

HARDSHIPS

When we were asked to speak today, the question naturally arose, "What shall we speak about?" We were told that we should talk about the experiences that have shaped our lives over these past years. It would be natural to talk about the many happy things that have transpired in our lives as we have filled many church assignments and lived in wonderful places, but as I have thought about today's assignment, I would like to talk about some of the struggles and difficulties that have had far more impact upon me than fair weather days or carefree seasons.

I have discovered through my study of the scriptures and the history of the Church, that my experiences with personal challenges are not unique, nor are they equal to the great sacrifices and struggles of our forbearers. I have often thought of those who slept on the ground in the frigid weather of the Plains on their way to the Great Basin, and earlier still, of the privations of the Saints in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. In a moment of exquisite grief during the Prophet's incarceration in Liberty Jail the Lord spoke words to Joseph Smith that might well be a theme for my remarks today. (Quote D & C 122:7)

"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."

I draw your attention to this phrase, "Shall give thee experience." There is something about challenging experiences that leave us better if we approach them in the spirit of faith. Indeed, Hugh B. Brown, who served as a Counselor in the First Presidency with President David O. McKay, reportedly said, "My soul has grown the most from those experiences I would have avoided, had it been possible."

I didn't cross the plains, nor have I ever faced truly great privations, but I have grown enormously from two or three ordeals of faith. In my late teens and early 20's (about the same age as many of you) I frequently posed the question, "How does one really know when true love has been discovered?" And though there were numerous relationships, none of them proved really satisfying. I suppose I began to wonder if I would ever find someone with whom I could be eternally happy. Towards the end of my college days I found myself in a relationship which seemed to be moving towards marriage, and as the young man involved returned from his mission I had completed college and was teaching school in Salt Lake City. One thing led to another and soon I was wearing a diamond engagement ring. Such days should be enjoyed with moonlit skies and music in the air, as well as those special moments when one's feet seem to be barely touching the ground, but for me these were miserable days. I simply wasn't in love. The young man who sought my hand was wholesome and had high ideals, but the relationship just didn't feel

right. There was much fasting and prayer on my part that grew out of a deep fear that if I went ahead with the marriage I might never be truly happy. The spirit of the Lord came in answer to my prayers, suggesting that, indeed, these thoughts were correct—that this match would not really promote enduring happiness. Even though my personal feelings and the direction of the Holy Ghost pressed for a breaking of the engagement, there came fears with such a thought—fears that just kept coming and coming. I had finished school and was no longer part of the dating scene—in fact I had no exposure whatsoever to young men with whom marriage might be a possibility. Rather than attending a singles ward such as this one, I was attending a family ward. I feared that breaking the engagement would turn me into an old maid. Nevertheless, I felt the overwhelming need to be true to my feelings and to give credence to the warning that had been given me. The night I returned my engagement ring brought a momentary relief of my worries about the absence of love, only to intensify that other set of concerns. Now, some 45 years have come and gone since that difficult decision and some of the greatest joys of my entire life have come as a result of the marriage relationship, which unexpectedly came about only a few short months following this time of deep distress. God had plans for me, and I needed to press forward in confidence to realize the great blessing that was in store.

Early on in our marriage we made a significant decision. We would have all the children my physical health would allow. That decision grew out of great idealism, and though I would make the same decision today, knowing all that I now know, I did not know all the ramifications of this conscious choice. I became the mother of 10 children, which involved 90 months of pregnancy, and some of those days were full of distress. Raising 10 children meant that there would be no second income to sustain our large family, despite the overwhelming financial pressures that would be involved, and while I was making personal sacrifices to fulfill my dreams as a mother, I frequently became the object of criticism and even censure for having a large family during days wherein large families had become unpopular, and in the mind of some—unpatriotic. I remember taking 5 children to the public health clinic for immunization shots, only to have a nurse upbraid me for having so many children. “You need to investigate Planned Parenthood,” she said in a tone of sarcasm, to which I replied, “Oh, I have. I planned every one of them.” My flippant response dismissed some of the discomfort of the moment, but her humiliating remarks continued to sting in the days that followed. Although my husband was a hard worker and I was a careful manager of our household means, Christmases were meager, household furnishings were of a hand-me-down character, as were the children’s clothes. None of our children ever left the dinner table hungry, but frequently we served powdered milk and casserole meals with homemade bread that were a far cry from luxurious living—and our periodic family sojourns for 10 cent ice cream cones constituted as much as we could afford when it came to eating out. These were the days before disposable diapers, and for a time we did not even have a clothes dryer. We didn’t get one until I had three little ones in diapers. But even then it seemed that I was always at the end of a conveyor belt loaded with dirty diapers that needed laundering. In offering this explanation, I have no desire to suggest that we were unhappy as a family for there was great love and happiness in our home. But our children had no understanding of the pressures I felt as a mother to provide a happy home life for

them—they seem to know now, and appreciate it more now that they have families of their own.

