

No Joy Without the Struggle

BARBARA W. WINDER

Everyone Struggles

Do any of you ever get discouraged? Men, women, fathers, mothers, young and old—discouragement comes to all. Let me share with you a story about a discouraged young college man. This young man couldn't get enthusiastic about anything. He didn't seem to have any sense of responsibility. He lacked motivation. I suppose there was no mission call, no engagement, nothing exciting on the horizon.

He had a mature friend who came to him and said, "I can help you. Let *me* accept full responsibility for you, for your worries." He then told him, "I'm going to pay your tuition and I'm going to buy your clothes, and then I'll give you an automobile with a credit card for gas."

Does that sound like it would take a few of your worries away?

"And when you marry, I'll look for a wife for you." (I've heard of some cultures where they do that.) "And after you're married, I'll even buy a house for you, and I'll furnish it. Now, what do you think of that? Do you like my offer?"

I can see some very thoughtful faces right now. And this young man became thoughtful. He looked sober for a few minutes and then

replied, "Well, if you did that, what would there be for me to live for?"

"Exactly. That is what I wanted you to see," said the man. "There is no joy without struggle and the exercise of one's own abilities."

This story was told in general conference by President Lee in 1972. But, you see, life's struggles go on—whether it is 1972 or 1982 or 1987 they are pretty much the same, aren't they?

I am impressed each day as I travel, read the newspaper, and hear the news on the radio or see it on television how many problems there are in the world: crime, accidents, sickness, natural and man-made disasters, hunger, and poverty. There seems to be no end to it. All of this may lead us to believe that there is nothing good occurring.

Of course that isn't true. Every day there are great events happening all around us—acts of heroism, courage, faithfulness, determination, commitment—things that may not seem newsworthy but are significant nonetheless. How wonderful it is when people can over-

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come discouragement, can rise above personal loss and move forward, gaining a victory where defeat appeared to be certain.

Each of us becomes discouraged at times. This is normal. But we need to recognize that we are not the only ones who have problems, and we must learn to be supportive of one another. It is easy to look at others and think how serene and trouble free their lives are and to feel sorry for ourselves. I was astonished one day when a neighbor, who had experienced a disappointment in her career, exclaimed angrily to me, as if I had caused her difficulty, “You don’t know what it is like to have troubles. Everything has always gone smoothly for you. You’ve never had any frustrations or rejections in your life.” Little did she know that at that time I had great concerns about one of my sons who was afflicted with a life-threatening illness. My problems were as troubling to me as her’s were to her.

When I was working in Lambda Delta Sigma, one of our national officers was a single girl named Diane. One of the young college women with whom Diane had been relating had a lot of problems, and she expressed her feelings to me like this: “Well, none of *you* have any problems. Diane is perfect and she has everything going for her.” As she said those words, I inwardly reflected on Diane’s life. She had lost her sister to cancer, and now her only living relatives were this sister’s two motherless children. Diane’s mother had passed away just a couple of years earlier, and her father had died when she was only a child. So Diane quit her job at the Church Office Building and took care of those preschool children full-time. She lost all her benefits, retirement, seniority—everything—in order to care for them. She mothered those children for a year and a half until her brother-in-law remarried and could again provide nurturing care for them in his own home. I thought, “This girl does not see at all what Diane is going through.” Sometimes we have a tendency to think, “I’m the only one

that has a mountain to climb, the only one with a problem.” We need to know that others also have problems and that the purpose of this life is to be tested, to experience both joy and sorrow.

Help from the Lord

The Prophet Joseph Smith cried to the Lord from Liberty Jail, in anguish of soul, at one of the most difficult periods of his life, and received this answer:

If thou art called to pass through tribulation; if thou art in peril among false brethren; if thou art in perils among robbers; if thou art in perils by land or by sea;

If thou art accused with all manner of false accusations; if thine enemies fall upon thee; if they tear thee from the society of thy father and mother and brethren and sisters; and if with a drawn sword thine enemies tear thee from the bosom of thy wife, and of thine offspring, and thine elder son, although but six years of age, shall cling to thy garments, and shall say, My father, my father, why can’t you stay with us? O, my father, what are the men going to do with you? And if then he shall be thrust from thee by the sword, and thou be dragged to prison, and thine enemies prowl around thee like wolves for the blood of the lamb;

And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience and shall be for thy good.

