

Ensign

BENEVOLENCE



COVER STORY:

Relief Society

**Home, Family, and
Personal Enrichment
around the World, p. 14**

**Faith and Families:
An Apostle's Counsel, p. 36**

**Hope and Rebuilding
after the Hurricanes, p. 46**



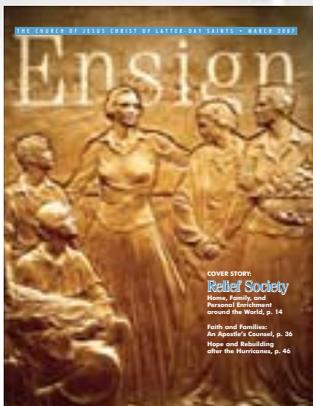
MAY NOT BE COPIED

We Are the Clay in His Hands, by Julie Rogers

*“O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter;
and we all are the work of thy hand” (Isaiah 64:8).*



62 *Preparing physically and mentally should begin at least two years before a full-time mission.*



ON THE COVER

Benevolence: Through Love Serve One Another, by Avard Fairbanks. This bas-relief is found on the Relief Society Centennial Campanile at the base of the Nauvoo Bell on Temple Square.



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Let us open the door of our hearts that the Savior—the living example of true compassion—may enter.

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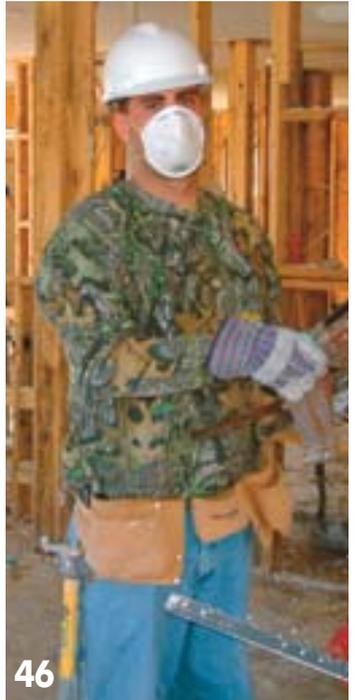
Relief Society sisters have caught the vision of what home, family, and personal enrichment meeting can be: a place where women of all ages can strengthen their faith in Jesus Christ, socialize, learn, and be uplifted.

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DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO TELL?

The *Ensign* welcomes submissions that show the gospel of Jesus Christ at work in the lives of Latter-day Saints, especially articles with personal experiences and gospel insights. This month we invite you to describe how you make Easter a Christ-centered season.

Limit submissions to 500 words, and label them "Easter." Send them by April 13 to ensign@ldschurch.org or *Ensign* Editorial, 50 E. North Temple Street, Room 2420, Salt Lake City, UT 84150-3220, USA. Include your name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, and ward and stake (or branch and district).

Writers' guidelines: Visit the link in the lower-right corner of the Gospel Library page at www.lds.org. Due to the volume of submissions, we cannot acknowledge receipt. Authors whose work is selected for publication will be notified. If you would like your manuscript, photos, art, or other material returned, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Ensign

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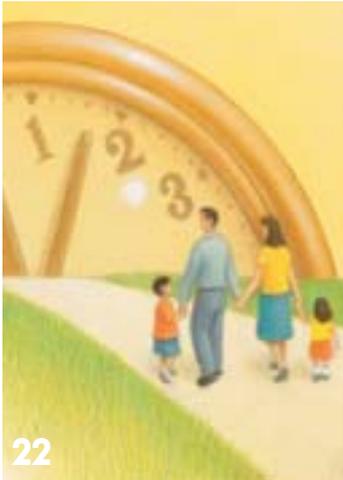
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USING THIS ISSUE

Trusting the hand of the Lord.

Think about an event in your life that didn't happen as you thought it would—or *when* you thought it would. Read "Having Faith in God's Timeline" (p. 22), and consider times you have recognized the hand of the Lord in your life.

Being self-reliant in emergencies.

After reading "Storming Back" (p. 46), think about emergencies you might face. Go to the Food Storage and Preparedness link on www.providentliving.org, and click on Emergency Preparation to learn how you might be more self-reliant in an emergency.

Preparing for missionary work.

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ELDER WONG YONG KO

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The Gift of Compassion

BY PRESIDENT THOMAS S. MONSON
First Counselor in the First Presidency

A few years ago I had the opportunity to preside at a regional conference in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. As I enjoyed the sweet spirit which prevailed during the conference and the wonderful hospitality of the people, I reflected upon how the community's spirit of compassionate help had been tested in the extreme on April 19, 1995. On that day a terrorist-planted bomb destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City, taking 168 persons to their deaths and injuring countless others.

Following the conference, I was driven to the entrance of a beautiful and symbolic memorial which graces the area where the Murrah building once stood. The day was dreary and rainy, which tended to underscore the pain and suffering that had occurred on this spot. The memorial features a 400-foot (122-m) reflecting pool. On one side of the pool are 168 empty glass and granite chairs, in honor of each of the people killed. These are placed, as far as can be determined, where the fallen bodies were found.

On the opposite side of the pool there

stands, on a gentle rise of ground, a mature American elm tree—the only nearby tree to survive the destruction. It is appropriately and affectionately named “The Survivor Tree.” In regal splendor it honors those who survived the horrific blast.

My host directed my attention to the inscription above the gate of the memorial:

We come here to remember those who were killed, those who survived and those changed forever.

May all who leave here know the impact of violence.

May this memorial offer comfort, strength, peace, hope and serenity.

With tears in his eyes and with a faltering voice, my host declared, “This community and all the churches and citizens in it have been galvanized together. In our grief we have become strong. In our spirit we have become united.”

We concluded that the best word to describe what had taken place was *compassion*. My thoughts turned to the musical play *Camelot*, written by Alan Jay Lerner and based on a novel by T. H. White. King Arthur, in his dream of a better world where people



“But a certain Samaritan . . . had compassion on him . . . and bound up his wounds . . . and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.” Now, as then, Jesus would say to us, “Go, and do thou likewise.”

would share an ideal relationship one with another, said, as he recalled the purpose of the Round Table, “Violence is not strength, and compassion is not weakness.”

Strength in Compassion

A stirring account which illustrates this statement is found in the Old Testament of the Holy Bible. Joseph was especially loved by his father, Jacob, which occasioned bitterness and jealousy on the part of his brothers. There followed the plot to slay Joseph, which eventually placed Joseph in a deep pit without food or water to sustain life. Joseph was extricated from the pit by a passing caravan of merchants, sold for 20 pieces of silver, and placed eventually in the house of Potiphar in the land of Egypt. There the young man prospered, for “the Lord was with Joseph.”¹

After years of plenty in Egypt, there followed years of famine. In the midst of this latter period, when the brothers of Joseph came to Egypt to buy corn, they were blessed by this favored man—even their own brother. Joseph could have dealt harshly with his brothers for the callous and cruel treatment he had earlier received from them. However, he was kind and gracious to them and won their favor and support with these words and actions:

“Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. . . .

“And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.”²

Joseph exemplified the magnificent virtue of compassion.

During the meridian of time, when Jesus walked the dusty pathways of the Holy Land, He often spoke in parables.

Said He: “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of

his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

“And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

“And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

“And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

“And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.”

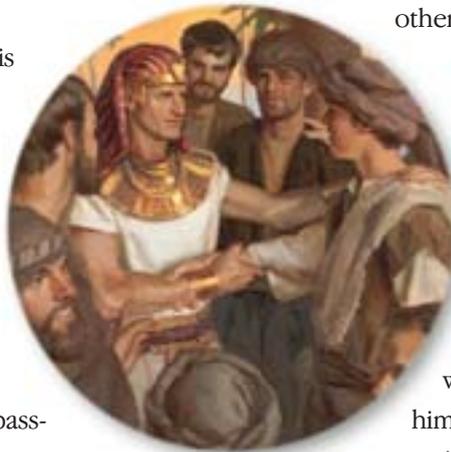
Well could the Savior say to us, “Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?”

No doubt our response would be, “He that shewed mercy on him.”

Now, as then, Jesus would say to us, “Go, and do thou likewise.”³

Jesus provided us many examples of compassionate concern. The crippled man at the pool of Bethesda; the woman taken in adultery; the woman at Jacob’s well; the daughter of Jairus; Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha—each represented a casualty on the Jericho road. Each needed help.

To the cripple at Bethesda, Jesus said, “Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.”⁴ To the sinful woman came the counsel, “Go, and sin no more.”⁵ To help her who came to draw water, He provided a well of water “springing up into everlasting life.”⁶ To the dead daughter of Jairus came the command, “Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.”⁷ To the entombed Lazarus, “Come forth.”⁸



Joseph could have dealt harshly with his brothers for the callous and cruel treatment he had earlier received from them. However, he was kind and gracious to them.

The Savior has always shown unlimited capacity for compassion.

On the American continent, Jesus appeared to a multitude and said:

“Have ye any that are sick among you? Bring them hither. Have ye any that are lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or that are withered, or that are deaf, or that are afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither and I will heal them, for I have compassion upon you. . . .

“ . . . And he did heal them every one.”⁹

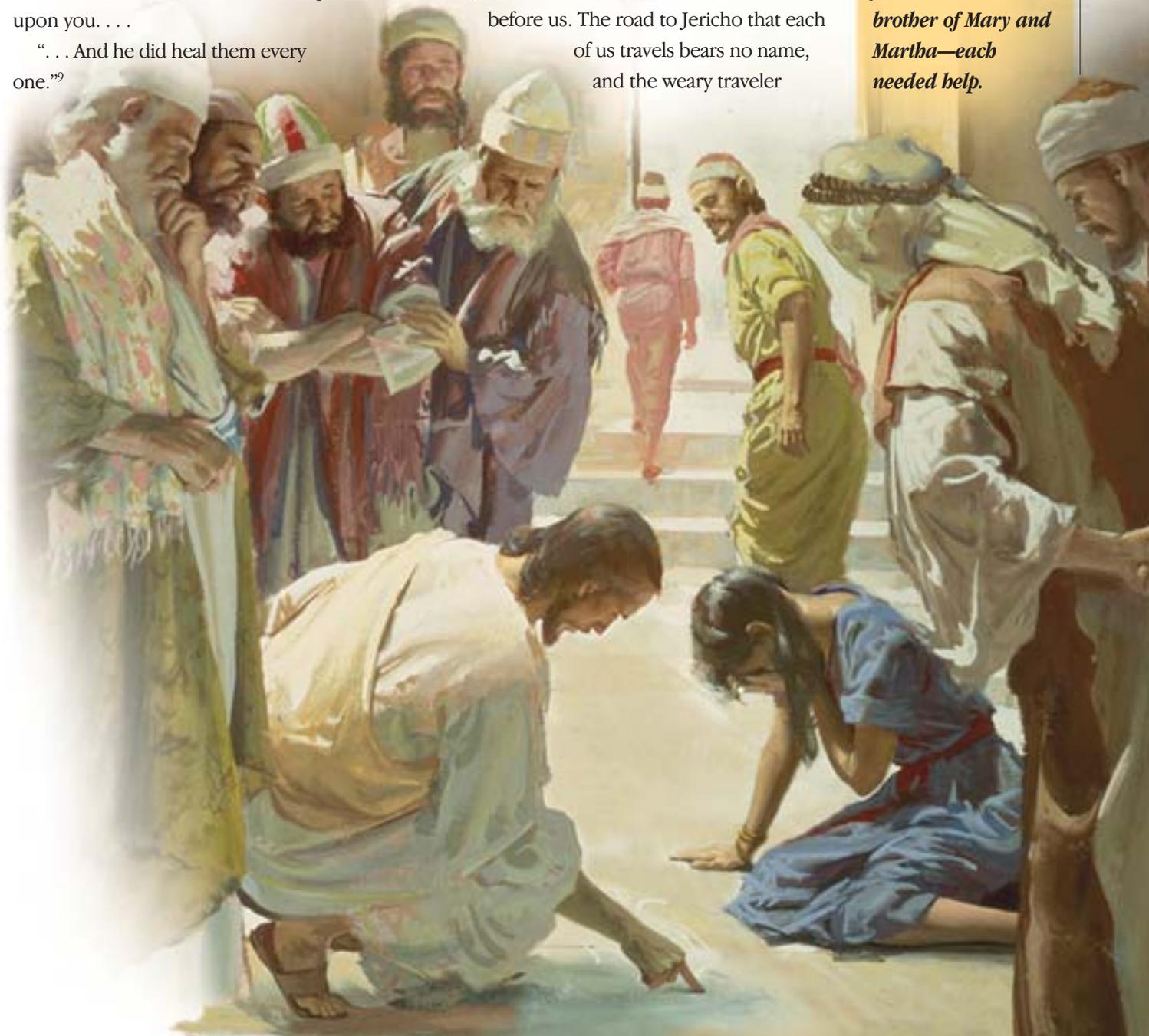
Our Jericho Road

One may well ask the penetrating question: These accounts pertain to the Redeemer of the world. Can there actually occur in my own life, on my own Jericho road, such a treasured experience?

I phrase my answer in the words of the Master: “Come and see.”¹⁰

We have no way of knowing when our privilege to extend a helping hand will unfold before us. The road to Jericho that each of us travels bears no name, and the weary traveler

Jesus provided us many examples of compassionate concern. *The crippled man at the pool of Bethesda; the woman taken in adultery; the daughter of Jairus; Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha—each needed help.*



I sat dejectedly. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a couple approach my table. 'Are you all right, young man?' the woman asked.

who needs our help may be one unknown.

Genuine gratitude was expressed by the writer of a letter received some time ago at Church headquarters. No return address was shown, no name, but the postmark was from Portland, Oregon:

"To the Office of the First Presidency:

"Salt Lake City showed me Christian hospitality once during my wandering years.

"On a cross-country journey by bus to California, I stepped down in the terminal in Salt Lake City, sick and trembling from aggravated loss of sleep caused by a lack of necessary medication. In my headlong flight from a bad situation in Boston, I had completely forgotten my supply.

"In the Temple Square Hotel restaurant, I sat dejectedly. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a couple approach my table. 'Are you all right, young man?' the woman asked. I raised up, crying and a bit shaken, related my story and the predicament I was in then. They listened carefully and patiently to my nearly incoherent ramblings, and then they took charge. They spoke with the restaurant manager, then told

me I could have all I wanted to eat there for



five days. They took me next door to the hotel desk and got me a room for five days. Then they drove me to a clinic and saw that I was provided with the medications I needed—truly my basic lifeline to sanity and comfort.

“While I was recuperating and building my strength, I made it a point to attend the daily Tabernacle organ recitals. The celestial voicing of that instrument from the faintest intonation to the mighty full organ is the most sublime sonority of my acquaintance. I have acquired albums and tapes of the Tabernacle organ and the choir which I can rely upon anytime to soothe and butress a sagging spirit.

“On my last day at the hotel, before I resumed my journey, I turned in my key; and there was a message for me from that couple: ‘Repay us by showing gentle kindness to some other troubled soul along your road.’ That was my habit, but I determined to be more keenly on the lookout for someone who needed a lift in life.

“I wish you well. I don’t know if these are indeed the ‘latter days’ spoken of in the scriptures, but I do know that two members of your church were saints to me in my desperate hours of need. I just thought you might like to know.”

What an example of caring compassion.

For Those in Need

At one privately owned and operated care facility, compassion reigned supreme. The proprietress was Edna Hewlett. There was a waiting list of patients who desired to live out their remaining days under her tender care, for she was an angelic person. She would wash and style the hair of every patient. She cleansed elderly bodies and dressed them with bright and clean clothing.

Through the years, in visiting the widows of the ward over which I once presided, I would generally start my

visits at Edna’s facility. She would welcome me with a cheery smile and take me to the living room where a number of the patients were seated.

I always had to begin with Jeannie Burt, who was the oldest—102 when she died. She had known me and my family from the time I was born.

On one occasion Jeannie asked with her thick Scottish brogue, “Tommy, have you been to Edinburgh lately?”

I replied, “Yes, not too long ago I was there.”

“Isn’t it beautiful!” she responded.

Jeannie closed her aged eyes in an expression of silent reverie. Then she became serious. “I’ve paid in advance for my funeral—in cash. You are to speak at my funeral, and you are to recite ‘Crossing the Bar’ by Tennyson. Now let’s hear it!”

It seemed every eye was upon me, and surely this was the case. I took a deep breath and began:

*Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea.¹¹*

Jeannie’s smile was benign and heavenly—then she declared, “Oh, Tommy, that was nice. But see that you practice a wee bit before my funeral!” This I did.

At some period in our mortal mission, there appears the faltering step, the wan smile, the pain of sickness—even the fading of summer, the approach of autumn, the chill of winter, and the experience we call death, which comes to all mankind. It comes to the aged as they walk on faltering feet. Its summons is heard by those who have scarcely reached midway in life’s journey. Often it hushes the laughter of little children.

Throughout the world there is enacted daily the sorrowful scene of loved ones mourning as they bid farewell



***I extol those who,
with loving care and
compassionate concern,
feed the hungry, clothe
the naked, and house
the homeless. He who
notes the sparrow’s fall
will not be unmindful
of such service.***

to a son, a daughter, a brother, a sister, a mother, a father, or a cherished friend.

From the cruel cross, the Savior's tender words of farewell to His mother are particularly poignant:

"When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!

"Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home."¹²

Let us remember that after the funeral flowers fade, the well wishes of friends become memories, and the prayers offered and words spoken dim in the corridors of the mind. Those who grieve frequently find themselves alone. Missed is the laughter of children, the commotion of teenagers, and the tender, loving concern of a departed companion. The clock ticks more loudly, time passes more slowly, and four walls can indeed a prison make.

I extol those who, with loving care and compassionate concern, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and house the homeless. He who notes the sparrow's fall will not be unmindful of such service.

Havens of Peace

In His compassion and according to His divine plan, holy temples bring to our Father's children the peace which surpasses understanding.

Under the leadership of President Gordon B. Hinckley, the number of new temples constructed and under construction staggers the mind to contemplate. Heavenly Father's compassionate concern for His children here on earth and for those who have gone beyond mortality merits our gratitude.

Thanks be to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for His life, for His gospel, for His example, and for His blessed Atonement.

I return in my thoughts to Oklahoma City. To me, it is beyond mere coincidence that now a temple of the Lord, in all its beauty, stands in that city as a heaven-sent beacon to mark the way to joy here on earth and eternal joy hereafter. Let us remember the words from the Psalms: "Weeping

may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."¹³

In a very real way, the Master speaks to us: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him."¹⁴

Let us listen for His knock. Let us open the door of our hearts, that He—the living example of true compassion—may enter. ■

NOTES

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Genesis 39:2. | 8. John 11:43. |
| 2. Genesis 45:5, 7. | 9. 3 Nephi 17:7, 9. |
| 3. See Luke 10:30–37. | 10. John 1:39. |
| 4. John 5:8. | 11. Lines 1–4. |
| 5. John 8:11. | 12. John 19:26–27. |
| 6. John 4:14. | 13. Psalm 30:5. |
| 7. Mark 5:41. | 14. Revelation 3:20. |

IDEAS FOR HOME TEACHERS

After prayerfully studying this message, share it using a method that encourages the participation of those you teach. The following are some examples:

1. Prepare paper hearts for each family member. As you relate examples of compassion from President Monson's message, invite family members to think of people in need and how they could show compassion to them. Have them write their ideas on the hearts.
2. Retell several of the examples of compassion from the article. Ask the family to ponder the following questions: Who is my neighbor? Whom do I know right now who could be blessed by my compassion? What can I do to help this person? When can I start? Conclude by reading the final two paragraphs of the article and challenging the family to consider ways to put into action a plan for compassion.
3. After relating a few accounts from the article, ask for the common theme. Show a picture of the Savior, and testify of His compassionate hand in your own life. Challenge family members to strive to follow the example of the Savior in giving the gift of compassion.



Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life

BY ELDER WON YONG KO
Of the Seventy

When Jesus Christ was on the earth, He performed many miracles such as turning water into wine, healing the sick and disabled, and even raising Lazarus from the dead. The miracle witnessed by the largest audience was likely the feeding of the 5,000 with five loaves and two fishes. This miracle is described in all four Gospels (see Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:34–44; Luke 9:12–17; John 6:5–14). Let us examine some of the details of this miraculous story and discuss why it is relevant in our day.

The Savior's Compassion

The Savior performed this miracle because of His compassion for the people. Mark wrote that as Jesus looked over the crowd of people eagerly listening to His words, He “was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd” (Mark 6:34). He was aware that “the day was now far spent” and that, being in “a desert place” (Mark 6:35), the people did not have access to food.

Yet Jesus withheld His power to perform the miracle for a time, deciding to test His disciples first. He asked Philip, “Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” (John 6:5).



Why did He ask Philip this question when “he himself knew what he would do” (John 6:6)? Perhaps

He wanted His disciples to fully recognize that they could not feed that many people with the money and time given to them. If the vast multitude was to be fed, it would require a miracle.

Then the disciples brought the food one boy had, the only food available to them: five barley loaves and two small fishes. I like to think that perhaps this boy was hungry but saved the food for his great Teacher instead of worrying about himself. This might have contributed to the great setting of the miracle.

“And They Sat Down in Ranks”

Jesus Christ deliberately accomplished one more task before performing the miracle: He commanded His disciples “to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties” (Mark 6:39–40). Why did He ask the people to sit down like this? Certainly He wanted to ensure that the process of distributing food was orderly. Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles adds to our understanding:



Jesus taught the people not to focus on physical bread, but to seek for much more important bread: “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you.”

Jesus fed more than 5,000 people with only five loaves and two fishes—a divine act. He declared Himself the “bread of life”—a divine teaching.

“There was nothing informal or unorganized about our Lord’s planning or performance. The assembled hosts were seated in a systematic way by companies and in ranks. His beneficence was not promiscuous largess scattered to a mob. Rather he was providing necessary and otherwise unavailable food to an inquiring congregation of hearers. Then too, there was to be no question left in anyone’s mind as to what actually took place. The apostles were to distribute the loaves and fishes in an orderly way, treating all with fairness and impartiality.”¹

In addition, I believe that—as with Philip—the Lord wanted the people to notice just how vast the multitude was when the miracle was

performed. He may have wanted to ensure that there were no arguments about the number of people who participated in this great miracle.

The number of people in the crowd was actually more than 5,000 because women and children were not counted. Therefore, many more than 5,000 people were miraculously fed with the five loaves and two fishes.

After the Savior took the five loaves and fishes, “he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves” (Mark 6:41) and then gave them to His disciples to pass to the people. They then distributed the fishes. The people did not take just a little food, worrying about a shortage. Instead, they took “as much as they would” (John 6:11) and “did all eat, and were filled” (Mark 6:42).

Jesus gave further instruction after performing the miracle. He told His disciples, “Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost” (John 6:12). The disciples gathered 12 baskets of food!

It was clear that by His power Jesus performed the miracle. The account in the book of John ends with this comment:

“Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world” (John 6:14).

Spiritual Nourishment

The story does not end there. All of these events were only a prelude to what the Savior taught afterward. He performed this miracle in a dramatic way so the people clearly understood that He has great power, and they



were thus better prepared to accept His teaching—which was so much more important than eating the loaves and the fishes.

A short time after performing this miracle, Jesus taught the people not to focus on physical bread but to seek for much more important bread: “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you” (John 6:27).

The people were confused about what He said. Their minds were still on the loaves they had eaten. They could not understand the meaning of the term “bread of life.”

Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

He continued to explain: “I am that bread of life. . . . This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever” (John 6:48, 50–51).

Some people murmured because of His saying. They thought they knew Jesus, son of Joseph the carpenter. They forgot the power by which Jesus had performed such a great miracle. Many chose to leave Him. Jesus asked His Twelve Apostles, “Will ye also go away?” (John 6:67). Peter answered with a testimony that was powerful in its simplicity: “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

Even though the Savior had prepared the people well for being taught His divine nature and mission, they still did not understand the significance of the miracle or of Jesus’s teaching that He is the Bread of Life. But the Twelve, led by Peter, assured Him of their testimonies. This must have given the Lord great comfort.



Knowing that Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life—the way by which all can receive eternal life—we have an important responsibility. We should seek to help people come to Him.

Relevance in Our Day

Today, some may think the miracle of the loaves and fishes is only an ancient story and is not relevant in our day. In so doing, they miss the point of this miraculous story and do not understand the significance of the “bread of life.”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “In our contemporary success and sophistication we too may walk away from the vitally crucial bread of eternal life; we may actually *choose* to be spiritually malnourished, willfully indulging in a kind of spiritual anorexia.”²

The Bible Dictionary explains that miracles are “an important element in the work of Jesus Christ, being

not only divine acts, but forming also a part of the divine teaching” (732; see also Guide to the Scriptures, “Miracle,” 165). The miracle of the loaves and fishes is a good example of this definition. Jesus fed more than 5,000 people with only five loaves and two fishes—a divine act. He declared Himself the “bread of life”—a divine teaching.

Knowing that Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life—the way by which all can receive eternal life—we have an important responsibility. We should seek to help people come to Him and partake of His word, like the people who were filled with the loaves and fishes. Our friends may not know they are hungry in spirit. They may try to consume many things to satisfy their spiritual hunger, and as a result, they may feel frustrated and lost. Let us help them know how they can be spiritually filled—by coming unto Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life. ■

NOTES

1. *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (1966–73), 1:344.
2. “He Hath Filled the Hungry with Good Things,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 65.

Home, Family, and Personal Enrichment

around the World



Left: Relief Society sisters in the San Miguel de Allende Ward, Celaya Mexico Stake, perform a cultural dance they learned at a home, family, and personal enrichment activity. Right: As part of an enrichment meeting and activity in the Mont St. Hilaire Ward, Longueuil Québec Stake, sisters learn how to grow sprouts—a healthy addition to their diet.



Left: Out of a desire to build self-reliance, Relief Society leaders in a Salt Lake City, Utah, singles ward asked the elders quorum to teach sisters how to change a flat tire and check the oil in their automobiles.



Left: Sister Adelma M. Linhares sews for a service project in her São Paulo, Brazil, ward. This enrichment activity benefited public hospitals in the area.

LEFT: PHOTOGRAPH BY JUAN CARLOS SANTOYO; TOP RIGHT: PHOTOGRAPH BY LAURENT LUCIUX; ABOVE: PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTINA SMITH; RIGHT: PHOTOGRAPH BY ANA CLAUDIA OLIVEIRA; BACKGROUND © DYNAMIC GRAPHICS, INC.

BY CONNIE D. CANNON
Relief Society General Board

A place “where hearts and hands are joined together in a safe, relaxed, and enjoyable environment” is how Bonnie D. Parkin, Relief Society general president, describes home, family, and personal enrichment meeting. It is a place where women of all ages can strengthen their faith in Jesus Christ and learn parenting and homemaking skills. It is a time when sisters can socialize, learn, and be uplifted.

Since January 2006, when the new guidelines for home, family, and personal enrichment went into effect, Relief Society sisters around the world have caught the vision of what this program can be.

Enrichment Meetings

Instead of monthly meetings, ward home, family, and personal enrichment meetings for all sisters are held

four times a year. One of these four meetings commemorates the March 17, 1842, organization of the Relief Society. In addition to ward or branch meetings, the stake or district Relief Society holds one or two enrichment meetings each year. One of these enrichment meetings is held in conjunction with the annual broadcast of the general Relief Society meeting in September.

Enrichment Activities

The ward or branch Relief Society also offers activities for groups of sisters with similar interests. In doing so, Relief Society leaders respond to the needs and wants of the sisters to determine what activities to offer.

Home, Family, and Personal Enrichment

Meetings

In quarterly enrichment meetings, Relief Society sisters can “feel a sense of belonging as they participate in activities that build spiritual strength, develop personal skills, strengthen home and family, and exercise charity through service,” says Sister Parkin. “In these meetings bonds of sisterhood are strengthened, new and less-active members are fellowshipped, and missionary opportunities abound.”

