

Ensign

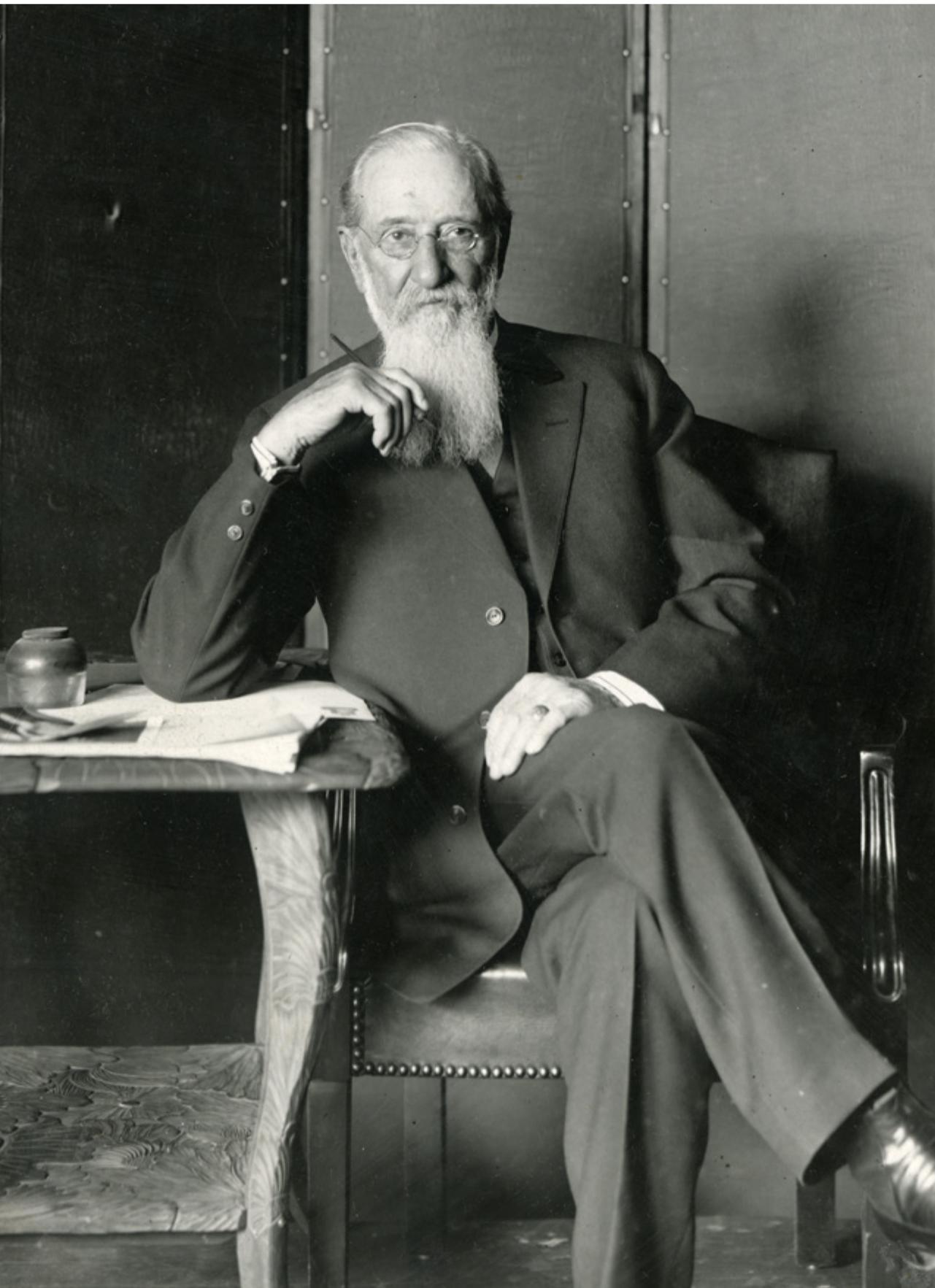


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Joseph F. Smith, who served as President of the Church from 1901 to 1918, is shown here a year before he passed away at age 80. His father, Hyrum Smith, was martyred with Joseph Smith in 1844. At age 27, Joseph F. Smith was ordained an Apostle in 1866 by President Brigham Young, and he served as a counselor to four Presidents of the Church. Having served as a General Authority for 52 years, his numerous teachings were published under the title Gospel Doctrine. He also received the revelation now recorded in Doctrine and Covenants section 138.

Photograph courtesy of Church History Library

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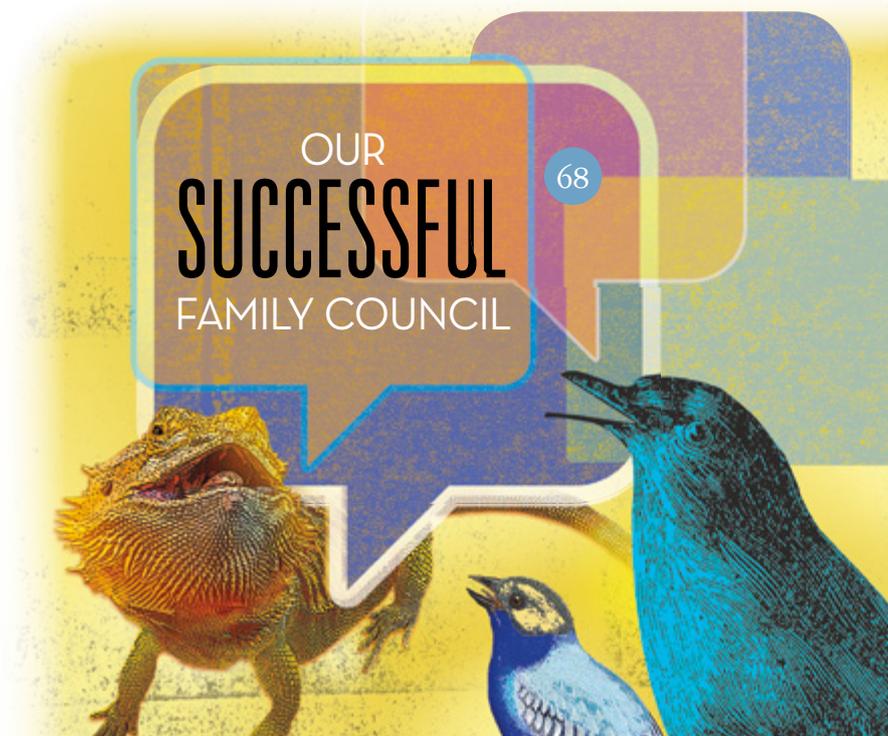
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Ensign

A MAGAZINE OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
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Invitation to Artists Worldwide

"I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings" (Psalm 77:11-12).



You are invited to create new works of art for the 11th International Art Competition, sponsored by the Church History Museum in Salt Lake City, Utah.

- Theme: "Meditations on Belief," inspired by Psalm 77:11-12. All artistic media, styles, and cultural approaches are welcome.
- Submission dates: February 1 to June 1, 2018.
- Ages: Participants must be age 18 or older.
- Awards: Chosen by a jury, awards will be announced in October 2018. Selected entries will be displayed at the Church History Museum and online.

Visit lds.org/artcompetition for detailed rules, eligibility requirements, and online registration.

FINDING YOUR PLACE

Read about taking responsibility for your own faith in part 2 of the series "We Can Do Better" (page 30). Learn what you can do yourself to feel like you belong at church: lds.org/go/belongE1217.

HE WANTS TO PROTECT US

Learn about seven principles from the Doctrine and Covenants that can help us find refuge from life's storms (page 48). Read a summary and find related resources at lds.org/go/refugeE1217.

CHRISTMAS TRIBUTE TO THE SAVIOR

Elder Rasband asks members to remember Christ by serving others at Christmastime (see page 24). Read article highlights and learn how to "Light the World" at lds.org/go/lightE1217.

Find these articles and other digital-exclusive content at ensign.lds.org or in the Gospel Library app in the *Liahona* under "2017 Digital Articles."



**By President
Dieter F. Uchtdorf**
Second Counselor in
the First Presidency

SEEKING CHRIST AT CHRISTMAS

To all who wish to understand who we are as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I would like to offer a starting point defined by these three words: We seek Christ.

We seek to learn of Him. To follow Him. To become more like Him.

Every day throughout the year, we seek Him. But especially at this time of the year—Christmas, when we celebrate the birth of our beloved Savior—our hearts are ever more inclined to Him.

As part of our preparations for celebrating Christmas, let us consider how those who lived two millennia ago were ready to welcome the arrival of the Savior.

The Shepherds

We don't know much about the shepherds, only that they were "abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night."¹ The shepherds were more than likely quite ordinary people, like many commendable souls who go about their days earning a living.

They could represent people who, at one time, may not have been actively seeking the Christ, but their hearts changed when the heavens opened and Christ was proclaimed to them.

These are they who, after hearing the voice of heavenly messengers, immediately went to Bethlehem wanting to see.²

The Wise Men

The Wise Men were academics who had been studying the advent of the Messiah, the Son of God. Through their learning, they identified the signs that pointed to His birth. When they identified them, they left their homes and traveled to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"³

Their knowledge of the Christ did not remain solely academic. Once they saw the signs of His birth, they acted. They set out to find the Christ.

The Wise Men could represent those who seek the Christ through learning and academic study. Their devotion to truth eventually leads them to find the Christ and worship Him as the King of kings, the Savior of mankind.⁴

Simeon and Anna

Simeon and Anna could represent those who seek Christ through the Spirit. These marvelous souls were devoutly religious and, through fasting and prayer and by leading lives of devotion and obedience, waited eagerly to see the day of the coming of the Son of God.

Through fidelity, humility, and faith, they patiently watched for the coming of the Savior.

Eventually, their faithfulness was rewarded as Mary and Joseph presented to them the baby who would one day take upon Himself the sins of mankind.⁵

Believers among the Nephites and Lamanites

The touching story of how believers in the New World watched for the signs of the birth of the Savior is found in the Book of Mormon.

You remember that those who had faith in Christ were ridiculed and persecuted. The sophisticates of that day accused believers of hanging on to foolish superstitions. In fact, the nonbelievers were so vocal in their ridicule that they made “a great uproar” in the land (3 Nephi 1:7). They scoffed at those who believed that the Savior would be born.

Their anger and rage grew so great that they became obsessed with silencing once and for all those who believed in the Savior. The Book of Mormon records the dramatic resolution.⁶

The believers who lived at this time could represent those who seek the Christ even when others laugh, mock, and taunt. They seek Christ even when



TEACHING FROM THIS MESSAGE

How can we better seek Christ, as President Uchtdorf suggests? You might encourage those you teach to ask themselves, “How am I seeking Christ?” Consider inviting them to start sharing how they are each seeking Christ during their daily family scripture study time. You could also watch the [Mormon.org](https://www.mormon.org) Christmas video with those you teach and invite them to participate in this yearly opportunity to seek Christ by following His teachings.

others attempt to caricature them as unrefined, unsophisticated, or gullible.

But the contempt of others does not discourage true believers from seeking Christ.

We Seek Christ

Throughout the year, and perhaps especially at this Christmas season, it would benefit us to once again ask the question “How am I seeking Christ?”

During a difficult period of his life, the great King David wrote, “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee.”⁷

Perhaps this attitude of seeking God was one of the reasons David was described as a man after God’s own heart.⁸



During this Christmas season and throughout the entire year, may we seek with our hearts and souls our beloved Savior, the Prince of Peace, the Holy One of Israel. For this desire, in large part, defines not only who we are as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints but even more who we really are as Christ’s disciples. ■

NOTES

1. Luke 2:8.
2. See Luke 2:15.
3. See Matthew 2:1–2.
4. See Matthew 2:11.
5. See Luke 2:22–38.
6. See 3 Nephi 1.
7. Psalm 63:1.
8. See Acts 13:22.

CHILDREN

Watching for Jesus

Many people watched and waited for Jesus to be born. Now we watch and wait for Him to come again! We can be ready by learning about Jesus and following Him. How do you follow Jesus? Write your ideas on the stars.



Willing to Bear One Another's Burdens

Prayerfully study this material and seek for inspiration to know what to share. How will understanding the purpose of Relief Society prepare daughters of God for the blessings of eternal life?

“We are surrounded by those in need of our attention, our encouragement, our support, our comfort, our kindness,” said President Thomas S. Monson.

“We are the Lord’s hands here upon the earth, with the mandate to serve and to lift His children. He is dependent upon each of us.”¹

President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, said: “A great change began in your heart when you came into the Church. You made a covenant, and you received a promise that began changing your very nature. . . .

“ . . . You promised that you would help the Lord make [others’] burdens light and be comforted. You were given the power to help lighten those loads when you received the gift of the Holy Ghost.”²

“We want to use the light of the gospel to see others as the



Faith
Family
Relief

Savior does—with compassion, hope, and charity,” said Jean B. Bingham, Relief Society General President. “The day will come when we will have a complete understanding of others’ hearts and will be grateful to have mercy extended to us—just as we extend charitable thoughts and words to others. . . .

“Our obligation and privilege is to embrace improvement in *everyone* as we strive to become more like our Savior.”³

As we bear one another’s burdens and keep our covenants, we open the way for Jesus Christ to heal others. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: “Considering the incomprehensible cost of the

Crucifixion and Atonement, I promise you He is not going to turn His back on us now. When He says to the poor in spirit, ‘Come unto me,’ He means He knows the way out and He knows the way up. He knows it because He has walked it. He knows the way because He *is* the way.”⁴

Additional Scriptures and Information

Matthew 25:40; Galatians 6:2; Mosiah 2:17; 18:8–9
reliefsociety.lds.org

NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “Serve the Lord with Love,” *Ensign*, Feb. 2014, 4.
2. Henry B. Eyring, “The Comforter,” *Ensign*, May 2015, 18.
3. Jean B. Bingham, “I Will Bring the Light of the Gospel into My Home,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2016, 6, 8.
4. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Broken Things to Mend,” *Ensign*, May 2006, 71.



Consider This

How does helping bear the burdens of others and keeping our covenants open the way for Jesus Christ to heal those in need?

How could we help our children become more active gospel learners?

By Doug Hart

Some time ago, my wife and I became concerned about a pattern of behavior developing in some of our teenage children during family scripture study, family home evenings, and even our impromptu, one-on-one gospel-centered conversations. They were meeting a minimum learning standard—a physical presence, occasional eye-contact, and one-word answers—but they were not engaging in active learning.

We knew that in order for them to gain strong testimonies and to experience deep, personal conversion by the power of the Holy Ghost, they needed to do more. The Savior wants

Elevating

His disciples to not just hear His words—He wants them to act on His teachings with faith (see *Teaching in the Savior's Way* [2016], 30).

One night we talked with them about our feelings. Our intent was to counsel with them in a Spirit-guided discussion. Our discussion, however, quickly deteriorated into a one-way lecture. Our boys heard our message, but their minds and hearts remained unaffected.

That experience troubled us, so my wife and I began to ponder how we could help our children become more proactive in their gospel learning, inspiring them to act instead of being acted upon by our speeches and lectures. Our questions led us to develop a plan based on what we learned from searching the scriptures,

Our Family

the words of latter-day prophets, and other Church resources related to teaching and learning. Our plan reads:

Leading Our Children to Seek the Holy Ghost in Family Discussions

Cultivate love and respect. Love softens hearts. Expressions of love will help prepare our children for the influence of the Holy Ghost. It will also nurture their desire and willingness to engage in active, spiritual learning. Respecting our children by listening to and validating their perspective and feelings will help them feel safer and more willing to share what they are feeling.

Teach by the Spirit. Carefully observing and listening to our children will prepare us to discern by the Spirit what to say next, what question to ask, or what invitation to extend that will

Discussions

lead them to seek the Holy Ghost's influence in their learning.

Anchor every discussion in the word of God. While sharing our own thoughts and opinions about the gospel together can be helpful, the scriptures and the words of latter-day prophets will often provide a deeper, more powerful connection to the Spirit (see D&C 84:45).

Make the Savior the basis of all gospel-centered discussions. Substance and power will come to our discussions as our children see how what we are discussing relates to the Savior and His Atonement, “the very root of Christian doctrine” (Boyd K. Packer, “The Mediator,” *Ensign*, May 1977, 56).

Ask inspiring questions. Effective questions will lead our children to draw truth and understanding directly

from the scriptures and words of the prophets with the Spirit's help. What they learn in that way will mean more to them than our clearest explanations of the very same material.

Encourage family members to do the talking. When our children use their own words to express what they are seeing, thinking, or feeling, they invite the Holy Ghost to help them know what to say and how to say it. That process will help them see and understand more clearly what the Lord wants them to learn and feel.

Be patient! The Holy Ghost will work with our children as they search their minds and hearts for truth and understanding. We need to resist the temptation to cut their search short by prematurely jumping in with personal opinions and self-conceived solutions.

Lead by example. Striving to learn and live the gospel in the same way we ask of our children will help us qualify for the support and guidance of the Spirit in our discussions.

As we've tried to implement our plan, we are learning that inviting the influence of the Holy Ghost into our family discussions will take practice and time. But we refuse to get discouraged or give up. Just the other night, our 10-year-old daughter, prompted by a verse from the Book of Mormon we were reading as a family, asked in sweet sincerity, “How do you learn by the Holy Ghost?” I smiled. I knew we were getting somewhere! ■

The author is currently serving as the mission president of the Brazil Curitiba Mission.

The new teaching guidebook *Teaching in the Savior's Way* includes suggestions for teaching teens and younger children. See teaching.lds.org.



Mongolia's Got Talent!

By Po Nien (Felipe) Chou, Petra Chou,
and Odgerel Ochirjav

Last December a choir from the Ulaanbaatar Mongolia East and West Stakes reached the semi-finals of the nationally televised show *Mongolia's Got Talent*. The choir—composed of seminary and institute students, half of whom are returned missionaries—never thought they would have this kind of opportunity to share their beliefs and talents.

In 2015 an Area Seventy visited Mongolia and provided training concerning the public affairs efforts of the Church. Odgerel Ochirjav, president of the Ulaanbaatar Mongolia West Stake, was unsure how to proceed. Then in January 2016 his brother-in-law called and said, “I was watching *Mongolia's Got Talent*. . . . I had a strong impression that your Church choir should participate.”

President Ochirjav discussed the idea with the choir director, Sister Unurjargal Purev. She and the choir members were enthusiastic about the possibility. The choir became known as Zion, or “SION,” an acronym in

Mongolian for *spirit, faith, mind,* and *unity*.

The First Round

For the first round of the competition in March 2016, SION performed a mash-up of two songs. One judge said, “I see your faces light up! . . . We need to put your video on YouTube to showcase this show to the world.”

Another judge asked the choir what they would do if they won the grand prize of U.S. \$50,000. He was impressed when they said they wanted to donate it all, as a special Christmas gift, to an orphanage.

