

# SPIRITUAL REHABILITATION

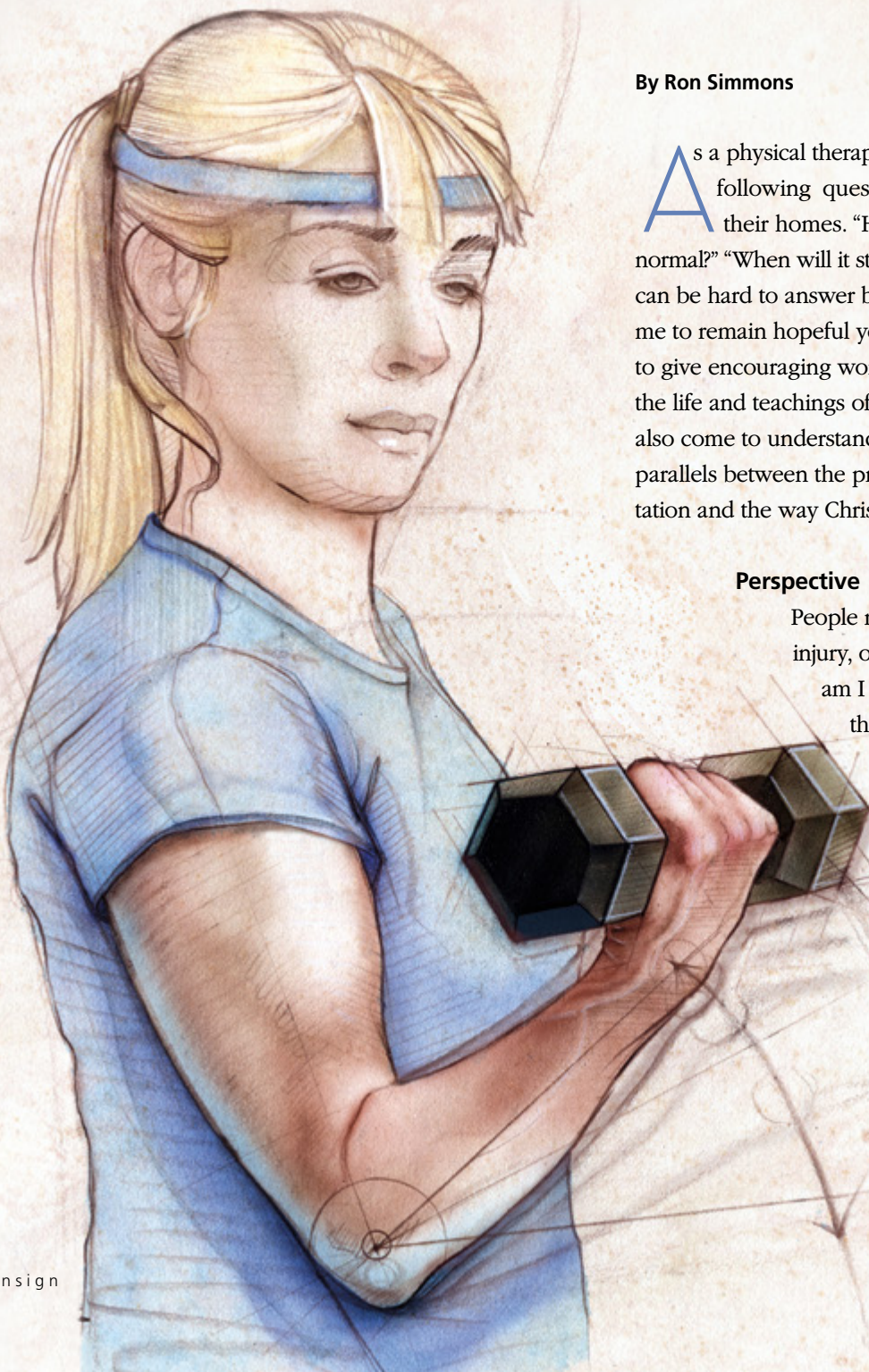
*Recognizing the similarities between physical rehabilitation and spiritual rehabilitation can change our perspective and give us patience to persist.*

