

On Enduring Well To the End

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Wherefore Ye Must Press Forward, pp.109-123

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. (Doctrine and Covenants 121:7-8.)

... know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. (Doctrine and Covenants 122:7.)

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you. (1 Peter 4:12.)

... God said that He would have a tried people, that He would purge them as gold. (Joseph Smith, *HC* 3:294.)

To think of enduring to the end as “hanging in there,” doing one’s duty relentlessly, is not inaccurate. Yet enduring to the end is more than outlasting and surviving, though it includes those qualities. We are called upon, as was the Prophet Joseph, to “endure it well,” gracefully, not grudgingly. (D&C 121:8.) We are also told that we must “endure in faith.” (D&C 101:35.) These dimensions of enduring are important to note. Likewise, we are asked to endure “valiantly.” (D&C 121:29.)

The Savior said, “Look unto me, and endure to the end.” (3 Nephi 15:9.) The quality of enduring could scarcely be achieved unless we did “look unto” Christ.

The poet-prophet Jacob speaks of the saints as having “endured the crosses of the world” (2 Nephi 9:18) and as having “despised the shame” of the world. Obviously, this involves more than coping with the mere passage of time. What are the “crosses of the world”? We cannot be sure, but the imagery suggests the bearing of a cross placed upon us by the world, as Jesus did; there may be persecutors and unhelpful onlookers, and the Church member is set apart (if not set upon), yet he does not flinch when accused and scoffed at by those who would make him ashamed, for he has no real reason to be ashamed.

It is best not to try to delineate too precisely between the crosses of the world and the cares of the world. The former may press us down, while the latter divert us. But the outcome is the same—the climb is stopped; instead of overcoming, we have been overcome.

We need also to have faith in and to be supportive of all callings, including our own. President Marion G. Romney movingly and humbly told the members of his home ward, at the time of his original call to the First Presidency, that he had faith in all those whom the Lord calls including the call that had just come to him. Enduring the sense of our inadequacy in the face of callings is more common than we know.

We are also asked to endure temptation. (James 1:12.) The growing coarseness of our times suggests that, like Lot in Sodom, we may be “vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked” (2 Peter 2:7)—just one more way in which we must endure evil in our environments.

But does not God know beforehand if we can endure? Yes, perfectly. But we need to know, firsthand, about our capacity. So much of a life well lived consists of coming to know what God knows already. Could our joy be complete if our personal triumph were not complete? Could we have the self-esteem necessary for the heavier—much heavier—duties to devolve upon us in that better world, if we did not know personally that we had passed the test and had fought the good fight? Meanwhile, the tests so often consist of vexing little things. The harassed helper, especially if he believes he has not been appreciated lately, is vulnerable. Since we really are to be the servants of others, some things can be done to help us to endure well the complexity and volume of problems others bring to us.

1. Focusing questions sincerely asked of others (“How can I be of specific help?” “You have obviously thought about this very much. What are your recommendations?”) can avoid the “stream of consciousness” form of communication that not only wastes time, but also usually requires focusing questions later anyway.

2. Noting how important the next thirty minutes will be is also a reminder to others about the limits of the appointment, when such limits need to be set.

3. Blocking out time for family and personal renewal is vital, and, barring emergencies, plans can be subtly communicated by a quorum president to his counselors, who can do some steering of the “traffic.” Those needing help are usually understanding of this need to keep faith

with one's family.

4. Making certain that the pyramid process (helping others at the level closest to them before going to the next level) is used lovingly and consistently can do much to protect, for instance, the busy bishop or stake Relief Society President. It was Jethro who noted a second and more hidden danger in the failure to delegate—not only would the leader “wear away,” but the people would “wear away” too. Counseling delayed may be counseling denied so far as the critical moment is concerned.

5. Making certain that in terms of voice tone, posture, and facial feedback we give others the best we have when they are with us provides them with a quality quarter of an hour instead of a half-hearted hour.

The disciple can be assured that when the basic virtues are in the process of active development, the techniques can also be developed. Since technique is tied to personal style and to circumstances, this volume has spoken only sparingly of technique. Suffice it to say, however, that our techniques should always be tested against principle. Techniques must not become little tricks we play on ourselves or others. Techniques such as those involved in enduring well must be grounded in the gospel. Ends require means, but means that are consistent with the ends being served.

