

STRENGTHENING MY BACK WITHOUT REMOVING MY **BURDEN**



We don't always know why the Lord allows our specific challenges, or why He doesn't take them away when we pray sincerely and often. But we can be assured that He is in control.

By Ryan E. Kunz

I'm no different than any other child of God in that my Heavenly Father has seen fit to test me with a number of challenges that seem perfectly tailored to try my faith, my capacity to endure, and to help me grow spiritually.

I was born with a speech impediment. In situations with any degree of stress, my tongue freezes up and my lips refuse to obey my commands. When I'm speaking with family or close friends, my stutter is negligible, but I feel tongue-tied when I have to speak in front of a group or to unfamiliar people to the point where merely introducing myself can be a wearisome ordeal.

I've lost count of the number of times I've petitioned the Lord for relief. What purpose could this serve, I've wondered late at night, and what could I possibly hope to learn from this? Wouldn't it be a simple matter for the Lord to simply tweak my tongue or vocal cords and save me embarrassment for years to come? Surely whatever lesson I might learn isn't worth the frustration I would endure in the process, I've thought.

When I turned 19, the time came for me to serve a mission. Part of me hoped that some miraculous development would occur that would speedily rid me of my problems so that



I might better serve the Lord—or that I might be healed as a result of faithful service.

So I continued the long process of praying for deliverance. I had four priesthood blessings during my mission for my speech, all of which promised me strength, but none promised any sort of immediate release from my problems.

“What am I doing wrong?” I asked myself.

By the time my mission was coming to a close, I had reached a point where door approaches were doable, if still frustrating. With the Lord’s help, I could speak to whomever I needed to and express what I wanted to say, but I still wasn’t satisfied.

I envied the confident way some of my companions spoke to members and investigators, and I fantasized about speaking freely and fluently in a way I never had. But such a gift never came.

I read the scriptures, finding again and again stories where the Savior healed people—the paralytic, the blind, the deaf. Why wouldn’t He heal me?

I recognized that my problems were small compared to the afflictions of many people in the world, but to me, they were big because I was forced to face them every day, almost any time I opened my mouth.

I returned home with honor, but not with complete satisfaction. I cherished the memories I had accumulated during my mission,

but I harbored a small pocket of bitterness that I’d had to struggle so hard when other missionaries had served the Lord seemingly without any trouble.

I began college, knowing I would continue to face many of the frustrations that had plagued me on my mission. I dated, attended social events, and enjoyed time with my roommates, but the frustration at never being able to speak as I wanted was never far away.

In my quest to understand my specific set of challenges, I have found many scriptures that shed light on my situation. There is one passage in particular, where Alma the Elder and his people labor in captivity, praying for deliverance. The wicked priest Amulon had placed great burdens upon Alma and his people.

“And it came to pass that so great were their afflictions that they [the people of Alma] began to cry mightily to God.

“And Amulon commanded them that they should stop their cries; and he put guards over them to watch them, that whosoever should be found calling upon God should be put to death.

“And Alma and his people did not raise their voices to the Lord their God, but did pour out their hearts to him; and he did know the thoughts of their hearts” (Mosiah 24:10–12).

Though I’m not in bondage to a tyrannical leader, I can sympathize with Alma and his people and their desperate need for hope.

Yet their answer wasn’t a miraculous rescue from their afflictions:

“And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions, saying: Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage.



HEALING FROM HIM WHO LOVES US BEST

“Healing blessings come in many ways, each suited to our individual needs, as known to Him who loves us best. Sometimes a ‘healing’ cures our illness or lifts our burden. But sometimes we are ‘healed’ by being given strength or understanding or patience to bear the burdens placed upon us.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “He Heals the Heavy Laden,” *Ensign*, November 2006, 7–8.



The Prophet Joseph Smith was never free of hardship. God revealed to him: “Thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; and then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high” (D&C 121: 7–8).

“And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; and this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses for me hereafter, and that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions.

“And now it came to pass that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord” (Mosiah 24:13–15).

Eventually, the Lord delivered the people of Alma. He promises that anyone who struggles but remains faithful will eventually be delivered, even if that deliverance isn’t found in this life.

The thing I found most helpful was the fact that when the people prayed, the Lord did not immediately free them from their burdens. Instead He *strengthened* them and let them know that He was watching over them, but He did not free them.

Another example of delayed deliverance comes from the life of the Prophet Joseph

Smith. After hearing of the horrific events that were befalling the Saints during his imprisonment in Liberty Jail, the Prophet pled with the Lord for deliverance for his people. He prayed, “O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?” (D&C 121:1).

The Prophet’s pleas were probably far more desperate and sincere than mine were, but even so it would be a long time before the Saints were free from persecution. Joseph himself would never be free from hardship in his life.

I like to think, however, that the Lord’s admonition came as a comfort to the Prophet:

“My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment;

“And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes.

“Thy friends do stand by thee, and they shall hail thee again with warm hearts and friendly hands” (D&C 121:7–9).

We don’t always know why the Lord allows our challenges, or why He doesn’t take them away when we pray sincerely and often. But we can be assured that He is in control and “that all these things shall give [us] experience, and shall be for [our] good” (D&C 122:7).

I’m slowly accepting that perhaps my lot isn’t to be free and fluent in my speech. But I know that when I ask for it, the Lord is willing to grant me strength to deal with my problems. And I know that although he doesn’t always remove our burdens, He is always willing to help us carry them. ■

For more on this topic, please see President Henry B. Eyring, “The Power of Deliverance,” Brigham Young University Devotional, January 15, 2008; Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “He Heals the Heavy Laden,” Ensign, November 2006, 6–9; and Elder David A. Bednar, “In the Strength of the Lord,” Brigham Young University–Idaho Devotional, January 8, 2002.