The Second Round

Of the 400 participants, SION was among the 200 who advanced to the second round, but their performance was scheduled for the same day as a multi-stake youth conference, which involved half of the 35 choir members. The choir decided to go to the second round, so they hired a bus and, following their performance, traveled eight hours to the youth conference.

Of the 200 acts, SION was among the 32 to advance to

Relatively few
Mongolians know
about the Church,
but this choir
helped change
that.

the semi-finals. The choir began to be featured on social media related to *Mongolia's Got Talent*.

The Semi-finals

They practiced from June to September to prepare for



the semi-finals. On the day of the performance, they woke up at 4:00 a.m. in -29 degrees F (-34 degrees C) weather. Sister Nomuungerel Enkhtuvshin, a choir member, said, "Many members of our group caught a cold. But they got better as we prayed for them."

People throughout Mongolia viewed the show and texted in their votes.

Brother Shijir Purevdorj said, "As a result of this TV show, many people are cultivating a positive attitude toward the Church."

The Blessings

Choir members themselves also received blessings. Brother Odgerel Tumursukh said, "We devoted our attention and time for a whole year while managing our jobs and other

facets of our lives. Although it was difficult, we have received many blessings. I have learned to manage my time and make sacrifices for the Lord."

In addition to increasing their faith, members of the choir gained self-confidence, developed friendships, and learned unity. "Singing in the choir has helped us to learn how to forgive and support one another," said Brother Ganbaatar Ulziiduuren. "We have become more united." Sister Bilguunzaya Tungalagtuul learned "that I should never doubt myself or think that I can't do something."

Brother Bayartsogt Lhagvajav said, "Singing in the choir has brought many blessings to my family, and it also helped me to receive the answers I was seeking for some time. Our leaders offered us solution[s]. . . . It has affirmed my testimony that our

leaders are called of God."

"When I participated in *Mongolia's Got Talent*," Sister Onon Dalaikhuu explained, "I learned that encouraging and supporting each other [was the] key to [our] success." Sister Dalaikhuu's responsibilities included organizing crew members, which helped strengthen her leadership abilities. She added, "We felt that [the] Lord guided and influenced us. Many of us were sick, busy, tired, and feeling overwhelmed. However, when we prayed together, somehow we would find more power and desire to endure."

Although the choir didn't receive enough votes to move on to the finals, their performances gave the Church significant exposure throughout Mongolia. President Ochirjav explains, "We were obedient to an assignment by our priesthood leaders, and the Lord prepared a way. . . . Now the whole city [Ulaanbaatar] talks

about the Mormon choir's participation in

Mongolia's Got Talent." ■

The authors live in Utah, USA, and Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.





By Stephen W. Owen
 Young Men
 General President

Become What God Wants You to Be

During my first semester at college 40 years ago, I decided to read the Book of Mormon cover to cover. Somehow, I had never done that before.

At that time, I could tell you why we have the Book of Mormon and why it's important, and I could bear testimony that it is the word of God. But a full-time mission was approaching, and I sensed that my conviction of the Book of Mormon was more in my head than in my heart. I knew that as a missionary, I would need more than just a working knowledge of the Book of Mormon—I wanted to teach from the heart!

So I set a goal to finish the Book of Mormon before the Thanksgiving break. I read every day. This was a life-changing experience. For the first time, the stories I had heard in pieces started flowing together. I could almost see Nephi, Alma, and Captain

Moroni. Visions of their experiences formed in my mind, and I can still see those images to this day. It was my first real experience “feasting upon the word of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:20), and it was “delicious to me” (Alma 32:28).

The day before Thanksgiving, I was reading in the book of Ether, so I stayed up all night and accomplished my goal. When I had finished, I prayed, as Moroni suggests, to “ask God . . . if these things are not true” (Moroni 10:4).

Did I receive a dramatic revelation? No. But I did receive a feeling of peace, consistent with the feelings I had while reading the book. I now had the ingredient that was missing, not just in my mission preparation but also in my conversion to the Savior.

I encourage you to accept the Lord's plan for you, even if it differs from your plan for yourself.



Examine Your Heart

Ask yourself: “Where am I spiritually? Where do I want to be? Am I making any progress in that direction?” Or, to use Alma’s words, “Have ye experienced [a] mighty change in your hearts?” And “if ye *have* experienced a change of heart, . . . can ye feel so now?” (Alma 5:14, 26; emphasis added).

It was this type of self-examination that inspired me to read the Book of Mormon as a freshman. It could also inspire you to take the next step in your spiritual progress.

Elder Dale G. Renlund of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles called this process doing a spiritual “biopsy” on our hearts. To illustrate, he shared an example from his life as a busy young physician. He often had to work on Sundays, and one Sunday it looked like he would finish in time to make it to church. On the other hand, if he stayed a little longer, his family would leave without him, and then he could go home and take a much-needed nap. Ultimately, that’s what he decided to do.

But he couldn't sleep. He was troubled by his decision. He used to love going to church. What had happened? In humility he examined his life and realized that his busy schedule had made him casual about prayer and scripture study.

Elder Renlund recalled: "I got off the couch, got on my knees, and pleaded with God for forgiveness. . . . The next day I brought a Book of Mormon to the hospital. On my to-do list that day, and every day since, were two items: praying at least morning and evening and reading in the scriptures. Sometimes midnight would come, and I would have to quickly find a private place to pray. Some days my scripture study was brief. I also promised Heavenly Father that I would always try to get to church, even if I missed part of the meeting. Over the course of a few weeks, the zeal returned and the fire of testimony burned fiercely again. I promised to never again . . . [become] casual about these seemingly small actions."¹

Can you imagine what would have happened had Elder Renlund decided that because of his busy schedule, he was excused from praying and reading the scriptures *every* day? What if he had reasoned that he was just fine spiritually—after all, he wasn't committing any grievous sins; he was just taking a nap! Fortunately, he was humble enough to notice that he was

drifting and to correct his course. And now this deeply spiritual man is blessing the Church and the world as an Apostle of the Lord.

I urge you to spend some time in quiet conversation with Heavenly Father. Ask Him, "What lack I yet?" (Matthew 19:20).

Often, letting the Lord guide you will mean altering the plans you have made for your life in favor of His plans.

The answers may surprise you. The path of conversion—the road between who we are and who Heavenly Father wants us to be—is a long one. Don't let that discourage you. Learn from your experience; let it humble you. Submit to some tutoring from the Lord.

Remember that the Savior loves you. He has promised, "Be of good cheer, for I will lead you along" (D&C 78:18).

Let the Lord Guide You

Often, letting the Lord guide you will mean altering the plans you have made for your life in favor of His plans. I encourage you to accept His plan for you, even if it differs from your plan for yourself.

Consider this example from the life of Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

When he was a young man, he looked forward to serving a full-time mission. But one week after he graduated from high school, war broke out in Korea, and young Dallin was sent into military duty.

Years later, when Elder Oaks was 48 years old, he was appointed to the Utah Supreme Court. At that time, he and his wife, June, made a plan for the rest of their lives. They determined that he would serve for 20 years on the court and then retire at age 68. Then they would submit their mission papers and serve, as a couple, the full-time mission neither of them got to serve in their youth.

Well, it didn't quite work out that way. Just four years later, Elder Oaks was called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles—not exactly the kind of thing you plan for. He would still be serving the Lord, just not in the capacity he had anticipated. Then, when he was 66, his wife died of cancer. Two years later he married his current wife, Kristen.

Elder Oaks has observed: “How fundamentally different my life is than I had sought to plan! My professional life has changed. My personal life has changed. But the commitment I made to the Lord—to put Him first in my life and to be ready for whatever He would have me do—has carried me through these changes of eternal importance.”²

Understand the Plan

Submitting our lives to God is not easy. But we can make it easier for ourselves.

When Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden, they received a commandment that at first they did not understand: Take the firstborn of your flocks and sacrifice it to the Lord. They trusted the Lord enough to

obey, but when an angel asked Adam why he was making sacrifices, Adam said, “I know not, save the Lord commanded me.” (See Moses 5:5–6.)

Then the angel taught Adam and Eve about the spiritual significance of sacrifice. It wasn't about giving up one of their animals. It was about redemption. It was about “the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father” (Moses 5:7). It meant that although they had fallen, they could be redeemed. The Holy Ghost fell upon them, and they saw the plan with new eyes (see Moses 5:10–11).

Do you see parallels between experiences in your life and the experiences of Adam and Eve? Do you sometimes receive counsel from the Lord that you do not understand? Sometimes we have to say, “I know not, save the Lord commanded me,” obeying out of a sense of duty. This is admirable because such faithful obedience can lead you, as it did Adam and Eve, to greater light, understanding, and blessings. Remember that Adam and Eve found joy and the strength to persevere *after* “God . . . made known unto them the plan of redemption” (Alma 12:30).

This is why we obey the commandments. This is why we raise families. This is why we make sacrifices joyfully—because we know the plan. Seek to understand the doctrine, for as President Boyd K. Packer (1924–2015), former President of



the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, often reminded us, “True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior.”³

It is not enough just to know with our minds; we must *understand* in our hearts. Doctrine can’t just influence our thoughts; we have to let it change our very nature.

Look to Jesus Christ

None of us knows what tomorrow will bring. But we do know one thing: We can put unreserved faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. No matter what happens, eternal life is available because of Jesus Christ. Death, pain, and sorrow will eventually become only memories because of Him. Every inequality, every injustice, every iniquity can be made right because of Him.

This is why Helaman pleaded with his sons to build their foundation “upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God”—because no other foundation can withstand the devil’s “mighty winds . . . [and] all his hail and his mighty storm” (Helaman 5:12).

We live in an era of secularism, when people are increasingly putting their trust in worldly philosophies, institutions, and wealth. But all of these will fall, and if we anchor ourselves to them, we will fall also.

Christ is the only “sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall” (Helaman 5:12). Faith and righteousness will prevail. Faith in Jesus Christ gives us strength to accept the unknown. It will carry us through

Faith in Jesus Christ gives us strength to accept the unknown. It will carry us through anything the future may hold.

anything the future may hold. So “look unto [Him] in every thought; doubt not, fear not” (D&C 6:36). Seek to become “a greater follower of righteousness” (Abraham 1:2). And “press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men” (2 Nephi 31:20).

I have always loved these words from the epistle to the Hebrews: “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”

(Joseph Smith Translation, Hebrews 11:1 [in Hebrews 11:1, footnote *b*]). I am a witness of things not seen. I have the assurance that the Lord has guided my path. I could not always see where that path would lead, but the evidence of God’s hand in my life has been revealed in many ways. Most often, they were subtle and gentle manifestations—opportunities and feelings. Isaiah described such guidance this way: “Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it” (Isaiah 30:21).

I don’t know how the hand of the Lord will manifest itself in your life, but I invite you to look for it. Then, someday 40 years from now, I hope you will also see profound changes in yourself and be filled with gratitude that during this pivotal time in your life, you allowed the Lord to help you become what He wants you to become. ■

From a devotional address, “I’ll Be What You Want Me to Be,” given at Brigham Young University–Idaho on November 8, 2016. For the full text, go to web.byui.edu/devotionalsandspeeches.

NOTES

1. See Dale G. Renlund, “Preserving the Heart’s Mighty Change,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2009, 98–99.
2. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Timing,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2003, 16–17.
3. Boyd K. Packer, “Little Children,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 17; see also “Do Not Fear,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 79.

“O WRETCHED MAN”

2 NEPHI 4:17-35

By Phyllis Baker White

*There are those days
when shadows of
my lesser self
obstruct the light,
and in my groping,
Nephi's words
reflect my plight:
“O wretched man . . . I am!”
With him I grieve,
and sorrow
over frailties
that haunt my
conscious mind
and tempt with
hopelessness
relief
I seek to find.*

*Yet there is One
whose light
will never fail,
whose mercy
makes a way
for my escape.
He opens up the gates.
His love can make me whole!
And with Nephi
I rejoice
and plead,
“O Lord, . . .
redeem my soul”!*

My **Gift** to the Savior

By Cherstan Pixton

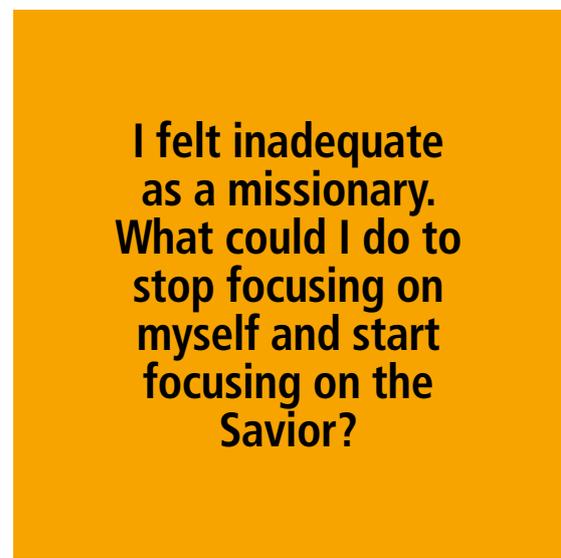
Russia is very cold in the winter and often overcast, making the days gloomy and somewhat miserable. It was late November, and on top of the depressing weather, I was feeling lonely, inadequate, and incapable of being a good missionary. I had just been assigned to train a new companion, and while Sister Hart was wonderful, the pressure was now on me to learn the language better, be an example, and find someone—anyone—to teach.

We had just gotten word that our new mission president was going to hold a zone conference in Yekaterinburg, five hours from our area of Perm. Early on a chilly December morning, Sister Hart and I went to the train station.

As we waited I pondered on the feelings I'd been having. I thought of the upcoming holidays and my longing to be with my family. The

excitement to be on a mission had faded, and now I felt like I hadn't accomplished much as a missionary in my nine months out. Finally the call for our train's arrival chimed, so we boarded and took our seats. I found myself thinking of the Savior. I closed my eyes and prayed that I would be able to know how to rid myself of these feelings and better focus on Him.

At the zone conference the next day, President Rust's talk was beautiful and heartfelt. When Sister Rust got up to speak, she shared a simple story about how the Savior is the shepherd who would go and find the one sheep that had wandered off and bring that sheep back to the fold. She talked about the sacrifices the Savior has made for us, and finally she bore a powerful testimony of the opportunity that we as missionaries have to serve Him by bringing His lost sheep to



I felt inadequate as a missionary. What could I do to stop focusing on myself and start focusing on the Savior?

the fold. Sister Rust challenged us to think of what gift we could give to the Savior for Christmas.

When she made that challenge, I felt the strongest impression that the gift that I was supposed to give to the Savior was to simply talk to more people. Up until that point I had been terrified to start up conversations with complete strangers



—especially in Russian! I didn't want them to think I was dumb for not understanding them, so it was just easier not to say anything at all. I knew, however, at that moment, exactly what I needed to do. I needed to stop thinking of myself and start thinking of my brothers and sisters. I set a goal to speak to someone about the gospel on every transportation vehicle I took for the rest of the month and to devote that as my Christmas gift to the Savior.

When Sister
Hart and I
boarded
another

train back to Perm the next morning, I started on my goal by talking to the people I sat next to. They weren't very interested in what I had to share, but at least I tried!

Every day was a struggle as I fought to give my gift to the Savior, but slowly I found myself feeling happier and more confident—I felt I was better fulfilling my calling as a missionary. Christmas came and went, but I decided that I would continue

talking to people. I started talking to them not only when we took

public transportation but also on the streets, in the store, at the library, and everywhere else we went.

We didn't find anyone to teach through my talking to people more; however, I feel that I planted gospel seeds. We made new friends with bus drivers, people at our local grocery store, and others. The best part was that when we saw someone again, we would often see them smile, and they would be the one to say hello to us first. I have faith that those seeds we planted will someday blossom when new opportunities arise for those people to learn about the gospel.

Heavenly Father works in small and simple ways, and sometimes it just starts with a simple “hello.”

Thinking back now to that time on the train to Yekaterinburg, I realize that Heavenly Father answered my prayer. He helped me see that missionary work isn't about me—it's about others; and when we put others above ourselves and our own worries and sorrows, we find the happiness we are all seeking. It's amazing to me how giving the Savior is, for even when we strive to give Him everything we can, He blesses us and gives us back a hundredfold. ■

The author lives in Idaho, USA.



ILLUSTRATION BY DINARA MIRTAIPOVA



By Elder
Alan C. Batt
Of the Seventy,
Idaho Area

Find the Joy Heavenly Father Wants for You

While serving a mission in Brazil, I attended the baptism of a man who had been preparing for eight months to be baptized. He told me that one night, while partying and drinking with friends, he had decided to change his life after this thought came to him: “Is this what you want your life to be?”

It can be difficult to make wise choices in the world in which we live. Sometimes we feel lost and alone as we strive to choose the right, but we are never alone. We have family and friends who love us, leaders who teach us, and a Father in Heaven who is always there to help us if we will just listen.

I’d like to talk about three choices that can help us find the joy Heavenly Father wants for each of us.

1. Share the Gospel

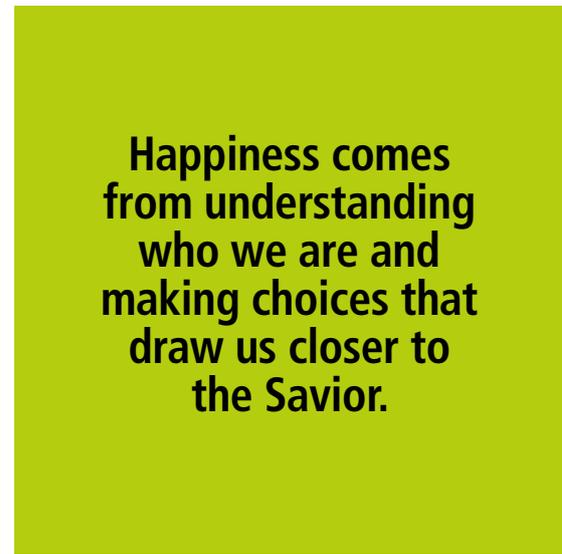
Sharing the gospel will bring a sweet spirit into our lives. When we

testify of the truth, our testimonies are strengthened. Sometimes we get discouraged because every experience doesn’t end with what we see as success. But all the Lord expects is that we do our part.

We should remember that those we share the gospel with are precious sons and daughters of our Eternal Father and deserve respect and understanding. We should never abandon people because they don’t respond to or accept our invitation.

Recently I flew to some area council meetings. On the way home, I committed to share the gospel with the person sitting next to me on the plane.

On my first flight, I sat next to a young man who had no interest in hearing about the Church. On the second flight, I waited eagerly to meet my next flight companion. He was from Germany. He spoke English, and I talked to him about the Church. He



Happiness comes from understanding who we are and making choices that draw us closer to the Savior.

said he had never heard of the Church and changed the subject. I asked where he was staying and offered him a ride to his hotel when we arrived in Idaho Falls, Idaho, USA. He explained that he was going to ride horses and herd cattle at a nearby ranch. He had been told that he needed a hat.

“That’s a good idea,” I said. “It’s hot there. You’ll get a sunburn without one.”



“How about cowboy boots?” he asked.

