

The Faith to Do His Will

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I would like for us to go on a journey together. The journey I am going to ask you to take, however, won't be a vacation. In fact, it will likely be a little painful. You see, for you to go on this journey, I need you to reflect upon a moment in your life when you were surviving a trial—a painful, discouraging trial wherein you experienced intense suffering. I need you to go back to how you felt in the midst of the darkness, the loneliness, and the anger, back to the moment when you felt you could no longer endure the heartache. It is this state of suffering that I would like to focus on today.

Our mortal life can be compared to a long journey. Sometimes the journey is easy for a time: the path is smooth, the warmth of the sun is comforting, and the light breeze is refreshing. Other times—what seems to be most of the time—the journey is difficult: the terrain is steep, treacherous, and fraught with all manner of obstacles, some of which cause us to trip or stumble on our way. And sometimes the journey requires us to shoulder much more of a burden than we think we can carry. It is during these turbulent and troubling times of life that the journey compels us to descend into a dangerously deep valley—so deep that we are surrounded by numbing cold temperatures, so deep that it seems like we are descending into a bottomless chasm, so deep, in fact, that

the unmitigated darkness causes us to question whether or not the sun still exists.

It is under these inhospitable conditions that I reverently contemplate Jesus willingly entering the Garden of Gethsemane to suffer for the sins of all mankind. It is difficult to imagine how He felt at that exact moment. We know from Matthew 26 that the Savior earnestly prayed, asking the Father three times if there were another way to accomplish His purpose. Verse 39 reads:

And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

The Savior pleaded again in verse 42, saying:

O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

In verse 44 the Savior prayed again a third time, “saying the same words.”

Beth Luthy, a professor in the BYU College of Nursing, delivered this devotional address on June 12, 2018.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained:

The Lord said, in effect, “If there is another path, I would rather walk it. If there is any other way . . . I will gladly embrace it.” . . . But in the end, the cup did not pass.¹

“I stand all *amazed*”² at the Lord’s response as recorded in Luke 22:42: “Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.” This means Jesus willingly submitted to the will of the Father in order to fulfill the need for an Atonement. Jesus, in perhaps the greatest example of humility and faith, submitted to the Father’s will, even though it meant He would suffer unimaginable grief and incomprehensible sorrow in the Garden of Gethsemane.

How can we have the faith and the strength to follow the Savior’s example, willingly submitting to our Father’s will even when we are in the throes of despair?

The Purpose of Suffering

First and foremost, I think we need to have a better understanding of the purpose of suffering. While no one escapes this life or journey without suffering, we are still conditioned as humans to avoid trials and adversity at all costs. Nevertheless, the amount of suffering in the world is all around. A quick check of the headlines confirms what I am talking about: poverty, addiction, illness, violence, abuse, corruption—the list seems to go on and on. Why? you may ask. Why does our Heavenly Father allow such horrifying events to happen to His cherished children? Why does He *allow* us to suffer?

In his book *Why Is This Happening to Me?* the Reverend Wayne Monbleau explained that one of the reasons God allows tribulation is to transform us into wounded healers. He wrote:

A wounded healer is someone who has suffered; but instead of being self-centered, the wounded healer sees suffering in an “other”-centered context . . . with holy compassion and mercy for others.³

In other words, when we suffer, there is something deep within our soul that changes, breaks, and then softens. We learn, firsthand, lessons about pain, anguish, misery, and torment, and then, because we know what it feels like to be wounded, we have compassion for others who are suffering and we can help to heal them. Essentially, our loving Heavenly Father uses times of suffering to transform us into an instrument in His hands—an instrument that, armed with a newly developed nobility of spirit, is compelled to help relieve the suffering of His children.

Think about it. Let us suppose for a moment that you have never experienced suffering. Maybe you have read about suffering; maybe you have even studied it. But until you have survived the kind of heart-wrenching suffering that shakes you to your very core, how in the world could you ever develop compassion toward another human being? You couldn’t. I find it interesting that the word *compassion* comes from two Latin words: *cum* and *passio*. *Cum* means “with” or “together,” and *passio* means “to suffer.” *Compassion*, then, literally means “to suffer with.”