Following are examples of what stakes and wards have done for their home, family, and personal enrichment meetings.

One ward celebrated the founding of Relief Society with a program they called “Sisterhood, a Tapestry of Love.” It was based on the talk given by President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, at the general Relief Society meeting in September 2002.¹ After dinner, eight sisters shared their experiences and thoughts on what Relief Society meant to them as a place for learning, making eternal friendships, enjoying sisterhood, and offering service.

One stake enrichment meeting focused on building faith in Jesus Christ with a sharing of testimonies. Stephanie Wilkey, stake Relief Society president, writes: “We had felt inspired to have a home, family, and personal enrichment meeting based on one of the principles of charity: kindness. It took every bit of faith we had to follow the promptings we had received as a presidency to carry through with this idea. My counselors assured me that the sisters would come and that they would stand and speak to us of the things of the heart. Oh, did they

come! Close to 350 sisters poured into the chapel on a windy, rainy evening. They stood and poured their hearts out to each other in magnificent testimonies of applying the principle of kindness in their lives. As the sisters left the building an hour and a half later, they expressed with words and tears that they had felt the love of the Lord and were so very grateful they had come.”

In another stake, Relief Society president Mickie Neslen realized that financial security helps strengthen families. She and the stake presidency prepared a stake home, family, and personal enrichment meeting that traveled from ward to ward. It began with a spiritual lesson on finances. Afterward, the sisters were invited to visit five different stations with 15-minute presentations by knowledgeable sisters:

1. “Budgeting” featured various ways to keep track of and manage money with notebooks, envelopes, or software.
2. “Money-Saving Tips” consisted of simple ways to save money each day.
3. “Finances for Kids” demonstrated a variety of ways to teach finances to children, including interactive games.
4. “Preparing for the Future” reviewed information about disability insurance, assisted living, nursing care, and other retirement concerns.
5. “The Cost of Credit” pointed out the dangers of debt and how to avoid it.

These enrichment meetings helped educate and strengthen the sisters in many important ways.

NOTE

1. See “You Are All Heaven Sent,” *Liabona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 110.



“We need to laugh together,” says one Relief Society sister in the Juniper Ward, Lancaster California Stake. “It balances out my life just to be with the sisters at home, family, and personal enrichment meetings.”

Right: Among the Relief Society activities in the Makati Second Ward, Makati Philippines Stake, was a presentation on how to prepare virgin coconut oil.



Above: In the Parleys Sixth Ward, Salt Lake Parleys Stake, a recently returned mission president and his wife teach a weekly class using the Preach My Gospel manual. Sisters and couples who attend improve teaching skills, which helps make them better parents and missionaries.



Left: Because Elvira Garza of the San Fernando First Ward, Valle Hermoso Mexico Stake, loves home canning, she was the perfect choice to teach the process at a home, family, and personal enrichment activity.

Below: Sisters in the Jardines Ward, Mexico City Ermita Stake, study the scriptures together.



Left: Each July the Mexico City Chapultepec Stake holds classes that teach basic skills. The sisters choose one class to attend from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. each day during the week. Here sisters learn to cut hair.



Left: After a spiritual lesson in the Odessa Tsentralny Branch in Ukraine, Relief Society sisters attend a class on storing food products safely. Below: Skilled hands sew a tote bag at a home, family, and personal enrichment activity in the Votorantim Ward, Sorocaba Brazil Barcelona Stake.



Above: Relief Society sisters around the world, such as these in Brazil, learn home decorating skills.



TOP: PHOTOGRAPHS BY ISRAEL GUTÉRREZ AND COURTESY OF THE RELIEF SOCIETY GENERAL PRESIDENCY; CENTER: PHOTOGRAPH BY MARINA LUKACH; BOTTOM LEFT: PHOTOGRAPH BY MIRIAM NERY; BOTTOM RIGHT: PHOTOGRAPH BY ISRAEL ANTUNES

Home, Family, and Personal Enrichment

Activities

Ward or branch home, family, and personal enrichment activities are less structured than the quarterly meetings. They can be organized by specialists, under the direction of the presidency. At first, the concept of activities seemed challenging to some leaders. But as they have assessed the sisters' needs, counseled with priesthood leaders, and prayed for inspiration, they have come up with good ideas and developed confidence. Some successful ideas include learning do-it-yourself home repairs, marriage enrichment classes, study groups using *Preach My Gospel*, bringing lunch to shut-in sisters, and a support group for sisters with infertility challenges.

"I wondered how this new program would bring sisters together if we met in smaller groups, but I was willing to try it," writes Richelle Pearce of the Shadowbrook Ward, Kaysville Utah South Stake. "I make bread a couple of times a week, so after making the proper arrangements, the Relief Society leaders invited anyone who was interested to come to my home for an activity.

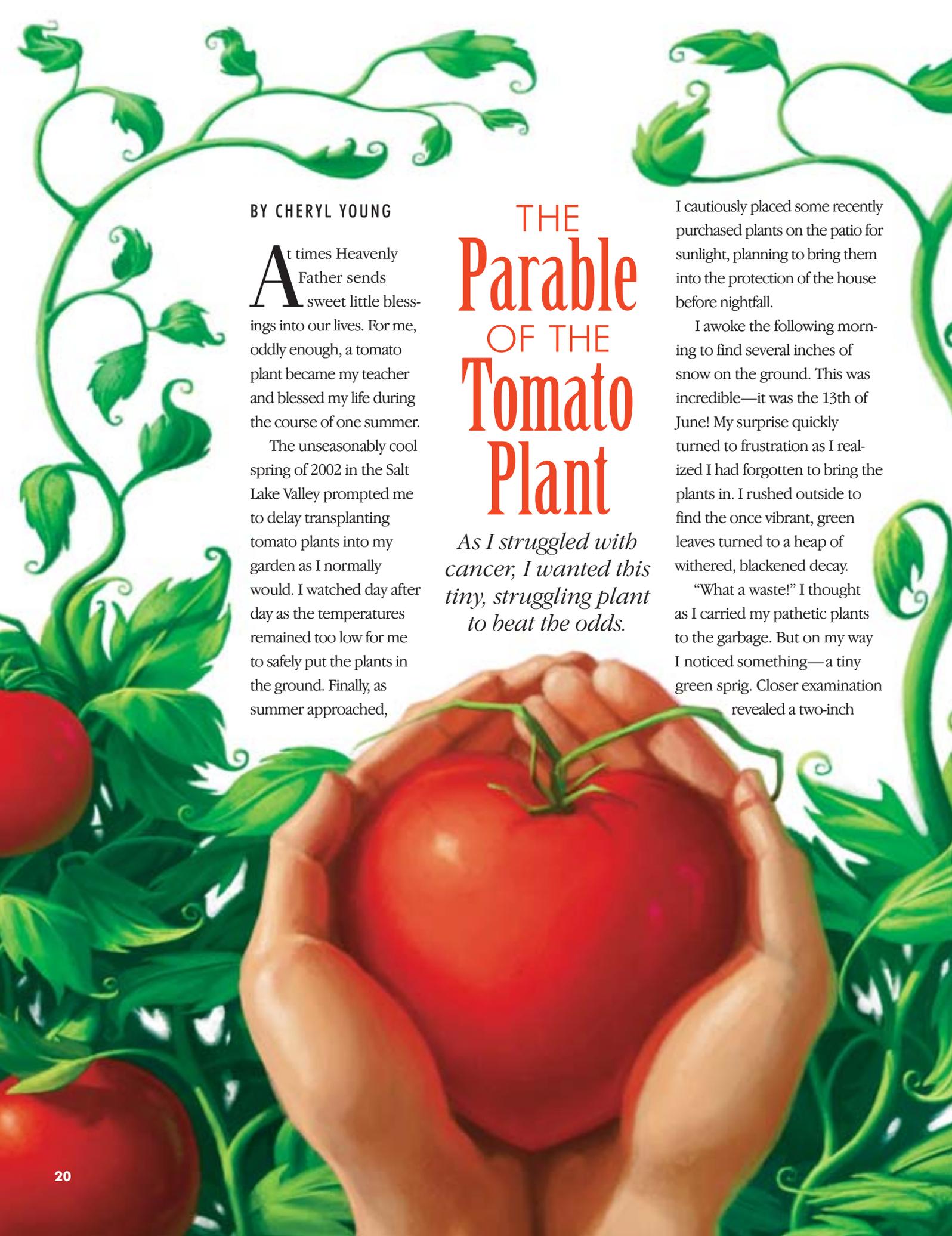
"The next Thursday five sisters showed up at my door. They were from all different stages of life: one new mother, one working mom, one senior sister, and two with large families like mine. What happened over the next two hours was a testimony to me of the inspiration of this program. The sisters not only learned how to grind wheat and make bread, but they also talked, laughed, shared ideas, and really connected. By the time they left with their bread and wheat flour, I knew this program could bring sisters together in a wonderful way."

In Nigeria, learning how to bake bread did more than teach an important skill. A sister in the Ikot Ekpene Branch, Nigeria Uyo Mission, says enrichment activities changed her life. She explains that after her baptism and confirmation she had stopped attending church. Then a Relief Society sister invited her to an enrichment activity where they learned how to make soap, a commodity difficult to come by in the distant village where she lived. At another activity she learned to bake high-quality bread, which was not available close to her home. Her enthusiasm has continued as sisters gather regularly to bake bread for their homes and for the sacrament on Sundays.

In Mexico, interested sisters learned some methods for cutting hair. For many, learning this money-saving skill helped their families financially.

In one singles ward, Relief Society leaders asked the elders quorum to teach the Relief Society sisters how to change a flat tire and check the oil in their automobiles. This not only helped build self-reliance among the sisters, but it also provided an opportunity for these young single members to socialize with each other.

How, then, are the new guidelines for home, family, and personal enrichment being received by Relief Society sisters? They are being welcomed in many areas with faith, enthusiasm, and creativity. As time goes on, this inspired program will continue to grow and bless the lives of even more Relief Society sisters of all ages around the world. ■



BY CHERYL YOUNG

At times Heavenly Father sends sweet little blessings into our lives. For me, oddly enough, a tomato plant became my teacher and blessed my life during the course of one summer.

The unseasonably cool spring of 2002 in the Salt Lake Valley prompted me to delay transplanting tomato plants into my garden as I normally would. I watched day after day as the temperatures remained too low for me to safely put the plants in the ground. Finally, as summer approached,

THE Parable OF THE Tomato Plant

As I struggled with cancer, I wanted this tiny, struggling plant to beat the odds.

I cautiously placed some recently purchased plants on the patio for sunlight, planning to bring them into the protection of the house before nightfall.

I awoke the following morning to find several inches of snow on the ground. This was incredible—it was the 13th of June! My surprise quickly turned to frustration as I realized I had forgotten to bring the plants in. I rushed outside to find the once vibrant, green leaves turned to a heap of withered, blackened decay.

“What a waste!” I thought as I carried my pathetic plants to the garbage. But on my way I noticed something—a tiny green sprig. Closer examination revealed a two-inch

sprout growing just to the side of one of the dead mother plants. The helpless offspring had been protected from the cold and had somehow survived.

Exactly one year prior to this discovery, I had started months of chemotherapy treatment for cancer. All forms of life had become especially precious to me. I couldn't throw the little plant away, despite the fact that it seemed pointless to plant it this late in the growing season. But it was still alive, and I wanted it to beat the odds.

A week later I set the sprout aside as I transplanted a second round of large tomato plants. I applied fertilizer and stepped back to admire my work. Almost as an afterthought I found a spot on the edge of the garden for the "little guy." Having little hope for it, I placed it in an area with poor soil and minimal sun exposure. I thought of myself as charitable for sparing it as I watered it periodically.

I was completely taken by surprise when I saw that the plant was not only growing but *thriving*. It grew exponentially in the following weeks and began to bear fruit. The tomatoes were numerous and large. My other plants were puny and unproductive by comparison. Soon my remarkable tomato "bush" had captured my full attention. The plant was more than five feet tall and almost as many feet in circumference. The tomato cage that had once seemed too big for this tiny plant was now buried deep beneath the foliage. A hodgepodge of stakes and poles were positioned to support it. I had difficulty keeping up with what seemed like endless production.

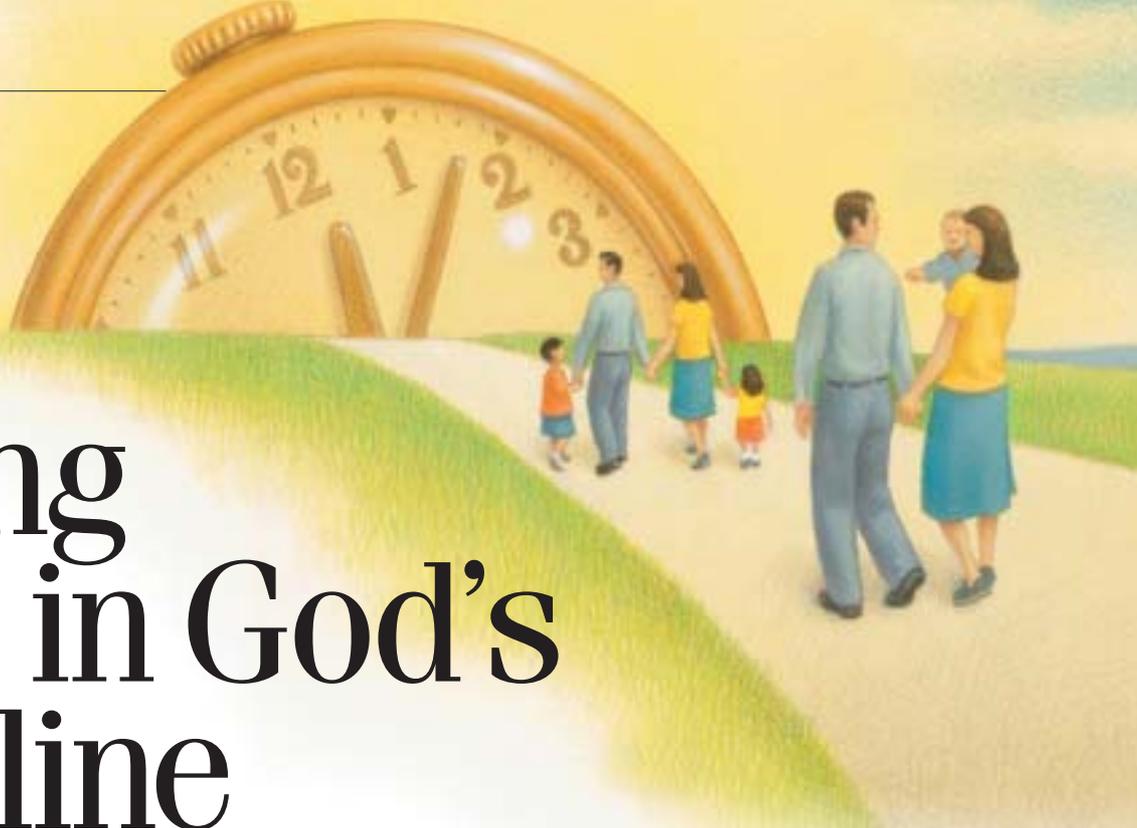
One day late in summer, as I filled a basket with tomatoes, I fought the urge to let some

go to waste. I was tired of the work. I had preserved more tomatoes than I could have imagined. But I persisted to mine into the depths of the plant for more tomatoes. In the center, as I pushed the jungle of leaves aside, I saw a beautiful, red-ripened tomato. I tugged at it gently and then examined it in my hand.

I felt tears in my eyes as I looked at it and saw a heart-shaped tomato. The once tiny plant had survived and given so generously to me. How I had underestimated the worth of that little plant. It had hidden potential that I might easily have thrown away, but it had been worth saving. I pondered many things as I looked at it. I thought of the godly potential we each possess. I thought of my own struggle with cancer, grateful that I too was surviving and that I too was worth saving.

It was not until the cold November winds began to blow that I finally took the tomato plant out of the garden. The rest of my garden had been cleared long before. The cumbersome tangle of stems and leaves had withered as it stood propped up alone in the garden. To me it stood for a life that surmounted overwhelming odds to come away victorious. I thought of it as symbolic of the transformation that can come to each of us through our Savior's love.

Every year as I work in my garden, I marvel at the lessons I learned from a tomato plant that had survived against difficult odds and had given me a heart-shaped tomato at a time when I too was struggling to survive. I am grateful beyond measure for the tender mercies of the Lord that bless our lives. ■



Having Faith in God's Timeline

As a single woman, I have come to appreciate that the Lord sustains us in our unique timelines.

BY CATHERINE EDWARDS

When I was 19 years old, one of my best friends was married. The wedding was wonderful, she looked beautiful, the groom was handsome, and they were happy. I, on the other hand, was a little distraught. I was caught off guard by what she was doing. She was altering my vision for her—and for me. I definitely wanted to get married, just not yet. I thought we were both so young, and here she was marrying not only before graduating from college, but before she had the chance to travel much or engage in intellectually stimulating career opportunities. I was up the night prior to her wedding, anxious about what would happen in her future, while she was sound asleep, rightly confident in her decision.

As I look back on my reaction, I have to smile. What was I thinking? I look at her life now: she has two lovely children and a loving home. A few months after her wedding it became clear to me that she had made the right decision, and it is even clearer now. I recognize that she was prayerful and thoughtful and trusted in God's promptings to her.

That was 20 years ago. I am still single. The majority of my friends are married; they have husbands and children and homes. I have a home: a rented two-bedroom apartment in New York City. I don't have a husband or children. I've wondered on occasion if people have the same late-night concerns for me as I had for my friend.

I am sure I have made some errors in my life, but I don't believe I have done anything that would preclude me from the blessing of marriage. I admittedly wonder on occasion if my life would be different if I had done better or worked harder or been kinder, and yet I realize I have done good things and that I consistently try to move forward with an eternal perspective. I try to do my part to fulfill my desire for a temple marriage.

I also recognize that God understands the timeline for important events in my life, and it is different from the timeline of many others. I am tremendously grateful to understand this. My appreciation has grown as I have developed faith in a loving Heavenly Father, who understands what I need and what I can give to others.



Recognizing that my life is on a different timeline has been a process. My queries to God regarding His design for me have led to a sense that I have distinct potential and goodness. I find that this sense of assurance is most often challenged not by my own ideas but by the frequently well-intentioned concerns of others. The feelings of others regarding my single state are not dissimilar from the reaction I had toward my 19-year-old, soon-to-be-married friend. I presumed that I understood what she should do, but I was wrong.

Sometimes people suggest possible explanations as to why I don't have a husband and children yet. I know that most often these ideas are kindly offered, and yet underlying them seems to be a sense that I have erred in my eligibility for the blessings of marriage and children. I have been told that perhaps I am too picky, too aggressive, too smart, too career oriented, too independent, too liberal, and—my favorite—too happy. I must say that on occasion I take some of these critiques as compliments, and yet at the same time I recognize that there are married women who are smarter, more aggressive, pickier, and more independent than I am.

A Goal of Discipleship

As I reflect on what I believe is God's timeline for important events in my life, I am keenly aware of my choices and agency. As children of our Heavenly Father, we are given the happy opportunity and responsibility to pursue the blessing of marriage. By working toward that goal, we are doing our part.

As a member of the Church, I have the blessings of prayer, the scriptures, the ward I attend, and the words of the prophets to give me a deeper understanding of Heavenly Father and the Savior. Each of these blessings provides guidelines for using my agency well. I hope that wisdom is reflected in the decisions I make, including in my response to unanticipated joys and challenges.

I regularly take stock of my life and my situation. The most important aspect of that self-inquiry is the question of my worthiness. I have made a dedicated effort to abide by the doctrines and practices of the Church: to attend my meetings and the temple, to pay tithing, to live a virtuous life, and to serve others. I believe in the Savior's Atonement and in the efficacy of lives spent living by the commandments and the directives of the prophets.

Whether we are married, divorced, widowed, or not yet married, we all have the blessing of our common divine ancestry and divine and distinct roles. I am grateful for a loving Heavenly Father, who knows what we can do with our lives—disparate and exciting as they are.



A Rich Life

I am frequently asked how I can be cheerful as an unmarried member of a church and culture that emphasize marriage. I'll tell you what I have done.

My sister Christine and I determined at a young age that we would certainly marry one day, and in the meantime we would live in a manner that would make us more well-rounded and well-developed people. I am so grateful we made that plan—a plan that is tied to our desire to do what we believe God hopes for us. It was, at its core, a plan that relied on listening to the promptings of the Spirit.

My sister married 10 years ago and has two wonderful children. She earned a PhD and makes significant contributions to the Church and to her community. I continue to live by our plan, and I believe that is what God wants me to do. I consistently check in on whether what I'm doing is right—if my

goals in life match the larger goal of discipleship to the Savior. I work to ensure that my pursuits and endeavors, both spiritual and secular, lead me to better understand my role as a daughter of God.

As a single Latter-day Saint woman, I have the opportunity to serve in ways that are wonderful. I have a career that is service oriented, and I am able to fulfill my Church callings. I have developed my talents and have enjoyed unique educational pursuits. My life is rich. Throughout, I seek to follow the Lord's promptings in my decisions.

Several years ago I, along with six other single women in my age range, had the unique and unexpected opportunity to meet with Relief Society general president Bonnie D. Parkin. We spent a little more than an hour together talking about our lives as single women in the Church.

That meeting was one of the real blessings

of my life that year. As we sat around the table in Sister Parkin's office, we spoke of the challenges and the blessings in our lives. At the end she asked us if we had a final comment we wanted to make. I raised my hand and pronounced, "The Church is the best place to be a single woman." Given the opportunity over the course of that short hour to bear my testimony of service and loyalty to God, I had genuinely deepened my testimony of my role in the Church. I knew what my role was before, but I needed that forum to articulate it and deepen my conviction of its importance.

Confidence in the Individual

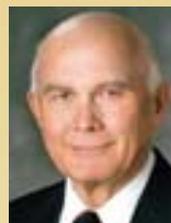
In the Church I believe there is a distinct need to develop confidence in the individual, not as he or she should fit into some culturally prescribed timeline but as he or she follows personal revelations from a loving Heavenly Father. It is important to have confidence that other people may be doing the right thing and to recognize that even when their lives look different, they have unique offerings we need. It is too easy to assume that one schedule is right for everyone.

Everyone has challenges. Whether we are married, divorced, widowed, or not yet married, we all have the blessing of our common divine ancestry and divine and distinct roles.

Of course I pray that I will marry and that my husband and I will have children. In the meantime I am working to extend and expand my gospel-oriented life. I have blessings as a single woman that I would be ungrateful and negligent to squander, and I am confident that those blessings will ultimately make me a better wife and mother.

I am grateful for a loving Heavenly Father, who knows us and knows what we can do with our lives—disparate and exciting as they are. I am grateful for the life I have and the opportunities ahead of me. I pray that each of us can have confidence in the Lord's timelines for us, timelines that are supported by our good decisions and faith in God. ■

MARRIAGE AND THE LORD'S TIMING



"The timing of marriage is perhaps the best example of an extremely important event in our lives that is almost impossible to plan. Like other important mortal events that depend on the agency of others or the will and timing of the Lord,

marriage cannot be anticipated or planned with certainty. We can and should work for and pray for our righteous desires, but despite this, many will remain single well beyond their desired time for marriage.

"So what should be done in the meantime? Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ prepares us for whatever life brings. This kind of faith prepares us to deal with life's opportunities—to take advantage of those that are received and to persist through the disappointments of those that are lost. In the exercise of that faith, we should commit ourselves to the priorities and standards we will follow on matters we do not control and persist faithfully in those commitments, whatever happens to us because of the agency of others or the timing of the Lord. When we do this, we will have a constancy in our lives that will give us direction and peace. Whatever the circumstances beyond our control, our commitments and standards can be constant.

"The commitments and service of adult singles can anchor them through the difficult years of waiting for the right time and the right person. Their commitments and service can also inspire and strengthen others. Wise are those who make this commitment: I will put the Lord first in my life, and I will keep His commandments. The performance of that commitment is within everyone's control. We can fulfill that commitment without regard to what others decide to do, and that commitment will anchor us no matter what timing the Lord directs for the most important events in our lives."

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Timing," *Liahona and Ensign*, Oct. 2003, 15.



Joshua's Walls

BY CINDY GRITTON

My husband and I expected to raise a typical little boy, but the Lord sent us one who faced life in a different way.

When my husband, Greg, gave our son, Joshua, a name and a blessing, neither of us realized the significance of a simple phrase contained in it: “We bless you with all the blessings the Lord has in store for you, blessings the Lord has reserved just for you.”

His Words

Joshua arrived as a healthy and happy baby. At two months old, he amazed me, and I little imagined how his future would differ from my ideas of it. After all, one afternoon as I finished changing a diaper, he said, “Thank you.” Stunned, I stared at him while he smiled at me. “Who will ever believe me?” I thought. Then, a week later, we took Joshua to the doctor for a worsening cold.

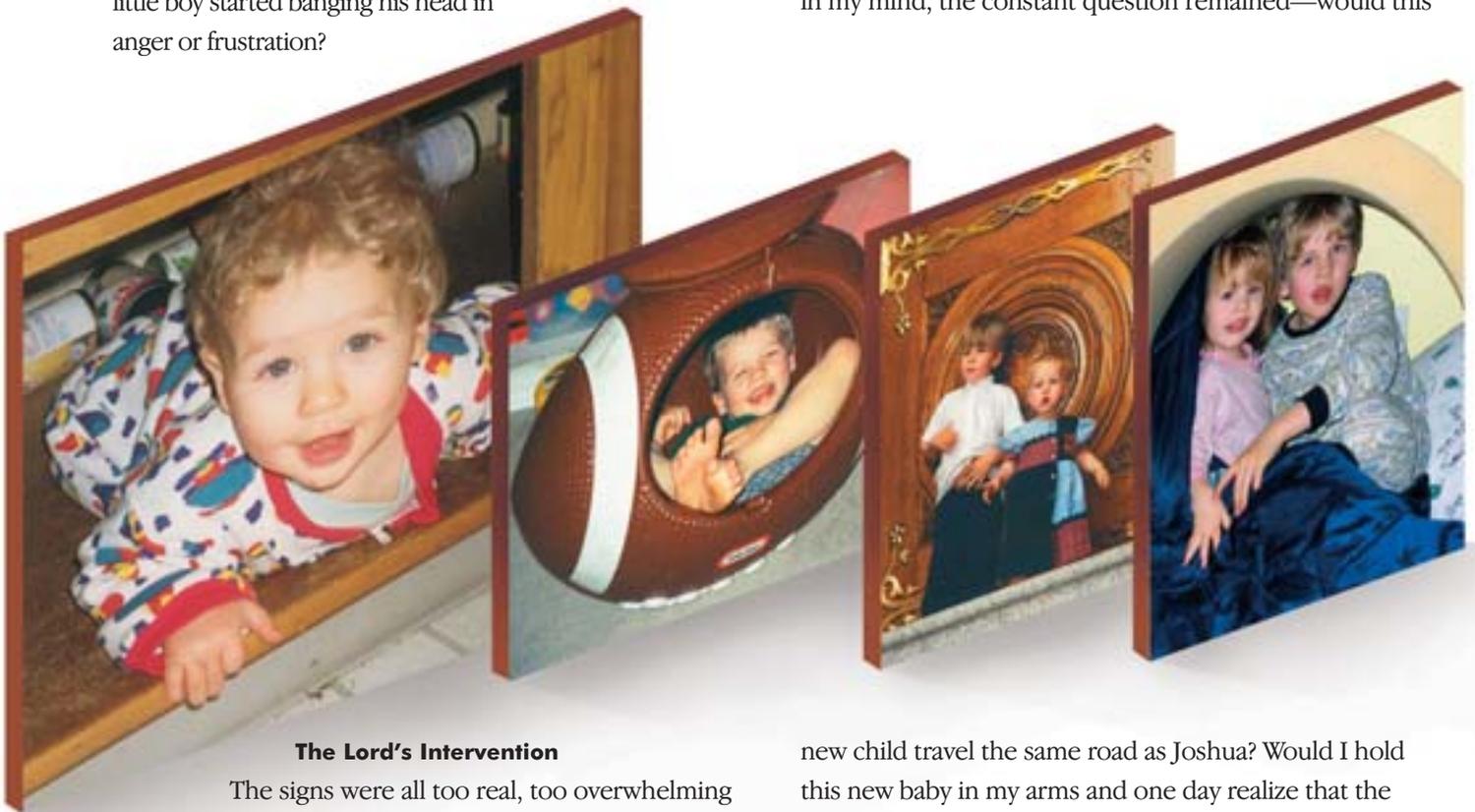
The nurse had just weighed him when he said something. She paled, looked up at the doctor, and asked, “Did you hear that?”

