

MOURNING WITH HOPE

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On the spring morning of Sunday, 20 March 1842, Joseph Smith stood in a grove of trees near the construction site of the Nauvoo Temple. He was speaking to a group of Saints who had gathered to hear him preach on baptism. However, because of the recent death of a young child, a two-year-old girl named Marian S. Lyon, the Prophet had altered his remarks to include thoughts on death and resurrection. At one point in his sermon, the Prophet said, “[We] mourn the loss but we do not mourn as those without hope.”¹

Joseph’s statement may be taken to mean that in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints we do mourn the deaths of our beloved friends and family members, but we mourn differently than others. One might say we mourn with hope. Where

does the hope that Joseph spoke of stem from? The answer to this question is significant. Death is both universal and personal—perhaps more than any other experience of mortal life. All of God’s children must deal with deep loss throughout mortal life, and all must eventually contemplate their own assured death.

The Sting of Death

Each individual has experienced or will experience the aching and sometimes overwhelming grief that comes with the passing of a cherished individual. Our Heavenly Father has given each of us a remarkable mind. With concentration, we can recall in our minds the voices and the laughter of those we love who have died. The human mind’s ability to draw on memories from even decades ago is astounding. In our mind’s eye, many can still recall a smile of a love one now passed on or a familiar phrase they would often repeat. Despite the time that has gone by, in a still moment we may hear the voice of a cherished family member or friend echoing across our memories, often with incredible clarity—a voice of a person whom we long to see again, to talk to again, to laugh with again. In such moments we feel both sweet happiness and piercing heartache. These experiences bring to mind the scriptural phrase, “The sting of death”²—the deep and inescapable pain of missing terribly a beloved mother or father, grandmother or grandfather, sister or brother, aunt or uncle, a close friend, or perhaps most painful of all, a child.

Jacob, the fifth son of Lehi, described death and hell as a monster.³ With this unique description, Jacob may teach us, at least in part, why human beings are naturally afraid of death. The word “monster” might take us back to our childhood bedrooms.

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"The sting of death" may refer to the deep and inseparable pain of missing a loved one.

How is death like the monsters of a dark closet or the dreaded monsters we were sure were lurking under our bed? What is it that children actually fear? Perhaps our fear of a monster was actually a fear of the unknown. Without knowing what the monster actually looked like, our young imagination was free to create the most hideous and fearsome creature it could devise. We knew the monster was both powerful and merciless. We knew that no matter how we struggled to fight or how sincerely we cried out for sympathy, the monster could not be stopped and would not choose to stop until we were destroyed.

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Perhaps Jacob used this description because death may seem both unknown and merciless. The fear of death is natural to our human experience and it, amid other reasons, keeps us striving to stay alive as long as possible. Like children, we feel vulnerable in the face of the unknown, the powerful, and the merciless. Epicurus, the ancient Greek philosopher wrote, “Against all other hazards it is possible for us to gain security for ourselves but so far as death is concerned all of us human beings inhabit a city without walls.”⁴ In other words, death brings a sense of vulnerability unmatched by any other fact of life. We stand in its path, completely exposed and without any form of defense.

When we experience the passing of a loved one, we may, in the grip of inescapable grief, even cry out in anguish or anger against the monster of death and hell. Said Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Sorrow makes us all children again—destroys all differences of intellect. The wisest know nothing.”⁵ The monster seems to steal our cherished loved ones without remorse. The following comments found on an online forum for those mourning a death may give us a glimpse of the experience:

There are no words and not enough tears to reflect the immensity of our loss. Everything is changed. A [thief] has robbed me of my future. The space she inhabited in our lives has become a void where her laughter and light no longer lives, where questions remain unanswered.⁶

The first few days were a surreal nightmare—I actually asked people to wake me up. Then I just started putting one foot in front of the other and walking through all the logistics of a death and learning to be alone. . . . I live in a wide awake

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coma. I'm here walking, talking, writing but not really here at all. All the meaning of life was drained from me in that one horrible moment.⁷

It has been over a decade for me now. . . . She is fixed in time, she never grew older the way I have. She remains the vital woman she was before the cancer in my memory. But even now, something will make me think of something about her and first I smile and get happy and then I get really sad. You remember the blessings and then you remember the loss. It still hurts.⁸

I cannot describe how the loss affects you physically, emotionally, spiritually—every way possible. I only know that it did—and my whole body ached with sorrow. I didn't think it was possible to cry that much, but I did. I didn't think it was possible to be so sad and miss someone so much, but I did.⁹

My husband of almost 20 years died suddenly 2 1/2 years ago. I was numb at first, but the devastation set in very quickly. Half of me disappeared. I felt empty, lost, disoriented, and totally depressed. I only need the simplest reminder of Sam and I start tearing up. He was my best friend first, then my love.¹⁰

