**Investing for Eternity**

By Elder John H. Groberg

Of the First Quorum of the Seventy

I would like to speak about the importance of wise investing. I remember hearing that one wise investment is worth a lifetime of work. In terms of dollar returns, I’m sure that could be proven true. Who hasn’t heard of the investor who put several thousands of dollars in IBM many years ago and now is a millionaire? Who hasn’t had thoughts of getting into a small company, “on the ground floor,” in hopes of duplicating that success?

But then there is the other side. How many bought silver or gold or other earthly goods at high prices and have frustratingly watched them slide to very low prices?

Some say, “Well, you can always trust real estate, if you find a good location. That’s always a sure investment.” Yes, unless the zoning changes or the taxes increase or growth stops or floods or natural disasters or wars come.

Of course, there is a place for wise investments, but generally temporal investments are at the mercy of forces beyond our control﻿—the death or defection of a key executive or salesman, the patenting of a new invention that replaces our company’s product, the sudden change in the price of oil, the unexpected shift in interest rates, the fraud or embezzlement of a trusted partner, or the precipitous fall of the stock market.

With this much uncertainty in investing, why even talk about it? True, earthly investments do not last, even when they are successful for a time. But I want to talk about another kind of investment. This investment has *no risk* whatsoever, and it pays *handsome returns* on a continuing basis. I speak of investment of time, of spiritual investments﻿—investments in character, obedience, service, kindness.

The Lord has told us:

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.” ([Matt. 6:19–20](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/nt/matt/6.19-20?lang=eng#18).)

I remember when I attended business school at BYU many years ago one of my professors gave three rules for good investing. He said, “First, you should invest in things that you know something about or have had some experience in, so you can tell whether the promises or prospects are reasonable or way out of line. Second, you should invest in things close to home, where you can see them. Third, you should invest with people you personally know and with whom you have had experience and whom you trust.”

I am not sure if all of those rules still apply today, but they have been good guides in my life. And they apply perfectly to investments of time, to spiritual investments.

The resources of the earth are distributed unevenly when it comes to financial investments. Some people have much more money to work with; some have much less. On the other hand, we all have an equal amount of time to invest. Twenty-four hours each day is allotted to each person. How we invest that time is of utmost importance to our happiness now and forever.

Let me give two specific examples﻿—first, investing time in service, and second, investing time in kindness.

Come with me for a moment to the small island of Lifuka in the South Pacific. The year is 1956. I was serving a mission in Tonga and had recently been appointed district president of the Ha’apai District, which had its headquarters on this island of Lifuka. The district covered seventeen islands. Since our only means of transportation was by sailboat, I needed some experienced, seaworthy counselors. The Lord provided, and two fine local men were chosen.

One of these was Brother Vea. He had a beautifully kept thatched home and a lovely, clean yard. To earn money he was a peanut vendor (selling peanuts he grew himself), and most evenings you could see him out with his cart selling peanuts and a few other items his wife had made.

I don’t know how many times we had to have presidency meetings on the night a big social or game or fair was going on, but never do I recall him saying, “I can’t come tonight,” even though such nights were the best for his business.

Very often our schedule called for us to go to another island for a conference or for tracting or for other Church business, and often we’d have to leave during a major rugby match or other large gathering. But never once did I hear Brother Vea complain or suggest we change our schedule. He chose to invest in obedience and in service to others﻿—often at the expense of some immediate worldly gain.

Now let’s follow that particular investment through. About fifteen years later, as a Regional Representative, I was given an assignment to the South Pacific. I had the responsibility of holding some meetings in California and then moving on to Honolulu and to the islands farther south. We had two meetings scheduled in California﻿—one in the evening and one the next morning﻿—involving a few stake presidents. As we went through the agenda that evening, I found myself feeling that we ought to finish the whole agenda and not stay on the next morning. Accordingly, we combined meetings and completed the entire agenda that evening, even though it was late.

Since we had originally scheduled to meet until noon the next day, I didn’t have an airplane reservation until the early afternoon. I wondered, “What am I going to do with these several extra hours I have?”

I got up early the next morning and, as any of you would do, prayed fervently to know if there was something I ought to do. I didn’t have any especially strong feelings, but I thought, “Well, I’d better check.” So I called the airport and said, “I have a reservation on this particular plane this afternoon. Do you have anything leaving before then?”

The man said, “We have one leaving in forty-five minutes.”

I said, “Let me give it a try.” So I quickly gathered up everything, threw it in the suitcase, and charged off to the airport. As it turned out, I went straight to the gate and was the last person on the plane, but I did get on.

I arrived in Honolulu four or five hours earlier than expected, so there was no one to pick me up for several hours. What should I do now?

Just a few minutes later I ran into a young man I had known in the mission field. He said, “Did you hear that just the other night Brother Vea flew in from Tonga? He has some kind of disease, and he is over at the Queens Hospital. I was just going to visit him. If you have a few minutes, would you like to come?”

I said, “Sure.”

When we saw Brother Vea, his whole body was yellow with jaundice because of a very serious kidney problem. His eyes were closed. I could tell he was in great pain.

I went over to him and said, “Brother Vea, I’ve come to visit you.”

He suddenly opened his eyes. They were about as yellow as anything I have ever seen. Then he said, “Oh, thank you for coming. I knew that you were scheduled for a conference in Tonga and that you would be coming through Honolulu. All last night I prayed as fervently as I could that some way or another you would visit me. Would you please give me a blessing?”

We administered to him, and, as I began to seal the anointing, I thought that everything would be just fine. With his kind of faith, how could it be otherwise? But, as is so often the case, that wasn’t what the Lord had in mind.

I won’t go into detail, but, basically, I had the opportunity of telling him that very shortly he would be performing a certain service on the other side that was badly needed. In a way it was a shock to me, but the Spirit was so strong there was no question as to the Lord’s will. When we concluded, he looked up at me and simply said, “Thank you. Thank you very much. I really wanted to live here, but more than that I want to do my Heavenly Father’s will. I’m grateful I now know what it is.”

