
Adversity

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I bear you my testimony that God the Father lives. He set a course for each of us that can polish and perfect us to be with Him.



My beloved brothers and sisters, this opportunity to speak to you is a great and sacred privilege. I pray that my words may be helpful and give you encouragement.

With all the differences in our lives, we have at least one challenge in common. We all must deal with adversity. There may be periods, sometimes long ones, when our lives seem to flow with little difficulty. But it is in the nature of our being human that comfort gives way to distress, periods of good health come to an end, and misfortunes arrive. Particularly when the comfortable times have gone on for a while, the arrival of suffering or the loss of material security can bring fear and sometimes even anger.

The anger comes at least in part from a feeling that what is happening is unfair. The good health and the serene sense of being secure can become to seem deserved and natural. When they vanish, a feeling of injustice can come. Even a brave man I knew wept and cried out in his physical suffering to those who ministered to him: “I have always tried to be good. How could this happen?”

That aching for an answer to “How could this happen?” becomes even more painful when those struggling include those we love. And it is especially hard for us to accept when those afflicted seem to us to be blameless. Then the distress can shake faith in the reality of a loving and all-powerful God. Some of us have seen such doubt come to infect a whole generation of people in times of war or famine. Such doubt can grow and spread until some may turn away from God, whom they charge with being indifferent or cruel. And if unchecked, those feelings can lead to loss of faith that there is a God at all.

My purpose today is to assure you that our Heavenly Father and the Savior live and that They love all humanity. The very opportunity for us to face adversity and affliction is part of the evidence of Their infinite love. God gave us the gift of living in mortality so that we could be prepared to receive the greatest of all the gifts of God, which is eternal life. Then



our spirits will be changed. We will become able to want what God wants, to think as He thinks, and thus be prepared for the trust of an endless posterity to teach and to lead through tests to be raised up to qualify to live forever in eternal life.

It is clear that for us to have that gift and to be given that trust, we must be transformed through making righteous choices where that is hard to do. We are prepared for so great a trust by passing through trying and testing experiences in mortality. That education can come only as we are subject to trials while serving God and others for Him.

In this education we experience misery and happiness, sickness and health, the sadness from sin and the joy of forgiveness. That forgiveness can come only through the infinite Atonement of the Savior, which He worked out through pain we could not bear and which we can only faintly comprehend.

It will comfort us when we must

wait in distress for the Savior's promised relief that He knows, from experience, how to heal and help us. The Book of Mormon gives us the certain assurance of His power to comfort. And faith in that power will give us patience as we pray and work and wait for help. He could have known how to succor us simply by revelation, but He chose to learn by His own personal experience. Here is the account from Alma:

"And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

"And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.

"Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, [so] that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me."¹

Even when you feel the truth of that capacity and kindness of the Lord to deliver you in your trials, it may still test your courage and strength to endure. The Prophet Joseph Smith cried out in agony in a dungeon:

"O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?

"How long shall thy hand be stayed, and thine eye, yea thy pure eye, behold from the eternal heavens the wrongs of thy people and of thy servants, and thine ear be penetrated with their cries?"²

The Lord's reply has helped me and can encourage us all in times of darkness. Here it is:

"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; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes.

“Thy friends do stand by thee, and they shall hail thee again with warm hearts and friendly hands.

“Thou art not yet as Job; thy friends do not contend against thee, neither charge thee with transgression, as they did Job.”³

I have seen faith and courage come from a testimony that it is true that we are being prepared for eternal life. The Lord will rescue His faithful disciples. And the disciple who accepts a trial as an invitation to grow and therefore qualify for eternal life can find peace in the midst of the struggle.

I spoke recently to a young father who has lost his job in the recent economic crisis. He knows that hundreds of thousands of people with exactly his skills are looking desperately for work to feed their families. His quiet confidence led me to ask him what he had done to become so confident that he would find a way to support his

family. He said he had examined his life to be sure that he had done all he could to be worthy of the Lord’s help. It was clear that his need and his faith in Jesus Christ were leading him to be obedient to God’s commandments when it is hard to do. He said that he saw that opportunity as he and his wife were reading in Alma where the Lord had prepared a people to find the gospel through adversity.

You remember the moment when Alma turned to the man who led the people in distress. The man told him that they had been persecuted and rejected for their poverty. And the record goes:

“And now when Alma heard this, he turned him about, his face immediately towards him, and he beheld with great joy; for he beheld that their afflictions had truly humbled them, and that they were in a preparation to hear the word.

“Therefore he did say no more to the other multitude; but he stretched forth his hand, and cried unto those whom he beheld, who were truly penitent, and said unto them:

“I behold that ye are lowly in heart; and if so, blessed are ye.”⁴

The scripture goes on to praise those of us who prepared for adversity in the more prosperous times. Many of you had the faith to try to qualify for the help you now need, before the crisis came.

