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Of the Seventy

# Developing Good Judgment and Not Judging Others

*Good judgment is needed not only in understanding people but also in facing decisions that often lead us to or away from our Heavenly Father.*

**W**e live in a world in which many situations require us to make judgments that are often difficult. Yet the Savior gave the commandment to “judge not” our fellowman.<sup>1</sup> How can we do this and still exercise good judgment in a world full of deception and corruption? We must judge well when making critical decisions in each phase of our life, such as choosing friends, finding an eternal companion, or choosing an occupation that will allow us to care for our family and serve the Lord. Although the Savior asked us not to judge others, He still expects us to use excellent judgment.

We may often find ourselves making quick judgments about people, which can change or redefine our relationships with them. Often incorrect judgments are made because of limited information or because we do not see beyond that which is immediately in front of us.

By way of illustration, the story is often told of the time when Jesus

visited the home of Mary and Martha, who lived in Bethany with their brother, Lazarus. It was a welcome place for the Master, where He could rest and enjoy the surroundings of a righteous home. During one of His visits, Martha was busy preparing a meal and Mary elected to sit at the Master’s feet to receive His instruction.

“But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? . . .

“And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things:

“But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”<sup>2</sup>

Many Sunday lessons have been taught using this story which have cast Martha in a lesser position in terms of her faith. Yet there is another story of this great woman, Martha, which gives us a deeper view of her understanding and testimony. It happened when the Savior arrived to raise her brother,



His divine power over life. A misjudgment of Martha may have caused us not to know the true nature of this wonderful woman.

On a personal level, as a young physician I learned a great lesson about making quick judgments. While I was working a midnight shift in an emergency department, a young man and his wife came in because she was suffering some severe pain. From their dress and hygiene, it was easy to see that theirs had been a rough life. His hair was ill kempt and very long. Their clothing had not been washed for some time, and the effects of a rough life were written on both of their faces.

After an examination, I sat down with him to explain the problem and discuss the treatment. This man looked at me with a deep clarity of love that is rarely experienced and asked with all the love of a caring husband, “Doctor, will my dear wife be all right?” At that moment, I felt the Spirit testify that he was a child of God and saw in his eyes the evidence of the Savior. This man truly projected love for another, and I had misjudged him. It was a lesson that left a lasting impression.

Good judgment is needed not only in understanding people but also in facing decisions that often lead us to or away from our Heavenly Father. As I look back over my own personal life, I can see many instances in which a slight change of course based on poor judgment would have led me far from where the Lord wanted me to be—decisions like having a family while obtaining an education, being active in all aspects of the gospel, paying tithes and offerings when income was severely limited, and accepting callings at difficult times, which helped me to understand more about sacrifice. Many blessings in life are missed because worldly judgment was applied

Lazarus, from the dead. On this occasion it was Martha whom we find going to Jesus “as soon as she heard” He was coming. As she meets Him, she says that she knows that “whatsoever [He would] ask of God, God [would] give [Him].”

Christ then shared with Martha the great doctrine of the resurrection, saying:

“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

“And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believeth thou this?”

She responded with her powerful testimony: “Yea, Lord: I believe that

thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.”<sup>3</sup>

How often has Martha been misjudged as being a person who cared more for the deeds of doing than for the Spirit? However, her testimony in the trial of her brother’s death clearly shows the depth of her understanding and faith.

Many a sister has often heard the first story and wondered if she were a Mary or a Martha, yet the truth lies in knowing the whole person and in using good judgment. By knowing more about Martha, we find she was actually a person of deep spiritual character who had a bold and daring testimony of the Savior’s mission and

to what was really a spiritual decision.

There are many characteristics of people who have developed good judgment. I would offer four guides for developing such judgment in making important decisions.

**First, put your own personal standards in alignment with the gospel of Jesus Christ.** A person can never be a good judge without the gospel of Jesus Christ as a reference. The gospel has a long and successful record of guiding people to happiness. Some of the world's ideas leave mankind adrift to try to define their own standards. Because of this, we hear phrases like "a new morality." This phrase is deceptive! The standards of morality are eternal and have not changed; neither should we try to discover a new interpretation of them. For the youth these standards are written in the pamphlet *For the Strength of Youth*. These standards are clearly aligned with the gospel of Jesus Christ and are intended to continue through adult life. Perhaps it would be good for us as adults to study and apply this pamphlet to our lives.

**Second, listen to the messages of the living prophet.** How many poor financial judgments would have been avoided had we listened to the years of advice given through our prophets about avoiding risky speculation and following a careful budget to avoid consumer debt? How many marriages would have been saved by using good judgment in avoiding media that lead to pornographic addiction and heartache? Each general conference and Church magazine contains advice from the prophets which, if applied, will lead us to good judgment. We are left without excuse when we ignore them.

**Third, cultivate with the Holy Spirit a relationship of listening.** We are given the gift of the Holy Ghost after

our baptism, but often we leave this gift on the shelf, forgetting that He will help us in the most important judgments of our lives. The Lord gave us this gift, knowing we would face difficult decisions in life. Listening to this voice is vital in developing good judgment. A relationship of listening often requires a quiet environment in which we can take time to ponder and hear the still, small voice. This peaceful environment is both external and internal. Therefore, it is more than shutting off the music of the world or the blare of other media; it is also shutting off the noise of sin that is internal to our soul. This will open the communication with the Spirit, which is so badly needed.

Christ said: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."<sup>4</sup> The peace that comes from listening to the Holy Spirit removes the fear of making a poor judgment in life.

**Fourth, keep the commandments.** The willingness to keep God's commandments opens to us many

promised blessings. The Book of Mormon, in addition to being another testament of Jesus Christ, is a book about the results of keeping and not keeping commandments. The Lord said to Nephi in the second chapter of his first book, "Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper."<sup>5</sup>

This same promise was repeated by almost every major prophet in the Book of Mormon. A thousand years of history is then recorded which bears witness that these things are true. And the same message applies to us today. Good judgment is best learned and practiced within the bounds the Lord sets by giving us commandments.

I testify that when we face difficult decisions and follow these guidelines, we can know better how we should judge. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

#### NOTES

1. Matthew 7:1. See also Matthew 7:1, footnote a; from Joseph Smith Translation, where the Savior commands us to "judge not unrighteously."
2. Luke 10:40–42.
3. See John 11:20–27.
4. John 14:27.
5. 1 Nephi 2:20.

