



Painting by Glen S. Hopkinson, 1843 *Christmas in Nauvoo*

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Enduring It Well (D&C 121:8)

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On 1 August 1989, while bodysurfing with my sixteen-year-old son and his friend at Laguna Beach, California, I suffered a severe injury that left me a quadriplegic and on life support. In just one split second, my life was changed forever. As you can imagine, I have struggled mightily to adjust to my new circumstances.

Although I tried to accept and deal with what had happened to me, I could not help but feel a great sense of loss and little hope for what the future might bring. Under these circumstances, I felt prompted to approach the Lord with intense fasting and prayer. In doing so, I prayed for a broken heart and a contrite spirit. I wanted to be open to whatever the Lord would see fit to reveal to me, if anything.

After I fasted and prayed for several days, a wonderful thing happened. I had an experience patterned after the truth revealed to Oliver Cowdery in Doctrine and Covenants 8:2–3. Speaking through Joseph Smith to Oliver, the Lord said, “Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. Now behold, this is the spirit of revelation.”

The Lord revealed three distinct things to me in this manner. The first was that my life was not going to end anytime soon. That knowledge brought me great peace of mind. When you are dependent upon electrical and mechanical equipment to keep you alive, life can be very unpredictable. I have often referred to my situation as “living on the edge.”

Second, the Lord revealed to me how I could be an effective husband and father in my new circumstances. Prior to my injury, I had worked diligently in fulfilling these two roles. However, in my incapacitated state, I felt inadequate in meeting my family's needs. Now, gratefully, my mind was flooded with ideas of how to achieve this, particularly with being more communicative.

Third, I knew that I was to be more productive with my life regardless of my condition. At that time, I did not realize that the Lord had already taken into account my limitations, and as I began to extend myself, He provided opportunities for me to grow and serve using the very same talents with which I had been previously blessed.

But the greatest miracle of all from this experience was that the Lord saw fit to give me a new heart. For the first time since my accident, I felt a peace regarding what had happened to me. I was filled with warmth, the sustaining power of the Spirit, that has never left.

Since that experience, my life has never been the same. On a daily basis, I experience a feeling of gratitude just for being alive. My wife, JoAnne, and I both feel that a true miracle has taken place as joy and happiness are once again a part of our lives. I feel a sense of fulfillment, well-being, and spontaneous joy that I never thought would be possible again. When we seek the Lord with all our hearts, He has the power to lift our burdens from off our backs and raise us to an elevated level of productivity, fulfillment, and happiness.

Joseph Smith's entire life is an example of this principle and of enduring well (see D&C 121:8). Early in Joseph's life, the Lord said to him, "Be patient in afflictions, for thou shalt have many" (D&C 24:8). Later, Joseph said that adversity had become "second nature" (D&C 127:2) and that it had "only wafted [him] that much nearer to Deity."^{ccxi}1 The words Joseph Smith spoke to his cousin George A. Smith on one occasion reveal so much about Joseph's attitude of faith and hope: "He told me I should never get discouraged, whatever difficulties might surround me. If I were sunk into the lowest pit of Nova Scotia and all the Rocky Mountains piled on top of me, I ought not to be discouraged, but hang on, exercise faith, and keep up good courage, and I should come out on the top of the heap."^{ccxli}2

We may not realize the real significance of events at the time of our afflictions, but blessings come as we endure. The Lord told Joseph as he suffered in Liberty Jail that even "if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good" (D&C 122:7).

