

# Making the Right Choices

RICHARD G. SCOTT

I express profound gratitude for the privilege and blessing of being with each of you tonight. I thank you for the sacrifice you have made to be here. I know that gathered throughout the world there is a very select group of righteous young men and women who love the Lord and want above all else to obey His commandments. Although this message is being broadcast from Brigham Young University, it is intended to be a personal conversation with you, individually, wherever you are.

I have been blessed to be in the presence of some of you in smaller groups as I have traveled throughout the world. As I have looked into your faces, I have been touched to the very core of my being. There is a radiance, an excitement, an expression of calm assurance, and, above all, an aura of purity and righteousness that emanate from you. I am not speaking of physical beauty. I am referring to something far more important—the peace and power that radiate from worthy, righteous, purposeful lives. It is here tonight. You can feel it wherever you are.

You are now making some of the most critically important decisions of your life—decisions that will have a profound influence on your happiness, on what you will become, and on how you will spend eternity. I have humbly, repeatedly sought the help of the

Lord to be able to share with you some of the principles that guide correct decisions. I know they are true. They are founded in doctrine, and they have been proven in the crucible of my own life. You do not have the assurance of making the right choices in essential matters without divine guidance. I will give suggestions concerning how that help can be obtained. I have also prayed that somehow, while we are together, you can feel the love of the Lord for you personally, and also that He will convey a message to your mind and heart through the Spirit tailored to your personal needs.

The spiritual moments in your life will often come in clusters when you feel so occupied that it seems difficult to record them. Yet that special effort is powerfully rewarded when you take a few moments to crystalize in a permanent record the sacred impressions of the Holy Spirit. Begin tonight, even if you have to borrow paper and pencil to do it.

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*Richard G. Scott was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 13 January 2002.*

With all the capacity that I possess, I counsel you to strengthen your testimony that there is in very deed a Heavenly Father who is in total control. You must come to really know God through the scriptures, prayer, and the testimonies of His chosen. Then He can guide you in the application of His teachings in every circumstance. He has a specific plan for your life. He will reveal parts of that plan to you when needed as you seek His guidance with faith and consistent obedience. You may have found portions of it realized already in your life. His Son has made you free—not from the consequences of your acts, but free to make choices. Your Father’s eternal purpose is for you to be successful in this mortal experience. Be attentive to the personal guidance given to you through the Holy Spirit. Continue to live worthy to receive it. Record it so that you can fulfill it. Then it will be available throughout your life. I am confident that as you pray for that help, some of it will come while we are together. That instruction will be far more important to you than anything you will hear from me.

Do you feel overwhelmed, wondering if you can make the correct choices, uncertain of how to proceed? Does trying your best not seem to be good enough? I understand what you are going through. Earlier in my life I have felt the same way. It took me a long time to figure out that part of the plan for our growth on earth is to have periods of life when we have far more important things to do than we can possibly accomplish. You know that feeling when there is more weight on your shoulders than you think you can possibly bear, far more questions than answers. That is a test to teach the importance of establishing priorities. It emphasizes the wondrous treasure of time. When you encounter more vital things to do than you can possibly accomplish yourself, you will learn how the Lord can, through guidance of the Spirit, give you help and assurance. Have you ever had the feeling that the walls are closing

in, that you are not in control of your life, that you simply cannot do it? Those feelings of frustration are not from the Lord. They are caused by Satan. He wants you to bolt and run when you encounter a difficult growth challenge. A sacred personal experience may help you.

### **Worry Versus Concern**

Some people divert their best efforts from constructive accomplishment by investing them in mental anguish and continual worry. The Lord has taught me a great lesson about worry that I now share with you. After completing meaningful full-time missions, my lovely Jeanene and I were sealed in the temple. We began life together with every expectation of happiness. I was blessed through the kindness of the Lord to obtain a job in a new, highly developmental pioneer effort to place a nuclear power plant in a submarine. The work was fascinating, challenging, and absorbing. When combined with the natural growth experiences that come with the formation of a new family and Church assignments, I found each day filled to overflowing.

