

Ten Axioms to Guide Your Life



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Recent events tell us that we are living in the last days. The increasing perplexities of nations recall the words of our Savior Jesus Christ: “Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: . . . for nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (Matthew 24:6–7).

It is a challenging but also an exciting time. The gospel is rolling forth as a stone cut out of a mountain without hands. It is filling the earth. (See Daniel 2:44–45.) And now, it is your privilege to help move it forward.

As you go forth to serve, you will find that your greatest success and influence won’t come solely from the knowledge you’ve gained. It will come from what you do with that knowledge—the wise use of agency to make sound decisions.

Of course, there are some decisions that must wait until circumstances change and your understanding develops. But many of the most important decisions can and should be made now. For example, you can decide the principles, or axioms, that will influence your decision making in the future.

Here are 10 axioms, distilled from my own experience of living the gospel. I hope they are helpful to you in determining the principles that should guide your life.



Axiom

It’s not the obstacle that counts, but how you overcome it.

Consider, for a moment, that you are the engineer of a train. As your locomotive races down the tracks, you look out the window. In the distance you see a great pile of debris blocking your way. What do you do? Radio ahead for help? Stop the train and take care of the problem yourself? Pour coal into the engine and plow on through?

Now it’s axiomatic that we will all encounter obstacles in our lives. Temporal obstacles make eternal development possible. So we must decide how to meet those obstacles.

Like the engineer, we can call for help. By prayer, fasting, and diligent study, we can



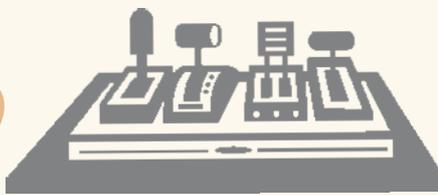
obtain the assistance of our Heavenly Father. He will comfort us, strengthen us, and enlighten us by His Holy Spirit. Often He will give us inspired counsel through parents and priesthood leaders. Sometimes He will smooth our path by removing the obstacle. Sometimes, like a switchman, He will help us get on a different track. But from time to time, the only way to clear debris from the track is to stop the train and remove the problem.

This is always true when the obstacle is of our own making, such as when we violate the Lord's commandments. Repentance is the only way to clear the debris of sin and move forward in our lives. "By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them" (D&C 58:43).

Finally, there are times when Heavenly Father directs us to pour on the spiritual coal of faith and hope and plow ahead. Or, to use the more scriptural phrase, "press forward":

"Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life" (2 Nephi 31:20).

2 Axiom



Pursue your goals with all your heart, might, mind, and strength. You are doomed to failure if you pursue them in a vacillating manner.

So often we are tentative and don't move forward with conviction. We feel our way along, as if we were afraid in the dark. It is so much better to turn on the light of faith and



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If our course is wrong, we will quickly recognize it and make the necessary adjustments. But if we pursue a course tentatively and indecisively, it is difficult to know whether it is right or wrong in time to correct it.

The Lord said, “I would thou wert cold or hot” (Revelation 3:15).

We should decide now to make our decisions prayerfully and then move forward with faith, energy, and determination.



Axiom

From a tiny spark can come a large fire.

In the course of moving forward, it is normal to generate a few sparks. Misunderstandings, differences of opinion, and diverse personalities and styles can produce friction. Remember, if we are not careful, little things can easily become big things.

Decide now to extinguish the sparks of conflict by thinking well of others. As the Lord taught, “Agree with thine adversary quickly while thou art in the way with him” (3 Nephi 12:25).

Don’t criticize. What you say about others may (and usually does) get back to them. See the good in people, and develop that goodness by your unwavering friendship, acceptance, loyalty, trust, and love.



Axiom

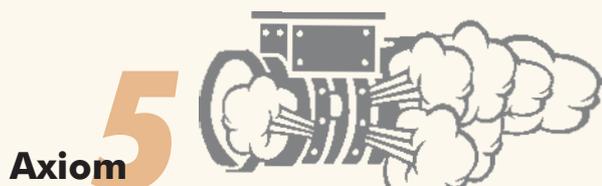
Our greatest strengths can become our greatest weaknesses.

