

# Ensign



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**Home Evening  
for Two, p. 46**



**Mary, by James C. Christensen**

*“And the angel [Gabriel] said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. . . . And Mary said, . . . Be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:30–31, 38).*



# Ensign



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**AN OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS**

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**MARKETING MANAGER:** Larry Hiller

**PRINTING DIRECTOR:** Craig K. Sedgwick

**DISTRIBUTION DIRECTOR:** Kris T Christensen

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# The Power of Peace

BY PRESIDENT JAMES E. FAUST

Second Counselor in the First Presidency

**W**ith all of you, I rejoice in this wonderful holiday season. I am old enough to have enjoyed many Christmases. As I get older, I seem to enjoy these special holidays more each year. Perhaps this is because there are many more than just our own families to love and be loved by.

Among the Christmas experiences that are etched most sharply in my memory are the ones spent away from home and loved ones while serving in the mission field or in military service. Each Christmas when I was in the military in World War II, I wondered when the terrible suffering and agony of war would end and we could all go home. And as we sang, "Peace on earth, goodwill to men,"<sup>1</sup> I wondered if the Germans and the Japanese who were Christians were also singing this familiar refrain with the same yearnings in their hearts. Then it all ended 59 years ago after the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan. Mankind had never before seen such destructive power. There was a concern in our hearts about the beast that had been unleashed.

I would like to recount a story told by Kenneth J. Brown, who was serving as a U.S. Marine in Japan following the dropping of the bomb. His moving story about a Japanese Christian he met at Christmas-time in Nagasaki is as follows.

"I watched him turn from the street and climb the path leading to our shelter. He was groping, hesitating. As he came near he folded his umbrella and stood quietly a long moment. His thin coat soon dampened from the cold rain that was falling from the same sky that had brought death to nearly half his townspeople three short months before. I concluded that it must take some special courage to confront one's conquerors without invitation. It was little wonder that he hesitated.

"His polite bow to me was no bow of submission. Rather his squared shoulders and lifted head let me feel as if I were looking up at him even . . . though I towered over him a foot or more. I recall being disturbed that I hadn't yet become used to the near sightless eyes of those who had looked heavenward that morning when the bomb dropped. . . .



***The power of the Christ has influenced for good the hosts of His followers on the earth for more than 2,000 years. It is the power in the knowledge that Jesus Christ is our Redeemer, our Savior.***



“ . . . I respectfully asked if I could be of service. [In his clear English] he introduced himself as Professor Iida. . . .

“‘I am Christian,’ he said. ‘I am told this is the head minister’s office. Are you a Christian? It is good to talk with a follower of Christ; there are so few Christian Japanese.’

“I took him to the inner office of the division chaplain and waited while the two men conversed. Professor Iida stated his request briefly. He was a teacher of music in a Christian girls’ college until it was closed by imperial command. . . . He had been imprisoned because of his professed Christianity. After being released he had returned to Nagasaki and continued his music instruction in his home even though it was forbidden. He had been able to continue a small chorus and would be pleased if . . . they [could] sing a concert for the American Marines.

“‘We know something of your American Christmases,’ he said. ‘We should like to do something to make your Christmas in Japan more enjoyable.’

“I felt sure the chaplain would give a negative reply. Our unit was one of hardened fighters, four years away from home, who had fought the enemy from Saipan to Iwo Jima. . . . Yet there was something about the man that bespoke sincere desire to do a good deed so that . . . permission was granted. The concert would be Christmas Eve.

“The rains had stopped and a calm settled over the atomic bowl reminiscent of the calm that night long ago. The concert was well attended; there was nothing else to do. The theater . . . had been cleared of its fallen roof and men were sitting on the jagged walls. The usual momentary hush fell over the audience as the performers filed on stage. . . .

“The first thing we noticed was that they were singing in English and we became aware that they didn’t understand the words but had memorized them for our benefit. Professor Iida had taught his students well; they sang beautifully. We sat enthralled as if a choir from heaven were singing for us. . . . It was as if Christ were being born anew that night.

“The closing number was a solo, an aria from ‘The Messiah.’ The girl sang with all the conviction of one who

knew that Jesus was indeed the Savior of mankind and it brought tears. After that there was a full minute of silence followed by sustained applause as the small group took bow after bow.

“Later that night I helped Professor Iida take down the trimmings. I could not resist asking some questions that propriety forbade but curiosity demanded. I just had to know.

“‘How did your group manage to survive the bomb?’ I asked.

“‘This is only half my group,’ he said softly, but seemed unoffended at my recalling his grief so that I felt I could ask more.

“‘And what of the families of these?’

“‘They nearly all lost one or more members. Some are orphans.’

“‘What about the soloist? She must have the soul of an angel the way she sang.’

“‘Her mother, two of her brothers were taken. Yes, she did sing well; I am so proud of her. She is my daughter.’ . . .

“The next day was Christmas, the one I remember best. For that day I knew that Christianity had not failed in spite of people’s unwillingness to live His teachings. I had seen hatred give way to service, pain to rejoicing, sorrow to forgiveness. This was possible because a babe had been born in a manger [and] later taught love of God and fellowmen. We had caused them the greatest grief and yet we were their Christian brothers and as such they were willing to forget their grief and unite with us in singing ‘Peace on earth, goodwill to all men.’

“The words of Miss Iida’s song testimony would not be stilled, ‘Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.’ They seemed to echo and re-echo over the half-dead city that day.

“That day also I knew that there was a greater power on earth than the atomic bomb.”<sup>2</sup>

That power has influenced for good the hosts of His followers on the earth for more than 2,000 years. It is the power in the knowledge that Jesus Christ is our Redeemer, our Savior, our Advocate with the Father, the King of kings,



***“The girl sang with all the conviction of one who knew that Jesus was indeed the Savior of mankind. . . . I had seen hatred give way to service, pain to rejoicing, sorrow to forgiveness.”***

the Lord of lords, and the Prince of Peace. It is the power by which, through faith and obedience to His teachings, we can find joy and happiness, peace and comfort.

It is the priesthood power by which the world was created and the plan of salvation and happiness was put in place to bless our lives eternally if we are true to our covenants. It is the power that was magnified by His agony on the cross, bringing the single most important blessing to mankind. The greatest of all acts in all history was the atoning sacrifice of our Savior and Redeemer.

We remember that sacrifice at this time of year when we celebrate His birth. It is only through the atoning sacrifice of the Prince of Peace that we may know the true power of peace in our own lives. ■

#### NOTES

1. “Far, Far Away on Judea’s Plains,” *Hymns*, no. 212.
2. “A Greater Power,” in *Christmas I Remember Best: A Compilation of Christmas Stories from the Pages of the Deseret News* (1983), 51–53.

## IDEAS FOR HOME TEACHERS

After prayerfully considering this message, choose a teaching method that will encourage participation by family members. Following are some examples:

1. Display a picture of the Savior praying in Gethsemane, of the Crucifixion, or of the resurrected Lord showing the wounds in His hands (see Gospel Art Picture Kit 227, 230, or 234). Ask family members what great gift Jesus gave us through His Atonement. How can this gift give us peace?
2. Point out the professor’s example of forgiveness, and ask family members to consider whether there is anyone they need to forgive. Then ask family members to consider whether they might be in need of another’s forgiveness and what they might do to receive this forgiveness.
3. Ask family members to consider seeking out an individual or family to bless this Christmas—as Professor Iida did.

# He Lives

*The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have earnestly borne testimony of our Savior Jesus Christ. Their testimonies stand as witnesses that Jesus is our Heavenly Father's Only Begotten Son—the Great Jehovah of the Old Testament and the Messiah of the New Testament.*

**I**ndividually in the following pages and collectively on page 9, the latter-day prophets, seers, and revelators teach of the Savior and bear witness that He lives.

## **President Gordon B. Hinckley**

"He lives, the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind, whose Atonement came as an act of grace for the entire world. . . . He has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. He has brought meaning to our mortal existence. He has given us the gift of eternal life. . . . God be thanked for the gift of His Son, the Redeemer of the world, the Savior of mankind, the Prince of Life and Peace, the Holy One" ("A Testimony of the Son of God," *Liabona* and *Ensign*, Dec. 2002, 4–5).

## **President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency**

"[Jesus Christ] is a teacher of truth—but He is more than a teacher. He is the Exemplar of the perfect life—but He is more than an exemplar. He is the Great Physician—but He is more than a physician. He is the literal Savior of the world. . . . I testify to you that He lives and that through Him, we too shall live" ("The Way of the Master," *Liabona* and *Ensign*, Jan. 2003, 7).

## **President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency**

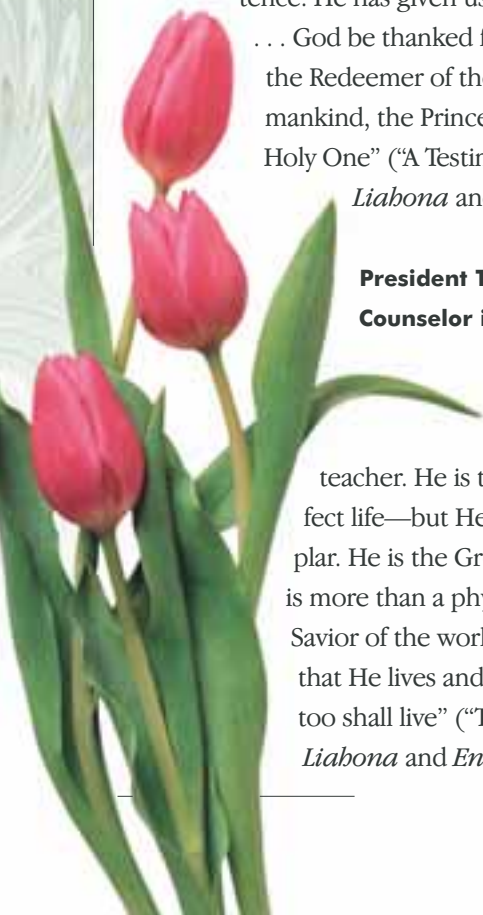
"As the Only Begotten Son of the Father in the flesh, Jesus inherited divine attributes. He was the only person ever born into mortality who could perform this most significant and supernal act. As the only sinless Man who ever lived on this earth, He was not subject to spiritual death. Because of His godhood, He also possessed power over physical death. Thus He did for us what we cannot do for ourselves" ("The Atonement: Our Greatest Hope," *Liabona*, Jan. 2002, 20; *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 19).

## **President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles**

"I bear witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. He lives. He is our Redeemer and is our Savior. He presides over this Church. He is no stranger to His servants here, and as we move into the future with quiet confidence, His spirit will be with us" ("The Peaceable Followers of Christ," *Liabona*, Dec. 1998, 24; *Ensign*, Apr. 1998, 67).

## **Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles**

"[Jesus Christ's] atoning sacrifice for all mankind is the centerpiece of the history of our Father in Heaven's children here on earth. Each of us who accepts the divine plan must accept the role of our Savior and covenant to keep his laws that our Father has developed for us. As we accept Christ in spirit and in deed, we may win our salvation" ("Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," *Ensign*, May 1996, 53).







**Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum  
of the Twelve Apostles**

“Just as a well-educated musician can recognize the composer of a symphony by its style and structure, so a well-educated surgeon can recognize the Creator of human beings by the similarity of style and structure of our anatomy. . . . This similarity provides additional evidence and deep spiritual confirmation of our divine creation by our same Creator” (“Jesus the Christ: Our Master and More,” *Liabona* and *Ensign*, Apr. 2000, 6).

**Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum  
of the Twelve Apostles**

“When we have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we must have trust in him. We must trust him enough that we are content to accept his will, knowing that he knows what is best for us. . . . We understand the meaning of the Savior’s words: ‘If ye will have faith in me ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me’ (Moro. 7:33)” (“Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, May 1994, 99–100).

**Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles**

“God our Eternal Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, have spoken again from the heavens and have called prophets and Apostles to teach the fulness of the everlasting gospel. . . . That is a glorious thing to know. . . . It changes the course of your life to a safer one because it provides an anchor that helps hold you fast to the teachings of the gospel” (“Steadfast in Christ,” *Ensign*, Dec. 1993, 50).

**Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles**

“In a premortal council at which we were all present, [the Savior] led the forces of good against those of Satan and his followers in a battle for the souls of men that began before this world was formed. That conflict continues today. We were all on the side of Jesus then. We are on the side of Jesus today” (“Christians in Belief and Action,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 71).

**Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles**

“I know that the Savior lives, that He is a resurrected, glorified personage of perfect love. I witness that He gave His life that we might live with Him eternally. He is our hope, our Mediator, our Redeemer” (“He Lives,” *Liabona*, Jan. 2000, 108; *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 89).

**Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles**

“Jesus Christ . . . is the Light of the Atonement fulfilled in the Garden of Gethsemane and on Golgotha, who took upon Himself the sins of the world, that all mankind may obtain eternal salvation. He is the Light of the empty tomb. . . . He is *my* Light, *my* Redeemer, *my* Savior—and yours” (“Out of Darkness into His Marvelous Light,” *Liabona*, July 2002, 79–80; *Ensign*, May 2002, 71–72).



**Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles**

“I testify of God’s love and the Savior’s power to calm the storm. Always remember in that biblical story [of Peter walking on the water] that [Christ] was out there

on the water also. . . . Only one who has fought against those ominous waves is justified in telling *us—as well as the sea*—to ‘be still’ [Mark 4:39]. Only one who has taken the full brunt of such adversity could ever be justified in telling us in such times to ‘be of good cheer’ [John 16:33]” (“An High Priest of Good Things to Come,” *Liabona*, Jan. 2000, 43; *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 37).

**Elder Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles**

“Jesus Christ is the light and the life of the world. If we do not choose to move toward Him, we will find that we have moved away. . . . Whether or not you choose to keep your covenant to always remember Him, He always remembers you” (“Always,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1999, 12).

**Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles**

“The Atonement of Jesus Christ is real; it brings immortality to all and opens the door to eternal life. The gospel of Jesus Christ is again on the earth. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true and living” (“The Opportunity to Testify,” *Liabona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 76).

**Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles**

“I testify and witness that Jesus is the Christ. He is our Redeemer and our Savior, and He lives. And I testify that the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and His true Church have been restored to the earth” (“In the Strength of the Lord,” *Liabona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 78). ■

# THE LIVING CHRIST

THE TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTLES  
THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

As we commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ two millennia ago, we offer our testimony of the reality of His matchless life and the infinite virtue of His great atoning sacrifice. None other has had so profound an influence upon all who have lived and will yet live upon the earth.

He was the Great Jehovah of the Old Testament, the Messiah of the New. Under the direction of His Father, He was the creator of the earth. "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3). Though sinless, He was baptized to fulfill all righteousness. He "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38), yet was despised for it. His gospel was a message of peace and goodwill. He entreated all to follow His example. He walked the roads of Palestine, healing the sick, causing the blind to see, and raising the dead. He taught the truths of eternity, the reality of our premortal existence, the purpose of our life on earth, and the potential for the sons and daughters of God in the life to come.

He instituted the sacrament as a reminder of His great atoning sacrifice. He was arrested and condemned on spurious charges, convicted to satisfy a mob, and sentenced to die on Calvary's cross. He gave His life to atone for the sins of all mankind. His was a great vicarious gift in behalf of all who would ever live upon the earth.

We solemnly testify that His life, which is central to all human history, neither began in Bethlehem nor concluded on Calvary. He was the Firstborn of the Father, the Only Begotten Son in the flesh, the Redeemer of the world.

He rose from the grave to "become the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Corinthians 15:20). As Risen Lord, He visited among those He had loved in life. He also ministered among His "other sheep" (John 10:16) in ancient America. In the modern world, He and His Father appeared to the boy Joseph Smith, ushering in the long-promised "dispensation of the fulness of times" (Ephesians 1:10).

Of the Living Christ, the Prophet Joseph wrote: "His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah, saying:

"I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father" (D&C 110:3-4).

Of Him the Prophet also declared: "And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!

"For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—

"That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God" (D&C 76:22-24).

We declare in words of solemnity that His priesthood and His Church have been restored upon the earth—"built upon the foundation of . . . apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20).

We testify that He will someday return to earth. "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together" (Isaiah 40:5). He will rule as King of Kings and reign as Lord of Lords, and every knee shall bend and every tongue shall speak in worship before Him. Each of us will stand to be judged of Him according to our works and the desires of our hearts.

We bear testimony, as His duly ordained Apostles—that Jesus is the Living Christ, the immortal Son of God. He is the great King Immanuel, who stands today on the right hand of His Father. He is the light, the life, and the hope of the world. His way is the path that leads to happiness in this life and eternal life in the world to come. God be thanked for the matchless gift of His divine Son.

## THE FIRST PRESIDENCY

*James E. Faust*  
*Thomas M. Monson*  
*James F. Faust*

January 1, 2000

## THE QUORUM OF THE TWELVE

*Boyd K. Packer*  
*L. Tom Perry*  
*Donna Hanks*  
*Neal A. Maxwell*  
*Russell M. Nelson*  
*Dallin H. Oaks*

*M. Russell Ballard*  
*Joseph B. Wirthlin*  
*Richard G. Scott*  
*Robert D. Hales*  
*Jeffrey R. Holland*  
*Henry B. Eyring*





# How Could I Testify?

BY ELDER HANS H. MATTSSON

Area Authority Seventy  
Europe Central Area



*With great gratitude  
these many years,  
I have felt strength  
radiating from  
the words that  
are recorded in  
the book of Ether.*

Many years ago my twin brother and I left our home in Göteborg, Sweden, to serve the Lord as full-time missionaries in England. During our flight to London, numerous thoughts ran through my head. For one thing, my brother and I would have to separate in London, and for the first time in our lives we would not be together every day. But the thing that worried me most was that I didn't know the English language well. At that time missionaries from Sweden did not receive language instruction or any other training; they were sent straight from home to the mission field. I thought of my twin brother, who was gifted in languages. My interests leaned more toward technical subjects, and for this reason I had not spent much time studying languages in school.

After I arrived in London and then finally in Birmingham, the headquarters of the England Central Mission, the mission president and his wife greeted me with huge smiles and all possible warmth. Everyone I met at the mission office was happy and

enthusiastic and spoke with me about things such as study guides, tracting, companions, and so forth. But I could not understand much because their language was new and foreign.

Despite the kindness of the people around me, I felt overwhelmed. How could I ever testify of the gospel in this strange language? I spent much of that first night on my knees, asking Heavenly Father why He had sent me here and if there had possibly been a mistake.

The following day an assistant to the mission president showed me a scripture—Ether 12:27. I got out my Swedish Book of Mormon and read: “If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.”

If anyone had a weakness, I did. Questions arose in my mind: Do you believe what is written in this verse? If so, do you have the courage to exercise the faith required? And can you humble yourself

before the Lord so that your weakness can become your strength?

My thoughts went back to the time when my twin and I were teenagers and our father challenged us to develop testimonies of our own rather than relying on the faith of our parents. I had decided to follow his counsel. I made an effort to carefully read and ponder the Book of Mormon, and then I asked Heavenly Father in prayer if what I read was true. I asked if Joseph Smith really had heard and seen the holy and wondrous manifestations he described.

In answer to my prayer, the Spirit of the Lord was poured out upon me. My heart burned within me in confirmation of the truth of what I had read and asked Heavenly Father about. At last I could testify that I had a testimony of the Book of Mormon and of the Restoration of the gospel through the Prophet Joseph Smith.

As a struggling young missionary, I thought back on this experience and realized that because I had received a confirmation from the Lord that the Book of Mormon is true, then what I read in the book of Ether was also true. I knelt in humble prayer before my Heavenly Father and expressed my inner feelings about my mission call and my language weakness. I promised Him that I would get up early every morning to study and memorize the 70 pages of lessons and scriptures we were to use to teach the people. I told Him I had faith that He, in return, would help me learn the language so that



I could testify of Him and of His Son.

Early every morning thereafter, I prayed to Heavenly Father and said, “Here I am; let us start.”

