

Thru Cloud and Sunshine, Lord, Abide with Me!

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I testify that “thru cloud and sunshine” the Lord will abide with us, that our “afflictions [can be] swallowed up in the joy of Christ.”

One of our beloved hymns expresses the plea “Thru cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me!”¹ I was once on a plane as it approached a large storm. Looking out the window, I could see a dense blanket of clouds below us. The rays of the setting sun reflected off the clouds, causing them to shine with intense brightness. Soon, the plane descended through the heavy clouds, and we were suddenly enveloped in a thick darkness that completely blinded us to the intense light we had witnessed just moments earlier.²

Black clouds may also form in our lives, which can blind us to God’s light and even cause us to question if that light exists for us anymore. Some of those clouds are of depression, anxiety, and other forms of mental and emotional affliction. They can distort the way we perceive ourselves, others, and even God. They affect women and men of all ages in all corners of the world.

Likewise damaging is the desensitizing cloud of skepticism that can affect others who have not experienced these challenges. Like any part of the body, the brain is subject to illnesses, trauma, and chemical imbalances. When our minds are suffering, it is appropriate to seek help from God, from those around us, and from medical and mental health professionals.

“All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and ... each has a divine nature and destiny.”³ Like our Heavenly Parents and our Savior, we have a physical body⁴ and experience emotions.⁵

My dear sisters, it is normal to feel sad or worried once in a while. Sadness and anxiety are natural human emotions.⁶ However, if we are constantly sad and if our pain blocks our ability to feel the love of our Heavenly Father and His Son and the influence of the Holy Ghost, then we may be suffering from depression, anxiety, or another emotional condition.

My daughter once wrote: “There was a time ... [when] I was extremely sad all of the time. I always thought that sadness was something to be ashamed of, and that it was a

sign of weakness. So I kept my sadness to myself. ... I felt completely worthless.”⁷

A friend described it this way: “Since my early childhood, I have faced a constant battle with feelings of hopelessness, darkness, loneliness, and fear and the sense that I am broken or defective. I did everything to hide my pain and to never give the impression that I was anything but thriving and strong.”⁸

My dear friends, it can happen to any of us—especially when, as believers in the plan of happiness, we place unnecessary burdens on ourselves by thinking we need to be perfect now. Such thoughts can be overwhelming. Achieving perfection is a process that will take place throughout our mortal life and beyond—and only through the grace of Jesus Christ.⁹

In contrast, when we open up about our emotional challenges, admitting we are not perfect, we give others permission to share their struggles. Together we realize there is hope and we do not have to suffer alone.¹⁰

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we have made a covenant with God that we “are willing to bear one another’s burdens” and “to mourn with those that mourn.”¹¹ This may include becoming informed about emotional illnesses, finding resources that can help address these struggles, and ultimately bringing ourselves and others to Christ, who is the Master Healer.¹² Even if we do not know how to relate to what others are going through, validating that their pain is real can be an important first step in finding understanding and healing.¹³

In some cases, the cause of depression or anxiety can be identified, while other times it may be harder to discern.¹⁴ Our brains may suffer because of stress¹⁵ or staggering fatigue,¹⁶ which can sometimes be improved through adjustments in diet, sleep, and exercise. Other times, therapy or medication under the direction of trained professionals may also be needed.

Untreated mental or emotional illness can lead to increased isolation, misunderstandings, broken relationships, self-harm, and even suicide. I know this firsthand, as my own father died by suicide many years ago. His death was shocking and heartbreaking for my family and me. It has taken me years to work through my grief, and it was only recently that I learned talking about suicide in appropriate ways actually helps to prevent it rather than encourage it.¹⁷ I have now openly discussed my father’s death with my children and witnessed the healing that the Savior can give on both sides of the veil.¹⁸

Sadly, many who suffer from severe depression distance themselves from their fellow Saints because they feel they do not fit some imaginary mold. We can help them know and feel that they do indeed belong with us. It is important to recognize that depression is not the result of weakness, nor is it usually the result of sin.¹⁹ It “thrives in secrecy but shrinks in empathy.”²⁰ Together, we can break through the clouds of isolation and stigma so the burden of shame is lifted and miracles of healing can

...and the sign of the path of healing is love and miracles of healing can occur.

During His mortal ministry, Jesus Christ healed the sick and the afflicted, but each person had to exercise faith in Him and act to receive His healing. Some walked for long distances, others extended their hand to touch His garment, and others had to be carried to Him in order to be healed.²¹ When it comes to healing, don't we all need Him desperately? "Are we not all beggars?"²²

Let us follow the Savior's path and increase our compassion, diminish our tendency to judge, and stop being the inspectors of the spirituality of others. Listening with love is one of the greatest gifts we can offer, and we may be able to help carry or lift the heavy clouds that suffocate our loved ones and friends²³ so that, through our love, they can once again feel the Holy Ghost and perceive the light that emanates from Jesus Christ.

If you are constantly surrounded by a "mist of darkness,"²⁴ turn to Heavenly Father. Nothing that you have experienced can change the eternal truth that you are His child and that He loves you.²⁵ Remember that Christ is your Savior and Redeemer, and God is your Father. They understand. Picture Them close by you, listening and offering support.²⁶ "[They] will console you in your afflictions."²⁷ Do all you can, and trust in the Lord's atoning grace.

Your struggles do not define you, but they can *refine* you.²⁸ Because of a "thorn in the flesh,"²⁹ you may have the ability to feel more compassion toward others. As guided by the Holy Ghost, share your story in order to "succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees."³⁰

For those of us currently struggling or supporting someone who is struggling, let us be willing to follow God's commandments so we may always have His Spirit with us.³¹ Let us do the "small and simple things"³² that will give us spiritual strength. As President Russell M. Nelson said, "Nothing opens the heavens quite like the combination of increased purity, exact obedience, earnest seeking, daily feasting on the words of Christ in the Book of Mormon, and regular time committed to temple and family history work."³³

Let us all remember that our Savior, Jesus Christ, "[has taken] upon him [our] infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know ... how to succor [us] according to [our] infirmities."³⁴ He came "to bind up the brokenhearted, ... to comfort all that mourn; ... to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."³⁵

I testify to you that "thru cloud and sunshine" the Lord will abide with us, our "afflictions [can be] swallowed up in the joy of Christ,"³⁶ and "it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do."³⁷ I testify that Jesus Christ will return to the earth "with healing in his wings."³⁸ Ultimately, He "shall wipe away all tears from [our] eyes; and

there shall be no more ... sorrow.”” For all who will “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him,”⁴⁰ the “sun shall no more go down; ... for the Lord shall be [our] everlasting light, and the days of [our] mourning shall be ended.”⁴¹ In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.