

Persistence, Patience, and Posies

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We all have individual plans for our lives. Some of your plans may be very detailed; others may only be brief outlines. What I do know is that part of your plan was to come to BYU for your education.

My plan also included BYU for my undergraduate education. My father was not a member of the Church, but he was very supportive of education. He would often help us with science projects or on a variety of our homework assignments, particularly math—he was really good at math. My mother was a member of the Church, and each week she took us to Sunday meetings and made sure we had rides to the weekly youth meetings, which at that time were Primary for the children and Mutual for the teenagers. From my teachers in these Church programs I learned the basic gospel principles.

As a teenager I also learned about BYU. When the time came I applied to the colleges in my hometown of San Diego, California, as well as BYU. My plan included the study of medical laboratory science so that I could work as a technologist in a hospital setting. My plan was pretty set in stone, I thought. I actually put in my high school yearbook that I was going to go to BYU and that I was going to be a medical technologist. I do not know where this desire

to be a medical technologist stemmed from. My father was a pharmacist, so there was a bit of the medical profession influence in my home, but I did not know anyone who worked as a medical technologist.

When I came to BYU I began my classes for the medical laboratory science major. Several semesters of chemistry were required, and I soon learned that I did not really love chemistry as much as a medical laboratory science major should. It was then that I realized my plan would need to change. I visited many colleges on campus and explored a variety of majors. Many were of interest to me. Each week I wrote handwritten letters home to my parents—this was before cell phones, email, and texting—and each week each letter contained a different idea regarding a possible major. I'm not sure what my parents told people I was studying, because I didn't know what I was studying either.

This situation reminds me of a poem by Robert Frost:

Patricia Ravert was associate dean of the BYU College of Nursing when this devotional was given on 10 July 2012.

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth.*

The last stanza reads:

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.¹*

I did not know which road to take, and when I finished my freshman year I returned home to San Diego, discouraged because I had not settled on a major. Near the end of the summer I received a letter with a BYU return address. It was an acceptance letter from the College of Nursing for the fall semester. In my search for a major I had visited the College of Nursing, but I didn't realize I had applied. In today's world I can assure you that would not happen, but what an opportunity that was for me. My plan was changing!

After consulting with my parents I decided to change my major to nursing. This change in my plan has had life-altering effects for forty years. I've been a nurse for more than thirty-eight years—now don't start counting how old I am, but yes, that's a long time—and I've done a variety of other things with my major. I've enjoyed the profession of nursing, and I've thoroughly enjoyed my time here at BYU. I'm anxious to begin serving in a new role as the dean of the College of Nursing, and I'm sure that after I finish this talk, being dean will cause more anxiety than speaking does right now. But I know I can be of service, and I'm greatly appreciative of the opportunity to do so.

Of Posies and Making Plans

Another part of my plan is always to enjoy the beauty of the world, particularly flow-

ers. I enjoy flowers in many ways: as posies, which is a small bouquet of flowers; in flower gardens; and in artwork such as paintings and sculptures of flowers. The BYU campus has outstanding floral displays throughout the year. When I walk across campus I often stop and admire the flowers. Wherever I am and wherever I travel, I strive to take advantage of the opportunities to visit gardens, take pictures, and admire God's creations.

I have special feelings for some flowers. Daffodils in the spring remind me of the renewing of life and new beginnings. They have always been a favorite of mine. When I was a young woman in Mutual we earned felt seals, or emblems, to mark our progress in the program. The felt seals were sewn onto blue bandalos, or sashes, which we wore each week. I created a felt daffodil to add to my bandolo to remind me of renewal and new beginnings. There are also two flowers that remind me of my mother: purple pansies and poinsettias. My mother would sing the Primary song "Little Purple Pansies" to us, and she often had pansies in her garden. Her birthday was in December, and whenever I see poinsettias I am reminded of her.

