



# BEYOND THE Bubblegum MACHINE

By Amy Schauers

After my conversion to the gospel, I began to believe the misconception that if I lived the standards of the gospel, life would be easy and I would get the blessings I wanted. I kept hearing and misinterpreting statements like, “If you read your scriptures, say your prayers, go to church, pay your tithing, and attend the temple, you will be blessed.” While these statements are true, I wasn’t being blessed in the ways I thought I deserved to be.

I had what I like to call a bubblegum-machine mentality: You put a coin in the machine and out pops a gum ball. Say your prayers and they will be answered. Go to church and your trials will be lifted. Attend the temple and your righteous desires will be granted in short order. My early testimony of the gospel was built on this misconception.

So it is not difficult to imagine my dismay when things didn’t always work out that way. I had to learn that having faith to turn to God and lay my burdens at His feet can be a difficult, heart-wrenching, and humbling experience. Through my own experiences and trials, I have learned

that life’s challenges are meant to change us and turn us to the Lord in faith.

*My trials of faith taught me that the gospel is more than a bubblegum machine that pops out a blessing for our every righteous action.*

## My First Contact with the Gospel

The process of my conversion to the gospel began after high school, when I moved to Montana, USA, and started dating Aaron. When the topic of religion came up, Aaron said that he was Mormon. He was the first Mormon I had ever met. He wasn’t an active member at the time, and we didn’t talk about it much.

After dating for about two years, we decided to move to Minnesota for better jobs and to be near my family. Just before we moved, we visited Aaron’s parents one last time. That night Aaron’s dad gave him a father’s blessing. Then Aaron’s dad turned to me and asked if I’d like a blessing. At that moment I didn’t know what I was getting myself into or how that single blessing would change the course of my life.

I don’t recall any of his words in the blessing, but I clearly remember how I felt. The Spirit was strong and

undeniable. I thought I'd had spiritual experiences before, but I'd never experienced anything that compared to the feelings I had that day.

### **The Challenge of Following the Truth**

After I received the blessing, Aaron's parents talked with me about the Church. It made so much sense. I felt like many of the questions I'd had all my life were being answered. But at that time I wasn't interested in pursuing the issue further. I had been raised in a devout Catholic family, and even though I hadn't been an active Catholic for some time, I was pretty well rooted in the traditions of that faith.

So when Aaron and I moved to Minnesota, I returned to life as a Catholic. We lived with my parents (Aaron and I having separate rooms) and went to church with them, where I felt comfortable and at home. Aaron loved the one-hour church meeting, and I liked feeling that I fit in. We carried on that way for a while, but it didn't take long before I wanted more. I remembered how I felt during that priesthood blessing, and I wanted to feel that way again. Much to the dismay of everyone in my life, I sought out a nearby LDS Church, met the missionaries, and started taking the discussions.

I felt conflicted. I had a background that included years of Catholic training, a family who didn't understand what I was doing, and a fiancé who was happy to continue attending one-hour-a-week mass with my parents. But deep down I knew that the missionaries were teaching the truth. Eventually what I felt and knew on the inside overruled the external pressures in my life. At age 21, I was baptized and confirmed a member of the Church. Six months later Aaron and I were married.

### **The Challenge of Staying Converted**

I knew I made the right decision to be baptized, so after my baptism—with my bubblegum-machine mentality—I thought that everything would be easy and I would feel blessed. Instead, I felt I had immersed myself in a

brand-new culture that was radically different from what I was used to. The ties of my old life tugged at me constantly.

I was at a crossroads where my core beliefs were being tested. Either I could forget my baptism and go back to living what I saw as an easier path, or I could dig deep, grab the iron rod, and stay on the path. Though I wasn't as abundantly blessed as I thought I would be by joining the Church, I did know the gospel was true, and that knowledge helped me turn to the Lord in faith and get through the challenge of joining the Church and remaining an active member.

Eventually membership in the Church got easier. My family became accepting, and we were able to discuss some of their misconceptions about the Church. Aaron and I were blessed to make great friends in the ward, and we were later sealed in the temple.

### **The Challenge of Unfulfilled Desires**

Sometime after our marriage, Aaron and I decided we wanted to start having children. I thought it was a righteous desire. We had been living gospel standards—putting our coins in the bubblegum machine, so to speak—so I figured that we'd quickly be blessed with a child. But that did not happen.

We tried for years to have a baby. After several miscarriages, I was finally pregnant again and felt that this time my prayers had been answered, that the trial was over, and that I could now reap my reward for living the gospel. Aaron and I began planning for our baby girl. Then, when I was six months along, our baby died.

Since my testimony was built on an unsteady, bubblegum-machine foundation, it quickly and easily toppled. This time, instead of turning to the gospel and leaning on my faith, I turned away from it. I couldn't see beyond the loss of our daughter. For the first time since joining the Church, I stopped attending meetings altogether. I became hardened and bitter. I blocked the Spirit and built walls of anger and bitterness, which resulted in my own unhappiness.

When we moved into a new ward years later, we decided it was time to make a fresh start and return to the gospel.



Nothing else was filling the gaping void in our hearts. As we turned back to the gospel, my outlook on life improved and my anger began to ease. The bitterness slowly subsided, and I allowed the Lord to work changes in me. Little by little, He lifted me up. Simply opening my heart and mind to the possibility that God's power could mend my broken heart resulted in a dramatic change.

### The Blessing of Building My Testimony

Rebuilding my testimony on a firmer foundation was a difficult process. I had to ask myself hard questions about my core beliefs. I learned that I needed to consciously decide every day to turn to God and work at living the gospel. I shouldn't expect to be blessed immediately for each action I perform in the way I might anticipate.

Having trials of faith is uncomfortable and frustrating and stretches me outside my comfort zone. But I know that trials of our faith are the only way to receive the witness Moroni talks about: "I would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith" (Ether 12:6).

The blessings I hold most dear are the ones that didn't come easily; they are the ones I had to fight the hardest for—the ones that came after a trial of my faith. I fought hard to join and stay active in the Church and—eventually, miraculously—to have children (we now have two girls).

I hope I can learn to turn to the gospel more quickly in times of great challenge and become what Heavenly Father wants me to become. I know that when our

trials overwhelm us and it seems there is nowhere to turn, Heavenly Father is there waiting patiently. Whenever we are ready to extend our faith, however small that faith may feel, He is right there, closer than we can imagine, waiting for us to come to Him. We only need to exercise our faith, even if it's just a particle (see Alma 32:27), and ask for the strength and guidance we need. ■

*The author lives in Utah, USA.*

*Put God first in your life. See November 2013 Ensign: Dallin H. Oaks, p. 72; Thomas S. Monson, p. 85; Russell M. Nelson, p. 106.*



### CHRIST AS OUR CENTER

"The history of the Church . . . is replete with the experiences of those who have struggled and yet who have remained steadfast and of good cheer. The reason? They have made the gospel of Jesus Christ the center of their lives. This is what will pull us through whatever comes our way. We will still experience difficult challenges, but we will be able to face them, to meet them head-on, and to emerge victorious."

**President Thomas S. Monson, "I Will Not Fail Thee, nor Forsake Thee," Ensign, Nov. 2013, 86.**

