

**“Continue Your Journey and Let Your Hearts Rejoice . . . I Am with You  
Even unto the End”**

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Five years ago, I moved 2,000 miles from my Utah home to the other side of the country. I saw the move as a kind of professional and personal getaway retreat. But I have learned something different.

From the day my four children and I moved into the yellow brick house in Utah, its calling was to become a haven for healing in our life’s journey. It became a symbol of personal recovery and strength. In the more than 20 years we lived there, I personally cleaned every surface, painted every wall, and made curtains for every window. At my sewing machine, I attached name labels to my sons’ missionary shirts; I made my daughter’s first prom dress of cream-yellow organza and my first grandson’s white silk blessing rompers. I embroidered temple aprons for my children and parents. I sewed my mother’s burial dress and made handkerchiefs for my sisters from its leftover lace. There were days of joy and hours of such pain that I did not know how we could continue. It was there where wounds of grief-stricken broken hearts were tended. But it was there where my children grew to adulthood, brought their amazing spouses into our family, and launched their own lives. And it was there where came calling new love and marriage.

At first look, our new home in the South is nothing like the old Provo place. It’s on a lake-size pond, surrounded by woods near the Lowcountry wetlands, an hour from historic Savannah. Bright red cardinals come alive off Christmas cards to flutter in our birdbath, whose fountain flows year-round. Camellias bloom in the front yard in January. By March the world is a paradise of white dogwoods and pink azaleas. And in June, the fragrance of gardenias fills the backyard—flowers I thought grew only on corsages. Grandchildren visit to ride the paddleboat. The place brought hope for a haven of happily ever after when all the major trials of life are over.

But it’s not such a new space at all. Both kitchens are blue and yellow. Backdoor guests trip over laundry. Both houses have the cherished piano, the work desk and sewing corner retreat. And each has a closet that hides projects that I will finish someday.

In each place, I make the same mistakes and promises for repentance. I overcommit, get too busy, and panic with a regular sense of unworthiness; and I sometimes wonder if I am “enough” to meet the expectations of others. And sorrow still finds me. My new home is not the time-out escape adventure I expected. My move was not a change at all. It is simply another place along my walk through this life in my continuing journey.

We are reminded by the Lord to “Continue your journey and let your hearts rejoice, for behold, and lo, I am with you, even unto the end.”<sup>1</sup> This short passage represents one of the most efficient statements of commandment and promise in all of scripture.

It offers three profound principles: First, to continue—to just keep going; second, to rejoice in that continuing; and finally is the marvelous promise that the Lord is with us now, always, and to the very end. It is a gentle reminder that all we have to do is “press forward”<sup>2</sup> with joy to have the only promise we really need, that the Lord is with us.

The scripture ends a message of reassurance to the Prophet Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, away from their families during hard times of persecution of the Saints in Missouri. The Lord assured them of His care for their loved ones, of His friendship to them, and of His promise to give them the thoughts and words they would need. Then he imparted to them the simple and profound message: Continue your journey; Let your hearts rejoice; I am with you.

### CONTINUE YOUR JOURNEY

The “continuing” may be the hardest part. I think it means to keep doing the small, prosaic, daily good things in our lives. It means to keep on choosing righteousness, or as I have heard Sister Sandra Rogers say, “Contribute our offerings to the central storehouse of good.”<sup>3</sup> On bad days, it means to simply put one foot in front of the other.

But we *do* need to know where we are going. Yogi Berra warned, “If you don’t know where you are going, you might end up someplace else.”<sup>4</sup>

The path is not *always* easy—it is not even *mostly* easy.

When I was a hospital staff nurse, one of my favorite physician orders was to “DC” or discontinue. To DC a medication or a catheter or an IV infusion usually meant relief, that the patient was getting better, and that I had fewer tasks and tubes to monitor. When I recognized a need to stop some treatment, I would call and ask for a “DC order.” Some days I wish I could ask the Lord for a DC order. Do you need a DC order? Is there something you want to just stop?

President Hinckley confirmed, “Life is like that—ups and downs, a bump on the head and a crack on the shins.”<sup>5</sup> He fondly quoted a newspaper columnist who wrote:

Anyone who imagines that bliss is normal is going to waste a lot of time running around shouting that he’s been robbed. The fact is that most putts don’t drop. Most beef is tough.

