

## Elder Paul V. Johnson

### The purpose of trials

Earth life includes tests, trials, and tribulations, and some of the trials we face in life can be excruciating. Whether it be illness, betrayal, temptations, loss of a loved one, natural disasters, or some other ordeal, affliction is part of our mortal experience. Many have wondered why we must face difficult challenges. We know that one reason is to provide a trial of our faith to see if we will do all the Lord has commanded.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately this earth life is the perfect setting to face—and pass—these tests.<sup>2</sup>

But these trials are not just to test us. They are vitally important to the process of putting on the divine nature.<sup>3</sup> If we handle these afflictions properly, they will be consecrated for our gain.<sup>4</sup>

Elder Orson F. Whitney said: “No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. . . . 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. . . . It is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire.”<sup>5</sup>

Recently a nine-year-old boy was diagnosed with a rare bone cancer. The doctor explained the diagnosis and the treatment, which included months of chemotherapy and major surgery. He said it would be a very difficult time for the boy and his family but then added, “People ask me, ‘Will I be the same after this is over?’ I tell them, ‘No, you won’t be the same. You will be so much stronger. You will be awesome!’”

At times it may seem that our trials are focused on areas of our lives and parts of our souls with which we seem least able to cope. Since personal growth is an intended outcome of these challenges, it should come as no surprise that the trials can be very personal—almost laser guided

to our particular needs or weaknesses. And no one is exempt, especially not Saints striving to do what’s right. Some obedient Saints may ask, “Why me? I’m trying to be good! Why is the Lord allowing this to happen?” The furnace of affliction helps purify even the very best of Saints by burning away the dross in their lives and leaving behind pure gold.<sup>6</sup> Even very rich ore needs refining to remove impurities. Being good is not enough. We want to become like the Savior, who learned as He suffered “pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind.”<sup>7</sup>

### Challenges can prepare us for blessings

The Crimson Trail in Logan Canyon is one of my favorite hikes. The main part of the trail creeps along the top of tall limestone cliffs and offers beautiful vistas of the canyon and valley below. Getting to the top of the cliffs isn’t easy, however. The trail there is a constant climb; and just before reaching the top, the climber encounters the steepest part of the trail; and views of the canyon are hidden by the cliffs themselves. The final exertion is more than worth the effort because once the climber is on top, the views are breathtaking. The only way to see the views is to make the climb.

A pattern in the scriptures and in life shows that many times the darkest, most dangerous tests immediately precede remarkable events and tremendous growth. “After much tribulation come the blessings.”<sup>8</sup> The children of Israel were trapped against the Red Sea before it was parted.<sup>9</sup> Nephi faced danger, anger from his brothers, and multiple failures before he was able to procure the brass plates.<sup>10</sup> Joseph Smith was overcome by an evil power so strong that it seemed he was doomed to utter destruction. When he was almost ready to sink into despair, he exerted himself to call upon God, and at that very moment he was visited by the Father and the Son.<sup>11</sup>

Often investigators face opposition and tribulation as they near baptism. Mothers know that the challenges of labor precede the miracle of birth. Time after time we see marvelous blessings on the heels of great trials.

When my grandmother was about 19 years old, she developed a disease that caused her to be very ill. She later said, “I couldn’t walk. My left foot was all out of shape after I had been in bed for several months. The bones were soft like a sponge, and when I touched my foot to the floor it felt like an electric shock.”<sup>12</sup> While she was confined to bed and at the height of her suffering, she obtained and studied pamphlets from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She was converted and later baptized. Many times a particular challenge helps prepare us for something vitally important.

### **Blessings outweigh afflictions**

In the midst of problems, it is nearly impossible to see that the coming blessings far outweigh the pain, humiliation, or heartbreak we may be experiencing at the time. “No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”<sup>13</sup> The Apostle Paul taught, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”<sup>14</sup> It is interesting that Paul uses the term “light affliction.” This comes from a person who was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, imprisoned, and who experienced many other trials.<sup>15</sup> I doubt many of us would label our afflictions light. Yet in comparison to the blessings and growth we ultimately receive, both in this life and in eternity, our afflictions truly are light.

We don’t seek out tests, trials, and tribulations. Our personal journey through life will provide just the right amount for our needs. Many trials are just a natural part

of our mortal existence, but they play such an important role in our progress.

As the Savior’s mortal ministry came to a close, He experienced the most difficult trial of all time—the incredible suffering in Gethsemane and on Golgotha. This preceded the glorious Resurrection and the promise that all our suffering will someday be done away. His suffering was a prerequisite to the empty tomb that Easter morning and to our future immortality and eternal life.

Sometimes we want to have growth without challenges and to develop strength without any struggle. But growth cannot come by taking the easy way. We clearly understand that an athlete who resists rigorous training will never become a world-class athlete. We must be careful that we don’t resent the very things that help us put on the divine nature.

### **Access to help from the Lord**

Not one of the trials and tribulations we face is beyond our limits, because we have access to help from the Lord. We can do all things through Christ, who strengthens us.<sup>16</sup>

After recovering from serious health challenges, Elder Robert D. Hales shared the following in general conference: “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. . . . I . . . learned that I would not be left alone to meet these trials and tribulations but that guardian angels would attend me. There were some that were near angels in the form of doctors, nurses, and most of all my sweet companion, Mary. And on occasion, when the Lord so desired, I was to be comforted with visitations of heavenly hosts that brought comfort and eternal reassurances in my time of need.”<sup>17</sup>

Our Heavenly Father loves us, and we “know that 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.”<sup>18</sup> Someday when we get to the other side of the veil, we want more than for someone just to tell us, “Well, you’re done.” Instead, we want the Lord to say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”<sup>19</sup>

I love the words of Paul:

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . .

“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”<sup>20</sup>

I know that God lives and that His Son, Jesus Christ, lives. I also know that through Their help, we can be “more than conquerors” of the tribulations we face in this life. We can become like Them. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## NOTES

1. See 1 Peter 1:6–8; Abraham 3:25.
2. See 1 Peter 2:20.
3. See 2 Peter 1:4.
4. See 2 Nephi 2:2.
5. Orson F. Whitney, in Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (1972), 98.
6. See Isaiah 48:10; 1 Nephi 20:10.
7. See Alma 7:11–12.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 58:4.
9. See Exodus 14:5–30.
10. See 1 Nephi 3–4.
11. See Joseph Smith—History 1:15–17.
12. Amalie Hollenweger Amacher, unpublished history in possession of author.
13. Hebrews 12:11.
14. 2 Corinthians 4:17.
15. See 2 Corinthians 11:23–28.
16. See Philippians 4:13.
17. Robert D. Hales, in Conference Report, Oct. 2000, 3–4; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 6.
18. Alma 36:3.
19. Matthew 25:21.
20. Romans 8:35, 37.

## Bishop H. David Burton

### Story of David O. McKay in Scotland

Good morning, brothers and sisters. In 1897 a young David O. McKay stood at a door with a tract in his hand. As a missionary in Stirling, Scotland, he had done this many times before. But on that day a very haggard woman opened the door and stood before him. She was poorly dressed and had sunken cheeks and unkempt hair.

She took the tract Elder McKay offered to her and spoke six words that he subsequently would never forget: “Will this buy me any bread?”

This encounter left a lasting impression on the young missionary. He later wrote: “From that moment I had a deeper realization that the Church of Christ should be and is interested in the temporal salvation of man. I walked away from the door feeling that that [woman], with . . . bitterness

in [her heart] toward man and God, [was] in no position to receive the message of the gospel. [She was] in need of temporal help, and there was no organization, so far as I could learn, in Stirling that could give it to [her].”<sup>1</sup>

### The welfare program of the Church

A few decades later the world groaned under the burden of the Great Depression. It was during that time, on April 6, 1936, that President Heber J. Grant and his counselors, J. Reuben Clark and David O. McKay, announced what would later become known as the welfare program of the Church. Interestingly, two weeks later Elder Melvin J. Ballard was appointed as its first chairman and Harold B. Lee its first managing director.