Not long ago a beautiful young mother asked me for guidance with a very difficult decision she was facing. It pertained to an important surgical operation that was being considered. Consequences of her choice would affect her husband and her family as well. She said, “Decisions are really hard for me. I even have trouble choosing what to wear each morning.”

“You are not so different,” I replied. “Each of us must make choices. That is one of life’s great privileges.”

I told this lovely mother that my fellow physicians are regularly asked questions about the human body. Some questions relate to surgical intervention to save a life or to save a part of the body. Other questions relate to elective procedures to alter the body’s structure or function. In recent years, many questions relate to the “choice” to abort the life of a newly forming human being. Ironically, such “choice” would deny that developing individual both life and choice.

I reminded her that questions regarding our bodies represent only an important fraction of life’s most challenging choices. Others include “Where shall I live?” “What shall I do with my life?” “To which cause should I commit my effort and my good name?” These are but a few of the many choices that we must make each day.

I will not disclose the name of the sister, nor the specific operation she was contemplating. To do so might divert our attention to a specific topic and away from those fundamental principles that pertain to important decisions generally.

Because challenging choices face all of us from time to time, I invite others to join with us as I extend my conversation with this young mother.

I would suggest three questions you might ask yourself as you consider your options. Whether they are once-in-a-lifetime or routine daily decisions, serious reflection on these three questions will help clarify your thinking. You might wish to review these questions first alone and then with your husband. They are:

1. “Who am I?”
2. “Why am I here?”
3. “Where am I going?”

Truthful answers to these three questions will remind you of important anchors and unchanging principles.

As you consider these fundamental questions, it will become clear that decisions you first thought to be purely personal virtually always impact the lives of others. In answering these questions, then, you must be mindful of the broader circle of family and friends who will be affected by the consequences of your choice. This self-evaluation will be a silent examination. No one else will hear your replies. Though I will suggest some answers, the ultimate responses must be uniquely yours.

“Who Am I?”

Remember, you are a daughter of God, just as your husband is a son of God. Our Heavenly Father loves you. He has created you to be successful and to have joy.

“He created man, male and female, after his own image and in his own likeness.” (D&C 20:18; see also Gen. 1:26-27; Mosiah 7:27; Alma 18:34; Alma 22:12; Ether 3:15; Moses 2:27.)

These bodies, created in God’s image, are to be preserved, protected, and well cared for. I feel as did the Apostle Paul, who likened the human body to a temple:

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” (1 Cor. 3:16-17.)

You are one of God’s noble and great spirits, held in reserve to come to earth at this time. (See D&C 86:8-11.) In your premortal life you were appointed to help prepare the world for the great gathering of souls that will precede the Lord’s second coming. You are one of a covenant people. You are an heir to the promise that all the earth will be blessed by the seed of Abraham and that God’s covenant with Abraham will be fulfilled through his lineage in these latter days. (See 1 Ne. 15:18; 3 Ne. 20:25.)

As a member of the Church, you have made sacred covenants with the Lord. You have taken upon yourself the name of Christ. (See D&C 18:28; D&C 20:29, 37.) You have promised to always remember Him and to keep His commandments. In return, He has agreed to grant His
Spirit to be with you. (See Moro. 4:3; Moro. 5:2; D&C 20:77.)

Having briefly considered some answers to question number one, let us turn our attention to question number two.

**“Why Am I Here?”**

This question is one I have often asked myself. Well do I remember doing so many years ago while in military service, separated from family and friends, surrounded by the horrible devastation of war. On another unforgettable occasion, I was stranded in a cold, remote area, far from transportation, food, or shelter. No doubt you have had similar anxious moments. But those experiences are the exceptions. I’d like to discuss the greater question.

Why are you here on planet earth?

One of the most important reasons is to receive a mortal body. Another is to be tested—to experience mortality—to determine what you will do with life’s challenging opportunities. Those opportunities require you to make choices, and choices depend on agency. A major reason for your mortal existence, therefore, is to test how you will exercise your agency. (See 2 Ne. 2:15, 25.)

Agency is a divine gift to you. You are free to choose what you will be and what you will do. And you are not without help. Counsel with your parents is a privilege at any age. Prayer provides communication with your Heavenly Father and invites the promptings of personal revelation. And in certain circumstances, consultation with professional advisers and with your local leaders in the Church may be highly advisable, especially when very difficult decisions must be made.

That is precisely the pattern chosen by President Spencer W. Kimball. In 1972, Elder Kimball, then a member of the Council of the Twelve, knew that his mortal life was slipping away because of heart disease. He obtained competent medical counsel and prayerfully consulted with the Lord and with his file leaders in the Church, Elder and Sister Kimball and the First Presidency carefully weighed available alternatives. Then President Harold B. Lee, speaking for the First Presidency, counseled Elder Kimball. With great conviction, President Lee said: “Spencer, you have been called! You are not to die! You must do everything you need to do to care for yourself and continue to live.” (Ensign, Dec. 1985, p. 40.)

President Kimball chose to have an operation performed upon his heart that was known to carry a high risk. He was blessed with a successful result. He lived thirteen more years, eventually to succeed President Lee as President of the Church.

That precious privilege of choice—man’s agency—was decreed before the world was created. (See D&C 93:29-31.) It is a moral agency. (See D&C 101:78.) Thus, it was opposed by Satan (see Moses 4:3), but affirmed by the Lord (see Moses 4:2) and reaffirmed through prophets in ancient and in modern times (see D&C 58:26-28; Moses 6:56; Moses 7:32).

The proper exercise of moral agency requires faith. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the first principle of the gospel. (See A of F 1:4.) Because of Him, you have your agency. He must be the very foundation of your faith, and the testing of that faith is a fundamental reason for your freedom to choose.

You are free to develop and exercise faith in God and in His divine Son, faith in His word, faith in His Church, faith in His servants, and faith in His commandments.

Facing difficult challenges is neither new nor unique. Centuries ago, Joshua spoke of a choice his family faced. He declared:

“Choose you this day whom ye will serve; … as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (Josh. 24:15; see also Moses 6:33.)

Cultivation of that faith will entitle you to the companionship of the Holy Ghost, who will help you make wise decisions. (See 2 Ne. 2:27-28; D&C 14:8.)

Many may profess a measure of faith in God, but without sincere repentance, faith cannot be fully operative. This concept was made known to the Nephites:

“Many of them as are brought to the knowledge of the truth, … and are led to believe the holy scriptures, … which leadeth them to faith on the Lord, and unto repentance, which faith and repentance bringeth a change of heart unto them.” (Hel. 15:7.)

Faith, repentance, and obedience will qualify you for sublime gifts of justice and mercy, which are bestowed upon those worthy of the blessings of the Atonement. (See Alma 34:16-17.)

Yes, every test, every trial, every challenge and hardship you endure is an opportunity to further develop your faith. (See D&C 63:11; D&C 101:4.)

Faith can be fortified through prayer. Prayer is the powerful key to making decisions, not only concerning your physical body, but concerning all other important aspects of your life. Humbly seek the Lord in prayer with a sincere heart and real intent, and He will help you. (See Alma 33:23; Moro. 7:9; Moro. 10:4; D&C 9:7-9.)

Remember that faith and prayer alone are seldom sufficient. Personal effort is usually necessary to accomplish your heart’s desire. “Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” (James 2:17; see also James
The answers to question number two emphasize that you are here to exercise faith, to pray, and to work hard. Now let’s turn our attention to question number three.

“Where Am I Going?”

This question reminds us that eventually you (and I) are going to die, be resurrected, be judged, and be awarded a place in eternal realms. (See 1 Cor. 15:22; Alma 12:24; Alma 21:9; Hel. 14:16-17; D&C 138:19.) With each passing sunset, you are closer to that inevitable day of judgment. Then you will be asked to account for your faith, your hopes, and your works. The Lord said:

“Every man may act in doctrine and principle … according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment.” (D&C 101:78; see also Mosiah 3:24.)

As all will be resurrected, your physical body will then be restored to its proper and perfect frame. (See Alma 11:43; Alma 40:23.) The day of your resurrection will be a day of judgment that will determine the kind of life you shall have hereafter.

That judgment will consider not only your actions, but also your innermost intent and heartfelt desires. Your everyday thoughts have not been lost. Scriptures speak of the “bright recollection” (Alma 11:43) and “perfect remembrance” (Alma 5:18) that your mind will provide in times of divine judgment.

The Lord knows the desires of our hearts. At the time of judgment, surely the special yearnings of single sisters and childless couples, for example, will be given compassionate consideration by Him who said:

“I, the Lord, will judge all … according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts.” (D&C 137:9; see also Heb. 4:12; Alma 18:32; D&C 6:16; D&C 33:1; D&C 88:109.)

He will know of your longings as a wife and mother who tried diligently to serve your family and society properly.

As I listen to those who argue for causes contrary to the commandments of God and observe individuals who revel in the pleasures of the world with apparent disregard for eventual judgment, I think of this divine description of their folly:

“They despised my judgments, and walked not in my statutes, … their heart went after their idols.” (Ezek. 20:16.)

Interviews, as for temple recommends, with your bishop and members of your stake presidency are precious experiences. And, in a way, they could be considered meaningful “dress rehearsals” for that grand colloquy when you will stand before the Great Judge.

After the resurrection and judgment, you will be assigned to your everlasting home on high. The revelations liken the glory of those dwelling places to the differing lights of heavenly bodies. Paul said:

“There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars.” (1 Cor. 15:41.)

The Lord revealed more to the Prophet Joseph Smith, who wrote of the _telestial_ glory, where those will ultimately abide “who received not the gospel of Christ, neither the testimony of Jesus” while in this life. (D&C 76:82.)

The Prophet taught of the _terrestrial_ glory as the abode for the “honorable … of the earth, who were blinded by the craftiness of men,” who rejected the gospel while on the earth. (D&C 76:75.)

And then he wrote of the _celestial_ glory, which “glory is that of the sun, even the glory of God, the highest of all.” (D&C 76:70.) There the faithful will dwell together with their families, enjoying exaltation with our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son. With them will be those who have been obedient to ordinances and covenants made in holy temples, where they were sealed to predecessors and posterity.

As you continue to face many challenging choices in life, remember, there is great protection when you know who you are, why you are here, and where you are going. Let your unique identity shape each decision you make on the path toward your eternal destiny. Accountability for your choices now will bear on all that lies ahead.

May each of us choose wisely and with faith in Him who created us, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.