

What Happens When Life Gets One Degree Colder?

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As a brand-new missionary in England, I was assigned to the southern coast for my first area. One Sunday afternoon my companion and I decided to go tracting in the small town of Sandwich, located just a few miles north of the white cliffs of Dover. After a few hours of knocking on doors, feeling like we must have talked to every living person in the place—and without any success at all—we sat down dejectedly on a nearby bench.

Although it was summertime, it was a rather cold and damp day, as sometimes happens in England. Feeling downcast due to the lack of response to our efforts to share the gospel, my companion tried to lighten the mood by remarking, “It’s okay, Elder. It could be worse: it could be one degree colder right now.”

His comment was well received and hit home. Life really wasn’t bad. We were in a beautiful country. We had the gospel. We were missionaries on the Lord’s errand. In fact, I had more blessings than problems. I felt much better knocking on doors the rest of the afternoon, armed with an enlightened attitude and a purer perspective—although I was still cold and damp and I still wished someone would listen.

As insightful and perceptive as was my companion’s point—that “it could be worse:

it could be one degree colder”—what happens when it does get one degree colder? Or, for that matter, what happens when, metaphorically speaking, it gets ten or even fifty degrees colder? What happens when the pressure is on, the crowd is watching, and the game is on the line?

In a college environment, what do you do when the homework is grueling, the exams are punishing, the roommates are exasperating, and the longed-for eternal companion is not materializing? Or, after college, what do you do if you don’t land a job, you get laid off, you have stress in your marriage, you have poor health, or your teenagers don’t listen? In those times of trial, despair, fear, and worry, the stage is best set for God to show forth His power. Indeed, it is often in the most dire of circumstances that God’s arm is revealed most miraculously.

Miracles require faith and generally some amount of courage and hope on our part as well as trust that God will always do His part. We must also remember that God’s ways are

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not our ways. His response to a given situation might be different than what we want to have happen. In addition, the timing of His response could vary greatly from our expected timing. Yet in all cases, God’s involvement in our lives is carefully crafted to bring about the greatest good. For “he doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world.”¹

Find Courage and Hope

Several years ago I gave a lesson in my elders quorum based on the July 2004 First Presidency message written by President Thomas S. Monson and titled “Miracles of Faith.” One part of the lesson particularly struck me because of the uniqueness of a principle that I had not previously considered—a principle that afterward became even more personally poignant because of imminent events that were to occur in our home.

From time to time the Lord puts certain truths into our hearts that affect our future destiny. We may not fully understand His reason for teaching us these principles at these particular times. Instead, it is often once we have passed through the ensuing experiences that clarity comes. We can then look back through life’s lenses and more fully see that God does prepare a way for us to accomplish what He commands.²

Part of President Monson’s message that I shared with my elders quorum read:

Mothers and fathers who anxiously await the arrival of a precious child sometimes learn that all is not well with this tiny infant. A missing limb, sightless eyes, a damaged brain . . . greets the parents, leaving them baffled, filled with sorrow, and reaching out for hope.

There follows the inevitable blaming of oneself, the condemnation of a careless action, and the perennial questions: “Why such a tragedy in our family?” . . . “How did this happen?” “Where was God?” “Where was a protecting angel?” If, why, where, how—those recurring words—do not bring back the lost son, the perfect body, the plans of

parents, or the dreams of youth. Self-pity, personal withdrawal, or deep despair will not bring the peace, the assurance, or help which are needed. Rather, we must go forward, look upward, move onward, and rise heavenward.

*It is imperative that we recognize that whatever has happened to us has happened to others. They have coped and so must we. We are not alone. Heavenly Father’s help is near.*³

What struck me was that “the absence of the miracle” could actually be a miracle in and of itself—the premise being that as God’s ways and thoughts are higher than man’s, at times the Lord may choose to provide a miracle counterintuitive to what we may want, knowing full well His own end purpose. Because of the absence of the miracle fixed in our minds, He is better able to help us grow and thus become happier than we ever could have been had we received the desired miracle for which we had prayed.

At the time I initially read this First Presidency message, I naïvely thought my impression of that principle was because I had given a blessing to the daughter of a family I home taught, hoping that a dramatic recovery would spark the family back into activity. When the little girl ended up in the hospital that same day, I thought the absence of the miracle would somehow bless their lives more than if she had been miraculously healed. However, little did I suspect the extraordinary experience among the challenges that the Lord was already engineering.

