

## A Dilemma Resolution Procedure

*Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. (D&C 9:7-8)*

Each of us must accommodate the mixture of reason and revelation in our lives. The gospel not only permits but requires it. An individual who concentrates on either side solely and alone will lose both balance and perspective. Boyd K. Packer<sup>1</sup>

This revelation (D&C 9) teaches that in the acquisition of knowledge about the things of God, reason is not an alternative to revelation. Study and reason can find the truth on many of these subjects, but only revelation can confirm it. Study and reason are a means to an end, and the end is revelation from God. Dallin H. Oaks<sup>2</sup>

When faced with an ethical dilemma, we are *required to study it out* in our minds while attempting to resolve it. *Study and reason can find the truth* about life's problems. Once we have made a decision, then God instructs us to *ask Him if it be right*. If our study has led us to the right decision, the Holy Ghost will *cause our bosom to burn within us*. *Only revelation can confirm* if we have made the correct choice. The use of this process can lead us to the correct resolution of a tough problem.

This chapter contains a practical, dilemma resolution procedure for applying this process. It combines *reason and revelation* and if properly used will allow us to maintain *both balance and perspective*. Here are the elements of the procedure:

1. Study it out
2. Pose alternatives and consider consequences
3. Choose an alternative and seek for confirmation
4. Implement the decision and assess the consequences

## *Study it Out*

In this part of the procedure, we will consider the following topics:

- Defining the problem including identifying people with accountability and who will be affected
- Identifying assumptions
  1. Are we prejudging people or the situation?
  2. Do we have any emotional ties that are clouding our ability to make a decision?
- Identifying fundamental laws and/or standards
  1. Are there standards in conflict?
  2. Does the ethical dilemma have any legal ramifications?
- Researching prior experience
  1. Do the scriptures say anything about the problem?
  2. Have the prophets said anything about the problem?

**Defining the problem.** Before deciding upon an appropriate resolution to a dilemma, it is essential to accurately define the problem. To do this, it is crucial to carefully judge the validity of each piece of information. Separating fact from opinion is essential to understanding a dilemma. This is especially important when people feel strongly about different resolutions. In such situations, emotions and opinions can heavily influence the interpretation of or possibly even prevent the recognition of relevant information. Consequently, care must be maintained to view information objectively.

A helpful technique for addressing complex dilemmas is to divide them into small, manageable units. Frequently, a problem appears so overwhelming that we do not know where to begin, and we leave the problem unresolved. We may try to justify or ignore the problem, hoping that it will go away or resolve itself. In many ethical dilemmas, however, failure to take action can be as unethical as choosing the wrong course of action. The problem might be divided according to the facets of the problem affecting each of the various people, by seriousness of the issues involved, by amount of time required to resolve the problem facet, or some other logical means. Dividing it in this manner can help to understand interrelationships between the facets of the problem. This may make it possible to form a logical sequence of tasks that will lead to a resolution.

In addressing a difficult dilemma, it is good to talk to others to get their perspectives. A family member, home or visiting teacher, or trusted friend who is not in the midst of the dilemma can often provide objective insight. They sometimes see information or courses of action that we cannot see ourselves. Even if the person is unable to provide counsel, speaking through a problem with another person can help to organize thoughts and possibly recognize options that were previously unnoticed.

It is also important to determine the people with accountability and those who will be affected by the situation. Frequently, most of these people will be obvious, but there may be many more whose relationships to the problem are obscure. Like determining the consequences of an action,

predicting all those who will be impacted by the resolution becomes a difficult, if not impossible, task.

Once the people have been identified, it is important to discern their expectations for the resolution. Oftentimes, it is possible to describe each of their primary interest with one or two key expectations. While it is difficult to accurately describe any individual or group as being interested only in obtaining a certain outcome, it may be fair to say that one or two expectations are controlling what a particular person would want to achieve in a specific situation. For instance, a driving motivation for a neighborhood committee proposing a new stop light may be safety, while that of a city planner might be functionality and economy. These desired outcomes do not completely describe each person's concerns, yet they adequately describe the value that is governing what each might hope to achieve in an effective resolution of a dilemma.

