

PATIENCE:

More Than Waiting

Patience is not an easy lesson to learn, but it's worth it.

By Hillary Olsen

Sister Olsen, we bless you with patience.” Those weren’t the words I wanted to hear. I had been praying all day to have enough faith to be healed. In the blessing, I was promised that I’d eventually get better, but I was assured that it would take time.

I sighed as the elders finished giving me a blessing. I had only three months left on my mission, and I wanted to be out with the people—not sick in bed. I wanted to accept the Lord’s will, but I honestly didn’t understand why He would make me wait.

It took me several days to come to terms with my situation. I had resigned myself to the fact that I wasn’t going to get better right away,



but in the meantime I was miserable—until one day I turned to the scriptures. Eventually, I found the peace I needed in James 1. Joseph Smith found his answer in verse 5—mine was in verses 2–4:

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations [the Joseph Smith Translation changes “divers temptations” to “many afflictions”];

“Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

“But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

As I read those verses, I can’t say that I was suddenly able to “count it all joy” that I was sick, but I did learn some things that helped me feel less miserable about my situation.

The fact that I hadn’t been immediately healed didn’t mean that I didn’t have faith, and it didn’t mean the Lord didn’t care about my situation—quite the opposite, actually. The Lord cared enough to test my faith by not healing me right away so that I could develop patience.

I realized that the Lord wanted me to develop patience because it’s a vital characteristic. Patience refines us. Patience helps us become more like the Savior. I did have important

responsibilities as a full-time missionary, but I realized that when it comes to serving the Lord, He cares just as much about the instrument as He does the task at hand. The Lord was teaching me patience so that I could be a better and more effective missionary in those final months of my mission.

My promised blessing of healing did eventually come, but my lesson in patience didn’t end there. Many blessings in our lives—marriage, employment, children, physical or emotional health, answers to prayers—don’t come right when we expect them to. When you experience delayed answers to prayers, and you likely have or will, commit to patience by trusting in the Lord and His timing. It will bless your life.

Perspective on Patience

I came home from my mission mistakenly feeling that I could check patience off my list of lessons to learn. The thing about patience, though, is that it’s not a lesson we learn only once. Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles gave a talk on patience, and I read it for the first time after a rather discouraging breakup with someone I had been dating. I was feeling heartbroken and a little hopeless, and at

that point, the last thing I thought I needed was a reminder to be patient. Surprisingly, though, Elder Maxwell’s insights on patience taught me some powerful concepts that totally changed my perspective (once again) and helped me recommit to patience.

Patience Isn’t Resignation

For example, I learned that committing to patience doesn’t mean we shrug our shoulders and give up hope. Elder Maxwell taught: “Patience is not indifference. Actually, it means caring very much but being willing, nevertheless, to submit to the Lord and to what the scriptures call the ‘process of time.’”¹ I had always thought of patience as a somewhat passive response to life’s experiences, a sort of relenting. But patience is not relenting. Patience is a manifestation of inner strength and devotion to the Lord.

Patience Is Confident, Not Anxious

Elder Maxwell also taught: “Patience is a willingness, in a sense, to watch the unfolding purposes of God with a sense of wonder and awe, rather than pacing up and down within the cell of our circumstance. Put another way, too much anxious opening of the oven door and the cake falls instead of rising. So it is with us. If we are always

selfishly taking our temperature to see if we are happy, we will not be.”² This idea really resonated with me (and not just because I am an impatient baker). It’s discouraging when plans fall through or don’t pan out as expected. To our mortal minds, divine timing can be hard to understand. But what I *can* understand is that God is a loving Father who has a plan that guarantees eventual happiness if we are faithful, and I am learning to accept His timing with confidence—not with anxiousness.

It’s Not Always about Us

Because patience tests us at a very personal level, our focus is often inward. But Elder Maxwell taught that “patience also helps us to realize that while we may be ready to move on, having had enough of a particular learning experience, our continued presence is often needed as a part of the learning environment of others.”³

Not only do we need patience, but others also need our patience or the example of our patience. This idea had never dawned on me, and it helped me to view patience as a noble quality, very closely tied to charity, the pure love of Christ, which “never faileth” (Moroni 7:46).

More Than Waiting

Even when we have the right perspective, waiting can be hard. But I have learned that patience is more than just waiting. I have learned this from my brother Andrew and his wife, Brianna, as they have dealt with being unable to have children. Although their hopes were crushed when they learned they wouldn’t be able to have children, they found new hope through the prospect of adoption—but that still meant more waiting.

