

“Here’s My Heart, O Take and Seal It”

BROOKE ANN ROBERTSON

I am so grateful to be part of this devoted community of teachers and learners. Brigham Young University has played an important role in my life, and I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to its inspired mission through my work in the Integrity and Compliance Office. I am excited to be with you today, in this new term and with a wonderful new president, and I have prayed earnestly that the Spirit will edify us in our time together.

The Unexpected

When you consider the concept of the unexpected, how do you feel? Some people love surprises and crave novelty. You may feel excited when something unplanned pops up to change the direction of your day, week, month, or even your entire life! Others love predictability and crave routine. You may feel a bit anxious when unexpected things happen, and you may wonder how things will work out—especially for you and for those you love.

My family and friends will tell you that I am solidly in the latter group. I am a creature of habit. I like to be prepared. When I was an undergraduate student at BYU, my roommates good-naturedly teased me about my level of preparedness. My backpack contained not just textbooks, notebooks, and pens but also a water bottle, an umbrella, snacks, Band-Aids, ibuprofen, safety pins, hair clips, and a whistle—it was basically a miniature Room of Requirement,¹ offering up everything I needed just when I needed it.

But my backpack did *not* have a magical map² to help me navigate the unexpected turns that my life took during my college years and thereafter. Although some of the plot twists have been amazing, some have been so difficult as to push me to the very edge of my abilities and strength.

You have also experienced the unexpected. The COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted your high school, college, and mission years, significantly changing your proms, graduation celebrations, internships, work opportunities, and gatherings

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with family and friends. Other unexpected twists in your life may have rerouted you and left you with feelings that run the gamut from lost to completely unmade.

Today I would like to share some thoughts on how we can successfully navigate the unexpected. In facing the unexpected in my own life, I have learned that being bound to the Savior Jesus Christ is lifesaving. Examples I will share from my life include a significant health challenge, an extended period of singleness, and an unexpected end to that period.

Health Challenge

To begin, the health challenge.

In the middle of winter midterms in my junior year at BYU, I felt run-down. I had a full load of classes, worked as an American Heritage teaching assistant, and spent any free time I had with my roommates and friends. I was busy; it didn't surprise me that I was also very tired. But when I started having to sit closer to the front of the class to see the board clearly and drink water almost constantly to alleviate my dry mouth, seeing a doctor seemed like a good idea.

I was completely unprepared for the type 1 diabetes diagnosis I received. I was admitted to the hospital with dangerously high blood sugar levels that doctors and nurses worked to stabilize. A diabetes educator taught me how to count carbohydrates and determine and deliver matching insulin doses.

When I was released from the hospital, I tried to reenter my normal life that, it turned out, was no longer normal at all. The settings were familiar—my parents' home, my apartment in Provo, the TA lab. But life within these familiar settings was totally foreign, and it *terrified* me. I did not have a grasp on the new rules that governed how I had to live. I had been told that if I under-administered insulin, it would damage my body over time, and if I over-administered insulin, I could put myself into a coma. The uncertainty I felt about such common everyday events as eating a snack or drinking anything other than water was paralyzing. I was so scared.

Perhaps you know how chronic illnesses or other serious physical or mental health challenges

feel. Perhaps divorce, death, or a ruptured relationship has torn you or your family apart. You may have felt blindsided by unemployment and financial difficulties or by serious questions about faith. You may have been abused. You, like me, may have been so scared.

Turning Point

Moments like these can be turning points. What we choose to do next matters, both in the moment and in the long run.

We can allow our fear to paralyze us—to persuade us that the ambition we once had for our lives was misguided. We can believe we are incapable—that there is no point in trying since bad things happen to us even when we are trying to make the best choices we can. When we are vulnerable and in pain, it seems so reasonable to give in to this line of thinking.

However, we who are blessed with a knowledge of Jesus Christ, “[He] who is mighty to save,”³ can and should make a different choice.

We should turn to the Savior for relief and be bound to Him.⁴

Binding to the Savior

Jesus Christ said:

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.

*For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*⁵

The Savior invites each of us to be His yoke-mate. He promises that with Him, the burden we carry will be light.

