

# Family Times

## When Hard Times Come

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### Quotable:

“While I do not believe in stepping out of the path of duty to pick up a cross I don’t need, a man is a coward who refuses to pick up a cross that clearly lies within his path. No cross, no crown. No gall, no glory. No thorns, no throne” (Ezra Taft Benson, *Area Conference Report*, Taipei, 1975, p. 3).



I continue to meet couples and families in my counseling practice who struggle with adversity. Unfortunately, when bad things happen to some of these good people, they often abandon everything they have believed in, and have even taught for that matter, curl up in the fetal position and cry that the sky is falling.

I guess I have learned over the years for myself that this phenomenon is very real. We all know what the gospel teaches about trials and adversity; in fact, most of us have even given talks and lessons on that topic. We seem to have a pretty good handle and perspective on the trials of life until.... Well, until those trials happen in our own lives. Once the shoe goes on the other foot, so to speak, we quickly forget why the Lord allows very rotten things to happen to the very best people; even his Saints.

It was C.S. Lewis who said “You never know how much you believe in anything until it’s truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you. It is easy to say you believe a rope to be strong and sound as long as you are merely using it to [tie]

a box. But suppose you had to hang by that rope over a precipice. Wouldn’t you then first discover how much you really trusted it?... Only a real risk tests the reality of a belief” (C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, 4-5).

Indeed, many of our good people are hanging over that cliff, by a rope that they are all of the sudden not to sure about. The rope was great as long as there was plenty of money in the bank, a good job, full cupboards, and good health. However, once the sore trials come, that rope often feels like a thin piece of thread.

Doctrinally, we do not have to look far in our scriptures to see the pattern of bad things happening to good people. In the Book of Mormon, we are immediately introduced to Nephi. I don’t know if I am acquainted with anyone who had more of a desire to do the right thing than Nephi. His mission seemed to be obedience; he always sought to do our Heavenly Father’s will. He urged his brethren to be faithful (1 Nephi 4:1); and he obeyed the Spirit (1 Nephi 4:18). Despite Nephi’s faithfulness, he suffered much in his quest of

obedience. He was beaten numerous times; he suffered hunger, thirst, fatigue, and the constant rebellion of his family. You would think that because of Nephi’s diligence, he would have been given a hall pass on trials and tribulations. As you are aware, that is not the case. Nephi suffered much as he learned what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

Professor Dennis Largey shared this commentary: “Obedient as Nephi was, his obedience did not shield him from afflictions. The Book of Mormon teaches that opposition is a necessary part of life’s test” (Dennis L. Largey, *Doctrines of the Book of Mormon*, 1991 Sperry Symposium, p. 61; emphasis added).

Another good example from the Book of Mormon includes the Anti-Nephi Lehi’s. As you are aware, these once fierce Lamanities converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ and made many personal changes in their lives. One major change is that they would never fight again. In fact, they buried their weapons so they would not be tempted to enter combat. Now, you would think that such an altruistic act



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would merit great blessings here on earth. Not so. What happened? They buried their weapons, and consequently, many were slaughtered. Wait a minute! These people were faithful. They were doing what was right. They made great changes and sacrifices to become Saints. And yet, they were slaughtered. To me, if there was a group of people who should have received a hall pass when it came to personal adversity, it would have been the Anti-Nephi Lehi's. And yet, they suffered greatly.

In our own Church History, another shining example would be our pioneer ancestors. All they wanted to do was keep the commandments and built Zion. These people paid tithing; they sacrificed all they had for the sake of the gospel, they built Temples, and they left their families and went on missions for years. If there ever was a group of people who deserved a "Magic Kingdom" card, it would have been our Mormon Pioneers. However, they too, were not immune from difficulty. Many lost their lives while crossing the plains; others were killed by mobs in Missouri and Illinois. **Why didn't** God protect these faithful people?

