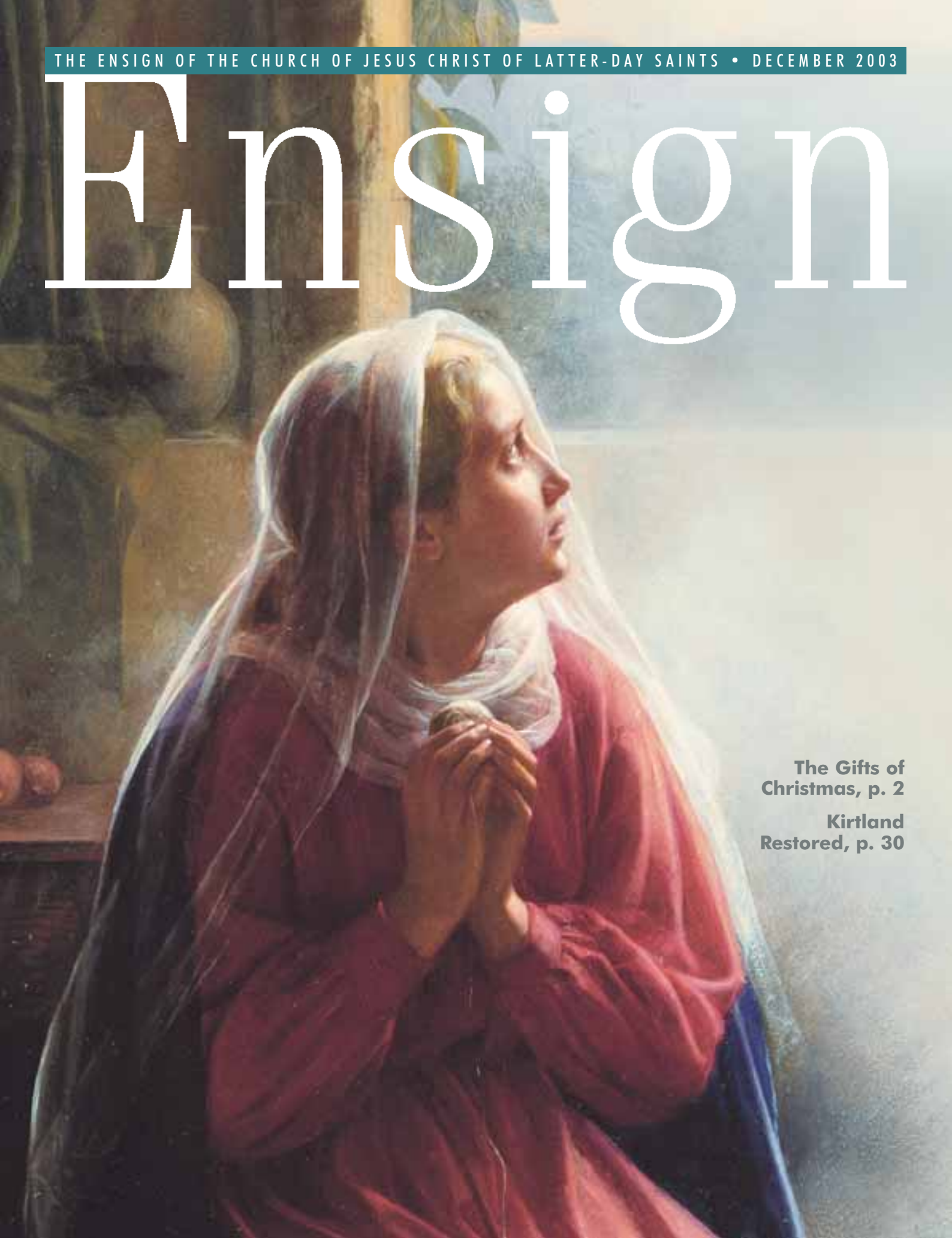


THE ENSIGN OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS • DECEMBER 2003

Ensign



**The Gifts of
Christmas, p. 2**

**Kirtland
Restored, p. 30**



The Presentation of Christ in the Temple, by James J. Tissot

“And [Simeon] came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, . . . For mine eyes have seen thy salvation” (Luke 2:27–30).

Ensign



13 *Could I Come Back?*



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45 *I Can Make Rolls*



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THE GIFTS OF Christmas



BY PRESIDENT THOMAS S. MONSON
First Counselor in the First Presidency

From 3 Nephi in the Book of Mormon we read, “Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world, to show unto the world that I will fulfil all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets.”¹

With the birth of the babe in Bethlehem, there emerged a great endowment, a power stronger than weapons, a wealth more lasting than the coins of Caesar. This child was to be the King of kings and Lord of lords, the promised Messiah—even Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

His Beckoning Invitation

Born in a stable, cradled in a manger, He came forth from heaven to live on earth as mortal man and to establish the kingdom of God. During His earthly ministry, He taught men the higher law. His glorious gospel reshaped the thinking of the world. He blessed the sick. He caused the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear. He even raised the dead to life.

What was the reaction to His message of mercy, His words of wisdom, His lessons of life? There were a precious few who appreciated Him. They bathed His feet. They learned His word. They followed His example.

Down through the generations of time, the message from Jesus has been the same. To Peter by the shores of beautiful Galilee, He said, “Follow me.”² To Philip of old came the call, “Follow me.”³ To the Levite who sat at receipt of customs came the instruction, “Follow me.”⁴ And to you and to me, if we but listen, shall come that same beckoning invitation, “Follow me.”

As we follow in His steps today, we too will have an opportunity to bless the lives of others. Jesus invites us to give of ourselves: “Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind.”⁵

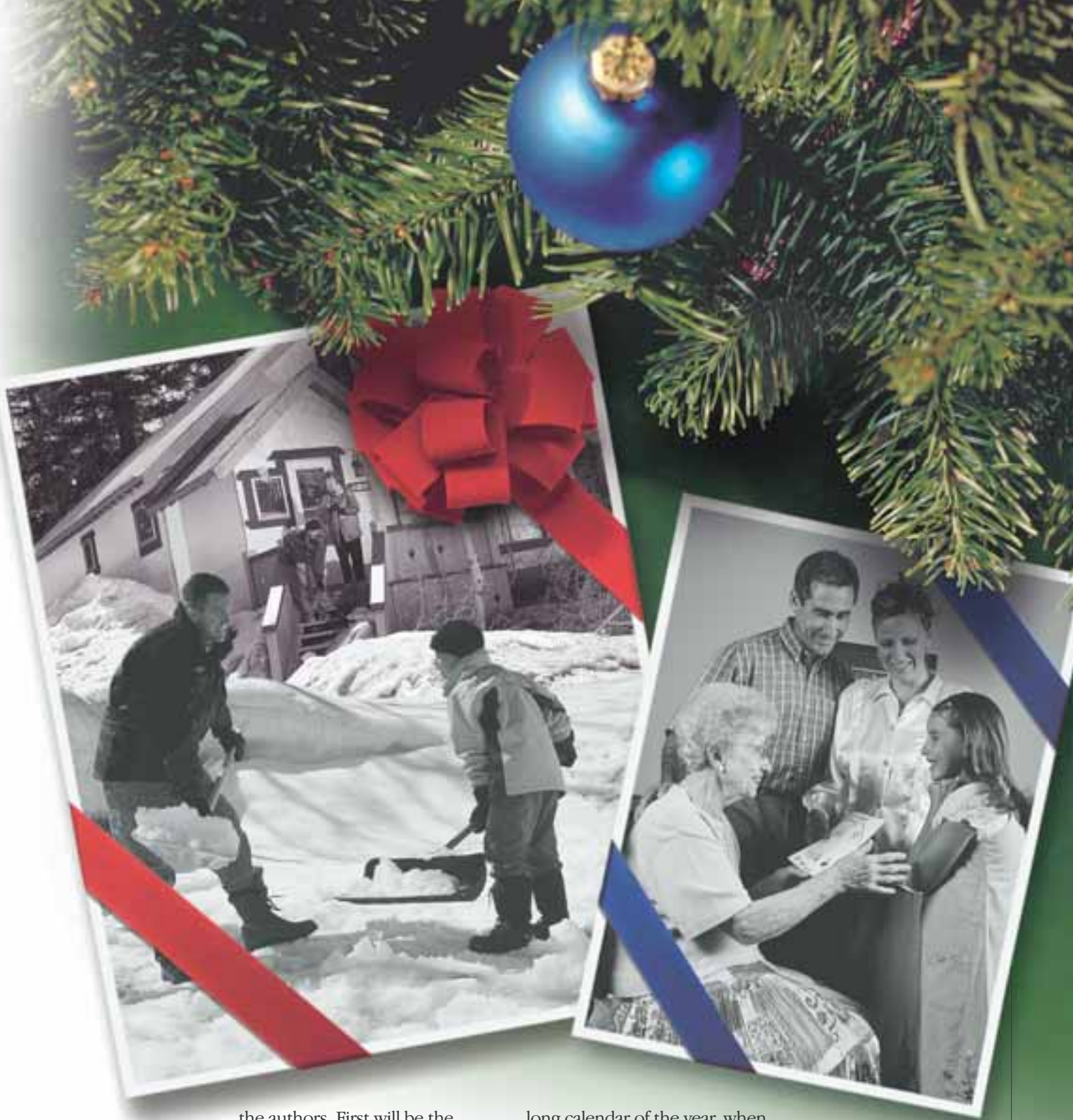
Our opportunities to give of ourselves are indeed limitless, but they are also perishable. There are hearts to gladden. There are kind words to say. There are gifts to be given. There are deeds to be done. There are souls to be saved. “Go, gladden the lonely, the dreary; Go, comfort the weeping, the weary; Go, scatter kind deeds on your way; Oh, make the world brighter today!”⁶

A wise Christian once urged, “May we not spend Christmas, but keep it.”⁷ When we keep the spirit of Christmas, we keep the spirit of Christ, for the Christmas spirit is the Christ spirit.

My Christmas Treasury of Books

At this time of the year my family knows that I will read again my Christmas treasury of books and ponder the wondrous words of

Jesus invites us to give of ourselves: “Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind.” Our opportunities to give of ourselves are indeed limitless, but they are also perishable.



RIGHT: PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE BUNDERSON, POSED BY MODELS

the authors. First will be the

Gospel of Luke—even the Christmas story. This will be followed by *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens and, finally, *The Mansion* by Henry Van Dyke.

I always must wipe my eyes when reading these inspired writings. They touch my inner soul, as they will yours.

Wrote Dickens, “I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round— . . . as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the

long calendar of the year, when

men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys.”⁸

In his classic *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens’s now converted character, Ebenezer Scrooge, declares at last: “I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The

Spirits of all three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach.”⁹

Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—He who was burdened with “sorrows, and acquainted with grief”¹⁰—speaks to every troubled heart and bestows the gift of peace: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”¹¹

True Giving

He sends forth His word through the many thousands of missionaries serving far and wide proclaiming His gospel of good tidings and salutation of peace. Vexing questions, such as “Where did I come from? What is the purpose of my being? Where do I go after death?” are answered by His special servants. Frustration flees, doubt disappears, and uncertainty wanes when truth is taught in boldness, yet in a spirit of humility by those who have been called to serve the Prince of Peace—even the Lord Jesus Christ.

His gift is bestowed individually: “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him.”¹²

May I share several more examples of true giving learned by me from the experiences of the three most recent Presidents of the Church, with whom I have had the privilege to serve as a counselor.

First, from President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994): He described an assignment he had received from the President of the Church following World War II. President Benson was to leave his wife and family and go to the devastated members of the Church in Germany and other nations. Through the God-inspired welfare program, he literally fed the hungry, comforted the weeping, and lifted closer to heaven all with whom he met. Years later, at a



President Ezra Taft Benson (left) exemplified true giving when he left his wife and family and went to the devastated members of the Church in Germany and other nations following World War II.

dedication service at Zwickau, Germany, an elderly member, with moist eyes, said to me, “Please tell President Benson that we love him. He saved our lives: mine, my wife’s, my children’s, and many, many others’. He was as an angel sent by God to literally restore to us hope and confidence in the future. Tell him we love him.”

Second, from President Howard W. Hunter (1907–95): On one occasion President Hunter dealt with a particularly

tragic and difficult situation. At length he said, “I have always liked to lift people, rather than put them down, to show them the way of the Lord, that they might follow Him.” Subsequently, the gift of forgiveness, the gift of compassion, the gift of encouragement were freely given to the distressed couple by this saintly leader.

Third, from President Gordon B. Hinckley: President Hinckley is a much-traveled prophet and President. His presence, his example, his testimony have been shared throughout the world. About five years ago he returned from a visit

to the southeast area of the United States, where he spoke to tens of thousands. The morning after his return home, President Hinckley said he felt a bit weary. In the next breath, he commented, “I’ve learned of the terrible suffering endured by the people of Central America because of the rampaging floods which engulfed homes, fields, and many persons. I feel a need to visit the stricken area, and so I, along with Elder L. Tom Perry and Bishop H. David Burton, will leave by plane in two days in order to do so.” We reviewed with the President information concerning the supplies already sent and received at distribution points, plus those which were en route by air and by ship.

President Hinckley returned from his three-day trip rejoicing in a welfare program which works. He met with

Right: About five years ago President Gordon B. Hinckley gave encouragement and assurances of assistance during a visit to flood-stricken Central America.

the members. He met with the missionaries. He complimented throngs who were at work cleaning up the debris which once was homes.

President Hinckley gave them encouragement and assurances of additional assistance, but more than this, he gave to them himself. We express thanks to our Heavenly Father for such a prophet.

In my lifelong association with President Hinckley, I know that he is a wise and prudent steward regarding the sacred funds of the Church. He abhors waste and extravagance. However, never have I seen President Hinckley turn away the needy, the hungry, the downtrodden, or the oppressed. Helping is our divine duty. The food, the shelter, the assistance rendered are freely given so that suffering may be alleviated, hearts cheered, and lives saved.

There is no better time than now, this very Christmas season, for all of us to rededicate ourselves to the principles taught by Jesus the Christ. It is the time to love the Lord our God with all our heart—and our neighbors as ourselves. It is well to remember that he who gives money gives much, he who gives time gives more, but he who gives of himself gives all. Let this be a description of our Christmas gifts. ■

NOTES

1. 3 Nephi 1:13.
2. Matthew 4:19.
3. John 1:43.
4. Matthew 9:9.
5. D&C 64:34.
6. "Make the World Brighter," *Deseret Sunday School Songs* (1909), no. 197.
7. Senate, Peter Marshall, 80th

- Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* (19 Dec. 1947), 93, pt. 9:11673.
8. *A Christmas Carol in Works of Charles Dickens, Complete and Unabridged* (1982), 535.
9. *Works of Charles Dickens*, 581.
10. Isaiah 53:3.
11. John 14:27.
12. Revelation 3:20.



Right: President Howard W. Hunter freely gave to a distressed couple in a particularly tragic and difficult situation the gift of forgiveness, the gift of compassion.

IDEAS FOR HOME TEACHERS

After you prayerfully prepare, share this message using a method that encourages the participation of those you teach. A few examples follow:

1. Ask family members to tell of instances when they have given of themselves at Christmastime. Read together the "His Beckoning Invitation" section. Encourage family members to follow the example of the Savior in their giving this year.
2. Give a gift of yourself to each family you teach. Then invite family members to read about the examples of giving in the "True Giving" section. Read the final paragraph of the message aloud, and bear testimony of gifts of Himself the Savior has given to you.



THE DIVINITY OF JESUS CHRIST



Orson F. Whitney was born on 1 July 1855 in Salt Lake City, Utah. He was ordained to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles on 9 April 1906 by President Joseph F. Smith. Elder Whitney died on 16 May 1931 in Salt Lake City at age 75. This is an excerpt from an address delivered at the Sunday evening session of the MIA Jubilee Conference held on 7 June 1925.

BY ELDER ORSON F. WHITNEY (1855–1931)

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

At a time when the divine character and mission of the world’s Redeemer are being questioned, even by many professing Christians, it is a cause for congratulation and rejoicing that there is still found “faith on the earth” [Luke 18:8]—faith in Jesus Christ as the very Son of God, as the virgin-born Savior of mankind, as the anointed and foreordained messenger of Him who “so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Among those who hold fast to this conviction are the Latter-day Saints. . . . And tonight we unfurl our banner, emblazoned with the slogan of the young men and young women of Zion: “*We stand for an individual testimony of the divinity of Jesus Christ.*”

How Testimony Comes

Such testimony can come but in one way—God’s way, not man’s. Books cannot give it. Schools cannot bestow it. No human power can impart it. It comes, if it comes at all, as a gift of God, by direct and immediate revelation from on high.

Said Jesus to His chief Apostle: “Whom say ye that I am?” Peter answered: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Then said

Jesus: “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 16:15–17).

Such was the basis of Peter’s testimony, and such is the basis of every real testimony of like character. They all rest upon the same foundation.

Testimony means evidence, and it may consist of divers things, fruits of the gospel’s varied gifts. Dreams, visions, prophecies, tongues and their interpretation, healings, and other manifestations of the divine Spirit are all included in the category.

The Surest Evidence

But the greatest and most convincing of all testimonies is the soul’s illumination under the kindling and enlightening power of the Holy Ghost—the Comforter, promised by the Savior to His disciples, to abide with them after He had departed, to bring things past to their remembrance and show them things to come, making manifest the things of God, past, present, and future.

God’s Greatest Gift

By that Spirit and by that alone can men know God and Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent—to know [Them], and to act consistently with that knowledge, is to lay hold upon eternal life. No greater thing can come to



He arose and walked to where the Apostles were kneeling—fast asleep! He shook them gently, awoke them, and in a tone of tender reproach, asked them if they could not watch with Him one hour.

men while in the flesh than the knowledge of how to secure that greatest of all heavenly gifts.

To know God, man must know himself, must know whence he came, why he is here, what is expected of him by the One who sent him here, where he is going when he leaves this mortal life, and what awaits him in the great hereafter. The Holy Spirit is the fountain from which flows this knowledge, the most precious that men can possess. By means of it comes the testimony that Jesus Christ was and is divine. . . .

Testimony of the Ages

“I know that my redeemer liveth” [Job 19:25]—the burden of righteous Job’s exultant cry, welling up from the depths of his sorely tried, suffering, yet patient soul—is echoed from 10,000 hearts, yea, 10,000 times 10,000 of the faithful and the just, whose heaven-inspired testimonies have come ringing down the ages, from the days of Adam to the days of Joseph Smith. The holy scriptures are replete with testimonies of Christ’s divinity, attested by miracles and wonders manifold.

A Life and Death Divine

But even if Christ had wrought no miracle—even if He had not walked upon the water, healed the sick, cast out devils, given sight to the blind, caused the lame to walk, or done anything else that men deem supernatural, was there not that about Him which bore unimpeachable testimony to His divinity?

What could be more divine than the life of One who “went about doing good” [Acts 10:38], teaching men to forgive their enemies, to pray for those who persecuted them, and to do unto others as they would that others should do unto them? And did He not set the example of godlike magnanimity by craving, while upon the cross in the agonies of death, heaven’s pardon upon His guilty murderers? “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” [Luke 23:34].

What could be more divine than that? Who but a God could offer such a prayer at such a time? “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” [John 15:13]. But here was One who could lay down His life for His enemies, as well as His friends. No mere man could do that. It took a God to die for all men—foes as well as friends—and that act alone stamps divinity upon the character and mission of Jesus Christ.

The Men Who Knew

The Twelve Apostles were His special witnesses. As such they had to know beyond all question that He was what



Here was One who could lay down His life for His enemies, as well as His friends. No mere man could do that.

He claimed to be. It was a new thing that was required of them. They were to vouch for His Resurrection—and there had been no resurrection upon this planet until Christ came forth from the grave. He was “the firstfruits of them that slept” [1 Corinthians 15:20]. Those Apostles had to know, not merely believe. They could not go into the world and say: “We believe Jesus has risen from the dead—such is our opinion, our conviction.” What impression would that have made upon a sin-hardened generation? No; mere belief would not suffice in their case. They

must know, and they did know, for they had seen and heard Him, had even been permitted to touch Him, that they might be convinced that He was indeed the resurrection and the life. It was their right to possess this knowledge, owing to the unique character of their mission. But the world at large was required to believe what the Apostles testified concerning Him. . . .

Belief and Knowledge

Sign-seeking is an abomination, indicating an adulterous disposition. It is blessed to believe without seeing, since by the exercise of faith comes spiritual development, one of the great objects of man’s earthly existence; while

knowledge, by swallowing up faith, prevents its exercise, thus hindering that development. “Knowledge is power”; and all things are to be known in due season. But premature knowledge—knowing at the wrong time—is fatal both to progress and to happiness.

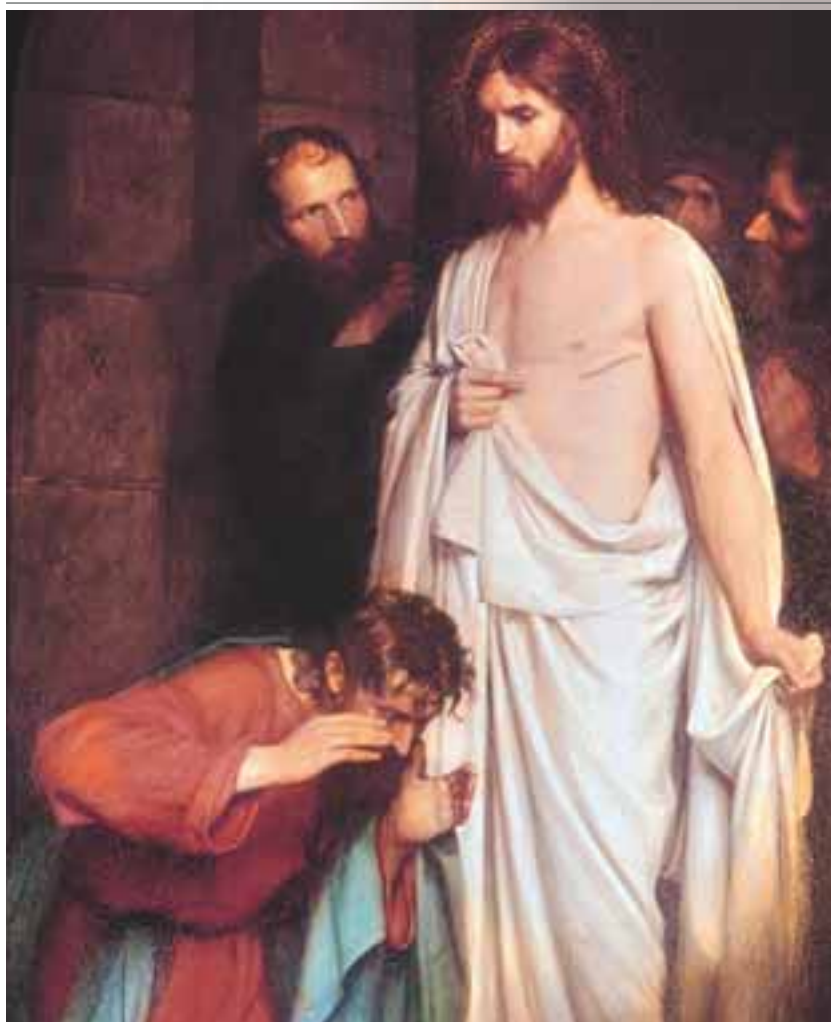
The case of the Apostles was exceptional. They stood in a peculiar position. It was better for them to know—nay, absolutely essential—in order to give the requisite force and power to their tremendous testimony.

Power from On High

And yet, even in their case, something more than the seeing of the eye, than the hearing of the ear, than the touch of the senses, was necessary to enable them to know and to testify of Christ’s divinity. Peter knew, before the Resurrection, that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God—knew it by divine revelation; and his brethren of the Twelve were entitled to the same knowledge, by the same means of imparting it.

That something besides His appearing to them in a resurrected state was necessary to qualify them for their work is shown by the fact that after that appearing, and after He had commissioned them to go “into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” [Mark 16:15], they were commanded by Him to tarry at Jerusalem until they were “endued with power from on high” [Luke 24:49]. They obeyed, and the power came upon them—“a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind. . . . Cloven tongues like as of fire . . . sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:2–4).

That same power the Apostles gave to



others, even to all who had faith in Jesus Christ, who had repented of their sins, and had been cleansed by baptism at the hands of those having divine authority to so officiate; to the end that they might receive the Holy Ghost and by continued obedience win life everlasting.

Latter-day Testimony

So much for the days of old. Now as to modern times. Joseph Smith, to whom the Father and the Son revealed Themselves in the early decades of the 19th century, and through whom the everlasting gospel, with all its ancient gifts and blessings, was restored at the opening of this last and greatest of the gospel dispensations; Joseph Smith, who with Sidney Rigdon saw the Son of God sitting on the right hand of God and gazed upon the glories of eternity; Joseph Smith, who with Oliver Cowdery beheld Jehovah, even Jesus

The Twelve Apostles were His special witnesses. As such they had to know beyond all question that He was what He claimed to be. They must know, and they did know, for they had seen and heard Him, had even been permitted to touch Him, that they might be convinced that He was indeed the resurrection and the life.

Christ, standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit in the Kirtland Temple; Joseph, the martyred prophet, who gave his life to lay the foundations of this work—he left upon record more than one mighty testimony to the divinity of Jesus Christ. And tens of thousands of faithful Saints have rejoiced and are rejoicing in those testimonies, confirmed to them by the all-convincing power of the Holy Ghost.

In the Mission Field

May I add my mite to the mass of evidence upon this all-important theme? Fifty years ago, or something less, I was a young missionary in the state of Pennsylvania. I had been praying for a testimony of the truth but beyond that had not displayed much zeal in missionary labor. My companion, a veteran in the cause, chided me for my lack of diligence in this direction. “You ought to be studying the books of the Church,” said he; “you were sent out to preach the gospel, not to write for the newspapers”—for that was what I was doing at the time.

I knew he was right, but I still kept on, fascinated by the discovery that I could wield a pen and preferring that to any other occupation except the [theater], my early ambition, which I had laid upon the altar when, as a youth of 21, I accepted a call to the mission field.

In Gethsemane

One night I dreamed—if dream it may be called—that I was in the Garden of Gethsemane, a witness of the Savior’s agony. I saw Him as plainly as I see this congregation. I stood behind a tree in the foreground, where I could see without being seen. Jesus, with Peter, James, and John, came through a little wicket gate at my right. Leaving the three Apostles there, after telling them to kneel and pray, He passed over to the other side, where He also knelt and prayed. It was the same prayer with which we are all familiar: “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” ([see] Matthew 26:36–44; Mark 14:32–41; Luke 22:42).

As He prayed the tears streamed down His face, which was toward me. I was so moved at the sight that I wept

also, out of pure sympathy with His great sorrow. My whole heart went out to Him. I loved Him with all my soul and longed to be with Him as I longed for nothing else.

Presently He arose and walked to where the Apostles were kneeling—fast asleep! He shook them gently, awoke them, and in a tone of tender reproach, untinged by the least suggestion of anger or scolding, asked them if they could not watch with Him one hour. There He was, with the weight of the world’s sin upon His shoulders, with the pangs of every man, woman, and child shooting through His sensitive soul—and they could not watch with Him one poor hour!

Returning to His place, He prayed again and then went back and found them again sleeping. Again He awoke them, admonished them, and returned and prayed as before. Three times this happened, until I was perfectly familiar with His appearance—face, form, and movements. He was of noble stature and of majestic mien—not at all the weak, effeminate being that some painters have portrayed—a very God among men, yet as meek and lowly as a little child.

All at once the circumstance seemed to change, the scene remaining just the same. Instead of before, it was after the Crucifixion, and the Savior, with those three Apostles, now stood together in a group at my left. They were about to depart and ascend into heaven. I could endure it no longer. I ran out from behind the tree, fell at His feet, clasped Him around the knees, and begged Him to take me with Him.

I shall never forget the kind and gentle manner in which He stooped and raised me up and embraced me. It was so vivid, so real, that I felt the very warmth of His bosom against which I rested. Then He said: “No, my son; these have finished their work, and they may go with me, but you must stay and finish yours.” Still I clung to Him. Gazing up into His face—for He was taller than I—I besought Him most earnestly: “Well, promise me that I will come to You at the last.” He smiled sweetly and tenderly and replied: “That will depend entirely upon yourself.” I awoke with a sob in my throat, and it was morning.



The Moral of the Tale

“That’s from God,” said my companion (Elder A. M. Musser), when I had related it to him. “I don’t need to be told that,” was my reply. I saw the moral clearly: I had never thought that I would be an Apostle or hold any other office in the Church; and it did not occur to me even then. Yet I knew that those sleeping Apostles meant me. I was asleep at my post—as any man is, or any woman, who, having been divinely appointed to do one thing, does another.

President Young’s Counsel

But from that hour all was changed—I was a different man. I did not give up writing, for President Brigham Young [1801–77], having noticed some of my contributions in the home papers, wrote advising me to cultivate what he called my “gift for writing” so that I might use it in future years “for the establishment of truth and righteousness upon the earth.” This was his last word of counsel to me. He died the same year, while I was still in the mission field, though laboring then in the

state of Ohio. I continued to write, but it was for the Church and kingdom of God. I held that first and foremost; all else was secondary.

The Speaker’s Testimony

Then came the divine illumination, which is greater than all dreams, visions, and other manifestations combined. By the light of God’s candle—the gift of the Holy Ghost—I saw what till then I had never seen, I learned what till then I had never known, I loved the Lord as I had never loved Him before. My soul was satisfied, my joy was full, for I had a testimony of the truth, and it has remained with me to this day.

I know that my Redeemer liveth. Not even Job knew it better. I have evidence that I cannot doubt; and this is why I am found among those who tonight unfurl the slogan for which we stand, possessing and proclaiming an individual testimony of the divinity of Jesus Christ. ■

Published in Improvement Era, Jan. 1926, 219–27; punctuation, capitalization, and spelling modernized.

The greatest and most convincing of all testimonies is the soul’s illumination under the kindling and enlightening power of the Holy Ghost—the Comforter, promised by the Savior to His disciples, to abide with them after He had departed.

Come, Lord Jesus



HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED WONDERFUL, BY SIMON DEWEY,
COURTESY OF ALTUS FINE ART, AMERICAN FORK, UTAH

Simply ♩ = 72-84

From the Church production of
Savior of the World: His Birth and Resurrection

1. Come, Lord Je - sus, to the man - ger; May we see thy ten - der face?
2. Come, Lord Je - sus, to the wound - ed, Bro - ken heart and bend - ed knee.
3. Come, Lord Je - sus, great Re - deem - er, Light of morn - ing from the East.

Great Cre - a - tor, here a strang - er, In - fant in this hum - ble place.
Worth - y Lamb, Thy love un - bound - ed, Bid our souls to rest in Thee.
We will be Thy chil - dren ev - er; Dry our tears, all weep - ing cease!

Dark - ness scat - ter, morn - ing swell; Come, dear Lord Im - man - u - el.
Come in glo - ry to the earth; Come to us to rule and reign.
Come in glo - ry to the earth; Come to us to rule and reign.

Come, Lord Je - sus, to the man - ger; Come, Lord Je - sus, come!
Rea - dy us to kneel and greet thee; Come, Lord Je - sus, come!
Rea - dy us to kneel and greet thee; Come, Lord Je - sus, come!

Savior of the World: His Birth and Resurrection was written and composed under the direction of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Many members throughout the Church contributed generously to this work, including David Warner, Cynthia Collier, Erik Orton, Dennis Packard, Sherry Wadham, Timothy Wadham, and David Zabriskie.

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Could I COME BACK?

BY SUSAN L. MACDONALD


I had been an excommunicated Latter-day Saint for 20 years. Then my mother died, and I found myself wondering if the gospel was really true.

When I was 30 years old, I was excommunicated from the Church. It was the most devastating event ever to occur in my life. I tried to stay active but was filled with anger and bitterness, and without the gift of the Holy Ghost it became more and more difficult. Nevertheless, anytime those around me mocked or disparaged the Church, I would be quick to defend it and to correct any misconceptions they had.

I remember clearly the day I was riding with my mother in the car and she suddenly told me she knew I had a

testimony. She said it was about time I returned. I told her I didn't believe and that I couldn't return. After all, I had been excommunicated once, and if I ever made another mistake I would be "out of there." She sat quietly for a moment and then wisely replied, "Yes, dear, but if you don't come back, you're already out of there." I said nothing at the time but pondered this for years. Another thought that often came to my mind was the verse in Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

When my mother died, I felt desperately lost without her and found myself wondering if I would ever see her again. If what she believed was true, I would certainly never be with her again if I continued to live the way I was. I decided I needed to know for myself.



I began devouring the scriptures. I was truly starving and thirsting for righteousness. I also began attending church regularly and found myself overpowered by the Spirit. I spent the first few months crying during every meeting. Sometimes the emotion was so intense I didn't think I could bear it. Yet I was terrified of praying to ask if the gospel and the Church were true. At last the time came when I could put it off no longer. I went into my bedroom, knelt by my bed, and pleaded with Heavenly Father—first

to tell me if He was there and second to tell me if the Church was true.

I think I have an inkling of the darkness that surrounded the Prophet Joseph Smith when he prayed in the Sacred Grove, for a darkness assailed me as I began to pray. It was so thick I felt almost consumed by it. I closed my eyes more tightly, dug my fingers into the covers of the bed, and prayed with all my might. The darkness disappeared as quickly as it had come, and in its place came an all-encompassing peace. I felt as if I had been picked up and rocked in the arms of the Savior. In my mind came the message, “You are a child of

God, and you have always known the Church is true.” It had not been hard for me to believe that everyone else was a child of God, but the message that I was His child touched me deeply.

I went to my bishop and began my long journey back into the Church. Prayer and scripture study led to baptism and increased blessings.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR HAPPINESS



“Jesus Christ the Redeemer . . . has given His life that even in our weakness, we may overcome our

mistakes through repentance and obedience to His gospel. Oh, what a favored people we are to have this light, this knowledge, these opportunities for happiness on earth and throughout the eternities. May we commit to share a knowledge of this magnificent work, personally or through missionaries, with our friends and neighbors that they may join this kingdom of God on earth, and receive the consummate, eternal blessings available to them.”

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “He Lives,” Ensign, Nov. 1999, 89.

DETAIL FROM IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE, BY CARL HENRICH BLOCH



What exhilaration! What joy! I wanted to climb to the top of the highest mountain and shout it to the world. Tears streamed down my face, as I could no longer contain them.

A family reunion was coming up the next week, and I needed to let everyone know how sorry I was for all the pain I had caused them for so many years and to thank them for never giving up on me, even in the worst of circumstances. I wrote a letter to my uncle, the head of our family. I began to feel better than I had in years.

I went to my bishop and began my long journey back into the Church. We worked together to accomplish the steps that led to my rebaptism. I have a strong testimony that each step in this process is an integral part of repentance and none can be skipped.

During this time of repentance, I came to be grateful for the Church leaders who had listened to the Spirit

and excommunicated me. This had been a necessary step in my path to forgiveness. It took me so long, and I walked so many dangerous and tragic paths. I am deeply grateful for the principle of repentance. I know with all my heart that Heavenly Father loves me and that His plan is a complete plan, that if we listen and obey we can return to live with Him. When a General Authority told me that all of my temple blessings had been restored and that I would be able to attend the temple again, the joy I felt was overwhelming.

No longer do I spend my time wishing I could go back in the past and change things. Now I try to live my life in such a manner that I can undo the harm I have done to my family, to other loved ones, and to those I am not even aware of hurting. I know with every fiber of my being that I have been forgiven. I know what it feels like to be without the Holy Ghost as well as how it feels to have this precious gift, and I never want to be without it again. ■

Susan L. MacDonald is a member of the Ralston-Lavista Ward, Omaha Nebraska Papillion Stake.



Joseph Smith

Restorer of Truth

In a single stunning moment, 14-year-old Joseph Smith learned a great truth about Jesus Christ that had been lost for centuries: that the Savior, though perfectly one in purpose with God the Father, is in fact a separate and distinct personage with a glorified physical body of His own. The Prophet Joseph Smith had other personal experiences with Jesus Christ while translating the plates that would become the Book of Mormon and while in the Kirtland Temple. Through Joseph many other lost doctrinal truths about Christ were restored.

During December we celebrate not only the Savior's birth but also the birth of the prophet who was the instrument to restore to earth a true understanding of Jesus Christ and the glorious fulness of His gospel. Following are some latter-day prophets' testimonies of Joseph Smith's mission in restoring the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His gospel, as well as excerpts from the Prophet Joseph Smith's own words testifying of Christ.



**President Brigham Young
(1801–77)**

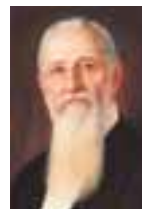
"All that Joseph Smith did was to preach the truth—the gospel as the Lord revealed it to him—and tell the people how to be saved, and the honest in heart ran together and gathered around him and loved him as they did their own lives" (*Deseret News*, 10 Aug. 1864, 859).



**President Lorenzo Snow
(1814–1901)**

"We testify to the whole world that we know, by divine revelation, even through the manifestations of the Holy

Ghost, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that he revealed himself to Joseph Smith as personally as he did to his apostles anciently, after he arose from the tomb, and that he made known unto him these heavenly truths by which alone mankind can be saved" (*Deseret News*, 31 Jan. 1877, 834).



**President Joseph F. Smith
(1838–1918)**

"The day will come—and it is not far distant, either—when the name of the Prophet Joseph Smith will be coupled

with the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the Son of God, as his representative, as his agent whom he chose, ordained and set apart to lay anew the foundations of the Church of God in the world, which is indeed the Church of Jesus Christ, possessing all the powers of the gospel, all the rites and privileges, the authority of the Holy Priesthood, and every principle necessary to fit and qualify both the living and the dead to inherit

I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

“. . . When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!"
(*Joseph Smith—History* 1:16–17).



THE FIRST VISION, BY GARY KAPP

eternal life, and to attain to exaltation in the kingdom of God” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [1939], 134).



**President George Albert Smith
(1870–1951)**

“To my mind one of the strongest testimonies of the divinity of the life of our Savior is the testimony of Joseph Smith who laid down his life as a witness of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (*Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 19 Dec. 1926, 4a).



President David O. McKay (1873–1970)

“The peace and happiness of mankind lie in the acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of the world, our Saviour. The principles of the restored gospel as revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith are the surest, safest guide to mortal man” (*Man May Know for Himself: Teachings of President David O. McKay*, comp. Clare Middlemiss [1967], 383).



**President Joseph Fielding Smith
(1876–1972)**

“Joseph Smith is the revealer of the knowledge of Christ and of salvation to the world for this day and generation. . . . I, for one, want to be numbered forever among those who seek counsel and authority and blessings as they have come from this great prophet whom the Lord raised up to commence the restoration of all things in this final, glorious gospel dispensation” (quoted in Joseph Fielding Smith Jr. and John J. Stewart, *The Life of Joseph Fielding Smith* [1972], 364).



President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973)

“No man can accept Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world, no man can accept this as His church, the Church of Jesus Christ, unless he can accept Joseph Smith as God’s mouthpiece and the restorer of His work in

these latter days” (*The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, ed. Clyde J. Williams [1996], 371).



President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994)

“God has in very deed revealed Himself from the heavens. He did raise up the boy prophet. . . .

“Joseph Smith has done more for the salvation of men in this world than any man who ever lived in it, except the Master (see D&C 135:3). He stands at the head of this dispensation—the greatest gospel dispensation of all time—and all the world will someday come to realize that he is in very deed a prophet of the Living God” (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [1988], 131–32).



President Gordon B. Hinckley

“How great indeed is our debt to him. . . . It was he who brought us a true knowledge of God, the Eternal Father, and His Risen Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. During the short time of his great vision he

learned more concerning the nature of Deity than all of those who through centuries had argued the matter in learned councils and scholarly forums. He brought us the marvelous Book of Mormon as another witness for the living reality of the Son of God. To him, from those who held it anciently, came the priesthood, the power, the gift, the authority, the keys to speak and act in the name of God. He gave us the organization of the Church and its great and sacred mission. Through him were restored the keys of the holy temples, that men and women might enter into eternal covenants with God and that the great work for the dead might be accomplished to open the way for eternal blessings. . . .

“He was the instrument in the hands of the Almighty. He was the servant acting under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ in bringing to pass this great latter-day work.

“We stand in reverence before him. He is the great prophet of this dispensation. He stands at the head of this great and mighty work which is spreading across

the earth. He is our prophet, our revelator, our seer, our friend. Let us not forget him. Let not his memory be forgotten in the celebration of Christmas. God be thanked for the Prophet Joseph” (“A Season for Gratitude,” *Ensign*, Dec. 1997, 2).



The Prophet Joseph Smith’s Testimony

“We [Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery] saw the Lord standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit [in the Kirtland Temple], before us; and under his feet was a paved work of pure gold, in color like amber.

“His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah, saying:

“I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father” (D&C 110:2–4).

“For while we [Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon] were doing the work of translation, . . .

“ . . . the Lord touched the eyes of our understandings and they were opened, and the glory of the Lord shone round about.

“And we beheld the glory of the Son, on the right hand of the Father, and received of his fulness. . . .

“And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!

“For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—

“That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God” (D&C 76:15, 19–20, 22–24).

“And this is the gospel, the glad tidings, which the voice out of the heavens bore record unto us—

“That he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify

SHARING THE PRICELESS GOSPEL

If only we could help our friends of other faiths see the great strength that comes from having living prophets and apostles to bear unshakable witness and teach the fullness of the gospel of Christ!



Now we have a powerful new tool for sharing that witness with others, the DVD and video presentation *Joy to the World*.

With the rest of the Christian world, during the holidays we celebrate the birth of the Savior Jesus Christ. As Church members, we also remember the birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Savior’s instrument for

restoring sacred gospel truths in this dispensation. The copy of *Joy to the World* on DVD that comes with this magazine (for subscribers in the United States, Canada, the British Isles, Australia, and New Zealand)

can help us bear witness of the Savior and His restored truth.

The *Joy to the World* DVD is designed to be shared in a spirit of friendship and love. Giving a copy to a prayerfully selected acquaintance is a great way to express what you believe. Even better is to sit down with those friends and view *Joy to the*

World together. Additional copies of *Joy to the World* in both DVD and video formats are available for purchase through distribution centers, on the Internet at www.ldscatalog.com, or by calling 240-3800 (in the Salt Lake City area) or 1-800-537-5971 (in the United States and Canada only). The DVD is item no. 54065. The video in VHS format is no. 53644. The PAL format video (used in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand) is item no. 56644. Also available are pass-along cards (item no. 36878) that members may use to invite friends and acquaintances to receive their own free copy of *Joy to the World*. Find time this season to share something priceless. ■

the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness; “That through him all might be saved whom the Father had put into his power and made by him” (D&C 76:40–42). ■

CATCHING THE VISION OF

Missionary

Our ward made a specific effort to double the results of our missionary efforts. Here's how it worked.

BY BRIAN JENSEN

We have seen a ward come alive with missionary work," Bishop Gary M. Stout of the Fair Oaks Third Ward in California said as he reported to the stake president on ward members' efforts. Ward members had shared in an effort to double the results of their missionary labors, as President Gordon B. Hinckley has challenged the Church to do.¹ When our ward tried to respond to President Hinckley's challenge, I was serving as ward mission leader and witnessed firsthand the blessings that come when we follow the counsel of Church leaders. I also caught a glimpse of what the prophets have foretold regarding the great harvest of souls to take place in this last dispensation.

A Specific Date

It began one Saturday evening when our stake presidency held a meeting with all of the bishops and ward mission leaders in the stake and their wives. The purpose was to convey President Hinckley's vision of missionary work, urge us to set specific goals, and motivate us to achieve them. The following day, Bishop Stout and his counselors discussed how to implement the instructions we had received.

Recalled Bishop Stout, "One of my wise counselors, Brother Ruggles, spoke up and told



"Last year [1998] there were approximately 300,000 convert baptisms throughout the Church. . . . It is wonderful. But it is not enough. I am not being unrealistic when I say that with concerted effort, with recognition of the duty which falls upon each of us as members of the Church, and with sincere prayer to the Lord for help, we could double that number" (Gordon B. Hinckley, "Find the Lambs, Feed the Sheep," Ensign, May 1999, 105).

about a college roommate he'd had who spent so much time preparing to study that he never really got down to studying." The bishopric decided to hold a special combined meeting of the priesthood, Relief Society, and youth on the fifth Sunday of that same month, and this meeting would reflect a specific missionary effort. This was not to be just another training meeting on why or how we should share the gospel; this was to be an opportunity to actually do it. The Apostle James, who so powerfully taught that faith is alive only when accompanied by action, said it this way: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22).

"We first agreed as a bishopric to invite our nonmember friends, coworkers, and family members," explained Bishop Stout. "We challenged the ward council to do likewise. I made a challenge to the ward members in sacrament meeting to be bold and invite their friends, family, and coworkers to come and join us for a special program concerning the family."

In the few weeks leading up to the special meeting, ward members worked diligently to prepare for the

Work



PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL VANDENBERGHE

Bishop Gary Stout (left), with his first counselor, Stan Ruggles, helped move the Fair Oaks Third Ward to action, challenging members to invite family, friends, and coworkers who were not members to a special Sunday meeting.



Above: Carolyn Danford returned to full activity in the Church after accepting an invitation to attend the special Sunday meeting. Below: Scott and Michele McKee, here with three of their children, spoke on the importance of family.

event. Although I am sure many of us felt a brief moment of hesitation, almost immediately a confident enthusiasm began to spread among members. This was primarily because of the obvious commitment and excitement of the bishopric. Each of them exuded an infectious desire to make this meeting a success. They even wore little tags with the words “BE BOLD.”

In every Church meeting and nearly every prayer, we received reminders about the fifth-Sunday meeting and our challenge to invite our friends. Priesthood and auxiliary leaders helped the bishopric prayerfully establish objectives and plan an agenda for the meeting

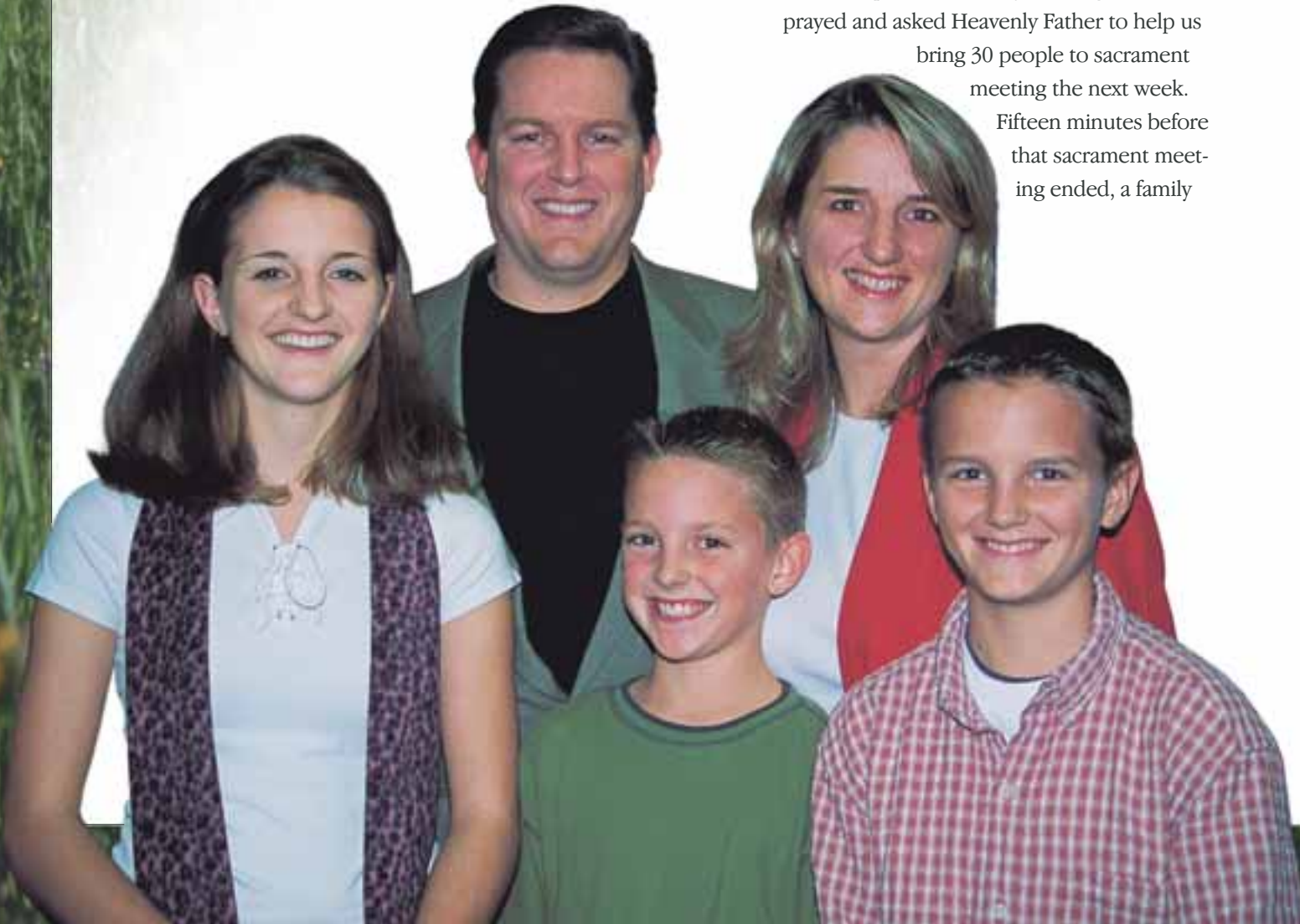
itself. As ward mission leader, I worked with the ward and full-time missionaries to plan ways to get people there. Prayerfully we set a goal for the number of investigators we wanted to bring to the meeting.

A Specific Goal

I thought back to my mission, when a visiting Apostle and my mission president instructed us to commit to specific actions and ask for specific blessings when approaching Heavenly Father, rather than praying in vague generalities. At the time my companion and I were serving in a struggling branch with declining attendance. After only 13 people showed up to our Sunday meetings, we prayed and asked Heavenly Father to help us

bring 30 people to sacrament meeting the next week.

Fifteen minutes before that sacrament meeting ended, a family



of four we had baptized sat down on the front row, making a total of 30 in attendance. At that moment, the Spirit acknowledged to me that this was a specific answer to our specific prayer.

Applying this principle to our special fifth-Sunday meeting, the full-time and ward missionaries decided on a specific request. Ordinarily, we would have felt that having more than two or three investigators in church was a very successful Sunday. However, the bishopric had talked about having as many as 20, 30, or 40 in attendance, so we prayerfully set a goal to have at least 30 investigators attend the special meeting. We committed to pray daily for the Spirit to motivate our fellow ward members to open their mouths and invite their friends, neighbors, and family members. Of course we discussed some of the people we would invite. We also pledged to come to the meeting fasting with this purpose in mind. Finally, we visited families in the ward to help them determine specific individuals and families they could invite to the meeting.

The most exciting thing that occurred in those three weeks was that people actually did it—they opened their mouths. They simply explained to their friends that we were having a special meeting about families and asked them to come. To their joy and, in some cases, shock, many people said yes. This was fuel for the fire. Within a short time many ward members discovered that it is not so hard after all to share with their friends something that is so important to them. They also discovered that when we do what the Lord has commanded us, He opens the way for us to succeed (see 1 Nephi 3:7). Perhaps most important, they discovered that sharing the gospel is enjoyable.

Results

When the fifth Sunday of the month finally came, a near-tangible energy was felt in the congregation during sacrament meeting and Sunday School. And when the time for our special meeting arrived, the ward reaped the fruit of its labor. Into the chapel walked active members of the Church with friends who were not members or were less active. As I greeted people at the door, I appreciated



Jarrod Morgan works on holiday crafts with his family at a ward party. Jarrod performed at the missionary meeting, sharing his testimony with those in attendance through song.

seeing the joyful expressions on the faces of ward members who introduced their guests.

The program was beautiful. Without a doubt, the Lord magnified the efforts of all who sang, spoke, and testified about the plan of salvation and the role of the family within the plan. And while we are accustomed to uplifting talks and musical performances, it seemed those who participated felt an increased focus and sense of purpose as they shared their testimonies in word and song. From the tears in the eyes of many of our visitors, I could tell they too felt the influence of the Holy Spirit.

As I counted the visitors scattered throughout the pews, I once again felt the Spirit confirm that Heavenly Father had heard and answered our specific, faithful plea. According to our best determination, 36 people who were not members and 19 less-active members had joined us for the meeting!

Long-Term Results

That was more than two years ago. With the passage of time, I recognize more and more blessings that have stemmed, directly and indirectly, from that exciting experience. First, several of the investigators present in the meeting have joined the Church. For example, Nate Pennington, along with his wife, Cathy, a less-active member of our ward, began attending other meetings and activities from time to time. As a result of sustained fellowship and specific prayer, roughly a year and a half



Less-active members and some who are not members come to nearly every ward activity, like this ward Christmas party with a children's nativity presentation.

after that meeting Nate joined the Church.

Equally important, a number of the less-active Saints who returned to church that day have remained faithful and now hold callings. Sister Carolyn Danford, in particular, who had not attended church for three decades, has hardly missed a Sunday service since that day. Despite her reserved nature, she now participates in class discussions and enjoys full fellowship within the ward.

While not all our guests immediately began investigating the gospel in earnest, several are still on the gradual path leading to that point. For instance, one promising family has agreed to participate in a family history project in our area. This is another opportunity for them to interact with the Church and cultivate the seeds that were planted in their hearts. Another entire family is scheduled to receive the missionary discussions in the home of the friends who brought them to church last year, and I am confident many others will yet seek further knowledge about the gospel.

A few months after the meeting, our ward conducted another such Sunday activity with similar results. Although not every Church function bears so much fruit, we routinely enjoy the company of new friends. Less-active members and some who are not members come to nearly every ward activity, from barbecues and dances to firesides and baptismal

services. Our ward is making a habit of boldly approaching those who are not already included in our great ward family.

Under the inspired direction of their priesthood leaders, ward members have helped develop a ward finding list. This is a master list of 100 names of friends, neighbors, and family members we feel might embrace the gospel someday. Some of them still may require much more preparation, but we have committed to think about these special people, pray for them, and seek revelation to know how to help lead them step-by-step to eternal life. With



Conducting a thriving temple preparation class, Jack Clark helps ward members prepare to enter the temple.

this goal in mind, more ward members are approaching me for suggestions as to which less-active members they can invite to our meetings or how to approach certain neighbors about the gospel. More and more, the focus of ward members has turned outward. And as my own family can testify regarding friends of other faiths, the Lord is answering our prayers, both by opening their hearts and showing us how to proceed.

Our Confidence Has Grown

While we are grateful for current success, I believe the greatest effects of that special meeting remain to be seen. The people who attended that first meeting represented only a fraction of those invited. But among those who declined that first invitation, many expressed a desire to join us in the future. In every case our friends now have a greater understanding of who we are as Latter-day Saints and know that we are anxious to share with them the spiritual treasures we have. Our confidence as members has grown from exercising faith and witnessing the Lord's blessings. By responding to a call, we may have benefited as much as the guests we invited to church. I feel certain

BRINGING FAMILIES TOGETHER

It started something for our whole family," says Cathy Pennington. "I had not been active for a long time. This meeting helped me realize that living the gospel was something I needed to be doing, something our whole family needed to be doing."

Cathy's husband, Nate, who was not a member, agreed to bring his family to the special fifth-Sunday meeting after they were invited by one of the ward members. Nate was impressed by the message and touched by the Spirit. "The meeting really sparked my interest," he says. "I knew it was time that I needed to look into the gospel. I needed to make some important choices for my life. And we needed to make some important choices as a family."

Nate and Cathy began attending other Church meetings and activities. They also began the missionary discussions in their home. Nate accepted the invitation to be baptized and became a member of the Church on 23 February 2002. "This ward has been extremely open and friendly to me and my family," says Nate. "They are true examples of people with Christlike love. And the bishop has been tremendous."

Six months later, Nate had the blessing of baptizing his son, Matthew. "It was really a great experience for both of us," says Nate. "It was a wonderful moment to share with my son." Cathy speaks of Matthew's baptism as a fulfillment even beyond her greatest hopes. "To have Nate worthy to hold the priesthood and then to have him baptize Matthew was extraordinary, something I could hardly have ever hoped for."

Now Cathy is serving with the Young Women, and Nate is serving with the Young Men of the Fair Oaks Third Ward. After finishing the temple preparation course, Nate and Cathy, along with their two children, Matthew and Emma, received the sealing ordinance in the temple on 15 March 2003. ■

the ripples caused by one bishop's bold challenge will continue to touch many lives as we build on this momentum.

The Lord has said to each of us, "And thou must open thy mouth at all times, declaring my gospel with the sound of rejoicing" (D&C 28:16). President Hinckley has pointed out that we have tremendous opportunities to reach others.² Those of us who have already embraced the gospel have a great privilege and responsibility to share it. The words of our California Sacramento Mission motto express this opportunity well: "Now is the time. This is the place. We are the ones." We just need to be bold in declaring the good news of the gospel. ■

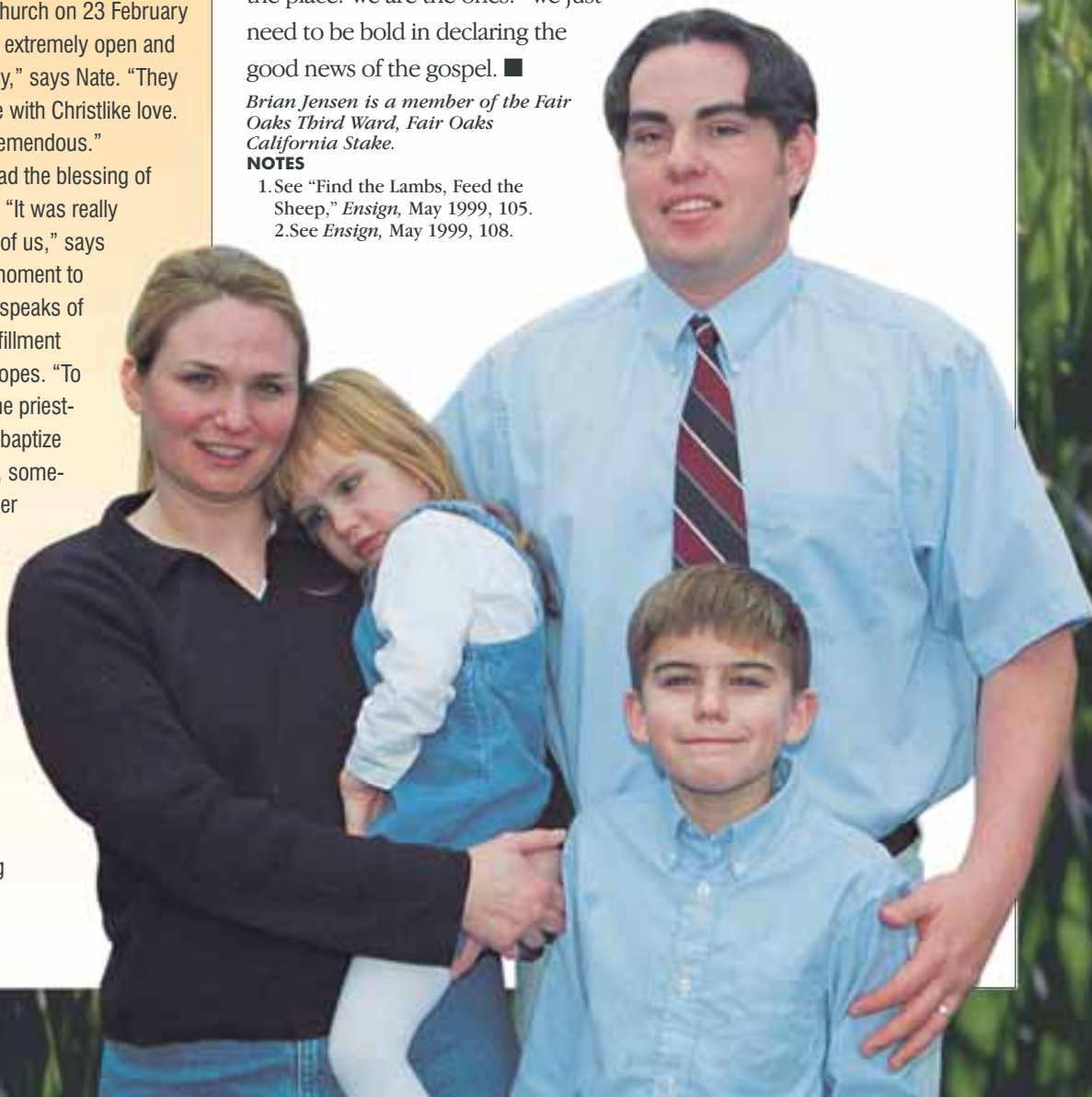
Brian Jensen is a member of the Fair Oaks Third Ward, Fair Oaks California Stake.

NOTES

1. See "Find the Lambs, Feed the Sheep," *Ensign*, May 1999, 105.
2. See *Ensign*, May 1999, 108.



Above: Primary children decorate cookies at a ward social. Below: After attending the special Sunday meeting, the Pennington family underwent a mighty change; Cathy became active again and her husband, Nate, was baptized.





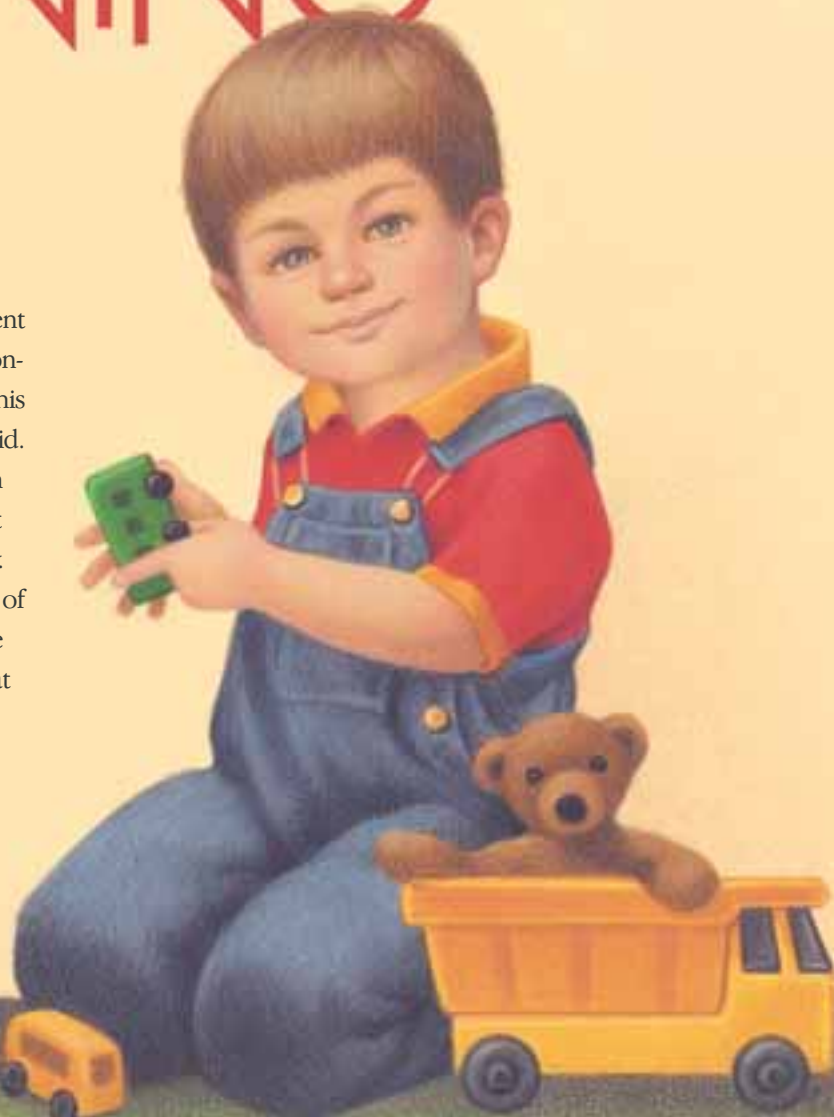
TESTIMONIES OF

FAMILY HOME EVENING

*Though our circumstances vary,
the prophetic promise is the same:
family home evening will bless and
improve our lives.*

During general conference of October 2002, President Gordon B. Hinckley stressed the importance of consistent family home evening. “We are fearful that this very important program is fading in too many areas,” he said. “This program was begun back in 1915, 87 years ago, when President Joseph F. Smith urged the Latter-day Saints to set aside one evening a week devoted specifically to the family. It was to be a time of teaching, of reading the scriptures, of cultivating talents, of discussing family matters. . . . In the increasingly frantic rush of our lives it is so important that fathers and mothers sit down with their children, pray together, instruct them in the ways of the Lord, consider their family problems, and let the children express their talents. I am satisfied that this program came under the revelations of the Lord in response to a need among the families of the Church.

“If there was a need 87 years ago, that need is





certainly much greater today” (“To Men of the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 58).

On these pages, Church members from various circumstances share their testimonies of how family home evening has blessed their lives.

More Than We Thought Possible

Years ago as we were listening to general conference, it struck us as interesting when Elder LeGrand R. Curtis of the Seventy said, “We have found that the child who is rolling on the floor during family home evening listens and learns more than we think possible” (“Happiness Is Homemade,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, 13).

Several weeks later, our seven-year-old daughter, Brittany, was giving the lesson during home evening. Our three-year-old, Alex, was behind the couch playing with some small toys, and since this was keeping him quiet, we allowed him to stay there.

Brittany began relating a Book of Mormon story. In her nervousness she forgot the name of one of the characters. “Nephi and his brothers went back to Jerusalem,” she said, “to get the brass plates from . . . um . . . um . . .”

“Laban!” said a small voice from behind the couch. We were astonished. Not only were we surprised that Alex was paying enough attention to follow the lesson, but he was familiar enough with the scripture story to supply the forgotten name!

The experience reminded us that we often don’t realize the impact of what we teach in family home evening. Whether they are toddlers “rolling on the floor” or bored-looking teenagers who act like they’d rather be someplace else, what our children are learning is “more than we think possible.”

Jenell Hansen, Kutztown Ward, Reading Pennsylvania Stake

My First Family Home Evening

When we started investigating the Church a few years ago, some families in the local ward invited us to join them for family home evening. We were unable to attend, but the invitation raised our curiosity, and we asked the missionaries many questions about the program.

After we set a baptismal date, we decided we wanted to have a family home evening of our own. We invited the missionaries and the families who had previously extended us the invitation.

Even though we really didn’t know what we were doing—we hadn’t attended a family home evening yet and had never read any literature on the subject—we experienced a wonderful, Spirit-filled, educational evening. We opened with a prayer, then sang a song of our choosing—“Old McDonald Had a Farm”! Next we had a lesson, a closing prayer, and dessert. The member families we had invited were so kind and loving, and we were blessed by their fellowship and examples.

When we were baptized the following Sunday, a sister in the ward gave us a priceless gift, the *Family Home Evening Resource Book* (item no. 31106; U.S. \$5.00). I pleasantly remember her gift today and sometimes laugh out loud wondering if someone told her we really needed this book! Whatever the case, I’m sure this sister was in tune with the Spirit and knew the growth our family would experience with this tool in our home. We have used it not just for family home evening but also as a resource when we’ve been asked to speak or teach in Church settings or when friends of other faiths have asked us questions.

As converts to the Church, we testify that family home evenings have strengthened our family.

Jo and Kevin Lucke, Brunswick Second Ward, Kingsland Georgia Stake

Led by a Four-Year-Old

After I joined the Church several years ago, my wife and I had a difficult time holding family home evenings. When we married, my wife had a 15-year-old daughter and a four-year-old son, and I wasn't sure how to approach having home evenings with them. So we just didn't have them.

Then one Sunday after church our four-year-old asked me why we didn't have family home evening. Apparently he had learned of its importance in Primary and was anxious to get started. I was put off at first, but when I saw his enthusiasm and desire, I hesitantly told him we'd have one the following evening.

All day long he talked of nothing else. "Isn't it great that we're going to have family home evening!" he said over and over. Well, things got busy, time grew short, and we didn't end up having it that night. I completely underestimated the devastation it would cause our son. He was disappointed and moody for days.


After trying to raise his spirits, only to hear how

much he wanted to have a family night, we had a simple gathering with scripture reading, questions, and family prayer the following week. To my amazement, even our four-year-old understood the scriptures we studied and asked intelligent questions about them. Our experience was wonderful.

Today we continue to have home evening each week because, thanks to our son, we have gained a solid testimony of its importance. We now have a third child, and we have seen the fruits of consistent home evenings in the increased closeness and unity of our blended family. I humbly add my testimony that family home evening is one of the integral ways of fulfilling the directives outlined in *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*. Even if the children don't fully understand the principle being taught, they do feel the spirit of our family meetings and will grow up knowing we care

about them and desire to spend time with them consistently.

E. Torrey Wickman, Puyallup Ward, Puyallup Washington Stake



One Sunday after learning about family home evening in Primary, my four-year-old son asked if our family could have one.



The First Priesthood Blessing

When our oldest child began school a few years ago, I decided that consistent family home evenings in our home were long overdue and it was time to commit to them. After all, we are responsible for showing our children the way back to our Heavenly Father.

I saw immediate blessings in our home! Our family and individual goals were given so much more emphasis and purpose as each family member was given a voice and as we discussed Heavenly Father's plan. Although I was surprised at the immediacy of the blessings, I definitely expected them because of the promises of modern-day prophets.

What I did not expect was the effect that family home evening would have on my less-active husband. What a perfect opportunity it has been for him to understand more about the basic doctrine of the Church in a close-knit family setting, where he is more willing to learn and participate.

As we have discussed the blessings and responsibilities of the priesthood as a family, he has warmed up to these principles. A few years ago we had a lesson from the *Family Home Evening Resource Book* titled "The Priesthood in Our Home." At that time I was in the ninth month of a pregnancy and very anxious about the delivery. That night my husband gave me the first priesthood blessing he had ever given on his own, a blessing of comfort. Family home evening gave my sweet husband an opportunity to use his priesthood and experience the positive effect it had on me and on our children through his example.

As the Spirit of the Lord permeates our home, I have noticed my husband being more in tune with what is appropriate for our family and what is not. I have seen his mind opened and his heart softened, and I attribute this to our weekly family home evenings. I am thankful for the divine inspiration behind such a promising program.

Giovanna Underwood, Sarasota Ward, Brandon Florida Stake

A variety of older adults plus a variety of Monday evening activities equals 10 years of belonging.

Our "Family"

About 10 years ago, when many of the older adults without children in our ward were having a hard time holding regular home evenings, several of us realized how much it would enrich us to form a home evening group. With the approval of our bishop, two sisters called everyone in the ward that fit this category, and we began meeting Monday nights. We take turns hosting home evening in our homes.

Ranging in age from our 40s to our 70s, we're about as diverse a group as you can imagine, with a delightful assortment

of personalities. Some of us have known each other for years; others are new to our "family."

We've had many spiritual evenings. Some lessons are given from *Ensign* articles; others are from personal experiences shared by the host member, such as experiences working in the temple, family history research, or missionary service. Other nights we've taken turns sharing what membership in the Church means to us, talked about the talents we see in one another, or invited new families in the ward to join us for dinner so we can get to know them.

As a group we also give service once a month, working in the bishops' storehouse, delivering fruit baskets to nursing homes, or assisting a member of the ward who needs service. In December we decided to give Christmas gifts to ward families in need. We asked the bishop to give us a list of family needs and clothing sizes.

Through the years we've continued to invite others without children at home to attend our family home evenings. We now even have two women of other faiths who come! Words cannot express the fellowship and love we have developed for one another. We have stood by each other through joys and sorrows, through life and death. Just as prophets have promised, family home evening is truly an inspired program that blesses all who participate. ■

Nancy B. Dunton, Greensboro Guilford Ward, Greensboro North Carolina Stake



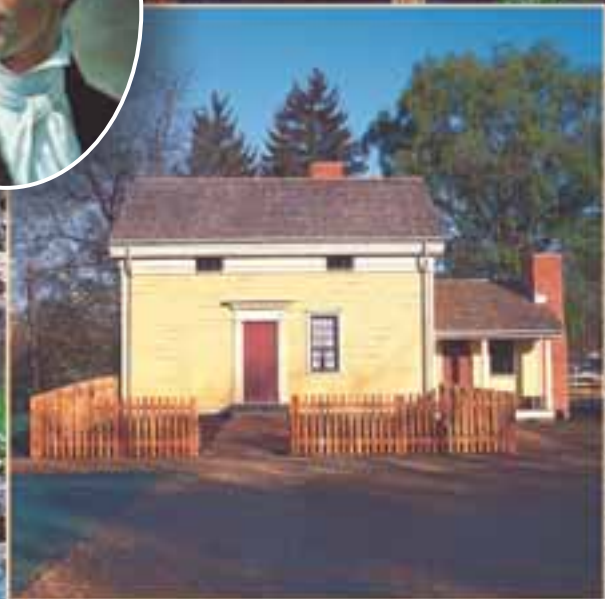
Kirtland Restored

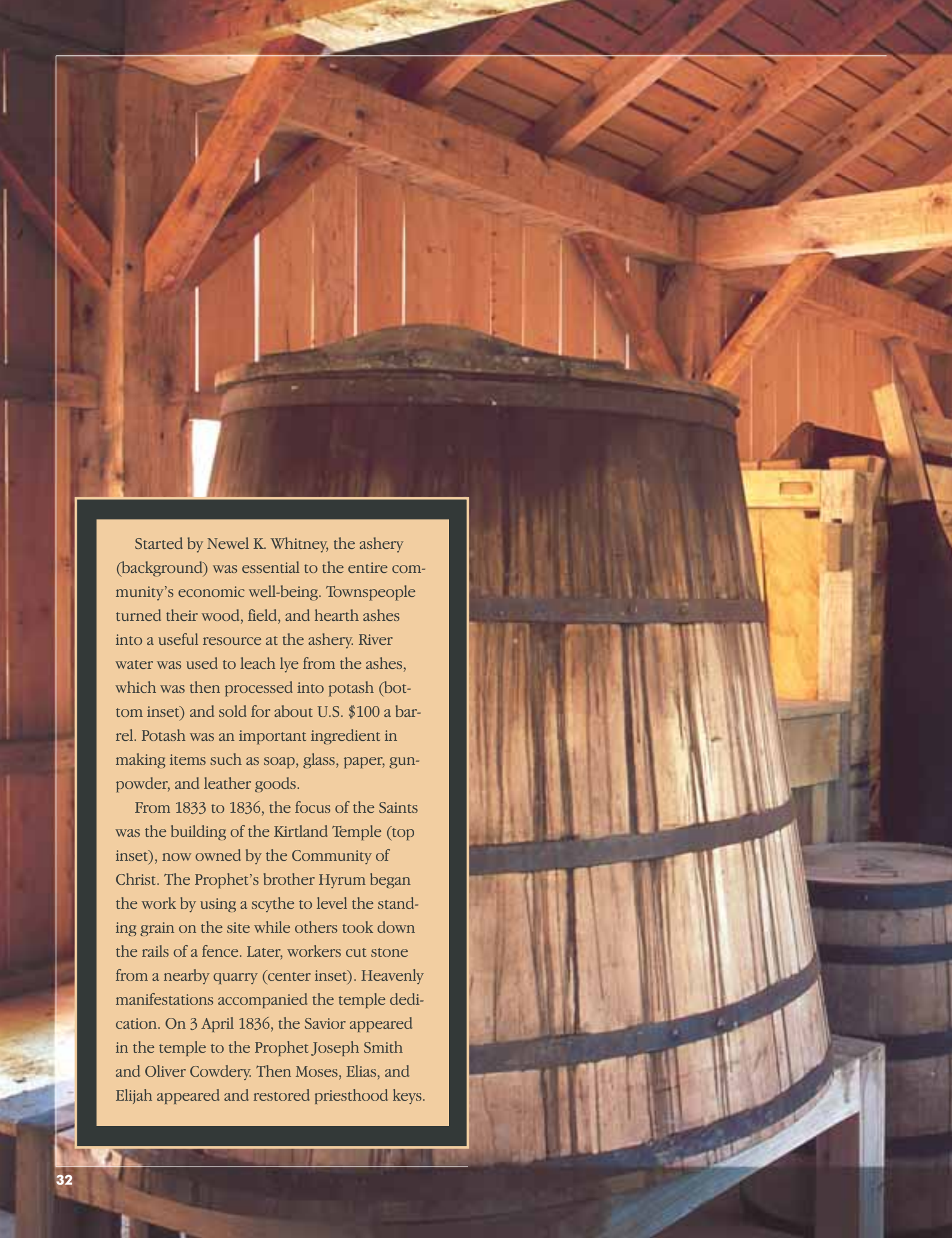
Newly restored historic sites help us envision how the Church flourished and suffered here between 1831 and 1838.

Once again an ashery stands on Stoney Brook, just as it did when early Latter-day Saints settled in Kirtland. The ashery (background) is one of several buildings rebuilt by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as part of the restoration of historic Kirtland, Ohio. The Prophet Joseph Smith (right) moved the newly organized Church from New York to Ohio in 1831.

The small home (far right) of early converts Newel K. and Elizabeth Ann Whitney had a summer kitchen on the back, a single bedroom on the main floor where Sister Whitney's aunt frequently stayed, and an open half-story upstairs where Newel, Elizabeth Ann, and their children slept.

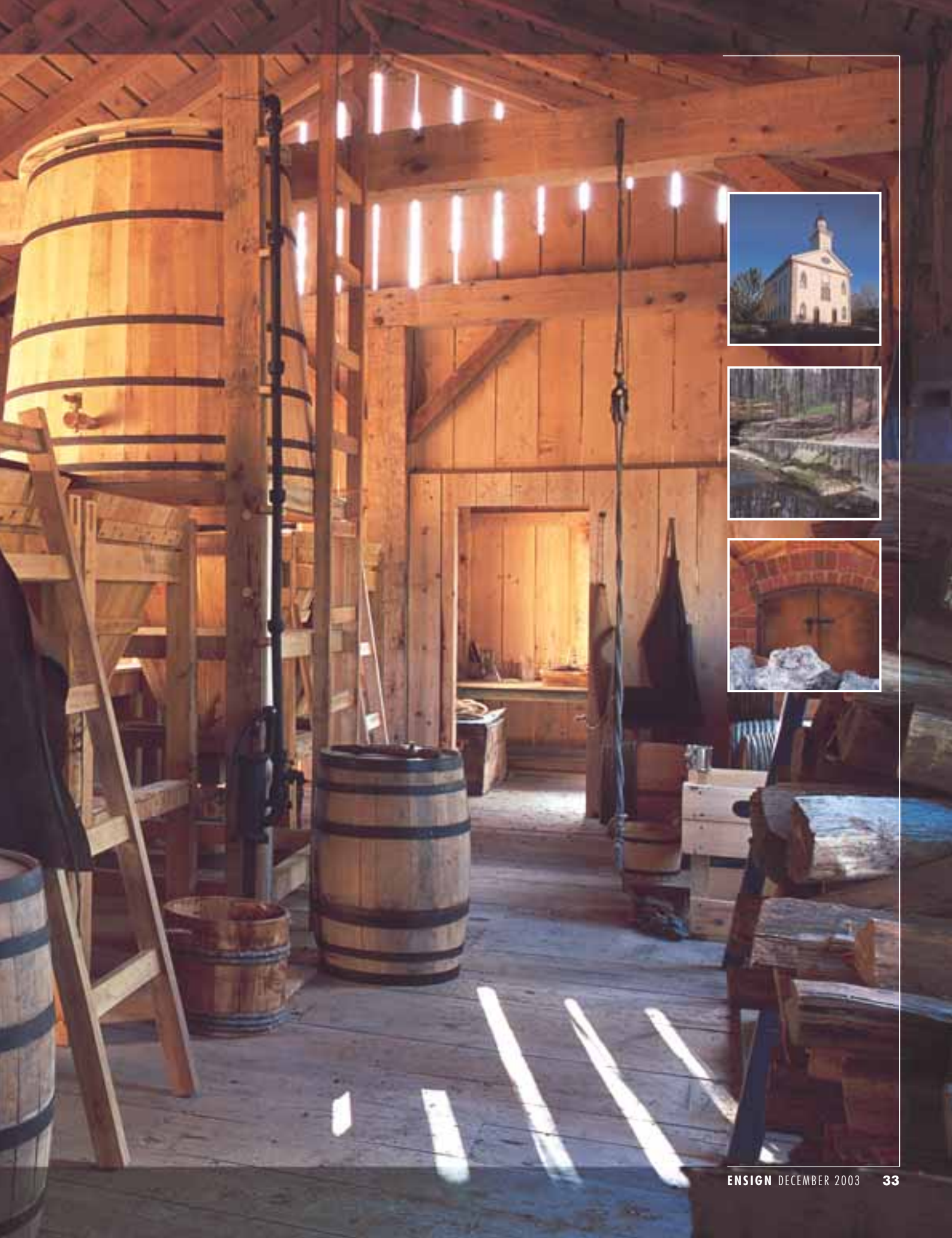
PHOTOGRAPHY BY WELDEN C. ANDERSEN; JOSEPH SMITH, BY ALVIN GITTINS



A large, dark-stained wooden barrel with several metal hoops is the central focus of the image. It is situated in a rustic wooden building with a high, vaulted ceiling supported by heavy wooden beams. The walls are also made of wood, with vertical planks. In the background, other wooden structures and a smaller barrel are visible, suggesting a workshop or storage area. The lighting is warm and natural, highlighting the textures of the wood.

Started by Newel K. Whitney, the ashery (background) was essential to the entire community's economic well-being. Townspeople turned their wood, field, and hearth ashes into a useful resource at the ashery. River water was used to leach lye from the ashes, which was then processed into potash (bottom inset) and sold for about U.S. \$100 a barrel. Potash was an important ingredient in making items such as soap, glass, paper, gunpowder, and leather goods.

From 1833 to 1836, the focus of the Saints was the building of the Kirtland Temple (top inset), now owned by the Community of Christ. The Prophet's brother Hyrum began the work by using a scythe to level the standing grain on the site while others took down the rails of a fence. Later, workers cut stone from a nearby quarry (center inset). Heavenly manifestations accompanied the temple dedication. On 3 April 1836, the Savior appeared in the temple to the Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. Then Moses, Elias, and Elijah appeared and restored priesthood keys.






The above map shows historic Kirtland as it has been restored. The sawmill (background) was built by Latter-day Saints on Newel K. Whitney's property but was a Church mill rather than a private operation. It provided the cash-poor Church a means of building the temple in the style dictated by the revelations. It also provided jobs for the many Latter-day Saints arriving in Kirtland. A waterwheel (top inset) powered the saw and lathe. Lumber from this mill was used for the temple and other buildings. The original sawmill burned down in the early 1850s.

The schoolhouse (center and bottom insets) was a center of activity. Schoolchildren played ball, a game called mumblety-peg, and marbles in the school yard. School supplies included a spelling book, a reader, an arithmetic book, and a slate. Students carved their own pencils from soapstone. On Sundays, the Saints often met in the schoolhouse for Church meetings.





Newel K. Whitney, with his general store (background and center inset) and ashery, was well established by February 1831 when the Prophet Joseph and Emma Smith arrived. The Whitneys generously made their resources available to the Church. While living in the store (top inset), the Prophet received many important revelations now recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants. And it was in an upper room of the store that the School of the Prophets met. Truly, in Kirtland the Lord helped the Prophet lay the foundation for the Church.

John Johnson operated an inn (bottom inset) near the Whitney store. Although they eventually left the Church, the Johnsons were early converts who had a significant impact for good. ■



BUILDING FOR THEIR



Teaching children how to make good decisions is one of the greatest gifts we can give them.

BY GARTH A. HANSON

When I was serving as a bishop some years ago, a young woman approached me about receiving a recommend for her temple marriage. She walked into my office with the eagerness and bright countenance that every parent hopes for in their children. She looked me straight in the eye and said, “Bishop, I have been preparing for this interview for the past eight years. Early in my experience in Young Women, I made the commitment to the Lord that I would be worthy when I presented myself to my bishop to ask for a recommend for temple marriage. I have kept that commitment. I am truly worthy.”

I was thrilled with her confidence and also with the success of her parents and the Young Women program. She answered all of the temple recommend questions with the same bold yet humble confidence. She truly was ready and worthy to go to the temple and be sealed to her soon-to-be husband. This young woman had her challenges in life but had kept her promises to herself and to the Lord.

What is it that brings a young person to this point? As I reflected on our interview, I realized it was the good decisions this young woman had made throughout each season of her life.

Decision-Making Stages

As children mature, they go through various developmental stages that bring change. Along with these changes come increasingly difficult choices. In the United States, the critical decisions of youth seem to come between ages 12 and 21. The age may vary in other areas. Let’s look at the decisions young people typically face during this period.

Children encounter their first decision-making stage at about age 12. When elementary or primary school ends, children must choose for the first time their own classes in middle school or junior high. And, as young people mature physically,

dress styles and social demands change dramatically.

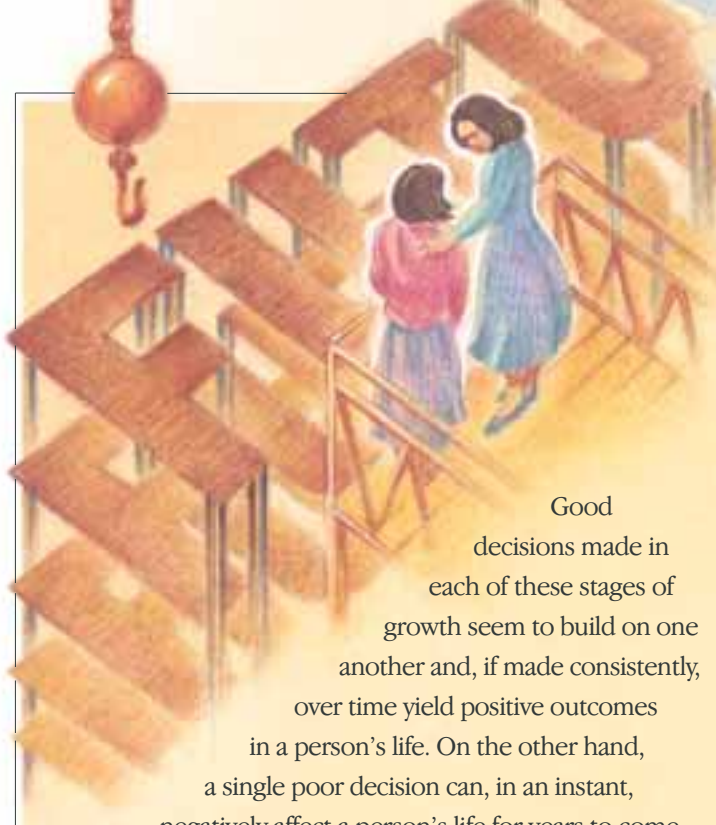
Expectations are also changing at church and at home. At church 12-year-olds are introduced into the Young Women or Aaronic Priesthood programs. At home parents may want their children to remain dependent, while at the same time they expect them to begin acting like adults. This is a very confusing time for children and parents alike. Children this age need help knowing how to adjust to their new adolescent situation while still doing what is right.

At 16, teenagers in some areas enter a second decision-making stage by getting their driver’s license. This allows them to travel outside their neighborhood more frequently on their own. Young people this age are also old enough to date. As 16-year-olds become more independent, arguments with their parents may proliferate over what they can and cannot do. Teens this age want to make good decisions but may feel overwhelmed by the new independence and choices now available to them.

The third stage comes with the completion of high school. That is when an 18-year-old begins to enter the world of adulthood. Making decisions becomes increasingly challenging as young people face choices about college, moving away from home, financial support, individual Church activity, and serving missions. All of these factors change relationships with parents, friends, and ward members.

Decisions made at this stage are critical because they affect not only the immediate future but also the rest of a person’s life. How can young people make such important “adult” decisions when they are just beginning to reach maturity?

Between the ages of 21 and 24, young people continue to grapple with critical decisions as they make their final adjustment into adulthood. Young men return from missions, young women decide if they are going to serve a mission, and both genders are typically beginning, continuing, or completing their education. This is also a time when many make decisions about careers and marriage. Decisions in young people’s lives have always been important, but now they seem to affect life for a much longer period of time than before.



Good decisions made in each of these stages of growth seem to build on one another and, if made consistently, over time yield positive outcomes in a person's life. On the other hand, a single poor decision can, in an instant, negatively affect a person's life for years to come. Some choices can even affect future generations.

Gathering and Processing Information

A very young child gathers data from a single source—the family. Information gathered in those early years from other sources, such as peers or school, can often be influenced or even overridden by parents. As the child grows, however, influences from outside the family grow stronger and parental influence can weaken if the child has not had experience making decisions with the help of the family. Getting children through each of the four critical periods of their young lives depends greatly upon how well we teach them to gather information from appropriate sources, process that information, and trust themselves in making good decisions.

Characteristics of Good Decision Makers

Teaching children how to make good decisions is one of the greatest gifts we can give them. As a parent of four grown children and in my vocation and Church service, I have worked with young people for nearly 40 years. During this time I have made some observations about youth and the decision-making process.

Young people who, for the most part, make good decisions typically:

1. Have confidence and feelings of self-worth.
2. Are comfortable being with their families.

3. Know what their parents expect of them.
4. Have some say in family decisions as they grow up.
5. Respect and are respected by their parents.
6. Recognize the value of gathering available information, getting counsel, and seeking spiritual direction in making key decisions.

Helping Children Acquire These Characteristics

As a parent, how can you instill these characteristics in your own children so they are more likely to make good decisions, no matter what age group they are in? The following suggestions provide at least a partial answer to this question.

1. Bring the Spirit into the decision-making process by living the gospel. Pray about decisions in family prayers, and encourage your children to pray about decisions in their personal prayers. Priesthood blessings would be appropriate as needed.

2. Find as many ways as possible to interact with your children at all ages. Establish basic practices in your family that will encourage conversation, interaction, and teaching opportunities. Such practices include family prayer, scripture study, weekly family home evenings, shared meals, abundant family activities, and church attendance as a family.

3. Regularly interview your children individually. Begin with a prayer; then ask your child questions that will encourage him or her to discuss, make, and evaluate decisions. Such questions might include: How are your relationships with friends? Are you embarrassed by anything we do as a family? What financial and transportation needs do you have?

4. Provide appropriate advice as children make decisions in each stage of their development. Let them know how you feel about the choices before them and the possible outcomes. Provide less advice on less significant decisions as children mature so they can practice the decision-making process. Know that your children are more capable of making good decisions than you realize. Let them try what you've taught them.

The background of the page is a vibrant illustration. At the top, a large, bright sun with rays is partially obscured by a large white circle containing text. To the left, there are soft, blue and white clouds. The lower half of the page features a cityscape with various buildings in shades of blue, brown, and yellow. Overlaid on this cityscape are large, three-dimensional letters that spell out the word 'JESUS' in a bold, sans-serif font. The letters are brown with a lighter tan interior and are arranged in a slightly receding perspective. In the foreground, the backs of two children are visible: a girl with dark hair in a pink shirt and a boy with reddish hair in a yellow shirt, both looking towards the city. The boy is holding binoculars to his eyes.

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

1. If you have children in any of the age groups discussed in this article, share with them a difficult decision you had to make when you were their age. Ask them if they are facing similar difficult decisions in their lives. Talk about what they can do to make correct decisions.

2. Read together the six characteristics of good decision makers listed in the article. Have your children rate themselves on each of these characteristics while you also rate each child. Compare your answers.

If any of your children rate themselves low on a characteristic, discuss what you might do to help with improvement in that area.

5. Hold regular family councils. Invite all the children to participate in family decisions. Follow up on decisions made in earlier family councils by evaluating together the results of those decisions. Let the children see that their opinions matter.

6. Treat your children with respect throughout their lives. When you do so, they will respect you in return, even though at times they may cause you grief. Interacting and teaching without respect can bring negative results. Children who see their parents' respect and sacrifice for them are more likely to honor their parents' desires, which leads to better decisions.

7. Teach your children to gather good information. Encourage them to get to know teachers, bishops, Church leaders, and other good counselors. Then ask them to share that information with you as they make important decisions.

Good decisions come at some price, but decision making is a skill that can be learned and improved. If we use teaching opportunities such as family home evenings, family prayers, scripture reading, individual interviews, family councils, and constant interaction, our children will be better prepared to make decisions that can lead to peace and happiness. ■

Garth A. Hanson is president of the Romania Bucharest Mission.

BY ANNETTE PAXMAN BOWEN

It was the day before Christmas. Lights and ornaments gleamed from our Christmas tree in the corner window, and the pine aroma filled our home. Packages of various shapes and sizes were wrapped in bright paper and adorned with jauntily tied bows and colorful Christmas stickers. From the stereo came the refrains of Christmas carols. In my pantry, red and green canisters contained treats and goodies: divinity, fudge, iced Christmas cookies, candied pretzels, and brownies. The refrigerator had ingredients for delicious holiday meals: fresh cranberries, a turkey and a ham, mushrooms for stuffing, chestnuts for roasting.

We had sent carefully selected gifts to loved ones in faraway cities. Our cards had been mailed with greetings and wishes. I had surprises for my husband and three boys to discover in the morning. But I was not yet ready for Christmas in the way that counted: instead of feeling joy and excitement, all I felt was heartache, homesickness, and loneliness. We had recently moved to a new state, and I acutely missed my family, old neighborhood, and dear friends.

As I stood at our window looking at our new neighborhood, tears slipped down my cheeks. We were surrounded by strangers.

LOADING UP THE



As I stood at my window looking at the houses of my new neighbors, tears slipped down my cheeks. We were surrounded by strangers.

I said a quiet prayer: "Please, help me somehow get the Christmas spirit. I've done everything I can think of, and I'm still sad."

Moments later, my oldest son came bounding up the stairs. "Hey, Mom! When are we taking treats around to the neighbors?" In our former neighborhood, we had traditionally filled baskets with homemade goodies and delivered them along with a carol on Christmas Eve.

"Oh, honey. We can't do that this year.

We don't know these people. We haven't even met most of them."

"So? What difference does that make? We've always taken stuff to our neighbors on Christmas Eve. It's a tradition!"

He would not take no for an answer, and I couldn't come up with a good enough reason why we shouldn't continue the tradition. We had plenty of goodies. I had green paper plates and red tissue to wrap them in.

"OK," I told him. "You're right. It is a tradition. Now go count the number of houses down to the corner and back across the street."

He called for his brothers to join him, and I quickly assembled what we'd need. The boys bounced back through the front door and announced that we'd need 12 gifts.

Within the hour, we had our little red wagon full of 12 brightly wrapped plates of the best samples from our kitchen. Since we knew no names of our neighbors, we'd added tags that said simply, "Merry Christmas! From your new neighbors, the Bowens." Then I listed our names, address, and phone number.

I was nervous as we walked up the hill to the first house. I had the boys stand in front of me on the doorstep. They weren't hesitant at all. As the door opened, the boys started to sing the simple lines of "We Wish You a Merry Christmas," and I joined in halfheartedly.

I was surprised when the attractive woman standing in the doorway started to sniffle. "Oh, thank you!" she exclaimed. "I've never had anyone do anything like this for me in my life! I've dreamed of moving into a neighborhood where people did things like this. We just moved in from Spokane." It turned out her family had preceded us to Bellevue, Washington, by one week.

At the next house, the family responded by bringing out huge gingerbread cookies for my boys.



LITTLE RED WAGON

They introduced us to their two teenage children, who offered their services as baby-sitters.

Cars filled the driveway of the next home. A party was obviously going on, so I suggested we skip that house. The boys wouldn't hear of it, so up the stairs we went. As we sang, a whole clan came into the hall to listen. The couple who lived there introduced us to their grown-up sons and daughters who were gathered

with their spouses and children to spend Christmas Eve with them. The family's obvious love for one another reminded me of my parents, brothers, and sisters. As I fondly remembered times when we had gathered at my parents' home, love and appreciation began to squeeze out my loneliness. I felt comforted as I realized I would be part of such gatherings again in the future.

Next, a warmhearted, grandmotherly woman hugged my children after we sang at her door. She called her husband to join her and insisted we sing another carol. "Children are the secret ingredient of a magical Christmas," she told me. "Thank you for sharing yours with us. They are angels!" She stood in her doorway and waved to us until we were well on our way.

No one answered at the next door or the next, but we left our gifts on their porches.

An Asian woman timidly opened the next door. We noticed pairs of shoes and beautiful embroidered satin slippers neatly lined up along the hall. We sang our song and then tried to introduce ourselves, but she interrupted by motioning for us to wait a minute. Using a foreign language, she called up the stairs to someone. Soon a young man joined us, and he interpreted for us. He explained that his mother was from China and did not speak English. They owned and operated a restaurant in town. He wrote her name and phone number on a card for us



As I looked out the window, I was grateful my son had insisted we continue our family Christmas tradition.

and thanked us profusely for the gift. As we walked back down the driveway, the boys were thrilled to have heard someone speak another language and were fascinated by the evidence of her Chinese culture.

Across the street, we met a young couple with a little toddler and a family with a preschooler who could be a play pal for my youngest son. These families were pleased to meet

us and promised to visit or contact us soon.

As we walked back to our home, pulling our empty red wagon behind us, we sang more of our favorite carols. My husband's car was in the driveway; he had arrived home from work. He stepped out on the porch and called to us, "Where have you been?"

My oldest son answered, "Where do you think? We've been taking treats to the neighbors! And Dad, we've met the coolest people."

"Merry Christmas, honey!" I said exuberantly. I was now full of Christmas cheer. "We've been out making friends."

That night, after we'd eaten our traditional dinner, made long-distance calls to the grandparents, hung the stockings, read the beautiful Christmas story from the scriptures, left out cookies and milk for Santa, said a family prayer, and tucked the boys in bed, I returned to the front room to look at the Christmas tree. Visible through the window, our neighbors' Christmas lights gleamed like stars through the darkness.

I thought of that first Christmas star and felt grateful that my son had insisted we continue a family tradition by serving the strangers on our street. "Merry Christmas," I whispered as I looked out my front window at the homes of our new friends. Their Christmas lights twinkled in reply. ■

Annette Paxman Bowen is a member of the North Bend Ward, Renton Washington North Stake.

BY GLENDA ANDERSON

When new neighbors moved into a house up the street, I was mindful of the hardships faced by the previous family who had lived there and regretted the missed opportunity to serve them.

The mother of the previous family had been diagnosed with leukemia. At the time, she was the Young Women president, and though I attended church regularly and lived close by, I did not know her or her family well. They were new to the ward, and I was busy rearing six sons. When I heard about her terminal illness, I yearned to help, to say something consoling, but I felt inadequate and uncomfortable reaching out to someone I did not know well.

Now, with a new family moving in, I determined to become friends. They were warm and loving, and the friendship grew easily. Soon after their arrival, however, a tragedy occurred—the couple's baby died from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Remembering my hesitancy to reach out during the previous sister's time of need, I wondered what to do—anything,

even something small. How could I express my heartfelt sorrow to this family? I knew their hearts were broken, and this time I determined not to be afraid to reach out.

"I can make rolls," I thought. "They have to eat sometime, and rolls are easy to make." I knew that baking rolls would not compensate for the loss of a child, but it was something I could do to show my love and concern. When I went to their home with my humble offering, I realized that my visit offered a small bit of consolation—the rolls were not necessary, but they had given me a reason to visit.

Since this experience, I have realized how often my fears have prevented me from serving as the Savior taught. It is important to show we care—through visiting teaching, home teaching, or visiting during a time of need. At first, we may wonder what to say, but the Spirit of the Lord will guide us if we put aside our fears and reach out to others (see Moses 6:32). ■

Glenda Anderson is a member of the Spring Creek Ward, Laramie Wyoming South Stake.

I CAN MAKE

ROLLS

NOT ROOM ENOUGH TO
Receive It



Members share insights and blessings they have received from paying tithing.

Each year we have the opportunity to attend tithing settlement and privately review with our bishop or branch president our payment of tithing. At this time we can begin again with a resolve to pay an honest tithe.

“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse,” commanded the Lord, “. . . and prove me now herewith, . . . if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:10). What spiritual and temporal blessings come pouring into our lives through heavenly windows thrown wide open when we pay tithing? Church members from around the world share their testimonies and experiences.

Guided to Return

Almost four years ago, I went to live with my father, a faithful member of the Church for 20 years. I had not been attending church at all and knew little about the gospel.

Gradually I began going to church. Then one Sunday at stake conference, I heard Elder Adelson de Paula Parrella, an Area Authority Seventy, give a talk about tithing. Although I didn’t understand much about this law, Elder Parrella spoke with such confidence, faith, and spirit that I decided to pay tithing from that day forward.

When I began to pay tithing and offerings, something marvelous began to happen in my life. The Spirit began to fill my heart, and like the prodigal son, I was guided to return to the true gospel path. The Lord even blessed me so greatly that I was able to serve as a missionary in the Brazil Fortaleza Mission.

I know that when we are faithful in paying our tithing

The Lord has promised that when we pay our tithing, He will “open . . . the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing.”

and a generous fast offering, the Lord can bless us temporally and spiritually.

Rafael Barcellos Machado, Parque Pinheiro Ward, Santa Maria Brazil Stake

Trusting Him

Two months after I was baptized, I told the sister missionaries that I had not yet paid any tithing. I was out of work and didn’t have enough money to last the month. The sisters read the Lord’s promise to open the windows of heaven, and I felt the Holy Ghost testify to me, “Trust in the Lord.”

I felt so happy the next day when I paid tithing on the small amount I had. During the next week, I found a job. I am so happy to know that if we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, He will do miracles for us.

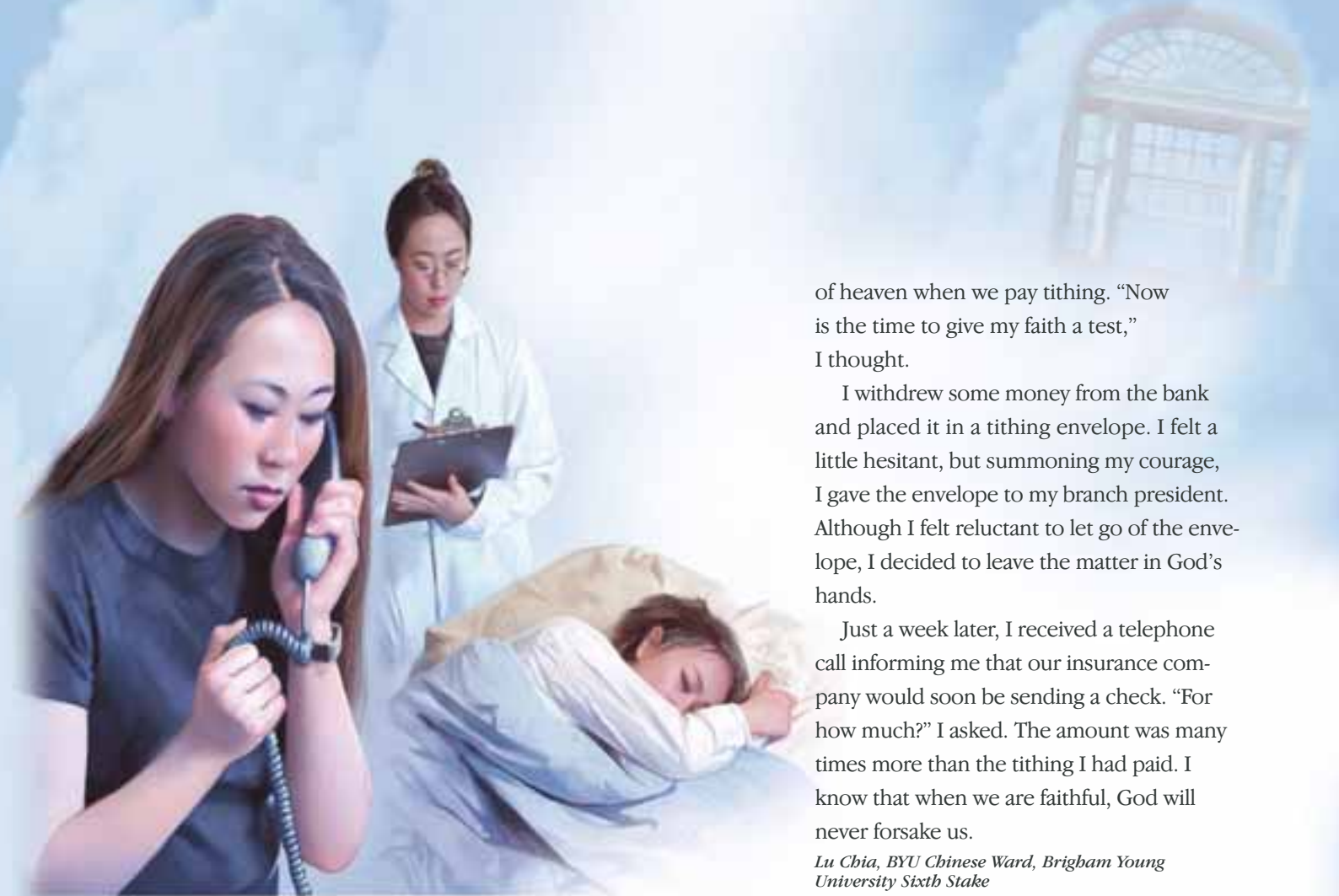
Ivanka Ivanova, Sofia Tsentralen Branch, Sofia Bulgaria District

More Than We Deserve

As the only Church member in my family, I had to overcome many obstacles to serve a full-time mission. One of these was financial, and I spent countless hours looking for jobs so I could earn enough money for my mission. Finally I found a job watching over someone’s home. Although I made only a small amount, I managed to pay tithing. Then I found another job teaching English to three children. It more than doubled my salary, and I could keep both jobs. What a blessing! After working for some months—always paying my tithing—I finally received my call to serve in the Cambodia Phnom Penh Mission.

Sometimes I think of the Lord as a master and myself as one of His servants. If I am a lazy servant who does nothing but sleep, eat, and entertain myself, will He be able to reward me? No. But if I labor diligently, will our Master withhold His blessings from me? No. He will reward me more than I deserve. And if we are obedient to the law of tithing, how generous will our blessings be then? He has said that there will not be enough room to receive them (see Malachi 3:10; 3 Nephi 24:10). This is the Lord’s wonderful promise to all who pay tithing.

Eng Bun Huoch, Ta Kbmau Branch, Phnom Penh Cambodia South District



My mother had to be admitted to the hospital. I was sorely worried about her and also about how we would pay for her care. The following Sunday I remembered I hadn't yet paid my tithing that month.

Putting Faith to the Test

When I joined the Church in Taiwan as a teenager, paying tithing was not difficult because I had little income. After I graduated and began working, it became a little harder. There were always so many things to buy and so little money to buy them with. But each year at tithing settlement, I could honestly tell the branch president that I had paid a full tithe.

