

Christlike Poise

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“And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm” (Mark 4:39).

The last time that I spoke in general conference, my son-in-law Ryan showed me a tweet that said, “Really? The guy’s name is Bragg”—meaning “to boast”—“and he doesn’t talk about humility? What a waste!” Sadly, the disappointment continues.

My wonderful father was an All-America basketball player for UCLA under legendary Coach John Wooden. They remained close throughout my father’s life, and occasionally Coach and Mrs. Wooden would come to our home for dinner. He was always happy to talk to me about basketball or anything else on my mind. Once I asked him what advice he had for me as I entered my senior year of high school. Always the teacher, he said, “Your father told me that you have joined the Church of Jesus Christ, so I know that you have faith in the Lord. With that faith be sure to have poise in every situation. Be a good man in a storm.”

Over the years, that conversation stuck with me. That counsel to be calm, cool, and collected in all situations, particularly in times of adversity and pressure, resonated with me. I could see how Coach Wooden’s teams played with poise and the great success that they experienced winning 10 national championships.

But poise is not spoken about much these days and practiced even less in turbulent and divisive times. It is often referenced in sports—a player with poise is unflappable in a close game, or a team unravels due to a lack of poise. But this wonderful quality goes way beyond sports. Poise has a much broader application to life and can bless parents, leaders, missionaries, teachers, students, and everyone else facing the storms of life.

Spiritual poise blesses us to stay calm and focused on what matters most, especially when we are under pressure. President Hugh B. Brown taught, “Faith in God and in the ultimate triumph of right contributes to mental and spiritual poise in the face of difficulties.”¹

President Russell M. Nelson is a wonderful example of spiritual poise. One time, while then-Dr. Nelson was performing a quadruple coronary artery bypass, the patient's blood pressure dropped suddenly. Dr. Nelson calmly assessed the situation and identified that a clamp was accidentally removed by one of the team members. It was replaced immediately, and Dr. Nelson comforted the team member, saying, "I still love you," and then added jokingly, "Sometimes I love you more than other times!" He showed how an emergency should be handled—with poise, focused only on what matters most—addressing the emergency. President Nelson said: "It's a matter of extreme self-discipline. Your natural reaction is, 'Take me out, coach! I want to go home.' But of course you can't. A life is totally dependent on the whole surgical team. So you've got to stay just as calm and relaxed and sharp as you ever were."²

Of course, the Savior is the ultimate example of poise.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, in unimaginable agony, as "he sweat as it were great drops of blood,"³ He exemplified divine poise with the simple yet majestic statement "Not my will, but thine, be done."⁴ Under the immense pressure to enable the salvation of all humankind, Jesus demonstrated three important conditions that help us understand His great poise. First, He knew who He was and was true to His divine mission. Next, He knew that there was a great plan of happiness. And finally, He knew that through His infinite Atonement, all who faithfully yoke themselves to Him by making and keeping sacred covenants received through priesthood ordinances will be saved, as was so beautifully taught by Elder Dale G. Renlund today.

To contrast the difference between losing and maintaining poise, think about what happened as Christ and His Apostles left the Garden of Gethsemane. When confronted by soldiers seeking to arrest Jesus, Peter's reaction was to lose his poise and lash out violently by cutting off the ear of the high priest's servant, Malchus. Jesus Christ's reaction, on the other hand, was to keep His poise and to bring calm to a tense situation by healing Malchus.⁵

And for those of us who struggle with maintaining our poise and perhaps have grown discouraged, consider the rest of Peter's story. A short time after this incident and the heartbreak of denying his association with Christ,⁶ Peter stood before the very same religious leaders who condemned the Savior, and with great poise under intense questioning, he bore eloquent testimony of the divinity of Jesus Christ.⁷

Know Who You Are and Be True to Your Divine Identity

Let's consider elements of Christlike poise. To begin, knowing who we are and being true to our divine identity brings calm. Christlike poise requires that we avoid comparing ourselves to others or pretending to be someone we're not.⁸ Joseph Smith taught, "If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves."⁹ It is just not possible to have divine poise without knowing that we are divine sons and daughters of a loving Heavenly Father.

In his talk "Choices for Eternity," President Nelson taught these eternal truths about who we are: we are children of God, we are children of the covenant, and we are disciples of Christ. He then promised, "As you embrace these truths, our Heavenly Father will help you reach your ultimate goal of living eternally in His holy presence."¹⁰ We truly are divine spiritual beings having a mortal experience. Knowing who we are and being true to that divine identity are foundational to the development of Christlike poise.

Know That There Is a Divine Plan

Next, remembering that there is a grand plan engenders courage and poise in challenging conditions. Nephi could "go and do"¹¹ as the Lord commanded "not knowing beforehand"¹² the things that he was to do because he knew that he would be led by the Spirit, in fulfillment of the eternal plan of a loving Heavenly Father. Poise comes when we see things from an eternal perspective. The Lord has counseled His disciples to "lift up your eyes"¹³ and to "let the solemnities of eternity rest upon your minds."¹⁴ By framing challenging times within an eternal plan, pressure becomes a privilege to love, serve, teach, and bless. An eternal view enables Christlike poise.

