

# What Should We Do When We Don't Know What to Do?



**By Elder Stanley G. Ellis**

Of the Seventy

**A**fter Nephi and his brothers had repeatedly failed to get the brass plates from Laban, Nephi set out to make a final attempt, “not knowing beforehand the things which [he] should do” (1 Nephi 4:6).

Many prophets throughout the ages have faced a similar challenge of having to act in faith. Adam was commanded to offer sacrifices without knowing why (see Moses 5:5–6). Abraham left his homeland to travel to a new land of inheritance without knowing where it was (see Hebrews 11:8; Abraham 2:3, 6). Paul journeyed to Jerusalem without knowing what would happen to him once he arrived (see Acts 20:22). Joseph Smith knelt in a grove of trees without knowing which church he should join (see Joseph Smith—History 1:19).

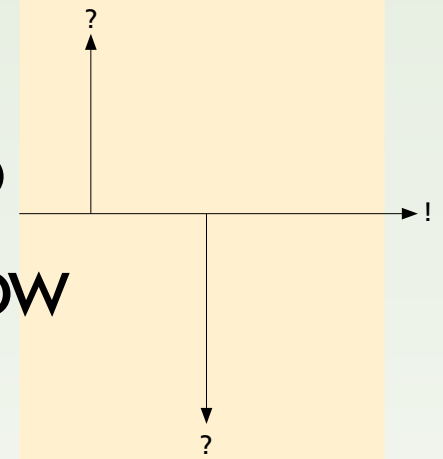
We also may find ourselves in situations that require us to take action without knowing what to do. Thankfully, the experiences above teach us ways to move forward despite uncertainty.

Nephi encouraged his brethren to be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord (see 1 Nephi 4:1). Then he acted on that faith. He “crept into the city and went forth towards the house of Laban,” being “led by the Spirit” (1 Nephi 4:5–17). The Spirit told him not only what to do but also why it was so important that he do it (see 1 Nephi 4:12–14).

Adam responded by being “obedient unto the commandments of the Lord” (Moses 5:5). Abraham acted in faith and, as a result, “sojourned in the land of promise” (Hebrews 11:9). Paul chose not to fear “bonds and afflictions” but to finish the ministry he had “received of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:23–24). Joseph Smith pondered the scriptures and determined to follow the invitation to “ask of God” (Joseph Smith—History 1:13).

## **Our Responsibility to Act**

The scriptures warn us that not knowing is not an excuse for not doing. Nephi “desired to



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know the things that [his] father had seen,” pondered them in his heart, and “was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord” (1 Nephi 11:1). Laman and Lemuel, meanwhile, spent their time “disputing one with another concerning the things which [Lehi] had spoken unto them” (1 Nephi 15:2).

The Lord expects us to inquire, study, and act—even though there are some things we may never know in this life. One of those things is the hour of His Second Coming. He said, “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” (Matthew 24:42). Because of this uncertainty,



President Wilford Woodruff (1807–98) counseled members of the Church to prepare, but he affirmed that he would continue to plant cherry trees.<sup>1</sup>

“When you are living worthily and your choice is consistent with the Savior’s teachings and you need to act, proceed with trust,” said Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. If we are sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit, Elder Scott added, “either the stupor of thought will come, indicating an improper choice, or the peace or the burning in the bosom will be felt, confirming that your choice was correct [see D&C 9:8–9]. When you are living righteously and are acting with trust, God will not let you proceed too far without a warning impression if you have made the wrong decision.”<sup>2</sup>

### Prove the Lord

Two experiences from my life—when I wasn’t sure what to do—illustrate the importance of obeying the commandments and following the living prophets. In college I ran out of money, so I found a part-time job. When I received my first check, I did not know whether it would be enough to get me through to the next paycheck. But I remembered the Lord’s promise regarding tithing: “Prove me now herewith . . . if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing” (Malachi 3:10).

I decided to prove the Lord. I paid my tithing first, and He blessed me to survive. In the process I learned to trust in His promises.

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Years later, when Sister Ellis and I had young children and I was starting a new career, my employer changed medical insurance plans. The old plan would end on June 1 and the new one would start on July 1, leaving us without insurance for one month. We did not know what to do, but at that point we remembered a talk by President N. Eldon Tanner (1898–1982) in which he counseled Church members to always have health insurance.<sup>3</sup>

I talked with the company, and we negotiated a contract to ensure continuous insurance coverage throughout June. On June 28 our oldest son, Matt, fell off the high diving board at the neighborhood pool and hit the concrete deck. He suffered a fractured skull and a brain concussion. He was rushed by helicopter to the hospital, where he was treated by specialists. The costs were astronomical and would have ruined us financially. Fortunately, health insurance paid for most of his treatment.



### What Should We Do?

So what should we do when we don't know what to do? We need look no further than the prophets, the scriptures, and the Savior for an answer. These valuable sources teach us to:

1. Seek answers through study and prayer.
2. Obey the commandments.
3. Trust in the Lord and in His promises.
4. Follow the prophet.
5. Go forward in faith, not fear.
6. Complete our mission.

And in each of these steps, may we follow the counsel of President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “Always, always follow the promptings of the Spirit.”<sup>4</sup> ■

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#### NOTES

1. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Wilford Woodruff* (2004), 250.
2. Richard G. Scott, “Using the Supernal Gift of Prayer,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2007, 10.
3. See N. Eldon Tanner, “Constancy amid Change,” *Liahona*, Feb. 1982, 46; *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 82.
4. Boyd K. Packer, “Restoration,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Jan. 11, 2003, 2.

# Aided by the Spirit

By Samantha M. Wills

The construction worker lay where he had fallen, precariously balanced on a plank nine inches (23 cm) wide and 100 feet (30 m) in the air. He had been struck by a falling steel beam that had partially severed his left arm and leg.

As a paramedic attached to the Yorkshire Air Ambulance, covering most of the north of England, I never know what the next emergency call will bring or what kind of situation we will face when we get to the scene.

In this case, the victim could not be moved safely until his injuries were assessed. I was hoisted up by crane on a metal cargo platform. Once I reached the victim, a construction worker held onto the back of my reflective jacket, serving as a human “crane” to allow me freedom of movement to examine the victim.

In situations like this, years of training take over, so I began to assess the man's injuries. On his knee was an emergency field dressing placed there by the construction crew's own first aid responder. Normally I would examine the injury to assess the damage since that is the protocol we are trained to follow.

But as I reached out, the Spirit prompted me: “Do not move the dressing.” So I did not touch it. Three more times during the incident, I was encouraged by others involved—the first responder, my colleague on the ground, and a doctor—to examine the knee wound, and three more times, the Spirit prompted me not to touch the dressing. Once we had stabilized the patient, we lifted the man onto the cargo platform, we