

YOUNG ADULTS

NAVIGATING



the Currents of Life

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Young adulthood. By nature, it seems an exciting, ever-flowing river of successes and disappointments, occasionally interspersed by a few marked moments: graduating from college, passing an entrance exam, getting married, having children, landing that dream job—all significant milestones along the river of life.

So what happens when it seems like you've reached most of your important milestones—after you have a degree, a job, and no immediate prospects for marriage? Or maybe you are married but feel stuck in a progression-rut. What happens when

you can no longer measure your life in semesters? when the benchmark of final exams is gone? when you feel like you're just not making progress in your life? It's easy to feel as though your once ebbing-and-flowing life is now completely stagnant, resulting in one of several things: an apathy toward life and progression of any kind, despair from feeling a lack of meaning or fulfillment, or angst from feeling you're not going anywhere. When you have nothing to measure your life against, it can quickly slip into anything from monotonous banality to debilitating helplessness.

Take the First Steps Forward

If you find yourself among those who feel trapped in this stagnating stage of life, remember that you don't have to be doing something extraordinary to have an extraordinary life, but you do have to be doing *something*.

The key is to keep moving. Elder Keith K. Hilbig, an emeritus member of the Seventy, said: "The path to eternal life is not on a plateau. Rather, it is an incline, ever onward and upward."¹ In order to move forward in life—past the stagnant parts of the river—we need to take a step toward improving

ourselves. Complacency is surprisingly powerful, though, especially when the ins and outs of daily life can seem all-consuming. Elder John H. Vandenberg (1904–92) of the Seventy commented, "The sad part of humanity seems to be the utter lack of desire, in the lives of many, to really do something about enlarging the vistas of their existence."² That lack of desire doesn't have to be the sad part of *your* existence, though. Overcoming complacency and finding the motivation to progress are the first steps to improving the course of your life.

As the new year rolls around, people often begin making goals. However, New Year's resolutions are easily made and broken—it's no coincidence that gym memberships peak during the month of January. But no matter the month, nor your marital, educational, or professional status, progression is not only an eternal principle of the gospel but also an integral part of creating a meaningful life. Although you can't always create the major milestones in your life, you can find meaning and fulfillment by setting and striving to keep purposeful daily, weekly, and yearly goals.

Instead of succumbing to a seemingly stagnant life, you can make a plan to keep improving.

Make an Evaluation



First, take a step back and look at your life as it already is.

This involves a thorough self-evaluation. Elder Marvin J. Ashton (1915–94) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles suggested that we ask ourselves the following questions: “Where do I need development? What do I want out of life? Where do I want to go? How can I get there?”³ Honestly evaluate where and how you spend your time and what things you want to change. Think about things you want to do, traits you want to develop, and skills you want to acquire.

Decide on Worthwhile Goals



After you’ve carefully evaluated your life, decide which areas you want to begin

improving first. As in everything else, the Savior is a great source to look to in knowing where to start. We don’t know much about Christ’s early life, but we do know that He “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:52). This implies at least four categories for potential self-improvement goals: mental, physical, spiritual, and social. President Howard W. Hunter (1907–95) suggested that we become engaged in “the personal pursuit of hobbies or crafts, the seeking of knowledge and wisdom, particularly of the things of God, and the development and honing of skills.”⁴ Other categories might be community, family, creativity, finance, or education.

When deciding on categories and goals, include Heavenly Father in the process. Make it a serious matter of prayer to find out how you can best improve your life and what His will is for you. After all, Heavenly Father knows best what things are going to make your life the most meaningful and fulfilling it can be. As one bishop said, “It is not enough to do things. We must do the right things—the things our Heavenly Father would want us to do.”⁵ Heavenly Father wants us to be continually progressing because He knows our eternal potential.

Once you’ve determined a reasonable number of categories—four or five—set some specific goals. Try to imagine the end goal: Do you want to be a scholar of the scriptures? Or do you just want to read the chapter in the manual *before* church? Do you want to be in better physical shape? Maybe you want to be closer to your family, more informed about political issues, or more up-to-date on technology. Perhaps the most important goal you have right now is to be worthy to attend the temple. Once you’ve established the end goal, think about what smaller goals will help you achieve your long-term goals. Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles suggested: “Set short-term goals that you can reach. Set goals that are well balanced—not too many nor too few, and not too high nor too low. Write down your attainable goals and work on them according to their importance. Pray for divine guidance in your goal setting.”⁶

Make sure that each of your goals will actually help you reach your desired outcome and that you are committed to keeping them. Elder Rex D. Pinegar, an emeritus member of the Seventy, counseled: “Decide about . . . things that you will incorporate into your life, things that will bring you eternal happiness. Decide to set goals which are consistent with your divine destiny. . . . Decide to believe in yourself, that you truly can reach goals—your goals.”⁷

Make It Happen



Once you have your goals squared away and written down, give each one a time frame.

Some of your goals might be a daily endeavor, such as scripture study. Others may be weekly: reading the material for Sunday lessons, making phone calls to friends and family, or attending the temple. Still other goals could be accomplished monthly or quarterly: setting a budget, attending town hall meetings, reading gospel-centered books, learning how to conjugate verbs in a foreign language. Maybe you’ll have a few goals that will only require a few hours a month, a few days per year, or just sporadic when-the-opportunity-presents-itself types of time commitments.

Grab an Oar, a Paddle—Anything

Throughout this new year, don’t settle for fleeting resolutions that will be abandoned before you can get all the confetti and glitter out of your carpet. Make serious goals and plans to begin rowing past the stagnant stage



of your life. Consider this invitation from Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “Use your agency to develop yourself personally. As you discover your gifts and talents, . . . you must let the Spirit guide you. Choose and act for yourself. Be motivated from within. Make a plan for your life, including education or vocational training. Explore interests and skills. Work and become self-reliant. Set goals, overcome mistakes, gain experience, and *finish what you begin*.”⁸

If your life’s progress seems like it’s come to a standstill, catch a current of motivation to keep improving. Grab a paddle, an oar, or just start up that engine—whatever your personal goal-reaching incentives may be—and get moving. By accomplishing small daily,

weekly, and monthly goals, you’ll find that not only will you become a better person, but you’ll feel the empowerment and fulfillment of having a milestone-achieving, self-improving, ever-flowing, and all-around more meaningful life. ■

NOTES

1. Keith K. Hilbig, “Quench Not the Spirit Which Quickens the Inner Man,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 38.
2. John H. Vandenberg, “Becoming a Somebody,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1973, 38.
3. Marvin J. Ashton, “Progress through Change,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 61.
4. Howard W. Hunter, “The Church Is for All People,” *Ensign*, June 1989, 77.
5. See Joseph B. Wirthlin, “Three Choices,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 80.
6. M. Russell Ballard, “Keeping Life’s Demands in Balance,” *Ensign*, May 1987, 14.
7. Rex D. Pinegar, “Decide to Decide,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 73.
8. Robert D. Hales, “Stand Strong in Holy Places,” *Ensign*, May 2013, 50; emphasis added.

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