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A CALL TO GROW

BY ELDER ULISSES SOARES

Of the Seventy

I was born in Brazil to a good family with four boys and a good mother and father.

When I was born, my parents were not members of the Church. They joined the Church when I was a little boy, and I was baptized and confirmed when I turned eight years old.

When I turned 12, my bishop invited me in for an interview. In that interview he explained to me what the Aaronic Priesthood is. He explained to me my responsibilities in holding the priesthood. I was set apart as deacons quorum president, but I was the only member of that quorum who was active. At that time my great bishop taught me an important lesson on Church service.

A Simple Invitation

One Sunday we were in the chapel for priesthood meeting, and he turned to me and asked, “Where are the other boys?”

Where are the deacons in your quorum?”

I said, “I’m it. I’m the only one I know of.”

“What are you doing to get to know the members of your quorum?” he said.

I said, “I don’t know what to do.”

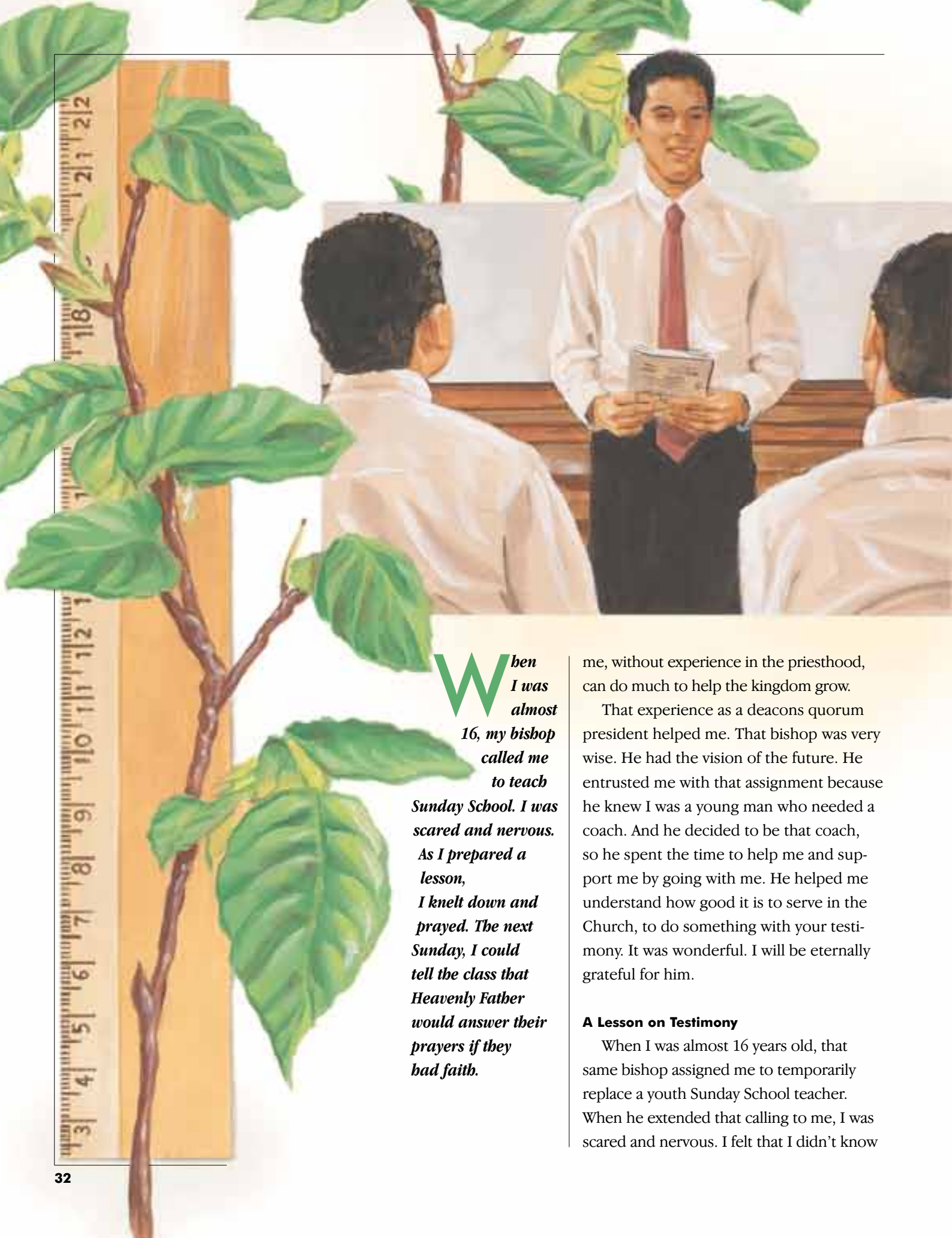
And then he sweetly said, “I’ll tell you what to do.”