In a relatively short time I was able to testify that the scripture in Ether is true. My ability to speak English—a weakness when I first started serving my mission—became a strength to me.

This experience has been a blessing to me all of my life. Many times I have thought new Church callings were beyond my abilities. Then the Spirit has testified to me and reminded me of the experience I had as a young missionary in England. With great gratitude these many years, I have felt strength radiating from those words that are recorded in the book of Ether. Through the power of the Spirit, they can give each of us strength, guidance, and hope. ■

**I** *promised Heavenly Father that I would get up early every morning to study. I had faith that He, in return, would help me learn English.*



# Come unto Christ



**Why come unto Christ?  
How can we find the  
way? And how can we  
know we are on the  
right path?**

BY ELDER ROBERT R. STEUER  
Of the Seventy

**I**n a wonderfully fitting conclusion to the Book of Mormon, the prophet Moroni exhorts us to “come unto Christ” (Moroni 10:30, 32). As I have pondered the meaning of this urgent plea, several questions have come to my mind: Why come unto Christ? How can we find the way? And how can we know we are on the right path?

## Why Come unto Christ?

The world offers us many choices of whom or what to “come unto.” Diverse religions, philosophies, social systems, political ideologies, and business or personal interests clamor for our allegiance. Many people believe there are many roads to heaven and it simply does not matter which one you are traveling on.

During Jesus’ mortal ministry there was a time when thousands of people followed after Him. Perhaps they were simply curious or wanted something. He fed them from five loaves and two fishes and taught them, “I am [the] bread of life” (John 6:48). Learning of the obedience that would be required, many then chose no longer to come unto Him. Jesus asked His Twelve Apostles, “Will ye also go away?” (v. 67).

Peter replied: “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (vv. 68–69).

Why come unto Christ? Simply stated, because all other ways do not lead to eternal life. Jesus made this bold declaration: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

The scriptures declare that “no unclean thing can enter” the holy presence of God. To become clean—to “stand spotless . . . at the last day”—we must be cleansed through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ (see 3 Nephi 27:19–20; see also Moroni 10:33). Christ is the only name, way, or means to come unto the Father (see Mosiah 3:17; Helaman 5:9).

At times we may look in the wrong places—to other people and other things—for answers to life’s crucial questions when we should be looking to the Savior and seeking guidance from the Holy Ghost. When we make the decision to look to Christ and follow the noble thoughts and feelings from within, our character begins to gain substance. As President David O. McKay (1873–1970) said, “What you sincerely in your heart think of Christ will determine what you are



[and] will largely determine what your acts will be.”<sup>1</sup>

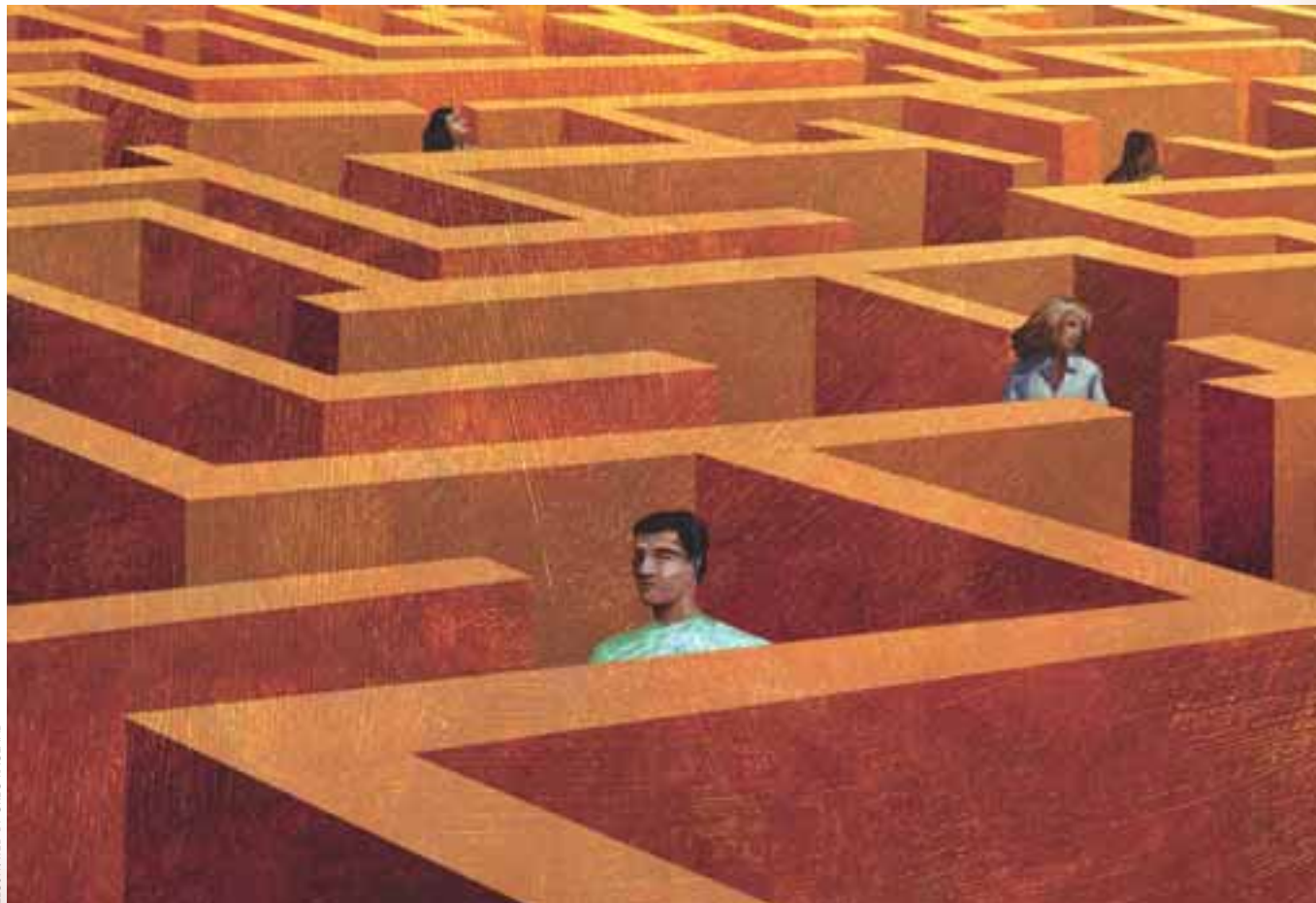
### How Can We Find the Way?

By divine plan we are constantly faced with important decisions. We may ask ourselves questions such as: Why is there so much suffering and hatred? Does God exist? What does He think of me? We eventually come to the conclusion that we do not know all the answers and that surely there must be someone who can see more clearly. If we realize that someone is Jesus Christ, we are likely to become more humble and teachable and to desire, like Abraham, “to be a greater follower of righteousness” (Abraham 1:2).

In our quiet moments of reflection, we can search our thoughts for the way to Christ. President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, said: “Hold your soul very still, and listen to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit. Follow the noble, intuitive feelings planted deep within your souls by Deity.”<sup>2</sup> The Holy Spirit is a revelator whose responsibility it is to lead us to Christ (see Moroni 10:5–7; D&C 11:12–14). As we begin to yield “to the enticings of the Holy Spirit” (Mosiah 3:19), we will admit to ourselves our faults and truly repent.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can now humbly obey the laws of obedience and sacrifice, enduring the adversity that comes

**T***he world would have us believe that there are many ways to get to heaven. But Christ has declared that He is the only way.*



ILLUSTRATED BY GREG RAGLAND



**T**he straight path is the shortest distance between the natural man and the disciple of Christ.

to us. We then begin to develop personal worthiness and a soft and understanding heart. If we can avoid murmuring, our works become “meet for repentance” (Alma 9:30), giving us the required broken heart and contrite spirit. Thus, in coming to Christ, our way becomes His way.

As we enter this narrow and straight way (see 2 Nephi 9:41), we may ask at times, Why so straight? Yet somehow we know that all other paths waste our common gift—time. The straight path is still the shortest distance between the natural man and the disciple of Christ.

#### **How Can We Know We Are on the Right Path?**

We can know we are on the right path by the blessings and manifestations of the Holy Ghost in our lives. He will graciously give us knowledge, instruction, and correction so that we can return to the Father’s presence. As we honor the priesthood and participate in sacred ordinances, “the power of godliness

[will be] manifest” in our personal lives (see D&C 84:20). “The words of Christ will tell [us] all things what [we] should do” (2 Nephi 32:3), leading us to a joy that none save the humble and penitent know (see Alma 27:18).

As we search the scriptures, we will be able to say we have heard the Savior’s voice (see D&C 18:34–36). In our afflictions, we will be able to feel and identify with His pain and suffering. As we repent, His Atonement will draw us even closer to Him.

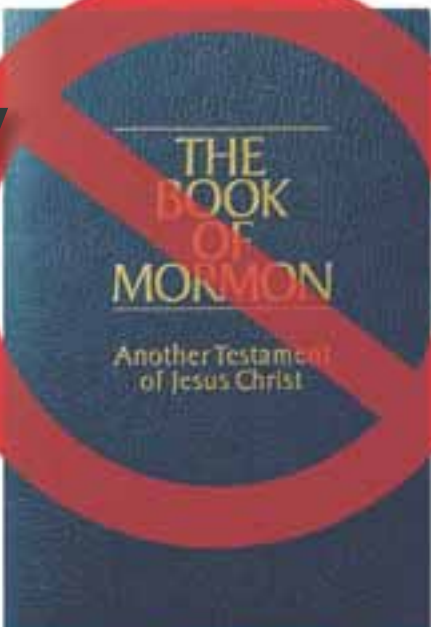
If we follow the path, we allow Him to work on and through us. We find He is able to do more with us than we could do; we serve with more capability than we thought we could.

We are truly blessed as we choose to come unto Christ. To taste of His atoning love is a joy beyond measure. To be His disciple and follow His way is the best decision we will ever make. He is the very Christ. ■

#### **NOTES**

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1951, 93.
2. “How Near to the Angels,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 97.

# THE FAITH I TRIED TO AVOID



*As a minister, I had been taught to stay far away from the LDS Church. But the Lord had a different plan for me.*

BY ROBERT MARSH

Up until a few years ago, I was a follower of the modern trend to take far too much liberty in the practice of religion. I tried to be self-sufficient and individualistic, and I denied that such a thing as “the true church” existed. Only by the grace of God am I now able to share my story of finding the truth.

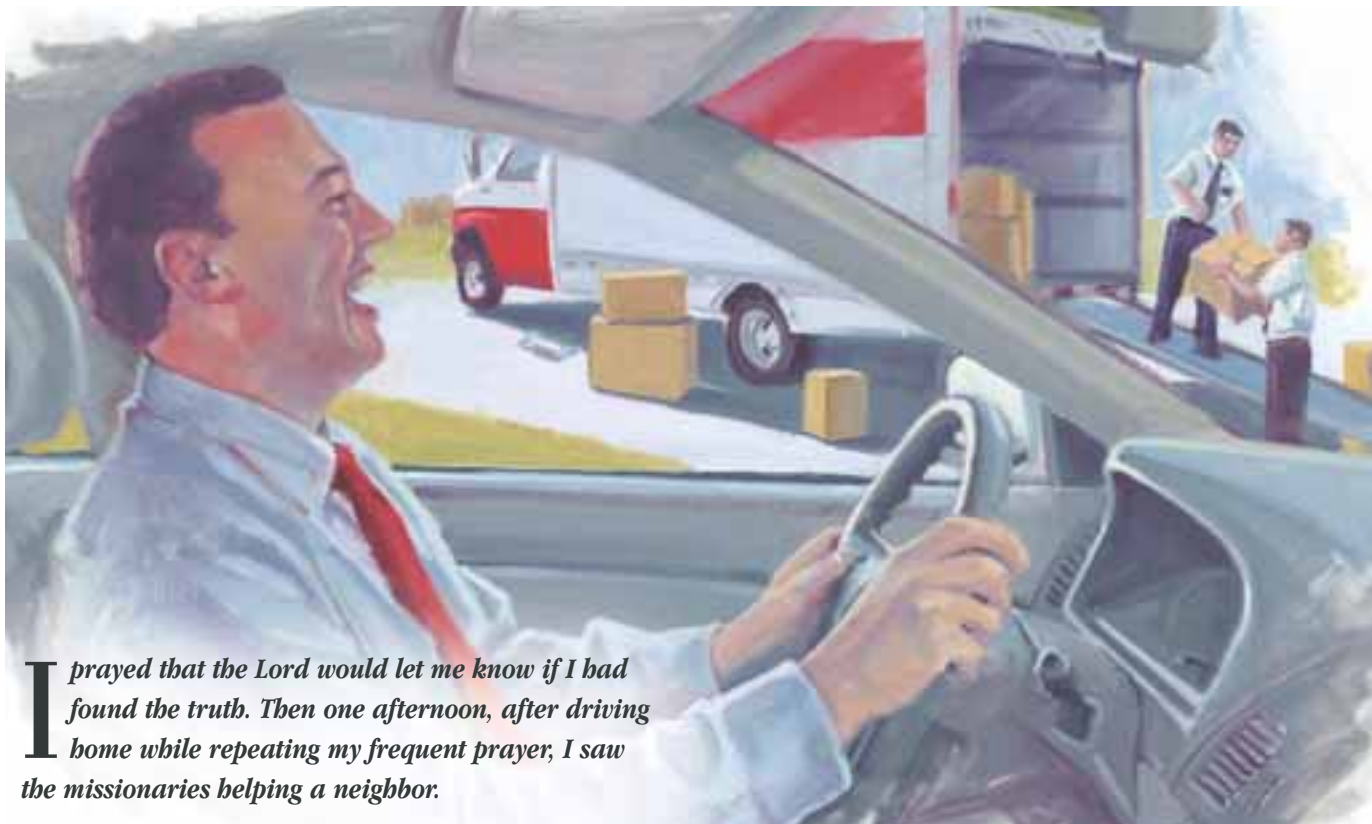
I was raised in a very loving Christian home. Our family would spend the majority of our week either involved in church activities or preparing for upcoming opportunities to serve. For years I was involved in child and youth religious programs, preparing myself for eventual enrollment in Bible college. Given my aptitude for music and my love for the Lord, my desire to achieve a degree in music ministry came quite naturally. I completed the degree and accepted a position with a church congregation, where I was responsible for hundreds of church attendees each Sunday morning.

Over the course of time, I realized that while I knew God existed, I had a hard time believing that everything I knew about Him was accurate. Several years after accepting the calling to serve as a minister, I resigned my position. I knew that I could no longer lead a group of well-meaning members in a practice that I myself was unsure of. I would not be a hypocrite to God, my family, or the members of my church.

## **In Pursuit of Truth**

For the next several years, my life was a downward spiral. My wife decided to start a new life without me and took our daughter with her. I lost my job. I lost my home. My faith crumbled, and anger overtook me. I decided that the Lord could not possibly exist in the way I had always felt He did. This philosophy led me to an intense study of all world religions. This type of study was not new to me. I had taken numerous classes





ILLUSTRATED BY BRIAN CALL

**I** prayed that the Lord would let me know if I had found the truth. Then one afternoon, after driving home while repeating my frequent prayer, I saw the missionaries helping a neighbor.

on multicultural worship practices, in which I had been shown why these religions were inaccurate according to the Bible. Yet new questions now rang in my head: What if the Bible was inaccurate? What if everything I had believed to be true was wrong?

From the earliest years of my religious training, my family, church, and professors had educated me on the danger of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I had seen almost every anti-Mormon movie, prayed for the lost souls giving tours of Temple Square, argued with LDS peers, and taken classes comparing the Book of Mormon with the Satanic bible. Decades of anti-Mormon training had equipped me with the tools and motivation to stay far away from any LDS affiliation. Although I wanted to open my mind to all religions as a form of truth, I did not allow room for the LDS Church.

### **Best Thing—or Brainwashing?**

While deeply involved in my study, I had the opportunity to start a new career. During my training period, I met several employees; one was a striking woman who immediately caught my attention. She accepted my awkward invitation to join me for dinner one night, and as we ate, we discussed religion and the fact that she was a Latter-day

Saint. Realizing that my desire to accept all world religions should have extended even to this church, I decided to overlook our religious differences. I asked her out for another date. I was shocked when she told me that she didn't feel it would be right, as dating outside of her church did not fit within her ethical standards. She told me, however, that she would love to consider me a friend.

At first this upset me greatly. I thought her decision to date only Church members seemed overly pious, lacking the love of Christ. I argued with her for some time about this, but to no avail. That night I spent many sleepless hours pondering and debating my position. After serious reflection, I decided that while I would never dedicate myself to a religious practice for the love of a person, this woman was worth at least investigating the one church I had sworn I would never consider.

As I thought about my coworker, I came to realize that the attraction I felt for her was focused on her morals and integrity. She was unlike women I knew who were desirous to live a carefree, unaccountable lifestyle. My Latter-day Saint friend had no false pretense, and her commitment to her faith was overwhelming. I decided that she had either found the best thing in the world or she was suffering from the worst case of brainwashing I had ever encountered.

### Searching for Answers

A few days after our date, I spent my night at a 24-hour restaurant. I wrote six pages, front and back, of theological and ethical questions I had about the LDS Church. I was vehemently opposed to sitting down with missionaries, who I felt had been trained to twist the scriptures as a type of brainwashing technique. I had decided, however, that I would approach my Latter-day Saint friends with my list and ask for answers. I told the Lord that if this church was true, I would devote myself to it wholeheartedly; if I didn't find this to be the case, I would walk away from it with no reservations. This would either be the easiest witnessing opportunity my friends had ever been given or the greatest challenge of their faith.

In fact, it proved to be both. I was not surprised when several of my LDS acquaintances told me that they couldn't answer many of my questions. I was told on numerous occasions, "That's just the way it is." Although my conclusion that all Latter-day Saints had been brainwashed was in fact strengthening, I was, nevertheless, impressed with my friends' concern for the fact that I needed answers. Never did anyone belittle me for asking. Never did any of them judge me for the fact that I didn't agree. In reality, they encouraged me to seek out the answers for myself in prayer—a step which I found contrary to the notion of indoctrination.

Over time, the Lord led several friends into my life who were able to answer my questions. The Spirit spoke to me, and I felt that the truth had been revealed. But I did not want to accept it. I distanced myself from the woman who had piqued my interest, and I prayed. I begged the Lord for a sign, an answer. One particular afternoon, after driving home from work while repeating my frequent prayer, I laughed out loud as I pulled

into my driveway and saw the LDS missionaries helping a neighbor move out of his house! That afternoon I scheduled my first missionary discussion.

### Blessed by His Help

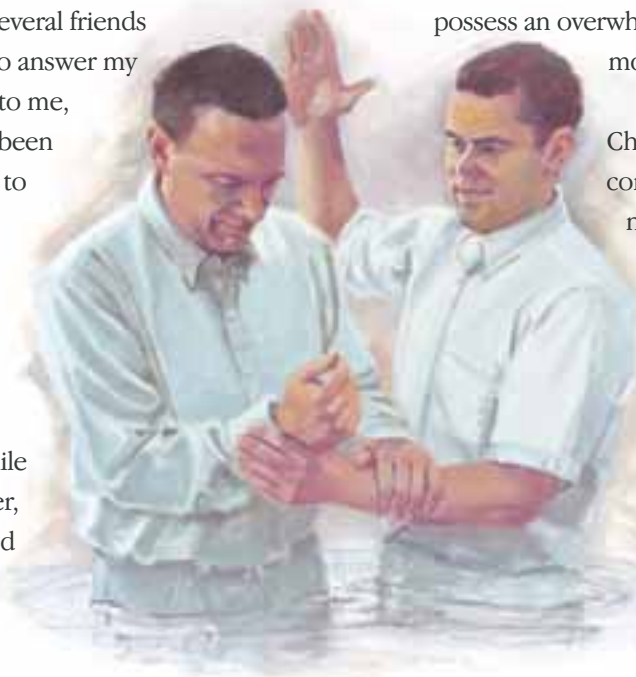
I was baptized into the true Church two months later. I did this knowing that it might mean losing all ties with many of my friends, my parents and extended family, and maybe even my daughter. Through Church members, the missionaries, the stake presidency, and the bishop, I have been blessed to recognize that I now have the support of a new family. The Lord uses His Church to help provide for my needs both spiritually and temporally. While I still strive to maintain my family relationships and struggle to retain the right to see my daughter, I hold to the assurances God has given me through blessings and personal prayer that someday I will again have a complete family.

