



*The Prophet's many responsibilities, as well as the persecutions he faced, often took him away from his family. While he and his brother Hyrum were imprisoned in Liberty Jail, the Prophet's wife, Emma, and their son Joseph came to visit him.*



## A Heart Full of Love and Faith: The Prophet's Letters to His Family

*“Remember that I am a true and faithful friend to you and the children forever. My heart is entwined around yours forever and ever. Oh, may God bless you all.”*

### **From the Life of Joseph Smith**

**I**n his prophetic calling, Joseph Smith was required to travel extensively to meet the needs of a rapidly expanding organization. After he identified Independence, Missouri, as the place for the building of Zion in the summer of 1831, the Church grew quickly there, as it continued to do in Kirtland, Ohio. From 1831 to 1838, the Church had two centers of population, one in Missouri and the other in Kirtland, where the Prophet lived. During this period, the Prophet made the arduous 900-mile journey to Missouri five times to oversee the development of the Church there.

In 1833 and again in 1837, Joseph Smith visited Upper Canada, teaching the gospel and strengthening branches. In 1834 and 1835, he traveled to Michigan to visit Church members. Over a period of years, he preached the gospel and conducted Church business in Springfield, Illinois; Boston and Salem, Massachusetts; Monmouth County, New Jersey; New York City and Albany, New York; Cincinnati, Ohio; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Washington, D.C.; and various other locations.

The Prophet's travels took him frequently away from his home and family, as did the persecutions he repeatedly faced. He was unjustly arrested and imprisoned numerous times, and he was the victim of dozens of unfounded lawsuits. For example, on July 27, 1837, the Prophet and several other Church leaders left

Kirtland to visit the Saints in Canada. When they reached Painesville, Ohio, they were “detained all day by malicious and vexatious lawsuits.” Since they were not far from Kirtland, they started for home in order to rest and then begin their journey again the next day. “About sunset I got into my carriage to return home to Kirtland,” the Prophet wrote. “At this moment the sheriff sprang into the carriage, seized my lines, and served another writ on me.”<sup>1</sup>

The Prophet’s many absences from home were a severe trial to him and to his family. His letters to Emma reveal the loneliness he experienced and the longing he felt for her and for their children. He wrote continually of his great love for his family and his faith in God. He also gave heartening assurances to his family, expressing optimism for the future in spite of the adversities they faced.

On April 1, 1832, the Prophet left home for his second journey to Missouri, only a week after he had been tarred and feathered by a mob and just two days after his adopted son had died. Surely his heart would have been heavy with sadness and concern for his wife, Emma, and for his only living child, Julia. While he was returning home the following month, anxious to rejoin his family, he was detained for several weeks in Greenville, Indiana. Bishop Newel K. Whitney, one of the Prophet’s traveling companions, had severely injured his leg in a stagecoach accident and needed to convalesce before he could travel. During this time, the Prophet was poisoned in some manner, causing him to vomit so violently that he dislocated his jaw. He made his way to Bishop Whitney, who, though still bedridden, gave Joseph a priesthood blessing. The Prophet was immediately healed.

Shortly after this experience, the Prophet penned these lines to his wife: “Brother Martin [Harris] has arrived here and brought the pleasing news that our families were well when he left there, which greatly cheered our hearts and revived our spirits. We thank our Heavenly Father for his goodness unto us and all of you. . . . My situation is a very unpleasant one, although I will endeavor to be contented, the Lord assisting me. . . . I should like to see little Julia and once more take her on my knee and converse with you. . . . I subscribe myself your husband. The Lord bless you, peace be with you, so farewell until I return.”<sup>2</sup>

## Teachings of Joseph Smith

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### Family members pray for, comfort, and strengthen one another.

*To Emma Smith on October 13, 1832, from New York City, New York:* “This day I have been walking through the most splendid part of the city of New York. The buildings are truly great and wonderful, to the astonishing of every beholder. . . . After beholding all that I had any desire to behold, I returned to my room to meditate and calm my mind; and behold, the thoughts of home, of Emma and Julia, rush upon my mind like a flood and I could wish for a moment to be with them. My breast is filled with all the feelings and tenderness of a parent and a husband, and could I be with you I would tell you many things. . . .

“I feel as if I wanted to say something to you to comfort you in your peculiar trial and present affliction [Emma was pregnant at the time]. I hope God will give you strength that you may not faint. I pray God to soften the hearts of those around you to be kind to you and take the burden off your shoulders as much as possible and not afflict you. I feel for you, for I know your state and that others do not, but you must comfort yourself knowing that God is your friend in heaven and that you have one true and living friend on earth, your husband.”<sup>3</sup>

*To Emma Smith on November 12, 1838, from Richmond, Missouri, where he was being held prisoner:* “I received your letter, which I read over and over again; it was a sweet morsel to me. O God, grant that I may have the privilege of seeing once more my lovely family in the enjoyment of the sweets of liberty and social life. To press them to my bosom and kiss their lovely cheeks would fill my heart with unspeakable gratitude. Tell the children that I am alive and trust I shall come and see them before long. Comfort their hearts all you can, and try to be comforted yourself all you can. . . .

