

Learning Through Life's Trials

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INTRODUCTION

The gospel of Jesus Christ teaches that all men and women on this earth are spirit children of a loving God, and as such, each of us has a divine nature and destiny.¹ Before we came to this earth, we knew and worshipped God as our Eternal Father. We used our agency to accept God's plan whereby we could obtain a physical body, gain earthly experience, and qualify to return to His presence and enjoy eternal life. In fact, we "shouted for joy" at the chance to receive a body and experience mortality.² This plan of salvation is also called the "plan of happiness."³

Now we are here on earth, and there is a lot of joy, but there are also times of trial, misfortune, and grief. We experience the heartache over the unexpected death of a loved one. Some couples cannot bear children. Others never marry in this life. Some devote their lives to care for a loved one who can't care for himself. Others suffer intense feelings of inadequacy or rejection, or dark times of depression. Some find themselves married to a spouse who fails to keep the commandments. Some endure painful illnesses. When mortality offers times of grief, stress, worry, confusion, and discouragement, we must remember that these experiences are part of the great plan of happiness and will ultimately lead to joy. It was meant that we experience opposition in all things—to learn the difference between righteousness and wickedness, good and bad, life and death, and happiness and misery.⁴ To receive a fullness of joy—and "men are, that they might have joy"⁵—we must experience and successfully respond to the trials of this life.

This book reviews the nature, origins, and purposes of adversity and includes suggestions on how to patiently trust

in the Lord and His eternal plan and how to use these trials to learn and grow stronger.

THE NATURE OF ADVERSITY

In facing adversity, it is important to recognize that living a righteous life does not guarantee that bad things will never happen to us. A common misperception among members of the Church is that if we strive with all our might to live the commandments, nothing bad will happen to us. We may believe if we are married in the temple our marriage will automatically be heaven on earth, or if we live the Word of Wisdom we will never get sick. But the truth is that bad things may happen to the best of people.⁶ The consequences of good and bad actions will come, but all of the consequences do not always come immediately, and they may not even come in this life.⁷

God does not take away all our problems, nor does He guard us from all pain, but He can give us the perspective and strength we need to bear our trials with integrity.⁸

President Spencer W. Kimball taught: “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 exposed to temptations to test our strength, sickness that we may learn patience, death that we might be immortalized and glorified? If all the sick for whom we pray were healed, if all the righteous were protected and the wicked destroyed, the whole program of the Father would be annulled and the basic principle of the gospel, free agency, would be ended. No man would have to live by faith.”⁹

THE ORIGINS OF ADVERSITY

Some of life's trials come as a result of sin, others because of unwise choices, and others simply because we are mortals living in a fallen world.

Adversity Because of Sin

Suffering that comes as a result of our sins or the sins of others is man-made. A husband who chooses to rule his family through intimidation or physical abuse causes suffering and heartache. An individual who chooses to disobey the Word of Wisdom may find himself ensnared in the bondage of addiction. When people use their agency to disregard the commandments of God, they follow Satan's plan of misery rather than God's plan of happiness. If people would embrace and live God's plan of happiness, there would be peace and joy in the world. Much of the suffering we know today would be eliminated if people just lived the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁰

Adversity Because of Unwise Choices

Other problems in life are the result of poor decisions and unwise choices by us or other people. For example, many people struggle with the burden of financial debt because they choose to make purchases on credit rather than use self-discipline to delay purchases until they can afford to pay for them in cash. Some students fail classes and later have trouble finding employment because they chose to waste time playing video games or watch too many hours of sports rather than studying.

Adversity Because We Are Mortals Living in a Fallen World

Some problems we face in life are a natural result of

mortality and the world we live in. Christ explained this to his disciples in this way: “And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.”¹¹

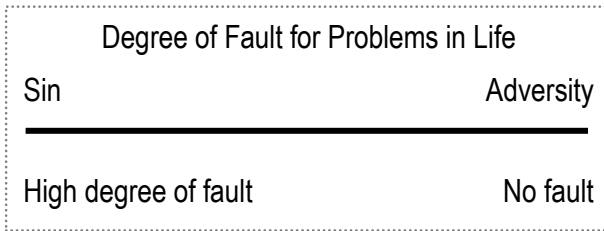
We are mortals with bodies that will age and that can become ill or injured. Everyone will eventually pass from this life, and all of us will inevitably suffer illness and injury, be it major or minor. Our mortality is an important part of God’s plan of salvation. God created natural laws and put His plan in motion. Although he can control the elements and thus prevent earthquakes and other natural disasters, for the most part He allows nature to run its course.¹²

Degree of Fault for Problems in Life

So how do we know when a difficulty is our fault or not? Often, we judge ourselves harshly, concluding that problems occur because of something we did wrong or because we failed to do something to prevent them.

