

Faith to Answer THE CALL

We all must have a conviction burning in our hearts that this is the work of God and that it requires the best we can give to building up “waste place[s] in Zion.”

In 1849, just two years after the Saints had entered the Salt Lake Valley, Elder Parley P. Pratt of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles led an expedition to the south. The farther south the expedition went, the more difficult the terrain became. After the men had dropped 3,000 feet (914 m) from the rim of the Great Basin to the convergence of the Virgin and the Santa Clara Rivers (south of modern-day St. George, Utah), the terrain became dry and sandy, volcanic and rugged. The scouts were not impressed. A journal says:

“Passed . . . over a rugged, stony, sandy almost indescribable country, thrown together in dreadful confusion. . . .

“A wide expanse of chaotic matter presented itself, consisting of huge hills, [red] deserts, cheerless, grassless plains, perpendicular rocks, loose barren clay, . . . sandstone . . . lying in inconceivable confusion—in short, a country in ruins, . . . turned inside out, upside down, by terrible convulsions in some former age.”¹

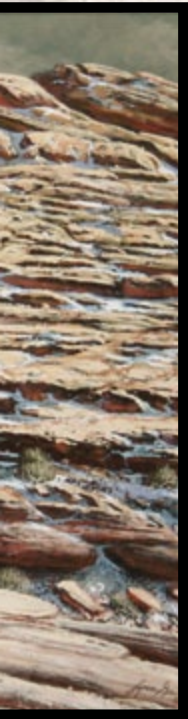
But however rugged the land looked going south, the wind-whipped, erosion-gutted cliffs and canyon wilderness of San Juan country to the east looked a lot tougher. Church leaders knew that taming that rough, uncharted corner of the territory would be difficult, but they nevertheless wanted to establish communities for the Church there. At the quarterly conference of the Parowan Stake in 1879, 250 people accepted the call by President John Taylor to establish the San Juan Mission. With 80 wagons and nearly 1,000 head of cattle and horses, they began to cut their way toward and through imposing, unexplored



THE LAST WAGON, BY LYNN GRIFFIN

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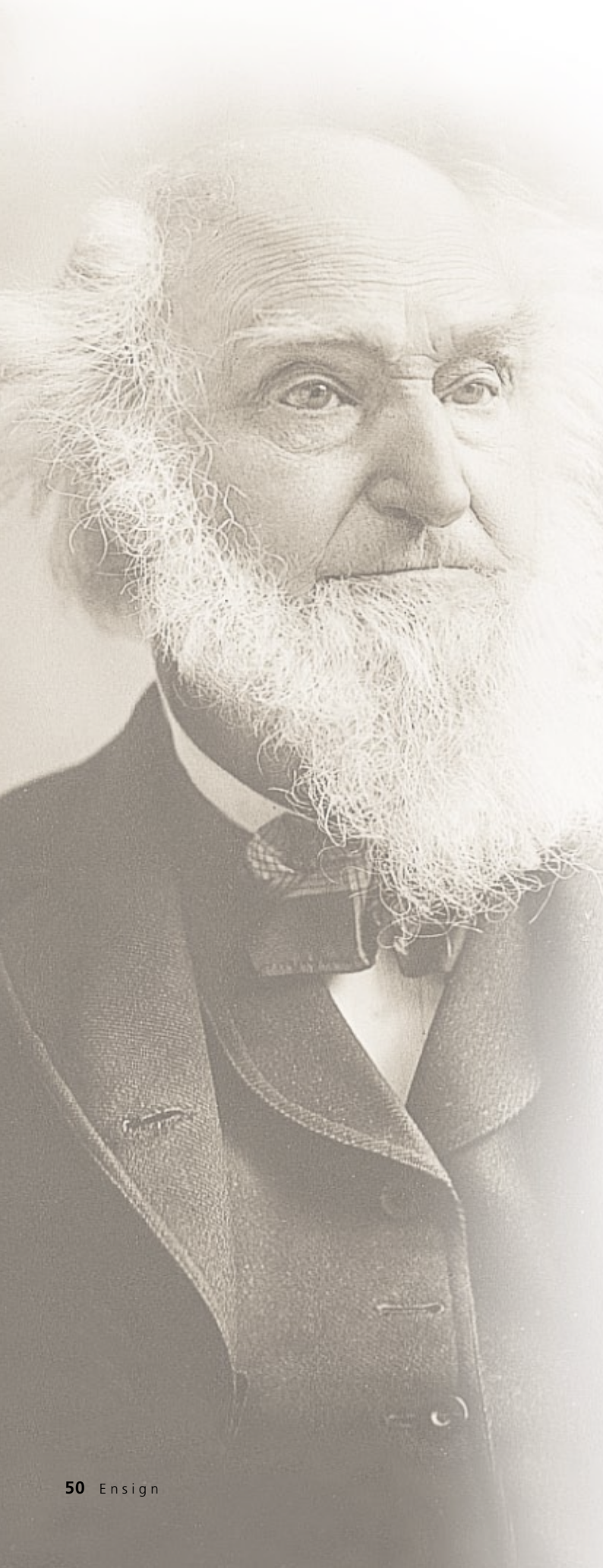
territory of snow-capped mountains and towering stone pinnacles.

