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Section 007

Option 1: Finding Answers

- What role does agency play in overcoming temptation, and how can understanding agency help resist temptation?

Scriptures:

- Joshua 24 – Old Testament
- James 1 – New Testament
- Alma 13 – Book of Mormon

Scholarly Sources:

- Pam Musil, “The Path to Transformative Change” (2019) – BYU Speeches
- Elder David A. Bednar, “We Will Prove Them Herewith” (2004) – General Conference
- Elder Lynn G. Robbins, “Avoid It” (2013) – BYU Speeches

Church Related Sources:

- Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Free Agency and Freedom” (1989) – Book of Mormon Central
- Lynne Wilson, “Matthew 4; Luke 4-5 Come Follow Me Commentary” – Book of Mormon Central
- Donald Q. Cannon, “Joseph Smith and Agency” (1991) – Religious Studies Center

I did not use AI in the writing of this paper.

## The Power of Agency: Choosing Christ to Overcome Temptation

### Introduction

What is the purpose of this life? This timeless question has been asked by every person who has walked planet Earth. From a Christian perspective, the principal purpose of life is to have joy, learn, grow, and walk with God through faith. However, temptation tries to thwart God's perfect plan by influencing us to turn away from God and turn towards sin. Agency allows us to make our own choices but is through our covenantal relationship with our Savior Jesus Christ that we can find the strength to choose right, regardless of our circumstances. This paper will explain how agency plays a vital role in choosing to overcome the temptations of this world through Jesus Christ and covenants.

### Purpose of Life

Life, a divine gift from God, is one of many pursuits, opportunities, responsibilities, and joys. Although many philosophers, theologians, and respected scholars believe that this life is an opportunity to grow in virtue and other disciplines, Jesus Christ has clearly stated the purpose of this mortal life in the Pearl of Great Price, where He says, "And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them" (*Pearl of Great Price*, Abraham 3:25). Mortal life, much like an academic test, serves as the best testing grounds by which the Lord can prove whom we choose to serve (*King James Version*, Joshua 24:15). The Lord has so lovingly provided each of us with countless testimonies that stand as a witness that how we live this life really does matter (*Think Celestial*, Nelson).

### Role of Agency

Our prophet, Russell M. Nelson, beautifully summed up what matters most about this life when he reiterated, "Mortality is a master class in learning to choose the things of greatest

eternal import (Nelson). Every Christian faces the challenge of consistently choosing the Lord over all other influences in life. In the Book of Mormon, we learn that “the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other” (*Book of Mormon*, 2 Nephi 2:16). Many prominent church leaders across various congregations and sects call the opportunity to choose, free agency. Elder Dallin H. Oaks once said, “Free agency, the power to choose and direct our thoughts and our actions, is a gift of God” (Oaks 13). Joseph Smith also stated that this freedom of choice is “one of its choicest gifts” (Cannon). Because God gave us our agency, we are then able to make our own choices. While we can make choices, we cannot control their consequences. Entire wars and revolutions, both on Earth and in heaven, have been fought to preserve the agency of men. Agency is both man’s greatest virtue and vice, depending on how we act in accordance with our beliefs.

### **Role of Temptation**

Because agency requires opposition, temptation plays an essential role in testing our faith and devotion to God. Some may see agency and temptation as opposites, but scripture teaches that choice cannot exist without opposition (*Book of Mormon*, 2 Nephi 2:11). Elder Dallin H. Oaks similarly stated, “Free agency cannot be exercised unless there is opposition in all things” (Oaks 9). Why is opposition as vital as agency in God’s plan? Lynne Wilson shares his opinion that “the underlying question with temptations is one of who to worship” (Wilson 62). This is an imperative truth because in the Doctrine and Covenants, we learn that “And it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves” (*Doctrine & Covenants*, Section 29:39). Without this opposition provided, it would be impossible to truly test the faith of God’s children.

