



By President Thomas S. Monson

The Three Rs of Choice

Each of us has come to this earth with all the tools necessary to make correct choices.

My beloved brethren of the priesthood, my earnest prayer tonight is that I might enjoy the help of our Heavenly Father in giving utterance to those things which I feel impressed to share with you.

I have been thinking recently about choices and their consequences. Scarcely an hour of the day goes by but what we are called upon to make choices of one sort or another. Some are trivial, some more far-reaching. Some will make no difference in the eternal scheme of things, and others will make *all* the difference.

As I've contemplated the various aspects of choice, I've put them into three categories: first, the *right* of choice; second, the *responsibility* of choice; and third, the *results* of choice. I call these the three Rs of choice.

I mention first the *right* of choice. I am so grateful to a loving Heavenly Father for His gift of agency, or the right to choose. President David O. McKay, ninth President of the Church, said, "Next to the bestowal of life itself, the right to direct that life is God's greatest gift to man."¹

We know that we had our agency before this world was and that Lucifer attempted to take it from us. He had no confidence in the principle of agency or in us and argued for imposed

salvation. He insisted that with his plan none would be lost, but he seemed not to recognize—or perhaps not to care—that in addition, none would be any wiser, any stronger, any more compassionate, or any more grateful if his plan were followed.

We who chose the Savior's plan knew that we would be embarking on a precarious, difficult journey, for we walk the ways of the world and sin and stumble, cutting us off from our Father. But the Firstborn in the Spirit offered Himself as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of all. Through unspeakable suffering He became the great Redeemer, the Savior of all mankind, thus making possible our successful return to our Father.

The prophet Lehi tells us: "Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself."²

Brethren, within the confines of whatever circumstances we find ourselves, we will always have the *right* to choose.

Next, with the *right* of choice comes the *responsibility* to choose. We cannot be neutral; there is no middle ground. The Lord knows this; Lucifer knows this. As long as we live upon this earth, Lucifer and his hosts will never abandon the hope of claiming our souls.

Our Heavenly Father did not launch us on our eternal journey without providing the means whereby we could receive from Him God-given guidance to assist in our safe return at the end of mortal life. I speak of prayer. I speak too of the whisperings from that still, small voice within each of us, and I do not overlook the holy scriptures, written by mariners who successfully sailed the seas we too must cross.

Each of us has come to this earth with all the tools necessary to make correct choices. The prophet Mormon tells us, "The Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil."³

We are surrounded—even at times bombarded—by the messages of the adversary. Listen to some of them; they are no doubt familiar to you: "Just this once won't matter." "Don't worry; no one will know." "You can stop smoking or drinking or taking drugs any time you want." "Everybody's doing it, so it can't be that bad." The lies are endless.

Although in our journey we will encounter forks and turnings in the road, we simply cannot afford the luxury of a detour from which we may never return. Lucifer, that clever pied piper, plays his lilting melody and attracts the unsuspecting away from the safety of their chosen pathway, away from the counsel of loving parents, away from the security of God's teachings. He seeks not just the so-called refuse of humanity; he seeks all



of us, including the very elect of God. King David listened, wavered, and then followed and fell. So did Cain in an earlier era and Judas Iscariot in a later one. Lucifer's methods are cunning; his victims, numerous.

We read of him in 2 Nephi: "Others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security."⁴ "Others he flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell . . . until he grasps them with his awful chains."⁵ "And thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell."⁶

When faced with significant choices, how do we decide? Do we

succumb to the promise of momentary pleasure? To our urges and passions? To the pressure of our peers?

Let us not find ourselves as indecisive as is Alice in Lewis Carroll's classic *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. You will remember that she comes to a crossroads with two paths before her, each stretching onward but in opposite directions. She is confronted by the Cheshire cat, of whom Alice asks, "Which path shall I follow?"

The cat answers, "That depends where you want to go. If you do not know where you want to go, it doesn't matter which path you take."⁷

Unlike Alice, we all know where we want to go, and it *does* matter which way we go, for by choosing our path, we choose our destination.

Decisions are constantly before us. To make them wisely, courage is needed—the courage to say no, the courage to say yes. Decisions *do* determine destiny.

I plead with you to make a determination right here, right now, not to deviate from the path which will lead to our goal: eternal life with our Father in Heaven. Along that straight and true path there are other goals: missionary service, temple marriage, Church activity, scripture study, prayer, temple work. There are countless worthy goals to reach as we travel through life. Needed is our commitment to reach them.

Finally, brethren, I speak of the *results* of choice. All of our choices have consequences, some of which have little or nothing to do with our eternal salvation and others of which have *everything* to do with it.

Whether you wear a green T-shirt or a blue one makes no difference in the long run. However, whether you decide to push a key on your computer which will take you to pornography can make *all* the difference in your life. You will have just taken a step off the straight, safe path. If a friend pressures you to drink alcohol or to try drugs and you succumb to the pressure, you are taking a detour from which you may not return. Brethren, whether we are 12-year-old deacons or mature high priests, we are susceptible. May we keep our eyes, our hearts, and our determination focused on that goal which is eternal and worth any price we will have to pay, regardless of the sacrifice we must make to reach it.

