

# Ensign



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**Three Christmas Memories, pp. 10, 13, 14**

**Prophets at Christmastime, p. 52**

**Never Too Old to Serve, pp. 56, 60**



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**Good Tidings of Great Joy, by Walter Rane**

*“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.*

*“And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them. . . .*

*“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.*

*“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:8–11).*

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# Ensign

**A MAGAZINE OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS**  
December 2012 Volume 42 • Number 12

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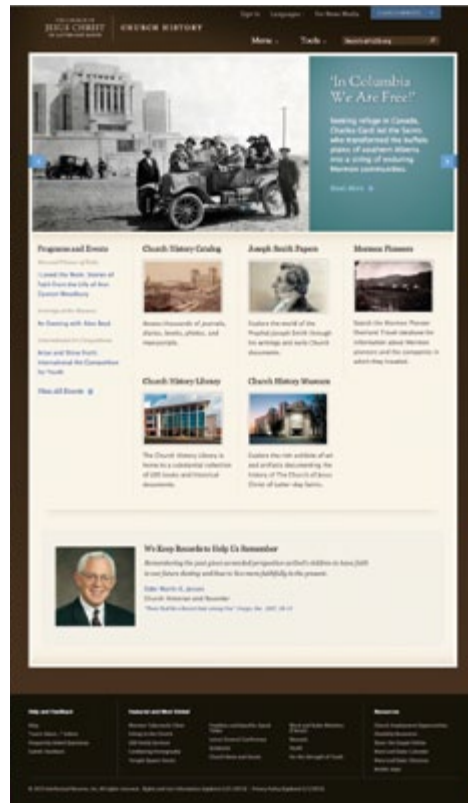
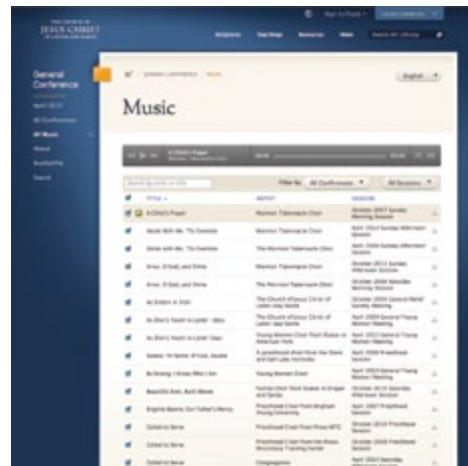
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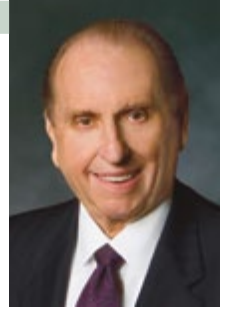
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By President  
Thomas S. Monson



# REDISCOVERING the Christmas Spirit

Years ago as a young elder, I was called with others to a hospital in Salt Lake City to provide blessings for sick children. Upon entering, we noted a Christmas tree with its bright and friendly lights and saw carefully wrapped packages beneath its outstretched limbs. We then went through corridors where small boys and girls—some with plaster casts upon an arm or leg, others with ailments that perhaps could not be cured so readily—greeted us with smiling faces.

A young, desperately ill small boy called out to me, “What is your name?”

I told him my name, and he inquired, “Will you give me a blessing?”

The blessing was provided, and as we turned to leave his bedside, he said, “Thank you very much.”

We walked a few steps, and then I heard him call, “Oh, Brother Monson, merry Christmas to you.” Then a great smile flashed across his countenance.

That boy had the spirit of Christmas. The spirit of Christmas is something I hope all of us would have in our hearts and lives—not only at this particular season but also throughout the year.

When we have the spirit of Christmas, we remember Him whose birth we commemorate at this season of the year: “For unto you is born this day in the city of

David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

In our day the spirit of giving gifts plays a large role in commemorating the Christmas season. I wonder if we might profit by asking ourselves, What gifts would the Lord have *me* give to Him or to others at this precious season of the year?

May I suggest that our Heavenly Father would want each of us to render to Him and to His Son the gift of obedience. I also feel that He would ask us to give of ourselves and not be selfish or greedy or quarrelsome, as His precious Son suggests in the Book of Mormon:

“Verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who . . . stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.

“Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away” (3 Nephi 11:29–30).

In this marvelous dispensation of the fulness of times, our opportunities to love and give of ourselves are indeed limitless, but they are also perishable. Today there are hearts to gladden, kind words to say, deeds to be done, and souls to be saved.

One who had keen insight into the Christmas spirit wrote:



*I am the Christmas Spirit—  
I enter the home of poverty, causing pale-  
faced children to open their eyes wide,  
in pleased wonder.  
I cause the miser's clutched hand to relax  
and thus paint a bright spot on his soul.  
I cause the aged to renew their youth and  
to laugh in the old glad way.  
I keep romance alive in the heart of child-  
hood, and brighten sleep with dreams  
woven of magic.  
I cause eager feet to climb dark stairways  
with filled baskets, leaving behind  
hearts amazed at the goodness of the  
world.  
I cause the prodigal to pause a moment  
on his wild, wasteful way and send  
to anxious love some little token that  
releases glad tears—tears which wash*

*away the hard lines of sorrow.  
I enter dark prison cells, reminding  
scarred manhood of what might have  
been and pointing forward to good  
days yet to be.  
I come softly into the still, white home  
of pain, and lips that are too weak to  
speak just tremble in silent, eloquent  
gratitude.  
In a thousand ways, I cause the weary  
world to look up into the face of God,  
and for a little moment forget the  
things that are small and wretched.  
I am the Christmas Spirit.<sup>1</sup>*

May we each discover anew the Christmas spirit—even the Spirit of Christ. ■

**NOTE**

1. E. C. Baird, "Christmas Spirit," in James S. Hewitt, ed., *Illustrations Unlimited* (1988), 81.

**TEACHING FROM THIS MESSAGE**

**A**s you share President Monson's message with the family, consider emphasizing the question he posed about what gifts the Lord would have us give to Him or to others this season. Encourage family members to record their thoughts and ideas (or, for young children, to draw a picture) about how to "discover anew the Christmas spirit—even the Spirit of Christ."

## The Perfect Christmas Eve

By Jerie S. Jacobs

When I was growing up, one of the highlights of every year was Christmas Eve. My family and I made pizza, went caroling, and then gathered for a Christmas devotional. We sang hymns in shaky four-part harmony and blasted out carols on our odd assortment of musical instruments. Dad always ended the evening with a Christmas thought that left us in happy tears. Life didn't get any better than Christmas Eve.

When I was a little older, my mom began taking care of a young neighbor, Kelly. Kelly came over to our house every day after school while her mom, Patty, worked. Kelly followed me around like a puppy—loud and needy. It was always a relief when Patty collected her daughter and left my home and family in peace.

One December, I was horrified when mom invited Patty and Kelly to join us for Christmas Eve. *My Christmas Eve.* Mom smiled and assured me, "It won't change a thing." But I knew better. They would eat all our pizza. Kelly would make fun of our singing. I resigned myself to the worst Christmas Eve ever.

When the evening came, Patty and Kelly joined us, and we talked and laughed and sang. My mother was right. It was perfect. At midnight they thanked us and reluctantly parted. I went to bed with a full heart. I discovered that the truly precious gifts of Christmas are not diminished when shared. Instead they sweeten and multiply when we give them away.

# CHILDREN

## Five Christmas Gifts

President Monson said that we might want to think about which gifts the Lord would want us to give to Him or to others.

Circle the five children in the picture who are serving others. How are their actions gifts to Jesus?





Prayerfully study this material and, as appropriate, discuss it with the sisters you visit. Use the questions to help you strengthen your sisters and to make Relief Society an active part of your own life.



Faith, Family, Relief

## Visiting Teaching, a Work of Salvation

Visiting teaching gives women the opportunity to watch over, strengthen, and teach one another—it is truly a work of salvation. Through visiting teaching, sisters minister in behalf of the Savior and help prepare women for the blessings of eternal life.

“We are ‘to warn, expound, exhort, and teach, and invite [others] to come unto Christ’ (D&C 20:59), as the Lord said in his revelations,” said President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985).

Further, he said, “Your testimony is a terrific medium.”<sup>1</sup>

When we as visiting teachers increase our knowledge of gospel truths, our testimonies strengthen and support sisters who are preparing to be baptized and confirmed. We help new members become anchored in the gospel. Our visits and love help “win back those who have gone astray [and] warm up the hearts of those who have grown cold in the gospel.”<sup>2</sup> And we encourage sisters to come unto Christ through temple attendance.

“You are going to save souls,” said President Kimball to visiting teachers, “and who can tell but that many of the fine active people in the Church today are active because you were in their homes and gave them a new outlook, a new vision. You pulled back the curtain. You extended their horizons. . . .



“You see, you are not only saving these sisters, but perhaps also their husbands and their homes.”<sup>3</sup>

### From the Scriptures

Doctrine and Covenants 20:59;  
84:106; 138:56

### What Can I Do?

1. How does Relief Society prepare me for the blessings of eternal life?
2. What can I do to increase the faith of those I watch over?

### From Our History

When the Prophet Joseph Smith organized the Relief Society, he said that the women were not only to look after the poor but also to save souls. He also taught that women in the Church play essential roles in Heavenly Father’s plan of salvation.<sup>4</sup> Guided by the principles taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith, we as sisters in Relief Society can work together to prepare women and their families for God’s greatest blessings.

“Let us have compassion upon each other,” said President Brigham Young (1801–77), “and let [those who are] strong tenderly nurse the weak into strength, and let those who can see guide the blind until they can see the way for themselves.”<sup>5</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Spencer W. Kimball, in *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (2011), 116.
2. Eliza R. Snow, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 83.
3. Spencer W. Kimball, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 117.
4. See Joseph Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 171–72.
5. Brigham Young, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 107.

THE GOSPEL OF  
JESUS CHRIST  
WAS RESTORED  
THROUGH THE

# PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH

After the Crucifixion of the Savior and the death of His Apostles, people changed some of the doctrines and ordinances of the gospel. Even though many good people believed in Jesus Christ and tried to understand and teach His gospel, the fulness of truth was no longer available. The result was varying stages of apostasy among the surviving Christians. While they had many truths, none of them had the fulness of Christ's doctrines, ordinances, or priesthood.

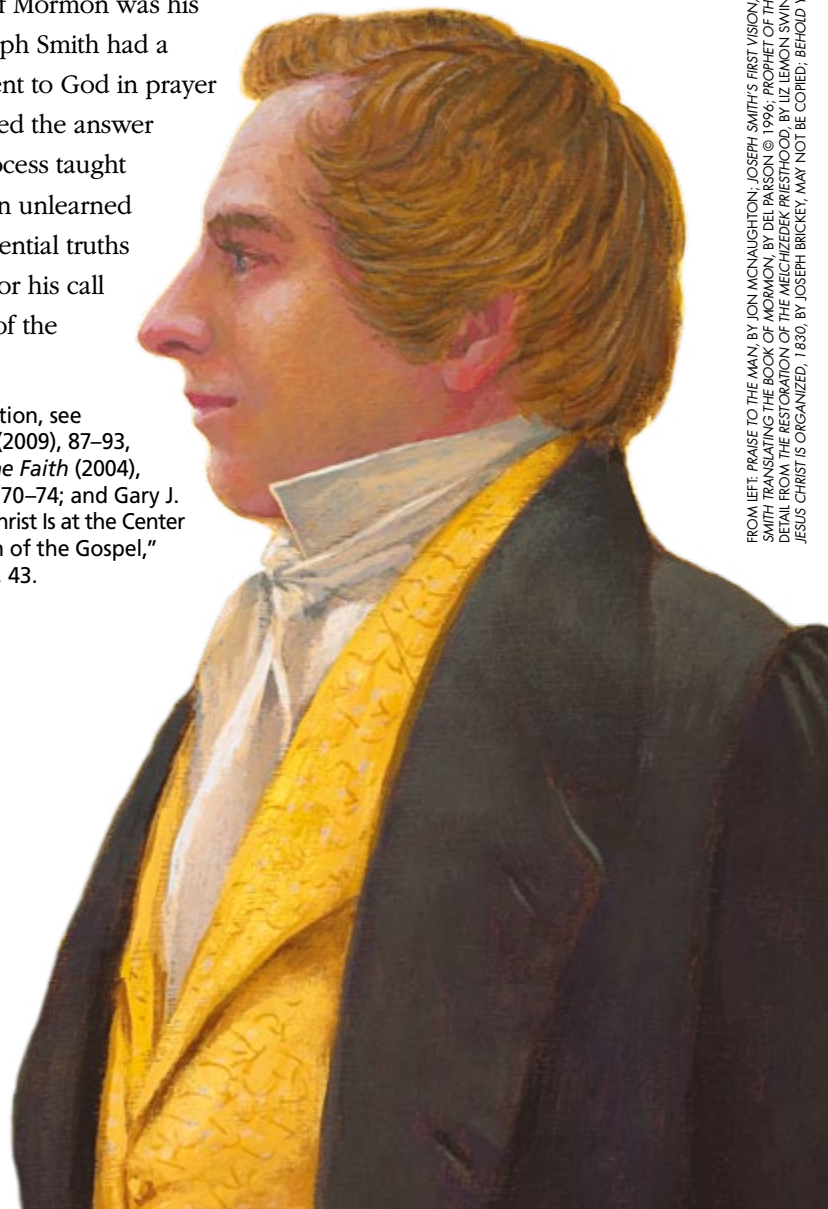
Our Heavenly Father knew that this gradual loss of truth would occur, so He preserved the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ in an ancient volume of scripture comparable to the Bible. In the early 1800s, a heavenly messenger named Moroni directed Joseph Smith to where this holy scripture had lain hidden for centuries. Written on golden plates, this record contained the writings of prophets telling of God's dealings with some of the ancient inhabitants of the Americas. The Prophet Joseph Smith translated the writings on these plates by the gift and power of God.

This record is the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ.

The process of translating the Book of Mormon provided Joseph Smith with an education in God's doctrines—the Spirit was his teacher, and the Book of Mormon was his text. When Joseph Smith had a question, he went to God in prayer and God revealed the answer to him. This process taught Joseph Smith, an unlearned young man, essential truths that were vital for his call as the Prophet of the Restoration. ■

For more information, see *Gospel Principles* (2009), 87–93, 95–100; *True to the Faith* (2004), 124–28, 135–39, 170–74; and Gary J. Coleman, "Jesus Christ Is at the Center of the Restoration of the Gospel," *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, 43.

*While we believe Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, we worship our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.*



FROM LEFT: PRAISE TO THE MAN, BY ION MCNAUGHTON; JOSEPH SMITH'S FIRST VISION, BY GREG OLSEN; MAY NOT BE COPIED; JOSEPH SMITH TRANSLATING THE BOOK OF MORMON, BY DEL PARSON © 1996; PROPHET OF THE LORD, BY DAVID LINDSEY; MAY NOT BE COPIED; DETAIL FROM THE RESTORATION OF THE MECHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD, BY LIZ IEMON SWINDE; MAY NOT BE COPIED; THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST IS ORGANIZED, 1830, BY JOSEPH BRICKEY; MAY NOT BE COPIED; BEHOLD YOUR LITTLE ONES, BY DAVID LINDSEY © 1983

## The Prophet Joseph Smith Testifies

1. "I had actually seen a light, and in the midst of that light I saw two Personages, and they did in reality speak to me; and though I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision, yet it was true; . . . I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it."<sup>1</sup>



2. "By the power of God I translated the Book of Mormon from hieroglyphics, the knowledge of which was lost to the world, in which wonderful event I stood alone, an unlearned youth, to combat the worldly wisdom and multiplied ignorance of eighteen centuries, with a new revelation."<sup>2</sup>



3. "I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."<sup>3</sup>



4. "I . . . hold the keys of the last kingdom, in which is the dispensation of the fullness of all things spoken by the mouths of all the holy Prophets since the world began, under the sealing power of the Melchizedek Priesthood."<sup>4</sup> (See D&C 27:12–13.)



5. "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was founded upon direct revelation, as the true Church of God has ever been, . . . and through the will and blessings of God, I have been an instrument in His hands, thus far, to move forward the cause of Zion."<sup>5</sup>



6. "[The Book of Mormon] tells us that our Savior made His appearance upon this continent [the Americas] after His resurrection; that He planted the Gospel here in all its fulness, and richness, and power, and blessing."<sup>6</sup>

### NOTES

1. Joseph Smith—History 1:25.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 60.
3. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 64.
4. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 511.
5. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 195.
6. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 64.



By Elder  
Jeffrey R. Holland

Of the Quorum of the  
Twelve Apostles

# Christmas WITHIN YOU

*Keep your faith.  
Look for the good  
in your situation.  
Do something  
kind for someone.  
Seek Christ devoid  
of wrapping and  
tinsel.*

I suppose everyone remembers his or her first Christmas away from home. The reason for being away might have been mission or military service, student life, or employment. Whatever the reason, that first Christmas away is a poignant memory for all of us. To those who have been away from home at Christmas, or who may be away from home this year, I dedicate my own such remembrance.





ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL MANN

In my case it was my service as a missionary. For 19 years I had enjoyed Christmas surrounded by family and friends. I suppose in my youthful self-centeredness I had never considered spending it any other way.

Then, as the Yule season approached in 1960, I found myself half a world away from all that. I had been in England less than three months when, on the first of December, I was summoned to the mission office to meet Elder Eldon Smith, newly arrived from Champion, Alberta, Canada—my first junior companion. We were sent to open missionary work in the conservative city of Guildford, in the county of Surrey, an area that had never had Latter-day Saint missionaries and, to our knowledge, had only one member hidden somewhere within its boundaries. We were young, inexperienced, and a bit overwhelmed, but we were not fainthearted.

We registered with the police, arranged for lodging, and, initially unable to locate our lone member of the Church, threw ourselves into the only thing we knew to do—knock on doors. We knocked on doors in the morning, we knocked on doors at midday, we knocked on doors in the afternoon, and we knocked on doors at night. We rode our bicycles through those streets in what must have been

the rainiest British December in history—or so it seemed to us. We were wet in the morning, we were wet at midday, we were wet in the afternoon, and we were wet at night, but we kept knocking on doors. And we got in almost none of them.

So it went until Christmas Eve, when people were even less inclined to hear a couple of missionaries “from the colonies.” That evening, weary but devoted, we retired to our one-room rental and had a Christmas devotional. We sang a Christmas hymn and then offered an invocation. We read from the scriptures and listened to a tape recording titled *The True Story of Christmas*. Then we sang another hymn of the season, said a closing prayer, and went to bed. We were too tired to have visions of sugarplums dance in our heads.

On Christmas morning we kept our morning study schedule and opened the two or three packages that had caught up with us following our transfer. Then we went out to knock on doors. We knocked in the morning, we knocked at midday, we knocked in the afternoon, and we knocked at night. We didn’t get in any of them.

For such an uneventful Christmas—clearly the least festive of any I ever had before or since—it says something that those special days in December of 1960 remain in my heart

(after more than 50 years!) as one of the sweetest Christmases I have ever had. I think that is because for the first time in my life, I found myself understanding Christmas rather than just enjoying it. I think for the first time in any truly significant way, I was getting the message of Christ's birth and life—His message and His mission and His sacrifice for others.

I should have made that connection at an earlier age, but I hadn't—at least not strongly enough. But that Christmas in England—as a cold, wet, somewhat overwhelmed 19-year-old—I “got it.” I can truly say that because of my mission, Christmas, like so many other aspects of the gospel, has meant more to me every year since that experience.

On this Christmas I send my love to every missionary, every man or woman in the military, every student, and every employee and traveler who won't “be home for Christmas,”<sup>1</sup> as the carol says. Keep your faith. Look for the good in your situation. Do something kind for someone. Seek Christ devoid of wrapping and tinsel. You will find that despite external circumstances, Christmas—like the kingdom of God—is “within you” (Luke 17:21). ■

*From “A Mission Christmas,” Church News, Dec. 17, 2011, 10.*

**NOTE**

1. James “Kim” Gannon, “I'll Be Home for Christmas” (1943).



# Christmas Ornaments, Christlike Friends

By **Mary N. Cook**

First Counselor in  
the Young Women  
General Presidency



Preparing to decorate our Christmas tree, I unpacked a box filled with Christmas decorations that I hadn't seen or used in several years. As I pawed through the Christmas lights and linens, I discovered a dress box filled with Christmas ornaments I had collected when I was single and teaching school. I discovered a plain, cross-stitched ornament that simply said "Christmas Open House—1984." My mind raced back to that year. I was unmarried and had apprehensively moved from a young single adult ward to a family ward.

I love the Christmas season, but some had been very lonely for me. Being in my 30s, single, and not having children, I sometimes felt left out. It was easy for me to feel sorry for myself, falling back into what I called the "poor little old me syndrome." That particular year, 1984, I remember making a conscious decision to conquer the syndrome, to look beyond myself and see what I could do to make Christmas joyful for others.

I was relatively new to the ward

and thought that opening my modest apartment to members of the Relief Society would help me celebrate the holidays and become better acquainted with the sisters.

As I reminisced about that open house, I remembered the small Christmas tree decorated with my box of ornaments, the smell of the shortbread cookies my single friends helped me bake, and the sweet taste of Mom's "white Christmas punch" I served to the guests.

As I studied the variety of ornaments, warm feelings of love and gratitude filled my heart as I thought of the many Christlike friends, young and old, who loved and mentored me through challenging times.

I picked up the starched, lacy snowflake that an older woman had crocheted for me and was reminded of her caring ways. I thought of the older sisters of the many wards in which I had lived who had passed on their knowledge to me. I learned to crochet, knit, sew, and tat from these sweet sisters who were willing to give

their time and especially patience so that I could enjoy what they enjoyed.

I held the tiny brass horn and thought of the invitation of the musically gifted choir director who invited me to join in early morning practices for a special musical program as a teenager. Her confidence instilled in me love of classical music and the confidence to participate in choirs the rest of my life.