About a month later my expectant wife, April, and I went to an ultrasound appointment to see whether we were having a boy or a girl. We learned that we were having our third son. We also learned that there were severe physical complications afflicting his body. He was missing large portions of his brain, his skull wasn’t properly shaped, and the doctors weren’t even sure if he would survive till delivery. During the ensuing weeks it seemed that every time

we received additional information it was bad news. I still remember sitting in a room in the Brewster Building, across the street from the Wilkinson Center, when my wife called to tell me the latest update: Our son didn't have a right eye. Thinking back to what my mission companion had said, I certainly felt like things were much worse than one degree colder.

With faith, and in order to pray more specifically and effectively for our unborn son, we decided on his name early. Previously we had waited until we actually saw our children to make sure they matched their names. We chose the name Caleb, after the Old Testament Israelite who was a companion to Moses and Joshua and who was noted for his "fearlessness in the face of overwhelming odds."⁴

Caleb survived his birth, though it became quickly apparent that he would be very much like a newborn throughout his entire life. He would never walk. He would never talk. He would never feed himself or be able to so much as hold his head up on his own. When we asked how long we might expect him to live, the doctor replied, "Take him home and never bring him back to the hospital. We can't do anything for him. He has a few weeks to a few months—outside chance of a year, possibly two."

I remember being terrified as we walked out of the hospital with our little boy to take him home. The number of machines and medical equipment we needed to sustain his life was overwhelming. The possibility of losing him was a constant fear. Simply feeding him required extraordinary effort because he needed to eat every three hours. The process to eat took one hour to complete. This involved waking up throughout the night: start the pump, sleep for an hour, stop the pump, sleep for two hours, start the pump, sleep for an hour, and so on. We wondered how we would keep ourselves alive, let alone our fragile son.

Thankfully, the Lord blessed us with many miracles in what seemed like a hopeless

situation. Angels in the form of ward members, family members, friends, and medical personnel came to our aid. We literally had meals brought in for three months. We had a competent and caring nurse, a doctor who made house calls, and family and neighbors who prayed mightily on our behalf. We could feel heaven's hand upon us. I felt angels walked our hallways and sat in Caleb's room. Our three-year-old son told us that sometimes he saw Jesus peeking in our windows.

In Caleb's baby blessing I promised him that he had completed his task on earth by being born and that he could now rest for a time. But this was not the plan for Caleb and his mother. In some kind of pact with heaven that I have yet to fully understand, Caleb and April bargained with heaven to do a greater work. God had matched them up perfectly—Caleb with his fearlessness in the face of overwhelming odds and April with her mother's love and daring optimism.

April purposefully chose hope and trust in the Lord. To her core she is happy and optimistic. With God's help she took what could have been a terrifying trial and reshaped it. She took a corner of heaven and pulled it right down into our home, opening it up for all to enjoy. Every day became a celebration with Caleb. She made him a birthday cake after his first week, cupcakes for his second week, cookies for his third week, and so on. She celebrated everything about Caleb, for every day was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience for the boy who was sent home without hope.

In what might have looked like a burdensome task to others, caring for Caleb became a privilege. Though his body was misshapen and broken, his spirit was whole, noble, and great.⁵ Being in his presence was healing and heavenly. I love my wife and thank her, Caleb, and Heavenly Father for making the time with Caleb not only possible but powerful. It was indeed heaven on earth.

Even his missing eye was a blessing. It became his distinctive feature. People were drawn to him, especially children. They would often ask, “Where is his eye? What happened to him?”

I would usually say that Caleb was a pirate or that a bear had eaten his eye. But my wife would explain that in our family, a wink meant “I love you.”

Before Caleb was born, we told our boys that he would only have one of his eyes. They were concerned for their brother.

“Don’t worry,” April would say. “He will just wink at us every day!”

