

# *“For When I Am Weak, Then Am I Strong”*

GÉRALD CAUSSÉ

**M**y dear brothers and sisters, it is a joy and a blessing to address you this morning. You are such a remarkable generation in the history of gospel dispensations! Recently I participated in a dinner honoring the ambassador of a European nation. He had just finished a full day of visiting Church sites in Utah. I asked him what had impressed him the most. His face suddenly changed, and he responded in a voice charged with emotion, “What touched me most was the visit to the BYU campus and the Missionary Training Center. What beautiful youth you have!”

Last year when the Lord decided to hasten His work, it was to the youth of the Church that He made the call. Following the announcement by President Thomas S. Monson that the ages for serving missions had been lowered, a wonderful wave of enthusiasm came across the Church. Tens of thousands of your generation are responding to the call of the prophet.

Perhaps the change in mission age was a surprise for many people—especially those outside of the Church. Some probably wondered, “Why would the Church put so much responsibility in the hands of inexperienced

young people who are barely out of high school?”

I remember asking the following question of several mission presidents: “Rather than young volunteers of eighteen or nineteen years of age, if we offered to send you professional missionaries who were older and had great command of the scriptures, missionary lessons, missionary methods, and language of the country, would you take them?”

They all answered without hesitation, “No, thank you. We love our young missionaries.”

What is so beautiful and powerful in having a missionary force essentially composed of young men and young women without much experience? The scriptures are filled with stories of young and modest people who, having great faith and being magnified by the power of God, accomplished exceptional things. Among them were Enoch, who considered himself to be “a lad” who was “slow of speech”;<sup>1</sup> Joseph Smith, who described himself

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as “an obscure boy” and “of no consequence in the world”;<sup>2</sup> and the Virgin Mary, who marveled that she had been chosen to become the Lord’s mother, saying, “My soul doth magnify the Lord, . . . for he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.”<sup>3</sup>

These great young people had pure and humble hearts. Yet the Lord made them powerful in words and deeds to accomplish His designs. The scripture was fulfilled that said, “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.”<sup>4</sup>

My brothers and sisters, this scripture is now truer than ever before. I often think of the enormous challenges facing your generation. You are living in an often hostile world at a time when great personal strength must be used to maintain righteousness and succeed in one’s personal goals. Perhaps you feel too weak to overcome such challenges. Perhaps you fear that you are not up to it. There is no shame in that! Everyone experiences those feelings at one time or another.

I assure you, the Lord has the power to transform your weaknesses into strengths! The promise made by the Lord to the Apostle Paul is valid for each of you: “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”<sup>5</sup> And then Paul added, “For when I am weak, then am I strong.”<sup>6</sup>

This promise, though a paradox, is very real. Allow me to describe a few principles that I believe can help you receive strength to overcome the challenges of life.

### **First Principle: Build on Your Strengths**

When you look in the mirror each morning, what do you see? We are such a blend of multiple and diverse talents, traits, and attributes. All of us have abilities, strengths, weaknesses, and inadequacies. However, getting objective and accurate evaluations of our own selves is difficult. While some take an indulgent and

embellished look at themselves and overestimate their strengths, others focus on their weaknesses and doubt their own abilities.

One of the most comforting teachings of the gospel is that each son and daughter of God—every one of us—is born with an inheritance of gifts, talents, and abilities that can help us through our earthly mission. The scripture says, “For there are many gifts, and to every man is given a gift by the Spirit of God.”<sup>7</sup> We cannot be happy and successful in life without gratefully acknowledging those gifts and doing all we can to develop them. Our problem is never that we have no strengths; the problem comes when we do not recognize our strengths and build upon them.

A couple of years ago I saw a film about King George VI, who led the United Kingdom through the dark hours of World War II. When he was forced to take the throne after his brother’s abdication, he doubted his ability to become the powerful leader the country needed in the face of war. George didn’t have the charisma of his predecessors. He also had a disabling speech impediment, and his most dreaded fear was that he would have to speak to the nation in an effort to galvanize them toward victory.

One scene depicted George watching television as Hitler stirred up his nation to engage in war. Hitler’s ferocious rhetoric and proclaimed invincibility contrasted with George’s humility and apparent vulnerability. However, George refused to let his weakness overwhelm him. Instead, he used his God-given gifts of dignity, courage, and perseverance to overcome his disability through long and exhausting therapy. He eventually addressed the nation in a powerful speech and became the right man at the right place to lead his people to victory.

