



By Brent L. Top

**O**ur grandson Gavin was born without the lower part of his left arm. Instead of a hand, he has what we lovingly refer to as his “nub.”

Although his birth defect hasn’t slowed him down much and he certainly doesn’t consider himself handicapped, he does notice that he is different from others. He is at an age now when he is conscious of the

doesn’t really have a nub but that He understands exactly what it is like for Gavin to have one. In that tender teaching moment, our daughter taught him about the Resurrection, the perfect love of the Savior, and how Christ’s Atonement ensures that someday Gavin will have a hand and arm like everyone else. I have thought a lot about that, and I want to share some of my thoughts about

## THE LOVING ARMS OF CHRIST

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stares and unkind comments about his nub.

In decorating her home for Christmas a few years ago, our daughter put out an olive wood nativity set she had received from us as a Christmas gift when we lived in Israel several years ago. Part of one of the carved wooden arms of the baby Jesus in the nativity set had been broken off. It was so small that none of us had even noticed it before. Yet three-year-old Gavin noticed.

“Mommy, look!” he excitedly exclaimed one day. “Jesus has a nub just like me!” He was thrilled that Jesus had a nub too.

His mother explained to him that Jesus

arms—our arms and Christ’s arms.

Spiritually speaking, each of us, whether born whole or not, has a defect. That defect is that we are mortal. We are all, as King Benjamin described us, “natural,” fallen men and women, “enem[ies] to God” (Mosiah 3:19). Our mortal arms—no matter how strong, how diligent, or how productive—can never save us in the celestial kingdom of God. It is only through the Atonement of Christ that we can be saved. His arms not only save us but also strengthen us. That is what we call grace.



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The LDS Bible Dictionary defines grace as the “enabling power”<sup>1</sup> of Christ. Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught, “The enabling power of the Atonement of Christ strengthens us to do things we could never do on our own.”<sup>2</sup>

Our Father in Heaven wants us to recognize that, spiritually speaking, we are like children born without arms—totally dependent upon the loving and caring arms of another—Jesus Christ. The Book of Mormon prophet Jacob taught, “The Lord God showeth us our weakness that we may know that it is by his grace, and his great condescensions unto the children of men, that we have power to do these things” (Jacob 4:7).

One of my favorite scriptural accounts that illustrates this important principle is found in Matthew chapter 14. As the disciples watched the Savior walk on the Sea of Galilee toward their boat, they thought they were seeing a ghost. Jesus assured them that it was He and that they need not be afraid. Peter declared, “Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water” (verse 28). Jesus said, “Come.” Matthew then records, “And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus” (see Matthew 14:24–29).

The rest of the story is what I find most significant. I can’t relate to walking on water, but I can relate to what Peter experienced next:

“But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

“And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

“And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.

“Then they that were in the ship came and

worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God” (Matthew 14:30–33).

All of us have had, are having, or will yet have a Peter-like “sinking” experience in some way and will at some time (probably many times) cry out, “Lord, save me.” Even Peter’s strong fisherman arms were not strong enough to save him. He needed the rescuing arms of Christ, and so do we. Can you imagine Peter—choking, his head bobbing beneath the surface of the water—saying as the Savior extends His arms: “No, thank you. I will swim to shore. I sank myself, so I must save myself”? Of course not. How ridiculous! Yet we sometimes do just that.

We may know in our heads that our mortal arms and hands are deficient—in fact, utterly incapable of rescuing or redeeming us—but we sometimes resist, even recoil from, the outstretched arms of the Savior. Sometimes we spiritually drown ourselves because we won’t allow His arms to cradle us. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve eloquently stated:

“May I be bold enough to suggest that it is impossible for anyone who really knows God to doubt his willingness to receive us with open arms in a divine embrace if we will but ‘come unto Him.’ . . .

“I am convinced that none of us can appreciate how deeply it wounds the loving heart of the Savior of the world when he finds that his people do not feel confident in his care or secure in his hands.”<sup>3</sup>

The scriptures contain many references to the arms of the Lord. They describe different ways whereby His arms bless our lives and strengthen our arms. I wish to focus on three: His arms of power, His arms of love, and His arms of mercy. These three, though certainly related to each other, are unique in what they do *for* us and *to* us.



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### **Arms of Power**

I am convinced that one of the reasons the scriptures are so full of examples and teachings of God's majestic power is to show us that nothing is too hard for the Lord (see Genesis 18:14).

Moses declared: "The Lord is my strength . . . , and he is become my salvation: he is my God. . . ."

