

If God Loves Me, Why Is Life So Hard?

With the Savior's help, we can endure trials with faith and come out stronger for it.

By **Barbara A. Lewis**

Methuselah is not only the name of the longest-living prophet of the Old Testament but also the name of one of the oldest living trees in the world. Located in California, USA, this bristlecone pine tree is close to 5,000 years old.

Bristlecone pine trees grow on high, craggy cliffs up to 10,000 feet in elevation. They endure a climate of harsh winds and little rainfall. Their roots fasten like anchors deep in the soil to soak up the few available nutrients. When bristlecones grow at lower elevations, they don't survive to the age and strength of the cliff-dwelling variety.

Like bristlecone pines, we can also grow stronger in difficult conditions, if our faith is firmly rooted in the soil of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Most of us would not raise our hands and ask for extra helpings of adversity, but with the Savior's help, we can learn to face trials with faith and come out stronger for it.

Why Do We Have to Endure Trials?

In the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye, a poor Jewish milkman, speaks aloud to the Lord: "I know, I know—we are the chosen people. But once in a while, can't You choose someone else?"¹

Like Tevye, we might feel singled out and wonder why we have been "chosen" for trials. But adversity is no respecter of persons. Hardship is a natural result of living on earth. Our

bodies can get injured, become mentally and physically ill, and die. We may be treated unjustly. Our own poor choices can also bring suffering.

Why is hardship part of a loving Heavenly Father's plan? Lehi explained one reason to his son Jacob: "It must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things" (2 Nephi 2:11). In other words, there could not be good without the contrast of bad. We could not experience joy if we did not also experience pain.

Sometimes our Father allows the wicked to harm the righteous in order to justly bring punishment upon the wicked (see Alma 14:10–11). And often He allows us to experience challenges to help us grow. Lehi assured Jacob that God would "consecrate [his] afflictions for [his] gain" (2 Nephi 2:2).

We are not meant to face these trials alone. If we follow the Lord and the teachings of His prophets, we can draw on His strength to endure trials. What happens to us is less important than how we react to it. Trials can be a blessing if we use them as an opportunity to draw closer to the Savior.





PHOTOGRAPH OF BRISTLE CONE PINE (SIMILAR TO THE ONE CALLED METHUSELAH) BY SCOTT BURKIN

Accepting His Will

To endure faithfully, it is essential to accept God’s will, even if it is not what we wanted. Elder Richard G. Scott (1928–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: “To ask, Why does this have to happen to me? Why do I have to suffer this, now? What have I done to cause this? will lead you into blind alleys. . . . Rather ask, What am I to do? What am I to learn from this experience? . . . When you pray with real conviction, ‘Please let me know Thy will’ and ‘May Thy will be done,’ you are in the strongest position to receive the maximum help from your loving Father.”²



Eight-year-old Lizzy Thomson learned to accept God’s will and endure faithfully when she was diagnosed with brain cancer. Lizzy loved life. She was a gifted violinist, a nature enthusiast, and a faithful friend. She believed that her Father in Heaven would heal her if she had faith. With a broad smile and a bald head, she bravely told her curious friends about her cancer and said that Heavenly Father would help her get well. When her mother asked her if she remembered to say her prayers, she answered, “Mom, I am praying all the time.”

However, as Lizzy’s condition grew worse, she began to realize that she might not get well. Her family watched her accept and endure suffering with pure faith in God’s will. She cried very little, but instead placed love notes around the house for her family. She loved a quote she found from Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “In [Heavenly Father’s] plan there are no true endings, only everlasting beginnings.”³ She clung to that promise with hope.

At Christmastime, while awaiting her own chemotherapy at the hospital, Lizzy played Christmas carols on her violin

for the other children awaiting treatment. A Santa hat covered her bald head and an IV needle was attached under her sleeve as she played “Silent Night” and other carols. Doctors and nurses stopped to listen with tissues in hand. Her peaceful music filled the cancer clinic with hope.

