

PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS BY CRAIG DIMOND

Never Give Up

A husband and wife tell of their conversions to the gospel of Jesus Christ—35 years apart.

By Al and Eva Fry

Her Story

For 35 years I hoped and waited for my husband to become a member of the Church. Those long years were full of heartfelt prayers, but three prayers in particular were memorable turning points in my experience.

Al and I were married in 1959. A decade later we had three children and were living in a small town in Canada. Al ran a construction business, and I was a stay-at-home mom who sometimes helped with the business. On the weekends, Al and I partied with our friends, always with alcohol. My dad had been an alcoholic, so I hated that drinking was such a big part of our lives, but it had become our way of socializing.

That year, 1969, I realized my life was going nowhere and that our children deserved better than what we were offering them. One night after another drinking party, I got down on my knees and prayed, “Dear God, if You are there, please help me change my life.” I promised Him I would never drink alcohol again, a commitment I’ve honored ever since.

That was the first memorable prayer, and it was answered quickly. My sister-in-law’s daughter, my niece, had been invited to attend Primary with a Latter-day Saint friend. As my sister-in-law learned more about the Church, she felt inspired to send me a subscription to the Church

magazines, which arrived within a month after I had said that first prayer. I didn’t know what a Mormon was, but I loved the messages the magazines contained and read them cover to cover. I decided to investigate the Church and therein found my answer. I *did* change my life, and I was baptized on June 19, 1970.

Al did not share my desires. He liked our former lifestyle and continued to live it. He continued to be a good husband, father, and provider, but for the next 35 years, as far as the gospel was concerned, I was on my own.

I was raising our children in the Church, but within a few years, our children decided they would rather spend Sundays boating with their dad than attending church with me. I was devastated. One day in 1975 I talked to my stake president and told him that I had decided I needed to leave the Church because it was breaking up our family. He patiently listened and said, “Do what you must, but be sure that your Father in Heaven approves.” So I went home and fasted and prayed. That was the second memorable prayer. The answer that came was the impression that I was the link in the gospel chain for my family; if I broke that link, everyone would be lost. I knew the answer came from God, so I committed to never leave the Church. And I never did.



LIVE FOR IT, PRAY FOR IT

“Throughout your life on earth, seek diligently to fulfill the fundamental purposes of this life *through the ideal family*. While you may not have yet reached that ideal, do all you can through obedience and faith in the Lord to consistently draw as close to it as you are able. Let nothing dissuade you from that objective. . . . If for the present, that does not include sealing in the temple to a righteous companion, live for it. Pray for it. Exercise faith that you will obtain it. Never do anything that would make you unworthy of it. If you have lost the vision of eternal marriage, rekindle it. If your dream requires patience, give it. As brothers, we prayed and worked for 30 years before our mother and our nonmember father were sealed in the temple. Don’t become overanxious. Do the best you can. We cannot say whether that blessing will be obtained on this side of the veil or beyond it, but the Lord will keep His promises.”

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “First Things First,” *Liahona*, July 2001, 7; *Ensign*, May 2001, 7.

Staying faithful didn’t come easily, but several things helped me maintain my faith and patiently hope for the day when Al would reconsider the gospel:

- I always loved Al and did my best to look after him and be a supportive, faithful wife.
- I prayed constantly. Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ became my gospel companions. When being with Al was difficult because he wasn’t living gospel standards, I talked with Heavenly Father and came to know my Savior.
- I regularly read my scriptures and every other Church publication I could get my hands on, including the *Ensign*. Two verses of scripture in particular, 3 Nephi 13:33 and Doctrine and Covenants 75:11, became especially meaningful and poignant to me. They gave me strength and patience to hold on while waiting for a change of heart in my husband and children.

- I faithfully went to church by myself until each of our children came back. All are active today. When they grew up and left home, I continued to attend church by myself.
- We held family home evening without Al knowing that was what we were doing. I would bring up a subject at the dinner table, and we would talk about it as a family.
- I always tried to be obedient and do the right thing.
- I accessed additional power by requesting priesthood blessings.
- I sought counsel from priesthood leaders.
- I treated my Church friends as family.
- I went to the temple and received my endowment. It took me many years to make that decision; I was afraid it would make my relationship with Al more difficult. In the end, I found it was the best decision for me. Al supported it, it made me happy, and after receiving it, I no longer resented Al as the reason I wasn’t going to the temple. When I participated in temple worship, I often put Al’s name on the prayer roll.

In essence, I continued to live as a faithful member of the Church. I looked for small ways to share the gospel with him, even though he usually didn’t want to hear it. But I found that the Holy Ghost would inspire me with the right things to say and the right way and time to share them. I later learned that because of my faithfulness and commitment to him, Al was touched by the Spirit from time to time.

