

Come unto Christ Through Your Trials

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It has been more than a few years since I've been invited to participate in a BYU devotional. I recognize what a great blessing this is in my life. Two years ago at this time I was having the good fortune of teaching a couple of classes in religion, and this past fall I enjoyed doing the same in engineering.

My thanks again to the Brethren for this invitation to be here this morning.

Recognizing the many and varied challenges that you and I face in today's world, I have sought diligently to be guided by the same Spirit that must edify us all.

Today we will speak of the most important event that can happen to each of us in our lifetime; or should I say the most important event that *must* happen to us? I hope I will not offend the faculty and the leaders here when I say it is not getting good grades or landing a great job on graduation; it is not winning a ball game or having a more fulfilling social life. It even comes as a higher priority than the world-renowned matchmaking program for which this institution is noted.

What I speak of transcends all else. With it in place, everything else will fall appropriately into place. Without it, we are subject to an unusual variety of challenges and

disappointments from which we can gain little peace or understanding. Even divine direction may elude us.

This morning we speak of the process of "Coming unto Christ" and why trials and heartaches, tears, frustrations, and disappointments play such a vital role in that divine process. If you have ever felt that the challenge is too difficult, or that you can't make it, or that it's not worth the effort, maybe this morning is for you.

Let's first lay some groundwork of common understanding as a preface to the things we will discuss today.

Simply stated, each one of us was called and elected before the foundations of the earth were laid to come here to prepare to become a joint heir with Christ. In the words of Elder Bruce R. McConkie, "People were called to glory and dignity and honor and reward, . . . people were called to eternal life" ("Making Our Calling and Election Sure," *Brigham Young*

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University Speeches of the Year [Provo, 25 March 1969], p. 6). There are no exceptions. There are no maybes. There are no losers, for Peter said we have all been called “to glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3).

The most significant quest in this life is to gain a personal assurance that we *will* become what we have been called to become. This effort and this process we refer to as “Coming unto Christ.”

With that as a given, let’s look at another eternal truth and a mortal reality.

Each one of us is different. There are no exact look-alikes and there are no exact act-alikes.

1. We differ in our *physical appearance*. Some are tall and some are short. Some are beautiful and some are more beautiful. Some are handsome and some are not so handsome.

2. We differ in our *mental capacity*. Some of you seem to sail through with a 4.0 GPA while others of us struggle just to stay in school.

3. We differ in our *gifts and talents* and *personality traits*.

4. We differ in our *background*. Some of you come from faithful LDS families; some of you have even had ancestors who walked the plains as they came to the valleys. Some of you are converts to the Church, and some of you are the only member of your family who belongs to the Church.

5. We differ in our *self-image*. Some of you have high self-esteem and others of us have a poor self-image. We judge ourselves differently, sometimes by a different standard. Sometimes we judge ourselves too harshly—and sometimes not harshly enough.

6. We differ in our faith and testimony. On the ladder of faith, there are some of you who are nearer the top rung of the ladder. Others are struggling just to get a foothold on the bottom rung. I have come to believe that the rung of the ladder you are on is not nearly as important as the direction you are moving—be it up or down.

Each one of us came to this earth with our own unique and different package filled with enough positive strengths to overcome the personal challenges that are also a part of our makeup. We must never forget that the number of gifts as well as the challenges we each have does not categorize us as being better or worse than another. How we *handle* our package is what makes the difference.

Let me say it in a little different way. A person more gifted than another is not necessarily a better person than another; and, conversely, an individual who has received fewer endowments from the Lord is not less qualified for godhood than another. Remember, the Lord gave the very same commendation to the servant who magnified two talents as to the servant who increased five talents.

From an eternal perspective, each one has the same promise. Each one of us was called and elected to glory and eternal life.

We must also remember that no one has a life void of trials and heartaches and severe challenges, and that with each one of these experiences comes a divine promise. Whether you are a student, a professor, or a prophet of God, the process is individualized and serves the same purpose.

Now, let’s talk about trials for a moment. First, where do they come from? What causes them to happen?

I believe that trials come from many sources and for many reasons. It is true that some of our trials are sent directly from our Father in Heaven in the hope that they will refine us and draw us closer to him. However, some of our trials are self-imposed because of our own poor judgment. These errors are a part of the learning process. They may not necessarily result from an evil act. Whatever the source of the trial, if properly approached and handled, it will draw us closer to God.

