

## “Fresh Courage Take”

DAVID A. HUNT

**M**y dear brothers and sisters, I express my gratitude for the privilege of sharing this devotional hour with you and pray that my words will help to invite the Spirit to touch our hearts and minds.

During my career here at the university, I have had numerous opportunities to witness the magnitude of struggles students can face. I admire and applaud those who pursue their academic goals while overcoming great difficulties and seemingly insurmountable challenges. The plight of a student overwhelmed by studies, financial burdens, health concerns, homesickness, and social relationships—just to name a few—is not uncommon. At best these may be difficult to bear; other times they seem impossible. I have often found that in the midst of these seemingly impossible circumstances, great relief and even joy can come as our understanding is deepened by spiritual encouragement and continued obedience to Heavenly Father’s commandments.

On April 15, 1846, William Clayton was asked by President Brigham Young to compose the hymn “Come, Come, Ye Saints.”<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this hymn was to give encouragement and support to the early pioneers as they would gather around their campfires at the end of the day. It was meant to help them forget the

many difficulties and trials of their journey.<sup>2</sup> Even today the singing of this hymn lends comfort in our trials and inspires us to “gird up [our] loins” and “fresh courage take.”<sup>3</sup>

### “Though Hard to You This Journey May Appear”

I wonder if we had such thoughts when we sat in the Grand Council in Heaven as spirit children of our heavenly parents before this earth was formed. In that great gathering we each had the privilege of hearing our Heavenly Father’s plan for this mortal existence. We learned that through this earth-life experience we would have the opportunity to become like our exalted parents. The prophets have revealed that we all sang together and “shouted for joy”<sup>4</sup> at this glorious news.

We were taught that this life would be a time of probation in which we would be faced with trials and tests, but if we were found true and faithful and *thankful* in all things, we would inherit all that our Heavenly Father had prepared for us. I feel confident that in spite

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of the challenges we knew we would face, we were still eager to experience this mortal state.

As a result of the Fall of Adam and Eve, the Lord declared that the *ground* would be cursed for Adam's sake. It is important to note that the scriptures specify that "the ground"—not Adam—was cursed and that it would be for his "sake," meaning for his benefit as well as for that of all his posterity.<sup>5</sup> This would mean that Adam and his children would need to labor all their days, overcoming challenges and obstacles to obtain even the basic necessities of life.

Adam and Eve were later instructed by an angel of the Lord who taught them the gospel and explained the plan of redemption and exaltation. They were told:

*It must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves; for if they never should have bitter they could not know the sweet.*<sup>6</sup>

They were also told that a Savior would come to redeem all mankind, so that all Adam's children would have an opportunity to return to our Heavenly Father.

Imagine Adam and Eve's joy as they received this eternal truth. Eve exclaimed:

*Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient.*<sup>7</sup>

#### **"'Tis Better Far for Us to Strive"**

A primary reason for coming to this mortal life was to prove our ability to make choices in the face of opposition. Overcoming opposition in this mortal probation is essential to our eternal progress. The prophet Lehi said to his son Jacob:

*For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so . . . , righteousness could*

*not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad.*<sup>8</sup>

This life and its accompanying pain, temptation, sickness, and sorrow is part of the plan for our eternal progress. "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy."<sup>9</sup> This law of opposition makes it possible for us to recognize goodness, virtue, and joy, along with having an appreciation for well-being. This law makes freedom of choice possible, and if we humbly submit to the will of our Heavenly Father and follow His counsel to yield to His Spirit and resist temptation, God promises to "consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain."<sup>10</sup>

When going through a difficult trial in our life, which one of us has not asked the Lord: "Why me?" As the trial continues or grows more intense, we may even wonder: "How long can I endure this before I am overcome?" It is in the midst of such questioning that we can be led to greater empathy for others who have endured life's trials and persecution.

