

Achieving Your Full Potential



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Your future happiness, personal righteousness, and relationship with the Lord will depend in large part on the habits you embrace and the choices and commitments you make.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY STEVE KROPP

It has been said that one of the greatest tragedies of our time is that so many people live far below their potential. Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin (1917-2008) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles had a favorite two-word statement that he used frequently to motivate us: “Always improving.” President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) continually encouraged us to “lengthen our stride” and to “enlarge our vision.”¹ Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) said it another way: “The Lord loves each of us too much to merely let us go on being what we now are, for he knows what we have the possibility to become!”²

Implicit in these quotations is the message that each of us can and should do more to

meet the Lord’s expectations of us. During your years as a young adult, you’ll make choices and form patterns that will have a major impact on who you will become. Your future happiness, personal righteousness, and relationship with the Lord will depend in large part on the habits you embrace and the choices and commitments you make over the next few years.

With these statements in mind, I’d like to share a few ways you can take and keep control of your life and achieve your full potential.

Take Responsibility for What You Want to Become

Is the road you are now traveling and the present conduct of your life leading you to achieve your full God-given potential?



Staying focused, disciplined, and committed to meaningful goals, both spiritual and temporal, is an important—in fact, an essential—key to your success here in this life and in the eternities to come.

If you were to make no changes in the present course of your life, would you be happy with who you are and what you have become five years from now? (I use the five-year time frame because the patterns, habits, and actions you take over the next five years will have tremendous impact on what you will become in the years that follow.)

Some of you have just left parents and family to be on your own for the first time. Many of you have had more years of experience in being independent and accountable for your personal actions. Others have returned from the discipline of a full-time mission to the less-structured life that follows. Regardless of your circumstances, these are the years when you must take responsibility for who you now are and what you want to become.

Many of you are well on your way with your education and the early stages of your careers. We commend you. If you are still pursuing your formal education, complete your degree or vocational training no matter the intellectual or financial struggles you encounter along the way. If you have not had the opportunity for advanced education or have dropped out of school for various reasons, think carefully about where you are. Remember, education is a vital key to the door of opportunity.

The Savior's parable of the talents is so applicable to you at this stage in your life. He knows there are differences between each of you intellectually, emotionally, and physically. The Lord only expects you to magnify and develop the talents and abilities you have been given. But He also expects you to be accountable for your actions

in so doing. Take control of your actions and prepare to succeed at whatever you are capable of doing. As President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) frequently counseled, “Just do the best you can, but be sure it is your very best.”³

This is also a time in your life when counsel from others can help you decide what you should be doing that will move you toward achieving your full potential. If you do not have a clear view of where you are going or what you want to do with your life, ask for help. There are numerous Church leaders, institute teachers, and friends who would be pleased to help mentor you through some of the challenges of life.

Stay Focused and Use Your Time Wisely

One of the most difficult challenges is to stay focused and stay on course—to finish what we have started. I am convinced that distractions and discouragement are some of Satan's most effective tools. He finds ways to help us make excuses about why we can't do this or that. He gets us involved in wasting our time and resources in things that lead us away from improving our lives and developing our talents. He blurs our focus by diverting our attention. This can happen to the very best of you.

A beautiful and vivacious young sister had just returned home from a very successful mission in South America.

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As her stake president, I completed an interview and released her from her mission. I asked her, “What are your plans for the future and how are you going to keep vibrant the beautiful spirit and testimony that you have expressed this evening?”

“Oh, that’s simple, President Staheli. I have my goals very clearly outlined.”

