

The Love of God: Suffering Tribulation in the Redeemer's Name

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What a privilege it is to be here at Brigham Young University and to be able to address all of you wonderful students. Whether you know it or not, you convey a great spirit and are having and will have a great impact upon the world. As a result of the training you receive here and your personal righteousness, you truly are, as Jesus said, a “light . . . on [a] hill” (Matthew 5:14).

Sister Cook and I have been privileged to have all of our children attend BYU—six of whom have graduated and two others who are preparing to do so. At least they hope so. I hope we are all very appreciative of the First Presidency, who feel strongly about education and provide such a wonderful institution, even the Lord’s university.

Loving God Even in the Face of One’s Trials

This morning I would like to address a topic entitled “The Love of God: Suffering Tribulation in the Redeemer’s Name.” Above all else, I desire that you know that God loves you. He loves all of His children across the world, and in spite of the very difficult problems being encountered worldwide these days, as well as in your individual lives, the love of God permeates all.

During a terrible war between the Lamanites and the Nephites where thousands were dying on both sides, Alma recorded:

Many had become hardened, because of the exceedingly great length of the war; and many were softened because of their afflictions, insomuch that they did humble themselves before God, even in the depth of humility. [Alma 62:41]

Our trials can either end up hardening our heart or humbling us. How true the saying that suffering in life is inevitable, but misery is of our own making. In other words, because of the plan that we all agreed upon in the premortal life, we are going to suffer, whether we want to or not. However, if you can find how to suffer that tribulation in the Redeemer’s name, you will bear it well and perhaps even do it with an understanding, happy heart.

Let’s look first at some catastrophic kinds of trials, and then later perhaps at some personal trials we all face.

Catastrophic Suffering

Some weeks ago a devastating tsunami took the lives of more than 160,000 of the Lord’s children. How does one understand an event such as that and even see the Lord’s hand in

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developing additional love and trust in Him as a result of that event?

Many do not understand God and His purposes, as reflected in the following observations by current writers:

1. “In the aftermath of a cataclysm, with pictures of parents sobbing over dead infants . . . , faith-shaking questions arise: Where was God? Why does a good and all-powerful deity permit such evil and grief to fall on so many thousands of innocents? What did these people do to deserve such suffering?” (William Safire, “Where Was God?” *New York Times*, 10 January 2005, A23).

2. Another one: “How do people of faith make sense of the senseless? The answer is, we can’t. The problem of suffering in this world has never been fully understood and cannot be completely explained” (Tom Schaefer from the *Wichita [Kansas] Eagle*, in “Why Did God Allow Tsunami Disaster?” *Deseret News*, 1 January 2005, E2).

3. One last one: A reverend said, “The disaster has shaken my faith.” A member of another Christian church said it had “made him ‘hate God.’ . . . [He] now says that if God existed, this tragedy would have been prevented” (in Karen Mazurkewich and Geoffrey A. Fowler, “When Faith Is Tested,” *Wall Street Journal*, 7 January 2005, W1, W10).

Certainly none of us as Latter-day Saints should be unduly surprised by prophesied last-day events such as these. The Lord said:

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring. [Luke 21:25]

And the . . . waves of the sea heaving themselves beyond their bounds. [D&C 88:90]

I bear testimony that often, in the midst of suffering trials, afflictions, and discouragement, those very circumstances tutor us in developing increasing love and trust in God. Consequently, what a great blessing those trials are!

Individual Suffering

My purpose here today is not to focus so much on worldwide events but more so on individual suffering and trials, although the principles we discuss can apply to both.

If I could catalog suffering and trials among young people of your age, it probably would include some of the following entries:

- “I have prayed fervently for something, but it has never occurred. Why won’t God help me?”
- “Why did my father have to die and leave my mother and us alone?”
- “Why am I struggling with this chronic illness that makes me miserable most of the time?”
- “Why am I not worth anything? It seems that others feel that way about me, and I do too. I feel worthless.”

Brothers and sisters, is not that kind of suffering very real for many of us, and very intense as well? Here are some more:

- “I have prayed and fasted for an eternal companion, but no one has come.”
- “Why did he break up with me? Things were going so well. My heart is broken.”
- “We thought the purpose of marriage was to have children. We have prayed for years, and none have come.”
- “I failed another algebra test. Why am I so dumb?”
- “I am so discouraged. I’m not sure where my life is going. I feel surrounded in darkness, depressed, and have little or no hope.”

