

“All This Way for That?”

ELAINE L. JACK

What a joyful noise comes from this congregation! It fills my heart with joy to be here with you, to sing the songs of Zion, and to hear your prayers and share in your spirit. How good you are! Your mothers probably tell you that, but I want to tell you, too. The members of the Church are blessed with the goodness of your generation.

The opening hymn was so appropriate for the first of January: “Come, let us anew our journey pursue, Roll round with the year, And never stand still till the Master appear” (“Come, Let Us Anew,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 217). As Latter-day Saints, those words have special meaning to us. They echo a theme about this journey of life that has characterized our entire dispensation: “No toil nor labor fear; But with joy wend your way” (“Come, Come, Ye Saints,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 30).

These stirring words inspired the early pioneer Saints who traveled west to find a sanctuary for religious freedom. This year, throughout the Church, we will observe the sesquicentennial of that great westward trek with a celebration that has been titled “Faith in Every Footstep.” Today the headquarters of the Church is in the desert valleys the pioneers settled. It is also the setting for the 2002 Olympics and home to Brigham Young University. The

spirit that characterized the pioneer era is very much a part of our lives today.

At the beginning of this new year, most of us have closed our journals on 1996 and opened new ones. Before us are blank pages to be filled in day by day as we each give shape to the year 1997. The first of January is usually marked by the tradition of making resolutions—the always well-intentioned list of what we are going to do differently in the months ahead.

A scripture in 1 Thessalonians can be a good guide for us in this process. In verse 3 the apostle Paul praises the Saints of Thessalonica: “Remembering without ceasing [their] work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in [the] Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 1:3).

I like Paul’s choice of words in commending those Saints. To me they speak as a powerful reminder of our need to set priorities and to center our work, labor, and patience of hope in Jesus Christ, to believe in him and in his ways enough to abandon selfish inclinations and develop direction in our spiritual journey.

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This scripture makes some interesting connections. Work is tied to faith, labor is associated with love, and patience is woven in with hope. This juxtaposition points out that what we do is balanced by how we do it. The ordinary tasks of work, labor, and patience are transformed into faith, love, and hope in Jesus Christ when we realize that it is through these seemingly commonplace tasks that we bring glory to our Father.

In my message tonight I want to focus on the quality of patience. What kind of patience was Paul speaking of in this scripture? I don't think the praise was for standing calmly in the checkout line or for a passive acceptance of circumstances. Rather, I envision "patience of hope" as an active part of a testimony of Jesus Christ.

Patience of hope in Jesus Christ demonstrates our understanding that there is more to existence than just today, more than our current problems, more than what we need or want now. This form of patience is often described with terms like *serenity, peace, quiet resolve, and dignity*. Patience displays confidence that "not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42), that all things will be accomplished in the Lord's way. We should not make the mistake of viewing patience as being idle, indifferent, apathetic, or nonchalant. Patience does not abdicate responsibility, nor does it simply give us a seat on the sideline of events. Patience brings balance and perspective. Think about it. We need patience most when things seem out of control or out of step with what we had intended. Patience has to be applied immediately and often to wounds that are slow to heal.

In contrast, impatience is to try to assert our own timetable on life, to assume we know more than God knows. What folly! This impatience with our earthly experience is a signal that we are not sure of God's omniscience and a rebuke of the view of life as "a time to

prepare to meet God" (Alma 12:24; see also Alma 34:32).

Patience isn't given as much attention as other virtues. I want to share two scriptures that I like because they don't isolate patience but rather place it in a context with other merits. The first is from Alma, who describes the greatest of personal virtues:

I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive and gentle; easy to be entreated; full of patience and long-suffering; being temperate in all things; being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times. [Alma 7:23]

The Doctrine and Covenants also places patience in good company: "Remember faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, diligence" (D&C 4:6). We should all have such good company!

Many of you in attendance tonight stand at the threshold of your adult lives. At this critical crossroad you can actively choose these rich qualities that are "of good report or praiseworthy" (Articles of Faith 1:13) or you can be distracted by the need to prepare to make all the money you can as quickly as you can. If you are patient with your lives and your experiences, the Lord's will for you can be the turning point. Exercising patience now in your daily life prepares for that which is ahead.

As I mentioned in the beginning, we now are writing chapter 1997 in our journals. Just like the scripture in Thessalonians, many personal journal accounts speak of work, labor, and patience. Because this is a year of celebrating the pioneers who crossed the plains, I want to draw an example from the journal of Ruth May, a young teenage convert who boarded a ship in Britain bound for America in 1867. Her story weaves in a "patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" with the effort to gather in Zion (see Ruth May Fox, "From England to Salt

Lake Valley in 1867," *Improvement Era* 37, no. 8 [July 1935]: 406–9, 450).

Ruth wrote of the excitement at the dock as the huge steamer slipped out to sea. It was an exhilarating moment filled with thoughts of the future and how good it would be. You've had such moments when the world was before you, when you felt the energy of something new and challenging. Yet there were also many days when the immigrant ship *Louisiana* dipped dangerously low with the swells of the sea.

"The old ship rolled and tossed," Ruth wrote of an inevitable storm. "But fear—I had none. We were Mormons, our family at least, going to Zion, and no ship would think of going down with such a precious cargo" (Fox, "From England," p. 407). Did she not have hope in Jesus Christ?

When they reached America, Ruth's father joined his family of five and their newly acquired one yoke of oxen with a certain brother who had a wagon but was short a yoke of oxen. Ruth May wrote, "There were fourteen persons with all their worldly possessions in that one wagon. . . . My father bought a small tent, just large enough for the five of us to lie down side by side like sardines in a can" (Fox, "From England," p. 408).

Ruth's company of Mormons was one of many who made their way west with few incidents. "Other than one birth and an accidental death by a bullet when men were shooting sage-hens, our journey across the plains seems to have been rather lacking in perilous adventure but was always interesting," she recalled (Fox, "From England," p. 409).

We know Brigham Young's first response when from the canyon crest he gazed over the valley he had seen in a dream: "This is the right place" (*The Utah Pioneers* [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Printing and Publishing Establishment, 1880], p. 23; quoted in B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century One*

[Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1930], 3:224).

Twenty years later Ruth May reached a similar summit and gazed out upon the desert valley below. Let me read her account:

Our last pull was through Parley's [Canyon] and up to the top of the hill. This was accomplished at twilight and here we got our first glimpse of the little city of Salt Lake.

I have to admit some disappointment as I exclaimed: "Oh, have we come all this way for that?" [Fox, "From England," p. 450]

She expected so much. After all, this was Zion. Perhaps after a significant effort or contribution you have made, you, too, have felt like you've walked more than 1,300 miles, climbed mountains, slept out of doors, and "come all this way for that." This is when patience plays a central role: "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." Ruth hadn't come for the valley; she had come to Christ.

There were no crowds lining the streets to welcome the travelers to Zion. No brass bands met the party. No one announced their arrival with fanfare. They arrived on Saturday, Ruth remembered, and they got up the next morning, washed in a basin, and put on their "best clothes and went to the tabernacle services. . . . All was well in Zion" (Fox, "From England," p. 450).

What does Ruth's experience teach us of patience? Often we expect that our righteousness, our willingness to stand firm, and our efforts to be faithful are to be rewarded here—now. But patience born of hope in Jesus Christ reminds us otherwise. Luke said it so well with these words: "In your patience possess ye your souls" (Luke 21:19). Ruth May initially was disappointed by the stark physical realities of her new desert home. Soon, her hunger for

spiritual purpose supplanted that momentary disillusionment.

Like the early pioneers, we are on a journey, one that I hope is joyful. This is a great time to be on earth. It is a time of technological wonder and a time of advancement in so many avenues of academics. It is a great time for the Church.

Look ahead to 1997. This can be a better year as you exercise the patience of hope in Jesus Christ. Now I have some suggestions for this new year and your opportunity to embrace patience.

First, recognize that patience plays a vital role in making Saints.

Patience is a constant companion of self-discipline. In 1856, after the pioneers had gotten settled in the valley, Brigham Young said, “This is a good place to make Saints” (*JD* 4:32). He knew settlement of this isolated frontier was hard. The people learned patience in working in a harsh climate; patience with one another; patience with God’s work; patience with their own fortitude.

Patience is like happiness. It isn’t something you jot down on a list of things to do like “do the laundry.” It comes as we are doing something else.

Patience can be lost or found everywhere: at stop lights, in crowds, in long lunch lines, at the library when someone has failed to return the book you needed, when your roommate’s problems become your problems, when you can’t figure out that calculus problem and you’ve tried so hard. These are the everyday listings of patience at work. It takes patience to go on a mission and pray for someone to listen. Just listen. It takes patience to do your home teaching or visiting teaching or care for an elderly parent or a disabled brother or sister. It takes patience to recognize your mistakes and work to correct them, and it takes patience to learn how to do something well. Patience is in short supply in so many lives and is so critical in all our lives.

