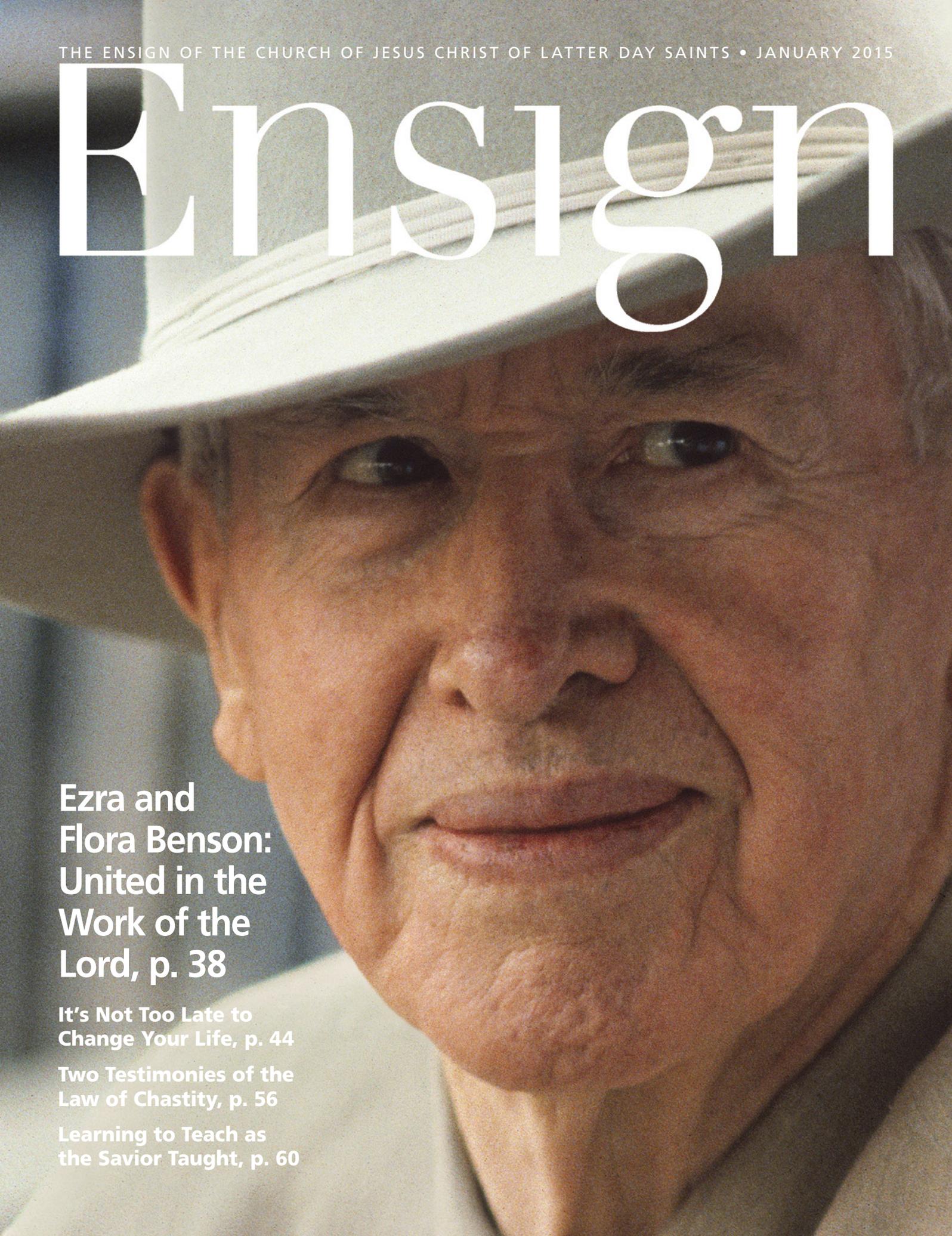


THE ENSIGN OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS • JANUARY 2015

Ensign



**Ezra and
Flora Benson:
United in the
Work of the
Lord, p. 38**

**It's Not Too Late to
Change Your Life, p. 44**

**Two Testimonies of the
Law of Chastity, p. 56**

**Learning to Teach as
the Savior Taught, p. 60**



"Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned?"

Luke 14:34

Dawn in winter at the Ein Gedi Beach of the Dead Sea with salt in the foreground

Contents January 2015

Volume 45 • Number 1



MESSAGES

FIRST PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

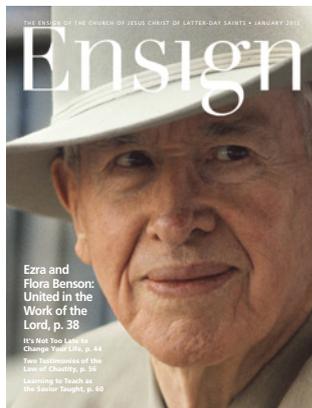
- 4 Follow the Prophets**
President Thomas S. Monson

VISITING TEACHING MESSAGE

- 7 The Attributes of Jesus Christ: Obedient Son**

ON THE COVER

Front: Photograph courtesy of Church History Library.
Inside front cover: Photograph by Gilad Mass. Inside back cover: Photograph by SW_arts/iStock/Thinkstock.



YOUNG ADULT FEATURES

- 18 Heavenly Father Provided an Answer to Prayer When . . .**
Young adults share different ways Heavenly Father answers prayers.

- 22 The Courage to Marry**
Christian Hägglund
I knew that marriage was the next step for me, but I wanted to wait until the Lord told me what to do.

- 24 Counsel Together Oft: Family Councils for Couples**
Nichole Eck
How to get started on holding meaningful, successful family councils.

- 28 Book of Mormon in the Battlefield**
Eric Carter
My time overseas in the military brought fears regarding death and past sins. Finally I decided to read the Book of Mormon.

FEATURES

- 30 What Will You Choose?**
Elder Russell M. Nelson
At a time in your life when choices abound, be sure you're making the right ones.

- 36 Staying the Course**
Kerry Griffin Smith
My brother's racing pigeon stayed steady when others faltered, teaching our family a valuable lesson about hope.

- 38 Flora and I: Equal Partners in the Work of the Lord**
Aaron L. West
Learn how the loving, supportive marriage that Ezra Taft Benson enjoyed with his wife, Flora, helped the 13th President of the Church.

- 44 "He Ran, and Fell on His Neck, and Kissed Him"**
Elder LeGrand R. Curtis Jr.
The blessings of bringing the prodigal back to the fold.





48 Parable of the Potato Weed

Larry Pearson

What my gardening experience taught me about the principle of repentance.

50 The Restored Testament

David A. Edwards and Norman W. Gardner

The Restoration gives enhanced clarity and meaning to treasured doctrines of the New Testament.

56 For the Strength of All: The Law of Chastity

Mark Wangsgaard and Holly Coutts

Two mid-single adults explain how teachings in For the Strength of Youth about chastity can bless us in all stages of our lives.

60 What Manner of Teachers Ought We to Be?

Sunday School General Presidency

The Savior can teach us best how to teach His gospel.

64 Three Ways Setting Goals Can Be Different This Year

Get ideas to help you really achieve your goals.

66 Prophetic Counsel and Temple Blessings

Elder Koichi Aoyagi

When we follow the prophet and make temple worship a priority, blessings will flow into our lives.

70 Why Michigan?

Christopher Burton

Twenty years after serving as a missionary in Michigan, I learned just how inspired the call had been.

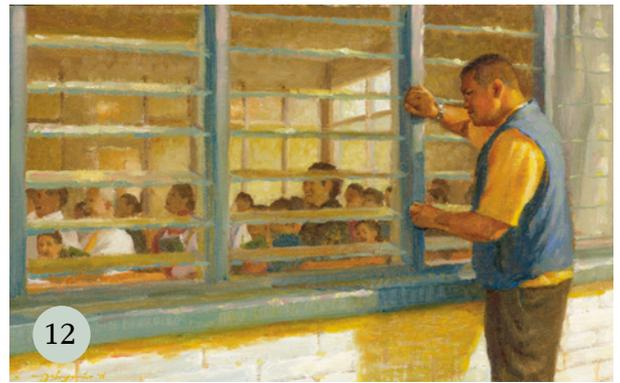
73 Poem: Faith like Water

Megan Wilcken

The Lord knows our hopes and fears.

74 One Fold and One Shepherd

An enclosure for sheep teaches us about the Savior's care for His people.



DEPARTMENTS

3 Family Home Evening Ideas

8 October 2014 Conference Notebook

10 We Talk of Christ: An Hour to Watch with Him

Maritza Gonzales Espejo

12 Our Homes, Our Families: The Road to a Forever Family

Garth and Sandy Hamblin

14 Reflections: Fireflies

David Wright

15 Serving in the Church: A Potato for the Teacher

Bonny Dahlsrud

16 News of the Church

76 Latter-day Saint Voices

80 Until We Meet Again: How Can I Know That the Lord Has Forgiven Me?

President Harold B. Lee



A MAGAZINE OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
January 2015 Volume 45 • Number 1

The First Presidency: Thomas S. Monson, Henry B. Eyring, Dieter F. Uchtdorf

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Family Home Evening Ideas

This issue contains articles and activities that could be used for family home evening. The following are some examples.



“Heavenly Father Provided an Answer to Prayer When . . .,” page 18: You may want to begin by singing with your family

“Did You Think to Pray?” (*Hymns*, no. 140). You could share some stories from the article to illustrate the principle that Heavenly Father answers prayers in different ways. Consider inviting family members to share their own experiences of having a personal prayer answered, or share an experience of your own. Read the counsel from Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles found in the sidebar on page 20 and ask family members how this counsel might help them.

“He Ran, and Fell on His Neck, and Kissed Him,” page 44: Begin by watching the Bible video about the prodigal son (lds.org/go/prodigalEO115).

Then consider discussing with your family Elder Curtis’s statement that “one of the great blessings we enjoy as members of God’s Church is the opportunity to assist Him in helping His children return to full activity in His Church” (page 46). What opportunities might your family have to help strengthen or reactivate others? For some ideas, read the section “Returning to God.” You might want to set a goal to do one thing during the next month to strengthen others (such as inviting a less-active family to church or to an activity).

Helpful Resources

Looking to revitalize your family home evenings as the new year begins? Here is a partial list of resources that can help:

- Media Library (lds.org/go/mediaEO115): access Bible videos that offer a new and meaningful way to learn about the Savior; gospel art that you can view and download to enrich lessons; Mormon Messages videos that highlight important values and principles.
- Gospel Topics (lds.org/topics): find information on more than 200 subjects arranged alphabetically.
- Resources for Teaching Children (lds.org/go/childrenEO115): discover stories, activities, and media for helping children learn.
- *The Family Home Evening Resource Book* (lds.org/go/fhebookEO115).
- *Preach My Gospel* (lds.org/go/preachEO115).

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DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO TELL?

We welcome donated submissions showing the gospel of Jesus Christ at work in your life. Please submit articles through ensign.lds.org. Authors whose work is selected for publication will be notified.



By President
Thomas S. Monson

FOLLOW THE Prophets

I served in the United States Navy toward the end of World War II. I was a seaman, the lowest possible rank in the navy. Then I qualified to be Seaman First Class, after which I qualified to be Yeoman Third Class.

World War II ended, and I was later discharged. But I made a decision that if ever I went back into the military, I wanted to serve as a commissioned officer. I thought, “No more mess kitchens for me, no more scrubbing the decks, if I can avoid it.”

After I was discharged, I joined the United States Naval Reserve. I went to drill every Monday night. I studied hard that I might qualify academically. I took every kind of examination imaginable: mental, physical, and emotional. Finally, there came the beautiful news: “You have been accepted to receive the commission of an ensign in the United States Naval Reserve.”

I gleefully showed it to my wife, Frances, and said, “I made it! I made it!” She hugged me and said, “You’ve worked hard enough to achieve it.”

But then something happened. I was called to be a counselor in my ward bishopric. The bishop’s council meeting was on the same evening as my navy drill meeting. I knew there was a terrible conflict. I knew that I didn’t have the time to pursue the Naval Reserve *and* my bishopric duties. What was I to do? A decision had to be made.

I prayed about it. Then I went to see the man who was my stake president when I was a boy, Elder Harold B. Lee

(1899–1973), then of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. I sat down across the table from him. I told him how much I valued that commission. In fact, I showed him the copy of the letter of appointment I had received.

After pondering the matter for a moment, he said to me, “Here’s what you should do, Brother Monson. You write a letter to the Bureau of Naval Affairs and tell them that because of your call as a member of the bishopric, you can’t accept that commission in the United States Naval Reserve.”

My heart sank. He added, “Then write to the commandant of the Twelfth Naval District in San Francisco indicating that you would like to be discharged from the reserve.”

I said, “Elder Lee, you don’t understand the military. Of course they will decline to give me that commission if I refuse to accept it, but the Twelfth Naval District isn’t going to let me off. With a war brewing in Korea, a noncommissioned officer will surely be called up. If called back, I would rather go back as a commissioned officer, but I won’t if I don’t accept this commission. Are you sure this is the counsel you want me to receive?”

Elder Lee put his hand on my shoulder and in a fatherly way said, “Brother Monson, have more faith. The military is not for you.”

I went home. I placed a tear-stained commission back in its envelope with its accompanying letter and declined to accept it. Then I wrote a letter to the Twelfth Naval District



I would not hold the position in the Church I hold today had I not followed the counsel of Elder Harold B. Lee.

and requested a discharge from the Naval Reserve.

My discharge from the Naval Reserve was in the last group processed before the outbreak of the Korean War. My headquarters outfit was activated. Six weeks after I was called to be a counselor in the bishopric, I was called to be the bishop of my ward.

I would not hold the position in the Church I hold today had I not followed the counsel of a prophet, had I not prayed about that decision, had I not come to an appreciation of an important truth: the wisdom of God oftentimes appears as foolishness to men.¹ But the greatest single lesson we can learn in mortality is that when God speaks and His children obey, they will always be right.

It has been said that history turns on small hinges, and so do our lives. Decisions determine destiny. But we are not left unaided in our decisions.

If you want to see the light of heaven, if you want to feel the inspiration of Almighty God, if you want to

have that feeling within your bosom that your Heavenly Father is guiding you, then follow the prophets of God. When you follow the prophets, you will be in safe territory. ■

NOTE

1. See 1 Corinthians 2:14.

TEACHING FROM THIS MESSAGE

Not many members of the Church will receive one-on-one counsel from an Apostle, as President Monson did. But we can still be blessed as we follow the teachings of prophets and apostles. Consider reading President Monson's addresses from the last general conference (remember his opening and closing remarks too). Look for specific directions or calls to action. You could discuss what you learn with those you visit and consider ways to apply President Monson's counsel.

For ideas on how to teach this message to youth and children, see page 6.

Counsel for Hard Choices

President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, told about a time when he followed prophetic counsel. During one general conference, President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) urged members to get out of debt—specifically mortgage debt.

President Eyring said: “I turned to my wife after the meeting and asked, ‘Do you think there is any way we could do that?’ At first we couldn’t.”

But by that evening he thought of a property they had unsuccessfully tried to sell for years. “We trusted God and . . . His servant’s message, [so] we placed a phone call. . . . I heard an answer that to this day strengthens my trust in God and His servants.” That same day a man had placed an offer on the Eyrings’ property for an amount just greater than their mortgage. The Eyrings soon became free

of debt (see “Trust in God, Then Go and Do,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 72–73).

You may not have a mortgage to pay, but prophetic counsel can guide you here and now through difficult decisions regarding work, education, a mission, and dating. Discuss with your family or peers about how you can follow the prophet when you have to make decisions.

CHILDREN

Find Your Way

We have to make a lot of choices to get back to our Heavenly Father. We can make the best choices when we follow the prophet.

Find your way through the maze. When you come to a decision, look to the prophet’s counsel!



Read the scriptures
Go right



Pray
Go down and then right



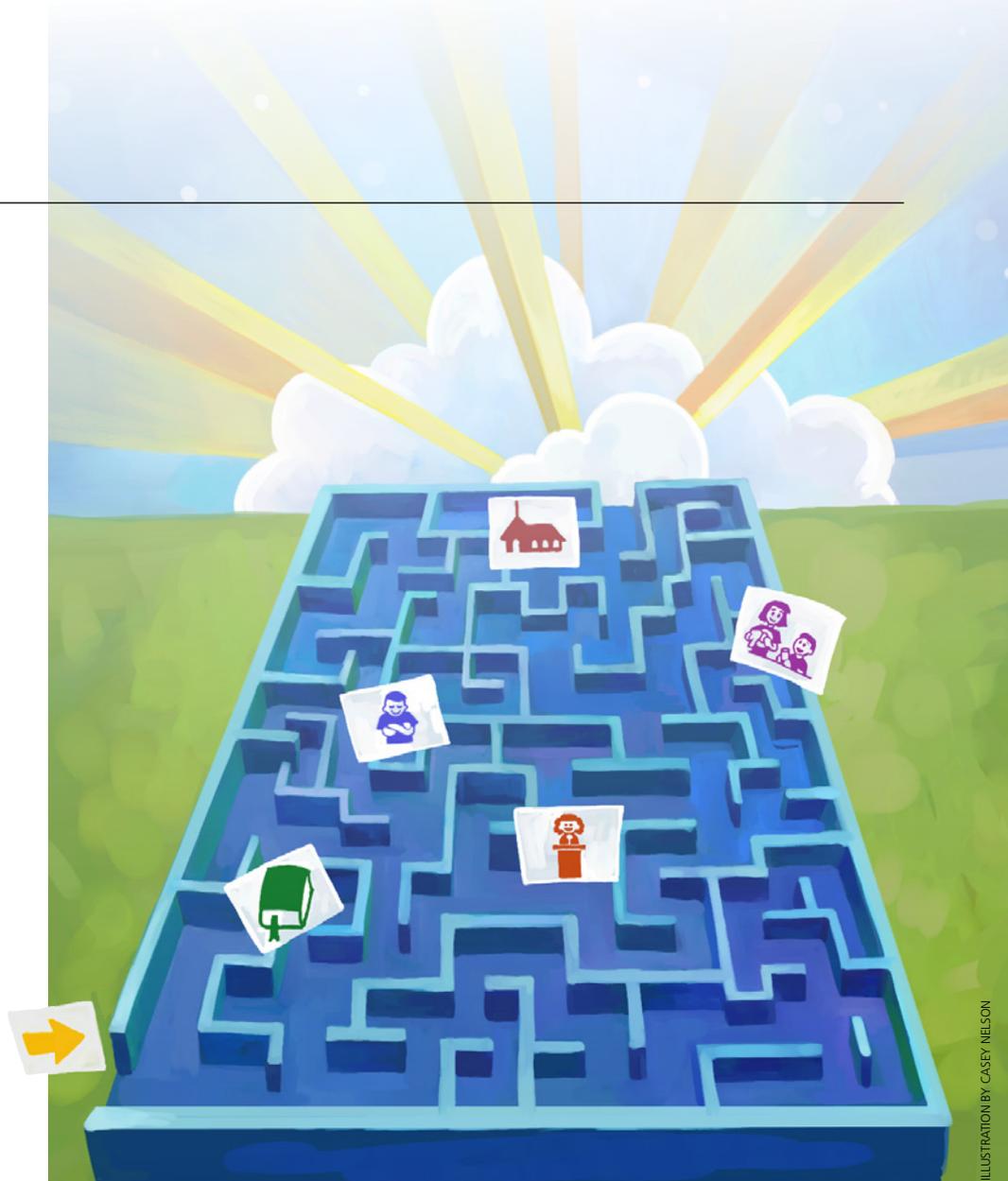
Share your testimony
Go right



Help others
Go down and then left



Go to church
Go up



Prayerfully study this material and seek to know what to share. How will understanding the life and roles of the Savior increase your faith in Him and bless those you watch over through visiting teaching? For more information, go to reliefsociety.lds.org.



Faith, Family, Relief

The Attributes of Jesus Christ: Obedient Son

This is part of a series of Visiting Teaching Messages featuring attributes of the Savior.

Following Jesus Christ's example of obedience increases our faith in Him. "Is it any wonder," said Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "that Christ chooses first and foremost to define himself in relation to his father—that he loved him and obeyed him and submitted to him like the loyal son he was? . . . Obedience is the first law of heaven."¹

The scriptures teach "when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated" (D&C 130:21). Our spiritual growth takes place as we draw close to God through obedience and invite the power of the Savior's Atonement into our lives.

"As we walk in obedience to the principles and commandments of the gospel of Jesus Christ," said Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "we enjoy a continual flow of blessings promised by God in His covenant with us. Those blessings provide the resources



we need to act rather than simply be acted upon as we go through life. . . . Obedience gives us greater control over our lives, greater capacity to come and go, to work and create."²

Additional Scriptures

Luke 22:41–46; Doctrine and Covenants 82:10; 93:28

NOTES

1. Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Will of the Father in All Things" (Brigham Young University devotional, Jan. 17, 1989), 4, speeches.byu.edu.
2. D. Todd Christofferson, "The Power of Covenants," *Ensign*, May 2009, 21.
3. David A. Bednar, "Converted unto the Lord," *Ensign*, Nov. 2012, 109.

From the Scriptures

"Can the spiritual strength that results from consistent obedience to the commandments be given to another person?" asked Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. "The clear answer . . . is no."³

The parable of the ten virgins is an example of this principle. While all of the virgins took their lamps to "meet the bridegroom," only five were wise and took oil in their lamps. The other five were foolish because they "took no oil with them."

Then the cry came at midnight: "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." All the virgins trimmed their lamps, but the foolish virgins had no oil. They said to the wise virgins, "Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out."

The wise virgins answered, "Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go . . . and buy for yourselves." And while the foolish virgins were gone, the bridegroom came and the wise virgins went with him and "the door was shut" (Matthew 25:1–13).

Consider This

What are some examples of obedience in the scriptures?

OCTOBER 2014 CONFERENCE NOTEBOOK

“What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken; . . . whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same” (D&C 1:38).

As you review the October 2014 general conference, you can use these pages (and Conference Notebooks in future issues) to help you study and apply the recent teachings of the living prophets and apostles and other Church leaders.

DOCTRINAL HIGHLIGHT



We Are Led by Living Prophets

“Last year, when President Monson reached the milestone of five years of service as President of the Church, he reflected on his 50 years of apostolic service and made this statement: . . . ‘I assure you that the Church is in good hands. The system set up for the Council of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve [Apostles] assures [us] that it will always be in good hands and that, come what may, there is no need to worry or to fear. Our Savior, Jesus Christ, whom we

follow, whom we worship, and whom we serve, is ever at the helm.’¹

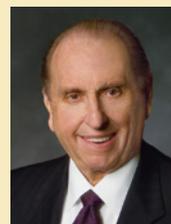
“President Monson, we thank you for those truths! And we thank you for your lifetime of exemplary and dedicated service. . . . We sustain you, not only with uplifted hands but with all our hearts and consecrated efforts.”

Elder Russell M. Nelson, “Sustaining the Prophets,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 76.

NOTE

1. “Message from President Thomas S. Monson,” *Church News*, Feb. 3, 2013, 9.

PROPHETIC PROMISE



Christ’s Path

“As we strive to place Christ at the center of our lives by learning His words, by following His teachings, and by walking in His path, He has promised to share with us the eternal life that He died to gain. There is no higher end than this, that we should choose to accept His discipline and become His disciples and do His work throughout our lives. Nothing else, no other choice we make, can make of us what He can.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “Ponder the Path of Thy Feet,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 88.



