

Seasons of Choice

RANDALL W. BOOTHE

It is a great pleasure to be with you today in this devotional. I am prayerful that the time we spend together will motivate each of us to consider our lives and to evaluate where we are as we begin this new year.

Have you noticed how the seasons of our lives move forward in a never-ending stream? I have been fascinated—sometimes surprised, but almost always invigorated—by the changes I have experienced so far in the seasons of my life. Our personal choices are different as we pass through each new season. Do you remember how many of your choices as a small child focused on play, on discovering the world and people around you, and on simple decisions that made you smile? As you grew to the age of accountability and beyond, choices became more critical. The adversary knew this, of course, and worked harder than ever to influence your choices as you matured. Progressing through the seasons of childhood into the teenage years and young adulthood, did you notice that the Spirit has a tremendous capacity to guide you, to lead you to productive, righteous choices? And as we qualify ourselves to be led by the Spirit in every season of life, the choices we must make become more clear.

Through the spring, summer, fall, and winter of our life, one thing remains constant: we are

free to *choose*. We fought for this right. It is ours. No matter how sheltered we may have been in our season of childhood, or how much we may have leaned on loved ones and friends to keep us safe, there come countless times in life when we have to choose for ourselves, when we, alone, face the winds of adversity, when we struggle and stand up to temptation, when we must choose which road to travel and then accept the consequences of that choice. Trusted friends cannot always go with us. Parents and teachers will not always be watching. Others are not in a position to make our choices or live our lives. In every season of life we have the opportunity to choose for ourselves.

In the Pearl of Great Price we are taught that it was God who gave us that power to choose. In Moses 4:2–3 we read:

But, behold, my Beloved Son . . . said unto me—Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever.

Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the

Randall W. Boothe was an associate professor in the BYU School of Music when this devotional address was given on 4 February 2003.

power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down.

Our Heavenly Father was not about to leave His precious sons and daughters on this earth without a means by which they could grow and learn and search and reach to find their way back to Him. The means by which God planned for our return is our free agency—our personal freedom to choose. In explaining these verses in Moses 4, Elder Charles W. Penrose said:

Here we read that that power of choice, the gift, the ability to understand right from wrong, to understand light from darkness, was given to the spirit of man by the Lord. . . . The power of volition is in the spirit man and he brings it with him when he is born into the earthly sphere, and so we can do good or do evil as we elect. [Charles W. Penrose, CR, October 1914, 40]

The scriptures are replete with further declarations of our power of choice. For example, here are Father Lehi's words:

Men are free . . . to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.

And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit;

And not choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom.

I have spoken these few words unto you all, my sons, in the last days of my probation; and I have chosen the good part. [2 Nephi 2:27–30]

Father Lehi understood the power of choice.

Years ago, after a visit to the former Soviet Union with the Young Ambassadors, we had the pleasure of welcoming our interpreter from Leningrad, Jessica Petrova, as she came to visit us in Utah. Early in her visit Jessica accompanied my wife, Susan, to the grocery store. As she entered the store she immediately observed what appeared to be thousands of boxes of different kinds of breakfast cereals. She was so disturbed by what she saw that she asked my wife if she might wait for her in the car. As Susan finished shopping and joined Jessica in the car, Jessica said: "It seems wicked that you have so much, so many choices in your country, and I have no choice. I wait in lines for hours at my neighborhood market for whatever food is arriving that day. I have no choice." Of course, this was at a time of difficult transition in that part of the world, but Jessica's comment caused my wife and me to look at our opportunity to choose with greater sensitivity and understanding.

In today's world we are literally bombarded with choices. In fact, in recent decades the number of choices in our lives have multiplied many times over. Local grocers stock not only hundreds of kinds of cereal but every other imaginable food. With the touch of a remote control we can choose between hundreds of television stations through cable TV or a satellite dish. This is a big change from the three stations that my mom and dad first enjoyed when black-and-white television became available in southern Idaho, where we were living at the time. Today we may choose to shop in hundreds of stores in convenient shopping malls that are filled to overflowing with merchandise from all over the world. With so many choices being required of us every day, we may become weary of choosing. This weariness can place us in a rather dangerous position. If we are weary of the mundane, everyday choices, we may also become weary of making life choices that are far more important than which brand to buy or which television program to watch. With

marketing teams working around the clock to capture our attention, we may occasionally allow someone else to make choices for us. Sometimes, however, our inability to make the right choice threatens the very core of our eternal lives. If we allow ourselves to sit back and “go with the flow” of society, we may be surprised to find ourselves somewhere we do not wish to be.

