

Agency, Accountability & Desire

Ghana Kumasi Mission

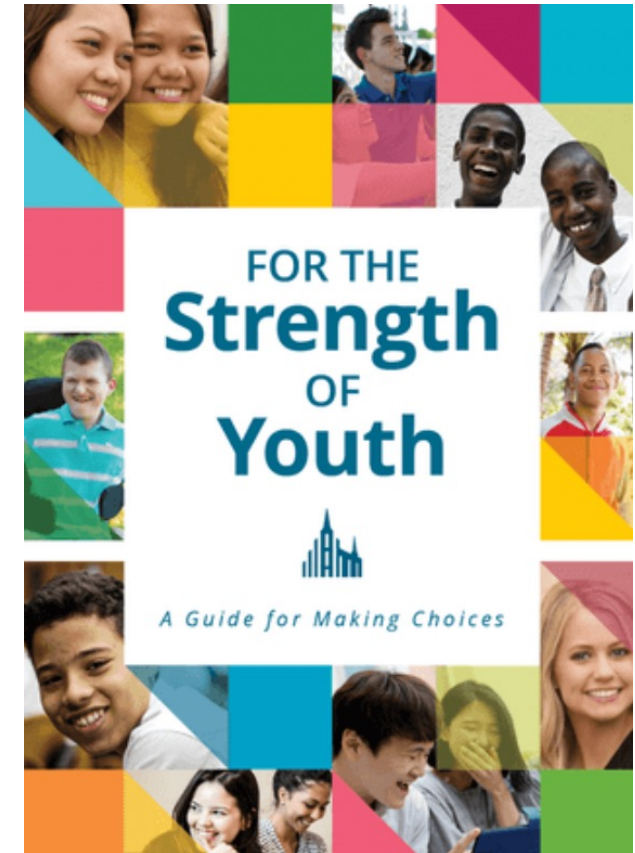
January 2024

Agency and Accountability

The very first principle in the **For the Strength of Youth** pamphlet is “Make Inspired Choices”

Why?

“Wherefore, men ... are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death.” [2 Nephi 2:27](#)



Freedom of Choice

“Freedom of choice is a God-given eternal principle. The great plan of liberty is the plan of the gospel. There is no coercion about it; no force, no intimidation. A man is free to accept the gospel or reject it. He may accept it and then refuse to live it, or he may accept it and live it fully. But God will never force us to live the gospel. He will use persuasion through His servants. He will call us and He will direct us and He will persuade us and encourage us and He will bless us when we respond, but He will never force the human mind.”



President Ezra Taft Benson

*“We are free to choose, but we
are not free to alter the
consequences of those choices.”*

Ezra Taft Benson

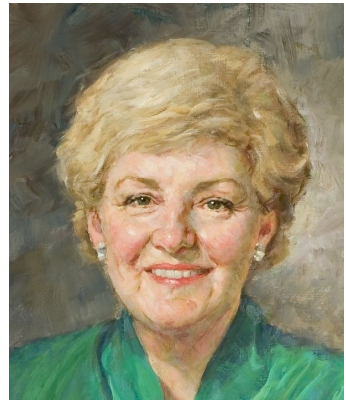
Agency and Accountability



“Accountability is the natural product of agency and is the basis of the plan of life. We are responsible for our own actions and accountable to God for what we choose to do with our lives.”

“‘Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.’ ([Gal. 6:7](#).) [T]ranslated that means, ...if you pick up one end of a stick, you pick up the other. When you pick a path, you choose the place it leads to.”

