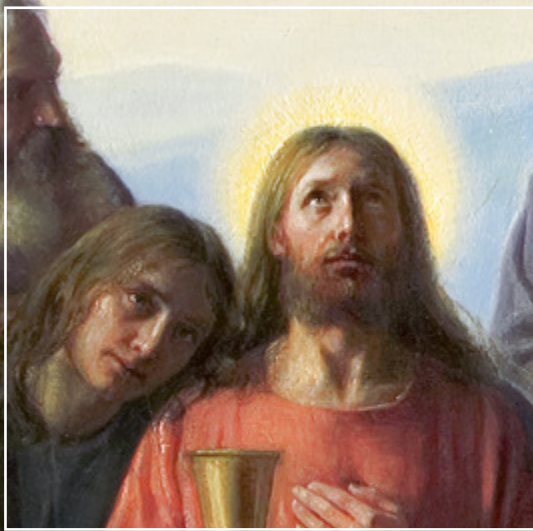


Ensign



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THE
CHURCH
IS HERE

Tokyo Japan





At the Yanaka Cemetery in Tokyo, Japan, a Latter-day Saint family, the Saitōs, visit their family memorial. For them it is a place of remembering, made all the more sacred because of their gospel knowledge that families can be together forever.

Respect for family and ancestors is deeply rooted in Japanese culture, and Japanese Latter-day Saints rejoice that their nation is now blessed with three temples: Tokyo (the first in Asia, dedicated in 1980 and currently under renovation), Fukuoka (dedicated in 2000), and Sapporo (dedicated in 2016). Japan is also home to 64 LDS family history centers.

Missionaries first arrived in Japan in 1901, led by Elder Heber J. Grant (1856–1945), then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and later seventh President of the Church. Today there are nearly 130,000 members in Japan in 261 congregations.

- The first translation of the Book of Mormon into Japanese took five years and was completed in 1909. A revised translation was published in 1957.
- The first LDS meetinghouse in Asia was dedicated in Japan in 1964.
- General Authorities of Japanese descent include Adney Y. Komatsu (1923–2011), born in Hawaii; Sam K. Shimabukuro (1925–2015), born in Hawaii; Yoshihiko Kikuchi, emeritus; Koichi Aoyagi, emeritus; Takashi Wada; and Kazuhiko Yamashita.



Discipleship

The world we live in seems designed to test our dedication to discipleship. As we study the New Testament this year, we can be inspired by the teachings and examples of Jesus Christ and of His disciples, who strived to both learn from and become more like their Master.

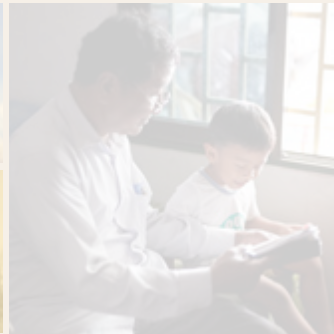
As teachers of the New Testament at Brigham Young University, my colleague Gaye Strathearn and I share some thoughts in this issue about the patterns of discipleship we can learn from Mary, the Lord's mother (page 12), and John the Beloved (page 18). These two figures were among the greatest witnesses of Jesus Christ. Other than God the Father Himself, no one knew better than Jesus's mother that He was in fact the Son of God, and John was numbered among the original Twelve and appears to have been one of the Lord's closest friends.

The devotion of these and other disciples teaches us how we can become beloved disciples of Jesus Christ ourselves and maintain our discipleship in spite of the world's challenges.

As we prayerfully study the New Testament, we can come to know not only more about Jesus but actually come to better know Him (see John 17:3).

Sincerely,

Eric D. Huntsman



The Miraculous Mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith
President Dallin H. Oaks

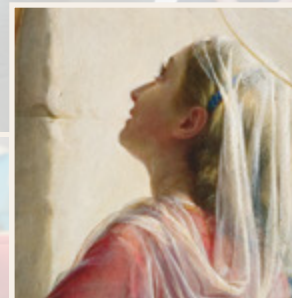
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John: The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved

Eric D. Huntsman

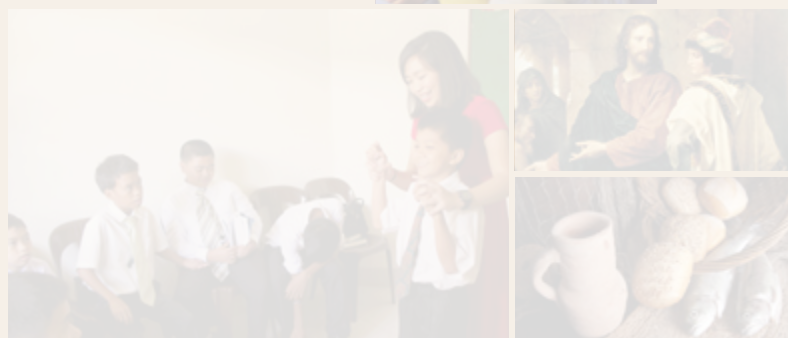
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Gaye Strathearn

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By Heather J. Johnson

These tips can help you feel like yourself again.



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By Alex Hugie

Take this quiz to find out how you're doing with setting and achieving goals.



Finding a Mental Health Professional Who's Right for You

By Kevin Theriot

If you're thinking about seeing a mental health professional, this can help you know where to start.

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SYMBOLS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

IN ADDITION TO THE TEACHINGS, WE CAN FIND MEANING IN THE OBJECTS, CULTURE, HISTORY, AND PLACES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

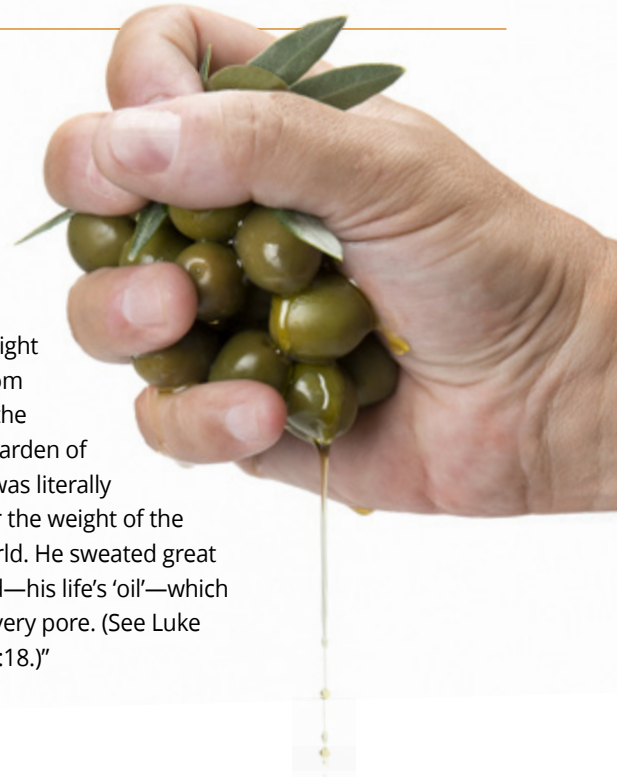
Mountains: "Mountains are not easy to climb. Then, as now, the Lord called His disciples to climb mountains to emphasize the efficacy of effort and obedience. He will ask the same of you, figuratively and possibly literally, also."

Olives: "Jesus came to the base of the Mount of Olives to effect the first component of the Atonement. This He did at the Garden of Gethsemane. The word *Gethsemane* comes from two Hebrew roots: *gath*, meaning 'press,' and *shemen*, meaning 'oil,' especially that of the olive.

"There olives had been pressed under the weight of great stone wheels to squeeze precious oil from the olives. So the Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane was literally



pressed under the weight of the sins of the world. He sweated great drops of blood—his life's 'oil'—which issued from every pore. (See Luke 22:44; D&C 19:18.)"

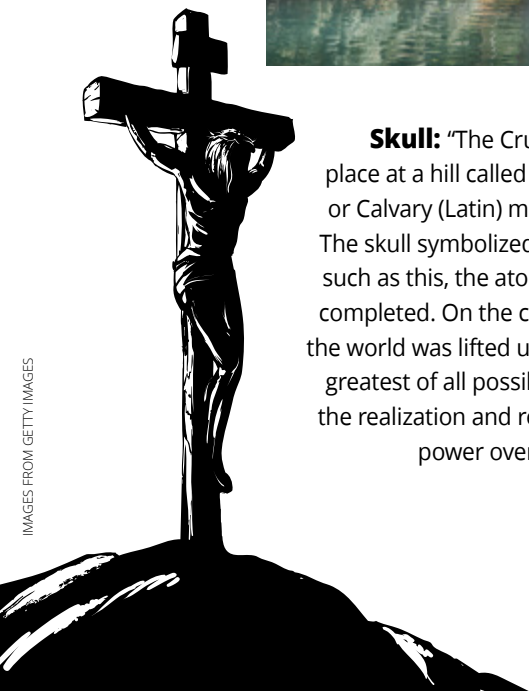


Water: "The River Jordan was the site Jesus chose for His baptism by John to 'fulfill all righteousness' [Matthew 3:15]. Is it significant that this sacred ordinance was performed in virtually the lowest body of fresh water on the planet? Could He have selected a better place to symbolize the humble depths to which He went and from which He rose?"

Skull: "The Crucifixion took place at a hill called Golgotha (Greek) or Calvary (Latin) meaning 'the skull.' The skull symbolized death. At a place such as this, the atoning sacrifice was completed. On the cross, the Savior of the world was lifted up over death in the greatest of all possible significance—the realization and reality of the Lord's power over death."



Excerpted from Russell M. Nelson, "Why This Holy Land?" Ensign, Dec. 1989, 15, 16, 17.



Phan Phon

Phnom Penh, Cambodia



When Phan's home caught on fire, he could only save his three grandchildren. Everything else burned to the ground. Phan was angry at the neighbor who caused the fire. When his anger spread to his family and neighbors, Phan knew he needed to forgive.

LESLIE NILSSON, PHOTOGRAPHER

I realized that my neighbor was poor like me. He didn't intend to start the fire. If I made him pay, he would be in trouble, and I would still feel hatred. I remembered the word of the Lord that we should love our neighbor. I felt that I should forgive.

When I decided to forgive, I felt peace.

My neighbor was happy I forgave him. My family is more happy too. When I see this, I am also happy.

Members and neighbors contributed what they could to help my family. I received a lot of rice and shared it with others. They asked me why I give when I'm in a bad situation. I tell them when I serve others, I serve the Lord. I want to give to Him because He made many miracles happen in my life. We have a beautiful home, better than the one that burned down.

FIND MORE

See more about Phan's journey of faith, including additional photographs, at lds.org/go/E1197.

Elder Larry J. Echo Hawk teaches how forgiveness helps you move forward and brings peace to your life. Read his message at lds.org/go/1196.

Find more Portraits of Faith at lds.org/go/18.





Ministering Principles

THE PURPOSE THAT WILL CHANGE OUR MINISTERING

While there are many purposes of ministering, our efforts should be guided by the desire to help others achieve a deeper individual conversion and become more like the Savior.

When we love others as the Savior does, we want to help them as He did. As the Good Shepherd, He is the ultimate example of meaningful ministering.

In modeling our ministering after Him, it is important to remember that His efforts to love, lift, serve, and bless had a higher goal than meeting the immediate need. Certainly He knew of their day-to-day needs and had compassion on their current suffering. So He healed, fed, forgave, and taught. But He wanted to do more than take care of today's thirst (see John 4:13–14). He wanted those around Him to follow Him (see Luke 18:22; John 21:22), know Him (see John 10:14; Doctrine and Covenants 132:22–24), and reach their divine potential (see Matthew 5:48). The same is true today (see Doctrine and Covenants 67:13).

There are countless ways we can help bless others, but when the end goal of our ministering is to help others come to know the Savior and become more like Him, we will be working toward the day when we won't have to teach our neighbor to know the Lord because we will all know Him (see Jeremiah 31:34).





The Savior's Focus Went beyond Immediate Needs

- Several individuals went to great lengths to bring their friend to Jesus to be healed of palsy. In the end the Savior healed the man, but He was more interested in forgiving him of his sins (see Luke 5:18–26).
 - When the people brought to the Savior the woman taken in adultery, His withholding of condemnation saved her life physically. But He wanted to save her spiritually too, telling her to “go, and sin no more” (see John 8:2–11).
 - Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus asking Him to come heal His friend Lazarus. Jesus, who had healed others on countless occasions, delayed His arrival until after Lazarus had died. Jesus knew what the family wanted, but in raising Lazarus from the dead, He strengthened their testimonies of His divinity (see John 11:21–27).

What other examples can you add to this list?



Ministering Principles articles are intended to help us learn to care for one another—not to be shared as messages during visits. As we come to know those we serve, the Holy Ghost will prompt us to know what message they might need in addition to our care and compassion.

What Can We Do?

If our purpose is to help others become more like the Savior, it will change how we minister. Here are some ways this understanding can guide our efforts to minister.

Idea 1: Connect Service with the Savior

All of our efforts to do good are worthwhile, but we can look for opportunities to enhance our service by connecting it with the Savior. For example, if the family you minister to is sick, a meal might be helpful, but your simple expression of love could be multiplied by your testimony of the Savior's love for them. Your help with yardwork would be appreciated, but could perhaps be made more meaningful with the offer of a priesthood blessing.

Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: “A person with a good heart can help someone fix a tire, take a roommate to the doctor, have lunch with someone who is sad, or smile and say hello to brighten a day.

“But a follower of the first commandment will naturally add to these important acts of service.”¹

Idea 2: Focus on the Covenant Path

Upon speaking to members for the first time as President of the Church, President Russell M. Nelson said, “Keep on the covenant path.” Making and keeping covenants “will open the door to every spiritual blessing and privilege available.”²

As Latter-day Saints, we are baptized, confirmed, and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Worthy male members receive the priesthood. We are endowed with power in the temple and are sealed together as families forever. These saving ordinances and their associated covenants are essential for us to become like Him so that we can be with Him.

We can have an important role to play in helping others along that path as we help them keep their covenants and prepare to make future covenants.³ How can you help the individuals or families you serve to receive the next ordinance they need? This could mean helping prepare a father to baptize his daughter, explaining the blessings of the next covenant to be made, or sharing ways to have a more meaningful experience renewing our covenants while partaking of the sacrament.



Idea 3: Invite and Encourage

When it’s appropriate, counsel with those you care for about their conversion and efforts to be more Christlike. Let them know the strengths you see and admire in them. Find out where they feel they could improve and talk about how you could help. (For more on counseling together with those to whom you minister, see “Counsel about Their Needs,” *Ensign*, Sept. 2018, 6–9.)

Don’t be afraid to invite them to follow the Savior and allow Him to help them reach their divine potential. This invitation can be life-changing, when coupled with an expression of your confidence in them and your faith in Him.



Six Ways We Can Help Others Progress toward Christ

Following are suggestions for supporting others in making life improvements and progressing along the covenant path. (See *Preach My Gospel*, chapter 11, for more ideas.)

1. Share. Be authentic and bold when sharing how the Savior has helped you as you have tried to draw nearer to Him by living gospel principles in spite of setbacks.

2. Promise blessings. People need a reason to change that is more compelling than the reasons not to change. Explaining the blessings associated with an action can provide powerful motivation (see Doctrine and Covenants 130:20–21).

3. Invite. Living a gospel principle brings a testimony that it is true (see John 7:17) and leads to deeper conversion.⁴ Nearly every interaction could include a simple invitation to do something that would help them progress.

4. Plan together. What needs to happen for them to successfully keep their commitment to change? How can you help? Is there a time line involved?

5. Support. When helpful, develop a support network of people who can help the individual stay motivated and succeed. We all need a cheerleader.

6. Follow up. Share progress regularly. Stay focused on the plan but refine it if necessary. Be patient, persistent, and encouraging. Change can take time.

Invitation to Act

Consider ways your efforts to minister—both large and small—can help others deepen their conversion and become more like the Savior.

Share Your Experiences

Send us your experiences as you have ministered to others or have been ministered to. Go to ensign.lds.org and click “Submit an Article or Feedback.” ■

NOTES

1. Neil L. Andersen, “A Holier Approach to Ministering” (Brigham Young University devotional, Apr. 10, 2018), 3, speeches.byu.edu.
2. Russell M. Nelson, “As We Go Forward Together,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2018, 7.
3. See Henry B. Eyring, “Daughters in the Covenant,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 125–28.
4. See David A. Bednar, “Converted unto the Lord,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2012, 106–9.



MARY KEPT ALL THESE THINGS. BY HOWARD LYON

Mary

the Mother of Jesus

Mary's story is a timeless reminder of the costs and blessings of discipleship.

By Gaye Strathearn

Associate Professor of Ancient Scripture, Brigham Young University

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is one of the few women mentioned in scripture and the only one whose life and ministry were prophesied about centuries before her birth (see 1 Nephi 11:15, 18; Mosiah 3:8; Alma 7:10).¹ The New Testament authors of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John provide only glimpses into her life and ministry because their focus is rightly concentrated on the Savior. But the early Christian church gave Mary the title of *theotokos*, the “bearer or mother of God”² as a reminder of the important part that she also plays in the Father’s plan.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has written: “Can we speak too highly of her whom the Lord has blessed above all women? There was only one Christ, and there is only one Mary. Each was noble and great in [the premortal existence], and each was foreordained to the ministry he or she performed. We cannot but think that the Father would choose the greatest female spirit to be the mother of his Son, even as he chose the male spirit like unto him to be the Savior. . . . We should . . . hold up Mary with that proper esteem which is hers.”³

Luke’s account of the story of the Annunciation to Mary

(see Luke 1:26–56) gives us a window through which to better appreciate this remarkable young woman. Through her interactions with Gabriel and Elisabeth, we see a young woman trying to grasp and understand her unique call from God. The magnitude of that call must have weighed heavily upon someone so young, and yet she readily submitted her will to that of the Father. Her story reminds us that God is aware of all of His children and that He calls ordinary men and women to participate in extraordinary ways to help build His kingdom. She became Jesus’s first disciple, and thus she is a model for all who choose to follow Him.

Nazareth: Mary’s Home

Unfortunately, the New Testament tells us nothing about Mary’s parents, her birth, or anything about her life in Nazareth. Luke describes Nazareth as a *polis*, which can be translated as either a city or a town, but it does not appear to have been a place of significance. Outside of the New Testament, Nazareth is not mentioned in any text until the end of the second century AD.

We do know that Nazareth was located on a hill in lower Galilee overlooking the fertile Jezreel Valley, 65 miles (105 km) north of Jerusalem. Archaeology indicates that

first-century Nazareth was more like a village than a city or even a town, with an estimated population of around 400–500.⁴ With few exceptions, much of the population throughout Galilee struggled to survive as subsistence workers, tending livestock, fishing, and working the land just to put food on the table for their families and to pay their taxes. The village had no fortifications; there is no evidence that it had paved streets or monumental architecture, nor that it used luxury items such as marble, mosaics, or frescos in the buildings, nor that the households contained imported fine wares.⁵ The two first-century houses that have been excavated appear to be modest one-story abodes with two rooms, a thatched roof, and a small courtyard.⁶ Burial practices and some limestone vessel fragments indicate that the inhabitants were Jewish rather than Gentiles.

While none of these discoveries can be tied directly to Mary or her family, they do give us a sense of what her life in Nazareth may have looked like: a peasant girl living in a rural village, far from the religious center of Jerusalem with its temple, priestly aristocracy, and wealth. Even as a young girl, she would have worked beside her mother and the other women of the village, weaving cloth, cooking, gathering firewood, collecting water from the household cisterns or village wells, and working in the fields—all to help her family survive from day to day.

Mary's Call

Mary's story in the book of Luke opens with the appearance of the angel Gabriel, the same angel who had earlier appeared to Zacharias in the temple (see Luke 1:11, 19, 26). When Gabriel appears, Mary is a young woman engaged to be married to Joseph (see Luke 1:27). Although we do not know how old Mary was at the time, in antiquity it was possible for marriage contracts to be arranged even before puberty. Gabriel's appearance and declarations that Mary is "highly favoured," that "the Lord is with thee," that she is "blessed . . . among women" (Luke 1:28), and that, according to the Joseph Smith Translation of Luke 1:28, she was "chosen" (see also Alma 7:10) must have elicited a mixed reaction

of confusion and even fear in Mary. We can only imagine what thoughts might have raced through her mind at that moment, but they could have included questions like, "Why does God consider me to be 'blessed among women'?" "Why have I 'found favour with God' and what does that even mean?" (see Luke 1:30). "Why did God send Gabriel to me and not to any of the other young women in Nazareth or in Jerusalem?" Yes, she was from the house of David (see Luke 1:32; Romans 1:3), but that meant little under the Roman occupation. After all, she was just a young woman from a peasant family, living in an insignificant village. As Nathaniel would later ask, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46).

