

“Letting God Prevail in Our Lives, While Expecting and Seeking Miracles”

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Good afternoon, sisters! I am so grateful for the chance to be here with you. This is my first time at BYU Women’s Conference, and I am thrilled to get to learn alongside all of you amazing women (and men) and feel the abundance of the Spirit that I pray will be poured out upon us today. I pray that the Spirit will convey this message from my heart to yours and that we can learn together.

Now, when I was about ten years old, I went on a camping trip in Northern California with my dad, stepmom, siblings, and a few friends. One night, as we sat around the campfire after dinner, my dad and his friend were throwing around a little bravado, talking about just what they’d do if a bear came into camp. We all felt it was hypothetical and just silly posturing.

Well, their “hypothetic” soon became a reality when suddenly we noticed a very real bear eating our leftover chicken dinner, not 10 feet away from us. Once it realized we saw it (likely one of us made a strangled, half-garbled scream), it stood up on its hind legs, made some noises that I am sure were a small roar (in my childish mind) –and panic ensued. I ran for the nearest vehicle—a truck—and illogically began trying to jump over its side, repeatedly attempting to climb and throw my little leg over it and scraping my leg up in the process. Some of the adults scooped up the other small children and ran for the van; my dad and his friend went running off after the bear to scare it away, chasing it back into the woods, and I...was trying to climb over the side of a truck. You can imagine. My stepmom called me from the back of the van where everyone else had gathered, and I realized getting inside a vehicle with walls and closing doors made much more sense.

Once I got to the safety of the van, fear for my dad set in. I was honestly afraid he was going to be eaten (luckily, black bears don’t tend to do that). I immediately, earnestly suggested that we say a prayer. My stepmom and stepsiblings were not religious, or members of any faith, but my stepmom agreed, and so we all knelt in that van, and I opened my mouth and prayed. I prayed for my dad, for his safety, that he wouldn’t be eaten, and that we’d all be safe.

Immediately the Spirit of the Lord filled the van. And sisters - he *filled* it. We felt the Comforter so “thick” surrounding us it felt like you could cut the air with a knife. It was immediate and powerful, and undeniable. An encompassing wave of peace and calmness came over us in such a way as I have only felt maybe two or three other times in my life to that degree. I think we were all taken aback by the immediacy and the power of that encompassing feeling. I remember us looking up and around at each other afterward, a bit in surprise. It’s a core memory I will never forget.

Well, as I am sure you are wondering, my dad came back soon after having scared the bear away, everyone was fine, and I honestly don’t remember much about what happened next. I did, however, remember that very quick and powerful answer to our prayer in the back of the van and for years I *loved* to “bear” testimony about the power of prayer. I had gained a witness at that young age that Heavenly Father truly does hear and answer our prayers.

Now, fast forward many years later to me in my 30’s. I’m kneeling in prayer for the umpteenth time (really, countless), asking Heavenly Father for a feeling of comfort and healing regarding a trial of the heart I was going through. And... I didn’t feel any response. I didn’t get that immediate presence or comfort. I didn’t feel very comforted at all. Imagine as I shake my head and feel the tears come again and start to question why my Heavenly Father is seeming to not answer my very sincere, heartfelt, and needed prayers. Have any of you ever felt that way? Like you’d done all you could, turned to God-and heaven felt silent to you? Sisters, I’d guess we all have. So, this begs the question: why did Heavenly Father answer me *so* powerfully years before when I was praying my dad wouldn’t get eaten (something very unlikely to have happened), but it seemed God was not answering me now with my just as sincere and heartfelt prayer? Again, have you felt this way?

Now, I am telling these stories for a reason, but one I’ll get back to in a bit.

