

THE
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JULY

2008

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COVER STORY:

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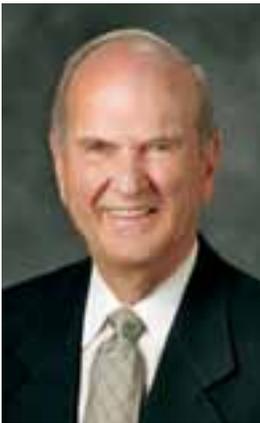
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YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD

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

Who are we? We are children of God. Our potential is unlimited. Our inheritance is sacred.



Your body is a magnificent creation of God. Consider the heart—it is an incredible pump. It has four delicate valves that open and close more than 100,000 times a day, directing the flow of blood.

Recently I observed young men who attracted attention to themselves because of their extreme styles of dress and grooming. One made a revealing remark when he said, “I’m trying to find out who I really am.” This occurred after I had come from a Church meeting where Primary children had sung “I Am a Child of God” (*Hymns*, no. 301). Such contrasting experiences emphasize the importance of knowing that we are literally children of God.

We are dual beings. Each soul is comprised of body and spirit, (see D&C 88:15), both of which emanate from God. A firm understanding of body and spirit will shape our thoughts and deeds for good.

The Body

The marvel of our physical bodies is often overlooked. Who has not encountered feelings of low self-esteem because of physique or appearance? Many people wish their bodies could be more to their liking. Some with naturally straight hair want it curly. Others with curly hair want it straight. Occasionally some ladies, believing that “gentlemen prefer blondes,” become

“decided blondes.”

Your body, whatever its natural gifts, is a magnificent creation of God. It is a tabernacle of flesh—a temple for your spirit. A study of your body attests to its divine design.

Its formation begins with the union of two reproductive cells—one from the mother and one from the father. Together, these two cells contain all of the new individual’s hereditary information, stored in a space so small it cannot be seen by the naked eye. Twenty-three chromosomes from each parent unite in one new cell. These chromosomes contain thousands of genes which determine all of the physical characteristics of the unborn person. Approximately 22 days after these two cells unite, a little heart begins to beat. At 26 days, blood begins to circulate. Cells multiply and divide. Some become eyes that see; others become ears that hear.

Each organ is a wondrous gift from God. The eye has a self-focusing lens. Nerves and muscles control two separate eyes to make a single three-dimensional image. The eyes are connected to the brain, which records



the sights seen. No cords or batteries are needed.

Each ear is connected to compact equipment designed to convert sound waves into audible tones. An eardrum serves as a diaphragm. Minute ossicles amplify sound vibrations and transmit a signal via nerves to the brain, which senses and remembers the sounds.

The heart is an incredible pump. It has four delicate valves that control the direction of blood flow. These valves open and close more than 100,000 times a day—36 million times a year. Yet, unless altered by disease, they are able to withstand this stress almost indefinitely. No man-made material developed to date can be flexed so frequently and so long without breaking.

Much could be said about each of the other precious organs in the body. They function in a marvelous manner, beyond my time or ability to describe.

Other attributes of the body are equally amazing, though less evident. For example, backup is provided. Each paired organ has instant backup available from the other of the pair. Single organs, such as the brain, the heart, and the liver, are nourished by two routes of blood supply. This design protects the organ if harm should come to any one channel.

Think of the body's system of self-defense. To protect it from harm, the body perceives pain. In response to infection, it generates antibodies. They not only help to combat the immediate problem, but they persist to strengthen resistance to infection in the future.

One day my attention was directed to some three-year-old children who had lapped up water from a street gutter. The number of germs they ingested must have been incalculable, but not one of those youngsters became ill. As soon as that dirty drink reached each little stomach, its hydrochloric acid went to work to treat the water and protect the life of the child.

The skin provides protection. It also warns against injuries that excessive heat or cold might cause. It even sends signals that indicate trouble elsewhere. With fever, the skin perspires. When one is frightened, it pales. When one is embarrassed, it blushes.

The body repairs itself. Broken bones mend and become strong once again. Skin lacerations heal themselves. A leak in the circulation can seal itself. The body renews its own outdated cells. The average red blood cell, for instance, lives about 120 days. Then it is replaced

by a newly regenerated cell.

The body regulates its own vital ingredients. Essential elements and chemical constituents are adjusted continuously. And regardless of wide fluctuations in the temperature of the environment, the temperature of the body is carefully controlled within narrow bounds.

If these qualities of normal function, defense, repair, regeneration, and regulation were to prevail in perpetuity, life here would continue without limit. Mercifully, our Creator provided for aging and other processes which ultimately result in physical death. We often think of death as untimely or tragic. But death, like birth, is part of life. When death claims an individual in the prime of life, we take comfort in knowing that the very laws which do not allow life to persist here are the same laws that will be implemented at the time of the Resurrection, when the body will be endowed with immortality.

The Spirit

Next I speak of the spirit. Prior to our mortal existence here, each spirit son and daughter lived with God. The spirit is eternal; it existed in innocence in the premortal realm and will exist after the body dies. The spirit provides the body with animation and personality. "All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure" (D&C 131:7). "The spirit of man [is] in the likeness of his person" (D&C 77:2).

Development of the spirit is of eternal consequence. The attributes by which we shall be judged one day are those of the spirit. These include the virtues of integrity, compassion, love, and more. Your spirit, by being housed in your body, is able to develop and express these attributes in ways that are vital to your eternal progression.

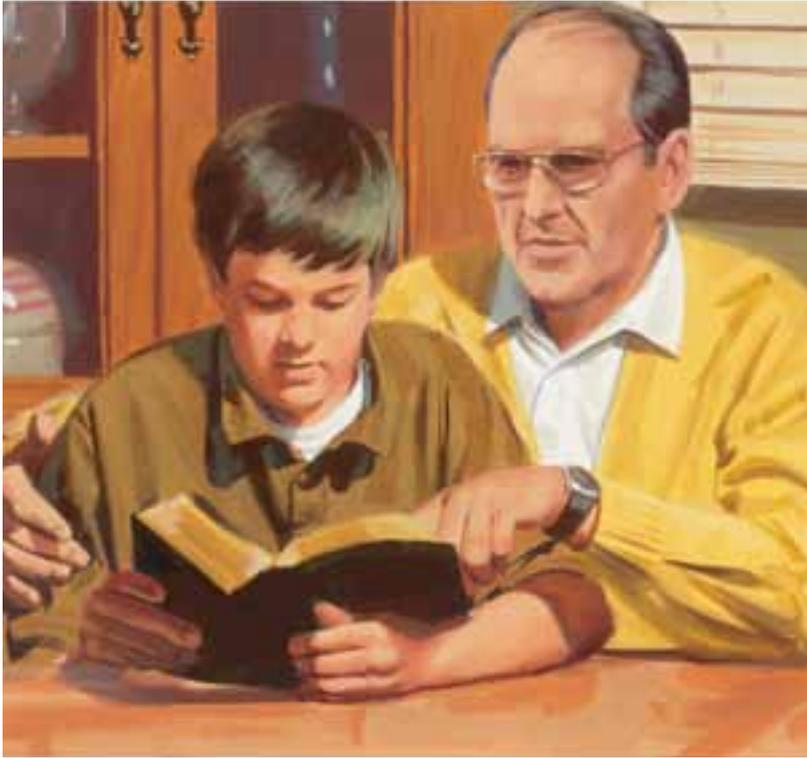
Spirit and body, when joined together, become a living soul of supernal worth. Indeed, we are children of God—physically and spiritually.

Physical Limitations

For reasons usually unknown, some people are born with physical limitations. Specific parts of the body may be abnormal. Regulatory systems may be out of balance. And all of our bodies are subject to disease and death. Nevertheless, the gift of a physical body is priceless. A perfect body is not required to achieve a divine destiny. In fact, some of the sweetest spirits are housed in frail frames. Great spiritual strength is often developed by



A study of your body attests to its divine design. For example, each paired organ has instant backup available from the other of the pair. Single organs, such as the brain, the heart, and the liver, are nourished by two routes of blood supply.



No less amazing is your eternal spirit. Among its attributes are the virtues of integrity, compassion, and love. The Spirit and body when joined together, become a living soul of supernal worth. Indeed, we are children of God—physically and spiritually.

those with physical challenges precisely because they are challenged. Such individuals are entitled to all the blessings that God has in store for His faithful and obedient children.

Eventually the time will come when each “spirit and . . . body shall be reunited again in . . . perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame” (Alma 11:43). Then, thanks to the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we can become perfected in Him.

Personal Behavior

How should these truths influence our personal behavior? We should gratefully acknowledge God as our Creator. Otherwise, we would be as guilty as goldfish swimming in a bowl, oblivious to the goodness of their provider. “Ye must give thanks unto God,” said the Lord, “for whatsoever blessing ye are blessed with” (D&C 46:32). And we can practice virtue and holiness before Him continually.

We will regard our body as a temple of our very own. We will not let it be des-

ecrated or defaced in any way. We will control our diet and exercise for physical fitness.

Should not equal attention be paid to spiritual fitness? Just as physical strength requires exercise, so spiritual strength requires effort. Among the most important of spiritual exercises is prayer. It engenders harmony with God and a desire to keep His commandments. Prayer is a key to wisdom, virtue, and humility.

We will be careful about which counsel we heed. Many so-called experts give advice for the body—without thought for the spirit. Anyone who accepts direction contrary to the Word of Wisdom, for example, forsakes a law revealed to bring both physical and spiritual blessings. Some recommendations regarding use of our reproductive organs are based solely—and inadequately—upon physical considerations. Beware of such one-sided views! Paul taught that “if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Romans 8:13).

That caution pertains to pornography, which is highly addictive. In time, addictions enslave both the body and the spirit. Full repentance from addiction is best accomplished in this life, while we still have a mortal body to help us.

As children of God, we should not let anything enter the body that might defile it. We will cherish our chastity and avoid “foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown [us] in destruction and perdition” (1 Timothy 6:9). We will “flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, [and] meekness” (1 Timothy 6:11)—traits that edify the whole soul.

Who are we? We are children of God. Our potential is unlimited. Our inheritance is sacred. May we always honor that heritage—in every thought and deed. **NE**

From an October 1998 general conference address.

THE LIVING CHRIST, Paragraphs 3–4

The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles plainly declare our central beliefs in Jesus Christ.

Sacrament

The sacrament is a special time to ponder the Savior's Atonement and to renew baptismal covenants.

To help you focus your thoughts, you might try this during your next sacrament meeting: While the bread is passed, ponder mistakes you have made during the previous week, and while the water is passed, think about what you would like to do better the following week. You could also read a scripture or a hymn that reflects on the life of the Savior.

Spurious

Not genuine, authentic, or true.



Atonement for the sins of all mankind

“Since all of us ‘have sinned, and come short of the glory of God’ (Rom. 3:23), the need for repentance is universal. And mercifully, Christ’s Atonement fits sins of all sizes—whether the smaller sins of omission or major transgressions. Hence, when we turn away from our sins, the required arc of that turning varies from person to person, but it is necessary for all.”

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004), “Testifying of the Great and Glorious Atonement,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2001, 10.

We solemnly testify

To solemnly testify is to bear witness in a serious, sober, and sacred manner.

In the scriptures there are several places where the Lord commands his people to testify of him (see Isaiah 43:10; Mosiah 18:9; D&C 84:62). As you study the scriptures, try highlighting areas where someone witnesses of the life of the Savior.

Vicarious

Taking the place of someone else; performing, receiving, or suffering for another.

Central to all human history

Why do we need the Atonement? For the answer, read Alma 34:9–18. Afterward you could write down five

reasons why it was necessary for Heavenly Father to send His Only Begotten Son to earth.