In a small way we gain a greater appreciation for the suffering the Savior bore for our sake:

*Which suffering caused [Him], even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that [He] might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink.*<sup>11</sup>

In his moments of greatest struggle, the Prophet Joseph Smith pleaded with the Lord to respond to these questions in a way that would give him understanding. Out of the depths of his suffering and heartache, the Lord answered his cry as recorded in section 121 of the Doctrine and Covenants:

*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; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes.*<sup>12</sup>

The Prophet later stated: "I think I never could have felt as I now do, if I had not suffered the wrongs that I have suffered. All things shall work together for good to them that love God."<sup>13</sup>

Elder Russell M. Nelson shared with us: "The precise challenge you regard now as 'impossible' may be the very refinement you need, in His eye."<sup>14</sup>

### **"And Should We Die Before Our Journey's Through"**

Physical suffering and death are part of the challenges we face in this mortal existence. They will visit all of us sometime.

In February 1837, Noah Rogers and his wife, Eda Hollister, joined the Church in New York. Noah gave up his practice as a physician, and with his wife and eight children, he set out to become part of the gathering Saints in Missouri. A ninth child was born to them the following year.

Noah and his family endured many hardships on their journey to Missouri, even being threatened by hostile mobs who demanded that they turn back or be killed. Undaunted in their desire to participate more fully in the blessings of the restored gospel, Noah and Eda continued onward until they were able to join a body of Saints in Commerce, Illinois, which later became known as Nauvoo the Beautiful.

While working in his field one day, Noah was kidnapped by a party of mobsters and taken across the state line into Missouri. In the hands of the mobsters he was dragged into the woods, bound, brutally beaten, and then confined in chains in a small shed for several months simply because he was a "Mormon." Noah eventually regained his strength and was able to escape back to his family.

In April conference of 1843, Noah Rogers was called on a mission to Vermont. Soon after this, a new mission call was extended to preach the gospel among the people of the islands of French Polynesia in the region known as the

Society Islands. He was to be accompanied by Addison Pratt, Benjamin F. Grouard, and Knowlton Hanks. The small group of missionaries quickly prepared for their journey and bid farewell to their families, trusting that they would be taken care of amidst the ever-increasing storm of hatred and bigotry aimed at the early Saints. Their missionary journals and letters home describe the many trials and hardships they endured as they made their way to the islands over the next nine months.

Their missionary companion Elder Hanks had been sick before leaving Nauvoo and progressively got worse. He refused to turn back. He was fearful that he would not be able to fulfill his mission and kept hoping that the long sea voyage and priesthood administrations would restore his health. He insisted that if he must die, at least it would be as near his mission field as possible. Elder Hanks' condition continued to worsen until he died on November 3, 1843. It was a sad and mournful event as his companions watched his body be wrapped in "a bit of old sail"<sup>15</sup> and dropped into the sea.

The remaining three missionaries continued their journey, finally arriving in Tahiti to begin the work of preaching the restored gospel throughout the surrounding Polynesian islands. Not all their efforts were met with great success. Noah encountered major opposition from the established churches on the islands he visited. After many months and many miles traveling from island to island, he was given a release to return home.

His journey back to Nauvoo again proved to be extremely difficult. He returned via the Orient, becoming the first missionary to circumnavigate the globe. Letters and communication from his wife and family were essentially nonexistent for his entire absence of two and a half years. He had heard rumors of the Martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith, but, beyond that, news was only hearsay, and he feared greatly for the safety of his loved ones.

Noah arrived back in Nauvoo on December 29, 1845, finding his family, along with the majority of the Saints, driven out of the city and living on the outskirts. Nevertheless, it was a joyful reunion, and shortly thereafter he and Eda were able to receive their endowments in the newly completed temple. They were among the last Saints to receive this sacred ordinance before being forced to flee across the frozen Mississippi River and eventually set up camp on the windswept prairie at Mount Pisgah, Iowa. There Noah became ill and passed away within a matter of days. A couple of his sons fashioned a coffin out of a wagon box and buried him in a small cemetery that was to become the resting place for hundreds of other Saints who likewise perished along the trail.

