

OF COVENANTS AND ADHD

With Heavenly Father's help, I accomplished the impossible.

By Todd Pennington

I have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, also known as ADHD. When I was in my teens, I spent so much energy trying to read a sentence that by the end I couldn't remember what I had just read. Placement tests showed that I was three to four years behind in my reading and comprehension. I had a hard time focusing in school. My mind raced, and then I daydreamed throughout the school day.

During grade school I played any sport I could and watched any sporting event involving Brigham Young University (BYU) that I could find. I was an average athlete, but I still dreamed of attending BYU and playing sports.

As I entered high school, I told my counselor I wanted to go to BYU. His response broke my heart. "Do you understand that based on your current abilities, that is not possible?" he said as kindly as he could. "Let's pick a trade that you might enjoy so you can prepare for a trade school."

The Power of Covenants

The evening after I met with the counselor I knelt and shared my heartache with my Heavenly Father. As I prayed, a portion of the oath and covenant of the priesthood came to my mind. I found a set of scriptures and read it. "For whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods of which I have spoken, and the magnifying their calling, are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies" (D&C 84:33).

That night I promised my Heavenly Father that I would keep the oath and covenant of the priesthood. I was beginning to understand the power of covenants—a power that has been described by Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. After declaring the need for spiritually strong Christians in our day, he said: "What is the source of such moral and spiritual power, and how do we obtain it? The source is God. Our access to that power is through our covenants with Him. A covenant is an agreement between God and man, an accord whose terms are set by God. . . . In these divine agreements, God binds Himself to sustain, sanctify, and exalt us in return for our commitment to serve Him and keep His commandments."¹

I wanted to go to BYU. The scripture said that those who are faithful in obtaining the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods and who magnify their calling "are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies." I knew that Heavenly Father had a plan for my life and that the scripture didn't guarantee that I would be able to go and achieve some of my dreams, but I had hope.

Working with the Lord

Then I went to work. My parents never discouraged me from my dream of attending BYU and tried to support me in my learning challenges. They told me, "You have



a different way of learning.” They worked with me, hired tutors, and sent me to summer school.

That first year of high school I started remedial classes. I worked my way into the industrial arts classes, and finally, my senior year, I started taking college preparation classes. I probably worked as hard in the first three years of high school as I later did in graduate school.

I had other challenges to overcome. When I started taking remedial classes, I lost many of my friends. I recall many long nights asking my Heavenly Father for strength and for the acceptance of my peers. My two close friends in my ward began to make some poor choices, but I knew that joining them could result in violating the promises I had made to my Heavenly Father. At times they made fun of me for the choices I was making to be a worthy priesthood holder. It tested my desire to honor my covenants.

It was during this time that my testimony of my Heavenly Father and the Savior began to grow significantly. As Elder Christofferson said, “In offering whatever sacrifice God may require of us, we obtain the witness of the Spirit that our course is right and pleasing to God. . . . With that knowledge, our faith becomes unbounded, having the assurance that God will in due time turn every affliction to our gain.”²

When you have chosen the right path, it doesn’t mean it’s easy, but the Lord will assure you it’s right. He comforted me during those times. Finally I took a college entrance exam and applied to BYU. Then I waited.

I arrived home from school one afternoon and went to check the mailbox. There was an envelope addressed to me from the BYU admissions office. My heart began to pound. I stood quietly by myself in the driveway and offered one last prayer and opened the letter.

“Congratulations. This letter is your official certificate of admission,” the letter read. Heavenly Father had blessed me in my efforts, and I began school in the fall.

Challenges of Higher Learning

BYU was all I had dreamed of. However, I quickly learned that school was much more difficult than I had



anticipated. The amount of reading and the comprehension it required provided a significant challenge. I was on the verge of academic probation. I took fewer credits and prepared to serve a mission. It was a relief to get away from school and serve in Cleveland, Ohio, USA.

During my mission, President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) spoke in general conference about the Book of Mormon. He said: “There is a power in the [Book of Mormon] which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book. You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path. The scriptures are called ‘the words of life’ (see D&C 84:85), and nowhere is that more true than it is of the Book of Mormon. When you begin to hunger and thirst after those words, you will find life in greater and greater abundance.”³

My companion and I committed to read the Book of Mormon 30 extra minutes a day in our personal study. After a month or two I realized that I could get to the end of a chapter of the Book of Mormon and still remember what I had read. This was amazing to me, and I began to remember more and more of the information I was reading. I began to recognize that one of the blessings promised by

President Benson of finding life in “greater and greater abundance” was happening to me as a missionary.

Back to BYU

As my mission was almost over, I was nervous about returning to school. I wondered if this blessing of being able to read and comprehend would continue. About two weeks after returning home from my mission, I began school again at BYU. I had decided that I would read the Book of Mormon 30 minutes a day because of the love I had gained for its teachings.

The Lord blessed my academic efforts, and I was able to successfully graduate from BYU and attend graduate school. I have maintained my daily reading of the Book of Mormon, and the blessings of doing so continue to assist me in my day-to-day life and in my role as a professor.

Heavenly Father blessed me with the brain he gave me. With His help, I have learned how best to use it. In my efforts to honor my covenants, the Lord has blessed me immensely but not always in the ways I anticipated. As I have tried to overcome my learning challenges, I have found that with His guidance I have learned coping strategies. I use not only spiritual principles to manage ADHD but also the physical and medical principles that God has blessed me to learn.

I have learned the truth of Elder Christofferson’s words: “Our covenant commitment to Him permits our Heavenly Father to let His divine influence, ‘the power of godliness’ (D&C 84:20), flow into our lives.”⁴

I am grateful that my covenant relationship with Heavenly Father has allowed me to pursue the dreams of my youth and ultimately achieve what once seemed impossible. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. D. Todd Christofferson, “The Power of Covenants,” *Ensign*, May 2009, 20.
2. D. Todd Christofferson, “The Power of Covenants,” 21.
3. Ezra Taft Benson, “The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 7.
4. D. Todd Christofferson, “The Power of Covenants,” 22.

TIPS FOR THOSE WITH ADHD

- *Do not be ashamed.* You are a son or daughter of God! He created you and has the “owner’s manual” for your success. Seek His guidance in identifying the path for meeting your specific challenges.
- *Seek professional help.* Those trained to both diagnose and treat ADHD or other learning challenges can advise you.
- *Use available resources.* Once your condition has been properly diagnosed, be proactive in identifying the resources available to you.
- *Be humble and teachable.* Identify the answers to your prayers and have the courage to implement them.
- *Embrace your strengths.* Just because you may learn differently from others does not make you any less intelligent.
- *Stay connected to others.* This can come through your relationships with Heavenly Father, family, and friends. Participating in family history and meaningful service can also contribute to a sense of belonging.
- *Practice good nutrition.* Eat food that helps rather than hurts the brain. Avoid sugars and processed foods.
- *Exercise.* Try to include a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day.
- *Maintain a schedule.* Follow weekly and daily routines. People with ADHD need structure and some form of accountability with someone who understands but is not judgmental.
- *Identify “closers” who can help you.* Find people who understand your challenge with ADHD, have skills related to what you’re working on, and can help you finish what you’ve started.