

# Overcoming Challenges along Life's Way

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Do you ever wonder, as I do, what gave the pioneer women the courage to sing, "All is well!" in the face of their many challenges?

Do you wonder how, as we face today's problems and concerns, we can continue to sing, "All is well"?

We need our personal answers to these questions as we, the sisters of the Church, respond to the charge given us to seek out and relieve the distressed, minister to the poor and needy, feed the hungry, teach and train wives and mothers, welcome and include every sister, lead the young women, and nurture the children—all these to further the work of perfecting the Saints.

Some years ago, my husband, David, and I took our young children to a lake to vacation. He has always had the greatest confidence in their ability to do anything for which they are prepared. He taught a small son, age nine, how to manage a one-man sailboat, then let our son take the boat by himself out onto the lake. He joyfully sailed away, his bright life jacket and silhouette getting smaller and smaller against the horizon. Finally, we felt that Dave should make sure all was well, so in another little boat he sailed out to him. When he arrived Doug was sitting calmly in the boat, but he had forgotten how to turn it around! The thing I love was his response to his dad. He looked up and said, "I knew you'd come."

Sisters, we, too, can know that if we sometimes forget the instructions, when we are wondering what to do, indeed our Father will come.

*Gird up your loins; fresh courage take.  
Our God will never us forsake*

We may not, probably will not, receive a personal visit from the Lord, but the answers do come—from prayer, the scriptures, the words of the prophet, the still, small voice of inspiration. I should like to reassure you that we truly can find courage to face our challenges and also give service to those whose needs are even greater than our own.

Today there are sisters in many places living in poverty, with hunger and disease taken for granted and with infant mortality high and life expectancy low. In some places fewer than 50 percent of the adult population can read or write; 70 percent of these adults are women.

There are those who have no pure water—some who have no water at all except that which they carry on their heads, often for long distances. There are some who live in the shadow of war. What gives these sisters the courage to endure? As with the pioneers, it is their faith that their Father will come, their faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There are other words, too, from that great hymn:

*And should we die before our journey's through,  
Happy day! All is well!*

Sometime to each of us will come questions of life and death, purpose and our own inevitable parting. All of us have had losses or will have. Perhaps it is for this that we are taught “to mourn with those that mourn” (Mosiah 18:9) and to “weep for the loss of them that die” (D&C 42:45).

David Macbeth Moir once penned these words:

*We miss thy small step on the stair;  
We miss thee at thine evening prayer;  
All day we miss thee, everywhere*

The death of a child is especially poignant, or that of a young person, or of a needed father or mother. We do miss those who die. No matter how many friends or family members one has, the loss of one beloved person is difficult.

One great difference for us is our added knowledge that death is not permanent, that families can be forever. The understanding we have of the reality of the Resurrection makes the waiting endurable and purposeful. Indeed, “sweet is the peace the gospel brings” (*Hymns*, 1985, no. 14). Here, too, the solace sisters bring to each other and to sorrowing families is part of the work of love assigned to women.

Single women in the Church continue to be included daily in the prayers of Church leaders. Many single sisters are living rich, full lives. They have made happy homes for themselves, their families, and friends. They serve as auxiliary leaders and teachers. They serve missions. They attend the temple and do genealogy work. They give compassionate service. They make the world better for their being in it.

There are those in this group who have never married, although most of them would like to do so. There are widowed sisters who live alone and those whose marriages have been shattered by divorce.

Many have difficult decisions to make regarding their choices in life. Should they pursue a career? Can they be successful in what is traditionally a man’s business world? Should they try to be? How do they balance their expectations with the reality of their lives? How do they find worthwhile relationships that do not have sexual overtones? How can they best fulfill the role given by the Lord to women?

Some of these sisters are single parents. Their challenges are many as they try to be both father and mother on what is most often a diminished income. If they are employed and trying to be self-reliant, there is great concern about quality child care. Even when their children are grown, single mothers are still mothers and share in the trials as well as the joys of their children. These are sobering realities for many sisters.

For all of them, there are no simple answers except, as for all sisters, to do the best they can every day—to look up; to learn; to evaluate resources within themselves, their families, their communities; to pray with faith; to search the scriptures; to find ways to be of service; to keep their own lives clean and pure, their relationships true; to forgive those who have caused the hurt.

Even as this is so, however, may every sister feel the warmth of friendship from her sisters in the Church and priesthood support from home teachers and bishops who care. May she be included, welcomed, given opportunities to serve.

There are lesbian women, as well as homosexual men, in the Church. The Lord God has decreed, “Thou shalt not.” And however hard the task, these people must likewise keep the commandments. Marriage and intimate

relationships are to be reserved for husbands and wives, and any sexual relationship outside of marriage, whether between men and women or between those of the same sex, is forbidden.