Elder Henry B. Eyring has told a story about his father, Dr. Henry Eyring, a renowned chemist and university professor who in his late seventies contracted bone cancer, which made movement difficult. As the senior high councilor in his stake, he was responsible for the welfare farm. Dr. Eyring and his group worked a long, full day to complete the job of weeding a field of onions.

The man weeding the row next to Dr. Eyring watched as this great university chemist pulled himself along on his stomach with his elbows, wrenching up the unruly weeds as he went. It was an awkward process and obviously painful; the cancer in his hips made it impossible for him to kneel. Yet as he dragged himself he smiled, laughed, and talked happily with his fellow members as they worked in that row of onions.

Near the end of the day, after all the onions were weeded, someone exclaimed, “Henry, good heavens! You didn’t pull *those* weeds, did you? Those weeds were sprayed two days ago, and they were going to die anyway.” Dr. Eyring laughed at the error that would have brought fury to many people’s lips.

When Dr. Eyring told his son the story, Elder Eyring looked at his aging father and asked, “How could you take it so pleasantly?”

At that point Dr. Eyring said something that his apostle son will never forget. He said, “I wasn’t there for the weeds.” (See Henry B. Eyring, “Waiting upon the Lord,” *BYU 1990–91 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* [Provo: Brigham Young University, 1991], pp. 21–22.)

Sometimes it will be hard to see where you are going or you may find yourself in the wrong row of the onions, but remember this: You didn’t come for the weeds. They’re merely what you are doing while you learn true patience.

Observe the patience of Jesus Christ. Picture him patiently teaching the woman at the well, reaching out to lift Peter as his faith faltered, washing the feet of his disciples in the

upper room. He taught patience as he was scourged, as he carried his cross, as he was hung among thieves.

Second, know that trials and adversity teach and train us. Recognize them for what they are and how they make us strong and effective.

The experience of the Prophet Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail, a filthy hovel, teaches us of patience. He had been taken from his home and young family with no promise that he might return. His people were being persecuted and tortured, driven from their homes, and their farms confiscated. He was locked up in jail, helpless to do anything. He turned to the Lord and received this answer to “O God, where art thou?”

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. [D&C 121:7–8]

This was a firm reminder to have patience in hope of Jesus Christ. In the Book of Mormon Alma also speaks of the difficulties that beset his people when “the hearts of many were hardened”:

Now this was a great trial to those that did stand fast in the faith; nevertheless, they were steadfast and immovable in keeping the commandments of God, and they bore with patience the persecution which was heaped upon them. [Alma 1:24–25]

I was visiting with a neighbor’s family that had traveled to Salt Lake City for the holidays. I asked how they liked their ward in their distant city, and Hanna said, “Cary likes it, but I don’t. Sister Jack, I’m having a hard time. I’m the only Hispanic in the ward, and they are not friendly to me. They ignore me in the hallways, and sometimes I don’t go at all.”

My heart went out to this usually happy and gregarious woman. I said, “Be patient with

them. Maybe you are there to help them learn understanding, and it will take time.”

Sometimes our pattern and response to difficulty is to circumvent the situation rather than to step back and try to learn from it. We become immersed in the circumstances and lose sight of the long-range goal. A better approach is to do what we can, being “steadfast and immovable in keeping the commandments” and carrying in our hearts the assurance that the Lord is with us and that our patience will turn the tide.

The scriptures often couple *patience* with the word *long-suffering*. For instance, in Colossians we read, “Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (Colossians 1:11). Have you ever wondered about long-suffering? It does not mean that patience is a painful process. To “suffer” in this context means to tolerate, to hold out, to allow, to nurture growth in ourselves and in others. I do not equate long-suffering or patience with submissiveness or lack of energy. Quite the opposite: this form of patience is persistent in reaching goals. Patience of hope is submissive only to the Spirit of the Lord. Sometimes the most important thing we do is suffer long on behalf of others.