Dealing with Death

Cultures and individuals across the globe seek to cope with this knowledge and mitigate the pain in unique ways. The “sting of death” is no respecter of persons. Said Roman poet Horace,

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“Death with impartial step knocks at the huts of the poor and at the palace of kings.”¹¹ All humanity will experience death—either as an observer and participant. Sorrow, fear, and despair are the common response, especially to those without the knowledge of the plan of salvation. Modern philosopher and Cambridge professor Stephen Cave has said, “We have to live in the knowledge that the worst thing that can possibly happen one day surely will, the end of all our projects, our hopes, our dreams, of our individual world. We each live in the shadow of a personal apocalypse. And that’s frightening. It’s terrifying.”¹² British novelist Howard Jacobson wrote, “How do you go on knowing that you will never again—not ever, ever—see the person you have loved? How do you survive a single hour, a single minute, a single second of that knowledge? How do you hold yourself together?”¹³ Ancient Greek playwright Euripides wrote to a loved one who had passed away, “Come back! Even as a shadow, / even as a dream.”¹⁴

There are some who seek to avoid death entirely. They hope to sidestep the sting and search for a way to escape the grasp of the monster. Corporate executive Larry Ellison is on record declaring his desire to live forever and has donated more than 430 million dollars to anti-aging research. “Death has never made any sense to me,” he told his biographer, Mike Wilson. “How can a person be there and then just vanish, just not be there?” Larry Page, another corporate executive, has made the biggest bet on longevity yet, founding California Life Company, an antiaging research center, with an investment of up to 750 million dollars. Despite the fortunes that have been poured into the fight against death, none have proven to be very effective.¹⁵ This reality caused author Susan Jacoby

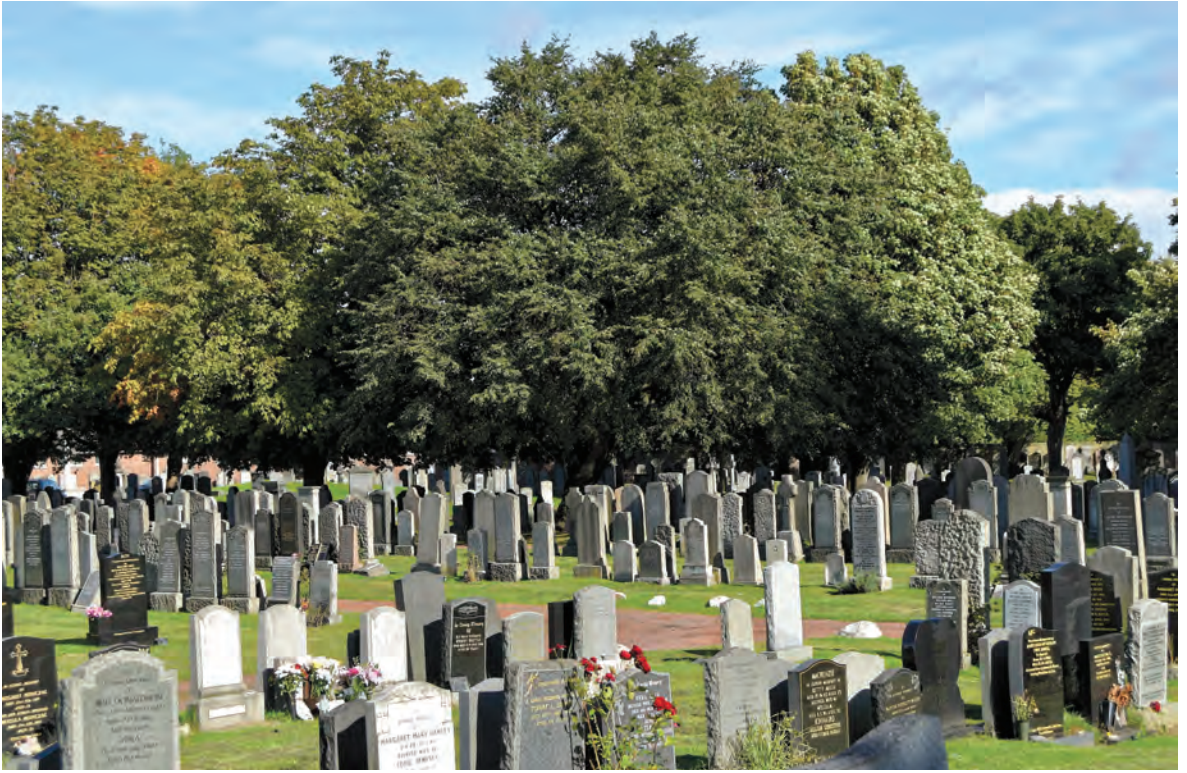
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to write, “Acceptance of the point at which intelligence and its inventions can no longer battle the ultimate natural master, death, is a true affirmation of what it means to be human.”¹⁶

