

“Come Boldly [with Confidence]...Find Grace to Help in Time of Need”

Nora Nyland Kerr

This address was given Thursday, May 1, 2014 at the BYU Women’s Conference

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For further information write:

BYU Women’s Conference

161 Harman Continuing Education Building

Provo, Utah 84602

801-422-7692

E-mail: womens_conference@byu.edu

Home page: <http://womensconference.byu.edu>

Important insights can come in unexpected places and times. I had one such insight a number of years ago in a hotel in Texas. It was the lunch break at a meeting where after lunch I was to make a presentation regarding teaching students about the Code of Ethics for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Now I hadn’t prepared the presentation; it was a canned speech prepared by a central committee for seven different people to present at seven different regional educator meetings. I find it difficult to present something I didn’t prepare because if I don’t develop the ideas and the flow, they just don’t stick in my brain well.

So I finished my meal and retired to my room to collect my materials and to pray for help in remembering and presenting this important topic. As I arose from my knees, I was absolutely confident that I would receive help and that the presentation would go well. Walking from my room to the elevator and riding down to the meeting area, I had a conversation with myself—I hope I’m not the only one who does that! I said to myself, “I wonder why I’m so confident that Heavenly Father will help me after my prayer. This is important to me, but it certainly doesn’t have eternal significance.” And the response that filled me completely was, “Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God.”

That scripture from Doctrine and Covenants 121:45 has implications far broader and deeper than making presentations somewhere in Texas, but it was the distinct and direct answer to my query. Almost every time I read that scripture, which in its entirety says, “Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven,” I think back to that experience.

What I find so comforting and encouraging about my elevator experience is that I am far from perfect in any area, let alone in the areas addressed in the scripture. I try to be full of charity, but I often run a bit low. I try to let virtue garnish my thought unceasingly, but sometimes it ceases. Heavenly Father, however, acknowledges my efforts enough that my confidence before Him does wax strong.

Hebrews 4:16, “Let us therefore **come boldly** unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and **find grace to help in time of need**” [emphasis added], is not a scripture I’d paid a lot of attention to, but as I began pondering and praying about it, I recalled my Texas insight and gained a few more. I’d like to talk about three of those insights: first, the nature of bold confidence—why we can have confidence in God; second, the nature of grace and why can we have confidence in ourselves; and third, combining confidence and grace to find help in time of need.

The word “boldly” in this scripture is interpreted as “with confidence.” So what is confidence and why do we need confidence in God and in ourselves? I’ve always loved looking up words in the dictionary, and it offers several definitions of confidence, including a feeling or belief that someone or something is good or has the ability to succeed at something, and a feeling or belief that you can do something well or succeed at something. Do you have confidence that Heavenly Father and the Savior are good and have the ability to succeed at their task of bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of man? Do you have confidence in you, that you are good and can succeed at following God’s plan for you?

Most of us find it easier to have confidence in someone we know something about. That’s why, in the King Follett Discourse, the Prophet Joseph Smith said: “It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God” (*Ensign*, April 1971, 12).

If there is anyone who can speak with authority about the nature of the Godhead, it’s Joseph Smith. He spoke to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ face to face. He witnessed their form and received revelation and instruction from them. From his personal experience and his inspired study of the Bible, he really knew those whom we worship. So in the winter of 1834 and 1835, the Prophet prepared a series of lessons for a class of elders in Kirtland, Ohio. These seven lessons became known as the *Lectures on Faith*, and were actually published as part of the Doctrine and Covenants from 1835 until 1921. The *Lectures on Faith* were intended to teach the character of God and provide instruction for understanding the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

Well, what did the Prophet Joseph teach us? Here are some of the characteristics God possesses as listed in the third Lecture:

- He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in goodness;
- He does not change, neither does he vary;
- He is a God of truth and cannot lie;
- He is no respecter of persons; and
- He is love.

Can you have confidence in someone with those qualities? I can.

Here is a final statement from the third Lecture that really confirms our ability to trust God:

“And again, the idea that he is a God of truth and cannot lie is equally as necessary to the exercise of faith in him as is the idea of his unchangeableness. For without the idea that he is a God of truth and cannot lie, men could not have the confidence in his word necessary to exercise

faith in him. But having the idea that he is not a man who can lie gives power to the minds of men to exercise faith in him.”