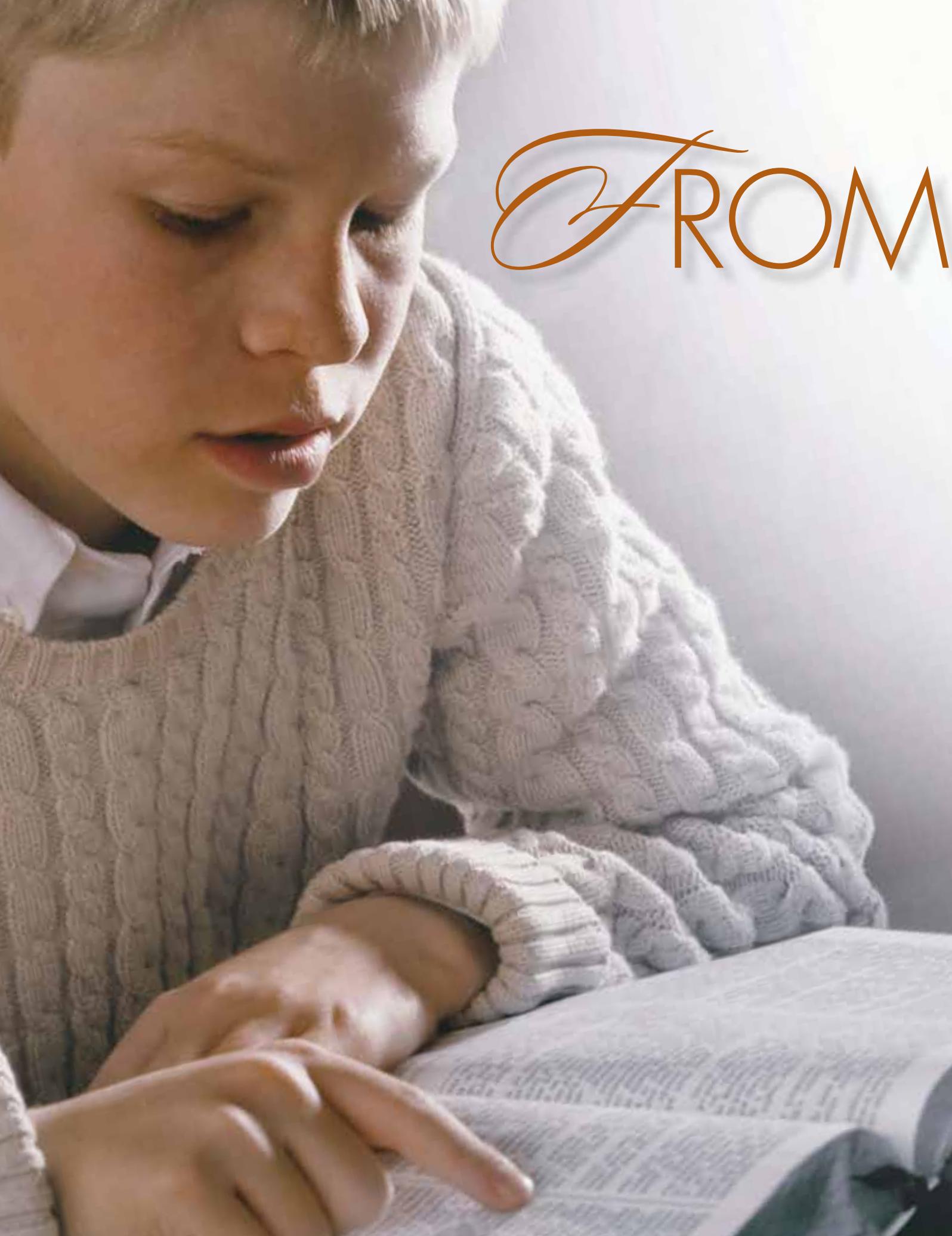


Firstborn of the Father

“I believe that He was born of Mary of the lineage of David as the promised Messiah, that He was in very deed begotten of the Father, and that in His birth was the fulfillment of the great prophetic declaration of Isaiah [see Isaiah 9:6].”

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), “In These Three I Believe,” *Ensign*, July 2006, 2–8.

Editors’ note: This page is not meant to be a comprehensive explanation of the selected passage, only a starting point for your own study.



FROM

WEAK TO STRONG

BY SCOTT SHEPHERD

The scriptures contain many spiritual treasures that may not be readily apparent to the casual reader. I think this is why we are commanded to *search* the scriptures in addition to merely reading the words.

The war chapters in the Book of Mormon used to be particularly easy for me to breeze through. Because I thought these chapters were mainly historical—rather than a collection of sermons—I found myself asking, “How is this going to help me in *my* life?” Through study, prayer, and the help of the Holy Ghost, I found a way these chapters can apply directly to my life.

In chapter 49 of Alma, the Lamanite armies are planning to attack the Nephite city Ammonihah. But as they approach the city, they discover that the Nephite armies are well prepared to receive them. Captain Moroni instructed the people to fortify the city Ammonihah. Disappointed in their attempt, the enraged army moves toward what was historically a weaker city called Noah. But, inspired by God, Moroni also made extra efforts to secure Noah, even to the extent that it exceeded the strength of Ammonihah. So when the Lamanites arrive, they cannot conquer the city.

As I studied this section, the Holy Ghost impressed upon my mind a personal meaning that I can apply to my own life. I realized I have



I would encourage all of us to continue to read and study the scriptures, that we might understand them and apply in our lives the lessons we find there.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “How Firm a Foundation,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 68.

built up strengths and spiritual fortifications, but I also have weak spots, which the adversary is focused on attacking. If I want to protect myself spiritually, I need to zero in on those weak spots and make them stronger than my greatest strengths—the same way the city Noah became strong by the hand of Moroni.

As I read, I was also reminded of a verse in the book of Ether, which added to my understanding of this powerful principle: “And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).

Through humility and faith in Christ, my weakness *can* become strong. I will have the power to overcome temptation when I build my foundation upon the gospel of Christ. What an inspiring insight I gained from just a few simple verses!

The scriptures have so much to teach us if we will only seek out what the Lord would have us learn. Through study, prayer, and the help of the Holy Ghost, we truly can find inspiration that will strengthen our testimonies and give us the direction we need. **NE**

NOW IS THE

Being a young Latter-day Saint in Ukraine means serving and leading in the Church—right now.

BY JANESEA CLOWARD

Imagine being a member of the Church in a place where everyone is a convert. Missionaries have been here for only a few years. And when you turn 17, instead of becoming Laurel president, you are called to be Primary president.

For Oksana Fersanova, that's exactly what the Church is like. Oksana, who lives in Khmel'nyts'kyy, Ukraine, was



one of the first people to be baptized when her city opened for missionary work in 2006. Not long after her baptism she was called to serve as Primary president for the small group

that meets in her city.

Oksana is typical of Latter-day Saint teenagers throughout the Church here—deeply involved in serving and eager to share the truth in a land where the message of the gospel is now taking hold. In areas like Khmel'nyts'kyy, the young converts provide energy, optimism, and unwavering testimonies of the gospel, which strengthen the Church in Ukraine.

Waiting for the Gospel

Oksana had a testimony of Jesus Christ, but it wasn't until her friends gave her a copy of the Book of Mormon that she gained a testimony of His restored gospel.

"As I read about Jesus Christ talking to the Nephites, a strong feeling came over me, and I knew that He loved

me. I prayed and had a witness that He is my Savior and the Book of Mormon is true," Oksana says.

"I knew that if Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon and the Book of Mormon was true, he was definitely a prophet of God and had restored the gospel of Jesus Christ," she says.

Her friends taught her more about the gospel because there were no missionaries in Khmel'nyts'kyy at that time. For four years she studied the gospel and lived its principles as best as she could, praying for the missionaries to come.

Finally, in March 2006, they came. Oksana and her friend Sasha Kubatov were the first two people baptized in Khmel'nyts'kyy.

Sasha was only 14 when he received a Book of Mormon from his older sisters, who had joined the Church in another city.



TIME



“They emphasized the fact that I was 14, just as Joseph Smith was when he had his First Vision. He was greatly blessed at a young age, and I could be too,” he says.

So he started reading. He read until he got to the Isaiah chapters in 2 Nephi, and then he stopped. He read the Book of Mormon again a year later, but as a historical document, not with a desire to know if it was true.

But when he read the Book of Mormon the third time, Sasha focused less on its history and more on the work of God it recorded.

“As I read it, I thought it was true, but I didn’t have a firm testimony yet,” he admits. “I wanted to talk to the missionaries.”

When the elders arrived a few years later, they answered all of his questions and helped him prepare to be baptized and confirmed.

“As I walked into the waters of baptism, all my doubts were gone, and I knew that Joseph Smith was a prophet and the gospel is true,” he says. “I was not afraid, even though I knew the rest of my life would be different.”

His life *is* different now. As a home teacher Sasha is learning how to magnify the priesthood he holds and serve in the Lord’s kingdom.

Within a year of his baptism Sasha baptized his mother and his grandfather. His entire family has now joined the Church, and Sasha is excited to bring the gospel to others.

“I am preparing to serve a mission so that I can preach the gospel and bring someone else to God,” he says. “His work must go forward.”

Opposite page: *Oksana Fersanova, a convert to the Church, loves teaching Primary. A group of children in Chernihiv hold up issues of the Liahona. Left: Sasha Kubatov shared the gospel with his family and is now preparing to serve in the Russia Yekaterinburg Mission. Below: The city center of L'viv.*





Above: After being baptized at age 16, Misha says of his confirmation, "I felt power come to me as hands were laid on my head, and I felt awesome." Right: Misha baptized his mother, Olga, six months after he was baptized. Bottom: Missionaries, branch members, and family supported Olga on the day of her baptism. Opposite page: Yuri Voynarovich loves serving as branch mission leader and clerk.



Following His Lead

Misha Sukonosov never imagined that attending English classes with the missionaries in Chernihiv would lead him to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. But that changed after several months of attending the classes.

Misha loved the spirit he felt as the missionaries taught him English. And when he finally accepted their invitation to attend Church meetings with them, he was surprised to feel the same spirit at church.

Finally, one of the elders invited Misha to simply do what he knew was right and be baptized.

Misha knew it would take a great deal

of courage to go against his family's traditions. In Ukraine most people are lifelong members of the predominant church. His family was no exception.

His mother wanted him to wait a few years to be baptized, so he agreed to wait until he turned 16. In the meantime he attended church every week and began serving as branch pianist.

"That helped me come every Sunday, because I had to come or there would be nobody to play," Misha says.

Finally, when the wait was over, Misha was baptized in the Desna River on July 1, 2006. At the time, he had no idea how quickly his family would follow his example.

His mother, Olga, started coming to church to learn more about her son's new religion. She came so often that the branch president asked her to play the organ in sacrament meeting so Misha could be called as the music director.



After six months of hearing the members' testimonies, including her son's, Olga developed a testimony of her own. Misha baptized his mother in December 2006.

Olga still plays the organ every week. Misha, now 17, keeps busy by helping the branch presidency, serving as a branch missionary, and leading the hymns in sacrament meeting.

"I know the Church needs me," he says. "I am so grateful for these chances to serve. The Church helps me as I help others."

Finding the Faith

In L'viv, a city in western Ukraine, Yuri Voynarovich and his family started searching for truth when he was just 10 years old. For years they visited different churches. Then his uncle invited them to attend a branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Yuri's parents were soon baptized and confirmed.

"I didn't go at first," Yuri says. "I kept searching on my own."



But his parents, who knew the Church was true, didn't give up on their son. They invited Yuri to English lessons and youth activities as well as Sunday meetings. Finally, the missionaries themselves invited him to English classes.

"I couldn't say no to them," Yuri says. So he went. Then he went to church. Eventually he too was baptized.

"Since that day I've had many more experiences that have built and molded my testimony and character into who I am today," he says.

"I often see people who suffer from bad choices they've made," he says. "I understand sometimes it's hard because of temptations and peer pressure, but we shouldn't give up. Later we can see the blessings that come from obedience."

Yuri, now 17, serves as the branch mission leader and branch clerk in L'viv.

"I am so thankful for the Church and all it has done for me," Yuri says. "I love this Church. I encourage everyone to hold to the iron rod and never let go." **NE**

"How do I decide what to study in college?"

Discovering what you would like to study can be frustrating at times, but it can also be an enjoyable experience ultimately leading to a career choice. You are not in it alone. There are people specifically trained to help you in that discovery, such as counselors at school, and others who will give you advice, such as your parents and friends.

Naturally, the first thing they will ask you is what you are interested in or what areas of study you are good at. Also think about any jobs you have held and which ones were your particular favorites. These things can give you clues about subjects you should pursue. Look for classes that will introduce you to areas of interest or that fit your strengths.

However, don't waste your time and money just taking random classes. Make sure that the classes you take, particularly in your first two years, are ones that will fill general requirements even if you don't end up majoring in those subjects.

In school, as in all aspects of your life, make your decisions a matter of prayer. Work hard and get good grades. It is surprising how opportunities you never imagined come into your life and affect your educational and career decisions. **NE**



Let Heavenly Father Guide You

Choosing what to study was a problem of mine not too long ago. One day I was really upset and wanted to know. I ran home from the bus stop and dropped to my knees and poured my heart out. I put all my faith in my Heavenly Father and I got an answer. Read your scriptures, pray, and let Him guide you. He knows your strengths and weaknesses.

Tracy H., 18, Florida



Fast and Pray

I think you should fast and pray about your decision. If you turn to the Lord, He will always help you.

Another thing you can do is ask your father or home teacher for a blessing. This can give you great comfort and help guide you in your decision.

Jessica W., Ohio



Be Logical and Practical

I made a list of 20 careers and the wages that went with them.

I narrowed down my list by if the career was in demand, the years of schooling required, and if the college I wanted to attend offered that major. I even called different schools and asked them about their programs and spoke with several contacts.

Katrina A., 19, Washington

Think about Your Interests

I'm only in junior high school, so I don't have to worry yet, but first it depends on where I go to college and what programs they have. I would think about my interests. I want to do something I would enjoy. Next, I would ask my family for help. My family knows what I would be good at and what I would enjoy. Then, I would fast and pray to my Heavenly Father. My Heavenly Father knows me and knows what is best for me.

Robert Dean L., 15, Utah

Follow Your Heart

I would suggest that you follow your heart. Pick out the subject that you love the most, are good at, and go for it. Choose a major that attracts your interest.

Mereadani R., 18, Fiji



Consider What You Enjoy

You should consider first what you enjoy learning about. And

secondly, you should choose something that will provide you with money you need later in life. It's important to fast and pray about your decision also, because Heavenly Father knows what is best for you. Remember, whatever you choose will require effort and hard work.

Hana O., 17, New Zealand



Use Tests and Counseling

I suggest taking personality tests and career tests. You could also

try seeing a school counselor. If you can, take any opportunities for internships or being a medical assistant for a day—those types of things. Also talk to friends and family for suggestions.

