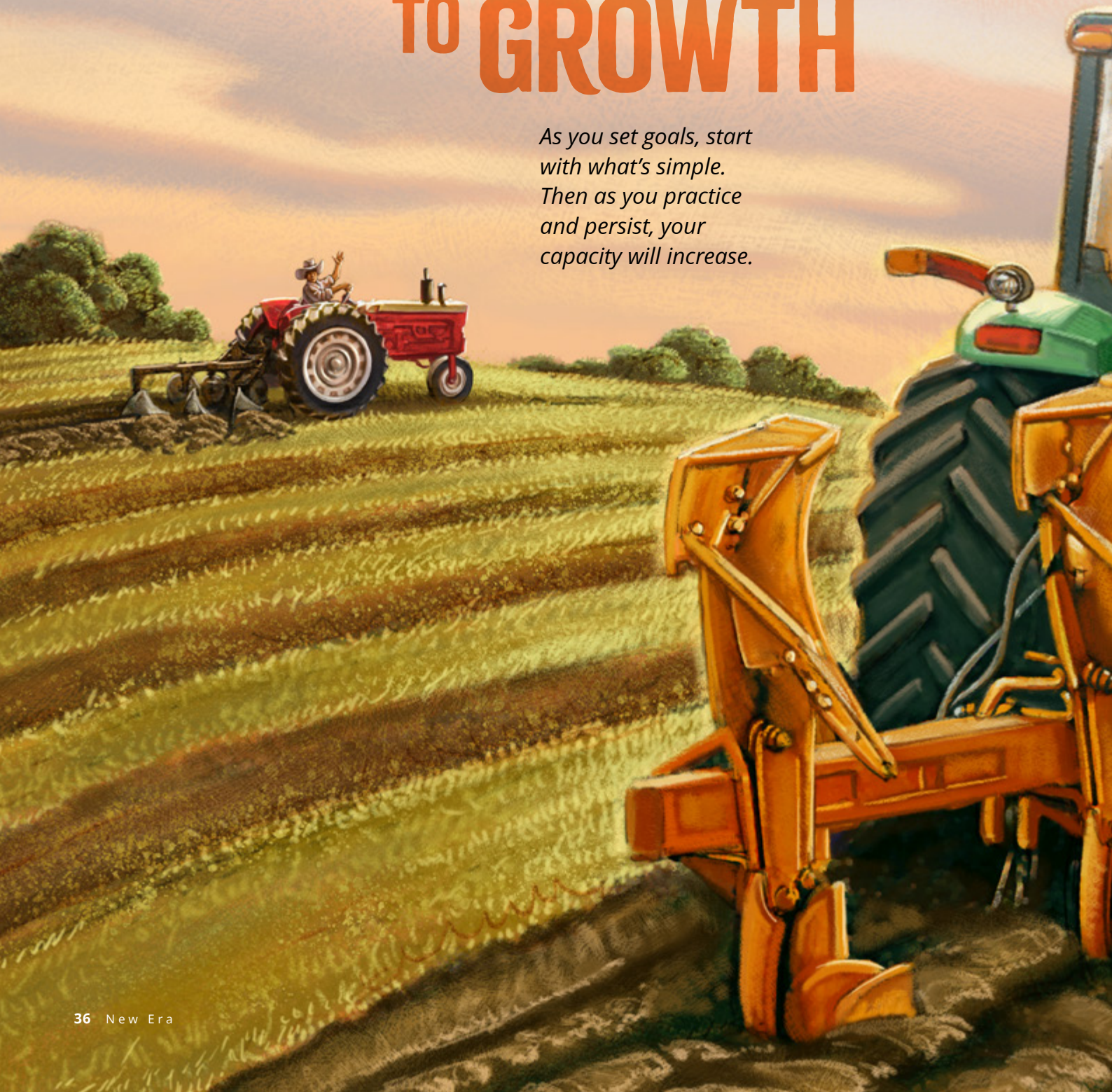




By Elder Vern P. Stanfill
Of the Seventy

GOALS ARE A GATEWAY TO GROWTH

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with what's simple.
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I grew up on a ranch. And as anyone who has lived on a ranch can tell you, there is plenty of work to do. We ran a lot of large machinery, but my first job was to drive a small, three-wheeled tractor to drag a harrow over the fields. A harrow is an implement with lots of circular disks, used to smooth the dirt after a field has been plowed.

Once I was comfortable harrowing the fields, there was bigger machinery to run, with more moving parts—and with more challenges if something went wrong. As I progressed from operating simple machinery to operating more complicated machinery, I

eventually became confident running each type of machinery. I even learned to make repairs when something broke down.


