

Tenacity

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Thank you for the kind introduction. My wife, Mary, and I are very grateful to be here today with you and with many of our family.

During this past general conference I had the opportunity to say the prayer at the beginning of the final session on Sunday afternoon. Let me tell you what happened while I said the prayer. As I was praying, I meant to say, “I pray that our faith may be strengthened.” Instead, I prayed that “our strength may be faithened.” I quickly corrected myself; however, I soon found that once something is said in a digital format, one can never take it back.

As soon as I got home after general conference and opened up Facebook, I had a post from one of our former missionaries. His post read, “And just that fast, you’re a meme.” A photo of me praying at general conference was attached to the post. This experience has taught me, and it should teach you, something about things you say that are sent out to the world in a digital form.

My prayer today is that not only will your strength be faithened but that your faith might also truly be strengthened.

Not long ago I was sitting in my office and the phone rang. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf was calling. As we spoke, President Uchtdorf

told me that he was pondering a word in English. The word was *tenacity*. President Uchtdorf’s command of the English language is remarkable. In our conversation he defined *tenacity* as the ability to stick to a task, even when obstacles arise, and he indicated that this word includes in its meaning an absolute determination to accomplish the work or task that has been undertaken. He noted that tenacity is a quality worth developing, especially in our youth and young single adults. It is the opposite of what he sometimes observes when some people meet adversity. Those without tenacity may strive halfheartedly against an obstacle, only to give up and quit when it becomes too difficult; others quit before they have even begun because their task seems insurmountable.

One online dictionary defines *tenacity* as “persistence, perseverance, and stubborn determination” and states that “tenacity is the quality displayed by someone who just won’t quit—who keeps trying until they reach their goal.”¹

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I agree with President Uchtdorf. Tenacity is required to become true disciples of the Savior and to achieve those truly good goals—to become a great missionary, to complete your education, to find an eternal companion, and to start a family—that our Heavenly Father knows we need to achieve in this life to prepare for eternity. Our ability to be tenacious in all good things will determine whether we become the sons and daughters of God that He knows we can and must become.

This conversation with President Uchtdorf caused me to think of the many examples of tenacious righteousness we find in the scriptures. The examples I use are not, of necessity, exhaustive. But they have given me both hope to be able to become a true disciple of Christ and faith that our Heavenly Father and His Son will help you and me hold on and persist in righteousness.

Your generation has been declared “the greatest generation of missionaries in the history of the Church,”² and this generation of missionaries has frequently been compared to Helaman’s 2,000 stripling warriors. Like you, these 2,000 stripling warriors had tenacity in everything that was good. Think of how the scriptures describe them:

- They “entered into a covenant.”³
- They were “a great support”⁴ and gave those around them “great hopes and much joy.”⁵
- They had “great courage,”⁶ “they did not fear,”⁷ and “they did not doubt”⁸; they “were firm and undaunted.”⁹
- “They did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness.”¹⁰
- The Lord blessed them “according to their faith.”¹¹
- “They were exceedingly valiant for courage, and also for strength and activity.”¹²
- They “were true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted.”¹³ “For

they had been taught to keep the commandments of God and to walk uprightly before him.”¹⁴

Notwithstanding these remarkable attributes, and notwithstanding the tenacious faith and effort of these young men and their leaders, the record states:

*And it came to pass that there were two hundred, out of my two thousand and sixty, who had fainted because of the loss of blood; nevertheless, according to the goodness of God, and to our great astonishment, and also the joy of our whole army, there was not one soul of them who did perish; yea, and neither was there one soul among them who had not received many wounds.*¹⁵

They were delivered

*because of their exceeding faith in that which they had been taught to believe—that there was a just God, and whosoever did not doubt, that they should be preserved by his marvelous power.*¹⁶

This is what Helaman said of them:

*Now this was the faith of these of whom I have spoken; they are young, and their minds are firm, and they do put their trust in God continually.*¹⁷

So it must be with us. In life it is when the rains descend and the floods come and the winds blow and beat upon us and on our house that we determine whether our faith is strong and whether we put our trust in God continually. There simply is no test until there is adversity.

Some of you have served as missionaries. Some of you have your call and will soon serve the Lord for eighteen months or two years. Some of you are in the process of gathering the needed information for your missionary recommendation, and some of you are still preparing, and even repenting, so that you can

serve. Some will not serve because you have chosen another direction, and, of course, the sisters (many of whom are blessing the entire Church through their missionary service) are not under the same obligation to serve as are the elders. However, when you serve, whether as a missionary or in any other capacity in the Church, we pray that you will have the kind of tenacity of which I am speaking.