To complete the problem definition, write a clear, concise statement of the dilemma. This should explain the conditions present that have created the dilemma, the expected consequences of doing nothing to resolve the situation, the people who will be affected and their relationships to the issue, and any schemes for subdividing the problem. Having this statement will help to focus the search for a resolution.

**Identifying assumptions.** For most dilemmas there are assumptions that must be made to arrive at a solution. This need arises because not all information is readily obtainable, and especially not in the time frame or with the resources available. Missing information will likely be manifest in the problem statement, and might include such things as characteristics, attitudes, or desires of some of the people and relationships between problem elements. It is desirable to err on the conservative side in making assumptions. This, however, will not ensure that the problem can be resolved in a satisfactory manner. If solutions are based on assumptions that are later discovered to be inaccurate, additional work will be required to completely solve the dilemma.

**Identifying fundamental laws and standards.** The next step is to identify relevant fundamental laws, principles, and standards. A consideration of God's characteristics provides the ideal starting place for this step. However, it may be that every one that is important to us may not be directly applicable to a specific situation. We should select those that are applicable and use them to lead our search for a resolution.

After determining the standards that are of significance to the problem, it is helpful to identify laws and principles that these employ. Laws and principles provide a more tangible link between thought and action. For instance, if a standard that is of importance in a given situation is *truth*, an individual might look to God's laws, government-mandated laws, and societal expectations. Any of these can be useful tools for understanding what manner of problem resolution might be acceptable.

Frequently, we see that standards may appear to be in conflict, such as justice and mercy, as we define the dilemma. For instance, in the classic story of *Les Miserables* <-, a man is caught stealing in order to feed his family. Justice demands that the man be turned over to the law. Mercy would suggest that he be allowed to go free for his family's survival. Should justice or mercy win

out in this dilemma? When two standards are in conflict as these are in this case, it would be beneficial to have developed a God-like perspective to help prioritize the standards. Again, we see the importance of striving to develop His characteristics to help us with our daily decisions in mortality.

**Researching prior experience.** Not every dilemma a person faces is completely new. Many times we have faced situations with many of the same conditions. If a person has not faced a similar dilemma, it is likely that an acquaintance has. Analyzing the similarities between the current dilemma and those of the past can provide valuable help in determining an appropriate resolution. Additionally, identifying the differences between the present and past situations can bring clarity to the current problem definition. Highlighting similarities and differences can help to clarify how a solution to the former problem might be adapted to fit the current situation.

A search in the scriptures or a search of the words of modern prophets may help determine what is the right course of action. Many of the daily problems that we face have been commented on by prophets and apostles. We would do well to seek their wisdom and experience. As an example, we may find ourselves in a debate over the use of a lottery to fund government programs including education in our local community. However, several of the apostles have spoken about the relationship of lotteries to gambling and the inherent problems that they bring to society.

## *Pose Alternatives and Consider Consequences*

In this part of the resolution procedure, we will look at the following topics:

- Posing alternative solutions
- Applying an algorithm for the solution
  1. Utilitarian approach (ends-based)
  2. Kantian approach (rules-based)
  3. Golden Rule approach

**Posing alternative solutions.** Once we are prepared with a clear understanding and an accurate definition of the problem we must set out to solve it. The procedure of finding a solution is comprised of two phases. The first phase is a divergent one, in which we generate several possible solutions without making an effort to evaluate them as to whether they will be effective, efficient, or ethical. The extent to which it will be possible to diverge depends, largely, upon the nature of the problem. For some problems, there may be half a dozen or more possible solutions, while for others, there might be only two.

One of the most common divergent processes for generating possible solutions is brainstorming. Alex F. Osborne, the man credited for the creation of this technique, began using it in his advertising agency in 1939 and wrote about it in his 1953 book entitled *Applied Imagination*.<sup>3</sup> Much has since been written about this process which provides a more thorough explanation than the basic guidelines that will be presented here.

A key element of the brainstorming process is deferred evaluation. During the process, no analysis is made of a solution's potential for solving the problem. Premature judgment is detrimental because it short-circuits the brainstorming process, limiting the creativity of the solutions generated. The principle of deferred evaluation applies to positive as well as negative evaluation. A solution which initially seems unreasonable may later be refined into the perfect fix. Conversely, if the first solution that looks adequate is accepted, it may lend poor results when it is discovered not to be the optimal solution.