James S., 16, Arizona

Responses are intended for help and perspective, not as pronouncements of Church doctrine.

NEXT QUESTION

"How do I avoid falling back into old habits such as swearing?"

Send your answer by August 15, 2008, to:

New Era, Q&A, 8/09

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Choosing a major in college is not as important as developing integrity, ethics, and good study habits and building character as a person of faith, confidence, and industry."

Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Sharing Family Heritage," Ensign, Sept. 2006, 8.



Recipe for a Happy Home

Togetherness, the gospel, and family fun—those are the ingredients this Swedish family mixes into a satisfying standard of love.

BY PAUL VANDENBERGHE

Church Magazines

You wake up to funny-sounding, high-pitched falsetto singing coming from the kitchen.

Naturally, you're a bit confused and most likely thinking one of two things: (1) "It's my little sister looking for cookies in the kitchen" or (2) "I'm in the wrong house." But if you happen to be a member of the Ronndahl family from Kavlinge, Sweden, you're not confused at all. In fact, you look forward to this each week—not the singing but what the family calls "hotel breakfast."

"I love the breakfast on Saturday morning," says Isabelle Ronndahl, 14, when asked about some of her favorite things about her family. "Dad always prepares it, and he always makes it excellent." There is a chorus of happy yeses as the other Ronndahl children enthusiastically nod in agreement.

"We wake up to Dad's singing," explains Andreas, 16. A few of his brothers and sisters volunteer impersonations, and they all laugh, including the parents, Brynolf and

Kristina. Laughter breaks out a lot in the Ronndahl home. Then they continue describing how, after the singing, the smell of fresh bacon and eggs draws the family out of bed each Saturday morning. Even more than sharing the food, they seem to enjoy just being together.



CHARITY

Fourteen-year-old Isabelle's favorite scripture is Moroni 7:45–48. These are the verses that talk about charity, the pure love of Christ. "I especially love verse 45," says Isabelle. "It tells about all of the wonderful qualities of charity and love. It helps me remember that charity is what really matters most for us to get back to our Heavenly Father."

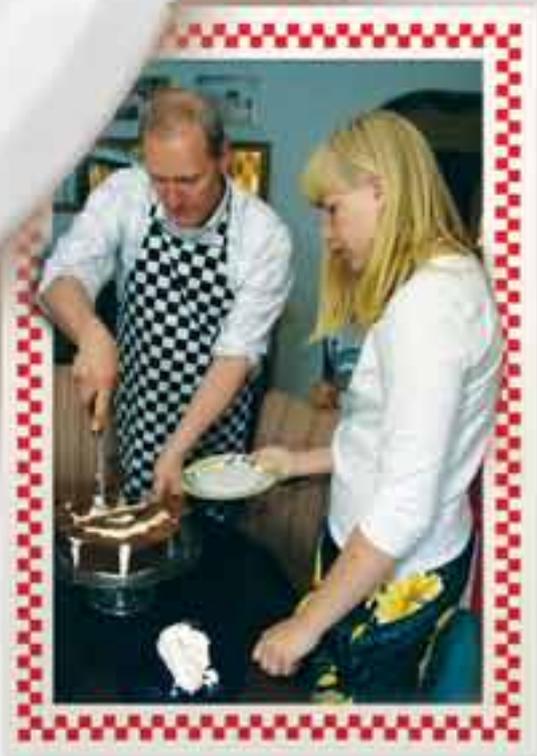
They also talk about another ingredient in their recipe for a happy home—family home evening. But that wasn't always the case. "I remember when our family home evenings were mostly very long lessons," says Christoffer, 18, with a playful glance in his mother's direction.

"Sometimes I would get bored and fall asleep," adds Andreas, who was only about five at that time. "But then I'd wake up, and there would be refreshments."

Brother Ronndahl explains that when the children were quite young, Sister Ronndahl would regularly prepare lessons that were over an hour long. The lessons were difficult for the young children to sit through. Now the Ronndahls have eight children, ranging in age from 8 to 23 years old—the oldest, Rebecka, has served a full-time mission and is now attending college in the United States.

Brother and Sister Ronndahl decided to change their approach to family home evening. "We gathered the family together and said, 'Hey, what do you like to do?'" says Sister Ronndahl. The parents weren't too surprised to learn that the kids liked the food, the games, and singing hymns—they even liked the idea of a lesson, if it were only shorter. Brother Ronndahl sums it up well when he says the right ingredients were there but maybe not in the right amounts. "We discovered we should focus on the fun side of things too," he says.

Sister Ronndahl decided to make an extra-nice dinner so Monday would start out as a special night. Then for family home evening



PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE RONNDAHL FAMILY BY PAUL VANDENBERGHE; OTHER PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN LUKE



HOW TO PLAY BLINDFOLDED CONDUCTOR

Twelve-year-old Josefin's favorite family home evening game is easy to play and a lot of fun. Everyone forms a circle, and one person, the "conductor," is blindfolded and placed in the center. The conductor directs the people in the circle to walk either to the right or the left with a point of her finger—changing the rotation of the circle whenever she changes the direction of her pointing. When the conductor lifts her hands, the circle stops. The conductor then blindly points toward the circle. Whoever is pointed at by the conductor must make a noise, any noise—loud or soft or funny or whatever. If the conductor guesses who made the noise, that person becomes the conductor; if the guess is wrong, the game continues with the same conductor.

they added a healthy measure of games and singing. They also shortened the lessons to about 10 minutes. The mixture worked well. "The children started to look forward to Monday nights," says Kristina. "Everybody loved it."

Now that the children are older, the lessons have lengthened and deepened. Rosanna, 20, says, "We actually can do very good lessons nowadays. We love to discuss the gospel and other things. It's fun because we have so many opinions and ideas. Now it is more interesting because we're talking about things that we want to talk about." But the music, games, and refreshments are still part of the recipe.

"My favorite things are the refreshments and games," says Josefin, 12.

"Refreshments and games of course," echoes Christoffer.

"I think the songs and music are the best," says Rosanna.

"The lessons," Isabelle chimes in meekly. Her brothers and sisters immediately offer Isabelle some good-natured teasing. "No, really," she adds earnestly.

"I think the whole family home evening is my favorite," says Andreas. "The lesson, songs, games, refreshments—all of them together make it very fun. If we had a family home evening without a lesson or games or songs, it would feel like something was missing."

"I love it when Brynolf and I don't have to do anything for family home evening," says

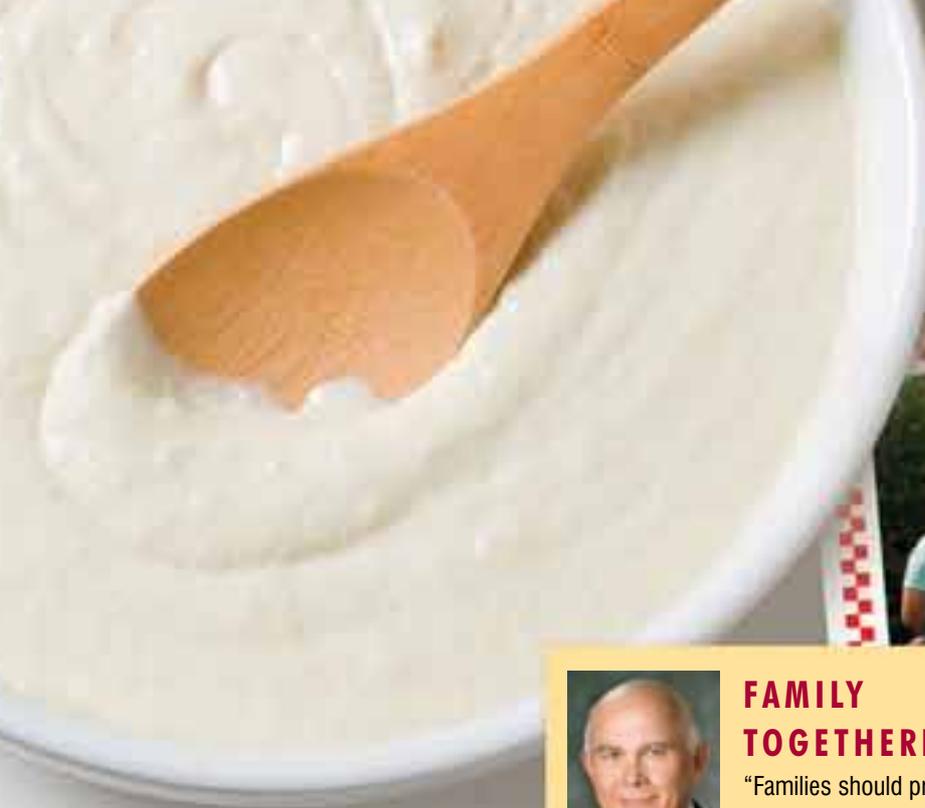
Sister Ronndahl. "We can just sit aside, and the children lead and they have the lesson and they have the refreshments. They do everything. That's my favorite."

Another key ingredient in the Ronndahls' recipe for a happy home is a family council every Sunday after church. They go through each person's assignment for the next family home evening. And since they rotate assignments, everyone gets a chance at all the jobs—from the lesson to the refreshments to



the scripture. They also talk about their regular household chores and how things are going with each member of the family.

Getting together as a family doesn't happen just on Sunday and Monday, however. Samuel, 10, and Johannes, 8, the youngest of the children, both say they like the fun outings and picnics the family takes



FAMILY TOGETHERNESS

“Families should pray together, kneeling night and morning to offer thanks for

blessings and prayers for common concerns.

“Families should worship together, participating in church services and family devotionals.

“Families should study and learn together. . . .

“Families should work together. . . . Families should also play together, so that happy recreational experiences are associated with the activities of the family.

“Families should counsel together, treating all matters of concern to the family and its members.

“Families should eat together. Mealtimes is a natural time for the family to assemble and communicate.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Parental Leadership in the Family,” *Ensign*, June 1985, 10–11.

children attend seminary as well. At times, both of their parents have served as seminary teachers. Of course, they’re also involved in their classes and quorums at church.

Those are the ingredients that, mixed together with care, help this family get along so well. From youngest to oldest, from parent to child, they all love to be together because they all love each other. And they have a lot of favorite things to do together, from swimming in the ocean to playing blindfolded conductor during family home evening (see sidebar). “One of my favorite things about our family is the music,”

says Sister Ronndahl. “We are a music family. We love to sing a lot.”

Yes, the Ronndahls all love to sing. They also love to hear singing—especially the silly falsetto coming from the kitchen on Saturday morning. **NE**



together. Their father agrees. “We all love to go swimming, everywhere—in lakes, in the ocean, in rivers,” says Brother Ronndahl. They also get together to sing and play music as a band since just about everyone plays one or more instruments.

All this family togetherness has made the Ronndahls best friends as well as family. They love each other and lean on each other. They draw strength from one another. That’s probably why they like to spend so much time together.

And while the members of the Ronndahl family strengthen each other, they also strengthen their ward and stake. “We go to all the activities in the stake and all the outings and conferences for the youth,” says Brother Ronndahl. “We encourage our children to be a part of all the things that happen in the stake and in the ward. The wards are not so big here, so we have a lot of stake activities to bring the youth together as much as possible.” The older



"You Have to Be

When my friends at camp asked me "What religion are you?" all I could say was, "Nothing." But that answer eventually changed.

BY LORAIN JORDAN

When I was in the sixth grade, my class went to the Marin Headlands (California) State Park for a weeklong field trip. After a long drive on the bus, we unpacked our belongings and settled in to our bunk beds. We started talking excitedly about what activities lay ahead of us over the next week. Slowly, the conversation changed, and somehow the subject of religion was brought up. One person after another briefly stated what faith they belonged to. I didn't want anyone to know that I didn't go to church and was different from them. However, they noticed that I wasn't participating in the discussion.

"What are you?" my friend asked curiously.

"I don't go to church, so I guess I'm nothing."

"You can't be nothing. You have to be something!"

I decided to ask my mom what she was, because I thought that whatever she was, I must be the same. "Mom, everyone in my group at camp goes to church except me. They told me what religions they were and when they asked me what I was, I told them that I was nothing. I'm nothing, right?"

"Yes, I guess that's right." my mom said assuredly.

