

Perspectives on our Life's Mission

Cameron Ford
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The late Apostle, Elder Neal A. Maxwell, once share the following:

“In the spring of 1945 I was on Okinawa as a frightened and barely adequate infantry replacement—concerned with victory, to be sure, but very much concerned with selfish survival. Japanese artillery pieces had tried for several days without success to hit the little plateau on which our mortar squad was located. Then one evening they dropped three shells around us. They had finally found the range, and we knew it. Surely they knew it. Since one of those shells fell just several feet from my foxhole, I was stimulated, as you might imagine, to intense prayer, full of promises. Strangely, no more shells fell near us that evening, the very time when more shells should have been fired for effect. Foxhole faith brought some real blessings that evening, causing me to make some covenants which I am still striving to keep.” (Elder Neal A. Maxwell, Insights from my life, BYU Speeches)

In a similar way, I believe that at some point in our premortal existence, perhaps in a figurative foxhole during the war in heaven waged by Lucifer against our Father in Heaven, that we all made promises to our Heavenly Father about the things we would strive to accomplish when we were eventually born into mortality. We sometimes call these our life missions, or our life's work. I believe that if we are diligent in seeking the will of our Heavenly Father throughout our lives, that when we are ready to hear, He will help us to understand what those assignments and promises were.

Modern day prophets and temple ordinances have long taught the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints that each individual born into mortality has specific missions to accomplish. In 1972, then Elder Gordon B. Hinckley, who would later become our President and Prophet from 1995 to 2008, stated:

“In various times, the Lord has chosen boys and trained them for the accomplishment of his marvelous purposes—such boys as Samuel, David, Joseph who was sold into Egypt, Nephi, Mormon, and Joseph Smith.

I believe that God has likewise chosen each of you for something of consequence in his grand design, perhaps not in the category of those I have named. But he loves you and he has a work for each of you to do.” (Elder Gordon B. Hinckley, Watch the Switches of Your Life, Oct 1972)

In 1976, in the same address that contained the foxhole account, Elder Maxwell, then of the Presidency of the Seventy said:

“...along with believing in the gospel, we need to believe in our own possibilities—not as to status, but as to power to do good. God could surprise—yes, even stun—each of us here today if we could manage such divine disclosures. Such must usually be kept from us (or can only be hinted at) for now. But specific and special opportunities are pending for every person here today, if we can trust God and do each day’s duties and bear our present pain.” (Elder Neal A. Maxwell, Insights from my life, BYU Speeches)

The first point that I’d like to make in relation to these “life missions” is the sometimes-harmful assumptions and expectations that surround this topic. I worry that some have a tendency to feel that if we have not had major academic or career accomplishments, or haven’t been in church leadership, or haven’t been financially successful, or haven’t gotten married, or been able to have children, or perhaps not all of our children have remained faithful members of the church, we might feel that we have somehow failed in fulfilling our life missions, or at least missed the mark.

When such feelings arise, it is important to remember Alma’s teachings to his son Helaman in Alma 37:6-7:

“Behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass; ... And the Lord God doth work by means to bring about his great and eternal purposes;

and by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise and bringeth about the salvation of many souls.” (Alma 37:6-7)

When looked at from this perspective, it becomes clear that every act of goodness and service, no matter how small, is significant and useful in the hands of our Heavenly Father. Because of our mortal limitations, we can have no idea how our small actions of today can result in powerful positive consequences in the future. Our Father in Heaven is like a master weaver, and if we could only see it, I believe that those small and simple acts of goodness and caring in our lives will be woven together by Him to create a tapestry of stunning beauty. Personally, I suspect that our Father in Heaven treasures the combined impact of a lifetime of small and simple acts of righteousness and kindness more than all the major discoveries, military victories, or grandiose accomplishments of the ages.

