

Allowing Your Faith in Jesus Christ to Guide Your Life

NEIL L. ANDERSEN

Kathy and I are so happy to be with you today. I just left a meeting with the Quorum of the Twelve, and I bring you their love as well as the love of the First Presidency. We think about you, we pray for you, and we talk about your future. We love you, admire you, and are lifted every time we have a chance to be with you.

Thank you, choir, for that marvelous arrangement of “The Lord Is My Light.” The words of that hymn are worth thinking about:

*The Lord is my light; the Lord is my strength.
I know in his might I'll conquer at length.
My weakness in mercy he covers with pow'r,
And, walking by faith, I am blest ev'ry hour.¹*

Beautiful, beautiful words!

Sitting on the stage are some of your fellow students who will help me today. I am so thankful for their wonderful contributions.

Fifty years ago this past November, I completed my mission to France and returned home to my

family's small dairy farm in Idaho. Milking the cows morning and night, I realized how much I needed to get an education. I had attended BYU for one year prior to my mission, and I returned to BYU exactly fifty years ago this month. I borrowed the money I needed for school, found a job, and began my classes. About a year later I met Kathy. It was the greatest day of my life. Let me show you a picture of our first date. [A picture was shown.] Not many have a picture of their first date. I'm hoping the bell-bottom pants return to style. We had hopes and dreams, and we made plans for our future together. A year later we were married in the Salt Lake Temple. It's hard to believe that Kathy and I have now been married nearly forty-eight years.

What are your hopes and plans for your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for the next fifty years?

- Looking back fifty years later, will your faith in the Savior have been the most powerful force that moved you forward?

Neil L. Andersen, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this devotional address on January 17, 2023.

- How will you withstand the temptations and pressures that seek to diminish your faith in Jesus Christ?
- If the Savior has not returned, how will you continue to keep the flame of your faith burning brightly for the next five decades?

These are important questions for you today. If you are determined to be a disciple of Jesus Christ all the days of your life, you will be, and remarkable blessings will be yours.

Let me share a few thoughts from what I have learned in the past fifty years about how to allow your faith in Jesus Christ to guide your life. My friends on the stage will add their comments as we go along.

Keep Developing Your Eternal Connection with God

As you know, you are a son or a daughter of God. That is an absolute truth.

Within each of us is a yearning—a longing, a hungering of our spirit—to have a deep relationship and an eternal connection with our Heavenly Father. This is true of all people, even those who do not recognize it.

Two weeks ago, after a very routine tackle during the first quarter of an NFL football game, the safety, Damar Hamlin, fell to the ground lifeless. Teammates, coaches, and then doctors and medical personnel rushed to his side. As the ambulance arrived on the field, an assistant trainer and the medical staff worked to resuscitate Hamlin's lifeless body. The stadium, filled with cheering fans moments before, became quiet. The ambulance rushed him to the hospital. Then something very unexpected happened. These seemingly invincible football players, so strong and confident only a few moments before, began kneeling on the playing field. Before a stadium of spectators and a large television audience, the entire Buffalo Bills team knelt and prayed fervently for their teammate Damar Hamlin.

In the hours and days that followed, all the NFL teams headlined their websites with the plea "Pray for Damar." In a remarkable expression of faith, an ESPN commentator bowed his head and prayed out loud to God on air. While many people

do not always speak openly about their faith in God, they very naturally believe in God, and in times of crisis, their prayers and hopes ascend to God. We are so very grateful for the miracle of Damar Hamlin's recovery.

Prayer is vital to faith in Jesus Christ. Prayer draws us closer to God. He hears and answers our prayers. If you feel your faith diminishing, pray more sincerely and more frequently.

Live Your Life with Hope in Jesus Christ

Next, live your life with hope in Christ.

Just a week ago, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland and his wife, Sister Patricia T. Holland, spoke to us about this hope. Do you remember these words?

Accompanying that bright hope will be the undeniable whisper that God loves you, that Christ is your Advocate, that the gospel is true. Its brightness will remind you that in the gospel there is always—every day, every hour—a new chance, a new life, a new year. . . . Because of Christ's gift, the best things in life are ours.²

To keep a brightness of hope, it will be important for you to be right before the Lord. We're not perfect, and we all need to follow President Russell M. Nelson's counsel about daily efforts to change, to repent. Elder Holland said, "Life is difficult enough without carrying a pack of mistakes on your back. . . . Unload that. Change anxiety for peace."³

President Russell M. Nelson said:

Hope emanates from the Lord. Only with an eternal perspective of God's great plan of happiness can we ever find a more excellent hope. . . . Have you heard the old statement that "hope springs eternal"? It can only be true if that hope springs from Him who is eternal.⁴

Look for the Hand of the Lord in Your Life

My next point: Keep your spirit open to seeing the hand of the Lord in your daily life.

