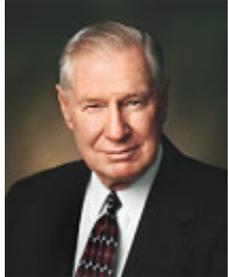


FIRST PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

# Refined in Our Trials

**By President James E. Faust***Second Counselor in the First Presidency*

## Refined in Our Trials

This message is to all, but especially to those who feel they have had more trials, sorrows, pricks, and thorns than they can bear and in their adversity are almost drowned in the waters of bitterness. It is intended as one of hope, strength, and deliverance.

Some years ago President David O. McKay (1873–1970) told of the experience of some of those in the Martin handcart company. Many of these early converts had emigrated from Europe and were too poor to buy oxen or horses and a wagon. They were forced by their poverty to pull handcarts containing all of their belongings across the plains by their own brute strength. President McKay related an occurrence which took place some years after the heroic exodus:

“A teacher, conducting a class, said it was unwise ever to attempt, even to permit them [the Martin handcart company] to come across the plains under such conditions.”

Then President McKay quoted an observer who was present in that class: “Some sharp criticism of the Church and its leaders was being indulged in for permitting any company of converts to venture across the plains with no more supplies or protection than a handcart caravan afforded.

“An old man in the corner ... sat silent and listened as long as he could stand it, then he arose and said things that no person who heard him will ever forget. His face was white with emotion, yet he spoke calmly, deliberately, but with great earnestness and sincerity.

“In substance [he] said, ‘I ask you to stop this criticism. You are discussing a matter you know nothing about. Cold historic facts mean nothing here, for they give no proper interpretation of the questions involved. Mistake to send the Handcart Company out so late in the season? Yes. But I was in that company and my wife was in it and Sister Nellie Unthank whom you have cited was there, too. We suffered beyond anything you can imagine and many died of exposure and starvation, but did you ever hear a survivor of that company utter a word of criticism? ...

“I have pulled my handcart when I was so weak and weary from illness and lack of food that I could hardly put one foot ahead of the other. I have looked ahead and seen a patch of sand or a hill slope and I have said, I can go only that far and

there I must give up, for I cannot pull the load through it.”

He continues: “I have gone on to that sand and when I reached it, the cart began pushing me. I have looked back many times to see who was pushing my cart, but my eyes saw no one. I knew then that the angels of God were there.

“Was I sorry that I chose to come by handcart? No. Neither then nor any minute of my life since. *The price we paid to become acquainted with God was a privilege to pay, and I am thankful that I was privileged to come in the Martin Handcart Company.*”<sup>1</sup>

## The Refining Fire

Here, then, is a great truth. In the pain, the agony, and the heroic endeavors of life, we pass through a refiner’s fire, and the insignificant and the unimportant in our lives can melt away like dross and make our faith bright, intact, and strong. In this way the divine image can be mirrored from the soul. It is part of the purging toll exacted of some to become acquainted with God. In the agonies of life, we seem to listen better to the faint, godly whisperings of the Divine Shepherd.

Into every life there come the painful, despairing days of adversity and buffeting. There seems to be a full measure of anguish, sorrow, and often heartbreak for everyone, including those who earnestly seek to do right and be faithful. The Apostle Paul referred to his own challenge: “And lest I should be exalted above measure ... , there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me.”<sup>2</sup>

The thorns that prick, that stick in the flesh, that hurt, often change lives which seem robbed of significance and hope. This change comes about through a refining process which often seems cruel and hard. In this way the soul can become like soft clay in the hands of the Master in building lives of faith, usefulness, beauty, and strength. For some, the refiner’s fire causes a loss of belief and faith in God, but those with eternal perspective understand that such refining is part of the perfection process.