The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?

. . . Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever.

[D&C 122:5–9]

Few of us will ever pass through such adversity as Joseph Smith endured, but we will all need our Father's comfort and admonition many times in our lives.

I remember one particular day in the San Diego Mission Home, when my husband was the mission president. It was time to bid one group of missionaries good-bye and welcome and train new ones. The zone leaders were in for training. Food had to be prepared. Linens needed to be changed and laundry done. The home was crowded, full to overflowing; I was supposed to give the missionaries an encouraging, inspirational talk. I felt pressured, even desperate.

I found a quiet corner among the crowd and prayed almost out loud to Heavenly Father, asking, "What am I to do about all these responsibilities that come so fast? There is no time to prepare. Please help me." I suppose I expected the sympathetic words of a parent to come to me, "You poor, dear child." But instead I heard a voice saying, "This is not your time, but my time." The voice was firm and strong, and from that I knew I should rely on the Lord and I would find help from him.

I began my scripture study in earnest, first priority. I am so grateful now for that inspiration. I received great solace and comfort as I read the Book of Mormon. A guide came to me when I read Alma 37:35–37.

Learn wisdom . . . to keep the commandments of God. . . .

. . . cry unto God for all thy support; yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and withersoever thou goest let it be in the Lord; yea, let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever.

Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God;

and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

I have put these things to the test and bear witness that they are true. If we rely on the Lord, live his gospel, converse with him daily, and are obedient to his teachings, he will provide the way for us to accomplish his work!

This lesson continues to bless me and bear me up.

The Eternal Nature of Things

Our Heavenly Father *is* our Father, and he is watching over us, looking after us, guiding us, and directing us. And he will be there to help us if we have questions, problems, or trials if we will but go to him. And then, through the strength we find in him, our lot will not seem so difficult.

The gospel helps us to put things in their proper perspective, to see the eternal nature of things, and, through faith, to overcome our problems and recognize that many of them are blessings in disguise. Sometimes those who have suffered the greatest tragedies in life are brought to recognize that even those tragedies have been great blessings for growth and development.

Botanists say that trees need to flex their trunks and main branches so the sap is drawn up to nourish the budding leaves. In a like manner, perhaps we too need the gales of life, as difficult as they are to endure. A blustery period is often the prelude to a new spring of life if we keep steadfast in faith and look to the good.

Faith to overcome is what we need to help us in our trials. A number of years ago, a man in our community impressed me with his testimony. He was a convert from Ireland, joining the Church against the wishes of his family. They disowned him and never spoke to him again. Tragedy seemed to follow him. His first child developed a serious illness that left him \$5,000 in debt (a huge sum at that time). Not

long after this, his bishop called in sixty faithful members of his ward, telling them they needed to raise \$30,000 immediately. When the bishop called for a show of hands of those who would contribute substantially, his faith wavered momentarily, but his wife quickly held up his hand. He did make his contribution, and the windows of heaven opened. Somehow he was able to pay his debts as well. He recounted what great blessings had come to him because he was faithful.

Barbara Jayne Richards

Not long ago we went to a wedding and saw the parents of a girl I knew a number of years ago—a girl who had been a great inspiration to me. I asked these parents, “How is Barbara doing?” They said, “She is doing just fine.” Let me share her story with you in her words, which appeared in the *Instructor* a number of years ago. Barbara was a student at BYU at the time this incident occurred.

It was just a normal, ordinary day. . . . We were driving home from California. It was raining, and the roads were slick. The driver lost control. I remember the sensation of the car turning over and over, shutting my eyes, being tossed about with no control, the banging of my head and arms, the pain and confusion, and then the final, awful silence—it was over. When I opened my eyes it was to a new and frightening world—to the reality of being paralyzed from the waist down.

