

# “Angels to Beckon Me”

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I am excited to be here. My husband is also excited to be here. In fact, when I was first asked to give this devotional, within the week he used that as an excuse to buy a new suit. And he and the suit have been waiting since then to make their debut. Well, here they are—with no one here to see them! All teasing aside, I am grateful to have him here today and to have his support always.

Waiting seems to be a constant theme of life—waiting to buy or wear a new suit, waiting to finish a class or just to pass the next exam, waiting in line at the grocery store, waiting for a job or job promotion, waiting for physical or mental healing, waiting for rebuilding of a broken relationship, or waiting for a pandemic to lift so that we can all come to the Marriott Center mask free to enjoy a devotional—or a basketball game.

Similarly, we can find ourselves waiting on things that are more spiritual in nature—waiting for answers to prayers, increased faith, additional gospel knowledge or understanding, promised blessings or ordinances, or forgiveness for a mistake we have made.

Of course when we are waiting, we are hopefully doing more than just twiddling our thumbs. We are working and doing what we can do to support the desired outcome with faith, hope, and charity. Professor Erin Holmes gave a BYU devotional expounding on how waiting on the Lord “includes actively seeking God,” “trying to understand God’s plan for us,” and “[choosing] faith and hope.”<sup>1</sup> But our necessary efforts are not what I want to talk about today. Instead, I want to talk about recognizing others’ efforts on our behalf.

Sometimes waiting is a mere nuisance. But other times, even when everything is going as it should, waiting is really hard. Several years ago I was visiting a friend. In the morning, she was trying to get her baby’s food ready. I watched the baby cry, oblivious to the fact that her mom was getting her exactly what she wanted and needed. Certainly, this is what a baby should be doing—crying to communicate her needs. However, I have thought of that moment several times since when I have been impatiently waiting. How often when

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*Candace Berrett, a BYU associate professor of statistics, delivered this devotional address on October 6, 2020.*

I am waiting do I recognize or look for the pieces that are falling into place exactly as I need them to? Or how often am I unaware of others or my Heavenly Parents working on my behalf?

This experience is similar, in a spiritual sense, to what Moroni said:

*For behold, God knowing all things, being from everlasting to everlasting, behold, he sent angels to minister unto the children of men, to make manifest concerning the coming of Christ; and in Christ there should come every good thing.*<sup>2</sup>

Like the mother working to get her baby the food she needed, our Heavenly Parents work to get us the things that we need—specifically, a Savior by whom “every good thing” cometh—by sending angels to minister to us.

Moroni went on to describe Christ’s coming and miracles and Resurrection—the Savior for whom the world had been waiting had come—and then he said, “And because he hath done this . . . , have miracles ceased? Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men.”<sup>3</sup>

I love this idea of angels ministering to us as we wait. I expect it happens a lot more often than we even realize. I believe in the ministering of heavenly angels,<sup>4</sup> but these angels in our lives are often unseen and unnoticed. Today I want to discuss those angels that can be more readily visible in our lives—how those with whom we live, work, and pass by in this life can act as angels in our lives every day.

So what makes an experience with someone angelic? To answer this question, I studied scriptural accounts of ministering angels to identify how heavenly angels performed their ministry and to connect these accounts to the ministry of mortal angels.

One thing I noticed was that, just like us, those to whom the angels appeared were also waiting for something. They, or perhaps someone they loved, were waiting for temporal things, such as for freedom from the rule of the Philistines, for deliverance from prison, for the defeat of oppressors, for relief from mistreatment by friends, for protection or aid of others, for emotional and

physical sustenance, for direction, for healing, for children, and more.

They also waited for things more spiritual in nature, such as to understand the meaning of visions or dreams; for a Savior; for others to repent or change; for knowledge of gospel, or truth; for the priesthood; for forgiveness or an acknowledgment of forgiveness; for privileges of the gospel; and more.

Often we might think that angels come to immediately and completely end the waiting, such as when the angel commanded Laman and Lemuel to stop torturing Nephi and Sam<sup>5</sup> or when Alma and the sons of Mosiah repented seemingly overnight after an angel appeared to them.<sup>6</sup> But more often, the waiting did not end.

Although there are many scriptural accounts of angels, I would like to share two here and relate these accounts to our interactions with mortal angels.

I have been intrigued by the story of the angel appearing to the wife of Manoah, more readily known as the mother of Samson.<sup>7</sup> The story indicates two things for which Manoah and his wife were waiting, although they were likely waiting for more than these two things. First, they and the other Israelites had been under the rule of the Philistines for forty years. Second, Manoah and his wife had been unable to have children. An angel appeared to the woman and told her that the waiting was over—kind of. The angel told her that she would bear a son, “and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.”<sup>8</sup> I don’t know the exact timing, but it appears to have taken Samson at least twenty more years before he began to fight against the Philistines. Twenty more years of waiting in addition to the forty they had already waited is a rather long time in our relatively short earthly experience. Just as angels in the scriptures did not always end the waiting, mortal angels likely will also not bring an end to our waiting as soon as we would like. Instead, here, the angel offered hope and gave direction.

Of note in this story is that Manoah and his wife did not initially know the man was an angel. The woman thought “his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God,”<sup>9</sup> but they did not know. It wasn’t until the angel came again and

“ascended in the flame of the [sacrificial] altar” that Manoah and his wife knew for sure he was sent from God.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Paul told us in Hebrews that “some have entertained angels unawares.”<sup>11</sup> Similarly, we may not immediately recognize those with whom we interact as angels. We likely won’t have the added perspective of mortal angels ascending to heaven in flames to clue us in, but we may need the added perspective of distance or time to recognize them as such.

I was particularly struck by this story because when the woman told her husband about the angel’s first visit to her, Manoah prayed in faith asking for the visitor to come to them again. But the angel didn’t come to Manoah. The angel appeared to the woman again when she was out in the fields alone. She ran to get her husband, and Manoah met him then, but why, when Manoah was the one who prayed for the angel to come again, did the angel appear to the woman and not directly to Manoah? I don’t know why—the scriptures don’t say—and maybe there are several reasons. But perhaps one reason is that angels minister to the individual, and the angel wasn’t meant for Manoah. In fact, when the angel initially appeared to the woman, he gave her instructions, and when Manoah actually met the angel, the angel simply repeated the instructions he had previously given the woman. This insight is important when I think about mortal angels in our lives: angels minister to us individually and sometimes in ways that are not what we had in mind.

The second scriptural account of angels that I want to share here is that of the angel coming to the aid of our Savior in Gethsemane. Luke told of the angel this way:

*And [Jesus] kneeled down, and prayed,*

*Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.*

*And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.*

*And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.<sup>12</sup>*

The angel could not end the Savior’s suffering, but the angel could strengthen Him by being with

Him. This angel’s service brings to mind the call of Alma as he preached of the covenant of baptism at the Waters of Mormon: “to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light; . . . and . . . to mourn with those that mourn; . . . and comfort those that stand in need of comfort.”<sup>13</sup>

Thus, if ending our waiting is not an angel’s purpose, what is? Moroni described the ministry of angels this way: “And the office of their ministry is to call [people] unto repentance, and to fulfil and to do the work of the covenants of the Father . . . by declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they . . . may have faith in Christ.”<sup>14</sup> I see this as two purposes of angels: (1) to call us closer to our Heavenly Parents and (2) to fulfill Their eternal purposes for us through covenants.

These two purposes are highlighted in Jacob’s dream about a ladder connecting earth to heaven. In this dream, Jacob saw “angels of God ascending and descending on [the ladder].”<sup>15</sup> John stated that Jesus used that same phrase when calling Nathanael as an apostle. Jesus said that Nathanael would see “angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man,”<sup>16</sup> alluding to the fact that He is what connects earth to heaven. Indeed, it is by Christ and through His Atonement that we are able to repent and to make and keep sacred covenants to return to our Heavenly Parents. Therefore, not only did Christ enable our return to our Heavenly Parents through the Atonement, but He also enabled the descending of angels to earth to aid in our making use of that Atonement, that we may ascend to heaven. As the poet Sarah Flower Adams wrote about these verses, “Angels to beckon me / Nearer, my God, to thee!”<sup>17</sup>

Imagining angels ascending and descending reminded me of temple workers moving in and out of the various temple rooms as needed. I thought of how the temple workers fulfill their callings by helping us make and keep sacred covenants individually, one by one. What a perfect depiction of angels performing their ministry for each of us, one by one.

How do angels accomplish these purposes? We read in Moroni’s description of angelic ministry that they do so “by declaring the word of Christ.” Nephi preached the same, saying, “Angels speak

by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ.”<sup>18</sup> In the scriptural accounts of angels, I found that they most often “speak the words of Christ” by ministering as Christ ministered. From the scriptural accounts that I shared, we saw that angels offer hope, give instructions, minister individually, and strengthen by being present. In other scriptural accounts I found that angels give guidance, answer prayers, prophesy, call to repentance, facilitate repentance or change, deliver, rejoice, announce, assure, give peace, command, remind, administer ordinances and ordinances, praise, protect, teach, and testify. Thus, mortal angels also accomplish these angelic purposes in our lives by ministering as the Savior would.

Today we have the keys of the ministry of angels on earth.<sup>19</sup> We all are authorized to act in that capacity specifically as ministering sisters and ministering brothers, but we have angelic moments all around us. We have people in our lives who fulfill these angelic purposes for us individually, and they do so in ways that heavenly angels would.

To help you more readily identify mortal angels in your life, I would like to share a few experiences where I have felt others act as angels to me. To provide context for these experiences, I first share a few of the things that I have waited for in my life. These experiences will not be representative of what you have waited or will wait for in your life, but they will provide context for why I describe certain interactions with others as angelic for me.

In one of the more substantial waiting periods in my life, I waited longer than I wanted to have my own family—a spouse and children. In fact, it was four years and one week ago today that I went on my first date with my husband. I have that family now that I had hoped for, and I am grateful to have each of them in my life. It is also much different than I had anticipated: we are a blended family, and thus, we all are waiting to feel like the family we each want as we figure out how to piece our family together in a way that we all feel we belong. In the middle of that waiting, my father was diagnosed with cancer. I waited for him to suffer through cancer and

treatments and get better, only to have to wait for him to ultimately die. And now I wait for the day when I will see him again. I also have waited and continue to wait for anxiety and depression to be healed. As I have gotten to know more students here, I have found this to be something that many of you are waiting for as well—either for yourselves or for someone you love. While I have sought and continue to work to find treatments and coping mechanisms to better manage my anxiety and depression, I am still waiting—and will likely continue to wait much longer—for these heavy oppressors to be lifted.

These more temporal waiting periods have sometimes brought on spiritual waiting periods when I wonder if my Heavenly Parents are really aware of me and if I am fulfilling the divine missions that They and I had hoped I would. Thus, those I identify as serving as angels in my life most often bring me messages of my Heavenly Parents’ love for and awareness of me. Because angels minister to the individual, you will find that angels accomplish their purposes for you differently than they do for me. But, just as I have found similar patterns between mortal angels in my life and scriptural accounts of angels, you may find patterns between angel experiences in my life and how you might find them in yours. I pray that the Spirit will bring these experiences to your mind.

I wish I could share with you all of those people who have served to fulfill that angelic ministry in my life. Certainly, many people listening to this devotional now have done so—even in more meaningful ways than those experiences I will share here—and I would love to honor their service in this message. Instead, I have chosen to share only a few experiences that illustrate a variety of people, situations, and modes of angelic ministry.

In the midst of one of the more difficult periods of my waiting, I asked a friend to give me a priesthood blessing. In the blessing he said, among other hopeful and heavenly things, “The Lord is closer than you know.” Afterward he testified to me how strongly he felt that impression and how he had never felt that so strongly before when giving a blessing. In that moment he acted exactly as

an angel would act, reminding me in an acute way of my Heavenly Parents' love for and closeness to me. I have reflected and relied on that blessing many times during similar periods of distress.

When my dad stopped cancer treatments and was in hospice care, we had a certified nursing assistant (CNA) come to our house every day. While different CNAs came, one particular CNA came more often than the others. She brought humor into our home during a time of stress and uncertainty. She ministered to my dad as she cared for him as his nurse, but her ministry was also to us. We could feel her love for him and for us. Because of her ministry—and because of the ministry of many other friends and family who gathered around us, just as I suspect heavenly angels gathered around us on the other side of the veil—we felt an abundance of heaven's love, peace, and strength.

I have been taught by mortal angels things that I wouldn't have otherwise been able to learn. For example, my therapist has taught me how to identify and change my thinking patterns in a way that I could not have done on my own. I didn't have the tools to do that. She has served as an angel to me to help me change and to bring me closer to the person my Heavenly Parents want and need me to be to fulfill my divine missions.

I have had angel friends rejoice with me—virtually even. When I shared on Instagram a picture of a quilt I had made for my son before he was born, a friend, knowing how much I had longed for a child, saw that I had signed the quilt with "Love, Mom" and wrote, "Awww 'Love, Mom.' I got tears in my eyes!" This message reminded me of the great blessing and answer to prayers this baby was for me. "Mourn[ing] with those that mourn" also means rejoicing with those that rejoice.

Complete strangers have served as angels to me. Occasionally I travel to different countries for work conferences. For one conference, I decided to travel around Italy ahead of time by myself. I enjoy seeing and experiencing different places and have traveled a bit by myself. But this was a longer solo trip than usual, and I was feeling a bit lonely as I sat on a bench by myself eating gelato. How cliché is that? A stranger asked if she could sit by

me while she waited for her husband. I chatted with her and learned that she was from Bountiful, Utah, not far from where I grew up and not far from us here in Provo too. I met many people on that trip, but to have met someone from home at that moment reminded me that my Heavenly Parents were aware of me—even as I sat by myself eating ice cream. I would have been fine without her visit, but it is not just in the desperate times that we will find angels ministering to us. It can and often will be in the simple times too. We might be in our fields, *per se*, going about our day as usual, and it might not be until later that we realize those who ministered to us were, in fact, angels.

Perhaps some of the most angelic experiences we can have are when we receive grace from those we have offended or hurt. I often feel that if I offer grace to those who have hurt me, then I am dismissing my pain and permitting future offenses. But this is in direct conflict with my own experiences: when those I have hurt or offended have offered me grace, I am more often humbled and brought to my knees to repent and change. While receiving grace from others does not mean I am free from consequences, it does mean I am free from their judgment or backlash. A friend and clinical psychologist, Dr. Danita Bowling, said of her practice:

*One of the theoretical assumptions I take into therapy sessions with me is that people are generally doing the best they can with what they have and know in the moment. . . . And there's more than enough grace and mercy for all of us.*

Just as the Savior offers grace to us, we have mortal angels offering us grace to show us the path back to heaven.

Sometimes, though, we won't have or notice angels around us when we feel we need them. A number of years ago I was having a particularly tough day. I prayed, asking for help, and I had a thought: to invite a new friend to a movie. I doubted myself: *How can I be a friend to someone when I feel like this?* But I did invite her—and you know what happened? She came to the movie with me. I did feel a little better, and I assumed

that this was why I felt that prompting. But that is not the reason I remember this day. The reason I remember this day is because I found out later how important my call and calls from others were to my friend. Those calls let her know that she was not alone during a time when she felt hopeless. We served as angels to each other.

Recently my siblings and I were talking about whether we ever feel our dad near us. My brother said, “I feel Dad when I do things that Dad would do.” Likewise, we will feel and recognize more angels in our lives as we do what angels—or, more precisely, what our Heavenly Parents—would do.

