



*Joy* the  
*Other Side*  
*of Sorrow*

*Steve Dunn Hanson*

# Joy, the Other Side of Sorrow

Steve Dunn Hanson

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*To those who shared*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Introduction](#)

[Understanding](#)

[Preparing](#)

[Overcoming](#)

[Learning](#)

[Choosing](#)

[Appendix](#)



# Introduction

To see and to experience the paradox of the joy which is related to sorrow is to know something of Christ. Through a process of understanding, preparing, overcoming, learning, and choosing as we face difficulties in our lives, our knowledge of Him expands. And as a result, we can become like Him. This book\* is about that process.

Much of the book is based upon interviews and conversations I had with people who have experienced this paradox in varying degrees. In selecting individuals to interview I sought a mix of people dealing with a broad range of experiences, in both content and intensity, so that the directional beam could be as bright and wide as possible.

Those who participated in this project shared with me feelings of a deeply personal and often confidential nature. The trade-off for including such sensitive observations was to maintain their anonymity, rather than to give them direct credit for their remarkable insights. Therefore I have changed their names and disguised some of the circumstances that might identify them.

The following pages contain many quotes from these people who have faced great difficulties and who offer empathy and insight for others. Though the quotes appear here pretty much as they were spoken, some minor editing on them has been done, mainly to provide clarity. A brief description of each individual's circumstances is included in the Appendix, but I wish to introduce here:

Ann, mother of a comatose daughter

Burt, father of a wayward daughter

Carol, mother with polio

Donna, young mother who contracted AIDS from her husband

Grace, woman with hearing loss who also cares for invalid husband

Janet, divorced mother with adopted children

Larry, man who struggled with business failures

Linda, divorced mother with large family

Loren, diabetic man on dialysis

Mark, young father with terminal cancer

Mary, mother who lost young daughter to cancer

Michael, father whose baby died at birth

Ron, man who was excommunicated for adultery (now reinstated)

Ted, man with chronic depression

\*This book was originally published in 1991 by BookCraft (now an imprint of Deseret Book). Subsequently the rights to publication were sold to the author, the publisher of this EBook. Other than a few minor changes this EBook edition (2010) is the same as the original edition.



# Understanding

...having no joy, for they knew no misery. --2 Nephi 2:23

A number of years ago my granddaughter Nichole, who was four years old at the time, called me on the phone. "Grandpa, I cut myself!"

It had been long enough since the incident occurred that she was no longer emotional about it, but it was obvious she was going to milk every ounce of sympathy from me that she could. I could tell the injury wasn't very serious, but being a cooperative grandfather, I was appropriately sympathetic. "How big was the cut, sweetheart?"

She dropped the phone and yelled, "Mommy! How big is my cut?"

I could hear her mother's response. "About two inches."

Nichole picked up the phone and, evidently not satisfied that two inches was important enough, declared, "Mommy said my cut was two inches; but Grandpa, it was a *long* two inches!"

As many of us do on occasion, Nichole was taking some pleasure in her pain. For some, there seems to be a sort of gratification or sense of accomplishment when someone else views our suffering with sympathy or awe. Is this the *joy* that comes from sorrow? I don't think so. I don't think this sensation of temporary satisfaction is what most of us would call "joy." Joy is deeper, more meaningful, longer lasting, more.... More what? We have all tasted of joy to one extent or another, but defining it is another matter. Many people think about joy in some sort of relationship to pain, though not in the pleasure/masochistic sense of my granddaughter's experience. For example, some might even define joy as the absence of pain. One woman, divorced and caring for her adopted children, said, "Maybe joy's like waking from a bad dream and realizing it isn't real. And you feel good because it wasn't real." But upon reflection, she noted that the relationship of pain or sorrow to joy is not so cut and dried. "I know this: Joy is more because of the pain. I always see joy now in the context of opposition because, before the opposition, it is some lesser level of joy." (Janet.)

However we might try to define joy, it seems we come up with

"sorrow" or "pain" somewhere in our definition. While we are stumbling around with definitions, how would we define sorrow? We use words like *hurt, anguish, misery, or suffering* to describe the symptoms of sorrow, but what do those words mean? And around and around we go.

It would seem that joy and sorrow are almost indefinable; that is, a person would have great difficulty describing them to someone who hadn't experienced them. Joy and sorrow need to be experienced to be fully known. Even then, understanding them is a different matter! We do know this: Joy is real and sorrow is real. We "want" joy, we "don't want" sorrow. They both have dimension in time, intensity, and quantity. Experiencing joy and sorrow seems to have something to do with reality, with our *aliveness*. Indeed the *feeling* of joy and sorrow appears to be fundamental to our existence.

As I have studied the scriptures, two passages have been of particular help to me in trying to understand what this means: "Thou wilt show me the path of life: *in thy presence* is fulness of joy" (Psalm 16:11, emphasis added); and "*spirit and element, inseparably connected*, receive a fulness of joy" (D&C 93:33, emphasis added). Apparently our joy--our state of happiness, if you will--is in direct proportion to our proximity to the Savior. When we are in His presence--and I believe that means being like Him--we receive all of the joy that can be received. It is infinite. It is a fulness. But in order to receive it, spirit and element must be inseparably connected. In other words we must have bodies and the experiences and sensations that come with them. In plain language that means we must feel sorrow. That means we must be acquainted with grief (see description of Christ in Isaiah 53:3). We were sent upon the earth to experience many things, including sorrow; otherwise we could not know joy, much less receive its fulness.

Perhaps a few scriptural passages will be helpful in demonstrating a relationship between joy and sorrow. Lehi teaches his son Jacob about the importance of opposition. "To bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man, after [God] had created our first parents, ...it must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter." Lehi continues, "And

now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the Garden of Eden .... They would have remained in a state of innocence, *having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin* .... [But] Adam fell that men might be; and *men are, that they might have joy.*" (2 Nephi 2: 15, 22-23, 25, emphasis added.)

Latter-day scriptures also tell us about bitter experiences leading to joy. "And in that day Adam blessed God . . . saying: Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy .... And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we . . . never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption." (Moses 5:10-11.) "And the Lord spake unto Adam, saying: Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, even so when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts, and they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good" (Moses 6:55). "My people must be tried in all things, that they may be prepared to receive the glory that I have for them" (D&C 136:31). "God having provided some better things for them through their sufferings, for without sufferings they could not be made perfect" JST, Hebrews 11:40).

A woman whose young daughter died from cancer reflected, "I don't think trials are there without a reason. I don't think pain can or should be escaped. Even though it's difficult and you wouldn't choose it, I don't see how any of us can be proven, or that I can return to the state that I want to, without having gone through experiences that are painful and difficult." (Mary.)

But why? Why is experiencing sorrow and pain necessary in order to experience joy? I'm not sure that I know. But I know that it is. The Savior's life was a testimony of that. He who declared to the Nephite people that His joy was now full, shortly before had "groaned within himself" and declared Himself "troubled" (see 3 Nephi 17: 14, 20). To a discouraged Joseph Smith, languishing in a filthy prison, Jesus said, "All these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?" (D&C 122:7-8.)

A divorced mother with a large family observed: "Joy has everything to do with sorrow because you will never understand what Christ is like until you suffer in a way that allows you to catch a glimpse at what he has suffered." (Linda.)

The Savior is our way. We cannot come to where He is without following His path. It is a paradox that He who ascended above all reached that pinnacle by way of descending below all. (See Alma 7: 11-12 and D&C 88:6.) Experiencing the height required the experiencing of the depth. And it appears it is so with us. It seems that suffering is part of the formula for us to understand and know Jesus Christ and to receive the resulting joy. That realization has not always made my own trials easier, but it has given them purpose. Sometimes that is enough.

A woman who faces the pain of polio told me, "I would like to think that joy is an absence of pain, but I really don't think so. Joy comes in being able to meet your pain and overcome it. You can have joy and pain at the same time, but you can't have one without the other. If you don't have pain, you can't understand what real joy is. If you haven't gone through agony, you don't understand beauty and peace. If everything has always been the same, you just don't even know what joy is." (Carol.)

Joy and sorrow may be *opposite ends* of the stick, but they are part of the same stick. Without both ends, there is no stick! Indeed, the length and breadth, the height and depth of the one in our lives often seems to determine the dimensions of the other.

Reflecting on her experiences with her daughter's disease and death, Mary said, "In an experience like this you feel all of the senses. Your emotions go from one extreme to the other. You are taken to the max in all directions. As much as I would be the first one to say to Heavenly Father, 'Don't give it to me; make this an easy road,' I don't think I could have known the joy I know now if I hadn't had this experience. You cannot experience joy without the sorrow. I don't even want to say it because it sounds so trite! But it's real! I know because I have experienced it. On the one hand your heart is broken, but at the same time the Comforter is there, saying all is well. I experienced them both at the same time. I was feeling intense pain and, at the same time, the peace of assurance. You have to

feel real pain to experience joy, and the intensity of the one determines the intensity of the other."

Orson F. Whitney, with great insight, stated: "No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. . . . It is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire and which will make us more like our Father and Mother in heaven." (Quoted in Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1972], p. 98.)

We learn about sorrow as a result of our gaining a body and experiencing, firsthand, life in a telestial world with its moral and mortal frailties. By choosing to use the resulting knowledge to bring us closer to Christ, we come to know joy.



# Preparing

*if ye are prepared ye shall not fear. – D&C 38:30*

Some years ago while serving as a counselor in the stake presidency, I called my stake president to talk about some details concerning the refurbishing of our stake center. He wasn't there, so I gave his wife the message and chatted with her for a few minutes. Neither one of us knew that, at that very moment, her sixteen-year-old daughter was being airlifted by helicopter to the trauma center at the hospital. The girl had been a passenger in a car that had been hit broadside by a large pickup truck. Her parents would not find out about the accident for another thirty minutes or so. In the meantime they were completely oblivious to the fact that something had already transpired that would drastically change their lives.

I visited with them during the two weeks their daughter stayed in the intensive care unit of the hospital, and many times during her lengthy period of recovery. I watched the whole schedule of their lives change as they devoted their time to the physical and mental rehabilitation of their daughter. I was often struck with the reminder that the event that brought such a change in their lives had actually happened a significant amount of time before they became aware of it; until then, life for them went on as usual.

It seems to me that their experience is something like the veil that has been placed over our minds relative to knowing future events, or even events that have already taken place. I suppose that in a way all events have already transpired. At least we are told that "all things are *present*" with the Lord (Moses 1:6). I believe that statement has much to say about eternity, and more will be said about that concept throughout this book. There can be no question that the Lord knows "the end from the beginning" (Abraham 2:8), and that "the Lord knoweth all things which are to come" (Words of Mormon 1:7). So, in that sense, everything that will happen to us during the rest of our lives has already happened, as far as the Lord is concerned. We are just not aware of it yet. We will spend the rest of our lives discovering what those occurrences are. The impact on us

comes only as we become aware of each of those events. (Of course that does not mean the Lord predestines our actions. We have our agency. To *know* does not mean to *cause*!)

If the Lord sees all of these things as if they were "present" with Him, why can't we? Why didn't my stake president and his wife "see" the accident when it happened? Indeed, why didn't they "see" the accident *before* it happened? If they had known it was going to happen, wouldn't they have been better prepared? Maybe so. But apparently our experience here in this mortal existence requires that we be veiled from past and future events, so that we can obtain the kind of growth necessary to be like the Savior.

The stated purpose of the Lord in putting us in this telestial environment is to "prove [us] herewith, to *see* if [we] will do all things whatsoever [He] shall command [us]" (Abraham 3:25). Much of the trial, the proving, comes in our simply *not* knowing. The not knowing is what allows us to develop the faith and spiritual reliance necessary to accomplish that which we have been sent on this earth to do. The test, then, is in how we respond to these unknowns as we are confronted with them, and that will determine the extent to which those experiences will ultimately bring us closer to the Savior. But what about being prepared? How can we prepare to make the most of experiences if we have no idea what's coming? In a sense, the very lack of preparation may have its plus side. "I think that part of the reason that this divorce experience has been a trial is that I wasn't prepared in that area. Would it have been the same kind of trial, would I have learned as much, if I had been better prepared? I don't know." (Janet.) After all, it is what we learn from the experience that gives the experience value. Perhaps our preparation, then, shouldn't be to try to figure out ahead of time what specific things we will do when a trial comes along. That would be a futile exercise anyway. Instead, it would be more productive for us to concentrate on doing those things today that will help us better *use* whatever experiences we face to bring us closer to Christ.

Some time ago I began to be concerned that I was ill-prepared, should something unforeseen happen while I was driving my car. I finally became

motivated enough to do something about that concern. I bought a cheap, plastic toolbox and proceeded to make my own emergency travel kit. As I tried to contemplate all of the possible problems and difficulties I might run into, so that I might have the proper remedy at hand, I became bogged down with the impossibility of the task. There were just too many things that might happen; I couldn't possibly have everything in place to handle each possible event. Yet I knew having an emergency kit was still a good idea. I just had to use some common sense in putting it together.

I finally determined that there were some things I could put in there that could help me get through most potential problems. After considerable thought, I chose my items. They were basic things like first-aid supplies, a screwdriver, flares, and a flashlight. Although my kit was simple, it was adequate; and I drove the roads with far greater peace of mind.

I believe we can build a spiritual emergency kit for use as we confront unseen difficulties on this telestial road we are traveling. There are a few basic spiritual tools-prayer, the scriptures, and temple attendance-that will stand us in good stead when we are confronted with an "emergency." And just as I need to know how to use the tools that sit in the emergency kit in my car in order for them to be of any value, so we must know how to use our spiritual tools if they are to be of any use when a trial comes. If we are prepared, we will have the spiritual resources that will not only help us cope but also bring us substantive, Christ-centered growth as a result of our adversities.

### *Spiritual Conditioning*

Perhaps it goes without saying that, before we can become proficient in the use of spiritual tools, our spiritual muscles must be in shape. Consistent righteousness-the constant striving for righteous thoughts and righteous actions-is the conditioning needed. Simply put, the extent of our faithfulness determines the extent of our faith. And our faith determines the effectiveness of our spiritual tools.

The Lord admonished Joseph Smith that he "should have been faithful;

... and [God] would have been with [him] in every time of trouble" (D&C 3:8). Keeping the commandments brings us the personal assurance that Christ's grace is ample for us, no matter what our future trial may be (see Moroni 10:32). It is this assurance, brought on by our faithfulness, that allows us to use all of the spiritual tools at our disposal at the time they are required and in the most effective ways possible. A diabetic testifies, "I believe that my basic religious belief has given me the strength to withstand my physical problems. If a person doesn't have this, I don't think it's really possible to cope very well. This goes back to my childhood- the rearing that I got at home and the preparation my mother and father gave me. I had an opportunity to go on a mission; and, even though it was well over forty years ago, that experience established my testimony and helped me to understand these kinds of things. All of these things, and my desire to live as I was taught, are the foundation for my outlook on life now." (Loren.)

### *Spiritual Tools*

Our veils are as securely in place as was my stake president's. But the Lord has not left us without the means of breaking through to receive His light and strength and comfort. These "veil-parters" are the spiritual tools He has made available to us so that we might make the most of our earthly experience. Notwithstanding that the Lord may from time to time unilaterally breach the veil, usually it is pierced as a result of our effectively utilizing these tools.

#### *Prayer*

Prayer is the most basic of our spiritual tools. Years ago we took a survey among the active members of our stake. A number of the questions had to do with prayer. I was not surprised when 90 percent indicated that their prayers were answered "frequently." After all, these were the active members. However, only two-thirds of them said they had personal evening prayers on a "regular" basis, and only one-third said they had their personal morning prayers on a "regular" basis! I found this somewhat incongruous. In my experience there is a direct relationship between the

effectiveness of my prayers and the degree to which I rely on them.

Sincere prayer is our acknowledgment that God lives and that we are in need of His help. This humility on our part seems to be what is necessary in order for our ears to hear, our eyes to see, and our hearts to feel what He is trying to communicate to us. Prayer is for our benefit. Certainly God doesn't need us to voice our needs and wants in order for Him to know what they are. But *our* vocalizing those needs prepares *us* to receive the help that He is trying to send us.

Perhaps this process is like the relationship of radio signals and an antenna. Through the Holy Ghost, God is trying to speak to us; to give us instruction, solace, assurance, and knowledge. The promise is that "the Holy Ghost . . . will show unto [us] all things [that we] should do" (2 Nephi 32:5). That Spirit is already filling the airwaves. We just need to tap into it. Prayer is our antenna. The more fervent, the more sincere, the more heartfelt our prayers are, the more directed and high-reaching our antenna is, and the more capable we become of hearing that still, small voice. Developing the spiritual tool of prayer teaches us how to utilize the gift of the Holy Ghost in our lives now, and that gift can then help us prepare in very specific ways for trials that are yet unseen. For "the Lord knoweth all things which are to come; wherefore, he worketh in [us] to do according to his will" (Words of Mormon 1:7).

Here is an example. "I was in the Deseret Book store and I was buying some books, and there was this book on the shelf called *God's Special Children* [about children with handicaps]. I thought that looked interesting; and I picked it up and was- perusing it when the Spirit said, 'Buy that book.' I wanted to drop it like a hot potato! My initial reaction was, 'Does that mean I'm going to have a handicapped child? No! I'm not going to buy that book!' I had a struggle. How often does the Spirit say so strongly, 'Buy that book'? So I put it back on the shelf, and I said, 'No, I don't want to do this!' But I'm a very logical person, and I said, 'Oh, so you think if you don't buy this book you're not going to have a handicapped child? I mean, if you're going to have a handicapped child, you're going to have a handicapped child; so you'd better buy the book!' So I bought the book and I took it home and I started reading it and I cried. It is a really

neat book, and I thought, "I can't deal with this now. If I ever have a handicapped child, I'll get the book out.' And I put it away on the bookshelf.

"Life was busy and I forgot about it. Then, in the hospital that night of the accident [in which her daughter's brain was injured], I said, 'The book! The book! That's why I bought the book!' So I knew my daughter wasn't going to be normal. And I went home, and I said, 'It's time to read it!' And I got it off the shelf and I read the book.

