

## Trek Lesson #2: We Can Do Hard Things

### I. Trials Are Part of the Journey

For a moment, think about your favorite story. Maybe you're a Lord of the Rings Fan, or Harry Potter. Maybe you love fairy tales like Beauty and the Beast or Cinderella. In that story the main character may be a hobbit or a wizard; they might be a mermaid or a tribute, a kid in a galaxy far far away. You will find one thing all have in common: they must overcome adversity.

Sandwiched between their opening pages and the "happily ever after" (or the closing credits) lies great adversity. Why must all experience sadness and tragedy? Why could we not simply live in bliss and peace, each day filled with wonder, joy, and love?

--ask the youth to tell you what these stories would be like without challenges. For example, what would Harry Potter's life have been like if his parents had lived? What would the Hobbit be like without leaving the Shire? What if Katniss's little sister had not been picked for the Hunger Games?

Elder Uchtdorf explains it like this:

"The scriptures tell us there must be opposition in all things, for without it we could not discern the sweet from the bitter. Would the marathon runner feel the triumph of finishing the race had she not felt the pain of the hours of pushing against her limits? Would the pianist feel the joy of mastering an intricate sonata without the painstaking hours of practice? In stories, as in life, adversity teaches us things we cannot learn otherwise. Adversity helps to develop a depth of character that comes in no other way. Our loving Heavenly Father has set us in a world filled with challenges and trials so that we, through opposition, can learn wisdom, become stronger, and experience joy."

--Think of the characters in the story. How are they changed by the end? Are they wiser? Stronger? More empathetic?

Remember, if you banish the dragons, you banish the heroes.

Whether we like it or not, in our own stories, we all must face challenges that can change who we are. Elder Uchtdorf teaches us the importance of facing challenges with faith:

“It is your reaction to adversity, not the adversity itself, that determines how your life’s story will develop. If you ever feel your burden is too great to bear, lift your heart to your Heavenly Father, and He will uphold and bless you. He says to you, as He said to Joseph Smith, “[Your] adversity and [your] afflictions shall be but a small moment; and then, if [you] endure it well, God shall exalt [you] on high.” Here are some other scriptures that address the necessity of trials:

D&C 29:39        If they never should have bitter they could not know  
                         the sweet:

D&C 121:7–8 Thine adversity shall be but a small moment:

D&C 122:5–8; All these things shall give thee experience, and shall be  
                         for thy good

Moses 6:55 They taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good:

## II. Pioneer Trails and Trials

What do you know about oxen? (cows, steers, & oxen are all cattle, oxen being the work animals, chosen for their strength, often harnessed or yoked together into groups for pulling)

Why would we choose the ox as a symbol for trek? The ox is a strong animal, capable of pulling heavy loads. They are most useful yoked together in groups. As you think of the stories we mentioned before, burdens are easier to bear when we have friends to help us. Frodo needed Sam, Luke needed Han Solo & Leia, Harry need Ron & Hermione, Katniss needed Gale & Peta. And even when we feel alone, the Lord is by our side. In Matthew 11:28-30 the Savior assures us of this (have someone read): 28 “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

As we know, the early saints were asked to do many hard things. The converts from Europe were asked to leave their homes and in many instances, their families, and travel for weeks across the ocean. They then took trains or wagons to the Midwest where they met up with church officials who organized them into companies and they began their journey to Zion.

Below are several different pioneer stories of adversity. Read them over and decide which you want you want to share with your youth, depending on time. Note that some have “happy” endings; others are more somber. But in each case, the saints faced trial with faith and courage and were transformed for the better.

### 1. Come, Come Ye Saints

William Clayton, the composer of "Come, Come, Ye Saints," was one of thousands of exiles forced from their homes in Nauvoo, Illinois. In early spring of 1846 this group moved westward across Iowa en route to a new, more tolerant home. He was not with is wife the night his new son was born because his wife was very sick and she could not leave Nauvoo. He sat by the banks of a river and wrote the song that has become the Mormon anthem.

