



Words of Hope and Consolation at the Time of Death

*“What have we to console us in relation to the dead?
We have reason to have the greatest hope and consolation
for our dead of any people on the earth.”*

From the Life of Joseph Smith

Bereavement at the death of loved ones repeatedly touched the life of the Prophet Joseph Smith. On June 15, 1828, in Harmony, Pennsylvania, Joseph and Emma’s first son, Alvin, died a short time after birth. When Joseph and Emma moved from New York to Kirtland, Ohio, in February 1831, Emma was again pregnant, this time with twins. Shortly after Joseph and Emma’s arrival in Kirtland, they moved to a cabin on the farm of Church member Isaac Morley. There, on April 30, little Thadeus and Louisa were born, but they did not long survive, dying within a few hours of their birth.

At the same time, in the nearby town of Warrensville, Ohio, Brother John Murdock lost his wife, Julia, who had just given birth to healthy twins. With a family that now included five children, Brother Murdock felt unable to care for the new arrivals, and he asked Joseph and Emma to adopt them as their own. This Joseph and Emma did, gratefully taking the two infants, named Joseph and Julia, into their family. Tragically, little Joseph died eleven months later in March 1832, a consequence of being exposed to the cold night air while suffering with measles when the Prophet was tarred and feathered by a mob. With this death, the grieving parents had laid to rest four of their first five children, leaving Julia as their only living child.



Joseph and Emma Smith with the twins they adopted shortly after their own infant twins died. Joseph and Emma gratefully took Joseph and Julia into their family, but little Joseph died in March 1832.

Of the eleven children of Joseph and Emma—nine born to them and two adopted—only five would live to adulthood: Julia, born in 1831; Joseph III, born in 1832; Frederick, born in 1836; Alexander, born in 1838; and David, born in November 1844, five months after his father’s death. Joseph and Emma’s 14-month-old son Don Carlos died in 1841, and a son born in 1842 died the same day he was born.

During his lifetime, Joseph Smith also lost three brothers to untimely deaths. Ephraim died soon after birth in 1810. Joseph’s older brother Alvin died in 1823 at the age of 25, and his younger brother Don Carlos died in 1841, also at 25 years of age.

The Prophet suffered another great loss when his father, upon whom he relied for counsel and strength, died in Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1840. When Father Smith realized that his death was imminent, he called his family to his bedside. He spoke to his wife, saying, “When I look upon my children and realize that although they were raised up to do the Lord’s work, yet they must pass through scenes of trouble and affliction as long as they live upon the earth, my heart is pained and I dread to leave you so surrounded by enemies.”¹

Then he spoke to each of his sons and daughters in turn, giving them his last blessing. As recorded by the Prophet’s mother, he spoke these reassuring words to the Prophet Joseph:

“ ‘Joseph, my son, thou art called to a high and holy calling. Thou art even called to do the work of the Lord. Hold out faithful and you shall be blessed, and your children after you. You shall even live to finish your work.’

“At this Joseph cried out, weeping, ‘Oh, my Father, will I?’ ‘Yes,’ said his father, ‘you shall live to lay out the plan of all the work which God has given you to do. This is my dying blessing on your head in the name of Jesus.’ ”²

Drawing upon these difficult experiences from his own life and his inspired understanding of the Savior’s Atonement, the Prophet Joseph Smith was able to give much-needed comfort to many mourning Saints.

Teachings of Joseph Smith

**When beloved family members or friends die,
we have great comfort in knowing we will meet them
again in the world to come.**

The Prophet spoke at a Church conference in Nauvoo on April 7, 1844. He spoke about his friend King Follett, who had recently died: “Beloved Saints: I will call [for] the attention of this congregation while I address you on the subject of the dead. The decease of our beloved brother, Elder King Follett, who was crushed in a well by the falling of a tub of rock, has more immediately led me to this subject. I have been requested to speak by his friends and relatives, but inasmuch as there are a great many in this congregation who live in this city as well as elsewhere, who have lost friends, I feel disposed to speak on the subject in general, and offer you my ideas, so far as I have ability, and so far as I shall be inspired by the Holy Spirit to dwell on this subject. I want your prayers and faith that I may have the instruction of Almighty God and the gift of the Holy Ghost, so that I may set forth things that are true and which can be easily comprehended by you, and that the testimony may carry conviction to your hearts and minds of the truth of what I shall say. . . .

