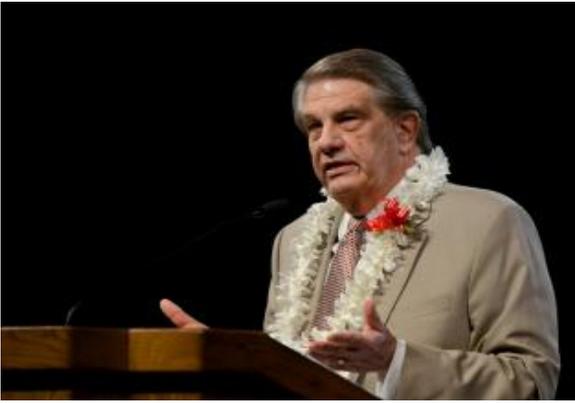


HABITS, PATTERNS and BECOMING



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Devotional
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Aloha, it is a joy to be with you today. Thank you for inviting us to share some thoughts that hopefully will provide perspective, the basis of some personal resolve, and a desire to change as we enjoy the journey that we are on. If you hear or feel anything motivating or prompting today that is *not* said, write it down and act on it. Similar to what happens in school, and in the temple, when we embrace and implement true principles and concepts that are shared, not necessarily the exact words, they eventually are manifest in what we become. So, take notes, mental or otherwise, with the intent to learn, retain and act, and not just to endure the time in this devotional. Life is an evolution, and where we end up depends on which path we select, how fast we travel, and how many side-trips we take.

Sister Hallstrom spoke of my growing up in Honolulu and attending The Church College of Hawaii after high school. It was a revealing and enlightening two years being by first time away from home. I formed relationships that still exist today. It was not by accident that I came here to school, although I did not know it at the time. Having lived in Laie as a young freshman and sophomore 55 years ago, I loved it. And, now as the Temple President, again having the privilege of being here, I know that I have come home. There is a spirit here like no other place. Like me, you are not here by accident, but have been placed in this environment for your profit and learning at this stage of your life. What a great privilege; don't live below your potential. Take advantage of your situation.

I commented a while back to President John Tanner how wonderful it is to have this beautiful campus here on Oahu situated in the middle of the Pacific. His insightful and thought-provoking reply was, that if it were not for the Laie Hawaii Temple, BYU-Hawaii as we know it would not be here. The school, and the Cultural Center, and all of their support facilities are here because of the presence and significance of the Temple. The Temple is the keystone of our community and its spiritual centerpiece. Everything has evolved from, and has been enhanced by, its presence.

The Temple was originally dedicated on Thanksgiving Day, November 27, 1919 after the site was revealed to Joseph F. Smith in 1915 who was then the President of the Church. He had previously served three missions to the Sandwich Islands as Hawaii was then called, the first being when he was 15 years old. Many of the early stalwart LDS families have deep roots in Laie. Hundreds more came here because of the Temple.

This year the Church and the community are celebrating the 100th year centennial anniversary of the Temple; the first one built since the restoration of the gospel outside of the continental United States, and the fifth oldest temple still in operation.

The Laie Hawaii Temple is The House of the Lord; it is the beacon that has brought light to all desiring to receive it, and it continues that prophetic mission today. I hope you recognize its significance, not just as a beautiful edifice and symbol of our faith, but is a sacred temple of God where you can enter into binding commitments essential to your personal journey, if you hope to fulfill the full measure of your creation and return back to your Heavenly Father. Like the other key establishments in Laie that the Lord has guided here, the Temple should become the centerpiece of *your* life and the symbol of *your* faith.

It is in the temple that we are prepared and receive our endowment. Endowment means gift. I hope that you comprehend the bestowal of the incredible gift that has been or can be given to you in the temple, conditioned upon your accepting, obeying and magnifying the required laws of God -- similar to opportunity given the servants in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25: 14-30). And, that you recognize the blessings that flow to each of us as we make, understand and keep our sacred covenants. In my view, it is all about knowledgeably making and keeping essential covenants. My eyes have been opened and by understanding significantly enhanced as I spend time in the temple since receiving the privilege of serving here in Laie.

As the Temple President, you may have anticipated that I am going to spend my time today sharing insights and ah ha's about the Temple. Not so. If you are not a member or not-endowed, it would not be something you would relate to; and, if an endowed member, I would encourage you to join us as an ordinance worker where you can bask in the spirit of the temple, and be taught first-hand the doctrine of Christ and work on discovering your own ah ha's. Instead, I want to talk about something more basic.

Your life and mine here and now is all about choices, and how we use our God-given gift of agency. We each determine the path we take; and, as Latter-day saints determine our own eternal destiny. I believe our conferred right to permanently have the ability to choose, which was an integral part of the plan of happiness in the preexistence, is second only in magnitude to the incomparable sacrifice of our Savior.

It is this concept I want to talk about today, our use of agency as it relates to conscious choices and consequences. As I have had opportunity to visit with young starry-eyed couples in the temple who have their entire lives ahead of them as partners in an eternal relationship, I hear myself saying to them that there are no such things as small choices.