An Austrian poet once wrote, “What is to give light must [first] endure burning.”⁴ These words summon the familiar imagery of the refiner’s fire, where the fire (or the trials of life) reshapes us into someone better and stronger than we could have possibly imagined. Ask yourself how Heavenly Father has used trials in your life to reshape you into a better, 2.0 version of yourself. Sometimes we think we know, because of our best-laid plans, what our final destination will be. Our Heavenly Father, however, may have a very different plan—a different final destination—where, in the end, we learn to become more like our Savior Jesus Christ.

However, successfully reaching the destination Heavenly Father has in store and becoming more like the Savior is not a pain-free journey. In essence, there is a price that must be paid in order to become intimately acquainted with our Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

William R. Palmer once shared an experience of one who had traveled in the Martin handcart company:

In an adult Sunday School class, . . . some sharp criticism of the Church and its leaders was being indulged in for permitting a company of converts to venture across the plains with no more supplies or protection than a handcart caravan afforded. . . .

An old man in the corner sat silent and listened as long as he could stand it then he arose and said things that few of those who heard him will ever forget. . . .

He said in substance, "I ask you to stop this criticism for you are discussing a matter you know nothing about. . . . Mistake to send the handcart company out so late in the season? Yes. But I was in that company and my wife was in it. . . . We suffered beyond anything you can imagine and many died of exposure and starvation. But did you ever hear a survivor of that company utter a word of criticism? . . .

"Was I sorry that I chose to come by handcart? No. Neither then nor one moment of my life since. The price we paid to become acquainted with God was a privilege to pay and I am thankful that I was privileged to come to Zion in the Martin Handcart Company."⁵

This idea may seem a little messy from our limited and earthly perspective, but Heavenly Father knows *exactly* how to guide us to a better destination. Our Heavenly Father is omnipotent (meaning He is all powerful), omniscient (meaning He is all knowing), and omnipresent (meaning He is always present); He knows what He is doing.

Author Max Lucado has a great little saying that he shares when he encounters those who are suffering. He says to them:

You'll get through this. It won't be painless. It won't be quick. But God will use this mess for good. In the meantime don't be foolish or naive. But don't despair either. With God's help you will get through this.⁶

Trust in God and Fear Not

Do you have faith that your Heavenly Father knows you so well that He knows under what circumstances you will emerge as a stronger,

albeit wounded, healer so that you will become a valuable instrument in His hands, able to do His work and comfort His children? Do you believe that God is good? And is it possible that God is *still* good even when things go, well, badly?

The answer is a resounding *yes!* Reverend Monbleau explained that when things are going well and we are enjoying the magnificent view from the top of a mountain, we have more perspective, and we understand that the long and maybe dangerous climb up the trail to the top was all worth it. The problem is, no one can stay on the top of the mountain for long; eventually all of us must walk down off the mountain and into a deep valley. We have all been there—or *will* all be there. During those painful times—the times we spend deep in the valley—remember the promise in Psalm 104:10, which reads, "He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills." Think about it: the life-sustaining water is *not* found on the mountaintop; it is found in the valley.⁷

So when you are walking, as it says in Psalm 23:4, "through the valley of the shadow of death," have no fear. God is with you. Trust Him. Trust that He will guide you through the valley. And look around—look for the springs of living water when you are in the valley. When you drink from the living water, you will be sustained through your time of trial and, eventually, be led back to the top of the mountain to sit for a while, where you can once again enjoy a magnificent view.

God Is Good

It is imperative to trust Heavenly Father even when His will seems contrary to your own. When I was nineteen years old, my husband and I had our first son, Michael. At birth, Michael's bile ducts were damaged, which meant that the bile had no way to exit his liver. Instead, the backup of bile caused extensive liver damage. His damaged liver grew to twice its normal size, encroaching on his stomach and making it difficult for him to eat. His eyes and skin slowly turned yellow. He developed abscesses of infection throughout his liver. At eight weeks of age, Michael had his first

surgery to try to correct the structure of his bile ducts. Then, at nine weeks of age, Michael had another surgery.

