

Listen, Lift, Rescue

JODI MAXFIELD

You might recall in the beloved Dr. Seuss children's book *Horton Hears a Who!* how Horton, who was an elephant, had a chance encounter with a speck of dust, from whence a voice, barely audible, called out for help. Horton recognized that the voice was coming from the speck of dust and proceeded to do all he could to protect and defend this colony of Whos, who were "too small to be seen by an elephant's eyes."

Horton perceived that someone was in distress and realized that *he* could help. Instead of discounting his newly discovered friends, and amidst scoffs and scorn from others, he did all he could to give aid. He had a clear understanding of his ability to rescue and protect the Who colony. Through his actions he demonstrated his ability to give aid, share his light, and serve. As Horton exclaimed, "A person's a person, no matter how small."

Being Grateful

Having just celebrated Thanksgiving this past week, and as we transition from November into the month of December and celebrate the birth of our beloved Savior, it seems particularly natural that gratitude has taken center stage in our minds and in our hearts—as it should. No matter how humble and meager our circumstances, we each have so much to be grateful for.

President Thomas S. Monson said of gratitude:

To express gratitude is gracious and honorable, to enact gratitude is generous and noble, but to live with gratitude ever in our hearts is to touch heaven. ["The Divine Gift of Gratitude," Ensign, November 2010]

He also said:

We can lift ourselves and others as well when we refuse to remain in the realm of negative thought and cultivate within our hearts an attitude of gratitude. ["Divine Gift"]

Gratitude is an expression of our faith. Negativity most certainly breeds despair, depression, lack of enthusiasm, and critical analysis of that which is most likely not our right to criticize or judge.

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, in a devotional address on gratitude given at BYU, said:

Gratitude is a mark of a noble soul and a refined character. We like to be around those who are grateful. They tend to brighten all around them. They make others feel better about themselves. They tend to be more humble, more joyful, more likable.

Jodi Maxfield, artistic director of the BYU Cougarettes dance team, delivered this devotional address on 29 November 2016.

. . . *Gratitude is a commandment of the Father.* [“Live in Thanksgiving Daily,” BYU devotional address, 31 October 2000]

Doctrine and Covenants 59:7 reads, “Thou shalt thank the Lord thy God in all things.”

While it may be more challenging to feel grateful when we are in the throes of trials and disappointments, those are the very times when we need to stop, take a look around, and count and list our blessings one by one. It has not been surprising to me throughout my life how much I truly take for granted when I am in a “woe is me” state of mind and how reflecting on my blessings has turned things around almost instantaneously, although not removing the trial. When my outlook is changed, my attitude, perception, and ability to cope are positively affected.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf said regarding gratitude: “Gratitude is a catalyst to *all* Christlike attributes! A thankful heart is the parent of all virtues” (“Grateful in Any Circumstances,” *Ensign*, May 2014; emphasis added). He has also said:

True gratitude is an expression of hope and testimony. It comes from acknowledging that we do not always understand the trials of life but trusting that one day we will. [“Grateful”; emphasis in original]

I am blessed to coach and direct the BYU Cougarettes. One of the areas we have chosen to focus on this year as a team is gratitude. I have seen, firsthand, gratitude in action over and over during the past few months, through numerous handwritten thank-you notes or heartfelt expressions of love for others. Expressions of appreciation for what has been received, individual random acts of kindness, a striving to avoid a sense of entitlement, and a focus on all that is good and uplifting have positively impacted individuals and the team. A focus on recognizing the tender mercies and blessings that have come to this team has truly made a difference and has ultimately added a culture of humility and gratefulness to each team practice.

Elder Wirthlin gave us a wonderful phrase to remember and implement in our lives: “Come what may, and love it” (“Come What May, and Love It,” *Ensign*, November 2008). We would all do well to reflect on and incorporate those six inspiring words into our daily lives. Not all days are easy to love, but within each day is something of value that will expand our vision, increase our horizon, and cause our hearts to truly swell with love, appreciation, and gratitude. We just have to open our hearts and our eyes.

Sharing Light

I love BYU Athletics. I love our student athletes, coaches, administrators, and teams, and I love my Cougarettes. I am inspired by them! They encourage me to be a better person and coach. This is a department and an environment in which all are engaged in excellence and in achieving the very best that the human body and spirit can accomplish. I am passionate about and committed to the job I have of coaching our competitive dance team and, more important, of helping provide opportunities for testimonies and lives to be enriched and changed and of helping spiritual moments happen frequently.

