



Your Hardest Season Might Be Exactly Half a Miracle

Delays can make faithful effort feel pointless. How does the Bible's symbolic 7 help us trust in God's promises?

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FAITH

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There's a kind of disappointment that doesn't arrive as tragedy. It arrives as delay: the diagnosis that lingers, the job search that won't resolve, the prayer that feels like it hits a ceiling. You keep doing the next right thing—and nothing budes.

“Are you having a 3½ Moment?” It sounds baffling—until you are in one.

A 3½ Moment is my name for a familiar stretch of discipleship when life feels stalled: you're doing what you know is right, but the relief doesn't come. The problem lingers, and hope starts to feel naïve.

In scripture, God often teaches through symbols. As Elder Orson F. Whitney, an early apostle in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, observed, “[God teaches with symbols](#); it is his favorite method of teaching.”

One of the Bible’s most familiar symbols is 7—wholeness and completion. But a lesser-known number appears in stories of drought, scattering, and delayed rescue: 3½, half of seven. It often functions as a literary signal that deliverance is delayed—but the delay has a limit. Here’s what that pattern can teach us about our hardest chapters, and four ways to keep faith until God brings your “7.”

Seven: Scripture’s Symbol of Completion

The Bible trains us to notice the symbol 7. God created the heavens and earth in six days, and “he rested on the seventh day” ([Genesis 2:2](#)). The number 7 appears throughout the Bible as one of the most common symbols in scripture.

In scripture, the number 7 often refers to wholeness, completion, and perfection. The symbol 7 teaches us to trust that God’s promises will be fulfilled. It also reminds us to obey to completion. Naaman’s story makes the point almost painfully: the sixth dip looks indistinguishable from the seventh. Partial obedience can look reasonable—until the miracle arrives one step later. Joshua’s armies would have suffered complete defeat had they circled Jericho for six days before battle. Seven often appears as a symbol for completing a work.

Three and a Half: When Deliverance is Delayed

In Daniel and Revelation, we see these 3½ measures show up in apocalyptic settings—visions of oppression, exile, and persecution. They mark a period that is real and painful, but also limited: evil is permitted a season, then God intervenes. That 3½ symbol can also have personal meaning to us as a metaphor for our discipleship—what it feels like to live inside a promised ending that hasn’t arrived yet.

During the time of Elijah, “the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land” ([Luke 4:25](#)). 1 Kings 17–18 contains this story

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of drought and famine, the widow of Zarephath and her son, and the eventual rain that ended the drought. The drought ended only when Elijah's servant followed his command to climb Mount Carmel and look toward the sea "seven times," connecting the symbols 3½ and 7 together (1 Kings 18:43).

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Note that recognizing the symbolic meaning of numbers in scriptures is safe spiritual territory, as opposed to the [speculative and tangential work of occult numerology](#). One caution: apocalyptic numbers are rarely a stopwatch for predicting outcomes, and they aren't a guarantee that God will resolve a specific hardship on our preferred schedule. Their gift is different: they insist that evil and suffering are not ultimate, and that God sets limits we cannot always see from inside the storm.

The symbol 3½ is often expressed in different but equivalent forms: 3½ years; 42 months; 1,260 days; "a time, times, and half a time"; or three and a half days. Revelation uses these equivalent measures to describe a bounded period of tribulation for God's people—long enough to be terrifying, short enough to be survivable because God remains sovereign.

The number 3½ is half of 7. That gives us a clue as to its meaning. Read alongside seven (completion), 3½ can be heard as the 'incomplete' half, an unfinished story. The texts are speaking first about communal suffering and divine deliverance; I'm using their repeated timeframe as a devotional lens for individual seasons that feel unfinished.

On a personal level, 3½ reminds us that we live in a fallen world, with seasons of opposition and adversity, which will resolve because of 7. For some, that glorious conclusion may arrive beyond mortality; the certainty of "7" rests in Christ's Resurrection even when present circumstances do not change. But that promise assures that for even the most stubborn problems of mortality, an amazing conclusion is promised.

When Life Feels Stuck at 3½

Symbolically, 3½ can represent our own hard times and challenges, but it carries the understanding that all things can be perfected and brought to a resolution by Jesus

Christ. The symbol 3½ teaches us to have divine hope in the eventual 7, to complete our work of keeping God's commandments ([D&C 11:20](#)) and to joyfully look forward to God completing His work ([Moses 1:39](#)).

In hard times, it may feel as though the gospel plan isn't working for us because we don't appear to be succeeding in ways that we expect. These are moments when cynicism feels most plausible, and most costly. Many hard times can feel like a 3½ Moment, but a 3½ Moment is not the end of the story. It is only half of seven, a limited period of adversity before divine deliverance. Because 3½ is connected to 7, we have the assurance that our suffering and problems are temporary, as we look to Jesus Christ.

President Russell M. Nelson, the late president of The Church of Jesus Christ, once described the discipline this way: "Our focus must be riveted on the Savior and His gospel. It is mentally rigorous to strive to look unto Him in every thought. But, when we do, [our doubts and fears flee](#)."

To have its intended meaning, the symbol of 3½ must be connected to the symbol of 7. Similarly, to fulfill its intended purposes, we benefit when we connect our hard times to Jesus Christ.

In my own prayers, I've learned to ask for something simpler than an explanation: a sentence I can live on. "I can't see the end yet. Help me be faithful in the middle. Help me take the next step."