Within eight months I was being examined by a doctor to determine if I had ulcers. For weeks I returned home from work each night with a severe headache, and only after long, quiet periods of isolation could I calm my nerves sufficiently to sleep briefly and return to work the next day. I began to prayerfully consider my plight. All I wanted to do was to be a worthy husband and father and honorably carry out my Church and professional assignments. Yet my best efforts produced frustration, worry, and illness. In time the Lord led me to a solution. I was prompted to divide mentally—and physically, where possible—all of the challenges, tasks, and assignments given to me into two categories. All of the things for which I felt responsibility but for which I could do nothing to resolve I put in a basket called “worry.” Then all of those things for which I had some ability to control

or resolve I put into a basket called “concern.” I realized I could not resolve those things in the worry basket, so I tried hard to forget them. Later in the process I learned that putting them into the worry basket didn’t mean they wouldn’t be taken care of. They were resolved by those who could best handle them—and most often that was the Lord Himself. The items in the concern basket were ordered in priority. I conscientiously tried to resolve them to the best of my ability. Although I could not always fulfill all of them on schedule or to the degree of competence I desired, I did my conscientious best.

As I was learning to control worry, occasionally I would feel my stomach muscles tighten and tension overcome me. I would cease whatever I was doing and, with earnest prayer for support, concentrate on relaxing and overcoming the barrier that worry produced in my life. I would mentally say, “I am not going to do another thing until I begin to control my emotions.” Over a period of time those efforts were blessed by the Lord. I came to understand how He is willing to fortify, guide, and direct every phase of life. The symptoms of illness passed, and I learned how to face tasks under pressure.

### **The Lord’s Help**

No matter how difficult the problems that surround you, the Lord knows how to resolve them. As you exercise faith, doing what you can, He will help you handle those things within your capability. He will bring into your path priesthood leaders who can counsel and advise, friends who can give you support, and parents who can provide answers. Through the avenue of prayer and the path of inspiration, He will help you know what to do. It is a process that takes time to master, but knowing it exists should give you great comfort as you face the difficult decisions you must now make in life.

The Lord puts challenges in your path to mold your character. For your own personal growth He will often let you struggle with a matter for a while, even when you are pleading

for help. But as you follow true principles, He will finally see you through. He intends that when you have reached your extremity, you will turn to Him for comfort, peace, and assistance. He will send it through the quiet prompting of the Spirit. He will give reassurance and guidance that are essential in correcting decisions in your life.

You are learning powerful, eternal lessons. Be sure you understand them. The Lord does not abandon your urgent pleas, nor is He ever, for even a moment, unmindful of your anguish and heartache. He hears every supplication. He invariably answers according to spiritual law. Understanding that law will help you appreciate how the Lord answers your prayers. His silence and seeming absence at times are a powerful means of expanding your vision and understanding as you continue in faith to do your best.

Consider this example. A racehorse may resist efforts to develop his potential to run, preferring to enjoy the beauty and rich green grass of the pasture. Yet, even at times against his will, if the horse will train, there develops a new excitement, a grander pleasure—the incomparable joy of winning. The pleasure of the pasture is not diminished, but his joy of life is expanded.

### **Answers to Prayers**

Seldom will you receive all at once a complete answer from the Lord. It will come a piece at a time. Inspiration comes in packets so that you will develop and grow and not remain as a child, given everything; also so that you will appreciate it, give thanks for it, treasure it, and apply it. Moreover, it will seldom come as the prayer is offered, rather in quiet moments when the Spirit can most effectively touch your mind and heart. Hence the need for periods of quiet time to keep perspective and to be instructed and strengthened. Discover how a clean, neat, quiet place can enhance spiritual direction in your life.

Your capacity is greater than you can possibly imagine. Satan will try mightily to discourage you. Initially he will encourage you to do many worthwhile things, but not the essential ones. Then he will try to lead you through rationalization into gray areas and subsequently into dark ones. Beware of rationalization. It is to twist something you know to be true into a pattern that appears to support a deviation from truth. Rationalization would lead you down blind alleys. It would drain spiritual power. It barricades the path to happiness because it distorts your understanding of truth.

When you seek inspiration to help make decisions, the Lord will give gentle promptings that require you to think, to exercise faith, to work, to struggle at times, and then to act. It is a stepwise process to finally reach an inspired conclusion. It is unlikely that the whole answer to an important problem will come all at once. The Lord's pattern allows you to grow. Satan's method would make you more bound to his ways, with the resultant loss of agency.

I was once present when the Lord inspired mightily a husband as he gave his wife a priesthood blessing. The blessing addressed specific needs in her life. He gave counsel that would bring a solution to her difficulties. It was a beautiful experience, evidence of the power the Lord permits to be exercised through a righteous priesthood bearer. Yet this blessing did not benefit her as much as it might have. She did not write down the promises made. Even shortly after the remarkable blessing she could not remember the counsel given. She did not realize that fulfillment of the blessing would require effort on her part. The truth is that we must do all we are capable of doing to help fulfill a blessing. That effort includes the exercise of faith; the consistent, diligent application of counsel given; and abundant, prayerful expression of gratitude to our Father in Heaven, the source of the promised blessings. This truth applies whether it be a priesthood blessing

or an impression from the Spirit to our mind and heart.

Your efforts to distill truth from reading and pondering the scriptures, from analyzing and striving to understand the inspired messages of the prophets, will provide you with an armory of truth. That truth will protect you from evil influences and lay a foundation for happiness, security, and purpose in your life. It will help you make correct choices. Initially these truths are accepted on faith. The confirming witness of their validity comes as you apply them in your life and as you express gratitude for the growth, maturity, and blessings that come from their use. That confirmation strengthens your capacity to discipline your life to avoid those things you know to be unproductive and harmful. Such a witness provides encouragement and the confidence to center your life in the teachings of the Savior and the plan of happiness of the Father.

#### **Analogy of an Orchestra**

An analogy will help you understand what is happening to you. I wrote down these impressions as I watched an impressive composer conduct an orchestra of gifted musicians. It has helped me understand more clearly our Father's plan of happiness. The conductor had created the musical score being played. He understood better than anyone else what he desired be accomplished through the music. He had crafted a role for each individual instrument. He was anxious to communicate that vision to the musicians so that, working in harmony together, they could make reality what he had defined in a complex musical score.

Each instrumentalist or percussionist had his or her part to play. They were experienced musicians and had polished innate talents through long, tedious hours of practice. They had studied their specific parts privately and attempted to master them.

It was not until they began to perform together under the direction of an inspired leader that the full beauty and grandeur of their combined efforts could be realized. The result was overwhelmingly moving and edifying. Each individual carefully followed the conductor, all striving to the utmost of their capability to play their part accurately with feeling, emotion, and precision. They were not forced to perform. It was done willingly. Although individual performances were outstanding, it was the combined effort of all that created the sublime result. Could you imagine how one discordant note could mar or destroy the power of their combined efforts? How one individual intentionally modifying the musical score could create havoc and destroy the beauty of the others' performances?

I understood with greater clarity how our Father in Heaven and His Beloved Son have schooled us in the premortal life, preparing us for this mortal experience that we might make the most of it. We can receive individual guidance from the Spirit to perfect our own talents and abilities. We can learn to work together and yield our will to the divine conductor. We become fitted for the unique contribution that we are expected to make in fulfilling His personal plan for us. Certainly those who work diligently to learn truth and to live it willingly will make the greatest progress here. Just as it would be a demoralizing experience for an untrained individual to attempt to play in an orchestra of skilled musicians, so it would be painful punishment to attempt to live in a celestial realm for which you are not prepared. Your personal understanding of truth, the willing obedience to it, and the resulting growth, development, and perfection obtained in mortal life will determine your happiness here and lay the foundation for what your contribution will be in the eternities.

A musician can perfect his or her skill with practice and determined effort to succeed—privately, correcting mistakes as they come. That effort is enhanced by the influence of a caring teacher who is anxious to share counsel for improvement and to identify specific areas where performance can be bettered. In like manner, the Lord through the Holy Spirit can perform those functions in your life so that this mortal experience may yield the development, perfection, and understanding that you should gain in your personal plan of happiness. If you qualify here, you can serve in the celestial kingdom.

### **Learn the Feelings of the Spirit**

How can you determine whether an impression is a prompting from the Lord, a temptation from the evil one, or the product of your own mind? One answer is explained in Ether 12:6:

*And now, I, Moroni, . . . would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.*

If you have a feeling that an impression has come through inspiration, “try your faith” by diligently living it. When it is truly a prompting of the Lord, there will be a confirmation that what you have done is right. You will learn what it feels like to have that witness. In time that feeling will become more certain than what you see or hear. A word of caution: Recognize that an individual who is violating commandments of the Lord will find it very difficult to discern a prompting of the Spirit from the powerful emotions that can be stimulated through transgression. I am confident that is one of the reasons that some marriages fail. Two individuals who have allowed themselves to violate the laws of chastity during courtship

cannot expect to clearly perceive the answer to their prayer regarding marriage. Under such circumstances, seeking to discern the guidance of the Spirit is like trying to savor the delicate flavor of a raspberry while chewing on a red-hot jalapeño pepper.

Don't judge yourself by what you understand of your potential. Trust in the Lord and what He can do with your dedicated heart and willing mind (see D&C 64:34). Order your life more effectively and eliminate trivia, meaningless detail, and activity. They waste the perishable, fixed, and limited resource of time. Choose to emphasize those matters that have an eternal consequence.

Permanent worthwhile growth is attainable, but not without great effort and the honest application of truth. Worthy accomplishment is founded in integrity. Righteousness is fundamental to happiness and desirable attainment. Righteousness is rooted in a pure heart. And indeed it protects one from contamination and the filth of the world. Righteous love is the supreme motivation for constructive change. The examples of our Father in Heaven and the Savior and Their teachings are the perfect source of motivation and direction for life.

May this teaching of the Master benefit you as much as it has me: "Be patient in afflictions, for thou shalt have many; but endure them, for, lo, I am with thee, even unto the end of thy days" (D&C 24:8). I know that promise is fulfilled.

As you discipline yourself in careful obedience to commandments of the Lord, you will qualify to receive inspiration and direction in your life. You will grow in discipline, capacity, devotion, understanding, compassion, and joyous service. Your worthy life will allow you to interpret and apply the inspiration that will come through the Holy Ghost. Your love of Heavenly Father and His Son will increase. It will be a love of reverence, awe, and gratitude of a child

to the greatest of all. It will become a love of total willingness to be obedient to Their will. It will result from a pure desire and willing determination to serve Them above all else.

### **Conclusion**

In closing I would share some of the innermost feelings of my heart. I do not know when I will have the opportunity to speak to you individually again. Though life now seems difficult, hold on to that iron rod. You are making better progress than you realize. Your struggles are defining character, discipline, and confidence in the promises of your Father in Heaven and the Savior as you consistently obey Their counsel. You are so important. You are so needed. There are so few willing to make the sacrifices you are making to live righteously. You will develop the sensitivity, love, and kindness to rejoice within the bonds of an eternal marriage. You will bless your children with an insight the world can never give them. Your example will set the course of their lives. You are needed to strengthen the growing kingdom of the Lord, to be the role models for so many more who will embrace the truths of the gospel.

This world is in trouble. The nation from which I speak is in difficulty. If you live elsewhere, your nation is struggling also. There is a continual crumbling of obedience to principle, the bedrock of civilization and an absolutely essential ingredient to happiness. Oh, there can be transitory pleasure from power, influence, or material wealth. But true, lasting happiness, the kind that is felt in the early hours of the morning when you are honest with yourself, can only be obtained by obedience to the teachings of God. Honesty, integrity, chastity, virtue, willingness to forego for the moment something seemingly desirable for a greater future good—these are essential to true success in life.

Develop the capacity, when circumstances demand, to lay everything on the altar to defend a principle. There are so few willing to do that. The world needs men and women like you who are willing to place principle above personal gain, businessmen who are honest and morally clean, attorneys who defend justice, and government officials who strive to preserve honor and integrity because it is right. You can be that shining light, that righteous influence, the leaven in the loaf to increase the moral fiber of your nation. Your prayers and humble study of the teachings of the Master, with a 24-hour application of those teachings every day of the week, will strengthen your life. They will help provide the stability the world needs.

Where can there be a greater satisfaction in life than to defend that part of the line the Lord has given you to preserve? Show those in the world around you a better way. There are some things that are wrong because God decreed that they are wrong. Truth is not determined by what men think, no matter how influential they may be. It was determined by an Almighty God before the creation of this earth, and it will exist forever. We serve. We make our contribution. We pass on. Let it never be said of you what was recently said of an individual with great potential and resources at his passing: "He left no legacy."

Will you prayerfully consider what we have discussed together? If there is a need to repent of some improper action, do it. Likewise, if there is a need to repent from failure to act, correct that. There are so many willing to be led by your righteous example. Because you have been enlightened, you owe it to those who follow to give them the best example you are capable of giving. Not only will they be blessed, but your life will be enriched as well.

I have come to know of the great influence for good that flows from individual acts born of conscience and principle rooted in truth. Resolve that each moment of your life will reflect your determination to humbly be an example of righteousness, integrity, and conviction. Keep the Sabbath day holy. Honor and live temple covenants as you receive them. Drink deeply from the fountain of the revealed word of God. Hold fast to His word. You are succeeding in the purpose for which you came to earth.

I bear solemn testimony that I have an absolute witness that Jesus Christ lives. As you follow the principles that we've discussed, I bear witness that He will guide you to the correct choices in the critical matters before you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.