

# Overcoming

## FEELINGS OF INADEQUACY



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Of the Seventy

**T**hirty-one years ago, in what I consider to be a landmark address titled “Notwithstanding My Weakness,” Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spoke to those who feel a sense of personal inadequacy. He directed his remarks “not to the slackers in the Kingdom, but to those who carry their own load and more; not to those lulled into false security, but to those buffeted by false insecurity, who, though laboring devotedly in the Kingdom, have recurring feelings of falling forever short.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, more than three decades later, I believe many Church members still feel deeply inadequate at times. Such feelings can come as a result of unfair comparisons with those around us. We “look at others with their lands and gold” and forget that “Christ has promised [us] His wealth untold.”<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes the unfortunate actions and unkind comments of others can diminish our feelings of self-worth. Young people are often on the receiving end of harsh criticism from peers, teachers, and even parents. Many

adults experience the emotional turmoil that follows personal rejection or fractured relationships. Some worry that they are simply “not good enough,” a feeling that may be reinforced by carping comments from unkind and unthinking spouses.

The adversary is also at work. President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) taught, “As the showdown between good and evil approaches with its accompanying trials and tribulations, Satan is increasingly striving to overcome the Saints with despair, discouragement, despondency, and depression.”<sup>3</sup> The adversary knows that if he can prevent us from recognizing our divine potential, he will have scored a major victory.

Whatever the source, such feelings of personal inadequacy can prove debilitating. If we allow them to persist, the weight of the world will press down on us, and we will be held back from achieving our potential. By extension, the lives of those we love will also be affected—lives that otherwise would have been touched for good if we had felt positively about ourselves.

How might we overcome such feelings

*Recognizing our strengths and stretching ourselves in service can help us achieve our full potential.*



and rise above our circumstances? Here are some ideas.

**You're Better Than You Think You Are**

First, if we have subjected ourselves to a constant barrage of self-criticism, let us recognize that we are better than we think we are! Elder Maxwell counseled, "Some of us stand before no more harsh a judge than ourselves,

a judge who stubbornly refuses to admit much happy evidence and who cares nothing for due process."<sup>4</sup>

When things go wrong in our lives, it is easy to lose all sense of perspective. We forget our divine inheritance, when we should remember that we come from heavenly parents who love us. We are impatient for instant solutions, when often it is the passage of time

**W**hatever their source, feelings of personal inadequacy can prove debilitating. But we can rise above our circumstances and overcome these feelings.





that will allow things to work out. We ignore or downplay our strengths and abilities, just at the time we should be recognizing and applying them. In Johnson Oatman Jr.'s hymn, written more than 100 years ago, we are advised, "Count your many blessings; name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done."<sup>5</sup>

A characteristic of a depressed spirit is an overconcentration on cares and concerns—an unwise wallowing in feelings of foreboding. What a difference it would make if, instead, we took account of our strengths, raised our eyes off the ground, and gave ourselves credit for how far we have already come and how much we have already achieved.

Let us recognize and make use of our talents, abilities, skills, and capacity instead of allowing these traits to be buried through self-criticism, forgetfulness, and disuse. Let us name our blessings one by one.

### Serve Others

Second, we can serve others. President Benson taught, "To press on in noble endeavours, even while surrounded by a cloud of depression, will eventually bring you out on top into the sunshine."<sup>6</sup>

There is something about service that brings about a marvelous change in how we think and feel about ourselves. As we stretch our souls in service, we begin to forget our own challenges, and we are blessed with good feelings—even joy.

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) taught this concept most powerfully: "The more we serve our fellowmen in appropriate ways, the more substance there is to our souls. We become more significant individuals. . . . Indeed, it is easier to 'find' ourselves because there is so much more of us to find!"<sup>7</sup>

The experience of Ammon and his missionary brethren is illustrative. While engaged in their missionary labors, they experienced discouragement and despondency; yet they were determined to press on. Ammon records, "Now when our hearts were depressed, and we were about to turn back, behold, the Lord comforted us, and said: Go amongst thy brethren, the Lamanites, and bear with patience thine afflictions, and I will give unto you success" (Alma 26:27).

There follows an inspiring record of their devotion to the cause. They "traveled from house to house" and taught in streets, homes, temples, synagogues—everywhere they went. It was not easy service. It was arduous and beset with difficulties, and it required that they give their very best. Ammon speaks of severe persecution that must have caused them to stretch every sinew (see Alma 26: 28–30).

Despite it all, and in sharp contrast to their original feelings of despondency, Ammon concludes his witness with this ringing declaration:

"Now have we not reason to rejoice? Yea, I say unto you, there never were men that had so great reason to rejoice as we, since the world began; yea, and my joy is carried away, even unto boasting in my God; for he has all power, all wisdom, and all understanding; he comprehendeth all things, and he is a merciful Being, even unto salvation, to those who will repent and believe on his name.

"Now if this is boasting, even so will I boast; for this is my life and my light, my joy and my salvation, and my redemption from everlasting wo" (Alma 26:35–36).

Ammon describes in the space of eight verses how they had progressed from despondency to joy. What made the difference? He and his brethren simply went to work. They devoted themselves to the great cause of preaching the gospel and testifying of the redemptive power of the Savior. As a result, they rose above their circumstances; in doing so, they found themselves. They knew the source of light and joy, and their joy was multiplied when they helped so many others to be saved "from everlasting wo."

So it can be for us as we lose ourselves in the service of others.



### Ignore the Devil's Derision

Third, as Elder Maxwell counseled in his address, we can distinguish “between divine discontent and the devil’s dissonance.”<sup>8</sup> The Savior invites improvement to encourage us in reaching our potential. The adversary deploys derision to discourage us with feelings of worthlessness. Satan “seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself”

(2 Nephi 2:27). He uses the circumstances of life to drag us down so that we think less of ourselves than we should. He would have us look at how far we have yet to travel and the challenges en route, in the desire that we might give up in a state of discouragement and hopelessness.

The Apostle Peter experienced something of this when he responded to Jesus’s

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## HELPS FOR HOME EVENING

1. Display a puzzle with four missing pieces (or cut up a picture to create your own puzzle). As you discuss each point for overcoming feelings of inadequacy, add the missing piece to the puzzle. Testify that as we follow this counsel we can feel more complete and fulfill our divine potential.

2. Have everyone write down strengths or talents that they admire in each family member. Discuss ways to “make use of our talents, abilities, skills, and capacity.” Ask individuals what they would like to do but may be afraid to try. Talk about how the four suggestions for overcoming inadequacies can provide courage to move forward.

divine opportunities that await us as we “continue in the faith grounded and settled, . . . not moved away from the hope of the gospel” (Colossians 1:23).

### Draw Near to the Savior

As we recognize our strengths, stretch ourselves in service, ignore the devil’s derision, and build our faith, we will overcome feelings of personal inadequacy.

Ultimately, we will feel an ever-increasing sense of value and worth

as we draw closer to the Savior. What we must do, through the exercise of faith and obedience, is to avail ourselves of the personal, intimate blessings of the Atonement. As we are able to receive His forgiveness, we are able to put our own feelings of inadequacy in perspective and understand how exaggerating them holds us back. We then are cleansed, refreshed, and strengthened. We feel the Savior’s love, and it is a transforming experience.

When asked how he had produced the magnificent statue of an angel, Michelangelo is reported to have simply replied, “I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.” That is what the Lord will do with each of us if we allow Him to do so. He can carry our burdens and help us overcome our self-doubts and fears. After all, it was He who said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:28–29).

I know from my own experience that this promise is sure. ■

### NOTES

1. *Ensign*, Nov. 1976, 12.
2. “Count Your Blessings,” *Hymns*, no. 241.
3. “Do Not Despair,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1974, 65.
4. *Ensign*, Nov. 1976, 13.
5. *Hymns*, no. 241.
6. *Ensign*, Nov. 1974, 67.
7. “The Abundant Life,” *Ensign*, July 1978, 3.
8. *Ensign*, Nov. 1976, 14.

invitation to walk on the waters of Galilee. He began with eagerness and purpose but then noticed how far he had to go, how fierce the wind was blowing, how choppy the sea had become—and he began to sink. Caught by the Savior’s hand, he heard the gentle rebuke, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” (Matthew 14:31).

There are high expectations for Church members, but the laws, ordinances, and commandments of His gospel are invitations, not indictments.

### Replenish Spiritual Reserves

Fourth, we need to regularly replenish our spiritual reserves if we are to avoid feeling empty. We accomplish this when we spend quiet moments in personal reflection and meditation, when our hearts are drawn out in humble prayer, and when we allow ourselves to be exposed to the insight, encouragement, counsel, and answers found in the scriptures and in the teachings of latter-day prophets.

We should also be strengthened as we read Church materials and participate in Sunday meetings. Our Sunday worship and instruction time should not simply leave us with an even longer checklist of things to do. While we know that “faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (James 2:17), we should also recognize that works without faith are equally sterile. Perhaps we might do less rushing around on Sundays with bulging briefcases, assignment lists, and schedules. Perhaps we could spend more time just sitting, in a sense of perfect stillness, with open scriptures and open hearts.

As we read Church magazines and manuals, as we attend Church classes, and as we sit in sacrament meetings, let us do so with a willingness to *feel* and to be strengthened. If we do this, we will be uplifted and encouraged, we will come to recognize how much we are loved, and we will gain a greater vision of the blessings that are ours and the