After a while, we left. Hours before I was originally scheduled to arrive in Honolulu, Brother Vea was transferred from this sphere of existence to his next assignment. He went with a great peace and calm in his heart. An investment in time and unselfish service paid off in a quiet, yet stunningly impressive, way. This investment in service had paid great dividends of joy all through those years and will continue to pay increasing dividends throughout all eternity.

Invest in service? What greater, what surer investment can we make?

Let me talk about investments in kindness. Being kind is often like making a deposit in a bank. We have blood banks and financial banks that we put into and draw from. We understand these banks and how they work. I would suggest that just by being kind to other people and by eliminating anger, we move our kindness into a bank﻿—a kindness bank, if you will﻿—which is available to help us and other people.

In that same mission to Tonga, my first assignment was with a native companion on a very small island of only about seven hundred people. We were extremely frustrated in tracting, for no one seemed to want to let us in. Some people would invite us to eat with them, but they would say, “We’ll let you eat something as long as you don’t talk about your church or talk religion to us.” We were grateful for the food and their hospitality and would ask if we could at least say a blessing. Sometimes we would say a ten-minute blessing to get a few points of doctrine in!

One village seemed particularly antagonistic. Many days we would tract all day and not get into a single home. Then one day we did get into a home. The family seemed nice and invited us back. We returned again and again. When we gave them the fourth discussion, they had lots of questions, and it was quite late at night before we finished.

This family’s house was right on the edge of a jungle area, and our house was on the other side of it, two miles away. There was a small trail through the bush that we usually took on our way home.

We had gone about a hundred feet from the door to where the bush started when a group of eight or ten tough young Tongan men suddenly emerged from behind the trees. They had clubs, stones, and broken bottles and were obviously drunk. They formed a sort of semicircle and began to close in. As they moved closer, my native companion﻿—just like a mother hen﻿—pushed me behind him and said, “Now here’s what we’ll do. I’m going to count to three. When I say, ‘Three,’ I’ll yell as loud as I can and charge right into the middle of them. Then you turn and run as fast as you can through the bush toward home. It is dark, and they won’t know you’re gone until you’re halfway home.”

“I can’t do that,” I said (even though maybe I wanted to).

He replied, “Look, I’m the senior companion. You do what I say. There is no sense in both of us getting hurt.” Then he started, “One … , two …”

Fortunately, he didn’t get to three, and I didn’t have to make that decision. For on the count of two there came a huge crash from behind us, and out of the bush came the man that everyone on the island feared more than anyone else. He was the toughest of them all.

My first impression was, “We’ve had it now﻿—sealed off from in front and behind.”

But he walked right past us and stood in front of us. He glared at those eight or ten young men and said, “These men are under my protection. Anyone who touches them or even says anything bad about them will answer to me.”

Have you ever watched a cube of butter placed in a hot frying pan? It just melts away. Well, that’s what happened. In no time at all that crowd melted into the darkness as quietly as they had appeared from it.

As we walked to our home with our protector, we asked him, “Why did you do that? Why did you help us?”

“Well,” he explained, “someone﻿—a minister, I think﻿—called us together tonight and gave us some free home brew and suggested that we take care of the Mormon missionaries and see that they didn’t come back to town. I attended that meeting,” he said, “and when I heard the name *Mormon,* something stirred deep inside me.”

He then told the following story: “I didn’t know my real parents. I was reared by some relatives. I was picked on a lot. It seemed that no one really wanted me. When I was about ten I went down to Vava’u. There I met two young men who were teaching a school in English. They wore white shirts and ties. Everyone else kicked me around, but they didn’t. They asked me if I would like to come to their school. They shared love and concern for me, something I hadn’t felt much in my life before.

“Shortly after that I came back to this island and had no further association with the Church. There weren’t any missionaries here, nor were there any members that I knew of. So, over a period of years, I seemed to forget about it. But when the minister spoke of Mormon missionaries, it all came back to me: ‘Mormon missionaries aren’t bad people; they are good people. They loved me. They helped me. They were kind to me.’ I wondered what to do. Then I thought, ‘I’ll just sit by the house and protect them.’”

And that is what he did. When our safety had come to that critical point, he had jumped out; and we didn’t have any more problems with any of those people because they knew we were under his protection.

Now, I want to ask, “What would have happened had those two missionaries twenty years earlier not been kind?” I don’t even know who they were. I don’t know their names or anything about them other than that they showed love and kindness to a little orphan boy who was kicked around by others. I know that the love and kindness they showed him went into this eternal kindness bank and came out with interest later﻿—twenty years later﻿—to help us.

Can you see how doing a kind deed continues on forever and pays eternal dividends and blesses countless people?

Oh, how we need to draw on this bank﻿—and how we need to put into it also, for ourselves and for others. No act of kindness is ever lost. It is always there and available.

Now you might say, “Yes, but there are so many things to do. How can we choose the best place to invest our time?” Certainly, we will want to invest our time in helping others, in being kind rather than selfish. And we will want to follow the promptings of the Spirit of the Lord in doing this.

