

LIVING IN Grace AND Gratitude

Because of the Savior’s love, I have come to understand eternal principles that bless my life and give me strength to bear my burdens.

By Cecily Smith

My life has been filled with joy and happiness. I came to a wonderful family and was raised by faithful parents. I have devoted children, and my husband is a most faithful and loving companion.

But one of the most difficult recurring challenges I have had to face is depression. With clinical depression, one never knows when or if those dark, lonely, hopeless feelings will go away. Though my depression is not fully gone or healed, the effects of it are much less significant. I believe, along with Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “that through any illness or difficult challenge, there is still much in life to be hopeful about and grateful for.”¹ I know our Savior can heal us and offer peace, and I strive to live each day through Him in grace and gratitude. Because of the healing power of the Savior’s love and Atonement, I have come to understand eternal principles that bless my life and give me strength to bear my burdens.

Recognizing My Depression

In my latter years of high school, I could tell something was wrong, but I didn’t know what. The sleepless nights and increased anxiety became overwhelming. I did what most do—held my feelings in and did my best in my responsibilities.

Years went by and I had moments of feeling normal, but mostly my feelings of hopelessness persisted. During the time I felt well, I met my husband, and later we were married. We were blessed with our firstborn son and things were wonderful. But deep down, I knew I was struggling.



Soon after our son was born, we moved across the country away from family and friends so that my husband could start medical school. I became pregnant with our second son. With all the change and isolation, the feelings of gloom deepened. I sought help but didn't get answers. Soon after the baby was born, my depression intensified dramatically. The hormonal change, along with the move, created a very dark place inside me. I collapsed mentally and physically.

“What Did I Do Wrong?”

At my worst time of darkness and discouragement, my feelings came to the forefront. Throughout my life I had tried to be good in every way. I prayed and read my scriptures. I attended the temple and fulfilled my callings. But apparently it wasn't enough. Why did I feel so bad when I had tried so hard to be good?

I dropped to my knees on the hard, cold floor of my room, looking for some ray of light through the window. I asked my Father in Heaven five simple words, “What did I do wrong?” As I knelt there in silence, I felt something. It was as if someone came into the room with me, knelt by my side, and wrapped their arms around me. Then this very quiet, comforting, gentle thought flooded into my mind: “You did nothing wrong. Just take care of yourself.”

After that quiet and comforting thought, I began to try and seek answers to help me “take care of myself.” With that, I found answers and principles that have helped guide me through these last 15 years.



Guiding Principles

1 Live gratefully. I began a gratitude journal inspired by President Henry B. Eyring, Second Counselor in the First Presidency. He asked himself: “Have I seen the hand of God reaching out to touch us or our children or our family today?”² Upon reflection, he could perceive ways that Heavenly Father had blessed someone in his family.

In journaling, my testimony was strengthened as I remembered the Lord's mercy. When I do have trials—even depression—those are often the times I am most grateful because I recognize the Lord's gifts of strength to me.

2 Live gracefully. In allowing the Savior's healing grace to be part of my life, I have come to rely on Him more fully. I need His influence each day to help me not only overcome my weaknesses but also increase my strengths. This brings me greater purpose and joy. I know I cannot make it back to the presence of the Father without the Savior's infinite Atonement. I have come to more fully utilize the enabling power of the Savior Jesus Christ.³

3 Live in love. As the Savior taught, the two greatest commandments have to do with love: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:37–39).

The more I have prayed to understand these commandments, the greater my love has grown for my Father in Heaven, for my neighbor—and for myself. This means I seek to care for my physical as well as spiritual well-being. I also take time to improve the talents Heavenly Father has given me. I know that as I care properly for myself, I am better able to serve and love others.

4 Live simply. Elder Holland has counseled, “In preventing illness whenever possible, watch for the stress indicators in yourself.”⁴ High levels of stress can contribute to depression, and because of that, I have learned to balance my life. This has blessed me to be able to do many things in life, including holding Church callings, being a wife to a busy physician, and meeting the needs of four active boys.

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught:

“When stress levels rise, when distress appears, when tragedy strikes, too often we attempt to keep up the same frantic pace. . . .

“There is a beauty and clarity that comes from simplicity.”⁵

I have learned to slow down my pace and recognize depression for what it really is—an illness—and care for myself so I can take care of my family. I’ve sometimes had to miss important events, but the more I take care of myself, the quicker I recover.

I’ve learned to leave margins in my days. Those open spaces have allowed for a greater influence of the Spirit, room to serve someone in need, and the ability to be present with my family.

I calendar differently. Instead of putting the doctor and dentist appointments in first, I put in the things I desire to do that will help me build my relationship with God, others, and myself. I schedule temple time, play time and learning time with my boys, dates with my husband, and service for those who have been on my mind. Second and less important are the things that typically go on a calendar: doctor and dentist appointments and so on.

5 Live faithfully. The basics of the gospel have enabled me to cope with depression again and again and to return to the light on the other side. I try to follow Elder Holland’s advice: “Faithfully pursue the time-tested devotional practices that bring the Spirit of the Lord into your life.”⁶ Daily scripture study, prayer, and temple and church attendance have been vital. In my darkest days, it was extremely difficult to go to church, but not because I didn’t love the gospel. Sundays were always a favorite day of mine. But when I felt depressed and anxious, I sometimes ended up crying in the car or restroom, praying for some solace. I wanted to obey the commandment to go to church but my social anxiety seemed too great. I went anyway. And though each week for years and years it was the same painful experience, I look back and realize how blessed I was for being consistent and not giving up. In fact, by going I was blessed to overcome my social anxiety.

Most of all, it has been faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that has enabled me to bear this burden with greater ease. In short, because of the Savior Jesus Christ, I have learned from my depression and know that there is a better way to pass through the trials we have been given. All that He desires us to experience—even in especially difficult circumstances—can be received in grace and gratitude. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Like a Broken Vessel,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 42.
2. Henry B. Eyring, “O Remember, Remember,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 67.
3. See David A. Bednar, “In the Strength of the Lord,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 76–78.
4. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Like a Broken Vessel,” 41.
5. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Of Things That Matter Most,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 19–20.
6. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Like a Broken Vessel,” 41.