You may be skilled and well prepared in some areas of your life, but that can also become a great weakness if you rely solely on these abilities. If you are not careful, the skills you have gained can be very self-serving when not properly balanced, and they may become very limiting.

For instance, if you cannot get along with other people, you will fail. You must now apply the knowledge you have gained to strengthen the Church, your family, your work, the community, and your friendships.

Our greatest strengths can become weaknesses to us whenever we forget that our gifts, talents, and intellect are given to us by

God—whenever we rely on the “natural man” (Mosiah 3:19) and forget that God is the giver of all the gifts of life. If we would keep our strength from turning to weakness, we must “confess . . . his hand in all things, and obey . . . his commandments” (D&C 59:21).



Axiom

Failure is one of the greatest teachers if we have the faith to learn from it.

The Savior said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation.” But because He has overcome the world, we can “be of good cheer” (John 16:33)—we can overcome our failures. Therefore, we should embrace the opportunity to learn from our mistakes, analyze where we could have done better, and make plans to improve.

In doing so, we discover that setbacks and disappointments are “but for a small moment” and “shall be for [our] good” (D&C 122:4, 7). With faith, we can take seriously the Lord’s counsel to “search diligently, pray always, and be believing, and all things shall work together for [our] good” (D&C 90:24).



Axiom

It is not how you start the race or where you are during the race. It is how you cross the finish line that matters.

John Stephen Akhwari, a marathon runner from Tanzania, competed in the 1968 Summer Olympics. Even though he suffered along the way from fatigue, leg cramps, dehydration, and disorientation, a voice called from within to go on, and so he went on. Exhausted and staggering, John Stephen was the last man to enter the stadium. When asked why he would complete a race he could never win, Akhwari replied,

“My country did not send me 7,000 miles [11,200 km] to start the race; they sent me 7,000 miles to finish the race.”

In life, we are not brought to earth just to be born into mortality. We came with a mission and a purpose, and that is to endure to the end.

Remember the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. All of them served the Master, and all received an equal wage. It did not matter that some arrived after others, only that each one finally came. (See Matthew 20:1–16.)

If you have taken missteps in your youth, don’t let discouragement overcome you. The Lord’s judgments are not spiritual grade-point averages—with past sins and mistakes averaged into the final grade. He has promised that “he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more” (D&C 58:42).

So, if you are not where you want to be, decide today to get there.

Our lifetime degree will be graded on how well we live up to the covenants made in our saving ordinances—baptism, receiving the Holy Ghost, washings, anointings, endowments, and sealings.

You *can* cross the finish line with everyone else.

“Go forward and not backward. Courage, . . . and on, on to the victory!” (D&C 128:22).



Axiom

“If you wish to get rich, save what you get. A fool can earn money; but it takes a wise man to save and dispose of it to his own advantage.”¹

It is to our advantage to cultivate genuine happiness in our lives. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that this “happiness is the object and design of our existence.”² Unfortunately, we live in an age of greed—an insatiable, enslaving appetite for temporal things.

Remember, *temporal* means “temporary.” And temporary things cannot bring eternal happiness.

So look ahead. Take the long view. Be patient. Pay your tithes and offerings. And save your money. Do not try to have now what it took your parents years of patient saving to acquire.

Happy are the individuals who can live within their means today and enjoy it.



Axiom 8

You cannot learn the Lord's will without exercising your agency and becoming accountable for your decisions.

Too often we think that with little or no effort on our part, the Holy Ghost will give us answers to our questions. Like Oliver Cowdery, we take “no thought save it [be] to ask” (D&C 9:7). And, regrettably, sometimes we don't even pray.

But this is not the way of the Lord. He has commanded us to “study it out in [our] mind[s]; [and] *then* . . . ask [Him] if it be right” (D&C 9:8; emphasis added).

