

Opposition in All Things

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To be able to exercise our agency, we need to have opposing options to consider.

Recently, while driving in a city unknown to us, I inadvertently took a wrong turn, which led my wife and me onto an express highway for endless miles without being able to turn around again. We had received a kind invitation to a friend's home and worried that we would now arrive much later than we were expected to.

While on this highway and desperately looking for a way out again, I blamed myself for not paying better attention to the navigation system. This experience caused me to think about how in our lives we sometimes make wrong decisions and how we must live with the consequences humbly and patiently until we are able to change our course again.

Life is all about making choices. Our Father in Heaven gave us the divine gift of agency precisely so that we could learn from our choices—from the right ones and also from the wrong ones. We correct our wrong choices when we repent. This is where growth happens. Heavenly Father's plan for all of us is about learning, developing, and progressing toward eternal life.

Ever since my wife and I were taught by the missionaries and joined the Church many years ago, I have always been impressed by the profound teachings that Lehi gave to his son Jacob in the Book of Mormon. He taught him that “the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself”¹ and that “it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things.”² To be able to exercise our agency, we need to have opposing options to consider. In doing so, the Book of Mormon also reminds us that we have been “instructed sufficiently”³ and that “the Spirit of Christ”⁴ has been given to every one of us to “know good from evil.”⁵

In life, we constantly confront many important choices. For example:

- Choosing whether or not we will follow God's commandments.
- Choosing to have faith and recognize when miracles happen or to skeptically wait for something to happen before choosing to believe only then.
- Choosing to develop trust in God or to fearfully anticipate another challenge the next day.

As when I took a wrong turn on that highway, suffering from the consequences of *our own* poor decisions can often be especially painful because we only have ourselves to blame. Nevertheless, we can always choose to receive comfort through the divine process of repentance, make wrong things right again, and in doing so learn some life-changing lessons.

Sometimes we can also experience opposition and trials from things outside of our control, such as:

- Moments of health and periods of sickness.
- Times of peace and times of war.
- Hours of day and of night and seasons of summer and of winter.
- Times of labor followed by times of rest.

Even though we usually cannot choose between these kinds of situations because they just happen, we are still free to choose *how* to react to them. We can do so with a positive or with a pessimistic attitude. We can seek to learn from the experience and ask for our Lord's help and support, or we can think that we are on our own in this trial and that we must suffer it alone. We can "adjust our sails" to the new reality, or we can decide not to change anything. In the darkness of night, we can turn on our lights. In the cold of winter, we should choose to wear warm clothes. In seasons of sickness, we can seek medical and spiritual help. We choose how to react to these circumstances.

Adjust, learn, seek, choose are all action verbs. Remember that we are agents and not objects. Let us never forget that Jesus promised to "take upon him the pains and sicknesses of his people ... that he may ... succor," or help, us as we turn to Him.⁶ We can choose to build our foundation on the rock that is Jesus Christ so that when the whirlwind comes, "it shall have no power over [us]."⁷ He has promised that "whosoever will come [to Him], him will [He] receive; and blessed are those who come unto [Him]."⁸

Now, there is one additional principle that is especially important. Lehi said that there "must needs be ... an opposition *in all things*."⁹ This means that opposites don't exist apart from each other. They can even complement each other. We would not be able to identify joy unless we had also experienced sorrow at some point. Feeling hungry at times helps us to be especially grateful when we do have enough to eat again. We would not be able to identify truth unless we had also seen lies here and there.

These opposites are all like the two sides of one same coin. Both sides are always present. Charles Dickens provided an example of this idea when he wrote that "it was the best of times, it was the worst of times."¹⁰

Let me give an example from our own life. Getting married, forming a family, and having children brought to us the greatest moments of joy we have ever experienced in our lives but also the most profound moments of pain, anguish, and grief when something happened to any one of us. Infinite joy and bliss with our children were sometimes also followed by recurring periods of sicknesses, hospitalizations, and sleepless nights filled with distress, as well as finding relief in prayers and priesthood blessings. These contrasting experiences taught us that we are never alone in moments of suffering, and they also showed us how much we can carry with the Lord's succor and help. These experiences helped to shape us in wonderful ways, and it has all been totally worthwhile. Is this not what we came here for?

In the scriptures we also find some interesting examples:

- Lehi taught his son Jacob that the afflictions he suffered in the wilderness helped him know the greatness of God and that “[God] shall consecrate [his] afflictions for [his] gain.”¹¹
- During Joseph Smith’s cruel incarceration in Liberty Jail, the Lord told him that “all these things shall give [him] experience, and shall be for [his] good.”¹²
- Finally, Jesus Christ’s infinite sacrifice was certainly the greatest example of pain and suffering ever seen, but it also brought about the wonderful blessings of His Atonement to all of God’s children.

Where there is sunshine, shadows must be there too. Floods can bring destruction, but they usually bring life as well. Tears of grief often turn into tears of relief and happiness. Feelings of sadness when loved ones depart are later compensated with the joy of meeting again. In periods of war and destruction, many little acts of kindness and love are also happening for those with “eyes to see, and ears to hear.”¹³

Our world today is often characterized by fear and anxiety—fear of what the future might bring for us. But Jesus has taught us to trust and “look unto [Him] in every thought; doubt not, fear not.”¹⁴

Let us constantly make a very conscious effort to see both sides of *every* coin allotted to us in our lives. Even though both sides might sometimes not be immediately visible to us, we can know and trust that they are always there.

We can rest assured that our difficulties, sorrows, afflictions, and pains do not define us; rather, it is *how* we go about them that will help us grow and draw closer to God. It is our attitudes and choices that define us much better than our challenges.

When in health, cherish and be grateful for it every moment. When in sickness, seek to patiently learn from it and know that this can change again according to God’s will. When in sorrow, trust that happiness is around the corner; we often just cannot see it yet. Consciously shift your focus and elevate your thoughts to the positive aspects of challenges, because they are undoubtedly always there too! Never forget to be grateful. Choose to believe. Choose to have faith in Jesus Christ. Choose to always trust God. Choose to “think celestial,” as President Russell M. Nelson recently taught us!¹⁵

Let us always be mindful of our Heavenly Father’s wonderful plan for us. He loves us and sent His Beloved Son to help in our trials and to open for us the door to return to Him. Jesus Christ lives and stands there at every moment, waiting for us to choose to call upon Him to provide succor, strength, and salvation. Of these things I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. 2 Nephi 2:16.
2. 2 Nephi 2:11.
3. 2 Nephi 2:5.
4. Moroni 7:16.
5. 2 Nephi 2:5.

6. Alma 7:11, 12.
7. Helaman 5:12.
8. 3 Nephi 9:14.
9. 2 Nephi 2:11; emphasis added.
10. Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), 1.
11. 2 Nephi 2:2.
12. Doctrine and Covenants 122:7.
13. Deuteronomy 29:4.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 6:36.
15. See Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2023, 117–20.