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A Still, Small Voice among **Big Decisions**

**If you are worthy,
Heavenly Father will
not let you make big
mistakes without
giving you a warning.**

As a new mission president in the fall of 2011, I was excited to be out among our missionaries. My wife, Emily, and I decided to do apartment inspections and visit every pair of missionaries in the mission.

As we traveled from Guatemala City to one of our more remote zones, known as Sololá, we learned that a demonstration was blocking the road in front of us. Demonstrations in Guatemala can take hours, and there is usually no way to get past them. But when we inquired about a possible detour, we learned of another route. That route, however, came with the following warnings:

- It is not a great road.
- Make sure you are not on the road after dark.
- Bands of robbers frequent the road.

Like any zealous new mission president and wife, on Emily and

I went. After driving a while, we came to a spot on a dirt road that looked like a steep drop-off in front of us. Emily joked that we should get the camera out and take pictures as we went over the edge.

Years earlier, when I was a young missionary in Guatemala, I had learned that a small branch dragged onto the road meant “proceed with caution.” It might even mean “stop.” I had seen a branch but failed to register what it meant.

A moment later, we found ourselves dangling off a 20-foot (6 m) ledge where a bridge had washed out. I managed to climb out my side, but Emily could not open her door. When she tried to climb over the seat and come out my door, the vehicle began to rock. Obviously, it was a very disconcerting moment.





Many thoughts ran through my mind. I could see the headlines: “New Mission President Drives over Embankment Where There Was No Bridge, Resulting in Severe Injury to Wife” or “New Mission President and Wife Missing after Being Robbed on a Road They Should Not Have Been Traveling on.”

Not knowing what to do, I paused outside the vehicle and pleaded with Heavenly Father, “Please help me in my moment of carelessness.” Can you believe that a large banana truck suddenly pulled up behind us? The driver and passengers saw us and came over to laugh and enjoy the predicament of the silly gringo. They pointed out the branch on the road. Literally, it was just a twig.

Then, to our miraculous blessing, they retrieved from their truck the only chain I saw in three years of service in Guatemala. Before they left, they cut down a tree and

pulled it across the road. I think they wanted to make sure that the next North American to come by did not make the same mistake.

Heed Promptings and Warnings

I tell you this story to make the point that we must heed warnings, promptings, and direction given us by the voice of the Lord—no matter how strong or mild. That voice comes in many forms: scriptures, commandments, whisperings from the Holy Ghost, words of living prophets, and counsel from parents, Church leaders, and good friends. Are we listening for and heeding these promptings and warnings? Why is it important to do so?

We read in Proverbs:

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

“In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

“Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil” (Proverbs 3:5–7).

We must trust the Lord with all our heart. We must understand that our knowledge falls short of what is best for us and best for others. If we do trust in Him, what a wonderful promise He bestows: He will direct our paths.

In our family, we have a saying that became an important part of our mission. President Russell M. Nelson has been teaching the concept for a



while. He said it this way: “Obedience brings success; exact obedience brings miracles.”¹

Our family and mission version is “Obedience brings blessings, but exact obedience brings miracles.”

