



By Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf

Of the Quorum
of the Twelve
Apostles

Your Adventure through Mortality

Believe—and God will be with you. Incline your heart to Him—and He will guide you on your journey.

From a worldwide devotional for young adults, “The Adventure of Mortality,” delivered by Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf and Sister Harriet Uchtdorf in the Conference Center on January 14, 2018.

It is so good to be with you today and to feel your spirit, your strength, your energy. I am very happy that you had a chance to hear from Sister Uchtdorf. Harriet is indeed the sunshine of my life. Everyone who knows her, loves her. She is the kind of person who makes those around her better and happier. She has certainly had that influence on me.

We just celebrated our 55th wedding anniversary. When we look at our two children and their spouses, our six grandchildren with their families, and our four great-grandchildren, we are amazed at the great adventure our life has been.

The Age of Instant Answers

An interesting thought occurred to me as I was preparing for this event. Yes, it’s true, the years when I was ages 18 to 30 are barely visible in my rearview mirror, but despite my current age, I still feel young inside. In fact, most of us older people consider ourselves to be young people who have just been living a very long time.

When you look at us, the “older generation,” you could be surprised how much more we have in common with your generation than you might suppose. I believe that the differences between Heavenly Father’s children, whatever their age, are minor compared to the similarities. For instance, many of you have questions about God and about yourself—deep, fundamental questions that are similar to those asked by people much older than you:



“Receiving [heavenly] answers often requires sacrifice, work, and patience,” said Elder Uchtdorf, pictured with Sister Uchtdorf and young adults in the Conference Center.

- “Does God really exist? Does He care?”
- “Am I on the right path?”
- “Why do I sometimes feel empty, overwhelmed, overlooked, or lonely?”
- “Why hasn’t God intervened in my life?”
- “Why didn’t He answer a prayer?”
- “Why did He allow me to experience this sadness, illness, or tragedy?”

These can be difficult questions to answer.

In this age of instant answers—where seemingly absolute and unsailable knowledge is merely a Google search away—we sometimes get frustrated when answers to our most personal, important, and urgent questions are delayed. We lift up our hearts to heaven, and all we seem to get is a frustrating, spinning “wait cursor.”

We don’t like waiting.

When we have to wait more than a few seconds for a search engine to respond, we might suppose the connection is down or broken. In our frustration, we might even abandon the search. But when it comes to eternal questions, matters of the soul, we must be more patient.

Not all answers are of equal worth. Answers that come from worldly wisdom or popular opinion are easy to come by, but they lose their worth

quickly when new theories or trends emerge. Heavenly answers—eternal answers—are priceless. Receiving these answers often requires sacrifice, work, and patience.

These answers are worth the wait.

My purpose is to offer my certain witness that your Father in Heaven knows you, hears you, and will never abandon you. As you incline your hearts to Him and strive to follow His way, He will intervene in your life and direct your path as you journey through this great and exciting adventure of mortality.

