
Spiritual Preparedness: Start Early and Be Steady

Elder Henry B. Eyring
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



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Most of us have thought about how to prepare for storms. We have seen and felt the suffering of women, men, and children, and of the aged and the weak, caught in hurricanes, tsunamis, wars, and droughts. One reaction is to ask, "How can I be prepared?" And there is a rush to buy and put away whatever people think they might need for the day they might face such calamities.

But there is another even more important preparation we must make for tests that are certain to come to each of us. That preparation must be started far in advance because it takes time. What we will need then can't be bought. It can't be borrowed. It doesn't store well. And it has to have been used regularly and recently.

What we will need in our day of testing is a spiritual preparation. It is to have developed faith in Jesus Christ so powerful that we can pass the test of life upon which everything for us in eternity depends. That test is part of the purpose God had for us in the Creation.

The Prophet Joseph Smith gave us the Lord's description of the test we face. Our Heavenly Father created the world with His Son, Jesus Christ. We have these words to tell us about the purpose of the Creation: "We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell; And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them." ¹

So, the great test of life is to see whether we will hearken to and obey God's commands in the midst of the storms of life. It is not to endure storms, but to choose the right while they rage. And the tragedy of life is to fail in that test and so fail to qualify to return in glory to our heavenly home.

We are the spirit children of a Heavenly Father. He loved us and He taught us before we were born into this world. He told us that He wished to give us all that He had. To qualify for that gift we had to receive mortal bodies and be tested. Because of those mortal bodies, we would face pain, sickness, and death.

We would be subject to temptations through the desires and weaknesses that came with our mortal bodies. Subtle and powerful forces of evil would tempt us to surrender to those temptations. Life would have storms in which we would have to make choices using faith in things we could not see with our natural eyes.

We were promised that we would have Jehovah, Jesus Christ, as our Savior and Redeemer. He would assure that we would all be resurrected. And He would make it possible for us to pass the test of life if we exercised faith in Him by being obedient. We shouted for joy at the good news.

A passage from the Book of Mormon, another witness of Jesus Christ, describes how hard the test is and what it will take to pass it:

“Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves—to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life.

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, reconcile yourselves to the will of God, and not to the will of the devil and the flesh; and remember, after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved.

“Wherefore, may God raise you from death by the power of the resurrection, and also from everlasting death by the power of the atonement, that ye may be received into the eternal kingdom of God, that ye may praise him through grace divine. Amen.” ²

It will take unshakable faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to choose the way to eternal life. It is by using that faith we can know the will of God. It is by acting on that faith we build the strength to do the will of God. And it is by exercising that faith in Jesus Christ that we can resist temptation and gain forgiveness through the Atonement.

We will need to have developed and nurtured faith in Jesus Christ long before Satan hits us, as he will, with doubts and appeals to our carnal desires and with lying voices saying that good is bad and that there is no sin. Those spiritual storms are already raging. We can expect that they will worsen until the Savior returns.

However much faith to obey God we now have, we will need to strengthen it continually and keep it refreshed constantly. We can do that by deciding now to be more quick to obey and more determined to endure. Learning to start early and to be steady are the keys to spiritual preparation. Procrastination and inconsistency are its mortal enemies.

Let me suggest to you four settings in which to practice quick and steady obedience. One is the command to feast upon the word of God. A second is to pray always. A third is the commandment to be a full-tithe payer. And the fourth is to escape from sin and its terrible effects. Each takes faith to start and then to persevere. And all can strengthen your capacity to know and obey the Lord’s commands.

You already have had the Lord’s help to get started. In August, you received this promise from President Gordon B. Hinckley if you would read the Book of Mormon through by the end of the year: “Without reservation I promise you that if each of you will observe this simple program, regardless of how many times you previously may have read the Book of Mormon, there will come into your lives and into your homes an added measure of the Spirit of the Lord, a strengthened resolution to walk in obedience to His commandments, and a stronger testimony of the living reality of the Son of God.” ³

That is the very promise of increased faith we need to be spiritually prepared. But if we delayed the start of our obedience to that inspired invitation, the number of pages we had to read each day grew larger. If we then missed reading for even a few days, the chance of failure grew. That's why I chose to read ahead of my daily plan to be sure I will qualify for the promised blessings of the spirit of resolution and testimony of Jesus Christ. When December ends, I will have learned about starting at the moment a command from God comes and being steady in obedience.

More than that, as I read in the Book of Mormon, I will pray that the Holy Ghost will help me know what God would have me do. There is a promise of that plea being answered in the book itself: "Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do." ⁴

I will act quickly on what the Holy Ghost tells me I should do as I read and ponder the Book of Mormon. When I complete the project in December, I will have had many experiences of stretching my faith to be obedient. And so my faith will be strengthened. And I will know from my own experience what comes from going to the scriptures early and consistently to know what God wants me to do and then doing it. If we do that, we will be better prepared for the greater storms when they come.

