

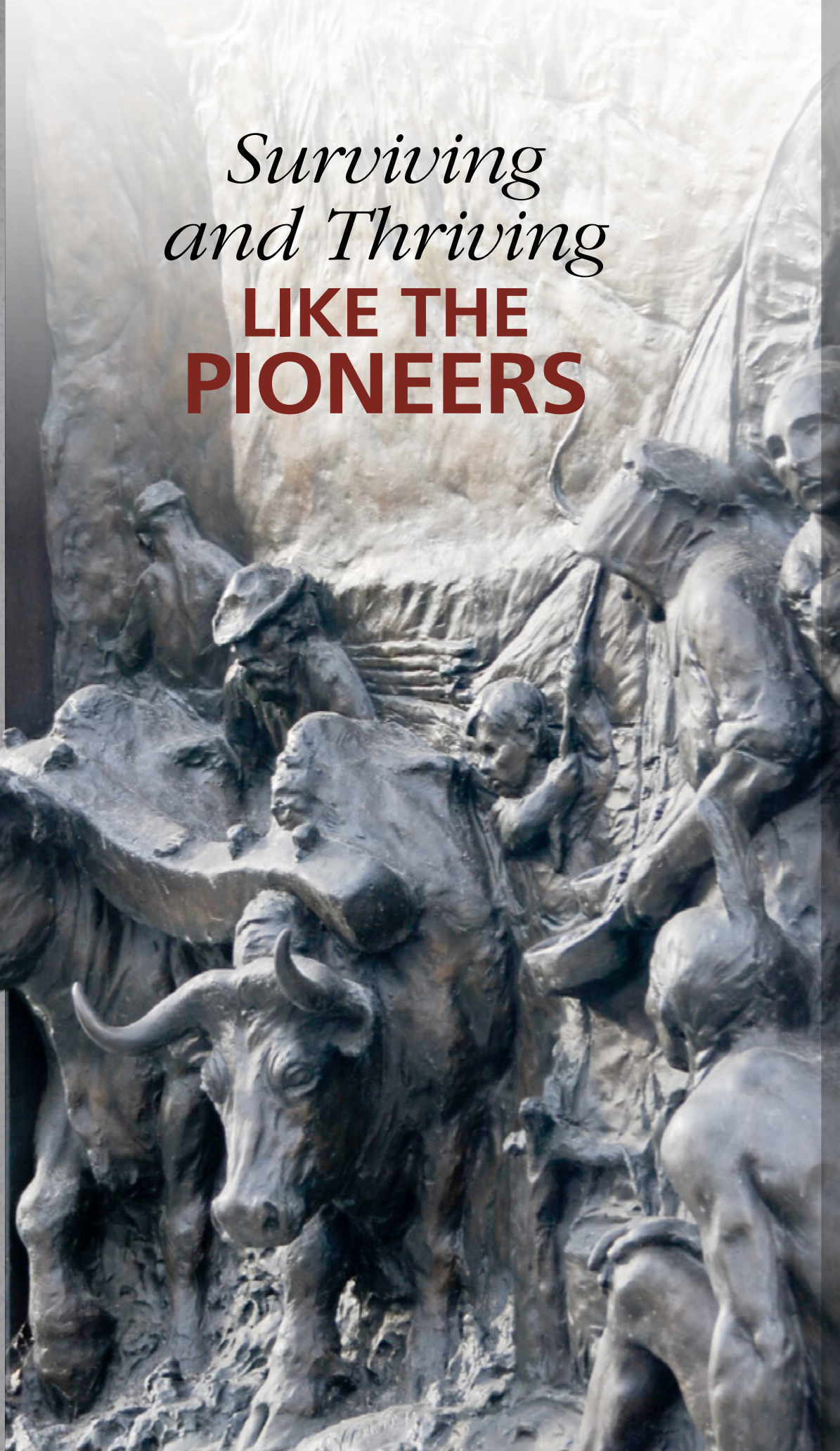


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Served as a General Authority Seventy from 2008 to 2019

With heavenly help and pioneer persistence, we can not only survive adversity but also thrive because of it.