Elder David A. Bednar shared the following:

There is no physical pain, no spiritual wound, no anguish of soul or heartache, no infirmity or weakness you or I ever confront in mortality that the Savior did not experience first. In a moment of weakness we may cry out, “No one knows what it is like. No one understands.” But the Son of God perfectly knows and understands, for He has felt and borne our individual burdens. And because of His infinite and eternal

sacrifice, He has perfect empathy and can extend to us His arm of mercy. He can reach out, touch, succor, heal, and strengthen us to be more than we could ever be and help us to do that which we could never do relying only upon our own power. Indeed, His yoke is easy and His burden is light.⁶

A week after my diabetes diagnosis, I was back on campus and feeling like an imposter in my own life, pretending that I knew how to do it. With my usual confidence shattered, I desperately needed relief. I found a quiet spot on campus and opened my scriptures to Doctrine and Covenants 122, a revelation received by the unjustly imprisoned Joseph Smith. There I read:

And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that 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?⁷

With these words, the Spirit brought to my remembrance what I knew to be true: Christ understood. He felt my pain, my fears, and my feelings of deep inadequacy. He intimately knew my burden and was eminently qualified to bear it with me.

I was humbled by the piercing question “Art thou greater than he?” As I considered my situation in the context of the Savior’s infinite atoning sacrifice, my concerns were immediately tempered. I felt physically lighter. A sacred peace filled me. I was *not* assured that I would be made well or healed from my illness. Remember, the Savior’s burden is still a burden. But I *was* assured that with Him, the burden of diabetes would be light. And, miraculously, it has been! With His help I have made inspired choices that have optimized my health. I have been guided to healthcare professionals who have given me excellent care. Through this challenge, Christ has helped me gain empathy

and patience that allow me to better love my brothers and sisters. I am so grateful for His care!

“Come, Thou Fount”

Lyrics from the second and third verses of my favorite hymn, “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” express how I feel about Christ’s atoning sacrifice:

*Jesus sought me when a stranger
Wand’ring from the fold of God;
He to rescue me from danger
Interposed His precious blood.*

*O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I’m constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wand’ring heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it;
Prone to leave the God I love.
Here’s my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.⁸*

Like a well-intentioned but also distractible sheep, I am prone to wander, especially when caught off guard and unprepared. It becomes difficult to see the Good Shepherd and His power when I am scared. My fears multiply, and before long the darkness begins to overwhelm me.

I want desperately to be kept from wandering, from leaving the God I love. I know that Christ is “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever,”⁹ and He “will not leave [me] comfortless”¹⁰ when I cry out. As the hymn’s lyrics suggest, His goodness, like a fetter, can bind my wandering heart to Him.

Fetters of Goodness

The choice of the word *fetter* in the hymn is a curious one. The term generally has a negative connotation. A fetter is a chain or a shackle that restrains and prevents motion. Upon hearing the word, we might envision a prisoner chained in a dank, dark cell, like in *The Count of Monte Cristo*.¹¹ This type of fettering is not an especially attractive prospect.

Let’s liberate the word *fetter* from that imagery. The hymn’s use of *fetter* conveys a depth of

meaning much more significant than the fact that it rhymes with *debtor*. The fetters that bind our otherwise wandering hearts to the Lord are fashioned from the Savior’s goodness. These are not heavy iron chains. They are covenants and ordinances that bind us to Him and His pure love and selflessness in the most healing embrace we can imagine and draw us into His warmth and safety.

The Lord’s covenantal fetters, paradoxically, give us ultimate freedom if we will wholeheartedly commit ourselves to them. The Savior has promised, “I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say.”¹² What a gift it is to know that when we keep the covenants we have entered into, we can depend upon Christ to deliver the blessings associated with them.¹³ With our hearts fettered to Him, we are granted freedom from those things that truly imprison us—pride, addiction, anger, fear, discouragement, and, ultimately, spiritual and physical death. He dissipates all that is dark and holds up all that is heavy.

Christ eased my burdens in the wake of my diabetes diagnosis. Since I recognized, like Samuel, that I had hitherto been helped by the Lord,¹⁴ I knew I could trust Him through another challenge—the unexpectedly extended single-adult season of my life.

Extended Singleness

One of the most cherished and fundamental beliefs of our faith is that, through the sealing ordinance, we can be bound together as families for eternity. As a young student, I eagerly looked forward to being sealed in the temple to a worthy companion and creating an eternal family together.

But I graduated from BYU single. I had not planned on that, and my lack of planning left me feeling adrift.

In the ensuing years I had a lot of questions for Heavenly Father. When I was at my lowest, they sounded like this:

“What am I doing wrong?”

“Why can my friends find companions and I can’t?”

“Why hast Thou forgotten me?”