Looking equally startled, the doctor nodded, “Yes.” “He said, ‘Thank you,’” the nurse said.

I smiled. A week later Greg heard him say it too, and we couldn’t help but think Joshua would talk early and easily. But the Lord knew otherwise, and I truly believe that the Lord blessed Joshua to express his thanks those few times before his verbal abilities became restricted by high-functioning autism.

For months I had tried telling Joshua about his soon-to-arrive sister, but each attempt was ignored. Then, although Joshua’s silent walls remained firmly in place, we had a moment of unhindered communication.

Prior to his diagnosis, Joshua seemed to develop normally. As he approached his second birthday, his enthusiastic vocabulary remained limited. I initially calmed Greg's concerns about Joshua by reminding him that boys usually talk later. But then one day I realized something. Words—*his* words—were gone. When had I last heard him say “mmm” when he saw the moon or a cat? Where was his lilting voice calling my name or his father's? Why, when he loved numbers so much, didn't he even attempt to say them? And why had our sweet little boy started banging his head in anger or frustration?



The Lord's Intervention

The signs were all too real, too overwhelming to avoid. But our pediatrician's own pregnancy had developed complications, and so I waited, unsure if I should take Joshua to the on-call doctor, who didn't know him. The Lord answered my prayers in His own way. On a plane trip home from visiting friends, I noticed that Joshua had developed a high fever. I had to take him in.

The on-call doctor discovered that he had an ear infection, and her manner was so kind that I decided to ask her advice on what I should do.

“You mean about his lack of speech?” she interrupted. Stunned, I replied, “Yes. And he's been banging his head.”

“Those are signs we watch for in autism,” she said. Her office provided me with the phone number for Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education, and I called. It was only later that I learned what a blessing this truly was: our regular pediatrician didn't know about this service, but the Lord knew who did.

Becoming a Big Brother

During this time, a new life was growing within me. And in my mind, the constant question remained—would this

new child travel the same road as Joshua? Would I hold this new baby in my arms and one day realize that the silent walls that had grown up around Joshua now also surrounded her? I turned to the Lord often and trusted that Heavenly Father would provide us with the answers needed to help this new child. The priesthood blessings I received during my pregnancy brought me the comfort of knowing that this new child would be healthy. I held onto this promise while still feeling that “healthy” didn't necessarily rule out autism.

Trying to prepare Joshua for big brotherhood now presented an interesting challenge. For months I had tried telling Joshua that a baby was in my tummy, but each attempt

was ignored. Then one day, as I held him on my lap, I tried one more time.

“Joshua, there’s a baby in Mommy’s tummy.”

His little face turned up to mine, and in one swift, intense look he conveyed his comprehension and thoughts, “Mom, you’re crazy!” I thought I would never stop laughing. Though Joshua’s silent walls remained firmly in place, I gratefully recognized this moment of unhindered communication.

“Where’s the baby?” became my new question in trying to engage Joshua. Quickly, his small fingers answered by pointing to my tummy. “Do you love the baby?” He smiled, kissed my tummy, and laughed. When his little sister, Annica, was born, he kissed her lovingly while watching me out of the corner of his eyes. My tears fell into his hair as I held him.

When Annica was a month old, we received the Early Intervention team’s official diagnosis for Joshua, now three, and learned that he met the requirements for high-functioning autism. Our faint sliver of hope that he was simply delayed faded away. Now the word *autism* became part of who our son was. And yet he was still Joshua; he really hadn’t changed—just our understanding of who he is had changed. We felt blessed that Joshua, unlike many autistic children, readily expressed emotion. Love seemed to flow from him, even if shared in brief acts of affection—swift, open-mouthed kisses, hugs that barely touched us, smiles when he was happy. His own little world existed, but he crossed into ours readily when he wanted to.

Still, at times, the pain of Joshua’s disability became almost overwhelming. Joshua found a way to express his enjoyment of music, bouncing up and down with the beat. But I cried at the thought that he might never sing or even hum. His earnest attempts to express his wants and thoughts

MANIFESTING THE WORKS OF GOD



“You parents and you families whose lives must be reordered because of a handicapped one, whose resources and time must be devoted to them, are special heroes. You are manifesting the works of God with every thought, with every gesture of tenderness and care you extend to the handicapped loved one. . . . You are living the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ in exceptional purity.”

President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Moving of the Water,” *Ensign*, May 1991, 9.



DETAIL FROM MASTER, I HAVE BROUGHT UNTO THEE MY SON, BY WALTER RANE, COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF CHURCH HISTORY AND ART

often frustrated us both when I couldn’t interpret his pointing.

By the age of five, Joshua still hadn’t regained his speech beyond a few words. His two years in Early Intervention blessed him with wonderful teachers who helped him begin to understand social interactions and responsibilities, but words still remained elusive.

Receiving Inspiration

One November day, the pain became so great that I turned to the scriptures and searched for every instance of the Savior healing a “dumb” person. I read each passage, and then I read in Mark 9:17–29 of the father who brought his son to Jesus after the disciples failed to heal him. The father’s words echoed in my soul: “Have compassion on us, and help us.”

“Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.

“And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears,

Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (vv. 22–24).

The Savior rebuked the evil spirit and delivered the son to his father whole. Then verses 28 and 29 caught my attention:

“And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out?

“And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.”

I had always loved this story but somehow had forgotten to apply it. We prayed for Joshua often, but we had never devoted a fast to his progress.

The next morning, as my mom and I talked on the phone about Joshua, she asked, “Cindy, have you ever fasted as a family for him?” I shared my experience of the day before, in awe of the Lord’s great love and guidance. We quickly decided to hold a family fast for Joshua the

next Sunday, and we began calling our relatives.

That Sunday after church, Greg and a man from our ward gave Joshua a priesthood blessing. He was blessed that he would learn to talk faster and that he would continue to progress cognitively. My fears for his speech disappeared. But I also knew that I would need to be patient.

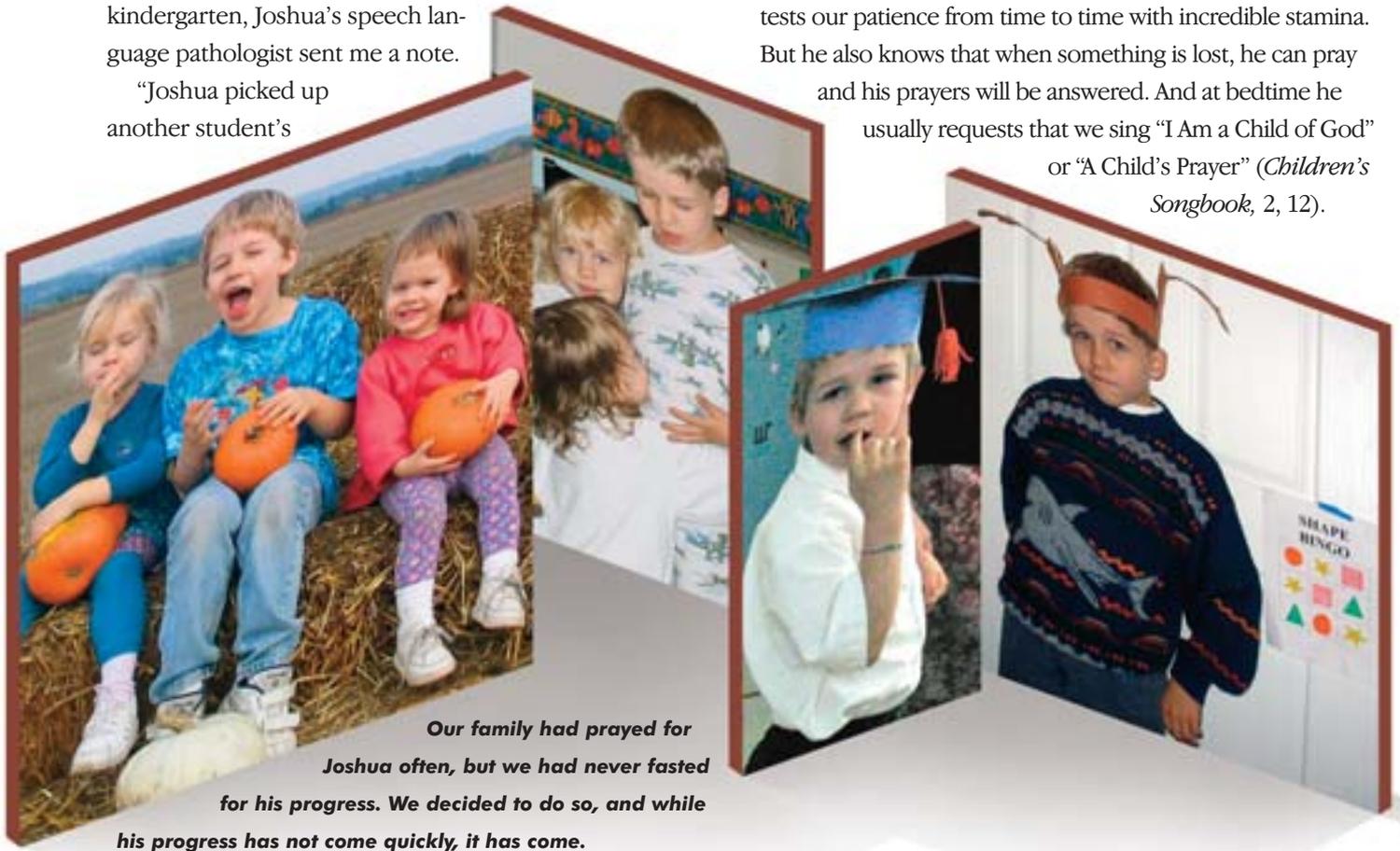
Progressing with Faith

Nine months later, with only two months to go before kindergarten, Joshua's speech language pathologist sent me a note.

"Joshua picked up another student's

on one end of the bleachers, Joshua wore his construction paper cap. He didn't sing all the words to each song; his eyes often fixated on something in his own mind. But then a tune would pull him back, and he would joyfully sing at the top of his voice. I could hardly contain my joy at seeing how the Lord had fulfilled His promise to our little boy.

Now Joshua is a rambunctious ten-year-old. He still receives speech therapy, struggles to fully understand social situations, finds school and church boring on occasion, and tests our patience from time to time with incredible stamina. But he also knows that when something is lost, he can pray and his prayers will be answered. And at bedtime he usually requests that we sing "I Am a Child of God" or "A Child's Prayer" (*Children's Songbook*, 2, 12).



Our family had prayed for Joshua often, but we had never fasted for his progress. We decided to do so, and while his progress has not come quickly, it has come.

B book today and pointed to each picture and said, "B!"

From that moment on, Joshua eagerly pointed out everything that started with *B* and even slowly regained his original words.

At the end of kindergarten, Joshua marched beside his aide to kindergarten graduation. At the start of that year, he hadn't been able to sing, but he could spell many words by pointing to letters, and he could say about 25 words. Now Greg and I videotaped him as he joined with about a hundred other kindergarten children in singing songs. Standing

When Joshua entered our lives, Greg and I expected to raise a little boy like others, but the Lord sent us one who needed to face life in a different way. Joshua of old found the walls of Jericho facing him, and those walls came down only by the power of the Lord (see Joshua 6:1–20). I know that one day, through the power of the Lord, all of our Joshua's walls will come down, though it may not be here on earth. I hope and pray that until then Greg and I will always receive the inspiration we need to help Joshua achieve his full potential. ■

Forgiving Oneself

BY ELDER D. CHAD RICHARDSON

Area Seventy
North America Southwest Area



The Lord makes no exceptions when He declares, “I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.”

This includes forgiving ourselves.

At a recent stake conference, as the congregation sang the hymn “Praise to the Man,” I thought about the composer, William W. Phelps. I was grateful for his hymns—15 in the current hymnbook—and for his love of the gospel and of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

I recalled how, during the trials of Missouri, he was reprimanded for misuse of Church funds and selling lands contrary to counsel. As a result, he became very bitter in Far West and turned against the Prophet and the Saints. Along with other apostates, W. W. Phelps was involved in an affidavit against the Prophet issued in Richmond, Missouri, in November 1838. After Governor Lilburn W. Boggs’s extermination order, the Saints were driven from Missouri, while the Prophet and his associates were imprisoned for months in the terrible winter dungeon of Liberty Jail.

By 1840 W. W. Phelps had experienced a profound change of heart and wrote to the Prophet pleading for forgiveness. In response, Joseph’s letter concluded with the couplet “Come on, dear brother, since the war is past, / For friends at first, are friends again at last.”¹ Joseph freely forgave Brother Phelps and took him back into full fellowship.

When Brother Phelps learned that Joseph and Hyrum had been killed by a mob, he was

devastated. With great power and inspiration, he expressed his own feelings and those of the entire Church as he penned the hymn “Praise to the Man.”

As we sang that hymn in stake conference, I was deeply moved by one line in the chorus: “Traitors and tyrants now fight him in vain.”² How, I wondered, could Brother Phelps speak of traitors and tyrants fighting the Prophet when he himself had been one? Immediately I realized not only that Brother Phelps was no longer a traitor but also that he must have come to no longer see himself as one. The genuine, complete love and trust he received from Brother Joseph helped make it possible for him not only to forgive himself but also to erase his image of himself as a traitor.

We Must Forgive All

Unfortunately, many Latter-day Saints today continue to carry the burden of past sins because they refuse to forgive themselves. President Howard W. Hunter (1907–95) observed: “It has always struck me as being sad that those among us who would not think of reprimanding our neighbor, much less a total stranger, for mistakes that have been made or weaknesses that might be evident, will nevertheless be cruel and unforgiving to themselves. When the scriptures say





People trapped in a cycle of sin, self-condemnation, and further sin, tend to become discouraged. In contrast, the Savior beckons us forward with the promise that we can become free from the chains of sin as we fully repent and forgive ourselves.

to judge righteously, that means with fairness and compassion and charity. That's how we must judge ourselves. We need to be patient and forgiving of ourselves, just as we must be patient and forgiving of others.”³

Apparently, many individuals do not understand the importance of self-forgiveness in the process of repentance. The Lord, however, makes no exceptions when He declares, “I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive *all* men” (D&C 64:10; emphasis added). This includes forgiving ourselves.

Without doubt, Satan uses this refusal to forgive ourselves as a means of enslaving us by turning past sins into addictions. He tempts some, for example, to believe that if they make themselves suffer enough, they will not return to the sin. This often leads, however, to self-loathing or self-abuse.

Satan tempts others to judge themselves harshly and to believe they don't deserve to be forgiven, even when the Lord is willing to forgive them. Such individuals continue

to dwell on their transgressions and mistakes, remembering the details and thus increasing the danger of repeating them. According to President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Preoccupation with unworthy behavior can lead to unworthy behavior.”⁴

People trapped in this cycle of sin, self-condemnation, and further sin, tend to become discouraged. Satan also uses discouragement to create addictions. A discouraged individual will be tempted to stop trying or to seek solace in more sin. In contrast, the Savior beckons us forward with the promise that we can become free from the chains of sin as we fully repent and forgive ourselves.

Sorrow for Sin

Sorrow always follows the recognition of sin. The destructive form of this sorrow, which often manifests itself as self-condemnation, is related to what the Apostle

Paul called “sorrow of the world,” which “worketh death.” In contrast, he described a positive form of sorrow, “godly sorrow,” which “worketh repentance to salvation” (2 Corinthians 7:10). A main difference between these two forms of sorrow is their source. Worldly sorrow is promoted by Satan. It is the sorrow of being caught, of not being able to continue sinning, or of turning against oneself with self-loathing or disdain.

Godly sorrow, on the other hand, is sorrow given as a gift from God to those who are willing to receive it. Godly sorrow leads us to a full recognition of the magnitude of our sins but with the knowledge that we can become free of them. It leads us to fully recognize the wrongs we have committed without giving in to the temptation to see ourselves as worthless or beyond God’s love.

There is no room in godly sorrow for self-contempt. Those who refuse to forgive themselves thus bear a double burden of sin, for not only do they carry the sin itself, but they also add to it the sin of self-condemnation and refusing to forgive. Indeed, refusal to forgive is cited in the scriptures as “the greater sin” (D&C 64:9).

We Are Not Alone

Over the years, as I have counseled with members and missionaries, I have found that many wonderful, otherwise faithful Latter-day Saints find it difficult to forgive themselves, even after being told that they must do so. Some have deep-seated patterns of anger and impatience with themselves that are hard to change.

Fortunately, we are not alone. The Savior, through His Atonement, can help us not only to remove the sins but also to forgive ourselves. To receive His help, we need to ask for it. And we need to be willing, given all our mortal limitations and weaknesses, to do all that we can do (see 2 Nephi 25:23).

President Packer taught:

“Save for the exception of the very few who defect to perdition, there is no habit, no addiction, no rebellion, no transgression, no apostasy, no crime exempted from the promise of complete forgiveness. That is the promise of the Atonement of Christ. . . .

“ . . . Do not give up if at first you fail. . . . Do not give up. That brilliant morning will come.”⁵

Love is a necessary precursor to being able to forgive oneself. As we develop an overpowering love of and gratitude for Jesus for His willingness to forgive us, we earnestly desire to come unto Him—to study His life and teachings and act upon them so that we become more like Him. As we do that, our own capacity to love grows to the point that we can indeed love and forgive ourselves and others.

Forgetting

Forgetting is part of forgiving. But forgiving oneself involves a special kind of forgetting. We don’t forget the sin and its effects; rather, the memory ceases to be part of how we see ourselves. For example, when Alma had been forgiven of his sins, he said, “I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more” (Alma 36:19). The fact that he could describe his repentance to his son Helaman showed that a memory was still there. But through Christ’s Atonement and forgiveness, that memory lost its edge of guilt and self-recrimination.

We must keep sin in its proper perspective. Satan would convince us that we are defined by our sins. He would have had the repentant W. W. Phelps see himself always as a traitor. He would convince someone who has stolen that he is and always will be a thief.

The Savior, in contrast, would have us understand that we have sins that need to be cleansed, but we are much more than those stains. If I spill ketchup on my shirt, I have a stain. Perhaps it is right in front where everyone can see it. But while I have a stain, *I* am not the stain. I need to recognize that there is a good deal of my shirt that is clean and white. I believe that God sees the white shirt—the goodness in His children—and offers, through Christ, to remove the stains. If we obsess about the stain, however, it will become who we are in our minds and then in our actions.

Many years ago I had an experience that helped me understand the forgetting process. When I was very young, a man with a large, rather startling birthmark on his face moved into our ward. After some time, this man was called as our bishop, and he served during all my Aaronic Priesthood years. He was a wonderful bishop, and the members of our ward learned to love him dearly.

Years later, while I was attending BYU, someone vaguely familiar with the town where I grew up asked me who my

bishop was. He didn't recognize the name I gave and asked for a description. I described his height, his profession, and many other things about him. The individual asked, "Oh, is he the man with the birthmark on his face?" I had to think for a moment and then said, "Yes, I guess he does have a birthmark." I was surprised at myself, for in my mind the birthmark had disappeared. That simply was not an important part of who he was to me, though I could still remember it if I tried.

Forgiveness Does Not Mean Excusing Sin

Forgiving a sin does not mean excusing it. When we forgive a sin, we neither say it is OK nor that payment will not be required. Rather, forgiveness allows us to turn both the final judgment of guilt and the full payment of the debt over to the Lord. The Lord tells us in Doctrine and Covenants 64:11, "Ye ought to say in your hearts—let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds."

Further, in Doctrine and Covenants 82:23, He says, "Leave judgment alone with me, for it is mine and I will repay."

When we sin or make mistakes, our Heavenly Father wants us to quickly resume our journey home with a new and even stronger grip on the iron rod. The repentance of Alma the Younger illustrates this principle of moving on. A "wicked and an idolatrous man" (Mosiah 27:8), he was brought to a realization of his sins, repented, and experienced a mighty change of heart (see Mosiah 27:11–37). He chose to take the strait and narrow path, filling his mind and his life with good works rather than remaining at the

side of the road worrying about his past transgressions. He didn't have time for that. And neither do we.

The Savior Is Key

When we turn to our Savior, He can heal us not only of the sin but also of the self-recrimination and the constant mental replaying of our sins or obsessing over them. We

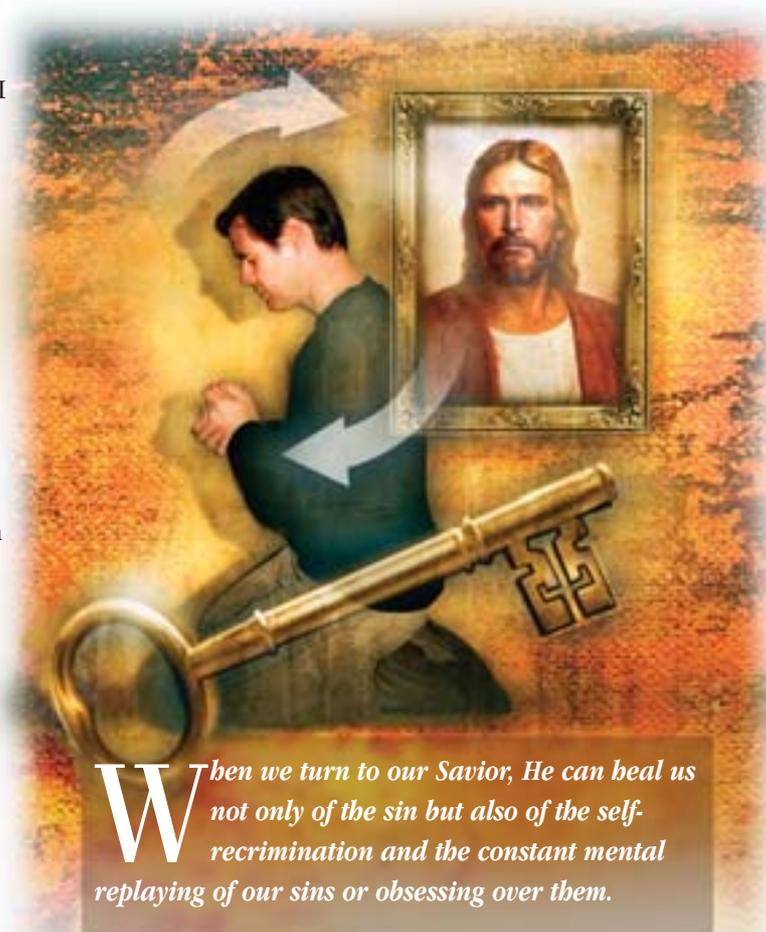
must turn the sins and the guilt over to the Savior in a process of complete repentance. For serious sins we will need the help of a bishop or another appropriate priesthood leader to complete our repentance. We then must let the Savior judge whether we or He must make final payment for the sin. Finally, we will need the Savior's help to feel self-acceptance rather than self-contempt.

With the Lord's help, we will experience a change in how we see ourselves. I believe this is the wonderful change that happened to Brother Phelps.

Because of his repentance and his willingness to forgive himself, he was no longer a traitor. He was able to accomplish many great spiritual and civic works following the Prophet's death. I believe his accomplishments would have been highly unlikely had he not, with the help of the Prophet and the Lord, fully forgiven himself. Let us learn from his example. ■

NOTES

1. See *History of the Church*, 4:163; see also 141–42.
2. *Hymns*, no. 27.
3. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (1997), 34.
4. "Little Children," *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 17.
5. "The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 20.



When we turn to our Savior, He can heal us not only of the sin but also of the self-recrimination and the constant mental replaying of our sins or obsessing over them.



Hailstorm

BY STEPHEN L. KNIGHT

With the storm only minutes away, there was nothing we could do physically to save our crop.



In 1974 my wife and I made a decision that dramatically altered our lifestyle. Although neither of us had ever lived on a farm, circumstances offered us the opportunity to move from our comfortable city life in Portland, Oregon, to a small farm 350 miles away.

In October of the following year, I found myself standing, for the very first time, on the platform of a combine, harvesting 140 acres of barley. To the occasional passerby on the nearby highway, there was nothing remarkable about that scene. I was simply one of dozens of farmers in that valley who was busily engaged in the annual harvest. Unknown to those passersby was the unique and sacred significance of our harvest and the divine intervention that had made it so plentiful.

It happened on a day in midsummer. The barley crop was thick and fully grown but still green. The heads of grain were full and fat. We had recently finished the final irrigation, and now all that remained before harvest was the ripening that would turn the fields from green to gold. The skies were cloudy that morning, but not unusually threatening—at least not until early afternoon, when the local radio station issued a warning that a severe hailstorm was headed our way.

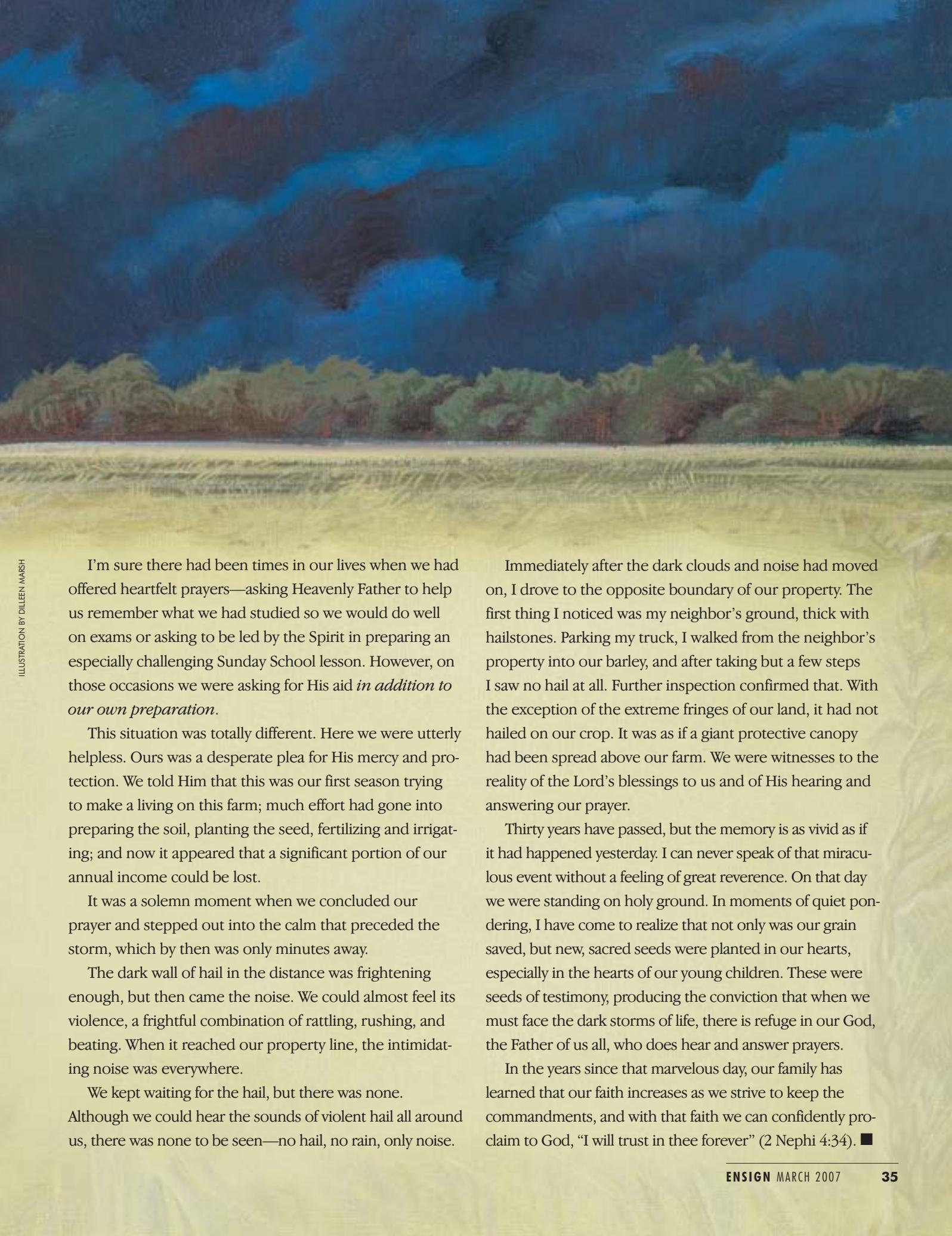
Stepping outside, I looked in the direction of the storm. The extremely dark and massive nature of the clouds told me this storm would be a serious threat to our crop.

