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The Strength to Endure

Our ability to endure to the end in righteousness will be in direct proportion to the strength of our testimony and the depth of our conversion.

Every morning when we wake up, we face a new day filled with the challenges of life. These challenges come in many forms: physical challenges, financial setbacks, difficulties with relationships, emotional trials, and even struggles with one's faith.

Many of the challenges we face in life can be solved and overcome; however, others may be difficult to understand and impossible to overcome and will be with us until we pass on to the next life. As we temporarily endure the challenges we can solve and as we continue to endure the challenges we cannot solve, it is important to remember that the spiritual strength we develop will help us successfully endure all the challenges we face in life.

Brothers and sisters, we have a loving Heavenly Father who has designed our earthly existence so that we can individually learn the lessons we need to learn to qualify for eternal life in His presence.

An episode in the life of the Prophet Joseph Smith illustrates this principle. The Prophet and several companions had been prisoners in Liberty, Missouri, for months. While suffering in jail, the Prophet Joseph pled with the Lord in humble prayer

that the Saints might be relieved from their current suffering. The Lord responded by teaching the Prophet Joseph, and all of us, that the challenges we face, if successfully endured, will be for our ultimate good. This is the Lord's response to Joseph's petition:

"My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment;

"And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high."¹

Heavenly Father has organized our journey through life to be a test of our character. We are exposed to both good and evil influences and then given the moral agency to choose for ourselves which path we will take. As the ancient Book of Mormon prophet Samuel taught, "Ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free."²

Heavenly Father also understood that due to our mortality we would not always make the correct or righteous choice. Because we are not perfect and because we make mistakes, we need help in returning to His presence. The necessary help is provided through the teachings, example, and atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The

Savior's atoning sacrifice makes possible our future salvation and exaltation through the principle of repentance. If we honestly and sincerely repent, the Atonement can help us become clean, change our nature, and successfully endure our challenges.

Endurance is an important principle found within the doctrine of Jesus Christ. It is important because the quality of our eternal future is proportional to our ability to endure in righteousness.

In 2 Nephi 31 the prophet Nephi teaches us that after we receive the same saving ordinance of baptism that Jesus Christ received and then receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, we must "press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, [and then] behold, thus saith the Father: [We] shall have eternal life."³

Therefore, in order to receive the greatest of all the blessings of our Heavenly Father, which is eternal life, we must complete the appropriate ordinance work and then continue to keep the associated covenants. In other words, we must successfully endure.

Our ability to endure to the end in righteousness will be in direct proportion to the strength of our testimony and the depth of our conversion. When our testimonies are strong and we are truly converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ, our choices will be inspired by the Holy Ghost, they will be Christ-centered, and they will support our desire to endure in righteousness. If our testimonies are weak and our conversion superficial, the risk is much greater that we will be enticed by the false traditions of the world to make poor choices.

I would like to share an experience that illustrates the effort required to endure physically and then compare it to the effort required to endure



desire and ability to live the gospel. As an anonymous author once said, “You must become the rock the river cannot wash away.”

Because we face challenges every day, it is important that we work on our spiritual stamina every day. When we develop spiritual stamina, the false traditions of the world, as well as our personal daily challenges, will have little negative impact on our ability to endure in righteousness.

Great examples of spiritual stamina come from our own family histories. Among the many stories from our ancestors, we will be able to find examples that demonstrate the positive characteristics of endurance.

A story from my own family history illustrates this principle. My great-grandfather Joseph Watson Maynes was born in 1856 in Hull, Yorkshire, England. His family joined the Church in England and then made their way to Salt Lake City. He married Emily Keep in 1883, and they became the parents of eight children. Joseph was called to serve a full-time mission in June of 1910, when he was 53 years old. With the support of his wife and eight children, he returned to his native England to serve his mission.

spiritually. Upon returning from my mission, I had the opportunity to play basketball for a well-respected coach and author at a college in California. This coach was very serious about his players being in shape before the start of the basketball season. One of his training prerequisites before any of us could touch a basketball on the practice court was to run a cross-country course in the hills near the school in a specific and very aggressive time. I remember my very first attempt at running this cross-country course immediately upon my return from the mission field: I thought I was going to die.

It took weeks of serious training in order to finally beat the time that the coach set as a goal. It was a great feeling to not only be able to run the course but also to accelerate down the stretch to the finish line.

To play basketball successfully, you need to get into good shape. Being in good physical condition comes at a price, and that price is dedication, perseverance, and self-discipline. Spiritual endurance also comes at a price. It is the same price: dedication, perseverance, and self-discipline.

A testimony, like your body, needs to be in shape if you want it to endure. So how do we keep our testimonies in shape? We cannot get our bodies into good basketball shape by simply watching basketball on

television. Similarly, we won't be able to get our testimonies in shape by simply watching general conference on television. We need to study and learn the fundamental principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and then we must do our very best to live them. That is how we become disciples of Jesus Christ, and that is how we build an enduring testimony.