Why this is so, I believe, is found in a statement made by Frances Webster. He was twenty-six years old when he, along with his wife and a little baby, experienced the suffering and hardship of the Martin Handcart Company. Later in his life he made a significant statement about that experience: "We suffered beyond anything you can imagine, and many died of exposure and starvation. . . . [However, those who survived] came through with the absolute knowledge that God lives, for we became acquainted with Him in our extremities."^{ccxliii}3

President James E. Faust further emphasized this concept when he said: "In the heroic effort of the handcart pioneers, we learn a great truth. All must pass through a refiner's fire, and the insignificant and unimportant in our lives can melt away like dross and make our faith bright, intact, and strong. There seems to be a full measure of anguish, sorrow, and often heartbreak for everyone, including those who earnestly seek to do right and be faithful. Yet this is part of the purging to become acquainted with God."^{ccxliv}4

Is any price too great to become acquainted with God? We may think that some individuals pay a greater price than others, but do they really? There are those like me whose adversity is apparent, but all of us in our own way are being tested and proven. Regardless of the adversity we suffer,

however, it would be to no avail if it did not drive us to our knees and draw us closer to our Heavenly Father. As we do so, He will help us, and we will be able to move forward with our lives.

Many years ago I read an essay written by Eugene England titled “The Church Is As True As the Gospel.”^{ccxliv} 5 This is not just a clever play on words; it is a powerful concept. Everything about the Church is designed to bring us closer to the Savior. Along with the Atonement, the Savior provided those elements within His Church that would enable the Saints to endure well this mortal experience so they could be perfected. Let me share with you just a few examples of what has sustained me and what I believe sustained the early pioneers as members of the Church. The day of my accident, the first person able to get to the hospital was our bishop—a young, busy attorney. He arrived soon after the accident and immediately took charge. He was a great source of comfort to JoAnne, and he informed close friends and family of what had happened and was happening. For the next several months, being directed by the Spirit, he was able to give help and support to a devastated family as only a bishop can. I mention him simply to put a face on the organization of the Church and all the Saints who make it work.

We will always be grateful to the members of our ward who built a 750-square-foot addition to our home so we would not have to move. We are also indebted to numerous ward members who have, through the years, come over each weekday morning to help JoAnne get me dressed and into my wheelchair. Without the love of the members of the Church, I don’t know how we could have ever endured these past thirteen years as well as we have.

Recalling my own experience, I cannot help but think of my ancestors who were in the Martin Handcart Company. Although my great-great-grandfather, Robert Mattinson II, had died at Deer Creek, his wife Ann and their four children—one of whom was my great-grandfather, then twenty years old—miraculously survived and finally made it to the valley because of the heroic efforts of the relief party sent out by Brigham Young. Driving wagons loaded with food and clothing donated by the Saints, these brave men traveled over four hundred miles in severe weather before finding the freezing and starving immigrants. I have often wondered which of the legendary young men carried my family across the Sweetwater on his back and helped them into Martin’s Cove. Because of the organization of this Church and the love of the Saints for one another, Robert Mattinson III was able to leave me a legacy of enduring well. His life has taught me that if we are built upon the rock of our Redeemer, regardless of the nature and fury of the storm, it will have no power over us (see Helaman 5:12).

Another sustaining power in the Church is the scriptures. Along with being paralyzed and unable to breathe on my own, I was not able to speak for the first month or so, and doctors led me to believe that this would always be the case. Suffering such physical losses, I felt as though I had entered a world of the mind and spirit. Doctrine and Covenants 130:18 came to me: “Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection.” Much like that scripture, I felt totally dependent upon my mind and spirit for the quality of life I would have from that point on. Because of my mission and my twenty-five years of teaching seminary and institute classes, the eternal truths contained in the scriptures were in my heart and mind and, thankfully, had not been lost along with my physical body.

Fortunately, within a few days, a good friend had created a special chart for me through which I was able to communicate. As family and friends scanned the items listed on the chart with their fingers, by blinking my eyes, I could indicate what my needs were, as well as what scriptures I wanted read to me. As favorite passages were read, I clung to the familiar words that I had come to cherish and had taught to others through the years. I could not have made it then, nor through

the subsequent years, without the spiritual nourishment that comes from the word of God. Thankfully, through voice-activated software, I am able to search the scriptures on a daily basis. They are an anchor to my soul and inspire me with a perfect brightness of hope in a literal resurrection.