Most children grow up to be just ordinary people. Most successful marriages require a high degree of mutual toleration. Most jobs are more often dull than otherwise . . .

Life is like an old-time rail journey—delays, sidetracks, smoke, dust, cinders, and jolts, interspersed only occasionally by beautiful vistas and thrilling bursts of speed. The trick is to thank the Lord for letting you have the ride.<sup>6</sup>

Whether it is the big, life-changing challenges or the drizzle of daily demands, we must not weary. In his last speech to the House of Commons, after a lifetime of service in England's worst of times, Winston Churchill reminded, "There is time and hope if we combine patience and courage . . . Meanwhile, never flinch, never weary, never despair."<sup>7</sup>

I love the old-fashioned rhyme of the pioneer hymn, "Weary Not":

If the way be full of trial, weary not.  
 If it's one of sore denial, weary not. . . .  
 Do not weary by the way, whatever be thy lot;  
 There awaits a brighter day,  
 To all, to all who weary not.<sup>8</sup>

Sometimes even good things like Church callings, meeting attendance, or the service we truly want to do for others can seem like pulls against our energy. Like my friend Martha once quoted, "If I am here to serve others, what are all the others here for?"<sup>9</sup>

I recently retrieved from my departed mother's unfinished projects a quilt top pieced by her mother with scraps from even her mother nearly 70 years ago. My mother had said it was not worth finishing. It was not straight and had been pieced with mismatched scraps.

But, drawn by nostalgia and a need for comfort, I decided to finish Grandma's imperfect quilt. I found a vintage reproduction fabric for its back and borders. Then, out of respect for its time, I knew it needed to be hand quilted. So I spent hours and days I really didn't have, quilting Grandma's work that my mother had labeled "not worth finishing." My husband called it "a monument to misspent effort."

The more I quilted, the more I noticed its flaws. Mom was right—Grandma's work was not that good. But as I continued, I felt comfort in the old seersucker fabrics. I imagined that I could remember some of them in my grandma's dress, or Mom's apron, or even a sunsuit of my own childhood. As I stitched, I returned with longing to my mothers. I wanted to be what they would have liked me to become. At the same time, I wondered if I was enough for them or enough for my own children. Sometimes the quilting seemed futile, but I wanted to continue this small work that my foremothers had started.

I worked on this quilt during a time of special concern for one of my children. (I suspect upon hearing this, each of my children will think I refer to him or her.) I tended fears that after all I had devoted to the raising that child, perhaps I had not been enough. I even entertained the self-defeating question that if I was not enough in this most important task, of what use was my life?

Why should I continue? In the evenings as I stitched, I grieved over the “what if I had” or “what if I hadn’t” in my life. Was I too strong? Was I not strong enough? Had I talked when I should have listened? Had I truly borne testimony? And worst of all, did I fulfill the poem written for Mother’s Day by my son in the fifth grade that he titled, “My Mother Is Always Busy, Busy, Busy”? Is that how I want to be remembered?

But I kept quilting, drawn to the strength of my mothers before me, assuring them that with all their flaws, they had been more than enough for me, stroking the same cloth their hands had touched, and praying that I might know how to continue to become enough for my children.

I have a friend who prays, like we all do, about the path of her own young adult daughter. You can imagine her joy in recently receiving this email message, “I know that I’ve come into something knit tight and strong and soft. I’m just the stray thread in this quilting bee of yours, but you’ve been kind enough to not snip me off just yet. So, here I’ll hang, tagging along, laughing when you do, and writing when you do, and studying the patchwork your stories have created.”<sup>10</sup>

As I continued Grandma’s quilt, I learned something else—my stitches weren’t even, and my borders were not straight. My work was worse than Grandma’s!

Nevertheless, to continue my well-worn metaphor, author Mary Neal proposed:

Each of us is like a small piece of thread that contributes to the weaving of a very large and very beautiful tapestry. We, as single threads, spend our lives worrying about our thread—what color it is and how long it is—even becoming upset if it becomes torn or frayed. The complete tapestry is far too large for us to see and of too complex a pattern for us to appreciate the importance of our single thread. Regardless, without our individual contribution, the tapestry would be incomplete and broken. We should, therefore, recognize and take joy in our contribution. Indeed, our threads—our lives—are important; what we do and the choices we make, even the seemingly small ones, actually make a difference.<sup>11</sup>

Was my continuing worth it? Was it worth continuing the imperfect work that now extends across the lives of at least three generations of imperfect women?

