

Strength in Adversity

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Brothers and sisters, this is indeed an honor to be back at BYU. It is an honor to be seated next to your president. I have had the opportunity of working with him, not only as he served as Presiding Bishop but also as a member of the Quorums of the Seventy. You are greatly blessed to have President Merrill J. Bateman as the president of this university. I am honored today to have our family here. We are lacking two of our sons, but the rest of the family is here with us. I see in the audience a number of you who were missionaries in Brazil when we served together there. Could I see just how many of you here were serving as missionaries when we were there together? It is good to see you here. I am honored to know that President Helvecio Martins, who served with me in the Brazilian Area Presidency, is seated in the audience. He is a man I have learned to love deeply and respect greatly.

Sister Hillam and I have great memories of BYU. When I returned from my first mission, we dated here at BYU for a year and were married at the end of the school year. In fact, we were married on a Thursday, and my wife, Carol, graduated on Friday. On Saturday morning I had to report to work on a farm, and so our honeymoon, I guess you could say, was

her graduation at BYU. She always reminds me that she has not had a honeymoon yet, and no matter where we go, no matter how lovely a place it is, she always says, "Well, this isn't the honeymoon yet."

Not too long ago a lady came to my office to explain to me all of the problems that she was having in her life. Basically, she said, "But, why me? Why now? Why so many problems? Why is the Lord chastising me so?"

I would like to give you my answers to some of those questions. Obviously, I cannot discuss all the details, but I would like you to think with me on this matter. Of course, some of the misfortunes we have we bring on ourselves because of our unwise decisions. Because of things we do not do well, we suffer the consequences. However, we cannot seem to explain some misfortunes; some problems just seem to happen. It is those problems that I would like to talk about today.

Harold G. Hillam was a member of the Presidency of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 25 June 1996.

After Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, the Lord spoke to them:

And Adam and Eve, his wife, called upon the name of the Lord, and they heard the voice of the Lord from the way toward the Garden of Eden, speaking unto them, and they saw him not; for they were shut out from his presence.

And he gave unto them commandments, that they should worship the Lord their God, and should offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord. And Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord.

And after many days an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam, saying: Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord? And Adam said unto him: I know not, save the Lord commanded me.

And then the angel spake, saying: This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth.

Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore. [Moses 5:4–8; emphasis added]

The phrase that I would like to recall now is “This thing is a similitude.” Looking up the word *similitude* in the dictionary, we see that it means similarity, resemblance, likeness, one closely resembling another, perceptible likeness, like unto. The Lord then told Adam and Eve that this would be something similar to, that there was a resemblance, that there was a likeness unto the sacrifice of the Savior.

I would like to go now to Abraham and Isaac, to the time when the Lord appeared and gave a commandment to Abraham:

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham [the word tempt meaning God tested him, he tried him, or put him to proof], and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.

And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. [Genesis 22:1–2]

Can you imagine how this must have stricken Abraham in his heart? “The son I love so much, and I am to take him and I am to sacrifice him and then to make of him a burnt offering!” Sometimes we may think of that and say, “Well, that is the way it was.” But we must think of it as Abraham and a son that he loved dearly. Some of you may have sons and daughters. You know how that would hurt—to think that you were to offer him or her as a sacrifice. But the next verse tells me something of Abraham:

And Abraham rose up early in the morning . . . , and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. [Genesis 22:3]

Abraham was a very obedient, trusting servant of our Father in Heaven.

As I continue, you might see some of the similarities between Abraham offering his son and our Heavenly Father offering his Son:

Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.

And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here . . . ; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.

And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood [you see, they had to carry the fire in a bucket or in some container; they didn’t have the matches that we

are familiar with]: *but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?*

And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together. [Genesis 22:4–8]

Can you imagine what Abraham was feeling? In the scriptures it almost sounds somewhat mechanical. I can almost imagine that when Abraham answered, he answered with tears in his voice: “God will provide himself a lamb.”

And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. [Genesis 22:9–12]

If you were to ask the world why the Lord asked Abraham to do that, they probably would say it was to test his obedience. The world would not know that it was in similitude of God and his Son, and we would not know it if it were not for the Book of Mormon. Jacob tells us that Abraham was “obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son Isaac, which is a *similitude* of God and his Only Begotten Son” (Jacob 4:5; emphasis added). Abraham had an experience that was almost the same as that of God and his Son, Jesus Christ. Abraham knew perhaps more than any person what God the Father was going through and what was happening to Jesus, his Son.

I would like to go now to a vision of the Prophet Joseph F. Smith. You recall that section

138 of the Doctrine and Covenants records a vision given to President Smith. He was pondering about the gospel being preached to the people after the Crucifixion of the Savior.

