

Eternal Perspective Through Owning Our Testimony

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Welcome to fall semester 2022. I hope that the first week of the semester has gone well for you. Sometimes you may find your coursework a bit challenging, but you have wisely chosen to further your education to acquire more knowledge and hopefully gain more understanding. I can assure you that that is a very good thing.

A story is told of a certain rabbi:

This rabbi . . . went on a journey with the prophet Elijah. They walked all day, and at nightfall they came to the humble cottage of a poor man, whose only treasure was a cow. The poor man ran out of his cottage, and his wife ran too, to welcome the strangers for the night and to offer them all the simple hospitality which they were able to give in straitened circumstances. Elijah and the Rabbi were entertained with plenty of the cow's milk, sustained by home-made bread and butter, and they were put to sleep in the best bed while their kindly hosts lay down before the kitchen fire. But in the morning the poor man's cow was dead. . . .

They walked all the next day, and came that evening to the house of a very wealthy merchant, whose hospitality they craved. The merchant was cold and proud and rich, and all that he would do for the prophet and his companion was to lodge them in a cowshed and feed them on bread and water. In the morning, however, Elijah thanked him very much for what he had done, and sent for a mason to repair one of his walls, which happened to be falling down, as a return for his kindness.

The Rabbi . . . , unable to keep silence any longer, begged the holy man to explain the meaning of his dealings with human beings.

"In regard to the poor man who received us so hospitably," replied the prophet, "it was decreed that his wife was to die that night, but in reward for his goodness God took the cow instead of the wife. I repaired the wall of the rich miser because a chest of gold was concealed near the place, and if the miser had repaired the wall himself he would have discovered the treasure. Say not therefore to the Lord: What doest thou? But say in thy heart: Must not the Lord of all the earth do right?"¹

Peggy S. Worthen, wife of BYU president Kevin J Worthen, delivered this devotional address on September 6, 2022.

The rabbi found it difficult to understand the injustice of what he had witnessed and desperately wanted an explanation from Elijah. It is a natural tendency to question—as the rabbi did—the unfairness of the difficulties and opposition we see in our lives and in the lives of others who are doing everything they can to follow and serve the Lord. We may find ourselves trying to understand why some things seem to come so easily for others—such as good grades and better job offers—but leave us feeling uncertain and full of doubt. What Elijah offered the rabbi in response to the rabbi’s desperate desire to grasp the situation was a valuable lesson in understanding that our ways are not the Lord’s way. And without gaining an eternal perspective, we, like the rabbi, may assume that in some situations the Lord acts unjustly.

All of us are bound to experience what could be viewed as unjust results or undeserved maladies. As President Dallin H. Oaks has explained:

*All of us experience various kinds of opposition that test us. Some of these tests are temptations to sin. Some are mortal challenges apart from personal sin. Some are very great. Some are minor. Some are continuous, and some are mere episodes. None of us is exempt.*²

Yet from an eternal perspective these experiences are not without purpose. Instead, as President Oaks noted, “Opposition permits us to grow toward what our Heavenly Father would have us become.”³

In other words, viewed from an eternal perspective, opposition, challenge, and trials are essential and inevitable elements of this life. Knowing this, the question becomes: How should we respond when we are faced with these inevitabilities? To me, it’s comforting to know that we have a choice. We can choose to be agents unto ourselves,⁴ or we can choose to be acted upon.⁵ And, as comforting as it is to know that we can choose how to respond, it is even more comforting to know that we need not face the opposition and challenges alone. Our loving Father in Heaven has provided us with a Savior to help us, if we choose to let Him into our lives.

Choosing to act and to let the Savior into our lives is not easy. But it makes all the difference. President Russell M. Nelson recently asked young adults—though this applies to all of us—to consider the following questions:

*Do you want to feel peace about concerns that presently plague you? Do you want to know Jesus Christ better? Do you want to learn how His divine power can heal your wounds and weaknesses? Do you want to experience the sweet, soothing power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ working in your life?*⁶

President Nelson emphasized that each of us can obtain these desired results, but “seeking to answer these questions will require effort—much effort.”⁷ And he pleaded—not merely suggested—that we “take charge of [our] testimony. Work for it. Own it. Care for it. Nurture it so that it will grow. Feed it truth.”⁸

Although President Nelson’s plea to take charge of our testimonies was directed to a worldwide audience, taking charge of our own testimony of Jesus Christ is a very personal endeavor. We can’t rely on other people’s testimonies, nor can we place the responsibility of our choices on others. President Nelson has entreated us to assume control and become responsible for our own testimony. This requires us to work in a sustained effort. If you currently lack or are struggling with your testimony, keep pressing on. As you search for Heavenly Father’s hand in overcoming your daily struggles, your testimony will grow and become your own.

But it doesn’t stop there. Our testimony of Jesus Christ must be nurtured and maintained through all that our Heavenly Father has provided us. The process of taking charge of our own testimonies can be demanding and exacting, but through the process we become more refined. Through the process we learn how deeply our Heavenly Father and our Savior love us. Through the process, our testimony of Jesus Christ gives us divine perspective. And, as President Nelson has assured us, as we make our testimony our highest priority, we can watch for miracles to happen in our lives.⁹

One of the miracles that will occur is that you will gain an eternal perspective, which will lead to greater understanding of and appreciation for the opposition and challenges you will face in this life. This eternal perspective can be transforming as you gain a greater understanding of God's purposes. Borrowing a parable from George MacDonald, C. S. Lewis beautifully illustrated this point:

Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.¹⁰

At times it may seem to you—just like the poor man whose cow died—that you are not receiving a just reward. Perhaps despite all of your efforts to strengthen your testimony of the Savior and despite your diligent studying, you will not obtain the grades you desire. But in those instances, if you understand God's purposes, you will know “the greatness of God,” and you can rest assured that “he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain.”¹¹ Although you may feel devastated in the

moment, your faith in our Savior can and will carry you through—until the day when you realize how that seemingly merciless outcome helped you transform into the best, divinely appointed version of yourself.

It is my prayer that as we strengthen and nourish our own personal testimony of Jesus Christ, we will be blessed with a greater understanding and knowledge of what our Heavenly Father would have us become. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. T. H. White, in chapter 9 of “The Sword in the Stone,” *The Once and Future King* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1958), 85.
2. Dallin H. Oaks, “Opposition in All Things,” *Ensign*, May 2016.
3. Oaks, “Opposition in All Things.”
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 29:35, 39.
5. See 2 Nephi 2:14, 16.
6. Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity,” worldwide devotional for young adults, 15 May 2022, [churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2022/05/12nelson](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2022/05/12nelson).
7. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity.”
8. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity.”
9. See Nelson, “Choices for Eternity.”
10. George MacDonald, cited in C. S. Lewis, “Counting the Cost,” *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 160; book 4, chapter 9, paragraph 10.
11. 2 Nephi 2:2.