



START ROWING

By Kathy Wright

*We went from
smooth sailing to
dead in the water,
becalmed by
unemployment.
Fortunately, a
conference talk
came along
just in time.*



Because my husband is highly skilled and a hard worker, unemployment was never something that I worried much about. So we were both surprised and concerned when he lost a very good job in June of 1993. We had 5 young children ages 1 to 11, and we had just purchased and remodeled a home, using all of our financial resources.

We fasted and prayed a great deal as my husband searched for new employment. But our concern grew as a few months went by without finding a new job. The little bit of severance pay my husband had received soon ran out. So it was in a very sober mood that we watched October general conference that year. When Elder John H. Groberg, now an emeritus member of the Seventy, spoke about faith and prayer, my heart was touched, and I felt his message was meant especially for us.

Elder Groberg related an experience he had as a young missionary in the South Pacific. Several Church members who were experienced sailors were taking him by sailboat to a distant island where a family was waiting to hear the gospel. Suddenly the wind died. Fervent prayers were offered, but the boat continued to drift.

Then one of the sailors, an older man, lowered the lifeboat into the ocean, attached two oars, and told young Elder Groberg that he would row him to the island so he could fulfill his assignment from the Lord. It was miles and miles

to go, under a hot sun, and the sailor was more than three times Elder Groberg's age. But the older sailor insisted, and he rowed Elder Groberg to the island to teach the gospel to the waiting family.

Elder Groberg concluded: "How often do we not do more because we pray for wind and none comes? We pray for good things and they don't seem to happen, so we sit and wait and do no more. We should always pray for help, but we should always listen for inspiration and impressions to proceed in ways different from those we may have thought of."¹

As I listened to this story my heart burned within me. I understood that my husband's previous job was like the sailboat with a nice wind blowing, but now the wind was blowing no more. We were going to have to get out of the sailboat and start rowing.

This experience prepared me for a long and difficult time of "rowing." My husband's unemployment lasted much longer than we had expected. When he did find work, it was in a very difficult environment in a department that was struggling. The company decided to shut down his department, and he was without work again. We then faced another period of underemployment and unemployment. All together, these financially and emotionally trying times spanned several years. Finally, he was hired by a stable, reputable company, and we have been greatly blessed since then.

Perhaps some of the lessons we learned will help others who are facing similar challenges.



Take advantage of every opportunity to obtain work and receive income. One stroke of the oars may not take you far, but steadily rowing will.

Start Rowing

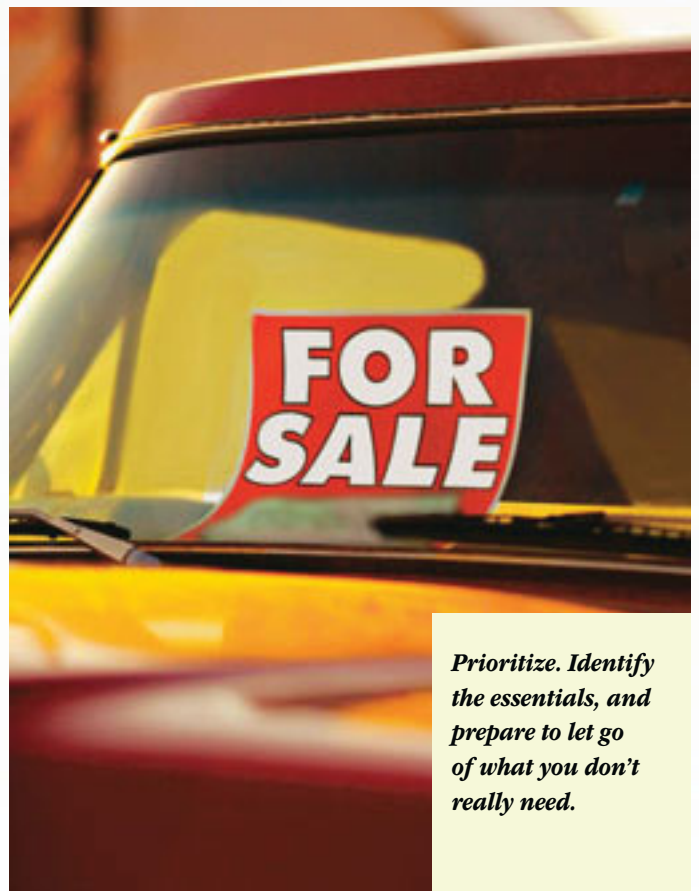
Even if the pay is not what you are accustomed to, working at temporary jobs will bring in some income and help keep your spirits up. My husband and I both did substitute teaching at various times. I found that I could spend about three hours a day cleaning other people's homes and bring in nearly enough to pay our mortgage each month. My husband found opportunities to do consulting work using his financial skills. His consulting earned much more than our other "rowing" income, but the work was not steady so the rowing continued.

