

Live Your Life with Purpose

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Good morning. I am humbled to be with you today. I am grateful for family, friends, and colleagues who are in the audience and watching at home to support me. I have prayed diligently over the past months that something I say today will benefit each of us, and I do that now as well.

I am an adventure seeker, especially in the outdoors. I love to hike, bike, swim, and ski. Through my many adventures I have learned that each one must be planned with clear purposes or objectives—to summit a peak, to complete a course, or to enjoy the views. I have found that planning with purpose is the best way to ensure that each adventure is successful.

For example, I love to Nordic ski. As with all skiing, there is a trail map that allows you to chart a successful course through the woods and terrain. My favorite place to ski is at Sundance's Nordic Center. The trails lead you through evergreen and aspen trees and include views of Mount Timpanogos and frozen Stewart Falls. There are several trails to choose from; some are out of the way and less traveled than others. All the trails are surrounded by ungroomed or wooded ground with unknown obstacles beneath the meringue-like layer of

snow. Leaving the trail could be troublesome or even perilous.

Each ski trek begins with the question Where to? followed by Which route? Each trail takes us to a different spot with different options for adventure and scenery—a steep climb, a flat meadow, or an incredible view. Before we begin to ski we must determine the purpose of our trek so we know which trails to take. Then we must ski on course or we will not reach our destination.

Determine Your Purpose

We are here on earth in a type of adventure. We left our Heavenly Father to obtain bodies, to be tested, to make covenants, to gain knowledge and experience, and to hopefully return to live with Him. But we do not always remember these purposes. Many who do not have the gospel have forgotten these purposes because of the veil. We often get weighed down by the daily monotony of school, church, family, and work and forget about our aspirations— aspirations that our Heavenly Father wants

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us to have. We often even get distracted and waylaid by “good” things.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught:

*As we consider various choices, we should remember that it is not enough that something is good. Other choices are better, and still others are best. Even though a particular choice is more costly, its far greater value may make it the best choice of all. [“Good, Better, Best,” *Ensign*, November 2007, 104–5]*

He goes on to say that “we have to forego some good things in order to choose others that are better or best because they develop faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and strengthen our families” (“Good, Better, Best,” 107). There are many good things that we can do, but we must stay true to our purpose and live the life of a disciple. We can get married or, better/best, we can get married in the temple. We can pray for the missionaries or, better/best, we can invite our friends and family to visit with them in our homes.

Individually we may become discouraged because of the distance between us and the mortal life we’ve aspired to. We may not be married, have children, or have the degree or success that we thought would give us the life we’d planned. Fame, fortune, fashion, and fun will play a part in our eventual destination. But we have the power to control what role, if any, these play in keeping us on or taking us off the path of discipleship. Our collection of choices will determine our final destination.

President Thomas S. Monson said:

Eternal life in the kingdom of our Father is [our] goal. Such a goal is not achieved in one glorious attempt but rather is the result of a lifetime of righteousness, an accumulation of wise choices, even a constancy of purpose. [“Decisions Determine Destiny,” BYU devotional address, 6 November 2005]

So what can we do to ensure that we build a lifetime of righteousness and accumulate wise choices? We can live our life with purpose—the purpose to gain eternal life and be counted as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Keeping our destination or the purpose of our life in mind influences our decisions. We are choosing friends, majors, careers, social activities, priorities, and many more things. But the most important decision that we must map out is the course to our destination if we are ever to get there. Where are we skiing to? If we make a conscious decision to be on the Lord’s side and to seek the highest degree of glory in the celestial kingdom, then many of our decisions in daily life fall into place. Knowing that we will *not* go toward so many other destinations provides us with significant direction. We can make our judgments and decisions based on the decided purpose of our life. Does this friend bring me closer to or further from the Spirit? Does this major or career allow me to be the disciple of Christ I aspire to be? Does this activity keep me close to the Lord? Committing to achieve the greatest possible outcome from mortality frees us from much of the push and pull of the world.

