

“The Lord Is My Light”

JANET G. LEE

Today marks a fresh beginning for students, teachers, administrators, and staff, as well as parents, friends, and all those connected with a new school term. Others listening may be charting unfamiliar courses as life’s circumstances constantly change. But as we all know, walking an unknown path—even when we have chosen to pursue that course—comes with feelings of excitement and joy that are sometimes shrouded with apprehension and fear.

In a few months Rex and I will open a new chapter in *our* lives as he retires from the presidency of BYU. We leave you with our love and appreciation along with our hope that your future will be bright and rewarding. It is not easy for us to close the book on this segment of our journey that has been so blessed with the intermingling of your lives. As Rex and I walk hand-in-hand into our new adventure, we want to walk in faith instead of in fear.

With a desire to remind myself and others who might have cause to be afraid of new challenges, I want to share some thoughts concerning why we should not be fearful. Many years ago Elder Franklin D. Richards said that the consequence of fear is that it “destroys faith and deprives us of many blessings”

(*CR*, October 1968, p. 113). Understanding this concept helps us realize the reason we are so often cautioned against fear in the scriptures. Comforting words from the Lord tell us: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee” (Isaiah 41:10).

Recently I found something I had written about my childhood that brought faith and fear into perspective for me. As a child, I failed to see the symbolism in the experience, but as an adult, standing at the edge of an unknown path, it now holds great meaning.

When I was very young, my family lived in a beautiful little community in New Jersey that surrounded a lake. It was a child’s paradise. In summer we splashed in cool water, climbed lush trees, and picked wild flowers and berries. In winter, snow and ice gave variety to our play as we skated, sledged, and built carrot-nosed snowmen. In any season we rarely tired of the great outdoors and reluctantly ventured inside only when it was dark.

Janet G. Lee, wife of Rex E. Lee, gave this devotional address at Brigham Young University on 5 September 1995.

One summer evening was an exception. I had been invited to a friend's house to watch a favorite television program. When it was time to go, I said good-bye and began walking home along the winding, wooded path between our two houses.

In the darkness, the path I thought I knew became a fearsome jungle. I couldn't see the occasional gnarled roots and sharp rocks protruding from the packed-down earth, and I tripped and fell. With my face in the dirt, sobs of frustration and fear wracked my seven-year-old body. As my tears subsided, I remained face down and immobile for a few seconds, fearing that I might be eaten by monsters, which were surely lurking behind every tree.

Then I remembered that before leaving home, my brother had tucked his penlight into my pocket, explaining that it would be dark when I returned. Relieved to find it just where he had placed it, I stood up, brushed off the dirt, and turned on the light. Although it produced only a dime-sized circle on the ground where I pointed it, and I couldn't get the full vision of what was on either side or ahead of me, I *could* see where to step safely. And so, hesitantly, I headed for home, hoping that I was going in the right direction.

My confidence increased with my new visibility, and, glancing up for a brief moment, I became aware of another light at the end of the path. I was relieved to recognize it as my porch light. Someone who cared about my safe return had turned it on for me. I was still groping step by step along the path, but with my destination in sight my fear diminished.

Then, suddenly, my little circle of light grew broader. At first I questioned the power of my tiny penlight, so I stopped and turned it around to examine its intensity. Despite the small circle of light now shining in my face, the path ahead was flooded with light illuminated by another source. Puzzled, I looked up and could see my older brother standing a few feet away, directing his Boy Scout flashlight on

my path. With this added light came a new perspective. I could now see my path more clearly, and with increased vision I was aware of the dangers on either side.

I couldn't see the details along the entire stretch of my journey, but with my light now strengthened by my brother's and the porch light marking my goal, I no longer felt afraid. I held my little light tightly, letting it shine where the brilliance of his led the way. That joint effort glowed gloriously. I could see now that each step in the right direction took me closer to my destination. With my tiny circle joining my brother's larger light, we walked together toward home.

When we were almost there I asked, "How did you know I needed help, that I couldn't find my way alone?"

"I just knew," was his only reply. And he took my hand and led me safely inside.

Each of us who comes to this earth has had a light tucked into our pocket by a kind and loving Elder Brother so that we might see our path of life more clearly. He has told us, "I am the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (D&C 93:2). How comforting it is to know that we are better prepared for the darkness of this world than we sometimes realize. And when our path becomes dark and we trip along the way, the monsters of life can seem very real as we lie in the dirt, wondering what will become of us. At those times we need to remember our gift of light and with renewed faith put fears aside, pick ourselves up, brush ourselves off, and go on. "Fear not," the Savior reassures us, "I am with you always."

Our "porch light" is the gospel of Jesus Christ that shines as a beacon, pointing out our destination and directing our footsteps. His gospel is exactly why we need not fear. We can find comfort in knowing that a loving Heavenly Father has turned on the porch light to protect us from the darkness of the world.

But when we lose sight of that destination and our little light becomes dim, we lose our way and falter. Then, how important it is for us to humble ourselves before our Heavenly Father in prayer seeking guidance. And sometimes even when we do not ask, our Elder Brother “just knows” when to shine his light along our darkened path, guiding us and giving needed perspective so that we can find our way safely home.

Even now for brief moments I occasionally feel like that seven-year-old child as I look out at the darkness of the unknown. At such times I remind myself that it was the light shed along my wooded childhood path that took away my fear and led me safely home. I was not given an easier path to walk—the gnarled roots and sharp rocks were still there—but with light I could see where I was going and was given help in getting there. We all need help. We cannot walk our paths alone in darkness.

The words of a favorite hymn express this concept beautifully:

*The Lord is my light; then why should I fear?
By day and by night his presence is near. . . .
The Lord is my light; tho clouds may arise,
Faith, stronger than sight, looks up thru the
skies. . . .
My weakness in mercy he covers with pow’r,
And, walking by faith, I am blest ev’ry hour.*
[“The Lord Is My Light,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 89]

That night long ago I was grateful for a sensitive, caring older brother who with his light helped me return home. Today, many years and experiences of life later, I want to tell you of my gratitude for our sensitive and caring Elder Brother, Jesus Christ. I know that he is the Savior and the Light of this world. I know that he stands ready to share his light with each of us, to help us find our way out of darkness and back to our heavenly home. I know that he has given us the gospel as a beacon to direct our footsteps. I pray that we will remember our gift of light, keep our eye on the light of the gospel, and walk in the path of righteousness illuminated by the light and life of our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ, in whose name I pray. Amen.