

# *Becoming and Overcoming*

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Whenever I visit my sister's family in Salt Lake City, as I am about to leave, my six-year-old niece usually chirps up with "Wait, Carol! We haven't written in my journal yet." Writing in her journal consists of the two of us going out to my car, where she uses a small notebook I keep in the glove compartment to draw pictures of different fairy tales such as Sleeping Beauty. She then spells out the names of the characters with my help. No matter what story she chooses, it inevitably consists of a princess and prince seeking to overcome difficult circumstances involving a wicked person and then eventually living happily ever after.

Over the last five years I have spent time working with the Young Women in my ward and in my stake. As I listen to them talk, many of them describe their worthy goals and their planned paths, which usually include getting an education, getting married, having children and grandchildren, and, hopefully, living happily ever after. They say it all with a smile. It's interesting that they never mention overcoming difficulties or facing a wicked person as part of their plans.

In 1840 Wilford Woodruff and other apostles traveled to England to share the message of the restored gospel. In the beautiful, green, rolling countryside of Herefordshire, Worcestershire, and Gloucestershire, Elder Woodruff experi-

enced phenomenal success, and hundreds of people joined the Church. Fourteen-year-old Thomas Steed of Malvern converted to the Church during this time period. Shortly after his baptism, while at a gathering of Saints, Thomas experienced a wonderful spiritual manifestation, which he recorded later in life:

*The house was filled with the Spirit and the power of God, and every one present was thrilled with the convincing power of the Holy Spirit and which I could feel through my whole system like fire shut up in my bones. It was then plainly made known unto me that God lives, that Jesus is the Redeemer and that Joseph Smith was a prophet of the Most High God. Of the truth of this a doubt has never crossed my mind from that day to this. [The Life of Thomas Steed from His Own Diary: 1826–1910, Salt Lake Family History Library, film 1036342, item 2, 43 pages, 6; <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/u/?FH25,79893>]*

A few years after that exhilarating experience, Thomas immigrated to America, arriving in Nauvoo on April 13, 1844. He recorded:

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*Carol Wilkinson was a BYU professor of exercise sciences when this devotional address was given on 17 March 2009.*

*The Prophet Joseph Smith was at the pier. At first glance I could tell it was him, by his noble expression. He came on board to shake hands and welcome us by many encouraging words, and express his thankfulness that we had arrived in safety. As he could not stay with us, he sent Apostle Geo. A. Smith to preach on board. "What did you come here for?" asked he. "To be instructed in the ways of the Lord," answered someone. [Apostle Smith said,] "I tell you, you have come to the thrashing floor, and after you have been thrashed and pounded you will have to go through the fanning mill, where the chaff will be blown away and the wheat remain." (The troubles of Nauvoo were just coming upon them). [Life of Thomas Steed, 8–10]*

Thrashed and pounded! Now, can you imagine a stunned Thomas and his fellow British converts possibly thinking, "Actually, no, this isn't what we had in mind." I'm sure they weren't contemplating a life full of trials upon arriving in Zion.

Yet overcoming difficulties is part of life's experience, as the Saints in Nauvoo discovered—and so will we. During my time working here at BYU, I have come to know of many students who have experienced difficulties in their lives. These trials range in degree of difficulty and include not getting into the school of one's choice, coping with eating disorders, loss of health (one of my students almost died last April), loss of loved ones, and experiencing abuse, to name a few. If trials haven't come into your life yet, rest assured that they will come to each of you at some point. As they say in the advertising business, "Watch this space!"

Now, I don't want you to think, "Oh, no—this is a doom-and-gloom talk." Adversity is part of the reality of life. Rather than push the topic under the carpet and hope it never affects us, I aim with my comments today to try and help you know how to deal with adversity when it does come into your life.

Why is there adversity in life? One reason adversity can come into our lives is sin.