“P.S. Write as often as you can, and if possible come and see me, and bring the children if possible. Act according to your own feelings and best judgment, and endeavor to be comforted, if possible, and I trust that all will turn out for the best.”<sup>4</sup>

*To Emma Smith on April 4, 1839, from the jail in Liberty, Missouri:* “My dear Emma, I think of you and the children continually. . . . I want to see little Frederick, Joseph, Julia, and Alexander, Johanna [an orphan who was living with the Smiths], and old Major [the family dog]. And as to yourself, if you want to know how much I want to see you, examine your feelings, how much you want to see me, and judge for yourself. I would gladly walk from here to you barefoot and bareheaded and half-naked to see you and think it great pleasure, and never count it toil. . . . I bear with fortitude all my oppression; so do those that are with me. Not one of us has flinched yet.”<sup>5</sup>

*To Emma Smith on January 20, 1840, from Chester County, Pennsylvania:* “I feel very anxious to see you all once more in this world. The time seems long that I am deprived of your society, but the Lord being my helper, I will not be much longer. . . . I am filled with constant anxiety and shall be until I get home. I pray God to spare you all until I get home. My dear Emma, my heart is entwined around you and those little ones. I want you to remember me. Tell all the children that I love them and will come home as soon as I can. Yours in the bonds of love, your husband.”<sup>6</sup>

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**The responsibility to teach our children is always with us.**

*To Emma Smith on November 12, 1838, from Richmond, Missouri, where he was being held prisoner:* “Tell little Joseph he must be a good boy; Father loves him with a perfect love. He is the eldest and must not hurt those that are smaller than him, but comfort them. Tell little Frederick Father loves him with all his heart; he is a lovely boy. Julia is a lovely little girl. I love her also. She is a promising child. Tell her Father wants her to remember him and be a good girl. Tell all the rest that I think of them and pray for them all. . . . Little Alexander is on my mind continually. O my affectionate Emma, I want you to remember that I am a true and faithful friend to you and the children forever. My heart is entwined around yours forever and ever. Oh, may God bless you all, amen. I am your husband and am in bands and tribulation.”<sup>7</sup>

*To Emma Smith on April 4, 1839, from the jail in Liberty, Missouri:* “I want you should not let those little fellows forget me.

Tell them Father loves them with a perfect love, and he is doing all he can to get away from the mob to come to them. Do teach [the children] all you can, that they may have good minds. Be tender and kind to them; don't be fractious to them, but listen to their wants. Tell them Father says they must be good children and mind their mother. My dear Emma, there is great responsibility resting upon you in preserving yourself in honor and sobriety before them and teaching them right things, to form their young and tender minds that they begin in right paths and not get contaminated when young by seeing ungodly examples."<sup>8</sup>

*To Emma Smith on November 9, 1839, from Springfield, Illinois:* "I shall be filled with constant anxiety about you and the children until I hear from you and, in a particular manner, little Frederick. It was so painful to leave him sick. I hope you will watch over those tender offspring in a manner that is becoming a mother and a saint and try to cultivate their minds and [teach] them to read and be sober. Do not let them be exposed to the weather to take cold, and try to get all the rest you can. It will be a long and lonesome time during my absence from you. . . . Be patient until I come, and do the best you can. I cannot write what I want but believe me, my feelings are of the best kind towards you all."<sup>9</sup>

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**God is our friend, and we can trust Him  
in our times of adversity.**

*To Emma Smith on June 6, 1832, from Greenville, Indiana:* "I have visited a grove which is just back of the town almost every day, where I can be secluded from the eyes of any mortal and there give vent to all the feelings of my heart in meditation and prayer. I have called to mind all the past moments of my life and am left to mourn and shed tears of sorrow for my folly in suffering the adversary of my soul to have so much power over me as he has had in times past. But God is merciful and has forgiven my sins, and I rejoice that he sendeth forth the Comforter unto as many as believe and humble themselves before him. . . .

"I will try to be contented with my lot, knowing that God is my friend. In him I shall find comfort. I have given my life into his



and my lovely children. My heart mourns and bleeds for the brethren and sisters and for the slain of the people of God. . . . What God may do for us I do not know, but I hope for the best always in all circumstances. Although I go unto death, I will trust in God. What outrages may be committed by the mob I know not, but expect there will be but little or no restraint. Oh, may God have mercy on us. . . . God has spared some of us thus far; perhaps he will extend mercy in some degree toward us yet. . . .

“I cannot learn much for certainty in the situation that I am in, and can only pray for deliverance until it is meted out and take everything as it comes with patience and fortitude. I hope you will be faithful and true to every trust. I can’t write much in my situation. Conduct all matters as your circumstances and necessities require. May God give you wisdom and prudence and sobriety, which I have every reason to believe you will [have].

