

# By Their Fruits

BY SANDI DAVIS

*I wanted so much to know what God was really like and to find His church.*

I began searching for God's church when I was a child. Mother and I lived with my grandparents, Mama and Papa, in the deep South. My parents had separated when I was very young, and my mother contracted polio when I was three. She could no longer walk and was in and out of hospitals throughout my childhood. Mama, my grandmother, became a mother to me.

Although my grandparents took me to the church they attended each Sunday, prayer was not a part of our home. The only time a family member prayed aloud was at Thanksgiving dinner, when one of my uncles asked a blessing on the food. Because I had not been taught that a loving Father in Heaven can hear even a child's prayer, many nights I gazed out my bedroom window waiting for the first star of the night so I could wish on it that my mother would be able to walk again.

Our church was a small white frame building located on a narrow dirt road that ran for miles through farmland. Mama and Papa discussed how high the cotton had grown since the previous week as we crept along on our way to church. In the winter the church was kept warm with propane-fueled stoves, and in the summer we kept cool with cardboard fans that had pictures of Jesus or angels on them.

When I was nine, my father took me to live with him. We rarely went to church, but my dad had studied to become a minister earlier in his life and had shelves of religious materials. One summer when I was 14, instead of going to my grandparents' house as I usually did, I

ILLUSTRATION BY GREG THORKEISON; FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR



**Sister Davis's photos showing her with her husband (above) and with her mother (right), her missionary daughter (right center), her daughter's family (far right), and her extended family (upper right).**

stayed at Dad's and read every piece of religious literature he had. Throughout my teenage years, I attended revivals and other religious services. I wanted so much to know what God was really like and find His church. I continued to read my Bible and began to pay tithing on the money I earned from babysitting.

One night I was reading some church literature my dad had received in the mail, and I came across an invitation to pray. Even though I had often attended church services, I had never prayed. I decided I would do it. As I knelt in my room, I felt a strong feeling not to join that church. I had never had a feeling like that before, and it frightened me. I jumped up from my knees and decided to abandon my search for God's true church.

### Recognizing an Inward Glow

After I was married and had two small children, I worked as a secretary for a man who spoke the truth and was courteous and happy. He seemed to have an inward glow that was quite visible to me. He told me that he attended The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Since I desired to take our children to a church that would offer them something substantial, I asked him to tell me about his religion.

A few days later, he invited my husband and me to his house to meet his family. At the end of the evening, he called his family together for prayer and asked if my husband and I would join them. Because of my negative experience with prayer many years before, I was reluctant. Imagine my astonishment when my boss called on his four-year-old daughter to say the prayer! Years earlier I had decided that prayer was only for clergymen, but this little girl's sweet communication with God showed me that wasn't true.

I began taking the missionary discussions in this family's home. One night the missionaries showed me a filmstrip. Just a couple of minutes into the film, I heard a voice say, "Ye shall know them by their fruits." The voice was so clear that it startled me. I looked around the room to see who had spoken. Everyone was



watching the film; evidently no one had spoken. Then I heard again, "Ye shall know them by their fruits." I looked at each person in the room and tried with all my might to find something wrong with them. But I could find no "bad fruit" among them. I didn't mention this experience to anyone that night but reflected upon it frequently in the days that followed. Could this church be what I had been searching for all these years?

### Finding the Truth

Soon the missionaries asked me to be baptized, and I knew with all my heart that it was the right thing to do. Though we were living several hundred miles from Mama, I couldn't wait to tell her what I had found. When we were finally able to make the trip, I joyfully told her that I had found God's true church. I thought she would be happy and want to know more. But she wouldn't speak to me or even look at me. Though I continued to love her, things were never quite the same between us.

Thirty-three years have passed since my baptism day. Father in Heaven has loved me sweetly, sustained me through trials, and given me many reasons to rejoice. "Ye shall know them by their fruits," the Holy Ghost told me that day. I have seen the fruits of living the gospel in my life. Temple sealings have blessed our family. I thank my Father in Heaven as I watch my nine grandchildren give talks in Primary and hear them pray in our family. I truly found a church that had something substantial to offer the little ones.

The gospel continues to bless our lives. We have performed temple ordinances for thousands of our ancestors. We have a daughter who has served a mission, teaching others who were searching for the truth as I searched many years ago. My reasons to rejoice keep multiplying! ■