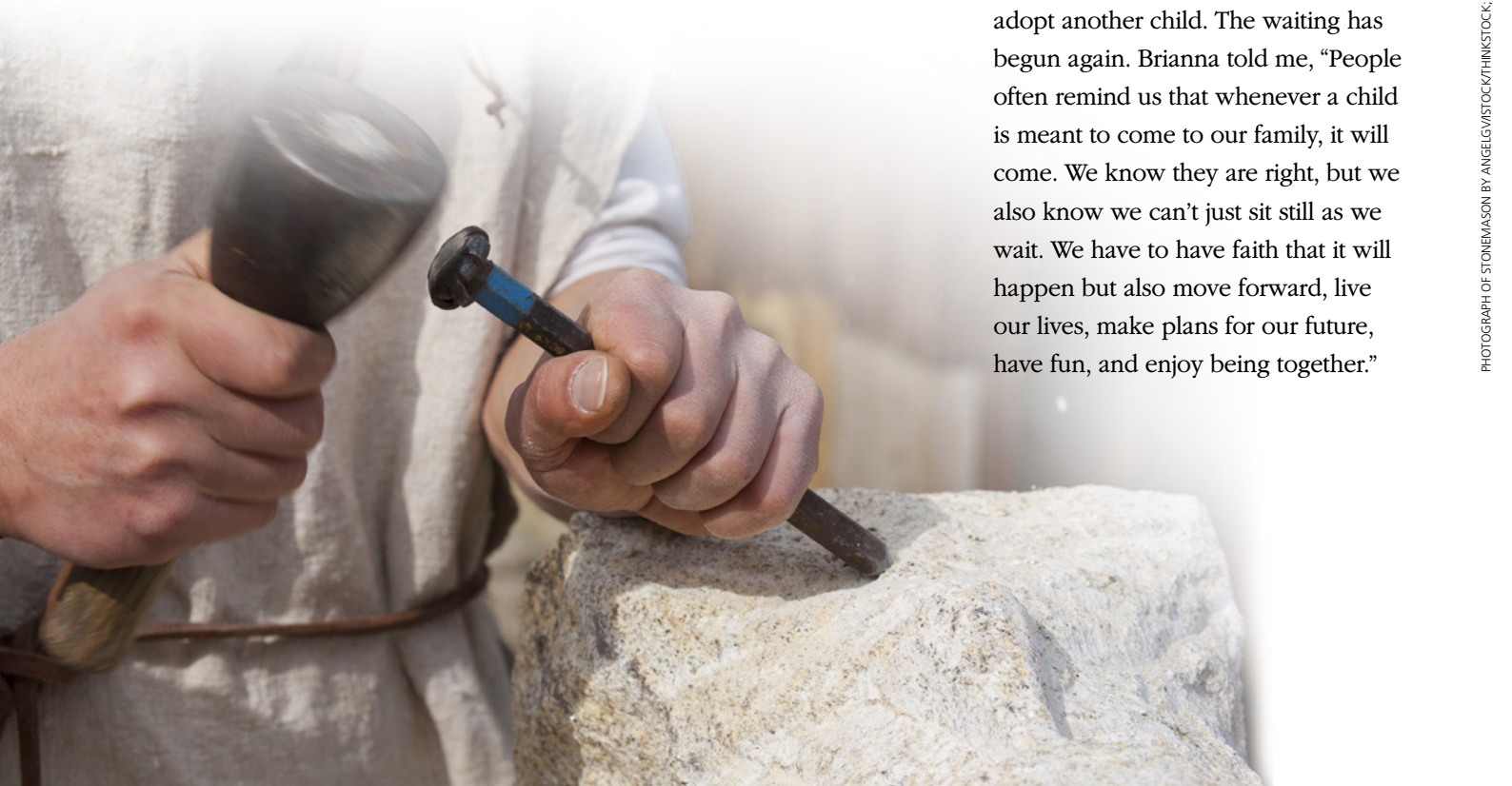
I hesitate to use the word *wait* when referring to them because that word often has very passive

