

# *Are You All the Way In?*

CAROLYN BILLINGS

I would like to let my staff, my students, and my athletes know that I am just as surprised as you are to see me up here, but please don't let it shake your testimony or your confidence in BYU.

When I was about four years old, I fell out of my bed. My father heard me crying and came into my room to check on me. As he helped me get back into my bed, he asked, with all of the compassion of a loving father, why I had fallen out of bed.

He always loved to tell me how I had looked up at him and said, with the eye roll of a rational four-year-old, "Obviously I wasn't in far enough!"

As a result, that statement became the question that my father would ask me every time I encountered a struggle, trial, or difficult problem. To this day I continue to ask myself, "Am I in far enough?"

I don't want to burst your bubble by telling you that this life will include tests, trials, and tribulations and that some of the trials you will face in life will be excruciating. What you do need to know is that, according to my friends, I am not the luckiest person in the world and I have had my share of challenges. We will all experience affliction, so I hope that sharing how I learned to get all the way in will help you along your path in college and in life.

## **Riding Out the Raging Tempests**

I remember being a student at this university. I came from a great home and was raised by incredible parents who shared their testimonies through word and deed. I felt confident as I entered BYU that I had a solid footing in the Church. However, it was during my college life that I started to experience small struggles that began to test my testimony and my commitment to our Savior.

It started with having to make my own decisions to go to church, say my prayers, and read my scriptures. And then came the self-doubt, the struggle of suddenly being average, the loneliness, and the experience of my first C grade being thrown at me. Next came the curveball of dating and breaking up combined with a "small" amount of pressure to get married, all while I was living with roommates who did not do the dishes and also while no one was liking my Instagram posts—well, at least back then I didn't have to worry about Instagram or Facebook.

It was at a particularly low moment in college that I came across the hymn "Master, the Tempest Is Raging" (*Hymns*, 2002, no. 105). The second

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verse described perfectly how I was feeling at that moment:

*Master, with anguish of spirit  
I bow in my grief today.  
The depths of my sad heart are troubled.  
Oh, waken and save, I pray!  
Torrents of sin and of anguish  
Sweep o'er my sinking soul,  
And I perish! I perish! dear Master.  
Oh, hasten and take control!*

However, it is the question in the first verse—“Carest thou not that we perish?”—that continues to come to the surface when I am struggling.

I am sure that many of you who are here today feel troubled and distressed; maybe you are in a moment similar to what I was in and you feel that your ship is going to capsize or sink. To those whose hearts are breaking or who feel that no one is listening; to those who are stressed, worried, or afraid; to those who bear the burdens of sin; and to anyone whose heart is pleading, “Master, carest thou not that I perish?” the answer is yes. Your Savior does care and He does love you. The Savior will always love you, no matter what.

It is the follow-up question in that first verse—“How canst thou lie asleep?”—that took me many years to understand. Then why does He sleep when the tempest rages all around me? Why does He not still this storm, or why would He let me suffer?

During these moments it is easy to think the Savior is oblivious to our trials, when in fact the reverse is true; it is we who need to be awakened. It is we who need to turn and find Him. It is we who need to continue to follow His teachings. And it is we who need to ask, “Am I all the way in?”

I found that when life became challenging, my first reaction was to turn away from my Savior. I would abandon the foundational habits of prayer, scripture study, and hope. That reaction was a choice; it was a choice that I made. The Savior didn't abandon me; instead, I turned from the Savior because I wasn't all the way in.

### **Growing like an Athlete**

Often my students and athletes will sit in my office and discuss their problems or struggles. They will ask, “Why me? I am trying to be good! I am keeping the commandments. Why is the Lord allowing this to happen?”

No one is exempt from struggles, especially not you who are striving to do what is right. But these trials are not just to test us; they are vitally important to the process of changing who we are. At times it may seem that our trials are focused on areas of our lives with which we seem the least able to cope. Since personal growth is an intended outcome of these challenges, it should come as no surprise that our trials will be very personal.

Now I may be going out on a limb here, but if you are anything like me, then you want to have growth without any challenges and to develop strength without any struggle. Unfortunately, that is not how the process of growth occurs. As much as we desire it, growth cannot come by taking the easy way.

In working with athletes, I recognize that an athlete who resists rigorous training will never become a world-class athlete. Anyone who wants to improve, win, or be the best must endure the daily torture of conditioning and practice. This is not easy, and I am familiar with all of the excuses that are used because someone is tired, sore, or lacking desire—mostly because I have used all of them. The question then becomes “Are you all the way in?”

We must be careful that we don't resent the very things that help us grow and change. And we need to be grateful that we have the Savior as a coach who knows us so well and who will push us so that we come to understand that we are stronger than we think we are.