Seeking the shortest route to San Juan, those first explorers overcame one obstacle after another but soon faced the largest and most intimidating barrier of all: the impassable gulf of the Colorado River gorge. Miraculously their weary scouts found a narrow slit in the canyon—a crevice running 2,000 feet (610 m) down the red cliffs to the Colorado River below. This lone, near-lethal “hole in the rock” seemed to offer the only possible passage to the eastern side.

For the most part, the slice in the sandstone was too narrow for horses and in some places too narrow even for a man or woman to pass through. Sheer drops of as much as 75 feet (23 m) would seem to have made it impossible for a mountain sheep, let alone loaded wagons. But the hardy Saints were not going to turn back, so with blasting powder and tools, working most of December 1879 and January 1880, they cut a precarious, primitive road into the face of the canyon precipice.

With this roadbed finished, such as it was, the task was now to get the first 40 wagons down the “hole.” The other wagons, waiting five miles (8 km) back at Fifty-Mile Spring, would follow later.

They organized themselves in such a way “that a dozen or more men could hang on behind the wagon” with long ropes to slow its descent. Then the wheels were brake-locked with chains, allowing



What are we seeing in these examples of faithful pioneers? We are seeing what we saw when the Saints fled New York and Pennsylvania and Ohio and Missouri and then fled their beloved Nauvoo across an ice-bound river with the temple soon burning in the distance.

them to slide but avoiding the catastrophe of the wheels actually rolling.

In one of the great moments of pioneer history, one by one the company took the wagons down the treacherous precipice. When they reached the canyon floor, they eagerly started to ferry across the river with a flatbed boat they had fashioned for that purpose. As it turned out, the Joseph Stanford Smith family was in the last wagon to descend that day.

Stanford Smith had systematically helped the preceding wagons down, but somehow the company apparently forgot that Brother Smith's family would still need help as the tailenders. Deeply disturbed that he and his family seemed abandoned, Stanford moved his team, wagon, and family to the edge of the precipice. The team was placed in front and a third horse was hitched *behind* the wagon to the rear axle. The Smiths stood for a moment and looked down the treacherous hole. Stanford turned to his wife, Arabella, and said, "I am afraid we can't make it."

She replied, "But we've got to make it."

He said, "If we only had a few men to hold the wagon back, we *might* make it."

Replied his wife, "*I'll* do the holding back."

She laid a quilt on the ground, and there she placed her infant son in the care of her three-year-old, Roy, and five-year-old, Ada. "Hold little brother 'til papa comes for you," she said. Then positioning herself behind the wagon, Belle Smith grasped the reins of the horse hitched to the back of the rig. Stanford started the team down the hole. The wagon lurched downward. With the first jolt the rear horse fell. Sister Smith raced after him and the wagon, pulling on the lines with all her strength and courage. She soon fell too, and as she was

dragged along with the horse, a jagged rock cut a cruel gash in her leg from heel to hip. That gallant woman, with clothes torn and a grievous wound, hung on to those lines with all her might and faith the full length of the

called out, "Forget it, fellows. We managed fine. Belle here is all the help a fellow needs [to make this journey]."²

When the Call Comes

The Hole-in-the-Rock expedition is only one of many examples of the dramatic determination and devotion of the early Saints to answer the call of their prophet when it came. Another example is the creation of and call to the Muddy Mission in present-day Nevada. As with so many early pioneer settlements, the Muddy promised a very hard life, and much soul-searching was done when the calls came to settle there.