Through this experience I have learned two very valuable lessons. First, all Latter-day Saints have the responsibility of maintaining their integrity and letting their light shine for those around them (see 3 Nephi 12:16). After all, the Lord used one person's example to change my heart. Second, we should all make the effort to learn what it is that we believe. If we live our lives as examples of God's love, know how to answer difficult questions, and truly open our hearts to the promptings of the Spirit, we possess an overwhelming power to draw even the

most calloused hearts to God's throne.

I testify of the truthfulness of the Church. I testify that I now live a more complete life because of God's faithfulness to a rebellious child, and I know that the Lord's spirit can overcome any hardened heart. It is my blessing and privilege to be able to say that I am a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. ■

*Robert Marsh is a member of the Meridian Second Ward, Meridian Idaho Stake.*





## I KNEW

Joseph

The following artwork features the Prophet Joseph Smith and is accompanied by narratives from Latter-day Saints who knew him. While some accounts were written near the time of the event and others long after, they all speak of Joseph Smith's noble character and countenance. All bear testimony that he was a prophet of God.

Bathsheba W. Smith, wife of the Prophet's cousin George A. Smith, wrote:

"The Prophet was a handsome man—splendid looking, a large man, tall and fair. He had a very nice complexion. His eyes were blue, and his hair a golden brown, and very pretty.

"My first impressions were that he was an extraordinary man, a man of great penetration; was different from any other man I ever saw; had the most heavenly countenance; was genial, affable and kind; and looked the soul of honor and integrity.

"I know him to be what he professed to be—a true prophet of God."<sup>1</sup> ■

### NOTE

1. Quoted in *They Knew the Prophet*, comp. Hyrum L. Andrus and Helen Mae Andrus (1974), 122.

JOSEPH TOOK HIS HANDKERCHIEF FROM HIS POCKET, BY CLARK KELLEY PRICE



Above: Margarette and Wallace McIntire got stuck in the mud near Joseph's store in Nauvoo. Margarette wrote: "We began to cry. . . . But looking up, I beheld the loving friend of children, the Prophet Joseph, coming to us. He soon had us on higher and drier ground. Then he stooped down and cleaned the mud from our little, heavy-laden shoes, took his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped our tear-stained faces. He spoke kind and cheering words to us, and sent us on our way to school rejoicing" (in Andrus, 127).

FAMILY VISIT TO LIBERTY JAIL, BY JOSEPH BRICKEY



Above: Amidst his suffering in Liberty Jail, the Prophet found joy in a visit from Emma and their son. He loved his family. Speaking of a happier time, Brother Benjamin F. Johnson wrote of a Sunday morning when he was sitting with the Prophet in the Mansion House in Nauvoo. Two of the children came to the Prophet "as just from their mother, all so nice, bright and sweet. Calling them to my attention, he said, 'Benjamin, look at these children. How could I help loving their mother?' " (in Andrus, 88).

Right: Telling of the last free days of the Prophet and his brother Hyrum in 1844, Mercy R. Thompson wrote: "The two brothers then started to cross the river, . . . [but] they returned to Nauvoo. . . . My feelings were indescribable, and the very air seemed burdened with sorrowful forebodings" (in Andrus, 121).





FRONTIER PROPHET, BY NATHAN ANDREW FINNOCK

Above: "The Prophet was strong and active, and could build more rods of good fence in one day than most men could in two," wrote Jesse W. Crosby, neighbor of the Prophet in Nauvoo. "His woodyard was an example of order."

When the Prophet's ax was stolen, Jesse wrote, "I contrived to loan him my ax because of the unfailing habit of the Prophet to always sharpen the ax he had been using before it left his hand" (in Andrus, 143–44).



Top: "Nearly everyone was sick with intermittent or other fevers, of which many died," wrote Brother Benjamin F. Johnson, of the malaria that struck the Saints in Nauvoo in 1839. "The Prophet, too, had a violent sickness. . . . A great fear began to prevail. . . . The Prophet now arose in great power, like a lion, . . . [and] shook off his own sickness. . . . Those being sick he commanded to be healed, which they were" (in Andrus, 91).

Right: "In the evening a few of the brethren came in, and we conversed together upon the things of the kingdom," wrote Brigham Young of his first day with the Prophet in the fall of 1832. "Joseph called upon me to pray. . . . [Then he said] the time will come when Brother Brigham Young will preside over this Church' " (in Andrus, 34).



BRIGHAM YOUNG LISTENING TO JOSEPH SMITH JR., BY PAUL MANN



Right: On 3 April 1836, in the newly dedicated Kirtland Temple, Christ appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. “We saw the Lord standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit, before us” (D&C 110:2). Oliver Cowdery, one of the Three Witnesses, said of the Prophet, “I wrote with my own pen the entire Book of Mormon (save a few pages) as it fell from the lips of the Prophet Joseph, as he translated it by the gift and power of God. . . . I beheld with my eyes and handled with my hands the gold plates from which it was transcribed” (quoted in William G. Hartley, “Pushing on to Zion,” *Ensign*, Aug. 2002, 18).

Below: Of the Relief Society sisters, Elizabeth Ann Whitney, counselor in the first Relief Society presidency, wrote: “President Joseph Smith had great faith in the sisters’ labors, and ever sought to encourage them in the performance of the duties which pertained to these societies” (in Andrus, 41).



ORGANIZATION OF THE RELIEF SOCIETY, BY NADINE BARTON



CHRIST APPEARS TO JOSEPH SMITH AND OLIVER COWDERY IN THE KIRTLAND TEMPLE, BY DEL PARSONS

Right: Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner wrote: “I heard Joseph say, ‘I have rolled this kingdom off of my shoulders on to the shoulders of the Twelve and they can carry out this work and build up His kingdom. . . . I am tired, I have been mobbed, I have suffered so much. . . . I have to seal my testimony to this generation with my blood. . . .’

“These words were spoken with such power that they penetrated the heart of every soul that believed on him” (in Andrus, 26).



JOSEPH, A POOR WAYFARING MAN OF GRIEF, BY JARED BARNES



# LET US ASK OF GOD

BY S. MICHAEL WILCOX

It has always brought a sense of wonder and comfort to me to realize that the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ began with a boy's private prayer. Perhaps one of the most powerful lessons the Prophet Joseph Smith taught the world is contained in five simple words he spoke to his mother after his experience in a grove of trees: "I have learned for myself . . ." (Joseph Smith—History 1:20). His whole life was an illustration of the truthfulness of those five words, and we all continue to benefit from the answers he received. I believe, however, that this first profound experience given to him was also meant as an assurance to all of us that we also "might ask of God, and obtain, and not be upbraided" (Joseph Smith—History 1:26).

As a teacher in the Church, I have been asked these questions more frequently than any other: "How do I get answers to prayers? How can I strengthen my relationship with my Father in Heaven?" It is evident that there is a natural hunger in the souls of God's children to commune privately with their Heavenly Father. All of our lives we can be learning how to do this more effectively. I have found it beneficial to take a close look at the First Vision.

## Searching for Answers

So many of our experiences are echoes of the Prophet Joseph Smith's search for truth. His words may be similar to our own: "If any person needed wisdom from God, I did; for how to act I did not know" (Joseph Smith—

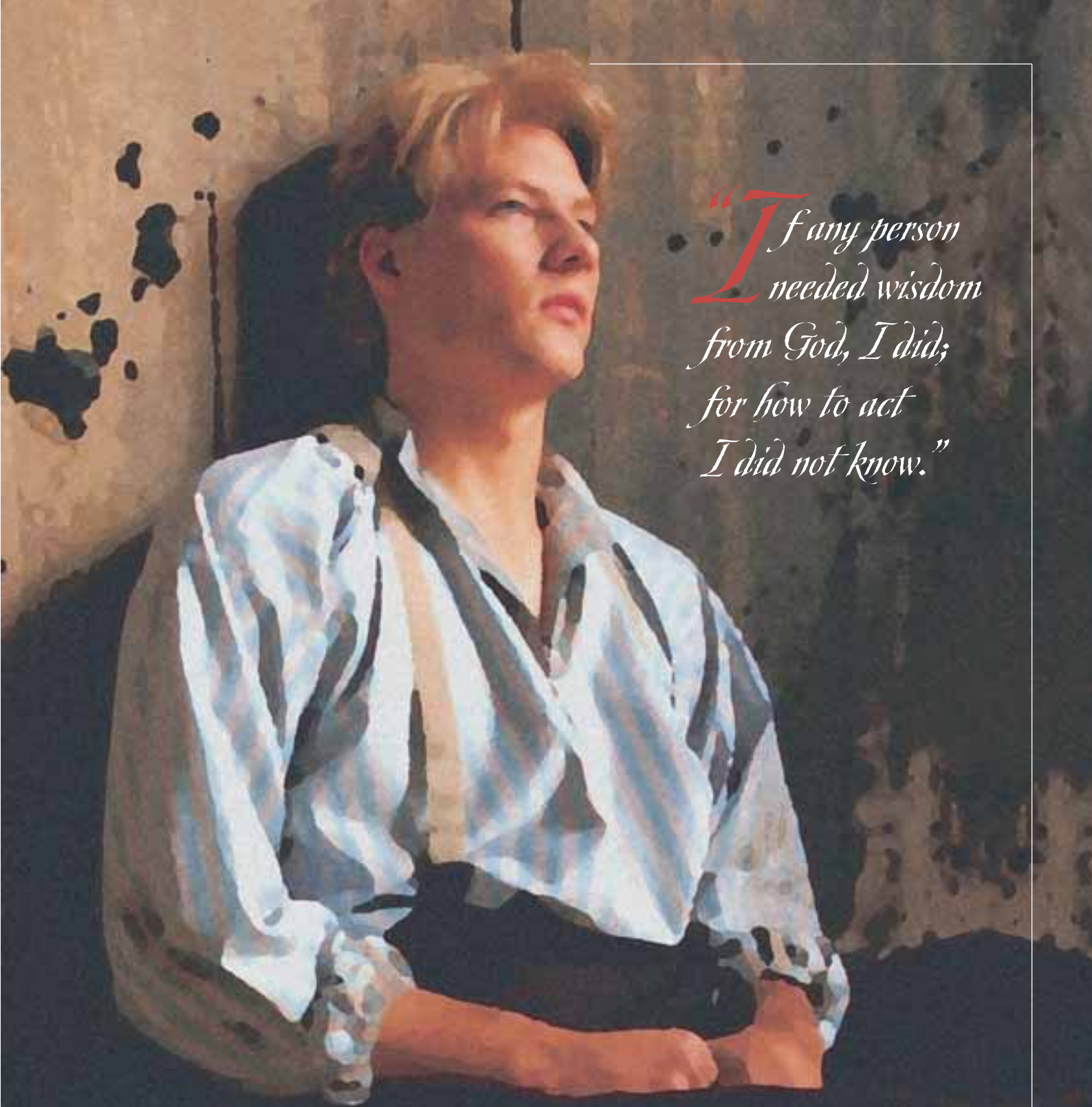


*The experience of a young boy in a grove of trees teaches that our Father blesses each of us generously as we humbly seek Him through personal prayer.*

History 1:12). He wanted a "certain conclusion" and was concerned about "settling the question" (Joseph Smith—History 1:8, 12). To whom may we turn when we need conclusions, wisdom, or settled questions? Perhaps the first step in obtaining wisdom is to understand the character of God as it is implied in James 1:5. The key words in that scripture are "giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not."

When I was younger, I often read Jesus' promise regarding prayer: "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24). I thought this meant I would get what I wanted if I simply believed strongly enough. But there was always a doubt in my mind, and I felt the doubt showed lack of faith. I knew the Lord *could* grant my requests, but *would* He? I was trying to manufacture faith in a request instead of in the grantor of the request. While our requests of God may be righteous, our faith must be in a being, and that being is merciful and kind and delights in the happiness of His children. We have the assurance that the Father we address in prayer "giveth liberally." But there are also times when all we desire is not granted. Knowing the character of our Father in Heaven, we can be assured in these cases that His wisdom is best, and we demonstrate our continued faith in Him by accepting His answers.

Sometimes we come close to Him at moments that are painful. Two summers ago in a moment of inattention, my 14-year-old son got his foot caught in the blade of the lawn mower. In a second, his toes were severed. While he lay on



*“If any person  
needed wisdom  
from God, I did;  
for how to act  
I did not know.”*

the ground bleeding, waiting for a friend to find his earthly parents, his thoughts turned to another Parent, and he prayed, “Father in Heaven, please help the pain go away until I can get to the hospital.” When I reached my boy a few minutes later, he was lying calmly on the lawn. The pain had been initially taken away and did not return until we arrived at the hospital, where he could be treated. One

of the lessons of that experience for me was the assurance that it was not unique. This is a small example of what thousands of people could attest to, that they have received help when they turned to our Heavenly Father in moments of extremity.

Though my young son’s experience may not be one that I or his Father in Heaven would have chosen for him, I have

prayed that each of my children would have an experience by which they might know the reality of their Eternal Father's love. The answers have come in different ways for each child, but there is a similarity in the life-changing power that these experiences produce. As children continue to call upon their Father, a confident humility, born of a sense of their kinship with Deity, begins to grow in them. They are kinder to one another as they see how God has been kind to them. They are more willing to seek out and follow His counsel, knowing it will come.

I have noticed my children more drawn to the truths of the scriptures, sensing that many answers to present and future prayers are recorded there. The things of the world seem to appear less attractive to them, dimmed by the light of the reality of a personal God who is aware of them. Moses experienced this life-transforming reality when the Lord spoke to him face-to-face, calling him "my son" (Moses 1:6).

When Lucifer later tempted the prophet, he replied, "I will not cease to call upon God, I have other things to inquire of him: for his glory has been upon me, wherefore I can judge between him and thee. Depart hence, Satan" (Moses 1:18).

When we are recipients of anyone's compassion, especially that of our Heavenly Father, we experience a refinement and softening of our character. In the first chapter of Ether, the brother of Jared offered three recorded prayers, each of which was granted. In every case we read that the Lord "had compassion" (Ether 1:35, 37, 40) upon Jared and his family or friends. It is critical as we seek our Father in Heaven that we understand that we address a being who is filled with compassion.

#### **Taking Time to Ponder**

Before he went into the Sacred Grove, the Prophet Joseph Smith's "mind was called up to serious reflection" (Joseph Smith—History 1:8). I believe our Heavenly Father

anticipates that we will reflect seriously about the concerns we bring to Him. This lesson was taught to the brother of Jared when the Lord asked him to ponder the problem of light in the barges (see Ether 2:22–25; 3:1–6; 6:2–3).

Sometimes when I pray, I can imagine the Lord saying, "What do *you* think about the matter?" There is something very humbling in knowing He really does care what we think. Perhaps this is what Alma meant when he taught his son Helaman to "*counsel* with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good" (Alma 37:37; emphasis

added). Serious reflection allows me to bring something to our counseling session when I approach my Father in prayer.

The Prophet Joseph Smith also indicated that his feelings "were deep and often poignant" (Joseph Smith—History 1:8). I am impressed by the word *deep*. It is used elsewhere in the scriptures to describe a certain hunger for communication with God. Enos

said that "the words . . . concerning eternal life, and the joy of the saints, *sunk deep* into my heart.

"And my soul hungered; and I kneeled down before my Maker" (Enos 1:3–4; emphasis added).

The Prophet Joseph Smith tells us that when he knelt down in the Sacred Grove he "began to offer up the desires of [his] heart to God" (Joseph Smith—History 1:15). The 12 chosen Nephite disciples "did not multiply many words, . . . and they were filled with desire" (3 Nephi 19:24). Speaking to the Lord, the brother of Jared observed "that from thee we may receive according to our desires" (Ether 3:2). We sing "prayer is the soul's sincere desire" (*Hymns*, no. 145). It seems almost self-evident that we should offer God our desires, but occasionally, for various reasons, we may find ourselves hesitating to express our deepest feelings.

#### **Trusting in the Lord's Wisdom**

Of course, not all of our petitions are granted, for we also address a God of wisdom. Jesus introduced the Lord's

**B**efore he went into the Sacred Grove, the Prophet Joseph Smith's "mind was called up to serious reflection." I believe our Heavenly Father anticipates that we will reflect seriously about the concerns we bring to him.






*“If any of you  
lack wisdom,  
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and it shall be  
given him.”*

Prayer with this comment: “Your Father knoweth what things *ye have need of* before ye ask him” (3 Nephi 13:8; Matthew 6:8; emphasis added). We know our desires; He knows our *needs*. It would be wonderful if our desires and our needs were always one and the same, but unfortunately this is not the case. That is why we must “counsel with the Lord” and then pray, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (3 Nephi 13:10; see also Matthew 6:10). Understanding that our Father in Heaven knows our needs, we can do as Hannah did after pouring out her soul to God that He would grant her a son. “So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad” (1 Samuel 1:18). She had put her desires in the Lord’s hands, trusting His goodness and wisdom.

When life’s answers don’t match our expectations, it is

important to realize that the Lord “doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world” (2 Nephi 26:24). And at a more individual level, Jesus taught, “If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?” (Luke 11:11). When one needs bread, a stone is a useless thing. A serpent is a harmful thing. The Lord does not give stones or serpents, only bread and fish.

As I approached my 19th birthday, I prayed fervently that the Lord would call me to Denmark on a mission. My grandfather, uncle, and cousin had all gone to Denmark. I also prayed that I would not go to France, even though I had studied four years of French. When I opened the call, it said France. I served two years in France and loved the French people, their culture and language, and the wonderful



*“Why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen? For I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it.”*

members. The Lord had not given me a stone; He gave me bread. I discovered a few years after returning home that I had French ancestors. I find myself expressing gratitude often to my Father in Heaven for allowing me the wonderful opportunity of serving the French people and experiencing as much joy in my French heritage as I do in my Danish.

If the answers to our pleadings do not come when we feel we most need them, let us remember that young Joseph Smith did not see the pillar of light until after “exerting all [his] powers to call upon God” and only “at the very moment when [he] was ready to sink into despair and abandon [himself] to destruction” (Joseph Smith—History 1:16). This was on the occasion when he prayed vocally for the first time in his life (see Joseph Smith—History 1:14). The Lord surely hears all our prayers, the silent and the spoken, but there is a concentration of purpose that often accompanies vocal prayer. I have

discovered in my own life that those times when I most deeply express my feelings and thoughts, I find myself, without consciously thinking about it, praying vocally.

While trying to come to a “certain conclusion,” the boy Joseph had searched the scriptures for answers. Though he did not find in them the specific answer he sought, he received guidance on how to get that answer. It seems that there are two parts to private prayer: speaking and listening. Sometimes the answers come even as we pray, but more often they come according to the Lord’s own time, place, and circumstance. Quite frequently they come through the scriptures. Most often when we pray, we expect to speak while God listens. When we read the scriptures, God speaks and we are invited to listen.

A few years ago a young woman in our ward who had recently graduated from high school was invited to go to Russia to teach English to young children. Communication

between her and her parents would be sporadic at best. Her father was concerned that there would be times she would need advice or comfort and he would not be there to give it. He pondered on the many situations, emotions, and needs she might encounter while away and then wrote a number of letters covering each situation. These he sealed in envelopes, labeling each one. When she left, she took her father's counsel and love with her. The scriptures are like those letters. Our Father in Heaven has placed within their pages many answers. They contain certain conclusions and wisdom. They can direct us how to act. They can settle many questions. In this way the scriptures fulfill the Lord's promise that "before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24).

