

PONDER, PRAY, PERFORM, PERSEVERE

BY ELDER W. CRAIG ZWICK

Of the Seventy

Four elements are vital to gaining spiritual strength.



I found that when we're earnest in creating a life plan for ourselves, we need to allow the Lord to be the architect of that plan.

An underlying foundation of scriptural strength comes when we ponder and pray for guidance. I discovered this strength when I was getting ready to serve a mission.

When I was preparing for a mission, there was a quota in the United States on religious deferrals granted to the Church, affecting how many could serve because of the Vietnam conflict. Only two young men per ward were allowed to serve missions, and there were 17 eligible priests in our ward. The quota was filled by chronological age, and I was number 14 of 17. I learned about pondering and praying when I wondered how I was going to fit into this quota. I thought I would go on a mission within the next couple of years, or wait until either the Vietnam conflict was over, or go when I was 25 years old and no longer subject to the draft or the quota system.

Turn to Wise Leaders

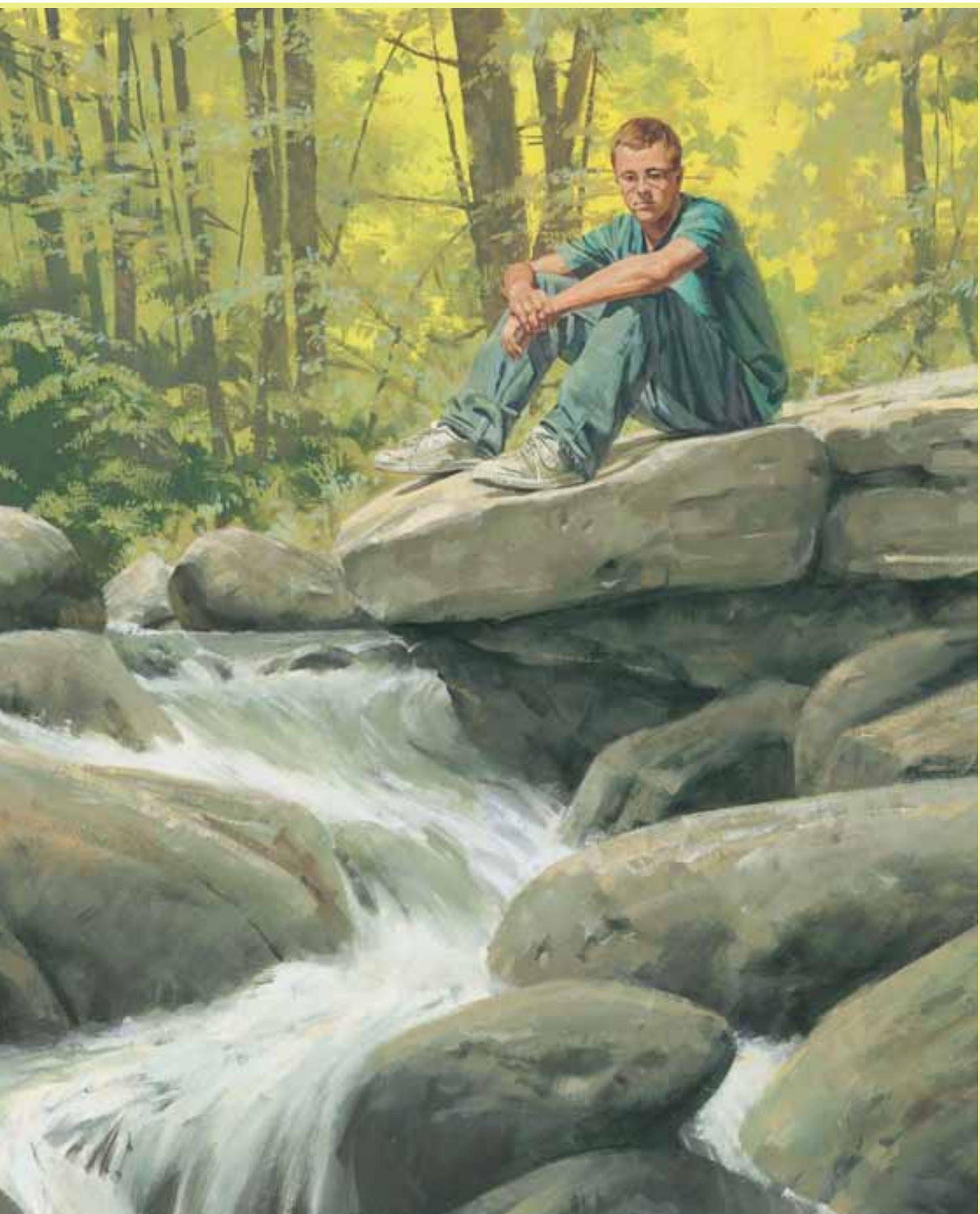
I received some wise advice from my bishop, who advised me to “pursue a mission now.” The only way I could do that was to enlist in the military and receive a change of status, but I pondered and prayed about it because I knew that conflict was imminent, and I wasn’t sure that

would really be the best direction. I had to ask myself some hard questions. I had been accepted into a master’s program in architecture at the University of Utah for a five-year course that I did not want to interrupt. But it didn’t feel right to postpone my mission, so I had gone to the bishop and asked for his suggestion. He said, “Prepare and go now.”

