

“Turning to the Savior and His Atonement in Life’s ‘Small Moments’”

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“Who am I to judge another when I walk imperfectly? In the quiet heart is hidden sorrow that the eye can’t see.”¹

We all have these moments. The times when we feel alone, forgotten, hurt, and forsaken. The moments when we, like the Prophet Joseph may feel to call out “Oh God, where art Thou?”² Each of us will, at times, experience the heavy weight of life’s burdens. It may be problems within our families, grappling with faith-related issues, or waiting for promised blessings that just haven’t quite yet come to be. It might be dealing with past events, things you’ve done wrong, or unfair things that have been done to you. Or it could be facing physical, mental, or emotional challenges that seem overwhelming.³

How do we face such moments? Elder Neil L. Andersen encouraged us, “Never give up—however deep the wounds of your soul, whatever their source, wherever or whenever they happen, and however short or long they persist, [because] you are not meant to perish spiritually. You are meant to survive spiritually and blossom in your faith and trust in God...Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, through the incalculable gift of His Atonement...stands ready to save us from the sorrows and pains of our wounded souls.”⁴

Sisters, the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ enables us to overcome all sorrow, disappointment, depression, and trials of life. As President Russell M. Nelson taught, “The joy we feel has little to do with the *circumstances* of our lives and everything to do with the *focus* of our lives.”⁵ As we turn to the Savior and make Him our focus and His Atonement an active part of our lives, we *will* find joy despite our adversities.

Today I'd like to share five principles that, if embraced, will help us to focus on the Savior, and turn our hidden sorrows and *small moments* of pain and unfairness into precious opportunities for spiritual growth.

To illustrate these principles, I'd like to introduce you to five dear friends. Each represents a principle of turning to the Savior and applying His Atonement. Each has faced her own *small moment* of adversity. Some of their sorrows may seem obvious, but each has her own *hidden sorrows* as well that may not be immediately apparent. I hope that as you meet them and hear their stories—in their own words—you will find inspiration and see how turning to the Savior and His Atonement can bless your lives in similar times of trial.

First, Mary has taught me how turning to the Savior as we face hidden sorrows, and the unfairness of life allows us to *exercise faith in and commitment to God's plan for us*.

Here is Mary's story, "Sometimes, I think, women do not have a single hidden hurt but rather a constellation of challenges and pains that can seem too complex and interrelated to even fully identify oneself—let alone figure out how to ask for help. For example, within the last year, we have lost my mother and an unborn grandson, my younger brother's serious mental health issues have worsened dramatically, my older brother has been diagnosed with cancer, my closest confidante at work has moved away, and I have made the decision to retire so that I can better deal with increasing family pressures. Additionally, within the last three weeks, we have gone from my husband's going in for a routine physical to quadruple bypass heart surgery followed by a (mercifully brief) post- surgery setback. Additionally, he has been diagnosed with severe pulmonary hypertension that is progressive and incurable.

"Sometimes in the midst of all this commotion, I have felt almost overwhelmed when I recognize how many small side issues are affected by the current events. For example, I hope this does not seem entirely selfish, but I have reflected on how many 'duties' that Kel and I share will fall to me alone for at least the next three months—and possibly permanently. He will be unable to pick up and tend our eleven-month-old grandson, Callum, whom we watch five days a week. Kelly will be unable to help with housework, driving, snow shoveling (which thankfully seems to have ended for the season), lawn and yard care, etc. Further, I must get Kelly to follow-up visits with doctors, to cardio rehab, and help in other ways with his post-operative recovery. I've felt required to put on a brave face for Kelly as well as for each of our six kids who do so love their dad and worry about him.

"At my very lowest point, I prayed in utter exasperation, 'What art Thou thinking, Lord? What could thou possibly have in mind by throwing all of this at me at once?' (To be honest, I expected the kind of answer I would have gotten from one of my four sons when they were teenagers and I asked, 'What were you thinking?' They'd just look blankly at me and offer no answer whatever.) The Lord, however, did not remain silent. Rather, I heard very clearly in my mind, 'I am thinking of your return to me and of your exaltation. This is the path that for you leads home, and I will be with you always.'