### Responding to the Lord

One of the greatest lessons I have learned from the First Vision is the need to act on the answers God gives us. The Lord can shape and transform our lives when we are willing to respond. But when He answers, will we believe? Can we meet the challenges the answer may bring? Are we willing to testify of the truths we receive? Will we follow the Lord's counsel? Our responses to these questions largely determine the life-changing efficacy of our communication with our Father in Heaven.

The Lord's answer to young Joseph Smith put him on the path that eventually led to Carthage, but the Lord knew the future prophet would pay that price. In spite of a lifetime of severe persecution, the Prophet Joseph Smith "continued to affirm that [he] had seen a vision" (Joseph Smith—History 1:27). He wrote: "Why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen? For I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it" (Joseph Smith—History 1:25).

The Lord taught this principle to Oliver Cowdery when he revealed: "Behold, I have manifested unto you, by my Spirit in many instances, that the things which you have written are true; wherefore you know that they are true.

"And if you know that they are true, behold, I give unto you a commandment, that *you rely upon the things which*

*are written*" (D&C 18:2–3; emphasis added).

Our willingness to act with faith before the answer comes helps to bring the desired assurances of our Father in Heaven. The Lord once asked the brother of Jared, "Believest thou the words which I shall speak?" When the brother of Jared responded, "Yea, Lord, I know that thou speakest the truth" (Ether 3:11–12), the Lord granted his request.

We worship a personal God who is our Father. Let us approach Him with the deepest respect, for as Isaiah wrote, God is He "who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance" (Isaiah 40:12).

Yet this God of majesty is pleased when His children individually and humbly approach Him "evening, and morning, and at noon, . . . and cry aloud" (Psalm 55:17). He delights in answering them, for "he heareth the prayer of the righteous" (Proverbs 15:29). ■

*S. Michael Wilcox is a member of the Draper 16th Ward, Draper Utah Stake.*



## HELPS FOR HOME EVENING

Invite family members to tell what they know about Joseph Smith's first prayer. Talk about possible answers to the two questions in the second paragraph.

Use the section headings to introduce the main points of this article. Ask family members to tell what they have learned by experience about receiving answers to prayer.

Show a stone and some bread. Ask family members what they think these objects have to do with prayer. Review the author's mission call story. How did he compare these objects to prayer? Read Luke 11:11 and 2 Nephi 26:24 and share a similar experience from your life.



# MAKING WEAK THINGS BECOME STRONG



BY ANNE C. PINGREE

Second Counselor in the Relief Society  
General Presidency

At every stage of our lives, we struggle to overcome our weaknesses. And as we do, we reflect on the familiar words of an ancient prophet who agonized over his own weakness. As Moroni labored to chronicle sacred events on metal plates, he was deeply concerned about his weakness in writing. Perhaps, he worried, future readers would not be able to feel the power of the inspired messages he was recording (see Ether 12:23–26). When he humbly turned to the Lord, the Lord revealed these words to him:

“And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (v. 27).



***The challenging process of facing and overcoming our weaknesses can refine us and bring us closer to the Savior.***

The Lord’s response to Moroni can enlarge our understanding of the purpose of weaknesses in our lives and the way to overcome them. We can feel hope and the same peace in our souls that Moroni did. Three vital steps can help replace a weakness with a strength: recognizing the problem, being determined to overcome it, and relying on the Lord for help.

## **Recognizing Our Weakness**

As Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) observed: “It is not an easy thing . . . to be shown one’s weaknesses. . . . Nevertheless, this is part of coming unto Christ, and it is a vital, if painful, part of God’s plan of happiness.”<sup>1</sup>

Some people feel defeated by their personal weaknesses and succumb to despair. Some attempt to hide, ignore, or compensate for their shortcomings because of pain and embarrassment. But, as the Lord told Moroni, recognizing and acknowledging a weakness is a necessary part of overcoming



it: “Because thou hast seen thy weakness thou shalt be made strong” (Ether 12:37).

A little girl named Jackie faced a devastating weakness that deeply affected her life—an inability to read. For years she experienced daily rejection and humiliation.

She said, “I was in second grade, and already I knew I was dumb. I just didn’t ever really catch on to reading.” Day after day and year after year the humiliation continued. Jackie said, “I was either told directly I was stupid or was asked, ‘Haven’t I already told you that a thousand times?’ ” She was labeled “lazy” and “a day-dreamer.” Comments like these, she said, “caused me such emotional stress that it was like having a curtain drawn across my mind.” Being called upon to read aloud in class was excruciating. “Even when I knew the words, I could not say them,” she recalled. “Tears would well up in my eyes and blur the page.”

Soon Jackie learned to cover for her weakness or avoid situations that would reveal her dreaded secret. When she and her friends visited the local library, she followed their lead in checking out popular mystery books. But even though she carried the books home, she could never read them or join in her friends’ lively discussions about the

characters and plots. She also found herself failing nearly every subject in school. Finally, at age 15, she decided to drop out of school and get married.

This decision could have led to more serious problems and a permanent detour from learning. Instead, through the loving, ongoing encouragement of her husband, the watchful care of the Lord, and her own determination, things began to change. “My husband has been my life-saver,” she explained. “He always treated me like I was the smartest person he ever saw.” Many years later, this mother of eight children graduated from high school—one year before her eldest daughter.

Jackie continued her education beyond high school, but each day was a struggle. “I cried every day, it was so hard,” she said. Her husband gave her priesthood blessings, and a daughter tutored her in algebra, leaving her little notes of encouragement. In faith, Jackie turned to the Lord and prayed for His help. Finally, after years of effort, she received a college degree at age 50. Her weakness ultimately became a great strength as she pursued a career path that became a great blessing to others also struggling to read. The little girl who once thought she was too dumb to read now directs a statewide program that helps children with reading difficulties.<sup>2</sup>



The challenging process of facing and overcoming our weaknesses can refine us, make us more profitable servants, and bring us closer to the Savior.

### Exercising Determination and Effort

Once we have recognized a weakness, we need strong determination and great effort to overcome it.

One young woman who was a lifelong member of the Church chose not to enroll in the seminary program in high school and seldom read the scriptures. After her marriage, she realized that she couldn't continue to live on the borrowed light of others' testimonies; she needed to develop a testimony of her own. She decided to read the Book of Mormon for the first time. At first it was difficult to concentrate. Then she realized she must ponder and pray about what she read. That was the beginning of overcoming her weakness.

As her small family grew larger and the demands on her time became greater, she set aside precious moments each day to read, study, and pray. The words in the scriptures became sweet to her, and she looked forward to "feasting upon the word of Christ" (2 Nephi 31:20). She also immersed herself in the other standard works, and her spiritual confidence grew.

Yearning to instill firm testimonies in her children, she, along with her husband, made gospel learning and scripture study a top priority. Each morning at breakfast they read the scriptures together and engaged in gospel discussions. Family home evening lessons also included the scriptures. Years later she received a calling to teach her sisters in the Relief Society, some of whom had not read the scriptures or were struggling with their testimonies. She encouraged these women to

turn to the scriptures with full energy of heart, and she bore the strong testimony she had gained of Jesus Christ and of the Book of Mormon.

### Turning to the Lord

Sometimes, in spite of all we do to "make weak things become strong," the Lord, in His infinite wisdom, does not take away our weakness. The Apostle Paul struggled throughout his life with "a thorn in the flesh," which he said served to humble him "lest [he] should be exalted above measure" (2 Corinthians 12:7). Three times Paul asked the Lord to take away his weakness, and three times the Lord declined to do so. The Lord then explained that His grace was sufficient for Paul and that, in fact, His strength was actually "made perfect in weakness." Then Paul wrote, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (vv. 9–10).

Like Paul, we can find positive meaning in weaknesses that are not taken away. Surely nothing is quite as humbling as having a weakness that we cannot overcome but

must continue to struggle with throughout our life. Such a weakness teaches us, in a very personal way, that after all we can do we must rely on the grace of Christ to make up the difference.

As we humbly submit our will to the Lord's, we find that our weaknesses can indeed become sources of strength if we put our trust in Him. ■



### HELPS FOR HOME EVENING

Invite a family member to lift a heavy object alone first, then with another's help. Read the two stories from this article and discuss how the Lord helped the two women. Talk about how the activity and stories relate to Ether 12:27. Share your own experiences with this scripture.

Discuss Elder Maxwell's statement. Invite family members to examine their lives and choose a weakness to overcome. Encourage them to pray daily and keep a record of their progress.

### NOTES

1. "Hope through the Atonement of Jesus Christ," *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 63.

2. Gib Twyman, "Long Road to Reading," *Deseret News*, 26 Mar. 2001, pp. C1–C2; personal letter to author.



# “Was I Always This Happy?”

BY AIMEE H. HANSEN

*Despite predictions that Emily Jensen wouldn't survive her terrible car accident, today this young woman lives a full life and blesses others with her faith and optimism.*

Until her sophomore year of high school, Emily Anne Jensen was what she terms a “typical teenager.” But her family and friends say she was never that. She played basketball and took ballet. She served in the Church. She worked hard in school and earned A grades in hopes of someday becoming a doctor. Emily also devoted much of her time to visiting the elderly, reaching out to those who were lonely at school, and volunteering at a camp for children with disabilities.



But everything changed at seven in the morning on 17 April 1999, when 16-year-old Emily was driving to a state high school drama competition and was broadsided by a 15-passenger van. Rescue workers arrived on the scene and began to

cut away the top of the mangled car. They expected to extract only a body, but instead they found Emily, barely alive, with severe brain trauma and numerous other injuries. She was in a deep coma, hovering between life and death. They rushed her to the hospital, expecting the worst.

A few days after the accident, as the reality of Emily's condition sank in, Emily's mother, Terri, dropped to her knees and begged Heavenly Father to let her daughter live. Emily's father, Larry, and sisters also pleaded with the Lord



**While in a coma for three months, Emily was comforted continually by family members such as her sister Sarah. When Emily awoke, she regained strength and ability gradually with the help of therapists (above and right).**

in heartfelt prayer. Sister Jensen says, “We offered again and again our broken hearts to our Father in Heaven, all the while trying to muster the courage and trust and faith to say, ‘Thy will be done, whatever that is.’ ”

While Emily lay in a coma, family, friends, and ward members rallied around her, giving up their time and sleep to be with her. Some medical professionals believed Emily would remain in a coma for life, but those who loved her still hoped and asked the Lord for her coma to end.

#### **A Daily Marathon**

Three months later, Emily began the slow process of awakening from her coma. Sister Jensen explains, “Emily didn’t even have a baby’s reflexes when she came out of her coma—she couldn’t even swallow. She’d been lying on a bed so long they had to put her on a board and raise her just a few inches at a time to get her body used to being in an upright position. She breathed through a tracheostomy and was fed through tubes. It took her months just to learn to hold her head up. She had to learn to sit and crawl and stand and walk.”

But Emily was determined. She says, “Once I had made up my mind to gain my life back, the Spirit enveloped me so that the pain was less, and I had a sense of being on the mission the Lord had sent me here to perform.”

**Once I had made up my mind to gain my life back, the Spirit enveloped me so that the pain was less, and I had a sense of being on the mission the Lord had sent me here to perform.”**

One of Emily’s doctors and a close friend from her ward, Vera Frances Tait, compares Emily’s hard work during her long rehabilitation process to “a cognitive and physical marathon” that she has had to fight daily. Dr. Tait says of her patient, “Throughout this terrible ordeal, she has maintained hope, discipline, a love of learning, and a sense of humor. In 20 years of working in rehabilitation, I have rarely seen anyone as determined and hardworking as Emily.” But Emily is quick to give credit to the Lord for

her recovery. She points out, “From the beginning the Lord was with me. I am nothing without Him.”

#### **Back to School**

After six months in the hospital, Emily returned home and started school again during her junior year. Because fatigue is a major problem for people who have traumatic head injuries, the doctors encouraged Emily to stay at



***"I'm not going through this life to endure," Emily says. "I'm going through this life to help others endure."***

***During the same time as these pictures were taken, Emily visited other patients struggling with similar challenges.***

school for only two hours a day. But she felt an urgency about education. On her first day back at school, Emily told her mother, "I've worked too hard to get here. I don't want to leave early." Speaking, writing, and walking were difficult for her. Even though she was still going to therapy for several hours every afternoon, Emily persevered and went to school full-time.

Sister Jensen attended classes with her daughter every day for six months to assist her. At first Emily needed to be pushed around in a wheelchair. As soon as she was able to walk at all, Emily refused to ride and would have her mother sit in the wheelchair while she pushed her from behind, using the wheelchair for support.

An aide helped Emily at school during her senior year, and Emily graduated with her class on 31 May 2001. As she slowly walked across the stage to receive her diploma, those in the audience rose to their feet and gave Emily a standing

ovation. Everyone clapped. Some cheered. Many cried. Emily realized that afternoon that her faith and determination

***Twenty months after Emily's accident, her mother, grandparents, and cousin were in an accident in which Emily's grandmother was killed. Emily's mother was seriously injured. Emily wrote this letter to her mother. It says, "Mom, You can be greater than anything that happens to you. Have a fantastic day!"***

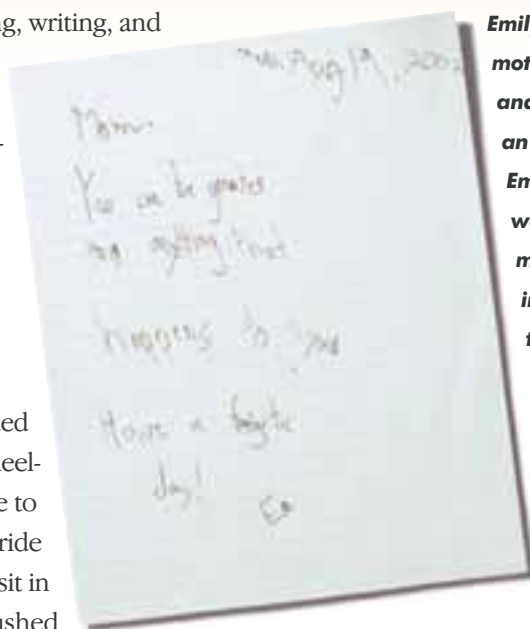
had already touched hundreds of lives.

### ***"If I Can, They Can"***

Emily has gone on to LDS Business College, where, with substantial help from teachers and fellow students, she is studying to become a recreational therapist. Her goal is to be able to help people, especially young people, who are going through challenges similar to her own. As Emily says,

"Therapy is the one job I can do where my disability is an advantage, not a disadvantage. I can help people see that they can make it. If I can, they can."

Emily's family and friends agree that therapy is a good field for her. Sister Jensen says, "Emily's disabilities give







***When Emily first began to attend LDS Business College, she wore leg braces, which she no longer needs. “Ever since the accident the Lord has never left my side, and that has been so incredible,” she says.***

her a lot of credibility in dealing with other people who suffer. They listen when Emily talks to them because they know she knows what they’re going through.”

But getting through school will be a difficult journey for Emily. In order to get ready and to school on time, she wakes up at four each morning. She dedicates herself to her schoolwork, often studying up to 10 hours a day. The effects of trauma to Emily’s brain make it hard for her to read and almost impossible to write. But Emily will do whatever she can to get through school. Already she has taught herself to type on a computer. Though it is still a slow process—one finger at a time—she is grateful to again have that avenue of communication.

### **An Ongoing Battle**

Each day presents challenges as Emily works to gain her life back. She tries to remain positive and put her trust in the Lord, but there is much that she and her family still struggle to accept and overcome. Sister Jensen comments that oftentimes when people talk about their struggles, they conclude with a fairy-tale ending. “But that’s not how it is,” she says. “There have been so many days when I’ve wondered how we’d ever survive. I think people who struggle with challenges need to know that the battle goes on

every day and must be fought with courage and honor and faith. We need to remind ourselves that God is allowing our faith to grow as we reach and stretch for Him.”

Emily’s speech is labored and often unclear; she longs to be able to share her thoughts and be easily understood. She explains, “It’s really hard because in my head I hear my normal voice, but when I speak it doesn’t come out the same—and I have so much to say!” She also longs to be able to play the hymns on the piano again. But Emily says her greatest challenge is probably loneliness: “People often treat me like I’m not a real person because I can’t talk or walk ‘the right way.’ They don’t see that I’m still me.”

And yet, as those close to Emily testify, she just keeps on trying. Her mother says, “Emily doesn’t let the experiences of life defeat her or break her heart or soul or spirit. She gets right back up every day and goes at it and does what needs to be done with heart and determination, courage and faith. What makes Emily unique though is that she does this all with great sensitivity to and compassion for her fellowmen.”

Even as Emily has struggled daily to regain her physical and cognitive abilities, she hasn’t let herself become self-absorbed. Her compassion for others has grown as a result of her trials, and as soon as she was physically able, she began devoting time each week to performing service for others.



**On each anniversary of her accident, Emily celebrates a “rebirthday.” She says, “This experience has been like spring, a rebirth.” Four years after the accident, Emily received her endowment in the Bountiful Utah Temple with her sisters, Jennifer and Sarah, and their parents.**

While still in high school, she visited with struggling children and their families in the hospital, spoke at fund-raisers for medical institutions, prepared and served food to the homeless, and helped collect necessities for several nonprofit organizations. She is continuing this pattern of service in college. Although school, therapy, and visits to doctors consume much of her time, Emily is determined to live up to her goal to live every day as if she is on a mission—“not the two-year or the 18-month kind—the life kind,” she says.

### Lessons of Love

For Emily, the trials she has struggled through have been lessons in patience, love, and the importance of an eternal perspective. She has learned to trust in the Lord and to be grateful for the blessings in her life, large and small. She says, “By not being able to do simple things—by wearing diapers and having feeding tubes in the hospital, by not being able to walk or talk—I learned that I can do nothing without the Lord. I have felt the Lord’s love so real, so near. It is incredible. I don’t know how I can ever repay that kind of love.”

Through her challenges, Emily has come to understand

the more important things in life. A short time ago she asked her father, “Dad, was I always this happy, or did it take the accident to help me realize it?” Emily recognizes



**D**ad, was I always this happy, or did it take the accident to help me realize it?”

that her positive outlook is a result of living close to the Spirit and acknowledging the Lord’s hand in her life. She also finds joy in loving and serving others and says, “I think life is all about one word: *love*. We have it, and we need to give it away.”

### Giving Back

At the four-year anniversary of her accident, Emily sought the opportunity to receive her endowment in the temple. She says the greatest desire of her heart is to give back all she can in service to

the Lord for His generous blessings and for the countless ways He has helped her and her family since her accident.

Emily says, “I once read, ‘You can be greater than anything that happens to you.’ And with the Lord’s help, I believe that is possible.” ■

*Aimee H. Hansen is a member of the East Mill Creek Ninth Ward, Salt Lake East Mill Creek Stake.*

# Strong Hands and Loving Hearts



*Visiting teaching gives us an opportunity to reach out in love and to care for one another as sisters in the gospel.*

I remember more than 30 years ago when I was first called to be a visiting teacher, I was assigned a young woman who never came to church,” recalls Catherine Carr Humphrey of the Hillside Ward, Rancho Cucamonga California Stake. “She impressed me in those early 1970s as a hippie type. I faithfully went every month and knocked on her door. She would open the inside door but leave the screen door shut. I was never really sure what she looked like. She would not say anything. She would just stand there. I would look cheerful and say, ‘Hi, I’m Cathie, your visiting teacher.’ And as she would say nothing, I would say, ‘Well, our lesson today is on . . .’ and try briefly to say something uplifting and friendly. When I was through, she would say, ‘Thank you,’ and shut the door.

“I did not like going there. I





felt embarrassed. But I went because I wanted to be obedient. After about seven or eight months of this, I got a phone call from the bishop.

“‘Cathie,’ he said, ‘the young woman you visit teach just had a baby who lived only a few days. She and her husband are going to have a graveside service, and she asked me to see if you would come and be there with her. She said you are her only friend.’