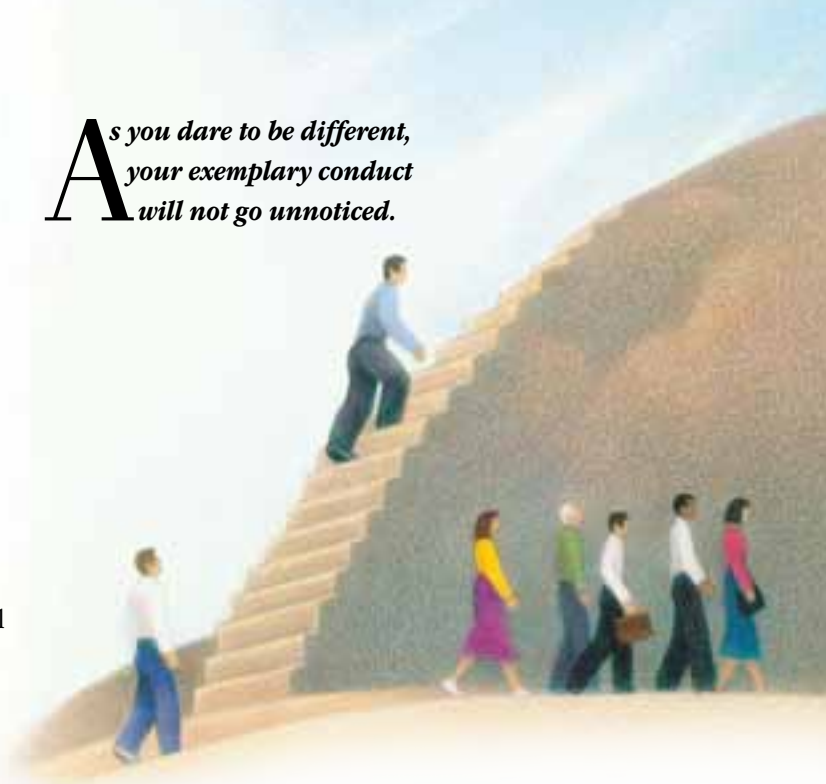
And then she enthusiastically recited several of them. They included daily prayer and scripture study, educational pursuits, and dreams of the kind of man she would marry. She really had her life together.

Several months later this young sister called for another interview—this time in preparation to be married and sealed in the temple to the young man of her dreams. As we finished, I casually asked, “How are you doing on your other goals?”

“What goals?” she replied.

As I reminded her of our earlier conversation, I recited back to her a few of the goals she had articulated to me. She teared up and her face flushed with embarrassment as she said, “President Staheli, I can’t believe I have forgotten so soon what was so important to me when I returned home from my mission.”

She still was a worthy young sister, but she had been caught up in the things of the world and had lost focus on some of the things of greatest worth to her. Staying focused, disciplined, and committed to meaningful goals, both spiritual and temporal, is an important—in fact, an essential—key to your success here in this life and in the eternities to come.



Have the Courage to Be Different

One of the greatest challenges for all of us is to learn how to live in the world without participating in all that it offers. Worldly standards will always be in a state of flux. The only true and unchanging standards are those set by the Savior and His teachings of the restored gospel.

Unfortunately, frequent exposure to what at first is unacceptable will over time legitimize in our minds that which we have seen and heard. Be careful that you do not become the victim of this seduction.

As you dare to be different, your exemplary conduct will not go unnoticed. Although you will be tried and tested, your faithful adherence to the Lord’s standards will be seen as a beacon in the night to those around you.

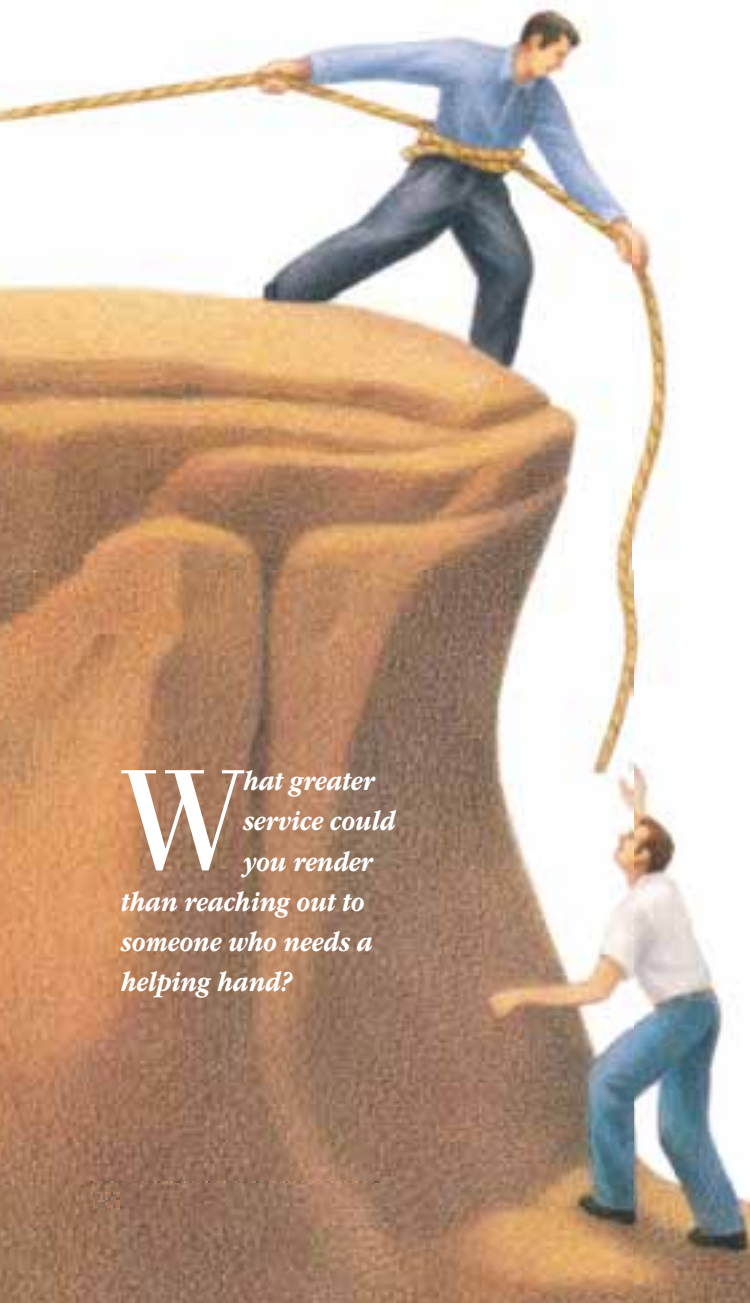
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Have the courage to be different when it is required of you to be true to the standards of the Church. You will be respected for it. And if occasionally you are not respected, you need not worry, because that is not the kind of association you will want or need in your future.