Gabriel does not answer any of the questions that may have filled Mary's mind and heart. Instead he continues with his message: she will conceive a child, but not just any child. Her child shall be called the "Son of the Highest" and will receive "the throne of his father David." (See Luke 1:31–32.) In other words, Gabriel told Mary that her son would be both the Son of God and the promised Messiah. If Mary had been confused and afraid before this announcement, we can only imagine her heightened state after it.

Let's consider one principle that this part of Mary's story teaches about discipleship. God's plan for Mary was not something that she had asked for! Gabriel had appeared to Zacharias because he and Elisabeth had prayed for a miracle child, but he came to Mary under very different circumstances: not to fulfill a petition, but to announce God's will for her. With her impending wedding, Mary had probably thought about the possibility of having children in the future. But even though there was a wave of messianic expectation in Judaism in the first century, would Mary have thought that she, a peasant young woman from Nazareth, would be the mother of the Messiah? Probably not. The point is that calls of discipleship often require alterations to our personal life plans.

Luke focuses his record on the declarations of Gabriel and then Elisabeth. But there are three occasions when Mary articulates her thoughts and feelings.



The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary with the astonishing message that she was “blessed . . . among women” and that she would bear the Son of God.

An Inspired Question

The first is her question to Gabriel, “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” (Luke 1:34). Given the circumstances, her question is a reasonable one. It reminds readers of Zacharias’s question, “Whereby shall I know this? [i.e., that Elisabeth would bear a son]” (verse 18). But whereas his question expresses doubt about Gabriel’s answer to a prayer that Zacharias himself had offered up to God, Mary’s question seeks clarification about God’s declared will for her. Questions are inevitable when God’s invitations challenge disciples to raise the bar and move out of their comfort zones, and inspired questions lead to revelation.

Gabriel’s answer to Mary’s question comes in three parts:

1. First, he tells Mary, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee” (verse 35). The Holy Ghost is the power whereby

disciples in every age are magnified in their callings.

“Remember that this work is not yours and mine alone,” taught President Thomas S. Monson (1927–2018). “It is the Lord’s work, and when we are on the Lord’s errand, we are entitled to the Lord’s help. Remember that whom the Lord calls, the Lord qualifies.”⁷ Then Gabriel gives Mary information specific to her situation: “And the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee:⁸ therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (verse 35).

2. Second, Gabriel tells Mary about Elisabeth, someone who is experiencing a similar, although not identical, miraculous pregnancy (see verse 36). Elisabeth’s pregnancy is a sign to Mary that she is not alone, that there is at least one other person who has some sense of what she is going through.



Mary's and Elisabeth's stories are interwoven through their love and support for each other in a time of need.

3. Third, Gabriel unequivocally declares, “For with God nothing shall be impossible” (verse 37). God did the impossible when Elisabeth conceived.⁹ Gabriel’s declaration is a reminder to disciples in every age that when we respond to God’s invitations, miracles can take place.

A Disciple’s Willingness

Mary’s second verbal response in the story epitomizes, in my mind, the commitment and outlook of a disciple: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38). “Handmaid” indicates that Mary has chosen to accept the call that God has extended to her. This statement is Mary’s version of what her Son will say in Gethsemane, “not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). While it seems clear that at this point in her journey, she cannot possibly understand all that will be required of her—Simeon later prophesies to her that “a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also” (Luke 2:35)—nevertheless, Mary chooses to move forward with faith.

“And the angel departed from her” (Luke 1:38). When Gabriel leaves, Mary is left alone. While it is one thing for a disciple to make declarations like hers in the presence of a divine messenger, what does she do now that the angel is gone? How does she explain this experience to her parents? to Joseph? What is the personal cost to her if they or the inhabitants of Nazareth do not believe her? The close quarters of her life in Nazareth could now become difficult for her.

So she recalls the second part of Gabriel’s answer to her question and journeys to the home of Elisabeth. Once again, Luke’s two opening stories are woven together. As soon as Mary greets Elisabeth, “the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb” (Luke 1:41–42). Her Spirit-directed salutation reinforced what Gabriel had already declared about Mary’s blessed place among women. Mary now had a second witness of her calling, but it came only after she had willingly accepted the call.

The account of Mary and Elisabeth is a reminder of two great aspects in the lives of modern disciples. It is a reminder of the great symbiotic value at the heart of Relief Societies around the world: women of different ages and at different stages of life coming together to sustain and support each other in times of need. It is also a reminder that God does not abandon those He has called in their times of need but that

He often responds by encircling them in the arms of others whom He has also called.

The Magnificat

Mary's final expression is known as the Magnificat and is her manifestation of joy in response to Elisabeth's declarations. She expresses her feelings about what has transpired in her life and reflects her newfound understanding of her place in God's plan. First and foremost she feels to magnify, give praise to, and glorify her God, in whom she rejoices as her Savior (see Luke 1:46–47). She sees in her experience the ongoing mercy of God, both in the fact that He chose someone of "low estate" like her (see verses 48–50) and also in the fact that He has chosen her to play a central part in the fulfilling of the Abrahamic covenant (see verses 54–55).

"And Mary abode with [Elisabeth] about three months, and returned to her own house" (verse 56). Mary was now more prepared to fulfill her divine calling.

Mary's Example for Us

Modern disciples are removed from the story of Mary by both culture and 2,000 years. Nevertheless, her story is a timeless reminder of the costs of discipleship. God expects His followers to step up to the invitations He extends to them. President Russell M. Nelson reminds us that "God has always asked His covenant children to do difficult things."¹⁰ Mary was no exception, and neither are we. Our challenge is to have the faith to submit our will to His, to accept His calls with faith that His Spirit will magnify us in His service. Bonnie H. Cordon, Young Women General President, also reminds us that "we can do hard things," and then adds, "but we can also do them joyfully."¹¹

As modern disciples, what will our Magnificat be? How will we express our rejoicing in our God? How will we express the magnificence of His mercy in our lives? How will we find ways to celebrate our part in the fulfilling of the Abrahamic covenant in our day? These are perhaps just some of the ways that we can learn from Mary's remarkable story of discipleship. ■

NOTES

1. Matthew also understands Mary to be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of a virgin who will bring forth a son named Immanuel (see Isaiah 7:14). His quotation of "a virgin" is from the second century BC Greek translation of Isaiah, which was used by the early Christians and is used in the King James Version of Isaiah 7:14.
2. In the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi 11:18 also describes Mary as "the mother of God."
3. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah* (1979), 1:326–27, footnote 4.
4. See James F. Strange, "Nazareth," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992), 4:1050; Jonathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-examination of the Evidence* (2002), 131.
5. See Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 131.
6. See Ken Dark, "Has Jesus' Nazareth House Been Found?" *Biblical Archaeology Review*, vol. 41, no. 2 (March/April 2015), 54–63; see also Ken Dark, "Early Roman-Period Nazareth and the Sisters of Nazareth Convent," *The Antiquities Journal*, vol. 92 (2012), 37–64.
7. Thomas S. Monson, "Duty Calls," *Ensign*, May 1996, 44.
8. The Greek word translated as "overshadow" (*episkiazō*) is the same word used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to describe the cloud descending on the tabernacle when it was completed. It described the glory of the Lord.
9. The Lord said likewise to Abraham when he and Sarah learned that they would have a child in their old age (see Genesis 18:14; Romans 4:19–21).
10. Russell M. Nelson, "Stand as True Millennials," *Ensign*, Oct. 2016, 27.
11. "Bonnie H. Cordon: Young Women General President," *Ensign*, May 2018, 129.



John

The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved

The New Testament writings associated with John the Beloved present him as both a teacher and a model for our own discipleship.

By Eric D. Huntsman

Professor of Ancient Scripture, Brigham Young University

After Peter, John is perhaps the best known of Jesus’s original Twelve Apostles. He and his brother, James, were with Peter at some of the most important moments of the Savior’s mortal ministry, and he has been traditionally associated with five different books in the New Testament.¹ His personal closeness to the Lord is suggested by John 13:23: “Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.” Throughout the ages, Christian art has reflected this image, picturing John as a young man, often resting in the Savior’s arms. This is the origin of his unique title, John the Beloved, but his witness and mission reveal aspects of discipleship that we can all share.

John, Son of Zebedee

John’s Hebrew name, *Yohanan*, means “God has been gracious.” Most of the details we know about him come from the first three Gospels, which tell the story of the Savior’s mortal ministry largely from the same perspective. They all agree that John was the son of a prosperous Galilean fisherman named Zebedee, who owned his own boat and was able to hire day laborers to assist him and his sons in their work. John and his brother, James, also had a partnership with brothers Peter and Andrew, and all four left their fishing business when Jesus called them to follow Him in full-time discipleship.²





Responding to Jesus's call, John and James "left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him" (Mark 1:20).

While the Gospels do not mention Zebedee again, the mother of James and John became a follower of Jesus, interceding with Jesus on behalf of her sons and being present at the Crucifixion.³ Usually identified by the name Salome, the mother of James and John may also have been a sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus, making them first cousins of Jesus and relatives of John the Baptist.⁴

Soon after his initial call, John witnessed many of the Lord's early miracles and teachings.⁵ Seeing these miracles and listening to discourses such as the Sermon on the Mount no doubt prepared John for the moment when Jesus called him to be one of His Twelve Apostles.⁶ Of these special witnesses, Peter, James, and John formed an inner circle of close disciples who were present at significant moments of Jesus's earthly ministry:

- At the raising of the daughter of Jairus, seeing firsthand the Lord's power over death.⁷
- On the Mount of Transfiguration, where they saw Jesus revealed in His glory and

heard the voice of the Father testify that Jesus was His Son in whom He was well pleased.⁸

- On the Mount of Olives for His final prophecy about the last days.⁹
- In the Garden of Gethsemane, where they were nearby as the Savior began His great work of Atonement.¹⁰

Just as Jesus Christ gave Simon the additional name *Cephas* or Peter, which means "rock," He also gave James and John the title *Boanerges*, or "sons of thunder."¹¹ Because they asked Jesus whether they should call down fire upon a village of Samaritans who had rejected Him (see Luke 9:51–56), this nickname might suggest that they were hot-tempered or at least very strong-willed. However, it is just as likely that the name was in anticipation of the powerful witnesses that they might become, much as Peter's name probably reflected not so much his earlier devoted but impulsive nature as it did his firmness and

strength after Jesus's Resurrection.¹²

In John's appearances in the book of Acts, he is portrayed as a strong, steady companion of Peter. John was with Peter when he healed the lame man in the temple, and together they boldly preached before the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem. Together, the two Apostles traveled to Samaria to confer the gift of the Holy Ghost upon the Samaritans whom Philip had taught and baptized.¹³

Yet it is in the writings that are associated with John that he is best seen as a powerful witness of the divinity of his master and friend, Jesus Christ. These New Testament books present John as both a teacher and a model for us in our own discipleship.

Beloved Disciple

Interestingly, John is never named in the Gospel that has traditionally been attributed to him. The Gospel of John mentions the two sons of Zebedee only once, in the last chapter, where they were two of the seven disciples who met the risen Lord by the Sea of Galilee. Even there, however, they are not mentioned by name. Instead, tradition, supported by references in Restoration scripture,¹⁴ has identified John as being the anonymous "disciple whom Jesus loved" who was present at the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, the empty tomb, and in Jesus's final Sea of Galilee appearance.¹⁵

He may also have been the "other disciple" who, along with Andrew, had been a follower of John the Baptist and heard him testify that Jesus was the Lamb of God (see John 1:35–40), and it is likely that he was the disciple who accompanied Peter after Jesus's arrest and helped Peter gain access to the court of the high priest (see John 18:15–16).

In the Gospel of John, the beloved disciple

emerges as a close, personal friend of the Lord. Along with Martha, Lazarus, and Mary, John is described explicitly in this Gospel as one whom Jesus loved (see John 11:3, 5). His position at the table during the Last Supper reflected not only honor but also closeness.

Beyond his friendship with the Savior, other passages reveal him as a powerful witness of the most important events of Jesus's mission: he stood at the foot of the cross to witness the Lord's death as a sacrifice for sin, ran to the tomb after the Resurrection to confirm that it was empty, and saw the resurrected Savior.

Twice the Gospel of John mentions that it is based upon the eyewitness of the beloved disciple and emphasizes that his witness is true,¹⁶ something which echoes Joseph Smith's retitling of the Gospel as "The

Testimony of John."¹⁷

While scholars still debate the identity of the beloved disciple, if he were the Apostle John, then he was the source of the material in the Gospel, if not its original author.¹⁸ Why then did he remain unnamed, never being directly identified as the Apostle John? The answer might partly be because he intended his own experi-

ences to be types for believers and disciples in every age. By remaining anonymous, he could allow us to project ourselves into his experiences, learning how to love and be loved by the Lord and then gaining our own witnesses, which we are then called upon to share with others.

The Epistles: 1, 2, and 3 John

Like the Gospel of John, none of the three letters attributed to John ever directly name him. Nevertheless, 1 John, which is more of a doctrinal treatise than an actual letter, is closely associated with the Gospel in its style and topics, which include the importance of love and obedience, themes that the Savior taught in John's account of the Last Supper.

Written after the Gospel, 1 John begins by declaring the author's witness of the Lord Jesus Christ, "which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked

"This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24).

upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life” (1 John 1:1; emphasis added). Besides restating the opening lines of the Gospel of John, the author stresses his powerful, personal, physical witness of Jesus Christ, who was the Word of God literally made flesh.

The early Christians, who were the book’s original audience, had apparently suffered internal division with a group who espoused incorrect beliefs about Jesus having left the Church.¹⁹ In 1 John, the author is not only a witness; he is an authority called upon to correct false doctrine and counter threats to faith from anti-Christians and false spirits (see 1 John 2:18–27; 4:1–6). His mission was also to encourage those who remained faithful by sharing meaningful truths about God and Christ and the importance of continued faith and righteousness.

In 2 John and 3 John, he identifies himself simply as “the elder” and continues to stress the importance of love and obedience and the dangers of false teachers and those who reject proper Church authority.²⁰

All three of these books teach us the importance of continued devotion to the revealed Jesus Christ.

The Revelator

Of the five books attributed to him, only Revelation actually uses the name John, identifying its author three times by that name in its opening verses (see Revelation 1:1, 4, 9). Other than identifying himself as the servant of God, the author gives no other indication of his position or calling, but most early Christian authorities believed that he was John, son of Zebedee.

The Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants confirm that the Apostle John had been given a special commission to receive and write the visions that he received.²¹ A complex and heavily symbolic book, Revelation was intended to comfort and reassure Christians suffering persecution or trials in every age while at the same time revealing the role of Jesus Christ throughout history.

Although two different dates have been proposed for when John wrote Revelation—an early date in the AD 60s during the reign of the emperor Nero and a later date in the AD 90s during that of the emperor Domitian—both would have been after the martyrdom of Peter, making John the senior Apostle left living.

His calling, however, was not only to receive and record the visions contained in the book. In one of his visions, an angel told John the Revelator to take a small book, or scroll, and to eat it. Sweet at first in his mouth, it made his belly bitter, which Joseph Smith interpreted as

representing his mission to help gather Israel as part of the restoration of all things (see Revelation 10:9–11; Doctrine and Covenants 77:14). This mission was possible because of John’s continuing ministry after he was translated. While commentators, ancient and modern, have been divided regarding the meaning of Jesus’s statement to Peter about John’s fate at the end of the Gospel (see John 21:20–23), Joseph Smith received a revelation confirming that John’s mission will continue as a translated being until the Savior’s return (see Doctrine and Covenants 7:1–6). In

*“By this we know that we
love the children of God,
when we love God, and
keep his commandments”
(1 John 5:2).*

other words, he not only prophesied of the end times, but his mission includes helping fulfill these prophecies as well as witnessing the fulfillment of the things that were revealed to him.

Although our own missions may not be as grand, John’s example teaches us that our love for Jesus Christ leads us to accept our own calls and challenges in life, no matter how bittersweet they at times may seem.

Becoming Beloved Disciples Ourselves

John was a leading member of Jesus’s original Twelve Apostles, one who had a close personal relationship with the Savior and served important

roles as His witness, as a leader of the Church, and as a revelator. Yet the way he chose to portray himself as the beloved disciple in the Gospel that bears his name allows him to serve as a model for all of us in our own discipleship. From him we learn that as followers of Jesus Christ, we can all rest in the arms of His love, which love we realize most fully through ordinances such as that which He established at the Last Supper. We too can symbolically stand at the foot of the cross, testifying that Jesus died for us, and run with hope to learn for ourselves that the Lord lives. Like John, as beloved disciples our call is to share that witness with others, testifying of the truth and fulfilling whatever calls come our way until the Lord comes again. ■

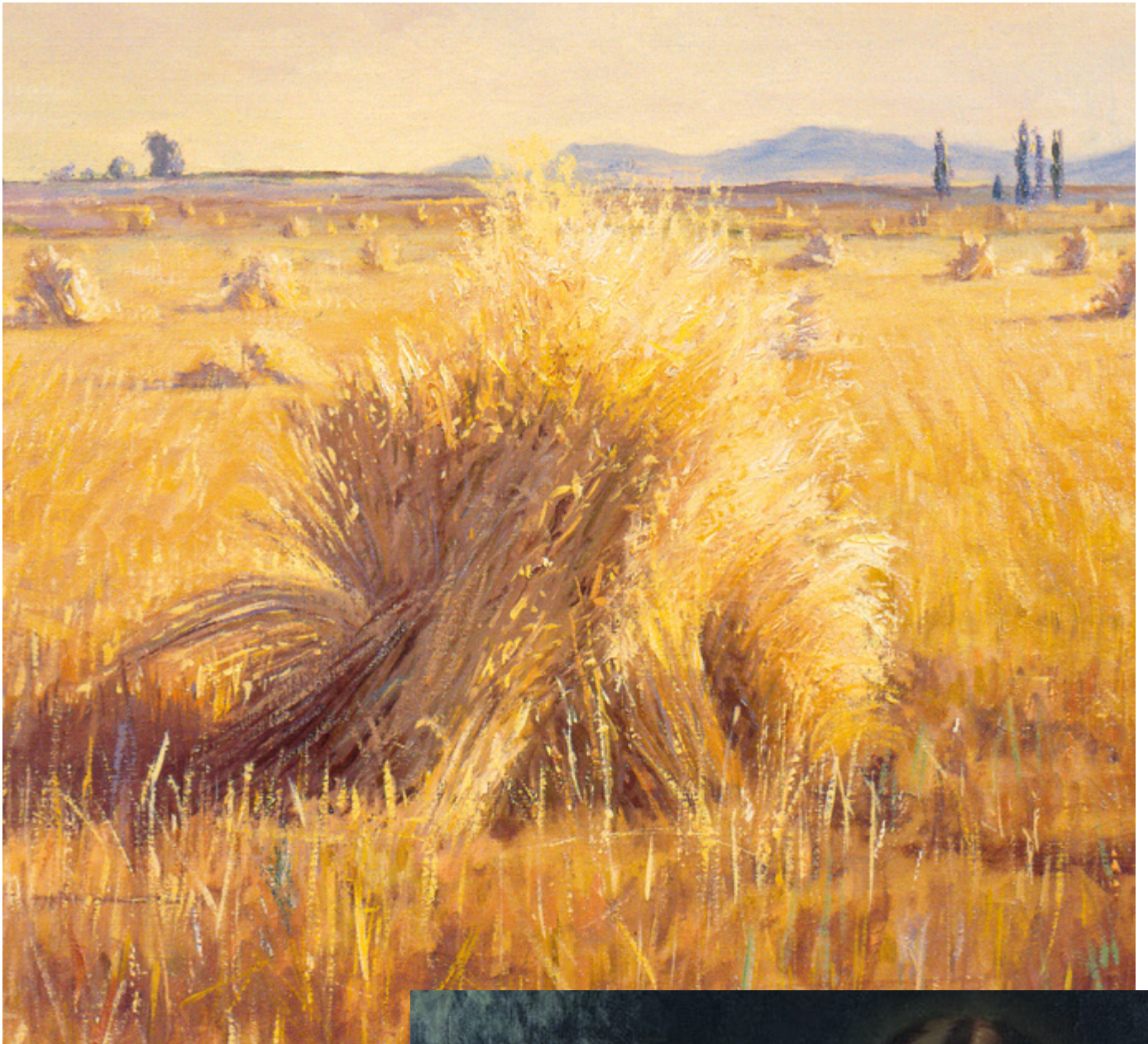
NOTES

1. Interestingly, only the book of Revelation directly states that its author was John (see Revelation 1:1, 4). None of the Gospels, including John, identifies its author. Early Christian tradition, however, identified the figure of the beloved disciple in the Gospel of John with the Apostle of that name. For a discussion of the evidence, scholarly discussion, and Restoration insights regarding this identification, see note 18. The book of 1 John similarly never identifies its author, but its style and subject matter connects it closely with the Gospel of John. The books of 2 and 3 John are attributed only to “the elder,” but early Christian tradition connected them with the author of John and 1 John.
2. See Mark 1:19–20; see also Matthew 4:21–22; Luke 5:10–11. Most scholars agree that Mark was written first, sometime in the mid-60s AD, with Matthew and Luke being written sometime in the AD 70s or early AD 80s. As a result, reading references from Mark first allows us to see how Matthew and Luke added to or adapted the earliest account.
3. While Mark 10:35–37 records that James and John asked to sit at the right and left sides of Jesus in His kingdom, Matthew 20:20–21 adds that this request actually came from their mother. For her presence at the Crucifixion and later at the empty tomb, see Mark 15:40; 16:1–8; see also Matthew 27:55–56; Luke 23:49, 55; 24:1–10; and John 19:25.
4. For further discussion of these possible connections of Salome, as well as more background on the family and fishing business of Zebedee, see R. Alan Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (2000), 7–23.
5. See Mark 1:21–31, 40–45; 2:1–12; 3:1–6; see also Matthew 8:1–4; 9:1–8; 12:9–14; Luke 4:33–39; 5:12–15, 17–26; 6:6–11.
6. For the Sermon on the Mount, see Matthew 5–7. For the call of John and the other original Apostles, see Mark 3:13–19; see also Matthew 10:2–4; Luke 6:13–16.
7. See Mark 5:37; see also Matthew 9:23–26; Luke 8:51, though Matthew does not name Peter, James, and John.