Some years ago my wife, Mary, and I were called to serve together as I presided over the Japan Nagoya Mission. We saw many missionaries during those years. We saw miracle after miracle. We also saw great faith and tenacity in so many.

As I think back on those missionaries whom we loved so very much, I have thought that the terms *faithful* and *valiant* that describe those 2,000 stripling warriors also describe those with whom we served and all who put their faith in God and who choose to serve the Lord in whatever place and in whatever manner He may call. You know that God will bless you and even deliver you as you keep the commandments of God and walk uprightly before Him.

The other description of those 2,000 stripling warriors is also accurate. A mission is not easy. Life is not easy. Some faint. All will be injured in some way. Some of this hurt comes from unresolved transgression. Some comes by way of accident or illness. Some comes when we see those we love either reject the gospel or not be faithful to what they know to be true. Through all of this we come to know God, and we grow to become the Savior's disciples. Our very hearts change, and that change becomes permanent as we continue to choose righteousness over sin and doubt.

Those 2,000 stripling warriors were tenacious in their desires. They simply would not give up, even when their path was difficult. A generation earlier their fathers and mothers were taught by Ammon and his brethren. Those missionaries had great success, but they

also had to hold on and not give up when their missions were difficult and discouraging. This verse describes those times:

Now when our hearts were depressed, and we were about to turn back, behold, the Lord comforted us, and said: Go amongst thy brethren, the Lamanites, and bear with patience thine afflictions, and I will give unto you success.¹⁸

With patience and tenacity, Ammon and his companions worked through their afflictions and ultimately saw remarkable success.

Let me give you one example of tenacious faith in a missionary. In 1999, Sister Marci Barr came to the Nagoya Mission from Columbus, Ohio. She was a convert to the Church. Japanese was not easy for her, but she was tenacious. She was not going to give up or give in. In fact, early in her mission she was so determined to learn Japanese that she tried riding her bike and studying at the same time. This resulted in a painful bike accident and is not recommended. "Persistence, perseverance, and stubborn determination" characterized everything about Sister Barr. Once she learned how to communicate, she never stopped talking with people about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We know that in Japan, and in every other country of the world, there are those who are ready to hear the gospel. There are great promises made to faithful, persistent, and even tenacious missionaries who open their mouths with boldness and love and who work with all their might in the ways that the Lord has set forth. One such promise is that the Lord "will open the hearts of the people, and they will receive you."¹⁹

Some missionaries become fearful of rejection and let their fears overcome the loving boldness that they once felt. Not Sister Barr! She found and taught and she taught and found all of her mission. She never gave up. She knew that God had sent her, and she knew

that God would fulfill His promises made to those who would be faithful to the end.

On the very last day of her mission she was traveling by train and subway alone to the mission home in Nagoya. That is how we did transfers in those days. She had faithfully completed her mission. That night I would interview her and tell her that she had done a wonderful job—and she had!

As she traveled to the mission home, there was a group of high school–age Japanese girls talking together on the subway. She approached them and asked if she could visit with them. She spoke of the gospel and its restoration. She gave a missionary tract to one of the girls who seemed interested and told her of the sister missionaries who served in the area where she lived and who could teach her the gospel. One last time she began to share the gospel in Japanese to one who so needed it in her life.

She got off the train, came to the mission home, and had her interview, never telling me of her experience on the train. To her it was unremarkable. It was what she did as a missionary. Sister Barr was a young woman who had become a missionary and who would be a missionary every day and every minute she could. She was simply continuing to do what she knew was right, all the way to the end. Perhaps this is the best definition of gospel tenacity I know: No matter what, continue to have faith in God and His promises and do what is right, all the time, regardless of who knows.

You might be interested to know that Sister Barr—now Marci—returned home to Columbus. There in a student ward she met her future husband. They have been blessed with children and happiness and joy.

The girl on the train that Marci found—Hitomi Kitayama—was taught by the sister missionaries. It took time, but Hitomi persevered and displayed her own form of tenacity as she first learned the truths of the gospel and

then embraced them, along the way overcoming opposition from family members and her own doubts.

We next met Hitomi nearly six years later at a mission conference in Tokyo, where she was serving as a missionary. It was at this missionary conference that she told us of her meeting Sister Barr on the subway and of her subsequent conversion to the gospel. She was a truly happy missionary. It had been a long journey from the subway in Nagoya to her being one of the Lord's missionaries in Tokyo. After her mission she met another returned missionary, Shimpei Yamashita. They were married in the Tokyo Japan Temple on December 20, 2008, and they now have three beautiful children. Interestingly, her husband, Shimpei, is the son of a man I taught in the summer of 1971 while I was on my first mission to Japan.