Caleb was never able to tell us he loved us with words, but he told us every day with his wink. His little wink was a daily message of love from heaven. He brought the love of God and the Light of Christ into the lives of all who knew him. His winking eye was a sweet reminder of his deep love for all of us.⁶

Hope and courage have always characterized the righteous. Ever the optimist, Joseph Smith was once quoted as saying:

I should never get discouraged, whatever difficulties should surround me, if I was sunk in the lowest pit of Nova Scotia and all the Rocky Mountains piled on top of me, I ought not to be discouraged but hang on, exercise faith and keep up good courage and I should come out on the top of the heap.⁷

It was this type of faithful fortitude that saved the Nephites from the decree of death declared by the unbelievers if the sign of Christ’s birth did not come. It came the very night that Nephi prayed.⁸ Likewise, a measure of firm faith and trust in God preceded the parting of the Red Sea;⁹ saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego from a fiery furnace;¹⁰ and helped David defeat a giant.¹¹

Recognize God’s Ways Are Higher

However, not all miracles deliver. Sometimes, according to God’s purposes, miracles

are seemingly withheld in order for His greater designs to develop. After all, Abinadi was burned at the stake, the Mormons were driven out of Jackson County, and Joseph Smith was martyred at Carthage Jail. On a less important scale, but still significant to those involved, lost puppies may not be found, testing center prayers may not be immediately answered, and Church basketball games may not be played with good sportsmanship in spite of prayers offered otherwise.

But that doesn’t mean God is absent or doesn’t care or hasn’t provided a miracle. Again, it is during those times when it is ten degrees colder that God is involved, He does care, and He is performing His work. We must remember that “as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are [His] ways higher than [our] ways, and [His] thoughts than [our] thoughts.”¹²

Just imagine what would happen if miracles were left up to us. In my arena of athletics, it would probably go something like this: The Church is true. The Church is the sponsoring organization of BYU, the Lord’s university. The BYU sports teams are flagships of the university. Therefore, no BYU team should ever lose, which would be irrefutable evidence that the Church is true. What a blessing this would be to the growth of the Church. I can picture the missionaries talking to an investigator: “Brother Jones, as you know, the BYU football team has never lost, the basketball team has won every national title, and each of our golfers gets a hole in one on every swing. Don’t you think it’s about time you were baptized?”

Obviously the Lord does not work this way. A plan in which supposedly everything would go right so nobody would be lost was already proposed and rejected. The plan of salvation, on the other hand, allows for opposition in all things: sadness and sweetness, wrongdoing and repentance, trial and testimony.

With so much opposition in our lives at times, it seems like God chooses to work

through underdogs. Take Gideon of the Old Testament, for example. Israel was in bondage to the Midianites. God called Gideon to deliver them, and Gideon raised an army of 32,000 men.

And the Lord said unto 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.¹³

God asked Gideon to reduce his army to 10,000, which was still too many. God then asked him to reduce his force even further to just 300 men to go against a foe who were “like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude.”¹⁴ With the help of God and against all odds, Gideon and those 300 men bested the Midianites and their tens of thousands.

God is clearly not limited by the same constraints that obstruct our mortal way. Left on their own, Gideon and his 300 would have had little chance for victory. But Gideon was not alone, nor is he the only instance of God using small and simple “means to bring about his great and eternal purposes.”¹⁵ God took Enoch, a lad slow of speech, and walked with him.

And so great was the faith of Enoch that he led the people of God . . . ; and he spake the word of the Lord, and the earth trembled, and the mountains fled, even according to his command; and the rivers of water were turned out of their course . . . ; and all nations feared greatly, so powerful was the word of Enoch, and so great was the power of the language which God had given him.¹⁶

God also took former Egyptian slaves and molded them into the mighty Israelite nation. He turned a fisherman into a chief apostle. And He shaped a plowboy into a prophet.¹⁷ The Lord Himself came to earth in the most

humble of circumstances—as a babe in a manger who was born into a carpenter’s family and who became Lord of lords, King of kings,¹⁸ and Savior of worlds without end.

Trust God

Such miraculous transformations come as a result of trusting in God’s plan. One night for family scripture study we read the account of the “man which was blind from his birth.”¹⁹ The “disciples asked [Christ], saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?”²⁰

Seeing the obvious parallel in our own home, our young sons asked why Caleb was born blind. In the next verse the Lord provided our response: “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.”²¹ Then Jesus healed the man so that he could see.

