

# *The Superhighway of Life*

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I grew up in the small town of Clearfield, Utah, and the last thing on my mind during those formative years was the thought that someday I would speak to the student body of Brigham Young University. Until I was in junior high, my hometown was little more than a bend in the road.

In those days my biggest challenge was gathering the eggs from the chicken coop without being attacked by the hen. I would carefully choose a stick large enough to lift each hen, and as a hen pecked at the stick, I would quickly gather her warm egg into my basket.

On the street where I lived there was the church, a canning factory, a small store, and the school. My life was uncomplicated and centered around home, church, school, and the candy aisle in the local store. That aisle was my incentive to work.

I was blessed because I had a kind and loving father and a mother and five sisters. We learned to work hard. Our father had his daughters help plant potatoes, corn, and various seeds in the ground each spring. We would place bedding plants around the yard and assist our father in mowing the lawn and trimming the shrubs. We were also taught the art of homemaking. Life was simple and rewarding.

You worked hard and felt the joy and satisfaction of your accomplishments.

As I look back, my road map on the highway of life was developed in that setting and through a series of small decisions that became sequential steps of progression in my life—small decisions relating to family and individual prayer, work, practice or studies before play, honesty, integrity, church attendance, and service. Following my parents' example, I soon found the richness of these blessings in my own life.

Whatever your backgrounds, each of you have made right decisions or you would not be here today. I don't think you know how wonderful you are. Do you know how important you are to our Father in Heaven?

Someday, some of you will stand where I am standing and be amazed, as I am, at the magnitude and grandeur of the work of the Lord. Make right choices, even when they appear to be small, insignificant choices. And ask for the Lord's blessings to guide your footsteps on your personal highway of life.

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*Mary Ellen Smoot was the Relief Society general - president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at BYU on 10 February 1998.*

I wish I could express to each of you personally the love and concern I feel for each of you on a daily basis. Because of my calling I see firsthand that President Hinckley has this same love and concern for each of you also.

As I focused my attention on preparing this talk, I contemplated your incredible challenges and choices and the struggles many of you face. My heart is filled with great love and empathy for each of you as you struggle, stretch, and grow to meet these challenges and make proper choices in life. Because our Father in Heaven has compassion upon us and desires the best for each of us, he has given us gifts in the way of travel plans to help us travel the superhighway of life.

As you think about it, life is like a superhighway. It is a time away from our heavenly home when we are confronted with a world of information and choices. Like any other highway, the superhighway of life will take you in one of two directions. If you choose to follow the philosophy of the world, it will lead you along a downward slope that ultimately leaves you lost, confused, and unhappy. Although the highway in this wrong direction is well traveled, and at first inviting, all who travel there will begin to notice deterioration and disrepair.

Before long the road becomes rough and difficult to traverse. The vehicle in which you travel sustains undue wear and tear. Your visibility becomes impaired as the highway takes you to a faltering side street, then to a dirt road, and finally to a rocky trail. Somewhere along the way some feel so despondent that they abandon their vehicle altogether and wander alone in a wilderness of despair.

Thankfully the other direction that leads in the way of truth and right is an altogether different experience. The superhighway in this direction turns into a thoroughfare that challenges and strengthens the traveler. Visibility increases as you travel in the right direction, enabling you to see and understand that which you cannot comprehend today. And your

vehicle, although requiring continued care and maintenance, does not give in to the wear and tear of the world but undergoes continual renewal.

I would like you to consider three very important elements of your travels along the superhighway of life:

- First, the vehicle in which you travel through life is your family. Each member of the family is a child of God, and together they make up a family, the basic unit of our Heavenly Father's plan of happiness.
- Second, your visibility, your spiritual perception, comes through the promptings of the Holy Ghost. It enables you to see the proper course regardless of travel conditions that beset you.
- And third are the road signs, the truth and the fallacies you face during your travels through life.