ALL ARE BLESSED BY FASTING

“I bear witness of the miracles, both spiritual and temporal, that come to those who live the law of the fast. . . . Cherish that sacred privilege at least monthly, and be as generous

as circumstances permit in your fast offering and other humanitarian, educational, and missionary contributions. I promise that God will be generous to you, and those who find relief at your hand will call your name blessed forever.”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, “Are We Not All Beggars?” *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 42.



ANSWERS FOR YOU

Each conference, prophets and leaders give inspired answers to questions Church members may have. Use your November 2014 issue or visit conference.lds.org to find answers to these questions:

- How are Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ one? See Robert D. Hales, “Eternal Life—to Know Our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ,” 80.
- What is a testimony and how do I get one? See Craig C. Christensen, “I Know These Things of Myself,” 50.
- What do I do while seeking answers to my questions? See M. Russell Ballard, “Stay in the Boat and Hold On!” 89.



DRAWING PARALLELS

TEMPLES

More than one speaker sometimes address the same gospel topic. Here is what three speakers said about temples:

- “We can receive inspiration and revelation in the temple—and also power to cope with the adversities of life.” —Sister Linda K. Burton, “Prepared in a Manner That Never Had Been Known,” 111.
- “By the nourishing spirit of the temple, we can learn the reality, the power, and the hope of the Savior’s Atonement in our personal life.” —Sister Neill F. Marriott, “Sharing Your Light,” 118.
- “If we are to receive all the blessings God so generously offers, our earthly path must lead to the temple. Temples are an expression of God’s love.” —Sister Jean A. Stevens, “Covenant Daughters of God,” 117.

To read, watch, or listen to general conference addresses, visit conference.lds.org.

AN HOUR TO WATCH WITH HIM

By Maritza Gonzales Espejo

One day I was preparing to give a talk in sacrament meeting. I was studying the article “The Atonement of Jesus Christ” by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the March 2008 *Liahona*. In his article, Elder Holland relates a dream Elder Orson F. Whitney (1855–1931) had in which he saw the Savior in the Garden of Gethsemane. Elder Whitney described the pain and suffering he saw the Savior bear. Then he wrote:

“Presently He arose and walked to where [the] Apostles were kneeling—fast asleep! He shook them gently, awoke them, and in a tone of tender reproach, untinged by the least show of anger or scolding, asked them if they could not watch with Him one hour. . . .

“Returning to His place, He prayed again and then went back and found them again sleeping. Again He awoke them, admonished them, and returned and prayed as before. Three times this happened.”¹

As I read this, the spirit of revelation entered my mind. In that instant, I realized that the way I could “watch with Him one hour” was in the way

I approached sacrament meeting each Sunday. Since then, I have learned that this is an hour in which we can pray to our Heavenly Father in a more meaningful way. Prayer is fundamental at all times, but the Spirit present in that hour of the sacrament is an opportunity to elevate ourselves closer to Heavenly Father and our Savior, Jesus Christ. When we focus our thoughts on the Lord, it is, in a way, accompanying

Him at the moment of the agony He endured when taking upon Himself our sins. It is a time to acknowledge the pain He suffered for us.

Sacrament meeting means everything to me. For me it is the hour of infinite salvation. It has become a sacred time in which I remember and commit in prayer and in spirit to honor my covenants and to follow the perfect example of my Savior. I know that He lives and loves me. I know



A REFLECTIVE, REVERENT MOMENT

“[The sacrament] should be a powerful, reverent, reflective moment. It should encourage spiritual feelings and impressions. As such it should not be rushed. It is not something to ‘get over’ so that the real purpose of a sacrament meeting can be pursued. This *is* the real purpose of the meeting. And everything that is said or sung or prayed in those services should be consistent with the grandeur of this sacred ordinance.”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “This Do in Remembrance of Me,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 68.



that it is only through His sacrifice and His precious blood that was spilt that we can all be saved. I know this is true because as I have worked at “watching with Him,” my understanding has been enlightened, my life has been blessed, and my vision of eternal life in His presence has been deepened. ■

The author lives in Ica, Peru.

NOTE

1. Orson F. Whitney, quoted in Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Mar. 2008, 33.

HOW CAN TAKING THE SACRAMENT CHANGE MY LIFE?

In the October 2012 general conference, Elder Don R. Clarke of the Seventy taught, “If we properly prepare for the sacrament, we can transform our lives.” He then suggested “five principles that can bless our lives as we partake of the sacrament worthily”:

1. Have a feeling of gratitude for the Atonement of Jesus Christ.
2. Remember that we are renewing baptismal covenants.
3. Seek to feel forgiven of our sins.
4. Seek inspiration for solutions to our problems.
5. Partake of the sacrament worthily so we can be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Elder Clarke promised: “It will always be a great sacrament meeting if the sacrament is the center of our worship.”¹

NOTE

1. See Don R. Clarke, “Blessings of the Sacrament,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2012, 104–6.

THE ROAD TO A FOREVER FAMILY

By Garth and Sandy Hamblin

Once they were converted, the 'Akau'olas were determined to make it to the temple.

One Sunday morning, after drinking alcohol and kava with friends for most of the night, Siope 'Akau'ola of Tonga was returning home when he saw a family dressed in their Sunday best. They were laughing and talking as they walked together. Siope wondered what made them so happy, so he followed them to see where they were going.

Siope saw the family enter a Latter-day Saint Church building. He watched through the window as others arrived. Happiness radiated from their faces as families sat together and sang songs of worship.

Siope's thoughts drifted to his wife, Liu. The love they had shared when first married was fading. Siope wanted to recapture that love. He hurried home and told his wife he had found the way to help their family succeed: they needed to join the Church.

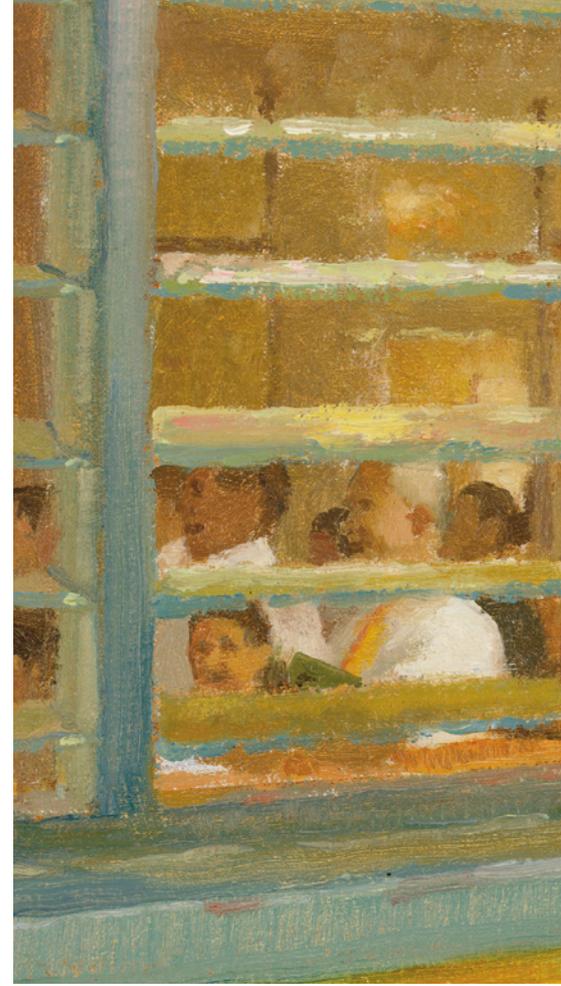
That very day Siope went to the bishop's home in his village. The bishop recognized Siope, having seen him drunk in the streets. As they talked, Siope could see doubt on the bishop's face, but he was firm in his resolve; he boldly told the bishop he wanted to be baptized. The bishop paused, invited Siope in, and began teaching him the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Liu was reluctant at first but watched as her husband gradually changed for the better. Siope began spending more time with their children and showing more love for his wife and family through his actions. So Liu began taking the missionary lessons also, and soon they were both baptized.

As the one-year anniversary of their baptism drew near, the 'Akau'ola family contemplated the wonderful blessings of the temple. Siope said, "If the blessings of the temple are so much greater than those we have received from being baptized, imagine how wonderful temple blessings must be." Despite their desire to be sealed, the temple in Tonga was undergoing renovations, so they would have to wait over a year or make an expensive trip to New Zealand or Fiji to attend the temple.

The family thought hard and prayed about what to do. They eventually decided to take out a small loan. While waiting for approval, the bank processing their loan was destroyed in a fire. All loans would be delayed until the following year.

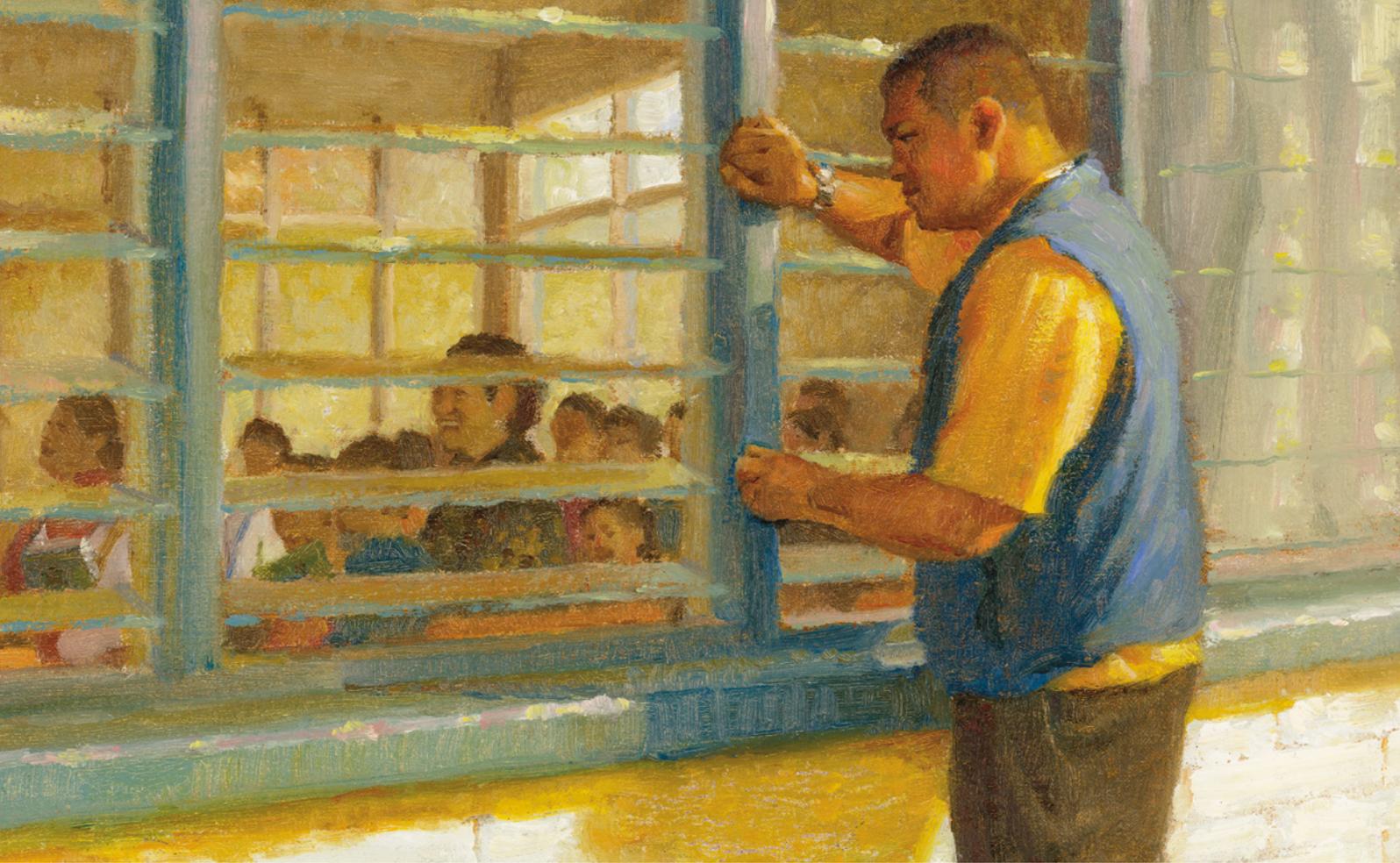
Siope and Liu were feeling discouraged. They sat together in their small living room and prayed for a



miracle. As they prayed and counseled together, the answer came: "I saw in my mind's eye the family van smiling at us and knew this was the answer to our prayers," Siope said. They were able to sell the van the next day and purchase airline tickets to Fiji for their family of five.

They arrived very late into Nadi, Fiji, with three tired children and a long drive ahead of them to the temple in Suva. Liu said, "I learned that the more we try to get closer to the Lord's house the more Satan tries to get us to give up before we get the blessing."

While sitting in the airport trying to decide what their next step would be, a woman helped them arrange lodging and a ride to Suva the next day for a fraction of the usual rates.



They felt that God had sent an angel to help them.

They arrived at the temple the next day. “As we entered the temple I felt a peace and calm in my heart,” Liu said. “I have never seen clean and white in my life like in the temple. A thought came to my mind: If the temple is a house made by man and it is so beautiful, then how wonderful must the home be that Heavenly Father has promised us!”

Their experiences in the temple were life-changing for the family. Liu said, “The whole time we were

in Fiji, I experienced the love of our Heavenly Father for us. When we choose to follow Him, He really takes good care of us.”

Wonderful blessings continued to come for the ‘Akau’ola family after they returned home. Both Siope and Liu received college scholarships, earned teaching degrees, and were hired at Liahona High School.

While teaching, they became aware of children who needed a place to live. Sometimes by ones, more often by twos and threes, children began

knocking on Siope and Liu’s door. And Siope and Liu took them in. Their small home now holds 20 people. They have five other “adopted” children who have since gone away to attend college or to serve missions.

Siope and Liu know that these children will grow and blossom when they are given love and structure in their lives. Those who were not members of the Church have embraced the gospel and now have growing desires to serve missions. Siope and Liu call all the children under their care *their* children, and all the kids call Liu and Siope Mom and Dad. The ‘Akau’olas know they’ve been richly blessed and are happy to share these blessings with others. ■

The authors are from Alaska, USA, and are serving a mission in Tonga.



ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES L. JOHNSON; PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE AUTHORS

FIREFLIES

By David Wright

Are we keeping our eyes on eternal rewards—or on something else?

Several years ago I worked at an archaeological site called Aguateca, which is located in a beautiful and remote part of Guatemala accessible only by a long boat ride up the winding Petexbatún River.

One evening I was returning to Aguateca with several archaeologists after spending the day at a neighboring site. As we traveled by boat up the river, with only the quiet hum of the motor and the chirp of insects in the background, I reclined against the side of the boat, enjoying the peaceful ride and the moonless, unusually clear night. As the boat followed the serpentine twists of the river, I tried to maintain my sense of direction by tracking the North Star. Sometimes the North Star disappeared behind the dark silhouettes of the trees lining the riverbanks, but it always reappeared shortly.

At one bend in the river, I lost the North Star behind the treetops again. Once the boat turned southward, I quickly relocated it, feeling like an old-time mariner, proud of my ability to stay oriented. After a minute of watching it, however, I realized I was mistaken: I had not relocated the North Star or even a star at all. I was watching a firefly.

Only then did I become aware that many of the “stars” above me were actually fireflies hovering silently in the warm night air. Amazingly, the glow of the dozens of fireflies overhead was almost identical to the glow of the distant stars and galaxies, and the twists and turns of the boat on the river had made it easy to confuse the two.

“How could I mistake a miniscule firefly for a star of almost infinite brilliance?” I wondered. The answer was clear: it was just a matter of perspective. The relatively faint and fleeting light of the fireflies rivaled that of the stars only because the fireflies were just a few feet above me and the stars were so distant. From my perspective, the two appeared nearly identical.

Like the fireflies, temptations and trials loom large because they are

close at hand. Meanwhile, the promised blessings, like stars, can appear very distant.

Our spiritual shortsightedness can have many consequences. The more distant the reward appears, the more tempted we are to think we can procrastinate the day of our repentance and still return to Heavenly Father to claim our eternal inheritance (see Alma 34:33–34). We may begin to doubt the eternal reward or decide that it’s more fun to indulge the natural man now than to wait for blessings that may come much later. We may fear the relentless, lifelong struggle against sin or lack faith that our Savior will help us withstand the buffetings of Satan.

We all lose our eternal perspective occasionally; the challenge is to regain it as quickly as possible. Though the world may offer attractive, counterfeit rewards, we can look to Jesus Christ as we navigate the twists and turns of life and trust that He truly is “a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

It has been years since I took that boat ride on the river, but even today I pause when confronted with temptation and remind myself, “It’s just a firefly.” ■

The author lives in Florida, USA.



A POTATO FOR THE TEACHER

By Bonny Dahlsrud

I learned that I don't have to give grand gestures of service every time.

A small gesture of love is just as nice.

As an elementary schoolteacher of more than 25 years, I have received a lot of interesting things from my young students. Silly notes, drawn pictures, and imaginative crafts are common gifts. Last year, however, was the first time I had ever received a potato.

"A potato for the teacher," young Emma said proudly when she came to my desk, "because I didn't have an apple." It was a medium-sized potato, scrubbed clean, and beautiful as far as potatoes go. I thanked her and placed it on my desk. I saw Emma's large blue eyes shine with pride whenever she looked at it throughout the day.

After school, when I was working at my desk, I couldn't help but regard the potato with a tender smile. Children see things so simply, and with that common potato, Emma taught me something important. I left it on my desk for over a week

because it served as a reminder to me.

As a visiting teacher and a sister in my ward, I wanted to serve others, but I was always waiting for an "apple" before I took time to help. If I was busy and couldn't make an extra casserole or if I wanted to give a special flower but didn't get to the floral shop, I ignored the still, small voice of the Spirit whispering of someone who needed my service.

"I'll do something this weekend, when I have time," I would convince myself. "Nobody needs me today."

But what if someone really did need me? What if I hadn't ignored the promptings to visit an elderly

neighbor or the young widow who had just lost her husband? Could I have helped or served, even with what I could offer then—a "potato"?

I learned a great lesson from Emma that I am trying hard to put into practice. If I don't have an apple, I give a potato instead, and I do it now. I don't wait to make a casserole or my special lemon cream pie; I buy a box of cookies instead. I don't often get to the florist, but I can drop in for a chat without the flower. A homemade card would be great, but so would a quick phone call. It doesn't have to be a grand gesture of service every time. A small gesture of love is just as nice.

I have the potato at home now, but I don't think I'll ever eat it. It serves as a constant reminder to serve when I'm prompted. I give what I can now instead of waiting until later. A potato for the teacher really was the nicest gift. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.



NEWS OF THE CHURCH

Visit news.lds.org for more Church news and events.

Requirements Encourage Seminary Students to Elevate Learning

New requirements for seminary graduation that will help students “elevate learning” are being implemented throughout the Church. The requirements, which take effect at the beginning of this year’s study of the Doctrine and Covenants and Church history, include two major elements:

1. Seminary students will be required to read the book of scripture they are studying for the year, in addition to receiving credit based on attendance

Seminary students in Guyana, South America, studying the scriptures together.



2. Students will be required to pass two course-learning assessments during the year, with a score of at least 75 percent. One assessment will be held halfway through the year and the second at the end of the academic year. Assessments will deal primarily with doctrinal understanding and application of gospel principles in everyday life.

The new seminary requirements—together with *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* and the Sunday youth curriculum, *Come, Follow Me*—will provide youth with the opportunity to become more self-sufficient in their testimonies, deepen their understanding of the gospel, and increase their ability to share their knowledge as they prepare for lives of service and discipleship.

At the end of every year, students will receive either a certificate indicating they completed the requirements necessary (including the reading and assessments) or a certificate of recognition indicating they met attendance requirements. ■

Indexing Challenge Sets Record

Participants in the International Indexing Challenge established a new record for the most indexing participants online in a single day. A total of 66,511 volunteers went on the Internet on July 22, 2014, to view images of historical records and transcribe the information for inclusion in the searchable database on FamilySearch.org. The previous one-day record of 49,025 volunteers was set in July 2012 at the height of the 1940 U.S. Census indexing effort.

The challenge also produced the second-highest combined (indexed or arbitrated) total of submitted records, reaching just over 5.7 million. (Each record is indexed by two volunteers and then reviewed by a third volunteer, known as an arbitrator, to ensure quality and accuracy.)

“Our members, young and old, have participated with a happy heart,” said Bishop Crouet in Toulouse, France. “What a beautiful experience.”

Christopher Jones of Wales said, “We arranged our family home evening so that we could all index—two parents and seven children aged 18 to 5. All told, as a family we indexed just over 900 records!”

Natalie Terry of Bangkok, Thailand, said she loved participating in the worldwide indexing day with her 13-year-old daughter. And Chris Shead of Chorley, England, said he was able to find about 30 new family names, including “a little girl who died soon after her baptism and had fallen through the gaps between the census records.” ■



Elder David A. Bednar says social media provides a unique opportunity to share the gospel.

Apostle Offers Counsel about Social Media

“Beginning at this place on this day, I exhort you to sweep the earth with messages filled with righteousness and truth, messages that are authentic, edifying, and praiseworthy, and literally to sweep the earth as with a flood,” Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said during an address at Education Week at Brigham Young University on August 19, 2014.

“I pray we will not simply participate in a flash flood that rises swiftly and then recedes just as rapidly,” he said in a message that focused on the power of social media to communicate truth. Elder Bednar called our time a “unique season in the history of the world,” in which we are blessed with “a miraculous progression of innovations and inventions that have enabled and accelerated the work of salvation.

“Approximately 40 percent of our worldwide missionary force soon will be using digital devices as tools in the work of conversion, retention,

and activation,” he said. “I am confident all of us also recognize how technology has accelerated family history and temple work, our individual and family study of the restored gospel, and made it possible for us to learn about, see, and experience the world in remarkable ways.”

He pointed to recent social media efforts including an Easter video produced by the Church, *Because of Him*, that was viewed more than five million times in 191 countries and territories, and the #didyouthinktopray hashtag, which led to more than 40,000 conversations about the need for prayer.

These and other efforts are “only a small trickle,” he said, calling upon Latter-day Saints to “help transform the trickle into a flood.” He also said that when using social media:

- “We should not exaggerate, embellish, or pretend to be someone, or something we are not. Our content should be trustworthy and constructive.”

- “Our messages should seek to edify and uplift, rather than to argue, debate, condemn, or belittle.”
- “Be courageous and bold, but not overbearing, in sustaining and defending our beliefs, and avoid contention. As disciples, our purpose should be to use social media channels as a means of projecting the light and truth of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.”
- “Too much time can be wasted, too many relationships can be harmed or destroyed, and precious patterns of righteousness can be disrupted when technology is used improperly. We should not allow even good applications of social media to overrule the better and best uses of our time, energy, and resources.”
- “We need not become social media experts or fanatics. And we do not need to spend inordinate amounts of time creating and disseminating elaborate messages.” ■

Heavenly Father Provided an **Answer to Prayer** When . . .

We are beloved children of God, who loves us and wants us to communicate with Him through prayer. Here young adults share different ways Heavenly Father answers prayers.