"All this would be utterly devastating were it not for Christ. As I read the scriptures reminding Joseph of the trials that will give him experience and remember that all things work for the good

of them that love the Lord, I continually feel my Savior's love and understanding and His assurance that He will help. Even if that help is not the miracle I'd like, His love convinces me that I will experience a miracle: the miracle of getting through the challenges with increased knowledge of Him and His love. Though I do not know how things are going to work out, I am at peace in the knowledge that I am not alone and will not be.

“I also find that, for me, comfort often results from gratitude. Just as there is a pride cycle that can lead us downward, there is a cycle that leads us upward, and I'm convinced that the easiest way to enter that upward spiral is through gratitude. Gratitude acts as a Urim and Thummim—it allows us to more clearly see the hand of the Lord in our lives. That in turn makes us more willing to follow His commandments and develop our faith. So, then we receive increased blessings—which leads to increased gratitude—and on it goes.”

Mary's walk of faith hand in hand with the Savior reflects the often-difficult truth that walking by faith requires “waiting upon the Lord”⁶ and trusting His timing.

Elder Robert D. Hales taught that we face mortal challenges so we can grow, develop, and be strengthened. As we ‘wait upon the Lord’⁷ we must plant the seed of faith, pray, follow promptings of the Spirit, and stand fast in that faith. We must rely upon the merits of Christ and have confidence that all things, including our afflictions, will work together for our good. Ultimately, we must choose to say, ‘Thy will be done.’⁸

Elder Ulisses Soares calls this exercise of faith “taking up our cross.” We must recognize that God knows us and our needs, but we must accept that His timing may differ from ours. We cannot demand that He fulfill our desires on our own schedule. Instead, we must trust Him enough to be patient and still, acknowledging that He knows all things.⁹

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland counsels that we must trust in God's love and compassion. “But that trust isn't always easy...faith means trusting God in good times and bad, even if that includes some suffering until we see His arm revealed in our behalf...And whether that [waiting] be a short period or a long one is not always ours to say, but by the grace of God, the blessings will come to those who hold fast to the gospel of Jesus Christ.”¹⁰

Second, Mikelle taught me that turning to the Savior as we face hidden sorrows, and the unfairness of life *allows us to exercise “active hope.”*

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf taught that hope is a gift of the Spirit and a principle of promise and commandment. Hope is active trust and confidence in God's promises and our expectation that our prayers will be answered.¹¹

I met Mikelle just before she graduated high school in the Covid-plagued Class of 2020. From the first time I met her I knew that she dreamed of going on a mission. And so, when she turned 19 her papers went in, she received her call, and off she went—the excited, testimony-filled, beautiful young missionary so ready to serve the Lord. But it didn't go as planned. Two weeks after her farewell talk, I saw Mikelle with her mother after Sacrament meeting. Excited to see her and thinking that I must have been mistaken about the date she was to leave for the mission field,

I excitedly went up and gave her a hug and asked if she was excited to get going. Her face fell in shame as she revealed that she had been out for just over a week and had come home because of debilitating anxiety. We hugged and cried and hugged some more. I'm sure I said something about "it being alright" and "being able to serve wherever you are." But I knew she was hurting. And I knew that there really wasn't anything that I, or her friends, or her parents, or our loving Bishop could do to help her heal. The only one who could help was the Savior. So, over the next two years I've watched as she and the Savior worked out her "hidden sorrow." A few weeks ago, she shared with me her story,

"As I reflected on the last couple years one thing that comes to my mind is the phrase, *but if not*, and I think about how that has been a theme throughout the scriptures, that people will pray for the Lord to save them from things or to help them from things, but then they let the Lord know that their will or that the Lord's will is what they will be able to accept. The prime example, of course, is Jesus Christ when He's suffering in the garden and asks if there's another way and says, 'but if not, let Thy will be done.'¹²

"I think about my mission and how I spent so long praying to get better so that I could stay on my mission. I prayed so, so hard, and I just kept getting worse and worse. It wasn't until I said the prayer, "I really want to get better Heavenly Father, but if not, I'll be okay to go home," that I was able to feel the Spirit and realize that I did need to go home. But I wasn't comfortable with that. So, I kept fighting for a few more days, until I was physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually drained. I remember the prayer that I said with my companion the night before I found out I was going home. My mission president told me he needed a day to counsel and to figure out what the best decision for me was. So, the night before, I prayed with my companion that either way I would be able to be okay, that if I went home, things would work out and I'd be able to understand God's plan for me. And if I stayed, that I'd have the courage to stay and that I would be okay."

