



# HEAVY TRIALS, *Tender Mercies*

*As one who has had to endure tribulation,  
I have learned that Heavenly Father  
can turn our suffering for our good.*

By Alice Warner Johnson

**A**fter I became partially bedridden with multiple sclerosis (MS), I was asked to speak at a Relief Society meeting on the topic “When Life Gives You Lemons, Make Lemonade.” At that point I was no longer able to sing, play the piano or cello, conduct a choir, or even walk—activities that had brought me much joy in the past. However, along with these trials, I have experienced many unexpected blessings. So I altered the title of my talk to reflect what I have learned: “Trust in God That When Life Gives You Sour Lemons, He Will Make for You a Sweet Lemonade.”

## **The Turning Point in My Life**

My nine siblings and I were raised by faithful parents. My years of growing up, attending college, serving a full-time mission in Taiwan, working in Boston, and preparing for marriage to my husband, Paul, were very happy. By early 1999, we had two children, and Paul was serving as the bishop of our ward.

One morning I awoke with my left eye throbbing. An eye doctor sent me to the local hospital for a scan, which revealed that I had at least 12 cerebral and spinal lesions affecting my nerves. The multiple sclerosis was already widespread.

My husband, my father, and my brother gave me a priesthood blessing, which taught me two significant and unforgettable things. First, Heavenly Father had not inflicted me with this terrible disease. It was simply a consequence of coming to earth in a mortal body to have experiences that would help me grow. Second, I was told that Heavenly Father would not allow anything to happen to me that could not be turned for my good.

Later, in another blessing, I learned that there would be a significant period of time before I would experience the extreme difficulties that accompany my disease. During this period, and against strong medical advice, I gave birth to two more children. When Paul was released as bishop, we sold our home and moved to the Boise area in Idaho.

## **After Much Tribulation Come the Blessings**

It was during this period that the crippling effects of MS increased dramatically and, step by step, left me unable to do most things for myself. I had to decide how I was going to meet these challenges.

I began to see that Heavenly Father knew and appreciated our efforts to bring children into the world with a timing that would make it possible for them to know and learn from their mother before

she became too infirm. This was just one of the tender mercies of the Lord that were given to me (see Psalm 69:16).

I also came to realize that I was being more than compensated for the loss of my musical abilities. Music—singing, playing, composing, and conducting—had been a joyful cornerstone of my earthly existence that I assumed would continue with me all my life. Instead, my delight in music found expression in my children. They all sing beautifully. Among them there is a flutist, a violinist, a cellist, and a composer and arranger. Several of them play the guitar and the piano. They not only honor and enjoy their musical gifts but also love using them to serve others. Often I have asked myself, “Given the choice between keeping my musical talents and having such talents blossom in my children, which would I choose?” The answer to that question has been made plain to me as my mother-heart has recognized what a sweet gift my children’s musical talents have been to us all.

Beyond the blessings of my children and their music, I have discovered the power—even the glory—of the loving-kindness of others. I have to be lifted, washed, dressed, and fed throughout the day, and many are the precious souls who have come to help me



day after day. Family and friends from my past write, call, and travel long distances to visit and assist me. Many of those who have served me are burdened with their own hardships and trials, and yet they have not forgotten me. In their kindness I have seen the Lord’s outstretched hand as He provides to me an overflowing bounty in my seemingly hopeless situation. This reminds me that “after much tribulation come the blessings” (D&C 58:4).

### All Have Challenges

I believe that it is my Heavenly Father who has turned my trials into learning opportunities. I think of those I know and realize that they, too, face difficult challenges. For most of us, life does not unfold as we once imagined that it would. Nevertheless, for those who strive to remain faithful, the challenges that at first appear as sour lemons in our lives will ultimately be turned into the sweetest lemonade—through the loving-kindness of our God. ■

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