

“Strengthen Your Faith as You Face Life’s Challenges”

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I am pleased to be with you on this occasion. I realize that for many of you these are difficult times, but I am very optimistic about your future. The title of my message is “Strengthen Your Faith as You Face Life’s Challenges.”

In the doctrine of the Church, we encourage you to strengthen your faith and your spiritual, social, physical, and intellectual growth. When I speak of faith, I am speaking of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a major purpose of everything we do, including the marvelous BYU-Pathway program.

The challenge is to find the time for spiritual growth while acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in a very competitive world.

Faith and acquiring skills and knowledge require equal effort and commitment. We cannot expect to have faith at the center of our lives if all our efforts are expended on skills, knowledge, making money, or other pursuits.

Some of us want faith to be at the center of our lives, but it does not get our attention; it is a small portion of our efforts.

Let me share three principles that I believe are essential as you place faith in the Lord Jesus Christ at the center of your lives, as you seek diligently to acquire the skills and knowledge required to fulfill your responsibilities.

First, understand that there is truly opposition in all things. The choices you make are critical.

“Choice” is a very loaded word. Most of you are at the stage of life where you have numerous options for some of the most important choices you will ever make.

Many of these decisions or choices will need to be made soon — most over the next few years. The choices you will make are the key to your future and your happiness. Remember, you are the sum total of every decision you make.

We live at a time when almost every choice is debated. Any righteous proposal or principle is almost immediately opposed by many.

The Prophet Lehi near the end of his life taught, “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things.”¹ He continues later:

Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they 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.²

Given the War in Heaven over the plan of salvation, it is not surprising that the religious principles that have been taught in this, the last dispensation, are attacked with malignant ferocity.

But lest we be discouraged, let us remember the outcome of the War in Heaven and the outcome that we know will come to fruition with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

The tough decisions you face today involve individual choices and behavior, and these choices can be made and followed. But do not be distracted by rationalization or diversion.

Many years ago, Robert K. Thomas, who for several years was academic vice president at Brigham Young University, told of a moving poem by John Holmes. The poem describes an old, deaf New England shipbuilder teaching Holmes in his youth about building a ship. Holmes comes to an understanding with the force of a voice shouting in his ear that, no matter how you build it, “your ship has to float: you can’t explain to the ocean.”³

A great enemy of good choices is rationalization. Many argue that we are not accountable for our choices.

Because of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, we know that we are accountable for our choices,⁴ and we also know to whom we must account.⁵ It is the Savior!

Do not suppose that rationalizations about bad choices will be any more effective than trying to explain to the ocean why the ship was built in such a way that it could not float.

We need to make good choices each day and not rationalize or be diverted.

When I was a young adult, a great mentor taught me that it is the small decisions or choices day by day that are important. He introduced me to some wonderful advice from an exceptional teacher who had influenced him.

It reads: “Ah, my soul, look to the road you are walking on! He who picks up one end of a stick picks up the other. He who chooses the beginning of a road chooses the place it leads to. It is the means that determines the end.”⁶

I have found this counsel to be true; it has been most helpful to me throughout my life. Let me make it very clear: the choices you make are critical.

A second principle is to avoid bondage, subjugation, and addictions.

Bondage, subjugation, and addictions come in many forms.

First, addictions that impair agency, contradict moral beliefs, and destroy good health cause bondage. The impact of drugs and alcohol, immorality, pornography, gambling, financial subjugation, and other afflictions impose on those in bondage and on society a burden of such magnitude that it is almost impossible to quantify.

Second, some addictions or choices, while not inherently evil, can use up our precious allotment of time that could otherwise be used to accomplish virtuous objectives. These can include excessive use of social media, video and digital games, and many others.

Third, the most universal subjugation in our day, as it has been throughout history, are making choices that are inconsistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Substituting the philosophies of men for gospel truth can lead us away from the simplicity of the Savior’s message.

When the Apostle Paul visited Athens, he tried to teach of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Of this effort we read in Acts, “(For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear *some new thing*.)”⁷ When the crowd realized the simple religious nature of Paul’s message, which was not new, they rejected it.

This is emblematic of our own day, where gospel truths are often rejected or distorted to make them intellectually more appealing or compatible with current cultural trends and intellectual philosophies. If we are not careful, we can be captured by these trends and place ourselves in intellectual bondage.

The third principle is to live so that the Atonement of Jesus Christ can be fully efficacious in your life.

As indicated previously, rationalization for bad choices will not be effective, but repentance and following the Savior will. Through revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Savior declared, “Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me.”⁸ This is the path you will want to follow.

In addition, those who repent will be blessed by the Atonement of Jesus Christ.⁹ Without His Atonement, the eternal principle of *justice* would require punishment.¹⁰ Because of the Savior’s Atonement, *mercy* can prevail for those who have repented and allow them to return to the presence of God.¹¹

Speaking of His Atonement, President Gordon B. Hinckley beautifully taught, “When all is said and done, when all of history is examined, when the deepest depths of the human mind have been explored, nothing is so wonderful, so majestic, so tremendous as this act of grace.”¹²

I have reviewed with you three significant principles to follow as you strengthen your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as you face life’s challenges.

1. Understand that there is truly opposition in all things. The choices you make are critical.
2. Avoid bondage, subjugation, and addictions.
3. Live so the Atonement of Jesus Christ can be efficacious in your life.

I personally testify of the divinity of the Savior and the reality of the Atonement, and I desire that you will prayerfully consider the significant choices that are before you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ [2 Nephi 2:11](#)

² [2 Nephi 2:27](#)

³ “Talk,” in *Collected Poems of John Holmes*, <http://hdl.handle.net/10427/14894>

⁴ See [Doctrine and Covenants 72:3](#)

⁵ See [2 Nephi 9:41](#)

⁶ Harry Emerson Fosdick, *Living Under Tension* (1941), 111

⁷ [Acts 17:21](#); emphasis added

⁸ [Doctrine and Covenants 19:23](#)

⁹ “The Atonement,” *Gospel Principles*, 75; see also “Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference*, 14

¹⁰ See [Alma 41–42](#)

¹¹ See [Alma 42:15](#)

¹² [Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Gordon B. Hinckley](#) (2016), 330