

FINDING THE  
*Savior*  
THROUGH THE  
BROKEN *and* BEAUTIFUL



13 WOMEN. 13 STORIES. 1 SAVIOR.

*Sarah Haroldsen*

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# FINDING CHRIST IN THE SACRED TRIALS OF OUR LIVES

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AMBER JACKSON

“YOU SHOULD GO DOWN THE ZIPLINE, MOM; BE A BRAVE GIRL!” THAT’S WHAT my four-year-old daughter said to me while I was camping with my children just after she attempted to go down the zipline herself. My sweet Charlotte found just enough courage to get strapped in the harness, walk across the field, and climb the very tall ladder. But when she could see just how high she really was and she was faced with the edge of the platform, the idea of jumping into the unknown was more than she could handle. As she climbed back down the ladder, slightly embarrassed and with a face full of tears, I assured her that she was such a brave girl. Standing in that field of wildflowers, I told my girl how proud I was of her and that it took courage and bravery to even try something scary and new.

“You should go down the zipline, Mom; be a brave girl!” I should have seen it coming. I felt foolish that I walked right into that trap. And a trap it was, for two reasons: first, I am terribly afraid of heights; and second, there was no way I could get out of this, especially after having expressed to her how proud I was for her doing something hard. I often told my children, “We can do hard things,” and now it was said right back to me.

And that is how I found myself in my own harness, standing at the edge of that platform, preparing to jump into the unknown. With the sun high above me, sweat already dripping down my neck, I climbed the ladder. With a nervous quiver in my voice, I told the man of my irrational fear of heights and

that this was the only time I ever tried a zip line. With the most gentle encouragement, he pointed to all of the safety checks where I was strapped in and assured me I wasn't going anywhere. Then he proceeded to tell me different ways I could ride down the zip line.

My body now filled with an excited buzz I couldn't deny, a thought came to me: *Go big or go home*. And with that thought, I stood at the edge of the platform and jumped off with a level of courage I did not think I was capable of, and I intentionally flipped upside down. With my legs wrapped around the cable that was attaching me to the zip line, I let go with one hand and felt the electrifying thrill. Go big or go home, right?

I was doing it. I was being a brave girl. Just as I actually started to enjoy the exhilaration, my hips started to slide out of my harness. With a strength I can only describe as one that came from God, I found myself right side up in the harness just as my legs fully slid out of the harness and whipped around me. I was now clinging to the line with one hand. My harness was still attached to the zip line, completely intact—I just wasn't in it any longer. This is what my actual nightmares were made of. I held on for as long as I could—I really did. Action movies make it look so much easier than it really is, because holding my body weight with just one hand? No chance.

With all of the strength I could possibly muster in my body I held onto that line, and less than two seconds later I fell . . . and fell . . . and fell. I fell about thirty feet and landed in that same meadow of wildflowers that hosted my daughter and me as we talked about bravery and courage just ten minutes earlier. It welcomed me back into its profusion of wildflowers, but instead of whispers of love and fearlessness among the blossoms, the meadow shouted at me as pain ripped through my body.

After much help from family and friends, a helicopter ride to the nearest trauma center, and many tests later, I was astoundingly released from the hospital emergency department that same day. With some form of cast and brace and boot on three of my four limbs, a face with so much road rash I hardly resembled myself, and a concussion that lingered for many months, I was actually going to be okay.

The main question that circulated for weeks and months was, "How could she have fallen? She was perfectly strapped in." Just as I was strapped into my harness and had all of my "safety checks," we may also feel like we are strapped into our life harness with all of the safety checks needed. We do our daily

scripture study, we study *Come Follow Me* with our families, we attend the temple, we minister lovingly to those around us, we fulfill our callings dutifully—and still, out of nowhere, we may have our own thirty-foot falls in life. Things happen to us, trials come, and decisions made by other people create difficulty or heartache—all of which may cause us to wonder, “Why did I fall?”

I know I have felt this feeling multiple times in my life. I felt it during the dark postpartum depression after my first child was born and we received his Down syndrome diagnosis. It was a dreadful year when I should have been enjoying the beautiful moments of having a newborn and this new life I helped create. And yet, I had a hard time getting out of bed. I couldn’t bathe myself and I hardly ate. There had to be more to being a mother than this.

I felt a thirty-foot fall during my divorce after my husband simply walked out one night. I felt it again after we got married for the second time and he left. Again. I struggled with my self-worth and where exactly I was supposed to fit in this big world. Was there a place for me? Would anyone love me again, or was this “thirty-foot fall” simply too much for someone else?

I felt it, yet again, three years after I married my second husband. He was a true gem of a man and was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer just one month after our fourth child was born. My prayers were answered when this man came into my life. I figured that he was the reason why I went through so many trials before—all of it had led me to him, and I was happier than I had ever been. Surely, he will beat this unbeatable cancer, right?

I felt it once again after he died just sixteen months later. I became a widow at the age of thirty-two with four small children, trying to navigate this new life alone. Why did I fall from this zipline in my life? I had all of my safety checks in place. I was active in the Church, and I fulfilled all of my callings the best I could. I attended the temple regularly and I prayed passionate prayers where my heart and soul and my very inner being cried unto the Lord.

