

Opposition in All Things

By Elder Dallin H. Oaks
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Opposition permits us to grow toward what our Heavenly Father would have us become.

Central to the gospel of Jesus Christ is the Father's plan of salvation for the eternal progress of His children. That plan, explained in modern revelation, helps us understand many things we face in mortality. My message focuses on the essential role of opposition in that plan.

I.

The purpose of mortal life for the children of God is to provide the experiences needed "to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny as heirs of eternal life."¹ As President Thomas S. Monson taught us so powerfully this morning, we progress by making choices, by which we are tested to show

that we will keep God's commandments (see Abraham 3:25). To be tested, we must have the agency to choose between alternatives. To provide alternatives on which to exercise our agency, we must have opposition.

The rest of the plan is also essential. When we make wrong choices—as we inevitably will—we are soiled by sin and must be cleansed to proceed toward our eternal destiny. The Father's plan provides the way to do this, the way to satisfy the eternal demands of justice: a Savior pays the price to redeem us from our sins. That Savior is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God the Eternal Father, whose atoning sacrifice—whose suffering—pays the price for our sins if we will repent of them.

One of the best explanations of the planned role of opposition is in the Book of Mormon, in Lehi's teachings to his son Jacob.

"It must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, ... righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness

nor misery, neither good nor bad" (2 Nephi 2:11; see also verse 15).

As a result, Lehi continued, "the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other" (verse 16). Similarly, in modern revelation the Lord declares, "It must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves" (D&C 29:39).

Opposition was necessary in the Garden of Eden. If Adam and Eve had not made the choice that introduced mortality, Lehi taught, "they would have remained in a state of innocence, ... doing no good, for they knew no sin" (2 Nephi 2:23).

From the beginning, agency and opposition were central to the Father's plan and to Satan's rebellion against it. As the Lord revealed to Moses, in the council of heaven Satan "sought to destroy the agency of man" (Moses 4:3). That destruction was inherent in the terms of Satan's offer. He came before the Father and said, "Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor" (Moses 4:1).

Thus, Satan proposed to carry out the Father's plan in a way that would prevent the accomplishment of the Father's purpose and give Satan His glory.

Satan's proposal would have ensured perfect equality: it would "redeem all mankind," that not one soul would be lost. There would be no agency or choice by anyone and, therefore, no need for opposition. There would be no test, no failure, and no success. There would be no growth to attain the purpose the Father desired for His children. The scriptures record that Satan's opposition resulted in a "war in heaven" (Revelation 12:7), in which two-thirds of the children of God earned the right to experience mortal life by choosing the Father's plan and rejecting Satan's rebellion.

Satan's purpose was to gain for himself the Father's honor and power (see Isaiah 14:12-15; Moses 4:1, 3). "Wherefore," the Father said, "because that Satan rebelled against me, ... I caused that he should be cast down" (Moses 4:3) with all the spirits who had exercised their agency to follow him (see Jude 1:6; Revelation 12:8-9; D&C 29:36-37). Cast down as unembodied spirits in mortality, Satan and his followers tempt and seek to deceive and captivate the children of God (see Moses 4:4). So it is that the evil one, who opposed and sought to *destroy* the Father's plan, actually *facilitated* it, because it is opposition that enables choice and it is the opportunity of making the right choices that leads to the growth that is the purpose of the Father's plan.

II.

Significantly, the temptation to sin is not the only kind of opposition in mortality. Father Lehi taught that if the Fall had not taken place, Adam and Eve “would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery” (2 Nephi 2:23). Without the experience of opposition in mortality, “all things must needs be a compound in one,” in which there would be no happiness or misery (verse 11). Therefore, Father Lehi continued, after God had created all things, “to bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man, ... it must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter” (verse 15).² His teaching on this part of the plan of salvation concludes with these words:

“Behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things.

“Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy” (verses 24–25).

Opposition in the form of difficult circumstances we face in mortality is also part of the plan that furthers our growth in mortality.

III.

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. Opposition permits us to grow toward what our Heavenly Father would have us become.

