

# “Nevertheless I Went Forth”

ANTHONY D. PERKINS

My wife, Christy, and I are so thrilled to be with you. When we were young and skinny BYU undergraduates, if someone had suggested we would return in thirty years to speak to students in the Marriott Center due to my calling in the Seventy, we would have laughed uncontrollably. Yet I suppose our visit today illustrates the marvelous wonder of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When we seek to be led by the Spirit and go forth in faith, often not knowing precisely what course to pursue, life can curiously turn out to be more abundant than we might ever have imagined.

You young adults are now living in what Elder Robert D. Hales of the Twelve Apostles has called “the decade of decision.” Many of the most important choices of your life will be made in your late teens and twenties, such as “going to the temple, serving a mission, getting an education, selecting an occupation, and choosing a companion and being sealed for time and for all eternity in the holy temple.”<sup>1</sup>

Today I speak particularly to those persons who are struggling with one of these important decisions—some perhaps almost paralyzed from fear of making the wrong decision and some maybe needing only a little reinforcement to remain confident in a decision made previously.

Four lessons of inspired decision making by Nephi in the well-known opening chapters of the Book of Mormon, if applied, can reduce your fears and increase your confidence to go forward.

## **Lesson 1: Qualify for the Spirit by Obeying Commandments**

The last sentence of Nephi’s sacred record encapsulates his life: “For thus hath the Lord commanded me, and I must obey.”<sup>2</sup> Nephi’s faith in and love for the Savior is exemplified in his actions to obey God’s commandments. He prayed, crying unto the Lord in his youth until he obtained a testimony.<sup>3</sup> He served as a missionary, teaching and inviting Ishmael’s family even without an “Elder Nephi” name tag.<sup>4</sup> He read the scriptures, searching the brass plates until he understood them and could teach from them.<sup>5</sup> He sought after and followed the direction of a living prophet, which blessed him spiritually and temporally.<sup>6</sup> Such obedience permitted the Holy Ghost to

---

*Anthony D. Perkins was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given on 4 February 2014.*

powerfully accompany Nephi throughout his life and yielded ongoing personal revelation.

As young adults who have been taught gospel truths and have accepted sacred covenants, you too must stay close to the Lord by keeping God's commandments. I testify that consistent obedience to small things such as reading the scriptures and praying daily, attending Church meetings, heeding the counsel of living prophets, and serving others will qualify you for the Spirit—and the revelation He brings.

Now, as obedient as Nephi was in life, he was not perfect. I repeat, Nephi was not perfect. He lamented his shortcomings with phrases such as this:

*O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities.*

*I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me.*<sup>7</sup>

But Nephi understood the doctrine of the Atonement, exercised faith in Jesus Christ unto repentance, and thus remained sufficiently worthy for the companionship of the Holy Ghost.

You too are not perfect, yet perfection is not a prerequisite to personal revelation. The prerequisite is daily repentance, because “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”<sup>8</sup> When Satan whispers that you are unworthy of personal revelation, as he always will, remember the Savior's teaching: “As often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me.”<sup>9</sup> If your repentance has been sincere and thorough,<sup>10</sup> and even though temptation may persist for a season, be assured that the cleansing power of the Atonement will bring the Spirit to guide you in the weighty decisions of life.

## **Lesson 2: Move Forward in Faith, Even Without Perfect Knowledge**

Put yourself in Nephi's sandals for a moment. Your father comes home to tell you

about a great spiritual experience whereby the Lord has commanded your family to leave behind all your wealth and travel through uncharted wilderness to a promised land. Wouldn't you like to know something about your journey and ultimate destination?

I suppose Nephi would have been thrilled if the Lord had clearly revealed his future: “You will leave Jerusalem but come back for brass plates and Ishmael's family, marry one of Ishmael's daughters and have children, travel southeast across the Arabian peninsula for many years, almost become a murder victim at the hands of your brothers (multiple times), build a ship, sail across an ocean, start building a village but then abandon it to escape persecution, and finally build a temple in your promised land.” But that degree of clarity is not how God worked with Nephi—even though Nephi was fully worthy of the Spirit and personal revelation—and that is *not* how He will work with you.

