

Volunteers feel “more joy in His service”

Over the last seven weeks, four major hurricanes have come ashore in Florida and along the Gulf of Mexico. Most nations of the Caribbean have experienced extensive devastation. Food, clothing, and shelter are in short supply. Large masses of debris clog roads and yards. Local infrastructure has been destroyed or needs major repair.

Last week I was in Tallahassee, Florida, and received many expressions of appreciation for the aid furnished by the Church during these emergencies. Florida Governor Bush, Lieutenant Governor Toni Jennings, partners like the Red Cross and Salvation Army, along with federal and state emergency personnel expressed gratitude that I pass on to you who performed the labor to ease the burden of cleanup and to those who have contributed to the Church's Humanitarian Fund. Thank you. I trust you have felt more joy and more used in His service.

Following the pattern of previous weekends at different locations, over 2,000 volunteers from all over the southeastern United States gathered in Pensacola, Florida, last weekend to help with the aftermath of Hurricane Ivan. They rolled out their sleeping bags on meetinghouse floors, in other churches, and in members' homes. They responded to thousands of work orders to assist wherever they were needed. Missionaries participated by covering the

roof of the local Methodist church with the ever-present blue tarps. First responders, the firemen and the policemen, expressed appreciation that the Latter-day Saints had been assigned to help their families in their absence.

All of this was accomplished at the same time Hurricane Jeanne was coming ashore after causing much distress in Haiti and other Caribbean locations. Thanks again to those of you who give of your means and those whose hands have lightened the load of so many. I salute you for your desire to be more blessed and holy and more like the Savior. This weekend 2,500 will be helping with the aftermath of Hurricane Jeanne.

Seek “more” of eternal virtues

In discussing our various longings for more, I'm not suggesting we adopt Scrooge as a role model for good parenting. I am suggesting that it is important for families and individuals to aggressively seek more of the virtues which go beyond this mortal life. A prayerful, conservative approach is the key to successfully living in an affluent society and building the qualities that come from waiting, sharing, saving, working hard, and making do with what we have. May we be blessed with the desire and the ability to understand when more is really less and when more is better. In the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin

Press on despite difficulties, sorrows

I have lived long enough to experience firsthand many of the challenges of life. I have known exceptional people who have endured severe trials, while others, at least on the surface, seem to have lived charmed lives.

Often those who struggle with adversity ask the question “Why did this happen to me?” They spend sleepless nights wondering why they feel so lonely, sick, discouraged, oppressed, or brokenhearted.

The question “Why me?” can be a difficult one to answer and often leads to frustration and despair. There is a better

question to ask ourselves. That question is “What could I learn from this experience?”

The way we answer that question may determine the quality of our lives not only on this earth but also in the eternities to come. Though our trials are diverse, there is one thing the Lord expects of us no matter our difficulties and sorrows: He expects us to press on.

The doctrine of enduring to the end

The gospel of Jesus Christ includes enduring to the end as one of its bedrock doctrines. Jesus taught, “He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”¹ And “if ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.”² Some think of enduring to the end as simply suffering through challenges. But it is so much more than that—it is the process of coming unto Christ and being perfected in Him.

The Book of Mormon prophet Nephi taught: “Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.”³

Enduring to the end is the doctrine of continuing on the path leading to eternal life after one has entered into the path through faith, repentance, baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost. Enduring to the end requires our whole heart—or, as the Book of Mormon prophet Amaleki taught, we must “come unto him, and offer [our] whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth [we] will be saved.”⁴

Enduring to the end means that we have planted our lives firmly on gospel soil, staying in the mainstream of the Church, humbly serving our fellowmen,

living Christlike lives, and keeping our covenants. Those who endure are balanced, consistent, humble, constantly improving, and without guile. Their testimonies are not based on worldly reasons—they are based on truth, knowledge, experience, and the Spirit.

The parable of the sower

The Lord Jesus Christ uses the simple parable of the sower to teach the doctrine of enduring to the end.

“The sower soweth the word.

“And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.

“And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness;

“And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake, immediately they are offended.

“And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word,

“And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

“And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.”⁵

This parable describes the types of soil onto which seeds of truth are sown and nourished. Each type of soil represents our degree of commitment and ability to endure.

The first type of soil, that of the “way side,” represents those who hear the gospel but never give the truth a chance to take root.

The second type of soil, “stony ground,” represents those in the Church who, at the first sign of sacrifice or trial, run away offended, not willing to pay the price.

The third type of soil, “sown among thorns,” represents some members of the Church who are distracted and obsessed by the cares, riches, and lusts of the world.

Finally, those on “good ground” are those members of the Church whose lives reflect their discipleship to the Master, whose roots go deep into gospel soil, and thereby produce abundant fruit.

Three obstacles to endurance

In the parable of the sower, the Savior identifies three obstacles to endurance which can canker our souls and stop our eternal progress.

