

Our Temple Marriage Was Worth Any Price

By Geovanny Medina

It wasn't until after my first business venture broke down and my second one burned to the ground that I wondered if I would be able to take my fiancée, Beny, to the temple. We had heard that getting there would be a trial of faith, but when we made temple marriage our goal, we had no idea how thoroughly our faith would be tested.

Beny and I met in our native Panama after serving missions. At the time, couples in Panama who wanted to start their married lives in the temple were married civilly just before traveling to the nearest temple, the Guatemala City Guatemala Temple. It would be an expensive and difficult trip, but being sealed was a blessing we did not want to live without.

The day after I proposed, I lost my job. Undaunted, I decided to earn money by giving bus tours. My bus broke down the first night. Concerned but determined, I next decided to sell T-shirts. The morning I went to pick up the shirts from the manufacturer, I found that the building had burned to the ground the night before. It seemed that my hopes had gone up in smoke too.

It was only a few months before the next scheduled temple trip, yet to this point, every effort I had made to raise money

had ended in abrupt failure. I left the smoldering rubble and went to find Beny.

"I have nothing," I told her. "Maybe you shouldn't marry me."

"If I were marrying for money, I'd be married already," she said. "But I'm not marrying for money. I'm marrying you because I love you."

That was a turning point. We felt that we had passed an important test. As we pushed ahead with faith, doors began opening. I found work making

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furniture, though the pay wasn't enough to meet our needs. Then a kind bishop offered to help us with our bus fare. As exciting as his offer was, it didn't feel right. We were intent on being self-sufficient. But seeing that he truly desired to help, we asked him if he could give Beny a job instead. He did.

After earning enough money to travel to the temple, we married civilly and were at last on our way to Guatemala with 10 other Church members. But our test wasn't over yet.

Widespread transportation strikes stopped us at the border of Costa Rica. After waiting at the border for two days, our driver decided to turn back. But Beny and I, along with two brothers and one other couple, decided not to give up. After watching our bus turn around and leave us, we walked into Costa Rica. We kept walking, sleeping in roadside shelters, until we reached the Nicaraguan border. From there we managed to take a taxi to the capital city, where we purchased a bus ticket to the Honduran border. Two days—and two more buses—later we finally arrived at the temple. We were happy, but we were dirty and tired, and we had spent far more than we had planned.

After cleaning up, Beny and I realized that we were missing our living-ordinance recommends! What made matters worse, our bishop in Panama was scheduled to leave that same day on a business trip. We were broken-hearted. Had we passed through all

of our trials for nothing? We ironed Beny's wedding dress and trusted that if the Lord had helped us get that far, He would see us through to the end.

Though we expected our bishop to be gone, we decided to call him anyway. To our surprise, he had not taken his business trip after all. He said he felt that he should stay home instead. We were thrilled! He promised to fax the needed paperwork as soon as he could get to a fax machine.

We waited and waited, all the while praying in the temple's marriage waiting room. It was Saturday, and in two hours the temple would close until Monday. What could be taking so long? At last the fax arrived, with an apology from the bishop: the power had gone out just as he was preparing to send the fax.

Finally, after all our trials and delays, we were sealed eternally as husband and wife. Our joy—worth the working, the waiting, and the worrying—was full!

Not everyone getting married in the temple will face such challenges, but for Beny and me (and the others who went to the temple with us), these experiences were a refining process. Three of the four brethren who made it to the temple on that

trip were later called as bishops. Two are currently serving as counselors in stake presidencies. We've all been so blessed. It was one of the greatest experiences of my life.

If our goal to marry in the temple had been only for worldly love, we wouldn't have made it. But because we believed in the sealing power of the priesthood restored in our day, we didn't give up, knowing that our temple marriage—for time and all eternity—was worth whatever sacrifice we had to make. ■



