



Choosing Liberty and Eternal Life



BY ELDER CRAIG A. CARDON

Of the Seventy

I began my college studies at a university about 100 miles (160 km) from home. It was an exciting time for all the freshman students. Many were living away from home for the first time and were eager to express their newfound freedom from parental oversight.

I was on the university basketball team, and it quickly became known that I was a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. During the first weeks of the semester, one of my teammates invited me to a Saturday night party for new students to be held in the desert outside the city. I asked if the party would include alcohol and was assured that it would not. I felt uncomfortable with this response but decided to attend nonetheless. A blind date was arranged for me with the assurance that she had the same standards I had. My teammate explained that we would use his car.

That Saturday night we drove some distance into the desert and found the party. To my great disappointment, drinking alcohol was the principal activity, notwithstanding the fact that the legal drinking age in the state was three years above the age of most of the

freshman students. My date couldn't wait to begin drinking, along with my teammate and his date. When I voiced disappointment, they said I needed to "grow up and live a little" and that they would help me. I told them that I had never drunk alcohol and that I was not going to start then. They soon left me so they could join the others.

I sat alone, apart from the drinking and boisterous laughter, without transportation to leave, wondering why I had gotten myself into this mess. Later in the night, I saw a line of car headlights coming through the desert toward the party. The cars encircled the group, and then, as if on signal, lights began flashing on the top of what I then recognized as police cars. Many students attempted to run into the desert but were quickly apprehended. I remained where I was, perplexed by the developments.

The police began checking identification to determine the ages of the students, giving breath tests to those below the legal drinking age to determine if they had been drinking. When they came to me, I told an officer that I had not drunk alcohol that night or ever. He laughed at me, but when I firmly stated that he could believe me, his countenance changed. He told me that I did not have to take the test

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and directed me to drive my teammate's car back to the university. Those who were underage and drinking were cited and required to pay fines. Some were taken to jail.

A Personal Message

I, however, left with no police record and arrived home at about 3:00 a.m. on Sunday morning. Priesthood meeting in my ward began at 7:00 a.m. My alarm sounded at 6:45 a.m. I turned it off and rolled over, thinking for a few moments of all the reasons not to attend that morning. But spiritually, I couldn't rest. I arose, dressed in my Sunday clothes, and walked to the chapel, arriving about 10 minutes after the meeting had begun.

As I walked into the chapel, my heart leaped as I recognized the back of my father's head. He had come to visit me, unannounced. I slipped in beside him and sat down. He

looked at me and smiled. Then, putting his hand firmly on my knee, he leaned over and whispered a message with meaning far beyond words: "I knew I would find you here, Son." Simultaneously, Heavenly Father whispered the same message to my soul. I can't adequately describe the love and joy I felt at that moment.

A few months later I was on my mission. A few months after that, I received word that my father had died unexpectedly. The message I received from him and through him that Sunday, however, has never left me.

Freedom to Choose Liberty or Captivity

This experience provides an example of the eternal truth Lehi communicated to his sons long ago: "And because [the children

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of men] are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon. . . . And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil” (2 Nephi 2:26–27).

Our Father’s plan of happiness incorporates the exercise of agency, but it also, of necessity, incorporates accountability and judgment. My teammate and others at the party were free to choose their behavior, but they were not free to choose the consequences of their behavior. Some of them spent the night in jail. Others began lives of uncontrolled appetites that continue to enslave them today.

The bondage we bring upon ourselves while seeking freedom through errant choices is a great irony. Cain

thought he was free after murdering his brother, only to find himself cursed and tormented for what he had done (see Moses 5:32–39). Peter spoke of those of evil influence as “wells without water” who promise liberty while they themselves are the servants of corruption. “For of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage” (2 Peter 2:17, 19). However, Peter also identified the true path of freedom, saying, “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations,” for we escape “the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 2:9, 20).

Samuel the Lamanite invited us to remember that we “are permitted to act for [ourselves]; for behold, God hath given unto [us] a knowledge and he hath made [us] free. . . . And he hath given unto [us] that [we] might choose life or death” (Helaman 14:30–31).

When my teammate misrepresented the party’s activities, I felt a spiritual unrest that I did not heed. When confronted with that reality, I was more disappointed with myself than with my teammate. But keeping myself apart from the crowd brought spiritual comfort and later temporal benefit when the police allowed me to return home.

However, the greatest blessing of liberty came when, in the privacy of my dormitory room early Sunday morning, I chose to be where I should be, not knowing beforehand the treasure that awaited me there. Such experiences, accompanied by the ministration of the Spirit, foreshadow the liberty associated with the blessing of eternal life.

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