

Loaves and Lessons from Grandma

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One of my earliest memories is of sitting on my Grandma Winder's back porch in the early morning sun, eating her hot homemade "brown" bread dripping with melted butter and honey. For the first thirteen years of my life, before her passing, I lived next door in rural Granger, Utah, to my grandpa and my grandma, Alma Eliza Cannon Winder. Grandma's influence upon me was profound. I felt loved and cherished by her, and I returned that love in my childlike ways. Later as I've learned more about her life, I have come to know that this loving act of sharing her bread with me was representative of her constant kindnesses to others. Her goodness came from her natural optimism and her faith in God. This faith helped her endure life's inevitable trials. She epitomized to me a woman who could "stand on her feet and go forward by putting her trust and faith in Him."¹

President Gordon B. Hinckley has told us to stand on our feet and move forward. He has repeatedly admonished us to be the best we can be, to rise to the divinity within us. He has given us counsel by which he has lived, as did my grandma. He said:

"Do not nag yourself with a sense of failure. Get on your knees and ask for the blessings of the Lord; then stand on your feet and do what you are asked to do. Then leave the matter in the hands of the Lord. You will discover that you have accomplished something beyond price."²

In a similar vein he also said: "Never lose sight of the great reassuring power of the Atonement of the Savior to lift and save. . . . I have been quoted as saying, 'Do the best you can.' . . . We must get on our knees and plead with the Lord for help and strength and direction. We must then stand on our feet and move forward. I am absolutely confident that heaven will smile upon us. The Lord will hear and answer our prayers if we will commit ourselves, giving our very best to this work."³

I think of this counsel as having five simple parts: (1) Don't nag yourself with feelings of failure; (2) Get on your knees and plead with the Lord; (3) Get on your feet and go forward; (4) Trust in the Lord, and (5) You will find you have accomplished something beyond price. This counsel reminds us to have faith in Jesus Christ, following his example as He prayed for strength to know the will of the Father and then do it, accomplishing something beyond price in behalf of each of us.

President Hinckley has lived this way. My grandma did too. She was optimistic despite her trials. She gave no place for self-pity. She "went about doing good,"⁴ as Jesus Christ did, choosing to forget herself in service to others. She endured to the end with patience and even much good humor. Her determined faith in Jesus Christ and modeling of His goodness not only carried her through her challenges, but left for her posterity a legacy beyond price.

Grandma was a naturally happy person. She was positive in her outlook and very social in her love for other people. Yet as a young mother she knew deep sorrow. Tragedy struck twice—first with the death of Barbara, their firstborn child, and then later with the untimely death of another little daughter, Helen Margaret. Grandma tells in intermittent journal entries a few details about the circumstances and her feelings about the deaths of these two little girls. She says about 6-year-old Barbara:

"Oh, the whole thing is such a horrible nightmare. On January 30th Mother stayed out here and Babs was very sick, so the next morning we took her in, intending to go right to the hospital, but [the doctor] advised us not to so we stayed at Mother's. . . . The next day we went to the doctor and . . . he was very reassuring. . . . She seemed so much improved. However after dinner she began going delirious and by 5 o'clock was right out of her head. The last word she ever said was "That's all." When I think of that night I turn cold, for dear little Babs nearly died. . . . She was taken to the hospital immediately. I went home that night, but five more nights I spent at the hospital. She never regained consciousness and it was pitiful to watch her. Tuesday she nearly died again, but rallied. They got meningitis serum in her and she seemed better. . . . It first helped but Saturday she became worse, and Saturday night she was gone. When she was gone there was no hope, but before I had never given up hope. I just felt at first like I couldn't stand to live without her, but when I saw Ed and the boys I knew I would have to live for them.

"It is now nearly two months after and oh, my heart just aches. I sometimes think I am unequal to the task of going on without her. I am sure I couldn't have stood it if Ed and the kiddies and everyone hadn't been so nice. Oh, but I loved Babs and miss her so. Little would anyone dream from the outside appearances just how lonesome I am for my darling."⁵

There are no specific journal entries about Helen Margaret's death. But other children in the family recall that when she was about two and a half months of age she suddenly became ill and was also hospitalized for a week before she died. As a mother myself, I can imagine the devastation my grandparents must have felt to lose another daughter. Yet in spite of her suffering, Grandma chose to move forward, living for her husband and other children. It was her eternal commitment to her family that moved her forward. She said that she was more

empathetic and tried to be kinder with others because of her own trials.

Later in her life, when I lived next to her, she suffered from a blood disease that I never knew anything about. To me, she was simply my loving grandma who read to me, invited me to tea parties, brought homemade soup to me when I was sick, taught me how to laugh at myself, and always had hot homemade brown bread coming from her oven. She never mentioned the disease, but since then I have read occasional journal entries where she mentions what a sore trial this was—such as this one:

“I am 61 and my skin has been broken out about 7 years. It came on all of a sudden. They don’t seem to know just what it is. The eruption leaves in the summer. I am writing this so if any of you children ever have the same thing, develop the philosophy I have tried to develop. ‘Things that can’t be cured must be endured.’ It has been a great trial to me, but I am sure I have been more tolerant of people and tried to be sweeter and kinder because of it.”

A year later she wrote:, “I still have my skin disease after about 8 years. . . . I used to feel so peppy and now I have felt kind of sick most of the time. . . . Even so, it could be worse and I am thankful I am alive. Dad [my grandpa] has been such a darling, understanding fellow in spite of my blemishes—Bless him—I will always be grateful to him.”