For those of you who are struggling because you may have crossed a line of the Lord's standards, please know there is a way back. The Lord loves you. His great atoning sacrifice was wrought so that the principles of repentance and forgiveness could be applied in each of our lives. Make an appointment this very week to see your bishop or branch president

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so that he can open the door to helping you to repent and to become clean and comfortable in your relationship with Heavenly Father and the Savior.

Lose Yourself in Service

King Benjamin taught the standard for service when he said: "Behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17).

The Savior's life, as the ultimate example of service, made clear His feelings of the importance of our service. He said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40).

There is one particular way to find joy and happiness as you lose yourself in service to another. Each of you must know of at least one of your friends or acquaintances who is struggling with certain gospel principles. Some are discouraged, and some have even lost hope. Others have been disappointed or have faced daunting challenges that they were unable to understand or handle emotionally. The end result, for whatever reason, is the loss of faith in and a testimony of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. You may have friends who have become less active. In many cases personal habits or transgressions have overshadowed them with guilt—to the point where it has become difficult for them to come back.

What greater service could you render than reaching out to someone you know who needs a helping hand to return to full fellowship in the gospel of Jesus Christ?

The counsel the Lord gave to the Prophet Joseph Smith in June 1829 is applicable to each of you as you accept this challenge: "And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!" (D&C 18:15).

Keep Your Testimony Burning Brightly

Because you are, according to President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), "the finest generation in the history of the Church,"⁴ much is expected of you. Keep the fire of your testimony burning brightly through faith, prayer, scripture

study, and the spiritual blessings that come from obedience to the Lord's commandments. Reach your full potential spiritually and temporally by:

- Taking responsibility for who you are and what you want to become.
- Staying focused and using your time wisely.
- Having the courage to be different from those in the world around you.
- Losing yourself in service.

As you do these things, the Lord will bless you and strengthen you so that you may move forward in magnifying the talents and opportunities He has given you. I bear testimony of Heavenly Father's plan for each of you.

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Jesus Christ is truly our Savior, and He very much loves and cares for each of you. As you keep His commandments and follow the counsel of the prophet and your leaders, He will be there to guide you through the challenges that lie ahead. ■

NOTES

1. Spencer W. Kimball, "When the World Will Be Converted," *Ensign*, Oct. 1974, 5.
2. Neal A. Maxwell, "In Him All Things Hold Together," in *Brigham Young University 1990–91 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* (1991), 107.
3. Gordon B. Hinckley, "A Challenging Time—a Wonderful Time" (An Evening with President Gordon B. Hinckley, Feb. 7, 2003), 5.
4. Gordon B. Hinckley, "A Chosen Generation," *Ensign*, May 1992, 69.

Excerpted from a Church Educational System fireside address for young adults given March 2, 2003. For the full text, please visit www.ldsces.org.