“If you buy new boots and wear them for five days straight, you’ll probably never walk again,” I said. “But I have a pair of boots in my closet at home that are a little too small for me. They are in good shape, and you can have them if you want.”

When we arrived at his hotel, he said, “When can I get the boots?”

“I have church tomorrow,” I replied, “so after church I’ll . . .”

Then I thought to myself, “You big chicken!” Then I said, “Or, if you’d like, you can go to church with me, and I can give you the boots then.”

“OK,” he said.

I was shocked and pleased. The next morning, I picked him up and we headed for church. When we arrived, I introduced him to a few members of my ward. Everyone who spoke one word of German, had ever seen a German movie, or had even eaten sauerkraut surrounded him. He really seemed to enjoy his time there.

As we drove back to the hotel, he thanked me and said, “I go to church almost every Sunday in Germany, but I have never felt what I felt today.”

And to think that I almost missed this wonderful opportunity to share the gospel.

2. Be Clean

A missionary who had been sent home early from his mission told me

in an interview that he had never once in his life felt clean. It made me sad to think that, with the Atonement of Jesus Christ available to all of us, he had never felt the peace and strength that come from being forgiven.

In contrast, I once interviewed a young man for a temple recommend as he prepared to be married. I asked him if he lived the law of chastity. He told me that he had never violated any part of that commandment.

“That’s wonderful,” I said. “How did you do it?”

He told me that as a young deacon, he was taught the Lord’s moral code and had decided to live it. He succeeded because he had decided what he wanted his life to be.

Righteous living is not something that happens without effort on our part. We have to decide to choose the right. Then we can go to Heavenly Father for help. Through faith in the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we can be helped and healed.

It’s our choice. Satan can’t force us to sin. The only power he has is what we give him.

We know when we’re not square with the Lord by the way we feel. We should recognize our sins and weaknesses and be honest with ourselves and not use excuses like, “It’s not my fault,” “I didn’t know it was wrong,” “Everybody is doing it.” This is what Satan wants us to believe and say.

Satan is a master of deception and will do all in his power to impede our efforts to be clean. He will always tempt us and slowly poison us if we listen to his lies. Sometimes he does things so cunningly that we hardly know what’s happening.

One of my childhood friends had a pigpen behind his house. Sometimes we would sit on the fence and watch the pigs. This might seem like odd behavior, but it wasn’t really much different from watching reality TV today.

One day my friend’s father pulled into the yard with his pickup truck



overflowing with doughnuts, bread, and cupcakes that had passed their expiration date. He backed up to the pigpen and shoveled his cargo into the muck. The pigs began to devour the food, wrappers and all. Each mouthful was filled with cupcakes and doughnuts, their plastic wrappers smeared with mud and manure. It was disgusting.

Each time we watched this happen over the next few weeks, it became less repulsive and more entertaining. One day I told my friend that if we could figure out a way to get some doughnuts and cupcakes out of the pigpen without the pigs attacking us, we could have free treats. We took a rake and pulled a large blob of mud, manure, and cupcakes from under the fence. We washed off the wrappers, climbed up on the fence, and ate away with the pigs.

Isn't this exactly how Satan works? He serves up something that is dirty and disgusting, and over time we start to accept it as entertaining, desirable, and good. The next time you think of doing something foolish, imagine yourself sitting on a fence eating cupcakes with the pigs.

3. Choose to Be Happy

Even when we make right choices, our lives don't always turn out as we imagined, planned, or worked to achieve. We might have health trials, our children or spouse might have

a crisis of faith, our marriage might end in divorce, or we might be single when we long to be married.

When we look at the life of Jesus Christ, we see that even though He was perfect, the path He walked took Him through many of the same challenges we face in life. Jesus encountered disappointment, temptation, and pain (see Hebrews 5:8–9).

Some things in our lives are not in our control, so the only thing we can do is try to control how we react to them.

Emily Kingsley wrote an essay that compares her unexpected challenge, having a child with Down syndrome, to getting on a plane for a vacation to Italy, only to have the plane land in Holland. She has the following imaginary conversation:

“Holland? What do you mean, Holland? I signed up for Italy! I'm supposed to be in Italy. All my life I've dreamed of going to Italy.”

The flight attendant replies: “But there's been a change in the flight plan. You've landed in Holland, and there you must stay.”

But then you meet others who are going to and coming from Italy. “And they're all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life you will say, ‘Yes, that's where I was supposed to go. That's what I had planned.’”

“But,” Kingsley concludes, “if you spend your life mourning the

fact that you didn't get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things about Holland.”¹

Accepting the unexpected realities in life can free us from despair and allow us to rejoice in the life we have. Through righteous living, our happiness can be complete as we embrace life in its full, unpredictable way.

Happiness does not come from what we have, what world status we attain, or whether all goes as planned. It comes from understanding who we are and making choices that draw us closer to the Savior. It comes from knowing that our personal weaknesses do not define us. It comes from listening to those who build, lift, and encourage us so we can better understand our divine nature.

I pray that we will have the courage to have faith in Jesus Christ, faith in ourselves and what we can become through His power, faith to be clean, and faith to choose wisely so that we may have eternal happiness. This is what our Father in Heaven wants for all of us. He loves us. He wants us back. He knows we can do it. ■

From a devotional address, “Is This What You Want Your Life to Be?” given at Brigham Young University–Idaho on November 1, 2016. For the full address, visit web.byui.edu/devotionalsandspeeches.

NOTE

1. See Emily Perl Kingsley, “Welcome to Holland,” in Darlene J. Hollingsworth, *Without U: Raising a Child with Down Syndrome* (2011), 14–15.



By Elder Ronald A.
Rasband

Of the Quorum of
the Twelve Apostles

Glory to God in the Highest

*Whenever we act in concert with the Lord—doing His bidding,
lifting those around us—we are bearing witness
that He lives and that He loves us.*

Seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem of Judea, the prophet Isaiah declared, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

King Benjamin, 125 years before the Savior’s birth, prophesied, “He shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary” (Mosiah 3:8).

The day before the birth of the baby Jesus, Nephi, the son of Nephi, heard a voice saying, “On the morrow come I into the world” (3 Nephi 1:13).

The next day, oceans away, the Christ child was born. There’s no question that His mother, Mary, looked on in wonder at her newborn son, the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh.

On the hills of Judea surrounding Bethlehem, Luke tells us, shepherds were abiding in their fields (see Luke 2:8). These shepherds were “just and holy men” (see Alma 13:26) who would bear witness of the Christ child.

“And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

“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. . . .



“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:9–11, 13–14).

Imagine that scene in Judea—the sky filled with the brilliance of a magnificent star and choruses from heaven marking this singular event. The shepherds then went “with haste” (Luke 2:16) to see the babe lying in a manger. Later “they made known abroad” (Luke 2:17) what they had heard and seen.

Each year at Christmas we add our witness to that of the shepherds—that Jesus Christ, the literal Son of the living God, came to a corner of the earth in what we call the Holy Land.

The shepherds reverently went to the stable to worship the King of kings. How will we worship Him this season? Endlessly shopping? Hustling about our homes decorating and wrapping? Will that be our tribute to our Savior? Or will we also bring peace to troubled hearts, good will to those in need of higher purpose, glory to God in our willingness to do His bidding?

Jesus put it simply: “Come, follow me” (Luke 18:22).

The gospel of Jesus Christ, restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith, has resonated with believers across the world. I have witnessed for myself the fervor of those from the isles of the sea to the enormity of Russia who have embraced the Savior’s sacred word.

The Message of Christmas

Among the early Saints who gathered to Zion was Hannah Last Cornaby, who settled in Spanish Fork, Utah, USA. In the difficult early days of the restored Church, Christmas was sometimes marked with a precious orange or a carved toy or perhaps only a rag doll—but not always. Hannah wrote of December 25, 1856:

“Christmas Eve came, and my darlings, with childish faith, hung up their stockings, wondering if [they] would [be filled]. With aching heart, which I concealed from them, I assured them they would not be forgotten; and they fell asleep with joyful anticipations for the morrow.

“Not having a particle of sweetening, I knew not what to do. They must not, however, be disappointed. I then thought of some squashes in the house, which I boiled, then strained off the liquid, that, when simmered a few hours, made a sweet syrup. With this, and a little spice, I made gingerbread dough which, when cut into every conceivable variety of design, and baked in a skillet, (I had no stove,) filled their stockings and pleased them as much as would the most fancy confectionaries.”¹

Between the lines of this story is an account of a mother working through the night without even an oven to ease her efforts. Yet she was committed to bring joy to her children, to reinforce their faith, to affirm in their home, “Happy day! All is well!”² Isn’t that the message of Christmas?

President Thomas S. Monson has taught: “Our opportunities to give of ourselves are indeed limitless, but they are also perishable. There are hearts to gladden. There are kind words to say. There are gifts to be given.”³

Whenever we act in concert with the Lord—doing His bidding, lifting those around us—we are bearing witness that He lives and that He loves us, no matter our temporal challenges.

After Scottish convert John Menzies Macfarlane joined the Church with his widowed mother and brother, the three of them journeyed to Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1852. He was 18 years old. Over the years, he became a surveyor, a builder, even a district judge, but it was his music that distinguished him.

He organized his first choir in Cedar City, Utah, and took his ensemble around southern Utah. After a performance in St. George, Elder Erastus Snow (1818–88), an Apostle and leader of the colony, encouraged John to move to St. George and bring his family and music with him.

Times had been hard in 1869, and Elder Snow asked Brother Macfarlane to stage a Christmas program that would lift the people’s spirits. Brother Macfarlane wanted a new and engaging musical piece for the event. But no matter how hard he tried to compose, nothing came. He prayed for inspiration and prayed again.



Then one night he woke his wife and exclaimed, “I have the words for a song, and I think I have the music too!” He hurried to the keyboard of their small parlor organ and played the tune, writing it down while his wife held before him the flickering light of a bit of burning flannel floating in a bowl of grease. The words and music flowed forth:

*Far, far away on Judea's plains,
Shepherds of old heard the joyous strains:
Glory to God,
Glory to God,
Glory to God in the highest;
Peace on earth, good will to men;
Peace on earth, good will to men!*⁴

Brother Macfarlane had never been to Judea to see that the plains were more like rocky hillsides, but the inspired message of

his music poured from his soul as a witness of the Savior's birth in Bethlehem, a beginning that would change the world forever.⁵

John Menzies Macfarlane testified of Jesus Christ through his music, and Hannah Last Cornaby testified of Christ through her service to her children. We likewise can serve the Lord and bear witness of Him through simple acts of selflessness. We too can make a difference within our families, our wards, our workplaces, and our other spheres of responsibility.

Make a Difference

One simple way we can make a difference is to become involved in the Church's annual social media Christmas campaign. The campaign is designed to help the Saints—and God's children throughout the world—focus on the Savior. This year the Church is launching another global effort to celebrate the birth of



My sister made a beautiful quilt and called it "Name above All Names." The quilt features 26 of the names of Jesus Christ.

Christ and to encourage people to emulate Him by serving others during the Christmas season.

The Church is repeating its successful theme of last year: “Light the World” (see Mormon.org). The theme comes from John 8:12, which reads, “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

The campaign includes an advent calendar and related scriptural verses that provide ideas for people to serve and share the light of Christmas.

“Each of us came to earth having been given the Light of Christ,” President Monson has said. “As we follow the example of the Savior and live as He lived and as He taught, that light will burn within us and will light the way for others.”⁶

We come to know the Savior by doing what He did. As we serve others, we bring them—and ourselves—closer to Him.

“Name above All Names”

During Christmastime, I especially miss our little grandson Paxton. Born with a rare genetic disorder, Paxton suffered from countless health problems. Heavenly Father taught our family many special and tender lessons during the three short years Paxton blessed our lives.

My sister, Nancy Schindler, made a beautiful quilt in honor of Paxton. She called it “Name above All Names.” The quilt features 26 of the names of Jesus Christ—names beginning with the letters A through Z. The quilt reminds me of the glorious future family reunion with Paxton made possible through the Savior’s suffering, sacrifice, and Resurrection.

The quilt inspired me to begin a study of the names of Jesus Christ as revealed in the scriptures. Researching His names has become part of my personal scripture study. So far, I have identified hundreds of names for the Savior.

One of my responsibilities as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and as stated in the Doctrine and Covenants, is to bear testimony of Jesus Christ. The Doctrine and Covenants states, “The twelve traveling councilors are called to be the Twelve Apostles, or

special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world” (D&C 107:23; emphasis added).

Recently I was asked to speak during a sacrament meeting at Primary Children’s Hospital in Salt Lake City. I felt prompted to speak about Jesus Christ and His hopeful names. I bore testimony of the Savior as “the bright and morning star” (Revelation 22:16), a “high priest of good things to come” (Hebrews 9:11), “a God of miracles” who rose “with healing in his wings” (2 Nephi 27:23; 25:13), “The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6; 2 Nephi 19:6), and “the resurrection, and the life” (John 11:25).

At Christmastime, I like to recite the Savior’s different names as I walk to and from my office through the Christmas lights on Temple Square. I start with A, “Alpha and Omega” (Revelation 1:8); B, “the babe” of Bethlehem (Luke 2:12, 16); C, “Counsellor” (Isaiah 9:6; see 2 Nephi 19:6); D, “the Deliverer” (Romans 11:26); E, the “exalted one” (Psalm 89:19); F, “the founder of peace” (Mosiah 15:18); and so on.

Throughout this Christmas season, I look forward to memorizing more of His names and to looking for opportunities to honor His name. As you strive to make a difference this Christmas season, I hope you will make the Savior the center of your efforts and that you will bring glory to Him as you serve others in His name.

I bear my witness that our Eternal Father lives. His plan of happiness profoundly blesses the lives of each of His children in all generations. I know that His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, the babe born in Bethlehem, is the Savior and Redeemer of the world.

These words of praise speak truth to my ears: “Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth, goodwill to men.”⁷ ■

From an address delivered to the BYU Management Society—Salt Lake Chapter in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, on December 13, 2016.

NOTES

1. Hannah Cornaby, *Autobiography and Poems* (1881), 45–46.
2. “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” *Hymns*, no. 30.
3. Thomas S. Monson, “May We So Live,” *Ensign*, Aug. 2008, 7.
4. “Far, Far Away on Judea’s Plains,” *Hymns*, no. 212.
5. See Karen Lynn Davidson, *Our Latter-day Hymns: The Stories and the Messages* (1988), 223–24.
6. Thomas S. Monson, “Be an Example and a Light,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2015, 86.
7. *Hymns*, no. 212.



We Can Do Better, Part 2:

Finding Your Place in the Church of Jesus Christ

Don't let others keep you from enjoying the blessings of membership in Christ's Church.



By Betsy VanDenBerghe

Editors' note: No matter how strong our belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ is, it can be difficult to remain faithful if we don't feel like we belong. Church leaders recently addressed this challenge in a video series titled Unity in Diversity. In the September 2017 issue, "We Can Do Better: Welcoming Others into the Fold" examined our responsibility to welcome others. This article, part 2, looks at how we can take responsibility for our own faith, regardless of whether we feel like we belong.

After eight years of not attending church, Paulo (all names have been changed) received a phone call from his bishop in Brazil asking how he was doing. Paulo had longed to return, but many concerns kept him from full activity. How could he avoid comparing himself, still single, to those married with children? Would he

find any friends at church after so long and, if he did, what would they think of him? Would he still be able to feel the Spirit like he had during his conversion and mission or have enough faith to accept callings?

One month after the phone call, Paulo watched President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, give a conference talk called, "Come, Join with Us."¹ "That talk hit me hard," he recalls, and within a few weeks he found himself sitting in the church parking lot, trembling and offering a silent prayer for the strength to get out of the car and enter the building.

"Everything wasn't perfect," he recalls of his first year after returning. It wasn't easy to fit in. Yet a feeling of connectedness to the Savior and a strong desire for a temple recommend helped him overcome his insecurities. He began reading his scriptures and praying again. "If you don't give up, you gain strength and can feel the Lord blessing you," he advises those who struggle to feel accepted. "I have a testimony that this is Christ's Church, but it's in Him you will find true belonging."

Paulo's story represents several points that Church leaders describe in the video series *Unity in Diversity*. Their messages offer hope and advice to those who don't feel like they belong. Sometimes we feel alone even in church, but, as these leaders and members point out, there are things we can do to help get ourselves through challenges such as exclusion or poor treatment by others. We can avoid comparisons, move forward in uncertainty, know that returning is always possible, and above all, trust the Savior.

Avoid Comparisons: We Will All Be Blessed in the End

"When you begin to compare yourself, one with another, it either leads to discouragement or it leads to pride. . . . Blessings come in the near-term. Blessings come in the long-term. Sometimes blessings are in store for us, I believe, after we pass through the veil. . . . Ultimately, we can be assured that the promise of eternal life is for everyone."

—Elder Gary E. Stevenson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Rochelle moved to a modest duplex in an affluent area in the western United States after spending time in a homeless shelter. Divorced and caring for several children, she worked at two jobs, sometimes three, to be able to afford food and rent, and had been less active, off and on, since her conversion.

“Even though just about everyone in my new ward seemed better off than I was,” she explains, “they reached out to me and accepted the way I dress. Everyone really cared.”

Although under significant financial pressure, Rochelle never resented others for their easier circumstances. “I want to be more secure, definitely, but I never looked at my neighbors’ houses and felt that God had left me behind,” she recalls. “I could feel Him walking beside me even through my poor choices.”

Although Rochelle’s work schedule has been a challenge at times, ward leaders and friends ultimately helped her fulfill a yearning to attend the temple. “Going to the temple regularly helps me be grateful for how far I’ve come,” she observes. “I don’t worry that others might seem ahead of me.”

Rochelle admits that she and her daughters struggle and “are not a perfect LDS family.” Yet she also recognizes that

“everyone has problems and no family is really perfect,” a perspective that liberates her from looking sideways at others instead of focusing on her relationship with God.

“My daughters can see what a difference the gospel has made in my life,” she says. “I can feel the difference too and am busy enough with work, family, and Church that I don’t have time for comparisons. I’m just happy to be on the right path.”

Stay Strong: Christ Can Transform You

“This person sitting next to me ignoring me or even wanting to move away . . . doesn’t change the reality of what Christ feels toward me and the possibilities I have in Christ. . . . Every individual needs to be determined that they’re going to have a place in the kingdom of God [and in] the body of Christ, and others who are thoughtless or careless or worse can’t prohibit that.”

—Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Growing up, Matthew attended church in small branches. He and his wife, a convert from Ukraine, grew accustomed to multiple callings and full engagement with international LDS communities but then moved to the United States. Large wards and different cultural expectations made them feel “unneeded and adrift,” he recalls. “We seemed unable to fit in. We felt ignored, with a lack of uplift and connection on Sundays.”