I think there's a principle here that's as true in life as it is on the ranch. Whatever you want to do in terms of personal development (in athletics, music, drama, science, or cooking—it doesn't matter), start with what's simple. Then as you learn more, as you practice and persist, your capacity will increase. You will be able to do more and more.

BECOMING IS A GRADUAL PROCESS

The Lord teaches us “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little” (2 Nephi 28:30). This means that it's a gradual process to become what we want to be. And it may take even longer to become what the Lord wants us to be. It's a process we see often in the Book of Mormon. Nephi, for example, learned principles he needed to know—but he did not learn them all at once.

He was a good young man, but he still needed to be instructed as he went along. First of all, he learned the basics—faith, obedience, prayer, and so forth—from his mother and father (see 1 Nephi 1:1). He learned to search the scriptures, pray for guidance, and listen to the prophets, including his father, Lehi. Nephi said he had “great desires to know of the mysteries of God, wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father” (1 Nephi 2:16). The Lord then





told Nephi that he was blessed “because of thy faith, for thou hast sought me diligently” (1 Nephi 2:19).

I think that all of us can learn spiritual things in much the same way. Many of us, born “of goodly parents” (1 Nephi 1:1), learn the spiritual basics in our homes through family prayer and family scripture study. Those not in ideal family situations still can learn spiritual basics with guidance from those who minister to them. And we all benefit from personal study and from prayer as we cry unto the Lord and allow Him to soften our hearts.

HOW DO YOU GROW?

Someone asked me recently, “How do you grow into the kind of person the Lord wants you to become?” I answered that I’m not there yet. We are all in the process of becoming. On a spiritual level, we are all trying to become more like Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father. Sometimes it can seem like our progress is slow. But as we try our best, we will gradually grow.

You might want to consider this principle of gradual growth as you work on personal goals in Children and Youth—whether you’re setting goals that are spiritual, physical, emotional, or intellectual. Remember that a goal serves a number of purposes.

It gives you a mark to shoot for, something you want to obtain. And once you accomplish the goal, it gives you the satisfaction and reinforcement that you can go on and achieve even greater things.

The reason the Lord teaches us line upon line is to give us confidence. If He expected us to know, learn, and do everything right away, we would become discouraged. Instead,

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he lets us grow from understanding to greater understanding:

“That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (Doctrine and Covenants 50:24).

This ability to increase in capacity reminds me of my experience running the machinery on the ranch. You learn one principle, and that gives you confidence to learn the next principle and then live it. That’s the Lord’s way of teaching us how to achieve great things. After you accomplish your first goal, you set another goal. Each goal becomes a gateway to new opportunities for service and growth.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD GOAL?

A good goal has to be attainable, but it should also be a gateway to something bigger, something more important. And of course, the greatest gateway is the one that places us on the path back to our Heavenly Father. When you find yourself on that path, you will be happy.

President M. Russell Ballard, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has said, “I believe that one important key to happiness is to learn how to set our own goals and establish our own plans within the framework of our Heavenly Father’s eternal plan. If we focus on this eternal path, we will inevitably qualify to return to His presence.”¹

President Dallin H. Oaks, First Counselor in the First Presidency, has said: “What is essential is that our labors in the workplace of the Lord have caused us to *become* something. For some of

us, this requires a longer time than for others. What is important in the end is what we have become by our labors.”²

WHAT ABOUT FAILURE?

Failure may be a part of that process. Sometimes working to achieve a goal may teach us something entirely unrelated to that goal. For example, when I was a missionary in southern France, it was fairly difficult. I learned life lessons about doing hard things to accomplish difficult goals and how failing to reach a short-term goal did not always mean failure in the long term. What I learned on my mission far exceeded my original goal of learning how to do missionary work.

YOU ARE KNOWN

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, then-Second Counselor in the First Presidency, has said that Heavenly Father “loves you not only for who you are this very day but also for the person of glory and light you have the potential and the desire to become.”³

As I look at the youth of the Church, I am amazed at your potential and capacity. Your Heavenly Father loves you and wants you to be happy and return to Him. When times are difficult, He knows what you’re struggling with. He will lift you up, love you, and encourage you to do better. His love for you never ceases. He rejoices in even your smallest successes, and He is particularly pleased when you grow in ways that bring you closer to Him. **NE**

NOTES

1. M. Russell Ballard, Apr. 2017 general conference (*Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2017, 63).
2. Dallin H. Oaks, Oct. 2000 general conference (*Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 34).
3. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Living the Gospel Joyful,” Oct. 2014 general conference (*Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2014, 123).