These questions were born of loneliness, sorrow, and frustration. In those times I would have been well served by Sister Michelle D. Craig’s words:

*When hard times come, I try to remember that I chose to follow Christ before I came to earth and that challenges to my faith, my health, and my endurance are all part of the reason I’m here. And I certainly should never think that today’s trial calls into question God’s love for me or let it turn my faith in Him into doubt. Trials do not mean that the plan is failing; they are part of the plan meant to help me seek God. I become more like Him when I endure patiently, and hopefully, like Him, when in agony, I pray more earnestly.*¹⁵

The challenge of waiting for marriage *did* help me to seek God and to pray more earnestly. My questions for Heavenly Father became more productive and faith-focused:

“What is Thy plan for me at this time, if not marriage and parenthood?”

“How should I be using my talents to build the kingdom?”¹⁶

As I listened in stillness, God began answering these questions. He prompted me to undertake a series of very intentional actions through which I offered my heart to Christ, who, in turn, bound me to Him.

Personal gospel study and prayer provided me with guidance for my situation. The temple became a beloved refuge. I felt the support of family on the other side of the veil as I engaged in temple and family history work. I wholeheartedly invested in my roles as a daughter, sister, aunt, and friend and in building relationships that I cherish. Serving in the Primary, Sunday School, Young Women, and Relief Society organizations gave me additional purpose and community. By consistently engaging in these activities, I experienced Christ’s goodness regularly. Seeing evidence of His mercy and love helped me maintain a “brightness of hope”¹⁷ for my future. How grateful I felt to be fettered to the Prince of Peace!

Our Role in Binding Ourselves to the Savior

We have a large part to play in allowing the Lord's goodness to bind us to Him like a loving fetter. With clear intention we must dedicate our hearts and our time to experience His goodness. You will remember three ways that President Russell M. Nelson has encouraged us to partner with the Savior.

1. Make and Keep Covenants

Making and keeping covenants binds us to the Savior like nothing else can.

We keep our baptismal covenant by taking upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ, always remembering Him, keeping His commandments, and serving Him to the end. The temple endowment includes "covenants to keep the law of obedience, the law of sacrifice, the law of the gospel, the law of chastity, and the law of consecration."¹⁸ And in Gospel Topics we are taught, "Honoring the covenants of the endowment qualifies Church members to enter the covenant of eternal marriage."¹⁹

President Nelson said:

*The reward for keeping covenants with God is heavenly power—power that strengthens us to withstand our trials, temptations, and heartaches better. This power eases our way. Those who live the higher laws of Jesus Christ have access to His higher power. Thus, covenant keepers are entitled to a special kind of **rest** that comes to them through their covenantal relationship with God.*²⁰

2. Help Others Make and Keep Covenants—Gather Israel

Helping our brothers and sisters make and keep covenants is a deeply meaningful way to experience Christ's goodness.

President Nelson said:

[The] gathering is the most important thing taking place on earth today. Nothing else compares in magnitude, nothing else compares in importance, nothing else compares in majesty. . . .

*Anytime you do **anything** that helps **anyone**—on either side of the veil—take a step toward making covenants with God and receiving their essential baptismal*

*and temple ordinances, you are helping to gather Israel. It is as simple as that.*²¹

Sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ, enhancing records in the FamilySearch website, performing proxy ordinances in temples, and encouraging friends to make and keep covenants are all excellent ways to engage in the most important work of our day and to draw near to Christ.

3. Be a Peacemaker

In a world full of conflict, we are uniquely positioned to be bearers of Christ's light through our peacemaking efforts. I am heartened regularly by members of the BYU community who avoid contention and treat others with dignity and respect.

President Nelson said:

*As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are to be examples of how to interact with others—**especially** when we have differences of opinion. One of the easiest ways to identify a **true follower** of Jesus Christ is how compassionately that person treats other people. . . .*

*The Savior's message is clear: His **true** disciples build, lift, encourage, persuade, and inspire—no matter how difficult the situation. True disciples of Jesus Christ are peacemakers.*²²

As we dedicate our hearts and our time to Christ by making and keeping covenants, helping others make and keep covenants, and acting as peacemakers, we should expect opposition. Satan is motivated to distance us from the Savior by breaking our bond to Him however he can. Satan will try to amplify any pain, fear, and isolation we feel in order to encourage us to wander. I invite you to resolve to stay faithful and to take action daily to strengthen your bond with Christ so He can fulfill for us all the promises and blessings of our Heavenly Father.

Marriage and Parenthood

I would like to conclude today by sharing with you the happiest unexpected happening of my life so far.

I met Aaron Robertson in the fall of 2021. Our first date included a hike at Ensign Peak in Salt Lake City. When we met at the trailhead, Aaron

had to change out of his cowboy boots into his hiking boots. I am pretty sure that is when I started falling for him.

Fast forward to a beautiful day in June 2022 when, with the support of Aaron’s six children, we were married. Three months later we were sealed in the Provo Utah Temple.