I remember some years ago hearing a father of a large family being interviewed on a talk show. His large family made him something of a novelty, which led to the inevitable question, “So what’s it like to raise such a large family?” I was able to identify with his frank response, “It was wonderful, but very, very difficult.” On occasion people have asked me, “How did you manage with such a large family?” and then came my standard but very honest response, “I managed, but thank goodness they didn’t all come at once.” Now, at this stage of my life, I look back with such fondness at those pressure filled days, at early morning scripture study sessions with little ones, and even bigger ones, struggling to keep their eyes open, at family home evenings that gave our little ones the feeling that we were a special family, at family prayers that seemed to be whispering distance from heaven, at family vacations that looked to others as if an entire community were on the move, at late nights when the family congregated in mom and dad’s bedroom to report on dates and just hang out. These were happy, happy days, and as an empty nester I would give anything to go back and relive them, despite the incredible pressures involved.

My husband and I made another critically important decision as we approached marriage—that being that we would accept every opportunity to serve in the Church, to sustain the Brethren, to go where we were sent, and to fill every assignment to the best of our ability. For my husband, that lofty idealism put his life in the midst of a squeeze play in which family demands, priesthood responsibilities, and professional obligations seemed to all be in competition for the little bit of time available. I, too, felt that pressure, as he was gone early and late, attending meetings all day Sundays and frequently on weeknights. I began to understand what was meant by the term, “Priesthood widowhood.” But in retrospect, those pressures were like the pressures that temper steel or turn common coal into diamonds. I may not be a diamond, but I do believe that our experiences together have fashioned something precious and lustrous deep in my soul. The nights I waited as my husband served in 2 stake presidencies, and ultimately as a stake president, were as a benediction and blessing upon our lives as a family. I remember those days when, as a mother of 7, we were called to travel to Germany where my husband would preside over the Germany Hamburg Mission, and thus, again, a life of service brought intense pressure. I remember struggling to shop in a foreign country where I had no knowledge of the language nor even the rudimentary ability to read the labels on kitchen necessities. During the first week of our service in Hamburg we had a flood in the mission home while my husband was off conducting zone conferences, and that set the stage for more interesting challenges to follow. Adapting to a new culture and struggling for confidence in a foreign language left me feeling a day late and a dollar shy, nearly all of the time. Finally I hit a low spot wherein I began to wonder if I would be able to cope with all that was expected of me. I wanted to be supportive and happy, and yet there came a night when dark feelings poured out of me. “I’m not happy,” I said to my husband. “I’m not sure I like these people. I don’t like the language and I doubt that I’ll ever be able to learn it.” As a good husband should always do, he listened and did his best to comfort me. There was really nothing he could do, and there was nothing I could

do but to somehow make the adjustment, meet the demands, and cope with the stress involved. I don't know when it happened, but the blessings of heaven rescued me. Nothing changed so far as my circumstances were involved, and yet everything changed within me. I remember the night, many weeks later, as my husband and I knelt in prayer together. It was my turn to pray, and again the words flooded from my heart, but this time they expressed beautiful and sublime sentiments. "We are so grateful for Thy blessings," I said, "for this call to serve in this special place in the world among these wonderful people whom we love with all our hearts." I had crossed over into another world of feeling and appreciation. I suppose I had become stronger and that somehow my spiritual perspectives had both deepened and heightened, and when, at the end of 3 years, we turned our faces towards home, together with our 9 children, (two of them born in Germany) I was so loathe to say goodbye. I remember our experience at the Hamburg International Airport as we ascended the steps to our awaiting plane and as we looked back, there on the observation deck, we saw many, many dark-suited missionaries waving white handkerchiefs, according to the German tradition of saying goodbye. I wept all the way from Hamburg to London, and felt that a precious part of my soul had been left in Germany, even after we had returned to the United States. If I had the chance, I would go back and do it all over again without giving a thought to the pressures and difficulties involved.

And so I would counsel you, my young friends, not to feel too put upon when doing the right thing is associated with sacrifice. And I make you this promise, if you will simply do your best and persevere, night will turn to day and challenges will fashion priceless memories that you will enjoy throughout the balance of your life. The blessings of heaven cannot be purchased with pennies, nor do glorious memories come without some measure of personal sacrifice. And if, at some point, you feel that you have come up against a wall and doubt that you can go further with whatever challenge confronts you, remember the example of the Sons of Mosiah, some of the greatest missionaries in the history of the world and remember that their way was so hard that they almost turned back and foreclosed the blessings of heaven in their behalf (Quote Alma 26;27).

Note these precious words of Ammon found in Alma 26.

"Now when our hearts were depressed, and we were about to turn back, behold, the Lord comforted us, and said: Go amongst thy brethren, the Lamanites, and bear with patience thine afflictions, and I will give unto you success." And he goes on to tell about the sufferings and then the success that they achieved, and then these words: "Now have we not reason to rejoice? Yea, I say unto you, there never were men that had so great reason to rejoice as we, since the world began."

Testimony