Their frustration reached a breaking point when, after moving to a different city, Matthew and his wife looked forward to a visit from a local priesthood leader whose purpose in visiting ended up being to ask them to keep their lively toddler under control during sacrament meeting. Deeply hurt, Matthew contemplated never returning to the local meetinghouse. “What stopped me,” he explains, “was my testimony that this is the Lord’s Church and that the Savior wants me there. Participating in the gospel has consequences beyond any hurt or personal encounter I’ll have in this life.”

Church situations can sometimes make us feel lonely, marginalized, and unneeded, a phenomenon that isn’t





unique to Latter-day Saints. Catholic writer David Mills describes the challenge that churchgoers face in interacting with those who are “wealthier or poorer, more or less educated than you. They may be of a different race or ethnic group or age than you.” We might not choose any of them for our various social networks, he explains. However, religious commitment involves mingling with people we do not choose and “provides one of the few places left that’s more like a community than a network. . . . You have to learn to love these people, or at least to act lovingly, when you don’t want to.”² Relying on God when you can’t block or unfollow people in your religious community is often the only way to overcome the challenge.

Matthew found this reliance on the divine crucial to staying active in the Church. “The only thing that’s kept me going sometimes is my testimony of Christ,” he explains. “The gospel is bigger than any of us. Christ sees what we cannot see, knows what we can become, and has room for all.”

Jasmin, a member in the southern United States, admits that “I had a hard time getting along with a sister in my ward who seemed to meddle in my life too much, and I let that drive me away.” But when concern for her little boy began to outweigh the uncertainty of what it would be like

to return, Jasmin knew it was time to “not let others’ opinions of me turn me away from Christ—whether or not I felt that someone in the ward looked down on me.”

She mustered up enough courage to venture out in a heavy storm one Sunday to where her small family soon felt embraced by friends who could help them grow in the Church of Jesus Christ. “I regret leaving,” she says. “But I’m grateful that I didn’t give up and that I pushed forward, because the gospel isn’t about others—or even me—it’s about my Savior.”

Take a Step into the Darkness: The Light Will Follow

“The natural man and the natural woman says, ‘There is no way I’m taking this step [and] moving into the darkness until the light moves and I can see where I’m going. The requirement is that we take the step, anticipating that when our foot hits the ground, the light will move.’”

—Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Sometimes it’s difficult for new members to stay rooted in the gospel when they don’t have a complete assurance of what the future holds. Learning about this aspect of faith for Mei-Hsin, a homemaker in Taiwan, involved the gospel admonition to bring children into the world, a challenging



step because “many in my culture have one child or have a pet instead,” she observes. Each pregnancy has required her to have faith to step into the unknown and ignore sometimes intense criticism from relatives and the culture at large.

Often, moving forward requires stepping into the unknown, which can be intimidating to those new in the faith. It requires developing trust that the Lord will help them along the path. Having unease and uncertainty, Elder Bednar assures, is a normal part of our learning and growing process, but sometimes our steps into the unknown—whether they involve forming a family or returning to participation in the Church—can be particularly daunting because the witness comes after the trial of our faith (see Ether 12:6). Mei-Hsin and her husband received such a witness after creating a family. “We are happy and so grateful for our children,” she says. “We’ve learned to live frugally, to help and love each other. I’m grateful we brought them into the world.”

Often, the initial steps are the hardest. “The first time we [step into the darkness],” according to Elder Bednar, “it’s not doubt, but there’s a little bit of uncertainty, even a little bit of apprehension, which is quite normal.” While the

process of moving ahead can’t be totally smooth (“not a perfect cycle that’s never interrupted,” he explains), we can gradually grow “line upon line,” with our faith increasing incrementally.

Moving forward takes practice, advises Lazare of Georgia, a convert in the country bordering Russia and Europe. Learning to trust LDS friends was his first step, after which he agreed to accept a priesthood blessing. “Then I could move forward with the missionary discussions,” he explains. As Lazare’s faith in Jesus Christ increased, “I took the big step of baptism even though I wasn’t 100 percent certain. But the Lord gave me courage with each phase, and I am so grateful now that I did it.”

Don’t Give Up

“People who think they’ve sinned too much or gone too far or been away for too long and somehow can’t come back into the circle: My declaration is no one can fall lower than the light of Christ shines. That isn’t possible.”

—Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Growing up in a devout LDS family in Utah, USA, Brian felt like the Church wasn’t for him. “I enjoyed fantasy games, movies, and rock music,” he says, “not Scouts,

scriptures, seminary, and sports.” As soon as he could leave home, he moved into an apartment and “opened myself to the world, including sex and drugs.” After an extended period of what Brian calls “riotous living and experimentation,” he ran into financial troubles and his parents took him in again, although he did not return to church.

The birth of a baby sister caused Brian to reevaluate his views. When he held her for the first time, he recalls, “I knew she was not just another kind of animal.” Somewhat apprehensively, he attended her baby blessing, and when the sacrament came to him, “I passed it on without partaking, but part of me felt spiritually hungry for it.”

Trying to sort out his conflicted feelings, Brian started keeping a journal. “I stayed up writing about my spiritual dilemma late one night,” he says, “and I had my first spiritual experience, though not with the good side.” He felt an evil, hateful, angry force trying to take over his soul. “After that,” he explains, “I knew I needed the Lord.” But having strayed so far, Brian wondered, “Could I be worthy of His help and protection?” He also questioned whether he could ever partake of the sacrament again.

The road back was hard. Giving up cigarettes wasn’t easy, confessing to the bishop took courage, and turning from old friends and activities was difficult. His family, girlfriend, and bishop all supported him, but Brian discovered his main source of strength in Jesus Christ.

“I found the Lord eager to help me,” he remembers. “New opportunities opened to replace my old pursuits. The more effort I put into living the gospel, the clearer my pathway became.” As Brian trusted the Lord and discovered His willingness to forgive and heal, the sacrament took on a greater meaning for him and helped bring him closer to the Savior. “While I’d eaten the bread and water at church as a child hundreds of times, I was finally able to partake of the sacrament for what felt like the first time.”

No One Can Take Your Place

Stepping out of the car and entering church, reaching out to other members, overcoming hurtful situations,

living the gospel without complete assurance about what the future holds, and confessing sins—we all walk difficult and uncertain paths on our way to the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 8).

Our personal commitment to following the Savior is essential for safe arrival. While encouragement, love, and acceptance from fellow Church members and leaders are important, each of us may face times when we must be willing to follow the Savior, even if we feel like we’re doing it alone.

Take your place in Jesus Christ’s Church. Don’t compare, let Christ transform you, take steps of faith that will be rewarded, and know that it’s never too late to return. “Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:20). ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. See Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Come, Join with Us,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 21–24.
2. David Mills, “Go to Church, Meet Annoying People,” Feb. 1, 2017, aleteia.org/2017/02/01/go-to-church-meet-annoying-people.



14 Events OF THE Nativity

By Jessica Griffith

The birth of Jesus Christ is celebrated every year—we sing hymns, we enjoy family traditions, and we remember our Lord by honoring His Nativity. But what details about the Nativity do we find in the scriptures?

LOCATION

EVENT

Christ's Birth Is Propesied

Genesis 49:10; Isaiah 7:14; 9:1-7; Micah 5:2; Mosiah 3:8; Alma 7:10; Helaman 14:2-5



The Angel Gabriel Visits John the Baptist's Parents

Matthew 17:12-13; Luke 1:5-25 (especially verse 17); Doctrine and Covenants 27:7; Guide to the Scriptures, "Elias"

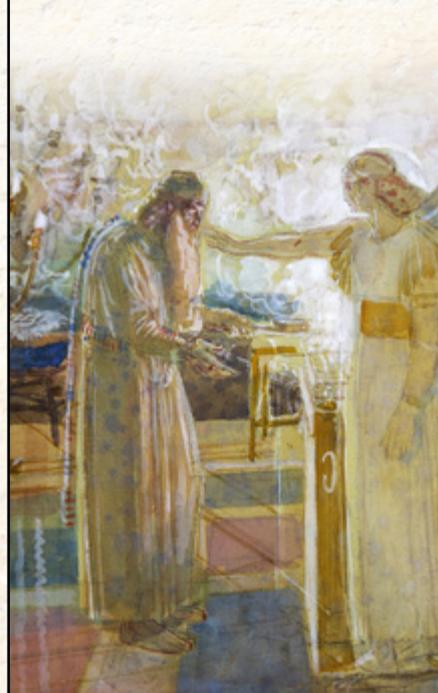


ANCIENT JERUSALEM AND ANCIENT AMERICA

JUDEA

Years before the Savior's birth, prophets had received revelation about Jesus Christ. Old Testament prophets spoke of a king descended from King David who would be born in Bethlehem—a Messiah. According to Jewish interpretation, this Messiah would become a king who would deliver His people, the Jews, from political oppression and rule the earth with justness. What the ancient Jews didn't expect, however, was a King who would deliver His people from spiritual oppression. Rather than a temporal salvation and an earthly kingdom, Jesus Christ offered an eternal salvation and His Father's kingdom.

John the Baptist was an Elias, or forerunner, to Christ. The angel Gabriel told Zacharias, John's father, that his wife, Elisabeth, was to have a child and that this child should be named John. Zacharias responded with doubt, which resulted in his being stricken deaf and dumb.



THE TRUE ESSENCE OF CHRISTMAS

"Our joy at this season is because He came into the world. The peace that comes

from Him, His infinite love which each of us may feel, and an overwhelming sense of gratitude for that which He freely gave us at so great a cost to Himself—these are of the true essence of Christmas."

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), "The Wondrous and True Story of Christmas," *Ensign*, Dec. 2000, 5.

The Angel Gabriel Appears to Mary

Matthew 1:18;
Luke 1:26-38



Mary Visits Elisabeth

Luke 1:39-56



John the Baptist Is Born

Luke 1:57-80

The Angel Gabriel Appears to Joseph

Matthew 1:18-23



NAZARETH AND GALILEE

JUDEA

JUDEA

NAZARETH



Gabriel's next visit was six months later to Elisabeth's cousin Mary. He told Mary that although she was a virgin, she would have a child by the power of the Holy Ghost and that the child would be Jesus Christ. Mary humbly accepted her call as the mother of the Son of God. The angel also told her that her cousin Elisabeth had conceived.

After Mary's angelic visitation, she left Nazareth to visit her cousin Elisabeth in Judea for three months. While Mary was there, Elisabeth received a testimony through the Holy Ghost that Mary's baby was the Son of God. Mary also bore her own testimony of God.



When John the Baptist was born, people assumed he would be named Zacharias, after his father. Elisabeth rejected that name, telling her friends and neighbors that his name was John. When these friends and neighbors questioned Zacharias about it, he agreed with Elisabeth. Because he followed Gabriel's instructions for naming his son, Zacharias's tongue was loosed, and he used his regained hearing and speech to glorify God.



Upon seeing Mary's pregnant condition when she returned to Nazareth, Joseph, the man to whom Mary was betrothed, intended to "put her away privily," or quietly annul their betrothal. Before he could do so, however, the angel Gabriel appeared to him in a dream, testifying that Mary's baby was conceived of the Holy Ghost and that the baby would be the one who would save His people from their sins. Instead of separating from Mary, Joseph decided to marry her.



THE PROPHET ISAIAH FORETELLS CHRIST'S BIRTH, BY HARRY ANDERSON; ILLUSTRATION OF THE ANGEL GABRIEL BY MICHAEL MALMI; BLESSED ART THOU AMONG WOMEN, BY WALTER RANE; DETAIL FROM THE VISITATION, BY REMBRANDT HARMENSZ. (1606-69)/DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ART, USA/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES; ARCHANGEL GABRIEL STRIKES ZACHARIA'S DUMB BACKGROUND, BORDER, MAN WITH CAMEL FROM GETTY IMAGES; ZACHARIAS WRITING A NAME FOR THE CHILD, COURTESY OF FCFI; ANNUNCIATION TO JOSEPH, BY JOSEPH BRICKEY

All the World Is Taxed

Luke 2:1-4;
James E. Talmage,
Jesus the Christ
(1916), 91-92



THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Jesus Christ Is Born

Luke 2:6-7



NAZARETH, BETHLEHEM, AND JUDEA

Propesied Signs Come Forth in the Americas

Helaman 14:1-5;
3 Nephi 1:15-21



THE AMERICAS

Shepherds Hear of Christ's Birth

Luke 2:8-17



NEAR BETHLEHEM

The taxing functioned as both a tax and a census enrollment, which was implemented by the Romans. Usually, the Romans enrolled people based on their current residency, but the Jewish custom was to enroll people based on their ancestral homes. Because of this, Bethlehem, the ancestral home of Joseph, was crowded, and the inns were full.



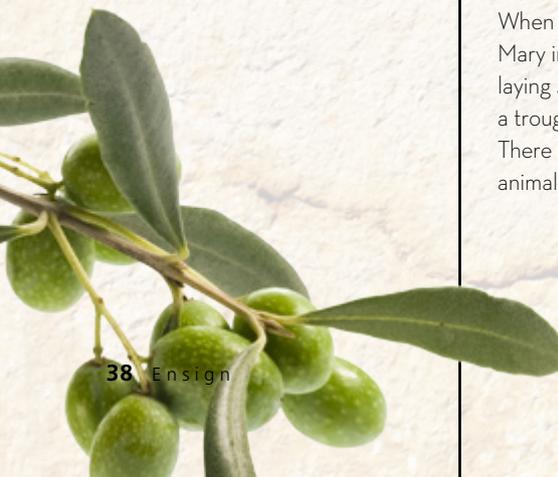
Bethlehem means "house of bread" and was the prophesied birthplace of the Messiah.

Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem to be taxed. When Jesus was born, Mary improvised a crib by laying Jesus in a manger, or a trough to feed livestock. There is no mention of animals being present.

As prophesied, on the day of Christ's birth, there was a day and a night and a day of full brightness on the American continent. A new star appeared in the sky.



At this time of year, shepherds were keeping their flocks outdoors both day and night. This is where they were when an angel appeared to them, telling them of the birth of the Savior. Following the angel's announcement, a host of angels appeared, glorifying God. After hearing this, the shepherds hurried to Bethlehem to see Jesus. Once they had seen Him, they left Joseph and Mary and testified to others of what they had seen.



Jesus Is Circumcised, Named, and Presented at the Temple

Luke 2:21-38;
James E. Talmage,
Jesus the Christ, 95



BETHLEHEM

Wise Men Ask Herod about Christ

Matthew 2:1-10



JERUSALEM

Wise Men Find Christ and Give Gifts

Matthew 2:9-12;
Bible Dictionary,
“Magi”



BETHLEHEM

Joseph Is Warned to Flee to Egypt

Matthew
2:13-16, 19-23



BETHLEHEM, EGYPT,
AND NAZARETH

After eight days, Christ was circumcised and named, as was the Jewish custom. He was named Jesus, or “Yeshua,” which means “Savior” in Hebrew. Jewish custom dictated that a woman must wait 40 days after childbirth to enter the temple. After the 40 days were over, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to be presented at the temple. There they met Simeon, who had been promised that he would see Christ before he died. He recognized Christ, held Him in his arms, and glorified God. He also prophesied of Christ’s mission on earth. Anna, a prophetess, also witnessed of Christ at the temple. She too testified of His mission.

An unspecified number of Wise Men “from the east” came to Jerusalem seeking Christ. They had seen a new star in the sky, which indicated that the Christ had been born. They asked King Herod, the Roman-appointed king of Judea, where to find the child. Herod was threatened by the possibility of a new king, the Messiah, who he thought would take over his kingdom. Without telling the Wise Men of his fears, he asked them to bring him word of where they found Christ. He planned to kill Him.

The Wise Men did eventually find Christ. Matthew specifies that they found Jesus in his house as a “young child,” suggesting that they came at least a year after Christ’s birth. They presented Him with gold, frankincense, and myrrh—valuable gifts that acknowledged the kingly status of Jesus. In a dream, the Wise Men were told not to tell Herod of their findings.

The Wise Men never reported to Herod as they said they would. Herod reacted by decreeing that all the children born in Bethlehem age two and under were to be killed. Being warned in a vision, Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Egypt. They stayed there until Herod died. At Herod’s death, an angel came to Joseph in a vision, telling him that it was safe to move back to Israel. Hearing that Herod’s son was the current ruler, however, Joseph took his family to Nazareth in Galilee instead of Judea, and thus Christ’s life as Jesus of Nazareth began. Years later He would be baptized, perform miracles, and complete His wonderful, eternal Atonement.



Including Grandpa Keiser *in Our* Christmas

I dreamed that my grandfather wanted his temple ordinances done, but how could we find time for family history in the middle of the busy Christmas season?

By Serena Kugath

One night near Christmastime I dreamed of my step-grandfather, Grandpa Keiser, who had died when I was 11. He had never been able to have any children of his own but had enjoyed being a grandpa to my cousins and me, bringing food to my single mother and winter coats and treats to us. In my dream he asked if he had been a “real” grandpa to me, and I told him that he definitely had been. He then asked if I would do for him what I would do for a “real” grandpa. I woke up and puzzled over what he had meant, until it hit me: Grandpa Keiser wanted his temple ordinances done.

I quickly began researching Grandpa Keiser’s life and discovered through census records that his family was the same size as mine! An idea began to form in my mind. Through family history and temple service, we could spend Christmas with our ancestors and link our family both backward and forward. I realized that this was an opportunity to teach our nine children, ages 19 to 1, that the spirit of Christmas is not about what they receive but what they give.

That night for family home evening I asked our children if they would like to serve my grandpa and his family for

Christmas this year. Their response was immediate, sincere, and affirmative, so we began our family history Christmas.

Christmas at the Temple

Including everyone in our project became a challenge. Only some of our children were old enough to perform baptisms for the dead, and only my husband and I could complete the rest of the temple ordinances, so we found other ways to involve the kids. Our older daughters willingly provided hours of babysitting so my husband and I could return to the temple often during the busy holiday season. All of us also began to learn the FamilySearch program, and our daughters excelled.

We sealed Grandpa Keiser’s family together on December 23, the last day that our temple was open before Christmas. There was a greater spirit of unity and love in our home that Christmas. We began a tradition of family history that year that now allows us to spend quality time together every year during the holiday season.

My mother, sisters, and I gather names for all of the cousins to take to the temple during the week of Thanksgiving.

The temple workers are excited to accommodate us, as they tell us that the holidays are actually a slow time for them.

We also distribute family ordinance cards to adult family members to take to the temple over the holidays.

Our family members become as excited and grateful about the time and effort spent in researching our progenitors as they do about a thoughtful and timely purchased gift. The eternal gifts associated with family history have often taken the place of crowded parking lots and chaotic struggling for discounted items.

For many people, Christmas is about family. For us, serving Grandpa Keiser has blessed us by making our Christmas about family both past and present. ■

The author lives in Idaho, USA.