Elaine Cannon



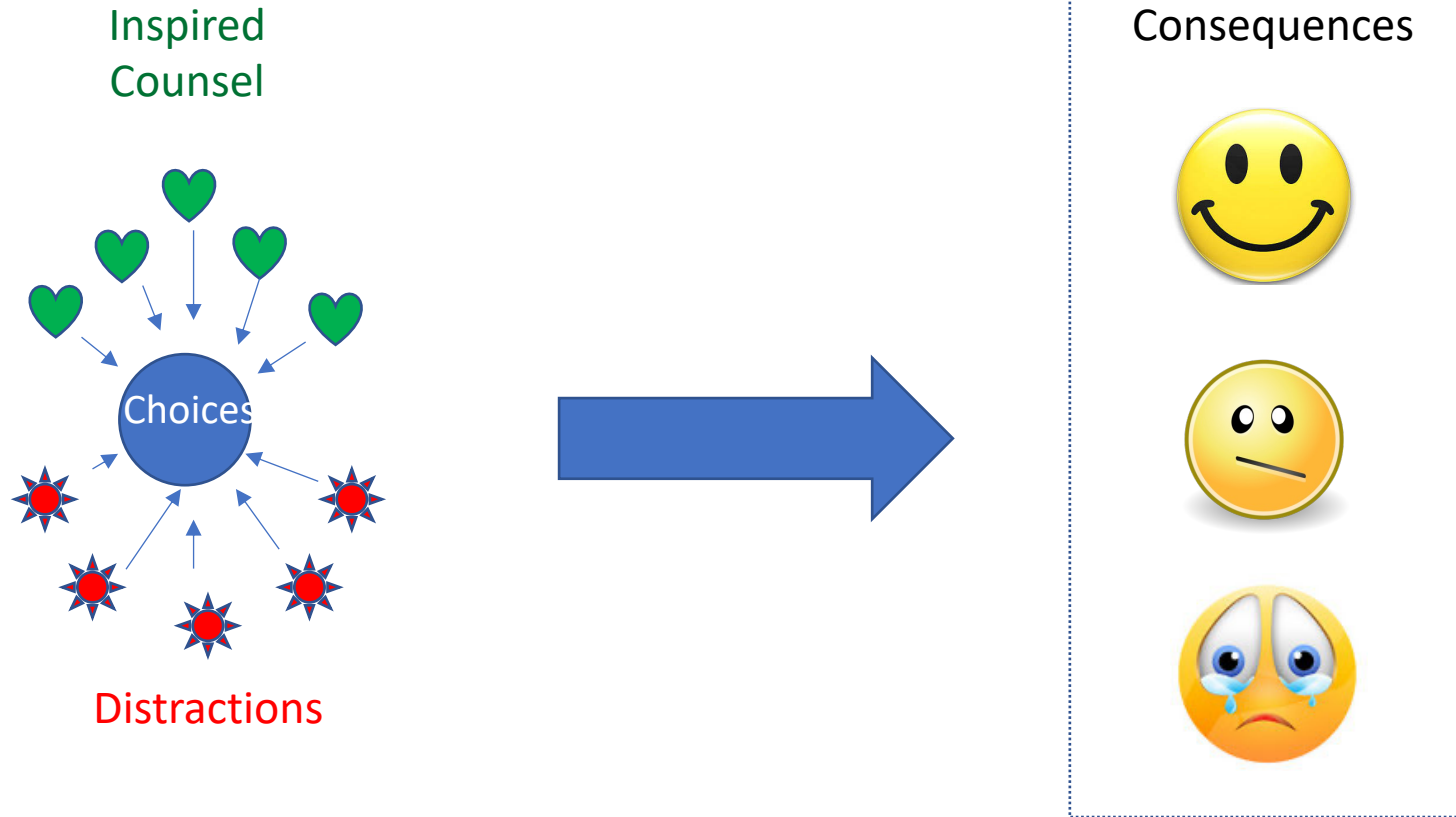
Elaine Cannon
General YW President
1978 - 1984



“A central part of our Father’s plan was that we would be free to choose. This gift is called agency, the power to choose. **The companion of agency is always accountability.** We are individually responsible for the choices we make.”



Elder Shayne M. Bowen



“The choices are not to be made among passive alternatives but among vibrant, alluring choices!” - Elder Neal A. Maxwell

The Prophet Joseph gave us this assurance: "The devil *could not* compel mankind to do evil; all was voluntary. . . . God *would not* exert any compulsory means, and the devil could not" (*Teachings*, 187; emphasis added).

Two Wolves Within

A close-up photograph of two wolves. The wolf on the right is in the foreground, looking directly at the camera with a calm expression. The wolf on the left is slightly behind and to the side, looking off-camera. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of their fur. The background is dark and out of focus.