**Could** he have protected them? That may be a more relevant question. I have always treasured the words of President Spencer W. Kimball on this topic:

*The Daily paper screamed the headlines: CRASH KILLS 3; NO SURVIVORS OF MOUNTAIN TRAGEDY. And thousands of voices joined in*

*chorus: "Why did the Lord let this terrible thing happen?"*

*Two automobiles crashed one went through a red light and six people were killed. "Why would God not prevent this?"*

*Why should the young mother die so young? Why should her eight children be left motherless? Why did not the Lord heal her of her malady?*

*A young man died in the mission field and people critically question, "Why did not the Lord protect this youth while he was doing proselyting work?"*

*May I ask some questions?*

*Was it the Lord who directed the plane into the mountain to snuff out the lives of its occupants or were there mechanical faults or human error?*

*Was our Father in Heaven responsible for the collision of the cars and took six people into eternity or was it the error of the driver who broke the rules?*

*Did the Lord cause the man to die, or was the death of the missionary untimely? Would it have been better to have occurred years earlier or later? Answer, if you can.*

*Now a final question. Could the Lord have prevented there tragedies'? The answer is, YES. The Lord is omnipotent with all power to control our lives, save us pain, prevent all accidents, drive all planes and cars, feed us, protect us, save us from labor, effort, sickness, even*

*from death.*

*But is that what you want? Would you shield your children from disappointments, temptations, sorrows, suffering?*

*The basic gospel law is free agency. To force us to be careful or righteous would be to nullify that fundamental law, and growth would be impossible.*

*Is there not wisdom in His giving us trials that we might rise above them, responsibilities that we might achieve, work to harden our muscles, sorrows to try our souls? Are we not permitted temptations to test our strength, sickness that we might learn patience, death that we might be immortal and glorified'?*

*Apparently the Lord did not consider death always as a curse or tragedy, for He said, "...blessed are the dead that die in the Lord..." (D&C 83:49) Life goes on and free agency continues, an death, which seems such a calamity, could be a blessing in disguise.....*

*Now, we find many people critical when a righteous person is killed, a young father or mother is taken from a family, or when violent deaths occur. Some become bitter when oft repeated prayers seem unanswered. Some lose faith and turn sour when solemn administrators by holy men seem to be ignored and no restoration seems to come from repeated prayer circles. But if all the sick were healed, if all the righteous were protected, and the wicked destroyed, the whole program of the Father would be annulled*

*and the basic principles of the Gospel, free agency, would be ended.*

*If pain and sorrow and total punishment immediately followed the doing of evil, no soul would repeat a misdeed. If joy and peace and rewards were instantaneously given the doer of good, there could be no evil—all would do good and not because of the righteousness of doing good. There would be no test of strength, no development of character, no growth of powers, no free agency only Satanic controls.*

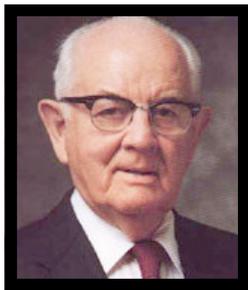
*Should all prayers be immediately answered according to our selfish desires and our limited understanding, then there would be little or no suffering, sorrow, disappointment or even death, and if these were not there would also be an absence of joy, success, resurrection, eternal life and Godhood.*

*We are assured by the Lord that the sick will be healed if the ordinance is performed, if there is sufficient faith and if the ill one is "not appointed unto death". Here there are three factors. Many do not comply with the ordinances and great numbers are unwilling or incapable of exercising sufficient faith. But there is the other factor which looms important: "If they are not appointed unto death" Every act of God is purposeful. He sees the end from the beginning. He knows what builds us, or tears us down, what will thwart the program and what will give us eventual triumph.*

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**“Being human we would expel from our lives, sorrow, distress, physical pain and mental anguish and assure ourselves of continual ease and comfort, but if we closed the doors upon such, we might be evicting our greatest friends and benefactors. Suffering can make saints of people as they learn patience, long suffering and self mastery. The sufferings of our Savior was part of his education”**



