



**By Elder
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Of the Seventy

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Trials, Tribulations, and **TRUST** in the **LORD**

In this world of “opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11), life is not fair. When I think of Preslee Jo Sullenger and her parents, I am reminded that bad, sad, and difficult things can and will happen even to good people.

Preslee was a bright and energetic 18-month-old. She had blond hair that usually had a mind of its own, piercing blue eyes, and a love of all things little girl—especially necklaces. Her turn on earth was short, but her impact was immeasurable.

On a warm night in July, little Preslee was with relatives while her parents, Pat and Ashley, went on a date. A few hours later, her parents received a phone call telling them that Preslee had fallen into a canal and that they needed to go straight to the hospital.

After falling into the canal, Preslee had floated about a mile and a half downstream, where she bumped into the leg of Jeff Call, a farmer who was working in the canal. He was about ready to leave but had decided he needed to put one last board in the ditch where he was irrigating. Jeff immediately began CPR, while his brother Mike called for medical help.

Many months before the accident, Preslee’s mother had created a blog on which she shared happy stories and photos as Preslee grew and experienced life. After the accident, the blog became a way for the family to update concerned family and friends on Preslee’s fight for life in the hospital.



Pat and Ashley Sullenger, pictured at right at the graveside service of their daughter, Preslee, say she “taught us about the miracles around us each and every day.”





Through social media, word of Preslee's accident spread quickly, and within a few days, the blog had tallied more than 300,000 views. People were drawn to her story, offering prayers and kind words of support. With permission, I share Ashley's update six days after the accident.

"Preslee has shown us today that perhaps there is a different plan for her than we [had] originally thought. Throughout the events of today and yesterday, Preslee's condition has turned down a different path, and her little spirit is torn between two worlds. . . . From one day to the next, it's as if her valiant little spirit is just staying . . . long enough for us to realize that this is not the end. Little Preslee has been a strong fighter, but we don't know if she will be fighting much longer."

The next day Preslee returned to her Heavenly Father. Ashley wrote, "We have . . . experienced a range of emotions from tragic horror to hope to complete humility and now to an assurance that God is the true giver and taker of life."

A massive audience followed as Pat and Ashley said good-bye to their precious child and witnessed how they had relied on their knowledge of eternal families and their faith in Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and the plan of salvation to help them through this extreme trial.

"She was an angel sent here for us—an angel that has taught us about the miracles around us each and every day," Ashley wrote. "When we think of what she accomplished in one week in the hospital, we begin to cry. She rebuilt

testimonies, she introduced people to the gospel, she even saved a complete stranger's marriage. We, like many of you, wonder why things had to turn out this way [what] with the hundreds and thousands of prayers offered up in her behalf and the complete faith we had for her to receive a miracle."

"I Know That My Redeemer Liveth"

When I think of the courageous and faithful way that Pat and Ashley Sullenger responded to the loss of their precious Preslee, I am reminded of the story of Job in the Old Testament. Among his many trials, Job lost all of his children. News of their deaths came from a messenger, who reported:

"Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house:

"And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead" (Job 1:18–19).

Job, an upright, God-fearing man who disdained evil, was so sorrowful that he fell to the earth upon hearing the news. Nevertheless, he accepted God's will. "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly" (Job 1:22).

But Job, like all of us, wondered why he had to face the trials that confronted him (see Job 10:15). And like us, at times he felt that perhaps God had forgotten him or was not listening to him (see Job 19:6–8; 23:3–4).

When sorrow, misfortune, or tragedy strike, how will we respond? If we trust in the Lord and if our testimony of the Savior's gospel and Resurrection is strong, we will be able to respond with the faith of Pat and Ashley Sullenger, who, with Job, can declare: "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth" (Job 19:25).

Heavenly Father placed us in this lone and dreary world to teach us what we need to learn so that we may become like Him. Our lives are changed daily by the incorrect decisions of others, by our own poor judgment, by the laws of nature, and by unforeseen circumstances in a world that was never designed to be fair.

I have learned much from a book titled *Why Did This Happen to Me?* by Ray Pritchard. He says: "*Sometimes we*

will face things for which there is no earthly explanation. In those moments we need to erect a sign that reads, ‘Quiet: God at Work.’ Meanwhile, hold on, child of God. Keep believing. Don’t quit. Don’t give up. Let God do His work in you. The greatest tragedy is to miss what God wants to teach us through our troubles.”¹

We do not know how long we will live on earth or what Heavenly Father has in store for us. We must trust in Him, make the most of each moment, and use our talents and gifts to improve our lives and to serve others.

President Thomas S. Monson has declared:

“Though the storm clouds may gather, though the rains may pour down upon us, our knowledge of the gospel and our love of our Heavenly Father and of our Savior will comfort and sustain us and bring joy to our hearts as we walk uprightly and keep the commandments. . . .

“My beloved brothers and sisters, fear not. Be of good cheer. The future is as bright as your faith.”²

The Lord Is in Charge

Someday, “from the vantage point of the future, we shall be satisfied with many of the happenings of this life that are so difficult for us to comprehend,” said President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985). He added: “We knew before we were born that we were coming to the earth for bodies and experience and that . . . after a period of life we would die. We accepted all these eventualities with a glad heart, eager to accept both the favorable and unfavorable. We eagerly accepted the chance to come earthward even though it might be for only a day or a year.”³

It has been almost four years since the Sullengers’ life was changed forever. During that time they have continued to share their highs and lows as they’ve tried to make sense of their loss and celebrate the good things that have blessed their lives since Preslee’s accident. Those blessings include two-year-old Ledger and baby twins, Cannon and Cruz.

While she was in the hospital, Preslee received a

blessing in which she was told that countless people would be drawn to her story and that she would continue to influence others for good. When Ashley heard this, she thought her daughter would recover. “How else could she continue to influence others?” she asked.

Ashley had no idea that her blog, which has had nearly seven million page views, would continue to grow. An author of one of the many comments on her blog stated:

“[Preslee] has taught families to draw closer, love harder, look at each other a bit differently, and appreciate what they have. She has taught people that what they make big deals of in their lives may not be that big after all. Your family’s faith and perseverance [have] taught people to step back and reevaluate their own lives, and maybe live a bit differently, and with more purpose.”

Even on the darkest days, Ashley and Pat still rely on the Lord and testify of the healing power of His Spirit. They have experienced a measure of the peace that only He can bring.

May we all face our challenges with faith, endurance, and trust in our Heavenly Father and in His plan for each of us. Remember, it’s not what happens to us that matters; it’s how we handle what happens that makes all the difference.⁴ “When the universe itself seems shattered and the shards of our world lie littered about us in pieces,”⁵ the Savior’s power and assurance can still make it possible for us to experience joy and peace.

I testify that the Savior will abide with you in your darkest hour. He is there, and He has declared, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). ■

The Atonement of Jesus Christ can heal afflictions. See November 2013 Ensign: Thomas S. Monson, p. 85; Linda S. Reeves, p. 118.

NOTES

1. Ray Pritchard, *Why Did This Happen to Me?* (2003), 57; emphasis in original.
2. Thomas S. Monson, “Be of Good Cheer,” *Ensign*, May 2009, 92.
3. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), 20.
4. See Pritchard, *Why Did This Happen to Me?* 57.
5. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “Sunday Will Come,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 30.

