

Confidence Before God

I came around a corner on a quiet Wyoming highway and saw some horses bunched up and running. I looked to see why, and there was a small dog chasing them. He could not have weighed ten pounds, but he had that whole herd on the run. It was a comical sight to see all those big horses running from one little spit of a mutt.

I wonder how many of us are afraid when we don't need to be and running when we don't have to. How many of us worry ourselves into a lather? Confidence before God and men comes with who and what you know, as illustrated.

Years ago, while serving as a missionary, I was walking one evening to an appointment with a new partner. The week before, we had met a group of wild teens involved in some pretty extreme behavior. Tact has never been my talent. I managed to offend them by my bluntness. Consequently, they were angry and intent on hurting us at our next appointment.

That evening, as we walked up the hill toward their house, we heard loud awful music; the kind that resembles the noise of a railroad switching yard. My new companion said, pointing to the run-down house, "I'm sure glad we don't have to go there."

"That's where we're going," I said with some dismay. The look on his face was a Kodak moment.

The gang leader met us at the door of the darkened home, wearing dark glasses. His look of menace and the dim candles heightened the sense of evil.

Don't ask me why, but we went in. The entire gang was seated around the room, all glaring at us and all wearing dark glasses.

We sat down expecting the worst.

"Okay, teach us," the leader sneered.

I looked up at my companion, and to this day I don't know what came over me. Then again, maybe I do. Did I mention that my com-

panion was an Olympic class swimmer who stood 6' 6" tall and was 250 pounds of tone and muscle? I felt no fear, only anger. I told them what I thought of their heavy-handed intimidation. My big companion suddenly cut me off and took over. They really listened when he went after them. Before long, the mood mellowed. They turned off the music and on the lights, and we were friends again. We never saw a conversion, but they were always our friends after that.

The bigger and tougher your friends, the easier it is to have confidence. That is why the Lord repeatedly reminds us, "Fear not, I am with thee" (Isaiah 41:10). He called Himself our "rereward" (Isaiah 52:12), meaning "I will guard your back." We will have perfect confidence before God and men when we have perfect love for Him and our neighbors. That love takes time and practice, but when your conscience is clear, there is nothing to fear.



Bartimaeus The Blind Beggar

To those who are prisoners—those who are caught and bound by circumstances not of their choosing—there is a man in the scriptures I would like you to meet. His name is Bartimaeus.

On the Savior's final journey to Jerusalem, He passed through Jericho. As He came out with a large group of people, He passed by a man sitting like pitiful litter on the side of the road. It was the blind beggar, Bartimaeus.

Hearing a commotion, Bartimaeus asks what is happening. When he learns that Jesus of Nazareth passes by, hope surges like a shock in him, and suddenly, he becomes animated and cries with a loud voice, "Jesus, thou Son of David have mercy on me."

Those with Jesus rebuke him and tell him to hold his peace. Why did they want to silence him rather than help him? But, Bartimaeus will not be deterred. He only cries out the louder.

To his fellows, Bartimaeus was an irritation and an interruption, but, to Jesus he was like a crying child in the night. The Savior stops and commands him to be brought.

Now they care. "Be of good comfort," they say, "rise, He calleth thee."

Bartimaeus then threw off his garment and went to Jesus; his excitement—who can even imagine? Why does it matter to Mark, the Gospel writer, that the garment was



thrown off? Because this was the depth of Bartimaeus' faith. Have you ever noticed the clothing of a beggar? It's not usually our fashion of choice. The garment, like the man, would not be the latest craze, but rather a cast off, tattered and forgotten. To cast off his old garment was to cast off his old life.

With earned compassion, the Master asks, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?"

Somehow word of the healer had before reached Bartimaeus. From those wind born seeds, faith blossomed, nurtured by the pain of his personal bondage. Blindness was his prison. Sight would be new life.

"Lord, that I might receive my sight," he pleaded.

"Go thy way," Jesus said to him, as He touched his eyes. "Thy faith hath made thee whole."

And Bartimaeus sees. Now, free at last to see his own way, Bartimaeus went instead the Master's way, the ascending road from Jericho to Jerusalem where the mists of darkness have so blinded the minds and hardened their hearts that the Light of the World will die on Calvary's Hill.

Just as there are none so blind as those who will not see, so too, there are no fetters more binding than those we forge ourselves. But, no prison is ever permanent when there is faith in the Savior. If you are that prisoner, have you had enough? If so, cry unto Him for mercy. Be patient in pain until its time, for that pain can purify your soul and prepare your faith. And then, when He visits you, throw off your past like filthy disgusting clothing. Don't look back. Again, remember agency may have put you in prison, but in Christ, no prison is permanent.

