

# EMPTY CUPBOARDS AND A CHERISHED PIANO

*As we struggled financially yet tried to be full-tithe payers,  
we enjoyed several tender mercies from the Lord.*



By Lauralee Burton Hill

When we had been married just over 10 years, my husband left a promising career in advertising, sought additional education, and began a second career as a professor. Our hope was that although he would make less money, we would enjoy more time together as a family. In order to begin his teaching career at a small private college, we moved our family across the country, far away from familiar territory and loved ones.

During these years we experienced severe economic challenges, as the cost of living was much higher than we had expected. Every month when I paid the bills, I pleaded with the Lord, praying for miracles and asking for help to know how to survive financially. Miracles did come but not always in the way that I would have expected or chosen.

Two experiences during this time cemented my trust in Heavenly Father and the Savior and Their gifts. One occurred soon after our move. As we neared the end of another desperately lean month, I looked around our kitchen for something to serve our children for dinner but found the cupboards largely empty. Thirty minutes later I reluctantly called our children to the table for dinner and produced a pot of plain rice with a little butter and salt to put on top. We prayed to give thanks for the food, and I began to fill the children's bowls. To my surprise they ate with gusto. During the meal one of my sons said, "Mom, this is delicious. Why don't we have it more often?"

I was incredulous. In fact, I wouldn't have believed it had I not witnessed it—and then I felt deeply grateful. As I reflected on this experience later, I realized that the Lord could transform a pot of rice into a feast

and a little into enough. What a profoundly beautiful lesson!

The second experience occurred several years later. Our financial situation had improved a little, but money was still scarce, particularly during the summer months when our monthly paycheck decreased because of the college's summer break. During this time we fell behind on the payment of our tithes. As the time for tithing settlement approached, I became more and more anxious. My husband and I wanted the peace and blessings of being full-tithe payers. We also wanted our children to see that being full-tithe payers was important to us. We could think of no solution but to repent and commit to be full-tithe payers in the year to come.

As we spoke with our branch president, he asked if there was any way we could make up the shortage by the end of the year so we could claim the full blessings of paying tithing. We could see no way. Most of the furniture we owned had been given to us and wasn't worth much. We did not own our vehicles outright. We were renting our home. We even spoke of selling our wedding rings, but both were modest, and we knew that their sale would not be enough to cover our shortage.

That evening I walked through our home, wondering if there was anything I had overlooked that was valuable enough. My eyes rested on our piano, and I felt a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. We had purchased the piano several years earlier at a closeout sale, and I was using it to teach my children and others to play. I often played it for relaxation and enjoyment. We used it to learn hymns, Primary songs, and other music, and we caroled around it at Christmastime. It had a built-in computer for composing, and the



**TITHING:  
A TEST OF FAITH**

"While tithing is paid with money, more importantly it is paid with faith. I have never met an individual who paid an honest tithe who complained about it. Rather, he put his trust in the Lord, and the Lord never failed him."

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), "Let Virtue Garnish Thy Thoughts Unceasingly," *Ensign*, May 2007, 117.



sound and touch were designed to simulate the sound and feel of a grand piano. It was worth enough to allow us to pay our tithing if we sold it, but would anyone really want to purchase it right before Christmas on top of the other holiday expenses and busyness? How would our children feel about its sale? Could we bear to part with it?

When we presented the idea to our children at scripture study the next morning, there were many tears. The decision, however, was unanimous: we would attempt to sell the piano. We knew that our family could not live safely and successfully without the blessings of tithing. The day after posting it online, we found a buyer. It was a miracle.

That night I sat in my dark bedroom rocking my baby and crying. There was a tiny part of me that had believed that being *willing* to sell the piano would be enough to receive a miracle from Heavenly Father. But now we were really doing

it; we were actually going to sell our piano. I laid my baby in his crib and then curled up in my own bed, crying quietly. Then a deep sense of calm began to enter my spirit, and it grew larger and larger. I had the impression that I was being held—cradled like a baby—and that I was loved immeasurably. The anguish over selling the piano dissipated gradually until it was completely gone and I was asleep.

The even greater miracle came when I spoke with my children the next morning during scripture study. “I’m not sad about the piano anymore,” I told the children. “The Savior has taken my sadness, and I feel very peaceful. It is a miracle.” My intent was to testify to the children how the Savior had healed me. I hoped to direct them to the same healing and peace. I was astonished when one of my sons (the one who had seemed the saddest when we decided to sell the piano) cheerfully said, “Mom, I’m not sad either.



I haven't been sad since we talked about it the first time." One by one the other children agreed. I was flabbergasted. I had not expected the Savior to work so quickly. It seemed that, in a sense, being willing to sell the piano *was* enough. As soon as we committed, He healed us.

We discussed how our family had experienced the power of the Savior's Atonement. We remembered how sad we were when we decided to sell the piano, but now none of us felt sad at all. The Savior had done what He claims He can: He had taken our sorrows and healed us (see Isaiah 53:4–5).

There will probably be times in our lives when we will face other difficulties greater than the challenge of selling our piano. On those days we will cast our minds back on this experience (see D&C 6:22) and look toward Heavenly Father and the Savior for help. We will remember this experience as a building block of our testimonies.

We helped wrap up the piano when the movers came to take it away. As it went out the door, no one cried. And when we handed our tithing envelope to the branch president and declared ourselves full-tithe payers, we felt victorious.

The day after the sale of the piano, a friend called. "How strong is your back?" she asked.

"What do you mean?" I inquired.

"I have a piano here that you can borrow until your family is able to acquire another," she said. "All you have to do is come and get it."

I am grateful for the Savior, who can turn a little into enough, who can heal troubled hearts, and who surrounds us with friends. I'm also grateful for the blessings that came to us during our lean years. ■

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