

*“The Atonement Heals, Comforts, Consoles, and Enables Us  
to Show Mercy and Grace unto Ourselves”*

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Years ago I was touched as President James E. Faust related the following story of a little boy whose mother purchased tickets to a concert featuring the great Polish concert pianist Paderewski. Our son had recently returned from his mission to Poland, so of course my ears perked right up as the Polish composer’s name was mentioned. President Faust explained:

“The night of the concert arrived and the mother and son found their seats near the front of the concert hall. While the mother visited with friends, the boy slipped quietly away.

“Suddenly, it was time for the performance to begin and a single spotlight cut through the darkness of the concert hall to illuminate the grand piano on stage. Only then did the audience notice the little boy on the bench, innocently picking out ‘Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.’

“His mother gasped, but before she could move, Paderewski appeared on stage and quickly moved to the keyboard. He whispered to the boy, ‘Don’t quit. Keep playing.’ And then, leaning over, the master reached down with his left hand and began filling in the bass part. Soon his right arm reached around the other side, encircling the child, to add a running obbligato. Together, the old master and the young novice held the crowd mesmerized.”

President Faust then summed up the story with this lesson:

“In our lives, unpolished though we may be, it is the Master who surrounds us and whispers in our ear, time and time again, ‘Don’t quit. Keep playing.’ And as we do, He augments and supplements until a work of amazing beauty is created. He is right there with all of us, telling us over and over, ‘Keep playing.’”<sup>1</sup>

The Apostle Paul bore his own powerful witness that the Lord’s grace strengthens us in our weakness, as we read in 2 Corinthians: “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for

my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

As I pondered that scripture, I found personal application as I reflected on some of my own experiences with the divine gift of grace. I wish I could report that like Paul I have always gloried “in my infirmities.” I would have to honestly admit that my faith has sometimes resembled the wavering faith of Sariah, Lehi’s wife, *before* her sons returned with the plates of brass. However, just as the Lord patiently tutored Sariah in her afflictions, He has also tutored me and continues to do so.

One of those tutoring times happened about 30 years ago. At that time, my husband was serving as a bishop. We had four small children—a young baby, a two-year-old, a five-year-old, and a seven-year-old, and we had gone without income for almost a year. The national economy was weak, and we had recently built a home. Because interest rates kept climbing, we were advised by well-meaning and trusted family members and friends to keep our home financed on our construction loan until the interest rates went down. But interest rates just kept climbing. As you might suppose, it wasn’t long until we were on the brink of losing our home.

To make matters worse, Christmas was coming and our sweet little children had visions of sugarplums dancing in their heads, which only added to my discouragement, for I knew that those expectations would go unfulfilled. We tormented ourselves with regrets and self-doubting thoughts that began with words like “if only we had,” “why didn’t we,” “we should have,” or “we shouldn’t have,” and similar thoughts and self-condemnation.

During this time, my cousin gave my father a copy of my great-great-grandmother’s autobiography, and my father, in turn, loaned it to me. Each night after the children were in bed, I would stay up late reading about Mary Lois Walker Morris while waiting for my husband to get home from his bishopric responsibilities. I came to know and love her, and I wept over her life, which was filled with challenges much greater than my own. I will name just a few.

At age 15, Mary and her parents left their beloved England to sail to America to join the Saints. They suffered homesickness, seasickness, cramped quarters, and faith-testing, ravaging ocean storms. When Mary was 16, her mother died. As a 17-year-old newlywed, Mary crossed the plains on foot with her husband’s family, but without her husband. There wasn’t enough money for both her and her husband to pay the price required to join the wagon train. He had to stay behind to work until he was able to earn enough to join them later, which he did.

During their first winter in the valley together, Mary and her husband were so poor that they suffered from hunger, freezing temperatures, and sickness. When Mary was 19, her first baby was born, but the baby became very ill and died three months after birth. Three weeks after the death of her baby, Mary’s husband died, leaving her not only childless, but a teenage widow. Her trials did not end there. Though she was blessed to marry again and bear more children, at age 33, her 5-year-old boy, Conway, burned to death as the result of an accidental fire in the chicken coop. By the time Mary saw the flames, heard her son’s screams, and ran to his rescue, he was perishing right before her eyes. At age 47, she bore a 15-pound baby who died the same day he was born.