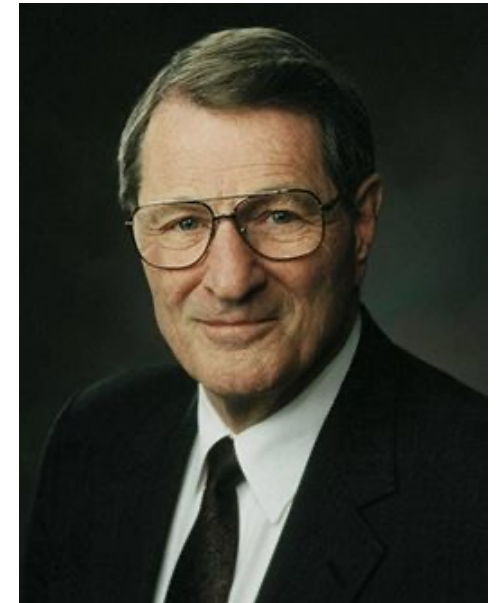
anger, envy, sorrow, regret,
greed, arrogance, self-pity,
guilt, resentment,
inferiority, lies, false pride,
superiority, and ego

joy, peace, love, hope,
serenity, humility,
kindness, benevolence,
empathy, generosity,
truth, compassion, and
faith.

“I’m not sure we grasp how the final judgment will reflect our choices! But **my desires and choices really will be honored!** How manifestly just of God! How trembling for me! Are my desires sufficiently educated to choose wisely (see Alma 13:3, 10)? **Could the further education of my desires be the most important form of continuing education?”**

Desire

What do I want?



Elder Neal A. Maxwell

Again, there can be no agency avoidance. *No decision is a decision.* Delay is a delusion, and that delay always discards the holy present. It simply throws it away.

Alma 29:5

Yea, and I know that good and evil have come before all men; he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless; but **he that knoweth good and evil, to him it is given according to his desires, whether he desireth good or evil, life or death, joy or remorse of conscience.**

D&C 137:9

For I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, **according to the desire of their hearts.**

3 Ne 19:24

And it came to pass that when Jesus had thus prayed unto the Father, he came unto his disciples, and behold, they did still continue, without ceasing, to pray unto him; and they did not multiply many words, for it was given unto them what they should pray, and they were filled with desire.

We can pray to be filled with righteous desires!

3 Nephi 17:5

And it came to pass that when Jesus had thus spoken, he cast his eyes round about again on the multitude, and beheld they were in tears, and did look steadfastly upon him as if they would ask him to tarry a little longer with them.

The Lord knows our desires!

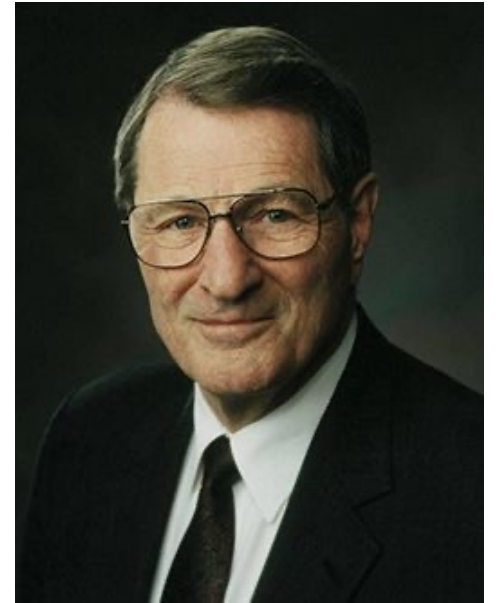
Jacob 4:14

But behold, the Jews were a stiffnecked people; and they despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets, and sought for things that they could not understand. Wherefore, because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall; for **God hath taken away his plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it. And because they desired it God hath done it, that they may stumble.**

D&C 11:8

Verily, verily, I say unto you, even **as you desire of me so it shall be done unto you**; and, if you desire, you shall be the means of doing much good in this generation.

“Desire denotes a real longing or craving. Hence righteous desires are much more than passive preferences or fleeting feelings. Of course our genes, circumstances, and environments matter very much, and they shape us significantly. Yet there remains an inner zone in which we are sovereign, unless we abdicate. In this zone lies the essence of our individuality and our personal accountability.”



Elder Neal A. Maxwell

“individuals who do right and ‘hunger and thirst after righteousness’ (Matt. 5:6) get and keep alive through their actions the feeling to do right.”

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, April 1976 GC



“The more often [a person] feels without acting, the less he will be able ever to act, and, in the long run, the less he will be able to feel.”

