

Decisions for Eternity

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The wise use of your freedom to make your own decisions is crucial to your spiritual growth, now and for eternity.

My dear brothers and sisters, each day is a day of decision. President Thomas S. Monson has taught us that “decisions determine destiny.”¹ The wise use of your freedom to make your own decisions is crucial to your spiritual growth, now and for eternity. You are never too young to learn, never too old to change. Your yearnings to learn and change come from a divinely instilled striving for eternal progression.² Each day brings opportunity for decisions for eternity.

We are eternal beings—spirit children of heavenly parents. The Bible records that “God created man in his own image, ... male and female created he them.”³ Recently I heard a chorus of children sing the beloved song “I Am a Child of God.”⁴ I wondered, “Why haven’t I heard that song rendered more often by singing mothers or faithful fathers?” Are we not *all* children of God? In truth, not one of us can *ever stop* being a child of God!

As children of God, we should love Him with all our heart and soul, even more than we love our earthly parents.⁵ We should love our neighbors as brothers and sisters. No other commandments are greater than these.⁶ And we should ever revere the worth of human life, through each of its many stages.

Scripture teaches that the body and the spirit are the soul of man.⁷ As a dual being, each of you can thank God for His priceless gifts of your body and your spirit.

The Human Body

My professional years as a medical doctor gave me a profound respect for the human body. Created by God as a gift to you, it is absolutely amazing! Think of your eyes that see, ears that hear, and fingers that feel all the wondrous things around you. Your brain lets you learn, think, and reason. Your heart pumps tirelessly day and night, almost without your awareness.⁸

Your body protects itself. Pain comes as a warning that something is wrong and needs attention. Infectious illnesses strike from time to time, and when they do, antibodies are formed that increase your resistance to subsequent infection.

Your body repairs itself. Cuts and bruises heal. Broken bones can become strong once again. I have cited but a tiny sample of the many amazing God-given qualities of your body.

Even so, it seems that in every family, if not in every person, some physical conditions exist that require special

care.⁹ A pattern for coping with such a challenge has been given by the Lord. He said, “I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; ... for if they humble themselves ... and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.”¹⁰

Stellar spirits are often housed in imperfect bodies.¹¹ The gift of such a body can actually strengthen a family as parents and siblings willingly build their lives around that child born with special needs.

The aging process is also a gift from God, as is death. The eventual death of your mortal body is essential to God’s great plan of happiness.¹² Why? Because death will allow your spirit to return home to Him.¹³ From an eternal perspective, death is only premature for those who are not prepared to meet God.

With your body being such a vital part of God’s eternal plan, it is little wonder that the Apostle Paul described it as a “temple of God.”¹⁴ Each time you look in the mirror, see your body as your temple. That truth—refreshed gratefully each day—can positively influence your decisions about how you will care for your body and how you will use it. And those decisions will determine your destiny. How could this be? Because your body is the temple for your spirit. And how you use your body affects your spirit. Some of the decisions that will determine your eternal destiny include:

1. •How will you choose to care for and use your body?
2. •What spiritual attributes will you choose to develop?

The Human Spirit

Your spirit is an eternal entity. The Lord said to His prophet Abraham: “Thou wast chosen before thou wast born.”¹⁵ The Lord said something similar about Jeremiah¹⁶ and many others.¹⁷ He even said it about you.¹⁸

Your Heavenly Father has known you for a very long time. You, as His son or daughter, were chosen by Him to come to earth at this precise time, to be a leader in His great work on earth.¹⁹ You were chosen *not* for your bodily characteristics but for your *spiritual* attributes, such as bravery, courage, integrity of heart, a thirst for truth, a hunger for wisdom, and a desire to serve others.

You developed some of these attributes premortally. Others you can develop here on earth²⁰ as you persistently seek them.²¹

A pivotal spiritual attribute is that of self-mastery—the strength to place reason over appetite. Self-mastery builds a strong conscience. And your conscience determines your moral responses in difficult, tempting, and trying situations. Fasting helps your spirit to develop dominance over your physical appetites. Fasting also increases your access to heaven’s help, as it intensifies your prayers. Why the need for self-mastery? God implanted strong appetites within us for nourishment and love, vital for the human family to be perpetuated.²² When we master our appetites within the bounds of God’s laws, we can enjoy longer life, greater love, and consummate joy.²³

It is not surprising, then, that most temptations to stray from God’s plan of happiness come through the misuse of those essential, God-given appetites. Controlling our appetites is not always easy. Not one of us manages them perfectly.²⁴ Mistakes happen. Errors are made. Sins are committed. What can we do then? We can learn from them. And we can truly repent.²⁵