Although her life was filled with one major trial after another, Mary's autobiography surprisingly reflects sweet expressions of faith and testimony. As I share a couple of excerpts, notice how the Lord not only blessed her to bear her burdens, but through His grace healed her heart in the midst of her sorrow. He comforted and consoled her and enabled her to let go of her regrets or self-condemning thoughts.

Following the deaths of her first baby boy and her husband, Mary recorded: "As we sat by the firelight after our return from the cemetery, I looked back upon my life, and though in deep sorrow, I was able to see where the hand of the Lord had been over me and felt how thankful I should be that he had sent me to parents who had taught me to serve Him in all things, and to count things as dross, compared with the wisdom that God gives to His faithful children. . . . I felt that I had served God to the utmost of my ability, that I had His approval, and that He would stand by me."

Later in her autobiography she wrote: "I have my Heavenly Father to thank for His assistance, through the inspiration of His Holy Spirit. No matter was too small for me to raise a petition to Him for help, and my prayer was always answered."

I have long held that Heavenly Father is the Divine Economist. As we are willing, He helps us learn through the experiences of others in order to help us overcome our own trials and tribulations. Such was the case with me as I read Mary's story. I realized that her faith in the Savior and His "amazing grace" enabled her to surmount heartache after heartache and challenge after challenge. As I read, I felt my own heart soften, and I felt that I too could trust our Savior, who is "full of grace and truth" (D&C 93:11), to do the same for me if I were willing to do my part.

As you can imagine, our financial trial, which seemed overwhelming before I read about Mary's experiences, became easier to bear as I saw how the Lord had enveloped her in His loving arms *in* her adversities. I felt the assurance that if I placed my faith and trust in Him, He would do the same for me. And I can bear fervent witness that He did just that.

I am slowly learning that as we move along life's path, the Lord gives us burdens to carry so that we might yoke ourselves to Him. Yoking ourselves to Him not only helps us develop the spiritual muscle needed to get us through our current trials but also blesses us with His enabling power, which helps us face the future trials that surely await us. It is the weight of the load, Elder David A. Bednar reminded us, that gives us the needed traction to move forward.<sup>2</sup>

Remember how Alma's people found themselves in bondage, bearing heavy burdens placed upon them by Amulon? Here is the beautiful promise given to Alma's people by the Lord while they were suffering: "Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage. And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; and this will I do . . . that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people *in* their afflictions" (Mosiah 24:13–14; italics added). But that was not all He did. Because Alma's people were submitting

cheerfully and patiently to the burdens that were upon their backs, the Lord strengthened them and spoke to them again, saying, “Be of good comfort, for on the morrow I will deliver you out of bondage” (Mosiah 24:16). And He did!

The world would have us believe that trials are unfair and that we are entitled to only blue skies and sunshine. Who of us has not heard people raise their hands against heaven and say, “If there really were a God, He would not allow such and such to happen.” You fill in the blank. Maybe in our darkest hours, we have even said or been tempted to say or feel something similar. We may forget in the heat of our trials that God is aware of us and that He has a plan for us. He knows us individually and perfectly and customizes our mortal experiences to help us grow into our very best selves—if we will let Him. He is the ultimate personal trainer! I find that as I look back on the tests and trials the Lord has customized for me, I realize that some of my greatest joys have followed my darkest moments. Sometimes we just have to tie a knot in our rope and hang on! At other times we might have to tie a knot on top of a knot on top of another knot and just keep hanging in there one minute at a time, one hour at a time, and eventually one day at a time. It can happen as we yoke ourselves to the Savior and draw upon His enabling power.

