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## Things I Learned as a **YOUNG CONVERT**

*When I was new in the Church, I saw a great example of sacrifice from the other youth in my ward. From that point onward, I have learned many great lessons.*

I joined the Church when I was 17 years old. I had been introduced to it through Americans from a military base in my hometown in Germany. There was no German-speaking ward in my area, so I attended church with the Americans at the military base in the little multid denominational army chapel.

One Sunday not long after I was baptized, at the end of the services, the bishop stood up and asked, “Can all the parents with seminary students please remain behind?” He

also asked me to join them.

Once these families, the bishop, and I were the only ones remaining in the chapel, the bishop explained that I was eligible to join their seminary class for the next school year. But I attended the local German school, which started over an hour earlier than the American school that all of the youth from the military base attended. In order for me to have enough time to race down the hill to get to my school on time, they would have to move their seminary class to 6:00 a.m., more than an hour earlier than they had been meeting.

The bishop then asked everyone to vote on whether they would be willing to make this sacrifice so that I could join the class. Immediately, all the parents and all the students raised their hands and said yes.





**The bishop asked everyone to vote on holding seminary an hour earlier so that I could attend. They all said yes.**



That was quite an impressive moment for me. It taught me a lesson about sacrifice. These young students were willing to personally sacrifice their own comfort—not only for a day or a week but for the whole school year—on behalf of a new convert who otherwise could not have participated in seminary.

I'm still grateful for their sacrifice, realizing how important that one year of seminary (studying the Doctrine and Covenants) was for my early life in the Church. Without seminary I wouldn't have had much contact with the Church except on Sunday. Daily seminary was a great preparation for a mission. It taught me a lot about discipline, and, of course, it blessed me to no end in my knowledge of the gospel and the scriptures. Ask me all the Doctrine and Covenants scripture mastery verses from back then, and I will still know them. These experiences helped me to draw closer to Heavenly Father and also helped me to deal with the challenges of being the only German-speaking member of the Church in my town.

### **Commune with God**

After I finished school and before I went on a mission, I completed mandatory military service. While I was in the military, I picked up a habit that I've kept to this day: to pray always.

Obviously, the environment in the military wasn't always very spiritual—the lockers, the pictures, the talk,

the movies people watched at night. But I knew I was going to go on a mission. I wanted to stay strong. I didn't want to fall. I didn't want to give in to peer pressure. So I developed a habit of praying in my heart all the time.

Walking from building to building, going up and down hills in the forests, lying in the foxholes, playing war games—wherever I was, I would engage with Heavenly Father in prayer whenever I could, filling minutes and sometimes hours by communing or talking with Heavenly Father in order to draw close to Him and stay strong. Mostly, I would just give thanks.

This habit is still with me. When I'm driving somewhere or sitting in a bus or walking someplace, it has become natural for me to always have a prayer in my heart or to “pray always” as the scriptures say (see, for instance, 2 Nephi 32:9). That's a good habit to develop at an early age.

We know we're supposed to say our prayers, but that doesn't just mean kneeling for a brief moment in the morning and at night as a favor to Heavenly Father. Prayer should turn into an honest, deep, and ongoing communion with your Father, which, over time, will help you draw closer and closer to Him. Developing this habit of prayer will help you face all of the temptations out there in the world (see 3 Nephi 18:15, 18). So, when you're going from point A to point B, or whenever you have a free moment, consider spending less time listening to music or texting and a little more time praying in your heart.

### **Apply the Atonement of Jesus Christ at All Times**

As you continue to pray and to learn the gospel, you will find that the Atonement of Jesus Christ is available to you every hour of every day in order to help you “retain a remission of your sins” (see Mosiah 4:11–12). You can go before Heavenly Father to access this power and be made clean literally at any time, not just on Sunday, not just when you go to the bishop to confess something serious.

The Lord means for you to draw upon the Atonement of Jesus Christ daily so that you can become clean and worthy, feel the Spirit, and be guided all the time rather than having constant ups and downs. By drawing upon the Atonement every day, you can have this blessing no matter what mistakes you may have made in the past. Many youth feel that repentance consists only of going to the bishop and telling him about serious sins. But repentance is a lot more. It means making a humble, consistent, prayerful, daily effort to (1) study the scriptures, especially those that teach about the Atonement of Christ, and then (2) learn how to actually apply it in your life every moment of every day. That is what it's for. Let Heavenly Father know every day that this is what you want—to be better today than you were yesterday.

and striving to keep the commandments and apply the Atonement every day, *all the time*. As the Apostle Paul said, “Examine yourselves” (2 Corinthians 13:5). But once you learn about the Atonement and how to draw upon it, you'll find that you can feel the Lord's love despite your shortcomings.

Understand who you are, and understand who Christ is and what He did for you. Then put those two things together so that you can be clean all the time and have confidence in yourself and in Heavenly Father and the Savior. Then, by extension, you will have a good sense of self-worth and self-confidence.

In time, these are things I began to learn as a young convert, and they have blessed my life greatly. As you sacrifice, study, and strive to stay close to Heavenly Father, He will bless you as well. Never give up! ■

## The Atonement of Jesus Christ is available to you every hour of every day.

Don't allow the adversary to put any distance between you and Heavenly Father by causing you to feel that you're not good enough, that everybody else is better—as if the Savior's Atonement and His love and approbation were dangled in front of you but never reachable. That just isn't true. Heavenly Father loves you just as you are today, but, of course, you *always* have to keep improving

