

## **Agency in Progression**

### **PART I: The Hinge Points of Life**

You will hear it said in the church how important it was to make the right decision(s) in the pre-earth life. You will also hear members talk frequently about how seemingly unfair, maybe even brutal, was the Fall, in that making seemingly one mistake in the pre-Earth life damned you eternally yet in this life people can make a multitude of mistakes and still obtain forgiveness. God is the same yesterday, today and forever- meaning that this misconception about the pre-earth life being a singular decision while earth is a multitude of decisions must be a falsehood. Overcoming the misconception involves two parts (pre-earth life and earth life) and the truth is somewhere in the middle. Yes, the decision to follow God's plan with Christ was important, but it wasn't taken on a whim. We know that we progressed and were given choices in the pre-Earth life just as we are given choices and options in this life. Some made good choices, some made bad choices. The accumulation of those choices was reflected in that meeting- the very cause. Those that made good decisions up to that point cheered for joy, those that made bad decisions up to that point feared and trembled and later went with Satan. And there were those yet who were in the middle. So we know that the pre-Earth life was not just a singular choice. The second point of misconception is that you can make a multitude of mistakes and will still be saved. And, two, there aren't a couple of big decisions that will have equally exalting or damning effects as the big choice in the pre-Earth life.

President Kimball referred to something he called "the point of no return" where the sinner has made enough wrong choices (big ones) that he is un-saveable, not because the Saviour doesn't have the power to save him, but the individual would no longer reach for the Lord's hand of forgiveness when it is offered. Mormon describes a similar state (most likely the exact same state) where the spirit of the Lord ceases to strive with you. Mormon describes teaching those people "without hope and without faith for he knew the judgments of the Lord would come upon them." And why? Because when Mormon:

#### **Mormon 2:12-15**

12 saw their lamentation and their <sup>a</sup>mourning and their sorrow before the Lord, my heart did begin to rejoice within me, knowing the mercies and the long-suffering of the Lord, therefore supposing that he would be merciful unto them that they would <sup>b</sup>again become a righteous people.

13 But behold this my joy was vain, for their <sup>a</sup>sorrowing was not unto repentance, because of the goodness of God; but it was rather the <sup>b</sup>sorrowing of the <sup>c</sup>damned, because the Lord would not always suffer them to take <sup>d</sup>happiness in sin.

14 And they did not come unto Jesus with broken <sup>a</sup>hearts and contrite spirits, but they did <sup>b</sup>curse God, and wish to die. Nevertheless they would struggle with the sword for their lives.

15 And it came to pass that my sorrow did return unto me again, and I saw that the <sup>a</sup>day of <sup>b</sup>grace <sup>c</sup>was passed with them, both temporally and spiritually; for I saw thousands of them hewn down in open <sup>d</sup>rebellion against their God, and heaped up as <sup>e</sup>dung upon the face of the land. And thus three hundred and forty and four years had passed away.

Taking into account what we just learned with God being the same forever and what happened in the pre-Earth life, we can gather that the pre-earth life had many small choices that led up and built into the

large choices. Once those large choices are made, in most cases, there is no going back. These larger choices in very real reality determine the direction that we go in the foreseeable future (until the next big decision). So what do we learn- you make a big choice and it puts you on a path from point A to point B. You then make a bunch of little decisions as you move from point A to point B- they may seem insignificant compared to the big decision at each point but they are what determines your strength of character so that when you reach point B and have to make the next large decision the small decisions from point A to B are reflected in your big decision at point B. From point B there is a path from B to C, B to D-one going up and one going down.

Why is it important to understand this? If what we are experiencing in this life is similar to what we experienced in the pre-earth life then if we learn what happened in the pre-earth life we will know what is coming in this life. And what we learn in the pre-earth life is that there were hinge points- points where large decision were made that sent you down a path for large periods of time. The same is true on earth. There are key choices in your life that will affect you for 5 years, 10 years, even 20 years. Years of your life will flow by like you are stuck on a track all because of one decision you made years ago. Identifying these key moments and preparing people for them will allow them to make the most informed choice and will also allow them during moments of self-reflection to understand why their life is the way it is.

Before talking about these big choices, in case you are still confused about the concept, or questioning the validity of it, here are some words from the prophets and apostles to help clarify.

**1. “Hidden Wedges/Forgotten Wedges”** Thomas S. Monson quoting Samuel T. Whitman

“The ice storm [that winter] wasn’t generally destructive. True, a few wires came down, and there was a sudden jump in accidents along the highway. ... Normally, the big walnut tree could easily have borne the weight that formed on its spreading limbs. It was the iron wedge in its heart that caused the damage.