President Kevin J. Worthen often quotes from the BYU Mission Statement. He is very passionate and committed to making sure that all at BYU have a clear understanding of what the aims and mission of a BYU education are all about.

President Worthen has said:

While we will not do everything that other universities do, the expectation is that everything we do will be first-rate. According to the mission statement, “a commitment to excellence” . . . is not an aspiration; it is an expectation. [“The Why of the Y,” BYU university conference address, 26 August 2014]

I have been inspired many times, as I am sure you have been, by President and Sister Worthen. There is no doubt that they are committed to BYU and love serving the students and faculty members here.

I appreciated the messages they shared at the beginning of this semester. President Worthen's message "The Light of the Y" encouraged all "to let the Y light you." His instruction was:

You are not here by accident. God has a work to perform through you. Make Him the center of your efforts. Do what He would want you to do. Let His light shine more brightly through you as a result of your experiences at BYU. If you do, miracles will happen in your life and you will see the majesty of the Lord work in the lives of others. [BYU devotional address, 6 September 2016]

In 2008, as the Cougarettes were preparing for the national competition, the team decided that they would like to compete with a routine that was unique in nature from those of previous years. The girls wanted to communicate something more heartfelt, and they wanted to seek for missionary opportunities to share their light and the gospel. It was determined that besides creating a special routine, they would also take with them about fifty copies of the March 2008 *Ensign* to give away and share, hoping for situations to arise in which they could present the magazine to their fellow competitors and share their love of the Savior.

This particular issue of the *Ensign* had a beautiful image of the Savior by Carl Bloch on the cover and was described as a special issue devoted entirely to expressing the Church's beliefs of our Savior Jesus Christ. It contained testimonies of our prophets and apostles. It testified of the life, mission, gospel, and Atonement of our Savior.

None of us could have imagined what would take place following the competition. Our final scores had us finishing in second place that year. Although obviously disappointed at the outcome, we huddled in a circle and said a prayer of gratitude before going to greet our families on the beach. What then ensued on the beach in Daytona was something unexpected and indeed humbling.

Many fellow competitors as well as members of the audience approached us to share their congratulations and well wishes and to tell us how our performance had touched them. Some expressed

that they had experienced a feeling during our performance, and others said they had even been brought to tears. As these moments unfolded on the beach, members of that team of Cougarettes were able to offer those copies of the *Ensign* as gifts and also to share brief testimonies of their love for the Savior.

It was very clear and apparent to each member of that team that—we believe—we were not meant to win a title that year. Coming very close to winning and performing a routine that spoke to the heart opened many more doors and provided missionary opportunities that most likely would not have occurred otherwise. God allowed us to have the missionary moments this team had prayed for.

That particular year and that experience will be forever etched in my mind as one of the most memorable college dance team nationals I have been blessed to be a part of, and it was not a winning year in terms of a national title or trophy.

We never know who might be watching and how what we say and do might be impacting those around us. Elder D. Todd Christofferson said, "Our example should be such that no one can deny that the Latter-day Saints love the Savior" (in "The Gospel Answers Life's Problems and Challenges," worldwide leadership training meeting, 11 February 2012).

While we do not know for certain what effect the sharing of the magazines and our testimonies had on those individuals or teams, we do know that through competing at college nationals over several years we were able to inspire one young woman who had also felt something from our performances. She was not a member of the Church at that time, but she wanted to come to BYU because of what she had seen the Cougarettes do at competition.

She applied for and was accepted to BYU. That led to her investigation of the Church and her baptism shortly thereafter. She then auditioned for and became a member of the BYU Cougarettes 2013 national championship team—during the year the team won in both jazz and hip-hop for the very first time.

I am so grateful to a loving Heavenly Father who provided a way for us to share a message and our light through our talents.