8. See Mark 9:2–10; see also Matthew 17:1–8; Luke 9:28–36.
9. See Mark 13:3–37.
10. See Mark 14:32–34; see also Matthew 26:36–38.
11. See Mark 3:17. *Boanerges* is apparently a rough Greek transliteration of the Aramaic *bene reghesh* or *r'm*, meaning “sons of commotion or thunder.”
12. See Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 38–40, 50.
13. See Acts 3:1–11; 4:1–21; 8:14–17.
14. See Doctrine and Covenants 7; 77; 88:141.
15. See John 13:23; 19:26, 34–35; 20:2–10; 21:1–14, 20–25; see also Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 57–69.
16. See John 19:35; 21:24–25; see also John 20:30–31.
17. See *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts*, edited by Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews (2004), 234.
18. For examples of the scholarly discussions about the identity of the beloved disciple, see Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 72–85, and Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, edited by Francis J. Moloney (2003), 189–99. For the Apostle John as either the source or author of the Gospel of John, see Richard Neitzel Holzappel, Eric D. Huntsman, and Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* (2006), 126–27, and my own recent treatment in “The Gospel of John” in *New Testament History, Culture, and Society* (2019), ed. Lincoln Blumell.
19. See Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (The Anchor Bible, vol. 30 [1982]), 49–55, 71.
20. See Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 90–95, and Holzappel, Huntsman, and Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament*, 274–77.
21. See Holzappel, Huntsman, and Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament*, 281–82, and especially 1 Nephi 14:18–27; Ether 4:16; and Doctrine and Covenants 7:1–3; 77.

A powerful witness of the most important events of Jesus’s mission, John stood at the foot of the cross to witness the Lord’s death, ran to the tomb after the Resurrection to confirm that it was empty, and saw the resurrected Savior.



GOLDEN HARVEST, BY DAVID MERRILL. COURTESY OF CHURCH HISTORY MUSEUM

Faith in Jesus Christ
and His Atonement is
the faith to reap.
It is faith in His power,
not yours.





By Elder
Wilford W. Andersen
Of the Seventy

DEVELOPING THE

Faith to Reap

Lehi and his family had been in the wilderness for only a matter of days when the Lord told him to send his sons back to Jerusalem to get the brass plates from Laban. We don't often compliment Lehi's two rebellious sons, Laman and Lemuel, but at least they were willing to go. They had enough faith to give it a try.

Laman, and later Lemuel with his brothers, asked Laban for the plates. The brothers lost their family fortune and almost their lives in the attempt. At that point, Laman's and Lemuel's faith failed them, and they were ready to quit. Nephi, on the other hand, rose above the danger and discouragement:

"As the Lord liveth, and as we live," he said, "we will not go down unto our father in the wilderness until we have accomplished the thing which the Lord hath commanded us.

"Wherefore, let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord" (1 Nephi 3:15–16).

Nephi then exercised great faith, obtained the plates of Laban, and returned with his brothers to their father in the wilderness.

There seem to be two distinct levels of faith. The first level is the faith to try, the faith to thrust in our sickles. The second level is the faith to do. It is more than the faith to thrust in our sickles—it is the faith to reap.

Laman and Lemuel had the faith to try, but Nephi had the faith to do. Laman and Lemuel had enough faith to thrust in their sickles, but Nephi had enough faith to reap.

That subtle distinction between the faith to thrust in our sickles and the faith to reap will make all the difference in our lives. To live again with our Heavenly Father and to live productive and joyful lives on earth, we need to develop the faith to reap.



Pray each day that Heavenly Father will bless you with righteous desires to conform your will to His.

We have received marvelous promises from the Lord—promises of happiness and joy in this life and exaltation in the next. But the challenges and problems of our daily lives tend to diminish our hope. Our land of promise seems so far away, so improbable, that we begin to doubt.

“It isn’t possible for me to reach that goal or to receive that blessing,” we think. “Surely, the Lord was thinking about someone else when He made those promises.”

No, He *was* thinking of you and of me. We only need sufficient faith to receive our blessings—a faith so strong that it can convert our future promises into present realities. We need the faith to reap.

What exactly is the faith to reap, and how can we develop it?

Have Faith in Jesus Christ

First, unlike the faith to thrust in our sickles, the faith to reap is not faith in ourselves. It is not the same as self-confidence or positive mental attitude. It is not even faith in our families or friends—all of which are good. The faith to reap is faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement. It is faith in His power, not ours.

When I was called as the stake president of the Mesa Arizona Maricopa Stake, Elder W. Mack Lawrence, at the time a General Authority Seventy, invited my wife and me into the stake president’s office and extended the calling. I dutifully accepted. Then he invited us to enter the high council room and prayerfully consider men to recommend as my counselors. As I entered the room, I saw pictures of all the

stake presidents who had previously served in the stake since it was organized, and my heart sank. They were great leaders both in the Church and in the community.

I looked at my wife and said, “Kathleen, I don’t think I can do this. I’m not in their league.”

She said, “Don’t talk to me about it. You had better talk to Elder Lawrence.”

To my surprise, when I told him that I didn’t think I could fulfill the calling, Elder Lawrence responded, “Well, I suppose you’re right.”

But then he said, “You can’t do it, Brother Andersen, but the Lord can. He has the power to do His work, and if you will be worthy and work hard, He will do it. You will see.”

And He did.

The faith to thrust in our sickles is the faith to try. It is faith in oneself, and it evaporates as soon as the going gets tough. And then we start to doubt. But the faith to reap is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It never yields.

Align Your Will with God’s Will

Second, to exercise the faith to reap, we must be certain that our desires and objectives are consistent with the will of God. We can never exercise faith to reap if God does not agree with the harvest. To have His help, we must align our will with His.

Because the prophet Nephi, the son of Helaman, was a righteous and faithful man, the Lord told him, “I will bless thee forever; and I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be

done unto thee according to thy word.” That is a wonderful promise. But then the Lord adds, “For thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will” (Helaman 10:5).

Moroni taught, “And Christ hath said: If ye will have faith in me ye shall have power to do *whatsoever thing is expedient in me*” (Moroni 7:33; emphasis added).

Conforming our desires to God’s will is a prerequisite to the faith to reap.

When my sons were younger, they played on the high school basketball teams. Back then they used to have a team prayer prior to beginning each game. As I watched from the stands, I would wonder what they were praying for. If they were praying to win the game, their prayers lacked the faith to reap. This was clearly evidenced by the number of games they lost! The Lord apparently did not share their desire that they necessarily win every game.

In other words, God will help us to achieve only the goals that are good for us. That is because He loves us, and He knows better than we do what will be for our good. We should pray each day that Heavenly Father will bless us with righteous desires to conform our will to His. We must learn to pray as the Lord did in the Garden of Gethsemane that God’s will, not ours, be done (see Luke 22:42). Only then can we exercise the faith to reap.

Go to Work

The third prerequisite of faith to reap is work. The Apostle James makes it clear that faith without works is dead. The faith to thrust in our sickles requires belief, but the faith to reap requires more than belief. “The devils believe,” writes James, “and tremble” (see James 2:17, 19).

I heard a story about a father who noticed his young daughter kneeling beside her bed, praying that Heavenly Father would protect little birds from entering a bird trap her brother had built and placed in the backyard. Later that day, the father grew concerned. He knew the trap was a good one. He had helped his son build it.

“I heard you praying this morning that Heavenly Father would protect the little birds from your brother’s trap,” he said to his daughter. “But sometimes sad things happen even when we pray that they won’t.”

She responded, “I just know he won’t catch any birds, Daddy.” “I admire your faith, sweetheart,” the father said. “But if he does catch some birds, I hope that won’t hurt your faith.” “He won’t, Daddy,” she said. “I know he won’t.” The father asked, “How can you have such great faith?” “Because after I said my prayers,” his daughter replied, “I went out back and kicked his bird trap all to pieces.”

It is good to pray for Heavenly Father’s blessings. But after we say amen, we have to go to work. We cannot expect the Lord to guide our footsteps if we’re not willing to move our feet. Nor should we ask Him to do for us that which we can and should do for ourselves.

We must work at reaching our righteous goals. We must work at keeping the commandments. The real power in our covenants and the real power in the faith to reap is realized not when we conclude with certainty that God keeps His promises but rather when we conclude with certainty that we keep ours. That great truth is what converts future promises into present realities. We must work.

Don’t be discouraged with your failures or mistakes, but be constant in your efforts, and be determined. The faith to reap does not require perfection, but it does require persistence.

I invite you to develop the faith to reap. Place your faith firmly in our Savior, Jesus Christ, and in His Atonement. Make sure that your desires align with and conform to His will. Then go to work with all your heart, might, mind, and strength, with unflinching determination and persistence. There is no challenge, no problem, no barrier that will not yield to the faith to reap. ■

From a devotional address, “The Faith to Reap,” delivered at Brigham Young University–Idaho on March 17, 2015.



SHOW YOUR FAITH

“There is only One in whom your faith is always safe, and that is in the Lord Jesus Christ. And you need to let your faith show!”

President Russell M. Nelson, “Let Your Faith Show,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 29.

Trusting God

By Angela Hess

The story of Sariah taught me a lesson on finding peace.

In 2015, I felt prompted to start reading the Book of Mormon again from the beginning. Shortly afterward, my husband, the main breadwinner of our family, lost his job. All of a sudden our lives changed from comfortable to full of stress and worry. How would we provide for our family?

That night, as my mind filled with anxious thoughts, I read the story of Nephi and his brothers returning to Jerusalem to obtain the brass plates. Something new struck me about their story, particularly the part in 1 Nephi 5 when they finally accomplish their mission and return home to their parents in the wilderness. Nephi explains:

“My mother, Sariah, . . . truly had mourned because of us.

“For she had supposed that we had perished in the wilderness; and she also had complained against my father,

telling him that he was a visionary man; saying: Behold thou hast led us forth from the land of our inheritance, and my sons are no more, and we perish in the wilderness” (verses 1–2).

Nephi goes on to say:

“And when we had returned to the tent of my father, behold their joy was full, and my mother was comforted.

“And she spake, saying: Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness; yea, and I also know of a surety that the Lord hath protected my sons, and delivered them out of the hands of Laban, and given them power whereby they could accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them” (verses 7–8).

I realized that Sariah had no direct control over her sons’ return; the only thing she had control over was how she chose to spend her time while they were gone—fretting and worrying or trusting in the Lord.

I saw that I had the same choice as Sariah. I could fret and worry and stress out about my husband’s need to find another job, or I could trust that the Lord would take care of us and try to let that trust bring peace during this time between jobs. The choice seemed obvious: I chose to trust the Lord. And in the end, the Lord did take care of us.

This experience was a reminder to me that the Lord wants us to trust Him and can provide peace in times of trial. We are in His care, and He will not fail us. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.



Service—the Best Medicine

By Camila Godoy

One of the best ways we can face difficult challenges is to give heartfelt service to others.

I have always had a strong testimony of the gospel and the truthfulness of its principles and ordinances. But a while back, for a number of reasons, I became very discouraged—about everything.

I also became selfish and started thinking only of myself. As a result, my view of life became narrow and limited. I knew that if I trusted in my Heavenly Father and my Savior, Jesus Christ, everything would be all right, but I didn't know how to see beyond “the mist of darkness” (1 Nephi 8:24) that surrounded me.

One night, while pondering what I could do to free myself of my dark mood, the words of President Gordon B. Hinckley's (1910–2008) father came to mind. When President

Hinckley became discouraged from lack of success during his mission to England, his father wrote and told him, “Forget yourself and go to work.”¹ Those six words pierced my heart. They were my answer.

In my somber mood, I had forgotten that many people were in worse circumstances than I was. I had forgotten that the best medicine for discouragement is service. Soon afterward, the Lord put numerous opportunities to serve others in my path.

I consoled a friend who was mourning her father's death. I comforted another friend who was fighting depression. I helped a classmate who had doubts about the existence of God. I volunteered to care for children of

Church members who couldn't afford a babysitter. The Lord gave me opportunities as a visiting teacher to strengthen sisters who were poor in spirit, struggling financially, and feeling down. I took food to people in nursing homes. Finally, I volunteered to help with the stray-dog problem in my city.

As I helped others, like magic, my spirits lifted and I felt rejuvenated spiritually. I know that the “magic” that lifted my heart was the love of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ that I received through service. I testify that one of the best ways we can face difficult challenges is to give heartfelt service to others. ■

The author lives in Antofagasta, Chile.

NOTE

1. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Gordon B. Hinckley* (2016), 7–8.



BLESSINGS OF SERVICE

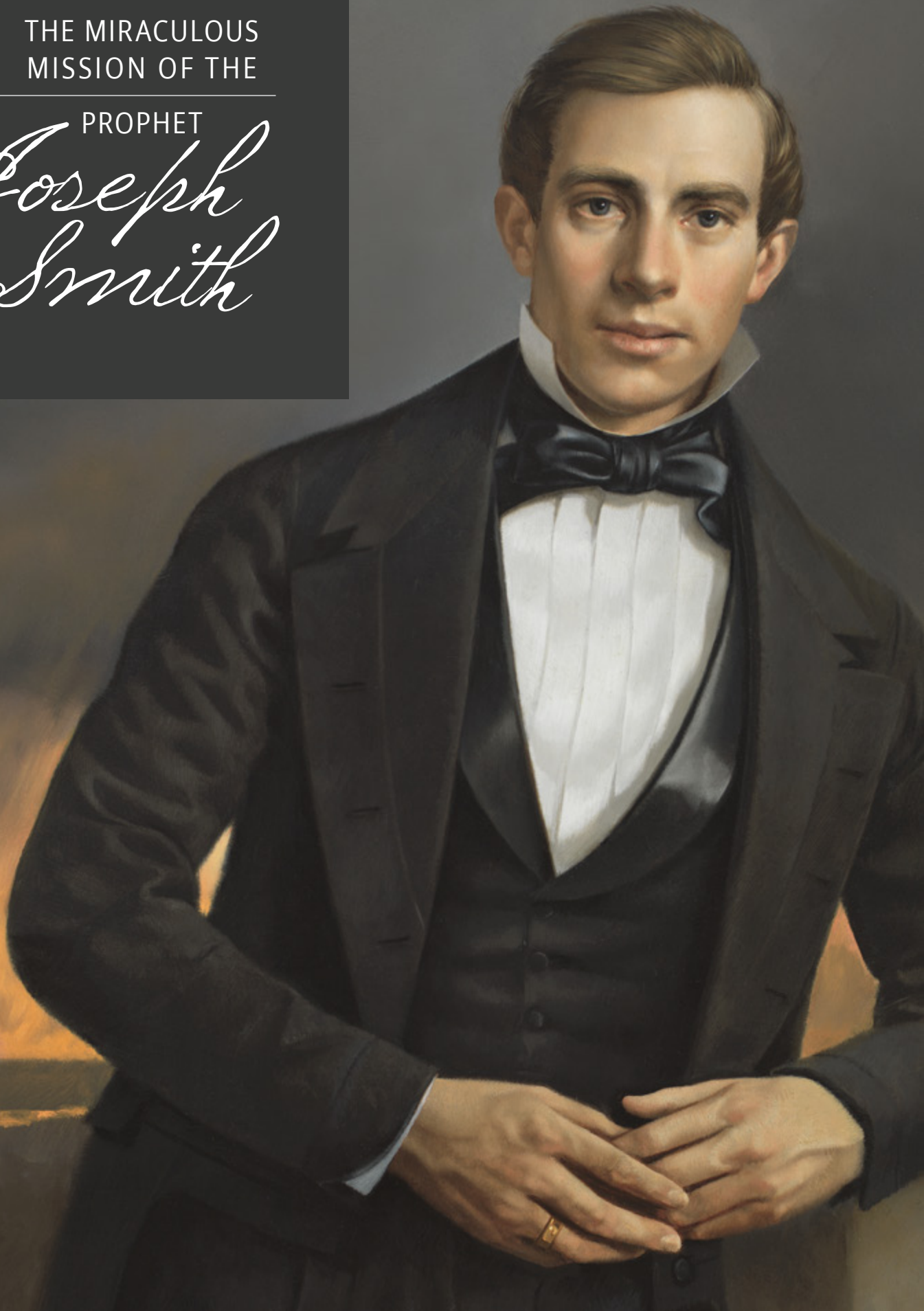
“Whether you have time for extensive service or can give only a few hours a month, your efforts will bless lives and will also bless you in ways you cannot begin to imagine.”

Bonnie L. Oscarson, former Young Women General President, “The Needs before Us,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2017, 27.

THE MIRACULOUS
MISSION OF THE

PROPHET

*Joseph
Smith*



I have chosen to speak of Joseph Smith, the Prophet and the man. In speaking of him, I hope I will contribute to your understanding of the unique and miraculous accomplishments of the founding prophet of this dispensation.

The relationship of knowledge and testimony of Joseph Smith to missionary work is vital. We all know that some investigators accept the principal doctrines of the gospel but simply cannot accept the fact that a 14-year-old was visited by the Father and the Son and that he translated the Book of Mormon and became the prophet we know him to be. Persons who have difficulty with the Prophet Joseph Smith need to learn from this teaching of President Russell M. Nelson:

“Joseph’s mission in mortality was foreordained. His receptive and pristine mind was open to the Lord’s instruction. But, by worldly standards, Joseph was most unlikely. And his task to be the Prophet of this last dispensation seemed totally impossible. This example demonstrates a principle that is often true of how the Lord works: He uses the unlikely to accomplish the impossible!”¹

It is very important that our missionaries have a testimony of the divine calling and miraculous work of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

I am a 65-year student of the life of Joseph Smith. I was

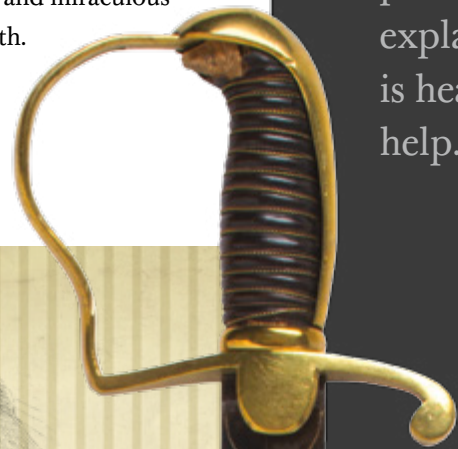


**By President
Dallin H. Oaks**

First Counselor in
the First Presidency

Joseph Smith accomplished more than any mortal man could have accomplished in so short a time. The only possible explanation is heavenly help.

