

led by apostles and prophets today and President Thomas S. Monson holds all of the keys of the priesthood necessary to bless our lives and advance the work of the Lord. I know we are all entitled to this knowledge, and if you are struggling, you

can rely on the truthfulness of the testimonies you hear from this pulpit at this conference. These things I know and bear testimony of in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

I have chosen to talk about the importance of *desire*. I hope each of us will search our hearts to determine what we really desire and how we rank our most important desires.

Desires dictate our priorities, priorities shape our choices, and choices determine our actions. The desires we act on determine our changing, our achieving, and our becoming.

The power of an overriding desire

First I speak of some common desires. As mortal beings we have some basic physical needs. Desires to satisfy these needs compel our choices and determine our actions. Three examples will demonstrate how we sometimes override these desires with other desires that we consider more important.

First, food. We have a basic need for food, but for a time that desire can be overridden by a stronger desire to fast.

Second, shelter. As a 12-year-old boy I resisted a desire for shelter because of my greater desire to fulfill a Boy Scout requirement to spend a night in the woods. I was one of several boys who left comfortable tents and found a way to construct a shelter and make a primitive bed from the natural materials we could find.

Third, sleep. Even this basic desire can be temporarily overridden by an even more important desire. As a young soldier in the Utah National Guard, I learned an example of this from a combat-seasoned officer.

In the early months of the Korean War, a Richfield Utah National Guard field artillery battery was called into active service. This battery, commanded by Captain Ray Cox, consisted of about 40 Mormon men. After additional training and reinforcement by reservists from elsewhere, they were sent to Korea, where they experienced some of the fiercest combat of that war. In one battle they had to repel a direct assault by hundreds of enemy infantry, the kind of attack that overran and destroyed other field artillery batteries.

What does this have to do with overcoming the desire for sleep? During one critical night, when enemy infantry had poured through the front lines and into the rear areas occupied by the artillery, the captain had the field telephone lines wired into his tent and ordered his numerous perimeter guards to phone him personally each hour on the hour all night long. This kept the guards awake, but it also meant that Captain Cox had scores of interruptions to his sleep. “How could you do that?” I asked him. His answer shows the power of an overriding desire.

“I knew that if we ever got home, I would be meeting the parents of those boys on the streets in our small town, and I didn’t want to face any of them if their son didn’t make it home because of anything I failed to do as his commander.”¹

What an example of the power of an overriding desire on priorities and on actions! What a powerful example for all of us who are responsible for the welfare of others—parents, Church leaders, and teachers!

As a conclusion to that illustration, early in the morning following his nearly sleepless night, Captain Cox led his men in a counterattack on the enemy infantry. They took over 800 prisoners and suffered only two wounded. Cox was decorated for bravery, and his battery received a Presidential Unit Citation for its extraordinary heroism. And, like Helaman's stripling warriors (see Alma 57:25–26), they all made it home.²

Scriptural teachings about desire

The Book of Mormon contains many teachings on the importance of desire.

After many hours of pleading with the Lord, Enos was told that his sins were forgiven. He then “began to feel a desire for the welfare of [his] brethren” (Enos 1:9). He wrote, “And . . . after I had prayed and labored with all diligence, the Lord said unto me: I will grant unto thee according to thy desires, because of thy faith” (verse 12). Note the three essentials that preceded the promised blessing: desire, labor, and faith.

In his sermon on faith, Alma teaches that faith can begin with “no more than [a] desire to believe” if we will “let this desire work in [us]” (Alma 32:27).

Another great teaching on desire, especially on what should be our ultimate desire, occurs in the experience of the Lamanite king being taught by the missionary Aaron. When Aaron’s teaching caught his interest, the king asked, “What shall I do that I may be born of God” and “have this eternal life?” (Alma 22:15). Aaron replied, “If thou desirest this thing, . . . if thou wilt repent of all thy sins, and will bow down before God, and call on his name in faith, believing that ye shall receive, then shalt thou receive the hope which thou desirest” (verse 16).

The king did so and in mighty prayer declared, “I will give away all my sins to know thee . . . and be saved at the last day” (verse 18). With that commitment and that

identification of his ultimate desire, his prayer was answered miraculously.

The prophet Alma had a great desire to cry repentance to all people, but he came to understand that he should not desire the compelling power this would require because, he concluded, “a just God . . . granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life” (Alma 29:4). Similarly, in modern revelation the Lord declares that He “will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts” (D&C 137:9).

Are we truly prepared to have our Eternal Judge attach this enormous significance to what we really desire?

Many scriptures speak of what we desire in terms of what we seek. “He that seeketh me early shall find me, and shall not be forsaken” (D&C 88:83). “Seek ye earnestly the best gifts” (D&C 46:8). “He that diligently seeketh shall find” (1 Nephi 10:19). “Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me; ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (D&C 88:63).

Readjusting our desires to give highest priority to the things of eternity is not easy. We are all tempted to desire that worldly quartet of property, prominence, pride, and power. We might desire these, but we should not fix them as our highest priorities.

Those whose highest desire is to acquire possessions fall into the trap of materialism. They fail to heed the warning “Seek not after riches nor the vain things of this world” (Alma 39:14; see also Jacob 2:18).

Those who desire prominence or power should follow the example of the valiant Captain Moroni, whose service was not “for power” or for the “honor of the world” (Alma 60:36).