Connecting the Dots

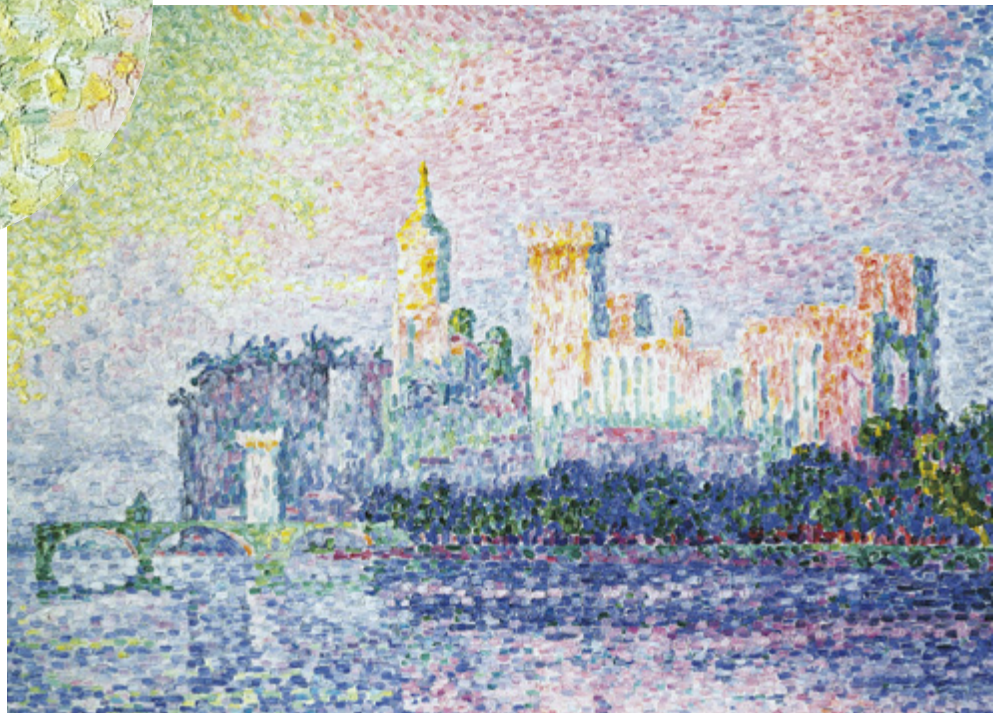
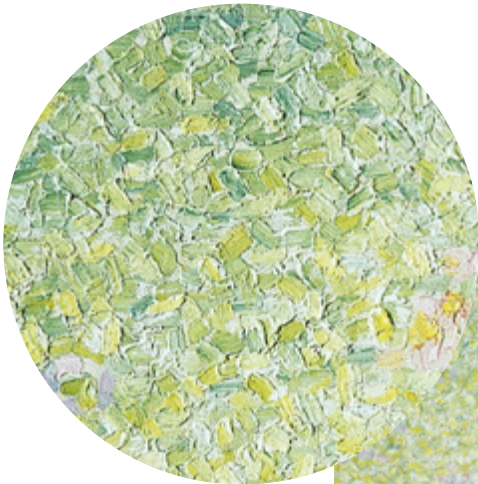
One of the great innovators of our time, Steve Jobs of Apple, had this insight: “You can’t connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backward. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future.”¹

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in the frame of the gospel
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interconnect.*

What did he mean by that? In the late 19th century, artists such as Georges Seurat and Paul Signac began painting in a new style that would become known as neo-impressionism. Their technique consisted of dotting canvases with small specks of color. Close up, these dots appear unconnected and random. But when you take in the entire painting, you can see how the dots blend into colors and how the colors form shapes that reveal a beautiful pattern. What once seemed arbitrary and even confusing begins to make sense.


Sometimes our lives are like neo-impressionistic art. The dots of color that make up the moments and events of our days can appear unconnected and chaotic at times. We can't see any order to them. We can't imagine that they have a purpose at all.

However, when we step back and take an eternal perspective, when we look at our lives in the frame of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we can begin to see how the various dots in our lives interconnect. We may not be able to see the entire picture just yet, but with patience we can see enough to trust that there is a beautiful, grand design. And as we strive to trust God and follow His Son, Jesus Christ, one day we will see the finished product, and we will know that the very hand of God was directing and guiding our steps.





You have to ask yourself, “Can I muster enough faith to believe God? Am I willing to trust that He loves me and wants to guide my path?”



We will know that the Master Artist had a plan for those random dots all along. We will see that He amplified our talents, prepared opportunities, and introduced us to possibilities far more glorious than we ever could have imagined or accomplished on our own. I have certainly seen this in my own life.

My Adventure of Mortality

When I was very young, my family was twice forced to flee our home and leave everything behind. On both occasions, it became apparent that people in our new locations considered us as “less” than them. Among the children my age,

my accent marked me as an outsider, and it was a rich source of ridicule and laughter for them.

The trauma and stress of our relocations caused me to fall behind in my studies, and I lost one full school year. In East Germany, I had studied Russian as a second language. It was difficult, but I managed. Now, in West Germany, I was required to learn English.

This seemed impossible to me! I believed that my mouth was simply not made for the English language.

During my teenage years, I had a crush on a most amazing girl with beautiful large brown eyes. Unfortunately, she didn’t seem the slightest bit interested in me.