Our friends on the stage will teach you this principle.

Grettel Garcia: "If you can see Him, you can take your decisions to Him or acknowledge that this would not have happened if you hadn't been

praying or if you didn't know about the gospel. If you let it be a bigger part of your life, you start seeing the miracles and you start seeing the blessings. And so your testimony grows as you try to look for God and for our Savior in your everyday life, in the little things."

Michael Ebert: "When you look for God's hand in your life, you see that He is always there and always reaching out. It may just be that someone was put in your life that day or something went your way. He helped put you in a place that you needed to be."

Lachlan Phillips: "There are a lot of things I'm not good at—whether it was learning Spanish on a mission or getting to BYU and realizing the classes are a lot harder than I expected. Just getting up in the morning some days is tough. And sometimes I just want to be like, 'Oh, I can do this by myself.' But definitely it is having the opportunities to find out: 'Oh, I can just ask the Lord. He can help me out, and He can help me get through those trials.' So many times in our lives—not intentionally—we end up being prideful and feel like, 'Oh, I'll be fine. I'll be fine. I don't need to ask the Lord.' Once I was able to see that, now I know that throughout my life I can rely on Him every day. He is going to help me."

Jada Brown: "There is a lovely piece of art that I love. I don't know who painted it, but it's called *Hand in Hand*, and one of the reasons I love it is because there is a little girl who looks like me. That just means so much to me. I think the main thing is that it always helps me visualize that there is a loving, just, merciful, all-knowing, perfect God, the Savior, and the Holy Spirit who love us and are walking right alongside us."

Many years ago I learned something very important from President Henry B. Eyring. He determined as a young father to ponder every night how the Lord's hand was blessing his life. Here are his words:

I wrote down a few lines every day for years. . . . Before I would write, I would ponder this question:

"Have I seen the hand of God reaching out to touch [my wife and me] or our children . . . today?" As I kept at it, something began to happen. As I would cast my mind over the day, I would see evidence of what God had done for one of us that I had not recognized in the busy moments of the day. As that happened, and it happened often, I realized that trying to remember had allowed God to show me what He had done.⁵

Consider following President Eyring's example. Some of your experiences will be small and simple, and others will stay in your righteous mind forever.

Embrace the Gift and Protection of the Gospel

Next, remember the restored gospel of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a gift and a protection for your faith.

Someone might ask, "Can't I be a disciple of Jesus Christ and not be a participating member of the Church?" There are certainly many wonderful Christians in the world who are not members of the Church, and we admire and respect them very much.

But once we have been baptized and have received the gift of the Holy Ghost, we are changed forever. We become "the children of the covenant,"⁶ and our souls need the truths of the restored gospel, the priesthood and ordinances that follow, the power of the Book of Mormon, and the safety that comes from prophets and apostles.

Speaking of the Restoration, the Lord declared, "Righteousness will I send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth, to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten."⁷ The Lord also said, "For I will raise up unto myself a pure people, that will serve me in righteousness."⁸ This is who we are becoming.

Think of the power of the Book of Mormon. No book teaches the Atonement of Jesus Christ as strongly and as clearly as does the Book of Mormon. Regularly immersing ourselves in the Book of Mormon brings a remarkable settling of our faith in Jesus Christ.

Moreover, we need the ordinances and covenants we remember and renew each week as we take the sacrament.

Our faith grows and develops as we regularly and consistently work to build our discipleship along with others who are as committed as we are. Here are Grettel and Micah.

Grettel Garcia: “I remember being in Young Women when I was twelve and asking my dad, ‘Why can’t we just be at home?’ I didn’t want to go to an activity. He told me, ‘Sometimes we go for ourselves, and sometimes we go for the people who are there.’ And I really felt it in my life. Even this last Sunday I was struggling, and I was able to be helped by somebody at church. And then during the week, one of my friends was struggling, and I was able to enlighten her.”

