



CONVERTED FOR LIFE

My missionary companion and I stopped at the gate, unaware we would soon witness the converting power of the Book of Mormon.

By Joshua Oram

I was serving as a full-time missionary in the Nicaragua Managua Mission, when one day my companion and I passed a well-kept property with a garden. “Someday I want to contact that house,” he said. Then suddenly he stopped. “Wait a second. Today might be that day, Elder Oram. Look, there’s a man in the garden. Let’s talk to him.”

With some trepidation, I followed my companion to the garden gate, where a large, intimidating man greeted us reluctantly. He agreed to let us sit on his porch but made it clear that he was merely being polite and that we could speak with him only, not his family. We sat down, and as was customary, this man went inside his home to get a drink of water for my companion and me. We took advantage of his absence to form a plan.

“Doesn’t look good,” I said.

“Yeah,” my companion agreed. “He seems polite but not receptive, and we really should be looking for whole families to teach.”

“Let’s make it quick,” I suggested. “We’ll just give him a pamphlet rather

than teach a whole discussion. Five minutes and we’re out.”

“Sounds good.”

A Change of Plan

The man returned with drinks and told us his name was Camilo. As we sipped our drinks and made small talk, I received a sudden and distinct impression that we should stay to teach Camilo a full discussion about the Restoration of the gospel.

“Okay,” I thought, “I’ll give it a try, but how to let my companion know the change of plan?” I looked to my companion, and to my surprise, he nodded his head knowingly, as if to say, “Yeah, we should stay. Let’s teach a full discussion.”

Forty-five minutes later I was more anxious than ever to abandon ship! Camilo was combative, challenging us on every particular. At one point we used a poor choice of wording that offended him, and he nearly shouted at us in anger. It was clear at that point that we needed to go, and quickly. We offered to leave a Book of Mormon, and Camilo accepted with the disclaimer that he was only interested in searching it for errors,



AN INVITATION TO ALL

“We invite all men everywhere to read the Book of Mormon, to ponder in their hearts the message it contains, and then to ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ if the book is true. Those who pursue this course and ask in faith will gain a testimony of its truth and divinity by the power of the Holy Ghost. (See Moroni 10:3–5.)

“Those who gain this divine witness from the Holy Spirit will also come to know by the same power that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, that Joseph Smith is His revelator and prophet in these last days, and that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Lord’s kingdom once again established on the earth, preparatory to the Second Coming of the Messiah.”

Introduction to the Book of Mormon.

which he would be sure to highlight in case missionaries ever called on him again.

Confusion and frustration lingered in my mind for the rest of the day. Why had the Spirit prompted us to stay, when the result had been so disastrous? I comforted myself with the thought that our job was only to plant the seed and that something might come of it years later. I’d simply have to trust the Spirit, because I’d never find out why we had been prompted to teach that lesson.

But I *did* find out, the very next morning! Ready for another day of contacting under the hot tropical sun, we stepped out of our house and were surprised when the door nearly struck someone waiting on our porch. There stood Camilo, red-faced and out of breath. I felt a flash of fear at the thought that this big man might still be angry and had come to fight us!

“I apologize, Elders,” Camilo explained. “I’m out of breath because I just ran all the way here from my house. I left as soon as the sun came up.”

We were speechless, so he continued: “Last night I sat down to read the book you left me, and I was still so upset. I felt sure that I’d easily spot the falsehood in its words.” He shook his head. “But within five minutes of reading, I felt something unlike anything I’ve ever felt. I read the chapter you left me, then started from the beginning and read all through 1 Nephi. I know this Book of Mormon has the truth. I came here to ask you to please return to my home and teach me everything. I want to be baptized into your church.”

Two weeks later, Camilo and his eight-year-old son received a humble baptism in a large drum behind our house.

Courage and Determination

For the next seven months I spent in the area, Camilo’s testimony continued to grow stronger, despite considerable opposition from family and friends. At one point a family member even attacked him with a knife to keep him from paying tithing! Camilo defended himself by grabbing the blade with his bare hands, then showed up at church to deliver the tithing envelope with bandaged fingers.

I marveled at his courage and determination. What accounted for his commitment to the gospel? Clearly he had not been baptized simply to be polite or because he liked the missionaries or because he was too afraid to say no. The only conclusion left was that he had truly felt something amazing as he read the Book of Mormon. His heart had changed, literally overnight. By the

time I left the area, Camilo was serving as first counselor in the branch presidency and had never missed a Sunday at church.

“What Ever Happened to Camilo?”

Some 15 years later, after I recounted Camilo’s story in an elders quorum lesson, a brother raised his hand and asked, “What ever happened to Camilo? Is he still active?” I had to admit I had no idea how Camilo was doing because I had not tried to contact him since completing my missionary service. But that brother’s question awoke a resolve in me to reach out to Camilo, even though I knew it might be difficult—there were no phones where he lived, and I didn’t know his address. That same night I prayed to Heavenly Father to help me know how I might get in touch with Camilo.

Once again, I only had to wait until the very next morning. To my amazement, I woke up to find a message on my computer from none other than Camilo. He explained how the night before he had finally decided to try out an online social media site, and the first person he had thought to contact was me.

I wrote back to Camilo and asked if he was still active in the Church. After a day of nervous waiting, I finally received his reply. Yes, he said, of course he was still active in the Church. In fact, he was happy to report that he had recently been set apart as the branch president, his wife was the Primary president, and they had more children who were now being raised in the gospel. “Thank you, thank you,” he said, “for

changing my life all those years ago.”

I didn’t change Camilo’s life. But his life *had* changed; his heart had changed deeply, profoundly. For life. That’s the power of the Book of Mormon. Two set-apart missionaries spent the better part of an hour with him, doing our best to teach him about the Restoration of the gospel. With only five minutes spent reading the Book of Mormon, however, Camilo’s anger and pride melted away. He was converted, truly *converted* in every sense of the word. It makes me wonder how many other Camilos are out there, waiting for us to show up at their garden gate, perhaps with trembling heart but bearing in our hands a book with all the power needed to do the Lord’s work. ■

The author lives in Arizona, USA.

THE GREATEST TOOL

“Combined with the Spirit of the Lord, the Book of Mormon is the greatest tool which God has given us to convert the world. If we are to have the harvest of souls, we must use the instrument which God has designed for the task—the Book of Mormon. . . .

“There is a difference between a convert who is built on the rock of Christ through the Book of Mormon and stays hold of the iron rod, and one who is not.”

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994), *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Ezra Taft Benson* (2014), 282.

