



By Elder Matthew S. Holland
Of the Seventy

The Exquisite Gift of the Son

Through Jesus Christ, we can escape the deserved agonies of our moral failings and overcome the undeserved agonies of our mortal misfortunes.

While reading the Book of Mormon for a *Come, Follow Me* lesson last summer, I was struck by Alma’s report that when he became fully conscious of his sins, there was “nothing so *exquisite* and so *bitter* as were [his] pains.”¹ I confess, talk of exquisite pain caught my attention partly due to my battle that week with a seven-millimeter kidney stone. Never has one man experienced such “great things” when such a “small and simple” thing was “brought to pass.”²

Alma’s language also stood out to me because the word *exquisite*, in the English translation of the Book of Mormon, typically describes things of exceptional beauty or unparalleled magnificence. For example, Joseph Smith noted that the angel Moroni wore robes of “exquisite whiteness,” “a whiteness beyond anything earthly [he] had ever seen.”³ Yet *exquisite* can also convey an extreme intensity even for awful things. Thus Alma and top



Temecula, California, USA



Bengaluru, India

dictionaries link *exquisite pain* to being “tormented,” “racked,” and “harrowed” to the “greatest degree.”⁴

Alma’s imagery reflects the sobering reality that at some point the full, excruciating guilt of every sin we commit must be felt. Justice demands it, and God Himself cannot change it.⁵ When Alma remembered “all” his sins—especially those that had destroyed the faith of others—his pain was virtually unbearable, and the idea of standing before God filled him with “inexpressible horror.” He yearned to “become extinct both soul and body.”⁶

However, Alma said everything started to change the moment his “mind caught hold upon” the prophesied “coming of one Jesus Christ . . . to atone for the sins of the world” and he “cried within [his] heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me.” With that one thought and that one plea, Alma was filled with “exquisite” joy “as exceeding as was [his] pain.”⁷

We must never forget that the very purpose of repentance is to take certain misery and transform it into pure bliss. Thanks to His “immediate goodness,”⁸ the *instant* we come unto Christ—demonstrating faith in Him and a true change of heart—the crushing weight of our sins starts to shift from our backs to His. This is possible only because He who is

without sin suffered “the infinite and unspeakable agony”⁹ of every single sin in the universe of His creations, for all of His creations—a suffering so severe, blood oozed out of His every pore. From direct, personal experience the Savior thus warns us, in modern scripture, that we have no idea how “exquisite” our “sufferings” will be if we do not repent. But with unfathomable generosity He also clarifies that “I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent”¹⁰—a repentance which allows us to “taste” the “exceeding joy” Alma tasted.¹¹ For this doctrine alone, “I stand all amazed.”¹² Yet, astonishingly, Christ offers even more.

Sometimes exquisite pain comes not from sin but from honest mistakes, the actions of others, or forces beyond our control. In these moments, you may cry like the righteous Psalmist:

“My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me.

“ . . . And horror hath overwhelmed me.

“ . . . Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.”¹³

Medical science, professional counseling, or legal rectification can help alleviate such suffering. But note,

all good gifts—including these—come from the Savior.¹⁴ Regardless of the causes of our worst hurts and heartaches, the ultimate source of relief is the same: Jesus Christ. He alone holds the full power and healing balm to correct every mistake, right every wrong, adjust every imperfection, mend every wound, and deliver every delayed blessing. Like witnesses of old, I testify that “we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities”¹⁵ but rather a loving Redeemer who descended from His throne above and went forth “suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind . . . , that he may know . . . how to succor his people.”¹⁶

For anyone today with pains so intense or so unique that you feel no one else could fully appreciate them, you may have a point. There may be no family member, friend, or priesthood leader—however sensitive and well-meaning each may be—who knows exactly what you are feeling or has the precise words to help you heal. But know this: there is One who understands perfectly what you are experiencing, who is “mightier than all the earth,”¹⁷ and who is “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that [you] ask or think.”¹⁸ The process will unfold in His way and on His schedule, but Christ stands ready *always* to heal every ounce and aspect of your agony.

As you allow Him to do so, you will discover that your suffering was not in vain. Speaking of many of the Bible’s greatest heroes and their griefs, the Apostle Paul said that “God . . . provided some better things for them through their sufferings, for without sufferings they could not be made perfect.”¹⁹ You see, the very nature of

God and aim of our earthly existence is happiness,²⁰ but we cannot become perfect beings of divine joy without experiences that test us, sometimes to our very core. Paul says even the Savior Himself was made eternally “perfect [or complete] through sufferings.”²¹ So guard against the satanic whispering that if you were a better person, you would avoid such trials.

You must also resist the related lie that your sufferings somehow suggest you stand outside the circle of God’s chosen ones, who seem to glide from one blessed state to another. Instead, see yourself as John the Revelator surely saw you in his majestic revelation of the latter days. For John saw “a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, [who] stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, . . . [who] cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God.”²²

When asked: “What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?” John received the answer: “These are they which came out of *great tribulation*, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”²³

Brothers and sisters, suffering in righteousness helps qualify you for, rather than distinguishes you from, God’s elect. And it makes their promises your promises. As John declares, you “shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on [you], nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed [you], and shall lead [you] unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from [your] eyes.”²⁴

“And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.”²⁵

I witness to you that through the staggering goodness of Jesus Christ and His infinite Atonement, we can escape the deserved agonies of our moral failings and overcome the undeserved agonies of our mortal misfortunes. Under His direction, your divine destiny will be one of unparalleled magnificence and indescribable joy—a joy so intense and so unique to you, your particular “ashes” will become beauties “beyond anything earthly.”²⁶ That you might taste this happiness now and be filled with it forever, I invite you to do what Alma did: let your mind catch hold on the *exquisite* gift of the Son of God as revealed through His gospel in this, His true and living Church. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Alma 36:21; emphasis added.
2. Alma 37:6.
3. Joseph Smith—History 1:31.
4. For instance, compare the explicitly similar language of Alma 36:11–17 with the entry

for *exquisite* in the *Oxford American Writer’s Thesaurus*—one of several publications that can be loaded in the “Dictionary” section of the general settings on certain devices and thus linked for easy access in the Gospel Library app. Thanks to Rachel Sanford for this reminder.

5. See Alma 42:13.
6. See Alma 36:13–15.
7. See Alma 36:17–21.
8. Mosiah 25:10.
9. See Orson F. Whitney, *Baptism—the Birth of Water and of Spirit* (1934), 5.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 19:15–16.
11. See Alma 36:24–26.
12. “I Stand All Amazed,” *Hymns*, no. 193.
13. Psalm 55:4–6.
14. See Moroni 7:24.
15. Hebrews 4:15.
16. Alma 7:11–12.
17. 1 Nephi 4:1.
18. Ephesians 3:20.
19. Joseph Smith Translation, Hebrews 11:40 (in Hebrews 11:40, footnote *a*).
20. See 2 Nephi 2:25; Alma 41:11.
21. Hebrews 2:10; see also Hebrews 5:8; Russell M. Nelson, “Perfection Pending,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 86–88.
22. Revelation 7:9–10.
23. Revelation 7:13–14; emphasis added.
24. Revelation 7:16–17.
25. Revelation 21:4.
26. See Isaiah 61:3; Joseph Smith—History 1:31.



Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic