

SURE FOUNDATION
Graduating Class of 2018
Charge to the Graduate, Anna C. Burford

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Morning dawned upon us August 6th of 2000 with Pam and I watching the newest member of our family rest peacefully. The new millennium had just dawned upon us as well, bringing with it a budding new life. A beautiful little girl we named Anna Colleen had just made her entrance into our world, and into our hearts.

We thought of how her big sister would be especially pleased with her newest sibling. After welcoming five younger brothers in a row into our family, Claire now had a little sister too. So, with Anna safely in her mother's arms, we took a few moments to reflect on who this little person might be. Who would she grow up to become? And of a more immediate concern, what would life in our home be like with the addition of a seventh child to our family?

I was truly grateful to have these few quiet moments with Pam before we had to return to being fully engaged in the various aspects of our busy lives. Words from the hymn, "*A calm and gentle peace reigns tonight,*" by David H. Smith captured the moment for me. The birth had gone well for both mother and daughter, and with our newborn all warm and cozy after being attended to by hospital staff, it felt as if *peace* was truly *brooding sweetly o'er us now*.

Soon enough Anna's older siblings got to welcome her home, and we all began incorporating her into our family routines; and time began flowing on again, as it were, through a steady stream of daily activities.

During her early years, Anna's personality began to blossom like a flower in springtime. From a young age, Anna evidenced quite a vocabulary and was often expressive when seeing flowers and lady bugs and the like. She also often surprised us with her use of well-structured sentences in her every-day conversations. Here is a cheery example from our four-year-old Anna included by her mom in her baby book: "*I had a fun day. Did you have a fun day?*"

A particular occasion comes to mind when I think back on those early days of Anna's enjoyable expressiveness. Late one evening the two-year-old (almost three) Anna broke the silence while our tired family rested on our way home from the 2003 Kirtland area reunion in Pennsylvania. Out of the stillness came a small, haunting voice from the car seat directly behind me: "*It was a dark and stormy night, when a knock was heard at the door. I opened the door and there stood Joe. ...*" Laughter quickly broke out all over the van as the story

continued on, a bit less eerily now: *"Hi Joe. Hi fellas. Tell us a story, Joe. It was a dark and stormy night when a knock was heard at the door ... "*

I apparently was the last to catch on while focusing on the dark, winding road ahead of us. This was the *never-ending story* we had heard at a campfire that past week at reunion. Anna apparently enjoyed it so much that she not only memorized it, but she was also able to tell it with an expression that sounded like the person who told it around the campfire. What fun memories!

Our young daughter put other "scares" into our lives as she grew in those early years, ones that were of the real-life variety. With Anna's help, along with the help of some of her siblings, we became quite familiar with emergency rooms and doctor's offices in town. She seemed to have a knack for coming up with novel ways of breaking her bones and spraining her ankle. Even though none of these breaks or sprains was too serious, each was severe enough to cause alarm at the time and lingering memories that have stayed with us.

Anna, *dark and stormy nights* inevitably come into each of our lives, and when they do, it's the calm and gentle times with our Lord that give us strength to endure the hardships of life. When facing difficulties of his own, King David expressed the matter well with these words from Psalm 23: *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."*

Such *dark* times can and do come in many forms. By way of a personal example, back near the end of the spring term of my 6th grade year, our teacher handed out a long exam to the class as we were taking our seats first thing one morning. I knew it wasn't just a pop quiz because it had perhaps a dozen pages or more. I panicked.

The whole first page was covered with a set of detailed instructions, starting with an instruction to read all instructions first. Reading didn't come easy for me, so I just glanced over the list of instructions and then turned the page to start taking the test. Being a slow reader, in an attempt to stay up with the rest of the class I felt it was best to jump right in.

Before too long, however, I started hearing quiet snickers coming from some of my classmates. But my stress meter told me I needed to keep going. As I did, the quiet snickers grew a bit louder. So I finally took a quick look around, but in a way that I hoped would not make it look like I was trying to cheat. To my surprise, it appeared that only a few of us were hard at work going through the test questions, and the rest were all looking around at us.

The teacher eventually spoke up to end the test and to explain the importance of following instructions. Although there was a whole page of instructions, the last one read something like: *"Stop! Do not turn the page. Put down your pencil and wait for further instructions from the teacher."* Because I hadn't taken time first thing that morning to read the instructions, I found myself in a panic until our teacher spoke to us. He apparently waited for the few of us who hadn't read the instructions to catch on. Oh, if I had only read all of

those instructions first, I thought rather sheepishly, I would not have been so stressed in those few moments of panic. Even more important to me at the time, I would not have been so embarrassed either. This of course was the purpose of the test.

Even though there were students who had read through the entire list of questions and stopped to await further instructions, the teacher said the lesson of the test was for them as well. He went on to explain that there would be times in each of our lives when we would take action without first reading through all of the *instructions* available to us.

