

# *Going Forward with Faith During Difficult Times*

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**D**uring the past year we have seen much economic turmoil—banks failing, businesses laying off employees, home mortgages being foreclosed, and retirement accounts shrinking. Thousands have lost their jobs, and many worry about paying for necessities such as food, clothing, and housing. In January of this year the unemployment rate in the United States hit a 16-year high at 7.6 percent, and it continues to rise.

I am sure many of you students have asked yourselves, “After I graduate, will I be able to find employment?” In addition to economic troubles, across the globe terrorist threats continue and mistrust, misunderstanding, and hatred abound. It is a discouraging and disheartening time. As I thought about the challenges we face today, my mind went back to the struggles of my great-great-grandmother and my parents as well as to two of my favorite scriptures.

My great-great-grandmother Eliza Cusworth was born in England in 1824 and married Joseph Burton in 1846. They lived happily for a few years and had two children, Joseph and Martha. In 1849 two LDS missionaries came to the area, and both Eliza and Joseph listened to them, gained testimonies of the gospel, and were baptized. The counsel

of the prophet at that time was for the Saints to migrate to Utah. Joseph and Eliza started saving so that they could make the journey.

Joseph was employed as a carrier delivering goods from the depot to various stores. While lifting at work he broke a blood vessel, which resulted in his death a short time later. His dying request to Eliza was for her to migrate to Utah so she could do their temple work and raise their children among the Saints in Zion. Eliza promised him she would do this.

Understandably, both Eliza’s and Joseph’s families discouraged her from making what they said was “a foolish journey.” Eliza’s mother said that if Eliza would stay with them, they would take care of her and her children, and she would want for nothing. Joseph’s family offered to give her any amount of money if she would stay in England. It was a difficult decision for Eliza. However, she had made a promise to her dying husband, and she knew the gospel was true, so she chose to go.

In the spring of 1856, at age 32, Eliza packed her trunks and embarked on the 6,000-mile journey with Joseph and Martha, her two

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children. They went by train to Liverpool, England, and boarded the ship *Horizon* on May 25, 1856. During the voyage Eliza suffered from severe seasickness. It got so bad that for about 10 days she was unable even to care for her children. The *Horizon* landed in Boston on June 30, 1856, and then Eliza and her children traveled by boat and train to Iowa City, Iowa, where the railway ended. She had planned to join a wagon train at Iowa City; however, upon arrival she discovered that they were too late—the last of the wagon trains had already gone. She had no choice but to wait for handcarts to be made. When the handcarts were ready, the travelers were told they would have to leave most of their belongings behind, as they could bring only necessities on the handcarts. Eliza’s trunks contained many of her valuable possessions—silverware, linen, bedsheets, and clothing. Most of it had to be left behind.

Eliza joined the Martin Handcart Company, which left Iowa City on July 30, 1856, for the 1,300-mile trek to Salt Lake City. She pulled the handcart, little seven-year-old Joseph walked and helped her pull the cart part of the time, and four-year-old Martha rode in the handcart. During the first part of the journey everyone got along quite well. At night many would gather around the campfires after supper and sing songs such as “Come, Come, Ye Saints.” However, travel was slower than expected because they had to stop frequently to repair the hurriedly made handcarts.

The days wore on, and the members of the company tried to encourage one another. Often the only fuel available was buffalo chips with which they made fires to do their cooking and dry their clothing. After a while their food began to run low. Sometimes the men were able to kill buffalo, but after the company’s store of salt gave out, the meat often made them sick. Toward the latter part of their journey, the food was almost gone, and rations were reduced to one-fourth pound of flour per person per day. The season was getting late

and the nights were cold—their clothing was thin, and they had little bedding. In their weakened condition, many became discouraged and wondered if they would ever reach the Salt Lake Valley.

When the company reached Devil’s Gate, they ran out of food entirely. At some ranchers’ cabins they tried to buy food, but the ranchers could sell them only some pelts of deer and mountain sheep that were dry and old. After soaking them and scraping off the hair, they cooked them into a soup that was thickened with their last remaining flour. Eating this helped relieve their hunger for a time.

Eliza waded across the Sweetwater River three times in one evening. First, she took little Joseph across on her back. When she reached the other side, Joseph was so frightened that he wouldn’t stay by himself and tried to follow her back. Eliza had to tie him to a nearby tree while she went back to get Martha. Then she had to go back a third time to get her handcart. She spent part of the night in freezing weather drying her clothes over the fire.

An early winter storm struck as the group was plodding its way along the Sweetwater River about 50 miles north of what is now Rawlins, Wyoming. The company waded through an icy stream and sought shelter in a nearby cove. Using frying pans and tin plates, they cleared the snow away as best they could and pitched their tents beside a tiny spring. As the desperate Saints huddled together in the cove, everyone hoped and prayed that they could survive until help arrived.

Brigham Young heard that the handcart company was marooned in the snow and sent rescuers with teams and food to assist them. More than one-fourth of the 500 members of the Martin Handcart Company perished, and many more would have died had Brigham Young not sent the rescuers. Eliza and her two children suffered greatly, but somehow they made it, arriving in the Salt Lake Valley on November 30, 1856.

When Eliza reached the Salt Lake Valley, she inquired about William Cusworth, a cousin who had gone to Utah earlier in the season in a wagon train and with whom she intended to make her home for a while. She learned that he had become discouraged and had taken his family back to Iowa. She and her children were taken to the home of Isaac Leney, where they received care for a few weeks. Little Joseph lost two of his toes because his feet had been frozen.

They eventually settled in Pleasant Grove, where Eliza met and married Nathan Staker, a widower with several children. Eliza and Nathan moved to Mount Pleasant, where they helped pioneer Sanpete County. In addition to Joseph and Martha, Eliza had four children with Nathan Staker: three daughters and one son. Eliza raised her children and was a faithful Latter-day Saint all of her life, dying at age 90.

By any objective standard it was foolish for her, a single mother with two young children, to attempt the 6,000-mile journey by boat, train, and handcart. Why did she do it? Because she wanted to keep a promise she had made to her husband. As I look back on her decision 153 years later, I believe she did the right thing. She was able to make it safely, have her and Joseph's temple work done, and raise their children in Zion. Because she was true to the promises she made to her husband and to God, I and her other descendants have been blessed beyond measure. I am confident that she and her husband Joseph are now together. I bless her name and am proud to call her my great-great-grandmother. One day when I meet her, I will embrace her and thank her for having the courage and humility to keep a promise to her husband and to follow the counsel of a prophet.

I also think of my mother and father and how they faced the troubles of their day. They both entered BYU in the 1930s during the Great Depression. They met at BYU, married in 1936,

and had their first child early in 1938 while they were still in school. They struggled to pay tuition and to earn enough money for food and rent. My father majored in agronomy, and as he approached graduation in 1938, the unemployment rate was 15 percent, about twice what it is today. He wondered if he would be able to find a job and support his wife and child. One of his professors encouraged him to take the civil service exam, and he did well enough on the exam that he was offered a job with the Soil Conservation Service within the Department of Agriculture. He was assigned to do soil surveys in New England, North Dakota—a small town in the southwestern part of the state. It was not where he or his wife would have chosen to go, but it was a job, and they went.

When they arrived, they discovered that there were no other members of the Church in the town. Dad and Mother held Sunday School in our home, and occasionally the full-time missionaries, who served in Dickinson, 30 miles to the north, would visit us. Money was tight, and some vital commodities were rationed during World War II, including gasoline, meat, sugar, and butter. These items were in short supply, and rationing was the only way to make sure everyone got their fair share. Even if you had money to buy more, you were only allowed to buy small amounts of the rationed items.

When I was six we moved to Dickinson, North Dakota, and after 14 years of marriage, my parents were able to buy a home. The economic situation improved somewhat after World War II; we had basic necessities, but with six children it was a challenge for my parents to meet their expenses. My mother taught us Primary at home, and we held church in our living room with our family, the two full-time missionaries, and Frank Whitney, the only other Church member in the town at the time. Gradually the Church grew—several families moved in, and a few were baptized. We rented a hall in the community center to hold church

services. My Dad worked with the local Lions Club and Methodist Church to start a Scout program.