Endurance is even more than elasticized courage, for it underwrites all the other virtues across the expanse of life. Without endurance, the other virtues would be episodic; faith would be fitful, and virtue transitory.

We will not have in all specific situations the answers to questions such as “Why me?” “Why this?,” but knowing the grand “why” of life will help us to endure the gritty little “whys” of this month or this year.

With gospel perspective, we can know that when we endure to the very end, we are actually enduring to the very beginning. Thus, rather than viewing this virtue as delivering us expiring in exhaustion to a finish line, we are brought intact and victorious to a starting line!

In the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith, we “hope to be able to endure all things.” (Article of Faith 13.) While we are not out looking for things to endure, some tests seem more likely to come our way in addition to those already mentioned.

We will live in a time of great lust not unlike another when it was said to an evil people, “How shall I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods: when I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses. They were as fed horses in the morning: every one neighed after his neighbour's

wife.” (Jeremiah 5:7-8.)

The very crassness of worldly ways, once the hardening has reached a certain point, is such that shame is no longer possible. Such a time had apparently been reached in the days of Jeremiah when, speaking of the evils among the people, he asked, “Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: . . . Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. . . .” (Jeremiah 6:15-16.) The phrasing of Jeremiah is significant in our time. He speaks of the people who had lost their capacity to walk in old paths and to blush. Sound familiar? Indeed this description sounds like a people who had not only departed from the ways of the Lord, but who also “loved to have it so.”

If in these times there seem to be more warnings than in other ages, it is because this is not a time when there can be many words. When someone is about to step into the path of an oncoming truck, the individual giving the warning does not take time to explain the make, model, and color of the truck that is coming or indeed to mention the velocity. He simply shouts! There is often no time to do more regarding some of the trends in our society.

This is an age, too, when it may again be necessary for leaders to do what leaders did once before in Book of Mormon times, to bear down in “pure testimony” so people will know clearly what their choices are. In a time around eighty-four years before Christ, there were among the people of the Church “envyings, and strife, and malice, and persecutions, and pride, even to exceed the pride of those who did not belong to the church of God.” (Alma 4:9.)

The Church did not progress. Indeed the wickedness in some of the members of the Church was “a great stumbling-block to those who did not belong to the church.” (Alma 4:10.) In such a setting Alma retained the office of high priest in the Church and gave up “the judgment-seat unto Nephihah.” (Alma 4:18.) Alma did this because he saw clearly what was necessary. He freed himself in terms of his time so that he might “preach the word of God unto them, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty, and that he might pull down, by the word of God, all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people, seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them.” (Alma 4:19. Italics added.)

That society was sufficiently far gone that it was too late to turn it around by debates in a Parliament and by this or that judicial decision. The people had to be told,

and told plainly, of the peril they faced.

Of course, this does not mean that warnings cannot be given in love or that the testimonies cannot be born in genuine love and affection. Even the warnings that must be delivered abruptly can be given, indeed should be given, with the truth being spoken, as Paul counseled us, in love. People can often respond at first to our love and to our concern more than to the content of our message. The quality of our lives can make it so much easier for people to believe on our words. When they have heard the gospel from us, they may say as a queenly woman said, “I have had no witness save thy word... nevertheless I believe.” (Alma 19:9.)

Given the kind of high adventure that we know is coming to us such as is contained in the prophecy of Heber C. Kimball, we must be prepared to speak plainly. President Kimball said that prior to the rebuilding of the Church in Missouri, “The Saints will be put to tests that will try the integrity of the best of them. The pressure will become so great that the more righteous among them will cry unto the Lord day and night until deliverance comes.” (*Deseret News*, Church Section, May 23, 1931, p. 3. Italics added.)

Difficulties of this degree will be experienced before traumatic deliverance comes. In such circumstances, what we say must be said plainly though lovingly. There is no time for sophistry or games or cleverness. Somehow in such circumstances, the proper balance will be struck by the prophets who will see that the gospel is carried to all nations “for a witness” in which we focus on preaching “Christ and him crucified,” so that other less important things do not get in the way of that grand message. At the same time there will apparently be, according to President Brigham Young, a very special effort made. President Young said, “I expect to see the day when the Elders of Israel will protect and sustain civil and religious liberty and every constitutional right bequeathed to us by our fathers, and spread those rights abroad in connection with the Gospel for the salvation of all nations.” (*Journal of Discourses* 11:262-63.) But such an added emphasis would come only by prophetic direction.

