

“Choose You This Day”—“Think Celestial”

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Throughout our marriage, Sister Nattress and I have enjoyed watching athletic events, especially the Olympic Games. It is exhilarating to watch the best athletes in the world showcase their talents on the worldwide stage. Sister Nattress’s favorite event is figure skating.

We were recently reminded of a family experience directly connected with the games. Our son Bryce was seven years old at the time and was mesmerized with the half-pipe snowboarding competition. He would jump from couch to couch in our family room, pretending to be a world-class snowboarder.

One evening when I returned home from work, my wife, Shawna, greeted me by saying, “You need to talk with *your son!*”

When she used the term *your*, it implied that *our* son had done something that would never happen in *her* family—and it must have been caused by some faulty DNA I had passed on.

Shawna then proceeded to share the events of that day. After lunch, she had heard a loud thud in the front room followed by a squeal from Bryce.

She entered the room to find Bryce writhing in pain. His younger brother was scolding him, saying, “You missed the pillow!”

Upon further interrogation, Shawna learned that Bryce had jumped off our nine-foot balcony, pretending to be a half-pipe snowboarder. His younger brother was waiting below, holding a small pillow that was supposed to break his fall. Shawna was more than a little upset, wondering why anyone would choose to jump off a nine-foot balcony. Thankfully there were no broken bones.

When I talked to Bryce, I learned that he had actually planned to do a flip off the balcony. At the last moment he decided to make a practice jump first. Given the consequences of the first jump, the second jump never materialized. When I asked Bryce why he had made the jump, he said, “Dad, I wouldn’t have done it if I had known it would hurt so much!”

Thankfully broken bones and sprained ankles can heal. Because of the Savior and His infinite Atonement, we can be completely forgiven when we make ill-advised jumps.

K. Brett Nattress, a General Authority Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this devotional address on January 16, 2024.

Choose to “Think Celestial”

Brothers and sisters, how many times in life do we cause ourselves pain and sorrow through poor choices? We live in a fast-paced world full of distractions and deceptions that can hurt us. We also live at a time of great opportunity. This is a time that has been prophesied and anticipated by prophets throughout the history of the world.

But you might say, “What if I have made a mistake? What if I have suffered a severe spiritual injury?”

My answer is simply this: The Savior Jesus Christ suffered, bled, and died so that you might be healed and be made whole again.

President Jeffrey R. Holland has said:

*I testify that you have **not** traveled beyond the reach of divine love. It is not possible for you to sink lower than the infinite light of Christ’s Atonement shines.*¹

Knowing that no one is perfect and that we all make mistakes, we will find peace and safety as we choose to “think celestial.”² This is the key to receiving spiritual power from on high. That spiritual power will not just help us avoid pitfalls; it will help us achieve greatness. To illustrate how this works, I want to show you one of my favorite photos from Papua New Guinea.

Now, pull out your phone or a pen and paper. Don’t worry, this isn’t a quiz.

Take a look at this picture and write down the first three things you see. We will take about ten seconds to do that. [A picture of a group of people was shown.]

Okay, now let’s do an informal survey of what you noted:

1. How many saw the missionaries?
2. How many noticed that this was a baptismal service?
3. How many noticed the villagers standing at the top of the embankment?
4. How many noticed the men holding spears and axes?

Let me provide some context for the spears and axes. A few days prior to the baptism, a young girl had died when she was attacked by a large

crocodile. The village came together to provide support and protection for this baptismal service. The people surrounded this sacred cove with boats and men with spears and axes to protect those who had made the decision to follow the Savior and be baptized.

Here are two questions to consider:

- Would you have had the faith to be baptized on that particular day?
- Would you have volunteered to hold a spear or an axe in those murky waters?

Without hesitation, these Saints made the decisions to be baptized and to hold the spears and axes.

These Saints knew what it meant to *think celestial!*

Now you may never come face-to-face with a crocodile, and you may never be asked to exercise your faith by entering muddy waters with danger lurking in the shadows. Instead you have your own crocodiles to deal with. These challenges may come in many forms: exams, papers, social media, evil influences, illness, depression, and, of course, relationships. The list goes on and on.

