



**By Elder
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Of the Seventy

The Most

On February 12, 2003, my wife and I, along with two of our sons, are careening down a canyon river. The dark river roars in our ears as we straddle either side of our raft and paddle with our might at the command of our guide. The wet suits we wear protect us from the splash of the numbing cold water.

Our river guide has run this particular stretch of the river hundreds of times without mishap. We think it safe enough, and so here we are. The worst of the rapids are behind us, and we are loving life as we approach the take-out point.

Then it happens.

Suddenly, the right side of the raft rises straight into the sky. Our sons are launched over our heads into the water, and the large raft flips over, dumping us all into the raging river.

It is dark and incredibly cold. Above I hear muted sounds of the river mixed with the chaos of people kicking and thrashing about, trying to reach the surface. I expect to surface, but the river holds me down. I think of my wife, Jacque, and of our sons, Chase and Zach, more than my need for air. I know we are in death's grasp, and I feel it squeezing life from me. I also feel profound regret for putting my family at such risk.

Then I hear the full roar of the river. I am finally above water. I gasp for air, desperately looking for my wife and sons, but I don't see them.

In seconds I am pulled under the water again but not before I see that I am headed toward a large rock where the force of the current turns the river back onto itself in a hydraulic roller. I try to get my legs in front of me to take the brunt of the impact, but before I hit the rock, the roller turns me back, over, and under and then spits me out to the side into an eddy. I see Chase and Zach in the same eddy, but where is Jacque?

I end the story here because there is not space to tell it all. It includes the miraculous rescue of my wife, who was saved by a kayaker and the powers of heaven.

I am not advocating high-adventure risk and certainly not recklessness; rather, I want you to understand what the river taught me that day.

Important Things



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available to everyone.*

The question is not how much you can get away with or how close to the line you can walk and still be good; rather, the question is, “Who are you, and who are you in the process of becoming?”

Difficulties, inconveniences, and disappointments come and go. Even life comes and goes. There isn't much that matters greatly in life, but a few things are monumentally important, even more important than life. I want to talk about some of those things. I also want you to understand that the few things that are most important are equally available to all, whatever your circumstances or past.

What Do You Want?

So, *what do you want?* Hopefully you can identify one or two things that occupy most of your thoughts and are your predominant desires.



The Lord said:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. . . .

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9).

While this may be understood as a declaration that we cannot comprehend the thoughts and ways of God, I think rather it is an invitation to think differently, to elevate our thoughts and, consequently, our ways to

coincide with the thoughts and ways of God. He is inviting us to think as He thinks.

So what are the thoughts and ways of the Lord? What are the most important things to which we should aspire? I will mention four.

The Most Important Thing

If there is something more important than all other things, would it be important to learn it, remember it, and give it the highest priority in our lives? Alma says there is something that is most important.

“For behold, I say unto you there be many things to come; and behold, *there is one thing which is of more importance than they all*—for behold, the time is not far distant that the Redeemer liveth and cometh among his people. . . .

“And behold, he shall be born of Mary, . . . [and] she . . . shall . . . bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God.

“And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and . . . he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

“And he will take upon him death. . . .

“. . . [He will] take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance. . . .

“Now I say unto you that ye must repent, and be born again; for the Spirit saith if ye are not born again ye cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. . . .

“And whosoever doeth this, and keepeth the commandments of God from thenceforth, . . . shall have eternal life” (Alma 7:7, 10–14, 16; emphasis added).

Do you remember the ultimate objective of



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all that father Lehi saw in his visionary dream? It was a tree “whose fruit is most precious and most desirable above all other fruits; yea, and it is the greatest of all the gifts of God” (1 Nephi 15:36).

The tree represents the love of God manifested through Jesus Christ, and its fruit is the blessings of His Atonement. The most important thing is to partake of the fruit of the tree of life—to be *forgiven of your sins and be endowed with the power of the Holy Ghost*. These gifts of the Atonement, along with the gift of eternal life, are the greatest of all the gifts of God.

We should want to receive these gifts more than anything else.

Follow the Word of the Lord

Next, we should want to hear and follow the word of the Lord. On one occasion Jesus “entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house.

“And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word.

“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? bid her therefore that she help me.

“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” (Luke 10:38–42).

This was not a question of right and wrong but rather of good, better, and best. What Martha was doing was good, but she was distracted by a good thing at the expense of

a best thing. In response to her complaint, the Lord made this astonishing statement: “One thing is needful”—that is, to hear and follow the word of the Lord.

Think about this statement in the book of Alma: “The preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, *it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else*” (Alma 31:5; emphasis added).

This is a profoundly important truth. The Lord says that your thoughts are not His thoughts, but the holy scriptures, the teachings of living prophets, and the promptings of the Holy Ghost *are* the thoughts of God, and they are more powerful than fear of death, addiction, pornography, or anything else. It stands to reason, therefore, that the Lord would say, “Treasure up in your minds continually the words of life” (D&C 84:85).

He is not talking about just reading the scriptures but rather about adopting His words to govern your life so that they become the standard works—the standard for *your* works. As you do so, His thoughts will become your thoughts, and His ways will become your ways.

Develop a Godly Character

Third, we should want to become like the Lord Jesus Christ.

He says, “And behold, all things are written by the Father; therefore out of the books which shall be written shall the world be judged” (3 Nephi 27:26). Then He poses the ultimate question: “Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:27).

As you hear and follow the word of the Lord, you become more like Him. Little by little the qualities and



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attributes of His character become a part of your character, a part of who you are.

The question is not how much you can get away with or how close to the line you can walk and still be good; rather, the question is, “Who are you, and who are you in the process of becoming?”

Be Fruitful

Finally, we should want to make a difference; we should want to be fruitful.

The Sermon on the Mount is the greatest sermon ever given. It is not a random collection of truths but rather a carefully orchestrated sermon that leads to an important conclusion.

The Lord describes a process beginning with the recognition that we are poor in spirit, which in turn may cause us to mourn for our sins, focus on things of eternal value, be filled with the Holy Ghost, avoid all that would offend the Spirit, and stand firm against adversity to the end, that we become “the salt of the earth,” “the light of the world,” and “a city that is set on an hill” (Matthew 5:13–14). He said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

At the end of the sermon, the Savior returns to this same conclusion to be fruitful:

“Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. . . .

“Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:17, 20).

The purpose of the Father’s plan is not only that we be redeemed from sin and endowed with power from on high but also that by the power of the Holy Ghost we become a “good tree” and make a difference in the lives of others, especially by helping them partake of the fruit of the tree of life—the most important thing.

The Greatest Gifts Are Available to All

Regarding the few things that matter most in life, no one is disadvantaged or privileged. Everyone is on equal footing. This is surprising because there is otherwise so much inequality in life.

In the end it does not matter how well liked you are or how much money you acquire or how beautiful you may be. The greatest gifts are equally available to everyone.

Conclusion

Seek the best things in life and work tirelessly to achieve them. You can. We all can. Elevate your thoughts to coincide with the Lord’s thoughts, that His ways become your ways. Don’t drift or become distracted by the things of the world or the honors of men.

Your future is bright. “Be of good cheer, and do not fear” (D&C 68:6).

Seek after those things that are *monumentally important and equally available to everyone*. Everything is before you. *All you have to do is choose the best.*

I testify that Jesus is the Christ and that He invites “all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him . . . ; and all are alike unto God” (2 Nephi 26:33). ■

From a devotional address, “The Best of Times,” given at Brigham Young University–Idaho on June 18, 2013. For the full address, visit web.byui.edu/devotionalsand speeches.