SOMETHING"

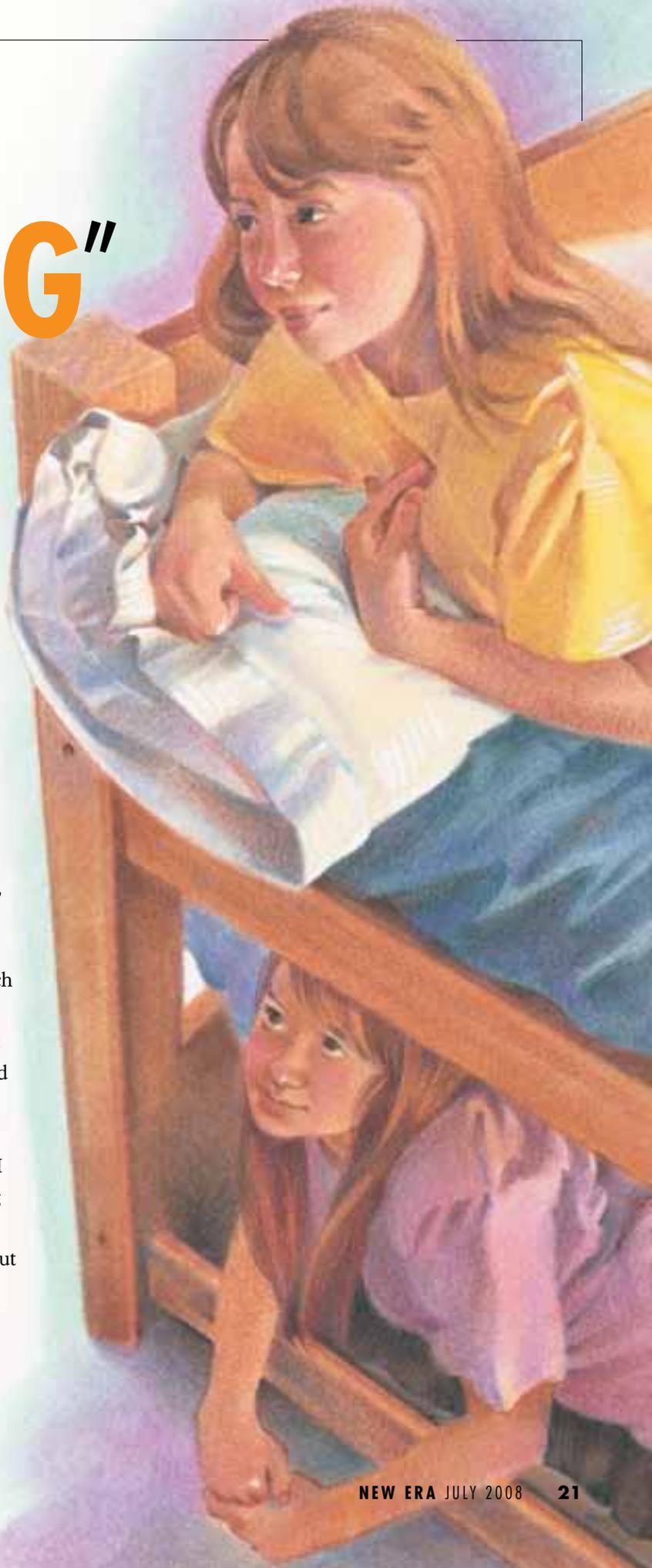
"But they said I have to be something," I complained.

My mom repeated herself, "If you don't belong to a particular church or religious group, then you are no religion at all."

Two years went by, and I didn't think too much about religion or the religious discussion we had had until my best friend invited me to attend a camp with her during the summer. After getting my parents' approval, I excitedly told my friend that I could go. There were a lot of fun activities but also classes about principles and stories in the Bible that were brand new to me. I enjoyed learning about them, and I learned how to look up scriptures in my new Bible given to me by my friend. By the end of the week, I was "saved." I wasn't sure what that meant, but there were other people that were "saved" too.

I asked my parents if it was all right if I went to church with my best friend's family every Sunday. They agreed. Unfortunately, something came up the next Sunday, and I wasn't able to go. One week after another went by, and for one reason or another I did not go to church. The good feelings from camp slowly faded away. My freshman year of high school began, but my best friend and I drifted apart. Now I knew there was no chance of going to church with her family.

"Mom, can we go to church?" I asked several times, but I never really got the answer I was looking for. One day was different. Instead of the usual reply, she answered, "Well, I do know of a church we can go to. I know that they teach good things, because I used to go when I was little. I can take you to that church—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." That was the first time





As weeks went by, I learned more about the Church. I wanted to do the right things: pray, eat good food, dress modestly, and try to live a Christian life. After trying all these things, I felt good about myself.

I learned she ever went to church, even though I knew my grandparents went to church.

I was more than satisfied with this answer. I was finally on my way to becoming something.

My mom, sister, brother, and I were finally going to church! My grandmother helped by locating which church building to attend in the area where we lived. Looking back, I do remember feeling welcomed.

Over the next few Sundays, I was welcomed like a friend that hadn't been seen for some time. When people noticed that I was new, they smiled and extended their hand to greet me and introduced themselves. I went to Young Women with the girls. I was 15 and belonged to the Mia Maid class. I quickly made friends despite my

shyness. Everyone made me feel comfortable. My sister was in the Beehive class. Being four years old, my brother went to Primary. He didn't like going by himself, so he always made my mom go with him. I think she enjoyed it. She sang children's songs and relearned stories from when she was younger.

The missionaries came to our house and taught us the lessons. I was delighted when they came over. Even though they were around 20 years old, they knew a lot about the scriptures and the gospel of Jesus Christ. They had a special presence and a warm glow about them. I soon found out that other members of the Church had that glow as well, including my Young Women teacher, who always let me know how happy she was to have me in her class.

I became good friends with a girl named Julia. We decided to be “buddies” at girls camp. Even though I don’t like camping or hiking very much, I really enjoyed the entire experience. There was a different feeling at this camp. Our counselors made a special effort to see that we were having a good time and that everyone was included in all the activities we participated in. During the week, we had devotionals, a nature walk to learn about different plants, a first-aid class, and campfire skits. There was also a service project that everyone in the camp happily participated in. In fact, the service project table was always crowded with volunteers. All through the week there was a sense of organization, cooperation, and friendship.

On Saturday morning, the last day, everyone got together around the campfire, and whoever wanted to stood up and told the others of their testimony of the Church and expressed their gratitude for their family, friends, and what a great and memorable experience they had at camp. Most of them cried while they talked, and I cried along with them. I was surprised to see my sister go up on stage. She said how happy she was to come to this Church and how thankful she was for her family, especially me. That was one of the first times she had ever expressed her love for me as her sister. Once she sat down, I got up and sat next to her. I told her how grateful I was for what she said, and we cried together. We really made a special connection.

We continued going to church and taking the missionary lessons. As the weeks went by, I learned much more about the Church. I wanted to do the right things. I began reading the Bible and the Book of Mormon, praying, eating good food, dressing modestly, and trying to live a Christian life. After trying all these things, I felt good about myself.

My mother, who had not wanted to go to church, continued to participate in the missionary lessons and continued to take us to church every Sunday. We made the decision to be baptized, and my mother, sister, and I became members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on June 3, 2000. This was a decision that has changed all of our lives. My brother was too young

to be baptized, and my stepfather did not share in our beliefs, but he always supported all of us in our Church-related activities and meetings.

We now have numerous friends that we would not otherwise have if we had not gone to church. We participate in many community service projects and have become happier people. I went on to receive my Young Women in Excellence award and attend community college. After high school, I became active in the single adults ward, where I met a wonderful returned missionary. We were married and have now had our first child.

Through all these experiences in the Church, our family has grown closer, and we are striving to become an eternal family. Seven years after our baptism, both my stepfather and my little brother made the decision to join the Church and were baptized together on January 20, 2007. **NE**



HELP by the

BY CHRISTA SKOUSEN

Teens in Layton, Utah, refurbished 24 homes and strengthened nearly 300 testimonies in just two days.

Imagine strolling down the streets of your neighborhood, only something looks different. Looking around, you may ask yourself, “Wasn’t that house white before? When did they find time to plant all these flowers?”

Many of the homes, which only two days before looked old and worn down, are now spruced up and polished. Is it a miracle? According to teens in northern Utah, it’s all in a day’s—well, make that two-days’—work.

The Layton Utah Kays Creek Stake hosted a fun, service-filled youth conference. For two days teens and leaders alike sacrificed their time and energy to fix up several homes in a nearby city.

And they weren’t just any homes. Through fasting and prayer co-chair Neil Wall and his committee carefully selected those people (some members of the Church and some not) they thought could really use the help—mostly single mothers, the elderly, and the disabled.

And then, with 16 homes in mind, donated supplies, and multiple prayers of faith, the youth set out to offer service in life-sized proportions.

Working Together

These teens quickly learned that this degree of service (it was approximately 100 degrees both days) was not for the faint of heart.

But despite the heat, what was initially a good-sized service project grew even bigger when more hands—attached to energetic teens—showed up than expected. On Friday

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CRAIG DIMOND



HANDFUL





Up to their elbows in paint, concrete, and hard work, these teens tore into these projects.



afternoon approximately 240 teens participated, but by Saturday Brother Wall estimated there were closer to 270.

“We really thought we would lose some because it was hard work and it was very hot and the days were long,” he says. “We thought, ‘On Saturday we won’t get as many.’ And we ended up with more. It really surprised us.”

And many hands made light work. With handfuls of help, the stake restored more than 24 homes—not just the original 16. They finished all their contingency projects and then some.

“I know without a doubt they will never forget it,” Brother Wall says. “They admit, it was hard, it was hot, and it wasn’t fun in one way because it was work, but it was rewarding. They could sense that they were doing something good.”

And these Utah teens proved themselves quite handy. Working under the direction of volunteer contractors, teens spent the bulk of their time doing all kinds of odd jobs: mowing lawns, hauling away garbage, painting, pouring cement for ramps for the disabled, roofing, and so on. At one house they planted flowers in a yard where previously trees had been growing wild, sending branches through windows.

“Even though I was tired, I didn’t want to stop. I never realized how good it feels to give all your strength to help better someone else’s life,” says 17-year-old Ashlee Karpowitz.

Many of the youth agreed with Ashlee. They found that working outside in hot weather turned out to be surprisingly fun—plus a few added activity breaks didn’t hurt either. The event kicked off on Thursday evening with a dinner, music from a local band, and a movie under the stars. On Friday evening every last ounce of energy was spent slipping down a plastic water slide. Hearty meals also helped to break up the workdays.

Sixteen-year-old Taylor Merrill had only good things to say about it. “My favorite part of youth conference was using the spray-paint gun and eating the food. We had sub sandwiches for lunch every day. I always tried to eat as much as I could before we went back to work.”

A Good Cause

But fun, sun, food, and spray-paint guns were only the beginning. In addition to the fresh paint and new leak-proof roofs, testimonies were refurbished as well.





“I feel like I accomplished something in my heart,” says 14-year-old Sarah Look.

“I made myself stronger, raised my feelings of self-worth, and strengthened my testimony.”

Like Sarah, many of these youth didn’t realize until later that service has spiritual side effects: when you forget about yourself and serve others, you can’t help but find happiness.

“I feel like I gained stronger friendships, a stronger testimony of the Church, and a closer relationship with my Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ,” says Kelly Smith, 14.

“While we worked on people’s houses I felt the Spirit of the Lord,” says 15-year-old Katie Stout.

The youth and leaders alike found the whole experience to be gratifying, but the homeowners were also blessed.

“Almost without exception, they were so excited, with tears in their eyes, just grateful that someone would consider doing it for them,” Brother Wall explains. “We had a fireside to conclude the event, and one of the sisters whose home we worked on came and spoke. It was just wonderful. The kids were just beaming.”

Today more than 270 kids may walk down the streets of this same neighborhood and see something different. Sure, anyone might notice the shiny paint, the newly made ramps, or the vibrant flowers. But when teens from the Layton Utah Kays Creek Stake walk down these streets, they will remember how good it felt when they served people who really needed help. These teens witnessed firsthand that, when it comes to serving, a handful of help goes a long way. **NE**



Good food and good fun was a great finish to a working youth conference.



OBEDIENCE

Joseph Smith knew the importance of following every commandment of the Lord.

The Prophet Joseph Smith learned by experience that it is best to strictly obey God’s commandments (see, for instance, D&C 3; 10). He also understood that obedience is the key to blessings, for he learned through revelation that “when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (D&C 130:21). Here are some of Joseph Smith’s teachings about obedience.*

BEING FULLY OBEDIENT

“As my life consisted of activity and unyielding exertions, I made this my rule: When the Lord commands, do it.”

“The object with me is to obey and teach others to obey God in just what He tells us to do. It mattereth not whether the principle is popular or unpopular, I will always maintain a true principle, even if I stand alone in it.”

Joseph Smith and Martin Harris learned a hard lesson on obedience after losing the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript (see D&C 3; 10).

A BRIGHTER PATH

“Be virtuous and pure; be men of integrity and truth; keep the commandments of God; and then you will be able more perfectly to understand the difference between right and wrong—between the things of God and the things of men; and your path will be like that of the just, which shineth brighter and brighter unto the perfect day [see Proverbs 4:18].”

THE BLESSINGS OF OBEDIENCE

“All blessings that were ordained for man by the Council of Heaven were on conditions of obedience to the law thereof.”

“You, who do the will of the Lord and keep His commandments, have need to rejoice with unspeakable joy, for such shall be exalted very high, and shall be lifted up in triumph above all the kingdoms of this world.”

* From *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 160, 161, 162–63, 164.



JOSEPH SMITH, JR., LEARNS THAT THE 116-PAGE MANUSCRIPT IS LOST; BY CLARK KELLY PRICE

SINK OR SWIM

BY MARY ELLEN HEINER

*Though the waters may be deep,
I learned we have help every stroke of the way.*

My brother honestly thought I'd be able to swim, but when he led me into deep water, I sunk! After that, I was terrified of water.

