPPING ACROSS THE MISSISSIPPI

*Far from where the river is wide, I learned a lesson
about the power of tributaries.*

By Tom Edmunds

A number of years ago I went on a business trip to Minnesota, USA, with some associates. On our way to an activity sponsored by the hosting company, our van driver pulled over at a wide spot in the road. He encouraged us to get out and look around.

It seemed like an odd place to stretch our legs, but then he pointed to a small set of stairs. It led to a three-foot-square platform with railings on three sides but not in back. At the back was an open space about 18 inches wide with a tiny stream running under it. Directly opposite this

space was another platform with stairs leading down the other direction.

We all took the opportunity to climb the stairs and step from one platform to the other. As the sign at the base of the platform explained, we had now stepped across the Mississippi River.

Of course, the Mississippi grows much wider from there. I have since crossed bridges in Missouri and Iowa where the river seems immense. At its widest navigable width, just downstream from its confluence with the Missouri River in Illinois, the Mississippi is nearly one mile across.



All rivers start small. They become great like the Mississippi as tributaries flow into them. We each have such tributaries and rivers in our own lives, for evil or for good. The Lord says, “Out of small things proceedeth that which is great” (D&C 64:33).

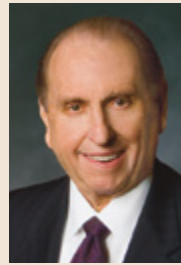
Some of life’s streams are negative. They start with an indiscretion, such as telling a little lie, looking “just once” at pornography, or allowing a seed of anger to be planted in our souls. Repentance allows us to cross over such transgressions easily while they are small. But if we keep feeding an evil stream, it eventually forms a sinister river. We tell a second lie to cover the first. We look at an inappropriate picture again, then again and again. We relive a small bitterness until it swells into resentment. These large rivers are much more difficult to cross. The Book of Mormon refers to such rivers of evil as “filthy water” and warns that they can become the “depths of hell” (see 1 Nephi 8:13–14; 12:16).

Fortunately, there are also spiritually strengthening streams. They start small, fed by daily habits like personal prayer, scripture study, and keeping a journal. We feel

comfort when we pray, so we pray again. We find an answer in the scriptures and gain confidence to search for more. We record our blessings and start to see clearly how the Holy Ghost guides us. Such recurring events become tributaries of testimony, flowing together to transform our spiritual stream into a river of righteousness.

Each of us has a choice about which sort of river we will feed each day. I hope that we will choose to feed the spiritual streams until they become rivers of righteousness. ■


The author lives in Utah, USA.



CHOICES DETERMINE DESTINY

“It has been said that the door of history turns on small hinges, and so do people’s lives. The choices we make determine our destiny.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “Choices,” *Ensign*, May 2016, 86.



The colors on this map, created in 1944, indicate variations in the size, course, and content of a section of the Mississippi River and its tributaries over centuries of time.