"Thy right hand [or arm], O Lord, is become glorious in power" (Exodus 15:2, 6).

David knew that God was more powerful than Goliath (see 1 Samuel 17). Elijah knew and demonstrated with consuming fire that Jehovah's power was greater than the power of Baal and all his priests (see 1 Kings 18). Likewise, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego could testify that fiery furnaces can't hold a candle, literally and symbolically, to the glory and power of the Son of Man (see Daniel 3).

His arms of power created "worlds without number" (Moses 1:33), parted the Red Sea, stilled the storms, fed the multitude, healed the sick, and raised the dead. His arms of power are seen in nature, in His compassion for the downtrodden, in His forgiveness of the repentant, and in His vengeance upon the wicked. All around us—both temporally and spiritually—we see the fulfillment of the Lord's words in Doctrine and Covenants section 1: "And the arm of the Lord shall be revealed" (verse 14).

When we understand and more fully accept, as Nephi declared, that "he is mightier than all the earth" (1 Nephi 4:1), we can







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trust more deeply in His arms of power, more fully allow ourselves to be upheld by those arms, and rely less on the arm of flesh—even our own puny arms. When we recognize the Lord's arms of power and learn to lean on His ample arms, we will trust more fully in His promises to us. His promises of power, protection, succor, and strength are too numerous to cite. The scriptures are full of them:

- Isaiah 41:10: “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; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand [or arm] of my righteousness.”
- John 14:18, 27: “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. . . . Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. . . . Let not your heart be troubled.”
- Alma 36:3: “Whosoever shall put their trust in God [His arms of power] shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions.”
- D&C 84:88: “I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up.”

In addition to scriptural promises and promises given by modern-day prophets and apostles, each of us is a beneficiary of *personal* promises of God's power in our lives. Those promises come to us in the form of priesthood blessings from patriarchs, from fathers and bishops, and from home

teachers and trusted friends. Because of the Lord's arms of power, we can trust in those promises and know that we are held tightly in what Amulek described as the "arms of safety" (Alma 34:16). God's promises of power and protection are sure. President George Q. Cannon (1827–1901) declared:

"No matter how serious the trial, how deep the distress, how great the affliction, He will never desert us. He never has, and He never will. He cannot do it. It is not His character [to do so]. He is an unchangeable being; the same yesterday, the same today, and He will be the same throughout the eternal ages to come. We have found that God. We have made Him our friend, by obeying His Gospel; and He will stand by us. We may pass through the fiery furnace; we may pass through deep waters; but we shall not be consumed nor overwhelmed. We shall emerge from all these trials and difficulties the better and purer for them, if we only trust in our God and keep His commandments."<sup>4</sup>

### Arms of Love

Father Lehi, in his final discourse to his family, testified, "The Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and *I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love*" (2 Nephi 1:15; emphasis added). That phrase—"encircled about eternally in the arms of his love"—is perhaps the most profound and deeply personal phrase in all of holy writ. I came to understand this passage more deeply from personal experience.

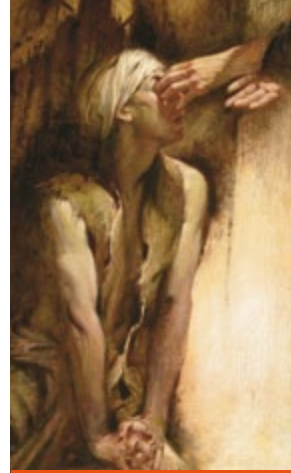
Several years ago I was a struggling new mission president trying to keep it together even as I felt that I was falling apart at the seams. I was overcome with the problems and pressures of presiding over a mission—tormented by my feelings of inadequacy and

overcome by how unprepared and unworthy I felt. I was in desperate need of strength and spirituality beyond my own. As we concluded an area mission presidents' seminar, I was at emotional and spiritual low points. For a few days we had been instructed by visiting General Authorities in all the things we needed to be doing to better train missionaries and to more effectively push the work of the kingdom forward. It was both inspiring and intimidating—intimidating because I felt that, compared to other mission presidents, I was not measuring up.

At the conclusion of the seminar, we attended a temple session in the Winter Quarters Nebraska Temple. In the celestial room, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, then a member of the Presidency of the Seventy, greeted each mission president with a warm embrace and the words, "I love you."