“ . . . I know that my testimony is true; hence, when I talk to these mourners, what have they lost? Their relatives and friends are only separated from their bodies for a short season: their spirits which existed with God have left the tabernacle of clay only for a little moment, as it were; and they now exist in a place where they converse together the same as we do on the earth. . . .

“ . . . What have we to console us in relation to the dead? We have reason to have the greatest hope and consolation for our dead of any people on the earth; for we have seen them walk worthily in our midst, and seen them sink asleep in the arms of Jesus. . . .

“You mourners have occasion to rejoice, speaking of the death of Elder King Follett; for your husband and father is gone to wait until the resurrection of the dead—until the perfection of the

remainder; for at the resurrection your friend will rise in perfect felicity and go to celestial glory. . . .

“I am authorized to say, by the authority of the Holy Ghost, that you have no occasion to fear; for he is gone to the home of the just. Don’t mourn, don’t weep. I know it by the testimony of the Holy Ghost that is within me; and you may wait for your friends to come forth to meet you in the morn of the celestial world. . . .

“I have a father, brothers, children, and friends who have gone to a world of spirits. They are only absent for a moment. They are in the spirit, and we shall soon meet again. The time will soon arrive when the trumpet shall sound. When we depart, we shall hail our mothers, fathers, friends, and all whom we love, who have fallen asleep in Jesus. There will be no fear of mobs, persecutions, or malicious lawsuits and arrests; but it will be an eternity of felicity.”³

Elder Lorenzo D. Barnes died while serving as a missionary in England. The Prophet spoke of his passing at a meeting held in the unfinished Nauvoo Temple: “I will tell you what I want. If tomorrow I shall be called to lie in yonder tomb, in the morning of the resurrection let me strike hands with my father, and cry, ‘My father,’ and he will say, ‘My son, my son,’ as soon as the rock rends and before we come out of our graves.

“And may we contemplate these things so? Yes, if we learn how to live and how to die. When we lie down we contemplate how we may rise in the morning; and it is pleasing for friends to lie down together, locked in the arms of love, to sleep and wake in each other’s embrace and renew their conversation.

“Would you think it strange if I relate what I have seen in vision in relation to this interesting theme? Those who have died in Jesus Christ may expect to enter into all that fruition of joy when they come forth, which they possessed or anticipated here.

“So plain was the vision, that I actually saw men, before they had ascended from the tomb, as though they were getting up slowly. They took each other by the hand and said to each other, ‘My father, my son, my mother, my daughter, my brother, my

sister.' And when the voice calls for the dead to arise, suppose I am laid by the side of my father, what would be the first joy of my heart? To meet my father, my mother, my brother, my sister; and when they are by my side, I embrace them and they me. . . .

"More painful to me are the thoughts of annihilation than death. If I have no expectation of seeing my father, mother, brothers, sisters and friends again, my heart would burst in a moment, and I should go down to my grave. The expectation of seeing my friends in the morning of the resurrection cheers my soul and makes me bear up against the evils of life. It is like their taking a long journey, and on their return we meet them with increased joy. . . .

"To Marcellus Bates [a Church member whose wife had died] let me administer comfort. You shall soon have the company of your companion in a world of glory, and the friends of Brother Barnes and all the Saints who are mourning. This has been a warning voice to us all to be sober and diligent and lay aside mirth, vanity and folly, and to be prepared to die tomorrow."⁴

Parents who lose children in death will receive them in the resurrection just as they laid them down.