“I went to the cemetery. The young woman, her husband, the bishop, and I were at the graveside. That was all. I had seen her only once a month for a few minutes at a time. I hadn’t even been able to tell through the screen door that she was expecting a baby, yet even my inept but



hopeful visiting had blessed us both.”

Scenes of service such as this are repeated in various forms over and over again throughout the Church. Relief Society general president Bonnie D. Parkin recently said: “I see legions of faithful sisters around the world going forward on the Lord’s errands, performing simple yet significant service. Why do we do visiting teaching? Sisters, it’s because we’ve made covenants. [Alma] described it this way: ‘To bear one another’s burdens, . . . to mourn with those that mourn; . . . comfort those that stand in need of comfort’ (Mosiah 18:8–9). . . .

“One morning . . . I received an e-mail from a college friend. She wrote, ‘Ray died this morning.’ And then she said, ‘Visiting teaching works. It really works.’ . . . Here was my dear friend bearing testimony to me that what we call visiting teaching is really so much more than a visit or a thought. It’s how we connect with one another. . . .

“Mourn, comfort, stand as witnesses. All of those promises came together for my friend. . . . [The Lord] had sent her two sisters who had entered into a covenant with Him. . . . They were sisters in the gospel who understood their charge to do this work with heart and soul. . . . That’s the essence of visiting teaching.”

And, Sister Parkin continued, “visiting teaching is the heart and soul of Relief Society.”<sup>1</sup>

Lucy Mack Smith, mother of the Prophet Joseph Smith, said in the second meeting of Relief Society, “We must cherish one another, watch over one another, comfort one another and gain instruction, that we may all sit down in heaven together.”<sup>2</sup>

We are reminded: “The purposes of visiting teaching are to build caring relationships with each sister and to offer support, comfort, and friendship. In visiting teaching, both the giver and the receiver are blessed and strengthened in their Church activity by their caring concern for one another.”<sup>3</sup>

#### **Mentor Others**

Teaching our new young Relief Society sisters that visiting teaching is the heart and soul of Relief Society is critical.



Training and mentoring can be provided by assigning a new sister to exemplary visiting teachers and, for some, to be a companion to her own mother.

Cara S. Longmore, now of the BYU 176th Ward, Brigham Young University Second Stake, was called to be a visiting teacher with her mother as her companion. Her mom was excited, but Cara considered herself too young for Relief Society. She remembers: “We were assigned to two wonderful women. As I look back, I realize the significant impact these sisters had on my life at that difficult time. They became not only examples to me, but also friends in a true sense—not just older mentors. When we would visit, I felt calm, secure, and truly loved.

“I am also so very thankful for that time with my mom. Now that I am at college, I realize how valuable those visiting teaching visits were to our relationship. I feel so grateful that I got to see my mom in that setting, hear her strong testimony, and learn more about the love she has for her ‘sisters in Zion’ [see *Hymns*, no. 309]. Because we were in the context of a team, we were more equal and I truly felt that we were ‘sisters in Zion’ as well.”

### Provide Watch-Care

While visiting teachers are asked to make monthly contact, some circumstances require more. President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) said: “Your duties in many ways must be like those of the home teachers, which briefly are ‘to watch over the church always’—not twenty minutes a month but always—‘and be with and strengthen them’—not a knock at the door, but to be with them, and lift them and strengthen them, and empower them, and fortify them.”<sup>4</sup> This type of visiting teaching is “watch-care.”

Watch-care was experienced by a sister who worked nights at a hospital. Her visiting teachers began coming each month to the hospital during her lunch hour, which was in the very, very early hours of the morning. She was amazed that they were willing to make such a sacrifice but greatly appreciated it.



Cynthia E. Larsen of the Heritage Ward, Calgary Alberta Stake, discovered the joy of watch-care with a challenging visiting teaching assignment. She says: “I remember being filled with apprehension the first time I visited Deanna. I thought we were complete opposites. She was single, an executive with an oil company, and a recent convert to the Church. Yet with each visit we found that we had much in common.

“After Deanna developed cancer, she put my anxiety to rest as she calmly answered my questions with honesty and courage. From that day on, she began to teach me by example what dignity and endurance are.

“In the following months, she enthusiastically educated herself and others about cancer. She organized a cancer information night for our Relief Society. She joined a local cancer support group.

“Eventually the medication and chemotherapy treatments sapped Deanna of her strength and energy. On her ‘good days,’ she went for walks and encouraged other cancer patients. On her ‘bad days,’ she worked at maintaining her optimism, conserving her strength, and building her testimony.

“As Deanna’s condition worsened, our visits became daily. We laughed, we cried, we were silly, and we were intensely serious. She anticipated death, hesitantly at first, then confidently. She worked to make each day the best she could.

“For months before her death I watched my dear friend and sister in the gospel find opportunities to serve. Yes, I served Deanna as her visiting teacher, but it was she who taught me about the blessings of living the gospel.”

President Gordon B. Hinckley explains: “We have some of our own who cry out in pain and suffering and loneliness and fear. Ours is a great and solemn duty to reach out and help them, to lift them, to feed them if they are hungry, to nurture their spirits if they thirst for truth and righteousness.”<sup>5</sup>







### Be Flexible

Watch-care is certainly the goal of visiting teaching and can be achieved even though some situations call for creativity and flexibility. In the Anchorage Alaska Bush District, for example, visits can usually be made only by snowmobile. If the nearby river is frozen solid enough to drive on, they can be made by car. Obviously, the preferred monthly face-to-face visit in each home is not possible. These sisters must connect hearts and souls through telephone and e-mail visits. Sister Parkin has counseled: "If monthly visits aren't possible, please don't do nothing. Be creative and find a way to connect with each sister."<sup>6</sup> Remember President Hinckley's encouraging statement: "Do the very best you can."<sup>7</sup>

Certainly this was the thinking of Florence Chukwurah of Nigeria when she was assigned to visit teach a sister who was having difficulties in her marriage and in her home, making it necessary to meet at the marketplace for a visit. After listening to and observing this sister's challenges, Sister Chukwurah asked her

husband for a priesthood blessing so that she might know how to help this troubled sister. Following the blessing she felt prompted to discuss with this sister the importance of tithing. "She tearfully told me that she did not pay her tithes because she was not making enough money," Sister Chukwurah remembers. "I suggested that she and I discuss Malachi 3:10 and that we do so in my house so we could relax and be alone for the discussion. She consented. After our discussion I encouraged her to exercise her faith and pay her tithes for at least six months. I bore my testimony to her by the Spirit."

Sister Chukwurah testifies that within a few months of this meeting, this sister's circumstances changed dramatically. Her daughter received a scholarship to complete her high school education, her husband worked with the bishop to become active and accept a calling, husband and wife teamed up to improve their financial situation and their relationship, and eventually they became an inspiration to others.

**O**ne of the purposes of visiting teaching is to build caring relationships by offering support, comfort, and friendship. Some circumstances require more than a monthly contact, and it is a responsibility and privilege for visiting teachers to give more.







**T**o give your heart and soul to visiting teaching requires you to be prayerful about those you visit. The Lord will direct you in doing His work as you listen and respond.

### Give Friendship

One young woman remembers how her visiting teacher shared a spirit of caring, concern, and friendship with her. She had moved into a new ward at the end of her last year of law school and found herself to be the youngest member there by about 30 years. “Feeling uncomfortable and not knowing anyone,” she recalls, “I drifted into semiactivity. I would appear and disappear in Church like a shadow without exchanging words with anyone.

“In the next few weeks there appeared at my door a vibrant, good-humored, white-haired lady who announced she was my visiting teacher. I received visits from her on an almost weekly basis, many times with other sisters of the ward in tow so that I might become acquainted. [Before long] I was no longer a shadow in Church. [My visiting teacher introduced] me into a vast army of friends. After having been away from [this ward] for several years, I still count its members [as] some of my most cherished friends.”<sup>8</sup>

### Follow Inspiration

To give your heart and soul to visiting teaching requires you to be prayerful about those you visit. The Lord will direct you in doing His work as you listen and respond.

As a Relief Society president in São Paulo, Brazil, Elizabeth Contieri Kemeny felt impressed to assign herself to visit a shy, pregnant sister who attended church alone as her husband was often away on business. The ward Relief Society had just participated in a stake project to make baby layettes consisting of blankets, clothing, and other supplies for infants. The layettes were supposed to be delivered to the stake on a particular Sunday morning. On that day Sister Kemeny awoke at

6:00 A.M. with a strong impression she should deliver the layettes to the home of this sister, rather than to the stake.

Taking along her counselor and the bishop, Sister Kemeny arrived at this sister’s apartment only to learn that she had already gone to the hospital in labor. Pressing on to the hospital, they found her holding her new baby in her arms, with tears streaming down her own cheeks. She had been praying that Heavenly Father would send somebody to help her. Her husband was out of town, and she had nothing—not a blanket to wrap the baby in nor money for a bus ride home.

That afternoon at the stake meeting this ward had no layettes to contribute. They had been given to bless a sister both temporally and spiritually—all because a visiting teacher had prayed and listened to the promptings of the Spirit.

President Hinckley reminds us “to seek those who need help, who are in desperate and difficult circumstances, and lift them in the spirit of love into the embrace of the Church, where strong hands and loving hearts will warm them, comfort them, sustain them.”<sup>9</sup> As a visiting teacher you have this responsibility and privilege. ■

### NOTES

1. *Visiting Teaching: The Heart and Soul of Relief Society* (address delivered at Relief Society open house, fall 2003), 3–4, 15–16.
2. Quoted in *History of Relief Society, 1842–1966* (1967), 20.
3. *Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 2: Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders* (1998), 202.
4. “A Vision of Visiting Teaching,” *Tambuli*, Dec. 1978, 2; see *Ensign*, June 1978, 24.
5. “Reach with a Rescuing Hand,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 86.
6. *Visiting Teaching: The Heart and Soul of Relief Society*, 12.
7. “Women of the Church,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 69.
8. Quoted in Barbara B. Smith, “A Story of New Beginnings,” in *A Woman’s Choices: The Relief Society Legacy Lectures* (1984), 8.
9. *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 86.



## Feeling the Love of the Lord through Service

**P**rayerfully select and read from this message the scriptures and teachings that meet the needs of the sisters you visit. Share your experiences and testimony. Invite those you teach to do the same.

### How Does Service Bring Us Closer to the Savior and His Love?

**D&C 76:5–6:** “I, the Lord, . . . delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end. Great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory.”

#### President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency:

“As we love our God, as we love our neighbor, we can be the recipients of our Heavenly Father’s love. Of all the blessings I have had in my life, one of the sweetest is that feeling the Lord provides when I know that He has answered the prayer of another person through me. As we love the Lord, as we love our neighbor, we discover that our Heavenly Father will answer the prayers of others through our ministry” (“How Do We Show Our Love?” *Liabona*, Feb. 1998, 7; *Ensign*, Jan. 1998, 6).

### What Does It Mean to Serve with Heart and Mind?

**Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:** “When we

think of service, we usually think of the acts of our hands. . . . It is not enough to serve God with all of our *might and strength*. He who looks into our hearts and knows our minds demands more than this. In order to stand blameless before God at the last day, we must also serve him with all our *heart and mind*. Service with all of our heart and mind is a high challenge for all of us. Such service must be free of selfish ambition. It must be motivated only by the pure love of Christ” (“Why Do We Serve?” *Ensign*, Nov. 1984, 12–15).

**Kathleen H. Hughes, first counselor in the Relief Society general presidency:** “[Heavenly Father] is a vastly loving God, and it has always been his intention to support us. . . . We have accepted [the] challenge to bear one another’s burdens. Now bearing one another’s burdens sounds like a chore, but it’s amazing how lightened we quickly feel when we do the work. Think for a moment why that is. When we bear one another’s burdens, we are acting as an agent for Christ, and by so doing we’re coming to Christ. . . . How blessed and grateful we should be that our Heavenly Father knew what we would need and then provided



the means—Relief Society—where these needs could be met through the hearts and hands of others who love” (“Serving and Supporting One Another,” in *The Rock of Our Redeemer: Talks from the 2002 BYU Women’s Conference* [2003], 53–54).

#### Elder Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

“A call to service should be primarily a matter of the heart. . . . You are called to represent the Savior. Your voice to testify becomes the same as His voice, your hands to lift the same as His hands. . . . The Father and His Beloved Son will send the Holy Ghost as your companion to guide you. Your efforts will be magnified in the lives of the people you serve. And when you look back on what may now seem trying times of service and sacrifice, the sacrifice will have become a blessing, and you will know that you have seen the arm of God lifting those you served for Him, and lifting you” (“Rise to Your Call,” *Liabona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 75–78). ■

# QUESTIONS    ANSWERS

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## Question

*I am an elderly woman, and due to my fragile health, I recently came to live with my daughter and her family. It has been difficult to leave behind my friends, my home, and especially my independence. I know it hasn't been easy for my daughter's family either. What can we do to make the change easier for all of us?*

### Tips for Those Moving In with Family

When at age 82 I moved in with my daughter and her husband, I made a conscious decision that I would not mourn, that I would accept the decision cheerfully, and that I would look forward to new adventures.

I discovered that many of my “precious things” were just stuff, and as I unloaded them, I felt a freedom that was wonderful. I sold my home and thought of all the freedom from upkeep and repairs. A burden was lifted off my shoulders.

I now keep busy by writing letters and working on my autobiography. I sort and place my photographs in albums. I go for walks. I subscribe to several good magazines. I invite friends to drop by. I teach the Bees in the Young Women organization, and my daughter and I are visiting teaching companions.

It is important for me to feel

useful around the house. I help make lunch and prepare dinner most evenings. Other tasks I help with include doing the laundry, folding clothes, watering houseplants, and dusting furniture.

*Dorothy L. Clark, Rainier Ward, Rainier Oregon Stake*

One advantage to growing older is that your pool of people to love grows larger. Keep in touch with the old friends you left behind by writing letters, making phone calls, and planning visits. Make new friends in your daughter's neighborhood. If there is a senior citizens' center nearby, take advantage of it. However, do not limit yourself to the elderly. Many young people find great satisfaction in associating with those who are the age of their grandparents and great-grandparents.

Another advantage to aging is that you continue to amass memories to



**Meaningful hobbies can help make life rich and interesting.**

cherish. Your home you left behind is probably not the first one you have moved from. Each home from your past can become a memory to hold dear.

*Colleen Young Staker, Jordan North Fourth Ward, Salt Lake Jordan North Stake*

We cared for my mother-in-law for almost a year before her death. These are the things I appreciated most about her: She was never bossy or demanding with our children or me. With five children there, our home got noisy and crazy sometimes, but she was slow to correct or complain.



She left the disciplining of the children to me or my husband. Instead, she always encouraged them or helped them with their homework. She would ask them about their day and listen intently as they talked. She was a peacemaker and could help our young boys change the subject and forget their quarrels.

I loved the talks we had when she and I were home alone during the day. And she knew just when to insist on buying pizza for dinner! Because of her gracious and loving ways, it was a joy to have her in our home.

*Debra Thiemann, Pocatello Eighth Branch, Pocatello Idaho West Stake*

I am living with my oldest daughter and her husband. When she asked me to live with them, the first thing I decided was that in no way would I come between them. For example, they've always sat by each other in

their car. When I go somewhere with them, they want me to sit in the front seat. Though it would be easier to get into the front, I stubbornly say, "No, I'd rather sit in the back," and I'm in before they know it. They're both *together* in the front.

I know they need time together for private conversations. They both work full-time and have various activities, so they come and go at different times. When they're both home, I make myself scarce for the next 30 or 40 minutes.

Many times they go out to dinner or a show and invite me to go with them. Occasionally I do, but more often I excuse myself so they can have a real date together. All married couples need private time together.

They have managed to live without my help for years; hence I learned early on to never question



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN LUKE

**Home teachers and visiting teachers can help elderly ward members feel loved and valued.**

their decisions or give suggestions unless the subject involves me or they request my help. I was given a mouth that closes and ears that don't. So I just listen and observe. It's surprising what I can learn.

*Helen L. Baird, Mount Vernon Ward, Mount Vernon Virginia Stake*

When my husband's parents moved into our home, several factors made the transition easier for us, including the following:

1. His parents never acted as though we owed them anything. They received even the smallest favors with gratitude, despite the awkwardness they may have felt in accepting them. Their gratitude made it much easier for us to give.
2. Our ward leaders gave our family

**Through participation in Church callings, many elderly members become a positive influence in others' lives.**



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTINA SMITH

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



**Grandparents can nurture tender relationships with their grandchildren as they share everyday moments with them.**

and my in-laws separate visiting and home teachers, and they treated us as separate households. They did not assume that, having met me or my husband, they now knew the entire family. The bishop also extended callings that my in-laws could fulfill despite their health limitations.

*Emily Milner, Lindon 14th Ward, Lindon Utah West Stake*

When things get tense, ask yourself these questions: How important is this issue in the grand scheme of things? Is it going to affect my eternal progression? When you get frustrated, think of the special moments you spend listening to your grandchildren tell of their day at school, or of the picnics you have with a toddler on

your bed, or of those rare occasions when you get to have heart-to-heart talks with your daughter. Those moments can make it all worthwhile and are opportunities you may not have shared had you not been living in the same home.

*Rashona Carraway, Pelican Creek Ward, North Las Vegas Nevada Stake*

An elderly parent can do many things to make the transition into a new living situation easier. For example, you might make the following decisions ahead of time:

1. Decide if you'll be eating with the family or cooking on your own. Will you be buying your own groceries or will the family be providing them?

2. Who will be the responsible driver? If you have a car but don't want to drive, are you willing to share it—perhaps in return for

some chauffeuring? Remember that a driver may not be available at all times. Be mindful of schedules and get rides where appropriate.

3. Consider paying a predetermined monthly amount to help cover the family's increased utility bills, telephone charges, groceries, gas, and so on.

*Eugenia S. Hancock, Plymouth Ward, Westland Michigan Stake*

Don't worry about the burden you think you will cause; realize instead what you can contribute to the family. We learned much about Grandpa's youth and early life as we visited with him and encouraged him to tape-record stories of his life that I later transcribed for the family. He shared his testimony with us and even with the nurses and health aides who came to care for him. He would occasionally give us advice and counsel from his experience and

**Elderly parents may want to keep in touch with the friends they left behind by planning visits, writing letters or e-mails, or making telephone calls.**



wisdom. And he gave us an opportunity to serve and learn constant love.

Try to be a part of the family and not just a boarder in the house. If your health permits, participate in family home evening, family meals, and family prayer, and attend church with your family.

Be willing to accept service. You served your children as they were growing up; now it is their turn to serve you. Give them that opportunity.

*Scherelyn Jensen, Rolling Valley Ward, Annandale Virginia Stake*

#### **Tips for Caregivers**

When I was about 10 years old, my grandmother came to live with our family. I loved my grandmother, and my life was enriched in many ways by the time we spent together. However, much pain and confusion could have been avoided if our parents had brought us children together in a family council ahead of time to talk about what would be happening.

Before the elderly loved one moves in, give all family members an opportunity to share their feelings without criticism, and encourage them to contribute to a plan for helping the loved one feel welcome. This is a wonderful time to teach about family responsibility in a positive way and to help each generation learn to value the blessings of others.

*Lynda Bennett, Milton-Freewater Ward, Walla Walla Washington Stake*

My husband and I had the privilege of caring for my mother a few years ago. Here are several suggestions

based on our experience:

- Immediately make appointments with medical professionals to establish necessary contacts. Doctors seldom accept new patients in emergency situations.

- Contact community agencies or offices on aging to learn what support resources are available in your area. We arranged for my mother to stay in a nice adult day care facility. In many areas there are also in-home services for those with special needs. This will take some investigating to find resources you are comfortable with.

- Find out about group homes and assisted living residences, which often accept seniors temporarily for respite care when the caregiver has to go out of town or otherwise needs this service. Gathering this information will also help you become familiar with alternative living situations should that become necessary in the future.

- Make sure that all end-of-life plans are in order, such as wills or trusts, living wills, instructions regarding location of important documents, and so on.