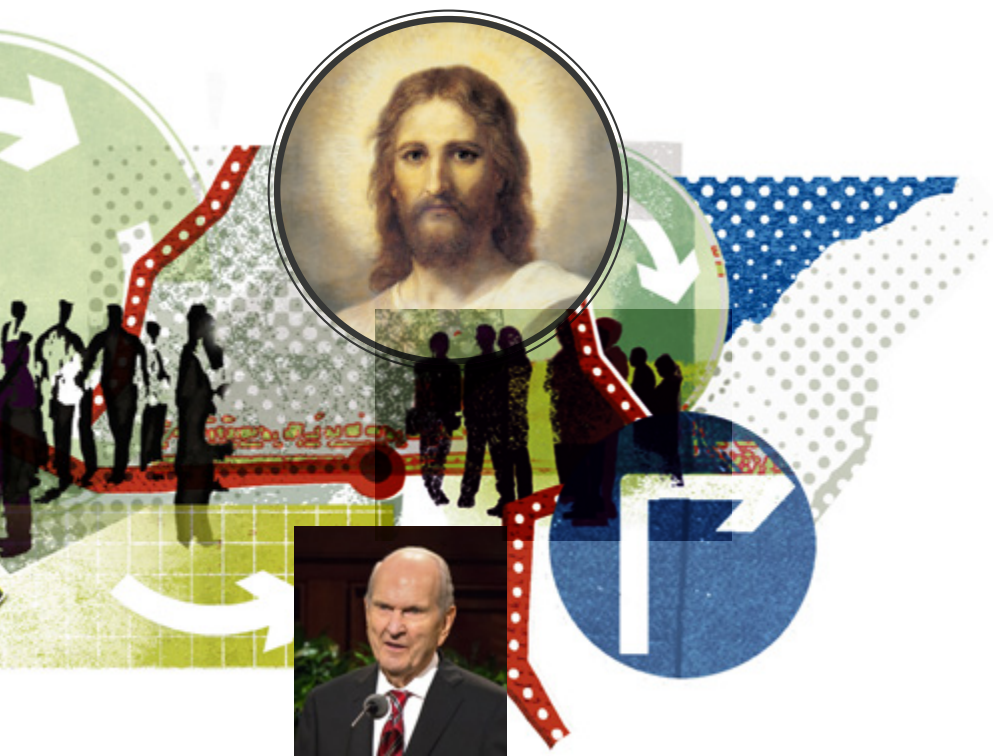
I do not completely understand what exact obedience means, but here is what I have come to understand. It does not mean that we are perfectly obedient right now in all things, although we can be perfect in obeying many of the Lord’s commandments. Hence, repentance must be a key part of exact obedience. Exact obedience requires a commitment to all the warnings and promptings and commandments Heavenly Father gives us.

Sometimes we will not understand why Heavenly Father asks certain things of us. Those times can be some of the toughest times to be

exactly obedient. Remember when Adam, one of the greatest of all, was asked why he gave sacrifice: “And after many days an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam, saying: Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord? And Adam said unto him: I know not, save the Lord commanded me” (Moses 5:6).

Follow the Prophets

Emily has been a wonderful example of exact obedience even when she has not understood. During the October 2000 general conference, she heard the following counsel from President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008): “We discourage tattoos and also ‘the piercing of the body for other than medical purposes.’ We do not, however, take any position ‘on the minimal piercing of the ears by women



for one pair of earrings’—one pair.”²

When my wife arrived home, she explained to our second daughter the importance of following the prophets no matter what. As she talked, my wife also obeyed. She took out her second pair of earrings for the last time. I believe she still does not understand why, but I know that why does not matter to her.

To some of us, that may seem insignificant because it is such a small thing. That is true. However, I do not remember the Savior saying, “If ye love me, keep my commandments that appear important” (see John 14:15).

My dear brothers and sisters, one clear voice of warning we must always heed comes from the Lord’s chosen apostles and prophets. It might not be popular by the world’s

standards, just like that small thing requested by President Hinckley. But you can—you must—trust that it comes from Heavenly Father. It might be only a small twig, or it might be a whole tree dragged across the road. I exhort you to read or listen to general conference with this thought in mind: What twigs or trees did the Lord place in my path?

Trust in the Lord

Some of you may be thinking, “Well, that is great. But what do you do when you are seeking promptings, counsel from the Lord, warnings, and direction, and you just do not seem to receive an answer?”

Maybe you have this concern regarding important decisions in your life. Remember the promise to trust in the Lord with all your heart,

and He will direct your paths.

Regarding important events in our lives, we do want clear direction, and that may be hard to find. But I have come to understand that if I am repentant, being exactly obedient, following my leaders, and making other good choices—in other words, if I am worthy—Heavenly Father will not let me make big mistakes without proper warning. Nor will He let you.

My young friends, Heavenly Father is here to keep us from making costly mistakes if we seek His warnings, promptings, and revelations from all available sources—and if we heed and act upon them. We have the right to have the Holy Ghost always with us, especially in crucial moments of life.

That you will successfully identify the warning twigs and trees that Heavenly Father places in your path is my hope.

I testify that as we heed the voice of the Lord, as we receive it from its many sources and strive to be exactly obedient, we can have a life that ends with “and they lived happily ever after.” That can happen only by living the doctrine of Christ and making and keeping sacred covenants. ■

From a devotional address, “Heeding the Voice of the Lord,” delivered at Brigham Young University–Idaho on October 17, 2017.

NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, in R. Scott Lloyd, “Elder Nelson Delivers Spiritual Thanksgiving Feast to MTCs,” Church News section of LDS.org, Dec. 4, 2013, news.lds.org.
2. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Great Shall Be the Peace of Thy Children,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 52; *Liahona*, Jan. 2001, 68.