Here are some thoughts and concepts on personal habits, patterns and choices first developed for a BYU Devotional presentation in 2011.

Habits. We all have habits; they take time to be developed and are difficult to change. They are our personal style of actions or kinds of thoughts, that occur repetitively and consistently ?? often without any forethought. Habits give definition to who we currently are, and how we daily act and re?act. The scary thing about habits is they can unconsciously control us; they often determine how we go about spending time, and what we do. We are all creatures of habit. It has been said "A habit is something you can do without thinking – which is why most of us have so many of them."1 In the 1600's, the English poet, John Dryden observed that "We first make our habits, and then our habits make us."2

We each have personal habits, social habits, health habits, and even spare time habits, that we do not necessarily think about. Here are some thesaurus synonyms: our custom, routine, practice; an addiction, a dependency. Examples of habit are that each of us put on a coat by inserting the same arm in the same armhole every time; the same goes for the way we towel off, comb our hair and brush our teeth.

Also swearing (or not swearing), using our hands when we speak, day dreaming in church, or how intently we pray or read the scriptures, and how we approach responsibility and work. Often, we don't even realize we have developed a habit.

Habits do not have to be bad or limiting; they can be good. Habits are enabling actions that become traits which identify us. They either serve us or enslave us.

Perhaps we can understand the impact of habits when we think about how it gives meaning to some common words: Such as habitation (the place we live.); or habitual (some people are always late because their habits control their actions). Like putting on an old shoe, we just slip into our habits, without thought. It has become the way we do, or don't do, things. When we don't think, habits control what we do.

There's only one thing worse than a bad habit, that's an *old* bad habit. The more established and entrenched, the harder a habit is to break.

We can have both positive and negative habits. But most often, they do not bless our lives if we do them *without* intention or thinking. The poet Henry Van Dyke wrote "As long as habit and routine dictate the pattern of living, new dimensions of the soul will not emerge."³

So, here is the relevant doctrine: We grow closer to Heavenly Father, and become more like Him, when we intentionally choose to do spiritual things with good intent ?? when we consciously exercise our sacred, empowering, moral agency. We are eternal spirits on earth having mortal experiences. Thoughtless habits here in mortality can rob us of our time and progression when they mechanically lead us.

Patterns. *Personal* patterns, more than rote habits, provide a deliberate blueprint for our lives. Synonyms are: a model, example, or design; an intended relationship. Where habits are largely unconscious, patterns can be developed as a conscious repetitive choice.

Chosen righteous patterns are reinforcing, and provide invitation and access to the Holy Ghost. They activate our gift of agency, and expand our ability to choose and act. As we use our agency appropriately, we immediately begin to grow closer to Heavenly Father and *feel* the difference. Alternately, when we use our agency unwisely, we quickly spiral downward and a pattern that distances us from Heavenly Father is created.

It is interesting and amazing, that our use of agency is a leveraged catalyst that invites or dismisses the spirit from our presence. For each of us, our pattern of choices makes all the difference in this world and in eternity.

Wise gospel?centered choices invite and build necessary requisite spirituality and change us from within. This is the plan of our Father; it is the covenant path. Change is possible by the atonement of Christ and the invited ministering of the Holy Ghost.

So, I ask you my young friends, especially those who are endowed in the temple, are your personal behavior patterns becoming of an elect lady or a holder of the Lord's priesthood? Will your current habits and life patterns facilitate becoming like Heavenly Father? If you stay exactly on the path you are on, and follow your current direction, what will be your final destination? Patterns need goals and direction.

We have always been counseled by the Lord to choose, establish and follow righteous patterns. In the New Testament, Paul tells us in Titus "In all things shewing thyself a *pattern* of good works:" (Titus 2:7); and in Timothy "...Jesus Christ might shew forth ...a *pattern* to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." (1 Timothy 1:16). In modern times, the Lord speaking to the prophet Joseph taught "And again, I will give unto you a *pattern* in all things, that ye may not be deceived." (D&C 52:14).

Our behavior patterns are the conscious, consistent, exercise of our agency. They show who we currently are and determine who we will become. They are only beneficial if they provide the means to get us to our desired destination at the end of the covenant path.

So, what are your life?patterns and goals? What do you want to accomplish? What are your current patterns in prayer? Have you thought about what constitutes meaningful prayer? What do you think the Saviors' prayers were like? Is that something you want? Are you willing to pay the price? Spiritually create and envision how you should act and make decisions pertinent to who you really are. Before we set a pattern, we must envision the goal. Are your current patterns of fasting, or paying tithing, or scripture study, or moral behavior actually empowering and enhancing who you really are, or is this the time to re?identify and spiritually 'gird up your loins and fresh courage take' and create a work plan? Remember the law of the harvest; we reap what we have sown. Later, repenting, and hoping for crop failure, won't change what we could have yielded.

A celestial inheritance requires a serious celestial candidate.