Within an hour it would be directly over our farm.

Because I had always lived in the city, I had never looked at a hailstorm as anything more than a novelty of nature. As a child I had enjoyed watching as hailstones bounced on the ground and settled in the grass, and I remember occasionally running outside to scoop them up in my hands. The hailstones of my childhood seemed so harmless, but I realized that this day I would not be enjoying them at all.

I wasn't experienced as a farmer. As evidence of this, it wasn't until that day that I learned I could have purchased crop insurance for protection against such a storm. But now it was too late, and I realized that if this fierce hailstorm struck our barley, it could shatter many heads of grain and scatter our family's only source of income onto the ground.

Our farm was a square of land that measured slightly less than one-half mile (about 800 meters) on each side. There is no physical way to protect such a large expanse. After discussing the situation, my wife and I concluded that we were facing a major threat to our crop and that there was nothing we could physically do about it. Prayer was our only hope. Gathering our little family around us—two sons, ages two and four, and our five-year-old daughter—we followed the counsel Amulek gave to the Zoramites: "Cry unto him over the crops of your fields, that ye may prosper in them" (Alma 34:24).



I'm sure there had been times in our lives when we had offered heartfelt prayers—asking Heavenly Father to help us remember what we had studied so we would do well on exams or asking to be led by the Spirit in preparing an especially challenging Sunday School lesson. However, on those occasions we were asking for His aid *in addition to our own preparation*.

This situation was totally different. Here we were utterly helpless. Ours was a desperate plea for His mercy and protection. We told Him that this was our first season trying to make a living on this farm; much effort had gone into preparing the soil, planting the seed, fertilizing and irrigating; and now it appeared that a significant portion of our annual income could be lost.

It was a solemn moment when we concluded our prayer and stepped out into the calm that preceded the storm, which by then was only minutes away.

The dark wall of hail in the distance was frightening enough, but then came the noise. We could almost feel its violence, a frightful combination of rattling, rushing, and beating. When it reached our property line, the intimidating noise was everywhere.

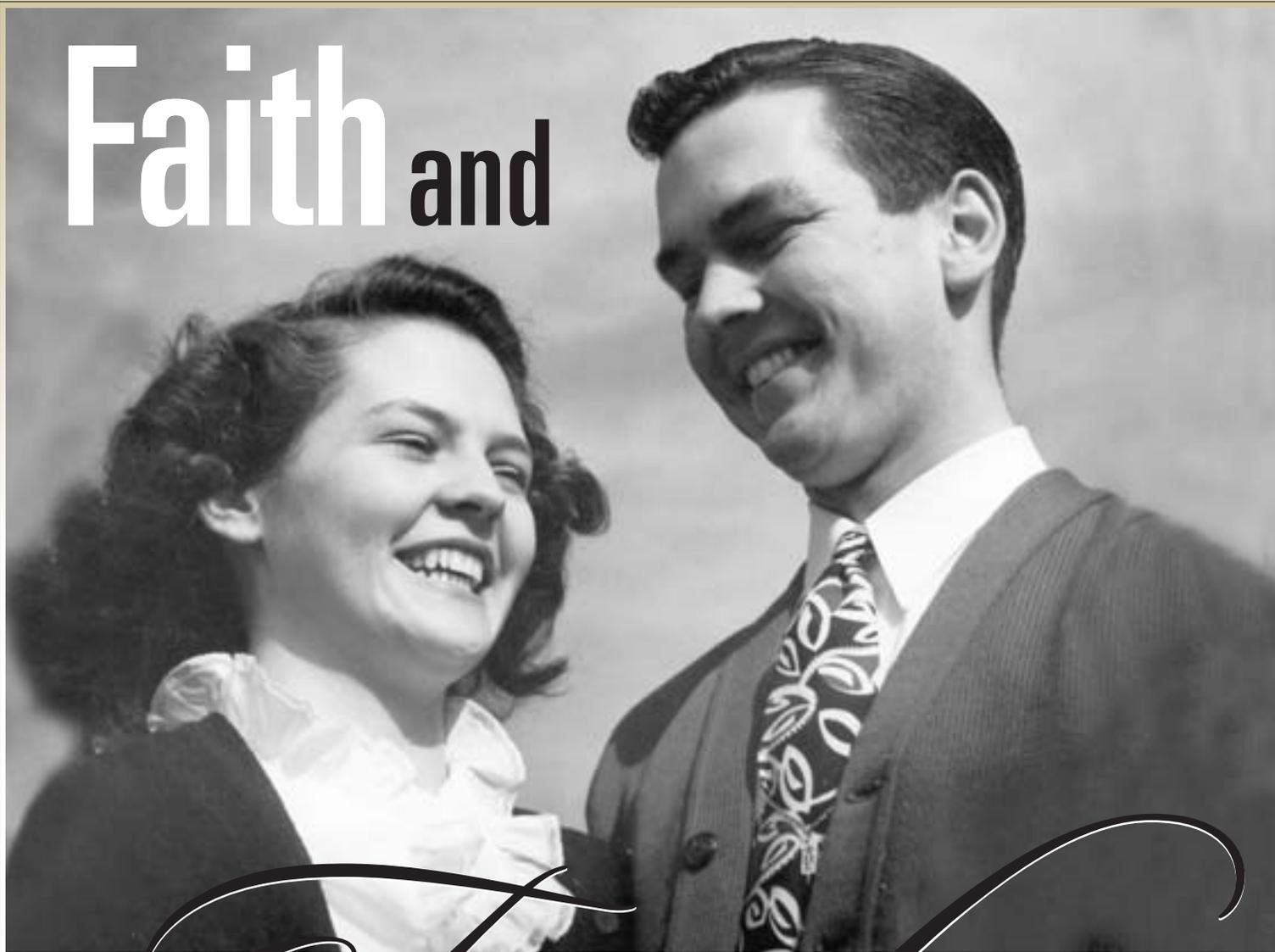
We kept waiting for the hail, but there was none. Although we could hear the sounds of violent hail all around us, there was none to be seen—no hail, no rain, only noise.

Immediately after the dark clouds and noise had moved on, I drove to the opposite boundary of our property. The first thing I noticed was my neighbor's ground, thick with hailstones. Parking my truck, I walked from the neighbor's property into our barley, and after taking but a few steps I saw no hail at all. Further inspection confirmed that. With the exception of the extreme fringes of our land, it had not hailed on our crop. It was as if a giant protective canopy had been spread above our farm. We were witnesses to the reality of the Lord's blessings to us and of His hearing and answering our prayer.

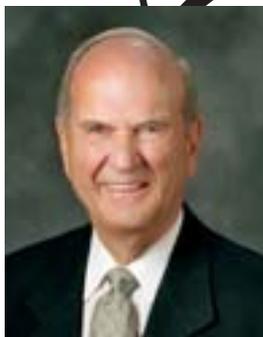
Thirty years have passed, but the memory is as vivid as if it had happened yesterday. I can never speak of that miraculous event without a feeling of great reverence. On that day we were standing on holy ground. In moments of quiet pondering, I have come to realize that not only was our grain saved, but new, sacred seeds were planted in our hearts, especially in the hearts of our young children. These were seeds of testimony, producing the conviction that when we must face the dark storms of life, there is refuge in our God, the Father of us all, who does hear and answer prayers.

In the years since that marvelous day, our family has learned that our faith increases as we strive to keep the commandments, and with that faith we can confidently proclaim to God, "I will trust in thee forever" (2 Nephi 4:34). ■

Faith and



Families



BY ELDER RUSSELL M. NELSON
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

We have learned that unshakable faith in the Lord enriches married life and love. Faith in Him increases one's very capacity to love.

This is excerpted from a Church Educational System fireside address given February 6, 2005. Six days later, Elder Nelson's wife, Dantzel White Nelson (pictured above with him in 1942 while they were college students), died suddenly in Salt Lake City, with Elder Nelson at her side. On April 6, 2006, Elder Nelson married Wendy Lee Watson.

I would like you to do some personal soul-searching. You are eager and young. Most of you are students with great ambitions for the future. I want you to think about yourself, not as you are, but as you may become—50 years from now. Through your imaginary time tunnel, look at yourself as you will be then. Your broad minds and narrow waists have traded places. You are finished with your careers. Your working days are over—no more time clocks to punch or paychecks to collect. Are you with me?

Now, here are my questions: What do you see in yourself 50 years from now? What do you want *to be* 50 years from now? What do you *really want*, most of all, 50 years from now?

I think I can hear your minds working. Some of you might say, “I just want to be alive 50 years from now.” Not a bad idea. Accidents and illnesses are part of mortality, which means that some of you won’t be here 50 years from now. But most of you will. So plan for the rule, not the exception. Some of you see fame or fortune in your future. And most of you want families.

The Lodestar of Our Marriage

If Sister Nelson were here, I would invite her to stand beside me. As you know, man is not without the woman in the Lord.¹ The title of my message tonight is “Faith and Families.” Purposely, I have listed faith first. That has always been the lodestar for our married life: to have faith to seek *first* the kingdom of God. We have learned that unshakable faith in the Lord enriches married life and love. Faith in Him increases one’s very capacity to love, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

More than 50 years ago we were young adults, as you are now. We were both university students. I was a sophomore premedical student; she was a freshman on a scholarship. We were very much in love.

My career as a doctor of medicine has now been completed. All of my many surgical operations have been done. Sister Nelson has had extremely demanding responsibilities as a mother of 10 children. Our first 9 children were all little girls. Our home was like a girls’ dormitory until our one and only son came along. Poor boy! He didn’t know who his real mother was for his first couple of years.

Now Sister Nelson’s life has matured. She has taken on a less rigorous role as grandmother of our grandchildren. We are blessed with 56 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren. Those numbers are likely to increase.

What is most important to Sister Nelson and me now? That we are husband and wife, wedded for time and all eternity. Our children are born in the covenant and are sealed to us forever. What joy that knowledge brings!

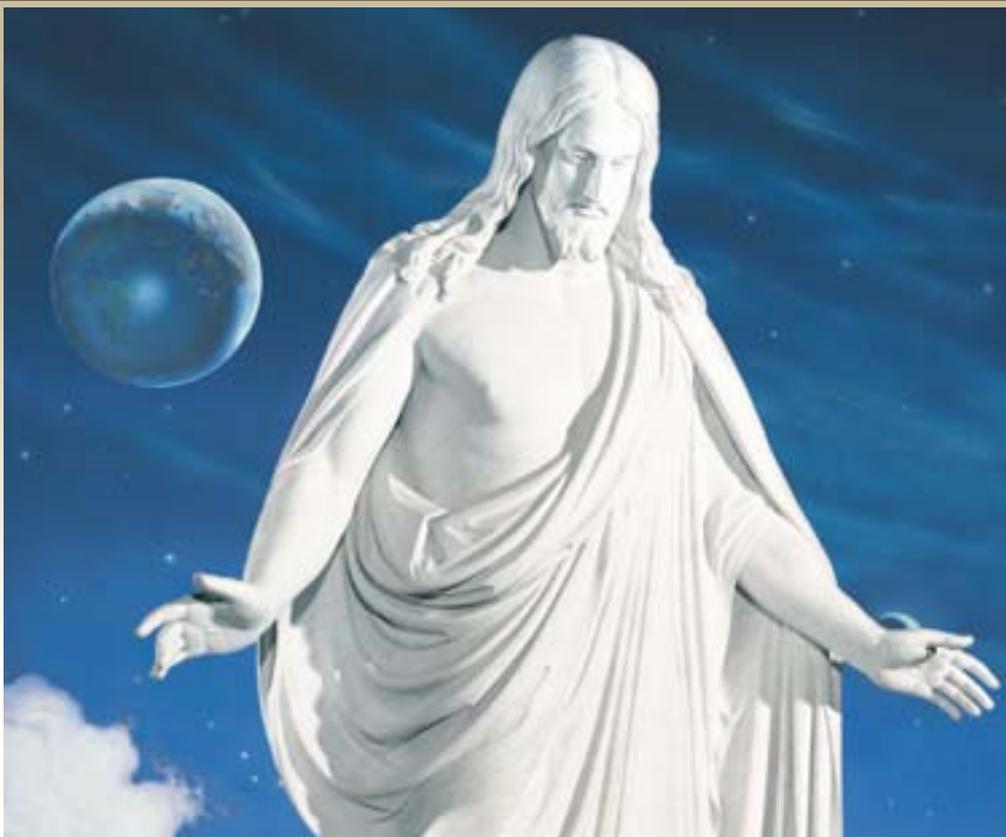
When we married in the temple, we didn’t know many scriptures. But we did know Matthew 6:33: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” That became the lodestar for every decision we made together. Only years later did we learn that the Joseph Smith Translation of that verse was even more compelling and clear: “Seek not the things of this world but seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”² We have been guided well by that scripture! I have been inspired well by this woman of faith who has stood beside me all these years. Blessings that mean the most to me have come because of her.

Hold the Line

Times have changed in half a century. The world is ailing spiritually. That sickness is rapidly becoming more rampant. Temptations to sin go way beyond anything we knew at your age. You are entering a consumer culture obsessed with materialistic goals. Multitudes worship at the shrine of selfishness. Loud voices defend the fallacious doctrine that all lifestyles are of equal value. People want more rights than responsibilities. They seem more concerned with entitlement than enlightenment. Responsible fatherhood is



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Central to the plan of salvation is the Atonement of Jesus Christ. In premortal councils He was foreordained by His Father to atone for our sins and break the bands of physical and spiritual death.

being defined as a weekly visit and financial support. In short, we face a mind-boggling moral inversion.

Against this backdrop of spiritual decay, you young adults of the Church enter the stage. You have a firm foundation of faith. You are role models, both in courtship and in marriage. You know what's right and what's wrong! You hold the line! You know the Lord's teachings. And you will teach them to your own children and grandchildren. You have far more spiritual power than we did at your age. As you go forward on life's battlefield, you are numbered with "the covenant people of the Lord, . . . scattered upon all . . . the earth; . . . armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory."³ We are very, very proud of you!

As Sister Nelson and I look back, we can honestly say that our family and membership in the Church are most important to us. How thankful we are that we heeded the counsel of Church leaders to marry in the temple, to invite children into our family, and to serve

the Lord! If we had placed our education ahead of our family, we would not be so blessed now. Education was a lengthy process for us. Earning two doctor's degrees took me a long time. Then we struggled through many more years of surgical specialization. I did not send a bill for surgical services until I had been out of medical school for more than 12 years! By then we had five children. But somehow we managed.

I pay tribute to Sister Nelson, who never murmured

because she had to make do with very little. I recall an experience one night in downtown Boston. We were walking along Boylston Street. There we passed a furniture store. Sister Nelson pressed her nose against the windowpane and asked, "Do you think we will ever be able to afford a lamp?"

Brethren, I suggest that you look for a companion with long-range vision, like Sister Nelson. To each sister I suggest that you motivate your husband to become all he can become, even if it takes a long time.

We have tasted of life's successes and sorrows. We have dealt with disappointment, disease, and death among our children. But death cannot divide families sealed in the temple. That period of separation is only temporary. Thanks to the Lord's great plan of happiness, we can all face the future with great faith and optimism.

Life Is Not a One-Act Play

Sister Nelson and I have learned that life is not a one-act play. There really is a premortal

period. And there really is life after death. Premortal and mortal portions are but preludes to our postmortal life. Knowledge of the three degrees of glory, as revealed to prophets, gives us a glimpse of our postmortal potential.⁴ Eternal life is glorious and well worth the quest.

The premortal period has important doctrinal underpinnings that fortify our faith. Then the everlasting gospel was set in place. Before the foundation of the earth, the plan of salvation was prepared.⁵ It included the glorious possibility of a divine inheritance for us in the kingdom of God.⁶

Central to that plan of salvation is the Atonement of Jesus Christ. In premortal councils He was foreordained by His Father to atone for our sins and break the bands of physical and spiritual death.⁷ Jesus declared: "I . . . was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. . . . In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name."⁸

Also pivotal to God's plan is the family. In fact, a purpose of the plan is to exalt the family. The earth was created so that we as premortal spirit children of our Father in Heaven could come to the earth and obtain physical bodies. We are here to be tried and tested.⁹ We are here to "choose liberty and eternal life . . . or to choose captivity and death."¹⁰ And best of all, we are allowed to fall in love, to be married, and to invite children into our families.

Certain blessings were to be reserved for the latter days. The Lord had planned to reveal "things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world."¹¹ Those things included revelations as recorded in the Book of Mormon.¹² They also included ordinances and covenants of the holy temple.¹³

The Lord teaches that "in order to obtain the highest [degree of celestial glory], a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; And if he does not, he cannot obtain it."¹⁴

Satan Wages War against the Family

Before the world was formed, opposition was allowed to come from Satan.¹⁵ He has always fought against the Savior's sacred work and will continue to do so. He has opposed the prophets and the scriptures of the Restoration. And in our day Satan has chosen to wage war directly at the heart of God's plan, which is the family. Signs of his attacks are all about us. The proportion of mature adults who are married is declining,¹⁶ as are birth rates.¹⁷ The age at which couples get married is increasing,¹⁸ as are the numbers of unmarried couples.¹⁹ Immorality and pornography are pervasive and pernicious.²⁰

With such spiritual sickness all about us, it takes real faith in the Lord and in His gospel to withstand attacks from the adversary. I urge you to deny yourselves of all ungodliness, both physical and spiritual.²¹ Keep a firm grasp on the iron rod of the gospel!

Brothers and sisters, before the world was, the gospel was central to God's eternal plan. It is an everlasting gospel—now restored in its fulness.²² With such a foundation, this Church will not be moved from its place,²³ even through the Millennium.²⁴ The gospel of Jesus Christ is a sure foundation upon which we can build our individual faith.

Such faith will not prevent life's problems but will help when things go wrong. Bad things happen to good people. Accidents occur. Some married couples may not be



PHOTOGRAPH BY GETTY IMAGES

I pay tribute to Sister Nelson, who never murmured because she had to make do with very little. I recall an experience one night in downtown Boston. We were walking along Boylston Street. There we passed a furniture store. Sister Nelson pressed her nose against the windowpane and asked, "Do you think we will ever be able to afford a lamp?"



PHOTOGRAPH BY ELDON K. LINSCHOTEN

A purpose of the plan of salvation is to exalt the family. The earth was created so that we as premortal spirit children of our Father in Heaven could come to earth and obtain physical bodies. (Above: Elder Nelson and Sister Dantzel Nelson with three of their children and six of their grandchildren in 1982.)

blessed with children. Some individuals may not marry in this life, or they may find themselves married to one who fails to keep the commandments of God. The Lord is aware of these circumstances. He will bestow all the blessings that He has in store for His faithful children—in His own way and in His own time.²⁵ Be righteous, be patient, keep an eternal perspective, and you will be protected.²⁶

Through the years you will note that apostles and prophets teach the rule. We don't teach exceptions to the rule. Exceptions are left to individual agency and accountability. The Lord knows we live in an imperfect world. He knows it is "ripening in iniquity."²⁷ His judgments will be fair, just, and merciful.

The Proclamation

A decade ago the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, foreseeing this spiritual slide, prepared a proclamation to the world on the family. It is even more relevant today. We 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.

"All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose. . . .

"The first commandment that God gave to Adam and

Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

"We declare the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God's eternal plan."

Now, dear friends, note this warning:

"Individuals who violate covenants of chastity . . . or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets."²⁸

If you will heed that proclamation, brothers and sisters, you will be blessed. God lives and loves us.²⁹ With His help, we can foster our faith and families. We can qualify for this

promise from the Lord: “If a man marry a wife by my word . . . and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise, . . . [they] shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, . . . powers, [and] dominions.”³⁰

I testify that your faith and your families will bring you great joy, here and hereafter. God lives. Jesus is the Christ. His Church has been restored. We are led by His prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley. Upon each of you beloved young adults of the Church, I leave my love and blessing. ■

NOTES

1. See 1 Corinthians 11:11.
2. Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 6:38.
3. 1 Nephi 14:14.
4. See 1 Corinthians 15:40–41; D&C 76:50–113; 88:17–32; Joseph Smith Translation, 1 Corinthians 15:40.
5. See 1 Nephi 10:18; Mosiah 15:19; Alma 12:25, 30; 18:39; 22:13–14; 42:26; D&C 76:12–13.
6. See Matthew 25:34; 2 Nephi 9:18; Ether 4:19.
7. See John 17:5, 24; 1 Peter 1:19–20; Mosiah 4:6–7; 18:13; 3 Nephi 26:3–5; D&C 93:7–9; Moses 5:57; Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 5:43; 14:30–31.
8. Ether 3:14.
9. See Abraham 3:24–25.
10. 2 Nephi 2:27.
11. Matthew 13:35.
12. See 2 Nephi 27:10.
13. See D&C 124:40–41.
14. D&C 131:2–3.
15. See Joseph Smith Translation, Revelation 12:6–8.
16. See David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *The State of Our Unions: The Social Health of Marriage in America* (2004), 16–18 (<http://marriage.rutgers.edu>).
17. See Popenoe and Whitehead, *The State of Our Unions*, 21–23.
18. See Jason Fields, “America’s Families and Living Arrangements: 2003,” U.S. Census Bureau, Nov. 2004, 12–13 (www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/p20-553.pdf).
19. See Popenoe and Whitehead, *The State of Our Unions*, 20–21.
20. See B. J. Sigismund, “XXX-ceptable,” *Newsweek* Web Exclusive, July 2, 2003 (www.keepmedia.com/pubs/

We proclaim
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Newsweek/2003/07/02/309790). Pornography is big business in the United States, generating a reported \$12 billion annually (see www.internetfilterreview.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html).

21. See Moroni 10:32; Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 16:26.
22. See Acts 3:20–21.
23. See Daniel 2:28, 31–44; D&C 65:2–6; 124:45.
24. See Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah* (1982), 672.
25. See D&C 130:20–21.
26. See 1 Corinthians 15:19.
27. D&C 18:6.
28. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
29. See 1 Nephi 11:16–17.
30. D&C 132:19.



PHOTOGRAPH BY CRAIG W. DIMOND

Coming into the

Fighting to Stay Active

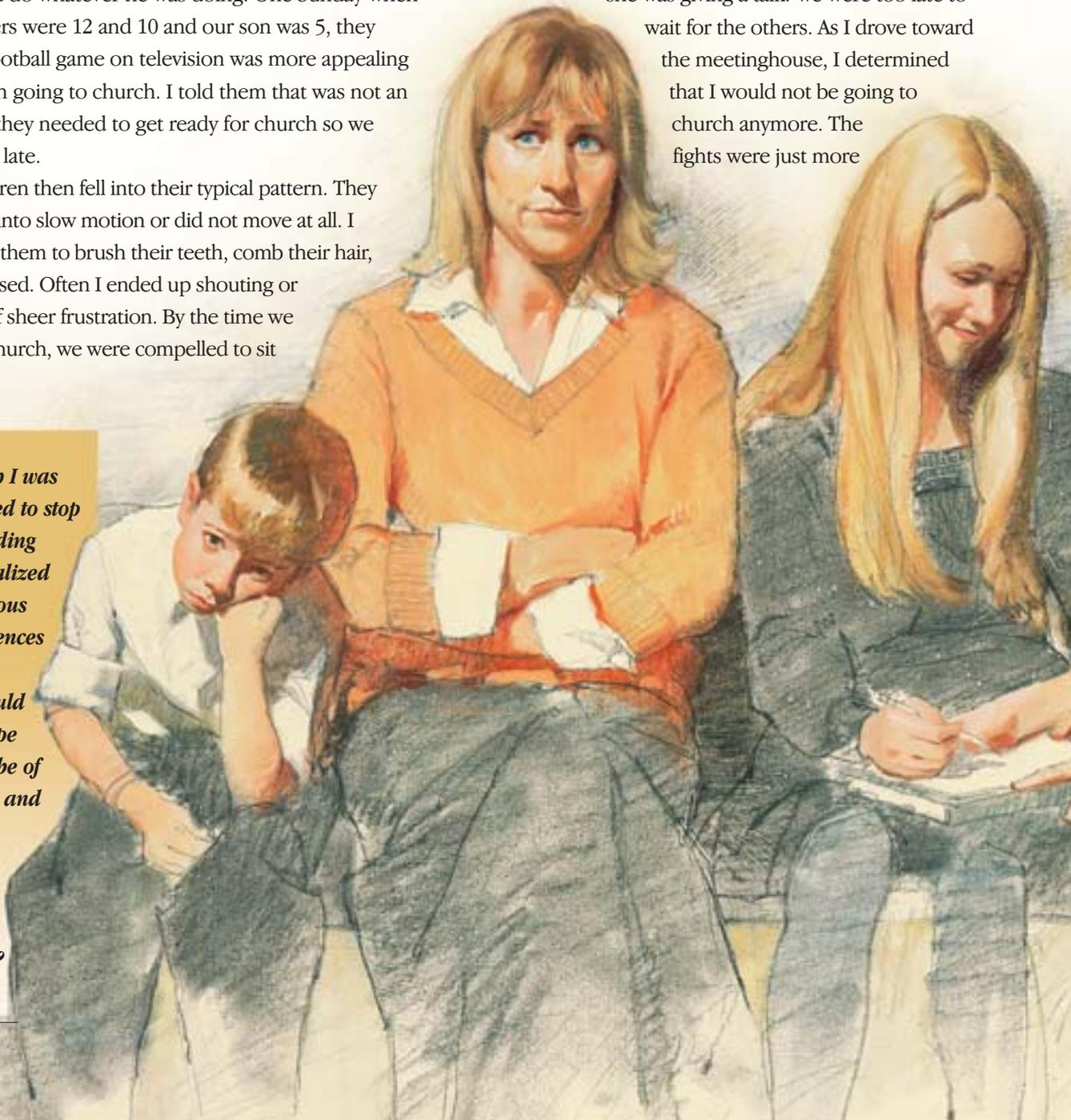
My husband stopped going to church a few years after we were married. And as our three children grew older, they began wanting to stay home with their father on Sundays and do whatever he was doing. One Sunday when our daughters were 12 and 10 and our son was 5, they decided a football game on television was more appealing to them than going to church. I told them that was not an option and they needed to get ready for church so we wouldn't be late.

The children then fell into their typical pattern. They either went into slow motion or did not move at all. I encouraged them to brush their teeth, comb their hair, and get dressed. Often I ended up shouting or crying out of sheer frustration. By the time we made it to church, we were compelled to sit

in the very back, and I felt angry and upset with my family.

A turning point came on a morning that had been more chaotic than usual. I was crying as we drove to church. Only one of the children came with me, and that was because she was giving a talk. We were too late to wait for the others. As I drove toward the meetinghouse, I determined that I would not be going to church anymore. The fights were just more

Although I was tempted to stop attending church, I realized how disastrous the consequences of such a decision would be. What hope could there be of my husband and children returning if I stayed home on Sundays too?



