

Finding

BY MICHAEL R. MORRIS

Church Magazines

For those who hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, the gospel resonates with answers to life's greatest questions—answers that offer hope to the bereft and peace to the troubled.

In Washington, D.C., people from all walks of life are embracing the gospel, learning for themselves, as President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) declared, that “this work, more than any other, will answer life’s perplexing problems and lead the people to walk in paths of safety and happiness.”¹

Following are three stories of those who heard the Savior’s voice and found their way to the Church.

A Joyous Day

As a high-ranking official with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Stephanie Smith attained a degree of professional success she had never dreamed possible. But her worldly achievements came at a cost.

“Once in a while, when I was not in too much of a hurry getting to my next

“In that first meeting with the sister missionaries, I was entirely captivated by them and their message. And from that simple, modest, quiet beginning, a voice inside me said, ‘Be still and listen, Stephanie.’ ”

STEPHANIE SMITH

Was Missing

Through the gospel of Jesus Christ, those drawn to the Church in the Washington, D.C., area are finding answers, fellowship, and strength.

goal, I would take a good, hard look at myself. I would see that I was not leading a life built on righteous values,” she says, even though she attended a church. “I didn’t have a living, vibrant faith guiding my life. But I did not know how to make room for God in my daily life or how to end the cycle of sin that entrapped me.”

Stephanie says she rationalized that she would repent and become a better person “when my job became less busy and when the pressure and demands on me became easier.” She felt an urgency to change, however, when two of her colleagues fell into “deep personal crises” in the spring of 2006. “Their crises led me to a deep introspection about my own private fall from grace, and about how fleeting the things of this world—like accomplishment, recognition, and fame—could be.”

Thanks to the example of a third colleague, a Latter-day Saint, Stephanie’s first halting steps toward spiritual recovery found direction. When she confided in him that she wanted to change her life, his response was so remarkable to her that she wrote it down.

“He said, ‘God knows you by your name, Stephanie. He has a plan for you, and it is a plan for your success in this life and in the life to come—but perhaps

not success as you’ve defined it.’ He also told me that our Heavenly Father wanted me to be at peace. His gentle words made me want to know more.”

A few weeks after Stephanie visited the visitors’ center at the Washington D.C. Temple, “two young missionaries named Sister Clark and Sister McDonald came to my home,” she recalls. “I was surprised by how young they were, and I wondered, ‘How on earth will they ever understand someone as troubled and headstrong as me? They have experienced nothing of the worldly temptations or pressures that I have. How can they relate to me?’ ”

She quickly found out. “In that first meeting, I was entirely captivated by them and their message. And from that simple, modest, quiet beginning, a voice inside me said, ‘Be still and listen, Stephanie.’ ”

The missionaries taught her to pray and helped her along “the hard journey of repentance.” They taught her the eternal nature of the family—a doctrine she found compelling. They also taught her about the Book of Mormon. Initially, Stephanie struggled with its words and the role the Prophet Joseph Smith played in bringing it forth. But as she read, she found “simple beauty” and “profound truth.” She also found answers to her questions and struggles.

“I loved it,” she says. “I took it everywhere with me.” Stephanie especially related to Alma’s call of repentance to



"When you see people throwing stones at the mango tree, you know they are doing so because the tree is bearing good fruit. So I said to myself, 'Since people are criticizing the Church, it must have something special, something good.'"

NORMAN KAMOSI

those who "are puffed up in the vain things of the world" (Alma 5:37). "In the process of living a life focused on worldly achievement," she says, "I committed sins of pride, arrogance, ego, envy, greed, and great vanity."

Stephanie began attending church in northern Virginia, where she received both encouragement and fellowship. A trained observer, she couldn't help but notice "the joyfulness" in the lives of Latter-day Saints—something she longed for in her own life.

Her husband, Bill, supported her as she investigated the Church. "He knew I was going through professional and personal turmoil," she says. As Stephanie contemplated baptism, she was concerned how her parents would react to her decision to leave her family's faith. "But they told me, 'When you find something that brings you peace, you run to it,'" she says.

"None of my worst fears were realized."

Stephanie was baptized on January 20, 2007. "My baptism was a joyous day for me," she says. "I felt the warm waters of the baptismal font welcome me and wash me clean. The next day, when I was confirmed a member of the Church and received the gift of the Holy Ghost, was also joyous."

