

THE POWER OF A FRIEND

By **Melissa Merrill**
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Jerell and Ashley, both of Kansas, had their lives changed—each because a friend wasn't afraid to speak up about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“It’s Been a Great Ride”

Jerell C., 17, of Kansas didn’t have any major interest in religion. But when David M., a Latter-day Saint Jerell knew from both work and school, persisted in inviting him to church, Jerell decided he shouldn’t keep turning his friend down. He agreed to attend one Sunday.

People in David’s ward were kind and welcoming, and Jerell felt at home. Before long, he was attending church with David’s family *every* Sunday. One thing led to another, and after meeting with the missionaries and gaining a testimony of the Book of Mormon, Jerell received permission from his family to join the Church. David baptized him July 5, 2009.

But that’s just the beginning of Jerell’s story. He learned about early-morning seminary. He knew a little bit about it from David—David had talked to him about memorizing scriptures, for example—but Jerell had never been there before. And going would present more than a few challenges. For one thing, it began at 5:30 a.m. For another, David, who had been with Jerell at every step of learning about the gospel, had already graduated from high school and would no longer be attending seminary. And—perhaps the most daunting obstacle—Jerell didn’t have a way to get there.

That didn’t stop him, however. “I wanted to learn more about the scriptures,” he says. Although he had studied the Book of Mormon reading assignments the missionaries had given him, even taking notes and sharing his thoughts with the elders, he knew there was still a lot to learn, and seminary, it seemed, was the most obvious way to do it.

So Jerell began waking up at 4:30 a.m. and biking an hour to the building where the class was held. He continued doing so—even through bad weather—for four months. At that point, a member began giving him rides.

It didn’t always come easily, he admits. “There were mornings I just didn’t want to get on that bike,” he says. “It was dark outside, so I worried about drivers seeing me.”

But he persisted anyhow, praying for strength as he rode or singing hymns to focus his mind elsewhere. “I knew I couldn’t quit,” he says.

Jerell attributes his consistency to help from Heavenly Father, a great class of students, a dedicated teacher, and opportunities to socialize with them.

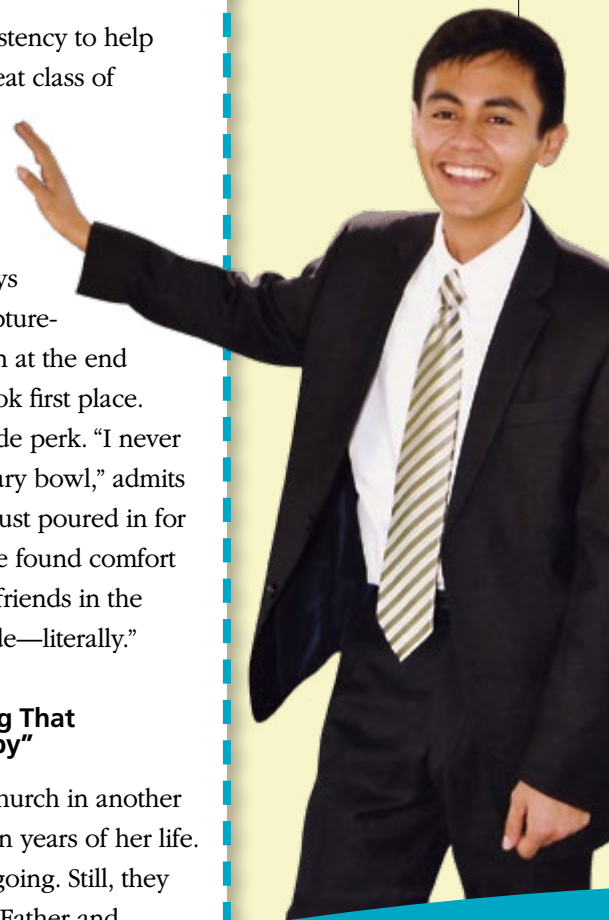
“We were good friends outside of class as well,” says Jerell. The payoff? At a scripture-mastery-related competition at the end of the school year, Jerell took first place.

Of course, that’s just a side perk. “I never expected to win the seminary bowl,” admits Jerell. “The blessings have just poured in for me as a new convert. I have found comfort in the scriptures and good friends in the Church. It’s been a great ride—literally.”

“Help Me Find Something That Will Make Me Truly Happy”

Ashley P., 16, attended church in another faith for the first six or seven years of her life. Then her parents stopped going. Still, they taught her about Heavenly Father and the power of prayer, so she grew up

After David M. (below) invited Jerell C. (left) to church numerous times, Jerell finally decided to go.



believing in God. Throughout her early teen years, she attended various worship services with friends.

Just before her sophomore year of high school, Ashley was struggling, so she looked for answers through prayer. “I prayed that I would be able to be happy in high school. I asked Heavenly Father, ‘Please help me find something that will make me truly happy.’”

Within a few weeks, she started to get to know a classmate, Katie J., in orchestra class. Because they shared a music stand, talking happened easily.

“One day after school in the orchestra room, several of us started talking about our faith,” recalls Katie. “Religion is a big

thing for a lot of kids in orchestra—most of the kids have strong beliefs and high standards, so those kinds of discussions happen a lot. Talking about the Church wasn’t scary for that reason—people are open to other people’s opinions and are generally accepting.”

“Katie started telling us about her church,” Ashley recalls. “I asked her a lot of questions after that discussion, and she suggested I go with her to church. And I found that I *really* wanted to.”

A few days later, Katie told Ashley about the Book of Mormon and showed her a copy. She had written her testimony in it and told Ashley she wanted to give it to someone, but she wasn’t sure whom. “I *wanted* that book,” says Ashley, smiling. “But I didn’t want to

just come out and say, ‘Can I have that?’ As it turned out, she gave it to me a few days later.”

Shortly after that, Katie repeated her invitation to Ashley to attend church with her and her family, and Ashley accepted. That pattern continued for the next two months. “I loved church!” says Ashley. “I loved that families worshipped together—sacrament meeting was for both parents *and* children. That is what church should be about—being there with your family.

“But I also loved that there were lessons specifically for different groups. Young Women strengthened me so much—I felt so accepted by the young women there. I have made lifelong friends.”

In time, Ashley began meeting with the missionaries. “I had questions about things I had wondered about since I was a kid,” Ashley says. “The missionaries answered my questions perfectly, especially when it came to the plan of salvation. It all made sense. And as I prayed about it, I got answers.”

Although Ashley’s parents initially asked her to wait until she was 18 to be baptized, they later told her that if she really felt that she needed to be baptized, she could. Shortly after that, her family began praying together at dinnertime. And a month after Ashley’s baptism in June 2010, her brother, Josh, was baptized. The whole family even joined in one of his meetings with the missionaries. “My family situation regarding the Church totally flipped,” Ashley says.

“I have learned that Heavenly Father will bless us and help us if what we want is righteous,” Ashley says. In addition to helping her find good friends and true happiness, she says, “He helps me with other things too. I



MISSIONARY WORK: A BETTER WAY

“Whenever there is a member who introduces an investigator, there is an immediate support system. The member bears testimony of the truth of the work. He is anxious for the happiness of his investigator friend. He becomes excited as that friend makes progress in learning the gospel.

“The full-time missionaries may do the actual teaching, but the member, wherever possible, will back up that teaching with the offering of his home to carry on this missionary service. He will bear sincere testimony of the divinity of the work. He will be there to answer questions when the missionaries are not around. He will be a friend to the convert who is making a big and often difficult change. . . .

“Opportunities for sharing the gospel are everywhere.”

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), “Find the Lambs, Feed the Sheep,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 105–6.

pray every day, and He always finds ways to comfort and bless each of us.”

Ashley points out that sometimes that comfort and those blessings come through other people, as they came to her through Katie. “You never know who you are going to touch spiritually,” she says. “Don’t be afraid to try. You never know if they are struggling with something hard in their life. They might really need to hear your testimony or learn about the Church. Don’t hold it in.”

Katie agrees. “If you feel a prompting to say something, don’t doubt it—go for it! If you doubt your testimony, people will see that. But if you are an example of what you believe in, they’ll see that too.

“Take the opportunities you find,” she continues. “If there is a religious discussion at school, you don’t want to miss that kind of chance. Be open and honest about what you believe in. Explain it to the best of your ability. It can change your life—and the life of a friend.” **NE**

Because Katie J. (left) was willing to talk about the Church with friends at school, it led Ashley P. (right) to the gospel.