At the funeral of two-year-old Marian Lyon, the Prophet said: "We have again the warning voice sounded in our midst, which shows the uncertainty of human life; and in my leisure moments I have meditated upon the subject, and asked the question, why it is that infants, innocent children, are taken away from us, especially those that seem to be the most intelligent and interesting. The strongest reasons that present themselves to my mind are these: This world is a very wicked world; and it . . . grows more wicked and corrupt. . . . The Lord takes many away, even in infancy, that they may escape the envy of man, and the sorrows and evils of this present world; they were too pure, too lovely, to live on earth; therefore, if rightly considered, instead of mourning we have reason to rejoice as they are delivered from evil, and we shall soon have them again. . . .

". . . The only difference between the old and young dying is, one lives longer in heaven and eternal light and glory than the



Joseph Smith taught that young children “must rise just as they died” and that parents will greet their children with “the same loveliness in the celestial glory.”

other, and is freed a little sooner from this miserable, wicked world. Notwithstanding all this glory, we for a moment lose sight of it, and mourn the loss, but we do not mourn as those without hope.”⁵

“A question may be asked—‘Will mothers have their children in eternity?’ Yes! Yes! Mothers, you shall have your children; for they shall have eternal life, for their debt is paid.”⁶

“Children . . . must rise just as they died; we can there hail our lovely infants with the same glory—the same loveliness in the celestial glory.”⁷

President Joseph F. Smith, the sixth President of the Church, reported: “Joseph Smith taught the doctrine that the infant child that was laid away in death would come up in the resurrection as a child; and, pointing to the mother of a lifeless child, he said to her: ‘You will have the joy, the pleasure and satisfaction of nurturing this child, after its resurrection, until it reaches the full stature of its spirit.’ . . .

“In 1854, I met with my aunt [Agnes Smith], the wife of my uncle, Don Carlos Smith, who was the mother of that little girl

[Sophronia] that Joseph Smith, the Prophet, was speaking about, when he told the mother that she should have the joy, the pleasure, and the satisfaction of rearing that child, after the resurrection, until it reached the full stature of its spirit; and that it would be a far greater joy than she could possibly have in mortality, because she would be free from the sorrow and fear and disabilities of mortal life, and she would know more than she could know in this life. I met that widow, the mother of that child, and she told me this circumstance and bore testimony to me that this was what the Prophet Joseph Smith said when he was speaking at the funeral of her little daughter.”⁸

*Mary Isabella Horne and Leonora Cannon Taylor each lost a young child in death. Sister Horne recalled that the Prophet Joseph Smith gave the two sisters these words of comfort: “He told us that we should receive those children in the morning of the resurrection just as we laid them down, in purity and innocence, and we should nourish and care for them as their mothers. He said that children would be raised in the resurrection just as they were laid down, and that they would obtain all the intelligence necessary to occupy thrones, principalities and powers.”*⁹

**While we mourn when loved ones die, we can trust that
“the God of all the earth will do right.”**

*At the funeral of 24-year-old Ephraim Marks, the Prophet declared: “It is a very solemn and awful time. I never felt more solemn; it calls to mind the death of my oldest brother, Alvin, who died in New York, and my youngest brother, Don Carlos Smith, who died in Nauvoo. It has been hard for me to live on earth and see these young men upon whom we have leaned for support and comfort taken from us in the midst of their youth. Yes, it has been hard to be reconciled to these things. I have sometimes thought that I should have felt more reconciled to have been called away myself if it had been the will of God; yet I know we ought to be still and know it is of God, and be reconciled to His will; all is right. It will be but a short time before we shall all in like manner be called: it may be the case with me as well as you.”*¹⁰

On June 6, 1832, Joseph Smith wrote to Emma Smith: “I was grieved to hear that Hyrum had lost his little child. I think we can in some degree sympathize with him, but we all must be reconciled to our lots and say the will of the Lord be done.”¹¹

On January 20, 1840, Joseph Smith wrote to Emma Smith: “I received a letter from Hyrum, which cheered my heart to learn that my family was all alive. Yet my heart mourns for those who have been taken from us, but not without hope, for I shall see them again and be with them. Therefore, we can be more reconciled to the dealings of God.”¹²