Stephanie knows that her baptism was a first step, not a final destination. But she hopes friends and colleagues see her in a new light. "What I hope people see in me is that I uphold a higher standard now and that I build rather than degrade."

The Good Fruit

"Welcome to the true Church!" Norman Kamosi belts out in his baritone voice as Latter-day Saints in Washington, D.C.'s inner

city arrive for sacrament meeting. In extending his greeting, Norman is returning the warm welcome he and his family received when they joined the Church in 2000.

That welcome contrasts starkly with the adieu he received in 1997 when escaping from his French-speaking homeland, now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At the time, he was a member of that nation's Congress and a successful executive with the national airline. But following a regime change, Brother Kamosi's life was suddenly in jeopardy. He fled with his family to Zambia, and they eventually made their way to the United States, settling in the nation's capital in 1999.

"I lost everything overnight—homes, cows, cars, a swimming pool, money in the bank," he says. "We took nothing."

Ten years earlier, when Norman and his wife, Julekha ("Jenke"), had visited a niece in the U.S. capital, they were impressed with the beauty of the Washington D.C. Temple. They knew little of the Church at the time, and Norman's niece discouraged them from learning more.

But soon after they arrived from Zambia with their three children—Erica, Jason, and Kimberly—Erica ordered a copy of the Church movie *The Lamb of God*, which she heard about on television. When the full-time missionaries came to deliver the movie, Jenke did not want to talk to them and tried to ignore their persistent knocking.

"Finally, I said to myself, 'That could be our son behind that door,'" Jenke recalls. She suggested that the family listen to the missionaries for a few minutes and then send them on their way.

Norman and Jenke had been baptized into Christian churches, but both were searching for what they felt was missing from their lives and from the teachings of the churches they had attended. "When the missionaries started

to teach, the Spirit was so strong that we wanted to hear more of it," Jenke says. "It was like they were opening up a new way. They were giving us information that was missing from our lives, and now we were getting it, so we listened."

"The missionaries became part of our family," Jenke says of Elders Kyle Houghton and Jared Banner. It wasn't long, however, before Norman and Jenke began hearing negative things about the Church.

"In Africa we have an expression," Norman says. "When you see people throwing stones at the mango tree, you know they are doing so because the tree is bearing good fruit. So I said to myself, 'Since people are criticizing the Church, it must have something special, something good.' I said, 'We have to investigate the Church. Something good is in there.'"



PHOTOGRAPH BY CRAIG DIMOND © IRI

Norman Kamosi (above) translates a talk into his native tongue of Lingala during a recent general conference in Salt Lake City. Opposite page: Brother and Sister Kamosi with their daughter Kimberly.

Like the fruit of the mango tree, the fruit of the teachings of the restored gospel tasted good to the Kamosis. In particular, the plan of salvation and the eternal nature and importance of the family enlightened their understanding and became "delicious to [them]" (Alma 32:28). They were also touched by the love they felt from Church members, who welcomed them and helped them during difficult financial times.

As they considered baptism, both Norman and Jenke received confirming witnesses from the Spirit that they should join the Church.

Jenke's answer came through the fulfillment of a dream. Norman's answer came while pondering, praying, and walking the grounds of the Washington D.C. Temple with his family and the missionaries.

"A voice came to me, telling me, 'This is the true Church of Jesus Christ. Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God,'" he says. "I turned to the missionaries and said, 'I'm ready for baptism!'"

Because of their knowledge of the plan of salvation,

Norman and Jenke feel more prepared to cope with life's challenges.

"When I joined the Church, I said, 'Oh, I see now.' I lost the fear I once had about death because of what I was taught about the plan of salvation, being sealed together, and meeting again with my family," Jenke says. "That's what was missing. The gospel has opened up life to me. I'm really happy to be in the Church. It's given me all the answers I was searching for."

For Norman, what he found is more valuable than what he lost.

"I found love, and I found service," he says. "Through service, you can feel the spirit of love gathering you, just as Jesus taught. After my baptism, I forgot about my misery. I forgot that I had lost all my belongings and all my wealth. I found something more valuable—the Church."

"Are You LDS?"