Wilford Woodruff, traveling with Brigham Young and others with the first pioneer company, recorded in his journal on a Sunday morning these words: “In the morning I shaved & washed all over & Anointed my head & put on Clean Clothing. Read A chapter in the Book of Mormon & humbled myself before the Lord & poured out my soul in prayer before the Lord & his spirit descended upon me & I was blessed.”⁶ As we combine the reading of scripture with sincere prayer, we are blessed in whatever circumstances we may find ourselves. The knowledge they impart to us will increase our faith and instill within us a hope that cannot be dimmed by our adversities.

Three months after the organization of the Church in this dispensation, the Savior, instructing Emma Smith to compile a selection of sacred hymns, said, “The song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads” (D&C 25:12).

While I was in the intensive-care unit, brethren from the ward and stake volunteered to sit with me through the night. Being unable to move or speak, I felt very vulnerable. Their presence was a great comfort to me. However, late one night I was having difficulty sleeping and was feeling fretful and uneasy. A young man whom I had recently called to the high council was sitting with me and sensed that all was not well. He said softly to me, “President, would you like me to sing to you?” I blinked my eyes once, which was my signal for yes. Taking out his little hymnbook, he commenced singing the hymns to me for the next several hours. He had a beautiful baritone voice. As he sang the familiar melodies and words, I felt the unmistakable comfort, peace, and warmth of the Spirit. It was as though I were immersed in love.

Another time at the rehabilitation center, I was suffering from anxiety again and did not know how I would make it through the night. I was alone except for two young men who were in my similar condition. As I lay there in the dark, unable to move and praying for relief of some kind, the thought came to me that I could sing the hymns in my mind. I began with some of the sacrament hymns—“I Stand All Amazed” and then “I Know That My Redeemer Lives.” Other hymns began flooding into my mind, bringing with them the spirit of peace and comfort, which gradually descended upon me. Without realizing when it happened, I slipped into a deep sleep. From the pages of Church history, we know that the Prophet Joseph also found solace in singing hymns. The back cover of the December 2000 *Ensign* displays a painting by Glen S. Hopkinson titled “1843 Christmas in Nauvoo.” It depicts my great-great-grandmother, Lettice Johnson Rushton, and other family members singing carols in front of the Nauvoo Mansion to Joseph, Emma, and others. I have a tender place in my heart for this grandmother, who was very familiar with adversity. Blind for many years of her life, she sailed across the ocean to a land she could not see, only to lose her husband shortly after her arrival in Nauvoo. The Prophet wrote of this experience that the singing “caused a thrill of pleasure to run through my soul . . . and I felt to thank my Heavenly Father for their visit, and blessed them in the name of the Lord.”⁷

The Prophet was comforted again in Carthage Jail shortly before his martyrdom when he requested John Taylor to sing “A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief.” When Elder Taylor had finished the song, the Prophet’s eyes were wet with tears, and he said, “Sing that song again, will you, John?”⁸ John “replied that he did not feel like singing. He was oppressed with a sense of coming disaster.”⁹ “You’ll feel better once you begin, and so will I,”¹⁰ replied Joseph.

Just as Joseph was blessed through the hymns, the pioneers were also buoyed up in the midst of their difficulties because of the music that was so much a part of their daily lives. John Jaques of the Martin Handcart Company wrote in his journal of the difficulties they were facing while camped at Red Buttes, Wyoming. They were stranded in an early snowstorm and had reduced the flour rations to four ounces per day. He wrote: "The outlook was certainly not encouraging, but it need not be supposed that the company was in despair. . . . Oh! No! A hopeful and cheerful spirit pervaded the camp, and the 'Songs of Zion' were frequently heard at this time, though the company was in the very depths of privation."^{cc1}11 I thank the Lord for inspired and inspiring music.

