

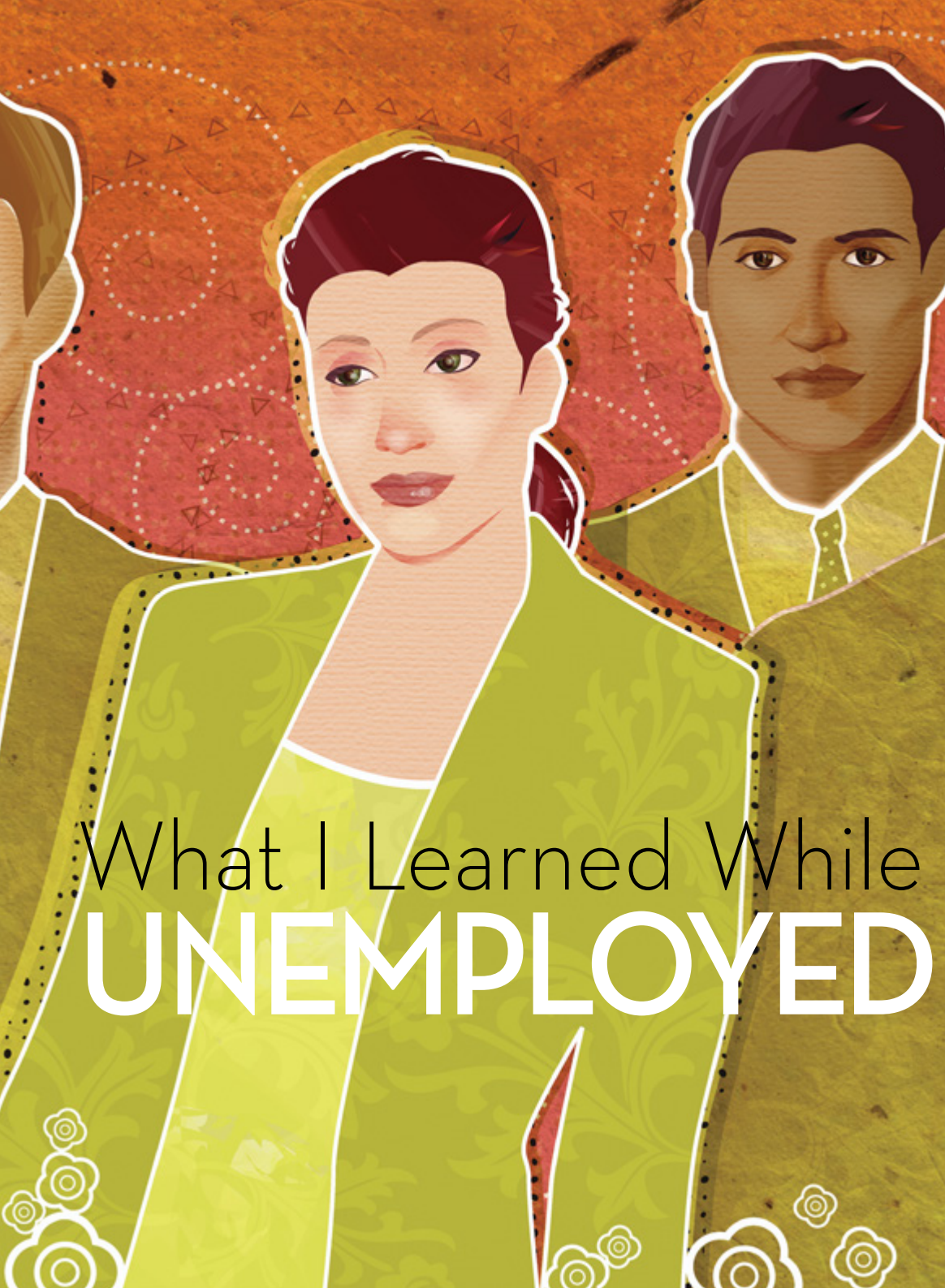


By Paul Johnson

In February 2012, after 36 years of steady service for two different employers in industrial distribution, I became unemployed due to a significant downturn in sales. It was not unexpected. As part of the management team, I understood the trends. But we had made a successful run during the

preceding 16 years and had been awarded several lucrative projects that kept the commerce going during slow times. I was blessed to have been compensated well during these good times and even more blessed to have a spouse who knew how to put aside some savings in preparation for a rainy day.

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In a year of unemployment, I couldn't seem to find a job, but I found something more valuable.

What I Learned While **UNEMPLOYED**

Our First Steps

My wife and I immediately took inventory of all of our resources and had a meeting with our bishop, who graciously volunteered to assist wherever we thought it might be helpful. I reassured our bishop that I was confident in my ability to secure another

position with a different firm in a few weeks or, at the most, within a month or two.