So there I was, a rather insignificant and struggling young man living in post-war Germany who didn’t seem to have much chance of success in life.

However, I had a couple of good things going for me. I knew that my family loved me. In school and in church, teachers encouraged me to always set my goals high. I still remember when a young American missionary taught this principle from the scriptures: “If God is for [you], who can be against [you]?”²

There was something about this that struck me with great power. “If that’s the case,” I thought, “then why should I fear?”

So, I believed. And I trusted God.

For a time, I was in an apprenticeship program. One of my teachers challenged me to aim higher and attend night school to study mechanical engineering. It took a great deal of extra work, but it led me to discover my great passion for aviation! It came as a shock when I learned that to become a pilot, I needed to know English. But I wanted to become a pilot, and somehow miraculously my mouth seemed to change, and English no longer was such an impossible language.

With new motivation, a fresh commitment to work hard, and trust in Heavenly Father, I took small steps that helped me to build the confidence that I could do it. Of course, that didn't mean things always went smoothly.

When I was 19, I traveled to San Antonio, Texas, USA, to begin my air force pilot training. On the airplane, I sat next to a man who spoke with a Texan accent. I realized to my horror that the English I had worked so desperately to learn was not the same English he spoke!

At pilot training school, things were difficult too. It was an extremely competitive program, with everyone vying for the top spot at graduation. I knew right away that I was at a disadvantage because most of my classmates were native English speakers.

My flight instructors cautioned me about another potential disadvantage—I spent a lot of time at church. The local members welcomed me into their branch and into their homes, and we even built a chapel in Big Spring, Texas, together. My instructors worried that such activities were impairing my chance at a high ranking. I didn't think so. So I trusted God and did the best I could.



Eventually, I did learn English, though I'm still working on it. I completed my pilot training—and finished first in my class. I became a fighter pilot and later an airline captain. And that beautiful, brown-eyed girl of my dreams became my wife.

Do Small Things Perfectly

Is there a lesson in this? I think there are several!

One might be this: Don't get overwhelmed by the many large, difficult tasks of life. If you commit to doing the "easy" things—the "small" things God asks you to do—and you do them as perfectly as you can, big things will follow.

Some of these small and easy things you could do perfectly are study the scriptures, live the Word of Wisdom, attend church, pray with real intent, and pay tithes and offerings.

Do these things even when you don't want to. These "sacrifices" may appear to be small, but they are important, for "sacrifice brings forth the blessings of heaven."³

In a sense, your small and simple sacrifices are the dots of daily living that make up the masterpiece painting of your life. You may not see how the dots connect now, and you don't need to yet. Simply have faith enough for the moment you are living in now. Trust in God, and "out of small things [will come] that which is great."⁴

Trust in God

Now, you may be thinking: "Yes, Elder Uchtdorf, that's all very nice for you. But you are an Apostle. I'm just a regular member of the Church. My prayers are not answered. My life is not directed. If there is a plan for me, it's a thrift store version. A hand-me-down plan. A pat-on-the-head-just-be-content-with-what-you-have plan."



My dear friends, you are children of the living God, the God of the universe. He loves you, He wants you to succeed, He has a plan prepared for your success. Remember what Steve Jobs said: “You cannot connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backward.”

When I was your age, I had no idea where my life would take me. I definitely didn’t see any dots connecting in front of me.

But I did trust God. I listened to the advice of loving family and wise friends, and I took small steps of faith, believing that if I did the best I could in the moment, God would take care of the big picture.

He did.

He knew the end from the beginning when I did not.

I could not see the future, but He could.

Even during those times of hardship when I thought I was abandoned, He was with me—I see that now.

In Proverbs we find this great promise: “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

“In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”⁵

I don’t believe there is a question mark at the end of that verse. No, I think there should be an exclamation point!

So you have to ask yourself, “Can I muster enough faith to believe God? Am I willing to trust that He loves me and wants to guide my path?”

In fact, you might do very well on your own in many things. But I urge you to believe that your life will be infinitely better if you rely on God to guide your steps. He knows things you cannot possibly know, and He has a future prepared for you that you cannot possibly imagine. The great Apostle Paul testified, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.”⁶

Do you want your Heavenly Father to guide you, bless you, and uphold you?