No temptation, no pressure, no enticing can overcome us unless we

allow such. If we make the wrong choice, we have no one to blame but ourselves. President Brigham Young once expressed this truth by relating it to himself. Said he: "If Brother Brigham shall take a wrong track, and be shut out of the Kingdom of heaven, no person will be to blame but Brother Brigham. I am the only being in heaven, earth, or hell, that can be blamed." He continued: "This will equally apply to every Latter-day Saint. Salvation is an individual operation."⁸

The Apostle Paul has assured us, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."⁹

We have all made incorrect choices. If we have not already corrected such choices, I assure you that there is a way to do so. The process is called repentance. I plead with you to correct your mistakes. Our Savior died to provide you and me that blessed gift. Although the path is not easy, the promise is real: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."¹⁰ "And I, the Lord, remember them no more."¹¹ Don't put your eternal life at risk. If you have sinned, the sooner you begin to make your way back, the sooner you will find the sweet peace and joy that come with the miracle of forgiveness.

Brethren, 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. As with anything really worthwhile, the reward of eternal life requires effort.



The scriptures are clear:

"Ye shall observe to do . . . as the Lord your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

"Ye shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God hath commanded you."¹²

In closing may I share with you an example of one who determined early in life what his goals would be. I speak of Brother Clayton M. Christensen, a member of the Church who is a professor of business administration in the business school at Harvard University.

When he was 16 years old, Brother Christensen decided, among other things, that he would not play sports on Sunday. Years later, when he attended Oxford University in England, he played center on the basketball team. That year they had an undefeated season and went through to the British equivalent of what in the United States would be the NCAA basketball tournament.

They won their games fairly easily in the tournament, making it to the final four. It was then that Brother Christensen looked at the schedule and, to his absolute horror, saw that the final basketball game was scheduled to be played on a Sunday. He and the team had worked so hard

to get where they were, and he was the starting center. He went to his coach with his dilemma. His coach was unsympathetic and told Brother Christensen he expected him to play in the game.

Prior to the final game, however, there was a semifinal game. Unfortunately, the backup center dislocated his shoulder, which increased the pressure on Brother Christensen to play in the final game. He went to his hotel room. He knelt down. He asked his Heavenly Father if it would be all right, just this once, if he played that game on Sunday. He said that before he had finished praying, he received the answer: "Clayton, what are you even asking me for? You know the answer."

He went to his coach, telling him how sorry he was that he wouldn't be playing in the final game. Then he went to the Sunday meetings in the local ward while his team played without him. He prayed mightily for their success. They did win.

That fateful, difficult decision was made more than 30 years ago. Brother Christensen has said that as time has passed, he considers it one of the most important decisions he ever made. It would have been very easy to have said, "You know, in general, keeping the Sabbath day holy is the right commandment, but in my



By President Henry B. Eyring
First Counselor in the First Presidency

particular extenuating circumstance, it's okay, just this once, if I don't do it." However, he says his entire life has turned out to be an unending stream of extenuating circumstances, and had he crossed the line just that once, then the next time something came up that was so demanding and critical, it would have been so much easier to cross the line again. The lesson he learned is that it is easier to keep the commandments 100 percent of the time than it is 98 percent of the time.¹³

My beloved brethren, may we be filled with gratitude for the *right* of choice, accept the *responsibility* of choice, and ever be conscious of the *results* of choice. As bearers of the priesthood, all of us united as one can qualify for the guiding influence of our Heavenly Father as we choose carefully and correctly. We are engaged in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We, like those of olden times, have answered His call. We are on His errand. We shall succeed in the solemn charge: "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord."¹⁴ That this may be so is my solemn and humble prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Master, amen. ■

NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: David O. McKay* (2003), 208.
2. 2 Nephi 2:27.
3. Moroni 7:16.
4. 2 Nephi 28:21.
5. 2 Nephi 28:22.
6. 2 Nephi 28:21.
7. Adapted from Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1898), 89.
8. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (1997), 294.
9. 1 Corinthians 10:13.
10. Isaiah 1:18.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 58:42.
12. Deuteronomy 5:32–33.
13. See Clayton M. Christensen, "Decisions for Which I've Been Grateful" (*Brigham Young University–Idaho devotional*, June 8, 2004), www.byui.edu/presentations.
14. Isaiah 52:11.

Trust in God, Then Go and Do

You show your trust in Him when you listen with the intent to learn and repent and then you go and do whatever He asks.

My beloved brothers and sisters, it is an honor to address you on this Sabbath day. I am humbled by the assignment to speak to the millions of Latter-day Saints and our friends across the world. In preparation for this sacred opportunity, I prayed and pondered to learn about your personal needs and what message the Lord wanted me to give.

Your needs are great and varied. Each of you is a unique child of God. God knows you individually. He sends messages of encouragement, correction, and direction fitted to you and to your needs.

To discover what God would have me add to this conference, I read the messages of His servants in scripture and in past conferences. I received an answer to my prayer as I read the words of Alma, a great servant of the Lord in the Book of Mormon:

"O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people!"

"Yea, I would declare unto every soul, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption, that they should repent and come unto our God, that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth.

"But behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me."¹

And then I found in Alma's reflection the direction for which I had been praying: "For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have; therefore we see that the Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true."²

As I read that message from a servant of God, my errand for today became clear. God sends messages and authorized messengers to His children. I am to build trust in God and His servants enough that we will go out and obey His counsel. He wants that because He loves us and wants