

## MOVING FORWARD WITH FAITH

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In 1833, the Prophet Joseph Smith and approximately 200 followers trekked 1,000 miles from Kirtland, Ohio to Jackson County, Missouri to assist the Saints who were being forced from their homes. The call to join the ranks of Zion's Camp was generally accepted by those brethren who revered Joseph to be a prophet of God. Rescuers needed for the trek were gathered with enthusiasm as young and old stepped forward with a shouldered rifle to support the cause. On leaving Kirtland, the Prophet Joseph spoke to his small army on the necessity of being humble, exercising faith, patience and living in obedience to the commands of the Almighty, and not murmur.

At the onset of the march, most were willing to acknowledge their General as a prophet of God and listen to his direction and counsel. Zion's Camp traveled approximately 25 miles a day, most traveling the entire distance on foot. It was a true test of faith for every man. Joseph commented, "Our feet were very sore and blistered, our stockings wet with blood, the weather being very warm." George Smith wrote: "The day was exceedingly hot and we suffered much from thirst and were compelled to drink water from sloughs which were filled with living creatures. Here I learned to strain wigglers with my teeth." Within two weeks, some complained that the camp was poorly managed, their feet were sore, and they were tired of eating corn-dodgers. George A. Smith wrote in his journal, "Even a dog would not bark at some men without their murmuring at Joseph. Many of us were prayerless, thoughtless, careless, heedless, foolish, or devilish and we did not know it. Joseph had to bear with us and tutor us like children." As difficulties and hardships increased, most of the men rose to the challenge and rallied others to faithfully follow the prophet and his assigned captains.

When President Gordon B. Hinckley made the announcement on June 21 that Ricks College would be transformed into a four-year university, most early reactions were the same, a bit of stupor and wonder, but a central commitment to the Prophet's voice. As wonderment and surprise were replaced with understanding of the difficulty that lay before us, attitudes and comments began to differ. As an academic dean, I had the opportunity to become involved in many discussions across campus. I found the reaction to the change was not necessarily in proportion with how individuals would be affected, but rather the attitude of the individuals towards change. I witnessed faculty that expressed a sense of

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excitement and commitment in spite of the fact that their program might be eliminated. Those faculty seemed to embrace a vision of building the kingdom and spreading the gospel and realized change would be necessary. Others spoke of looking for new employment or early retirement regardless of how the change personally would affect them. Some hastily announced that the Spirit of Ricks would be lost. Others conceived ideas of how to enhance and share that spirit with more students.

For many, the work load increased as we were challenged to reduce, consolidate, and eliminate programs. It was obvious that this change would create some very real challenges. Our true commitments to our leaders began to manifest themselves. Boiling water softens the potato or hardens the egg; we were a few weeks into the trek. Sore feet and a steady diet of corn-dodgers were bringing out the best and the worst in us. Small groups were sharing complaints as other groups prayerfully considered possibilities for the future.

I hadn't really investigated my own feelings until a sister, who was upset at the name change, asked me a very pointed question: "Why is it that you priesthood brethren have so little to say after the prophet speaks? Certainly, you agree that all subjects presented by the brethren could be open for discussion." She went on to encourage me to write a letter to the prophet helping him understand more clearly the effects of the name change on the local community. I was stunned by her comments. My response was, "I am sorry, but when the prophet speaks it is a done deal." I couldn't say another word. I held that comment for a long moment, and then changed the subject.

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In the weeks that have passed, I have pondered and prayed to better understand my own feelings and the vision of our prophet. I have come to the conclusion that the most important issue is not the change to BYU-Idaho, but the exercise of testing my faith. My thoughts continue to turn to the stories of Zion's Camp, a march of saints that by many was viewed as a fruitless endeavor, a trek that began with a shared commitment to follow the prophet. As this entire company experienced stockings wet with blood some complained and defected, which slowed but did not stop the march forward. Most were strengthened in their faith and commitment to the prophet. Zion's Camp was said to have served as an initiatory experience and bonding agent between most of the members, and as a crucible out of which emerged the principal leaders of the early movement of the church.

Just as those in Zion's Camp had the opportunity to prove their obedience to the Lord and the Prophet, we too are being tested. The development of BYU-Idaho will be as Heber C. Kimball recollected of

Zion's Camp "to prove them worthy in the flesh of the great calling where unto they were called in the eternal councils." As we have in some way or another been involved in the transition to BYU-Idaho, we have played many of the roles of those traveling with Zion's Camp. We all have felt the excitement and energy of receiving direction from the Prophet of the Lord. As our loads have become heavy to bear we are learning to strain wigglers with our teeth. Some have not given their full support to our appointed leaders. I have found myself at times whining about a daily diet of corn-dodgers and wondering if the miracles performed were coincidence. May the Lord forgive us if we have slowed the march, and may we work to rally our comrades forward.

As my prayers have been answered as to the importance of the work before us, I am eager to press forward in the ranks with full purpose of heart. We are laying the foundation of a great work. Each of us is part of the small army shaping BYU-Idaho for its future role in the Church Education System. More importantly, we are proving our worthiness by moving forward with faith. ☺

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