**By Ron Simmons**

As a physical therapist, I am often asked the following questions as I visit patients in their homes. “How am I doing?” “Is this normal?” “When will it stop hurting?” Such questions can be hard to answer because it is important for me to remain hopeful yet honest. As I have strived to give encouraging words, I have pondered on the life and teachings of the Master Healer. I have also come to understand that there are many parallels between the process of physical rehabilitation and the way Christ heals our souls.

## **Perspective**

People recovering from surgery, injury, or disease often ask, “How am I doing?” They wonder if they are behind schedule or if they are doing something wrong. I have realized that part of my job as a physical therapist is to give patients proper perspective.





I share with them my observation that everyone heals at a different rate. Each person is different, but I have noticed that if patients consistently do their exercises as instructed, they improve little by little until at some point they are healed. While some might get better faster than others, consistency will get all to the same place.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, taught a similar principle: “The Lord doesn’t expect us to work harder than we are able. . . . Our Heavenly Father asks only that we do the best we can—that we work according to our full capacity, however great or small that may be.”<sup>1</sup> Our Savior, too, often gives us proper perspective on our spiritual journey, reminding us to “be of good cheer” (D&C 61:36). He comforts us by saying, “Behold, ye are little children and ye cannot bear all things now; ye must grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth” (D&C 50:40). He teaches us to be diligent and to keep “exercising” faith, forgiveness, patience, and charity. He reminds us to trust that He will fulfill His promises.

When I teach patients certain exercises, they rarely get them right the first time. They need repetitive cues and reminders. They also sometimes need feedback and correction. We, too, have received instruction from the Master, and few of us get it right the first time. He encourages us not to give up. He lovingly calls us to repentance and corrects us when needed. He delights in every little step of progress we make and appreciates our best efforts.

There have been times when I have found myself in prayer asking my Father in Heaven, “How am I doing? Am I where Thou wouldst have me be? Am I doing what Thou wouldst have me do?” As we ask these questions, He can give us divine perspective. Often the answer will be to “hold on thy way” (D&C 122:9) and to “continue in steadfastness” (D&C 49:23).

## Comparison Can Bring Discouragement

“Is this normal?” is another tough question for me to answer as a physical therapist. *Normal*, a comparative word, is perhaps unfairly used. Two patients may have the same surgery on the same day by the same surgeon but have different symptoms and different experiences in recovery. Pre-existing medical conditions, previous fitness levels, or even previous attitudes and expectations can all contribute to surgical outcomes. Similarly, all of us have different personalities, different upbringings, different strengths and weaknesses, and different life experiences. How can we compare ourselves fairly to each other? We can’t.

I often remind my patients neither to listen to the stories of others’ bad experiences nor to compare themselves with those who claim extraordinary results. I encourage them to evaluate their progress based on their own situations. I teach them that if they are consistent, they will see small gains daily. Sometimes the gains may be imperceptible, until one day they will notice they are doing much better than before.

Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught this principle from a spiritual perspective: “Sometimes . . . in our daily efforts to become more Christlike, we find ourselves repeatedly struggling with the same difficulties. As if we were climbing a tree-covered mountain, at times we don’t see our progress until we get closer to the top and look back from the high ridges. Don’t be discouraged.”<sup>2</sup>

Just as each patient progresses little by little, with diligence, we too grow spiritually “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little” (2 Nephi 28:30).

