

Perseverance

A lesson from Where Lilacs Still Bloom by Jane Kirkpatrick

"Anyone who meets a testing challenge head-on and manages to stick it out is mighty fortunate. For such persons loyally in love with God, the reward is life and more life."

James 1:12 (The Message)

I enjoy words, looking up their origin and exploring their many meanings discovering new insights into words and life. That proved true for the word *challenge*. So many of the historical people I write about are beset with challenges on the Oregon Trail, as homesteaders and pioneers, as mothers and fathers making lives for their families. Challenges are part of the human condition. When I looked up that word I found these definitions that were familiar: "A call to engage in a fight" or "the quality of requiring full use of one's abilities, energy or resources" or "a formal objection as to a juror" or "to summon to action." Quite far down on Webster's list were origins of the word *challenge* as coming from the Latin *calumnia* meaning *trickery*. Right below that was the definition "*to deceive*."

How could a challenge be a deception? I began to think back to a time of great challenge. One of the biggest was finally agreeing to move with my husband to a remote ranch twenty-five miles from the smallest town, seven miles from a mailbox and eleven miles from a paved road. He wanted to build a new life on 160 acres of remote, sage and rattlesnake covered land. After five years of resistance on my part, we stepped out on a cloud of faith believing we wouldn't fall through. We faced enormous challenges from the weather, the distance, the isolation. Acquiring building materials, making phone calls from a barn ten miles away, dealing with a treacherous dirt road that wound up a canyon with a 950 foot drop and no guardrails became almost daily encounters.

Yet from those challenges my husband and I developed a closer relationship. We found ourselves trusting in God's calling to that land and deepened our loyalty to God. Each of us discovered new skills we didn't realize we had and found ways to help our family that might not so easily have occurred before our move. We found happiness and contentment and more life.

The deception in the challenge? If I had stayed where I was I would never have found that joy; our faith might not have been deepened, our lives enriched beyond measure through new professions and helping each other. Sometimes the greatest challenges begin with a deception, our minds telling us "You can't do that! You're too old, too weak, too foolish." We are tempted to listen to the nay-saying voices rather than hear the gentle sound of God calling us to greater

things, helping us through the hard times knowing there are joys on the other side of the challenge because we persevered.

Scripture tells us "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial." Stepping over the deceit does not mean the challenge will be easy, but doing so promises a deeper relationship with God and the reward of "more life." Those words are not deceitful but full of hope.

God the Creator of the universe, give us wisdom to see beyond the deceit to the challenge that will deepen our love for you. Help us face the challenges today head-on trusting that we may know you more deeply and discover all you have planned for "more life." Amen.