Isn't that a most comforting thought? We can come boldly, or with confidence, to the throne of grace precisely because, while we are not perfect, He is. Our faith, trust, and confidence are centered in a divine and loving God. He has told us that “My grace is sufficient for you,” and He cannot lie.

Having confidence doesn't mean we should have an entitled assumption that Heavenly Father will give us what we want when we want it, but rather a faithful expectation that an all-knowing and all-loving Father will answer our humble supplications in the way that is ultimately for our best good. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego showed this kind of confidence when they were cast into the fiery furnace for refusing to worship the golden image King Nebuchadnezzar created. They told the king, “our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Daniel 3:17–18).

Now to the insight about grace and confidence in ourselves. Even though we know all of those things about Heavenly Father and the Savior, and even though we may think we should or even do have confidence in them, there is often a disconnect in our thinking—we believe in Them and Their grace in the abstract but not in the particular as relating to ourselves. We somehow think we are exempt from that grace, mercy, and love. Perhaps that is because we do not have confidence in ourselves, and coming boldly to the throne of grace requires both confidence in God and confidence in self.

For some reason, we let the fact that we are mortal beings with mortal weaknesses cloud our self-assessment. If Heavenly Father expected us to *be* perfect, rather than *become* perfect, He would not have provided a Savior because there would be no need for one. But He did provide a Savior who loves us and whose grace makes it possible for us to progress. C. S. Lewis captured this thought when he wrote, “Be ye perfect (Matthew 5:48). Some people seem to think this means ‘Unless you are perfect, I will not help you’; and as we cannot be perfect, then, if He meant that, our position is hopeless. But I do not think He did mean that. I think He meant ‘The only help I will give is to help to become perfect. You may want something less: but I will give you nothing less.’ . . . ‘Make no mistake,’ He says, ‘if you let me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in my hands, that is what you are in for. Nothing less, or other, than that. You will have free will, and if you choose, you can push Me away. But if you do not push me away, understand that I am going to see this job through. . . . I will never rest, nor let you rest, until you are literally perfect. . . . This I can do and will do. But I will not do anything less” (*Mere Christianity*, Book 4, Chapter 9, “Counting the Cost”).

That thought—that you *can* choose to push Christ away, but if you don't push Him away, you are going to be assisted all the way to perfection—is vital. I'm convinced that the vast majority of Christ's followers simply are *not* pushing Him away. Rather, we're troubled by the recognition of our imperfections and our sins. We so desperately want to be perfect that we become discouraged and impatient with the perfection process. By the way, the Prophet Joseph

taught that that process will go on for a great while after we have passed through the veil, so impatience doesn't seem really practical. It is, however, normal. Even Nephi, when concluding his record, said, "and ye shall know that I have been commanded of him to write these things, notwithstanding my weakness[es]" (2 Nephi 33:11). But Nephi didn't let feelings of weakness keep him from seeking God's grace and accomplishing His work, and neither should we.

It's probably been 15 years since I first read the definition of grace in the Bible Dictionary. I was astounded because I thought I had a basic understanding of grace. However, I had focused only on the effect of grace on the hereafter, and really didn't appreciate its effect on the here and now.

Let me read part of the definition:

"The main idea of the word [grace] is divine means of help or strength, given through the bounteous mercy and love of Jesus Christ. It is through the grace of the Lord Jesus, made possible by his atoning sacrifice, that mankind will be raised in immortality, every person receiving his body from the grave in a condition of everlasting life. It is likewise through the grace of the Lord that individuals, through faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance of their sins, receive strength and assistance to do good works that they otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to their own means. This grace is an enabling power that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own best efforts. Divine grace is needed by every soul in consequence of the fall of Adam and also because of man's weaknesses and shortcomings. However, grace cannot suffice without total effort on the part of the recipient. Hence the explanation, 'It is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do' (2 Ne. 25:23). It is truly the grace of Jesus Christ that makes salvation possible" (*Bible Dictionary*, p. 697).

I think the phrase "after all we can do" is what makes so many of us lose confidence in ourselves. It's easy to think there is a measured amount of grace, and it cannot be activated until we collapse in a heap after expending our very best. How do we know when we've given our best; how do we know when it's all we can do so that we're worthy of some grace? But that's simply not how grace works. An abundance of grace operates in conjunction with our own efforts every day. It's not held in reserve until some point in the distant future.

