



WILMA RUDOLPH

2-time Olympian
3 gold medals
Polio survivor



By Sister Michelle D. Craig
First Counselor in the Young
Women General Presidency

WHAT VOICES WILL YOU LISTEN TO?

*We each have the potential for
greatness and an inner beauty
waiting to be revealed.*

There are a lot of voices in the world that will try to tell you negative things:

that you aren't good enough, that you're ugly or weak or incapable. There will always be voices that try to pull you down.

And so often we struggle because we listen to them. We feel unremarkable. We feel halting and slow. We feel ugly or worthless.

The question we have to ask is, what voice will we listen to? What will you choose to believe about who you are—and about your divine potential?

I love the following two stories. They teach us that no matter the physical challenges we face or the voices trying to bring us down, we each have the potential for greatness and an inner beauty waiting to be revealed.

THE FASTEST WOMAN IN THE WORLD

In 1960 Wilma Rudolph became a track-and-field legend. She was running for the United States in the Olympics, which were being televised for the first time. In spite of the intense pressure, Wilma ran so quickly she was proclaimed “the fastest woman in the world.” By the end of the Olympics, she had won not just one gold medal but three—the first American woman ever to do so.

Wilma's incredible victory teaches us a powerful lesson about our true potential and identity. But her story is even more inspiring when you know how it began.

THEY SAID SHE'D NEVER WALK

Wilma was born in Tennessee in 1940. She was the 20th of 22 children in her family. She was born prematurely and weighed under five pounds. In her early childhood she suffered from a slew of illnesses—pneumonia, scarlet fever, and then polio, which left her with limited use of her left leg. She required leg braces to stand. “My doctor told me I would never walk again. My mother told me I would,” Wilma said. “I believed my mother.”¹

When she was nine years old, Wilma determined to prove the doctors wrong. She took

off her leg braces and began to walk, one slow step at a time. She fell, she got up and tried again, and again, and again. With grit, determination, and faith, Wilma continued to practice. Eventually, she even started to run. She ran a lot. And, after years of work, she ran fast—very fast. Fast enough to run in the 1956 Olympics and win a bronze medal at age 16. Then, four years later, she ran again to win those amazing three gold medals.



Winners of the women's 100-meter race at the 1960 Summer Olympics in Rome, Italy. Wilma Rudolph (center) is awarded the gold medal.

THE HIDDEN BEAUTY WITHIN

Just like Wilma, you'll face voices telling you you're not good enough, you're too weak, or you're just not capable. They may tell you that you're different, ugly, or no good, or that you're not worth anything because you don't meet their physical standards.

Think about this next story.

In Thailand in 1955, a nearly 10-foot sculpture of a Buddha was being moved to a new building. Made of plaster and very heavy, it didn't appear all that remarkable.

But as the statue was being lifted from its pedestal, the ropes broke and the sculpture fell to the ground. The anxious movers quickly checked the statue for

damage, and to their dismay they discovered cracks in the plaster. Then a glint of color caught their attention.

Where the plaster was removed, they discovered that the sculpture was really made of gold! Apparently, hundreds of years earlier, the golden statue had been covered in plaster, perhaps to protect it from thieves, and over time the secret was forgotten until the fall revealed its true inner beauty. Today the gold alone is valued at \$250 million, and the statue is housed in a building of honor as a beautiful, historic, religious work of art.²



BUDDHA STATUE

9.8 feet tall
Weighs 6.1 tons
Worth \$250 million

The temple of Wat Traimit, Bangkok, Thailand

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM GETTY IMAGES



PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRISTINA SMITH

WHO WILL YOU LISTEN TO?

Many of us may feel like the plaster-covered Buddha statue, especially if we compare ourselves to others. Satan wants us to do just that—to compare our looks, our skills, our talents, our bodies to other people and to feel bad about our failings. If we listen, we may never realize the great inner beauty that God has granted each of us. Inside we are truly amazing.

As President Boyd K. Packer (1924–2015), President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, taught: “However many generations in your mortal ancestry, no matter what race or people you represent, the pedigree of your spirit can be written on a single line. You are a child of God!”³ We have a divine nature and a beautiful eternal destiny! We are indeed sons and daughters of Heavenly Parents who love us, and we love Them!

The truth is, there are times when each of us struggles to break free of the figurative layers of plaster or leg braces that are holding us back and keeping our beautiful spirits and inner strength from shining through. What do we do in those moments? Do we listen to the voices that tell us we’re ugly or no good or we can’t measure up?

Or will we do as Wilma, who believed the encouraging words of her mother instead of alternate voices and then had the determination to get up each time she fell and try again?

Will you listen to the voice of our living prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, who tells you that you are among the spirits Heavenly Father held in reserve to come to the earth in these latter days—that “those noble spirits—those finest players, those heroes—are you?”⁴

Just as the golden Buddha covered in plaster and the young girl in leg braces, each one of us, as a child of God, has unlimited potential waiting to be developed and an inner beauty to be trusted and revealed. As we exercise faith in God and live as disciples of Jesus Christ, His Son, we can live with confidence, find joy, and reach our eternal potential. **NE**

NOTES

1. Quoted in “Wilma Rudolph,” at biography.com.
2. See Jack Canfield, “The Golden Buddha,” in *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, ed. Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen (1993), 69–71.
3. Boyd K. Packer, Apr. 1989 general conference (*Ensign*, May 1989, 54).
4. Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel” (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), 8, HopeofIsrael.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.