

“Aligning with the Lord”
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In some of Moroni’s parting words, he counseled that we should “meet together oft... to speak one with another concerning the welfare of [our] souls.”¹ What a sweet opportunity this is to gather for that purpose—to speak about the welfare of the woman’s soul.

You, dear sisters, are a blessing in my life! My association with women, professionally, in my Church callings, in Relief Society, as neighbors and friends, friends who feel like family, and the beloved women in my family—my associations with you have polished me, lifted me, enlightened me, and strengthened my testimony in a loving Savior. I have been blessed by the influence of smart women, courageous women, virtuous women, women of faith. You are women who are “distinct and different in happy ways”² just as prophets foresaw. I am thrilled to have this opportunity to be with you, to soak in your goodness, and to counsel about the welfare of our souls.

Mine is the concluding address after several days of inspiring content, interaction, and association.

So, let’s start by sitting up straight. Will you? Perhaps you are slouching after several days of sitting. So, take a minute and check your alignment—chin up, neck straight, shoulders back. Do you feel better?

Sisters, the Savior knows our souls. When we counsel about the welfare of our souls, we are really discovering for ourselves and helping others discover what He already knows. Being aware of what is needful for our souls, He invites us to “look unto [Him] in every thought,”³ and to “seek him with the whole heart.”⁴ Elder Ulisses Soares has explained that “Seeking Christ in every thought and following Him with all our heart requires that we align our mind and desires with His.”⁵

So, I want you to sit up straight again, and this time consider not just the alignment of your chin, neck and shoulders—but the alignment of your desires—that is your heart—and your mind. Are your heart and mind aligned with the Savior?

Alignment of our heart and mind with Jesus Christ is at the very heart of how we keep our baptismal and sacramental covenants to take the Savior’s name upon us and always remember Him. It is the way we stay on the covenant path.

Let’s use a car’s alignment by analogy. Alignment refers to an adjustment of a vehicle's suspension—the system that connects a vehicle to its wheels. Proper alignment means adjusting the angles of the tires, which affects how they make contact with the road. If a car is aligned, it drives straight, it can navigate even a narrow path. If a car is aligned, obstacles don’t pull it to the left or right. Alignment is part of regular car maintenance.

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And so, as part of our regular maintenance—to get and stay aligned—we engage in daily devotion to God, praying...and studying scriptures which helps us come to know His voice and better discern His direction.

We repent, daily. We serve. We align our heart and mind with the Savior when we use words that are “virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy,”⁶—when that is “our standard of communication.”⁷

All of this invites the Spirit to be present in our lives. We listen intently for the manifestations of the Holy Ghost. We adjust our thoughts and what occupies our time to make sure we are making constant contact with heaven.

Elder Neal L. Andersen explained it this way, “Filling our mind with the power of Jesus Christ does not mean that He is the only thought we have. But it does mean that all our thoughts are circumscribed in His love, His life and teachings, and His atoning sacrifice and glorious Resurrection. Jesus is never in a forgotten corner because our thoughts of Him are always present.”⁸

This effort at alignment must be constant and is personal. President Russell M. Nelson has said, “The truth is that you must own your own conversion.”⁹ You are responsible for your alignment with the Savior.

And when we are aligned, we can travel that well-defined, straight and narrow path back home without being pulled off course by distraction or sin, even while carrying a fully loaded backpack.

But how do we keep everything in alignment, navigating a straight and narrow path when we are carrying a fully loaded backpack?

I have used the backpack before—as a metaphor for carrying the challenging experiences and burdens of living in a fallen world.¹⁰ Let’s explore the analogy in light of our desire to be heart and mind aligned with the Savior. The thesis is that that alignment will help us manage our load.

Of course, the load in my metaphorical backpack looks different from yours. The load varies from person to person and certainly changes as we age. But we all get a backpack. In fact, I think we shouted for joy when the plan of happiness was revealed, and we learned we would come to earth and get a backpack.

Do you remember how delighted you were to get your first backpack as a child? Or perhaps you recall the excitement of a child carrying their own backpack to school.

As we mature, our backpacks generally become utilitarian to us. But I think we relished the opportunity to graduate to mortality, put on a backpack and carry life’s experiences. Why? Why were we so good with the whole idea?