Other Ways to Bring Your Ancestors Home for Christmas

Christmastime is family time. Incorporating family history into our Christmas traditions can help us come to know our ancestors and see our families as extending both backward and forward. Here are a few suggestions on how your family might develop some Christmas traditions that celebrate family history:

- **Tell some stories.** While gathered around the Christmas tree, the fireplace, the dinner table—wherever your family meets—recount favorite stories from individual ancestors.
- **Give the gift of family history.** You can make memoir books, photo albums, photo biographies, and many other gifts related to family history for family members, neighbors, and friends.
- **Sample some foreign traditions.** Wherever your ancestors come from, they probably had different Christmas traditions than you do now. Discover some traditional foods, games, or other activities from your ancestors' homelands and try them out with your family.
- **Decorate your Christmas tree to reflect your family tree.** Create ornaments that represent the ancestors whose work you have done. Place names and pictures (if available) of these ancestors among the tree's decorations.



The Kugaths place pictures of their ancestors inside clear ornaments to hang on their Christmas tree.

Christmas in Thailand

As a missionary, I learned valuable lessons at Christmastime about charity and service.

By Brett Bartholomew

Christmas is often spent with family ornamenting the house with bells and tinsel, placing presents under the Christmas tree, enjoying a hearty (but usually not healthy) meal, and baking cookies for Santa Claus. My Christmas experience while serving as a missionary in the Thailand Bangkok Mission, however, was quite different. I was away from family, had no decorations, didn't set up a tree, ate rice instead of a traditional Christmas meal, and didn't have an oven to bake cookies for Santa Claus. But I learned more in Thailand about the true meaning of Christmas than I ever had before.

I'll never forget the charity of the Thai members, especially, as they spread the true spirit of Christmas by both inviting others to come to the church and giving of their time and talents to bless others.

Of the millions of people in Bangkok, the vast majority belong to the Buddhist religion. Their knowledge about Christmas mostly comes from what they see on American television: big trees, decorative gifts, and so on. So the members took Christmas as an opportunity to invite both less-active members and nonmembers to come to the church and learn more about Christ, the real reason for Christmas, and feel of His love. Deciding on a date in December, the members prepared to put on a Christmas

production by creating flyers, designing visuals, memorizing lines, building backdrops, and practicing speaking and singing parts. Each week, I witnessed the members give an enormous amount of time and effort to bring Christmas to Thailand.

Finally, the night arrived. As a missionary, I was excited by how many new people I got to meet and reach out to, but I was more impressed when I saw the wonderful Thai members reaching out to befriend the newcomers. I was nearing the end of my mission then, and seeing the members' examples made me want to be a better member missionary when I got home. As the night progressed, I got to watch the production the members put on, and I felt the Spirit strongly as I watched the pageant and was reminded of truths about eternal families, the scriptures, and the birth of our Savior.

Even after the Christmas program, the members kept on giving. They invited the missionaries to go caroling at less-active members' houses. Arriving in a caravan of cars, our young and old members approached those less-active members with a love hard to imagine. That night was one of my favorite nights in Thailand. I feel like I gained more than I gave because I saw those less-active members the way that Heavenly Father saw them—as

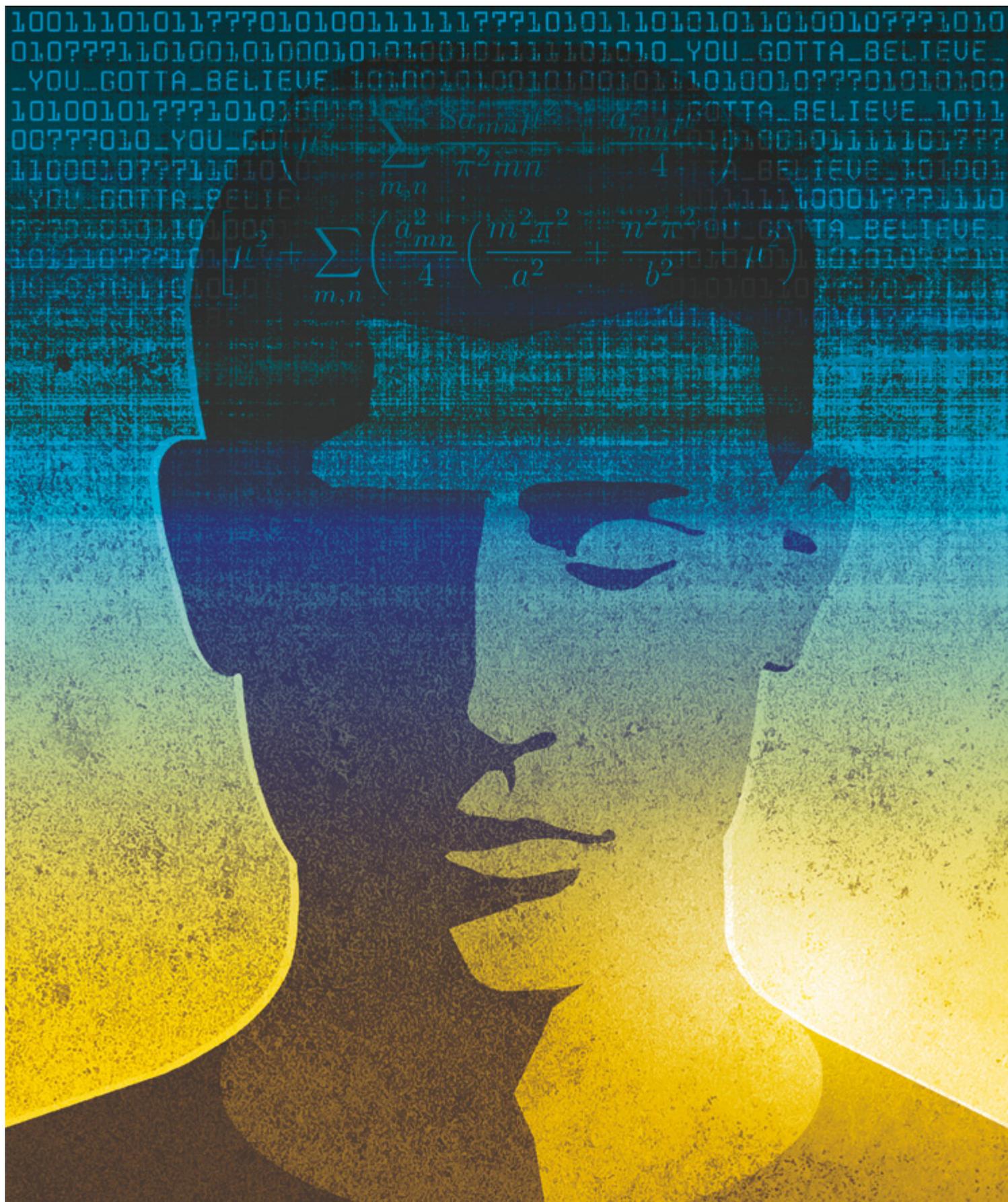


His children whom He loved very much, no doubt wanting them to know of His love for them. I was struck by the members' willingness to do as the prophets and apostles have asked and administer to those in need and seek out the lost sheep. As our little caravan was about to leave each place, we invited those less-active members to come back to church and partake of the Lord's goodness.

The two principles I learned during Christmastime in Thailand—inviting others to come unto Christ and unconditional giving—have changed my life. When I came home, I realized there are many things we can do to help

others draw nearer to Christ, such as inviting others to participate in family home evening, bringing friends or family members to church, and encouraging less-active members to participate in callings. And I hope to always choose to have an attitude of giving, especially as Christmastime approaches. By inviting others and truly giving, we, like the Saints in Thailand, can have the true spirit of Christmas with us during the Christmas season. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.



“You Gotta Believe”

I was stuck in the rut of believing that God would work His mighty miracles for everyone but me.

By Matthew O. Richardson

Advancement Vice President at Brigham Young University

Every computer I have owned for the past 29 years has had the same screen saver. It is a scrawling custom message that reads, “You gotta believe.” This helps me recall something I hope to always remember. While there are many more details to this experience, I will offer an abridged version.

At the beginning of my senior year at Brigham Young University, I began worrying whether I was making the right decision about my future. I was taking entrance exams for graduate programs and even submitting applications, but nothing felt right. To find some guidance, I interviewed doctors, lawyers, businesspeople, teachers, and pretty much everyone who had a pulse. Nothing clicked. My wife, Lisa, and I started fasting and praying for direction. Nothing happened. We kept on praying and fasting.

One day in the fall, Lisa asked me if there was *anyone* who could possibly help me with whom I hadn’t yet already talked.

Without a moment’s hesitation, I said, “Yes. If I could only talk to the president of BYU, Jeffrey R. Holland, that would clear everything up.”

So Lisa, who possesses more passion, compassion, and faith than Joan of Arc, Mother Teresa, and Esther of the Old Testament—combined—said, “Then you should go and talk with him!”

“Are you crazy?” I thought. What would I say? “Um,

excuse me, President. I am one of the 30,000-plus students at BYU. Will you please tell me what I should major in?” Oh please!

Instead I muddled my way through the next seven or so months trying to figure it out. But I couldn’t seem to get my bearings. I felt as if I were in a fog. It felt as if *everyone* else was receiving revelation, direction, and confidence.

The irony was that while I knew that God would answer the prayers of any who asked with sincere intent, I still wavered in knowing that He would answer my prayers. And when it seemed like it mattered the very most, I felt a little alone—abandoned and even hopeless at times. I reached a point in which I didn’t care so much about what I did for a living as much as I cared about receiving divine direction. It was clear that I wasn’t standing up very straight, my hands were hanging down, and my feeble knees needed strengthening (see D&C 81:5).

Just several weeks prior to graduation, I attended my senior capstone classes in the basement of the Jesse Knight Building. As I prepared to leave the building, I noticed a crowd gathered at the west doors. I worked my way to the front of the doors and discovered that the reason no one was leaving was because it was raining—a complete down-pour. Having taught at the missionary training center earlier that day, I was dressed in a suit. I can almost hear myself saying, “Typical, just typical,” as I looked outside at the rainstorm and sized up the situation.

I put a *Daily Universe* newspaper over my head and started running through the parking lot. The newspaper turned to a pulpy mush, and I was soaked almost immediately. So I walked—slowly.

“I might as well catch pneumonia and be sent to the hospital,” I thought. I was in a blue mood.

As I walked past the Brimhall Building, I heard someone yell out, “You need this more than I do!”

I looked across the street, and there was President Holland holding up an umbrella. I offered an exchange of my backpack for his umbrella. He responded by opening the rear passenger door and offering me a ride home. I ran across the street, got in, and immediately created a little puddle of water on the backseat. Sister Holland, who was already in the car, greeted me as President Holland got into the driver’s seat.

“Where can I take you?” President Holland asked as he looked at me through the rearview mirror.

My wife and I were managing apartments south of campus, and I hesitated telling him where I lived because I didn’t think he would be very impressed. But with the president of the university looking me in the eye, albeit through the rearview mirror, I confessed the name of the complex.

President and Sister Holland chuckled, and President Holland said, “Pat and I managed those apartments when we were undergraduates at BYU.”

I was stunned and speechless. My tiny brain couldn’t comprehend that President Jeffrey R. Holland had actually lived in the same apartments that I was living in. Impossible! You see, I had long admired President Holland and had placed him and Sister Holland in the “Born with a Life” category. I imagined that his life was charmed. He had been a perfect high school athlete, had been a perfect missionary, and had a perfect wife—just perfect. So to think that I actually lived in the same apartments was incomprehensible.

“Are you married?” they asked.

“Yes,” I answered, my head still spinning.

“Do you have children?”

“We have a son,” I said.

“Our first son was born while we were in those apartments,” they explained.

“Really?” I managed to blurt out.

We drove south on Campus Drive past the Maeser Building. As I sat in the car, I suddenly realized that seven months previous I had told my wife that if I could only talk with President Holland, then I was confident I would receive helpful direction. I mustered my courage and asked, “Did you ever worry about your future?”

“Oh yes,” he replied.

I was stunned, and all I could say was, “Really?” After all, I thought this was a man who had never had a worry in his entire life.

I asked several other questions and found my response to be “Really?” every time.

I finally asked, “President Holland, have you ever been so discouraged that you didn’t know if things would ever work out? Did you ever worry that you might not make it after all?”

He looked at me through the rearview mirror and answered, once again to my surprise, “Yes, I did.”

True to the pattern of our conversation, I managed an incredulous “Really?”

I recall Sister Holland saying, “Yes, Matt. Really.”

We drove to my complex (without any directions given, I might add), and I moved toward the door to get out. But President Holland put the car in park, and he and Sister Holland turned in their seats to face me. We talked.

At one point he said, “Matt, part of your problem is that you don’t believe.”

I admit I felt a little bad, as if my testimony was considered subpar.

“Oh, I’m not talking about your testimony,” President Holland said. “You just believe that God will work His mighty miracles for everyone but you.”

His assessment was right.



And then he said with his typical fervor, “You gotta believe, Matt. You gotta believe.”

He offered me sound counsel and heaps of encouragement, and then I got out of the car. I stood and waved until they were out of sight.

Upon entering our apartment, I shared my experience with my wife. We wept together and then wrote the experience down—so that we would always remember.

So why the screen saver? While I will always be grateful for President and Sister Holland, I want to make sure that I never forget that God is aware of each of us. I want to remember every day that no matter what happens, you gotta believe.

Twelve years after my ride home in the rainstorm, Elder Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, in a general conference address, reflected on a personal experience when he was discouraged and unsure about his own future. He offered himself this advice, which brought back memories and renewed my own resolve. Elder

Holland said: “Don’t give up, boy. Don’t you quit. You keep walking. You keep trying. There is help and happiness ahead—a lot of it—30 years of it now, and still counting. You keep your chin up. It will be all right in the end. Trust God and believe in good things to come.”¹

I testify that if you seek help and invite others into your life, then your life will be fuller, your success will be more meaningful, and you will find peace. I testify that God will answer your prayers. It may take months, years, or however long is required for you to openly receive His answers, but the vision will surely come. You gotta believe!

I especially hope that you will stand up straight, smile, and remember who you are. You are a child of God. Be a light. Don’t you ever forget it. ■

From a devotional address, “Brigham Young University: A Visionary House,” given at Brigham Young University on October 25, 2016. For the full address, visit speeches.byu.edu.

NOTE

1. Jeffrey R. Holland, “An High Priest of Good Things to Come,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 38.



THE

Gospel of Jesus Christ

A REFUGE AND PROTECTION

By Getulio Walter Jagher e Silva
Seminaries and Institutes

The Lord wants to protect His people.

During a time of great persecution in the Church, He stressed the importance of gathering to Zion “for a *defense*, and for a *refuge* from the storm” (D&C 115:6; emphasis added).

This refuge and protection is found by living the gospel of Jesus Christ as we “search these commandments” (D&C 1:37). Therefore, let us examine some principles found in the Doctrine and Covenants that, *if understood and lived,*

will bring us protection and will be a refuge against the temptations, evil, and other dangers that we face today.

We Are Protected as We Seek the Holy Ghost

Having the Holy Ghost with us can be a refuge and a protection from the world. The Lord promised that if Oliver Cowdery would “apply unto” the gift of revelation, “it shall deliver you out of the hands of your enemies, when, if it were not so, they would slay you and bring your soul to destruction” (D&C 8:4). Observe that by the voice of the Spirit, Oliver Cowdery could be protected from death and from sin.

Receiving the truth through the power of the Holy Ghost

will also protect us against the precepts of men and the lies and deceptions of Satan. The Lord promised that “they that are wise and have received the truth, and *have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide*, and have not been deceived—verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day” (D&C 45:57; emphasis added). The power of the Holy Ghost writes the truth in our hearts and protects us from deception.

But heeding the promptings of the Spirit doesn’t mean that we will be protected from every trial. Section 122 of the Doctrine and Covenants shows that even when worthy, we can face sorrows and challenges. In the view

and wisdom of God, who “knoweth all these things” (D&C 127:2), “all these things shall give [us] experience, and shall be for [our] good” (D&C 122:7).

We Are Protected as We Follow Living Prophets

On the day the Church was organized, the Lord commanded His Saints to listen to the prophet:

“Thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me;

“For his [the Church President’s] word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.

“For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name’s glory” (D&C 21:4–6).

The Lord tells us in the Doctrine and Covenants that “they who will not hear the

voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants, neither give heed to the *words of the prophets and apostles*, shall be cut off from among the people” (D&C 1:14; emphasis added).

Listening to and applying the teachings of the living prophets will bring protection and security, for they speak of our current problems and tell us what we need to do to overcome these challenges. What a wonderful blessing it is to have living oracles of the Lord.

In Doctrine and Covenants 101:43–62, the Lord uses a parable about an olive vineyard to demonstrate the importance of listening to a living prophet. The parable compares the prophet to a watchman on a tower. In ancient times people built towers where a watchman could see beyond the city and warn the people when the enemy was approaching.

The parable begins: “Build a tower, that one may overlook the land round about, to be a watchman upon the tower, that mine olive trees may not be broken down when the

The teachings in the Doctrine and Covenants can protect us from the difficulties we will face as we prepare for the Lord’s Second Coming.

enemy shall come to spoil and take upon themselves the fruit of my vineyard” (verse 45; emphasis added).

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught about the protection and blessings that come from following the counsel of a living prophet: “It is no small thing, my brothers and sisters, to have a prophet of God in our midst. . . . When we hear the counsel of the Lord expressed through the words of the President of the Church, our response should be

positive and prompt. History has shown that there is safety, peace, prosperity, and happiness in responding to prophetic counsel.”¹

More important than the physical protection that comes from listening to the prophets is the spiritual protection. It is sorely needed, for “Satan hath sought to deceive you, that he might overthrow you” (D&C 50:3). Listening to the prophets protects us from the philosophies of the world and “the subtle craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (D&C 123:12).

We Are Protected as We Are Faithful in Marriage

The Lord promises us that the new and everlasting covenant of marriage can be eternal (see D&C 132:19). This doctrine of exaltation is a refuge from the relationship falsehoods that plague our world. Although many worldly voices claim that marriage is old-fashioned, inconvenient, or unnecessary, the voice of the Lord declares, “Whoso forbiddeth to marry

is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man” (D&C 49:15).

The Lord teaches us how to protect our marriages: “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else” (D&C 42:22).

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) explained the all-encompassing nature of this commandment:

“When the Lord says *all* thy heart, it allows for no sharing nor dividing nor depriving. And, to the woman it is paraphrased: ‘Thou shalt love thy husband with *all* thy heart and shalt cleave unto him and none else.’

“The words *none else* eliminate everyone and everything. The spouse then becomes preeminent in the life of the husband or wife, and neither social life nor occupational life nor political life nor any other interest nor person nor thing shall ever take precedence over the companion spouse.”²

What we see affects us greatly for good or for evil. I think that is why the Lord



warns us in the following verse: “He that *looketh* upon a woman to lust after her shall deny the faith, and shall not have the Spirit; and if he repents not he shall be cast out” (D&C 42:23; emphasis added).

To be protected from the attacks of the enemy, our eyes and hearts should be turned only to our spouse and to the Lord. We must not permit our eyes to wander or desire someone other than our spouse. We need to lock our hearts and minds to be protected from that temptation. This is the Lord’s recipe for success in marriage.

