

Lift Up Your Head and Rejoice

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As we face hard things in the Lord's way, may we lift up our heads and rejoice.

In 1981, my father, two close friends, and I went on an adventure in Alaska. We were to land on a remote lake and climb to some beautiful high country. In order to reduce the load we would have to personally carry, we wrapped our supplies in boxes, covered them with foam, attached large colored streamers, and threw them out the window of our bush plane at our intended destination.

After arriving, we searched and searched, but to our dismay, we could not find any of the boxes. Eventually we found one. It contained a small gas stove, a tarp, some candy, and a couple packages of Hamburger Helper—but no hamburger. We had no way to communicate with the outside world, and our scheduled pickup was a week later.

I learned two valuable lessons from this experience: One, do not throw your food out the window. Two, sometimes we have to face hard things.

Frequently, our first reaction to hard things is “Why me?” Asking why, however, never takes away the hard thing. The Lord requires that we overcome challenges, and He has indicated “that all these things shall give [us] experience, and shall be for [our] good.”¹

Sometimes the Lord asks us to do a hard thing, and sometimes our challenges are created by our own or others' use of agency. Nephi experienced both of these situations. When Lehi invited his sons to return to get the plates from Laban, he said, “Behold thy brothers murmur, saying it is a hard thing which I have required of them; but behold I have not required it of them, but it is a commandment of the Lord.”² On another occasion, Nephi's brothers used their agency to limit his: “They did lay their hands upon me, for behold, they were exceedingly wroth, and they did bind me with cords, for they sought to take away my life.”³

Joseph Smith confronted a hard thing in Liberty Jail. With no relief in sight and in despair, Joseph cried out, “O God, where art thou?”⁴ No doubt some of us have felt as Joseph did.

Everyone faces hard things: the death of a loved one, divorce, a wayward child, illness, trials of faith, a lost job, or any other difficulty.

I was forever changed upon hearing these words from Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve, spoken in the midst of his struggle with leukemia. He said, “I was doing some pensive pondering and these 13 instructive and reassuring words came into my mind: ‘I have given you leukemia that you might teach my people with authenticity.’” He then went on to express how this experience had blessed him with “perspective about the great realities of eternity. ... Such glimpses of eternity can help us to travel the next 100 yards, which may be very difficult.”⁵

To help us travel and triumph over our hard times with such glimpses of eternity, may I suggest two things. We must face hard things, first, by forgiving others and, second, by giving ourselves to Heavenly Father.

Forgiving those who may have caused our hard thing and reconciling “[our]selves to the will of God”⁶ can be very difficult. It can hurt most when our hard thing is caused by a family member, a close friend, or even ourselves.

As a young bishop, I learned of forgiveness when my stake president, Bruce M. Cook, shared the following story. He explained:

“During the late 1970s, some associates and I started a business. Although we did nothing illegal, some poor decisions, combined with the challenging economic times, resulted in our failure.

“Some investors filed a lawsuit to recover their losses. Their attorney happened to be a counselor in my family’s bishopric. It was very difficult to sustain the man who seemed to be seeking to destroy me. I developed some real animosity toward him and considered him my enemy. After five years of legal battles, we lost everything we owned, including our home.

“In 2002, my wife and I learned that the stake presidency in which I served as a counselor was being reorganized. As we traveled on a short vacation prior to the release, she asked me whom I would choose as my counselors if I were called as the new stake president. I did not want to speak about it, but she persisted. Eventually, one name came to my mind. She then mentioned the name of the attorney we considered to have been at the center of our difficulties 20 years earlier. As she spoke, the Spirit confirmed that he should be the other counselor. Could I forgive the man?

“When Elder David E. Sorensen extended to me the call to serve as stake president, he gave me an hour to select counselors. Through tears, I indicated that the Lord had already provided that revelation. As I spoke the name of the man I had considered my enemy, the anger, animosity, and hate I had harbored disappeared. In that moment, I learned of the peace that comes with forgiveness through the Atonement of Christ.”

In other words, my stake president did “frankly forgive” him, like Nephi of old.⁷ I knew President Cook and his counselor as two righteous priesthood leaders who loved one another. I determined to be like them.

Years before, during our misadventure in Alaska, I had quickly learned that blaming our circumstances on others—the pilot launching the food out in fading light—was not a solution. However, as we experienced physical exhaustion, lack of food, sickness, and sleeping on the ground during a major storm with only a tarp to cover us, I learned that “with God nothing shall be impossible.”⁸

Young people, God requires hard things of you. One 14-year-old young woman participated in competitive basketball. She dreamed of playing high school basketball like her older sister. She then learned that her parents had been called to preside over a mission in Guatemala.

Upon arrival, she discovered that a couple of her classes would be in Spanish, a language she did not yet speak. There was not a single girls’ sports team at her school. She lived on the 14th

floor of a building with tight security. And to top it all off, she could not go outside alone for safety reasons.

Her parents listened to her cry herself to sleep every night for months. This broke their hearts! They finally decided they would send her home to her grandmother for high school.

When my wife entered our daughter's room to tell her our decision, she saw our daughter kneeling in prayer with the Book of Mormon open on the bed. The Spirit whispered to my wife, "She will be OK," and my wife quietly left the room.

We never heard her cry herself to sleep again. With determination and the Lord's help, she faced those three years valiantly.

At the conclusion of our mission, I asked my daughter if she was going to serve a full-time mission. Her answer was "No, Dad, I have already served."

I was just fine with that! But about six months later, the Spirit awoke me in the night with this thought: "I have called your daughter to serve a mission."

My reaction was "Heavenly Father, she has given so much." I was quickly corrected by the Spirit and came to understand that her missionary service was required of the Lord.

I soon took my daughter to lunch. From across the table, I said, "Ganzie, do you know why we are here?"

She said, "Yes, Dad. You know I have to serve a mission. I do not want to go, but I am going."

Because she gave her will to Heavenly Father, she served Him with all of her heart, might, mind, and strength. She has taught her father how to do a hard thing.

In President Russell M. Nelson's worldwide devotional for youth, he requested some hard things of the youth. President Nelson said: "My fifth invitation is for you to stand out; be different from the world. ... The Lord needs you to look like, sound like, act like, and dress like a true disciple of Jesus Christ."⁹ That can be a hard thing, yet I know you can do it—with joy.

Remember that "men are, that they might have joy."¹⁰ With all that Lehi faced, he still found joy. Remember when Alma was "weighed down with sorrow"¹¹ because of the people of Ammonihah? The angel told him, "Blessed art thou, Alma; therefore, lift up thy head and rejoice, ... for thou hast been faithful in keeping the commandments of God."¹² Alma learned a great truth: we can always rejoice when we keep the commandments. Remember that during the wars and challenges faced during the time of Captain Moroni, "there never was a happier time among the people of Nephi."¹³ We can and should find joy when we face hard things.

The Savior faced hard things: "The world ... shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men."¹⁴

Because of that loving-kindness, Jesus Christ suffered the Atonement. As a result, He says to each one of us, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."¹⁵ Because of Christ, we too can overcome the world.

As we face hard things in the Lord's way, may we lift up our heads and rejoice. At this sacred opportunity to testify to the world, I proclaim that our Savior lives and guides His Church. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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