The first obstacle of endurance, “the cares of the world,” is essentially pride.⁶ Pride rears its ugly head in so many ways that are destructive. For example, intellectual pride is very prevalent in our day. Some people exalt themselves above God and His anointed servants because of their learning and scholarly achievements. We must never allow our intellect to take priority over our spirit. Our intellect can feed our spirit and our spirit can feed our intellect, but if we allow our intellect to take precedence over our spirit, we will stumble, find fault, and may even lose our testimonies.

Knowledge is very important and one of the few things that accompanies us into the next life.⁷ We should always be learning. However, we must be careful not to set aside our faith in the process because faith actually enhances our ability to learn.

The second obstacle to endurance is “the deceitfulness of riches.” We should end our fixation on wealth. It is only a means to an end, which end should ultimately be the building up of the kingdom of God. I feel that some are so concerned

about the type of car they drive, the expensive clothes they wear, or the size of their house in comparison to others that they lose sight of the weightier matters.⁸ We must be careful in our daily lives that we do not allow the things of this world to take precedence over spiritual things.

The third obstacle to endurance mentioned by the Savior is “the lusts of other [things].” The plague of pornography is swirling about us as never before. Pornography brings a vicious wake of immorality, broken homes, and broken lives. Pornography will sap spiritual strength to endure. Pornography is much like quicksand. You can become so easily trapped and overcome as soon as you step into it that you do not realize the severe danger. Most likely you will need assistance to get out of the quicksand of pornography. But how much better it is never to step into it. I plead with you to be careful and cautious.

Enduring to the end is a principle for all

A few weeks before President Heber J. Grant passed away, one of the Brethren went to visit him in his home. Before the man left, President Grant prayed, “O God, bless me that I shall not lose my testimony and keep faithful to the end!”⁹ Can you imagine President Grant, one of the great prophets of the Restoration, the President of the Church for nearly 27 years, praying that he would keep faithful to the end?

No one is immune from Satan’s influence and temptations. Do not be so proud to think that you are beyond the adversary’s influence. Be watchful that you do not fall prey to his deceptions. Stay close to the Lord through daily scripture study and daily prayer. We cannot afford to sit back and take our salvation for granted. We must be anxiously engaged our whole lives.¹⁰ These words of President Brigham Young motivate and remind us that we can never give up the fight to endure:

“The men and women, who desire to obtain seats in the celestial kingdom, will find that they must battle every day [for this sacred goal].”¹¹

Strength to endure

I know that there are many who suffer heartbreak, loneliness, pain, and setback. These experiences are a necessary part of the human experience. However, please do not lose hope in the Savior and His love for you. It is constant. He promised that He would not leave us comfortless.¹²

When we face challenges in our lives, we are comforted by the words of the Lord in the 58th section of the Doctrine and Covenants:

“Ye cannot behold with your natural eyes, for the present time, the design of your God concerning those things which shall come hereafter, and the glory which shall follow after much tribulation.

“For after much tribulation come the blessings. Wherefore the day cometh that ye shall be crowned with much glory; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand.”¹³

Warren Johnson presses on despite trials

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we must press on and eventually become more like the Lord in the process. We all know those who have faced great trials in life and have endured faithfully. One inspiring example is from an early Saint of the 19th century, Warren M. Johnson. He was assigned by Church leaders to operate Lee’s Ferry, an important crossing over the Colorado River in the desert of northern Arizona. Brother Johnson endured great challenges yet remained faithful his entire life. Listen to Brother Johnson explain his family tragedy in a letter to President Wilford Woodruff:

“In May 1891 a family . . . came [to Lee’s Ferry] from Richfield Utah, where they . . . spent the winter visiting friends. At Panguitch they buried a child, . . . with-

out [cleaning] the wagon or themselves. . . . They came to our house, and remained overnight, mingling with my little children. . . .

“We knew nothing of the nature of the disease [diphtheria], but had faith in God, as we were here on a very hard mission, and had tried as hard as we knew how to obey the [commandments] . . . that our children would be spared. But alas, in four and a half days [the oldest boy died] in my arms. Two more were taken down with the disease and we fasted and prayed as much as we thought it wisdom as we had many duties to perform here. We fasted [for] twenty-four hours and once I fasted [for] forty hours, but to no avail, for both my little girls died also. About a week after their death my fifteen year old daughter Melinda was [also] stricken down and we did all we could for her but she [soon] followed the others. . . . Three of my dear girls and one boy [have] been taken from us, and the end is not yet. My oldest girl nineteen years old is now prostrate [from] the disease, and we are fasting and praying in her behalf today. . . . I would ask for your faith and prayers in our behalf however. What have we done that the Lord has left us, and what can we do to gain his favor again[?]”

A short time later, Brother Johnson wrote a local leader and friend, expressing his faith to press on:

“It is the hardest trial of my life, but I set out for salvation and am determined that . . . through the help of Heavenly Father that I [would] hold fast to the iron rod no matter what troubles [came] upon me. I have not slackened in the performance of my duties, and hope and trust that I shall have the faith and prayers of my brethren, that I can live so as to receive the blessings.”¹⁴

Three attributes to foster endurance

Though heavy trials of Brother Johnson can help us to face our own challenges,

may I suggest three attributes to foster endurance in our day.

