

# Recognizing the Hand of the Lord's in Difficult Time

## SISTER BEKI PHELPS

**SPEAKER:** OK. I am deeply honored to be here, and very grateful for the opportunity to stand in front of so many of you that I respect. And I feel your unifying strength—I'm sorry. I'm going to try not to get emotional, but it's going to happen.

I have thought of you many times during the difficult things that I've been through in the last few years and this very room. I'm also grateful for the wonderful brethren that are here gathered to support us. And I apologize that much of my talk is going to be directed toward the sisters, but just bear with me.

OK, so I'm asking for participation now. So I'm sorry if I catch you midroll. But listen carefully to this list, and please raise your hand if you hear anything that you've experienced: deployment or absence of your spouse, especially over holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, performances, weddings, funerals, births, and moves. That got almost all of you. I could probably stop.

Fear and anxiety for the safety of your spouse—just keep your hands up. Sorry—it's a workout. A tricep workout. Delayed or canceled outings due to unexpected work demands, such as counseling or crisis intervention. A move where paperwork caused delays, or orders changed, or belongings were lost, damaged, stolen, or mistreated. Lost opportunity for your children, such as participation in sports activities, consistency in instruction, or lack of resources in the new home.

Loneliness from lack of friend support, or isolation due to change of location from one home to another. And finally, medicating depression or anxiety in you and your family due to your spouse's operational obligations, having to reset your entire life, finding new hairstylists—whole room, right?—instructors, grocery, and other basic needs, or from weariness and the only constant being change.

OK, I've gotten most of you. Hold your hands up again. I'm holding two, three, four—all my feet. Thank you very much. Just remember those hands as I continue.

Challenges, trials, and difficulties can either litter our lives or enrich them. What makes the difference? In our weariness, what can help us? I think the answer is not what, but who. Who guides our eyes heavenward and helps us see eternity instead of mundanity? Sisters of faith, you already know: His hand is always, always raised when we experience the trials of life.

The Savior Jesus Christ said, For my hand is outstretched still, so we must come to not just see it but recognize it. To recognize is to come to know again. We knew Him, and our spirits still do. And He knows us. And every trial that He already bore, we recognize the Lord's hand is exacting, full of mercy, steady, always available to all, and unlimited in its love and power and infinite grace. With this eternal perspective, we are prepared to seek guidance in our lives where before we only saw struggle.

Trials can yield sacred evidence of the Lord's constant hand when we use our practiced and spiritually honed eyes to recognize Him as the One who converts the heavy taxes of our difficulties, losses, and trials into a payment toward everlasting joy, deep understanding, and a clear vision of our goal for eternal life. Our losses become sacrifices for a wise and noble purpose and goal, with eventual joy only through Jesus Christ's Atonement in its enabling power.

Perhaps in our list of things lost, given up, gone without, difficulties, and heartaches, we can recognize the Lord's hand, neither coddling us nor ignoring us, but helping us grow and even heal, much like the skillful physician cleaning and suturing a wound. Poignant and beautiful, too, His hand by His choice bears a constant scar that reminds us of His own sacrifice—His Atonement for each one of us.

Sisters, take confidence that we are already coming to know the Lord better to recognize His hand, reminding our spirits of a beloved brother, and One who has spiritually begat each of us. Sisters, we are here because we trust the Lord, and we live a life of ministry. Every day as we walk the covenant path, reading, praying, receiving revelation, ministering to those on both sides of the veil, nurturing, and loving our families, testifying of the Lord's tender mercies, honoring the Sabbath, we are being careful to confess His hand in all things and obey His commandments.

We must also be ever mindful that we are not meant—and I emphasize this—we are not meant to run faster than we have strength. And difficult times are amazing for shifting our priorities. We must, therefore, create and maintain a pattern of personal revelation to be ever guided and continue to seek the enabling power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, thus gaining peace and avoiding corrosive bitterness.

Now, refer to the hands that we lifted earlier. In contrast to that list, once again, please raise your hand if you have felt and heard others express deep appreciation for you as a chaplain or for the chaplain in your life because they helped in their darkest hour; had opportunity to testify of truth to women of different faiths and your own; lived in or visited places you never thought you would; made friends you treasure as family; were inspired that your family had a divine work to do beyond your spouse's ministry; felt the deep fulfillment of godly purpose in your sacrifice; grew in your love and empathy for others; received amazing acts of service that in turn ignited your deep desire to pay it forward; became stronger and gained knowledge and independence that help you endure life with more joy; and learned to laugh as well as cry.