In a 2011 BYU Devotional address entitled "His Grace is Sufficient," Brad Wilcox describes a common misconception about the Savior's grace.

"One young man wrote me the following e-mail: 'I know God has all power, and I know He will help me if I'm worthy, but I'm just never worthy enough to ask for His help. I want Christ's grace, but I always find myself stuck in the same self-defeating and impossible position: no work, no grace.'

"I wrote him back and testified with all my heart that Christ is not waiting at the [end of the] finish line once we have done all we can do. He is with us every step of the way."

He continues, "Elder Bruce C. Hafen has written, 'The Savior's gift of grace to us is not necessarily limited in time to "after" all we can do. We may receive his grace before, during, and

after the time when we expend our own efforts' (*The Broken Heart*, Deseret Book, p. 155). So grace is not a booster engine that kicks in once our fuel supply is exhausted. Rather, it is our constant energy source. It is not the light at the end of the tunnel but the light that moves us through the tunnel. Grace is not achieved somewhere down the road. It is received right here and right now. It is not a finishing touch; it is the Finisher's touch. . . . The grace of Christ is sufficient—sufficient to cover our debt, sufficient to transform us, and sufficient to help us as long as that transformation process takes. The Book of Mormon teaches us to rely solely on 'the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah' (2 Nephi 2:8). As we do, . . . we discover the reason He requires so much and the strength to do all He asks (see Philippians 4:13). Grace is not the absence of God's high expectations. Grace is the presence of God's power (see Luke 1:37)."

Grace doesn't replace good works, nor do good works replace grace, in either our final salvation nor in our daily attempts to become more like the Savior as we face our challenges. On the debate over faith and good works, C.S. Lewis said, "I have no right really to speak on such a difficult question, but it does seem to me like asking which blade in a pair of scissors is most necessary" (*Mere Christianity*, New York: HarperCollins edition, p. 148)

What a great analogy! If you've ever cut paper or fabric, you know that the blades must be aligned or the scissors won't cut. One blade doesn't work for a while and then the other blade takes over—they operate in tandem to accomplish their work. We can have confidence in ourselves as we approach the throne of grace, because our Father and our Savior will work in tandem with us as we work our way through mortality. They know we can succeed because They established a plan specifically designed for weak mortals like us.

Finally, let's talk about finding grace in time of need. When I looked up the word *graceful* in the dictionary, I expected to find at least one obscure definition having something to do with spiritual grace. To my surprise there wasn't anything like that. So right here, today, we're going to create a definition.

Here is it—graceful: displaying the spiritual confidence available through the Atonement of the Savior, Jesus Christ; using the enabling power of grace for strength and assistance in doing good works. For our purposes, then, being graceful has nothing to do with gliding down a staircase or across a dance floor; it's all about facing life with the enabling power of the Savior.

You probably don't have to think really hard to come up with the last time you were in need. Our challenges are carefully calculated to turn us toward Heavenly Father and the Savior, so what constitutes a time of need will vary from person to person and even from season to season in life. Perhaps you have caught yourself saying, "It's always something," emphasis on the *something*, meaning that disappointments, irritations, challenges and even tragedies seem to crop up regularly. But when we're graceful, that statement sounds like this: It's *always* something. With grace there is *always* something that helps, lifts, or guides us. It can be the kindness of a stranger or a friend; the scriptural passage that leaps off the page and brings understanding; the priesthood blessing that brings calm or healing; the gift of forgiveness; miracles large, miracles small; daffodils, a sunset, and well, you get the idea.

I'd like to give just a few examples of finding grace in time of need. One has to do with church service. Most members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have had at least one

calling that seemed completely outside their interests or beyond their ability to accomplish, but the call was accepted anyway. No calling we can ever receive, however, will match the overwhelming call Mary received to be the mother of Jesus. We read the account of that call in Luke chapter 1. Some of my favorite verses are when the angel Gabriel says, “For with God nothing shall be impossible” and when Mary said, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.” Then a bit later, Mary said, “My soul doth magnify the Lord. And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” The record doesn’t tell us a lot about the time between the angel’s visit and the Savior’s birth, but my guess is that Mary spent much time in prayer seeking help from Heavenly Father, and that she both expected to and did receive it. I would also imagine that Mary and Joseph frequently sought God’s direction while raising Jesus. Mary and Joseph shared a challenging calling, and both received grace to do it well.

