

THE MAN FROM THE

By Travis Behunin

I couldn't imagine a homeless man as a golden investigator, but then I met Ray.

The call came that comes to every missionary now and again. I was serving in California, and it was time for me to transfer to a new area. As soon as I met my new companion, Elder Wilding, he hurried us out of the door. He was not one to waste time when there were so many people waiting to hear the gospel.

Elder Wilding said we had an appointment to teach a first discussion later that day. As we were out contacting people, he told me about the man we would be teaching.

His name was Ray, and he had a habit of

walking the streets at night. It wasn't because he liked walking or taking in the night air. It was because Ray had fallen on hard times, and the downtown streets were the closest thing to someplace he could call home.

Elder Wilding and his previous companion ran into Ray on their way home one night. They had talked briefly with him about the Church and the Book of Mormon. They had asked if he would like a copy of the book and if they could come back and teach him more. Ray had accepted the book and said he would meet them at the corner

ILLUSTRATION BY KEITH LARSON



Street

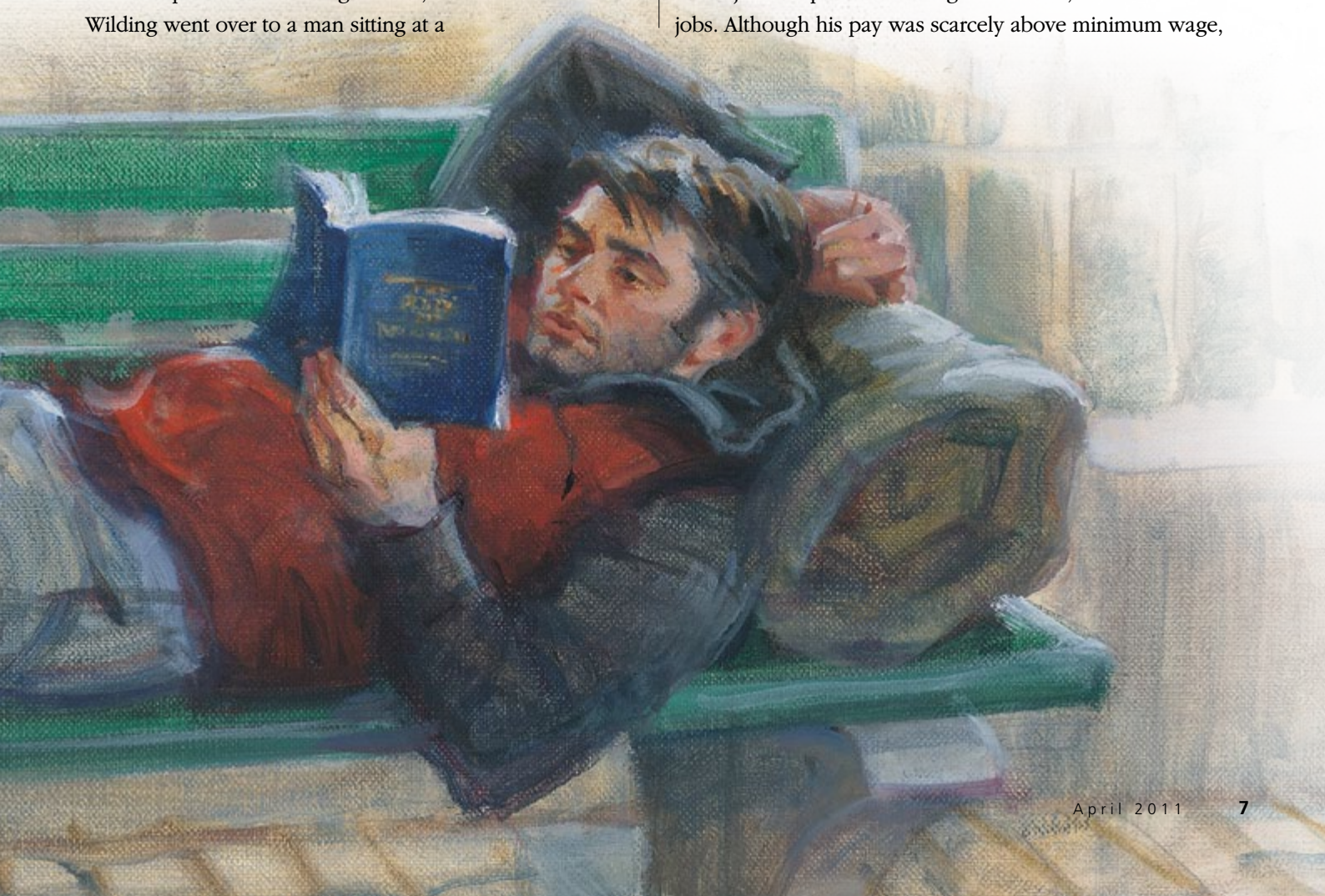
bookstore the next day.

I took all this in but was stuck on the part about Ray living on the streets. I was picturing in my mind a man with a scraggly gray beard, wearing a faded trench coat, and begging for money to buy a drink. I couldn't see how we could do anything for this man from the streets.

We reached the bookstore and went in. The two levels of the store were filled with row after row of books. Upstairs were some tables and chairs where people could sit and read. It looked more like a library than a bookstore. We passed several people wandering around as we headed upstairs. When we got there, Elder Wilding went over to a man sitting at a

table reading a book. The man looked no different from the other people in the bookstore. And at first I was wondering who he was. Then I noticed the book the man was reading. It was the Book of Mormon.

Ray was nothing like the man I had been expecting. He was a middle-aged guy who had just had a streak of bad luck. Some people who have lost their jobs, their home, and everything they have turn bitter at the world and expect others to solve their problems. But there was something different about Ray. He wasn't about to wait for someone to come along with a handout. When he couldn't find a job that paid him enough to survive, he took two jobs. Although his pay was scarcely above minimum wage,





I learned that the Lord is mindful of all His children and sees the potential in each and every one of us.

he was determined to get himself off the street as soon as possible.

You would have thought after seeing Ray that my heart would have softened, but I was still skeptical. However, as we taught Ray about Jesus Christ and told him about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, he was genuinely interested in what we had to say. He

told us to meet him again in two days' time.

Soon we were teaching Ray regularly, meeting in many different places. I would have to say the most interesting place was in a coffee house. It was at this meeting that we were to teach Ray about the Word of Wisdom. I didn't miss the irony that we were going to commit Ray to stop drinking coffee in a place where he was surrounded by the stuff.

Ray was waiting for us. I groaned inwardly when I saw the cup of coffee sitting next to him. He sipped his coffee while we taught. I wondered if he would laugh at us when we asked him to stop drinking coffee.

The time came, and we asked Ray if he would live the Word of Wisdom. I braced myself for his reaction. He didn't hesitate. He looked around and said, "I guess we'll want to meet somewhere else next time." He told us that there was a little Mexican restaurant a few blocks away. He was friends with the owner. They had a balcony in the back used for large groups, and he thought the owners would let us meet there.

Ray gained a testimony and was baptized and confirmed. A Church member in his new ward offered him a spare room he could rent. Ray thanked the Lord for getting him off the streets and back on his feet. He said it was not until the Church and the gospel came into his life that things started coming back together for him.

My heart had finally been softened, and my eyes were opened to see the Lord's hand in Ray's life. I was humbled to learn that Heavenly Father is mindful of all His children and sees the great potential in each and every one of us—even when we can't see it ourselves. **NE**