While I was thus engaged, my mind reverted to the writings of the apostle Peter, to the primitive saints scattered abroad throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, and other parts of Asia, where the gospel had been preached after the crucifixion of the Lord. [D&C 138:5]

President Smith saw the people that lived after the Crucifixion, after the sacrifice of animals was discontinued. Here is what he recorded:

As I pondered over these things which are written, the eyes of my understanding were opened, and the Spirit of the Lord rested upon me, and I saw the hosts of the dead, both small and great.

And there were gathered together in one place an innumerable company of the spirits of the just, who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality. [D&C 138:11–12]

These were they who had lived on this earth after the Crucifixion.

And who had offered sacrifice in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of God, and had suffered tribulation in their Redeemer’s name. [D&C 138:13; emphasis added]

We have seen three different references to similitude: Adam and Eve, when they were commanded to offer up animal sacrifice; Abraham, in similitude, being willing to offer up his son Isaac; and the Saints in the primitive Church, who are in a special, blessed condition because of their sacrifice in similitude.

What are the sacrifices that might be in similitude of the Atonement, the most important event that has ever happened in the history of all the universe? Christ suffered more

than we can contemplate. He descended below anything that we know. He took “upon him the pain and the sicknesses of his people.” He suffered physically, mentally, and spiritually. There is no suffering that we know of that the Savior did not know, that he did not feel, that he did not pass through during that time (see Alma 7:11–12).

We will have opportunities to be called upon to suffer. There will be times when we will have feelings of hurt and pain—physical and mental as well as spiritual—and then we will know what adversity is, and we will know a little better what Jesus Christ might have suffered, and we will have done in *similitude* that which Jesus Christ did.

What does this mean to us? We will know Jesus better. It also means that when we are called on to suffer, when we have afflictions in our lives, we will know that we are not alone. The Savior has already passed through those times. As we partake of the sacrament, we might be able to understand the sufferings of the Savior as we remember our own challenges, pains, hurts, and adversities. We might be able to understand that in *similitude* it is somewhat the same as what Abraham, Isaac, Adam and Eve, and Joseph F. Smith understood.

I had an occasion one time as a stake president to have a man come to me and tell me of some serious things that had happened in his life. He knew that he had not done well. He knew that a disciplinary council should be held. And he knew that it would happen. The discipline was determined, and the man was absolutely faithful. He complied with every condition imposed by that council. As time passed, he came in and we visited. It was not easy for him. The Lord was training him, he was preparing him. This man knew what adversity was. He turned to the scriptures. He found comfort as he read of the Savior and others who had passed through those periods of adversity, and then he knelt in mighty prayer.

He went to our Father in Heaven and pled with him during those times of anguish. The day finally came when he was baptized again, and he had his blessings restored. Then came an experience that I will never forget. As we met one more time, he said, with tears in his eyes, “I used to know about the Savior. I used to read about him; now I *know* him. I *know* Jesus Christ. He *is* my Redeemer.” I don’t know of any person that I have met who knew the Savior better. The only thing I felt bad about is that he had to go through all that to know him. I would pray that in our activities and in our trials we would not have to go that far to get to know the Savior.

In speaking of adversity, could I just tell you now that it is one of those things that is going to happen in your life and in my life. We are all going to pass through adversity. It is a requirement. I have often asked myself who really is going to be in the presence of God the Father and Jesus Christ, to live eternally with them and with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and with Nephi and Alma and Abinadi and Mormon and Moroni, and with Joseph Smith and many of the great Saints who sacrificed as they walked across the plains to these valleys in the West. Who really is going to be with them? I have determined it is not going to be those who sit doing nothing. I guess we get in the habit of calling them “couch potatoes.” I don’t think it is going to be them. I know it is not. Let me read what the Lord told us:

Yet I will own them, and they shall be mine in that day when I shall come to make up my jewels.

Therefore, they must needs be chastened and tried, even as Abraham, who was commanded to offer up his only son. [D&C 101:3–4]

The Lord is talking about the members of his church. We will be tried as was Abraham. “For all those who will not endure chastening, but deny me, cannot be sanctified” (D&C 101:5).

My people must be tried in all things, that they may be prepared to receive the glory that I have for them, even the glory of Zion; and he that will not bear chastisement is not worthy of my kingdom.

[D&C 136:31]

Brothers and sisters, we all will have that opportunity. The Lord is going to tutor us. He is going to train us and he is going to prepare us. Elder Maxwell said, "God, as a loving Father, will stretch our souls at times. The soul is like a violin string: it makes music only when it is stretched. (Eric Hoffer.) God will tutor us by trying us *because* He loves us, not because of indifference!" (Neal A. Maxwell, *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1979], p. 28; emphasis in original). We will know of God's love when we have that tutoring.

