

THE JOSEPH SMITH LECTURE SERIES

Lecture 4: Joseph Smith and Trials

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Early in this dispensation, a revelation was given in which the Prophet was addressed as follows: “Be patient in afflictions for thou shalt have many; but endure them, for lo, I am with thee, even unto the end of thy days.”¹

Near the end of his life, the Prophet wrote: “Deep water is what I am wont to swim in. It all has become a second nature to me.”² In the same epistle, he said, “The envy and wrath of man have been my common lot all the days of my life.” But, he added, “I feel, like Paul, to glory in tribulation; . . . for behold, and lo, I shall triumph over all my enemies, for the Lord God hath spoken it.”³

On his deathbed in Nauvoo in 1840, Father Smith said to his wife, Lucy, “You are the mother of as great a family as ever lived upon the earth.” On that same occasion, Father Smith gave a blessing to each of his assembled children, blessings that not only prophesied but also reflected the monumental struggle that the Prophet and those around him had had and yet would have to endure.⁴ In a revelation given in 1829, the year before the Church was organized, Joseph had been admonished, “Repent and . . . be firm in keeping the commandments . . . and if you do this, behold I grant unto you eternal life, even if you should be slain.”⁵ One month later both Joseph and Oliver were addressed with this counsel: “And even if they do unto you even as they have

done unto me, blessed are ye, for ye shall dwell with me in glory.”⁶ Speaking of enduring persecution in a Christlike way⁷ rather than of merely surviving our trials (which most of us manage to do), the Prophet said: “Those who cannot endure persecution, and stand in the day of affliction, cannot stand in the day when the Son of God shall burst the veil, and appear in all the glory of His Father, with all the holy angels.”⁸ This is an interesting test each of us might apply to himself.

“Many of the elders of this Church will yet be martyred,” Joseph said on one occasion,⁹ and one wonders whether the long shadow of his own martyrdom was in his mind at that time. Persecutors did do unto him and his brothers as they had done unto the Lord. They fought, they vilified, they attacked. They perceived him as a threat to them, and they did all within their power to stop him. Someone has suggested that the worst difficulties that came to the early Church arose from its clash with other organized religions. That, I think, is a half-truth. The Church did suffer immensely from what could be called

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“officialdom” in the religious world, and it suffered more in political and social areas. By all odds, the opposition that was the most difficult and painful and hurtful to the Church was that which arose from apostates.¹⁰

The ancient ministry of Christ faced betrayal from within, and it was so also in the early days of this modern dispensation. A revealing conversation once occurred between Joseph Smith and a brother named Isaac Behunnin. He had seen men involved in the quorums and in the high spiritual experiences of the kingdom who had subsequently become disaffected, and it was a mystery to him why they had then devoted their zeal and energy to attacking the Church. He said to the Prophet: “If I should leave this Church I would not do as those men have done. I would go to some remote place where Mormonism had never been heard of, settle down, and no one would ever learn that I knew anything about it.” The Prophet immediately responded: “Brother Behunnin, you don’t know what you would do. No doubt these men once thought as you do. Before you joined this Church you stood on neutral ground. When the gospel was preached, good and evil were set before you. You could choose either or neither. There were two opposite masters inviting you to serve them. When you joined this Church you enlisted to serve God. When you did that you left the neutral ground, and you never can get back on to it. Should you forsake the Master you enlisted to serve it will be by the instigation of the evil one, and you will follow his dictation and be his servant.” Happily, Brother Behunnin was faithful to his death.¹¹

What Joseph said there became a genuine description of case after case. To name a few: William McClellin, John C. Bennett, William Law, and to some degree Thomas B. Marsh. Up until the Nauvoo era every one of the Prophet’s own counselors, with the sole exception of his brother Hyrum, either betrayed him, went astray, faltered, or failed in some way. Some, glorious to report, found their way back. Orson Hyde, not a member of the First Presidency but one of the Twelve, under oath endorsed terrible things said against

the Church and the Prophet, of which he later repented.

But many remained bitter in their opposition to the end. “If it were not for a Brutus,” Joseph said in 1844, “I might live as long as Caesar would have lived.”¹² There was more than one! So, much enmity came from within and Joseph struggled as the revelation warned him he would: “If thou art in perils among false brethren. . . .”¹³ That is only the beginning.

Think for a moment of Joseph’s physical setbacks. In lecture two we noted his leg operation early in life. He had a slight limp ever after and could not be enlisted in the state militia in Missouri because of that injury.¹⁴ On that awful night, at the Johnson home in Hiram, Ohio, when he was dragged out and his body was bent and twisted by strong men, they left him with back sprains from which he never recovered. That night they tried to poison him with aquafortis (nitric acid), and as he clenched his teeth to prevent the vial from going in his mouth, one of his teeth was broken.¹⁵ It was never properly cared for, and there was a slight lisp in his speech after that.¹⁶ On one occasion he was beaten with guns in a wagon until he had an eighteen-inch-circumference bruise on each side.¹⁷ More than once he faced the diseases of the time but overcame them, and he was even smitten with cholera at the end of the Zion’s Camp march.

In all of this Joseph struggled both to endure and to overcome. That is the tension we all face. What must we simply go through, and what, through our faith and worthiness, can we overcome? He was never completely free of physical strains and, again, never really free of the pressures of the Presidency. He was indeed in deep water.