Months went by. Our son seemed perpetually stuck in the intensive care unit, completely dependent on the miracle of modern medicine. Then came the day when specialists told us Michael wouldn't survive much longer if he didn't receive a liver transplant. And so our request for a transplant went out to every hospital in the United States that was doing pediatric liver transplants at the time.

By the time Michael was nine months old, his future looked bleak. We received word that no hospital would accept Michael as a patient on the transplant waiting list because his portal vein, which is a major blood vessel to the liver, was too small and was unlikely to support the blood flow needed for a new liver.

My husband and I prayed constantly, asking Heavenly Father for a miracle—and I have to say that God was good. Seemingly from out of nowhere, the transplant team at the University of Nebraska Medical Center changed their mind and agreed to take Michael as a patient, but only under one condition: we needed to move to Omaha.

We didn't know anyone in Omaha, but again we prayed for help. And again, another miracle came. God was good. My in-laws knew someone in their ward who used to go to church with another family who, they thought, was still somewhere in Omaha. And, as it turned out, the Halls (George and Ginny) *were* still in Omaha. They came to the rescue, allowing me to stay with them while my husband finished his military training.

We were in Omaha just over two months when another miracle happened: Michael received a liver transplant. Yet again, God was good. Most of the first year and a half of Michael's life was spent in the intensive care unit, and I can testify that I witnessed one miracle right after another. It was a tough time, but I could also see that during that time my family was blessed on many occasions.

Then the bottom fell out. You see, I thought our family was already enduring suffering in the valley, but I then came to realize that the valley

was much deeper than I had imagined it could be. Michael caught a severe infection. At the time, he was taking immune suppression medication, which kept his immune system from attacking his new liver. The tradeoff was that his immune system wasn't able to protect itself from other infections. I watched in horror as, within less than twenty-four hours, he went from being an active eighteen-month-old who was running around and playing to lying unresponsive in a hospital bed. His blood pressure and heart rate dropped. He went into shock. He started seizing. He quit breathing.

The physicians frantically intubated him so that a respirator could breathe for him. They desperately tried to maintain his blood pressure by infusing IV fluids as quickly as they could. The fluid eventually found its way into Michael's lungs, which then became stiff and difficult to inflate with oxygen. To overcome this issue, the pressure was turned up on the respirator, which, in turn, caused Michael's lungs to collapse. There was one problem after another.

Again my husband and I prayed for a miracle. This time, however, the miracle did not come as I had expected. Michael was comatose for almost six months. Every day was a horrific roller-coaster ride. One day he would be stable; the next day he would almost die.

Then Michael's condition took a dreadful turn for the worst, and this time he continued to steadily deteriorate. The transplant team requested a family meeting. As we walked into the consultation room, I thought, "This can't be good."

I remember them saying that they couldn't do anything else to save Michael's life. The only option left was to sustain him on a new and, at the time, experimental heart and lung bypass machine called ECMO. That meant that Michael would have to endure yet *another* surgery. There was no guarantee that this surgery would work and that Michael would live, but he would surely die if we took no action.

My husband and I looked at each other, took a deep breath, and told the physicians that we

wanted to try the surgery. Then my husband asked if we could have a quiet moment in the room with Michael before the surgical team took him to the operating room.

We shut the door to Michael's room, and my husband and I stood on either side of Michael's crib, looking across at each other. I took one of Michael's hands, tenderly held it in my own, and closed my eyes as my husband offered a priesthood blessing. The blessing was the most beautiful blessing I had ever heard. My husband spoke calmly and deliberately.

I patiently waited for the part of the blessing when my husband would bless Michael with the power to overcome his illness. I had the faith that Michael would survive if my husband would just speak the words in the blessing.

But toward the end of the blessing, my husband's voice cracked with emotion. "Michael," he said, "as your parents, we love you very much. But we also know that your Father in Heaven loves you and wants what is best for you. Michael, if it is Heavenly Father's will that you return to Him at this time, know that we will always love you and we will be okay. We will, in time, heal. And we will, at some point, be together again as a family."