We frequently encounter heroes in our lives. Their examples of righteousness, faith, service, and love wield a tremendous influence on our choices to become more like them. You know them; they are all around us. I am so grateful for the power of examples in my life. I have been blessed with so many whose faith and works have served to motivate me to make righteous choices. Today I'd like you to become acquainted with six men and women whose lives have influenced their part of the world in an incredible way because they have consistently exercised their power to choose the right.

Choose to Love

In Johannesburg, South Africa, the Young Ambassadors were privileged to meet Sister Julia Mavimbela. In 1955, when Julia was expecting her last child, her husband, John, was tragically killed. This period was a time of intense oppression for the blacks in that country. After her husband's death, Julia was left with a young family to raise. From the 1960s through the 1980s, she worked as a schoolteacher in Soweto township. She was always engaged in a worthwhile project, helping others to help themselves. She taught young people to garden. Julia told her students, “Let us dig the soil of bitterness, throw in a seed, show love, and see what fruits will grow. Love will not come without forgiving others. Where there was a bloodstain, a beautiful flower must grow.” She got seeds and taught people to plant around their homes. She showed them how to strain dishwater through a gallon bucket filled with sand so they could use it to water their seeds.

In 1981 two young men in white shirts and dark, conservative ties volunteered to help her with her work. When the missionaries subsequently taught her about the plan of salvation and spoke of life after death, Julia was deeply moved by the message that she could see her husband, John, again. It made sense. She joined the Church, and the gospel became a great strength to her as she faced more tragedy in her family. In the 1990s her grandson happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time when gunfire rang through the township, and he was murdered. When Sister Mavimbela's soul cried out for the healing influence of the Spirit, she left behind the rocky paths of grief and bitterness. Julia Mavimbela chose to love.

Choose to Share

Raj Kumar studied at the University of Punjab in Chandigarh, India. Attending a performance of the Young Ambassadors at his university in 1982, he saw in the faces of our students something different. As he recognized the light of truth and felt the Spirit, he wasted no time in approaching Tom Nelson, our Young Ambassador lighting technician, after the show, asking to know more about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. A letter from Raj to Tom after his baptism illustrates his intense desire to share his newfound knowledge with others.

Dear Brother Tom:

It was only because of you that I have found this great happiness and peace. I had been praying continuously for one year before my prayers had an answer through you. You will be glad to know that three young men here in the university are investigating, and one of them, named Pamas Rai, may very soon join the Church. He is very serious, and I have given him sufficient lectures on the basic principles of the gospel. He has left tea, coffee, alcoholic drinks, and tobacco. The Spirit has commanded me to teach and contact two other young men.

Dear brother, before I was baptized in this true church of the Savior, I was very reluctant

to tell others that I was a Christian. But now, to whosoever comes into contact with me, I openly declare before him that I am a follower of the Living Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and a member of His true church upon this earth. I visit hospitals every Friday and spend about three hours there. I pray for sick people admitted over there and visit from one bed to another, introducing them to the Church and the Lord and distributing tracts. As you know, we do not have tracts and pamphlets in Hindi or Punjabi languages. I've translated the testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith into the Punjabi language.

I have applied for the mission. I expect to get the call within a couple of months. You will be glad to know that I have started going to Delhi every weekend to take part in church services. Our branch president, John R. Marshall, who is from England, has recommended me for an elder. I hope to be ordained to the high priesthood in a short time. Last week I was given the chance to ordain a young boy to the office of a teacher. This was a wonderful experience for me. [Letter to Tom Nelson from Raj Kumar, 1980]

Brother Raj Kumar received his call and served a mission in Fresno, California. Since his mission he and his wife, Sarala, have been blessed with a beautiful family. Brother Kumar has served as bishop, on the stake high council, and currently is ward mission leader in Toronto, Canada. When blessed to embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ, Raj Kumar chose to share.

Choose to Follow the Light

In 1991 Larisa Deeva served as a hostess for two Young Ambassadors on their tour to Riga, Latvia. She recognized the Spirit in the lives of these young men and wanted that spirit to be a part of her life. As she received a copy of the Book of Mormon in Russian from her guests, she proudly displayed it right next to the Bible in her home.

