

Ladder of Faith

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Unbelief blocks our ability to see miracles, whereas a mindset of faith in the Savior unlocks the powers of heaven.

How will life's challenges affect our faith in Jesus Christ? And what effect will our faith have on the joy and peace we experience in this life?

The year was 1977. The phone rang, and the message tore our hearts apart. Carolyn and Doug Tebbs were in the process of moving to their new home after completing graduate school. The elders quorum had come to load the moving van. Doug, making sure the path was clear before backing out, took one last look. What he could not see was his little daughter, Jennie, dart behind the truck at just the wrong moment. In an instant, their beloved Jennie was gone.

What would happen next? Would the pain they so deeply felt and the inconceivable sense of loss create an irreconcilable chasm between Carolyn and Doug, or would it somehow bind their hearts together and solidify their faith in Heavenly Father's plan?

The road through their afflictions has been long and painful, but from somewhere came the spiritual reserves to not lose hope but to "hold on [their] way."¹ Somehow this incredible couple became even more Christlike. More committed. More compassionate. They believed that, in His time, God would consecrate their afflictions for their gain.²

Though the pain and loss would not and could not leave completely, Carolyn and Doug have been comforted by the assurance that by their staying firmly on the covenant path, their beloved Jennie would be theirs forever.³

Their example has strengthened my faith in the Lord's plan. We don't see all things. He does. The Lord told Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail that "all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?"⁴

As we accept the Lord's will, He teaches us how to walk with Him.⁵ As a young missionary serving in Tahiti, I was asked to administer to a sick infant. We laid our hands on his head and blessed him to get better. His health began to improve, but

then he fell sick again. A second time we blessed him but with the same result. A third request came. We pleaded with the Lord that His will be done. Shortly after, this little spirit returned to his heavenly home.

But we were at peace. We wanted the infant to live, but the Lord had other plans. Accepting His will in place of our own is key to finding joy no matter our circumstances.

The simple faith we have in Jesus Christ as we first begin to learn about Him can remain in our hearts as we confront life's challenges. Our faith in Him can and will guide us through the complexities of life. Indeed, we will find that there is simplicity on the other side of life's complexities⁶ as we remain "[steadfast] in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope."⁷

Part of life's purpose is to allow these potential stumbling blocks to become stepping-stones as we climb what I call the "ladder of faith"—a ladder because it suggests that faith is not static. It can go up or down according to the choices we make.

As we strive to build faith in the Savior, we may not fully comprehend God's love for us, and we may obey His laws out of a sense of obligation. Guilt may even become our primary motivator rather than love. A real connection to Him may not yet have been experienced.

As we seek to increase our faith, we may be confused by what James taught. He reminded us that "faith without works is dead."⁸ We may stumble if we think everything depends on us. An overdependence on ourselves can impede our ability to access the powers of heaven.

But as we move toward true faith in Jesus Christ, our mindset begins to change. We recognize that obedience and faith in the Savior qualify us to have His Spirit always to be with us.⁹ Obedience is no longer an irritant but becomes a quest.¹⁰ We recognize that obedience to God's commands enables us to be trusted of Him. With His trust comes increased light. This light guides our journey and allows us to see more clearly the path we should take.

But there is more. As our faith in the Savior increases, we observe a subtle shift that includes a divine understanding of our relationship with God—a steady movement away from "What do I want?" to "What does God want?" Like the Savior, we want to act "not as I will, but as thou wilt."¹¹ We want to do God's work and be an instrument in His hands.¹²

Our progression is an eternal one. President Russell M. Nelson has taught that there is so much more that Heavenly Father wants us to know.¹³ As we progress, we better understand what the Lord taught Joseph Smith: "For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me; ... I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace."¹⁴

How high we climb on the ladder of faith is our decision. Elder Neil L. Andersen taught that “faith is not by chance, but by choice.”¹⁵ We can choose to make the choices needed to increase our faith in the Savior.