Then believe.

Love Him.

Seek Him with all your heart.

Walk in His ways—which means keeping the commandments, honoring your covenants, following the teachings of the prophets, and hearkening unto the promptings of the Spirit.

Do this and God will “increase you a thousand times and bless you as he has promised!”⁷

I understand that for some this may seem easy

to say and hard to do. You don't have to go far in today's culture to hear contradictory voices that discourage or even ridicule belief in God generally, and in our religion specifically.

Such voices are amplified in our day by unmatched advances in communication. That is your challenge, but it also is your privilege.

I am confident that you will find means to deal with it the Lord's way! It is part of your adventure of mortality. How you do it will greatly influence your future and the part you play in God's work here on earth.

Nevertheless, what you are experiencing in life is not all that uncommon. Yours is not the only generation whose faith in God has been challenged and ridiculed. In fact, this seems to be part of the mortal test for all of God's children.

"If ye were of the world," Jesus told His disciples, "the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."⁸

You might as well accept the likelihood that once you make the commitment to follow the Savior, the residents of the great and spacious building will disapprove—quite vocally, at times.⁹ They may even attempt to bully and shame you.

But remember that you do not answer to them. You answer to God. One day you will stand before Him to account for your life.

He will ask what you did to overcome the temptations of the world and follow the path of righteousness. He will ask if you followed the Savior, if you loved your neighbor, if you earnestly tried to stay on the path of discipleship.

Remember, we can't have it both ways. We cannot receive the incomprehensible blessings of discipleship while at the same time maintaining our membership records in the Babylon First

Ward. Dear friends, now is the time to commit to Christ and follow His path.

One day all of God's children will know what is right—including those who now mock the truth. They will bow the knee and confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Redeemer, the Savior of the world.¹⁰ They will know that He died for them.

On that day it will be clear that His is the only voice that ever really mattered.

You will know with certainty how blessed you are because you kept the faith, kept God's commandments, served your fellowmen, and built God's kingdom here on earth. My beloved friends, believe—and God will be with you. Incline your heart to Him—and He will guide you on your journey through this great and exciting adventure of mortal life.

"It Mattereth Not"

When we speak of letting God guide our lives, I would like to clarify one thing. You might not like what I'm about to tell you. When you ask God what to do about decisions in your life—including some important decisions—He may not give you a clear answer right away. The truth is that sometimes it just doesn't matter what you decide, as long as you stay within the fundamental covenants and principles of the gospel.

In many cases, the decisions you make may not be as important as what you do after making the decisions.

For example, a couple may choose to get married even though some in their own families do not consider them a perfect match. However, I have great hope for such a couple if, after they make their decision, they stay totally committed to each other and to the Lord with all their heart and mind. By treating each other with love and kindness and by focusing on one another's emotional, spiritual, and temporal needs—by doing the little things consistently—they become the perfect match.

In contrast is the couple who think they picked the "perfect" person and then assume that all the heavy lifting is over. If they quit courting each other, stop communicating one-on-one, and slide into egotism and a self-centered life, this couple is on a path that leads to sorrow and regret.

The same principle applies to vocational choices. I have great hope for those who pick a less prestigious occupation but who do the best they can and find ways to make their work interesting and challenging.

I have less hope for those who choose impressive-sounding occupations but along the way lose that inner fire necessary to make them

successful at their work. In fact, successfully adapting to changes in the workplace will be one of the prime attributes your generation will have to develop to cope with the future.

So how does the Lord want you to approach key decisions?

His instructions to Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith have helped me. The Lord told them, “You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right.”¹¹

Heavenly Father has given you a brain and a heart. If you trust Him, He will help you to use both of them properly in your decision making.

For many decisions, you have more than one good option to choose from. When this happened to Joseph and his companions, the Lord used an interesting phrase as they sought His guidance: “It mattereth not.”¹²

But the Lord immediately added, “Only be faithful.”¹³

Your work is to make the best decisions you can based on



the information available to you, grounded in the values and principles of the gospel. Then strive with all your might to succeed in the things you undertake—and be faithful.

Do that, and the dots will connect.

