

# Latter-day Saints Keep on Trying

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*Of the Seventy*



As we try, persevere, and help others to do the same, we are true Latter-day Saints.

My dear brothers and sisters, in December 2013 the world mourned the death of Nelson Mandela. After 27 years of imprisonment for his role in the antiapartheid struggle, Mandela was the first democratically elected president of South Africa. His forgiveness of those who had imprisoned him was remarkable. He received widespread acclaim and praise.<sup>1</sup> Mandela frequently deflected accolades by saying, “I’m no saint—that is, unless you think a saint is a sinner who keeps on trying.”<sup>2</sup>

This statement—“a saint is a sinner who keeps on trying”—should reassure and encourage members of the Church. Although we are referred to as “Latter-day Saints,” we sometimes flinch at this reference. The term *Saints* is commonly used to designate those who have achieved an elevated state of holiness or even perfection. And we know perfectly well that we are not perfect.

Our theology does teach us, though, that we may be perfected by repeatedly and iteratively “relying wholly upon” the doctrine of Christ: exercising faith in Him, repenting, partaking of the sacrament to renew the covenants and blessings of baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost as a constant companion to a greater degree. As we do so, we become more like Christ and are able to endure to the end, with all that that entails.<sup>3</sup> In less formal terms, God cares a lot more about who we are and who we are becoming than about who we once were.<sup>4</sup> He cares that we keep on trying.

The comedy *As You Like It*, written by the English playwright William Shakespeare, depicts a dramatic change in a character’s life. An older brother attempts to have his younger brother killed. Even knowing this, the younger brother saves his wicked brother from certain death. When the older brother learns of this undeserved compassion, he is totally and forever changed and has what he calls a “conversion.” Later several women approach the older brother and ask, “Was’t you that did so oft contrive to kill [your brother]?”

The older brother answers, “’Twas I; but ’tis not I: I do not shame to tell you what I was, since my conversion so sweetly tastes, being the thing I am.”<sup>5</sup>

For us, because of God’s mercy and the Atonement of Jesus Christ, such a change is not just literary fiction. Through Ezekiel, the Lord declared:

“As for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness. ...

“... If he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right;

“... Restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live. ...

“None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right.”<sup>6</sup>

In His mercy, God promises forgiveness when we repent and turn from wickedness—so much so that our sins will not even be mentioned to us. For us, because of the Atonement of Christ and our repentance, we can look at our past deeds and say, “’Twas I; but ’tis not I.” No matter how wicked, we can say, “That’s who I was. But that past wicked self is no longer who I am.”<sup>7</sup>

President Thomas S. Monson has taught, “One of God’s greatest gifts to us is the joy of trying again, for no failure ever need be final.”<sup>8</sup> Even if we’ve been a conscious, deliberate sinner or have repeatedly faced failure and disappointment, the moment we decide to try again, the Atonement of Christ can help us. And we need to remember that it is not the Holy Ghost that tells us we’re so far gone that we might as well give up.

God’s desire that Latter-day Saints keep on trying also extends beyond overcoming sin. Whether we suffer because of troubled relationships, economic challenges, or illnesses or as a consequence of someone else’s sins, the Savior’s infinite Atonement can heal even—and perhaps especially—those who have innocently suffered. He understands perfectly what it is like to suffer innocently as a consequence of another’s transgression. As prophesied, the Savior will “bind up the brokenhearted, ... give ... beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, [and] the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”<sup>9</sup> No matter what, with His help, God expects Latter-day Saints to keep on trying.

Just as God rejoices when we persevere, He is disappointed if we do not recognize that others are trying too. Our dear friend Thoba shared how she learned this lesson from her mother, Julia. Julia and Thoba were among the early black converts in South Africa. After the apartheid regime ended, black and white members of the Church were permitted to attend church together. For many, the equality of interaction between the races was new and challenging. One time, as Julia and Thoba attended church, they felt they were treated less than kindly by some white members. As they left, Thoba complained bitterly to her mother. Julia listened calmly until Thoba had vented her frustration. Then Julia said, “Oh, Thoba, the Church is like a big hospital, and we are all sick in our own way. We come to church to be helped.”