Throughout life, in his own family some deep cuts and wounds came to him. For example, several of his children died at birth or soon after. He speculated—he did not say it was a doctrine of the Church—that perhaps some of the choice children born into this world and then taken so quickly were “too pure, too lovely” to live on this wicked earth, so the Lord took them.¹⁸ On the other hand,

he once observed that he did not like to see a child die in infancy, because it had not yet, as he put it, “filled the measure of its creation and gained the victory over death.”¹⁹ Apparently the Prophet did not tell all he knew about this subject, but it may well be that the plan makes provision for such children to obtain the requisite mortal experience later (in post-millennial circumstances?) and make the necessary choices that lead to exaltation.²⁰

A woman recorded years later that, at the Prophet’s request, her mother “lent” one of the family’s twin little girls to him and Emma to assuage their loneliness at the loss of their own children. Joseph called her “my little Mary.” In the morning he would come just after breakfast, pick up the child, take her home to Emma for most of the day, then bring her back in the evening. When he was late in returning the child one day the mother went to the Prophet’s home and found him dandling her on his knee and singing to her, as she had been fretful. The next morning she handed him Sarah, the other baby. Strangers could not distinguish one from the other, but Joseph did. He took a step or two, stopped, turned back, and said, “Oh no, this is not my little Mary.” She gave him Mary instead, and he smilingly carried her away.²¹

Many have observed that Joseph’s love for children was remarkable, that he seemed to find deep happiness playing with a child on his knee, or helping one across a muddy field, or picking flowers to give to children, or wiping away their tears.²² I believe that the response of those children, and we have record of many, to him is one of the lasting witnesses of the nobility of his soul. Children are not easily deceived. Many have described how they felt in his presence. How he loved little children!

In Nauvoo, preaching was almost always done out of doors because there was no adequate inside accommodation. (The temple was unfinished.) There was sometimes the problem of order and decorum. Often people stood to listen, sometimes on the benches of their wagons drawn up near the speaker. Occasionally the younger people would move out behind the dais or to the side, which was

a distraction. Those charged with the responsibility for order, the ushers and others, could be very severe to those young people. The Prophet chided those who went too far. “Let the boys alone,” he would say, “they will hear something that they will never forget.”²³ “May God bless you, my little man,” he said to ten-year-old Amasa Potter as he took the boy by the hand. “You have a great work to perform in the earth, and when you are in trouble think upon me and you will be delivered.”²⁴

Another of the Prophet’s trials in the home related to the burdens imposed on their marriage by his persecutors, burdens that Emma too had to carry. Often they would think they had a moment of peace, and then there would come the rude shock at the door: another lawman, another lawlessman, another subpoena, another cry, another warning.²⁵ At one point two little girls were charged with keeping their eyes open for anyone who came within a block of the house. They would rush to the house and say, “Someone suspicious-looking is coming.” Sometimes the Prophet would leave, and sometimes he would hide, and sometimes the person would turn out to be a friend who looked disreputable, such as bearded, long-haired Porter Rockwell. Joseph would scoop up the children and run out and say, “Now, now, he’s not all that bad, is he?”²⁶

Then there were the endless legal entanglements. Brigham Young said that Joseph had forty-six lawsuits.²⁷ The standard LDS statement is that he was acquitted from all these. It is true in most cases that he was, but in some he was convicted. There was a charge, for example, in the state of New York that he was guilty of casting out an evil spirit. The trial was held and he was found guilty. The judge then observed that there was, to his knowledge, no ordinance against that, and he would have to be set free!²⁸

Often the basis of the complaints charged against Joseph, especially in the early days, was about the same as the ancient Christians faced, as recorded in the book of Acts: “You have set the neighborhood in an uproar.”²⁹ So he had. But how could he help it? Light always stirs up darkness. That is an eternal law. Some dark souls were

stirred up to murder, to the assassinations at the Carthage Jail. Only then was Joseph free from his enemies and their lawsuits.

It seems to me symbolic that Willard Richards, speaking to calm the Saints after the word was out that Joseph and Hyrum had fallen, said, in effect, Do not make any rash moves, do not seek vengeance, leave all of this to the law, and *when* that fails, leave it to God. Notice, not “*if* that fails” but “*when* that fails, leave it to God.”³⁰ It failed. A trial was held of five men charged with involvement in what Dallin H. Oaks and Marvin S. Hill call the Carthage Conspiracy, but they were all acquitted.³¹ None of those involved at Carthage was ever brought to earthly justice. So be it. Eternal justice will take care of it.

Of the Prophet’s many trials, surely one of the most severe was the five months’ imprisonment—four of them in the infamous Liberty Jail. There is something ironic in that name. Part of the reason why he was there was Sidney Rigdon’s “Salt Sermon,” which had been delivered in June 1838, in which the speaker had used as his text Matthew 5:13. He applied it to the prominent dissidents in the Church—they were like the salt that has “lost his savour,” and were henceforth “good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men.”³² On Independence Day, July 4, he gave an even stronger speech that defied enemies of the Church, whether individuals or mobs, and vowed the Saints would retaliate against any further oppression. Contention escalated, mob violence spread, a militia besieged the Saints’ city of Far West, and Joseph and other leaders were taken prisoner.

During those cold winter months in Liberty Jail—December through March—Joseph did not have a blanket. He wrote to Emma and pleaded for one. She had to reply that in his absence William McLellin, formerly one of the original Twelve Apostles and now a vicious antagonist, had stolen all the blankets from his house.³³ Several times the jailers administered poison to the prisoners, and as a mean joke, on one occasion they tried to feed them with human flesh.³⁴ There were no sanitary facilities except the slop bucket, and there was very little light.

Joseph was not alone; his brother Hyrum and four other brethren were with him. In some respects that was an added affliction, as he saw their sufferings too. The reports piled up of cruelties inflicted on the Saints—the whippings, the beatings, the rapes, the plundering of homes and farms, and finally the enforced exodus to Illinois in dead of winter, leaving bloody marks in their footprints on the snow. These weighed heavily on the souls and the hearts of these men in prison for conscience’s sake.³⁵

Joseph’s personal trials were one thing; those of the Saints he loved were another. He prayed for an answer from the Lord to the two questions: “How long, O Lord, wilt thou witness these things and not avenge us?” And the other question, “Why?” Why must the Saints suffer so?³⁶

To the first the Lord answered that in due time “a generation of vipers” would receive their due.³⁷ But to the second there was no full answer, except the answer that Job received, and the admonition to trust: “The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?”³⁸

The full explanation of trials is never that we have sinned. The full explanation is that we are sometimes called on to go through affliction. The Missouri Saints had not fully lived up to their covenants, and the Lord made that known to Joseph. Part of their difficulties, therefore, was deserved.³⁹ But that will not take care of that great sum of man’s inhumanity to man that remained. What happened at Haun’s Mill, for example, was undeserved.⁴⁰

Joseph had to learn forbearance, had to learn forgiveness. He also had to learn vigilance. He would say, in effect, “If ever I am in such a situation, I will help you. I will not say I can do nothing for you. I *can* do something for you and I will.”⁴¹ That’s an echo and a reversal of President Martin Van Buren’s response to him in Washington. But he prophesied also at times that there would be repentance and that some who had most hated us would become our most beloved. And so it was.

Patience he had to learn. Pain he had to endure.

We can talk, then, of the spiritual burdens he bore: how he was called over and over again to impose sacrifices on himself and on others when

he would rather have not. Here is an example. Place: Kirtland. Commandment: Build a temple. The question: How? Stands here Brigham, stands here Joseph. How will we build a temple? They review the names of every Latter-day Saint they can think of who has ability in construction, and there isn't anyone who can do it. Then Joseph Young says: "Well, I know a man up in Canada; he's excellent in construction work. His name is Artemus Millett; but of course he's not a member of the Church."

At that point Joseph turns to Brigham: "Brother Brigham, I give you a mission. You are to go to Canada. You are to convert Artemus Millett. You are to bring him back to Kirtland with his family and tell him to bring at least a thousand dollars in cash." It is a testament of the mettle of Brigham that he said, "All right, Brother Joseph, I'll go." Go he did. He did convert Artemus Millett and his family. They did come to Kirtland with the thousand dollars.⁴² Brother Millett oversaw the construction of that temple and later the Manti Temple. That is one of the up-against-the-wall impossibilities—perhaps hundreds of them in the Prophet's life—that both wrenched his soul and stretched it.

Even when he saw, secondhand and at a distance, what the Saints had to bear, he broke into tears and privately went into prayer. In such a case, at the Nickerson home in Toronto he became aware of a young girl named Lydia Bailey. By the tender age of eighteen, she had had one husband and two children. Her husband had abandoned her and both children had died. Why? Joseph went to the Lord. Then he met with Lydia. An outpouring of the Spirit ensued, and Joseph made promises to her that out of her affliction there would come into her life such strength as she could not now comprehend. "The Lord, your Savior, loves you, and will overrule all your past sorrows and afflictions for good unto you." She had a role to play in the redemption of her family that she could not fully understand. The promises came to fulfillment.⁴³

How he suffered in the witness of how his family suffered! "My father," cried out his six-year-old

son, "My father, why can't you stay with us? What are the men going to do with you?" And then the boy was thrust from him by the sword.⁴⁴ The Prophet cried unto the Lord, "Bless my family."

The one journal we have that he wrote in his own handwriting over a daily period of time was on a missionary trip north into Canada. It reflects two preoccupations. Over and over the journal turns into a prayer: "Oh, God, establish thy word among this people." And the other: "Lord, bless my family."⁴⁵

Calm times were rare, but we find in the records here and there a day of family peace, especially at Christmas. On Christmas Day 1835: "Enjoyed myself at home with my family, all day, it being Christmas, the only time I have had this privilege so satisfactorily for a long period." The Prophet recorded the following for Christmas morning 1843: "This morning, about one o'clock, I was aroused by an English sister, Lettice Rushton, widow of Richard Rushton, Senior (who, ten years ago, lost her sight), accompanied by three of her sons, with their wives, and her two daughters, with their husbands, and several of her neighbors, singing, 'Mortals, awake! with angels join,' &c., which caused a thrill of pleasure to run through my soul. All of my family and boarders arose to hear the serenade, and I felt to thank my Heavenly Father for their visit, and blessed them in the name of the Lord. They also visited my brother Hyrum, who was awakened from his sleep. He arose and went out of doors. He shook hands with and blessed each one of them in the name of the Lord, and said that he thought at first that a cohort of angels had come to visit him, it was such heavenly music to him."⁴⁶