Another reason trials come is that they can help us develop. It is this latter reason that I wish to explore. Elder Richard G. Scott stated:

*When those trials are not consequences of your disobedience, they are evidence that the Lord feels you are prepared to grow more. . . . He therefore gives you experiences that stimulate growth, understanding, and compassion which polish you for your everlasting benefit. To get you from where you are to where He wants you to be requires a lot of stretching, and that generally entails discomfort and pain. ["Trust in the Lord," Ensign, November 1995, 16–17]*

Our Father in Heaven wants us to *become* like Him, and in so doing He wants us to *overcome* the world and the influence of Satan. Difficulties in life allow us to find out how much we need the divine strength and love of our Father—not just during the difficulties, but always. As we reach out to God, we can find and experience His goodness and want to be like Him. Satan also wants us to be like him—evil and miserable—and so he seeks to overcome us and thwart God's plan.

Elder Henry B. Eyring said, "The great test of life is . . . not to endure storms, but to choose the right while they rage" ("Spiritual Preparedness: Start Early and Be Steady," *Ensign*, November 2005, 38). In the premortal life we shouted for joy at the opportunity to come to earth to take this test. Yet there have been times when I've been really struggling in the midst of a trial and I've thought, "In pre-earth life was I excited for this? What was I thinking?" And I've wondered if when all the joyful shouting took place I was actually in the spiritual restroom taking a break!

I'd like to place difficulties into two categories: short-term difficulties and long-term difficulties. I will define short-term difficulties as those that occur in a period of time that extends from minutes to a few months. For example, you lose an object and try to find it;

your car breaks down and you need help; you don't get into the school you wish to enter and have to choose another.

As difficulties come into our lives, there are two ways to approach them. The first approach leads to allowing yourself to be influenced and overcome by Satan. This approach consists of not exhibiting any faith, ignoring spiritual promptings, and refusing to seek for divine help and instead relying on your own abilities. When difficulties come and they're not resolved quickly, you may just feel extremely irritated.

The second approach leads to overcoming the world and the influence of Satan through having faith in Christ. With this approach, you are obedient, you plead for help, and you exhibit faith. You may find that the trial is just a test of your faith and can be resolved relatively quickly. Many of you have probably experienced the situation where you have lost an object and after a prayer were able to find it. Or maybe you have had someone show up to help with a broken-down car. However, even though a difficulty is short-term, it can still be somewhat traumatic.

For example, 20 years ago I had just finished my mission in England. I had worked in the U.S. prior to going on a mission, and I felt impressed by the Spirit to return to the U.S. to continue working. An application for a green card had been submitted by my company in the United States 18 months earlier, and I began to wonder if it was ever going to come through. I prayed for help, tried hard to be obedient, and waited. One morning as I lay in bed at my parent's home in England, I heard the postman push the mail through the letter box in the front door of the house. The Spirit immediately confirmed to me that the letter stating the date of my interview at the U.S. embassy had arrived, and I felt that all was going to be well.

On the day of my interview, I traveled to London and sat in the embassy and waited for my interview. Suddenly I noticed an older man come out from a back room and go over

to one of the interviewers. With a start I recognized him as an individual I had encountered several years before at the embassy when I was renewing a temporary work visa enabling me to work in the U.S. The temporary visa I had applied for at that time was totally legal, but this fellow seemed to be perturbed and told me that after looking at my passport he thought I looked like a visitor to my own country and that he never expected to see me again at the embassy. As it turned out, the visa I obtained from him was the wrong one, and I had to return to the embassy to get the correct one. Fortunately I didn't see him on that visit.

Now, several years later, here he was talking to an interviewer, and both of them kept glancing over at me with penetrating stares. I continued to read my book and pretended that I didn't notice their stares. However, inside me, my stomach was going into spasms, doing all sorts of gastrointestinal gymnastics, and I started to feel nauseated and light-headed as a feeling of panic swept over me.

I began to think I was doomed in my current endeavor to obtain a green card. I said a silent prayer, reminding Heavenly Father that I was only trying to follow spiritual promptings in going back to the U.S. and that I desperately needed His help. The older man returned to his office, and a short while later the interviewer called me over. Everything went smoothly as he told me not to worry about previous comments that had been made about my visas. My panic subsided, and as I walked out of the building, a feeling of elation came over me. I silently expressed my gratitude to my Heavenly Father, and immediately the thought came to my mind "You felt confirmation earlier from Me about the visa. Why did you doubt that I would come through for you?" I felt chagrined at my lack of faith in that difficult moment.

Sometimes a difficulty isn't resolved as quickly as we would like it to be, and the problem becomes a long-term problem, lasting

for many months or years. Examples of chronic problems are illness; coping with the loss of a loved one; and experiencing the effects of sin in someone else's life, such as wayward parents, wayward children, or a spouse with an addiction to pornography. In such situations, let's first consider responses to the difficulty that can lead us down the path to rebellion and that could ultimately lead us to being overcome by Satan. The purpose of doing this is so you'll know what behaviors to avoid.

### The First Approach

The first approach—the one that leads to rebellion and being overcome—consists of the following steps:

#### *Step 1. Your Plan Is Thwarted; You Become Baffled and Questioning*

Things are not going according to the plan you had for your life. You're baffled, and so you question. You don't understand why things are going wrong. You ask questions such as "Why is God allowing this to happen to me if I don't deserve this?" or "This is a righteous desire; why doesn't He help me?" You don't ask the Lord to help you understand the situation.

Laman and Lemuel are prime examples of people who took this approach by not asking for understanding. When they could not comprehend some of their father's teachings, Nephi asked them if they had inquired of the Lord. They responded, "We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us" (1 Nephi 15:9; see also verse 8). You can become bogged down in the fact that the Lord hasn't granted your desire. When you use this approach, you find that your own reasoning leads you nowhere.

#### *Step 2. Faith Doesn't Bring the Desired Results; You Become Hurt and Doubtful*

You have exhibited faith, but as time has passed, it hasn't brought the results you desired. You feel let down and hurt, and you

start to doubt your Father in Heaven. You may think to yourself, "God doesn't love me or care about me." You know He could remove the problem, as He is omnipotent, so you may wonder why He doesn't.

#### *Step 3. You Set Conditions*

You still want your desires to be fulfilled, and since you think *you* know best, you decide to set certain conditions. Maybe you set the condition that you're not going to give your full effort in your Church calling unless Heavenly Father helps you get a job you've been seeking. Or you mistakenly think that if you have enough faith, you can set a time frame for the Lord to come through for you. For example, you might think, "I'm going to exhibit faith—I want to meet my spouse by the end of this year. But if it doesn't happen, I won't have faith anymore." Elder Scott advised us:

*Our Father in Heaven has invited you to express your needs, hopes, and desires unto Him. That should not be done in a spirit of negotiation, but rather as a willingness to obey His will no matter what direction that takes. His invitation, "Ask, and ye shall receive" (3 Ne. 27:29) does not assure that you will get what you want. It does guarantee that, if worthy, you will get what you need, as judged by a Father that loves you perfectly, who wants your eternal happiness even more than do you. ["Trust in the Lord," 17; emphasis in original]*

#### *Step 4. Your Desire Is Not Met; You Become Angry, Bitter, and Rebellious*

Your desire is still not met, and so you become angry or bitter, which can lead to rebellion. When you rebel, the Spirit leaves you. Satan whispers to you, and you may have thoughts such as: "I was right—God doesn't care about me; Church members are all hypocrites; the leaders aren't right; the Church isn't true; there is no God." You listen to these whisperings and allow Satan to overcome you, and you become miserable like him.

### The Second Approach

In contrast to this first approach in dealing with long-term difficulties is the second approach in which you continually seek to be obedient to the commandments, plead for divine help, and have faith in the Lord. This approach leads us to become like God and overcome the world and the effects of Satan through faith in the Savior.

The second approach—the one that leads to becoming and overcoming—consists of the following steps:

#### *Step 1. Your Plan Is Thwarted; You Trust God and Ask Different Questions*

Things are not going according to your plan. You don't understand why things are going wrong. You know Heavenly Father could solve the problem, as He is omnipotent. Yet you know that you don't know the meaning of all things, so, remembering times when He has come through for you in the past, you decide to absolutely trust God. You trust that He knows what He is doing with you and that it will be for your good, even though you haven't the faintest idea of how He is going to do it. Instead of asking "why" questions, you ask questions such as "What should I do?" or "What do you want me to learn from this?"