From the beginning the song captured the pain and hope of the saints. Heber J. Grant shares a testimony given by his father-in-law, Oscar Winters, while Brother Winters was visiting at the Grant home:

“Brother Grant, I do not believe that the young people today fully appreciate what a marvelous inspiration it was to the Saints in crossing the plains to sing, almost daily, the hymn, "Come, Come Ye Saints." Brother Winters then related the following incident:

“One night, as we were making camp, we noticed one of our brethren had not arrived, and a volunteer party was immediately organized to return and see if anything had happened to him. Just as we were about to start, we saw the missing brother coming in the distance. When he arrived, he said he had been quite sick; so some of us unyoked his oxen and attended to his part of the camp duties. After supper, he sat down before the campfire on a large rock, and sang in a very faint but plaintive

and sweet voice, the hymn, "Come, Come Ye Saints." It was a rule of the camp that whenever anybody started this hymn all in the camp should join, but for some reason this evening nobody joined him; he sang the hymn alone. When he had finished, I doubt if there was a single dry eye in the camp. The next morning we noticed that he was not yoking up his cattle. We went to his wagon and found that he had died during the night. We dug a shallow grave, and after we had covered his body with the earth we rolled the large stone to the head of the grave to mark it, the stone on which he had been sitting the night before when he sang:

"And should we die before our journey's through  
Happy day! All is well!  
We then are free from toil and sorrow too;  
With the just we shall dwell.  
But if our lives are spared again  
To see the Saints their rest obtain,  
O how we'll make this chorus swell—  
All is well! All is well!"

(<http://www.ldsiving.com/story/5246-come-come-ye-saints-heber-j-grant-lesson-14>)

*How did the song give comfort and strength? What hymns have given you strength during hard times?*

## 2. Mary Fielding Smith and the Fallen Oxen

Mary Fielding Smith was the widow of Hyrum, who was killed with his brother the Prophet Joseph Smith. She was determined to go west despite her situation. When the time came for Mary Fielding Smith and her group to go west, many of her animals had died from severe winter weather. Mary prepared for the journey as best she could; however, she had to attach two wagons together because she did not have enough oxen and drivers, and instead of sturdy ox teams for each wagon, she had wild steers, cows, and young oxen pulling her wagons. These animals had not been trained to work together and were difficult to control.

The captain of the company told Mary it would be foolish for her to go west because she was not prepared. He said she would never make it to the Salt Lake Valley and would be a burden on the rest of the company. He told her to return to Winter Quarters and wait to come to the Salt Lake Valley until she could get more help. Mary calmly told the captain that she did not need his help. Furthermore, she said, she would enter the valley before he did!

Friends provided several more oxen, which were a great blessing to Mary and her family, and as they progressed across the plains, the untrained oxen learned to work together well. All the children helped on the journey. Martha, the youngest, gathered wood and brush for fires and helped herd the loose cattle (the cattle that were not pulling wagons). Joseph F., who was nine years old, drove a team of oxen, as did his older brother, John.

As the company was crossing Wyoming one day, one of Mary's oxen suddenly lay down as if poisoned. It appeared the ox would die, and Mary had no spare ox with which to replace him. As the ox began to stiffen, the company captain exclaimed, "He is dead, there is no use working with him, we'll have to fix up some way to take the Widow [Mary] along. I told her she would be a burden on the company." But he was mistaken. According to Joseph F., Mary said nothing, "but she took a bottle of consecrated oil from her wagon. After praying for the ox and pouring oil upon him, he got up and we drove along, only detaining the company a very short time." Soon another ox fell ill and was administered to, and it also recovered.

The day before the company was to enter the Salt Lake Valley, several of Mary's oxen were missing again. She knelt in prayer, asking Heavenly Father's help in finding them. She was certain that Heavenly Father would help her. The captain and the rest of the company started off while Mary and her family were still searching for their oxen. Suddenly a storm cloud appeared, thunder rolled, lightning flashed, and rain poured down. Everyone was forced to wait. Sixteen-year-old John was able to find the lost animals during the storm and had them hitched up ready to go as the storm cleared. Mary's family left while the others were still gathering up their teams. They entered the valley hours before the captain and the rest of the company. (*I Walked to Zion*)