With a smile I picked up the Mickey Mouse ornament and was grateful for the couple who shared their toddlers with me. Their children became my children. I held them in church, read to them, played with them, and loved them, helping to fill a painful and empty void.

The Savior taught us in Matthew 10:39, "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

That conscious decision in 1984 to "lose my life" by looking outward was indeed a turning point in "finding" myself. As I pondered the past, I realized that many, in turn, had followed our Savior's words and lost their life for me. *Christmas* ornaments had become a sweet reminder of *Christlike* friends. ■



# The Christmas Handkerchief

By **Scott M. Mooy**

Church Magazines

Every year when I was young, I helped my mother wrap the family Christmas presents. I had 5 married siblings and 13 nieces and nephews, so this was no simple task. But even in the colorful mess, I noticed that we seemed to always wrap a handkerchief for my sister. Even if my mother was giving her a nightgown or a blouse or some kitchen gadget, there was that handkerchief for Ann again. I understood that handkerchiefs were practical and inexpensive, but I began to wonder what my sister would think about receiving this gift so often.

One December, I finally commented: “Another handkerchief for Ann? Mom, it seems you give her one almost every year. Have you considered maybe she has enough by now? How many does she need? And another gift makes her family parcel more expensive to mail. I don’t think you need to do this.”

ILLUSTRATION BY SAM LAWICOR



My mother put her scissors aside. "Let me tell you a story. Then maybe you'll understand. This happened before you were born.

"You know how I came to this country." (I did. My mother's family was surprised when she married a widower with four children but shocked it meant she was leaving Holland for the United States.) "But some things you don't know. When we came here, we had nothing. Life was hard. Your father was working two jobs but with little pay. I took in washing and ironing. Still we didn't have enough money.

"Ann was 17 then and understood how much money we owed. She decided she could help. She went to work. She found a job in the city at a candy store. She had to take the bus there and stand at the counter all day. She gave us almost all her salary, keeping just enough for bus fare and to buy some lunch, since she couldn't keep any food behind the counter.

"Ann would tell me she was glad she had a job and that her salary could help us. But she didn't tell me she worried for her little brothers. Christmas was coming. Their new American friends were talking about the toys they had asked Santa to bring them. What if Santa didn't bring any presents to our house?

"A few days before Christmas, Ann gave me some money. But it wasn't

her payday. I asked her where she got this money. She told me she had saved it by not eating lunch. It wasn't a lot of money, but I knew it meant she hadn't had lunch for weeks. She told me to take the money and buy Christmas presents for her brothers. She trusted me, the new stepmother, to buy what was right.

"I had to buy little things. But I decided I could make a Christmas for the whole family. Tangerines to eat, teddy bear soaps, crayons, little toy cars, socks for your father. And I bought Ann a handkerchief. It was plain, but I stayed up late at night to embroider it and make it pretty. I was so happy my new daughter was giving us Christmas. I wanted her to have something special for Christmas too.

"Christmas came. We were surprised when our church friends brought us a Christmas tree and a box full of presents. They apologized that it was simple things wrapped up in newspaper, but it was wonderful! There were so many useful things and good food to eat. And then another surprise, Ann's and my secret surprise: Santa had come to our house! Your brothers were so excited! Soon they were on the floor of that little living room, running cars over and under the newspaper. Newspaper everywhere! And Ann opened her present and found the handkerchief. She cried. I cried a little too.

"We made our Christmas meal. Oh, we had treats we hadn't had in such a long time! Then we cleaned up. Ann went to put her handkerchief away. But it was gone. We looked everywhere. And then I thought, oh no, your father had thrown the newspaper in the fire. Had the handkerchief gone in the fire? It must have because we never found it. But Ann didn't complain. What had happened had happened. She said she was happy because her brothers were happy.

"The next Christmas, I gave Ann a handkerchief. I made sure that one didn't get lost. When she got married and moved away, I mailed her a Christmas handkerchief. I don't give her a handkerchief now because I think she needs it. I give her a handkerchief to tell her I will never forget what she did for our first Christmas together."

Several years after my mother told me this story, we were able to celebrate Christmas with our entire family. In the commotion, I watched my sister unwrap a handkerchief. I saw her eyes glisten as she reached over and gave our mother's hand a squeeze. I understood. It wasn't just a handkerchief. It was their special remembrance of love, gifts, and sacrifice. And, in its simple way, it reminded me of why we celebrate Christmas—because of a very great and loving gift that required sacrifice. ■

# Lights and Marvels

Words by Penelope Moody Allen  
Music by Michael F. Moody

*Heartfelt* ♩ = 63-69

1. The man - ner of His  
(2. The) man - ner of His

*rall.*

com - ing was so hum - ble few gave heed. Tho' lights and mar - vels  
com - ing to the seek - ing soul who prays Is per - son - al, a

blaz - oned, Their glad tid - ings few re - ceived. The man - ner of His  
wit - ness, Thru' the Spi - rit, of His grace. The man - ner of His

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com - ing Back to earth is with ac - claim: All men will kneel and  
com - ing To our heart brings joy and peace, In pri - vate lights and

wor - ship; Ev - ry tongue con - fess His name. He comes with lights and mar - vels! Christ  
mar - vels, As our faith and love in - crease.

*♩ = 48-52 (a bit faster)*

comes with Truth and Right! Our hearts ex - pand in wor - ship; Our eyes re - ceive their

sight. 2. The eyes re - ceive their sight. *rall.*

*♩ = 63-69*

# My Christmas Letter

*How could I find peace in the Christmas season after the death of our two-year-old son?*

**By Robyn Marie Allgood**

**C**hristmas 2006 was to be our first Christmas without our son, Kyle. It was three months since he had passed away, and we had started trying to adjust to a new normal. I was determined not to allow Christmas or his birthday (just before Christmas) to be sad, but it was still hard to enjoy all the usual preparations for Christmas—I longed to buy a little train or car for my son.

Soon it was Kyle's third birthday, and I didn't want it to be a sad day. Of course there was sadness and grief, but there was joy and peace too. We hosted a small party, and we released three balloons, symbolic of Kyle's three years. We even sang to him and my mother, whose birthday was the day before.

A few days later, it came time to write our annual Christmas letter to friends and family. I wasn't sure what to write this year, and the thought of writing about Kyle overwhelmed me. I had spent the morning reviewing my journal from the past summer. I remembered how Kyle was too scared to take swimming lessons by himself. Although I had to get a babysitter every day for two weeks for our daughter Megan, I was soon grateful that I got to be the one who taught him to blow bubbles, dip his head under the water, kick his legs, and jump from the side of the pool so I could catch him in my arms.

Reading my journal entries jump-started my mind, and I knew exactly what I wanted to write in the Christmas letter—everything I was grateful for. I sat down at the computer and wrote:

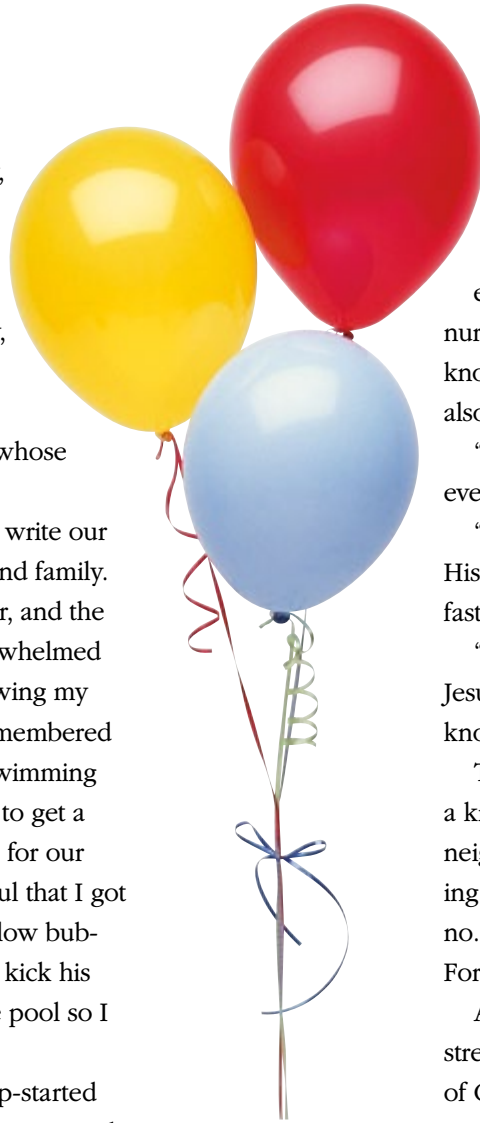
"I am grateful that I could read piles of books with Kyle while he sat in my lap so contentedly.

"I am grateful we spent hours playing in the park.

"I am grateful that I could play hide-and-seek and hear him squeal when he was discovered.

"I am thankful for his adventurous ways because they kept me on my toes.

"I do not regret staying home to be his mom.



*We hosted a small party on the day Kyle would have turned three. I didn't want it to be a sad day.*

"I do not regret staying up all night with him while he was sick.

"I do not regret taking him to church every Sunday, even if the report back from nursery wasn't always a positive one. (He was known to tackle the other children, but he was also the most enthusiastic singer!)

"I am grateful that I could teach him to pray, even if he hadn't yet mastered sitting still.

"I am grateful that he shared his testimony. His first and last trip to the pulpit was his last fast Sunday before he died.

"And I am thankful I could teach him about Jesus Christ and his Heavenly Father, for I know he is with Them now."

The day after I sent the letter out, there was a knock at our door. Our yard was filled with neighbors, friends, and ward members caroling to us. They sang "Silent Night" (*Hymns*, no. 204) and then "Families Can Be Together Forever" (*Hymns*, no. 300).

As I listened, tears of joy and gratitude streamed down my face, for I felt the power of God's plan to seal our families together for eternity. How grateful I am for our loving and kind Father in Heaven, who is so mindful of us and willing to let us learn from our weaknesses and trials. How grateful I am for the plan of salvation and for the babe Jesus, who was born in a humble stable and would bring to the world the gift of forgiveness through His Atonement for our sins.

The Savior taught, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). I am grateful for this comfort and peace. May that peace be with each of us this Christmas. ■



# A CHRISTMAS EVE TRANSFORMATION

*The Christmas spirit helped me overcome my grief.*

**O**n Christmas Eve, I waited at the bus station in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, to pick up my parents after their five-hour bus ride from Vernal, Utah, to spend Christmas with my sister's family and me. The bus arrived very late—two hours in fact.

While I waited, I thought about how difficult this holiday season had been for me. I had tried to focus on my preparations for Christmas, but this year my children were traveling with their own families and my husband had passed away, and I soon discovered that no amount of shopping and wrapping or beautiful Christmas music could lighten my heavy heart. However, I pushed these thoughts from my mind when I saw my parents get off the bus.

Soon my mother and I were chatting, waiting in line to pick up their baggage. She casually mentioned that a grandmother on the bus had traveled all the way from Chicago, Illinois, USA, to connect with another bus that would take her to her final destination in Pocatello, Idaho, USA. This traveler was sad and upset, however, because she had missed her connection. Even if she boarded the next bus to Pocatello, she would still miss Christmas with her daughter and new granddaughter.

I pictured in my mind a disappointed grandma alone in a hotel room in a strange city on Christmas Eve. I felt a terrible sadness for her and wanted to do something to help her.

I soon found her talking on a pay phone to her daughter. I walked up to her, gently tapped her on the arm, and asked if I could speak with her. She looked startled but put her hand over the receiver and said, "Yes?"

"Are you the lady who missed the connection to Pocatello?" I asked.

She responded, "Yes."

The next words out of my mouth surprised both my mother and the stranger. "Will you ask your daughter if she is familiar with Tremonton, Utah?"

With hesitation in her voice, she asked her daughter the question. "Yes, she knows where that is," came the reply.

"Ask her if she could drive there tonight. That is about halfway from Salt Lake City to Pocatello."

She again relayed my question to her daughter, and again the answer was affirmative.

"You two decide on a time to meet," I said, "and I will have you there—but give her this phone number in the event that something goes wrong and we need to communicate."

I couldn't hear any more of the conversation, but after she hung up, she looked at me in utter amazement. My mother, too, was in shock as she said to my stepfather, "Harold, make room in the back of Myrle's car for this lady's luggage. She is going home with us."

I introduced myself and my parents to the stranger and learned that her name was Vanessa Black. My stepfather loaded Vanessa's bags into my little car, Vanessa climbed into the only spot left, and then we all headed to my sister's house for dinner before leaving for our destination. My heart was joyful as I kept reassuring her that she was no inconvenience (just 80 or so miles [130 km] out of the way).

Our arrival at Tremonton was greeted by an empty town. The service stations and restaurants were closed, and everything was dark as we looked for the place where we were to meet Vanessa's daughter. Meanwhile, the daughter, who had understood that we would be arriving a half hour earlier, was anxiously trying to contact us by phone. We pulled up to a phone booth, and as my car lights shined into the booth, there stood Vanessa's daughter. When she saw the lights of my car, she came running, and Vanessa jumped out of the car to embrace her sobbing daughter.

After a short introduction, I said, "Well, we both have a drive ahead of us, so we will leave you now. I hope you have a wonderful Christmas."

Her daughter threw her arms around me and in a teary voice responded, "We will, thanks to you! Merry Christmas to you too."

When I look back on that Christmas, my heart warms at the memory of the most joyous, peaceful Christmas I ever had. My gift to Vanessa Black was a perfect way for me to remember the birth of the Savior, who said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). That Christmas, I received the best possible gift to brighten my Christmas—the gift of giving. ■

# I'll Stay with the Sheep

By Sheralee Bills Hardy

A few years ago in December, I took my four young sons to watch the dress rehearsal for our stake's production of *Savior of the World: His Birth*. The evening's performance culminated three intense months for our family: my husband was portraying Joseph, and during the past several weeks of rehearsals, we had missed him.

Many times during those weeks of preparation, I had envied my husband's role. A starring role seemed so much more exciting and important than a behind-the-scenes babysitter. I wasn't proud of my feelings. I wanted to support my husband serenely, to bear with cheerfulness and patience the demands on his time. I knew many others who bore heavier burdens routinely—not for a matter of months, but for years. I prayed often to overcome my self-pity and my aspiration for a more visible function.

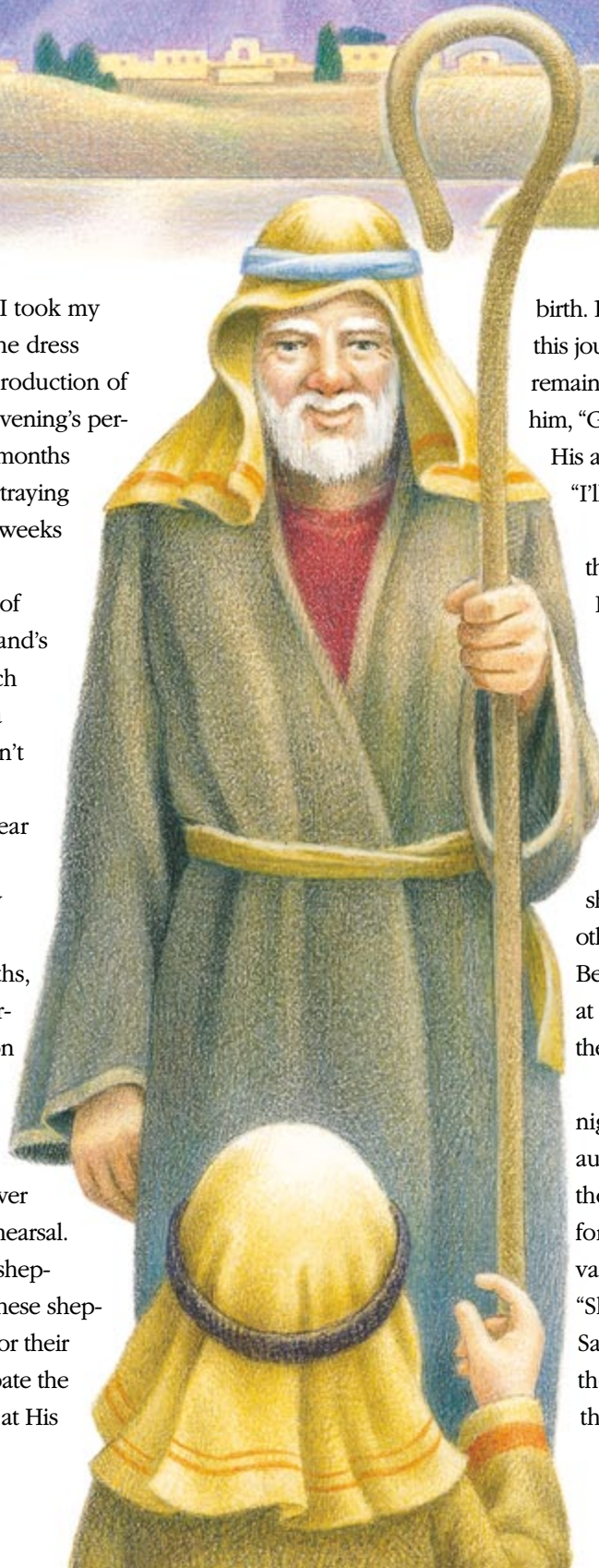
Heavenly Father answered my prayers more abundantly than I expected. Perhaps His sweetest answer of all came that night at the dress rehearsal. At the conclusion of one scene, the shepherds hasten to meet the Messiah. These shepherds have waited their entire lives for their Savior's arrival, and now they anticipate the unspeakable honor of greeting Him at His

birth. But amid the scurry to embark on this journey of a lifetime, one shepherd remains still. His grandson calls out to him, "Grandfather, aren't you coming?"

His answer teaches a great lesson: "I'll stay with the sheep."

As I listened to these words at the dress rehearsal, in that moment I felt the love of the Savior encircle me. My supporting role, which had once seemed menial, took on a greater significance. I knew my Heavenly Father wanted me to devote myself to the spirits He had entrusted to my keeping, just like that shepherd who stayed back so others could go see the Babe of Bethlehem. My children needed me at home more than I needed to be the one in a starring role on stage.

I put my sons to bed that night without the applause of an audience, but my heart held all the serenity, cheer, and patience for which I'd prayed. Though vain ambition might whisper, "Sheralee, aren't you coming?" the Savior of the world had given me the peace to reply, "I'll stay with the sheep." ■





# MAKING FRIENDS THROUGH DATING

Appropriate dating can be a great way for your older teens to enjoy the company of other young men and young women. Dating can help them learn better social skills, make friends, and have fun (see *For the Strength of Youth* [booklet, 2011], 4–5). In this month’s *New Era*, Larry M. Gibson, first counselor in the Young Men general presidency, answers questions about dating.

For instance, he explains: “Although some have defined *dating* as ‘courting,’ dating in the Church among youth does not imply that they are ‘going steady’ or can date no others. By Church standards, dating is intended to be a chance for social relationships that can establish many friendships.”

## Suggestions for Teaching Youth

- With your teen, read Brother Gibson’s article on pages 16–17 of this month’s *New Era*. Ask your child if he or she has any other dating questions. Use *For the Strength of Youth* to find the answers.
- Discuss why it’s important to “choose to date only those who have high moral standards and in whose company you can maintain your standards” (*For the Strength of Youth*, 4). Consider role-playing what your children could say if someone who doesn’t share their standards asks them on a date.
- Consider holding a family home evening on dating. The April 2010 *New Era* can be a good resource.

- Go to [youth.lds.org](http://youth.lds.org) and click on “For the Strength of Youth” in the youth menu. Then choose “Dating.” There you will find scripture references on this topic, videos (see, for example, “A Brand New Year 2010: Dating” and “Mormonad: Wish You Were Here”), questions and answers, and articles, including talks by General Authorities.

## Suggestions for Teaching Children

Although children don’t date, you can prepare your children for dating by teaching them gospel standards, providing ways for them to make good friends, and preparing them to choose the right in the face of peer pressure. Consider these ideas:

- As a family, you could read “Decide Right Now” (*Friend*, Mar. 2012, 2–3), “A True Friend” (*Friend*, June 2012, 44–45), or “Take the Lead!” (*Friend*, Sept. 2012, 24–25) and talk about choosing the right even when there is pressure to make another decision.
- Talk to your child about what decisions he or she makes at school or with friends each day. Sometimes even children experience pressure to date or to label others as girlfriends or boyfriends. As appropriate, discuss the dating standards of the Church and any additional family guidelines you may have. ■



## SCRIPTURES RELATED TO DATING

1 Corinthians 11:11  
 Doctrine and Covenants 46:33



**By Elder David S. Baxter**  
Of the Seventy

# LEAVING ADVERSITY BEHIND

*There will  
come a time  
when we can  
leave adversity  
behind and,  
with the Lord's  
help, emerge  
from darkness  
into an abun-  
dance of light.*

**O**ne of the great hymns of the Restoration, penned by Parley P. Pratt, speaks of how the dark curtains of apostasy opened to the glorious light of truth restored:

*The morning breaks, the shadows flee;  
Lo, Zion's standard is unfurled! . . .  
The dawning of a brighter day  
Majestic rises on the world.*

*The clouds of error disappear  
Before the rays of truth divine; . . .  
The glory bursting from afar  
Wide o'er the nations soon will shine.<sup>1</sup>*

Interestingly, the Apostle Paul also uses the analogy of light in explaining how he could testify that “we are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not

in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8–9).

He explains his escape from the brink of it all this way: “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Most of us at some time in our lives feel the chill winds of adversity. Storms brew, winds blow, rains fall, floods rise. It may seem that there is no end in sight, that we simply face a future of uncertainty and doubt, trial and tribulation.

As well as experiencing periodic thunderstorms, we can experience horrific hurricanes and tempests of turmoil, which can destroy our confidence and shake our sense of self-worth. All that we hold dear can suddenly



feel so ephemeral, slipping through our fingers. Major life changes can knock us off balance, disrupting our sense of equilibrium.

Perhaps an unexpected layoff has led to long-term unemployment, lack of financial freedom has cut choice, or mortgage meltdown has left us in monetary misery. Perhaps anticipated retirement after a long, busy, and productive career has brought a sense of loss. Perhaps sudden sickness or devastating disability has left us feeling “boxed in,” helpless, hopeless, and uncertain. In such circumstances, fear can come easily, while faith can be hard to sustain.

I know all of this for myself. While recovering from surgery to remove two sizeable brain tumors, I experienced periods of melancholy and dismay from the emotional and mental impact of it all. I discovered that I was not as invincible as I once thought I was. Medication did not help, and a relapse or two brought additional despondency. I began to feel sorry for myself.

### **Decide to Be Happy**

Then some wonderful things began to happen. Good friends and trusted Church leaders offered their support and understanding, and I began to listen to their counsel and accept their encouragement. Late one night as I shared my gloomy feelings with our youngest son, he said, “Well, Dad, I have always thought that happiness is a decision.” He is right.

I found myself increasingly expressing gratitude for all the blessings I still enjoyed. I discovered for myself that “this kind [of trial] goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21).

I felt the strength, refreshing power, and love of the Savior. With Paul, I came to rejoice in the knowledge that tribulation, distress, and peril could not separate me from the love of Christ (see Romans 8:35).

Fortunately, the hopeful and certain truth is that no matter what, we can find strength and encouragement. Our burdens can become lighter, even if they do not suddenly

*Even if at times our faith seems no bigger than a mustard seed, as we move forward, Providence will move with us. If we seek heaven's help, we will receive it—perhaps even in unexpected ways.*

go away. We can emerge on the other side of the darkest abyss, stronger and more resolute, better men and better women.

Having been proven in the crucible of affliction, we will have cultivated a character that is able to face and withstand future life shocks. As a result, we can use our experiences to lift and empathize with others. Our own example of personal perseverance can give hope to others and inspire our families. We become more fit for the future.

While adversity may be slow to leave us, *we can choose* to leave it any time. The Lord's promise to us is as it was to Alma and his people in the midst of horrendous persecution:

"Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage.

"And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs" (Mosiah 24:13–14).

Furthermore, the Lord has confirmed, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18).

### **Seek Heavenly Help**

Heavenly help may not be obvious. We may not immediately see or know that some other burdens that would have come our way have been lifted, diverted from our door.

The Lord assures: "Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you that mine eyes are upon you. I am in your midst and ye cannot see me" (D&C 38:7).

Of course, we may need to be supremely patient with others and ourselves; it often takes time for everything to work out.

Even if at times our faith seems no bigger than a mustard seed, as we move forward, Providence will move with us. If we seek heaven's help, we will receive it—perhaps even in unexpected ways.

We can find the wherewithal to be thankful for what we have, rather than mourn what we have lost. Interestingly, we often hear that same sentiment expressed by those who have lost all of their worldly possessions in a natural disaster, such as a wildfire, flood, or hurricane. In virtually every case, they say, "At least we still have what is really important."

The testimony of Paul is encouraging:

"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

"I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:11–13).

As has been written, "All that is unfair about life can be made right through the Atonement of Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup>

Whatever our circumstances, there will come a time when we can leave adversity behind and, with the Lord's help, emerge from darkness into an abundance of light. ■

#### **NOTES**

1. "The Morning Breaks," *Hymns*, no. 1.
2. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), 52.

# Never Alone

By Andrea Dayne Quilla-Soleta

For the past three years, I have had the opportunity to be tested. I have come to realize that no matter what you go through, with God you do not have to do it alone.

Shortly after my 16th birthday, I discovered that I have eczema. It was difficult every morning to look in the mirror and see the rashes that covered my body. I challenged myself to see this as an opportunity to be tested. Instead of feeling sorry for myself, I tried to do what my Young Women teachers taught me: to count my blessings each day despite my trials. Even though I don't have clear skin right now, I am grateful for my family and friends and for my musical talents. I am grateful to have two legs, two hands and feet, eyes to see, and ears to hear. I know that true beauty lies within one's self, not on the outside.

But my eczema gradually got the better of me. I was no longer as friendly as I used to be and no longer smiled. The many doctors I consulted were certain that I would be "flawless" before Christmas. But I wasn't. I prayed every day for

strength to overcome the shyness brought about by my skin disease.

Everybody kept telling me not to think about my plight, that I should act normally and pretend there was nothing wrong with my skin. But this was not easy to do. My mom would gently repeat scripture stories over and over again, hoping to comfort and encourage me.

Doctrine and Covenants 24:8 says, "Be patient in afflictions, for thou shalt have many; but endure them, for lo, I am with thee, even unto the end of thy days." This scripture gave me words to live by. I have them written on

bookmarks, on notebooks, and in my room. It is now one of my favorite verses for encouraging me to do my best despite my trial.

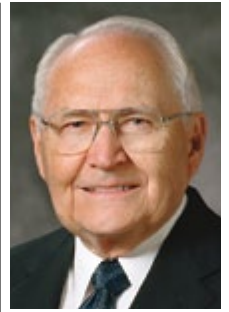
Enduring this trial has been difficult, but now I am more prepared for future trials. Heavenly Father has prepared me so that I can handle whatever challenges come. Now I know that no matter what I go through, I do not have to do it alone. ■



*Be certain you are creating a rich environment in which your family can look forward to special times of the year when traditions hold you together as a great eternal family unit.*



By Elder L. Tom Perry  
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



# THE TRADITION OF LIGHT AND TESTIMONY

**T**he Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is truly a worldwide Church. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that the Church could never have become what it is today without the birth of a great nation, the United States of America. The Lord prepared a new land to attract the peoples of the world who sought liberty and religious freedom. This new land was blessed with strong leaders who felt duty bound to establish a government that allowed individuals to worship according to their own conscience.

The Founding Fathers of the United States believed that religious faith was fundamental to the establishment of strong government. Many people in the world, however, have forgotten the central importance of religious beliefs in the formation of the policies, laws, and rules of government. Many Americans, for example, do not understand that the founders believed the role of religion would be as important in our day as it was in their day. The founders did not consider religion and morality an intellectual exercise—they forcefully declared it an essential ingredient of good government and the happiness of humankind.

This position was set forth by the first U.S. president, George Washington, in his Farewell Address. He said:

“Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. . . . Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. . . . Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

“It is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government.”<sup>1</sup>

The United States is the promised land foretold in the Book of Mormon—a place where divine guidance directed inspired men to create the conditions necessary for the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was the birth of the United States of America that



*Where do I look to learn about how to build a contingency plan for the spiritual security of my family? I look to the Church—the scaffolding with which I build an eternal family.*

ushered out the Great Apostasy, when the earth was darkened by the absence of prophets and revealed light. It was no coincidence that the lovely morning of the First Vision occurred just a few decades after the establishment of the United States.

The First Vision precipitated a flood of revealed truth. Knowledge was restored about the nature of the Godhead. A new translated scripture gave a second witness and testament of Jesus Christ. The restoration of the priesthood reendowed mankind with the power and authority to act for and on behalf of God in conducting priesthood ordinances and in reestablishing the Church of Jesus Christ on the earth. We are blessed to be members of the restored Church.

### **A Plan for Spiritual Security**

One of the blessings of the restored Church is living prophets. President Harold B. Lee

(1899–1973) had a beautifully clear understanding of priorities. He taught, “Much of what we do organizationally [in the Church] . . . is scaffolding, as we seek to build the individual, and we must not mistake the scaffolding for the soul.”<sup>2</sup>

President Lee was not minimizing the role of the Church in the salvation of men, women, and families. Rather, he taught powerfully that the core of the gospel of Jesus Christ is individuals, families, and homes, which the Church functions to support.<sup>3</sup> The Church, therefore, is the scaffolding with which we build eternal families.

I belong to a branch of the Wing family tree. Members of the Wing family still own the oldest home built in New England that has stayed in the same family. It is called the Old Fort House. It was the home of Stephen Wing and his family after they arrived in America about 1635.

The nucleus of the house was constructed for protection. Its walls are two feet (0.6 m) thick, made of hewn oak trunks driven into the ground to form the typical construction of a New England garrison. It has two separate walls. The space in between was filled with sandstone for protection against arrows and bullets. The fort was the center of the home. As the Wing family grew, it added onto the sides of the original fort house. But the fort remained their protection, their safe haven.

Perhaps each of us should consider building structures for our spiritual security that are free from the influences of the world—places where we can protect and teach family members how to meet the challenges of a world that is always threatening core gospel values. I prefer to be optimistic, so I continue to hope



for positive change in the world. But I'm also a realist, so I form a contingency plan in case positive changes don't come. My contingency plan for spiritual security must account for all the content—both good and evil—that is being pushed through various media. Where do I look to learn about how to build such a contingency plan for the spiritual security of my family? I look to the Church—the scaffolding with which I build an eternal family.

There are two principal reasons I appreciate President Lee's metaphor for the Church as scaffolding for our eternal families. First, it helps me understand what the Church is. Second, and equally important, I understand what the Church is not.

The Church as scaffolding is perhaps best represented by a statement the Prophet Joseph Smith made about his role as the leader of the Church. He said, "I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves."<sup>4</sup> Eternal principles are the scaffolding the Church provides. These eternal principles are embedded in the doctrines of the kingdom of God and are reflected in His eternal plan of happiness. We meet as members of the Church to teach and learn from each other the principles of righteousness and to receive saving ordinances so the scaffolding is steady and stable as we build our eternal families.

Notice that the Church is not meant to do the work of parents; rather, it guides the work of parents. The Church offers an eternal form. As builders of eternal families, we are reassured by promises that if we build according to this eternal form, our efforts can provide the safety and protection we seek for those we love most.

Our challenge is to use the Church as scaffolding to build a family that is as spiritually strong or stronger than the Old Fort House is physically strong. How do we do this?

### **The Importance of Traditions**

I believe family traditions are like the hewn oak trunks driven into the ground to build the Old Fort House. Make the honoring of family traditions—holiday traditions, birthday traditions, Sunday traditions, dinnertime traditions—and the development of new ones a priority throughout your lives. Honor them, write them down, and make certain you follow them. Studies show that the reason young people join gangs is for the tradition and ritual of belonging to something larger than self. That is what a family should be. Be certain you are creating a rich environment in which your family can look forward to special times of the year when traditions hold you together as a great eternal family unit.

Understand that this is neither a simple nor an easy solution. Just as Rome was not built in a day, neither are family traditions. Family traditions can offer basic and lasting support, but there's a lot that must be built around them. Perhaps family traditions work only when they create a role for every member of the family and when there is united effort to build them. This means family members need to spend time together and learn how to work together. When it comes to families, there is no such thing as quality time without a certain quantity of time.

When you consider employment, for example, reflect on how much time a job will demand of you each day. Is it one that will keep you working 14 hours a day and prevent



*Family traditions work only when they create a role for every member of the family and when there is united effort to build them. This means family members need to spend time together and learn how to work together.*

*We must be bold in our declarations and testimony of the divinity of Jesus Christ. We want others to know that we believe He is the central figure in all human history.*

you from arriving home until after your children are in bed? I'm not suggesting such employment opportunities are out of bounds, but if you choose them, you must find creative ways to remain connected to your family. The scaffolding of the Church will help remind you of your eternal priorities.

For my career I selected retail business. Our stores were open six days a week from 10:00 in the morning until 10:00 at night. My normal workday was at least 10 hours, sometimes 12 to 15. I had to be very careful to have time for my children, and I believe that seeing the Church as scaffolding continuously reminded me of my eternal priorities.

For example, I involved all of my children in part-time jobs at our stores. My oldest

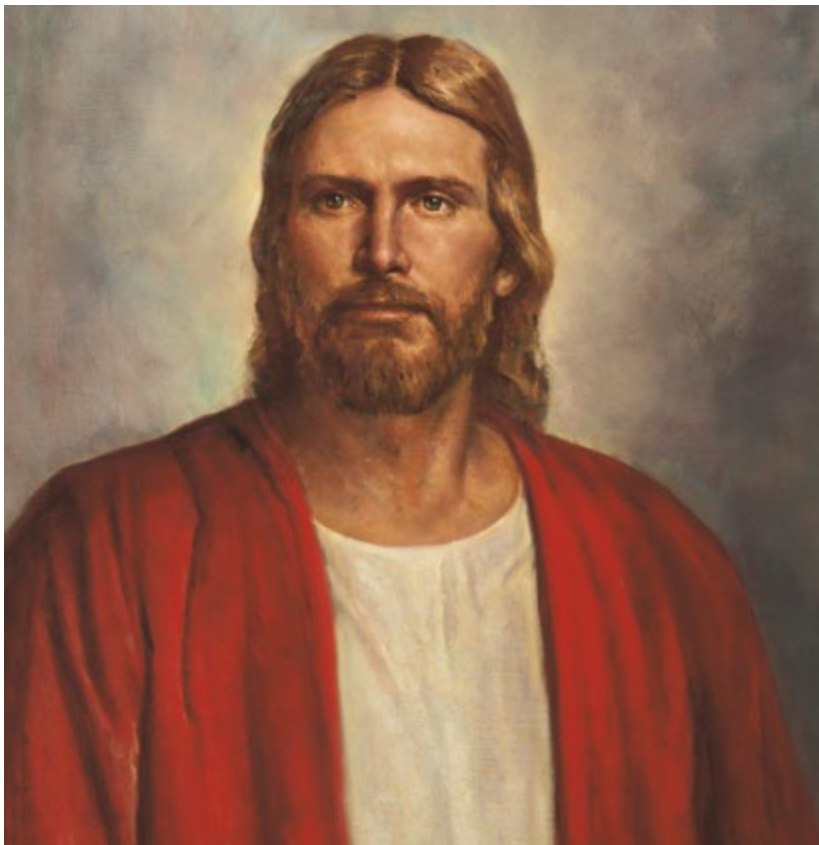
daughter used to come in and update sales figures so that my reporting was always current and I could make year-over-year comparisons. I had my son work in accounts payable during the summer. I taught my youngest daughter how to run a cash register so she could be a part-time cashier. This gave us the opportunity to see each other during the day, have lunch together several days a week, and spend precious one-on-one time together. The best time together was during the daily commute to and from work.

### **Scaffolding for Our Professional Lives**

I also believe the Church can provide scaffolding for our professional lives. As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we represent the Savior and His Church. For us, being as good as someone else from another church is not good enough. President George Albert Smith (1870–1951) taught this lesson when he said:

“Within the last year, I have had the privilege of meeting and conversing on the gospel with some men who live in this community [Salt Lake City], not members of our Church. One man had resided here for twenty years, a man whose life is above reproach, a good citizen, a splendid businessman, one who has kindly feelings towards our people. He told me that he had . . . come to the conclusion that we were just as good as our neighbors who are members of other churches; he could not see any difference in us.

“I want to say to you, my brethren and sisters, that is no compliment to me. If the gospel of Jesus Christ does not make me a better man, then I have not developed as I should, and if our neighbors not in this Church can



live among us from year to year and see no evidence of the benefits that come from keeping the commandments of God in our lives, then there is need for reform in Israel.”<sup>5</sup>

A member of the Church who is worthy of a temple recommend should always stand out in whatever professional circles he or she belongs to. Dare to be different. Never worry about offending others by living up to the standards of the Church. I promise you that living up to temple recommend standards will bless and never hurt you in any situation in which you may find yourself.

### Reflecting the Savior’s Light

As I read and watch the news each day, I am shocked at the difficulties we are creating for ourselves. As times and conditions change and become more complex, there seem to be fewer and fewer individuals capable of shouldering the responsibilities of leading positive change. I issue a challenge to you who are leaders and future leaders to recognize that the world is changing rapidly. There is an urgent need for leaders capable and bold enough to take on the immense challenges that face us today.

The moral foundation of a strong Judeo-Christian tradition appears to be eroding in the United States and in other nations. This tradition was based on justice, compassion, and respect for human dignity. It was not based on laws and regulations but on the Light of Christ in every good and decent citizen.

The number of people who subscribe to these beliefs and values is dwindling, but you and I remain true. We have covenanted with the Savior to represent Him. By representing

Jesus Christ and reflecting the Light of Christ in our lives, we can help many of our brothers and sisters remember their Judeo-Christian traditions and heritage.

We must be bold in our declarations and testimony of the divinity of Jesus Christ. We want others to know that we believe He is the central figure in all human history. His life and teachings are the heart of the Bible and the other books we consider to be holy scriptures. The Old Testament sets the stage for Christ’s mortal ministry. The New Testament describes His mortal ministry. The Book of Mormon gives us a second witness of His mortal ministry. He came to earth to declare His gospel as a foundation for all mankind so that all of God’s children could learn about Him and His teachings. He then gave His life in order to be our Savior and Redeemer. Only through Jesus Christ is salvation possible. This is why we believe He is the central figure in all human history. Our eternal destiny is always in His hands. It is a glorious thing to believe in Him and accept Him as our Savior, our Lord, and our Master.

Remember all that the Church has done, is doing, and can do for you and your family. And remember that this is not just any other church; it is the restored Church of Jesus Christ. ■

*From a devotional address delivered on January 24, 2012, at Brigham Young University–Idaho. For the full text in English, visit [web.byui.edu/devotionalsandspeeches](http://web.byui.edu/devotionalsandspeeches).*

#### NOTES

1. *Washington’s Farewell Address*, ed. Thomas Arkle Clark (1908), 14.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* (2000), 148.
3. See *Teachings: Harold B. Lee*, 148–49.
4. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 284.
5. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: George Albert Smith* (2011), 7–8.



*Remember all that the Church has done, is doing, and can do for your family. And remember that this is not just any other church; it is the restored Church of Jesus Christ.*

# They Didn't Wait for Me to Ask

*In my time of greatest need,  
my ward family taught me  
the meaning of service  
and love.*

By C. Angel Smith

I was baptized into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when I was 50 years old. Before then, I had been involved in service in my previous church. Following my baptism, I welcomed the opportunity to reach out to others through my new Church callings. Often when I helped a sister in the ward, she would thank me and tell me how much it meant to her. I'd brush it off, reassuring her that "it was nothing." Little did I know that one day I would learn how much such service truly means.

This happened when my husband, Phil, and I were told by a doctor that Phil had lung cancer and only a 25 percent chance





### SELFLESS SERVICE

"No one has learned the meaning of living until he has surrendered his ego to the service of his fellow man. Service to others is akin to duty, the fulfillment of which brings true joy. We do not live alone—in our city, our nation, or our world. There is no dividing line between our prosperity and our neighbor's wretchedness. 'Love thy neighbor' is more than a divine truth. It is a pattern for perfection."

President Thomas S. Monson, "The Joy of Service," *New Era*, Oct. 2009, 4.



*I didn't know how to ask for help. I knew only how to give, not receive.*

of survival. From that point on, our lives changed—they became filled with rounds of doctors and hospitals, chemo and radiation.

We struggled to figure out how to fight the cancer and how to pay for it. The expenses of the treatments overwhelmed us; we were already consumed with pain and worry. To make things worse, I found out quickly that I didn't know how to ask for the help needed. I knew only how to give, not receive.

But during that time I was blessed to receive more love than I knew existed from the members of our ward along with the love and support we received from my family. My ward members didn't wait for me to ask for help but rather stepped in and served when they heard about Phil's cancer. When we needed gas money to go to the doctor every day, it was there. When Phil needed special foods, they were provided. When we had to travel out of town to another hospital, anonymous friends provided us with the means.

I also received emotional support and advice. On days I didn't think I could go on another minute, a sister from my ward or stake would call to tell me she loved me and to remind me the Lord loved me also. These phone calls gave me the strength to hold on a little longer.

One of the families in my ward had lost a daughter to bone cancer the year before and recommended things to do, questions to ask, and places to stay when we were out of town for treatments. Their advice was priceless as it gave us a direction to go and greatly helped us as we struggled to know how to deal with this unfamiliar trial.

Another sister, a nurse, would come over to check on Phil. She'd tell me how to help him stay as healthy as he could so treatments would be easier for him. She also reminded me to take good care of myself so I could better help him. This was hard to do when all I could think about was Phil's health.

One family in our previous ward even let us move in with them for eight months after we sold our home to help pay for the hospital expenses. The outpouring of love we felt from each ward was incredible. It would be impossible to list all the people who blessed our lives during that time, but we will never forget them.