Let us talk for a moment about the vehicle, or the family with which you each travel. There are all kinds of families. When you were born you left your heavenly family to join an earthly family. Your earthly family is not limited to just your siblings and parents but also includes a long line of ancestors as well as the generations yet to come. When rightly considered, both your ancestors and your posterity have a significant stake in your life decisions. In addition, you have your ward or branch families, no matter where you go, and now that you are here at BYU, you also have a home evening family.

Families in whatever form are critical to your experience here in mortality. Families bolster you in times of need and humble you when you are overtaken with pride. The members of your family often see the worst side of you, yet still love and accept you. They help you maintain perspective and help you to see your own weaknesses that you may not otherwise recognize.

For instance, my grandson Spencer, who was about five years old at the time, received a doctor's kit for Christmas. While examining his two-year-old brother, Austin, one day, Spencer made a rather revealing prognosis. After inserting the thermometer into Austin's mouth and making him lie still for several minutes, Spencer extracted the thermometer and proclaimed, "Austin, you've got a big temper!"

Brothers and sisters, we need strong families. The family unit is not a nicety but a necessity. It is an essential element of our Father in Heaven's plan of happiness. Your Father in Heaven did not set you off on life's highway alone. He gave you a family.

The traditional family, the family as you have known it, is under political and social siege. Years ago I traveled to Washington, D.C., as a chaperone for a group of high school students. Two of my sons accompanied me on that trip. During the course of our tour we visited the Capitol and met with a senator from Utah. He didn't have much time to meet with us, as he was scheduled to be at a Senate hearing, so he invited our group to come along with him. His task that day was to question an outspoken activist on a proposed legislative initiative that would have an adverse impact on the family unit.

The hearing was just beginning when we arrived. The room was full to overflowing. We stood and witnessed a frontline battle that has been raging now for several decades over the family. I am happy to report that those in favor of the family won the debate on that occasion. Sadly, however, there have been many battles where the family unit has sustained serious losses—both in the Capitol and in homes across the land.

Where do you stand in the flood of decline? Are you busy sandbagging or are you building your homes and families upon the bedrock of the gospel? Government cannot save our families. Lawmakers would be pleased if they could even define what a family is anymore.

The salvation of our families depends upon our obedience to the words of the prophets.

Recently our modern-day prophets have presented us with "The Family: A Proclamation to the World." It outlines the Lord's sacred doctrines pertaining to the family. It is decisive and clear. You must know the truths it contains and share them with your families if you are to travel the superhighway of life successfully.

Someday it will not matter where else you have traveled if you have not followed after "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) within the walls of your own homes and have not come unto Christ.

Stop! Listen! Do you hear sadness and heartbreak in families all over the world? How can the people of the world turn a deaf ear? Is it because they are beyond feeling, or do they ignore it because they do not have the answers? The gospel of Jesus Christ has the answers. I have witnessed countless examples of eternal families working together for the whole of the family, as well as for the one, where each person, each life, is valued and loved, and individual talents are praised, admired, and developed.

I cannot envision heaven without my wonderful husband and each of our beloved children and grandchildren and each of you. That's what this life is all about. That's what eternal life is all about. Not everyone will understand nor be willing to follow the Lord's counsel for families.

During my youth Clearfield had only one stake center. On the day of stake conference the city police would stand in the road to usher cars into the parking lot. The cars came bumper to bumper and automatically followed the guiding hand.

One gentleman, however, after being guided to his designated parking stall, rolled down his window and said, "What is this? Where are we all going?"

The officer said, "This is the stake house."

"Oh," he replied, "but we're not hungry yet!"

First, this gentleman did not understand the spiritual food his family could receive at this stake house. And second, he had not developed a spiritual appetite.

Each of you need to stop and consider how well you are prepared for the miles ahead. Have you maintained a relationship with your Father in Heaven? Are you strong enough to withstand the inevitable bumps, jolts, and storms that life's superhighway will introduce? Are you too preoccupied or busy with worldly things? Are you devoting time and energy enough to your loved ones? If you are, you will find no greater joy. You'll actually enjoy the ride. For as we move closer together, we move closer to God.