“The story of the iron wedge began years ago when the white-haired farmer [who now inhabited the property on which it stood] was a lad on his father’s homestead. The sawmill had then only recently been moved from the valley, and the settlers were still finding tools and odd pieces of equipment scattered about. ...

“On this particular day, it was a faller’s wedge—wide, flat, and heavy, a foot or more long, and splayed from mighty poundings [—which the lad found] ... in the south pasture. [A faller’s wedge, used to help fell a tree, is inserted in a cut made by a saw and then struck with a sledge hammer to widen the cut.] ... Because he was already late for dinner, the lad laid the wedge ... between the limbs of the young walnut tree his father had planted near the front gate. He would take the wedge to the shed right after dinner, or sometime when he was going that way.

“He truly meant to, but he never did. [The wedge] was there between the limbs, a little tight, when he attained his manhood. It was there, now firmly gripped, when he married and took over his father’s farm. It was half grown over on the day the threshing crew ate dinner under the tree. ... Grown in and healed over, the wedge was still in the tree the winter the ice storm came.

“In the chill silence of that wintry night ... one of the three major limbs split away from the trunk and crashed to the ground. This so unbalanced the remainder of the top that it, too, split apart and went down. When the storm was over, not a twig of the once-proud tree remained.

“Early the next morning, the farmer went out to mourn his loss. ...

“Then, his eyes caught sight of something in the splintered ruin. ‘The wedge,’ he muttered reproachfully. ‘The wedge I found in the south pasture.’ A glance told him why the tree had fallen. Growing, edge-up in the trunk, the wedge had prevented the limb fibers from knitting together as they should.”

## 2. **“Watch the Switches in Your Life”** Gordon B. Hinckley

“Many years ago I worked in the head office of one of our railroads. One day I received a telephone call from my counterpart in Newark, New Jersey, who said that a passenger train had arrived without its baggage car. The patrons were angry.

We discovered that the train had been properly made up in Oakland, California, and properly delivered to St. Louis, from which station it was to be carried to its destination on the east coast. But in the St. Louis yards, a thoughtless switchman had moved a piece of steel just three inches.

That piece of steel was a switch point, and the car that should have been in Newark, New Jersey, was in New Orleans, Louisiana, thirteen hundred miles away.

So it is with our lives—a cigarette smoked, a can of beer drunk at a party, a shot of Speed taken on a dare, a careless giving in to an impulse on a date. Each has thrown a switch in the life of a boy that put him on a track that carried him far away from what might have been a great and foreordained calling. And as Nephi said, “... thus the devil cheateth their souls and leadeth them away carefully down to hell.” (2 Ne. 28:21.)”

## 3. **“A Matter of Few Degrees”** Dieter F. Uchtdorf

“In 1979 a large passenger jet with 257 people on board left New Zealand for a sightseeing flight to Antarctica and back. Unknown to the pilots, however, someone had modified the flight coordinates by a mere two degrees. This error placed the aircraft 28 miles (45 km) to the east of where the pilots assumed they were. As they approached Antarctica, the pilots descended to a lower altitude to give the passengers a better look at the landscape. Although both were experienced pilots, neither had made this particular flight before, and they had no way of knowing that the incorrect coordinates had placed them directly in the path of Mount Erebus, an active volcano that rises from the frozen landscape to a height of more than 12,000 feet (3,700 m).

As the pilots flew onward, the white of the snow and ice covering the volcano blended with the white of the clouds above, making it appear as though they were flying over flat ground. By the time the instruments sounded the warning that the ground was rising fast toward them, it was too late. The airplane crashed into the side of the volcano, killing everyone on board.

It was a terrible tragedy brought on by a minor error—a matter of only a few degrees.

Through years of serving the Lord and in countless interviews, I have learned that the difference between happiness and misery in individuals, in marriages, and families often comes down to an error of only a few degrees."

#### 4. **"The Tale of Two Wolves"** Old Cherokee Proverb

One evening, an elderly Cherokee brave told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people.

He said "my son, the battle is between two 'wolves' inside us all. one is evil. it is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.

The other is good. It is joy, peace love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: "which wolf wins?..."

The old Cherokee simply replied, "the one that you feed"

In summary, as you move between major decisions in your life (ie. Switch points), the small daily decisions you make (ie. Which wolf you feed) will predict what your major decisions will be at your switchboards. Once the big decisions are made, once the switch is thrown, you are on that track until the next switch.