As we consider the degree of our personal fault for the trials in our lives, it may be helpful to think of a continuum with sin at one end and adversity at the other.

Our degree of fault is high at the end of the spectrum marked as sin. We should accept full responsibility for these problems we cause. We should repent of these and continually strive to do better. However, as we continue down the spectrum, our fault drops to zero at the end marked by “adversity,” where we may bear no responsibility at all. These are trials that may come to us, as



they did to Job in the Old Testament, regardless of any conscious action on our part.¹³ If we blame ourselves for things that are not our fault, not only are we a victim of the unfortunate circumstance, but we make a bad situation worse by seeing ourselves as bad people who deserve bad things. At times it may be difficult to judge our level of responsibility for problems that fall between these two ends of the spectrum. In these cases, it may be unproductive to spend much effort on establishing blame and searching for answers because it may cause us to lose focus on the very reason for the trial.

The Atonement Heals All Suffering

In the face of misfortune, we can take comfort in knowing that Christ's Atonement can heal all suffering. We often speak of the Atonement in terms of relief from sin and guilt. But the Atonement is more. Alma taught that Christ would "go forth, *suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind*; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the *pains and the sicknesses* of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their *infirmities*, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh,

that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.”¹⁴

Regardless of the source of suffering, the Atonement can heal the effects of all pain and affliction in mortality.¹⁵ When suffering is our fault, we can be cleansed through repentance, and “after all we can do,” the Atonement can compensate for the consequences of our sins. It can also compensate for the harmful effects of our ignorance or neglect, the pain caused by the willful actions of others, and the suffering that comes as a result of living in a natural world.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught, “If your faith and prayers and the power of the priesthood do not heal you from an affliction, the power of the Atonement will surely give you the strength to bear the burden.”¹⁶

THE PURPOSES OF ADVERSITY

Life Is for Refinement

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the plan whereby we can *become* what our Heavenly Father wants us to become. Elder Oaks explained: “The Final Judgment is not just an evaluation of a sum total of good and evil acts—what we have *done*. It is an acknowledgment of the final effect of our acts and thoughts—what we have *become*. It is not enough for anyone just to go through the motions.”¹⁷

It wasn't until well into my adulthood that I finally realized that life was about more than accumulating points for good deeds. What really matters is what those good actions do to build our character—what they help us to *become*. Take, for example, the parable in Matthew, chapter 20, of the laborers in the vineyard. The master of the vineyard hired laborers at different times of the day.

Some worked all day and others only an hour, yet he paid them all the same wage. You will recall that some of the workers murmured at the seeming unfairness of their relative wages. One lesson we can learn from this parable is that we will not earn our eternal reward by a heavenly accounting of the number of hours worked. What will matter is whether our efforts have caused us to *become* something better. We may be able to refine some aspects of our lives in a few hours work, while other characteristics may take days, years, or our entire lives.

We qualify for eternal life through a process of refinement and conversion. For some, the refiner's fire is a warm campfire, and for others it needs to be a blast furnace. Some are converted easily; others must experience many trials of faith to become truly converted and committed. God allows each of us to experience the challenges, the suffering, and the trials we need to grow and finally *become* all that we can be.

Adversity Builds Strength and Character

Life is not intended to be easy. It is a “probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God.”¹⁸ With this eternal perspective, we can see that there is a purpose for challenges. They test our resolve and help us build strength of character, self-confidence, and self-respect. They teach us that faith in our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, is the source of inner strength.

Elder Orson F. Whitney explained: “No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer

“No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God...and 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.”

— Orson F. Whitney

and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God...and 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.”¹⁹

Spiritual growth and strong character can often be achieved more readily by trials and adversity than by comfort and tranquility. One of the survivors of the ill-fated Martin handcart company said: “We suffered beyond anything you can imagine and many died of exposure and starvation, but did you ever hear a survivor of that company utter a word of criticism? Not one of that company ever apostatized or left the church, because everyone of us came through with the absolute knowledge that God lives for we became acquainted with him in our extremities.”²⁰

Trials can help us grow spiritually and remind us that we need the Lord's help. Trials give us opportunities to show the Lord and ourselves that we will be faithful. President Henry B. Eyring reminds us that “the test a loving God has set before us is not to see if we can endure difficulty. It is to see if we can endure it well.”²¹ How well you endure trials is up to you. You can feel sorry for yourself and ask, “Why me?” or you can grow from your trials, increase your faith in the Lord, and ask, “How can I be faithful in the midst of this trial?”

RESPONDING TO TRIALS

Whether your trials are small or significant, it is important to respond to them well. You can let adversity break you down and make you bitter or you can let it refine you and make you stronger. The result is up to you. You

can allow adversity to lead you to drift away from the things that matter most, or you can use it as a stepping stone to grow closer to things of eternal worth.

Since adversity will come to us all, consider the following ideas to help you face your trials and benefit from them.

Through Your Trials, Develop a Relationship with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ

Remember that you are a son or daughter of a loving Heavenly Father. Elder Richard G. Scott explains that God loves you perfectly and “would not require you to experience a moment more of difficulty than is absolutely needed for your personal benefit or for that of those you love.”²²

President Harold B. Lee once remarked: “Don’t be afraid of the testing and trials of life. Sometimes when you are going through the most severe tests, you will be nearer to God than you have any idea, for like the experience of the Master himself in the temptation on the mount, in the Garden of Gethsemane, and on the cross at Calvary, the scriptures record, ‘And, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.’ (Matt. 4:11.) Sometimes that may happen to you in the midst of your trials.”²³

You can face adversity more easily when you understand who you are, who your Father is, who your Savior is, and the relationship you have with Them. One of the purposes of trials is to help you come to know Christ, understand His teachings in your mind, feel them in your heart, and live them in your life. It is through our struggles that we come to know and appreciate Him.

Let Others Help You

President Spencer W. Kimball taught, “God does notice us, and he watches over us. But it is usually through another person that he meets our needs.”²⁴ Allow other people to be instruments in the Lord's hands to help you through the challenges in life.

President Ezra Taft Benson taught that heavenly hosts are also pulling for us. He called them “friends in heaven that we cannot now remember who yearn for our victory.”²⁵ A survivor of the Martin handcart company recounted his experience, saying: “I have pulled my handcart when I was so weak and weary from illness and lack of food that I could hardly put one foot ahead of the other. I have looked ahead and seen a patch of sand or a hill slope and I have said, I can go only that far and there I must give up, for I cannot pull the load through it... I have gone on to that sand and when I reached it, the cart began pushing me. I have looked back many times to see who was pushing my cart, but my eyes saw no one. I knew then that the angels of God were there.”²⁶

Let God Carry Your Burdens

When I face trials in life, I often find myself trying to carry the entire load on my shoulders. Then I remember the Savior's invitation, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”²⁷

At times, we may despair that our burdens are too great. When it seems that a tempest is raging in our lives, we may feel abandoned and cry out like the disciples in the storm, “Master, carest thou not that we perish?”²⁸ At such times we should remember His reply: “Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?”²⁹ The healing power of the

Lord Jesus Christ is available for every affliction in mortality.

In some cases, He removes our burdens; in other cases, He strengthens us to endure them. When Alma and his people were under the oppression of the Lamanites, they cried “mightily to God” for deliverance. The Lord did not remove their persecution, but promised to help them carry the burden. “And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions, saying: Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I...will...ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs.... 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.”³⁰

God can ease your burdens and make them light. When you turn to God, you will not only find the comfort you seek, but in so doing you will gain an increased testimony of the reality of the Savior and His Atonement. This may be one of the higher purposes of adversity in our life—to build our faith and help us come unto Christ.

Trust That the Lord Is in Control; Allow His Will to be Done

Elder Richard G. Scott explains: “This life is an experience in profound trust—trust in Jesus Christ, trust in His teachings, trust in our capacity as led by the Holy Spirit to obey those teachings for happiness now and for a purposeful, supremely happy eternal existence. To trust means to obey willingly without knowing the end from the beginning (see Proverbs 3:5–7). To produce fruit, your trust

in the Lord must be more powerful and enduring than your confidence in your own personal feelings and experience.

“To exercise faith is to trust that the Lord knows what He is doing with you and that He can accomplish it for your eternal good even though you cannot understand how He can possibly do it. We are like infants in our understanding of eternal matters and their impact on us here in mortality. Yet at times we act as if we knew it all. When you pass through trials for His purposes, as you trust Him, exercise faith in Him, He will help you. That support will generally come step by step, a portion at a time. While you are passing through each phase, the pain and difficulty that come from being enlarged will continue. If all matters were immediately resolved at your first petition, you could not grow.”³¹

God lets us have hard days, months, or lives because those are the experiences we need to grow. I believe that the specific challenges I have faced in my life were the specific ways I had to learn the lessons I needed to learn. I believe I am the man I am today *because* of the trials I've experienced, not *in spite* of them.

A year ago, a man in our ward was diagnosed with cancer. By the time the cancer was detected, the tumor had grown around the bone and nerves in a way that made it inoperable. Randy was given 10 months to live. He began chemotherapy treatments, and his family and the ward began fasting and praying for him and others in the ward with serious health problems. At nine months, on Randy's last visit to his doctor, the doctor sat at the desk and shook his head. Nine months before, Randy was given no chance of survival; that day, the tests showed no signs of a tumor.

God answers prayers and performs miracles today. But why did God perform a miracle by sparing Randy's life when another man in our ward died from cancer just a few weeks later? The other man's family and the ward prayed and fasted for him as well. In both cases, there were lessons to be learned—for the individuals involved, for their families, and for the ward. Faith was tested, people became stronger, and a ward grew closer together.

As we pray for the Lord to remove our burdens, we should also pray that His will be done and that we be granted the strength we need to endure our trials with patience and faith. As we do, the Lord will grant us the peace and comfort we seek.

We never know how our lives will turn out. There is no way to avoid all misfortune. We can plan the perfect life and work hard to achieve it. But, fortunately, it may not turn out as we planned. There will be surprising turns and challenges that we never could have anticipated. And because the Lord is in control, we have richer, more rewarding lives.³² If you look carefully, you will see the Lord's tender mercies as he guides you through life's trials.³³

Elder Richard G. Scott explained: "The Lord is intent on your personal growth and development. That progress is accelerated when you willingly allow Him to lead you through every growth experience you encounter, whether initially it be to your individual liking or not. When you trust in the Lord, when you are willing to let your heart and your mind be centered in His will, when you ask to be led by the Spirit to do His will, you are assured of the greatest happiness along the way and the most fulfilling attainment from this mortal experience. If you question everything you

are asked to do, or dig in your heels at every unpleasant challenge, you make it harder for the Lord to bless you.”³⁴

Remember That Everyone Has Challenges

When we consider the trials that other people have, ours may not seem so difficult. I once met a man who was just a few months old when he lost sight in both eyes. He could have let his disability ruin his life, but instead he empowered his hearing and became a concert pianist. He developed the ability to re-create on the piano the music he hears. Since he can't read the scriptures, he could have become spiritually dormant. But instead, he developed a spiritual sensitivity by listening daily to recordings of the scriptures.

A colleague of mine has a disabled child who needs total care. Even now that she is an adult, they must lift her out of bed, feed her, and change her diapers. She requires physical therapy, special chairs, and daily medication. As my friend goes about his daily work, I seldom think about the extra emotional energy he gives at home to care for his daughter's needs. He is sometimes fatigued by the late nights and the financial pressures but somehow finds the strength to go on. He does it because he loves her. And he doesn't regret the inconvenience or the extra money it requires. When I talk with parents of disabled children, they explain that their experiences increase their capacity to love, and they are blessed in many ways. They often seem to be the ones who develop strong character traits of sensitivity and endurance that perhaps they would not have been able to develop without these experiences.

Let Adversity Make You a Better Person

Trials effect people in different ways. Some people see

them as challenges to overcome; others see them as excuses to fail. Although we cannot control all the forces that cause adversity, we can control what adversity does to us. We can let trials make us bitter and jealous, or we can use them to become sensitive and compassionate.

A woman in my stake fought a battle with cancer. Although she endured pains and heartache that few people understood, she remained cheerful and optimistic. She lost her hair and, after spinal surgery, wore a metal brace to immobilize her head. As embarrassed as she must have felt by her appearance, she came to church meetings and smiled and tried to cheer up everyone else.³⁵ She wrote her own obituary, which, in part, reads: "Today at the young age of 33 I left this mortal existence to a holier sphere. I was born...to wonderful parents...who taught me to live life well.... We have three sweet children who I will miss greatly. At the young age of 29, I was introduced to something called cancer. Cancer was my great adversary but I have learned that in this life our enemies can become our choicest friends; the secret is in learning what to do with the conflict."