I think it’s fair to assume that Heavenly Father realizes that we’re the only thing He has to work with, and despite that, or probably because of that, He is ready to inspire us, buoy us, and enlarge our capacities, notwithstanding our weaknesses, if we seek him with the humble confidence that He will do so. Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, “Having genuine faith in God clearly requires not only believing that He is there but also that He is cosmically competent—that He can really bring to pass His purposes” (*The Christmas Scene*, Bookcraft, 1994, p. 7).

Another example: In the summer of 1969, my sister, Gloria, was 27 years old with little boys ages four and two and a four-month-old daughter. In July of that year, her husband drowned. Before I tell you the story I really want to tell you, I’m jumping ahead to the happy ending. All three of her children served missions and all have advanced degrees; all married in the temple and are parents of their own children. After 20 years of widowhood, Gloria married a wonderful widower, and they have been married for 25 years. May I just tell you that there were many miracles while my sister was raising her family? Gloria would tell you that it surely was because of grace that she was enabled to do what she could not do by herself. She truly received the divine means of help or strength given through the bounteous mercy and love of Jesus Christ. She was graceful.

Now let me go back to a harder time and tell you about one of those miracles of grace.

Because her children were so small, my sister really did not want to work outside the home. So until that baby girl was about 10 years old, Gloria did occasional freelance work using her excellent typing and editing skills, but her main source of income was Social Security survivor benefits. She developed an astonishing ability to stretch a dollar—in fact, to this day she can tell you where you’ll find the best bargain on virtually anything in a 15-mile radius! Well, in 1974 the United States economy was experiencing terrible inflation that made it increasingly difficult to stretch her dollars far enough. Gloria was more and more concerned about how she could pay the rent, keep the car going, and feed her family. One morning she slipped out of bed and went directly to her knees, pouring out her heart to Heavenly Father and asking Him to help her know what to do. She had not yet finished her prayer, and while still on her knees, the telephone rang. She picked it up, and her brother-in-law said, “Gloria, we’ve been thinking about you, and starting today, we’re going to send you \$50 a month to help with your expenses.” Though it may not sound like a lot today, in 1974 and for the next several years, that \$50 made an enormous difference to my sister.

Another time of need arises when contemplating or experiencing a major life change. Some among many life changes are marriage or divorce, having children or emptying the nest, deciding on a career change or whether or not to return to school. Just two years ago, I experienced a tremendous time of need involving a life change.

One Saturday I received a letter from a complete stranger. He introduced himself as the husband of my former roommate who had passed away about a year before. (She and I had lost touch for nearly 35 years, but had reconnected a few years earlier when her daughter became one of my students.) The letter went on to say that soon after his wife had been diagnosed with terminal cancer, she suggested to him that if he wanted to remarry after she passed away, he should get acquainted with Nora Nyland.

When I picked the letter back up, I read that he was suggesting we correspond (he lived 1,200 miles away), but only if I was interested. He told me a little more about himself and his family, and then ended by saying he would like to hear from me, but he would understand if I did not want to exchange letters. Well, I didn't want to. However, while I was trying to think of the most polite way to say, "Are you crazy?!?" I had a distinct impression that I should not answer the letter that way. And frankly, I was upset. Ever since I had graduated from college, my life had been rich, full, and rewarding. I had assumed I would marry, but when that hadn't happened by my early 40s, I remember thinking one day, "Well, isn't that interesting—I guess I won't marry in this life." And except for the occasional bout of thinking, "It's not easy being single in a family-oriented church," I continued to have a rich, full, and rewarding life, something I credit to multiple doses of grace.

Anyway, I knew a prompting when I received one, and so I wrote back. Like Enos, I knew that God could not lie, but I kind of hoped He was kidding. Over the next several months I had many doubts and fears, but I also had many clear manifestations that I should continue on this path. I really did not want to change my life, and left to my own devices, I wouldn't have. My courtship and marriage at age 60 required more faith than anything I have ever done. There was nothing logical about what I was doing, yet every time I wanted to back out, I received the enabling power of peace in my heart that propelled me past the doubt in my head. And I can honestly say that my husband is the sweetest and most unexpected blessing of my life.

We have a most magnificent gift—grace. Let us have our confidence in Heavenly Father and the Savior permeate our thoughts and our actions. Let us remember that the God who cannot lie said, "My grace is sufficient for you." Let us therefore go through life gracefully. I testify that we may indeed find grace to help in time of need. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.