Fold

than I could bear. There would be no more coaxing and begging, no more frantic pleas to hurry, no more embarrassment from walking into church consistently late.

When our daughter and I got out of the car and walked inside, my mind was made up that this was the last time I would be at church for a long time—at least until our children were more mature or my husband came back into activity.

When we walked into the chapel, a sister was playing the prelude music, a medley of hymns by Eliza R. Snow. The music was so beautiful that I stopped where I was for a few seconds to feel the joy of those

hymns; they felt like a warm blanket on a chilly evening, wrapped around me in comfort and bringing me peace. As

I stood there for those few seconds, I knew I was in the right place at the right time. As I sat down, the sweet, peaceful feeling of the hymns continued with me.

I knew Heavenly Father expected me to be right there in that chapel with my ward family each week.

I also realized how disastrous it would be for my husband and children if I quit going to church.

What hope could there be of my family becoming active if

Regardless of your circumstance, you are included in the fold of God. Following are three stories from members who have experienced both trials of faith and the renewing blessings of membership in the Church.

I stayed home on Sundays too? So I let our children know that I would be leaving for church at a set time each week and would be happy for them to come with me. Things didn't improve immediately, but our children knew inside where they should be on Sundays, and eventually they realized they were happier being at church than staying at home. Today our three children are active, and I am grateful for the experience I had of knowing that I was in the right place at the right time. I'm grateful for what the Lord taught me to do in my family situation. I'm confident that He will guide others in their particular situations.

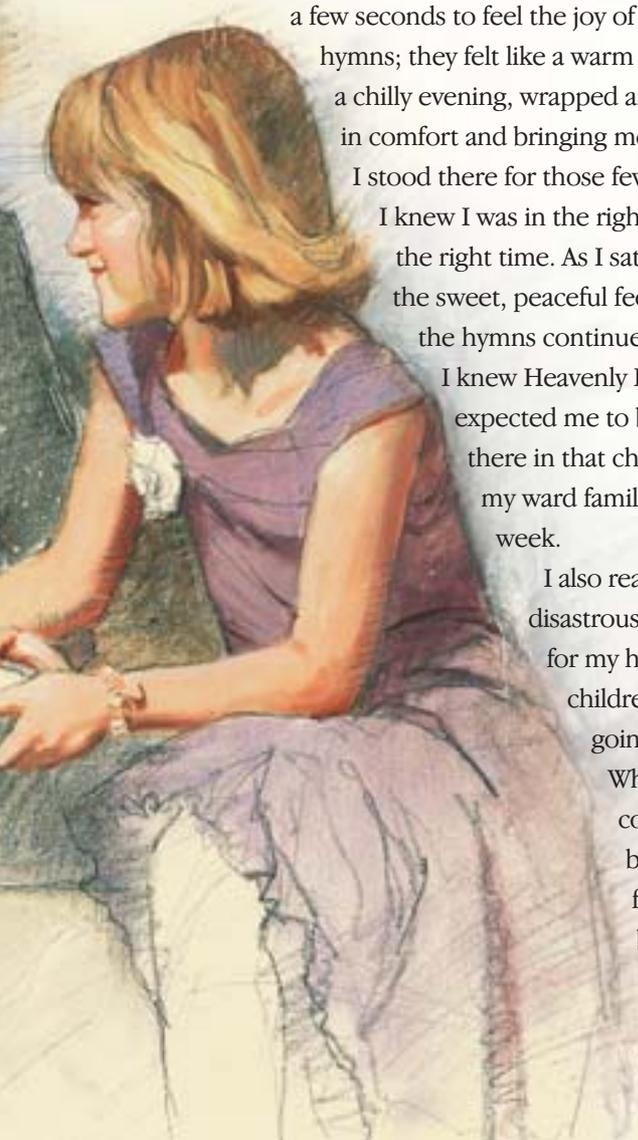
Charlene Higuera, Utah

My Part-Member Family

As a child, I overheard my bishop say of me, "She's growing up in a part-member family." I wondered what that meant, though I had noticed that my father did not attend meetings with my mother and me. But as I grew older, my father's lack of membership in the Church became an emotional stumbling block for me. He wouldn't allow me to be baptized when I was eight. Instead he insisted that I wait a year and be taught by the missionaries, even though I had attended church with my mother since I was a toddler. This erected a wall between us that was cemented by my baptism.

My father's attitude toward the Church continued to be negative, and it affected our family's daily interactions at home. If dinner wasn't on the table at the appropriate hour, it was the Church's fault. If the gas tank in the car was empty sooner than he thought it should be, it must be from all our traveling to the church building. If our home looked unkempt, it was because my mother spent her time fulfilling her callings instead of tending to the home. "That church mess," he named her duties.

The perceived lack of support from my father caused me to view him in an unfavorable light and to cling more





Dad could no longer talk, but I could talk to him. I said, “I love you,” which I hadn’t done in decades.

fervently to the gospel. Being at church was a breath of fresh air in a life that was gasping for spirituality. My ward family was sympathetic to the tumultuous atmosphere in my home and gave me great support. Priesthood leaders were on hand to give blessings, and they often visited with my father when in our home. He tolerated their visits better than he tolerated our Church activity.

Once I grew up, moved away, and married in the temple, home life for me improved greatly. Life seemed to be on course with the gospel plan—except for my relationship with my father.

Several years after our marriage, my husband and I moved back to my hometown. I managed to keep unpleasant memories at bay when in my father’s presence, but I suppressed the Holy Spirit’s invitations to show love and honor to him.

In time my father’s health began to decline. He became feeble and had a series of strokes that left him partially incapacitated. I pondered my relationship with him. Finally, I began to regret the hardness in my heart. I knew I could not “reconcile [myself] to the will of God” (2 Nephi 10:24) until my heart was softened toward my father.

After I had offered many prayers, the Holy Ghost prompted me one day to ask Heavenly Father for something specific: that He bless my mind to be able to recall positive, affectionate childhood memories with my father. From the moment I implored Heavenly Father to bless me, the memories came.

My father was the person who taught me how to do a headstand on the living room carpet, working with me until I mastered it. On rainy, cool nights my father was the one who took my brother and me to the front porch bundled in blankets and told us stories of growing up on his father’s farm. Friday nights were reserved for trips to the farmers’ market, where my father expertly chose watermelons, peaches, and produce that made our mouths water. My father was a lover of the English language, and he had my brother and me face off in impromptu spelling bees.

Recalling these memories changed my perspective. Each memory brought warmth to my heart and gave me reason to repent. How wrong I had been to hold my father in such low esteem. Though growing up in my home had not been easy, I came to realize my father had done much more good than I had given him credit for.

Toward the end of one summer, my siblings and I realized our father needed more constant care. My husband and I moved my father in with us, complete with a hospital bed, walker, and wheelchair. I became his practical nurse. Our children would fly into the house after school, straight to the bedside of our new resident. Dad could no longer speak, so the children just spoke to him. We savored this time with him. There was no doubt that it was my turn to give something back to him. I said “I love you” to him—words that I had not uttered in decades.

Dad’s days with us were not long. The night he died, several of us gathered around his bedside, including some of our children. The feeling in the room was peaceful, quiet, and profoundly spiritual. It occurred to me that not only had I witnessed the good there was in my father but our children had witnessed it as well.

The Holy Ghost had shown me that I needed the influence of positive memories to recognize the truth in the words of this hymn:

*Count your blessings;
Name them one by one.
Count your many blessings;
See what God hath done.¹*

By learning to look beyond my father's criticism of my Church activity, I finally came to see the good in him and learned to love him.

Beth Griffin, Georgia

Coming Back

It had been nearly a year from the time I decided to change my life and start going back to church. In high school I had made some bad decisions that had led to more and more bad decisions, and by the time I was in college, no one would have been able to tell I had been raised in a strong Latter-day Saint family. Finally, in January of 2001, I decided I had had enough. I wasn't satisfied, and I knew the life I was living was not pleasing to the Lord. I broke up with my boyfriend, left all my social contacts behind, and began going to church. But a year later, I found myself sitting in sacrament meeting in a singles ward, wondering if I had made the right decision.

At first, my decision to become active was exciting. I began to read the scriptures again and felt the fire of testimony rekindle in my life. I began paying my tithing again and writing in a journal. My prayers were sincere and often emotional. I was glad to feel the changes take place in my heart. However, after a few months I felt that I had reached a plateau. I figured it must be the ward I was attending with my family—there were no people my age. I craved the testimony and friendship of my peers, so I decided to attend my local singles ward. Although I felt the strength of the young people's testimonies, I began to feel self-conscious about the weakness of my own testimony.

I began coming to church late and leaving early to avoid talking to anyone, especially the bishop. I was afraid that if he talked to me, he would see that I needed his help. This anxiety led me to come back into contact with my former friends. Although they respected the fact that I was trying to change, being around the temptations I once indulged in did not help my resolve

to become an active Latter-day Saint. I often stopped by one of their houses "on the way to church" and ended up staying through the whole meeting.

During the passing of the sacrament one particular Sunday, I was struggling with my decision to come back to the Church. Why was it so difficult for me to let go of my past? How could I find the strength to go to the bishop and complete the repentance process I had begun? Would I ever really make the changes I wanted so badly to make, or was I just wasting my time? These and many other questions raced through my mind. I was desperate to feel good about my decision and yet unable to find peace.

As I sat there, I picked up the hymnbook and thumbed through the pages. I stopped on page 124 and read the words, "Be still, my soul: The Lord is on thy side."² I began to weep as an overwhelming spirit of peace swept over me. Each word of the hymn seemed to be written especially for me. The Spirit confirmed to me that my life was in the hands of an all-knowing, loving God. I knew that He could

help me change and that everything I worried about would be fine.

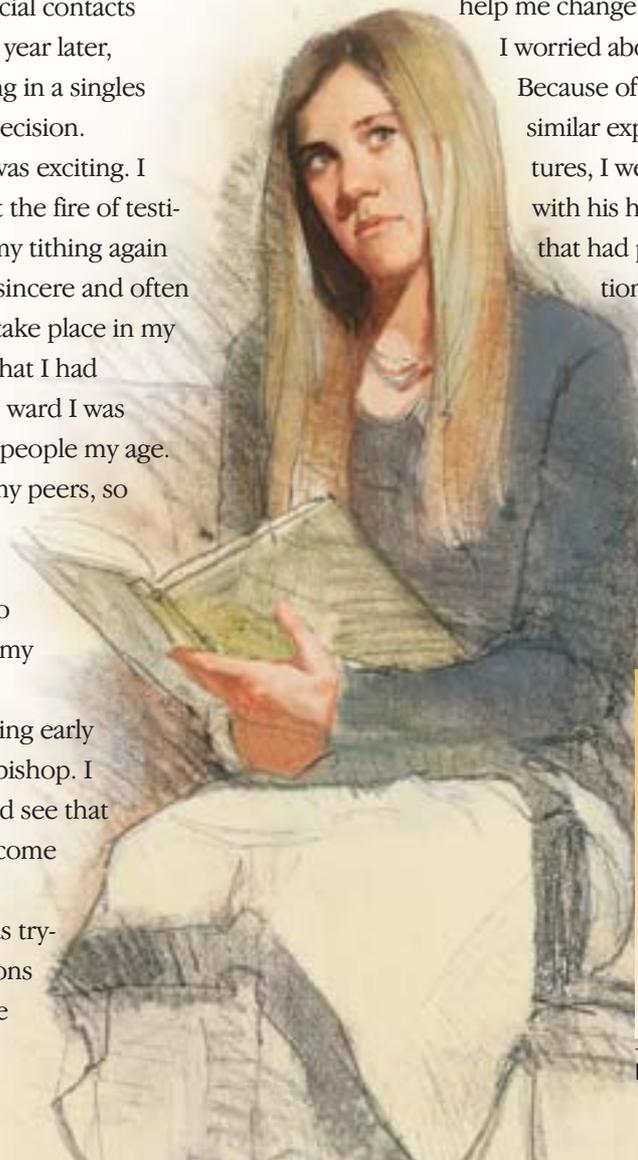
Because of that experience and a similar experience with the scriptures, I went to the bishop and with his help let go of the sins that had plagued me. My activation in the gospel has

truly made my soul still and taught me that the Lord is on my side. ■

Kelley Gee, Idaho

NOTES

1. "Count Your Many Blessings," *Hymns*, no. 241.
2. "Be Still, My Soul," *Hymns*, no. 124.



Throughout sacrament meeting, I was struggling with my decision to return to Church activity. Why was it so difficult to let go of my past?

Storming

Two hurricanes dealt them devastating blows, but members along the Gulf Coast are slowly and optimistically rebuilding their lives.

BY NORMAN C. HILL AND RICHARD M. ROMNEY

Photographs by Richard M. Romney
and courtesy of members in affected areas

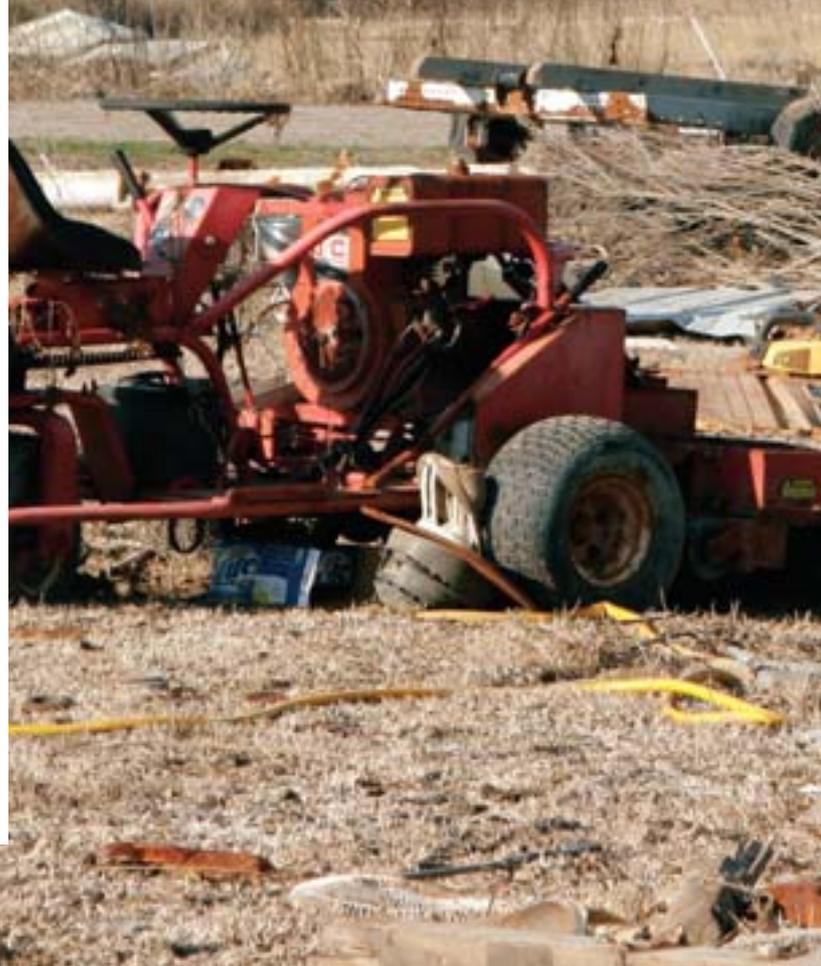
It was like someone took our entire town and put it in a blender,” says Alfred Trahan, remembering how Hurricane Rita ravaged Cameron, Louisiana, late in 2005. Even though it has been a year and a half since the devastation, Cameron still looks like a war zone.

“This *was* the foundation of our house,” Brother Trahan says on a visit back to Cameron, pointing at a concrete slab. “It’s all that’s left.” It’s a similar story at his mother’s property, except the shell of her house can still be found—500 yards from its foundation, lodged against some trees.

“For a while we salvaged what we could out of the mud,” Brother Trahan explains. “Sometimes what we found amazed us—things like my son’s \$5 wristwatch that was still ticking, or the piggy bank that belonged to our daughter’s friend. She lived two blocks away, but the piggy bank ended up in our yard.”

Moving Ahead

Like most Latter-day Saints living along the Gulf Coast after Hurricanes Rita and Katrina, the Trahans put fear behind them and moved on, relying on faith that the Lord



Back

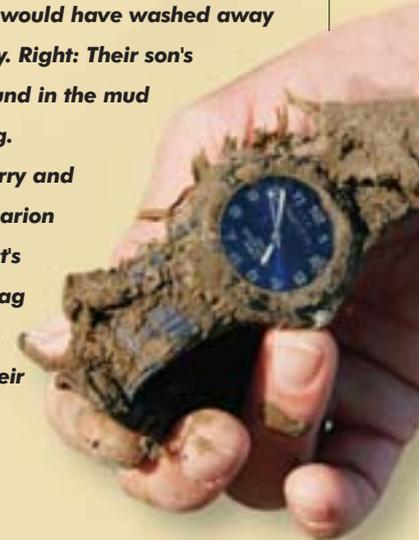


"The Lord does temper the elements. Yes, we had a lot of people who had damage. But time after time we saw that trees had fallen parallel to the houses rather than on the houses. It was scary to think what could have happened if the trees had fallen the other way."

Nelwyn Marion, Texas

Left: The Trahans and their daughter stand on the foundation at his mother's property. Her house lodged against trees or it would have washed away completely. Right: Their son's watch, found in the mud still ticking.

Above: Jerry and Nelwyn Marion show what's left of a flag that flew outside their home.





“If you live along the Gulf Coast, you must prepare for hurricanes, just as if you live along the fault lines in California or Utah, you must prepare for earthquakes. The prophets have warned us. The question is how well will we prepare.” Joe Clarke, Louisiana

Opposite page, top: Cheryl and Bruce Jackson remember the many LDS volunteer work crews, shown here and on following pages, that came to provide relief.

Bottom: Johnny W. Ross is rebuilding his “secret garden.”

would help them to recover. “We’ve learned that even in the toughest times, Heavenly Father is nearby,” Sister Trahan says. “And we’ve learned to be grateful for what we have instead of missing what is gone.”

For a while the Trahans lived in a trailer parked on relatives’ property. Now they live in a “fixer-upper” home in Lake Charles, a bigger city 35 miles north, where they plan to stay for a year or two until they can return to Cameron, “as soon as a grocery store opens.”

Brother Trahan’s wife, Claire, finds a way to lighten up about all they have endured. Shortly after the hurricane, she joked about how easy it was to tidy up when the home teachers came over. “All you do is wash off the concrete and set out some folding chairs.” More recently, she chuckled about a home, family, and personal enrichment lesson in Lake Charles. “The subject was how to reduce clutter in your house. That’s really not a problem—our clutter is long gone.”

In many ways, the Trahans typify Latter-day Saints all over the Gulf

Coast. They are not just survivors; they are people of faith. And there are thousands of them, Latter-day Saints storming back from the storms, decidedly optimistic and eager to move forward.

Thriving and Growing

Take Johnny W. Ross, for example. President of the Orange Texas Stake, he not only organized and participated in relief efforts for victims of Hurricane Katrina but also guided members of his own stake through Hurricane Rita the next month. And when all of that was done, he had to clean up his own property.

“I used to have a private place I called my secret garden,” he says. Tall trees shaded a little grove where he liked to sit and think. “Now my secret garden has been revealed,” he laughs, and says the Lord must have decided it was time to prune the trees.

He says that sharing a common experience, even a difficult one, helps build unity in wards and stakes. “In one fell swoop, everybody in this stake had something in common,” he explains. “We *all* lived through the storm, and we *all* have a story we can relate to. We think about the tender mercies of the Lord because we’ve seen those mercies in our lives.”

Helping Everyone

There is a similar optimism in Slidell, Louisiana. Bruce Jackson,





who joined the Church five years ago, typifies that spirit of hope. He stands with his wife, Cheryl, inside their jewelry shop on Pontchartrain Drive. Even though the store is four miles from the lake, it was flooded five feet deep with water. Brother Jackson is also a former race car driver, and the storm surge destroyed his automobile shop and all the vehicles in it. He also lost his home, the house he built for his disabled mother before she died, and another home he built for his father. What's more, the Jacksons lost all of their clothing and personal belongings, and because the damage was from flooding, it wasn't covered by insurance.

"It would be easy to just to throw your hands up, walk away, and have a sour attitude," says Brother Jackson, "But the way I'm looking at it is that I'm blessed to have made it through the storm. My wife and children are safe, and we have each other. And the support from people in the Church has been overwhelming. Ward members kept coming by and

saying, 'Keep your head up; things are going to work out.'

"During one of the darkest times," he continues, "I asked for a priesthood blessing."

"The next day," Sister Jackson joins in, "we got up with a whole different outlook. We went into our home and just started working, working, working." A Mormon Helping Hands crew of 12 men came to remove damaged carpet, flooring, and wallboard.

The Jacksons explain that it was "phenomenal" to witness such relief efforts. "It was like watching the Church step up and hit a home run," Brother Jackson says.





“It isn’t the material things you lose that you miss; it’s the things that bring back pleasant memories, like family photos. But with the comfort of the gospel, you know that in eternity the good things will be restored to you.”

Barbara Baesle,
Louisiana

“People know we’re LDS,” Sister Jackson adds. “And even though it’s been quite a while since the storm, they still tell us how Helping Hands cut up a tree, moved debris, tore out damaged wallboard, or provided food.” One of their business associates was so impressed she decided to investigate the Church.

Mike Dohm is another Latter-day Saint who saw firsthand how Church efforts were appreciated in Slidell. As coordinator of command center field operations, he and others from the bishops’ storehouse worked with

community leaders, other churches, and officials from Church headquarters to organize distribution of relief supplies and coordinate assignments for volunteer work crews. He notes that every faith-based group in the city was involved in recovery operations, but the LDS Church effort was especially well organized, arrived quickly, and provided consistent help for months. Thousands of LDS volunteers came from all over the region, some driving hundreds of miles, working all weekend, then returning to their homes.

At a city meeting Slidell’s mayor said that assistance from Mormon Helping Hands was like having 5,000 additional city workers, without the need of additional payroll. The 200 community leaders in attendance “exploded in applause,” Brother Dohm remembers. “That’s how the community feels about us now.”

Bishop Steven Baxter of the Lake Charles Ward also notes that many churches and



volunteer groups helped during the times of crisis. “Latter-day Saints don’t have a corner on charity,” he says. “It’s just that on a Churchwide basis we are so well prepared that we can follow up quickly on our good intentions. People in the community came to us because they knew that we could get things done. The relief effort showed me and all of our neighbors as well that Latter-day Saints are not alone, that during times of distress my brothers and sisters of the Church will be here for me, and for them.”

Learning about Faith and Love

“Tree Cuttin’ and House Guttin’ ”—for months, such handmade signs were posted all over the devastated town of Waveland, Mississippi. Many homes were completely swept away by storm surge. Others were so flooded they had to have all the carpet and plasterboard removed. Many people lived in government-furnished trailers for months.

Sitting in the foyer at the Waveland Ward building, Terrie Garrett reminisces. “The commercial building next door had four feet of water inside,” she recalls, “but our meetinghouse had only a foot and a half. It was as if the Lord put a bubble over the church because He knew we needed it. In the days and weeks after the storm, the members came here. They put their names on a bulletin board to say they were OK. It was like a refuge to say ‘somebody knows.’ ”

She remembers how ward leaders worked with Church officials to



prepare for 200 Mormon Helping Hands coming to assist with cleanup the week after the storm. “What we did first was to find our people. They had scattered everywhere. We went to see if their homes had been washed away, to find out what their needs were.” Her husband, working with a ward address list, helped prepare work orders for every Latter-day Saint. “It didn’t matter if they had been coming to church or if we hadn’t seen them in years. We just wanted to make sure they were all right.” She says there are several members who, because of contacts made following the hurricane, have started coming back to church.

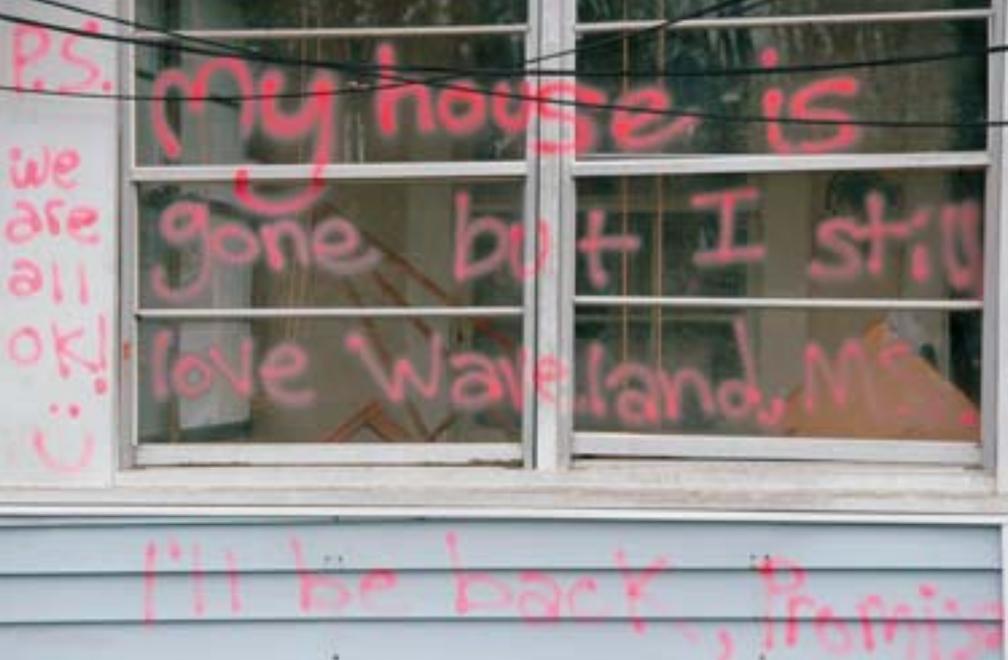
Melanie Cuevas remembers returning to her home in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, after the evacuation. “We had heard that our house was still there, but that it was off the foundation,” she recalls. “We thought maybe we could move it back and live in it. We also run a millwork shop. So I was thinking, even if the house is no good, if the shop is there we’ll still be OK because we’ll have a job and we’ll be able to get going. But when we got here, we saw that the house was gone, the shop was gone, and all of

HELP WAS ABUNDANT

The effort to help victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita was the largest response ever by the Church to a disaster in the United States. Although the Church is still helping, here is a summary of what has been done.

- Anticipating the need for relief in areas affected by the hurricanes, the Church prepositioned truckloads of supplies in staging areas nearby.
- More than 200 truckloads of commodities and relief supplies were delivered for distribution.
- Almost five million pounds of food and water were contributed.
- Volunteers made 40,000 linen sets, 60,000 cleaning kits, 70,000 kitchen kits, 250,000 school kits, and nearly a million hygiene kits.
- About 4,000 refugees were temporarily housed in 20 Church buildings.
- Approximately 10,000 Church members, mostly from the southern states, worked for months to clear downed trees and power lines, remove mud, tear out damaged wall-board and carpet, and disinfect homes. Crews came every weekend for three months, until public services could once again handle the volume of tasks remaining.
- Church volunteers provided more than 42,000 man-days.





Left: Many survivors painted messages on what remained of their homes.

Above: The Cuevas family recalls how priesthood blessings helped.

SUGGESTIONS FROM SURVIVORS

“Be both spiritually and temporally prepared,” says Charlotte Moore of the Waveland Ward in Mississippi. “Have food and water in your home, gas up your car, and know when the storm is coming. Then you’re not struggling to deal with basic needs, and you can take care of your family and serve others.” Here are some other suggestions from those who survived the hurricanes.