Now my granddaughter, Robyn Elaine, and perhaps her daughter, may enjoy this remnant filled with scraps, stitches, and flaws that may reach across five generations as a symbol of our continuing.

It connects me to who I am. I am a daughter of great-great-grandmothers who were among those who knew the Prophet Joseph when he was young, who followed the Saints across tribulations, who buried too many children along the way, who sold their butter to make ends meet, and patched their aprons and quilts, but who continued. They just kept stitching—and they kept walking. They were among those pioneers who “walked and walked” and continued to walk.<sup>12</sup>

Near the end of his own mortal journey, Moroni comforted, “I would speak unto you that are of the church, that are the peaceable followers of Christ, and that have obtained a sufficient hope by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord, from this time henceforth until ye shall rest with him in heaven. . . . because of your peaceable walk with the children of men.”<sup>13</sup>

Sisters, whether your walk was begun by great-grandmothers in the early days of the Restoration, or whether you are a first- or second-generation convert breaking a new path of courage, you must keep walking that peaceable walk, keep stitching, keep growing, keep trying. Keep doing the daily good things you do. It is who you are. You do it by faith and courage and commitment to your covenants with God.

Sharing his own personal story, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland reminded, “Don’t give up . . . Don’t you quit. You keep walking. You keep trying. There is help and happiness ahead . . . It will be all right in the end. Trust God and believe in good things to come.”<sup>14</sup>

### LET YOUR HEARTS REJOICE

It is not enough to continue the walk with gritted teeth. We are told to “rejoice evermore.”<sup>15</sup> We *are* “that we might have joy.”<sup>16</sup>

When I was a new faculty member at BYU, I sat in this very room to hear Annie Dillard. I wrote what I heard her say that day: “Grace happens anyway; the least we can do is be there.”

I believe that the commandment to “rejoice evermore” isn’t just an ancient nod to the power of positive thinking. When we rejoice, our eyes become open to miracles. There are gifts of grace all around waiting to be made visible by our rejoicing. If we are willing to rejoice in our walk, however hard the road, we will witness miracles. I like the saying, “Anyone who doesn’t believe in miracles is not a realist.”<sup>17</sup>

A father in my ward lost his job and has not found work for nearly a year. Last winter, his wife took the children to the pediatrician’s office to get their flu vaccinations, with just enough in her purse to cover the expense of the immunizations. Ten-year-old Drew has a deathly fear of needles, but modern medicine has its own miracle called the nasal mist. When Mom stepped to the counter to verify that the shot and the mist were the same cost, all sighed to hear that the price for the mist was more than twice that of the injection. Drew instantly panicked. He knew this meant that he would have to get a shot, so he did the only reasonable thing—he ran away. Mom and older sister caught up with him and brought him back to a nook in the hallway to calm him.

Interrupting his tears, Drew asked if they could have a prayer to ask Heavenly Father’s help. Mom agreed and suggested that Drew should say it. He gave an inspiring prayer asking for help to be calm and still. He asked Heavenly Father to help him to be brave. Then he closed his prayer with the words, “And please help that I will get the mist instead of the shot.”

So of course Mom worried not only about the imminent extreme reaction, but his disappointment when his prayer could not be granted. This only added to the pileup of burden and despair over the last year.

Eventually, Drew's oldest sister went first to show that the shot wasn't so bad. Then it was Drew's turn. Just then, another nurse came running to announce that hearts in the office had been touched. Drew would not need the injection. He would be provided the mist at no additional cost. Drew looked up to his Mom and said, "See, Mom, the Lord answers prayers."<sup>18</sup>

I know that Drew's father will find work, and I suspect that the memories of hardship will fade with rejoicing in what our ward has come to call "Drew's Flu Mist Miracle."

When I was a ward Relief Society president, my stake Relief Society president, Sister Ann Madsen, challenged us to pray specifically, "Lord, who needs me today? What is her name?" I found that a rather frightening challenge. Frightening, first because it required me to commit, to listen, and to be available; frightening because it worked. On the days that I dared to say that prayer, I did receive a name in the most miraculous ways. More than once I was led to the doorstep of a sister who needed someone at just that moment, whether in the anguish of watching her dying husband or just needing a word of cheer. I rejoice in the memory of those miracles.

Let us practice saying the very word "rejoice" in our prayers, as the words of the Psalm: "I will praise thee, O Lord, with my whole heart . . . I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name."<sup>19</sup>

Rejoicing can be learned. Joy can be cultivated by practicing gratitude, forgiveness, and kindness. (I am not talking about casserole-to-my-sweet-sister kindness—I am talking about letting-the-jerk-in-the-car-merge-in-front-of-you-in-traffic kindness.)

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could rejoice so much that others become suspicious? As did Ammon, whose joy was so great that it made his brothers question his motives, that he must be boasting.<sup>20</sup> He "did rejoice exceedingly,"<sup>21</sup> proclaiming, "How great reason have we to rejoice; for could we have supposed when we started . . . that God would have granted unto us such great blessings?"<sup>22</sup> "Blessed be the name of our God; let us sing to his praise, yea let us give thanks to his holy name . . ."<sup>23</sup> ". . . yea, my heart is brim with joy, and I will rejoice in my God . . . for in his strength I can do all things."<sup>24</sup>

Today, we sing "Now Let Us Rejoice." When he wrote the words to this hymn, William W. Phelps had moved his family to Jackson County, Missouri, where they helped to build a community of farms, stores, and schools. They lived in the newspaper press building where he was the editor. But soon a mob on a rampage tore down the building, destroyed the press, burned precious books and papers, tarred and feathered Church leaders, and drove the Saints, including the Phelps family, from their new Zion out into the cold dark winter. It was in the midst of such suffering that Brother Phelps wrote the words to the hymn, later to be sung at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple:<sup>25</sup>

Now let us rejoice in the day of salvation . . .  
 Good tidings are sounding to us and each nation . . .  
 In faith we'll rely on the arm of Jehovah  
 To guide thru these last days of trouble and gloom . . .  
 Then all that was promised the Saints will be given,  
 And they will be crowned with the angels of heav'n . . .<sup>26</sup>

And on that day in March 1842, on the upper floor of the “red brick store,” 20 brave women sang the same song as they closed the very first meeting of Relief Society with the words, “Come let us rejoice.”<sup>27</sup>

Let us rejoice because He is with us as the Psalm proclaims, “Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance.”<sup>28</sup> And let us sing our own song on our own walk with rejoicing, “Be swift my soul to answer Him, be jubilant my feet.”<sup>29</sup>

### I AM WITH YOU—EVEN UNTO THE END

We rejoice because the Lord is with us, even to the end. Life is not about overcoming or enduring this one great trial in front of us. I hear sisters say, “I know if I make it through this, everything else will be OK,” as if the Lord has some specific test planned for each of us, and if we pass, we get a free “Do Not Pass Go” card directly to happiness on Earth and in heaven. Sisters, I am here to tell you that you *can* get through the challenge you have today, but do you know what? There are more out there—things you cannot even imagine. Satan has a growing number of creative ways to tempt us and our children. Life is a continuing journey, and the Lord is with us, walking beside us throughout this eternity, step by step. And today is part of that eternity. A dear friend recently reminded me of the words of C. S. Lewis: “Relying on God has to begin all over again every day as if nothing had yet been done.”<sup>30</sup>

Sister Carole Stephens warned, “It isn’t enough just to be on the journey; we must be awake to our duty and continue with faith as we draw upon the comforting, strengthening, enabling, and healing power of the Atonement.”<sup>31</sup>

Through the Atonement, the Savior fills the measure where we are not enough.

Sister Linda Burton reminded that, “‘All that is unfair about life can be made right through the Atonement’ . . . ‘There is power in the Atonement to enable us to . . . become true disciples of Christ.’” And “The Atonement is the greatest evidence we have of the Father’s love for His children.”<sup>32</sup>

There is a comforting pattern that reassures of the reality that our lives continue together across earthly and heavenly spheres. We are all part of a wonderful pattern we weave with the important people of our life that can fill our hearts with rejoicing in the testimony of our Savior beside us today and through all eternity.

In my family, threads were broken for a time. We were ambushed by trauma. The loss of my eight-year-old son Todd continues to be the most profound and defining experience of my life. In a strange way, everything goes back to that. The ache never leaves.

For a time, the resurrection and even the Atonement didn't matter to me. It didn't matter if I died. I might have wished it. I have told the story before of that time when all I knew was his absence. The void without him was all there was. I had no sense of where he was, of if he was. All I knew was that he was gone. I have since met mothers who have expressed similar anguish about children who are struggling to find their way in this life.