I PRAYED ABOUT SERVING A MISSION

I had never had a desire to serve a mission, so I never paid attention when people would ask me if I was going to submit my missionary papers. One day, a missionary couple I had grown close to, the Thomases, asked me the same question: "When are you going on a mission?" As was my custom, I didn't give their question much thought.

Not long afterward, though, Sister Madalyne Thomas brought up the subject of a mission again. She advised me to pray about serving a mission. Initially I didn't think much about her counsel, but something changed that night: I decided to pray about serving a mission as Sister Thomas had said. And Heavenly Father gave me an answer.

I submitted my missionary papers shortly after that. I entered the South Africa Missionary Training Center in February 2009 and then served as a missionary in Kenya.

Zachary Fernand Meistré, Gauteng, South Africa

THERE WAS ONE MORE THING TO TRY

I grew up on a cattle ranch and have always loved animals. So when my fiancé and I were making wedding preparations, we decided to include my horse, Lucy, in our bride-and-groom pictures. In order to take advantage of the beautiful autumn colors, we scheduled the picture-taking for the end of October. As the date approached, however, I worried about my horse's appearance. During the fall, horses grow a long, thick winter coat that gives them a fuzzy, unkempt look. So I planned to groom her the afternoon before picture day.

As I started the grooming process, Lucy was a little restless, but I managed to comb out the tangles from her mane and tail. Now it was time for the ears. As I moved my hand up the side of her head and began snipping a few hairs with some scissors, she threw her head out of reach and pulled away from me. No matter how I tried, she wouldn't cooperate. We were both flustered and tired. There was one more thing to try. I knelt down on the barn floor and said a simple prayer.

I stood up, took a big breath, and slowly walked to Lucy and patted her neck. As I spoke to her in a gentle voice, I raised my hand to her ear and she didn't move. I slowly closed the scissors on the hair and she acted like nothing had happened. I said out loud, "Thank you, Heavenly Father," and with tears in my eyes and gratitude in my heart, I finished the job.

That day I learned for myself that prayers are answered, even if they are about a horse.

Paige Nelson, Idaho, USA





“Don’t worry about your clumsily expressed feelings. Just talk to your Father. He hears

every prayer and answers it in His way.”

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Learning to Recognize Answers to Prayer,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 31.

THE MISSIONARIES CAME TO THE RESCUE

Some time ago I was talking to some co-workers about my membership in the Church and my service as a full-time missionary. A woman at my work soon came up to share with me an experience she had had years earlier.

At the time, she explained, she was recently divorced and had reluctantly agreed to let her children move to another state to live with their father. Around the same time, she accepted a job that would move her even farther away from her children. On moving day, the people who had agreed to assist her in loading the moving truck cancelled at the last minute. Already feeling uncertain about her recent life choices, she was left with an empty truck in the driveway, no one to help her move, and despair in her heart. Yearning for divine assurance, she offered a silent, pleading prayer.

Soon after she prayed, the doorbell rang and she met two young men at her doorstep eager to share their message of hope and God’s love. The two missionaries immediately recognized her need and proceeded to load everything from her house into the moving truck. The example of those missionaries was ingrained in her memory, and the charity they shared impacted her outlook on life for years afterward.

As we continued to speak of missionary work and service, I was able to testify that her experience was not a coincidence but an answer to her fervent prayer. Her experience reminded me that God is aware of us all and can answer our prayers in unexpected ways.

Ben George, Ohio, USA

I PRAYED TO FIND THINGS I HAD LOST

At an early age I was taught that I have a Heavenly Father who knows and loves me. I was taught to pray, and as I followed the example of my parents and prayed to Heavenly Father, I came to understand for myself that He answers my prayers. When I prayed to find things I had lost, He helped me. No matter the significance of what I prayed for, I knew that my Father in Heaven would hear my prayers and answer them according to His wisdom, will, and timing.

I know that through prayer we can come to understand God's will for us and can come to better understand and emulate the attributes of Jesus Christ and Heavenly Father. I know that prayer is the link between heaven and us; as we pray, Heavenly Father does indeed listen. While sometimes He doesn't answer right away or in the way we expect or desire, through the power of the Holy Ghost, He always gives an answer. He understands the desires of our hearts, and as we pray He will answer and bless us.

Emily Lloyd, Colorado, USA



I Poured Out My Soul in Gratitude

Several months after returning home from a mission, I had the opportunity to go back to the city where I served to do a research project to finish my undergraduate degree. As I traveled each day throughout the city to do my project, Heavenly Father blessed me in many ways. He guided my path and protected me. He gave me opportunities to share the gospel, and He multiplied my time so I could do my project and also visit many of the people I taught, knew, and loved as a full-time missionary.

I felt so blessed that every morning and night I poured out my soul in gratitude to my Father for the chance to be there. Throughout the day I prayed in my heart, thanking Him when my plans went smoothly. And when they didn't go smoothly, I thanked Him for the plan He had for me instead, which usually ended up being a better one anyway.

One day on the trip, I sat pondering my experiences. I wondered why Heavenly Father was helping me so much. The thought came clearly to my mind: "It is because you are being grateful." That day I learned that sometimes gratitude precedes the blessing. The more grateful I was, the more I could recognize the blessings I received and appreciate the lessons I learned from difficulties. And the more I recognized the blessings and lessons, the more I had to be grateful for.

Elizabeth Stitt, Utah, USA

The Courage

By Christian Hägglund

When I returned home to Sweden after my mission, I wrestled for a long time with the next step in my life—temple marriage. The Spirit reaffirmed that I needed to start my family to become the person I needed to become. I focused so much on how this was the most important decision of my life, that even though I felt that I had found the eternal companion for me, and that the Lord approved of my choice, my faith wavered. My girlfriend, Evelina, and I chose a time for our temple sealing, booked our honeymoon, and bought engagement rings before actually becoming engaged—all because of my fear of committing to marriage. I wanted Heavenly Father to command me to marry Evelina because I feared being accountable for the decision in case our marriage ended. Fear and misguided prayers left me paralyzed with my important decision still looming.



I learned to use my agency to act instead of being acted upon when I made the most important decision of my life.

Agency—the Lord’s Way

The promptings of the Holy Ghost eventually made the difference when I turned to Doctrine and Covenants 58:26–29: “For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is [slothful]. . . .

“ . . . Men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;

“For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. . . .

“But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned.”

As I pondered these verses, I gained an understanding of the role of agency in our Heavenly Father’s plan, which changed my thinking and gave me courage to move forward. Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of

to Marry

the Twelve Apostles taught that if we received inspired guidance without personal effort, we would miss out on “essential personal growth” that comes “as [we] struggle to learn how to be led by the Spirit.”¹

Power to Move Forward

I then resolved to exercise my faith and make a decision, and the Lord blessed me with confidence in my ability to decide. I realized that I should “be anxiously engaged . . . and do many things of [my] own free will”—including getting engaged. The Lord encourages us to use our power as agents to govern ourselves. The use of this power is a central feature in our lives.

I believe that the Lord is more eager to see us exercise our agency than to see us always make perfect decisions. He has, however, given us the necessary tools to make good decisions, especially when it comes to deciding whom to marry. As President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) taught, “Emotions must



not wholly determine decisions, but the mind and the heart, strengthened by fasting and prayer and serious consideration, will give one a maximum chance of marital happiness. It brings with it sacrifice, sharing, and a demand for great selflessness.”²

We even have scriptural instruction on how to receive spiritual confirmations: “You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within

you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.

“But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought” (D&C 9:8–9). Not all of us, however, will experience a burning in our bosom in response to the Lord’s spiritual confirmations. Each of us must learn to recognize our own particular way of receiving these confirmations.³ By following this pattern, we will gain faith in our ability to make choices.

Heavenly Father knew the needs of my heart, soul, and mind. He gave me these truths, which made all the difference. Evelina and I were married. We have now enjoyed several years of happy family life, and we have three beautiful children. I am so grateful to the Lord for my testimony of agency and its role in making life’s most important decisions. ■

The author lives in Stockholm, Sweden.

NOTES

1. Richard G. Scott, “To Acquire Spiritual Guidance,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2009, 7.
2. Spencer W. Kimball, “Oneness in Marriage,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2002, 40.
3. See also Doctrine and Covenants 8:2–3.



COUNSEL TOGETHER OFT

Family Councils for Couples

By Nichole Eck

Councils in the Church follow a divine pattern at every level, from the Council of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to stake, ward, branch, quorum, and other leadership

councils. “The most basic council of the Church,” said President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985), is the family council.¹

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught that “family councils are ideal forums for effective communication to take place.”² They are, he explained, a time to “talk about the needs of the family and the needs of individual members of the family, . . . solve problems, make family decisions, [and] plan day-to-day and long-range family activities and goals.”³

If you haven’t had a family council, you can start today. If you have children living with you, you can include them. However, it is also important that husbands and wives have a separate family council where they can

discuss family and personal issues privately.

Here are some principles and practical suggestions you can apply to your family councils between husband and wife.

Start with Prayer

“When communication with Heavenly Father breaks down, communication between spouses also breaks down.”⁴

The Lord can be a vital participant in your marriage. In your prayer, you can thank Heavenly Father for your many blessings, including your spouse, and ask for His Spirit to permeate your conversation. His Spirit can guide your discussion and help foster good feelings and good communication.

Couples face many problems and decisions. These six principles of family councils can help.



Decide Together

“Consensus of the council members must be obtained, through prayer and discussion, to achieve that unity which is prerequisite to the Lord’s help.”⁵

You and your spouse must make important decisions, such as whether or not to take a job offer, where to apply for school, when to have children, or how to divide housework. Husbands and wives can propose possible solutions to problems and

discuss them. Humbly listen to your spouse’s input. This can help you learn to understand another point of view and will remind your spouse that you value his or her opinion.

In family councils, we must reach our important decisions “by divine consensus, not by compromise.”⁶ You may not be able to achieve this unity on every issue immediately. It may take several councils and sincere

prayer—both individually and with your spouse—to agree on a decision. But “if you will confer in council as you are expected to do, God will give you solutions to the problems that confront you.”⁷

It may also be helpful to decide beforehand on a topic for a family council. This will give you time to ponder the subject so you and your spouse can feel more prepared to voice your thoughts.

Evaluate Yourself

“Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” (Matthew 7:3).

You have the power to change only one person: yourself. You may be tempted to use a family council to present a list of criticisms of your spouse. Instead, approach these councils with a desire to improve yourself. Ask your spouse if there is anything problematic or worrisome he or she has noticed in your words or behavior.



Make goals for personal improvement and ask for your spouse's support as you strive to change. Support your spouse in any personal goals he or she wishes to make.

Talk about the Hard Stuff

“Every family has problems and challenges. But successful families try to work together toward solutions instead of resorting to criticism and contention.”⁸

Strong marriages are built by overcoming challenges, not by ignoring or avoiding them. There will be times when serious issues arise that need to be discussed. You may struggle to work through issues of sin and repentance or financial burdens, for example, but the open and honest communication of a family council can help soften strong feelings. A family council can act as an appropriate

and comfortable forum to bring up concerns or to ask for help.

Focus your energies on possible solutions to the problem and avoid bickering or criticism. Be humble. Share love for your spouse and remind each other that you are working together to build a happy, eternal marriage and family.

Keep It Positive

“If you call family councils only “in times of stress . . . and never to recognize . . . achievements or to compliment [your family members] and show your love to them, then they will learn to dread family councils.”⁹

Not all family council meetings need to focus on problems or decisions. You can take opportunities to share something positive about your spouse or share the blessings in your life. You can celebrate

individual achievements, discuss ways to spiritually strengthen your marriage and family, make goals together, or express gratitude for your spouse's strengths or acts of service. Use family councils to “establish habits of communication and mutual respect on which . . . [you and your spouse] can rely when serious and difficult problems arise.”¹⁰

Persevere

“Let us do the best we can and try to improve each day. When our imperfections appear, we can keep trying to correct them. We can be more forgiving of flaws in ourselves and among those we love.”¹¹

Finally, remember that replacing poor communication habits with positive patterns takes time and practice. Your first family council may seem awkward or





WHAT DO WE TALK ABOUT?

If you don't know what to talk about in a family council, consider questions like these:

- How can we divide up the work so that each member shares home responsibilities and feels good about what he or she is doing?
- What sort of media will we allow in the house?
- What new skills can we learn as a family?
- What can we do as a family to eliminate quarreling?
- What activities will encourage us to keep the Sabbath day holy?
- How can we prepare for a natural disaster?
- How will we be more involved in our community?
- What new traditions can we start as a family?
- How can we be better about managing our finances?
- What can we do to spiritually strengthen our marriage?

intimidating, but as you humbly strive to communicate with each other and include the Lord in your decisions, you will better understand the blessings of family councils.

The Lord intends for us to have peace in our homes and in our communication. He helps us where we fall short and blesses our efforts. With His help, we can nurture “an atmosphere of respect, understanding, and harmony”¹² that will make our homes, as President Thomas S. Monson promised, “a bit of heaven here on earth.”¹³ ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), 211.

2. M. Russell Ballard, *Counseling with Our Councils: Learning to Minister Together in the Church and in the Family* (2012), 165.
3. M. Russell Ballard, “Family Councils: A Conversation with Elder and Sister Ballard,” *Ensign*, June 2003, 16.
4. M. Russell Ballard, “Family Councils,” 19.
5. Ronald E. Poelman, “Priesthood Councils: Key to Meeting Temporal and Spiritual Needs,” *Ensign*, May 1980, 91.
6. Ronald E. Poelman, “Priesthood Councils,” 91.
7. Stephen L Richards, in Conference Report, Oct. 1953, 86.
8. Ezra Taft Benson, “Counsel to the Saints,” *Ensign*, May 1984, 6.
9. *When Thou Art Converted, Strengthen Thy Brethren* (Melchizedek Priesthood study guide, 1974), 168.
10. “Family Councils: A Heavenly Pattern,” *Follow Me: Relief Society Personal Study Guide* (1989), 171.
11. Russell M. Nelson “Perfection Pending,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 88.
12. “Working Together in Family Councils,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1985, 31.
13. Thomas S. Monson, “Hallmarks of a Happy Home,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1988, 69.

Book of Mormon in the BATTLEFIELD

By Eric Carter

I was raised in a home with parents who loved the Lord and gave me every opportunity to learn the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, as a teenager I made the decision to leave the Church. Not only did I decide to leave, but I vowed I would never again have anything to do with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Convinced my family felt great disappointment, I enlisted in the United States military rather than face their disapproval. I embraced the military lifestyle—working hard but playing even harder. I became selfish and gave no thought to the welfare of my soul. I fell into Satan’s trap of believing that I was beyond saving and therefore should give up on being good. For over a decade I heaped the burden of sin onto my shoulders.

Realizing My Mortality

Despite my riotous living, I worked hard and was eventually trained as a medic. My job took me throughout the world. By this time I had a family of my own, but I felt that time away from them and a certain amount of stress were acceptable consequences of doing what I enjoyed. So I thought nothing of it when in 2007 I received an assignment to Afghanistan that would last several months, believing that my family and I were accustomed to long absences.

Initially, my time in Afghanistan was exactly what I expected: work and lots of it. Our unit was always on call, and I was the only medic. I thought I adapted well, but eventually exposure to death and the destruction of war began to take its toll. While I continued to perform

my duties as required, fear ruled my thoughts. I feared death and the justice of God, and I questioned whether I would see my wife and children again. The sins that I had so flippantly committed were now unbearable, but I had nowhere to turn for relief.

Fear and the weight of my sins nearly broke me. It took a particularly close brush with death before I gave in to the promptings of the Holy Ghost and the teachings of my parents from my youth. Despite my vow to never return to church, I carried a Book of Mormon with me on every deployment. (My mother had sent me a military scripture set when I entered basic training.) For over a decade this book accompanied me around the world but was never opened. One night I finally opened the Book of Mormon and began to read.

One day my fears caught up with me. Could the Book of Mormon be my solution?

Relief through the Word of God

The change was not instant, but over several weeks, as I read the scriptures daily, I recognized that fear no longer ruled my life. I still had no intention of returning to church and still believed the lie that I was beyond saving, but I was willing to read. At some point I read Alma 32:26–27, which forever altered my life:

“Now, as I said concerning faith—that it was not a perfect knowledge—even so it is with my words. Ye cannot know of their surety at first, unto perfection, any more than faith is a perfect knowledge.

“But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words.”

I had no faith or hope, but I had the “desire to believe” that I could be forgiven of my sins through the

Atonement of Jesus Christ. I began to “experiment” as directed in the scriptures. It took many months after I returned home for me to gain a testimony of the gospel and follow the steps required to receive forgiveness of my sins.

I still suffer consequences from some of my unrighteous decisions,

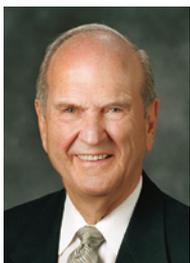
but I no longer carry the burden of past transgressions. Today I know and testify that Christ atoned for my sins, that the Book of Mormon is the word of God, and that following the precepts taught within its covers will guide us in all we should do. I am so grateful for that. ■

The author lives in Arizona, USA.



*May you choose to be a light to the world
to help save God's children, to have joy, and
ultimately to earn the blessing of eternal life.*





**By Elder
Russell M. Nelson**
Of the Quorum of
the Twelve Apostles

WHAT WILL YOU CHOOSE?

*You were commissioned by your Heavenly Father
to build up the kingdom of God on earth right now
and to prepare a people to receive the Savior.*

As “youth of the noble birthright,”¹ you are literally sons and daughters of God, born at this particular time in the world’s history for a most sacred purpose. Although the moral and religious values of society seem to be weakening across the globe, youth of this Church are to be standard bearers of the Lord and beacons of light to attract others to Him. Your identity and purpose are unique.

What is your identity? You are children of the covenant that God made with Father Abraham when Abraham was promised that “in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed” (Acts 3:25; see also 1 Nephi 15:18; 3 Nephi 20:25). You are also “children of the promised day,”² this period of world history when the gospel is being broadly proclaimed across the entire planet.

What is your purpose? You brethren were foreordained in a premortal realm to bear the priesthood (see Alma 13:2–3). And you sisters were chosen before the foundation of the world to bear and care for God’s children; in doing so, you glorify God (see D&C 132:63). Have you sisters considered what it really means to be co-creators with God?

Each of you young men and young women was commissioned by your Heavenly Father to build up the kingdom of God on earth right now and to prepare a people to receive the Savior when He will rule and reign as the Millennial Messiah. Your noble birthright, identity, purpose, and divine commission set you apart from all others.

But neither your birthright nor your premortal ordinations and commissions can save or exalt you. You will do that through your individual decisions and as you choose to access the power of the Lord’s Atonement in your lives. The great eternal principle of agency is vital to our Father’s plan. So, you youth of the noble birthright, what will you choose?

Will you choose to increase in learning?

Education is yours to obtain. No one else can gain it for you. Wherever you are, develop a deep desire to learn. For us as Latter-day Saints, gaining an education is not just a privilege; it is a religious responsibility. “The glory of God is intelligence” (D&C 93:36). Indeed, our education is for the eternities.

“Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection.

“And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life . . . , he [or she] will have so much the advantage in the world to come” (D&C 130:18–19).

Such a long-range perspective will help you make good choices about learning.

Don’t be afraid to pursue your goals—even your dreams! But know that there is no shortcut to excellence and competence. Education is the difference between *wishing* you could help other people and *being able* to help them.

What manner of living will you choose?

You are expected to live differently than others. You know what Paul said to young Timothy: “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12).³ Choose to think and act differently than those of the world. Choose to look different, and see what an influence for good you will become. As Ardeth G. Kapp, former Young Women general president, once said, “You can’t be a life saver if you look like all the other swimmers on the beach.”⁴

As youth of the noble birthright, you have a great start in life, but you also have an additional responsibility. “For of him [or her] unto whom much is given much is required” (D&C 82:3; see also Luke 12:48). Part of that requirement is to be a recruit. When you were baptized, you actually reenlisted in the Lord’s army.⁵ Premortally, you stood by Jesus Christ during the War in Heaven. And now the conflict between the forces of good and evil continues here on earth. It is real! (See Revelation 12:7–9; D&C 29:40–41). On God’s side is Jesus Christ,

foreordained to be the Savior of the world (see 1 Nephi 10:4). On the other side is Satan—a rebel, a destroyer of agency (see Moses 4:3).⁶

God’s plan allows the adversary to tempt you so that you can exercise your agency to choose good over evil, to choose to repent, to choose to come unto Jesus Christ and believe His teachings and follow His example. What a huge responsibility and a huge trust!

Your freedom to act for yourself is so central to your eternal progress and happiness that the adversary exerts extraordinary efforts to undermine it (see 2 Nephi 2:27; 10:23).

Will you establish priorities to help you make your choices?

Your choices will not all be between good and evil. Many will be choices between two good options. Not all truths are created equal, so you will need to establish priorities. In your pursuit of knowledge, know that the most important truth you can learn comes from the Lord. In His Intercessory Prayer to His Father, the Savior Himself confirmed this. He said, “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). Above everything else you are seeking to learn, seek to know God, your Heavenly Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ. Come to know Them and love Them, as I do.

Another priority scripture that has helped me throughout my life is this one: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

More than anything else in this world, you want to make choices that lead to the ultimate and glorious destiny of eternal life. That is God’s great glory for you (see D&C 14:7; Moses 1:39). Choose eternal life as your highest priority! Study the scriptures, such as sections 76 and 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants, to understand more about the different blessings awaiting those who choose eternal life and those who don’t. Choose eternal life as your highest priority, and notice how other choices fall into place.



Many people have not yet found divine truth and don't know where to look for it. But you youth of the noble birthright are coming to their rescue.

With whom will you choose to associate?

You will mingle with many good people who also believe in God. Whether they be Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, or Muslim, believers know that there actually is absolute truth. Believers in God have a conscience. Believers obey civil and divine law voluntarily, even laws that might otherwise be unenforceable.

With your commitment to obey civil and divine law, you stop for a red light, even if no other traffic is in sight. As a child of God you know, even if the police don't catch you, that stealing and murdering are wrong and that God will ultimately hold you accountable. You know that the consequences for not playing by the rules are not only temporal but also eternal.

As you move along life's journey, you will also become acquainted with people who do not believe in God. Many of them have not yet found divine truth and don't know

where to look for it. But you youth of the noble birthright are coming to their rescue. In great numbers, you are rallying to the call of God's prophet for more missionaries. We are deeply grateful for each one!

As you mingle with nonbelievers, be aware that there may be a few who do not have your best interest at heart (see D&C 1:16; 89:4). As soon as you discern that, flee from them quickly and permanently (see 1 Timothy 6:5–6, 11).

Sadly, you will meet people whose desperate search for something that seems to them like happiness takes them down the slippery slopes of sin. Beware of that slimy slide! Any pleasure in sin is only fleeting, while haunting memories of sin are filled with gnawing and grinding guilt. The sinful warping of the embrace divinely designed to unite husband and wife is but a hollow counterfeit. Each unlawful experience is stripped of deep meaning and sweet memory.

Will you choose freedom or bondage?

Godless forces are all around. You are literally living in enemy territory.⁷ A plague of poisonous pornography abounds. It ensnares all who yield to its insidious grasp.