Evacuation, travel, communication

- Take evacuation orders seriously. Leave as early as you can.
- Travel in caravans. “It may slow you down a little, but there’s security in knowing you’re in a group,” says President Johnny Ross of the Orange Texas Stake.
- Be aware of gridlock. Highways may be tied up with evacuating traffic. Leave early to avoid it. Back roads may be open when major interstates are clogged.
- Contact your home teacher or other priesthood leaders, and let them know your plans. When you get to an evacuation center, check in and let them know where you are headed.

Evacuation centers

- Know where you can go ahead of time. If possible, have a plan to stay with family or friends.

Emergency supplies

- Gasoline. If you know a disaster is on the way, keep your gas tank full and have extra gas containers filled well in advance.
- Extension cords.
- Cash. Get it out of the bank in advance, or keep a small emergency supply if you

can. “If you wait until everyone else is taking money from the bank, it will be empty,” cautions Melissa Moore of the Williamson Third Ward, Orange Texas Stake.

- Ward roster or address list. “You might not think of it first off,” says Keith Crossley, also of the Williamson Third Ward. “But when we were asked to start checking on people’s homes, it came in really handy.”
- Prescription medication.
- Flashlight with extra batteries.
- Portable, battery-powered radio.
- Waterproof matches.
- Fire extinguisher.
- First aid kit and instruction book.
- Blankets and sheets.
- Duct tape. At evacuation centers, duct tape came in handy for making labels and signs.
- Change of clothes.
- Adequate supply of food and water.
- Coloring books and crayons. These will give your children something to do during long hours of waiting.
- Favorite games, toys, and books.
- Consecrated oil.
- Scriptures.

For those who stay and those who return

- Turn off gas and electricity.
- Don’t open doors or windows during a storm. The change in pressure may cause destruction.
- Beware of downed power lines. To avoid electrical shock, treat every power line as if it is live.
- Take as many belongings as possible off the floor, or move them to a higher floor.

the equipment was destroyed. We were homeless, jobless, and all we had was what we had taken with us.”

“There’s a time when reality hits,” says her husband, Donald. “You understand that you’re alive, you’re safe, and it’s time to move on. But which way do you move? When we prayed about it, we felt that the Lord wants us here for a reason, but He hasn’t completely told us why. We lost pretty much everything we had except our seven children. But the answer to our prayers has been clear— that we’re supposed to stay here. So we’re here, and we’re going to rebuild.”

Sister Cuevas remembers the power of priesthood blessings. “I was so unsure about what to do,” she says. “But my husband gave me a blessing, and then the bishop gave him a blessing. I’ve never been more grateful for the priesthood in all my life. After that, my mind became clear. I was calm and realized what we had to do. I knew it was going to be a long road with lots of hard work. But I was at peace, and I knew we were going to be OK.”

Today, the Cuevas family, like the Trahan family and thousands of other Latter-day Saints across the Gulf Coast,



“By working together, we’re rebuilding our homes and communities. Through our combined efforts, the Church is literally coming out of obscurity. It’s like we have lifted a lantern in a darkened area, and not only can we see farther ourselves but others also see and are attracted by our elevated light.”

Kim Crossley with her family, Texas

WHAT ABOUT MY NEIGHBOR?

Hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and other natural disasters are community hardships, not just individual misfortunes. Like Joseph of old, who directed food storage plans that included enough grain not only for Pharaoh’s household but also for Egypt and her neighbors, members of the Houston Texas (Spanish) Stake are involving their neighbors in emergency planning.

As they prepare their own emergency kits and food storage plans, stake members are asked to include friends and neighbors in their efforts, and as they develop emergency response plans, they are encouraged to develop them together with the rest of the community. The stake has prepared a Spanish-language brochure that can easily be shared with neighbors, but members are committed to go beyond just handing out a brochure, explains Mario Salcedo, stake preparedness specialist. “Instead, we

support joint planning, joint preparation, and joint arrangements,” he says.

According to Cheryl Driggs, Houston area LDS preparedness specialist, Church members have taken to heart the counsel that sharing ideas and plans is truly following the Savior’s counsel to love our neighbors. “It’s easier to work together than to work alone,” she says, explaining that the idea “isn’t to do something *for* their neighbors but to do something *along with* their neighbors.”

The Houston Spanish stake’s plan is based on principles represented in the good Samaritan story. “It involves making plans together with trusted friends who live close enough to encourage each other to buy something extra each visit to the grocery store, perhaps share costs on expensive preparedness items, and look out for each other in the event of an emergency. It’s helping ourselves as well as sharing what we know in a way that also helps our neighbors,” Brother Salcedo concludes.

is moving forward with faith. They are rebuilding a house and rebuilding their lives. They continue to pray, to believe, and to live the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are storming back from adversity, sure in the knowledge that even when the hurricane rages, they are in the hands of the Lord. ■

Even though the devastation was enormous, members all over the Gulf Coast are rebounding and rebuilding, both on their own and with help from others.





“My Burden Is Light”



ELDER PAUL V. JOHNSON

Of the Seventy

One of the Savior’s most comforting promises is found in Matthew 11:28–30:

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

The Thatcher family felt the comfort of that promise during a particularly difficult time.

During October 2003, Aaron and Lorraine Thatcher’s two little daughters, 17-month-old Kaitlin and 6-month-old Madelyn, were diagnosed with cystic fibrosis. Shortly before the unexpected diagnosis, Aaron had to be hospitalized with kidney stones. Lorraine, meanwhile, was expecting their third child and was battling morning sickness. It was a heavy, dark time for the little family. Lorraine commented, “It was as if all our hopes and dreams for our children had been stolen away.”

Because of Aaron’s and Lorraine’s poor

health, Aaron’s mother spent nights in the hospital with the little girls. Lorraine would make her way to the hospital whenever her intense nausea abated. It all seemed impossible to handle. The little girls needed the comfort of their mother, and she was unable to be there at all times. The sorrow and guilt she felt only added to the heavy burden of coping with the new changes in her family’s lives.

Around noon one day she dragged herself to her car, sick, exhausted, and full of anxiety. As she headed toward the hospital, she turned on some soothing music and listened to the words of her favorite hymn—a hymn that had comforted her in the past when her mother had died. As the music surrounded her, it was as if the Lord were speaking the penetrating words directly to her mind and heart:

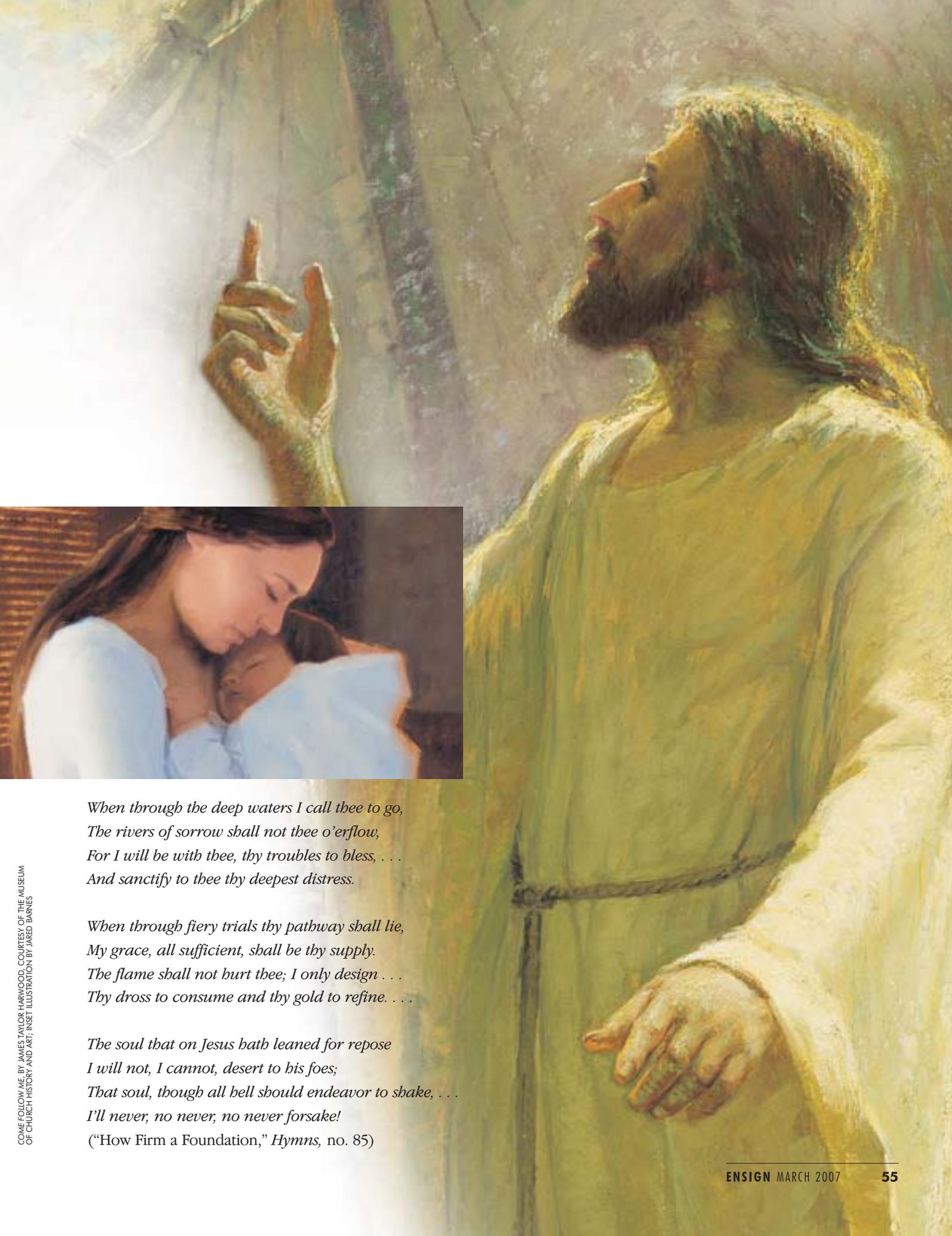
*Fear not, I am with thee; oh, be not
dismayed,*

*For I am thy God and will still give thee
aid.*

*I’ll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause
thee to stand, . . .*

*Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent
hand.*

Each of us has access to the power of the Atonement to help us through difficult times and to bring peace and joy into our lives.



*When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not thee o'erflow,
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless, . . .
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.*

*When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply.
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design . . .
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine. . . .*

*The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
I will not, I cannot, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, . . .
I'll never, no never, no never forsake!*
("How Firm a Foundation," Hymns, no. 85)

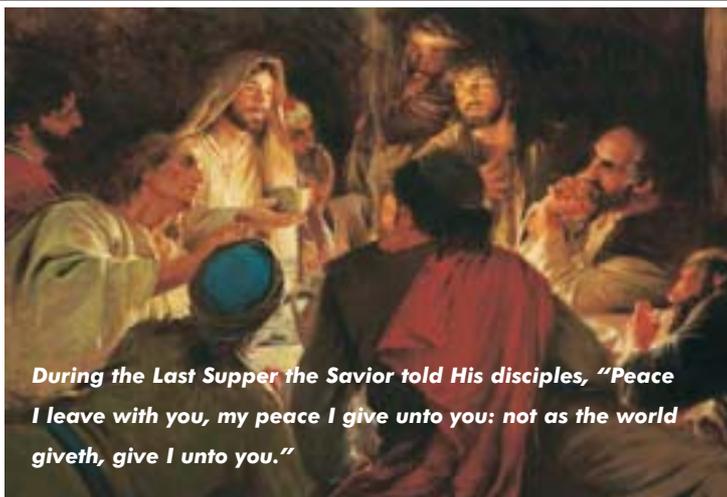
A short time later, Aaron and Lorraine brought their daughters home. Relief Society sisters had cleaned the house, done the wash, and filled the kitchen with food. Aaron and Lorraine felt the peacefulness of the clean home as they entered.

A package had been left on their doorstep. Opening it, they found a beautifully framed picture of the Savior. Typed and mounted with the picture were the words to the hymn that had been such a direct, personal message of peace to Lorraine. A sister in the ward, thinking the message was appropriate for this little family, had thoughtfully made the gift. She had no idea that these

words had special meaning to Lorraine. Lorraine felt the Spirit gently confirm that the Lord loved her, was aware of her, and would help lift her burdens.

Each of us faces challenging trials at times in our lives. Each of us also has access to the power of the Atonement to help us through difficult times and to bring peace and joy into our lives. Sometimes the help comes by removal of the burden. Many times the promised rest and peace come into our lives even though the burden is still present.

At one point in the Book of Mormon, the people of Alma were in bondage and afflicted with heavy burdens. Because of their faith in the Lord, “the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord” (Mosiah 24:15).



During the Last Supper the Savior told His disciples, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.”



HELPS FOR HOME EVENING

Most *Ensign* articles can be used for family home evening discussions, personal reflection, or teaching the gospel in a variety of settings.

1. To illustrate how others can help lighten burdens, have everyone help fold the clothes in a basket of clean laundry. Point out how quickly the task was accomplished with everyone’s help. Discuss how Sister Thatcher’s burdens were lightened. Challenge the family members to look for opportunities to help others.

2. Read Matthew 11:28–30. Ask, “What is Christ’s yoke?” List some of the burdens we may carry. How can taking Christ’s yoke upon us make these burdens lighter? Memorize the scripture as a family by writing the first letter of each word of the verses. Point to the letters as you repeat each corresponding word until the family can recite the passage without looking.

Many people can testify that the Lord has given them strength to “bear up their burdens with ease.” We all have met people who are happy even though they face tremendous hardships. By coming unto the Savior, they have found His promised peace.

The Apostle Paul suffered with an unnamed problem he described as “a thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7). This infirmity was not taken away even after he petitioned the Lord, but his faith is manifest in his declaration:

“For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

“And he said unto me,

My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. 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” (2 Corinthians 12:8–10).

During the Last Supper the Savior told His disciples, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you” (John 14:27). The peace and joy found through the Savior and the Atonement is individual and personal. It can be difficult to describe to others, but it is powerful and life changing. The Apostle Paul describes it as “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). This peace is available to each of us, whatever our burdens, if we will make the choice to come unto Him. ■

Become an Instrument in the Hands of God by Listening to and Following the Promptings of the Spirit



Prayerfully 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 Can I Feel the Promptings of the Spirit?

D&C 8:2: “I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart.”

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

“The Spirit of God . . . will be as soft as a whisper, coming as a thought to our minds or a feeling in our hearts. . . . Choose to put yourself in a position to have experiences with the Spirit of God through prayer, in scripture study, at Church meetings, in your home, and through wholesome interactions with others” (“To Act for Ourselves: The Gift and Blessings of Agency,” *Liabona* and *Ensign*, May 2006, 7).



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

“Put difficult questions in the back of your minds and go about your lives. Ponder and pray quietly and persistently about them. The answer may not come as a lightning bolt. It may come as a little inspiration here and a little there, ‘line upon line, precept upon precept’ (D&C 98:12). Some answers will come from reading the scriptures, some from hearing speakers. And, occasionally, when it is important, some will come by very direct and powerful inspiration” (“Prayers and Answers,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 21).

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

“Write down impressions or thoughts that you feel came from God. . . . Think carefully about whether the truth you received requires action. It is by obedience to commandments that we qualify for further revelation of truth and light” (“A Life Founded in Light and Truth,” *Ensign*, July 2001, 13).

How Can the Spirit Magnify Me to Be an Instrument in the Lord’s Hands?

Eliza R. Snow (1804–87), former Relief Society general president:

“When you are filled with the Spirit of God, . . . that [Spirit] satisfies and fills up every longing of the human heart, and fills up every vacuum. When I am filled with that spirit my soul is satisfied. . . . The Spirit of God will impart instruction to your minds, and you will impart it to each other. . . . Remember that you are Saints of God; and that you have important works to perform in Zion” (*Woman’s Exponent*, Sept. 15, 1873, 62).

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

“Women . . . who can hear the voice of the Lord, and who respond to those promptings, become invaluable instruments in His hands. . . . Never doubt that your influence is absolutely vital to preserving the family and to assisting with the growth and spiritual vitality of the Church” (“Women of Righteousness,” *Liabona*, Dec. 2002, 42; *Ensign*, Apr. 2002, 72).

Bonnie D. Parkin, Relief Society general president:

“If we are in tune with the Spirit, if we are seeking the Lord and His guidance, if our direction is to return to our Father in Heaven, the sweet moments will come. And we will treasure them, for we have become instruments in the hands of God” (“Sweet Moments,” *Liabona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 108). ■

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

I have difficulty distinguishing between promptings of the Spirit and my own personal feelings. How can I tell the difference?



ELIJAH, BY WILSON JAY ONG

The Lord speaks to Elijah.

From an experience of the prophet Elijah, we learn how the Spirit most often speaks to us: “The Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice” (1 Kings 19:11–12). The Spirit speaks in such a still, small voice that it might be unrecognized if one is not spiritually in tune.

Through sincere prayer, we can ask Heavenly Father to give us the ability to recognize the sweet promptings of the Spirit and the courage to follow that guidance.

Tinubi Oluwasegun Babatunde, Nigeria

Here are several questions I ask to help make the determination:

Is the prompting an answer to prayer? Sometimes an impression will come after I have been praying and pondering over a particular issue for some time.

Does the prompting help me accomplish my righteous desires and goals? When my heart has a desire the Lord approves of, He frequently will assist me in accomplishing that desire.

If I follow this prompting, what will happen? I visualize myself following the prompting and experiencing the results. If this process leaves me feeling dark and cold, I choose not to follow. If the feelings are light and warm, I move forward.

Denise W. Anderson, North Dakota

When I was a new missionary, President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) taught that we must have the courage to act on promptings and then observe the fruit of those actions. In other words, if a sudden thought comes *and it is a good thought*, act on it and then observe the outcome. In this way you begin to learn from

your own experience to distinguish the impressions of the Spirit. Alma taught this same principle relating to faith, inviting listeners to “experiment upon [his] words” (Alma 32:27).

Thirty years after being instructed by President Lee, I went to a meeting for stake presidencies where we were taught by General Authorities. The presiding authority called on members to share an experience in which they had been led by the Spirit. Among men of much experience, one ventured to say that many times he wasn’t completely sure whether an impression was inspired until afterward when he saw the outcome. The presiding authority replied, “Would you feel better if you knew it’s that way much of the time?”

I was immediately taken back to that day 30 years before when we were taught that we must act and learn from our own experience. Following this instruction has yielded some of the choicest experiences of my life.

Reese Carter, Utah

The majority of my answers to prayers have come as I have followed this process: studying out the issue in my mind (see D&C 9:8–9), making the decision that best follows what I know to be right, and then going forward with what I have decided even if

I don't seem to get an answer from the Lord. Then, as I act on my decision, I feel comfortable and at peace, and I may even feel a strong burning in my bosom later on.

Melissa Camille Clayton, Pennsylvania

The only thing we truly have to give to Heavenly Father is our will. He wants to bless us, but He wants us to learn accountability and responsibility. As we choose to turn our mind, body, heart, and spirit to Him, we tune our souls to receive better spiritual reception.

Many of the decisions we make have minimal eternal impact and are between two or more good options. When it's not clear whether a prompting is from personal feelings or the Spirit, I take comfort in the fact that Heavenly Father gave me resources to make decisions: a mind, good parents and friends, and talents. As long as my choice allows me to better serve others, brings me closer to God, and allows me to be happy, I am certain He is pleased. He has said, "It is not meet that I should command in all things" (D&C 58:26). He wants us to use our agency to do good. We will not stray if we are truly seeking His righteousness.

Christopher K. Cox, Utah

When making important decisions I use the test given in Doctrine and Covenants 8:2 as my guide: "I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost." If a prompting makes sense in my mind and feels good in my heart, I can have confidence that it is right and

comes from the Lord. If the two are not in harmony and I am confused, I know I may need to step back, take some time, reconsider the options, and modify the decision.

Crystal Ward, Utah

This method works for me and is helping me teach my children to recognize promptings:

When you are in a situation where you are positive that the Spirit is present—such as a testimony meeting, during a musical number, after receiving a blessing, and so on—take note of how you feel. Write down your thoughts and

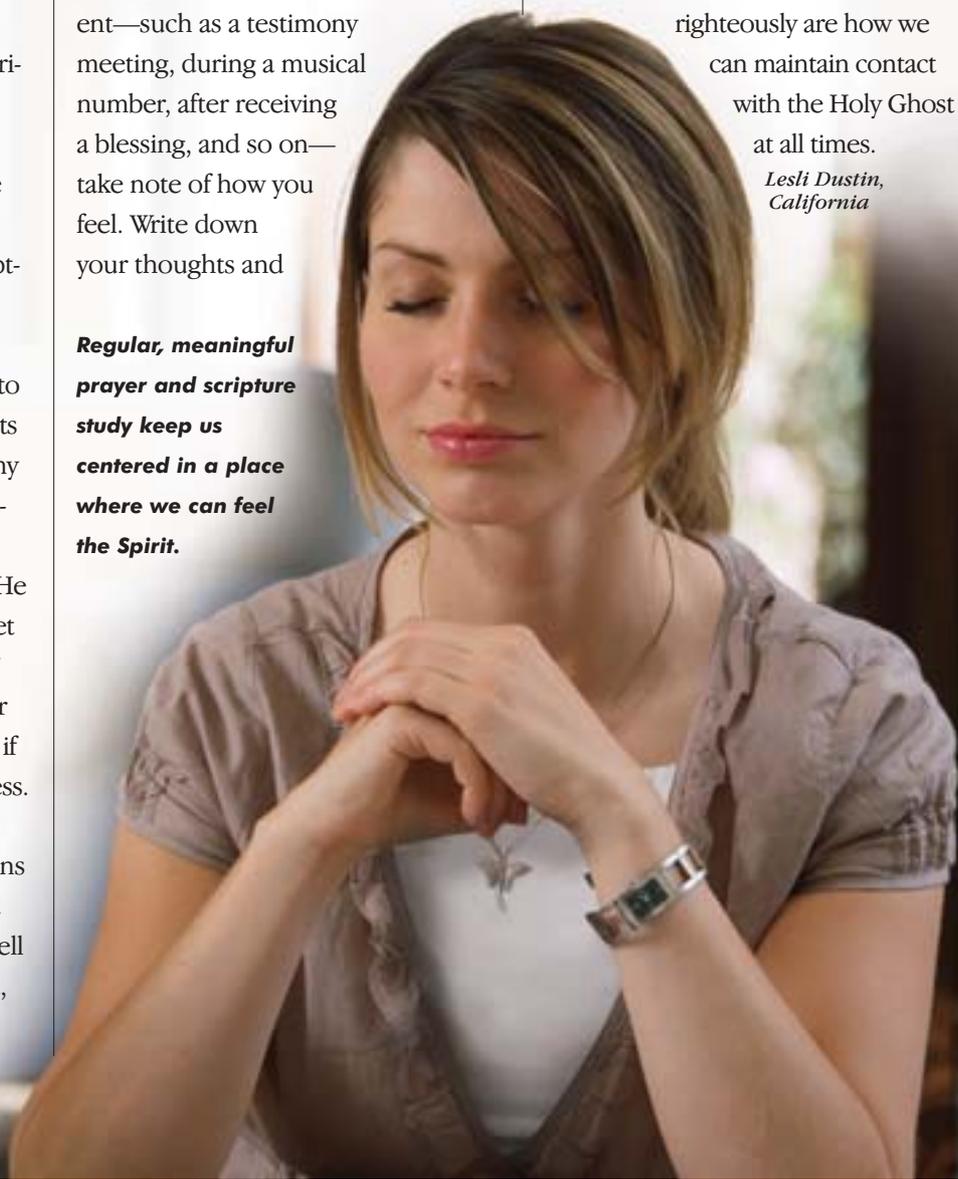
Regular, meaningful prayer and scripture study keep us centered in a place where we can feel the Spirit.

feelings. This way you learn what the Spirit feels like, as it can be different for you than for someone else.

As you learn to recognize this feeling, the second step is putting yourself in a place where you can receive revelation. This is why regular, meaningful prayer and scripture study are so vital—they keep us centered in a place where we can feel the Spirit. Doing

these things every day and living righteously are how we can maintain contact with the Holy Ghost at all times.

Lesli Dustin, California



PHOTOGRAPH BY HENRIKALS

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Sometimes we want so much to be guided by the Spirit that we forget the Lord will not make our decisions for us. At times I have been almost paralyzed worrying about whether what I feel is “the Spirit.” Regardless of where a thought comes from, it is up to me to use my agency responsibly in considering my resources and choosing the best course.

Sometimes we need to use our faith to make the best decision we can, effectively taking a step into the darkness, asking the Lord to bless and protect us. Through repeated experiences like these, we come to better recognize the whisperings of the Holy Ghost.

Jonathon English, Tennessee

I have found that if a thought has one or more of the following characteristics, it has a high probability of being a prompting. Then I act on it, as long as it is safe and righteous.

- The thought increases your awareness of a situation so you can make a good decision.

- An insistent righteous thought seems to come back after you have dismissed it.

- The thought prompts you to act in a more logical way, even if you don't see anything wrong with your current way.

I will probably never know whether some of the thoughts I have acted on were promptings, but I do not mind. Sometimes the promptings we get are to benefit other people, and we do

not see the fruits of our actions.

However, I find contentment and comfort in knowing that I will receive

further instruction from the Spirit because I have diligently strived to heed the promptings I have already been given.

Meaghan James, Washington

One way I have learned to recognize promptings is by keeping a daily journal and recording spiritual thoughts. I identify the specific feeling or thought and write down what I think it means and what I should do about it. If it is an answer to a specific question I have asked, I record that and the fact that I feel it is the answer. Then I act upon it when the opportunity is presented. It can be moments, days, or years later when I see the outcome. I record that spiritual verification also.

With this practice I am able to recognize new inspiration more readily.

Donna K. Maxwell, Utah

Each week while partaking of the sacrament, we

Each week while partaking of the sacrament, we are taught that if we take upon us the name of Christ, always remember Him, and keep His commandments, we will have His Spirit to be with us.



are taught that if we take upon us the name of Christ, always remember Him, and keep His commandments, we will have His Spirit to be with us (see Moroni 4–5). By entering this covenant, we can step forward in faith with the assurance that our righteous feelings and actions become “one” with the desires of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. Instead of worrying about where a prompting originates, we can listen and act for righteousness’ sake.

Sberan K. Milius, Colorado

Here are some distinguishing characteristics of spiritual promptings:

Consistency. Spiritual promptings are consistent with gospel principles. Doctrine and Covenants 11:12 teaches, “Put your trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good—yea, to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously; and this is my Spirit.”

Clarity. We learn in 1 Corinthians 14:33 that “God is not the author of confusion.” Instead, like the good seed described by Alma, the good word of God can “enlighten [our] understanding” (Alma 32:28).

Remembrance. Once during a period of concern, I knelt in prayer. As I prayed, a relevant passage from my patriarchal blessing came immediately into my remembrance. At other times of need, relevant scriptures have come to mind, offering much-needed guidance.

Peace. Doctrine and Covenants 6:23 teaches, “Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have

HUMILITY PRECEDES INSPIRATION



“Each of us is influenced strongly by our own desires and preferences.

We may even mistake these influences as the ratification or prompting of the Holy Ghost. It is therefore significant when we feel prompted to do something contrary to our personal preference. That is good evidence of authenticity. Conversely, a feeling that seems to confirm a person in some action he or she strongly desires should be received with caution and subjected to more than one test of validity. In that circumstance a person could well ask himself, ‘Am I humbly submitting myself to the will of my Heavenly Father and asking for his guidance, or am I proudly submitting my will to my Heavenly Father and asking for his approval?’ Humility is more likely to receive inspiration; pride is more likely to be deceived and fall.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “I Have a Question,” Ensign, June 1983, 27.

than from God?” Peace is another sign of the Holy Ghost.

Krista Oakes, Texas

There is more to this process than simply figuring out the right answers.

Heavenly Father wants us to know Him. We come to know Him by seeking His voice among all the voices clamoring for our attention and then by choosing that voice above all others.

