

SPIRITUAL RESILIENCE

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Good morning fellow Saints. I am glad to be here with you on this beautiful Sabbath morning.

Last week at this time I was 10,913 feet above sea level, on Seldon Pass in the Sierra Mountain Range. My sister, Jill, who is an avid hiker and backpacker had invited me to join her as she worked on completing her goal to hike the entire John Muir Trail in sections. The John Muir Trail is a 211 mile trail in California that stretches from the Yosemite Valley to Mount Whitney, the highest point in the contiguous United States. I was to accompany her for a 50 mile section over 4 days. When I had completed this section, I had hiked from one side to the other of the Sierra Nevada mountains.

I can say, without a doubt, that this was the most physically challenging experience I have ever had. We would wake up early in the morning with the sun, and then hike most of the days for 10-12 hours carrying a 20 plus pound pack on our backs for 10 or more miles. On the most strenuous day we hiked 4,000 feet in elevation.

I had backpacked before and have done plenty of hiking, but I don't think I realized how challenging this would be when I said, "Yes." There were several times when I **thought**, "I don't think I can do this." In the end, though, I accomplished what I set out to do.

I am going to use this most recent experience as a metaphor for my message today. Hiking along the John Muir Trail, in some ways, could be compared to our journey through life.

I would like to share some thoughts I have had about how we can increase our spiritual resilience and how we can help our children or the children we interact with to build their spiritual resilience. These could be our own children, children or youth in the classes we teach or they could be our grandchildren, nieces or nephews.

I am a school counselor at Wasatch Junior High. As a counselor, part of my job is to teach social emotional skills to students. In the last few years there has been a big focus not only in our school but worldwide on resilience. Resilience is "an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change." In this definition it describes resilience as an

ability. An ability is something acquired through working at it. For example, a child gains the ability to walk or feed themselves through practice.

Apparently, many of our most recent generation of children have not been given the chance to acquire this ability. A recent study published in JAMA Pediatrics stated that there has been an increase in children and teen depression and anxiety over the last five years. And the CDC recently reported that from 2019 to 2021 there has been a 51% increase in emergency room visits by teenage girls for attempted suicides.

As a corollary, we have seen an increase in youth returning home early from missions and have seen our youth leaving active membership in the church. While not exactly the same, there are some similarities between emotional and spiritual resilience. The root of the problem in both cases is that the person doesn't feel able to withstand the challenges, whether social, emotional or spiritual that they are faced with and feel the need to exit the situation rather than push through. I would like to share four ways that we can improve our ability and our children and youth's ability to bounce back spiritually.

The first is understanding who the Holy Ghost is and how to access this gift in our lives. Going back to my backpacking experience, the area we were hiking in was a wilderness area, meaning that the closest roads and people were miles away. There was no accessible cell service most of the way. And while the trail was well-established there were many obstacles and physical challenges along the way. We had to cross rushing rivers that were knee deep, we had to cross fields of snow that were slippery and the path was not always clear, so there were times we had to find ways to get past downed trees. Not to mention the fact that we were 55 and 60 year old women with some health issues of our own.

In order to have communication with the outside world in an emergency, we had a satellite phone. This device helped us to feel confident and safe as we traveled along that challenging route. We could send messages home each day to let our loved ones know that we were doing fine and if we needed help we could get it.

We have been given a similar tool from our Heavenly Father to help us communicate with Him. That tool is the gift of the Holy Ghost. To build spiritual resilience we need to understand and exercise this gift.

President Nelson has stated, "In coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost."

And Elder Lynn Robbins, in a 2019 Ensign article stated: “Because the gift of the Holy Ghost is the greatest gift that mortal man can receive, it would logically follow that the greatest and most enabling thing a parent could teach a child is to recognize and follow the whisperings of the Holy Ghost. Teaching children to be worthy of this great gift and how to receive personal revelation is the foremost thing we can do to raise spiritually self-reliant and resilient children. The Holy Ghost, along with the other members of the Godhead, is every parent’s strongest ally in raising resilient youth.”

There are some things we can do to increase the presence of the Holy Ghost in our lives. We need to do our best to live in a way that we are worthy of His presence. We need to teach our children that as we take the time to be still, we can hear His voice. And we can take the time to have conversations about our experiences with the Holy Ghost. Perhaps that could be a little check in at the end of the day during meal time or family prayer to ask “Has the Spirit been a part of your life today? What did it feel like? Or “How did the Holy Ghost help you today?”

The second way we can increase our spiritual resilience is to respect personal agency. Elder Hales has taught, “Agency is essential to the plan of salvation. ... Without agency we would be unable to make right choices and progress.” Agency is so important to Heavenly Father’s plan that in the premortal life, Lucifer “sought to destroy the agency of man.”

At the end of the second day of our hike I was really beat. We had hiked 14 miles and I wasn’t sure I could do the required 6 miles and 3,000 feet of elevation gain that would be required of me first thing the next morning. I was definitely doubting myself.

Jill didn’t tell me what I had to do. She gave me some choices and let me decide. I told her I would decide after I had a good night’s sleep and after I had eaten breakfast in the morning. The next morning, we chatted about options again and I chose to keep going on the planned route rather than take a shorter route to finish at that point. The ability to choose was so empowering. I had buy-in. And I knew that when I had finished it had been my choice to continue.