In the last general conference President Dieter F. Uchtdorf said, “The foundational principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ can affect our life’s direction for good, if only we will apply them” (“Of Regrets and Resolutions,” *Ensign*, November 2012, 21). If we want to enjoy eternal life we must apply the principles President Uchtdorf is referring to and become disciples of Christ. As he says, “The pursuit of holiness and happiness . . . is the path to our best and happiest self” (“Of Regrets,” 23). We must plan our lives with the purpose of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. President Uchtdorf says we can do this by following the Savior, striving to be like Him, listening to and obeying the Spirit’s promptings, and devoting ourselves to the pursuit of

holiness and happiness (see “Of Regrets,” 23). Becoming a disciple also includes being baptized, making and keeping temple covenants, and building the kingdom of God.

It can sometimes be difficult to remember our predetermined course. The scriptures and the prophets counsel us to remember the things of the Spirit—our Savior and the Atonement, our covenants, and the commandments. Remembering helps us keep proper perspective and focus on our purpose. We must choose to remember. We must remember what we want and why we want it. President Henry B. Eyring taught us that “the key to the remembering that brings and maintains testimony is receiving the Holy Ghost as a companion” (“O Remember, Remember,” *Ensign*, November 2007, 68). If we live worthy of the Holy Ghost we will remember our purpose. The Savior taught, “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance” (John 14:26).

Determine Your Course

Once we are fixed on our purpose, we must determine our course to fulfill that purpose. We have to make a plan for how we will reach our destination.

Last January there were twelve of us geared up in Wyoming with our skis on, ready to go. Granite Hot Springs was over ten miles in front of us. We knew we needed to stay on the road and keep going in spite of the serious negative temperatures, the hills, and the lack of sunshine. We also planned to take time to enjoy the scenery around us. We had planned to do an out-and-back route of over twenty miles in a day, and we needed to start early, stay together, keep fueled, keep moving, and stay the course. We did, and we finished the out-and-back trek exhausted!

Just as my friends and I were as we skied on our adventure in Wyoming, we must be fixed on our course and our purpose.

We must continue to press forward despite adverse conditions. We must not be deterred by challenges—big and small—all the while taking in the beauty and wonders mortality affords us.

The map to navigate life on earth has been provided to us through the restoration of the gospel. The standard works, modern-day prophets, and inspired leaders help us navigate through the challenges of mortality. Lehi’s dream is a broad sketch of mortality. The latter-day prophets fill in the challenges and specific guidance for our day, helping us keep hold of the iron rod. We must determine our course to ensure that our daily choices have a chance of leading us to eternal life—we will not arrive there by chance. In Doctrine and Covenants 132:22 we read, “For strait is the gate, and narrow the way that leadeth unto the exaltation and continuation of the lives.” We need to be on the path when we reach the gate. Having the goal of eternal life, we know where we can look for direction to stay on the narrow way and to find the strait gate.

The scriptures and the teachings of the prophets have provided us with a course for our life on earth. The path of discipleship is the path that runs within reach of the iron rod. We move each hand and each foot in front of the other, progressing as we make decisions to prioritize the work of the Lord, the keeping of our covenants, and our constant efforts to emulate the Savior. What is on the narrow way? Temple marriage, missionary service, paying a full tithe, keeping the Sabbath day holy, fulfilling callings, being charitable—and the list goes on.

Staying on the strait and narrow path requires us to make consistent “best” choices. As a skier, in order to return to the trailhead you have to take the right trails, turn at the right times, and have the skill to descend the mountain safely. As many inexperienced Nordic skiers have noted, the hills look easy to navigate until you strap on boots that only

bind in the front and skis that are slightly wider than Popsicle sticks. We must chart our course carefully. Where will we turn, go straight, or climb? The trail map and master teachers will give us all of the information we need.

We learn from Elder L. Lionel Kendrick that the guidance we need is in the scriptures. He said:

Those revelations received by prophets are given to us in the form of scripture or by the voice of the living prophets. Thus, the scriptures become a road map, a set of divine directions to assist us on our journey through mortality and our return trip home. ["Search the Scriptures," Ensign, May 1993, 13]

Just as Lehi and his family looked to the Liahona for direction through the wilderness to the promised land, we should let the scriptures and the teachings of the prophets serve as our map as we make our way through the wilderness of mortality.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf said:

We all search for happiness, and we all try to find our own "happily ever after." The truth is, God knows how to get there! He has created a map for you; He knows the way. . . . The map is available to all. It gives explicit directions of what to do and where to go to everyone who is striving to come unto Christ. ["Your Happily Ever After," Ensign, May 2010, 126–27]

All you have to do is trust your Heavenly Father—trust Him enough to follow His plan, keep your covenants, and keep His commandments.