Now, when the trials come, what should we do? First of all, we must resist murmuring. We must not criticize or rise up against our Heavenly Father. We should study the scriptures so that we know the doctrine and receive from it that comfort that only our Heavenly Father can give. As the man I mentioned who knew Jesus Christ, we should pray mightily. We should be on our knees constantly so that we can receive from our Heavenly Father the assurance that this is part of our trial. Then we should seek to recognize our need to be tutored. We do not know what Heavenly Father has in store for us.

I recall a little story that Sister Hillam used to tell:

Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite

a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace.

[George MacDonald, cited in C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), p. 160]

Elder Hugh B. Brown shared a story that illustrates that God knows best:

*I was living up in Canada. I had purchased a farm. It was run-down. I went out one morning and saw a currant bush. It had grown up over six feet high. It was going all to wood. There were no blossoms and no currants. I was raised on a fruit farm in Salt Lake before we went to Canada, and I knew what ought to happen to that currant bush. So I got some pruning shears and went after it, and I cut it down, and pruned it, and clipped it back until there was nothing left but a little clump of stumps. It was just coming daylight, and I thought I saw on top of each of these little stumps what appeared to be a tear, and I thought the currant bush was crying. . . . I looked at it, and smiled, and said, "What are you crying about?" You know, I thought I heard that currant bush talk. And I thought I heard it say this: "How could you do this to me? . . . I thought you were the gardener here." . . . I said, "Look, little currant bush, I am the gardener here, and I know what I want you to be. . . . And some day, little currant bush, when you are laden with fruit, you are going to say, 'Thank you, Mr. Gardener, for loving me enough to cut me down, for caring enough about me to hurt me. Thank you, Mr. Gardener.'" [Hugh B. Brown, "The Currant Bush," *New Era*, January 1973, pp. 14–15; emphasis in original]*

I pray that we will think upon the Savior and know we are not alone. He passed that way before, and he will give us that comfort. I pray that we will understand what the Lord taught the Prophet Joseph Smith. You recall

that the Prophet had been in Liberty Jail for many months, including cold winter months. Much of the time he was under a part of the jail while passing through this tribulation. We know that the ceiling was not high enough that he could stand erect. He had to walk bent over. There are many other things we could say about the adversities he faced. He was away from the Church, away from the Saints, away from his family, and he was not allowed to have visitors constantly or to be about his Father in Heaven's business. But the Lord had the Prophet where he could speak to him. I think some of the most glorious revelations were given to the Prophet at that time. The revelation on leadership (see D&C 121:34–46) is probably the most priceless document we have on leadership.

The Lord said to the Prophet Joseph Smith:

If thou art called to pass through tribulation; if thou art in perils among false brethren; if thou art in perils among robbers; if thou art in perils by land or by sea;

If thou art accused with all manner of false accusations; if thine enemies fall upon thee; if they tear thee from the society of thy father and mother and brethren and sisters; and if with a drawn sword thine enemies tear thee from the bosom of thy wife, and of thine offspring, and thine elder son, although but six years of age, shall cling to thy garments, and shall say, My father, my father, why can't you stay with us? O, my father, what are the men going to do with you? and if then he shall be thrust from thee by the sword, and thou be dragged to prison, and thine enemies prowl around thee like wolves for the blood of the lamb;

And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds

become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.

The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he? [D&C 122:5–8; emphasis added]

I pray, brothers and sisters, that when the adversities come—and, as I have mentioned, they will—we might respond to our Father in Heaven, saying, “I am not sure why I am having this adversity at this time or at this intensity. I know I will have something to learn. Help me to endure. Just help me to endure this trial that I have.” Then maybe, like the Savior, we will say: “Not my will, but thine” (Luke 22:42). I pray, brothers and sisters, that we might always be able to remember: It is “for thy good. . . . Art thou greater than he?”

I pray that the Lord's blessings will be with us as we are proven, as we are tried, as we go into that crucible of adversity, that we will know there is always going to be the brighter day, and the brightest day will be the day when, if we stay true and faithful and we understand, we can enter into the presence of God the Father and Jesus Christ. How glorious it would be if we could have the Judge who will judge us all, Jesus Christ, stand at our side, being our advocate, our defender, our attorney with our Father in Heaven, and have Jesus Christ say to the Father, “Have mercy on him. He defended my name, he was valiant, he was one of my servants. Have mercy on him, let him live with us throughout the eternities.”

This I pray, and I ask it humbly, in the name of the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.