



# Unshaken

*As we turned to the Lord in the aftermath of the earthquake,  
we were reminded of the importance of always remembering Him.*

**By Reid Tateoka**

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**F**riday, March 11, 2011, 2:46 p.m.; Kōriyama, Japan; Kōriyama chapel, second floor.

Fifteen missionaries in the middle of leadership training begin to practice teaching about Joseph Smith. As the message of hope and peace fills the room, the windows begin to rattle. The noise intensifies. What began as vibrations escalates to booming.

The building jerks side to side, and the movement increases in speed and magnitude until it becomes one continuous jolting motion. Standing and walking are nearly impossible. Some missionaries try to take cover under the tables—until the tables are thrown across the

room. The building, the city, even the whole province reel in commotion as if the earth will burst open. One thought prevails in my mind: “Get the missionaries out of here!”

## **Our Miraculous Evacuation**

As mission president of the Japan Sendai Mission, I had been teaching the missionaries and members for months to “turn to the Lord” (Mosiah 7:33). Now, as I turned to Him for divine guidance, inspiration came quickly: “Open the door—create an escape route.” I knew that I must open the door before the ceiling collapsed, trapping us inside. So I rushed to the door and opened it. “Get out of here!” I shouted.



*The March 2011 earthquake and resulting tsunami devastated numerous cities in northern Japan (such as Miyako City, above), killing thousands of people and displacing hundreds of thousands of others.*

The missionaries staggered along the shifting, rocking, heaving floor toward the open door; then they headed down the stairwell and out of the church. Once outside, we felt safer, although we were not yet safe from the elements. The weather had turned bitter cold, and snow pelted our faces.

Across from the church, headstones in a Buddhist cemetery toppled over; the wall of the cemetery had turned to rubble. A large fissure zigzagged up all 12 stories of an apartment building behind the church. Large chunks of concrete facade had crumbled off the walls of an adjacent elementary school. Windows had blown out, and broken glass littered the ground. On the opposite side of the road, a blue tile roof lay in pieces. I gathered the 15 missionaries in the parking lot of the church, and we gave our Heavenly Father thanks for our protection and asked for His continued help.

### **Our Thanksgiving Prayers**

Panic set in throughout the city. Afraid that they would go without food, people began buying everything in

sight. Bread and milk sold out immediately, and within a few hours no bread could be found in the city. Lines miles long formed at the gas stations.

In contrast to the panic of the people on the streets, the missionaries were remarkably calm. We offered prayers of thanksgiving, and we felt a calm assurance that all would be well.

We could not leave the city—roads were damaged and freeways were closed, and no trains or buses were running. People who had waited hours in long lines to purchase gasoline were turned away. Government inspectors systematically entered each residence, condemning some and approving others for occupancy. So we stayed overnight at evacuation centers with numerous others who, like us, could not return to their homes.

### **Discipleship amid Distress**

The next day, Saturday, we began as usual with scripture study and prayer. That day we especially needed our Heavenly Father's help. After scripture study, I

organized the missionaries into groups. One group went to the church to help clean up and then worked with the branch president to repair members' homes. One group visited the city inspectors to find out whether the missionary apartments were safe to enter. Another group checked to see if trains and buses were running. Several others stood in lines to obtain water while others searched for food. One companionship received a special assignment: find bread for the sacrament on Sunday. I worked throughout the day trying to contact all the missionaries in the mission.

That day we felt our Heavenly Father's guidance in everything we did. The missionaries who stood in the line for water met two men with whom they shared the gospel. The missionaries shared their testimonies of God's love and brought the two men to our testimony meeting in the evening and to church the next day.

The sisters who sought food for us soon learned that God was guiding their footsteps. Unable to find anything

in the stores, they found food in places they usually would not consider, such as down deserted alleys and in small, one-room shops. We had been given our "daily bread" (Matthew 6:11).

At the end of the day we reported back to our Heavenly Father. We had not lost our focus. We were still "disciple[s] of Jesus Christ," who were "called of him to declare his word among his people, that they might have everlasting life" (3 Nephi 5:13).

### The Father's Strength, Power, and Peace

That evening we felt a greater need for the strength and power of our Heavenly Father. We needed His Spirit to be with us. So we had a testimony meeting at the chapel. The missionaries thanked the Lord for giving us our daily bread, and they recognized that we had been led, guided, directed, and protected. They knew that many others were not so fortunate and would not see another sunrise. We truly had been "troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we [had been] perplexed, but not in despair; . . . cast down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8–9).

All the missionaries testified of the peace they felt. They testified that God had protected them and calmed their souls. They had faced the possibility of death but did not fear. They did not have the water, food, or heat needed to sustain them long-term, yet they were nourished with living water; they were fed by the word of God; they were warmed by the Spirit. Within our little band of missionaries, not one feared. Each missionary felt God's strengthening power that night and felt closer to God than ever before.

As that day ended, we were grateful to be alive. We thanked the Lord for the help He had extended to us in very literal ways. We made assignments for our worship service the next day and left the chapel to join the dozens of other temporarily homeless people in the evacuation center.



### THE PURPOSE OF TRIALS

"Our Heavenly Father, who gives us so much to delight in, also knows that we learn and grow and become stronger as we face and survive the trials through which we must pass. . . . Such difficulties allow us to change for the better, to rebuild our lives in the way our Heavenly Father teaches us, and to become something different from what we were—better than we were, more understanding than we were, more empathetic than we were, with stronger testimonies than we had before."

President Thomas S. Monson, "I Will Not Fail Thee, nor Forsake Thee," *Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 87.



***As if preserving our lives had not been enough, our Heavenly Father made sure that we would be able to “always remember” His Son.***

### **The Sacrament Bread**

But two elders were especially solemn. They had been asked to get the bread for the sacrament the next day and had not accomplished their assignment.

As we reached the evacuation center Saturday evening, the city employees welcomed us back. They apologized that they had given us little food (20 crackers) to eat the day before but then beamed as they handed us the next day’s rations: a bottle of water and eight slices of bread.

My elders looked at me as if to say, “How could the Lord bless us any more?”

God, who knows the fall of a sparrow, had reached out again, as if preserving our lives had not been enough. Our Heavenly Father made sure that we would be able to “always remember” His Son (D&C 20:77). We were closer to our Savior than we had ever been in our lives.

The missionaries gave a special prayer that night. They dropped to their knees to thank our Heavenly Father for another miracle in a series of special miracles. They understood the priority that God has placed on our covenant to always remember Jesus Christ, and they were grateful for the mercy and kindness of a loving God who lets us partake of the sacrament each week.

These missionaries now testified, with greater conviction than ever before, that God wants us to always remember His Son, Jesus Christ. ■

*The 2011 Tōhoku earthquake took place 70 kilometers (about 45 miles) off the Oshika Peninsula and registered at a 9.0 magnitude, one of the five most powerful earthquakes measured since modern record keeping began in 1900.<sup>1</sup> All of the Sendai missionaries were accounted for within days of the earthquake.*

*The author lives in Utah, USA.*

#### **NOTE**

1. “Managing Post-Disaster Debris: The Japan Experience” (United Nations Environment Programme, June 2012), 5, [unep.org/disastersandconflicts](http://unep.org/disastersandconflicts).