

# Turn to the Lord

## October 2017 General Conference

By Bishop W. Christopher Waddell  
Second Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric

We cannot control all that happens to us, but we have absolute control over how we respond to the changes in our lives.

In the spring of 1998, Carol and I were able to combine a business trip with a family vacation and bring our four children, along with my recently widowed mother-in-law, to Hawaii for a few days.

The night before our flight to Hawaii, our four-month-old son, Jonathon, was diagnosed with a double ear infection, and we were told that he could not travel for at least three to four days. The decision was made for Carol to stay home with Jonathon, while I would make the trip with the rest of the family.

My first indication that this was not the trip I had envisioned occurred soon after our arrival. Walking down a moonlit, palm-lined path, with a view of the ocean in front of us, I turned to comment on the beauty of the island, and in that romantic moment, rather than seeing Carol, I found myself looking into the eyes of my mother-in-law—whom, I may add, I love dearly. It just wasn't what I had anticipated. Nor had Carol expected to spend her vacation at home alone with our sick infant son.

There will be times in our lives when we find ourselves on an unexpected path, facing circumstances much more severe than a disrupted vacation. How do we respond when events, often out of our control, alter the life we had planned or hoped for?

On June 6, 1944, Hyrum Shumway, a young second lieutenant in the United States Army, went ashore at Omaha Beach as part of the D-day invasion. He made it safely through the landing, but on July 27, as part of the Allied advance, he was severely injured by an exploding anti-tank mine. In an instant, his life and future medical career had been dramatically impacted. Following multiple surgeries, which helped him recover from most of his serious injuries, Brother Shumway never did regain his sight. How would he respond?

Following three years in a rehabilitation hospital, he returned home to Lovell, Wyoming. He knew that his dream of becoming a medical doctor was no longer possible, but he was determined to move ahead, get married, and support a family.

He eventually found work in Baltimore, Maryland, as a rehab counselor and employment specialist for the blind. In his own rehabilitation process, he had learned

that the blind are capable of much more than he had realized, and during his eight years in this position, he placed more blind people into employment than any other counselor in the nation.

Now confident in his ability to provide for a family, Hyrum proposed to his sweetheart by telling her, "If you will read the mail, sort the socks, and drive the car, I can do the rest." They were soon sealed in the Salt Lake Temple and ultimately blessed with eight children.

In 1954 the Shumways returned to Wyoming, where Brother Shumway worked for 32 years as the State Director of Education for the Deaf and Blind. During that time, he served for seven years as bishop of the Cheyenne First Ward and, later, 17 years as stake patriarch. Following his retirement, Brother and Sister Shumway also served as a senior couple in the London England South Mission.

Hyrum Shumway passed away in March 2011, leaving behind a legacy of faith and trust in the Lord, even under trying conditions, to his large posterity of children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.<sup>1</sup>

Hyrum Shumway's life may have been changed by war, but he never doubted his divine nature and eternal potential. Like him, we are spirit sons and daughters of God, and we "accepted His plan by which [we] could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize [our] divine destiny as heirs of eternal life."<sup>2</sup> No amount of change, trial, or opposition can alter that eternal course—only our choices, as we exercise our agency.

The changes, and resulting challenges, that we encounter in mortality come in a variety of shapes and sizes and impact each of us in unique ways. Like you, I have witnessed friends and family face challenges caused by:

- The death of a loved one.
- A bitter divorce.
- Perhaps never having the opportunity to marry.
- A serious illness or injury.
- And even natural disasters, as we have recently witnessed around the world.

And the list goes on. Although each "change" may be unique to our individual circumstances, there is a common element in the resulting trial or challenge—hope and peace are always available through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The Atonement of Jesus Christ provides the ultimate corrective and healing measures to every wounded body, damaged spirit, and broken heart.

He knows, in a way that no one else can understand, what it is that we need, individually, in order to move forward in the midst of change. Unlike friends and loved ones, the Savior not only sympathizes with us, but He can empathize perfectly because He has been where we are. In addition to paying the price and suffering for our sins, Jesus Christ also walked every path, dealt with every challenge, faced every hurt—physical, emotional, or spiritual—that we will ever encounter in mortality.