Consider the impact of the choices made when Laman and Lemuel descended the ladder of faith while Nephi climbed higher. Is there a clearer representation than the difference between Nephi’s response of “I will go and do”¹⁶ versus Laman and Lemuel, having just seen an angel, responding with “How is it possible that the Lord will deliver?”¹⁷

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Even when our faith is weak, the Lord’s hand will always be stretched out.¹⁸ Years ago I received the assignment to reorganize a stake in Nigeria. At the last minute, there was a change in the date. There was a man in the stake who had decided to skip town for the first conference date. He did not want to risk being called as the stake president.

While he was away, he was in a terrible accident, but he was unharmed. This caused him to consider why his life had been spared. He revisited the decision he had made. He repented and humbly attended the new conference date. And yes, he was called to be the new stake president.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught: “Only by aligning our wills with God’s is full happiness to be found. Anything less results in a lesser portion.”¹⁹

After doing “all things that lie in our power,” then it is time to “stand still ... to see the salvation of God.”²⁰ I saw this while serving as a ministering brother to the McCormick family. Married for 21 years, Mary Kay served faithfully in her callings. Ken was not a member of the Church and had no interest in becoming one, but loving his wife, he chose to attend church with her.

One Sunday I felt impressed to share my testimony with Ken. I asked him if I could do so. His response was simple and clear: “No, thank you.”

I was puzzled. I had felt a prompting and tried to follow it. It was tempting to decide that I had done my part. But after prayer and reflection, I could see that though my intentions were correct, I had relied too much on myself and too little on the Lord.

Later I returned but with a different mindset. I would go simply as an instrument in the Lord’s hands, with no other desire than to follow the Spirit. Together with my faithful companion, Gerald Cardon, we entered the McCormick home.

Soon after, I felt prompted to invite Gerald to sing “I Know That My Redeemer Lives.”²¹ He gave me a questioning look, but having faith in my faith, he did it. A beautiful spirit filled the room. The prompting came to invite Mary Kay and Kristin, their daughter, to share their testimonies. As they did so, the Spirit grew

stronger. In fact, after Kristin’s testimony, tears were streaming down Ken’s cheeks.²²

God had taken over. Hearts were not just touched but changed forever. Twenty-one years of unbelief were washed away by the power of the Holy Ghost. A week later, Ken was baptized. A year later, Ken and Mary Kay were sealed in the house of the Lord for time and for all eternity.

Together we had experienced what it meant to replace our will with the Lord’s will, and our faith in Him increased.

Please consider a few questions posed by God’s prophets as you strive to climb your ladder of faith:

Am I stripped of pride?²³

Do I give place in my heart for the word of God?²⁴

Do I allow my afflictions to be consecrated for my gain?²⁵

Am I willing to let my will be swallowed up in the will of the Father?²⁶

If I have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, can I feel so now?²⁷

Do I let God prevail in my life?²⁸

If you find your current path in conflict with your faith in the Savior, then please find your way back to Him. Your exaltation and that of your posterity depend on it.

May we plant the seeds of faith deep in our hearts. May we nourish these seeds as we bind ourselves to the Savior by honoring the covenants we have made with Him. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Doctrine and Covenants 122:9.
2. See 2 Nephi 2:2.
3. See Alma 7:11–12.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 122:7–8.
5. See Moses 6:34.
6. See Bruce C. and Marie K. Hafen, “Faith Is Not Blind” (Brigham Young University–Hawaii devotional, Jan. 24, 2017), speeches.byuh.edu.
7. 2 Nephi 31:20.
8. James 2:20.
9. See Moroni 4:3.
10. See Mary Ellen Smoot, “We Are Instruments in the Hands of God,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 91; *Liahona*, Jan. 2001, 105.

11. Matthew 26:39.
12. See Alma 29:9.
13. See Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 95.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 93:20.
15. Neil L. Andersen, “Faith Is Not by Chance, but by Choice,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2015, 65.
16. 1 Nephi 3:7.
17. 1 Nephi 3:31.
18. See 3 Nephi 9:14.
19. Neal A. Maxwell, “Swallowed Up in the Will of the Father,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 23.
20. Doctrine and Covenants 123:17.
21. “I Know That My Redeemer Lives,” *Hymns*, no. 136.
22. See Moroni 6:9.
23. See Alma 5:28.
24. See Alma 32:27–28.
25. See 2 Nephi 2:2.
26. See Mosiah 15:7.
27. See Alma 5:26.
28. See Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2020, 94.