

“Notwithstanding My Weakness”: Removing the Feeling of Forever Falling Short
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Good morning, sisters. Sister Craig and I are so happy to see you here today. Thank you for sharing your time with us. You may not realize it, but the light you each brought into this center is a source of strength to us all. Doesn’t it feel good to be together?

The topic we’re addressing is one we believe we all relate to—at least I do! I am painfully aware of my weakness and my weaknesses. And I’m certain I have many more that I’m just not willing to ask Heavenly Father to show me right now. What I love about our Father in Heaven is that He is not fixated on our weakness or what we can or cannot do. He is focused on our progress! He is focused on *us*!

It's important to understand that weakness and sin are not the same thing. Sin is willfully disobeying God’s commandments or failing to act righteously despite knowing truth.¹ Sin is a choice that leads us away from God.

Weakness, in contrast, is a “condition of being mortal.”² It’s the lack of ability, strength, or skill and is part of each of us in unique and individual ways. Remember, we came to earth knowing absolutely *nothing!* But isn’t it wonderful that we are here? Just think of all you have learned! We wanted this mortal experience where we could acquire knowledge and learn through a variety of experiences how to make good choices and grow to become like our heavenly parents.

Unlike sin, weakness can bring us *closer* to God. We learn in the book of Ether, chapter 12, that the Lord gave us weakness in the hope that we would become humble and teachable enough for Him to transform our weak places into strongholds. This growth comes line upon line until we someday reach perfection. But sisters, it will not happen in this life! *So, breathe!*

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland stated: “If we persevere, then somewhere in eternity our refinement will be finished and complete—which is the New Testament meaning of *perfection*.”³

But the Lord doesn’t wait for that transformation to be finished before giving us important responsibilities. In fact, He uses us to accomplish His work, *in* our weakness, *with* our weakness, and *despite* our weakness. Somehow, He trusts us right now in our current condition!

Have you ever considered your weakness to be a gift from God to promote humility and growth? How can this change your perspective of who you are and who God knows you can become?

TRUST AMID UNCERTAINTY

I recently became friends with a remarkable 14-year-old young woman from Colorado named Preslee.

I first became acquainted with Preslee when I heard an inspiring message she shared on an app that supports our *Come, Follow Me* study. With Preslee’s permission, I’d like to share her message with you.

Preslee was born with cerebral palsy. Her disability restricts many of her physical capabilities, including her ability to walk. If Preslee *chose* to, she could spend her energy absorbed in comparisons: Why can’t I run like you? Why is your handwriting easier to read than mine? Why can’t I dress myself, take ballet lessons, or play soccer like you? Why was I given *this* particular challenge? It seems so much harder than yours.

Of course, Preslee wishes she could do more. And I’m sure there are moments or even days filled with tears. But Preslee **chooses** *not* to let her *physical* weakness overshadow the strength of her beautiful *spiritual gifts* or impede her capacity to grow. She understands that the mortal weakness of her body does not determine her divine destiny. I love how Preslee boldly testifies that even with the uncertainty of her future, she has nothing to worry about. She has not quit or even slowed down. She continues to move forward in her faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement by placing her trust in Him and His promise:

“If they ... have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.”⁴

Preslee’s motto? “I can do hard things!” And she does!

Like Preslee, we each face uncertainty and challenges. It’s part of our earthly journey. So is weakness. But don’t forget—weakness is mortal, but like Preslee, we are divine!

One of the greatest oppositions to moving forward, “notwithstanding [our] weakness,”⁵ is Satan himself. To stop *the work of the Lord* from progressing, Satan campaigns diligently to stop *us* from progressing. And he can be pretty good at it. If he can break our inner spirit, bring doubt

into our mind, destroy our confidence, or undermine our divine identity, our growth can be stunted.

For the most part, we know our own weak spots. And Satan knows that we know them. Thus, he capitalizes on our insecurities by endeavoring to change our view about our worth. For instance, rather than seeing our God-given weakness as a space to grow, we begin to view it as an impassable barrier. Soon, feelings of hopelessness, inferiority, and worthlessness creep in.

We quit seeing the things we *do imperfectly* as a failure—I failed—and start believing ***I am a failure!***

We no longer see things we do wrong as a mistake—I made a mistake— but embrace the lie ***I am a mistake!***

This type of belief leads to the most catastrophic and crippling form of ***identity crisis***. It prompts additional feelings like:

- I am broken.
- I am nothing.
- I am invisible.
- I am not (whatever) enough.
- I am stuck.
- I am alone.

Sisters, we cannot bury ourselves in this murky propaganda of the adversary. In all our weakness, we are stronger than he is. We are daughters of divine parentage. Our covenants give us power to overcome such deception. The challenge, however, is remembering who we are. Every. Single. Day!

Now, let's look at how Heavenly Father treats us in our weakness, and even in our mistakes:

- He forgives.
- He assures.
- He encourages.
- He inspires.
- He comforts.
- He strengthens.