For about eight months after my accident, I was unable to attend meetings of the Church. I remember well the Aaronic Priesthood boys from our stake and ward coming regularly to the hospital and later to our home to bless and pass the sacrament. With just a hospital curtain drawn around my bed, these young men in their white shirts and ties sang hymns, gave talks, and bore their testimonies. Now, as I go to church each Sunday, I rejoice in the sweet experience of having a young deacon come to me and carefully place the broken bread in my mouth and then later put the cup to my lips.

I can picture in my mind the pioneers gathered together on the windswept plains sharing a sacred sacrament service together. It was a sustaining influence then and continues to be so today because of the sacramental promise. As I partake of those sacred emblems each week, I feel the burden of paralysis lifted from me. I have come to truly understand through this ordinance that the Savior knows "how to succor his people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:12).

The spirit and the knowledge we receive from the temple also sustain us in our adversities. Sarah DeArmon Pea Rich, who was living in Nauvoo at the time of the exodus, recorded in her journal how she and her husband worked many hours each day in the temple for weeks before the Saints left for the West. Sarah made this insightful comment: "Many were the blessings we had received in the house of the Lord, which . . . enabled us to have faith in God, knowing he would guide us and sustain us in the unknown journey that lay before us. For if it had not been for the faith and knowledge that was bestowed upon us in that temple by the influence and help of the Spirit of the Lord, our journey would have been like one taking a leap in the dark."^{cc1}12

JoAnne and I went to the temple just a week before I was hurt. It was our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, and we were asked to be the witness couple. Kneeling at the altar on that particular occasion, I don't think our experience then was much unlike that of those early Saints. The temple gives us an eternal perspective and aids us in our journey through this life's wilderness. Although I can no longer kneel at the altar, I consider it a great privilege whenever JoAnne and I participate in sealings. With cushions removed, I roll up alongside the altar, and JoAnne kneels across from me and takes my hand. In that special setting, I am always comforted as I am reminded of the eternal nature of God's plan for us and of the truthfulness of the words He spoke to Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail: "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).

You can imagine my feelings toward JoAnne at such a time as well. I doubt my feelings of love and gratitude for her are much different than those Jens Neilson had toward his wife, Elsie, as she pulled him in their handcart to Rock Creek through a terrible storm.

Jens, six feet two inches tall and weighing 230 pounds, collapsed at the top of Rocky Ridge after pulling his five-year-old son and a young girl up the three-mile ascent. After he had waded through freezing snow for over fourteen hours, his feet were badly frostbitten. He said, "Elsie, I

can go no farther. You go on without me.” Elsie, who was four feet eleven inches tall and weighed a hundred pounds, said, “I will not leave you”^{ccli} 13 and helped him into the cart with the two children and was able to pull them the remaining thirteen miles to camp. The following morning they buried their only son and then, clinging to each other and to their faith, they continued their journey into the valley and participated in the colonization of southern Utah. Jens and Elsie are perfect examples of what President Hinckley was referring to when he said: “Our people have endured every kind of suffering. Indescribable have been their sacrifices. Immense beyond belief have been their labors. But out of all of this fiery crucible has come something glorious.”^{ccliii} 14

We are indebted to these faithful and courageous pioneers who have left us all a great legacy of enduring well. I believe that their journals, much like the scriptures, have been preserved to inspire us as we encounter the challenges of our day. I know I have drawn great strength from those journals and my very own ancestors’ journals in dealing with my situation. By studying the history of our Church, we come to understand the diversity and quantity of suffering the early Latter-day Saints endured from the beginning of the Restoration. Knowing what we know about how most of them “kept the faith” and “finished [the] course” (2 Timothy 4:7), how could we ever surrender to despair and self-pity?