Let me repeat what President Worthen said:

Let His light shine more brightly through you as a result of your experiences at BYU. If you do, miracles will happen in your life and you will see the majesty of the Lord work in the lives of others. [“The Light of the Y”]

Elder Craig C. Christensen taught:

*Heavenly Father knows all about you—your strengths and your weaknesses. He knows perfectly who you are, but He also knows who you can become. And with that knowledge, He has placed you here, now—at the exact place and time in which you can do the most good with the talents and gifts He has given you. [“Becoming Children of Light,” *Ensign*, August 2014]*

Every day as I enter campus, I drive past a sign that reads “Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Serve.” It thrills me as I watch former members of my team, now BYU alumni, take this phrase to heart. They are in the community serving and setting wonderful examples for those they are teaching, working with, and mentoring.

Each of you here at this time will have similar opportunities today, tomorrow, and in the future to touch and change lives. The things that you will experience here at BYU will give you so much to offer the world, your community, and, more personally and importantly, your families as you seek to better your circle of influence and make a difference in the lives of others.

Living by the Spirit

While I have already spoken about gratitude, I would like to share a personal story of which I am eternally grateful that provided an opportunity for growth in my own life and is for me an overwhelming testimony of God’s presence in each of our lives.

In 2004 my home ward planned to participate in a pioneer trek. At that time I was serving in

the Relief Society. I had not been called to go, nor was I expected to go, on the trek. My husband was called as the equipment coordinator of the trek, and our youngest son, age sixteen at the time, was eagerly planning to be a part of the trek experience with the rest of our ward youth.

About six weeks prior to the start of the trek, I received a distinct impression that I needed to go on the trek with the ward. What I need to explain to you is that at that time in my life, I really was not into camping, hiking, getting dirty, or sleeping on the ground with bugs. I think you could safely call me a little spoiled in my nature.

As I am sure you can probably imagine, I brushed off the impression. While I felt that the impression was something I *should* listen to, my more logical side kept reminding me that this was not something I would enjoy doing, nor would it be a restful or relaxing vacation. There surely would not be a Marriott hotel waiting for me at the end of each day. I felt that I knew what was best for me.

The problem was that the impression did not go away. It kept coming back to me, all the while getting stronger, until I knew I could no longer ignore it. I met with my bishop and asked if I could volunteer to join a trek family and participate alongside my ward members, my husband, and my son.

Those of you who have been on a pioneer trek know of what I speak when I say it was not easy. What I experienced physically was not easy, but what I experienced spiritually taught me and prepared me for some very significant challenges that would be coming into my life in a few short weeks and months.

As I trekked along in the heat and the dirt, lay in my sleeping bag with my legs and feet throbbing at the end of a long day, and sat in the middle of a meadow on a plastic bucket, pouring my heart out in my personal journal, I truly allowed God to speak to me through the Holy Ghost. I was profoundly changed through that experience in ways I could never have been otherwise. It was a refiner’s fire of sorts. Heavenly Father gave me a choice, tender gift. I was humbled, and I was

taught—not in ways that I would have preferred, planned, or expected but in ways that God, who knows me and you best, knew I needed to be taught. I didn't realize I needed this experience in my life, but indeed I did.

What was to come were some very challenging trials, and had I not hearkened to these impressions I had received to participate in the trek, I would not have been spiritually, physically, or emotionally prepared for them. I was surrounded by angels from my ward as well as those not seen. The trek was in fact life changing for me.

That trek was more than twelve years ago, and I often reflect on that journey. I am so grateful for that experience and for the fact that God knew what I needed at that time. I am grateful for the promptings of the Holy Ghost and the impressions I clearly felt, and I am so grateful that I chose not to ignore them but to listen to them, trust them, and rely on the Spirit.

John 14:27 reads: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

I lost my precious mother shortly after the trek to a terrible liver disease, and this particular verse of scripture, along with my experience on the trek, provided tremendous strength when I needed it the most. They have also provided great strength since then throughout various other personal trials.

It is important that we allow ourselves to be in places in which the Spirit can speak to us, we can feel the Holy Ghost, and the distractions of the world do not interfere. Most days I can be found up very early riding my bike through the neighborhoods near my home. While I do not profess to be a professional cyclist—in fact, far from it—riding my bike is something I enjoy doing to honor my health, commune with nature, and listen as the Spirit speaks to me. It is on these morning rides that I have many opportunities to pray, ponder, and seek inspiration.

In our day-to-day lives there is so much noise, clutter, stress, and so on, and these distractions can in fact prevent us from hearing promptings and spiritual impressions.

In a talk titled "Stand in Holy Places," President Monson taught:

We must be vigilant in a world which has moved so far from that which is spiritual. It is essential that we reject anything that does not conform to our standards, refusing in the process to surrender that which we desire most: eternal life in the kingdom of God. The storms will still beat at our doors from time to time, for they are an inescapable part of our existence in mortality. We, however, will be far better equipped to deal with them, to learn from them, and to overcome them if we have the gospel at our core and the love of the Savior in our hearts. The prophet Isaiah declared [in Isaiah 32:17], "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." . . .

My beloved brothers and sisters, communication with our Father in Heaven—including our prayers to Him and His inspiration to us—is necessary in order for us to weather the storms and trials of life. The Lord invites us, "Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me" [D&C 88:63]. As we do so, we will feel His Spirit in our lives, providing us the desire and the courage to stand strong and firm in righteousness—to "stand . . . in holy places, and be not moved" [D&C 87:8]. [Ensign, November 2011]

Holy places can be anywhere we allow ourselves to feel God's Spirit.

God truly has a hand in our lives and will bless us as we prepare for small yet significant miracles to occur. As we draw near unto Him and seek Him diligently, we will find stability and strength to overcome and a source to which we can look for direction. That stability will come as an anchor in our lives and in our testimonies.

Serving as God's Hands

An old Quaker saying is:

*If thee'll lift me while I lift thee,
We shall go up together!*

[John Townsend Trowbridge, "A Story of the 'Barefoot Boy': Written for J. G. Whittier's Seventieth Birthday," *The Poetical Works of John Townsend Trowbridge* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1903), 227]

President Harold B. Lee said:

*You cannot lift another soul until you are standing on higher ground than he is. You must be sure, if you would rescue the man [or woman], that you yourself are setting the example of what you would have him be. You cannot light a fire in another soul unless it is burning in your own soul. . . . The testimony that you bear, the spirit with which you teach and with which you lead, is one of the most important assets that you can have, as you help to strengthen those who need so much, wherein you have so much to give. Who of us, in whatever station we may have been in, have not needed strengthening? ["Stand Ye in Holy Places," *Ensign*, July 1973]*

I am so grateful for the many ways in which I have truly felt the hand of the Lord in my life in blessing me with many choice spiritual experiences and with opportunities to share His light.

Back in 2012 the Cougarettes were getting ready to compete in an international festival in Prague in the Czech Republic. We had prepared five numbers to compete with at the festival. One of those numbers was a lyrical dance, spiritual in nature, performed to the hymn "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing." It was a repertory piece that we had brought back for this occasion. Once again missionary moments were prayed for and sought after.

At a directors meeting the evening before the kickoff of the festival, I was asked by another director what types of numbers we were planning to compete with.

I described each of them and then told her that we were also doing a spiritual piece that was very special to us.

Her response was, "I wouldn't perform that if I were you. Those types of pieces never do well in this competition."

Needless to say, the Cougarettes took the stage the next day dressed in beautiful white costumes. As the girls began to dance, a hush came over the audience; you could hear a pin drop as those in the audience watched intently. As I looked around, I could see individuals unmistakably moved by what they were witnessing. Each of these girls was bearing a powerful silent testimony of our Savior Jesus Christ through dance. At the conclusion of the piece, the audience members sat in silence rather than applauding. The Spirit had truly communicated to them.

What a blessing it was to be able to use our dancing to touch others. We are taught that "our ability to develop and use our artistic gifts to edify and inspire others depends on our faithful adherence to the Lord's teachings" (from the introductory summary for M. Russell Ballard, "Filling the World with Goodness and Truth," *Ensign*, July 1996).

In a small and simple way we are able, through our talents, to do the Lord's work and help spread His gospel. "By small and simple things are great things brought to pass" (Alma 37:6).

We are serving as the Lord's hands, and He asks for us to give all that we are able to bless the lives of others—to serve; to "lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees" (D&C 81:5); to rescue; and to bless. We have a blessed and sacred opportunity to be a light, to lift, to edify, to recognize a need, and to be the Lord's angels here on earth.

My husband, Scott, and I have been blessed with five beautiful and precious grandchildren—four girls and a boy. Two of those little girls are twins, Beth and Sadie, so it might come as no surprise that I love this story about some other twins, Kyrie and Brielle Jackson.

The twin girls were born on October 17, 1995, a full twelve weeks ahead of their due date. Both

babies were placed in separate incubators. Kyrie, the larger of the two babies, was making good progress and gaining weight, but her smaller sister had breathing and heart-rate problems. There was little weight gain, and her oxygen levels were low.

On November 12 tiny Brielle went into critical condition. Her stick-thin arms and legs turned bluish-gray as she gasped for air. Her heart rate soared. Her parents watched, terrified that their little daughter might die.

After exhausting all other conventional remedies, one of the NICU nurses decided to try a procedure that was common in parts of Europe but virtually unknown in the United States. With parental permission, she placed the twins in the same bed.

No sooner had she closed the incubator door than Brielle snuggled up to Kyrie and began to calm down. Within minutes her blood-oxygen readings improved. As she dozed, Kyrie wrapped her left arm around her smaller sister. Brielle's heart rate stabilized, and her temperature rose to normal.

A photograph of Kyrie hugging her little sister, dubbed the "Rescuing Hug," appeared in both *Life* magazine and *Reader's Digest*. (See paraphrased story found on the Internet in various places; see also full story: Nancy Sheehan, "A Sister's Helping Hand," *Reader's Digest*, May 1996, 155–56.)

Our ability to rescue might be as simple as a smile, a listening ear, an understanding heart, a hug at an appropriate time, or an artistic expression of testimony.

President Monson reminded us:

*We are surrounded by those in need of our attention, our encouragement, our support, our comfort, our kindness. . . . We are the Lord's hands here upon the earth, with the mandate to serve and to lift His children. He is dependent upon each of us. ["What Have I Done for Someone Today?" *Ensign*, November 2009]*

A picture recently appeared on the Church's Instagram feed that illustrated perfectly just how often throughout any given day we are in a

situation in which we have no idea of the burdens others are carrying. Wouldn't it be nice if we could wear an appropriate emoji over our heads, signaling to one and all just how we are feeling at any given moment? Of course that is not possible. How important, then, is it that we have open, compassionate, kind, and nonjudgmental hearts and that we seek to love others unconditionally and hearken to the promptings of the Spirit.

President Spencer W. Kimball said—and I know and have experienced this many, many times firsthand—that "God does notice us, and he watches over us. But it is usually through another person that he meets our needs" ("First Presidency Message: Small Acts of Service," *Ensign*, December 1974).

None of us will escape sorrow, disappointment, and trials. There may be times when we will be called upon to be the rescuer or to have the strength, the fortitude, and the means to help, lift, and love another. There may be many other times when we are the one who needs to allow others to rescue us. It is at times a difficult thing to admit we need help. However, when we allow others to help us, we are not only receiving blessings but are allowing the giver to be the receiver as well.

A poem titled "Touching Shoulders" is one of my favorites:

*There's a comforting thought at the close of the day,
When I'm weary and lonely and sad,
That sort of grips hold of my crusty old heart,
And bids it be merry and glad:
It gets in my soul and it drives out the blues
And it thrills, through and through—
It is just a sweet memory that chants the refrain,
"I'm glad I touched shoulders with you."*

*Did you know you were brave? Did you know you
were strong?
Did you know there was one leaning hard?
Did you know that I waited and listened and prayed,
And was cheered by your simplest word?
Did you know that I longed for the smile on your face—
For the sound of your voice ringing true?*

Did you know I grew stronger and better because

I had merely touched shoulders with you?

[Mrs. Fred W. Gage, “Touching Shoulders,”

The Inland Printer 53, no. 4 (July 1914): 624]

So many of our brothers and sisters experience loneliness, heartache, disappointment, and sorrow at this time of year. Take time to listen to the promptings of the Holy Ghost. Pray for opportunities to rescue and to help. As you do so, you *will* be blessed to be the miracle in someone’s life.

As Horton so perfectly demonstrated, we should be willing to go out of our way to help, to rescue, and to provide aid, encouragement,

enlightenment, a listening ear, or a safe place to rest:

If thee’ll lift me while I lift thee,

We shall go up together!

Our Savior gave us the perfect example of love, compassion, respite, and rescue. He has beckoned us to come unto Him, to be His hands, and to love one another. May we go forward with a commitment to listen to those spiritual promptings; to love, lift, and rescue; to be a light to others; and to be His hands here on earth. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.