With faith and trust in Jesus Christ, we are neither stuck nor alone! He invites us to get in the yoke *with* Him, where He will help us move forward, even if it's only a few inches at a time.

DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

When I was younger, I used to visualize myself moving through life on an upward line or slope. That's just the way I remember my Sunday School teachers drawing the plan of salvation on the chalkboard. The more I thought I was doing okay, the more I felt I was going to make it to heaven. **But** as soon as an unkind word slipped out of my mouth, or I got angry or impatient, I felt myself slide all the way down that slope—hitting rock bottom every time! It was as if all the things I **was** doing right had been erased and I had to start *everything* all over again! *I became the failure* and was confident that *I could never be good enough* to make it to the celestial kingdom. It was depressing.

Now looking back, I clearly see how I was caught in Satan's pattern of demoralization.

My life changed when I began to understand the doctrine of Christ and how to apply it in my life. I found hope, encouragement, and light. The doctrine of Christ is the Lord's *pattern of change and growth*.

It begins with faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement. By placing our *faith* and focus on the Savior, we are prompted to grow and make modifications in our lives to become more like Him. We want to **repent**, grow, and change.

President Russell M. Nelson said, “When we choose to repent, we choose to change!”⁶ As we choose to repent, our desire to make and keep covenants with God increases. We choose to be *baptized* and receive the *gift of the Holy Ghost*. The Holy Ghost inspires us to make additional covenants in the temple and *endure to the end*.

Enduring to the end means changing to the end, and so we repeat this continuous cycle of growth throughout our lives. As we continue to apply the doctrine of Christ, we receive His grace, which is the enabling power and spiritual healing offered through the mercy and love of Jesus Christ.

“The grace of God helps us every day. It strengthens us to do [those things] we could not do on our own. The Lord promised that if we humble ourselves before Him and have faith in Him, His grace will help us overcome all our personal weaknesses.”⁷

As I continued to follow the pattern in the doctrine of Christ, I began to recognize the good I *was* doing, and not only the failures that seemed to be continually destroying my confidence. I felt empowered. I started to see how each day I could try and be a little better. And when I did give in to weakness, I didn’t feel myself tumble the entire way to the ground. Instead of beating myself up, I picked myself up where I left off and tried to do better the next time. I grew to LOVE the cherished gift of repentance!

This scripture found in Alma 34:31 is one of my favorites about repentance: “If ye will repent and harden not your hearts, *immediately* shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you.”⁸

The word *immediately* is significant. It does not mean that we will be immediately forgiven. Sometimes that takes time. But when we approach the Lord with a humble and repentant heart, *immediately* He will begin to work within us, and the blessings of His Atonement will flow into our lives. That is a powerful and reassuring promise!

We all make mistakes, and we all need to repent—every day. We cannot become perfect in mortality, but we can be headed in that direction! We can seek to improve each day, showing the Lord our *effort* to become a little better and more like Him. And we know how the Lord feels about effort!

Our beloved prophet taught: “Because the Savior, through His infinite Atonement, redeemed each of us from weakness, mistakes, and sin, and because He experienced every pain, worry, and burden you have ever had, then as you truly repent and seek His help, you can rise above this present precarious world. ...

“Overcoming the world is not an event that happens in a day or two. It happens over a lifetime as we repeatedly embrace the doctrine of Christ. We cultivate faith in Jesus Christ by repenting daily and keeping covenants that endow us with power. We stay on the covenant path and are blessed with spiritual strength, personal revelation, increasing faith, and the ministering of angels. Living the doctrine of Christ can produce the most powerful virtuous cycle, creating spiritual momentum in our lives.”⁹ [end quote]

SLIPPING INTO WORTHLESSNESS

I admit that I occasionally migrate into that space where “*I am a failure!*” It can be easy to do! And for whatever reason, I feel weakest when I’m fasting.

I attended a sacrament meeting not too long ago in a local ward. I happened to be fasting and feeling particularly vulnerable. As I looked over the congregation, I beheld a mass of faithful members who had come to partake of the sacrament and worship together. They radiated light and goodness, and I was grateful to be with them. But then out of the blue, that light I had been drawn to suddenly made my light seem very dim. Feelings of total inadequacy quickly and completely filled me—both body and spirit. I felt so small and could not contain my tears. I was embarrassed and closed my eyes as if I was praying, hoping no one would notice. Since my eyes were already closed, I began praying mightily for reassurance and strength. And then the sweetest sound began flowing from the organ.

We began to sing:

“I know that my Redeemer lives.

What comfort this sweet sentence gives! ...

He lives to grant me rich supply.

He lives to guide me with his eye.

He lives to comfort me when faint.

He lives to hear my soul’s complaint.

He lives to silence all my fears.

He lives to wipe away my tears.

He lives to calm my troubled heart.