As an athletic trainer, I spend a lot of time with athletes who are injured and struggling with the challenge to heal and return to their preinjury level. This process is not easy, especially for the natural man—who has zero patience for the process of growth—or for a generation that is used to getting things instantly. The process to rebuild

tissue and muscle strength takes time and can be painful.

The most common question that I get during these moments is, “Will I be the same after this is over?”

And my response is always, “No, you won’t be the same. If you will be all the way in and follow my treatment and rehab plan, you will be stronger. You will learn more about your abilities. You will be awesome.”

My athlete has to trust that I have been there before and that I know they can and will be successful. This challenge is the same for all of us when facing a trial and going through the pain and agony of change and growth. We must continue to turn to our Savior and trust Him as He works to smooth off our rough edges.

### Understanding the Savior’s Yoke

The Book of Mormon often talks about how the Nephites were taught the scriptures. They believed the story of Moses and that God parted the Red Sea to handle the mighty pharaoh and Egypt’s great army.

In 1 Nephi we read about the three attempts that it took Nephi and his brothers to get the plates from Laban. The boys had tried two times and failed, so naturally Laman and Lemuel asked the question

*How is it possible that the Lord will deliver Laban into our hands? Behold, he is a mighty man, and he can command fifty, yea, even he can slay fifty; then why not us? [1 Nephi 3:31]*

Are you ever like Laman and Lemuel, who didn’t have a problem believing that God could part the Red Sea for Moses and the Israelites but who couldn’t believe that God was powerful enough to help them get the plates from the mighty Laban? Or are you ever like me, believing that God helped Moses, Nephi, and Joseph Smith but doubting that He would help me through my own difficult struggles? To be all the way in, you have to believe that His help is available to you now. Even when you feel that you are alone in the

boat, you are never truly alone. Please know you are never truly alone! He will calm the sea for you just as He has done for those who have gone before us. Don’t listen to the voice of Satan that will tell you that Christ sleeps because He doesn’t care if you perish! In fact, the opposite is true. In Matthew it says:

*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.*  
[Matthew 11:28–30]

This scripture has an invitation and a promise. The invitation is to take up Christ’s yoke. The yoke was a device of great assistance to those who tilled the fields. It allowed the strength of one animal to be linked and coupled with another animal. The result was that two animals sharing the load reduced the heavy labor of the plow or wagon. A burden that was overwhelming or perhaps impossible for one to bear could easily and comfortably be borne by two bound together with a common yoke.

The promise is that once we are yoked with Christ, our burden will be lighter because He will help us carry it.

Now His yoke requires a great effort. We need to eliminate the idea that taking His yoke means that life will be easy and enjoyable, but let us not forget that our Savior was a carpenter. He has carved and rounded the yoke so that it fits perfectly over your shoulders. He has made sure to smooth off the rough edges so that it won’t dig into your back. He has tailored His yoke perfectly for you to comfortably carry the load, thereby fulfilling the promise that His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

A modern-day yoke that most of you carried with you this morning is a backpack. As you place a load of books into the backpack, adjust the straps, and wear the backpack on both shoulders, your ability to carry that load of books increases

compared to your ability to carry those books in your hands. The weight is not eliminated; instead the energy required to sustain the effort is reduced.

As a heavy-laden college student, imagine the power and peace of standing side by side with the Savior. As you choose to be all the way in and take His yoke, He will be yoked to your side, always standing with you to provide the support, balance, and strength you need to meet your challenges and succeed.

I have learned the importance of the Savior's yoke through my battles with cancer. I wasn't particularly thrilled with the plan to go through chemotherapy and radiation, and I still wish I had hired President Worthen to read through the small print on my contract for mortality. Nevertheless, cancer has brought me to my knees on many occasions. I learned quickly that Satan would wait until my strength was gone to cause me to doubt if God was really there for me. I had moments when I would question my testimony and wonder if I was worth saving or question if I had accomplished anything worthwhile in my life.

It was during one of these low moments that I was reading the Savior's invitation in Luke: "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

This scripture didn't tell me to follow Him as long as I didn't have cancer, and it didn't tell me to follow Him only if I was married or had righteous children, and it didn't tell me to follow Him only when I was having a good day. I learned that no matter what my circumstances were, I needed to deny myself and follow Christ daily. In other words, no matter what my struggle was, peace came as I continued to be all the way in the gospel.