Perhaps seeing a Blu-ray-quality trailer of his entire life and its trials would have been so daunting that Nephi might have been too frightened to even leave Jerusalem. Instead, as his family traveled through the wilderness, new instructions only came to Nephi “from time to time.”<sup>11</sup> Even when he was building the ship, the Lord provided specific guidance only “from time to time.”<sup>12</sup> These glimpses “from time to time” turned out to be a great blessing to Nephi. Viewing his life journey with certainty up front would not have provided Nephi the soul-stretching and faith-forming experiences that helped him become a more Christlike man.

If you are waiting for God to unmistakably reveal to you what academic major to pursue, whom to marry, what job offer to accept, where to live, whether to go to graduate school or not, and how many children to bear, then you will likely never leave your apartment. Christy and I can testify that such personal revelation will come to you only “from time to time.”

Our Heavenly Father wants us to grow in every way while on this earth, and that includes developing our ability to weigh facts, render judgments, and make decisions. But He also invites us to bring our decisions to Him in prayer.<sup>13</sup> Answers to our prayers are personal revelation and come to us, as taught by Elder Richard G. Scott of the Twelve Apostles, “in one of *three* ways.”<sup>14</sup>

#### *Confirming Assurance*

“First,” Elder Scott says, “you can feel the peace, comfort, and assurance that confirm that your decision is right.”<sup>15</sup> In our married life, Christy and I have found that assurance for critical life-impacting decisions can be communicated through the scriptures, often after temple worship.

For example, after much pondering and prayer, we decided to abandon our new dream home in Dallas, accept a job transfer, and move with six young children to Beijing. But we desperately desired spiritual confirmation for such a momentous move. Divine assurance did come to us, in the temple, as we read these words in the Doctrine and Covenants: “It is my will that you should . . . tarry not many days in this place; . . . think not of thy property. Go unto the eastern lands.”<sup>16</sup> The voice of Jesus Christ in the scriptures, accompanied by powerful feelings from the Holy Ghost, unquestionably confirmed that our decision to move to China was right.

Nephi had similar experiences while building his ship. He said, “I . . . did go into the mount oft . . . ; wherefore the Lord showed unto me great things.”<sup>17</sup> When you need to confirm important decisions, spend time with the scriptures and at the temple so God can speak to you.<sup>18</sup> I emphasize *can* speak to you, because sometimes the Lord withholds confirming assurance.

#### *Unsettled Feeling*

The second way Heavenly Father answers prayers, Elder Scott says, is when “you can sense that unsettled feeling, the stupor of thought, indicating that your choice is wrong.”<sup>19</sup> While newlywed undergraduates at BYU, Christy and I learned valuable lessons about recognizing this type of prompting.

After my mission to Taiwan, I thought international law would be a good career choice. As Christy and I considered that possible future, we understood that five more years of expensive education lay ahead. The United States economy was in a deep recession and our funds were limited, so we reasoned that joining the air force ROTC would be a wise choice to pay for my schooling. But as I took the required tests and filled out the paperwork, we just could not get comfortable about making that commitment. No stupor of thought or dark feelings came—only an absence of peace. While joining the air force is a great option for some, we determined this was not the right course for us. Looking back, that seemingly illogical financial decision was inspired, in part, because I would have been a horrible lawyer!

While at BYU we learned another lesson about wrong choices that was painful in the short-term but a blessing in the long run. Christy and I found a used Mazda car that fit our small budget and prayed about purchasing it. An unsettled feeling came that I foolishly disregarded because the car’s interior looked cool and the car had a great sound system. I rationalized that the bad feeling would depart if the high-mileage engine were replaced. After the seller agreed and put a Toyota engine in that Mazda, the dark feeling remained, but we once again pushed it aside and handed over our meager funds. This car, which we cleverly named “Toyazda,” turned out to be a pile of junk. But we learned to recognize the “Toyazda feeling” that warns of a wrong choice.