JOSEPH SMITH, BY WILLIAM WHITAKER; LITHOGRAPH COURTESY OF CHURCH HISTORY LIBRARY



At the time of his death, Joseph Smith was serving as both mayor of Nauvoo and lieutenant general of the Nauvoo Legion.

born in 1932, when the Church was just over 100 years old. I believe I am typical of the faithful Latter-day Saints of this second century. We did not meet Joseph Smith, but we feel we know him, and we love him through what he revealed and taught. We are witnesses of the truth of the poetic prediction that “millions shall know ‘Brother Joseph.’”²

I. Joseph Smith, the Prophet

We all know Joseph Smith as the first prophet of this dispensation, the Lord’s instrument in the Lord’s Restoration. But what did the Lord restore through this prophet? Not all Latter-day Saints (and few nonmembers) are aware of the illuminating and massive additions the Lord inspired the Prophet Joseph to make to Christian doctrine. Here is a brief list:

- The nature of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.
- The relative functions of these three members of the Godhead and Their relationship to mortal beings.
- The nature of the Fall of man.
- The purpose of mortal life in furtherance of the Father’s plan for His children to attain their eternal destiny.
- The role of the Atonement of Jesus Christ in assuring immortality and providing the opportunity for eternal life.
- The role of earthly and eternal marriage in the Father’s plan.
- The essential role of priesthood and ordinances in the Father’s plan.
- The essential role of temples and proxy ordinances in the Father’s plan.
- The knowledge that God desires to save all of His children and that every person who has lived upon this earth—whether then knowing of Jesus Christ or not—is capable of attaining the highest heaven hereafter.

Joseph Smith was born on December 23, 1805, in Sharon, Vermont, USA.



- The relationship of the threefold sources of truth about man and the universe: science, scriptures, and continuing revelation.

Anyone who studies even a small part of this list—whether believer or nonbeliever—must acknowledge that Joseph Smith stands at the headwaters of an immense stream of bold and new and precious religious ideas. As we read in *Preach My Gospel*, the fullness of the gospel was restored to the earth through Joseph Smith.³

You may have noted that my list did not specifically mention Joseph’s bringing forth the Book of Mormon, a new volume of scripture that is, of course, the source of many of those new religious ideas. That book deserves special mention. Its title proclaims its most important function: “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.” But beyond that fundamental role, there is more. Here is what a best-selling scholar said of the book:

“The *Book of Mormon* proposes a new purpose for America: becoming a realm of righteousness rather than an empire of liberty. Against increasing wealth and inequality, the *Book of Mormon* advocates the cause of the poor. . . . Against republican government, it proposes righteous rule by judges and kings under God’s law. Against a closed-canon Bible and nonmiraculous religion, the *Book of Mormon* stands for ongoing revelation, miracles, and revelation to all nations. Against skepticism, it promotes belief; against nationalism, a universal Israel. It foresees disaster for the nation if the love of riches, resistance



Joseph Smith stands at the headwaters of an immense stream of bold, new, and precious religious ideas.

to revelation, and Gentile civilization prevail over righteousness, revelation, and Israel.”⁴

More important is just what President Nelson recently said about the Book of Mormon: it “is the instrument by which the promised gathering of Israel will be accomplished.”⁵

As we read in *Preach My Gospel*, the Prophet Joseph Smith said that the Book of Mormon is “the keystone of our religion.”⁶

Most non-Latter-day Saints do not know of Joseph Smith’s great contributions to religious thought. In a notable nationwide study, pollster Gary Lawrence found that nearly half of the people he studied thought Latter-day Saints were secluded and mysterious and had “weird beliefs.”⁷ When he asked interviewers, “What is the main claim of Mormonism?” only one in seven could describe

anything close to the idea of restoration or reestablishment of the original Christian faith. Similarly, when another national survey asked respondents to describe their impression of our religion, not one person suggested the idea of original or restoration Christianity.⁸

These findings remind us that we must not let our missionaries assume too much knowledge about our faith. Those they teach may have heard the word *Mormon*, but missionaries must not assume that most have even the most primitive understanding of the basic principles of our faith.

II. Joseph Smith, the Man

Here are some of my personal thoughts about Joseph Smith’s

remarkable life.⁹ The Joseph Smith I met in my personal research, mostly in Illinois, USA, was a man of the frontier—young, emotional, dynamic, and so loved and approachable by his people that they often called him “Brother Joseph.” His comparative youth overarched his prophetic ministry. He was 14 at the time of the First Vision, 21 when he received the golden plates, and just 23 when he finished translating the Book of Mormon (in less than 60 working days).

Over half of the revelations in our Doctrine and Covenants were given through this prophet when he was 25 or younger. He was 26 when the First Presidency was organized and just over 33 when he escaped from imprisonment in Missouri and resumed leadership of the Saints. He was only 38 and a half when he was murdered.

During his short life, Joseph Smith had more than his share of mortal afflictions. When he was about seven, he suffered an excruciatingly painful leg surgery. Because of the poverty of his family, he had little formal education and as a youth was compelled to work long hours to help put food on the family table. He was attacked physically on many occasions. In the midst of trying to fulfill the staggering responsibilities of his sacred calling, he had to labor as a farmer or merchant to provide a living for his family. He did this without the remarkable spiritual gifts that sustained him in his prophetic calling. The Lord had told him that “in temporal labors thou shalt not have strength, for this is not thy calling” (Doctrine and Covenants 24:9).

In spiritual matters, Joseph Smith had no role models from whom he could learn how to be a prophet and a leader. He had to rely on inexperienced associates. He and they struggled and learned together. Joseph was extremely rapid in his acquisition of knowledge and maturity. He unquestionably had unique gifts. As we would say today, he was “a quick study.” He said he was taught by heavenly

messengers and by other revelations from God, and I believe him.

One of his personal gifts is evidenced by the love and loyalty of the remarkable people who followed him. When Joseph challenged his followers to overcome their mortal imperfections, he did not raise himself above them, and they loved him for it. In a sermon Joseph preached a little over a month before he was murdered, he declared, “I never told you I was perfect; but there is no error in the revelations which I have taught.”¹⁰ Joseph Smith had a “native cheery temperament” (Joseph Smith—History 1:28) that endeared him to almost everyone who knew him. One acquaintance said, “The love the saints had for him was inexpressible.”¹¹ The companionship of his friends was a delight to Joseph, who saw society building and community building as major purposes of the gospel.

I once observed: “All of his life, Joseph Smith lived on the frontier, where men had to pit their brute strength against nature and sometimes against one another. He was a large man, strong and physically active. He delighted in competitive sports, including pulling sticks—a test of physical strength (see *History of the Church*, 5:302). Our archives contain many recollections of his wrestling with friends and acquaintances. On one Sabbath, he and Brigham Young preached to the Saints in Ramus, Illinois, about a day’s ride from Nauvoo. On Monday, before departing Ramus, Joseph matched his wrestling prowess against a man someone described as ‘the bully of Ramus’ (see Joseph Smith Journal, 13 March 1843, recorded by Willard Richards, Joseph Smith Collection, LDS Church Archives). Joseph threw him. I am glad our current conference schedules do not provide the local members opportunity to test the visiting authorities in this manner.”¹²

Few men have been the targets of more assaults on their mission or their memory than Joseph Smith.

Joseph Smith was 21 when he received the golden plates, buried in the Hill Cumorah, and just 23 when he finished translating the Book of Mormon.



I investigated some of these charges by personal research in original records in Illinois, where Joseph lived the last five years of his life. One such charge arose when Joseph Smith, then mayor, and the Nauvoo City Council suppressed the *Nauvoo Expositor*, an opposition newspaper. This suppression focused hostilities against the Church and led directly to Joseph's murder.

Early Latter-day Saint historians, including Elder B. H. Roberts, conceded that this action was illegal. However, as I researched this subject as a young law professor, I was surprised to find a legal basis for this action in the Illinois law of 1844. There were many suppressions of newspapers on the frontier in the period before the Civil War. The guarantee of freedom of the press in the U.S. Constitution was not declared applicable to the actions of city and state governments until 1931, and then only by the U.S. Supreme Court's five-to-four reliance on a constitutional amendment adopted in 1868.¹³ One should judge the actions of Joseph Smith on the basis of the laws and circumstances of his day, not ours.

As students at the University of Chicago, historian Marvin S. Hill and I were intrigued with the little-known fact that five men went to trial in Illinois for the murder of Joseph Smith. For over 10 years we scoured libraries and archives across the nation to find every scrap of information about this 1845 trial and those involved in it. Our book reviewed the words and actions of Illinois citizens who knew Joseph Smith personally—some who loved him and risked their lives for him, and others who hated him



and plotted to kill him. Nothing in our discoveries in the original court records or in the testimony at the lengthy trial disclosed anything that reflected dishonor on the man who was murdered.¹⁴

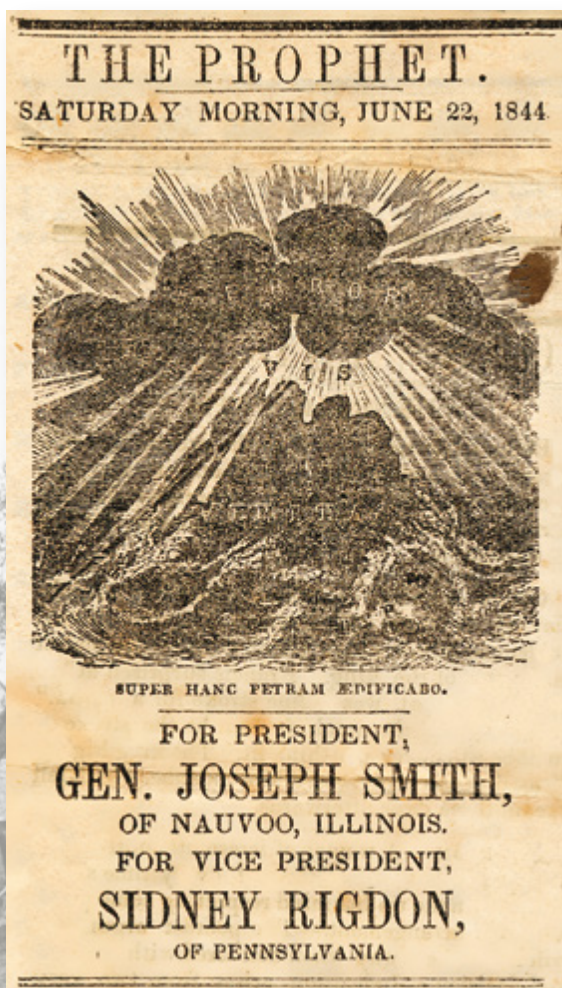
The accessibility of Illinois court records led to another previously untouched area of research on Joseph Smith. Joseph I. Bentley, then a law student at Chicago, and I discovered numerous records of the business activities of Joseph Smith. We coauthored a 1976 *Brigham Young University Law Review* article on this subject.¹⁵ The 1840s followed

Age:	Event:
14	Had First Vision
21	Received the golden plates
23	Finished translating the Book of Mormon
25	Received half of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants
26	First Presidency organized
33	Escaped from jail in Missouri, resumed leadership
38	Martyred

a period of nationwide financial panic and depression. Economic conditions in frontier states like Illinois were ruinous. For example, the biographers of Abraham Lincoln have described his financial embarrassments during this decade, when business was precarious, many obligations were in a default, and lawsuits were common.¹⁶

Joseph Smith's enemies charged him with fraud in various property conveyances, most conducted in behalf of the Church. A succession of court proceedings that extended for nearly a decade examined these charges in meticulous detail. Finally, in 1852, long after the Saints' exodus from Illinois (so there was no conceivable political or other cause for anyone to favor the Saints or their leader), a federal judge concluded this litigation with a decree

Joseph Smith ran for president of the United States in 1844. This flyer announces a speech he was scheduled to give just five days before he was martyred.



that found no fraud or other moral impropriety by Joseph Smith.¹⁷

Scholars knowledgeable about public issues in this period wrote this about Joseph Smith's campaign for the U.S. presidency:

"While he may not have had a serious chance of winning the 1844 national election, he ran shrewdly as a third-party candidate who was definitely serious about encouraging legal reforms in the United States. He hoped and worked to improve public opinions on momentous issues including slavery, religious freedom, prisons, and public lands. He and Robert F. Kennedy remain the only two Americans to be assassinated while they were candidates for the office of United States president."¹⁸

Joseph Smith's character was perhaps best apprehended by men who knew him best and stood closest to him in Church leadership. They adored him and sustained him as a prophet. "His brother Hyrum chose to die at his side. John Taylor, also with him when he was murdered, said: 'I testify before God, angels, and men, that he was a good, honorable, virtuous man . . . —that his private and public character was unimpeachable—and that he lived and died as a man of God' (*The Gospel Kingdom* [1987], 355; see also D&C 135:3). Brigham Young declared: 'I do not think that a man lives on the earth that knew [Joseph Smith] any better than I did; and I am bold to say that, Jesus Christ excepted, no better man ever lived or does live upon this earth' ["Remarks," *Deseret News*, Aug. 27, 1862, 65]."¹⁹

III. Joseph Smith and the Law

As is evident from the examples I have already cited, my longtime interest in legal history included a special interest in Joseph Smith's interactions with the American legal system of his day. Historians have traditionally stated that Joseph Smith was a party to no more than about 40 legal actions. Today, with the

benefit of the work done on *The Joseph Smith Papers*, we know that the number is more than 220. These legal actions ranged “from simple collection cases to complex [litigation] involving sophisticated legal theories. . . . Joseph retained scores of attorneys to . . . bring and defend [such] actions . . . both civil and criminal matters.”²⁰

Drawing on the remarkable wealth of knowledge we have about the Prophet’s life, Latter-day Saint scholar Jeffrey N. Walker has written: “Undeniably, Joseph Smith was intimately, actively, and consistently involved in the American legal system. To ignore these important activities is to miss much of how he spent his time and energies, brilliantly and effectively—so much so that Daniel H. Wells, himself a lawyer, judge, and attorney general, who was well acquainted with Smith, would opine: ‘I have known legal men all my life. Joseph Smith was the best lawyer that I have ever known in my life’ [as quoted in *The Journal of Jesse Nathaniel Smith: Six Decades in the Early West: Diaries and Papers of a Mormon Pioneer, 1834–1906* (1953), 456].”²¹

Three Latter-day Saint authors summarize as follows: “With his heavy involvement in the legal system, Smith quickly learned the rules of the game and legally used those rules to his full lawful advantage, striving to make full use of the new opportunities and protections afforded by the young nation’s laws. His legal choices and conduct make it clear that he was well informed about legal matters and that he took explicit steps to make every appropriate use allowed by the law, whether he was obtaining the copyright for the Book of Mormon under federal law, performing marriages under Ohio law, shaping Nauvoo city ordinances, invoking the full protections of religious freedom, making effective use of new laws that governed the sale of federal land, asserting [the] right of habeas corpus, demanding proper venue, or applying for coverage under the



newly adopted federal bankruptcy law. In his spare time, he studied law books. He knew the precise wording of the Constitution and the specific language of state statutes. No doubt he was well aware of many current legal developments at state and federal levels throughout his lifetime.”²²

Significantly, those three authors add this statement: “As a defendant, he was never convicted of any criminal offense. Whenever he was given a fair hearing, he was found to be an upstanding and honest citizen.”²³

The detailed summaries of the Prophet’s litigation selected and analyzed in the book I have quoted depended on the work of numerous J. Reuben Clark Law School students who took courses on the subject and did the detailed work that led to the book by these three authors. I was fascinated with their description of the opinions of these law students:

“The law students who have used previous iterations of this book as

“Joseph Smith was the best lawyer that I have ever known in my life.”

—Elder Daniel H. Wells, *Utah territorial attorney general*



their textbook have consistently come to the opinion that Joseph was responsible, accountable, loyal, prudent, merciful, cautious, meticulous, law-abiding, patient, positive, resourceful, astute, savvy, a good judge of character, and even legally brilliant (to use some of their own words), especially when it came to protecting the religious and civil rights of others or carrying out the duties with which he had been entrusted. . . . Joseph Smith never lost faith in the Constitution and strived to work solidly under its aegis, even though he was often frustrated, disappointed, and wary of people administering it.”²⁴

IV. Conclusion

In his life, Joseph Smith accomplished more than any mortal man could have accomplished in so short a time. The only possible explanation is heavenly help. I like this summary:

“He translated and published the Book of Mormon in New York; organized the Church in New York, and then resettled it in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois; founded cities, including Kirtland, Far West, and Nauvoo; called and trained hundreds of church leaders; studied Hebrew and the Bible; founded the Relief Society of Nauvoo; ran businesses, alone and with partners; developed real estate and built temples; wrote and published articles and editorials; had a large family and embraced a wide circle of friends; and served in several civic capacities, including commander-in-chief of a large legion of militia men,

as well as the mayor and chief judge for the city of Nauvoo. He spoke regularly in weekly worship services, dedications, and at all-too-frequent funerals; he attracted tens of thousands of followers, prompting waves of converts to immigrate to the United States.”²⁵

In a general conference talk given over 20 years ago, I said this:

“Like other faithful Latter-day Saints, I have built my life on the testimony and mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith. In all of my reading and original research, I have never been dissuaded from my testimony of his prophetic calling and of the gospel and priesthood restoration the Lord initiated through him. I solemnly affirm the testimony Joseph Smith expressed in the famous Wentworth letter of 1842:

“ . . . The standard of truth has been erected; no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing, persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished and the great Jehovah shall say the work is done’ (*Times and Seasons*, 1 March 1842, 709; quoted in Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 5 vols. [1992], 4:1754).”²⁶

Brothers and sisters, I testify of Jesus Christ, our Savior, who appeared with God the Father to the boy prophet and of whom the Father said: “*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*” (Joseph Smith—History 1:17). We have heard our Lord Jesus Christ in revelation since that time. This is His Church. We are holders of the authority of His holy priesthood. We go forward in His cause. I testify of the calling of the Prophet Joseph Smith and of the calling of the prophets who have succeeded him in this great work in which you are engaged. ■

From an address, “Joseph Smith: The Prophet and the Man,” delivered at the mission leadership seminar on June 25, 2018.

The Prophet Joseph Smith was 38 years old when he was martyred with his brother Hyrum at Carthage Jail on June 27, 1844.





“The truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished and the great Jehovah shall say the work is done.”

—Joseph Smith,
in the *Wentworth letter*, March 1,
1842

NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, *Accomplishing the Impossible* (2015), 1–2.
2. “Praise to the Man,” *Hymns*, no. 27.
3. See *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), 37.
4. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (2005), 105.
5. Russell M. Nelson, in Sarah Jane Weaver, “President Nelson Shares the ‘Hopes of My Heart’ with New Mission Leaders,” *Church News*, June 26, 2018, news.lds.org.
6. *Preach My Gospel*, 103; see also the introduction to the Book of Mormon.
7. Gary C. Lawrence, *How Americans View Mormonism: Seven Steps to Improve Our Image* (2008), 32.
8. See Gary C. Lawrence, *How Americans View Mormonism*, 42.
9. This portion through the text at note 10 is adapted from Dallin H. Oaks, “Joseph Smith in a Personal World,” in John W. Welch, ed., *The Worlds of Joseph Smith: A Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress* (2006), 159.
10. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 522.
11. Mary Alice Cannon Lambert, in “Joseph Smith, the Prophet,” *Young Woman’s Journal*, Dec. 1905, 554.
12. Dallin H. Oaks, “Joseph, the Man and the Prophet,” *Ensign*, May 1996, 72.
13. See Dallin H. Oaks, “The Suppression of the *Nauvoo Expositor*,” *Utah Law Review*, vol. 9, no. 4 (1965), 862–903.
14. See Dallin H. Oaks and Marvin S. Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph Smith* (1975).
15. See Dallin H. Oaks and Joseph I. Bentley, “Joseph Smith and Legal Process: In the Wake of the Steamboat *Nauvoo*,” *BYU Law Review*, vol. 1976, no. 3 (1976), 735–82.
16. See David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (1995), 94–118.
17. See Dallin H. Oaks and Joseph I. Bentley, “Joseph Smith and Legal Process,” 781.
18. Gordon A. Madsen, Jeffrey N. Walker, and John W. Welch, eds., *Sustaining the Law: Joseph Smith’s Legal Encounters* (2014), x–xi.
19. Dallin H. Oaks, “Joseph, the Man and the Prophet,” 73.
20. Jeffrey N. Walker, in Gordon A. Madsen and others, eds., *Sustaining the Law*, vi.
21. Jeffrey N. Walker, in Gordon A. Madsen and others, eds., *Sustaining the Law*, vii.
22. Gordon A. Madsen and others, eds., *Sustaining the Law*, xvii.
23. Gordon A. Madsen and others, eds., *Sustaining the Law*, xvii–xviii.
24. Gordon A. Madsen and others, eds., *Sustaining the Law*, xviii.
25. Gordon A. Madsen and others, eds., *Sustaining the Law*, xi–xii.
26. Dallin H. Oaks, “Joseph, the Man and the Prophet,” 73.



