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It Starts with Sharing

BY RYAN E. WITHROW



With almost any conversion story, I believe the process begins with members of the Church attempting to *share* what they believe. I was fortunate enough to have such a member do exactly that for me when I was a sophomore in high school. Her name was Cami, and she often invited me to Mutual activities and to church. Unfortunately, I wasn't ready to accept the gospel at that point in my life, so I kindly turned her down. However, her efforts were not in vain.

During my high school years, I played football and had a good friend named Ryan. I frequently offered him rides home from practice. Early one morning in February of 2003, my senior year, I was at school getting help from my math teacher. A girl walked in the door and announced the death of my friend Ryan. I was astonished and almost didn't believe the words I had just heard. A good friend of mine, whom I had just talked to a week before, was now dead.



I made the decision to miss school the next week and attend the funeral services. Upon arriving, I noticed that the building was very beautiful and bore the logo of the church to which it belonged—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The moment I walked in the door, I felt something different: a sense of peace, joy, and happiness—feelings that are not typically experienced at a funeral. As the services progressed, I noticed a new vocabulary, one that I had never before heard. The words *gospel* and *Atonement* entered into my mind for the first time. It was something new and unheard-of but, oddly enough, familiar.

I listened attentively as Ryan's mom spoke, and tears came to my eyes. *Something* was telling me that this “plan of salvation,” which she was speaking about, was true. I felt that the people in this chapel had something in their lives that I did not, and for some reason, I felt a desire to get it.

Now, I was not completely oblivious to Mormons. I grew up in Mesa, Arizona, where members of the Church come in great abundance. I knew two things for sure: first, many of my friends were members of the Church, and second, Church members believed in something called the Book of Mormon. I had a newfound desire to get my hands on this book and to find out what this religion was all about.

In March of 2003, one of my good friends, Bret, invited me to help with his Eagle Scout project. After school the next day we drove in his truck with another friend of ours, Camden, to where the project would be. Inspired by the Spirit, Bret directed Camden to a Book of Mormon situated in a holder in the passenger-side door. He told him to open to a verse he had recently read in the Book of Alma. My interest was sparked, and for the first time, I saw the book I wanted so very badly. However, I was too scared to say anything right then. Upon returning that evening, I worked up the confidence to ask Bret for the book. He happily gave it to me and told me to read it. That night I read nine chapters. From the moment I picked up the book, I fell in love with its message.

The next evening, I was sitting in Bret's living room with his family and two young men dressed in dark suits, both of whom were named “Elder.” I learned these were missionaries for Bret's church. We watched *Finding Faith in Christ*. I will admit that I cried during the movie and loved

every bit of the lesson. I decided to continue investigating and to come to church. I eventually finished the lessons and accepted everything the elders taught me about being a member of the Church of Jesus Christ.

One night as I was kneeling in prayer after reading a portion of the Book of Mormon, I specifically asked if what I was learning was true. Overwhelming feelings of peace and joy came into my heart. I was feeling the Spirit, and it was answering my prayers. After that time, I knew without a doubt that the Book of Mormon was true. I felt it in my heart and had the knowledge given to me in my mind.

With this new knowledge, I knew what my next step would be. I was baptized on May 3, 2003. The following day, I was confirmed a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I will always remember my baptism, the Spirit I felt, and the covenants I made with my Heavenly Father.

My first year as a member of the Church was a long and difficult one, but also full of rewards. Being the only member in your family isn't the easiest thing, and I also received much persecution from old friends. In May of 2004, I received the Melchizedek Priesthood and a call to serve in the Virginia Richmond Mission, speaking Spanish. I left my nonmember family in July of 2004, not knowing exactly what I was getting myself into or just what it was that I was leaving behind.

During the beginning months of my mission, I heard many things from many friends about the progress of my parents in the Church. They had been attending church off and on and had allowed the missionaries to come by every so often. I was always excited to hear news. Then one Saturday morning my mission president told me he had just spoken with my stake president about my parents. My parents had decided to join the Church. The gospel had now changed their lives for the better, just as it had mine only two years before.

I am so grateful for my Savior Jesus Christ and for the opportunity I had to serve Him as a missionary. I now understand more fully the plan of salvation. I know that this is the gospel and Church of Jesus Christ. Upon returning from my mission in July of 2006 I was overjoyed to enter the Mesa temple with my parents, where we were sealed as a family for time and all eternity. It's a day I could hardly have imagined just a few years earlier. **NE**

The Spirit was answering my prayers in my heart and in my mind.