In addition to beginning my search for a new job, I promptly applied for state unemployment compensation, and we got our two children (ages 12 and 6) on a state health insurance plan. We cut out nonessential

expenses and reduced our life insurance plan to give us a break from making premium payments.

My wife, who has a master's degree in accounting, began to search for jobs as well. We soon started to secure interviews; however, for one reason or another, the positions we applied for just did not work out. I thought it was a matter of the jobs not being right according to Heavenly Father's plan for us. We fasted, prayed, attended the temple, and did all the things we thought would help us to secure guidance from the Lord.

A Test of Patience

Days quickly turned into weeks, and weeks turned into months. It soon became easy to be disappointed and get discouraged. One day my wife placed a note on the mirror in our bathroom for us to read daily: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5–6). She further explained that when we prayed, we needed to make sure we let God know that we were willing to do whatever He had in store for us, according to His will. This gave me a new outlook, and I was even more determined to attempt to help accomplish God's will for us.

My personal scripture study time and intensity reached an all-time high. One day I read in the Book of Mormon, "And whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you" (3 Nephi 18:20). Surely the Lord wanted me to be able to provide for my family; it seemed that all I needed to do was mention details, and my prayers would be answered. However, I did not take into consideration that this scripture has a qualifying phrase—"which is right." I later realized that even though I was being specific, my prayers still had to be right according to God. I was still trying to force my own will upon Him.

These experiences tested my patience, a virtue I didn't feel I previously possessed. After nearly seven months without work, I felt like I was getting nowhere. In my

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discouragement, I began to let some things slide. I complained about how human resources departments were filled with employees in their early 20s who were making poor management decisions, and I was sure that my job applications were being put into piles with hundreds of others. I felt like the chances of having my application viewed were like winning the lottery. Networking was not effective either. I hit a low point.

An Inspired Bishop

About this time, my bishop, who is incredibly in tune with the Holy Ghost, called me into his office and asked me how I was doing. I confessed that I had been struggling and that I had let go of my daily scripture reading. Showing forth an increase of love toward me, he gently and persuasively encouraged me to increase my reading of the scriptures and promised me strength and blessings from doing so.

As I followed the advice of my bishop, I began to discover additional blessings flowing into my life from areas I had never considered previously. The brethren in my priesthood quorum had been providing love and emotional support in ways that I had never imagined. Additional job interviews gave me hope for employment and helped me be optimistic.

In November my ever-sensitive bishop caught me in the hall between Sunday meetings and told me he felt inspired to inform the brethren in priesthood meeting that three or four of our quorum members needed employment. I consented and thought it might help. During his comments, the bishop mentioned some skills of those in need. As a result, I received four or five leads for employment. I followed up on all of the opportunities. These leads and the hope that came from them kept me going.

Still several more weeks passed. Almost daily I would feel a panic attack coming on, and I would begin to feel emotionally weighed down. Only persistent prayer helped me through these perilous times. My prayers included expressions of gratitude for the strength that allowed me to continue to move ahead according to my Father's will and pleas for the ability to endure. I continued to serve others to the best of my ability in my callings and wherever else I was asked.

Strength from the Book of Mormon

Again turning to the Book of Mormon for strength, I read where Alma and Amulek struggled while attempting to teach the people in Ammonihah. They were bound and cast into prison. I realized that they were delivered from bondage according to their faith in Jesus Christ, and this helped me to apply this same concept in becoming free from the overwhelming burden of not being able to provide for my family. I applied the words of Alma to myself: "How long shall [I] suffer these great afflictions, O Lord? O Lord, give [me] strength according to [my] faith which is in Christ, even unto deliverance [from unemployment]. And [I] broke the cords with which [I was] bound" (Alma 14:26).

I also tried to apply other virtues Alma spoke of:

"I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive and gentle; easy to be entreated; full of patience and long-suffering; being temperate in all things; being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times; asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal; always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive.

"And see that you have faith, hope, and charity, and then ye will always abound in good works" (Alma 7:23–24).

Such principles became a standard in my life.

Near my one-year mark of unemployment, my wife secured a position with a firm that allowed her the freedom of working online from home most of the time. After 14 months of unemployment, I secured a management position in our area in which I could use my best skill set.

Our Many Blessings

Every day I count my many blessings, naming them in my prayers. My loving wife has been compassionate and supportive during the process of job hunting, always encouraging me to stay close to our Heavenly Father. Our home teachers have been encouraging and loving in ways I could not have predicted. My priesthood leader, a physician, actually made house calls when an infection set in my leg, offering professional counsel and showing genuine charity toward me. The kindness, benevolence, and understanding from many families in our ward have been beyond belief and have kept me going when I could not have moved forward otherwise. With my bishop's assistance, I was able to keep my hopes up and be optimistic for success.

I am most grateful for the pure love of Jesus Christ and the knowledge that He knows "according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:12). He certainly has comforted, supported, and strengthened me in my need. ■

The author lives in Washington, USA.

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