We will then have a choice of what to do after January 1. We can choose to sigh with relief and say to ourselves: "I have built a great reservoir of faith by starting early and being steady in obedience. I will store it away against the times when I will be tested in storms." There is a better way to prepare, because great faith has a short shelf life. We could decide to persist in studying the words of Christ in the scriptures and the teachings of living prophets. This is what I will do. I will go back to the Book of Mormon and drink deeply and often. And then I will be grateful for what the prophet's challenge and promise did to teach me how to gain greater faith and maintain it.

Personal prayer can also build our faith to do what God commands. We are commanded to pray *always* that we will not be overcome. Some of the protection we need will be direct intervention of God. But more of it will come from building our faith to obey. We can pray every day to know what God would have us do. We can commit to start to do it quickly when the answer comes. My experience is that He always answers such petitions. Then, we can choose to obey. As we do, we will build faith enough that we will not be overcome. And we will gain the faith to go back again and again for further instruction. When the storms come, we will be ready to go and do what the Lord commands.

The Savior showed us a great example of such a prayer of submission. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane as He worked out the Atonement that His Father's will would be done. He knew that His Father's will would be for Him to do what was so painful and so terrible that we cannot comprehend it. He prayed not simply to accept the Father's will but to do it. He showed us the way to pray in perfect and determined submission.

The principle of exercising faith early and steadily applies as well to the commandment to pay tithing. We should not wait until the annual tithing settlement to decide to be a full-tithe payer. We can decide now. It takes time to learn to control our spending with faith that what we have comes from God. It takes faith to pay our tithing promptly and without procrastination.

If we decide now to be a full-tithe payer and if we are steady in paying it, blessings will flow throughout the year, as well as at the time of tithing settlement. By our decision now to be a full-tithe payer and our steady efforts to obey, we will be strengthened in our faith and, in time, our hearts will be softened. It is that change in our hearts through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, beyond the offering of our money or goods, that makes it possible for the Lord to promise full-tithe payers protection in the last days. ⁵ We

can have confidence that we will qualify for that blessing of protection if we commit now to pay a full tithe and are steady in doing it.

The same power of an early choice to exercise faith and to be persistent in obedience applies to gaining the faith to resist temptation and to gain forgiveness. The best time to resist temptation is early. The best time to repent is now. The enemy of our souls will place thoughts in our minds to tempt us. We can decide early to exercise faith, to cast out evil thoughts before we act on them. And we can choose quickly to repent when we do sin, before Satan can weaken our faith and bind us. Seeking forgiveness is always better now than later.

As my father lay in his bed near death, I asked him if he didn't think it was a time to repent and pray for forgiveness for any sins that were not yet resolved with God. He probably heard a little hint in my voice that he might fear death and the Judgment. He just chuckled quietly, smiled up at me, and said, "Oh no, Hal, I've been repenting as I went along."

Decisions now to exercise faith and be steady in obedience will in time produce great faith and assurance. That is the spiritual preparedness we all will need. And it will qualify us in the moments of crisis to receive the Lord's promise that "if ye are prepared ye shall not fear." ⁶

That will be true when we face the storms of life and the prospect of death. A loving Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son have given us all the help They can to pass the test of life set before us. But we must decide to obey and then do it. We build the faith to pass the tests of obedience over time and through our daily choices. We can decide now to do quickly whatever God asks of us. And we can decide to be steady in the small tests of obedience which build the faith to carry us through the great tests, which will surely come.

I know that you and I are children of a loving Heavenly Father. I know that His Son, Jesus Christ, lives and that He is our Savior and that He paid the price of all of our sins. He was resurrected, and He and Heavenly Father appeared to the boy Joseph Smith. I know that the Book of Mormon is the word of God, translated through the gift and power of God. I know that this is the true Church of Jesus Christ.

I know that through the Holy Ghost we can learn what God would have us do. I testify that He can give us the power to do what He asks of us, whatever it is and whatever trials may come.

I pray that we will choose to obey the Lord quickly, always, in quiet times and in storms. As we do, our faith will be strengthened, we will find peace in this life, and we will gain the assurance that we and our families can qualify for eternal life in the world to come. I so promise you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Gospel topics: Jesus Christ, faith, obedience, plan of salvation, prayer, preparation, repentance, scripture study

Notes

1. **Abr. 3:24–25.**

2. **2 Ne. 10:23–25.**

3. "A Testimony Vibrant and True," *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Aug. 2005, 6.

4. **2 Ne. 32:3.**

5. See **D&C 64:23.**

6. **D&C 38:30.**

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