Surviving and Thriving **LIKE THE PIONEERS**





90,000

Saints had gathered to the United States by 1900

1. Why did so many intelligent people give up so much and willingly endure such great suffering to gather with the Saints?

There is nothing easy about the pioneers and the story of the Restoration, but there is nothing easy about the children of God receiving and following His guidance from the beginning of time. The best and highest road, the road of greatest worth, the only road to fulfillment and eternal life is not an easy road.

Hardship, suffering, disappointment, failure, and faith—always leading to ultimate triumph—have been the common lot of the faithful in all ages. When I think of the Restoration, including pioneers, I think of hardship and suffering, but I also have questions.

This is a particularly relevant question today, as some chart a course of ease, cherry-picking among what the gospel, the Restoration, and the Church offer. They quietly hunker down in the routines of their lives and shrink from any level of inconvenience, sacrifice, and service—much less the level of hardship willingly endured by the early members of the Church.

Why not accept the ordinances and the scriptures and live a good life without extraordinary sacrifice? Why not simply embrace a new religion and remain in place? Why uproot everything and everyone? Why leave one's family, home, and homeland forevermore to traipse off to a strange land, how-

ever great the promise may be? Why not build the kingdom of God in New England, the British Isles, Scandinavia, or wherever is home? Could the Saints not simply live the gospel where they were? Does faith, faithfulness, and righteousness require willing abandonment of almost everything else?

Our natural instinct understandably is to shrink from hardship, but it is a grave mistake for that to be life's primary objective. That kind of thinking wrongly equates the pursuit of joy with the hollowness of ease. While that has



some appeal, it is a deeply flawed strategy because suffering and joy are not incompatible but rather essential companions. You can suffer and never know joy, but you can't have joy without suffering. (See 2 Nephi 2:23.)

On April 6, 1830, the restored Church of Jesus Christ was organized. In September of that year the Lord declared:

“Ye are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect. . . .

“ . . . The decree hath gone forth from the Father that they shall be gathered in unto one place upon the face of this land” (Doctrine and Covenants 29:7–8).

Over time there were four gathering places, beginning with Kirtland, Ohio (1831–37), then Missouri (1831–38), followed by Nauvoo, Illinois (1839–46), and then Utah (1847–early 1900s).

In a series of wagon trains and a few handcart companies over 22 years, between 60,000 and 70,000 people gathered in the Salt Lake Valley.¹ By 1900, about 90,000 Saints had gathered to the United States. Approximately 50,000 emigrated from the British Isles. About 30,000 came from Scandinavia. Others came from Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Italy, France, Australia, and the South Pacific.²

You can't explain it as religious fanaticism, not on this scale. It is one thing for a new convert or even a few zealots here and there to pack up a few things and leave everything else behind blinded by a new faith. It is quite another for tens of thousands of intelligent, good, rational people to do that in the same time frame and do it willingly and largely independently

of others. They were, as Charles Dickens described them, “the pick and flower of England”³ and other nations.

How does one explain that, tens of thousands of times over? There is nothing like it and there is no good explanation, at least in human terms. You cannot explain it away by the charisma of Joseph Smith, whom these emigrants had never met, and you can't explain it away as the power of a so-called cult either, not on the scale of what actually occurred.

Some have said it was the result of a sense of community. But while a sense of community evolved over time as diverse converts gathered and melded together in increasingly greater numbers, that was after they had left home and homeland. A sense of community might have kept them together once they were together, but what sense of community would have urged leaving home in the first place?

What about a need to find refuge from persecution and the evils of the world? Maybe, here and there, but can that explain the scale of sacrifice we are considering? Can't you hunker down at home and let the winds of scorn blow overhead?

