

THEY SPOKE TO US

LOOK UP

*A challenge for all of us is
not to look sideways to see
how others are viewing our
lives but to look up to see how
Heavenly Father sees us.*



By Elder
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Of the Seventy



As a young man I was called to serve a mission in Hamburg, Germany. At the Language Training Mission—the predecessor to today’s missionary training center—I struggled to learn the language. As the first and then the second week passed, I noticed that the others in my district were progressing much faster than I was. While they were advancing to complex concepts, my *dies*, *ders*, and *dases* were a disaster.

I started to become concerned—and discouraged. How could I serve a successful mission if I couldn’t communicate with the people I was called to teach?

I prayed for help and sought a priesthood blessing, which provided some reassurance. But I continued to search and struggle, and one day I felt more uptight and worried than ever. As my companion and I walked down the hallway, I stopped at a small janitor’s closet. I asked

my companion to wait for me for a moment. I slipped into that tiny room and knelt down on a mop. I began to plead with Heavenly Father for some relief.

The Lord answered that prayer. I felt this thought come into my mind: “I never called you to master the German language. I just called you to serve with all of your heart, mind, and strength.”

I immediately thought, “*I can do that*. I can serve with all of my heart, mind, and strength. If that’s what the Lord has called me to do, *I can do that*.” I stood up feeling tremendously relieved.

From that point on, my measuring stick changed. I no longer gauged my progress and success against that of my companion or other members

of my district. Instead, I focused on how the Lord felt I was doing. Instead of looking to the side to compare myself to others, I began to look up, so to speak, to know what *He* thought of my efforts.

I don’t know that I learned the language much faster or much better from that point on, but I no longer felt the concerns I once had. I knew what the Lord wanted me to do, and it was in my power to do it.

I began counseling with Heavenly Father in the morning, telling Him that I didn’t know what the day would bring but that I would do my very best. “Whatever I can learn, allow me to learn it,” I prayed, “but no matter what, I’m going to give Thee my very best today.”

At night I would pray again to report on what I had studied and what I had done. I shared with my Father in Heaven my struggles and my successes alike. I had begun



to turn to Him—not to others or even myself—to validate my progress.

That lesson that I learned in a tiny broom closet more than 35 years ago has stayed with me all my life, through a number of callings and assignments. Whenever I have been asked to do something where the expectations seem greater than what I have the capacity to do, I remember that experience and say to myself, “Wait. Who called you? Who are you serving? Who are you trying to please?”

The world we live in today has all kinds of measurements—most of them external to us. I think such measurements can be especially harsh to young adults. You go to school and earn a grade, but that doesn’t necessarily take into account what else you experience in your other classes or your family or your life situation. Sometimes we’re judged by the way we look or by the car we drive. We might base our sense of self-worth on how many friends are writing on our wall on social networking sites. We worry about what others think about the person we’re dating or what people will think if we marry before finishing school. It’s easy to get caught up in trying to please others, but we can’t trust such external measurements; the world can be too quick both to praise and to criticize.

I think the challenge for all of us—but perhaps particularly for young adults—is to try not to look sideways

to see how others are viewing our lives but to look up to see how Heavenly Father sees us. He doesn’t look on the outward appearance but on the heart (see 1 Samuel 16:7). And He knows, better than anyone else, what each one of us needs.

So how do we “look up”? Here are some principles that can help.

Tap into Spiritual Power

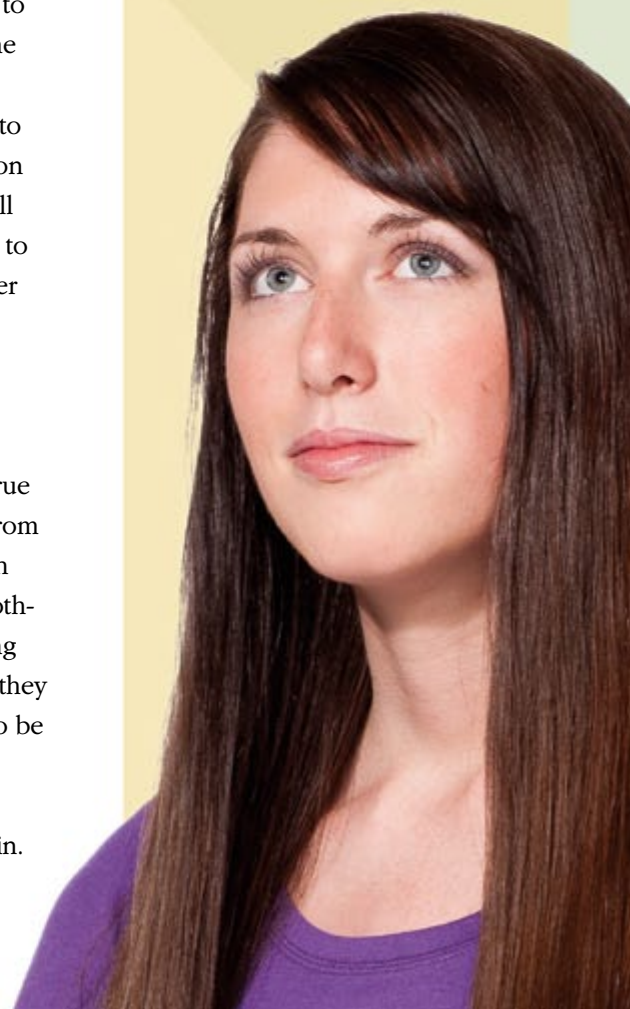
We can tap into the spiritual power we need in making decisions by beginning each day with personal prayer and scripture study. That prayer can include a petition to be receptive to God’s plan for us. Even though we may not see the whole plan, we can ask to be receptive to the part of the plan that will come that day. As we are receptive, we will see the fruits of our choices to follow Him. We’ll be able to act on impressions we receive. And we’ll be able to do difficult things and to do, for the right reasons, whatever is required.

Stay True to the Direction You Receive

We can “look up” by staying true to the direction we’ve received from a loving Heavenly Father through personal revelation. Sometimes others would dissuade us from acting on what we receive, and even if they have good intentions, we need to be true to what we have felt.

My wife and I have a daughter serving a full-time mission in Spain.

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LOOK HEAVENWARD

“Looking heavenward should be our lifelong endeavor. Some foolish persons turn their backs on the wisdom of God and follow the allurements of fickle fashion, the attraction of false popularity, and the thrill of the moment. Their course of conduct resembles the disastrous experience of Esau, who exchanged his birthright for a mess of pottage.

“And what are the results of such action? I testify to you today that turning away from God brings broken covenants, shattered dreams, and crushed hopes. Such a quagmire of quicksand I plead with you to avoid. You are of a noble birthright. Eternal life in the kingdom of our Father is your goal.

“Such a goal is not achieved in one glorious attempt, but rather is the result of a lifetime of righteousness, an accumulation of wise choices, even a constancy of purpose and lofty ideals.

“Amidst the confusion of our age, the conflicts of conscience, and the turmoil of daily living, an abiding faith becomes an anchor to our lives.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “Guideposts for Life’s Journey” (Brigham Young University devotional address, Nov. 13, 2007), 3, speeches.byu.edu.

That daughter spent her high school years in New Zealand, while I was serving as mission president. When she turned 21, she said, “Dad, Mom, I think I need to serve a mission.” Of course, we were pleased with this righteous decision, but knowing that it had been a sacrifice for her to move away from friends and family during her teenage years, I told her, “You’ve already served a mission.”

She smiled and said, “No, Dad, *you* have. Now *I* want to go serve the Lord.”

“OK,” I smiled. “You fill that mission. You follow that prompting to serve.”

Today I am elated that she is not only serving her Heavenly Father and His children in Spain but she is also following the impression she felt. She didn’t let even me—a well-meaning parent—convince her to do anything other than what she felt was right for her life and Heavenly Father’s plan for her.

Don’t Be Afraid to Act

As important as it is to learn Heavenly Father’s plan for our lives, we sometimes get so caught up in knowing every detail, start to finish, that we become afraid to act. Don’t fall into this trap. Make good choices using your best judgment and move forward with your life. We’re blessed as we make choices. Don’t be afraid to make choices because you are

afraid of making mistakes. Don’t be afraid to try new things.

In doing so, you will find joy in the journey.

Stand by Your Post

When our family was living in New Zealand, we sometimes became overwhelmed by the number of challenges that investigators, recent converts, missionaries, and others were experiencing. We often found ourselves praying for answers—and expecting to receive them *quickly!*

All of us are in need of help. And sometimes the solutions we seek *do* come quickly. But other times they come in ways other than we had hoped. Or they come later than we expected. And occasionally, it seems, they’re not coming at all.

In such cases, adopt the attitude of “stand by your post” until the Lord sends some help, however long that takes. But standing by your post doesn’t mean standing still. As I mentioned, don’t be afraid to act. Keep doing good things. Keep obeying the commandments. Keep praying and studying and doing your best until you receive additional direction. Don’t abandon your post. In His time the Lord will allow all things to work out for your good.

“Looking up” has blessed my life over and over since my experience in the Language Training Mission. As Mormon explains in Helaman 3:27, “The Lord is merciful unto all who will, in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name.” I have felt and experienced His mercy and love. I know His mercy will come to all of us as we believe and call upon His name. ■