*Heather Schoeny, Savage Mill Ward, Columbia Maryland Stake*

- If the parent is unable to leave the home, arrange to have the sacrament brought to him or her.

- If possible, take your parent with you to Church events or other activities. Even a trip to the drugstore can add excitement to life. I took my



PHOTOGRAPH BY STEVE BUNDERSON

**Elderly family members can contribute much to the loving atmosphere in a home.**

father on at least one outing every day as long as he was able.

- If other relatives live nearby, suggest that they invite the elderly person to instruct them or their children in some areas of expertise. This helps the elderly person know he or she is of worth.

*Judith LaMontagne, South Whidbey Island Ward, Everett Washington Stake*

Time for self should be a priority, even if in small amounts. Regular dates with a spouse are essential, especially temple trips. Understand that the senior family member may strongly discourage your absence, possibly due to fear. But caretakers will be happier and better able to fulfill their responsibilities if they have consistent renewal time. ■

*Andrea Walter, Chardon Branch, Kirtland Ohio Stake*



# Family Home Evening for 2





BY JANENE WOLSEY BAADSGAARD

I think our experience of not being able to have children has influenced our feelings about family home evening," says Sister Kristi Collins of Oahu, Hawaii. "Many times I've heard other couples say they think family home evenings are just for families with children. With or without children, my husband and I are a family. We became a family when we knelt across from each other in the Portland Oregon Temple and were sealed together for time and all eternity. Having children would increase the size of our family, but even without children, family home evening has been a great blessing to our marriage."

"Often our schedules are so busy during the week that setting aside one evening to focus on our family is vital and allows us to do more than just meet in passing," says Kristi's husband, Jeffery Collins. "Family home evening provides the opportunity to bear our testimonies to each other. I think husbands can take the initiative to make sure it happens. We shouldn't wait for our wives to remind us that it is our turn to plan a lesson or activity. I don't think family home evening should be so structured that the same routine is followed week after week. We like to have variety."

It is important to realize that family home evening is not just for families with children; many couples will spend all or a large part of their lives together without children in the home. When couples are obedient and give family home evening top priority, it can be a means of spiritual nourishment, growth, and fun at any age or in any circumstance.

Because each couple is different, husbands and wives can select the approach that uniquely suits their situation and best meets their needs. For most families, Monday night is the best time to hold family home evening because that night is kept free of Church meetings and activities.

In 1978 the First Presidency promised, "As you faithfully plan and hold quality family home evenings, you will gain

strength to withstand the temptations of the world and will receive many blessings which will help qualify you to enjoy your families through eternity in the Celestial Kingdom."<sup>1</sup>

Brother and Sister Collins like to use some of their family home evenings as an opportunity to serve. They write letters to missionaries, take food to local food banks, donate blood at the Red Cross center, and take cookies or treats to less-active members. They also like to clean up trash along the beach and help others learn English.

Dave and Karene Warby, a young couple from Anaheim, California, have found their biggest challenge to holding family home evening is making it official.

"Every night could be family night because we spend most of our evenings together," Sister Warby says. "When we make it official every Monday night and open with prayer it seems we have an easier time staying connected and communicating with each other that week. I think it's important to establish a habit from the beginning."

Dave and Karene both enjoy reading and discussing the scriptures and other good books, as well as riding bikes, followed by making cookies and ice cream. Brother and Sister Warby, both returned missionaries, have also enjoyed discussing their missions in combined family home evenings with their brothers, sisters, nieces, and nephews.

Ryan and Kate McFarland of Ann Arbor, Michigan, say that with school and work, their biggest challenge to holding family home evening has been time. The McFarlands like to start with a prayer, sing a song, have a lesson, enjoy some kind of activity, then close with prayer. Before their son was born, they regularly invited new couples in their ward to share family home evening as a way to reach out and build friendships.

"When we have a prayer and lesson we invite the Spirit into our home and we're better able to apply the gospel to our personal lives," Sister McFarland says. "I think holding regular family home evening, even when there were just

*Everyone  
needs the rich  
blessings that  
flow from  
holding  
regular  
family home  
evenings.*







the two of us, helped set a pattern of obedience and got us into the habit early in our married life.”

“Holding family home evening gives us a chance to discuss the gospel more often,” Brother McFarland says. “If the gospel of Jesus Christ is our foundation, it will see us through whatever we have to face in our marriage. I notice a real difference if we miss a week. When we don’t take care of the important things like family home evening, it’s hard to keep a healthy balance in our lives, because we lack the Spirit.”

When the McFarlands moved into their previous ward, they were given a notebook from their bishop that included information on how to strengthen the family. They sometimes draw from that notebook for lessons. McFarland family home evening favorite activities include home haircuts, game nights, throwing Frisbees at the park, and going on hikes.

“I write ‘family home evening’ on my calendar and give it top priority,” Brother McFarland

says. “I know we’ve been blessed with the Spirit and greater unity in our marriage.”

Many couples find that consistently holding family home evening after all the children leave home presents new challenges and opportunities. William and Ruth Williams, of Jacksonville, Illinois, looked for and found several solutions that worked for them.

“My husband and I found it difficult to keep having family home evening after all the children left home,” Sister Williams says. “Although we knew how important it was to our family’s closeness, sometimes it just didn’t happen.

When we didn’t hold family home evening, I noticed we had less contact with our grown children. When we did have it, I personally felt less alone and seemed to have more contact with our children. My husband and I tried a variety of things to help restore our closeness to each other and to our children. Among our solutions were watching movies from the library, having the missionaries for dinner, inviting single mothers over with

**F**amily home evening can be a means of spiritual nourishment and fun at any age or in any circumstance.







their children, having grandchildren over, and writing letters to the missionaries. Because my husband and I work different schedules, we plan our family night on whatever day we get off together.”

Making some kind of contact with grown children and grandchildren on a regular basis helps families keep in touch and sets a pattern of contact and caring. Some couples plan a combined family night at regular times with their adult children and grandchildren who live close by and then celebrate all the birthdays or special occasions in the family for that month. Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said: “We enjoy extended family home evenings once a month with all available members of our family. At that time we also celebrate family birthdays. Many names are written on each birthday cake.”<sup>2</sup>

Some couples find it helpful to make weekly plans during each family home evening. Others take turns presenting a lesson or planning an activity. It doesn’t matter so much how they plan or implement family home evening, only that they’re consistent and give their family relationship the priority, time, and nourishment it deserves.

Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said: “An eternal bond doesn’t just happen as a result of sealing covenants we make in the temple. How we conduct ourselves in this life will determine what we will be in all the eternities to come. To receive the blessings of the sealing that our Heavenly Father has given to us, we have to keep the commandments and conduct ourselves in such a way that our families will want to live with us in the eternities.”<sup>3</sup>

When couples arrange their lives to include quality family home evenings, they invite the Spirit into their marriages and build a solid foundation of love. Consistent, quality home evenings, combined with obedience to other gospel teachings, will help form a strong foundation of love, joy, and peace that can bind a family together forever. ■

*Janene Wolsey Baadsgaard is a member of the East Bench Ward, Spanish Fork Utah Palmyra Stake.*

#### NOTES

1. *Family Home Evening* (1978), 2.
2. “Identity, Priority, and Blessings,” *Ensign*, Aug. 2001, 9.
3. “The Eternal Family,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 65.

## IDEAS FOR COUPLE FAMILY HOME EVENING LESSONS AND STUDY

- Read and discuss the scriptures or research a gospel question.
- Take turns presenting lessons from the family home evening manual.
- Write in journals or work on family research.
- Invite a single sister or brother to participate in a family home evening with you.
- Record a tape or make a video for family history.
- Read and discuss a Church magazine article.
- Read and discuss patriarchal blessings.
- Write letters, send e-mails, or telephone family members.
- Write to missionaries or invite the missionaries over.
- Research a topic you want to learn more about such as auto repair, cooking, decorating, yard work, food storage, or home maintenance.
- Read and discuss the First Presidency message, visiting teaching message, conference talks, or next week’s priesthood and Relief Society lesson.
- Read and discuss next week’s Sunday School lesson.
- Invite a nonmember family to your home.
- Select an aspect of your relationship you would like to improve; then search the scriptures and other good resources for guidance.
- Ask what aspect of life is most challenging to your spouse and discuss ways you can be more supportive.
- Ask your spouse what makes him or her feel loved; then express your love in ways your spouse most appreciates. ■





STRENGTHENING THE FAMILY

# THE FAMILY IS CENTRAL TO THE CREATOR'S PLAN

*A continuing series giving insights for your study and use of  
"The Family: A Proclamation to the World."*

*"We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children."<sup>1</sup>*

## **Efforts to Destroy the Family**

The family, the most fundamental institution of society, is under attack from all sides. Adultery, divorce, cohabitation, child and spouse abuse, homosexuality, abortion, teen pregnancies, pornography, disobedient



children, economic struggles, an increasing unwillingness among married couples to bear and rear children—all these and more are proof that the adversary understands very well the central role the family plays in the destiny of God's children.

"Because of the importance of the family to the eternal plan of happiness," said Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Satan makes a major effort to destroy the sanctity of the family, demean the importance of the role of men and women, encourage moral uncleanness and violations of the sacred law of chastity, and to

discourage parents from placing the bearing and rearing of children as one of their highest priorities.”<sup>2</sup>

Even in such circumstances, we need not fear. God is with us. In the end good will conquer evil. In the here and now, however, we must take our place on the front line in this war that began in the premortal world and do all we can to preserve and protect the sanctity of the family.

### Marriage Is Ordained of God

The first thing we can and must do is prepare ourselves and our children for the temple ordinances that seal families together eternally. Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: “From the moment of birth into mortality to the time we are married in the temple, everything we have in the whole gospel system is to prepare and qualify us to enter that holy order of matrimony which makes us husband and wife in this life and in the world to come. . . . There is nothing in this world as important as the creation and perfection of family units.”<sup>3</sup>

Temple marriage is the beginning of a new entity that can endure forever—an eternal family. It is therefore most important that husband and wife keep the covenants they make in the house of the Lord. President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) said: “Marriage according to the law of the Church is the most holy and sacred ordinance. It will bring to the husband and the wife, if they abide in their covenants, the fulness of exaltation in the kingdom of God.”<sup>4</sup>

### Eternal Salvation—a Family Affair

“The fulness of eternal salvation is a family affair,” said Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. “The gospel plan originated in the council of an eternal family, it is implemented through our earthly families, and has its destiny in our eternal families.”<sup>5</sup>



**T**here is nothing in this world as important as the creation and perfection of family units.”

“Birth into a family was the way God chose to send His spirit children to earth. Marriage and family relationships are the central means He has prepared to achieve His purposes. We learn the lessons of life, not in an Edenic garden, but in a context where we face challenge, opposition, hardship, and temptation (see 2 Ne. 2:11).”<sup>6</sup> Thus, we should not fear the troubles of our day but should view them as an environment in which faith can be strengthened and obedience refined. As Elder Joe J.

Christensen, former member of the Presidency of the Seventy, observed, “How many truly great individuals do you know who never had to struggle?”<sup>7</sup>

The family is the primary support structure in God’s plan to help us resist evil, overcome weakness, and work out our salvation. For this reason we should do all we can to strengthen the family in these days of confusion and opposition.

### Hope in a Failing World

As Satan and his emissaries work to tear down the family, many people are losing sight of the joys and blessings a strong and loving family can offer. In this gathering gloom, the teachings and ordinances of the restored gospel shine as a unique beacon of hope. As we build our families upon the gospel’s firm foundation, our light will shine brighter and attract those who are seeking hope and happiness in a deteriorating world that offers neither. ■

### NOTES

1. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Liabona*, Oct. 2004, 49; *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. “The Eternal Family,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 65.
3. In Conference Report, Apr. 1970, 27.
4. *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (1954–56), 2:84.
5. “Parental Leadership in the Family,” *Ensign*, June 1985, 7.
6. Daniel K Judd, Guy L. Dorius, and David C. Dollahite, “Families and the Great Plan of Happiness,” in David C. Dollahite, ed., *Strengthening Our Families: An In-Depth Look at the Proclamation on the Family* (2000), 8.
7. “Greed, Selfishness, and Overindulgence,” *Liabona*, July 1999, 10; *Ensign*, May 1999, 9.



# A Christmas Cross-Stitch

*After my mother died during the Christmas season,  
we learned that we could feel peace again.*

BY DAVID TOY

I am a first-time dad. Now, perhaps more than ever, I want and need an eternal family.

The principle of eternal families changed my life before I was even born. When my dad asked my mother to marry him, she expressed her convictions about going to the temple in a letter that has been invaluable to our family. Part of that letter reads:

“Temple marriage is forever. It lasts beyond death. Children born to parents [who] married in the temple [and] who live up to their vows will rejoin their parents in heaven. The family unit is preserved for time and eternity. Steve, I believe as clearly as I believe the sun will rise tomorrow that this is true. And I also believe that as much as my Heavenly Father loves me, as much as He loves you, He could not preserve any other kind of relationship beyond death because He is a God of truth, bound by His word.

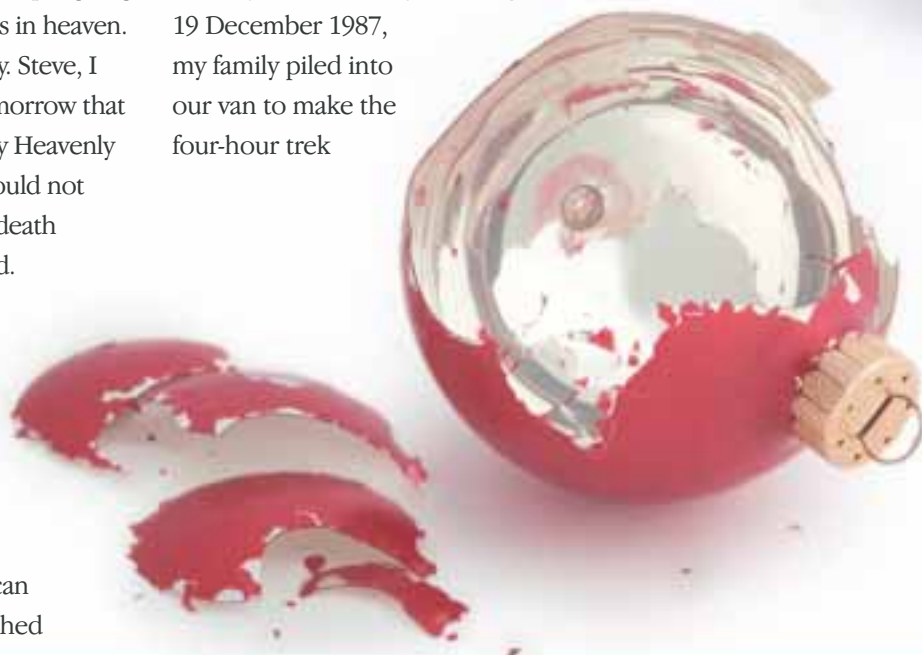
“Steve, if I love you this much, and I have known you only two and a half years, how much more will you mean to me as time goes by? If I can’t answer you now because I can’t face what the consequences might be, how could I ever, ever face them later?

“Without the covenant of God, two people can build their lives together, only to see it all snatched

away in an unexpected nightmare. There can be no peace of mind.”

Those words supplied the added encouragement my father needed to join the Church. My mother committed to marriage, and my parents were sealed in the temple for time and eternity. My father’s testimony was strengthened by the peace of mind found through temple marriage—a peace of mind that would become very meaningful years later.

Early on a Saturday morning, 19 December 1987, my family piled into our van to make the four-hour trek





from Shelley, Idaho, to Salt Lake City, Utah, to finish our Christmas shopping and to see the lights on Temple Square. The trip felt routine. We had made it several times before, and I quickly fell asleep in the backseat.

After less than an hour I awoke in terror as the van jerked to the left, then to the right. Suddenly I was thrown from the vehicle and landed on my backside on the cold, snow-covered roadside. Only moments before, my mother had fastened my one-year-old sister into her car seat after feeding her but failed

to buckle her own seatbelt. I sat rubbing my hip, listening to our van tumble in the background and trying to recall the circumstances in which I had fallen asleep.

When the van came to a rest, everything was silent for a moment. Then, as I caught sight of our mangled van, I began to realize what had happened, though still not understanding the magnitude of the tragic event.

Bruised slightly and quite confused, I walked to the wreckage and my family.

**M**y one-year-old sister chose the first gift, and Dad removed the wrapping paper for her from a framed cross-stitch my mother had prepared. It read, "The circle of our love is Forever."



JOSEPH SMITH, BY ALVIN GITTINS

**I** frequently reflect on the comforting words of the Prophet Joseph Smith: “And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy.”

Everyone appeared to be in pain. I stepped close to my mother, who sat leaning against the van’s tire, and asked how she was. The indecisive phrase “I don’t know” satisfied my frightened mind.

Within minutes an emergency helicopter arrived to rush my mother and five-year-old brother, Josh, to a nearby hospital. I climbed into one of two ambulances that carried the rest of my battered family to the emergency room. Suffering from a mere scrape on my back, I was the least injured.

My family dispersed into various examination rooms for individual treatment before we were reunited an hour or so later in a small hospital room at the request of my father. I looked around the room at family members whose medical treatments were temporarily postponed and began to worry about the effects of this unthinkable tragedy. Two of our family were missing: Josh, who I later learned was in a coma in critical condition, and Mom.

The words my father then spoke will never fade from memory.

“Mom is dead,” he mumbled beneath his tears.

My heart sank, and my eyes also filled with tears. The room was silent for a few moments as these words sank in.

“Who’s going to cook for us?” nine-year-old Sarah asked.

Dad replied with the best words of comfort he could think of under the circumstances. “I don’t know. We’ll work something out.”

Christmas was different that year, falling only six days after the accident. We postponed celebrating the holiday until Josh had recuperated enough to join

the family. Then, on our special Christmas morning, my seven brothers and sisters and I gathered in a circle around the tree with my dad to open presents. As was tradition in our family, the youngest, my one-year-old sister, picked the first present to open. She chose a gift my mother had prepared for the family before her death.

Dad removed the wrapping paper from a framed cross-stitch that read, “The circle of our love is Forever.” The implication of that simple phrase brought peace to my family in that time of trial, and the meaning behind the words has bound us together ever since with the knowledge that we will see our mother again.

Today, nearly 17 years later, I’m reminded of the powerful truth of eternal families as I begin to build my own. Now my constant reminder to live my life worthily comes not only from my desire to see my mother again but also from my desire to live forever with my wife and baby boy.

I frequently reflect on the comforting words of the Prophet Joseph Smith: “And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy” (D&C 130:2).

The cross-stitch we unwrapped many years ago still hangs on my family’s living room wall, reminding me and my siblings of our beloved mother, providing continued hope in the divine plan of our Heavenly Father, and bringing us peace of mind because of the promise of eternal families made possible by the sacrifice of our Savior Jesus Christ. ■

*David Toy is a member of the Tates Creek Ward, Lexington Kentucky Stake.*



# Christmas

## CAME ANYWAY

BY LORRAINE F. DAY

For more than 25 years I was Santa Claus, Mrs. Claus, Rudolph, and all the elves. I fought the shopping malls and the traffic. Christmas depended on me from the right shirt size to the consistency of the gravy. I was the creator of Christmas for my family, and I was weary under the burden.

One year in early November I suddenly realized that Christmas was upon me again. But I was too exhausted to face another major production. I asked myself, "What does all this work and stress have to do with the birth of the Savior?" Something was wrong. I had grown to hate Christmas. I seriously contemplated what would happen if I stepped out of Christmas. What if I left the front lines? Would Christmas happen? Would my family forgive me?

For my own survival, I retired. I stepped off the Christmas stage where I had been the star for so long. I made a small list and checked it once. There were fewer presents and limited festivities. And guess

what? Christmas came anyway. It was quiet, peaceful. There was time to feel the season. Christmas was in the air. It was in my heart. I thought about Christ.

I have to admit that I worried about the reaction of my family. Some were disappointed. But there was more time to visit with each other, more time to appreciate the gifts we opened. Christmas was more spiritual.