Failure to defer judgment limits creativity in several other ways. An important part of the brainstorming process – particularly when it is performed in groups – is "hitch-hiking" or "piggy-backing." This happens when one idea, whether it is good or bad, leads to another. If a solution is immediately discredited, it will also eliminate all of the permutations of that idea which might have been generated. On the other hand, if an idea is praised, it may heavily influence the direction of the process, so those involved only create variations of that one particular solution. Limiting the brainstorming process in this manner undesirably diminishes the solution possibilities both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Marvin Levine describes another useful technique for studying a problem as "looking at the extremes" which can be applied to problems in ethics.<sup>4</sup> First, minimize the problem – make it far less serious than it really is. In this scenario, the consequences are minimal and the complexities of interpersonal relationships are greatly simplified. Now, determine if the problem in this simplified state has an obvious solution. Next, look at the problem in the opposite way by making the situation far more serious. The decision now carries with it enormous consequences that will affect many people's lives. Is there a clear solution to the problem in this scenario? Looking at the extreme cases of the problem can provide valuable insights into an appropriate solution.

After visualizing the extreme scenarios, consider the situation in which both extremes suggest a single course of action. In this case, it is likely that the solution is appropriate for the actual problem, and one should study the implementation of this solution. Are there complexities that would make the extreme solution inadequate in the actual situation? If not, a satisfactory solution may have been found.

Next, consider the situation in which each extreme case suggests different courses of action. Though this situation is not as clear cut as the previous case, there are still valuable insights to gain. An appropriate question one might ask is, "Is my decision-making process being too heavily influenced by the consequences of the situation?" In other words, am I reacting differently when the situation is dire than I would when the ramifications of my decision are not so tremendous? If this is the case, it would serve well to take a close look at what is motivating the action. Is it being driven by Godly characteristics or outside influences? If our decision-making in ethical dilemmas is being steered by externalities, we are being led into a potentially dangerous situation in which we are being reactive, rather than proactive. When we allow ourselves to be influenced in this manner, we tend to practice situational ethics or relativism. Thus, obtaining this result from evaluating the extremes may not provide the answer, but it provides a valuable check to determine

if we are being properly motivated in our decision process.

Often, it is not clear how to proceed in resolving a problem. No matter how much effort we put into finding the solution, an appropriate resolution continues to evade us. In times such as this, we may want to set aside the problem and let it incubate. Levine writes the following about incubation:

A problem resists solution because we have the wrong approach. . . The recommendation is that we put the problem aside and become involved in other activities. This frequently has one of two results. The first is that the solution will later occur to us when we least expect it. It is as though the mind has been unconsciously working on the problem while we have been going about our daily routine. The second effect of taking a break is not only that the problem-solving process "incubates," but that our mind has changed when we return to the problem. We are less dominated, controlled, by the incorrect set we had several hours earlier. We are now more likely to think of new approaches.<sup>4</sup>

In complex problems that require days or weeks to resolve, there will naturally be a considerable amount of time for incubation. The trick is to allow one's self to benefit from this time. This requires an open mind that is not controlled by habits or preconceived notions of how to handle the situation. We must continually look at a problem from different perspectives, trying to understand its many intricacies. If we are willing to evaluate and make adjustments to our mindset, we can benefit from the subconscious thought process that takes place during incubation.

**Applying an algorithm for the solution.** Once we have diverged to generate as many solutions as is possible, we must begin the convergence process to discover which solution is optimal. Now, quality becomes the driving force, rather than quantity. This is when we evaluate the solutions to see if they adhere to our standards.

