



I NEEDED TO UNDERSTAND

When my baby sister died, I couldn't make sense of the tragedy.

I am the fifth child in a family of nine kids. We've always gone to church on Sundays and had family night on Mondays. I was president of both the Beehive and Mia Maid classes. I guess I took my religion for granted. Nobody really asked me if I believed it, and I never really even asked myself.

That all changed one Sunday morning in March. My mother had risen early to warm our home with a brisk fire in our big rock fireplace. There was no other heat in the house, and Mother knew we'd get out of bed faster if we were warm.

My mother ignited the wood on the fireplace grate, and small flames started burning the kindling. My little brother and sister were lying on the couch in a big blanket.

A flame jumped onto the nozzle of a gasoline can that had been left on the hearth. My mother lunged to take the can outside but stumbled, and gasoline spilled across the room. Suddenly the curtains, walls, and furniture caught fire.

"Matthew! Mary! Fire!" My mother jumped toward her children, the flames of the fire building around her bathrobe.

Instantly the children roused. Older Matthew shielded our younger sister, and together they leapt through the flames, stumbling outside into the early morning rain.

My mother ran toward the back rooms, shouting for the rest of us. We older children awoke in a sleepy stupor. I remember feeling the heat on my face and hearing the crackle of burning wood. Thick smoke burned my

lungs and eyes. We escaped through our bedroom windows, dropping onto the cold, wet grass with our bare feet.

Sirens broke the air as a fire truck arrived and firefighters surrounded the area. My mother counted as eight pajama-clad children emerged from the home coughing, crying, and wheezing. My stomach heaved when I heard her gasp, "We left the baby in there!" She tried desperately to get back inside.

One of the men held my mother back while she fought at his grip, her arms reaching toward the fire and her baby. As jets of water struck the house, a fireman climbed into the billowing smoke of the baby's room. He returned within moments. He slumped to the grass, clutching my littlest sister. She wasn't breathing.



**Families
into Eternity**
President

Thomas S. Monson has said, "Life beyond the grave is as real and as certain as is our life here on earth" ("The Holy Temple—a Beacon to the World," *Ensign*, May 2011, 94). Watch a short video, "We Can Live with God Again," where he testifies of this truth, at lds.org/go/02F.



WHAT WE BELIEVE: LIFE AFTER DEATH

Few things in life are as hard to bear as losing a loved one. When someone close to you passes away, you may at first feel empty. Thankfully, the Lord does not leave you alone in doubt. He has provided you knowledge and truth so that you can better understand why death occurs and how we can come to terms with it. It's natural to grieve over the loss of a loved one. The Savior said, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). The Comforter, the Holy Ghost, can soften the pain of your loss by helping you remember the importance of faith and hope, as well as the following truths:

1. Death is a part of God's plan.
2. Family relationships can continue beyond death.
3. Through Jesus Christ, all will be resurrected.

Gaining a testimony of these truths will enable you to see death for what it really is: a short-term separation before eternal life.

I watched my mother weep inconsolably. We had lost our home, clothes, even our childhood pictures. But nothing compared to the emptiness of losing our baby. How could this have happened?

We buried my sister three days later. The funeral left me empty and cold. I returned to our blackened home that afternoon and kicked at the embers. Heavy tears slid down my chin, and I turned and ran toward a nearby field. Sorrow overwhelmed me, and I dropped to my knees. For the first time in my life, I prayed—I mean *really* prayed. I opened not only my mouth but also my heart. The words that followed were not repetitious or planned. My pain spilled out, and I cried, "I need to understand. Why did this happen?"

Something changed. My body started to warm from the inside out. It was more than the warmth of a physical touch. My soul awakened, and I felt comfort and love. It was as though Heavenly Father were saying, "I understand."

I opened one eye toward heaven and said out loud, "Heavenly Father, is that you?"

Once again, I felt it. I stayed on my knees for a long time, clinging to the first peace I'd felt since the fire. Heavenly Father was there.

Eventually we rebuilt our home and our lives. I still miss my sister, but I am at peace. I know I will see her again.

Each one of us will have to go through trials that will tear at our hearts. There have been many times since that morning that I have again asked, "Heavenly Father, are you there?"

He answers in that quiet voice, and I know I am not alone. **NE**