These prophetic comments were made in an address in the Bowery in Salt Lake City August 12, 1866. President Young had just listened to an address by Elder George A. Smith, who had apparently recapitulated something of the history and suffering of the Church and its people and their coming to the Salt Lake Valley. President Young was able to be forgiving and ecumenical in the face of those memories and observed: “I am thankful that the rehearsal of those occurrences has ceased to irritate me as it did formerly.” (*JD* 11:257.) He had

risen above the harsh history that had brought the Saints to that valley and the afflictions that had accompanied their pioneer passage.

We should not be dismayed if our words are reacted to as the words of earlier leaders were reacted to in Old Testament times. We read this searing indictment with regard to the insensitivity of earlier inhabitants: “But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, . . . till there was no remedy.” (2 Chronicles 36:16. Italics added.)

But enduring, as already indicated, consists of much more than just coping with the passage of time or putting up with things we cannot change, though these are a part of enduring. We must, for instance, endure in doing good without becoming weary in well-doing—a special challenge in declining times when we may be tempted to think the good done is of no consequence.

Another special challenge we face from time to time is having good motives and good intentions—and even good actions misfire. Abish, the “Lamanitish woman” (Alma 19:16-17), was not the first nor the last Church member to think an opportunity to be present and, therefore, to act on the impulse to do good. Confusion and contention followed her deed, as did tears from conscientious Abish. Vindication was nearly immediate in her case, but it is much slower coming at other times.

If our motives and actions are good, we should be able to endure some misunderstanding, but the pain and frustration of it will be real because we really care. Time and truth can cause lower courts of opinion to reverse themselves, hopefully soon. But if not, we will come to that final gate where Jesus Christ is the gatekeeper and “he employeth no servant there.” The gospel guarantees ultimate, not proximate, justice.

A tender story told by President Marion G. Romney illustrates another aspect of enduring:

“In 1912 Father’s family, with the other war refugees from the Mormon colonies in northern Chihuahua, fled into the United States. Two years later he and his brother Gaskell, with their families—Father with eight children, his brother with six—settled in Oakley, Idaho.

“Father was employed as a teacher in the Cassia Stake Academy at a salary of \$80 a month. The two brothers pooled their earnings and divided their income equally.

“During the winter of 1913-14, my uncle, a carpenter, could find no employment and therefore had no income. Father’s salary of \$80 a month had to be divided between the families. If tithing was to be paid, each family would have \$36 a month. If it was not paid, each family would have \$40.

“A family council was held to decide whether to pay tithing. The decision was to pay. For me, then 16 years of age, this was a crucial decision; I thought it was unrealistic. How could our family, ten people, live on \$36 a month—\$3.60 each? We had to pay rent and buy fuel. Having left a warm climate and come to a cold one, we were in desperate need of clothing. I was sensitive and embarrassed by the appearance of the cast-off clothing we wore. Notwithstanding my feelings, tithing—the debt owed to the Lord—was paid and we survived the winter. Father’s integrity paid off. He never compromised in dealing with me or the Lord.”

Pooled tithing is like pooled talents. We can do so much more than we could ever accomplish alone, for what is being pooled is not just money, but dedication!

What our involvement in missionary work often lacks is a fixed time for accountability like tithing settlement; we are always “refinancing” our resolves, putting off the practical payments. Thank goodness for the toll-booths along the straight and narrow path that call us to account on some things!

We must also endure—by producing examples, explanations, and exhortations in order to help—the confusions of those who simply don’t understand at first why the Church and the gospel mean everything to us. Such individuals often seem to be looking for something else to explain us and our devotion to the Church other than the truth.

Errors need not be great before distance and time make a very great difference in the outcome! The Old Testament scriptures concerning Jesus’ advent were quite clear and each prophecy was fulfilled. But almost all missed out. How? Because they mistook the nature of the second coming for the first? Yes. Because the busyness of the workaday world dulled their interests and perceptions? Yes. Because they were also looking beyond the mark? Yes, indeed. But also, because having not really searched the scriptures and having not been schooled in the scriptures, they genuinely did not expect what emerged. There was the obscurity of a Nazarene prophet; the scalding criticism of Him by the establishment; no interest by Him in triumph over Rome; the leadership of fishermen instead of the Sanhedrin. How unattractive to the cognoscente of that time!