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President Brigham Young taught “All intelligent beings who are crowned with crowns of glory, immortality, and eternal lives must pass through every ordeal appointed for intelligent beings to pass through, to gain their glory and exaltation. Every calamity that can come upon mortal beings will be suffered to come upon the few, to prepare them to enjoy the presence of the Lord. If we obtain the glory that Abraham obtained, we must do so by the same means that he did. If we are ever prepared to enjoy the society of Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or of their faithful children, and of the faithful

Prophets and Apostles, we must pass through the same experience, and gain the knowledge, intelligence, endowments that will prepare us to enter the celestial kingdom of our Father and God” (Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, p. 345).

Likewise, President Lorenzo Snow declared that “The Lord ... will try us until He knows what he can do with us. He tried His Son Jesus. Thousands of years before He came upon the earth the Father had watched His course and knew that He could depend upon Him when the salvation of worlds should be at stake... He will.... continue to try us, in order that He may place us in the highest positions in life and put upon us the most sacred responsibilities” (Lorenzo Snow, *Millennial Star*, 24 August 1899, 532).

In a similar vein, the Prophet Joseph Smith declared: “You will have all kinds of trials to pass through. And it is quite necessary for you to be tried as it was for Abraham and other men of God...Brethren, God will feel after you, and he will take hold of you and will wrench your very heart strings, and if you cannot stand it, you will not be fit for an inheritance in the Celestial Kingdom of God” (Joseph Smith, *Journal of Discourses* 24:197).

Like you, I don’t like statements like these. They make me uncomfortable. Especially as I sit here in the comforts of my West McKinney home, at my computer, listening to some of my favorite music, eating my favorite snack, and writing to my hearts content as my children

chase each other out in the cul-de-sac. Could life get any better?

There is no question, for our own Christian growth, the Lord allows trials and heartache in our lives. Through those “growth opportunities,” we draw closer to the Lord and learn to become like him. However, as I have pondered this topic over the years, I know that the Lord loves us; he knows us, and he has our best interest at stake. Our trials our often part of the plan he has laid out for us so that we can overcome the things we needed to in order to become like him.

Professor Camille Fronk has written, “Sometimes I think we expect that our lives will be free from hardship, suffering, and pain if we just continue to pay our tithing, read our scriptures, and do our home and visiting teaching most of the time. We like to focus on scripture passages that proclaim God’s love and concern for us, concluding that he will therefore protect us from any discomfort and distress if we are at least trying to keep his commandments. We are then surprised when we get sick right before finals, or we lose our job while trying to save money for a mission, or what looks like a tragedy hits a strong family in the ward. We may be wiser to also notice scriptures where the Lord says:

*Whom I love I also chasten [D&C 95:1].*

*My people must be tried in all things, that they may be prepared to receive the glory that I have for them, even the glory of Zion;*



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*and he that will not bear chastisement is not worthy of my kingdom [D&C 136:31].*

**“Remember that the Savior came to ‘heal’ broken hearts, not to prevent them.** It is also helpful to note that one meaning of the word *chaste* is ‘pure,’ and therefore, to ‘chasten’ also means to ‘purify’ (*Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1981)” (Camille Fronk, “Lessons from the Potter and the Clay,” *BYU 1994-1995 Devotional and Fireside Speeches*, p. 196; emphasis added).

Now, back to Nephi for a minute. Although the Lord did not prevent heartache and trial from happening in his life, He certainly gave him the strength to overcome his challenges. Consider, for example, the time that Nephi’s bow broke while he was trying to find food for his family.

“Nephi’s bow broke in the wilderness, even though his family needed food.... Yet Nephi found a solution to his dilemma in one simple act: ‘I, Nephi, did make out of wood a bow, and out of a straight stick, an arrow’ (I Nephi 16:23). Instead of murmuring, Nephi simply went to work and made another bow. Murmuring wastes time, lengthens one’s journey, and harden’s one’s heart... *God may not always stop bows from breaking, but he does help in the construction of new ones*” (Dennis L. Largey, *Doctrines of the Book of Mormon*, 1991 Sperry Symposium, p. 61).

I would like to conclude with one of my favorite stories. “Sister Ingrid Olsen (not her real name) was a recently divorced mother of a young son and was almost as recently a convert to the Church. The divorce had alienated Ingrid from part of her family, and her conversion to Mormonism had alienated her from her friends. The resulting personal anguish had dampened her initial joy in joining the Church. She felt alone and abandoned and overwhelmed before an uncertain future. In the midst of such turmoil, her prayers seemed futile, and what had initially been a time of spiritual refreshing had become a season of despair.

“Bewildered by it all, she welcomed one afternoon the opportunity to visit a cousin in a neighboring village, nearly ninety minutes away by bicycle. She planned to devote her trip to prayer, hoping to receive some indication that her Heavenly Father understood her plight and would give her some needed direction and solace. As she rode her bicycle toward her destination, she was miserably aware that the darkening day and threatening clouds matched her own darkened spirits, and she felt that her prayers were rebounding, unheard and unanswered, from the leaden heavens..

“In this state of mind, Ingrid at length reached the distant village and made her visit. Starting on her return trip, she rode her bicycle up a long incline in the face of an increasingly strong wind before which she could hardly make progress. Seeing in her

difficulty an opportunity to test the reality of the Lord, she went into a grove of trees that the Father would manifest his presence in a simple way: He would stop the wind. And she would know that he heard her prayers and knew her predicament. Mustering her faith, she resumed her journey— in the face of an ever-increasing head wind. She rode, hard, into that wind, becoming more disillusioned and bitter with each kilometer, for it seemed apparent that God, if after all there was really such a being, had neither heard nor answered her heartfelt pleas. Arriving at last at the hill above her village, a bitter Sister Olsen dismounted before coasting down the hill toward her home. Looking to the lowering heavens, she uttered a sardonic, ‘Thanks, Lord, now I know.’

“Then it happened, the surprise of the Spirit. Suddenly Ingrid Olsen was filled with an intense, powerful, commanding voice that sounded through her being and thrilled her with the words, ‘I did not still the wind; instead, I gave you strength to overcome.’ Then stillness, and that was all! But God had changed her life.

“She was stunned by the reality of what she had just experienced. Her whole soul reverberated with the [Spirit], and she stood all amazed at this tangible answer to her prayers. Wondering about the meaning of the words, she glanced at her watch and was surprised to realize that she had made the ninety-minute return trip, in the face of the heaviest wind she had ever encountered, in less than sixty minutes. She knew immediately the truth of the words of the Holy Spirit— he had not stilled the wind; he had

instead given her strength to overcome. She knew, as well, that this revelation described his pattern in dealing with all of his mortal children, and it becomes a revelation to all of us who listen with spiritually attuned ears: God will not diminish the adversity of the obstacles of our lives— there must need be such; that is the nature of our probation. However, he will be with us ‘always, even unto the end of the world’ to guide and direct and give succor, through his minister, the Holy Spirit (see Matthew 28:20)” (Richard H. Cracroft, “We’ll Sing and We’ll Shout: A Mantic Celebration of the Holy Spirit,” *BYU 1992-93 Devotional and Fireside Speeches*, 124-125).

Although the Lord will not necessarily take challenges away from us, I know he will help us meet them head on. From the Book of Mosiah, we read, “And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; and this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses for me hereafter, and that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions. And now it came to pass that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord” (Mosiah 24:14-15).

Perhaps President Benson said it best: “While I do not believe in stepping out of the path of duty to pick up a cross I don’t need, a man is a coward who refuses to pick up a cross that clearly lies within his path. No cross, no crown. No gall, no glory. No thorns, no throne” (Ezra Taft Benson, *Area Conference Report*, Taipei, 1975, p. 3).