Said Alma, “A shepherd hath called after you and is still calling after you, but ye will not hearken unto his voice!”<sup>3</sup> In our extremities, it is possible to become born again, born anew, renewed in heart and spirit. We no longer ride with the flow of the crowd, but instead we enjoy the promise of Isaiah to be renewed in our strength and “mount up with wings as eagles.”<sup>4</sup>

The proving of one’s faith goes before the witnessing, for Moroni testified, “Ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.”<sup>5</sup> This trial of faith can become a priceless experience.

States Peter, “The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”<sup>6</sup> Trials and adversity can be preparatory to becoming born anew.

## Becoming New Creatures

A rebirth out of spiritual adversity causes us to become new creatures. From the book of Mosiah we learn that all mankind must be born again—born of God, changed, redeemed, and uplifted—to become the sons and daughters of God.<sup>7</sup> President Marion G. Romney (1897–1988), First Counselor in the First Presidency, said of this marvelous power: “The effect upon each person’s life is likewise similar. No person whose soul is illuminated by the burning Spirit of God can in this world of sin and

dense darkness remain passive. He is driven by an irresistible urge to fit himself to be an active agent of God in furthering righteousness and in freeing the lives and minds of men from the bondage of sin.”<sup>8</sup>

The feelings of being reborn were expressed by Elder Parley P. Pratt (1807–57) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “If I had been set to turn the world over,—to dig down a mountain, to go to the ends of the earth, or traverse the deserts of Arabia, it would have been easier than to have undertaken to rest, while the Priesthood was upon me. I have received the holy anointing and I can never rest, till the last enemy is conquered, death destroyed, and truth reigns triumphant.”<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, some of our greatest tribulations are the result of our own foolishness and weakness and occur because of our own carelessness or transgression. Central to solving these problems is the great need to get back on the right track and, if necessary, engage in each of the steps for full and complete repentance. Through this great principle, many things can be made fully right and all things better.

We can go to others for help. To whom can we go? Elder Orson F. Whitney (1855–1931) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles asked and answered this question:

“To whom do we look, in days of grief and disaster, for help and consolation? ... They are men and women who have suffered, and out of their experience in suffering they bring forth the riches of their sympathy and condolences as a blessing to those now in need. Could they do this had they not suffered themselves?

“... Is not this God’s purpose in causing his children to suffer? He wants them to become more like himself. God has suffered far more than man ever did or ever will, and is therefore the great source of sympathy and consolation.”<sup>10</sup>

Isaiah, before the Savior’s birth, referred to Him as “a man of sorrows.”<sup>11</sup> Speaking in the Doctrine and Covenants of Himself, the Savior said, “Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink.”<sup>12</sup>

Some are prone to feel that their afflictions are punishment. Roy W. Doxey writes:

“The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that it is a false idea to believe that the saints will escape all the judgments—disease, pestilence, war, etc.—of the last days; consequently, it is an unhallowed principle to say that these adversities are due to transgression. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 162.)

“President Joseph F. Smith taught that it is a feeble thought to believe that the illness and affliction that come to us are attributable either to the mercy or the displeasure of God.”<sup>13</sup>

Paul understood this perfectly. When referring to the Savior, he said,

“Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

“And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”<sup>14</sup>

## A Chronicle of Endurance

For some, the suffering is extraordinary. In the early days of the Church Stillman Pond was a member of the second quorum of the seventy in Nauvoo. He was an early convert to the Church, having come from Hubbardston, Massachusetts. Like

others, he and his wife, Maria, and their children were harassed and driven out of Nauvoo. In September 1846 they became part of the great western migration. The early winter that year brought extreme hardships, including malaria, cholera, and consumption. The family was visited by all three of these diseases.

Maria contracted consumption, and all of the children were stricken with malaria. Three of the children died while moving through the early snows. Stillman buried them on the plains. Maria's condition worsened because of the grief, pain, and the fever of malaria. She could no longer walk. Weakened and sickly, she gave birth to twins. They were named Joseph and Hyrum, and both died within a few days.

The Stillman Pond family arrived at Winter Quarters, and like many other families, they suffered bitterly while living in a tent. The death of the five children coming across the plains to Winter Quarters was but a beginning.

The journal of Horace K. and Helen Mar Whitney verifies the following regarding four more of the children of Stillman Pond who perished:

“On Wednesday, the 2nd of December 1846, Laura Jane Pond, age 14 years, ... died of chills and fever.” Two days later on “Friday, the 4th of December 1846, Harriet M. Pond, age 11 years, ... died with chills.” Three days later, “Monday, the 7th of December, 1846, Abigail A. Pond, age 18 years, ... died with chills.” Just five weeks later, “Friday, the 15th of January, 1847, Lyman Pond, age 6 years, ... died with chills and fever.”<sup>15</sup>

Four months later, on May 17, 1847, his wife, Maria Davis Pond, also died. Crossing the plains, Stillman Pond lost nine children and a wife. He became an outstanding colonizer in Utah and later became a leader in the quorums of the seventy. Having lost these nine children and his wife in crossing the plains, Stillman Pond did not lose his faith. He did not quit. He went forward. He paid a price, as have many others before and since, to become acquainted with God.

The Divine Shepherd has a message of hope, strength, and deliverance for all. If there were no night, we would not appreciate the day, nor could we see the stars and the vastness of the heavens. We must partake of the bitter with the sweet. There is a divine purpose in the adversities we encounter every day. They prepare, they purge, they purify, and thus they bless.

When we pluck the roses, we find we often cannot avoid the thorns which spring from the same stem.

Out of the refiner's fire can come a glorious deliverance. It can be a noble and lasting rebirth. The price to become acquainted with God will have been paid. There can come a sacred peace. There will be a reawakening of dormant, inner resources. A comfortable cloak of righteousness will be drawn around us to protect us and to keep us warm spiritually. Self-pity will vanish as our blessings are counted.

The blessings of eternity will surely come to those who endure refining, as the Lord Himself taught: “He only is saved who endureth unto the end.”<sup>16</sup> I testify that Jesus is the Christ and the Divine Redeemer. He lives! His are the sweet words of eternal life.

## Ideas for Home Teachers

After prayerfully studying this message, share it using a method that encourages the participation of those you teach. Following are some examples.

1. Hold up a gold ring or a picture of a ring. Explain how at first gold can have many impurities. Describe how heat separates the impurities from the gold, leaving the gold pure and beautiful. Compare this process to what happens to us when we overcome trials, and bear testimony of what the Apostle Peter taught: “The trial of your faith [is] much more precious than of gold that perisheth.”
2. Ask family members to suggest reasons we experience trials. Read a pioneer story from the message. Discuss how these pioneers were examples of being refined by trials. Ask family members to whom they, like the pioneers, should look in times of trouble. Bear testimony that the Savior is the best counselor.
3. Make a list of blessings that come from trials by reading aloud the section of the message titled “A Chronicle of Endurance.” Invite family members to share blessings they have received through their own trials.

[illustrations] Illustrated by Michael T. Malm

[illustration] *The Second Coming*, by Harry Anderson

#### Notes

1. “Pioneer Women,” *Relief Society Magazine*, Jan. 1948, 8.
2. 2 Cor. 12:7.
3. Alma 5:37.
4. Isa. 40:31.
5. Ether 12:6.
6. 1 Pet. 1:7.
7. See Mosiah 27:24–27.
8. In Conference Report, Oct. 1941, 89.
9. *Deseret News*, Apr. 30, 1853, 2.
10. “A Lesson from the Book of Job,” *Improvement Era*, Nov. 1918, 7.
11. Isa. 53:3.
12. D&C 19:18.
13. *The Doctrine and Covenants Speaks* (1970), 2:373; see also Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (1939), 56–57.
14. Heb. 5:8–9.
15. As quoted in “Stillman Pond, a Biographical Sketch,” comp. Leon Y. and H. Ray Pond, in Sterling Forsyth, *Histories*, Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 4.
16. D&C 53:7.