President Boyd K. Packer taught: “The mercy and grace of Jesus Christ are not limited to those who commit sins ... , but they encompass the promise of everlasting peace to all who will accept and follow Him. ... His mercy is the mighty healer, even to the wounded innocent.”<sup>3</sup>

In this mortal experience, we cannot *control* all that happens to us, but we have absolute control over how we *respond* to the changes in our lives. This does not imply that the challenges and trials we face are of no consequence and easily handled or dealt with. It does not imply that we will be free from pain or heartache. But it does mean that there is cause for hope and that due to the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we can move forward and find better days—even days full of joy, light, and happiness.

In Mosiah we read the account of Alma, the ex-priest of King Noah, and his people, who, “having been warned of the Lord ... [,] departed into the wilderness before the armies of king Noah.” After eight days, “they came to ... a very beautiful and pleasant land” where “they pitched their tents, and began to till the ground, and began to build buildings.”<sup>4</sup>

Their situation looked promising. They had accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ. They had been baptized as a covenant that they would serve the Lord and keep His commandments. And “they did multiply and prosper exceedingly in the land.”<sup>5</sup>

However, their circumstances would soon change. “An army of the Lamanites was in the borders of the land.”<sup>6</sup> Alma and his people were soon placed in bondage, and “so great were their afflictions that they began to cry mightily to God.” In addition, they were even commanded by their captors to stop praying, otherwise, “whosoever should be found calling upon God should be put to death.”<sup>7</sup> Alma and his people had done nothing to deserve their new condition. How would they respond?

Rather than blame God, they turned to Him and “did pour out their hearts to him.” In response to their faith and silent prayers, the Lord responded: “Be of good comfort. ... I will ... ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs.” Soon after, “the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord.”<sup>8</sup> Although not yet delivered from bondage, by turning *to* the Lord, and not *from* the Lord, they were blessed according to their needs and according to the Lord's wisdom.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks has taught: "Healing blessings come in many ways, each suited to our individual needs, as known to Him who loves us best. Sometimes a 'healing' cures our illness or lifts our burden. But sometimes we are 'healed' by being given strength or understanding or patience to bear the burdens placed upon us."<sup>9</sup>

Ultimately, "so great was their faith and their patience" that Alma and his people were delivered by the Lord, as will we, "and they gave thanks," "for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it were the Lord their God."<sup>10</sup>

The sad irony is that, too often, those most in need turn away from their one perfect source of help—our Savior, Jesus Christ. A familiar scriptural account of the brazen serpent teaches us that we have a choice when faced with challenges. After many of the children of Israel were bitten by "fiery flying serpents,"<sup>11</sup> "a type was raised up ... that whosoever would look ... might live. [But it was a choice.] And many did look and live.

"... But there were many who were so hardened that they would not look, therefore they perished."<sup>12</sup>

Like the ancient Israelites, we are also invited and encouraged to look to the Savior and live—for His yoke is easy and His burden is light, even when ours may be heavy.

Alma the Younger taught this sacred truth when he said, "I do know that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day."<sup>13</sup>

In these latter days, the Lord has provided us with numerous resources, our "brazen serpents," all of which are designed to help us look to Christ and place our trust in Him. Dealing with the challenges of life is not about ignoring reality but rather where we choose to focus and the foundation upon which we choose to build.

These resources include, but are not limited to:

- Regular study of the scriptures and the teachings of living prophets.
- Frequent, sincere prayer and fasting.
- Worthily partaking of the sacrament.
- Regular temple attendance.
- Priesthood blessings.
- Wise counseling through trained professionals.
- And even medication, when properly prescribed and used as authorized.

Whatever change in life's circumstance may come our way, and whatever unexpected path we may have to travel, how we respond is a choice. Turning to the Savior and grasping His outstretched arm is always our best option.

Elder Richard G. Scott taught this eternal truth: "True enduring happiness with the accompanying strength, courage, and capacity to overcome the most challenging difficulties comes from a life centered in Jesus Christ. ... There is no guarantee of overnight results, but there is absolute assurance that, in the Lord's time, solutions will come, peace will prevail, and emptiness will be filled."<sup>14</sup>

To these truths I share my witness. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

© 2017 by Intellectual Reserve, Inc. All rights reserved.