With that in mind, one might draw the conclusion that keeping the commandments equates to following God, and sinning equates to following the adversary. Although this thought might be controversial, Elder Lynn G. Robbins uses a strong modern-day analogy about tempting chocolate chip cookies. He teaches that “Moses warned of the danger of leaving the door ajar: ‘Sin lieth at the door, and Satan desireth to have thee’ (*Pearl of Great Price*, Moses 5:7). All Satan needs to gain access to your pleasure center is a cracked door and a sweet aroma” (Robbins). This implies that temptation occurs well before the actual choice to sin. The Book of Mormon adds on to that by teaching us of the adversary’s tactics, where it adds, “And others he will pacify, and lull them away into carnal security” (*Book of Mormon*, 2 Nephi 28:21). In this world of AI fakes, instant gratification, and the adversary’s seemingly endless array of temptations, it is easy to lose hope. It is exactly in this moment that we need to follow the counsel and promises of James: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (*King James Version*, James 1:12).

### **Role of Jesus Christ**

Since temptation is inevitable, we must rely on the Savior’s help to overcome it. It is through Jesus Christ that we can avoid the full weight of negative consequences and gain strength to persevere despite past mistakes. For followers of Christ, this saving and enabling power is what gives them the faith, hope, and power to continue in this world of polarity. With that said, Jesus Christ has always and will always preserve our agency. He invites us to “trust and place our confidence in [Him] as our Savior, on His name, and in His promises” (Bednar). Jesus understands our struggles and weaknesses. He knows how to “succor them who are tempted” (*Doctrine & Covenants*, D&C 62:1) because “He suffered pains and afflictions of every kind”

(*Book of Mormon*, Alma 7:11). Yet, unlike us, “He gave no heed unto them” (*Doctrine & Covenants*, D&C 20:22). To pinpoint a prime example of this, Jesus had endured a 40 day fast before starting His ministry as recorded in Matthew 4 and Luke 4. Just as Jesus was at His lowest moment physically, the devil tempted Him. It is inspiring to learn of the measures our Redeemer went through to overcome the adversary’s tactics by using His agency to choose righteousness. In a moment of distress, one can follow the advice from James, Jesus’ half-brother, where he counsels, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (*King James Version*, James 1:4). Jesus Christ is perfect, and as we depend on Him in all things, He will come to our aid because of His infinite love for each one of God’s children. He only asks that we follow Him.

### **Role of Covenants**

We follow our Older Brother by entering in the covenant path set before us, by adhering to the ordinances and commandments of His gospel. This is a central purpose for mortal life, to enter into a covenantal relationship with our Heavenly Father and His Only Begotten Son. In *Doctrine and Covenants*, Jesus declares, “I will prove you in all things, whether you will abide in my covenant” (*Doctrine & Covenants*, D&C 98:14). Covenants are promises we enter into with God, where we promise faithfulness to Him, and He promises blessings to us. By centering our thoughts and actions on the Lord, we honor our covenants and make wiser choices. The clearest example of the profound implications of covenants is found in the *Book of Mormon*, where the people of Ammon covenanted to bury their weapons of war because the Lord had asked them to (*Book of Mormon*, Alma 24). It says that this people “was firm and would suffer even unto death rather than commit sin” (*Book of Mormon*, Alma 24:19). Even though one has entered into a covenant with the Lord, this does not mean that life will be easy. The Lord admonitions, “watch

and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (*King James Version*, Matthew 26:41). In contrast, President Russell M. Nelson has taught the following about covenants: “Each person who makes covenants...and keeps them – has increased access to the power of Jesus Christ to lift us above the pull of this fallen world” (*Overcome the World*, Nelson).

## **Conclusion**

Jesus Christ is always the answer to overcoming temptation, and He asks us to choose to follow Him by obeying His commandments and by entering into a covenantal relationship with Him and the Father. Even when life feels overwhelming, Jesus Christ is the light that guides us to the end of the tunnel. As John C. Maxwell said, “Life is a matter of choices, and every choice you make makes you” (Maxwell). There is infinite power, love, mercy, and hope when we choose to follow Jesus Christ, for He is the source of all that is good in this world.

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