Caught up in the grandeur of the story, our boys asked if I could heal Caleb. I stammered some kind of response that I didn’t feel it was the Lord’s will for Caleb to be healed. I added that often the healings recorded in the scriptures were performed by Jesus, prophets, or apostles—very righteous men commissioned by God to perform miracles for specific purposes of blessing the lives of those involved and increasing the faith of those who would eventually read these stories.

Not to be put off, and possibly sensing my apprehensive response, my boys faithfully concluded that it was time to appeal to a higher authority. It so happened that we were going to the Church Administration Building later that week to attend the setting apart of my dad as a mission president by one of the Brethren. Knowing that we would be meeting an apostle, my sons requested that I ask him to heal Caleb.

Talk about being put between a rock and a hard place. How could I sustain their faith without selfishly imposing on an apostle? I compromised with my boys by telling them

that I would not ask for a blessing on Caleb but that we would leave it in the hands of the Lord.

It was a wonderful occasion to be with my dad as he was set apart and to be in the presence of one of the Lord's special witnesses. He was not inspired to heal Caleb. But as we walked out of his office, he stopped at Caleb's stroller, bent down, and kissed him. He told him three times that he loved him. He then shook my hand and hugged my wife while whispering in her ear, "I am so proud of you." In the sight of God, Caleb did not need healing. Instead, it was I who left that office peacefully whole.

Rely on His Timing

Trusting in God means that we also trust in His timing. The man in the New Testament story was blind from birth. I'm not sure how old he was, but he had waited years for that miracle. Then one day the Master came along and healed him. "In his own time, and in his own way,"²² God will respond.

As an example of the Lord's timing in my life, I had been at my new job in the BYU Athletic Department for about three weeks when I had to go down to Las Vegas for a business meeting as part of the conference basketball tournament. I woke up very early to make the long drive in time for my meeting at noon. My wife and I prayed fervently that I would make it safely. Caleb had been in the hospital for a few weeks, and we had been up many late nights to be with him. Despite every precaution and physical effort I could make, just outside of St. George I fell asleep in the blink of an eye while driving full speed down the freeway.

I woke up to find myself heading down a hill into the median dividing the highway—one set of tires on the pavement, the other set in the weeds and gravel. I quickly spun the wheel to take me back on the road, but this only caused me to do a 180-degree turn across the lanes of traffic. Thankfully no other cars

were near me. Once I got to the far right side of the road, I had the fleeting thought that I could pull it off and would be able to stop the car on the right shoulder. Not so. I think the car was still traveling about 60 to 70 miles per hour when I slammed into the sand and sagebrush, flipping the car over.

Eventually the car came to an abrupt stop with me hanging upside down by my seat belt. I undid the catch and fell to the floor—which had been the roof of the car. It was impossible to open any of the car doors. They were all wedged shut because the car had become fairly flattened to the ground. I climbed through a window, since all the glass in the vehicle had shattered.

Besides a bruised and embarrassed ego, I was completely unharmed. The only cut I had was a small slice on my hand where a piece of glass had stuck me when I released myself from the seat belt and fell to the ground. After being checked out by the police (who also issued me a ticket), my sweet grandmother who lived in St. George somehow let me borrow her car so I could finish my trip to Las Vegas. I walked into my meeting about fifteen minutes late.

The hard part was telling my boss, Tom Holmoe—who was also at the basketball tournament—that I had destroyed a university vehicle during my first month on the job. To make a bad situation worse, my seat at the basketball game following the meeting happened to be directly in front of President Samuelson. I spent the game pulling glass out of my hair as inconspicuously as possible.

In my mind the timing of that wreck was life turning one degree colder. I was trying to make a good first impression at my job. My wife and I were doing our best to take care of a sick child. We had prayed for safety.

The Lord's timing and purpose were made clear over the following days and months. Tom is a great boss and has never held the accident and the loss of the car against me. The university eventually replaced the car but thankfully

didn't have to replace me—because I was still alive. The Lord had preserved me from what should have been a fatal accident. Having come so close to death helped me more fully appreciate my life and the people around me. I especially enjoyed the time spent with Caleb late at night when I would wake up to take care of him. Not only did it mean I was still alive, but Caleb was too.

