

WHERE WILL IT LEAD?

BY ELDER DALLIN H. OAKS
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

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I wish to speak about some lessons of life, hoping to help each of us with choices we all make along the road of life.

Which Direction Am I Headed?

A good news/bad news story introduces my subject. An airline pilot on the intercom gave his passengers this in-flight message: “I have good news and bad news. The good news is that we’re making good time. The bad news is that we’ve had an equipment failure, and we’re not sure we’re headed in the right direction.”

The direction in which we are headed is critically important, especially at the beginning of our journey. I have a friend who concluded his career as a pilot flying long routes across the Pacific for a major airline. He told me that an error of only two degrees in the course set on the 4,500-mile, direct-line flight from Chicago to Hilo, Hawaii, would cause the plane to miss that island by more than 145 miles to the south. If it were not a clear day, the pilot could not even see the island, and there would be nothing but ocean until you got to Australia. But of course you wouldn’t get to Australia, because you wouldn’t have

that much fuel. Small errors in direction can cause large tragedies in destination.

All of us—and especially young people—need to be very careful about the paths we choose and the directions in which we set our lives. What seem to be only small deviations in direction or small detours from the straight and narrow path can result in huge differences in position down the road of life.

Potentially destructive deviations often seem so small that some find it easy to justify “just this once.” When that temptation arises—as it will—I urge you to ask yourself, “Where will it lead?”

Where Will Spiritual Impressions Lead?

I recall a story told by Elder Harold B. Lee in 1952. His story has had a significant impact on me for several reasons. I quote Elder Lee:

“I was around ten or eleven years of age. I was with my father out on a farm away from our home, trying to spend the day busying myself until my father was ready to go home. Over the fence from our place were some tumbledown sheds that would attract a curious boy, and I was adventurous. I started to climb through the fence,



and I heard a voice as clearly as you are hearing mine, calling me by name and saying, 'Don't go over there!' I turned to look at my father to see if he were talking to me, but he was way up at the other end of the field. There was no person in sight. I realized then, as a child, that there were persons beyond my sight, for I had definitely heard a voice. Since then, when I hear or read stories of the Prophet Joseph Smith, I too have known what it means to hear a voice, because I've had the experience" (*Stand Ye in Holy Places* [1974], 139).

Consider some of the effects of that experience. First, it taught the reality of revelation to a young boy who was to become a prophet. Second, it may have protected young Harold from some hidden danger in those old sheds. That was the way I interpreted the story for many years, and perhaps that is true. We will never know. But perhaps the warning he heard was not to protect him from danger. Perhaps it was to test his willingness to be obedient to heavenly guidance. Surely he passed the test, and where did that lead? It kept the channel of revelation open for further guidance, and it was a formative experience in the life of one of our greatest teachers. Following an impression may seem a small thing now, but where it leads can be immensely important.

Following an impression once saved my life. It was dark, I was alone, and I was high in the mountains several miles from the nearest road. Though I had never been on this particular mountainside, I was not lost. I knew the general location, and I knew that all I had to do was keep walking down and eventually this would lead me to a familiar road. The problem was the pitch darkness of the moonless night.

I chose a gully and started to feel my way down through the brush and deadfall. It was slow going, so I was relieved when

the gully flattened out to a sandy bottom beneath my feet. I picked up my pace for about 10 steps and suddenly had a strong impression to stop. I did. Reaching down, I took a rock and tossed it out into the darkness ahead of me. I heard no sound for a few seconds, and then there was a clatter on the rocks a long distance away. I knew immediately that I was standing on the lip of a sheer drop-off.

I retraced my steps and eventually got down the mountain by another gully. I phoned my worried family close to midnight, just before they called for a search party. The next day I revisited that spot in daylight and saw my tracks, which stopped just two or three feet from a drop-off of at least 50 feet. I was glad I had heard and heeded a warning. Where did that lead? It saved my life.

Where Will My Choices Lead?

I invite you to think about some seemingly small decisions you are making in your life that would benefit from your asking “Where will it lead?”

We often hear about the choice between good and evil. For example, most students will have to choose sometime between plagiarism or cheating to get a higher grade or relying on honest personal efforts to get what we deserve from our own preparation and qualifications.

Other choices are not between good and evil. The most familiar choices we face are between two goods, and here, too, it is desirable to ask where it will lead. We make many such choices in what we will do on the Sabbath, which television programs we will watch, which job offer to accept, what to read, and—on a very broad front—how to spend our time. All of these will profit from thoughtful and habitual measurement against the standard of “Where will it lead?”

Sometimes the choice is not between two different actions but between action and inaction. Should I speak up or remain silent? Should I allow my loved one to pursue a course I know to be injurious and let them learn by experience or should I intervene to save him or her from that experience? Again, it is useful to ask ourselves, “Where will it lead?”

I recall an event described by a man I met at a stake conference in the Midwest more than a decade ago. The setting was a beautiful campus in central Illinois.



My informant, a participant in a summer workshop, saw a crowd of young students seated on the grass in a large semicircle about 20 feet from one of the large hardwood trees that are so common and so beautiful there. They were watching something at the base of the tree. He turned aside from his walk to see what it was.

There was a handsome tree squirrel with a large, bushy tail playing around the base of the tree—now on the ground, now up and down and around the trunk. But why would that beautiful but familiar sight attract a crowd of students?

Stretched out prone on the grass nearby was an Irish setter. He was the object of the students' interest, and, though he pretended otherwise, the squirrel was the object of his. Each time the squirrel was momentarily out of sight circling the tree or looking in another direction, the setter would quickly creep forward a few inches and then resume his apparent indifferent posture. Each minute or two he crept closer to the squirrel, and the squirrel apparently did not notice. This was the scene that held the students' interest. They were silent and immobile, attention riveted on the drama—the probable outcome of which was becoming increasingly obvious.

Finally the setter was close enough to bound at the squirrel and catch it in his mouth. A gasp of horror arose, and the crowd of students surged forward and wrested the beautiful little animal away from the hound, but it was too late. The squirrel was dead.

Anyone in that crowd of students could have warned the squirrel at any time by waving their arms or crying out, but none had done so. They just watched while the inevitable consequence got closer and closer. No one asked "Where will this lead?" and no one wished to interfere. When the predictable outcome occurred, they rushed

to the defense, but it was too late. Tearful and regretful expressions were all they could offer.

That true story is a parable of sorts. It has a lesson for things we see in our own lives, in the lives of those around us, and in the events occurring in our cities, states, and nations. In all these areas we can see threats creeping up on things we love, and we cannot afford to be indifferent or quiet. We must be ever vigilant to ask "Where will it lead?" and to sound appropriate warnings or join appropriate preventive efforts while there is still time. Often we cannot prevent the outcome, but we can remove ourselves from the crowd who, by failing to try to intervene, has complicity in the outcome.

Where Does the Gospel Lead?

Where will it lead? I've suggested this as a valuable question against which we can measure many personal and private decisions. It is also a way of bearing testimony. Where does faith in the Lord Jesus Christ lead? Where does the gospel lead? I quote from the Doctrine and Covenants the word of the Lord to His people in this dispensation:

"Seek to bring forth and establish my Zion. Keep my commandments in all things.

"And, if you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God" (D&C 14:6–7).

I testify of Jesus Christ, who is our Savior. I testify of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which will lead us to eternal life. I testify that we are led by a prophet. This is the Lord's Church and His gospel, in which we can place trust that it will lead us to eternal life.

From a devotional address given at Brigham Young University on November 9, 2004.

Next month look for President Hinckley's story about the misdirected baggage car in "Seek Learning," *New Era*, Sept. 2007, p. 2.

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