
Decide to Decide

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Rex D. Pinegar, "Decide to Decide," *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 71

Each time we sing that lovely song ("We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet"), my heart pounds in rhythm with that testimony, and I bear witness to you of the divinity of the call of Spencer W. Kimball, who is our living prophet of God today.

I am grateful for my assignment with the young men of the Church. Those in the Aaronic Priesthood quorums of the Church are our future missionaries, Church leaders, and leaders in the world. With so great an opportunity, I desire today to speak to this vast army of youth about their power to be whatever they decide to be.

This summer I had the unforgettable experience of camping with twenty-six hundred of these wonderful Aaronic Priesthood Young Men and their leaders. Amid a colorful array of tents and Boy Scout uniforms, the encampment took the shape of a giant twelve-spoked wheel. Each spoke housed one of Israel's twelve "tribes." The six days of camping at the Florida Deseret Ranch provided camping skills, special demonstrations, tests of physical fitness, inspirational programs, and numerous other activities (not to mention consumption of fifty-eight hundred gallons of milk, sixty-three thousand pounds of ice, one thousand cases of soft drinks, and one and one-half tons of bread). The young men and their priesthood leaders participated together, focusing upon priesthood objectives.

On the first evening at dusk, with each "tribe" in place, all of "Israel" marched to an arena for the opening campfire. The golden rays of sunset formed a magnificent backdrop for the mile-long line of young men as they marched two abreast toward the arena. With colorful banners held aloft, the modern-day sons of Israel passed beneath an archway emblazoned with the Scout Promise: "On My Honor." Sentries stood holding torch-lighted signs inscribed with the Scout Oath and Law and Aaronic Priesthood objectives. As the priesthood leaders led their young men past these sentries, it was anticipated that

each young man would make a personal commitment to strive daily toward eternal life, to be a worthy priesthood bearer, worthy to serve a mission; worthy to marry in the temple.

The decisions made that night were followed up during the next four days by special “mountaintop” experiences. The leaders of ancient Israel often went to a designated mountaintop to receive special instruction from the Lord. It was planned that these “Israelite” priesthood bearers would prepare themselves to come to especially designated locations at the encampment where they might receive spiritual guidance and counsel. Here they learned that, having committed themselves to live the basic principles of the gospel, they had also committed themselves to make other important decisions regarding such things as being morally clean, being honest in word and deed, keeping the Word of Wisdom, and so forth.

These are some of the “certain things” to which President Kimball referred in a recent conference address:

“We hope we can help our young men and young women to realize, even sooner than they do now, that they need to make *certain* decisions only *once*. . . . We can push some things away from us once and have done with them! We can make a single decision about certain things that we will incorporate in our lives and then make them ours—without having to brood and redecide a hundred times what it is we will do and what we will not do.

“... My young brothers, if you have not done so yet, decide to decide!” (*Ensign*, May 1976, p. 46; italics added.)

You can do it, my young brethren. You can become the men of righteousness and stature that your dreams and ambitions hold up before you. To accomplish this objective, you need to make some important decisions now, early in your life. This *is* the time to decide to decide!

First, decide to set goals. In his same conference address, President Kimball said:

“It is most appropriate for Aaronic Priesthood youth, as well as Melchizedek Priesthood men [and I would add, the women of the Church], to quietly, and with determination, set some serious personal goals in which they will seek to improve by selecting certain things that they will accomplish within a specified period of time.” (*Ensign*, May 1976, p. 46).

A friend of mine helped his son set goals in this manner. Don asked his son what he wanted to be, whom he would want to be like. His son named a member of the ward who lived nearby, a man he had admired for some time. Don drove his son to where the man lived.

As they sat in their automobile in front of his home, they observed the man’s possessions and his way of life. They also discussed his kindness and generosity, his good name and

integrity. They discussed the price their neighbor had paid to become what he was: the years of hard work, the schooling and training required, the sacrifices made, the challenges encountered. The affluence and seeming ease with which he now lived had come about as the result of diligent toil toward his righteous goals and the blessings of the Lord.