Perhaps it’s disappointing to hear that God won’t necessarily give you a detailed itinerary for your life’s journey. But do you really want direction in every detail of your life? Do you really want someone giving you the cheat codes to life before you have a chance to figure things out for yourself? What kind of adventure would that be?

My dear friends, you pass through the adventure of mortality only once. Wouldn’t an individually tailored walk-through complete with spoilers and answers to all of life’s great questions take away your great feeling of accomplishment and your increase of confidence in the Lord and in yourself?¹⁴

Because God has given you your agency, you can choose many directions to go and still lead a fulfilling life. Mortality is an open-ended, choose-your-own-adventure story. You have commandments, you have covenants, you have inspired prophetic counsel, and you have the gift of the Holy Ghost. That is more than enough to lead you to mortal happiness and eternal joy. Beyond that, don’t despair if you make some decisions that are less than perfect. That is how you learn. That’s part of the adventure!

No, adventures never go smoothly from start to finish, but if you are faithful, you can be assured of a happy ending. Consider the example of Joseph of Egypt. In many ways, his life was disastrous. He was sold into slavery by his brothers. He was cast into prison for a crime he did not commit. Despite all the terrible circumstances forced upon him, he maintained his faith. He trusted God. He made the best of it. Year after year—even when it appeared that he had been overlooked and abandoned—he believed. Joseph always inclined his heart to God. And God showed that He is able to turn negatives into positives.¹⁵

Today, 4,000 years later, we still find inspiration in Joseph’s story.

Your adventure may not be quite as dramatic, but it will have its ups and downs. So, remember Joseph’s example.

Remain faithful. Believe. Be honest. Don't become bitter. Don't be a bully. Love God. Love your fellowmen. Trust the Lord, even when things appear bleak.

You may not see it until much later, but you will look back and know that the Lord did indeed direct and guide your path. And the dots did connect.

Five Things to Remember

Until then, may I ask you to remember five things?

First, know that God's answers to your most profound questions may take a little time and may come in ways you don't expect. God's answers are of eternal value. They are worth the wait.

Second, have a little faith. Incline your hearts to God. Believe that you are important to God, and trust that He will make more of you than you can possibly make of yourself. Learn of Him. Love Him. Believe Him. Speak with Him regularly, intensely. Listen for His voice.

Third, walk as best as you can on the path of discipleship. Don't get overwhelmed. Just do the small things as perfectly as you can, and the big things will fall into place.

Fourth, don't let discouraging voices dissuade you from your journey of faith. Remember, you don't answer to your critics. You answer to your Father in Heaven. His values count.

Fifth, make the best decisions you can by following the promptings that come to your heart and mind. Give your best efforts to follow through. Have faith, and God will consecrate your honest efforts for your eternal good.¹⁶

Do this and, in the end, all will be well.

As you seek to follow your Savior, your confidence will grow.¹⁷ And as you walk in faithfulness and open your heart to the Light of Christ, your love of God will mature and your ability to love your neighbor will be refined.

And all this will bring you happiness and joy.

It will bring you peace.

One day, it will bring you eternal glory.

On that future day, you will look back on this cherished and exciting adventure of mortality, and you will understand.



You will see that the dots really did connect into a beautiful pattern, more sublime than you ever could have imagined.

With unspeakable gratitude, you will see that God Himself, in His abounding love, grace, and compassion, was always there watching over you, blessing you, and guiding your steps as you walked toward Him. ■

NOTES

1. Steve Jobs, Stanford University commencement address, June 12, 2005.
2. Romans 8:31, New International Version (1984).
3. "Praise to the Man," *Hymns*, no. 27.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 64:33.
5. Proverbs 3:5–6.
6. 1 Corinthians 2:9, New International Version.
7. Deuteronomy 1:11, New International Version.
8. John 15:19.
9. See 1 Nephi 8:26–28.
10. See Romans 14:10–12; Philippians 2:10.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 9:8.
12. Doctrine and Covenants 60:5; 62:5; 80:3.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 62:5.
14. See Doctrine and Covenants 121:45.
15. See Genesis 37, 39–46.
16. See 2 Nephi 32:9.
17. See 2 Nephi 32:9.