Sometimes it helps just to keep a sense of humor. We can easily get distracted and use up our supply of patience on things that have no eternal significance. I have a friend who is a writer. One day, not so long ago, she was pressured to complete an assignment and print off a lengthy script. Her printer jammed so many times that after four hours she decided her next move would be to smash the machine to pieces. So she went to the kitchen to fix dinner. She put a can in her fairly new but unreliable electric can opener, and the can just went around and around without the blade cutting open the lid. This was the last straw. She picked up the can opener, marched over to the garbage can, and threw it away. She felt much

better. Don't take too seriously the things that don't really matter.

Third, the scriptures inspire us to be patient. In particular they remind us to be patient with each other.

In Romans we read, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

The scriptures bring us comfort and prompt patience of hope. Next time everything is unraveling around you, sit down and read the scriptures. The scriptures also include stirring examples of showing patience with each other. We are all familiar with the account in Matthew when the king took an accounting of his servants and found that one owed him 10,000 talents. He called the man before him and demanded payment, threatening to sell the servant, his wife, and children for payment.

The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

The king relented and forgave the debt.

But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

Now listen to this plea:

And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

And he would not.

The king heard of this act and called the "wicked servant" before him whose debts he had forgiven and "delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him" (Matthew 18:23–34). The message

to show patience to each other could not be more clear.

On a particularly busy day during the Christmas season, a woman in my neighborhood—Marion, a mother of 12—was in line in a local specialty food store picking up five smoked turkeys for her family gathering. Chatting with the woman behind her in line, Marion mentioned the size of her order. The other woman quickly suggested that since she had only one turkey to pick up and she was in such a hurry, couldn't she just step ahead with her order? My friend smiled and motioned the bustling shopper ahead.

The next woman in line then said, "I am in a huge hurry as well, and I have a long way to go. Since you are picking up so much more than I am, couldn't I just pick up my order, too?"

My friend nodded again. When she finally reached the counter, the clerks looked at her and said, "We watched what happened and how you handled it. We want to give you these turkeys at half price." In Romans we read, "Be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus" (Romans 15:5).

Patience with hope in Jesus Christ means we follow his example in the way we treat each other. Have you ever taken advantage of someone's "good nature"? How many times have you wanted to fall before your friends or fellow members of the Church, those with whom you work or live, and say, "Have patience with me." Others may have bad days, too. Be patient. Don't be like the servant in the story in Matthew who took the man who owed him "by the throat." Show love for those who use you or fail you. Reach out to those floundering in their mistakes and give them a hand. The early pioneers had to cross the plains to reach Zion, but we can have Zion right where we are by sharing with each other pure, patient hearts.

Patience is an expression of spiritual maturity.

Patience brings balance into our lives. Ruth May and her fellow pioneers sang "all is well"

on the plains by firelight. Today that song is sung in dozens of foreign languages in small and large congregations around the world. The Church's growth testifies that the gospel is the same in every tongue. We have a bold and endearing message for the world. And when it is shared it changes lives. People grow and mature in spiritual ways, and they become closer to God.

This fall I visited Mongolia. There are more than 600 Saints building the kingdom of God in a country that until recently was, to me, only a name on a map—a country at the end of the earth. These people are accepting the gospel, and the Spirit is with them. They, too, sing "all is well." They have no chapel and no stakes. There are a handful of proselyting missionaries and some wonderful couples helping establish the work through teaching English at the universities. The Mongolian Saints are just beginning their journey to Zion.

The most exciting part of the gospel in Mongolia is that there are already 23 elders and sisters from that country serving as missionaries in many other parts of the world. Think of the surge of strength these missionaries will bring back to their fellow members when they return with their experience and knowledge. Now is their time for patience—patience of hope in Jesus Christ.

The Church in Russia is only a few years ahead of the Saints in Mongolia. In a recent letter to me, some Russian sisters described the patience required in accepting the gospel in their country, or in any country for that matter. Listen to the sequence they described:

Baptism is just a beginning of a long journey. Having joined the Church, we accept a new mode of living, which is very far from being easy for a grown-up person. Being a member of the Church is not a guarantee against any problems in our life, and it is very important to understand that. On the contrary, it is just the beginning of hard work. It is necessary to change one's way of living, to get rid of

many old habits and to acquire new ones. It takes time.

They understand the prolonged need for patience of hope. They wrote:

We are constantly praying for our neighbors, for our friends and foes, for our spiritual sisters and brothers in our faith all over the world, for our long-suffering country, for all the people on the earth, and for our world. We believe that our Lord God hears the prayers of the righteous people, and we are doing our best to fulfill the commandments, to regularly attend our Sunday meetings, to find joy in serving in our callings, to love our neighbors, and to strengthen each other and our families. It is a great blessing for us all that the only true church—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—has come to us in Russia. [Personal letter to Elaine L. Jack from six district Relief Society presidents in Moscow, Russia, 25 September 1996]

From Africa comes another example of being patient in the gospel.

Robert Israel Muhile was one of the first from Tanzania to accept the gospel. He was converted while working and studying in Cairo, Egypt. . . . His decision to join the Church brought him "great joy and peace."

A year later Robert, by then an elder, returned to his home in Tanzania with the strong desire to convert his family. . . . He was unsuccessful. His family had no interest in his newfound religion. He was isolated from other Church members, for his home . . . was six hundred miles, three days by bus, from the nearest branch of the Church.

Robert went to the mission president and received permission to administer the sacrament to himself each week. The next Sunday he invited his family to attend his worship service, but no one came. So he held his meeting alone. This is his poignant description of his Sunday meetings:

*I prepared water and bread. I also had more water to clean my hands and a small towel. I sang a song to myself out loud. I had my hymn book. After that I offered an opening prayer. Because I was alone, I didn't have any business to do, so I sang the sacrament hymn and prepared the sacrament. Then I knelt and blessed it and took it. After the sacrament I covered it, as we respect it always. I offered myself a talk—my testimony. Then I sang as we did in Sunday School and then read from Gospel Principles. I finished with a prayer. I then attended priesthood meeting. After singing a hymn, I said a prayer and then read a lesson from the priesthood manual. After that, I finished by singing and then offered the closing prayer. Each Sunday I had all three meetings. When I partook of the emblems it helped me to be more worthy. [Heidi S. Swinton, "I Sang to Myself," *Pioneer Spirit: Modern-Day Stories of Courage and Conviction* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1996), pp. 127–28]*

It was with patience that members cut off from the rest of the world by the Iron Curtain waited for decades to incorporate religion in their lives. Their governments had forbidden church meetings and missionary work. In the meantime, the few LDS Church members did what they could to live close to God. They fasted the third Sunday of every month for the return of the missionaries. When the wall finally came down, a young missionary, one of the first sent into East Germany, exclaimed, "It was a great honor to be the answer to someone's 40 years of prayers."

Temples, too, have brought blessings to those who have waited patiently. Today there are 49 temples in countries around the world. Nine more are under construction. Temples have been announced for Massachusetts, Montana, Tennessee, and New York in the United States and for Mexico and Venezuela. Already the sisters in Russia pray constantly for the continued growth of the Church there so that a temple might be built in that land.

Years ago, Ruth May walked across the plains for the Lord. Today, a young man in Africa sits alone holding his Sunday services and renewing his covenants and the Saints in Russia and Mongolia are holding fast to the gospel. The spiritual principle of patience is exercised by them all. They reflect what is said so well in Hebrews: "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1).

"Run with patience" suggests determined movement. Each one of us can cross the finish line. This year focus your attention on strengthening the quality of patience. It is a characteristic prized by the Lord, for he is infinitely patient with each one of us.

Let me close with a poem of Walt Whitman's, one that could sit at the front of each of our journals. In this poem, "A Noiseless Patient Spider," Whitman compares the ceaseless work of a spider spinning a web to the human experience:

*A noiseless patient spider,
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood
isolated,
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launched forth filament, filament, filament, out of
itself,
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.
And you O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of
space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking
the spheres to connect them,
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile
anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere,
O my soul.*

[Walt Whitman, "A Noiseless Patient Spider"]

"Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking"—these are the works of patience "till the bridge you will need be form'd." That bridge is the patience of hope in Jesus Christ,

and it reaches to heaven across our mortal life, this “ocean of space.”

The new year is before us. It brings the promise of a host of new experiences and challenges, joys and sorrows. These are the building blocks of our souls, for we take back with us to our Father in Heaven only those things that reside inside. The little spider “launched forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself, . . . tirelessly . . . till the . . . anchor h[e]ld.” Patience of hope in Jesus Christ is like those

gossamer threads, strong enough to catch and hold securely and anchor our souls to Jesus Christ and all eternity.

In the Doctrine and Covenants we are told, “Ye are not able to abide the presence of God now, neither the ministering of angels; wherefore, continue in patience until ye are perfected” (D&C 67:13).

May we seek that blessing and be patient in the process is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.