After a long battle, Phil is now cancer-free. In the years since then, our family has faced other trials, including my diagnosis with breast cancer. In those trials the members of our ward have stood by our side in support and love. This love may seem small to those who give it, but to me, my husband, and my family, these unsolicited acts were monumental and have given us a deeper understanding of the meaning of love and service. ■

By Aaron L. West

Church Publishing Services Department

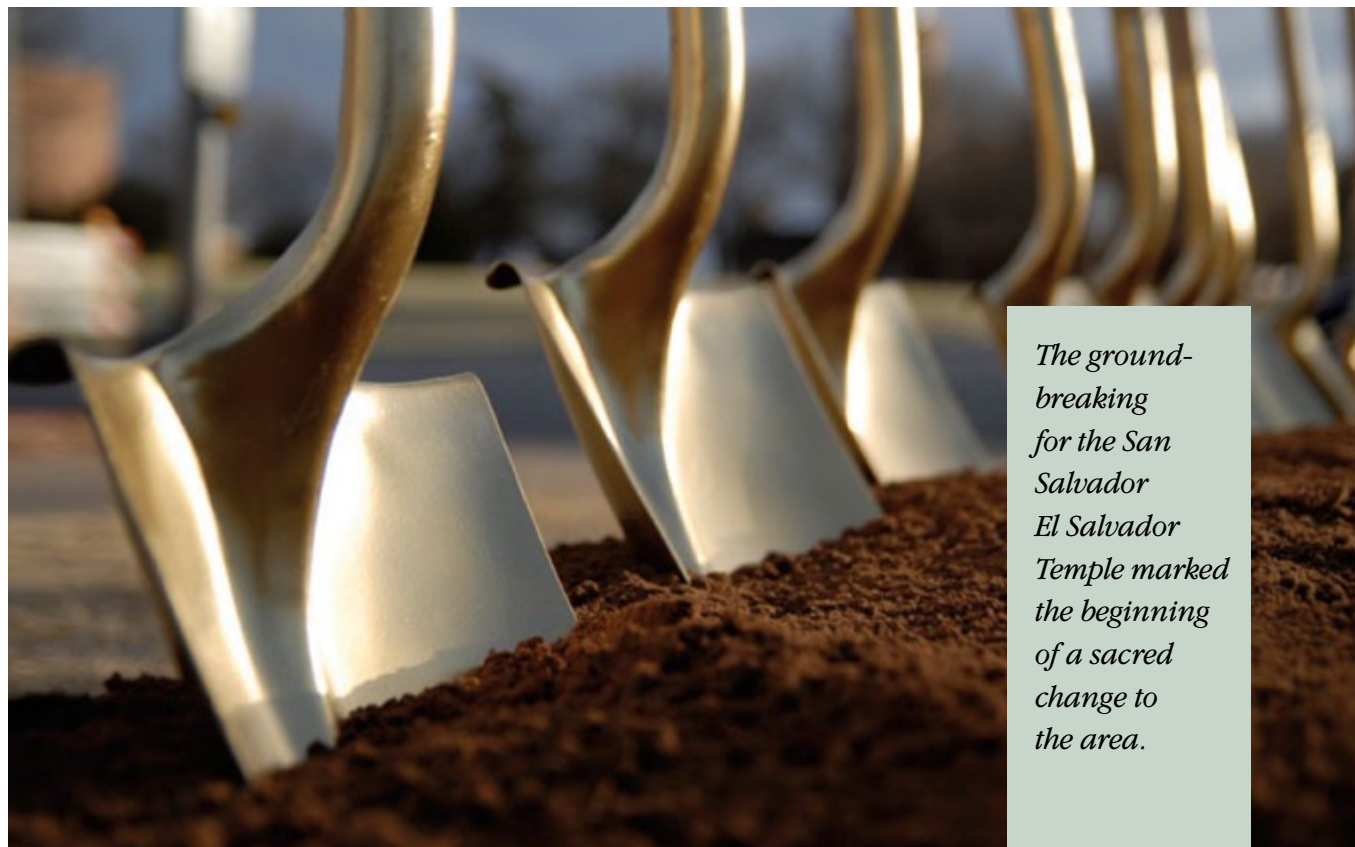
# SACRED Transformations

*The San Salvador El Salvador Temple has done more than transform the landscape; its influence is changing hearts, families, and an entire nation.*

## Transformation of a Hill

On September 20, 2008, approximately 600 Latter-day Saints gathered on a rain-soaked hill in the city of San Salvador, El Salvador. They stood on land that had been used for many years as a plantation. Under the direction of the Central America Area Presidency, they prayed together and shared words of testimony. Some of them sank new shovels in the ancient soil, anticipating a change that would soon come to that chosen spot.

On August 21, 2011, thousands of reverently exuberant Latter-day Saints greeted each other on that same hill. No longer a plantation, it had been transformed into the most sacred spot in El Salvador. The Saints gathered around a temple. They eagerly awaited the arrival of a prophet, President Henry B. Eyring of the First Presidency, who would dedicate that temple to the Lord. One longtime member of the Church, speaking almost in a whisper,



*The groundbreaking for the San Salvador El Salvador Temple marked the beginning of a sacred change to the area.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY ZACH GRAY. MAY NOT BE COPIED

*Like the land that was transformed to build the San Salvador El Salvador Temple, the lives of Amado and Evelyn Vigil were transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

said that the place felt separated from its surroundings—“a little piece of heaven on earth.”

### **Transformation of a Family**

In April 2010, Evelyn Vigil was concerned that her husband, Amado, was losing his faith. He had not attended any church for 11 years, having arrived at the conclusion that the true Church did not exist. Meanwhile, Evelyn had never stopped believing in God, and she went from one church to another, yearning to hear His word but never satisfied with what she heard. Some mornings she awoke in tears. On such days, she pled for guidance from her Heavenly Father. She asked Him why she never felt right in any of the churches she attended, even though she wanted so desperately to learn of Him. She also prayed that her family would someday find unity in one church.

By August 23, 2011, Amado and Evelyn Vigil had experienced a transformation not unlike the change that had occurred on that hill in their capital city. Dressed in white, they entered a sealing room with their daughter, Michelle, age nine, and their son, Christian, age three. They were the first family sealed for time and eternity in the San Salvador El Salvador Temple. Like the temple they had entered, they were newly dedicated to the Lord’s service, and they were united in their dedication.

### **The Vigils’ Story**

“Our story began,” Amado recalls, “when we found a pair of elders—rather, when they found us. We were leaving the home of Evelyn’s parents, and we were carrying shopping bags. We noticed that the elders had seen us and were crossing the street toward us. One of them kindly asked if they could help us.

“They also asked if we would allow them to visit us. I said yes, mostly out of curiosity. Up to that point, I didn’t

know much about the Church—only comments I had heard from other people.

“After I agreed to let the elders visit our home, I told my wife, ‘Don’t get too excited about this. Don’t get any illusions about me deciding to join a church. I’m just curious to see what they have to say.’

“The elders started visiting us. I was ready to politely tell them to go away if they said anything that didn’t seem right to me. But they were so kind, and I was impressed that they never said anything bad about other churches. They taught with such love and diligence, and they were patient when I asked many questions. They quickly endeared themselves to us.”

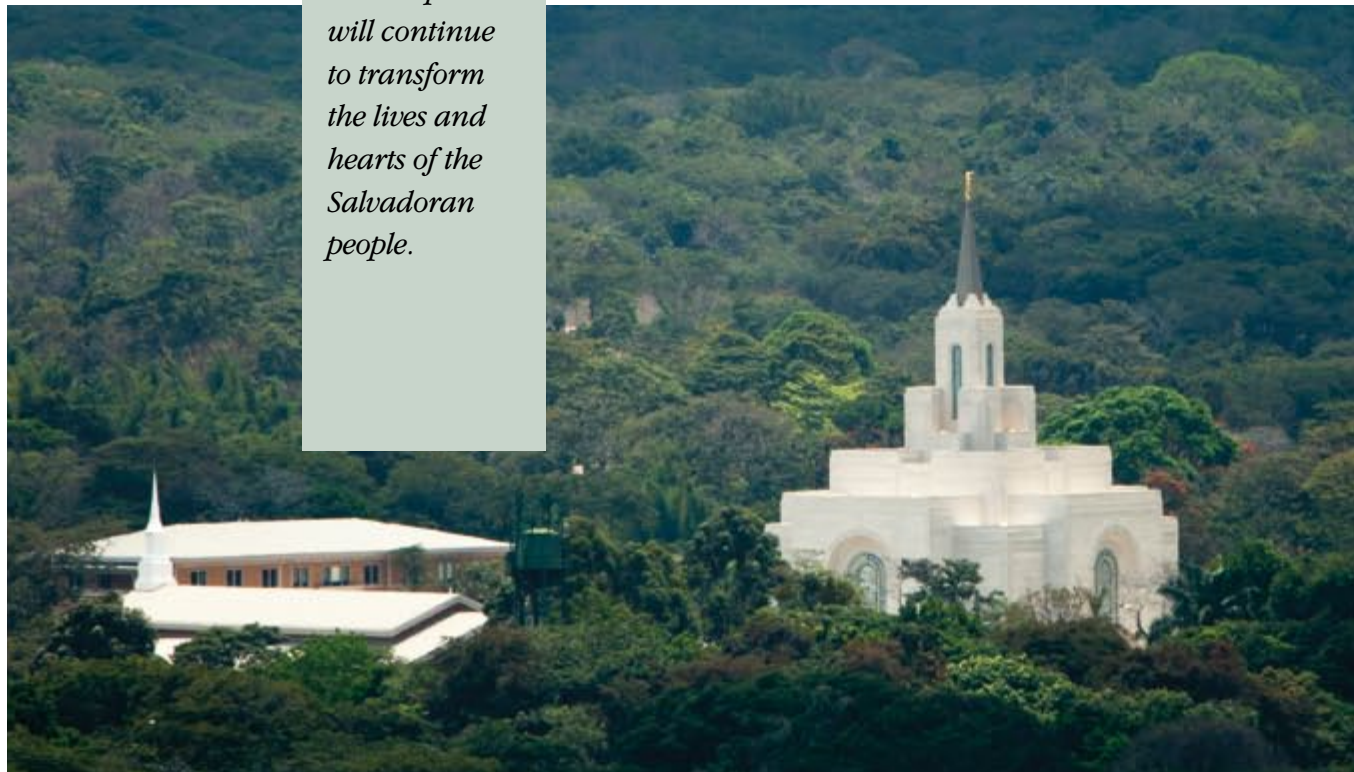
Bit by bit, Amado and Evelyn prepared themselves to be baptized and confirmed members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Evelyn’s biggest challenge was the Word of Wisdom. She was saddened by the realization that she would need to let go of her desire for coffee. Amado didn’t need to let go of any bad habits; he just needed to learn to grab hold of the truth. He believed what the missionaries were teaching, and he even recognized many doctrines and practices that he and his wife had felt were missing from other churches, such as eternal families, baptisms for the dead, and fellowship and organization in the Church. But he hesitated to commit to be baptized. He worried that he would join the Church only to find that he had made the wrong decision.

These concerns soon faded. Evelyn prayed for help and overcame her coffee habit, saying, “I’m not going to let this keep me from receiving blessings.” After about two months of indecision, Amado committed to be baptized. Now, according to Evelyn, he frequently says, “We need to embrace the doctrine.”

### **Changes and Blessings**

Amado, Evelyn, and Michelle were baptized and confirmed in early June 2011. “From the time that we were

*The temple  
will continue  
to transform  
the lives and  
hearts of the  
Salvadoran  
people.*



baptized,” Evelyn says, “I could feel that everything started to change. My family was united in the Church. We had found the restored gospel. We have had trials and sickness since then, but our Heavenly Father has poured many blessings on us.”

Amado observes: “The first change I noticed was unity in our family. It’s not that we were dysfunctional before, but we started to unite more. The doctrines of the gospel helped us. As Church leaders taught us about the sacredness of the family, we thought more about the value we should place on our family.”

The Vigils’ bishop, César Orellana, also saw changes in their lives. Soon after their baptism, Amado approached Bishop Orellana and said, “We want to pay tithing, but we don’t know how.”

Bishop Orellana explained that tithing was 10 percent of their increase. Amado was somewhat concerned. At the time, Evelyn had a job, but he did not. “We always come up short,” Amado explained to his bishop, “but we want to pay tithing.”

Bishop Orellana responded, “Brother, the Lord has made many promises.” Together they read scriptures about the blessings that come from faithfully paying tithing, including the Lord’s words through the prophet Malachi: “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, . . .

and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:10).

After reading these scriptures together, Bishop Orellana looked at the new convert and said, “If paying tithing means that you can’t pay for water or electricity, pay tithing. If paying tithing means that you can’t pay your rent, pay tithing. Even if paying tithing means that you don’t have enough money to feed your family, pay tithing. The Lord will not abandon you.”

The next Sunday, Amado approached Bishop Orellana again. This time he didn’t ask any questions. He simply handed his bishop an envelope and said, “Bishop, here is our tithing.”

Reflecting on this experience, Bishop Orellana says, “Ever since then, they have been faithful tithe payers.” The family received some commodities from the bishops’ storehouse during their financial difficulties. Beyond that, the Lord blessed them to be able to care for themselves. Evelyn received a promotion, and Amado found a good job. Evelyn later lost her job, but they continued to pay tithing and to receive spiritual and temporal blessings for their faithfulness. Once Bishop Orellana asked Amado how the family was doing financially. Amado responded,



“We’re doing all right. Sometimes we don’t have much to eat, but we have enough. And more than anything, we trust in the Lord.”

After paying tithing for some time, Evelyn and Amado spoke with Bishop Orellana about the blessings they had received. Referring to Malachi 3:10, they said, “We have proven the Lord.” And true to Bishop Orellana’s promise, the Lord never abandoned them.

### A New Perspective

Evelyn and Amado speak tenderly of the day their family gathered in the sealing room. They had worried that by the time they were endowed and ready for the sealing ordinance that same day, their children would be restless. They were particularly concerned about their energetic three-year-old son, Christian. But the children entered the sealing room with peaceful reverence, suggesting that they understood the reason they were there. And when it was time for the children to participate in the sealing ordinance, Christian, without any instruction or prompting, walked to the altar and kneeled by his parents.

Evelyn remembers seeing the family’s reflection in the mirrors. Amado also speaks of seeing, not only in the temple but in everyday life. He expresses gratitude for the eternal perspective that now guides his life—a perspective that Michelle and Christian seemed to sense when they were in the Lord’s house. This perspective has expanded even more since then, especially as the Vigils have welcomed a new daughter into the family—Andrea, who was born in the covenant in August.

### A Light upon a Hill

The Vigil family will be forever changed through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the influence of His temple in their land. Because a plantation has been



*The Vigils were the first family to be sealed in the San Salvador El Salvador Temple, dedicated in August 2011.*

transformed into sacred ground, their own home has become more sacred.

In many ways they represent the promise of an entire nation. El Salvador is home to millions of good, honest people who are bombarded every day by the noise and allure of the world. The Salvadoran Saints love their homeland, and they find renewed hope as they see the Lord’s temple there. They find assurance in the following words from the temple’s dedicatory prayer given by President Eyring:

“We pray for Thy blessings to rest upon this nation of El Salvador. Touch the hearts of those who govern, that the people may be blessed with freedom and opportunity. May peace reign in the land.

“Prosper Thy work in this land. May the gospel message touch the hearts of people throughout the nation. May they come into the waters of baptism, and remain faithful and true unto Thee. . . .

“ . . . With grateful hearts, we dedicate and consecrate this hallowed structure and its surroundings to the accomplishment of Thy will and the fulfillment of Thine eternal work. We pray that its influence may be felt throughout the land as a light upon a hill.”<sup>1</sup>

Much of this influence is sure to be felt through the service and example of people like the Vigil family. Brushing back tears and struggling to speak through his emotion, Amado Vigil now speaks lovingly of the missionaries who made it possible for him and his family to come unto Christ and receive the blessings of the temple. “It is our hope that our children will serve missions,” he says, “so they can bless other families, just as those young men blessed ours.” ■

#### NOTE

1. “‘May Peace Reign in the Land’—Dedicatory Prayer for El Salvador Temple,” *Church News*, Aug. 27, 2011, [ldschurchnews.com](http://ldschurchnews.com).

# THE COMING OF CHRIST

The scriptural narrative of our Savior's birth is filled with people coming: Joseph and Mary journeying to Bethlehem, shepherds coming with haste to the stable, Mary and Joseph taking the infant Savior to the temple, Wise Men coming to worship their Savior. Perhaps as we contemplate these many comings, we will be reminded that we too have been told to come to Him.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First

Presidency, said: "Christmas and some of the cherished traditions of the season remind us that we, like the Wise Men of old, should seek the Christ and lay before Him the most precious of gifts: a broken heart and a contrite spirit. We should offer Him our love. We should give Him our willingness to take upon ourselves His name and walk in the path of discipleship. We should promise to remember Him always, to emulate His example, and to go about doing good."



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*Journey, by Liz Lemon Swindle. Joseph and Mary traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a journey close to 100 miles (160 km).*

*No Room in the Inn, by Joseph F. Brickey. Mary and Joseph stayed in a stable because there was no room for them in the inn.*



*The Nativity, by Benjamin West. Mary soothed and comforted her newborn, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as Joseph watched over them.*

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The Adoration of the Shepherds, by an unknown Neapolitan artist. The shepherds followed the directions of the angel and found “the babe lying in a manger” (Luke 2:16).



Jesus Presented in the Temple, by Christen Dalsgaard. Simeon thanked God that he had seen “the Lord’s Christ,” as did Anna, shown in the background (see Luke 2:22–38).

COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY PICTURE LIBRARY, LONDON, MAY NOT BE COPIED

The Adoration of the Magi, by Diego Rodríguez Velázquez. *The Wise Men traveled from afar and brought gifts to the Christ Child.*



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“We cannot offer Him the gift of perfection in all things because this is a gift beyond our capacity to give—at least for now. The Lord does not expect that we commit to move mountains. But He does require that we bring as gifts our best efforts to move ourselves, one foot in front of the other, walking in the ways He has prepared and taught.”<sup>1</sup> ■

**NOTE**

1. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Of Curtains, Contentment, and Christmas,” 2011 First Presidency Christmas Devotional, available at [lds.org/broadcasts](http://lds.org/broadcasts).

Rest on the Flight into Egypt, by Luc Olivier Merson. *This painting symbolizes the feeling of safety Egypt offered to the holy family.*



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# Choosing OUR ROLES IN LIFE

*As disciples of Jesus Christ, the most important calling we will ever have is that of parent.*

**By Samuel J. Palmer**

As part of a recent seminary lesson, I wrote the following words on the whiteboard: “I am . . .” I then invited the students to complete the statement. Many students gave answers like “a soccer player” or “a band member.”

When I asked the students to consider their roles in relationship to the gospel, their answers changed. This time they said such things as, “I am a priesthood holder,” “I am a young woman,” and “I am a friend.” But the most common response was, “I am a child of God.”

Like my students, I am a lot of things. I am a husband, a father, an active Church member, and a runner. Professionally, I am a full-time seminary teacher and a U.S. Navy Reservist.

Each of us holds various roles at the same time. As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and within our families, we may be husbands or wives, brothers or sisters, home or visiting teachers, nurturers and providers, Sunday School teachers or Primary teachers. The list goes on. But of all these things, which role defines

us most? As disciples of Jesus Christ, the most important calling we will ever have is that of parent.

Each of us will face times when the various roles we play come into competition with each other, forcing us to consider who we are and what role should take precedence in a particular moment. Recently I had to ask myself that same question.

I am constantly training for a run, whether it is a marathon or the Navy’s Physical Readiness Test. One winter day I was running on our treadmill at home. I had been running for just over an hour at a fast pace and had about a half-mile left. Into the room came our little two-year-old daughter, Lucy. She stood there and stared at me. I put out my fist and said, “Give me some bones,” but she did not raise her little hand and punch my knuckles like she usually did. So I put out my fist again and said, “How about some knuckles?” No reply, just a stare. I wanted so badly to finish that last half-mile to meet my goal, but I felt she needed me more in that moment than I needed to finish my workout.



Lucy needed her father, not a runner.

I stopped the treadmill, wrapped her in one of her small, fuzzy blankets, and held her close. She was gratified and her happy smile returned.

What was the greater title that day?

Father.

Depending on the moment, we will finish the statement “I am . . .” differently; yet there are some answers many of us share, and some answers are more important than others.

“The Family: A Proclamation to the World” reminds us, “Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, and to teach them to love and serve one another, observe the commandments of God, and be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.”<sup>1</sup>

As children of God, we all need to be nurtured. And as disciples of Christ, we all need to nurture others. Just as I learned that day when Lucy needed me to choose the role of father over the role of runner, we all need to choose to act in the right role at the right time. That choice will make a critical difference in the joy, happiness, and success of ourselves and others. ■

**NOTE**

1. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.





# Repentance

## MAKING THE INSIDE CLEAN

By Michael Weir Allred

Josh climbed into his newly purchased sport-utility vehicle, ready to have the ultimate four-wheeling experience. He was excited to use the SUV in the way he thought it was meant to be used—on a muddy, wet adventure. He was thrilled by how high in the air the car splashed the muddy water before raining it down all over him.

After his adventure, Josh did not wash the mud off the four-wheeler—he thought mud made it look tough. Eventually rain washed off the outside of the vehicle, but several months later, Josh began having trouble with the engine.

He took the car to a mechanic, who told him that the dirty water from his ride through the mud had damaged the air filter; as a result, contaminants had gotten into the engine and it needed repair. It was a costly mistake, but Josh learned a valuable lesson: keep things clean, and if they get dirty, wash them as soon as possible.

Just as with Josh's SUV, sometimes things happen that cause our insides—our spirits—to become unclean or impure. As we go about our lives, we occasionally commit sins. But if we want to live with our Heavenly Father again, we cannot be unclean. We need to repent, which includes forsaking sin, replacing it with righteousness, and cleansing ourselves from the effects of sin.