But how do you know when the Spirit is prompting you? Here is a short list, modified from a Seminary outline, of some ways to know. Of course, all the items won’t apply all the time. We each have our ups and downs. But as general guides, you will find the list helpful.

| **When You Have the Spirit** | **When You Do Not Have the Spirit** |
| --- | --- |
| 1. You generally feel happy and calm. | You may feel unhappy, depressed, confused, frustrated most of the time. |
| 2. You feel full of light. | You may feel heavy, full of darkness. |
| 3. Your mind is clear. | Your mind may be muddled. |
| 4. You feel love for the Lord and others. | You may feel empty, hollow, cold inside. |
| 5. You feel generous. | You may feel selfish, possessive, self-centered. |
| 6. Nobody can offend you. | You may be offended easily. |
| 7. You are very forgiving and kind. | You may usually be on the defensive. |
| 8. You feel confident in what you do. | You may become discouraged easily. |
| 9. You don’t mind others seeing what you are doing. | You may become secretive, evasive. |
| 10. You want to be with those who love you—especially family members. | You may want to be alone most of the time. You avoid others—especially family members. |
| 11. You are glad when others succeed. | You may be envious almost constantly of what others do and what they have. |
| 12. You want to help others be happy, even those opposed to you. | You may want to get even and show others up. |
| 13. You willingly perform Church work. | You may feel hesitant, unworthy, and unwilling to perform Church ordinances. |
| 14. You feel like praying and reading the scriptures. | You may not want to pray or read scriptures. |
| 15. You wish you could keep all the Lord’s commandments. | You may find the commandments of God and rules of the family bothersome, restricting, or senseless. |
| 16. You usually control your appetites and emotions. You are calm and control your speech; you feel no anger. | You may be a slave to your appetites. You give way to strong anger and outspokenness. |
| 17. You generally feel a deep desire to help others—usually in a way no one else will know about. | When you help others, your main desire may be to have your actions noticed. |
| 18. You speak and think good about others. | You are critical of others, especially family members and those in authority. |
| 19. You feel sorrow when others have problems and sincerely desire to help them. | You may often question others’ motives and secretly delight in others’ problems. |
| 20. You realize that your thoughts and your actions are open to God. | You may feel that what you do and think is only your business and no one else knows or cares. |

I pray that all of us will invest our time as the Spirit directs us. The opportunities for service and kindness are all around us.

President Kimball has said, “God does notice us, and he watches over us. But it is usually through another person that he meets our needs.” (*Ensign,* July 1978, p. 4.)

Just stop and think for a moment of the whole world, the whole universe, literally filled with pleas for help. Hearing those cries is like listening to a radio. Most of us listen to the close-range familiar FM bands. The sound we hear is bright, clear, and familiar, and we can listen with little effort. Most of us prefer to listen to such stations.

It seems to be our nature to try to shield ourselves from things different. How desperately we attempt to move in the circles of familiarity, expending little or no effort, lulled into the security of sensing no need for change as the big sound we are used to comes through so clearly.

But we must begin to listen to our “short-wave radio.” When we turn to a short-wave radio, we hear static and distant voices, fading music, foreign tongues, strange sounds, dots and dashes, low-pitched hums and high-pitched squeals. We can no longer relax with effortless familiarity, but must painstakingly tune the dial and carefully, with much effort, attune our hearing and focus our attention. We must attempt to understand those unclear sounds and unfamiliar languages.

Like listening to a short-wave radio, we must spend effort to hear the cry of others﻿—those unborn, those untaught, those unhappy, those unbaptized, those unwell, those unsealed. We must even strain to comprehend what is being requested, what is needed, and how we can best fill that need. We must, in fact, move into the unknown, become a full partner with God, and attune our souls to the hearing and answering of those pleas. It will always present a challenge. All growth requires effort.

I testify from personal experience and deep assurance that, in all situations and at all times, the best investment we can make will be to do what we know is right and to follow the promptings of the Spirit. My brothers and sisters, let’s make wise investments! Let’s serve willingly. Let’s forgive readily. Let’s be kind, consistently. God will help us. We can eliminate anger from our lives. We can substitute love. We can develop love in our hearts. We can be kind to one another.

I testify to you that our Father in Heaven loves us with all his heart. Jesus loves us with all his heart. They live and are available to help us. They are the greatest investment counselors anywhere.

**Let’s Talk about It**

*After reading “Investing for Eternity,” individually or as a family, you may wish to consider some of the following questions during a family home evening or study time.*

1. What is meant by the term spiritual investments?
2. Elder Groberg points out that we all have an equal allotment of time to invest. What are some of the best ways we can invest our time?
3. Think of times in your life when you have made an investment of service or kindness. How did the investment make you feel? What blessings resulted from that investment?
4. Discuss times you have been blessed as others have made spiritual investments that benefited you.
5. Discuss specific ways in which you and your family can develop the ability to consistently invest your time in spiritual, rather than temporal, things.

**One Man Can Make a Difference**

[F. Melvin Hammond](https://speeches.byu.edu/speakers/f-melvin-hammond/) Professor of Political Science and Religion at Ricks College June 21, 1988 • Devotional

My dear brothers and sisters, I am happy to be with you today, especially as you are beginning a new summer session of study at Brigham Young University. It is pleasing to me to see so many of my dear friends—President Holland, my family, and my mission family, who have come to lend their love and spiritual strength to me on this occasion.

This is a devotional assembly. It is a moment for each of us to think of heavenly things, of things that will build our spiritual strength and draw us closer to our Heavenly Father. I realize, in part, the responsibility that has been placed upon me. Therefore, I seek for the spirit of the Holy Ghost to be with me. And I pray that you, too, will sense my desire and let your faith and prayers be exercised in my behalf.

The famous Christian reformer, Billy Sunday, is quoted as having said that the secret to his success was that “He started a fire in himself and the people came to watch him burn.” I feel that I have come with a fire in my heart, kindled by the love that I have for the Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that as the Spirit burns in me, this same Spirit will ignite a fire in you. “Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together” (D&C 50:22).

**Because of One Man**

Some time ago, while laboring in the Lord’s missionary service, a wonderful missionary came to see me. It was near the end of his mission. He was very depressed. Saddened by his own perception of personal success, he had imposed upon himself a standard from which he had fallen far short. As he spoke, he recounted for me the difficult time he had experienced in the MTC. While he was there, his father had died unexpectedly, and for a brief period of time the elder had considered leaving the mission and returning home. But, encouraged by a loving mother and spurred on by an individual commitment, he continued his training and finally found himself in the beautiful country of Bolivia.

I listened to him as he told me of the initial efforts he had made in his mission to work hard, pray often, follow all the rules, and be a model missionary—expecting, of course, to be rewarded with hundreds of baptisms. But, unfortunately, the baptisms had not come. Gradually he began to slacken his pace. He felt that his prayers were not being heard, so why pray? The mission rules seemed somehow to be burdensome. They were restrictive, silly things, written by the mission president only to goad and irritate him and the other missionaries.