To find strength in challenges, draw closer to God, even if conditions don't appear to be resolved as you would want. Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught: "Healing blessings come in many ways, each suited to our individual needs, as known to Him who loves us best. Sometimes a 'healing' cures our illness or lifts our burden. But sometimes we are 'healed' by being given strength or understanding or patience to bear the burdens placed upon us."³⁶

In the face of trials, take comfort in these words of the Lord: "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.”³⁷ Lehi explained to his son Jacob that God would “consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain.”³⁸ What an amazing blessing! The very things we thought were weaknesses can become our strengths! Take the trials you have and use them to your advantage. Remember, we become great people *because* of our trials, not *in spite* of them.

Live with Integrity

When faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges, you may be tempted to take the easy way out. For example, the world teaches that people who experience same-gender attractions are born that way and have no other option. The gospel teaches differently. However, in the face of such a difficult and often confusing challenge, people may find it easier to accept the world's view. Satan whispers to people that they can't control their behavior or that they shouldn't have to deprive themselves of same-gender sexual relationships. If you have a testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel and if you are converted to Christ, your only option is to live your life with integrity to the principles you know to be true.

Cody has felt same-gender attractions ever since he was a young boy. He knows he is a son of God. He knows that the commandments and the blessings of the gospel are as real and relevant to him as to anyone else. He has gained some understanding of his feelings. He has also talked with others who have grown past their same-gender attractions and hardly ever feel them anymore. But for whatever reason, Cody's feelings are still intense. Nevertheless, he is committed to living a chaste life, even if he never gets to the point in this life that he can marry. He knows that if he

“We need strength beyond ourselves to keep the commandments in whatever circumstance life brings to us.... The combination of trials and their duration are as varied as are the children of our Heavenly Father. No two are alike. But what is being tested is the same, at all times in our lives and for every person: will we do whatsoever the Lord our God will command us?”

— Henry B. Eyring

lives faithfully, all the blessings of the gospel will be his, either in this life or in the next. I admire Cody for his integrity in the face of an immense inner struggle. Cody and others like him are great examples of standing up courageously to the trials in their lives.

Yielding to adversity makes us weaker. Keeping the commandments—no matter how trying—makes us stronger and helps us overcome every challenge in life. Through faith and obedience, we qualify for the divine spiritual guidance we need to guide us along unknown roads.

President Henry B. Eyring reminds us: “We need strength beyond ourselves to keep the commandments in whatever circumstance life brings to us.... The combination of trials and their duration are as varied as are the children of our Heavenly Father. No two are alike. But what is being tested is the same, at all times in our lives and for every person: will we do whatsoever the Lord our God will command us?”³⁹

Be Patient

We live in a world of instant gratification. We want fast food, quick loans, instant solutions to our problems, and constant emotional comfort. If we can't solve a problem in minutes or days, we become frustrated.

Elder Robert D. Hales explained the lessons he learned about patience while recovering from three major surgeries.

“In the past two years,” he said, “I have waited upon the Lord for mortal lessons to be taught me through periods of physical pain, mental anguish, and pondering. I learned that constant, intense pain is a great consecrating purifier that humbles us and draws us closer to God's Spirit. . . .

“There were times when I have asked a few direct questions in my prayers, such as, ‘What lessons dost Thou want me to learn from these experiences?’ As I studied the scriptures during this critical period of my life, the veil was thin and answers were given to me as they were recorded in lives of others who had gone through even more severe trials. ‘My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high’ (D&C 121:7–8).

“Dark moments of depression were quickly dispelled by the light of the gospel as the Spirit brought peace and comfort with assurances that all would be well.

“On a few occasions, I told the Lord that I had surely learned the lessons to be taught and that it wouldn’t be necessary for me to endure any more suffering. Such entreaties seemed to be of no avail, for it was made clear to me that this purifying process of testing was to be endured in the Lord’s time and in the Lord’s own way. It is one thing to teach, ‘Thy will be done’ (Matt. 26:42). It is another to live it.”⁴⁰

In the midst of your trials, consider that the Lord may ask you to show your faith by enduring patiently. Today, you may not be able to grasp all the reasons for your challenges or the opportunities they will give you to grow. You may have to learn line upon line. As you patiently endure in righteousness, He may reveal to you greater understanding about your trials and the purpose of them in your life.

Elder Richard G. Scott’s explanation of the step-by-step process of prayer may help you understand how to gain insight into your trials. He said:

“Often when we pray for help with a significant matter, Heavenly Father will give us gentle promptings that require us to think, exercise faith, work, at times struggle, then act. It is a step-by-step process that enables us to discern inspired answers.

