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Waiting on the Lord

Faith means trusting God in good times and bad, even if that includes some suffering until we see His arm revealed in our behalf.

My beloved brothers and sisters, we are all eager—no one more than I—to hear concluding remarks from our beloved prophet, President Russell M. Nelson. This has been a marvelous conference, but it is the second time that COVID-19 has altered our traditional proceedings. We are so tired of this contagion, we feel like tearing our hair out. And apparently, some of my Brethren have already taken that course of action. Please know that we do pray constantly for those who have been affected in any way, especially for any who have lost loved ones. Everyone agrees that this has gone on much, much too long.

How long do we wait for relief from hardships that come upon us? What about enduring personal trials while we wait and wait, and help seems so slow in coming? Why the delay when burdens seem more than we can bear?

While asking such questions, we can, if we try, hear another’s cry echoing from a dank, dark prison cell during one of the coldest winters then on record in that locale.

“O God, where art thou?” we hear from the depths of Liberty Jail. “And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place? How long shall thy

hand be stayed?”¹ How long, O Lord, how long?

So, we are not the first nor will we be the last to ask such questions when sorrows bear down on us or an ache in our heart goes on and on. I am not now speaking of pandemics or prisons but of you, your family, and your neighbors who face any number of such challenges. I speak of the yearning of many who would like to be married and aren’t or who are married and wish the relationship were a little more celestial. I speak of those who have to deal with the unwanted appearance of a serious medical condition—perhaps an incurable one—or who face a lifelong battle with a genetic defect that has no remedy. I speak of the continuing struggle with emotional and mental health challenges that weigh heavily on the souls of so many who suffer with them, and on the hearts of those who love and suffer with them. I speak of the poor, whom the Savior told us never to forget, and I speak of you waiting for the return of a child, no matter what the age, who has chosen a path different from the one you prayed he or she would take.

Furthermore, I acknowledge that even this long list of things for which

we might wait personally does not attempt to address the large economic, political, and social concerns that confront us collectively. Our Father in Heaven clearly expects us to address these wrenching public issues as well as the personal ones, but there will be times in our lives when even our best spiritual effort and earnest, pleading prayers do not yield the victories for which we have yearned, whether that be regarding the large global matters or the small personal ones. So while we work and wait together for the answers to some of our prayers, I offer you my apostolic promise that they are heard and they are answered, though perhaps not at



San Lucas Sacatepéquez, Guatemala

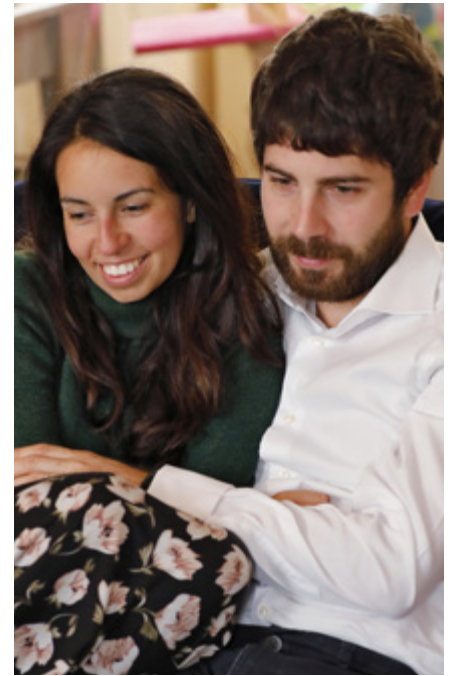
the time or in the way we wanted. But they are *always* answered at the time and in the way an omniscient and eternally compassionate parent should answer them. My beloved brothers and sisters, please understand that He who never sleeps nor slumbers² cares for the happiness and ultimate exaltation of His children above all else that a divine being has to do. He is pure love, gloriously personified, and Merciful Father is His name.

“Well, if this is the case,” you might say, “shouldn’t His love and mercy simply part our personal Red Seas and allow us to walk through our troubles on dry ground? Shouldn’t He send 21st-century seagulls winging in from somewhere to gobble up all of our pesky 21st-century crickets?”

The answer to such questions is “Yes, God can provide miracles instantaneously, but sooner or later we learn that the times and seasons of our mortal journey are His and His alone to direct.” He administers that

calendar to every one of us individually. For every infirm man healed instantly as he waits to enter the Pool of Bethesda,³ someone else will spend 40 years in the desert waiting to enter the promised land.⁴ For every Nephi and Lehi divinely protected by an encircling flame of fire for their faith,⁵ we have an Abinadi burned at a stake of flaming fire for his.⁶ And we remember that the same Elijah who in an instant called down fire from heaven to bear witness against the priests of Baal⁷ is the same Elijah who endured a period when there was no rain for years and who, for a time, was fed only by the skimpy sustenance that could be carried in a raven’s claw.⁸ By my estimation, that can’t have been anything we would call a “happy meal.”