When I was 13 my dad was transferred to Bismarck, North Dakota, a beautiful little town on the Missouri River. My parents bought a three-bedroom rambler with an unfinished basement and no garage, and our family had one car, which we all shared. Mother took a job as a medical stenographer. I was happy that there was a small branch of the Church in Bismarck with several other teenagers. Our branch met in the basement of a local hotel, and as we set up for church on Sunday mornings, we usually had to clear away a few beer cans that had been left from the night before. As the branch grew, we were able to rent a small church from the Seventh-day Adventists.

At that time, Church policy was that local units had to earn a certain percentage of the cost before they could build a chapel. I remember many branch bake sales being held so we could earn money and one day have our own chapel. In addition, members were encouraged to contribute what they could to the building fund, but the branch was small and most members could not afford to give much. Accumulation of funds was slow, and I wondered if we would ever be able to build our own chapel. Finally, when I reached age 18—after years of dreaming, planning, and working—we had earned enough to pay our share of the cost to build a small chapel.

After I left North Dakota, the Church continued to grow. The Bismarck Stake was organized in the 1980s, and then in 1998 a small temple was constructed. For those of us who grew up in North Dakota and lived through the early struggles, the construction of a temple in Bismarck was a miracle that we had never dreamed could happen. Prior to that time the closest temple was in Idaho Falls, Idaho, 750 miles away.

My parents married and graduated during a challenging time—the Great Depression. They were sent to a cold and unknown place far from their families and their beloved Utah. Mother and Dad experienced North Dakota blizzards, rationing during the war, and the birth of a handicapped son. They went forward with faith and did the best they could during difficult times. As I look back on my life, I cherish the experiences I had in North Dakota. It is not where my parents would have chosen to raise us, but I thank God for sending them there. We associated with many good people of different faiths who enriched our lives, and we learned much from facing economic and spiritual challenges. I thank my parents for their faith and courage through much adversity. They taught us well and were true to their ideals.

Another inspiring example of great faith under severe economic adversity is recorded in 1 Kings 17. There was a severe drought, and the Lord told Elijah to go dwell in Zarephath, where a widow would sustain him. In verses 8 through 16 it states:

*And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, . . . and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.*

*So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.*

*And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.*

*And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.*

*And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake*

*first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.*

*For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.*

*And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.*

*And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah.*

Finally, Nephi was a wonderful example of faith during a time of great adversity. As recorded in 1 Nephi 16, after he broke his bow his family was “much fatigued,” “did suffer much for the want of food,” and “did begin to murmur exceedingly, because of their sufferings” (verses 19–20). While everyone else complained, Nephi tried to find a solution to the problem. He used his mind and the resources available to him to make a sling and a new bow, and with them he was able to obtain food. Nephi was as tired and hungry as everyone else, but rather than complain, he used his mind and energy to seek for a solution to the problem.

I gain courage and hope from the examples of my great-great-grandmother, my parents, the widow who fed Elijah, and Nephi. I have learned much from them, and I offer several suggestions that may be helpful to all of us as we face the problems and uncertainties of today.

First, as we face difficulties, we can use our minds and the resources God has given us to seek solutions to our problems. If we spend our energies trying to solve problems rather than complaining about them or blaming others, we will have fewer problems.

Second, every difficulty brings opportunities. Too often we stress over the closed doors rather than taking advantage of the open doors. Even in difficult economic times, I am confident that there are opportunities, and we will find them if we are diligent in looking for them.

Third, even though we may have very little, we can share what we have with those around us. The widow of Zarephath scarcely had sufficient food for herself and her son, but she shared with Elijah and had faith that the Lord would provide. As we exercise faith by sharing with others and paying our tithes and offerings, I am sure we will be blessed.

Finally, no matter how challenging our situations, if we trust in God, obey His laws, and offer our best efforts, He has promised to sustain us. His help will not always be in the way we prefer and may not come as quickly as we desire. Even with His help, the road may not be easy—but He will help us. Great blessings come when the faithful endure adversity.

I testify that our Father in Heaven and His Son live and love us. Our Savior wants us to succeed and will support us through our trials if we have the faith to follow Him and the counsel He has given through His prophets. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.