Young people, you stand on the threshold between leaving your immediate family and creating your own. The family in which you were raised will always be a part of your life, but so much of the schooling that our Father in Heaven sent you here to receive is yet ahead. Although you have all experienced a great deal to this point in your lives, on the horizon are the most deepening and joyous experiences in life. Until now you have only been a passenger in your parent's vehicle. Although at times I am sure you have been backseat drivers, it has been your parent's sacred accountability to steer the vehicle for the benefit of each member of the family. But now it is your turn to take the wheel and navigate the course for your family and posterity.

As you make decisions relative to your family, please accept some motherly counsel from me. Do not let convenience be the determining factor regarding the person you choose as your eternal companion, the timing and number of children that you bring into the world, and any career decisions that either you or your spouse make, especially if they would adversely impact your primary role as parents. Remember the words President David O. McKay used to quote: "No success in life can compensate for failure in the home" (quoting James Edward

McCulloch, ed., *Home: The Savior of Civilization* [Washington, D.C.: Southern Co-operative League, 1924], p. 42).

Some of you may travel alone for a time in your own vehicle. Although you may still travel in a caravan with your parents and siblings, you will control your own vehicle and the course that it takes. Remember this promise: The Lord intends for each of you to experience the joys, challenges, and growth that come with having your own family and raising spirit children of our Father in Heaven. This I promise: If you live worthy, all of the joy of creating and raising your own family to the Lord will be yours, whether in this lifetime or in the one to come. The superhighway of life, and the growth and progress it brings, spans not only this lifetime but the eternities to come. Therefore, reach out and serve your family and fellow travelers, for that which you serve you come to love.

President Brigham Young spoke of the joy that accompanies gospel living and family life. His formula for happiness stands the test of time. He said, "Truly happy is that man, or woman, or that people, who enjoys the privileges of the Gospel of the Son of God, and who know how to appreciate his blessings" (*JD* 1:309). And he also said, "We want to see every countenance full of cheerfulness, and every eye bright with the hope of future happiness" (*JD* 12:314).

What a difference you will make in the lives of those most dear to you if your countenance truly is "full of cheerfulness" and your eyes shine bright with hope and happiness. The gospel of Jesus Christ puts such joy within reach. It is yours for the finding and yours for the sharing. Regardless of background, you can decide now to be happy and to have a happy family of your own.

My philosophy is: If you are happy, notify your face.

To you who have been hurt by members of your own family, you have the opportunity to

break the abusive cycle. Decide now to take the road that leads to happiness. You cannot get there unless you're moving forward with a brightness of hope.

No matter who your family is, joy is your birthright. Nephi taught that "men [and women] are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25). Make choices consistent with the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and you will find joy. "Joyriding" is not just an option—it is a part of the plan.

The second element of your travels is visibility, your ability to see clearly and discern right from wrong. The gift of the Holy Ghost helps you to see through the fog of this world and find your way back to your Father in Heaven. The Holy Ghost helps you recognize distractions for what they are. He also gives you strength to resist temptations, and peace when you are faced with difficult traveling conditions. All in all, the Holy Ghost clears the window of your soul and gives you the visibility needed to avoid life-threatening accidents and destructive detours.

Elder Parley P. Pratt understood this process well. In his book *Key to Theology*, he gives a useful and inspiring description of what happens to us when we receive the wonderful gift of the Holy Ghost. Listen carefully to these astounding blessings:

*The gift of the Holy Ghost adapts itself [in many facets of our lives]. It quickens all the intellectual faculties, increases, enlarges, expands and purifies all the natural passions and affections. . . . It inspires, develops, cultivates and matures all the fine-toned sympathies, joys, tastes, kindred feelings and affections of our nature. It inspires virtue, kindness, goodness, tenderness, gentleness and charity. It develops beauty of person, form and features. It tends to health, vigor, animation and social feeling. It invigorates all the faculties of the physical and intellectual man. It strengthens, and gives tone to the nerves. In short, it is, as it were, marrow to the bone, joy to the heart, light to the eyes, music to the*

*ears, and life to the whole being.* [Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1973), p. 101]

Can you imagine anyone understanding these blessings and not doing everything they could to receive them? The joy that will come into your individual lives as you understand and embrace the promptings of the Holy Ghost will make the difference in your individual lives.