Developing desires

How do we develop desires? Few will have the kind of crisis that motivated Aron Ralston, but his experience provides a valuable lesson about developing desires. While Ralston was hiking in a remote canyon in southern Utah, an 800-pound rock shifted suddenly and trapped his right arm. For five lonely days he struggled to free himself. When he was about to give up and accept death, he had a vision of a three-year-old boy running toward him and being scooped up with his left arm. Understanding this as a vision of his future son and an assurance that he could still live, Ralston summoned the courage and took drastic action to save his life before his strength ran out. He broke the two bones in his trapped right arm and then used the knife in his multitool to cut off that arm. He then summoned the strength to hike five miles for help.³ What an example of the power of an overwhelming desire! When we have a vision of what we can become, our desire and our power to act increase enormously.

Most of us will never face such an extreme crisis, but all of us face potential traps that will prevent progress toward our eternal destiny. If our righteous desires are sufficiently intense, they will motivate us to cut and carve ourselves free from addictions and other sinful pressures and priorities that prevent our eternal progress.

We should remember that righteous desires cannot be superficial, impulsive, or temporary. They must be heartfelt, unwavering, and permanent. So motivated, we will seek for that condition described by the Prophet Joseph Smith, where we have “overcome the evils of [our lives] and lost every desire for sin.”⁴ That is a very personal decision. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell said:

“When people are described as ‘having lost their desire for sin,’ it is they, and they only, who deliberately decided to lose those wrong desires by being willing

to ‘give away all [their] sins’ in order to know God.”

“Therefore, what we insistently desire, over time, is what we will eventually become and what we will receive in eternity.”⁵

As important as it is to lose every desire for sin, eternal life requires more. To achieve our eternal destiny, we will desire and work for the qualities required to become an eternal being. For example, eternal beings forgive all who have wronged them. They put the welfare of others ahead of themselves. And they love all of God’s children. If this seems too difficult—and surely it is not easy for any of us—then we should begin with a desire for such qualities and call upon our loving Heavenly Father for help with our feelings. The Book of Mormon teaches us that we should “pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that [we] may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ” (Moroni 7:48).

Marriage for eternity

I close with a final example of a desire that should be paramount for all men and women—those who are currently married and those who are single. All should desire and seriously work to secure a marriage for eternity. Those who already have a temple marriage should do all they can to preserve it. Those who are single should desire a temple marriage and exert priority efforts to obtain it. Youth and young singles should resist the politically correct but eternally false concept that discredits the importance of marrying and having children.⁶

Single men, please consider the challenge in this letter written by a single sister. She pleaded for “the righteous daughters of God that are sincerely searching for a worthy helpmeet, yet the men seem to be blinded and confused as to whether or not it is their responsibility to seek out

these wonderful, choice daughters of our Heavenly Father and court them and be willing to make and keep sacred covenants in the Lord's house." She concluded, "There are many single LDS men here that are happy to go out and have fun, and date and hang out, but have absolutely no desire to ever make any kind of commitment to a woman."⁷

I am sure that some anxiously seeking young men would want me to add that there are some young women whose desires for a worthy marriage and children rank far below their desires for a career or other mortal distinctions. Both men and women need righteous desires that will lead them to eternal life.

Let us remember that desires dictate our priorities, priorities shape our choices, and choices determine our actions. In addition, it is our actions and our desires that cause us to become something, whether a true friend, a gifted teacher, or one who has qualified for eternal life.

I testify of Jesus Christ, whose love, whose teachings, and whose Atonement make it all possible. I pray that above all else we will desire to become like Him so that one day we can return to His presence to receive the fulness of His joy. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Ray Cox, interview by author, Aug. 1, 1985, Mount Pleasant, Utah, confirming what he told me in Provo, Utah, circa 1953.
2. See Richard C. Roberts, *Legacy: The History of the Utah National Guard* (2003), 307–14; "Self-Propelled Task Force,"

National Guardsman, May 1971, back cover; *Miracle at Kapyong: The Story of the 213th* (film produced by Southern Utah University, 2002).

3. See Aron Ralston, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* (2004).
4. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 211.
5. Neal A. Maxwell, in Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 28, 26; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 22, 21.
6. See Julie B. Beck, "Teaching the Doctrine of the Family," *Ensign*, Mar. 2011, 12–17.
7. Letter, Sept. 14, 2006.

President Uchtdorf

Thank you, brethren.

We remind the brethren of the general priesthood meeting, which will commence in the Conference Center this evening at 6:00 mountain daylight time.

The nationwide Tabernacle Choir broadcast tomorrow morning will be from 9:30 to 10:00 mountain daylight time. The Sunday morning session of conference will immediately follow.

We express appreciation to the combined choir from BYU–Idaho for the beautiful music they have provided this afternoon and to those who have spoken to us in this session of conference.

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will be our concluding speaker at this session. Following Elder Ballard's remarks, the choir will sing our closing hymn, "Let Zion in Her Beauty Rise." The benediction will then be offered by Elder Michael T. Ringwood of the Seventy.

Elder M. Russell Ballard

Finding hope amid challenges

Brothers and sisters, I hope those of you visiting Salt Lake will take the opportunity to enjoy the colors and fragrances

of the beautiful spring flowers on Temple Square.

Spring brings a renewal of light and life—reminding us, through the cycle of seasons, of the life, sacrifice, and