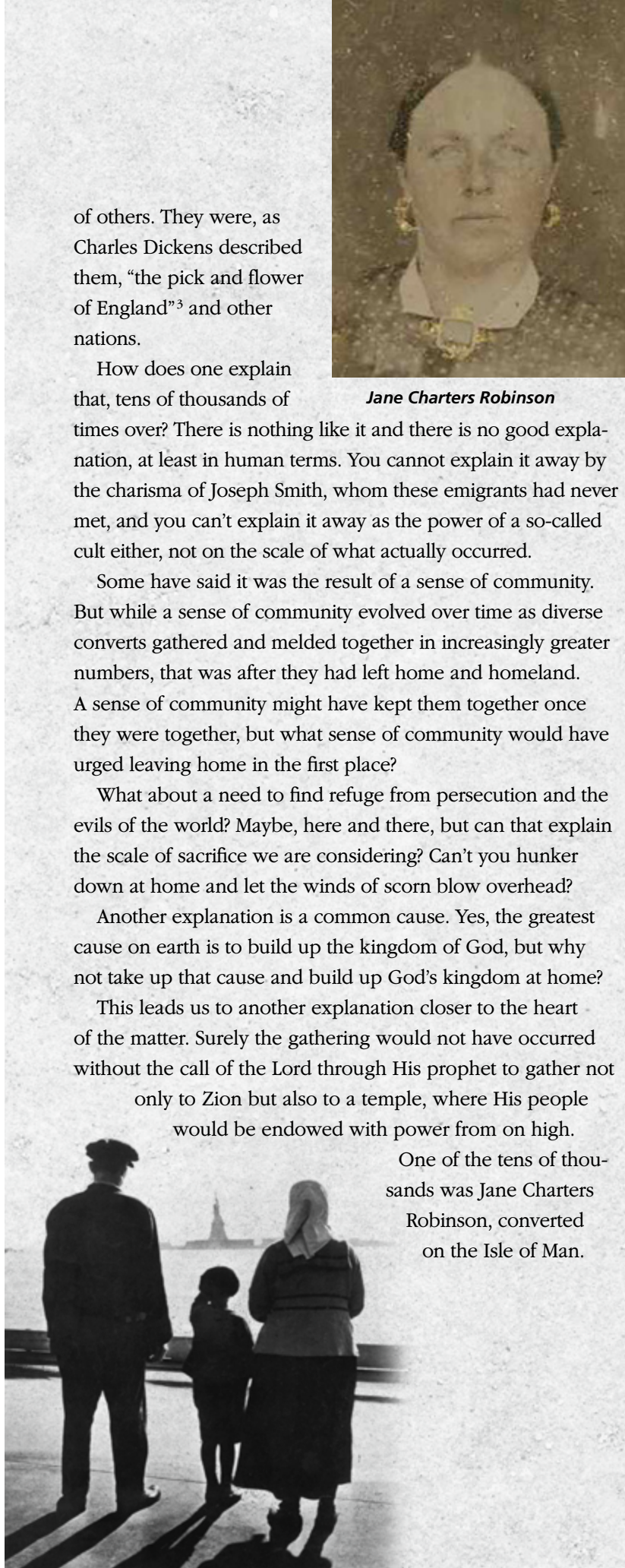
Another explanation is a common cause. Yes, the greatest cause on earth is to build up the kingdom of God, but why not take up that cause and build up God's kingdom at home?

This leads us to another explanation closer to the heart of the matter. Surely the gathering would not have occurred without the call of the Lord through His prophet to gather not only to Zion but also to a temple, where His people would be endowed with power from on high.

One of the tens of thousands was Jane Charters Robinson, converted on the Isle of Man.



Jane Charters Robinson





50,000

Saints emigrated from the British Isles

2. Why did the early Saints persist after repeated failure and constant opposition?

She said: "In the year 1855 . . . I, together with a younger sister, left home and sailed . . . for Liverpool, and arrived there next day for the purpose of going to America, very much against my father's wishes. But I believed in the principle of the gathering and felt it my duty to go, although it was a severe trial to me in my feelings to leave my native land and the pleasing associations that I had formed there, but my heart was fixed. I knew in whom I had trusted, and with the fire of Israel's God burning in my bosom, I forsook my home, but not to gather wealth or the perishable things of this world."⁴

In the end, however, all of the above explanations fall short. There is no satisfactory explanation, at least in human terms, because it was not merely a human endeavor but rather the work of God. The story of the Restoration, the pioneers and the westward migration, the willing and total sacrifice of tens of thousands, and the hardship and suffering and making the desert to blossom as a rose is the story of God's hand bringing about His purposes. It is that simple. This story stands alone in history and is a testament to the truthfulness of the Restoration and the work of God gathering Israel, which continues today on both sides of the veil.

