

“From Grit to Grace”

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When I was a first-year high school student, I was so excited to make the varsity track team. I’m not sure I had the best runners’ form and wasn’t fast over short distances. But I worked really hard, and I had a high pain threshold. I guess, this meant I was the perfect *distance* runner! In fact, I placed first in the city-wide track meet as a freshman. But there was one race that I lost that may have been my most important finish. I was lined up against two of the fastest runners in the state. The race started, and they began to separate themselves from the rest of the field. Somehow, I managed to keep pace through the first and second lap. When we got to the final straight away on the third lap, I started into a full sprint—I was going to win the race! As I crossed the finish line, I threw up my hands in celebration and turned to the crowd for acknowledgment. Unfortunately, at that same moment, the gun went off signaling the start of the last lap! I had miscounted! To my horror, there was one more lap to go. My confused competitors quickly ran by me before I eventually got back in the race. In pain and with some embarrassment, I finished, but nearly in last place.

President Thomas S. Monson has taught: “There has always been a need for those persons who could be called finishers.”¹ What does it take to be a finisher, both academically and spiritually? Psychologist Angela Duckworth calls this characteristic “grit,” which she describes as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals.” She points out that “at various points, in big ways and small, we get knocked down. If we stay down, grit loses. If we get up, grit prevails.”²

But sometimes grit alone is not enough. To do all that is expected of you as a BYU-Pathway student, you will need to work hard and demonstrate grit. But to go where you need to go will take something more. You will need to seek after the strengthening power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Elder Bednar has taught: “I wonder if we fail to fully acknowledge this strengthening aspect of the Atonement in our lives and mistakenly believe we must carry our load all alone—through sheer grit, willpower, and discipline and with our obviously limited capacities.”³

I learned this when Sister Gilbert and I moved to Boston for graduate school. Like track, I had done reasonably well in school, not because I was smarter than others, but because I worked really hard. At the start of graduate school, I was required to participate in a multi-week

¹ Thomas S. Monson, “Finishers Wanted,” April 1972 General Conference

² Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, (Scribner, 2016), 92

³ David A. Bednar, “Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2014

program affectionately called “Math Camp.” And yes, it was about as fun as that sounds! I was in way over my head. One evening as we gathered as a little family, I confessed my doubts to my wife. I confided that I did not think I could complete the program, stating that it wasn’t simply a matter of working harder, but rather a more fundamental capability gap. I’ll never forget Christine’s response: “Clark, you prayed for this opportunity, and you know our family is supposed to be here. Now, buck up and do the math!”

Well, I think what she was really saying was that I needed to recognize that grit was not enough and that I needed to trust in the Savior’s grace. This transition is what it means to go from grit to grace.

Nephi teaches “that it is by grace we are saved, after all we can do.”⁴ Yes, we have to work hard, do our best, and marshal all of the personal grit we can; but in the end, we must rely on the Savior and His grace. Elder Carlos Godoy taught this at a BYU-Pathway gathering we were at in Lima, Peru, earlier this year. He shared empathy for how hard it is to learn to speak college-level English. He even described how he came to the United States and lived with an American family only to be discouraged when he realized their family dog knew more English than he did! Elder Godoy reminded the students that pursuing their education would be really hard work. But he also promised that the Lord will “help you more than you can help yourself. [So therefore], *involve the Lord in this process.*”⁵

To our beloved BYU-Pathway students: I know that pursuing your education can be challenging and requires sacrifice. I know how hard you are working and that there are many difficult nights as you stay up late to complete assignments, learn new concepts, and manage other demanding commitments in your life. But hang in there. Keep demonstrating real grit. But also, be prepared to move from grit to grace. Involve the Lord. Pray for His help, and He will magnify your efforts. Know how much we love you. More importantly, know how much the Lord loves you and will strengthen you in all of your righteous efforts to learn and grow and become more like Him.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

⁴ 2 Nephi 25:23

⁵ Carlos A. Godoy, BYU-Pathway Connections Conference, Lima, Peru, May 3, 2018