Deciding to serve a mission was an expansion of faith driven by two possible options: “Do I do it now?” or “Do I do it later?” I had worked through the decision to go on a mission now, and a good bishop advised me to persevere toward a solution that would allow it to happen.

That solution came when I enlisted in the Air Force Reserves. After serving for one year, I was able to reclassify my status and thereby avoid being part of the mission quota. This change allowed me to go on a mission when I was almost 20. My mission was a wonderful experience that would not have happened had I not pondered, prayed, performed by seeking good guidance, and persevered.

Most of the group who went into the Air Force Reserves that year were a little older than I was, and I learned a lot from them. I remained worthy, and it was a wonderful



My assignment from the mission president was to help build a chapel in Quiriza, Bolivia. It required pondering, praying, performing, and persevering, and was a labor of love.

thing to know that those who were with me recognized and appreciated my standards. Associating with those good people helped me to be a better missionary.

I found that when we're earnest in creating a life plan for ourselves, we need to allow the Lord to be the architect of that plan. When the Lord is the architect, long-term benefits result and connect us to additional opportunities and experiences that accelerate our capacity for growth.

Spiritual Preparation for a Mission

Preach My Gospel is a marvelous tool to gain a testimony of the principles of the gospel. It's important to understand that inspiration comes from a connection to doctrine that strengthens good behavior and allows us to overcome whatever challenges we face.

When I was struggling with my decision about whether to serve a mission, I spent some time every day by myself reading and studying, pondering and praying, and gaining a witness that what I was about to do was right.

I remember being alone in a peaceful setting. I knelt down and prayed to know if going on a mission was the right thing to do. It felt good to me. I had been through a period of personal torment on what to do, and after the cumulative effort of pondering and praying, I received a feeling of peace in my mind and heart. It was like the counsel that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery received from the Lord, "Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter" (D&C 6:23).

We didn't have *Preach My Gospel*, but I read the Book of Mormon cover to cover and gained a personal witness of my Savior Jesus Christ. I also had the old basic missionary outline of seven discussions, and I decided to commit those principles to memory. I wanted to connect the doctrine

to the principles in the discussions, and I found it was easier to do if I had a foundation of scriptures to rely on. I realized that four elements are vital to gain spiritual strength: ponder, pray, perform, and then persevere.

Performing and Persevering

I learned about performing and persevering on my mission. I served in a little dusty village, Quiriza, Bolivia, near the Argentine border. We traveled by horseback in those mountain villages of Bolivia and lived at a high altitude in dusty, dirty conditions. I felt at times like Ammon and the sons of Mosiah when the Lord told them, "Be patient in long-suffering and afflictions, that ye may show forth good examples unto them in me, and I will make an instrument of thee in my hands unto the salvation of many souls" (Alma 17:11).

My assignment from the mission president was to help build a chapel. It was a wonderful experience building that chapel, using adobe bricks, and bringing lumber, metal decking, and other building materials over a 20-mile, steep mountain pass. It required the same level of pondering, praying, performing, and persevering as we built the Quiriza chapel. I found that it was a labor of love, and because of that love gained by serving those people, it was far more difficult for me to leave Bolivia than it had been to leave home to serve my mission.

Being Steadfast and Immovable

Sometimes we need a tangible way to measure success. If we can feel good about our efforts every day, then even in the most difficult circumstances we can have that tangible feeling of success. Being "steadfast and immovable" and not letting anything get in our way "in keeping the commandments of God" (Alma 1:25) is a tangible

outcome that provides an enduring foundation to grow on. We grow when we have to overcome pains of endurance—that's perseverance. Impressive results may not come every day or even every week, but we need to hang in there. That's the steadfast and immovable side of it. Great rewards will come when we persevere.

These words of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, give us

hope: "Be patient in afflictions. . . . Govern your house in meekness, and be steadfast. . . .

" . . . It shall be given you by the Comforter what you shall do and wither you shall go.

"Pray always, lest you enter into temptation and lose your reward.

"Be faithful unto the end, and lo, I am with you"
(D&C 31:9, 11–13). **NE**