Some of those called in the 1860s certainly must have asked, "Of all places on the earth, why the Muddy?" Well, there actually were reasons. First of all, the American Civil War had given rise to the possibility of shipping commodities via the Colorado River. Second, when the war interrupted traditional sources for textiles, the Cotton Mission had been established in the cities of St. George and Washington not too many miles away. It was assumed that cotton for that mission could be grown in the Muddy region. Third, the Latter-day Saints felt strongly their obligation to work with the Native American tribes in the region, helping to feed them and hoping to educate them.

But the region was nevertheless a lonely, barren wasteland. It seemed to have almost nothing to offer but heat and hard work. It was isolated and for



incline all the way to the river's edge.

On reaching the bottom and almost in disbelief at their accomplishment, Stanford immediately raced the 2,000 feet (607 m) back up to the top of the cliff, fearful for the welfare of the children. When he climbed over the rim, there he saw them literally unmoved from their position. Carrying the baby, with the other two children clinging to him and to each other, he led them down the rocky crack to their anxious mother below. In the distance they saw five men moving toward them carrying chains and ropes. Realizing the plight the Smiths were in, these men were coming to help. Stanford

When her father was called to move his family to the difficult Muddy Mission in present-day Nevada, USA, Elizabeth Claridge (above) wept but declared, "I should not own him as a father if he would not go when he is called."

the most part desolate, and the river that gave the mission its identity was aptly named.

As to how and with what faith and determination the Muddy was settled, I will let one of the settlers have her say. She represents the grit and spunk and moral conviction that both young and old had—in this case especially the young. Wrote Elizabeth Claridge McCune of her father’s call to settle the Muddy:

“No place on earth seemed so precious to me at fifteen years of age as [the town of] dear old Nephi [in Utah’s Juab County]. How eagerly we looked forward to the periodical visits of President Brigham Young and his company! . . .

“. . . Bro. Brigham, Bros. Kimball and Wells with [their] entire company got out of their carriages, and walked over the flowery road . . . to our homes, [where] dinner was prepared and served. . . .

“We all attended the [Sunday] afternoon meeting, the girls in white having reserved seats in front. The sermons were grand, and we were happy until President Young announced that he had a few names to read of men who were to be called and voted in as missionaries to go and settle . . . the ‘Muddy.’ This almost stilled the beating of the hearts of all present. Many of our people had been called to go to settle the Dixie country—but the Muddy, so many miles farther south! and so much worse! oh! oh! I did not hear another name

except ‘Samuel Claridge.’ Then how I sobbed and cried, regardless of the fact that the tears were spoiling [my] new white dress. The father of the girl who sat next to me was also called. Said my companion, ‘Why, what are



you crying about? It doesn’t make me cry. I know my father won’t go.’ ‘Well, there is the difference,’ said I. ‘I know that my father *will* go and that nothing could prevent him, and I should not own him as a father if he would not go when he is called.’ Then I broke down sobbing again. . . .

“As we had just moved into a new house and were fixed [so] comfortably, many of our friends tried to persuade father to keep his home and farm; to go south awhile and then come back. But father knew that this was not the kind of mission upon which he had been called. ‘I shall sell everything I own,’ said he, ‘and take my means to help build up another waste place in Zion.’”³

It is the heart of our conviction that the work not only should go forth but that it also can and will and must go forth. I don’t know how else mothers and fathers could leave those babies in those makeshift graves on the plains and then, with one last look, weep their way forward toward Zion.