This was foreseen by the Lord, who said, “And now I show unto you a mystery, a thing which is had in secret chambers, to bring to pass even your destruction in process of time, and ye knew it not” (D&C 38:13; see also verse 28).

Consider how many people in secret chambers are seeking to destroy your life and happiness! Carnal temptation is not new. The Apostle Peter warned of this same snare when he wrote:

“They allure through the lusts of the flesh . . . those that were clean. . . .

“While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage” (2 Peter 2:18–19).

Avoid that bondage, my beloved brothers and sisters. If you are currently viewing pornography, stop it now! Seek help from your bishop. None are smart enough to outwit the adversary on their own once they have been poisoned by pornography. It is as destructive as leprosy, as addictive as meth, and as corrosive as lye.

Will you choose to follow the Lord or the philosophies of men?

Carefully study “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.”⁸ The family is under attack across the entire world, but the truths of the family proclamation will fortify you.

You need to understand the far-reaching consequences of society’s current skirmish over the definition of marriage. The present debate involves the question of whether two people of the same gender can be married. If you have a question about the position of the Church on this or any other important issue, prayerfully ponder it and then heed the prophetic messages of living prophets. Their inspired words, with inspiration from the Holy Ghost, will bring to your mind a fuller and truer understanding.⁹

The marriage debate is but one of the many controversies

that will challenge you in the future. Against the strident voices of the adversary, you, as youth of the noble birthright, will choose to stand for the Lord and His truth.

The Apostle Paul prophesied about the plight of our day (see 2 Timothy 3:1–5). His accurate vision of the spiritual devastation of our day was followed by his reassuring conclusion, telling us how to stay safe: “From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15).

To his advice I add my own: Keep studying the scriptures. Keep doing the things that build your faith in Jesus Christ. And then notice the wise choices you are naturally drawn to make.

Your faith in Jesus Christ and His gospel will give you the courage to marry and to bring children into your family while you are young and able to have them. When you are my age, you will prize your children, your grandchildren, and their children above any fame or fortune that otherwise might have come.

How will you prepare for your personal interview with the Savior?

You youth of the noble birthright are not perfect yet. None of us are. So you, along with the rest of us, are very grateful for the Atonement of the Savior, which provides full forgiveness as you truly repent. You also know that your stay here in mortality is relatively brief. In time, each of you will graduate from this frail existence and move on to the next world.

Judgment Day awaits each of us. I know that “the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there” (2 Nephi 9:41). Yes, each of us will have a personal interview with Jesus Christ.

Each day on earth gives you time and opportunity to prepare for that interview. Please know this: As you choose to live on the Lord’s side, you are never alone. God has given you access to His help while you move along mortality’s perilous pathway. As you diligently, earnestly pour out your heart to Him in daily prayer, He will send His angels to help you (see D&C 84:88). He has



*Choose to think and
act differently than
those of the world.
Choose to look
different, and see
what an influence for
good you will become.*

given you the Holy Ghost to be by your side as you live worthily. He has given you the scriptures so that you can fully feast upon the words of Jesus Christ (see 2 Nephi 9:51; 32:3). He has given you words to heed from living prophets.

In whom will you put your trust?

You know that God is your Father. He loves you. He wants you to be happy. Put your trust in Him (see 2 Nephi 4:34; 28:31). Maintain your focus on His holy temple. Be worthy to receive your endowment and sealing ordinances. Remain faithful to those covenants, and return frequently to the temple. Remember, your loftiest goal is to gain the greatest of all the blessings of God, that of eternal life (see D&C 14:7). Temple ordinances are essential for that blessing (see D&C 131:1–3).

I invite you to prayerfully study the scriptural statement of your identity, purpose, and blessing (see D&C 86:8–11).

Yes, you truly are youth of the noble birthright, created in God's image. You are the lawful heirs, to be tried and tested. May you choose to be a light to the world to help save God's children, to have joy, and ultimately to earn the blessing of eternal life. ■

From a Church Educational System devotional address, "Youth of the Noble Birthright: What Will You Choose?" delivered at Brigham Young University–Hawaii on September 6, 2013. For the full address, go to cesdevotionals.lds.org.

NOTES

1. "Carry On," *Hymns*, no. 255.
2. "Hope of Israel," *Hymns*, no. 259.
3. The Greek word *anastrophe*, from which *conversation* was translated, means an upward manner of living.
4. Ardeeth Greene Kapp, *I Walk by Faith* (1987), 97.
5. See "We Are All Enlisted," *Hymns*, no. 250.
6. Some people describe agency as *free agency*, but that expression is not scriptural. Scripture speaks only of *moral agency* (see D&C 101:78).
7. See Boyd K. Packer, "Counsel to Youth," *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 16, 18.
8. See "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
9. The Church's inspired proclamation on the family states: "The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother" ("The Family: A Proclamation to the World," 129).



STAYING THE Course

The determination of a racing pigeon taught our family that when we are faced with seemingly insurmountable odds, we can still choose to have hope.

By Kerry Griffin Smith

Sometimes Heavenly Father teaches us through His creations, and we are reminded that even the smallest creature is of value to Him (see Matthew 10:29). A few years ago, one special bird taught our family an ever-important lesson in a time of great need—stay the course and persevere, no matter the odds.

My brother, Kelly, raises racing pigeons. A few years ago he had a unique bird that competed in a race that turned out to be unusually challenging, one that many other pigeons failed to complete. But my brother's bird didn't give up. During that same time frame, my cousin Jason was diagnosed with terminal cancer. The prospects were grim, but family support and his will to live were strong. He began chemotherapy treatments despite terrible odds for survival. His race for an extended life had begun; the outcome of the pigeon's race would inspire him.

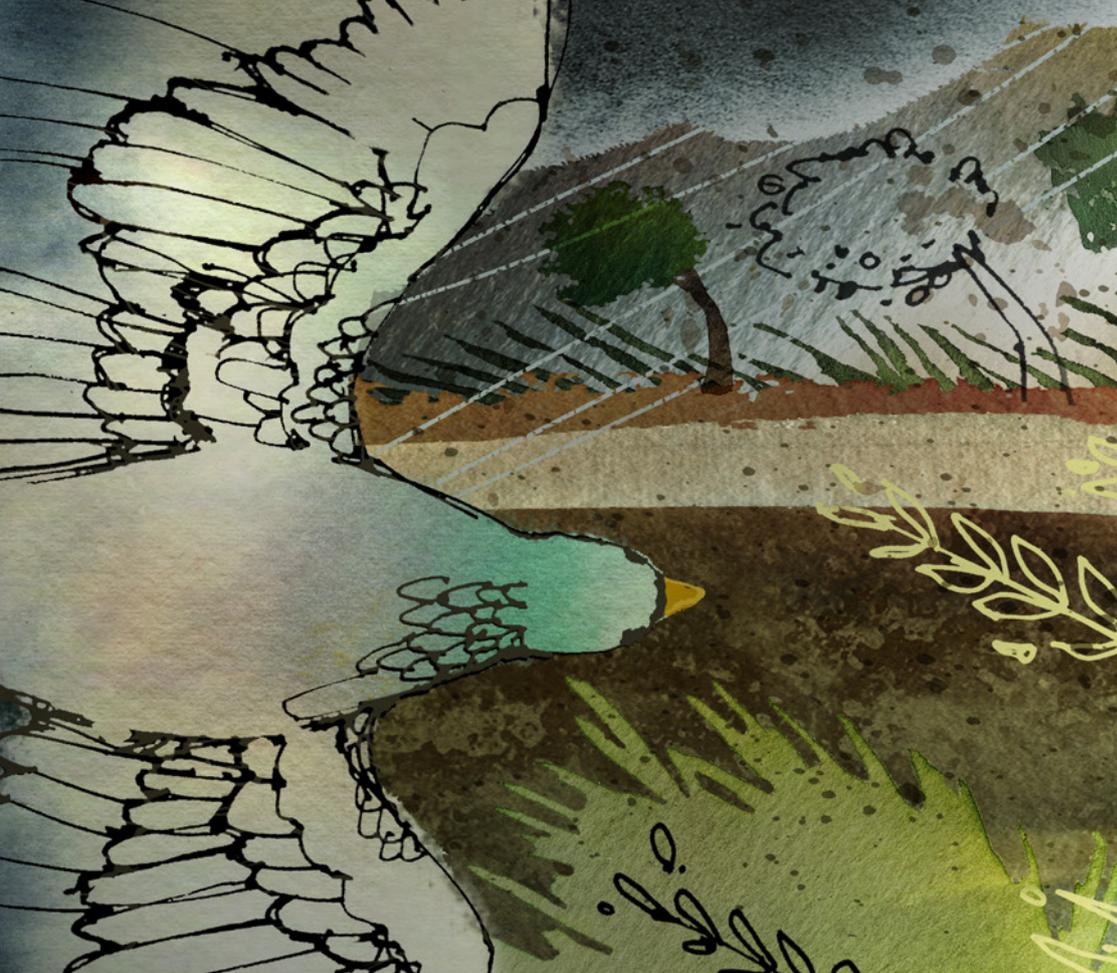
Our Special Pigeon

For those who know about racing pigeons, they are essentially aviary athletes. Hours of practice flights and a strict, specially formulated diet are required for racing

preparation. Our special bird, one of my brother's best racing pigeons, came from a lineage of prized competitors. He was bred to race, but his inner determination is what made him special, pushing him to finish—no matter what. During practice flights, he wasn't necessarily the fastest, but he always finished near the top with a respectable time. He was consistently a solid competitor.

His constant drive to finish with his personal best time paid off in one particular 300-mile race, a challenging journey but usually a doable distance for race-ready birds. With an innate GPS system, racing pigeons can be expected to cover this distance in about six hours. But that didn't happen in this race. Owners waited and waited for the birds to return home. Stressful weather conditions caused many of the 700-plus birds in the competition to lose their way. Some returned to their lofts days off schedule. Others were found way off course and were shipped back to their owners, and some never made it back at all.

But my brother's pigeon stayed the course. Upon returning home, he flew directly into the loft and landed



A HERITAGE OF HOPE

“When you choose whether to make or keep a covenant with God, you choose whether you will leave an inheritance of hope to those who might follow your example.”

President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, “A Priceless Heritage of Hope,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 22.

on the computerized race pad. The chip on his leg band recorded the official time. It wasn't his best time by a long shot. He, too, had been delayed in the race. But because so many other birds had given up during the flight, his time placed him in a top slot. He ranked 35th—a respectable finish, given the circumstances.

For our pigeon's efforts in the race, he was awarded a cash prize that my brother donated to help Jason pay for ongoing expenses during his cancer treatments.

Our extended family gathered at Thanksgiving that year to also offer emotional and financial support. Jason learned about our pigeon's inspiring story then; it touched us all.

Our Messenger of Hope

And how did Jason's race against cancer go? In a rare twist of fate, he beat the odds. Incredibly, after he had endured four rounds of chemotherapy, his doctors discovered they had misdiagnosed the cancer. Instead, he had another condition that was treatable. Several years later he still enjoys life, and the story of our special pigeon continues to inspire him. We are grateful that Jason's earthly life has been extended but realize that other patients in similar circumstances are often called to their eternal home. In accepting God's will and doing their mortal best, they, too, stayed the course and finished their individual races with honor.

When we are faced with seemingly insurmountable odds, we can still choose to have hope. We do all that we can to prepare for life's challenges, but ultimately we must have faith in our Heavenly Father's plan for us. Along our journey, He sends us encouraging reminders of His love. We just have to look for them. For our family, His messenger was a prize-winning pigeon. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

Flora and I

Equal Partners in the Work of the Lord



Left: Flora Amussen and Ezra Taft Benson in their younger years. Right: Flora and Ezra enjoying a day with their six children.





As we learn of the supportive, loving partnership that President Ezra Taft Benson enjoyed with his wife, Flora, we gain a deeper understanding of his ministry.

By Aaron L. West

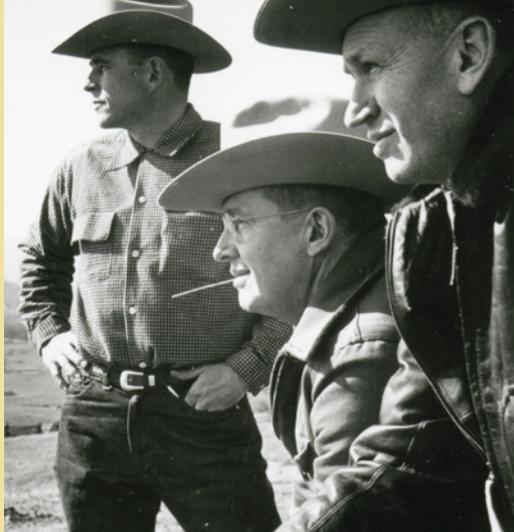
Church Publishing Services

Sometimes, if we listen closely, a short phrase can be as powerful as a sermon. Such was the case on November 11, 1985. The phrase was “Flora and I.” President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) read those words as part of a prepared statement for news reporters the day after he was set apart as President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) had died six days earlier, leaving President Benson as the senior Apostle.

President Benson and his wife, Flora, had been together when they received word of President Kimball’s passing, and they “immediately dropped to their knees” in prayer.¹ Now, in the first paragraph of the statement that would be published throughout the world, President Benson again placed himself beside Flora. He said: “This is a day I have not anticipated. My wife, Flora, and I have prayed continually that President Kimball’s days would be prolonged on this earth and another miracle performed on his behalf. Now that the Lord has spoken, we will do our best, under his guiding direction, to move the work forward in the earth.”²

After 59 years of marriage, the phrase “Flora and I” came naturally to President Benson. And when he said, “we will do our best, under his guiding direction, to move the work forward,” he did not use the word *we* to refer to himself and the other General Authorities, although he certainly would be united with them. In this statement, the Church’s prophet, seer, and revelator spoke of being united with his wife in the work of the Lord.

To read about how farm life shaped Ezra Taft Benson's character, see *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Ezra Taft Benson*, pages 2–5.



Clockwise from top: Ezra Taft Benson with other farmers; Ezra, second from the left, with his mother and siblings; Ezra's parents, George T. Benson and Sarah Dunkley Benson.



And why wouldn't he? He and Flora had been united in the Lord's work for almost six decades. While many aspects of their life had changed over the years, their partnership had been a constant source of strength for both of them.

This year the course of study for Relief Society sisters and Melchizedek Priesthood holders includes an opportunity to learn from President Ezra Taft Benson. As you study his teachings, you may feel inclined to learn about his character. This article provides a few glimpses into his life and ministry, through the perspective of his wife, Flora Amussen Benson. All chapter and page numbers in the article refer to *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Ezra Taft Benson*.

"I'd Like to Marry a Farmer"

In the fall of 1920, 21-year-old Ezra Taft Benson traveled from his family's farm in Whitney, Idaho, USA, to Logan, Utah, where he enrolled at the Utah Agricultural College (now Utah State University). One day when he was with some friends on the school's

campus, a young woman stole his attention. He later recalled:

"We were out by the dairy barns when a young woman—very attractive and beautiful—drove by in her little car on her way to the dairy to get some milk. As the boys waved at her, she waved back. I said, 'Who is that girl?' They said 'That's Flora Amussen.'

"I told them, 'You know, I've just had the impression I'm going to marry her.'"

Ezra's friends were amused by this announcement. They said, "She's too popular for a farm boy." His response? "That makes it all the more interesting."³

Ezra's friends couldn't have been more wrong in their judgment of Flora Amussen. Since her teenage years, she had seen something special in men who worked the land. One day when her mother, Barbara, told her "that she could not attain the highest degree of glory without celestial marriage, Flora replied, perhaps naively but with some insight, 'Then I want to marry a poor man materially, but rich spiritually, so we can get what we get together.' After a pause she added, 'I'd like to marry a farmer.'"⁴

Flora and Ezra met later in 1920, and their friendship soon became courtship. In Ezra Taft Benson, Flora found a young man who had begun to accumulate the spiritual riches she valued so much. And as she must have expected, the roots of his spiritual strength went deep into the soil of his family's farm.

Working Together to Put God First

Just when Flora and Ezra were beginning to grow closer to each other, they learned that they would be separated for two years. Ezra received a call to serve in the British Mission.

To read accounts of Ezra Taft Benson's service as a full-time missionary, see pages 9–10 and 103–4 in the manual. To read about his service in post-World War II Europe during his apostleship, see pages 17–21, 54–55, 69–70, 264, and 268.



He and Flora were excited about his opportunity to serve, and they “talked about their relationship. They wanted their friendship to continue, but they also recognized the need for Ezra to be a devoted missionary. ‘Before I left, Flora and I had decided to write [letters] only once a month,’ he said. ‘We also decided that our letters would be of encouragement, confidence and news. We did just that.’”⁵

In approaching the mission call this way, they exemplified a truth Ezra would teach the Saints many years later: “When we put God first, all other things fall into their proper place or drop out of our lives. Our love of the Lord will govern the claims for our affection, the demands on our time, the interests we pursue, and the order of our priorities.”⁶

As Ezra approached the end of his mission, he and Flora looked forward to seeing each other. But Flora “did more than anticipate the immediate prospect of spending time with him. She truly looked forward—to his future and his potential. . . . She was happy with Ezra’s apparent desire to settle on the family farm in Whitney, Idaho. However, she felt that he needed to finish his education first.”⁷ In her effort to help him do so, she joined him in putting God first. Less than a year after he returned from his mission, she surprised him by telling him that she was going to serve a mission herself. To learn more about her decision, see pages 10–11.

A Diamond in the Rough

Flora and Ezra were sealed in the Salt Lake Temple on September 10, 1926. Despite Ezra’s innate goodness and his success in school, “some people continued to question Flora’s judgment. They did not understand



Top: Young Ezra Taft Benson, before receiving a mission call. Above and right: As an Apostle he helped serve the people in post-World War II Europe.

why someone so accomplished, wealthy, and popular would settle for a farm boy. But she continued to say that she had ‘always wanted to marry a farmer.’ Ezra ‘was practical, sensible and solid,’ she said. And, she observed, ‘He was sweet to his parents, and I knew if he respected them, he’d respect me.’ She recognized that he was ‘a diamond in the rough,’ and she said, ‘I am going to do all within my power to help him be known and felt for good, not only in this little community but for the entire world to know him.’”⁸

With this vision of her husband’s potential, Flora happily went wherever they needed to go to provide for their children and serve the Church, their community, and their nation. This sometimes required her to live a simpler life than she had been accustomed to, but she embraced the challenge.

For example, on their wedding day, “the only festivity . . . was a breakfast for family and friends. After the breakfast, the new



Elder Ezra Taft Benson served as U.S. secretary of agriculture while also serving as an Apostle. To read about these responsibilities, see pages 21–25 and 47–48.



Top: President Benson among the Saints. Left and above: Serving as United States secretary of agriculture.

couple left immediately in their Model T Ford pickup truck for Ames, Iowa,” where Ezra would pursue a master’s degree in agricultural economics. “Along the way, they spent eight nights in a leaky tent. When they arrived in Ames, they rented an apartment one block from the college campus. The apartment was small, and the Bensons shared the space with a large family of cockroaches, but Ezra said that ‘it soon looked like the coziest little cottage one could ever imagine.’”⁹

As Ezra became more “diamond” and less “rough,” he became increasingly more involved in service outside the home. This led to a refining process for Flora as well. When he was away she sometimes struggled with loneliness and discouragement. But she loved being a wife and mother, and she expressed gratitude for her husband’s goodness and for his devotion to the family. To learn more about Flora and Ezra’s early marriage and parenthood, see pages 12–15.

Two Life-Changing Phone Calls

On July 27, 1943, Flora received a phone call from her husband. He was in Salt Lake City, Utah, preparing to return from a business trip with their son Reed. She was at their home near Washington, D.C., about 2,000 miles (3,200 km) away. After a sleepless night full of prayer and tears, he telephoned to let her know that the previous day he had been called to serve as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The news did not surprise Flora. She “had had a strong impression that something of magnitude would happen on [her husband’s] trip.”¹⁰ She expressed confidence in Ezra, and her words had a calming effect on him. He later recalled: “It was reassuring to talk to her. She has always shown more faith in me than I have myself.”¹¹

Even though Flora had confidence in her husband, she knew he could not fulfill his calling alone—he needed support from his family and strength from heaven. At one general conference, a whispered message demonstrated Flora’s love for her husband and her understanding of his reliance on the Lord (see pages 48–49).

Flora received another life-changing phone call from her husband on November 24, 1952. This time he was visiting the Washington, D.C., area, and she was at their home in Salt Lake City. Dwight D. Eisenhower, who would soon begin his service as president of the United States, had just asked Elder Benson to serve as his secretary of agriculture, a high-ranking position that would require great sacrifice and dedication. Elder Benson accepted the position, having been counseled to do so by the President of



the Church, David O. McKay (1873–1970).

When Elder Benson told Flora that President-Elect Eisenhower had offered him a position and that he had accepted, she replied, “I knew he would. And I knew you would accept.” She acknowledged that it would be difficult for the family but added, “It seems to be God’s will.”¹²

Elder Benson served as secretary of agriculture for eight years. During that time, the family endured periods of separation, and Elder Benson had to deal with the criticism and adulation that often accompany public service. The Bensons received great opportunities. For example, Elder Benson once took Flora and their daughters Beverly and Bonnie on a four-week trip in which he worked to establish trade relations with 12 different countries (see pages 181–82). An invitation from a news reporter led to a unique missionary experience for the family (see page 24).



Equal Instruments in the Hands of the Lord

Like all Presidents of the Church, Ezra Taft Benson was foreordained for his calling. But on his own he could not have fulfilled that foreordination or served with such strength. Certainly no other person influenced him as much as Flora did. In the Church and in their family, they worked

side by side as powerful instruments in the Lord’s hands.

Just as President and Sister Benson kneeled together when they learned that he would preside over the Church, they worked together to “move the work forward in the earth.”¹³ As she had hoped when she was a teenager, they got what they wanted—together.¹⁴

From the pulpit, President Benson exhorted Latter-day Saints to flood the earth and their lives with the Book of Mormon (see chapters 9–10). At home, Flora read the Book of Mormon to him every day, and then they discussed what they had read.¹⁵ From the pulpit, President Benson urged the Saints to regularly serve and worship in the temple (see chapter 13). Privately, Flora and

Ezra Benson attended the temple every Friday morning when they were able to do so.¹⁶ From the pulpit, President Benson warned of the sin of pride and the “applause of the world.”¹⁷ But even though Flora had succeeded in helping “the entire world to know him,”¹⁸ they were content, together, with the quiet “applause of heaven.”¹⁹

President Ezra Taft Benson delivered hundreds of sermons as an Apostle and President of the Church. It is difficult to imagine any of those sermons without the influence of that three-word sermon he delivered on November 11, 1985: “Flora and I.” ■

NOTES

1. Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography* (1987), 479.
2. Ezra Taft Benson, in Don L. Searle, “President Ezra Taft Benson Ordained Thirteenth President of the Church,” *Ensign*, Dec. 1985, 5.
3. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Ezra Taft Benson* (2014), 7–8.
4. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 74–75.
5. *Teachings: Ezra Taft Benson*, 8.
6. *Teachings: Ezra Taft Benson*, 40.
7. *Teachings: Ezra Taft Benson*, 10.
8. *Teachings: Ezra Taft Benson*, 11–12.
9. *Teachings: Ezra Taft Benson*, 12.
10. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 176.
11. Ezra Taft Benson, in *Teachings: Ezra Taft Benson*, 16.
12. Flora Amussen Benson, in *Teachings: Ezra Taft Benson*, 23.
13. Ezra Taft Benson, in Searle, “President Ezra Taft Benson Ordained Thirteenth President of the Church,” 5.
14. See Flora Amussen Benson, in Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 74–75.
15. See Derin Head Rodriguez, “Flora Amussen Benson: Handmaiden of the Lord, Helpmeet of a Prophet, Mother in Zion,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1987, 20.
16. See Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 511.
17. *Teachings: Ezra Taft Benson*, 229.
18. *Teachings: Ezra Taft Benson*, 11–12.
19. *Teachings: Ezra Taft Benson*, 229.





