

Jesus Christ Is the Way – Choose Best

(The Supreme Achievement of Intelligence)

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“Stand Forever” Episode 12

If you were dying, if you were in a terrible accident and life were quickly ebbing away, if you only had moments to write two words in the sand, words for your children and grandchildren to live by, what two words would you choose?

Hello, my name is Larry Corbridge, and this is Episode 12 of the *Stand Forever Series*. In Episode 10 we established that great achievement is the result of having a destination (Point B), getting a fix on where you are (Point A), plotting the line in between, and staying on course. We also concluded that the destination you were born to reach is to choose to receive the gift of God’s Son, the gift of God’s Spirit, the gift of God’s life, and help others do the same. In the last episode we considered the extent to which happiness and joy may be considered as part of the destination. This episode is about choosing wisely.

Choose Best

So again, if you were dying, if you were in a terrible accident and life were quickly ebbing away, if you only had moments to write two words in the sand, words for your children and grandchildren to live by, what two words would you choose? “Live strong,” “work hard,” “play hard,” “love God,” “love others,” “do good,” and “be good,” would all be good words to live by. “Follow Christ” would even be better. What two words would you choose?

To narrow life’s purpose to only two words, consider three questions.

First question: What is the characteristic that distinguishes man from every other form of life?

The Lord explained, “Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither can be.”¹ He also said, “Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection. And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come.”²

¹ Doctrine and Covenants 93:29

² Doctrine and Covenants 130:18, 19

No doubt a person who gains more knowledge and intelligence at any point in this life, will have so much the advantage here and now, as well.

One of the defining characteristics of godliness is intelligence. “The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth.”³ Unlike all other forms of life in all their vast diversity, you are endowed with reason and the capacity to increase in intelligence with unlimited potential—intelligence and potential. You are endowed with greater intelligence than any other form of life with unlimited capacity to advance from one degree of intelligence and capacity to the next and from there to the next until you see God face to face and know Him as he knows you. And “the day shall come when you shall comprehend even God, being quickened in him and by him.”⁴ Intelligence and potential set man apart from all other forms of life.

Second question: What is the hallmark, the defining characteristic of intelligence?

The hallmark of intelligence, the defining characteristic of rationality is rational behavior and rational choices.

And now we come to the third and most important question: What is the supreme expression of intelligence?

The supreme expression of intelligence, the crowning achievement of every rational being is to choose best. That’s it—not flying to Mars and back safely, not finding a cure for cancer—the crowning achievement of every rational being is to make the best choices. To do otherwise is irrational and foolish.

You are the product of your choices. You do that. No one else chooses for you. Choose most wisely—that is the sum and substance of your existence. It is and has always been the central test.

In the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Jones is presented with an array of goblets, one of which is the Holy Grail. The Grail Knight tells Jones to select one but warns: “Choose wisely, for while the true Grail will bring you life, the false Grail will take it from you.” Jones selects the plainest of the cups saying, “that’s the cup of a carpenter.” The Grail Knight replies, “You have chosen ... wisely.”

³ Doctrine and Covenants 93:36

⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 88:49, 50

The purpose of God's plan for you is to learn to choose wisely, to make increasingly better choices until you learn to make the best choices, the choices God would make. It's that simple.

There is a God who is the Creator of all things. You are His child. Offspring may become like their parents in each of life's many divisions and you may become like yours. As His child and in His likeness, you have the innate potential and capacity to advance from one degree of light and intelligence to the next, and from there on to the next beyond that and on and on until, in the process of a very long time and with the right conditions and choices, you become like Him. What else could be the natural conclusion of the evolution of a child, if not to that of the parents?

The full realization of your divine potential, however, is not inevitable. It is no more inevitable than a child in this life matching either the superb character or excellent achievements of an outstanding father or mother. One may be born into greatness, but greatness achieved must be won by each individually. Greatness actualized and greatness internalized comes neither by birth nor environment, rather by choice.

Your divine potential is achievable only by choosing to follow the plan, which He, Our Eternal Father, established to that end. It is His work and glory that you fully realize your divine potential.

If you had to choose only two words to describe the sum and substance of your existence, two words that sum up the purpose of life, only two words to live by, what would they be? What two words would you choose? "Choose best" would be a good start. And what are the best choices? Choose to receive the gifts of God's Son, His Spirit, His life, and help others do the same. Those are the best choices.

The River of Life

The First Section of the River

To learn to choose most wisely is a process that requires experience, which in turn gradually reveals knowledge of the alternative choices and the consequences of each. That process is not new to this life.

Prior to this life, we lived in God's presence. Unlike the doctrine of most other religions which repudiate life before birth and also characterize the next life as utterly unlike this estate, the truth is, this life is a continuum or extension of our first estate, and from here

on to the next. This world is patterned after the pre-mortal world and is a dress rehearsal for the next. Life before, life here and now, and life yet to come are not distinct realms but three sections of the same river through which the same water flows. All the principles, purposes, and process of the great river flow constantly through all three sections unchanged and eternal.

Both agency and opposition were elements in the first part of the river as well. We usually think agency and choice presuppose good and evil, that for opposition to exist, for choice and agency to exist, the choices must be fundamentally between good and evil. That may not be true.

While it is true good and evil must exist for *moral* agency to operate, agency otherwise only requires alternatives, not necessarily *moral* alternatives. There is opposition in the existence of alternatives alone without polar opposition, without moral opposition. We learn from everything and are affected by most choices, not just those between good and evil.

In this life, many of our choices have no moral implication but vary as between superior and inferior, better and worse, depending on context. At one time of the day, exercise may be a superior or better choice than sleep, and yet at another time sleep may be the better choice. What kind of salad dressing, or ice cream do you buy? Those choices give rise to the exercise of agency but do not require *moral* agency.