Once I might have thought of paralysis only as a terrible tragedy, but after it became a part of my life I discovered it could also bring blessings. My paralysis introduced me to a whole new way of living, to many wonderful people, to a new assemblage of problems, adjustments, frustrations, tears, laughter, and joy. [I gained an] appreciation for myself as a person and as a child of God, appreciation for other people, and especially a love and appreciation for my Father in heaven.

Oh, what a self-image I used to have! I used to feel self-conscious wearing glasses; and now I had to

“wear” a wheelchair. I used to be embarrassed if I did a clumsy, awkward thing . . . ; and now clumsy was my middle name. I used to think people stared at me before, but now! . . . I had to learn to laugh so others would feel at ease around me and I wouldn’t feel so self-conscious. It may seem strange, but I appreciate myself more now than before I was paralyzed.

I used to take so many things for granted, things like showering, kneeling for prayers, dressing in a minute, getting places quickly. Now it is a challenge to do these once-simple things. (Just try getting out of a bathtub without using your legs.) I guess it took losing the use of my legs to make me start appreciating the physical body I have. Now I became very grateful for a clear mind with which to think, ears to hear, eyes to see . . . , hands that could do so many things.

Although I can’t dance, hike, play volleyball or basketball anymore, I have found there are still many things I can do from a wheelchair. I can drive a car, swim better than before, play doubles in tennis, bowl, play catch in softball (nobody dares try to slide home), cook, sew . . . , and do many other enjoyable things.

Since that eventful day [of my accident], I’ve realized the world is full of special people. How grateful I have become for a family who loves me—for parents who have stood by without a complaint, without a moment’s hesitation, willing to give unselfishly of their time, money and love.

Going back to the Brigham Young University put me in a position where I had to rely on people to pull me up stairs, open doors, reach books, push me through snow, etc. I became indebted to my understanding, patient, helpful, loving roommates and friends. . . . I was also fortunate to have . . . professors who [helped] me when the physical facilities . . . limited my accomplishments. These instructors encouraged me when I was discouraged, helped me achieve in my studies, and were especially supportive while I worked to earn my degrees and my teaching certificate.

Later I was blessed to meet Mr. Alma Edwards, who gave me the opportunity to [be a physical

education instructor] at West Lake Junior High School in Salt Lake City. Here at last I proved to myself and others that I could do a useful, productive job in society.

Because so many have done so much for me, I have learned how important it is to serve anyone in any way I can.

Perhaps the greatest blessing which came from my "tragedy" was the love and appreciation I developed for my Father in heaven. Without the gospel . . . , this life in a wheelchair would be hard to bear. After my accident I had to depend completely on the Lord for the first time in my life. He became a real person with whom I could talk and who would help me to solve the problems and make the adjustments that were to come. Without my understanding of God as my . . . loving, concerned Father, I would be in the same rut I have seen so many others in—that of blaming God for my misfortune.

If I had to choose the one thing that has helped me most in my adjustment it would be what Elder Harold B. Lee said in a blessing he gave me one Sunday in the hospital.

*"Barbara, the Lord loves you," he said. With this knowledge what more did I need (what more does anyone need!) to keep trying, . . . to find reason and purpose in my life, to be happy, joyful and grateful for life, even in a wheelchair! [Barbara Jayne Richards, "A Joyful Life (in a Wheelchair)," *Instructor*, July 1970, pp. 224–45]*

I am happy to report that Barbara Richards served for many years as a girls' physical education teacher, instructing and influencing for good hundreds and hundreds of young women. She has continued to set goals for herself. She wanted to get a Ph.D., so set the goal and achieved it. Being in a wheelchair presented weight problems. She needed to lose forty pounds. She set the goal and achieved it.

Barbara is now teaching at the University of Utah. Her story teaches us so many lessons. When she talks about how self-conscious she used to be, worrying about her clumsiness, her looks, and what other people might think

of her, I thought about how I felt when I was growing up, having those same kinds of concerns—concerns that each of us has—about our looks, our appearance, and what it takes to make us appealing to those about us. Some young people were asked in a recent survey, "What is it that makes a man successful?" Can you think what those teens replied? According to the survey, it is money. What is the second thing that makes men successful, according to those young people? Their appearance—their looks. And with a woman—what is it that makes her successful? Number one thing: appearance. Number two thing: money. Perhaps our values are not where they ought to be. Barbara learned, through this hard, hard experience, something of the deeper and more meaningful values in life.