Who you are becoming as sons and daughters of God is eternally important, and Satan knows it! Just as with the crocodiles, he will try to distract you, take you, and destroy you. His destructive path leads to heartache, disappointment, and discouragement. Knowing these challenges, President Russell M. Nelson has provided us with his prophetic counsel:

*I extend to members of the entire Church the same charge I gave to our young adults last May. I urged them then—and I **plead** with you now—to take charge of your own testimony of Jesus Christ and His gospel. Work for it. Nurture it so that it will grow. Feed it truth. Don’t pollute it with false philosophies of unbelieving men and women. As you make the continual strengthening of your testimony of Jesus Christ your highest priority, watch for miracles to happen in your life.*³

Think for a moment about the magnitude of what the Lord’s prophet said: “As you make the continual strengthening of your testimony of Jesus

Christ your highest priority, watch for miracles to happen in your life.” A prophetic invitation with a promised blessing! Incredible. As we think celestial, our testimony of Jesus Christ will be strengthened.

Place Your Faith in the Savior and His Gospel

When I think of the blessings of a testimony, I think of how I obtained a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This happened when I was a little boy. I read one scripture that changed my life forever.

It is a scripture that I go to when I need a spiritual lift. It is the scripture of Joseph Smith recounting his experience at the age of fourteen. He wanted to know which church was true. In connection with this desire, he went to a grove of trees not far from his home and prayed to his Father in Heaven, seeking an answer.

Of this experience, he said:

I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

*. . . When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—**This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!**⁴*

Brothers and sisters, I know that Joseph saw God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, in the Sacred Grove. Because I know that Joseph was a prophet of God, I know that God lives and that He answers prayers. I know that God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, are separate and distinct individuals, yet one in purpose. I know the fullness of the gospel was restored to prepare us for the Savior’s Second Coming.

This First Vision marked the beginning of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the earth. Joseph Smith received a multitude of visitations from heavenly messengers, and they restored the priesthood authority of God. Moroni visited the Prophet Joseph Smith twenty different times in connection with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ.⁵

The Restoration of the gospel has changed my life forever! It has changed the world.

I have come to admire many of our modern-day pioneers who learned what I have learned: that God lives and loves His children. With this understanding, they have placed their faith in the Savior and His gospel.

I recently became acquainted with the Abol family from the Wali Branch in Madang, Papua New Guinea. During our visit, Sister Abol explained that she had spent seven years searching for the gospel of Jesus Christ. When she first met the missionaries, she immediately recognized that they had been sent from God.

She said, “I could feel their power. I knew I had found the truth!”

With tears streaming down her face, she said, “Elder Nattress, I know that the gospel is true! I read the Book of Mormon to our five sons every day, and I bear my testimony to them every day!”

Sister Abol and her husband have been preparing for five years to attend the temple. They are looking forward to when they can enter the house of the Lord, kneel around the holy altar of the temple with their children, and be sealed as a family for time and for all eternity.

Every Sunday morning at 6 a.m., they join with the entire village to begin a four-hour walk to sacrament meeting, which begins at 10 a.m. With a smile, Brother Ulugun explained that they climb over two mountains and cross five rivers. They do this with one thing in mind: they want to partake of the sacrament to renew their covenants with God. They want to always remember Him.

After their meetings, they make that same journey back, crossing those same five rivers and scaling those same two mountains. Members of this village have been making this trek for five years! Five faithful years of walking, hiking, and wading—followed by partaking of the sacred emblems of the sacrament.

There is only one explanation why these Saints endure and sacrifice so much. It is because they know that the gospel is true! They *choose* to always remember Him. They strive to think celestial.

Do These Three Things Every Day

I have learned that the key to happiness, peace, and safety in this troubled world is to heed the words of God’s chosen servants—His prophets and apostles.

These Brethren have given so many magnificent sermons. We quote them, we ponder them, and we apply them. However, I believe that the greatest sermons of these Brethren are found in their exemplary lives. They are devoted disciples of Jesus Christ. When I am honored to be in their presence, without exception I am lifted and inspired by their examples, I am strengthened by their testimonies, and I feel the love of the Lord. They are special witnesses of the name of Jesus Christ to all the world. They have been fore-ordained to their callings.

In May 2022, President Nelson said in his worldwide devotional to young adults:

I believe that if the Lord were speaking to you directly . . . , the first thing He would make sure you understand is your true identity. My dear friends, you are literally spirit children of God. . . .