Rush Kidder, in his book *How Good People Make Tough Choices*, presents an approach for resolving dilemmas in which proposed alternatives are evaluated using classical ethical theories.<sup>5</sup> The evaluation is accomplished by examining three possible algorithms which Kidder described simply by the following phrases:<sup>5</sup>

1. Do what's best for the greatest number of people
2. Follow your highest sense of principle
3. Do what you want others to do to you

Applying these is not a simple task. Each has its problems while considering possible solutions to dilemmas. Still, it is helpful to look at a problem from these perspectives to help gain insight as to which solution is the most suitable. At the very least, evaluating a solution on these terms will point out a solution that obviously fails to meet the standards of one of the classical ethical theories. In the discussion that follows, we will consider these three algorithms by briefly reviewing the theoretical background of each (for a more detailed background, please see Appendix A?) and then applying each to the following ethical dilemma which was first posed in Chapter 1:

A roommate returns from an appointment with her Bishop and waves a temple recommend exclaiming, "I got it!" Her roommates are surprised. They know her immoral behavior would not qualify her for it. She had simply not been honest with the Bishop. Out of her hearing, the roommates discuss their responsibility in the matter. Do they report her immoral behavior to the Bishop? Do they talk to the roommate about the situation? Or, do they decide that it is between her and her Bishop?

The first algorithm described by the phrase, "Do what's best for the greatest number of people," is a form of utilitarianism. The ideas of utilitarianism were principally developed by English philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Kidder refers to it as "ends-based" thinking since it relies heavily on the consequences of actions.<sup>5</sup> Mill wrote that "the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator."<sup>6</sup> Mill concludes that the highest form of happiness is obtaining unity with others. Thus, this approach of solving ethical dilemmas asks us to find 'the greatest good for the greatest number of people.'

The use of this approach requires answers to two difficult questions: What is the greatest good? What or who is the greatest number? To answer these questions, we must have a knowledge of the consequences of our actions which we are not always good at predicting. For example, as coal burning stoves and factories began to develop in England, who would have predicted that the output from those devices coupled with weather inversions would have led to the deaths of several thousands of Londoners in the 1800's? Consider this second example. Can we see both the good and the bad in the potential that the current bioengineering technology has to offer?

Let's apply this algorithm to the scenario posed above. First, we must ask, what is the greatest number? Who is involved? Is it just the roommate who has obtained her recommend dishonestly? Are the other roommates involved? How about the woman's fiancée? What about the future posterity of the couple? What about other current family members? Is there a silent observer, one whose feelings about the church and the Lord could be significantly affected by the unworthy participation in temple ceremonies? We must also ask, what is the greatest good? Will the temple marriage help cure immoral behavior? Will allowing people to enter the temple who have obtained their recommends dishonestly lessen the sacredness of the holy temple? Will the reporting of the immoral behavior to the Bishop lead to the couple developing a sincere repentant attitude and thus help them come to Christ?

The utilitarianism philosophy is the major consideration for most policy decisions that are made by governments, particularly in the United States. When policy questions are considered, lawmakers usually attempt to determine the long-term consequences and then attempt to act so that the greatest good will occur for the greatest number of people. However, this approach is fraught with difficulty. For example, in applying this philosophy to a question regarding the development of a particular medical procedure or drug, this algorithm could allow researchers to put a small number of lives in jeopardy for the health of millions in the future. If this involved children, who

would be willing to put at risk their own child?

The second algorithm that we will consider is summarized by the phrase, “Follow your highest sense of principle.” Immanuel Kant is considered the prime developer of this philosophy which is concerned more about actions than consequences. Kant wrote: “An action done from duty has its moral worth, not in the purpose to be attained by it, but in the maxim in accordance with which it is to be decided upon. . . What is essentially good in the action consists in the mental disposition, let the consequences be what they may,” and “I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law.”<sup>7</sup> Kidder refers to this algorithm as “rules-based.”<sup>5</sup> The Kantian philosophy would ask us when resolving dilemmas to consider our highest principle and act on it rather than think about the consequences of our actions.

This algorithm may also be problematic in application. Upon what rule or principle does one choose to act? Who is allowed to make the choice? Are principles legislated by government entities? There is a story about a teacher giving a failing grade to an elementary school child on a coloring assignment. When asked about it, the teacher said she gave the grade because the child didn’t follow the ‘rules’ for coloring. She asked the child why the grass wasn’t colored green and the sky blue. The child responded that when she gets up in the morning those aren’t the colors she sees as the sun is just rising. So who’s rule is the most important and should be considered as the highest principle?

Consider the roommates’ dilemma in our proposed scenario. When contemplating a course of action, do they choose as the highest principle the fact that their roommate’s agency needs to be preserved and protected? Or do they act on the fact that *wickedness never was happiness* (Alma 41:10) and that we should have respect for sacred things? If the roommates follow strictly the Kantian philosophy, they will choose to act in a way that they wish everyone would act given the same situation. So whatever rule or principle they choose, it should be universal.

People who are critical of the Kantian approach argue that it does not consider a person’s individuality or the uniqueness of a situation. For example, many parents when going out for the evening are concerned for the safety of their children. They frequently will tell them not to answer the phone or if they do and the caller asks for a parent, the children are instructed to say the parents are not available. But what if there is an emergency that requires the children to talk on the phone? Is the rule of the parents more important than the safety of the children?

The third resolution procedure that Kidder discusses is what he refers to as the “care-based” approach.<sup>5</sup> This is based on the golden rule which is a fundamental belief in most of the worlds’ major religions. Kidder writes:

This rule, familiar to students of the Bible, is often thought of as a narrowly Christian dictum. To be sure, it appears in the book of Matthew: “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” But Jews find it in the Talmud, which says, “That which you hold as detestable, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole law: the rest is but commentary.” Or, as it appears in the teachings of Islam, “None of you is a believer if he does not desire for his brother that

which he desires for himself.” . . . But the label “golden” was applied by Confucius (551-479 B.C.), who wrote, “Here certainly is the golden maxim: Do not do to others that which we do not want them to do to us.” Similar formulations appear at the center of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, and the rest of the world’s major religions.<sup>5</sup>

The golden rule asks us to consider the feelings of others, in fact, it does so in an interesting way, i.e., by asking us to place ourselves in their position. It would seem that a very good test of our proposed course of action is to ask if we are willing to allow it to happen to ourselves. This could very well lead to a more consistent application of peoples’ actions.

Like the other two algorithms, this approach is not without its problems in application. A major consideration is who are the ‘others’? In the case of our scenario, is the other the bishop or the roommate or someone else? Will we act differently depending upon who we choose to be the other?

A case where the golden rule breaks down is the case when all of the parties are indifferent to moral or legal things. For example, if we consider the issues involved in gang violence, we soon realize that many of the participants in gangs do not care about laws, etc. Therefore, their actions will frequently defy the law. If they are asked to place themselves in the position of the ‘others’, they are likely to say that whatever course of action is decided upon doesn’t matter.

The questions that we have considered above are not easy questions to answer. But the fact that we are asking them, helps us go through the process of dilemma resolution. We may decide that none of these three algorithms are appropriate for our choice of action. However, they may have helped make us aware of other possible resolutions.

Another approach to solving a dilemma is what is referred to as the "Front Page Test."<sup>8</sup> This is somewhat easier to implement than purely studying a problem in the context of our standards or by studying it based upon one of the three algorithms discussed above. The test is performed by asking, "How would I feel if a report of this action appeared on the front page of the local newspaper tomorrow?"<sup>8</sup> This question is a simple way to begin a thorough, introspective study of a possible problem resolution.

Asking one’s self this question can be helpful because it creates an imagined external impetus for thought. Initially, we might study such questions as "Would I be embarrassed? Would it be harmful to my family or business?" After these first questions that deal with the superficial evaluations made by others, our thoughts turn to the more important questions of "Would I be portrayed as being honest? Would I be happy with the person described in the article? Should I have acted differently?" Ultimately, these questions help us focus our standards on the dilemma, but by using the test, we initially look at ourselves from an outside perspective.

In the dilemma that we have considered, we should think about one of two possible headlines:

1. Roommates’ choice allows unworthy member to attend temple
2. Roommate reported for immoral behavior by friends

Which of these are we willing to have written on the front page about our resolution? Which resonates with our standards?

Since our goal is to determine if our course in life is agreeable to God, one approach to solve a dilemma is to ask the question: What would a member of the Godhead do? A popular movement in the Christian world revolves around the specific question: What would Jesus do? Some might consider it presumptuous to even ask this question. But we shouldn't consider it as a way of psychoanalyzing the Savior's behavior but rather as a way of aligning our actions with His. If we study and learn about how He reacted in certain situations and commit to follow His ways, it will help us make decisions when faced with tough choices.

