

Good morning brothers and sisters.

It was late in the summer of 1978, my family had just received some good news. My dad had been diagnosed with cancer almost 6 months earlier and had been fighting it ever since. His doctors had informed us that there were signs that he was improving. My mom packed me and my brothers into the car to go get some ice cream to celebrate. My dad did not come with us as he was still very ill and bed ridden. By the time we arrived back home my father had passed away.

It was tough growing up without a father, it wasn't the end of the world, but as a young kid it was nearly impossible not to feel this absence in our home. In many ways I felt like I was incomplete, that there were things that I would inevitably miss out on. I wouldn't be like the other kids. I would look at other families and it would hurt. I often asked myself questions like why me? Or how would my life be different if my father hadn't died?

It was especially difficult going to church on father's day – hearing how great everyone else's dad was and all these touching stories. But for me, there was no "I'm so glad when daddy comes home." I haven't willingly attended church services on father's day in a very long time (and having been asked to speak today, I think my streak continues).

Even having become a father myself, this pain still remained with me and I used to think that these emotions centered around father's day. When I was asked to speak I thought about coming up with some excuse to be unavailable to speak today. Then I had this thought come into my mind that I should just do it and get it over with, and so throughout the process of preparing for today my heart has gone through some significant changes.

There was a very big part of me that could not let go of this event. I have felt as though this date – August 18, 1978, has defined me more than any other event in my life. Over the past few weeks I began to question the effects that my father’s death has had on me. I began to realize that I have let this have an extremely negative impact on my life. Over the past thirty years I have silently felt sorry for my self. I was internally angry and bitter. Any thought of my father would bring up feelings of extreme sadness. Privately, I would use it as an excuse for my shortcomings. So over the past few weeks I began to ask myself why? Why such a negative reaction to this subject? Swallowing my pride, the only answer I could come up with was that I had a lack of faith.

I guess in some very real way I had grown to doubt my father in heaven. I somehow let the thought creep into my mind that this particular challenge, this trial, was perhaps too great for me to overcome. That God has not set up a road course that would allow me to return to him. The very purpose of this earth life was clouded. So I went back to the basics.

“For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors.” Alma 34:32.

“For behold, this is my work and my glory – to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” Moses 1:32

God’s work, and the thing that he finds the most joy in, is helping us return to live with him. It is the very essence of who he is and what he does. I realize that all these thoughts are basic, but recently they have had a deep impact on my relationship with him.

“This life never was intended to be easy... The testing processes of mortality are for all men, saints and sinners

alike. Sometimes the tests and trials of those who have received the gospel far exceed any imposed upon worldly people. Abraham was called upon to sacrifice his only son. Lehi and his family left their lands and wealth to live in a wilderness. Saints in all ages have been commanded to lay all that they have upon the altar, sometimes even their lives. As to the individual trials or problems that befall all of us, all we need say is that in the wisdom of Him who knows all things, and who does all things well, all of us are given the particular and specific tests that we need in our personal situations.” Bruce R. McKonkie

The great thought began to enter my mind – “why would God do anything unless it somehow contributed to our eternal salvation?” God uses these trials so that we can grow and increase our capacities.

I remember when I was very young my mother teaching me how to swim. She would walk a few feet from the steps and hold out her arms. I would swim towards her and just about when I was to reach her she would back away. I remember how frustrating this was. Why is she doing that? She knows I can’t swim that far. But as soon as I would start to sink she would rush up and rescue me, then show me how far I had swam – which was almost inevitably farther than I thought I could go.

Our heavenly father teaches us very much in the same way – he knows our capacity is greater than we think it is and he has given us a particular set of trials or problems that will help us in our eternal progression. He does this because he loves us.

“Is there not wisdom in His giving us trials that we might rise above them, responsibilities that we might achieve, work to harden our muscles, sorrows to try our

souls? Are we not exposed to temptations to test our strength, sickness that we might learn patience, death that we might be immortalized and glorified?” Spencer W. Kimball.

Lately I have been going on early morning bike rides. As I start out I have in my mind the route I'm going to take. I have broken down this route in to sections of hills. Some of these hills have a very steep incline and are very difficult. I began to ask myself, “These hills are so difficult. There are easier courses to take, why not bypass these hills and ride a flatter course.” Which then leads to the question, “why am I doing this at all.” The reason I ride the hills is so my capacity improves, my endurance increases, and ultimately, after I've completed my ride a feel better. Spiritually, if we really want to improve, if we want our testimonies to increase – we need the hills.

“God, the Father, the supreme God, knows the equivalent of every phase of the Great Plan, which we are working out. He has had our experiences or their equivalents, and understands therefore the difficulties of our journey. His love for us is an understanding love. Our earth troubles we may lay fully before him, knowing that he understands how human hearts are touched by the tribulations and the joys of life.” John A. Widstoe

As I've read these words the clouds of doubt have been removed from my mind. I have been filled with a new sense of love and gratitude for my Heavenly Father. This Father's Day is different. Today I am better able to see all the help that my Heavenly Father provided me and my family over the years. This Father's Day is full of thankfulness. I'm thankful that my mother had the strength to push forward and keep her head up. I'm thankful for people like

Pete Roberts who always made sure we didn't feel left out of a Fathers & Sons outing. I'm thankful for my church leaders who have always kept watch over us. I'm thankful for my extended family who have also borne this trial. I'm thankful for my father-in-law who has provided my family with many blessings. I'm grateful for my brothers who went through this with me, they have always been great examples of courage and perseverance. I'm especially grateful to my wife and kids, who have made being a husband and father such an incredible joy.

Sure, it would be nice to celebrate this day with my earthly father, but there is an overwhelming comfort that comes with the knowledge that through my Heavenly Father's plan, through the atonement of His Son, Jesus Christ, I'll be able to live for eternity with my family.

I've quoted several prophets and apostles in my talk today, but I'd like to end today with a quote from George Strait:

“Let me tell you a secret about a Father's love,
A secret that my daddy said was just between us,
You see daddies don't just love their children
every now and then,
It's a love without end, Amen.”

Heavenly Father lives and he loves us.