"There was another thing that happened just before the accident that I think was the Holy Ghost preparing me. You know, you go every night to kiss the kids and pull up the covers and tuck them in, even though they're asleep. My daughter is an unusual child, and no matter how late it was when you went in to pull up her covers, she'd wake up just enough to put her arms around you and say, 'I love you, Mommy.' She always did that. I had this feeling. It was probably about a month before the accident. It was like a premonition that said, 'I wish it could always be this way, but it won't. It will change.' I hate those forebodings! You think maybe it will change in a positive way, but you know. You know that's not what it means. So I was being prepared. Subtly, very subtly, Heavenly Father holds your hand. At the time they don't make sense, but in retrospect they make sense and are a comfort. I suppose I was prepared to hear the promptings. I was faithful in my prayers, in my asking for guidance. But maybe He had to use a megaphone with me; I don't know." (Ann.)

From a woman dealing with a different trial: "My basic habit of prayer has been my best preparation for this trial. It has given me someplace to go, access to somebody beyond me with some advice. Because I didn't know! I can't express to you enough, I didn't know what I was doing." (Janet.)

### *The Scriptures*

The scriptures are another necessary part of our spiritual emergency kit. In my life, at least, it is through the scriptures that the Lord most often answers my prayers. As we have experiences similar to those we have read about in the scriptures, we can call to remembrance that which we have studied and pondered. This can give us strength and direction in the

midst of our adversities.

Another man had similar experiences. "Throughout school I was a pretty regular reader of the scriptures. I let it slide a little bit after I got out of school, but then repented! A couple of years out of school, I made a vow with myself and the Lord that I wouldn't go to sleep at night without reading something in the scriptures. And I've kept that promise. It's changed my life! It's been like building up a reservoir of insight for when trouble comes.

"When my wife and I had an opportunity to go into a new business, we applied the principles in the ninth section of the Doctrine and Covenants and took our decision to go into the business to the Lord for confirmation. We received confirmation, and away we went. It turned out to be devastating! We lost all of our savings as a result of circumstances completely beyond our control, and my faith was really tested. I kept asking myself, 'Am I sure? Did the Lord really confirm my decision?' I really started to question the whole process of revelation. I even had a priesthood leader that I had a lot of respect for tell me that I must have been misreading the Spirit! I remember I was really low.

"And then this scripture popped into my mind that I had read a hundred times and never really paid any attention to. It was in Luke and had to do with the Savior's going into the wilderness for forty days and being tempted by Satan. It said Jesus was 'led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil' (Luke 4: 1-2). And then it hit me. The Savior was led by the Spirit into a really adverse situation, and that was just like me! His experience helped give Him the strength He needed to carry out His mission on the earth. To me, I had thought that my business decision was going to make me a lot of money and that was why I was impressed to make it. I was stupid! Remembering that scripture at that time changed the whole way I looked at things. I had no idea what the end result of that experience was going to be, but my faith in the ultimate outcome and in the realness of personal revelation was reestablished.

"That situation never did work out financially, and in fact led to another even more financially devastating condition; but what I gained spiritually as a result of those experiences that the Spirit led me into, I

wouldn't trade for anything. I learned to stop telling the Lord what constituted a blessing. I learned that any experience that brought me closer to the Savior was, in fact a blessing. And these experiences did exactly that. And they were, therefore, blessings. I have often thought since, how would I have handled those situations if I wasn't familiar enough with the scriptures to have that passage come into my mind at that crucial time? I don't know, but I don't think I would have been in the frame of mind to have learned what I have learned." (Larry.)

A young man close to death has increased appreciation for the scriptures. "Probably the greatest frustration I have had relative to being prepared for my challenge is in relationship to the scriptures. In the past I just didn't take the time to read them like I should and I am missing some great help because I didn't do it." (Mark.)

If we are faithful in reading and pondering the scriptures on a day-to-day basis, the Lord can use His written word to bless us in the times of our need.

### *The Temple*

The temple is another tool that puts us in touch with the Lord. I have discovered that the temple experience, like an artichoke, is layered. It has meaning even at the surface, but there is much more. Only the very base of the artichoke leaf contains edible meat. Each succeeding layer of leaves contains more and more meat in relation to the leaf. Going through each layer finally reveals the artichoke heart, which is all meat, tender and succulent. Those not familiar with artichokes may stop after picking off a few leaves or even a layer, figuring the small amount of meat they get off of each of the surface leaves is not worth the effort to continue. They miss altogether the delicate inner leaves and the savory, fleshy heart.

So it is with the temple experience. Some partake of it only on a surface level, then stop altogether. They may feel that the initial degree of satisfaction was not worth their time and trouble, and they are unwilling to look further. Others nibble at the surface from time to time, enjoying the meat, but not having the faith or desire to go any further. On the other hand, faithful members partake of the experience often, hoping that their understanding will be enlightened and their knowledge increased as a

result of their consistent expression of faith and desire. Inevitably they are rewarded. The layers are stripped away, as constant experience with the temple brings to view nuances and verities that at first blush (and second and third and fourth and... !) escaped view.

"I used to go weekly to the temple when I was at school. And I would go as much as I possibly could after I was married, somehow knowing that the time would come when I would not be able to go as frequently. When my daughter was in the hospital after the accident, I would go as often as I could. I made a real effort to go. Since she has come home, I have only been three or four times, because I literally don't get out of town! I want to go more, but I can't. Interestingly enough, as life happens I find things from the temple being explained now. I always went to the temple not understanding it, wondering what I was supposed to be learning. Oh, I had little insights here and there, but I wasn't seeing the great light that I was supposed to see; and I'm not an intellectual slug! I would say to myself, 'What am I missing? Why am I not getting more out of this?' But I would keep going. I had to force myself to go, because I wasn't really understanding it. I was hearing it, but I didn't know what I was supposed to be learning, and I looked at it as service for the dead. It's been interesting that now, in the least expected times, I am learning more when I can't go. Now, as something is happening in my life, there will be an illumination from my past experiences in the temple, like a light has turned on.

"So even going to the temple was a preparation. Sometimes you have to force yourself. You've got to go first; then the blessing comes. And who's to say, it might take years. The blessings of the endowment have helped me cope with this! My abilities have been enhanced! The temple has made it easier for me to handle this situation." (Ann.)

That which we have learned in the temple, like that which we have studied in the scriptures, is fleshed out and given real meaning as we confront life and its trials. The resulting understanding builds our faith and gives us strength as we seek to find purpose and growth in our sorrow.

*“If Ye Are Prepared Ye Shall Not Fear”*

I was impressed with a comment made by my stake president several days after his daughter's accident and while she was still in a coma. "I am glad that I was no stranger to prayer and to the whisperings of the Spirit and to the scriptures when this thing happened. I am grateful the communication channels with my Heavenly Father were already well established." Our spiritual emergency kit is built by developing habits that allow God to bless us amply with His grace when severe difficulties come. Seeking righteousness in our daily lives, and learning to use the "veil-parting" gifts of prayer, the scriptures, and temple attendance are the ways we prepare for life's challenges.

It is important to recognize that this kind of preparation helps us not only to cope but also to see; that is, to see the opportunity for Christ-like growth in our trial. Several years ago a young friend of mine returned home after serving an honorable full-time mission. In his report to the high council and stake presidency, he said that one of the great blessings of his mission was that it taught him to *look for* spiritual experiences. Perhaps that is a key to our being prepared. Our willingness to look for spiritual growth and understanding in all of the experiences that life brings helps us to look at tribulation in a much more favorable light. Far from being Pollyannaish, such a perspective allows us to see "things as they really are" (Jacob 4:13) and to open doors to truth and understanding.

Fear is an anxiety associated with the unknown. Preparation is a light that helps us see more clearly. Hence, "If ye are prepared ye shall not fear" (D&C 38:30).



# Overcoming

*Gird up now thy loins. – Job 38:3*

I have found that real growth often comes when there is a change in our circumstances.

We have an inertial tendency. Change can force us to make the adjustments in our life that will at least allow us to cope with our new situation. Although sometimes painful, these challenges can help us move to new and higher spiritual plateaus and levels of understanding. Oftentimes the more difficult and traumatic the change, the more the potential for personal growth-and for joy. But we have to *handle* the change in order to achieve positive results.

I was commiserating with a friend of mine who raised twelve adopted children and who had seen several of them make choices in their teenage and adult lives that had brought great pain and sorrow. She said that it was interesting that, before any of her children were teenagers, she was constantly being asked to talk to adults at firesides and Sunday School classes about dealing with teenagers. She said that then she knew all of the answers! It was simple: Just maintain communication and patience and understanding, and everything will work out just fine. Oh, you'll have a wrinkle here or there, but your wise handling of these situations will ultimately iron out those wrinkles, and the results will virtually always be positive. She stopped giving those talks when her children became teenagers. If our adversities have no other positive result, they at least give us perspective. Handling them is anything but simple. Coping with them is anything but a "given."

When our children were very young, my wife and one of the teenage girls in our ward became fast friends. This young woman became for my wife the kid sister she never had, steady baby-sitter, and fun friend, all rolled into one. During this period my sister's baby passed away. My sister lived four hundred miles from us, and we decided to attend the funeral without our five little children. Naturally we asked my wife's young friend to stay with the children while we were away. It was literally the first time

that we had left them overnight. We were gone for two nights and three days. Needless to say, we were a bit concerned about how she would be able to handle our five very active kids!

When we arrived home, we were expecting the worst. But the children were dressed neatly, the house was immaculate, and the baby-sitter was calm, relaxed, and cool as a cucumber. "No big deal!" she said. "I don't know why everybody thinks having kids is a big deal! This was a cinch!"

Several years later, she married. About the sixth month of her first pregnancy, she called my wife; and, in the most dejected and weary tone, pleaded, "How do you do it? How do you do it with all of those kids?"

It is one thing to be a concerned observer and to dabble in someone else's difficulty; it is quite another to be fully immersed in your own "up-to-your-ears" problems! How *do* you do it? How do you do it when it's real, and you're right in the middle of it, and all of the clichés you have heard and repeated over the years are just a bunch of empty words?

There are times when people really can't handle everything. "I was in severe depression when my husband first left. I couldn't eat or sleep. My brain had basically shut down, and I wasn't functioning at all. It was during the summer, and the neighbors got worried because they never saw me or the girls. We'd stay in the house and wouldn't go anywhere. It was almost impossible for me just to get up. It would take me hours just to get out of bed and get dressed. It was the most phenomenal thing. I think about it now and I think it's so weird. You don't even realize it. You don't see it. You're so stuck when your brain isn't working just right. I've never had anything like that happen to me, ever! I'm always the most organized and productive person there is. It was amazing to me that this was even happening." (Linda.)

How do you do it? Perhaps the most meaningful thing that can be said is, you just do. Since no two experiences are exactly alike, there can be no set formula given, no panacea to apply universally. Yet there is something to be learned by observing the way others handle their adversities. After all, part of our experience here in mortality is seeing what others are doing. We multiply the effectiveness of our learning time considerably if we are astute observers. And we can observe significant similarities in the

ways some people have dealt successfully with their trials. It is worth contemplating these attitudes and actions to learn how they have helped others to overcome and to grow.

### *Using Our Spiritual Tool Kit*

"It sounds like a cliché, but it's not; it's reality. To handle this I read the scriptures, say my prayers, and go to church. I've read many books on coping and on my daughter's problems, but primarily it's the gospel. It sounds trite, but it's the gospel." (Ann.)

If we have been circumspect in living the gospel and consistent in our utilization of the tools of prayer, scripture reading, and the temple, it is natural to rely upon these tools once we are in the middle of a trial. But what if we have not prepared adequately? What if our faithfulness has been lacking and we have been dilatory in developing these gifts the Lord has given us?

Then it is time that we changed!

Whatever our degree of preparation, it seems that living the gospel, relying upon its principles, and seeking to conform our lives to the pattern it provides are vital keys to coping with our afflictions and growing as a result of them. Indeed, our trials can provide an opportunity to repent. Our adverse experiences may help us see for ourselves what the gospel is all about. The gospel can stop being just words on a page, and instead take on meaning in our actions and feelings and concerns.

"Before we moved to Utah, I had been the Young Women's president in our ward, and there was one of the Laurel girls I had spent some extra time with. I expressed my love for her and bore my testimony to her that the gospel was true and that there were no guarantees, but that if you lived the gospel and did the things you knew to be right, everything would be okay.

"She wrote me a letter later during the time of our trial. She said, 'It is true, isn't it? Everything you said to me is true, isn't it? If it is true, then I hope now it will give to you the strength to get through this trial in your life.' So basically she was just feeding back to me the things I had tried to

teach her. In a way she was saying, 'Put it to the test. Put what you believe and what you have taught to the test. Now is your test.'

"Up until then my life had pretty well gone like clockwork. We were happy in the Church, I had a wonderful husband, and a special relationship in our marriage. I had these beautiful children, and our family was wonderful. And all of a sudden I came to that time in my life when I was going to have to put to the test all of the things I knew and had believed, and all of the experiences, and all of the teachings, and my testimony. And I thought, 'She's right. It is! This is my test. Am I going to do it? Or am I going to sit back and let all of these things that mean the most to me go by the wayside?'" (Mary.)

It would seem logical that if we want the gospel to work for us in the time of our need, we need at that time to be committed to living it. Burt tried to remind himself and his daughter of this principle. "We were standing by the car, and my daughter was crying and talking about taking her life and how hopeless everything was. I'd heard the same thing a hundred times over the last ten years, and I guess I was a bit hardened to it. Because I wasn't responding emotionally, she was getting frustrated and kept saying, 'You just don't understand, Dad. Everything's going right for you, and you and Mom are happy, and you don't understand what I'm going through.' I put my arm around her and told her I loved her, and then explained as kindly as I could for the hundredth time that I couldn't change the formula. Living the gospel was how she'd pull out of her problems. Unless she was willing to try to do that, there was nothing I could say or do to bring her peace. I think she knew that, but she just didn't want to do it; and I knew we'd have this same conversation again, just like we've had it before. And it would continue until she wants to change."

I believe this concept is so fundamental that it is worth repeating:

*Basic commandment keeping helps establish the kind of faith that makes the gospel tools functional and efficacious in our lives.*

With the confidence that comes from our trying to do the right thing, prayer, scripture reading, and temple attendance help us pierce the veil by opening doors of understanding and providing sources of strength that would otherwise be unavailable to us. In other words, this process opens

the door to the Savior's grace.

### *Prayer*

"It is classic that adversity drives us to our knees. And that has been my experience. Throughout this thing I have been able to feel that remarkable communication with Heavenly Father through prayer. Consistently those prayers have been comforting and caring and useful for me." (Janet.)

How can prayer be "comforting and caring and useful" during our times of trial? Certainly when we see direct and rapid response to our supplication, there is comfort in that! "You can't imagine how wonderful it was as I was praying the night of my daughter's accident, to have my prayers answered with her voice saying she was all right! That was the most comforting thing in the world! God couldn't have said anything better! I didn't want to see an angel; I wanted to know that Janie was okay! That's pretty powerful.

"Prayer has always been important to me. I prayed fervently before the accident and pray fervently now. I've had too many experiences to count, where my prayers have been answered. I get these insights, flashes of light, as answers. They can only come from Heavenly Father. I could be spending thousands of dollars on therapy, and I'd rather have the Lord. I get these insights from the Lord. They don't change my situation, but understanding does a lot. It does a lot in helping you cope." (Ann.)

For most of us, though, answers to our prayers don't seem to always come so quickly and discernibly. In fact, sometimes we are confused at the Lord's "answer," or feel that our pleadings have gone altogether unheard. Perhaps part of that confusion comes because we have arbitrarily predetermined the response that we will consider an "answer" from the Lord. To be so myopic certainly limits the blessing of prayer in our time of trial. To be willing to be patient and reliant upon the wisdom of the Lord allows us to see, at least in retrospect, that the Lord not only listens to our pleadings but also responds in ways that work for our best good.

"I think my experiences have taught me something about prayer. Back a number of years ago, I was at my office, working, when I received this phone call from my neighbor. She just said, 'Come home, quick; Nancy's

been hit by a car.' That was it. Nancy was my two-year-old daughter. I could tell by the tone of my neighbor's voice that it was serious, and I remember that, as I was driving home, I was praying and crying and thinking that my daughter was probably dead. And I was praying for some answers and to know what was happening. Then I got this feeling that, no matter what, everything was going to be all right.

"When I got home the paramedics were there and the ambulance was there. Nancy was lying, unconscious, in the middle of the street. She had been hit by a car while she was running across the street. Her head was swollen up like a basketball, and was black and blue from the internal bleeding. They put her in the ambulance, and my wife got in with her, and they took them to the hospital. I followed in the car, begging my Heavenly Father that He would let me heal her by the power of the priesthood. I received absolutely unmistakable confirmation that I could bless her to get well.

"After the doctors worked on her in the emergency room, they let me go in to give her a blessing. A member of our ward who lived by us anointed her, and I blessed her. I just simply blessed her that she could recover completely and that there would be no lasting effects of this injury. Even though she had a fracture around half her skull and was unconscious for over two days, she was home in four days; and within five or six weeks you wouldn't have known she had been in an accident.

"At this time my wife was pregnant with our sixth child. As it turned out, some really serious complications arose; and there was great concern about whether either she or the baby would survive. The doctor told her that she had to go into the hospital, and this was a good two months before the baby was due. I wanted to give her a blessing, and I prayed to know that I could bless her that she and the baby would live. But as I prayed I couldn't get a specific answer at all. More than I wanted to live I wanted to know that they were going to be okay; and I tried to put those words in the Lord's mouth, but I knew those were my words and not His.

"It came time for me to give her the blessing and I didn't know what to say. And then I had this feeling come over me that everything was okay, that the Lord was involved here, and that everything was all right. And

that's what I told her in the blessing. But I didn't bless her to get well or that the baby would be okay, because I didn't know that was going to happen. As it turned out, my wife lived and our baby died. It was a heartbreak. But we both felt that the Lord knew what He was doing, and we could accept it.

"That's been a number of years ago now, and that experience has brought about a real bonding in my family. I think sometimes we are so concerned about how we think something ought to turn out that we don't understand that the Lord has, in fact, answered our prayers, even if what happens isn't what we expected. I know my answer that everything would be all right here has happened. Everything is okay. I wish I had that son to raise here, and sometimes it was pretty hard-like when the time came that he would have been baptized or ordained to the priesthood. But it really has been okay." (Michael. )

Mary also struggled with answers to prayer. "You fast and pray and get no response, and fast and pray, and do it again, and sometimes feel forsaken. And you do your homework and all you can, and keep asking for the miracle and for the answers. And you ask yourself, 'What am I not doing? The answer isn't coming!' Of course I was wrong, but it was the way I thought. I just thought if I'd do this, this, and this, then the Lord would do this, this, and this. And nothing happened! I wasn't so sure anymore about death being a temporary separation, and my faith wavered.

