

Elder Boyd K. Packer

"Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches.

"In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.

"For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had" (John 5:2-4).

There has always been in all of humanity a sprinkling of those who are described in the scriptures as the blind, the halt, the lame, the deaf, the withered, the dumb, the impotent folk. We refer to them as having learning or communication disorders, as the hearing or visually impaired, as those with motor or orthopedic limitations. We speak of intellectual or emotional impairment, of retardation, and mental illness. Some suffer from a combination of these, and all of them cannot function without some help.

I speak to the families of those who, at birth or as the result of accident or disease, must live with an impaired body or mind. I desire to bring comfort to those to whom the words *handicapped* or *disability* have very personal meaning.

Teach doctrine

It is my intent to teach doctrine which, if understood, will reinforce your courage and endurance, even foster a measure of contentment with circumstances which you did not invite, do not deserve, but from which you cannot turn away.

No room for guilt

I must first, and with emphasis, clarify this point: It is natural for par-

ents with handicapped children to ask themselves, "What did we do wrong?" The idea that *all* suffering is somehow the direct result of sin has been taught since ancient times. It is false doctrine. That notion was even accepted by some of the early disciples until the Lord corrected them.

"As Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.

"And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

"Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (John 9:1-3).

There is little room for feelings of guilt in connection with handicaps. Some handicaps may result from carelessness or abuse, and some through addiction of parents. But most of them do not. Afflictions come to the innocent.

Laws of nature sovereign

The very purpose for which the world was created, and man introduced to live upon it, requires that the laws of nature operate in cold disregard for human feelings. We must work out our salvation without expecting the laws of nature to be exempted for us. Natural law is, on rare occasions, suspended in a miracle. But mostly our handicapped, like the lame man at the pool of Bethesda, wait endlessly for the moving of the water.

Never ridicule

I must say this to parents. It is not unusual for foolish children and some very thoughtless adults to make light of the handicapped. The mimicking or teasing or ridiculing of those with handicaps is cruel. Such an assault can

inflict deeper pain than can physical punishment—more painful because it is undeserved. It is my conviction that such brutality will not, in the eternal scheme of things, go unanswered, and there will come a day of recompense.

My mother taught us when we were very young that we must never ridicule the unfortunate. Her mother died when she was six. My mother worked in the fields from a very early age. One day some teenagers were picking fruit. One of the girls laughingly mimicked one who suffered from cerebral palsy, saying, "Look who I am," and she named the handicapped person. They all laughed as she threw herself into a stumbling walk. Suddenly she fell as if struck down. They gathered around her in great fright. Presently she recovered, but there was no more fun at the expense of the handicapped. Mother never forgot what she saw, nor to teach a lesson from it.

Parents, take time in the next home evening to caution your family never to amuse themselves at the expense of the handicapped or of any whose face or form or personality does not fit the supposed ideal or whose skin is too light or too dark to suit their fancy. Teach them that they, in their own way, should become like angels who "move the water," healing a spirit by erasing loneliness, embarrassment, or rejection.

In Mendoza, Argentina, we attended a seminary graduation. In the class was a young man who had great difficulty climbing ordinary steps. As the class marched in, two strong young classmates gracefully lifted him up the steps. We watched during and after the proceedings, and it became apparent that the whole class was afflicted with a marvelous kind of blindness. They could not see that he was different. They saw a classmate, a friend. In *them* the works of God *were being* manifest. While there was no physical transfor-

mation in the boy or in his classmates, they were serving like angels, soothing a spirit locked in a deformed body awaiting that time when it would be everlastingly made perfect.

She's under there someplace

At a recent stake conference, I noticed on the front row a family including a girl of ten who has palsy and is deaf. Her father held her so that she would not slide off the bench. Their tenderness touched me deeply. When the meeting ended, I motioned for them to come up to me, for they were holding back. The father turned so that I could see Heidi's face, which was buried into his shoulder, and he said with a smile, "She's under there someplace."

Indeed she is under there someplace. All of them are under there somewhere.

President Joseph Fielding Smith

President Joseph Fielding Smith explained that "all spirits while in the pre-existence were perfect in form, having all their faculties and mental powers unimpaired. . . . Deformities in body and mind are . . . physical" (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., 5 vols. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1957-66], 3:19). *Physical* means "temporal"; *temporal* means "temporary." Spirits which are beautiful and innocent may be temporally restrained by physical impediments.

If healing does not come in mortal life, it will come thereafter. Just as the gorgeous monarch butterfly emerges from a chrysalis, so will spirits emerge.

Restored to perfect frame

"Their sleeping dust [will] be restored unto its perfect frame, bone to his bone, and the sinews and the flesh

upon them, the spirit and the body to be united never again to be divided, that they might receive a fulness of joy" (D&C 138:17).