Faith in the Work

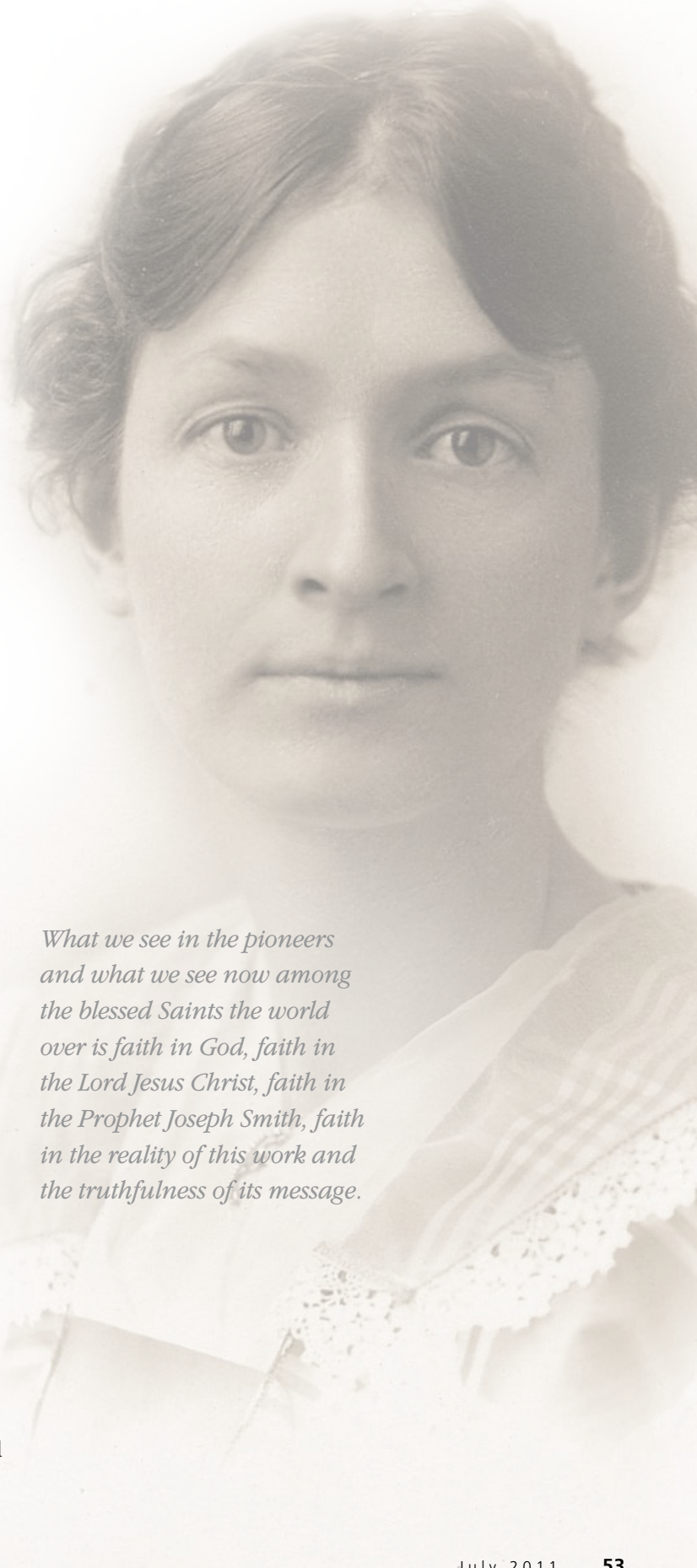
What is it that bred then and breeds now the loyalty and devotion found in this 15-year-old girl and the family into which she was born? What is it that made her turn on her slightly less stalwart friend and declare, "I know that my father *will* go and that nothing could prevent him"? Where does that kind of spunk come from that would allow her to go on to say, "And I should not own him as a father if he would not go when he is called"?

And what of those three little children who watched their parents disappear in a wagon over the edge of the Colorado River gorge but trusted in the instruction they had been given by their mother? They sat there stalwartly, determined not to move or weep despite what must have been their tremendous fear.

What are we seeing in these examples of faithful pioneers? It is what we have seen down through the dispensations of time and certainly down through this dispensation. We are seeing what we saw when the Saints fled New York and Pennsylvania and Ohio and Missouri and then fled their beloved Nauvoo across an ice-bound river with the temple soon burning in the distance. It is what we saw when those same people buried their dead in large numbers at Winter Quarters, followed by leaving isolated graves, sometimes as tiny as a bread box, in Wyoming near Chimney Rock or at one of the many crossings of the Sweetwater River or in a snowbank at Martin's Cove.