Micah Johnson: “I remember an analogy that I heard. The speaker talked about fire and how there are coals within the fire. He compared that to coming to church and being around others and sharing your light and knowledge and the truth with each other and learning from each other. He talked about when you take a coal out of the fire: maybe you don’t go to church one week or you don’t read your scriptures one day. It’s not going to immediately cause the coal to go dark. But you are going to remove yourself from the flame. And over time, one week turns into two. Two weeks turn into three. Months go by, and suddenly you are dark and you are cold inside. I think that is a way Satan gets us, by degrees. At least that is how he gets me. Going to church, continuing to take the sacrament, finding ways to serve others and be around others, and bearing your testimony are all ways you can be firmly planted within the flame of the gospel so that you are burning bright. And when you get kicked out, just quickly get kicked back in.”

President Dallin H. Oaks taught:

Members who forgo Church attendance and rely only on individual spirituality separate themselves from these gospel essentials: the power and blessings of the priesthood, the fulness of restored doctrine, and the motivations and opportunities to apply that doctrine.⁹

Finally, in the temple we separate ourselves from the commotion of the world. We unselfishly

serve others. And the endowment gives more clarity to the difficulties and the temptations before us. In the temple we quietly ponder why we are here upon the earth and the power and glory of our Savior in making our return to our Heavenly Father possible. Listen to Jessie’s comments.

Jessie Ebert: “I have been thinking a lot about the temple because, with all of the distractions, that is where I am able to find peace and redirect myself. It is a sacrifice to go, especially with so many exams and so much homework. It’s never-ending. The temple is something that I have tried to prioritize as my number one because I know that when I do that, everything else works out.”

I hope we all remember the beautiful story that President Kevin J. Worthen told last week about his experience in the temple. The temple brings miracles to our lives.

Diminish the Distractions and Magnify the Good

Next, consider diminishing the distractions and magnifying the good.

We live in a world with enormous amounts of information and influences pushing against us: entertainment, social media, the internet, and philosophies from every direction. Remember, President Nelson said, “Take charge of your own testimony. . . . Don’t pollute it with false philosophies of unbelieving men and women.”¹⁰ As we seek to grow our faith, we will need to do our very best to diminish those things that weaken our judgment and our faith and to conscientiously magnify those things that build our character and strengthen our faith in Jesus Christ.

Listen to several of your fellow students.

Kami Mitchell: “I think the world is just so noisy, and a lot of times it can really dampen your ability to feel the Spirit. But it is just the total opposite when you are surrounding yourself with things that are going to uplift you and when you are choosing to focus on the Christ-centered things. Notice just how much more peaceful it is to focus on the good and the uplifting things that are going to invite the Spirit rather than bring a lot of fear.”

Claire Hadlock: “I think that we all have questions at different times, and I think the key is that what sources we go to makes the difference between whether we keep our faith or whether we slip from it. I have seen so many people go to wrong sources. They just go to social media or they go to people who don’t believe in the Church, and that can totally destroy their faith. But I feel that people who go to the prophets or go to other people of faith can end up strengthening their faith when they feel that they are slipping. I just feel that is such a key to keeping your faith when you feel like you have questions.”

Michael Ebert: “I really like the scripture in Mosiah that says, ‘When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God’ (Mosiah 2:17). There is so much joy that comes when you are able to do something for someone else. It feels kind of contagious. You want to keep doing it after that because you are feeling the blessings of serving your Heavenly Father and also His children.”

Manoa Mangisi: “When your faith is being attacked by those doubts in your own mind, that is the time to turn to Jesus Christ. . . . I have found a lot of the things that strengthen your faith are the small things: just saying a little prayer here and there, reading our scriptures, and trying to take small moments to hear the Spirit. I find that those things strengthen our faith the most and that striving to do those things in times of doubt can really help us.”

Macee Pickup: “I know that it can be difficult—especially in today’s day and age with all the distractions and all the confusion that the world is trying to throw at us through our social media—but personally I try to fill my feed with gospel pages and with uplifting quotes and insights that will help me draw closer to Heavenly Father. When I see those posts and share those posts with other people, I message them or say, ‘This reminded me of you. I just hope you are doing okay’—that kind of thing. I know that is what Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ want me to do. That is a way of ministering, and that is a way of using technology

and social media for good. That is the way that Heavenly Father desires us to use it—to crowd out all of the noise and focus on the good.”

Be Spiritually Prepared for the Challenges and Tests in Your Life

Finally, realize that there will be tests in your life. There is no need to fear. Many tests will come not because of anything you did or didn’t do. They just come. Life is that way. The Savior said that His Father “maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”¹¹

You have only lived two decades, but even in those two decades you have already felt some of life’s tests. As you listen to Claire and Benton, think of tests that you have faced and how your faith has grown during those times.