In despair, he said, “And now I’m nobody! What I do won’t make any difference!” Then searchingly, he quickly added, “Will it, President Hammond?”

For an instant the same questions passed through my own mind. “Can he make a difference? Can I? Can anyone? Does it matter what one man does?” Then, in my mind’s eye I saw a myriad of people and events. I found myself talking eagerly and enthusiastically.

“Elder, do you remember a man named Copernicus?”

For more than a millennium men’s ideas about the universe had been cemented in the theories of the Greeks, of Ptolemy and Aristotle. That is to say, the earth was the center of the universe. Even the Catholic church in the thirteenth century, influenced by St. Thomas Aquinas, had adopted the Aristotelian view that the earth lies right in the middle of the heavens. The dreaded Inquisition managed to silence any radical views that might have been expressed. Then, in A.D. 1543, Nicolaus Copernicus published a new truth: that the earth rotates daily on its axis and the planets revolve in orbits around the sun. Of this, Martin Luther is reputed to have said, “The fool wants to turn the whole science of astronomy upside down” (“Pioneers in Man’s Search for the Universe,” *National Geographic*145, no. 5 [May 1974]:627). Copernicus did just that, and in so doing set astronomy free.

One man! And today we are awed into humility by the tremendous scope of the universe. Yes, we measure space by light-years, the distance light travels in one year at the rate of 186,282 miles a second. We know that galaxies are as common as blades of grass in a meadow—perhaps over a hundred billion of them. There are distant objects known as quasars, placed at ten billion light years away from the earth, that in one second throw out enough energy to supply all the earth’s electrical needs for billions of years. And we know of neutron stars whose matter, if contained in a teaspoon, would weigh over a billion tons. The learning goes on and on because of “one man.”

**Thousands Followed**

The elder seemed interested. For a moment he had forgotten himself and was listening intently. Therefore, I continued. I know of a man raised in India and educated in England as an attorney. He loved his native land and longed for the time that she would be free from the domination of Great Britain. Most of his life he lived in a mud hut that had no electric lights, no running water, no telephone. He didn’t own an automobile, and he never sought or held a public office. By some he was thought to be the most Christ-like person who had ever lived, and yet he was not even a Christian. To India he was the “Mahatma” or “The Great Soul.” He described himself as a “self-remade man.”

When Britain was struggling for survival against the Axis powers during World War II, and some prominent Indian leaders wanted to revolt and throw off her authority, he said, “We will not steal even our independence.” In his efforts to stop the continual fighting between India and Pakistan he often subjected himself to prolonged fasts. During one of those lengthy ordeals a medical doctor tried to get him to take a small portion of beef broth, to which he commented, “Even for life itself we may not do certain things. There is only one course open to me—to die, but never to break my pledge.” And as they begged him to eat or drink, fearing for his life, for his kidneys had begun to fail, he simply said, “Life is more than science and God more than chemistry” (see Sterling W. Sill, *The Glory of the Sun*[Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961], pp. 309–10).

Someone has said, “When Cicero speaks, the people say, ‘How eloquent!’ When Demosthenes speaks, the people say, ‘Come, let us march!’” When this humble Indian went out from his house to walk, multitudes followed him. Thousands were willing to submit to death rather than take up arms against their enemies because he did not believe in violence, but rather in the principles of peace and love.

On 30 July 1948, as he hurried to the village prayer ground, blessing the people as he went, a religious fanatic shot and killed him. The Mahatma was gone. His name was Mohandas K. Gandhi. Only one man! Yet through his efforts, India was granted her freedom. The name *Gandhi*will live on forever—in the annals of time.

**“In the Hands of Man”**

“You see, Elder, there are men who have truly made a difference.”

Yet we must use prudence in our study, for it is possible that evil men can also have a lasting effect upon their fellow beings. A demented Austrian with a view of total world control used his evil genius to disrupt the whole earth. Plunging the civilized world into war, his powerful armies created havoc throughout all of Europe. His regime left behind a path of death and destruction that had few equals in the history of the world. His racial myth of Aryan supremacy was responsible for the mass murder of over six million Jews and many more millions of members of other races, supposedly “inferior” to the Germans. The names of the death camps of Dachau, Buchenwald, and others will long be remembered as horrible proof of the depth of depravity to which supposedly civilized countries may descend. Such atrocities were instigated by one man, Adolf Hitler, who caused himself to be called simply “Der Führer.” In a pamphlet written of the tragedy of Dachau, the author said, “Man cannot trust himself in the hands of man” (pamphlet distributed at Dachau).

Truly a man may make a difference, but if he is not guided by the Holy Spirit, but rather by the evil one, he may jeopardize all that is sacred in this life and in the life to come.

**More Than Any Other Man**

The elder sat quietly. Hardly moving. Not speaking. “Are you beginning to understand?” I asked him pointedly.

“I believe I am,” he responded. “But, please, don’t stop now, President. Go on!” I thought for a moment and then continued.

“Very well. There are two others I would like to tell you about.”

On 23 December 1805, [a baby boy](https://speeches.byu.edu/topic/joseph-smith/) was born to Joseph and Lucy Smith. They named him after his father. As he grew and developed in mind and in body, schooled in godly principles by his devoted parents, his inquisitive mind sought for religious truth. In response to his humble pleading, the most glorious manifestation ever given to man appeared before him. He saw the living God and Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son. Acting upon their admonitions, one boy (one man) began the incredible task of preparing a way to preach the restored gospel of salvation to “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (D&C 133:37).

Progress was slow. The translation of sacred records into the Book of Mormon required considerable time and great effort. There were persecutions, killings—every possible delaying tactic conceivable was employed by Satan to stop the work. Still, “having put his hand to the plough” (Luke 9:62), he did not look back. Many followed him. They were driven from place to place. Finding no rest from their tribulations, they relied only on his leadership and their implicit faith in the Savior of Men.

