

Deciding for Myself

I wanted the Lord to decide for me because I knew He saw the whole picture, but that's why He wanted me to decide for myself.



By Valerie Durrant

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I had a choice—I could accept a mission call or a marriage proposal. In a somewhat surprising turn of events, I was presented with both opportunities, but I didn't know which to choose. After discussing my dilemma with the bishop, he helped me come to the conclusion that I had to decide for myself.

Though I wished that his answer had been more definitive, I can't say I was surprised; I had felt the same way when I prayed. As much as I wanted a clear-cut answer, it didn't come until I made my own decision and moved forward in faith.

The Dilemma

The decision to serve had been easy. I had always wanted to be a missionary, and when President Thomas S. Monson announced that sisters would be eligible to serve at age 19, I started preparing right away. I attended missionary preparation classes, met with my bishop, and got my wisdom teeth pulled. Before I knew it, I was opening my call to the Argentina Salta Mission and was scheduled to leave in five months.

Everything was going according to plan. Even Ryan, the young man I was dating, supported my desire to serve, and we soon broke up so that I could focus on preparing.

There was just one problem: my feelings for Ryan didn't go away. I

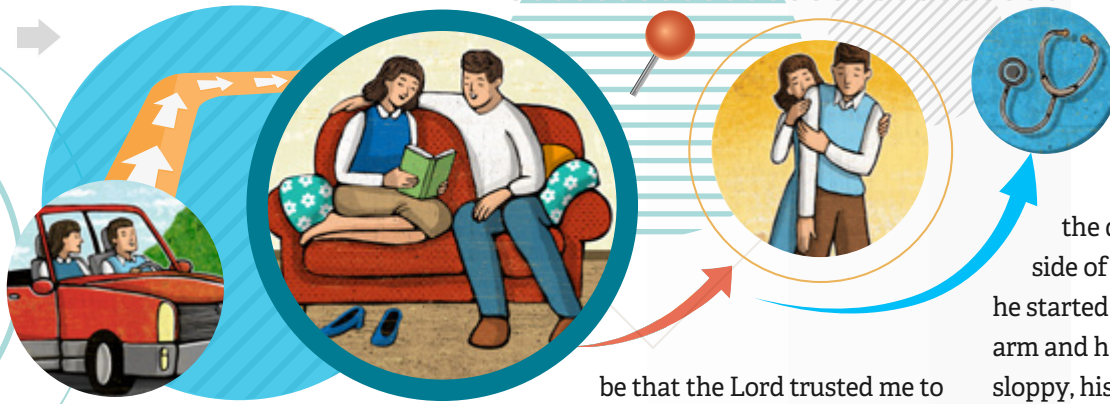
prayed about our relationship and received spiritual confirmation that he was someone I could marry. But I wanted to serve my mission, so I did my best not to think about him. I could think about marriage when I got back.

Then, two weeks before I was to enter the missionary training center, Ryan showed up unexpectedly at my house. To my surprise, he asked me to defer my mission and consider marrying him. I had no idea what to do: I wanted to marry Ryan, but I also wanted to serve my mission. Both were righteous desires.

It felt like the weight of the world had been compressed into this one decision—the course of my life, now and in eternity, would be affected by



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my choice. I prayed to know what Heavenly Father would have me do but didn't feel guided in either direction.

Exercising My Agency

After much frustration, I recalled the counsel in Doctrine and Covenants 9:8: "You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right." As I considered the consequences of each choice, I started to think that the right thing for me was to defer my mission call and keep dating Ryan. But still, I had not received a distinct spiritual impression telling me that this choice was right—or wrong.

There wasn't time to wait, though, and I had to move forward. After consulting with my bishop and stake president, I deferred my mission call for six months. Soon, the Holy Ghost bore witness to me that I was on the right path, and later that year, Ryan and I were sealed for time and all eternity in the temple.

Why Did He Let Me Decide?

If it was the Lord's will all along that I stay and marry Ryan, why hadn't He just told me so from the beginning? The simple answer might

be that the Lord trusted me to make my own decision. After all, He wants us "to act for [ourselves] and not to be acted upon" (2 Nephi 2:26).

