

An Unexpected Path

PEGGY S. WORTHEN

During the last few months I have been able to meet some of you, and I have also been able to learn some things about you. Let me tell you some of the things that I have learned.

You are hard workers. Besides attending classes in order to obtain a degree of your choice, many of you have jobs. Some of you are in the performing arts and do amazing things. Some of you are student athletes who succeed at the highest levels. Here I take special note of the women's volleyball team, which for the first time in school history went to the Final Four and played for the national championship. Congratulations to you.

Most of you have Church callings. Your schedules are full. Hopefully you are able to fit some sleep into your busy schedule. You are indeed a very impressive group. You are what I would call "high achievers," and I imagine that—in order to have achieved all that you have so far—it has been necessary for you to set goals. It is that subject I want to address today.

Goals are a very significant part of our lives. Goals help us to keep focused. Goals help us plan for and attain the things that are important to us.

I have found that there are at least three things we should consider when we set our

goals. First, we should ask ourselves, "Will this goal help us achieve our own full divine potential?" In other words, are our goals in harmony with Heavenly Father's plan for us, which is to gain "eternal life, . . . the greatest of all the gifts of God" (D&C 14:7)?

One way we can determine whether our goals are in line with those of Heavenly Father's plan for us is to study our patriarchal blessings. This is the second thing we should consider when we set our goals. Patriarchal blessings are our own personal "road maps" and help us to know what Heavenly Father has planned for us. We need to study them, especially when we set goals. What does your patriarchal blessing tell you? What does Heavenly Father want you to do?

In my patriarchal blessing I am admonished not to shy away from opportunities to share the gospel. When I first read this many years ago, I realized I needed to make a change in my life. At that time one of the things that I feared most was having to stand up in front of a group of people to teach a lesson or to give a

Peggy S. Worthen, wife of BYU President Kevin J. Worthen, delivered this devotional address on 6 January 2014.

talk. I know that this is not an uncommon fear, but I realized that somehow I had to overcome it because it was something that Heavenly Father wanted me to do—it was a commandment specifically for me, given in my patriarchal blessing.

I then made it my goal that whenever I was asked to teach a lesson or give a talk I would not “shy away” from it but would willingly accept the invitation. I am still apprehensive about teaching a lesson or giving a talk, especially in a place as big as the Marriott Center, but I know that it is something Heavenly Father wants me to do, so I have faith that, if I try, He will help me.

In the last general conference, Elder Carlos A. Godoy told of his personal experience in using his patriarchal blessing to evaluate his goals:

At the end of the 1980s, our young family was made up of my wife, Mônica, two of our four children, and me. We lived in São Paulo, Brazil, I worked for a good company, I had finished my university studies, and I had recently been released as bishop of the ward where we had lived. Life was good, and everything seemed to be as it should be—until one day an old friend came to visit us.

*At the conclusion of his visit, he made a comment and asked a question that unsettled my convictions. He said, “Carlos, everything seems to be going well for you, your family, your career, and your service in the Church, but—” and then came the question, “if you continue to live as you are living, will the blessings promised in your patriarchal blessing be fulfilled?” [Godoy, “The Lord Has a Plan for Us!” *Ensign*, November 2014]*

As a result of this question from his friend, Elder Godoy paid attention to his patriarchal blessing and made some necessary changes in his life that would help him realize Heavenly Father’s promised blessings for him. We can similarly benefit from regularly reading our patriarchal blessings. This practice will help

keep our goals and our lives in line with Heavenly Father’s plan for us.

The third consideration that is significant in setting goals is to allow for flexibility. It is important that we learn to adjust to change. We need to learn not to panic when things don’t go exactly as we have planned. One thing I have learned is that there is no such thing as an uninterrupted pathway to the goals we make. As someone once observed, there is no freeway to perfection. We usually face detours or unexpected events that occur while trying to achieve our goals.

When I think of detours and unexpected events, I am reminded of Highway 6 in Utah, a road with which I am very familiar. This stretch of highway is between the mouth of Spanish Fork Canyon and my hometown, Price, Utah. If you have ever traveled from Provo to Moab to visit Arches National Park or farther south to Lake Powell, you have driven on this stretch of highway. It is a very beautiful, scenic canyon and one of my favorite drives. Occasionally rockslides can block lanes of traffic, and drivers have to adjust their travel in minor ways to accommodate this. Sometimes, however, there are even greater unplanned changes in the route.

In April 1983 a massive mountain slide completely covered the highway as well as the main line of the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad. The slide blocked the flow of the Spanish Fork River, creating a natural dam and flooding the entire area. Because of this mountain slide, traffic had to be diverted for many months as a new section of highway was being built. Anyone who wanted to travel in that direction had to take a route that was twice as long. It was, indeed, very inconvenient. However, what resulted from this mountain slide was a four-lane highway that was much safer than the narrow two-lane highway that had existed before the mountain slide.