Like George VI, all of you have received remarkable abilities and strengths from the Lord on which you can build to overcome your weaknesses and bless the lives of others. With

a humble and honest heart, seek to identify, develop, and apply for good those gifts that the Lord has given you.

### **Second Principle: Recognize Your Personal Limitations**

In order to become strong in the Lord, we need to recognize our personal limitations. For some, one of life's greatest challenges is accepting their own limits. Because of pride, they prefer to see themselves as bigger, stronger, and more capable than they really are. They want to create this illusion both to impress others and especially themselves.

I would like to share an experience from my youth. When I was fifteen, I noticed that my vision was getting progressively worse. At the time, for a reason that I have a hard time understanding now, I didn't want to recognize nor accept it. I hid the truth from my relatives and teachers, and my life began to get more and more difficult. Being unable to read the chalkboard, I had to copy over the shoulders of my classmates. When on the street, I was no longer able to read signs and traffic signals, which caused me to take the wrong bus many times and get lost.

Several months passed before a medical checkup in high school liberated me from my secret. I had to resign myself to wearing a magnificent pair of glasses, which, to my great surprise, made life much more practical and enjoyable than I had imagined!

One reason we may not want to acknowledge our personal limitations is that weakness is perceived by society as a fault or a failure. The world values the cult of the invincible. Superheroes, from Batman to Superman, abound in our media. This ideology leads to dangerous behavior. We see people who want to hide their problems under the appearance of strength through boasting, aggressiveness, or abusive behaviors. Some are so obsessed with outperforming others that they turn to drugs or other stimulants in order to do so.

Still others lose themselves in egotism and self-admiration. These forms of pride lead to disappointment, ineffectiveness, or worse.

God is not the God of superheroes, nor of people without weaknesses. Such beings do not exist! God helps people like you and me, those who recognize their limits and the weakness of their condition and seek His help and guidance. Failing to recognize our limitations will block our progression. On the other hand, accepting them humbly lays the foundation for eternal progression.

Recently I had the opportunity to interview Gaël Yonnet. Gaël is a former BYU student from France. At the age of thirty-one, while he was in his final year of medical school, he participated in a snowboard competition at Snowbird. It turned out to be tragic for him. He missed his second jump and crashed from a height of forty feet onto the icy snow below. When he regained consciousness, he realized that he had lost feeling in his lower limbs. After four years of medical studies, Gaël understood what pain in his stomach and numbness under his belly button meant. He was indeed paralyzed.

Gaël said that on the day following his accident, he awoke with feelings of intense distress. He thought to himself, "There are many simple things in life, such as going to the bathroom, that I can no longer do on my own. If that is how I am going to have to live, maybe it's better for me to die."

Shortly thereafter he met another patient at the hospital who was a quadriplegic. That patient confided in him, "I would so much like to have arms like yours." This was a key moment for Gaël. If someone could be envious of what he had, he should be grateful to still have it!

Gaël testifies:

*We all want something more. I believe that is human nature. But I discovered that the key to happiness is to accept ourselves as we are, to be*

*content and to live with what we have. I miss my legs terribly. But, in the end, I don't have any other choice but to move forward and try to be happy without them.*

During the time he was at the hospital, he learned more about pain and about caring for patients than he could have learned in several years of medical school. Gaël decided to specialize in rehabilitative medicine. Today he is a renowned doctor who works with patients suffering from spinal injuries, amputations, strokes and seizures, and multiple sclerosis. His patients praise his empathy and his ability to understand their problems. For Gaël, the acceptance of his limitations was the starting point for his own exceptional progress.

### **Third Principle: Rely on the Lord**

In the northern provinces of Canada there is a version of an old fable about two geese and a tortoise. They had a strong friendship. The story goes something like this: When fall arrived, the geese planned to migrate south for the winter. One evening the geese worried about the situation of their friend, the tortoise.

"It's too bad that you can't fly," said one of the geese. "You will certainly miss us. How will you survive?"

"I have an idea," responded the tortoise. "Why not find a good stick that you can hold in your beaks? I will hold onto it with my teeth. Thus, when you fly south, I will fly with you."

"Do you think you are strong enough to hold on for such a long time?" asked the other goose.

"Certainly. I am very strong," said the tortoise.

