

By Janet Thomas

Church Magazines

Gaining a testimony is a big part of being an LDS teen in Jacksonville, Florida.

Corey remembers being 11 or so when his cousin died of cancer. He was at his funeral and struggling with questions. Why did this have to happen? He was a good kid who was strong in the gospel. Why did he have to die? His family knew they would be together again, but the loss made them so sad.

“I didn’t understand why he was taken from us. Then I heard a small voice that said, ‘I need him here.’ It was still a hard thing, but I felt better. After that experience **I know that the Lord answers my prayers.** That was the beginning of my testimony.”

Corey Clarkston is just one of a group of teens from the Mandarin First and Second wards from Jacksonville, Florida, who got together to discuss a big question, perhaps the biggest question that faces LDS teens. How do you gain a testimony?

These teens are at the age where they want to find out for themselves that the things they have been taught by their parents and at church are right. They are quick to remember that a boy of 14, right around their age, had the same dilemma. The Prophet Joseph wanted to find out the truth, and the



answer he received has affected millions of people, including this modern group of teens in Florida. Now these youth want to know more for themselves and receive the assurance of their own testimonies.

The Way You Live

On this Saturday morning, these teens are willing to come to their meetinghouse and have a serious discussion about testimonies. Just about everyone has something to say. Jacob Warner had been listening to the others when it was his turn to speak. “For me, a testimony is a lifestyle. To have a testimony, it can’t just be in your head. It’s got to be in the way you act and the way

you live.” Jacob has this well thought out. “Everything has an impact on your testimony, whether it’s good or bad. If you do something bad, it will be negative to your testimony. If you do something good, it will strengthen it.”

Matthew Zipron knows what it means to have your family’s life changed by the missionaries. He joined the Church at age 13. Now his friends ask him why he is Mormon. They ask him what is so different about his Church. Matthew admits that they may not completely understand his answer. “I tell them,” says Matthew, “when I come to my Church **I feel the Spirit really strong.**” He says he has learned to rely on the Spirit.

Matthew is not the only one who has to explain his religion to friends. Nate Livsey has started carrying a Book of Mormon

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Talking • about • Testimonies



and pass-along cards in his backpack. He has had a lot of experiences lately talking to friends about the scriptures and giving them



pass-along cards. "I used to be scared. But that's not what it's all about. Even if they go home and laugh at my cards or scriptures, **I still have to share it with them.**"

Share It

Several people mention one excellent way to help their testimonies grow. They share it.

"I've had so many experiences with my friends and family members," says



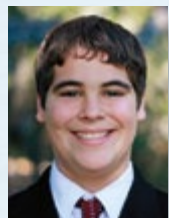
Sierra Thomas, "teaching the gospel to help them feel what I feel. **When you teach other people, you realize that you actually know this and why you believe in it.**"

Chelsea Aniel was listening. "I was just thinking about my testimony," she says, with



tears suddenly coming to her eyes. "**When I share my testimony, it grows.** I heard a good quote that says, 'What you share grows; what you withhold diminishes.'"

As they grow through their teen years, this group finds they have more and more opportunities to talk to their friends about the Church. Brandon Hudgins just received



the Aaronic Priesthood. He says, "**Friends at school ask me about the Church. It's fun teaching them what I know.**"

Doing as You Are Taught

As we talk, Tyson Warner tells of when things changed in his life. He had just been ordained to the priesthood and felt it was

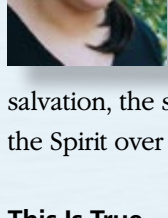
time, as he put it, to step up. "When I was about 12, I had a hard time reading the scriptures regularly. I made a goal that I would give up sleeping in, and I would wake up 30 minutes earlier every morning and spend the time reading my scriptures. It was difficult. I thought, 'What's the point in doing this?' After a month I started to feel changes in my life. I was more in tune with the Spirit. I started noticing things in the scriptures better than I could before. That's how I knew the Church is true."



Now, four years later, Tyson says, "I like **the book of Alma** because that was what I was reading when I really started to feel the Spirit. That book is special to me. It **was a turning point in my life.** I gained a strong testimony."

For Kayla Zipron, her testimony started when the missionaries were teaching her family about the plan of salvation. That has become her favorite discussion.

"When they taught us the plan of salvation, I felt that something was right. **I could feel the Spirit in the room.**



And, at Church, whenever we talk about the plan of salvation, the same feeling comes back. I feel the Spirit over again."

This Is True

Testimonies grow step by step. One of those steps happened when Megan Fowler came to understand the significance of the temple.



Megan said, "Even though I have been a member all my life, **it finally dawned on me that I'm going to be with my family forever.**"

For Adrian Adams, his testimony is tied to

Teens from the Mandarin First and Second Wards (previous page) pose for a group photo near the water. (This page) These teens were interviewed about gaining their testimonies and talked about the great feelings they have had as they stayed close to the gospel and used prayer as the means to grow closer to the Savior.

events where he could see the Lord's protection. "Growing up, your parents tell you about the gospel, and you gain the beginnings of your testimony from them. Once you become a teen, you start questioning everything."

Then Adrian pauses, remembering a traumatic accident his family had on a car trip. "You don't have control over everything.



But no matter what the situation, we can rely on the Lord."

For Adrian, this experience helped his testimony more than anything else.

For Dayna Miller, she feels her testimony growing every time she goes to church and takes the sacrament. She remembers



the day of her baptism.

"I came out of the water, and I had such a great feeling. I knew I had done the right thing. This

is true. This is real."

As each person speaks, we come around the circle to Trevor, a young man with special challenges. He sits quietly, reluctant



to participate in the discussion about testimonies.

Spontaneously, one by one, his friends in the circle start telling good things about

Trevor: how he is a good

example, how he brings friends to church, how it is nice to know him and have him as a friend. It is a great moment. The kindness toward their friend is authentic. These teens have learned something special about treating someone with Christlike kindness. It is part of their testimonies. For them, having a testimony isn't just something you talk about, it really is something you do. It is the way you live. It is the decisions you make. And these teens have found what it really means to have a testimony of Christ. **NE**



WHERE DO YOU START?

What if you don't have a testimony? Where do you even start?

"Simple desire for a testimony is a pretty strong thing," Jacob Warner answers.

Devin Reading suggests going to Alma 22:18. This is the part in the Book of Mormon where Aaron is teaching King Lamoni's father. The king wants to know what he should do to receive eternal life. He is willing to give up everything including his kingdom. Aaron encourages him to pray. The king kneels and in his prayer he says, "O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me."

"That's how you can do it," says Devin. He said prayer is a good pattern for anyone who wants to know more. Pray each night and, Devin says, you "will feel peaceful and sure."