It may be helpful and comforting to refer to some of the promises of the Lord as we

struggle through these experiences. We read, as Paul recorded:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. [1 Corinthians 10:13]

Remember Paul's two points: (1) There will be no trial—there will be no challenge—beyond our ability to handle. (2) As we turn to him, God provides the way for us to escape, or to get through the trial.

Perhaps some of you or your family members or friends struggle and suffer as Paul did throughout his whole lifetime. Paul called it like it was when he said:

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. [Hebrews 12:11]

“Exercised” by a trial means to turn to God.

Peter taught us that it is better to suffer in trials for doing right, even if you must take the scoffing and ridicule of friends. He said:

If ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye. . . .

For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. [1 Peter 3:14, 17]

And Paul adds to our understanding of this teaching when he spoke of Moses. He said Moses “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,” followed by these important words, “choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Hebrews 11:24–25).

It has been my experience that our capacity to handle trials depends on two things:

1. Our understanding of their purpose and their source.

2. Whether, with this understanding, we increase in our faith in our Heavenly Father and in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Paul helps us understand why we have trials as he tells of the thorn that beset him. Here he speaks of the trials that were a part of his process of “Coming unto Christ”:

And lest I should be exalted above measure [my interpretation would be “lest I become prideful”] . . . , there was given to me a thorn in the flesh.

He said it was a messenger sent from Satan to buffet him so he wouldn't become exalted above measure. Then he goes on to say (and there's a great message here):

For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

Then a peace came to Paul, and he heard a voice that said:

My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. [And then Paul said:] Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. [2 Corinthians 12:7–9]

Okay, now how do we handle our trials? How do we get through them on a daily basis? We have important insights and counsel from Moroni as he tells us how to keep new converts believing in Christ, how to maintain their faith in Christ.

You'll remember in those first verses of Moroni 6 that we are told of the qualifications for one who is to be baptized. Then, as we go through the fourth, fifth, and sixth verses, Moroni names four things that, if followed, will keep us faithful in Christ. Moroni was speaking of the new convert, but these things apply to all of us.

First, he said we must be “nourished by the good word of God.” Simply stated, Moroni is saying we must *read from the revelations* every day.

Second, we must “keep them continually watchful unto *prayer*” (emphasis added). We must be on our knees every day.

Third, we must serve one another. He uses the terms that they met “together oft,” and they spoke “one with another concerning the welfare” of each other—which is to say, *service*.

Last of all, Moroni said they must *partake of the sacrament*, “in remembrance of the Lord Jesus” (see Moroni 6:4–6).

Moroni taught us these four simple practices: (1) scripture reading, daily; (2) prayer, daily; (3) service, daily; and (4) the sacrament on Sundays. These will see us through our trials.

Now, it is also true that we may not feel to express gratitude for our trials until years later. When our daughters were young—one of them was a newborn baby—my wife’s life was threatened by lung cancer. It was a time of wrenching our very heartstrings, as the Prophet Joseph said the Lord would do (see *JD* 20:259, 24:197). Perhaps, because of our youth, we were not able to feel thankful for our trials at that time. We just tried to get through them. Now, however, thirty-one years later, we appreciate and are thankful for all that trial taught us, for the strength we’ve drawn from it that has helped us through many another trial.

Here is some comforting counsel from the Doctrine and Covenants:

And ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along. The kingdom is yours and the blessings thereof are yours, and the riches of eternity are yours.

And he who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glorious. [D&C 78:18–19]

Yes, I believe the Lord meant *all* things with thankfulness, even trials and sorrows. You understand why it is important to be thankful for all things—it is because all things draw us closer to God.

As we do these things of which we have spoken, we will increase in our faith, our faith in Christ. There is no other way to effectively handle trial. As faith increases, so does our trust in him for all our needs. With increased faith and hope, we may then be able to do as Peter did. He said:

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. [1 Peter 5:6–7]

For a few more minutes now, let’s speak of how to qualify for his help or, in other words, how to “bind” the Lord to his promises. There is a scripture in the Doctrine and Covenants that, when understood, opens up a whole new world of understanding on how to “bind” the Lord. Remember, he has said that he is bound when we do as he says. In section 88 we read:

And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things. [D&C 88:67]

Brothers and sisters, there is in each one of us a measure of light and a measure of darkness. Every time we do the things that we’ve been speaking of, the light inside of us increases and the darkness decreases. Every time we kneel and pray, the light increases and the darkness decreases. Every time we read from the Book of Mormon, likewise the light increases and the darkness decreases. Light and darkness cannot occupy the same place at the same time.

