

THE SHEPHERD'S CROOK

By Stephen G. Biddulph

Saving a marine from drowning helped me remember my own need for rescue by the Savior.

When I was a young marine lieutenant, I took my platoon to the pool for water survival training. Each marine was to jump off a 15-foot (4.6 m) tower—fully clothed in combat boots, fatigues, and helmet—into 12 feet (3.7 m) of water, come to the surface, and tread water for a time.

One marine in my unit froze on the tower that day. Despite taunts from his fellow marines and a direct order, he could not muster the courage to jump from the tower. In response to my inquiry as to the problem, the young marine told me that he was not a strong swimmer and that he was afraid that if he jumped in with all his clothes on, he would drown.

I had been a lifeguard at Brigham Young University, so I felt confident that I could help this young man. I removed the shepherd's crook—a long pole with an elongated hook on

the end used for rescuing people—from its place and told him that if he would jump, I would extend the shepherd's crook to him. All he had to do was grasp it when he felt me push it into his chest, and I would pull him to the surface.

Frankly, I was caught off guard by the marine's compliance. He shouted, "Sir! Yes, sir!" and off the tower he went.

He proved prophetic. He went straight to the bottom of the pool and stood there with arms outstretched, tiny bubbles of air escaping upward through pursed lips. Quickly I lowered the shepherd's crook and pushed the hook into his chest. He grabbed the pole, and I pulled him up to the cheers of the other marines, who seemed to appreciate a man who showed courage in the face of fear.

This experience of saving another

man from drowning has helped me remember my own need for rescue by the Savior—and my duty to lift and strengthen others. As I have contemplated this man's willingness to trust me, based only on my promise of rescue, my own trust in the Savior has been strengthened, and I have felt more fully my dependence upon Him for my own spiritual survival.

Each of us needs divine rescue from our leap of faith into mortality. How amazing it is to me that the Savior, at great personal suffering, condescended to come personally to our rescue, to lift us from the depths of death and sin by accomplishing His Atonement, an act of infinite love. All He asks of us is that we trust Him and reach out and grasp hold of the true gospel that He has so magnanimously extended to us, and He will lift us to





Him (see 3 Nephi 27:13–16). There is no depth to which we can sink in this life that is not reachable by His mercy and grace.

We are not alone in the pool of life. We are surrounded by others who also need rescuing. Some know what it is like to sink to the very depths of life and feel the helplessness and panic that come in knowing that they

cannot make it to the surface on their own. How remarkable it is when we can extend the shepherd's crook to someone else in need and lift that person up. I have discovered that the quality of my own life depends, in large part, upon my willingness to extend to others a shepherd's crook of love, service, example, and encouragement. As we help to rescue others, we value even more our own rescue.

My own leap of faith has been a blessing because of my testimony that God lives, that Jesus is our Savior, and that He stands ready with his shepherd's crook to lift each of us. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.



HIS MERCIFUL ARM IS OUTSTRETCHED

“Those who will repent and forsake sin will find that His merciful arm is outstretched still. Those who listen to and heed His words and the words of His chosen servants will find peace and understanding even in the midst of great heartache and sorrow. The result of His sacrifice is to free us from the effects of sin, that all may have guilt erased and feel hope.”

President Boyd K. Packer (1924–2015), President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Reason for Our Hope,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 7.