Because we had the benefit of being part of that first grand council, we learned the plan of happiness and heard the Savior volunteer, “Here am I, send me.”¹¹ Perhaps we were part of the joyful choir of “morning stars that sang together.”¹² Our hearts and minds were aligned with Him. And so, with an understanding of our mortality, our eternal nature, and the possibility of exaltation through the atonement of Jesus Christ, we strapped on our backpacks. Some of you carry burdens in your backpack which were not there of your own making—loneliness and grief, chronic disease and pain; or maybe you carry a burden because of the unkindness or poor choices of others. And, on occasion, all of us carry the burden of unrepented sin. How can we arrange that very personal load in our backpack so that the burden feels light? How do we keep things aligned?

First, seek to remove the weight of sin as quickly as possible. Strive to remove those pebbles of sin through joyful daily repentance. Don’t let one of those pesky pebbles fall to the bottom of the backpack. And they will, if we are not actively engaged in striving to remove them quickly and regularly.

Sometimes, when we teach how we come unto Christ, we move too fast from exercising faith in Him to baptism—inadvertently diminishing the significance of repentance. Repentance isn’t the elephant in the room. It’s not Plan B. It’s Plan A! As President Nelson has taught, “we should neither fear nor delay repenting.”¹³

“Satan delights in our misery.”¹⁴ He delights in seeing us weighed down, veering from side to side as we try to make our way. In fact, when we are weighed down by sin we struggle to move forward, we swerve, we are ill-aligned.

We can keep the load in our backpack light and align ourselves with the Lord more fully so that we can better carry our burdens, by applying the Atonement of Jesus Christ. President Nelson taught that “when Jesus asks you and me to ‘repent,’ He is inviting us to change our mind, our knowledge, our spirit—even the way we breathe. He is asking us to change the way we love, think, serve, spend our time, treat our [spouses], teach our children, and even care for our bodies.”¹⁵

It sounds like the alignment of our heart and mind with His! That is repentance. Next, the load created by the mistakes or misdeeds of others ought to be tenderly placed in an accessible place in our backpack, perhaps in an outside zipper pocket. Again, it is the Atonement of Jesus Christ that supplies us with the spiritual energy and ability to forgive that mistreatment.

President Nelson has reassured us that “Through His infinite Atonement, you can forgive those who have hurt you and who may never accept responsibility for their cruelty to you.”¹⁶ I don’t mean to pretend you just pull it out of your backpack. Forgiveness is a process facilitated by the Savior. It is part of the relief He offers us.

Sister Kristin Yee taught of her own experience, “As my love for the Savior has grown, so has my desire to replace hurt and anger with His healing balm. It has been a process of many years, requiring courage, vulnerability, perseverance, and learning to trust in the Savior’s divine power to save and heal. I still have work to do, but my heart is no longer on a warpath.”¹⁷

You see, when my dear friend Sister Yee consciously aligned her heart and mind with the Savior, the burden of the mistakes of others she was carrying was replaced, over time, by healing balm.

Finally, how do we arrange the rest of our load—the burdens we carry simply because we are living in mortality, where people age, get sick, feel lonely, and accidents happen?

Holding that question, let me share with you a personal story about pain and disappointment and the Lord’s goodness. It is a story about alignment too.

In 2019, my husband Doug and I returned home after serving as mission leaders in Arequipa Peru. Doug’s back had been bothering him the last few months we were there—pain we attributed to long trips in the mission van to be with our missionaries.

So, when we got back to Utah, Doug saw an orthopedist who ordered physical therapy and then injections. As neither helped him, it was suggested that Doug have surgery. He did. But the surgery didn’t relieve his pain, it got worse. So, a second surgery was performed, with similar results, and finally a third surgery to fuse his whole lumbar spine.

Shouldn’t things have been easier for us, a future free of these kinds of burdens because we had devoted ourselves with full purpose of heart and mind to serving the Lord for three years? I thought we were aligned. But we, nonetheless, have had the burdens of mortality befall us. Sisters, all of us do!

Alignment of our heart and mind with the Savior isn’t a free pass to a life of ease. Instead, it is a fast pass to His relief.

After three surgical tries, and various treatment tries, and nearly four years, Doug was worse, and never without pain. His spine was misaligned. Proper spinal alignment is critical to pain-free functioning of the spine. But Doug now had a sideways curvature of his spine, scoliosis, and was missing the gentle sway back of the lower spine necessary to keep the body’s center of gravity aligned over his pelvis.

I spent the last two weeks in St. Louis with Doug where he had a fourth surgery. We traveled there because a doctor at Washington University was recommended to Doug for his expertise and focus on complex spinal reconstructive surgery.

Doug is still in St. Louis, recovering in the care of his sister now, so that I can be here with you. The doctor removed all the old hardware from his back, cleaned out the scar tissue, replaced screws, did an osteopathy to create an appropriate curve in the lumbar spine, and inserted rods. Doug's spine now has all the right curves. It's vertically straight—less than 1 centimeter to the left. And he has curvature in the lumbar spine so that he can stand up straight. He's aligned again. Of course, he is still battling the pain associated with surgery and healing. But we trust, and hope and pray that his physical alignment will bring him physical relief. Doug did not get into alignment alone. He needed the help of a physician, in this case a surgeon. If Doug had buried this mortal burden in his figurative backpack, he would have remained misaligned. He couldn't fix it alone.

There are many famous statements out there about the power of one. Culturally, societally, we have celebrated the accomplishments of the individual.

I testify of the power of two! Bound to the Savior, through the covenants we have made with God, we stay aligned with Him and “can do all things through Christ [who strengthens us].”¹⁸

To be aligned with the Savior we need to give ourselves over to Him. We must avoid burying our burdens in our pack and clinging to them tenaciously. Rather, we must place them in our backpack in an accessible place and allow Him to provide His relief.

The last four years have been a journey for Doug, and for me. I wouldn't wish it upon anyone, but the experience of watching someone I love battle pain has smoothed down some of my rough edges and improved my still imperfect patience.

More than ever before, Doug and I have relied on the Savior's healing, comfort, and enabling power made possible through His Atoning sacrifice. Doug wasn't immediately provided with physical relief; what he got, and what we got, was a more sustained and deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. His covenantal promises have never felt more significant to us. We tested His promise that “we could always have His Spirit to be with us”¹⁹ in a way we hadn't before. And I testify that the promise is real and fulfilled even in the midst of suffering.

The Savior provided us with spiritual and temporal relief—through the Comforter and through the acts of other people. As covenant keepers have aligned themselves with Jesus Christ, they have brought us closer to Him and have been instruments in His hands to help us experience His relief.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland testified of this when he said, “To be called the Savior's people and to stand in His Church, we must be ‘willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; yea, and [be] willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things.’ For me, bearing another's burden is a simple but powerful definition of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. When we seek to lift the burden of another, we are ‘saviors... on mount Zion.’ We are symbolically aligning ourselves with the Redeemer of the world and His Atonement. We are ‘bind[ing] up the brokenhearted,... proclaim[ing] liberty to the captives, and... opening... the prison to them that

are bound.'...Often enough, we can't help—or at least can't sustain our help or can't repeat it when we do sometimes succeed. But Christ can help. God the Father can help. The Holy Ghost can help, and we need to keep trying to be Their agents, helping when and where we can."²⁰

Sisters, we can be agents of the Savior's relief by aligning ourselves with Him in 'succoring the weak, lifting the hands that hang down and strengthening those with feeble knees and backs.'²¹ The Lord asks us to serve, not to create busy work for the sisters of the Church. He knows you have plenty to do.

The Lord asks you to serve in fulfillment of your covenant responsibility to "take His name upon you,"²² to sacrifice²³ and consecrate.²⁴ He asks you to serve so that you can receive the blessings promised to covenant keepers, including "a special kind of love and mercy."²⁵

The Savior asks you to serve because in doing so you align your heart and mind with Him. That alignment brings His relief and the ability to carry your mortal load. Sisters, Jesus Christ not only asks you to serve, He asks you to be served, to graciously receive the ministering sisters, friends, and even strangers who are doing their part. Would you deprive them of the blessings associated with their covenant keeping?

I am, admittedly, not very good at this. The "I've got this" power of one mentality overtakes me sometimes.

Shortly before General Conference, when they knew I was extra busy, the sister and brother who minister to our family offered to bring some soup. They sent a kind text to my husband and me. True to form, I quickly responded to say we were good, and no soup was needed. My gracious husband on the other hand responded with a message that soup would be great, inviting them to minister to us in that way. I should have done better.

In anticipation of Doug's surgery in St. Louis, I asked Elder Randall Bennett, in the North America Central Area presidency, for the name of a stake Relief Society president I could call, just in case I had some extraordinary need for help while I was there. That was way out of my comfort zone, but I asked and Elder Bennett gave me the number for Sister Diana Taylor, who is a stake Relief Society president in the area.

I called Sister Taylor and explained why we were coming to St. Louis and assured her I would let her know if, and how, I needed her help.

And the next day, she sent me this text:

"Sister Johnson, Ten hours is a long time to be waiting alone while Brother Johnson is in surgery. I would be happy to come to the hospital to be with you if that would help. I could come the whole time or part of the time. We could share the Spirit of Christ as we pray and remember the blessings of a loving Father in Heaven, the blessings of sisterhood, the blessing of families, and of service."♥ Diana Taylor

Perhaps you've guessed my first reaction. "I'm good." "I've got this alone." "I'll wallow in my sadness by myself." "I need to write a talk for BYU Women's Conference." And I was just about ready to send a response that declined her invitation. Until I remembered what I had preached, and that I ought to practice it. "[H]ow does the Savior relieve us of the burdens of living in a

fallen world with mortal bodies subject to grief and pain? Often, He performs that kind of relief through us!... We are a conduit through which He provides relief.”²⁶

And so, I responded with this text message:

“I don’t want to trouble you at all. If it works for you to come around 11:00 am perhaps you and I could find the hospital cafeteria and have lunch together. That would be a nice break from the talks that I am working on writing.” ❤️

Sister Taylor and I walked to the Chick-Fil-A, we sat outside because it was a sunny day and enjoyed lunch together. And in the end, I trust that both of us found needed relief.

I was alone in St. Louis. Doug was in a surgery which did last more than 10 hours. How was the Savior going to help me? How was He going to relieve me of loneliness, and frustration, and worry. He sent someone to minister to me. Someone who was magnifying her calling and keeping her covenant to “comfort those that stand in need of comfort.”²⁷ If I had failed to receive her, I would have failed to receive Him.

President Nelson has taught that the three most important designations that could be applied to us ‘are child of God, child of the covenant, and disciple of Jesus Christ.’²⁸

We are all daughters of God. We chose to be children of the covenant by making covenants with God at baptism and in the House of the Lord, and then keeping them.

As we keep those covenants, we exercise our agency as disciples of Jesus Christ—bringing the Savior, and His relief, to others.

Sisters, we are members of the Relief Society. Whenever we do anything to bring relief to others—temporal or spiritual—we are bringing them to Jesus Christ and will be blessed to find our own relief in Him. In doing so we align our hearts and minds and our goals with God’s. President Nelson has taught, “Now is the time to align our goals with God’s goals. His work and His glory—‘to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man’—can become ours.”²⁹

With the conviction of both my heart and mind I testify that our Heavenly Father and His son, Jesus Christ, love us. Their work and glory are salvation and exaltation for all of us. They want us to return home.

As covenant keepers, aligned with Jesus Christ, we can be instruments in His hands to help others experience His relief. As we do, we will come to know the Savior, be like the Savior and find for ourselves His everlasting relief. I testify that it is real. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ Moroni 6:5.

² Spencer W. Kimball, “The Role of Righteous Women,” October 1979.

³ Doctrine and Covenants 6:36.

⁴ Psalms 119:2.

⁵ Ulisses Soares, “Seek Christ in Every Thought,” October 2020.

⁶ Articles of Faith 1:13.

⁷ Russell M. Nelson, “Peacemakers Needed,” April 2023.

- ⁸ Neil L. Andersen, “My Mind Caught Hold upon This Thought of Jesus Christ,” April 2023.
- ⁹ Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity,” Worldwide Devotional for Young Adults, May 2022.
- ¹⁰ Camille N. Johnson, “Jesus Christ Is Relief,” April 2023.
- ¹¹ Abraham 3:27.
- ¹² Job 38:7.
- ¹³ Russell M. Nelson, “The Power of Spiritual Momentum,” April 2022.
- ¹⁴ Russell M. Nelson, “The Power of Spiritual Momentum,” April 2022.
- ¹⁵ Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” April 2019.
- ¹⁶ Russell M. Nelson, “Four Gifts from the Savior,” *Liahona*, December 2019.
- ¹⁷ Kristin M. Yee, “Beauty for Ashes: The Healing Path of Forgiveness,” October 2022.
- ¹⁸ Philippians 4:13.
- ¹⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 20:77.
- ²⁰ Jeffery R. Holland, “Bearing One Another’s Burdens,” *Ensign*, June 2018.
- ²¹ See Doctrine and Covenants 81:5.
- ²² See Mosiah 5:8-9.
- ²³ See Alma 34:8-12.
- ²⁴ See Study Helps, “Consecration, Law of Consecration,” Gospel Library.
- ²⁵ Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” October 2022.
- ²⁶ Camille N. Johnson, “Jesus Christ is Relief,” April 2023.
- ²⁷ Mosiah 18:9.
- ²⁸ Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity,” Worldwide Devotional for Young Adults, May 2022.
- ²⁹ Russell M. Nelson, “Now is the Time to Prepare,” April 2005.