In February of this year, it was my privilege, along with Sister Carol McConkie, to visit the Philippines. As you will recall, last November the super typhoon Haiyan hit the Philippines, the strongest typhoon ever recorded in the Philippines. We spent one day in Tacloban, the hardest hit of all the areas. As we witnessed the aftermath of the storm for ourselves, we were deeply moved with compassion for those affected by it. We had the privilege of attending Church meetings with the Saints in Tacloban and hearing their stories of faith, embracing them in our arms, assuring them that the Lord was aware of them, and reminding them of the continued prayers of their brothers and sisters throughout the world in their behalf. On our way to the airport to return to Manila, we stopped by to see the remains of a house where sister missionaries had lived. We had heard the miraculous story of the escape of the 10 sisters and wanted to see for ourselves where the story took place. Let me give you a brief summary of their story.

The sisters living in areas close to the shore were advised to move further inland, where other sisters were located. As a result, 10 sisters had gathered in one small house. As the super typhoon hit, it brought with it not only winds of up to 200 miles per hour, but a storm surge, which caught everyone by surprise. Black, murky water began filling the cinderblock home of the sister missionaries. The sisters retreated to what they thought was the safest place—a room on the second floor—but even there, the water rose as they sang hymns and recited scriptures in an effort to remain calm. Because the windows were barred, they were trapped in the house and could not find a way to get out.

Finally they were able to escape by kicking away the plastic sheeting in a skylight in the ceiling, and the sisters huddled together in a tight, well-formed group under a short eave on the roof. They watched as parts of the roof and houses were torn away and felt they were being protected as the storm raged about them. Fearing they would be washed into the ocean, as the waters continued to rise, the sisters prayed that the waters would subside. They testified that as soon as they finished praying, the waters stopped rising.

As we stood outside the missionary home, I remembered the lyrics to the hymn we had sung earlier that morning with the surviving Saints in Tacloban: “When dark clouds of trouble hang o’er us and threaten our peace to destroy, there is hope smiling brightly before us, and we know that deliv’rance is nigh.”<sup>3</sup> And then I thought of the Primary children who had sung these words as the closing hymn that morning: “Heavenly Father, are you *really* there? And do you hear and answer ev’ry child’s prayer?”<sup>4</sup> As we looked at the sisters’ home and thought about those precious missionaries and the other 194 missionaries, who all survived, I knew the answer to that question was indeed, “Yes! I do hear!”

As we turned to leave the house, I clicked this photo of a pink shoe that we guessed must have belonged to a sister missionary. At first I entitled it “Faith in Every Footstep.” However, I have since renamed it “Amazing Grace.” To me it is symbolic of the grace of the Lord and what is required of us in order to receive that enabling power. I love the fact that the shoe is pointing away from the house—moving forward and not retreating or giving in to the overwhelming adversity of the moment. It is as if the Master is whispering, “Don’t quit. Keep playing”—or in this case, “Keep faith-ing!” I know that these sister missionaries have built spiritual muscle as a result of their experience that will help them weather the trials they face in the years to come and continue to rely on the grace of the Lord.

No matter how thorny our path may seem, as we look unto the Lord “in every thought,” doubting not and fearing not (D&C 6:36), “His arm is sufficient, though demons oppose.”<sup>5</sup> That includes physical, financial, emotional, mental, and spiritual demons.

“Sister [Eliza R. Snow’s] personal expression of faith and optimism can serve as a guide for all [of us]. ‘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>6</sup>

I invite each of us to pay attention to the unseen arms surrounding us and to listen with faith to the reassuring whisperings in our hearts saying, “Don’t quit. Keep playing.” Let us remember always that the Savior is “full of grace and truth” and that He will comfort, console, heal, enable, and magnify us. He helps us to forgive ourselves in our times of need. Of this I am a humble witness, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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<sup>1</sup> James E. Faust, “What It Means to Be a Daughter of God,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 101.

<sup>2</sup> David A. Bednar, “Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease,” *Ensign*, May 2014,

<sup>3</sup> “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet,” *Hymns*, no. 19.

<sup>4</sup> “A Child’s Prayer,” *Children’s Songbook*, 12; italics added.

<sup>5</sup> “The Time Is Far Spent,” *Hymns*, no. 266.

<sup>6</sup> *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 59.