We Are Protected as We Serve a Mission

We have many opportunities to serve in the Church, and the Lord “delight[s] to honor those who serve [Him]” (D&C 76:5). Great principles are taught in the Doctrine and Covenants about serving missions.

The Lord promises that “any man that shall go and preach this gospel of the kingdom, and fail not to

continue faithful in all things, shall not be weary in mind, neither darkened, neither in body, limb, nor joint; and a hair of his head shall not fall to the ground unnoticed. And they shall not go hungry, neither athirst” (D&C 84:80). Note that the Lord does not exempt us from difficulties but promises that we will be in His divine care.

He added, “I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up” (D&C 84:88). If we serve Him, “it shall come to pass that power shall rest upon thee; thou shalt have great faith, and I will be with thee and go before thy face” (D&C 39:12). Those who serve missions with all their hearts have the promise that they “shall be blessed both spiritually and temporally” (D&C 14:11).

The Lord also extends this protection to the families of those who serve: “I, the Lord, give unto them a promise that I will provide for their families; and an effectual door shall be

opened for them, from henceforth” (D&C 118:3).

And faithful missionaries are promised that “your sins are forgiven you, and you shall be laden with sheaves upon your back” (D&C 31:5). This blessing is a refuge for our souls.

We Are Protected as We Obey the Law of Tithing

In the Doctrine and Covenants we find the following teaching concerning tithing: “Behold, now it is called today until the coming of the Son of Man, and verily it is a day of sacrifice, and a day for the tithing of my people” (D&C 64:23).

I like to say that the law of tithing is contrary to mathematics because 90 will be greater than 100. As we give the Lord 10 percent of our income, He promises to “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; see also 3 Nephi 24:10).

To evaluate how strong our faith is, we can look at

Like watchmen on a tower, prophets see into the distance and warn of approaching enemies.

our attitude toward the law of tithing. Paying tithing is not a question of money; it is a matter of faith.

President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, teaches us: “By our decision now to be a full-tithe payer and our steady efforts to obey, we will be strengthened in our faith and, in time, our hearts will be softened. It is that change in our hearts through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, beyond the offering of our money or goods, that makes it possible for the Lord to promise full-tithe payers protection in the last days [see D&C 64:23]. We can have confidence that we will qualify for that blessing of protection if we commit now to pay a full tithe and are steady in doing it.”³

We Are Protected as We Obey the Word of Wisdom

We live in a time when our health can be threatened by many dangerous substances. The Lord, knowing what we face, taught the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1833 that “in consequence of evils and designs

which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days, I have warned you, and forewarn you, by giving unto you this word of wisdom” (D&C 89:4).

Those who keep the Lord’s law of health have the promise that they “shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones [physical health]; and shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures [intellectual and spiritual blessings]; and shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint [physical health].”

And the Lord promises safety to those who obey this law: “And I, the Lord, give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them” (D&C 89:18–21).

This promise does not mean that we will not die, because death is part of the eternal plan. But “the destroying angel, he who comes to punish the unrighteous for their sins, as he in olden time afflicted the corrupt Egyptians in their wickedness [see

Exodus 12:23, 29], shall pass by the Saints.”⁴

We Are Protected as We Stand in Holy Places

The Lord commands us again and again to “stand in holy places” (see D&C 45:32; 87:8; 101:22). Surely our temples are holy places. President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) taught:

“If we realize what we are doing then the endowment will be a protection to us all our lives—a protection which a man who does not go to the temple does not have.

“I have heard my father [President Joseph F. Smith] say that in the hour of trial, in the hour of temptation, he would think of the promises, the covenants that he made in the House of the Lord, and they were a protection to him.”⁵

Together with temples, the chapels and classrooms of Church meetinghouses and our homes are dedicated, holy places. These places are holy if people who inhabit them are pure in heart and live the commandments of God. When we keep the

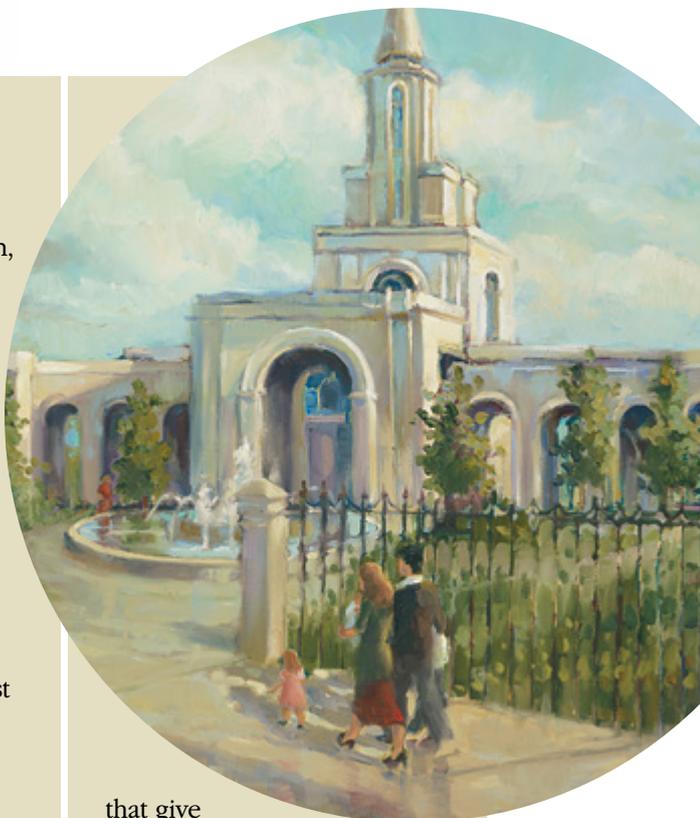
commandments, we enjoy the companionship, direction, and comfort of the Holy Ghost. If He can be our constant companion, then surely we will stand in holy places.

Conclusion

We have seen in the Doctrine and Covenants various forms of protection that the gospel of Jesus Christ gives us when we seek to learn and live these principles. We may ask where to find this protection.

The Lord, showing His love and mercy to the Saints, promised He would be with us: “Be of good cheer, little children; for I am in your midst, and I have not forsaken you” (D&C 61:36). “Hearken, . . . saith the Lord your God, even Jesus Christ, your advocate, who knoweth the weakness of man and how to succor them who are tempted” (D&C 62:1).

When we apply the Atonement and teachings of our Savior Jesus Christ in our lives, we can receive the healing, protection, and refuge



that give us the strength to relieve our burdens, overcome our sins and difficulties, and make us Saints. ■

The author lives in Curitiba, Brazil.

NOTES

1. M. Russell Ballard, “His Word Ye Shall Receive,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 65.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), 199.
3. Henry B. Eyring, “Spiritual Preparedness: Start Early and Be Steady,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 40.
4. J. Reuben Clark Jr., in Conference Report, Oct. 1940, 17; see also *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual* (Church Educational System manual, 2001), 211.
5. Joseph Fielding Smith, “The Pearl of Great Price,” *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, July 1930, 103; see also *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual*, 259.





By Elder
Marcus B. Nash
Of the Seventy

Joseph Smith:

STRENGTH OUT OF WEAKNESS

Thousands of years ago, Joseph of old prophesied, “Thus saith the Lord unto me: A choice seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; . . . and unto him will I give power to bring forth my word . . . and out of weakness he shall be made strong” (2 Nephi 3:7, 11, 13).

I am intrigued and inspired by this prophecy that “out of weakness he shall be made strong.” It may seem counterintuitive that the Lord would call upon the weak to accomplish a mighty work. Yet those who recognize their weakness can be moved by that very weakness to seek the Lord’s strength. Those who thus humble themselves in faith will be strengthened by Him who has all power in heaven and earth (see Matthew 28:18; Mosiah 4:9).¹

From the time of his youth, Joseph Smith approached the Lord on these terms. When Joseph was in his 15th year, he yearned for forgiveness of sins and longed to learn which church was right. He wrote, “Though my feelings were deep and often poignant, . . . it was impossible for a person young as I was, and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong” (see Joseph Smith—History 1:8).

Fully aware of this weakness, he went into the Sacred Grove to learn where he could find the Church of God. He inquired so that he could *do* something about it, so that he could *join* that church (see Joseph Smith—History 1:18). In response to his humble, sincere petition, God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to Joseph. In doing so, They delivered him from the power of the evil one and prepared the way for the Restoration (see Joseph Smith—History 1:14–19).

If we, like Joseph Smith, will recognize our weakness and turn in faith to the Lord, we too will be made strong.

obliged to labour hard

Joseph Smith did not contest that he was one of “the weak things of the world” (D&C 1:19; 35:13). Years later the Lord addressed him this way: “Unto this end have I raised you up, that I might show forth my wisdom through the weak things of the earth” (D&C 124:1).

An Obscure Boy

Joseph described himself as “an obscure boy . . . who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance by his daily labor” (Joseph Smith—History 1:23). He was born into a low social stratum

with limited formal education. His first attempt at writing his history underscores the weak position from which he was called to the work.

“I was born in the town of Charon [Sharon] in the State of Vermont North America on the twenty third day of December AD 1805 of goodly Parents who spared no pains to instructing me in the christian religion[,] at the age of about ten years my Father Joseph Smith Seignior moved to Palmyra Ontario County in the State of New York and being in indigent circumstances were obliged to labour hard for the support of a large Family having nine children and as it required the exertions of all that were able to render any assistance for the support of the Family therefore we were deprived of the bennifit of an education suffice it to say I was nearly instructid in reading writing and the ground rules of Arithmatic.”²

Joseph felt so keenly his lack of education that he once lamented being trapped in “the little narrow prison almost as it were totel darkness of paper pen and ink and a crooked broken scattered and imperfect language.”³ Despite this, the Lord called him to translate the Book of Mormon—all 588 pages of it as originally published—which he did in less than 90 days!

Any person who thinks clearly would conclude it to be impossible for the educationally weak Joseph to have accomplished such a thing on his own, and the explanations some have concocted are much more difficult to believe than the true explanation: he was a prophet who translated by the gift and power of God.

Emma’s Witness

Late in her life, Emma Smith recalled that at the time her husband translated the golden plates, he “could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter; let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon. And,

Left: An entry from Joseph Smith’s history written in his own hand. Opposite page: A page from Joseph Smith’s journal. Note the words that have been crossed out.



*New York and being in indigent
obliged to labour hard for the
Family having nine child
and the exertions of all that
any assistance for the supp
Therefore we were deprived of*

for the support of a lar...

though I was an active participant in the scenes that transpired, it is marvelous to me, 'a marvel and a wonder,' as much so as to any one else."⁴

Against the backdrop of this history, it is interesting to look at page one of Joseph's first journal, dated November 27, 1832 (shown at right). He wrote this approximately three and a half years after he had concluded the translation of the Book of Mormon. Note that he writes and then strikes out the following words:

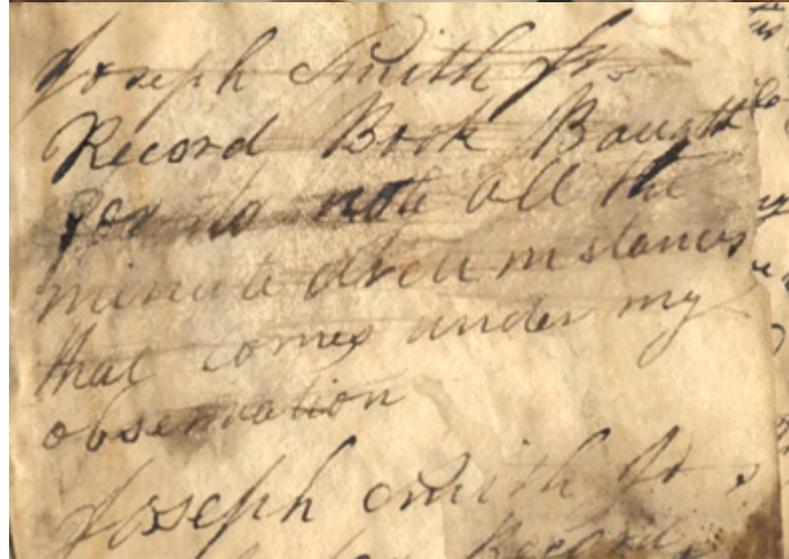
"Joseph Smith Jrs—Record Book Bought for to note all the minute circumstances that comes under my observation."

As I have held this diary and read these crossed-out words, I have imagined Joseph seated in a rustic setting in frontier America, writing the opening sentence and then thinking, "No, that's not quite right; let me try again." So he strikes out the sentence and writes, "Joseph Smith Jrs Book for Record Bought on the 27th of November 1832 for the purpose to keep a minute account of all things that come under my observation &c— —"

Finally, probably not entirely satisfied with the stilted, halting language he had just penned, he writes, "Oh may God grant that I may be directed in all my thoughts Oh bless thy Servent Amen."⁵ I sense in this sentence Joseph feeling his inadequacy and weakness, and calling upon God in faith to direct him in all he does.

Now, contrast that journal entry with a copy of an original manuscript page of the Book of Mormon transcribed sometime between April and June 1829 (shown on the next page).

Note the flowing prose—without punctuation, without strikeouts. This was not a composition. Joseph dictated it word by word as he looked into instruments the Lord had prepared for him, including the Urim and Thummim and at times a seer stone, using a hat to shield his eyes from extraneous light in order to plainly see the words as they appeared (see 2 Nephi 27:6, 19–22; Mosiah 28:13). As you can see, there is a vast difference between the translation of the Book



of Mormon and the journal entry: one was the product of Joseph Smith, the prophet, seer, and revelator; the other was the product of Joseph Smith, the man. If you look closely at this original manuscript of the translation, you will read words that must have been encouraging to Joseph:

"And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto my father: I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them" (1 Nephi 3:7).

Shortly before these words, he had translated the

DETAIL FROM FIRST VISION, BY WALTER RANE

following: “But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (1 Nephi 1:20).

Yes, a theme of the Book of Mormon—and the Prophet Joseph’s life—is that the weak who humbly seek the Lord in faith are made strong, even mighty, in the work of the Lord. This strengthening will occur even in seemingly small things.

For example, Joseph, a poor speller, corrected the spelling of the name *Coriantumr* (see Helaman 1:15) by his primary scribe, Oliver Cowdery. The first time Joseph dictated the name to Oliver, Oliver wrote *Coriantummer*. This was reasonable because no English words end in “mr.” However, Joseph—who was a weak enough speller to accept the spelling the Lord gave to him—corrected the spelling during the translation. We now know that while this is an unusual spelling in English, it is a perfectly good Egyptian spelling and fits well into the Old World setting. Joseph would not have known this but by revelation.⁶

We Can Be Made Strong

The miracle of the translation of the Book of Mormon is one example of how Joseph, out of weakness, was made strong. There is another, more personal lesson: if we, like Joseph, will recognize our weakness and turn in faith to the Lord with all of our heart, determined to do His will, we too will be made strong out of weakness. This does not necessarily mean that the weakness is erased in mortality—but it does mean that such an individual will be made strong by God.

Joseph humbly admitted his imperfections. He remarked that during his youth he “displayed the weakness of youth, and the foibles of human nature” (Joseph Smith—History 1:28). Later in life he told the Saints in Nauvoo that he “was but a man, and they must not expect [him] to be

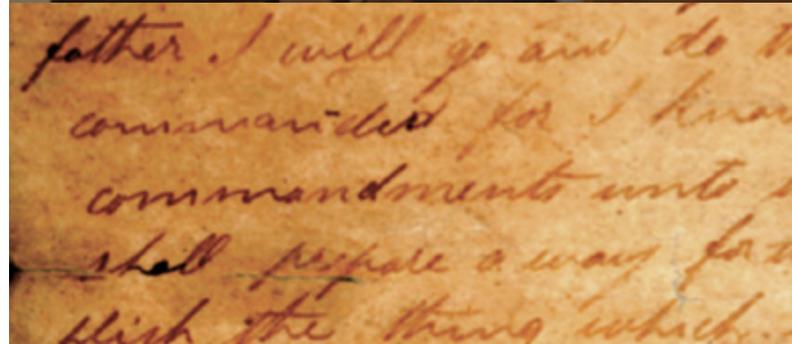
An excerpt from the Book of Mormon manuscript corresponding to 1 Nephi 3:7.

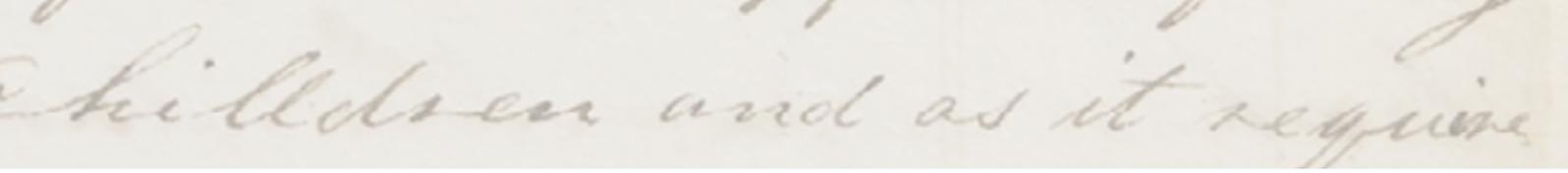
perfect; . . . but if they would bear with [his] infirmities and the infirmities of the brethren, [he] would likewise bear with their infirmities.”⁷

Joseph never pretended to be perfect or infallible, yet he acknowledged the power of God wielded through him when acting as a prophet: “When I speak as a man it is Joseph only that speaks. But when the Lord speaks through me, it is no more Joseph Smith who speaks; but it is God.”⁸

So, out of weakness, Joseph was made strong—strong enough to do “more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men” (D&C 135:3) than any other prophet in all history.

Our unchangeable God will likewise make you and me strong out of weakness—if we will turn to Him in faith with full purpose of heart, as did Joseph.





Prayer and Humility

According to His celestial chemistry, the Lord gives us weakness to facilitate our becoming strong in the only way that matters in time and eternity—through Him. He says: “And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).

According to this scripture, we are given weakness so that we may be humble. Those who choose to humble themselves and to exercise faith in Him will be made strong. Our humility before God, then, is an essential

catalyst for the strength and power of God to be manifest in our lives.

There are those who “think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not” (2 Nephi 9:28). The antidote to this pride is to “consider [our]selves fools before God, and come down in the depths of humility” (2 Nephi 9:42).