Eda Rogers had lost her beloved husband. Other family members soon followed him in death. Eda and her sister Amanda recorded:

*Our afflictions seemingly were greater than we could bear, yet we trust in God and feel that He will support and comfort the widow and the fatherless.*

*. . . We feel not to complain nor murmur but to go ahead in the things of the Lord.<sup>16</sup>*

Many critics could say that Noah Rogers' life ended without his having accomplished much—that his sacrifice to answer the call to serve a mission resulted in little success and robbed him of precious time with his family. Of what worth were his struggles? His death and burial were unheralded events and were marked by a simple journal entry and a wooden grave marker. His grieving widow was left to move on with her children to the Salt Lake Valley. Yet who among us can question the designs of our Heavenly Father?

Noah and Eda Rogers' example of quietly submitting themselves to the will of the Lord set a sure foundation for their posterity. I am honored to be numbered in that lineage.

The records of our collective pioneer ancestry as well as scriptural documentation teach us that when resistance and opposition are greatest, we also have the greatest potential for growth in our faith, our commitment, and our advancement. As witnessed in the Book of Mormon, complacency and eventual loss of faith result when opposition is minimal. Alma lamented, "Thus we see how quick the children of men do forget the Lord their God, yea, how quick to do iniquity, and to be led away by the evil one."<sup>17</sup>

As we look back on the past 176 years of Church history, we can testify that our progress today has been made possible because of the early Saints who were able to faithfully encounter and overcome opposition. I trust that future generations will likewise be able to look back on our generation and attribute their progress to our own faithfulness and courage.

#### **"Why Should We Think to Earn a Great Reward If We Now Shun the Fight?"**

How can we expect to receive the fullness of the blessings the Lord has prepared for us if we quit the battle because the fight is difficult and the odds seem against us? Truly, we cannot expect to gain the reward our Heavenly Father has prepared for us if we "shun the fight" or surrender partway through the battle.

In the Old Testament we find another exemplar of great faith and obedience. The prophet Gideon, of ancient Israel, found himself facing a seemingly impossible obstacle. The book of Judges relates, "All the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together,"<sup>18</sup> prepared to give battle to the Israelites under Gideon's command. Like many of us in overwhelming situations, Gideon seriously doubted the odds of winning such a conflict. He pleaded with the Lord to confirm that he was the right one to lead Israel into triumph and devised a couple of tests by which the Lord could do so.

*And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said,*

*Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said.*

*And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water.<sup>19</sup>*

Gideon, wanting not to mistake the Lord's answer and continuing to doubt his own ability to conquer such a mighty foe, approached Him once again and prayed:

*Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew.*

*And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.<sup>20</sup>*

With this miraculous confirmation Gideon must have been feeling reassured, but it was now the Lord's turn to prove Gideon and to teach the host of Israel that they must always look to Him for salvation rather than rely upon their own strength. Gideon was commanded to dismiss any of the warriors who were fearful of going into battle. Twenty-two thousand departed, leaving only 10 thousand.<sup>21</sup>

The Lord then informed Gideon that he still had too many soldiers, and another reduction was made, leaving only 300 men to deliver Israel from the Midianites, who were in numbers "like grasshoppers for multitude."<sup>22</sup> With this unlikely army the Lord proceeded to deliver a victory to the outnumbered Israelites.

We each have occasions in our lives when we feel overwhelmed and far outnumbered with life's battles. We can be put in the midst of trials that shake us to the very core and test our ability to hang on. President Gordon B. Hinckley encourages us to remain true even

when the odds seem against us. He challenges us: "Be true to yourselves and the best you have within you"; likewise, "Be true to our Eternal Father and His Beloved Son."<sup>23</sup>

I sincerely believe that if we are humble and obedient to the Lord, we will find His helping hand even in the worst of circumstances. I also testify that many of the choicest instructions the Lord would have us receive will come in the midst of our greatest trials.

### **"Fresh Courage Take"**

Often our struggles and challenges are accompanied by feelings of isolation and loneliness. Our initial suffering can make us feel that we are alone and that no one can possibly understand the depth of our pain or comprehend the magnitude of our trial. We seek consolation from others who can share our burden—those who can care about us and understand the nature of our burden.