We can change our behavior. Our very desires can change. How? There is only one way. True change—permanent change—can come only through the healing, cleansing, and enabling power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.²⁶ He loves you—each of you!²⁷ He allows you to access His power as you keep His commandments, eagerly, earnestly, and exactly. It is that simple and certain. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a gospel of change!²⁸

A strong human spirit with control over appetites of the flesh is master over emotions and passions and not a slave to them. That kind of freedom is as vital to the spirit as oxygen is to the body! Freedom from self-slavery is true liberation!²⁹

We are “free to choose liberty and eternal life ... or to choose captivity and death.”³⁰ When we choose the loftier path toward liberty and eternal life, that path includes marriage.³¹ Latter-day Saints proclaim that “marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.” We also know that “gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.”³²

Marriage between a man and a woman is fundamental to the Lord’s doctrine and crucial to God’s eternal plan. Marriage between a man and a woman is God’s pattern for a fulness of life on earth and in heaven. God’s marriage pattern cannot be abused, misunderstood, or misconstrued.³³ Not if you want true joy. God’s marriage pattern protects the sacred power of procreation and the joy of true marital intimacy.³⁴ We know that Adam and Eve were married by God before they ever experienced the joy of uniting as husband and wife.³⁵

In our day civil governments have a vested interest in protecting marriage because strong families constitute the best way of providing for the health, education, welfare, and prosperity of rising generations.³⁶ But civil governments are heavily influenced by social trends and secular philosophies as they write, rewrite, and enforce laws. Regardless of what civil legislation may be enacted, the doctrine of the Lord regarding marriage and morality *cannot be changed*.³⁷ Remember: sin, even if legalized by man, is still sin in the eyes of God!

While we are to emulate our Savior’s kindness and compassion, while we are to value the rights and feelings of all of God’s children, we cannot change His doctrine. It is not ours to change. His doctrine is ours to study, understand, and uphold.

The Savior’s way of life is good. His way includes chastity before marriage and total fidelity within marriage.³⁸ The Lord’s way is the only way for us to experience enduring happiness. His way brings sustained comfort to our souls and perennial peace to our homes. And best of all, His way leads us home to Him and our Heavenly Father, to eternal life and exaltation.³⁹ This is the very essence of God’s work and glory.⁴⁰

My dear brothers and sisters, each day is a day of decision, and our decisions determine our destiny. One day each of us will stand before the Lord in judgment.⁴¹ We will each have a personal interview with Jesus Christ.⁴² We will account for decisions that we made about our bodies, our spiritual attributes, and how we honored God’s pattern for marriage and family. That we may choose wisely each day’s decisions for eternity is my earnest prayer in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Thomas S. Monson, “Decisions Determine Destiny” (Church Educational System fireside, Nov. 6, 2005),

3; speeches.byu.edu.

2. The concept of eternal progression was captured well by W. W. Phelps in his text to the hymn “If You Could Hie to Kolob” (*Hymns*, no. 284). Verse 4 reads: “There is no end to virtue; / There is no end to might; / There is no end to wisdom; / There is no end to light. / There is no end to union; / There is no end to youth; / There is no end to priesthood; / There is no end to truth.” Verse 5 concludes: “There is no end to glory; / There is no end to love; / There is no end to being; / There is no death above.”

3. Genesis 1:27; see also Colossians 3:10; Alma 18:34; Ether 3:15; Moses 6:9.

4. “I Am a Child of God,” *Hymns*, no. 301.

5. See Matthew 10:37.

6. See Mark 12:30–31.

7. See Doctrine and Covenants 88:15.

8. Other God-given mechanisms are also at work in your body. Elements like sodium, potassium, and calcium and compounds like water, glucose, and proteins are essential for survival. The body deals with gases like oxygen and carbon dioxide. It makes hormones like insulin, adrenalin, and thyroxin. Levels of each of these and many other constituents in the body are auto-regulated within certain bounds. Servo-regulatory relationships exist between glands of the body. For example, the pituitary gland at the base of the brain emits a hormone to stimulate the cortex of the adrenal glands to produce adrenal cortical hormones. Rising levels of cortical hormones in turn suppress the pituitary’s output of the stimulating hormone and vice versa. Your body temperature is maintained at a normal range of 98.6°F or 37°C, whether you’re at the equator or at the North Pole.