Some take a lighthearted approach. Billy Standley of Mechanicsburg, Ohio, purchased three burial plots so he could be buried in a large casket allowing his body to sit atop his 1967 Harley Davidson.¹⁷ George Swanson of Hempfield County, Pennsylvania, purchased twelve burial plots so he could be buried in the driver’s seat of his 1984 white Corvette (which only had 27,000 miles on the odometer).¹⁸ The family of Pittsburgh Steelers fan James Smith transformed the funeral home with a small stage and furniture from Smith’s living room. The deceased was placed in his favorite recliner, remote control in hand, so he could comfortably watch a loop of Steelers football on TV.¹⁹ When Judy Sunday passed away in 2013, her family and friends held a memorial at her favorite bowling alley, where they spelled “RIP Judy” in pins and then knocked them down with the dolly-mounted casket.²⁰

Humor can be a coping mechanism for those dealing with death. Actor Woody Allen is said to have remarked, “I’m not afraid to die, I just don’t want to be there when it happens.” Eighty-eight-year-old prankster Chet Finch of Oregon had his barber mail handwritten cards to friends two months after Chet’s death with heaven as the return address.²¹ British prime minister Winston Churchill is said to have remarked, “I am prepared to meet my Maker. Whether my Maker is prepared for the great ordeal of meeting me is another matter.”²² Legend holds that on his deathbed, Oscar Wilde is reported to have said, “Either that wallpaper goes or I do.” Some believe that he actually said, “This wallpaper and I are fighting a duel to the death.

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*All humanity will have to deal with death on their mortal journey—
either as an observer or as a participant.*

Either it goes or I do.”²³ Bertrand Russell once quipped, “We are all like the turkey who wakes up [Thanksgiving] morning expecting lunch as usual. Things can go wrong at any time.”²⁴

Different cultures have passed down ancient death traditions for thousands of years. Famadihana is a funerary tradition of the Malagasy people in Madagascar. The Malagasy, in what is termed “the turning of the bones,” bring forth the bodies of their ancestors from the family tombs and rewrap them in fresh cloth, then dance with the corpses around the tomb to

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live music. This tradition is akin to Memorial Day in the US, a time for the Malagasy people to remember their dead relatives and loved ones.

For Torajans on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, the death of the family member isn't an abrupt, final, severing event like it is in the West. Instead, death is just one step in a long, gradually unfolding process. The bodies of deceased loved ones are tended to in the home; they are dressed, offered food, and are even part of family pictures for weeks, months, or even years after death.

The majority of human beings deal with death in a much more traditional way. Many turn to mourning in private. These can be the darkest and most difficult times of life. After returning to her home the night of the funeral for her husband who was killed in an accident in the streets of Paris, the famed scientist Madame Marie Curie wrote this entry in her diary: "They filled the grave and put sheaves of flowers on it. Everything is over. Pierre is sleeping his last sleep beneath the earth; it is the end of everything, everything, everything."²⁵

Latter-day Saints are not immune to the tragedy of death. The faithful are not exempt from grief. Try to imagine the heartache of Stillman Pond, who with his wife Maria, joined the Church in 1841. The Ponds had been among the first group to flee Nauvoo in February of 1846. Later that year, in Winter Quarters, Nebraska, the Saints were ravaged by malaria, cholera, and consumption. It was there where Stillman Pond buried nine of his eleven children and his sweet wife, Maria. Historian Richard E. Bennett estimated that a minimum of 723 Latter-day Saint pioneers died between June 1846 and May 1847 in settlements on both sides of the Missouri River and back along

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the Iowa trail. Nearly half the deaths were infants two years old and younger.²⁶ (Comparatively, approximately 250–70 handcart pioneers died in the Willie and Martin companies in 1856.)²⁷ Words cannot express the heartbreak Stillman Pond and those like him experienced. In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare wrote, “Give sorrow words. The grief that does not speak whispers the o’erfraught heart and bids it break.”²⁸

The painful reality of mourning is also not foreign to prophets and apostles. All men and women, including the Lord’s anointed servants, must wrestle with the pain of death. Job asked, “If a man die, shall he live again?”²⁹ The Lord has said, “Thou shalt weep for the loss of them that die” (D&C 42:45). President Gordon B. Hinckley, who lost his beloved wife, Marjorie, after sixty-seven years of marriage, said the following:

When the last of life’s breath is drawn, there is a finality comparable to no other finality. When a father and mother lay the remains of a beloved child in the cold of the grave, there is grief almost insoluble. When a husband buries the companion of his life, there is a loneliness that is poignant and unrelieved. When a wife closes the casket on the remains of her beloved husband, there are wounds that seem never to heal. When children are bereft of parents who loved and nurtured them, there is an abject destitution comparable to none other. Life is sacred, and death is somber. Life is buoyant and hopeful. Death is solemn and dark. It is awesome in its silence and certainty.³⁰

A testimony does not exempt anyone from the deep sense of loss that accompanies death.