*. . . No identifier should **displace, replace, or take priority over** these three enduring designations: “child of God,” “child of the covenant,” and “disciple of Jesus Christ.”⁶*

As we remember these eternal truths, the Lord has provided gifts that help remind us of who we are. He has given us the temple—the house of the Lord—where we learn of His great plan of happiness. I would like to share with you three simple things in addition to receiving the blessings of the temple that you can do every day that will make an eternal difference in your life. These are three things that many stop doing at the first glimpse of trial and opposition. Here they are.

1. Pray Every Day

When the Savior carried the excruciating weight of the sins of the world, we read that “being in an agony he prayed more earnestly.”⁷ So much can be learned from His perfect example. He taught us to pray always. The Savior said, “Pray in your families unto the Father, always in

my name, that your wives and your children may be blessed.”⁸

2. Read the Book of Mormon Every Day

The Book of Mormon “testifies of Christ and plainly teaches His doctrine.”⁹ And “the Book of Mormon, combined with the Spirit, is [our] most powerful resource in conversion.”¹⁰

The Savior is mentioned in every 1.7 verses. It is no surprise that our testimony of the Savior is strengthened as we read the Book of Mormon with real intent, having faith in Christ.

The Lord Himself has declared that the Book of Mormon is true! He said, “As your Lord and your God liveth it is true.”¹¹

President Nelson said:

*I promise that as you prayerfully study the Book of Mormon **every day**, you will make better decisions—**every day**. I promise that as you ponder what you study, the windows of heaven will open, and you will receive answers to your own questions and direction for your own life. I promise that as you daily immerse yourself in the Book of Mormon, you can be immunized against the evils of the day.¹²*

3. Find Someone to Serve Each Day

Service is the measuring stick of love. Some here might say, “I don’t have time for a two-hour service project each day!” That is not what I am talking about here. Examples of serving each day are as simple as sending a text: “I hope you have a good day!” The message could be a simple “Thank you!” to a friend or an “I love you” to your mother. It doesn’t take much, but when it comes to kindness, a little goes a long way.

The Savior taught, “For . . . whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.”¹³ If you want to find happiness, if you want to find *yourself*, then serve someone else!

Who doesn’t want these blessings? So pray, read, and serve. And then, once each week, partake of the sacrament and renew your covenants with the Lord.

I know these measures sound simple and easy to do, but I promise that if we are faithful in these simple measures, we will find great joy and will

be blessed with an increase of His Spirit to be with us.

Remember, “by small and simple things are great things brought to pass.”¹⁴

Having said this, I know that life can be extremely challenging. Sometimes we experience things that are so devastatingly difficult that they cause us to tremble, to gasp for air, and to search for peace. During those times, more than ever, we need to seek for the guiding influence of the Holy Ghost.

“Trust in the Lord”

In July 2013, Sister Nattress and I loaded up our four youngest children and moved to Gilbert, Arizona, to serve as mission leaders. It was hard to leave our home, our family, and our friends in Idaho. However, our service in Arizona has proven to be one of the great blessings in our lives. We love our missionaries, and we love the people in the Arizona Gilbert Mission.

In our second year, Sister Nattress experienced some minor symptoms of discomfort. We sought medical attention from three different physicians and were given three different diagnoses. Then we made an appointment with a specialist, and he gave us the devastating news. Shawna had stage-four cancer.

The doctor advised us to make plans to return home and to put things in order. We fell to our knees in prayer. We sincerely felt that the Lord’s hand was in our call to serve and that we needed to stay. It was then that we discovered our mission was just a few miles away from a treatment center that specialized in the very cancer that Shawna was diagnosed with. Through a series of miracles, we were able to receive care at this hospital. Shawna endured a six-hour surgery that was followed up by chemotherapy and radiation treatments. During this time the Lord was watching over us and sent us an angel.

On the morning of Shawna’s first chemotherapy treatment, a beautiful young patient asked, “Is this your first time at chemotherapy?”

We nodded affirmatively. The other patient was also there for chemotherapy, and she said, “Can I help you? I know it can be scary the first time.”

She noticed our missionary tags and asked if we were missionaries for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

When we told her yes, she responded with a smile: “I’m a member of the Church. My parents are currently serving as temple president and matron in Mexico.”

Our angel’s name was Raquel. She expressed her gratitude for the gospel of Jesus Christ and told us she had been diagnosed with stage-four cancer soon after the birth of her third child. Her diagnosis was shocking, and her prognosis was even more devastating. Further tests showed that her cancer had metastasized to her spine, both legs, and all her large bones. She was given a 5 percent chance of survival, with six months to live. Raquel said this was a time of great reflection for her. She decided that if she only had six months left, she would spend her time serving the Lord. No matter how difficult her life and imminent death would be, she would spend the rest of her life serving the Lord and His children.