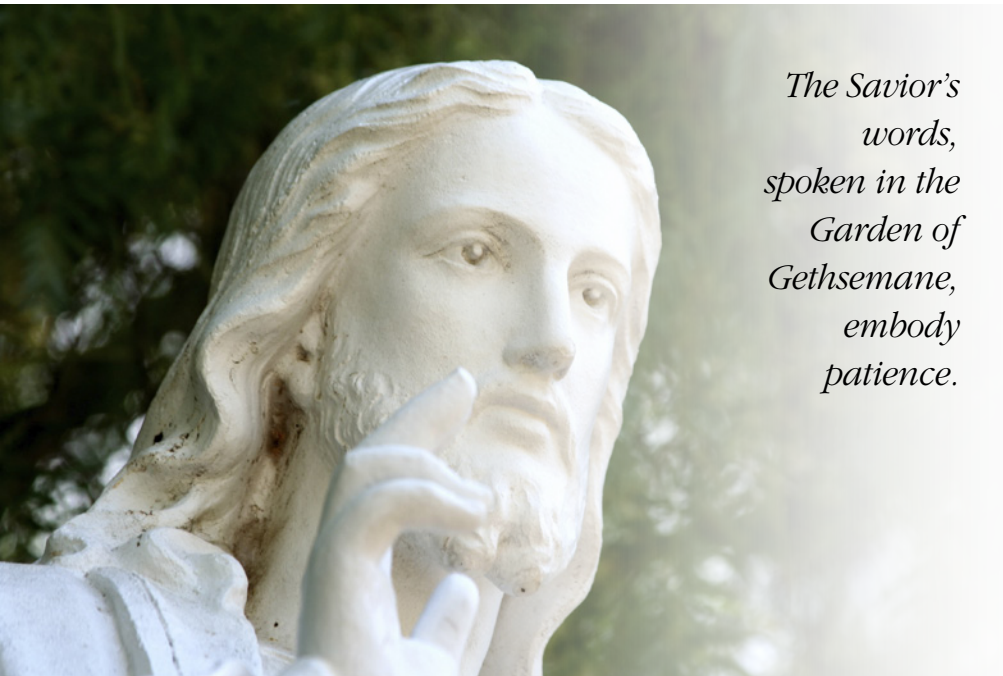
connotations. For them, waiting doesn’t mean biding their time until a child comes—patience is so much more than that.

Andrew said, “So much of adoption is in the Lord’s hands, not ours. But it makes us feel good to have something we can do to work toward our goal of having children in our family.” Whether it’s through blogging, sharing their contact information with friends and family, or getting involved with local groups of adoptive parents, they try to “do all things that lie in [their] power” (D&C 123:17), and then they put their trust in the Lord.

After years of waiting and praying, they were able to adopt a beautiful baby girl named Jessica. As they held her in their arms, years’ worth of disappointment and discouragement faded away. For them, she was and is a miracle.

Five years have now passed since they adopted Jessica, and for the last four years, they have been trying to adopt another child. The waiting has begun again. Brianna told me, “People often remind us that whenever a child is meant to come to our family, it will come. We know they are right, but we also know we can’t just sit still as we wait. We have to have faith that it will happen but also move forward, live our lives, make plans for our future, have fun, and enjoy being together.”





The Savior's words, spoken in the Garden of Gethsemane, embody patience.

Waiting is hard, but Andrew and Brianna have taught me to choose to be happy today. It's so easy to think, "I will be happy when _____," but we miss out on so much of what life has to offer by postponing our happiness. Even though we sometimes have to put our desires aside to submit to the will of our Father, that doesn't mean we have to also put our happiness aside. His love can provide strength, fill voids, and instill hope.

The Savior's Example of Patience

The Savior is our ultimate example of patience. To me, His words spoken in the Garden of Gethsemane embody His patience. In the midst of unimaginable suffering and sacrifice,

He asked that, if possible, the cup of His suffering be taken from Him. "Nevertheless," He said, "not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). The word *nevertheless* carries a powerful message. In spite of what the Savior really wanted in that moment, He expressed His willingness to accept His Father's will and to endure.

We'll all be required to wait for things in our lives—even at times the most righteous desires of our hearts. But Jesus Christ, our "best, [our] heav'nly Friend,"⁴ can comfort and reassure us of good things to come. And He is lovingly patient with us as we learn to be like Him, as we learn to face the expected and unexpected plot twists of mortality and say to our

Father, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."

My perspective on patience has definitely changed as I have entered adulthood. Patience is a process, and I'll always be learning. Even though waiting *is* hard, I am learning to "count it all joy" when my patience is tried—not because I find joy in the hardness of it, but because I know that it has glorious purpose. I know that letting "patience have her perfect work" is part of fulfilling my purpose here on earth of one day becoming "perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:4). ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. Neal A. Maxwell, "Patience" (Brigham Young University devotional, Nov. 27, 1979), 1, speeches.byu.edu.
2. Neal A. Maxwell, "Patience," 2.
3. Neal A. Maxwell, "Patience," 3.
4. "Be Still, My Soul," *Hymns*, no. 124.



THANK HIM FOR PATIENCE

"If you pray, if you talk to God, and if you plead for the help you need, and if you thank him

not only for help but for the patience and gentleness that come from not receiving all you desire right away or perhaps ever, then I promise you that you will draw closer to him."

President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, "Waiting Upon the Lord," (Brigham Young University devotional, Sept. 30, 1990), 4, speeches.byu.edu.