



**By Bishop
Dean M. Davies**
Second Counselor in
the Presiding Bishopric

Heavenly Help

FOR OUR MORTAL JOURNEY

Some time ago I participated with Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in a series of priesthood leadership meetings in Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA. On Friday evening we held a devotional with LDS cadets at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

After the opening hymn and prayer, Elder Holland determined that in place of formal talks or presentations, the time would be given to the cadets to ask questions. Elder Holland fielded the first few questions, and then a young man stood and sincerely asked the following question: “Elder Holland, does the Lord give us challenges that are intended to impede our progress?”

I thought to myself what a great question that was. Then, after a moment of thought, Elder Holland responded, “Well, that sounds like a Bishop Davies question!”

For a moment I froze. But in those few seconds before giving a response, and with a prayer in my heart, I thought about those attending. The bright and capable cadets are there for a minimum of four years. They cannot marry, they have limited outside access and contact, and they are learning how to defend their country. They love God, are committed to keeping their covenants, and want to progress.

My response came easily and without hesitation: “No, the Lord does not give us challenges that are intended to impede our eternal progress.”

The scriptures teach that in our personal search for support and assistance, there is one, even Jesus Christ, who can help us.

A Time of Trial and Testing

In the beginning, I explained to the cadets, while we were in the presence of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, we learned that mortality would be a time of trial and testing. We learned that mortality would include such challenges as disease, disability, temptation, calamity, natural disaster, and war. Some of the Father’s children would be born with imperfect bodies; others would experience poverty. Unwise choices by some of His children would bring heartbreak and discouragement.

Thankfully, as President Thomas S. Monson has observed, “our Heavenly Father did not launch us on our eternal voyage without providing the means whereby we could receive from Him guidance to ensure our safe return.”¹

Essential to our personal faith and development is the unmistakable knowledge that our Father and our Savior want us to succeed. They want us to return to Their presence. Because of Their love for us, They have given us resources to obtain comfort, direction, and strength for our journey home. I speak of prayer, the wonderful



and sublime ability to communicate and share our concerns with the Father; the Holy Spirit, which will enlighten and comfort us; and the words of the prophets, both ancient and modern. These resources give us understanding and direction in dealing with our challenges.

It is important to understand that blessings often accompany our challenges. For example, those who suffer pain and afflictions are often better able to understand and have compassion and sympathy for others who similarly suffer.

Challenges Come to All

Some of life's disappointments and challenges may be found in the place dearest to us—our family. Sister Davies and I love our five children and have striven to do the things the prophets have instructed. We have prayed together, held family home evening, read the scriptures, attended Church meetings, and shared with our children our testimonies of the gospel.

Nevertheless, one of our beautiful daughters has chosen to leave the gospel and her covenants. It breaks our hearts, but we still love her and pray for her. And we are comforted by the Lord as we continue to do so.

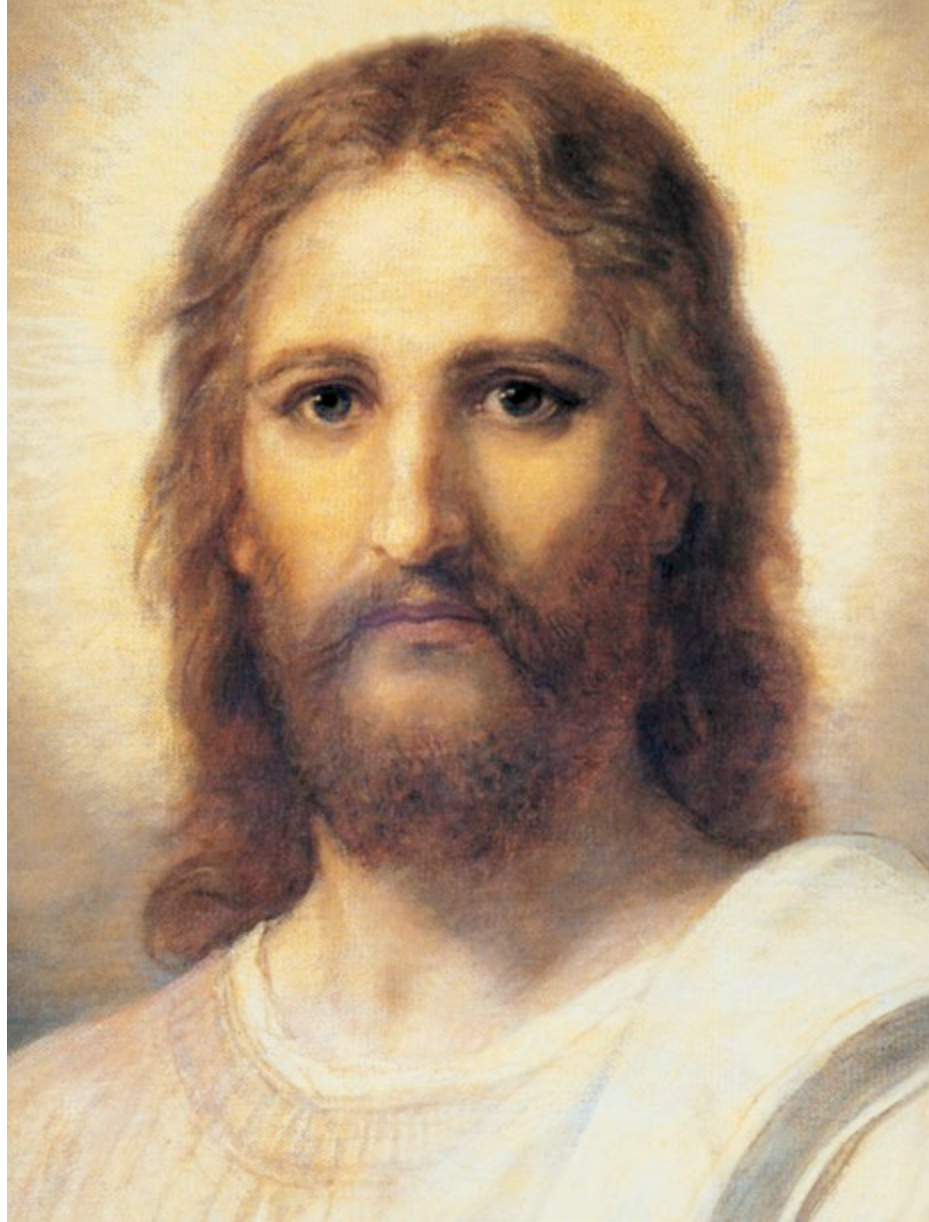
I love the words Lehi spoke to his son Jacob:

“Behold, in thy childhood thou hast suffered afflictions and much sorrow, because of the rudeness of thy brethren.

“Nevertheless, Jacob, my firstborn in the wilderness, thou knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain” (2 Nephi 2:1–2).

Life's challenges take place in a multitude of settings—at home, at school, and at work. Challenges may come in the form of physical limitations, temptations, or social or emotional difficulties. Relief from our challenges may come slowly or quickly; in some cases full relief may not come until after this mortal existence.

Sometimes challenges are miraculously resolved.



Certainly the Savior's life was filled with healing the sick and afflicted and even raising the dead. Our personal faith in the Atonement of Jesus Christ and our devotion to God will greatly influence the outcome of our challenges. We can have confidence that the Lord knows at all times what is in our best interest and that where there is faith, and in accordance with His will, miracles can occur.

A Change of Heart

Before being called to the Presiding Bishopric, I had the blessing of helping to identify and acquire sites for temples. In 2008, President Monson announced the Philadelphia Pennsylvania Temple. After the First Presidency gave permission to search for a temple site, we identified a number of possible locations. Two properties across the street from each other emerged as highly desirable. We evaluated the

properties and made an offer. To my surprise, the owner of the first property accepted our offer without negotiation.

When I met with the owner, he said he had owned the property for almost 25 years and could have developed it several times. He added that he had always felt that the property had a “higher and better purpose.”

Shortly thereafter, however, the city of Philadelphia, through a city-controlled agency, filed an action to stop the Church purchase. We did everything we could to remove the claim but were unsuccessful.

We had felt good about the property and that it was the right place for the temple. So, as a last resort, we determined to meet with the mayor. The Church temple architect and I flew to Philadelphia, and before the scheduled meeting, we met with local legal counsel, an Area Seventy, and two local Church members.

One of the members was Vai Sikahema, a well-known local celebrity who had played football at Brigham Young University and then played professional football for the Philadelphia Eagles. After retiring from football, he became a sports announcer on a local television station. In our pre-meeting we knelt in prayer to seek the Lord’s blessing on our efforts.

At our meeting with the mayor, it soon became clear that he was set against the project. His staff had assured him that this property was better suited for a commercial office building or a hotel that would generate jobs and tax revenue. We would need to look for another site.

I asked him if the architect could show a drawing or two of how the temple might look. As the architect began to stand, Brother Sikahema said, “Mr. Mayor, may I say something?” The mayor knew Brother Sikahema and said, “Of course.”

Brother Sikahema humbly said, “Many years ago when I was a young boy in Tonga, my father, mother, brothers, sisters, and I sold our home, sold fruit and vegetables, sold everything we could to raise enough money to travel to Hamilton, New Zealand, to be sealed as an eternal family in the temple. You need this temple. This temple will bless your city. It will bless the people.”

He sat down, and the Church architect then showed the mayor a few drawings. As he sat down, a city councilman who was not a member of the Church stood.

“Mr. Mayor,” he said, “I have spoken with the leaders in the community and the neighbors of this property. We want this temple. We need this temple. It will bless our city. It will bless our community. It will bless our people.”

The Spirit had come into the meeting. We were all touched. The mayor’s heart was changed. The temple would go forward on the site selected. At the end of the meeting, to my surprise, the mayor asked if I would offer a prayer.

The Lord Will Help Us

The Lord knows the end from the beginning. He knew almost 40 years before then that Vai Sikahema would need to share his faith and testimony to help advance His work.

The scriptures teach that in our personal search for support and assistance, there is one, even Jesus Christ, who can help us. He has offered this sweet counsel:

“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).

Does the Lord give us challenges in life that are intended to impede us? No. When we face tests and trials, rather than feeling sorry for ourselves, let us ask these questions: “What can I learn from this experience?” and “How will this experience strengthen me and help me prepare for the future?”

I humbly bear testimony of Jesus Christ and His Atonement—that He lives and that He is fully capable of assisting us throughout our mortal journey. ■

From a devotional address, “We Will Prove Them Herewith,” given at Brigham Young University–Idaho on May 14, 2013. For the full address, visit web.byui.edu/devotionalsand speeches.

NOTE

1. Thomas S. Monson, “The Race of Life,” *Ensign*, May 2012, 92.

Conference Connection: For a similar message from April 2014 general conference, read “Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease” by Elder David A. Bednar.