

The Immediate Goodness of God

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Several years ago, our five-year-old son came to me and announced, “Dad, I’ve figured something out. I’ve figured out that *soon* for you is a very long time for me.”

When the Lord or His servants say things like, “Not many days hence” or “The time is not far distant,” it can literally mean a lifetime or longer.¹ His time, and frequently His timing, is different from ours. Patience is key. Without it, we can neither develop nor demonstrate faith in God unto life and salvation. But my message today is that, even while we are patiently waiting upon the Lord, there are certain blessings that come to us immediately.

When Alma and his people were captured by the Lamanites, they prayed for deliverance. They were not immediately delivered, but while they patiently waited for deliverance, the Lord showed forth His goodness with certain immediate blessings. He immediately softened the hearts of the Lamanites so they wouldn’t slay them. He also strengthened Alma’s people and eased their burdens.² When they finally were delivered, they traveled to Zarahemla, where they recounted their experience to an amazed audience. The people of Zarahemla marveled, and “when they thought of the *immediate goodness of God*, and his power in delivering Alma and his brethren out of ... bondage, they did raise their voices and give thanks to God.”³

The immediate goodness of God comes to all who call upon Him with real intent and full purpose of heart. This includes those who cry out in earnest desperation, when deliverance seems so distant and suffering seems prolonged, even intensified.

So it was with a young prophet who suffered to the brink in the dank of a dungeon before finally crying out: “O God, where art thou? ... How long shall thy hand be stayed ... ? Yea, O Lord, how long ... ?”⁴ In response, the Lord did not immediately deliver Joseph, but He did immediately pronounce peace.⁵

God also gives immediate hope for eventual deliverance.⁶ No matter what, no matter where, in Christ and through Christ there is always hope smiling brightly before us.⁷ Immediately before us.

Moreover, He has promised, “My *kindness* shall not depart from thee.”⁸

Above all, God’s love is immediate. With Paul, I testify that nothing can “separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus.”⁹ Even our sins, though they may separate us from His Spirit for a time, cannot separate us from the constancy and immediacy of His divine paternal love.

These are some of the ways and means by which “he doth immediately bless [us].”¹⁰ Now, to bring these principles current and close, I share with you the experiences of two people whose lives stand

as testaments of the immediate goodness of God.

From the time she was a young teen, Emilie struggled with substance abuse. Experimentation led to habit, and habit eventually hardened into an addiction that held her captive for years, notwithstanding occasional periods of wellness. Emilie carefully concealed her problem, especially after she became a wife and mother.

The beginning of her deliverance did not feel like deliverance at all. One minute, Emilie was undergoing a routine medical exam, and the next, she was being driven by ambulance to an inpatient treatment facility. She began to panic as she thought of being separated from her children, her husband, her home.

That night, alone in a cold, dark room, Emilie curled up on her bed and sobbed. Her ability to reason diminished until finally, overcome with anxiety, fear, and the oppressive darkness in that room and in her soul, Emilie actually thought she would die that night. Alone.

In that desperate condition, Emilie somehow summoned the strength to roll off the bed and onto her knees. Without any posturing that had sometimes been part of previous prayers, Emilie completely surrendered herself to the Lord as she desperately pleaded, "Dear God, I need You. Please help me. I don't want to be alone. Please get me through this night."

And immediately, as He had done with Peter of old, Jesus stretched forth His hand and caught her sinking soul.¹¹ There came over Emilie a wondrous calm, courage, assurance, and love. The room was no longer cold, she knew she was not alone, and for the first time since she was 14 years old, Emilie knew everything would be all right. As she "awoke unto God,"¹² Emilie fell asleep in peace. And thus we see that "if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you."¹³

Emilie's healing and ultimate deliverance took a long time—months of treatment, training, and counseling, during which she was sustained and sometimes carried by His goodness. And that goodness continued with her as she entered the temple with her husband and children to be sealed together forever. Like the people of Zarahemla, Emilie now gives thanks as she reflects on the immediate goodness of God and His power in delivering her from bondage.

Now, from the life of another brave believer. On December 27, 2013, Alicia Schroeder joyfully welcomed her dear friends Sean and Sharla Chilcote, who unexpectedly showed up on her doorstep. Sean, who was also Alicia's bishop, handed her his cell phone and solemnly said, "Alicia, we love you. You need to take this call."

Alicia's husband, Mario, was on the phone. He was in a remote area with some of their children on a long-anticipated snowmobile trip. There had been a terrible accident. Mario was seriously injured, and their 10-year-old son, Kaleb, was gone. When Mario tearfully told Alicia of Kaleb's death, she was overcome with a shock and horror few of us will ever know. It dropped her. Paralyzed with unspeakable anguish, Alicia could neither move nor speak.

Bishop and Sister Chilcote quickly lifted her up and held her. They wept and deeply grieved together for some time. Then Bishop Chilcote offered to give Alicia a blessing.

What happened next is incomprehensible without some understanding of the Atonement of Jesus Christ and the immediate goodness of God. Bishop Chilcote gently placed his hands on Alicia's head and, with quivering voice, began to speak. Alicia heard two things as though spoken by God Himself.

First, she heard her name, Alicia Susan Schroeder. Then she heard the bishop invoke the authority of Almighty God. In that instant—at the mere utterance of her name and God’s power—Alicia was filled with an indescribable peace, love, comfort, and somehow *joy*. And it has continued with her.

Now, of course, Alicia, Mario, and their family still mourn for and miss Kaleb. It is *hard!* Whenever I speak with her, Alicia’s eyes well up with tears as she tells how much she loves and misses her little boy. And her eyes remain moist as she tells how the Great Deliverer has sustained her through every bit of her ordeal, beginning with His immediate goodness during her deepest despair and continuing now with the bright hope of a sweet reunion that is “not many days hence.”

I realize that sometimes life’s experiences create confusion and turbulence that can make it difficult to receive or recognize or retain the kind of relief that came to Emilie and Alicia. I have been through such times. I testify that, during such times, our mere preservation is a tender and powerful manifestation of the immediate goodness of God. Remember, ancient Israel was ultimately delivered “by that same God who had preserved them”¹⁴ day to day.

I bear witness that Jesus Christ is the Great Deliverer, and in His name, I promise that as you turn to Him with real intent and full purpose of heart, He will deliver you from everything that threatens to diminish or destroy your life or joy. That deliverance may take longer than you would like—perhaps a lifetime or longer. So, to give you comfort, courage, and hope, to sustain and strengthen you to that day of ultimate deliverance, I commend to you and testify of *the immediate goodness of God* in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.