



IMAGE BY PAUL TAYLOR / GETTY IMAGES

A BURNED BOOK OF MORMON

The burned and tattered copy of the Book of Mormon I kept from my mission still reminds me of the book's power.

By Joshua Sanchez

Oscar Cruz had not been active in the Church for more than 15 years when he stopped my companion and me on the street and told us how he wanted to return to church. We immediately set up an appointment to meet with his family the following day. Over the next few weeks we shared numerous Spirit-filled discussions as we taught Oscar's family about the restored gospel. We gave a copy of the Book of Mormon to each of his children. His four oldest children were soon baptized.

A few weeks after their baptism, my companion and I stepped off the bus on our way to visit the Cruz family. They lived about half a mile away from the bus stop, at the end of a dirt road. As we began walking toward their home, we noticed plumes of smoke rising from the direction of their house. However, we paid little heed, assuming it was a farmer burning brush and debris. As we got closer, we realized that this wasn't a brush fire.

"The Lord Will Watch Over Us"

The Cruz family's house had been constructed out of two-by-four wood pillars wrapped with heavy plastic that formed the walls. The roof was made of corrugated plastic. Now everything was gone except for a few scattered two-by-fours protruding from the ground, smoldering from the blaze. Fortunately, no one had been home when the fire occurred.

Shortly after we arrived, Oscar and his family pulled up in their truck and we tried to console them. They had

lost every physical possession except the clothes on their backs. After spending a short time with the family and the branch president, who had come over as soon as he heard about the incident, we decided to meet back there the next day to help sort through the debris.

It was a long bus ride home for my companion and me that night. I was worried that a trial like this, so soon after Oscar's reactivation and the baptism of his children, might be too much if they allowed doubt to enter their minds. I prayed fervently that the Cruz family would find strength in the face of adversity.

We left early the next morning to meet at the scene of the fire with members of the branch. I approached Oscar the moment we arrived to once again offer my condolences. I had tried to prepare responses to the questions I felt were inevitable. Why would the Lord allow something like this to happen? Why do I feel punished for coming back to church? But Oscar didn't ask any of these questions. He only said, "Elder Sanchez, it's OK. I know that everything will be OK. The Lord will watch over us."

I was very humbled by the sincere testimony of this dear brother. The Lord reminded me that every trial can be overcome when we turn to Him and keep our focus on what is really important. With my spirits lifted, I went to work sifting through the rubble. A member of the Church had brought a large trailer for us to use to remove anything that could not be salvaged. Unfortunately, that was almost everything.



LOOK TO THE BOOK

“Do you realize that the Book of Mormon was written for you—and for your day? This book is one of the blessings of living in what we call the dispensation of the fulness of times. Although the Book of Mormon was written by inspired, ancient authors—many of whom were prophets—they and the people of their day did not have the benefit of possessing the whole book. . . .

“Within the book’s pages, you will discover the infinite love and incomprehensible grace of God. As you strive to follow the teachings you find there, your joy will expand, your understanding will increase, and the answers you seek to the many challenges mortality presents will be opened to you. As you look to the book, you look to the Lord.”

Elder Gary E. Stevenson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Look to the Book, Look to the Lord,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2016, 46, 47.



A Precious Book

As I was shoveling up ash, a small rectangular object caught my attention. I stooped down and picked up a burned Book of Mormon. The cover was missing, and the edges were charred and black. I realized that this was one of the copies of the Book of Mormon I had given to Oscar’s children. Heavyhearted, I walked over to the trailer to dispose of a book that meant so much to me but that couldn’t be salvaged.

As I reached up to throw away the book, I couldn’t do it. It was almost as if it were sticky and my hand couldn’t let go. I looked at the burned pages once again. I still couldn’t bring myself to throw it away, so I set it aside, planning to throw it away later. The rest of the afternoon my thoughts kept returning to that Book of Mormon. Stories and verses from its pages ran through my mind. I thought about its importance in my life, the sacrifices that had been made so that I could read the words of these ancient American prophets today. I recalled the discussions we had had with Oscar’s family and the gospel truths we had shared from the Book of Mormon.

As we finally finished cleaning up that afternoon, I walked back to the place where I

had hidden the book and picked it up. Again I thought about throwing it away, but once again I couldn’t bring myself to do it. Burned, tattered, and unreadable as it was, it was still a Book of Mormon. I had always known the Book of Mormon was important, but I don’t think I had truly realized until then just how much I cherished its words. I wrapped it in a plastic bag for safekeeping.

I carried that burned Book of Mormon around with me in a plastic bag for the rest of my mission. The story of the Cruz family had become part of my story. For the rest of my mission I shared how they lost their house in a fire but relied on their faith in God to help them move forward. Then I shared my story of finding the burned Book of Mormon and how I couldn’t throw it away because its doctrine and stories meant so much to me. In the decade or so since I have been home, I have continued to share this story about the burned Book of Mormon with my family, youth groups, missionaries, and elders quorums. Every time I share the story, the Spirit reconfirms to me the divinity and truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and its teachings. ■

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