We know little about the first section of the river, but what we do know is some of God's children made better, more intelligent choices than others. We know some of God's children advanced and progressed to become the "noble and great ones."⁵ An infinite array of knowledge, intelligence, character, and capacity developed among God's children, but there is One who made the best choices. One became more intelligent and capable than all others.

The Lord explained, "If there be two spirits, and one shall be more intelligent than the other, ... These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they; I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all."⁶

Whatever role good and evil played there, some may not have exerted themselves as much as others in the most worthwhile, productive, rewarding work and endeavors,

⁵ Abraham 3:22

⁶ Abraham 3:18-19

wasting to some extent their opportunities engaged in lesser things, while others, more diligent, worked harder at better, more productive endeavors. In comparison to this life, some may have filled their school schedules with random easy classes while others prudently chose more difficult courses designed to make them more capable, more intelligent, and better prepared for what lay ahead on earth.

The scriptures seem to suggest good and evil did exist to some extent in our pre-mortal state. We know there was a war in heaven, for example, in which Satan rebelled against God and one third of the hosts of heaven followed him.

Speaking of those who are ordained to the “high priesthood of the holy order” in this life, Alma said, “And this is the manner after which they were ordained being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such.”⁷

President Joseph Fielding Smith spoke to this point as well: “God gave his children their free agency even in the spirit world, by which the individual spirits had the privilege, just as men have here, of choosing the good and rejecting the evil, or partaking of the evil to suffer the consequences of their sins. Because of this, some even there were more faithful than others in keeping the commandments of the Lord.

“Some were of greater intelligence than others, as we find it here, and were honored accordingly The spirits of men had their free agency, some were greater than others The spirits of men were not equal. They may have had an equal start, and we know they were all innocent in the beginning; but the right of free agency which was given to them enabled some to outstrip others, and thus, through the eons of immortal existence, to become more intelligent, more faithful, for they were free to act for themselves, to think for themselves, to receive the truth or rebel against it.”⁸

If good and evil were present to some extent, we must conclude we made mistakes; we sinned there, as well as here. Consequently, the “infinite atonement” reaches back eternally as well as forward throughout eternity. We were able to repent and be forgiven there, as we can here.

⁷ Alma 13:3

⁸ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:58–59

We may have made better choices in the first part of the river; it may have been easier in God's presence without physical bodies. But that would have been both positive and negative: positive insofar as encouraging intelligent choices and yet negative in limitation for independent growth and development. There came a time for us to leave home for earth where we could learn to choose for ourselves, and where our opportunities and risks would be vastly greater.

The Second Section of the River

In the second part of the river, mortality, the conditions, and circumstances are different. We don't remember the first part and the canyon walls here are steeper and the rapids more dangerous, but the principles, purpose, and process of learning to choose better and better until we learn to choose the best remain the same.

Choice makes the difference between a controlled life and life control. You may allow circumstances to control your life, like a pinball knocked from one side to the other until the game is over. That is life in reactionary mode, being acted upon rather than acting.⁹

Sometimes you may live on autopilot mindlessly moving, sleepwalking through the routines of the day. Routines are beneficial but life control sometimes requires doing something out of the ordinary.

You can overcome being controlled in life, you can learn to act and take control of life by choice. Choice enables you and God to control your life. Better than life controlling you, control what you can and let God do the rest.

Life on earth has many purposes, but the essence of all of them combined is the same as before and is the same as after this life: to learn to choose best, to make choices that will produce change and growth within you to become most like your Heavenly Father.

You are now being tested to see if you will do all things whatsoever the Lord your God may command you to do,¹⁰ in order that you may eventually become an agent unto yourself and do all the things He would do without being commanded.

⁹ 2 Nephi 2:13-14

¹⁰ Abraham 3:25

The Third Section of the River

To choose best is now a test, but if you stay the course the test will end but the process will continue not as a test but as a way of life. In the hymn “Come Follow Me” we sing these words:

“Come, follow me,” the Savior said,
Then let us in his footsteps tread,
For this alone can we be one,
With God’s own loved, begotten Son.

“Come, follow me,” a simple phrase.
Yet truth’s sublime, effulgent rays
Are in these simple words combined
To urge, inspire the human mind.

Is it enough alone to know
That we must follow him below,
While trav-’ling thru this vale of tears?
No, this extends to holier spheres.

Not only shall we emulate
His course while in this earthly state,
But when we’re freed from present cares,
If with our Lord we would be heirs.¹¹

The supreme expression of intelligence, the crowning achievement of every rational being is to choose best. The heart of it all is Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Choices to receive the gifts of God’s Son, His Spirit, His life and help others do the same have always been and will always be the best choices through all three sections of the river of life.

Reorientation

Finally, let’s pause here and remember where we have been thus far in the *Stand Forever Series* and where we are going. The primary framework or big picture of the series is this:

¹¹ John Nicholson, *Come Follow Me*, Hymn no. 116

- A. *The essential problem in life is separation from God Our Father.***
- *Without God, chaos, darkness, and death prevail.*
- B. *Jesus Christ bridges the gap if we will believe and follow Him to the end and help others do the same.***
- *He is the Way offsetting chaos, the Truth offsetting darkness, and the Life offsetting death.*
- C. *Therefore, cross the bridge and close the gap; Believe and follow Christ to the end and help others do the same.***

We began by talking about the conclusion of the series really which is “believe.” We then explored separation from God as the essential problem in life and the consequent conditions of chaos, darkness and death. We are now in the heart of it all, the solution portion of the series, which is Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life offsetting chaos, darkness and death.

In the next episode we will continue our consideration of Christ as the Way. Christ as the Truth and the Life will follow. I hope you will stay with me on this journey and Stand Forever.