For example, when choosing an eternal companion, we do not present a list of names to the Lord and ask Him to decide. Instead, we exercise our agency by participating in dating experiences. We get to know the other person's inner attitudes and outward behavior. Then we make a decision and take it to the Lord.

In this way, we become accountable for our decisions and responsible to prayerfully resolve any challenges that may arise.



Axiom 9

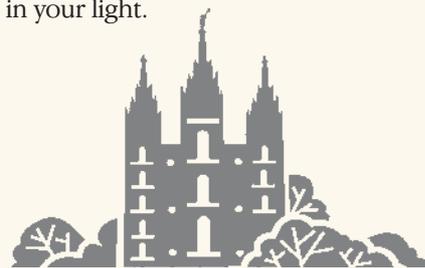
The more things change, the more they stay the same.

In 1975 I spoke to students at Brigham Young University. I held up my left hand and said, “We are here.” Then, moving my right hand away from my left, I said,

“And the world is moving farther and farther away.” At that time, I imagined the world's ways as being hundreds of miles away from the ways of the gospel. Then, referring to my left hand, I said, “But the Church is still here.”

That was almost 32 years ago. Today, the world is a great deal farther away than that. From my perspective, I'd say it is thousands of miles away—maybe farther—but, again, the Church has not moved.

As a member of that Church, you should expect to be different from your peers in the world. You should expect the distance will increase. But don't be dismayed. Those with eyes to see will recognize you as a light on a hill, and they will come through the darkness of these last days to be with you and bask in your light.



Axiom 10

The temple of God is the greatest university.

The knowledge of the truths of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ is the most valuable knowledge you will ever possess.

Go to the temple. The endowment is the eternal curriculum. In it we are taught where we came from and why we are here on earth, and we are given the promise of achieving life eternal in the celestial kingdom if we obey the commandments and covenants.

With these 10 axioms in mind, I want to bear a personal testimony to you and give you a promise. In striving to be a successful son or daughter of God, you will never have to compromise the things of the kingdom. Where your divinely appointed mission is concerned, you will never be penalized for living the gospel. However, if you compromise God's eternal principles for your own temporal gains, you will lose the eternal blessings that are rightfully yours.

As a New York boy, I grew up as one of only two or three members of the Church in a high school of a few thousand.



At a recent 50-year reunion, my former classmates remembered how I lived according to my values and beliefs. I realized then that one infraction of the Word of Wisdom or transgression of moral values would have meant I could never say, “This is what I believe” and be trusted by my friends.

We can share the gospel only to the extent we live it. During my life at college, in the military as an adjutant and fighter pilot, in graduate school, or in my professional career in sales and marketing, as president of a division, or as a group vice president at corporate headquarters—I was never required to compromise my values or beliefs.

Was it easy?

I don’t know. I wasn’t looking for easy.

Was it hard?

I wasn’t looking for hard either. That is just the way it was.

Were there men and women who challenged me on my beliefs at times?

Certainly.

When I held to my beliefs, did they respect and honor the commitment I had made to live the gospel?

In every instance.

If you will remember who you are and

act accordingly; if you will return with honor from every calling, task, and assignment; if you will be true to the Savior’s name and worthy of His eternal blessings, you will always have the light of the Holy Ghost to be with you, to lead you, to guide you, and to buoy you up. You will never want for what to say or how to act. It will be given you.

How you live, what you represent, how you treat your associates, and how you honor and revere your companion and your family will spread the influence of our Savior Jesus Christ. For there is no greater Christian service than to become like Him, heed the counsel of His Spirit, and do His will.

As the years go by, you will discover more axioms that reflect your own experience of living the gospel. Learn them and live your life accordingly.

May the Lord bless you and keep you that you may have a good life, be what you want to be, and fulfill your dreams now, returning with honor in the eternities. ■

From a commencement address given on August 14, 2003, at Brigham Young University.

NOTES

1. Brigham Young, in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (1997), 229.
2. *History of the Church*, 5:134.

Save your money.
Do not try to
have now what
it took your parents
years of patient
saving to acquire.