

Finding Help after Nancy's Death

*What did I need to do in order to activate
Jesus Christ's healing power in my life?*

By Darren Wilcox

In February of 2016, my wife Nancy passed away after an 11-year struggle with breast cancer. The overwhelming grief I felt in the first months after she died would be impossible to describe to one who has not experienced this kind of a loss. Sorrow, anguish, misery, pain—none of these words do it justice. It was unbearable.

The Savior's Healing Power

I have long understood that Jesus Christ “descended below all things” (D&C 88:6) so that He would be able “to succor [give relief or aid to] his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12). This means that the power of the Savior's Atonement extends beyond providing for the Resurrection and for the redemption from sins. Through this power, He can also heal us in our times of suffering and need. In my grief, I urgently—almost frantically—tried to learn what I needed to do to activate this aspect of the Savior's power in my life. For weeks I searched the scriptures and talks by the General Authorities of the Church. I sincerely believed that, at the cost of considerable pain and sacrifice to Himself, the Savior knew the pain I was experiencing. But how did His knowing that help me? Since He suffered this *for* me, what did I need to do to receive the succoring that He thereby knows how to provide?

After much searching, study, prayer, and temple worship, I began to understand. First of all, I started to see more clearly that the Lord already had been succoring, comforting,

and supporting our family, especially in the weeks leading up to Nancy's death. There were marvelous spiritual experiences that I now recognize to be blessings that come from the healing and strengthening power available to us because of the Savior's Atonement. And just knowing that the Savior was already taking care of us in a very individualized way was, in and of itself, immensely comforting. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego of old, He has been with us in the “fiery furnace” (Daniel 3:17) of our affliction.

Trust in the Lord

I also learned that there are some things required of us in order to receive the Lord's comfort and healing. Most importantly, we have to trust in Him. That can be a difficult thing to do. Why should I trust in God when He could have prevented Nancy's death in the first place? In answer to this question, I continually ponder something that the Lord told the Prophet Joseph Smith:

“Ye cannot behold with your natural eyes, for the present time, the design of your God concerning those things which shall come hereafter, and the glory which shall follow after much tribulation” (D&C 58:3).

We were blessed with many signs that the manner and timing of Nancy's death were according to the Lord's will. I have come to understand that an omniscient and loving Father has allowed us to suffer these things because, in His perfect design for our family's exaltation, this affliction is



ILLUSTRATION OF ATLANTA GEORGIA TEMPLE

somehow necessary. Knowing that, I understand that my part in His design is not just to endure it but to “endure it well” (D&C 121:8). To the extent that I can consecrate this tribulation to Him, I will be not only succored but also sanctified. I have already experienced this in many ways.

I have counseled our children to do what I have learned in this process myself:

- Let the pain of hard experiences drive you toward greater discipleship.
- Pour out your heart in prayer.
- If you feel anger toward God for allowing tragedies to happen, beseech Him to replace that anger with faith and submission.
- Covenant that you will love Him and be faithful to the end.
- Drink from the word of God constantly—from the scriptures and talks and writings of modern prophets and inspired teachers.
- Go to the temple with a hunger to be taught the things of eternity.
- Find people for whom a personal crisis is becoming a crisis of faith, and strengthen them with your testimony of these doctrines.

An Apostolic Witness

Approximately a month after Nancy’s death, there came a night when the grief I felt was absolutely crushing. I had been in very deep pain and sorrow all of that day. I remembered Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles teaching that “the path of salvation has always led . . . through Gethsemane.”¹ Though my suffering can’t be compared to the Savior’s, that night I was in the midst of my own “dark and bitter hours.”²

After experiencing this for some time and praying for help, there came into my mind something that I had read and bookmarked on my computer several years before. I located the document and scrolled down to what I was looking for. It was an interview with Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (1928–2015) in which he was asked about losing his wife, Jeanene, to cancer in 1995. Elder Scott responded, “First of all, . . . I didn’t lose her. She’s on the other side of the veil. We’ve been sealed in that holy ordinance of the temple, and we’ll be together forever.”³

That night those words came with a power that I have never felt before. It was like a lighthouse beacon being switched on in a dark night. I have never read something that had such a sudden and profound effect on me. The

darkness and the pain were gone. It was like Alma when he could “remember [his] pains no more” (Alma 36:19). This apostolic witness penetrated me to the very core. I marveled that a concept I had understood since childhood could suddenly seem so remarkable. I found myself wondering how it was possible that Elder Scott could know something like this. And in the moment, I realized that I know it too. If I am faithful, I can have all of the hope that Elder Scott had. While there has certainly been sadness and mourning since then, I have never again felt the depths of pain and sorrow that I experienced that night.

This is the power the Savior extends to us to succor us in our trials. I know that our family’s grief will never completely disappear, but it becomes swallowed up in what have been called the “strengthening” and “perfecting” blessings of the Savior’s Atonement.⁴ We have drawn nearer to the Savior, have felt His assurances, and have been sustained by the certain foundation of our covenants. ■

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NOTES

1. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Lessons from Liberty Jail” (Brigham Young University devotional, Sept. 7, 2008), 6, speeches.byu.edu.
2. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Encircled in His Gentle Arms,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Mar. 2015, 5.
3. “A Sure Witness of Jesus Christ: Elder Richard G. Scott,” lds.org/prophets-and-apostles.
4. See Bruce C. Hafen and Marie K. Hafen, *The Contrite Spirit: How the Temple Helps Us Apply Christ’s Atonement* (2015), 34–52.



After an 11-year battle with breast cancer, Nancy Jean Newton Wilcox passed away in 2016.



STRENGTHENED BY JESUS CHRIST

“Isaiah taught that the Messiah would bear our ‘griefs’ and our ‘sorrows’ (Isaiah 53:4). Isaiah also taught of His strengthening us: ‘Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee’ (Isaiah 41:10). . . .

“And so we see that because of His Atonement, the Savior has the power to succor—to help—every mortal pain and affliction. Sometimes His power heals an infirmity, but the scriptures and our experiences teach that sometimes He succors or helps by giving us the strength or patience to endure our infirmities. . . .

“. . . Our Savior’s Atonement does more than assure us of immortality by a universal resurrection and give us the opportunity to be cleansed from sin by repentance and baptism. His Atonement also provides the opportunity to call upon Him who has experienced all of our mortal infirmities to give us the strength to bear the burdens of mortality. He knows of our anguish, and He is there for us. Like the good Samaritan, when He finds us wounded at the wayside, He will bind up our wounds and care for us (see Luke 10:34). The healing and strengthening power of Jesus Christ and His Atonement is for all of us who will ask. I testify of that as I also testify of our Savior, who makes it all possible.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Strengthened by the Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2015, 62, 64.