"Then I started to see that this experience was giving me a depth of understanding and knowledge about the Church teachings and my experiences that I hadn't had. And even though I didn't understand why this was happening to us and to my daughter, I started to feel comfort and peace as I tried to live the gospel; and I started to see the importance of all that I had been taught about the gospel, about things I had taken so much for granted before. The Lord's answer wasn't the specific one I wanted, but it was real and it brought strength."

Broadening our concept of what constitutes answers to our prayers not only helps us *recognize* answers but also helps us to be willing to *accept* those answers as coming from the Lord. With our vision broadened we come to find out through time that they are also the "right" answers. "I've

learned to pray, and it works. When there didn't seem to be anything left in me, I'd pray, 'Please, no more for a while.' And sometimes I'd get a few weeks or months of rest, and then the next thing would hit. And I'd say, 'Please, I don't feel very strong right now. Please, if I have to have something else that's difficult right now, let it be a little one. Make it as short as possible.' The prayers were never answered in the way I thought they would be. But they were answered; because I'm still here! So far, I've made it through; and I'm growing." (Linda.)

Perhaps the most frequent blessing associated with praying is the peace that it can bring. Indeed that is a promise! "Look unto God with firmness of mind, and pray unto him with exceeding faith, and he will console you in your afflictions" (Jacob 3: 1).

"The fears during this time were enormous; with no bearing, of course, but you don't know that. They are there and are real. And eventually the only way I could deal with this was to pray, and then I would be flooded with peace from the Holy Ghost. I was allowed to know peace, especially during those periods of time when I didn't have another ounce of energy or reason or resource within me." (Janet.)

Peace does not necessarily come automatically just because we pray. It has much to do with the quality of our prayer. I am impressed with how Jacob describes the qualifications required for us to receive that blessing. He says we must "look unto God with firmness of mind" and we must "pray unto him with exceeding faith" (See Jacob 3:1). This is a chicken-and-egg proposition: Which comes first? How do we develop enough faith for our prayers to be efficacious, when we need to have positive results from our prayers in order to have that kind of faith? The one begets the other. I suppose the key thing is that *we need to start the cycle*.

As Mark approached death he began such a cycle. "I have had a challenge that has been thrown at me, and I have had to respond, and I have chosen to commune with my Heavenly Father in a more intense and a different way than I did before. I have learned to speak the feelings of my heart. Even though I didn't feel my prayers before were canned, they were somewhat repetitious. But now my prayers are the feelings of my heart. It is a two-way communication now. I haven't had any manifestations or

revelations, but I know I am communicating, because of the Spirit I feel."

Expressing the feelings of our hearts seems to be a necessary part of prayer, if we wish to open the door through which the Comforter may enter our hearts. "In May I was in the hospital to receive dialysis. They have to put a shunt in your jugular vein. It is a temporary thing, until the graft they put in your arm is matured; that takes about ten days to two weeks. The doctor told me he didn't think I'd live more than a month if I didn't go on dialysis. There were seven or eight doctors looking after me, and because my physical condition had deteriorated so much, they were really concerned and didn't think I'd make it through the operation. That night, as I lay in the hospital, I didn't sleep a wink. I was wide awake and I prayed all night long. I talked to my Savior as I had never done before. I was ready, and I would accept anything he had for me. As morning came I felt relieved and comfortable. I just felt completely at peace." (Loren.)

It has been my experience that being consistently involved in the act of prayer brings a softening impact. Being on our knees, and at least "going through the motion," helps prepare us so that our prayers can become more meaningful. There really is something to the adage that the time to pray is when we least feel like it. Perhaps the very act of getting on our knees consistently, even though nothing seems to happen, is the kind of acceptable offering we need to make in order to eventually have our ears unplugged to the spiritual whisperings the Lord is sending our way.

"During my time of bitterness I prayed only occasionally, and that was out of desperation. I just had no relationship with Heavenly Father. What turned it around for me was when our first child was born, and it all of a sudden hit me again what it meant to be a full-time father. I started to pray again. During the first year my prayers were really not for forgiveness, and I didn't feel much of anything; but the second and third years I began to feel it intensely. I could start to feel spiritual things. Things would touch me again that I had become calloused to." (Ron.)

To pray is to acknowledge that there is a Source of strength and comfort beyond us. That recognition is the first step in unlocking the door to His comfort and strength. We can then tap into that Source by looking "unto God with firmness of mind," by praying "unto him with exceeding

faith," and by speaking the feelings of our hearts. As we seek His will rather than our own, knowing his vision encompasses it all, His answers to our prayers can bring us great comfort and peace, and can lead us step by step into those experiences and understandings that will bring us His joy.

### *Scripture Reading*

Why do we have scriptures? Why did the Lord have his prophets go through the tremendous effort to write words that were for future generations to see? Wouldn't it have been better for them to have spent all of their time with their contemporaries, helping them to come to Christ? Why be concerned about influencing people who would live hundreds or even thousands of years in the future? Paul answers those questions succinctly: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

That we might have hope! Daily scripture reading can give us hope and direction. In a general sense, being immersed in the scriptures increases testimony and faith. The very fact that we have them-particularly the Book of Mormon, which came to us in such a miraculous way-is prima facie evidence that God lives and that Jesus Christ is His son and that the gospel is true. How that kind of assurance can help us in the midst of adversity should be apparent. As we involve ourselves in these words that are God's words, we catch glimpses of His divine nature. We are motivated to do better. We gain understanding about what this life is all about. Reading the scriptures brings us hope.

In a specific sense, our hope is increased as we read about people who were real and who had real problems and struggles, just as we do. Nephi set a valuable example: "I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning" (I Nephi 19:23). As we study the scriptures and contemplate what those people did to overcome their trials (or what they did that kept them from overcoming!), we can receive both insight and encouragement. Oftentimes that encouragement can be a painful prod as we see our own life and inadequate faith juxtaposed against those whose lives we are studying. Observed one man who suffers from chronic depression: "The scriptures can go to the heart of the problem and quicken

my guilt and enhance my feelings of inadequacies and dig my depression deeper. And they can be uplifting. And when the Spirit is there, they can be a tremendous solace. They can make the pain deeper or relieve the pain." (Ted.)

Whether we are lifted gently or shoved brusquely by these scriptural experiences, the result can be positive if that is our choice. Daily involvement in the lives of those who speak through the scriptures can help us make positive changes in our own lives and can lead us to understandings that will bring us closer to Christ.

There is another blessing we can receive by being constantly involved in God's word. In a very real sense, the scriptures are our main source of revelation. After all, they are God's word and they were written for us..

The father of a wayward child found help in the scriptures. "If we are asking God to respond to our prayers, and His answers to our prayers are sitting in this book that we have been counseled to read daily, and we are not reading it, I think we are effectively cutting off our ability to receive His answers. I don't know how many times I have had my prayers answered directly, right out of the scriptures.

"Not too long ago I was feeling so hopeless with what my daughter was doing and how it was affecting her little kids that I was beside myself. It was night, and I was getting ready for bed, and I just sort of looked up and said, 'Father, please let me read something tonight that will help me.' I got undressed and got into bed and picked up my Book of Mormon and began reading where I had left off the night before. I was reading King Benjamin's speech in the book of Mosiah, and the phrase, 'put his trust in the Lord' (Mosiah 4:6), just leaped out at me. I had been worrying about things I couldn't control, and that was my answer: I just had to trust the Lord here. My anxieties left me, and for the moment I had peace." (Burt.)

Janet relates a similar experience, as she tried to resolve problems in her marriage. "I wanted to work this out somehow, and the kids and I went back to live with my husband. When we arrived he wouldn't even speak to me. We stayed there for three months in silence! Should I stay there and suffer the rest of my life, or should I leave? I had prayed and prayed to know what I should do, because I just couldn't see what I was to do.

"Then the Book of Mormon scripture from 3 Nephi came to me. I was reading it at the time, after I had been praying for guidance. It talks about the barren woman (and, of course, I haven't been able to have children of my own.) and the blessings of the barren being greater than those of the married wife. I know our Heavenly Father uses scripture to answer individual prayers. That scripture has a whole, huge meaning to me that it doesn't have to anyone else, because that's not what Isaiah was writing about at the time; Janet was not what he had in mind! Isaiah was writing prophecy about Zion in the last days, but the words were clearly the exact words that I needed at that point. 'And then shall that which is written come to pass: Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child; for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord .... Fear not, for thou shalt not be ashamed; neither be thou confounded, for thou shalt not be put to shame; for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy maker, thy husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel-the God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee.' (3 Nephi 22: 1, 4-7.) Without question this scripture applied directly to me and was the answer to my prayers."

In our time of trial the scriptures can strengthen our spiritual foundation, provide solace and comfort, lead us to make those changes that will help us to overcome and learn, and allow the Lord to provide direct and dramatic answers to our prayers. Why would we not avail ourselves of such a blessing?

### *The Temple*

Mark, struggling with terminal cancer, decided to make temple attendance a priority. "I have made a commitment to attend the temple regularly through this time, and although I cannot honestly say that I have had any specific manifestations there, I have felt an extremely comforting

peace. I have wanted to be there."

The temple is a sanctuary. The world is shut out. The whiteness of the clothing, the softness of the voices, the spiritual level of the conversations, the simple beauty of the rooms and furnishings, the solemnity and dignity of the officiator, all tend to lift us to a higher plane. The ordinances we participate in and the covenants we make remind us that we are strangers and foreigners in this telestial sphere. For that period everything is put into perspective, and that which we are struggling with in the world somehow seems manageable.

Larry, who has suffered serious business setbacks, comments: "For me, going to the temple was like stepping out of the world. There were a lot of times when I walked through the door into the foyer of the temple that my financial worries and concerns would just drop off. It was as if they were too big and cumbersome to make it through the door and were just scraped off. And just putting on white clothes and getting out of the clothes of the world was like hanging up my burdens in the locker. Of course, when I would leave the temple and go back home, I still had to be concerned about how I was going to make the house payment that month. My financial situation certainly hadn't changed, but my ability to handle it was immeasurably increased by going to the temple regularly. It gave my shoulders the rest they needed."

The temple is also a place for revelation. Because of what it is, those of us who enter it are generally more spiritually focused and better prepared to hear and see the things of the Spirit. Many can testify that they have received answers to their prayers there, but it is not automatic. Some, like Janet, must sometimes readjust the focus: "The temple has been a very positive thing, but not at first. At first I was going back and hearing those vows associated with my husband in my mind, so it was very painful. But I didn't avoid the temple. I knew it was right to attend, and I did. And it was in the temple that it was eventually revealed to me that it was okay; that I had done what was required; and no, it wasn't what I would have preferred, but that I had done all that was required of me. I was okay."

It seems that what is required to receive revelation in the temple is patience and a willingness to go consistently. "As my daughter began her

bout with cancer, my husband and I went to the temple to seek strength and inspiration. We knew her departure would not be sudden and that she would be in for a long and very hard battle. But we couldn't come to any impression as to the final outcome. Several years later, after many ups and downs, and when her cancer recurred, we went to the temple; and it was revealed to us that this was the last time she would face this disease and that the miracle of the last three years was soon to be over. We learned in the temple that the purpose of trials in this life is all for our learning and experience." (Mary.) The daughter died shortly after this temple experience.

Perhaps a significant reason for our receiving such blessings through temple worship is that what we do there represents a sacrifice or offering. In ancient times the Lord's people brought animal sacrifices to the temple, as an outward manifestation of their gratitude for their blessings and as propitiation to the Lord for their sins. Our offering today is to be our broken hearts and contrite spirits, as demonstrated by our willingness to obey Him and to serve Him in His holy house. "Through my work in the temple, I can serve God and demonstrate my gratitude for the love He has shown me. It is my spiritual medicine. I have spent hours here in prayer, talking to my Heavenly Father about this overwhelming challenge [of AIDS]. I continually commit to Him that I will do His will." (Donna.)

When we are in the middle of our hectic lives, going to the temple regularly may seem a horrible inconvenience-the last thing we can do! To complicate things, our past temple experiences may not have been as spiritually fulfilling as we would have liked. Tribulations, however, may actually stimulate our understanding and testimony of the temple and its blessings. It has been my experience that if, during our trial, we are willing to make temple attendance a regular part of our lives and to go with a desire to serve and to see and to hear, we are ultimately rewarded with peace and with revelation.

The Lord has not left us alone! Our willingness to live the gospel prepares us to make effective use of the instruments He has given us to rend the veil. Prayer, the scriptures, and the temple are those tools. As we humbly and faithfully work with these gifts, we hear His voice. The

resulting peace, assurance, and direction not only provide consolation in our time of trial, but also place us on a path that can ultimately lead to the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

### *Understanding Our Innate Weakness*

"I consider my faith pretty strong, and it's there. But it has been pretty devastating when the doctor comes in your home and tells you that maybe you will die in a year. That's devastating." (Mark.)

Some of us pride ourselves on our stoicism and ability to withstand suffering. To such, an admission like the one Mark made would be considered weak. However, just such a sincere acknowledgment of weakness can bring us strength. On the other hand, there are those who "suffer" from an "Invictus" syndrome—"I am the master of my fate:\I am the captain of my soul" (William Ernest Henley, "Invictus," in *The Best Loved Poems of the American People*, sel. Hazel Felleman [New York: Doubleday, 1936], p. 73). These people are likely to find that their perceived strength falls far short when coping with severe adversity.

This paradox, that weakness begets strength, is well documented in scripture. For example, we read in Moroni's wonderful discourse on faith that the Lord promises, "If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them." (Ether 12:27.)

I think this process of gaining strength from recognizing weakness works for a couple of reasons. First of all, knowing what we *can't* do helps us know what we *can* do. King Benjamin emphasized our "nothingness" in relation to God (see Mosiah 4). He counseled his people to recognize that they were innately weak, insufficient in and of themselves to do much of anything. He wanted his people to depend on God, not on the arm of flesh. After some additional instructions, he added, "And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength" (Mosiah 4:27). Seeing ourselves in this light

helps us eliminate frustrating, pride-generated comparison with others. Each has his own bag of weaknesses, and comparisons are generally invalid and counterproductive.

Second, understanding what we can't do by ourselves causes us to look outside of ourselves for help. That can point us to the Savior, who is both the source of the strength we are lacking and the end we seek. "My T-cell count had dropped to fifty-five, where a normal reading is in the two hundreds. My doctor insisted that I get on AZT [an experimental medication at the time to relieve AIDS symptoms], but I wouldn't do it. I didn't want the medicine. My doctor just looked at me. I was looking healthy and doing exercises, and was maintaining my weight. He said, 'You're obviously putting your faith somewhere else; I guess it's not in medicine.' And I said, 'You're right. I'm using my faith in Jesus Christ to get me through this.'" (Donna.)

Such faith and reliance doesn't guarantee that the pain will stop or that the outcome will be what we wanted it to be. But our burden becomes manageable, because Christ will "ease the burdens which are put upon [our] shoulders" and will "strengthen [us] that [we can] bear up [our] burdens with ease" (Mosiah 24:14-15).

Most of us find that our faith ebbs and flows. But just knowing that the Source of relief and strength is there gives us hope in our down moments and leads us back to the rest that the Savior affords. Mark describes his faith when he thinks about dying: "The sacrifice of the Savior's life has greater meaning to me now. I feel closer to Him. Sometimes my thoughts run away as I consider the seriousness of my illness and the ultimate outcome, and it dampens my faith. I think I would like to be worthy of a miracle. I wonder if one is in store for me. Sometimes my temporal self is over here speaking, saying not so much that you aren't worthy, but the odds are so much against you. How could a miracle be possible? Those thoughts are there, and sometimes I feel like I'm pulling away from the Savior, and I don't like that to happen. But fortunately this doesn't turn out to be a major event, and my thoughts evolve very quickly into more comforting ones."

Coming to grips with our weaknesses also allows us to willingly

receive succor and support from others. It seems that it is through our family and associates that the Lord provides most of His direct help. "I've been at the bottom. I was losing it. I was in the middle of this depression, and my ex-husband had been so degrading to me, and it was such a struggle to manage the kids all by myself. I went to the medicine cabinet and I had all of these pain pills that probably had been prescribed for me when I was pregnant. All of the kids were in bed, and it was about ten-thirty at night, and I was so lonely and depressed, and I had the pills in my hand and was looking at them, and I was ready to take all of them and end everything, when the doorbell rang. I went to the door, and there were my friends from church-this man and his wife. They said they were kneeling down to say their prayers before going to bed, and the Spirit told them that they needed to come over to my house; so there they were. I just totally came apart. They saved my life." (Linda.)

Good friends were also able to help Burt's family as they struggled with their wayward daughter. "For the longest time we thought we were the only ones in the world that were having these kinds of problems with a child. To begin with we tried to handle it by ourselves. For one thing we didn't want anybody to know that our family wasn't 'normal.' I suppose that was our pride, as well as wanting to protect our other children and our daughter. But as this thing became more and more impossible to handle, we began to realize that, if we were going to be able to make it through this, we needed all of the help we could get. We were very private people, and to even talk about our problem with someone else was extremely difficult. But finally we started to. We found great comfort in doing this. For one thing we quickly found out we were not alone! That was a relief! There were plenty of others out there who were having the same kinds of struggle, and we received much help from them, both in support and in practical suggestions for coping with our own problems. Just being able to talk to somebody who understood was a great blessing. I just don't see how anybody can go through something like this by themselves. At least you can't do it very well."

As we learn that human weakness is a given in this telestial state and that our *direction* is all-important, we become more patient with the speed

of our progress. With our pride lifted we begin to catch glimpses of the universal aspect of the Atonement. We come to understand that Christ's grace is not just to provide resurrection and remission of sins; it is also available and sufficient to see us through all aspects of this mortal life. His atonement eases and lifts burdens. Our humility opens the door that allows Christ's grace to be efficacious in our personal day-to-day struggles. Strength and assurance can be manifest in our lives through feelings of peace and rest and through the inspired ministering of others. It is as the Lord told Moroni: "Because thou hast seen thy weakness thou shalt be made strong" (Ether 12:37)

### *Keeping Focus*

There is almost always a futility associated with adversity. It has to do with the difficulty of living in the present when we can easily remember or imagine something so much better. "There have been things I have missed. The father my children could have had! Gee, that would have been neat! The beauty part of the marriage relationship, I really miss. This has been immeasurably lonely."(Janet.)