Her last entry came a month before she died about eight years later. She said: “My skin trouble has taken a turn for the worse. . . . Lumps have developed on my side and back. They are bad sores . . . but I am grateful to my Heavenly Father for letting me live this long. Dad has been so good, kind and sweet to me.”

When I read her journal now as an adult, knowing what I now know about her seventeen-year-long illness, I am astonished at how few times she mentions her debilitating disease. Instead, she focuses on the welfare of her family and friends and expresses joy in life. Only after her death did we learn that Grandma died from what was then a rare blood cancer manifesting itself in skin flare-ups. Only then did we glimpse what the grandma who loved to laugh with us, to have us for tea parties, and to ask us about our “beaux,” had so graciously endured.

Here was a woman who didn’t dwell on her feelings of inadequacy. Instead she got on her knees and prayed for strength, then got on her feet and went forward cheerfully serving her family and neighbors, trusting in Heavenly Father and enduring to the end. She lived by her motto that if something could not be cured, it could and must be endured. Grandma not only endured, she prevailed. She never wallowed in self-pity. Instead, she reached out to others in goodness, in kindness. She was, as King Benjamin taught us we should be, “meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon [us].”⁶ All the years I knew her, she was sick, but I never knew it. Her legacy of goodness, patience in suffering, and endurance with a smile is something beyond price for each of her posterity.

How can that legacy live on? Grandma taught us to share—to share both intangible kindnesses of the heart and tangible kindnesses of our hands. Recently our daughter’s family home evening

lesson emphasized kindness. She taught how important each member of their little family is. The activity was to each choose a name from a hat for whom they could show special kindnesses during the week. Daddy chose two-year-old Eliza. The first thing he did to show kindness to her was to share part of a package of candy with her, much to her delight. Then he put the rest of the candy on top of the refrigerator and forgot about it. Later in the week Eliza stood by the fridge looking up longingly and said to her mommy, “May I please have some kindnesses?”

Grandma also gave tangible kindnesses. Among Grandma’s tangible kindnesses were pots of soup for the sick, dairy products for the neighbors, and hot loaves of bread for anyone in need. She followed what King Benjamin taught: “I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants.”⁷

In a sense Grandma’s simple loaves of brown bread were miracle loaves which have miraculously multiplied over the years as we, her daughters and sons, granddaughters and grandsons, have tried symbolically and literally to share bread with others. Sharing blesses the giver and the receiver. For the giver, the effort may sometimes feel like jogging uphill feels to me. Even the slightest incline requires so much effort. But once I have made that effort and I’m on the downward slope, I say over and over to myself, “now let the road carry you.” When we are in the midst of a personal challenge, if we can make that huge uphill effort to think of others in need and serve them, then that very act will carry us over our hills of discouragement. And the road can carry us the rest of the way toward renewed purpose and hope. Perhaps in a sense Grandma’s kindnesses to others helped carry her through her own problems.

I remember a day not too long ago when sharing some tangible kindnesses carried me through some personal struggles. After first getting on my knees and praying fervently for answers and strength to deal with my problems, I felt impressed to rise to my feet and make a dozen little loaves of whole wheat bread to take with me to the office. Each time I gave one away, the recipient opened his or her heart and shared some tender feelings. A secretary said, “How did you know it was my birthday; no one else has remembered me.” A much-admired General Authority lamented, “Some days I wish I had at least one thing, like making bread, that I could do well.” The parents of an open-heart surgery patient confided, “Let us share with you the priesthood miracles involved with this surgery for our daughter.” An executive director said, “I will give this to my wife who is sitting each day in the hospital with our daughter who has leukemia.” Another leader reminisced, “This brings my mother back to me, because she too made bread.” These little experiences touched, taught, strengthened, and carried me along that day.

President Hinckley said: “Do you want to be happy? Forget yourself and get lost in this great cause. Lend your efforts to helping people. Look to the Lord and live and work to lift and serve His sons and daughters. You will come to know a happiness that you have never known before if you will do that. I do not care how old you are, how young you are. You can lift people and help them. Heaven knows there are so very, very, very many people in this world who need help. Let

us stand a little taller and reach a little higher in the service of others.”⁸

The little loaves became miracle loaves for me as much or more than for those with whom I shared them—just like Grandma’s loaves. On those summer mornings of my childhood, Grandma gave me more than hot brown bread dripping with butter and honey. Little did I realize that she was giving me something far more precious and lasting. She was giving an example of service, faith, courage, and endurance that has sustained and nourished my soul over the years. She taught me what it meant to get on your knees every day to ask Heavenly Father to bless you, and then to stand on your feet and forget yourself by cheerfully going about doing good. As a result of her daily choice not to nag herself or others with feelings of failure but to stand on her feet and serve, she accomplished something of great price. Her loaves of kindness have been multiplied through the generations and nourished multitudes, becoming miracle loaves. I know that the day of miracles has not ceased and that Heavenly Father is a God of miracles. He loves each one of us, and He will bless us through our trials as we exert our faith in Jesus Christ and follow His examples of love, service, and endurance. I know we have a called prophet of God on the earth whose revelatory words strengthen and inspire us and teach us of our Savior.

May each of us participate in our own miracle of the loaves by being “steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting life.”⁹

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