

# We Can Do Hard Things through Him

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We grow in our discipleship when we exercise faith in the Lord during difficult times.

During the Savior's earthly ministry, He noticed a man who was blind. Jesus's disciples asked, "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?"

The Savior's firm, loving, and sincere answer reassures us that He is mindful of our struggles: "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."<sup>1</sup>

While some challenges may come because of willful disobedience, we know that many of life's challenges come because of other reasons. Whatever the source of our challenges, they can be a golden opportunity to grow.

Our family has not been spared the adversities of life. Growing up, I admired large families. Such families felt appealing to me, especially when I found the Church in my teens through my maternal uncle, Sarfo, and his wife in Takoradi, Ghana.

When Hannah and I were married, we desired the fulfillment of our patriarchal blessings, which indicated that we would be blessed with many children. However, prior to the birth of our third boy, it became medically clear that Hannah would not be able to have another baby. Gratefully, though Kenneth was born in a life-threatening situation to both him and his mother, he arrived safely, and his mother recovered. He was able to begin to fully participate in our family life—including Church attendance, daily family prayers, scripture study, home evening, and wholesome recreational activities.

Though we had to adjust our expectations of a large family, it was a joy to put into practice the teachings from "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" with our three beloved children. Following those teachings added much meaning to my growing faith.

As the proclamation states: "Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the

bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity.”<sup>2</sup> As we put these principles into practice, we were blessed.

However, one weekend during my service as a stake president, we experienced perhaps the worst trial parents can face. Our family returned from a Church activity and gathered for lunch. Then our three boys went out within our compound to play.

My wife felt repeated impressions that something might be wrong. She asked me to check on the children while we were washing the dishes. I felt they were safe since we could hear their voices of excitement from their play.

When we both finally went to check on our sons, to our dismay we found little 18-month-old Kenneth helpless in a bucket of water, unseen by his brothers. We rushed him to the hospital, but all attempts to revive him proved futile.

We were devastated that we would not have the opportunity to raise our precious child during this mortal life. Though we knew Kenneth would be part of our family eternally, I found myself questioning why God would let this tragedy happen to me when I was doing all I could to magnify my calling. I had just come home from fulfilling one of my duties in ministering to the Saints. Why couldn't God look upon my service and save our son and our family from this tragedy? The more I thought about it, the more bitter I became.

My wife never blamed me for not responding to her promptings, but I learned a life-changing lesson and made two rules, never to be broken:

*Rule 1:* Listen to and heed the promptings of your wife.

*Rule 2:* If you are not sure for any reason, refer to rule number 1.

Though the experience was shattering and we continue to grieve, our overwhelming burden was eventually eased.<sup>3</sup> My wife and I learned specific lessons from our loss. We came to feel united and bound by our temple covenants; we know we can claim Kenneth as ours in the next world because he was born in the covenant. We also gained experience necessary to minister to others and empathize with their pain. I testify that our bitterness has since dispersed as we exercised faith in the Lord. Our experience continues to be hard, but we have learned with the Apostle Paul that we “can do all things through Christ which [strengthens us]” if we focus on Him.<sup>4</sup>

President Russell M. Nelson taught, “When the focus of our lives is on God’s plan of salvation ... and Jesus Christ and His gospel, we can feel

joy regardless of what is happening—or not happening—in our lives.” He further said, “Joy comes from and because of Him.”<sup>5</sup>

We can be of good cheer and be filled with peace in our tough times. The love we feel because of the Savior and His Atonement becomes a powerful resource to us in our trying moments. “All that is unfair [and difficult] about life can be made right through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.”<sup>6</sup> He commanded, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”<sup>7</sup> He can help us endure whatever pain, sickness, and trials we face in mortality.

We find many scriptural stories of great and noble leaders, such as Jeremiah, Job, Joseph Smith, and Nephi, who were not spared from the struggles and challenges of mortality. They were mortals who learned to obey the Lord even in harsh conditions.<sup>8</sup>

During the terrible days in Liberty Jail, Joseph Smith cried out: “O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?”<sup>9</sup> The Lord taught Joseph to “endure it well”<sup>10</sup> and promised that if he did, all these things would give him experience and would be for his good.<sup>11</sup>

Reflecting on my own experiences, I realize I have learned some of my best lessons during the hardest times in my life, times that took me out of my comfort zone. Difficulties I encountered as a youth, while learning about the Church through seminary, as a recent convert, and as a full-time missionary and challenges I faced in my education, in striving to magnify my callings, and in raising a family have prepared me for the future. The more I cheerfully respond to difficult circumstances with faith in the Lord, the more I grow in my discipleship.

The hard things in our lives should come as no surprise once we have entered the strait and narrow path.<sup>12</sup> Jesus Christ learned “obedience by the things which he suffered.”<sup>13</sup> As we follow Him, especially in our difficult times, we can grow to become more like Him.

One of the covenants we make with the Lord in the temple is to live the law of sacrifice. Sacrifice has always been part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a reminder of the great atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ for all who have lived or will live on earth.

I know that the Lord always compensates our righteous desires. Remember the many children I was promised in my patriarchal blessing? That blessing is being fulfilled. My wife and I served with several hundred missionaries, from more than 25 countries, in the Ghana Cape Coast Mission. They are as dear to us as if they were literally our own children.

I testify that we grow in our discipleship when we exercise faith in the Lord during difficult times. As we do so, He will mercifully strengthen us and help us carry our burdens. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. John 9:2–3.
2. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,”  
ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
3. See Mosiah 24:14–15.
4. Philippians 4:13.
5. Russell M. Nelson, “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Ensign* or  
*Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 82.
6. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2019), 52.
7. John 16:33.
8. See Job 27:5.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 121:1.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 121:8.
11. See Doctrine and Covenants 122:7.
12. See 2 Nephi 31:19–21.
13. Hebrews 5:8.