### *Divine Trust*

Elder Scott said God answers prayers in a third way: “And this is the difficult one—you can feel no response.” Elder Scott continued:

*You may want to express thanks when that occurs, for it is an evidence of His trust. When you are living worthily and your choice is consistent with the Savior’s teachings and you need to act, proceed with trust.*<sup>20</sup>

Nephi’s third attempt to enter Jerusalem and obtain the brass plates illustrates how we should proceed with divine trust. Nephi recorded, “I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do. Nevertheless I went forth.”<sup>21</sup> What a great statement of faith: “Nevertheless I went forth!” Nephi had received no specific answer on how to accomplish his objective, but the time to act had arrived and could not be postponed. So he moved forward, knowing the Spirit would direct him when needed.

Moments will arrive during your decade of decision when you cannot procrastinate any longer and must act. A few months ago our family went out to see the latest *Star Trek* movie. At one point Spock questions the course of action that Captain Kirk has determined to pursue. Kirk responds, “You’re right! What I am about to do, it doesn’t make sense, it’s not logical, it is a gut feeling! I have no idea what I’m supposed to do. I only know what I can do.”<sup>22</sup>

Looking back at my life, what Captain Kirk calls a “gut feeling” has guided many important decisions: marriage to Christy, my BYU major, my first job, and graduate school. I had studied each decision out in my mind and prayed for confirmation, but I had to act on what felt right because no unmistakably divine assurance had yet come. Confirmation came only later.

I learned what Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Twelve Apostles taught:

*We will get promptings of the Spirit when we have done everything we can, when we are out in the sun working rather than sitting back in the shade praying for direction on the first step to take. Revelation comes when the children of God are on the move.*<sup>23</sup>

Some of you may be nervous about acting when heavenly assurance has not yet come. Take courage. Elder Scott promised, “When you are living righteously and are acting with trust, God will not let you proceed too far without a warning impression if you have made the wrong decision.”<sup>24</sup>

Our daughter Jenni uses a humorous example from the movie *Home Alone* to illustrate this concept. You might recall the scene where Kevin is surprised to be in an empty house but still yells out to his absent parents, “Guys, I’m eating junk and watching rubbish! You better come out and stop me!”<sup>25</sup> Jenni says her prayers sometimes feel similar: “I’m moving ahead to major in psychology, so if that is not right, please let me know!”

I testify that you are sons and daughters of loving heavenly parents who trust you to make decisions and move forward in faith without a perfect knowledge of what the future holds. And, as with Nephi, the Spirit will in due time confirm or warn of your chosen path.

### **Lesson 3: Commit Fully to Inspired Decisions and Live in the Present**

Nephi’s commitment on the journey to the promised land stands in stark contrast to that of his brothers Laman and Lemuel. Like Nephi, they made the decision to go, but their hearts never left Jerusalem. Nephi was fixing his broken bow to hunt for food and mining ore to build a ship while his brothers seem to have been lounging in a tent.

Today the world has too many Lamans and Lemuels. Schoolwork is undertaken half-heartedly because Halo 4, Angry Birds, or Facebook beckon us back into the tent;

employment is perfunctorily accepted while looking for the next, hopefully better job; a ward is moved into but never really joined because of a possible future relocation; and even marriage can be exited if inconvenient.

Jesus Christ's church needs committed men and women who are like Nephi. You will experience greater progress in life when you wholly commit to your decisions and strive to excel in your current circumstances even while you have an eye open to the future. Doors usually open to the fully committed.

Nephi exemplifies the wise counsel of President Thomas S. Monson:

*Sometimes we let our thoughts of tomorrow take up too much of today. Daydreaming of the past and longing for the future may provide comfort but will not take the place of living in the present. This is the day of our opportunity, and we must grasp it. . . .*

*. . . Learn from the past, prepare for the future, live in the present.*<sup>26</sup>

#### **Lesson 4: Draw on the Strength of Trusted Loved Ones to Sustain the Journey**

Even after we have sought the Spirit, moved forward with our decision, and are wholly committed to it, doubts may still arise and cause us to re-question our decision. In such circumstances a trusted family member or friend can provide counsel and strength to stay the course. When Lehi's family left Jerusalem, Nephi probably relied on his father, mother, and his brother Sam for this support. But I suggest that along the journey his new bride became that trusted anchor.