President Uchtdorf continued:

Nevertheless, not all will follow the map. They may look at it. They may think it is reasonable, perhaps even true. But they do not follow the divine directions. Many believe that any road will take

them to a "happily ever after." ["Your Happily Ever After," 127]

As members of the Church, we know that not all roads or trails lead to the eternal life we seek. "Happily ever after" will only be ours if we choose to follow the Savior and be His disciples.

We are constantly making decisions, and if your life is like mine, most of those decisions are made while in "survival mode." This is decision making in the moment, instead of planning out a course and moving forward when the time is right. This is not the best way to make decisions, for when I live in survival mode, I too often fail to accomplish the things I prioritized in my mind—that phone call to a friend, lunch with my brother, an evening at the temple, a workout, and even what I'm going to do on vacation. It is also while I am in survival mode that I see opportunities pass me by—a weakening friendship with a kindred spirit, waning family relationships, a decrease in desire to do the things to stay close to the Spirit, decreased fitness level, and even a missed opportunity to kayak the Napoli Coast in Hawaii! (How did I let that happen?)

Perhaps you are like me. Perhaps you, too, let the chaos of life, your studies, your calling, your job, or your fun crowd out the opportunities the Spirit has to speak to you. Perhaps your prayers have become hurried or your scripture study is more reading than study. Perhaps you have reshuffled your priorities and have put staying close to the Spirit off to the side simply as a result of *not* prioritizing it. President Uchtdorf said, "Discipleship is the pursuit of holiness and happiness. It is the path to our best and happiest self" ("Of Regrets," 23). So it follows that pursuing and prioritizing discipleship will lead us to the best life we can build for ourselves on earth, but we have to seek it by choosing to be a disciple of Christ. We have to choose it by being forgiving, charitable, grateful, and anxiously engaged in serving

others. We have to make discipleship our course.

How do we know what we can do to be a disciple? How do we know what we can do to fulfill our purpose on earth and build the kingdom of God? We have to ask Him—through prayer. The scriptures have taught us that the Lord will give us answers to our prayers: “Behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart” (D&C 8:2). We will hear by the whisperings of the Spirit what we can do to be more like Christ. We will be quietly drawn to opportunities that will allow us to serve on His behalf. We will find ourselves using our talents to build the kingdom of God if we follow the guidance in our heart.

In the last general conference Elder Craig C. Christensen taught:

Through the gift of the Holy Ghost, we receive added capacity and spiritual gifts, increased revelation and protection, steady guidance and direction, and the promised blessings of sanctification and exaltation in the celestial kingdom. All of these blessings are given as a result of our personal desire to receive them and come as we align our lives with the will of God and seek His constant direction. [“An Unspeakable Gift from God,” Ensign, November 2012, 14]

When Alma gives counsel to his son Helaman, he too tells him to stay aligned with our Heavenly Father and seek His guidance: “O, remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God” (Alma 37:35). What great counsel—from both Elder Christensen and Alma. Alma continued to call on Helaman to “counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good” (Alma 37:37). We know how to get the direction of the Spirit. Now we have to do it.

How can we allocate our time, talents, and resources to align with our purpose and stay on course? We can do it through goals. I have a lot of goals that aren’t the New Year’s type of goals. I have the goal of being married in the temple, having and raising children in the gospel, and witnessing them serve missions and raise a righteous posterity. I have the goal of serving a mission myself. I have the goal of being worthy of eternal life with my Father in Heaven and with my family. I have the goal of making my earthly and my heavenly parents proud because I have heeded their counsel and made the gospel of Jesus Christ an integral part of my life. I have the goal of being happy here on earth and in the eternities.

Your goals may be similar to mine. These are our individual course markings. They are the significant choices in our lives that allow us to recognize that we are in alignment with our Father in Heaven. He has given us the personal guidance and direction we need to accomplish our goals.

The companionship of the Holy Ghost provides us with unlimited personal revelation, direction, comfort, strength, and guidance from God. Humility and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are essential to being worthy of personal revelation and answers to our prayers. All answers do not come when we ask for them. They often come as Alma describes our faith growing: over time as we ponder, study, and seek direction from the Lord (see Alma 32). President Boyd K. Packer tells us that “[we] must learn to seek the power and direction that is available to [us], and then follow that course no matter what” (“How to Survive in Enemy Territory,” *Ensign*, October 2012, 29).