In a peaceful cemetery located south of the BYU campus, there is a section of graves specifically set apart for the burial of infants and small children. This particular place is surrounded by the graves of others of all ages who have been laid to rest by loving family and friends. My wife and I cannot visit this particular area in the cemetery without thinking of similar mothers and fathers who had such wonderful expectations and hopes for their child, only to have them laid to rest in an untimely season.

If you visit this particular section of the cemetery on certain days of the year, you will find a small flower or decoration placed on every infant's grave. No grave is forgotten. This small token represents the expression of love and understanding by another mother and father who faced a similar trial and who now reach out to console others.

Fresh courage is received when such selfless acts of service and compassion are freely given. Not only does our compassionate service help another, it provides the vehicle to lift

us from our own sorrow and misery. We are commanded to bear one another's burdens, and, as Latter-day Saints, we truly understand the importance the Savior has put on selfless service to others. The Lord does not place any restrictions upon us in our participation in good works. As brothers and sisters in the gospel, helping one another, giving comfort and support, and sacrificing on behalf of those in need should be second nature to us. Our own trials and tribulations cannot justify withholding our love and service to others.

**“Our God Will Never Us Forsake”**

Elder Eldred G. Smith admonished us:

*Remember that this world was created and all the development and the progress on this earth from Adam till now have been primarily for you as much as anyone else.*

*Christ came to atone for you.*

*The gospel was restored for you.*

*The Lord will answer your prayers.*

*God is mindful of you, for you are [His child].*

*It is true—each has a different life to live and a different task to fill. Some tasks may be more important than others, but you—a son or daughter of God—are just as important to God as anyone else.<sup>24</sup>*

With faith in the Lord, you can even do hard things, for “with God all things are possible.”<sup>25</sup> Power to overcome our trials, as well as protection from the adversary, will come as we obey the commandments and live according to the counsel we receive from the prophets. The Lord has promised:

*For I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up.<sup>26</sup>*

**“With the Just We Shall Dwell!”**

I feel quite confident that if we look closely, with a sensitive heart, each of us can recognize

someone who is an example of the teachings of the Savior—someone who “cleave[s] unto charity” while bearing all things and enduring all things.

We are taught in Moroni in the Book of Mormon:

*And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

*... For charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail—*

*But charity is the pure love of Christ.<sup>27</sup>*

One of the choicest examples in my personal life of “charity [that] never faileth” was manifest in the life of a close friend known to my family as Grandma Gardner. Muriel Gardner recently passed away after a courageous fight with cancer.

While this sweet lady was not directly related to us, her example of the pure love of Christ made me and my family feel that we were her own. We were prayed over, watched over, and blessed by her faith throughout the past 30 years of our lives. She always seemed to know when we were at a challenging crossroad and needed additional help or encouragement.

She would not be considered as anyone of great acclaim or importance. She did not change the world, nor was she instrumental in making any remarkable contribution to her community. Grandma Gardner was just an ordinary individual trying to live the best she knew how. It was through the latter refining months of her life that she exclaimed that she finally “got it”—meaning that she finally understood the purpose of the Atonement and Christ’s love for each of us.

Her own life was filled with trials and challenges. She bore them with dignity and thankfulness to the Lord for allowing her to be an instrument in His hands. Always a vibrant and lively person, she refused to let cancer destroy her love of the Lord. Never did she blame the Lord for the afflictions she bore. She continued to express her testimony and faith in writing—even when the cancerous growth took away her ability to speak and bear testimony vocally. She hoped that by doing so, her family and friends would be led to say that they also got it. I am grateful that the Lord placed this dear sister along my life’s path as an example to me.