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Speaking of the loss of one of his wives, Sarah, whose death was followed shortly by one of his daughters, Zina, President Joseph F. Smith said, “I cannot yet dwell on the scenes of the recent past. Our hearts have been tried to the core. Not that the end of mortal life has come to two of the dearest souls on earth to me, so much as at the sufferings of our loved ones, which we were utterly powerless to relieve. Oh! How helpless is mortal man in the face of sickness unto death!”³¹ In his first general conference address following Marjorie’s death, President Hinckley remarked, “Before I married her, she had been the girl of my dreams, to use the words of a song then popular. She was my dear companion for more than two-thirds of a century, my equal before the Lord, really my superior. And now in my old age, she has again become the girl of my dreams.”³²

Recent Apostles such as Richard G. Scott, L. Tom Perry, Dallin H. Oaks, and Russell M. Nelson have buried a spouse during their lives. Speaking of the passing of his wife, Dantzel, President Nelson recounted the following experience:

While I was at home on a rare Saturday with no assignment, we had worked together. She had washed our clothing. I had helped to carry it, fold it, and put it in place. Then while we were sitting on the sofa, holding hands, enjoying a program on television, my precious Dantzel slipped peacefully into eternity. Her passing came suddenly and unexpectedly. Just four days earlier, our doctor’s report at a routine checkup indicated that her laboratory tests were good. After my efforts to revive her proved fruitless, feelings of shock and sorrow overwhelmed me. My closest friend, angel mother

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of our 10 children, grandmother of our 56 grandchildren,
had been taken.³³

Stories like these tug on our heartstrings because we all will experience (or we are conscious of the reality that we someday will experience) scenes like them.

Without hope, death's finality is crushing. This monster's power is devastating. Its sting is piercing and agonizing. The light and energy of life are gone, and a heavy and complete darkness closes in until the bereaved is entirely overcome, engulfed in impenetrable grief.

Light, Life, and Hope

When the people of the Book of Mormon were encompassed in the overwhelming darkness described in 3 Nephi 8, the record states that they were "mourning and howling and weeping" (3 Nephi 8:21). Sometime toward the end of the three days of complete darkness, they heard a voice. Amid the message given to them they heard, "I am Jesus Christ the Son of God. . . . I am the light and the life of the world."³⁴ Not long after the voice had spoken, "the darkness dispersed from off the face of the land . . . and the mourning, and the weeping, and the wailing. . . . did cease; and their mourning was turned into joy, and their lamentations into the praise and thanksgiving unto the Lord Jesus Christ, their Redeemer."³⁵

Not long after, the resurrected Lord appeared to the Nephite people. Their confusion about what was happening slowly turned into comprehension. As they processed the reality of his presence, and all that it meant, they fell to the earth

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Arnold Friberg. Christ Appearing in the Western Hemisphere.

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in worship. This was not a dream. This was not a hallucination. It was Jesus Christ. He was right there in front of them to see, hear, and touch. It was overwhelming in every sense. Among

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many other things, his presence was an irrefutable witness of life after death—his life after death and the life after death of so many loved ones. Annihilation quickly became a myth of yesterday. After this day, all about yesterday would seem like a completely different life. It is no wonder why Elder Jeffrey R. Holland referred to it as “the day of days!”³⁶

The Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer, our brother and friend, turns darkness into light and mourning into joy. His entire existence witnesses the reality that death is not the end. Like the first glimmer of dawn turns into a glorious morning sun after the darkest and coldest of nights, he has gloriously risen as the supreme embodiment of light and life. Weeping did endure for a night, but joy has come with the rising Son.

Without the slightest equivocation, Latter-day Saints declare the reality of historical Christianity. We declare, “Christ actually lived, died, and was resurrected and that the glad tidings of His Resurrection spawned a movement and a doctrine that continue to change lives. If there is one recurring theological constancy of the Book of Mormon, it is that Christ was born, that He lived and died in Jerusalem, that He was literally resurrected, and that His atoning sacrifice for sin happened in time and place.”³⁷ G. Stanley Hall, an American psychologist, wrote in 1915, “The most essential claim of Christianity is to have removed the fear of death and made the king of terrors into a good friend and boon companion.”³⁸

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the very core of who we are as a Church and who we are as disciples of Christ. Joseph Smith declared, “The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus

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Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.”³⁹ Latter-day Saints boldly believe in literal everlasting life. We do not fear an unending consciousness. Said President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “In light of what we know about our eternal destiny, is it any wonder that whenever we face the bitter endings of life, they seem unacceptable to us? There seems to be something inside of us that resists endings. Why is this? Because we are made of the stuff of eternity. We are eternal beings, children of the Almighty God, whose name is Endless and who promises eternal blessings without number. Endings are not our destiny.”⁴⁰

In the Bible Dictionary we read, “Christianity is founded on the greatest of all miracles, the Resurrection of our Lord. If that be admitted, other miracles cease to be improbable.”⁴¹ In other words, if Jesus Christ was really resurrected, if he really does now live forever as a glorified being, what else can he do? What else will he do? Certainly, having a teenage farm-boy translate the Book of Mormon and restore his (Christ’s) Church does not fall outside the expertise of one who has power over life and death. Such an orchestration would seem simple for such a being. In fact, using *unlikely* scenarios may be the preferred method to a being whose Resurrection was an achievement which had never been accomplished before in the history of the world. Wrote scientist Henry Eyring, “The Creator of the universe almost certainly knows enough about how things work to control and manipulate event to meet his purposes. . . . Revelations and miracles seem like the natural consequences of having a compassionate and just Creator of the universe interested in human events.”⁴²



Grant Romney Clawson, Jesus Appearing to the Five Hundred.

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The reality of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ has been and continues to be witnessed by many. Among the first to see the resurrected Lord was the chief Apostle Peter, who wrote, “We have not followed cunningly devised fables . . . but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”⁴³ Elder James E. Talmage referred to Christ’s Resurrection as “the greatest miracle and the most glorious fact of history . . . and is attested by evidence more conclusive than that which rests our acceptance of historical events in general.”⁴⁴ Mary Magdalene, Cleophas, Peter, James, John, Thomas, Paul, Joseph Smith, Lorenzo Snow, and many others, both ancient and modern, have witnessed that they have seen him and have heard his voice.



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The text of the New Testament reveals Jesus's followers gaining, not losing, confidence following his death. This is explained best by a powerful belief in his Resurrection. In promoting the gospel message, the ancient Apostles appealed, even when encountering their most ruthless opponents, to seemingly common knowledge concerning the reality of the Resurrection. Peter and John and the others of Christ's followers did not leave the area to declare that Christ was raised from the dead. Rather, they went right back to the city of Jerusalem, where, if what they were teaching was false, the deceptiveness would be most blatantly evident. The Pharisee Gamaliel suggested that what Peter and John preached may "be of God."⁴⁵ Why would he do such a thing if he had any compelling evidence that their message was spurious? Concerning the value of the testimonies of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, F. F. Bruce, Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism at the University of Manchester, says, "Had there been any tendency to depart from the facts in any material respect, the possible presence of hostile witnesses in the audience would have served as a further corrective."⁴⁶

There are those who say the record of the New Testament cannot be trusted. Archaeological discoveries have bolstered the veracity of the New Testament manuscripts. Because of its unlikely claims, the Bible is held to a higher standard. Said Christian scholar F. F. Bruce, "If the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt."⁴⁷

Of course there will be those who insist that Jesus Christ's Resurrection is simply foolish in the enlightened world. They disregard the idea of such a miracle and the notion that

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miracles exist at all. Renowned intellectual E. F. Schumacher wrote, “The modern world seems to be skeptical about everything that makes demands on man’s higher faculties. But it is not at all skeptical about skepticism, which demands hardly anything.”⁴⁸ Instead, these enlightened skeptics sometimes seek to replace the Christian God with godless science. In writing about what he called the belief “that living beings suddenly made their appearance by pure chance,” Schumacher wrote sarcastically, “One can just see it, can’t one: organic compounds getting together and surrounding themselves by membranes—nothing could be simpler for these clever compounds—and lo! there is the cell, and once the cell has been born there is nothing to stop the emergence of Shakespeare, although it will obviously take a bit of time. There is therefore no need to speak of miracles.”⁴⁹

Now, that isn’t to say that we as a church do not appreciate scientific discovery, particularly the theory of evolution. Our gospel is a search for truth, no matter where it is found. However, most Latter-day Saints would probably agree with Dr. Henry Eyring when he wrote, “The [theory] has to include the notion that the dice have been loaded from the beginning in favor of more complex life forms. That is, without intelligent design of the natural laws in such a way as to favor evolution from lower forms to higher forms of life, I don’t think the theory holds water.”⁵⁰ Within a broader perspective produced by acknowledging the omniscience of God, our significant scientific discoveries can be put in their proper place and can be incredibly useful. Elder Russell M. Nelson modeled this when he taught, “Yes, compounds derived from dust—elements of the earth—are combined

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to make each living cell in our bodies. The miracle of the Resurrection, wondrous as it will be, is marvelously matched by the miracle of our creation in the first place.”⁵¹ The methods of science can teach us many things, but they should not be misused to tear down faith—they were never designed to do so.