First-I’m going to level with you. I was worried when I received my topic for this presentation. Not because I don’t have faith in following our modern-day prophet. I do. I love President Russell M. Nelson, and I loved President Thomas S. Monson before him, and I loved President Gordon B. Hinckley before him. I have faith in and a love for these men and their predecessors as true prophets of God, and I believe their words to be the words of a loving Heavenly Father that He would have us know and choose to follow to be ultimately happy. I was worried because the invitation I felt most prompted to speak on - Letting God Prevail in our lives - is something I am currently struggling to do right now, today, yesterday, this week! But perhaps that is why you are here, too. Perhaps you, like me, are seeking to deepen your faith in our loving heavenly father so that you can more readily trust Him, let Him prevail in your life, and seek and expect miracles, as we’ve been invited to do. Perhaps you feel you’ve missed the mark or signpost somewhere and are trying to understand how to receive or, I’ll say, *recognize* the promised miracles and blessings in your life from following these invitations. Well, let’s work on this and dive in together.

Let God Prevail

So, let’s first talk about really choosing to Let God Prevail. I will focus particularly on the why and how, as those lessons can help us truly embrace this invitation.

In President Nelson's October 2022 General Conference talk, he encouraged us to, "Let God Prevail" in our lives, which he learned is actually one of the very definitions of the word "Israel." My good friend named Israel loved this talk. President Nelson tells us that, "...as [we] choose to let God prevail in [our] lives, [we] will experience for [ourselves] that our God is 'a God of miracles.'"¹

President Nelson also helps us consider how doing so will make decisions become easier, we will be led to understanding, we'll find greater courage in the face of adversity and temptation, and God will fight out battles and our children's battles and our children's *children's* battles. That's pretty wonderful. I'd take any and or all of those blessings.

So, what does it mean to let God prevail? The Oxford Learner's Dictionary (book nerd!) defines the verb 'prevail' as:

1. "To exist or be very common in a particular place." Or,
2. "To be accepted, especially after a struggle or an argument."²

Let's apply these understandings to letting God prevail in our lives.

First, to let him exist or be present in our lives or for Him to be commonly found there. What would that look like? To see God in our choices and actions. Imagine what your home would feel like. Your conversation. Let him exist, be present - prevail there.

This second definition interests me by applying it to the idea of accepting God into our lives, especially after a struggle. That's interesting and often real. Struggle to submit our will and limited understanding to His. Struggle to believe or trust in Him. Struggle to make sense of a difficult situation. I think this is important in that we are all going to be tried and come to that place where, as CS Lewis calls it, our "house of faith"³ is tested and we must decide what we believe and how and if we choose to let God prevail after, despite of, or perhaps even more because of those hardships. Lewis notes, in speaking of his rocked faith after the death of his wife.

"It is different when the thing happens to oneself, not to others, and in reality, not in imagination. ...If my house [of faith] has collapsed at one blow, that is because it was a house of cards. The faith which "took these things into account" was not faith but imagination."

He also said, "You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you. It is easy to say you believe a rope to be strong and sound as long as you are merely using it to cord a box. But suppose you had to hang by that rope over a precipice. Wouldn't you then first discover how much you really trusted it?"⁴

In her powerful talk on, "A Latter-day Saint Theology of Suffering," given at BYU Women's Conference in 1986, Francine R. Bennion makes the following insight, "[One] of the reasons our theology [or understanding] of suffering matters is that we may live comfortably with a framework which has inherent holes and contradictions as long as the suffering is someone else's or as long as our own suffering isn't very great. But holes and contradictions have a way of becoming very important when anguish is our own or when we feel the pain of persons we care about. Job's friends said to him:

“Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands.

“Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees.

“But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled.

“If, like Job, we find that the comforts we’ve offered others aren’t sufficient for our own experience, then the suffering itself, however great, is not the only problem. The problem is also that the universe and our ability to make sense of it have fallen apart, and we are without hope or trust in ourselves or in God.”⁵

Have you been there? I’ll admit I have. It’s something I am grappling with learning right now, and I hope I can help share some of what I am learning, through this talk, with you.

Sisters don’t be surprised when in this life we have our very foundations of faith tested (which you well know); when we will question something -a doctrine, a trial, a situation, the world around us-and will need to come to an understanding, a choice, and truly settle ourselves on the rock of faith.