A few days later, somewhere over Montana, a farmer raised his eyes and saw something unbelievable: two geese flying over his head with a stick in their beaks and a tortoise holding onto the stick.

He cried out, "That's incredible! Who had such a great idea?"

Knowing that it was his idea, the tortoise couldn't resist and cried out, "It was I!"

And the tortoise fell.<sup>8</sup>

This story illustrates how pride leads its victims to their fall. It whispers to them, "You can get there all alone. You just need a little intelligence and strength." This reasoning may work in certain aspects of our lives. However, it is of no value in accomplishing the core purpose of our existence. Are our personal abilities, intelligence, and work sufficient to enable us to fulfill the measure of our creation? Can we, by our own efforts, raise ourselves to the level of perfection required to return to the presence of God?

Certainly not! True wisdom includes recognizing our dependence on our Creator and His Son, Jesus Christ, to reach our full potential. Whatever our personal capabilities, we know that "no flesh . . . can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah."<sup>9</sup> Where pride says, "I am the one who did it," wisdom prefers to recognize, "God empowered me to be able to do it."

After the remarkable success on his mission among the Lamanites, Ammon humbly recognized the hand of the Lord in these terms:

*Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things; yea, behold, many mighty miracles we have wrought in this land, for which we will praise his name forever.<sup>10</sup>*

Recognizing our personal limitations does not mean that we should put ourselves down and wallow in our weaknesses. Accepting our limitations is not an excuse to limit ourselves.

On the contrary, as disciples of Jesus Christ we aspire to that which is better and more elevated. The goal of our existence is to be raised

to a level of perfection that will allow us to return to live in the presence of our Heavenly Father. We firmly believe that each son and each daughter of God possesses in himself or herself the potential to inherit all that God has and to become such as He is.

But no one can reach this ultimate goal by relying solely on “the arm of flesh.”<sup>11</sup> If we rely only on our personal abilities, our progress is and always will remain limited. However, when we move forward “in the strength of the Lord,”<sup>12</sup> our potential for progress knows no bounds.

Another important point to remember is that we usually experience our greatest growth when we face difficult, if not impossible, situations. The acute awareness that we have of our own limitations pushes us to humbly seek the help of our Creator. An example of this is found in the Old Testament, when Gideon, head of the Israelite armies, prepared to fight the Midianites with 32,000 men.

But the Lord said to Gideon, “The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.”<sup>13</sup>

So, step-by-step, the Lord asked Gideon to reduce the number of his soldiers until only 300 remained. It is when it became impossible for Gideon to conquer the Midianites with his own strength that the Lord sent him to battle and miraculously delivered the enemy into his hands.

My brothers and sisters, you probably have had this type of experience yourselves. The Lord often places His servants in situations with seemingly insurmountable obstacles. In this manner He pushes us to humble ourselves and to rely solely on His strength. He makes us instruments of His miracles and the manifestations of His power and compassion. That is perhaps the reason why missionary work is performed by missionaries who are, for the most part, young and inexperienced. It is also,

perhaps, the reason why so many members receive callings and responsibilities that often appear to them to be beyond their strength and abilities.

I had this type of experience a little over five years ago when I was called as a General Authority of the Church. At that time my family and I lived in France. Life had smiled on us, and we thought we had received all the blessings we could possibly wish for, both within our family and materially.

One evening, completely unexpectedly, President Thomas S. Monson called our home. I can still remember the sound of his voice as he said, “Brother Caussé, you have been called to serve as a Seventy until you turn seventy.” We valiantly accepted the call with faith and determination.

But in those few minutes our lives had been totally turned upside down! My call meant that we were going to leave our home country and live the next twenty-six years wherever the Lord wanted us to serve. Additionally, I had only a few days to resign from my professional responsibilities if I was to be ready to serve in the time frame requested by the prophet.

The next morning I woke up early to get ready for work. I remember sitting at the kitchen table eating breakfast. Suddenly I felt completely petrified, even paralyzed. The idea of announcing to the president of my company that I was leaving his employment seemed insurmountable to me. I felt tied to him by great loyalty. Everything was moving too fast, too unexpectedly.

Overcome, I began to pray fervently, asking the Lord for the strength to do whatever He wanted me to do. When I reopened my eyes, I saw an issue of the *Liahona* lying on the table. It was the October 2007 general conference edition. Opening it at random, I fell on an article whose title caught my attention: “Live by Faith and Not by Fear.”