When he was only thirty-nine years old, a bloodthirsty mob stormed a jail in Carthage, Illinois, where he had been imprisoned unjustly, shooting and killing him and his brother Hyrum. His murderers believed that in this way they would stop the work Joseph had begun. But the work did not stop, for it is the work of God. Today, because of one man and his indomitable character for good, the truth is being proclaimed in much of the known world. Of him, Elder John Taylor has said,

*Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it.*[D&C 135:3]

**Because He First Loved Us**

“And now I come to the last, yet by far the most significant of all,” I said to the young elder.

He was born [a babe in Bethlehem](https://speeches.byu.edu/topic/jesus-christ/) of old and placed in a manger by his beautiful virgin mother, Mary. He was the firstborn son in the spirit world and the only begotten son of Eloheim in the flesh. As he grew, “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:52). At the age of thirty he began his public ministry. To the ancient prophet Nephi, an angel said,

*Look and behold the condescension of God!*

*And I looked and beheld the Redeemer of the world, of whom my father had spoken. . . .*

*And I beheld that he went forth ministering unto the people, in power and great glory; and the multitudes were gathered together to hear him; and I beheld that they cast him out from among them. . . .*

*. . . And I looked, and I beheld the Lamb of God going forth among the children of men. And I beheld multitudes of people who were sick, and who were afflicted with all manner of diseases, and with devils and unclean spirits. . . . And they were healed by the power of the Lamb of God; and the devils and the unclean spirits were cast out.*

*. . . And I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, the Son of the everlasting God was judged of the world; and I saw and bear record.*

*And I, Nephi, saw that he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world.*[1 Nephi 11:26–33]

As a resurrected being he proclaimed to the Nephites, on this continent:

*And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even*so *should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—*

*And for this cause have I been lifted up.*[3 Nephi 27:14–15]

All this was precipitated by one thing: his infinite love for all of God’s children. The Apostle John said, “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). One man!—the Son of the Eternal God, who submitted himself to all of these things in order that we, you and I, might live again with the hope of eternal life.

**One Faithful Elder**

Now I spoke softly to the young missionary with all the fervor of my soul. I placed my hand on his and said, “Are you ready to go back out into the field of labor? Can you make a difference in the lives of these special Bolivian children of our Heavenly Father? Are you ready to once again ‘take up your cross, follow [him], and feed [his] sheep?’ (D&C 112:14).

It was apparent that his attitude had changed. With a renewed spirit of dedication, tears slipping down his face, he committed himself once again to the work of the Lord. We knelt in prayer together. I blessed him that he would be able to find the way.

Although he had been weak, I felt an inner confidence in him. As I sought to find direction from the Spirit for a new assignment for the elder, I surprised even myself by sending him to one of the most difficult and remote areas of Bolivia—a small community near the Argentine border named Bermejo. The work had gone badly there for some time, with only a few baptisms to reinforce the little handful of Saints who were discouraged and finding it hard to keep the faith.

But the Lord and his ways are wonderful to behold. In his weekly reports to me the missionary told of his diligent efforts to contact the people and preach the gospel to them. He indicated that they were slow to listen, but that he was continuing his faithful stewardship in that part of the Lord’s vineyard. And then it happened!

Overnight a small river running near the village of Bermejo, fed by heavy rains in the mountains, rose to a height never before known in the history of the land. Homes were swept away; and people were drowned. The only bridge connecting the city to the main road was torn from its footings and washed downstream. Communications were destroyed. There was chaos everywhere. Two young missionaries were caught in the turmoil of death and destruction caused by the flooding waters. And one remembered that “a man can make a difference.” He threw himself into the turbulent waters to rescue many who were drowning; he sought for those buried beneath fallen buildings; he gave relief to the injured and succor to the hungry.

And a miracle occurred! He became a hero. He was lauded by the newspapers. His name was spoken over the airwaves. The people mentioned his name with reverence. Those who had previously rejected him and the message he carried now searched him out. Their doors were opened to receive him. They loved him! They accepted his burning testimony of Jesus Christ and the gospel restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. In the few months that remained of his mission he brought scores of wonderful people into the Church. He saw the men receive the holy priesthood and their wives become more lovely in Relief Society activity. Today a beautiful chapel stands in Bermejo. On the Sabbath day it is full of people who still remember one faithful elder who made a difference.

**What Difference Will You Make**

And now, just for a moment: What can *you*do to make a difference? Each one of those about whom I have spoken paid a price for his remarkable achievements. It seems there is always a price! May I suggest a few methods that will start you on the road to making a difference.

First, attend all three of your Sabbath-day meetings—without fail! Then you will be instructed in principle and truth. You will be reminded of sacred baptismal covenants as you take the Lord’s sacrament.

Second, pay your tithing and your offerings faithfully. Then you will begin to understand the purpose for the law of sacrifice and the law of consecration.

Third, maintain a resolute firmness in keeping the law of chastity. Then you will be a pure vessel where darkness is removed and where light remains.

Fourth, when you are prepared, go to the Lord’s house. There you will be taught in the ways of godliness and be prepared to receive a fullness of the priesthood.

Fifth, preach the everlasting gospel in word and deed. Then you will share in the joy of a converted soul—you will understand true joy. And you will win the crown of eternal life.

And what difference will you make? The kingdom of God will be strengthened by your membership. Your character will become as strong as steel. You will be a source of spiritual wisdom and strength to many. And God will love you!

As I look at you, children of Israel, I see the light of truth glowing in your eyes. I know that your desires are good. I pray that you will remember the lives of such great men as Copernicus and Gandhi, that you will not forget what evils can be wrought by men such as Adolph Hitler. I beseech you to think often of Joseph Smith and how his life has affected your own. I humbly remind you of the only pure, sinless life ever lived on this earth, that of our Savior, Jesus Christ. I sincerely confess to you my love for him. I witness that he lives and that he loves us. Seek for him! Be like him! He is the Way, the Light, and the Life. And when you find him, you, too, will make a difference. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

# Agency or Inspiration—Which?

[Bruce R. McConkie](https://speeches.byu.edu/speakers/bruce-r-mcconkie/) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles February 27, 1973 • Devotional

It is our obligation to go to work on our problems and then counsel with the Lord and get the ratifying seal of the Holy Spirit on the conclusions that we’ve reached; and that ratifying seal is the spirit of revelation.