“Those little children are subjects of my meditation continually. Tell them that Father is yet alive. God grant that he may see them again. O Emma, . . . do not forsake me nor the truth, but remember me; if I do not meet you again in this life, may God grant that we may meet in heaven. I cannot express my feelings; my heart is full. Farewell, O my kind and affectionate Emma. I am yours forever, your husband and true friend.”<sup>12</sup>

*To Emma Smith on March 21, 1839, from the jail in Liberty, Missouri:* “My dear Emma, I very well know your toils and sympathize with you. If God will spare my life once more to have the privilege of taking care of you, I will ease your care and endeavor to comfort your heart. I want you to take the best care of the family you can. I believe you will do all you can. I was sorry to learn that Frederick was sick, but I trust he is well again and that you are all well. I want you to try to gain time and write to me a long letter and tell me all you can and even if old Major is alive yet and what those little prattlers say that cling around your neck. . . . Tell them I am in prison that their lives might be saved. . . .

“God ruleth all things after the counsel of his own will. My trust is in him. The salvation of my soul is of the most importance to me forasmuch as I know for a certainty of eternal things. If the heavens linger, it is nothing to me. I must steer my [ship] safe, which I intend to do. I want you to do the same. Yours forever.”<sup>13</sup>

*To Emma Smith on August 16, 1842, near Nauwoo, Illinois; the Prophet Joseph was hiding from his enemies:* “I take the liberty to tender you my sincere thanks for the two interesting and consoling visits that you have made me during my almost exiled situation. Tongue cannot express the gratitude of my heart, for the warm and true-hearted friendship you have manifested in these things towards me. The time has passed away, since you left me, very agreeably thus far; my mind being perfectly reconciled to my fate, let it be what it may. . . .

“Tell the children it is well with their father as yet; and that he remains in fervent prayer to Almighty God for the safety of himself, and for you, and for them. Tell Mother Smith that it shall be well with her son, whether in life or in death; for thus saith the Lord God. Tell her that I remember her all the while, as well as Lucy [Joseph’s sister], and all the rest. They all must be of good cheer. . . . Yours in haste, your affectionate husband until death, through all eternity; for evermore.”<sup>14</sup>

## Suggestions for Study and Teaching

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

- Briefly review this chapter, noting Joseph Smith’s feelings toward Emma and their children. What does his example teach about how we should speak and act in our families? What can we learn from Joseph and Emma Smith’s efforts to write to one another and to see one another? What are some things you have done to show family members that you love them?
- The Prophet Joseph told Emma that he was “a true and faithful friend to [her] and the children forever,” and he thanked her for her “warm and true-hearted friendship” (pages 242, 246). What can husbands and wives do to nurture their friendship?
- In his letters, Joseph Smith showed trust in Emma, expressing confidence that she would make good decisions and do all she could to take care of the family (page 245). How might such expressions of trust influence the relationship between a husband and a wife?

- Read the Prophet Joseph’s message to his children in the second paragraph on page 246. How might it have helped his children to receive this news? During times of trial, what can parents do to show their children that they have faith in God?
- Review Joseph Smith’s expressions of trust in God found on pages 243–46. Identify several of these expressions that are particularly touching to you. How can you apply these truths in your life?

*Related Scriptures:* Genesis 2:24; 1 Corinthians 11:11; Ephesians 5:25; Mosiah 4:14–15; D&C 25:5, 9, 14; 68:25–28

### Notes

1. *History of the Church*, 2:502; spelling modernized; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book B-1, p. 767, and addenda, p. 6, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
2. Letter from Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, June 6, 1832, Greenville, Indiana; Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois.
3. Letter from Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, Oct. 13, 1832, New York City, New York; Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri.
4. Letter from Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, Nov. 12, 1838, Richmond, Missouri; Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri.
5. Letter from Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, Apr. 4, 1839, Liberty Jail, Liberty, Missouri; Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut; copy in Church Archives. Johanna’s full name was Johanna Carter; she was the orphaned daughter of John S. and Elizabeth Kenyon Carter.
6. Letter from Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, Jan. 20, 1840, Chester County, Pennsylvania; Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois.
7. Letter from Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, Nov. 12, 1838, Richmond, Missouri; Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri.
8. Letter from Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, Apr. 4, 1839, Liberty Jail, Liberty, Missouri; Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut; copy in Church Archives.
9. Letter from Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, Nov. 9, 1839, Springfield, Illinois; Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri; copy in Church Archives.
10. Letter from Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, June 6, 1832, Greenville, Indiana; Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois.
11. Letter from Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, June 4, 1834, from the banks of the Mississippi River in western Illinois; Letter Book 2, 1837–43, p. 58, Joseph Smith, Collection, Church Archives.
12. Letter from Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, Nov. 4, 1838, Independence, Missouri; Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri; copy in Church Archives.
13. Letter from Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, Mar. 21, 1839, Liberty Jail, Liberty, Missouri; Joseph Smith, Collection, Church Archives.
14. *History of the Church*, 5:103, 105; paragraph divisions altered; from a letter from Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, Aug. 16, 1842, near Nauvoo, Illinois.