From the time of his youth, Joseph understood that a great key to cultivating humility is to seek our Heavenly Father through sincere, heartfelt prayer. Daniel Tyler, an early Church member, recalled a time in Kirtland when many had turned against the Prophet. Brother Tyler, present in a meeting where the Prophet prayed with the congregation for the Lord’s help, described the experience in these words:

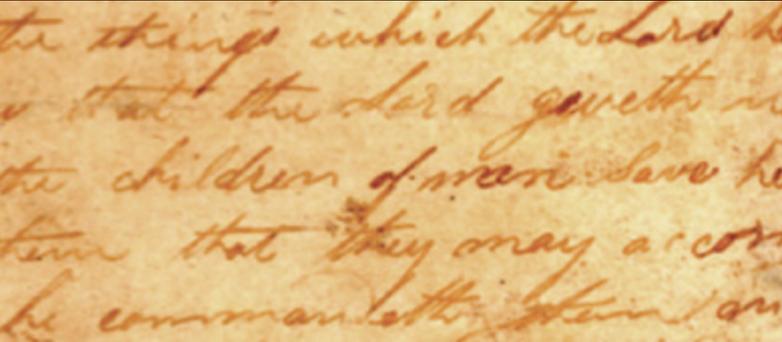
“I had heard men and women pray . . . , but never until then had I heard a man address his Maker as though He was present listening as a kind father would listen to the sorrows of a dutiful child. Joseph was at that time unlearned, but that prayer, which was to a considerable extent in behalf of those who accused him of having gone astray . . . , partook of the learning and eloquence of heaven. . . . It appeared to me as though, in case the vail were taken away, I could see the Lord standing facing His humblest of all servants I had ever seen.”⁹

Out of Weakness, Strength

When Joseph was 17, Moroni told him that “God had a work for me to do; and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people” (Joseph Smith—History 1:33).

I am confident that at the time, many thought that such a claim was evidence of delusions of grandeur; yet in today’s world with the internet, the name of that obscure farm boy is known around the globe, and of him both good and evil are spoken.

EARLY BOOK OF MORMON AND MANUSCRIPT IMAGES COURTESY OF CHURCH HISTORY LIBRARY



any assistance

Just before Joseph and Hyrum Smith went to their deaths at Carthage, Illinois, Hyrum read aloud to Joseph and others in the jail room with them and then folded the page that contains the following words:

“And it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord that he would give unto the Gentiles grace, that they might have charity.

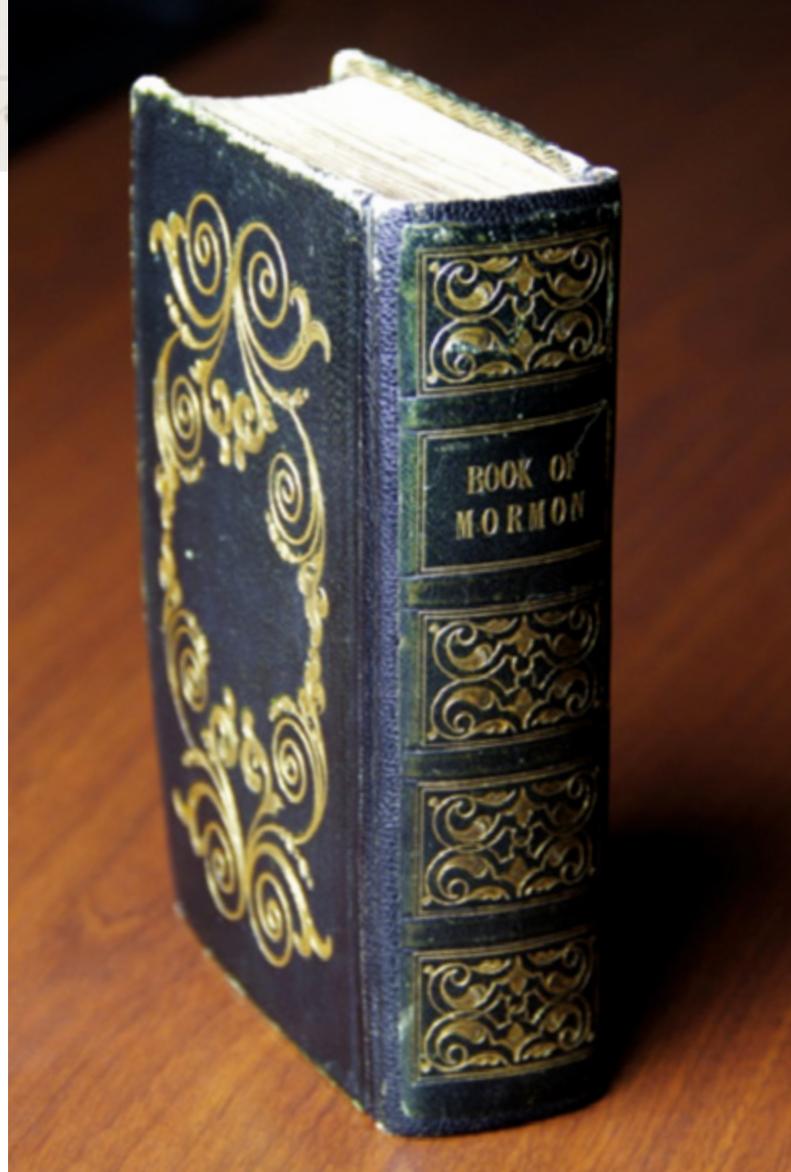
“And it came to pass that the Lord said unto me: If they have not charity it mattereth not unto thee, thou hast been faithful; wherefore, thy garments shall be made clean. And because thou hast seen thy weakness thou shalt be made strong, even unto the sitting down in the place which I have prepared in the mansions of my Father” (Ether 12:36–37).

In a literal sense it is *out of weakness* that Joseph was made strong. Motivated in part by his weakness, he sought the help of God in faith, determined to act according to His will. He approached our Father in Heaven on these terms throughout his life. As a result, he experienced the First Vision, translated the Book of Mormon, received priesthood keys, organized the restored Church of Christ, and brought to the earth the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Prophet Joseph grew in strength; he was not made mighty in a moment. It came to him, and it will come to you and me, “line upon line, precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little” (D&C 128:21; see also Isaiah 28:10; 2 Nephi 28:30).

So do not be discouraged; the process of being made strong is gradual and requires patience with a steadfast determination to follow the Savior and abide by His will, come what may.

The Gift Has Returned

William Tyndale, who translated and published the Bible in English in the 16th century, stated to a learned man opposed to placing the Bible into the hands of common people, “If God spare my life, ere many years *I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the scripture than thou dost.*”¹⁰

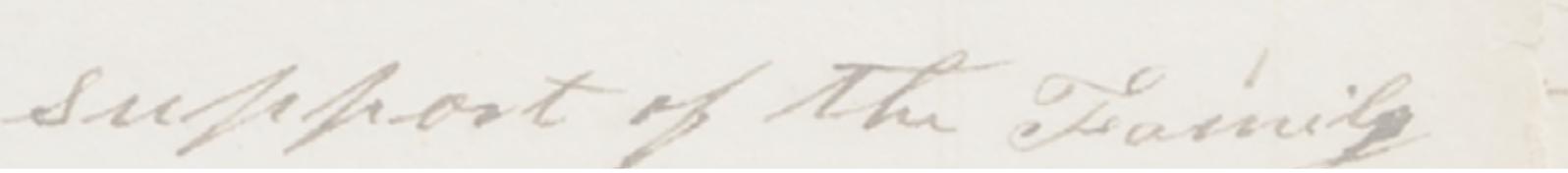


Just before Joseph and Hyrum Smith went to their deaths at Carthage, Illinois, Hyrum read aloud to Joseph and others from this copy of the Book of Mormon.

In a curious parallel 300 years later, Nancy Towle, a famous itinerant preacher in the 1830s, visited Kirtland to personally observe the “Mormons.” In conversing with Joseph Smith and other Church leaders, she sharply criticized the Church.

According to Towle’s record, Joseph said nothing until she turned to him and demanded that he swear that an angel had shown him where to find the golden plates. He good-naturedly replied that he never swore at all! Failing to rattle him, she tried to belittle him. “Are you not ashamed, of such pretensions?” she asked. “You, who are no more than any ignorant plough-boy of our land!”

Joseph calmly responded, “The gift, has returned back again, as in former times, to illiterate fishermen.”¹¹



So Tyndale's words were prescient: a plough-boy did grow to know more of scripture than probably any man who ever lived, save the Savior.

Certainly, the restored Church and gospel of Jesus Christ are not the work of Joseph Smith, a "plough-boy" of the American frontier. Rather, they are the work of the Lord Jesus Christ restored through Joseph Smith, the Prophet. As he reflected upon his life, Joseph may have resonated with Jacob's observation that "the Lord God showeth us our weakness that we may know that it is by his grace, and his great condescensions unto the children of men, that we have power to do these things" (Jacob 4:7).

I know that Joseph Smith was and is a prophet of God, made strong out of weakness. Said President Brigham Young (1801–77): "I feel like shouting Hallelujah, all the time, when I think that I ever knew Joseph Smith, the Prophet."¹² While I have not had that privilege in mortality, I take solace in the poetic promise that "millions shall know 'Brother Joseph' again."¹³ I am profoundly grateful for the Prophet and his humility before our God, who made him strong. I am also encouraged by this history and the doctrine that the Lord will make each of us strong out of weakness if we likewise humble ourselves before Him and exercise our faith in Him with the steadfast determination to do His will. ■

From an address, "Out of Weakness He Shall Be Made Strong," given at the 70th Annual Joseph Smith Memorial Devotional in Logan, Utah, USA, on February 10, 2013.

NOTES

1. I thank my colleagues, particularly Richard E. Turley Jr. and Jed Woodworth in the Church History Department, for their thoughtful input.
2. Joseph Smith, in *The Joseph Smith Papers, Histories, Volume 1: 1832–1844*, ed. Karen Lynn Davidson and others (2012), 11.
3. Joseph Smith, "Letter to William W. Phelps, 27 November 1832," 4, josephsmithpapers.org.
4. Emma Smith, in "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald*, Oct. 1, 1879, 290; spelling standardized; see also Russell M. Nelson, "A Treasured Testament," *Ensign*, July 1993, 62–63.
5. Joseph Smith, in *The Joseph Smith Papers, Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, ed. Dean C. Jessee and others (2008), 9.
6. On "Coriantumr" and the spelling of proper names, see Royal Skousen, in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (1997), 61–93. Using evidence from the original manuscript, Skousen shows that the first time proper names appeared in the text, they were spelled correctly. In subsequent appearances the names may not be spelled correctly, suggesting that Joseph Smith spelled out each name the first time but relied on the scribe's memory thereafter.
7. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 522.
8. Edward Stevenson, in Hyrum L. Andrus and Helen Mae Andrus, comps., *They Knew the Prophet* (1974), 87.
9. Daniel Tyler, in "Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith," *Juvenile Instructor*, Feb. 15, 1892, 127; see also *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 127.
10. William Tyndale, in S. Michael Wilcox, *Fire in the Bones: William Tyndale—Martyr, Father of the English Bible* (2004), 47.
11. *Vicissitudes Illustrated, in the Experience of Nancy Towle, in Europe and America* (1833), 156, 157.
12. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (1997), 343.
13. "Praise to the Man," *Hymns*, no. 27.



JOSEPH'S RAPID ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE AND MATURITY

"Overarching the Prophet Joseph's entire ministry was his comparative youth, his superficial formal education, and his incredibly rapid acquisition of knowledge and maturity. He was 14 at the First Vision and 17 at the first visit from the angel Moroni. He was 21 when he received the golden plates and just 23 when he

finished translating the Book of Mormon (in less than 60 working days). Over half of the revelations in our Doctrine and Covenants were given through the Prophet while he was 25 or younger. He was 26 when the First Presidency was organized and 30 when the Kirtland Temple was dedicated."

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Joseph, the Man and the Prophet," *Ensign*, May 1996, 71.

ONCE IN ROYAL DAVID'S CITY

Words by Cecil Frances Alexander
and Anna M. Molgard

Music by Henry J. Gauntlett
Arr. by Rachel P. Mohlman

With joy ♩ = 110 *mp*

1. (Women) Once in roy - al
2. (Men) He came down to

Piano *mp*

4

Da - vid's cit - y Stood a low - ly cat - tle shed,
earth from heav - en, Who is God and Lord of all,

7

Where a moth - er laid her ba - by In a man - ger
And His shel - ter was a sta - ble, And His cra - dle

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10

for His bed: Ma - ry was that moth - er mild, _____
was a stall; With the poor, and mean, and low - ly,

13

Je - sus Christ her lit - tle child. _____
Lived on earth our Sav - ior ho - ly. _____

17

S.A. And our eyes at last shall see Him, Through His own re -
mf

T.B.



20

deem - ing love; For that child so dear — and gen - tle

23

Is our Lord in heav'n — a - bove, And He leads His

26

chil - dren on — To the place where He — is



29

f Descant (a few sopranos)

One day He will come to greet us, —
gone. One day He will come — to greet us,

29

32

Blaz - ing trails of glo - ry past. We will bow in a - do - ra-tion,
Blaz - ing trails of glo - ry past. We will bow in a - do - ra-tion,

32



36

For our Lord has come_ at last. Oh, the long - a - wait - ed morn-ing;_

For our Lord has come_ at last. Oh, the long - a - wait - ed morn-ing;

36

40

We will shout in joy - ous praise. Prom-ised Lord_ at last to meet us,

We will shout in joy - ous praise. Prom - ised Lord at last_ to meet us,

40



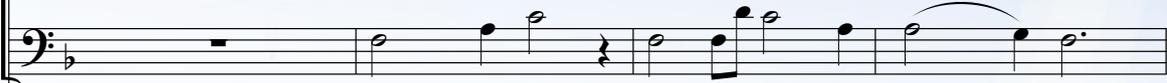
44



Christ, the King, _____ Christ, the King of lat - ter



Christ, the King, _____ Christ, the King of lat - ter



Christ, the King,

44



48



days. _____ A - men. _____



days. _____ A - men. _____



48



OUR SUCCESSFUL FAMILY COUNCIL



By Jennifer Lyn Pond

As I consider family councils in the Church and their relation to parenthood, I think of the symbolism of the oxen huddled in a protective circle under the baptismal fonts in temples. In the wild, when musk oxen sense a threat, they will gather into a tight, outward-facing circle, forming a cluster of heads and horns. Calves hide safely inside the circle. When the herd stays together in this tight formation, their defense of their little ones is virtually impenetrable. As parents, we can also create a protection around our children by using the tool of the family council. Over the years, our family has taken advantage of family councils to foster communication and to protect and strengthen our family.

On one occasion, we held a family council to decide

what to do with our pets. Emma, our nine-year-old, had two parakeets. Michael, our 10-year-old, had a gorgeous reddish-orange bearded dragon. We loved these pets; we would hold them on our shoulders and take them on walks. But unfortunately, our kids were becoming busier as they got older, and I had noticed the pets sitting in their cages more often.

First I discussed my concerns with my husband, who had noticed the same thing. We looked at the previous year's finances and were shocked to discover how much the pets were costing us. We wondered if the pets really gave us the same amount of enjoyment they used to and if they would be happier with other owners.

We decided to hold a family council to get our children's



We can encircle our families with the promised protection of family councils.

input. We explained our concerns and told our children we would have a family council the coming Sunday. We asked them to pray and prepare their thoughts for our council. This time to think and pray was important because they were initially upset at the prospect of losing their pets. We assured them that we had not already decided to get rid of the pets and that we would counsel and make a decision together.

When Sunday came, we began our council with prayer, asking Heavenly Father to help us be open to His will. My husband explained that the purpose of our council was not to vote and go with the majority's wishes but to seek God's will and wait until all family members felt good about the decision.

We first asked Michael and Emma to present their feelings. They were prepared with a pros-and-cons list. My husband and I listened, added points, and asked follow-up questions. As we discussed the needs of our family and our pets, we reached a unique solution that hadn't occurred to us earlier.

We decided Michael would let his bearded dragon go to a new owner and that Emma would keep her birds for now. Initially this idea sounded unfair to me—to let only one child keep her pets. But it actually was our children who realized that Emma still needed and loved her pets and that Michael admittedly viewed caring for his pet as an obligation. The birds had each other for company and weren't as lonely as the dragon might have been, and the dragon was certainly more expensive. The solution made sense, but my husband and I never would have come to this conclusion without counseling with our children.

Our family council not only helped us make a decision but also helped us strengthen our family. Whereas the children might have resented a decision made solely by us as parents, involving them in the decision-making process helped maintain harmony in our home. It showed our children we value their input and seek to follow the Lord's counsel to "let one speak at a time and let all listen unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified" (D&C 88:122).

I know as we provide a place to discuss worries, questions, and goals in the inspired setting of the family council, our families will be blessed. Just like with the musk oxen, if our families are united after seeking the Lord's will, it will be difficult for spiritual threats of contention to get through our protective circle of love. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.



WHY COUNCILS?

"The family is under heavy attack from antagonists bent on extinguishing this powerful source of light in a darkening world. Successful families have a wide assortment of tools, and one of the most useful tools is the family council."

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, in "Family Councils: A Conversation with Elder and Sister Ballard," *Ensign*, June 2003, 14.

THELP WITH YOUR Teens

By David A. Edwards
Church Magazines



Most all of us know teenagers. We're their parents, leaders, teachers, grandparents, fellow ward members, and friends. We love them and want to help them draw closer to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, keep the commandments, and establish righteous patterns for the rest of their lives.

The best way for us to do this is to be with,

encourage, and teach them so that they can see our example, feel our love, and taste God's love through us.

In addition, the Church provides many resources that can help us strengthen youth. We can use these resources in our homes and in church. And more important, we can point the youth to them so that they can learn and grow on their own.

Check out these resources for youth available in print, online, or mobile formats.

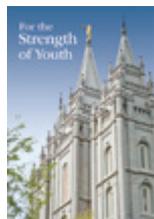


The New Era

This monthly youth magazine contains messages from Church leaders, stories and testimonies from youth, articles on

topics of interest to youth, photos, posters, games, questions and answers, and more.

Subscribe at store.lds.org. You can even make a gift subscription and put the recipient's name on it. Also in the Gospel Library app and at newera.lds.org.

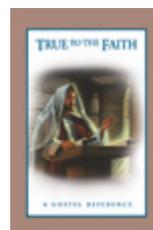


For the Strength of Youth

This is the First Presidency's booklet of standards for youth. It gives

youth clear guidelines and counsel about these standards.

Order a printed book at store.lds.org or find it online at lds.org/youth/for-the-strength-of-youth. Also in the Gospel Library app.



True to the Faith

This booklet is a dictionary-like list of gospel topics. It gives basic information about each item and

was prepared with youth, young adults, and new converts in mind.

Order a printed book at store.lds.org or find it online at lds.org/manual/true-to-the-faith. Also in the Gospel Library app.



@LDSYouth Instagram Account

This Instagram account shares inspiring photos, stories, and testimonies of youth around the world.

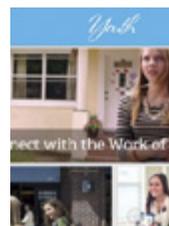
Check it out at the account [@LDSYouth](https://www.instagram.com/LDSYouth) on Instagram.



LDS Youth Mobile App

This mobile app has videos, articles, and music.

Download the LDS Youth app at the [Apple App Store](https://www.apple.com/app-store) or [Google Play](https://www.google.com/play).