Raquel said, “Every day I live is a gift from God. What can I give back as my gift to Him?”

She answered her own question: “I need to share the gospel every day! This is why I am still alive!”

At the time, she had been receiving chemotherapy for seven years.

Over the next several months, Raquel became a close friend to Shawna. She rearranged her schedule and attended each one of Shawna’s six-hour treatments. She would hold her hand, share her testimony, and share her love and her time. She provided meals to our family and brought her daughters over to clean our house. During this time she never once complained that she had a permanent IV port below her clavicle with what appeared to be a life sentence to her own chemotherapy treatments.

We were also blessed by many of the local members and friends who ministered to Sister Nattress in a spirit of love and to whom we are eternally grateful.

We later met Raquel’s husband. He confirmed what we already knew: he was married to an angel.

He said, “She never stops serving. Oftentimes I come home for dinner only to be greeted by a total stranger! Usually it is another cancer friend who needs to hear about the plan of salvation and who needs to understand that the Savior lives and that He loves His children.”

Many of our friends with whom we shared this experience of cancer and uncertainty have heroically passed through the veil, faithful and true to their covenants. I am grateful that Shawna has been able to continue her journey in this mortal existence. Cancer has helped our family to cherish each day. Each day is a gift. We live in a world filled with uncertainty. The eternal truth that never changes is that God lives and that He loves His children.

Raquel Kimball taught us how to have joy in the journey. She showed us what it means to “trust in the Lord”¹⁵—especially when the journey is difficult. She has blessed our lives and the lives of countless others. She showed us what it means to think celestial!

Two of her daughters are enrolled here at BYU. Raquel continues to love, to serve, and to bless the lives of others. We are grateful that she is here with us this morning. She is a miracle, as is Sister Nattress.

Brothers and sisters, as we continue on this mortal journey, let us think celestial by avoiding the spiritual crocodiles in our lives. Let us do the simple things that will strengthen our personal testimonies. Let us remember to

1. Pray every day
2. Read the Book of Mormon every day
3. Find someone to serve, doing one kind act every day

Then each week partake of the sacrament. Let us covenant with God that we will always remember Him.

Imagine for a moment what would happen if every student—all thirty thousand of you—did these three things every day for the rest of your lives. It would be transformational!

Doing these things will strengthen us, will provide healing, and will help us to receive the guidance and direction we seek in our lives. It

will also increase our desire to enter the house of the Lord.

I testify that God is our Father and that He knows us personally. I further testify that Jesus Christ is the Living Son of the Living God. We are His work and His glory.¹⁶ I know that He lives. He is our Savior, our Redeemer, and our Friend. It is my prayer that we will seek Him, that we will choose to follow Him.¹⁷ In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Laborers in the Vineyard,” *Ensign*, May 2012; emphasis in original.

2. Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!” *Liahona*, November 2023.

3. Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” *Liahona*, November 2022; emphasis in original; see also Nelson, “Choices for Eternity,” worldwide devotional for young adults, 15 May 2022, [churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2022/05/12nelson](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2022/05/12nelson).

4. JS—H 1:16–17; emphasis in original.

5. See Russell M. Nelson, *Heart of the Matter: What 100 Years of Living Have Taught Me* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2023), 146; citing H. Donl Peterson, “Moroni—Joseph Smith’s Tutor,” *Ensign*, January 1992; Robert J. Woodford, “Book of Mormon Personalities Known by Joseph Smith,” *Ensign*, August 1978.

6. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity”; emphasis in original.

7. Luke 22:44.

8. 3 Nephi 18:21.

9. *PMG*, 2023, 114; see 2 Nephi 31; 32:1–6; 3 Nephi 11:31–39; 27:13–22.

10. *PMG*, 113.

11. Doctrine and Covenants 17:6.

12. Russell M. Nelson, “The Book of Mormon: What Would Your Life Be Like Without It?” *Ensign*, November 2017; emphasis in original.

13. Mark 8:35.

14. Alma 37:6.

15. Proverbs 3:5.

16. See Moses 1:39.

17. See Joshua 24:15; see also Moses 6:33.