“I have discovered that what sometimes seems an impenetrable barrier to communication is a giant step to be taken in trust. Seldom will you receive a complete response all at once. It will come a piece at a time, in packets, so that you will grow in capacity. As each piece is followed in faith, you will be led to other portions until you have the whole answer. That pattern requires you to exercise faith in our Father's capacity to respond. While sometimes it's very hard, it results in significant personal growth.”⁴¹

Make the Best of Your Situation

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland cautioned us to keep a healthy perspective on our challenges when he said, “Yes, life has its problems, and yes, there are negative things to face, but please accept one of Elder Holland's maxims for living—no misfortune is so bad that whining about it won't make it worse.”⁴² When you face difficult trials, don't whine about them, but find a way to use the experiences to your advantage.

People who succeed in life don't waste time *waiting* for the right circumstances. They *make* the right circumstances. You can choose to see a trial as a roadblock or an expressway. If you see it as a roadblock, it will obstruct your way. However, if you see it as an expressway, you can use it to learn and grow.

An oyster has the extraordinary ability to turn irritations into a thing of beauty. When it cannot get rid of a grain of sand in its shell, it turns it into a pearl. We also have the

chance to make pearls in our lives. Just like the oyster, you could take an irritation and use it to develop a pearl of patience.

Serve Others

We heal ourselves of pain when we reach out to help others. Service is the great healer. There is an old Chinese tale of a woman whose only son died. “In her grief, she went to the holy man and said, ‘What prayers, what magical incantations do you have to bring my son back to life?’ Instead of sending her away or reasoning with her, he said to her, ‘Fetch me a mustard seed from a home that has never known sorrow. We will use it to drive the sorrow out of your life.’ The woman set off at once in search of that magical mustard seed. She came first to a splendid mansion, knocked at the door, and said, ‘I am looking for a home that has never known sorrow. Is this such a place? It is very important to me.’ They told her, ‘You’ve certainly come to the wrong place,’ and began to describe all the tragic things that had recently befallen them. The woman said to herself, ‘Who is better able to help these poor unfortunate people than I, who have had misfortune of my own?’ She stayed to comfort them, then went on in her search for a home that had never known sorrow. But wherever she turned, in hovels and in palaces, she found one tale after another of sadness and misfortune. Ultimately, she became so involved in ministering to other people’s grief that she forgot about her quest for the magical mustard seed, never realizing that it had in fact driven the sorrow out of her life.”⁴³

Keep a Positive Attitude

When you suffer trials, Satan will be anxious to discourage you. “Thomas Edison devoted ten years and all

of his money to developing the nickel-alkaline storage battery at a time when he was almost penniless.... One night the terrifying cry of fire echoed through the film plant.... Within moments all of the packing compounds, celluloids for records, film, and other flammable goods had gone up with a whoosh. Fire companies from eight towns arrived, but the heat was so intense and the water pressure so low that the fire hoses had no effect. Edison was 67 years old—no age to begin anew. His daughter was frantic, wondering if he were safe, if his spirits were broken, how he would handle a crisis such as this at his age. She saw him running toward her. He spoke first. He said, ‘Where’s your mother? Go get her. Tell her to get her friends. They’ll never see another fire like this as long as they live.’ At 5:30 the next morning, with the fire barely under control, he called his employees together and announced, ‘We’re rebuilding.’ One man was told to lease all the machine shops in the area, another to obtain a wrecking crane.... Then, almost as an afterthought, he added, ‘Oh, by the way, anybody know where we can get some money?’ ”⁴⁴ Virtually everything we now recognize as a contribution by Thomas Edison came after that disaster. Some of his most famous inventions include the electric lightbulb, the phonograph, motion pictures, the electric voting machine, the stock ticker, and the mimeograph machine. The world is richer today because Thomas Edison did not allow himself to become discouraged and give up at age 67.

When the Prophet Joseph Smith was a prisoner in Liberty Jail for several months, he suffered injustices and deplorable conditions. As he prayed for understanding and help, the message came: “My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes.”⁴⁵ The

Lord explained to Joseph that he would suffer great afflictions, and He partly explained why: “Know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.”⁴⁶ This calming assurance helped Joseph endure his afflictions with a positive attitude.