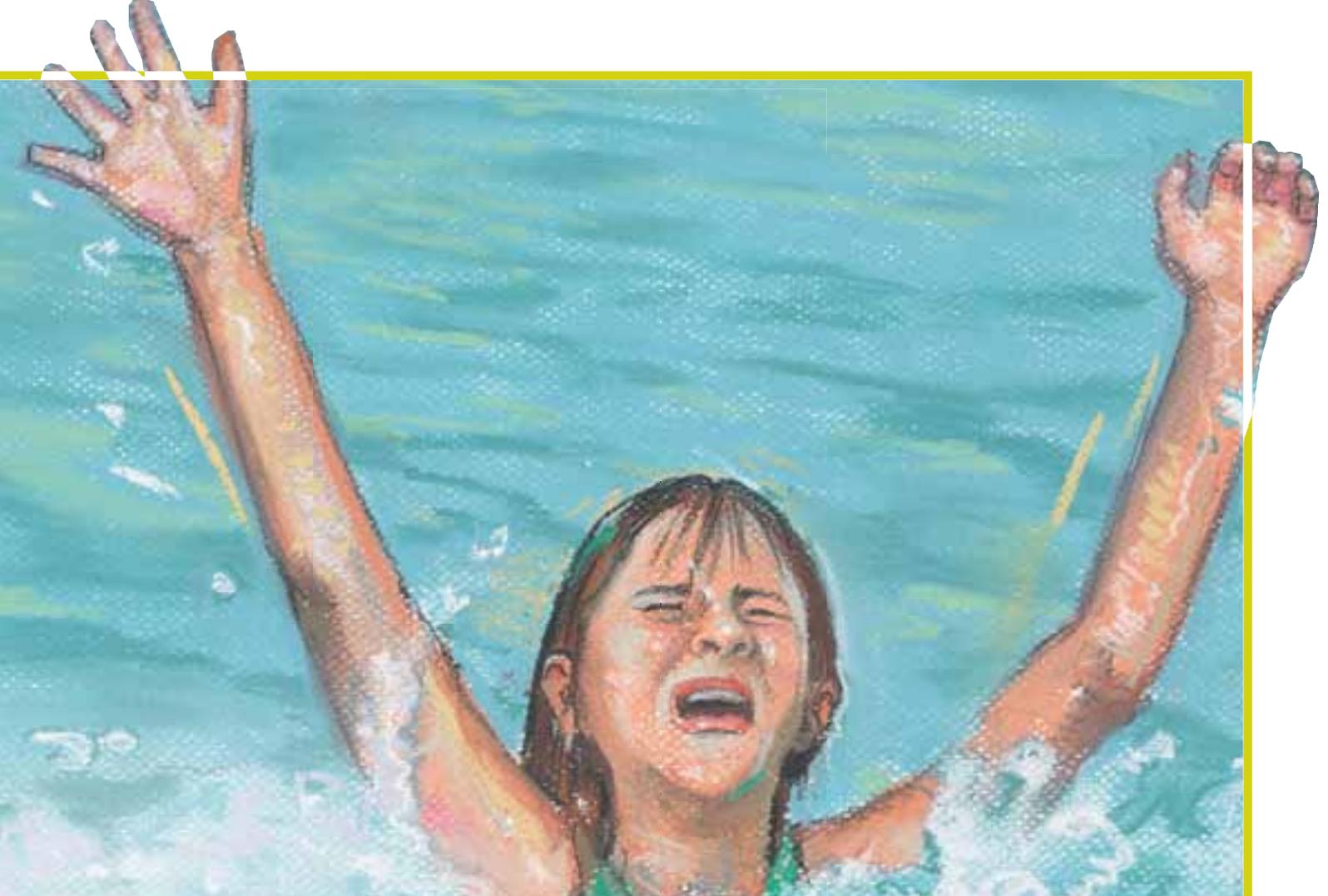
At the age of two I was in a farming accident that left me paralyzed from the waist down. However, I was fortunate enough to be raised in a family who overlooked the disability and treated me just like everyone else.

We always enjoyed swimming at the local pool. One evening at the pool, when I was about 9 or 10, as I “walked” up and down the edge of the pool (my weightlessness in the water allowed me for a short time to be like everybody else), I watched my family laughing, splashing, and diving from the sides. My brother Robert, who is two years older than I am, thought I was not having as much fun as the rest, so he decided to help me. He told me to hold on to his shoulders, and he would swim me over to the far side of the pool. He said it would be fun. He was right; it was fun. I played on the other side, and as long as my feet could touch the bot-

tom, I felt safe and secure.

Then Robert came to take me back. This time he veered from the shallow end, and I was soon in deep water. Suddenly he stopped and with a quick movement he turned and pulled my arms off of his shoulders and said, “OK, now swim.” Then he let go, and it was a matter of sink or swim. I sunk! Robert thought for sure I would swim. Luckily my dad had been keeping an eye on us, and he was at my side instantly. I grabbed onto his strong shoulders, and he led me back to the shallow end of the pool. As a result of that experience, I developed a fear of the water. I would still go with my family on these outings, but I would usually watch from the safety of the poolside deck chairs.

Years later, while I was attending BYU–Idaho, this fear confronted me again. I was in an adaptive physical education class



taught by Brother Gary Griffeth, who was also a physical therapist. The first two classes were great fun. I established a friendship with the other three class members and my instructor. Then Brother Griffeth dropped the bomb. He casually announced that he had made arrangements for us to use the swimming pool for the rest of the semester. Everybody was excited—except me.

Brother Griffeth let us have the first couple of class periods to just play in the pool. Then one day he got in the pool with us. I knew this was trouble. He told me he was going to teach me how to swim. He started by attaching blue flotation boards to my legs with towels. What a scary feeling I experienced as my legs began to float and my head and upper body sank. Brother Griffeth gently held me up while he taught me how to move my arms in a rather awkward stroke, how to breathe, and how to rotate my head from side to side. Before I realized what was happening, I was swimming! What an exhilarating feeling! What freedom!

Once Brother Griffeth thought I had developed my

upper body strength and technique sufficiently, he decided it was time to take off the flotation devices. My legs sunk; I sunk; and my fear of the water returned. With great patience, Brother Griffeth began the process of teaching me how to swim all over again. But with the strength and technique I had already developed in my upper body, I was soon able to get up enough speed that my legs actually began to float. As long as I kept within arm's length of the side, I felt safe. When I felt myself sinking, I would reach out and grasp the side.

The semester was coming to an end, and finals were approaching. I did not even think about my final for the swimming class. On the last day of class, Brother Griffeth



Just like Peter as he took those first steps to meet Jesus on the water, if we fear, we will flounder. But if we let Him, He will carry us to safety.

calmly announced that for my final I would have to swim a mile. This did not bother me too much because I had come close to swimming a mile each class period anyway.

But swimming a mile was only the first part. When I got into the water, Brother Griffeth calmly told me that if I wanted to get an A in the class, I had to swim in the middle of the pool, totally out of reach of my lifeline. My heart began pounding; the water suddenly wasn't my friend anymore. It became a giant monster with mouth gaping open, ready to swallow me into its murky depths. Brother Griffeth put his hands on my shoulders and looked me in the eyes and said, "You can do it. I have faith in you. I will be right there beside you every stroke of the way." And he was—right to the very last stroke. My eyes beamed with excitement and my heart swelled with happiness as I looked at that A on my transcript.

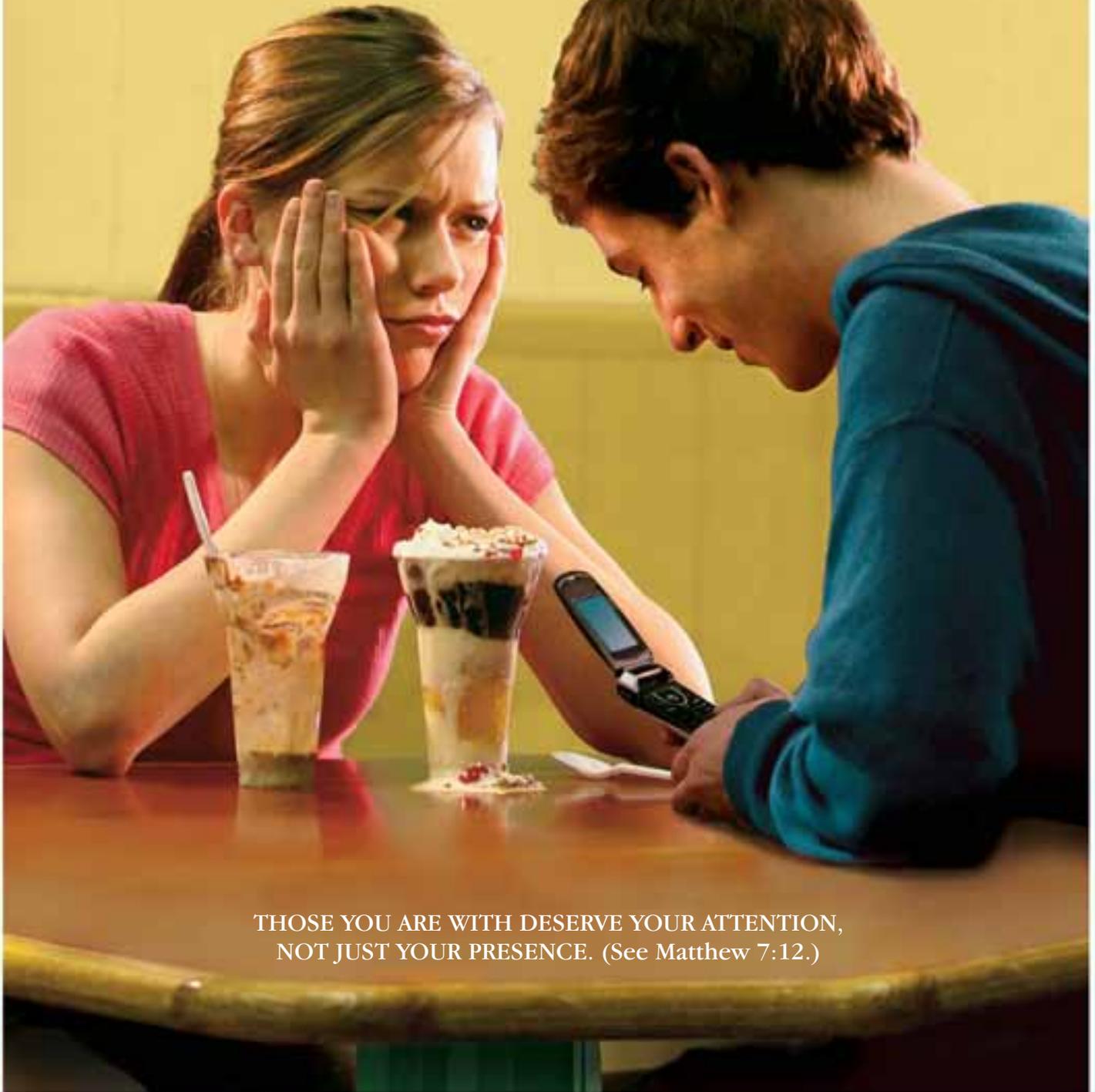
This is similar to how we develop a testimony. We begin as children and converts

by leaning on the testimonies of others. We eventually grow comfortable with our own testimony, but we don't know how strong it is until that first wave hits us, and we either "sink or swim"—just like Peter as he took those first steps to meet Jesus on the water. He became frightened, took his eyes off of the Savior, and floundered (see Matthew 14:25–31).

Sometimes our testimony is strong, and we swim. Other times we take our eyes off of the Savior, and we sink. But every time, our Father in Heaven is there to pick us up and to carry us to safety—if we let Him.

Throughout our lives we learn new principles and meet people who lift us up and inspire us. And then when we experience waves of trials, we suddenly realize that our testimonies are stronger. We can deal with each little wave that hits us because we know Father in Heaven will be there with us every stroke of the way. All we have to do is reach out in faith and take His hand. **NE**

WISH YOU WERE HERE



THOSE YOU ARE WITH DESERVE YOUR ATTENTION,
NOT JUST YOUR PRESENCE. (See Matthew 7:12.)

PEARL OF GREAT PRICE
SUDOKU

The objective is to fill the 9x9 grid so that each column, each row, and each of the nine 3x3 boxes (also called blocks or regions) contains the digits from 1 to 9 only one time. For this puzzle, instead of numbers, use the nine underlined words of the scripture to complete the puzzle.

Moses 1:39
For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.

For the solution, go to www.newera.lds.org.

			behold		1:39		glory	life
1:39			For		work			eternal
		behold		immor- tality	life	Moses		1:39
behold	1:39		life					glory
		eternal		work			behold	
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life	eternal			behold			Moses	
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IDEA BY SHAUNA WHEELWRIGHT

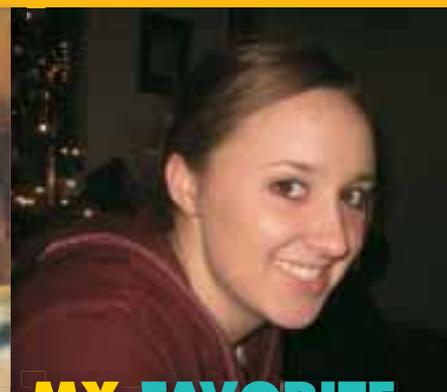


A POOR WAYFARING MAN OF GRIEF

The words to this song (see *Hymns*, no. 29), written by James Montgomery, are based on Matthew 25:37–40. This hymn is special because of the role it played in the last few hours of the Prophet

Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum's lives. Not long before the brothers went with John Taylor and Willard Richards to Carthage in June 1844, the hymn had just been introduced in Nauvoo. As the men sat, knowing their

lives were in danger, John Taylor sang it twice, as this was one of Joseph's favorite songs, to cheer them up. Shortly after he sang it the second time, the mob attacked, murdering Joseph and Hyrum, and badly injuring John Taylor.