Despite what critics may say, the fact remains that with His Resurrection, Jesus Christ has driven back and conquered the monster of death. Christ has healed the sting of death and has allowed courage and strength to fill the human heart. Followers of Christ witness as the prophet Abinadi testified when he faced his own impending death. After being falsely accused and condemned to death, Abinadi turned to his captors and affirmed, “There is a resurrection, therefore the grave hath no victory, and the sting of death is swallowed up in Christ. He is the light and the life of the world; yea, a light that is endless, that can never be darkened; yea, and also a life that is endless, that there can be no more death.”⁵² When one is focused on the Savior and his Resurrection, confidence replaces darkness; hope replaces fear.

In 1842, Eliza R. Snow penned the following poem in which she addressed death itself:

The darkness that encompass'd thee, is gone;
There is no frightfulness about thee no . . .
Since the glorious light
Of revelation shone upon thy path
Thou seem'st no more a hideous monster, arm'd
With as thou art, by inspiration's light,
Thou hast no look the righteous need to fear.⁵³

Easter

Each spring, the Lord teaches us that life and warmth follow the fall and the winter. The “fortunate fall”⁵⁴ of man brought about spiritual and physical death. These deaths, crucial to the Lord’s plan of salvation, were meant to be overcome. With the budding of the trees and flowers, God teaches us each year that life overpowers death, warmth replaces cold, and light banishes darkness. Martin Luther is credited with saying, “Our Lord has written the promise of the resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in spring-time.”⁵⁵

If grading by the significance of what is being celebrated, Easter could be (perhaps should be) thought of as the most important of all the modern holidays. The Resurrection is the “greatest of all events in the history of mankind.” President Dieter F. Uchtdorf wrote, “On Easter Sunday we celebrate the most long-awaited and glorious event in the history of the world. It is the day that changed everything. On that day, my life changed. Your life changed. The destiny of all God’s children changed. When I think of what the Savior did for us . . . that first Easter Sunday, I want to lift up my voice and shout praises to the Most High God and His Son, Jesus Christ! The gates of heaven are unlocked! The windows of heaven are opened!”⁵⁶ For believers, the Easter holiday is a personal recognition of devotion to a literally resurrected Lord.

The scriptures are rife in the reassurance that not only did Christ rise from the dead but all mankind will follow Him through their individual resurrection. Wrote Phillips Brooks, “Let every man and woman count himself immortal. Let him catch the revelation of Jesus in his resurrection. Let him say

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not merely, ‘Christ is risen,’ but ‘I shall rise.’”⁵⁷ The promise is sure. Without any doubt, without any uncertainty, Christ’s followers declare each individual will see, hear, talk with, laugh with, and embrace their cherished loved ones again. Their kind mother, their gentle father, their grandparents, their siblings, their best of friends—all will live again. Is there any more important message in all the world?

While we do not know what difficulty the Savior had to endure to ensure resurrection for all mankind, we can assume it was not done with ease. Each time the sting of death is used in the Book of Mormon, it is followed by the word “swallowed.”⁵⁸ Mormon states simply that the “sting of death” is “swallowed up.” Abinadi comments that the “sting of death is swallowed up in Christ.” Aaron teaches King Lamoni’s father that the “sting of death should be swallowed up in the hopes of his glory.” The word “swallow” is often thought of encompassing, covering, or completely surrounding something. In that regard, the knowledge of Christ’s Resurrection does swallow up and balm the sting of death. However, the Savior has also repeatedly told us that He has drunk out of “the bitter cup.” With such a picture in mind, the sting of death being swallowed up in Christ takes on a different meaning. It was in Christ’s partaking of the bitter cup that death was swallowed up and overcome.

Merciful Hope

The certainty of the Resurrection is the only force able to mitigate the shock and bereavement of losing a beloved family member or friend to death. No matter where we “search for peace,” every other source will “cease to make [us] whole.”⁵⁹

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While the deep pain of loss and trauma of a changed daily life is not taken away, the surety of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ can calm the stormy seas of the heart. We are bereaved, but such grief is, mercifully, only temporary. Because of Jesus Christ, “even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise.”⁶⁰ Our knowledge of the plan of salvation, the Fall of man, the role of death, and the Atonement of Jesus Christ enable us to mourn with hope.

