SEARCHING FOR GOD

I have never felt such a strong feeling of peace as I did when I first attended seminary.

By Ismael Ezequiel Polanco Almonte

When I was only about eight years old, I wondered about the nature of God. One day my father read the scripture from the book of James that promises that if we lack wisdom, we can "ask of God, that giveth . . . liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given" (James 1:5). Those words filled my heart and were imprinted on my mind.
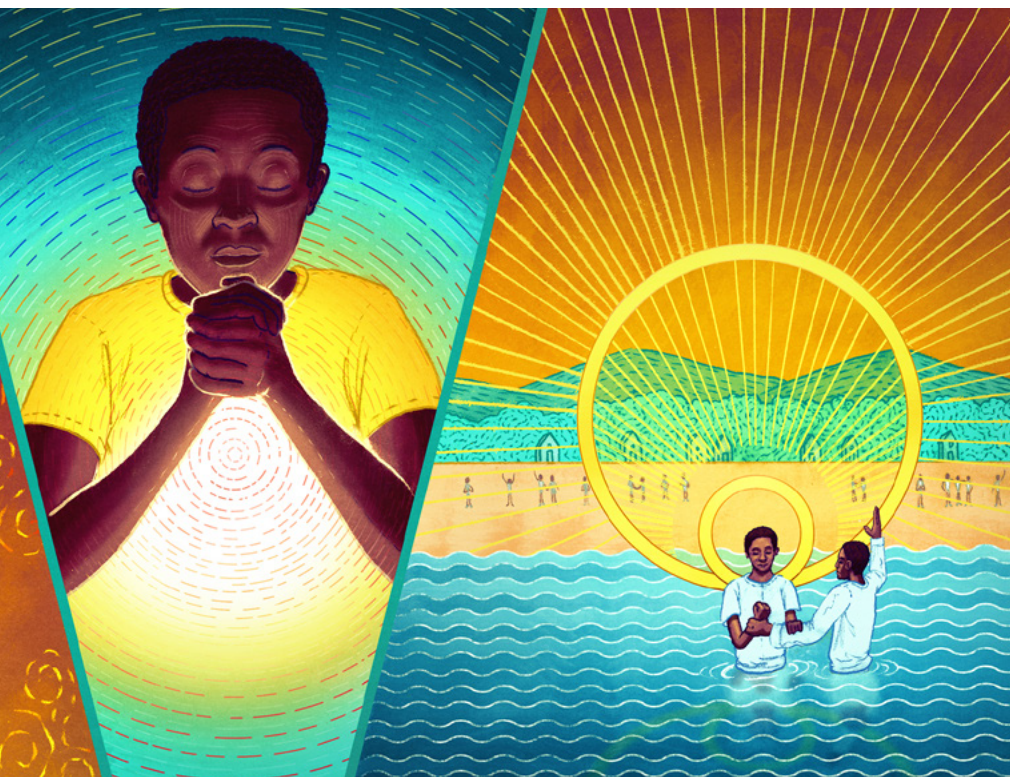
When I was alone in my bedroom, I prayed to God, asking Him to tell me if the church I was attending was the right one. I wanted Him to answer me immediately. But that didn't happen. God didn't do what I wanted, and I was sad that He hadn't answered my prayer immediately.

I wanted to know! I had done what I thought was sufficient.

Growing up, I had the opportunity to search for the answer in many churches. As I did, I got more and more confused. Everybody contradicted each other, and they would just gloss over my questions about the nature of God.

Years later, tired of searching, I said, "There is no answer."

I began to do things that some modern youth do, such as partying and participating in a lot of worldly diversions. Each week I sank further and further into darkness because my decisions weren't the best. The bad habits were also distancing me from my family, who had always supported me.

But once again the desire came to me to ask God. I prayed, "Father, I am here waiting. I have searched, and I have not found. The scriptures promise answers, but nothing is coming. Look at me. I am alone. I want to know, but I don't know how to find You."

At that time only—not before and not after, but just when I needed it— I felt that my chest burned as strong as if a volcano were inside of me. I couldn't control the tears. I knew it was an answer to my question.

In the afternoon, when I was at school, I was thinking about my answer when my best friend asked me, "What are you thinking about, Ismael?" I didn't give him a truthful answer then, telling him that I was thinking about the beach and that I wanted to go see the sunrise in the morning. I invited him to go.

"I can't," he told me, smiling.

"Why not?" I asked him. "What are you doing so early in the morning?"

"Seminary," he said.

"Seminary? What is seminary?" I asked him. He explained to me that it was classes that his church held.

"How long have you been going to a church?" I asked him, surprised.

"As long as I can remember. I'm a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

I told him I wanted to go and see. I knew inside that it was an answer to my long years of prayer.

The next day I woke up at 5:30 a.m. and went to seminary. The greatest surprise was that they were studying the Bible. I can say that I have never felt such a strong feeling of peace as I did when I entered the branch's building in Matancita, the Dominican Republic, where pure doctrine was shared, delicious to a soul that had sought so anxiously. The hymns sung filled my mind and my heart with a thought: "This is the truth."

"Wow," I thought, "I want to feel this every day." I asked when I could come back, and the teacher, my friend's mother, gave me the class schedule and invited me to come to the branch's Sunday services also.

From then on, every Monday through Friday, I got up at 5:30 to go to seminary and every Sunday to church. I couldn't miss. I had found what I had always been looking for.

Sadly, there were no missionaries to teach me and baptize me. After a year and a half and much prayer, missionaries arrived and taught me all of the missionary lessons in a week. I remember the moment when I was submerged in the blue waters on my village's beautiful beach.

I now enjoy the privilege of being not a stranger or foreigner (see Ephesians 2:19) but a brother of all those who have entered in the path of the Lord, the strait and narrow path. ■

The author lives in Santiago, Dominican Republic.