

“Plow in Hope”

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By utilizing the Atonement, we access the gifts of the Holy Ghost, which “filleteth with hope and perfect love” (Moro. 8:26).

Granted, brothers and sisters, the world is “in commotion,” but the kingdom is in forward motion as never before! (see D&C 88:91; D&C 45:26). Its distinctiveness is being more sharply defined by adverse trends in the world, where traditional values are not fastened down by the rivets of the Restoration. They are sliding swiftly (see D&C 105:31).

The results are contradictory mixtures, such as boredom and violence. Some simply exist, “having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12; see also Alma 41:11). The trek of modern discipleship is taking us through this hostile wilderness, including cultures ambivalent about setting limits and with no brakes!

Yes, we have unprecedented mass entertainment and mass communications, but so many lonely crowds. The togetherness of technology is no substitute for the family.

Much as I lament the resulting and gathering storms, there can be some usefulness in them. Thereby we may become further tamed spiritually, for “except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, ... they will not remember him” (Hel. 12:3). The Lord is always quietly refining His faithful people individually anyway, but events will also illuminate God’s higher ways and His kingdom (see D&C 136:31).

Our context is challenging, however. We have many overwhelmed parents, more and more marriages in meltdown, and dysfunctional families. Destructive consequences impact steadily from drugs, violence, and pornography. Truly, “despair cometh ... of iniquity” (Moro. 10:22). Since the adversary desireth “that all men might be miserable like unto himself,” his is the plan of misery (2 Ne. 2:27; see also 2 Ne. 2:18).

The valiant among us keep moving forward anyway, because they know the Lord loves them, even when they “do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Ne. 11:17). As you and I observe the valiant cope successfully with severe and relentless trials, we applaud and celebrate their

emerging strength and goodness. Yet the rest of us tremble at the tuition required for the shaping of such sterling character, while hoping we would not falter should similar circumstances come to us!

It may be too late to fix some communities, but not to help those individuals and families willing to fix themselves. It is not too late, either, for some to become pioneer disciples in their families and locations, or for individuals to become local peacemakers in a world from which peace has been taken (see D&C 1:35). If still others experience a shortage of exemplars, they can become such.

While Joshua was able to say, “But as for me and my house, ...” some individuals, presently bereft of intact families, nevertheless, can still say, “But as for me, ...” and then so live as to become worthy of all the Lord has prepared for them (see Josh. 24:15). Thus disciples “stand fast” (D&C 9:14), “hold out faithful to the end” (D&C 6:13), and “hold on [their] way” (D&C 122:9), even in a troubled world.

However, enduring and submitting are not passive responses at all, but instead are actually more like being braced sufficiently to report for advanced duties, while carrying—meekly and victoriously—bruises from the previous frays.

What are a few fingers of scorn now anyway (see 1 Ne. 8:33), when the faithful can eventually know what it is like to be “clasped in the arms of Jesus”? (Morm. 5:11).

What are mocking words now, if later we hear those glorious words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant”? (Matt. 25:21).

Meanwhile, Paul urges us to “plow in hope” (1 Cor. 9:10).

Therefore, desperately needed is longitudinal perspective, the hope of the gospel. Today’s *put-down* is then placed in the perspective of our being *lifted up* tomorrow in God’s plan of happiness (see Alma 42:8, 16).

Since the Lord wants a people “tried in all things” (D&C 136:31), how specifically will we be tried? He tells us, I will try the faith and the patience of my people (see Mosiah 23:21). Since faith in the timing of the Lord may be tried, let us learn to say not only, “Thy will be done,” but patiently also, “Thy timing be done.”

Hope feasts on the words of Christ, “through patience and comfort of the scriptures,” “written for our learning” (Rom. 15:4), and bolstered by “having all these witnesses” (Jacob 4:6; see also 2 Ne. 31:20). Faith constitutes “the assurance of things hoped for” and the proof of “things not seen” (JST, Heb. 11:1; see also Ether 12:6). Therefore, whatever our humble furrow, we are to “plow in hope” (1 Cor. 9:10), finally developing “a perfect brightness of hope” (2 Ne. 31:20; see also Alma

29:4).

Yet too many of the partially committed, like Naaman, wait for the Lord to bid them to “do some great thing,” while declining His biddings in small things (2 Kgs. 5:13). When he was humbled and corrected, not only did Naaman’s flesh become like that of a little child, but his heart also (see 2 Kgs. 5:14–15). Failure to serve the Master in small ways estranges us from Him (see Mosiah 5:13).

Those, however, who “plow in hope” not only understand the law of the harvest but they also understand what growing seasons are all about. True, those with genuine hope may see their proximate circumstances shaken like a kaleidoscope at times, yet with the “eye of faith” they still see divine design (Alma 5:15).

Ultimate hope, of course, is tied to Jesus and the great Atonement, with its free gift of the universal Resurrection and the proffer of God’s greatest gift, eternal life (see Moro. 7:40–41; Alma 27:28; D&C 6:13; D&C 14:7).