Talk about the unexpected! All those years, waiting, I had not imagined that I would find my eternal companion and marry at the age of forty-two. I also had not imagined becoming stepmother to six wonderful children who have generously made space for me in their lives and who graciously allow me to love them.

At the time when Aaron and I met, I had built a comfortable life. I loved working with my colleagues at BYU, spending quality time with my family and friends, and serving with the young women of my ward. I had made peace with being single and was thriving.

That being said, I felt absolute peace of mind and heart as Aaron and I discussed the possibility of building a life together. I felt the Savior with me in the choice. He gave me the courage to leave my familiar life to embrace the unfamiliar and sometimes daunting roles of wife and mother. I am so grateful to be bound to Christ! He is helping me every day to learn how to be a new version of myself.

As a couple and as a family, we have navigated a good amount of unexpectedness in our first year together. The night we returned home from our honeymoon, the children were sick with upset stomachs—every last one of them. Two of the children who felt the worst set up camp in the living room, where we had easier access to care for them. In the middle of the night, the younger of the two rolled to the edge of the couch and threw up, unfortunately missing the bowl that had been placed on the floor near her. Aaron carried his daughter to the bathroom to tend to her.

At that moment I realized it would be up to me to clean the floor. Here I was, a brand-new wife and mother just back from her honeymoon, in an unfamiliar home and facing an unenviable task. I screwed my “courage to the sticking-place”²³ and resolved to get the job done. As I looked around for tools to use, my eyes settled

on just the thing—a very wide spatula that was part of a pancake-themed wedding gift we had received. Grabbing the spatula and the bowl that had been left untouched next to the couch, I knelt on the carpet and began scraping. The child who remained in the room had witnessed the whole scene from her spot on the floor. As I cleaned, she looked me in the eyes and moaned, “Welcome to the family, Brooke.”

I have come to expect the unexpected. And I recognize now, more than ever, my absolute reliance on the Savior. I don’t know with exactness how His goodness will guide me in the years to come; I just know that it will.

Conclusion

President Nelson ended the most recent general conference with this powerful testimony of Jesus Christ:

I plead with you to come unto Him so that He can heal you! He will heal you from sin as you repent. He will heal you from sadness and fear. He will heal you from the wounds of this world.

Whatever questions or problems you have, the answer is always found in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Learn more about His Atonement, His love, His mercy, His doctrine, and His restored gospel of healing and progression. Turn to Him! Follow Him!²⁴

It is my prayer that we will heed the prophet’s call to know and follow the Savior so that we may be forever bound to Him. Connection with Christ is the answer, in good times and in bad. I testify of His everlasting goodness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. The Room of Requirement, also known as the Come and Go Room, is a magical room that provides whatever a person needs. It is found in the Harry Potter book series and was first introduced in chapter 18 of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003).

2. The “magical map” alludes to the Marauder’s Map from the Harry Potter book series. It was first introduced in chapter 10 of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999).

3. 2 Nephi 31:19.
4. See Camille N. Johnson, "Jesus Christ Is Relief," *Liahona*, May 2023.
5. Matthew 11:28–30.
6. David A. Bednar, "Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease," *Ensign*, May 2014; see also Alma 34:14.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 122:7–8.
8. "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," lyrics by Robert Robinson; originally published as no. 29b in John Wyeth, *Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Music, Part Second* (1813).
9. Hebrews 13:8.
10. John 14:18.
11. See Alexandre Dumas (père), *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844–45).
12. Doctrine and Covenants 82:10.
13. See Doctrine and Covenants 130:20–21.
14. See 1 Samuel 7:10–12.
15. Michelle D. Craig, "Wholehearted," *Liahona*, November 2022; see also Luke 22:44.
16. See Brooke Ann Smith, "Waiting a Little Season," *Ensign*, July 2008.
17. 2 Nephi 31:20.
18. David A. Bednar, "Prepared to Obtain Every Needful Thing," *Ensign*, May 2019.
19. Gospel Topics page, "Endowment," Church of Jesus Christ.
20. Russell M. Nelson, "Overcome the World and Find Rest," *Liahona*, November 2022; emphasis in original.
21. Russell M. Nelson, in Russell M. Nelson and Wendy W. Nelson, "Hope of Israel," worldwide youth devotional, 3 June 2018; emphasis in original.
22. Russell M. Nelson, "Peacemakers Needed," *Liahona*, May 2023; emphasis in original; see also Moroni 7:3–4.
23. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, act 1, scene 7, line 60.
24. Russell M. Nelson, "The Answer Is Always Jesus Christ," *Liahona*, May 2023; emphasis in original.