This is not to say that the Lord will leave us entirely without guidance. Elder Richard G. Scott (1928–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that Heavenly Father "will confirm the correctness of our choices His way. That confirmation generally comes through packets of help found along the way. We discover them by being spiritually sensitive. They are like notes from a loving Father as evidence of His approval."¹ The spiritual witness I received after my decision served as just such a note of divine approval.

With the gift of hindsight, I also recognize that Heavenly Father was teaching me another vital principle of agency: that we grow as we assume total responsibility for our decisions. By allowing me to make my own choice and move forward in faith, the Lord was preparing me for larger trials ahead.

The Diagnosis

Just one year after Ryan and I were sealed (around the time that I would have been returning from my mission, had I gone), Ryan started to feel a tingling sensation in the right side of his mouth. I didn't think much of it when he said, "I feel like I just got back from

the dentist, but just the right side of my tongue is numb." Then he started losing control of his right arm and hand. His handwriting went sloppy, his smile became lopsided, and he felt clumsy and weak while playing basketball.

We knew we had to go to the doctor to have Ryan checked out. Before we went, Ryan asked his dad for a priesthood blessing. His dad blessed him that the doctors would be able to resolve the issue quickly and that he would become whole and complete again. With those words ringing in our ears, we headed to the hospital.

After learning about Ryan's symptoms, the doctor ordered an MRI. He told us he just wanted to be sure it wasn't something serious, like a brain tumor or multiple sclerosis.

Afterward, the doctor came into the small hospital room where we had been waiting and said he didn't have good news. The MRI showed eight lesions on Ryan's brain, and the doctor was almost certain that it was a case of multiple sclerosis.

Strengthened to Bear Our Burden

We weren't prepared for this diagnosis. Ryan says, "I remember feeling helpless—this wasn't something I could just 'tough out.' My entire self-image changed; I used to be invincible, and now I could barely scribble my own name." After several rounds of steroid treatment over the next few weeks, Ryan regained control of

the right side of his body and started to feel normal again—physically, at least. Mentally we were still in turmoil, uncertain of the future but still trying to have faith in the Lord’s plan and the blessing Ryan’s father had given him.

In my own priesthood blessing I was blessed with an added measure of faith to face the uncertainties ahead. Together we adjusted to the new normal, attending doctor appointments and educating ourselves about this disease that was now part of our lives. We came to rely on each other more than ever, and as a result, we emerged more bonded together than ever.

I was humbled when Ryan told me, “There was nothing more comforting than being able to cry with you, have you by my side as we met with doctors, and feel your complete support and love.” And we realized that if I had served my mission, I wouldn’t have been there for him when he was diagnosed, whether we would have ended up marrying or not. “It was the greatest blessing to have someone who I knew loved me no matter what happened,” Ryan says.

my marriage—the sacrifices and trials, the prayers for strength and guidance, the development of trust in the Lord and his timing—have shaped me and helped me become a little more Christlike; they have given me the opportunity to think about someone other than myself. For both Ryan and me, marriage has been a gateway to additional learning and growth.

I am grateful that in His infinite wisdom, the Lord gave me experiences that would prepare me to respond to my trials with faith—one of which was the blessing to exercise my agency and choose to marry Ryan instead of going on my mission. It may have been difficult to face that decision on my own, but because the Lord trusted me to make my own decision, I was confident and ready to accept the responsibility that accompanied that choice. By *not* intervening, He showed me great love. ■

NOTE

1. Richard G. Scott, “Learning to Recognize Answers to Prayer,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 32. Elder Scott further explained, “If, in trust, we begin something which is not right, [Heavenly Father] will let us know before we have gone too far. We sense that help by recognizing troubled or uneasy feelings” (page 32).

Grateful for the Lord’s Trust

With the help of the Lord, Ryan and I were strengthened beyond our normal capacity. We grew stronger individually and as a couple during those first few months of uncertainty—maybe more than we had throughout our whole lives leading up to that point. We learned how to rely on our Heavenly Father, and we came to understand what a blessing it was to be together.

The experiences that have come with