I'm not sure whether he remembers doing this, but I will never forget it. It may not have been a big deal to him or the others, but it was a monumentally transforming moment for me. I felt the love of the Savior emanating from this special witness into my soul. It was as if I were being embraced by the Lord Himself—I was truly encircled in the arms of the Master's love. That hug and the words "I love you" and "You are doing a great job" strengthened and inspired and motivated me more than all the teaching and training presented in the meetings.

The Savior's perfect and infinite arms of love give us the strength to endure heartache and hardship, the power to resist temptation, and the courage to keep the commandments even as we are being mocked and scorned by those in the "great and spacious building" (1 Nephi 11:36). From his own personal experiences, Paul clearly understood the strengthening power of the Lord's arms of love. He testified:



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“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . .

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

“Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35, 38–39).

### **Arms of Mercy**

Alma reminded his people that Christ “sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the *arms of mercy* are extended towards them” (Alma 5:33; emphasis added). Think of what that invitation really means. Think of what His arms of mercy can do for you. When you are embraced in His arms of mercy, you will come to know the peace and joy of being clean—forgiven of your sins through His atoning mercy. You will see the world and all eternity with new eyes through the companionship of the Holy Ghost. You will feel more profoundly and love more deeply because He will, as the prophet Ezekiel declared, “take away the stony heart out of your flesh” and give you “a new heart” and “a new spirit” that will “cause you to walk in [His] statutes . . . and do them” (Ezekiel 36:26–27).

I had an experience that helped me glimpse what it means to be embraced in the arms of His mercy. I was so moved and motivated by my experience with President Uchtdorf that I determined to follow his example with my missionaries. We took every group of departing missionaries, on their last day in the mission, to the Nauvoo Illinois Temple for an endowment session. I

greeted the missionaries as they entered the celestial room with a big hug and the words “I love you.” I expressed my deep appreciation for their service and that they were now able to return home with honor. I meant every word of it, but I must admit that it was easier to express those sentiments to some missionaries than to others.

One elder in particular had given me more than his share of grief. On more than one occasion, I told him I was going to send him home. He would always promise me that he would try harder, which he did for a while. But then the cycle would start over again—disobedience, admonishment, repentance, renewed determination, and then slacking off. I badly wanted him to complete his mission honorably, which he finally did.

As he entered the celestial room, I greeted him with the customary hug and the almost obligatory “I love you.” Tears streamed down his face. His whole body shook with weeping. When he could speak, he whispered to me over and over again, “Thank you for extending me mercy.” It was a tender moment and I too shed many tears. My love for him at that moment was unbounded.

Then it happened. I understood. Almost as if the veil had parted, I sensed a coming day when I would embrace the Savior, and with tears of gratitude and love I would likewise declare, “Thank you for extending me mercy.”

How grateful I am for the Lord’s arms of mercy. I am grateful that He has rescued me, not only from physical death and sin but also from myself—my fears, my discouragement, my doubts, and my feelings of inadequacy. Truly, His arms of mercy are arms of safety and security. Mormon reminds us that had his people repented and faithfully followed the



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Savior, “they might have been clasped in the arms of Jesus” (Mormon 5:11).

Despite our accomplishments, talents, and desires for righteousness, we are weak—spiritually without arms. At times we feel what Ammon declared: “Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God” (Alma 26:12). Ammon knew whose arms gave him the strength to perform mighty miracles and proclaim the gospel. To paraphrase his words, “Clasped in the arms of Jesus, I can do all things” (see Alma 26:12).

May we exercise greater faith in the arms of the Lord—His arms of power, His arms of love, and His arms of mercy. May we allow Him to cradle and carry and comfort us in those arms. In turn, our arms—our determination and our devotion—will be strengthened. I bear testimony of the living reality of Jesus Christ and the truthfulness of His gospel. I have witnessed the enabling power of the Lord’s grace that empowers us to do and to be better. I have experienced that power. I have felt His arms around me. May we all be “clasped in the arms of Jesus.” ■

*From a devotional address delivered at BYU–Idaho on September 29, 2009. For the full text, visit [web.byui.edu/devotionalsandspeeches/speeches.aspx](http://web.byui.edu/devotionalsandspeeches/speeches.aspx).*

#### NOTES

1. Bible Dictionary, “Grace.”
2. David A. Bednar, “In the Strength of the Lord,” in *Brigham Young University 2001–2002 Speeches*, Oct. 23, 2001, 7.
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Come Unto Me,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1998, 19.
4. George Q. Cannon, in *Collected Discourses Delivered by President Wilford Woodruff, His Two Counselors, the Twelve Apostles, and Others* (1988), 2:185.