The risk of honoring agency as a parent is that things might not go perfectly. We have to be willing to allow our children to make their own choices in a developmentally appropriate way and be willing to support and help them work through the consequences. Meaning, gradually giving them more and more freedom so that when they eventually have to live

independently, they are capable of doing so. We are there to teach them the skills they need to make good decisions.

This is the precise model that was proposed to Oliver Cowdery in D&C Section 9 when the Lord told him, “Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.” Heavenly Father has given us the template right here. As we teach our children to use this template they will become more capable and more resilient.

The third way we can improve our spiritual resilience and that of our children is to experience hard things. When my children were young, the minute I thought they might be in danger, what I would call the Mama Bear, would come out in me. It was the natural instinct to protect my children from any form of hurt or discomfort. Fortunately, they found ways to experience some hardship when I wasn't hovering.

As I mentioned before, this backpacking trip was the most physically demanding thing I have ever done. So hard at times that I absolutely wasn't sure I could take another step. But at the end of each day I was so proud that I had done what was needed to get to our destination and when I woke the next morning, I had the confidence to carry on. In the process, I experienced breathtaking scenery and one-on-one time with my sister.

The scriptures tell us how important challenges are to our eternal progression. In D&C 122 we are told, “Adversity shall give us experience and be for our good.” And in Ether 12:6 it states, “We receive no witness until after the trial of our faith.”

Jospeh Smith in one of his most challenging moments was told, “. . .my son, all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than He?”

As the Mama or Papa Bear in us comes out, we need to reframe our thinking. We need to think celestial, as President Nelson has taught us recently, and that these hard experiences are just going to build strength and new abilities in ourselves or in our children. And if we and our children are to continue our progression and ultimately become as our Savior, Jesus Christ we must experience hard things, as He did.

We can give our children the opportunity to do challenging things by having them participate in a sport, work out difficult social situations with friends or teachers, learn to master a musical instrument, or take a class in school that will stretch them. And when they encounter something challenging their faith we can teach them how to ask questions and seek out truth. We can be examples of holding on tightly to the foundational gospel truths and having faith that in time or in eternity we will have more answers.

Finally, our spiritual resilience can be increased by understanding the plan our Father in Heaven has put in place for us and how to use that plan to grow and improve. My sister had done all the planning for our backpacking trip. She had thoroughly researched the trail and had an app that told her where every stream crossing was, where every possible camp site was and where we could find water. She had worked out how far we should go each day in order to get to our final destination and she had some alternative options, just in case we needed to pivot.

This knowledge of the trail that she had acquired and the map which she had downloaded to her phone made it possible for us to make good choices along the way and to feel strength, confidence and peace as we traveled. In many ways, it made it possible for us to more fully enjoy the experience without excessive worry. And there were times when we had to make a minor detour because of an obstacle or needed to figure out which fork in the path to take, but we knew we could see where we were on the map and get back on the right path.

Elder Robert D. Hales has said, “How empowering it is to know the plan! The plan of salvation is one of the greatest treasures of knowledge ever given to mankind because it explains the eternal purpose of life.”

The centerpiece of this plan is the Atonement. Understanding that we have an advocate in our Savior, Jesus Christ and that as we move through life and make a mistake, it’s not the end of the world. We can come back stronger by taking advantage of our ability to repent and change. Understanding the plan of salvation or the plan of happiness can help us bounce back from challenges better as we use the Atonement in our lives.

I would like to take a moment to talk directly to the children and youth. Listen carefully. You are extraordinary. You are capable. You are strong. And you are children of God, which means that you have the ability to become like Him. I want to give you a few quick tips about how to do that.

First – I want you to get to know the Holy Ghost. Talk to your parents and others about what it's like to feel the Holy Ghost and how it has influenced them in their lives. Seek out the influence of the Spirit in your lives. You will be able to feel His presence when you seek it.

Second - Ask your parents for responsibilities. Don't let them do everything for you. If you are going to take care of yourself in the future, you need to learn how to do that now. And learn how to make good decisions. You will need lots of practice and with help and guidance from your parents you will become good at it.

Third - Be courageous. Don't be afraid to do hard things. One of our family mottos which I think we stole from a Kelly Clarkson song is, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." And this is true!

And Fourth - Remember the Plan of Happiness that our loving Heavenly Father has created for you. No matter what happens, He has provided a way back to Him. Don't be afraid to make mistakes. Do your best and our Savior, Jesus Christ, through the Atonement has created a way for you to be forgiven and get back on the road to returning to Him.

Brothers and sisters, life can be really hard, just like the hike I completed recently. But we are all strong and capable. Heavenly Father has provided us with everything we need to make it back to Him.

I have felt Heavenly Father and the Savior's love for me. The Spirit has testified to me that Joseph Smith was the prophet of the restoration. I know that Heavenly Father wants us to know what's important for us to know at this time because he has provided a living prophet to guide and direct us and President Nelson is that person. And I am grateful for my Savior, Jesus Christ and what He has done for me so that I can become a better person through the power of the Atonement. I share these thoughts and my testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.