Sister Bennion goes on to point out that in the premortal life when we chose to come to this earth, “We wanted life, however high the cost. We suffer because we were willing to pay the cost of being and of being here with others in their ignorance and inexperience as well as our own. We suffer because we are willing to pay the costs of living with laws of nature, which operate quite consistently whether or not we understand them or can manage them. We suffer because, like Christ in the desert, we apparently did not say we would come only if God would change all our stones to bread in time of hunger. We were willing to know hunger. Like Christ in the desert, we did not ask God to let us try falling or being bruised only on condition that he catch us before we touch the ground and save us from real hurt. We were willing to know hurt.”

When those hungry, hurtful, or trying times come, we need to decide if we are going to trust God or not. If we are going to rely on and believe in the Atonement of Jesus Christ or not. If we are going to let Him prevail in our lives. This leads to my next point, or actually, questions.

Why & How

Please, I hope these don't sound blasphemous. Why would we choose to let God prevail in our lives? To trust? To follow Him? Perhaps tied to that, or the better question is how can we prepare now to let God prevail when we hit those hard times, challenging questions, or faith-foundation-shaking experiences? These can be important questions to seek answers to help us stand on more firm ground during those times.

Experience

To answer the first question, we might first lean on experience. For example, we have been following the commandments to the best of our ability thus far, and it seems to be working out. That’s a start. Or we’ve felt the Spirit and are going to choose to lean on that. Perhaps we have

the gift to trust in the testimony of others, as it speaks of in Doctrine and Covenants 46:14. Have you had experiences that have taught you to trust in God or given you cause to let him prevail in your life?

Looking back to the story I started with, with the bear, an answered prayer; and then years later, some seemingly very unanswered prayers. When, upon later reflection, I thought of that first experience praying with my family in the van, it was easy to question why Heavenly Father chose to answer that particular prayer so clearly and powerfully. Honestly, my dad came back just minutes later and was really never in any real danger. Why, then, was it so important to bless that experience with such a powerful assurance and witness of the Spirit? Was I more faithful then? Was my prayer and request more important than those other heartfelt pleas I offered on my knees throughout the years? No, I really don't believe so. What thought-revelation-did come to me as I knelt in prayer and pled all those years later was an understanding that God had given me that experience in my youth so that, years later, when my prayers seemed to be going unanswered, I could know with a surety that God *does* hear and answer my prayers. Even when I can't see how He is, or if they are being answered differently than I thought I wanted or in ways I can't yet understand, He wanted to assure me that He was hearing me and answering me in those seemingly "silent" times. He knew I'd need that to lean on, as some blessings I was pleading for would not come yet for years. I believe Heavenly Father often gives us different experiences that we can hold to and remember to strengthen our faith when other things don't currently make as much sense.

President Thomas S. Monson was fond of quoting the following from the Scottish poet James Barrie, when he said: "God gave us memories, that we might have June roses in the December of our lives."⁶

Sisters, remember those times and experiences in your own life. 'Remember those blessings and witnesses. Record them, if you will, and forget not the blessings God has given or the promises he has already fulfilled. Review the miracles he has already blessed you and your loved ones with in your life.'⁷ I think of when Christ visited the Nephites and asked them why they had not written the fulfillment of the prophecy and promise made to them that, when he was born, many saints would rise from the dead and minister to many.⁸ He wants us to remember and find comfort in the witnesses and fulfillment of promises we've already received. In the Book of Mormon, the verb "remember" appears about 220 times, making it one of the most frequently used verbs in the entire book.⁹ So, I think one reason we can decide to Let God Prevail in our lives is by honestly looking at patterns and reviewing-remembering-how he has blessed us in our lives already and using that to help us trust that He will do so in the future. In remembering and being grateful, we will often uncover more 'blessings than we initially recognized.'¹⁰

Plan of Happiness

Another reason we might choose to let God prevail in our lives is because we have thought through and understand the implications of His great plan of happiness, including His and our place within that plan. Heavenly Father tells us: "For this is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."¹¹ His entire work and glory are to bring about our

ultimate joy and exaltation! That should, logically, be reason enough for me to trust Him right there, assuming, of course, that I believe He has the power to do what He says. And, if I believe He is the one true God of all.

In the Lectures on Faith, speaking of our faith in God, it notes, “For if [a person] did not, in the first instance, believe [Elohim] to be God, that is, the creator and upholder of all things, he could not center his faith in him for life and salvation, for fear there should be a greater than he, who would thwart all his plans, and he, like the gods of the heathen, would be unable to fulfill his promises; but seeing he is God over all, from everlasting to everlasting, the creator and upholder of all things, no such fear can exist in the minds of those who put their trust in him, so that in this respect their faith can be without wavering.”¹²

What hopeful, empowering knowledge! Thus, it is wise for us to examine what we profess to believe, such as the plan of happiness and the belief that Heavenly Father is indeed the one true god. Then look at how those beliefs can fortify us. Look at what it really should mean in our lives and the hope we should hold in our hearts. Sometimes, I think I compartmentalize these truths too much and don't naturally connect them to the day-to-day moments in my life without more intentional thought.

Understanding God’s Character

Somewhat tied to this is what should be a fundamental quest each of us takes to truly come to know God, who He is, and what our relationship is to Him. If we do this prayerfully and with the Spirit, we will increase our faith *in* Him and thus find it easier to let Him prevail in our lives. This is something I’ve been working on, personally, of late, and it's been a blessing.

In his 1978 General Conference talk, “A Basis for Faith in the Living God,” N. Eldon Tanner stated, “In addition to a belief in the existence of God, we must know something of his character and attributes, or our faith will be imperfect and unfruitful. ...Unless we know him and understand his nature and character, we cannot have perfect faith in him.” He also clarified that “Faith will avail us nothing unless it is based on true principles.”

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “It is the first principle of the gospel to know for a certainty the character of God.”¹³ And in John 17:3, we read the Savior’s words, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.”

So, what are some true principles the scriptures can teach us about the character and attributes of God? Here are a few just a few:

- Exodus 34:6, “The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.”
- 2 Nephi 26:24, “[God] doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world.”
- Psalms 103:6-8, "The Lord executes righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy:"
- James 1:17, "Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from ... the Father of lights; with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

- Alma 26:35, “He has all power, all wisdom, and all understanding; he comprehendeth all things, and he is a merciful Being, even unto salvation, to those who will repent and believe on his name.”
- 1 John 4:8 "He that loves not, knows not God; *for God is love.*" (*Emphasis added.*)

I think that last phrase pretty much sums up much of the “why” we’d choose to follow and trust in God, and with great hope! For, if we take that thought that He *is* love and let that trickle down to its implications, it’s reason that he has our very greatest interests at heart. Another look at this: If we believe that charity is an attribute found perfected in God, which it is, then we also know that God ‘suffereth long, is kind, does not envy and is not puffed up or proud, seeks not His own, is not easily provoked, and is full of hope.’¹⁴ Hone in on the phrase “seeketh not [His] own.” Again, I want to point out that his work and glory are to bring about *our* ‘eternal life and salvation.’¹⁵ I’m also guessing he is pretty good at his job.

Elder Dale G. Renlund taught, “Our Heavenly Father’s goal in parenting is not to have His children do what is right; it is to have His children choose to do what is right and ultimately become like Him. If He simply wanted us to be obedient, He would use immediate rewards and punishments to influence our behaviors.

“But God is not interested in His children just becoming trained and obedient “pets” who will not chew on His slippers in the celestial living room. No, God wants His children to grow up spiritually and join Him in the family business.”¹⁶

We can trust in God and let him prevail in our lives because we know he has a perfect love for us. He is helping us, if we let Him, realize our ultimate goal of becoming like Him. But not just because He wants it; because we chose it in the premortal life, ultimately want it, and now choose the path that leads to it. The scriptures and the prophets help us find and follow that path, such as through invitations like those offered by President Nelson.