Joseph was stretched to do things that he was not by his own reckoning fully equipped to do in the temporal sense. One promise says, "In temporal labors thou shalt not have strength, for this is not thy calling."⁴⁷ Yet he was required to introduce advanced ideals—not just dreams, but actual structures: in economics, the law of consecration; in politics, the Council of Fifty; in social thought, plans for communities and for their very city design with the temple at the center—thus he was,

among other things, a city planner. Educationally, he established the School of the Prophets and the University of Nauvoo, and the school instructions that are outlined in sections 88 and 109 of the Doctrine and Covenants involve processes for the expansion of the knowledge and skill and power of his faithful band. How could a man be stretched to that?

It is one thing to be spiritual adviser and to bring forth inspiration. But it is quite another thing to take a melting-pot group of converts from all over the world and introduce instantly plans for their temporal welfare—and he always taught that you could not totally separate the temporal and the spiritual. To do that he had help. The Lord raised up men all around him. He needed all that and more. “The burdens which roll upon me,” he said once, “are very great.”⁴⁸

In the community setting he referred to “the contraction of feeling.” (He thought this was one of the absolute marks that apostasy had occurred.) “It is one evidence that men are unacquainted with the principle of godliness, to behold the contraction of feeling and lack of charity.”⁴⁹

He talked to the Relief Society, the faithful women to whom he paid high tribute. “As you increase in innocence and virtue, as you increase in goodness, let your hearts expand, let them be enlarged towards others; you must be long-suffering, and bear with the faults and errors of mankind. How precious are the souls of men! The female part of the community are apt to be contracted in their views. You must not be contracted, but you must be liberal in your feelings.”⁵⁰ And he warned them against gossip, warned them against the unruly tongue. He said, “God does not look on sin with allowance, but when men have sinned, there must be allowance made for them. . . . The nearer we get to our heavenly Father, the more are we disposed to look with compassion on perishing souls; we feel that we want to take them upon our shoulders, and cast their sins behind our backs.”⁵¹

Many came to him bearing burdens of sin and pleaded for him to intervene for them, to help them. There were also those who came and

pleaded for other kinds of help. It was as if he could not avoid being servant of all. How would it be, for example, to be sound asleep, the doorbell rings, and there stand before you two black women. They have traveled over eight hundred miles, mainly across the countryside, not daring to use the highways lest they be apprehended. They have escaped from some who have threatened their lives. They are both converts to the Church.⁵² What can they do? Where can they go? Joseph calls Emma down. “Emma, here is a girl that has no home. Haven’t you a home for her?” “Why, yes, if she wants one.” Jane, one of the two, stayed with them for the rest of the Prophet’s life. She records what it was like to be involved in the prayers of that family and that she was treated not as a slave and not as a servant but as one of the family.⁵³

The Prophet’s role as a judge and as mayor of Nauvoo and the head of the Nauvoo Legion required him to discipline the legionnaires and render judgment as the mayor. Anthony, a black, had been selling liquor in violation of the law—to make it worse, on the Sabbath. He pleaded that he needed money urgently to buy the freedom of his child held as a slave in a southern state. Said Joseph: “I am sorry, Anthony, but the law must be observed, and we will have to impose a fine.” The next day Joseph gave him a fine horse to purchase the freedom of the child.⁵⁴

The pressure of love, of caring about the Saints and wanting them to receive and follow the will of the Lord, was another major part of Joseph’s load. Sometimes—even as early as the mid-1830s—he would have welcomed deliverance into the next world, leaving the kingdom in the hands of others. “Oh! I am so tired,” he told his friend Benjamin Johnson, “so tired that I often feel to long for my day of rest. . . . Bennie, if I were on the other side of the veil I could do many times more for my friends than I can do while I am with them here.” Yet there was an ambivalence. “If it were not for the love of you, my brethren and sisters, death would be sweet to me as honey.”⁵⁵ Before leaving on the Zion’s Camp march, he charged Brigham Young, “If I fall in battle in Missouri I want you

to bring my bones back [to Kirtland] and deposit them in that sepulchre—I command you to do it in the name of the Lord.”⁵⁶ In 1835 he said, “I supposed I had established this church on a permanent foundation when I went to Missouri, and indeed I did so, for if I had been taken away, it would have been enough, but I yet live, and therefore God requires more at my hands.”⁵⁷

Many threats on the Prophet’s life were empty; some were not; to all he exhibited a fearlessness that may have been related to his readiness to shed the burdens of mortality. Someone asked him, “How do you dare think you are safe in the midst of your enemies?” Once he answered, “Because the children are praying for me.”⁵⁸ During two weeks in hiding with the Prophet, tramping through the woods, William Taylor, age nineteen, asked, “Don’t you get frightened when all those hounding wolves are after you?” Joseph answered: “No, I am not afraid; the Lord said he would protect me, and I have full confidence in His word.”⁵⁹

It was at the home of his wife’s nephew Lorenzo Wasson that he was accosted by Sheriff Reynolds of Missouri and Constable Wilson of Carthage, Illinois. Without legal process they pointed their pistols at his chest and threatened to shoot him if he stirred. Joseph, baring his breast, said, “I am not afraid to die. Shoot away. I have endured so much oppression, I am weary of life; and kill me, if you please. I am a strong man, however, and with my own natural weapons could soon level both of you.”⁶⁰ Confidence? Beyond the ordinary.

In Far West, Missouri, the mob lined up about 3,500 men, preparing to attack and destroy every Mormon there. There were between two and three hundred, including two or three Jack-Mormons (in those days that term meant a Mormon sympathizer). Aware of those three, a man came with a flag of truce and said, “We’re going to wipe you out, but we understand that a few of you aren’t Mormon: they can come with us.” Those non-Mormons decided they would stay. Then said the Prophet to the man with the white flag, “Go back and tell your general to withdraw his troops or I will send them to hell.”⁶¹ John Taylor, who was

present that day, said years later, “I thought that was a pretty bold stand to take.”⁶² That may be the understatement of the nineteenth century. The man went back with his flag, and the militia withdrew.

That same courage, faith, and endurance as was exhibited in the open land around Far West was shown in cramped and confined conditions in Nauvoo. Edward Hunter, who became a Presiding Bishop, records that he and the Prophet would hide in the little attic in his house, which still stands in Nauvoo. I say “little” because they couldn’t even stand up there. They went up through a trapdoor, but by then they were over the rafters and under the roof, so they had to double down and sit. They were often many hours in that exact setting. There the Prophet wrote section 128 of the Doctrine and Covenants, a rhapsody—in an attic. In that same attic he said to Edward Hunter one day, “I know your genealogy, you are akin to me, and I know what brought you into the Church; it was to do good to your fellow men, and you can do much good.”⁶³

The sheer separation from his loved ones; the inability to speak, which he met by writing; the cooped-up feeling which because of his spontaneity and makeup he despised—all those things compounded to make life difficult. And yet he could write inspired, rejoicing literature. “Brethren, shall we not go on in so great a cause? Go forward not backward. Courage, brethren; and on, on to the victory.”⁶⁴ He was not discouraged.

When he asked for peace of soul in moments of great anguish, like us he did not always receive the Lord’s full explanation.⁶⁵ The demand that the Lord explain to us in detail why it is necessary for this or that—that demand takes us a step beyond genuine faith. If we are close enough to the Lord and if we have the assurance that we are filling our missions as appointed, it should not come as any great shock or surprise that we sometimes walk in affliction. That is the program. In a measure that is what we came to face and to endure in righteousness.

So Joseph was simply given assurance, the whisper of peace, the “Be still, Joseph, and know

that I am God.”⁶⁶ Or again, the serenity that does not assure you anything by way of, Where am I? or, Where am I going? but only, “You’re on track, murmur not—all will work out in the end.”

The Prophet had to endure and not know why or when. Along the way he had premonitions. “May I borrow that book?” he asked at the home of Edward L. Stevenson, in Pontiac, Michigan, in the early 1830s. The book was titled *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*. When he returned it to Mother Stevenson in Missouri, he said, “I have prayed about those old martyrs.” These were men and women who had literally given their blood and their lives for the testimony of Jesus. They were people of various faiths and backgrounds, but allegiance to their conviction meant death, usually in horrible forms. When he returned the book, he said: “I have, by the aid of the Urim and Thummim [perhaps the seer stone], seen those martyrs. They were honest, devoted followers of Christ, according to the light they possessed, and they will be saved.”⁶⁷ Why would he have been preoccupied with that? Perhaps he anticipated that he would be numbered among them.

Again and again he had promises that his life would be prolonged to fill a certain mission. “Thy days are known,” he was told in Liberty Jail, “and thy years shall not be numbered less.”⁶⁸ What is that? A statement of fatalism? No, for we have contemporaries’ recollections as to his statements on this: from Lyman Wight, that “he would not live to see forty years,” and from at least two sources that speak of about five years—one of them giving the conditional “if I listen to the voice of the Spirit.”⁶⁹ The revelation “Thy days are known . . .” was given in late March 1839. He was shot in Carthage on June 27, 1844, five years and three months after that.

During the last few months of his life, Joseph seems to have had a sense of urgency which in our day would be called a sense of living on borrowed time. In that period he laid upon the Twelve the burdens he had carried for so long, and he rejoiced at the relief it gave him. “Now the responsibility rests on you,” he told them. “It mattereth not what becomes of me.”⁷⁰ He did not

fear death, he anticipated it, but he often said that he wanted to give his life in a way that would matter.⁷¹ On a Sunday, a beautiful day, Benjamin Johnson records, they were sitting in the dining room and in came two of his children “as just from their mother, all so nice, bright and sweet.” Joseph said, “Benjamin, look at these children. How could I help loving their mother; if necessary, I would go to hell for such a woman.”⁷² There is the truth about the legend that has grown up. Joseph Smith, so far as the evidence leads, never said (a) “Emma is going to hell,” or (b) “I’m going to go to dig her out.” He said, “I would go to hell for such a woman,” meaning, “I feel strongly and deeply toward my wife.” The distinction is clear.