In a letter to Young Ambassador Richard Higbee, Larisa wrote in halting English:

I don't know how to thank you for all that you have done for me. I am so very glad met you. I am happy found fine friends. It was unforgettably for me! I was visit the paradise with you. I have believed in God! You have agitated my excite! . . . You have given back me sense in life. I wasn't know why and what for I lived. And you present me wings! [Letter to Richard Higbee from Larisa Deeva, 1990]

Sister Deeva was baptized on August 22, 1992. In a subsequent letter to Richard Higbee, Larisa wrote:

In August of last year I was baptized. I was the first member in the Church here in Riga. Now there are approximately 30 members in this branch. I play the piano in our ward. Now I have God in my life, and He helps me deal with all of my struggles. I know that this church is true and know that our Heavenly Father loves us. [Letter to Richard Higbee from Larisa Deeva, 1993]

As the Young Ambassadors returned to Latvia to present a fireside for the new Riga Branch on May 30, 1993, we were pleased to learn that Sister Deeva had been sustained as president of the Relief Society. Larisa Deeva found the truth, was nourished by its power, and with great eagerness made the choice to follow the light.

Choose to Learn from the Word of God

Nearly every morning at 6:30 you will find me walking the streets of Spanish Fork with another of my heroes: my dad, Wayne Boothe. As we exercise, Dad speaks of his experience studying the scriptures that morning before our walk. For 34 years Dad taught seminary and institute classes for the Church Educational System. Through those years he chose to study the scriptures most mornings at 4:00. Since his retirement in 1990 his enthusiasm for scriptural feasts has not diminished. He sleeps in now until 5:00 a.m. and then gets up and dives into

the scriptures every day. As we walk along he talks excitedly of his newest scripture discoveries. He enjoys the topical guide and will often approach his study by topic. He loves to encourage us to visualize the scriptural accounts in our minds or to place ourselves in the time and place of the scriptures to explore what it might have felt like to be there.

Dad chooses to ponder and pray about those passages he reads. He recently commented, "Son, my scripture study has a fresh new focus. I am reading the scriptures this time through to clearly ascertain whether I am living the gospel as correctly as I should at this stage of my life. I want to be prepared. The scriptures are helping me to prepare." At 4:00 a.m. many of us could think of other ways to spend our time, but through all of the years of raising a family of seven children, 40 grandchildren, and nine great-grandchildren with my beautiful mother, Dad has chosen to consistently learn from the word of God.

Choose to Serve

Choosing to run for mayor of Spanish Fork, Utah, was not a decision that most 76-year-old women would make, but for Marie Huff the choice was simple. She had a great desire to work hard for the betterment of her community. While serving as mayor Marie was president of the Utah County League of Mayors and was recognized in 1995 by Governor Leavitt as the Outstanding Mayor in the State of Utah.

After eight years in office, Marie finished her service as mayor at age 83. Marie is still a member of the Spanish Fork Arts Council and at 88 years of age has devoted herself to making beautiful bookmarks for school and city libraries in the county. In the past five years she has made 3,000 of them to give to schoolchildren as a means of encouraging them not only to read but to take good care of their library books.

While serving 14 years as a Relief Society president, Sister Huff learned that folks need to be recognized. In a recent telephone conversation she said, "There are a lot of lonely people in the

world. I continue to call young and old alike on the phone to congratulate them, and I try to send notes every day to express appreciation for all the good things they are doing for our growing community of Spanish Fork." Every day Marie Huff chooses to serve.

Choose to Be Firm in the Faith of Christ

In the Book of Mormon we read of another hero who "was a strong and a mighty man; he was a man of a perfect understanding" (Alma 48:11). His name was Moroni. We are told that Moroni "was a man who was firm in the faith of Christ" and that "if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men" (Alma 48:13, 17).

What if we were to choose to grow up and be like Moroni or choose to love as did Sister Julia Mavimbela? How would the world be different if we chose to share as did Raj Kumar in India or chose to follow the light as did Sister Larisa Deeva? Wouldn't this world be a remarkable, wonderful place to live if all of us here today were to choose to serve others well into our eighties just like Marie Huff, or if we chose to learn from the scriptures as does my dad? Will we, like our heroes, be anxiously engaged in choosing to help accomplish the great mission of bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of man? Will we choose to follow the Spirit in our own lives? And then will we choose to extend our love to our families, our associates, and our neighbors, illuminating their paths in our own little corner of the world? What an influence we can collectively have on this world as we choose the right.