C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*)



“Let us remember that desires dictate our priorities, priorities shape our choices, and choices determine our actions. In addition, it is our actions and our desires that cause us to become something, whether a true friend, a gifted teacher, or one who has qualified for eternal life.”

Dallin H. Oaks – April 2011 GC



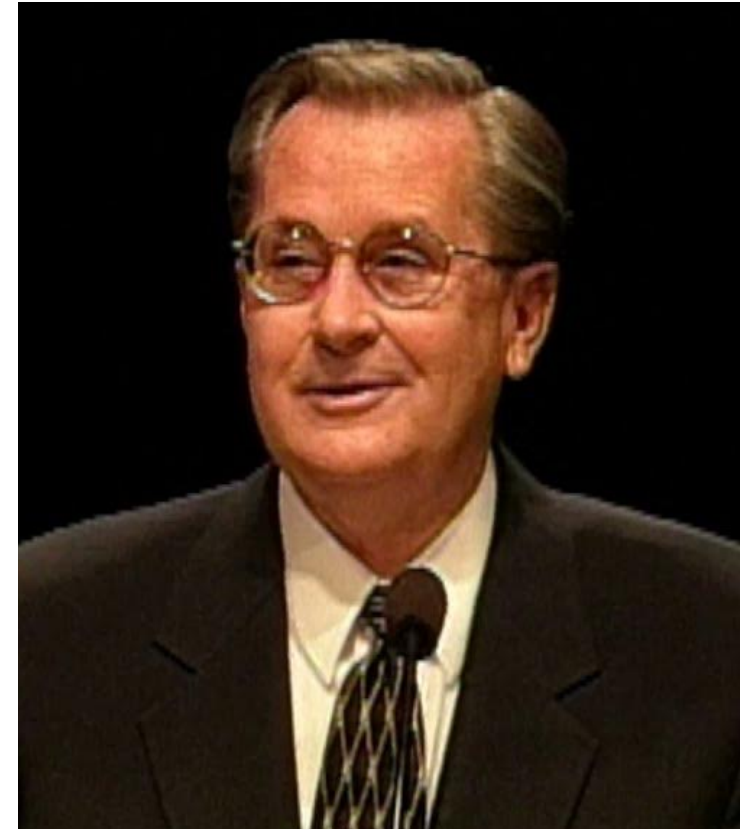
- “When we have a vision of what we can become, our desire and our power to act increase enormously.”
- “To achieve our eternal destiny, we will desire and work for the qualities required to become an eternal being. For example, eternal beings forgive all who have wronged them. They put the welfare of others ahead of themselves. And they love all of God’s children. If this seems too difficult—and surely it is not easy for any of us—then **we should begin with a desire for such qualities and call upon our loving Heavenly Father for help with our feelings.**”



Dallin H. Oaks – April 2011 GC

“Desire is the beginning of faith. The Lord will bless you “even if ye can no more than desire to believe.” (Alma 32:27.) If we let it, this desire will grow into a mature faith that can make things happen.”

Elder Jack H. Goaslind Jr.
April 1991 GC



Knowledge

“Spiritual maturity is understanding that we cannot blame anybody else for our actions.”

“To use our agency wisely we need information to act upon. We need a knowledge of the laws of life, with their accompanying blessings and protective punishments.”

“Our job is to search for the full truth and apply it in our lives. Though we are free to act, we are not free to decide what is right or wrong.”

“We cannot alter God’s laws, his truth. We can choose to use truth wisely and reach our goal, or we can refuse to learn truth, to live it, and then pay the inevitable penalty.”