Then he said to Benjamin something about other children. They had had a joint experience wherein he had blessed twenty-six in a row and had sensed what they would face in the trials of life and had concentrated his faith to seal upon them a blessing. In consequence he was weary when he had finished, and Jedediah M. Grant noted that he turned pale.⁷³ The Prophet had another anxiety, one that involved his beloved family. Of his four living children, the oldest was but thirteen, the oldest boy eleven, and another child was on the way. The record is clear that he was profoundly concerned about his family. He embodied the Abrahamic desire for children, honorable, loyal, faithful children, and certainly he would be leaving his own children in tender years and in critical circumstances. There is some evidence that the Prophet had a premonition of his eldest son’s leading away a portion of the Latter-day Saints and thus creating a division in the family as well as in the kingdom he was living and dying to establish.⁷⁴ That must have pierced the Prophet deeply. He might well have chosen to live on for the sake of his family. That choice was denied him.

“Emma,” he said on that last morning, according to one account, “can you train my sons to walk in their father’s footsteps?” She replied, “Oh, Joseph, you are coming back.” She couldn’t believe he was not: he always had before. “Emma”—he repeated the same question. “Joseph, you are

coming back.” And the third time.⁷⁵ He left with such reticence that reportedly he went all the way back a third time to say good-bye to his children.

Yes, the Prophet Joseph Smith was a superb example of enduring and overcoming trials.

Notes

1. D&C 24:8.
2. D&C 127:2. Edward Stevenson recalled, “I have often heard him say, ‘I love to swim in deep water’” (see J. Grant Stevenson, “Life of Edward Stevenson . . .,” p. 104).
3. D&C 127:2.
4. See Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, pp. 308–13.
5. D&C 5:22.
6. D&C 6:30.
7. The divine word to Joseph in Liberty Jail was, “And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes” (D&C 121:8).
8. *TPJS*, p. 42.
9. Daniel Tyler heard this discourse in Far West, Missouri. See *JI* 27 (February 15, 1892): 128.
10. In 1834 Joseph himself said, “From apostates the faithful have received the severest persecutions” (*TPJS*, p. 67). As the Church grew, so did the severity of such opposition.
11. Recalled by Daniel Tyler in *JI* 27 (August 15, 1892): 492; Andrus, *They Knew*, p. 54. See also the Prophet’s statement, “When once that light which was in them is taken from them, they become as much darkened as they were previously enlightened, and then, no marvel, if all their power should be enlisted against the truth” (*TPJS*, p. 67). Compare the statement of Jesus: “If . . . the light that is in thee [the disciples] be darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Matthew 6:23.) Joseph also said: “When you find a spirit that wants bloodshed—murder—the same is not of God, but is of the devil. Out of the abundance of the heart of man the mouth speaketh.” (*TPJS*, p. 358.)
12. Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, p. 320.
13. D&C 122:5.
14. See the author’s pamphlet, *Joseph Smith Among the Prophets*.
15. See the first published accounts of this experience in *TS* 5 (August 15, 1844): 611–12, and in *MS* 14 (May 1, 1852): 148–50; see also Barrett, *Joseph Smith and the Restoration*, p. 205, and *MS* 26 (December 31, 1864): 834–35.
16. Benjamin F. Johnson reported that a dentist helped with Joseph’s tooth problem “a year or two previous to his death.” Until then “there had been a whistle-like sound” in his speaking. (See *The Benjamin F. Johnson Letter to George S. Gibbs*, p. 22.)
17. *HC* 5:442.
18. *TPJS*, p. 197; *WJS*, p. 106.
19. This statement is made by Brigham Young and apparently ascribed to “Elder Jos. Smith.” (See record of the Utah Stake of Zion, July 17, 1868; also “Early History of Provo, 1849–72,” vol. 2.)
20. In modern revelation we read that during the Millennium children will grow up without sin unto salvation (D&C 45:58). But at the end, Satan will be loosed again “for a little season” (see D&C 88:111). For a further discussion of this subject see the author’s comment in Palmer, ed., *Deity and Death*, p. 65; also Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* 2:54.
21. See recollection of Margarette McIntire Burgess in *JI* 27 (January 15, 1892): 67.
22. Mercy R. Thompson, wife of Joseph’s scribe, Robert B. Thompson, recalled Joseph alighting from the carriage and picking flowers for her little girl (*JI* 27 [July 1, 1892]: 399). Joseph would pull the children up, “take them up in his arms and wash the mud from their bare feet with his handkerchief. And oh how kind he was to the old folks, as well as to little children.” (“Life Story of Mosiah Lyman Hancock,” p. 3.) In one of his last discourses Joseph said, “I rejoice in hearing the testimony of my aged friends” (*WJS*, p. 355).
23. See journal of Harvey H. Cluff, p. 6. Cluff recorded that this was “the first impression of divinity” of the Prophet’s calling. He treated the young men as equals. An eleven-year-old, Alvah Alexander, was playing with Joseph’s family when the Prophet came back with two men from the violence and abuse of his attempted kidnapping at Dixon (see *HC* 5:439–60). “These men had been arrested for abusing Joseph,” Alvah later recalled.

“He brought them in and treated them as he would one who had never done him a wrong; gave them their dinner before he would allow them to depart.” During introductions, the Prophet pointed to Alvah, saying, “This is a neighbor’s little boy.” Alvah also recalled that “no amusements or games were as interesting to [him] as to hear [Joseph] talk.” (YWJ 17 [December 1906]: 541.)