### **Overcoming the 80:20 Rule**

My staff, students, and athletes will freely admit that I have a major addiction: I love sugar. Now, while chocolate, Oreos, and ice cream are delicious, they are not usually considered to be the world's most nutritious foods. With my apologies to all of the faculty and students in nutrition

and dietetics, I want to share how I resolved this dilemma by living my 80:20 theory of nutrition. My theory is that if I eat good, nutritious food 80 percent of the time, then I can eat what I want the other 20 percent of the time.

I found this approach to be quite successful, and I have looked for other areas in my life where I can apply this theory. I have found that if I exercise 80 percent of the time, then I can skip 20 percent of my workouts. If I make my bed 80 percent of the time, then 20 percent of the time it really isn't necessary. And when I was a student in college, I found that if I got eight hours of sleep 80 percent of the time, I could survive on two hours of sleep 20 percent of the time when studying the night before a test or when a paper was due. I also realized that I used the reverse of this theory when I was in college. When I did the dishes only 20 percent of the time, then my roommates could do them 80 percent of the time!

Now this approach may have brought some success to my habits of eating and exercise, and it certainly helped my roommates learn how to wash dishes, but as often as I have tried, I could not get the 80:20 theory to work with gospel principles. I have not been able to find a way to keep my temple recommend by paying my tithing 80 percent of the time or by keeping the Word of Wisdom 80 percent of the time or by keeping 80 percent of the commandments. Living the 80:20 theory is not conducive to being all the way in and following the Savior.

Living the gospel 100 percent of the time means doing the little things that keep us connected with the Savior every day. Develop the habits of the small, simple requests of His gospel by committing to daily read your scriptures; say your morning, evening, and testing center prayers; and find time to put down your phone and serve others.

### **Revvng the Engine**

It surprises most people when they find out that I have a motorcycle. Now please do not confuse it with the common scooter found on campus. I am the proud owner of what I affectionately call a "Honda Davidson"—because it is cheaper

than a Harley Davidson. Riding my motorcycle is one of my favorite activities to reduce stress. I love these fall days when I can enjoy a relaxing ride on my way home or through the canyon and feel the wind blowing around me.

I will admit that I enjoy the times when I am stopped at a red light or when I have just started my motorcycle and am in neutral revving the engine—and I do so loudly. I love the sound of the engine and feeling its vibration. I love feeling the power that I am sitting on and feeling ready to let go. But therein lies the difference: at some point, to enjoy the ride, I have to put the motorcycle in gear and use the power.

How many of us spend our time in the gospel sitting in neutral and revving the engine? To be all the way in, we have to use our faith and our abilities to get out of neutral and use the power to serve as the Savior would and to become more like the Savior.

We are all hearers of the word, which is just like sitting on my motorcycle, holding the clutch so that the engine is in neutral, and then revving the engine. Christ wants us to be doers of the word, which requires us to put our engines into gear and go to work.

I pray that you don't leave here today just having heard my words but that you choose to move all the way in. Take action. Do not wait for people to visit you; go and lift others. Be active in your wards and apartments. Accept and fulfill callings. Do not wait for life to serve you; find ways to serve and lift someone every day.

### **Becoming a Conqueror**

Last year, as I was battling cancer for the fourth time and going through treatment, the women's soccer team came up with the "Carolyn Can" campaign, believing that if anyone could beat cancer, it was me. Coach Jennifer Rockwood purchased shirts for everyone to wear.

Words cannot express how inspiring this act was for me. Every day was a struggle for me to

get out of bed and choose to fight. I would dread going to radiation. But often it was in those moments of discouragement that I would receive a text reminding me that "Carolyn can" or that I would see the girls wearing their shirts and their yellow wristbands. Their hope, faith, and energy, which was so contagious, would provide the strength I needed to continue to fight.

Not every day was this simple. There were many days when I didn't have a bounce in my step or when it was hard to smile or laugh, and I found on those days that my victory was simply just to endure the day. But because the women's soccer team lifted and served me, I found the energy to make it through each day and to stay yoked with my Savior, who carried enough of my load so I could continue to press forward.

One of my favorite scriptures is found in Romans, when Paul asked the question "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Romans 8:35).

This scripture has been a lifeline for me through difficult times. In the margin of my own scriptures, I have added, "Will cancer, being single, shortcomings, sin, or tragedy separate me from the love of Christ?"

Will there be a struggle in your life that will separate you from the love of Christ? If so, then please hear Paul's next words, when he declared, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans 8:37).

You are stronger than you think. Heavenly Father knows and loves each of you. If you will make sure that you are all the way in by trusting in the Lord, taking His yoke upon you, and following Him, then He will make you a conqueror.

I know that Christ lives, and I bear testimony that He is not sleeping while the tempest rages and that He cares very much if you perish. Be all the way in and I bear witness that He will always be by your side. I say these things humbly in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.