By Elder
LeGrand R.
Curtis Jr.
Of the Seventy

“He Ran, and Fell on His Neck, and Kissed Him”

As the Savior was teaching in Galilee, a group of publicans and sinners gathered to hear Him. This caused the Pharisees and the scribes to murmur at the kind of company Jesus was keeping. (See Luke 15:1–2.) The Savior’s response to this murmuring was to tell three parables that deal with those who have gone astray.

First, He told the parable of the lost sheep, emphasizing the effort to find the sheep that had strayed and the joy of its return. Jesus made the application of the parable clear: “Likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:7).

Next, He told the parable of the lost coin, again stressing the effort made and the joy of recovery. Again the Savior clearly stated the application: “Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:10).

The Prodigal Son

The third parable is commonly known as the parable of the prodigal son. In this

*It is our
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feel the love
Heavenly
Father has
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for our
brothers and
sisters as we
assist in the
great work of
helping them
come to
themselves
and, more
important,
come to God.*

parable the Savior told of a son requesting and obtaining his inheritance from his father and going to a far country. There the son “wasted his substance with riotous living” (Luke 15:13). Once the money was gone, he tried working as a hired hand but still found himself in want. He even envied the swine he was sent to feed—at least they had plenty to eat. (See Luke 15:15–16.)

As he mused on his predicament, the son turned his thoughts to home. He realized that the hired servants in his father’s house lived better than he did. He “came to himself” and acknowledged that he had “sinned against heaven” and against his father. (See Luke 15:17–18.) So he resolved upon a plan. He determined to go home, being prepared to admit his errors to his father, confess his unworthiness to be his father’s son, and plead to be allowed to become one of his father’s hired servants (see Luke 15:18–19). With that speech prepared, he headed toward home.

At this point in the story, the Savior includes some important details. While the



GOD WANTS US BACK

“The tender image of [the prodigal son’s] anxious, faithful father running to meet him and showering him with kisses is one of the most moving and compassionate scenes in all of holy writ. It tells every child of God, wayward or otherwise, how much God wants us back in the protection of His arms.”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Other Prodigal,” *Ensign*, May 2002, 62.

son is “yet a great way off,” the father sees him, has compassion on him, runs to him, falls on his neck, and kisses him. The son tries to give his speech but does not get far beyond acknowledging his sins. The father calls for a robe, a ring, and shoes to be put on his son, and he orders that the fatted calf be killed for a feast to celebrate the happy reunion. (See Luke 15:20–24.) The father’s joy in the return of his son is unbounded.

The Loving, Forgiving Father

All three parables speak of recovering what was lost, but the focus of the third parable differs from the first two. The third parable focuses on the actions of the father. For me, the most important aspect of this parable is what it tells us of our Heavenly Father’s reaction when we turn toward Him: He runs to embrace us.

I have seen God’s love for the returning prodigal played out time after time as I have watched people return to Him. As a priesthood leader, I was somewhat taken aback by the strength and depth of God’s love I felt the first time I listened to a repentant Church member confess wrongdoing. That feeling has returned every time I have helped someone with the repentance process.

While I served as a bishop, a man moved into our ward who previously had been a faithful, temple-going member. In the intervening years he had drifted away from God and the standards of the Church. When he relocated to our ward, he was ready to return to God. He repented and then worked to qualify for a temple recommend.

When he was finally ready, I was with him when, for the first time in decades, he returned to the house of the Lord. As we sat together in the temple, Heavenly Father’s love for him filled both of us. The embrace, kiss, robe, ring, and shoes described in the parable of the prodigal son all seemed to be rolled into one as I sat with a son of God who had come to himself, repented of his sins, and returned to His Father’s house.

Returning to God

The invitation to return to God appears repeatedly in the scriptures. The Savior told the Nephites, “How oft will I gather you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, if ye will repent and return unto me with full purpose of heart” (3 Nephi 10:6). Through the prophet Malachi, the Lord said, “Return unto me, and I will return unto you” (Malachi 3:7).

In the revealed dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple, the Prophet Joseph Smith prayed, “And when thy people transgress, . . . may [they] speedily repent and return unto thee, and find favor in thy sight, and be restored to the blessings which thou hast ordained to be poured out upon those who shall reverence thee in thy house” (D&C 109:21).

One of the great blessings we enjoy as members of God’s Church is the opportunity to assist Him in helping His children return to full activity in His Church. President Thomas S. Monson has called on all of us to rescue those who have drifted away.¹ As we do so, we help God’s children feel the warm embrace of a loving Heavenly Father longing to welcome them back into His fold.



Over the years I have seen many loving Relief Society presidencies. One of those presidencies was exceptionally good at welcoming people into our ward and, along with other members of the ward council, finding ways that the new members could participate in ward activities. After we got to know these new people better, we were sometimes surprised to learn that they had not been very active in their previous wards. As these new ward members enjoyed the fellowship of the other members, we watched them progress in the Church. In several instances, we attended the temple with them when they received temple ordinances.

On one such occasion the father of one of these members approached me in a temple sealing room and said, “I can never thank you enough for what your ward has done for my son.” He did not need to thank us. All of us present felt the loving spiritual embrace of our Heavenly Father for this man’s son and his family.

The Older Son

Of course, the parable of the prodigal son does not end with the father embracing his formerly wayward son and celebrating his return. The father had an older son who had *not* wasted the family assets in riotous living but had dutifully stayed at his father’s side. When this older son learned of the celebration for the return of his brother, he became angry. He resented the attention and the celebration his brother had received, and he condemned him for his previous sinful ways. (See Luke 15:25–30.)

In the parable the loving father left the feast and went out to the older son to entreat him to join the celebration. His words to this son are full of love for both sons:

“Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.

“It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:31–32).

In the example of this older son there is a warning for all of us. Heavenly Father’s love for all His children is unbounded, and there is no need to resent that love when it is manifested in the lives of others. There is plenty of love for us, and we share more fully in that love as we not only celebrate the return of the prodigal but also assist as many as possible to return to the fold “safe and sound” (Luke 15:27).

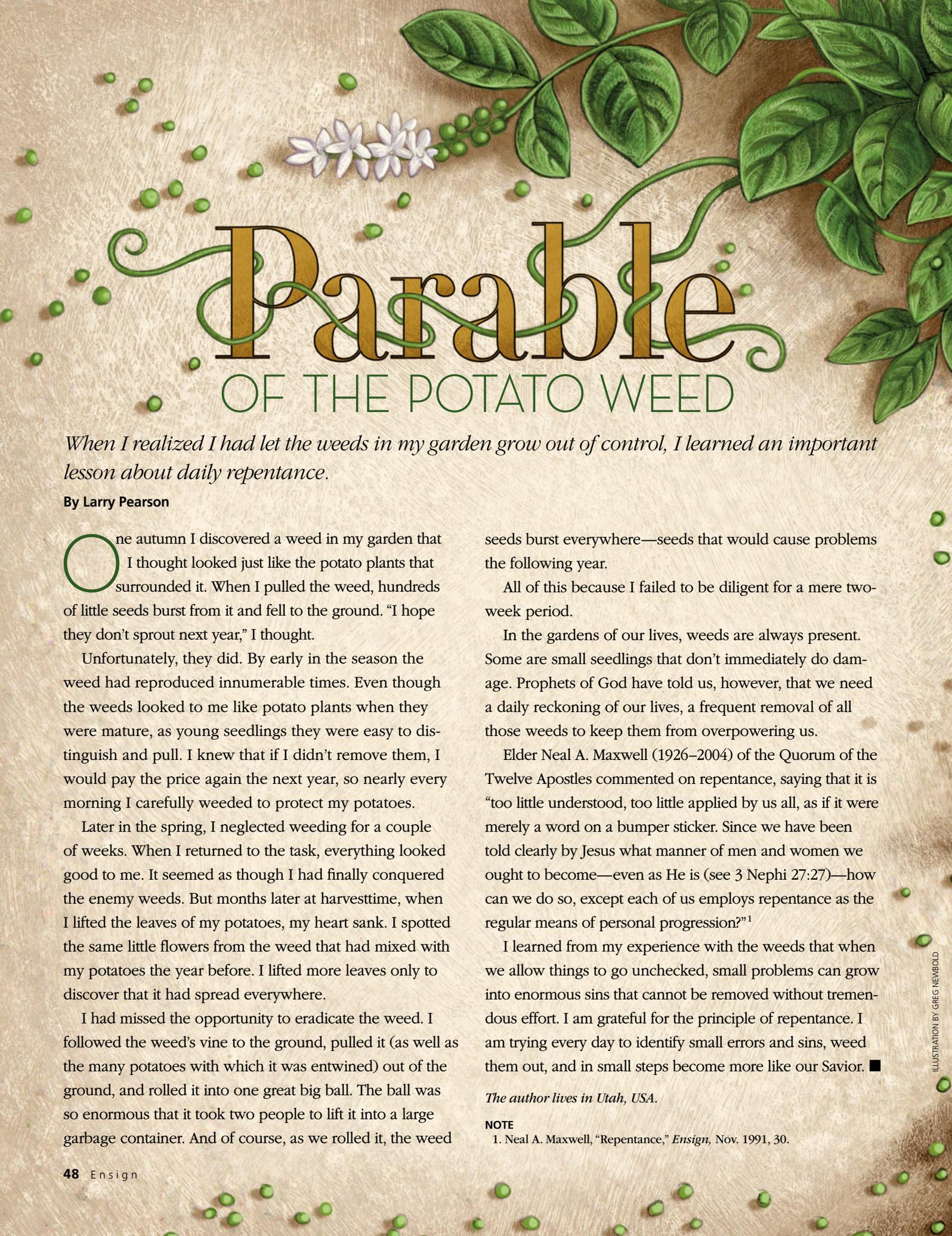
Conclusion

As Jesus taught the publicans and sinners, He did what all of us should do: help our brothers and sisters know Heavenly Father and come to Him. Through the parable of the prodigal son, we catch a glimpse of the love Heavenly Father has for His children, and how He feels when one of them takes steps to repent and return to Him. This is a love that “passeth knowledge” (Ephesians 3:19).

It is our privilege to feel the love Heavenly Father has for us and for our brothers and sisters as we assist in the great work of helping them come to themselves and, more important, come to God. ■

NOTE

1. See Thomas S. Monson, “Our Responsibility to Rescue,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2013, 4–5.



Parable

OF THE POTATO WEED

When I realized I had let the weeds in my garden grow out of control, I learned an important lesson about daily repentance.

By Larry Pearson

One autumn I discovered a weed in my garden that I thought looked just like the potato plants that surrounded it. When I pulled the weed, hundreds of little seeds burst from it and fell to the ground. “I hope they don’t sprout next year,” I thought.

Unfortunately, they did. By early in the season the weed had reproduced innumerable times. Even though the weeds looked to me like potato plants when they were mature, as young seedlings they were easy to distinguish and pull. I knew that if I didn’t remove them, I would pay the price again the next year, so nearly every morning I carefully weeded to protect my potatoes.

Later in the spring, I neglected weeding for a couple of weeks. When I returned to the task, everything looked good to me. It seemed as though I had finally conquered the enemy weeds. But months later at harvesttime, when I lifted the leaves of my potatoes, my heart sank. I spotted the same little flowers from the weed that had mixed with my potatoes the year before. I lifted more leaves only to discover that it had spread everywhere.

I had missed the opportunity to eradicate the weed. I followed the weed’s vine to the ground, pulled it (as well as the many potatoes with which it was entwined) out of the ground, and rolled it into one great big ball. The ball was so enormous that it took two people to lift it into a large garbage container. And of course, as we rolled it, the weed

seeds burst everywhere—seeds that would cause problems the following year.

All of this because I failed to be diligent for a mere two-week period.

In the gardens of our lives, weeds are always present. Some are small seedlings that don’t immediately do damage. Prophets of God have told us, however, that we need a daily reckoning of our lives, a frequent removal of all those weeds to keep them from overpowering us.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles commented on repentance, saying that it is “too little understood, too little applied by us all, as if it were merely a word on a bumper sticker. Since we have been told clearly by Jesus what manner of men and women we ought to become—even as He is (see 3 Nephi 27:27)—how can we do so, except each of us employs repentance as the regular means of personal progression?”¹

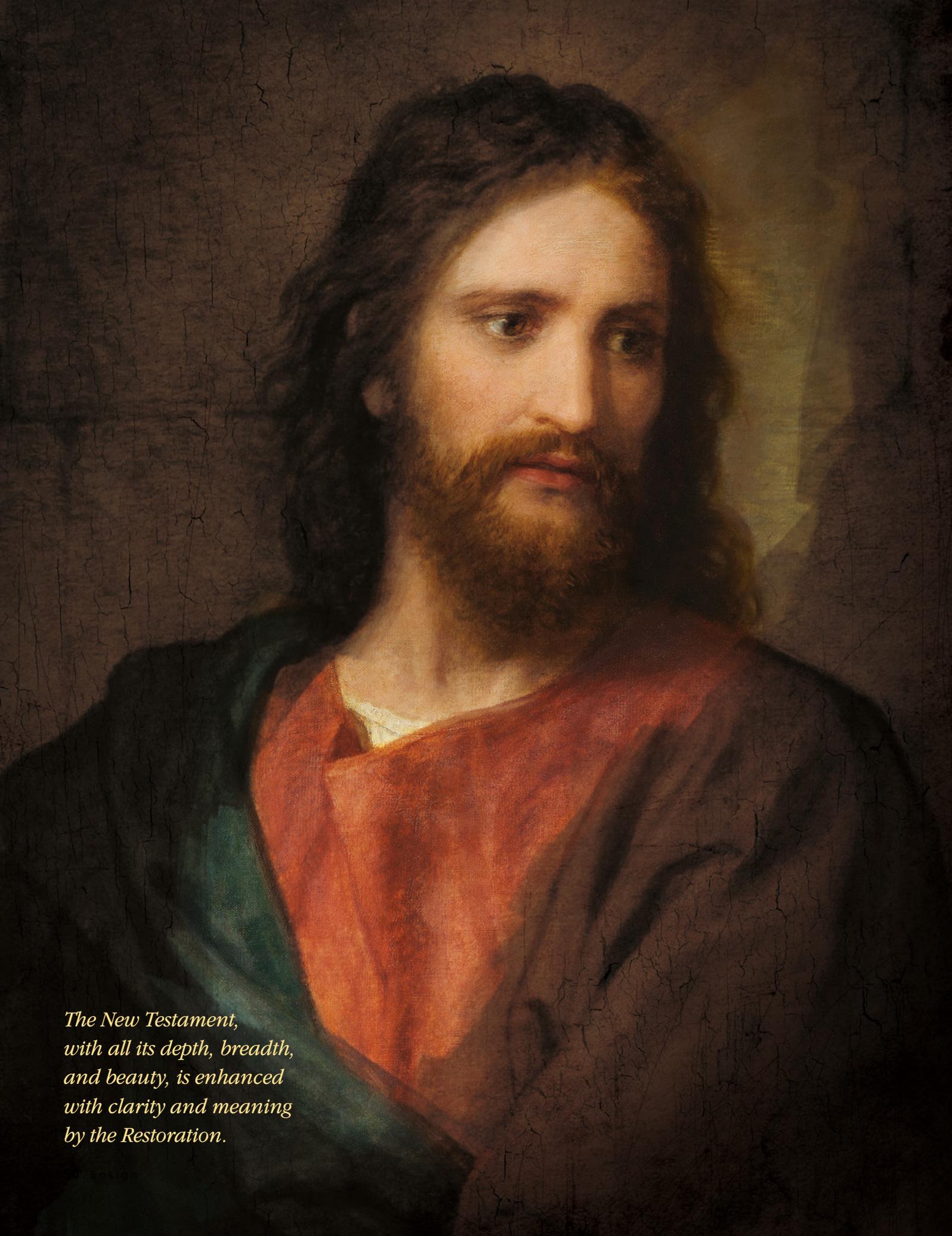
I learned from my experience with the weeds that when we allow things to go unchecked, small problems can grow into enormous sins that cannot be removed without tremendous effort. I am grateful for the principle of repentance. I am trying every day to identify small errors and sins, weed them out, and in small steps become more like our Savior. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTE

1. Neal A. Maxwell, “Repentance,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 30.





*The New Testament,
with all its depth, breadth,
and beauty, is enhanced
with clarity and meaning
by the Restoration.*

The Restored Testament

By **David A. Edwards**, Church Magazines,
and **Norman W. Gardner**, Seminaries and Institutes

The New Testament is one of the most influential and life-changing texts in the history of the world, and its influence continues today. The accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, His atoning sacrifice and Resurrection, as well as the teachings of His Apostles, have indelibly shaped the course of world events and ideas. Most importantly, they have helped bring people to Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

This book contains the story of our Heavenly Father's love for His children as seen in the life of His Beloved Son and in the efforts of humble disciples who did their best to follow Him. The Restoration is a continuation of that story of Heavenly Father's love for us in our day.

The fact that the Restoration clarifies and enhances New Testament teachings does not diminish the love and reverence that members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints feel for the New Testament. In fact, we believe that the scriptures, revelations, and teachings we have received through the Prophet Joseph Smith and others have helped establish the truth of the New Testament record by providing additional witnesses of it (see 1 Nephi 13:35–40).

Here are just three of the many New Testament themes on which the Restoration offers additional insights.

Faith in Jesus Christ

In the Lord's preface to the Doctrine and Covenants (section 1), He declares why He called upon Joseph Smith, gave him revelations, and asked him and others to proclaim them. Among the reasons He gives is this one: "That faith also might increase in the earth" (D&C 1:21).

The New Testament teaches us the essential role of faith in our salvation. We learn there that our faith in Jesus Christ can make us whole (see Matthew 9:22), that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17), that faith is a gift of the Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 12:9), that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1), and that “faith, if it hath not works, is dead” (James 2:17).

The Restoration affirms all of these teachings, declaring that the first principle of the gospel is “faith in the Lord Jesus Christ” (Articles of Faith 1:4). Through numerous visitations and revelations, the Prophet Joseph Smith became the preeminent witness of Jesus Christ in the dispensation of the fulness of times. As such, he taught the world about the Savior’s central role in our lives and about His true nature, correcting erroneous ideas. Because of this witness and these teachings, we can have faith in a living God and in His Son, who invites us to follow Him, become a true disciple, and receive exaltation.

Because of the Restoration, we understand that to truly have faith in God, we must have “a *correct* idea of his character, perfections, and attributes,” as well as “an actual knowledge that the course of life [we are] pursuing is according to his will.”¹

One revelation to Joseph Smith, found in Doctrine and Covenants 93, builds upon the foundation of New Testament teachings to help us develop greater faith in Jesus Christ by better understanding His “character, perfections, and attributes.”

The Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith an expanded version of the testimony of John the Baptist, who declared that “before the world was,” Jesus Christ was the chosen “messenger of salvation,” the “light and the Redeemer of the world,” and the Creator of the world (see D&C 93:7–10). His testimony further states that Jesus Christ “received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness” (D&C 93:13).

The Lord then explains that He revealed this information “that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the

Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness” (D&C 93:19).

This revelation helps us see how it is possible for us to become like Jesus Christ. In it the Lord expands upon ideas from the New Testament (particularly the Gospel of John) in order to show that we “were also in the beginning with the Father” (D&C 93:23) and that because of the Savior, we too can “receive grace for grace” (D&C 93:20) and progress *through obedience* until we receive exaltation (see D&C 93:27–28).

Thus, true faith in Jesus Christ is coupled with obedience, and the result of the increased knowledge and faith afforded by the Restoration is the furthering of the Father’s work and glory, “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

Grace

The doctrine of grace found in the New Testament has been given a richer explanation through the revelations and teachings of the Restoration. The Apostle Paul taught, “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). We find this teaching repeated in the Book of Mormon, with some important supplemental ideas. For instance, the prophet Jacob taught, “Reconcile yourselves to the will of God . . . ; and remember, after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved” (2 Nephi 10:24). The Book of Mormon reinforces the truth that it is alone the gift of Christ’s Atonement that saves us, but it also reminds us that we *must* yield our wills to God by believing in His Son, repenting, keeping His commandments, and doing good works.

In addition, the Restoration clarifies the New Testament’s teachings regarding the power of grace. The Apostle Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13). Through modern prophets we have learned that grace is not only the power that brings about our ultimate salvation and exaltation but also “an enabling power” that can strengthen us now (Bible Dictionary, “Grace”). As Elder David A. Bednar of



Through numerous visitations and revelations, beginning with the First Vision, the Prophet Joseph Smith became the preeminent witness of Jesus Christ in this last dispensation.

of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (1 Nephi 1:20). This “power of deliverance” is God’s grace, His enabling power. As Nephi and others turned their lives over to the Lord, they received this power. For example, when Alma the Elder’s people were in bondage, they did not cease to pray and have faith, and then “the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease” (Mosiah 24:15).

Thus, Restoration scriptures support the New Testament’s teachings on grace and also expand our view of it, helping us see the hand of the Lord in our lives and how we can access His power here and now.

Covenants

As mentioned before, Doctrine and Covenants 1 lists some reasons why the Lord brought about the Restoration, among which is this one: “That mine everlasting covenant might be established” (D&C 1:22).

The word often translated as “testament” in the New Testament means “covenant” (see, for instance, Matthew 26:28). When covenants are spoken of in the New Testament, they are often mentioned particularly in relation to the old covenant (kept through the law of Moses) that was done away and the new covenant that was established through Jesus Christ in the meridian of time (see Hebrews 8–10). The Restoration of the gospel is the reestablishment of the new and everlasting covenant and helps us see how the concept of covenants permeates all of the Savior’s teachings and is central to our understanding of discipleship.

The Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew 5–7 is a good example of how the Restoration places the Savior’s teachings in a covenant context. When the resurrected Jesus Christ appeared to the Nephites (see 3 Nephi 11), He called twelve disciples and gave them authority to baptize; taught the people His doctrine (the gospel of faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost); told them the purpose of His doctrine (to be saved and inherit the kingdom of God); and then delivered a sermon nearly identical to the Sermon on the Mount (see 3 Nephi 12–14). Significantly, though, He introduced that sermon with these words:

the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught, “Not only does the Atonement of Jesus Christ overcome the effects of the Fall of Adam and make possible the remission of our individual sins and transgressions, but His Atonement also enables us to do good and become better in ways that stretch far beyond our mortal capacities.”²

This idea that God grants people His enabling power here and now is a theme that runs throughout the Book of Mormon, which contains numerous stories of people who are strengthened to overcome life’s difficulties. Even though the Book of Mormon doesn’t often use the word *grace* in describing such events, it contains multiple accounts in which the Lord strengthens people who humble themselves and exercise faith in Him.