MY FAVORITE SCRIPTURE

JOHN 15:13 I love this scripture because Jesus loved us so much that He died for us. When I first read this, it really touched me to know that He loves us so much He wanted us to be with Him and our Heavenly Father again.

Emily F., 17, Arizona, USA

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF EMILY F.

PAINTING BY DEL PARSON



THE CHURCH IN THE USA HAWAII

Missionaries serving in California were assigned to begin preaching in Polynesia in 1850. In February 1851, the first convert was baptized in Hawaii, and by August, there were 220 members. A meetinghouse was built in Pulehu on the island of Maui in 1852.

In 1963, the Polynesian Cultural Center opened to represent the various South Pacific cultures. The cultural

center and the Laie Hawaii Temple, which was completed in 1919, bring international attention to the Church.

Here are a few facts about the Church today in Hawaii:

Membership	66,066
Missions	1
Temples	2
Congregations	131
Family History Centers	25

Information from Newsroom at www.lds.org.

BY THE NUMBERS

358,516

Number of institute students worldwide.

Aloha from Colorado

Where will Personal Progress take you? It took the young women of the Colorado Miramont Ward to Hawaii—well, kind of. The young women earned “miles” to travel the 3,000-plus miles to “Hawaii” every time they completed a Personal Progress goal or project.

Haley Tyler, a Laurel, loved the idea of going somewhere exotic. “I was excited because I thought it was a good way to get more motivated about Personal Progress.” One of Haley’s projects was sewing teddy bears for hospitals and fire departments.

The night they went to Hawaii was unforgettable. Even though Hawaii was actually in the backyard of one of their advisers, the girls didn’t mind. They ate tropical food and listened to Hawaiian music, and a stake member taught them how to dance the Hukilau.

Clarissa Clements, a Laurel, said, “It was awesome. The food was great. I loved the dancing.” She also liked learning how to play traditional Hawaiian instruments.

Next year the Miramont young women plan on going to “France.”



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE COLORADO MIRAMONT WARD



Standing on My Own

BY LINDSAY CANO

I'd always lived Church standards, but why?

I was born into a Latter-day Saint family and grew up following the Church standards as outlined in the pamphlet *For the Strength of Youth*. I didn't drink, smoke, or swear; I dressed modestly, and I tried to keep the Sabbath day holy. This made me something of an oddity in my small New England town.

Though I did have a few friends who had similar standards, I had many more friends who did not. In my high school I was frequently teased about my standards and the fact that I was a Mormon. I was also the only person in my high school who could boast of living on a dairy farm, which didn't add to my popularity. I was known as "the good Mormon farm girl," wholesome to the core.

A Test on My Own

When I was 16 I had the opportunity to go to Ecuador for the summer as an exchange student. I looked forward to this opportunity to live in an exotic location, but some of my excitement was reserved for meeting new people who wouldn't know I was a Mormon. I decided that it wasn't necessary for the people of Ecuador to know that I was LDS. I could still live the standards—but quietly and unobtrusively.

In Ecuador I attended an orientation with other exchange students from all over the United States. I quickly made friends, some that I would see almost every day that summer because we were staying with host families in the same city. Others I saw throughout the summer at parties and field trips. It felt wonderfully liberating to meet people who didn't know my family's entire history. They didn't know I was a farm girl or that I was Miss Squeaky-clean. For the first time in my life I felt popular and accepted.

After orientation I met my host family. The very first thing we did, before I even unpacked, was to walk to a liquor store. My host sisters informed me that they were giving a big party that night in honor of my arrival, and they wanted me to pick out the booze. They were surprised to learn that I didn't drink and pressured me about it. I finally had to admit that I was Mormon.

My stay in Ecuador marked the beginning of the most intense test of living Church standards I had ever faced. I was frequently pressured to drink alcohol. I met several handsome, fun young men who were anxious to get to know me a little too well. The other exchange students



quickly learned that I was a Mormon, and they had quite a bit to say about it, much of it negative. One girl, who was known for her partying, teased me frequently about my moral standards. She suggested that I thought I was better than others because of these standards.

Though I never seriously considered abandoning my standards, I did begin to question why I was making these choices. I felt like it wasn't good enough anymore to say, "Because of my religion, I don't do such-and-such" or "That's how I was raised."

I knew I needed a testimony of my standards if I was going to continue to uphold them. I wanted a stronger testimony of the restored Church.

A Testimony of My Own

I started reading the Book of Mormon on my own for the first time, and I finished it in 13 days. The Spirit testified to me that the powerful testimonies of those ancient prophets were true. I was filled with joy and gratitude that I had the privilege of being a member of Christ's Church.

This precipitated a complete change in my attitude toward Church standards. My newfound testimony of the Book of Mormon gave power and substance to my beliefs. I felt proud of my standards, and it became easier to live them.

Nothing had really changed as far as how I lived, but my feelings were different. Nothing about me had outwardly changed, and yet I was a new person. I even noticed that my new friends responded to this change in me, perhaps without realizing it. They seemed to have greater respect for me.

One day I was alone with the girl who had been making fun of me in front of the other exchange students. She confided that she wished she had been raised to have the

same standards I had. She said she wished she had never had a drink and had never been unchaste. She was not the only one to tell me that.

When I was a senior in high school, a good friend who had gone on to college was visiting at Christmas break. She told me that she wished she had been taught my standards as a child because it would have been

much easier to keep from getting into trouble.

She told me to hold on to my standards no matter what because they would keep me safe.

A couple of years later when I was in college a girl I had known in Ecuador came to visit. She told me she wished she had been raised a Mormon because then she might have avoided the burdensome sins she'd committed. I felt very sad for my classmates, and on both occasions I cried with them over the pain they'd suffered.

They'd had to learn the hard way that "while you are free to choose for yourself, you are not free to choose the consequences of your actions" (*For the Strength of Youth* [2001], 4.)

At first it surprised me a little to think that other teens were envious of my standards. Hadn't so many of them made fun of me in high school? Didn't teens want fewer restrictions instead of more? However, it soon began to make sense. My standards did keep me safe, and everyone wants to feel safe. Living the standards as outlined in *For the Strength of Youth* had spared me a great deal of pain. Also, more importantly, because I was exercising faith by living those standards and reading the Book of Mormon, I was worthy of the companionship of the Holy Ghost. It was through the Holy Ghost that I was able to obtain one of my most valued possessions: my testimony of the Book of Mormon and the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. **NE**



THE EXTRA SMILE

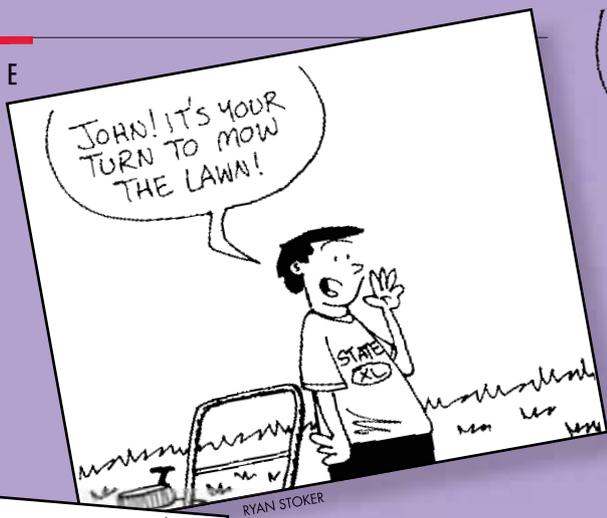
"No, really, sir. Would you part the sea again?"



"You mean no one thought to pack a microwave?"



JOHN! IT'S YOUR TURN TO MOW THE LAWN!



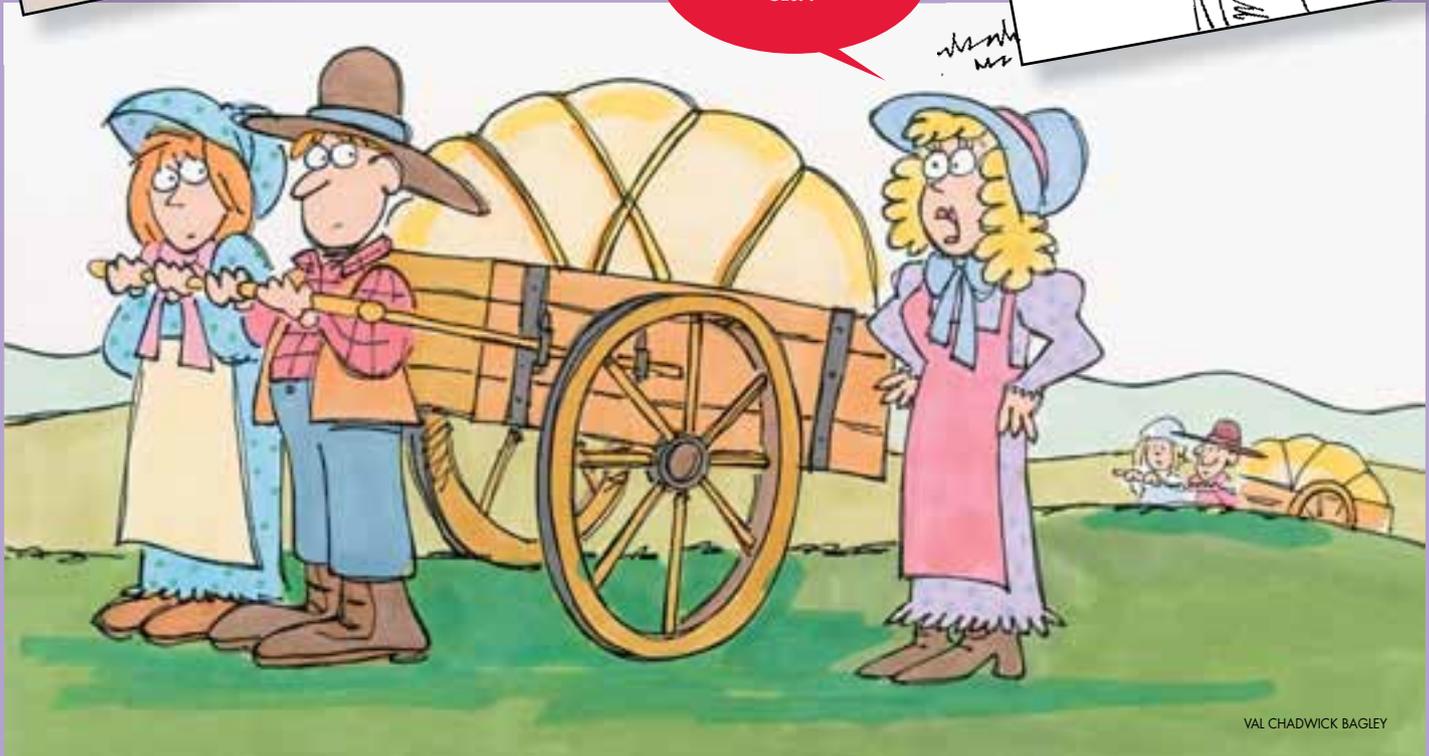
THAT'S RIGHT! YOU CAN RUN, BUT YOU CAN'T—



HEY-WHERE'D HE GO?!



"Where am I supposed to sit?!"



VAL CHADWICK BAGLEY

GOD'S GUIDING HAND



The Lord will shape your life to His purposes if you will let Him. And great blessings will result.

BY ELDER WOLFGANG H. PAUL
Of the Seventy

What will your life be like in, say, 10 years, 20 years? What kind of job or career will you have?

What Church callings will come to you? What will your family be like?

I can answer all of those questions for you with absolute certainty: I'm certain I don't know. But I'm equally certain that God *does* know. And if you trust in Him and place yourself in His hands, you may find Him taking you in unexpected directions, giving you wonderful experiences and opportunities.