I realized that I had suffocated the real spirit of Christmas with all of my own trappings. Why had I assumed such a responsibility—to try to create a celebration to outshine the birth of the Christ child? That seemed sacrilegious now. My new theme for December became "Be still and know that I am God" (D&C 101:16).

I will never go back. I have finally found the spirit of Christmas. But first I had to find the courage to let go. I had to trust that the spirit of that humble birth over 2,000 years ago would be felt without my efforts. It was, and this was the best of gifts I could have received or given. ■

*Lorraine F. Day is a member of the Union Second Ward, Sandy Utah Cottonwood Creek Stake.*



# My Daughter's Choice

NAME WITHHELD



**M**y daughter Maren (name has been changed) has contributed much to our family, but perhaps the characteristic I admire most about her is her great empathy for others. As a teenager she attracted many friends because they saw in her someone who would not judge, who would not scorn, and who would listen. Unfortunately, these qualities also attracted some individuals who would later take advantage of her.

Because of this and because of a series of poor decisions she had made, Maren became pregnant not long after graduating from high school. Before she realized she was expecting a baby, she had begun attending an institute class; she recognized something was missing from her life and concluded that a change of friends might be a start to finding wholeness. As she began the institute course of study and as these new friends surrounded her, she commenced a journey that would change and test her beyond anything she had ever experienced.

When Maren discovered she was expecting, she was dismayed to realize that her path to repentance and forgiveness was going to require a great sacrifice. She determined to carry the baby to term and place it for adoption with a worthy couple through LDS Family Services. When she broke the news of her pregnancy to my wife and me, we

were extremely saddened by the choices she had made that brought her to this point. Nevertheless, her commitment to place the baby for adoption and her desire to change gave us hope that she might at last come back and partake of the blessings of the gospel.


As Maren worked with LDS Family Services to choose an adoptive family, she scanned through the applicants' profiles and was instantly drawn to a particular couple. She felt a confirmation of the Holy Ghost that this was the couple who would lovingly raise this baby.

During this time, Maren worked hard at reading her scriptures daily and offering fervent prayers that included her pleas for forgiveness. Finally the day arrived when the baby would be born. Now the time began that would be most difficult for us all and particularly heartrending for Maren.

That day Maren asked me to write a letter that could be given to this child at some future time by his parents, if they so chose. This is some of what I wrote:

"Dear Grandson,

"I write this letter not knowing if or when you might read these words. I'm sitting at a table while close by your birth mother is rocking you in her arms. Tomorrow she will lay you in the arms of your adoptive mother and father, to whom you will be sealed in the temple of our God.



*I never expected  
my teenage daughter  
to become pregnant.  
Nor did I expect  
to learn so much  
about love and sacrifice.*

This will be the hardest thing your birth mother has ever done. I know because I see the love that she has for you. She loves you so much that she is willing to make this sacrifice in order that you might be brought up now by a wonderful couple with the blessings that a temple sealing can bring.”

you might ask. Because she knew in her heart that there were some things that she could not yet give you. She could, of course, provide you with food and shelter. Nevertheless, she could not give you a father worthy to raise you. She could not give you the blessings of the temple covenant, as your parents will be able to do.

I added that I was writing the letter to help him understand why his birth mother made the decision she did. I wrote that while my daughter had made some mistakes, the best decision she had made in this situation was to allow him to come into the world and to place him in the care of his adoptive parents.

The letter continued: “This decision was made entirely on her own. ‘Why?’



“So, while she could have given you love, she loved you enough to give you more. This is the difference between a selfish love and a godly love. . . .

“I sincerely hope that you appreciate the love of your parents and the love of a birth mother whom I am blessed to know as a daughter. I know that tomorrow will break her heart, realizing that she may not see you again in this earth life. I also know that she has the strength to do so because of the Holy Spirit, which will sustain her, and the knowledge she has of the wonderful couple into whose arms she will place you tomorrow.”

As I finished the letter, I signed it,

“Love,

“Your Other Grandfather.”

The day after I wrote this letter, we traveled with heavy hearts to the place where we would see this child for possibly the last time in this life. While we waited to meet the adoptive couple—Maren had met them before—we sat in almost total silence. I wondered if Maren had the strength to complete this great sacrifice. I watched her as she gazed into the baby’s eyes; she was almost too choked up to talk. Her mother and I could hardly bear to watch.



**W**e knew this child would be greatly loved and that this was in accordance with the will of our Father in Heaven.

Finally it was time for us to walk into the room where the adoptive couple waited. Instantly their eyes were drawn to the baby, and tears began to flow. I felt at peace as I watched them hug Maren. When she placed the baby

into the arms of the adoptive mother, my heart went out to Maren, and I couldn’t decide whether to weep for the pain I knew this was causing her or for the joy this sweet couple was feeling. In the end, the Spirit gave great comfort to Maren, my wife, and me. We knew that God had accepted this sacrifice, that this child would be greatly loved, and that this was in accordance with the will of our Father in Heaven.

Since that time, Maren has put her life in order and has entered the temple to be sealed to a worthy young man. Words cannot express my deep gratitude to our Father in Heaven and His Son Jesus

Christ for the Atonement. I have seen my daughter travel through the depths of despair into the gospel light of hope. I have beheld her great sacrifice. I have felt her intense joy at forgiveness received, and I have watched the peace of the temple ordinances spread across her countenance. Above all, I am grateful for the privilege of being her father. ■

*More on this topic: Alan D. Harrison, “Our Struggle to ‘Be Fruitful,’ ” Ensign, June 2003, 52–55; “Could I Let My Baby Go?” Ensign, Feb. 2002, 60–62; LDS Family Services, “Adoption and the Unwed Mother,” Ensign, Feb. 2002, 63.*

**For additional information about adoption services, contact LDS Family Services at 800-537-2229 or visit [www.ldsfamilyservices.org](http://www.ldsfamilyservices.org).**

# Christmas Eve Breakfast

By Toni Hakes

About 18 years ago on Christmas Eve, I was a young mother very painfully aware of the wide gap between my household reality and what I thought the ideal Christmas looked like—the ideal Christmas as portrayed on television and in magazines, the Christmas of beautiful decor, exquisite meals, and happy, smiling children. I had tried hard to finish wrapping and cleaning, all the while attempting to achieve some order and peace in my home as I cared for my three little sons, one of whom was a very cranky baby. There was a heavy feeling weighing me down that night—I was overwhelmed.

It was starting to get dark. I had the baby in the highchair, trying to feed him and get him settled. Dinnertime was fast approaching, and there was no candlelit table, no warm feast, nothing ready on the stove. Just then my husband, who had been out doing some last-minute shopping, walked into the kitchen and

placed on the counter a bag of pancake mix, some frozen orange juice, and a package of sausage. In his own way, he was telling me that he knew I was at the end of my rope and, if worse came to worst, he was prepared to make our Christmas Eve dinner.

And so that Christmas Eve, our family shared breakfast. I don't remember how it tasted, but I remember how it felt to be loved and understood. From then on, breakfast has always been our

**I was overwhelmed and tired. Then my husband walked into the kitchen with a bag of pancake mix, some frozen orange juice, and a package of sausage.**

Christmas Eve fare. Our children probably don't completely understand its significance to me; nevertheless, breakfast has become our tradition.

The small act of service my husband performed for me that Christmas Eve so long ago may seem insignificant, but it taught me that through small and thoughtful acts in the midst of the mundane, our lives can be changed. Through our own and others' selfless service, the Spirit can work in our hearts and Christ can enter our lives, which is what this season is all about. Perhaps decor sets the stage, but love and service are at the very heart of Christmas. ■

*Toni Hakes is a member of the Willow Canyon Eighth Ward, Sandy Utah East Stake.*



# The Appalachian Christmas Tree

By Laurie Hopkins

Christmas of 1977 was not a happy one for me. No family members were close enough to visit, we had almost no money, and we had no pretty decorations to boost my spirits—only a scraggly little Christmas tree strung with colored paper and popcorn chains. If not for the wide-eyed hope of our small children, I probably wouldn't even have bothered with the tree.

My husband had to drive our car about 45 minutes to get to work, taking with him our only means of transportation. I was stuck at home all day, every day, miles away from anything and everything. The nearest town was a 20-minute drive over insanely twisting mountain roads. The chapel and most of the members of our tiny branch were nearly an hour away.

We had moved to this isolated Appalachian valley in a spasm of youthful idealism and adventurousness. My husband heard of cheap land in Virginia, and before I could say, "Middle of nowhere," we had moved there. He built us a little house on the side of a mountain, with water piped in from a nearby spring.

**I somehow managed to balance the tree and the children without major mishap and arrived safely at the cabin door.**

We did have neighbors, though they were few and far between. The closest house was an 1801 log cabin, rented for a short while by a young family from our branch, the Andersons (names have been changed). They were poor like we were. Donald, the dad, was working six and sometimes seven days a week. Donald and Ruth had three small children, as we did, and Ruth was in a constant state of exhaustion.

It was a fairly precarious hike from my house to Ruth's, over a deeply rutted, muddy road. For either of us—with a baby in our arms and two small children in tow—visits were a bit tricky. On one of our rare visits, however, Ruth mentioned to me that they hadn't been able to get a Christmas tree. Donald left home before dawn and didn't get back until late evening. Ruth just wasn't up to traipsing about the countryside in search of a tree.





One evening just before Christmas I was struck with a sudden, passionate urge to find a Christmas tree for the Andersons. Out of nowhere the idea hit me—I just had to get them a tree. As pathetic as my own tree might be, it brought at least a portion of the Christmas spirit into our home.

I spent the rest of the evening making paper chains, popcorn strings, and, of course, a yellow star

with glitter for the treetop. In the morning I hiked out onto the mountainside and searched until I found a small tree. I hacked it down and found an old can to decorate and fill with dirt for a base. The end product was more laughable than beautiful, but it looked cheery enough—if you sort of squinted your eyes.

I called to ask Ruth if I could come down, then bundled up my kids and

made the hike down the mountain. I somehow managed to balance the tree and the children without major mishap and arrived safely at the cabin door. When Ruth answered my knock, she took one look at my comical little tree and burst into tears. I entered the house very much afraid that my idea had not been such a good one after all.

When Ruth regained her composure, she explained her tears. It was

## Open the Card First

By Samuel Osorio Mendoza

When we're young, sometimes all we think about at Christmastime is what we are going to receive. In 1991, I received the best gift of all.

The previous year I had decided to serve a mission, because my mother and several other relatives had set an example for me. So I left the university after my 18th birthday and worked at a fire station for a year to save money and help relieve my family of the financial burden of supporting me on my mission.

I finally sent my papers in, certain that by 1 December I would be

leaving to serve the Lord. When the first two weeks of December passed, I became more anxious to receive a reply than to get any Christmas gift.

But no letter came. I thought perhaps the Lord didn't love me or maybe my worthiness was in question; I had all kinds of discouraging thoughts.

On Christmas Eve I left early in the morning to play handball with my brother at a club near our house. When I got home, I noticed several Christmas cards hanging on the tree, including a very large card wrapped in gift paper. It had my name on it. I wanted to open it, but

my mother said it would be better to wait until evening when our family had gathered.

After dinner we decided to open our gifts. I headed for the biggest gift I had, but my family told me to open the card first. When I did, I saw that it was a letter and the sender was The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It was addressed to Elder Samuel Osorio.

By then all I could see were camera flashes, as my father took pictures of my astonished face. I was so happy and grateful to receive my call on Christmas Eve.

That was my best Christmas present ever. My mission was one of the greatest experiences of my life, and my call from the Lord is the best gift I've ever received at Christmas. ■

*Samuel Osorio Mendoza is a member of the Palmas Ward, Poza Rica Mexico Palmas Stake.*



late the evening before when Donald finally arrived home from work. With nearly empty cupboards, the family had piled into the car for the long ride to the store. After a while three-year-old Michael said, “Daddy, can we say a prayer?”

Donald asked Michael if he would like to say it. Then with the simple faith of a child, Michael asked Heavenly Father to help them get a Christmas tree. After saying, “Amen,” Donald and Ruth looked at each other, knowing they would have to try harder to satisfy the longing of their little boy’s heart. They were not able to come up with a plan that night and went to bed more than a little perplexed.

So it was that when we appeared with the little tree, we were an answer to more than one prayer. As soon as the Anderson children caught a glimpse of us, they squealed with joy and made a place of honor for the funny looking tree. There could never have been a Christmas tree more loved.

The miracle of that Christmas, however, was not just the prayer that bounced from a little boy’s heart to heaven and back again to the heart of someone who could help. It was also the healing power I found in the act of giving.

From the moment the thought of finding a tree for the Andersons struck me, the spirit of Christmas began to fill my own heart. I was grateful that the Lord loved me enough to try to get through to me and teach me. And

I was reminded anew that it is in losing ourselves that we find ourselves. As we serve, we find that “He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds” (Psalm 147:3). ■

*Laurie Hopkins is a member of the Big Thompson Ward, Loveland Colorado Stake.*

## Missionaries on the Metro

By Rémy van der Put

**T**he first Christmas I experienced on my mission in France was very enjoyable. We were invited to celebrate with a wonderful member family, and I felt comfortable and at home. But the second Christmas stands out in my memory and will always be precious to me.

The thrill of the holiday season was in the air in the small French town where I was serving: Christmas music in the stores, advertisements everywhere, and Christmas cards in the mail.

A few days before Christmas the missionaries in our zone went caroling in the buses, metro stations, and shopping malls. We tried to share the joy of Christmas with our French brothers and sisters by singing carols, handing out brochures, and presenting copies of the Book of Mormon wrapped in Christmas paper. We wished the people a very merry Christmas. Just like the previous year, we were planning to spend Christmas Eve at a member

family’s home. My companion and I had received an invitation and were looking forward to a wonderful home-made Christmas dinner.

On 24 December we worked hard the entire morning. When we returned home for lunch, we received a call from the family who had invited us for dinner that evening. They had to cancel the appointment because of a death in the family. We couldn’t go to their home because of their family commitments, so we tried to comfort them as best we could over the telephone. After we hung up, I realized this was going to be a very lonely Christmas Eve. The other elders in our apartment had been invited elsewhere. We ate our lunch and left again to work.

The evening fell, and a cold wind blew. As I looked at the Christmas trees lit up in warm homes—homes filled with happy faces—my thoughts wandered home to my own family in the Netherlands. They would be sitting together, singing Christmas carols, and reading the story of the Nativity. Then they would listen to Christmas music while my dad lit the candles on our Christmas tree. All of a sudden I felt very homesick.

We returned to our apartment, and I sat down at my desk, feeling very sorry for myself. I turned on a Mormon Tabernacle Choir Christmas tape and started to write in my journal.

One of the many things I learned on my mission was that those I served with were always my companion for a



**I approached a man who was sitting alone by a window, and we started talking about our families and Christmas.**

reason. Such was the case with Elder Wagner. After a while he got up from his desk and said he had a plan. “Why don’t we take some of our wrapped copies of the Book of Mormon, go down to the metro station, and talk to those who also feel lonely on Christmas Eve?” he suggested. I said I would join him, although I was pretty reluctant about the whole idea. I just wanted to sit in my chair and feel sorry for myself.

We left our apartment and started walking toward the metro. The closer we got to the station, the more I felt this wasn’t such a bad idea and might possibly turn out to be a good experience. When we boarded the metro, it was nearly empty. A few people were scattered about. I approached a man who was sitting alone by a window. Introducing myself, I asked if we

could join him. He agreed. We started talking about families—his family, my family—and Christmas. He told me he was a refugee and had had to leave his country and his family. He told me about his wife and child and how much he missed them. Though our situations weren’t the same, I could sympathize because my family was also far away. Then I started talking about Jesus Christ, how much He meant to me, and how much Christmas meant to me. “The Savior came to earth,” I testified.

Instantly there was a fire burning in my soul. I felt the same burning sensation later that evening while I talked and testified of Jesus Christ to other people on the metro. When my

companion and I finally left to return to our apartment, I was filled with a wonderful sense of appreciation. As we discussed the events of that evening I learned that my companion was feeling the

same thing. We had truly felt the spirit of Christmas, and I felt as if my heart would burst with joy. The Savior was born in Bethlehem for me and for the entire world! How blessed I felt to have the gospel in my life and to have felt His love for me that night.

It was a Christmas I will always cherish, for it was on that Christmas Eve I finally learned what Christmas is all about. It is about Christ and sharing my precious testimony of the living Son of God. ■

*Rémy van der Put is a member of the Kirkland Second Ward, Kirkland Washington Stake.*



## A Brick for Christmas?

At Christmastime, many of us face the dilemma of giving meaningful gifts. A few years ago, my parents came up with a great solution: heritage gifts. Each year these simple gifts represent a part of our family's history.

These gifts have included copies of family audiotapes that record the squeals of delight from our childhood Christmas mornings. Our annual

recorded interviews are also included, sharing highlights from school, our friendships, and our progress in the gospel as we were growing up. Recordings of us as budding musicians also carry fun memories.

Videotape recordings, transferred from our old 8-mm home movies, show us as children opening gifts, going on family vacations, and catching the bus on our first day of school. My children now love to watch my siblings and me as children.

Family history compilations, family cookbooks, a collection of family letters, and a brick have been favorite

heritage gifts as well. Using some of the best bricks from an exterior wall that was demolished when our house was remodeled, my parents cleaned and varnished them, then affixed a plaque that simply says "Home" and our address. The brick serves as a happy reminder of the fond childhood memories we shared at home.

Through these heritage gifts, we have received a treasure of memories that will last throughout the years—long after other tangible gifts are gone.

*Bonnie B. Larsen, Wellsville Eighth Ward, Wellsville Utah Stake*

## Helping Children Memorize Scriptures

One of my goals is to help my children cherish the scriptures. To accomplish this, I have used several methods to develop regular scripture study habits.

However, I felt there was more I could do. But what?

One day I read the history of a pioneer ancestor who had been blind since

early childhood. For many years he could not read; yet through his faith and knowledge of the word of God, he could quote long scriptural passages. After reading his account, I realized the answer to



my prayers was to follow my ancestor's example—memorizing “the words of life” (D&C 84:85).

We now follow a simple routine every night before family prayer to help us memorize scriptures:

**Day one:** Choose a scripture and repeat it aloud once or twice. We are currently working on the Articles of Faith, but in the past we have memorized favorite missionary scriptures and Primary scripture themes.

**Day two:** Repeat the scripture, but this time discuss its meaning. We have found we memorize the words more quickly if we understand what we are saying.

**Day three and beyond:** Continue rehearsing the scripture until all have learned it. Sometimes we each take turns repeating it aloud, and sometimes we say it together. Because we do this every night, we always have a scripture in mind before kneeling in prayer.

**Memorization tips for young children:** Since we each learn at different rates, our family sometimes moves on to another scripture before my youngest has fully memorized it. Watching her older siblings move quickly through a long verse overwhelms her, so we have developed other ways to help her have a positive experience. We encourage her to take part during our discussions and while we repeat the scriptures.

We also regularly invite her to repeat those she knows well, and we have occasional review sessions that



#### Five True Gifts

“Among the true gifts of Christmas are peace, love, service, self, and faith.” These words touched me as I read President James E. Faust’s message in the December 2001 *Ensign* (“A Christmas with No Presents,” 2). To share this important message with our children, my husband and I decided that our December family home evenings should focus on these gifts.

Before our first family night that month, I displayed a poster listing these five true gifts. Each family member old enough to prepare a lesson was given one of the topics, along with a teaching suggestion.

For our first lesson, I chose the

gift of love. Sharing quotations from the *Ensign* article, I referred to an attractively wrapped gift placed under our tree ahead of time. It displayed the word *love* on it. To visually remind us of the true gifts we were seeking, we added four more gifts in the ensuing weeks.

For the gift of peace, we challenged our family to avoid contention in our home. Our lesson on service took us to a neighboring nursing home, where we sang carols and decorated a tree for a sister my husband visited as a home teacher. During our lesson on the gift of self, we chose to look beyond ourselves and secretly serve others.