Learning to Skin a Skunk

Whenever I think about self-reliance, a phrase from my mission president comes to mind: “Skin your own skunks.” Yes, it’s an odd statement, but there’s a lot of truth in the idea that **there are hard things in our lives** that we can’t ask others to face for us.

So how do we “skin our own skunks” in regards to emotional self-reliance? How do we handle disappointments and **learn to cope with all our emotions?**

Thankfully, we aren’t left in the dark—resources abound. We can find a few of these in “14 Ways to Get Your Emotional Health Back on Track.” More importantly, **we can simplify life** as we keep the commandments (see page 42).

Learning to respond to everything life throws at us is a process. Being emotionally self-reliant doesn’t mean we’ll always feel the way we want to. It means that, through the grace of Jesus Christ and our own efforts, **we’ll be able to manage emotions in healthy and productive ways.** President M. Russell Ballard gives us some practical advice for achieving this balance (see page 46).

As we **strive for emotional self-reliance**, we might feel like a weak little sparrow (see page 44), but as we put in the effort and partner with Heavenly Father, we can be confident that one day we will “mount up with wings as eagles” (Isaiah 40:31), which is a fancy way of saying we’ll have the strength to skin our own skunks.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather Johnson".

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YOUNG ADULTS



BEST ADVICE . . .

Young adults share the best advice they've ever received about taking care of their emotional and mental health:

"Make time for yourself to exercise, clear your mind, and get rid of any toxic thoughts and feelings you have."

—Brianna Forrester, Washington, USA

"Don't be afraid to see a therapist. With the proper combination of spiritual and temporal treatments, I have been able to live my life and am awaiting a mission call so I can serve the Lord."

—Nate Seal, Utah, USA

"Have moderation in all good things while centering your life around Christ."

—Nan Crews, Louisiana, USA

"Remember to get enough sleep. It sounds funny, but it's actually super important!"

—Sydney Smith, California, USA

What's the best advice you've ever received about not being too hard on yourself? Submit your response at ensign.lds.org by January 31, 2019.

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ABOUT THE YA AUTHORS

Lori Fuller is an editor for the *Friend* magazine. She loves finding new bands, listening to news on the radio, and cooking food from around the world. Sometimes she writes stuff.



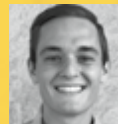
Valerie Durrant is from California, USA, and has been married to her husband, Ryan, for four years. She recently became a mother to a baby boy. She loves yoga, painting, reading, and hiking.



Heather J. Johnson is a writer and editor. She loves waterskiing and going on winter adventures in the mountains. She favors British literature and recommends the use of "y'all" in everyday conversation.



Dave Clarke loves spending time with his wife and daughter. When he's not crunching numbers as an accountant, he can be found spending time outside, running, biking, or watching basketball.



Alex Hugie is from Oregon, USA. He graduated from Brigham Young University with a bachelor's degree in English. He has particular interests in studying young adult literature, writing wonky short stories and novels, and drinking milk.



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DIGITAL ONLY

Finding a Mental Health Professional Who's Right for You

By Kevin Theriot

14 Ways to Get Your Emotional Health Back on Track

By Heather J. Johnson

Why I'm Not Afraid of Mental Health Counseling Anymore

By Dave Clarke

How Effective Are Your Goals?

By Alex Hugie





THE GOSPEL

An Eternal Life Hack

By Lori Fuller
Church Magazines

Have you ever thought about how keeping the commandments makes life so much easier?

Last month, some friends and I were catching each other up on our week. One friend shared that he was taking on the burden of his mom's alcoholism recovery. He was just younger than me, and that sounded like the worst task ever.

Later that night, the conversation moved to how expensive smoking is and how someone we knew had been going through a pack of cigarettes a day. (Do the math; it's so much money!) She was trying to quit and was going through withdrawals. Her son was really happy she was quitting, though. His dad had died of a drug overdose, which made any drug use that much scarier for this kid.

Finally, our conversation ended on coffee—how much people drank every morning (and afternoon and sometimes night) and how they missed their lattes now that they couldn't afford them daily.

As I drove home, thinking over all these conversations, I had the thought, "The Word of Wisdom is basically the biggest life hack ever." (If you don't know, a "life hack" is a way to make your life better, live more efficiently, etc. As someone online described it, a life hack is what was formerly known as "a good





idea.”) It’s as if God said, “Here’s a way to save you money, help you stay healthy, protect your kids, and avoid really tough emotional burdens, including your own and others’ addictions.” It’s almost as if God anticipated all the problems we’d be up against and gave us a way to avoid half of them.



With any of God’s commandments, we have the choice to follow them or ignore them. But as I thought of the Word of Wisdom as a set of guidelines from God that both anticipates and protects us from so many challenges, I thought, “What if all of God’s commandments work that way?” What if a loving Heavenly Father, who has experienced this life and its challenges, has given a guidebook to help us navigate the world as painlessly as possible? And what if He gave that to us because He loves us and wants to protect us?

Want to be content with what you have, to be happy and grateful? “Thou

shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house” (Exodus 20:17).

Want to avoid guilt, incarceration, crippling bail and court fees? Want to keep people’s trust and respect—and your job? “Thou shalt not steal” (Exodus 20:15).

Want to stay close to God so that He can guide and direct you and help carry your burdens? “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matthew 22:37).

The list goes on and on. Every single commandment can protect us from heartache, make our lives easier, keep us out of trouble, or just help us find peace. And all with so very little personal cost or inconvenience. (And no hidden fees!)

I certainly don’t want to minimize God’s commandments as mere guidelines or helpful life hacks. They’re much bigger than that. But they’re also really that simple.



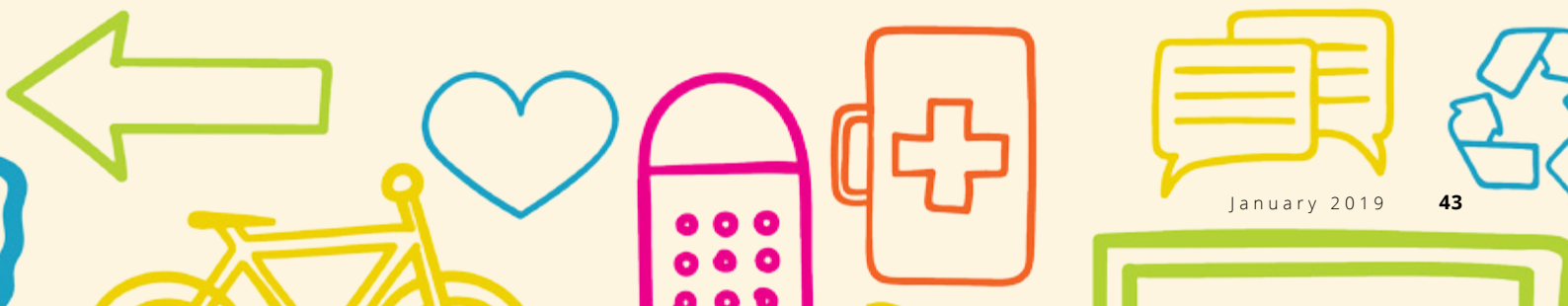
Heavenly Father can’t protect us from everything. But as a loving parent, He would like to prepare us and protect us from the cost of our choices—by guiding us to make better ones.

Of course, we can keep the commandments and still have bad things happen. So why bother?

Because we’ll never know what we *are* being protected from through our obedience. Because it helps free us from a life of self-inflicted wounds. Because obedience helps us stay close to God. Because it puts us in position to repent when we choose wrong. Because we trust God to know how to bless and protect us.

The list goes on and on. It is so much longer than the list of reasons *not* to keep the commandments.

For better or worse, God lets me choose how obedient I want to be. I get to choose how much I open myself to the blessings He has for me. So why keep the commandments? Because I want my life wide open to the help God is trying to give. ■



We need to rely on Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and put in our own effort as we aim to be emotionally self-reliant.

Teach Me to Fly

Achieving Emotional Self-Reliance in the Lord's Way

By Valerie Durrant

When we think of a baby bird learning to fly, we often picture its last heroic attempt: the fledgling flopping out of the nest, spreading its wings, and soaring into the sky. Before that final success, though, there were likely many failures that ended with the bird not soaring into the sky but rather plummeting to the ground.

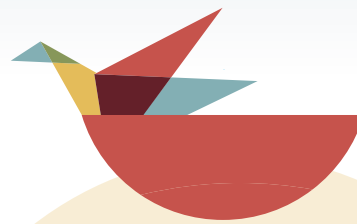
Like a bird learning to fly, we too may fall down over and over as we set out to achieve emotional self-reliance on our own. But if we turn to the Lord for help and put in the effort, we can learn how to be resilient when life doesn't go quite as planned and to rely on Him when trials become too much for us to bear on our own.

Learning to Fly

If learning to fly is a painful process, why would a bird ever leave the nest in the first place? Because of its mother. For the first part of her babies' lives, the mother bird will bring food directly to them in the nest. But in time, she starts leaving food outside the nest so the fledglings must venture out of their comfort zone to obtain nourishment.

It's the same process we endure as we learn to become emotionally self-reliant—but we are not expected to be able to fly completely on our own just yet.

Similar to a mother bird allowing her babies to fall out of the nest, Heavenly Father allows us to go through trials and experiences that can be painful, frustrating, and discouraging. His plan of salvation is designed to help us become like Him, so every challenge we face can be an opportunity to learn and grow. Like the mother bird, Heavenly



Father still provides us with comfort and direction because only with His help can we achieve and maintain our emotional and mental health.

Flapping Our Own Wings

Even though Heavenly Father is our partner, we shouldn't expect Him to do everything for us. He wants us to use our agency and the resources He has given us on our path to emotional self-reliance.

For example, when we undergo heartache, anger, or loss, He wants us to counsel with Him, but we shouldn't just stop there—we need to do our best to act on the promptings He gives us; to keep the commandments; to attend the temple to seek peace, comfort, and answers; to be mindful of prophetic counsel; and to trust in His plan for us.

Heavenly Father has given us many tools to achieve emotional self-reliance, but if we have given it our all and still find ourselves stuck or struggling with

our mental health, additional resources may be necessary. There are certainly times when you may need to turn to a mental health professional or receive counsel from your bishop for further guidance in order to move forward.

Keep in mind, though, that if we ask for advice from others every time we run into a roadblock, we may lose invaluable opportunities to learn and grow on our own. Again, we need to put in an adequate amount of our own effort to move forward.

Following the Lord's Pattern

In Doctrine and Covenants section 9, Oliver Cowdery is chastised for trying to translate the Book of Mormon plates without taking any “thought save it was to ask [God]” (verse 7). He is then admonished to “study it out in [his] mind,” come to his own conclusion, and then “ask [God] if it be right” (verse 8).

When we follow this pattern, Heavenly Father is not abandoning us to rely completely on our own abilities

and thoughts as we care for our mental health. He is allowing us the opportunity to learn how to exercise our agency. Seeking out answers to our questions and finding solutions to our problems with His help is what will help us ultimately become like Him. With this in mind, we can ask Him to show us how we can become more balanced emotionally instead of simply asking Him to make us better.

As we exercise our agency over and over again in this manner whenever our emotional well-being is tested, we slowly become better and more confident. While we don't have to master flying just yet, we can rest assured that He is with us all along the way and rejoice in the fact that He is helping us become better bit by bit. Each day there is another opportunity to reach new heights—preparing us for the day when we will be able to fly on our own. ■

The author lives in California, USA.



**By President
M. Russell
Ballard**

Acting
President of
the Quorum
of the Twelve
Apostles

I have a few suggestions that I hope will be valuable to those of you concerned with balancing life's demands.

EIGHT SUGGESTIONS FOR Balancing Life's Demands

1. *First, think about your life and set your priorities.* Find some quiet time regularly to think deeply about where you are going and what you will need to do to get there. Jesus, our exemplar, often “withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed” (Luke 5:16). We need to do the same thing occasionally to rejuvenate ourselves spiritually as the Savior did. Write down the tasks you would like to accomplish each day. Keep foremost in mind the sacred covenants you have made with the Lord as you write down your daily schedules.

2. *Second, set short-term goals that you can reach.* Set goals that are well balanced—not too many nor too few, and not too high nor too low. Write down your attainable goals and work on them according to their importance. Pray for divine guidance in your goal setting.

3. *Third, through wise budgeting, control your real needs and measure them carefully against your many wants in life.* Far too many individuals and families have incurred too much debt. Be careful of the many attractive offers to borrow money. It is much easier to borrow money than it is to pay it back. There are no shortcuts to financial security. We never will have balance in our lives unless our finances are securely under control.

Remember to always pay a full tithing.



4. *Fourth, stay close to your spouse, children, relatives, and friends.* They will help you keep a balance in your life. Build relationships with your family and friends through open and honest communication.

A good marriage and good family relationships can be maintained through gentle, loving, thoughtful communication. Remember that often a glance, a wink, a nod, or a touch will say more than words. A sense of humor and good listening are also vital parts of good communication.

5. *Fifth, study the scriptures.* They offer one of the best sources we have to keep in touch with the Spirit of the Lord. One of the ways I have gained my sure knowledge that Jesus is the Christ is through my study of the scriptures. President Russell M. Nelson has asked members of the Church to prayerfully study the Book of Mormon every day.

6. *Sixth, we must schedule time on our daily calendars for*

sufficient rest, exercise, and relaxation if we are to enjoy a healthy and balanced life. Good physical appearance enhances our dignity and self-respect.

7. *Seventh, hold weekly family home evening.* We must not lose this special opportunity to “teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:77), which will lead families to eternal life. Satan is always working to destroy our testimonies, but he will not have the power to tempt or disturb us beyond our strength to resist when we are studying the gospel and living its commandments.

8. *My last suggestion is to pray often.* You can know the right decisions to make each day through constant, sincere prayer. When I am in tune spiritually, I find that I can balance everything in my life much more easily.

I realize that other suggestions could be added to these. However, I believe that when we focus on a few basic objectives, we are more likely to be able to manage the

many demands that life makes on us. Remember, too much of anything in life can throw us off-balance. At the same time, too little of the important things can do the same thing. King Benjamin counseled “that all these things are done in wisdom and order” (Mosiah 4:27).

Often the lack of clear direction and goals can waste away our time and energy and contribute to imbalance in our lives. Our main goal should be to seek “immortality and eternal life” (Moses 1:39). With this as our goal, why not eliminate from our lives the things that clamor for and consume our thoughts, feelings, and energies without contributing to our reaching that goal?

Just do the very best you can each day. Do the basic things and, before you realize it, your life will be full of spiritual understanding that will confirm to you that your Heavenly Father loves you. When a person knows this, then life will be full of purpose and meaning, making balance easier to maintain. ■

From an April 1987 general conference address.



A goal without a process can get in the way of progress.



Keeping Your Goals from Getting in the Way of Personal Growth

By Adam M. Moore

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist

I love all things Italian. I have always dreamed of wandering the streets of Rome, speaking to the people there as if I had been born in Italy myself. A few years ago, I saw a language-learning program for Italian on sale, and I immediately purchased it. I told everyone on social media my goal to learn Italian that year and make a trip to Italy to practice my new language skills.

I had two interesting experiences that taught me something important about how goals can get in the way of progress. First, publicly announcing my goal convinced my mind that I was making more progress than I really was. Although I hadn't yet learned even one word of Italian, I got a lot of pats on the back but no accountability.¹ Second, after spending an hour or two trying to learn Italian, I looked at the massive gap between where I was and where I wanted to be (full fluency in Italian) and felt overwhelmed and disheartened.

Between the false progress I thought I was making and my frustration with my lack of progress, I never got back into the learning program again. It's now collecting dust somewhere in my basement. I still haven't visited Italy, either.

Goals and Growth

Plenty of evidence demonstrates that properly implemented goal setting can help us get things done.² But in this case, my goal to learn Italian wasn't enough, because growth doesn't happen just because I have a goal; it comes from making the effort to achieve it (see Mosiah 4:27).

How we measure progress can determine whether or not we are successful. Maybe you set goals for daily scripture study or increased one-on-one time with family members. These goals are easy to define, easy to measure, and you can see immediate progress with many of them.

But what about goals that involve *becoming*? What if your goals are focused on a change, an identity, or a character trait you want to achieve? These might include goals to be more patient, recover from compulsive

pornography use, or become more like Jesus Christ.

This is where things can get complicated, because measuring progress can be particularly challenging when it comes to goals that are about personal growth. They are harder to measure because they may be achieved only over a lifetime of work and will likely require continued personal effort even into the next phase of our immortal journey.

The Binary Dilemma

Perhaps the biggest problem here is that sometimes measuring the success of our goals can get us into a *binary* mind-set. Binary means off/on, yes/no, pass/fail. It's one or the other. You've either achieved your goal or you haven't.

Problem 1: Too Much Failure

One problem with this binary mind-set is that we often feel we have

succeeded only after we have fully obtained what we're seeking. It's easy for us to believe that until we have entirely completed our goal, or arrived fully, we are failing. This is especially true with goals of *becoming*, because we may never experience the feeling of complete success in our mortal lifetime—which could easily leave us feeling like a failure every single day of our lives.

I think that most of us have run into this aspect of what I call the *binary dilemma* in our quest to achieve our divine potential. It's just the kind of tool the adversary can use to keep us stuck or feeling hopeless. If we feel like we're failing every day, it's often not long before we quit trying.

Problem 2: Too Much Success

There's another way the binary dilemma can keep us from doing the necessary work on our journey of

becoming. With the earlier problem, we gave up because we couldn't see success; the problem here is seeing too much success or false success. Let me show you how this happens.

I'm a family therapist and have focused most of my career on helping people who are struggling to recover from compulsive pornography use. People set goals all the time about stopping the behavior. It seems like a reasonable thing to do—promise to stop doing something that is causing harm to ourselves and others. But I have repeatedly seen people fail to experience the progress they expected when they set this goal.

Imagine being the person promising to never view pornography again. The moment we set the goal and share it with another person, we immediately feel a sense of relief. We feel optimistic that perhaps this really was our last time indulging. In fact, since our goal is binary—either don't look at pornography (pass) or look at it (fail)—we are either passing or failing at any given moment.

Here we see the opposite but equally problematic side of the binary dilemma. From the very moment we set this binary goal, we feel successful because we're not currently viewing pornography right then. And in fact, we will feel successful every moment afterward, all the way right up until the second we turn back to pornography again.

The reason that falling into the binary dilemma is such a problem is that unless we are doing the emotional, spiritual, mental, or relational work required to heal or change, we're experiencing only



the illusion of success. We're not really doing any of the work required to progress toward our goal. Then, when we realize we have failed, we're faced with the temptation to give up.

We can apply this to any of the *becoming* goals mentioned earlier. If our goal is to be a patient parent, we will feel successful up until the point that we act impatiently. We'll believe we've become a patience champion. But without the work required to make real progress, when our patience is tested, we suddenly realize we are not acting the way we wanted, and we may feel like a failure.

A Better Way of Becoming

In both cases—resigning yourself to failure the moment you make one mistake or feeling like you've changed without real effort—the goal itself is actually getting in the way of progress, either because the distance to your destination is overwhelming or because feeling like you've already reached the destination is keeping you from doing any of the work necessary to actually change. In both situations, the goal has become demotivating. Let me be clear. I'm not saying don't set goals. But I am suggesting a more effective way to engage in your journey of becoming.

Rather than focusing solely on the outcome of the goal, put your energy into the process of becoming. In a process, every moment is

Rather than focusing solely on the outcome of the goal, put your energy into the process of becoming.

important. You can enjoy feelings of small daily successes. You can learn from setbacks, rather than treating them as signs of failure. In a process of becoming, you can find joy in each moment—grateful for the opportunity to be a work in progress. You trust that as long as you are *working the process*, which is an essential part of exercising faith in the Lord, reaching your goal will be the natural outcome.

After my wife and I were married, we spent our way into some credit card debt. We had not yet honed our financial skills. The debt loomed over us for over a decade after our first year of marriage. It was daunting to look at the balance on the statements each month. Staring at that amount would sometimes plunge me into shame about my financial choices, and I would start to lose hope that I could ever escape the burden of the debt.

Rather than panic or give up, however, my wife and I decided to put together a process that worked for us. We worked to be cautious with our spending; we made at least the minimum payment each month, and we were regularly accountable to each other to avoid getting into more debt. Like I mentioned, it took us more than 10 years to pay off that debt. But we paid it off through our consistent daily efforts at working the process and being financially wise. For us, a goal without a process would have just been a wish or a dream.

We all have goals of becoming. We know where we want to be, even if we struggle to get there. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, "Every one of us aspires to a more Christlike life than we often succeed in living."³ If we will focus on the process of reaching our goals rather than how close or how far we are from where we want to be, we can trust that we are making progress, even if much of our change and growth is only visible in hindsight. ■

NOTES

1. Researchers have found that announcing goals to others can give you a false sense of progress and decrease your motivation to complete your goals. See Peter M. Gollwitzer, Paschal Sheeran, Verena Michalski, and Andrea E. Seifert, "When Intentions Go Public: Does Social Reality Widen the Intention-Behavior Gap?" *Psychological Science*, vol. 20, no. 5 (May 2009), 612–18, psych.nyu.edu/gollwitzer/09_Gollwitzer_Sheeran_Seifert_Michalski_When_Intentions_.pdf.
2. See Peter M. Gollwitzer and Paschal Sheeran, "Implementation Intentions and Goal Achievement: A Meta-analysis of Effects and Processes," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 38 (2006), 69–119, sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0065260106380021.
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Be Ye Therefore Perfect—Eventually," *Ensign*, Nov. 2017, 42.



3 When you notice yourself comparing where you are to where you want to be, focus on this one question: "What single, small decision can I make right now to move forward in my process of becoming?"

2 Bring some people into your life who can hold you accountable each day for participating in your process of becoming.

1 If you know the kind of person you want to be, pray about a few daily behaviors you can engage in that will help you move in that direction.

4 Remember that "by small and simple things are great things brought to pass" (Alma 37:6).

5 When you slip up, **don't give up.** Evaluate what led to the mistake and whether your process should be modified to help prevent it from happening in the future.

6 Keep moving forward with faith in the Lord.

A Process for Progress

In your journey to become, here are some tips that can help you continue to progress and avoid getting caught in the binary dilemma.



Elisabeth

By Aspen Stander
Church Magazines

Elisabeth, mother of John the Baptist, set a remarkable example of faith and humility.

Elisabeth was a woman of great faith and great humility. Both she and her husband, Zacharias, were “righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6). Both were descended from the priestly lineage of Aaron. They had grown very old together, their lives spent faithfully serving the Lord as husband and wife, but they remained childless (see Luke 1:7).

Infertility and the Abrahamic Covenant

It was at this time, when Elisabeth was beyond childbearing age, that the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias as he was working in the temple and announced that Elisabeth would bear a son. And not just any son—their son had been reserved for that time to act as a forerunner to Jesus Christ, to prepare the children of Israel for the coming of the Lord (see Luke 1:17). Elisabeth was soon pregnant with the child later known as John the Baptist.

After John was born, Zacharias prophesied of John’s calling as “the prophet of the Highest” (Luke 1:76). John would prepare the way for the Lord, the Messiah who would “perform

the mercy promised to our fathers, and . . . remember his holy covenant; the *oath* which he swore to our father Abraham” (Luke 1:72–73; emphasis added). Interestingly, Elisabeth’s name in Hebrew means “God is my oath.”¹ One of the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant—an oath that God made with Abraham—is posterity as numerous as the stars in the sky (see Genesis 22:17). We are heirs to the blessings of Abraham, and through him all the families of the earth, including ours, will be blessed (see Abraham 2:11). Elisabeth shows us that women who make and keep covenants with God will eventually have the opportunity to bear children, whether that happens in this life or the next.

Prophecy and the Holy Ghost

Because Elisabeth had lived a righteous life, the Holy Ghost was her constant companion. When Elisabeth was six months pregnant, the angel announced another miraculous pregnancy to one of her relatives. Gabriel appeared to Mary, a betrothed young woman, and told her that she would conceive and bear the Son of God. Gabriel told Mary that Elisabeth had

also conceived, so Mary decided to visit her. The baby in Elisabeth’s womb leapt for joy when Mary arrived, and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost (see Luke 1:41).

Elisabeth then exclaimed:

“Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

“And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Luke 1:42–43).

Elisabeth’s humility and spiritual receptivity are remarkable, but what’s even more remarkable is that she had no prior knowledge of Mary’s pregnancy. Elisabeth discerned the miraculous nature of Mary’s condition through the influence of the Holy Ghost. She received the gift of prophecy as she bore testimony of Jesus Christ and showed reverence for His mother long before His earthly ministry began.

Sisterhood and Empathy

Both Elisabeth’s and Mary’s pregnancies seemed to be biologically impossible. Elisabeth was seemingly infertile and beyond childbearing years. Mary was a virgin. These faithful women recognized the truth that “with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37).



Elisabeth comforted and strengthened Mary through the trials and joys of pregnancy.

Elisabeth played an important role in comforting and strengthening her young, newly pregnant relative. Because Elisabeth had faced reproach for her inability to have children, she could show empathy for Mary, who may have feared reproach for her pregnancy out of wedlock. Like Elisabeth and Mary, women need each other’s love and wisdom, friendship and sisterhood in order to grow in the gospel and in their responsibilities as women.

Women also need each other’s support during trials. Elisabeth provided spiritual, physical, and emotional support to Mary. She took Mary into her care at a time when both women felt vulnerable and lonely, and the two were strengthened together. They rejoiced

together in the “impossibility” that had become their reality.

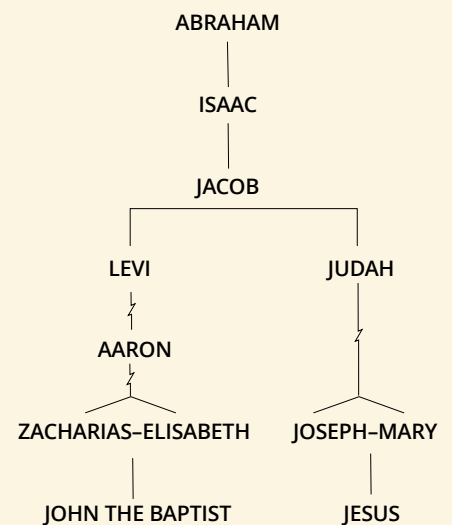
Mary stayed in Elisabeth’s home for three months (see Luke 1:56), and we can only guess how they must have bonded during their shared trials and joys of pregnancy. Maybe they were unfamiliar with all the changes happening in their bodies. Maybe they felt overwhelmed by their callings to bear the Son of God and the prophet to declare His coming. But surely women need the influence of other righteous women, and we know they marveled, they rejoiced, and they prepared one another for their divinely given calling to motherhood. ■

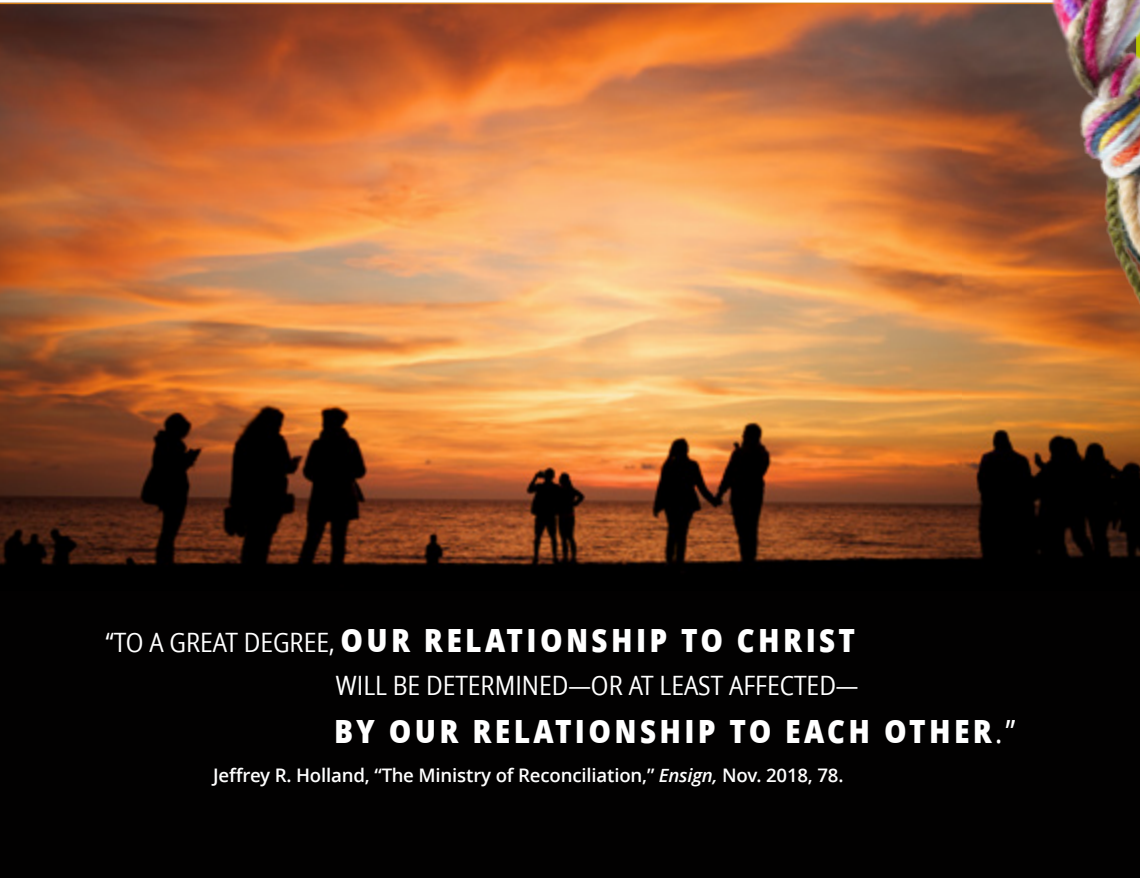
NOTE

1. *A Dictionary of First Names*, 2nd ed. (2006), “Elisabeth.”

THE PRIESTLY LINEAGE

Both Elisabeth and Zacharias descended from the tribe of Levi through Aaron (see Luke 1:5). Their son, John the Baptist, preserved the priesthood lineage to prepare the way for Jesus Christ.





“TO A GREAT DEGREE, **OUR RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST** WILL BE DETERMINED—OR AT LEAST AFFECTED—**BY OUR RELATIONSHIP TO EACH OTHER.**”

Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Ministry of Reconciliation,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 78.



Our Greatest Teachers

“Along with the bright colors of happiness and joy, the darker-colored threads of trial and tragedy are woven deeply into the fabric of our Father’s plan. These struggles, although difficult, often become our greatest teachers.”

Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Wounded,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 84.

PONDER THIS . . .

Why do I serve others?

See Joy D. Jones, “For Him,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 50–52.



SHARE YOUR

THOUGHTS on the *Ensign* Facebook page, or record your thoughts in your journal.

DIVING DEEPER

There Is *Always* Hope

No matter what hardships, disappointments, or heartbreak we face, there is always hope. If you are looking for comfort or courage, consider reading these talks:

- Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Believe, Love, Do,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 46–49.
- Neil L. Andersen, “Wounded,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 83–86.
- Henry B. Eyring, “Try, Try, Try,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 90–93.
- Ronald A. Rasband, “Be Not Troubled,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 18–21.
- D. Todd Christofferson, “Firm and Steadfast in the Faith of Christ,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 30–33.



HOW TO MINISTER TO LOST SHEEP



1. "We are to identify the lost sheep.
2. "We search after them until they are found.
3. "When they are found, we may have to lay them on our shoulders to bring them home.
4. "We surround them with friends upon their return."

Elder Gary E. Stevenson, "Shepherding Souls," *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 112.



More Online

Find out how recent conference messages blessed these individuals' lives:

- Maryssa Dennis, "His Name, My Heart," lds.org/go/E1191
- Jess Verzello, "General Conference and Being Made Whole," lds.org/go/E1193
- Clarissa McIntire, "The Conference Treat That Kept Me from Conference," lds.org/go/E1194

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

I try to teach my children to live the gospel, but sometimes it feels like they are not "getting it." What can I do?

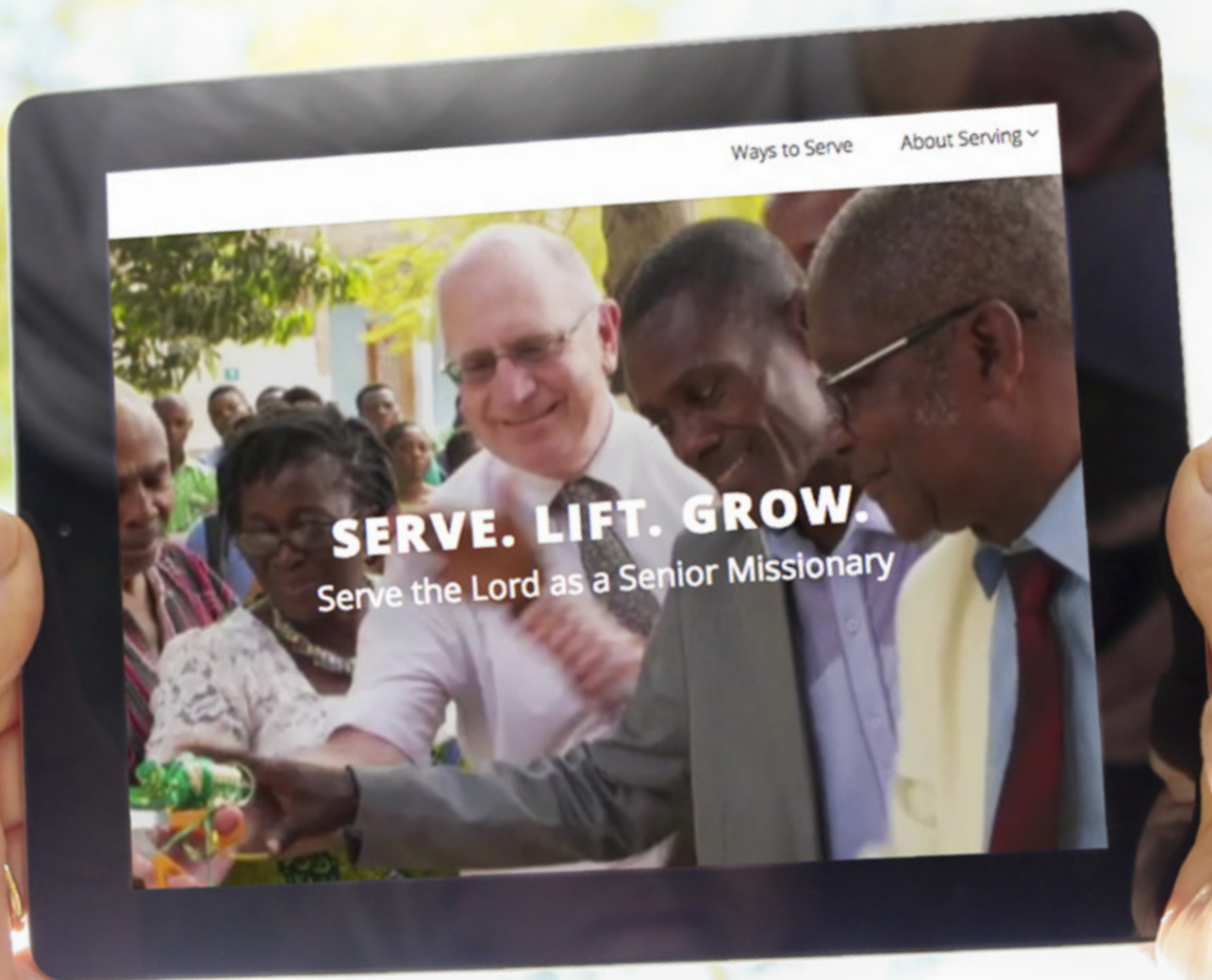
"I believe that it is less a question of whether our children are 'getting it' in the midst of our teaching, such as while striving to read the scriptures or to have family home evening . . . and more a question of whether we, as parents, are exercising faith enough to follow the Lord's counsel to diligently live, teach, exhort, and set forth expectations that are inspired by the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is an effort driven by our faith—our belief that one day the seeds sown in their youth will take root and begin to sprout and grow."

Elder Steven R. Bangerter of the Seventy, "Laying the Foundation of a Great Work," *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 17.

What questions did you have that were answered by something you heard at conference? **SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE** on our Facebook page: facebook.com/ensign.magazine.

Senior Missionary Service Made Simple

A new Church website provides answers
for seniors seeking mission guidance.



By Margot Hovley
Church Magazines

For Marcia and Rodney Ford from Bountiful, Utah, serving a mission together as a senior couple was a long-time dream they kept alive while they raised their family. When they finally opened their mission call to New Jersey, they were surprised—and delighted. They threw themselves into the work, helping with local leadership and working with the people of the area. They grew to truly love the people they served, forming lifelong connections and finding so much joy and fulfillment in missionary work that they went on to serve again and again in missions around the world.

But since that day in 2004 when the Fords opened their first mission call, the process for getting ready to serve as a senior missionary has changed in new and exciting ways. And never have you been so needed. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said: “We need thousands of more couples serving in the missions of the Church. Every mission president pleads for them. Everywhere they serve, our couples bring a maturity to the work that no number of 19-year-olds, however good they are, can provide.”¹ This plea goes out to all seniors, married or single.

The Church has launched a new website that will make it easier than ever to learn the perfect way for seniors to serve. This powerful new tool will answer nearly all your questions about serving as a senior missionary.

Serve. Lift. Grow.

Start by visiting **senior missionary.lds.org** for a guided tour through the various opportunities available to seniors.

There are three main areas to experience.

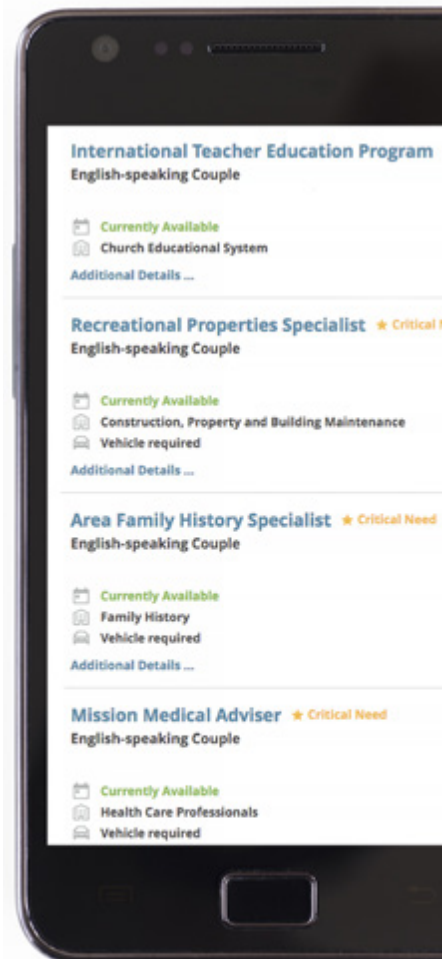
1 First, you’ll see a section titled **“What are the options?”** Click “Get Started,” and you’ll be presented with over 30 meaningful service options—whether close to home or across the world—that will allow you to serve the Lord and bless others. The wide variety of mission types are briefly described, with videos showing examples of seniors at work—helping you know what to expect with each kind of missionary service shown.