How grateful I am for those who have the tenacity to work through, hold on, continue doing right, and overcome. It is not just Sister Barr and Hitomi Kitayama, and it is not just in spreading the gospel that we need tenacity to do what is right. We need this same righteous tenacity as we seek to overcome personal sin and temptation, complete our education, and seek temple marriage and an eternal family. We will need love, tenacity, and resilience as we hold on to our spouse and children and work through the challenges that come to every marriage and family. We will need this same commitment, tenacity, and patience when the blessings we seek don't come in the time frame we anticipate. In all of this and in every other righteous thing, our commitment to do right and be right will be challenged by the world. Each of us will need to be one who just won't quit—who keeps trying until we reach our goal. That goal, ultimately, is eternal life with our husband or wife, with our children and their children and generations to come.

How do we gain this strength and commitment and how do we keep it?

First, let me suggest that we establish goals that are worthy of achievement and that are compatible with our ultimate goal of eternal life. This includes education and employment goals that will lead to and be compatible with family, personal growth, service, activity in the Church, and personal happiness. Part of the making of these goals will be our own personal choice, but another part must include prayer and personal revelation. Let me give you one example from my own life.

Since I was very young I wanted to be a physician. My uncle Ted was a physician, and he was my role model during my formative years. He treated me when I was sick as a child, and, as I got older, he was both a mentor and a friend. Not only was he a successful doctor, he also served in the Church, serving twice as a bishop. I admired everything about him, and I felt that I would like to pattern my life after his.

As I got older, I kept this goal and enrolled in college courses that would lead to medical school. After my freshman year I left for my mission to Japan and returned in the fall of 1972. Three months later Mary and I were married in the Salt Lake Temple, and a year later our first child was born. As we prayed, both Mary and I felt the desire and prompting to have children, and our second child, little Rebecca, was born in October 1975. Over the years we were blessed with six other children.

During the months preceding the birth of Becky, I had a constant feeling that the Lord was leading us in a direction that did not include medical school. I was confused and a little stubborn in holding on to my childhood desire of becoming a doctor. The J. Reuben Clark Law School had recently opened at BYU, and I felt a continuing impression—and growing desire—that this was where I belonged and where the Lord would have me continue my education.

I had a wonderful stake president who had been a prominent lawyer in Salt Lake and had

given it all up to accept the position of secretary to the First Presidency. I went to visit him and told him of both my confusion and the feelings that I was having.

Rather than telling me the answer I was looking for, he said something that I have never forgotten. He said, “David, you know section 9 of the Doctrine and Covenants as well as I do. Go home to your wife, Mary. Study it out in your minds together and come to a decision that you can take to the Lord. Then pray and ask God if what you have decided is right. He will answer you.”

He then said, “This revelation does not need to take months and months of agonizing. Rather, it takes the desire to find out what the Lord would have you do and the determination to do it.”

Two weeks later I was back with my stake president. I told him that both Mary and I were settled and that we would be applying to law school instead of medical school. Once we knew what the Lord would have us do, we were absolutely determined to follow that course. After I told him of our experience, he told me that he had received that same witness when we had met two weeks earlier, but it was important for *me* to receive the witness rather than for him to just tell me what I should do.

For me it was the right answer. That same path may not be right for others. The way to know is through personal revelation. If you care enough to go through the process of seeking God’s will, God will care enough to answer.

Among the many things you should pray about, you should pray to find a worthy companion with whom you can go to the temple and make sacred covenants. *If you want to make and keep sacred covenants and have the motivation to achieve your most righteous goals, prayerfully seek the blessings and responsibilities of marriage.*

During this past general conference, Elder Tad R. Callister spoke of “the power of prayer, not just the routine of prayer,” and told a story from his youth:

When I was about 17 years of age, I was kneeling by my bed, saying my evening prayers. Unbeknown to me, my mother was standing in the doorway. When I finished, she said, “Tad, are you asking the Lord to help you find a good wife?”

Her question caught me totally off guard. That was the furthest thing from my mind. I was thinking about basketball and school. And so, I replied, “No,” to which she responded, “Well, you should, Son; it will be the most important decision you will ever make.” Those words sunk deep into my heart, and so for the next six years, I prayed that God would help me find a good wife. And, oh, how He answered that prayer.²⁰

Knowing what God would have you do provides great motivation to do it and to do it without delay. Think of Alma outside of Ammonihah. After he had received his message from the Lord, he went about doing it “speedily.”²¹ There is nothing more discouraging than knowing what you should do and then procrastinating performance and missing the opportunity. There is nothing more invigorating than knowing what you should do and then getting about doing it.

Find out what God would have you do. Study it out. Make some decisions. Take them to the Lord and find out. Then get on with achieving those goals.