Why do we as human beings experience devastating losses and incredibly hard trials when we are already giving our everything to the Lord? In a devotional given at Brigham Young University entitled “Lessons from Liberty Jail,” Elder Jeffrey R. Holland described the Prophet Joseph Smith’s time in Liberty Jail:

[Liberty] Jail, one of the . . . more forbidding . . . structures in that region, was considered escape proof, and it probably was. [Surrounded by stone walls], . . . four feet thick, . . . the floor-to-ceiling height in the dungeon was barely six feet. Inasmuch as some of the men, including the

Prophet Joseph, were over six feet tall, this meant that when standing they were constantly in a stooped position, and when lying [down] it was mostly upon the rough, bare stones of the prison floor. . . . The food given to the prisoners was coarse and sometimes contaminated, so filthy that one of them said they “could not eat it until [they] were driven to it by hunger.” On as many as four occasions . . . poison [was] administered to them in their food, making them so violently ill that for days they alternated between vomiting and a kind of delirium, not really caring whether they lived or died. In the Prophet Joseph’s letters, he spoke of the jail being a “hell, surrounded with demons . . . where we are compelled to hear nothing but blasphemous oaths, and witness a scene of blasphemy, and drunkenness and hypocrisy, and debaucheries of every description.” “We have . . . not blankets sufficient to keep us warm; . . . and when we have a fire, we are obliged to have almost a constant smoke.” “Our souls have been bowed down” and “my nerve trembles from long confinement,” “Pen, or tongue, or angels,” Joseph wrote, could not adequately describe “the malice of hell” that he suffered there. And all of this occurred during what, by some accounts, was considered then the coldest winter on record in the state of Missouri.<sup>16</sup>

It was during this time that the Prophet Joseph cried unto the Lord “O God, where art thou?”<sup>17</sup> And because of this toilsome time spent in Liberty Jail, the Prophet Joseph Smith received the revelation known to us as Doctrine and Covenants 121–123, some of the most profound sections in the Doctrine and Covenants.

From those sections we can study scriptures such as: My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes.<sup>18</sup>

And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; . . . if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.<sup>19</sup>

These scriptures gave me insight and knowledge that the Lord is abundantly clear of the trials in my life, and no matter what, He will not leave me. He would never do it. And although these are trials I would have rather not faced, they have been meant to challenge me. To change me. They have been for my good. They have given me the opportunity to turn my heart and soul and my entire being to my Savior, knowing that not only did I want Him in my life, but I needed the Savior and His Atonement. These experiences—the postpartum and the two divorces and the death of my dear eternal companion at such a young age—are so that I can be stretched and become one of the noble and great ones. They have been the moments I have turned to the Savior in the most sincere plea for help and guidance. As devastating as

they have been, I would not trade those sacred moments with my Savior and the wonderful Atonement.

Again, Elder Holland put it perfectly when he said:

When you have to, you can have sacred, revelatory, profoundly instructive experiences with the Lord in any situation you are in. Indeed, let me say that even a little stronger: You can have sacred, revelatory, profoundly instructive experiences with the Lord in the most miserable experiences of your life—in the worst settings, while enduring the most painful injustices, when facing the most insurmountable odds and opposition you have ever faced.<sup>20</sup>

We have all been put in our own version of Liberty Jail. Maybe we were put there by our own choices. Maybe we were put there by the choices of others. Or maybe we were put there simply because of things that happen in mortality.

Have you turned your Liberty Jail into your sacred experience? What can you do to make that happen in your heart? Instead of asking the Lord to change the situation, try asking Him to change YOU.

Accepting Heavenly Father's will can be challenging and overwhelming. With the death of my sweet husband, I spent many months asking the Lord, "What is it you are wanting from me? And if I do your will, will you truly give me the peace and joy for which I long?" Having this curious thought process allowed me to really focus on my relationship with my Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. I began to yoke myself with the Savior and know with complete certainty that He will always be in that yoke with me.

Staying on the covenant path and aligning myself with my Heavenly Father has brought a small sense of clarity to the harsh moments of my life. I will never fully understand in this life why they had to happen the way they did. But I know that it will all make sense someday, and probably not until the next life. Not only will I be blessed with understanding, but the joy and blessings bestowed upon me will more than make up for any pain I have felt. Jesus Christ has made sure of that through His infinite Atonement.

It can be hard in our mortal state to be grateful for certain trials that come into our lives. I certainly feel that way about spending the last few years as a widow, without the greatest human I have ever known by my side. But I can say I am grateful for the sacred time it has allowed me to spend with Jesus Christ. I am grateful for the time I have spent during all of my trials getting to know Him and figuring out how He is showing up in my life and in my story.

As I continue to turn my life over to Him, I cannot wait to see where He takes me as I continue to enjoy the zipline of my life.

The life I lead now with my four children looks very similar to the life I had before my husband passed away, but also very different. But I know for certain that we will always look for Jesus and for the joy. We enjoy kitchen dance parties, pizza Friday and movie night, wrestling matches in the living room, and lullabies before bed. We talk about Daddy and always look for the ways the Savior is showing up in our story. Our home is loud and chaotic most of the time, but full of joy because of the Savior and His love.

One of my absolute favorite quotes comes from Sister Linda S. Reeves, former second counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency. She said:

I do not know why we have the many trials that we have, but it is my personal feeling that the reward is so great, so eternal and everlasting, so joyful and beyond our understanding that in that day of reward, we may feel to say to our merciful, loving Father, "Was that *all* that was required?" I believe that if we could daily remember and recognize the depth of that love our Heavenly Father and our Savior have for us, we would be willing to do anything to be back in Their presence again, surrounded by Their love eternally. What will it matter, dear sisters, what we suffered here if, in the end, those trials are the very things which qualify us for eternal life and exaltation in the kingdom of God with our Father and Savior?<sup>21</sup>

It's easy to look at the events of my life and feel discouraged about many things. But knowing the Savior is right there with me, ready to catch me during my thirty-foot falls, makes it worth giving this zipline life of mine everything I have to offer. The Savior has proven to me time and time again that He will not leave me, He will not let me down, and He will help me find the joy I so desire in every aspect of my life. Because Jesus is Joy.

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