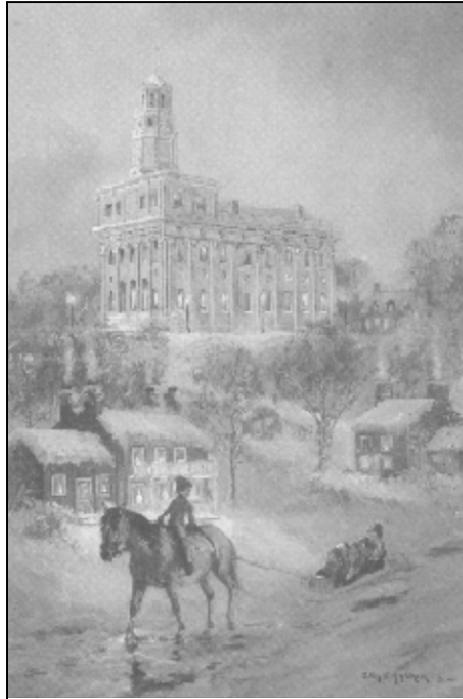
As the Saints in Missouri were receiving severe persecution, losing their homes, and being threatened with death by their enemies, Joseph Smith sought the Lord in prayer and received a significant revelation for them and for us today. It contains a powerful truth concerning the perspective the Lord would have us possess regarding the experiences we have in mortality: “Wherefore, fear not even unto death; for in this world your joy is not full, but in me your joy is full. Therefore, care not for the body, neither the life of the body; but care for the soul, and for the life of the soul. And seek the face of the Lord always, that in patience ye may possess your souls, and ye shall have eternal life” (D&C 101:36–38).

Regardless of the adversities we may experience, as we accept the enabling power of the Atonement of Christ and the sustaining power that comes from our membership in His Church, we can be productive in helping to build the kingdom, and we will experience great joy and fulfillment.

Notes

1. Joseph Smith, in B. H. Roberts, *The Gospel: An Exposition of Its First Principles and Man’s Relationship to Deity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965), 279.
2. George A. Smith, in *The Teachings of Joseph Smith*, ed. Larry E. Dahl and Donald Q. Cannon (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 195.
3. Gordon B. Hinckley, in R. Scott Lloyd, “‘Little Colony’ Has Persisted for 150 Years,” *Church News*, 17 November 2001, 3.
4. James E. Faust, in Conference Report, April 1997, 85; or *Ensign*, May 1997, 63.
5. Eugene England, “The Church Is As True As the Gospel,” unpublished manuscript.
6. Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal* (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983), 3:190–91.
7. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1950), 6:134.
8. Claire Noall, *Intimate Disciple: A Portrait of Willard Richards, Apostle to Joseph Smith—Cousin of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1957), 440.
9. George Q. Cannon, *Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1958), 524.

10. Noall, *Intimate Disciple*, 440.
11. John Jaques, in Stewart E. Glazier and Robert S. Clark, eds., *Journal of the Trail* (n.p., 1997), 63.
12. Sarah DeArmon Pea Rich, in Glazier and Clark, *Journal of the Trail*, 3.
13. In Gerald N. Lund, “The Fire of the Covenant,” in *Every Good Thing: Talks from the 1997 BYU Women’s Conference*, ed. Dawn Hall Anderson, Susette Fletcher Green, and Dora Hall Dalton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 272.
14. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Church Goes Forward,” *Ensign*, May 2002, 4.



Painting by Glen S. Hopkinson, *Winter Fun in Nauvoo, 1845–46*

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“A Voice of Gladness for the Living and the Dead” (D&C 128:19)

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Years before the Prophet Joseph Smith announced the doctrine of baptism for the dead, glimpses of the glorious principle were revealed to him. In 1836 in an upper room of the Kirtland Temple, the Prophet exclaimed, “I [see] Fathers Adam and Abraham, and my father and mother, [and] my brother, Alvin, that has long since slept.” In reference to Alvin, he “marveled how it was that he had obtained an inheritance in that kingdom, seeing that he had departed this life before the Lord had set His hand to gather Israel the second time, and had not been baptized for the remission of sins.” When Joseph sought clarification as to how his beloved brother could have inherited celestial glory, the voice of the Lord declared, “All who have died without a knowledge of this Gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the