

# *Finding Strength in the Lord*

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When our son Max was about six years old, he and I were discussing our Heavenly Father's plan and the purpose of our mortal life. At the end of our discussion, he said very matter-of-factly, "You can have a no-problem day, but you can't have a no-problem life!" His simple but profound response is an important reminder that we will all face challenges in our lives and that those challenges have an important and eternal purpose.

## **We Came to Earth to Be Tested**

Elder Orson F. Whitney taught:

*No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, . . . and it is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire.<sup>1</sup>*

We came to earth to be tested, to "prove" ourselves and "see if [we] will do all things whatsoever the Lord [our] God shall command [us]" (Abraham 3:25). Through our trials we learn to put our full trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Redeemer. We will have no-problem days, but none of us will have a no-problem life.

## **The People of Alma**

For many years I have been intrigued by the story of Alma and his people found in Mosiah 23 and 24. The story is a compelling example of how we can find strength in the Lord amid our trials. As you will recall, the people of Alma were driven into the wilderness by King Noah. They were "oppressed" and "in bondage" (Mosiah 23:12) and then "delivered by the power of God" (Mosiah 23:13). They settled in "a very beautiful and pleasant land" and "prosper[ed] exceedingly" (Mosiah 23:4, 19). Stop the story here, and this seems like a group of people who responded faithfully to a significant period of trial and difficulty. Could we not say that they had been proven and had sufficiently

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demonstrated their dedication to and faith in the Lord? Was it not enough?

But this is not the end of their story because “the Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith” (Mosiah 23:21). This important and instructive scripture is another way of saying, “You can’t have a no-problem life.” As illustrated in this account of the people of Alma, our times of trial and testing will be mixed in with our no-problem days and will continue to come—multiple times—over the full course of our lives.

Sometimes we might think that if we have enough faith or are sufficiently obedient, we can be saved from life’s challenges. This misunderstanding may be partially rooted in our interpretation of the oft-repeated promise “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land” (2 Nephi 4:4), which is found throughout the Book of Mormon (see 1 Nephi 2:20, Jarom 1:9, Mosiah 1:7, Alma 38:1). It is easy to misinterpret this promise when we adopt an erroneous definition of prospering that focuses on financial rewards, popularity or fame, or any other worldly recognition or achievement. It is equally problematic when we think prospering is equivalent to an easy, no-problem life or the swift and immediate removal of any and all challenges that might come into our lives. President Russell M. Nelson has powerfully taught, “The joy we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives.”<sup>2</sup> We *will* prosper as we keep the commandments, put our full trust in our Savior Jesus Christ, and make Him the focus of our lives. That prospering can and will happen even amid our trials and challenges.

And so it was with the people of Alma. They once again found themselves in bondage—this time under the heavy persecution of Amulon and his followers. In fact, “so great were their afflictions that they began to cry mightily to God” (Mosiah 24:10).

And then the Lord came to them, saying:

*Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me. . . .*

*And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs. [Mosiah 24:13–14]*

The Lord did not immediately remove their trials. He did, however, “strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease” (Mosiah 24:15). This may not look or feel exactly like prospering as we imagine it, but receiving strength from the Lord to bear up our burdens is exactly what prospering looks like amid life’s trials and challenges. We prosper when we have a strong, personal relationship with our Savior Jesus Christ and hope in our Heavenly Father’s great plan of happiness. In other words, prospering is manifest in the peace and joy that come from knowing, as the apostle Paul declared, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13).

The Lord strengthened the people of Alma and again delivered them from their enemies. He caused “a deep sleep” to come upon the guards (Mosiah 24:19), and Alma led his people into the wilderness. They came to a valley, pitched their tents, and poured out their hearts in thanksgiving “because [God] had been merciful unto them, and eased their burdens, and had delivered them out of bondage; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it were the Lord their God” (Mosiah 24:21). Indeed, whatever trial or challenge we might face in our lives, we must always remember that Jesus Christ is the only way. He is the only one who can deliver us.

Now this is another place we could end this story of a group of people twice in bondage, first to King Noah and then to Amulon. They remained faithful through it all, even pouring out their hearts in thanksgiving. They had proven they would do all the Lord commanded them to do. But the Lord still had something more in mind for the people of Alma. Just as they began to settle, the Lord told Alma they would have to keep going:

*Haste thee and get thou and this people out of this land, for the Lamanites have awakened and do pursue thee; therefore get thee out of this land, and I will stop the*

*Lamanites in this valley that they come no further in pursuit of this people.* [Mosiah 24:23]

Each time I read these verses, I find myself wondering how I might have responded if I had been among the people of Alma. I am pretty sure my reaction would have been something like, “Wait, what? There’s more? We have to keep going after all we have been through?” My next prayer would have most certainly included some significant pleading with the Lord for a change of plans.