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

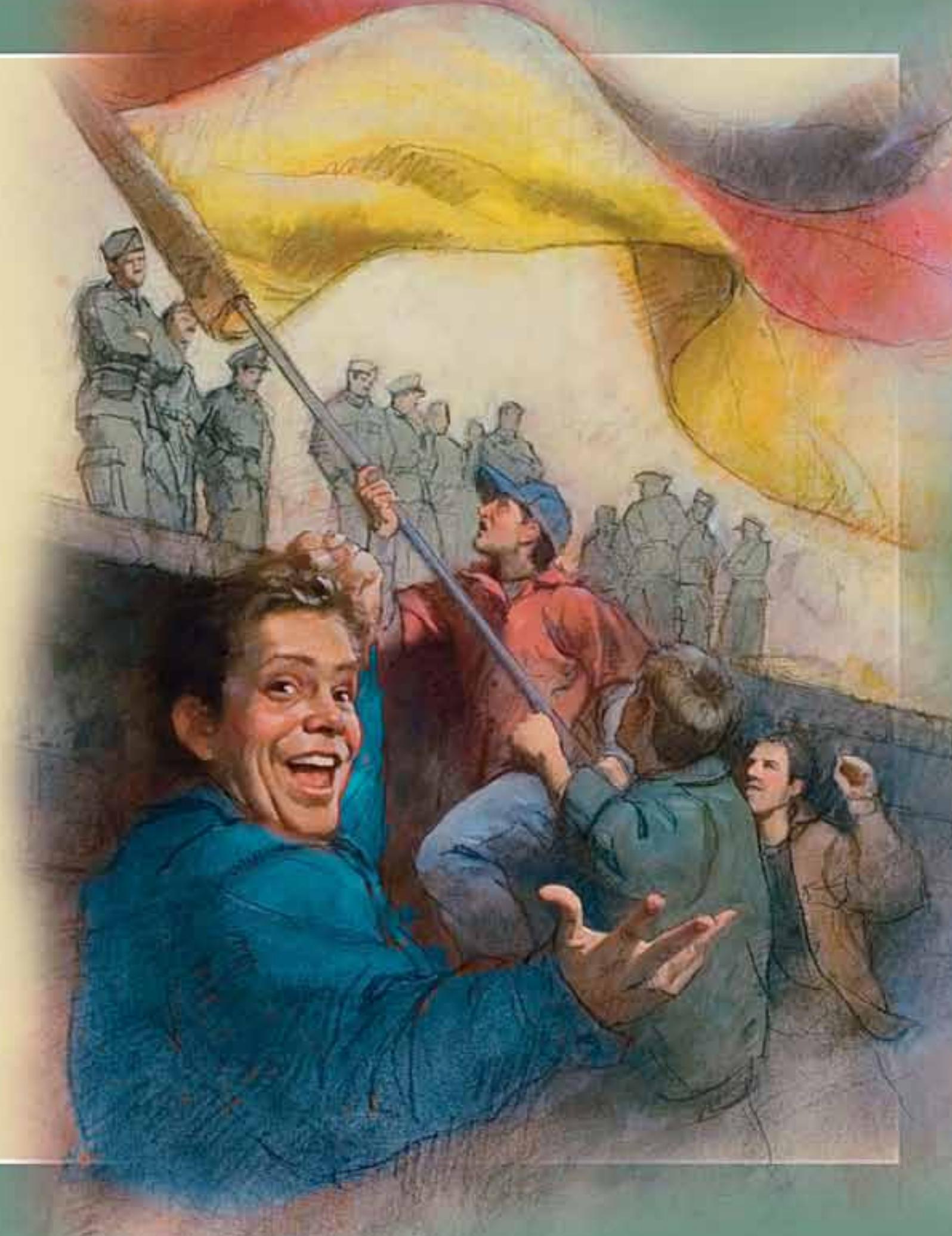
"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5–6).

The same God who directs the course of nations cares enough about you, one of His children, to bless you personally. I have witnessed and experienced both of these examples of the guiding hand of God.

Blessing Whole Nations

When I was growing up, Germany was a divided nation. The west, where I lived, was free and democratic and became prosperous. The east was ruled by a communist system that was allied with the Soviet Union. A border separated east and west, marked by walls, barbed wire, minefields, and towers manned by guards with machine guns. Trapped in the east, behind that border, were a number of faithful Latter-day Saints who longed for freedom to worship and for the blessings of the temple.

We members of the Church knew that someday—in fulfillment of prophecy—the gospel would be preached in every nation (see Matthew 24:14). But because the armies seemed so powerful and the governments so hard-hearted, we feared that only a major international conflict or other world calamity would bring the necessary changes to East Germany, Poland, and the other countries under Soviet domination.



The same God who speaks to prophets and who changes the course of nations is willing to speak to your heart through His Spirit. He will guide the course of your life and make much more of you than you could ever make of yourself.

The Lord knew better. President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) challenged all Church members to pray that the borders would be opened. And slowly but surely miraculous things began to happen. The East German government allowed a temple to be built on its territory, and the Freiberg Germany Temple was dedicated in 1985. Then in 1988, following a request from Church leaders, the government agreed to allow missionaries into the country and missionaries from East Germany to serve out of the country. In November 1989 the East German government opened the Berlin Wall, and it was soon demolished. The government fell, and Germany became united under a democratic government.

Historians list many causes for these great events. But there is no doubt in my mind that behind it all, the Lord was guiding the destinies of these nations so that His purposes could be fulfilled.

Guiding a Life

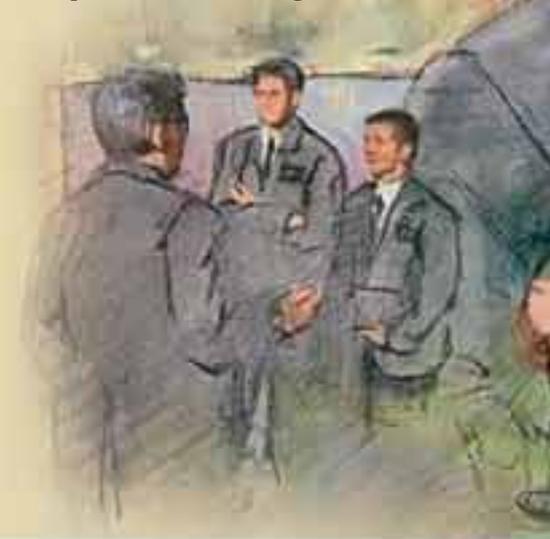
That same God is interested in you personally and will guide and shape your life for your own blessing and for the blessing of others—if you will invite Him to do so. I know it because He has shaped my life and kept His promise that when I put Him first, He will bless me with all other things that I need. I have seen this happen many times in my life.

Our family were the only Latter-day Saints in our town of 60,000 people. We did our best to live the gospel. I felt the Spirit often, and I never really doubted that the Church was true. But while serving in the military, I felt a strong desire to know for myself that

the Book of Mormon is true. So I went to a private place and did just as the Book of Mormon counsels (see Moroni 10:4–5). I asked God. And I received a witness—a spiritual feeling of warmth, comfort, peace, and great happiness that I shall never forget.

After my military service, I pursued an education in military administration in the West German government. It was quite demanding, but I gained a broad background in such things as finance, real estate, legal affairs, and so forth. I also had a calling to serve in the district presidency. While my fellow students were busy studying on Sundays, I was fulfilling Church assignments and spending time with my family. It was hard, but the Lord's promises are true, and you can rely on them. I did as well as any of my fellow students.

After graduation, I worked for the government for eight years. I was guaranteed a lifetime job and a very good pension. It looked as if my life was comfortably laid out before me. Then the Church's Presiding Bishopric asked me if I would be willing to move to Frankfurt and work as the area representative for Europe. I would have to give



up my secure job and future pension. But when my wife and I prayed about it, we felt that it was the right thing to do. From then on, my life went in a different but very blessed direction.

My government training had prepared me for many of the things I dealt with in my new responsibility. And taking this job allowed me to serve later as a mission president, something I would never have been permitted to do if I were still working for the government.

I share these things with you with deep gratitude and not to boast but to show you that the Lord will shape your life to His purposes if you will let Him. And great blessings will result. I can promise you that not only will He bless you in such important things as your career, but if you turn to

Him in prayer, He will bless you in small, everyday challenges.

I have experienced this many times in my life.

Blessed from Day to Day

I remember when I was serving as a branch president and was working

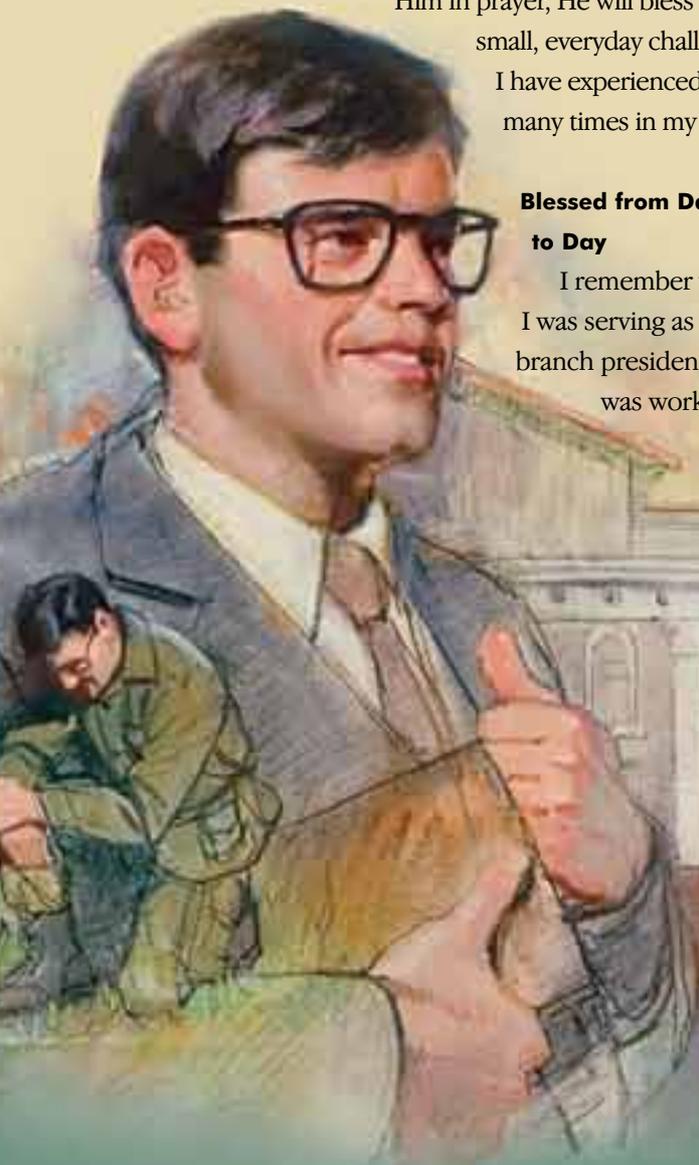
on our annual tithing report. It was a beautiful winter day, and my wife was waiting to go for a walk with me. I was used to doing finances as a government officer, so this was no big task for me. But every time I tried to balance the figures, they did not add up right. I kept trying and trying, but nothing worked, and I was getting frustrated. I asked Heavenly Father to help.

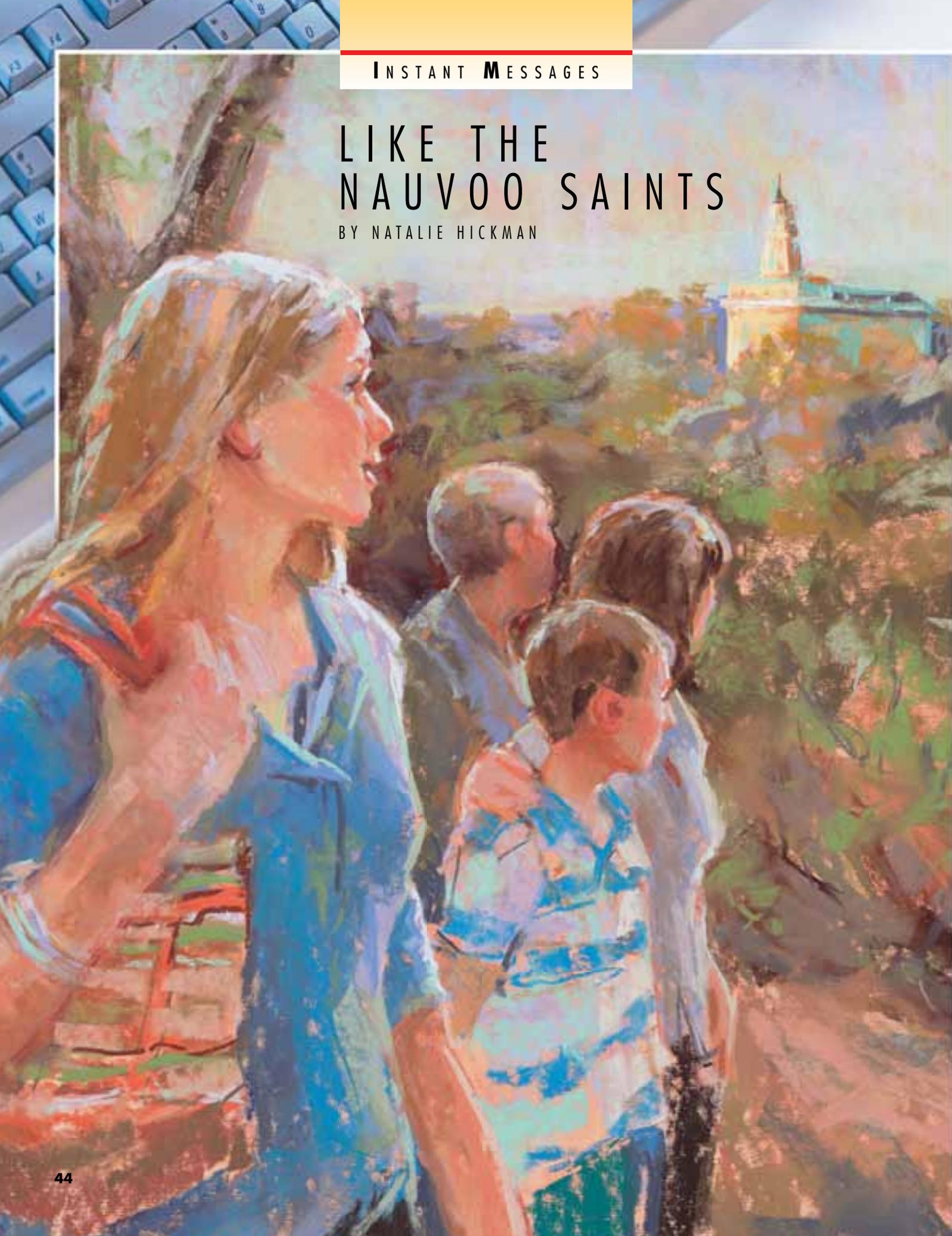
After I got up from my knees, I couldn't see that anything had changed. But I felt prompted to review a specific portion of the donation receipt file again. In those days the receipts were glued together in pads, and this time I discovered that two receipts had stuck together and looked like one receipt. The problem was solved.

Your challenge may be as ordinary as one I had not long ago. I had bought a new high-speed modem for my computer, but when I hooked everything up according to the directions, it did not work. I went through the troubleshooting instructions, reconnected everything, and called the help desk of the manufacturer, but still it didn't work. The equipment was even tested at the store where I bought it, and they couldn't find anything wrong. So I took it back home. But this time I remembered to pray. That was the only thing I did that was different. This time the equipment worked, and it still works.

Now, some of these events affected whole nations. Some affected the whole course of my life. And some are quite small on the grand scale of things. But that is precisely my point. The same God who speaks to prophets and who changes the course of nations is willing to speak to your heart through His Spirit. He will guide the course of your life and make much more of you than you could ever make of yourself. And He will help you with the everyday challenges of your life if you will trust in Him and lean on Him.

He knows you, He loves you, and His promises are sure. **NE**





INSTANT **M**ESSAGES

LIKE THE NAUVOO SAINTS

BY NATALIE HICKMAN

GETTING THROUGH HARD TIMES

BY KENDALL SPACKMAN

A few years ago, my family and I were lucky enough to visit the great city of Nauvoo. It was such a quiet and peaceful place. I really enjoyed visiting many of the prophets' homes.

I also had the privilege to go to the Nauvoo Temple and participate in baptisms for some of my ancestors. The Nauvoo Temple was beautiful inside and out. I felt a special spirit there and was grateful to the early Saints in Nauvoo. Building the temple was so important to them. They worked hard to finish the temple's construction, so they could complete temple ordinances and make and keep sacred covenants before they were forced out of this beautiful city.

As our time to leave the city of Nauvoo drew near, I felt very sad. It was easy to imagine how difficult it was for the early Saints to leave. My family and I walked down Parley Street, following the Trail of Hope. As I looked back at the Nauvoo Temple, it stood so beautiful and brilliant on the hill. I realized that the Saints of Nauvoo had great faith to leave their beautiful homes and a temple of God. As I walked to the very edge of the Mississippi River, I recognized that many of the early Saints did not know where they were going. They had great faith that God would guide them and protect them.

While in Nauvoo, I realized that I want to have faith as strong as the early Saints. I want to follow our living prophet and trust in my Heavenly Father as they did. **NE**

One day in seminary, in the year when we were studying the Doctrine and Covenants and Church history, we were studying section 122. My teacher had us write down a few problems or trials in our life at the time. Then we read verse 7 of that section. The last part of it says, "Know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good." Then my teacher had us write down

our trials in a sentence and add this to the end.

This verse really hit me hard, and I realized that I'm meant to go through the hard times I have in my life. I have realized that the Lord has a plan, and He knows what I'm going through. He knows that I can handle it. And I know that if I ask for help, having faith that it will happen, He will be able to help me through these hard times. **NE**

FEAR NOT

BY JESSICA SMITH

One night when I was a new Beehive, I awoke from a bad dream. I didn't want to wake my parents because I thought I was too old for nightmares, but this one really shook me up, and I was scared.

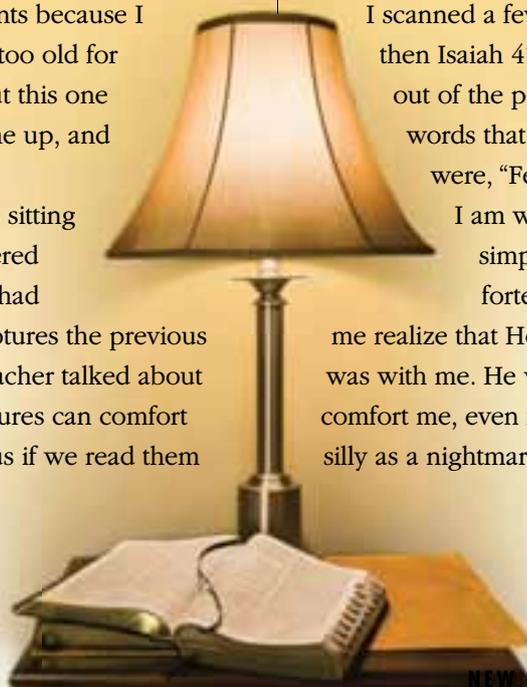
While I was sitting up, I remembered the lesson we had about the scriptures the previous Sunday. My teacher talked about how the scriptures can comfort us and guide us if we read them

with the Spirit. So I took out my scriptures and looked up the term "fear" in the Topical Guide.

I scanned a few scriptures and then Isaiah 41:10 popped out of the page at me. The words that caught my eye were, "Fear thou not; for

I am with thee." These simple words comforted me and made

me realize that Heavenly Father was with me. He was there to comfort me, even for something as silly as a nightmare. **NE**



ILLUSTRATIONS BY JULIE ROGERS; PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID STOKER

HANGING OUT WITH MOM AND DAD

BY JENNIFER MAYER

When I was about to enter ninth grade, my dad announced that our family was moving from Utah to Colorado. I was excited to make new friends and experience a different world, but my expectations changed after my first day at my new junior high school.

I felt lonely and miserable for a long time. Eventually, I shrugged it

off and worked hard at school. For the first time since elementary school, I received straight A's. I spent my nights at home reading. For the next four years, many of my Friday nights were spent with my parents.

Although I had a hard time making friends at school, I realized the love my parents had for me. My mom and my dad became my best friends.

My dad got up at 5:45 a.m. to take me to seminary. During those early-morning drives, I bonded with my

dad. We talked about everything from the latest news to politics and money. Although my dad is not a talker, he would listen as I rattled on about my latest story for the school newspaper or a cute boy in one of my classes. Once in a while, he would get in a comment or two.

My mom wasn't much different. I started spending time exercising and shopping with her. Every Saturday we would buy groceries and run errands together. I would talk endlessly while she grated cheese or prepared a roast for dinner.

In those early morning hours and on those Saturday trips, I found myself, and my testimony of the gospel grew. My parents' love and support reminded me of my infinite worth. I didn't have to go to dances or be student body president. I could be myself because I knew I was important, not only in my parents' eyes, but in Heavenly Father's eyes too. I still have hard times, but I have found that knowing the Lord loves me is miraculous and comforting. **NE**

INSTANT MESSAGES features personal experiences, insights into favorite hymns and scriptures, and other uplifting thoughts. If you have a personal experience that has strengthened your testimony and you'd like us to consider it for Instant Messages, please e-mail it to

newera@ldschurch.org

or send it to:

New Era, Instant Messages
50 E. North Temple St., Rm. 2420
Salt Lake City, UT 84150-3220, USA

Please limit submissions to 400 words or less. They may be edited for length and clarity.



Mutual Activity Idea

- Have a career night. Invite members of your ward in a variety of professions to give short presentations on their jobs and what they did to prepare. If possible, you can ask presenters to demonstrate or teach a simple skill used in their profession.

Personal Progress or Duty to God

- Select a skill that you would like to learn, and create a plan to accomplish it. For example, if you would like to take better photographs, you might sign up for a community class. Or ask someone who is proficient to critique your work and help you improve. Perhaps you could sign

up for swimming lessons or a creative writing class to improve your ability. You could even learn an unusual skill such as riding a unicycle or learning tricks with a yo-yo. The value of learning will become clear as you persist and succeed in your simple goals.



Family Home Evening Idea

- Read the article “Recipe for a Happy Home” on page 16. Notice what the Ronndahl family did to avoid having boring family home evenings. Talk about what your family needs to do to make family home evenings enjoyable for everyone. Be flexible and willing to change as family members grow older.

SUNDAY LESSON HELPS

In addition to the Resource Guides (online at www.lds.org/gospellibrary, in the Shortcuts section), Young Women and Aaronic Priesthood teachers may find these resources helpful in enhancing lessons 30–33.

Young Women Manual 3

Lesson 30: Scripture Study

Bethany E. Walker, “Everyday Scriptures,” *New Era*, Nov. 2007, 46.
 Andrea Cartwright, “Creative Scripture Study,” *New Era*, May 2006, 15.

Lesson 31: Service in the Church

Robert S. Wood, “Article of Faith: Called of God,” *New Era*, Nov. 2005, 28.
 Laura Kohn and Susan Winters, “Skating with Jennifer,” *New Era*, May 2008, 10.

Lesson 32: Service in the Community

Christa Skousen, “Help by the Handful,” this issue, 28.
 Janessa Cloward, “Building Ryan’s Place,” *New Era*, June 2008, 40.

Lesson 33: Each Person Is Divine and Eternal

Russell M. Nelson, “You Are a Child of God,” this issue, 2.
 To the Point (I don’t feel pretty), *New Era*, Sept. 2007, 31.
 Gordon B. Hinckley, “How Can I Become the Woman of Whom I Dream,” *New Era*, Nov. 2001, 4.

Aaronic Priesthood Manual 3

Lesson 30: An Aaronic Priesthood Holder Cherishes Womanhood

A. Lynn Scoresby, “How to Treat a Girl,” *New Era*, Feb. 1987, 12.
 Richard G. Scott, “The Sanctity of Womanhood,” *Ensign*, May 2000, 36.

Lesson 31: Choosing an Eternal Companion

Thomas S. Monson, “Whom Shall I Marry?” *New Era*, Oct. 2004, 4.
 Astell Cerf, “The One You Wed,” *New Era*, Feb. 1987, 16.

Lesson 32: Preparing for the Temple Endowment

Shanna Butler, “How to Talk about the Temple,” *New Era*, Jan. 2006, 44.
 L. Aldin Porter, “Come to the Temple,” *New Era*, Oct. 2004, 8.

Lesson 33: Celestial Marriage—A Preparation for Eternity

Chris Crowe, “A Marvelous Work,” *New Era*, Feb. 1987, 32.
 The October 2004 *New Era* is a special issue on courtship and temple marriage.

IT'S JUST A COPY, RIGHT?

When I first read "It's Just a Copy, Right?" (Feb. 2008), I couldn't understand why downloading music was so bad. "Many teens don't have money" and "It's just like burning a CD" were my arguments. However, when I read the article, it made me realize illegal downloading is a problem and a dishonest one at that. Thank you for articles that help us youth understand better what the Lord would have us do.

Jamie R., Florida

I just finished reading the article "It's Just a Copy, Right?" The Church is a worldwide organization, and the Church magazines have a worldwide distribution. Please be aware that copyright laws are different from one country to another.

Nicholas C., Canada

Editor's note: As a general rule, it is illegal to download copyrighted material from file-sharing networks, but we recognize that copyright laws vary around the world.

NEW ERA CHALLENGE

My Young Women class is being challenged to read The Message each month in the *New Era*, and I love reading them. So far they have helped me every day in middle school. I just wanted to say thank you.

Leah S., Nevada

OVERCOMING TRIALS

I enjoyed the story "Face Trials with Smiles" (Feb. 2008) because it shows how other people overcome trials. I also liked it because Porter plays baseball with one hand. I can't play with two! This story shows what the gospel does for people and how it enlightens people's lives.

Dwayne H., California

"What a wonderful help the New Era magazine has been in my [Sunday School] lessons."

I read the article about Jason Smyth, "Sprinting to Success" in the November 2007 *New Era*. I was really impressed with his obedience to try and serve a mission even though he had poor eye-sight. I hope to be as obedient as he is and serve a mission someday.

Jacob B., Oregon

THANKS FOR "VISITS FROM NATHAN"

The Instant Message "Visits from Nathan" (Feb. 2008) was special to me personally. I recently left the hospital after being diagnosed with staph meningitis. Though it is different from what Melanie Kenny went through, I knew almost exactly how she felt. I would like to thank her. I would never have survived without the love of those around me and the Church.

Karisa B., Washington

HELPS IN CALLINGS

I recently subscribed to the *New Era* to help my husband in his Young Men calling. Then I was called to teach the 14-year-olds in Sunday School. What a wonderful help the *New Era* magazine has been in my lessons as well. Each week I've been able to find a quote or a story that perfectly ties into my lesson and helps to connect the course material to the youth in my class.

Lisa B., Utah

We love hearing from you. Write us at the following address. Please include names of your ward and stake (or branch and district).

New Era

We've Got Mail

*50 E. North Temple St. Rm. 2420
Salt Lake City, UT 84150-3220, USA*

Or e-mail us at newera@ldschurch.org

Submissions may be edited for length and clarity.



A TESTIMONY GROWS

BY CLEA JENSON NEWMAN

Through mountain and valley I roam,
Searching for something,
Waiting for a clear image,
Expecting something startling,
 shocking, or revealing.
Yet God, in His wisdom, let me
Listen to the secret whisper of pines,
Gaze at crystal-cut stars,
Watch a golden sun sink behind age-old hills,
Tenderly hold a hand,
And slowly I began to know . . .



COMING NEXT MONTH

- *Discover more LDS athletes from around the world.*
- *What are the benefits of going to Mutual every week?*
- *Read about a girl who almost lost her sister to suicide.*
- *Hear what our new prophet tells us about opening gates in our lives.*

Just a few of the articles waiting for you in the upcoming August 2008 New Era.

SEE US ONLINE AT WWW.NEWERA.LDS.ORG