Several scriptures describe the essence of that glorious and rescuing Atonement, including a breathtaking, autobiographical verse confiding how Jesus “would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink” (D&C 19:18). Since the “infinite atonement” required infinite suffering, the risk of recoil was there! (2 Ne. 9:7; Alma 34:12). All humanity hung on the hinge of Christ’s character! Mercifully, He did not shrink but “finished [His] preparations unto the children of men” (D&C 19:19).

But Christ’s unique submissiveness has always been in place. Indeed, He has “suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning” (3 Ne. 11:11), keenly observing His Father all the while: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19). This verse carries intimations of grand things—beyond the beyond.

In the agonizing atoning process, Jesus let His will be “swallowed up in the will of the Father” (Mosiah 15:7). As sovereigns, choosing to yield to the Highest Sovereign is our highest act of choice. It is the only surrender which is also a victory! The *putting off* of the natural man makes possible the *putting on* of the whole armor of God, which would not fully fit before! (see Eph. 6:11, 13).

Redeeming Jesus also “poured out his soul unto death” (Mosiah 14:12; see also Isa. 53:12; D&C 38:4). As we on occasion “pour” out our souls in personal pleadings, we are thus emptied, making room for more joy!

Another fundamental scripture describes Jesus’ having trodden the winepress of the “fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God” (D&C 88:106; see also D&C 76:107; D&C 133:50). Others can and should encourage, commend, pray, and comfort, but the lifting and carrying of our individual crosses remains ours to do. Given the “fierceness” Christ endured for us, we cannot expect a discipleship of unruffled easiness. As we seek forgiveness, for example, repentance can be a rough-hewn regimen to bear. By the way, let us not, as some do, mistake the chips we have placed on our own shoulders for crosses!

Uniquely, atoning Jesus also “descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things” (D&C 88:6; see also D&C 122:8). How deep that descent into despair and abysmal agony must have been! He did it to rescue us and in order to comprehend human suffering. Therefore, let us not resent those tutoring experiences which can develop our own empathy further (see Alma 7:11–12). A slothful heart will not do, and neither will a resentful heart. So being admitted fully to “the fellowship of his sufferings” requires the full dues of discipleship (Philip. 3:10; see also 1 Cor. 1:9).

Moreover, Jesus not only took upon Him our sins to atone for them, but also our sicknesses and aching griefs (see Alma 7:11–12; Matt. 8:17). Hence, He knows personally all that we pass through and how to extend His perfect mercy—as well as how to succor us. His agony was all the more astonishing in that He trod “the wine-press alone” (D&C 133:50).

On occasion, the God of heaven has wept (see Moses 7:28). One ponders, therefore, the agonies of Jesus’ infinite Atonement and the feelings of the Father—for His Son and for us. There are no instructive, relevant revelations, but our finite, emotional extrapolations come flooding in anyway!

If, like the Savior, we do not “shrink,” then we must go with the demanding flow of discipleship, including where the tutoring doctrines of the Master take us. Otherwise, we may walk with Jesus up to a point, but then walk no more with Him (see John 6:66). Shrinking includes stopping as well as turning back.

The more we know of Jesus, the more we will love Him. The more we know of Jesus, the more we will trust Him. The more we know of Jesus, the more we will want to be like Him and to be with Him by becoming the manner of men and women that He wishes us to be (see 3 Ne. 27:27), while living now “after the manner of happiness” (2 Ne. 5:27).

Therefore, with the help of the Holy Ghost, we can glorify Christ by repenting and thereby accessing the blessings of the astonishing

Atonement which He provided for us at such a stunning cost! (see John 16:14). So, brothers and sisters, given what Jesus *died for*, are we willing to *live with* the challenges allotted to us? (see Alma 29:4, 6). Trembling is sometimes both permissible and understandable.

There are many specific ways in which we can liken to ourselves these “essence” scriptures about Jesus and the Atonement, but all are covered under this conceptual canopy: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me” (Matt. 11:29). In fact, there is no other way to learn deeply! (see 1 Ne. 19:23). The infinite Atonement is so vast and universal, but finally, it is so very personal! Mercifully, through the Atonement we can be forgiven and, very importantly, we can know that we have been forgiven—that final, joyous emancipation from error.

By utilizing the Atonement, we access the gifts of the Holy Ghost, which “fillet with hope and perfect love” (Moro. 8:26). None of us can afford to be without that needed hope and love in the treks through our Sinais of circumstance!

Thus within the discipleship allotted to us, we are to overcome the world (see 1 Jn. 5:3–4); to finish the work we personally have been given to do; to be able to partake of a bitter cup without becoming bitter; to experience pouring out our souls; to let our wills increasingly be swallowed up in the will of the Father; to acknowledge—tough though the tutoring trials—that, indeed, “All these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D&C 122:7); and to plow enduringly to the end of the furrow—all the while glorifying Him and using the matchless gifts He has given us, including, one day, “all” that He has (D&C 84:38).

In the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen!