



Joseph Smith's Feelings about His Prophetic Mission

"I have no desire but to do all men good."

From the Life of Joseph Smith

From the beginning of the Prophet Joseph Smith's ministry, his life was often in peril. Though the Lord delivered him many times from his enemies, the Prophet knew that once he had completed his earthly mission, he could die. "Some have supposed that Brother Joseph could not die," he said at a funeral in Nauvoo in 1842, "but this is a mistake: it is true there have been times when I have had the promise of my life to accomplish such and such things, but, having now accomplished those things, I have not at present any lease of my life. I am as liable to die as other men."¹

The Prophet was well aware that he and all of the Saints living in Nauvoo were in an increasingly dangerous situation. As Nauvoo grew larger, some of the people who lived in the area began to fear the growing political and economic power of the Saints, and mobs began again to harass them. The Prophet was in particular danger, for authorities from Missouri made repeated efforts to capture him, and apostates from the Church became increasingly hostile in their efforts to destroy him. On August 6, 1842, the Prophet declared that the time would come when Church members would be forced to leave Nauvoo:

"I prophesied that the Saints would continue to suffer much affliction and would be driven to the Rocky Mountains, many would apostatize, others would be put to death by our persecutors or lose their lives in consequence of exposure or disease, and some of you will live to go and assist in making settlements and build cities and see the Saints become a mighty people in the midst of the Rocky Mountains."²



Joseph Smith found time to show that he cared for the Saints individually. Margarette McIntire Burgess remembered the Prophet, whom she called “the loving friend of children,” helping her and her brother when they were stuck in the mud.

In the sermons and writings of the last few years of the Prophet's life, there is a sense of urgency in his words. Knowing that his time was short, he labored earnestly to teach the Saints the things that God had revealed to him and encouraged them to prepare to receive these truths. He also expressed his great love for the Saints, even declaring that he was willing to lay down his life for them: "I am ready to be offered up a sacrifice in that way that can bring to pass the greatest benefit and good."³

It is remarkable that while the Prophet was enduring so much persecution and was pressured by the constant demands of the growing Church, he found time to show that he cared for each Church member as an individual. Many Saints in later years remembered the love and kindness the Prophet Joseph showed to them.

Aroet L. Hale recalled: "The Prophet . . . frequently used to come out of the Mansion [House] and play ball with us boys, his son Joseph being near my age. [The Prophet] Joseph would always conform to the rules. He would catch till it came his turn to take the club, then, being a very stout [strong] man, would knock the ball so far that we used to holler to the boy that was going for the ball to take his dinner. This used to make the Prophet laugh. Joseph was always good natured and full of fun."⁴

Margarette McIntire Burgess recalled another experience with the Prophet in Nauvoo: "My older brother and I were going to school, near to the building which was known as Joseph's brick store. It had been raining the previous day, causing the ground to be very muddy, especially along that street. My brother Wallace and I both got fast in the mud, and could not get out, and of course, child-like, we began to cry, for we thought we would have to stay there. But looking up, I beheld the loving friend of children, the Prophet Joseph, coming to us. He soon had us on higher and drier ground. Then he stooped down and cleaned the mud from our little, heavy-laden shoes, took his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped our tear-stained faces. He spoke kind and cheering words to us, and sent us on our way to school rejoicing. Was it any wonder that I loved that great, good and noble man of God?"⁵

Teachings of Joseph Smith

**Prophets teach what God reveals to them;
we strive to understand and give heed to their words.**

“It is my meditation all the day, and more than my meat and drink, to know how I shall make the Saints of God comprehend the visions that roll like an overflowing surge before my mind. Oh! how I would delight to bring before you things which you never thought of! But poverty and the cares of the world prevent. . . .

“Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna to Almighty God, that rays of light begin to burst forth upon us even now. I cannot find words in which to express myself. I am not learned, but I have as good feelings as any man. Oh, that I had the language of the archangel to express my feelings once to my friends! But I never expect to in this life.”⁶

“There has been a great difficulty in getting anything into the heads of this generation. It has been like splitting hemlock knots with a corn-dodger [a piece of corn bread] for a wedge, and a pumpkin for a beetle [a wooden mallet]. Even the Saints are slow to understand.

“I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them, after suffering all they have for the work of God, will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions: they cannot stand the fire at all. How many will be able to abide a celestial law, and go through and receive their exaltation, I am unable to say, as many are called, but few are chosen [see D&C 121:40].”⁷

“I am not like other men. My mind is continually occupied with the business of the day, and I have to depend entirely upon the living God for everything I say on such occasions as these [a funeral]. . . .

“Had I inspiration, revelation, and lungs to communicate what my soul has contemplated in times past, there is not a soul in this congregation but would go to their homes and shut their mouths in everlasting silence on religion till they had learned something.

“Why be so certain that you comprehend the things of God, when all things with you are so uncertain? You are welcome to all the knowledge and intelligence I can impart to you.”⁸

“Some people say I am a fallen Prophet, because I do not bring forth more of the word of the Lord. Why do I not do it? Are we able to receive it? No! not one in this room.”⁹

“I will from time to time reveal to you the subjects that are revealed by the Holy Ghost to me. All the lies that are now hatched up against me are of the devil, and the influence of the devil and his servants will be used against the kingdom of God. The servants of God teach nothing but principles of eternal life, by their works ye shall know them. A good man will speak good things and holy principles, and an evil man evil things. I feel, in the name of the Lord, to rebuke all such bad principles, liars, etc., and I warn all of you to look out whom you are going after. I exhort you to give heed to all the virtue and the teachings which I have given you. . . .

“I enjoin for your consideration—add to your faith virtue, love, etc. I say, in the name of the Lord, if these things are in you, you shall be fruitful [see 2 Peter 1:5–8]. I testify that no man has power to reveal it but myself—things in heaven, in earth and hell. . . . I commend you all to God, that you may inherit all things; and may God add His blessing.”¹⁰

**Although prophets are men with human frailties,
they are called of God to teach and lead His people.**

The Prophet’s journal for November 6, 1835, records: “I was this morning introduced to a man from the east. After hearing my name, he remarked that I was nothing but a man, indicating by this expression, that he had supposed that a person to whom the Lord should see fit to reveal His will, must be something more than a man. He seemed to have forgotten the saying that fell from the lips of St. James, that [Elijah] was a man subject to like passions as we are, yet he had such power with God, that He, in answer to his prayers, shut the heavens that they gave no rain for the space of three years and six months; and again, in answer to his prayer, the heavens gave forth rain, and the earth

gave forth fruit [see James 5:17–18]. Indeed, such is the darkness and ignorance of this generation, that they look upon it as incredible that a man should have any [dealings] with his Maker.”¹¹

“When did I ever teach anything wrong from this stand? When was I ever confounded? I want to triumph in Israel before I depart hence and am no more seen. I never told you I was perfect; but there is no error in the revelations which I have taught. Must I, then, be thrown away as a thing of naught?”¹²

“Although I do wrong, I do not the wrongs that I am charged with doing: the wrong that I do is through the frailty of human nature, like other men. No man lives without fault. Do you think that even Jesus, if He were here, would be without fault in your eyes? His enemies said all manner of evil against Him—they all watched for iniquity in Him.”¹³

Joseph Smith’s journal for October 29, 1842, records: “I . . . went over to the store [in Nauvoo, Illinois], where a number of brethren and sisters were assembled, who had arrived this morning from the neighborhood of New York. . . . I told them I was but a man, and they must not expect me to be perfect; if they expected perfection from me, I should expect it from them; but if they would bear with my infirmities and the infirmities of the brethren, I would likewise bear with their infirmities.”¹⁴

**Despite opposition, prophets fulfill the missions
given to them by God.**

“I am happy and thankful for the privilege of being present on this occasion. Great exertions have been made on the part of our enemies to carry me to Missouri and destroy my life; but the Lord has hedged up their way, and they have not, as yet, accomplished their purpose. God has enabled me to keep out of their hands. I have warred a good warfare. . . .

“I shall triumph over my enemies: I have begun to triumph over them at home, and I shall do it abroad. All those that rise up against me will surely feel the weight of their iniquity upon their own heads.”¹⁵

“I speak boldly and faithfully and with authority. . . . I know what I say; I understand my mission and business. God Almighty

is my shield; and what can man do if God is my friend? I shall not be sacrificed until my time comes; then I shall be offered freely. . . . I thank God for preserving me from my enemies; I have no enemies but for the truth's sake. I have no desire but to do all men good. I feel to pray for all men."¹⁶

"If I had not actually got into this work and been called of God, I would back out. But I cannot back out: I have no doubt of the truth."¹⁷

"I am a rough stone. The sound of the hammer and chisel was never heard on me until the Lord took me in hand. I desire the learning and wisdom of heaven alone."¹⁸

"I prophesy and bear record this morning that all the combined powers of earth and hell shall not and cannot ever overthrow or overcome this boy, for I have a promise from the eternal God. If I have sinned, I have sinned outwardly; but surely I have contemplated the things of God."¹⁹

"When men come out and build upon other men's foundations, they do it on their own responsibility, without authority from God; and when the floods come and the winds blow, their foundations will be found to be sand, and their whole fabric will crumble to dust.

"Did I build on any other man's foundation? I have got all the truth which the Christian world possessed, and an independent revelation in the bargain, and God will bear me off triumphant."²⁰

Prophets love those they serve and desire to lead them well, even if doing so requires reproving them.

"There is no greater love than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends [see John 15:13]. I discover hundreds and thousands of my brethren ready to sacrifice their lives for me.

"The burdens which roll upon me are very great. My persecutors allow me no rest, and I find that in the midst of business and care the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Although I was called of my Heavenly Father to lay the foundation of this great work and kingdom in this dispensation, and testify of His revealed will to scattered Israel, I am subject to like passions as other men, like the prophets of olden times. . . .

“I see no faults in the Church, and therefore let me be resurrected with the Saints, whether I ascend to heaven or descend to hell, or go to any other place. And if we go to hell, we will turn the devils out of doors and make a heaven of it. Where this people are, there is good society.”²¹

“The Saints need not think because I am familiar with them and am playful and cheerful, that I am ignorant of what is going on. Iniquity of any kind cannot be sustained in the Church, and it will not fare well where I am; for I am determined while I do lead the Church, to lead it right.”²²

“If I am so fortunate as to be the man to comprehend God, and explain or convey the principles to your hearts, so that the Spirit seals them upon you, then let every man and woman henceforth sit in silence, put their hands on their mouths, and never lift their hands or voices, or say anything against the man of God or the servants of God again. . . . If I am bringing you to a knowledge of Him, all persecutions against me ought to cease. You will then know that I am His servant; for I speak as one having authority. . . .



“I have intended my remarks for all, both rich and poor, bond and free, great and small. . . . I love all men, especially these my brethren and sisters.”

“. . . I can taste the principles of eternal life, and so can you. They are given to me by the revelations of Jesus Christ; and I know that when I tell you these words of eternal life as they are given to me, you taste them, and I know that you believe them. You say honey is sweet, and so do I. I can also taste the spirit of eternal life. I know that it is good; and when I tell you of these things which were given me by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you are bound to receive them as sweet, and rejoice more and more. . . .

“I have intended my remarks for all, both rich and poor, bond and free, great and small. I have no enmity against any man. I love you all; but I hate some of your deeds. I am your best friend, and if persons miss their mark it is their own fault. If I reprove a man, and he hates me, he is a fool; for I love all men, especially these my brethren and sisters.

“. . . You don't know me; you never knew my heart. No man knows my history. I cannot tell it: I shall never undertake it. I don't blame any one for not believing my history. If I had not experienced what I have, I would not have believed it myself. I never did harm any man since I was born in the world. My voice is always for peace.