He even agreed to listen to the missionary lessons on several occasions. But each time, my heart broke because he always returned to his old way of life. Even in these discouraging moments, however, Heavenly Father watched over me and made up for what I didn’t have with other blessings. All along I knew that there was something inside Al worth waiting for.

Slowly Al began to make changes. He stopped swearing. He stopped drinking. He treated me better than he ever had before. He began coming to church.

And I kept praying.

The incredible answer to my third memorable prayer came in April 2005. I was wondering if Al would ever accept the gospel of Jesus Christ—I was feeling a little bit desperate. I pleaded with Heavenly Father for His help. It must have finally been the right time because on July 9, Al was baptized.

Although getting to this point was not easy, I am grateful to have witnessed the amazing power of God in changing an unbelieving heart to a believing one. I know that He heard and answered the many prayers I prayed over the course of 35 years. Because of His answers, I now live with a changed man, one who loves our Heavenly Father as much as I do. And we love each other more deeply than we ever did before.

I know that there are others in the Church who are waiting, hoping, and praying for a loved one to come into the Church. I wish to encourage these brothers and sisters to accept the Savior's invitation to "come unto me" (Alma 5:34) for themselves and not just for their loved ones. I know from experience that doing so will give strength as nothing else can. Staying close to Heavenly Father, obeying His commandments, and enjoying current blessings yield happiness and allow Him to work through us.

I testify that God does hear our prayers. Waiting on the Lord and accepting His timetable with faith is rarely easy, but I know that His timing is always right.

His Story

For 35 years many people discussed the gospel with me. My wife never missed an opportunity to talk about it, and she would cleverly leave the Book of Mormon and *Ensign* magazine in plain sight. Of course, I never picked them up. She invited the missionaries over on many occasions; two or three sets of them even taught me the missionary lessons.

So what was keeping me from entering the waters of baptism?

I always had an excuse. I worked long hours. I didn't see that I'd ever have time for the gospel. I was much too busy making money. So I told Eva, "Sometime when things slow

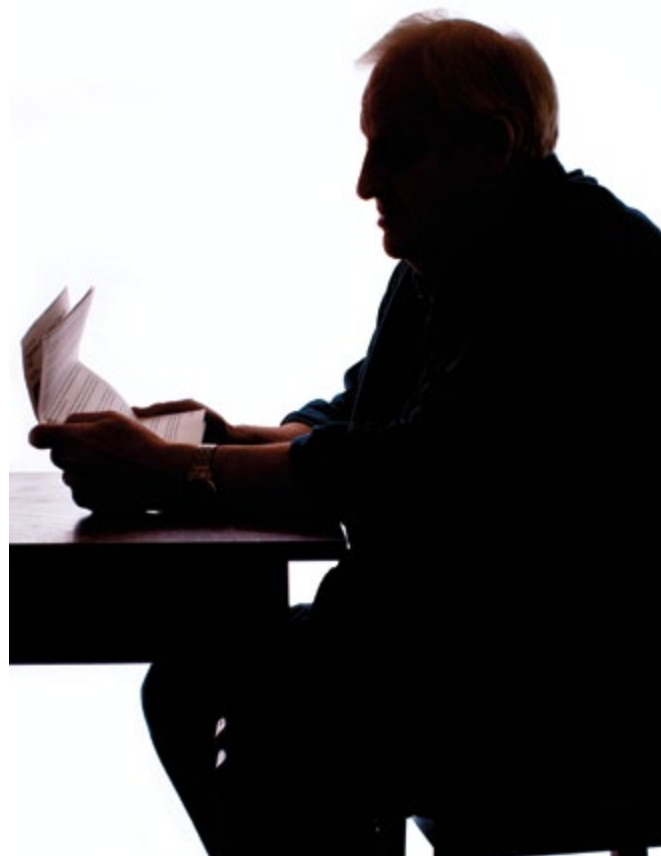
down and I have more time, I'll read the Book of Mormon."

But I never did. Besides, I had never been much of a reader, and when I tried to read the Bible, it didn't make any sense to me. So that was the end of that.

There was another thing that was keeping me from joining the Church, something more serious: the sinful life I was leading. King Benjamin teaches us that "the natural man is an enemy to God . . . unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit" (Mosiah 3:19). I did not yield—I was sitting on the fence. The Savior said, "He that is not with me is against me" (Mathew 12:30). I realize now that because of the way I was living my life, I was against Him. I needed to change.

I was living around the gospel but never actually living it, but as time went on, I started to feel the Spirit. I

As I read my daughter's letter, I realized I had no more excuses.



stopped partying and drinking. When I made that change, the Spirit started to manifest itself more frequently. I still wasn't where I needed to be—my language wasn't very good and I had some other bad habits to work on—but I was changing.

Then one day I received a package. It was from one of my daughters, Linda. It contained a Book of Mormon and a Bible with lots of marked scriptures. She also wrote me a letter in which she told me how much she loved me and wanted me to know what she knew.

She wrote, "The only way to know if the gospel of Jesus Christ is true is to ask with a sincere heart and with real intent."

Linda then shared a series of scriptures that led me on a journey of prayer and scripture study.

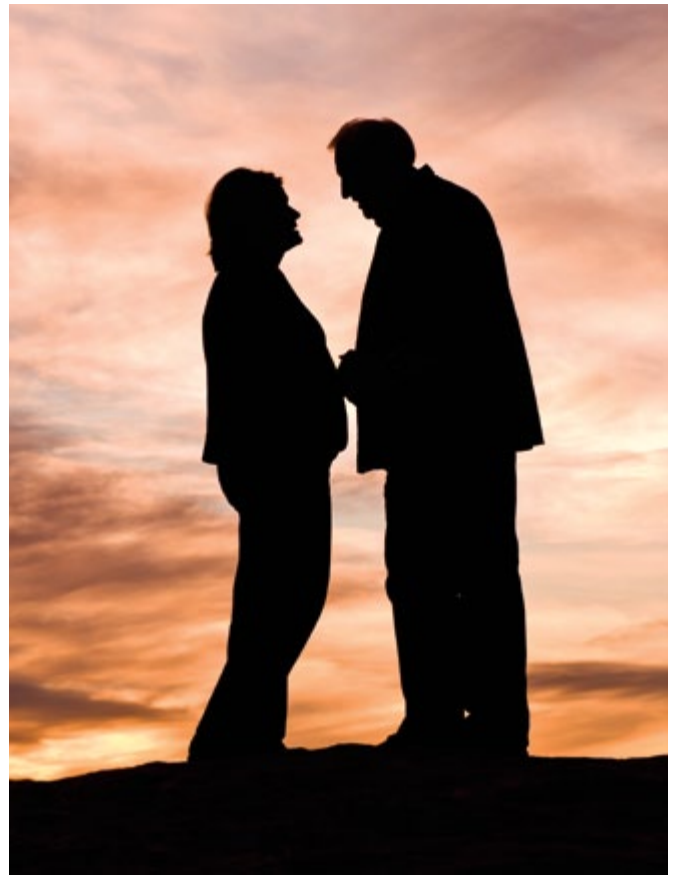
"The only way I get to know my Savior and Heavenly Father," she wrote, "is by praying and reading about Them in scriptures."

She then described how important humility is and how, without God in her life, she couldn't have peace. Finally, she wrote, "Don't procrastinate anymore. You have been given so much. Now it's time to give back to Heavenly Father. This is the only way to true happiness."

I no longer had any excuses. Work slowed down, and I had some extra time. So I started reading and studying the scriptures she had outlined for me, which gave me the desire to read the entire Book of Mormon. But there were still so many things I did not understand.

By this time I was attending sacrament meeting because my wife said it would be nice if I came and sat beside her. She also suggested I read the Doctrine and Covenants. I did, and I understood it better. Then, with my wife's help, I read the Book of Mormon and experienced the scriptures coming to life. Through lots of prayer, the Spirit was ignited in me.

What made the difference in me? The Holy Spirit and a knowledge of the scriptures. Both gave me the courage to change my life and to ask God for forgiveness of my sins, which were what had really kept me from joining the Church all those years.



Great happiness has come into our lives because we are united in the gospel.

Confessing my sins was very difficult. It brought me such pain that I lay in bed for three days in sorrow. But through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, I was forgiven. Then Heavenly Father gave me the strength to get up and get on with my new life.

My son Kevin baptized me on July 9, 2005. One of the missionaries who had taught my wife decades earlier attended. Two years later I took my family to the San Diego California Temple to be sealed for time and eternity.

The last seven years have been the happiest years of my life. I can finally take my place as the patriarch and spiritual leader of our family and share in the gospel with my wife, our children, and our nine grandchildren. This family unity has spiritually strengthened everyone. A son-in-law has joined the Church, and four of our grandchildren have served or are serving missions. My new life in the Church is a miracle. I had no idea what great happiness and growth it would bring me.

I am so thankful for this second chance. I am grateful to be making up for those lost years by doing God's work. ■