How do we anticipate obtaining Christ?like traits and virtues, if there is not a spiritually created goal and planned behavior patterns that embrace the envisioned result? The Christ?like attributes that we learned in *Preach My Gospel* can be developed and honed; and when learned and used for the benefit of others, the giver and the receiver are each blessed. Heaven is not just a place, but a quality of character. It is all within our grasp.

The Lord's plan from the beginning is that each of us be given agency – the right to choose. We fought for that right, and we understood its eternal significance. We would reap eternal life if we chose to sow the proper seeds and follow reinforcing patterns. We experience miraculous spiritual growth when we choose to pattern our life after and align with the Savior.

There is no better time to make these choices. Each of us needs to set actual action patterns to reach our eternal goals; otherwise, our goals are just good intentions and wishful thinking.

Finally, I would like to comment on the **Process of Becoming** which is a significant gospel doctrine. When I was a young missionary, we had the six Brother Brown lessons. That was in the 60's before most of you were born. In teaching where we came from, why we are here, and where we are going, the dialogue explained that just as our earthly parents created us physically, God created us spiritually. As our physical bodies grow and develop, we *become* more like our earthly parents. As our spirits mature and we can take upon ourselves the attributes of godliness, we can *become* more like our Father in Heaven. This is the Law of Eternal Progression. We are all in the process of growing and becoming; the question is, what are we actually becoming?

Alma explains that we receive the wages of him we obey (Alma 3:27). You are going to become something or somebody; who will make that determination of what you will become? When are you going to do that? In theory, it is never too late; but in truth, it is never too early to make and reinforce that choice.

Fortunately, this is a gospel of daily repentance; therefore, a gospel of change ?? of putting off the natural man, and of experiencing through the influence of the spirit, the mighty change in our hearts as we prepare to become more like Heavenly Father. One of the miracles of the gospel is, that through Christ's atonement, change is not only possible, in fact, it is promised. When we align ourselves with the Lord and are brought to a knowledge of the truth, our new found "...faith and repentance bringeth a change of heart.." (Helaman 15: 7) In Mosiah the Lord said, "...marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters;" (Mosiah 27:25).

"Choose you this day who ye will serve..." (Joshua 24:15). Actually, we need to choose every day, according to our pattern, and demonstrate real intent by building a trust relationship with the Lord through the consistency of our actions – based on our intended habits and chosen patterns.

Many of us can seemingly rise up to meet special spiritual challenges or circumstances, and succeed for a time. However, like Lamon and Lemuel, we then fall back to normal unconscious daily habits and lose the goodness gained by having been with the Lord only for a season. Paul told the saints in Thessalonica, "Quench not the spirit" (I Thessalonians 5:19). Don't do a spiritual yo?yo, build line upon line and make steady progress along your goal-directed covenant path.

To become like Father, we must humbly and worthily call upon Him for help, and through the atonement of Christ and with the support of the Holy Ghost, we can permanently correct our course, like the sons of Mosiah and Alma the younger. The Savior's promise is "Whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you" (3 Nephi 18:20).

My remarks are a call for each of us to *acknowledge* and responsibly *rise up above* our bad habits, and to establish stronger virtuous patterns in thought and deed, using "all your heart, might, mind and strength" (D&C 4:2). It may not be easy, but there will *never* be a better time to break the habitual negative chains that bind you. We can be released through His grace. It is a great privilege and honor that our Lord has made this possible for each one of us.

Our Father in Heaven loves us! He will empower us, his children, as we commit to align ourselves with Him by purifying our hearts and keeping our covenants. But we are the only ones who can institute the direction of change. He has provided the gift, but we must utilize it.

Again, the Doctrine: What we do with our gift of agency determines who and what we will become.

You and I are endowed from on high with the gifted?power to choose our priorities. As we commit to develop good habits and pattern our thoughts and activities to become more Christ?like, loving, sharing, serving, sacrificing, being full of charity, diligently keeping the commandments, our countenances change, our hearts fill with joy and gratitude, and we literally grow from within to become more like our Heavenly Father. We will recognize him when we see him, for we shall be like him. (1 John 3:2?3; Moroni 7:48). We will have become like Him.

The journey is all of ours, but the choices are for each of us to make individually. We can determine who we will become and our quality of life; or, we can just let life happen to us.

President Dallin H. Oaks stated, “Desires dictate our priorities, priorities shape our choices, and choices determine our actions. The desires we act on determine our changing, our achieving, and our becoming”⁴

It is my prayer that as covenant individuals, we understand and acknowledge that we have controlling habits, and that we need to exercise our sacred moral agency to change or enhance our current life patterns, so that we can become like our Father and inherit all that he has.

Change is possible through the atonement of Christ ?? and we can have joy and rejoicing on the journey during these days of our probation.

Of this I bear witness, in the name of Jesus Christ.

1 Frank A. Clark, American politician, 1860-1936.

2 John Dryden, English poet, 1631-1700.

3 Henry Van Dyke, American poet, 1852-1933.

4 Dallin H. Oaks, Apostle, April 2011 General Conference.