LDS Youth Facebook Page

The LDS Youth page on Facebook posts videos, photos, testimonies, inspirational messages, and much more every day.

Check it out at [facebook.com/LDSYouth](https://www.facebook.com/LDSYouth).



Youth Activities Website

Need ideas for a Mutual night? Or did you recently do an awesome activity

that you'd like to share? On the youth activities website, you and the youth can browse through activities by topic, use online tools to plan an activity, and submit activity ideas to share with others. This is also where you'll find an archive of past Face to Face event broadcasts.

Check it out at lds.org/youth/activities.



Youth Website

The Church's youth website has videos, articles, and (perhaps most popular of all) music for youth. In addition, it's your

portal to the *Come, Follow Me* lessons for youth, the youth activities website, and programs such as Personal Progress and Duty to God online.

Check it out at youth.lds.org.

A NEW ERA MYTH

Myth: I don't need to subscribe to the *New Era* for my youth because nowadays young people just want to get everything on their phones and computers.

Reality: Nope. Youth overwhelmingly report that they prefer to get the *New Era* in print, delivered to their mailbox every month. They're not as likely to search it out online or on the Gospel Library app. And they usually need an adult to subscribe for them.

Go to store.lds.org.



Learn how the *Friend* magazine can help your family understand a different sensitive topic each month.

DEALING WITH PEER PRESSURE

The kids your children interact with can have a big influence on them—and vice versa. Last month's *Friend* looks at the upsides and downsides of peer pressure and encourages children to be a force for good in the lives of others. Turn to the November *Friend* for some help getting the conversation started!

"The Ripple Effect" (pages 36–37)

In this story, a boy learns that his attempts to share the gospel can have a wider influence than he first imagined.



"Peer Pressure Problems" (page 34)

A page of ideas for children to use if a friend or classmate tries to pressure them to do something they don't want to do.

"Question Corner: My friends sometimes use their phones to look at bad pictures. What should I do?" (page 21)

Advice from children, for children, about this important topic.



HELPING KIDS SAY NO

- Role-play different situations at home to give your child practice.
- Let them know it's OK to blame an escape on you. "Sorry, I have to be home. Gotta go!"
- Brainstorm escape plans as a family. For example, come up with a code word your children could use in a phone call or text message to let you know they need help getting out of a situation. Talk through how the scenario might play out.
- Reassure your children that, even when they make mistakes, you are always there to love and help them!



SCRIPTURE SUPPORT

- Nephi's example (1 Nephi 4:2): We often think of Nephi as the good example. But who set an example for Nephi to follow? Talk about role models who have helped you make good choices.
- The Lord's promise (D&C 6:33–37): Sometimes making the right choice is hard, and it can feel like everyone is against us. The Savior tells us that in these situations, we should still "do good" and know that He is with us.
- Daniel said no (Daniel 1:8–16): Daniel and his friends refused the food the Lord had commanded them not to eat and chose better food instead. What are some different ways you can say no to outside pressures?

Find stories, activities, and media about other gospel topics at lessonhelps.lds.org. For past *Friend* Connection articles, visit FriendConnection.lds.org.

TEACHING THE PROCLAMATION TO CHILDREN

This month, we conclude our series of tips for talking with your children about “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.”¹

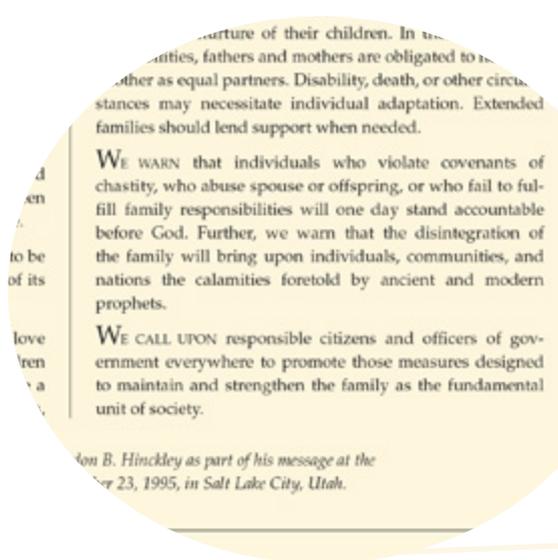
This Month’s Selection

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

“We call upon responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.”

How to Explain This to Children

Heavenly Father knows how we treat our family. People who hurt their family members will have to answer to Him one day. Many prophets have taught that families are important. Families make neighborhoods and countries stronger. We should tell our government leaders that we care about families and ask them for help making our families as healthy and happy as they can be.



Activity Idea

Learn about who your local government leaders are. Write them a letter asking for something that would help your family or thanking them for something that already does. For example, you could thank them for a park near your home, or ask them for more family-friendly community activities. What have you learned about the family proclamation this year?

NOTE

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



Find other teaching tips and a copy of the family proclamation at ProclamationKids.lds.org.





PORTRAITS OF FAITH

The dedication of the Philadelphia Pennsylvania Temple in 2016 has given Josephine the opportunity to attend weekly. In the temple she finds strength and healing for dealing with the trials of life.

LESLIE NILSSON, PHOTOGRAPHER

Josephine Scere

Pennsylvania, USA

I was born into hardship. My mother was an immigrant from Liberia, we were poor, and I was abused as a child while left in the care of people my mother thought she could trust. That has made certain things really hard in my life.

What has kept me so determined to live the gospel is my trials.

Life is hard whether you're a Latter-day Saint or not. My strength comes from my relationship with my Savior and with my son, Enoch. Keeping the covenants I made in the temple also gives me strength.

Truth is truth, regardless. You don't have to argue it. You don't have to prove it. It just is. It's real, and it's real for everyone. It's real for people who live in Salt Lake City, Utah, and it's real for people who live in the slums of Philadelphia. I think that's what should carry us.

See more about Josephine's story at lds.org/go/portraitsE1217.

Learn more about temples at temples.lds.org.

SHARING THE SAVIOR'S LOVE AT CHRISTMAS

I was excited to participate in the Church's 2016 "Light the World" Christmas campaign. I looked forward to completing the daily challenges, particularly for day five: "Jesus helped the sick, and so can you."

That day I left work and walked through the gray city streets planning to visit my grandparents. I felt great. It was Christmastime and the world was beautiful. The peal of a charity bell rang through the air. As I neared the streetcar platform, the sound of the bell was drowned out by a homeless woman yelling at the bell ringer.

"You're a fake!" she screamed. "I'm hungry, I'm cold, and you take it all for yourself! You're a fake!"

Most people ignored her, and the bell ringer continued ringing his bell. I put my headphones on, but I could still hear the woman yelling, "You're a fake! I'm hungry. I'm cold."

I remembered I had a 20-dollar bill in my pocket. I considered giving it to the woman. "No," I thought. "If I'm going to give this to someone, I should give it to someone nice." Then the Spirit reminded me of the challenge and whom I was trying to be like. Jesus was the King of kings, yet He served the lowest of the low. I knew what I needed to do.

I walked toward the woman. She wasn't yelling now, but tears ran down her cheeks.

I walked toward the woman. She wasn't yelling now, but her eyes were closed and tears ran down her cheeks. I took the 20-dollar bill from my pocket and handed it to her.

"Rough day?" I asked.

She looked up at me. "Yeah," she said.

"I'm sorry," I said. I wrapped my arms around her, and she cried into my shoulder until the streetcar came.

"Thanks," the woman said when

we said goodbye. "And not just for the money. Thanks for the hug. I needed a hug."

Hugging a random person on the street was not something I had planned on doing, but I know it's something Jesus would have done. I am grateful the Lord gave me the opportunity to serve as He would have. Jesus helped the sick, the poor, and the needy.

So can I. ■

Jordan Wright, Utah, USA



Two large boxes had my name on them but no return address.



CHRISTMAS PACKAGES FOR ME?

I was serving in the California Sacramento Mission during Christmas 2003. My companion and the two other sister missionaries we shared an apartment with began receiving gifts and letters from their relatives and friends. I knew it would not be the same for me.

My family in Argentina had few resources, and their letters were usually delayed two to three months. I was far from my family, but I was happy to spend Christmas in the service of Jesus Christ.

On Christmas Eve, we were getting ready for bed when one of the sisters told me that someone had left some packages at the door with my name on them.

“For me? It can’t be!” I said, amazed. Two large boxes had my name on them but no return address. I was excited, and the other sisters were excited for me too. I opened the packages, which were full of gifts, sweets, children’s drawings, and other items! I couldn’t hold back the tears.

“Who could have sent me these packages?” I wondered. None of us knew, but we all rejoiced because of the generosity.

Several days after Christmas, I still did not know who had sent the packages. So I called the mission office and asked the secretary if she could tell me the name of the mysterious sender. She told me that members in a ward who wanted to remain

anonymous had decided to send packages to me with Christmas goodies. I will always be thankful for the generosity of the ward that brought so much love that Christmas Eve and for the support I received during my mission.

I learned that every member of the Church can make the missionaries—though far from home—feel at home through their encouragement and service. That was one of the best Christmases of my life. I was serving the Savior and felt His love through the members of His Church. ■

Elisabet Andersen Bogado, Neuquén, Argentina

CHRISTMAS THROUGH MY DAUGHTER'S EYES

A quiet calm settled over my family and me as we walked into a barn to see a live Nativity. Animals lined the stalls, and a man and woman, dressed as Joseph and Mary, stood with a baby wrapped in the woman's arms. They were quiet and focused on the little child. The whole atmosphere was very peaceful.

My older children, my wife, and I stood while my youngest daughter sat on a hay bale in front of us. She was quiet and still, and her eyes stayed focused on the baby. When the rest of my family was ready to go, I placed a hand on my daughter's shoulder and whispered that it was time to leave. She said she wanted to stay with baby Jesus. Her words touched my heart, and I decided to stay with her.

A few minutes later, I gently took my daughter by the hand and told her we needed to leave. She said

My daughter was quiet and still, and her eyes stayed focused on the baby Jesus.

she still wanted to stay. I put my arm around her and knelt beside her.

It didn't take long for me to feel as if I had traveled back in time and was with Mary and Joseph. I then understood why my daughter wanted to stay. I felt the Spirit wash over me. In that place, I felt that I was in the presence of the Savior. Tears glistened in my eyes as I felt of His love. When it was finally time to leave, I picked up

my little girl. As I turned toward the exit, I heard her tell baby Jesus good-bye and how much she loved Him.

That evening I shared an experience with my daughter that I will treasure for the rest of my life, and I almost missed it. That night, I was given a gift. I felt closer to God and felt His love for me. I am grateful for the Savior and the

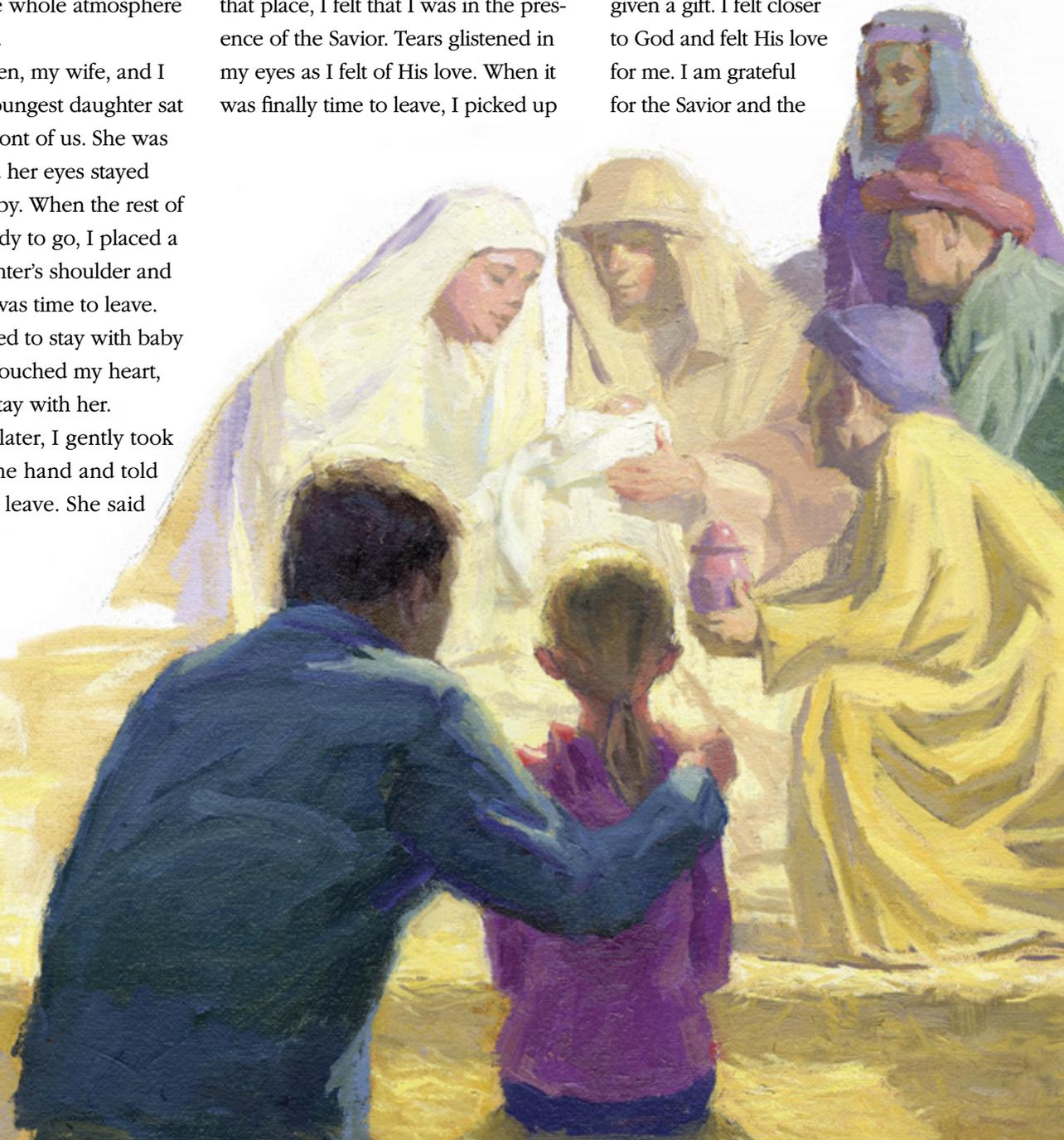


ILLUSTRATION BY ALLEN GARRIS

A FAMILY GIFT FOR THE SAVIOR

opportunity to remember His birth. I know that the Savior's life, example, and Atonement constitute a wonderful gift of never-ending love from God to all His children. I will always cherish this gift deep in my heart. ■

Aaron Adams, South Carolina, USA



As December approached, I was busy preparing for the rush of the Christmas season. For four years, Christmas festivities had been held in our home, but this year I felt overwhelmed. When I discussed with my husband everything we needed to do—buy presents, prepare food, and do many other things—we decided to cancel the Christmas party and do something different this Christmas. We wanted to do something that we could give as a gift for the Savior.

Throughout December, we held family home evenings about the life of Jesus Christ, went to the temple, and planned family service projects. My husband was a bishop at the time, and we decided that on Christmas Day we would sing for all the widows in the ward. As a family, we began to practice several hymns we would sing. My children loved to sing “Away in a Manger” (*Hymns*, no. 206).

On Christmas Eve, we made cards with special Christmas messages and prepared treats to take on our visits. I was pleased to see our family so united and happy to serve others with such love. I could feel the spirit of Christmas.

On Christmas Day, our children were eager to make the visits. With each home we visited, we felt happier, and it seemed that the hymns became better each time we sang. When we arrived at the last house, it looked like no one was home. We waited a few minutes, and the children began to get restless. Eventually an elderly widow came out to meet us with her Sunday clothes on and her hair nicely combed. When she saw us, her eyes filled with tears. I became emotional as well and could hardly sing.

As we returned home, our five-year-old daughter told us she didn't want to go home but wanted to keep singing. Before I could respond, my nine-year-old said, “We'll just do it again next year!”

For our family, this was an unforgettable Christmas because we lifted others and showed our love for Jesus Christ. As I reflected on the events of the day, I felt the love of the Lord and remembered His words, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40). ■

Maria Aparecida da Kiyama Silva, São Paulo, Brazil



By Joseph Smith
(1805–44)

First President
of the Church

VALIANT IN THE CAUSE OF CHRIST

You cannot be too good.

I am a lover of the cause of Christ and of virtue, chastity, and an upright, steady course of conduct, and a holy walk.

I believe in living a virtuous, upright and holy life before God and feel it my duty to persuade all [people] in my power to do the same, that they may cease to do evil and learn to do well, and break off their sins by righteousness.

Strengthening our faith by adding every good quality that adorns the children of the blessed Jesus, we can pray in the season of prayer; we can love our neighbor as ourselves, and be faithful in tribulation, knowing that the reward of such is greater in the kingdom of heaven. What a consolation! What a joy! Let me live the life of the righteous, and let my reward be like his! . . .



As one that greatly desires the salvation of men, let me remind you all to strive with godly zeal for virtue, holiness, and the commandments of the Lord. Be good, be wise, be just, be liberal [with your means]; and above all, be charitable, always abounding in all good works. . . .

Be meek and lowly, upright and pure; render good for evil. . . . Be humble and patient in all circumstances of life; we shall then triumph more gloriously.

We feel to exhort our brethren [and sisters] with boldness, to be humble

and prayerful, to walk indeed as children of the light and of the day, that they may have grace to withstand every temptation, and to overcome every evil in the worthy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The reflection that everyone is to receive according to his own diligence and perseverance while in the vineyard, ought to inspire everyone who is called to be a minister of these glad tidings. . . .

Our trust is in God, and we are determined, His grace assisting us, to maintain the cause and hold out faithful unto the end, that we may be crowned with crowns of celestial glory, and enter into the rest that is prepared for the children of God. . . .

You cannot be too good. Patience is heavenly, obedience is noble, forgiveness is merciful, and exaltation is godly; and he that holds out faithful to the end shall in no wise lose his reward. A good man [or woman] will endure all things to honor Christ. ■

From Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith (2007), 352–56.



**JESUS PRESENTED
IN THE TEMPLE,
BY CHRISTEN DALSGAARD**

*"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:
"For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
"Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
"A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel."
—Luke 2:29–32; see also verses 25–35.*



In Church Magazines

Ensign: As a missionary, I felt inadequate. Then I realized that I needed to stop focusing on myself and start focusing on the Savior. See “My Gift to the Savior” (page 18). Plus, find out how one family made their ancestors a part of their Christmas celebration (page 40).

New Era: There’s more than a little Christmas in the *New Era* this month: Elder Dallin H. Oaks on celebrating Jesus Christ this Christmas (page 2); eight reasons the Christmas season is the best time to share the gospel (page 14); symbols of Christmas (page 28); and more.

Friend: Help your children focus on the Savior this December! Use the advent calendar (page 24) to read a different teaching from the Savior each day. Then learn a new song (page 30) all about making room for Jesus in our lives.

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