Our minds are wonderful things. They control our bodies, store past experiences so we may recall feelings and facts instantaneously, and serve as logical processors for the sights and sounds that surround us, allowing us to make sense of this world and function in it. But because we can remember, our minds also serve as a convenient escape from the present. It is much easier to deal with pleasant memories than with unpleasant now's! When used as temporary relief, such memories may refresh and even rejuvenate. When used as a permanent substitute for what is, our memories become an opiate. They take us from one fantasy to another, depleting both the vision and strength necessary to cope with and learn from our present challenge. Realizing that we are "in it," and that there is no going back, helps us to focus on what we can and should be doing to deal with our present set of circumstances. To dwell on "what might have been," or to constantly think, "If only I had ...," is to deepen our frustration and to cloud our vision of the present potential for growth.

"I can remember watching my little daughter not too long after my divorce. I turned and watched her on the bench at church, and I remember how painful it was that there was no one for me to say to, 'Look, wasn't it cute! Did you see what she did?' No one! A lifetime of never being able to share the joy of the child because, to everyone but the parent of the child, it would seem just ordinary.

"I didn't know that I could even be a whole person, and it took me years to come back to be a whole person by myself. I can remember when people would take pictures of families at reunions and other places. I'd just die because we would have to stand there, not being a complete family. And after about five years, it occurred to me that we were a complete family. And I went and had a formal picture taken of the four of us, and there was no big black hole." (Janet. )

"I wheeled my daughter down to the parade the other day so she could have a good time, and we saw this little girl who used to be our neighbor and was one of my daughter's best friends. That was a little painful. I said to myself, 'Oh, Janie would be running and playing and having a good time with her!' But I don't let myself dwell on those things. The thought was there, and I acknowledged it; but instead of walking down that path, I said, 'That's not how life is, though. This is what we have, and let's have fun and do what Janie *can* do that will be fun for her.' I think that it's beneficial that I don't walk down that path. I think that's good." (Ann.)

There is another mind game that is equally debilitating. It is our fearful view of the future. We may imagine the future as some extension of the present, complete with present pains and difficulties, but magnified and unmanageable. Carol worries about the problems ahead with polio. "My challenges in the past have been meetable. My challenges in the future-I don't know. My skin is breaking down. Sores are a problem. I'm finding that my strength is going. But where it is going to be very difficult for me is not the physical, as much as what's inside me and how I handle having to be waited on, having to be taken care of. The fear for me is that I will be a burden sooner on my children." (Carol.)

To dwell on things over which we have no control is to divert our focus from things which we can do something about. On the other hand,

when we realize that we have plenty we can do without worrying needlessly about the future, we can devote our energies to productive and potentially satisfying activities. "When we were in the early stages of this thing [young daughter's cancer], the doctor had me and my daughter Cindy come into his office at the hospital. He said, 'I'll bet you don't have a lot of regrets in life. I can just tell. You've lived your life just the way you've wanted to. You've set your goals; you've done it.' He went on complimenting. But you put on one face at the hospital, when you're trying to be strong in front of your daughter; and nobody knows your weaker points behind closed doors.

"I went home and talked to my husband about that conversation and I said, 'You know, the doctor's wrong. I have a lot of regrets. And there are a lot of things in each one of our lives that we would have done differently. But you know, I've done a lot of right things, and so has every member of our family.' And this whole experience made me think and commit that from now on I'm going to do my best so that, if I can help it, someday I can say when I look back, 'I don't have a lot of major regrets.' And I don't want Cindy or any member of my family to have regrets-regrets about the way I'm being a mother, or the way I'm living the gospel, or any way.

"There were so many things out of our control. After all we could do, it was still out of our control what would happen to Cindy. Even if we lived righteously and had all of the proper medical help, it was still ultimately out of our control what happened to Cindy here. But knowing that if I lived my life the way I knew I could and should, I would be able to be with her ultimately-without doubt, that was a great comfort, and that allowed me to accept whatever happened to me here. That was kind of a turning point for me, and the way I handled the whole situation." (Mary.)

To live in the present, to be concerned with those things that we can do something about, seems to be the *20/20* perspective that allows us to see our adversities for what they are and how they can point us to Christ. Perhaps it was just such vision that motivated Paul to say: "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am

instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

(Philippians 4:11-13.)

Of course that is easier said than done! I think a key phrase in Paul's statement is, "I have learned." It is doubtful that Paul could have honestly made such a statement without having had experiences that taught him such perspective. To me, that is one of the frustrating things about this whole process of telestial trial. We learn how to handle it by being in it. There is no other way. Words of others can only serve as reference points. As such, though, they can be of inestimable worth in helping us use our experiences to gain, for example, Paul's celestial perspective.

As we muddle through our own Gethsemanes, it will help us to make real progress if we try to keep our minds in the present and our focus on what we can control. Our vision may not yet be 20/20, but it will be sufficiently clear to help us take the next step safely. We may develop an outlook as realistic and hopeful as Janet's. "Obviously my life has been changed completely from what it would have been. I really don't know whether this way is better for me than what it would have been. I can only hope that this way is better. *I mean for it to be.*"

### *Dealing with the Question, "Why?"*

"The hardest for me was the why of it all! Why would this [having cancer] happen to a child? Why would it happen in a family who had the gospel and were trying to live it; with sisters who needed her, and all of the other things there too? The other girls had their problems and needed a parent to help them, and you'd think, 'Why can't you take care of your own problems? Can't you see what pressure is on me and what I've got to cope with?' And from a business point of view, my husband wasn't satisfied with what was going on with the business he was working for, but we couldn't leave because of the health insurance benefit. Sometimes it is all too heavy to bear. The burden of knowing that your daughter is here one day, but will be gone the next, is heavy. I remember going out of the house one day, wondering why people were still driving cars and how they could

be laughing. I just wondered what life was all about. What had we done wrong? You go through that." (Mary.)

The Lord has told us that blessings are forthcoming when we obey His laws. In fact, He has told us that specific blessings are predicated on our obedience to certain laws (see D&C 130:20-21). What He does not explain in that revelation is what constitutes a "blessing." Nor does it logically follow that because blessings are predicated on obedience to law, all adversities and problems occur as a result of disobedience to God's laws. Sometimes, though, we make that illogical jump; and in the process, we also try to define for the Lord just what comprises a "blessing."

Ann recounts her early expectations of the Lord. "We were raised to expect 'easy!' We were raised with 'Donna Reed' and 'My Three Sons' and 'Father Knows Best,' and every problem was solved in thirty minutes, and then it was done. And they weren't real problems either. Even in the Church, every Mutual lesson I had was, 'Be worthy to get married in the temple and live happily ever after. If you go to college and work hard, your life will be easy. Just follow the rules and everything will be fine.'" As we seek to cope with and learn from our trials, however, or as we try to help others with their adversities, such myopia and unwarranted amplification of God's statements can be more than just counterproductive. Occasionally a Church member feels that such factors are involved in what he perceives as lack of appropriate response from a Church leader. "If I were honest about it, we didn't get much help from my priesthood leaders. At least not at first. Neither my bishop nor my stake president had had any real serious problems with any of their children, and the assumption seemed to be that your children would be okay if you were okay. You know the standard: Have family nights; read the scriptures; keep the commandments; do things with them. Then everything will be all right. We were trying to do those things, and in fact our daughter had read the Book of Mormon cover to cover at least once and had given great family nights when she was younger. It wasn't that my leaders weren't willing to talk to us; they were. But as our hearts were begging for some sort of consolation that we were okay as parents, you could just see in their eyes and hear in their brief responses that they thought there was more to the

story than we were telling them. That was devastating! Maybe I misperceived, but I don't think so.

"And then when our daughter was sixteen she ran away, out of state, for the second time. We found out where she was and took steps to get her back. She contacted a member of the Church where she was and told him things that weren't true, and he called and talked to one of my Church leaders. I received a phone call from that leader, and the first thing he said was, 'How can you treat your daughter that way?' We'd been living with this thing twenty-four hours a day for several years; and for the last few days I had been worried sick, not knowing where my daughter was or if she was okay. And after knowing me and working closely with me for all of those years, that was his response; and it was like kicking me in the stomach! I explained to him what the situation was, and I still wasn't sure he understood; and when I hung up the phone, I sobbed."(Burt.)

There is no single reason for adversity. In some cases tribulation and difficulties are the consequences of our unrighteous actions or unwise decisions. In other cases they are not. Then, too, since moral agency exists, we are affected by the choices of others. Living among telestial people and having telestial knowledge and wisdom naturally bring difficulties, problems, and frustrations. By striving to look objectively at the "reason" for our present adversity, we can more effectively learn from our trial and make the changes necessary in our lives to avoid such a difficulty in the future or to lessen its negative impact.

Sometimes we do "blow it!" And we may suffer accordingly. But that is part of our schooling process. It is not a sin to make a mistake that doesn't have moral implication. It is a great pity, however, not to learn from such mistakes. "My father taught me something that has really helped me. He was an army officer. He said, 'Okay, you've got a problem. What do you do with it? Don't worry about how you got into the problem, unless analyzing that will help you learn and not repeat it again. But, so you've got a problem. Think how you're going to handle it now. That's all that's important. '

"He taught in a similar vein about making a decision. 'You've made a decision and you've blown it. It was the wrong decision! But at the time

you made the decision, you did the best you could with the information you had and with the person you were at the time. Therefore, don't keep looking back. Change your course. Analyze the situation again. Re-evaluate and go forward.' And that's my basic way of looking at it." (Carol.)

A friend of mine expressed the same view, but in fewer words. "There are two kinds of decisions we can make," he said. "The right ones. And the ones we *make* right."

When serious transgression has been the source of our problems, there can also be benefit derived from looking at how the transgression came about. "I would have done this differently if I knew what I know now. I wouldn't have been involved in the process that ended up in adultery. It was a long, drawn-out process over a couple of years, and I wouldn't have put myself in that position in the first place. I'm so conscious about this now that I almost avoid shaking hands with women in our ward. I feel so uncomfortable about it. And another thing: even with the adultery, I would have tried a lot harder to save my marriage. It was savable, and both my present wife and I feel that if we had tried harder, maybe we could have preserved our original families." (Ron.)

One of the causes of affliction that is hardest to deal with is the actions of others. Sometimes there is no difficulty at all in knowing that someone else brought on our trial. Certainly the Jews who died in the Holocaust were not culpable! However, when we recognize that the cause of affliction is clearly outside of our influence, it is easy to become bitter and resentful. That, of course, is counter-productive. In such instances, as we focus on our challenge rather than its cause, we have the opportunity to increase our ability to cope and to learn from our adversity.

On the other hand, there are times when we are so caught up with self-flagellation that we do not see that someone (or something) other than ourselves is the reason for our present problem. In these instances it is important that we come to see clearly where the fault lies, or we will be misdirected in our efforts to successfully cope.

Burt describes his feelings about this issue. "Obviously you take this kind of thing personally! You ask yourself, 'What did I do wrong? What

should I have I done that I didn't do?"

"When this whole thing started [the problems with their daughter], my wife was particularly ready to accept the blame for it all; and I probably didn't help her too much. She had been physically sick for months, and she wasn't as patient as I thought she ought to be. We took our daughter to some psychologists to get some help. There were a couple of them. First they would talk with our daughter privately, and then with us, and then with the three of us together. While we were together, the one psychologist was asking us questions, and the other was sitting there kind of observing. Then the one who was just sitting there looked at my daughter and said, 'What would your mother have to do to get you to like her and get along with her?' And my daughter replied, without showing any emotion whatsoever, 'Nothing. There's nothing she could do that would make me want to get along with her.' Then the psychologist looked at my wife and said, 'Does that answer your question as to who's at fault here?'"

"That was really the changing point in how we handled the thing. Of course neither one of us had done everything right, but we certainly tried to teach her correct principles and love her, and there was a lot of love in our family. It was clear now that, for whatever reasons, she was making her own decisions to rebel and do what she was doing; and it wasn't because of something we had done or were doing. It was like a big cloud had lifted off of us. The worst was yet to come, in terms of how her actions would affect our family; but just seeing that she was making her own choices here helped us handle the situation better."

Disease and accidents are also part of our telestial experience. In many instances the righteous suffer right along with the wicked, as a result of the natural consequences of a telestial world. "Sometimes I have a little battle with the phrase, 'It's the Lord's will.' For one thing, I don't know what the Lord's will is. On the one hand, I don't believe that what is happening to me is the Lord's will. But on the other hand, I have faith that the Lord will provide for my needs and the needs of my family. It's not so much that this is the Lord's will as it is that the Lord is aware of my circumstances, and that is a great source of peace." (Mark.)

Such random afflictions can come without a specific reason, and

recognizing that can help us concentrate on how we can learn and grow from the experience. Dwelling on "Why me?" can sap our strength and distort our perspective.

"This happened to us because this is life. I don't believe we were singled out at all. It's just life. Accidents happen. That's why they're called accidents. People make mistakes. And the driver involved made a mistake, and Janie got hit. That's my opinion. I think the blessing is that God let Janie live. People say to me, 'Wouldn't you rather that she died?' Well, if she can put up with it, I'm thrilled that she's alive! I don't know, maybe Janie would rather be dead; but it doesn't appear that way to me." (Ann.)

"I don't believe I was given polio by the Lord! It just happened. He could have, and it wouldn't bother me if He did, because I have grown. When I had had polio for about a year, Elder [Marion D.] Hanks spoke locally. He asked me about my polio. I told him that I considered it a blessing. He said, 'No, but the Lord has consecrated it to your needs as He did the desert to Lehi.' That's true. I'm not the person I would have been. Patience has never been my strong point, and I've had to learn it." (Carol.)

It can be helpful to look at the possible reasons for our affliction, *if* we will learn from that exercise, and *if* we will not let that glimpse into the past become an all-consuming stare! It is also possible that we may never answer the question, "Why?" And that is all right too. "I don't know why this happened to me, but I do know that it's okay that it did. But I didn't know that for a very long time. I think I know now that it's simply a part of life. Everybody gets something. And I do sometimes think that we are challenged to do the thing we really can't do. And this was it for me! Divorce in my family is unheard of, and I would never have dreamed this in a million years. My husband was so wonderful at first, and I would never have dreamed this. I don't know why this happened." (Janet.)

As it turns out, in the now, the *whys* gradually lose their importance. Ultimately, "What am I doing about it?" is the question that takes center stage. "If I could make an analogy: I worked on the space program for twenty-five years on Apollo and the space shuttle, and I was involved in the qualification testing from the purchasing standpoint. As new materials and products were developed, we had to run them through a qualification

test program. And there were some very hostile environments: hot temperature, cold temperature, salt spray, and potential for corrosion, electrical checks, etc. And if they passed these tests, they were considered for unlimited use throughout the spacecraft. If they failed, they were discarded and were not considered for use at all.

"I've tried to apply this to my life. We're here to be tested. And I feel that this is kind of a test to qualify me for things that lie in the future. And I am determined that, whatever comes, I'm going to meet that challenge and pass the test. I think about that quite often. I've never asked, 'Why me, Lord?' I've just prayed that I could meet the test." (Loren.)

### *Working to Be Happy*

Striving to be happy while in the midst of our trials can also help us successfully handle our adversity. A cheerful, positive attitude under difficult circumstances seems to come naturally to some. "In Relief Society they were talking about the needs of a paraplegic, and here I sit. There are only three times I'll claim being one! One is for an absentee ballot. One is for a good parking space. And one is for a cheaper gas bill! I just don't see myself as having polio. I didn't have a long-length mirror until my children were in their teens. Now my long-length mirror is in my furnace closet. I don't want to look at myself in the wheelchair. I don't want to be bothered about it. When I got it [polio] I was filled with gratitude that it didn't happen to my children, because they would be very deformed as they continued to grow. So I have skinny legs and I used to have pretty ankles. That's all." (Carol.)

For many of us, though, it seems that all of our energy is needed to just keep ourselves from sinking. It is more than a little difficult to try to maintain a happy countenance, let alone keep a positive attitude. Yet Nephi asks a legitimate question. "Why should my heart weep and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow ... because of mine afflictions?" (2 Nephi 4:26.) That we would become depressed and discouraged as a result of our adversities is to be expected. But apparently we don't have to "linger" there! In fact, it is the lingering there that makes the burden

onerous and virtually impossible to bear. I believe that that is what Nephi was saying when he asked his rhetorical question.

It seems, then, that it is not only possible to be happy in our misery, but also advisable to be so-if we are to make the most of our experience. Burt describes his family's efforts to be happy, even while facing the problems with a wayward daughter. "When this thing began, it was like our home was a war zone. Even when our daughter wasn't there, you could just feel this heavy thing in the home; and we were edgy with each other and with the other children, and nobody was very happy at all. Then my wife and I were talking, and we were talking about the gospel and that it was a gospel of love and happiness and that, if we were to survive this thing, we had this responsibility to be happy and to show our kids-and particularly our daughter-that the fruit of the gospel was happiness. And that's what we tried to do. Sometimes maybe it was a facade, but I think just trying to do it brought the real thing, if you know what I mean. Anyway, trying to be happy made a difference, at least between my wife and me and with our other children. I think it helped my daughter too, both in terms of how we dealt with her directly and in the example she could see, that our way of living really did make us happy."

Wanting to be happy under adverse circumstances is one thing. Being happy when all hell is breaking loose is quite another! We generally need help to bridge the gap. Our first and most important source of help, of course, should be the Lord. "If thou art sorrowful, call on the Lord thy God with supplication, that your souls may be joyful" (D&C 136:29). With this kind of support we can *learn* to be happy, and that means we have to do some things ourselves as well. For example, I think we need to *look* for things to be happy about. That goes back to attitude again and to what we want to focus on. For most of us it shouldn't be too hard to *see something* in our lives that can make us happy. The trick, then, is to try to concentrate on that.