Try to find out what the Lord's will is. Obviously He wants you to be obedient to His commandments, but what else does He have in mind for you? Tell Him what your desires are, but be prepared to do His will. Sometimes your desire is not in line with His will. Remember that in Gethsemane, the Savior petitioned His Father several times for His own will, that the cup would pass from Him, while at the same time being willing to submit to His Father's will, which He ultimately did (see Matthew 26:39).

Sometimes God is taking us down a different path than we expected, and righteous desires may not be met on our time schedule. Elder Scott said:

*As you trust Him, exercise faith in Him, He will help you. That support will generally come step by step, a portion at a time. While you are passing through each phase, the pain and difficulty that comes from being enlarged will continue. If all matters were immediately resolved at your first petition, you could not grow. ["Trust in the Lord," 17]*

Even when we feel a prompting to do something, God may have an entirely different goal in mind than what we think will be the case as we start to follow the prompting. For example, in 1830 Oliver Cowdery, Parley P. Pratt, Ziba Peterson, and Peter Whitmer were called to serve a mission to the Lamanites. On the way out to the Missouri frontier to preach to the Lamanites, they stopped in Kirtland, Ohio, and gave a Book of Mormon to Parley's friend Sidney Rigdon, a Reformed Baptist minister. Prior to joining the Church, Parley had also been a member of the Reformed Baptist Church in the Kirtland area. After reading the Book of Mormon for two weeks, Sidney was converted, and through him many who attended his several congregations eventually accepted the restored gospel. The missionaries served the mission but didn't bring many Lamanites into the Church. Yet the mission *was* a success in terms of converts—just in a different way than what they had originally expected. So you need to pay attention to promptings and circumstances as they unfold in your life. Heavenly Father will use these to unfold His will to you. Prepare yourself for bends in the road and lots of surprises!

#### *Step 2. Faith Doesn't Bring Desired Results; You Ask for Strength*

When your faith doesn't bring the results you desire and you struggle with the trial, you need to ask for strength. Through the Holy Ghost, God will strengthen you, show you that He loves you, comfort you, and bring peace to your heart.

I came to the United States from York, England, when I was 25 years old. After completing graduate work, I returned to England to look for a university teaching job and to be near my family. However, after initially rejecting a job offer in Utah because it wasn't part of my plan, I felt strongly prompted to take the job and did so.

After being in the U.S. for some time, I remember feeling homesick one day and wondering where Heavenly Father was taking me. I went to the Jordan River Temple and was waiting outside the dressing room for a friend to join me. As I sat there, feelings of homesickness swept over me, and I remember thinking how much I missed my home and family. I turned to look at the photograph on the wall behind my chair. It was of the Jordan River Temple. Immediately a thought came clearly into my mind: "You are home." A sweet, loving peace swept over me as I turned to look at the painting on the wall to my left. It showed Jesus appearing to a kneeling Mary outside the Garden Tomb, and as I gazed at it, another thought came clearly to my mind: "And I am here." I suddenly felt totally at home, loved, and comforted.

*Step 3. You Are Not Consumed with the Trial; You Focus on the Good Things in Your Life*

Don't be consumed with the trial. This can be hard to do. Try to focus on the good things in your life, not on what you don't have. Choose to be happy in spite of the difficulty you are dealing with. Don't wait for circumstances to make you happy. Sometimes you may think, "When I get married, then I'll be happy. When I get a certain job, then I'll be happy. When this trial is over, then I'll be happy." Look for small miracles as the Lord reaches out in kindness to touch your life. Isaiah confirms that the Lord's kindness shall not depart from us, nor will He remove His covenant of peace (see Isaiah 54:10).

Life can be sweet and peaceful in the midst of difficulty. Donna Turley, a Church member who suffered chronic illness, wrote this shortly before her death:

*When I am gone, most of all I hope you will know that life was not too hard, too pained, too discouraging—that it never once seemed overwhelming to me. Please don't spend much time upon my illnesses, my difficulties, the disappointments, and the pain. Don't ever let that overshadow and obscure the splendor and the glory of life as it was always felt and known by me. . . . Please don't miss seeing and feeling the happiness and the beauty with which life as I have known it has been filled. [Letter to family and friends, November 1984]*

*Step 4. You Consecrate Your Life to God; You Draw Closer to Him*

Fully consecrate your life to Heavenly Father and draw ever closer to Him and His Son. Have an attitude that you will serve Him in spite of the pain you are going through and the lack of true understanding you have of where He is taking you. Continue to feast on the word of God and have faith. Be willing to spend time with God; desire it with all of your heart. Make the time to pray fervently while being willing to submit to His will, serve Him by serving others, spend time in meaningful meditation, and attend the temple with a worshipful attitude. I bear you my witness that as you do this, the veil will become thin, and you will feel a wonderful closeness to your Father. Like the bee that gathers precious, life-sustaining nectar and pollen, we come to the Light to be spiritually fed and leave feeling a sweet peace in our own lives and a sure knowledge that one day, in the Lord's time, all will be well.

I have taken a poem by the poet Eunice Tietjens and modified it, but I give her the credit for much of the poem. This best describes my own feelings that have come as a result of spending sacred time with my Father in Heaven.

*But I will descend from this elevated state, this  
 seeping sweet peace, this consuming love.  
 And time will close about me, and my soul stir to  
 the rhythm of the daily round.  
 Yet, having known, life will not press so close, and  
 always I shall feel time ravel thin about me;  
 For I have felt  
 The still, pure, white presence of divinity.*  
 [Adapted from Eunice Tietjens, "The Most-  
 Sacred Mountain," *Profiles from China* (New  
 York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), 38–39]

When you consecrate your life to the Lord's service and draw ever closer to Him and His Father, you will move along the path, as Elder Bruce C. Hafen said in his devotional address last year, from being a servant of the Lord to becoming His friend. Ultimately, as you become like Him, you will become His son or daughter and a joint heir with Him (see "A Disciple's Journey," BYU devotional, 5 February 2008).

This past Christmas I made star-shaped shortbread cookies for my neighbors. In order to roll out the dough, I had to hold it in my hands so that the butter softened and the dough became malleable. As we have faith in Christ and let Him hold us in His hands in submission to the Father's will, He will mold us, roll us out, and cook us through adversity in our lives until we reach the point where, through faith in Him, He is able to make of us bright, glowing stars. Shining individuals who are sensitive to others who are struggling—sensitive because of the pain they've felt, which helps them know better how to succor others—mirror in a very small way the way Christ succors us. Ultimately, through this process, we can become one with Him and with our Father. So we *become* like Him and then *overcome* the world through faith in our Savior.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell confirmed this process. He said:

*Attributively, we are to become even as Jesus, with His virtues being increasingly replicated in our lives. Even in the midst of our obvious imperfections, a sacred process is to be underway—if slowly, nevertheless resolutely. Whatever one's unfolding agenda, he can be overcoming if he is becoming more like Christ! ["Overcome . . . Even As I Also Overcame," *Ensign*, May 1987, 72; emphasis in original]*

The wonderful promise is, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Revelations 3:21).

Heavenly Father is preparing us to be gods. We don't understand what this really means, but He does. He knows the necessary process to help us achieve this end.

Trust in our Father and His Son as you seek to become like Them. Choose to live a happy life in spite of the trials of life. With God's help you can overcome them and Satan and find peace and happiness in this life. Then, one day, if we have been faithful, we will have the happiness that is far beyond any fairy-tale ending as we experience the reality of eternal life with our Father and His Son. I know this to be true, for His Spirit has borne witness of this to me. I am grateful for the gospel and the great plan of happiness. I am grateful for the abundant love I feel from my Father and His Son. May each of us endure well and grow from the various situations we are called upon to face in this life. And may we each reach out in kindness to succor others in their trials and help them along the way, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.