When the aircraft hit a violent storm while flying to Washington, D.C., from Boston, many on board thought the flight might be their last.

"The plane was being buffeted around violently, lights were flickering on and off, people were screaming, crying, and praying," Najib ("Jim") Kabbani recalls.

Every time the plane jolted, the woman sitting in the seat next to Jim grabbed his jacket. In attempting to calm her down, he says, "I tried to put things into perspective, telling her, 'We may be living at this moment in our lives, but we came from somewhere else before. And just as we were somewhere else before, we will go somewhere else after this life. However long we spend in between is part of God's plan, and there's a purpose for it.' "

The woman calmed down, looked at him, and asked, "Are you LDS?" Sensing his confusion, she added, "Latter-day Saint."

"I thought she was complimenting me," Jim says, "so

I said, 'Shucks, Ma'am, I'm no Saint.' "

She explained her meaning, adding that her husband was a bishop in the Church. She then wrote her family's name and phone number on a piece of paper and handed it to Jim.

"When we get back to Washington, you should give us a call," she said. "You sound like you would really feel at home with some of the things we believe."

Jim, a management consultant, put the paper in his pocket but lost it when he took his suit to the cleaners. It wasn't long, however, before he met more Latter-day Saints. He would share his philosophy on life in the midst

of a difficult circumstance, and once again someone would ask if he was LDS and then invite him to church. Finally, he accepted an invitation.

Jim, whose family is from Lebanon, became interested in religion while in college. Fluent in four languages, he had read the Torah, the Koran in Arabic, Buddhist and Hindu religious books, and the Old and New Testaments. "I found things that resonated in me in all of those books, and yet there was always the feeling that each of them was missing something," he says.

His impressions of Christianity were largely positive, but he had concerns about doctrines that he later learned came from the Apostasy. As Jim initially listened to the missionaries, his interest in the restored gospel grew. But because of discouragement from his fiancée and negative stereotypes of the Church, "I left it on the back burner," he says.

It wasn't until later, after his marriage had failed and another relationship had ended, that Jim was ready to accept the gospel. When a former girlfriend, with whom he had been occasionally attending a different church, suggested that he find another church to attend after they had stopped dating, Jim knew where to go. A short time later, while returning home from work in May 2006, he saw two full-time



Brother Kabbani calls the bishops' storehouse and cannery, where he works as a volunteer coordinator in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, "a living testimony of how we care for each other."



missionaries on bicycles. To their surprise, he honked, pulled over, and gave them his name, phone number, and address.

“This time I was determined to go through the process,” Jim says. It became clear to him that the restored Church had been organized the way the Savior intended it to be. Only one thing held him back: “I really felt that I had to become an expert on the Church before I could truthfully step forward and say, ‘OK, I’m ready to be baptized.’ ”

After receiving the missionary discussions and sincerely praying about his decision, Jim received a strong impression. “The impression was of someone holding in his hand a piece of paper from a university. A voice said to me, ‘Is he holding a diploma, or is he holding a letter of admission?’ That’s when I realized that I had been thinking of baptism as a diploma, whereas, in fact, it was quite the opposite—it was a letter of admission. Once I got that, I thought, ‘OK. Now I can join with a clear conscience. This is my opportunity to continue

learning.’ It was the beginning of a journey of learning rather than the conclusion of it.”

He called the missionaries and scheduled his baptism, which he describes as “a wonderful experience.”

Jim is grateful for the gentle, quiet, and consistent confirmations that have followed his baptism, and he is grateful for opportunities to serve. Service, he says, allows the Church to be an ongoing part of his life and provides him with an expanded family. He is also grateful for personal improvements made possible by the Spirit.

“I’ve tried to show what it means to be a member of the Church by example,” he says.

To investigators who may be hesitating, Jim says, “They really need to join the Church in order to understand what it will mean to them to be a member. They just have to take a leap of faith and do it. My testimony is that they will be very glad they did. Their only regret will be that they didn’t do it sooner.” ■

NOTE

1. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 243.

“The impression was of someone holding in his hand a piece of paper from a university. A voice said to me, ‘Is he holding a diploma, or is he holding a letter of admission?’ I realized that I had been thinking of baptism as a diploma, whereas, in fact, it was quite the opposite—it was a letter of admission.”

JIM KABBANI