Wendell's 3½ Moment

Wendell Jones and I previously served together in a bishopric, a congregation's leadership. In 2022, Wendell was diagnosed with ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

ALS is a progressive neurodegenerative disorder that affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. The disease has taken things from him in stages, but it hasn't taken his posture toward life.

As he navigates this period, Wendell has a deep knowledge and testimony of the gospel plan that helps him maintain an eternal perspective about his life and his illness.

After his diagnosis, he logged miles on a two-wheeled bike to keep his strength. When that became unsafe, he switched to three wheels. Now he rides in a car—often in the passenger seat—so he can talk while someone else drives. It’s a small parable of discipleship: when one way of moving forward closes, you learn another.

My wife recently asked Wendell, “You are always so happy; how do you do it?” Wendell’s response was direct: “How could I not, when I think of everything that Jesus has done for me?”

Wendell has spent his adult life serving his parents and his large posterity. Now, in this season of life, he humbly allows them to serve him.

What Suffering Makes of Us

[Alma 62:41](#) demonstrates the principle that the same difficulties will result in different outcomes. The Nephites had just finished a decade of war, witnessing and experiencing horrific atrocities. The Book of Mormon records that “because of the exceedingly great length of the war... many had become hardened... [and] many were softened because of their afflictions.” The same set of experiences led to opposite spiritual outcomes. What matters most in life is not the adversity faced, but the response.

There is nothing neutral with adversity. Adversity changes us, for better or worse.

Yet when hard times come, we may think:

- “What have I done to deserve this?”
- “Why is this happening to me, when I’m trying so hard to be good?”
- “Why is this problem lingering so long?”

The book of Alma teaches that “whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day” ([Alma 36:3](#)).

Expect Friction

How can difficult problems be a catalyst to make us better, not bitter? How can adversity become a 3½ Moment that is a stepping stone toward our 7, which is eternal life? I observed four practices in the example of Wendell, and in my own life.

From the beginning of the scripture record we are put on notice that difficult experiences are the norm, not the exception. The Book of Genesis records that the ground was cursed for Adam’s sake, and Eve was promised that her sorrow would be multiplied ([Genesis 3:16–17](#)).

Difficult experiences are the norm, not the exception.

Author [Dennis Wholey](#) wrote, as shared by [President Jeffrey R. Holland](#), then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “Expecting a trouble-free life because you are a good person is like expecting the bull not to charge you because you are a vegetarian.”

Even Jesus was made “perfect through sufferings” ([Hebrews 2:10](#)). Trials are not evidence that the plan is failing; often they are evidence that God’s plan for us is working.

Practice Gratitude Without Denial

I share a principle that has been meaningful to me. I’ve come to think of it as a kind of “eternal unfairness” principle. Each of us will be resurrected and can receive an immortal body, a gift made possible by the Atonement of Christ. We didn’t earn that.

Jesus Christ bled “from every pore” ([Mosiah 3:7](#); [D&C 19:18](#)) and suffered infinitely, so we have the gift of repentance and receive a remission of our sins. We didn’t earn that.

In Latter-day Saint belief, Jesus Christ, through the ordinances provided in temples, blesses us with eternal life and eternal families—an incomprehensible gift made possible as we receive the Atonement of Christ by making and keeping covenants. We didn’t earn that.

In things that matter most, remember: The deck is stacked—not against us, but in our favor! Life is truly “unfair” because of Jesus Christ. Aren’t we so grateful for it?

Jesus taught, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” ([John 16:33](#)). It helps to ponder the price He paid for us: “which suffering caused myself, even God... to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore” ([D&C 19:16–18](#)). Gratitude for Jesus helps hard times become 3½ Moments of growth.

Healing will come.

Let Trust Be Active

Elder Richard G. Scott, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, taught, “This life is an [experience in profound trust](#)—trust in Jesus Christ, trust in His teachings... To trust means to obey willingly without knowing the end from the beginning.” Trials can help us increase our trust in God: that He “shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain” ([2 Nephi 2:2](#)), and that “He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world” ([2 Nephi 26:24](#)).

Instead of asking, “Why is this happening to me?” we can ask, “Why is this happening for me?” What am I to learn? How can this problem help me increase my faith and trust in Jesus Christ? Nelson taught that we can “[receive more faith](#) by doing something that requires more faith.”

Turn Outward

Jesus taught by example that in times of adversity we should look outward and serve others. While on the cross, in His deepest agony and suffering, we see Jesus—astonishingly—arranging for the care of His mother:

“When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son. Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother” ([John 19:26–27](#)).

In times of adversity, our natural inclination is to focus inward. Instead, Jesus invites us to look outward to others, especially when we are experiencing personal challenges. This is a gospel paradox: “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” ([Matthew 10:39](#)). Elder David A. Bednar, also an apostle in The

Church of Jesus Christ, taught, “Character is demonstrated by **looking and reaching outward** when the natural and instinctive response is to be self-absorbed and turn inward.”

When those inevitable hard times come, we have a choice: we can be frustrated, grit our teeth, and suffer through it. Or we can see this problem that we would never choose as an opportunity. Your 3½ Moment does not define you, but it can refine you. Healing will come. All problems can be temporary on an eternal scale, as we strive to follow Jesus Christ. When you are in that 3½ Moment, remember: 7 is coming.

About the author

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