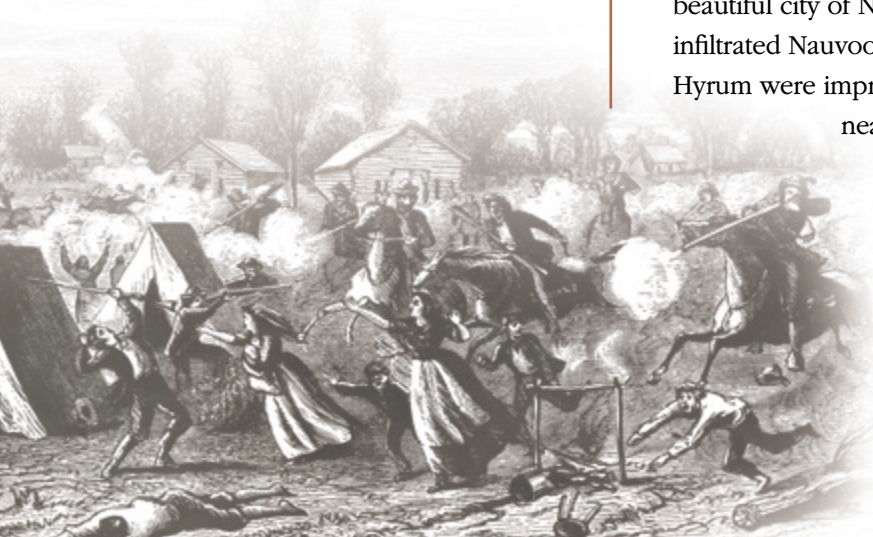
Some say that nothing breeds success like success. If that is the formula for success, then the story of Joseph Smith, the Restoration, the pioneers, and the early Saints should have been a very different story because it is a story of repeated failure and unrelenting opposition. It is the story of ultimate success arising out of the ashes of repeated failure.

The early Saints were driven from home and lands in New York to Kirtland, Ohio, where they built homes, a community, and the first temple in this dispensation. After a 900-mile (1,450 km) march to Missouri, Zion's Camp failed to regain land from which the Saints had been dispossessed. The bank established under the direction of Joseph Smith failed. From Kirtland the Saints were driven to Missouri, but soon an order was issued from the highest level of the state government to expel them.

Some were massacred, and others were beaten, tarred and feathered, and left for dead. Many women were brutally assaulted, and time and time again, houses were robbed; food, wagons, tents, and clothing were stolen; and livestock was driven off. Joseph Smith and other leaders were imprisoned for many months. Opposition came from every direction, from without and within. There was apostasy, dissent, and betrayal even among trusted leaders.

The Saints were driven from Missouri to Illinois, where out of the swamps of the Mississippi River they built another temple and the beautiful city of Nauvoo. Within a few years, persecution and discord infiltrated Nauvoo as well. The Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were imprisoned and martyred by a mob of about 200 men in nearby Carthage. The Saints were driven into the bleak winter, at first without a clear destination in sight. The temple was ransacked and burned.

During the trek across the western plains, hundreds, if not thousands, would die along the



350

communities of Saints were established in the western U.S. within 20 years

3. What are the characteristics of people who not only **survive** but also **thrive in great adversity**?

trail.⁵ Once the Saints arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, homes, farms, and communities had to be carved out of the wilderness. Surely some, if not many, questioned, “If this is God’s work, where is He?”

People ask a similar question today. Some lose faith because of hardship. A daughter dies and, in their grief, parents question their faith in God. Another thinks her life should be happier and better because of her righteousness. But it is more than “Why me?” Rather, it is “Where is God? Why would He allow this to happen despite my faithfulness?”

God declared His purpose for the creation of the heavens and the earth, saying, “And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abraham 3:25).