"The Lord just doesn't give you an obstacle that you can't cope with. No matter what our difficulty, each one of us has an outlet for joy if we will find it. I can't hear the birds sing, but I can *see* them. They are beautiful! Someday I will hear their song again." (Grace.)

"It's difficult for me to read now, but I'm getting the *Ensign* and priesthood manual on tape. I'm having a real spiritual experience for the three hours I am on dialysis, as I listen to these and the Book of Mormon on tape." (Loren.)

"Now, even considering the pain and treatment and testing and everything revolving around Cindy's illness for those three years, we can look back and think of all the wonderful experiences that we had. Because we did! There wasn't a family vacation that wasn't the best vacation. There wasn't a family home evening that didn't take on meaning. There wasn't a prayer that was just normal." (Mary.)

I also think we learn to be happy as we try to see our present difficulties in context. Admittedly it is hard to see the whole picture clearly when the tears in our eyes keep blurring our vision. But if we will let it, time has a way of both broadening and sharpening our focus. "There have been some painful things. You get tired of sitting in sacrament meeting and being uncomfortable over this issue or that issue. We all hated Father's Day programs and we were uncomfortable. I was the Primary president and hated the song, 'Families Can Be Together Forever.' We stand there, being very much not together, and I'm worrying about how the song affected my children. But as the maturity comes to both me and the children, those things are really insignificant and just human, people kinds of things." (Janet.)

Learning to be happy *in spite of* our adversity takes away much of the drudgery of our march through the tribulation. More important, it is possible for us to learn to be happy *because of* our adversity. When that is occurring, we are making great strides. For instance, in spite of AIDS, Donna can say: "There is purpose in this life. No matter what affliction we may meet, if we turn our obstacles around, they can be to our advantage. We can grow from them. I'm not ready for this challenge to end yet. I'm in love with the change that is taking place in me! I'm beginning to realize my potential."

"My mind and spirit weren't in the Church, even though I was attending. You really can't take full advantage of what the gospel offers unless you're helping others." (Ron.)

To attempt to relieve our burden by relinquishing our opportunities for service is to try to heal ourselves with medicine that usually doesn't work and can, in fact, exacerbate and prolong the suffering. On the other hand, losing ourselves in service is a salve that immediately soothes the most intense pain. "I've been home teaching two sisters. One is seventy-six and one is eighty and they are widows. And they just indicated they would like to go to the temple, but because of their health they couldn't go to church regularly. They didn't think they were worthy to go to the temple because of that. I told them that they did everything you're supposed to do, paying their tithing, etc. I talked to the bishop, and he gave me permission to give the temple seminar lessons at their home. I gave them, and told the bishop the sisters were ready. I went with them to be interviewed by the bishop and the stake president. Then I rode up with them to the temple in the bishop's van. We had a beautiful experience. We had them sealed to their husbands, and their parents sealed to each other, and they were sealed to their parents.

"When I was helping prepare these two sisters for the temple, even though I was suffering a lot of pain, I was happy. They were so thankful they could go to the temple, and that brought me great joy. I've kept my call as a home teacher through all this. When you're working to help somebody else, you're not thinking about your own problems. You're more excited, more happy with what you're doing to help make these kind of good things happen for someone else. And there's nothing that's greater than sharing the gospel blessings and seeing others enjoy what you have experienced. When you stop serving, then you become selfish, because you have nothing else to think about other than you. When you're home teaching, or doing any other Church calling, you are involved in other people's lives; and that overshadows your own pain." (Loren.)

But sometimes when we are "in the middle of it," our opportunities for service are effectively diminished. What then? That seems to be a matter of attitude also. "I've just learned to accept my limitations and try to make

the best of what I have left." (Loren.) What *do* we have left? Usually much more than we assume. Often we just need to look in a little different direction for service opportunities. Chances are, we will find new service avenues that will bring us a sense of fulfillment and self-worth.

"I have recently been called as a counselor in our ward Relief Society presidency. I'm stunned that they would want me to do that, because I can't go clean the kitchens! I told the bishop that I drew the line at cleaning kitchens! I can clean the kitchen, all right; but if I do, I have no energy left to do anything else. And I think part of my job is to serve the women and help set up and help clean up. My assignment now is to go around and talk to the sisters that need talking to, after the meeting, while everyone else does the work. That's going to be the most difficult thing for me with this calling. But what I am asked to do is a service too. And I have to look realistically, and I can't ignore completely that I have polio and that it affects what I can do. So I just have to look for other ways to serve." (Carol.)

"Counting family, I write letters to thirty or forty people at least monthly, and to some of them every week, and then just notes to people I think need encouragement. Then I send something to each of my forty-plus grandchildren and great-grandchildren on their birthdays and at Christmastime. That's my life! That's the way I can communicate. It's a blessing to me. I want to share in their sorrow and happiness. It is a pleasure thing for me. Whatever I do for service pretty much has to be within the confines of my own home. I just don't have the strength, after I take care of my husband, and with my own hurts. This is the way I can serve, given my restrictions.

"I get letters back. My nephew, who is on a mission, just wrote me and said, 'You don't know what your letters mean to me. You've been like a grandmother to me. You are the most faithful letter writer, and they are such a blessing to me.'

"When you can't do some of the other things, this is my outlet. Service brings strength and joy to the one who gives. It gives me strength. I receive many times the benefit than those I am serving, and it's a commandment.

"My mother was also hard of hearing and was incapable of doing many of the standard Church service opportunities. I remember, when I was a little girl, going over to a neighbor with Mother. The neighbor's hands had been burned in a cooking accident. Mother took her clothes home in a little wagon to wash them. And that's what she did her entire life, and it was a blessing to her. I hate to think what will happen when my hands go! My memories are there of when I was physically able to serve in many other ways, and I get emotional as I think about that and can't do it anymore. But it's important to continue to do what I can do." (Grace.)

Sometimes we let our misery get the best of us. We excuse ourselves from *any* meaningful service because of our absorption in our own chronic trauma. Such inward fall can cause us to sustain mental and emotional injuries that are simply unnecessary. Although our circumstances may, in fact, restrict our service opportunities, perhaps we should not be too ready to arbitrarily restrict ourselves. "Now my husband and I talk about going on a mission, and it terrifies me. I go to cold countries, and I freeze up. I miss my medication by two hours, and my left hand freezes. I go to the grocery store and come home, and I'm in pain for an hour and a half, because I push through the freezer section and I've had it, left-hand-wise! I go to a hot country, and I go bloomph! I have no strength. So I don't know what the Lord will do with us. *But we'll go.*" (Carol.)

In fact, being willing to accept callings that at first blush seem impossible to handle can often bring marvelous, unexpected blessings. "In the middle of all of this [struggles with daughter's cancer], when I was at my lowest point, the ward divided; and the bishop called me in and called me to be the Beehive adviser. Given our situation I thought, 'How insensitive can a bishop be!' We now knew my daughter was terminal and needed all my energy, and I said, 'Bishop, I don't think I have the enthusiasm, the cheerfulness. I don't think I have what it takes to be with these silly Beehives. I don't even know if I have what it takes to survive this, and you're asking me to do the Beehives!' He looked at me and said, 'The Lord is calling you to this position, and there is more at stake here than just silliness and activities; and if you will accept this calling, it will be a blessing to your family.'

"He was right! That last year, those Beehives did more for my family than I did for them. They were incredible. They were always there with me and my daughter and my family. They brought me gifts. They put their arms around me and they let me cry. And the lessons weren't the typical lessons, and we learned a lot together. At the end we had the funeral, and the kids were all there. We had the viewing, and my rebellious, little, free-spirited Beehive who had been so difficult led the other Beehives in, and she put her arms around me and she said, 'All of your girls are here now. We're all here. Everything's going to be okay.' And, for the first time in her life, she said, 'The gospel's true! Families are forever!' And this was the girl we didn't think had a testimony of the gospel.

"That was the kind of experience I had with them, and that's the kind of testimony and faith they provided for me during that time. My accepting that call made all of the difference to me and my family-not just because of what they did for us, but it provided me an opportunity to grow. I'm not sure that, without magnifying my call, this whole experience would have been as meaningful. It kept me from being self-centered. You lose yourself. I was worried about the Beehives and how they were doing. It gave me something else to focus on. There was something beyond just our own problems, and having the opportunity to serve helped relieve our own burdens and allowed us to keep things in their proper perspective. It was necessary." (Mary.)

There is another aspect to service and affliction that is perhaps at least as important as those we have discussed. When the sons of Mosiah went forth among the Lamanites to bring them to Christ, the Lord told them, "Ye shall be patient in long-suffering and afflictions, that ye may show forth good examples unto them in me, and I will make an instrument of thee in my hands unto the salvation of many souls" (Alma 17: 11). Being a good example in our affliction can have enormous positive effect on our family members and our associates. It may be the ultimate act of service we perform while in the midst of our trial. What could we do that would be of greater worth than to be an "instrument" in the hands of the Lord "unto the salvation" of our family and friends? Our example to them of righteous consistency in the middle of our suffering provides just such a

light.

"I had wanted children so desperately; and they were impossible to get, except by adoption; and I had waited so long for those children to come. When my husband left I knew without doubt that those children didn't deserve what would come next, and that somehow I would have to make life as normal for them as I possibly could. And that purpose has really, really helped! I have sought to have family home evening and family prayer and to accept callings in the Church, because I wanted my children to understand that this is the way we live. Having this purpose beyond myself became very important and has provided my path and direction through this." (Janet.)

To face affliction without seeking to lose ourselves in service is to lose our battle. Paradoxically, to put upon our shoulders the weight of Christ-like service is to lighten our overall load. Without such load-lightening, it is doubtful we will have the strength to walk the path that leads to His joy. "My decision to remain active and be obedient and serve, even though I don't feel like it, is my thread that sustains me and keeps me from falling. I can keep afloat. I know why I am here. I know that I'm in a death-throes struggle with that purpose. My continued involvement in Church service is the only way. My prayers, my reading the scriptures, my trying to do my calling the best that I can are the only things that have kept me together. They define the purpose. They are what this is all about. They call for the divine in me." (Ted.)

### *Resolving to See It Through*

Nephi testified, "I know by this that unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved" (2 Nephi 31:16). With many of us, the most difficult part of our trial is its length. It seems that it is almost always longer than we could imagine it would be, making it more difficult than we could ever comprehend. "Sometimes we'd find that what appeared to be a light at the end of the tunnel was really a train coming at us." (Ann.)

Yet the chronic nature of many of our trials appears to be an important

part of our experience, and enduring to the end seems to be necessary if we are to receive the potential blessings inherent within our adversities. But how do we endure?

"It just went on and on. You'd ask yourself, 'How long can we go on like this?' And the answer always turned out to be-a lot longer than we thought possible! I think one of the things that helped me was trying to see this thing in perspective. At first I was always worrying about it. It affected my sleep particularly. I had kind of a weird way of trying to solve that problem. It occurred to me that specific things that I had worried about a year ago, I wasn't even thinking about now. If that was the case, I reasoned, why should I lose sleep over it now, when I probably won't be thinking about it as much in a couple of months, and within a year I probably won't even be bothering about it? In any case I started to see that my losing sleep and worrying about it tonight wasn't going to affect the problem one way or the other. That kind of perspective about the whole thing helped me. Certainly there were times when I forgot about that kind of perspective and let things gnaw on me, but most of the time it helped." (Larry.)

Perspective seems to be a key to enduring. Seeing our challenges, no matter how long they take, as being momentary in the context of our eternal existence can be helpful. Mary said, "One of our other daughters, who was Beehive age, came to my husband and me and was all excited and said, 'It's going to be okay! Even if Cindy dies now, the Millennium will be here in thirteen years; and it's going to be okay!' We laughed about that then, and I don't know where she got from her Sunday School teacher that the Millennium was going to be here in thirteen years! But she was saying it's okay because it won't be that long before we will all be together again. And that was a great comfort to us. Because when we are on this earth and we are in the middle of something like this, each moment is painful and each day a trial and you really don't see beyond tomorrow. A twelve-year-old girl saw this as a stage and as part of a whole and that, even if we were separated here, it wouldn't be that long until we would be together again. So in her childlike way, she put the plan of salvation right there, right now. To our family, the gospel was becoming not just lofty

ideas anymore. It was becoming real. It had to be real."

To maintain this perspective at all times is, of course, extremely difficult. We naturally become absorbed in the challenges of the moment and frequently find our eternal view being clouded as we deal with a difficult now. However, if we are *trying* to keep perspective, we find that at key times our vision expands to help us see our affliction in context; and that can provide us with momentary respite. Sometimes that is all we need to continue. "My husband's upper arm got very bad and he went to see the doctor; but it seemed to get worse. I was even feeding him. He couldn't get his arm up, and the left one didn't work. Then, on top of it all, he lost his balance while he was trying to walk and fell against the guardrail and right on his sore spot. So all night he was up and down and down and up, and I could not sleep. Then I read this little quote. 'Don't become so concerned with the cares of life that the Spirit is neglected. For this life is but a moment, and it will only be those things of the Spirit that we have nurtured that will go with us when we leave.' Of course I knew that, but this just came at the right time." (Grace.)

Enduring a long-term trial seems to take a different set of spiritual and emotional muscles than coping with an affliction that is acute and relatively short-term. It is difficult-and maybe impossible-to develop those muscles, except by being directly involved in a chronic ordeal. "People say it only happens to those parents who are strong enough to bear it. That's not true! You get strong because it has happened! I found out that learning to cope is a process. You wake up with the shock. You wake up every morning hoping this was just some sort of a bad dream. I don't know how many months into this that I would wake up thinking and hoping that. Or not wanting to wake up! When you lose a loved one, you go through a process of denial and wondering and 'Why us?' and 'Why aren't you there, Lord?' You just have to grin and bear it and come out of that." (Mary.)

It is a line-upon-line process which requires us to be patient with ourselves as we develop, through our experience, the strength to endure. But as we have discussed, our own strength is only capable of taking us so far. That realization can ultimately bring us the Lord's promised assistance. "Therefore, dearly beloved ..., let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our

power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance . . . for his arm to be revealed" (D&C 123:17).

"There were times I didn't think I could go any further. I can remember, the morning after my husband left, sweeping my six-by-six-foot kitchen floor for three hours! I didn't keep sweeping it over and over; it just took me that long. I felt heavy. This weight of despair. Not knowing what to do. That has happened occasionally in between. Another time I got a headache that was so bad; I can't explain how horrible it was. I can remember needing to lie on my bed because it was so bad; but it was like six in the afternoon, and the children were still up, and there was no way I could lie down and go to sleep when they were still up, because they were so young and there was no one who could put them to bed. And I remember the first night I finally crawled into bed when I felt that way and said, 'I can't do it any longer.' And I said to my oldest son, 'You'll have to turn all the lights out by yourself and go to bed when you're ready, because I've got to lie down. I can't do it anymore.'

"And the issue of being on the line all the time. There was never anyone else to make a decision or drive a car someplace where the child needed to be. And the exhaustion ... I was so tired! When I'd get that far, I'd just bargain with the Lord: 'Just get me through this next hour and then I'll take care of myself. Then I'll be okay.' And He always has." (Janet)

"Let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power," Joseph Smith said. Then that in turn would open the door for the Lord to step in with assistance (See D&C 123:17). That is hard to do! Especially the "cheerfully" part! But there are some things we can do that "lie in our power," and the "cheerfully" part may just follow. For example, regardless of our capacity, we cannot eat an elephant in a single bite! Breaking our problems down into bite-sized pieces and taking things a day at a time can help make an unending tribulation manageable. "I know I'm not at the end! I know that I'm going to wake up tomorrow and that it's going to go on. I'm tempted to say, 'I quit! I'm tired of this!' But what's that going to get me? Nothing! I know it's not over. I know I'm not quitting. So I tend to break the problems down into smaller ones. Sometimes when you look at the whole thing it's overwhelming. People feel like quitting when they are

out of control and overwhelmed. So on those days when I think I can't do it anymore, I write down just a few simple things that I know I can do, and I do them and I cross them off as being done. That helps.

"I'd be lying if I said I didn't have days when everything wasn't totally depressing. Some days you eat the bear, and some days the bear eats you! And on the day I know the bear is going to eat me, I get out my little planner and say, 'I can't control all the craziness; but I can control the things I write on this list, and I can make myself do these things.' And so, by doing this, I am taking control in a very real way, so it makes it more manageable. And I may only put two things on the list. That's okay. I can do that. And tomorrow I'll have more." (Ann.)

Often our change in circumstances means we can't ever do some things the way we did them before. To seek to adapt to our present condition, rather than to try to do things the way we have always done them, can help decrease our frustrations and allow us to literally make the best of a difficult situation. "When I'm in the grocery store, I take the arm of the wheelchair, hook it around the item I want, and pull it onto my lap. I do the same thing at home. I'm great at getting things out. Then my husband comes and puts them back! Getting in and out of the bathtub, I use a little children's chair.

"It doesn't matter whether you are in a wheelchair or not. Facing life has little to do with our physical situation, and more to do with the way we approach it. I see people who become defeated at the first try. You look at the situation and analyze it. All right, this doesn't work. We can try this and this and this. It comes up in every effort for me. For example, I have a cooking board I carry on my lap so I can carry hot pans off the stove over to the table or to the counter. Sometimes I have to ask for help. It galls me to death, but I've learned that sometimes the best thing is to ask for help! When I left the hospital, they advised my husband not to do anything for me that I could do for myself. The doctor didn't need to give that advice! If you can do it yourself, it's so much easier. People say, 'I'll go for you! I'll do it for you!' But to me, it's easier to do than to sit. My daughter says she's going to put square wheels on my wheelchair when I get older! I drive my own car, thanks to my friend who is also in a wheelchair, who

invented this simple hand control. He gave it to me, and we went around the block, and my sister held her breath all the way; and since then my husband's never seen the car! It's my freedom! I carry my wheelchair behind me, between the front seat and the backseat, and pull it out when I need it." (Carol.)

Sometimes it is helpful for us to make changes in our routine as well. Becoming involved in new hobbies and activities can take our minds off of our drudgery and increase our ability to cope. "I've lived a normal life. Dancing is about the only thing I really liked to do that I can't do now; and my husband doesn't like to dance. Oh, I'd like to travel. I'd like to walk on the beach. I'd like to walk against the wind in the rain like we used to do. Those things will come. There are so many other things you can do, you know." (Carol.)