24. Journal of Amasa Potter, pp. 9–10.

25. “My family,” he wrote, “was kept in a continual state of alarm, not knowing, when I went from home, that I should ever return again; or what would befall me from day to day” (TS 1 [November 1839]: 3).

26. One of these little girls was Sarah Holmes, daughter of Jonathan Holmes. She would sometimes “stand guard” sitting on a woodpile. When the “enemy” was a friend, Joseph would take Sarah in his arms, stand holding the door knob, and say, “Now, Sarah does that look like the mob?” then kiss her and put her down. (See Jonathan H. Holmes papers.)

27. Joseph himself records in July 1843: “This made the 38th vexatious lawsuit against me for my religion” (HC 5:518). After the kidnapping incident at Dixon in 1843, Joseph told George Laub that this was the forty-second suit brought against him (see diary of George Laub, p. 18). Brigham Young said in one discourse that the lawsuits against Joseph totalled forty-six; in another, he said forty-seven (JD 14:199; JD 8:16).

28. Recollection of Patriarch Emer Harris, brother of Martin Harris, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

29. See Acts 17:6; 19:29–41; 21:31, 38.

30. “Dr. Richards admonished the people to keep the peace, stating that he had pledged his honor, and his life for their good conduct, when the people with one united voice resolved to trust to the law for a remedy of such a high-handed assassination, and when that failed, to call upon God to avenge them of their wrongs” (HC 6:626). Compare Willard Richards’s note from Carthage, written on the day of the martyrdom: “The citizens here [Carthage] are afraid of the

‘Mormons’ attacking them; I promise them no” (HC 7:110).

31. See Oaks and Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph Smith*.

32. See Corrill, *Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints*, p. 30.

33. McLellin plundered the house of jewelry and bed clothes. “Sister Emma cried and said that they had taken all of her bed clothes, except one quilt and blanket, and what could she do?” (See “Autobiography of John Lowe Butler,” p. 16.)

34. HC 3:420.

35. See affidavit of Hyrum Smith in HC 3:404–24.

36. See D&C 121 and 122.

37. D&C 121:23.

38. D&C 122:8.

39. Joseph was aware of transgressions among the Saints that had incurred divine displeasure. He spoke specifically against profiteering and land speculation and had warned them: “You say I am a Prophet. Well, then, I will prophesy, and when you go home write it down and remember it. You think you have been badly treated by your enemies; but if you don’t do better than you are now doing, I prophesy that the state of Missouri will not hold you. Your sufferings have hardly commenced.” (See recollection of David Osborne in *Ji* 27 [March 15, 1892]: 173.)

40. Innocent children, for example, were wounded, killed, dragged into the snow, and mutilated. A company of Saints camped nearby received word of the massacre and of the mob’s intention to attack them also. “Upon hearing this, some of the women picked up their babes and tried to wade through the deep snow, towards the neighboring woods, but after suffering almost beyond description from cold and exposure they were obliged to return to the wagons and trust in God for protection.” (See Jenson, *Biographical Encyclopedia* 1:808–9; recollections of Lucy Walker Kimball in Walker and Stevenson, comps., *Ancestry and Descendants of John Walker*, pp. 27–28.)

41. Journal of Levi Richards, p. 88.

42. Statement of Joseph Millett, Sr., a son of Artemus Millett. See Millett, *Ancestors and Descendants of Thomas Millett*. . . .