A friend reminded me that *waiting* has two orthogonal definitions: the waiting in life I have talked about today and the waiting that happens when a server at a restaurant waits tables. Thus, our waiting can act as a reminder to wait on—or serve—the Lord. Isaiah said, “They that wait upon the Lord shall . . . mount up with wings as eagles.”<sup>20</sup> Perhaps Isaiah would not mind this slight edit: “They that wait upon the Lord shall . . . mount up with wings as *angels*.” President Bonnie H. Cordon called on us in April’s general conference to let our lights shine, and I couldn’t help but see the parallels to the purposes of angels when she said:

*The Lord’s invitation to let our light so shine . . . is about focusing our light so others may see the way to Christ . . . [and] helping others see the next step forward in making and keeping sacred covenants with God.*<sup>21</sup>

We often think that our small efforts don’t mean anything. My ward Relief Society president sent a message to our ward a month or so ago that said, “The essence of ministering is to hold up the light of Jesus Christ, one by one.” I want you to know that “one by one” is not insignificant. It is significant. And, as a statistics professor—you all knew this was coming—I want to say that it is both statistically and practically significant! This summer my collaborator, Professor Mike Goodrich, and his research team mapped the connections of all students through classes here at BYU. We found that through classes alone, 95 percent of students are connected to over half of all BYU students within just three classes. This

means that those in your classes (1) are connected to those in their classes (2), who are connected to others in their classes (3). And that collection makes up more than 50 percent of BYU students—more than 16,000 people. How quickly one can become 16,000!

Alissa Parker, who sought peace and connection to her daughter after her daughter was killed at Sandy Hook Elementary, said in a talk, “Do you see it? We are all connected. We are all each other’s angels. We are all ministering angels. We are part of that same angelic work.”<sup>22</sup>

We might feel unprepared to take on the calling of angelic ministry to others. The story of Esther is a story that means a lot to me. I love it when her cousin said to her, essentially, “If you don’t stand up for us, God will send someone else, but ‘who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?’”<sup>23</sup>

Former Relief Society general president Barbara B. Smith said:

*We have no reason to believe that Esther had prepared specifically for the role she had to play, and yet all her life was preparation, as mine is and as yours is.*

*Preparation may be conscious and skillful or casual and undirected, but, in either case, it is cumulative.*<sup>24</sup>

Our Heavenly Parents will use our experiences and testimonies right where we are. We have been prepared to act as angels for others. Don’t be afraid to offer comfort and to teach of Christ.

Around the time I finished my PhD, one of my sisters said how impressed she was.

I told her something like, “Yeah, but I couldn’t have done it without my advisor.”

Her response? “Isn’t that what an advisor is for?”

We need each other. We are not meant to accomplish this life alone. While we are waiting, we have angels ascending and descending all around us.

I testify to you of the power of everyday mortal angels in our lives that we can see if we will look! They will show us of our Heavenly Parents’ love for us individually. They will help us to fulfill our divine missions. And we can also be angels for others through even simple acts, one by one.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Notes

1. Erin Kramer Holmes, "Waiting upon the Lord: The Antidote to Uncertainty," BYU devotional address, 4 April 2017.
2. Moroni 7:22.
3. Moroni 7:29.
4. See Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Ministry of Angels," *Ensign*, November 2008.
5. See 1 Nephi 3:29.
6. See Mosiah 27.
7. See Judges 13.
8. Judges 13:5.
9. Judges 13:6.
10. Judges 13:20; see also verse 21.
11. Hebrews 13:2.
12. Luke 22:41–44.
13. Mosiah 18:8–9.
14. Moroni 7:31–32.
15. Genesis 28:12.
16. John 1:51.
17. "Nearer, My God, to Thee," *Hymns*, 2002, no. 100.
18. 2 Nephi 32:3.
19. See, for example, D&C 13.
20. Isaiah 40:31.
21. Bonnie H. Cordon, "That They May See," *Ensign*, May 2020.
22. Alissa Parker, "Discovering the Angels Around You," address given at Time Out for Women 2016, available as an audiobook from Deseret Book.
23. Esther 4:14.
24. Barbara B. Smith, "For Such a Time as This," BYU devotional address, 16 February 1982.