"While I was going to school, I was walking to a class and saw a sign about trying out for women's basketball. I thought it would be good to be involved in something like that. I went to the coach, thinking I'd do stats or something. He said, 'Can you shoot?' And I said, 'Kind of.' And he told me I should come out for the team. He didn't think I'd last a week. But I'm one of those people that, once I start something, I don't stop. It might take me forever, but I won't quit. He'd run me until I was almost throwing up. And I kept coming back. He said afterward that he didn't think I'd be back after the third day and he knew I'd be gone before two weeks were up. But I kept coming back. I must have really looked goofy just coming back.

"I'd leave practice early to pick up my kids, until finally the coach asked me if I would stop leaving practice early; because, the funny thing was, that when I'd leave practice, the practice would fall apart because those nineteen-year-old kids were trying to keep up with me or beat me. When I left, their incentive was gone. They weren't going to let an old thirty-five-year-old mother of five kids beat them at anything, and that's what seemed to be a motivation for them.

"The first few months, it was awful. I broke my finger. They threw a pass at me so hard that it broke it. I just taped my finger and kept playing. I didn't complain. I'd bring my kids to practice sometimes, and they were always at my games. But I'd never let this interfere with the family. I

always spent the time I needed with them.

"Playing basketball helped a lot. I was around other people, joking around, crying, interacting with other people. And that's what I needed. That time after my husband left, I hadn't been out to be around people, and that was making me worse. You need that physical outlet and that association. I went to aerobic dancing at the stake center and I would just stand there and cry. But working with a team was different for me."  
(Linda.)

There is another thing that is within our power to do to help us endure; it was mentioned earlier, but it bears re-emphasis. Other people can be a real help to us. But when we are devastated and see no way out, no end to our misery, we tend to become withdrawn and inner-focused. Allowing ourselves to feel and respond to the efforts of love by those around us can provide welcome relief. As temporary as that may be, it can take us a step closer to overcoming in the long haul. "I went through depression for months. I would just lie on the floor and cry. I'd just lie there, but I didn't have the strength to get up. I just lay there. I could hear the kids, but I didn't know what was going on. And this one time the kids cleaned up the whole house. They cleaned up the bathrooms, they cleaned the kitchen, they cleaned up everything. And when they were all done, one of my daughters came into my bedroom. I had been crying in there for hours, and I was crying and I was lying there, all curled up; and she was only eight at the time, and she lay on top of me and just held me. And we both sobbed, and the other kids came in and said, 'Mom, we've cleaned the whole house. You've got to come and look at it!' And I could never disappoint the kids. They got me up and out of my room and lugged me around from room to room. What can you do! And I made it through another day."  
(Linda.)

### *"Gird Up Now Thy Loins"*

Life goes on, and so must we. "Gird up now thy loins," the Lord told Job (Job 38:3). But sometimes we falter. I have watched a young mother become so absorbed in the physical pain associated with a chronic, but

non-debilitating, illness, that she made herself, her husband, and children constantly miserable. I have observed a man of considerable talent slowly sink into a morass of self-pity, because of an undiagnosed illness. He has arbitrarily restricted himself in terms of the kind and quantity of service he will render, thus denying himself and others of the good his unbridled service would have brought. The temptation to drop out seems to be always there or at least lurking around the corner. Part of life's test, I have come to see, is in overcoming that tendency to quit. "The real battle is the one against yourself. There just are no shortcuts in a fifty-mile hike." (Janet. )

Fortunately, the Lord has not left us alone. Through our striving to live the gospel, we are given peace and sufficient faith to allow us to take steps beyond the light. Through prayer, the scriptures, and the temple, our veil is ultimately pierced; and His revelation and consolation pours through. As we humble ourselves before Him and realize our weaknesses, He is able to work within us to relieve our burdens and mold us in His image. To try to see our afflictions in their eternal perspective; to live in the "now" rather than in the past (or future, for that matter); and to "do all things that lie in our power" help us endure to the end and make us eligible to have the Savior's "arm to be revealed" in our lives.

On the other hand, to drop out of life as a result of our affliction may be to spiritually immobilize ourselves. We lose out on spiritual growth that may come from our affliction, and we may keep ourselves from future experiences that would bring us closer to the Savior. Perhaps experiencing adversity is not unlike taking penicillin. We need to take the prescribed dosage over the prescribed period of time. To cut it, either in quantity or duration, could make it ineffectual or even harmful to us. By taking the full dose, we are healed and restored.

Each of us must ask ourselves the question the Savior puts to Peter (who wanted to quickly rescue his Master): "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18: 11.) Our answer has much to do with our willingness, and therefore our ability, to use our telestial experience to bring us to a fulness of joy.





# Learning

*I will teach you by the hand of God. –Job 27:11*

I have said much about perspective and its importance in coping with and growing from our experiences. Obviously the ultimate perspective is the one from above, looking down at our telestial struggles from the heights of eternity. There have been some-Enoch, Moses, and the brother of Jared, for example-who have seen that limitless panorama even while living on this earth. Most of us probably will not. Yet the passage of time can help us see our experiences with sorrow in some sort of meaningful context. That which we may have myopically viewed as tragic frequently becomes sublime as our vision is broadened with the passage of time.

I think this happens because the veil that was set in place as we entered mortality has made of this life something of a picture puzzle, with each experience being a piece of that puzzle. As we view a single piece in isolation, or even several pieces interlocked, it is difficult to see what the whole picture is. But as we add piece to piece, not only do we start to see what the ultimate picture will be, but we can see the *necessity* of each piece being in its place in order to make that picture whole and complete. We come to see that there really is a plan, a purpose, to this whole thing we call mortality.

As I discussed briefly in the first chapter of this book, that purpose has to do with our receiving a fulness of joy. A telestial world and the veil and our "picture-puzzle" lives are an integral part of the process. In a real sense, we are in a classroom that has been uniquely designed to teach us how to be like God, so that we may receive all that He has, including the fulness of His joy (see John 17:12-13, I John 1:1-4; I John 3:1-3, D&C 76:54-70; D&C 84:37-38; D&C 88: 15-20). In fact, in describing our earthly experience, the Lord uses terms like *prove*, *learn* and *try*, all referring to the teaching aspect of this segment of our eternal journey (see Hebrews 5:8; D&C 98:12,14; D&C 101:4; Abraham 3:25).

Each piece of our own life's picture puzzle is meant to have purpose. Each experience with adversity can bring the development of godly

attributes, so that we may "come ... unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4: 13). However, as many Primary children can tell us, the Lord will force no man to learn, for He "gave unto man that he should act for himself" (2 Nephi 2:16). It is up to us to use our earthly experiences for their intended purpose-to learn how to become one with God.

I suppose each person has a slightly different idea as to which attributes we must develop if we are to be like the Savior. I have mine. And the older I get, the simpler my list becomes. In fact, it is down to just five basic traits, and even these overlap and define one another. They are: humility; a thankful heart; a repentant spirit; faith; and charity, the pure love of Christ.

"On the one hand, I found it really difficult to keep focused on my eternal objectives when my trials of the flesh were so immediate and pressing. My dreams of another world and my anticipation that I at least wouldn't have to be concerned about money there just weren't sufficient to pay the bills! But what I discovered-and there were times right in the middle of my trials when I caught glimpses of this-was that these experiences with the world were helping me to learn things of the Spirit. The learning process was subtle, although some of my experiences were anything but that! It wasn't something that would happen overnight. But as I would look back six months or a year, I'd see that I was a little more humble, or had a little more faith, or was a little more compassionate. I think you need to look at your trials like that. I think you need to see how you can grow from them." (Larry.)

If we do, we may receive a blessing like the one given to Jacob: "[the Lord] shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain" (2 Nephi 2:2).

### *Humility*

*"Because ye are compelled to be humble blessed are ye " (Alma 32:13).*

As pointed out in the preceding chapter, part of the process of coping with adversity is recognizing that we need the Lord's help. This exercise in

humility opens the door for His grace to be efficacious in our struggle. In fact, our experience with sorrow can help instill within us a permanent state of humility, which condition is necessary if we are to gain all that we have been sent here to receive.

Why is humility so important to our ultimately receiving a fulness of joy? First of all, when we are humble we can start to see ourselves as we really are. The cataracts of pride are no longer there to cloud and distort our view. Knowing where we are helps us see what needs to be done in order to improve. Our bouts with adversity can help disintegrate those cataracts and clear our vision.

Carol had such an experience. "My polio has helped me to learn about Carol. It has helped me to be still, so I can hear. In the last year I think I've been getting a handle on what I can and can't do. After fifty-six years of life! This isn't related to polio, it's related to life. Knowing what I can and cannot do-that's a question for life. The polio, because it takes me longer to do things and makes things more difficult, has helped me to come to an awareness of my need to learn that lesson: getting a handle on what I can and cannot do."

Ron describes how he came to see things more clearly. "At the first, I blamed my first wife-and everybody else, but especially her. I was really mad at her. I tried to justify that it was her fault that I got caught up in this problem with another woman. But I've since learned that it was not her problem. It was my problem! I just came to this stark conclusion, years later, that I just didn't handle it right."

The cleared vision that comes with true humility allows us to see our strengths as well as our weaknesses. Knowing something of our self-worth provides an important foundation as we seek to become like the Savior.

"For years my husband told me I was stupid and crazy. And I really believed that! And even now, with all that's happened and all he has done, sometimes I revert back to the thought, 'It must have been me. It must have been my fault.' But now, whenever I get like that, something happens that shows me that that isn't right, and I get everything back in context. As much as it hurts, I think this is an experience that I needed to have. I would never be who I am now if I hadn't gone through this. I'm still

working on me. A lot of times I think I'm okay and sometimes I don't. But I'm learning that I'm okay." (Linda.)

"I've learned something about myself. I'm a lot stronger than I thought I was! I'm fun to be with. I'm delightful and charming. It's almost like I can say, 'You shouldn't take this divorce personally!' The issue here was not that I'm an awful person! But that has been a long time coming. I didn't know that for an awful long time." (Janet.)

"I never would have chosen, on my own, this kind of experience and this kind of growth. Depending on when you would have asked me what I learned about myself, sometimes I would have said I'm a lot weaker than I thought I was, sometimes that I'm stronger; sometimes that I know why I'm here, and other times that things are foggy and I didn't even want to think through it. But I now know more about myself and my relationship with the Savior." (Mary.)

The second reason why humility is important is that it tends to make us teachable (see Alma 32:6). The humility we learn from our trials can help us to be receptive to all that the Lord would teach us in our celestial school. The opening of our ears and eyes to celestial tutoring is essential if we are to learn His ways. But the opening of our hearts to His teachings makes the learning only possible, not easy. "This experience has taught me that I am not where I want to be. I would like to be like Jesus Christ, only I'm not sure how He got to be like He is. I'd like to be all of the things that I'm not, but I'm not sure that I am willing to pay the price to get there. I wish there was an easy way, but there's not. So I've learned how far I really need to go. That's not pleasant, is it? It's not pleasant to learn that you're not compassionate, patient, and nurturing, by nature. For me, they are acquired traits; and the acquiring is difficult. As I sat and listened to conference, I wanted to be as those people. I wanted to have a greater command of the scriptures, to know more, to get it together, to do what I'm supposed to do while I'm here so I can finish it and be done with it and move on. And I have learned that I have a long way to go. My daughter Janie is a blessing. God let her live to help me! So that I could role-model Janie. I asked Him about what I was learning, the other day, in prayer. Why don't I feel like I've learned more?" (Ann.)

There often seems to be an accelerated learning benefit to our adversity. The increase in humility that is frequently brought on by our trials can do much to speed up our individual learning process. "I think I have become all of the things I wanted to be on this earth more and faster than I could have, had I not had this experience. None of those things to perfection, but I'm better than I was! Some of this is age, and that would have happened anyway. But wonderful capacities inside for life; being better than I dreamed it could be. I'm glad-not glad I had this trial, but glad I'm learning and I'm okay." (Janet.)

Finally, coming to a realization of our own nothingness in relationship to God, as Moses did (see Moses 1: 10), opens the door for us to learn of our need to depend upon Him in *everything* that we do. For many of us, this humility would only come as a result of experiences that strip us of our pride and bring us to see our need for complete reliance on Him. For "the Lord God showeth us our weakness that we may know that it is by his grace, and his great condescensions unto the children of men, that we have power to do these things" (Jacob 4:7).

"I have learned that I was vulnerable. I am not above anything happening to me. I had been so critical of others, and then I found it happening to me. I'm as vulnerable as anybody! And when all is said and done, you have no one to turn to except your Heavenly Father. Everyone thinks you're a creep, and rightly so; and your self-esteem is shot and gone. So you're brought to humility and to approaching God, because that's your only way out." (Ron.)

As we continue to experience the need to rely on Christ, we meet His corresponding willingness to succor us in our hours of want. Then our damning tendency to be a "law unto [ourselves]" (D&C 88:35) gradually dissipates, and we begin to willingly surrender our souls to Him, which offering is a prerequisite to our receiving all that the Lord would have us receive (see Omni 1:26).

"I've thought a lot about what's happened to me as a result of my experiences here. I am coming to understand my complete dependency upon the Lord. I mean, how could I have dealt with this whole situation if I didn't have that comforting Spirit? That has been my real strength. And I

think that there is a paradox there. My strength has come through seeing my inability to do much of anything by myself. And that awareness has led me to rely upon the Savior, and that has brought me strength-His strength. Maybe that's humility, I don't know. But that's what I am learning. And I'm learning that I want to be one with Him, and I'm learning that He will teach me how, if I'm willing to listen and to seek those experiences that will bring me to Him. I'm learning not to put restrictions on what those experiences will be. And my prayer is that He will bless me with experiences that will let me know Him and be like Him, whatever those experiences may be. That seems to open the door wide open, doesn't it! I'm not really masochistic, and I don't seek pain; but I've decided that I don't know exactly what I need, and He does. So I will leave that up to Him." (Michael.)

### *A Thankful Heart*

*"Live in thanksgiving daily, for the many mercies and blessings which he doth bestow upon you" (Alma 34:38).*

Sometimes, when everything is going smoothly for us, we tend to forget about blessings. The "smoothness" or the "easiness" of the way can have a hypnotic effect, lulling us into a sense of expectation which replaces our feelings of gratitude. We cease to recognize the Lord's hand in all good things that come our way (see Moroni 10:18), and instead we assume that the good life just comes with the territory. Our adversities, on the other hand, can provide the kind of contrasting background that highlights our blessings and allows us to see that they are, in fact, gifts; and that because they are gifts, we should be forever grateful, having received them through no merit of our own.

"I think I understand better now the purpose for mortal existence. Without this trial I may have been unappreciative of the great blessing of life." (Loren.)

"I look at life differently now. I cherish-that's the word!-I *cherish* every moment of my life. Every moment. And I have discovered the

importance of giving thanks daily for life's blessings. I just feel this continual desire to give thanks." (Mark.)

"I was simple and took the magnificence of this life for granted and expected so much to just come, one thing right after another-marriage, motherhood. And having those things be difficult has made every minute of motherhood joyous. Even the tough ones. I am grateful to have been allowed to be a mother." (Janet. )

Our gratitude continues to expand as we begin to see our everyday experiences for what they really are: blessings. "I have become aware of the simple things, the great blessings that we perhaps miss. Just the other day I was looking up at the sky, at the night, and saw hundreds and hundreds of stars, and was struck by their beauty. And my heart sang with joy! I went down to the ocean and was filled with the beauty that I found there. I was in the grocery store the other day, and there was a father and mother, and a little child who couldn't speak words but was gibbering along like the whole world could understand him. I stopped and laughed as I witnessed this, and the parents looked at me strangely, like this was no big deal. But the little child and his attempt to talk were a joy to me." (Mark.)

"This experience has brought me an appreciation for some important things, like forgiveness and repentance, that would have taken me years to have gained appreciation of the priesthood and the ordinances and blessings that I took for granted before. Going without it, it was devastating! I feel I have a greater value of things like the sacrament. For five years I couldn't take it. I took it for granted before. Not now." (Ron.)

Why is a thankful heart so important? Because in order for us to *understand* and *partake of* the love of God, we need to *recognize* the manifestations of that love. We are told that, even if we were to "render all the thanks and praise which [our] whole soul has power to possess, ...yet [we] would be unprofitable servants" (Mosiah 2:20-21). Can we even begin to comprehend our standing before the Lord if we actually deny His gifts by our ingratitude? (See Moroni 10:8.) "I have been given so much! My baby died, but my wife lived! And even the baby dying has ended up being a blessing to me. The resurrection is more of a reality to me. The

Savior is more of a reality to me. I feel more intense love and gratitude for each of my living children than I did before. I love my wife more. I look at my life now as one continual stream of blessings, and I didn't see it like that before. I can see His love manifest in every aspect of my life, and there are times that I am literally overwhelmed. What have I done to deserve such blessings? I know the answer to that, too. Not very darn much! He just loves me." (Michael.)

### *A Repentant Spirit*

*"My soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!" (Alma 36:20.)*

While it is true that sorrow does not always bring repentance, it is also true that repentance can never come about in our lives without our experiencing sorrow. Ultimately, as Alma so poignantly testified, that sorrow can lead to intense joy. In fact, the only sorrow that cannot bring joy comes from sin unrepented of, for "wickedness never was happiness" (Alma 41:10). But sometimes it takes a while before we understand that. Our pride is resilient. It does not break easily. It is difficult to admit that we are wrong. Our trials can lead us to repentance by softening our pride. "Initially I looked for faults in the Church. I looked for things that would make the Church not true. I didn't feel guilt at first. I guarded against this feeling of sorrow, and I rationalized my way through everything. It was better for the kids, for me, for everyone involved. It was silly! I didn't have peace! When I started sincerely praying for forgiveness and understanding, which was in the second or third year, it started coming to me. There was a tremendous amount of guilt and there still is to this day. I know the Lord has forgiven me. I've been re-baptized. I've gone to the temple again and have been sealed to my present wife, but I've caused a lot of heartache." (Ron.)

"No unclean thing can dwell with God" (1 Nephi 10:21), and God "doth not dwell in unholy temples" (Alma 7:21). "How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?" (Job 25:4.) Repentance is that cleansing mechanism. I believe there are three

aspects to that process.

