

## **Strengthening the Family: Adapting to Circumstances, *Ensign*, Dec. 2005**

“Fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Less Than Ideal**

In an ideal world all adults would be happily married, all marriages would be blessed with children, and all family members would be healthy, obedient, and supportive of each other. But life is rarely ideal. Each individual experiences adversity, and no family’s mortal sojourn is consistently trouble free. Without trial, weakness, illness, and death, we would not learn the lessons we came here to learn. President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) explained: “If we look at mortality as a complete existence, then pain, sorrow, failure, and short life could be a calamity. But if we look upon life as an eternal thing stretching far into the pre-earth past and on into the eternal post-death future, then all happenings may be put in proper perspective.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Shifting Responsibilities**

Disease, disability, death, divorce, and other disruptive factors can create challenges. In such situations, “individual adaptation” of roles may be necessary. A father may need to take on additional household and nurturing responsibilities, or a mother who has been a full-time homemaker may need to enter the workforce. Even children may need to accept new responsibilities.

When unsettling events occur, the extended family may also need to assist. Support may range from providing financial assistance to donating time to tend children, help with chores, or care for an ill or disabled family member. The degree of extended-family involvement depends on the situation and the family’s needs.

Even without the effects of serious adversity, the extended family can be an important support system. Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught: “To build a foundation strong enough to support a family in our troubled world today requires the best effort of each of us—father, mother, brother, sister, grandmother, grandfather, aunts, uncles, cousins, and so on. Each must contribute energy and effort in driving piles right down to the bedrock of the gospel until the foundation is strong enough to endure through the eternities.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Adversity**

You may wonder why your family has to endure adversity and the disruption it brings. The answer, and the comfort, can be found in the gospel’s eternal perspective. The Apostle Paul taught that our “affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17). How is this possible?

Elder Merrill J. Bateman of the Presidency of the Seventy reminds us: “Trials and tribulations take many forms: the death of a loved one, a marriage that is different than expected, no marriage, a divorce, a child born with a disability, no children, losing a job, parents who make mistakes, a wayward son or daughter, ill health. The list is endless. Why did God make allowances in His plan for disappointment, pain, suffering, and death? Is adversity necessary for one to build a Christ-centered life, to receive the image of God in his or her countenance?

“An understanding of the plan of salvation, of premortality, earth life, and life after death provides perspective. . . . Opposition, disappointments, pain, suffering, and death are necessary to protect agency and provide for spiritual development (see 2 Ne. 11). On the other hand, if life were limited to our mortal experience, adversity could not be understood. . . . Without an eternal perspective, there are no meaningful explanations for man’s inhumanity to man or for earthquakes, floods, or children with disabilities.

“We should remember that it was Satan who wanted an earth with no disappointments, no tests, no adversity, and no glory except for himself.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Healing through the Atonement**

Although this mortal existence is meant to test us, we are not without divine help. Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said: “It is important to understand that His healing can mean being cured, or having your burdens eased, or even coming to realize that it is worth it to endure to the end patiently. . . .

“Recognize that some challenges in life will not be resolved here on earth. . . . He wants you to learn how to be cured when that is His will and how to obtain strength to live with your challenge when He intends it to be an instrument for growth. . . .

“When you feel you can do no more, temporarily lay your challenges at His feet. . . . The Lord will give relief with divine power when you seek deliverance in humility and *faith in Jesus Christ*.”<sup>5</sup>