Elaine Cannon
General YW President
1978 - 1984

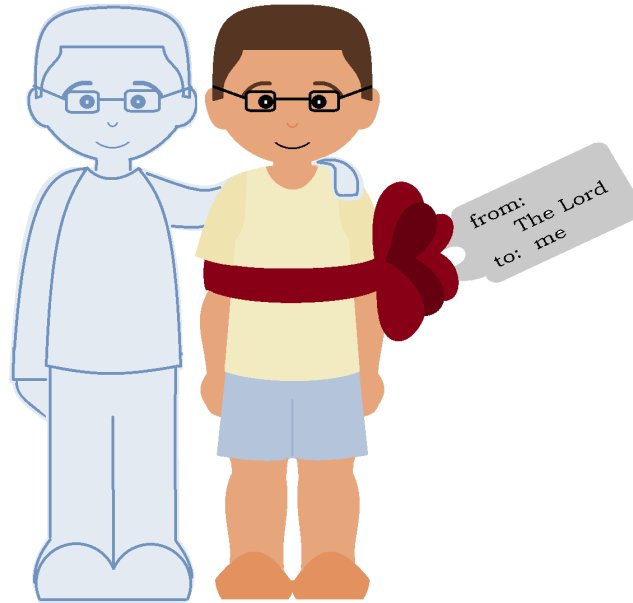
Making Choices and Placing Blame

“If Brother Brigham shall take a wrong track, and be shut out of the Kingdom of heaven, no person will be to blame but Brother Brigham. I am the only being in heaven, earth, or hell, that can be blamed.”

“This will equally apply to every Latter-day Saint. Salvation is an individual operation. I am the only person that can possibly save myself. When salvation is sent to me, I can reject or receive it. In receiving it, I yield implicit obedience and submission to its great Author throughout my life, and to those whom he shall appoint to instruct me; in rejecting it, I follow the dictates of my own will in preference to the will of my Creator.” (Discourses of Brigham Young, sel. John A. Widtsoe, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1941], p. 390.)



President Brigham Young:



Larry and Susan Lunt
(Former mission president, temple
presidency counselor and religion
teacher at BYU)

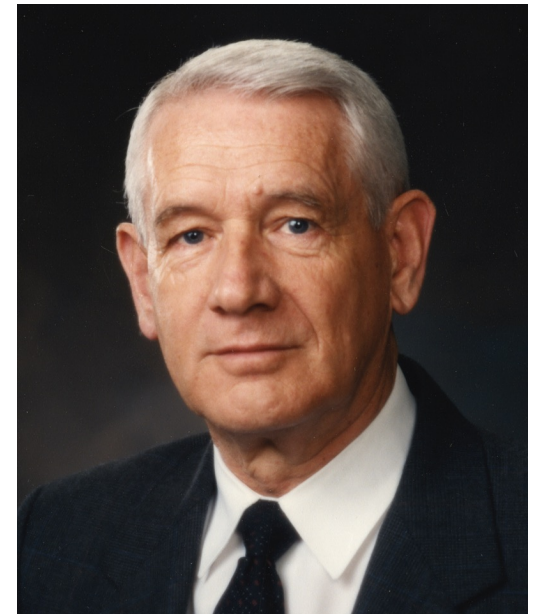
Things to act and things to be acted upon

“In all creation there is a fundamental difference between things that have agency, the ability to choose (‘things that act’), and those that do not have agency (‘things acted upon’). ([2 Nephi 2:13-14](#)) Mankind has both a body and a spirit. Our spirit, which will never die, is to act, and our body, which has life only if it has a spirit, is to be acted upon.”

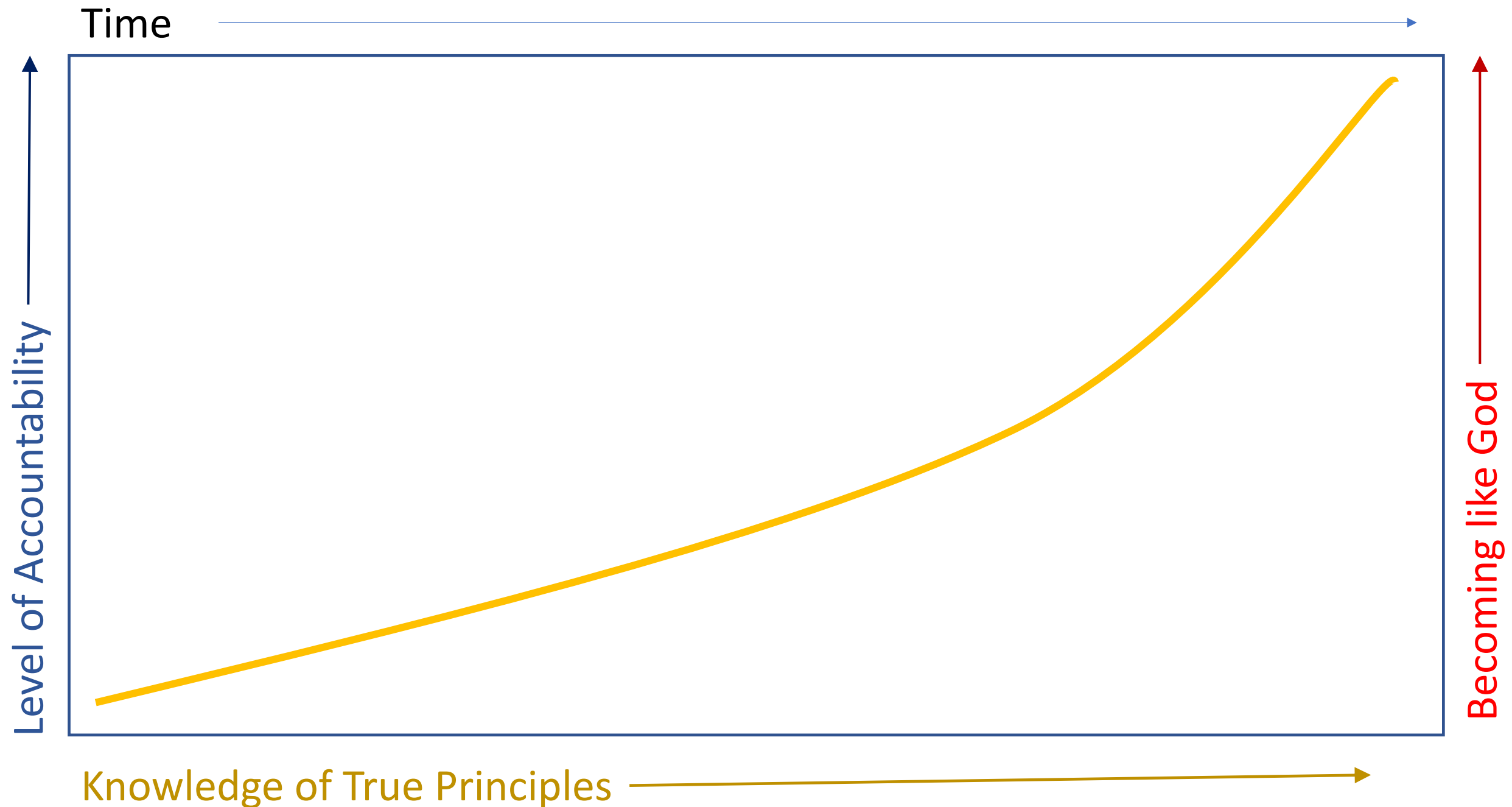
*“Accountability has to do with one’s exercising his own will in making decisions and following a course of conduct. It implies self-initiative and a measure of self-reliance. But it requires more than the ability to act for oneself. **It must be guided by a knowledge of true principles.** Accountability is heightened by the confirmation of the Holy Spirit as to what is right and wrong.*

*“**To the degree to which one becomes more fully accountable, he becomes more like God....** ‘And I, the Lord God, said unto mine Only Begotten: Behold, the man is become as one of us to know good and evil’ (Moses 4:28). Such knowledge is essential to accountability, and with this knowledge men become “free . . . to act for themselves and not to be acted upon...” (2 Nephi 2:26).”*

“As knowledge and experience increase and as spiritual enlightenment is enhanced, the level of accountability is raised.”



Elder Dean L. Larsen
March 1983 BYU Devotional



Agency, Accountability and the Atonement of Jesus Christ

“Implicit with this freedom to choose is the reality that **we all make mistakes.**”

“Agency is inextricably bound to accountability: for every decision and action, we remain answerable to God. **Without Jesus Christ’s role in the plan of salvation, this accountability would mean a dead end for us in our progression.** ”



Benjamin M. Ogles
Dean of BYU's College of
Family, Home, and Social
Sciences

“And if a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness, whether he hath seen or known of it; if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity.”

Leviticus 5:1



Summary of Key Points

- Without accountability there is no agency, and without agency there can be no accountability
- We are all ultimately accountable to God
- Blaming others is evidence of a lack of spiritual maturity
- We do not get to choose the consequences of our decisions
- Truth is not relative - God's truths are absolute and unchanging
- God will honor our desires. Educating those desires by acquiring knowledge of true principles is critical for us to make good choices
- Praying that which the spirit teaches us will result in increased righteous desires
- The more knowledge of truth that we possess, the more we can become like God and the more accountable we become
- Without the atonement of Jesus Christ, accountability for our bad choices would mean a dead end for us in our progression