I would also like to share another favorite flower. Clematis flowers grow on climbing vines that twist and curl around supporting structures to anchor the plant as it climbs. I took a picture in France not far from Giverny, where the French impressionist painter Claude Monet lived and maintained beautiful gardens. The clematis vines were thick with gorgeous blossoms and covered the building. A few years ago I searched for a home to purchase, and one of my requirements was a nice yard with flower beds. That year I closed on a home in November and was excited to find two clematis vines in the backyard. I thought the plan included two gorgeous vines on either side of the back steps the next spring and summer. The plant on the left side has many blossoms, but the right vine has not done well. Some of the leaves have

died, yet the plant is persistent and occasionally has a few small blossoms. These blossoms are purple—a little bit of a different color from the other vine’s flowers. I am sure when the previous owner planted these vines, the plan was to have full, beautiful vines on each side of the steps. There has been a bump in this plan.

Persistence, Perseverance, and Progress

Most of our plans have bumps along the way. Your plan may include an education program that because of limited resources cannot admit all applicants. Your bump may be that you are not able to get into your program or that you have to apply to it more than once. Maybe you will find some of your courses especially challenging. This is when persistence and patience are particularly helpful.

Persistence is a stick-to-it attitude, even when things are difficult. Consistent individual actions show persistence. As you practice persistence, such as by daily studying for that challenging course or by completing the necessary tasks to reapply to a program, your daily persistence develops into perseverance.

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin spoke regarding perseverance:

Perseverance means to continue in a given course until we have reached a goal or objective, regardless of obstacles, opposition, and other counter-influences. . . .

Perseverance is a positive, active characteristic. It is not idly, passively waiting and hoping for some good thing to happen. . . .

. . . Perseverance is vital to success in any endeavor, whether spiritual or temporal, large or small, public or personal. Think seriously of how important perseverance, or the lack of it, has been in your own endeavors, such as Church callings, schooling, or employment. I believe that essentially all significant achievement results largely from perseverance. . . .

. . . Perseverance is essential to us in learning and living.²

Sometimes persistence is needed for the short term in completing a difficult assignment or course. At the time it may feel overwhelming, yet with patience and sincere effort we can complete the goal. Sometimes we need to be persistent and persevere over a long period of time—maybe over a lifetime.

A woman I know—I will call her Suzanne—has persisted daily in a very different plan than she ever imagined as a young woman. She has an optimistic and positive attitude, finding joy in the ups and downs of life. She completed her degree in nursing, married, and began her family, which eventually included three daughters. As her second daughter began to grow, Suzanne realized she was not developing normally. After a period of time her daughter was diagnosed with a form of autism that severely affected her social and communication skills. The plan for Suzanne’s family was altered. A few years later Suzanne delivered her third daughter, who eventually was also diagnosed with autism. Suzanne’s husband was a supportive, involved father, and together they altered their plan, knowing that they could handle this challenge. When the girls were ages eleven, thirteen, and eighteen, their father unexpectedly passed away from a heart attack while out on his daily run. Again Suzanne’s plan was greatly altered. She continues to find joy as she has realized that life doesn’t have to be perfect to be wonderful. She is persistent and will continue to persevere over her lifetime.

We often are admonished to endure to the end, as in Matthew 24:13, “But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved”; and in Doctrine and Covenants 50:5, “Blessed are they who are faithful and endure, . . . for they shall inherit eternal life.” For many years I struggled with the word *endure* because “to the end” seemed so far off and overwhelming. I came to realize that what I really needed was persistence as I worked on my daily to-do list.

In the last general Young Women meeting President Thomas S. Monson offered this suggestion:

*Seek heavenly guidance one day at a time. Life by the yard is hard; by the inch it's a cinch. Each of us can be true for just one day—and then one more and then one more after that—until we've lived a lifetime guided by the Spirit, a lifetime close to the Lord, a lifetime of good deeds and righteousness.*³

As we strive to live our lives by the inch we must examine the contents of our daily to-do lists. We all want to be successful, but continuing to focus on the wrong to-do items puts us on the wrong plan or road and will only slow our progress. C. S. Lewis wrote:

*We all want progress. . . . If you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; and in that case the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man.*⁴

If life is not what you would like, this is where the concepts of Alma 5 come into play. Alma 5 is the “personal inventory” chapter:

And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?

Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you? Do you look forward with an eye of faith, and view this mortal body raised in immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body?

I say unto you, can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth? [Alma 5:14–16]

So I ask myself, and I ask all of you: Are the right things on our to-do lists? Are we focusing on the tasks that will have the outcomes we desire so that our behavior is an example of who we desire to be? Do the expressions on our faces show that we have His image on our countenances? If we need to make changes, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf reminded us that it is much easier to make minor course corrections along the way. But if we are way off course, there is a way back. President Uchtdorf said:

*No matter how terribly off course you are, no matter how far you have strayed, the way back is certain and clear. Come, learn of the Father; offer up a sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Have faith, and believe in the cleansing power of the infinite Atonement of Jesus the Christ.*⁵

I urge you to strive to stay focused on a plan that is in line with the basic gospel principles. The gospel principles sound so simple. We know them from Primary and Sunday School:

- Read and study the scriptures and conference talks.
- Consistently pray.
- Obey the commandments.
- Attend and be actively engaged in Church meetings and callings.
- Keep your covenants.
- Attend the temple.

The gospel principles are foundational to happiness in our individual plans. Elder M. Russell Ballard said:

*The Church is a mooring in this tempestuous sea, an anchor in the churning waters of change and division, and a beacon to those who value and seek righteousness. The Lord uses this Church as a tool in pulling His children throughout the world toward the protection of His gospel.*⁶

The Patience to Reach Your Goals

Another important thing to remember is to not allow your enthusiasm to be stifled by the discouragement that will inevitably come to you. As we are persistent and persevere in living the gospel principles, we also must trust Heavenly Father and His timing. We don't always know His plan for us. We must be patient and continue in faith to understand.

President Uchtdorf spoke of patience:

Brigham Young taught that when something came up which he could not comprehend fully, he would pray to the Lord, "Give me patience to wait until I can understand it for myself." And then Brigham would continue to pray until he could comprehend it.

We must learn that in the Lord's plan, our understanding comes "line upon line, precept upon precept." In short, knowledge and understanding come at the price of patience.⁷

The principles of persistence and patience have served me well in my life. After I changed my major to nursing, I first obtained an associate degree and then continued on to complete my bachelor's degree in my early married life. I had a goal to return to school for a master's degree. When I had five children I began the nursing administration master's program at BYU. I took one class a semester. People often would say, "How can you take one class per semester? You may never finish." Well, I knew that if I continued I would. I was persistent and patient, and after five years I finished the degree. Twenty-five years after beginning my college education at BYU, I again returned to school, this time at the University of Utah to earn a doctorate degree. My plan has been

different than that of many others, but with persistence, patience, and faith I have enjoyed the journey—the hard times and especially the easy and rewarding times.

Now, back to the posies. Of the two clematis vines in my backyard, even with persistence and patience the one has not prospered. I have added fertilizer and water; it has not flourished, but I still have enjoyed the few flowers it has produced. The vine is not perfect, but it is still wonderful in its own way. I urge you to be persistent and persevere and exercise patience to find your plan and reach your goals.

I have a testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel. I know that Joseph Smith served as the Lord's instrument to restore the true gospel to the earth. The Book of Mormon is the word of God, and it contains the gospel principles that, if followed, will lead us back to Heavenly Father. I am very grateful for Jesus Christ, who is my Redeemer and Savior. I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken" (1916).
2. Joseph B. Wirthlin, "Never Give Up," *Ensign*, November 1987, 8, 9, 10.
3. Thomas S. Monson, "Believe, Obey, and Endure," *Ensign*, May 2012, 129.
4. C. S. Lewis, chapter 5, paragraph 2, in *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 28.
5. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "A Matter of a Few Degrees," *Ensign*, May 2008, 60.
6. M. Russell Ballard, "That the Lost May Be Found," *Ensign*, May 2012, 98–99.
7. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Continue in Patience," *Ensign*, May 2010, 58; quoting *DBY*, 224, and *D&C* 98:12.