President Boyd K. Packer (1924–2015), President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, emphasized this principle as it applies to testimonies:



“A testimony is not thrust upon you; a testimony grows. We become taller in testimony like we grow taller in physical stature; we hardly know it happens because it comes by growth.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Pain Can Be Good**

To accurately answer a patient who asks, “When will it stop hurting?” one would need to be able to predict the future. Everyone perceives pain differently, and what hurts one person may not hurt another. We all try to avoid pain, but pain is also necessary to protect us from harm. Pain tells us something is wrong. It deters us from hurting ourselves. Too much pain can be counterproductive. No pain at all can lead us to further injury. There must be the right amount and intensity of pain, especially during recovery. If a patient’s pain is too severe, she will not be able to participate in therapy and her results will not be ideal. If a patient experiences no pain after a recent injury or surgery, he may become overconfident and injure himself.

Contrary to popular belief, then, pain can be good. And in life, our pain can be more than physical. We can

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experience spiritual pain and emotional pain. Our trials, hardships, and uncomfortable experiences also can be considered types of pain.

When our first parents lived in the Garden of Eden, there was no pain, sorrow, or hardship. Thus there was no growth, progress, or joy. (See 2 Nephi 2:23–24.) Adam and Eve understood that it would be better to experience sorrow so that they could learn the difference between good and evil (see Moses 5:10–11). When life is painful, we learn by experience to choose the right.

The Savior reminds us that in the world we will have “tribulation” but to “be of good cheer,” for He has “overcome the world” (John 16:33). There is no pain, illness, or hardship that He doesn’t know. He stands “all the day long” (2 Nephi 28:32) with arms extended and beckons us to lean on Him.

### Healing Takes Time

We live in a world of instant results. Often very little effort is required on our part to get what we want. Many patients want to recover as quickly as possible to return to work and other activities, and I bring unwelcome news when I tell them that it will take time to heal. Though I can estimate the healing time required, it might take longer than expected.

The same may be true in our spiritual recovery from the sorrows of life or from the consequences of sin. Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that repentance “takes time—painful time!”<sup>4</sup> President Howard W. Hunter (1907–95) said: “Developing spirituality and attuning ourselves to the highest influences of godliness are not an easy matter. It takes time and frequently involves a struggle.”<sup>5</sup>

### Struggle Brings Strength

When a neighbor saw me standing next to an unsteady patient, she asked me, “Aren’t you going to help her?” I realized that to the neighbor it may have looked like I was not

helping my patient, but indeed I was helping as I allowed her to struggle. It was through the struggle that she would grow stronger and more confident in her ability to stand and walk. I was always close in case she began to fall, and I assisted her when she could not complete her task alone.

I reflected on the times when I had looked upward to heaven, saying, “Father, where art Thou? Wilt Thou not help me?” And yet I knew that Heavenly Father and His Son were there, allowing me to pass through my struggles but ever ready to assist me when I needed help. I now see how They taught me, supported me, and loved me through my difficult times.

The Savior gives these comforting words:

“Fear not, little children, for you are mine, and I have overcome the world, and you are of them that my Father hath given me;

“And none of them that my Father hath given me shall be lost. . . .

“Wherefore, I am in your midst. . . .

“And the day cometh that you shall hear my voice and see me, and know that I am” (D&C 50:41–42, 44–45).

### Hope amid Pain

Our Father in Heaven hears our prayers. Our Savior, Jesus Christ, is the Great Healer and individually assists us throughout our “spiritual rehabilitation.” Let us remain hopeful during our painful experiences. Let us keep an eternal perspective and remember our divine potential as we progress step by step. Let us remember the Savior’s words: “What I say unto one I say unto all, be of good cheer, little children; for I am in your midst, and I have not forsaken you” (D&C 61:36). ■

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#### NOTES

1. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Two Principles for Any Economy,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2009, 56.
2. Neil L. Andersen, “Repent . . . That I May Heal You,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2009, 41.
3. Boyd K. Packer, “The Quest for Spiritual Knowledge,” *New Era*, Jan. 2007, 4.
4. M. Russell Ballard, “Keeping Covenants,” *Ensign*, May 1993, 7.
5. Howard W. Hunter, “Blessed from on High,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1988, 61.