I have made many mistakes in trying to learn discernment. Mistakes occur in the course of practicing a skill; they show us our weaknesses so we can be humble and teachable.

This is a lifelong endeavor, but that does not mean we have to wait an entire lifetime to succeed. If we are prepared when we knock, the door will be opened. I believe our Heavenly Father is so desirous of having us return to His presence that He will make use of every opportunity we give Him—“even if [we] can no more than desire” to receive His direction (Alma 32:27). It generally begins with small and simple things.

Kiersten Olson, Utah

SHARE YOUR IDEAS

An upcoming Q&A feature will focus on the following question:

With all the difficulty in the world, I often find myself feeling anxious and worried. How can I find peace during troubled times?

If you’d like to contribute your ideas and experiences, please label them “finding peace” and follow the submission guidelines under “Do You Have a Story to Tell?” in the contents pages at the beginning of the magazine. Please limit responses to 500 words, and submit them by April 13.

BY DONALD B. DOTY, M.D.
Chairman, Missionary Department
Health Services

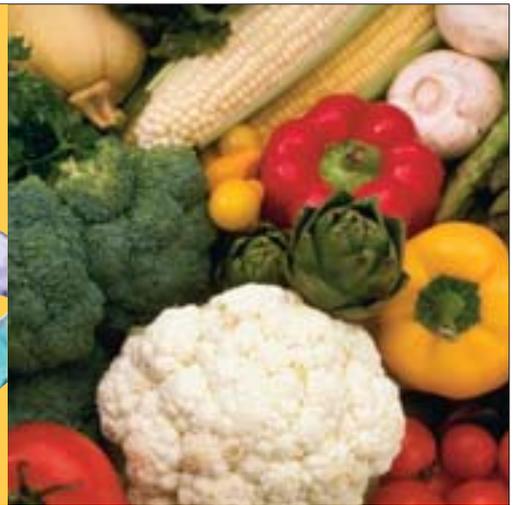
*Physical and mental
preparation should begin
at least two years before
a full-time mission.*

During 35 years of practice as a cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon, I performed thousands of operations on the heart. After cardiac surgery, patients would often ask me how they could prevent future surgery. And even if they didn't ask, I felt obligated to advise them anyway. I would talk to them about the importance of a healthy diet, appropriate weight, aerobic exercise, adequate rest, and stress reduction. Those who acted on my advice were generally blessed with years of comfortable living. Many of those who lacked the resolve to make the necessary lifestyle changes had to face the surgical knife again—often sooner rather than later.

MISSIONARY

Health

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GETTY IMAGES, EXCEPT AS NOTED



Starting Now

Preventive measures are also essential for young adults who are preparing to serve missions. Today about 3 percent of missionaries have their missions shortened by either physical or mental health problems. Losing three out of 100 missionaries may not seem like very many. But to the individual and his or her family, having a mission cut short is significant.

For more than a year, I have served in a calling in which I observe the health problems missionaries encounter. Based on my experiences in this assignment, I would offer the

following information to help young people who are preparing to become missionaries reduce the likelihood of developing these health problems.

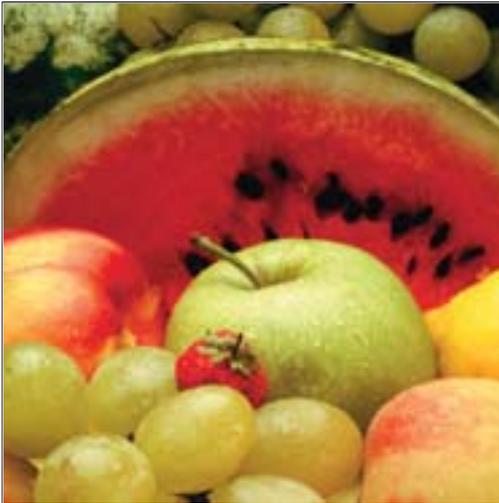
Fortunately, many of the health problems that missionaries encounter are preventable with proper preparation. Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stated, “The single most important thing you can do to prepare for a call to serve is to *become* a missionary long before you *go* on a mission.”¹

I recommend that health preparation begin at least two years in advance of the anticipated missionary service.



Many of the health problems that missionaries encounter are preventable with proper preparation.

Preparation



Rather than living on sugar and fat, young people should learn to enjoy meals consisting of protein and fiber, such as lean meat, yogurt, vegetables, and fruit.

Prospective missionaries can prepare for the rigors of missionary life by establishing a regular pattern of aerobic exercise—walking, running, or cycling for one hour every day. Those whose primary form of exercise is playing electronic games or text messaging will take at least four months to achieve the level of conditioning that will allow

Those who wait to prepare until the last minute or until after they have received the call to serve may not be ready and may even have their missions delayed.

Physical health preparation usually includes a routine office consultation with a medical doctor and a dentist. In some cases, mental health preparation may require evaluation by a mental health professional.

Physical Health Preparation

Regular (daily) exercise. A missionary must be able to walk an average of six miles (10 km) per day and ride a bicycle 12 miles (19 km) per day. Prospective missionaries who aren't walking more than from the car to a class or a job will likely get sore feet and blisters when they reach the mission field. Those who are not used to riding a bicycle regularly will also become very "saddle sore" when a bike becomes their primary means of transportation. A missionary who is out of shape will be fatigued by missionary work, and a tired missionary is more open to discouragement and health concerns than a missionary who is physically fit.

them to actually enjoy a workout.

Adequate sleep. Although sleep needs vary, young adults generally need to sleep seven to eight hours per day. Ideally, they should be in bed by 10:30 to midnight and out of bed by 6:30 to 8:00 a.m. Staying up until 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. and sleeping until 10:00 a.m. leaves a person feeling tired all the time and wanting to sleep until noon. Staying up all night to cram for examinations, playing video games most of the night, or working a graveyard shift can be detrimental because keeping late hours resets the body's clock. Missionaries live a scheduled life. They are in bed by 10:30 p.m. and up by 6:30 a.m. every day. This schedule will be difficult unless prospective missionaries get into a similar routine well in advance of the call to service.

Healthy eating habits. Rather than living on sugar and fat, young people should learn to enjoy meals consisting of protein and fiber, such as lean meat, yogurt, vegetables, and fruit. Also, drinking more than 12 ounces of carbonated beverage per day is too much.

The Missionary Department requires that missionaries



PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT CASEY

Prospective missionaries can prepare for the rigors of missionary life by establishing a regular pattern of aerobic exercise. Missionaries live a scheduled life. They are in bed by 10:30 p.m. and up by 6:30 a.m. every day.

have a body mass index no higher than 37. This is actually on the border between obesity and morbid obesity. Prospective missionaries should strive to keep their weight in the normal range, thereby avoiding obesity-related health problems. Being markedly under normal weight can also have serious health consequences.

Meal preparation skills. Parents can help their sons and daughters learn how to prepare simple, healthy meals. I stress the word *simple* because missionaries often cook food on a hot plate or a single gas burner and may not have an oven. Every prospective missionary needs to know the basics of cooking and sanitary food handling. Since dishwashers are rarely found in missionary living quarters, it is also important to know how to clean up after meals with hot water and dish soap.

Personal hygiene. Personal cleanliness and good grooming habits are vital to missionary success. Favorable first impressions are lasting. Clean hands also help missionaries stay healthy and prevent the spread of communicable diseases.

Skin problems. Acne is a common teenage problem. Those with a severe acne problem should get help from a medical doctor well before entering the Missionary Training Center. Some acne medicines require monitoring over time and are not used in the mission field.

Dental health. Prevention is the key to good dental health. This means a habit of brushing teeth at least morning and night, daily use of dental floss, and consistent visits to your dentist. Any required dental repair should be finished before the missionary recommendation is submitted. Orthodontic treatment—which often takes two years or more—must be completed before arrival at the MTC.

Chronic health issues. Headaches are a common, difficult health problem that may worsen during missionary

service and that can be difficult to evaluate and treat in the field. Occasional stomach and bowel problems may also become chronic during missionary service. Heart problems and breathing problems such as asthma should be thoroughly evaluated before missionaries begin service. With proper treatment, many health problems become controllable, making missionary service possible if treatment continues throughout the mission.

Bone and joint problems resulting from injury may require surgery. Orthopedic procedures, even arthroscopic operations, usually entail lengthy periods of rehabilitation.

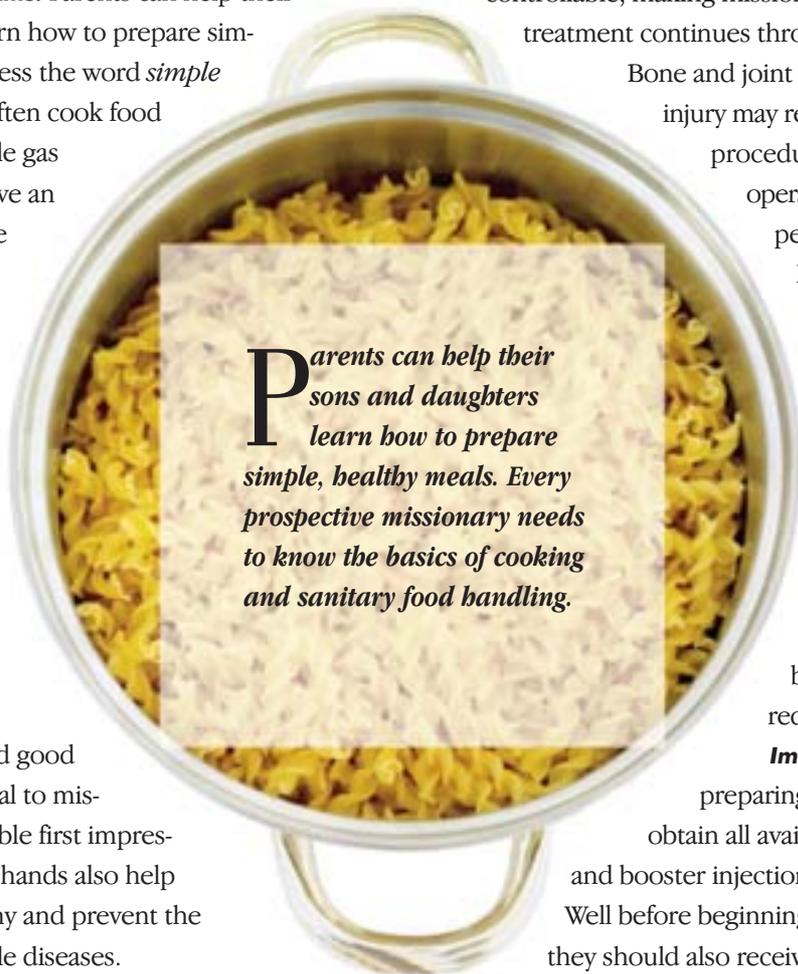
Prospective missionaries must obtain appropriate orthopedic care well in advance (four to six months) of entering missionary service. A young man or woman who arrives at the MTC on crutches two weeks after knee surgery will not be able to walk the distance required in the mission field.

Immunizations. Those preparing to serve missions should obtain all available routine vaccinations and booster injections at appropriate ages. Well before beginning their missionary service, they should also receive any special immunizations required for the particular country where they will serve.

The advantages of immunization overwhelmingly exceed the minuscule risks of receiving vaccines. Immunization renders an individual resistant to disease for varying time periods. Maintaining immunity may require a booster injection.

Mental Health Preparation

All people have moments of sadness, anxiety, and discouragement. This is normal, especially at times of loss and grief. However, any emotional difficulty that interferes with normal daily functioning needs to be dealt with before missionary service begins.



Parents can help their sons and daughters learn how to prepare simple, healthy meals. Every prospective missionary needs to know the basics of cooking and sanitary food handling.



Prospective missionaries should strive to keep their weight in the normal range, thereby avoiding obesity-related health problems.

Any unresolved sins can affect both the mental and physical health of individuals. These should be resolved through full repentance as potential missionaries meet with their bishops before receiving a call. But once this is done, there still may be other conditions needing treatment.

Mood disorders. Those who suffer from chronic or recurring feelings of depression, sadness, anxiety, or fear should be evaluated by a doctor or mental health counselor. Mood swings, especially when they involve temper and anger, should also be evaluated. Treatment, including counseling or medication or both, often reduces or relieves mood disorders, making missionary service possible.

Abnormal thought patterns. Excessive worry and guilt can seriously impair a missionary's ability to serve. Perfectionism, which is a consuming need to be perfect, can also become a crippling mental health issue. Recurring painful thoughts and repetitive behaviors such as excessive hand washing are signs of obsessive-compulsive thought disorder. Counseling with a doctor or mental health professional can often effectively treat these abnormal thought patterns.

Learning disorders. Because the ability to learn and teach is the essence of missionary work, learning problems such as attention deficit disorder (ADD) can impair missionary success. However, evaluation and treatment of learning disorders may improve learning ability considerably. Some learning disorders may not be compatible with missionary life. Parents and

prospective missionaries should prayerfully counsel with their bishop and professionals on the viability of serving a full-time proselyting mission.

Eating disorders. Because people can use food to comfort themselves and relieve feelings of depression or anxiety, eating can become an addiction leading to obesity. On the other hand, social pressure to be lean or even underweight can lead to anorexia nervosa or bulimia, both of which create serious health risks. These disorders will not resolve themselves during a mission. Because they are so difficult to treat, they may not be compatible with missionary service.

Homesickness. While mild homesickness is a normal part of the mission experience, leaving parents and siblings can cause anxiety so intense that it interferes with the ability to sleep or eat. Rapid weight loss is common among missionaries with severe separation anxiety. To prevent these problems, prospective missionaries should become comfortable being away from home. Extended camping trips or living in a dormitory at school can reveal any tendency for severe separation anxiety. Those who do have problems functioning

A regular job teaches such habits as getting to work on time, not missing work unnecessarily, doing assigned tasks well, looking for more work when the assigned task is completed, and not going home early. A job also helps young people understand the value of money.



when they are away from home should seek treatment from a doctor or mental health professional.

Social skills. Missionary work involves meeting and conversing with people of all ages and speaking before groups. Prospective missionaries should become comfortable talking to older people. They should practice being respectful and courteous, using proper table manners, and observing other social courtesies. Missionaries are also required to approach strangers and strike up a conversation. Therefore, prospective missionaries should learn to be comfortable in initiating contact and conversing with people outside their normal circle of family and friends. They should also be aware of cultural differences in the world.

Employment. Missionary work is just that, work. There is nothing easy about missionary work, so young people should develop the ability to work reliably. A regular job teaches such habits as getting to work on time, not missing work unnecessarily, doing assigned tasks well, looking for more work when the assigned task is completed, and not going home early. A job also helps young people understand the value of money. Where possible, prospective missionaries should plan to pay as much of the cost of the mission as possible, rather than depending on parents or donations from others. Helping pay for their own missions will help prospective missionaries learn to live within the stringent missionary allowance.

Other Mission Opportunities

During the course of preparing to serve, prospective missionaries may discover serious physical or emotional issues. Prospective missionaries and their parents should be completely candid in disclosing all health issues and medications on the missionary recommendation application.

Unfortunately, some health problems can present insurmountable obstacles to serving full-time proselytizing missions. The First Presidency has stated: “There are worthy

individuals who desire to serve but do not qualify for the physical, mental, or emotional challenges of a mission. We ask stake presidents and bishops to express love and appreciation to these individuals and to honorably excuse them from full-time missionary labors.”² In such cases, service missions can be a great blessing, allowing individuals to live at home and receive appropriate medical care while growing and maturing in the service of the Lord. Parents, bishops, and stake presidents can help in encouraging and arranging appropriate opportunities.

Opportunities for service missions can also be found at the Church Web site www.lds.org. Select “Other Resources,” then “Mission and Service Opportunities.” Continuing higher education or technical training to allow better coping with chronic impairment is also an admirable alternative.

Here to Help

When prospective missionaries prepare themselves well in advance of submitting their recommendation applications, they can identify and resolve health problems, improve their physical strength, and be better mentally and emotionally prepared to withstand the rigorous life required of missionaries. They will then be much more likely to complete a successful mission free of significant health problems.

Unfortunately, some missionaries unpredictably become ill or injured while serving. More than 50 health care professionals are serving as full-time missionaries throughout the world, with 200 additional volunteers serving at Church headquarters—all in support of missionary health. Speaking for this small army of health-care professionals, we will be there to help any missionary who becomes ill or injured. And we pray every day that our missionaries will remain healthy and safe from harm as they serve the Lord and His children. ■

NOTES

1. “Becoming a Missionary,” *Liabona and Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 45.
2. First Presidency letter, Jan. 30, 2004.



HELPS FOR HOME EVENING

Most *Ensign* articles can be used for family home evening discussions, personal reflection, or teaching the gospel in a variety of settings.

1. Create an obstacle course and time family members as they perform tasks from several of the sections in the article: for example, physical health preparation—go up and down stairs; healthy eating—peel a carrot; personal hygiene—tie a necktie; dental health—brush their teeth; and so on. Using the article, discuss how to prepare for a future mission. Have each person make a goal of one area to work on.
2. As a family, choose recipes for five simple, well-balanced meals. Learn how to prepare each meal, and discuss proper cleanup. Assign each older family member a meal to prepare during the coming week. Create a file of these and other simple recipes.

Pen Pals and Referrals

By Brittany Jones Beahm

My companion handed me an envelope and said, “Sister Jones, I think this is for you.” I looked at the return address and was pleased to see my cousin’s name printed neatly in the corner. I had just been transferred to a new city from the other side of southern France and didn’t think anyone back home in the United States was aware of my new address. I opened the envelope and read a short note in which my cousin said that she had recently received an e-mail from her French pen pal after eight years of no contact.

My cousin explained that although

she and Céline had received each other’s address in their high school French and English classes, respectively, they had never actually written to each other. My cousin was therefore very surprised to receive Céline’s e-mail. She didn’t know if Céline lived in southern France where I was serving, but she included her name and address, asking me to contact her if possible.

Because I was new to the area, I handed the note to my companion and asked her if my cousin’s pen pal lived in the mission. “Not only does she live within mission boundaries,” she responded; “she lives in our district!” Excitedly, we called Céline to introduce ourselves, and she agreed

to meet with us. We took the short train ride to Montauban.

As we stepped off the train, we were greeted warmly by Céline and her parents. They invited us to their home and asked us to share our message. As we taught them about the Book of Mormon and the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Spirit bore witness of the truthfulness of the restored gospel. The family expressed their appreciation for the values taught by the Church, and after a lengthy discussion we left them with a copy of the Book of Mormon, a prayer, and a promise to return.

That was the first of several visits with Céline and her family. My mission ended while they were still in the process of learning about the Church, but before I said good-bye to Céline, I asked her why she had decided to contact my cousin after eight years.

I marveled at how a loving Father allowed a lost address to be found and an old connection to be made.



Her response surprised me: “When I was cleaning out a drawer, I came across her address on a small piece of paper I thought I’d lost. I felt strongly that I needed to write to her.”

On the way home to our apartment I gazed out the train window and marveled at how a loving Father allowed a lost address to be found and an old connection to be made at the very time I was unexpectedly transferred to a new city for the last six weeks of my mission. He is mindful of all and will make miracles happen, even with such a small and simple thing as a pen pal’s address. ■

Never Too Late

By Sylvia de Moscuí Maldonado

While I was serving as a full-time missionary in my homeland of Ecuador, one day I had a definite feeling that someone special was waiting for us—someone who would accept the gospel.

As my companion and I walked, we came to a humble house. An elderly lady, perhaps 80 years of age, smiled sweetly at me. I smiled at her in return. I was ready to keep walking, but the woman looked so happy to see us. Something told me to stop right there.

Many people in that little town were illiterate, so I asked her if she could read. Her answer was an enthusiastic yes. I was suddenly filled with



excitement. I felt that she was the person the Lord wanted us to teach. I took a Book of Mormon from my bag and showed it to her. I was surprised when she began to read aloud from the first page without needing glasses. I asked her if she would like to have the book, and again she answered yes. Happiness glowed in her tired eyes—eyes that had long been seeking a better life.

We began to teach her the gospel, and the Spirit bore witness to her of its truthfulness. Such tender feelings filled my heart.

As we concluded our lesson, I showed her chapter 11 of 3 Nephi, which tells about the visit of Jesus Christ to the Americas. She promised to read it. She marked the page herself and kissed the book,

beaming with an unspeakable joy.

We made other visits to our new investigator, and we were delighted to find she read everything we assigned her. After completing her daily work, she would read the Book of Mormon late into the night. She also started attending church, although it took two hours for her to walk slowly to the meetinghouse. Her feelings about the Book of Mormon and Jesus Christ grew rapidly and deeply. After hearing all of the missionary lessons, she wanted to be baptized and pay tithing.

What great blessings this dear woman received! Her heart was ready to follow the Lord, and His Spirit guided us to her. She taught us about love, courage, sacrifice, joy, and obedience. Above all else she taught us that it is never too late to change. ■



If you will allow the Spirit to magnify your callings, you will be able to work miracles for the Lord.”

Speaking the Language of the Spirit

By Sergio Adrián López

As missionaries in the Argentina Buenos Aires South Mission, my companion, Elder Allred, and I received a referral card to contact a family from Russia. When we found the house, the woman recognized us as missionaries and invited us in to meet her family.

We quickly realized the Balva family understood very little Spanish, and it was difficult for us to understand them as well. From their broken Spanish, we gathered that they had been in Argentina only a short time but were eager to learn about the Church. We adapted the first lesson into simplified Spanish, and the family flipped through their two Russian-Spanish dictionaries as we slowly taught our message, but we weren't sure how much of it they really understood.

After making an appointment to return, we walked home, discussing how difficult it had been to convey the meaning of our message. We wondered if the family would understand the other lessons any better or if they would get frustrated and ask us to stop coming.

We returned to visit the Balva family the following day to see how they were and if they had begun reading the Book of Mormon and praying to know of its truthfulness. To our surprise and joy, they excitedly showed us a paper on which they had written in Spanish the principles we had taught them. They also shared with us what they had read in 3 Nephi 11 regarding the Savior's visit to the American continent, assuring us that they had understood all we had

discussed the day before and that they were excited to learn more.

Over the next few weeks my testimony was strengthened as the Holy Ghost witnessed to the Balva family of the gospel's truthfulness and enlightened their understanding in Spanish. Heavenly Father knew the desire of their hearts and recognized the sincerity of their prayers to find truth. Together, the Balva family, Elder Allred, and I experienced the joy described in D&C 50:22: "Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together"—not because we spoke the same language but because of the universal language of the Spirit.

The Balva family introduced us to another Russian family, whom we were also privileged to teach. Both families made covenants with Heavenly Father by entering the waters of baptism not long after we met them.

I am a witness that the words of

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) are true: “The influence of the Spirit is the most important element in this work. If you will allow the Spirit to magnify your callings, you will be able to work miracles for the Lord” (new mission presidents’ seminar, June 25, 1986). ■

The First of a Thousand Souls

By Norie Tsubaki Murae

My companion and I, serving in the Japan Fukuoka Mission, were working in an area known as Kasuga, located near the Kumamoto Station. The people who lived in this area were very skeptical about religion. But knowing this, our mission president told us, “There are a thousand people in Kumamoto who have been prepared by the Lord. Please find them.”

One rainy day we decided to try to find Noboru Yamagata, a less-active member we had never met. Approaching his house, we noticed a sign that read, “No religious solicitation”—a common warning in Japanese culture. But heeding the promptings of the Spirit, we knocked on the door.

Brother Yamagata’s mother answered the door and informed us that her son was out of town. She went on to say that she would be friendly to anyone who had ties to him, as is traditional for Japanese families, and she consequently invited us in. But despite her surface hospitality, her face wore a threatening expression.

As we sat down, she warned, “I don’t want to hear anything about religion.” She then began to talk about herself and expressed how strongly she felt about certain values in her life.

To our surprise she talked about faith, love, and the Beatitudes, and we took the chance to tell her that these principles were also important to us. We recounted the glorious vision that resulted from Joseph Smith’s faith, and we described the importance of the Book of Mormon in the Restoration of the gospel.

It was interesting to observe the change that took place in Mrs.

Yamagata as she listened to our message. Tears ran down her cheeks as we testified of the divinity of Jesus Christ and the Restoration of the gospel through Joseph Smith. She replied, “Joseph Smith was a lucky man.”

When we said good-bye at last, her face shined and her eyes sparkled with happiness. She said, “Thank you for coming today. My son must have led you to me.” We shook hands, and she jokingly said, “I won’t be washing my hand today!”

As we walked home we realized that this woman was one of the people our mission president had described as being ready to receive the gospel. Clearly, the Spirit had prepared her heart for our message, and we knew she was the first of a thousand souls we needed to find. ■



Our mission president told us, “There are a thousand people who have been prepared by the Lord. Please find them.”

Budgeting on an Irregular Income

One of the hardest things my husband and I have encountered while being self-employed is maintaining a budget. With a fluctuating income, it can be a challenge to plan for expenses. For us, the key to successful budgeting is creating a “steady income.” We do that by depositing all net income into one account and paying ourselves a monthly household salary, a median of the highs and lows. In other words, even when the previous month’s

income was high, we maintain an average income, thus leaving enough to cover the low-income months as well. To successfully track our spending, we have established a detailed spending plan that includes all our fixed and

periodic expenses. We also maintain a careful savings plan. The saying “don’t count your chickens before they’re hatched” is especially relevant when you are self-employed.

You cannot spend what you make month to month. You have to look at the overall picture and set a budget plan within fixed parameters.

Katie Stone, Utah

“Yes?”

When your chil-

dren call to you or seek your attention, instead of responding with an exasperated “What?” try saying “Yes?” Somehow this slight change is naturally more upbeat. And when you do have to say no, children can accept it more easily when they’ve been answered all day with yes.

Sue M. Carter, Ohio



Ready-Made Music Lessons

In my various roles as Sunbeam teacher, Primary music leader, and family home evening mom, I have often used the music CD tucked inside the front cover of the Primary 1 manual (*I Am a Child of God*). It provides a variety of music-and-motion activities for young, restless bodies. For instance, children can learn about basic music by moving to high and low notes as well as different rhythms. Recently, our

junior Primary, which consists of more than 80 children, was having a hard time paying attention during singing time.

As soon as I turned on the CD, they listened intently and followed my actions as suggested by the narrator. Together we enjoyed a ready-made, interactive singing activity





Gifts of the Spirit

One of our best family home evening lessons focused on the gifts of the Spirit. I found items around our home that related to each gift and wrapped them in decorative paper to hide the contents. For example, a

Spanish/English dictionary represented the gift of tongues. A box of band-aids signified the gift of healing. Taped to each package was a corresponding scripture. Not only did

the unwrapping keep two-year-old hands busy, but as a family we enjoyed meaningful discussions about each gift.

*Jennifer Graham,
New Mexico*



that helped us to get the wiggles out as we learned about music.

Note: The manual (item no. 34969; \$11.50 U.S.) comes with a picture packet and CD (5004; \$.75 U.S.). Both items are also available separately at LDS distribution centers or online at www.ldscatalog.com.

Kerry Griffin Smith, Idaho

Heritage Albums

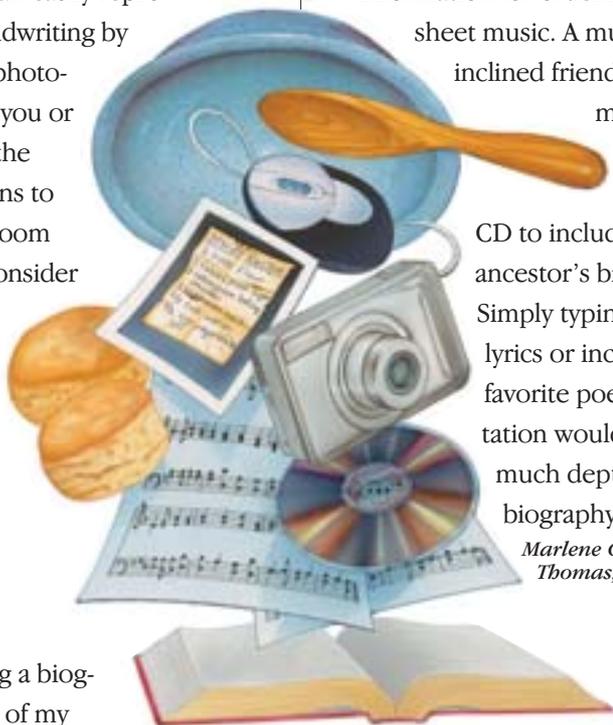
I enjoy creating heritage albums about my ancestors. In addition to writing their biographies, I like to include items that show their talents and personalities. Here are two ideas for adding interest to a biography.