"The next morning, I woke up and I had a feeling that I was going to have to go home. My mission president confirmed that to me a couple of hours later. So, I went home. And long story short, it was really difficult. I didn't get that hopeful, happy, embrace with my parents. I was really broken. I felt like there was no way that God was going to be able to make this better than what I had planned. I had a lot of people ask me, 'how did you stay faithful? How did you stay in the church or not be mad at Heavenly Father?' I just thought Christ was my only way to overcome that trial. The only way I got through it was through the hope that I had in Jesus Christ and the hope that He would heal me and the hope that things would get better and the hope that He had a plan for me. And of course, that came what felt like pretty slowly."

Through a beautiful and miraculous turn of events, Mikelle was able to teach seminary at the local high school—and she was a natural. It seemed to be the answer to her prayers and the way to complete the mission she had so desperately wanted to serve. And then, after a year, she received an unexpected phone call.

"Out of the blue, my supervisor said that they weren't going to be able to have me continue teaching seminary for the following semesters. They were grateful for my time, and I was a great teacher, but they just didn't have a spot for me. It was hard because I felt like I had come home from my mission to teach seminary and had this experience. I felt like this was my calling in life

and why everything happened the way it did. I felt like I just got knocked down again. And for a moment I thought, again, ‘Heavenly Father, what are you doing?’ I had this plan. I knew what I was doing, and again, in my mind I thought about how I was chastised a little bit by Heavenly Father because I received the prompting, ‘You thought the same thing when you got home from your mission that I didn’t know what I was doing. Just believe me that I know what I’m doing again.’

So, as I go through trials and as I have what seem like bumps in the road and, and stops and turnarounds, I just remember that the hope that I have in Jesus Christ and the comfort that He has for me is going to be able to help me through whatever Heavenly Father has planned for me.”

As a perfect postscript to her story, today Mikelle is being sealed to her eternal sweetheart just down the road in the Payson temple!

As Mikelle learned, the strength and power needed to overcome the challenges of life can only be found in the Lord’s plan and His power, which flow through our covenants with Him. As we strive to keep our covenants and exercise active hope, even during tough times, we gradually receive His light, strength, love, and peace. We should not let trials make us doubt God’s love for us, but instead, endure patiently and as we do so, become more like Him.

Sister Michelle D. Craig, First Counselor in the Young Women General Presidency, said it perfectly, “Even when we stumble, He is there...When hard times come, I try to remember that I chose to follow Christ before I came to earth and that challenges to my faith, my health, and my endurance are all part of the reason I’m here. And I certainly should never think that today’s trial calls into question God’s love for me or let it turn my faith in Him into doubt. Trials do not mean that the plan is failing; they are part of the plan meant to help me seek God. I become more like Him when I endure patiently, and hopefully, like Him, when in agony, I pray more earnestly. Jesus Christ was the perfect example of loving our Father with all His heart—of doing His will, *regardless of the cost.*”¹³

Third, I want to tell you about my friend Judy. Over the 25 years that I have known Judy she has helped me to learn profound lessons about charity, service, and faith. But today, I want to tell you how she exemplifies *finding reassurance in God’s love for us and in the Savior’s infinite Atonement.*

Here is Judy’s story:

“In July of last year, I was diagnosed with lymphoma cancer. It was so unexpected and so shocking. As I tried to process my new situation and all that it would bring into my life and the lives of my family members, I heard very clearly the Holy Ghost whisper a single word, *Opportunity.* I don’t know if that was exactly the word, I would have chosen to describe my new reality, but I was about to be tutored from on high and so I determined to embrace this *opportunity.* My prayers changed. I began to be grateful in a whole new way. Grateful to know that I am a daughter of a loving Heavenly Father, who is in charge of everything. Grateful for the Atonement of my Savior Jesus Christ that would give me the power and strength to press forward. Grateful for the gift of the Holy Ghost who could and would comfort and guide me.

And then there was the pleading part of my prayers. Every day I would fight back the anxiety of the unknown and plead, ‘Please stay right with me. Please help me do this.’

I realized that there would be a whole lot of new people coming into my life in the form of doctors, nurses, lab techs, fellow cancer patients, front desk office ladies, and more.