When we face adversity in life and our desire is to emulate the attributes of Jesus Christ, it is essential to be spiritually prepared. Being spiritually prepared means we have developed spiritual stamina or strength—we will be in good shape spiritually. We will be in such good shape spiritually that we will consistently choose the right. We will become immovable in our



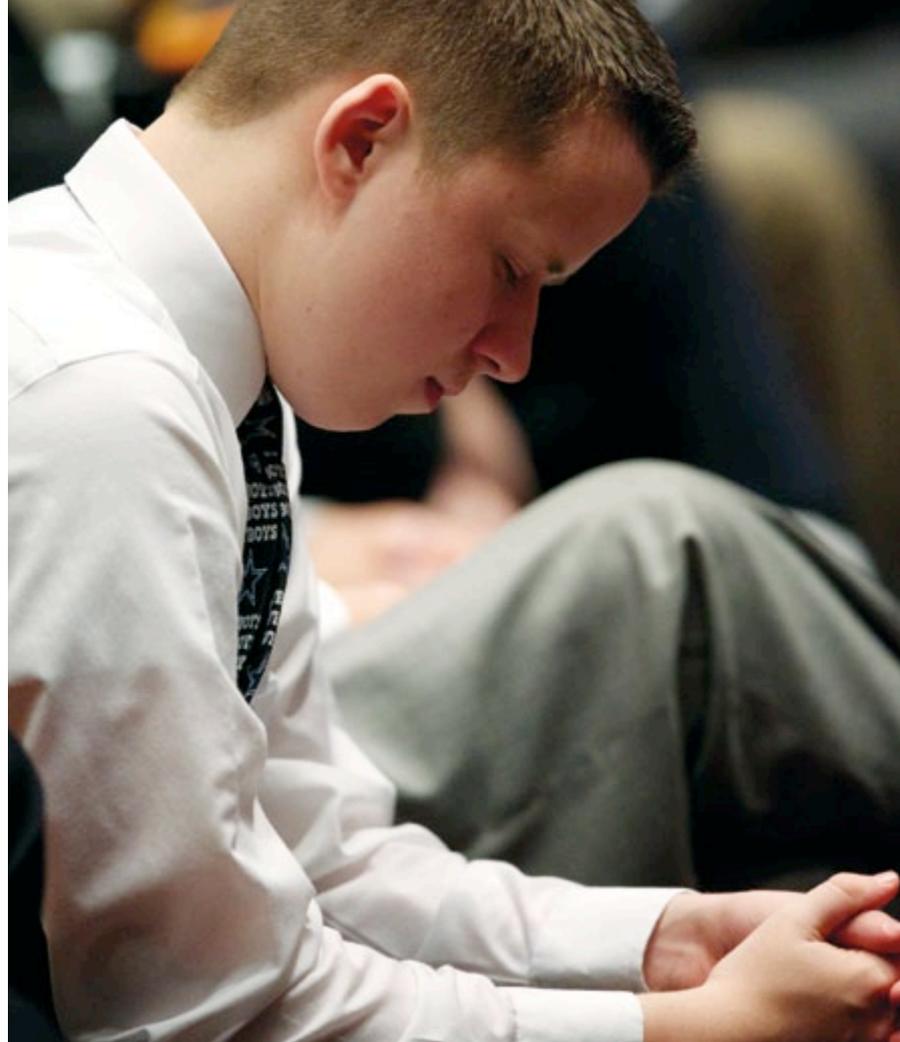
Joseph Watson Maynes (right) with his companion, Gilpin S. Woolley

After serving faithfully for approximately two years, he was riding his bicycle along with his companion to Sunday School services in Gloucester, England, when his tire burst. He got off his bicycle to assess the damage. When he saw that it was serious and would take a while to fix, he told his companion to go ahead and begin the Sunday service and he would be there shortly. Just as he finished saying this, he collapsed to the ground. He had died suddenly of a heart attack.

Joseph Watson Maynes never saw his wife and eight children again in this life. They were able to transport his body back to Salt Lake City and have his funeral service at the old Waterloo Assembly Hall. A statement made at his funeral service by Elder Anthony W. Ivins of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles teaches us an important lesson about life, death, and endurance: “This is what the gospel gives us—not immunity from death, but victory over it through the hope we have in a glorious resurrection. . . . It applies to [Joseph Maynes]. . . . It is a pleasure, and it is a satisfaction and joy to know that men lay down their lives in righteousness, in the faith, true to the faith.”⁴

This family story inspires me to try my very best to follow the example of endurance and spiritual stamina illustrated by my great-grandfather. I am equally inspired by the faith of his wife, Emily, whose life after Joseph’s death was certainly a heavy burden to bear. Her testimony was strong and her conversion complete as she spent the rest of her life true to the faith while supporting her eight children on her own.

The Apostle Paul stated, “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before



us.”⁵ The race that is set before us on this earth is an endurance race filled with obstacles. The obstacles in this race are the challenges we wake up to each morning. We are here on earth to run the race, to exercise our moral agency, and to choose between right and wrong. In order to honorably and successfully finish the race and return to our Heavenly Father, we will need to pay the price of dedication, perseverance, and self-discipline. We need to get into spiritual shape. We need to develop spiritual stamina. We need strong testimonies that will lead to true conversion, and as a result we will find within ourselves the inner peace and strength needed to endure whatever challenges we may face.

So whatever challenges you wake up to each morning, remember—with the spiritual strength you develop, coupled with the Lord’s help, at the end of the race you will be able to enjoy the confidence that the Apostle Paul expressed when he said:

“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day.”⁶

I bear you my testimony and my witness of the reality of a loving Heavenly Father and His great and eternal plan of happiness, which has brought us to this earth at this time. May the Spirit of the Lord inspire us all to develop within ourselves the strength to endure. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Doctrine and Covenants 121:7–8.
2. Helaman 14:30.
3. 2 Nephi 31:20.
4. Anthony W. Ivins, remarks at funeral service for Joseph Watson Maynes (personal records of the Maynes family).
5. Hebrews 12:1.
6. 2 Timothy 4:6–8.