What would Jesus do in the scenario that we proposed above? One way to think about this is to consider which of His eight characteristics that we discussed in Chapter 4 are operable in this situation? By thinking about these characteristics, we can see which ones we need to develop that will help us with our own decision making.

In summary, the most important evaluation to make of a solution is through the filter of our standards, i.e., God's characteristics and attributes. If there is a solution that is not in harmony with these, it is not an acceptable solution. This is the most effective means by which to separate out those solutions which might outwardly look promising, but upon deeper inspection, are not viable. Though this is the most important test and the most effective, it is by no means the simplest. Measuring an action against fundamental principles such as honesty, justice, mercy, and love requires careful thought and deep introspection.

Stephen Covey in his book entitled *The Divine Center* writes of an experience in which the solution to a difficult situation came as the parties involved took a moment to sincerely listen to what their consciences were telling them, rather than clinging to incorrect, unprincipled viewpoints.<sup>9</sup> We understand that our consciences are revealing to us God's word which of course is based upon correct principles or His characteristics. Covey explains that we often choose improper courses of action because our minds have been educated with ideologies based in incorrect principles. By ignoring this education momentarily, we can see the correct course to take in a given situation. The challenge, then, is to turn from our previous behavior in the present situation, then work to retrain our minds to consistently listen to revelation and act appropriately.

Covey's example illustrates an important point: in measuring a choice against our standards, the answers are often more emotional and spiritual than they are logical and rational. This makes the evaluation particularly challenging because, as we discussed in the last chapter, we must train ourselves to pay attention to the still, small quiet voice of revelation from God which is more subtle than those voices coming from external forces. However, the key to ethical problem resolution and consistent ethical conduct lies in acting upon the internal evaluations made as we measure our choices against correct standards.

### *Choose an alternative and seek for confirmation*

We shall consider the following items in this part of the process:

- Choosing an alternative
  1. Principles of decision making
  2. It requires work on our part, we can't just turn it over to God
- Seeking confirmation

**Choosing an alternative.** Once we have studied out the problem and posed possible alternatives, we are now ready to choose an alternative. Our work is not done. God expects us to labor over our choice just as Oliver Cowdery had to do when he desired to perform some of the translation of the Book of Mormon himself. Oliver learned that he had to do all he could to determine the solution to his problems using his own reasoning ability, conscience, and talents. The Lord gave us these for a purpose, and we can only learn and grow by exercising them. Throughout the problem-solving process we should petition the Lord for guidance, but we cannot neglect the requirement to make a sufficient personal effort.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord taught us this principle in another application when He said the following:

*For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward. Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward. But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned. Who am I that made man, saith the Lord, that will hold him guiltless that obeys not my commandments? Who am I, saith the Lord, that have promised and have not fulfilled? I command and men obey not; I revoke and they receive not the blessing. Then they say in their hearts: This is not the work of the Lord, for his promises are not fulfilled. But wo unto such, for their reward lurketh beneath, and not from above. (D&C 58:26-33)*

**Seeking confirmation.** Many people would conclude that after the decision is made as to which alternative to select, all that remains to do is to implement the solution. There is, however, an intermediate step that is vital to the process: to seek a confirmation from God as to whether the solution chosen is truly the correct one. A second thing to learn from Oliver Cowdery's experience is that, if we do our part, the Lord will bless us with a confirmation of our decision, either in the positive or the negative. He has committed to this, but only after we fulfill our part of the commitment. In the Book of James, we read,

*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. (James 1:5)*

God wants us to communicate with Him about our challenges. Furthermore, He is willing to provide assistance when our knowledge and experience are lacking if we will do all that we can

and ask for His help to compensate for our inadequacies.

God provides the confirmation in the form of personal revelation which follows the principles that we discussed in the previous chapter.

It is important to note that those who consider themselves to not be religious can apply a similar process for obtaining a confirmation with equal success. After performing the labor necessary to determine a solution, if a person will take time to meditate on the decision, a similar confirmation to that described previously can be obtained. This is possible if a person will ponder over the decision, thinking about how it fits with his or her standards and listening to the subtle voice of the conscience. If a person is sincerely trying to resolve a problem in an ethical manner, and the solution chosen is a good one, there will be a clear confirmation that the solution is right.