He lives all blessings to impart.”¹⁰

My tears were not wiped away. In fact, they multiplied. But they changed from tears of self-pity to tears of gratitude. Heavenly Father had heard my prayer and had given me a much-needed assurance. He answered it during what I thought was a randomly picked meeting entirely

determined by my schedule! But He knew where I needed to be that morning to hear His voice through a hymn to calm my troubled heart. Although we are not perfect, we are perfectly known.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland shared: “The first great *commandment* of all eternity is to love God with all *our* heart, might, mind, and strength—that’s the first great commandment. But the first great *truth* of all eternity is that God loves *us* with all of *His* heart, might, mind, and strength.”¹¹

NEGATIVE SPACE

Sometimes, sisters, we just need to push away some of the clutter in our lives to bring into focus what matters most. Clutter, whether it’s a messy home or a messy schedule, can cause feelings of anxiety and stress and can cloud our ability to recognize the promptings of the Spirit or feel the love of God.

My degree is in interior design. There is a principle in design called negative space. In home design, especially in the field of decorating, there is a tendency to overdecorate, over-prop, and over-fluff—making sure that *every* vertical and *every* horizontal space in the room has something on it! Each item may have special meaning or may have been carefully handpicked, but when *every* space is occupied, the eye does not know where to land. It bounces from wall to wall and from item to item, wondering where to settle. It cannot find the intended focal point.

Negative space is the principle of leaving some areas blank, unadorned, or empty so the positive space, or focal point, is easily noticed.

When we overdecorate our lives with too many “things,” it becomes hard to see the focal point—those things of most worth. Our overcrowded lives can leave us physically, emotionally, and spiritually exhausted! In these circumstances, we are more susceptible to feelings of discouragement, self-doubt, and failure. Being overprogrammed, even with good things, makes it

difficult for the Holy Ghost to gain our attention. We then miss out on the direction, peace, assurance, and encouragement He offers.

Sisters, can we make space for the Lord to fill our hearts? Even a moment of quiet or connection with heaven can refocus us.

PATIENCE AND PACE

Since life is neither a race nor a competition, we do not need to run faster or labor more than we have strength.¹² *We can pace our progress.* We can be patient with ourselves and with others.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell gave this wonderful counsel about being patient with ourselves as we progress: “If there were too much swiftness, there could be no long-suffering, no gradual soul-stretching, nor repenting. With too little time to absorb, to assimilate, and to apply the truths already given, our capacities would not be fully developed. Pearls cast before us would go unfound, ungathered, and unsavored. It takes time to prepare for eternity.”¹³

PERFECTIONISM

We are not expected to *BE* perfect in our mortal state, nor are we expected to *DO* everything perfectly. Remember, we are doing many things for the first time in our lives—and I don’t just mean our earthly lives!

I was offered some excellent counsel before I gave my first general conference talk. It was given to me by a former General Officer who spoke from experience. She said, “You know, your talks don’t have to be great, they just have to be good!” Her wisdom was well said and well received! It helped ease my anxiety and gave me a better view of reality. So, my talk-giving standard is this: Just:

- Don't embarrass myself.
- Don't embarrass my family.
- And above all else, PLEASE, don't embarrass the Church!

Anything good that may come from the talk after those three conditions are met is a bonus!

I'm not really great at anything, but there are many things I love doing. Although we can always strive to do things better and be better, we must work to avoid the "Three Cs."

Do not criticize, complain, or compare. We each have our own path and our own pace of growing and learning. We need to give each other and ourselves a much-needed break. In fact, we should compliment, champion, and celebrate our own and each other's progress. And even more, we can show compassion, courage, caring, curiosity, cheer, consideration, and cooperation.

As we offer this generosity to ourselves and others, we will come to know the joy Heavenly Father has in store for us—the same joy that Preslee has found because she chooses to focus on the Savior more than the struggle. We too can focus on Christ more than our weakness. "He is the source of all joy."¹⁴ If we are missing the joy—His joy—in our journey, we are missing everything!

Sisters, like the incredible Preslee, *you are magnificent!* If you cannot see that, please accept *our certainty* that you are. As you attend this conference this week, we pray that you will feel an increase in the power and assurance that comes from knowing who you are. You are glorious. Your light shines through any dark spaces you may perceive you are in. And when we unite as women bound to the Savior, our light will permeate the world more majestically and brilliantly than all the stars in the heavens.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ See Guide to the Scriptures, “Sin,” scriptures.ChurchofJesusChrist.org; see also James 4:17.

² Guide to the Scriptures, “Weakness,” scriptures.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.

³ Jeffrey R. Holland, “Be Ye Therefore Perfect—Eventually,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2017.

⁴ Ether 12:27.

⁵ 2 Nephi 33:11.

⁶ Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2019.

⁷ Gospel Topics, “Grace,” topics.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.

⁸ Alma 34:31; emphasis added.

⁹ Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2022.

¹⁰ “I Know That My Redeemer Lives,” *Hymns*, no. 136.

¹¹ Jeffrey R. Holland, “Tomorrow the Lord Will Do Wonders among You,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2016.

¹² See Doctrine and Covenants 10:4.

¹³ Neal A. Maxwell, “Meek and Lowly” (Brigham Young University devotional, Oct. 21, 1986), speeches.byu.edu.

¹⁴ Russell M. Nelson, “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2016.