- “Where will the money come from for our apartment, our food, our books, our insurance, our car?”
- “Why am I so heavy? They say I’m big-boned, but the truth of it is, I’m just downright fat.”

Well, we could add a lot more suffering to that list, could we not? A struggling missionary asked me, “Elder Cook, when will this ‘happiest two years of my life’ be over?”

A suffering friend once said, “I have been keeping the commandments and trying to do what is right. Why do they even call this plan ‘the plan of happiness’?”

Those are some very real questions. Unlike some in the world who do not understand the purposes of suffering, Latter-day Saints, thanks to the Restoration of the gospel, in large measure *do* understand. Why then do even the righteous suffer?

The Righteous Suffer but the Lord Delivers Them

Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all. [Psalm 34:19]

“After Much Tribulation Come the Blessings”

Ye cannot behold with your natural eyes, for the present time, the design of your God concerning those things which shall come hereafter. . . .

For after much tribulation come the blessings. [D&C 58:3–4]

It is interesting to note that there would be even more suffering if it were not for the righteous in the land:

If it were not for the prayers of the righteous, who are now in the land, that ye would even now be visited with utter destruction. . . .

But it is by the prayers of the righteous that ye are spared. [Alma 10:22–23]

Will you, right now, those of you here listening to me, humble your heart and prayerfully consider these additional words I am going to quote from the Lord? Do it with the Spirit, and I am confident that they *will* humble your heart, strengthen your faith, and increase your love for Him, in spite of some of your current trials. Here are some of the Lord’s answers as to *why* He allows such suffering.

Suffering Is to Prove Oneself

Therefore, be not afraid of your enemies, . . . I will prove you in all things, whether you will abide in my covenant, . . . that you may be found worthy. [D&C 98:14]

Suffering Creates a Witness Against Sin

When the Saints were being cast into the fire in Alma’s day, he said:

And he [the Lord] doth suffer that they may do this thing . . . that . . . the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them. [Alma 14:11]

Suffering Teaches Obedience

And my people must needs be chastened until they learn obedience, if it must needs be, by the things which they suffer. [D&C 105:6]

Suffering Teaches Patience and Faith

Nevertheless the Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith. [Mosiah 23:21]

Suffering Assists One to Repent and Be Forgiven

*Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you whom I love, and whom I love I also chasten that their sins may be forgiven, for with the chastisement I prepare a way for their deliverance in all things out of temptation, **and I have loved you.*** [D&C 95:1; emphasis added]

Isn’t it wonderful that the Lord’s motive in allowing suffering truly is love, and He will

even prepare a way for our deliverance? Truly He has loved us during these serious trials, in spite of what some may think.

It is evident, brothers and sisters, that the Lord will use tragedy and sorrow to help humble His people and thereby cause them to repent and be saved. Listen carefully to this: *He loves you more than your being perfectly happy day by day, and thus He will do what is required to purify you so you can return to Him.*

Suffering Can Occur from the Lord Hedging Up Your Way

I will not succor my people in the day of their transgression; but I will hedge up their ways that they prosper not; and their doings shall be as a stumbling block before them. [Mosiah 7:29]

Suffering Brings Forth Righteousness

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth. . . .

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them. [Hebrews 12:6, 11]

Be Patient in Suffering

Be patient in afflictions, for thou shalt have many; but endure them, for, lo, I am with thee, even unto the end of thy days. [D&C 24:8]

The Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord. [Mosiah 24:15]

Lightening Your Burdens Through Christ

That they should suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ. [Alma 31:38]

And then may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son. And even all this can ye do if ye will. [Alma 33:23]

Aren't these profound answers clarifying why the righteous suffer? We, of all people, ought to stand and humbly bear testimony of how God's great love can be found in the suffering of individuals, as well as of nations, and be able to explain to a large degree why much of that is occurring. Of course, no man knows all the purposes of God, and thus does not fully understand the full purpose of suffering. That is only known by the Lord.

On a personal note, I think in my own life of what a challenge my wife and I had when we were first married and went for nearly five years without having children, even though we fasted, prayed, and had numerous priesthood blessings concerning that challenge. We suffered much. However, in time, after adopting our first son, seven others came naturally, and we now stand as the parents of those eight children, plus 21 grandchildren.