I have been around the block enough times to know that everyone has challenges, and that life isn’t easy for anyone. So, I determined to be the most compliant, cheerful, optimistic patient, in an effort to bring the love and the light of the Savior with me through my journey. I am not sure that I always succeeded, but I really tried. And in return I found myself surrounded by angels, both seen and unseen.

Things went well. I am in complete remission. Heavenly Father has given me more time. Now it’s my job to learn from Him what He wants me to do with this blessing. It’s my task to ‘hear him’ and to ‘Let God prevail.’¹⁴”

Judy continually reminds me that God hears our prayers and will not leave us comfortless, especially in times of adversity.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland reminds us, “know that God hears your cries and knows your distress. He is your Father, and you are His child...Even though seemingly unjust circumstances may be heaped upon us and even though unkind and unmerited things may be done to us—... God is with us... We are not alone... When suffering, we may in fact be nearer to God than we’ve ever been in our entire lives... That is an everlasting declaration of God’s love and care for us, including—and perhaps especially—in times of trouble.”¹⁵

Fourth, Lisa taught me that turning to the Savior as we face hidden sorrows and the unfairness of life allows us to *see our blessings and express gratitude for those things we do have, now and in the future.*

As I have watched Lisa and her family over the years, I have been impressed by her quiet, constant faith and her ability to see the good in everyone and everything—no matter the circumstance. Here is her story:

“A few years ago, my husband lost employment for an extended period of time. I began working full-time outside of the home for the first time in 30 years, and then 4 months later, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. During this same time there were some injustices that happened in my extended family. At first, I really felt like I couldn’t handle life. It seemed as though everything was crashing all at once. I had never felt so home sick for our Heavenly home. My prayers increased to multiple times during the day and my husband and I found ourselves drawn towards increased temple attendance. Turning to the Savior during these times changed my thoughts about it being unfair. When we turn our thoughts to the Savior, it changes our *feelings* and gives us comfort and peace. Remembering that the Savior atoned not only for our sins, but for our infirmities and sorrows was very helpful. The very thought lightened my burdens. Also remembering what the Savior, himself, went through physically, puts things in perspective.

I had to keep reminding myself that we are here to be tested and tried. I know that Heavenly Father is mindful of what was going on. After all - He is God- He knows all, and if this is what He has in mind for my life, then I need to submit to it and learn from it. It doesn't always make it easier but does make it bearable. I asked myself - what am I learning from this? What am I grateful for that has come from these situations? There were actually many blessings that came during and from the trials. Writing in my journal about the things I was learning and the things I was grateful for, also helped me to turn to the Savior. It was a positive snowball effect. Some of the physical things and situations still have not been resolved, but my emotional resilience and my faith in the Lord's timing has been strengthened."

Lisa has taught me that finding joy and gratitude in times of trial is truly a gift.

Elder Isaac K. Morrison of the Seventy taught, "We can be of good cheer and be filled with peace in our tough times. The love we feel because of the Savior and His Atonement becomes a powerful resource to us in our trying moments. 'All that is unfair [and difficult] about life can be made right through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.' He commanded, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.'"16

Fifth, Kristin taught me that turning to the Savior as we face hidden sorrows, and the unfairness of life allows us to *show Christlike charity and compassion for others when they face their sorrows and trials*.

Kristin has had her own share of hidden sorrows and *not so very small* moments of hurt and heartache. Kristin lost her precious daughter Violet to a rare genetic disorder. Here is her story:

"Holding your own child as she takes her last breath is as devastating and traumatic as you would imagine - worse even. I had to give back the most precious thing I had. I am still in shock as to how this is even my life. Now that I have lived an entire year without her, society says I should be cured of my grief, that I should be *over it*. Yes, my grief looks different now than it did a year ago - it is no longer the crushing weight on my chest making it difficult to breathe. But grief is still here: the longing for reality to be different is ever-present, the ache of missing her is my constant companion, the sting of separation is still painful, the reminders of what I have lost are still everywhere.

In the midst of this nightmare, I have felt God in a very real way. As I have turned to Him in my anguish, I have felt His love wash over and sustain me. I believe He is a God who mourns with us for the suffering we endure as a result of living in a fallen world. Though He hasn't taken my sorrow or grief away, He has met me here. He has made my heartbreak and pain feel seen, understood, and validated. I truly believe my tears are numbered to Him. While I don't always feel it, any peace I have felt has come from Him. Any strength someone may see in me comes only from Him.

