





By Elder
Ulisses Soares
Of the Presidency
of the Seventy

HOLD ON TO THE ROD

If we exercise faith and diligently obey the commandments of the Lord, we can more easily choose the right.

I know a good member of the Church who had a difficult experience while in college. He was invited to a party at the house of a classmate. My friend's college professors were also invited, especially those who were friendly to the students. The party seemed inviting and secure.

When my friend arrived, however, he quickly realized that the atmosphere was not what he had expected. Students were drinking, smoking, using drugs, and doing horrible things in every corner of the house. He became concerned and decided to leave, but the party was being held far from his home. He had gotten a ride with friends, so he had no way to leave on his own.

At that moment he prayed silently to the Lord, asking for help. After some pondering, he felt that he should go outside. He followed his feelings and stayed outside the house until the party had ended.

During the ride home, his friends talked about the horrible things that had happened during the party. My friend felt uncomfortable

with the situation. It was not easy for him to bear.

However, when he partook of the sacrament the next day at church, he felt calm, peaceful, and certain he had made the correct decision. He realized what it means to grasp the iron rod and not let go, even in the mists of darkness. He understood clearly what Nephi had taught his brothers when he said that "whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction" (1 Nephi 15:24).

Imagine what might have happened had that young man, out of embarrassment, not been strong enough to hold on to the iron rod. As a result of this and other decisions in his life, he married a young woman in the temple, formed a righteous family, and became successful. He serves faithfully in the Church today and seeks to be a good example for his children.

The Natural Man

It is not easy to face daily temptation. We are all exposed to an environment that is hostile to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We live in a world that is deteriorating morally. Media and technology invite us to participate in destructive and life-shattering activities that oppose our beliefs and the values of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Pressures from friends who do not share our values, or who share our values but are weak in their faith, push us to participate in degrading behaviors. On top of this, we have to deal with the natural man that exists in each of us.

The Guide to the Scriptures defines the natural man as “a person who chooses to be influenced by the passions, desires, appetites, and senses of the flesh rather than by the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Such a person can comprehend physical things but not spiritual things. . . . Each person must be born again through the atonement of Jesus Christ to cease being a natural man.”¹

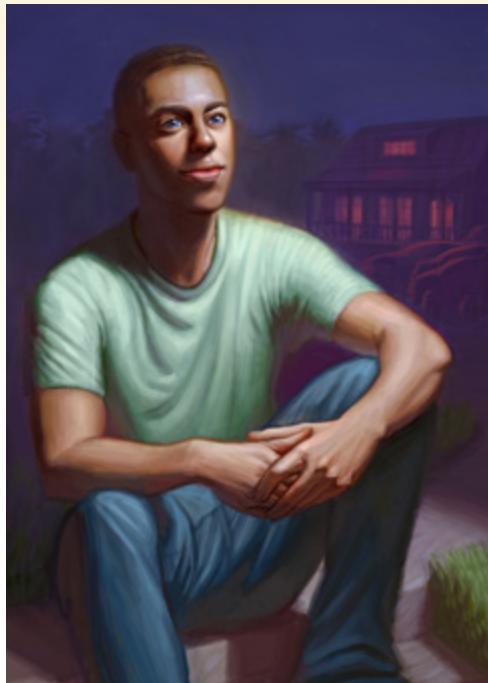
President Thomas S. Monson often quotes a simple adage that can help us avoid the distraction of temptation and keep us moving in the right direction: “You can’t be right by doing wrong, and you can’t be wrong by doing right.”²

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The Light of Christ

The prophet Mormon taught his people:

“Wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in



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Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.

“But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil; for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him” (Moroni 7:16–17).

Our Heavenly Father has given us the Light of Christ, which is the “divine energy, power, or influence that proceeds from God through Christ and gives life and light to all things.”³ It helps a person choose between right and wrong. This gift, in conjunction with the companionship of the Holy Ghost, helps us to determine whether a choice places us in the territory of the Lord or behind enemy lines. If our behavior is good, that is evidence that we are being inspired by God. If our behavior is bad, that is evidence that we are being influenced by the enemy.