Sometimes we hear of Church members who outwardly do all the things that would indicate full Church involvement, yet who neglect their children or abuse them physically, emotionally, or sexually, who are untrue to their covenants and marriage vows, or who are dishonest in other ways. If such a person is listening, could we plead with you this night to repent, to seek help and forgiveness.

Mormon wrote of other people in another time and place who also were in such a state of wickedness. He said, as it might be said today, “Now they did not sin ignorantly, for they knew the will of God concerning them” (3 Ne. 6:18).

I have a sweet friend who some time ago found herself in such a state. I do not know, nor need I know, what her problem was, but she did summon the courage to go tearfully to her bishop to confess. A Church court was held. She was excommunicated and began the difficult process of repentance. Quite a long time later, after the spiritual healing had taken place and at the time of her baptism, she expressed great appreciation to a bishop who had shed tears of caring for her, even while being firm in the steps that must be taken; to a dear friend in Relief Society, who, she said, had helped her “to understand and forgive all those who couldn’t understand or forgive” her; to those who had helped to keep her testimony strong in those quiet, desperate times when “coming home again” seemed nearly impossible.

I recently had a note from this friend, married now in the temple with a lovely family. She says, “Tell the sisters that it is all worth it. Tell them how beautiful and joyful life can be when you keep the commandments.”

Perhaps this lesson is twofold: If you are not personally living a pure, righteous life, if you have somehow slipped away, repent and come back. Love and hope are real!

If you know someone, or the loved one of someone, who has been excommunicated or disfellowshipped, try to understand the anguish. Sometimes what is said or done is less important than that someone cares enough to say or do anything at all.

There are sisters who are caught in the web of drug or alcohol abuse with its threads of deceit, guilt, and unproductive lives. Some are themselves dependent on alcohol or on either legal prescription or illegal drugs. Some are the loved ones of alcoholics or drug users.

It is indeed hard for them to feel that “all is well”; but even here, there is hope.

Seeking help early is the best chance for recovery. Pretending there is no problem, covering up for the behavior, or shielding the person from the consequences of that behavior will never solve the problem. There are excellent professional resources and support groups, some of whom, though not connected officially with the Church, still support LDS values. Above all, acknowledge your dependence on the Lord. Let him help and heal you.

As Alma taught us of faith, the desire to believe, to change, can be as a seed that will grow, sprout, and bear fruit (see Alma 32:27–43). All can be well again.

There may be times when we do not understand the “why” of the challenges we face, when whatever is

happening doesn't seem fair or the people about us seem to be indifferent to our suffering.

You may know the picture of the mythological tale of Icarus painted by Peter Bruegel. The story he illustrates tells of Icarus, who tried to fly, using wings made of wax created by his father. He did indeed fly, but in his enthusiasm flew too near the sun; the wax melted, and he fell into the sea. In Bruegel's painting, only his white legs are visible as he disappears into the green water. A nearby fisherman and a ploughman go unconcernedly about their work, and in spite of something amazing—a boy falling out of the sky—a beautiful ship in the harbor sails calmly on.

W. H. Auden wrote of suffering and of the world's indifference:

*About suffering they were never wrong,  
The Old Masters: how well they understood  
Its human position; how it takes place  
While someone else is eating or opening a window or  
just walking dully along*

So it is with most of our personal suffering. The world goes on about us as if nothing out of the ordinary were happening. However, within the bonds of sisterhood in the Church, hopefully it will be different.

One of our daughters and her family recently suffered a tragedy. Their house burned down, leaving little in the place of all their worldly possessions. The blessing was that even though five of their six children were at home, their two teenage sons remembered the training they had been given, picked up the little ones, and ran from the house. All were safe. And they felt great comfort from their ward and neighborhood, who rallied around with food, clothing, and offers of help. Such a blessing it is to belong to "the household of God" (Eph. 2:19). No one simply turned away or sailed calmly on.

For this family, as for others who experience trials and grief, love and help were extended, along with priesthood blessings and the assurance from the Father of us all that "blessed are they who are faithful and endure, whether in life or in death, for they shall inherit eternal life" (D&C 50:5). They have the same promise given to Joseph that "thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a ... moment" (D&C 121:7).

May we never be indifferent, sisters, to the suffering of others. May we be sensitive to those about us who are hurting for whatever reason.

May we, when the trials are our own, look up with "a perfect brightness of hope" (2 Ne. 31:20) in the Lord Jesus Christ and say, as did Paul:

"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

"Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor. 4:8).

Death and adversity come to us all, but so does life everlasting!

*Above the rest these words we'll tell—  
All is well!*

I bear you my testimony that the gospel is true, that we are led today by a prophet and by the priesthood of God. May we heed their counsel as we meet our personal challenges and help others to do so, I pray in the name of

Jesus Christ, amen.

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