Then last year my mother had to be admitted to the hospital intensive care unit. I was sorely worried about my mother and also about how we would pay for her care. The following Sunday I remembered I hadn't yet paid my tithing that month. Thinking I would need all my money to pay the hospital, I decided to put off paying my tithing until the next week. As Sunday approached once again, a small voice reminded me that the Lord has promised to open the windows

of heaven when we pay tithing. "Now is the time to give my faith a test," I thought.

I withdrew some money from the bank and placed it in a tithing envelope. I felt a little hesitant, but summoning my courage, I gave the envelope to my branch president. Although I felt reluctant to let go of the envelope, I decided to leave the matter in God's hands.

Just a week later, I received a telephone call informing me that our insurance company would soon be sending a check. "For how much?" I asked. The amount was many times more than the tithing I had paid. I know that when we are faithful, God will never forsake us.

Lu Chia, BYU Chinese Ward, Brigham Young University Sixth Stake

Blessed with Peace

When I was baptized in 2001, I began paying tithing every month. Then just eight months later, my husband passed away. I became a widow with two small children at home and one son on a mission. Although my financial problems were serious, I never stopped paying tithing. I have been blessed with more and more work, which has enabled me to earn more money. But even more important, because I pay my tithing I always feel at peace with the Lord.

Today my small house seems big and comfortable. I feel calm with my two little children. I will never stop paying tithing because I know the Lord has blessed me not only with physical and spiritual health but also with wisdom and peace.

Josefa Margarida dos Santos Fontes, Rio Grande da Serra Ward, Ribeirão Pires Brazil Stake

We Couldn't Afford Not to Pay It

After my wife, Jean, and I were baptized on 27 October 1957, we did not start paying tithing right away as we should have. I thought we had too many debts and too little money. I should have known that we could not afford not to pay it.

When a year passed, we were expecting our third child. We had just purchased a new house and also had several more debts. About this time, my wife said, "We need to pay our tithing." I did not know how we could because we had no money left after our expenses, but I said, "We will do it." And we did.

We had already moved into our new house, but the loan had not yet closed because the street and the driveway were not finished. It soon began to rain and rain and rain some more. As a result, the work on the street and driveway was delayed. The loan did not close, so we had no house payments.

By the time the work was finally completed, the mortgage company had lost the loan papers and seemed in no hurry to find them. When the papers were finally found, we had lived in our house for six or seven months without making a single payment. We were able to get ahead on some of our other payments during this time.

Things have not always been financially easy for us, but we have never stopped paying our tithing. We call this experience a blessing from heaven.

Henry Hardnock, Midland Second Ward, Odessa Texas Stake

Happiness and Well-Being

When I was 20 years old and investigating the Church in Ulan-Ude, Russia, my brother

and I sang in a music competition. I prayed that our music would touch the judges' hearts. My prayer was answered when two of the judges were touched in such a way that they cried during our performance. And I was thrilled when we won second place and received a cash prize.

After my brother and I had divided the prize money, I remembered what I had learned about tithing—that the Lord's 10 percent should be paid to the branch president. My family was having financial problems, and they argued that I shouldn't pay 10 percent to God.

When my brother and I won a cash prize in a music competition, I knew I should pay tithing on my share. My family was having financial problems, and they argued that I shouldn't pay 10 percent to God.



After a lady gave me a bag of apples, our neighbor's young son asked me, "Could I have just one?" When the Lord had given so much to me and mine, would I also share with others?

But one of the branch members showed me how to put my money in a tithing envelope. And I felt happy when I gave my first tithing to the branch president, believing that Heavenly Father would not let my family die for lack of money to buy food.

That evening, a friend of my mother's came to our home. She wanted to help us and gave us more money than I had paid. That experience helped me very much. I was baptized six weeks later and am now serving a full-time mission.

I know that our happiness and well-being are influenced by how honest we are in paying our tithing. And my family now has the same opinion too!

Sister Marita Ivanova, Russia Samara Mission



Sharing the Blessings

Once when our children were young, I decided to test the Lord's promise by paying our tithe, even though I didn't know where we would get money to buy food. I didn't mention our plight to anyone.

To my surprise, my parents soon came to visit, bringing with them enough meat, potatoes, and bread to last us a very long time. But this wasn't all. Our oldest daughter had a work-study assignment at school. Her assigned workplace was a sandwich shop, and at the end of the week, she received permission to bring home sandwiches for the whole family!

"Now we just lack some fruit," I thought to myself. And that afternoon, returning from biking, I saw a lady putting apples into a bag. "Would you like to have these?" she asked. Surprised, I said that I would like them very much indeed.

Just then our neighbor's young son came by. When he saw the delicious apples, he asked, "Could I have just one?" I held the bag out to him, and he chose one. Thanking me, he hurried away, his eyes shining with happiness.

I thought afterward that the Lord must have wanted to test me too. When He had given so much to me and mine, would I also share with others? I did—and have tried to do so ever since.

Jytte Christiansen, Fredericia Ward, Aarhus Denmark Stake

Tithing First

After graduating from high school, I got a good job as a secretary at the university and was able to help Papa support the family. He had been the only one in the family



working, and it had been hard for him to support four of us in school. We had sometimes gone without necessities.

Then when I was 18, my father died unexpectedly. My mother could not work because she was ill, and as the oldest I would have to support the family.

One day when I was upset because I hadn't made enough money to cover all our expenses, I remembered the promise in Malachi. I prayed to Heavenly Father, reminding Him that I was paying a full tithe, even when I lacked money for food. Later that day the bishop came to visit, bringing food and help. Never in all the time I was supporting my family did the Lord fail me.

When my brother became old enough to serve a mission, he wanted to stay home and work to help pay for household expenses. But we felt he should go, so he quit his job and left for a mission. The following month, my salary was raised. The whole time he was on his mission, my family never lacked for anything. I received a scholarship and was able to study to become a commercial engineer. During this time our shoes lasted longer, our clothes didn't wear out as quickly, and we didn't get sick as often.

After supporting my family for six years, I married a wonderful man in the Guayaquil Ecuador Temple. Our goal was always to pay

tithing, and we always did. Every month we took our tithing out first. We didn't have everything, but we didn't suffer either.

Two years after we married, my husband died in a traffic accident. Now once again I support my own family. But I have a good job, and I know that if I continue to live the law of tithing, my young son and I will have what we need. With all my heart I know that the Lord will never forsake me and that He will continue to pour out blessings—not only temporal but also spiritual. ■

Karina Vanegas Barcia, Monay Branch, Cuenca Ecuador Stake

I supported my family for six years, then married a wonderful man in the Guayaquil Ecuador Temple. Our goal was always to pay tithing first. We didn't have everything, but we didn't suffer either.

Prepare by Living Providently and Paying Tithes and Offerings

Payerfully select and read from this message the scriptures and teachings that meet the needs of the sisters you visit. Share your experiences and testimony. Invite those you teach to do the same.

What Is Provident Living, and How Can It Bless Our Lives?

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985): “‘Provident living’ . . . implies the husbanding of our resources, the wise planning of financial matters, full provision for personal health, and adequate preparation for education and career development, giving appropriate attention to home production and storage as well as the development of emotional resiliency. . . .

“Let’s do these things because they are right, because they are satisfying, and because we are obedient to the counsels of the Lord. . . . It is true

that difficult times will come—for the Lord has foretold them. . . . But if we live wisely and providently, we will be as safe as in the palm of His hand” (“Welfare Services: The Gospel in Action,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1977, 78).

President Gordon B. Hinckley: “We have been counseled again and again concerning self-reliance, concerning debt, concerning thrift. . . .

“ . . . Let us have some food set aside that would sustain us for a time in case of need. But let us not panic nor go to extremes. Let us be prudent in every respect. And, above all . . . let us move forward with faith in the Living God and His Beloved Son” (“The Times in Which We Live,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 73).

Bonnie D. Parkin, Relief Society general president: “The advertising industry is very effective in changing our wants into needs. The temptations are often overwhelming to acquire more than we can afford. The regular payment of tithing should help

teach us wise financial management. Tithing payment does not release us from the necessity of living within our means. Family happiness is not determined by things. It does come from husbands and wives working together, communicating, and solving problems” (women’s conference, Herriman, Utah, 8 Feb. 2003).

How Do Tithes and Offerings Help Us Prepare Spiritually and Temporally?

Malachi 3:10: “Prove me now herewith, . . . if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing.”

President N. Eldon Tanner (1898–1982), First Counselor in the First Presidency: “Tithing is . . . a commandment with a promise. If we obey this commandment, we are promised that we will ‘prosper in the land.’ This prosperity consists of more than material goods—it may include enjoying good health and vigor of mind. It includes family solidarity and spiritual increase” (“Constancy amid Change,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 81).

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “Contributing a generous fast offering blesses the givers richly and allows them to become partners with the Lord and the bishop in helping relieve suffering and fostering self-reliance. . . . Perhaps we should evaluate our offerings and decide if we are as generous with the Lord as He is with us” (“Inspired Church Welfare,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 78). ■



“I Am the True Vine”

“I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5).

BY ELDER ANTHONY R. TEMPLE

Area Authority Seventy
North America Northeast Area

Early in our marriage, my wife and I planted a garden. We knew little about gardening, but we thought the back corner of our yard looked fertile. And indeed it was. In one area we planted banana squash. The squash vines grew almost without any effort on our part until they stretched some 40 to 50 feet (10 to 15 m) along the top of a long fence. The squash were enormous. It was an incredible result for novices.

In the scriptures we often read about vineyards and grapevines. But growing grapes is not as easy as growing squash. It takes the right climate and skilled cultivation to maintain a fruitful vineyard.

Grapes were an important part of early Hebrew culture, and the tablelands and hills in the Holy Land provided an ideal place for grapevine cultivation. The land was groomed,

the vines were planted along the hillsides, and the vineyards were carefully fenced to keep out unwanted animals or people. The vines were cultivated and pruned so that they would yield as much fruit as possible.

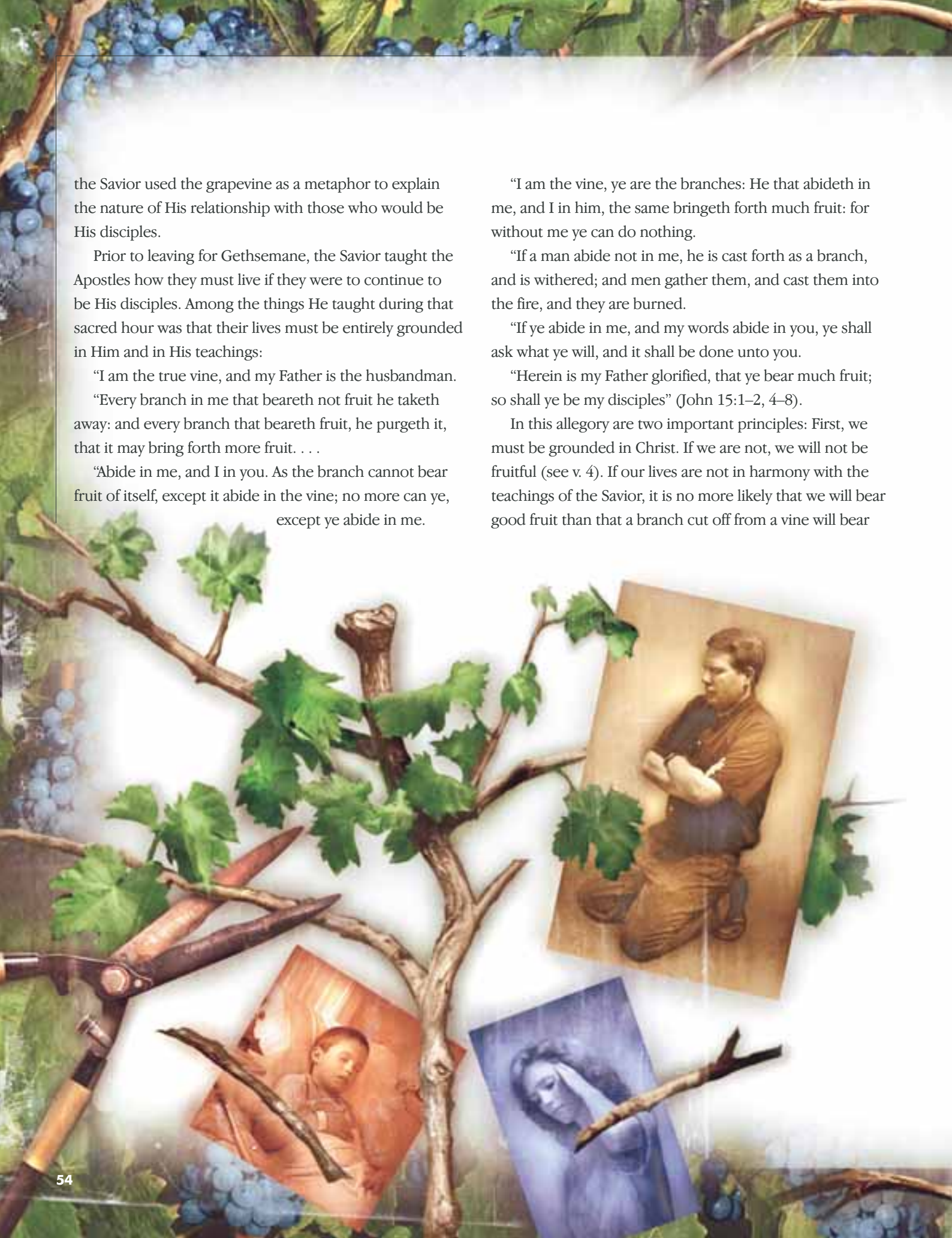
Pruning is probably the most important part of growing grapes. Branches not producing fruit are cut off. When a vine’s main branch reaches a certain size, it is cut back by taking off the tip to force the development of side shoots. Such pruning and shaping halt the growth at the tip of the branch and send nourishment into the new branches. Then, as these side branches develop, each produces as much fruit as the single vine had produced. The sturdy center stalk of the vine, rooted deep in the soil, provides the nourishment to all of these long, fruit-bearing spurs.

Symbolism of the Vineyard and the Vine

Vineyards have often been used symbolically in the scriptures. In the book of John,



We must derive our spiritual nourishment from Jesus Christ. He is the source of all truth and of all goodness.



the Savior used the grapevine as a metaphor to explain the nature of His relationship with those who would be His disciples.

Prior to leaving for Gethsemane, the Savior taught the Apostles how they must live if they were to continue to be His disciples. Among the things He taught during that sacred hour was that their lives must be entirely grounded in Him and in His teachings:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. . . .

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

“I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

“If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (John 15:1–2, 4–8).

In this allegory are two important principles: First, we must be grounded in Christ. If we are not, we will not be fruitful (see v. 4). If our lives are not in harmony with the teachings of the Savior, it is no more likely that we will bear good fruit than that a branch cut off from a vine will bear

fruit. Second, even when we are living righteously, we still need the Gardener, who knows us so completely and sees beyond what we see, so that He can purge, or prune and purify, us (see v. 2). While at times this pruning may seem hard to bear, it is only through this process that we will become more fruitful.

Our pruning comes in a variety of ways. We may develop an illness or physical limitation. We may find that our expectations are not fulfilled. We may find sorrow in relationships or experience personal loss. Yet what initially might seem to be a sad event can help us grow if it causes us to rely more on the Lord and to rethink our priorities. Such difficult experiences can make us more fruitful, or more like the Savior—our true vine.

An Experience with Pruning

Throughout my life I have had ample need for pruning. For example, a few years ago I expected to receive a company promotion. I felt I had the experience, skills, and longevity required, and I hoped the choice was obvious.

At that time there was a new top manager in our company who had different priorities and goals than I did. Among other things, he expected all senior managers to work weekends in addition to weekdays. I was a stake president then and knew that to best serve the members of my stake, I needed to spend a certain amount of time fulfilling my Church responsibilities.

When the hoped-for promotion never occurred, I had to struggle to keep myself from feeling bitter. What a disappointment! I determined just to keep going, to try to do things as well as I could, and to maintain a positive demeanor. Yet my sense of self-worth had been challenged. My abilities had been called into question. Other Church leaders I knew seemed to capably manage both demanding Church callings and time-consuming employment.

Our pruning comes in a variety of ways. We may develop an illness or physical limitation. We may find sorrow in relationships or experience personal loss. Yet what initially might seem to be a sad event can help us grow if it causes us to rely more on the Lord and to rethink our priorities.

In a weak moment, I even wondered whether I had made the right choice to devote so much time to the Church. Then I decided I needed to focus on what was truly important. I began to look not only at my capabilities but also at my limitations. I could see that the time I was spending in Church service was necessary and that I probably wouldn't have been able to manage both the employment position I had sought and my Church calling.

I think the Lord was telling me I had to choose and would have to keep choosing. To have chosen to devote extra time to my employment so I could get the promotion would have disengaged me from the Lord's work. As I look back, I can see what

a blessing it was for me to devote so much of my time to the Church. The ensuing years were some of the most rewarding of my life. I felt closer to the Lord. My testimony was strengthened. My relationship with fellow Saints in the area was a great blessing, and I am sure I became more fruitful than I would have been otherwise.

Firmly Rooted to Christ

We can expect that we will be pruned throughout our lives. How wonderful it is to know that an all-wise Father is watching over our development and that He is nurturing us through His careful husbandry.

We must derive our spiritual nourishment from Jesus Christ. He is the source of all truth and of all goodness. Without Him we can do nothing (see John 15:5). When we focus on Christ and His gospel, we are filled with His light. Then the fruits of the Spirit are made manifest in us, and the blessings come (see John 15:7; Galatians 5:22–23). If we seek to achieve our full potential, let us daily think of Christ and emulate His example until we become firmly rooted to Him, the True Vine. ■

Words of
the Early
Apostles

Safely Anchored by Love



*“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear”
(1 John 4:18).*



If there were ever a time when people need to be firmly anchored, it is today. The world is in commotion. Fear grips the hearts of millions; rebellions, terrorism, famine, and disease are rampant.

BY ELDER H. ROSS WORKMAN

Of the Seventy

As a beginning sailor, I was warned of a great danger and how to avoid it. When mooring a boat at anchor, it is essential that the anchor be secure on the sea bottom. If the anchor is placed in coral or if the anchor rope is too short, the anchor can break free, and the boat will be adrift.