First, it seems that there must be a purging. That "wicked spirit [must be] rooted out of [our] breasts and [we must] receive his Spirit, that [we] may be filled with joy" (Alma 22:15). "I can't think of anything that is more humiliating and humbling than being excommunicated when you are an active, strong, believing member of the Church. The Lord knew what He was doing when he put that whole process together. At the time you don't realize it, but you're broken down and given a clean slate so you can start all over again. And unless you feel you have done some form of punishment and forgiveness, I don't know if you ever totally go through the whole process of repentance. You know how they say, if you're a drug addict, you've got to hit bottom before you can start going up. It's kind of the same process. You hit bottom and everything is taken from you. For me, as I look back on it, there really was no other choice." (Ron.)

Alma describes his own experience with this purging process in gut-wrenching terms. "I [was] racked ... with the pains of a damned soul" (Alma 36:16). "My soul [was racked] with inexpressible horror" (verse 14). "[My desire was] that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body" (verse 15). It would seem obvious that the degree of purging required has to do with the degree to which our spirits have become contaminated. We can rest assured that if we sincerely begin the repentance process, the Lord will see to it that our cleansing is adequate!

Being thus prepared, we can then take the second step to being completely cleansed. "And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (Mosiah 4:2.) The recognition and acceptance of our need to rely completely upon the grace of Christ-not only to receive forgiveness, but also to overcome the weaknesses of the flesh-is an integral part of our repentance. To accept Christ as *our own personal Savior* is to make effectual in our lives His atonement and its cleansing and strengthening power. The joyful experience of this spiritual rebirth, juxtaposed with the pain of our purging

sorrow, is experiencing existence to its fullest. "What joy, and what marvelous light I did behold .... There could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains .... On the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy." (Alma 36:20-21.)

"If you have ever been in a position where you need forgiveness, and you ask for forgiveness, and that forgiveness is given to you, that kind of joy is absolutely intense. I have never been in a position before where I've asked for forgiveness that humbly. When I received my priesthood back and felt that forgiveness from the Lord . . . I have never experienced joy like that before or since." (Ron.)

Repentance is a process. It is ongoing. Repentance is not complete until our lives have been changed and we seek righteousness in all that we do. Although we may have had a singular and powerful rebirth experience as Alma did, it is not a "take" unless it has affected every aspect of our life. That is why Alma asked the members of the Church in his day, "If ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, ... can ye feel so now?" (Alma 5:26.) To have a clean vessel requires not only a thorough spring cleaning, but a daily sweeping as well!

"I found that the things that matter the most didn't occupy enough of my thoughts before [prior to the struggles with her daughter's cancer]. I have found that we can really be in the world but not of the world. Some people work on this every day, and other people (like me) had to have something like this happen to see this. Four years down the line you get in a rut again, and the world starts to creep in again, and you get complacent. I read back in my journal about the promises I made to my daughter and to my Heavenly Father at that time, and reflect back upon these experiences again to put things back in perspective. I have learned that life is such a constant struggle." (Mary.)

The complete repentance process involves purging, being spiritually reborn through Christ, and consistently striving for righteousness. Our trials whether they come as a direct result of our sins or not-can lead us to a repentant spirit which makes the cleansing and purifying power of the Savior a reality in our lives. Ultimately this results in the mastering of our

carnal natures. And this in turn allows us to experience fulness of joy-not because the carnal part is gone, for it isn't; but because we *understand* it and totally *subject* it to our righteous wills.

In this connection, writer Brenda Ueland observed, "Great men feel and know everything that mean men feel, even more clearly, but they seem to have made some kind of an ascension, and these evil feelings, though they still understand them sympathetically, no longer exert any power over them" (*If You Want to Write* [Saint Paul, Minn.: Graywolf Press, 1987], p. 111).

### *Faith*

*"Ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith" (Ether 12:6).*

Our afflictions are by definition "trials of our faith." In order to begin to understand what faith is and why it plays such a vital role in our search for the fulness of joy, it might be helpful to take a closer look at the relationship between eternity, time, and the veil. I know I can't adequately explain eternity-I don't understand it perfectly and I can use only time-restricted words-but I have thought about an analogy that has helped me.

Looking at time from the perspective of eternity is rather like looking at an hourglass which represents "time." The sand in the top of the hourglass represents the "future," the narrow neck of the glass through which the sand drops represents the "now," and the bottom of the hourglass is the "past." God is *outside* of the hourglass and sees it in its entirety. He can see the "future" and watch it slip through the "now," into the "past." It is all there and all there at once. On the other hand, we cannot look at the hour glass as a whole, because we are *inside* of it. We are in the neck of the hourglass and catch only a fleeting glimpse of the sand granule as it falls past us from future to past. That is our "now." We see neither the future nor the past because we are caught in the "now" of time. We have some ability to expand our view into the past, however. Our memories allow us to recall (with varying degrees of accuracy) the experiences which have passed through our "nows," but that is a hazy and incomplete recollection at best. As imperfect as our memory is, though, it has a

dilative effect on our "now" experiences; and that in turn can affect how we will react to our future "nows." In essence, our ability to remember allows us to learn.

Since our view is thus restricted, virtually all our premeditated acts are done because we anticipate that the results (which we cannot see) will be what we desire them to be. And here is where faith comes in, for "faith is the substance of things *hoped for*, the evidence of things *not seen*" (Hebrews 11: 1, emphasis added). In a sense, faith is the proof of our righteous desires. It is a manifestation of who and what we want to be.

At first we generally keep the commandments of God because we just want to obey; or, in some cases, because we are fearful of what may happen if we don't. We don't know for certain that the consequence of obedience is joy. We hope it is, and because of that hope we do that which we have been commanded to do. In essence, that combination of righteous hope and action can be defined as faith the manifesting of our hope by our actions.

There is something terribly important about this whole process of acting according to our desires without knowing with certainty the end results. I confess that I am only beginning to catch glimpses of what it really means. I am beginning to see, though, that it is a characteristic we must have in order to overcome our earthly trials. In fact, it is by some kind of ultimate faith that God's power is manifest in *everything* (see *Lectures on Faith* 7:1-5). Faith is a defining characteristic of God Himself. And our experience with time and its restriction of our vision is necessary for us to obtain that faith.

Our faith is both acquired and strengthened by experiencing trying circumstances without a clear end in sight, and being sustained primarily by our hope not only for a "brighter day," but for meaningful fruits from the trial itself. As we exercise faith to that end, relying on the prophetic promise, we ultimately see fulfillment of that promise; and our faith yields its eternal fruit (see Alma 32:21, 26-27, 33-34, 40-43). There simply is no other way. And in a very real sense, those afflictions and trials that require the greatest faith to overcome, allow us to make the greatest strides, drawing us ever closer to knowing the Savior.

"I feel that I needed these experiences in order for me to realize what I needed to find out here on this earth. I know that, in order for me to accomplish what He has sent me to accomplish (and it is frightening), I am required to exercise faith in the end result without knowing or seeing that end result in what I am doing or what is happening to me. Almost everything, now, takes total reliance on Him and crying out for His help for me to do it. It almost seems impossible. Yet it results in the most exquisite, joyful experiences that I have had. Yet I daily fear my own salvation. And I fight back. I just had no idea that life would be like this; but on the other hand, I know why it must be like this." (Ted.)

There are some practical, here-and-now benefits from faith. Faith is a line-upon-line kind of thing. Our faith can take us through one trial after another, building our strength as we go, and allowing us to cope with and learn from increasingly difficult circumstances. Knowing that we safely made it through one trial bolsters our faith, and therefore our ability, to make it through an even tougher one. As we gain confidence in our ability, with the Lord's help, to withstand and learn, our fear of the unknown begins to shrink.

"When I was a kid, there were some nights when the shadows scared me. I was extra careful on those nights to lock my windows and to make certain the doors in the house were locked as well. I wouldn't sleep very well, and I would force my eyes to stay closed, and I would wonder whether I would survive the night. In the morning the shadows would be gone and I would be embarrassed, as I'd look around the room at the things that had made such terrifying shadows in the night. As I got older, the shadows stopped bothering me so much, and I stopped being so scared. The shadows were still there, but I wasn't afraid of them, because I had gone through the night so many times safely that I wasn't scared of them anymore.

"It's been like this with my experiences with my daughter. My family and I have survived everything that has happened so far; and when something happens now that would have been completely devastating before, we take it more in stride. Maybe it's easier now because of that. Maybe not easier, but we don't fear so much what is going to ultimately

happen here. We know from experience that the key thing is for us to be doing what we are supposed to be doing, and everything will work out. There is no question that this whole experience has increased our faith. And that has brought a peace of mind that we didn't have at the beginning of this." (Burt.)

Overcoming our bouts with adversity in a time-restricted environment requires faith. As a result of our striving to exercise the needed faith, that faith is increased and strengthened, blessing us with ever greater capacities to overcome and learn. That process, we are promised, will ultimately lead to the knowledge of God Himself, and to the eternal life and fulness of joy that is the result (see John 17:3).

### *Charity, the Pure Love of Christ*

*"Cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all" (Moroni 7:46).*

Over the last few years I have thought often about love. Love, I believe, is much like white light. As white light is the sum of all of the colors in the spectrum, so love is the sum of all that is good (see I Corinthians 13:1-13). I heard a man say that, in order for you to know what another person means when he talks about love, you have to know something about that person. I believe that is true. I know that it is true in order to understand the pure love of Christ, for "every one that loveth is born of God, and *knoweth* God. He that *loveth not knoweth not God*; for God is love" (I John 4:7-8, emphasis added).

As I have studied the life of the Savior, I have been impressed that everything that He does seems to have the same end: to bring us into an oneness with Him and His Father. From the creation of the world to the At-one-ment, every act, every recorded statement of purpose, is to gather us in, that we may be partakers with Him of the divine. I believe that such a godly desire is the pure love of Christ. I believe that to have that desire in its fulness is to have a fulness of joy. And that desire is a gift which "[God] hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ" (Moroni 7:48).

To love a person with the pure love of Christ is to want to become one

with that person in Christ. Christ's prayers on our behalf and His admonitions toward that end have been consistent and pointed. For example, He prayed "that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me" (John 17:21). And He has told us that "if ye are not one ye are not mine" (D&C 38:27). But such love is not a natural tendency for people with a carnal nature. We have a tendency to become a law unto ourselves; to be elf-centered, prideful, and anxious about our own comforts, pleasures, prestige, and glory. These are traits that pull us away from the oneness that will bring a fulness of joy. And they are not inclinations we can overcome easily or by ourselves.

Our experiences on this telestial sphere test our willingness to obtain this oneness, and provide the means by which we may receive the grace of Christ and ultimately realize that oneness to its fullest. If it is our desire to be a "true follower" of Christ, then all that we learn through our trials will point us to His pure love until we become "filled" (see Moroni 7:48).

"I've shed tears about the Savior. I've learned that somewhere, somehow, He suffered an extra burden because of me. Before, it was a theory, this Atonement. It sounded good. But now it is real. I was sick, and He was the doctor; and He made me well again." (Ron.)

"Now I'm not looking so much at what other people do, or determining what's right by what other people do; I look more at what Christ would do. I constantly ask myself, 'If Christ were in my situation, with five children, what would He do in this thing or that?' When I blow up and get angry at the children, I ask, 'What would Christ do? He would go and apologize.' And that's what I do. I never thought that before. Never! The bottom line is that Christ always gave. I have tried to follow Christ in giving-giving to my children, to others, and even to my ex-husband." (Linda.)

"There is greater love between me and my wife and among our children than there was before. We don't quarrel and we don't raise our voices anymore." (Mark.)

"I think my experience has made me appreciate love-particularly as it applies to my wife, as she has sacrificed for me and supported me. It has bonded our love." (Loren.)

"I wonder if you have to experience hate and bitterness, and pound

your fist, and curse, and ask the Lord where He is, in order to feel His love. I did that. I didn't know how else to get through it. But I felt His love. I felt the love of the Savior in a time when nothing else could have made a difference. I felt that I was no longer alone." (Mary.)

"I have learned to appreciate another person's good. To accept other people. My biggest responsibility is to increase my capacity to love. When I am doing that, the other things in my life fall in line." (Carol.)

"Not too long ago I was talking with two of my children who are now in college. They were expressing their love for me and for the family and their gratitude for being in the family. I asked them why they thought our family was so close and why they felt there was so much love there. At first they mentioned things we did as a family-like family home evening, and special activities, and family prayers, and reading the scriptures. And then they both got emotional, and I knew what they were going to say, because I have felt the same way. They said that maybe the biggest reason was because of our experiences with my oldest daughter and her trials. I just nodded my head and wept because of the love I feel for her and how intensely I want her to be part of my family, and because we were all learning about love and the effect that kind of love was having on my family." (Burt.)

Charity manifests itself in our lives by the way we feel toward our fellowmen; and our own experiences with sorrow and tribulation can help make us more compassionate and empathetic towards others. "I see all around me, now, that life is not the simple formula I used to think it was. So I have an increased empathy. But sometimes I am so bound up in my own troubles that I have difficulty being concerned about others. It is only when I feel the Savior's love that I become aware of the needs of others. I've come to realize that that is what charity is. I have felt it; and it turns you outward to help and assist others." (Ted.)

With increased capacity for empathy, our tendency to be critical and judgmental decreases.

"Before, I very much looked down on anybody else who had this problem. I was a critical person. I'd sit in priesthood meetings when they would announce the excommunication of a person, and that person wasn't

going to get any mercy from me! That all has totally changed." (Ron.)

"There is no question that I have learned something about judging others! Before this happened to us, when everything was sailing smoothly along, I'd look at the parents of a problem child and nod my head knowingly. They just weren't being patient enough, or spending enough time, or being a good enough friend to their child; or these problems with the child wouldn't be happening. 'After all,' I would think, 'look how things are going with me and my family. No major problems, and good relationships; and that's because I'm being the kind of parent I ought to be!' It wasn't that I would be openly critical of these people, but I certainly thought they weren't being very good parents. Consequently I didn't have much compassion for them at all. Boy, has that changed! I don't judge another parent. Period." (Burt.)

Having our own weaknesses spotlighted through our trials, and feeling the consoling and forgiving love of the Savior, leads us to be similarly forgiving and hopeful for those who have wronged us. "We were once singing 'Jesus, Once of Humble Birth' at church. And the phrase that caught me was 'once rejected by his own.' That idea has been of great value to me. He must have felt what I feel, as people He cared about betrayed Him. Maybe He felt it on a grander scale, but I have certainly felt it to the stretch of my ability. Knowing He paid for this whole thing, and I'm okay because of what He did, and the hope that I still have for my former husband as a result of my understanding of what the Savior is all about—all of this has been a great blessing to me." (Janet.)

As we seek to reduce our tendency to react in a retributive way to those who have hurt us, we find the Savior's love growing in our hearts; and that, in turn, increases our ability to forgive. "This experience has changed my capacity to love. I still love my ex-husband! After all the hurt and pain, I still love him. I believe that is because I have tried to live closer to the Savior. And that tenderness that has resulted has helped me and my children not to be bitter.

"I have seen others be bitter. A lady I know who had been divorced for sixteen years was ugly and bitter and would yell at my children. She just stood out in my mind, and I knew I didn't want to become like that. I knew

I wouldn't become like that. I still get angry. But now my kids and I talk about it. We talk it out." (Linda.)

Being compassionate and forgiving leads us to the ultimate expression of charity: a willingness to bear another's burdens. Having experienced trials ourselves, we may become capable of lightening the load of another, and we are led to desire to do so. "I might not understand exactly how another person feels in their difficult situation; but I have a friend I am working with now that has a lot of emotional problems, and I can say to her, 'I know how it feels to be low, to be stressed, and to have my testimony lower, and to not be sure I want to wake up in the morning. I also know that there are people who care and who understand and who want to help.' And I can put my arm around her and mean it. I don't know if, having never had these kinds of experiences, you could really do that and have the other person feel it. I look back at my talks and my service before this experience and I don't regret what I said and did then, because I realize life is a process; but I couldn't reach and understand like I can now." (Mary.)

It may be that, to comprehend the heights and depths of Christ's love, we must also experience circumstances that would require intense and persistent self-sacrificing and sorrow on behalf of another. "I don't know how to explain this, but with my experience with my daughter, I think I have caught a glimpse of what the Savior's atonement is about. I know something about bearing the sins of another, and paying for those sins and willingly paying for those sins, because of your love for that person. I know something about how heavy that burden must be to the Savior. I also know something of the tremendous sorrow that the bearing of that burden brings, and also the joy that comes when that person responds in a positive way to your offering. I don't know how to explain what I am trying to say, but I feel it. I know it is the love of Christ, and I am grateful for those experiences that have allowed me to taste it." (Burt.)

Ultimately, our feelings of love must be transformed into actions of love or they stagnate and die. Service is the works of charity. And as faith without works is dead (see James 2:17), so there is not charity without

service. As we feel the love of Christ increase in our lives, our focus becomes centered on doing things that bless the lives of others, rather than on our own selfish wants. Indeed, it is likely that we will find our wants changing drastically.

"Over the last few years, we have not had the financial struggles that we had for so long. Maybe it was the Lord withholding the financial blessings until He knew I would handle them right. Whatever the reason, I have come to understand the stewardship role I have with these blessings; and I don't know that I would have understood that, to the extent I do now, if I had not had my struggles before. Now I don't want to hoard, and the making of money is not a priority in my life anymore. I have found out that the Lord will provide sufficient for my needs, and I don't need to be excessively worried about it. What I need to do is to use my time to help others. And I try to do that. I am far more willing to share with others both my time and resources than I was before we had these experiences. In fact, I am finding myself looking for opportunities to help, and that just wasn't me before. That is what I want to do, and that is the kind of person I want to be." (Larry.)

The pure love of Christ has been promised to all who are His true followers. Our experiences with sorrow and affliction provide unique insights into what that love is all about. We are taught by our trials to have compassion, to not judge, and to be forgiving. As a result, we seek to bear the burdens of others and to lose our lives in service. These manifestations of charity ultimately lead us to the tree of life, which is "the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men" and is "the most desirable above all things" and "the most joyous to the soul" (1 Nephi 11:22-23).