What we saw then and what we see now among the blessed Saints the world over is faith in God, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, faith in the Prophet Joseph Smith, faith in the reality of this work and the truthfulness of its message. It was faith that took a boy into a grove of trees to pray, and it was faith that enabled him to get up off his knees, place himself in God's hands for the Restoration of the gospel, and ultimately march toward his own martyrdom scarcely two dozen short years later.

Little wonder that faith always has been and always will be the first and abiding principle of the gospel and of our work. It is the heart of our conviction that the work not



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I don't know how else mothers and fathers could leave those babies in those makeshift graves on the plains and then, with one last look, weep their way forward toward Zion. I don't know how else a woman like Belle Smith could set her children at the edge of a cliff and muscle her wagon down the perilous incline. I don't know how else Samuel Claridge could sell all he owned and head off to build Zion in the desolate Muddy Mission. The fundamental driving force in these stories is faith—rock-ribbed, furnace-refined, event-filled, spiritually girded faith that this is the very Church and kingdom of God and that when you are called, you go.

A Call for Conviction

There are still “waste place[s] in Zion” to be built up, and some of those are much closer than the Muddy or San Juan Missions. Some of them are in our own hearts and in our own homes.

And so I issue a call for the conviction we all must have burning in our hearts that this is the work of God and that it requires the best we can give to the effort. My appeal is that you nurture your own physical and spiritual strength so that you have a deep reservoir of faith to call upon when tasks or challenges or demands of one kind or another come. Pray a little more, study a little more, shut out the noise and shut down the clamor, enjoy nature, call

down personal revelation, search your soul, and search the heavens for the testimony that led our pioneer parents. Then, when you need to reach down inside a little deeper and a little farther to face life and do your work, you will be sure there is something down there to call upon.

When you have your own faith, you are prepared to bless your family. The single strongest indicator of activity and service, of devotion and loyalty in this Church continues to be the presence of strong family ties. I say that, knowing full well that part of the majesty of this Church is in the *individual* member. Sometimes that member is a new convert; sometimes that member is the only Latter-day Saint in the family. Some individual somewhere had to plant the flag of faith and start a new generation in the gospel. But the fact is that faith is better nurtured and more protected and longer lasting when there is an entire family to reinforce it. So after standing alone if you have to, work diligently to see that others in your family *don't* stand alone. Build your family and see that faith is strong there.

With that accomplished, we can serve the Church near at hand or at some distant outpost if called. Then we can search out that lost sheep—member or nonmember, living or dead. This can be done wisely and well only when the other 99 lambs, including our own little flock, are safely folded while we search. If we have loved and taught those at home,

they will understand exactly as little Elizabeth Claridge did: when the call comes, you can be certain that your father and mother, your brothers and sisters are going to go.

There is work to be done. We cannot say that every one of our neighbors has deep faith, that every one has a strong family, that every one near and far has heard the gospel message and has become a believing, teaching, temple-going Latter-day Saint. The world is getting more wicked, and the times ahead will try the best of us. But the forces of righteousness will always prevail when people like Stanford and Arabella Smith, people like Samuel Claridge and his spunky daughter Elizabeth make it prevail.

We must have faith in this work—faith in what all believers are called to do, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in our Father in Heaven. We need to conform our will to Theirs and then make that will rock-ribbed and pioneer strong indeed. If we do that, I know we will be safe and secure in the inexorable onward movement of the Church and kingdom of God on earth. ■

From a regional stake conference broadcast address delivered on September 12, 2010, at Brigham Young University.

NOTES

1. In Milton R. Hunter, *Brigham Young the Colonizer* (1973), 47.
2. See David E. Miller, *Hole-in-the-Rock: An Epic in the Colonization of the Great American West* (1959), 101–18; emphasis added and punctuation standardized.
3. Elizabeth Claridge McCune, in Susa Young Gates, “Biographical Sketches,” *Young Woman's Journal*, July 1898, 292, 293; punctuation standardized.