The son selected other men whom he deemed models of successful and righteous living and learned from a wise father the stories of their lives. Thereupon at an early age he set his own goal of what he wanted to become. And with his goal before him as a guide by which to make other decisions along the way, he was prepared to stay on his chosen course.

Next, decide to work. Work is necessary if you are to reach your goal. J. Paul Getty, considered to be at one time one of the world's wealthiest men, gave this formula for success: "Rise early, work late, and strike oil!" Mr. Getty has also made the thought-provoking comment that "it is possible for a man to get on a train that goes 60 miles per hour and say to himself, 'I am going 60 miles per hour.' But it is not true. Unless he is moving ahead on his own power, he is standing still." (J. Paul Getty, *Reader's Digest*, Sept. 1980, p. 94.)

Isaac Stern, the world-famous musician-violinist, was asked by a television talk show host at what point in his life he determined to devote his energies toward a career as a concert violinist. Mr. Stern told of having given his first concert in San Francisco at a young age. Music critics were extremely impressed and predicted a fine future for the promising young talent. With this encouragement, Isaac Stern began preparations for another concert a year later in New York City. The critics were not so kind to him there. It would require a tremendous amount of work, they judged, if Isaac Stern were to achieve success as a soloist.

Dejected and discouraged, the young Mr. Stern boarded one of New York City's double-decker buses and rode it up and down Manhattan a number of times. He was, in his words, "crying inside" as he tried to decide where he was going from there. Were his critics correct? Had he gone as far as he was capable of going? Should he now seek a profession as just another member of an orchestra?

After his fourth bus ride through the city, he returned to his apartment where his mother was waiting. He had made his decision. "I am going to *work*, mother—*work* at my music until it *works for me*." Today Isaac Stern is acclaimed as one of the finest violinists in the world. Work is a principle with a blessing. Work builds us physically and spiritually. It increases both our strength of body and our strength of character.

A basketball coach claimed, "If you find a man on top of a mountain, he didn't fall there." If you and I are to reach the **summit** of **our divine** potential, we must work each step of the way. The path may be rugged, difficult, unheralded; but it can be successfully climbed if we are willing to work with all our strength and commitment.

Next, decide to believe. Believe in God. Believe in yourself. Believe that God is very interested in you as an individual, that he is anxious for you to succeed. He has provided in the gospel of his Son Jesus Christ the sure pattern for ultimate success.

When our lives are consistent with his gospel, we receive confidence through his Spirit to meet the challenges of each day. We can say with Nephi: “The Lord is able to do all things according to his will, for the children of men, if it so be that they exercise faith in him. . . . Wherefore, let us be faithful to him.” (1 Ne. 7:12.)

The Prophet Joseph Smith’s belief in God, his faith in God’s interest in him, gave him the courage and optimism to say:

“Never get discouraged, whatever difficulties might surround [you]. If [you were] sunk in the lowest pit of Nova Scotia, and all the Rocky Mountains piled on top of [you], [you] ought not to be discouraged, but hang on, exercise faith and keep up good courage and [you] should come out on top of the heap.” (George A. Smith’s journal, quoted by Preston Nibley, in *Church Section*, 12 Mar. 1950, p. 16.)

You, our beloved young men and women, are in the most critical period of life. Youth is the time when habits are formed, when ideas are adopted. It is the time of decision. Decide today to heed these words of our prophet: “Decide to decide!”

Decide to make decisions about certain things once—those things will push from you that might otherwise destroy you—and decide about other things that you will incorporate into your life, things that will bring you eternal happiness. Decide to set goals which are consistent with your divine destiny. Decide to believe in God, who created you. Decide to believe in yourself, that you truly can reach goals—your goals. Decide to work. You can be successful in any righteous endeavor when you are willing to work under the guiding hand of the Lord.

May we all make our decisions in the favorable light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Gospel topics: agency, goals