And, "the soul shall be restored to the body, and the body to the soul; yea, and every limb and joint shall be restored to its body; yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost; but all things shall be restored to their *proper and perfect frame*" (Alma 40:23; italics added).

"O how great the plan of our God! . . . The spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men become incorruptible, and immortal, and they are living souls, having a perfect knowledge like unto us in the flesh, save it be that our knowledge shall be perfect" (2 Nephi 9:13).

Eternal truths bring perspective

The Apostle Paul said, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Corinthians 15:19).

If our view is limited to mortal life, some things become unbearable because they seem so unfair and so permanent. There are doctrines which, if understood, will bring a perspective toward and a composure regarding problems which otherwise have no satisfactory explanation.

Truth: We are spirit children of a Father God. We lived with him in our premortal existence, of which it must be said that there was not, neither could there have been, a beginning. The revelations speak of things "from before the foundation of the world" and "before the world was" (see D&C 124:33-41).

Truth: Mortal life is temporary and, measured against eternity, infinitesimally brief. If a microscopic drop-let of water should represent the length of mortal life, by comparison all the oceans on earth put together would not even begin to represent everlasting life.

Truth: After mortal death we will rise in the Resurrection to an existence to which there will not neither could there be an end. The words *everlasting, never ending, eternal, forever and forever* in the revelations describe both the gospel and life.

Look after the handicapped

That day of healing will come. Bodies which are deformed and minds that are warped will be made perfect. In the meantime, we must look after those who wait by the pool of Bethesda.

You parents and you families whose lives must be reordered because of a handicapped one, whose resources and time must be devoted to them, are special heroes. You are manifesting the works of God with every thought, with every gesture of tenderness and care you extend to the handicapped loved one. Never mind the tears nor the hours of regret and discouragement; never mind the times when you feel you cannot stand another day of what is required. You are living the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ in exceptional purity. *And you perfect yourselves in the process.*

Now, in all of this there must be balance, for the handicapped have responsibility to work out their own salvation. The nearer the normal patterns of conduct and discipline apply to the handicapped, the happier they will be.

Every quarter of an inch of physical and mental improvement is worth striving for. The Prophet Joseph Smith said that "all the minds and spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938], p. 354).

I have known some who seemed to enjoy poor health and have interrupted

the lives of those who were caring for them unnecessarily, making life miserable for all. They thrive on sympathy, which is generally very low in nourishment. To know just how far to press the handicapped when physical and emotional pain are involved may be the most difficult part for those who serve them. Nevertheless, as the Prophet Joseph Smith said, "There must be decision of character, aside from sympathy" (*History of the Church*, 4:570).

Think of this: Unless we die prematurely, every one of us may end up both physically and mentally handicapped. We would do well to make advance payments of service and compassion on which we may draw when that time comes.

Why not help the parents who have extra things to do and extra expenses and are confined because of a handicapped family member. Encourage the teachers and social workers who show such devotion to them. And it wouldn't hurt you to donate a few dollars or a few hours to one of the many organizations which help the handicapped. If we do this, without the slightest idea of selfishness, it will remain in our account against that time when we may need help. And the works of God will be made manifest in our lives.

After tribulation come the blessings

"Ye cannot behold with your natural eyes, for the present time, the design of your God concerning those things which shall come hereafter, and

the glory which shall follow after much tribulation.

"For after much tribulation come the blessings. Wherefore the day cometh that ye shall be crowned with much glory; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand" (D&C 58:3-4).

I bear witness of the restoration which will come. Each body and mind will be restored in perfect frame. However long and unfair mortality may seem, however long the suffering and the waiting may be, he has said:

"After that cometh the day of my power; then shall the poor, the lame, and the blind, and the deaf, come in unto the marriage of the Lamb, and partake of the supper of the Lord, prepared for the great day to come.

"Behold, I, the Lord, have spoken it" (D&C 58:11-12).

I am a witness of the condition of those who have gone beyond the veil, and we all have reason to glorify him who is our Father and him who is our Redeemer, of whom I bear witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The chorus sang "Praise Ye the Lord" without announcement.

President Monson

Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Council of the Twelve Apostles has just spoken to us, followed by the Mormon Youth Chorus singing "Praise Ye the Lord."

Elder Dean L. Larsen, a member of the Presidency of the Quorums of the Seventy, will now address us.

Elder Dean L. Larsen

We welcome the Brethren whom you have sustained this morning as new members of the Seventies Quorums. They are men of faith and devotion

with a broad background of experience in Church leadership. Their call is a reflection of the continuing growth of the Church worldwide.