In the very first chapter of the book, Nephi explains that his record “will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because



“Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen . . . ; and unto them I have given power that they may baptize you with water; and after that ye are baptized with water, behold, I will baptize you with fire and with the Holy Ghost. . . .

“ . . . Yea, blessed are they who shall believe in your words, and come down into the depths of humility and be baptized, for they shall be visited with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and shall receive a remission of their sins” (3 Nephi 12:1–2; see also Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 5:3–4).

This introduction suggests that the sermon that follows is for disciples—those who have made a covenant through baptism and have received certain promises. The remainder of this sermon, then, rather than simply being seen as good moral or ethical teachings, can be seen in the context of covenant making. It shows us the requirements and the promises associated with entering into these covenants.

For instance, when the Savior says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit who come unto me,” and “Blessed are the meek” (3 Nephi 12:3, 5), He is telling us what is required of us and what we will receive as a result of entering into the baptismal covenant. As we learn in Moroni 8:26, “Remission

of sins [through baptism] bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost.” We are “blessed” when we receive the Holy Ghost, which is one of the greatest gifts we can receive in this life and comes as a result of making and keeping covenants.

“Blessed are all they that mourn” (3 Nephi 12:4) reminds us that we must feel sorrow for our sins and repent and that part of the baptismal covenant is to “mourn with those that mourn” (Mosiah 18:9). We are told that those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness . . . shall be filled *with the Holy Ghost*” (3 Nephi 12:6; emphasis added). That last phrase is added in the sermon to the Nephites, emphasizing again the result of keeping the baptismal covenant.

When Jesus Christ called His disciples the “salt of the earth” (3 Nephi 12:13), He was again teaching them about the role of disciples who have made covenants. As the Lord taught in Doctrine and Covenants 101:39, “When men are called unto mine everlasting gospel, and covenant with an everlasting covenant, they are accounted as the salt of the earth and the savor of men.” And one way we fulfill our baptismal covenant is to become “the saviors of men” (D&C 103:9–10) by bringing the gospel to others through missionary and temple work.

The resurrected Savior’s sermon at the temple in the Book of Mormon underscores how His teachings, including the Sermon on the Mount, point us to the making and keeping of covenants as the means of becoming like Him and the Father.

The setting for the Savior’s sermon to the Nephites also underscores its covenant context. It is given at “the temple which was in the land Bountiful” (3 Nephi 11:1). This setting helps us see, perhaps, why the original sermon was given on a mount—a place often associated with the Lord’s house, where covenants are made (see Psalm 24:3; Isaiah 2:2).³

So, rather than its simply being a catalog of ethical teachings or a list of things a good Christian should do, this sermon becomes for us a description of covenant discipleship, a covenant that can lead us to move beyond our initial following of the Savior to becoming like Him.

The key may be in 3 Nephi 12:48: “Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect.” To be perfect means to be complete or whole. The Lord’s teachings in the sermon are designed to help us do and become those things that will help us be whole in the covenant.⁴

MODERN REVELATIONS SPURRED BY STUDYING THE NEW TESTAMENT

The First Vision—A 14-year-old Joseph Smith read James 1:5 (“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God”), which “seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of [his] heart” (Joseph Smith—History 1:12). He then decided to kneel in prayer among a grove of trees, where the Father and the Son appeared to him.

Doctrine and Covenants 7—The Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery sought clarification of John 21:20–23 and received this revelation, which “is a translated version of the record made on parchment by John and hidden up by himself” (D&C 7, section introduction).

Doctrine and Covenants 76—The Prophet Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon were working on the inspired translation of the Bible and came to John 5:29, which they were inspired to render with slightly different wording (“resurrection of the just; . . . resurrection of the unjust”). “This caused us to marvel. . . . And while we meditated upon these things, the

The Fulness of the Gospel

Latter-day Saints admire and are grateful to the many people who recorded, preserved, and translated the New Testament so that it could be available to us and help us gain faith in Jesus Christ and taste of His grace. Accepting the added light and knowledge of the Restoration enhances rather than diminishes their contribution.

As we study the New Testament, the Spirit testifies to us of the divinity of Jesus Christ and the truthfulness of His message. And because of the Restoration, we see better how several of the threads of the New Testament fit into the greater tapestry of the fulness of the gospel. ■

NOTES

1. *Lectures on Faith* (1985), 38.
2. David A. Bednar, “Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 89.
3. For possible associations with the temple in the Sermon on the Mount, see John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount: A Latter-day Saint Approach* (1990).
4. For more on the responsibilities and blessings of covenants, see Russell M. Nelson, “Covenants,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 86–89.

Lord touched the eyes of our understandings” (D&C 76:18–19). They then beheld a vision of the celestial, terrestrial, and telestial kingdoms.

Doctrine and Covenants 77—While he was working on the inspired translation of the Bible, the Prophet Joseph Smith was reading the book of Revelation and had questions. He then received this explanation.

Doctrine and Covenants 138—While Joseph F. Smith “sat in [his] room pondering over the scriptures” and “reflecting upon the great atoning sacrifice that was made by the Son of God” (D&C 138:1–2), he read 1 Peter 3:18–20 and 1 Peter 4:6, which mention the preaching to the spirits in prison. He then received a revelation regarding the Savior’s ministry to the spirits of the dead and the continuing ministry among those spirits.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT

You can find further insights in the new manual for institute classes on the New Testament at lds.org/manual/new-testament-student-manual.



FOR THE STRENGTH OF ALL: THE LAW OF • Chastity

Two mid-single adults talk about how the clearly stated principles in For the Strength of Youth about chastity have blessed their lives.

Timeless Standards

By Mark Wangsgaard

As a teenager I learned what a blessing it was to have *For the Strength of Youth* as a guide, especially as I watched some of my friends make choices not in keeping with the standards this booklet teaches—choices they later regretted. Now, some 20 years later, I serve as the priests quorum adviser in my ward and regularly use this resource in teaching the young men I work with. I have seen, repeatedly, that *For the Strength of Youth* helps the young men in my quorum stay on the right path just as it helped me.

As a mid-single adult, I have come to appreciate that the principles found in *For the Strength of Youth* can guide us—regardless of age—in making the right decisions, decisions that will affect the course of the rest of our mortal lives as well as our eternal destiny.

The Temptation to Relax Standards

Single adults are sometimes tempted to relax their standards. Here are examples of faulty reasoning I have heard:

- “We are adults, so we can engage in overnight outings with men and women in the same sleeping quarters.”
- “It doesn’t hurt to indulge myself in a few small pleasures that might be on the edge of Church standards.”
- “Even though I’ve tried to live as righteously as possible, I still have not been blessed to find my companion. In fact, even some of my friends who haven’t been as valiant as I’ve tried to be are now married with children. It just isn’t fair.”

Sadly, this way of thinking causes some singles to abandon standards they know to be of God, especially with regard to the law of chastity.

Sometimes single adults attend an activity expecting to meet other singles who share their standards, only to find that standards of modest dress and morality are not upheld by some. They can wonder if holding to their standards is worth it, or if they’ll ever find someone who is trying to live the way they live. They may wonder if the teachings they learned to follow in *For the Strength of Youth* are still applicable or if, as adults, they’ve somehow “outgrown” them. Ultimately, such experiences and the questions they raise can damage hope and make it more difficult for some singles to hold to their seemingly unpopular standards. Many single adults I have known, in order to avoid these situations where some may relax their standards, simply stop going to all singles events, limiting their opportunities to make friends.

Obedience Brings the Spirit

With all of this in mind, some Latter-day Saint single friends and I, all in our 30s and 40s, decided to hold an activity that would be fun and also invite the Spirit. We planned a trip to a lake where we could boat, water-ski, swim, and dance. We reserved a place for the men to sleep and a separate one for the women. We asked everyone to wear modest swimsuits. We hoped to ensure that the singles would appreciate each other for who they were and that any relationships that resulted would be built upon the principles and standards of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We concluded with a fireside and testimony meeting, asking the singles to testify of ways Heavenly Father had blessed them for living the standards of the gospel. We felt the Spirit, and our hearts were “knit together in unity” (Mosiah 18:21).

We learned through this experience that obedience brings the Spirit. Many of the single adults developed strong friendships, and some of those who had previously been less active expressed desires to return to church. Perhaps the best part was that many participants have since married righteous companions in the temple, and those who are still single continue to promote gospel standards at other events.

The Lord Fulfills His Promises

I know that the Lord fulfills His promises, as He says in Doctrine and Covenants 58:31: “Who am I, saith the Lord, that have promised and have not fulfilled?”

However, we must have the faith to obey His laws:

“I give unto you directions how you may act before me, that it may turn to you for your salvation.

“I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise” (D&C 82:9–10).

I am still in the process of seeking an eternal companion, and choosing to follow the guidelines I learned in my youth as outlined in *For the Strength of Youth* has blessed me with a profound peace. I know that as I put forth my best efforts to find an eternal companion through appropriate dating and participation in single adult events where others also hold to these standards, I can be worthy of the Lord’s help throughout the process. And this allows me to take to heart the following scriptural counsel: “Let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed” (D&C 123:17). ■

The author, who since writing this article has married, lives in Utah, USA.



“A Gem for Any Age Group”

By Holly Coutts

About six years ago, I found myself in an unexpected position. My marriage ended in divorce, and I was single again. As I struggled with the loneliness and challenges of single motherhood, I found peace in clinging to my covenants and the principles of the gospel. These principles have provided and continue to provide me with the comfort and strength I so desperately need as I move forward in my single life. One of the things that have been a great strength to me has been maintaining my moral standards.

Specific Instruction and Promised Blessings

As I came to know other Latter-day Saint mid-single adults, I was sad to discover a pervasive feeling of loss and loneliness among some of my new friends. Some good and well-meaning individuals had slipped into compromising their standards and temple covenants as they dealt with the loneliness and disillusionment that resulted from their

broken homes and marriages. The results of these compromises left them feeling even more lost and broken.

As I became aware of the challenges some of my single friends faced, I reviewed Church standards as they relate to sexual purity and found clear and specific instruction in the *For the Strength of Youth* booklet. The youth are promised that as they live these standards, they will be blessed with the companionship of the Holy Ghost and increased faith and happiness. This also applies to adults. As President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, has said, “This little booklet is a gem for any age group. It contains standards which are sacred symbols representing our membership in the Church.”¹

Spiritual Protection

Although loneliness and deep desires for companionship can seem overwhelming, we single adults must never step away from the Lord’s standards of morality and our covenants. Our covenants provide spiritual protections and are very much a part of the “armour of God” described in the scriptures (see Ephesians 6:11–17; D&C 27:15–18). Neglecting our covenants during this difficult time is much like removing armor in the middle of a dangerous battle. We are left unprotected and vulnerable to the “fiery darts” of the adversary.

I’m incredibly grateful for clear and well-defined Church standards. As a single woman, they have provided me with safety and protection. In addition, by living the standards set forth in *For the Strength of Youth*, we can develop and maintain the kind of countenance and beauty of character

that will help us attract others who share our standards and values. Elaine S. Dalton, former Young Women general president, described what she calls “deep beauty,” a beauty “that shines from the *inside* out. . . . Deep beauty springs from virtue. It is the beauty of being chaste and morally clean. . . . It is a beauty that is earned through faith, repentance, and honoring covenants.”²

I could not imagine traveling through this time as a single mother without the gospel in my life, and I am deeply grateful for the strength, understanding, and guidance it provides as I am able to move forward with peace and joy. More than anything else, I recognize my reliance on the Savior, who is truly my “light which shineth in darkness” (D&C 34:2). ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “See the End from the Beginning,” *Ensign*, May 2006, 44.
2. Elaine S. Dalton, “Remember Who You Are!” *Ensign*, May 2010, 122.

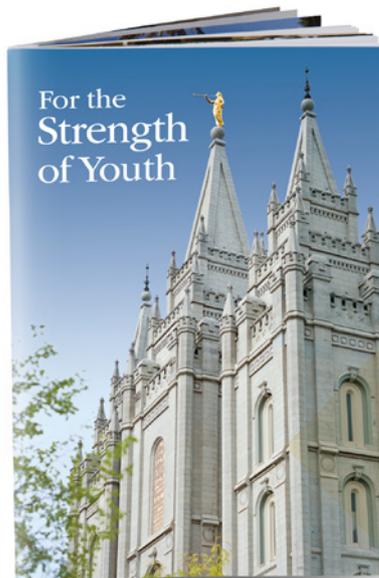


THE LORD’S STANDARD OF MORALITY

“God’s moral standards . . . are positive, uplifting, and liberating. They build relationships of trust, they enhance self-esteem, they foster a clear conscience, and they invite the Spirit of the Lord to bless [us]. . . .

“The blessings of living a clean and moral life are overwhelming. Such a life will bring self-confidence and self-esteem. It will result in a clear conscience. It will make us eligible for a spouse of like purity.”

Tad R. Callister, Sunday School general president, “The Lord’s Standard of Morality,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2014, 45, 49.



SECTIONS TO STUDY

Sections in *For the Strength of Youth* (booklet, 2011) that contain material related to chastity include:

- “Dating” (p.4)
- “Dress and Appearance” (p.6)
- “Entertainment and Media” (p.11)
- “Language” (p.20)
- “Music and Dancing” (p.22)
- “Sexual Purity” (p.35)

WHAT MANNER OF Teachers OUGHT WE TO BE?

If we truly want to become like the Savior, we must learn to teach in the way He taught.

By the Sunday School
General Presidency



**Tad R. Callister, president (center);
John S. Tanner, first counselor (left);
and Devin G. Durrant, second counselor
(right)**

The resurrected Lord was nearly finished with His ministry in the Americas. Not long before, He had descended from heaven, bringing light to dispel the darkness that had engulfed the lands of the Nephites and Lamanites following His death. He had taught and testified and prayed. He had blessed, settled questions, and established His Church. Now, as He prepared to leave His disciples, He presented them with a charge that must have filled them with confidence:

“Ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do . . .

“ . . . Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:21, 27).

Jesus invited us to become like Him, and one of His great attributes is His ability to teach. He is the Master Teacher. To become like Him, we too need to become more loving and life-changing teachers, not only

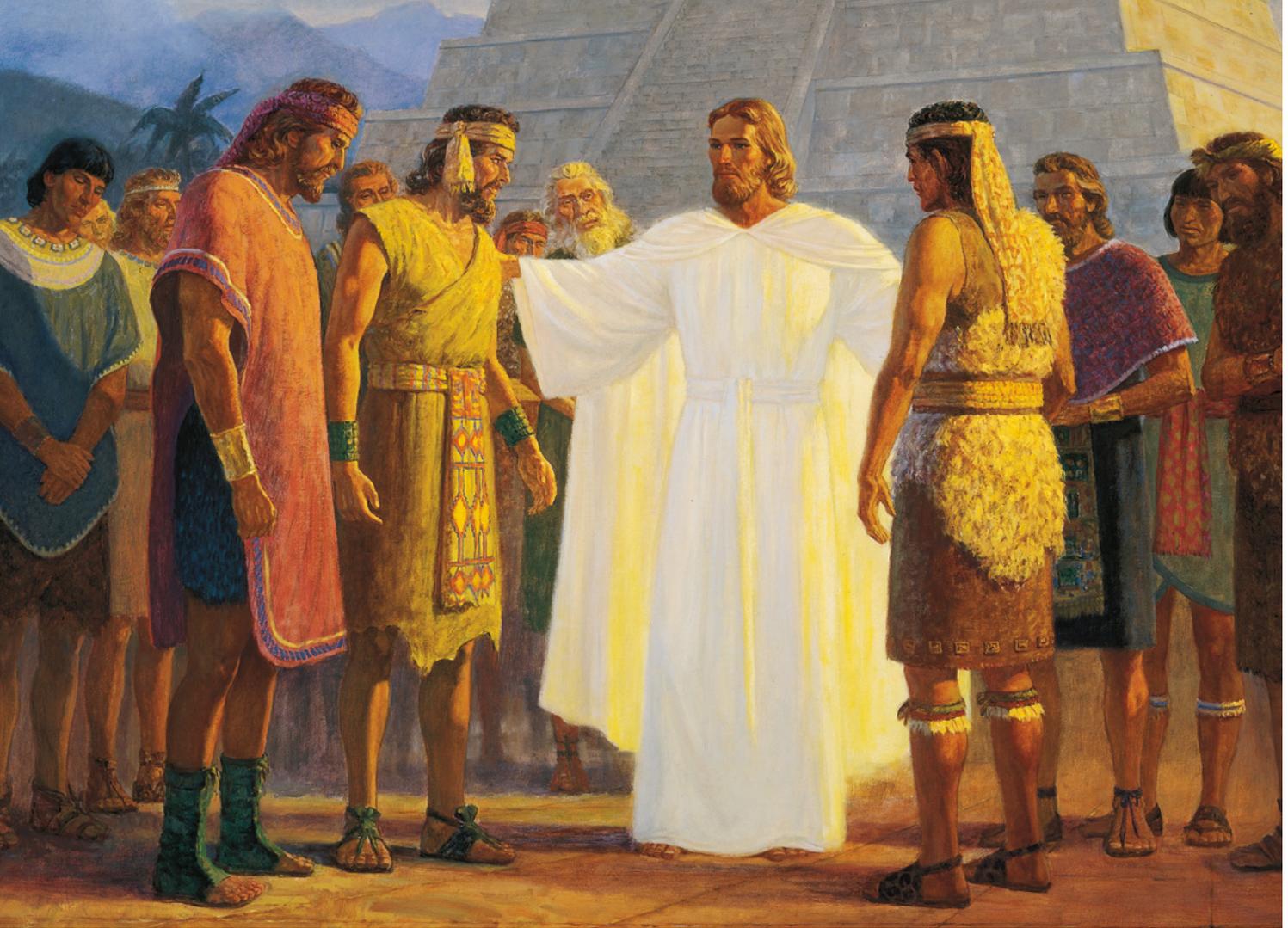
at church but also in our homes. To become like Him, we ought to have a burning desire in our hearts to teach as He taught.

Questions and Invitations

Jesus often taught through questions and invitations. Consider an example from the time He spent with His disciples on the American continent. Once while they were praying, the Savior appeared to them and asked an inviting opening question: “What will ye that I shall give unto you?” (3 Nephi 27:2). How would you respond if the Savior asked you this question?

The disciples responded: “Lord, we will that thou wouldst tell us the name whereby we shall call this church; for there are disputations among the people concerning this matter” (3 Nephi 27:3).

Christ answered their question with one of His own: “Have they not read the scriptures, which say ye must take upon you the name of Christ, which is my name?” (3 Nephi 27:5).



This question reminded His learners that they should put some effort into answering their own questions and that answers to many questions could be found in the scriptures.

He then concluded by reminding the disciples of the significance of His name. His words invited them to act and promised them a blessing: “And whoso taketh upon him my name, and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:6).

A Teaching Model

In these few short verses, Jesus Christ gave us a divine teaching model. He began with a thought-provoking question designed to discern the needs of His learners. He then waited for and listened to their response.

After His learners replied, He helped them find what they were looking for by directing them to the scriptures.

Finally, He extended two invitations and promised a wonderful blessing to those willing to act on His invitations. Christ’s teaching method on this occasion might be summarized in these five principles:

1. Ask effective questions.

The Savior asked, “What will ye that I shall give unto you?” This question invites a variety of responses. As we ask such questions, we help learners articulate what they want to learn, and we help them focus on those things of greatest importance; we engage them in active learning.

2. Listen to your learners.

Jesus Christ listened as they said, “Lord, we will that thou wouldst tell us

the name whereby we shall call this church.” By listening intently, we are better prepared to focus on the needs of our learners.

3. Use the scriptures.

Christ reminded His disciples, “Have they not read the scriptures, which say ye must take upon you the name of Christ, which is my name?” Both teacher and learner should spend time in the scriptures to prepare for lessons. Scripture study is a key part of spiritual preparation for both teachers and learners.

4. Invite your learners to act.

The Lord invited His disciples to (1) take His name upon them and (2) endure to the end. *Preach My Gospel* says, “Rarely, if ever, should you talk to people or teach them without extending an invitation to do something that will strengthen their faith in Christ.”¹ This is good counsel not just for missionaries but for all gospel teachers.

5. Remind your learners of the promised blessings of obedience.

Finally, Jesus Christ promised His learners that those who act upon His invitations “shall be saved at the last day.” Christ frequently promises us His choicest blessings for our obedience (see D&C 14:7). We can do the same, as teachers of His gospel.

The example above illustrates several important teaching methods used by the Savior. In addition, sometimes He taught by parable or analogy. Occasionally He challenged and even

chastised His detractors. But always He taught with love, even for those chastened (see Revelation 3:19).

Love Your Learners

We too must always teach with love and charity if we would teach in the Savior’s way. Love opens the heart of teacher and learner alike, so “both [can be] edified and rejoice together” (D&C 50:22).

A vivid example of the Savior’s love for His learners can be found in 3 Nephi where He prays for, weeps with, and blesses the people. As He prayed to His Father for them, the Nephites felt His love: “No one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father” (3 Nephi 17:17).

He joyfully wept for them and blessed them for their faith, so great was His love:

“Blessed are ye because of your faith. And now behold, my joy is full.

“And when he had said these words, he wept” (3 Nephi 17:20–21).

Great love enables great learning. The scripture records that “his countenance did smile upon them” and “their hearts were open and they did understand in their hearts” (3 Nephi 19:25, 33).

Encourage Your Learners to Testify

The Savior also gave His learners opportunity to share their testimonies. For example, “when Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

“And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

“He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?



“And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:13–16).

After Peter shared his testimony, Christ pronounced marvelous blessings on him:

“Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:17–19).

In trying to become master teachers, we too will frequently ask questions that prompt learners to share their testimonies, both verbally and in their hearts. We will invite our learners to seek personal testimony-building experiences in their daily lives. Then, if the atmosphere in the classroom or home is conducive to the Spirit, our learners will feel comfortable in sharing spiritual experiences and testimonies with each other.

Live What You Teach

Jesus Christ exhorted others to do the things He did (see 3 Nephi

27:21)—to follow Him (see Matthew 4:19). He lived what He taught, and thereby He taught by example.

He taught about service by serving. What a lesson it must have been for His disciples as He washed their feet! “If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet.

“For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you” (John 13:14–15).

He taught about love by loving. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34).

He taught about prayer by praying. After offering prayers so intimate and so sublime that they cannot be recorded, He said, “And as I have prayed among you even so shall ye pray in my church . . . Behold I am the light; I have set an example for you” (3 Nephi 18:16).

Jesus Christ has provided a pattern for all gospel teachers who desire to teach in His way. While not perfect as was He, we can strive diligently to live what we teach. In the words of a children’s song, teachers should be able to say, “Do as I’m doing; follow, follow me!”²

Teach in the Savior’s Way

All gospel teachers are invited to adopt the following six core principles, which reflect the way the Savior taught:

1. Love those you teach.

- Seek after the one.
- Focus on the needs of your learners.

2. Prepare yourself spiritually.

- Live what you teach.
- Know available resources.

3. Teach by the Spirit.

- Help your learners recognize the Spirit.
- Be a teachable teacher.
- Create a learning atmosphere.