After Joseph Smith had completed translating the Book of Mormon, he still had to find a publisher. This was not easy. The complexity of this lengthy manuscript and the cost of printing and binding thousands of copies were intimidating. Joseph first approached E. B. Grandin, a Palmyra printer, who refused. He then sought another printer in Palmyra, who also turned him down. He traveled to Rochester, 25 miles (40 km) away, and approached the most prominent publisher in western New York, who also turned him down. Another Rochester publisher was willing, but circumstances made this alternative unacceptable.

Weeks had passed, and Joseph must have been bewildered at the opposition to accomplishing his divine mandate. The Lord did not make it easy, but He did make it possible. Joseph’s fifth attempt, a second approach to the Palmyra publisher Grandin, was successful.³

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Years later, Joseph was painfully imprisoned in Liberty Jail for many months. When he prayed for relief, the Lord told him that “all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D&C 122:7).

We are all acquainted with other kinds of mortal opposition not caused by our personal sins, including illness, disability, and death. President Thomas S. Monson explained:

“Some of you may at times have cried out in your suffering, wondering why our Heavenly Father would allow you to go through whatever trials you are facing. ...

“Our mortal life, however, was never meant to be easy or consistently pleasant. Our Heavenly Father ... knows that we learn and grow and become refined through hard challenges, heartbreaking sorrows, and difficult choices. Each one of us experiences dark days when our loved ones pass away, painful times when our health is lost, feelings of being forsaken when those we love seem to have abandoned us. These and other trials present us with the real test of our ability to endure.”⁴

Our efforts to improve our observance of the Sabbath day pose a less stressful example of opposition. We have the Lord’s commandment to honor the Sabbath. Some of our choices may violate that commandment, but other choices in how to spend time on the Sabbath are simply a question of whether we will do what is merely good or what is better or best.⁵

To illustrate the opposition of temptation, the Book of Mormon describes three methods the devil will use in the last days. First, he will “rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good” (2 Nephi 28:20). Second, he will “pacify, and lull [members] away into carnal security,” saying “Zion prospereth, all is well” (verse 21). Third, he will tell us “there is no hell; and ... I am no devil, for there is none” (verse 22), and therefore there is no right and wrong. Because of this opposition, we are warned not to be “at ease in Zion!” (verse 24).

The Church in its divine mission and we in our personal lives seem to face increasing opposition today. Perhaps as the Church grows in strength and we members grow in faith and obedience, Satan increases the strength of his opposition so we will continue to have “opposition in all things.”

Some of this opposition even comes from Church members. Some who use personal reasoning or wisdom to resist prophetic direction give themselves a label borrowed from elected bodies—“the loyal opposition.” However appropriate for a democracy, there is no warrant for this concept in the

appropriate for a democracy, there is no warrant for this concept in the government of God's kingdom, where questions are honored but opposition is not (see Matthew 26:24).

As another example, there are many things in our early Church history, such as what Joseph Smith did or did not do in every circumstance, that some use as a basis for opposition. To all I say, exercise faith and put reliance on the Savior's teaching that we should "know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16). The Church is making great efforts to be transparent with the records we have, but after all we can publish, our members are sometimes left with basic questions that cannot be resolved by study. That is the Church history version of "opposition in all things." Some things can be learned only by faith (see D&C 88:118). Our ultimate reliance must be on faith in the witness we have received from the Holy Ghost.

God rarely infringes on the agency of any of His children by intervening against some for the relief of others. But He does ease the burdens of our afflictions and strengthen us to bear them, as He did for Alma's people in the land of Helam (see Mosiah 24:13–15). He does not prevent all disasters, but He does answer our prayers to turn them aside, as He did with the uniquely powerful cyclone that threatened to prevent the dedication of the temple in Fiji;⁶ or He does blunt their effects, as He did with the terrorist bombing that took so many lives in the Brussels airport but only injured our four missionaries.

Through all mortal opposition, we have God's assurance that He will "consecrate [our] afflictions for [our] gain" (2 Nephi 2:2). We have also been taught to understand our mortal experiences and His commandments in the context of His great plan of salvation, which tells us the purpose of life and gives us the assurance of a Savior, in whose name I testify of the truth of these things. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.