President Hinckley once shared:

“The Lord has blessed each of you with greater capacity than you realize. Your I.Q. may not be the highest in the world. So what? Our jails are filled with clever men who were anything but smart. I have concluded that the work of the world is not done by intellectual geniuses. It is done by men [and I would add women] of ordinary capacity who use their abilities in an extraordinary manner.” (Elder Gordon B. Hinckley, *Watch the Switches of Your Life*, Oct 1972)

On another occasion he said:

“Brigham Young and a handful of others are remembered from our pioneer history. But what of the unsung, the unheralded, the unrecognized who lived the gospel, loved the Lord, and did their daily work without fanfare or applause? Will their eternal reward be any less? I think not. ... We each make our own contribution, and that contribution adds up to the building of the cause. Your contribution is as acceptable as ours. Jesus said, “If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all” (Mark 9:35).” (President Gordon B. Hinckley, *Our Testimony to the World*, Apr 1997)

One of the greatest men I have ever known was a man that never became a Bishop, a Stake President, a Mission President, or a General Authority. He was a humble Orthodontist who felt that part of his life's mission was to seek out the lost sheep. He did so by sharing gospel related books with them, inviting them to go to lunch, or taking them on vacations with his family – all without being asked to do so by virtue of a formal church calling. I was one of those lost sheep that the Lord led him to, and I believe that the effects of his gentle ministrations will be felt by generations and generations to come of my family.

Brothers and Sisters, I want you to know that I believe that some of the Lord's greatest treasures, some of his most precious gems, are the humble Nursery leaders, Primary teachers, and Sunday School teachers of the Church. They are those persistent and caring ministering brothers and sisters. They are those that visit the lonely, or help clothe the naked, or feed the hungry. They are those who do family history work and temple service. They are those that sacrifice careers to raise and nurture children. They are those that work to alleviate suffering, or who light the path away from debilitating addictions. They are those that adopt children, or who provide lifelong parental love to a challenging child that no-one but a mother or father can love. They are you, the faithful members of the Kaysville 11th ward. They are all of the Father's children that faithfully follow the daily promptings of His spirit to serve and to love in small but significant ways.

I'd now like to share some thoughts that we may want to consider as we all go about trying to discover our own life missions. Of the many possibilities there can be for us to "be about our Father's business", it seems clear that our various Church callings may certainly be a part of our life's work, but they do not completely bound or define our life's work.

Here is a list of things that I feel that everyone should consider as they ponder their life missions:

1. All of our life missions should include seeking, finding, living, and being transformed by the teachings, saving ordinances, and atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. For some, understanding parts of our life missions will come from Patriarchal Blessings from ordained Patriarchs, for others it may come in unique and personalized ways. Because we have a loving and all-knowing Heavenly Father, we can be confident that this knowledge will come in a way, and at a time, that will be best for us. But regardless of how the knowledge comes to us, the assignments are real, and the promises made to the faithful, are sure. The late apostle Boyd K. Packer, president of the quorum of the twelve apostles, said:

“Sometimes someone will worry because a promise made in a patriarchal blessing is not yet fulfilled. For instance, a blessing may indicate that a member will be married, and they do not find a companion. That does not mean that the blessing will go unfulfilled. It is well to know that things happen in the Lord’s due time, not always in ours. Things of an eternal nature have no boundaries. From the premortal existence to our existence beyond the veils of death, our life is an eternal life.”

3. As part of our customized life curriculum, the Lord will often ask us to do hard things. This makes sense because almost everything good and worthwhile in life takes a lot of effort and hard work, and being transformed by the atonement of Jesus Christ to be like our Father in Heaven is the most worthwhile thing of all. Therefore, we should not shy away from hard things just because they are hard. Our life mission will never follow the path of least resistance. Always seeking the easy way out, and avoiding discomfort, is a sure-fire recipe for

ending up at the bottom of the mountain of life with an even longer and harder climb ahead than the ones we were trying to avoid.

4. As part of our Life’s mission, the Lord will also ask us to endure severe trials. Some are the results of our own choices, while others are chosen for us. For some, just getting up in the morning and putting one foot in front of the other may be their life mission for a while. In such cases, it can help to remember that the Lord has promised the faithful that all our present suffering will be more than made up in the end.
5. From the very beginning of the restoration in 1830, Prophets have taught every generation of the church in language somewhat similar to the words of our current prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, when he said to the youth in 2018:

“You were sent to earth at this precise time, the most crucial time in the history of the world, to help gather Israel... This gathering should mean *everything* to you. This *is* the mission for which you were sent to earth.” Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel” (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018)

In that foxhole address I mentioned earlier, Elder Maxwell poignantly said:

“In a time when increasing numbers of our fellowmen are wrongly concluding, but nevertheless concluding, that man is alone in the universe, there is a cosmic chill settling in, an astral aloneness that seems to be about and in the hearts of so many, for which the truths of the gospel are the only real remedy. The hungry of the world are reaching out for these truths, even when you and I present them fumblingly and live them less than perfectly.” (Elder Neal A. Maxwell, *Insights from my life*, BYU Speeches)

From modern revelations and the Old Testament blessings and prophecies of Moses that he gave just before his death, we know that gathering Israel is a specific mission assigned in the last days to the tribes of Joseph, who are the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Of Joseph’s posterity, Moses said:

“...his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth.” (Deut. 33:17)

I believe that I would be safe in guessing that the patriarchal blessings of the members in our area reveal that the vast majority of us are descended from the tribe of Ephraim. Therefore, this particular assignment applies directly to us. Even if this is not the case, the primary mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to gather Israel on both sides of the veil.

So, given the statements of modern-day prophets, our patriarchal blessings, and by virtue of our membership in the Lord’s church, I believe it would be safe to describe all of us using language similar to what the Savior used when He spoke of His own atoning mission:

To this end were we born, and for this cause did we come into the world, that we should bear witness to the world of the Savior, to share His restored gospel to the peoples of the earth, to redeem the dead via family history and temple ordinance work for those that have passed away, and to help our fellow brothers and sisters of the Church to live His gospel.

6. 2 Nephi 2:25 says: “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy”. Therefore, finding joy and fulfillment in our lives should be a significant part of our life’s work. Our Father in Heaven is a creator and a builder. He finds His greatest joy in us, His creations. This means that as His spirit children, we will also find our greatest joy and fulfillment as we seek to build and create, ...and this ALWAYS involves work. This means that working and staying productive are key to finding joy. These works of creation certainly include marriage, home, and family, as well as artistic, literary, physical, and even financial creations. However, among the most important of our creations should involve being builders of faith and hope, and creators and nurturers of strong relationships both within and outside the family.

7. Some might feel that a discussion of “life missions” is a topic for the young, not for the more mature who have already lived the majority of their lives.

However, I believe the exact opposite may be true. Old age and retirement often provide the perfect opportunity to focus on parts of our life mission that we struggled to find time for when we were younger.

8. The last point that I’d like to make is how harmful it can be to just stand still waiting for detailed directions before moving forward on our life missions. Our Father has given us agency, and He expects us to use it to choose to bring about “much good” in our own lives and in the lives of those that surround us.

Explicit heavenly direction is not generally how the Lord works. His guidance usually comes as impressions and general directions, not as detailed roadmaps. We need to receive and study our patriarchal blessings, receive priesthood blessings, study and weigh our options, fast and pray for guidance, make what we feel is the best choice, and then move forward with faith.

This point is well illustrated by an experience the apostle Elder Jeffrey R.

Holland had years ago about choosing a wrong road in trying to get back home from a southern Utah day trip with his young son. On the way back they found themselves at a fork in the road that neither of them had paid attention to on the way in. At that point Elder Holland had asked his son to pray about which road to take, and they both felt to take the one to the right. As it turned out, the one to the right ended up being a dead end after several hundred yards. After backtracking and getting on the correct road, his son asked him why they had ended up choosing the wrong road after praying about it and both feeling it was the correct one? Elder Holland responded:

“I think that the Lord, His wish for us there, and his answer to our prayer was to get us on the right road as quickly as possible with some reassurance, with some understanding, that we were on the right road and we didn’t have to worry about it, and in this case, the

easiest way to do that was to let us go 400 yards or 500 yards on the wrong road, and very quickly know, without a doubt, that it was the wrong road, and therefore with equal certainty with equal conviction that the other one was the right road.

I have absolute certain knowledge, perfect knowledge, that God loves us. He is good, He is our Father, and He expects us to pray, and trust, and be believing, and not give up, and not panic, and not retreat, and not jump ship, when something doesn't seem to be going just right.

We stay in, we keep working, we keep believing, keep trusting, following that same path and we will live to fall in His arms and feel His embrace and hear Him say, "I told you that it'd be okay, I told you it would be all right."

Brothers and sisters, when we all eventually arrive at the end of our mortal journey and fall into our Saviors arms, I pray that we will be able to approach that day with confidence that we have given our best effort to discovering and fulfilling the life mission that our Father in Heaven sent us each here to accomplish; so that with the Apostle Paul, we will be able to say "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). This is my humble prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.