4. Discover the gospel together.

- Set high expectations.
- Encourage your learners to testify.
- Ask effective questions.
- Listen to your learners.

5. Teach the doctrine.

- Use the scriptures.
- Use stories and examples.
- Promise blessings and testify.

6. Invite learners to act.

- Help your learners practice.
- Follow up on invitations.

As we apply these principles, we will become better teachers, better learners, better parents, and better disciples of Jesus Christ. For He has commanded us to “teach one another” “diligently,” in a way “that all may be edified of all” (D&C 88:77, 78, 122). May those we teach glimpse in us something of the Master Teacher and come away from the experience not merely informed, but transformed. ■

NOTES

1. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), 196.
2. “Do As I’m Doing,” *Children’s Songbook*, 276.

THREE WAYS Setting Goals CAN BE DIFFERENT THIS YEAR

The beginning of a new year can be great, with family time, parties, tasty food . . . and goals. Some people love goals—they rank right up there with watching fireworks and counting down to midnight. Other people, well, don't. It can be terribly frustrating to set goals and then not achieve them. But whether you love setting goals or dread it, *setting goals can be different this year!* Here's how:

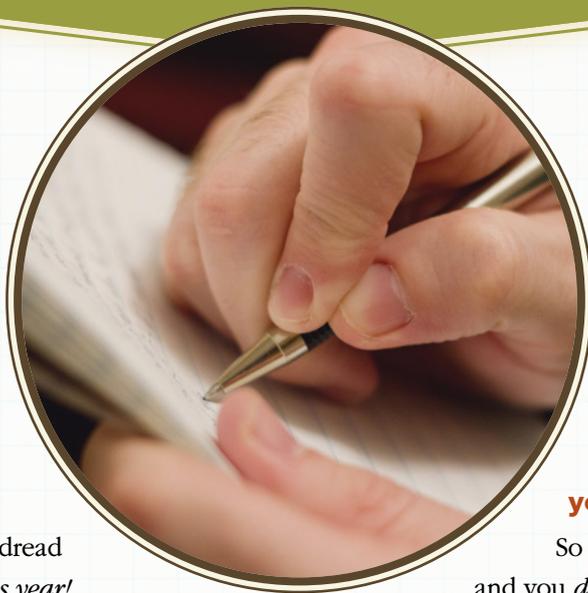
1. Know what God wants for you.

When you seek revelation to know what goals to set, you'll likely be more committed to them. As you seek that revelation through prayer and ponder what Heavenly Father wants you to accomplish, remember this counsel from President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency: "The holy scriptures and the talks given at general conference are an effective mirror we can hold up for self-examination."¹

Don't think this principle applies only to spiritual goals either—God can help you see how to improve physically, in relationships, in your job, and with your education, too.

2. Know that God can help you succeed.

In the October 2014 general conference, President Thomas S. Monson said: "Although we are left to find and follow that path which will lead us back to our Father in Heaven, He did not send us here without direction and guidance. . . . He will assist us as we seek His help and strive



to do all in our power to endure to the end and gain eternal life."² Remember that the Atonement of Jesus Christ provides enabling power to do more than you think you can at first.

3. Know that God loves you, even if you feel like you have failed.

So what happens when you set goals and you *don't* reach them?

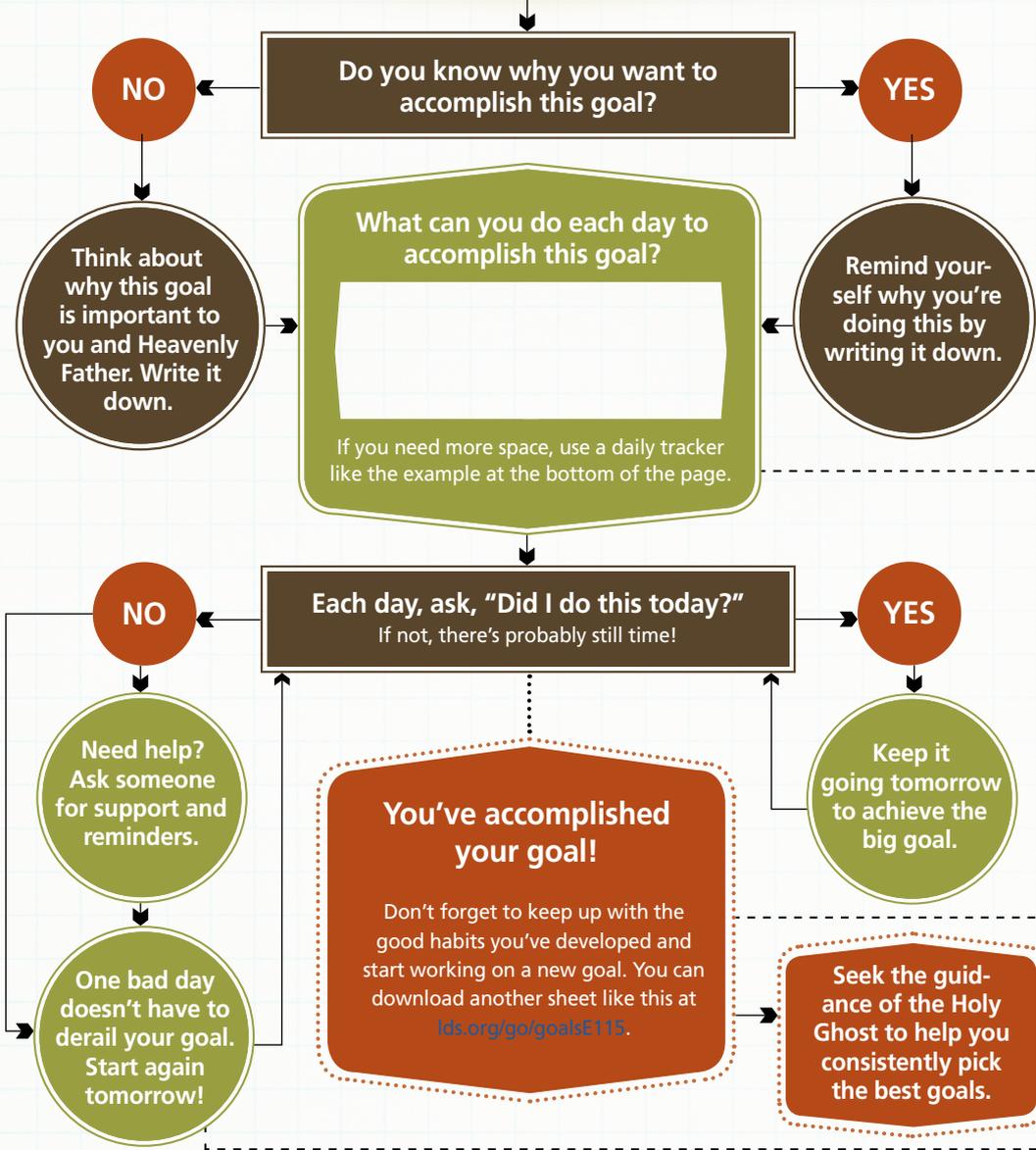
President Uchtdorf said: "God loves you this very day and always. He is not waiting to love you until you have overcome your weaknesses and bad habits. He loves you today with a full understanding of your struggles. . . . He knows of your remorse for the times you have fallen short or failed. And still He loves you. . . . He wants you to achieve your destiny—to return to your heavenly home in honor."³

God will continue to help you. Even if you don't achieve your goals perfectly, you'll still grow from the effort of trying to get there! Whatever progress you make leaves you better than before you started. And if you miss your goal, don't get discouraged; just start again where you left off. Look to Heavenly Father and to others who love you for support. For more ideas on setting goals, go to lds.org/go/change15 and the chart at right, and make this year different from any other! ■

NOTES

1. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Lord, Is It I?" *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 58.
2. Thomas S. Monson, "Ponder the Path of Thy Feet," *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 86.
3. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Living the Gospel Joyful," *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 123.

WHAT IS YOUR GOAL?



"We must be willing to learn and to change. And, oh, how much we gain by committing to live the life our Heavenly Father intends for us."

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, "Lord, Is It I?" *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 58.

"Just because things are going well does not mean that we should not from time to time consider whether there might be something better."

Elder Carlos A. Godoy of the Seventy, "The Lord Has a Plan for Us!" *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 98.

"Acknowledge and face your weaknesses, but don't be immobilized by them."

Elder Jörg Klebingat of the Seventy, "Approaching the Throne of God with Confidence," *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 37.

DAILY TRACKER

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
To do:	To do:	To do:	To do:	To do:	To do:	To do:



By Elder
Koichi Aoyagi
Of the Seventy



PROPHETIC COUNSEL AND Temple Blessings

When I was a young man, Elder Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985), then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, visited Japan and spoke at a conference I attended. I still remember his counsel: “Young people are to go on missions, and they are to be married in the temple.”

I felt prompted by the Holy Ghost and resolved that I would serve a mission and marry in the temple, even though Japan did not yet have a temple.

At the time, I was 19 and in my second year of university studies. My parents, who were not Latter-day Saints, strongly opposed my decision to serve a mission. Every day I prayed that they would give me their permission and blessing. Six months later the Lord answered my prayer.

“We are having financial difficulties, and we can no longer pay for your school and living expenses,” my parents told me. “From this point onward you will have to live on your own. We don’t mind if you go on a mission either!”

I had my parents’ blessing, so I quit school, served a Church construction mission, and then began looking for a job to raise money for a proselyting mission. With the Lord’s help, I found three jobs! Every day except Sunday for the following year, I delivered newspapers from 3:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m., cleaned buildings from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00

I testify that when we pray for guidance, follow the living prophets, and make the temple a priority in our lives, Heavenly Father will lead us and bless us.

p.m., and worked as a cook from 5:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Then I would change clothes and work nights as a district missionary.

When I was 22, I was called to the Northern Far East Mission. Through my mission service I experienced the greatest joy I had ever felt, had many opportunities to come to know God’s love, and received many blessings. My family was also blessed during my service when my parents resolved their financial challenges.

Following the Prophet

When I completed my mission, the Spirit prompted me to follow the second part of President Kimball’s counsel and not delay marriage in the temple. A year before, Church members in Japan began planning a trip to the Salt Lake Temple. Because they were going to leave in three months, I prayed and fasted to be led to a worthy young woman I could take to the temple.

A short while later I attended a Church activity in my hometown of Matsumoto City. While there I ran into Shiroko Momose, who had attended the same high school I was attending when I joined the Church. The Spirit immediately confirmed that she was the one who had been prepared for me.

I proposed to Shiroko shortly after we began dating. She made me happy when she accepted, but she surprised me by what she said next.

“I am very happy to know that your Lord is my Lord,” she said. “When they announced the trip to the Salt Lake Temple, I longed to go. I prayed many times that the Lord would help me find someone I could marry there. About a year ago I came to know through the Spirit while praying that I should wait for you and that you would propose to me when you returned from your mission.”

That was a great spiritual experience for us, and it strengthened our resolve to marry in the Salt Lake Temple. We had little money to make the trip, but we did not let that discourage us. By then we knew that when we rely on the Lord and keep His commandments, He helps us accomplish things we could not otherwise accomplish.

We appealed to our Heavenly Father in prayer and exerted all our efforts to raise the necessary funds. Those efforts, combined with financial help from one of Shiroko’s friends, enabled us to join the Japanese Saints who went to the Salt Lake Temple.

It is not possible to express the joy we felt in being sealed there as an eternal couple. We will never forget that experience. What added to our joy is that we had researched five generations of our ancestors and had prepared their names for temple work. While in Salt Lake City we performed proxy ordinances for those ancestors. Doing those ordinances helped us feel close to them. We knew they were filled with joy because of our efforts.

We were poor newlyweds, but we made temple attendance a priority, later going to the Laie Hawaii Temple as often as finances permitted.

Blessed by the Temple

“We need the temple more than anything else,” said the Prophet Joseph Smith.¹

In God’s plan of salvation, the temple is essential to our eternal happiness because we perform sacred ceremonies and ordinances of salvation there. The Bible Dictionary tells us that the temple is the holiest place of worship on earth and is “a place where the Lord may come.”²

If we honor our temple covenants and come to the temple “with humble hearts, in cleanliness, and honor, and integrity,”³ we will feel the Holy Spirit and receive further light and knowledge. When we leave the temple, we will depart armed with power from the Lord and with His name upon us, His glory round about us, and His angels to watch over us (see D&C 109:13, 22).

When we returned to Japan after our marriage, the Lord’s promises came to pass in my life as I looked for full-time employment.

The Lord Fulfills His Promises

I was working only part-time when our first child arrived. We were elated, but I knew I would not be able to support our growing family without a full-time job. We began praying earnestly for heaven’s help.

Before I served my mission, I had wanted to work in foreign trade. But to be hired by a trading company, an



OBEDIENCE— AN UNFAILING GUIDE

“A loving Heavenly Father has plotted our course and provided an unailing guide—even *obedience*. A knowledge of truth and the answers to our greatest questions come to us as we are obedient to the commandments of God.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “Obedience Brings Blessings,” *Ensign*, May 2013, 89.



applicant generally had to be a university graduate who held certain certifications. I hadn't finished college and had no certifications, but when we prayed, we felt that the Lord would bless us and prepare a job for me.

I decided to take the hiring exams at a number of trading companies despite my lack of education. The first two turned me down, but I had a curious experience when I applied at a third company.

The Church had few Japanese members during that era, and many people were prejudiced against the Church. When three representatives from the third trading company interviewed me, they looked at my résumé and learned that I was a Latter-day Saint. They began asking me questions about the Church, requesting detailed answers. Having recently returned from my mission, I had no problem talking about the restored Church of Jesus Christ.

For what must have been at least 40 minutes, I spoke about the gospel and bore my testimony of the life of Jesus Christ, the Apostasy, Joseph Smith's First Vision, the

Book of Mormon, the Restoration of the true Church of Jesus Christ, and the teachings of the Church.

Not one of the interviewers stopped me while I spoke. A few days later the trading company offered me a job at an astoundingly high salary. Later, when I asked my manager why they had hired me, he replied, "During your interview I gained an assurance that you were conscientious, sincere, and loyal, and that you would be someone who would work in such a way for our company."

I testify that the Lord fulfills His promises. During my interview I felt the power and Spirit of the Lord upon me, just as He promises to those who attend the temple and honor their temple covenants. I also felt His Spirit with me while I worked for the company, where I was blessed to make many valuable contributions.

A Temple Comes to Japan

At a regional conference in Tokyo in 1975, President Kimball announced construction of the Tokyo Japan Temple. The Japanese Saints, overcome with emotion, spontaneously burst into applause to show their joy and gratitude.

The Tokyo Japan Temple was completed in 1980. During the open house and dedicatory ceremonies, the Saints were blessed with wonderful spiritual experiences and great joy. Those experiences continued following the temple's dedication as the Saints began receiving their temple ordinances and acting as proxy for their deceased ancestors.

Today, almost 45 years after Shiroko and I were married, my decision to follow prophetic counsel continues to bless our lives and the lives of our children. We have built a wonderful home the Lord's way—founded upon the gospel of Jesus Christ, including temple covenants.

I testify that when we pray for guidance, follow the living prophets, and make the temple a priority in our lives, Heavenly Father will lead us and bless us. ■

NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 416.
2. Bible Dictionary, "Temple."
3. Spencer W. Kimball, from the Tokyo Japan Temple dedicatory prayer, in *2013 Church Almanac* (2013), 297.

Michigan? WHY

By Christopher Burton

More than 20 years after I returned home from serving in the Michigan Lansing Mission, my neighbor invited me to take a DNA test offered by the family history company he worked for. I had been adopted and had no idea of my biological ancestry. As far as I knew, my children were the only blood relatives I had ever seen, so the invitation appealed to me. The test would help me discover the countries of my ancestral origin.

The results came back showing I was entirely Scandinavian on one line and part Finnish and part Russian on my other line—not too surprising considering my light skin and blue eyes. What *was* surprising was the list of possible DNA matches that linked me with others who had also taken the test: the results showed a “close family” match and predicted with 99 percent confidence that this was a close family member or first cousin.

For years people had asked me if I wanted to find my birth parents, and while I was definitely curious enough to take this test, I was content with my life. I already had a family I loved. They had raised me, so I wasn't sure how far I wanted to go down the path in search of another family. What would happen if I found them? Would we have a relationship? What if we didn't? I was okay with not knowing, but now here was a match to my biological family.

I had always believed that the Lord inspired my mission calls, but it was 20 years before I realized the full blessings of having served in Michigan.

Reuniting with Relatives

My wife, children, and the neighbor who had given me the test were all with me, excitedly looking on as I viewed the DNA results for the first time. But in the midst of their excitement, they didn't know the trepidation that had suddenly hit me in my stomach. I didn't know what to think. And before I knew what was happening, they were composing an email to send to this “close family” match.

Within minutes an email came back. How old was I? Where was I born? More excitement filled my living room. More trepidation filled my stomach. We sent the answers.

I didn't get another response until late the following night. It turned out the “close family” match was my half brother. The person sending the emails was my birth mother, and she wanted me to call her.

The next morning I dialed her number. As we talked, she told me the story of my birth. It seems strange to me that it should matter, but I asked if she had held me. When she said that she kept me with her for those first



I saw in front of me the ward mission leader with whom I had worked for a large part of my mission.

two and a half days before I was placed for adoption, I felt such relief and comfort. We talked for almost an hour, and I began to sense the fulfillment of a need I hadn't even known I had. I also felt deeply grateful to my birth mother for her gift in giving me to the family I grew up with.

At the end of the call, I asked about my biological father. She told me his name, that he had light skin and blue eyes, and that she thought he was from Lansing, Michigan. Lansing, Michigan? A light switched on in my mind.

Remembering My Missionary Service

More than 20 years earlier, I had opened my mission call to the Michigan Lansing Mission. This was the letter I'd been waiting for my whole life. In high school I had taken three years of German and two years of Spanish. I had dreamed of tracting through Europe or hiking to the remote mountain pueblos in South America. But Michigan? I didn't know what to think. I wondered, Why Michigan? Now I discovered that my biological father was from there!

After hanging up the phone, I got on the Internet, and within minutes I was confident I'd found him. He was living in an area close to where I'd served for six months of my missionary service. With more digging, I discovered

that he also had a sister in the area who had lived there while I was a missionary. Had I met her?

I had always suspected that if I found my biological family, I might hold some resentment toward my biological father. So until now I didn't think I wanted to contact this man whose DNA I shared. But with the dawning realization that as a missionary I had been sent to a place where I had biological relatives, suddenly I had a desire to reach out. I sent an email. The response the next morning confirmed that this person was my biological father.

In a subsequent email, my father said that his sister and her husband were coming to Utah, and he asked if they could visit me. I was excited to meet them and to see if I might possibly remember them from my mission.

As they walked in my door, I felt an instant familiarity. Suddenly another light turned on. The man's hair had gone from black to silver, and I didn't recognize his first name because I had never used it (always "Brother" followed by the last name), but suddenly I saw in front of me the ward mission leader from the Grand Rapids Ward with whom I had worked for a large part of my mission. For months I had been at his home weekly. I had played with his children—my cousins—and been with my aunt and uncle and hadn't known it.



I had played with my cousins and been with my aunt and uncle and hadn't known it.

Understanding the Inspiration

In light of my discovery, I knew why I had been called to serve a mission in Michigan. I had gone there and unknowingly interacted with my own biological family. My “newfound” aunt told me the story of how she and her brothers joined the Church, but her mother

(my grandmother) never did, nor did her family before her. My biological family was spread all over Michigan in the places where I was called by prophecy to serve my mission. I knew now that this was truly a call by inspiration specifically for me.



CALLED BY REVELATION

“It is by the great love of the Savior that His servants know where these wonderful young men and women, senior missionaries, and senior couple missionaries are to serve. . . . Every missionary called in this Church, and assigned or reassigned to a particular mission, is called by revelation from the Lord God Almighty.”

Elder Ronald A. Rasband, Senior President of the Seventy, “The Divine Call of a Missionary,” *Ensign*, May 2010, 53.

Thankfully this is not the end of my story, and I wasn't shown these things just to have a glimpse of what might have been. Rather, I believe that my Heavenly Father revealed all of this to me because there is still work to do—work I began as a full-time missionary and work I have been called to continue throughout my life. And next time I'm tempted to think that I've been assigned to a random calling in a ward with haphazard boundaries, I just hope it won't take me 20 years to find the faith to see the purpose in it. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

Faith like Water

By Megan Wilcken

*Again, my faith like water falls.
It ebbs and flows in tides
That trap me where I stand.
It cannot hold the weight of all
My hopes and all my fears;
They slip below the surface and
Dwell in depths unseen.
My weary heart is tempted to let
Them lie, untouched, unfelt.
But seedling faith in fourth-watch prayer still
Knows, somehow, that He is there.
He knows of faith and water, and of my
Hopes and fears and depths;
I give them to His keeping,
For holding in His perfect hands.
Again upheld by Saving Grace,
I walk on faith like water.
The author lives in Oregon, USA.*

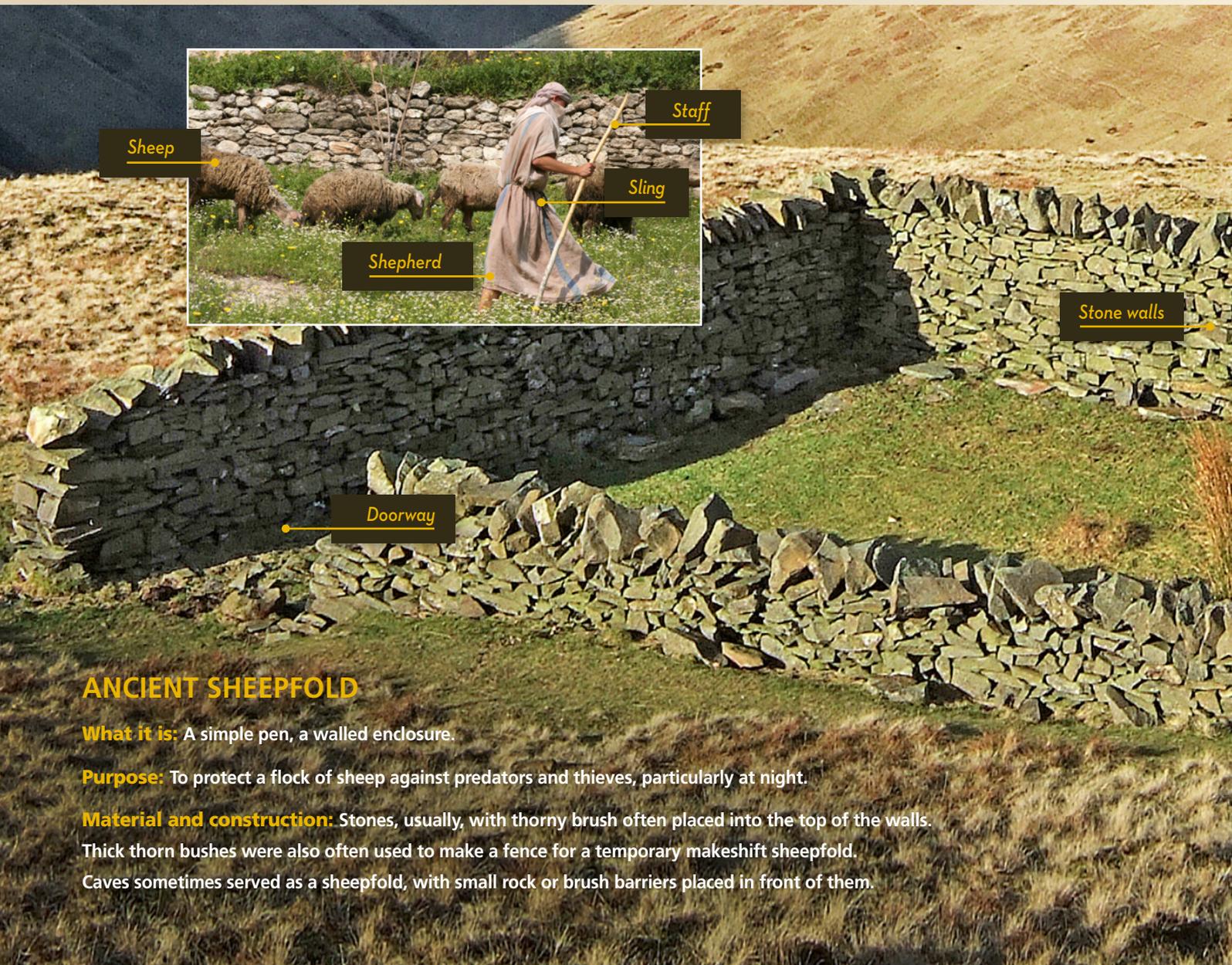
One Fold and One Shepherd

AN ENCLOSURE FOR A FLOCK OF SHEEP TEACHES US ABOUT THE SAVIOR'S CARE FOR HIS PEOPLE.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN

SHEEPFOLDS ARE:

Where the flock gathers. As Church members, we share a bond of unity through our faith and our covenants, as well as through literally gathering together. President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, has taught: "The joy of unity [Heavenly Father] wants so much to give us is not solitary. We must seek it and qualify for it with others. It is not surprising then that God urges us to gather so that He can bless us. He wants us to gather into families. He has established classes, wards, and branches and



ANCIENT SHEEPFOLD

What it is: A simple pen, a walled enclosure.