Although the Apostle Paul suffered much, listen to the positive outlook he expressed in his second epistle to the Corinthians: “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.”⁴⁷

God has created a world where there are many more good things than bad. Harold Kushner explained: “We find life’s disasters upsetting not only because they are painful but because they are exceptional. Most people wake up on most days feeling good. Most illnesses are curable. Most airplanes take off and land safely. Most of the time, when we send our children out to play, they come home safely. The accident, the robbery, the inoperable tumor are life-shattering exceptions, but they are very rare exceptions. When you have been hurt by life, it may be hard to keep that in mind. When you are standing very close to a large object, all you can see is the object. Only by stepping back from it can you also see the rest of its setting around it. When we are stunned by some tragedy, we can only see and feel the tragedy. Only with time and distance can we see the tragedy in the context of a whole life and a whole world.”⁴⁸

Keep an Eternal Perspective

Elder Richard G. Scott taught us to keep a long-term perspective when he said: “The challenges you face, the growth experiences you encounter, are intended to be temporary scenes played out on the stage of a life of

continuing peace and happiness. Sadness, heartache, and disappointment are events in life. It is not intended that they be the substance of life. I do not minimize how hard some of these events can be. When the lesson you are to learn is very important, trials can extend over a long period of time, but they should not be allowed to become the confining focus of everything you do. Your life can and should be wondrously rewarding. It is your understanding and application of the laws of God that will give your life glorious purpose as you ascend and conquer the difficulties of life. That perspective keeps challenges confined to their proper place—stepping-stones to further growth and attainment.”⁴⁹

Bishop Richard C. Edgley said: “For the faithful, the normal tests and trials of life need not be the enemy of faith. While we don’t necessarily look forward to these obstacles and challenges, we accept them, and we build our lives and faith from them. To the faithful, the very obstacles that we overcome draw us closer to our Heavenly Father by helping us develop a humble, submissive spirit and causing us to be grateful and appreciative of those blessings that flow from a loving Father. In short, these experiences can and often do increase our faith. The faithful do not pray to be spared the trials of life but pray that they may have the strength to rise above them.”⁵⁰

Some of the personal challenges we experience in this life are conditions of mortality that will not continue into the next life. To the person who was born with mental deficiencies, and to the person who has no reasonable expectation of marriage in this life, and to the person who has not yet been able to overcome same-gender attractions, I counsel you to keep an eternal perspective. Even though the present difficulties may at times seem more than you

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can bear, an understanding of eternal truths is a powerful motivation for righteous behavior. You are best served by concentrating on the things you can presently understand and control—not wasting energy or enlarging frustration by worrying about that which God has not yet fully revealed. Our present trials do not determine who we really are, but our response to them does influence who we will become.

President Brigham Young taught: “We talk about our trials and troubles here in this life; but suppose that you could see yourselves thousands and millions of years after you have proved faithful to your religion during the few short years in this time, and have obtained eternal salvation and a crown of glory in the presence of God? Then look back upon your lives here, and see the losses, crosses, and disappointments, the sorrows...; you would be constrained to exclaim, ‘but what of all that? Those things were but for a moment, and we are now here. We have been faithful during a few moments in our mortality, and now we enjoy eternal life and glory, with power to progress in all the boundless knowledge and through the countless stages of progression, enjoying the smiles and approbation of our Father and God, and of Jesus Christ our elder brother.’ ”⁵¹

CONCLUSION

By ourselves, we are weak, but with God's strength, we can do all things.⁵² We can have faith and hope to accept and face adversity when it comes. We can suffer trials with patience. We can forgive cruelty. We can love those who hate us. We can face death with dignity. As Alma testified, “whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day.”⁵³

The doctrines of the restored gospel give us an eternal perspective that provides hope and courage to bear all of life's trials. Trials can bless our lives if we learn from them and turn weakness into strength. Each of us has the strength to bear each challenge in life because of who we are, who God is, and who we are together.

An abbreviated version of this text was given as a devotional address at Brigham Young University–Idaho on October 30, 2007. Watch the video at bit.ly/byu-vid or read the transcript at bit.ly/byu-trans.

Notes

¹ See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.

² Job 38:7.

³ Alma 42:8, 16

⁴ See 2 Nephi 2:11.

⁵ 2 Nephi 2:25.

⁶ See Psalms 34: 19.

⁷ See Jacob 3:1 and Alma 36:3.

⁸ See Robert L. Millet, *When a Child Wanders* (1996), 58.

⁹ *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (1972), 97.

¹⁰ See M. Russell Ballard, in Conference Report, April 1995, 30; or *Ensign*, May 1995, 23.

¹¹ John 9:1–3

¹² See M. Russell Ballard, in Conference Report, April 1995, 30; or *Ensign*, May 1995, 23.

¹³ See Bruce C. Hafen, “Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1990, 10.

¹⁴ Alma 7:11–12; italics added.