### The Consequences of Sin

When we sin, we suffer from the effects of being unclean and impure. The immediate consequence of sin is that we withdraw ourselves from the companionship of the Holy Ghost. King Benjamin reminds us, “And now, I say unto you, my brethren, that after ye have known

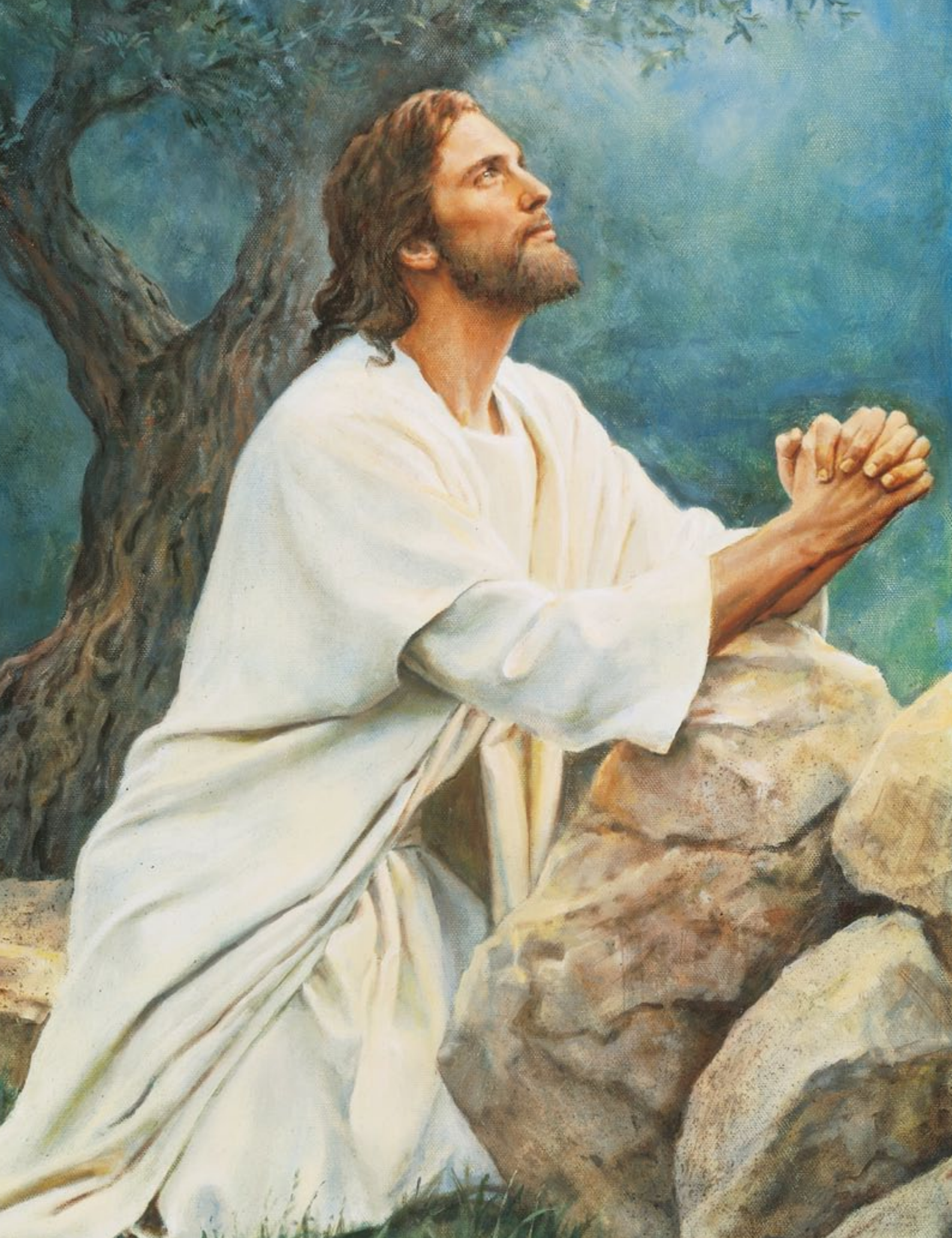
and have been taught all these things, if ye should transgress and go contrary to that which has been spoken, that ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit of the Lord, that it may have no place in you to guide you in wisdom's paths that ye may be blessed, prospered, and preserved” (Mosiah 2:36).

Notice what happens after we pull away from the Spirit: we lose our guide, causing us to lose blessings, protection, comfort, and peace. When we sin, we “[go] contrary to the nature of God,”

and we are “in a state contrary to the nature of happiness” (Alma 41:11). In other words, if we sin, we are not happy.

Not only does sin make us unhappy in this life, but it also leads to suffering in the next life. Amulek reminds us that “no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven. . . . Therefore, ye cannot be saved in your sins” (Alma 11:37). The Lord describes the sufferings of those who don't repent as “sore—how sore you know not” (D&C 19:15).

*Repentance is  
about becoming  
clean from sin and  
gaining increased  
spirituality  
through the power  
of the Atonement.*



## The Atonement Brings Forgiveness

Fortunately for us, Heavenly Father provided a way for us to be cleansed from sin so that we may be restored to a clean and pure state. That way is through faith, repentance, and the Atonement of Jesus Christ: “We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:26).

The miraculous gift of the Atonement allows Jesus to take upon Himself our sins so that we don’t have to suffer eternal consequences for them if we will repent (see D&C 19:16–17).

“There is only one way to rid ourselves of this suffering,” says Elder Claudio D. Zivic of the Seventy. “It is by means of sincere repentance. I learned that if I could present unto the Lord a broken heart and a contrite spirit, feeling a godly sorrow for my sins, humbling myself, being repentant of my faults, He, through His miraculous atoning sacrifice, could erase those sins and remember them no more.”<sup>1</sup>

If we repent, we can feel the joy of forgiveness that comes through the mercy of Jesus Christ.

## It’s Never Too Late to Repent

We can learn yet another important lesson about repentance from Josh and his SUV: the best time to repent is now. Because Josh neglected to take full care of his vehicle, the problems on the inside grew worse. Similarly, sin can affect all aspects of our lives if we allow it to remain by delaying our repentance.

That being said, we need to remember that it is never too late to repent. President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum



***Repentance is like soap; it can wash sin away.***

of the Twelve Apostles, tells us: “Those who make one serious mistake tend to add another by assuming that it is then too late for them. It is never too late! . . . The discouraging idea that a mistake (or even a series of them) makes it everlastingly too late, does not come from the Lord. He has said that *if* we will repent, not only will He forgive us our transgressions, but He will forget them and remember our sins no more. (See Isaiah 43:25; Hebrews 8:12; 10:17; D&C 58:42; Alma 36:19.) Repentance is like soap; it can wash sin away.”<sup>2</sup>

Those of us who are afraid that repentance is no longer an option can find comfort in the words of Alma: “Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you” (Alma 5:33).

## Confess, Forsake, and Become Better

As we repent of our sins, we are required to “confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:43) and then to “go, and sin no more” (John 8:11). However, simply forsaking sin by itself is not sufficient to completely remove the effects of sin.

During my time as a bishop, I used the following visual to help explain what we need to do after we forsake a sin. Picture in your mind a bucket of water. That bucket represents you and me, and the water represents the Spirit, which can reside within us. The water can also represent our pure, worthy state.



### A DIVINE GIFT

“Repentance is a divine gift, and there should be a smile on our faces when we speak of it. It points us to freedom, confidence, and peace. Rather than interrupting the celebration, the gift of repentance is the cause for true celebration.”

Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Divine Gift of Repentance,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 38.

Now imagine that you have a brick and have dropped it into the bucket. That brick is like sin—it’s hard and rough and impure. As soon as it enters the bucket, it causes some of the water to slosh out. When we sin, we displace some of the good things in our life, like our peace of mind and some of our capacity to feel the Spirit.

Repenting is like taking that brick out of the bucket of water and making the water pure and clean again. But the repentance isn’t complete by just removing the brick, because the bucket is still not full. We must add more water to fill the bucket again.

When we repent, it is not enough just to forsake sin; we must replace the empty space left by sin by living righteously. We need to refill our spiritual bucket by doing those things that invite the Spirit back into our lives. We need to recommit to living an obedient life, to forgiving others, to restoring damages,

and to enduring faithfully to the end.

The power to make these changes comes from the Savior and His Atonement. The people of King Benjamin recognized how the Atonement was working in their lives when they said, “Because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, . . . we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2).

The people of King Benjamin experienced one of the healing aspects of repentance: as we repent, we develop “a fresh view about God, about [ourselves], and about the world.”<sup>3</sup> This fresh perspective helps us to once again feel and recognize the love of our Savior and our Heavenly Father, and we can continue to feel Their love as we strive to keep the commandments of God.

Obedience to God’s commandments also qualifies us to receive help from the Holy

### ANSWERING QUESTIONS

#### Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going?

**Y**ou or someone you know may wonder about the purpose of life. Following are some of the Church’s basic teachings on this topic.

God is our Heavenly Father, and He loves us.

We are eternal beings who lived as spirits before we were born. We will continue to live after we die.

Our life on earth has purpose—to gain a physical body and learn to choose between good and evil.

Jesus Christ atoned for our sins and provided a way for us to repent and become clean again.

Following God’s plan for us is the surest way to find happiness, endure life’s challenges, and return to our Heavenly Father.

For more information see [lds.org/plan/our-eternal-life](http://lds.org/plan/our-eternal-life); *True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* (2004), 132–35, 115–17; Guide to the Scriptures, “Plan of Redemption,” “Repentance,” [scriptures.lds.org](http://scriptures.lds.org).



***Sin is like a brick dropped into a full bucket of water. Repentance isn't complete by just removing the brick; we must add more water to fill the bucket again.***

Ghost to overcome our weaknesses. Our problems and weaknesses will not be completely taken away, but just as the Lord strengthened Alma and his people “that they could bear up their burdens with ease” (Mosiah 24:15), we too can be blessed with comfort and understanding to make our burdens lighter. We too can “submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord” (Mosiah 24:15). This kind of aid comes as a blessing of living the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup>

### **Repentance Brings Us Joy**

When Josh first purchased his SUV, he didn't realize the importance of keeping a small thing like the air filter clean. Yet in order for the car to continue functioning, it needed to be clean in every aspect. Likewise, if we want

to progress in this life, we too need to clean our spirits when they become unclean or impure through sin. If we remain in sin, we lose the guidance of the Holy Ghost and can no longer return to our Father in Heaven.

To provide a way for us to be cleansed from sin, our Savior lovingly performed the Atonement, which enables us not only to be cleansed but also to refill our spiritual buckets. As we make the effort to repent and to refill our lives with the Spirit, we can experience renewed joy, peace, and confidence in our lives as we work to overcome our weaknesses and become better. ■

#### **NOTES**

1. Claudio D. Zivic, “After All We Can Do,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 98.
2. Boyd K. Packer, “To Young Women and Men,” *Ensign*, May 1989, 59.
3. Bible Dictionary, “Repentance.”
4. See *True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* (2004), 19–20, 132–35; *Let Virtue Garnish Thy Thoughts* (2006), 12.

# Prophets at Christmastime



**T**he lives of our 16 latter-day prophets exemplify the Christmas spirit, reminding us of that incomparable event that took place in the stable at Bethlehem over 20 centuries ago: the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. We can never go wrong by following their example—especially at Christmas.

## Gifts of Love

Giving gifts of love and service to those less fortunate has been a hallmark of the prophets' Christmas experiences. In 1931, during the Great Depression, President Harold B. Lee was president of a large stake in Salt Lake City, Utah. President Lee determined that he would know the needs of his stake members and do everything he could to alleviate their want. By survey he learned that more than half of his stake, almost 5,000 people, were dependent on others for help, including almost 1,000 children under the age of 10.

He mobilized members to collect toys and organized workshops to repair, paint, and clean old toys or make new ones so no child would be without on Christmas. He decided that every family in the stake should have a dinner for Christmas and solicited food donations to make that happen.<sup>1</sup> Later as an Apostle, Elder Lee was asked to organize the Church's welfare program based on similar principles of service, sacrifice, and work.

As a boy, President Thomas S. Monson was celebrating Christmas when his friend asked a startling question, "What does turkey taste like?" He responded that it tasted like chicken, but then he realized that his unfortunate friend had never tasted either. Not only that, but there was nothing in his friend's house with which to prepare a Christmas dinner. "I pondered a solution," said President

Monson. “I had no turkeys, no chickens, no money. Then I remembered I did have two pet rabbits. Immediately I took my friend by the hand and rushed to the rabbit hutch, placed the rabbits in a box, and handed the box to him with the comment, ‘Here, take these two rabbits. They’re good to eat—just like chicken.’ . . . Tears came easily to me as I closed the door to the empty rabbit hutch. But I was not sad. A warmth, a feeling of indescribable joy, filled my heart. It was a memorable Christmas.”<sup>2</sup>



### Drawing Together as a Family

One of the sweetest Christmases President Ezra Taft Benson remembered occurred in 1923, when he returned home on Christmas Eve to the family farm in Whitney, Idaho, USA, after a two-and-a-half-year mission to England. This joyful reunion with his parents and 10 brothers and sisters was also filled with enthusiasm and excitement for Christmas. As a special treat, his parents allowed him to stay up to help with Christmas preparations after the other children were in bed. As he worked alongside his parents, he quietly shared his missionary experiences. He couldn’t hold back the tears during this “choice evening” in his childhood home.<sup>3</sup>

The prophets’ lives encourage us to draw close to our families at Christmastime. President Joseph F. Smith remembered one Christmas as a young father when he had no money—not even a penny—to buy gifts for his children. Just before Christmas he left his home and walked down the street, looking at all the wonderful things in the shop windows but knowing that he could buy none of them. Near despair he found a private place and “wept like a child” to relieve his aching heart. But, drying his eyes, he went home and played with his children all day, “grateful and happy only for them.”<sup>4</sup> Despite his inability to provide a material Christmas for

his children, he had nevertheless given them the greatest gifts any father could—his love and his time.

The Prophet Joseph Smith spent the Christmas of 1838 imprisoned in Liberty Jail in Missouri. He and several companions were held in a small basement dungeon that was cold, dirty, and smoky from the open fire they were forced to use. The ceiling was so low they couldn’t stand up straight. But there was a bright moment that Christmas season. The Prophet’s wife, Emma, was able to visit Joseph shortly before Christmas for several days. What’s more, she had brought their son, Joseph Smith III. Feeling the love of his family, Joseph wrote words of encouragement to the Saints from the dungeon: “We glory in our tribulation, because we know that God is with us.”<sup>5</sup>

In 1937, President Joseph Fielding Smith was adjusting to life without his beloved wife Ethel, who had recently died. Ethel had asked that Jessie Evans, a single woman with a beautiful singing voice, perform at her funeral. Through that encounter, Jessie Evans and Joseph Fielding Smith became better acquainted and their mutual attraction blossomed into love. She accepted his proposal of marriage shortly after Christmas. In contemplating the gifts he had received the Christmas of 1937, President Smith wrote, “I have received [Jessie] as a Christmas present, for which I am grateful.”<sup>6</sup> They were married the following April.



One of President David O. McKay's annual family traditions was to take the grandchildren riding on a bobsleigh pulled by a fine team of horses, "bells a-jingle." The ride was one of their favorite traditions. President McKay continued it into his 80s. To stay warm, President McKay wore his long, thick raccoon coat and big gloves. The smaller grandchildren rode in the sleigh, but the older ones "whizzed along behind on their own sleds" tied to the back of the bobsleigh. These long-to-be-remembered Christmas celebrations sometimes ended with carols around the piano and singing "Love at Home."<sup>7</sup>

### **A Testimony of Jesus Christ**

Perhaps most important, the Christmas experiences of the prophets teach us to increase our testimonies of Jesus Christ as we make Him the center of our celebrations. In 1876 the St. George Utah Temple was nearing completion. The dedication ceremony for the basement, main room, and sealing room was scheduled for January 1, 1877.<sup>8</sup> With Christmas just seven days before the dedication, many in St. George worked frantically to help ensure the temple was completed in time.

President Wilford Woodruff, who served as the first president of the temple, recorded in his journal that on Christmas day the men were busy at work with buzz saws and that 40 women spent the whole day in the temple sewing carpets. They laid carpet and put up curtains.<sup>9</sup>

Although they nearly didn't finish in time, their offering that Christmas season was worth the effort. This work was their Christmas celebration. With 2,000 people present on January 1, President Woodruff gave the dedicatory prayer for portions of the temple—over 30 years after Latter-day Saints had been forced to abandon the Nauvoo Temple.

During World War II, many cities in the United States enforced nightly blackouts to conserve fuel. In Salt Lake City the floodlights on the Salt Lake Temple were turned off. The temple stood dark in a dark city for years. When the ceasefire was declared in Europe, President Heber J. Grant ordered the floodlights of the temple turned back on.

For Christmas 1945, President George Albert Smith planned an inspiring and meaningful Christmas card. On the front was a photograph of the three eastern spires of



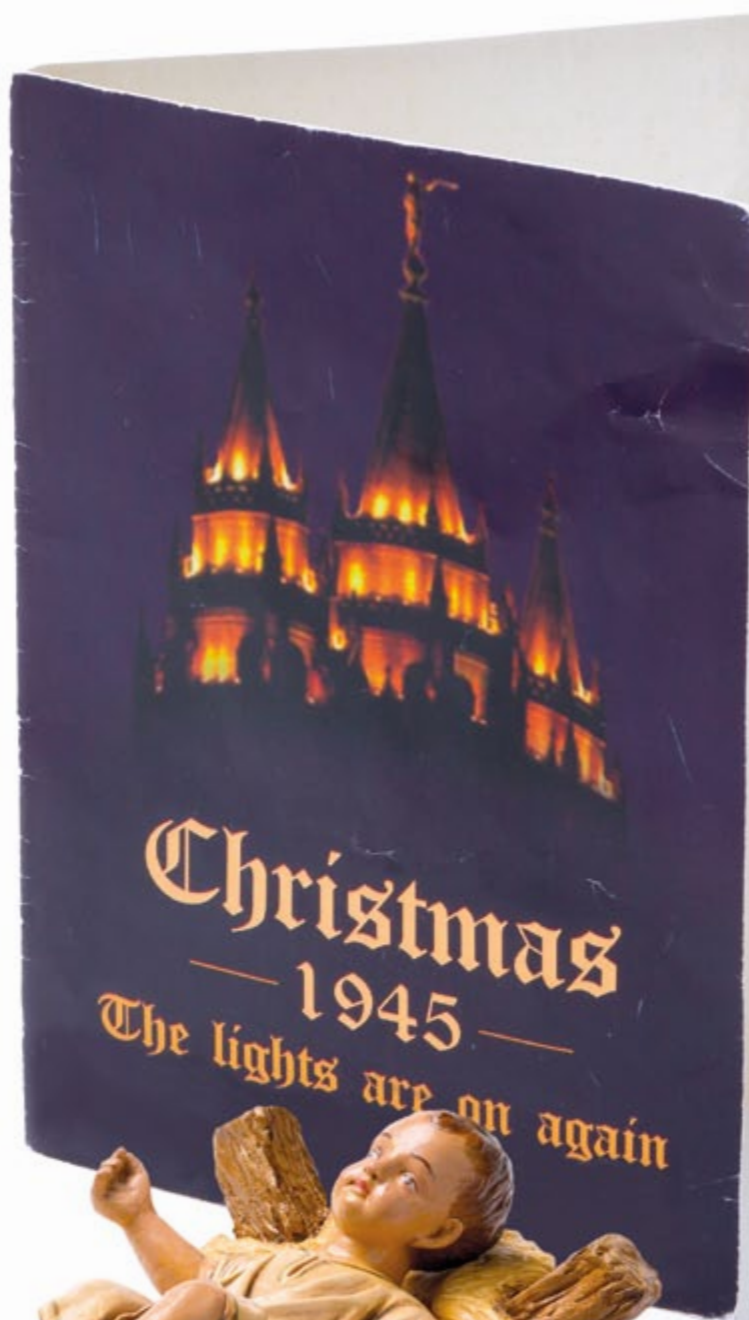
the Salt Lake Temple beautifully lit against a dark blue background with the angel Moroni figure standing above. Across the bottom were the words “Christmas—1945” and the message “The lights are on again.”<sup>10</sup> Nothing could have better reflected the joy felt by everyone after so many long years of death and destruction.

But this beautiful Christmas card was also President Smith’s way of bearing his testimony of Jesus Christ and the Restoration of the gospel. Just as the end of the war brought peace and light in dark places, the Restoration of the gospel following the centuries-long Apostasy turned the bright lights of truth “on again” for all the people of the world.

The examples of our latter-day prophets of love, service, faith, and sacrifice testify that true joy during the Christmas season comes through living as Christ lived. As President Howard W. Hunter said, “The real Christmas comes to him who has taken Christ into his life as a moving, dynamic, vitalizing force. The real spirit of Christmas lies in the life and mission of the Master.”<sup>11</sup> ■

#### NOTES

1. See Larry C. Porter, “Remembering Christmas Past,” *BYU Studies*, vol. 40, no. 3 (2001): 94–96.
2. Thomas S. Monson, “Christmas Gifts, Christmas Blessings,” *New Era*, Dec. 1986, 7.
3. See Porter, “Remembering Christmas Past,” 104–5.
4. Joseph F. Smith, “Christmas and New Year,” *Improvement Era*, Jan. 1919, 267.
5. Joseph Smith, in Porter, “Remembering Christmas Past,” 53.
6. Joseph Fielding Smith, in Joseph Fielding Smith Jr. and John J. Stewart, *The Life of Joseph Fielding Smith* (1972), 255.
7. See David Lawrence McKay, *My Father, David O. McKay* (1989), 70–71.
8. Final dedication of the completed St. George Utah Temple was held four months later, on April 6–8, 1877.
9. See *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (1983–85), 7:297.
10. See Albert L. Zobell Jr., “It Being Christmas,” *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1949, 826–27.
11. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (1997), 269.



*These Latter-day Saints have learned that serving with all their heart, might, mind, and strength isn't limited by age or ability.*

# SERVICE

## NEVER GROWS OLD

**W**hen Glenna Smith of Utah, USA, waited outside her bishop's office, she wasn't sure what to expect. All she knew was that she was getting a calling. She thought maybe she would be asked to help in the nursery, and that was fine with her, as long as she had a chair to sit on while watching the children. She was 74 years old, after all.

So when her bishop called her to be the Laurel adviser, she was stunned. Sister Smith stared at the bishop. "Do you know how old I am?" she asked.

Sister Smith remembers, "I was surprised because I knew what the calling would entail. My bishop told me that he knew I had some physical problems and that I could do what I felt comfortable with as far as attending activities. My main responsibility would be the Sunday lesson."

Sister Smith felt overwhelmed, but she accepted the call.

"I felt like I had a purpose," she says, "that I wasn't too old to do something important, and I know how important this calling is. These

youth have a battle ahead of them. If I can touch one and help her be more Christlike, then I will do my best."

She has been able to cultivate strong friendships with the Laurels she serves.

"If they need me to do anything for them, they ask," explains Sister Smith. "They feel comfortable coming to me with problems, and I feel a closeness with these girls that is nice at my age. I know how precious they are."

As people reach their senior years, some feel that they have no more to contribute; but the Lord sees their potential to do good. President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) taught: "The Lord knows and loves the elderly among His people. It has always been so, and upon them He has bestowed many of His greatest responsibilities. . . . [I] hope your days are filled with things to do and ways in which you can render service to others."<sup>1</sup>

Many older Latter-day Saints, like Sister Smith, have learned that the limitations that come with age may restrict *how* they can serve but not how *well* they can serve—or how much their service is needed.





### Relying on the Lord

After Sister Smith was called to teach the Laurels, she studied *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* to learn how to fulfill her calling. She decided that she wanted to complete the Personal Progress program herself, so she found a project she wanted to try—memorizing “The Living Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

“When you get my age you don’t retain things like the Laurels do,” Sister Smith explains. “I went to my Heavenly Father and said, ‘I can’t do this alone, but I can with Thy help.’”

She memorized one paragraph each week, one sentence at a time. As she relied on the Lord, she was able to memorize the entire document.

The other Young Women leaders in her ward challenged the young women to follow Sister Smith’s example by memorizing “The Living Christ.” Soon stake leaders heard about her project and challenged all the young women in the stake to do the same.

“We say, ‘I can’t do this, I can’t do that,’” says Sister Smith. “But the truth is that we can do anything in righteousness. When we put ourselves down, we are not accepting the Atonement. We are so special to God. He will help us.”

### Doing What No Computer Can

For 20 years, Herbert Schory and his wife, Margaret, worked together to submit thousands of names for temple work. Sister Schory passed away in 2000, but Brother Schory, now in his 80s, continues to move forward in the work they started together.

Brother Schory, who lives in Nevada, USA, spends

hours each day transcribing names from digital images of original records as part of the FamilySearch indexing program, often in languages such as French, German, Italian, and Spanish.

“It is exciting to help people do things they can’t do for themselves,” Brother Schory explains. “That is the whole idea—people who have passed away can have ordinances performed for them. They can progress. Knowing that is enough to keep me going.”

Brother Schory enjoys teaching others how to get started and helping them learn to love indexing as much as he does.

“Age is no handicap,” he says. “The only requirement for indexing is good eyesight. I’ve seen people with tired and crippled hands type in information. Anyone can serve if they want to.”

### Developing a Missionary Spirit

When the missionaries challenged ward members to invite a friend to hear the gospel in their home, Natalie Hazard of Pennsylvania, USA, didn’t hesitate to accept that challenge. She picked a date and prayed that the Lord would help her find someone to invite.

Sister Hazard, who is in her 80s, soon noticed that she hadn’t seen the couple who lived across the street recently, so she decided to stop by. As she stood on their porch, she realized that she had found her opportunity to invite someone to meet the missionaries. The couple accepted.

Sister Hazard finds that one of the best ways she can serve is to be obedient by fulfilling her assignments, bearing her testimony, attending the temple, and especially sharing the gospel. For her, the challenge to share the gospel is more than just a way to serve.

“I want people to know about the gospel,” she explains. “I have had a missionary spirit since I joined the Church as a young woman. I’m not always successful, but I keep trying because I love my Savior. I want to be His disciple.”

### Finding a Way to Serve

Sister Gale Ward’s husband, Burt, passed away several years ago in a car accident. Serving has helped Sister Ward

cope with the unexpected grief and loneliness. A few months after Burt's death, Sister Ward started working in the Newport Beach California Temple. While she enjoyed her service there, she felt there was something more she needed to do.

"I kept searching for another way the Lord wanted me to serve, but I couldn't find it," says Sister Ward, who is in her 70s. "I thought about serving a full-time mission, but I didn't want to go without my husband. We were a companionship, and I couldn't serve without him."

While many older single sisters do find joy in full-time missions, Sister Ward felt that she needed to serve in a different way. She found it in a part-time service mission at the local LDS employment resource center. Sister Ward now serves there twice a week in addition to serving in the temple and in her calling as a Relief Society teacher.

"I do office work, make appointments, enter information, and greet people, and eventually I will be teaching employment classes," says Sister Ward. "I am enjoying my mission, but it has been a difficult adjustment because I hadn't done this kind of work in many years."

Despite the adjustment period, Sister Ward has found her service fulfilling. "You don't have to just sit around and wait for your time to return back to Heavenly Father," she says. "I want to be with Burt, but this is not the time. There are other people who need me."

### Focusing on What We Can Do

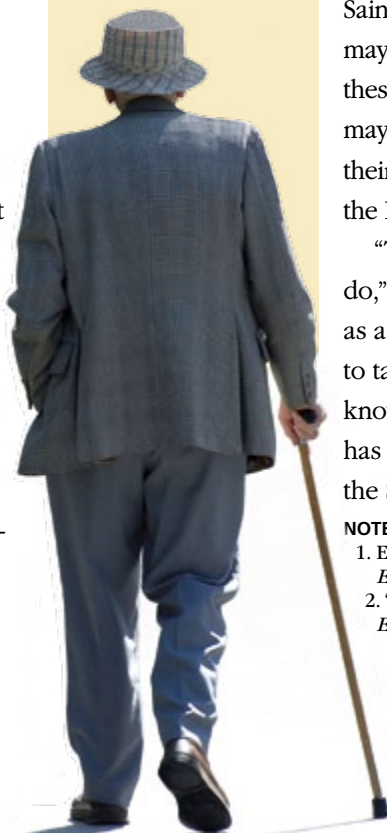
Bernard Phipps of Meriden, England, has decided not to focus on what he can't do because of the limitations that come with



### OUR EFFORTS ARE ENOUGH

"Some worry endlessly . . . because age limits what they can do. I do not think it pleases the Lord when we worry because we think we never do enough or that what we do is never good enough."

President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "The Least of These," *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 87.



age. Instead he focuses on what he can do. He and his wife, Evelyn, have experienced many difficult health challenges but have been able to serve faithfully in their callings. Sister Phipps has served as visiting teaching coordinator, and Brother Phipps has taught the high priests group. Currently both serve together as Primary teachers.

"Problems may come with age, but there are still things you can do," says Brother Phipps. "If we are able to do something to help, then we do it. We try not to worry about what we can't do. We just keep serving where we can."

Some things the Phippses have found they *can* do are look after their grandchildren, prepare Sunday lessons, and help the children they teach in Primary understand how the scriptures can be meaningful to them.

Like the Phippses, many older Latter-day Saints magnify their callings, whatever they may be, and reach out to serve. In so doing, these faithful Saints discover that while age may bring physical limitations, it does not limit their responsibility to make contributions to the Lord's kingdom.

"There are things our bodies won't let us do," says Sister Smith, who has now served as a Laurel adviser for about a year. "We have to take that into consideration. But we don't know what we can do if we don't try. Age has no bearing on what Heavenly Father and the Savior think of us." ■

### NOTES

1. Ezra Taft Benson, "To the Elderly in the Church," *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 4.
2. "The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles," *Ensign*, Apr. 2000, 2.

*Brother Bernard Phipps passed away while this article was being prepared for publication.*



## NEVER TOO OLD TO **Testify**

*Despite my age, I realized that I still have a purpose in life.*

**I**n the Church we often speak about “enduring to the end” as though it were always painful and difficult. Enduring is not necessarily painful—enduring well can be joyful and beneficial, and it can bring us closer to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.

I learned this important lesson as I visit taught a friend, now deceased, whom I loved. She was in her mid-90s and often said she was ready to be called home. She had fulfilled many callings during her life, often involving music. She was very talented and had a lovely voice, but she felt she could

do no more at her age. I felt to tell her often that she was not useless and that she still had purpose in this life, as we all do. But I knew how she felt. Though I was many years younger than my friend, my health was not good, and I also felt useless and ready to be called home.

Not long after one visit with her, I went to the hospital in an ambulance. My daughter called the missionaries, and they came to the hospital to give me a blessing. I felt comfort as the elders laid their hands on my head, but I don't remember much after that. I do remember being miserable and expecting that I would not live much longer. I felt comfortable with that.

But I began to improve after a few days. As I pondered, I felt the peaceful presence of the Holy Ghost. I realized that it was not my time to die and that I still had purpose in life. I also felt that I had a specific errand: I needed to tell my friend something.

I had realized that a necessary part of enduring well to the end is bearing testimony to our posterity and others around us. They need to know that our testimonies are still intact and that we feel joy in knowing that we can access the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

That realization helped me decide what to do.

Though I was still shaky when I left the hospital, I wanted to see my friend and tell her what I had learned. On trembling legs, I walked to her apartment, trusting that the Lord would sustain me in my efforts. Seated in a chair and wrapped in a blanket, she welcomed me to her home. I threw my arms around her and said, "We *are* enduring to the end, but we have something important we still need to do. We need to bear our testimonies to our posterity and others."

Her eyes lit up and we both cried; we knew that the prompting came from the Lord and that we both needed to heed it. I stayed only a few minutes. Somehow I knew it would be our last earthly visit, but I saw joy in her eyes.

Less than two days later, my sweet friend was called home, and I feel that she had done what the Lord had wanted her to do.

We all have purpose, and I am grateful to know that our purpose is not limited by our age. As we endure to the end of this life, we can continue to strengthen each other, our posterity, and all of God's children by bearing testimony. ■



## THE GOLDEN YEARS

"We are old now, and in due time, we will be summoned beyond the veil. We do not resist that.

We try to teach the practical things we have learned over the years to those who are younger—to our family and to others.

"We cannot *do* what we once did, but we have become more than ever we were before. . . .

"In your golden years there is so much to *do* and so much to *be*. Do not withdraw into a retirement from life, into amusement. That, for some, would be useless, even selfish. You may have served a mission and been released and consider yourself as having completed your service in the Church, but you are never released from being active in the *gospel*. . . .

"You may at last, when old and feeble, learn that the greatest mission of all is to strengthen your own family and the families of others, to seal the generations. . . .

"Keep the fire of your testimony of the restored gospel and your witness of our Redeemer burning so brightly that our children can warm their hands by the fire of your faith."

President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "The Golden Years," *Ensign*, May 2003, 84.



**By Bishop Gary E. Stevenson**  
Presiding Bishop

# The Safety and Peace of Keeping the Commandments

*The patterns and truths found in the Book of Mormon  
are clear and instructive, plain and precious.  
When we begin with righteousness and obedience,  
we will end with blessings and joy.*

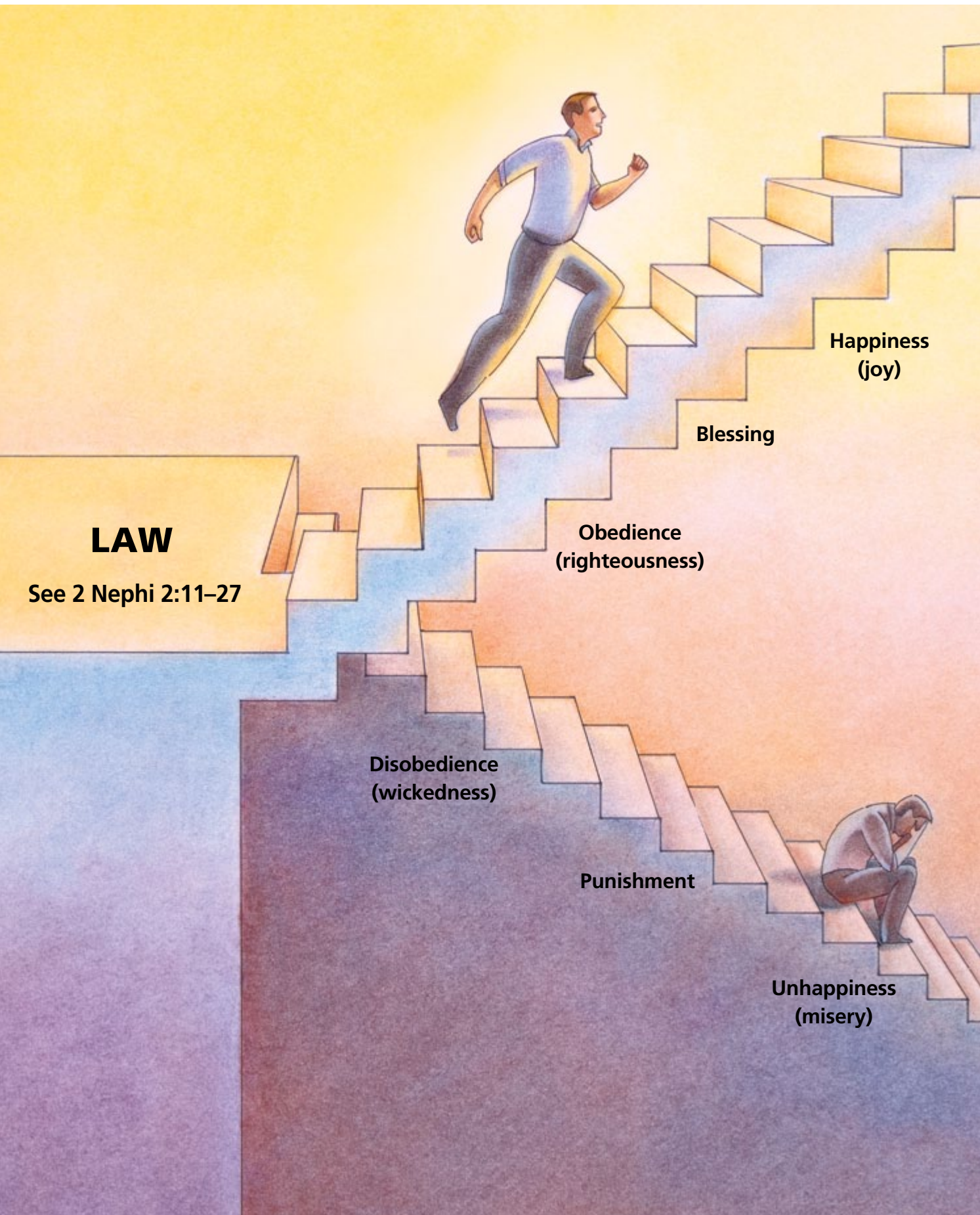
In our digital information age, it seems that a 24-hour news cycle cannot pass without the chapters of a familiar story being played out over and over. The characters of the well-worn plot have usually earned celebrity and prominence through extraordinary talent as actors, athletes, politicians, or business leaders. Years of practice or dedicated service and sacrifice—vehicles to the pinnacle of their success in a particular craft or profession—are dashed to pieces in the midst of scandal.

The final scene is often the somber image of the characters making a tearful plea to a judge, shareholders, or constituents or to family, friends, or fans for forgiveness for their misguided actions. The outcome usually casts a broad net of unintended consequences—including heartache, shame, and misery—over them, their loved ones, and their associates.

The plain yet profound words of the ancient Book of Mormon prophet Alma in exhortation to his son seem as relevant in the 21st century as they were more than 2,000 years ago: “Wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10).

In virtually every scandal today, a knowledge of and obedience to the commandments found in the restored gospel would have been enough to avert personal and professional disaster.





# LAW

See 2 Nephi 2:11-27

Happiness  
(joy)

Blessing

Obedience  
(righteousness)

Disobedience  
(wickedness)

Punishment

Unhappiness  
(misery)

## A Formula for Happiness

A formula embodied in the gospel of Jesus Christ reveals the pathway to happiness. It is a plain and precious truth found throughout the Book of Mormon. It is described particularly well in the teachings of the prophet Lehi to his sons as he neared the end of his life. In speaking to his son Jacob, he taught, “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11). A few verses later he added, “Men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25).

Lehi’s teachings in this sermon to Jacob may be summarized simply: Obedience and righteousness lead to blessings, which lead to joy. Conversely, disobedience and wickedness lead to punishment, which leads to sorrow. The Savior is the great Mediator of all mankind and the sponsor of the pathway to happiness and eternal life. The devil is the miserable father of lies and the sponsor of the pathway to captivity and death.

Clearly, the adversary understands that we would not knowingly choose captivity and death, yet because he will be miserable forever, he seeks also the misery of all mankind (see 2 Nephi 2:27). He does this by distorting the consequences of sin and disobedience. That is one reason he is called the father of lies.

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) said: “All of you . . . know of Satan, the father of lies. You know how he turns the truth into a lie. He garnishes evil to make it appear beautiful, pleasing, easy, and even good.”<sup>1</sup>

Satan would have us believe that the formula for happiness begins with wickedness and sin. We are warned that his temptations are cloaked so cleverly that sometimes he even appears “nigh unto an angel of light” (2 Nephi 9:9). The Lord described the fall and goals of Satan:

“Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down;

“And he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will” (Moses 4:3–4).

The pathway to happiness begins with righteousness through obedience to the commandments. The commandments have been given to us as a divine playbook to direct us away from many of the calamities of mortality. The Lord proclaimed this in the infancy of the Restoration: “Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, *and gave him commandments*” (D&C 1:17; emphasis added).

## Keep the Commandments

Some people find it counterintuitive that the commandments are at the trailhead of the path to happiness rather than something to be carried along the way. The following story from my service as a mission president in Nagoya, Japan, some years ago illustrates this.

My wife, Lesa, and I became acquainted with a young woman soon after she came to church to attend an English class taught by the missionaries. She was outgoing, vibrant, and in control of her life, which included a good job, a longtime boyfriend, and her family. Her association with the missionaries and members through English class piqued her interest in the Church, and she began to receive the missionary lessons. Her testimony of the truthfulness of the restored gospel seemed to blossom each time she met with the missionaries. As she read the Book of Mormon and pondered and prayed about it and the things she was hearing, she knew they were true.

When the missionaries began teaching her the commandments, she knew she must obey. She broke up with her boyfriend and quit her job, which required that she work Sundays. She began observing the Word of Wisdom and accepted the law of tithing. Her faith was so strong that she began keeping the commandments virtually the moment she learned them.

When she announced to her family her interest in the Church and her study of the restored gospel, her parents told her that their relationship with her would suffer as

a result. Within a few weeks of accepting the commandments, she found herself without a job, an apartment, or family support. Clearly, the consequences of her obedience affected her life in what appeared to be a devastating way.

I worried deeply about her situation. Late one night, at the end of a hectic day, Lesa and I left the mission home for a walk, seeking some quiet time together. We were surprised as we came upon a busy intersection at the same time this vibrant young investigator approached on her bicycle. She greeted us with a warm smile and a hug. Surprised that she was out so late, we asked what she was doing.

“I am on my way to my new job working the graveyard shift at the drive-up window of a fast-food restaurant,” she gleefully exclaimed.

This job represented a significant drop in pay, responsibility, and hours from her previous job. Despite significant trials and setbacks in the temporal affairs of her life, happiness exuded from her. She then announced that her baptismal date had been set. As we walked back to the mission home, Lesa and I marveled at how her faith and obedience to newfound commandments had put her on the pathway to true joy.

A few weeks later she was baptized. After some time had passed, she reconciled with her family and found better employment. A few years following her baptism, she was sealed in the Tokyo Japan Temple to a returned missionary she had met at a young single adult activity. Now an eternal family, they were recently blessed with a beautiful baby boy. A short, sweet hymn describes what occurred in her life as a result of keeping the commandments:



*Keep the commandments; keep the commandments!*

*In this there is safety; in this there is peace.*

*He will send blessings; He will send blessings.*

*Words of a prophet: Keep the commandments.*

*In this there is safety and peace.<sup>2</sup>*

***We were surprised as we came upon a busy intersection at the same time this vibrant young investigator approached on her bicycle. We marveled at how her faith and obedience to newfound commandments had put her on a pathway to true joy.***

The patterns and truths found in the Book of Mormon are clear and instructive, plain and precious. When we begin with righteousness and obedience, we will end with blessings and joy. ■

#### NOTES

1. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Blessings and Responsibilities of Womanhood,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1976, 70.
2. “Keep the Commandments,” *Children’s Songbook*, 146–47.

## HOW CAN WE FEED SO MANY?

**A**s Relief Society president, I felt overwhelmed by the needs and challenges some families in our little branch were facing. Times had been tough, and several members had lost their jobs.

Outside the Church, discouragement, sadness, and hopelessness could be seen in the eyes of many who were having difficulty providing for their families. Even children and youth exuded feelings of uncertainty and turmoil.

Branch leaders felt the need to carry a bit of hope and love to the most needy—something that could help people in our community feel that a loving Heavenly Father knew of their

trials and was watching over them.

As Christmas drew near, we proposed inviting the poorest children in our community to a dinner. Branch members would hold fund-raisers, buy food from a fast-food chain, and prepare our meetinghouse to receive our guests. Everyone got involved, including the Primary children, young women, and young men.

We arranged for the fast-food chain to provide the food, and we contacted social workers to locate families with the greatest needs. The workers gave us a list of about 100 children, which was more than we had anticipated. Our spirits did not fail, but it seemed impossible to raise

enough money to purchase food for that many children.

When the day of our dinner arrived, the branch president, accompanied by several deacons, took the funds we had raised and headed to the restaurant, wondering how we were going to feed so many children with our limited funds. They prayed as they went, thinking that maybe we should invite only the smallest children, divide the meals in half, or call off the activity.

When they reached the restaurant, the branch president put the money on the counter. That's when their prayers were answered.

The restaurant manager looked at them and, with a smile, said the restaurant would be happy to contribute as many meals as necessary—at no cost! I cannot express the joy we all felt upon learning of this kind gesture, which allowed us to bring some cheer—and plenty of food—to a large group of needy children.

Thanks to the restaurant's generosity, we were able to use the money that we had raised to purchase food and make food baskets for the neediest families.

From this experience we learned that no effort is in vain when we put our talents and good desires to the service of our fellow beings. Our testimonies were strengthened that the Lord opens doors after we do all we can. ■  
Marta Fernández-Rebollos, Spain

*As the branch president put the money on the counter, their prayers were answered.*



## I HOPE SOMEONE WILL LOVE HER

When my son was three years old and my daughter was four, they were part of a neighborhood preschool group. That winter those of us in charge of the group decided to do a Christmas project that included having each child donate a toy to a needy family.

We taught many lessons in the preceding weeks about how gratitude and sharing with others make us happy. I told my children to start thinking about which toys they would like to give, wanting them to have the experience of choosing what to give. Our family finances were limited, and I was curious which of their few toys they would be willing to part with.

One Saturday morning I told the children it was time to select their donation. I helped Hunter wrap the truck he had chosen and then went to see how Mikelle was doing. The scene I witnessed from the doorway of her room brought tears to my eyes.

Mikelle was holding her favorite doll, Mella, dressed in her best doll clothing, and she was singing to her. Then she tucked a small blanket into the bottom of a gift bag. She smiled at the doll, hugged and kissed her, and lovingly placed her in the bag. Seeing me, she said, "Mella's all ready, Mom. I hope someone will love her."

*One Saturday morning I told the children it was time to select their donation. The scene I witnessed from the doorway of Mikelle's room brought tears to my eyes.*



Knowing how my daughter felt about this doll, I was stunned she was giving her away. I almost wanted to tell Mikelle she didn't have to give up her favorite doll, but I stopped myself.

"She understands giving," I thought. "She is giving her very best."

Suddenly I recognized that part of me was willing to give and share but not at too great a personal sacrifice. I had placed limits on my charity, and I knew I needed to change.

I thought of how Heavenly Father gave up His only perfect Son and allowed Him to suffer and die for me. I pictured a loving Father in Heaven kissing His Beloved Son and sending

Him to earth as a baby, hoping that we would love and follow Him.

The Savior Himself held nothing back and gave everything He had to give.

I wondered if Mikelle would change her mind before the Christmas program, when the toys were to be donated, but she did not. I wondered if she would later regret her choice and feel sad, but she did not.

Seeing my daughter's Christlike example, I decided that whether I have much or little to give, I would always cheerfully give my best when I have an opportunity to share. ■

Brittney Pyne, Utah, USA

## YOU SANG FROM YOUR HEARTS

In December 2000 our stake choir was preparing to host a choral festival. Several choirs of great renown in the city of Posadas, Argentina, had confirmed that they would be participating, and many people would be attending. Through our singing we hoped to share our testimony of the birth of the Savior.

As the choir director, I was a bit anxious. Adding to my anxiety was that I was eight months pregnant with twins. I experienced pains during our final rehearsal a week before the concert and had to conduct sitting down.

By the time the rehearsal ended, I could no longer stand. My husband, Carlos, and my father gave me a blessing. Carlos then took me to the hospital, where doctors determined that the babies would arrive that day. I was fearful, but Carlos told me to trust in the Lord.

Soon the cry of a newborn baby flooded the room. My heart leapt for joy at the sound, but then the doctor drew close and said, “That is Kira crying, but Abril did not make it.”

I have no words to describe the feelings that swept over me. Soon I was moved to another room, where my husband was waiting for me. We embraced and wept.

“Dafne, we don’t know the Lord’s purpose in taking Abril to Himself,” Carlos said. “But we must be strong, accept His will, and move forward in faith.”

A little while later, Carlos held Kira’s tiny body and blessed her to live. She did, but because of complications, she remained in the hospital for the next 10 days.

I was released the following week. Because of frequent trips to the hospital to see and feed Kira, I gave no thought to the choir. The night before the festival, my father asked me if I had decided whether to conduct. “Pray about it, Dafne,” he said, “and surely whatever decision you make will be the right one.”

I thought about Kira, who still lay

***As the voices melded with the instruments, I was overcome with the sensation that I was in a beautiful place.***



in the hospital. I thought about the choir members, who had worked hard to prepare for the concert. I thought about the Savior and His birth, life, and sacrifice. I knew what I needed to do.

The demonstrations of love our family received the next evening from choir members moved us deeply, and the spirit of harmony among them created a heartfelt desire to touch those who attended.

Because we hosted the festival, our stake choir sang last. When the piano and violin played the introduction to “The First Noel,” tears spilled onto my cheeks. Then, as the voices melded with the instruments, I was overcome with the sensation that I was in a beautiful place.

When we finished, I turned around to see that most audience members had tears in their eyes. People who perhaps had never heard the gospel’s message of peace and love had felt through our music the beauty and wonder of the birth of the Son of God.

Afterward, the director of one of the other choirs said to us, “We had good technique, but you sang from your hearts.”

On Christmas Eve my husband and I thanked God for sending Kira to our home and for sending His Son to earth. Because of the Son’s Atonement and our sealing in the temple, we know that Abril will someday be ours again. ■

Dafne Analia Romero de Tau, Misiones, Argentina

## POPCORN, PIONEERS, AND PEACE

Mom put bricks in the oven and then wrapped them in blankets so our feet would stay warm as we traveled in our car without a heater. It was 1935, and we were making the 60-mile (96 km) drive from Salt Lake City to Payson, Utah, to visit my grandparents in early December. The snow was falling lightly around us and swirled in what looked like little tornadoes on the road ahead. My big brother, Fred, and I were bundled in heavy coats and itchy wool socks and mufflers. The drive seemed endless to me as a seven-year-old.

We made this trip every December. The Christmas season didn't really start until we were in Grandma and Grandpa Tanner's warm kitchen making popcorn balls. Grandpa would stoke up the fire, and Grandma would fill a wire basket with popcorn and shake it vigorously over the fire until it filled with puffy, white corn. Then Grandma would pour hot honey butter over the popcorn in a big cast-iron kettle and mix in peanuts. When the mixture cooled, we would dig in with our butter-covered hands and make festive balls to share with family and friends.

This Christmas, however, would be different. Usually Fred and I rode in the backseat, but this year we were wedged between

my parents on the bench seat up front. A small white coffin carrying the body of my one-year-old brother, Gerold, took up the backseat. A case of measles had turned into pneumonia and snuffed out his young life. Earlier we had gone to the mortuary to pick up the small wooden coffin.

As we made the two-hour journey, Dad led us in singing Christmas songs. Mom and Dad harmonized, and the beautiful music comforted us as we grieved the loss of our baby.

When we got to Grandpa's house, the usually jovial crowd of family and relatives was waiting solemnly. The coffin was taken from the backseat and brought into Grandma's spotless parlor. My grandparents' bishop spoke a few kind words, and then we were back in the car to ride to the cemetery, where we all wept as this precious little boy was laid in the frozen ground.

Christmas did come. The fire was

stoked, the popcorn was popped, and the festive popcorn balls were delivered on Grandpa's horse-drawn sleigh. There was sadness that day but also a resonant peace as I listened to my faithful grandparents reading the story of Christ's birth.

My grandparents had been born of pioneer parents who had laid many babies in the ground. As our family mourned our loss, we turned to where our ancestors had turned—to the Son of God and His words. I remembered the Christmas story with a different heart that year, for it was because of the baby born in a manger that the baby we had laid in the ground would rise again and be ours.

Many decades have passed since then, but each Christmas I still pour honey butter over popcorn, mix in peanuts, shape the mixture into balls, and remember. ■

Shirlee Hurst Shields, Utah, USA

*As we made the two-hour journey, Dad led us in singing Christmas songs. Mom and Dad harmonized, and the beautiful music comforted us as we grieved.*



# Small & Simple Things

*“By small and simple things are great things brought to pass”  
(Alma 37:6).*

## What Did Joseph Smith Really Look Like?

This month marks the 207th anniversary of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s birth. When he was alive, photography was a new invention, and its use was not widespread. No authenticated photograph of the Prophet is known to exist.

For centuries, people created castings of faces in order to preserve the images of their loved ones. After the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum, death masks were made of them, which accurately preserved their facial bone structure. Sculptors and artists later based their works on these masks. Included here is a small sample of those works.



GIFT OF WILFORD C. WOOD MUSEUM, COURTESY OF CHURCH HISTORY MUSEUM

### Death mask of Joseph Smith Jr., 1844

*This mask was created shortly after the Prophet’s martyrdom. Since the mask did not cover his entire face, his face appears more narrow than it actually was.*

### Joseph Smith Jr., by Alvin Gittins, 1959

*Gittin’s portrait was the first to consciously use the death mask as an information source.*



ALVIN GITTINS, © 1959 IRI

### Joseph Smith, by L. Gahagan, 1850

*President John Taylor (1808–87) commissioned this sculpture. He and other men who had known the Prophet met with and advised Lucius Gahagan in England. Gahagan used sketches done from life (by Sutcliffe Maudsley) and the death masks to make portrait busts of both Joseph and Hyrum. Because it was created with input from Joseph Smith’s friends, this is a very significant sculpture.*



PHOTOGRAPH BY WEIDEN C. ANDERSEN, COURTESY OF CHURCH HISTORY MUSEUM

### Joseph Smith, by Mahonri Young, 1908

*This statue was created to stand in an alcove near the east doors of the Salt Lake Temple. It is now on Temple Square.*



# Temple Spotlight: London England Temple

The London England Temple was dedicated by President David O. McKay (1873–1970) in September 1958. The open house was extended three days longer than previously scheduled because of the overwhelming interest in the temple. In all, there were 76,324 visitors to the open house.

The London Temple was the second temple built in Europe, and it is one of two temples in the British Isles today. It sits on 32 acres of property selected by President David O. McKay. It is located in the county of Surrey, the same county where the Magna Carta was signed in 1215.

In 1990 the London England Temple closed for an extensive interior remodeling and was rededicated by President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) in October 1992. Fifty years after the temple was first dedicated, on December 15, 2008, the angel Moroni was added by helicopter to the 160-foot tall spire.

An excerpt from the rededicatory prayer by President Gordon B. Hinckley follows:



“Our beloved Father, wilt thou bless thy faithful people in this island nation and throughout the world. Smile upon them with favor and open the windows of heaven and shower down blessings upon them as they walk in faithfulness.”<sup>1</sup>

**NOTE**

1. Gordon B. Hinckley, in “London Temple: Temple ‘Made Even More Beautiful,’” *Church News*, Oct. 31, 1992, 4.



PINO DRAGO, COURTESY OF CHURCH HISTORY MUSEUM

**Monday, 24 June 1844, 4:15 a.m.: Beyond the Events, by Pino Drago, 1987**

*This portrait is a psychological artistic study of the Prophet’s decision to face charges in Carthage, Illinois, USA.*

**Joseph Smith, by Dee Jay Bawden, 1981**

*To create an accurate likeness, Bawden used Joseph Smith’s skeletal measurements along with the death mask. This statue is displayed outside Carthage Jail in Illinois, USA.*

**Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, 1840, by Theodore Gorka, 1980**

*Theodore Gorka’s conté crayon studies are an effort to represent the Prophet’s face with life and emotion that seem authentic.*



THEODORE GORKA, © 1996 IRI



PHOTOGRAPH OF MAHONRI YOUNG SCULPTURE BY CODY BELL



DEE JAY BAWDEN, COURTESY OF CHURCH HISTORY MUSEUM

# FEELING HIS LOVE THROUGH SERVICE

By Mishelle Wasden



It was two weeks before Christmas, and the familiar stress of the season was upon me. I had presents to buy, a tree to decorate, and gifts to deliver.

For several months I had felt overwhelmed by the daily tasks that face a mother of five young children. I had even felt mechanical in my Church attendance as I wrestled with my little ones on the bench. I longed for an increase of the Spirit and of spiritual experiences in my life.

About this time my sister purchased a new home in a neighboring state and was trying to get things settled before Christmas. That would be a lot of work for any family, but for hers it would be even more difficult. My sister was eight months pregnant, a mother of two small children, and the caregiver of her quadriplegic husband.

Realizing the struggle she faced, I called her to see how things were progressing. She was optimistic about the move and hopeful that members of her new ward would be supportive. After our conversation I hung up the phone, wishing her good luck and wondering how I could help

from 400 miles (650 km) away.

That evening the thought kept coming to my mind that I needed to be there to help. But as I looked at my schedule, I dismissed the thought and went to bed.

The next morning I awoke with the same prompting. The feeling was so strong this time that I could not deny it. I called my husband and said, “I need to go help my sister.” Without hesitation, he responded, “I’ve been thinking the same thing.”

I called my sister, told her my plans, and booked a flight for that afternoon. I quickly packed my suitcase, kissed my children good-bye, and headed to the airport.

Over the next three days I unpacked boxes, organized rooms, and helped decorate a Christmas tree. After most of the boxes were unpacked, I sat with my sister and her family, admiring their pretty tree. My five-year-old niece, pleased that her family was ready for Christmas, exclaimed, “This is going to be a great Christmas!”

As I flew home, I knew that by giving part of myself to this sweet family,

## ETERNALLY IMPORTANT SERVICE

“Perhaps the most familiar and most important examples of unselfish service and sacrifice are performed in our families. Mothers devote themselves to the bearing and nurturing of their children. Husbands give themselves to supporting their wives and children. The sacrifices involved in the eternally important service to our families are too numerous to mention and too familiar to need mention.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Sacrifice,” *Ensign*, May 2012, 22.

I had felt the Spirit, which I had been yearning to feel. It came because I had served others.

It is easy to talk about giving service at Christmastime, as long as giving that service fits into our schedules and doesn’t cost much or take us out of our comfort zone. But to really feel the true spirit of Christmas, we need to reach beyond ourselves. Doing so helps us comprehend the love our Savior has for each of us. ■



# Using *True to the Faith*

**T***True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* (item no. 36863) has been an invaluable resource for our family to learn the gospel together. For Christmas a few years ago, my husband and I gave a copy to each family member, from our oldest child to our youngest grandchild. We then used it as the basis for family home evenings with our extended family.

During the first lesson we introduced the book and got acquainted with it by playing a game we called “*True to the Faith*

Chase.” Since the book is arranged alphabetically by topic from *Aaronic Priesthood to Zion*, someone would call out a topic and family members would see how fast they could turn to that page. The winner would call out the next word.

On Easter we asked everyone to find something in *True to the Faith* about Jesus Christ to share, and at Thanksgiving the assignment was to find something each person was thankful for.



We have also played “Name that Topic.” In this game, someone reads a paragraph from the book, ending with, “*True to the Faith.*” Then family members try to guess the topic. If no one can figure it out, the person reads on until someone knows the answer. Whoever gives the first correct answer leads out next.

We have found many uses for *True to the Faith* and believe it can help nurture families in gospel learning. ■

Marilynne Linford, Utah, USA

ILLUSTRATION BY BETH WHITAKER

## HELPS FOR HOME EVENING

**“The Tradition of Light and Testimony,” page 28:** Summarize the article and consider inviting your family to create a visual aid in some way to demonstrate the purpose of scaffolding. Consider discussing together how the Church’s structure gives your family “scaffolding” to “reach higher” to build your family and other aspects of your life.

**“Prophets at Christmastime,” page 52:** After reading several stories from the lives of our latter-day prophets, consider sharing with your family experiences you have had in which your life or the lives of others were touched by service or a special experience during a past Christmas. You may want to discuss ways to follow the examples of our prophets during this season.

**“The Safety and Peace of Keeping the Commandments,” page 62:** Those with young children might want to have them draw pictures of people doing

righteous things along a road leading to a picture of a temple. Other families might consider reading the entire article and discussing it, emphasizing that “the pathway to happiness begins with righteousness through obedience to the commandments” (page 64).

by Laura E Wilson

### Prophets at Christmastime

**THE** lives of our 18 latter-day prophets exemplify the Christmas spirit, illustrating us of the invaluable events that took place in the winter of Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago. The birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, was an event so wondrous that it is celebrated every year—especially at Christmas.

He embodied attributes to collect toys and repaired toys: always to repair, paint, and clean old toys or make new ones, so no child would be without on Christmas. He decided that every family in the order should have a dinner for Christmas and did his best to ensure it was the best. “Come on an Apostle, Elder Lee was asked to organize the Church’s welfare program based on similar principles of service, justice, and work.”

As a boy, President Thomas S. Monson was celebrating Christmas when his friend asked a startling question, “What does making toys like?” He responded that it meant the children, but then he realized that his celebration friend had never seen either. Not only that, but there was nothing in his friend’s home with which to prepare a Christmas dinner if “parents’ schedules,” said President

Monson. “That on Monday, on Christmas, on Tuesday, they remembered I did have two pet rabbits. Immediately I took my friend by the hand and rushed to the rabbit hutch, placed the rabbits in a box, and looked for the toys with the command, ‘Here, take those two rabbits. They’re going to save just like children.’” “You come over to my house to check them out in the empty rabbit hutch. That’s not so bad. At least, a feeling of indescribable joy filled my heart. It was a memorable Christmas.”

**Drawing Together as a Family**  
One of the recent Christmas President Eric S. Lott lessons mentioned occurred in 1970, when he returned home on Christmas Eve to the family home in Whittier, Idaho. After a three-and-a-half-hour session in England, this joyful reunion with his parents and his brother and sisters was filled with enthusiasm and excitement for Christmas. As a special treat, his parents allowed him to stay up to watch with Christmas preparations after the other children were in bed. He worked alongside his parents, he quickly shared his excitement, and he couldn’t hold back the tears during this “Christmas evening” in his childhood home.

The prophet’s first experience as to show close to his family on Christmas. President Joseph F. Smith remembered one Christmas as a young father when he had never—yet even a parent—on the gift for his children. Just before Christmas he left his home and walked down the street, looking at all the wonderful things in the shop windows but knowing that he could buy only one gift. His heart was filled with a prayer: “Please send ‘my gift’ to allow for a gift to be sent to my children all day, joyful and happy only for them.” “I was amazed [and] as a Christmas present for which I thought his family to provide a warm Christmas Eve

for his children, he had remembered given them the greatest gift any father could—his love and his time.” The Prophet Joseph Smith spent the Christmas of 1838 imprisoned in Liberty Jail in Missouri. He and several companions were held in a small basement dungeon that was cold, dark, and smoky from the open fire they were burned in. The ceiling was so low that candles could not be lit. There was a night room for Christmas morning. The Prophet with Bruce, was able to visit Joseph shortly before Christmas for several days. “What more, she had brought her own, Joseph Smith Jr. Finding the love of his family, Joseph wrote words of encouragement to the sisters from the dungeon. “We glory in our afflictions, because we know the God as well as.”

In 1977 President Joseph Smith was suffering from a heart ailment and was unable to visit home. He had recently died. Elder Lott called upon Bruce Evans, an eight-year-old boy, to help him. Bruce Evans was a young man with beautiful singing voice, perfect as he heard. Through the evening, Bruce Evans and Joseph Smith sang Christmas songs, and the most precious thing that happened was the acceptance of the prophet’s love. The prophet’s love, the acceptance of the prophet’s love, the acceptance of the prophet’s love. “I was amazed [and] as a Christmas present for which I thought his family to provide a warm Christmas Eve

# News of the Church

Visit [news.lds.org](http://news.lds.org) for more Church news and events.

## Members Invited to Share the Gospel through Magazine Subscriptions

By Heather Whittle Wrigley

Church News and Events

As the Church's Materials Management supervisor for Thailand, Kanogwan Wongwiraphab regularly handles requests from members for Church equipment and supplies such as sacred clothing and LDS publications.

But she was surprised one day when a woman visited her office to renew her Church magazines subscription. In that part of the world, members normally renew their subscriptions through their unit's magazine representative. The woman, however, explained she did not have a ward representative. She was Buddhist and had learned about the Church magazines when a friend who was a member of the Church gifted a subscription to her.

"She started to tell me wonderful things about the Church magazines and how valuable they are to her children," Sister Wongwiraphab wrote. "When her children came back from school and saw the magazines, they were so excited, and they read and finished them quickly."

The woman praised the magazines for their "great worth" and for teaching her children good morals and

vocabulary. She was so impressed she renewed her own subscription and gifted subscriptions to her coworkers so their children could also benefit.

"Even nonmembers can feel and see the value [of the magazines], and [they] want to share it with others," Sister Wongwiraphab wrote.

Church leaders have consistently encouraged members of the Church to read the Church magazines and share them with others.

Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has highlighted the far-reaching benefits of

Help is also available by contacting local magazines representatives, e-mailing [help@store.lds.org](mailto:help@store.lds.org), or calling a country customer service representative. A list of telephone numbers for these representatives by country is available on [store.lds.org](http://store.lds.org). Click on **Contact Us** under **Customer Support** at the bottom of the page, then on the **by telephone** link under **Contact Us**.