43. *Lydia Knight's History*, pp. 11–12, 21–23.
44. See D&C 122:6. Willard Richards later recorded that Joseph said that he “was taken prisoner of war at Far West in his own door yard” and that his little boy clung to his garments. A man with a sword, blaspheming and blustering, thrust the boy away and said, “Get away, you little rascal, or I will run you through.” (See entry of December 30, 1842, in “President Joseph Smith’s Journal,” December 21, 1842, to March 10, 1843, kept by Willard Richards, p. 15.)
45. See Smith, *Writings*, pp. 17–19. “Oh, God, seal our testimony to their hearts. Amen.” (*Writings*, p. 17.) “The Lord is with us,” he wrote one evening, “but have much anxiety about my family” (*Writings*, p. 18). See also “Joseph Smith’s Missionary Journal,” *New Era* 4 (February 1974): 33–36.
46. *HC* 2:345; *HC* 6:134.
47. D&C 24:9.
48. *TPJS*, p. 315.
49. *WJS*, p. 123.
50. *TPJS*, p. 228; *WJS*, p. 118.
51. *TPJS*, pp. 240–41; *WJS*, p. 123.
52. See “Biography of Jane E. Manning James. . . .” The two came on bleeding feet, over 800 miles, from Buffalo, New York, to Nauvoo. They were born free, but were accused and harassed as if they were fugitive slaves.
53. Emma and Joseph tried to adopt Jane Manning into their family. She said no “because I did not understand or know what it meant. They were always good and kind to me, but I did not know my own mind.” (“Biography of Jane E. Manning James . . .,” p. 20.)
54. Recalled by Mary Frost Adams in *YWJ* 17 (December 1906): 538.
55. See Johnson, *My Life's Review*, p. 97; journal of John Pulsipher.
56. *MS* 7 (January 15, 1846): 23.
57. *TPJS*, p. 90.
58. Apparently he had faith in the faith of little children. One evening, Joseph saw through a slightly opened door a little boy kneeling and praying that Joseph would be safe, would be protected from his enemies. The Prophet turned to the guards and said, “Brethren, you may all go to bed and sleep soundly, for the Lord has heard that little boy’s prayer, and no harm will befall us this night.” (Diary of Oliver B. Huntington, vol. 2, pp. 167–68.)
59. *YWJ* 17 (December 1906): 548.
60. *HC* 5:440; journal of Wandle Mace, pp. 85–86.
61. Joseph later reported this incident to Willard Richards as follows: “Hinkle ordered a retreat. I rode through and ordered them to stand, 300 against 3,000. A truce came and [they] said, ‘We want Clemenson and wife. . . . We will protect them. We will massacre all the rest.’ They refused to go. I said, ‘Go tell the army to retreat in 5 minutes or we’ll give them hell’ and they ran.” (See entry of December 30, 1842, in “President Joseph Smith’s Journal,” December 21, 1842, to March 10, 1843, kept by Willard Richards, p. 18.)
62. “I thought that was a pretty bold stand to take, as we only numbered about two hundred to their thirty-five hundred” (see *The Gospel Kingdom*, pp. 354–55).
63. See Oscar F. Hunter, “Bishop Edward Hunter,” *IE* 5 (September 1902): 870.
64. D&C 128:22.
65. In his letter to the exiled Saints in Missouri in December 1833, Joseph wrote: “Now there are two things of which I am ignorant and the Lord will not show me . . . : Why God hath suffered so great calamity to come upon Zion . . . and again by what means he will return her back to her inheritance with songs of everlasting joy upon her head [see D&C 101:18].” Instead, “when I enquire concerning this subject, the voice of the Lord is, ‘Be still, and know that I am God! All those who suffer for my name shall reign with me, and he that layeth down his life for my sake shall find it again.’” Joseph was aware of transgressions among the Saints that had incurred divine displeasure. But because the innocent suffered, he wrote, “It is with difficulty that I can keep from complaining and murmuring against this dispensation.” (See *Writings*, pp. 308–9.)
66. See D&C 101:9–18.
67. See Stevenson, *Reminiscences of Joseph, the Prophet*, pp. 5–6; Andrus, *They Knew*, p. 85. Foxe’s

Book of Martyrs includes accounts of John Wycliffe, John Huss, William Tyndale, Robert Smith, the Albigenes and Waldenses, and “a godly woman” put to death under the reign of King Henry VIII.

68. D&C 122:9.

69. See HC 7:212; Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, p. 248; recollection of Lucy Walker Kimball in Littlefield, *Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints*, p. 45. After the martyrdom, Mother Smith recalled that in Missouri she had received a promise “that in five years Joseph should have power over all his enemies. The time had elapsed and the promise was fulfilled.” (*History of Joseph Smith*, p. 325.)

70. TS 5 (November 1, 1844): 698. Nine of the Twelve were present in this meeting. Absent were John E. Page, Lyman Wight, and William Smith. See diary of Oliver B. Huntington, vol. 2, p. 378.

71. To James A. Bennett, a journalist and politician in New York who was drawn to the Prophet’s character, he wrote, “On my part, I am ready to be offered up a sacrifice in that way that can bring to pass the greatest benefit and good” (HC 5:159). Explaining his running for the Presidency he said, “If I lose my life in a good cause I am willing to be sacrificed on the altar of virtue, righteousness and truth, in maintaining the laws and Constitution of the United States, if need be, for the general good of mankind” (TPJS, p. 332).

72. There were other wives at this point, Benjamin Johnson added, “yet Emma, the wife of his youth, to me, appeared the queen of his heart and of his home” (see *Benjamin F. Johnson Letter*, p. 4). Jesse N. Smith, for whom Joseph and Emma

provided a home, said of Emma: “I knew that queenly woman, his wife, Emma Smith. I may say that I was greatly impressed with her personality. She was the fitting helpmate of such a man. I stood in awe of this lady far more than I did of the Prophet himself, because she was so considerate of the feelings of the children.” (*Journal of Jesse Nathaniel Smith*, p. 454.)

73. The next day Jedediah M. Grant asked the Prophet why he had turned pale after the incident. Joseph explained by referring to the spirit of life or the “virtue,” as in the incident of the Master and the woman who touched his garment recorded in Luke 8:43–48. (See TPJS, pp. 280–81.)

74. See Levi Hancock’s account of Joseph Smith’s statement as told to his son, Mosiah Hancock, and recollected in “Life Story of Mosiah Lyman Hancock,” pp. 27–29.

75. See experiences of Edwin Rushton as related by his son in Andrus, *They Knew*, p. 171. Compare Brigham Young’s remarks: “Joseph said to me, ‘God will take care of my children when I am taken.’” President Young added: “They are in the hands of God, and when they make their appearance before this people, full of his power, there are none but what will say—‘Amen! we are ready to receive you.’” (JD 8:69.) See also entry of October 9, 1856, in journal of Wilford Woodruff.

For full citations see “Author’s Note on Sources, Abbreviations, and Bibliography” in the Joseph Smith Lecture Series.