#### **“But with Joy Wend Your Way”**

President Hinckley reminds us that even in the midst of opposition and turmoil, “life is to be enjoyed, not just endured.”<sup>28</sup> In the gospel sense, enduring to the end is more than just physically abiding. The greatest victory comes to those who endure with joy and gratitude, with a deep abiding faith in the divine purpose of life’s mortal existence. This was affirmed by the Lord when He stated to the early Saints through the Prophet Joseph Smith:

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye are little children, and ye have not as yet understood how great blessings the Father hath in his own hands and prepared for you;*

*And ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along. The kingdom is yours and the blessings thereof are yours, and the riches of eternity are yours.*

*And he who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glorious; and the things of this earth shall be added unto him, even an hundred fold, yea more.<sup>29</sup>*

I have shared with you some thoughts on the need for opposition in all things. I do not pretend to know all the reasons that the Lord has for giving us trials and obstacles, but let me review some of the reasons that I would like to

leave with you today by way of the examples I have just given.

First, I believe the Lord provides opportunities for us to be tested because He wants to know on whom He can depend and trust. The Lord found that He could trust Noah and Eda Rogers to be faithful in whatever circumstances they were given. He knew He could trust Gideon because he was willing to follow His counsel even in the midst of incredible odds. The Lord uses trials to help us grow in faithfulness and obedience.

Second, the Lord tells us in section 122 of the Doctrine and Covenants that adversity came to the Prophet Joseph Smith to give him experience and to be for his good.<sup>30</sup> Opposition and adversity are necessary experiences in the course of our eternal progression. The great plan of happiness demands that we experience trial and sorrow as we strive to overcome, “for if they never should have bitter they could not know the sweet.”<sup>31</sup> President James E. Faust stated: “The suffering of the Savior in Gethsemane was without question the greatest that has ever come to mankind, yet out of it came the greatest good in the promise of eternal life.”<sup>32</sup>

Third, our individual struggles and suffering teach us to relate to the Atonement of Christ in a deep and profound way that cannot be learned through any other experience. As exemplified by Sister Gardner, our capacity to show empathy and compassion for another is heightened by our own endurance and suffering. My personal witness is that only through such experiences can a person develop true charity—the pure love of Christ.

Please be assured that there is purpose in it all. The Lord has promised to give us His power and protection as we live righteous lives. I pray that we can each take fresh courage and truly find the refuge that God has prepared for us in our personal lives, where we will be blessed with those who overcome the trials of this life, where we too can exclaim:

“All is well! All is well!” I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. William Clayton journal entry of 15 April 1846.

2. See “Guide Lessons for March,” Lesson III: Literature, *Relief Society Magazine*, January 1921, 58.

3. “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 30; and for all subsequent quotations from this hymn.

4. Job 38:7.

5. Moses 4:23.

6. D&C 29:39.

7. Moses 5:11.

8. 2 Nephi 2:11.

9. 2 Nephi 2:25.

10. 2 Nephi 2:2.

11. D&C 19:18.

12. D&C 121:7–8.

13. *HC* 3:286.

14. Russell M. Nelson, “With God Nothing Shall Be Impossible,” *Ensign*, May 1988, 35.

15. Inez Smith Davis, “A Mission to the South Sea Islands,” in *The Story of the Church*,

3rd ed. (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1943), 288.

16. *Sketch of the Life of Noah Rogers and His Wife, Eda Hollister*, comp. Julia Fellows Rogers; [www.timeforitnow.knotsindeed.com/genealogy/NoahRogersEdaHollister.html](http://www.timeforitnow.knotsindeed.com/genealogy/NoahRogersEdaHollister.html).

17. Alma 46:8.

18. Judges 6:33.

19. Judges 6:36–38.

20. Judges 6:39–40.

21. See Judges 7:2–3.

22. Judges 7:12.

23. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Stand True and Faithful,” *Ensign*, May 1996, 92, 93.

24. Eldred G. Smith, “Opposition in Order to Strengthen Us,” *Ensign*, January 1974, 63; emphasis in original.

25. Matthew 19:26.

26. D&C 84:88.

27. Moroni 7:45–47; emphasis added.

28. Hinckley, “Stand True,” 94.

29. D&C 78:17–19.

30. See D&C 122:5–7.

31. D&C 29:39.

32. James E. Faust, “The Blessings of Adversity,” *Ensign*, February 1998, 4.