We then learn in Doctrine and Covenants 45:57: “For they that are wise and have received the truth, and have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide, and have not been deceived—verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall

abide the day.” We must choose to be wise and take the Holy Spirit for our guide. We can benefit from the direction of the Holy Ghost in everything we do. He will guide me—helping me avoid cliffs while skiing, potholes while biking, and terrible snafus at work—if I seek His direction and am aligned with Him and His will.

Prayer is our communication piece with our Heavenly Father, and the Holy Ghost is His communication piece with us. We must keep the line open by seeking out the Father in prayer and by living worthy of the Holy Ghost’s companionship. President Packer also taught:

[We] can always have a direct line of communication with [our] Father in Heaven. Do not allow the adversary to convince you that no one is listening on the other end. Your prayers are always heard. You are never alone! [“How to Survive,” 29]

Staying on Course

Over the last few years I have participated in several road bike rides with wonderful friends. To get in the full mileage—sixty, eighty, or one hundred miles—the courses are marked on the streets with colored arrows and spray paint. There are signs at intersections, and there are usually other riders to follow. However, on more than three different occasions we have ended up off course. On one ride my friends and I mistakenly followed other riders off course—they were riding a different route than we were. On another ride we found the rest stop from the “less traveled” side, as we had apparently missed a turn or two. And on yet another ride we knew we were close to the finish line because of the traffic and noise, but we couldn’t find the roads that led us to it. We couldn’t find any markings. On each of these road rides my friends and I did get back on course and finish the race, and we learned several lessons—each of which are transferable to our lives.

If we are to reach our intended destination, we must pay attention to the big and the small course markings. In life these markings are not spray-painted arrows and signs; instead they are advancements, covenants, and the companionship of the Spirit. If we are not committed to our course and purpose, we will move with the push and pull of the world, away from the path that leads us to return to our Father in Heaven. We must be committed, and we must do all that we can to stay the course. We must look to the prophets to learn how to read the course’s legend to ensure that we stay firmly planted on the strait and narrow path, holding onto the iron rod with both hands.

I don’t know exactly when my friends and I went off course on these three occasions, but I can clearly remember when we realized it. Our surroundings weren’t familiar or expected, we didn’t have the biking companions we’d had before, and when we looked for course markings, we could not find them. There are too many things that could have distracted us and allowed us to get off course, even when we were within blocks of the finish line. What distracted us is far less important than how we got off course. It happened so subtly that we didn’t notice until we were off the course—not right next to it or parallel to it, but off.

So it is with the strait and narrow path. At one point in our lives we have two feet firmly planted on it. With a change of roommates or friends, a new girl- or boyfriend, a new city, a new schedule, or even a new job, we can slowly start moving to the path’s edge until we realize that we are doing things we never imagined doing: we haven’t prayed for days or weeks, we pass on spiritual things, our scriptures are covered in layers of dust, or so many other things happen that indicate we haven’t been feeding our testimony the nourishment it needs. Most of the time we cannot pinpoint what changed in our life, but we know our testimony isn’t as firm as it once was. Maybe we can’t even remember why we keep the commandments.

But there are many things we can do to ensure that we stay on course—on the strait and narrow path. Like my friends and I learned on our road-riding races, we must keep a lookout for the course markings or warning signs. The prophets and the scriptures give us significant counsel on how to stay on course and live our lives with the right purpose. Elder Quentin L. Cook taught, “Immersion in the scriptures is essential for spiritual nourishment” (“Can Ye Feel So Now?” *Ensign*, November 2012, 7). We need to make sure we are constantly feeding ourselves spiritually from the scriptures. Do you immerse yourself in the scriptures?

Mother Teresa and Alma both reminded us of the power of small acts in our lives such as prayer, scripture study, and charity. Mother Teresa said, “Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies” (*In the Heart of the World: Thoughts, Stories and Prayers* [Novato, California: New World Library, 1997], 15). Alma taught:

By small and simple things are great things brought to pass; and small means in many instances doth confound the wise.

. . . And by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise and bringeth about the salvation of many souls. [Alma 37:6–7]

There are no small things, because combined, they are our strength and they will bring about our salvation!