In the April 2009 general conference, President Thomas S. Monson related the story of a member of the Church who was saved, both physically and spiritually, by her knowledge of a certain Resurrection. She and her family lived in East Prussia, but her husband was killed in World War II. She was left alone to care for their four children, the oldest being only seven. While fleeing Prussia for West Germany, a journey of over one thousand miles, she and her children were forced to gather food from fields and forests along the way. As they continued, the weather turned freezing. Without the necessary supplies, she and the children had little protection. One by one, this faithful sister lost each of her children to death—at times digging their graves with a spoon. Her grief was overwhelming and she contemplated ending her own life. President Monson continued:

And then, as these thoughts assailed her, something within her said, “Get down on your knees and pray.” She ignored the prompting until she could resist it no longer. She knelt and prayed more fervently than she had in her entire life: “Dear Heavenly Father, I do not know how I can go on. I have nothing left—except my faith in Thee. I feel, Father, amidst the desolation of my soul, an overwhelming gratitude for the atoning sacrifice of Thy Son, Jesus Christ. I cannot express

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adequately my love for Him. I know that because He suffered and died, I shall live again with my family; that because He broke the chains of death, I shall see my children again and will have the joy of raising them. Though I do not at this moment wish to live, I will do so, that we may be reunited as a family and return—together—to Thee.”

The woman eventually reached Germany, starving and emaciated. Shortly thereafter, she bore testimony in a Church meeting. She stated “that of all the ailing people in her saddened land, she was one of the happiest because she knew that God lived, that Jesus is the Christ, and that He died and was resurrected so that we might live again. She testified that she knew if she continued faithful and true to the end, she would be reunited with those she had lost and would be saved in the celestial kingdom of God.”⁶¹

Among other hopeful doctrines, the woman must have been bolstered by the knowledge that her children and husband were together in the spirit world. They were now in the company of many family members, ancestors who had passed on before them. President Nelson once remarked, “Our limited perspective would be enlarged if we could witness the reunion on the other side of the veil, when doors of death open to those returning home.”⁶²

At the funeral of his friend King Follett, Joseph Smith taught that these thoughts can even bring cheerfulness in times of sorrow. He said, “[Our] relatives and friends are only separated from their bodies for a short season: their spirits which existed with God have left the tabernacle of clay only for a little moment, as it were; and they now exist in a

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place where they converse together the same as we do on the earth. . . . The expectation of seeing my friends in the morning of the Resurrection cheers my soul and makes me bear up against the evils of life.”⁶³ John Taylor bore a second witness to this knowledge when he said, “While we are mourning the loss of our friends, others are rejoicing to meet them behind the veil.”⁶⁴

President Henry B. Eyring shared similar sentiments when he told of what happened the day his mother died:

The afternoon my mother died, we went to the family home from the hospital. We sat quietly in the darkened living room for a while. Dad excused himself and went to his bedroom. He was gone for a few minutes. When he walked back into the living room, there was a smile on his face. He said that he’d been concerned for Mother. During the time he had gathered her things from her hospital room and thanked the staff for being so kind to her, he thought of her going into the spirit world just minutes after her death. He was afraid she would be lonely if there was no one to meet her.

He had gone to his bedroom to ask his Heavenly Father to have someone greet Mildred, his wife and my mother. He said that he had been told in answer to his prayer that his mother had met his sweetheart. I smiled at that too. Grandma Eyring was not very tall. I had a clear picture of her rushing through the crowd, her short legs moving rapidly on her mission to meet my mother. When I saw in my mind my grandmother rushing to my mother, I felt joy for them and a longing to bring my sweetheart and our children to such a reunion.⁶⁵

Mourning with Hope: A Personal Account

Almost twenty years ago, I met the girl who would eventually, through great persuasion on my part, become my wife. I have been forever changed because of her. I have also been blessed to have known and learn from her incredible parents, Rod and Marlene Savage. This is their story:

Rod Savage describes his early years, growing up in Richfield, Utah, as incredibly happy. He has always been, according to his friends and family, “naturally cheerful.” It was during this blissful childhood, around age seven, that a significant event occurred that would stay in his memory forever.

Throughout each week Rod would often find himself inside Richfield’s local dairy, either there on errands from his parents or to pick up a treat for himself—and often, both. It was during one of these routine visits, that the bell hanging above the entrance rang and Rod turned to see who had come in. To his surprise, it was a girl, about his own age, that he had never truly noticed before. Like Rod, she had lived in Richfield all her life, and they attended the same school, but seeing her today was different. He was, in his words, “struck” by her. He was completely “fascinated.” He watched her intently as she perused the penny candy and soda fountain flavors.

His goggling must have been noticeable because his mother asked him why he was “studying that girl.” He promptly replied that he was doing no such thing and was ready to leave when she was. He quickly left with his mother, but the impression made by that little girl never left him.