My college friend used these two gifts. The Light of Christ helped him to identify what was right, and the Holy Ghost guided his decision about which path to follow. These two gifts are available to those who hold on to the iron rod.

The Gift of Repentance

Let us imagine that for some reason we have been deceived or confused by temptation and end up committing sin. What should we do? If we fall into temptation and sin, we have to reconcile ourselves with God. In the language of the scriptures, we must repent.

Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught:

"When we sin, we turn away from God.
When we repent, we turn back toward God.

"The invitation to repent is rarely a voice of chastisement but rather a loving appeal to turn around and to 're-turn' toward God [see Helaman 7:17]. It is the beckoning of a loving Father and His Only Begotten Son to be more than we are, to reach up to a higher way of life, to change, and to feel the happiness of keeping the commandments. Being disciples of Christ, we rejoice in the blessing of repenting and the joy of being forgiven. They become part of us, shaping the way we think and feel."⁴

Repentance is a wonderful gift available to all who desire to return to God and allow Him to mold their lives.

We were born with the seed of divinity in our spirits because we are God's children. This seed needs to grow. It grows as we exercise our agency in righteousness, as we make correct decisions, and as we use the Light of Christ and the Holy Ghost to guide us in the decisions we make during the course of our lives. This process takes time, and it is not possible to shape our lives from one day to another.

Recognizing our dedication and perseverance, the Lord will give us what we are unable to obtain by ourselves. He will shape us because He sees our efforts to overcome our imperfections and human weaknesses.

In that regard, repentance becomes part of our daily lives. Our weekly taking of the sacrament—to come meekly, humbly before the Lord, acknowledging our dependence upon Him, asking Him to forgive and renew us, and promising to always remember Him—is very important.

Sometimes in our daily efforts to become more Christlike, we find ourselves repeatedly struggling with the same difficulties. It is as if we were climbing a tree-covered mountain. At times we don't see our progress until we get closer to the top and look back from the high ridges. Don't be discouraged. If you are striving and working to repent, you are in the process of repenting.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, "Overcoming bad habits or addictions often means an effort today followed by another tomorrow and then another, perhaps for many days, even months and years, until we achieve victory."⁵

As we improve, we see life more clearly and feel the Holy Ghost working more strongly within us. For those who are truly repentant but seem unable to feel relief, continue keeping the commandments. I promise you that relief will come in the timetable of the Lord. Healing requires time.

Let us maintain an eternal perspective by overcoming the natural man, judging by the Light of Christ, seeking guidance from the Holy Ghost, repenting when we fall short, and allowing our Heavenly Father to transform our lives into that which He has planned for us. ■

From a devotional address, "Becoming a Work of Art," given at Brigham Young University on Nov. 5, 2013. For the full address, visit speeches.byu.edu.



A PROMISE TO ALL

"The Savior wrought the Atonement, which provides a way for us to become clean. . . . Those who will repent and forsake sin will find that His merciful arm is outstretched still. . . . The result of His sacrifice is to free us from the effects of sin, that all may have guilt erased and feel hope."

President Boyd K. Packer,
President of the Quorum
of the Twelve Apostles,
"The Reason for Our Hope,"
Ensign, Nov. 2014, 6, 7.

NOTES

1. Guide to the Scriptures, "Natural Man," scriptures.lds.org.
2. Thomas S. Monson, "In Harm's Way," *Ensign*, May 1998, 48.
3. Guide to the Scriptures, "Light, Light of Christ," scriptures.lds.org.
4. Neil L. Andersen, "Repent . . . That I May Heal You," *Ensign*, Nov. 2009, 40.
5. D. Todd Christofferson, "Recognizing God's Hand in Our Daily Blessings," *Ensign*, Jan. 2012, 21.