There are a few other seemingly “small” things that will have a great impact on our ability to stay true to our purpose. One of these seemingly small things is our friends. Who do we choose to associate with? Who do we choose to date? To marry? To seek advice from and counsel with? To play and study with? President Thomas S. Monson said, “Choose your friends with caution” (“Decisions Determine Destiny”). We must cautiously

choose who we allow to have a great impact on our lives. We do many “small” things with our friends. Brother Scott Robley on the Mormon Channel said that true friends treat you like a campsite—they leave you better than they found you (see Mormon Channel, *For the Youth*, “Mapping Your Way,” part 2, episode 25, at 21:40; www.mormonchannel.org/for-the-youth/25). We all have companions in our time on earth. They may be siblings, friends, spouses, missionary companions, and even strangers who observe us or briefly interact with us. Are you the true friend you should be to those you are with, and are they the friends they should be for you? Do your friends make it easier for you to live the gospel or not? Do they help you draw closer to the Spirit, even in small degrees? Do they leave you better than they found you, and you them?

If we do not bolster and feed our faith, we will not have the strength to keep covenants or commandments and stay on course. Maintaining our testimony and staying on course will require righteousness and regular repentance. It will require great faith. We must be spiritually strong. We must live worthy of the Holy Ghost’s companionship. Elder D. Todd Christofferson said, “Faith comes by the witness of the Holy Spirit to our souls, Spirit to spirit, as we hear or read the word of God. And faith matures as we continue to feast upon the word” (“The Blessing of Scripture,” *Ensign*, May 2010, 35). We must delve into the scriptures to know what to do in times of trial, how to help others, and how to answer our questions. The answers are in them. We learn about the Master Teacher and His ways in the scriptures. By studying the scriptures we develop our faith and learn about the Savior, His teachings, the commandments, our Father, and the plan of salvation. Studying the scriptures will keep us on course.

President Thomas S. Monson has given us exceptional counsel for how to stay on course:

Obey the laws of God. They are given to us by a loving Heavenly Father. When they are obeyed, our lives will be more fulfilling, less complicated. Our challenges and problems will be easier to bear. We will receive the Lord's promised blessings. . . .

*. . . Make every decision you contemplate pass this test: "What does it do to me? What does it do for me?" And let your code of conduct emphasize not "What will others think?" but rather "What will I think of myself?" Be influenced by that still, small voice. . . . Open your hearts, even your very souls, to the sound of that special voice which testifies of truth. ["Believe, Obey, and Endure," *Ensign*, May 2012, 128, 129]*

We need to open our hearts to that special voice, as President Monson said. The Holy Ghost is the only companion of constancy. All of the others will leave us—even if only temporarily—to run errands, go to class, or go to work for the day. The Holy Ghost will be a constant presence in our lives if we will live worthily. We control the level of influence He has in our lives. Do we listen to or ignore Him? Do we act or relax? Do we provide an environment that will allow the Holy Ghost to remain with us? Do we remove the "worldly habits, customs, and traditions" from our lives (Robert D. Hales, "Being a More Christian Christian," *Ensign*, November 2012, 90)?

As the hymn by Penelope Moody Allen says:

*Let the Holy Spirit guide;
Let him teach us what is true.*

*He will testify of Christ,
Light our minds with heaven's view.*

*Let the Holy Spirit guard;
Let his whisper govern choice.
He will lead us safely home
If we listen to his voice.*

*Let the Spirit heal our hearts
Thru his quiet, gentle pow'r.
May we purify our lives
To receive him hour by hour.
["Let the Holy Spirit Guide," *Hymns*, 2002,
no. 143]*

While the challenges of each day do not fade with each sunset, I know that if we can do as the prophets have counseled us, we will be able to continue moving forward on the strait and narrow path. I also know that this path will lead us to eternal life—a life worth every amount of effort required to get there. If we will firmly establish the purpose of our life and stay the course that leads us to it, we will live in the house the Lord has prepared for us "among the mansions of [our] Father" (Ether 12:32).

Let Heavenly Father guide and direct you.
Live your life with purpose.

I know the gospel of Jesus Christ is true. I know He is our Savior. I know Thomas S. Monson is a prophet of God, and I know our Father in Heaven loves us and leads us through the Holy Ghost. Of this I testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.