Claire Hadlock: “My parents went through a pretty bad divorce when I was younger, and it really tested my faith because I didn’t know how to deal with it. It really brought me closer to Christ and helped me understand the Atonement a lot better. I think when you are younger, you kind of think of the Atonement as ‘Oh, I make a mistake and I repent.’ Through this experience I realized that Christ overcame everything, and He overcame all of our pain and all of our suffering. The Lord gave me so much peace throughout this experience. And if I hadn’t gone through it, I don’t think I would have the amount of faith that I do now in my Heavenly Father and in my Savior.”

Benton Worthen: “I grew up in Phoenix, Arizona. The particular suburb that I grew up in was not overly populated with members of the Church, though I had a pretty decent-sized Young Men group. But of those senior boys who I had grown up with, I was the only one who ended up going on a mission. At that period of my life, I was slipping, we could say, because it is easier to dim your light when other lights aren’t shining as bright—if that makes sense. And so within this certain period of my life, I felt very strongly that if I didn’t go on a mission soon, I was going to have some struggles. So through prayer, scripture study, and the basics that we are familiar with,

my Heavenly Father and my Savior Jesus Christ pulled me through to where I am today, regardless of the decisions that people I love made around me.”

The Lord comforted Joseph Smith:

Thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment;

*And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high.*¹²

Lehi promised his son Jacob, “[God] shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain.”¹³

These are the promises for the righteous.

There is no need to be fearful about the tests of life. As your faith in Jesus Christ is firm, the tests of mortality will shape your eternal destiny.

In summary, here are some of the important things I pray will strengthen your faith in Jesus Christ during the next five decades:

- Remember that you are a son or daughter of God and that the spiritual feelings that draw you to Him will grow as you respond to them.
- Keep as the burning, bright, powerful star in your life your hope in Jesus Christ.
- Look for the hand of the Lord in your life.
- Embrace the gifts and protections of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- Diminish the distractions and magnify the good that focuses your attention on the Savior and His teachings.
- Be spiritually prepared for the challenges and tests that will come into your life.

I want to give special thanks to my friends on the stand who have strengthened us today with their faith and their experiences. You can see more of their outstanding insights and counsel on BYU social media. After I have shared my testimony, Dr. Andrew Crane and this gifted choir will lead us as we stand and sing three verses of the hymn “How Firm a Foundation.” The closing prayer will be offered by Claire Hadlock, my granddaughter.

Your faith in Jesus Christ will bring you assurance in the choices you are making, happiness

in good times and in challenges, and peace in knowing your eternal destiny. Remember, there is a power that can cause things to happen that need to happen, and that power comes from your faith in Jesus Christ.

As the Lord’s servant, I bless you that as you reach out to the Savior, you will feel His hands reaching out to you. I bless you that as you keep Him central in your life, all will be well.

I share with you my sure and certain witness that He lives, that He is resurrected, and that He calls to each of us, “Come unto me.”¹⁴ He makes eternal life possible. He appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith. His priesthood power is found in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Russell M. Nelson is His prophet upon the earth. One day we will all kneel at His feet, and all the world will confess that He is the Only Begotten of the Father, the King of Kings, the noble Son of God.

I testify that to His true disciples, He gives the assurance of the hymn we will now sing: “Fear not, I am with thee. . . . I’ll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand, . . . Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.”¹⁵

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. From the third verse of “The Lord Is My Light,” *Hymns*, 2002, no. 89.

2. Jeffrey R. Holland, in Jeffrey R. Holland and Patricia T. Holland, “A Future Filled with Hope,” worldwide devotional for young adults, 8 January 2023, [churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2023/01/14holland](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2023/01/14holland).

3. Holland, “A Future Filled with Hope.”

4. Russell M. Nelson, “The Message: The Power of Hope,” *New Era*, July 2017; article excerpted from Nelson, “A More Excellent Hope,” BYU fire-side address, 8 January 1995.

5. Henry B. Eyring, “O Remember, Remember,” *Ensign*, November 2007.

6. 3 Nephi 20:26.

7. Moses 7:62.

8. Doctrine and Covenants 100:16.

9. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Need for a Church,” *Liahona*, November 2021.

10. Russell M. Nelson, "Overcome the World and Find Rest," *Liahona*, November 2022.
11. Matthew 5:45.
12. Doctrine and Covenants 121:7–8.

13. 2 Nephi 2:2.
14. Matthew 11:28.
15. From the third verse of "How Firm a Foundation," *Hymns*, 2002, no. 85.