Brothers and sisters, it is the bottom of the ninth inning, the score is tied, there are two outs, the bases are loaded, and *you* are up to bat. That pretty much sums up the situation we find ourselves in today as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The world is

being prepared to receive the Savior, and we are all up to bat. So many of our Father’s children are counting on us to bring them into home plate. This is our time to play the game of life. As you step up to the plate in this game of *choice*, you must choose to serve, to love, to learn, to follow the light, to share. The choice is not complex. We simply choose the Lord or we choose the opposition—and we all know who leads that opposing team. We might well ask ourselves with the poet Hannah Last Cornaby:

*Who’s on the Lord’s side? Who?
Now is the time to show.
We ask it fearlessly:
Who’s on the Lord’s side? Who?
We wage no common war,
Cope with no common foe.
The enemy’s awake;
Who’s on the Lord’s side? Who?
[Hymns, 1985, no. 260]*

At times in our weariness we may catch ourselves saying, “I just don’t care anymore. I don’t want to choose. I’ll go along with whatever you want to do. I’ll embrace whichever marketing approach is more convincing. I am simply too tired to think this through and choose.” In that critical moment we need to wake up, arouse our faculties, and join with the prophet Joshua, who declared: “Choose you this day whom ye will serve . . . : but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). We might have to expand Joshua’s invitation to say, “Choose you this minute whom ye will serve. Choose you this day, this week, whom ye will serve.”

Choose hundreds of times every hour to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. We must, of course, enlist the good counsel and influence of the Spirit that we may be directed to those choices that will help us become the woman or man God has planned for us to become.

It is possible to make every important decision in our lives correctly if we can learn

to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. What we choose today will influence eternity. Every choice brings us either a step closer to or further from our eternal destiny. We are not victims of circumstance. We have total control. We are the ones who decide how we will react to the environment we find ourselves in.

President Spencer W. Kimball taught:

Some people feel that decisions are really out of our hands, that we merely respond to circumstances without choice, like a rudderless ship that drifts at the mercy of the wind and waves. And I agree that there can come a time when we no longer have control over our destinies, but I believe that this is only after the cumulation of our own past decisions has left us helpless.

In the beginning, each of us is a bundle of potential that can be developed and shaped by what we choose to do. In youth there is still great malleability. We can choose what we will become. As the years go by, we find our past choices have narrowed the alternatives still open to us and we have less and less control over our future. [TSWK, 165]

We cannot do everything at once, but every act—every choice—opens the gate and leads us down a specific pathway. With every choice thereafter we progress further down that path. Sometimes we must turn around, take some time out, get back in touch with our eternal map, and hang on as the Savior of mankind draws us back closer to our heavenly home. There are millions who have walked this path before us. When we see a caution sign or a guardrail, we need to recognize that someone wiser and more experienced generously thought to provide some help, some protection, for those who would follow. At those times when we feel very strong and independent, we might close our hearts to those closest to us who could help the most in our journey over life’s treacherous paths. Don’t close up. Open your heart to the wisdom of life’s precious companions.

Can you imagine how excited we all were in the premortal existence as we anticipated the blessing of exercising our free agency while experiencing life together? How have those heroes in our lives become so valiant in choosing to love, to share, to follow the light, to learn, and to serve? We may feel somewhat overwhelmed with so many good choices. I am convinced that there is really only one choice that we must make, and that choice is Jesus Christ. When we choose Him, everything else will naturally follow.

The Lord himself outlined His four recommended choices for every season, for every day of our lives:

Verily, thus saith the Lord: It shall come to pass that every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am. [D&C 93:1]

These are four simple, righteous choices to make every day. How about it? Are we ready to choose to commit to the Lord's plan? Are we ready to choose to forsake our sins and come

unto Christ? Will we choose to call on His name? Will our choice be to obey His voice? Are we prepared to choose to keep His commandments?

The great blessings associated with keeping His commandments are explained in this same section of the Doctrine and Covenants. In verse 28 we are promised that "he that keepeth [the Lord's] commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things." We can know all things! That has got to be helpful when we are trying to choose wisely. Every season of life is a season of choice. This is not a time for sitting on the sidelines. We must choose to play ball every day, every hour, every season, relying on the merits of our Savior to assist us in this journey of choice.

May we choose to be firm and steadfast in our faith in Christ so that when the time for choosing in mortality is past, our knees will have already bowed and our tongues will have already confessed. And, most important, our lives will have been filled with choices that testify of our knowledge that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. May we choose to follow Him in every season is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.