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TURN AROUNDS FROM THE SCRIPTURES

By David Dickson Church Magazines

When your best efforts don't immediately work out the way you hoped... you're in good company.

Have you ever given your absolute best to accomplish something but still come up short? You aren't alone! The scriptures are full of inspiring people who had to learn the hard way that life is rarely a smooth ride.

At the same time, it's also worth pushing past the speed bumps. Here are a few examples from the scriptures worth considering whenever you need a little encouragement.



NEPHI AND THE BRASS PLATES

The stakes couldn't have been much higher. The fate of an entire nation was on the line. If Nephi and his brothers didn't bring back the brass plates from Laban, an entire "nation [would] dwindle and perish in unbelief" (1 Nephi 4:13).

A whole nation! All of those people depending on one errand. You might think that with such high stakes, mighty miracles would open up a clear path to success. As you may have read, the way forward turned out to be anything but clear.

Despite their best efforts, Nephi and his brothers failed not once but twice. The second failure was particularly devastating. They lost all their worldly riches and were nearly killed by Laban's servants. After the second attempt, Nephi and Sam were beaten by their older brothers (see 1 Nephi 3:22-28).

Soon after, Nephi was ready to make a third attempt. This time he went alone, "led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which [he] should do" (1 Nephi 4:6). Only on this third attempt, while listening closely to the Spirit, did he succeed.



SAMUEL AND THE WALL

When Samuel the Lamanite came to Zarahemla, he had a message from God to share. And he worked hard at doing so. The scriptures say he preached repentance for "many days" to the wicked Nephites (Helaman 13:2). And how did the people respond? They ran him out of town. Samuel had done all he could, and was "about to return to his own land" when the Spirit told him to try again (Helaman 13:2-3).

He didn't exactly receive a warm welcome. The citizens refused to let Samuel back into the city (see Helaman 13:4). Next step, he climbed on the city wall to deliver his message anew. The disbelievers were so determined to stop Samuel that they threw stones and shot arrows at him (see Helaman 16:2).

Artists, Primary programs, and family home evening enactments alike all delight in portraying the miracle of Samuel's

PETER AND THE ROAD TO FAITH

The New Testament is full of examples of devoted followers of Jesus Christ having to learn as they go. For example, the Apostle Peter walked on water briefly, until doubt crept in and he began to sink (see Matthew 14:28-31).

But Peter's faith didn't waver like that forever. He learned and grew, ultimately performing many miracles in the name of Jesus Christ (see Acts 2:43). One miracle happened after Jesus's Resurrection, when Peter saw a lame beggar outside a temple.

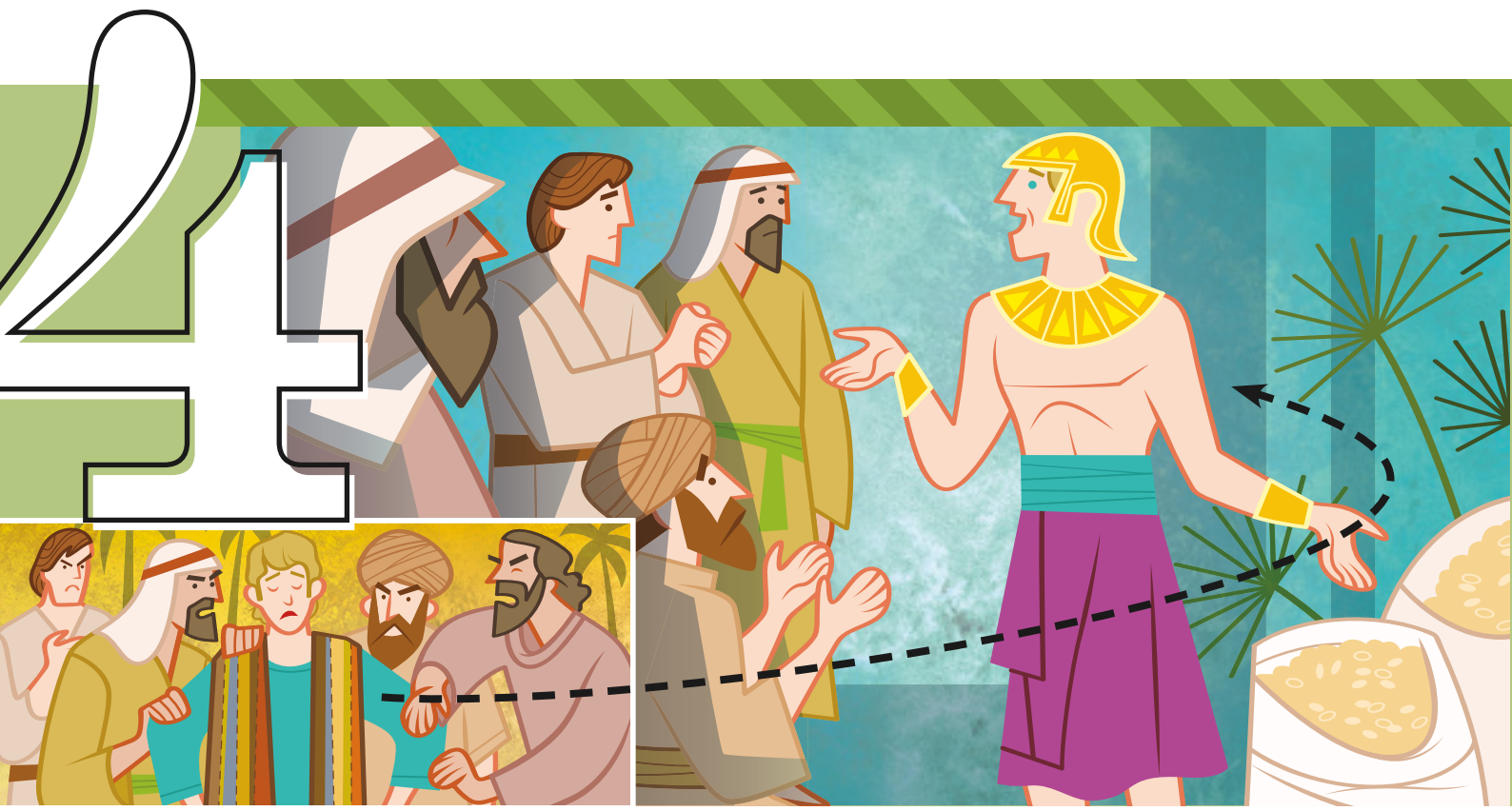
"Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6-7). Peter, the same man who had sunk into the water when his faith faltered, grabbed the hand of the lame beggar with full faith that he'd be able to walk. The man rose, walked, and leaped for joy, praising God (see Acts 3:8).



protection. "Guess what, Mom and Dad? The arrows couldn't hit him!"

The truth is, we have no way of knowing whether Samuel was assured ahead of time that he'd be protected. We know only that he followed the commandment to try again despite the challenges. As a result, many people were converted and baptized (see Helaman 16:1-3).





MARTIN HARRIS AND THE CHANCE TO TESTIFY

Some people think immediately of the lost 116 manuscript pages whenever they hear the name “Martin Harris.” After all, he pressed Joseph Smith time and again to ask God if Martin could show the pages to his family (see D&C 3:12–13). But Martin’s story doesn’t end there.

Martin repented and continued supporting the Prophet Joseph, including financing the original publication of the Book of Mormon.

President Dallin H. Oaks described that single act as “one of Martin Harris’s greatest contributions to the Church, for which he should be honored for all time.”¹

His story continues. Martin was chosen as one of the three special witnesses of the Book of Mormon. Yet even with this experience (which took place *after* the 116 pages were lost), Martin had to overcome failure.

To set the scene, Joseph Smith entered the woods with Martin Harris, David Whitmer, and Oliver Cowdery. They were acting on revelation that the time had come for witnesses to see the sacred plates. Each man took turns praying to be shown the plates. Nothing happened. They each prayed again . . . still nothing.

Joseph Smith wrote, “Upon this, our second failure, Martin Harris proposed that he should withdraw himself from us, believing, as he expressed himself, that his presence was the cause of our not obtaining what we wished for.”²

Sure enough, not long after Martin left, the angel Moroni appeared and revealed the plates to David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery. But if you read the Testimony of the Three Witnesses, you’ll see Martin’s name right alongside the other two. How so?

Because Martin didn’t give up.

He retreated further into the woods and kept praying. When Joseph found him later, Martin pleaded with Joseph to pray with him again.

This time, Martin’s faith was rewarded with the same vision the others had seen. “’Tis enough; ’tis enough; mine eyes have beheld,” Martin said.³

Though Martin Harris faded in and out of Church activity in later years (finally fully returning to the Church community at age 87), he never once faded in his testimony of the Book of Mormon nor what he had witnessed in the woods.

JOSEPH OF EGYPT AND THE REDIRECTED LIFE

Few figures in the scriptures are a better example of optimistic persistence through setbacks than Joseph of Egypt. You can read his story in depth in Genesis 37-50. For now, here are a couple highlights.

Seventeen-year-old Joseph tells his older brothers—who already hated him—about a dream he had where one day he'd rule over them (see Genesis 37:5-10). Their punishment of him was swift and brutal. They faked Joseph's death and sold him into slavery.

He then became a favored servant in the house of Potiphar—until Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. When Joseph resisted, she lied about him to her husband. Now in jail for his supposed crimes, Joseph gained the trust of the jailer and was given

charge of all the prisoners. Though innocent, he remained in prison for two years until he had a chance to help Pharaoh interpret a dream.

Here, at last, his luck changed . . . but at age 30! Some quick math reveals that Joseph spent 13 years (or roughly 43 percent of his life to that point) as a slave or prisoner when he had done nothing wrong. But oh, what happened next as a result of his continued faith and persistence!

Pharaoh was so impressed with Joseph that he made him second in command over all of Egypt. Because of Joseph's position, he was later able to help save many people, including many from other countries—among them his whole family—from starvation.



TRY AND TRY AGAIN

A pattern seems to float to the surface after studying these and other similar scriptural accounts. Plain and simple, many of life's setbacks seem to work out in the long run. Failing once or even multiple times at something often doesn't determine the final outcome, as long as you stay faithful to God and His commandments and keep on trying.

So, keep on trying! The best is yet to come. **NE**

NOTES

1. Dallin H. Oaks, Apr. 1999 general conference.
2. *History of the Church*, 1:54.
3. *History of the Church*, 1:55.