I remember my mother standing by watching in her own sorrow, that I can only understand now that I am a mother. I thought then that she just did not understand, when she would say, "Elaine, you cannot live your life in Gethsemane. Jesus was already there. You need to come into another garden."

I eventually learned that even though I was not aware, the Lord was always at my side. His greatest gift is that He is there regardless of where we are or what we believe in the moment. The Savior lives. He is with us. His Atonement allows us to try again, to repent, and to continue. He is there regardless of where we are in our belief or doubt about that reality.

Other sorrows and losses will come. We will suffer, and sin, and regret, and need to try again.

Anyone who would be a disciple of Christ kneels sometime at [our own] Gethsemane. But . . . we need not stay. We can find the courage to surrender, to accept the gift of the Savior, who already suffered there; we can stand and move on to another garden. Grace [and the Atonement] offer[s] the quiet promise of that safe passage.<sup>33</sup>

Somewhere, sometime, I don't know exactly when, I made a decision. I don't know if it was a decision or a gift. But I decided that since I cannot die, because life continues and there really is no death, quitting is not an option. There really is no DC order. Then I must live. If I must live, then I am going to live fully, embrace and own my life as mine, engage in each moment, and continue forward.

I decided to accept the company of the Lord, who was already beside me. I decided to walk with God—no—to run with God, as Paul declared to the Hebrews: "Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight . . . and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."<sup>34</sup>

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland promised:

Every one of us has times when we need to know things will get better. Moroni spoke of it in the Book of Mormon as "hope for a better world." (Ether 12:4) For emotional health and spiritual stamina, everyone needs to be able to look forward to some respite, to something pleasant and renewing and hopeful, whether that blessing be near at hand or



still some distance ahead. It is enough just to know we can get there, that however measured or far away, there is the promise of “good things to come.”

. . . [T]his is precisely what the gospel of Jesus Christ offers us . . . There *is* help. There *is* happiness. There really *is* light at the end of the tunnel. It is the Light of the World, the Bright and Morning Star, the “light that is endless, that can never be darkened.” (see John 8:12; Rev 22:16; Mosiah 16:9) It is the very Son of God Himself. . . . To any who may be struggling to see that light and find that hope, I say: Hold on. Keep trying. God loves you. Things will improve. Christ comes to you in His “more excellent ministry” with a future of “better promises.”<sup>14</sup>

The Savior is with us—to the end. He has shown Himself in his power and calls to us personally to know Him. We learned that with Martha on the path to the house of her brother Lazarus as she grieved his death, when He said, “I am the resurrection and the life,”<sup>35</sup> with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, when He showed Himself as the resurrected Savior,<sup>36</sup> with Paul on the road to Damascus,<sup>37</sup> and with Mary Magdalene at the end of her lonely walk to the empty sepulchre.<sup>38</sup> How many times on our path need He show Himself to us?

Because He is with us, we must continue, embrace and own the lives we are given, find ways to make them useful, and live every day of our eternal life—and that means today.

Sister Eliza R. Snow declared, “I will go forward, I will smile at the rage of the tempest and ride fearlessly and triumphantly across the boisterous ocean of circumstance . . . and the ‘*testimony of Jesus*’ will light up a lamp that will guide my vision through the portals of immortality.”<sup>39</sup>

The promises of Isaiah are made alive in our joyful singing: “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; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness”<sup>40</sup> “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; . . . For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour . . . Since thou wast precious in my sight . . . I have loved thee . . . . Fear not: for I am with thee.”<sup>41</sup>

Whether I am at home in the West or the South or somewhere yet unknown, each place is part of my journey, woven together across eternity among loved ones here, in heaven, and in my life to come. Our journey continues. It will not always be easy. Indeed, I expect challenges even in heaven, but we can rejoice in this day, and we can walk with God wherever, and forever.

We can continue and rejoice, for the Lord is with us. Remember what those first 20 valiant women promised: “We are going to do something extraordinary.”<sup>42</sup>

And now let us do as the Lord commanded those early Saints of the Restoration: “And now continue your journey. Assemble yourselves upon the land of Zion; and hold a meeting and rejoice together . . .”<sup>43</sup>

Sisters, let us “hold a meeting and rejoice together!” In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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43. Doctrine and Covenants 62:4.