I said to myself, “That’s exactly what I need!” It was a talk by Elder Quentin L. Cook



in which he told the story of his being called as a General Authority. He explained that he was not feeling up to the calling and had asked for counsel from Elder Neal A. Maxwell. Elder Maxwell explained that the most important qualification for serving in the kingdom was to be able to bear testimony of the divinity of the Savior. Elder Cook then quoted the promise that the Lord made to His servants in the Doctrine and Covenants, which says, “Wherefore, be of good cheer, and do not fear, for I the Lord am with you, and will stand by you; and ye shall bear record of me, even Jesus Christ.”<sup>14</sup>

In reading this scripture I experienced a complete change. I knew what I had to do. My responsibility was to bear testimony of the Savior. The Lord would take care of the rest. Thus I left for work with a reassured heart.

The interview with my employer went beyond my hopes. I was able to testify very simply of my love for the Savior and of my desire to serve Him. At that moment the Spirit entered the office in which we were meeting. Touched by my words, the president assured me of his understanding, his respect, and his support. He later sent a letter to all the managers of my company asking them to do the same.

Is there any more beautiful experience than to feel the influence of the Lord working in our lives; to know that He is there, close by; to feel that He magnifies and enhances our natural abilities, thereby making us tools in His hands? I firmly believe that there is much more joy and satisfaction in saying, “It is the Lord who did it through me,” rather than in saying, “I did it all by myself.”

#### **Fourth Principle: Qualify Yourselves to Receive the Grace of the Savior**

The power that allows us to raise ourselves above our mortal condition and our human abilities is called the grace of the Savior.

As Elder Neil L. Andersen said, “Grace is spiritual knowledge and power that changes how [someone] sees himself, increases his capacities, and magnifies his ability to be an instrument in the hands of the Lord.”<sup>15</sup>

Grace is one of the gifts of God made possible through the Atonement of Christ. The Lord Himself spoke to Moroni in these terms:

*And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.*<sup>16</sup>

I testify that this power of grace is of divine origin and is real and tangible. Each one of us can access it on condition of receiving the ordinances of the gospel. As is said in the sacrament prayer, one of the promises made to all those who persevere in respecting these ordinances is “that they may always have his Spirit to be with them.”<sup>17</sup>

The Spirit of the Lord, or the Holy Ghost, is the agent of the Atonement. Thanks to His gentle influence we can feel the love of the Savior and receive His grace in our lives. When the Spirit accompanies us, we become aware of a powerful transformation taking place within us as our weaknesses are transformed into strengths and our natural abilities are magnified and enhanced beyond even what we believe is possible. The Spirit sanctifies us and progressively raises us beyond our mortal condition.

#### **Conclusion**

My young brothers and sisters, I express my love for you and my deep admiration for the example and strength you are for the entire Church. Each of you has been endowed with a remarkable set of gifts, talents, and abilities. As

you build upon these strengths, humbly recognize your personal limitations, remain faithful to your covenants, and put your confidence in the Lord, you will see your weaknesses transformed into strengths through the power and grace of His Atonement. You will have the ability to meet the challenges you will face in your life. With Paul you will be able to say, “For when I am weak, then am I strong.”<sup>18</sup> Of these things I testify humbly, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. Moses 6:31.
2. JS—H 1:22.
3. Luke 1:46–48.
4. 1 Corinthians 1:27.
5. 2 Corinthians 12:9.
6. 2 Corinthians 12:10.
7. D&C 46:11.
8. Based on *The Tortoise and the Geese*, Maude Barrows Dutton; version translated from [famillejetaime.com/index.php/lectures/dossiers-du-mois/269-orgueil-ou-humilite](http://famillejetaime.com/index.php/lectures/dossiers-du-mois/269-orgueil-ou-humilite).
9. 2 Nephi 2:8.
10. Alma 26:12.
11. 2 Nephi 4:34.
12. Micah 5:4.
13. Judges 7:2.
14. D&C 68:6; see Quentin L. Cook, “Live by Faith and Not by Fear,” *Ensign*, November 2007, 70.
15. Neil L. Andersen, “A Missionary and the Atonement,” address given at the seminar for new mission presidents, 26 June 2010.
16. Ether 12:27.
17. D&C 20:77.
18. 2 Corinthians 12:10.