Those same reactions are in evidence today with regard to the Lord and his church. Some let the obscurity of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints block their examination of its validity. Others find the bold claims of Christ’s church today too much for them, just as some then could not accept Jesus’ claim about who He was. Still others are put off by a smoke screen of

allegations and charges about the Church, preferring to believe the worst rather than to know the truth. Christians who would not think of judging Jesus by Judas will listen to today’s Judases and defecting disciples, who seem, by the way, to do much better than Judas’s thirty pieces of silver.

Indeed, our very eagerness to serve the kingdom must be carefully projected. We must not let our tongues testify beyond what we know, lest what we do know is then called into question. Paul warned Timothy that some church members had swerved aside into “vain jangling” because, apparently, they desired “to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.” (1 Timothy 1:6-7.) Likewise we must be careful not to let our desire to help buckle under the temptation to have ready answers for everything. We must learn to endure sensitively when certain answers are not available. We must also spring back from our own mistakes.

Next to avoiding mistakes, most to be admired is the quick and honest recovery from them. For instance, a miscommunication followed by “I did not say that very well, did I? May I try again?”

It is not improbable, now and then, that while we are in the very act of spreading the work of truth, trying to build up the kingdom, some unpleasant truth with personal implications may be flung at us to throw us off balance. Coping with the need to respond even when embarrassed is also a dimension of enduring. A saving or helping truth may be a bitter pill, but it is never toxic!

A wide-eyed infantryman in basic training during World War II, I saw a lieutenant, much admired by his platoon, attempt to leap upon a tank to speak to the troops. He fell and scraped his legs badly, but with no more than a wince, he quickly jumped again, this time successfully, to speak to the troops while in great pain. None of us heard what he said, but we saw what he did. Coping with our own shortfalls, even when these are painfully public, is the best sermon on our own staying power.

We must endure the barbs of those in this age when democratic emphases are the seeming test of everything, for some will remind us that we are members of an authoritarian church. Indeed we are, and while much could be said on this subject, the author often notes to those who are critical of an authoritarian church—better to have a theocracy with a little democracy than a democracy with only a little theology. Further, can one seriously propose a church of Jesus Christ in which the King has only one vote—and each subject the same?

One great aid that is essential to enduring is to be able

to have access to the promptings of the Spirit.

Sometimes we try to make access to the promptings of the Spirit an almost mechanical thing. There are so many things involved: our readiness, the need for the prompting, studying it out in our minds, taking no thought save it were to ask, lessons to be learned, etc.

The true disciple has an inborn questing to know, personally, all that God is willing to teach us. Nephi could have accepted gladly the vision of his father, Lehi. But Nephi “desired to know the things that [his] father had seen.” (1 Nephi 11:1.) Abraham sought, even though he had a father who had turned from the faith, “for greater happiness and peace” and “for mine appointment unto the Priesthood.” (Abraham 1:2, 4.) Abraham described himself as desiring “great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness” (Abraham 1:2), questing for the word of Christ. Divine discontent in the form of promptings can move us to feast because we know that by feasting we can increase our knowledge, effectiveness, and joy.

Now, clearly, the word of Christ, as given in the past through the holy scriptures and as given to us now through the Holy Ghost, can provide us with the guidance necessary to help us to know “all things what [we] should do.” (2 Nephi 32:3.) Such can happen when the Holy Ghost is our constant companion, not a periodic partner.

There is a twin danger in our glossing over certain promises as profound as this one, however. First, we may be unduly harsh on ourselves when revelations for our personal lives do not gush forth as if from a fire hydrant. Second, we may think of the process as if it were like switching our decision-making apparatus on ‘automatic pilot,’ leaving us with a ho-hum role.

We must make allowance for the real possibility that we are lacking in faith and/or worthiness. But we must also make allowance for the equally real possibility that some considerations of growth are involved at times, too. Oliver Cowdery was told that he had oversimplified his role in the process: “You took no thought save it was to ask.” (D&C 9:7.)