First, testimony. Testimony gives us the eternal perspective necessary to see past the trials or challenges we will inevitably face. Remember what Heber C. Kimball prophesied:

“The time will come when no man nor woman will be able to endure on borrowed light. Each will have to be guided by the light within himself. . . .

“ . . . If you don’t have it you will not stand; therefore seek for the testimony of Jesus and cleave to it, that when the trying time comes you may not stumble and fall.”¹⁵

Second, humility. Humility is the recognition and attitude that one must rely on the Lord’s assistance to make it through this life. We cannot endure to the end on our own strength. Without Him, we are nothing.¹⁶

Third, repentance. The glorious gift of repentance allows us to return to the path with a new heart, giving us the strength to endure on the path leading to eternal life. The sacrament thus becomes a key component of our endurance in this life. The sacrament provides a precious weekly opportunity to renew our baptismal covenants and repent and evaluate our progress toward exaltation.

Have the faith and courage to press on

We are sons and daughters of the Eternal God, with the potential to be joint-heirs with Christ.¹⁷ Knowing who we are, we should never give up the goal of achieving our eternal destiny.

I testify that in the eternities, as we look back upon our little span of existence here on this earth, we will lift our voices and rejoice that, in spite of the difficulties we encountered, we had the wisdom, the faith, and the courage to endure and press on.

That we may do so this day and forever is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Matthew 24:13.
2. John 8:31.
3. 2 Nephi 31:20.
4. Omni 1:26.
5. Mark 4:14–20.
6. See Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, Apr. 1989, 3–7; or *Ensign*, May 1989, 4–7.
7. See Doctrine and Covenants 130:18–19.
8. See Matthew 23:23.
9. Quoted by John Longden, in Conference Report, Oct. 1958, 70.
10. See Doctrine and Covenants 58:27.
11. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1954), 392.
12. See John 14:18.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 58:3–4.
14. Quoted in Jay A. Parry and others, eds., *Best-Loved Stories of the LDS People*, 3 vols. (1997–2000), 3:107–8.
15. In Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (1945), 450.
16. See John 15:5.
17. See Romans 8:17.

President Monson

Thank you, Elder Richards, Bishop Burton, and Elder Wirthlin, for those inspiring messages.

As we conclude the conference, we express appreciation to the Tabernacle Choir, the Primary Choir from the stakes of West Jordan, Utah—we still see those smiling faces, taught to sing—and the men of the Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra at Temple Square. We likewise thank their conductors and organists for the beautiful and inspiring music. We also extend our gratitude to all who have participated in any way in these proceedings.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet, will be our concluding speaker at this session. Following Pres-

ident Hinckley's remarks, the choir will sing "God Be with You Till We Meet Again." The benediction will then be of-

fered by Elder Quentin S. Cook of the Seventy, and this conference will be adjourned for six months.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Leave conference with stronger faith

We have experienced another great conference. What remarkable meetings these are. What a great purpose they serve. We gather together in a spirit of worship and with a desire to learn. We renew our relationships as members of this large family of Latter-day Saints who live in many lands, who speak a variety of languages, who come out of difficult cultures, who even look different. And we recognize that we are all one, each a son or daughter of our Father in Heaven.

In a few minutes this great Conference Center in Salt Lake City will be emptied. The lights will be dimmed and the doors locked. It will be so with thousands of other halls across this broad world. We shall return to our homes, greatly enriched I hope. Our faith will have been strengthened, our resolve fortified. Where we have felt defeated and beaten, I hope that a new courage has come into our lives. Where we have been wayward and indifferent, I hope that a spirit of repentance has taken hold of us. Where we have been unkind or mean and selfish, I hope that we have determined that we will change. All who walk in faith will have had that faith strengthened.

Today is Monday in the Far East. Tomorrow is Monday in the Western Hemisphere and in Europe. It is a time that we have designated as family home evening. On that occasion I hope that fathers and mothers will gather their children about them and talk of some of the things they have heard in this conference. I would wish they might even write down some of

these things, reflect on them, and remember them.

Temple attendance sanctifies us

Now as we conclude I wish to remind you of another matter. I would hope that we might go to the house of the Lord a little more frequently. As I indicated at the opening session, we have done all that we know how to do to bring temples closer to our people. There are still many who have to travel long distances. I hope they will continue to make that effort until such time as a temple is justified in their midst.

Most of our temples could be much busier than they are. In this noisy, bustling, competitive world, what a privilege it is to have a sacred house where we may experience the sanctifying influence of the Spirit of the Lord. The element of selfishness crowds in upon us constantly. We need to overcome it, and there is no better way than to go to the house of the Lord and there serve in a vicarious relationship in behalf of those who are beyond the veil of death. What a remarkable thing this is. In most cases we do not know those for whom we work. We expect no thanks. We have no assurance that they will accept that which we offer. But we go, and in that process we attain to a state that comes of no other effort. We literally become saviors on Mount Zion. What does this mean? Just as our Redeemer gave His life as a vicarious sacrifice for all men, and in so doing became our Savior, even so we, in a small measure, when we engage in proxy work in the temple, become as