But the people of Alma chose to approach this new challenge with faith—to “submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord” (Mosiah 24:15). Although it is not explicitly stated in these verses of scripture, I believe that after all their experiences trusting in the Lord during times of trial and difficulty over about a twenty-year period of time, the people of Alma were now better prepared to put their trust in the Lord as they faced this new challenge. The same is true for us; as we act in faith, our faith grows stronger.<sup>3</sup> This is the principle of spiritual momentum.<sup>4</sup> The people of Alma experienced multiple challenges, but each time that they trusted in the Lord and put their full faith in Him, they were strengthened—they were learning and growing in their faith. They were prospering even in times of trial and challenge.

I love the final verse in Mosiah 24 because it is an important reminder that the Lord always has something better for us in the future—now and eternally. After wandering in the wilderness for twelve days, the people of Alma arrived in the land of Zarahemla, where “king Mosiah did also receive them with joy” (Mosiah 24:25). More were baptized into the fold of God, and all received increased blessings. When Alma and his people started their journey into the wilderness, they could not have known the great blessings that were in store for them. But they had faith—believing that the future, whatever it might hold, would be better for them as they put their full trust in the Lord. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught, “Faith is for the future. . . . [It] trusts that God has great things in store for each of us and that Christ truly is the ‘high priest of good things to come.’”<sup>5</sup> With faith, our future is eternally bright.

## Four Key Lessons for Finding Strength in the Lord

Drawing from this example of Alma and his people, I would like to share four key lessons I have learned from my own experiences finding strength in the Lord Jesus Christ amid the trials and challenges of life.

### 1. Put Your Trust in the Lord

Trust is created in a relationship. You trust your parents or your friends because of your experiences with them. You know their character and how they will typically act or respond in a given situation. For example, I trust my mom because I know that in whatever situation we are in, she will see the good in me. She knows all my flaws and faults but in every situation will still find the good. I trust her because of my fifty years of experience with this. Time and again she will see the good and focus her attention there—no matter what.

Sometimes we might expect our trust in the Savior to exist automatically. He loves us—and His love for us is perfect and unchanging. However, we need to build and strengthen our relationship with Him—we need to have experiences with Him and come to know Him as our Savior and Redeemer. We build a relationship with Jesus Christ through sincere prayer, studying about Him in the scriptures, attending the temple, and trying to emulate His attributes.<sup>6</sup> The process of coming to know the Savior is a lifetime pursuit, and as we come to know Him, we will have an increased capacity to trust Him.

Trusting in the Lord and exercising our faith in Him also requires us to act (see James 2:26; Alma 32:37). As Elder David A. Bednar explained, “Faith as [a] principle of action . . . is so central to the process of learning and applying spiritual truth.”<sup>7</sup>

When I graduated from BYU in 1996, I felt a bit lost. So much in my life was not what I had imagined it would be, and the future felt incredibly scary and uncertain. I was looking for Heavenly Father to direct me in every decision, big and small. I wanted a set of step-by-step directions to tell me exactly what to do and how to do it. I believed the Lord would direct my path, but my fear was at times immobilizing.

One day I came across a book titled *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway* by Susan J. Jeffers (1987). I don't remember much about the content of the book—or if I even read more than just a few pages of it—but the title was the perfect description of the faith I needed to demonstrate. I needed to act on my faith in the Savior. I needed to act on my belief that He would always be with me and strengthen me, no matter the circumstance. We might feel scared, confused, or uncertain, but we can still move forward with faith in Jesus Christ. This is what it means to put our trust in Him.

Sister Rebecca L. Craven has taught, “A key component of trusting in the Lord is moving forward, believing He will guide us even when we don't have all the answers.”<sup>8</sup> As I started to move forward, even while also feeling fearful and uncertain, I gained a greater capacity to act more fully on my faith. Some of that faith to act looked like accepting a teaching position in inner-city Washington, DC, and then making the decision to attend graduate school in New York City. However, acting on my faith looked most importantly like an intentional decision to stay on the covenant path. This included committing to actively attend church, even when I didn't always feel I fit in; worthily partaking of the sacrament to renew my covenants with the Lord; striving to develop Christlike attributes; repenting; studying the scriptures to strengthen my knowledge and testimony of gospel truths; attending the temple; loving and serving others; and more fully understanding my identity as a beloved daughter of God. All of these efforts to stay on the covenant path and trust in the Lord required faith—faith in Jesus Christ as my Savior and Redeemer and the belief that He had something better for me in the future. This tremendous growth period in my life began as I learned to put my full trust in the Lord and act on my faith in Him.

I would like to say this was the only time in my life when I felt uncertain and that I never experienced any other times of testing or difficulty, but of course that is not the case. I am still learning, still trusting, and still growing in my faith in Jesus Christ as I continue to face challenges in my life. We all must engage in this lifelong process of “continuing conversion,” which

requires ever-increasing “faith in Jesus Christ” and demonstrated “faithfulness to His gospel throughout our lives.”<sup>9</sup> Continuing conversion requires us to implement a pattern of faith in our lives. We can develop this pattern during our no-problem days as well as during times of struggle and difficulty as we accept President Nelson's invitation to “make time for the Lord” each day.<sup>10</sup> Every time we exercise our faith in Jesus Christ, our capacity to move forward with full trust in Him will also increase.

## ***2. Submit Cheerfully and with Patience to the Will of the Lord***

The Lord will strengthen us and ease our burdens, but those burdens may not ever be completely removed from us in mortality. Still, we must keep moving forward with faith, submitting cheerfully and with patience to the will of the Lord.

My older brother, Jason, was injured in a diving accident in 1986 at the age of fifteen. He became a quadriplegic. He had some movement in his arms but could not move his hands or his body from the chest down. After several months in the hospital, Jason was ready to go home. In preparation for that transition, one of the therapists talked to Jason about what he should expect in the months and years ahead. She was well-intentioned but laid out a very bleak picture for Jason's future. She told him, among other things, that his high school graduation would likely be delayed, he probably wouldn't be able to go away to college, he would have few job prospects—if any—and he would likely live with our parents for the rest of his life.

I am sure the therapist thought managing Jason's expectations would help him avoid disappointment in his life. He certainly was facing an uphill battle. Little did the therapist know that ten years after his first accident, Jason would again be seriously injured in a car accident that would result in a thirteen-month hospital stay and a seven-year recovery process. Undoubtedly with that knowledge the therapist would have given him far less hope for the future.

But even with these times of significant difficulty in his life, Jason accomplished things that were nothing short of miraculous, and they far

exceeded the expectations the therapist had for him when he left the hospital. Jason found his strength in the Lord and chose to submit cheerfully and with patience to the Lord's will. Through his faith in Jesus Christ, Jason experienced the enabling power of the Atonement, which allowed him to do more than he ever could have done on his own.<sup>11</sup>

Here are just a few examples:

- He graduated with his high school class.
- He came to BYU as a freshman and later became the student body president here at BYU.
- He got married and had a family.
- He began his career as an insurance agent and qualified for the Million Dollar Round Table after just three months—a qualification only about 10 percent of agents achieve at any point in their career.
- He became a motivational speaker.
- He coached his son's lacrosse team. I am guessing there are not very many lacrosse teams who can say their coach was a quadriplegic!

When Jason was first injured, we prayed for healing. As a family we exercised our faith and pleaded with the Lord to make his body whole. Jason's body was never fully healed, but there were still miracles, and Jason was strengthened by the Lord in countless ways. He was the recipient of the Lord's tender mercies, which are what Elder Bednar described as "the very personal and individualized blessings, strength, protection, assurances, guidance, loving-kindnesses, consolation, support, and spiritual gifts which we receive from and because of and through the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>12</sup> These tender mercies or blessings are the ways that the Savior eases our burdens and helps us cope with our challenges. Through the Lord's tender mercies, we are strengthened and can prosper even in times of difficulty.

We all have burdens to carry in our lives, and those burdens look different for everyone. My brother Jason endured many physical challenges throughout his life—none of which he likely would have chosen. He could have easily focused

on his challenges. He wasn't perfect, but each day he chose to have faith. He chose to respond with patience and trust in the Lord. He found his strength in Jesus Christ.

As his sister, I think the thing that impacted my life the most was Jason's cheerfulness amid so many significant challenges. His positive attitude was founded in hope. Hope in his Savior Jesus Christ. Hope that because of Christ's atoning sacrifice and Resurrection he would one day be able to lay down his broken body and be raised unto life eternal. Jason passed away unexpectedly in May 2019. His life is a powerful illustration of how the Lord will strengthen us in our challenges as we cheerfully and patiently submit to His will.