¹⁵ See Hafen, *Ensign*, Apr. 1990, 7-13; see also Dallin H. Oaks, in Conference Report, Oct. 2006, 4–7; or *Ensign*, Nov 2006, 6–9.

- ¹⁶ In Conference Report, Apr. 2006, 7.
- ¹⁷ In Conference Report, Oct. 2000, 41; or *Ensign*, Nov 2000, 32.
- ¹⁸ Alma 12:24
- ¹⁹ Quoted by Spencer W. Kimball in *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (1972), 98. Also, Brigham Young taught, "Every trial and experience you have passed through is necessary for your salvation" (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe, (1954), 345).
- ²⁰ Quoted by David O. McKay, *Relief Society Magazine*, January 1948, 8.
- ²¹ In Conference Report, Apr. 2004, 15; or *Ensign*, May 2004, 17.
- ²² In Conference Report, Oct. 1995, 19; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 17.
- ²³ In Conference Report, Munich Germany Area Conference 1973, 114.
- ²⁴ "Small Acts of Service," *Ensign*, Dec 1974, 5.
- ²⁵ "Jesus Christ—Gifts and Expectations," Christmas Devotional, Dec. 7, 1986.
- ²⁶ *Relief Society Magazine*, Jan. 1948, 8.
- ²⁷ Matthew 11:28.
- ²⁸ Mark 4:38.
- ²⁹ Mark 4:40.
- ³⁰ Mosiah 24:13–15.
- ³¹ In Conference Report, Oct. 1995, 19; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 17.
- ³² See Camille Fronk, "Lessons from the Potter and the Clay," unpublished manuscript of a devotional address at Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, Mar. 7 1995, 8–9.
- ³³ See David A. Bednar, in Conference Report, Apr. 2005, 104–108; or *Ensign*, May 2005, 99.
- ³⁴ In Conference Report, Apr. 1996, 33; or *Ensign*, May 1996, 25.
- ³⁵ See Joanne D. Smith, "Annette's Halo," *Ensign*, September 1991, 71–73.
- ³⁶ In Conference Report, Oct. 2006, 5; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 7–8.
- ³⁷ Ether 12:27.
- ³⁸ 2 Nephi 2:2. See also D&C 98:3; 122:7.
- ³⁹ In Conference Report, Apr. 2004, 15–16; or *Ensign*, May 2004, 17.
- ⁴⁰ In Conference Report, Oct. 2000, 3–4; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 6.
- ⁴¹ In Conference Report, Apr. 2007, 6; or *Ensign*, May 2007, 9.
- ⁴² In Conference Report, Apr. 2007, 15; or *Ensign*, May 2007, 15.
- ⁴³ Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, (1981), 110–11.
- ⁴⁴ Jeffrey R. Holland, "For Times of Trouble," *New Era*, Oct. 1980, 10.
- ⁴⁵ See D&C 121:7–8.

⁴⁶ D&C 122:7.

⁴⁷ 2 Corinthians 4:8–9.

⁴⁸ *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (1981), 138–39.

⁴⁹ In Conference Report, Oct. 2006, 44; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 41.

⁵⁰ In Conference Report, Apr. 1993, 11; or *Ensign*, May 1993, 11.

⁵¹ Brigham Young, in *Deseret News*, Nov. 9, 1859, 1.

⁵² Alma 26:12.

⁵³ Alma 36:3.

Learning Through Life's Trials

You can choose to see a trial as a roadblock or an expressway. If you see it as a roadblock, it will obstruct your way. However, if you see it as an expressway, you can use it to learn and grow.

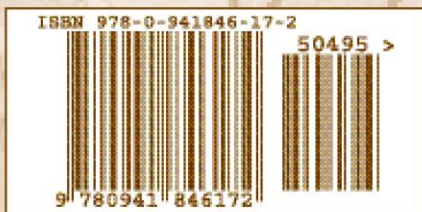
This book reviews the nature, origins, and purposes of adversity and includes suggestions on how to patiently trust in the Lord and His eternal plan and how to use these trials to learn and grow stronger. You can benefit from your trials if you:

- Develop a Relationship with God
- Let Others Help You
- Let God Carry Your Burdens
- Trust That the Lord Is in Control; Allow His Will to be Done
- Remember That Everyone Has Challenges
- Let Adversity Make You a Better Person
- Live with Integrity
- Be Patient
- Make the Best of Your Situation
- Serve Others
- Keep a Positive Attitude
- Keep an Eternal Perspective

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the plan whereby we can become what God wants us to become. In fact, we become great people *because* of our trials, not *in spite* of them.

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