

# Finding Peace in the Storm of Addiction

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Addiction is a relentless hurricane that tosses both the addict and his or her loved ones to and fro.

The night my brother overdosed on heroin is one I'll never forget. I can still recall every detail: the thud of his body hitting the floor, my parents' yells, the terror, the confusion, and the hopelessness that sank in when I realized we were back to square one with his seemingly never-ending battle with addiction.

When my brother didn't respond, I actually surprised myself. Despite the chaos around me, an unnatural inner strength came over me that enabled me to help my parents get my brother stable. I held his stiff gray hands and spoke slowly to him as he stared back with dull eyes. Though I couldn't believe what I was seeing, I was surprisingly calm as we waited for him to come to. I realized later that this timely calmness was the Lord's sustaining power.

After he was stabilized and taken to be treated at a hospital, the reality of the situation struck me. My momentary heaven-sent strength ran out, and I collapsed with grief. My heart broke. My chest ached as I lay curled on my bed, and I couldn't catch my breath. I couldn't sob hard enough to keep up with my emotions.



“How is this my life?” I thought. “He’s never going to beat this! I can’t do this anymore!”

In that moment when I collapsed with grief, I felt like I had been lifted into the air by an unseen force—a gale-force wind that slammed me to the cold, dark ground of rock bottom—a place reserved not just for addicts but for those who love them, a place I’m becoming all too familiar with.

### **A Relentless Hurricane**

Watching someone you love struggle with addiction is almost unbearable. Addiction feeds lies, secrecy, deceit, and betrayal, which breeds defensiveness, shame, and distrust—all of which damage relationships with others and cause each of us to question our grasp on reality. I can’t tell you how many times my parents, siblings, and I have each been faced with the crushing weight of “what ifs?” and “if onlys.”

Not every family that is affected by addiction has the same experience, but in my family’s case, my brother’s addiction has caused disagreements about how to handle his situation. There have been passive-aggressive comments about “enabling” and hurt feelings among me and my sisters when my parents’ attention is constantly focused on our brother. Sometimes, we are all forced to walk on eggshells around each other.

Addiction is like a looming thunderstorm—an ever-present cloud of uncertainty and worry hanging above our heads. Though we’re always on edge, waiting for lightning to strike, whenever it does, it still catches us off guard, sending us into absolute panic. Every time. It’s a vicious, never-ending cycle.

When my brother overdosed, he had been clean for two years. We were finally seeing the light after watching him battle the brutal

consequences of addiction for more than a decade. But the moment he was again exposed to his vice, everything he had worked to build in the past two years came crashing down.

After briefly seeing freedom on the horizon, we had been sucked by my brother’s relapse back into the raging, messy, and seemingly inescapable hurricane of addiction, a storm that buffets the addict while also tossing their loved ones to and fro.

President Russell M. Nelson explained addiction as follows: “From an initial experiment thought to be trivial, a vicious cycle may follow. From trial comes a habit. From habit comes dependence. From dependence comes addiction. Its grasp is so gradual. Enslaving shackles of habit are too small to be sensed until they are too strong to be broken.”<sup>1</sup>

Feelings of complete and utter betrayal crushed me and my family.

But the thing we often forget about addiction is that when my brother relapses, he’s not choosing his addiction over his family; he is faced daily with an almost unbearable temptation that we can’t fully understand.

### **The Savior Can Be Found at Rock Bottom**

Lying on my bed, I could already feel the familiar turmoil creeping back into my mind. I was hopeless. Defeated. Aching. Although I begged God to take the pain in my heart away and to give my brother the strength to overcome this trial once again, I was certain that I would never be able to pull myself out of the dark pit of despair after seeing my brother so broken.

Yet somehow I did.

Each time I find myself lying in the depths of rock bottom, whether it stems from my brother’s addiction or because of other trials I’m facing, I manage to stand up, steady my ship, and set sail once again. It might seem impossible, but that’s the wonderful thing about the grace and mercy of the Savior: when I put my life in His hands, He makes the impossible, possible. As the Apostle Paul taught, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13).

My moments of despair, my “rock bottom” moments, usually come when life is going well, when I’m feeling on top of the world, and then, out of nowhere, I’m falling—and *smack!* I’m facedown on the merciless ground of rock bottom. The fall is sudden, unexpected, and painful. But surprisingly, after spending a fair amount of time in my life there while I’m in the midst of different trials, I’ve learned that rock bottom can also be a beautiful place. Because when you’re surrounded by complete darkness, the light of the Savior still shines brightly. When you find yourself at rock bottom,

remember the words of Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “It is not possible for you to sink lower than the infinite light of Christ’s Atonement shines.”<sup>2</sup>

My moments at rock bottom have helped me better realize the power of Jesus Christ’s Atonement. When I’m grieving for my brother and I think no one understands what I’m going through, I know that the Savior does. I know that He also understands my brother’s addiction in a way no one else can. As much as I hate that sudden, dreadful fall to rock bottom, I am grateful for the moments the Savior has helped me stand when I don’t have the strength to stand on my own. Regarding my brother’s addiction, He strengthens me to have compassion for my brother instead of judging or blaming him, to empathize with him even though he struggles with something I can’t fully grasp, and to forgive him and to love him despite how many times I’ve been hurt by his choices.

### Supporting Those Who Are Facing Addiction

My brother is truly a good person. He’s kind and respectful. He’s humble and gentle. He’s intelligent and downright hilarious. He’s a beloved uncle, a great friend, and a cherished member of my family. He’s not a bad person at all. He’s a child of God with infinite worth who has become trapped by Satan and his own addictions because he made some poor decisions. As President Dallin H. Oaks, First Counselor in the First Presidency, taught, “Small acts of disobedience or minor failures to follow righteous practices can draw us down toward an outcome we have been warned to avoid.”<sup>3</sup> Despite my brother’s poor choices, he and anyone else who struggles with addiction, as well as their families, need support and strength.

My family suffered in silence regarding my brother’s struggles for a long time. We endured self-imposed shame for years. Addiction was taboo, so we didn’t talk about it. We thought drug addiction wasn’t supposed to affect families who were doing their best to live the gospel and follow Jesus Christ. We were so afraid of what people would think if they found out. My parents constantly blamed themselves for my brother’s decisions, I would hide what was happening from my friends, and we would dodge all questions about my brother. Little did we know that not talking about it made our circumstances more painful than they already were.

Now I face my brother’s addiction differently. And that’s the key word: *face*. For so many years, I turned away from it and hid it from everyone else, but now I face it head-on with my family. We seek support and we try

to support others. As the years have gone by, we’ve discovered that addiction affects many families in many different forms—and there’s no need to feel ashamed or to hide. It needs to be talked about, and those who have been hurt by it, whether they be loved ones or those who struggle themselves, need less judgment and more support, compassion, understanding, and love. No one should have to suffer alone.



## Finding Peace in the Tempest

Although I prayed for years for my brother's addiction to be taken away from him, I've learned that his agency can't be tampered with. He still retains some agency and makes his own choices, even in the bonds of addiction. My family and I can be there for him and love him, but we cannot force him to change. He is the deciding factor. So when we find ourselves trapped in the furious hurricane that surrounds my brother, sometimes it feels as if there is no way out. Like many others who face addiction, it feels like we'll never escape. But without fail, the Savior is there to offer us small moments of freedom through feelings of peace, relief, and the knowledge that one day all will be well.

The Savior's way of bringing me peace is not always instantaneous or a jaw-dropping miracle. When I'm facing the hurricane-force winds of addiction, I often think of when the Savior slept through the tempest while sailing on the Sea of Galilee. In that moment, His Apostles were terrified. They chose to focus on the storm instead of focusing on the Savior, yet He was right next to them the whole time. He never left their side and He came to their rescue—even when they doubted Him. (See Mark 4:36–41.)

I've come to learn that the Savior will never leave me to drown either. In my life, it has always been small instances of the Lord's mercy that allow me to keep paddling against the stormy waves life throws at me. He enabled me to remain calm and hold myself together when my brother needed me, He has helped me muster up enough strength to get out of bed on days when I believe I have no strength left, and He continues to offer me peace despite my constant numbing fear of the unknown.

## There Is Always Hope

Because we often hear about the tragedies associated with drug overdoses, alcohol poisoning, or the many divorces due to pornography, addiction can seem like a daunting lost cause, but that doesn't always have to be the case. Because of the Savior, there truly is hope to hold onto in any situation.

Although I don't know how my brother's struggles are going to come to a close, I still hold onto hope, even when it seems futile. I fast. I now pray for understanding, empathy, and guidance rather than for his addiction to be instantly taken away. I recognize the personal and spiritual growth in myself that has stemmed from this decade-long trial. I use as many resources as I can to understand the unfathomable. And I reach out to receive wonderful support from friends and Church leaders.

But most of all, I rely on the Savior and His healing and saving power. His Atonement is real. There is no greater comfort than knowing that He understands perfectly what both I and my brother are facing. Psalm 34:18 teaches, "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

I know He is close to me in the moments when my heart is broken, and I know He will always be there to help me piece it back together again. He is not only watching the hurricane from the shore, but most often He is on the boat, facing the raging winds and waves with me. He continues to calm the tempestuous seas in my life and allows me to grow and feel true peace. ■

### NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, "Addiction or Freedom," *Ensign*, Nov. 1988, 6.
2. Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Laborers in the Vineyard," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2012, 33.
3. Dallin H. Oaks, "Small and Simple Things," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 91.