In all of this, if we are going to be tenacious in righteous things, we must stay close to the Lord through righteous living. Few things will distract us more from achieving our righteous goals than being unworthy of the blessings of the Spirit in our lives.

Brethren and sisters, if I may be straightforward for a moment, avoid pornography completely. Habits—for good or for evil—that you form or deepen at this time of your life will likely stay with you for many years to come. Nothing will distract you more from achieving righteous goals, including marriage and family, than this or other sexual sin. If repentance is needed, you know what to do.

Do not procrastinate. Forgiveness, healing, and even innocence will follow. Remember, “Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God.”²²

The best measure we have of righteous living is the worthy holding and use of a temple recommend. President Thomas S. Monson said:

*If you have not yet been to the temple or if you **have** been but currently do not qualify for a recommend, there is no more important goal for you to work toward than being worthy to go to the temple. Your sacrifice may be bringing your life into compliance with what is required to receive a recommend, perhaps by forsaking long-held habits which disqualify you. It may be having the faith and the discipline to pay your tithing. Whatever it is, qualify to enter the temple of God. Secure a temple recommend and regard it as a precious possession, for such it is.²³*

Not every problem is solved quickly, and some problems have no earthly solution. Other problems are solved, but not when or as we would have solved them. But God is true to His word. Remember His promise from section 90 of the Doctrine and Covenants:

*Search diligently, pray always, and be believing, and all things shall work together for your good, **if ye walk uprightly and remember the covenant wherewith ye have covenanted one with another.**²⁴*

There are also patterns found in the scriptures for when we do not have clear direction from the Lord. Some things are left to our good judgment. When that happens, we can look to Nephi for a pattern as we move forward in faith. He said, “I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do. Nevertheless I went forth.”²⁵ Don’t become paralyzed waiting for the Lord to solve every problem. Rather, move forward in faith, knowing that there will be sufficient light along

the way to provide the guidance that will be needed.

I close with words from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland. He spoke of a time when he and Sister Holland had small children and no money. They had a car that wouldn't work and a destination that was very far off. He was discouraged and felt a measure of real concern. Years later, as he reflected on that experience, he said:

In my mind's eye, for just an instant, I thought perhaps I saw on that side road an old car with a devoted young wife and two little children making the best of a bad situation there. Just ahead of them I imagined that I saw a young fellow walking toward [help], with plenty of distance still ahead of him. His shoulders seemed to be slumping a little, the weight of a young father's fear evident in his pace. In the scriptural phrase his hands did seem to "hang down" (D&C 81:5). In that imaginary instant, I couldn't help calling out to him: "Don't give up, boy. Don't you quit. You keep walking. You keep trying. There is help and happiness ahead. . . . You keep your chin up. It will be all right in the end. Trust God and believe in good things to come."

*. . . Some blessings come soon, some come late, and some don't come until heaven; but for those who embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ, **they come.**²⁶*

I add my testimony to that of Elder Holland. Make righteous goals. Always pray and seek the Lord's guidance. Be worthy and avoid those things that will distract or hinder your progress. Have and use your personal temple recommend. Keep your covenants, especially when life is hard. Seek the blessings of eternal marriage and family. Then hold on. Don't give up. Don't quit. Keep walking and keep trying. There is happiness and help ahead. "Trust God and believe in good things to come." Be tenacious in every righteous thing. You will see your faith strengthened and you will see your strengths and talents that God has given

you deepened and magnified as your faith increases. In all of this, remember, "Some blessings come soon, some come late, and some don't come until heaven; but for those who embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ, *they come.*" Of this I testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. S.v. "tenacity," vocabulary.com/dictionary/tenacity.
2. M. Russell Ballard, "The Greatest Generation of Missionaries," *Ensign*, November 2002, 47.
3. Alma 53:17.
4. Alma 53:19.
5. Alma 56:17.
6. Alma 56:45.
7. Alma 56:47.
8. Alma 56:47; see also verse 48.
9. Alma 57:20.
10. Alma 57:21.
11. Alma 57:21.
12. Alma 53:20.
13. Alma 53:20.
14. Alma 53:21.
15. Alma 57:25.
16. Alma 57:26.
17. Alma 57:27.
18. Alma 26:27.
19. D&C 31:7.
20. Tad R. Callister, "Parents: The Prime Gospel Teachers of Their Children," *Ensign*, November 2014, 33.
21. Alma 8:18.
22. D&C 121:45; emphasis added.
23. Thomas S. Monson, "The Holy Temple—A Beacon to the World," *Ensign*, May 2011, 93; emphasis in original.
24. D&C 90:24; emphasis added.
25. 1 Nephi 4:6–7.
26. Jeffrey R. Holland, "An High Priest of Good Things to Come," *Ensign*, November 1999, 37–38; emphasis in original.