

Elder L. Whitney Clayton

Each of us has burdens

Many years ago I walked at dawn through the narrow cobblestone streets of Cusco, Peru, high in the Andes Mountains. I saw a man from a local indigenous group walking down one of the streets. He was not a big man physically, but he carried an immense load of firewood in a huge burlap sack on his back. The sack seemed to be as big as he was. The load must have weighed as much as he did. He steadied it with a rope that looped under the bottom of the sack and circled up around his forehead. He gripped the rope tightly on both sides of his head. He kept a rag on his forehead underneath the rope to keep it from cutting into his skin. He leaned forward under his burden and walked with deliberate, difficult steps.

The man was carrying the firewood to the marketplace, where it would be sold. In an average day he might make just two or three round-trips across the town to deliver similarly awkward, heavy loads.

The memory of him bent forward, struggling down the street has become increasingly meaningful for me with the passage of years. How long could he continue to carry such burdens?

Life presses all kinds of burdens on each of us, some light but others relentless and heavy. People struggle every day under burdens that tax their souls. Many of *us* struggle under such burdens. They can be emotionally or physically ponderous. They can be worrisome, oppressive, and exhausting. And they can continue for years.

Sources of our burdens

In a general sense, our burdens come from three sources. Some burdens are the natural product of the conditions of the world in which we live. Illness, physical disability, hurricanes, and earthquakes

come from time to time through no fault of our own. We can prepare for these risks and sometimes we can predict them, but in the natural pattern of life we will all confront some of these challenges.

Other burdens are imposed on us by the misconduct of others. Abuse and addictions can make home anything but a heaven on earth for innocent family members. Sin, incorrect traditions, repression, and crime scatter burdened victims along the pathways of life. Even less-serious misdeeds such as gossip and unkindness can cause others genuine suffering.

Our own mistakes and shortcomings produce many of our problems and can place heavy burdens on our own shoulders. The most onerous burden we impose upon ourselves is the burden of sin. We have all known the remorse and pain which inevitably follow our failure to keep the commandments.

No matter the burdens we face in life as a consequence of natural conditions, the misconduct of others, or our own mistakes and shortcomings, we are all children of a loving Heavenly Father, who sent us to earth as part of His eternal plan for our growth and progress. Our unique, individual experiences can help us prepare to return to Him. The adversity and afflictions that are ours, however difficult to bear, last, from heaven's perspective, for "but a small moment; and then, if [we] endure it well, God shall exalt [us] on high."¹ We must do everything we can to bear our burdens "well" for however long our "small moment" carrying them lasts.

Opportunities and blessings

Burdens provide opportunities to practice virtues that contribute to eventual perfection. They invite us to yield "to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and [put] off the natural man and [become] a

saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and [become] as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon [us], even as a child doth submit to his father.”² Thus burdens become blessings, though often such blessings are well disguised and may require time, effort, and faith to accept and understand. Four examples may help explain this:

- First, Adam was told, “Cursed shall be the ground for thy sake,” which meant for his benefit, and “by the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.”³ Work is a continual burden, but it is also a continual blessing “for [our] sake,” for it teaches lessons *we* can learn only “by the sweat of [our] face.”
- Second, Alma observed that the poverty and “afflictions [of the poor among the Zoramites] had truly humbled them, and that they were in a preparation to hear the word.”⁴ He added, “Because ye are compelled to be humble blessed are ye.”⁵ Our economic challenges may help prepare us to hear the word of the Lord.
- Third, because of the “exceedingly great length of [their] war,” many Nephites and Lamanites “were softened because of their afflictions, insomuch that they did humble themselves before God, even in the depth of humility.”⁶ Political unrest, social disorder, and, in some areas of the world, modern Gadianton robbers may humble us and motivate us to seek heavenly shelter from societal storms.
- Fourth, Joseph Smith was told that the terrible things he suffered for years at the hands of his enemies would “give [him] experience, and . . . be for [his] good.”⁷ The suffering we experience through the offenses of others is a valuable, though painful, school for improving our own behavior.

Bearing one another’s burdens

Further, bearing up under our own burdens can help us develop a reservoir of empathy for the problems others face. The Apostle Paul taught that we should “bear . . . one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”⁸ Accordingly, our baptismal covenants require that we should be “willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light; yea, and [be] willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort.”⁹

Keeping our baptismal covenants helps relieve our *own* burdens as well as those of burdened souls we serve.¹⁰ Those who offer such assistance to others stand on holy ground. In explaining this, the Savior taught:

“When saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

“When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

“Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

“And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”¹¹

The Savior offers us help

Through it all, the Savior offers us sustaining strength and support, and in His own time and way, He offers deliverance. When Alma and his followers escaped from the armies of King Noah, they established a community named Helam. They began to till the ground, build buildings, and prosper.¹² Without warning, an army of the Lamanites brought them into bondage, and “none could deliver them but the Lord their God.”¹³ That deliverance, however, did not come immediately.

Their enemies began to “put tasks upon them, and put taskmasters over them.”¹⁴ Although they were threatened with death

for praying,¹⁵ Alma and his people “did pour out their hearts to [God]; and he did know the thoughts of their hearts.”¹⁶ Because of their goodness and their obedience to their baptismal covenants,¹⁷ they were delivered in stages. The Lord said to them:

“I will . . . ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that . . . 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.

“And it came to pass that so great was their faith and their patience that the voice of the Lord came unto them again, saying: Be of good comfort, for on the morrow I will deliver you out of bondage.”¹⁸

Mercifully, the Son of God offers us deliverance from the bondage of our sins, which are among the heaviest of all the burdens we bear. During His Atonement He suffered “according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance.”¹⁹ Christ “suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent.”²⁰ When we repent and keep the commandments, forgiveness and relief from our burdened conscience come with the help that only the Savior offers, for “surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy.”²¹

I remember that man in Peru, hunched over and struggling to carry that enormous sack of firewood on his back. For me, he is an image of us all as we struggle with the burdens of life. I know that as we

keep the commandments of God and our covenants, He helps us with our burdens. He strengthens us. When we repent, He forgives us and blesses us with peace of conscience and joy.²² May we then submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Doctrine and Covenants 121:7–8.
2. Mosiah 3:19.
3. Moses 4:23, 25.
4. Alma 32:6.
5. Alma 32:13.
6. Alma 62:41.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 122:7.
8. Galatians 6:2.
9. Mosiah 18:8–9.
10. See Matthew 10:39; 11:28–30; Mosiah 2:22.
11. See Matthew 25:35–40.
12. See Mosiah 23:5, 19–20.
13. See Mosiah 23:23–26.
14. Mosiah 24:9.
15. See Mosiah 24:10–11.
16. Mosiah 24:12.
17. See Mosiah 18:8–10; 24:13.
18. Mosiah 24:14–16.
19. Alma 7:13.
20. Doctrine and Covenants 19:16.
21. Alma 32:13.
22. See Mosiah 4:3; Alma 36:19–21.

President Eyring

The choir and the congregation will now join in singing “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet.” At the conclusion of the singing, Brother Russell T. Osguthorpe, Sunday School general president, will address us, after which we shall hear from Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The choir will then sing “My Heavenly Father Loves Me.”

The choir and congregation sang “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet.”