I’ve been many places with my wife when, as we have met members of the Church, stake presidencies, high councils, and the like, they’ve said to me: “We’re surely glad to meet you, Brother McConkie, and we’re most pleased to have Sister Smith with us.” I’ve assured her that that was all right with me, as long as they didn’t call me Brother Smith. And now that’s happened.\*

I’ve sought the Lord diligently, as is my custom, to be guided and directed this morning in what ought to be said—sought him both for myself and for you, so that I might speak and you might hear by the power of the Holy Spirit. Two subjects have occurred to me. I thought that on the one hand I might talk about “Agency or Inspiration—Which?” Or, on the other hand, I might talk about how to choose a wife. It occurred to me I might consult the student body, but then I said to myself, “No, it doesn’t make a particle of difference which subject it is; I’m going to say exactly the same things anyway.”

My wife and I were having a serious discussion recently, in which we were counting our many blessings. We named a host of things that have come to us, because of the Church, because of our family, because of the glorious restoration of eternal truth that has taken place in this day; and then she climaxed the discussion by asking this question: “What’s the greatest blessing that has ever come into your life?”

Without a moment’s hesitation I said, “The greatest blessing that has ever come to me was on the thirteenth day of October in 1937, at 11:20 a.m., when I was privileged to kneel in the Salt Lake Temple at the Lord’s altar and receive you as an eternal companion.”

She said, “Well, you passed that test.”

I believe that the most important single thing that any Latter-day Saint ever does in this world is to [marry](https://speeches.byu.edu/topic/marriage/) the right person, in the right place, by the right authority; and that then—when they have been so sealed by the power and authority which Elijah the prophet restored—the most important remaining thing that any Latter-day Saint can ever do is so to live that the terms and conditions of the covenant thus made will be binding and efficacious now and forever. And so I’d like, if properly guided, to make some suggestions that apply in all fields of choice—in all fields, at least all major fields, of activity—but which apply particularly to the matter of eternal marriage, singling that out as the one thing paramount above all other.

When we dwelt in the presence of God our Heavenly Father, we were endowed with agency. This gave us the opportunity, the privilege, to choose what we would do—to make a free, untrammeled choice. When Father Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden, he was given this same power, and we now possess it. We’re expected to use the gifts and talents and abilities, the sense and judgment and agency with which we are endowed.

But on the other hand, we’re commanded to seek the Lord, to desire his Spirit, to get the spirit of revelation and inspiration in our lives. We come unto the Church and a legal administrator places his hands upon our head and says, “Receive the Holy Ghost.” This gives us the gift of the Holy Ghost, which is the right to the constant companionship of that member of the Godhead, based on faithfulness.

And so we’re faced with two propositions. One is that we ought to be guided by the spirit of inspiration, the spirit of revelation. The other is that we’re here under a direction to use our agency, to determine what we ought to do on our own; and we need to strike a fine balance between these two, if we’re going to pursue a course that will give us joy and satisfaction and peace in this life and lead to eternal reward in our Father’s kingdom.

When we were with our Father in the preexistent sphere, he observed and studied us; he knew how we would respond to his laws when we were in his presence, when we had the knowledge that he was our Father and that the teachings presented to us came from him. We walked by sight. Now he’s finding out how we’ll respond when we walk by faith, when we’re outside his presence and we have to rely on other things than the personal counsel that we once received from him.

Well, I’d like, if I may, to present three case studies, out of which, perhaps, we can draw some very realistic and sound conclusions as to what ought to be in our lives. I’ll take these illustrations out of the revelations that the Lord has given us.

## “You Have Not Understood”

Case study number one: There was a man named Oliver Cowdery. In the early days, he operated as an amanuensis to the Prophet. He was the scribe. He wrote down the words that the Prophet dictated while the Spirit rested upon him in the translation processes (the Book of Mormon was then being translated). Brother Cowdery was relatively spiritually immature at that time, and he sought and desired to do something beyond his then present spiritual capacity. He himself wanted to translate. And so he importuned the Prophet, the Prophet took the matter up with the Lord, and they got a revelation. The Lord said, “Oliver Cowdery, verily, verily, I say unto you, that assuredly as the Lord liveth, who is your God and your Redeemer, even so surely shall you receive a knowledge of whatsoever things you shall ask in faith, with an honest heart, believing that you shall receive.” And then one thing he might receive is defined as “a knowledge concerning the engravings of old records, which are ancient, which contain those parts of my scripture of which as been spoken by the manifestation of my Spirit.”

Having thus dealt with the specific problem, then the Lord revealed a principle that applies to it and all other like situations: “Yea, 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. Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation” ([D&C 8:1–3](https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/8.1-3)).

Well now, Oliver did what a good many of us would have done. He had the instructions I have read, and he assumed that they meant what they seemed on the surface to say, which was that if in faith he asked God he’d have power to translate. But in his condition of relative spiritual immaturity, he hadn’t yet learned what was involved in asking of God, or how to generate the kind of faith or do the specific thing that has to be done in order to get an answer to a prayer. And so he asked. And as you know, he failed; he was totally unable to translate. This caused some concern, I suppose, to him and the Prophet. The matter was referred back to the Lord, whose promise they had been attempting to conform to; and the answer came, the reason came, why he couldn’t translate: “You have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me” ([D&C 9:7](https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/9.7)).