Purpose: To protect a flock of sheep against predators and thieves, particularly at night.

Material and construction: Stones, usually, with thorny brush often placed into the top of the walls.

Thick thorn bushes were also often used to make a fence for a temporary makeshift sheepfold.

Caves sometimes served as a sheepfold, with small rock or brush barriers placed in front of them.

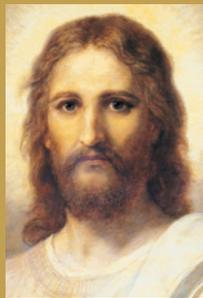
BIBLE FACTS

commanded us to meet together often. In those gatherings, . . . we can pray and work for the unity that will bring us joy and multiply our power to serve” (“Our Hearts Knit as One,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 69).

A place of safety and rest. In Jesus Christ we “find rest unto [our] souls” (Matthew 11:29). His Church is “a defense, and . . . a refuge” (D&C 115:6). And as President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has taught, “We find safety and security for ourselves and our children in honoring the covenants we

have made and living up to the ordinary acts of obedience required of the followers of Christ” (“These Things I Know,” *Ensign*, May 2013, 7).

Guarded by the shepherd. Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd who saves us. He suffered and died so that we might overcome sin and death and return to our Heavenly Father. As we come unto Christ and are obedient to His commandments, He blesses, guides, and protects us both individually and as His covenant people.



“Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”

John 10:16 (see also 3 Nephi 15:14–24; 16:1–3)

- Sheep were very valuable for their meat, milk, fat, wool, skins, and horns and were a primary sacrificial animal.
- In Israel, wolves, hyenas, panthers, and jackals are among predators that would target sheep. In ancient times, lions and bears also inhabited the region (see 1 Samuel 17:33–37).
- Shepherds used a staff to lead the sheep and a rod and a sling to defend them.
- A shepherd led his sheep to food and water during the day (see Psalm 23:1–2) and back to the fold at night. The shepherd would count the sheep as they returned, searching for strays if any were missing. He would then lie in the doorway of the fold to protect them.
- Jesus Christ called Himself the Good Shepherd (see John 10:11–15) because He laid down His life for us. He also compared Himself to the door of the sheepfold (see John 10:1–9) because it is through Him that we receive spiritual nourishment, rest, peace, salvation, and exaltation.
- The Apostle Paul compared the Church to a flock of sheep (see Acts 20:28).

PHOTOGRAPH OF SHEEPFOLD BY KEVIN EAVES/HEMERA/THINKSTOCK; PHOTOGRAPH OF SHEPHERD BY HEINRICH HOFMANN, COURTESY OF C. HARRISON CONROY CO.

SERVICE THAT CAME FULL CIRCLE

When I was a college freshman, I would go with my roommate to visit her 98-year-old great-great-uncle, whom we affectionately called Uncle Joe. He lived alone and was lonely, so we tried to visit him as often as possible. During our visits he would tell us stories about when he lived in Mexico and in several border towns in Arizona, including Nogales.

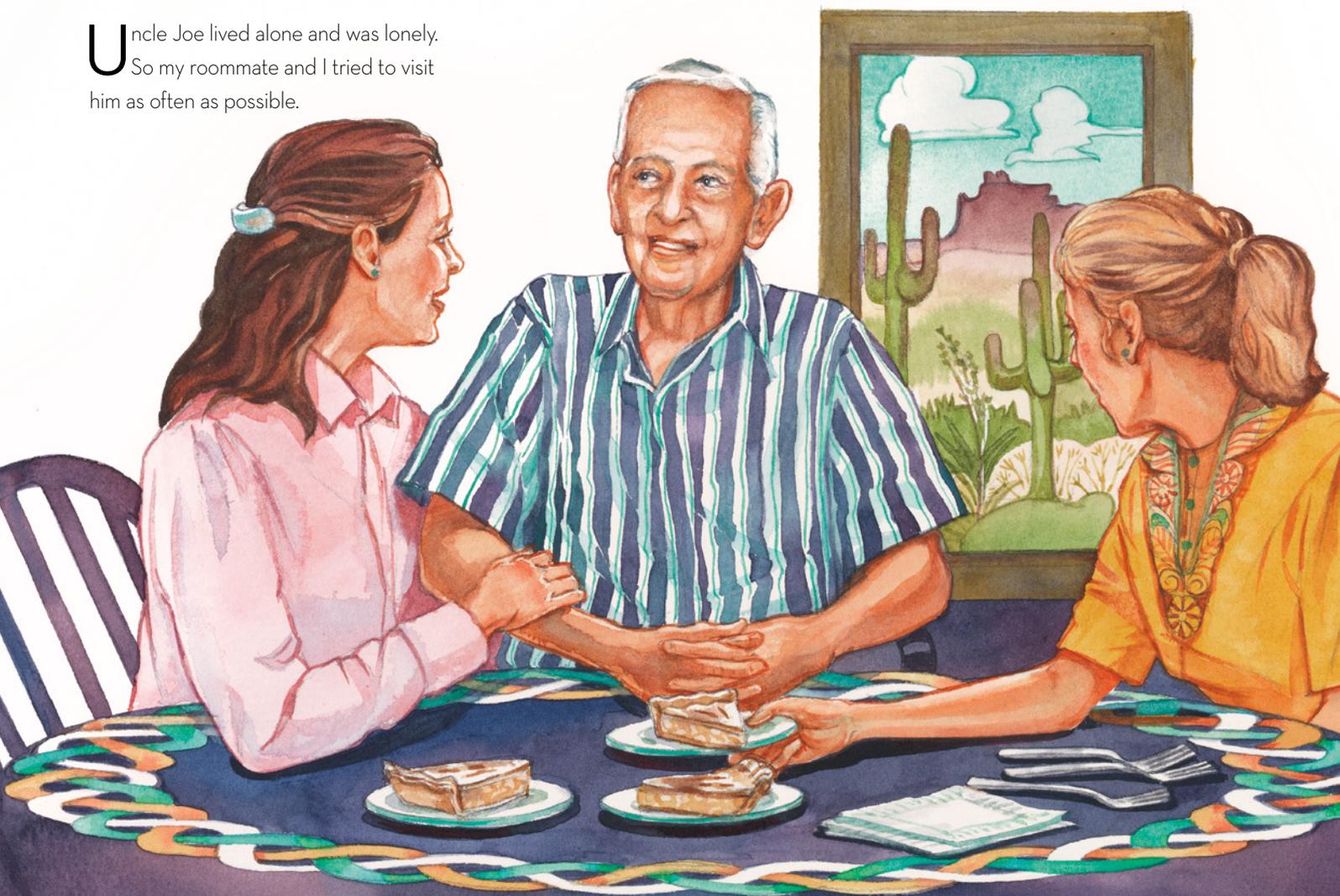
Uncle Joe lived alone and was lonely. So my roommate and I tried to visit him as often as possible.

When my roommate temporarily moved back home, I felt prompted to continue visiting Uncle Joe. He became a close friend, and I visited him until he passed away a year and a half later. I was sad to lose my friend but grateful for the valuable time we had spent together.

Ten years after Uncle Joe passed away, I was reading through my

great-grandmother's journal. The journal told of her husband leaving her with no money, \$30 due in rent, and nine mouths to feed.

Then she wrote: "In Bisbee [Arizona] the people were so good to us. Even when we lived out of town south of Bisbee, they brought us home [from church]. Brother Joseph Kleinman, who lived in Mexico,



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRADLEY H. CLARK

COULD I CONFESS?

brought us home many times, and not only that, but [his family] took us all to eat dinner with them. They served fried rabbit with all the trimmings, which we enjoyed very much. They were transferred to Nogales . . . and they let us have their rabbits, pretty white ones, and we sure had all we could eat then.”

As I read this entry, I realized that the Joseph Kleinman who had helped my great-grandmother was Uncle Joe! I felt the Spirit whisper that I had been inspired to continue visiting Uncle Joe as a small thank-you for the kindness he had shown to my great-grandmother and her family.

I was thrilled to be a part of a story of love and service that came full circle. I know the Lord is aware of His children. If we heed the promptings of the Holy Ghost, we can bless the lives of others and in return be blessed ourselves. ■

Krisi Church Summers, Utah, USA

As I sat across from a member of the stake presidency, my heart started pounding. I had felt jumpy since the stake clerk had called to set an appointment. *Would he know I was not worthy to serve?*

I had decided that some sins would be easier to take to the judgment bar of God than to reveal here on earth, thinking it would be selfish to disclose things that would bring pain or embarrassment to my wife. Better to overcome them by myself and live with the burden. The only problem was that I couldn't overcome them on my own.

I sat there as the counselor in the stake presidency extended a call to serve. He asked, “Brother, would you accept this calling?” How I wanted to shout, “Yes!” Instead, almost involuntarily, I heard myself say, “I cannot; I need to clear up some sins.”

Anxiety and relief poured into me simultaneously as I confessed the general nature of the sin. He asked if I had spoken with my bishop. “No.” My wife? “No.” He shook my hand, smiled, told me he was proud of me for confessing, and directed me to talk with the bishop and my wife.

I obeyed, telling my wife first—thereby eliminating my biggest fear. She still loved me! Yes, she was upset, and we would have to work out some things, but she loved me and encouraged me to visit the bishop.

When I went to see the bishop, he immediately welcomed me into his office. With difficulty, I tried to articulate why I was there. After hiding my sins so long, I hardly knew where to start. He lovingly encouraged me to come clean. I explained the general nature of my sins and asked for time to provide the full inventory of my misdeeds. He readily agreed.

I still had yet to fully confess, but I felt the weight of the world lifting from my shoulders. I also felt a renewed hope of freedom, finally, from this burden.

I spent the next weeks praying, reading the scriptures, and creating my inventory to present to both my bishop and my Heavenly Father. First I took my list to Heavenly Father, with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, to let Him know I was sorry and sincerely desired to change. I set another appointment with the bishop and shared my list in its entirety. He didn't frown, yell, or chastise me; instead, he gave me a big hug. He let me know of his love and the Lord's love, informing me that I was now on the path of true repentance. I knew it was true.

Confessing my sins, formerly my biggest fear, became one of the most beautiful experiences of my life. It was the first step for me to truly understand the gift and the healing power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. ■

Name withheld

WE FOLLOWED THE PATH

In the last area of my mission, my companion and I served in two villages located in the interior of the state of São Paulo, Brazil. Between the two villages was a shortcut through the forest we had never taken because we felt it was dangerous and that we weren't likely to meet anyone there.

One afternoon as we approached the shortcut, the Holy Ghost touched my heart, telling me that we should enter the forest. I looked at Elder Andrade and told him about the impression I had just received. He told me he had felt the same thing.

Shortly after we had started down the unfamiliar trail, we saw a woman walking toward us. The trail was narrow, and as we passed her, we couldn't help but notice that she was crying.

When she looked up, she invited us to follow her to her home, where we met her husband. Immediately we began teaching the receptive couple the gospel. After a few weeks we invited them to be baptized. We were excited when they readily accepted because it had been a year since the ward's last baptism. We were grateful we had acted on the prompting to enter the trail that day.

A short time before their baptism, however, the wife said she needed to talk to us. She said that for years she had had a recurring dream. In her dream she found herself waiting in the center of São Paulo. An older man

approached her and said two young men were coming to change her life. She would then see two young men approaching, but her dream always ended at that point.

One day a few weeks earlier, she was sweeping the floor in her house when a voice told her that two young men were approaching and that she needed to go at that moment to the shortcut trail, where we had first seen her. Not understanding the prompting but wanting to know the answer to her dream, she dropped her broom and walked to the trail.

As she walked, the images of her dream came to her mind as if in a

movie that ended with her finally seeing the faces of the two young men. She also saw that each wore a black name badge. Moments later, she said, Elder Andrade and I appeared before her on the trail. Emotion overtook her, and she could not help but weep.

Today, remembering that sacred experience, I feel the Spirit and again see in my mind the tear-streaked face of that sister who embraced the gospel. Gratefully, my companion and I had the sensitivity and the courage to follow the path the Lord wanted us to take that day. ■

Rut de Oliveira Marcolino, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil

Shortly after we had started down the unfamiliar trail, we saw a woman walking toward us. We couldn't help but notice that she was crying.



WOULD YOU LIKE SOME FLOWERS?

One day after a particularly hard shift in the hospital's pediatrics unit, I was tired and grumpy. As I walked to the security desk, I noticed some beautiful flowers. When I commented to the person at the desk how beautiful they were and how good they smelled, she told me I could have them.

I was so happy! I thought that surely Heavenly Father wanted me to have the flowers to brighten my day.

Walking out of the hospital, I found myself behind a woman in a wheelchair. I grew impatient with her but finally was able to pass her as we exited the building. As I passed, she lifted her head and said, "Oh, what beautiful flowers." I thanked her and hurried toward my husband, who was waiting in our car. I was excited to show him my flowers.

Suddenly I felt the Holy Ghost tell me that the woman needed the flowers more than I did. I was reluctant to give them to her, but I followed the prompting. When I asked if she would like them, I hoped she would say no.

"Oh, yes!" she replied. "I would love them. They are beautiful."

I handed them to her, but as I turned to leave, she began to sob. When I asked if she was all right, she told me that her husband had passed away several years ago and that it had been more than a year since any of her children had visited her. She said she had been pleading with God to show her a sign of His love.

"You are an angel sent from God to give me my favorite flowers," she said. "Now I know that He loves me."

My heart broke. I had been so selfish. This woman needed a loving word, and I didn't even want to talk to her. I was no angel. As we parted, I also started to cry.

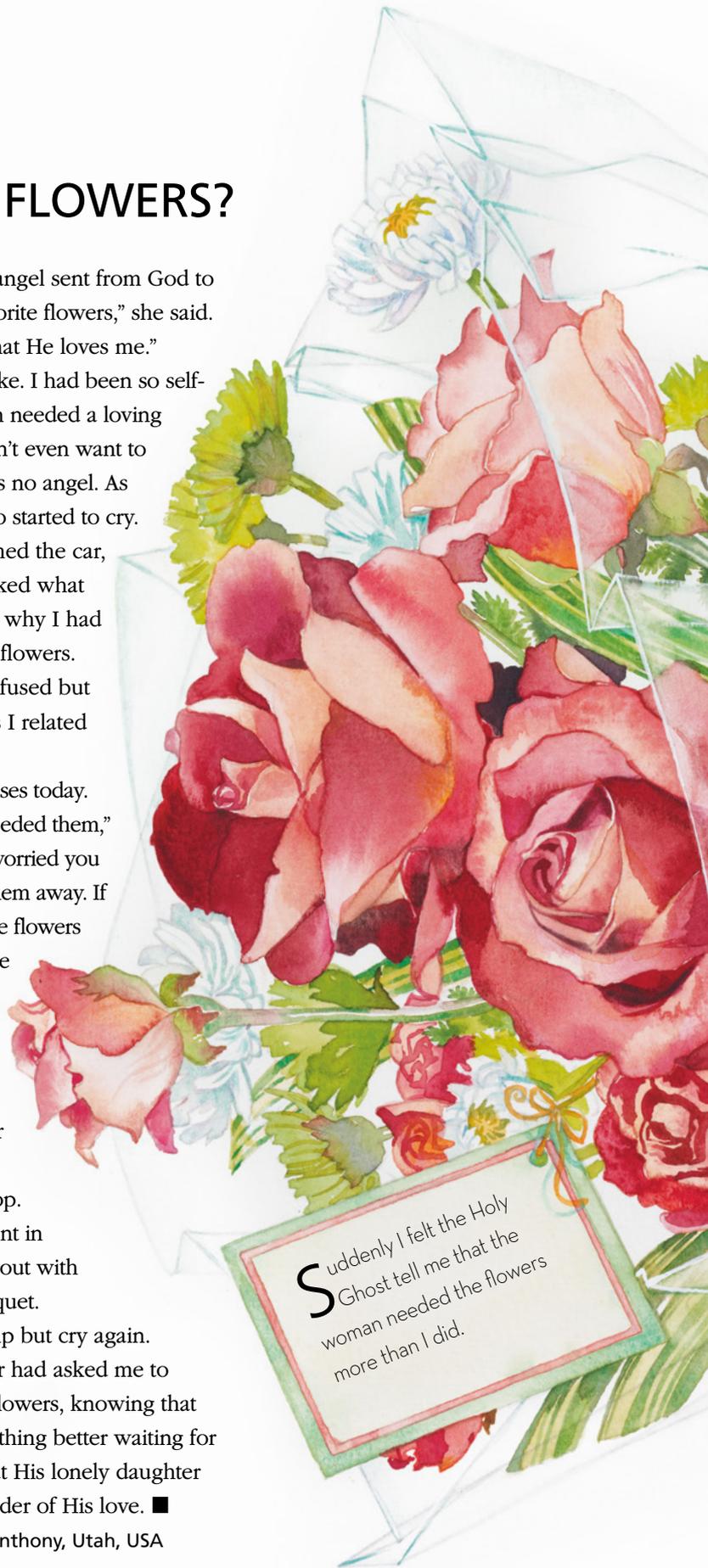
When I reached the car, my husband asked what was wrong and why I had given away my flowers. He seemed confused but then relieved as I related the story.

"I sent you roses today. I felt that you needed them," he said. "I was worried you had just given them away. If those weren't the flowers I sent you, where are they?"

It turned out that the floral shop had forgotten to deliver the roses, so we drove to the shop. My husband went in and soon came out with a beautiful bouquet.

I couldn't help but cry again. Heavenly Father had asked me to sacrifice those flowers, knowing that there was something better waiting for me and also that His lonely daughter needed a reminder of His love. ■

Cindy Almaraz Anthony, Utah, USA





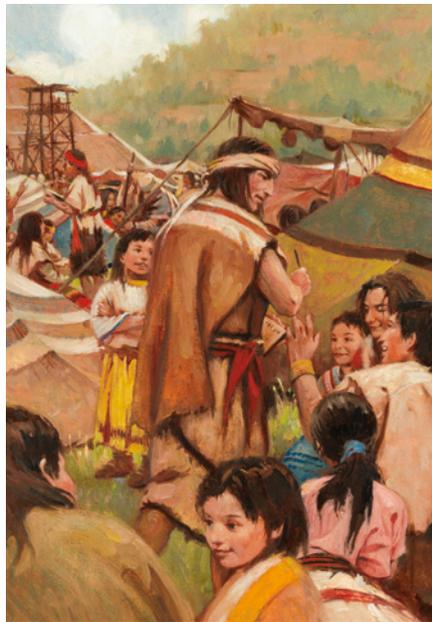
By President
Harold B. Lee
(1899–1973)

HOW CAN I KNOW THAT THE LORD HAS FORGIVEN ME?

How would you answer one who came to you asking that question?

Some years ago President [Marion G.] Romney [1897–1988] and I were sitting in my office. The door opened and a fine young man came in with a troubled look on his face, and he said, “Brethren, I am going to the temple for the first time tomorrow. I have made some mistakes in the past, and I have gone to my bishop and my stake president, and I have made a clean disclosure of it all; and after a period of repentance and assurance that I have not returned again to those mistakes, they have now adjudged me ready to go to the temple. But, brethren, that is not enough. I want to know, and how can I know, that the Lord has forgiven me also.”

What would you answer one who would come to you asking that question? As we pondered for a moment, we remembered King Benjamin’s



address contained in the book of Mosiah. Here was a group of people who now were asking for baptism, and they said they viewed themselves in their carnal state:

“And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified. . . .

“ . . . After they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience” (Mosiah 4:2–3).

There was the answer.

If the time comes when you have done all that you can to repent of your sins, whoever you are, wherever you are, and have made amends and restitution to the best of your ability; if it be something that will affect your standing in the Church and you have gone to the proper authorities, then you will want that confirming answer as to whether or not the Lord has accepted of you. In your soul-searching, if you seek for and you find that peace of conscience, by that token you may know that the Lord has accepted of your repentance. Satan would have you think otherwise and sometimes persuade you that now having made one mistake, you might go on and on with no turning back. That is one of the great falsehoods. The miracle of forgiveness is available to all of those who turn from their evil doings and return no more. ■

From “Stand Ye in Holy Places,” Ensign, July 1973, 122.

INSIGHTS



For what purpose was the earth created?

“The earth and all life upon it are of divine origin. . . . This earth is but one of many creations over which God presides. ‘Worlds without number have I created,’ He said. ‘And I also created them for mine own purpose; and by the Son I created them, which is mine Only Begotten’ [Moses 1:33]. Grand as it is, planet Earth is part of something even grander—that great plan of God. Simply summarized, the earth was created that families might be. Scripture explains that a husband and wife ‘shall be one flesh, and all this that the earth might answer the end of its creation’ [D&C 49:16].”



In Church Magazines

Ensign: Repentance is a gift of the Atonement, not a punishment. See pages 12, 44, 48, and 80.

New Era: To start this new year, find articles and resources related to the 2015 Mutual theme (pages 16–30). Also, encourage youth to read President Boyd K. Packer’s message “Lehi’s Dream and You” (page 2).

Friend: What’s new in the *Friend* this year? Read all about it on page 11! See page 40 for a lesson and activity to go along with the scripture reading in senior Primary. Look on the back cover each month for other ways you can use the *Friend* to teach children at home and in Primary.

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