I have felt my Savior's love for me personally more so than I ever have before. I have truly felt that He weeps alongside me in my heartbreak. He has not always taken this grief or pain away, but He has made me feel seen in my grief and pain. He has made me feel understood. When I felt

that this was more than I could bear and have turned to my Father in Heaven in prayer, I have felt a literal weight lifted - a divine comfort and sustaining power that allowed me to get through another day.

I have a new relationship with gratitude. I have learned that gratitude does not fix or solve or cancel out suffering. Rather, gratitude sits beside suffering, giving strength to endure. On hard days, being grateful for my child's laugh, or a fizzy drink, or the sunshine on my face was enough to make the day bearable. I can be both grateful for my daughter's beautiful life and devastated that it was all-too short. There is room for both.

I now have such compassion for sufferers. I learn to recognize them by asking honest questions, waiting for honest answers, looking at their eyes, and seeking the guidance of the Holy Ghost. I know that the best comfort, at least to me, came from those who were willing to sit with me in the pain, those who acknowledged how hard this was. I know the value of a big hug and a listening ear and a neighborhood walk. I don't feel the need to fix anyone's problems or try to take the sorrow away; instead, I let them know I am there with them through it all."

Elaine S. Marshall, former Dean of the BYU College of Nursing, said, "Every day someone in your path is hurting, someone is afraid, someone feels inadequate, or someone needs a friend. Someone needs you to notice, to reach out, and to help...her to heal. You may not know who that is at the time, but you can give encouragement and hope. You can help heal wounds of misunderstanding and contention. You can serve 'in the cause of the Master Healer.'"¹⁷

None of us escape heartache, challenges, loss, or pain. We can treat those around us with love, gentleness, understanding, compassion, and forgiveness even if from the outside their lives look perfect, and we think they have no need of anything from us. In so treating each other, we may be able to strengthen our neighbors' (and our own) faith in a loving Father and Savior whose only aim is our return home and our exaltation. When we truly know that the most powerful being in the universe loves us personally and has prepared an individualized curriculum intended to bring us back to Him, not as broken shells, but clothed in glory, it becomes easier to exercise faith in that plan and to remain committed to stay on the covenant path. Life can be incredibly hard, painful, patently unfair and unjust, and just plain sad, but as we know, weeping lasts for the night, but joy cometh in the morning. And that glorious morning will come.

To conclude, my dear Sisters, I bear my testimony that our Heavenly Father does not, nor can He leave us alone as we face the often all-to-long *small moments* in our lives. Because of the Savior and His infinite Atonement not only can we endure these "small moments" with peace, but we can emerge from them with greater faith, hope, and charity and greater gratitude for and understanding of our covenants and our blessings. May we turn to Him and find solace in our times of need and reach out with charity to others in their times of need. In the name of Him who can turn our heartaches into healing and bring rest to our weariness, even Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ Hymn 140.

² Doctrine and Covenants 121:1

³ Elder Donald L. Hallstrom, "How Firm a Foundation," 2014 YSA Devotional.

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- ⁴ Elder Neil L. Andersen, “Wounded,” October 2018.
- ⁵ Russell M. Nelson, “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2016, 82.
- ⁶ Isaiah 25:9
- ⁷ Isaiah 40:31
- ⁸ Elder Robert D. Hales, “Waiting Upon the Lord: Thy Will Be Done,” October 2011.
- ⁹ Elder Ulisses Soares, “Take Up Our Cross,” October 2019.
- ¹⁰ See Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, “Waiting on the Lord,” October 2020.
- ¹¹ President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “The Infinite Power of Hope,” October 2008.
- ¹² Matthew 26:42.
- ¹³ Sister Michelle D. Craig, “Wholehearted,” October 2022.
- ¹⁴ Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” October 2020.
- ¹⁵ See Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, “Lessons from Liberty Jail,” *BYU YSA Fireside*, 7 September 2008.
- ¹⁶ Elder Isaac K. Morrison, “We Can Do Hard Things through Him,” October 2022.
- ¹⁷ See Elaine S. Marshall, “Lessons on Healing,” *BYU Devotional address given on 8 October 2002*, *Ensign* April 2004.