Does the Lord fulfill His promises? He does. Be patient. Wait upon the Lord. He does love us.

Here is another personal example showing the uniqueness of the Lord's gifts. All of my adult life I have suffered with very difficult health problems, some of which have been life-threatening. What lessons were taught in the process of all those years! I believe they could not have been learned any other way. They have helped me to be more Christlike. Truly the Lord knows the end from the beginning and will tutor, correct, mold, and even refine you in the furnace of affliction. He will do so until He has accomplished His purposes in purifying you, sanctifying you, and helping you draw closer to Him.

These kinds of gifts from the Lord are not always easy to understand, but I count them as priceless gifts to me and my family. One can sense the deep feelings of the Lord when He spoke these words:

For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he

rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift. [D&C 88:33]

I pray that the Lord will help us to recognize even these unique gifts of suffering and to always be found giving thanks for them to the Giver of the gifts.

The Lord Sews a Spiritual Tapestry into All Our Lives

How little does man understand the purposes of God! How true these words:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. [Isaiah 55:8]

Great is his wisdom, marvelous are his ways, and the extent of his doings none can find out. [D&C 76:2]

President Thomas S. Monson has spoken recently of “small hinges” upon which the very history of our lives turn (“Choose You This Day,” *Ensign*, November 2004, 67). A few weeks ago my family and I discussed that thought, and we were deeply humbled to see how the Lord had directed all of our lives.

One married son said, “Had I not been the best man in my older brother’s marriage, I would have missed meeting my future wife.”

His wife responded, “If 15 years earlier my family had not determined to move to Ecuador, where they met your family, they would not have been invited to the reception and thus perhaps I never would have met my husband-to-be.”

How does the Lord sew that kind of life tapestry to bring about such wonderful blessings?

Another son mentioned, “Dad, had you not *happened* to be assigned to a particular stake conference, you would not have met my future wife and facilitated our meeting one another.”

His wife said, “I just *happened* to go to that conference, where my father presided that day, instead of my own stake.”

And I must add, how was it that the president of the Quorum of the Twelve *happened* to assign me to that particular conference that weekend?

My wife and I commented on the fact that had we not felt inspired to move from Arizona to Utah 35 years ago, much of what has just been said would not have happened. We concluded that in many ways our children’s “small hinges” were dependent upon our “small hinges” as their parents.

Of course, as Latter-day Saints we know that all those events are not predestined, but it is the Lord’s loving hand in our lives attempting to bless us with the very best that we can receive.

Add to all of this the times the Lord has used daily experiences to mold your personality, to refine your attributes, to help you be more Christlike. How complex it appears to man. How difficult it would be to influence all within one man’s life in one day, let alone throughout his whole life. Think of the orchestration that is going on among your whole family, the whole community, and the whole world. Could any man ever comprehend the love and works of the Lord? I think not.

Brigham Young once said, “Every trial and experience you have passed through is necessary for your salvation” (*JD* 8:150). How blessed are we, my dear brothers and sisters, to recognize the Lord sewing this spiritual tapestry of our lives to produce a more Christlike individual. I remind you of these words:

Wherefore, brethren, seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand. For behold, ye yourselves know that he counseleth in wisdom, and in justice, and in great mercy, over all his works. [Jacob 4:10]

Could any man think to counsel the Lord on anything, even having a small view of what

has just been described? All of this causes me to feel deeply the need to always pray more fervently for the will of the Lord in my life and, whatever I ask, to be sure to condition it upon His holy, divine, all-knowing will.

How great is the wisdom of God! How great is His love! I stand humbled—in absolute awe of my Heavenly Father, His love for us, and His glorious plan of happiness.

The Lord Will Help Us with Our Suffering

Prayerfully listen to these words:

In all their afflictions he was afflicted. And the angel of his presence saved them; and in his love, and in his pity, he redeemed them, and bore them, and carried them all the days of old. [D&C 133:53]

No trial or suffering will separate us from the love of God, said Paul the Apostle:

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

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. [Romans 8:35, 38–39]

Men Can Bring Suffering upon Themselves

We have spoken of the suffering of the righteous—now a word regarding the suffering of the unrighteous. The Lord said:

But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I. [D&C 19:17]

Also, one could surely increase his suffering by not keeping the commandments of the Lord, couldn't he? The Lord said:

Remember to sin no more, lest perils shall come upon you. [D&C 29:3]

And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him. [Helaman 12:3]

It ought to be easy to see in the case of those who sin that they bring much suffering and misery upon themselves by not keeping the commandments of the Lord. That is unfortunately true of some of us who know better but who are either not keeping the commandments or are just skirting the edges of some.