Some years later I was reminded of this lesson by a sign on an office wall at my first job in Wichita. "*Full speed ahead,*" it read. "*The direction will be determined later.*" Perhaps these words were meant to be a bit humorous, but they exposed a potential problem in a rather cynical manner, that of taking action without fully thinking through a matter.

Stressful situations often push us to press onward at *full speed* even if we are not sure which direction we should take. To avoid going off in a wrong direction or making a regrettable decision, the teacher encouraged us to look back to the time when we took this test and how failing to read all the instructions first had led some of us to experience needless stress and embarrassment.

Anna, over the years I have learned that getting up early and reading and studying God's word given in the scriptures (His instructions) has been the most beneficial to me in determining how to navigate through my daily activities. I know that without it, I simply would not be able to live the *abundant* life Jesus Christ came to give us (John 10:10).

Taking time for prayer and study each day does not mean everything will go smoothly on any given day. Rather, it assures us that God will provide us with direction and strength for keeping things in a right perspective and for having a determination to continue *pressing on the upward way*, as we sing. Counsel from James, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, has been especially helpful to me in this regard. He wrote:

*James 1:2-8 - My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into many afflictions; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men **liberally**, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.*

The Lord gave similar counsel in these latter days, saying:

*D&C 46:3b,c - ... ye are commanded in all things to ask of God, who giveth **liberally**, and that which the Spirit testifies unto you, even so I would that you should do in all holiness of heart, walking uprightly before me, considering the end of your salvation, doing all things with prayer and thanksgiving, that ye may not be seduced by evil spirits, or doctrines of devils, or the commandments of men, for some are of men, and others of devils.*

Anna, did you notice the use of the word *liberally* in both passages of scripture? The Lord promises to give wisdom in abundance to all those who call on Him in the sincerity of true faith. With His wisdom, the Lord equips us with knowledge and understanding for facing the challenges of each new day.

In John 10, we also read of how our Lord said His sheep hear His voice and follow Him. King David experienced this truth in his life, as evidenced in the Psalms. He trusted God to be with him as he passed through both the dark valleys of his life as well as his days of joy (Psalm 23). Paul assures us of this very thing, writing:

*Acts 17:24-28a - God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; **That they should seek the Lord, if they are willing to find him, for he is not far from every one of us; For in him we live, and move, and have our being ...***

Note how Paul tells us that the Lord is not far from any one of us. The Lord makes Himself available to each of us and even instructs us to *ask, seek* and *knock* (Matthew 7:12,13). For those who do, they will receive wisdom and instruction from Him.

Anna, wisdom and guidance from the Lord is especially important in leadership roles. This past year, you have had a number of good opportunities to lead, and your mother and I congratulate you for you doing a great job. Directing the youth volunteers for ushering at the Wichita Symphony weekend performances was an excellent opportunity for you. Your adult leader confirmed this when she commended you for the excellent instructions you composed when handing off these responsibilities to next year's youth directors.

You also demonstrated effective leadership in your college speech class when organizing your team's presentation for the right-to-privacy debate. Now, as you prepare for participating in Leadership Camp this summer, I encourage you to remember the words of Peter, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, who wrote:

1 Peter 5:6-11 - Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time. Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Hearing the Lord's voice, Anna, and following Him is essential to staying the course of faith in our Lord. As we have briefly reviewed here, this comes of prayer and studying His scriptures as you follow Him and listen for His voice given to us by His Spirit of truth.

Anna, in closing, I would like to reference a portion of your baby blessing given on October 15, 2000. I offered the prayer over you and your grandfathers assisted. Included in my prayer over you at that time were the following words:

Beloved and gracious Father in heaven, with all gratitude in the name of Jesus Christ, we come and present this child to you ... And we submit her unto Thee at this tender age that in due time, as she becomes accountable unto thee, she might present herself as a living sacrifice unto Thee <as> a daughter of Abraham, a woman of faith. And that she might be righteous in all her doings and perform the works of her life without fear, walking in uprightness before Thee, honoring thee through faith. And we commend her unto Thee, Father, that she might receive Thy Spirit and that you might always grant unto her the opportunity to have access to the scriptures and the preached word, that she might not dwindle in unbelief..

I am truly grateful, Anna, that you entered into the waters of baptism to live in a covenant relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Even still, my prayer for you continues to be that you will be a daughter of Abraham by walking in faith and virtue with your God unto the end of your days on earth and on into eternity in His presence in the kingdom of heaven.

As you once rested safely in her mother's arms, remember now to cast all your cares upon your heavenly Father, for He cares for you. We love you Anna and have enjoyed getting to know you. It has been a blessing to have you in our family and we look forward to what you will yet do with your many talents through faith in your Lord.

May God richly bless and keep you all the days of your life, and may His Spirit of truth be your constant companion and comfort through both the peaceful and *dark and stormy* times of your life.