“With respect to the deaths in Zion, we feel to mourn with those that mourn, but remember that the God of all the earth will do right.”¹³

“There have been many deaths, which leaves a melancholy reflection, but we cannot help it. When God speaks from the heavens to call us hence, we must submit to His mandates.”¹⁴

At the funeral of James Adams, the Prophet said: “I saw him first at Springfield, [Illinois,] when on my way from Missouri to Washington. He sought me out when a stranger, took me to his home, encouraged and cheered me, and gave me money. He has been a most intimate friend. . . . He has had revelations concerning his departure, and has gone to a more important work. When men are prepared, they are better off to go hence. Brother Adams has gone to open up a more effectual door for the dead. The spirits of the just are exalted to a greater and more glorious work; hence they are blessed in their departure to the world of spirits.”¹⁵

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages vii–xii.

- What are your thoughts or feelings as you read the accounts on pages 171–73? How might these experiences have influenced the way the Prophet Joseph taught about death and resurrection?

- This chapter contains messages Joseph Smith shared with people who mourned the deaths of loved ones (pages 174–79). In these messages, the Prophet offered “hope and consolation” by teaching doctrines of the gospel and showing his hearers how those doctrines applied in their lives. As you think of loved ones who have died or who may soon die, what gospel truths bring you comfort? Why are these truths significant to you?
- Read the counsel Joseph Smith gave when speaking of Elder Barnes’s death, including his counsel about “how to live and how to die” (pages 175–76). What does this counsel mean to you? Think about how your life might change as you remember his counsel.
- Review the Prophet’s words to parents whose little children had died (pages 176–78). How can these doctrines provide hope to grieving parents?
- Study Joseph Smith’s counsel about reconciling ourselves to God’s will when loved ones die (pages 178–79). How does our decision to accept God’s will influence our emotions? our words and our actions? In what ways might our decision help others?

Related Scriptures: John 20:1–29; Mosiah 16:7–8; Alma 40:11–12; Moroni 8:11–20; D&C 42:45–46

Notes

1. Joseph Smith Sr., quoted in Lucy Mack Smith, “The History of Lucy Smith, Mother of the Prophet,” 1844–45 manuscript, book 18, p. 5, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
2. Joseph Smith Sr., blessing given to Joseph Smith shortly before Joseph Smith Sr.’s death on Sept. 14, 1840, in Nauvoo, Illinois; quoted in Lucy Mack Smith, “The History of Lucy Smith, Mother of the Prophet,” 1845 manuscript, p. 298, Church Archives.
3. *History of the Church*, 6:302–3, 310–11, 315–16; bracketed word in original; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 7, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
4. *History of the Church*, 5:361–63; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 16, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff and Willard Richards.
5. *History of the Church*, 4:553–54; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Mar. 20, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.

6. *History of the Church*, 6:316; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 7, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
7. *History of the Church*, 6:366; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on May 12, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Thomas Bullock.
8. Joseph F. Smith, "Status of Children in the Resurrection," *Improvement Era*, May 1918, p. 571.
9. Mary Isabella Horne, quoted in *History of the Church*, 4:556, footnote; from her statement given on Nov. 19, 1896, in Salt Lake City, Utah.
10. *History of the Church*, 4:587; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 9, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.
11. Letter from Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, June 6, 1832, Greenville, Indiana; Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois.
12. Letter from Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, Jan. 20, 1840, Chester County, Pennsylvania; Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois.
13. *History of the Church*, 1:341; from a letter from Joseph Smith to the brethren in Missouri, Apr. 21, 1833, Kirtland, Ohio.
14. *History of the Church*, 4:432; from a letter from Joseph Smith to Smith Tuttle, Oct. 9, 1841, Nauvoo, Illinois.
15. *History of the Church*, 6:51–52; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Oct. 9, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards and *Times and Seasons*, Sept. 15, 1843, p. 331; this issue of the *Times and Seasons* was published late.