Now, hold them high. Look around and see the hands, and recognize the Lord's hand in their lives. Hands that the Lord uses as an instrument in concert with His own to do His ministering and share His love. These hands support and love others and are full of the power of God to bless others and to be a light to all. Please, if you are comfortable, in true Protestant fashion, join hands and feel that you are not alone.

Thank you so much. That was a beautifully moving sight. I particularly enjoyed the table of brethren over here. That was great.

The Lord's hand guides us to see and experience giving up in a sanctified way. The losses become sacrifices that work together for our good. That doesn't mean that we won't have trials and heartache.

I echo President [INAUDIBLE] when he said, I have been thankful for the many ways the Lord has visited me with a comforter when I needed peace. Yet, our Father in Heaven is concerned not just about our comfort, but even more about our upward progression. To demonstrate that, I will end by recounting my greatest trial to date, and the sacrifice and peace amidst it all.

Two years ago, with the Lord's direction, we accepted an assignment to Norfolk, Virginia, knowing my husband would likely deploy twice in that time. We also had been praying to expand our family and felt we should. But conceiving for us has been quite difficult, and we knew the timing was going to be challenging. So we prayed to Heavenly Father that Thy will be done, and He answered our prayers. And we conceived just in time for my husband to be able to feel—to hear the heartbeat before he deployed.

Not only did Heavenly Father answer my prayer, but He answered it in a different way. My husband deployed in

April, and our daughter was born August 28, not meeting her father until she was four months old. I can tell you that I was filled with faith unshaken, untouched by fear and weariness, but sisters, that would be a lie.

I labored naturally because I'm stubborn. And although it was mercifully uncomplicated, it was agony, with my husband on the phone, a friend blessed with the healer's heart by my side, and my less-than-perfect midwife—and my amazing mother.

I longed and cried for my absent husband and tried not to be overcome with the great loss of experiencing such a trial and beautiful moment and miracle together, as the Spirit testified that this was one of those sacrifices that will be compensated for by the Lord. And that is honestly how I felt. The loss becomes sanctified. And what a blessing to fully appreciate how supportive and wonderful my partner husband is with his absence.

And then to our joy and to my healing, Laura, my youngest—her name was chosen because it means God's light—was such an easy and peaceful baby in contrast to my first two tear-filled acid reflux babies, who cried all the time. She began to sleep all night almost immediately. And I had enough energy to metaphorically push my handcart through the remaining deployment.

The Lord's hand was upon me. I learned in order to see the Lord's hand, you have to know that it will be present through the difficult and the joyous. Never did I feel abandoned, but I often felt at the edge and very brink of giving up in some way. With the widow of Zarephath's supply of just enough meal and oil to survive one more day and sometimes, quite frankly, one more hour, prayer, faith, worship, gratitude, and seeking revelation about what matters most were essential to getting through each day. I filled my spiritual reservoirs with these every day and guided my children, as well.

I was blessed by so many that were prompted to serve and love, especially the sisters from church and my friends and family, my husband from afar, and my oldest daughter, who took on way too much to help support me. Their hands lifted me even as the Lord's growing and motivating hand was upon me.

Deployment hasn't stopped impacting our lives. Our relationship is different. And there are times we both ache over the sacrifice. And yet, we hope in Christ that His hand will mend and heal the holes and the tears in the fabric of our lives through His enabling Atonement.

Sisters, we recognize the hand of the Lord when we see all that we give up with holy clarity and eternal perspective, converting them into sacrifices to serve, to support the work of the Lord, our own opportunity to grow and progress despite the pain required. We can experience joy and peace because our focus is on Jesus Christ. He can and does heal us, even as He requires much.

I close with the words of a favorite hymn: "Be still, my soul: The Lord is on [my] side; With patience bear thy cross of grief or pain. Leave to thy God to order and provide; In every change he faithful will remain. Be still, my soul: Thy best, thy heavenly Friend Thru thorny ways leads to a joyful end" ("Be Still, My Soul," Hymns, no. 124). I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

**ALL:** Amen.