To conclude this section, consider the following quote from Brigham Young:

Brother Heber alluded to counseling men and women who come to him after they had been to me, and said that they always received the same counsel I had given them. I never have known it to fail, that if they come to me and then go to brother Heber, they will get the same counsel all the time. . . I have no counsel for a man, unless I have the testimony of Jesus on the subject. Then, when the same man asks counsel of me, and goes to brother Heber, do you not see that if he acts on the same principle and gives counsel, it must be by the Spirit of revelation; or he has no counsel to give, if it is not by that Spirit. . . Every man in the Kingdom of God would give the same counsel upon each subject, if he would wait until he had the mind of Christ upon it. Then all would have one word and mind, and all men would see eye to eye.<sup>10</sup>

This suggests that there is a right answer to a dilemma and that if we seek the word of God, either through prayer or counsel from our leaders, we can be confident in the answer.

### *Implement the decision and assess the consequences*

**Implementing the decision.** Once we have received a confirmation – either from divine sources or through sincere introspection – we have the responsibility to do what we now know to be right. This step can sometimes be extremely challenging, as it can require a great deal of courage. Resolving a problem mentally is far different from actually implementing the solution.

Implementing the solution requires careful monitoring to ensure that the solution will be successful. If we have performed the problem-solving process well – particularly, if we received a confirmation of the appropriateness of our decision – the likelihood of success is great. However, we must realize that unforeseen complications often arise, and we must always be prepared to reevaluate and adjust the solution process when the situation warrants. Since we, hopefully, have received a confirmation based upon the best information that we had in making our original decision, we will need to make sure that the new information does not change how God wants us to proceed.

**Assessing the consequences.** As we properly resolve a difficult dilemma, we should

look back to analyze what we have done with the intent of learning from the experience. Those who subscribe strictly to consequential philosophies would argue that a person cannot apply the solution to one problem to another, since the parties involved and the resulting consequences are different. Furthermore, those who follow rules-based theories might argue that evaluation of the consequences is unnecessary, so long as we have done what is right. While these arguments may be true in the most strict sense, there are many opportunities to learn from an experience resolving an ethical dilemma.

Often, similarities between problems will allow us to modify the solution from a previous problem to fit a later dilemma. Even better, we may learn to discern the events and situations that led us into the dilemma in the first place. If we can learn to recognize and avoid such situations, we may find that we will not have to resolve similar problems in the future.

One of the greatest things to be gained from a successful resolution to an ethical dilemma is a sense of satisfaction for having completed it in the proper manner. This knowledge is empowering, as it will strengthen us in times of future difficulty. As we successfully resolve ethical dilemmas, our confidence grows in our ability to face them, and we will begin to feel comfortable in resolving larger, more complex problems in the future.

### *What if we have done all of this and still don't feel that we have a confirmation from God?*

We may feel that after much prayer and meditation we have not received a confirmation to our resolution. In Chapter 5, we discussed the principles regarding receiving revelation. If we feel that we have not received a confirmation, then we should review those principles and the writings of the prophets in this regard. However, if we have sincerely done our part in the resolution process and we are striving with all our might to make our course in life agreeable to God and we have followed the principles discussed in Chapter 5, then we can take reassurance in the following words of Brigham Young. President Young's words should be placed in context with the entire talk that he was giving when these words were spoke. He was speaking on virtue and attempting to define it for the saints.

You say, "I want an explanation upon virtue." . . . Learn the will of God, keep His commandments and do His will, and you will be a virtuous person. . . if you can know the will of God and do it, you will be a virtuous person, and will receive knowledge upon knowledge, and wisdom upon wisdom, and you will increase in understanding, in faith, and in the light of eternity, and know how to discriminate between the right and the wrong.<sup>11</sup>

and then these powerful words,

If I ask Him to give me wisdom concerning any requirement in life, or in regard to my  
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own course, or that of my friends, my family, my children, or those that I preside over, and get no answer from Him, and then do the very best that my judgment will teach me, He is bound to own and honor that transaction, and He will do so to all intents and purposes.<sup>11</sup>

This is a great promise but it requires much faith and effort on our part. The key for this promise to be valid is that we are doing all we can to make our lives agreeable to God.

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