I have learned that life is somewhat like Highway 6. Even though life in general is

beautiful and scenic, the road we travel will not always be an uneventful, direct course, even when we know where we are going. We have to learn to be flexible and to deal with the unexpected. Happily, I have also learned that if we pay attention, prepare for the unexpected, and learn not to panic when we are forced to take a longer detour or a different route, things will often work out better than we could have planned on our own.

Learning to be flexible and adjusting to change can often be very difficult. However, if we are striving to reach our full potential and are setting goals that are in line with Heavenly Father's plan for us, He will help and guide us. We need to remember the Lord's words in Isaiah 55:8–9:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. . . .

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

These words can bring us great comfort when the unexpected happens. Simply knowing that Heavenly Father's plan is the best one for us can take the fear out of the unexpected. Let me illustrate with an example.

My friend Lauri's desire was to gain an education from BYU. Her goal was to obtain her degree in design (a program that no longer exists) and then find employment in that field. While she was attending BYU and pursuing this goal, she was employed part-time at the Registration Office, where she developed organizational and management skills. When she graduated with her degree in design, she was offered a full-time position as an assistant manager in the Registration Office—something that was definitely not in the design field. However, she was newly married and she needed the job in the Registration Office so that she could help support her husband, who was getting his education at BYU. She therefore

accepted the offer and put on hold her desire to use her new skills in design. She had to take an unplanned detour. But rather than panic or give up her goal, Lauri adjusted her plans, and a new, improved route appeared.

Because of her job in the Registration Office, Lauri was given the opportunity to attend a variety of organizational and management skills conferences and presentations, subsequently learning things she had not learned in her major design classes. Before she knew it, Lauri had become the manager of the Registration Office, where she developed those skills even more. In the meantime, Lauri and her husband began to have a family. Her husband continued his schooling, and Lauri continued to work.

When their first child was born, they had to place the baby in a childcare facility during the hours that Lauri worked. She soon learned that the childcare facility was struggling financially—in fact, it was on the brink of failure. Relying on the skills she had obtained in her unplanned employment, Lauri suggested some things to the owner of the childcare facility that she believed would help the facility improve financially.

What happened next was totally unexpected. The owner of the childcare facility asked Lauri to take over as owner. The change was made, and Laurie became the new owner of the facility. Because of the skills she had learned in the Registration Office at BYU, she was able to turn the facility into a very profitable organization. And what about her degree in design? She was able to use that as well, as she decorated her new business using the skills she had learned in her design classes.

The most important thing that happened in Lauri's unexpected detour is that while her husband continued his education and their family grew, her children were able to be with her at the childcare center. She set her goals, and through faith, hard work, responsibility, and the willingness to learn and be flexible,

she was, in her own words, “set up for years.” Her course was not a direct course and the end results were not what she had originally planned, but they were far better than she could have ever expected.

The prophet Nephi in the Book of Mormon also had a life of unexpected events. I imagine that Nephi, like most of you, probably had plans and wanted to achieve certain goals. I like to think that if Nephi had lived at this time he would have done things similar to those things you are doing. One of his goals would have been to serve a mission. And following his mission he would have had a goal to attend a university—undoubtedly BYU. We know that he was a good student because he had learned much and “had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God” (1 Nephi 1:1). One of his goals might have been to participate as a student athlete, because we know that he was “large in stature, and [had] much strength” (1 Nephi 4:31; see also 1 Nephi 2:16). He would have done all he could to obtain his goals.

However, Heavenly Father had different plans for Nephi. His route was not going to be a straight course. Nephi definitely had unexpected detours. But because of his obedience and great faith, he did not panic or fear the detours. He was able to be flexible and adjust to the changes that occurred. He was also very

willing to learn new things along the way—even things that may have seemed impossible, such as building an “exceedingly fine” ship (1 Nephi 18:4) that would carry his family to the land of promise.

Nephi had many wonderful qualities. He accomplished much during his life. The one quality that I admire most was his ability to stay true even when detours were placed in his path. He not only made the necessary adjustments to his plans but did so with a positive attitude. He was always grateful and quick to recognize and acknowledge the tender mercies of the Lord in his life—even during the unexpected and difficult times. If we can be flexible with similar grace, we will be blessed, as was Nephi.

I have found that life is full of unexpected detours. I know that very well from recent events in my life. I hope that with the beginning of this new year we will take time to set goals, evaluate whether they are consistent with God’s plan for us, and read and reread our patriarchal blessings. May we, like Nephi and my friend Lauri, not only be flexible as we encounter detours but also be grateful for the unplanned opportunities Heavenly Father gives us. As we do so, we will develop our full potential as sons and daughters of God. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.