

We need to rely on Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and put in our own effort as we aim to be emotionally self-reliant.

Teach Me to Fly

Achieving Emotional Self-Reliance in the Lord's Way

By Valerie Durrant

When we think of a baby bird learning to fly, we often picture its last heroic attempt: the fledgling flopping out of the nest, spreading its wings, and soaring into the sky. Before that final success, though, there were likely many failures that ended with the bird not soaring into the sky but rather plummeting to the ground.

Like a bird learning to fly, we too may fall down over and over as we set out to achieve emotional self-reliance on our own. But if we turn to the Lord for help and put in the effort, we can learn how to be resilient when life doesn't go quite as planned and to rely on Him when trials become too much for us to bear on our own.

Learning to Fly

If learning to fly is a painful process, why would a bird ever leave the nest in the first place? Because of its mother. For the first part of her babies' lives, the mother bird will bring food directly to them in the nest. But in time, she starts leaving food outside the nest so the fledglings must venture out of their comfort zone to obtain nourishment.

It's the same process we endure as we learn to become emotionally self-reliant—but we are not expected to be able to fly completely on our own just yet.

Similar to a mother bird allowing her babies to fall out of the nest, Heavenly Father allows us to go through trials and experiences that can be painful, frustrating, and discouraging. His plan of salvation is designed to help us become like Him, so every challenge we face can be an opportunity to learn and grow. Like the mother bird, Heavenly Father



still provides us with comfort and direction because only with His help can we achieve and maintain our emotional and mental health.

Flapping Our Own Wings

Even though Heavenly Father is our partner, we shouldn't expect Him to do everything for us. He wants us to use our agency and the resources He has given us on our path to emotional self-reliance.

For example, when we undergo heartache, anger, or loss, He wants us to counsel with Him, but we shouldn't just stop there—we need to do our best to act on the promptings He gives us; to keep the commandments; to attend the temple to seek peace, comfort, and answers; to be mindful of prophetic counsel; and to trust in His plan for us.

Heavenly Father has given us many tools to achieve emotional self-reliance, but if we have given it our all and still find ourselves stuck or struggling with our mental health, additional resources may

be necessary. There are certainly times when you may need to turn to a mental health professional or receive counsel from your bishop for further guidance in order to move forward.

Keep in mind, though, that if we ask for advice from others every time we run into a roadblock, we may lose invaluable opportunities to learn and grow on our own. Again, we need to put in an adequate amount of our own effort to move forward.

Following the Lord's Pattern

In Doctrine and Covenants section 9, Oliver Cowdery is chastised for trying to translate the Book of Mormon plates without taking any “thought save it was to ask [God]” (verse 7). He is then admonished to “study it out in [his] mind,” come to his own conclusion, and then “ask [God] if it be right” (verse 8).

When we follow this pattern, Heavenly Father is not abandoning us to rely completely on our own abilities and thoughts

as we care for our mental health. He is allowing us the opportunity to learn how to exercise our agency. Seeking out answers to our questions and finding solutions to our problems with His help is what will help us ultimately become like Him. With this in mind, we can ask Him to show us how we can become more balanced emotionally instead of simply asking Him to make us better.

As we exercise our agency over and over again in this manner whenever our emotional well-being is tested, we slowly become better and more confident. While we don't have to master flying just yet, we can rest assured that He is with us all along the way and rejoice in the fact that He is helping us become better bit by bit. Each day there is another opportunity to reach new heights—preparing us for the day when we will be able to fly on our own. ■

The author lives in California, USA.