

After many of my family members lost their faith, I wondered what it meant for me to have a spiritual heritage full of withered plants.

Name withheld

My son pulled a tangle of long green vines out of his school-bag. “I almost forgot about these,” he told me.

I recognized the battered, young green bean plants as a familiar elementary school science project. They sprang from two clear plastic cups. One plant grew in black potting soil specially formulated for germinating seeds in small containers indoors. The plant’s stalk was stout but short and crowned by only a few large, fleshy leaves.

The second plant was different. The seed had been pressed into a damp, crumpled paper towel. Through the wall of the cup we could see a few white, soggy roots growing downward. A long, pale-green vine grew upward, tapering into thinner stems and small, papery leaves.

“It’s an experiment,” my son explained. “And it’s not working like it’s supposed to.”

“You mean the seed in the paper towel shouldn’t have grown bigger than the seed in the soil?” I suggested.

He fingered the longer vine. “Yeah,” he admitted. I could tell he was a little embarrassed that the simple lesson his teacher had tried to show her class hadn’t





A PARABLE *in* *My Windowsill*

been supported by the results of the bean plant experiment.

“Well,” I said, “maybe the experiment’s not over yet. Let’s set the beans here in the window and let them keep growing. Then we can tell Mrs. Rice how it really ended.”

He agreed, and the experiment continued in our kitchen window. Of course, Mrs. Rice, my son’s fourth-grade teacher, wasn’t the only teacher in his life who taught about the importance of good soil. We had read the Savior’s parable of the sower (see Matthew 13:3–8) during our family scripture study and knew that the Lord also taught that plants without good ground do not prosper long.

The parable of the sower strikes me personally. When I was a young mother, my parents and four of my seven siblings left the Church. They had once been paragons of spiritual strength to me and to the hundreds of people they touched during their decades of Church service and leadership.

For years the lapse of faith among so many of my family members left me with ambivalent feelings toward the parable of the sower. Sometimes I

was tempted to wonder what it meant for my own testimony if my parents’ spiritual roots—the roots by which my testimony had once been nurtured—were ultimately without good ground. What did it mean for me to have a spiritual heritage full of withered, rootless plants? I’d usually reassure myself with the reminder not to wrest the scriptures (see Alma 41:1) and resisted the temptation to force the parable to apply to issues it may not have been intended to address.

Still, it was with a bit of a grimace that I set the bean plants—reminders of the parable of the sower and all the conflicts it awakened in my mind—in my kitchen window.

As the weeks went by, each developed delicate blossoms. Soon the blossoms fell away, leaving little green pods in their places. The pods didn’t appear exclusively on the plant grown in the good soil. The plant in the wet paper towel bore them too. My son eyed the plants nervously. As long as the plant in the paper towel thrived, Mrs. Rice’s hypothesis was still unproven. We let the experiment go on.

Not long after the bean plants produced their pods, the long, impressive

plant growing from the wad of paper towel finally died. The plant in the good soil still lived.

“There,” I said. “Now it’s happened just like Mrs. Rice said it would.”

My son sighed, relieved that his teacher was right at last but a little sad for the loss of the plant. I was about to drop the wilted plant into the trash when one of the wrinkly yellow pods caught my attention. I pulled it off the stalk and cracked the pod open. Inside was a little seed, brown and hard like a nut. Despite its origins in the paper towel and the withering of its parent plant, the seed could now be taken and buried in good soil, where it could send its roots deep into the earth and bear fruit “an hundredfold” (Matthew 13:8).

I stood holding the seed in one hand and the withered bean plant in the other. I closed my eyes and thanked my Heavenly Father for the lesson He and my son had unfolded for me on my kitchen windowsill. Although my parents’ testimonies had withered away, I could still choose to plant my testimony in a rich, fertile place of its own. ■