9. Some conditions are easily evident; others are latent. Some are familial; others are not. Some people are predisposed to cancer, others have allergies, and so on. Each of us can be alert to his or her own area of weakness and humbly learn what the Lord would teach, that the weakness may become a strength.

10. Ether 12:27.

11. Some conditions won't be fully corrected until the Resurrection, when "all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame" (Alma 40:23).

12. See Alma 42:8.

13. The Psalmist wrote, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15). Death is precious because it is a "homecoming" for the Saint with the Lord.

14. 1 Corinthians 3:16; see also 6:19.

15. Abraham 3:23.

16. See Jeremiah 1:5.

17. See Alma 13:2–3.

18. See Doctrine and Covenants 138:55–56.

19. See Alma 13:2–3; Doctrine and Covenants 138:38–57.

20. Attributes of "faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, [and] diligence" (Doctrine and Covenants 4:6) are among the spiritual gifts we can develop and be given. Gratitude is another spiritual attribute that can be developed. Gratitude shapes mood and productivity. And when you have "spiritually been born of God," you may gratefully receive His image in your countenance (see Alma 5:14).

21. See 1 Corinthians 12; 14:1–12; Moroni 10:8–19; Doctrine and Covenants 46:10–29.

22. Some are tempted to eat too much. “Obesity has reached epidemic proportions globally, with at least 2.8 million people dying each year as a result of being overweight” (“10 Facts on Obesity,” World Health Organization, Mar. 2013, www.who.int/features/factfiles/obesity/en). Others are tempted to eat too little. Anorexia and bulimia devastate many lives, marriages, and families. And some are tempted by sexual appetites forbidden by our Creator. Clarification is found in *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, which states: “The Lord’s law of chastity is abstinence from sexual relations outside of lawful marriage and fidelity within marriage. ... Adultery, fornication, homosexual or lesbian relations, and every other unholy, unnatural, or impure practice are sinful.” Still quoting from the handbook: “Homosexual behavior violates the commandments of God, is contrary to the purposes of human sexuality, and deprives people of the blessings that can be found in family life and in the saving ordinances of the gospel. ... While opposing homosexual behavior, the Church reaches out with understanding and respect to individuals who are attracted to those of the same gender” ([2010], 21.4.5; 21.4.6).

23. See 1 Corinthians 6:9–20; James 1:25–27; Doctrine and Covenants 130:20–21. And we should always remember that “men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25).

24. Mortality is a period of testing, as explained in scripture: “We will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abraham 3:25).

25. See Mosiah 4:10; Alma 39:9; Helaman 15:7. *Handbook 2* includes this message: “Homosexual behavior can be forgiven through sincere repentance” (21.4.6).

26. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ and by obedience to the principles of the gospel, all mankind may be saved (see Doctrine and Covenants 138:4; Articles of Faith 1:3).

27. See Ether 12:33–34; Moroni 8:17.

28. See Mosiah 5:2; Alma 5:12–14.

29. See Romans 8:13–17; Galatians 5:13–25; Doctrine and Covenants 88:86.

30. 2 Nephi 2:27.

31. See Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–4.

32. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129.

33. See Matthew 19:4–6; Mosiah 29:26–27; Helaman 5:2.

34. Each person is born with unique identity, chromosomes, and DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid). DNA is a molecule that encodes genetic instructions used in the development and function of living cells. Each person’s DNA is created when the DNA from a father and a mother combine to create the DNA of a new body—a partnership between father, mother, and child.

35. See Genesis 2:24–25; 3:20–21; 4:1–2, 25.

36. Dr. Patrick F. Fagan wrote: “The indispensable building block upon which the fortunes of the economy depends [is] the married-parent household—especially the child-rich family that worships weekly. ... Every marriage creates a new household, an independent economic unit that generates income, spends, saves, and invests” (“The Family GDP: How Marriage and Fertility Drive the Economy,” *The Family in America*, vol. 24, no. 2 [Spring 2010], 136).

37. See Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:18; Matthew 5:27–28; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; Romans 1:26–27; 13:9; Mosiah 13:22; 3 Nephi 12:27–28; Doctrine and Covenants 42:24; 59:6.

38. See Gordon B. Hinckley, “This Thing Was Not Done in a Corner,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 49.

39. See Doctrine and Covenants 14:7.

40. See Moses 1:39.

41. See 2 Nephi 9:41, 46; Mosiah 16:10.

42. We will be judged according to our deeds and the desire of our hearts (see Doctrine and Covenants 137:9; see also Hebrews 4:12; Alma 18:32; Doctrine and Covenants 6:16; 88:109).

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