See Mark 10



Asleep At The Concert

Jesus taught his disciples, “No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and they to whom the Son will reveal Himself; they shall see the Father also” (JST Matthew 11:27). To truly know Jesus Christ, His life must be revealed to us. We can’t truly know just by reading about Him. We have to experience His life through our own. May I illustrate?

A famous philharmonic orchestra came to the area. We went as a family because we have two beautiful daughters who love music. The star performance was a young violinist of some accomplishment. He played a concerto piece from Tchaikovsky. He was good, very good, as were they all. At one point in the performance, I looked around. Everyone seemed enthralled by the music. At the end, the audience awarded him ovation after ovation. I can’t remember an audience lauding such a performance as they did him.

And where was I in all this commotion and rejoicing? The clapping woke me up. I was fighting sleep. I’m sure that the good people around me wondered ‘what is his problem?’

I’ve wondered since then, what is my problem? I knew it was good. I knew I was seeing talent. I knew they were doing something quite difficult. So how could I fall asleep?



Because I share no experience with music. I do not play any musical instruments. I have never given myself to the hours of practice that it takes to perfect

an instrument. I can't read music, not a note. I have never paid the least price to make music. I cannot fully appreciate what I have not experienced. On the other hand, those who have lived, suffered, and loved music knew and appreciated the difficulty of his performance, and their response was moving and emotional.

The Savior's life was a masterpiece that only those who have tried to be like Him can fully appreciate. In loving our enemies, the Spirit helps us see how He loved His. When we hurt so much that we cannot bear for someone else to suffer as we do, we then see why He went about doing good. When we carry someone else and suffer unto death because of them, we glimpse what Gethsemane was like for Him. We see His life through our own. We know Him when we live in Him.



Stillman Pond

I don't suppose I'm alone when I say sometimes life gets pretty difficult. I also have learned from past experience that when life seems difficult, sometimes it helps to hear about someone whose had it a little rougher than you. Such is the story of a pioneer by the name of Stillman Pond.

Stillman Pond and his family were among the last to leave Nauvoo in September of 1846. Having already endured much persecution and harassment from enemies, the Pond family was ultimately driven from their home at the point of a bayonet. Without adequate preparation for their trek, they left without proper food, clothing, and shelter. Across Iowa they journeyed, fraught with almost unimaginable suffering and heartache.

Snow came early to Iowa territory that year, making travel even more difficult. Weakened from trudging through the deep snow, Stillman's pregnant wife, Maria, who had already been afflicted with consumption, contracted malaria. She, along with every member of her family, suffered greatly from this sickness. Bowed with grief and aching from the pain and fever of malaria, Maria could no longer walk. Amidst these grim circumstances she gave birth to twin boys. They both died only a few days later. The deaths of these children coming across the plains from Nauvoo to Winter Quarters were only the beginning of the sacrifice and trials of Stillman Pond.



With all of the members of the Pond family now sick with malaria, Stillman, who was himself unable to walk or even sit up, lay on his stomach in the bed of his wagon. Bracing himself with one

arm and extending his other over the dashboard to hold the reins, he drove his team the last 150 miles.

On the 16th of October 1846, they arrived at Winter Quarters. During that winter, the Pond family continued to suffer. In the space of five days, three more children died. A sixth died a few weeks later.

Laura Jane Pond, age 14, died of “chills and fever”
on December 2, 1846.

Harriet M. Pond, age 11, died “with chills”
on December the 4th.

Abigail A. Pond, age 18, “died with chills”
on December the 7th.

Lyman Pond, age 6, died with “chills and fever”
on January 15, 1847.

Having survived the heartache of burying all her children, the hardships of the trek across Iowa, and the hunger and privations of a long hard winter, Stillman’s beloved wife, Marie, finally succumbed to her sickness on May 17th at Winter Quarters.

Despite all of this, Stillman Pond journeyed onward, arriving in the Salt Lake Valley in the early fall of 1847. His testimony of the Gospel, his faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ, and the fire of the covenant that burned in his soul gave him the strength to go on.

May it ever be so with us.

See Leon Y. Pond and H. Ray Pond, Stillman Pond: A Biographical Sketch, typescript copy, LDS Historical Department, pp. 4-5.

See also Brent L. Top, It Still Takes Faith, BYU Devotional Assembly, 22 July 1997, pp. 2-3.