After leaving high school I attended college and at first lived in the dormitory. Then I became friends with two young women, and together we decided to move into a top-floor apartment off campus.

When I lived on campus my roommates and I belonged to a student ward, and we would all attend church together. Attending church had always been a part of my life, and I looked forward to the spiritual uplift each Sunday.

However, on the first Sunday in our new apartment I was faced with a decision. I had been to a formal dance the night before, and I was very tired. One of my roommates returned home for the weekend, and I awoke on Sunday realizing I was supposed to attend a regular ward that met in a building a block from our apartment.

I could sleep in and have a day of leisure for which I yearned, or I could attend a strange ward made up primarily of families with very few students. I woke my roommate and invited her to go with me to church. She declined my invitation and chose the day of leisure. She said she was too tired. I could not convince her. I hated the thought of going alone, but I got dressed, walked the block, and attended the ward. I can't remember that it changed my week significantly, but I do remember I knew in my heart that I made the right decision to follow the promptings of the Holy Ghost. The next week it would only have been easier to stay in bed. That's how the adversary works.

As I stand here today, I see clearly that the seemingly insignificant decisions to obey the promptings of the Holy Ghost have made all the difference in my life. Commit today to follow each prompting of the Holy Ghost, and I guarantee that you will receive joy and, ultimately, exaltation.

More than a 100 years ago, while studying at the Budich Institute of higher learning in Dresden, Germany, a man abandoned the faith of his youth and gave way to skepticism. He became what we would call an agnostic. He recalled “this dark period” of his life as a time of searching among the “political, social, philosophic, and religious opinions of the world.” During the course of his study, his attention was called to a Mormon pamphlet. He recounted:

*I had some conceited notions in those days about literacy, and I had no faith in the Bible and religious doctrines; therefore, the inaccuracies and the poverty of language I found in those publications were, at first, sources of some ironical amusement.*

And yet the truth began to pierce his soul.

Even though he found the pamphlet poorly written, and at times even illogical, the Holy Ghost spoke to his soul. He explained:

*The humble but straightforward statements of testimony, the mistakes and the meagreness of the language used in the exposition of the wonderful truths that I could see back of it all, brought such uneasiness to me that I could not rest, my soul was on fire, as it were, and I therefore expressed a desire to have an elder sent to me. [Karl G. Maeser, in Reinhard Maeser, *Karl G. Maeser* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1928), pp. 19–21]*

The rest is history.

This man whose “soul was on fire” was named Karl G. Maeser. You’ve seen his name around campus. He was one of the founding fathers of this university. And just like you and me, he had to come to a knowledge of the

truth. He had to receive the witness of the Holy Ghost. His conversion began in the recesses of his heart, where his faith lay dormant until truth entered in. He hearkened to a still small voice, and his life took a different course ever after.

The Holy Ghost set him back on track—just as it will for each of you. As you learn to recognize and follow promptings of the Spirit, the way will become clear before you. Darkness will be dispelled, fog will be lifted, and your visibility will increase.

This all leads us to the third element of our travels that I’d like you to consider: road signs, or the truths and the fallacies that confront you.

We live in a marvelous time. The information age is in full swing. We have access to incredible tools for research, discovery, and communication. I, too, have been introduced to the “information highway” via the Internet and e-mail. Who says an old dog can’t learn new tricks? I marvel at the rapid advancement of technology. Even while I use a handheld electronic planner that records my handwriting, I remember being amazed as a young girl by the fact that a single song could be recorded on a small record and played back any time I wanted to hear it. My, what progress we have made.

We now have access to massive sources of information on the Internet and elsewhere. A comprehensive collection of the writings of God’s prophets throughout the history of the world can fit on one—or, at the most, two—small compact discs that can be held in my hand. Such advancements were mere science fiction 20 years ago. And yet, has all of this information added one wit to the body of eternal truths available to you through the gospel of Jesus Christ? No! What it has added, however, is further evidence of the divinity of the work in which you are engaged and of the universal struggle between truth and fallacy.