Jesus gave us some instructions about those who worry too much about themselves:

Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field. . . .

. . . even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field . . . shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? . . .

But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. [Matthew 6:27–33]

I was impressed by Barbara's recognition of all the good things done for her by her friends, relatives, and particularly her Father in Heaven, and by how she realizes that she must reciprocate and give service to those about her.

Remember the words of King Benjamin to his people:

Learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of God.

I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you . . . and is preserving you from day to day . . . I say if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye (still) would be unprofitable servants. [Mosiah 2:17, 21]

Barbara learned the importance of having a testimony of our Heavenly Father's love from the statement of President Lee as he blessed her, "Barbara, the Lord loves you."

He love all of us and will help and guide us if we will but let him. How reassuring it is for us to have this knowledge, and how helpful when things are difficult. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). We must know how important each one of us is.

This Life Is Our Test

I have another good friend—a contemporary of mine—Geneva Brown. She has also been a great inspiration to me. A number of years ago she became afflicted with multiple sclerosis. Her health steadily deteriorated, confining her to a wheelchair. It would have been an easy thing for her to give up, but it was not her nature. She was a person who was used to doing and being busy in all kinds of things. But she has shown more determination than ever and has kept herself busy.

We saw her one day just coming out of the temple. I watched as her husband wheeled her across the street from the temple to the car, as he opened the door, and as she lifted herself from the wheelchair into the car. I kept wanting to reach out and help her some way. But she has learned how to manage. She is interested in people and things. How easy it would have been for her to refuse a calling in the Church, even to be a visiting teacher. Certainly she had an excuse. She didn't need to be a visiting teacher, but it was not her nature to quit. She was able to drive a car with special

controls, so she would go on her visiting teaching rounds with her companion. When she arrived at the home of the sister to be visited, a beep of the horn would bring the sister out of her home to sit in the back seat of the car and be taught. Neighbors along the street, seeing the fun that was going on, would come out of their homes and join them until the car was full. Many were lifted and edified by this wonderful woman who was willing to push on and go the extra mile.

We might ask, "If God is a kind, loving father, why would he allow his children to suffer"? We must remember that he does not bring hardships upon us, that this life is our test, and that all of these things "shall give [us] experience and shall be for [our] good" (D&C 122:7). We grow and develop spiritually by the things we experience. If there were no sadness we would not know joy; without bitterness we would not recognize the sweetness. We need the contrasts in order to progress.

I remember President Kimball talking about those who were disgruntled because God didn't do all they asked him to. He pointed out the folly of such thinking. If all our prayers were answered to our satisfaction, there would never be any sickness, no deaths, not unpleasant events, no poverty; but neither would there be growth. There would be no test for any of us. The purpose of our creation would be frustrated.

Some of our greatest problems can be the most help as we work through to the solution or toward overcoming these obstacles. And it is there in the growth and development of our character that we find great happiness and joy.

As Happy As We Want To Be

A couple of summers ago my husband and I went on a trip down the Danube River. We went down into the area around the Black Sea and across to Istanbul. Each day there were excursions into the various Eastern European countries. Some of them were quite taxing and

tiring and required a lot of walking. A number of the tourists grumbled about everything. It was too hot or too cold or there was too much walking. It was too far. There was too much time between meals, and when we did get them, the meals weren't very good, and so on. You've seen those kinds of people. But we were very impressed with the cheerful disposition of a particular woman on the ship—a lovely lady. We never heard her complain about anything, and she was always smiling. Each day as we watched her, we would hear her exclaim happily over things that delighted her. She was a joy to be around—lifting the spirits of all who associated with her. And what was even more impressive about her was that this cheerful lady walked with difficulty and with a cane. In visiting with her we learned that she had been in an accident some time ago that required the amputation of a leg. One of her legs was artificial. Certainly she must have gone through many agonizing moments wondering why such a calamity had befallen her. Undoubtedly, at some point she realized she was blessed, that things could have been worse, that she yet had much to offer, and that feeling sorry for herself would not make her happy. She may have even reflected on the statement of the Savior when he said, "Be of good cheer," or perhaps when he said, "Let not your heart be troubled," and recognized that we can be as happy as we want to be.