Julia’s comment reflects a valuable insight. We must not only be tolerant while others work on their individual illnesses; we must also be kind, patient, supportive, and understanding. As God encourages us to keep on trying, He expects us to also allow others the space to do the same, at their own pace. The Atonement will come into our lives in even greater measure. We will then recognize that regardless of perceived differences, all of us are in need of the same infinite Atonement.

Some years ago a wonderful young man named Curtis was called to serve a mission. He was the kind of missionary every mission president prays for. He was focused and worked hard. At one point he was assigned a missionary companion who was immature, socially awkward, and not particularly enthusiastic about getting the work done.

One day, while they were riding their bicycles, Curtis looked back and saw that his companion had inexplicably gotten off his bike and was walking. Silently, Curtis expressed his frustration to God; what a chore it was to be saddled with a companion he had to drag around in order to accomplish anything. Moments later, Curtis had a profound impression, as if God were saying to him, “You know, Curtis, compared to me, the two of you aren’t all that different.” Curtis learned that he needed to be patient with an imperfect companion who nonetheless was trying in his

own way.

My invitation to all of us is to evaluate our lives, repent, and keep on trying. If we don't try, we're just latter-day sinners; if we don't persevere, we're latter-day quitters; and if we don't allow others to try, we're just latter-day hypocrites.<sup>10</sup> As we try, persevere, and help others to do the same, we are true Latter-day Saints. As we change, we will find that God indeed cares a lot more about who we are and about who we are becoming than about who we once were.<sup>11</sup>

I am deeply grateful for the Savior, for His infinite Atonement, and for latter-day prophets who encourage us to be Latter-day Saints, to keep on trying.<sup>12</sup> I witness of the Savior's living reality in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. See Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994); "Biography of Nelson Mandela," [nelsonmandela.org/content/page/biography](http://nelsonmandela.org/content/page/biography); and President Barack Obama's Dec. 10, 2013, eulogy for Nelson Mandela, at [whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/12/10/remarks-president-obama-memorial-service-former-south-african-president-](http://whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/12/10/remarks-president-obama-memorial-service-former-south-african-president-). The diversity of the awards is indicated by Mandela receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, the United States Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the Soviet Order of Lenin.

2. See, for instance, Nelson Mandela's address at Rice University's Baker Institute on Oct. 26, 1999, [bakerinstitute.org/events/1221](http://bakerinstitute.org/events/1221). He was likely paraphrasing the well-known statement attributed to Robert Louis Stevenson: "The saints are the sinners who keep on trying." Over the years many have expressed similar sentiments. For instance, Confucius is credited with saying, "Our greatest glory lies not in never falling but in getting up every time we fall."

3. See, for instance, 2 Nephi 31:2–21; 3 Nephi 11:23–31; 27:13–21; Moroni 6:6; Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79; 59:8–9; *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 2.1.2.

4. Saying that God cares a lot more about who we are and who we are becoming than about who we once were does not mean that the Savior is dismissive of the consequences of an individual's sin on others. In fact, the Savior cares infinitely about those who suffer hurt, pain, and heartache because of another's transgressions. The Savior "will take upon him [His people's] infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, ... that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:12).

5. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, act 4, scene 3, lines 134–37.

6. Ezekiel 33:12, 14–16.

7. The use of present tense in verbs is notable in many scriptures related to Final Judgment. See, for instance, 2 Nephi 9:16; Mormon 9:14; Doctrine and Covenants 58:42–43.

8. Thomas S. Monson, “The Will Within,” *Ensign*, May 1987, 68.

9. Isaiah 61:1–3; see also Luke 4:16–21.

10. *Hypocrite* as used in the New Testament may be translated from the Greek as “pretender”; “the Greek word means ‘a play actor,’ or ‘one who feigns, represents dramatically, or exaggerates a part’” (Matthew 6:2, footnote a). If we do not give others the opportunity to change at their own pace, we are simply pretending to be Latter-day Saints.

11. See note 4, above.

12. The number of times this message appears in the sermons of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles is striking. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf made this point as he said, “Of all the principles taught by prophets over the centuries, one that has been emphasized over and over again is the hopeful and heartwarming message that mankind can repent, change course, and get back on the true path of discipleship” (“You Can Do It Now!” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2013, 56).