My Last Chance

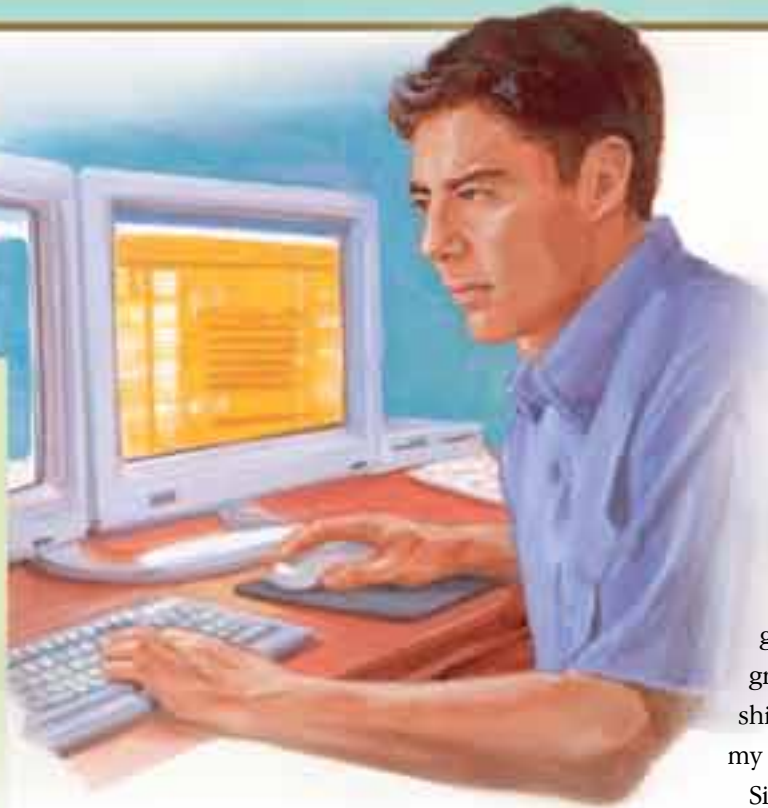
By Luis Mella

At age 18 I decided to leave the Church. For a time, leaving my Savior's side did not seem to have any repercussions in my

life. In my home country of Chile I was able to live comfortably on my salary. I felt I would always be able to finance my worldly lifestyle and could continue to ignore the promises I had made at the age of 14 in the waters of baptism.

I pursued this course for a few years, but then things stopped working out for me. Everything seemed to grow dark around me. I lost my job and had difficulty finding work. I had to do whatever kind of work I could

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just to survive. This should have made me wake up and find the path once again, but it didn't.

Not long after this, my father passed away in 1998. Because I was the eldest son, a large part of the responsibility for taking care of my mother and younger brother fell on my shoulders. I bid farewell to my carefree lifestyle and came to realize that sometimes the Lord allows things to happen that we don't understand until we see the end result.

I believe He allowed me to be drained economically to show me that the only way out was to pay tithing, which I did after returning to church and renewing my covenants. In this manner He patiently and lovingly brought me back to the fold.

During general conference in 2001, President Gordon B. Hinckley

introduced the Perpetual Education Fund. I needed the opportunities that such a program offered so I could lift myself economically, but I wondered whether I could meet the program's requirements.

During sacrament meeting a few months later, our stake president spoke about the program. To my great surprise, I learned that I might qualify after all. I thought to myself, "This is my last chance. I can't pass it up."

I then began to consider the responsibilities the program would require of me, and I feared that I would fail and once again fall short in Heavenly Father's eyes. But I overcame these thoughts, and gathering information from the local institute director, I applied. Considering my past, I had little hope that I would be accepted. I felt that I did not deserve such a blessing even though I had repented and returned to church.

When I received a positive response from Church headquarters, my family and I rejoiced. The amount granted was not enough for the entire academic year, but I went ahead and registered for a major in computer programming. I received high grades and earned a scholarship that paid for the rest of my schooling.

Since then I have done everything in my power to show my gratitude. I work hard, I study hard, and I fulfill my responsibilities in the Church. I attend institute classes to try to make up for the years I missed and to learn what the Lord expects of me.

The most important thing I know is that I have been forgiven for all the bad things I did in the past. All of my plans for the future are based on this knowledge. I will continue to help my family, but now I will be able to do so in a better manner. ■

United by Prayer

By Daniel Openshaw

Military basic training was tough, especially spiritually. I was surrounded by foul language and bad influences. Prayer and priesthood blessings gave me

power to endure, but I longed to have more than personal prayers. Having served a mission, I knew the power and unity that can come from praying with a companion. Unity was one thing our group of about 56 airmen definitely lacked.

Three weeks into basic training, we were still struggling to get along and work as a team. Approaching the junior officers, I requested permission to hold a nightly prayer meeting for anyone who desired to come. Surprisingly, they not only agreed but also supported the idea.

Six airmen came to the first meeting. After taps and lights out, we used a flashlight to read a few verses from the New Testament that related to the challenges we were facing. We then said a prayer, asking that we could have the Spirit of God with us and that we

could be grateful for the things we had.

Gradually, more airmen began attending our meeting. Soon our numbers had increased to 15. Sometimes we read Bible verses; other times we read from the Book of Mormon. Each evening anyone who wanted to pray was given the opportunity.

One airman who ventured to our prayer meeting just listened at first. When it came time for him to pray, he asked to be passed over. But a few weeks later, he joined in, praying one evening that his family would be

helped with problems at home and that he would be strengthened during the final weeks of training. He told us he was going to miss our meetings when the training ended and that he planned to say a personal prayer each night before going to bed.

While praying with our group soon thereafter, he

expressed gratitude that his prayers for his family had been answered. In addition, he said he had been strengthened, which gave him confidence to continue with basic training.

The night before we departed to our assigned technical schools, this same airman explained that before coming to basic training, he had been taught little about God and did not believe in Him. But after reading scriptures with us and seeing the example set by the other airmen who prayed, he had started to develop faith. He confided that the first prayer he had said with the group was the first prayer he had ever said.

As I had hoped, our prayer meetings had brought unity to our group. But they did more than that: they strengthened us as individuals and helped us turn to our Heavenly Father. ■

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