A comprehension of Nephi's wife did not come to me until I was in my late thirties. While vacationing in Utah from our home in Beijing, we visited the Church History Museum to view the Churchwide art competition. I was transfixed by a painting of Nephi lashed to the mast of a ship, soaked to the skin in a driving storm, and absolutely exhausted.<sup>27</sup> At that time I felt I could

relate to Nephi—I was bearing the burden of establishing my firm's position in China, striving to be a good father to six young children, and magnifying my Church calling. I felt pretty overwhelmed. I wondered whether we should remain in China as we had been directed by the Spirit to do.

But in the painting I also observed that at Nephi's side were his wife and one of his children. She was experiencing the same storm and challenges as Nephi, but her eyes were defiant and her strong arms were protectively wrapped around his shoulders. In that moment I realized that I too was blessed to have a loyal spouse offering her strength in my times of trial. And I hoped that I was a similar strength to her when she felt lashed to a mast raising six kids in the storm of a foreign land. Together we recommitted to our decision of living in China.

Since that museum visit I have spent time looking for Nephi's wife amidst the opening pages of the Book of Mormon. My studies have caused me to ponder their courtship and life together.

What did she see in Nephi? He wrote that he was "large in stature."<sup>28</sup> Does that imply she was enthralled by Thor-like ripped abs? I believe it was his spiritual strength that drew her heart to him. When Nephi came to the home of Ishmael, she observed a powerful missionary. On the trip to Lehi's camp she heard him raise his voice in faith and forgive his attackers. Brethren, preserving and enhancing the spiritual strength you developed (or will yet develop) as a missionary or in other righteous service is your best asset in becoming a desirable husband and father.

What did Nephi see in her? At Ishmael's home he was likely impressed by this young woman whose heart was softened by the word of God.<sup>29</sup> On the journey out of Jerusalem he observed a woman unwilling to rebel and prepared to move forward in faith, and we might assume she was the courageous daughter of

Ishmael who pleaded with Nephi’s brothers to not harm him.<sup>30</sup> Sisters, being able to develop spiritual sensitivity, faith, and courage to follow Jesus Christ is among your best qualities in becoming an incredible wife and mother.

I invite each of you to become the type of person that your current or future spouse can draw on for wise counsel and strength. Drifting aimlessly without spiritual or temporal purpose will not enhance your prospects for a successful marriage. Do not retreat into an impenetrable shell because of prior relationship rejections and pains. Invest yourself in finding a mutually compatible companion and be willing to move forward in faith when you feel you have found the right person. Do not let fears of repeating the broken marriage of your parents or your friends keep you from that crowning covenant.

I am confident that Nephi’s wife strengthened his resolve to do the many hard things the Lord commanded him to do. I testify that in our day, a virtuous man and a worthy woman, sealed for time and all eternity in the temple, can likewise do difficult things as equal partners.

To stick with our decisions in times of doubt, each of us needs to draw on the strength of a trusted friend, family member, or spouse. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Twelve Apostles shared an experience that happened at BYU not long after his 1963 marriage. Elder Holland related:

*I turned to Pat and said something like this: “Honey, should we give up? I can get a good job and carve out a good living for us. I can do some things. I’ll be okay without a degree. Should we stop trying to tackle what right now seems so difficult to face?” . . .*

*Then my beloved little bride did what she has done for 45 years since then. She grabbed me by the lapels and said, “We are not going back. We are not going home. The future holds **everything** for us.”<sup>31</sup>*

### “I Will Lead You Along”

The future did hold everything for Jeff and Pat Holland, for Nephi and his wife, and for Tony and Christy Perkins—and it does for you. Jesus Christ promises:

*Ye are little children, and ye have not as yet understood how great blessings the Father hath in his own hands and prepared for you;*

*And ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along.<sup>32</sup>*

I promise that if you will apply the lessons learned from Nephi and modern prophets about making decisions, you will be led along with personal revelation from time to time and your life will be “of curious workmanship,”<sup>33</sup> uniquely pleasing to the Lord. I invite you to do the following:

1. Qualify for the Spirit by obeying commandments.
2. Move forward in faith, even without perfect knowledge.
3. Commit fully to inspired decisions and live in the present.
4. Draw on the strength of trusted loved ones to sustain the journey.

As you progress through your decade of decision, may you have the faith to say, as did Nephi, “I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do. Nevertheless I went forth.”<sup>34</sup>

I know that Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, are the source of all our blessings in mortality and in the eternities. Jesus taught, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”<sup>35</sup> Be confident that the Savior will fulfill His promise to lead you along to an abundant life, even when the immediate path sometimes seems uncertain. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Notes

1. Robert D. Hales, "To the Aaronic Priesthood: Preparing for the Decade of Decision," *Ensign*, May 2007, 48.
2. 2 Nephi 33:15.
3. See 1 Nephi 2:16.
4. See 1 Nephi 7:4–5.
5. See 1 Nephi 22:1.
6. See 1 Nephi 16:23–32.
7. 2 Nephi 4:17–18; see also a pleading Nephi in a painting entitled *Nephi's Broken Bow* by Jeremy Winborg, at [jeremywinborg.com/religious-art/nephis-broken-bow](http://jeremywinborg.com/religious-art/nephis-broken-bow).
8. Romans 3:23.
9. Mosiah 26:30; see also Craig A. Cardon, "The Savior Wants to Forgive," *Ensign*, May 2013, 15–18.
10. See D&C 58:42–43.
11. 1 Nephi 16:29.
12. 1 Nephi 18:1.
13. See D&C 9:7–9.
14. Richard G. Scott, "Using the Supernal Gift of Prayer," *Ensign*, May 2007, 10; emphasis in original.
15. Scott, "Supernal," 10.
16. D&C 66:5–7.
17. 1 Nephi 18:3.
18. See D&C 18:34–36. Elder Robert D. Hales has taught, "For when we want to speak to God, we pray. And when we want Him to speak to us, we search the scriptures. . . . If you have not heard His voice speaking to you lately, return with new eyes and new ears to the scriptures" ("Holy Scriptures: The Power of God unto Our Salvation," *Ensign*, November 2006, 26–27).
19. Scott, "Supernal," 10.
20. Scott, "Supernal," 10.
21. 1 Nephi 4:6–7.
22. IMDb's page for "Quotes for Captain Kirk (Character)" from *Star Trek into Darkness* (2013), at [imdb.com/character/ch0001448/quotes](http://imdb.com/character/ch0001448/quotes).
23. Dallin H. Oaks, "In His Own Time, in His Own Way," *Ensign*, August 2013, 24.
24. Scott, "Supernal," 10.
25. IMDb's page for "Quotes for Kevin McCallister (Character)" from *Home Alone* (1990), at [imdb.com/character/ch0004114/quotes](http://imdb.com/character/ch0004114/quotes).
26. Thomas S. Monson, "In Search of Treasure," *Ensign*, May 2003, 20, 22; emphasis in original.
27. See the painting entitled *Helpmeet* by K. Sean Sullivan, shown in the Fifth International Art Competition sponsored by the Museum of Church History and Art and reproduced in "The Book of Mormon: A Worldwide View," *Ensign*, August 2000, 39.
28. 1 Nephi 2:16.
29. See 1 Nephi 7:4–5.
30. See 1 Nephi 7:19.
31. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Remember Lot's Wife," BYU devotional address, 13 January 2009; emphasis in original.
32. D&C 78:17–18.
33. 1 Nephi 16:10; 18:1.
34. 1 Nephi 4:6–7.
35. John 10:10.