“I cannot lie down until all my work is finished. I never think any evil, nor do anything to the harm of my fellow-man. When I am called by the trump of the archangel and weighed in the balance, you will all know me then. I add no more. God bless you all.”²³

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.

- On page 517, read about the persecution Joseph Smith faced in Nauvoo. Then turn to page 519 and review the stories of him serving and playing with the children in Nauvoo. Why do you think he was able to maintain such a cheerful, caring attitude? Think about what you can do to remain happy and loving during times of trial.

- Read the third and fourth paragraphs on page 520, noting the Prophet Joseph’s disappointment when the Saints were not ready to receive all he wanted to teach them (see pages 520–21). What can interfere with our ability to receive more truth? What can we do to be “prepared to receive the things of God”?
- Review the paragraph that begins on the bottom of page 521 and the two following paragraphs. What counsel could you give someone who refuses to follow a Church leader because the leader has some kind of character flaw? Read the third full paragraph on page 522, and think about how this statement applies in all our relationships.
- Joseph Smith expressed faith that God would protect him and enable him to accomplish his mission in life (pages 522–23). What experiences have you had in which God has helped you to fulfill your responsibilities in your family or in a Church calling?
- Study the first two paragraphs on page 525. When have you tasted the sweetness of the truth? How can we rejoice in the words of a prophet or other Church leader even when he reproves us for our misdeeds?
- Quickly review the entire chapter, looking for one or two statements that are particularly helpful for you. What do you appreciate about the statements you have chosen? How has this chapter influenced your testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith?

Related Scriptures: Daniel 2:44–45; 2 Timothy 4:6–8; Jacob 1:17–19; Mosiah 2:9–11; Mormon 9:31

Notes

1. *History of the Church*, 4:587; punctuation modernized; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 9, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.
2. *History of the Church*, 5:85; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book D-1, p. 1362, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
3. *History of the Church*, 5:159; from a letter from Joseph Smith to James Arlington Bennet, Sept. 8, 1842, Nauvoo, Illinois; James Bennet’s last name is incorrectly spelled “Bennett” in *History of the Church*.
4. Aroet L. Hale, “First Book or Journal of the Life and Travels of Aroet L. Hale,” pp. 23–24; Aroet Lucius Hale, *Reminiscences*, ca. 1882, Church Archives.

5. Margarette McIntire Burgess, in "Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith," *Juvenile Instructor*, Jan. 15, 1892, pp. 66–67.
6. *History of the Church*, 5:362; spelling and punctuation modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 16, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff and Willard Richards.
7. *History of the Church*, 6:184–85; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Jan. 21, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.
8. *History of the Church*, 5:529–30; spelling and punctuation modernized; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Aug. 13, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
9. *History of the Church*, 4:478; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Dec. 19, 1841, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.
10. *History of the Church*, 6:366–67; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on May 12, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Thomas Bullock.
11. *History of the Church*, 2:302; from a Joseph Smith journal entry, Nov. 6, 1835, Kirtland, Ohio.
12. *History of the Church*, 6:366; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on May 12, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Thomas Bullock.
13. *History of the Church*, 5:140; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Aug. 31, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Eliza R. Snow.
14. *History of the Church*, 5:181; paragraph divisions altered; from a Joseph Smith journal entry, Oct. 29, 1842, Nauvoo, Illinois.
15. *History of the Church*, 5:139–40; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Aug. 31, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Eliza R. Snow; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
16. *History of the Church*, 5:257, 259; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Jan. 22, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
17. *History of the Church*, 5:336; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 6, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
18. *History of the Church*, 5:423; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 11, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff and Willard Richards; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
19. *History of the Church*, 5:554; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Aug. 27, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards and William Clayton.
20. *History of the Church*, 6:479; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 16, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Thomas Bullock; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
21. *History of the Church*, 5:516–17; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on July 23, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
22. *History of the Church*, 5:411; from instructions given by Joseph Smith on May 27, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.
23. *History of the Church*, 6:304–5, 312, 317; 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.