There were times when I thought Caleb would live a long time. He had so often successfully battled sicknesses and surgeries, illnesses and infections. He had been to the hospital many times but always came back to us. We loved having him in our home. “Caleb could have quickly returned to heaven but, instead, he brought heaven to us for seven years.”²³

Twenty-five days ago, in the timing of the Lord, Caleb slipped peacefully away while being held in the arms of his mother and surrounded by his family. He had spent a courageous day fighting with his might against a vicious infection brought on by pneumonia. The wonderful doctors, nurses, and other medical personnel at Primary Children's Medical Center had done all they professionally could to keep Caleb alive. His body was simply too worn out.

I have heroes in my life: Joseph Smith, Captain Moroni, Ammon, and others. On that day, my wife was my hero. As she bravely and tenderly leaned down to hug Caleb, she whispered in his ear, “I love you, Caleb. I am so proud of you. If your body is too tired, it's okay. You can go back. You can return to Heavenly Father.”

For over seven years her love and God's will allowed Caleb to be a significant part of our earthly experience. But in the very moment when it was needed, her heart changed. She could let him go. She trusted God because she knew God. She knew that God understood her personally, in a way that few others could, for God had also lost a son. And through the Atonement of that Son, God can do miracles.

He can forgive a sinner. He can save a lost soul. He can heal a broken heart.

“With God nothing [is] impossible,”²⁴ especially when life is hard and it is ten degrees colder outside. “But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things.”²⁵ God provides the plan and we contribute the faith and courage. We trust in His timing and in His ways to achieve His purposes, even when—and probably *especially* when—such purposes may be unclear from our perspective.

At a stake conference not too long ago, I had an interview with a visiting General Authority. He learned about Caleb as part of our discussion. After he acknowledged the hard work it took to care for Caleb, I thought he would then encourage me to keep it up and to faithfully persevere in the service and sacrifice I was providing. Instead, his next four words entirely transformed my relationship with Caleb. He simply said, “You are being exalted.”

All this time I had thought that we were taking care of Caleb. But in reality, God, through Caleb, had been taking care of us. God was making a miracle where I hadn't expected one. He was performing a miracle on me, on my wife, on our kids, and on all those who came in contact with Caleb. Having Caleb in our home was an honor and a privilege. It was also a sacred experience.

Through our faith, courage, hope, and trust, God will bless us—no matter how cold our lives may feel. I know that God loves us. I know that He hears us and heals us. And I know that He is exalting us. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. 2 Nephi 26:24.
2. See 1 Nephi 3:7.
3. Thomas S. Monson, “Miracles of Faith,” *Ensign*, July 2004, 4.
4. “Caleb,” Think Baby Names; www.thinkbabynames.com/meaning/1/Caleb.

5. See Abraham 3:22.
6. The “I love you” wink idea was written by April Moody as part of a message from the Moody family to hand out to family and friends at Caleb’s funeral.
7. Joseph Smith, quoted in *Memoirs of George A. Smith*, in George A. Smith papers, ms 1322, box, folder 1, Family and Church History Department Archives, Salt Lake City; see Tad R. Callister, “Joseph Smith: Prophet of the Restoration,” *Ensign*, June 2002, 66, note 7.
8. See 3 Nephi 1:9–16.
9. See Exodus 14:13–31.
10. See Daniel 3:15–28.
11. See 1 Samuel 17:45–51.
12. Isaiah 55:9.
13. Judges 7:2.
14. Judges 7:12.
15. Alma 37:7; see Alma 37:6 and 1 Nephi 16:29.
16. Moses 7:13.
17. See William Tyndale, quoted in John Foxe, *Book of Martyrs* (Hartford, Connecticut: Edwin Hunt, 1845), 259; see Robert D. Hales, “Preparations for the Restoration and the Second Coming: ‘My Hand Shall Be over Thee,’” *Ensign*, November 2005, 90. See also William A. Morton and L. A. Ramsey, “From Plowboy to Mormon Prophet: Being a Short History of Joseph Smith for Children” (n.p.: USA, 1912).
18. See Revelation 17:14.
19. John 9:1.
20. John 9:2.
21. John 9:3.
22. D&C 88:68.
23. See “Obituary: Caleb Joseph Moody,” Walker Family Mortuaries; tributes.com/show/Caleb-Joseph-Moody-93217356.
24. Luke 1:37.
25. 2 Nephi 2:24.