Alma continued, “Yea, he that truly humbleth himself, and repenteth of his sins, and endureth to the end, the same shall be blessed—yea, much more blessed than they who are compelled to be humble because of their exceeding poverty.”⁵

That young man with whom I spoke recently was one who had done more than put away food and a little savings for the misfortune which living prophets had warned would come. He had begun to prepare his heart to be worthy of the Lord’s help which he knew he would in the near future need. When I asked his wife on the day he lost his job if she was worried, she said with cheerfulness in her voice, “No, we’ve just come from the bishop’s office. We are full-tithe payers.” Now, it is still too early to tell, but I felt assured as they seemed to be assured: “Things will work out.” Tragedy did not erode their faith; it tested it and strengthened it. And the feeling of peace the Lord has promised has already been delivered in the midst of the storm. Other miracles are sure to follow.

The Lord always suits the relief to the person in need to best strengthen and purify him or her. Often it will come in the inspiration to do what might seem especially hard for the person who needs help himself. One of the great trials of life is losing to death a beloved husband or wife. President Hinckley described the hurt when Sister Hinckley was no longer at his side. The Lord knows the needs of those separated from loved ones by death. He saw the pain of widows and knew of their needs from His earthly experience. He asked a beloved



Apostle, from the agony of the cross, to care for His widowed mother, who would now lose a son. He now feels the needs of husbands who lose their wives and the needs of wives who are left alone by death.

Most of us know widows who need attention. What touches me is to hear, as I have, of an older widow whom I was intending to visit again having been inspired to visit a younger widow to comfort her. A widow needing comfort herself was sent to comfort another. The Lord helped and blessed two widows by inspiring them to encourage each other. So He gave succor to them both.

The Lord sent help in that same way to the humble poor in Alma 34 who had responded to the teaching and testimony of His servants. Once they had repented and were converted, they were still poor. But He sent them to do for others what they might reasonably have thought was beyond them and which they still needed. They were to give others what they would have hoped He would give them. Through His servant, the Lord gave these poor converts this hard task: "After ye have done all these things, if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need—I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith."⁶

That may seem much to ask of people in such great need themselves. But I know one young man who was inspired to do that very thing early in his marriage. He and his wife were barely getting by on a tiny budget. But he saw another couple even poorer than they were. To the surprise of his wife, he gave help to them from their scanty finances. A promised blessing of peace came while they were still in their poverty. The blessing of



prosperity beyond their fondest dreams came later. And the pattern of seeing someone in need, someone with less or in pain, has never ceased.

There is yet another trial which, when endured well, can bring blessings in this life and blessings forever. Age and illness can test the best of us. My friend served as our bishop when my daughters were still at home. They speak of what they felt when he bore his simple testimony around campfires in the mountains. He loved them, and they knew it. He was released as our bishop. He had served as a bishop before in another state. Those I have met who were from his earlier ward remember him as my daughters do.

I visited him in his home from time to time to thank him and to give him priesthood blessings. His health began a slow decline. I can't remember all the ailments he suffered. He needed surgery. He was in constant pain. Yet every time I visited him to give him comfort, he turned the tables; I always was the one comforted. His back and legs forced him to use a cane to walk. Yet there he was in church, always sitting near the door, where he could greet those arriving early, with a smile.

I will never forget the feeling of wonder and admiration which came over me when I opened the back door at home and saw him coming up our driveway. It was the day we put out our garbage cans to be picked up by city workers. I had put the can out in the morning. But there he was dragging my garbage can up the hill with one hand while he balanced himself with a cane in his other hand. He was giving me the help he thought I needed when he needed it far more than I did. And he was helping with a smile and without being asked.

I visited him when he finally had to be cared for by nurses and doctors. He was lying in a hospital bed, still in pain and still smiling. His wife had called me to say that he was getting weaker. My son and I gave him a priesthood blessing as he lay in the bed with tubes and bottles connected to him. I sealed the blessing with a promise that he would have time and the strength to do all that God had for him to do in this life, to pass every test. He stretched out his hand to grasp mine as I stepped away from his bed to leave. I was surprised at the strength of his grip and the firmness in his voice when he said, "I'm going to make it."

I left thinking that I would see him again soon. But the phone call came within a day. He was gone to the glorious place where he will see the Savior, who is his perfect judge and will be ours. As I spoke at his funeral, I thought of the words of Paul when he knew that he would go to that place where my neighbor and friend has gone:

"But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

"I have fought a good fight, I

have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”⁷

I have confidence that my neighbor made it through his trial and will face his judge with a joyous smile.

I bear you my testimony that God the Father lives. He set a course for each of us that can polish and perfect us to be with Him. I testify that the Savior lives. His Atonement makes possible our being purified as we keep His commandments and our sacred covenants. And I know from my own experience that He can and will give us strength to rise through every trial. President Monson is the Lord’s prophet. He holds all the keys of the priesthood. This is the Lord’s true Church in which we are, with Him, lifting each other and being blessed to succor the fellow sufferers He places in our way. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Alma 7:11–13.
2. D&C 121:1–2.
3. D&C 121:7–10.
4. Alma 32:6–8.
5. Alma 32:15.
6. Alma 34:28.
7. 2 Timothy 4:5–8.