There are other things that we do that increase the light inside us. Whenever we're thoughtful and kind and honest, the light inside us increases. Whenever we observe the Sabbath, the light increases and the darkness decreases.

And then, conversely, if we are not careful, there are those things that we may get involved in that cause the darkness to increase and the light to decrease. There is no way that you and I can involve ourselves in pornography or anything of vulgarity without the darkness inside us increasing. There is no way you and I can look at an indecent scene on television or video, or listen to explicit sexual encounters, or view nudity, without the darkness inside us increasing and the light decreasing. There is no way we can use uncouth language without the darkness increasing inside us, because there is no way that light and darkness can occupy the same place at the same time.

When I speak of the light and the darkness, brothers and sisters, remember that the darkness that can overcome the light originated with Satan. And the light that we speak of is the light that comes from heaven. This is the light inside that gives you the right to call upon the powers of heaven when you need help. You will make wiser decisions—you will be more comfortable with your decisions because the light inside you has increased and your opportunity to draw on heaven's powers will increase also.

We must remember that all rewards for doing good do not come in this life. All penalties for doing wrong are not meted out in this life either. In fact, what we receive here is only a shadow of what the future holds for each one of us, be it good or ill. God will not be mocked—that is an eternal truth.

Now, in conclusion, I'd like to speak of what is at the heart of the process of "Coming unto Christ."

In southern Arizona there is a prison complex operated by both federal and state

agencies. This prison complex has maximum as well as minimum security prisoners in it. Once each year, for several years, the authorities have permitted members of the Church to come in and hold a conference for the inmates. I've had the great blessing of being there a couple of times. The last was a few years ago.

After our proper clearances, we came to the gates of the prison and were permitted in. The doors clanged behind us. You like the doors at home to close quietly, but the prison doors do not close quietly. We went into a room. It was a good-sized recreation room where we were to meet with fifty or sixty men. Appropriate guards were stationed around. There were men there who had done some very terrible things. Some would be there the rest of their lives.

As they came in, I shook hands with many of them. One—I had been his bishop many years earlier. Another—I had been his elders quorum president. Another young man reminded me that just a few short years earlier I had visited with him as a missionary as we toured one of the missions in Great Britain. These were men who had lost their priesthood, had lost their membership in the Church. Many had lost their wives and their children. These were men who were there to pay their debt to society for some horrible things.

We sang the songs of Zion. We used a little Cassio organ. One of them prayed, and then several of them were invited to speak. Each one—I think there were three or four of them who spoke—each one spoke about the Savior. Each one spoke about repentance and forgiveness and the feelings they had about the Savior. As they spoke, I felt an unusual spirit. The content of their talks was unusual, but beyond that, I was feeling stirrings inside that I hadn't experienced very often: good feelings, warm feelings, peaceful feelings. I was confused because I couldn't understand how, in a place like this with men who had done what they had done, I could be having the spiritual

experience I was having. The meeting went on. Those of us who were called to speak finished, and the two-hour meeting was concluded.

As I got on the plane and went home, trying to understand, I turned to 3 Nephi and read the record there of the Beatitudes. Listen carefully to the words of this particular verse. I had not understood what I understand now until I had that experience: “And blessed are all they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 12:6).

The scripture does not say “blessed are the righteous for they shall be filled.” That’s obvious. But the scripture says blessed are they who want to be—blessed are they who want more than anything else to be righteous. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness. That’s the center focus of coming unto Christ.

After reading that verse, I began to understand why I was having such an experience in a place like that with men who will pay their debt to society. These were men who were now learning repentance and were participants in the process of “Coming unto Christ.”

Remember when King Benjamin finished his address and asked the people how they felt about it—he’d been teaching them about the Savior and about the beggar and about serving one another. The people said, “The Spirit of the

Lord Omnipotent . . . has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil” (Mosiah 5:2). Now let’s keep that in focus. These were not perfect people. There are no perfect people on the earth. Only one who has come here was perfect.

But these are people who want to do better. And it’s not just wanting to, it’s wanting to with all of your heart—to hunger and to thirst after righteousness.

Let me conclude with this:

And again I would exhort you that ye would come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift, and touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing. [Moroni 10:30]

I’m beginning to understand, brothers and sisters, what that means. It means when I have done the best I can, when I’ve not played games with the counsel, but when I have really, really tried, I still cannot perfect myself, in and of myself. There is no way. But the difference between what I can do and what must be done is accomplished because of the grace of Christ. I pray that the Lord will bless you and me in this magnificent process we call “Coming unto Christ.” I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.