Road signs are now found in places where you never used to see them. You're bombarded with advertisements, enticements, directions, and choices. And yet all of the different road signs present you with only two classes of information: truth and fallacy. Truth endures and liberates, whereas fallacy falters and imprisons. Truth carries with it power, whereas falsehood yields only unfulfilled expectations.

The difficulty lies in recognizing the difference, in seeing a road sign for what it really is. Sometimes our progress is halted not because we don't want to follow the path of truth, but because we're not sure which path is truth.

Or, as Elijah suggests in the Old Testament, sometimes we don't want to accept the burden of truth. It's so much easier to get off at the nearest exit and indulge our appetites. During the reign of wicked King Ahab, the people of Israel began to set aside sacred truths and worship Baal. Such idol worship was less restrictive and allowed for indulgence in worldly pleasures. But the Lord raised up Elijah as his prophet to remind his people of saving truths.

After three full years of drought and suffering, the wicked Israelites remained in their sins and refused to embrace the truth. Elijah then issued his famous challenge to the priests of Baal to meet him on Mount Carmel. On that occasion the prophet stepped forward and exclaimed to the Israelites: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal [be God], then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21).

All 450 of the priests of Baal proceeded to call upon Baal from early morning until noon, but their petitions were in vain. Baal did not manifest himself nor claim his domain as the priests had promised.

Then Elijah took his turn. He rebuilt the altar of Jehovah, dug a trench around it, and ordered that 12 barrels of water be poured atop the sacrifice, drenching the altar and filling the trench. Elijah then addressed God and asked that he make himself known to the Israelites.

The swift reply from heaven was spectacular: "The fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench" (1 Kings 18:38). The lightning from heaven had fallen from a clear sky.

Elijah then knelt and prayed for rain to end the long drought. The Lord again heard his prayer, and "the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain" (1 Kings 18:45).

The God of truth made himself known to the Israelites, clearly and undeniably. And yet, like them, how often "halt ye between two opinions"? How easily we forget what truth is, how to recognize it, and how to find it. Especially when so many road signs point to easier, more alluring, or more widely accepted ways, you, too, often lose sight of your destination.

When the wicked King Ahab returned from Mount Carmel and told his evil wife Jezebel about all that took place, she was infuriated. Jezebel immediately sent a message to Elijah, informing him that she intended to have him killed on the morrow.

Elijah fled into the wilderness to save his own life. And after a day's journey he rested under a juniper tree. While there, he pled with the Lord to take his life before his enemies overtook him (see 1 Kings 19:4). That night, as Elijah slept, an angel of the Lord came to him and told him to go to what was known as the "mount of God." And Elijah did as he was commanded. He went to the mountain called Horeb and stood before the Lord (see 1 Kings 19:8). We next read of the prophet's encounter with the Lord:

*And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake:*

*And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.*  
[1 Kings 19:11–12]

Although the Lord is the master of all the elements, he speaks truth to our minds most often, most powerfully, through the Holy Ghost, in a still small voice. And that voice, when it pierces our souls, can be just as powerful as the lightning that consumed the altar on Mount Carmel.

Remember the words of Elder Parley P. Pratt: “[The Holy Ghost is] marrow to the bone, joy to the heart, light to the eyes, music to the ears, and life to the whole being.”

Are you prepared to receive these blessings? They are there before you. They are there for all who seek and earnestly strive. Visualize your eternal goals, work to achieve them, and you

will be blessed with the strength to overcome any impediments in your way.

Like Elijah of old, you can make a difference. One person can make a difference. Before resuming your travels on the superhighway of life, stop to evaluate what you can do. Give your loved ones the attention they deserve, adhere to sacred truths, and let the Holy Ghost, your personal compass, lead you along. Not only will you enjoy the ride, but you’ll also find your way back to your Father in Heaven. The Savior has gone before and shown the way. He is the way, the only “way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

The Savior said: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). Of this I testify in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.