Next, the effort to study propositions out in our mind, carefully and prayerfully, can be followed by a stupor or a burning, but these are not the only ways in which God can tell what we should do. There is a spectrum of styles used by the Lord to inspire and guide us. If we seek to make the process too mechanical, we may deprive ourselves of guidance from God that comes in other ways, equally valid. Matthias, Judas’s replacement, was chosen by lot, but no doubt under the direction of the Spirit. Dreams, visions, Urim and Thummim, voices, and some forms of revelation are quite dramatic. Yet, as the Prophet

Joseph Smith said, inspiration can come in the form of “sudden strokes of ideas.” President Marion G. Romney has noted how whole sentences have come into his mind. The author has said God does not send thunder when a still small voice is enough.

Inspiration can come in the form of our being directed to already revealed wisdom that is apropos and adequate for our need. The disciple needs to become at home in the Lord’s library. A bit of wisdom or a phrase uttered by a friend in a timely way can remain in our mind and prove catalytic in meeting the challenge. There are probably some situations in which we are struggling over something that is a matter of preference rather than principle, or situations in which more than one alternative is acceptable and, as the Lord said on one occasion, “it mattereth not unto me.” (D&C 60:5.)

Divine guidance is so crucial, however, that we need to go out of our way to put ourselves in a situation in which such special help can be given. President David O. McKay spoke of how the morning hours, before we are cluttered with the cares of day, are especially conducive to inspiration. Others have felt that solitude and reading the scriptures can create an atmosphere conducive to the Spirit and can be developed. After all, to read the words of Christ already before us is a good thing to do before asking for more. Sometimes steady importuning is a necessity.

As desirable as the frequency of revelation and inspiration is, that it happens at all is the crucial thing. In any event, we may know that a loving Father will give to us as we are ready, and even then in a way that is consistent with our need to grow and the needs of others who may be involved in the considerations at hand.

General Authorities, for instance, are not able to go to a community and live for weeks among the people before selecting a new stake president. Those circumstances, therefore, may lend themselves to more dramatic examples of direct inspiration than, say, circumstances when a mother is struggling to communicate with a daughter. The latter situation is as vital as the former and inspiration can be and is given in rich ways, but there may be growth considerations involved in the latter situation that may not obtain in the former.

Other times it is good for us to ponder more than we do. Mary, the mother of Jesus, heard and saw almost more than she could absorb for the moment, so she kept certain things in her heart and pondered them. The main thing for the disciple to do is to increase his personal righteousness, to inquire, and to be ready to receive. That is far more important than focusing on technique and mechanics or seeking to follow a single delivery system.

It should not surprise us that one of the highest exercises of discipleship, learning to draw upon the Spirit for help, should require some schooling—sometimes deep and extensive schooling. We may need to learn, for instance, that reflection and pause are even more necessary than we had supposed in order to wipe clean the busy chalkboard of our lives; fresh impressions need a place to be recorded. The visit to a sick friend we are prompted to make but do not make because we have our own problems, may provide a clue: often we need first to seek inspiration in order to help others before we ask for it to help ourselves. With regard to inspiration, as with other things in the kingdom, we must be faithful stewards over small things first.

If we desire to have the promptings of the Spirit become almost habitual in our lives, then we must develop the habits that lend themselves to the flow of such inspiration.

We should learn, too, that the prompting that goes unresponded to may not be repeated. Writing down what we have been prompted with is vital. A special thought can also be lost later in the day in the rough and tumble of life. God should not, and may not, choose to repeat the prompting if we assign what was given such a low priority as to put it aside.

Finally, regarding promptings and impressions, this is special territory one enters for which detailed maps are not available. The guides who know the country well speak of such things only in hushed tones, if at all. Suffice it to say that if we truly hunger and thirst after such things, we will be led to living water!

President John Taylor said, as if in commentary on the blending of enduring and prompting: “Pray for the revelations of God, that the spirit and power of God may rest upon us, that we may comprehend correct principles and understand the laws of life, to guide and guard and protect the ship’s Zion from among the rocks and shoals and troubles that will sooner or later overcome this nation and other nations, and prepare ourselves for the events that are to come.” [*Journal of Discourses*, 19:307]

Indeed the pressures will be so great that the Lord will be asked to shorten the days of tribulation. “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.” (Matthew 24:21-22.)

And finally, it is more than noteworthy that Nephi tells of how the Son’s voice came to him to attest to the mighty responsibilities that come with the baptisms of water and fire. Then Nephi heard the voice of the Father

certify to the truth of what the Son had said, saying further: “He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.” (2 Nephi 31:15.) The Father chose to emphasize, among the many things He might have said, enduring to the end.