

Even during one of
the most miserable
experiences of his
life, the Prophet
Joseph Smith found
hope, help, and
healing.



HOW TO FIND Help in Your Hardest Trials

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“O GOD, WHERE ART THOU?”

Things must be pretty bad to ask a desperate question like that. For the Prophet Joseph Smith, who was suffering in Liberty Jail in Missouri, USA, they were.

The year was 1839. Joseph and his friends had been in prison—on false charges—for over four months. It was the coldest winter on record, and they had barely anything to keep warm. His family, his friends, and the rest of the Church had been driven from the county by violent mobs. Joseph had very little contact with them. It was one of the darkest times in Joseph’s life.

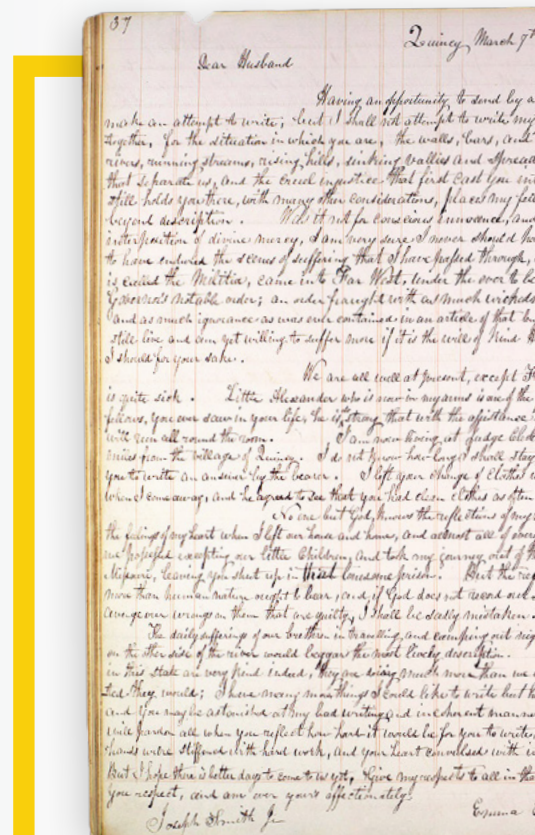
A Light in the Darkness

At one point, Joseph asked from the depths of this dark prison, “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?” (Doctrine and Covenants 121:1–2).

Even in a life full of trials, something about Liberty Jail seemed to drain Joseph Smith more than almost any other difficulty.

However, right during the worst of it, a ray of hope shone down into that cold prison cell.

Joseph and the other prisoners received some unexpected letters from friends and family—and the darkness of the experience decreased.



On March 7, 1839, Emma Smith wrote a letter to her husband, Joseph, who was imprisoned in Liberty Jail.

The Power of Friendship

About that occasion, Joseph Smith said, “We received some letters last evening . . . all breathing a kind and consoling spirit. . . . When we read those letters they were to our souls as the gentle air is refreshing.”¹

Of course, those letters didn’t make the jail warmer. They didn’t make the guards kinder, nor the food taste better. But the letters made all the difference as to how the prisoners *felt*. That simple show of support from friends and family helped Joseph move from wondering where God was, to being able to hear the comforting words of the Savior, “My son, peace be unto thy soul” (Doctrine and Covenants 121:1, 7).

Joseph Smith offered this perspective: “Those who have not been enclosed in the walls of a prison without cause or provocation can have but a little idea how sweet the voice of a friend is. One token of friendship from any source whatever awakens and calls into action every sympathetic feeling.”²

You most likely know someone who is struggling. You might not think there’s anything you could do to help, but Joseph’s experience in Liberty Jail teaches us otherwise. Your words can have the same effect on those you care about as the letters did for Joseph. You can send a letter or a text, make a phone call, or stop by in person.

Who needs to hear from you today? Write some ideas on what you could say:

How have Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ helped you in trials? Write about some experiences:

Revelation Is Within Reach

Another truth we can learn from Liberty Jail is that, like Joseph, you can still receive comfort and revelation from Heavenly Father and the Savior even when you’re going through something terrible.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles once spoke about Liberty Jail and taught: “When you have to, you can have sacred, revelatory, profoundly instructive experience with the Lord in *any* situation you are in. Indeed, let me say that even a little stronger: You can have sacred, revelatory, profoundly instructive experience with the Lord *in the most miserable experiences of your life*—in the worst settings, while enduring the most painful injustices, when facing the most insurmountable odds and opposition you have ever faced.”³

As you walk through your own refiner’s fire, or spend your own nights in a type of Liberty Jail, you might be tempted to think God is far from you. But it’s during those times when He may be closer than ever!

All in This Together

As Joseph Smith's time in Liberty Jail demonstrates, trials come to us all even when we're following Jesus Christ.

Another revelation in Liberty Jail reminded Joseph Smith that he wasn't the first to suffer deeply. The Lord, after describing all types of suffering, said: "The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?" (Doctrine and Covenants 122:8).

Trials come to each of us. But because the Savior suffered for our sins and pains, we can take comfort knowing that He can help us through our suffering. The Lord told Joseph, "Fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever" (Doctrine and Covenants 122:9). Heaven's help is available to all of us.

Refined and Stronger

The Prophet Joseph Smith didn't enjoy his experiences in Liberty Jail. Yet he grew through those experiences. And the lessons he learned and revelations he received inspire each of us through our trials.

Elder Gary E. Stevenson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught: "I believe that one day, each of you will look back at the canceled events, the sadness, the disappointments, and the loneliness attendant to the challenging times we are passing through to see them overshadowed by choice blessings and increased faith and testimonies. I believe that in this life, and in the life to come, your afflictions, . . . your Liberty Jail, will be consecrated for your gain. I pray that, along with Nephi, we can acknowledge the afflictions in the course of our days while at the same time recognizing that we are highly favored of the Lord."⁴

If you're in the middle of your own heart-wrenching trials right now, please know that, with God's help, you'll eventually come through this stronger and holier. 🏰

NOTES

1. Joseph Smith, "Letter to the Church and Edward Partridge, 20 March 1839," 7, josephsmithpapers.org; spelling, punctuation, and capitalization standardized.
2. "Letter to the Church and Edward Partridge," 7.
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Lessons from Liberty Jail" (Brigham Young University devotional, Sept. 7, 2008), 3–4, speeches.byu.edu.
4. Gary E. Stevenson, Oct. 2020 general conference (*Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2020, 105).

How has God made you stronger through trials?
Write about some experiences:

