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Remember Thy Suffering Saints, O Our God

Keeping covenants unlocks the power of Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice to provide strength and even joy to you who suffer.

Heavenly Father's plan of happiness includes a mortal experience where all of His children will be tested and face trials.¹ Five years ago I was diagnosed with cancer. I have felt and still feel the physical pains from surgeries, radiation treatments, and medication side effects. I have experienced emotional struggles during torturous sleepless nights. Medical statistics indicate I will probably depart mortality earlier than I ever expected, leaving behind, for a season, a family who means everything to me.

Regardless of where you live, physical or emotional suffering from a variety of trials and mortal weaknesses has been, is now, or will someday be part of your life.

Physical suffering can result from natural aging, unexpected diseases, and random accidents; hunger or homelessness; or abuse, violent acts, and war.

Emotional suffering can arise from anxiety or depression; the betrayal of a spouse, parent, or trusted leader; employment or financial reversals; unfair judgment by others; the choices of friends, children, or other family

members; abuse in its many forms; unfulfilled dreams of marriage or children; the severe illness or early death of loved ones; or so many other sources.

How can you possibly endure the unique and sometimes debilitating suffering that comes to each of us?

Gratefully, hope is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and hope can also be part of your life. Today I share four principles of hope drawn from scripture, prophetic teachings, many

ministering visits, and my own ongoing health trial. These principles are not just broadly applicable but also deeply personal.

First, suffering does not mean God is displeased with your life. Two thousand years ago, Jesus's disciples saw a blind man at the temple and asked, "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?"

His disciples seemed to incorrectly believe, as do far too many people today, that all hardship and suffering in life are the result of sin. But the Savior replied, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."²

The work of God is to bring to pass our immortality and eternal life.³ But how can trials and suffering—especially suffering imposed by another person's sinful use of agency⁴—ultimately advance God's work?

The Lord told His covenant people, "I have refined thee . . . ; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction."⁵ Whatever the cause of your sufferings, your loving Heavenly Father



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can direct them to refine your soul.⁶ Refined souls can bear others' burdens with true empathy and compassion.⁷ Refined souls who have come "out of great tribulation" are prepared to joyfully live in God's presence forever, and "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."⁸

Second, Heavenly Father is intimately aware of your suffering.

While in the midst of trials, we can mistakenly think that God is far away and unconcerned with our pain. Even the Prophet Joseph Smith expressed this feeling at a low point in his life. When imprisoned in Liberty Jail while thousands of Latter-day Saints were being driven from their homes, Joseph sought understanding through prayer: "O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?" He ended with this plea: "Remember thy suffering saints, O our God."⁹

The Lord's answer reassured Joseph and all who suffer:

"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."¹⁰

Many suffering Saints have shared with me how they felt God's love during their trials. I vividly recall my own experience at one point in my cancer battle when the doctors had not yet diagnosed the cause of some severe pain. I sat with my wife, intending to offer a routine blessing on our lunch.

Instead, all I could do was simply weep, "Heavenly Father, please help me. I am so sick." For the next 20 to 30 seconds, I was encircled in His love. I was given no reason for my illness, no indication of the ultimate outcome, and no relief from the pain. I just felt of His pure love, and that was and is enough.

I witness that our Heavenly Father, who notes the fall of even a single sparrow, is aware of your suffering.¹¹

Third, Jesus Christ offers His enabling power to help you have strength to endure your suffering well. This enabling power is made possible through His Atonement.¹² I fear that too many Church members think if they are just a little tougher, they can get through any suffering on their own. This is a hard way to live. Your temporary moment of strength can never compare to the Savior's infinite supply of power to fortify your soul.¹³

The Book of Mormon teaches that Jesus Christ would "take upon him" our pains, sicknesses, and infirmities so He can succor us.¹⁴ How can you draw upon the power that Jesus Christ offers to succor you and strengthen you in times of suffering? The key is binding yourself to the Savior by keeping the covenants you have made with Him. We make these covenants as we receive priesthood ordinances.¹⁵

The people of Alma entered into the covenant of baptism. Later they suffered in bondage and were

forbidden to worship publicly or even pray aloud. Yet they kept their covenants the best they could by crying out silently in their hearts. As a result, divine power came. "The Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease."¹⁶

In our day, the Savior invites, "Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not."¹⁷ When we keep our sacrament covenant to always remember Him, He promises that His Spirit will be with us. The Spirit gives us strength to endure trials and do what we cannot possibly do on our own. The Spirit can heal us, although as President James E. Faust taught, "Some of the healing may take place in another world."¹⁸

We are also blessed by temple covenants and ordinances, where "the power of godliness is manifest."¹⁹ I visited a woman who had lost a teenage daughter in a terrible accident, then later her husband to cancer. I asked how she could endure such loss and suffering. She replied that strength came from spiritual reassurances of an eternal family, received during regular temple worship. As promised, the ordinances of the Lord's house had armed her with God's power.²⁰

Fourth, choose to find joy each day. Those who suffer often feel that the night just goes on and on, and daylight will never come. It is OK to weep.²¹ Yet, if you find yourself in dark nights of suffering, by choosing faith you can awake to bright mornings of rejoicing.²²

For example, I visited a young mother being treated for cancer, smiling majestically in her chair despite the pain and a lack of hair. I met a middle-aged couple happily serving as youth leaders though they were unable to conceive children.

I sat with a dear woman—a young grandmother, mother, and wife—who would pass away within days, yet amid the family’s tears were laughter and joyful recollections.

These suffering Saints exemplify what President Russell M. Nelson has taught:

“The joy we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives.

“When the focus of our lives is on God’s plan of salvation . . . and Jesus Christ and His gospel, we can feel joy regardless of what is happening—or

not happening—in our lives.”²³

I testify²⁴ that our Heavenly Father remembers His suffering Saints, loves you, and is intimately aware of you. Our Savior knows how you feel. “Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.”²⁵ I know—as a daily recipient²⁶—that keeping covenants unlocks the power of Jesus Christ’s atoning sacrifice to provide strength and even joy to you who suffer.

For all who suffer, I pray, “May God grant unto you that your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son.”²⁷ In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■



Guatemala

NOTES

1. See 1 Peter 4:12–13.
2. See John 9:1–3.
3. See Moses 1:39.
4. Sinful uses of agency that cause suffering to others are too many to list but surely include a spouse who commits adultery, a person who abuses a child or an adult, a drunk driver who injures or kills a loved one, or a mass shooter or a terrorist bomber who maims or kills many.
5. Isaiah 48:10; see also Zechariah 13:9.
6. See 2 Nephi 2:1–2.
7. Elder Robert D. Hales taught: “We must develop the ability to have a concern for others while we are suffering. It is a key element in our spiritual growth. As we lose our lives in the service of our fellowmen, we find ourselves” (“Your Sorrow Shall Be Turned to Joy,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1983, 66).
8. See Revelation 7:13–17; 21:3–4.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 121:1, 6.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 121:7–8.
11. See Matthew 10:29–31.
12. See Bible Dictionary, “Grace.”
13. See Philippians 4:13, 19; Alma 26:12; see also 2 Chronicles 32:7–8.
14. See Alma 7:11–13; see also 2 Nephi 9:21.
15. See *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 3.5, ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
16. See Mosiah 24:13–15.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 6:36.
18. James E. Faust, “Where Do I Make My Stand?,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2004, 21.
19. Doctrine and Covenants 84:20.
20. See Doctrine and Covenants 109:22; see also 1 Nephi 14:14.
21. See John 11:35; Doctrine and Covenants 42:45.
22. This idea is inspired by Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin’s message “Sunday Will Come,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2006, 28–30. See also James 1:2–4 (including the Joseph Smith Translation in footnote 2a); 5:10–11.
23. Russell M. Nelson, “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 82.
24. Twenty years ago, the Apostle Elder Neal A. Maxwell was pondering his painful and ultimately life-ending illness. The Spirit whispered, “I have given you leukemia that you might teach my people with authenticity” (see Bruce C. Hafen, *A Disciple’s Life: The Biography of Neal A. Maxwell* [2002], 562).
25. Mosiah 14:4; see also Isaiah 53:4.
26. The more appropriate scriptural word for recipient is *partaker* (see Ether 12:6–9).
27. Alma 33:23.