2 The next section, **“What is the best mission for me?”** asks you to log in to your LDS Account, which provides the system with basic information about you. Then you will be asked a series of questions that help the website tailor the opportunities it presents to you.

3 Lastly, you’ll see the section called **“Can I browse a list of opportunities?”** Click here to see a list of possible missions, curated by the information you’ve provided. You can filter your results by priority of need, couple or single, length of service, monthly cost, country or region, and language need. Once the list is filtered to your specifications, you can mark ones you are interested in. These will be compiled into a list for you, helping you see the opportunities at a glance. You can choose several favorites to ponder and compare, and the system will remember your selections for the next time you log in.

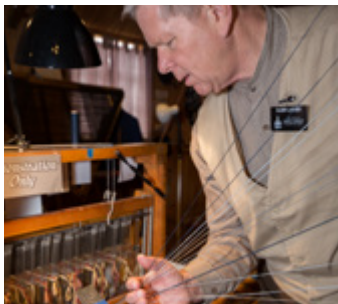
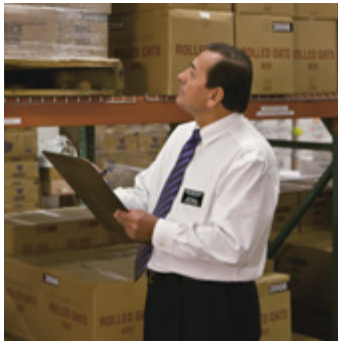
Once you have narrowed your choices, the website allows you to **submit them to your bishop** in a simple and easy process. He will then help expedite your calling through the necessary steps.

The website is a great resource of general



Members or priesthood leaders seeking additional assistance can call 801-240-0897 or e-mail seniormission@ldschurch.org.

There is a surprising variety of mission opportunities awaiting seniors.



information about missionary service. Tabs across the top give you quick access to the different areas of the site. The “Ways to Serve” tab will take you to the descriptions of mission types, where you can review the videos and learn more. The “About Serving” tab describes full-time missions, Church-service missions, and missions in a foreign country. In the “Search Opportunities” tab, your curated list of possible missions can be viewed at any time.

Seeking Service

In a church where we don't seek out callings, it may seem strange to initiate the process of a mission call. But this is exactly what is needed—and encouraged. Potential full-time missionaries are encouraged to make three to six specific choices on the website. President Russell M. Nelson has said, “Good inspiration is based upon good information.”² Be detailed in your interests and past experiences to allow for the best possible fit.

If you have the finances, health, and family support to allow it, please consider a full-time mission. Thousands of full-time opportunities are available and are the greatest priority. For those unable to leave home, many Church-service opportunities are available.

While full-time positions are limited to couples or single sisters, single brothers are also greatly needed in Church-service mission capacities.

Ask nearly any young missionary about the impact senior missionaries have, and they will tell story after story about how critically senior missionaries are needed, especially in developing countries where the local leadership is often new and inexperienced. A senior missionary's Church-service experience can be immeasurably important to these areas.

Kenny Hovley, who served as a young missionary in the Sierra Leone Freetown Mission in

West Africa in 2015, had this comment: “I can’t imagine how we could have functioned without the help of the senior missionaries. The Church is growing so rapidly in West Africa that an average of one new unit is being created every day. You can imagine that with that rate of growth, there is a huge need for the help and guidance of experienced members. Many more are needed than what we had. I know Africa could be challenging for those who have never lived there, but living situations for missionaries are very safe and comfortable for the most part. Please consider serving these choice new brothers and sisters in the gospel who need you so desperately. Don’t be afraid. God will strengthen and bless you.”

The Needs Are Varied and Great

You might be surprised at the variety of mission types for which seniors are needed. The website lists 13 categories (see below), with one to five options to consider within each category. Information and videos are provided throughout.

- Teach and Fellowship
- Interact with the Public
- Preserve and Share Church History
- Help People Find Their Ancestors
- Preserve Family History Records
- Provide Humanitarian Aid
- Feed the Hungry
- Help People Become Self-Reliant
- Support Church Operations
- Serve in a Temple
- Support Young Adults
- Manage and Maintain Church Properties and Facilities
- Use Your Professional Skills

President Nelson has said:

“No senior missionary finds it convenient to leave. Neither did Joseph or Brigham or John or



President Russell M. Nelson greets participants at the mission leadership seminar, June 2018.

Wilford. They had children and grandchildren too. They loved their families not one whit less, but they also loved the Lord and wanted to serve Him. Someday we may meet these stalwarts who helped to establish this dispensation. Then will we rejoice that we did not seek the shadows when a call to missionary service came from the prophet, even in the autumn years of our lives. . . .

“ . . . Opportunities for senior missionaries are varied and vast. Their calls to serve are officially made after prayerful consideration has been given to their occupational background, language experience, and personal capabilities. Of all qualifications to serve, a *desire* to serve may be the most important. The Lord has declared:

“O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day.

“Therefore, if ye have *desires* to serve God ye are called to the work’ [Doctrine and Covenants 4:2–3; emphasis added]. . . .

“As I extol the work of senior missionaries, I realize that there are many more who would like to serve but are not able to do so. Limitations imposed by age or by poor health deserve realistic appraisal, as do the important needs of family members. When desire burns within yet such limitations exist, you can extend your service through others. They can be your arms and legs, and you can provide needed funds. Still others can contribute time and talents as live-at-home missionaries. Each will be pleasing to the Lord, and each will receive His praise.”³

Even if you aren’t quite ready to serve as a senior missionary, try the website out and let it inspire you with ways you can serve the Lord when the time is right. You and your whole family will be blessed. ■

NOTES

1. Jeffrey R. Holland, “We Are All Enlisted,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 46.
2. Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” *Ensign*, May 2018, 94.
3. Russell M. Nelson, “Senior Missionaries and the Gospel,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 81.

ALL WHO HAVE A Desire to Serve

More than ever before, every worthy young man and young woman who desires to serve the Lord as a missionary can do so.

By Sally Palmer

Service Mission Office at Church Headquarters

When young men or young women have a desire to serve a mission, are worthy to serve a mission, but are unable to serve a proselyting mission, it can be a great challenge for them. How can they fulfill their desire to serve? And how can we help them? Recent changes to Church programs can make a big difference for young people—and for the Lord’s work.

Under the direction of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, the recommendation and application process for missionary candidates has changed to allow young people to serve where they can best use their talents and capabilities in the great work of teaching and blessing God’s children. Now, truly, “if ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work” (Doctrine and Covenants 4:3).

These changes are rolling out in the United States and Canada.

Previously, if a young person was unable to serve a full-time mission because of physical, mental, or





How Missionaries Are Called



Interview with bishop	
Complete application in online Missionary Recommendation System	
Interview with stake president	
Recommendation by stake president to Church headquarters	
Review at Church headquarters	
Assignment by member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles	
PROSELYTING MISSION	SERVICE MISSION
Call letter from President of the Church	Call letter from President of the Church
Proselyting missionary call packet and materials	Service missionary assignment packet and materials
Speak in sacrament meeting	Speak in sacrament meeting
Set apart by stake president	Set apart by stake president



Details on Service Missionaries

Where do they live? At home.

Where do they serve? At approved nonprofit community organizations, Church operations, or in stake service assignments.

How long do they serve? From 6 to 24 months, working as close to full-time as they are able.

Who can serve a service mission? Worthy young men ages 18–25 or young women ages 19–25 who have a desire to serve the Lord and are unable to serve a proselyting mission. A worthy young man who is unable to serve a proselyting mission does not have a priesthood duty to serve a service mission.

Can a young person choose to serve either a proselyting mission or a service mission? No. A young person simply applies for missionary service. Under divine inspiration and with the information provided in the application, an Apostle

of the Lord determines the type of mission a person will serve. All applicants are considered first for proselyting missions.

Do they have financial obligations? The missionaries and their families are responsible for expenses related to their service, including transportation, food, clothing, medical care, and insurance.



emotional challenges, he or she was honorably excused from missionary service. Though some may still be honorably excused from service, the Church now offers a way for many more worthy young men age 18–25 or young women age 19–25 to use their abilities in the Lord’s service.

Called and Assigned

Young people who desire to serve the Lord will:

- Go through the same application process.
- Be assigned by a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to a particular mission and type of labor (proselyting away from home or service while living at home).
- Receive a mission call from the Lord’s prophet.

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught, “An assignment to labor in a specific place is essential and important but secondary to a call to the work” (“Called to the Work,” *Ensign*, May 2017, 68). All missionaries are called to represent the Savior, whether through proselyting or service. As the Apostle Paul taught, “He that planteth and he that watereth are one: . . . for we are labourers together with God” (1 Corinthians 3:8–9). Similarly, President Russell M. Nelson has said: “Through a lifetime of service in this Church, I have learned that it really doesn’t matter *where* one serves. What the Lord cares about is *how* one serves” (“Ministering with the Power and Authority of God,” *Ensign*, May 2018, 68).

Proclaiming the Gospel and Serving

The Church’s missionary program strives to follow Jesus Christ’s command to “go . . . into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). This is why missionaries’ teaching of the gospel is so important. For those unable to fulfill a proselyting mission, service is also a vital part of this labor.

Proselyting missionaries spend up to 10 hours a week performing service. Service missionaries dedicate all of their time to service, building goodwill for the Church and representing God and helping His children feel His love.

With the help of local service mission leaders and priesthood leaders, each service missionary receives an assignment customized to their



Service Mission Experiences

Leadership

- Stake president
- Service mission leaders
- Managers or other supervisors

Daily Activities

- Study and preparation
- Service

Other Regular Activities

- Devotionals
- Conferences
- Temple visits
- Other unifying activities with service missionaries



abilities and preferences. They may serve in:

- Approved community charitable organizations such as refugee services, food banks, animal shelters, and museums.
- Church-owned operations, such as Deseret Industries, bishops' storehouses, family history centers, and seminaries.
- Stake-assigned compassionate service assignments, such as visiting hospitals, engaging in temple work, and assisting the elderly.

Service changes lives and can also lead to conversions. Like all Church members, service missionaries are encouraged to always share the gospel of Jesus Christ through their examples of goodness and Christlike service. For example, Sister Jessica Ager, serving at Deseret Mill and Pasta in Kaysville, Utah, helps to clean the facility and to package and box flour, rice, and pasta for bishops' storehouses. She loves to work around people and is not afraid to answer questions about the Church. Volunteers fulfilling community-service assignments at the mill have been touched by Sister Ager's service and friendship. She has referred a number of these volunteers to the proselyting missionaries, who taught them the gospel.

Richard Bramwell, a service mission leader, says: "The Light of Christ shines through these young men and women. By their actions, they touch people's hearts. They give people hope and encouragement, and they make a difference by their very goodness that just radiates from who they are."

Service missionaries at community charitable organizations leave a very favorable impression. Nadine Topozada, director of refugee services at Catholic Charities in San Diego, California, says: "We have used volunteers for many, many years. Service missionaries are different; they have a quality that is hard to put in words. The foundation for their service is their faith and their calling, and that is a quality you can't put on a scale of 1 to 10—it far exceeds the 10."

New Assignment, Same Calling

Occasionally, someone initially called to a proselyting mission may, for health reasons, be unable to complete their proselyting mission. In such cases, they may be reassigned as a service missionary. They are not released as missionaries, merely reassigned.





Those reassigned as service missionaries from proselyting missions continue serving and contributing to the Lord's work. One such missionary, Elder Julian Arellano, now working with the elderly in a residential facility, says: "Knowing I was coming home, I felt like I failed the Lord. But after being reassigned as a service missionary, I knew He still needed my help. It was a really good feeling to know that. Being able to serve is a wonderful thing. It's drawn me closer to the Lord."

Another reassigned missionary, Elder Gavin Zierden, agrees. "A service mission gave me the opportunity to continue to serve the Lord and help people. I was still a missionary."

The Blessings of Service

Through their service, all missionaries receive bountiful blessings from the Lord. For example, for six months Elder Christian Fugal's assignment at the Deseret Dairy in Salt Lake City involved packaging cheese and doing quality control on the powder line. But then the dairy staff and senior missionaries, who loved Elder Fugal, noticed that he was especially good at assembling and repairing equipment. They moved him to the maintenance team, where he began troubleshooting, tearing down and rebuilding machinery, and increasing his welding skills. Elder Fugal became known as "Welder Fugal," with all bottled milk at the dairy going through one of his welds.

Elder Fugal's service mission experiences included speaking at meetings, companion study, and holding leadership positions. These duties helped Elder Fugal, who has struggled with the challenges of autism since birth, to further his communication and relationship skills.

After his mission, the skills Elder Fugal acquired on his mission helped earn him a university scholarship and employment opportunities. Currently he is employed, driving his own car, serving in his ward and in the temple, and interacting well with family and friends. His father says, "We are so grateful that the Lord provided this miraculous, successful mission experience where he could lose his life in the Lord's service and find his own in return."

Like those serving proselyting missions, service missionaries find joy by participating in the Savior's great work. Elder Stephen Balik, who works at Habitat for Humanity, says: "Every time I help, it always brings a smile to my face. Just go out and serve; then that joy will come to you. And you'll find out what it's like to constantly serve, to constantly be happy."

Sister Kahla Oteo, who serves as a guide in a state park, sums up what any mission is all about: "We put on a name tag and a smile, and we do what we can. We go out and we love first. And that's what the Savior did." ■

MORE ON SERVICE MISSIONS

For more on service missions, go to www.lds.org/service-missionary.



By Elder
Mark A. Bragg
Of the Seventy

Entering the Gate of Heaven

The example of Jacob (later known as Israel) shows us that the temple is not a place for casual attendance, attitude, or attire.

Can you imagine not being able to go to the temple for 20 years? Can you imagine your desire to be in that sacred place, to feel that peace, and to make covenants with the Lord, but having to wait?

In the Old Testament, Jacob had such an experience. He endured 20 years away from a place that was like a temple to him. His spiritual preparation and eventual return to that place were rewarded with spiritual manifestations and great joy. From his example, we can learn a lot about our own preparation to enter the house of the Lord.

Keeping Covenants

Jacob, later renamed Israel (see Genesis 35:10), is one of the inspiring prophets of the Old Testament. He is a study in making and keeping covenants and following the word of the Lord. He was born of goodly parents; his father was the humble Isaac, Abraham's son, who in a holy similitude of the Atonement of the Savior meekly agreed to be offered as a sacrifice. Jacob learned in his youth the importance of making and keeping sacred covenants.

Obediently following the counsel of his father, Jacob left Canaan to live with his uncle in Padan-aram (also known as Haran). While on his journey there he stopped at a site he would later rename Bethel (a contraction of the Hebrew

Beth-Elohim, meaning “house of God”). There the heavens were opened to him. He had a marvelous vision of receiving ordinances in the “house of God” and making covenants there that lead to eternal life. (See Genesis 28:10–22.)

None Other but the House of God

Jacob saw a ladder ascending from earth to heaven. Angels ascended and descended on the rungs of the ladder. At the top stood the Lord. What a powerful sight it must have been to see that the way to the presence of God is “to receive all those ordinances in the house of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels.”¹

The next morning Jacob anointed a stone pillar on the sacred site of his vision and called the place Bethel, because it was “none other but the house of God” and “the gate of heaven” (Genesis 28:17). As President Marion G. Romney (1897–1988), First Counselor in the First Presidency, taught:

“Jacob realized that the covenants he made with the Lord there were the rungs on the ladder that he himself would have to climb in order to obtain the promised blessings—blessings that would entitle him to enter heaven and associate with the Lord. . . .



“Temples are to us all what Bethel was to Jacob.”²

It would be 20 years before the Lord finally commanded Jacob to “arise, go up to Beth-el” (Genesis 35:1). Can you imagine the joy Jacob must have felt knowing he would finally return to that sacred place? He had waited for so long; he wanted everything to be perfect. I am sure he prepared himself physically and spiritually.

Properly Preparing

The scriptures teach us that Jacob instructed his family to prepare spiritually and physically to enjoy the blessings of Bethel. He told them: “Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments” (Genesis 35:2).

The scriptures inform us that they complied, giving Jacob “all the strange gods” (Genesis 35:4) and all other things that would distract them from the holy and sacred experience of Bethel. They even changed

the way that they dressed to properly prepare.

That counsel is just as important today. There are many things we can do to prepare to enjoy the blessings of the temple, whether we are going for the first time, for the first time in years, or regularly. President Russell M. Nelson taught: “To enter the temple is a tremendous blessing. But first we must be worthy. We should not be rushed. We cannot cut corners of preparation and risk the breaking of covenants we were not prepared to make.”³

Jacob seemed to know that to prepare for spiritual experiences and personal revelation, his family needed to eliminate all distractions so they could focus on God and His eternal plan.

The temple is a house of learning, and we need to elevate our thoughts and minds to focus with a more eternal perspective. In the temple we learn visually, through participation, through symbolism, and, most importantly, through personal revelation. Our personal spiritual preparation will lead to personal revelation, greater understanding of the eternal plan of happiness, and a more intimate understanding and application of the Atonement of Jesus Christ in our lives.

Preparing Spiritually

We prepare spiritually by being clean. As we repent and put away those things that weigh us down, we can experience the glory and cleansing power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ as we return to the straight and narrow path. We will feel our “confidence wax strong in the presence of God” (Doctrine and Covenants 121:45).

President Nelson further taught: “When we choose to deny ourselves of all ungodliness, we lose nothing of value and gain the glory of eternal life. Covenants do not hold us down; they elevate us beyond the limits of our own power and perspective.”⁴

He counseled that “spiritual preparation is enhanced by study” and that we can prepare by studying selected paragraphs from the following topics in the Bible Dictionary: “Anoint,” “Atonement,” “Christ,” “Covenant,” “Fall of Adam,” “Sacrifices,” and “Temple.”⁵ Such spiritual preparation will help us learn, receive sacred ordinances, and make eternal covenants with the Lord in the temple.

Our spiritual preparation is also strengthened as we dress in keeping with the sacred setting of the temple. The temple is not a place for casual attendance, attitude, or attire. President Boyd K. Packer (1924–2015), President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, taught, “We should dress in such a way that we might comfortably attend a sacrament meeting or a gathering that is proper and dignified.”⁶

We can also prepare spiritually by seeking our ancestors through family history research; then we can prepare physically by literally taking their names to the temple to perform their sacred temple work. Performing the work for our kindred dead will enhance every aspect of our temple experience and always offers deeper communion with God and enhanced love and appreciation for His plan of salvation.



Grandpa Hugh's Return

For Jacob, it was more than 20 years before he could return to his “temple” at Bethel. For the grandfather of one of our close friends, it was more than 50 years before he returned to the temple that he loved.

Hugh Lyman was born into a loving and faithful family. He was baptized at 8, received the Aaronic Priesthood at 12, and served a mission at 19. He was sealed to his wife and faithfully began to raise his family in the Church.

After a difficult personal experience, he left the Church and began to live far from the commandments of God. In 1968, he was disfellowshipped. He left his family, and for nearly 50 years pursued the “strange gods” of planes, boats, outdoor activities, and partying. By his own account he was consuming 30 gallons of alcohol and smoking 80 pounds of pipe tobacco annually.

But beginning in the mid-1970s, a wonderful ward member started visiting him regularly. Missionaries would stop by from time to time to invite him to return to the Church. Finally, in October of 2016, when Hugh acted on a challenge to read the book of 1 Nephi in the Book of Mormon, the fire of his testimony was rekindled.

The next Sunday, he attended church for the first time in 50 years. Since that day, he has not missed a Sunday attending church or a day of studying the scriptures.

Hugh explains that after meeting with the bishop, “I started preparing myself for the changes I would need to make to return to full activity. December 1, 2016, I stopped smoking and drinking. I paid a full tithing. I kept the Sabbath day holy, reading scriptures and attending Church meetings. I began wearing garments again.”

Back to His Bethel

In late January 2017, Hugh was returned to full fellowship in the Church, and he began to prepare to return to the temple. In February, he had temple recommend interviews with his bishop and stake president. He felt the joy of the Atonement of Christ, the blessings of obedience, and the power of the covenants that he had made in his life.

On March 10, 2017, after 50 years away from his Bethel, Hugh Lyman entered the Seattle Washington Temple with family and friends. As his recommend was accepted at the

front desk, he asked the brother there to scan it again, just to be sure. When it was again accepted, Hugh was overcome with emotion as he felt welcomed back into the house of the Lord. Later, in the celestial room, he said to his family, “This is the happiest day of my life!”