• **Favorite recipes.** I cherish an old handwritten recipe for biscuits that my maternal grandmother used. When including such a recipe in an album, you can easily reproduce the handwriting by scanning or photocopying it. If you or someone in the family happens to have an heirloom cookbook, consider photographing it and including the image with any recipes you reproduce.

• **Favorite song lyrics.** While reading a biography of one of my

ancestors, I discovered that he loved singing a particular song. I had never heard of it, but a quick Internet search of the song title produced information for ordering the sheet music. A musically inclined friend played the music, and I recorded it onto a CD to include with my ancestor's biography. Simply typing the song lyrics or including a favorite poem or quotation would also add much depth to a biography.

*Marlene Cameron
Thomas, Tennessee*



A Soft Answer

During tense moments with your children, try whispering instead of yelling. When our children were young, I found that they often paid better attention when they had to strain to hear me. Whispering also helped me to communicate instructions in a more loving way, thus encouraging them to more willingly cooperate. Now that our oldest daughter has children of her own, I smile when I hear her whisper, "Please, clean up your mess," rewarding with a soft-spoken "thank you" when they do as they're asked. I am grateful that our children—and now grandchildren as well—know how "a soft answer turneth away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1).

Peggy Climer, Arkansas

Prophet, Church Leaders Counsel Youth at Fireside

By Stephanie Long, Church Magazines

Thousands of youth, their parents, and their leaders gathered at the Conference Center or watched by satellite Sunday, December 31, 2006, for a special New Year's Eve youth devotional that Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles called "remarkable. . . . There is not anything like this anywhere else in the world."

President Gordon B. Hinckley, Elder Holland, and Young Women general president Susan W. Tanner spoke during the devotional. Ten musical numbers were provided by the Orchestra at Temple Square and a choir made up of members of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and selected seminary students from across the Salt Lake Valley, along with special soloists Peter Breinholt, William Joseph, and Ryan Tani.

President Hinckley

President Hinckley counseled young people not to spoil the future before them. "Don't make the kinds of mistakes that will bring regret. You can be wise and happy or stupid and miserable. The choice is yours."

President Hinckley emphasized several principles as guidance to the youth for the future.

Be grateful. "My first suggestion to you, my dear young friends, is that you

walk with gratitude in your hearts. Be thankful for the wonderful blessings that are yours. Be grateful for the tremendous opportunities that you have. Be thankful to your parents who care so very much about you and who have worked so very hard to provide for you."

Be smart. "You need all the education you can get.

You should sacrifice anything that is needed to be sacrificed to qualify yourselves to do the work of the world. . . . Train your mind and your hands to become an influence for good as you go forward with your life."

Be clean. "Be clean in every way. Someday you will meet the man or woman of your dreams. Be clean for the sake of your future companion. Be clean for the sake of your posterity. Be clean for the sake of your self-respect."

Be prayerful. "None of us can do it alone. . . . Prayer will

change your life. It will bring you peace. It will give you direction and guidance. It will help you feel that you are not alone in this big and sometimes brutal world. The Lord answers our prayers. I know that."

Encouraging the youth to follow counsel, President Hinckley assured them that with such obedience would come blessings and happiness.

Elder Holland

Acknowledging that the most common illness that those in their teens and 20s experience is feelings of low self-esteem, self-doubt, and the like, Elder Holland spoke about his personal struggles with such problems and how to overcome them.

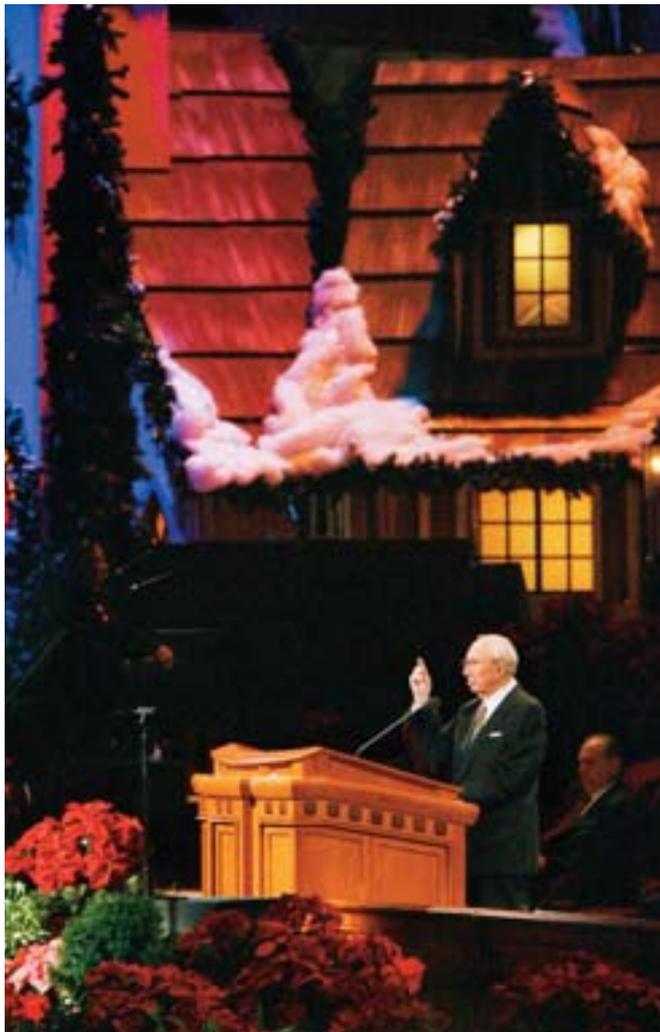
"Yes, I can remember all the things you remember—not being sure about how I looked or if I was accepted or what the future would hold for me."

Elder Holland said that with the new year one could gain a new confidence.

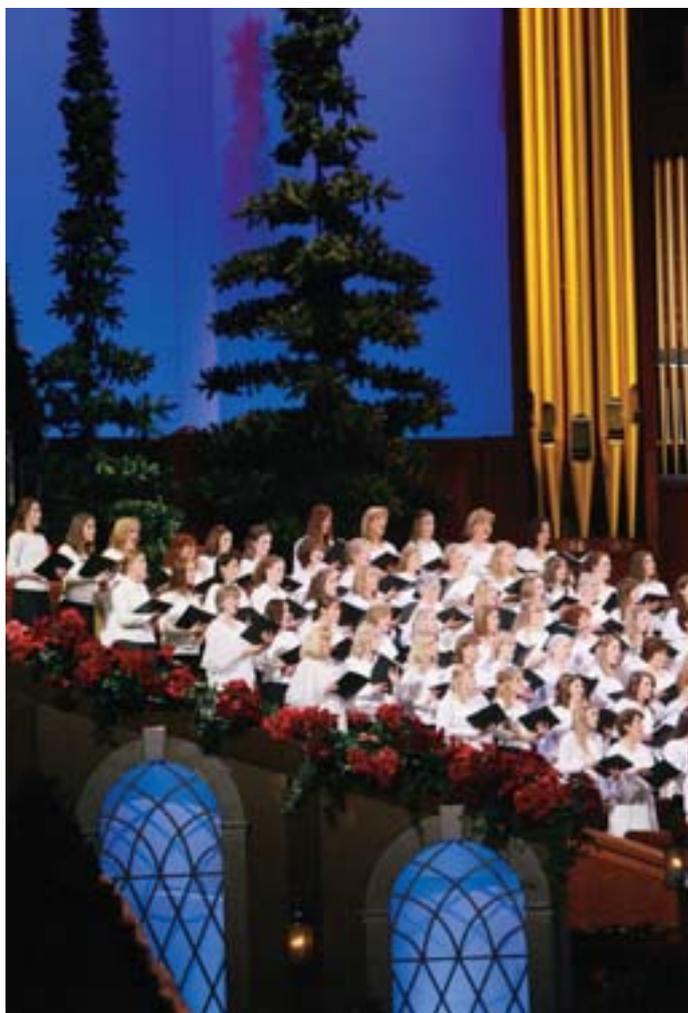
"I wish to speak pointedly tonight about how to have a very special kind of confidence in this new year, a confidence which when rightfully earned does wonders for every other aspect of our lives, especially our self-esteem and how we view the future."

Elder Holland said that positive feelings felt when one is personally worthy would bring such confidence.

Sharing a story of a young man who had borne his testimony about the importance of personal worthiness, Elder



President Gordon B. Hinckley speaks to Church teens during a special New Year's devotional.



Salt Lake Valley seminary students perform with members of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

Holland illustrated that in order to be personally worthy of the Holy Ghost we must garnish our thoughts unceasingly, as it states in Doctrine and Covenants 121:45–46: “Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven. The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth.”

Youth should not be so preoccupied with the troubles of the world that they become discouraged. If they think and act virtuously, then they will have confidence, Elder Holland said.

“Have a wonderful life. Think the best and hope the best and have faith in the future. You have a great life ahead of you. Your Heavenly Father loves you.”

Sister Tanner

Also speaking on the scripture in Doctrine and Covenants 121, Sister Tanner

pointed out: “Our thoughts are so important. Proverbs says that as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he (see Proverbs 23:7). The Book of Mormon says that we will be judged by our thoughts (see Alma 12:14). We are admonished in Doctrine and Covenants 121:45–46 to ‘let virtue garnish [our] thoughts unceasingly’ so that our confidence will ‘wax strong in the presence of God’ and ‘the Holy Ghost shall be [our] constant companion.’”

Sister Tanner said that virtuous thought would invite the companionship of the Holy Ghost, and one could find confidence and comfort in such a companionship.

Sharing a personal story, she spoke of a time when she was struggling with despair, yet found comfort in thinking positive thoughts.

“I concentrated on three things: Finals will be over in three weeks. I know my family loves me. And I know Heavenly Father loves me. . . . These thoughts elevated me enough to feel the comfort and guidance of the Holy Ghost through a difficult time.”

Everyone struggles with hard times, everyone needs to be rescued from time to time, but everyone has a loving Heavenly Father who is always there, Sister Tanner said.

Personally living by the motto “I can do hard things,” Sister Tanner encouraged all the youth to resolve to let virtue garnish their thoughts unceasingly, that their confidence may wax strong in the presence of God. ■

Temple Work Rolls On

Papeete Tahiti Temple

Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles rededicated the Papeete Tahiti Temple in two sessions during November 2006. First dedicated in October 1983, the temple underwent a 15-month renovation to enlarge the baptismal font and sealing rooms and provide a youth center for children being sealed to their parents.

An estimated 10,000 Tahitians participated in the rededication, which was broadcast to local stake centers as well as to meeting places in Salt Lake City and New Caledonia and on the BYU–Hawaii campus.

Oquirrh Mountain Utah Temple

President Gordon B. Hinckley presided at a groundbreaking ceremony for the Oquirrh Mountain Utah Temple on December 16, 2006. In attendance were President Thomas S. Monson and President James E. Faust, counselors in the First Presidency; President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; and other General Authorities. Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles conducted the service.

Plans for the Oquirrh Mountain Utah Temple include a 9-foot-tall statue of the angel Moroni that will sit atop a 193-foot, copper-clad



Oquirrh Mountain Utah Temple

spire. The temple will be located on an 11-acre site at the base of the Oquirrh Mountains on the west side of the Salt Lake Valley and will face the Wasatch Mountains to the east.

South Jordan, Utah, where the Jordan River and the Oquirrh Mountain temples are located, will be the first city in the world to have two temples. The new temple will be the 13th in Utah.

Quetzaltenango, Guatemala

During the groundbreaking ceremony for the Oquirrh Mountain Utah Temple, President Gordon B. Hinckley announced plans to build a temple in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala.

That temple, the second temple in Guatemala, will most likely serve stakes only in Guatemala. It will be one of the smaller temples



President Gordon B. Hinckley, right, the counselors in the First Presidency, members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and other Church leaders break ground for the Oquirrh Mountain Utah Temple.

introduced by President Hinckley during the October 1997 general conference.

Other Temples

Work continues on the Curitiba Brazil Temple, Draper Utah Temple, Panamá City Panamá Temple, Rexburg Idaho Temple, and

Twin Falls Idaho Temple.

Currently the Church has 135 temples announced, under construction, or operational.

For more information about temples across the globe, visit the Church's temples Web site (www.lds.org/temples). ■

Church Marks Anniversary of Wilford Woodruff's Birth

By Kate McNeil, Church Magazines

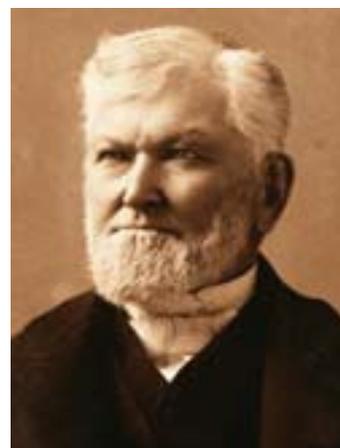
March 1, 2007, marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Wilford Woodruff, the fourth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Born on March 1, 1807, and raised in Farmington, Connecticut, Wilford Woodruff was a flour mill operator. He joined the Church in 1833 and served two missions before being ordained an Apostle in 1839.

As a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, he completed four additional missions; presided over the temple in St. George, Utah; and served six years as Church historian.

He was sustained as President of the Church on April 7, 1889. He dedicated the Manti Utah Temple and the long-awaited Salt Lake Temple, oversaw the organization of the Genealogical Society of Utah, and reemphasized the value of historical record keeping.

President Woodruff was a faithful pioneer, participating in Zion's Camp with the Prophet Joseph Smith. At age 40 he entered the Salt Lake



President Wilford Woodruff

Valley on July 24, 1847, and was present when Brigham Young proclaimed, "This is the right place."

"God Moves in a Mysterious Way" (*Hymns*, no. 285) was President Woodruff's favorite hymn. " 'He loved [that hymn],' remarked President Heber J. Grant [1856–1945], who served as an Apostle when Wilford Woodruff was President of the Church. 'We sang it, I am sure, sometimes twice a month in our weekly meetings in the Temple, and very seldom did a month pass by when that song was not called for by Brother Woodruff. He believed in this



President Woodruff dedicated the Salt Lake Temple in 1893 following its 40 years of construction.

work with all his heart and soul, and labored with all the power that God gave him for its advancement'” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Wilford Woodruff* [2004], xv).

President Woodruff is remembered for being an avid journal keeper. He kept a journal for most of his adult life, “making his final entry on August 31, 1898, two days before he died” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 125).

In one meeting, he taught a principle that can be applied to journals as well as to official Church records: “While walking in a rapid stream we cannot tread twice in the same water. Neither can we spend twice the same time. When we pass out of that door, the work of this meeting will be closed to us forever. We shall never spend the time of this evening again. Then should we not keep a record

of our work, teachings, and counsel which we give in this meeting? We should” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 127).

He encouraged children to start keeping journals early in their lives: “If my young friends will begin to do this and continue it, it will be of far more worth than gold to them in a future day,” he said (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 132).

In 2006 members across the world learned of this prophet’s testimony from the manual *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Wilford Woodruff*. In the manual are many stories from President Woodruff’s life and ministry.

While searching for the truth as a young man, President Woodruff felt a need to see a modern-day prophet: “I prayed day and night that I might live to see a prophet. I would have gone a

thousand miles to have seen a prophet, or a man that could teach me the things that I read of in the Bible. I could not join any church, because I could not find any church at that time that advocated these principles” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, xix–xx).

President Woodruff taught the importance of modern revelation: “The Church of God could not live twenty-four hours without revelation” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 47).

He also emphasized personal revelation through the Spirit: “You may have the administration of angels; you may see many miracles; . . . but I claim that the gift of the Holy Ghost is the greatest gift that can be bestowed

upon man” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 49).

President Woodruff frequently exhorted his fellow Saints to partake of the blessings available in the temple. He said, “I consider that the building of temples is one of the important things required by the Lord of the Latter-day Saints in the dispensation of the fulness of times, that we may go into those temples and not only redeem the living but redeem our dead” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, xxix). With characteristic diligence, he set an example of temple work, ensuring that temple work be done for thousands of his ancestors.

President Woodruff died in San Francisco, California, on September 2, 1898, at age 91. ■



President Wilford Woodruff with his counselors in the 1893 First Presidency: George Q. Cannon, First Counselor, left, and Joseph F. Smith, Second Counselor.

Education Aids Gospel Understanding

By Kate McNeil, Church Magazines

When Stephen Abu Jr. went to high school in Abomosu, Ghana, he carried his books in a plastic shopping bag. As a college student in Utah, he enjoyed the benefits of a backpack. Whether he carried books in plastic or canvas, Stephen's goal remained the same—to get an education.

Stephen was the first of his 70 classmates at Abomosu Presbyterian Middle School to attend high school and the first to attend college. In 2004 he finished his business marketing degree at Utah State University in Logan, Utah.

After overcoming great odds to become a college graduate, Stephen is now giving back to his home country by rebuilding schoolhouses and improving education in Ghana.

“Education is key to understanding and accepting the gospel,” Stephen says.

A Father's Example

Influenced by his father, Stephen Abu Sr., Stephen was able to gain an education and accept the gospel. A principal of the Abomosu Presbyterian Middle School, Stephen's father always encouraged him to gain a full education. Stephen was the first of his five siblings to attend high school.

Stephen's father joined the Church after his brother introduced him to the gospel. He soon began spreading the

gospel in the Atiwa district of Ghana.

“Our white shirts and ties made us unique in the village, and many mothers encouraged their children to join the Church,” Stephen said. “The mothers liked our outward cleanliness and the standards that the members of the Church lived by.”

Neighbors would gather at the Abu home for family home evening. Brother Abu Sr. said many children did not fully understand what was being taught but loved to sing.

“Family home evening was new to us as a family and to our culture,” Stephen said. “Rarely do you find an African family sitting and eating together, let alone counseling together as a family. For my dad to organize a forum where each could share his or her feelings on the direction of the family was a sign of his humility.”

By the time the full-time missionaries arrived from Accra in 1984, Brother Abu Sr. had prepared 84 people for baptism. The Abu family has built a legacy of faith in Abomosu, Ghana.

True Liberty Found in the Temple

After serving a mission in Nigeria, Stephen began attending school at Utah State University in 2001.

“While I was flying into JFK [New York City's John F.



PHOTOGRAPH BY ADAM OLSON

Stephen Abu Jr., who overcame great odds to receive an education, is now helping others do the same.

Kennedy International Airport] on my way to Utah, the person I sat by tried to show me the Statue of Liberty,” he said. “Try as I did, I could not see it because the plane tilted whenever I stretched to peep through the window.

“When I arrived in Salt Lake City, my cousin drove me past the Salt Lake Temple, which I had seen only in Church magazines and videos. I felt so calm seeing the temple, and I thought, ‘This is the true statue of liberty,’ for if we enter the temple and keep the covenants we make with the Lord, we will have true liberty.”

While studying at Utah State University, Stephen attended the Logan LDS Institute. There he met his wife, Sonya. The two were sealed in the Logan Utah Temple on April 23, 2003, following Stephen's sealing to his parents.

Jesus, Others, You

Stephen now works as the director of humanitarian affairs for World Joy, Inc., a nonprofit organization in Utah dedicated to helping developing countries, specifically Ghana. Stephen believes improving literacy in villages will help his people accept the gospel, the greatest gift in his life.

“Many of our brothers and sisters who are illiterate find it difficult to fully grasp the mission of the Church,” he said. “Those who cannot read and write usually stay away from worship service when they are given a speaking or prayer assignment because they feel inadequate. This sometimes leads to their inactivity. Being educated will allow them to read and understand the scriptures and Church manuals. The gospel is the reason I have decided to go back and help my people.” ■

Scriptures in French, German, and Italian Now Available Online

By Stephanie Long, Church Magazines

An estimated 125,000 native French-, German-, and Italian-speaking members will now be able to study the scriptures in their native tongue by accessing the LDS scriptures online. On January 8, 2007, the official French, German, and Italian versions of the LDS scriptures were made available at <http://scriptures.lds.org>. Previously, the LDS scriptures have been available online only in English and Spanish.

The process to convert the traditional print edition of the scriptures into the Internet version takes about six months to complete, according to Ron Schwendiman, manager of the Internet Coordination Group for

the Church Curriculum Department. It depends upon the checks, reviews, and revisions that must be made to eliminate errors that may have occurred during the conversion process.

Several languages are in line to begin the process to be put in Internet form. “Portuguese will be coming soon, and others will follow,” said Kai Anderson, director of scriptures coordination.

Brother Schwendiman is hoping that in the near future more members will be able to access the LDS scriptures online in their native tongue. “Right now we are reviewing with the scriptures committee the order of the next languages and are hoping to release as

many as possible this year,” he said.

Just as with the Spanish Internet scriptures, the French, German, and Italian online scriptures include the triple combination (the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price), the Guide to the Scriptures (a listing of gospel topics with definitions and cross-references), and links to other study aids, such as

selections from the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, a chronology of Church history, and photographs and maps related to biblical events and Church history.

To access the scriptures in English, French, German, Italian, or Spanish, go to <http://scriptures.lds.org>, and click on “English” in the top right corner. Then select the appropriate language from the menu. ■

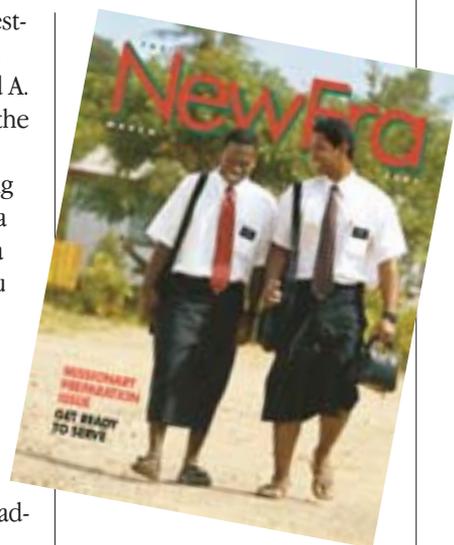
New Era Publishes New Issue on Missionaries

In the October 2005 priesthood session of general conference, Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “The single most important thing you can do to prepare for a call to serve is to become a missionary long before you go on a mission.”

March’s 2007 issue of the *New Era* is focused on just that—helping youth prepare for missionary service.

Inside the magazine, readers will find features that focus specifically on missionary preparation, life, and work.

Featured articles include a message from President Gordon B. Hinckley that focuses on the blessings serving a mission can bring, a message from President Thomas S. Monson that examines “The Five Ms of Missionary Work,” advice from Elder M. Russell Ballard on how youth can prepare now to serve a mission, and a view into the life of missionaries at



the MTC and in the field.

Members may find many different uses for the magazine. It might be used in conjunction with *Preach My Gospel* to aid in the teaching of a missionary preparation class. A quiz game could be made using information found in the magazine to help youth learn more about missionary preparation. Or a role-playing game could be designed around the topic “A Day in the Life of a Missionary.” ■



The LDS edition of the scriptures is now online in French, German, Italian, and Spanish, as well as English.

Young Women in Africa Serve Prisoners

By Stephanie Long, Church Magazines

Gathered together in a bush camp in Africa without modern conveniences such as running water, 160 young women worked together to give more than 200 people they had never met something those people didn't have.

Inspired by their camp theme, "Let us all arise and shine forth that our light may be a standard to the nation" (see D&C 115:5), the young women of the Harare Zimbabwe Stake decided to share their light with the women of the Chikurubi Women's Prison by putting together hygiene kits for them.

"The theme for the camp . . . made the young women decide that they would like the light to be felt in the prison," said Margaret Ignatius, Harare Zimbabwe Stake Young Women president. "When people are locked up, they are isolated from the world. So the young women wanted them to know and feel their love."

Just as the young women had hoped, the residents of the prison were very happy and grateful. "They have never received such gifts," Sister Ignatius said, "and they wanted to know more about the Church and the Book of Mormon."

Although the young women could not go to the facility to personally deliver the kits, Sister Ignatius had

the opportunity to take the kits to the women, an experience she is grateful for.

"I felt the Spirit of the Lord, and I was humbled to see the women who were in prison singing and praising the Lord," Sister Ignatius said. "They had gratitude even in the difficult situation they were in, which made me reflect and be thankful for the blessings I have."

In addition to the service performed at the prison, the young women and their leaders hope to continue serving the community, as they often do in homes and hospitals.

"It was a very good and uplifting experience; we wish for more opportunities to do it," Sister Ignatius said. ■

Comment

An Inspiring Rescue

Thank you for the article in the December *Ensign* about the 1856 rescue of the handcart companies. The article was well researched, finely written, and highly inspiring. The authors clearly put a significant amount of time and effort into writing this captivating story. I am grateful to them for this wonderful article.

Jeff Ehlers, Utah

Getting Back on Track

Your article "Getting Back on Track" in the January issue

was of great interest to me. Wayne Sidwell, whose family returned to the Church because of loving Primary teachers, was my parents' home teacher. My parents had also been "derailed from the gospel by a series of choices," but because of Brother Sidwell's efforts in visiting them monthly over the course of many years, they too were eventually set "back on the strait and



narrow track." Since then, my parents have served as temple workers and have served a mission. Brother Sidwell magnified his calling and became an instrument in the Lord's hands. My brothers and I will be eternally grateful to him.

Debby Croshaw, Idaho

Feeling United

When I received the November *Ensign* with the general conference talks, I read it right through and am now rereading one talk each morning. I would like to say how much I enjoy the pictures in this issue—the families, the children, the priesthood session attendees. I was just looking at the picture on page 118 of the sisters in St. Petersburg

gathered for the Relief Society general meeting and had such a feeling of worldwide sisterhood. Thank you for the work you do in making us feel united wherever we live.

Carol Dunkley, Australia

Answers and Peace

The past few days I have been touched by the Spirit as I have read and pondered from the Church magazines. The words of "The Temple Is about Families" (Nov. 2006), given at the last general conference, and "What I Have Learned about Mighty Prayer" (Dec. 2006) spoke to my heart and gave me answers and peace I have been seeking. More important, they taught me once again that Heavenly Father and the Savior are aware of me, understand my struggles, and are prepared to help me if I will ask.

Sue Hirse, Utah

The Name Is Caspar

On page 44 of the December *Ensign* you show a map tracing the route of the handcart pioneers. (This same map is also found in the July 2006 issue on pages 42 and 44.) Each map spells Fort Caspar as "Fort Casper." This is incorrect, as the fort was named for Caspar Collins. His name was misspelled when the city in Wyoming was named for him. Additional information about how the spelling of the city and fort came to be different can be found on the official Fort Caspar Web site: www.fortcasparwyoming.com/Fortbuil.asp.

Beth Anderson, Wyoming



MAY NOT BE COPIED

The Lord's Harvest, by Marilee Campbell

This painting is based on a favorite missionary scripture found four times in the Doctrine and Covenants:

"Behold, the field is white already to harvest; therefore, whoso desireth to reap, let him thrust in his sickle with his might, and reap while the day lasts, that he may treasure up for his soul everlasting salvation in the kingdom of God" (D&C 6:3; see also D&C 11:3; 12:3; 14:3).



Around the world, Relief Society sisters—like these in the San Miguel de Allende Ward, Celaya Mexico Stake—strengthen their talents and testimonies through home, family, and personal enrichment meetings and activities.