The point? The point is that faith means trusting God in good times and bad, even if that includes some suffering until we see His arm revealed in our behalf.⁹ That can be difficult in



Saonara, Padua, Italy

our modern world when many have come to believe that the highest good in life is to avoid all suffering, that no one should ever anguish over anything.¹⁰ But that belief will never lead us to “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”¹¹

With apologies to Elder Neal A. Maxwell for daring to modify and enlarge something he once said, I too suggest that “one’s life . . . cannot be both faith-filled and stress-free.” It simply will not work “to glide naively through life,” saying as we sip another glass of lemonade, “Lord, give me all thy choicest virtues, but be certain not to give me grief, nor sorrow, nor pain, nor opposition. Please do not let anyone dislike me or betray me, and above all, do not ever let me feel forsaken by Thee or those I love. In fact, Lord, be careful to keep me from all the experiences that made Thee divine. And then, when the rough sledding by everyone else is over, please let me come and dwell with Thee, where I can boast about how similar our strengths and our characters are as I float along on my cloud of comfortable Christianity.”¹²

My beloved brothers and sisters, Christianity is comforting, but it is



Sugar City, Idaho, USA

often not comfortable. The path to holiness and happiness here and hereafter is a long and sometimes rocky one. It takes time and tenacity to walk it. But, of course, the reward for doing so is monumental. This truth is taught clearly and persuasively in the 32nd chapter of Alma in the Book of Mormon. There this great high priest teaches that if the word of God is planted in our hearts as a mere seed, and if we care enough to water, weed, nourish, and encourage it, it will *in the future* bear fruit “which is most precious, . . . sweet above all that is sweet,” the consuming of which leads to a condition of no more thirst and no more hunger.¹³

Many lessons are taught in this remarkable chapter, but central to them all is the axiom that the seed has to be nourished and we must wait for it to mature; we “[*look*] forward with an eye of faith to the fruit thereof.”¹⁴ Our harvest, Alma says, comes “by and by.”¹⁵ Little wonder that he concludes his remarkable instruction by repeating three times a call for *diligence* and *patience* in nurturing the word of God in our hearts, “*waiting*,” as he says, with “long-suffering . . . for the tree to bring forth fruit unto you.”¹⁶

COVID and cancer, doubt and dismay, financial trouble and family trials. When will these burdens be lifted? The answer is “by and by.”¹⁷ And whether that be a short period or a long one is not always ours to say, but by the grace of God, the blessings will come to those who hold fast to the gospel of Jesus Christ. That issue was settled in a very private garden and on a very public hill in Jerusalem long ago.

As we now hear our beloved prophet close this conference, may



we remember, as Russell Nelson has demonstrated all of his life, that those who “*wait upon the Lord* shall renew their strength [and] shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; . . . they shall walk, and not faint.”¹⁸ I pray that “by and by”—soon or late—those blessings will come to every one of you who seeks relief from your sorrow and freedom from your grief. I bear witness of God’s love and of the Restoration of His glorious gospel, which is, in one way or another, the answer to every issue we face in life. In the redeeming name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Doctrine and Covenants 121:1–2.
2. See Psalm 121:4.

3. See John 5:2–9.
4. See Numbers 32:13; Deuteronomy 2:7; Joshua 5:6.
5. See Helaman 5:20–52.
6. See Mosiah 17.
7. See 1 Kings 18:17–40.
8. See 1 Kings 17:1–7.
9. See Doctrine and Covenants 123:17.
10. See Rankin Wilbourne and Brian Gregor, “Jesus Didn’t Suffer to Prove a Philosophical Point,” *Christianity Today*, Sept. 20, 2019, christianitytoday.com.
11. Ephesians 4:13.
12. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland’s modification of Elder Neal A. Maxwell’s text; see Neal A. Maxwell, “Lest Ye Be Wearied and Faint in Your Minds,” *Ensign*, May 1991, 88.
13. Alma 32:42.
14. Alma 32:40; emphasis added.
15. Alma 32:42.
16. Alma 32:43; emphasis added; see also Alma 32:41–42.
17. Alma 32:42.
18. Isaiah 40:31; emphasis added; see also Isaiah 40:28–30.