I started to tremble and cry uncontrollably. I opened my eyes and looked at my husband. Now, I use the word *look*, but it probably looked a little more like a glare. I couldn't believe what he had said. No! It was all wrong. He was supposed to have blessed Michael to get better. My husband had blessed him *wrong*. I wanted to call for a do-over, but I figured that wouldn't be appropriate. But Heavenly Father couldn't take my only child away from me. We had survived so much against all odds. Why? Why would Heavenly Father get us this far only to call Michael home? For a fleeting moment I couldn't help but think, "If God lets Michael die, then I will know that God is, in fact, *not* good."

My husband looked at me with a sad but determined expression and said, "It's time we turn this over to Heavenly Father and His will. We need to have the faith to let Michael go, if that's what God wants."

I was angry. I was sad. I wanted to scream. But I also couldn't deny how strong the Spirit was in the room. The two of us stood in silence for a few seconds with only the sound of the heart monitor beeping in the room.

"Okay," I finally said. "If it's Heavenly Father's will, I'll accept it."

I remember walking with the surgical team to the end of the hall. Michael lay in his crib, surrounded by a half dozen people who pushed him in his bed with all of the life-sustaining machinery and tubes that were attached to him. My husband and I kissed Michael, told him that we loved him, and went back to the waiting room, where the surgeon would be able to find us to report on Michael's condition after attempting the surgery.

About thirty minutes later Michael was wheeled back to the ICU, right past the waiting room where my husband and I were seated. We were confused. We had been told that the surgery would take several hours. As we stood up to follow the entourage of medical professionals pushing Michael back into the ICU, the surgeon caught us.

"I don't know what happened," he said, "but before we started the surgery, Michael's condition stabilized. At this point we don't need to resort to surgery. We'll wait and see if he continues to stabilize."

And he did. That day was a major turning point in Michael's recovery. Every day, he continued to improve. He never needed the surgery, and a few months later he came home for the first time in almost a year. It was another miracle, and God was good.

This story has a good ending. Today Michael is thirty years old and happily married with an adorable son, and he is sitting with my family in the front row.

The question remains though: If Michael had died that day in the ICU, would that have meant that God was somehow missing, that God didn't care, or that God was *not* good? I testify that Heavenly Father remains all powerful, all knowing, and ever present. I learned, in a very painful way, a profound lesson that day: that I needed to have faith in God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

I needed the faith to accept Heavenly Father’s will, regardless of what that entailed. And I needed the faith to maintain my testimony in times of happiness and in times of sorrow, during my time on the mountaintop *and* while in the valley.

The Living Water

My dear brothers and sisters, I testify of our Heavenly Father’s goodness. I testify that He loves each of us and wants what is best for us. I know that sometimes what He sees as our final destination isn’t always the same as what we have in mind for ourselves. There will be trials and suffering in life. I testify, however, that it is important to trust God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Whether you are on the mountaintop or deep in the valley, They love you. And when you are asked to take a journey to the lowest part of the valley, to your own personal Gethsemane, have faith. Don’t stop believing. Keep on going! And always look for the sweet spring of living water to sustain you during the most troubling times. Embrace your role as a wounded healer, follow the example of the Savior, and know that God will always “use this mess for good.”⁸

Brothers and sisters, have the faith and the courage to do His will. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Teaching, Preaching, Healing,” *Ensign*, January 2003.
2. “I Stand All Amazed,” *Hymns*, 2002, no. 193; emphasis added.
3. Wayne Monbleau, *Why Is This Happening to Me? How God Brings Blessing from Our Pain* (Fort Washington, Pennsylvania: CLC Publications, 2008), 24.
4. Anton Wildgans, “Helldunkle Stunde” (1916); quoted in Viktor Emil Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1965), 67–68.
5. William R. Palmer, “Pioneers of Southern Utah: VI. Francis Webster,” *Instructor* 79, no. 5 (May 1944): 217–18; see also David O. McKay, “Pioneer Women,” *Relief Society Magazine*, January 1948, 8.
6. Max Lucado, *You’ll Get Through This: Hope and Help for Your Turbulent Times* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 3.
7. See Monbleau, *Why Is This Happening to Me?* 79–85.
8. Lucado, *You’ll Get Through This*, 3.