Now, seemingly, that’s all he’d been instructed to do, to ask in faith; but implicit in asking in faith is the precedent requirement that we do everything in our power to accomplish the goal that we seek. We use the agency with which we have been endowed. We use every faculty and capacity and ability that we possess to bring about the eventuality that may be involved. Now this is translating the Book of Mormon, it’s choosing a wife, it’s choosing employment, it’s doing any one of ten thousand important things that arise in our lives.

The Lord continued:

*I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.*

*But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me.* [[D&C 9:8–9](https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/9.8-9)]

How do you choose a wife? I’ve heard a lot of young people from Brigham Young University and elsewhere say, “I’ve got to get a feeling of inspiration. I’ve got to get some revelation. I’ve got to fast and pray and get the Lord to manifest to me whom I should marry.” Well, maybe it will be a little shock to you, but never in my life did I ever ask the Lord whom I ought to marry. It never occurred to me to ask him. I went out and found the girl I wanted; she suited me; I evaluated and weighed the proposition, and it just seemed a hundred percent to me as though this ought to be. Now, if I’d done things perfectly, I’d have done some counseling with the Lord, which I didn’t do; but all I did was pray to the Lord and ask for some guidance and direction in connection with the decision that I’d reached. A more perfect thing to have done would have been to counsel with him relative to the decision and get a spiritual confirmation that the conclusion, which I by my agency and faculties had arrived at, was the right one.

## “Why Are You Asking Me?”

Now, case study number two: There was a man whose name is not so much as preserved to us in the ancient record. He’s known as the brother of Jared. From other sources we know his name was Moriancumer. He was the spiritual leader, initially, of the Jaredite people. As they started their progress from the Tower of Babel to their American promised land, he was the one that got in communion with the Lord to get the direction, the spiritual guidance, that they, as a people, needed.

And some very interesting things occurred. They got to the waters that they were going to cross, and the Lord said to him, “Build some barges.” But interestingly, the Lord didn’t tell him how to build the barges. He’d done it on a previous occasion; he didn’t need instruction; there wasn’t any revelation that was necessary to guide him. So he built the barges.

But this time they were going to be used under some peculiar and difficult circumstances, and he needed something more than was now present in them: he needed some air. And this was a problem that was beyond him. So he took that matter up with the Lord, and because it was totally beyond his capacity to solve, the Lord solved it for him and said, “Do thus and so and you’ll have air.”

But then the brother of Jared—having confidence because he was talking to the Lord, because he was communing and getting answers—asked another question: he asked for a solution to a problem that he should have figured out by himself and not taken up with the Lord. He said, “What will we do for light in the vessels?”

And the Lord talked to him about it a little and then he said this: “What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels?” ([Eth. 2:23](https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bofm/ether/2.23)). In effect, “What are you asking me for? This is something you should have solved.” And he talked a little more, and he repeated in essence the question: “What will ye that I should prepare for you that ye may have light when ye are swallowed up in the depths of the sea?” ([Eth. 2:25](https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bofm/ether/2.25)). In other words, “Moriancumer, this is your problem. Why are you troubling me? I’ve given you your agency; you are endowed with capacity and ability. Get out and solve the problem.”

Well, the brother of Jared got the message. He went up into a mount called Shelem, and the record says he “did molten out of a rock sixteen small stones; and they were white and clear, even as transparent glass” ([Eth. 3:1](https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bofm/ether/3.1)).

I hold here a little piece of amorphous quartz that’s clear as transparent glass. I picked this up in a wilderness area outside of a little community called Crystalina, in a nation called Brazil, in South America. The Brethren thought I was off touring missions, but actually I was doing a little rock hunting. And in that connection, I hope you got the message that the brother of Jared was a rock hound also.

Well, the brother of Jared took sixteen little crystals of some sort (he could hold all of them in his hands); he took them up on the mount. The record says, “He did carry them in his hands upon the top of the mount” (Eth. 3:1), and then he said in effect to the Lord, “Now this is what I hope you will do.” You really don’t tell the Lord what to do, but you get some inspiration and you use your judgment, and then you talk the matter over with him. And so Moriancumer said to the Lord: “Touch these stones, O Lord, with thy finger, and prepare them that they may shine forth in darkness; and they shall shine forth unto us in the vessels which we have prepared, that we may have light while we shall cross the sea” ([Eth. 3:4](https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bofm/ether/3.4)).

And the Lord did what the brother of Jared asked, and this is the occasion when he then saw the finger of the Lord; and, while he was in tune, he received revelation that exceeded anything that any prophet had ever gained up to that moment. The Lord revealed more to him about his nature and personality than ever theretofore had come forth, and it all came about because he’d done everything that he could do and because he counseled with the Lord.

There’s a fine balance between agency and inspiration. We’re expected to do everything in our power that we can, and then to seek an answer from the Lord, a confirming seal that we’ve reached the right conclusion; and sometimes, happily, in addition, we get added truths and knowledge that we hadn’t even supposed.

## “They Shall Counsel Between Themselves and Me”

Now case study number 3: In the early history of the Church, the Lord commanded the Saints to assemble in a certain place in Missouri. The decree went forth: “Assemble.” Specifically, the decree went forth, “Let the Presiding Bishop come here and do such and such.” Now notice what happened. The Lord is talking:

*As I spake concerning my servant Edward Partridge, this land is the land of his residence, and those whom he has appointed for his counselors; and also the land of the residence of him whom I have appointed to keep my storehouse;*

*Wherefore, let them bring their families to this land,* [and here’s the point] *as they shall counsel between themselves and me.* [[D&C 58:24–25](https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/58.24-25)]

You see, the Lord said “assemble” to Zion. The details and the arrangements, however, the *how* and the *when* and the *circumstances* are to be determined by the agency of those who are called to assemble, but they are to counsel with the Lord. Now, when you counsel with the Lord, you talk something over. I bring my children in and we counsel on a problem. I don’t tell them what ought to be; I say, “What do you think? What’s your evaluation? What do you want to do in this situation? What’s the best thing to do?” And they tell me what they think, and if I happen to have any wisdom or judgment on the matter, I express my views. Well now, the Lord has all wisdom, all knowledge, and all power; he knows how to govern and control and direct us in a perfect manner. He lets us determine what we should do, but he expects us to counsel with him.