### *Conclusion*

*"I will teach you by the hand of God" (Job 27:11).*

The Lord tells us that "all things wherewith you have been afflicted shall work together for your good" (D&C 98:3). Indeed, our entire earthly experience has been uniquely designed to be like the law given to Moses,

a "schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ" (Galatians 3:24). While that doesn't necessarily mean the Lord has direct involvement in all that transpires in our lives, I believe it does mean that this mortal probation allows each of us to be confronted with the particular set of experiences and challenges that would teach us all that we were sent here to learn. If it is our desire, our trials can teach us humility, a thankful heart, a repentant spirit, and faith. These are divine qualities that apparently can be learned only in a time-restricted environment and while we are temporarily estranged from God. The development of these traits leads, in turn, to the pure love of Christ, which brings a fulness of joy. That state of being is represented in the scriptures by our partaking of the fruit of the tree of life.

The Savior has shown us by precept and example how we may partake of the fruit of that tree. We can use Lehi's imagery to describe His journey. He has passed through the dark and dreary waste, has walked safely past the filthy waters, has withstood the taunting and temptations of the world, and has stood at the tree and partaken (see I Nephi 8:5-33). He has gone "forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind" (Alma 7: 11), that He might grow from "grace to grace" (see D&C 93:12-14) and show us the way. He has taught us, not only by His hand, but by His very life. That was His great condescension (see I Nephi 11:16-17, 26-33). That was the ultimate manifestation of His pure love. He has given us the iron rod, which is His word; by holding fast to it, we are assured of reaching the tree of life, which is the love of God (see I Nephi 11:25). And He has given us His grace which, if we will "deny ourselves of all ungodliness," is "sufficient" for us that we may "become holy, without spot," as He is (Moroni 10:32-33). Then we may be worthy to partake, with Him, of the fruit that brings us a fulness of joy (see I Nephi 11:22-23).

But the way, His way to joy, is through the recognition of the "opposition in all things"- and, therefore, experiencing sorrow as a requisite to experiencing joy. We must follow Jesus, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured...lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." (Hebrews 12:2-3).

"The problem is, we all want to eradicate pain, but it is an eternal verity. We can't, and we've all been trying to. If you didn't have pain, you'd never have joy; because pain's a constant. The mistake we make is that we think we can eliminate it totally. It can't happen. Joy is not pain-free." (Ann.)

Joy is not the absence of sorrow, but the mastery of sorrow. Joy and sorrow cannot be defined without each other; cannot be known without each other; cannot exist one without the other. But when we follow the Savior's way, He promises our "sorrow shall be turned into joy" (John 16:20).

"This experience has led me to the Savior. I have found that there is no way I can live my life alone. I cannot overcome alone. I need the Savior, and I know that through Him I can overcome. I can see that the road ahead is just as treacherous as the one I have been on. But I have learned that when it is the darkest, when all else has failed, he is there. He has been there for me. I don't think I could have found Him in any other way." (Ted.)

Who shall partake of His "tree of life" or drink of His "living waters"? (See I Nephi 11:25.) "Only he shall drink who has himself spilled and gulped and wept. . . . Only he who is beaten, like oil which has been beaten from the olives, until he is ... pure and fit, shall drink." (Lawrence Kushner, *The Book of Letters, A Mystical Alef-bait* [New York: Harper and Row, 1975], p. 35.)

There is no other way.



# Choosing

*What then shall I do? – Job 31:14*

Choice is all-important. As James E. Talmage explained, "From Father Adam we have inherited all the ills to which flesh is heir; but such are necessarily incident to a knowledge of good and evil, *by the proper use of which knowledge man may become even as the Gods*" (*The Articles of Faith*, 12th ed. [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1977], p. 70, emphasis added). Understanding this, each of us must ultimately ask and answer the same introspective question Job asked in the midst of his sorrows: "What then shall I do?" (Job 31:14.)

"As we talked about it with the children during that first meeting, my husband said there are two ways we can go with this thing. We can fight it, where we can grow and use the gospel and scriptures and family ties to bring closeness and faith to help us through, and grow in love and be a better family because of it. Or we can fall apart and become bitter; we can become resentful; we can wonder each day of our life why this happened to us; we can resent the time that it's going to take to be with Cindy and away from the rest of the family. We knew there couldn't be a middle of the road for us." (Mary.)

When my great-great-grandparents joined the Church in Sweden in the early 1860s, they were faced with a long ocean voyage to America, a train trip from New York to Omaha, and then a trek by wagon to Salt Lake City. But when they boarded the train in New York, they discovered that they were to ride in stock cars that had been used to haul hogs to market. The cars were filthy and filled with hog lice. Grandmother accepted the inconvenience, but the humiliation was almost more than Grandfather could bear. "To think we are no better than hogs," he grumbled. Reluctantly he made the trip anyway.

Grandmother was expecting another child, and when they reached Omaha to begin their long trek west, Grandfather was concerned about her health and the safety of the baby. The wagon master assured him there were competent midwives available and that everything would be all right,

so they commenced their journey.

Somewhere on the plains of Nebraska, a healthy baby was born. But a few days later their three-year-old son contracted cholera. In the middle of the night Grandfather went to a neighboring wagon to borrow a candle, but was told there were none to spare. This angered him, and he fumed as he sat in the dark with his son's limp, feverish body in his arms. The boy died that night.

The next morning the wagon master said they would hold a short funeral service and bury the boy in a shallow grave, apologetically explaining that they were in dangerous Indian country and didn't have time to do anything more. But Grandfather couldn't accept this; he insisted on staying behind to dig a grave deep enough that animals couldn't get the body.

Throughout the day and into the night he worked, building a strong, wood coffin and digging a grave five feet deep in the hard soil. Finally, exhausted and sobbing, he buried his son and then walked all night to catch up with the wagon train. He was heartbroken and he was mad-mad at the wagon master for not waiting to give his son a proper burial, and mad at God for "allowing" his son to die. When he arrived at his wagon and vented his feelings to his wife, she spoke to him tenderly. "Father, we have to make the best of it. The baby and I are all right, and, thank the Lord, the rest of us are well. If we get to our journey's end without any more trouble, we must be very thankful to our Heavenly Father. We have joined the Mormon church because we believed it was the only true one, and I have faith that it is. We are not the only ones that are having sorrow and trouble on this trip."

This wasn't the end of their difficulties. They continued to suffer serious hardships and adversities throughout their lives. But although they both went through nearly identical experiences, each responded differently to them. Grandfather became withdrawn, cantankerous, and bitter. He stopped going to church and found fault with Church leaders. He became caught up in his own miseries, and the light of Christ grew dimmer and dimmer in his life.

On the other hand, Grandmother's faith increased. Each new problem

seemed to make her stronger. It was her choice to use her experience with sorrow to become more Christ-like, more filled with empathy and compassion. Throughout her life she was a light to those around her. And she was happy. Her sorrow led her to peace and joy. (See the author's article "What to Do with Adversity," *Ensign*, February 1981, pp. 54-55.)

The end of sorrow, it seems, can be either charity, which defines the nature of God and is such a vital part of joy; or bitterness, which defines the nature of those who turn inward and become a law unto themselves. For "whosoever will come may come and partake of the waters of life freely; and whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come" (Alma 42:27). And thus the question, "What then shall I do?" Will I find bitterness in sorrow? Or will I choose to build joy from sorrow?

"I would be willing to go through it again. The growth has been worth it. I somehow have to be the kind of person that would stand with the Lord, somehow prove that I'm worthy of what those blessings may be. I'm willing to do that." (Janet.)

"I don't like being ill. I'm a young woman. I love dancing and dating and all the things that every woman enjoys. More than anything I want to have a happy marriage and raise my daughter. I didn't ask for this disease and I don't want it! But I would go through it all again because *I like me as I am now.*" (Donna.)

The Lord's direction and promise is clear. "Wherefore, fear not even unto death; for in this world your joy is not full, but in me your joy is full. Therefore, care not for the body, neither the life of the body; but care for the soul, and for the life of the soul. And seek the face of the Lord always, that in patience ye may possess your souls." (D&C 101:36-38.)

And Alma's pleadings for all who seek to follow Christ resonate with hope. "Then may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son. And even all this can ye do if ye will." (Alma 33:23)

Joy is indeed the other side of sorrow. If that is our choice.



# Appendix

The people who were interviewed for this book are listed alphabetically below, along with a brief description of their circumstances. In order to preserve their anonymity, I have changed their names and some details that might identify them.

## **Ann, mother of comatose daughter**

Ann is the mother of three children. Some years ago her six-year-old daughter, Janie, was struck by a car while crossing a busy street near her home. Janie had stopped breathing when the paramedics arrived. They revived her by CPR, but the oxygen to her brain had been shut off for several minutes. Ann was told her daughter would not live, but she did. After an extended stay in the hospital and then in a trauma center, her daughter was allowed to come home. Janie is not ambulatory, nor can she communicate her needs. She has periods where she seems to be aware of what is happening; at other times she is definitely not conscious. Since they have chosen to keep Janie at home and work with her, rather than to institutionalize her, Ann and her family do everything differently now. Ann does not leave her home very often, and then seldom goes more than a few miles away. Janie wears diapers and stays in a bed or wheelchair. She is heavy to lift. She cannot feed herself. There is also a tremendous financial burden on the family. *Note for 2010 edition: Janie lived to her early twenties then peacefully passed away.*

## **Burt, father of wayward daughter**

Burt and his wife have five children who are close together in age. They were considered by many to be a model Latter-day Saint family. They held weekly family home evenings, had daily family prayers, and read scriptures as a family. Both parents spend a good deal of quality time with the family and with each child. But when their oldest daughter reached her teens, she began to show signs of rebelliousness that were not

normal. She began to associate with other young people at school who were involved in drugs and antisocial behavior. At home she became increasingly difficult to deal with. She was verbally and physically abusive to her siblings, as well as to her parents. She stopped going to church and was truant at school. She began to steal from other members of her family and would not keep curfews set by her parents. When she was fifteen she dropped out of school, ran away from home, and spent several months in another state. Burt located her and kept in contact with her as much as she would allow. Then she returned home. For a time, it looked as though she might be making some positive changes, but it wasn't long before the old behavior returned. The parents feared for the safety of their other children. Finally, just before her seventeenth birthday, the daughter left home for good. Over the next few years she became pregnant out of wedlock several times and bore two children. Burt and his wife are now helping to raise these children. *Note for 2010 edition: Their daughter subsequently became active in the Church and one of her daughters has been married in the temple.*

### **Carol, mother with polio**

Carol contracted polio when she was a young mother with two children. The Salk vaccine had just been made available, but the scarce supply was given only to children, pregnant women, and school teachers. Carol didn't qualify, was left unprotected, and contracted the disease. She spent considerable time in an iron lung. She is now confined to a wheelchair. In addition, she has no abdominal muscles and is missing sections of her backbone, so she must wear a back brace constantly. *Note for 2010 edition: Carol passed away, living into her 70's.*

### **Donna, young mother who contracted AIDS from her husband**

Donna and her husband joined the Church shortly after their civil marriage and were later married in the temple. When their daughter was three, Donna's husband became ill. Although he knew he had AIDS, he didn't tell Donna. She did not find out until just before he was hospitalized, and then it was his doctor who told her. Even when

confronted, her husband denied that he had been unfaithful or that he was bisexual. Donna requested AIDS tests for her and her daughter. Her daughter's test showed she was free of the virus, but Donna tested positive. Her husband lived in great pain for a few weeks, then died. Donna refused to take any of the standard drugs for AIDS, insisting that her faith would heal her. For nearly three years after she found out she had AIDS, she lived a miracle. In almost every way she lived a normal life, even with an immune count that was impossibly low. She spent much of her time in the temple or speaking to AIDS patients. Finally she began to lose weight, and her body took on the characteristics of an AIDS victim. She died before this book was finished.

### **Grace, woman with hearing loss who also cares for invalid husband**

Grace's husband began showing symptoms of Parkinson's disease in his early sixties. Over the years he developed a serious arthritic condition in his back, which required several operations. Now Grace has to dress him and undress him, help him eat, assist him in virtually all of his physical efforts, and seek to relieve his pain. She has lost most of her own hearing and is bothered with various other physical maladies as well. In the past Grace has served in teaching and leadership positions on the stake and ward level. But now she is pretty much restricted to the house, leaving home only to shop and to go to church on Sunday. *Note for 2010 edition: Grace's husband passed away and she followed him in death a year later.*

### **Janet, divorced mother with adopted children**

Janet and her husband were not able to bear children; but over a period of several years they adopted three. Both Janet and her husband came from active Latter-day Saint families and were married in the temple. Their early married life seemed "perfect," and they were extremely happy. Later, however, for several months Janet could sense that something was wrong, but her husband would give no verbal indication of what it was. Then, suddenly, her husband packed a few things and left her. He dissociated himself from the Church. He moved to a city some distance

away, while Janet and her children stayed in their house. Over the next few years Janet made a number of attempts to work it out with him, but all failed. At one point she and the children, at his invitation, moved to his new home and stayed with him for a month or two; but that failed as well. Finally Janet felt there was no alternative but to get a divorce. Although she had a master's degree, she felt incapable of financially supporting her family. She went back to school and obtained a Ph.D., and is currently teaching at a college. *Note for 2010 edition: Janet's son went on a mission for the LDS Church and all children have been married in the temple.*

### **Larry, man who struggled with business failures**

When Larry was still in graduate school, he became involved in a business that was very successful. For a number of years after he received his advanced degree, he stayed with this business. He was making an excellent salary, and the job held much promise for the future. There were aspects about the business, though, that he didn't like, and he sought a change. An entrepreneur invited him to join in a new venture. Larry made the change, in spite of having a large family and large financial obligations. What appeared to be an excellent financial opportunity turned into a bust. Larry worked for more than a year without any income and watched his savings dwindle to practically nothing. He finally left the company and was unemployed for six months. At the point when Larry had virtually exhausted all of his own financial resources but his home, another business opportunity came along. Working on a "barely-get-by" wage, as this new company got off the ground floor, Larry built the company into a profitable business during the next three to four years. Just as he was getting to a point of financial comfort, his business was hit with the recession of the early 1980s. He was forced to liquidate his company and was left with what seemed to be insurmountable debts. *Note for 2010 edition: Larry ultimately was able to resolve all of his financial challenges and he and his wife served a fulltime foreign mission for the LDS Church*

### **Linda, divorced mother with large family**

Linda is the mother of five young children. She was a convert to the

Church, and she and her husband were married in the temple. Their children came rapidly, and that seemed to put a strain on the marriage. For several years prior to their divorce, her husband was verbally abusive to her and expressed his hate and disdain for her. She discovered that he was having an affair with his secretary. She was crushed, but loved him and still wanted to work things out. Her husband refused. He moved out, and they were divorced. At first he paid alimony and child support and left them with the home. But then he stopped paying any money at all, and Linda was forced to somehow provide for a family of six. She had to sell her home and try to find some sort of meaningful occupation, though she had no professional training and only one year of college. She went back to school, but when her husband stopped providing money, she was forced to drop out so she could work full time to support her children.

### **Loren, diabetic man on dialysis**

Loren, who is in his mid-sixties, has been fighting diabetes and its complications for over thirty years. At first his disease was not too debilitating, but over the last decade or so his body has begun to gradually weaken. His eyes have given him much trouble. He has had more than eighty laser treatments, has had fluid changed in both eyes twice, and has had cataracts removed. He is now legally blind. He has severe asthma because of fluid retention in the lungs. He also has heart problems. Recently he had kidney failure; he receives dialysis treatment twice a week. Because of his health problems, he had to retire early and is living on disability income. He is largely confined to home now because of his weakened condition. *Note for 2010 edition: Loren passed away shortly after the first edition of this book was published.*

### **Mark, young father with terminal cancer**

Mark has three small children. When he was only twenty-seven his cancer was discovered-metastatic melanoma, a virtually incurable form. He went through a full range of treatments, including chemotherapy and radiation, but the cancer did not respond. The doctors concluded that it was inoperable and all that could be done was to wait and let the disease

take its course, keeping Mark as comfortable as possible. Mark passed away as this book was being written.

### **Mary, mother who lost young daughter to cancer**

When Mary was seven months pregnant with her sixth child, her husband took a new job, and the family moved to Utah. On the way there, Cindy, her seven-year-old daughter, mentioned that her leg was hurting. Over the next few days the pain became increasingly worse. X rays were taken, and a severe, progressive cancer was discovered. Cindy immediately began chemotherapy, and surgery was scheduled. The doctors removed the cancerous growth. They had given her only a 50 percent chance to live, but after a year of successful chemotherapy and another year of checkups, there were no signs of tumors. The doctors reassessed her chances of survival at 80 percent. But then tumors began to reappear, this time in both lungs, and the doctors gave her virtually no chance of recovery. She was put on chemotherapy for seven more months, and finally just radiation and pain medication to keep her as comfortable as possible. After three years of pain, treatment, and extensive operations, Cindy passed away.

### **Michael, father whose baby died at birth**

Michael and his wife are the parents of six children; five are still living. Their fifth child required an emergency Caesarean delivery. Michael's wife was near death with that delivery, and had to be given a blood transfusion. The baby was fine. When his wife was several months pregnant with their sixth and last child, their two-year-old daughter ran into the street in front of their home and was hit by a car. She was thrown forty feet through the air, and her skull was fractured. Her head swelled, and she was unconscious for two days; but she made a complete recovery. A few months later, as Michael's wife was coming to the close of her pregnancy, severe complications arose. In the sixth month of pregnancy, the doctor ordered her to stay in bed; then he admitted her to the hospital to preserve her life and the life of the baby. After several weeks in the hospital, the doctor determined he would have to take the baby. Michael's

wife lived, but their baby died shortly after birth.

### **Ron, man who was excommunicated for adultery and later reinstated**

Ron was married in the temple and had two children. He committed adultery with another Church member. They were both excommunicated. They each divorced their spouses and married each other. Two families were torn apart. Ron's new wife immediately began to get her life back in order. Ron kept going to church, but he felt that everyone was against him, and he was defiant. After several years he began the process of repentance. He was able to be re-baptized and have all of his blessings restored.

### **Ted, man with chronic depression**

Ted has suffered from depression for as long as he can remember. Although he has accomplished much in his life, his depressions continue. Because of his fear of change, he did not get married until relatively late in his life. It is a paradox that both single and circumstances served as catalysts for his chronic feelings of inadequacy. He continues to serve in the Church and to raise his family, while battling these almost overwhelming depressions. *Note for 2010 edition: Ted subsequently served as a bishop and passed away at a relatively young age from cancer.*