Know the Enabling Power of Jesus Christ and His Atonement

And finally, the enabling power of Christ, made possible by His atoning sacrifice, gives us the strength to endure and prevail. Because of Jesus Christ we can covenant with God and be strengthened in keeping that covenant. We can be bound to the Savior in joy and calm, regardless of our temporal circumstances.¹⁵ Alma chapter 7 teaches beautifully about Christ's enabling power. In addition to redeeming us from sin, the

Savior can strengthen us in our weaknesses, fears, and challenges in this life.

As we focus on Christ, we can hush our fears, as Alma's people did in Helam.¹⁶ As a threatening army gathered, those faithful disciples of Christ demonstrated poise. Elder David A. Bednar has taught: "Alma counseled the believers to remember the Lord and the deliverance only He could bestow (see 2 Nephi 2:8). And knowledge of the Savior's protecting watchcare enabled the people to hush their own fears."¹⁷ This exemplifies poise.

The Great Man in a Storm

Noah taught us much about patience in a storm, but the Savior was the greatest teacher on how to survive a storm. He is the great man in a storm. After a long day of teaching with His Apostles, the Savior needed some rest and suggested that they cross by boat to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. As the Savior rested, a severe storm arose. As the wind and waves threatened to sink the boat, the Apostles began to fear for their lives. And remember, several of those Apostles were fishermen who were very well acquainted with the storms on that sea! Yet, worried,¹⁸ they woke the Lord and asked, "[Lord], carest thou not that we perish?" Then, with exemplary poise, the Savior "arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was ... great calm."¹⁹

And then a great lesson in poise for His Apostles. He asked, "Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?"²⁰ He was reminding them that He was the Savior of the world and that He was sent by the Father to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of God's children. Surely the Son of God would not perish on a boat. He exemplified divine poise because He knew of His divinity and He knew that there was a plan of salvation and exaltation and how essential His Atonement would be to the eternal success of that plan.

It is through Christ and His Atonement that all good things come into our lives. As we remember who we are, knowing that there is a divine plan of mercy and drawing courage in the strength of the Lord, we can do all things. We will find calm. We will be good women and men in any storm.

May we seek the blessings of Christlike poise, not only to help ourselves in challenging times but to bless others and help them through the storms in their lives. On this eve of Palm Sunday, I joyfully testify of Jesus Christ. He is risen. I testify of the peace, calm, and heavenly poise

that only He brings to our lives and do so in His holy name, Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Hugh B. Brown, in Conference Report, Oct. 1969, 105.
2. See Sheri Dew, *Insights from a Prophet's Life: Russell M. Nelson* (2019), 66–67.
3. Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 22:44 (in Luke 22:44, footnote *b*).
4. Luke 22:42.
5. See Luke 22:50–51; John 18:10–11.
6. See Matthew 26:34–35, 69–75.
7. See Acts 4:8–10; Neal A. Maxwell, “Content with the Things Allotted unto Us,” *Ensign*, May 2000, 74; *Liahona*, July 2000, 89: “When spiritually aligned, a poise can come, even when we do not know ‘the meaning of all things’ [1 Nephi 11:17].”
8. See John R. Wooden, *Wooden on Leadership* (2005), 50: “I define *poise* as being true to oneself, not getting rattled, thrown off, or unbalanced regardless of the circumstance or situation. This may sound easy, but Poise can be a most elusive quality in challenging times. Leaders lacking Poise panic under pressure.

“Poise means holding fast to your beliefs and acting in accordance with them, regardless of how bad or good the situation may be. Poise means avoiding pose or pretense, comparing yourself to others, and acting like someone you’re not. Poise means having a brave heart in all circumstances.”
9. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 40.
10. Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity” (worldwide devotional for young adults, May 15, 2022), broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
11. 1 Nephi 3:7.
12. 1 Nephi 4:6.
13. John 4:35.

14. Doctrine and Covenants 43:34; see also James E. Faust, “The Dignity of Self,” *Ensign*, May 1981, 10: “The dignity of self is greatly enhanced by looking upward in the search for holiness. Like the giant trees, we should reach up for the light. The most important source of light we can come to know is the gift of the Holy Ghost. It is the source of inner strength and peace.”
15. See Russell M. Nelson, “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 82: “My dear brothers and sisters, the joy we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives.”
16. See Mosiah 23:27–28.
17. David A. Bednar, “Therefore They Hushed Their Fears,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2015, 46–47.
18. See Jeffrey R. Holland, *Our Day Star Rising: Exploring the New Testament with Jeffrey R. Holland* (2022), 61–62: “Furthermore, these were experienced men on board with Him—eleven of the original Twelve were Galileans (only Judas Iscariot was a Judean). And six of those eleven were fishermen. They had lived on this lake. They had made their living by fishing on it. They had been there since they were children. Their fathers had them mending nets and making repairs on the boat when they were very young. They know this sea; they know the winds and the waves. They are experienced men—but they are terrified. And if *they* are afraid, this is a legitimate storm.”
19. See Mark 4:35–39.
20. Mark 4:40.