Expecting and Seeking Miracles

One of those invitations I've also been implementing of late is to seek and expect miracles. My dear friend Millie and I have taken to checking in with each other each week (she lives in North Carolina), and after sharing about our weeks and what thoughts are in our hearts, we end by asking each other what we can specifically pray for, for the other. I recently had a faith-affirming experience watching a devotional by Elder Holland and his wife on hope¹⁷ and I felt confident in the Spiritual momentum I was working on. President Nelson has challenged us to do the Spiritual work necessary to seek miracles and affirmed that: “Few things will accelerate [our] spiritual momentum more than realizing the Lord is helping you to move a mountain in your life.”¹⁸ So we took that challenge.

That first week I asked for two very particular things to happen, believing that they would and working towards them, and sisters-that very first night, the first one came to be! The second thing followed just 4 days later. I was elated! I almost forgot to care about the reason I had wanted those things to happen in the first place; I was just so happy that God had so clearly and honestly heard and answered mine and Millie’s prayers! I felt His love so clearly, and it came to me that this was another of those “prayers about the bear” moments, where He was reminding me that He loves me and is hearing and working on answering my righteous prayers. Within a

week or two, the same thing happened with what we were focusing on for Millie. Sisters, it was miraculous. But I want to note that, in this, both Millie and I didn't just pray for the miracles and sat back. We believed they'd happen and then started to act in specific ways to encourage those miracles along. We began looking for miracles and opportunities to make them happen. Because we had faith, we both acted and started looking and seeing how God's hand was already active in our lives. Another quote by President Nelson is, "The Lord loves effort."¹⁹

This makes me think of another friend of mine who has been working towards marriage for years with her boyfriend. Due to very real mental health anxieties, they have not yet been able to take that step. They decided to work towards a miracle and set a goal of a date that they wanted to be married by. They prayed for it and planned and worked towards it. As the date neared, my friend realized there was no way it was going to happen. But rather than let that turn her bitter or lose her faith because their prayers and specific efforts to reach this goal hadn't been realized, she continued to pray and turn to God. As she and her boyfriend did so, sisters, the real miracle happened. God helped change their hearts, clear their minds, guided them in their words, and was able to miraculously ease the way to this goal of theirs. He was answering their prayers, rewarding their faith and efforts, just in the way and timing that was needed. And though they did not get married on their intended date -April 15th-they did end up getting engaged that day and are now going to be married, after 5 years of dating, on June 23rd.

I was impressed by this experience with the thought that God does answer our prayers of faith and helps us move mountains in our lives, though sometimes it can take time or look different than we first expect. Not because he doesn't love us, but because he knows all things, he won't force our agency on someone else's, and, most notably and precisely, because he does love us.

Finally, I want to share this last insight into the character of God. In his talk, "The Grandeur of God," given at General Conference in October of 2003, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland shares the following truths. He points out, "...that in all that Jesus came to say and do, including and especially in His atoning suffering and sacrifice, He was showing us who and what God our Eternal Father is like, how completely devoted He is to His children in every age and nation. In word and in deed Jesus was trying to reveal and make personal to us the true nature of His Father, our Father in Heaven.

"He did this at least in part because then and now all of us need to know God more fully in order to love Him more deeply and obey Him more completely."

Elder Holland also recently addressed one of these characteristics of Christ, and thus of God, which we can learn about in Christ's admonition to his disciples during the last supper to 'be of good cheer.'²⁰

Elder Holland asks, "How could Jesus speak of cheerfulness in the midst of all the anguish that He faced moving toward the Crucifixion? Even in the fateful atmosphere that must have prevailed at the Last Supper, Christ is still reminding His disciples of the reason, and their duty, to "be of good cheer." I have wondered, with the pain that lay ahead of Him, how He could speak so positively... Surely, this manifestation of His faith, of His hope and charity, comes because He knows the end of the story. He knows righteousness prevails when final accounts are completed. He knows that light always conquers darkness forever and forever and forever. He knows His Father in Heaven never gives a commandment without also providing the way to

fulfill it. A victory makes everyone cheerful, and Christ was the victor in His great contest with death and hell...Christ triumphant is the source of our hope.”²¹

I love that we have so much to hope for because of Jesus Christ and our loving Heavenly Father, especially as we let them prevail in our lives.

One of the first scriptures to touch my heart as a youth is found in Mosiah 4, verses 9-10. They read, “Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend.

“And again, believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God, and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them.”

Sisters, once we come to a knowledge of God, or a belief in Him and a belief in His love for us, once we look and find His hand in our lives through the blessings we’ve received, it can be easier to let God prevail in our lives. Let us be true to that knowledge and belief and choose to act on it. Even if you, “can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until [you] believe in a manner that [you] can give place for a portion of”²² God’s words and promises and those of his prophets.

Sisters, let us trust him and his prophets, who he speaks to us through. Let us let him “exist” and be found present in our lives, commonly found in our homes, speech, and through the choices we make. Let us accept Him even, or especially, after a struggle or an argument-as the definition of prevail suggests. Let us allow God to prevail in our lives. As we do so, I restate President Nelson’s promise that we will experience miracles. The blessings may come as bright and bold miracles, experiences that are easy to recognize. Or they may come more slowly over time, through day-to-day things building on one another, such as the miracle of a slow, continual movement toward a change of heart. Those are miracles, too, and perhaps are more important as they can be lasting and part of our eternal growth and ultimate salvation. Elder Bednar once gave a talk on receiving revelation, how sometimes it’s like a light switch being turned on, but other times it comes on gradually, almost imperceptibly over time, like a sunrise.²³ I think miracles and blessings can be like that too. Sometimes they are quick and obvious, undeniable, but perhaps more often, they come gradually, the miracle building over time like a sunrise. And that’s beautiful. We all know sunrises are beautiful.

I’d like to end with a scripture from Jacob 4:6, “Wherefore, we search the prophets, and we have many revelation and the Spirit of prophecy; and having all these witnesses we obtain a hope, and our faith becometh unshaken, insomuch that we truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains (such as the mountains in our lives), or the waves of the sea.”

I hope and pray that we will actively choose to let God prevail a little more in our lives each day, that we will look for, seek, and expect those promised miracles in return, and that through all this, we will ultimately find everlasting joy with our loving Father in Heaven. I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ Russell M. Nelson, ““Let God Prevail,” October 2020.

² Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries. See “prevail.”

³ C. S. Lewis, “Mere Christianity,” January 1942.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, “A Grief Observed” 1976.

⁵ Francine R. Bennion, “A Latter-day Saint Theology of Suffering.” March 1986.

⁶ Thomas S. Monsoon, “Becoming Our Best Selves.” October 1999.

⁷ Henry B. Eyring, “O Remember, Remember.” October 2007.

⁸ Nephi 23:9-13.

⁹ Steven L. Olsen, “Memory and Identity in the Book of Mormon.” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, vol 22: no. 2, article 5 (2013), 42.

¹⁰ Count Your Blessings,” Hymns, no. 241.

¹¹ Moses 1:39.

¹² See Institute: Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual, “Contributions of the Doctrine and Covenants to an Understanding of Jesus Christ,” Gospel Library.

¹³ Joseph Smith, “Discourse, 7 April 1844, As Published in *Times and Seasons*,” www.josephsmithpapers.org.

¹⁴ See Moroni 7:45.

¹⁵ See Moses 1:39.

¹⁶ Dale G. Renlund, “Choose You This Day,” October 2018.

¹⁷ Jeffrey R. Holland & Patricia T. Holland, “A Future Filled with Hope,” January 2023.

¹⁸ Russell M. Nelson, “The Power of Spiritual Momentum,” April 2022.

¹⁹ Quoted in: Joy D. Jones, “An Especially Noble Calling” April 2020.

²⁰ See John 16:33.

²¹ Jeffrey R. Holland & Patricia T. Holland, “A Future Filled with Hope,” January 2023.

²² See Alma 32:27.

²³ See David A. Bednar, “The Spirit of Revelation,” April 2011.