How many are suffering right now as a result of not keeping the Word of Wisdom—not only physically but spiritually being alienated from the Lord? How many other evil sins—such as robbery, abuse, or immorality—and thereby great suffering, result from someone not obeying the Word of Wisdom?

What great blessings are promised to those who obey the Sabbath day, even “the fulness of the earth” (D&C 59:16; see also verses 15 through 21). What great losses, spiritually and temporally, come our way if we disobey?

What about the suffering that comes from those who do not pay an honest tithe and offering and therefore struggle with debt and financial hardship all the days of their lives?

What about the suffering that results from dishonesty or involvement in risky financial endeavors—even loss of trust, divorce, and imprisonment?

What great chastisement comes to one who disobeys the law of chastity and is involved in immodesty, petting, pornography, and fornication. He loses his faith, loses the Spirit, and even could lose his membership in the kingdom of God.

What suffering comes to one who skips his Church meetings and avoids having a Church calling? He not only loses the opportunity to

give needed service but also retards the growth and development of his own soul.

Incorporated in all of the laws of the Lord are blessings that will be yours when you keep them and consequences causing you to suffer when you do not. When we disobey the Lord, we truly learn that *“wickedness never was happiness”* (Alma 41:10).

A Few Suggestions on Cheerfully Suffering Tribulation in the Redeemer’s Name (D&C 138:13)

1. *Keep the commandments of the Lord with exactness.* By so doing you will avoid the suffering of the wicked and reap the blessings the Lord has promised to the obedient.

2. *Endeavor to see more fully the Lord’s hand in your life and in the lives of those around you.* The Lord loves you. Each day He adds to the beautiful spiritual tapestry being sewn of your life, if you allow Him to do so.

3. *When faced with adversity, trial, or suffering, do your best to increase your faith in the face of the trial.* Many of less faith, when faced with a serious trial, become angry, weaken their faith, and thereby struggle and suffer more. Perhaps the real test of your faith is how to increase your faith and your love when trials come your way.

4. *Be patient. Wait on the Lord. Plead fervently for understanding and the ability to endure.*

Remember, we are not to counsel Him; He will counsel us. Be patient. Trust in Him for that which you do not know, and you will come to know much more. You will feel more profoundly of His personal love for you. Remember the words *“even this will pass”* and these sacred words: *“The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord”* (Job 1:21).

5. *Do not be discouraged along the way.* My young friends, the devil delights in discouraging people and causing them to feel inadequate, unworthy, unneeded, and unloved. Discouragement is a tool of the devil. He uses much of our suffering and misery to bring about discouragement and thus fulfill his

purpose. May I say with a smile: *Cheer up, pray, read in the scriptures, bear your testimony, sing, express love to God and to others, serve, obtain a priesthood blessing if need be, and do away with discouragement, the devil’s influence upon you.*

6. *Humble yourself and repent of your personal sins.* Humility before the Lord, a broken heart, and a contrite spirit truly seem to be the offering and sacrifice required of the Lord. The peace of the Spirit will then rest upon you and the love of God will fill your soul.

Final Testimony

Well, brothers and sisters, let us return to where we began: *“Where is God in all of the suffering that is going on in the world?”* I testify of my certainty of His loving involvement. He uses trying circumstances for His purposes to develop true disciples of Christ, even a Zion people.

I express gratitude for the Lord’s hand upon me through the years. He has answered all of my prayers—even though at times I had no idea what His purpose was, nor perhaps still do. He has blessed me with many wonderful days—more of those than of difficult days of suffering and despair. And yet even in those difficult days I have felt the Lord reach out to me, felt the darkness disperse, and felt His personal love fill my very soul.

I bear witness that He is a God of love. He does love His children in spite of what many in the world may think. I bear testimony that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is sufficient for all men.

May God bless us to be more humble, more repentant, more filled with faith, more trusting, and more loving to one another and to Him. This is His work. This is the true Church of Jesus Christ. The Church and the fullness of the gospel have been restored.

Living apostles and prophets of the Lord Jesus Christ walk the earth in our day. Of these things I humbly bear testimony, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.