*Why do you think Mary refused to stay behind? How did she show faith, especially regarding her oxen? Why was she so sure the Lord would help her? Why was she determined to arrive before the company captain? What does this say about her?*

### 3. Wounds Are Healed

Ebenezer Farnes crossed the plains with a wagon train. While trying to cross a river the wagon was stuck and he was in cold water for more than an hour. He had an injured leg, with the shinbone exposed 4-5 inches. "At first my leg hurt me, then got numb; at least it seemed no use to me. I had to drag it along like a piece of lead, but at last we crossed the river and camped. After turning our cattle out to feed, I go back to the river and took my boot off. The sight of my poor leg made me sick. I wrapped up my leg and thought perhaps I could get to Utah and have it taken off. Pleasant thoughts for a young man all alone in the desert. But from that day forth the sore did not pain me so much, and day by day the wound got smaller and smaller, so when we got to Utah the wound was ore than half closed and soon got well." (*I Walked to Zion*)

*If Ebenezer's leg had not healed, do you think he would have been bitter and angry? Why is it important to have faith DURING the trial, regardless of the outcome? How does our faith affect how we interpret the outcome?*

### 4. Barefoot with My Brother on My Back

Margaret McNeil and her family joined the Church in Scotland. They immigrated to Utah when Margaret was ten years old. "One night the cow ran away from camp, and I was sent to bring her back. I was not watching were I was going and was barefooted. All of a sudden I began to feel I was walking on something soft. I looked down...and to my horror found that I was standing in a bed of snakes, large ones, small ones. At the sight of them I became so weak I could scarcely move; all I could think of was to pray, and in some way I jumped out of them.

The Lord blessed and cared for me. We arrived in Ogden, Utah on the fourth day of October, after a journey of hardships and hunger, with

thankfulness to our Heavenly Father for his protecting care. I walked every step of the way across the plains and drove a cow, and a large part of the way I carried my brother, James, on my back.”

(See Margaret McNeil Ballard, “I Walked Every Step of the Way,” pp. 10–11; see also Susan Arrington Madsen, *I Walked to Zion*, pp. 125–26.)

## 5. Disguised as a Girl

Edwin Petit was forbidden by his guardians to leave Nauvoo and join the pioneers, but he had other plans. After running away twice and being taken back, the third time he succeeded in leaving town but had to sleep in the fields and keep his distance from the LDS camps as he was still being hunted. “Disguised as a girl, and in a company with four or five girls, I crossed the Des Moines River on a flat boat, the boatman supposing I was a girl. I was wearing side combs in my hair, and false curls covered my head. I also wore a sunbonnet...and when I met a friend on horseback, he took me behind him [and I even rode side saddle]. In going along the road, the people sometimes hollered out, “old man, that girl will fall—she’s asleep!” because I was trying to hide my face.” (*I Walked to Zion*)

*Is it surprising that Edwin would repeatedly run away to join the saints? Were you surprised at his disguise and how long he kept it up?*

6. George Burnham was born in Illinois in 1839 and was old enough to remember the Prophet Joseph’s death at Carthage Jail. When George was 6 his dad died while serving a mission. This left his mother Mary Ann and her 5 small kids all alone with no home and no means of support. Mary Ann’s relatives in the East offered her money to return to them if she would leave the church. She refused. Mary Ann very much wanted to go with the Saints to Utah where her family could enjoy freedom and peace, but she had no way to get there. She prayed to the Lord about what to do. She decided to send her two sons, Wallace and George, ages 10 and 8, to go with a man named Mr. Wood to Salt Lake. In exchange, the small boys would be in charge of driving the loose stock. Her two young sons walked all the way from Nauvoo to Salt Lake City. When crossing streams they would grab hold of an animal’s tail and hold on for dear life until they reached the opposite bank. Then they

would have to walk in their wet clothes until they dried on their backs. At night, hungry and tired, they would gather buffalo chips to make a fire to cook their supper on. When they reached the valley, they had no mother to greet them, no home to live in. Wallace and George did their best to look after themselves until their mother and sisters could join them in Salt Lake. Their separation had covered over five years. Every day they were apart, Mary Ann would get on her knees and ask the Lord to watch over her boys and to speed their reunion.

In later years, George remembered how hard his journey was and so he often made the trip East to help bring poor and struggling families to Utah. Traveling by ox was slow and plodding, yet it was much more comfortable than his first trip across the plains and rivers of America.

*Why would a mother send her young kids ahead of her on such a hard trip? When you were their age, (10 & 8) could you have managed on your own? What did George do to help those who came after him? Why did he feel it was his duty?*

## 7. Singing Mosquitos

From the journal of Zebulon Jacobs: August 2. I fixed the mules' feet, mended harnesses, and played laundress. In the evening I went to meeting, but the mosquitoes were there first. The mosquitoes sang at the opening, sang during the service, and at the closing, and finally sang all night. Tried to sleep, but they pulled me out of bed.

*How can humor make hard times more bearable?*

## 8. Martin & Willey Hand Cart Companies

Martin & Willey hand cart companies are infamous for their suffering. There are several reasons for this: they started too late in the season, they didn't have enough carts or supplies, they didn't get restocked sufficiently along the way, and had extreme weather conditions. Any of these on their own would have made it a tough trip, but together these conditions made it a perfect storm for disaster. When Brigham Young realized in October that two companies were stranded in the Rockies, he immediately sent help. This was the report sent to Brigham Young "It is



not of much use for me to attempt to give a description of the situation of these people, for this you will learn from [others]; but you can imagine between five and six hundred men, women and children, worn down by drawing hand carts through snow and mud; fainting by the wayside; falling, chilled by the cold; children crying, their limbs stiffened by cold, their feet bleeding and some of them bare to snow and frost. The sight is almost too much for the stoutest of us; but we go on doing all we can, not doubting nor despairing.” When they finally reached the Valley 68 member of Willie and 145 members from Martin had died.

But the faith of those saints ran deep. They could have chosen to feel abandoned by God, as many do during hard times. And it is a choice, how we feel about our trials. Andrew Solomon, who researches mental health has said, “We cannot bear pointless torment, but we can endure great pain if we believe that it’s purposeful.”

Famous writer Wallace Stegner had this to say about the Martin Willey tragedy: “But if courage and endurance make a story, if human kindness and helpfulness and brotherly love in the midst of raw horror are worth recording, this half-forgotten episode of Mormon migration is one of the great tales of the West and of America.” - Why did most of these pioneers bear their suffering ‘meekly, praising God’? The answer is found in their testimonies of the gospel of Jesus Christ and in a common goal—to ‘hear a prophet’s voice and live with the Saints of Zion’ [and that all trials would work to their good].”

*How does believing that our trials will work to our good help us get through them? How do people make sense of hard things? Do we all do it the same way? Do we need to?*

### III. Trials in our Lives

Ask the youth to think about a trial in their life (or their family’s). Did they feel more or less likely to pray during this trial? Why? How does prayer help us endure? Over time, what have you learned because you faced adversity? Why do you think the Lord allows us to suffer? Are there times when your parents could take a trial away, but choose to let you struggle? Why might they do this?

If you feel inclined, share how a difficulty challenged you and helped you grow in some way.

Explain that faith is like a muscle, and as we go through hard times, we can exercise that muscle and grow stronger.

#### IV. Conclusion

We are all the heroes of our own story, and as such, we will face dragons, serve as tributes, have ugly stepsisters, and chose between the Dark Side and the Force. As we learn to trust the Lord, He will guide us through our trials. And while He may not always rescue us, He will never leave us alone.

Bear testimony that as we look at the way the pioneers endured their hardships, we will find insights into facing our own hard times. Close with this quote from President Gordon B. Hinckley:

“Now, I am grateful that today none of our people are stranded on the Wyoming highlands. But I know that all about us there are many who are in need of help and who are deserving of rescue. Our mission in life, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, must be a mission of saving... We must rise above our love for comfort and ease, and in the very process of effort and struggle, even in our extremity, we shall become better acquainted with our God.

“Let us never forget that we have a marvelous heritage received from great and courageous people who endured unimaginable suffering and demonstrated unbelievable courage for the cause they loved. You and I know what we should do. God help us to do it when it needs to be done.”  
 (“Our Mission of Saving,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 59.)