

The Relief Society Lesson That Changed Our Family

Have you ever wished there was a simple, miraculous way to protect your family from the evil influences that attack on every side?

NAME WITHHELD

I noticed a gradual change in our son Jacob's attitude his first year of junior high school (names have been changed). He was a good young man, but he became rude and rebellious at times. He seemed obsessed with television, video games, and the Internet. He fought us continually over doing his homework, keeping his room clean, and helping around the house. I had seen the same thing happen with our older children as they became teenagers, but I felt this was more serious. I knew from painful personal experience how some children turn away from the Church as they grow up. I fervently prayed to know how to protect our youngest son and our whole family from the evil influences in the world.

I certainly didn't expect a miracle that Sunday in November as I sat down at the back of the Relief Society class. Sister Randall, a counselor in the Relief Society presidency, announced that the lesson topic was scripture study, and I was struck by a feeling of weary guilt as I thought of my own family. "Not another lesson on scripture study," I thought. "I'm doing the best I can."

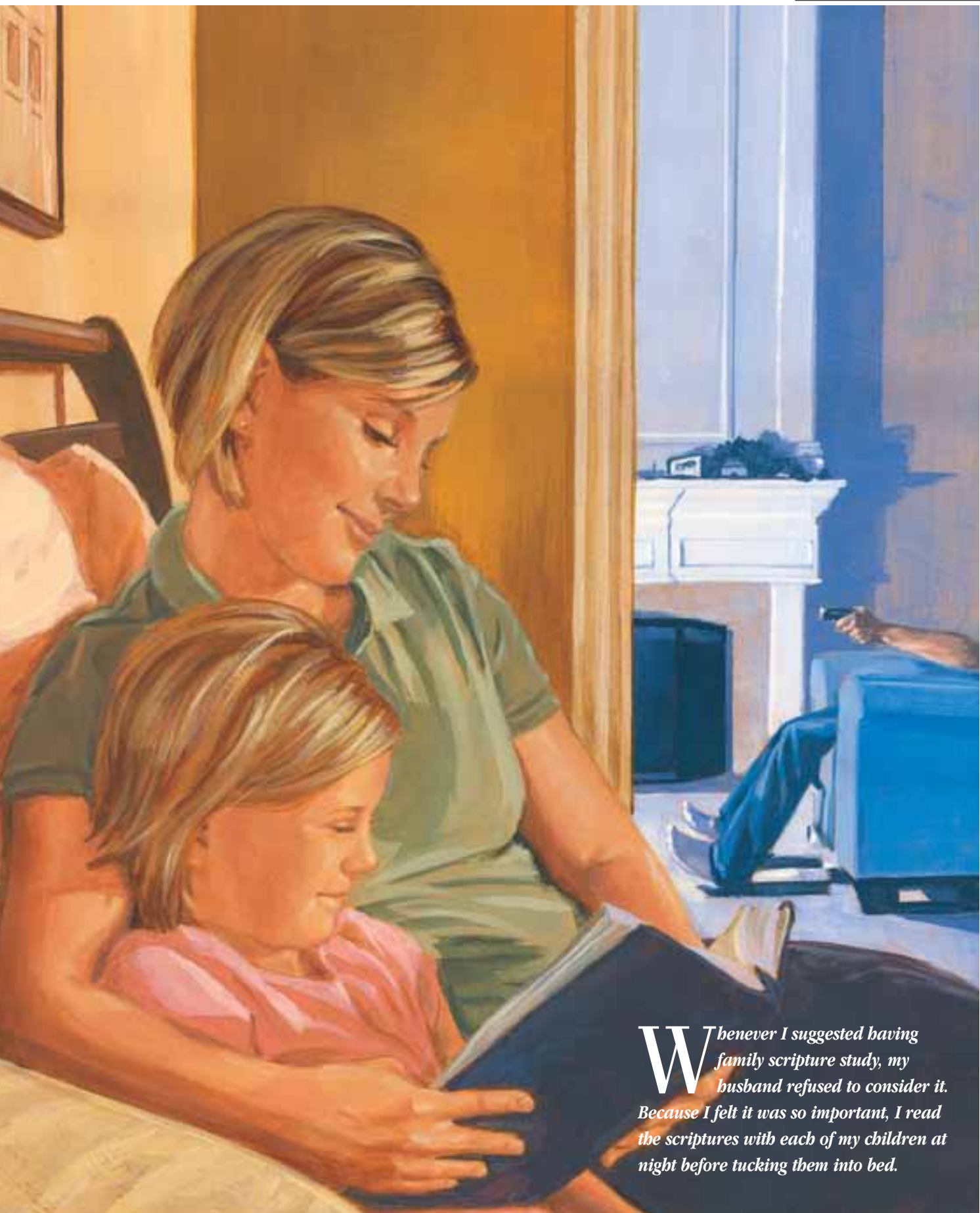
My husband is a good husband and father who has always loved his family dearly, but he couldn't be bothered with family scripture study. We had prayer with the children, and we tried to hold family home evening regularly. But whenever I suggested family scripture study, he

refused to consider it. Because I felt it was so important, I read the scriptures with each of my children at night before tucking them into bed. I didn't know what more I could do.

Lately, however, whenever I came in to read scriptures with Jacob, more often than not he said: "Oh, not now. I'm too tired [or busy or whatever; he had a hundred excuses]. I'll read them by myself." Whenever we didn't read scriptures together and I'd ask about it the next morning, he would always say he had somehow "forgotten" to do it. I wondered how far to push scripture study when he could hear his father watching television in the other room.

As Sister Randall began her lesson, I expected to hear yet another story of how a "perfect family" enjoys scripture study. Instead, Sister Randall began telling a story from the Old Testament: "Numbers 21 tells about fiery serpents attacking the Israelites as they journeyed toward the promised land. Many people were bitten by the serpents and died. Seeing the terrible destruction, the Israelites repented and asked Moses to pray for the Lord to take the serpents from them and to heal them."

In my mind's eye I visualized our family journeying through life and suddenly being attacked by fiery serpents in the form of our own latter-day vipers: crime, drugs, pornography, immorality. I felt as helpless as the Israelites.



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On New Year's Day my husband began to lead us in daily scripture study. Over time I was amazed at how much our home atmosphere improved.

Sister Randall explained how the Lord told Moses to make a brass serpent (symbolic of Christ) and put it on a staff. Then Moses promised the people that anyone who had been bitten by a serpent had only to look at the brass serpent and he or she would live. Despite the simplicity of this promise, Alma tells us that “there were many who were so hardened that they would not look, therefore they perished. Now the reason they would not look is because they did not believe that it would heal them” (Alma 33:20).

Sister Randall told us that although in our day the fiery serpents take a different form, we too can look to Christ and be saved. In our day prophets have told us to read our scriptures daily, both personally and with our families; to have personal and family prayers; to attend our meetings; to pay tithing; to repent; to be worthy to attend the temple; and to have family home evening. This is our way to look to Christ and be healed.

At first the simplicity of the concept seemed too easy to protect us from life's daily temptations. But as Sister Randall talked, my heart was touched, and I felt the Lord speaking to me through her. I realized it

was simply a matter of faith. Did I believe the words of today's prophets and apostles, or would I turn away, as many Israelites turned away from the brass serpent?

I went home from church determined to help my family be strengthened by family prayer and scripture study. I prayed for weeks that my husband would soften his heart. I fasted. I had a special family home evening and invited our less-active married son and his family to join us. We learned about Moses and the fiery serpents. Finally, one night I asked my husband if we could begin the new year by studying the scriptures as a family. And on New Year's Day he began to lead us in daily scripture study.

Our family didn't become perfect overnight, but I was amazed at how much our home atmosphere improved. We had less contention and a sweeter spirit in the home. I didn't lose my temper or get discouraged nearly as often. I felt a closeness to my husband and to the Lord that astonished me. It was Jacob's attitude, however, that changed the most. He began to remind us all that we must have family scripture study, and he willingly took his turn to read.

I realized anew the wisdom of following the prophets and relying on their promises. I have a testimony of the truth of these words from President James E. Faust (1920–2007), Second Counselor in the First Presidency: “It often takes a superhuman effort for parents of a busy family to get everyone out of bed and together for family prayer and scripture study. You may not always feel like praying when you finally get together, but it will pay great dividends if you persevere.”¹ ■

NOTE

1. “Enriching Family Life,” *Ensign*, May 1983, 41.