He then took me with him right after the meeting, and we walked around the neighborhood, visiting each of the young men on the quorum list and inviting them to come back. And several of them did come back after a few visits. Some went on to serve missions, have great families, and become bishops and stake presidents. And it all started with that simple visit from my bishop and me. He paid attention to that special need in our little ward, and I’m really grateful because I learned a lesson that has remained with me.

Through my life I have learned that people are ready to be invited to come back. You have to go and invite them. Even a boy like



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When I was almost 16, my bishop called me to teach Sunday School. I was scared and nervous. As I prepared a lesson, I knelt down and prayed. The next Sunday, I could tell the class that Heavenly Father would answer their prayers if they had faith.

me, without experience in the priesthood, can do much to help the kingdom grow.

That experience as a deacons quorum president helped me. That bishop was very wise. He had the vision of the future. He entrusted me with that assignment because he knew I was a young man who needed a coach. And he decided to be that coach, so he spent the time to help me and support me by going with me. He helped me understand how good it is to serve in the Church, to do something with your testimony. It was wonderful. I will be eternally grateful for him.

A Lesson on Testimony

When I was almost 16 years old, that same bishop assigned me to temporarily replace a youth Sunday School teacher. When he extended that calling to me, I was scared and nervous. I felt that I didn't know

enough to teach. I thought, “How can I be a teacher in that class? It’s like the blind leading the blind.”

I remember that in one specific lesson I had to talk about the testimony of Jesus Christ. We were studying in the Book of Mormon about how we could have a testimony of the gospel. I felt in my heart that I knew this Church is true, that Jesus is the Christ. But I had never prayed about those things. I thought, “How in the world can I teach these youth that they have to pray and receive an answer when I’ve never prayed for an answer?”

Ever since I was born, I had been taught about faith in Jesus Christ. And when I became a member of the Church, I always had that warm feeling in my heart about Jesus Christ, about my Heavenly Father, and about the Church. I had never had any concerns about whether this was the true Church of Jesus Christ; I had never prayed about it because those feelings were so strong. But in preparation for that class that week, I decided that I should pray to receive a confirmation that the gospel is true.

I knelt down in my room, and I decided to pray with all my might to confirm in my heart that this is the true Church of Jesus Christ. I was not expecting a great manifestation or an angel or something. I didn’t know what to expect as an answer.

When I knelt down and asked the Lord if the gospel is true, there came to my heart a very sweet feeling, a small voice that confirmed to me the gospel is true and that I should continue in it. It was so strong that I could never say that I didn’t know. I could never disregard that answer. Even though it was a small voice, it was a very strong feeling in my heart.

I spent that whole day feeling so happy that I couldn’t think about anything bad. When kids at school would say bad things, I wouldn’t listen to them. It was like I was in heaven, contemplating that beautiful feeling in my heart.

The next Sunday, when I stood up in front of the class of young people, I could share my testimony and tell them that Heavenly Father would answer their prayers if they

had faith. I read James 1:5, which is the same scripture Joseph Smith read regarding asking God for wisdom. But the next verse says that you have to ask in faith, “for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed” (James 1:6). It also says that a person cannot expect to receive an answer if he or she has a heart that doesn’t trust when praying. And then I said to myself and to my little class that we should ask with real faith, looking for an answer, and then the Lord will answer.

From that time on my testimony gave me the conviction I needed to make good decisions, especially in moments when I faced challenges. All of us faced challenges in keeping the standards of the gospel, especially those, like me, who were the only Church members at their schools. But my testimony helped me to remember that even though I was pressured by my friends to do wrong things, I knew in my heart that I was following the true gospel of Jesus Christ. After that experience I could never reject that testimony.

That day made a big difference in my life. Afterward I continued preparing myself for a mission with the help of my wonderful bishop and my family. I served a mission, and when I came back, I went to school to get my degree. I married and started a family. And everything happened because of that prayer when I was only about 16 years old.

A Lifetime of Growth

As I said, I always knew the gospel was true, but I had to ask and then share my own experience with other people. That helped me on my mission too, because when I invited people to pray, I could tell them my own experience, letting them know that I had done that before. I testified that they could get an answer if they would pray with faith.

Great blessings came to me because I was given the opportunity to learn and serve and grow through callings and assignments in the Church. I pray that as such opportunities come to you, you will take advantage of them. They can make all the difference in your life. **NE**