Now, after the Lord had said this to the Presiding Bishopric of the Church, he gave the principle that governed in that situation, and it governs in all situations. And this is one of our glorious revealed truths. He said:

*For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward.*

*Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;*

*For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward.*

*But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned.* [[D&C 58:26–29](https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/58.26-29)]

You know, they said to the Prophet Joseph Smith, “How do you govern so great and diverse a people as the Latter-day Saints?”

He said, “I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves.”

Now, that’s the order of heaven. That’s how the Almighty operates. That’s how the Church is supposed to operate. We’re supposed to learn correct principles and then govern ourselves. We make our own choices, and then we present the matter to the Lord and get his approving, ratifying seal.

## “Counsel with the Lord in All Thy Doings”

Now, those are the three case studies; let us come to the revealed conclusion. There was a man named Alma, a mighty and a great prophet. He had a son named Helaman, who was a holy and righteous man, following the pattern that his father had set. And to Helaman, Alma said this: “O, remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God. Yea, and cry unto God for all thy support” ([Al. 37:35–36](https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bofm/alma/37.35-36)). Do you think that if you’re counseled to pray to the Lord for support, both temporal and spiritual, that that’s all you have to do? The Lord’s prayer says, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Do you go out and sit down in the desert or on the mountain and pray with all the fervor you can possess, “Give us this day our daily bread,” or do you go out and plant crops and raise herds and do everything that you can in your situation to accomplish the end result?

Well, continuing: “Yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest let it be in the Lord; yea, let thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever” ([Al. 37:36](https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bofm/alma/37.36)). Now note: “Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good” ([Al. 37:37](https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bofm/alma/37.37)).

What was Oliver Cowdery’s problem? “You took no thought save it was to ask. . . .You must study it out in your mind” ([D&C 9:7–8](https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/9.7-8)).

Well, do you want a wife? Do you want anything that’s right and proper? You go to work and you use the agency and power and ability that God has given you. You use every faculty, you get all the judgment that you can centered on the problem, you make up your own mind, and then, to be sure that you don’t err, you counsel with the Lord. You talk it over. You say, “This is what I think; what do you think?” And if you get the calm, sweet surety that comes only from the Holy Spirit, you know you’ve reached the right conclusion; but if there’s anxiety and uncertainty in your heart, then you’d better start over, because the Lord’s hand is not in it, and you’re not getting the ratifying seal that, as a member of the Church who has the gift of the Holy Ghost, you are entitled to receive.

“Yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day” ([Al. 37:37](https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bofm/alma/37.37)). If you learn how to use the agency that God has given you, and if you try to make your own decisions, and if you reach conclusions that are sound and right, and you counsel with the Lord and get his ratifying seal of approval upon the conclusions you’ve reached, then you’ve received revelation, for one thing; and for another thing, you’re going to have the great reward of eternal life, be lifted up at the last day. Now, we’re not all equal by any means; some have one talent and capacity and some another. But if we use the talents we have, somehow we’ll come out all right.

On the recent Monday when we were celebrating Washington’s birthday, I was down at my mother’s sawing a log in the backyard. She came out to give me some direction and see how I was doing it, and she wasn’t very pleased. She thought I ought to do it differently. She went back into the house and in a few minutes my younger brother arrived. She said to him, “I think you’d better go out in the backyard and give Bruce some help and see that he does this thing right.” And then she said to him, “Bruce isn’t very bright.” Well, so I’m not. So I start where I am, and I go forward from there. I start using such talent as I have, and I begin to apply principles of eternal truth to my life. And I consult and counsel with the Lord in the process. And no matter where I am, the gospel takes me forward and onward and upward, and blessings flow to me that will ennoble and sanctify and improve me in this life and eventually give me glory and honor and dignity in the life to come.

## We Have the Spirit of Revelation

Now, I think we’ve said enough; the principles are before us. Let me just do one thing more. Let me do, in effect, what my friend Alma would do. After he’d preached a sermon, he said, “And this is not all. Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself?” ([Al. 5:45](https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bofm/alma/5.45)). That is, he’d given them the case studies, he’d quoted the revelations, he’d told them what was involved, and then he bore personal testimony. This is what we ought to do in the Church. We ought to learn how to teach by the power of the Spirit, so that when we get through talking about the gospel subjects we’ll know whether what we’ve said is right, and we’ll be in a position to bear testimony, not alone of the truth and the divinity of the work, but also that the doctrine we proclaim and the everlasting truths which we expound are right, that they are the mind and voice and will of the Lord. Now, the glorious, wondrous thing about this work and about these doctrines is that they are true. There isn’t anything in this world, no truth that we can conceive of, to compare with the truth that the work we’re engaged in is true, that the Lord’s hand is here. It’s a literal fact that we have the gift and power of the Holy Ghost. We have the spirit of revelation, the spirit of testimony, the spirit of prophecy. These things must be, or else we’re not the church and kingdom of God; we’re not the Lord’s people.

Now, the fact is that we do have them; revelation works. Don’t shy away from getting revelation. Joseph Smith said, “God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what He will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith,* p. 149). We’re entitled to the spirit of revelation. But what I’m attempting to teach this morning is that there’s a how and a procedure, and there are conditions precedent, and it is our obligation to go to work on our problems and then counsel with the Lord and get the ratifying seal of the Holy Spirit on the conclusions that we’ve reached; and that ratifying seal is the spirit of revelation.

God grant us wisdom in these things. God grant us the courage and the ability to stand on our own feet and use our agency and the abilities and capacities we possess; then let’s be sufficiently humble and amenable to the Spirit to bow our will to his will, to get his ratifying, confirming seal of approval, to get in our lives, in that way, the spirit of revelation. And if we so do, there’s no question about the result: it’s peace in this life; it’s glory and honor and dignity in the life to come. Which may God grant for all of us. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.