Lessons on faith came from the scriptures as we focused on the prophecies of the Savior’s birth and on the faith of those who, under the threat of death, still believed He would come (see, for instance, Helaman 14:2–6; 3 Nephi 1:4–21).

On Christmas morning the impact of our lessons became evident when I saw how our teenage son had arranged our true gifts around a painting of the Savior. Our Christmas was much richer when our family focused more on these true gifts of Christmas.

*Heather J. West, East Valley Ward, Emmett Idaho Stake*



help her—and everyone—recall scriptures we have previously studied.

This memorization process has helped us have regular scripture time, even on hectic nights, because there is always time to repeat one scripture. Our children have also gained

confidence through their increased understanding and memorization skills. Like our faithful forebears, the messages from the scriptures are becoming part of who we are.

*Ronda Gibb Hinrichsen, Perry Third Ward, Willard Utah Stake*

## Members Touched by Historic Conference

In a historic meeting on 12 September 2004, President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke by satellite broadcast from Salt Lake City to more than 23,000 Latter-day Saints gathered at stake and district conferences in about 35 meetinghouses across Venezuela and on islands including the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba. Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and Elder H. Aldridge Gillespie of the Seventy also addressed the conferences.

President Hinckley told the Saints that as a young boy he would often look into the night sky to find the North Star. "From looking at that star I learned a great lesson which has remained with me throughout my life," he said. "I learned that there are fixed and constant points by which we may guide our lives." He encouraged members to use unchanging gospel truths the

same way in their own lives.

Each congregation had a few minutes to open its individual conference, pray, sing, and conduct stake business before receiving the transmission from Church headquarters. After the transmission, the congregations closed their meetings with a hymn and a prayer.

Venezuelan Saints felt the significance of the broadcast both on a personal level and as a momentous event for that nation's membership as a whole.

Thirteen-year-old Marcel Fariás of La Isabelica Ward, Valencia Venezuela Candelaria Stake, a recent convert in Valencia, said President Hinckley's words were special to him. "What affected me most about his message was the great love he feels for us, the members of the Church in Venezuela."

"To know that the Lord is



**President Hinckley addresses Latter-day Saints in Venezuela via a satellite broadcast.**

concerned for each one of us and has chosen prophets to help us strengthen our faith will have a marvelous effect on our members," said Bishop Julio Márquez of the Palo Verde Ward, Caracas Venezuela Palo Verde Stake.

"This satellite transmission," said Freddy Guede of the Tocuyito Ward,

Valencia Venezuela Candelaria Stake, "is a unique and unprecedented event in the history of the Church in Venezuela."

Alexis Uriepero, president of the Porlamar Venezuela District, said the conference proved to him that "the prophet and other leaders have their eyes on Venezuela." ■

## Church Provides Hurricane Relief

Four major hurricanes passed through islands in the Caribbean and parts of the United States in the months of August and September 2004, damaging homes and businesses and killing close to 1,700.

Following hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne, the Church and its members reacted quickly to bring relief to those of many faiths. The Church sent more than 1.5 million pounds (680,000 kg) of food, 350,000

hygiene kits, and 400,000 items of clothing in 70 semi-truck loads. By mid-October, members had donated more than 310,000 hours of labor during cleanup and other relief efforts.

### Hurricane Charley

On Friday, 14 August, Hurricane Charley slammed ashore in southwest Florida as a Category Four hurricane with winds up to 180 miles per hour (290 kph). At least 16 people were killed,

hundreds were injured, and approximately 1,500 were left homeless. Millions went without power for as long as two weeks or more.

No Church members were reported killed or injured by the storm, but several were displaced from their homes. At least seven meetinghouses were damaged.

The Church and its members were quick to respond, organizing or participating in relief efforts in areas affected by the storm.

### Hurricane Frances

Hurricane Frances brought 125 mph (200 kph) winds through the Bahamas and into Florida only a few weeks after Charley struck. Fourteen people were reported dead, none of whom were Church members. More than 3 million were without power after the storm. About 53,000 people stayed in emergency shelters. Close to a dozen Church buildings were damaged. The Orlando Florida Temple was undamaged.

Many disaster response



## New Temple Presidents and Matrons Begin Service

**F**ifty-two new temple presidents recently began three-year terms of service with their wives. Most of the couples began their service on 1 November 2004.

### Temple

### President and Matron

Aba Nigeria	Jerry V. and Joanne O. Kirk
Anchorage Alaska	Gary E and Joyce S. Cox
Atlanta Georgia	Jim David and K. Caroline Echard
Birmingham Alabama	John Reid and DeAnn H. Giles
Caracas Venezuela	David Craig and Diane T. Hoopes
Chicago Illinois	Glenn Allan and Betty J. Hansen
Ciudad Juárez Mexico	Ashton Harvey and Naomi H. Taylor
Cochabamba Bolivia	David Evans and Sylvia L. Heywood
Colonia Juárez	
Chihuahua Mexico	John Brentnell and Ellen L. Robinson
Columbia River Washington	Earl J and Rayola Wheelwright
Columbus Ohio	Don Lee and Darlene T. Tobler
Copenhagen Denmark	Dee Valentine and Kay P. Jacobs
Dallas Texas	Philip Hichborn and Peggy J. Besselievre
Denver Colorado	Grant Elggren and Edith R. Marsh
Detroit Michigan	David Ray and Bonnie L. Shurtz
Edmonton Alberta	Robert Steven and Belva E. Patterson
Frankfurt Germany	Richard Woolley and Kathleen M. Fetzner
Fresno California	Charles Allen and Anne Kropf
Guadalajara Mexico	Robert Savage and Kathleen Gabbitas
Halifax Nova Scotia	Byron Ronald and Zelma Christensen
Hamilton New Zealand	James Anthony and Tepua Morley
Hong Kong China	Kwok Yuen and Hui Hua (Flora) Tai
Johannesburg South Africa	Louis and Rina Groenewald
Laie Hawaii	Wayne Octave and Bernice O. Ursenbach
Lima Peru	Royden John and Rebecca B. Glade
London England	Rowland Edward and Barbara J. Elvidge
Los Angeles California	Richard Morris and Darlene A. Andrus
Louisville Kentucky	James Wayne and Karen L. Hansen
Lubbock Texas	Thomas Scott and Marian Hendricks
Manhattan New York	John Roger and Helen B. Stone



**The Oakland California Temple and its newly renovated visitors' center have been a community gathering point for Christmas activities for more than 25 years.**

Medford Oregon	Gene "B" and Carol L. Welling
Melbourne Australia	Graeme Edward and Marie L. Cray
Memphis Tennessee	John Richard and Carol K. Thorderson
Mérida Mexico	Carl Lavon and Jean S. Call
Monterrey Mexico	Jesús and Adelfa A. Santos
Nashville Tennessee	Billy Joe and Marianne Eaves
Nauvoo Illinois	David Bitner and Anne Wirthlin
Orlando Florida	Blaine W and Jeanette Johnson
Perth Australia	John Anthony and Vicki T. Grincer
Portland Oregon	Nicholas Peery and Susan R. Collins
Provo Utah	Carl William and Carolyn S. Bacon
Raleigh North Carolina	Grady Lynn and Genevieve B. Barnes
Reno Nevada	Oris Lorenzo and Alice A. Corbridge
Santiago Chile	Julio Humberto and Maria Jaramillo
Santo Domingo	
Dominican Republic	Edward Harry and JoAnn A. Petersen
Seattle Washington	Denzel Nolan and Beverly M. Wiser
Spokane Washington	Farrell Newren and Joyce L. Binns
St. George Utah	Harold Harrison and Mona E. Hiskey
St. Paul Minnesota	Thomas Albert and Bonnie A. Holt
Tampico Mexico	Ricardo and Maria Torres
Tuxtla Gutiérrez Mexico	Wilbur Thayne and Caryl R. Wagner
Winter Quarters Nebraska	Robert B and Rene Harbertson

agencies were already depleted or still recovering from Hurricane Charley, but the Church set up temporary bishops' storehouses inside a number of meetinghouses within the disaster area. Supplies were transported from Utah and Georgia.

Approximately 100,000 hygiene kits were distributed, and members continued to help with cleanup around the state.

### Hurricane Ivan

On 7 September, the Category Four Hurricane Ivan

tore through the small island of Grenada. Winds of 145 mph (230 kph) left 90 percent of the island's buildings damaged or uninhabitable. At least 39 people died, and 40,000 were in temporary shelters.

The storm brushed the

islands of Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and St. Vincent before arriving in Jamaica as a Category Five storm with winds of 160 mph (260 kph). Jamaica suffered 15 deaths, and 8,000 people were left in shelters.

The next day Ivan battered



**Latter-day Saint volunteers help remove a tree that damaged this home in Florida.**

the Cayman Islands as the eye of the storm passed just offshore. Two died and 50 percent of the islands' homes were left uninhabitable.

The storm caused heavy damage in Alabama and Florida. In the United States, 52 deaths were attributed to Ivan, and more than 440,000 homes were left without power for days.

No missionaries or members were hurt in any of the affected locations.

The Church and its members again responded to the need for relief. Humanitarian donations of hygiene kits, canned goods, food boxes, and medical supplies were sent from bishops' storehouses in Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas. Supplies were airlifted to Grenada, Jamaica, and Grand Cayman.

In Florida, priesthood leaders coordinated a major volunteer response. Many

Church members came from hundreds of miles away to help meet members' needs. Meetinghouses became shelters and/or distribution points for relief supplies not only from the Church, but from other relief agencies as well.

#### **Hurricane Jeanne**

The Caribbean didn't have long to recover from Hurricane Ivan before Hurricane Jeanne struck. On 18 September, the storm hit Haiti, which sustained the greatest loss of life in any of the areas hit by the storms.

At press time, more than 1,500 people were reported killed and another 900 people were missing in the small country located on the island of Hispaniola. One of those killed was a 70-year-old man who was a member of the Church. No missionaries were serving in the areas hit hardest. They had been evacuated earlier in the year due

to political unrest in the area.

Hundreds of thousands were left homeless in the cities of Gonaïves, Port-de-Paix, and Terre-Neuve; 800 Church members were displaced. The majority of the damage occurred in Gonaïves, where 80 percent of the area remained underwater days after the storm's

landfall. The city's meetinghouse was flooded with several feet of water and mud. In the city of Saint-Marc, approximately 150 members were living in tents next to the local meetinghouse.

Local Church leaders responded to members' needs with the distribution of relief items and fast offering funds. Sixteen pallets of essential emergency items were airlifted to Haiti, and thirteen 40-foot (12-m) containers of clothing, shoes, blankets, and hygiene kits were sent from the Church's Humanitarian Center.

The Red Cross requested grief counselors to help many of the people. Church Welfare Services sent 10 counselors to help those who had lost everything to cope with their circumstances and find hope for the future.

After devastating Haiti, the storm moved on to Florida, making landfall on September 26. No state in the U.S. has endured four hurricanes in a single season in more than



**Wind and waves from the hurricanes destroyed many structures, including part of this home in Florida.**

100 years. However, Jeanne was the fourth to hit Florida in two months, following Charley on 13 August, Frances on 5 September, and

Ivan on 16 September.

Many Florida cities were in the path of multiple storms. The death toll in the U.S. for all four storms was 91. ■

Mrs. Durán de Lagos met and talked with the First Presidency before touring the Humanitarian Center. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles gave the tour, ending it with the presentation of a gift: 600 computers donated by Brigham Young University

for schoolchildren in Chile.

"I came here because I wanted to personally thank the Church for what it has given us," she said. "We have received from the [Church] assistance with 'Chile Solidario,' a program designed to help Chile's poorest families arise from poverty." ■

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF CHURCH NEWS



*The first lady of Chile, Luisa Durán de Lagos, visits Church leaders, including Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, in Salt Lake City.*

## World Leaders Visiting Utah to Learn about Church

World leaders are recognizing the need to learn more about the Church as they become aware of the presence of a growing religion in their area or notice the good works the Church is doing through its humanitarian arm. Two leaders recently made separate visits to Salt Lake City to tour Temple Square and learn more about the Church.

### Kyrgyzstan's President and First Lady

Askar Akaev and Mairam Akaeva, president and first lady of Kyrgyzstan, toured Temple Square and attended a live broadcast of *Music and the Spoken Word* on

26 September 2004. They also visited with Church leaders.

While in Utah, President Akaev and First Lady Akaeva received honorary degrees from Utah Valley State College in Orem, Utah. They were recognized for their contributions to the world community. The couple has helped build orphanages, children's schools, and centers for those with special needs.

### Chile's First Lady

Chile's first lady, Luisa Durán de Lagos, visited Salt Lake City on 21 September 2004 to personally thank the Church for the many humanitarian efforts taking place in her country.

## In the News

### New Mission Makes 338 Worldwide

Three missions in the northern part of Luzon in the Philippines have been reorganized to create a fourth mission, the Philippines Laoag Mission.

The Ilagan, Baguio, and

Olongapo missions, with a combined estimated population of 7.6 million residents, were reconfigured to create the Laoag mission, the 14th mission in the Philippines. The mission will be headquartered in Laoag, located on the northwestern tip of the island.

The new mission was created in October, making it the 338th mission of the Church.

About 18,910 members reside in the Laoag mission. Stakes within the mission include Batac, Laoag, and Narvacan. Districts include Aparri, Ballesteros, Bangued, Bangui, and Vigan.

Jerry W. Hatch of the Idaho Falls Seventh Ward, Idaho Falls Idaho North Stake, has been called to preside over the new mission. He will be accompanied by his wife, Marilyn Kay Hatch. At the time of their call, they were serving as senior missionaries in the Philippines Area.

Adapted from Church News, 25 September 2004.



**Three existing missions in the Philippines were reconfigured to create the Philippines Laoag Mission, the 14th in the Philippines and the 338th in the Church.**





**Various creches at the Green Valley Stake's Nativity Festival in St. George, Utah, draw thousands of visitors each year.**

#### **Nativity Festival Helps Saints to Share the Gospel**

Church members in St. George, Utah, know many ways to remember Christ during the Christmas season, and one way is to provide an opportunity for others to learn more about Him and His Church. For the past four years, members have invited the community to a nativity festival, to be held this year on 3–4 December at the Green Valley Stake Center. The festival has grown every year, with almost 2,000 visitors viewing the displays last year.

At this year's festival, more than 100 paintings and 500 nativities from around the world will be on display. One nativity was made from mud and dried in the sun by children in Africa—the fingernail marks used to create the eyes and mouths of the figures are visible. A nativity from Russia is made of brightly colored, hand-painted wooden figures. Another shows Mary and the Christ child dressed in Chinese silk.

#### **Young Single Adults Hold Conference in Poland**

Some 65 Church members from throughout the country met in Zakopane, Poland, on 3–5 September 2004 for the second all-Poland young single adult conference. They enjoyed both recreation and gospel learning activities.

Friday afternoon included time to explore Krupówki Street, a tourist attraction in this internationally known ski-resort city. Saturday included a brief visit to historical sites and a conference session that took place during a hike into nearby

Tatrzański National Park. In a meeting on Saturday evening, they heard counsel from Poland Warsaw Mission president David J. Barnett. On Sunday, the conference ended with a fast and testimony meeting.

#### **Share Joy to the World This Christmas Season**

This issue of the *Ensign* includes a sheet of pass-along cards offering the Church's *Joy to the World* DVD. The DVD includes the story of Christ's birth as experienced in both Jerusalem and the Americas, music by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, and an introduction to the Restoration of the gospel through the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Those who call the toll-free number on the card will be given the option of having the DVD delivered to them by mail or by missionaries who will also share a message about the Savior. When giving the pass-along cards, allow enough time for delivery of the DVD.

Copies of *Joy to the World* and additional pass-along cards are also available through local distribution centers. ■



**Young single adults from across Poland met together in a nationwide conference.**

## **Calls for Articles**

### **Christmas**

Do you have an inspiring Christmas experience to share? What did you do to draw closer to the Savior? Did you serve others? Did someone serve you? Please share your experience with readers of the Church magazines.

Send them by 1 February 2005 to Christmas Experiences, *Ensign* Editorial, 24th Floor, 50 East North Temple Street, Salt Lake City, UT 84150-3220, USA; or to [cur-editorial-ensign@ldschurch.org](mailto:cur-editorial-ensign@ldschurch.org). Please include your name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, and ward and stake (or branch and district).

### **Modesty**

Dressing modestly is a challenge in today's world. How do you make sure that your everyday wear, exercise clothing, or formalwear is modest? How have you promoted modesty in your family, ward, or stake (or branch or district)?

Please send your comments by 17 January 2005 to Modesty, *Ensign* Editorial, 24th Floor, 50 East North Temple Street, Salt Lake City, UT 84150-3220, USA; or to [cur-editorial-ensign@ldschurch.org](mailto:cur-editorial-ensign@ldschurch.org). Clearly mark your submission "Modesty;" and include your name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, and ward and stake (or branch and district). ■

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for

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# MAKING THE MOST OF THIS ISSUE

D E C E M B E R 2 0 0 4

## Testifying of Him

- Testimonies of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ from leaders committed to knowing and teaching His way, page 6.

- Elder Hans H. Mattsson, Area Authority Seventy, recalls how he learned as a young missionary that the Lord could help him in his weakness. "How Could I Testify?" page 10.

- "Why come unto Christ? Simply stated, because all other ways do not lead to eternal life," writes Elder Robert R. Steuer of the Seventy. For counsel on finding the way, see "Come unto Christ," page 12.

- All his life he had been taught to avoid The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But when he sought truth and peace, it was there. See "The Faith I Tried to Avoid," page 15.

## Stronger Families

- Knowing our Father's plan for the family is central to the happiness of His children on earth and to their

progress in eternity. See page 50.

- No children at home? You can still have enjoyable, uplifting family home evenings. See "Family Home Evening for Two," page 46.

- For more on family home evening, see "Family Home Evening Helps," page 65.

## The True Spirit

- How could a family possibly enjoy Christmas when their mother was killed during the holiday season? Then they opened the gift she had left behind. See page 52.

- The spirit of Christmas can be found in breakfast at the wrong time of day, a kindness for a friend, a mysterious card on the tree, or an evening chat on the Paris metro. See Latter-day Saint Voices, page 59.

- One mother found the true spirit of Christmas when she learned to let go of some traditions that had been important to her. See "Christmas Came Anyway," page 55.



## Answers—Just Keystrokes Away

When you're facing a personal challenge, do you ever wish you knew how other Latter-day Saints handle that type of problem? When you read articles like "Making Weak Things Become Strong," on page 28 in this issue, do you ever wish you could learn more about increasing your own spiritual strength? More information on facing personal challenges is at your fingertips when you explore the Church's Web site [www.lds.org](http://www.lds.org). You can find additional magazine articles under Gospel Library—but that's only the beginning. The site offers information on provident living, specific counsel on strengthening families, help with family history and gospel study, as well as lesson manuals and other reference materials. And there's much more. Tap into the wealth of spiritual resources available online by visiting [www.lds.org](http://www.lds.org).

## Sharing with Sisters

Do you really know how much visiting teaching affects other lives? Read stories of sisters who learned the impact of this kind of sharing in "Strong Hands and Loving Hearts," page 36.

## Home, Visiting Teachers

Find the monthly messages on page 2 and page 41.

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MAY NOT BE COPIED

**Holiday Glow, by Rebecca W. Hartvigsen**

*From the snow-covered trees surrounding the Salt Lake Temple to the Christmas tree in the window of the Hotel Utah on the corner of South Temple and Main Streets, this winter holiday scene captures the seasonal feel of Christmas in Salt Lake City in the early 1900s.*





*The greatest of all acts in all history was the atoning sacrifice of our Savior and Redeemer. We remember that sacrifice at this time of year when we celebrate His birth. It is only through the atoning sacrifice of the Prince of Peace that we may know the true power of peace in our own lives.” See President James E. Faust, “The Power of Peace,” p. 2.*