As the years passed, Rod filled his life with his natural loves, hunting and fishing. However, he kept his eye on the

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little girl year after year, but he rarely spoke to her. He discovered her name was Marlene Baker. As they entered Richfield High School, Rod preferred the fun crowd while Marlene preferred friends who took school more seriously. Rod said, "My friends and I thought school was fun, but all those classes and all that homework kept getting in the way."

In a casual conversation with his school counselor one day late in Rod's junior year, he was asked, "Rod, who are you taking to prom?" "Nobody," Rod said quickly. "I'll probably go hunting." "That's too bad," the counselor replied, "I think every girl deserves to go to prom." That sentiment had never crossed Rod's mind before. "Maybe I should ask someone to prom," he thought. "But who?" It was then he thought of Marlene. He worked up the courage and asked her to prom that evening.

Almost fifty years later, when speaking of their date, Rod said, "That date was so wonderful. She laughed harder than she'd ever laughed in her life and she got me to think more about the importance of school than I ever had in my life. We never went on a date with a different person after that night." Rod and Marlene Savage were sealed in the St. George Temple the summer after they graduated from high school.

Though they tempered each other, Rod and Marlene kept the traits of their youth. She was reserved and careful; he was spontaneous and playful. They were loyal to each other. They were the best of friends. Eventually, they decided their little family needed to grow.

The day they brought their newborn son, Justin, home from the hospital, Rod had an idea. The baby (who was a just a few days old), he said, needed a tour of the home. He took the baby, with Marlene in tow, through a tour of the entire

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home: the living room (where he told Justin they would have family home evening), the family room (where he told Justin they would watch countless hours of John Wayne movies), the kitchen (where he promised Justin the cookie jar would always be full), and each bedroom, each picture, each faucet, and any other detail Rod could find. Needless to say, it was a long and extensive tour.

“The tour” became a tradition. When Rod and Marlene brought a new baby home (they brought home six total), the entire family would take the baby on a tour of the home. Even new nieces and nephews went on the tour. As the years passed, grandchild after grandchild were taken, with an ever increasing entourage, through the home. While each tour started with everyone present in the home, most would trickle back to other activities and each tour would usually end with Grandpa Rod, Grandma Marlene, and the new baby.

Then, as it always does in this mortal classroom, tragedy struck their home. It had been a visitor before, but perhaps never in such a catastrophic way. Marlene was diagnosed with advanced liver cancer. They fought with faith. They prayed and begged the Lord for an outcome different than those predicted by their doctors. Less than a year later, however, the cancer grew too powerful, and Marlene was placed on hospice care, where she could pass away in the home she loved and surrounded by the family she adored.

This is where I learned personally what it means to mourn with hope. They both remained optimistic and sometimes even cheerful throughout the entire ordeal. They discussed at length, with and without their children present, their plans



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for the next life. Though heartbroken, Marlene expressed certainty of her soon seeing her mother and father, brother, and other family members. They laughed and cried together as they reminisced and mourned this unwanted change of plan. They faced the last months, then weeks, and then days with grace, humility, and unshakeable faith.

As Marlene approached what the hospice nurses recognized as her last hours, it was decided that Rod should place her in bed for the last time. He stood up and took his place behind her wheelchair and began to slowly make his way to the bedroom with their adult children and some grandchildren following. In the hallway, however, he stopped. He quietly asked the nurse something, and she nodded affirmatively. Rod slowly turned the wheelchair around and softly said to his children and grandchildren with an attempt of quiet cheerfulness, "Let's take Mom on one last tour."

The group made their way toward the living room, where Rod knelt down in front of Marlene and said through visible tears, "Marlene, we are in the family room. . . . forty-seven years of family home evening. . . . How did you put up with all of us? . . . Thank you."

The group moved on to the kitchen and the closest bedrooms, while Rod complimented, thanked, and kissed his bride of almost five decades. The children and grandchildren then held back and allowed Rod and Marlene time alone. After a few minutes, they all made their way into the bedroom, where they all watched this spiritual giant lift his equally spiritual wife and place her in bed, where he would stay with her until she peacefully passed away a few hours later.

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As Rod knelt next to the bed where Marlene lay, he thought of his children. This was a significant moment for the entire family. He decided it would be an appropriate time to tell them once again about the day he first saw their mother. He began, “One day, when I was just seven years old, I was in the Richfield dairy . . .”

Mourning with hope means celebrating the time spent in mortality with those we love. It means we look forward with anticipation to joyful reunions, both in the spirit world and in the Resurrection. Mourning with hope means placing all your hope in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ to return you and those you love to your heavenly home. It means acting in faith upon his commandments until you regain the presence and behold the face of your Heavenly Father.

When I leave this frail existence,
When I lay this mortal by,
Father, Mother, may I meet you
In your royal courts on high?
Then at length, when I’ve completed
All you sent me forth to do,
With your mutual approbation
Let me come and dwell with you.⁶⁶

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