The question is not whether we will be faithful when things go well; rather, will we be faithful when they don’t? Faith is faithfulness in uncertainty and disappointment, faithfulness not to get one’s way, faithfulness regardless of the outcome.

So, back to the primary question: Why did the early Saints keep going after repeated failure and constant opposition? Why not step back from the lightning rod of the body of the Saints, hunker down, keep the faith without talking about it so much, and live a life of quiet devotion? Wouldn’t that be the prudent course of action?

Surely some quietly stepped away, but we know little about them, and in that fact alone, we find the answer to our question. Faith does not step back or hunker down. Faith is rarely, if ever, quiet or obscure, and in this case, silence is not golden.

It is one thing to survive the desert but quite another to make it blossom as a rose. It is one thing to survive; it is another to thrive. What makes the difference?

Just four days after arriving in the Salt Lake Valley, President Brigham Young (1801–77) stated “that he intended to have every hole and corner from the Bay of San Francisco to Hudson Bay known to us.”⁶ Small settlements emerged along the Wasatch Front almost immediately to the north and south of the Salt Lake Valley. Within 20 years the Saints had established approximately 350 communities in the West. That is not surviving but thriving in hardship.

While serving in Chile, my wife and I experienced the fifth-strongest earthquake in recorded history anywhere in the world. In the aftermath we observed different reactions.

We witnessed what some experts have termed the 10-80-10 principle, which suggests that 10 percent of people will handle crisis and trauma with a relatively calm and rational state of mind. They pull themselves together quickly. They accept the situation, make decisions to improve it, and take action. However, the vast majority of us, 80 percent, are immobilized, stunned, and bewildered and wait for help to come or someone to tell us what to do. The group we try not to be in, however, is the last 10 percent. They freak out and make the situation worse.

Our missionaries in Chile responded quickly by helping others rebuild their lives and homes. They were in the first group, the top 10 percent, perhaps because they were on the errand of the Lord.

Another characteristic of those who not only survive but also thrive is adaptability, or



coming to terms with a new reality. We are most rattled when our lives suddenly change, especially by events outside our control. Those who fare best are the most flexible and less dependent on their environment and the normal routines of life for stability. This is more than optimism or a positive attitude. It is faith, which is different.

Survivors and thrivers see things for what they are—good and bad—and they deal with them. Bad things happen, but as did the early Saints, we must accept life’s realities, even the harsh ones, and trust that with the Lord’s help we may endure well and that all things, both good and bad, will ultimately work together for our good (see Doctrine and Covenants 98:3).

Adapt with Faith

I am grateful for the marvelous heritage we share. I testify of the hand of God in bringing about His purposes both in the early days of this last chapter and today. I pray that we will be valiant, that our faith not be quiet or obscure, that we not step back or hunker down, that we adapt with faith to whatever our circumstances may be, knowing that all things will work together for our good if we endure them well. I pray that we

will not only survive the adversities of life but also thrive because of them. ■

From a Pioneer Day devotional, “Survive or Thrive,” delivered July 24, 2019, in the Assembly Hall on Temple Square.

NOTES

1. See Susan Easton Black, “Do We Know How Many Latter-day Saints Died between 1846 and 1869 in the Migration to the Salt Lake Valley?” *Ensign*, July 1998, 41.
2. See Richard L. Jensen, “Immigration to Utah,” in *Utah History Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan Kent Powell (1994), 270–73.
3. Charles Dickens, *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1896), 193.
4. Jane R. Hindley journals, 1855–1905, Feb. 12, 1856, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, spelling and punctuation standardized; see also “Saints by Sea: Latter-day Saint Immigration to America,” saintsbysea.lib.byu.edu.
5. Estimates range between 1,900 and 5,000. See Melvin L. Bashore and H. Dennis Tolley, “Mortality on the Mormon Trail, 1847–1868,” *BYU Studies*, vol. 53, no. 4 (2014), 109–23; Black, “Do We Know How Many Latter-day Saints Died between 1846 and 1869 in the Migration to the Salt Lake Valley?” 40–43.
6. Wilford Woodruff, in *Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, July 28, 1847, 2, Church History Catalog, catalog.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.