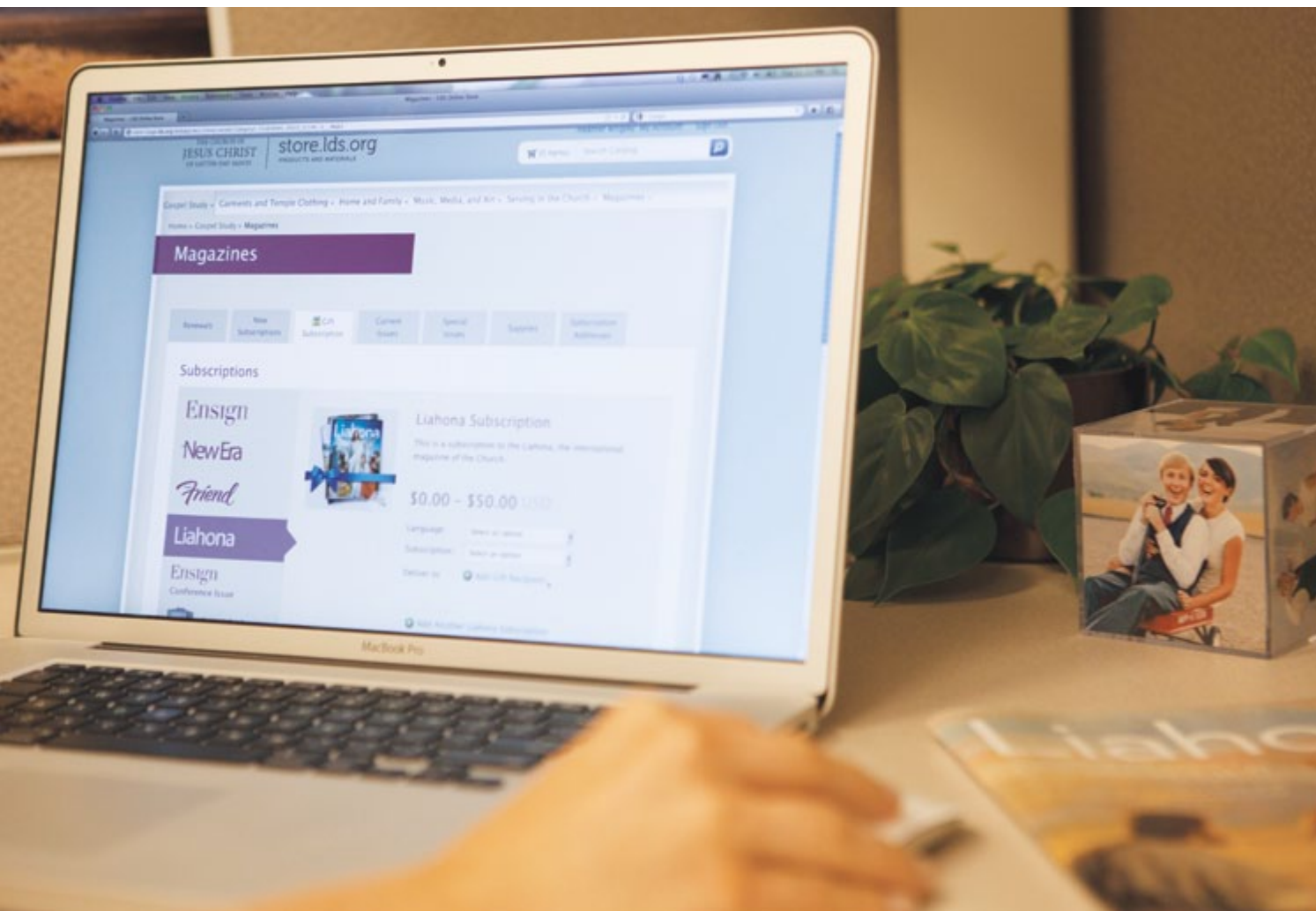
the magazines. "The good spirit in these magazines will help fill your homes with warmth, love, and the strength of the gospel," he said ("The Importance of the Family," *Liahona*, May 2003, 42).

Elder Craig A. Cardon of the Seventy serves as Assistant Executive Director in the Priesthood Department and Editor of the Church magazines, and he sees the value they hold for every individual.

"Church magazines are an important segment of the authoritative voice of the Church through which prophetic counsel from the Lord is made available to all of our Father's children of all ages on matters pertinent in today's world," he said. "Each month, interesting and engaging articles address circumstances common to all people throughout the earth, whether in or out of the Church. All earnest seekers of truth are greatly benefited by the inspired teachings and guidance found therein."

If every subscriber of the Church magazines were to send a gift subscription to a nonmember friend or relative, nearly 1.7 million new subscribers would be brought into a friendly, monthly contact with the Church.

Through the Church's Online Store—[store.lds.org](http://store.lds.org)—individuals can quickly and easily subscribe to one or more of the magazines or gift a



**Members are encouraged to share the gospel with nonmember friends and family of all ages, religions, and backgrounds through gift subscriptions to the Church magazines.**

subscription of the magazines to a family member or friend. The *Friend*, the *New Era*, and the *Ensign* are available in English only, while the *Liahona*, which contains articles concurrently printed in the three English-only magazines, is available in dozens of languages.

One bishop in Arizona's Peoria Stake has found gifting a yearlong subscription of the *Friend* to children in his ward to be an effective way to help surround them with the words of living prophets and apostles.

Penélope B. Woodward of Texas, USA, sent a gift subscription of the *Liahona* to her cousin, as well as to a friend and teacher in another country.

"I hope that it will help [my cousin] learn the importance of making and keeping covenants," she wrote. She continued, saying that the gift subscription is a way of "preparing the ground for [my friend] to one day hear and accept the restored gospel."

To order or gift a subscription, go to [store.lds.org](http://store.lds.org). Magazine ordering information is on the left side

of the page. The online ordering process walks individuals through renewals, new subscriptions, and gift subscriptions.

[Store.lds.org](http://Store.lds.org) is available in Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. Those who don't speak those languages or who don't have Internet access can order or gift magazines by contacting or visiting Church distribution centers, which are located in many countries. ■

# Leadership Training Library Videos Help Members in New Callings

By **Melissa Merrill**

Church News and Events

**M**ore than a year after its launch in September 2011, [Leadershiplibrary.lds.org](http://Leadershiplibrary.lds.org) continues to be a valuable resource for members—containing approximately 100 videos in 11 languages offering help concerning Church callings related to bishoprics, high priests, elders, Aaronic Priesthood, Relief Society, Young Women, Primary, Sunday School, mission leaders, and young single adults.

For years Church leaders have noticed a need for video-based training.

The videos were created to correspond with the sections of *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, which was introduced in November 2010, and include

unscripted footage of real wards and branches in a variety of countries, including Guatemala, Korea, and England.

“Members throughout the Church—in more ‘established’ areas as well as areas where the Church is newer—can benefit from the training and explanation these videos offer,” said Ray Robinson, a director in the Church’s Priesthood Department. “As we see real-life examples of leaders serving, we can learn how to serve in our own homes and in the Church.”

Regardless of where they were filmed, the videos provide an opportunity for members of the Church in any location to learn from each other.

“I cannot teach what these clips teach,” one Primary president in

Nicaragua wrote. “I cannot paint a picture of how successful Primary can be. To me, these are of great value.”

During the February 2011 Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “The purpose of [the Leadership Training Library] is to help local leaders learn, teach, and apply principles and policies from the handbook.”

One of the features of the Leadership Training Library is that topics of special interest to the Brethren are added regularly. Also, new material is added to the library quarterly, as Area Presidencies identify additional training needs.

In South America, one leader has found the Leadership Training Library an up-to-date resource to be utilized in area council training meetings.

“Priesthood and auxiliary training is a challenge for two reasons: restrictions on . . . travel, and the volume of information in the handbook and manuals,” he wrote. “This marvelous resource enables us to resolve both of those problems.”

The Leadership Training Library is not intended to be an exhaustive training resource, but a site to help members get started. Members should still study *Handbook 2* and the scriptures, counsel as presidencies and with priesthood leaders, and perhaps confer with other members who have served in the calling in the past and who may be familiar with particular situations that exist in their community. ■

*Leaders around the world are finding valuable help for themselves and for members in new callings in the online Leadership Training Library.*



**Leadership Training Library**

# Church Leaders Visit Heads of State, Members in Croatia and Bosnia

By **Gerry Avant**

*Church News editor*

In September, Elder Ronald A. Rasband of the Presidency of the Seventy and Elder Kent F. Richards, Second Counselor in the Europe Area Presidency, met with heads of state in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In Zagreb, Croatia, Elder Rasband and Elder Richards met with the country's president, Ivo Josipovic, and thanked him for the government's support of religious freedom, which the Church has enjoyed over the past 40 years. Elder Rasband pledged the Church's ongoing commitment to strengthen the family, to offer humanitarian service, to encourage education and self-improvement, and to foster high moral standards—centered in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

President Josipovic spoke of his government's commitment to religious freedom and its desire to promote tolerance among all faiths and peoples. This year marks the 40th anniversary since the late Brigham Young University basketball legend Krešimir Cosic introduced the Church to his home country of Croatia.

President Josipovic also

expressed his appreciation for the humanitarian aid the Church has provided his country, including the aid sent to address the devastation of the Balkan war in the 1990s.

Following this meeting, Elder Rasband and Elder Richards, accompanied by their wives, met with more than 160 members in a special devotional and then conducted a training meeting with missionaries serving in Croatia and Slovenia.

Traveling from Croatia, Elder Rasband arrived in Bosnia, where he presided at a meeting for new members of the Church and delivered messages about faith, the reality of the Restoration of the gospel, the sanctity of the family, and the worldwide scope of the Church.

This was the first meeting in Bosnia presided over by a General Authority since the Church was officially recognized there; that recognition occurred earlier this year. Now the Church has official status, Church units, and proselytizing missionaries in all of the countries in the former Yugoslavia—and in all of Europe.

The next morning, on September 12, Elder Rasband met with missionaries from Bosnia, Serbia, and the eastern part of Croatia, before meeting with Željko Komšić, one of the three-person presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This was the first time Church leaders had met with a head of state from Bosnia.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF CHURCH NEWS

**Elder Ronald A. Rasband, right, presents a gift to Željko Komšić, a member of the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina.**

President Komšić described the diverse religious community that exists in Bosnia and welcomed the Church as a member of that community. He described the challenges families face in today's society and his concern for the success and well-being of families in his country.

Elder Rasband explained that the family is a high priority in the Church and that its members look forward to supporting this shared objective and contributing in other positive ways to Bosnia's society. ■



PHOTOGRAPH BY TJ THOMAS

***While participating in Mormon Helping Hands projects across Africa, members of the Church rendered valuable service, built interfaith relationships, raised awareness of the Church, and built their testimonies of charity.***

**Sixth Annual Day of Service across Africa**

Saturday, August 18, 2012, saw thousands of Saints in more than half a dozen African countries gather in their communities to participate in the sixth annual All-Africa Mormon Helping Hands Day.

“The wards and branches generally went all out to render significant service,” public affairs missionary Elder C. Terry Warner wrote in an email. “They recruited partners; they chose projects that, though difficult, really mattered. They came out in large numbers anxious to help, and they truly made friends for the Church.”

Elder Adesina J. Olukanni, director of public affairs for the Africa West Area, said of the day of service, “It is the easiest way by which we can respond to the prophet’s call to be kind to our neighbors, to respond to their need, to give rather than to receive. It is the easiest way to preach the gospel—by example.”

**Access to Classic.LDS.org Going Away**

By the end of 2012, the stake and ward websites on classic.lds.org will be gone. Wards and stakes are strongly encouraged to begin using the new stake and ward tools on LDS.org, which include membership directory, calendar highlights, lesson schedule highlights, newsletter highlights, and LDS Maps highlights.

The new tools are simpler, allow for greater functionality, work together better, are more secure, and can be personalized. To access the new tools, go the top of the LDS.org website and click on the Sign In/Tools menu. Enter your name and password.

More information about migrating to the new tools can be found at [tech.lds.org/blog/528-migration](http://tech.lds.org/blog/528-migration).

**Members Rejoice at Tijuana Mexico Temple Groundbreaking**

On August 18, 2012, some 2,000 Latter-day Saints gathered in east

Tijuana, Mexico, to participate in the dedication of the site of a new temple.

“We’ve seen in other . . . cities where a temple has been built that there is a newfound peace in the city itself,” said Elder Benjamín De Hoyos, First Counselor in the Mexico Area Presidency. “We feel certain much the same thing will happen here.”

**Church Breaks Ground for Indiana’s First Temple**

Church and community leaders broke ground on Saturday, September 29, 2012, for the Indianapolis Indiana Temple, announced in 2010.

Elder Donald L. Hallstrom of the Presidency of the Seventy, who conducted the ceremony, explained, “The holy temple helps us to know, in our lives, what to embrace and what to discard.” He challenged Church members to develop traditions of righteousness.



# In Other Church Magazines

## THE NEW ERA

### Focus on the Family

The December *New Era* has a special section on the family. “Focusing on a Forever Family” (page 28) shares the experience of two youth in El Salvador who helped their parents return to Church activity. Youth who come from difficult family situations will find ideas in “Overcoming Family Challenges” (page 38).



### The Spirit of Christmas

Keep Christ at the center of the holiday season with articles such as “Now There Is Hope” (page 7), “Gifts That Can’t Be Wrapped” (page 42), and “How to Give Gifts to Christ,” by President Henry B. Eyring (page 48).

### International Art Competition for Youth

See top entries from this year’s International Art Competition for Youth. This artwork, designed for the 2012 Mutual theme, is a great way to wrap up the year and help youth “arise and shine forth” (see page 24).

## COMMENT

### Other Ways to Be a Mom

I am grateful for the article “My Search for Motherhood” in the April 2012 *Ensign*. It not only spoke about healing from the pains of childlessness but also suggested seeking opportunities to become a mother by serving others.

Jennifer Sisson  
Nebraska, USA

### CORRECTION

The January 2012 First Presidency Message, “Living the Abundant Life,” failed to attribute a quotation to Mary Anne Radmacher. The quotation is found on page 5 of the *Liahona* and *Ensign*. Ms. Radmacher’s original quotation reads, “Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, ‘I will try again tomorrow.’” It appears in, among other publications by Ms. Radmacher, *Courage Doesn’t Always Roar* (2009). We apologize for the oversight.

## THE FRIEND

The December *Friend* includes a Christmas activity to help children celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ (pages 24–25). The activity encourages children to think about gifts the Savior has given them and gifts they can give to the Savior.



Make some Christmas memories with your children by cooking one of the cultural Christmas dishes found on page 18.

By Elder  
**Quentin L. Cook**

Of the Quorum of  
 the Twelve Apostles



## SUNBEAMS, PUBLIC AFFAIRS, AND GOSPEL JOY

A few years ago, when Elder M. Russell Ballard and I were the General Authority advisers to the Church Public Affairs Department, we realized that media outlets often contacted people who weren't members of the Church to find out about the Church. Desiring a change, Elder Ballard and I, under the direction of the First Presidency, began visiting the editorial boards of major newspapers, sharing the message that, as Latter-day Saints, we are politically neutral. We don't take a position in terms of candidates or parties. We do, however, want to be the ones who define our own faith. "We want you," we told them, "to come and talk to us if you're going to discuss what we believe."

Those visits were well received, and we found that our request resonated. And we're now finding a much better understanding of Latter-day Saints among the media. Some old stereotypes have been broken down, and we see other people recognizing us as people of character who try to approach life from an educated and informed point of view. We've also noticed a realization outside the Church that Latter-day Saints aren't all the same; our people are very different from one another in good and interesting ways.

With these shifting attitudes, it's a wonderful time to be a member of the Church and for members to speak up and answer questions from their friends and neighbors about our beliefs. As we do so, there is nothing more

*What do  
 Sunbeams  
 have to do with  
 public affairs?  
 A lot when they  
 represent the joy  
 of the gospel.*

significant than that we feel joy and that we rejoice in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We know what the ultimate outcome is, we know who Jesus Christ is, and we have the opportunity of having a loving Father in Heaven bless us.

I find it interesting that our best member missionaries, those who take the opportunity of sharing the gospel, are often people who are joyful. When I was the Executive Director of the Missionary Department, we suddenly noticed some baptisms in France. Thrilled, we wondered about the reasons, and there were several. But one of the main reasons was a sister who went to work on Monday morning and talked about Sunbeams. After the Sabbath, she would—with great joy and delight—tell her co-workers about her experience teaching young children the day before. Before long, her associates could hardly wait for her to talk about the Sunbeams. And what did that do? Here was a group of people living with the same concerns we all have about our world and the future, and all of a sudden, there was a person who was not only joyful but joyful about children—who represent the future. This sister clearly loved the Savior, and that love radiated. Her co-workers wanted to know more.

If we rejoice in what we have, if we feel joy and express it, we are happier. We do what the Lord wants us to do, we become better people, and by association, those around us—our children and friends and neighbors—are happier. Joy is the key. As we share the joy of the gospel, we accomplish what the Lord wants us to accomplish. ■

*Adapted from a Mormon Channel interview. To listen to the entire interview in English, go to [mormonchannel.org/conversations/27](http://mormonchannel.org/conversations/27).*



*Seeking the One,*  
by Liz Lemon Swindle

*“And he spake this parable  
unto them, saying,*

*“What man of you, having an  
hundred sheep, if he lose one of  
them, doth not leave the ninety  
and nine in the wilderness, and  
go after that which is lost, until he  
find it?”*

*“And when he hath found  
it, he layeth it on his shoulders,  
rejoicing.*

*“And when he cometh home,  
he calleth together his friends and  
neighbours, saying unto them,  
Rejoice with me; for I have found  
my sheep which was lost.*

*“I say unto you, that likewise  
joy shall be in heaven over one  
sinner that repenteth, more than  
over ninety and nine just persons,  
which need no repentance”  
(Luke 15:3–7).*



*Like the lights that adorn some temple grounds at Christmastime, inviting visitors to enjoy the peace and joy found there, Jesus Christ shines as the Light of the World, inviting all to receive the peace and joy He offers through gospel ordinances, particularly those received in His holy house. Among the greatest joys anyone can experience is knowing that, through the sealing ordinances of the temple, a marriage can endure beyond death and family ties can last forever. See “Lights and Marvels,” page 16; “The Tradition of Light and Testimony,” page 28; and “Sacred Transformations,” page 36.*





# Ensign

*GET READY. . .*

## New Sunday Lessons for Youth Are Here!

Beginning in January, teaching and learning in Aaronic Priesthood quorums, Young Women classes, and youth Sunday School classes will be transformed.



## *Comments from Those Who Have Been Using the New Learning Resources for Youth*

Over the past year, stakes throughout the world have been testing a new approach to Sunday learning. And those who have used it say it has made a big difference. Here's what they're saying:

### **From Youth**

*"What I love most is the learning—it doesn't stop at just Sunday School. You . . . carry on throughout the week. And your teacher gives you assignments, and you need to come prepared for the next Sunday."*

*"Once you get going in the right direction, it's so easy to get people into these lessons because it's just all the rest of the quorum members who really are teaching."*

*"At the end of every class, . . . whoever has been teaching the lesson . . . will give us a challenge. . . . So throughout the week we'll have that challenge to become better."*

### **From Teachers and Leaders**

*"As [the youth] speak, their testimonies grow and their understanding of that doctrine becomes part of them."*

*"We discuss the challenges that the girls were given from the previous week. And typically, the experiences that they've had that week in trying to obey and learn the doctrine . . . brings the Spirit quicker than anything else we could do."*

*"We've given the young men opportunities to do this, and they've succeeded. They've been able to be facilitators of gospel discussions."*

*"Teaching in the Savior's way requires effort every day. It takes constant practice. The key is love."*

**Questions? See the inside back page of this special cover and [lds.org/youth/learn](http://lds.org/youth/learn).**



## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### Why the change?

This new approach to learning will help youth be better prepared to talk about the gospel with their friends, prepare for missionary and family service now and in the future, and deepen their testimonies of the gospel. This will happen as they actively participate in searching the scriptures, share their thoughts, and accept invitations to apply what they're learning outside of class. In class they will study the current teachings of living prophets.

### What classes will use the new lessons?

Aaronic Priesthood quorums, Young Women classes, and Sunday School classes for youth ages 12 to 18 will use the curriculum in Sunday instruction. Each month, the quorums, the Young Women classes, and the Sunday School classes will focus on learning the same doctrine, such as the Godhead, and strengthening one another in living and teaching it.

### How do teachers know what to teach?

The curriculum is organized into 12 monthly units. Each unit includes several learning outlines to choose from. Each unit contains more than four outlines so teachers can select outlines based on the needs of the youth. More than one week can be spent on an outline.

### What is in the learning outlines?

Each outline focuses on questions youth may have and doctrines that can help resolve those questions. The outlines do not prescribe what or how to teach. Instead, they help teachers first learn the doctrine themselves and then provide learning experiences for the youth. Teachers can tailor the learning experiences to their students' needs. Each outline contains references and links, which will be updated regularly, to Church leaders' recent teachings.

The outlines often suggest using videos. Most of the videos suggested are available for download and presentation on a portable electronic device. If a video is not downloadable, it can be shown over the Internet using the meetinghouse's wireless Internet connection, if available.

### Where do teachers find the new youth lessons?

Learning outlines (with separate ones for Aaronic Priesthood, Young Women, and Sunday School) are found online at [lds.org/youth/learn](http://lds.org/youth/learn).

### What other resources would be useful?

In addition to the scriptures and words of the living prophets, the following resources are referred to frequently in the learning outlines:

- *Fulfilling My Duty to God: For Aaronic Priesthood Holders*
- *Young Women Personal Progress*
- *True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference*
- *For the Strength of Youth*
- *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service*
- *Teaching, No Greater Call: A Resource Guide for Gospel Teaching*

### Will this new Sunday instruction affect Mutual?

Class and quorum presidencies are encouraged to consider the monthly themes while planning Mutual activities. Activity ideas from the learning outlines can be used as a starting place in that planning.

To view the outlines, go to [lds.org/youth/learn](http://lds.org/youth/learn).



## Coming in January—Come, Follow Me: Learning Resources for Youth

### HOW WE LEARN TOGETHER IN THE LORD'S WAY

#### Youth

Learning in the Lord's way includes coming to class prepared to learn, searching the scriptures and words of the prophets, explaining gospel truths to others, and sharing how living the gospel is influencing your life.

#### Teachers

As you take a personal interest in the lives of your students, you will understand their needs, create relationships, and tailor learning experiences that will enable their personal conversion. The new curriculum will help you understand the doctrine and give you ideas to engage the youth in learning. Teaching this way is not a lecture but a conversation guided by the Spirit.

#### Parents

Taking a personal interest in what your children are learning will help you help them become responsible for their own learning. Your children will be invited to teach your family what they are learning. As you give them opportunities to do so, their testimonies and ability to share the gospel will grow.

#### Adult Leaders of Youth

You are responsible for how this curriculum is implemented in your ward or branch. As you provide ongoing training and set an example of teaching in the Lord's way, your teachers will adopt this type of teaching. Focus on the needs of the youth and find ways to help the youth, parents, leaders, and teachers discuss these needs. This new curriculum will help facilitate the conversion of the youth in your ward or branch.

For more information, see *Teaching the Gospel in the Savior's Way* and [lds.org/youth/learn](http://lds.org/youth/learn).



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