Lizzy’s family continued to fast and pray for her recovery, but God had another plan for Lizzy. Within a few months, she couldn’t talk or move. On her last Sunday, as she lay almost lifeless in bed, the sun streamed through the window and bathed her small frame in light. Those gathered around her knew that they were in the presence of a noble spirit. Soon after, Lizzy quietly passed away. With the enduring faith of a child, she had set the example and entered an “everlasting beginning.”

The Ultimate Example

As Lizzy patiently endured the trial of her cancer, she followed the example of Jesus Christ, who endured with faith beyond mortal imagining. He took upon Himself every sin, sickness, pain, and affliction we would ever experience (see Alma 7:11–12). He was betrayed, mocked, beaten, and crucified. He “descended below all things” and drank “the bitter cup” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:6; 19:18)—all the while glorifying the Father and faithfully accepting His will.

“What if Jesus had wavered in His commitment to do His Father’s will?” President Russell M. Nelson asked. “His Atonement would not have been accomplished. The dead

HOW CAN I ENDURE TRIALS WITH GREATER FAITH?

- See trials as opportunities for growth. Ask, “What can I learn?”
- Ask for a priesthood blessing.
- Read your patriarchal blessing and reflect on all that the Lord has promised you.
- Confide in your ministering brothers and sisters. Welcome their comfort and service.
- Feast upon the words of Christ, both in scripture and in recent general conference addresses.
- Pray for strength and resilience.



Jesus Christ took upon Himself every sin, sickness, pain, and affliction we would ever experience.

would not be resurrected. The blessings of immortality and eternal life would not be. But Jesus did endure.”⁴ He paid for all our sins and suffering and paid the price for our return to our Father. Because He endured with faith, each of us can enjoy the blessings of eternal life.

At times, we may feel stretched to the limit as we seek to follow the Savior’s example of enduring with faith. But of course our Heavenly Father does not desire us to falter. Consider a story of physical endurance that suggests a spiritual parallel. John Stephen Akhwari was a marathon runner who represented Tanzania in the 1968 Summer Olympics. Over an hour after the winner had already crossed the finish line, John continued to stumble on to the end—in spite of cramps, dehydration, and disorientation. He said afterwards, “My country did not send me [9,000] miles to

start the race; my country sent me to *finish* the race.”⁵

Likewise, “our Heavenly Father did not put us on earth to fail but to succeed gloriously.”⁶ He wants each of us to plant our roots deep in His gospel and finish the race, no matter how difficult the course.

Elder Ronald A. Rasband of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles encouraged us to “press on no matter how hard it gets, no matter . . . how steep the climb; no matter how little you have left to keep going. Remember and rely upon the Lord’s promise, ‘. . . be of good cheer; I have overcome the world’ [John 16:33].”⁷

It is only by following the Savior’s example to persist through adversity that we can become the people the Lord needs us to be. Like the bristlecone pine whose roots are anchored deep in the soil, we can endure hardships if our faith is firmly rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We can trust in the promise the Lord gave Joseph Smith:

“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” (Doctrine and Covenants 121:7–8). ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. Joseph Stein, *Fiddler on the Roof* (film, 1971).
2. Richard G. Scott, “Trust in the Lord,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 17.
3. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Grateful in Any Circumstances,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 77.
4. Russell M. Nelson, “Endure and Be Lifted Up,” *Ensign*, May 1997, 71.
5. See Robert D. Hales, “Behold, We Count Them Happy Which Endure,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 76.
6. Richard G. Scott, “Learning to Recognize Answers to Prayer,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 30.
7. Ronald A. Rasband, “To the Summit” (Brigham Young University–Idaho commencement address, Apr. 8, 2016), byui.edu.

HOW CAN I HELP OTHERS ENDURE WITH FAITH?

- Do not tell others why you think they are suffering.
- Pray for inspiration about how you can give help to someone who needs it.
- Find ways to provide uplifting experiences for those who have trials.
- When appropriate, ask the individual if you can inform the ward council and bishop, so that others can assist as well.
- Dedicate a fast to the individual who struggles.