### 3. Rejoice in the Safety of Your Covenants

President Nelson recently taught:

*Whenever any kind of upheaval occurs in your life, the safest place to be **spiritually** is living **inside** your temple covenants!*

*Please believe me when I say that when your spiritual foundation is built solidly upon Jesus Christ, you have **no need to fear**. As you are true to your covenants made in the temple, you will be strengthened by His power. Then, when spiritual earthquakes occur, you will be able to stand **strong** because your spiritual foundation is solid and immovable.<sup>13</sup>*

This past year our son Max has been able to attend the temple for the first time. I love being there with him. Max started middle school this year, and if you remember much about middle school, you know it is tough out there. In this new context and in the process of growing up, Max is facing new challenges, learning new things, and having to exercise his faith in new ways. As his mother, I find great comfort in knowing that Max can be in the house of the Lord. I know the Spirit he feels there and the things he can learn there will be just what he needs to overcome whatever challenges he will face—now and throughout the rest of his life. The same is true for you and for me. We must find ourselves in the temple as often as we can. President Nelson has reminded us of the importance of the temple and how it helps connect us to Jesus Christ and provide access to His

power, which is power we will need to endure the challenges of our day. He said:

*Everything taught in the temple, through instruction and through the Spirit, increases our understanding of Jesus Christ. His essential ordinances bind us to Him through sacred priesthood covenants. Then, as we keep our covenants, He endows us with His healing, strengthening power. And oh, how we will need His power in the days ahead.*<sup>14</sup>

#### 4. Center Your Life on Jesus Christ

When I was a student teacher in an inner-city school in Washington, DC, two children from the school were tragically killed as a result of gang violence. The principal of our school asked each teacher to lead a class discussion about how to stay safe and protect others from such violence.

As we started the discussion, one student enthusiastically said, “We have to save them.”

Not knowing exactly what she meant, I said, “Yes, that is what we are talking about. How do we protect ourselves and others and stay safe?”

She responded emphatically, “No, no, Ms. Hall. We have to save them by the Lord Jesus Christ.”

I must admit I was not expecting that response. And I don’t know much about her beliefs in Jesus Christ because we could not engage in such a discussion in a public-school setting. But what I do know is that Jesus Christ was her first thought. He was her first line of defense.

Over the years I have thought a lot about what that eleven-year-old girl taught me that day through her example. Is Jesus Christ our first thought when we face a trial or challenge? When we think about answers to challenging problems, is He the one we turn to? Do we look to Him as our example for how to respond in difficult situations? Do we put our full trust in Him? That is what that young student taught me that day. My faith was strengthened because of her faith. For “none [can] deliver [us] except it [be] the Lord [our] God” (Mosiah 24:21). Jesus Christ is always the answer, and it is only in and through Him that all mankind can be saved.

President Nelson has said:

*There has never been a time in the history of the world when knowledge of our Savior is more personally vital and relevant to every human soul. Imagine how quickly the devastating conflicts throughout the world—and those in our individual lives—would be resolved if we all chose to follow Jesus Christ and heed His teachings.*<sup>15</sup>

Whether it is a no-problem day or we are in the midst of an intensive period of testing and trial in our lives, we can find strength in the Lord Jesus Christ. I know He lives. He loves each and every one of us, and He will help us. As we put our full trust in Him, we will receive His enabling power, which will allow us to overcome all things. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. Orson F. Whitney, quoted in Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 98.

2. Russell M. Nelson, “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Ensign*, November 2016.

3. See Dale G. Renlund, “Lifelong Conversion,” BYU devotional address, 14 September 2021; see also Russell M. Nelson, “Christ Is Risen; Faith in Him Will Move Mountains,” *Liahona*, May 2021.

4. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Power of Spiritual Momentum,” *Liahona*, May 2022.

5. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Remember Lot’s Wife,” BYU devotional address, 13 January 2009; quoting Hebrews 9:11.

6. See Bonnie H. Cordon, “Trust in the Lord and Lean Not,” *Ensign*, May 2017.

7. David A. Bednar, “Seek Learning by Faith,” *Ensign*, September 2007.

8. Rebecca L. Craven, “Do What Mattereth Most,” *Liahona*, May 2022.

9. M. Russell Ballard, “Stay in the Boat and Hold On!” *Ensign*, November 2014.

10. Russell M. Nelson, “Make Time for the Lord,” *Liahona*, November 2021.

11. See David A. Bednar, “‘In the Strength of the Lord’ (Words of Mormon 1:14; Mosiah 9:17; Mosiah 10:10; Alma 20:4),” BYU devotional address, 23 October 2001.

12. David A. Bednar, "The Tender Mercies of the Lord," *Ensign*, May 2005.

13. Russell M. Nelson, "The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation," *Liahona*, November 2021; emphasis in original.

14. Nelson, "The Temple"; emphasis in original. See Doctrine and Covenants 109:15, 22.

15. Russell M. Nelson, "Pure Truth, Pure Doctrine, and Pure Revelation," *Liahona*, November 2021; emphasis in original.