Letting your extended family know of your situation enables them to help in your job search and to help you financially as they are able. Making your bishop and quorum president aware of your situation allows them to help you network to find other employment, and they can also provide financial counseling. The bishop can give you a referral to the nearest Church employment services center, if there is one in your area, where valuable help and training are available.² The bishop can also arrange for you to obtain food and other commodities, if necessary. Paying tithing on any income you receive will bring blessings and greater confidence in seeking the Lord's help.

Be Cautiously Optimistic

We found it wise to hope and pray for the best but prepare for the worst. In a time of uncertainty, it's best to be cautious. Ask yourself, "What do we need to do to survive if this lasts very long?" Identifying essential needs—like food and shelter—helps you avoid putting them at risk. If you begin to fall behind, or must delay a rent or mortgage payment, it's wise to notify your mortgage holder or your landlord. They will be much more likely to work with you if you keep them informed and they know you are making an earnest effort.

We learned to sacrifice. For example, we had a second car with a monthly payment when my husband lost his job. We held onto that car for about five months before we sold it. Those payments could have been used to make a mortgage payment. If you have nonessentials that you are making payments on, consider letting them go. Those payments could go toward true needs. You could also sell valuable nonessentials that you own. They can be replaced later. One thing is certain: Debt is not the answer. It simply makes the problem worse.



Prioritize. Identify the essentials, and prepare to let go of what you don't really need.



Pay attention to your family's emotional and spiritual needs. Communicate and reassure.

Money Isn't the Only Essential

In the midst of your hard work and concern, it can be easy to overlook your family's spiritual and emotional needs. At first we were so focused on how we were going to pay the bills that we were not fully aware of our children's needs and concerns. They also had struggles while my husband was out of work. They did not feel they had our full attention, and I must admit they didn't.

We suggest talking to your children frequently about their lives. How are they doing? What are their concerns? What needs of theirs are not being met? What opportunities are they giving up because they think you can't afford it? Try not to answer every request with "We can't afford it." If you can, help them feel empowered. If they are old enough, they might get a job to pay for some of the things that they would like.

Unemployment, like other trials, can bring blessings and spiritual growth when faith and personal effort combine.

Blessings from the Trial

I am grateful that after this difficult time finally passed my husband did find a good, stable job. Although I could never imagine it at the time, I now look back at this period of unemployment as one of the greatest times in my life—not because of the hardships, but because of the spiritual growth I felt. We re-learned that God is real. He often answered prayers with kindness and generosity from our family and ward members. When we turned to Him with real faith and prayed for consulting opportunities for my husband, our prayers were answered.

It was during this time that I overcame my fear of "the last days." Since I had been a young girl I had been afraid of the hardships and trials that I have heard prophesied about the last days. But during my husband's unemployment, I learned that God is watching over us, and even when times are difficult, He will guide us and help us find safety and resources. ■

NOTES

1. John H. Groberg, "The Lord's Wind," *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 28.
2. See Jennifer Williams, "Way Beyond the Help-Wanted Ads," *Ensign*, July 2009, 58.