Like Jacob and his family, and like Hugh, we all need to prepare for the temple. Then, as we worship in that holy place, we can one day receive the same eternal blessings given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who have “entered into their exaltation, according to the promises” (Doctrine and Covenants 132:37). ■

NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (1997), 302.
2. Marion G. Romney, “Temples—the Gates to Heaven,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1971, 16.
3. Russell M. Nelson, “Personal Preparation for Temple Blessings,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 32.
4. Russell M. Nelson, “Personal Preparation for Temple Blessings,” 34.
5. See Russell M. Nelson, “Personal Preparation for Temple Blessings,” 33, 35.
6. Boyd K. Packer, *The Holy Temple* (1980), 73.



Hugh Lyman outside the Seattle Washington Temple

Talking about Testimonies

You play a vital role in helping children grow in the gospel and navigate new spiritual terrain. Teach them what a testimony is in clear, simple terms—for example, “A testimony is what you know or believe is true about the gospel. The Holy Ghost helps us know what is true.” Help them recognize what they already believe with questions like, “How do you think Jesus feels about you?” or “How do you feel when you pray?”

Older children and teens may wonder if they have a testimony or worry that their testimony is not as strong as they want it to be. A lot of this worry comes from an incomplete understanding of faith and testimonies. You can help them by dispelling their misconceptions in a compassionate, faith-affirming way. Here are some examples.



I feel like everyone has a testimony but me.

It's normal to feel like that when your testimony is just starting to grow. Be patient. Your faith will get stronger as you keep following Jesus Christ.

I wish my testimony was as strong as my friend's.

Every person's testimony grows at a different pace, so you don't need to worry about comparing yours to others'. You might develop a testimony of some things first and of other things later, and that's OK.

I feel bad for having questions about the gospel.

Questions are good! If we ask in faith, questions help us turn to Heavenly Father and seek truth. Joseph Smith had a question, which is why he prayed.

I don't have a testimony because I'm not sure if these things are true.

You don't have to know something to believe in it. Believing or even just wanting to believe is a good start (see Alma 32:27).

I can't have a testimony because I haven't had any big spiritual experiences.

You don't need a huge revelation to gain a testimony. Most spiritual experiences are small and quiet. But over time, they can build up into a strong testimony.

I want to get a testimony, but I don't know how.

Faith grows through action (see John 7:17; Alma 32:27–33). Want to have a testimony of tithing? Pay it. Want to know if the Book of Mormon is true? Read it. Heavenly Father rewards our faith after we prove we are willing to obey Him (see Ether 12:6).

These responses may not fit every situation, but they provide a good starting point. Seek the Spirit's guidance to know how best to teach your children. To strengthen their faith, be open about yours. Share personal experiences where possible. President Russell M. Nelson taught: "Let them feel your faith, even when sore trials come upon you. . . . Teach that faith with deep conviction" ("Face the

Future with Faith," *Ensign*, May 2011, 34). Even if you're struggling with your own testimony, you can provide your children with much-needed strength and insight.

Above all, show support and understanding for your children's unique journey of faith. As you do this, you will empower them to seek truth with the Lord's help and develop a solid testimony of their own. ■

FOR CHILDREN

In this month's *Friend*:

- "Testimony Plants" (pages 8–9)
- "Seeds of Faith" (page 10)
- "Jesus Learned and Grew" (pages FJ4–FJ7)

For other resources, visit lessonhelps.lds.org and click "Lesson Helps by Topic."

FOR TEENS

In previous *New Era* issues:

- "You Cannot Freeze What's in My Heart," *New Era*, Feb. 2018, 18–19
- Questions & Answers: "In addition to prayer and scripture study, what's the best way to strengthen my testimony?" *New Era*, Oct. 2017, 42–43
- "How to Gain a Testimony," *New Era*, July 2017, 48
- "What Is Pure Testimony?" *New Era*, July 2012, 6–9

For other resources, visit youth.lds.org.



By Elder
Weatherford T.
Clayton
Of the Seventy

Be Strong

AND OF A GOOD COURAGE

The promise God gave to Joshua so long ago is also a promise to us today: He will neither fail us nor forsake us.

Before Moses was translated, he set Joshua apart as the new prophet of the children of Israel. The scriptures say that Joshua “was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him” (Deuteronomy 34:9).

God’s first command to Joshua was to obtain the land promised to the children of Israel. God promised Joshua that no one would be able to stand before him and that God would neither “fail [him], nor forsake [him]” (Joshua 1:5). So that He could bless Joshua, God commanded him to “be strong and of a good courage” (Joshua 1:6). This same commandment applies to us today.

God’s Promises to Us Today

God still sends us into new lands and commands us to learn new things and to change. When we do these things, the promise He gave to Joshua so long ago is also His promise to us: He will neither fail us nor forsake us. In our day, the Savior has promised, “He that is faithful *shall be made strong* in every place; and I, the Lord, will go with you” (Doctrine and Covenants 66:8; emphasis added).

Jesus Christ promises that He will make the faithful become strong and enable the weak (the humble and obedient) to confound the wise (see Doctrine and Covenants 133:57–58) and that He will go with us, helping us to bring forth fruits of praise and wisdom (see Doctrine and Covenants 52:17). What magnificent promises!



Five Milestones That Show Strength

Through the writings of His prophets, the Lord identifies milestones we can achieve if we are strong and courageous. Here are five important ones:

1 OBTAIN A PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST AND BE BAPTIZED AND CONFIRMED

Nephi is a perfect example of how to achieve this milestone. His father, Lehi, had just finished teaching the gospel to Nephi's rebellious older brothers, Laman and Lemuel, with such spiritual power that they were not able to speak against him. Nephi was so moved by what his father taught that he wanted to know for himself that it was true.

So, Nephi prayed and received an answer: "Behold [the Lord] did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father" (1 Nephi 2:16).

Nephi didn't rebel. He felt the Spirit testify that what his father had said was true. He prayed and received an answer that it was true! This is the same thing that can happen to us when we pray after feeling the Spirit. It can happen to investigators while missionaries are teaching. It can happen as parents teach children. It can happen as Church leaders testify during general conference. God will confirm their words to us.

Once we are convinced of the truth, the Savior invites us to be baptized. He says, "Follow me, and do the things which ye have seen me do" (2 Nephi 31:12). Heavenly Father confirms this by inviting, "Repent ye, repent ye, and be baptized in the name of my Beloved Son" (2 Nephi 31:11). Being baptized is the natural next step for everyone who repents.

2 FULLY SHARE IN THE BLESSINGS OF THE PRIESTHOOD

Each of us needs to share in the priesthood. For young women as well as young men, that means learning what the priesthood is and how it can bless your life. All the ordinances that make eternal life possible come through the priesthood. Without it we cannot receive the temple endowment or be sealed as couples or families.

President Dallin H. Oaks, First Counselor in the First Presidency, said, "Priesthood keys direct women as well as



men, and priesthood ordinances and priesthood authority pertain to women as well as men."¹

When someone receives the priesthood, whether it is Aaronic or Melchizedek, it is a major milestone not only for the individual but also for the family. The presence of the priesthood in the home blesses not only the priesthood holder but also each family member. Every member in the Church is, in fact, blessed by and through the priesthood.

3 OBTAIN AND HONOR TEMPLE BLESSINGS

Joseph Smith prayed that "thy servants may go forth from [the temple] armed with thy power, and that thy name may be upon them, and thy glory be round about them, and thine angels have charge over them; . . . [that] they may bear exceedingly great and glorious tidings, in truth, unto the ends of the earth" (Doctrine and Covenants 109:22–23).

Of course, this blessing applies to all Latter-day Saints who worthily ascend to the house of the Lord. They may be young men and women being baptized and confirmed for the dead, converts going to the temple for the first time, couples being married, families being sealed, missionaries preparing to serve, or faithful Saints who have made temple attendance a regular

part of their worship for years. All may go forth armed with power, taking upon them the name of Christ, with glory about them, able to bear testimony of great and glorious tidings.

In addition to being a site of sacred learning, the temple is a place of covenants, promises that are meant to be kept. That is why we take the sacrament—to remember the Savior and renew our covenants to follow Him. That is why we return to the house of the Lord as often as we are able. As we do so we find strength in the Lord.

4 SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH JOY

The Lord said we must “in mildness and in meekness” reach out to our neighbors (Doctrine and Covenants 38:41.) President Oaks reminded us that *all* Christians are commanded to share the gospel.²

Elder Quentin L. Cook of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, “Missionary work is not just one of the 88 keys on a piano that is occasionally played; it is a major chord in a compelling melody that needs to be played continuously throughout our lives if we are to remain in harmony with our commitment to Christianity and the gospel of Jesus Christ.”³

Of course, full-time missionary service also provides a marvelous opportunity to share the gospel. It is a priesthood responsibility for young men who are physically and emotionally able to serve, and an opportunity for young women who desire to serve. Senior sisters and couples are blessed as they serve, and service and volunteer opportunities bless many, including those who, for one reason or another, may not be able to serve full-time.

Sharing the gospel requires us to be strong and of a good courage. However, the blessings we receive from heeding Christ’s call to “teach all nations” (Matthew 28:19) far exceed any sacrifice we may make.

5 BE SEALED IN THE TEMPLE AND ENJOY THE BLESSINGS OF FAMILY LIFE

“The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force.”⁴

One of the greatest joys of this life comes from falling in

love and marrying a worthy companion in the temple. I know, because it happened to me! In October 1975, I first saw a certain beautiful young woman. From the beginning, she stole my heart. We began to court, and it was a magical, joyful time. On March 16, 1976, we were married and sealed together in the Salt Lake Temple, surrounded by family and friends. We knew the love we felt could only grow greater as we kept the promises we made to the Lord and to each other.

Especially in today’s world, strength and courage are required to honor the covenants of an eternal marriage. My wife and I have chosen to be “fiercely loyal” to each other.⁵ I encourage you to do the same. I promise you that being loyal, strong, and of a good courage in marriage has brought blessings far beyond the wildest hopes I had in 1976. It is worth it! Regardless of your circumstances, keep the goal of eternal marriage in your heart.

My wife and I were blessed to have four daughters and a son. They have been the joy of our lives. As we watched them take their first steps, throw their first ball, play their first soccer match, be baptized, go on their first date, advance in Young Women or obtain the priesthood, receive their endowment, go on a mission, fall in love, be sealed to worthy companions in the temple, and have their own families, the joys and blessings of our own marriage have increased. As parents, we have had to “be strong and of a good courage” and the Lord has blessed us along each step of our path.

Press Forward

May these milestones help you map your future. Some may be fulfilled sooner than others, but whether now or later, Heavenly Father wants you to have all the blessings that come from them. As you press forward, choose to “be strong and of a good courage.” The Lord’s promise to Joshua will be yours: “As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Joshua 1:5). ■

NOTES

1. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Keys and Authority of the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 49.
2. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Sharing the Restored Gospel,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2016, 57.
3. Quentin L. Cook, in Dallin H. Oaks, “Sharing the Restored Gospel,” 58.
4. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, May 2017, 145.
5. See L. Whitney Clayton, “Marriage: Watch and Learn,” *Ensign*, May 2013, 84.

Investigators Falling from the Trees

To the young missionaries tracting the streets of Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1995, the promise they had received from a member of the Area Presidency seemed odd: “If you work hard and are completely obedient, investigators will fall out of the trees to be baptized.” We found out about that promise a short time later.

My father was pruning one of the trees along the sidewalk in front of our

home. As he was up in the tree pruning, he noticed two young men walking toward him on the street. As they passed under the tree, he called down to them in English.

My father didn’t really speak English, but he knew a few words, and he was curious. Who were these young men, and what were they doing in our neighborhood?

The missionaries stopped, wondering

where the voice had come from. My father then climbed out of the tree to talk to them. Impressed by their message and manner, he invited them into his home.

My father’s previous experience with religion had left him troubled, but the message of the restored gospel spoke to his heart. He had lived through some tough times, and he knew he needed to change. He listened closely as the

As my father was up in the tree pruning, he noticed two young men walking toward him on the street.



missionaries taught him, my mother, my grandmother, and me.

I was only 11 years old, but the truths they taught also resonated with me—and with my mother and grandmother. As a result, we were all baptized a few months after we first met the missionaries.

The seeds of faith that the missionaries planted in our hearts were soon nourished by fellowshipping from friends at church, additional gospel teaching, and good experiences with strong Church leaders. Because of the warm welcome we received, the seeds of our faith “fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundred-fold” (Luke 8:8).

The fruits of our faith that we enjoy today—nearly 25 years later—include a firm commitment to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, the blessings of the temple, and a full and happy life with a new generation of family members united for all eternity.

We will always be grateful for two faithful missionaries who put an inspired promise to the test. ■

Yamila Caminos, Buenos Aires, Argentina



From Fear to Feasting

I have been active in the Church all my life. I served a full-time mission, married in the temple, and helped raise four wonderful daughters. As the years passed, however, I noticed that some of my friends had given up their Church membership. Some family members were using social media to question and criticize Church leaders. And I was beginning to have my own doubts about the Church for the first time in my life. My doubts caused me to fear the future. At times, I felt overcome with hopelessness.

During this difficult time, I forced myself to attend stake conference. As my stake president spoke, he said, “If we are to survive the difficult times ahead, we need to move from casual feasting to urgent feasting upon the word of God. We need to make regular and focused scripture study a priority in our lives. If we do, I promise that we will not fear.”

The word “fear” caught my attention. I realized that I had allowed my gospel

I set up a small desk with a comfortable chair and began my gospel study with a prayer.

study to become casual. As a result, fear took hold of my life. I decided to give my stake president’s counsel a try.

I went home and created a space for gospel study. In the corner of a room, I set up a small desk with a comfortable chair. I put a few pictures of the Savior on the wall. I gathered my scriptures, some pencils, and a notepad. I began my study with a prayer.

After a week or two, I developed a daily routine. I would first listen to a general conference talk and then study a particular gospel topic. Then I would read a few chapters of the Book of Mormon and finish my study with heartfelt prayer to my Heavenly Father.

Despite various distractions, I rarely missed a day of gospel study for six months. I gained a greater understanding of many gospel topics and strengthened my relationship with my Heavenly Father through regular and sincere prayer.

My testimony was again becoming something I could lean on. My doubts faded because of the new witnesses I had received of the restored gospel. I found myself worrying less because I was trusting God more. I felt fear and despair leaving me. I also lost interest in time-wasting activities and noticed that I was becoming more generous and gentle to others.

As I heeded my stake president’s counsel, God was able to transform me. I was healed and restored by the Master Himself as I feasted upon His word. ■

Matt Maxwell, Utah, USA



We had worked hard all day long. We were hungry. Maybe finding the money was a blessing for our service.



But I'm Hungry!

One rainy day on my mission in Colombia, my companion and I had an hour left before we had to be home. We were hungry and tired from walking all day. We hadn't found anyone to teach.

We also had no money with us, and we hadn't gone grocery shopping. We knew we would get home and have nothing to eat. I tried to push away these negative thoughts and focus on the work.

"Look what I found!" My companion suddenly exclaimed.

She had found some money on the ground. From the expression on her face, I could tell she was thinking what I was. We could buy something to eat!

But after a moment, my companion said, "No, this money is not ours!"

"But I'm hungry!" I thought.

"Whoever it belongs to, we're not going to find them at this time of night," I told her.

She suggested that we pray. I knew that was right, but a part of me thought it was crazy. We had worked hard all day long. We were hungry. Maybe finding the money was a blessing for our service.

Then I remembered my mother. When I was young, she taught my sisters and me to always be honest. She was an example to us and prayed that we would have courage to be honest. I knew that if she were there, she would be sad if I did not make the right decision.

So we prayed. We asked Heavenly Father to help us find the owner. Several minutes later, a young man came along, searching for something.

He had tears in his eyes and looked upset. My companion and I went up to him and found out that we had what he was looking for.

We returned his money to him, and he thanked us repeatedly. He said he needed it to pay for college. Without it, he would lose his enrollment. My eyes filled with tears, and I repented of my previous desires to spend the money. We got his contact information, and we were able to teach him and five other people. That night I thanked my companion for her good example.

I know that God blesses us when we are honest. We didn't have anything to eat that night, but I do not remember going to bed hungry. Finding the money was a blessing, after all. ■

Isadora Marques Garcia, São Paulo, Brazil

Our Furnace Ran on Faith

When my husband, Mark, and I lived with our five small children on the east coast of the United States, we lived in a house that had an oil furnace. To check the oil level, we would put a measuring stick into the tank. And if the oil was low, we would call the heating oil company to come fill the tank.

During an unusually cold January, we were having financial problems. I even took a part-time job in the evenings at a restaurant to supplement our income, but we still had trouble making ends meet. It finally came down to the choice of paying tithing or paying to heat our house. We measured the oil and it came to two inches (5 cm). That would last only a day or two. But we decided to put our faith in the Lord and pay our tithing.

The next day, Mark measured the oil again. It was still at two inches. Mark measured it again the following day, and it was still at two inches. The heat was coming on, but the oil was not going down. The next two days, the oil remained at two inches. I remember crying tears of joy at night when I heard

the heat come on. Our furnace was not running on oil; it was running on faith.

I felt like the widow who fed the prophet Elijah and found that her “barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail” (1 Kings 17:16). When payday finally came, Mark once again measured the oil. This time it measured at one inch (2.5 cm). Now the oil was going down, but we had money to fill the tank.

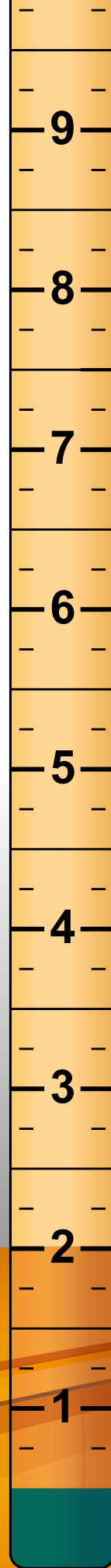
Our family had tested the Lord’s promise found in Malachi 3:10: “And prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

To any who doubt the blessings of paying tithing, I encourage them to accept the Lord’s invitation to “prove [him] now herewith.” Paying tithing unlocks the windows of heaven, and through obedience and faithfulness to the Lord’s laws and commandments, we are blessed in many ways.

Our family will never forget when our oil furnace ran on faith instead of oil. ■

Lois Mansius, Texas, USA

*We measured the oil in the furnace,
and it came to two inches (5 cm).
That would last only a day or two.*





By Elder
Marcos A. Aidukaitis
Of the Seventy

Why I Honor My Father

He did not recoil from the answer he received, even while facing great challenges.

I consider June 2, 1940, to be a very important day in the history of my family. On this day my father was baptized.

I am not sure my father was able to foresee the wisdom of his act, but I love him for what he did that day.

My father was the son of Lithuanians, but he was born in Scotland. He moved to Brazil when he was still young. His ability to speak English facilitated his conversion since he could read the Book of Mormon in English, and there was not yet a reliable translation into Portuguese.

I admire the courage my father had to be baptized. It was not easy for him. His wife did not get baptized with him.¹ The vices of drinking alcohol and smoking were strong temptations for him. He was poor. His mother told him that if he were baptized, she would no longer consider him her son. With fewer than 300 members in Brazil, the Church



Elder Aidukaitis's father (center), with missionaries, on the day of his baptism

did not have a single chapel there. I am truly astonished by my father's determination and courage.

How could he make such a decision in the face of so many unfavorable circumstances? The answer is simple: it was because my father read the Book of Mormon and came to know of the truthfulness of the message of the Restoration.

To those who may argue that we cannot know these things, I testify that we can, when we are humble enough to do as God has instructed us. To believe otherwise would be to accept the absurd notion that God also does not

know where truth can be found or does not have the power to show it to us.

Why do I love and honor the name of my father? Because my father read and acted on the promise of the Book of Mormon. Because he did not recoil from the answer he received, even while facing great challenges. Because he blessed my life, even before I was born, by having the courage to do what God expected him to do. ■

Adapted from "Because My Father Read the Book of Mormon," Ensign, Nov. 2008, 15–17.

NOTE

1. The language barrier prevented my mother from joining the Church until a few years later, but when she did, she became a powerful example of dedication.



Dispensation of Virtue
Bruce H. Smith

“And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment:

“For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.

“But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour” (Matthew 9:20-22).

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