We Need To Count Our Blessings

A great burden to me during my growing-up years was the fact that my folks were not active in the Church. I sensed that I was missing out on many of the things that others were enjoying. The depression was on. Jobs were hard to get. Because of this, our family moved frequently. Though we had to do without many material things, that never seemed a hardship to me. But always there was the longing that my parents would feel the importance of church activity. I loved them dearly and it

hurt to see what was happening in our home. The Word of Wisdom was not observed. There was not the closeness and solidarity that appeared to be in the homes of my friends. I craved that peaceful atmosphere that was lacking. Fortunately, each place we moved there were good people who would encourage me and welcome me. I came to know the importance of the Church and the gospel. It hurt so much on the day of my wedding when my parents were not able to enter the temple but remained outside while that special ceremony took place. I am happy to report that later, through the help of caring friends and my loving husband, my parents did become active and were able to enjoy those blessing they had missed for so many years.

Just recently my mother and I returned to the neighborhood where we had lived when I was baptized. The area is shabby and forlorn. The house where we lived looked so tiny and run down. A great feeling of sadness came over me, not because of the humble circumstances, but because I vividly remembered how I felt as a child, knowing I was missing blessings that could have been mine.

Life is full of frustrations and challenges. Often we feel inadequate to deal with them. It is important that we recognize where help lies. A courageous divorced sister with the responsibility of raising six children wrote:

Gradually I am coming to realize that God is as close as or closer to us when we don't feel good as when we do . . .

. . . He relates to each of us intimately, personally, and with unwavering attention. We only need to ask. He is unchanging, eternal, and immovable in His tenderness, His forgiveness, His absolute love. . . . We can call upon Him for guidance, comfort, and support, we can feel His arms about us, His smiling eyes encouraging us, at any moment, no matter how stupid or inept or impatient or selfish we may have been. [Frances Warden, "To Always Have His Spirit," Single Sheet—A Publication of the

Utah Valley Program for Single Adults, January 1987, pp. 1–2]

When we are in the midst of the gale, remember the gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news. We are so blessed to have a knowledge of it. We need to constantly count our blessings. We have the physical things we need: food, clothing, shelter, and, as my dear counselor said the other day, we have plumbing—running water, potable water. What a blessing! We have opportunities for schooling to learn, develop our talents, and progress. We live in a free country. We usually have good health. We have friends and associates whom we love and who love and care about us. We have the knowledge of God’s plan for us. What more could we ask?

I’d like to share with you a poem that was written by Leila Grace Bassford called “Prerequisite.”

*I prayed for strength when life pulsed low
Until God answered me:
“Go, lift the load of weary ones
Then I will strengthen thee.”*

*I asked for courage when hope despaired,
Then came a voice benign:
“Inspire with faith thy brother’s soul,
And I’ll inspire thine.”*

*I longed for light when darkness made
Me stumble through the night:
“Thy lamp held high for others’ feet
Will make thy pathway bright.”*

*I prayed that wisdom, talent, skill
Increased their meager store:
“First, share the portions that you have,
And I will give thee more.”*

*At length I learned that blessings sought,
And help for which I pray,
Are only mine when shed abroad
And given, first, away.*

[Leila Grace Bassford, in *Especially for Mormons*, vol. 3, compiled by Stan and Sharon Miller (Provo, Utah: Kellirae Arts, 1976), p. 252]

I’ll close with a statement from Philippians that I think is so appropriate for us. “This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13–14). There can be joy in the struggle as we exercise our abilities and press toward the mark.

Brothers and sisters, our Heavenly Father loves us! Jesus Christ is our hope. As we lose ourselves in their service we will be blessed and helped to overcome our difficulties. I know that our Savior dies for us, that he made it possible for us to have eternal life and exaltation. It is my prayer that each of us finds the testimony of that hope and shares it with others. I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.