A few years ago, when my wife, Kaye, and I were sailing and scuba diving with some friends, I saw what happens when that warning is ignored. As we explored an underwater reef, we were shocked to discover the sunken hull of a sailboat. It had been recently dashed upon the coral reef, and the sea bottom was strewn with wreckage and personal effects. It appeared to me that the sunken boat had broken free because of a careless anchor mooring and drifted toward the island, where the breaking sea smashed the hull against the reef. How grateful I was that we had heeded the warning and anchored our own boat safely.

Troubled Times

If there were ever a time when people need to be firmly anchored, it is today. The

world is in commotion. Fear grips the hearts of millions; rebellions, terrorism, famine, and disease are rampant. There is no place on earth where people are completely free from “the perplexities of the nations” (D&C 88:79). The Lord has described our day as a time when “darkness covereth the earth, and gross darkness the minds of the people” (D&C 112:23).

The Apostle John, son of Zebedee, also lived in a time of great commotion. The first of his three letters is one of the last apostolic messages of the early Church. His letters in 2 John and 3 John are personal messages to loved ones and echo the warning and counsel given in his first general epistle. At the time of John’s writing, the winds of apostasy were already blowing, and the long night of darkness was about to descend.

John’s Warning

Speaking to those early Saints, aware of the advancing apostasy, John sounds a warning: “Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even



now are there many antichrists; . . . Many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 2:18; 4:1). It is a warning that echoes what the Savior Himself had said: “There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; inso-much that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:24).

John warns that the path to darkness is paved with lies, not only the lies told by anti-Christ and false prophets, but the lies of those who deceive themselves. “If we say that

we have no sin, we deceive ourselves” (1 John 1:8). “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar” (1 John 2:4). “He that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth” (1 John 2:11).

John also warns that some of those who would lead unwary Saints to error and darkness were once in the fellowship of the Saints, saying that “they went out from us, but they were not of us” (1 John 2:19).

In a day when men are “lovers of their own selves” and “without natural affection” and when “the love of many shall wax cold,” we can find spiritual safety and a sure anchor for our souls in love of God and of our fellowmen.

These last epistles of the first apostolic era were addressed to those who had accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ, who had the gift of the Holy Ghost. “Ye have an unction [anointing] from the Holy One, and ye know all things” (1 John 2:20). Today, members of the Lord’s restored Church also have the gift of the Holy Ghost and the light of the restored gospel. But just as darkness was gathering around those early Saints, we are surrounded by a world still in spiritual darkness. The deceiver is abroad now as he was then. So the counsel John gave the early Saints is as much for us as it was for them.

John’s plea is that the Saints remain faithful, that they not be seduced by lies. Over and over John equates untruth with darkness. In contrast, he says, “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. . . . If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:5, 7).

Finding Safety in Light

We have assurance that “the Spirit giveth light to every man” and “every one that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father” (D&C 84:46–47). “The word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light” (D&C 84:45). The question is, then, how do we obtain light and truth?

“He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things” (D&C 93:28).

Keeping the commandments, then, brings truth and light, which are the opposites of the lies and darkness John warns us about. And the first and great commandment is to love God (see Matthew 22:36–38).

Love Is the Key

We know that God loves us. The supreme example of that love is the gift of His Only Begotten Son:

“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him” (1 John 4:9).

“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16).

Though God loves us perfectly, He will not force us to love Him in return. We are invited to “abide” in His love (see John 15:10), but we must freely choose to do so. The closeness we feel to God depends upon whether or not we love Him, so how can we show that love?

We show love to God when we obey the second great commandment: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:39). And this commandment cannot be kept only within our hearts. We show love with our deeds. “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

John is emphatic about the importance of loving others. “He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (1 John 4:20–21).

John speaks, too, of the special bond of love that should exist among those who are true followers of the Savior: “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him” (1 John 5:1). In other words, those who have been spiritually reborn in Christ will love those who have also been begotten of Him.

And John tells us that the Saints, through love, ought to be willing to sacrifice for one another: “Hereby perceive



We show love to God when we obey the second great commandment: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” And this commandment cannot be kept only within our hearts. We show love with our deeds.



we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16).

Are You Safe?

Some years ago, I had an experience that made me realize how powerful that principle of brotherly love is. I was climbing a steep mountain with a close friend. We reached a place near the top where it was necessary to make a long step across a cleft in the rock face. The step would require a moment of unbalance when the weight of one foot well planted on solid rock would be shifted to the foot not yet planted securely on the other side. The cleft was not wide, but the drop below was more than 1,000 feet (300 m).

My friend grasped my hand as a counterbalance and stepped across. After obtaining a secure handhold on the opposite side, he

then reached out for my hand. I trusted him. I loved him, and I knew he loved me. I confidently reached for his hand and crossed, secure in his grip. As I reached the other side, and before he let go of my hand, he asked, “Are you safe?” Only when I answered in the affirmative did he let my hand go.

In a day when men are “lovers of their own selves” and “without natural affection” (2 Timothy 3:2–3) and when “the love of many shall wax cold” (Matthew 24:12), we can find spiritual safety and a sure anchor for our souls in love of God and of our fellowmen. As we fulfill the two great commandments, John assures us that we will find fellowship with the Father: “If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:12). And in a time that is becoming ever more fearful, we can come to know personally that “perfect love casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18). ■

After obtaining a secure handhold on the opposite side, my friend then reached out for my hand. I trusted him. I confidently reached for his hand and crossed, secure in his grip. As I reached the other side, and before he let go of my hand, he asked, “Are you safe?”

Christmas with a Minister

By Blaine K. Gehring

It was 1967, and I was serving as a missionary in Hildesheim, Germany. Christmas was fast approaching, and I was excited because Christmas Eve was a Sunday, and a wonderful meeting and other appropriate and special celebrations were planned.

Two weeks before Christmas,

however, I received a transfer to Rendsburg. My companion, Elder Fadel, and I would be new there, and I wondered what the members would be like and how we would celebrate Christmas.

We soon came to know that the Rendsburg Branch had few members and little was being planned for Christmas Eve other than a special sacrament meeting. Our landlady, a Church member, invited us to join her for dinner on Christmas Day. I thought that would be the extent of my Christmas. But things soon changed.

The preceding missionaries had left us a tracting book including the names of several people who said they would like the missionaries to call back. Because people were so busy, finding new contacts at Christmastime was not very successful, so we thought these names might be a good place to start. We began visiting people on the

M*My companion and I sat with Reverend Lübbert and asked him about his ministry. We then talked about our ministry.*



ILLUSTRATED BY DANIEL LEWIS

list. When we visited the home of Frau Lübbert, we were greeted by a wonderful, cheery lady. She invited us in, and we learned that she was the widow of a Lutheran minister, who had passed away earlier that year. Her son was also a minister. He would be home for Christmas, and it would be just the two of them sharing their first Christmas without their husband and father. Then, with a sparkle in her eyes, she asked if we would join them for Christmas Eve. Having no other plans, we consented.

Christmas Eve arrived, and we had a lovely sacrament meeting in which we talked about the Savior and listened to the Christmas story. As my companion and I helped administer the sacrament, we pondered on the life the Savior had given for us.

After the meeting we were to meet the Lübberts at the Lutheran church. As we walked through the park, the snow was just beginning to fall, and we stopped to watch children and parents skating on a frozen pond. We saw Christmas lights here and there and heard church bells announcing Christmas Eve services.

The Lübberts were waiting for us at their church. We enjoyed a wonderful spirit as we listened to the minister and as we sang Christmas carols in a church older than some of the carols. Singing “Silent Night” in its original language made the occasion even more special.

After the service, we got into Reverend Lübbert’s car and drove to

their home. Frau Lübbert had prepared a goose for dinner, and as she put the finishing touches on the meal, my companion and I sat with Reverend Lübbert and asked him about his ministry. He talked of how he was active in a movement trying to bring Christian churches together. Many shared that dream, but others were antagonistic and fought the movement.

We then talked about our ministry. We told him of the Book of Mormon and how the Church had been restored. We told him of living prophets, and we talked about Jesus Christ and bore witness of Him as our Savior. No animosity existed among us. There was no belittling of one another’s beliefs. As I think upon it now, the words of 2 Nephi 25:26 come to mind. We literally “talk[ed] of Christ, we rejoice[d] in Christ” on that Christmas Eve. He was the center of our attention. He was the purpose of our being together.

As we bowed our heads for a prayer on the food, Reverend Lübbert asked a blessing on his fellow servants in Christ, that we would be led to those who sought Jesus. The meal was wonderful—roasted goose with all the trimmings and special German desserts.

German tradition is for parents to retire to a separate room where the tree has been newly decorated and to light the candles on the tree. The children are then allowed to enter and see the tree and their presents. So Frau

Lübbert retired to the living room and closed the large sliding doors. In a moment she opened the doors and invited her “sons” to come in.

As we entered the room, where the only light was the soft light coming from the candles on the Christmas tree, Frau Lübbert handed my companion and me our gifts: some candies and a souvenir book about Rendsburg. She then gave her son his presents, and they paused a moment to remember their husband and father. We then opened the Bible to Luke and read the Christmas story. The Spirit touched each of us and witnessed again of the divine message in those verses. As we sang Christmas carols, the words bore testimony to each of us of the love we shared for Jesus Christ, His life, His teachings, and the most precious of gifts—His atoning sacrifice.

I don’t believe my feet touched the ground that night as we made our way to the bus stop. Santa Claus hadn’t come. I hadn’t been rushing around buying presents. I hadn’t attended any concerts or seen the traditional Christmas movies. My family was far away, and my packages from home were delayed because of the transfer. But I was the happiest I had ever been on Christmas Eve. For the first time in my life, Christmas had been totally focused on Christ. And the only gift I had given was my witness of Him. ■

Blaine K. Gebring is a member of the East Mill Creek Fourth Ward, Salt Lake East Mill Creek Stake.



I hurried to my parents' house and saw that my dad could hardly breathe; he had a tingling in his arm and a horrible pain in his chest. It was a heart attack!

“Read Your Patriarchal Blessing!”

By Célia Augusto de Souza

In our home we have a Christmas tradition of decorating the house by the end of October or the beginning of November so that the spirit of Christmas comes sooner and remains longer. But in 1993 it certainly didn't work this way.

In October I discovered I was pregnant. I already had two children—a four-year-old daughter and a two-year-old son—and we were experiencing a very difficult financial situation. “How will we support another baby?” I wondered. When the beginning-of-pregnancy nausea started, I found myself arguing with the Lord, complaining, murmuring, and failing to

pray. I didn't decorate the house as in other years. I didn't want to remember the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. For me there wouldn't be Christmas that year.

Every year my mother holds a special banquet on 25 December to bring the family together. But that year as I sat down at the table with everyone else, I couldn't eat. Everything made me sick. I was so sad and filled with such bitterness that I hardly participated in the family conversations, and I soon returned home.

Some hours later my brother ran to my house to tell me my father was feeling sick. I hurried to my parents' house and saw that my dad could hardly breathe; he had a tingling in his arm and a horrible pain in his chest. It was a heart attack! I urged my brother to take my father to the emergency room.

I went back home and asked my husband to pray that my father would

not die. He told me I was the one who should pray. But I had not prayed for many, many days and felt Heavenly Father would not hear my prayer. Wisely, my husband told me it was time for me to ask His forgiveness.

I knelt, weeping bitterly. My father was dying on his way to the hospital, and I implored our Father in Heaven not to let him die that Christmas. In desperation I implored the Lord for forgiveness, and a voice whispered in my ear, “Read your patriarchal blessing!” How could I think about my patriarchal blessing at a time like this? But the prompting continued, strongly urging me to read the blessing.

I stood up, found a copy of my patriarchal blessing, and began to read it. And then something amazing happened. I realized that several times the blessing mentioned that I am a beloved daughter of Heavenly Father and of my earthly parents and that if I honor my parents on earth, He will prolong their lives, they will have the opportunity to see my children grow, and they will rejoice with me in our posterity.

As I read, an understanding came to me. My father hadn't yet seen my unborn child, neither had he seen this child grow. He wouldn't die at that moment, I realized. My blessing was my answer that day. I knelt once

again, this time thanking our Father in Heaven for the very special child—my son Guilherme—I was carrying.

Sometimes we are so blind, so selfish! And Heavenly Father, in His kindness and love, allows us to learn and grow from our trials. I thank Him for each day He allows me to live with my family—with my three dear children, my husband, and my parents. I know that God lives, that Jesus Christ lives, and that They love me and have great patience with me. ■

Célia Augusto de Souza is a member of the Vila Sônia Ward, São Paulo Brazil Stake.

The Trucker's Gift

By Norma J. Broadhead

I don't have to work on Christmas this year," my husband, Ken, said. He was a truck driver, and for many years the children and I had partial Christmases and some late Christmases because of his work. But now all the children were married, and we had encouraged them to spend this Christmas at their own homes as we had done when we had a young family.

It took only a minute for me to think of a father who would have to work on Christmas, so I told Ken, "Remember how it was when you couldn't be with us for Christmas? I'll be all right if you work and let some father who has small children stay home with his family for Christmas."

"Are you sure? You'll be all alone."
"I'll be fine."

Ken told the dispatcher he would work Christmas so a young father could be at home. Another truck driver standing nearby overheard the conversation. "If you're going to do that," he said, "I will too. I don't have any children at home."

So it was arranged. Then another driver heard about it and volunteered to work on Christmas also. So three veteran truck drivers worked for three days in some of the worst weather our area had seen, and three fathers of young children were able to stay home with their families.

As for me, I watched the snow fall and knew that although Ken didn't have to be out in that cold weather, he had made the choice to be. And I

thought of our 10 children and of the Christmases we had had together—especially the ones when we didn't have their daddy with us.

So for three days, I read, sewed, watched Christmas programs on television, ate my solitary meals, looked at the unwrapped gifts, and spent a peaceful and happy Christmas—grateful for my husband and his gift of Christmas to someone else. ■

Norma J. Broadhead is a member of the Millcreek Fifth Ward, Salt Lake Millcreek Stake.

Ken and two other veteran truck drivers worked for three days in severe winter weather to give a Christmas gift to three fathers of young children.



Neighborhood Concerts

Since our family has moved often throughout the United States and Europe, we wanted to establish a successful holiday tradition that could be done wherever we lived. Based on an idea I read about, we began several years ago to host yearly neighborhood

Christmas benefit concerts.

Held at our home in early December, the concert is for everyone on our street. Several weeks in advance we deliver invitations, encouraging all the neighborhood children to think about their talents and decide on one to share, either individually or in a group. Our concerts have featured a variety of talents, including musical performances, poetry readings, displays of art projects and athletic trophies, gymnastics, and magic tricks.

Each family is also invited to bring Christmas goodies to share. At the appointed hour, we welcome everyone to our home. Then with our video camera rolling, we record the children performing or demonstrating their talents. After the benefit concert, the children pass around a donation container to collect proceeds for a charitable organization in the community. One year, they collected canned goods for the local food bank. The children are always thrilled to see how their collective efforts can raise substantial contributions.

After the concert, we enjoy visiting with one another while eating the goodies from our potluck refreshment table. And the children love viewing themselves on video while they eat.

If our Christmas holiday season has been too busy to accommodate this activity, we have an Easter benefit concert instead. Our concerts have appealed to all ages, even to neighbors whose children are grown. Through the years, this simple activity has helped us build strong friendships in our various neighborhoods. In fact, after we have lived a year or two in an area, our neighbors begin to ask, "When are you holding this year's benefit concert?"

*Diane Robinson Haines,
Crescent Park Fourth Ward, Sandy Utah
Crescent Park Stake*



Simplifying Christmas

At Christmastime do you make a long list of to-do items? For many of us, the answer is a resounding yes. But we would rather enjoy a relaxed holiday season, focusing instead on the birth of the Savior. Eliminating some of our “must do’s” can help. Consider making the following adjustments to your busy Christmastime routine:

Simplify correspondence. Avoid the holiday rush by mailing your cards early in December or after the New Year to avoid post office crowds. Or, instead, send cards for Thanksgiving or other occasions throughout the year.

Shop early. To find a good selection of presents when crowds are minimal, bargain shop year-round, or at least start early. For convenience, consider mail-order and Internet purchases.

Trim gift giving for family and close friends. For large families, drawing names and asking for “wish lists” make Christmas shopping easier. Cash or gift certificates, magazine subscriptions, or “tradition” presents (repeat items given yearly) based on the recipient’s hobbies or favorite foods are also appreciated. Or rather than exchanging presents, let family and friends know that you are donating what money you would have spent on them to charity.

NO MORE LAST-MINUTE LESSONS

Our family rotates various family home evening responsibilities. Too often, though, the person in charge of the lesson procrastinates or forgets, and we receive a last-minute lesson.

To resolve this problem, my husband and I decided to periodically hold a family home evening to help everyone prepare an upcoming lesson. The first time we did this activity, we discussed how prayer helps us seek inspiration for preparing lessons specific to our needs. We then invited each family member to come up with his or her own list of possible topics. We also talked about the importance of teaching effectively from

the scriptures, thus making them more meaningful and applicable to our lives. To further enhance our lessons, we suggested using ideas from Church magazines, singing hymns and Primary songs, or using puppet shows and other games to hold younger children’s interest.

We then spread out and began working quietly on our lessons. I went in



another room to help our preschooler. By the time we had finished, she had prepared her first lesson by drawing pictures of the beautiful things God has created for us. The others also had each carefully prepared a lesson, without revealing their ideas, and were ready for their upcoming turns.

Not only does this activity help us to have more thoughtful family home evening lessons, but it also helps our children acquire teaching skills they can use in future Church callings.

*Kathy Rose,
Layton Sixth
Ward, Layton
Utah Stake*



Simplify gifts for ward members and neighbors. Where I live, neighbors like to exchange small, inexpensive gifts. I often purchase ingredients in bulk and work with family members to quickly assemble our neighborhood gifts.

Prepare and shop for food ahead of time. If you prefer to serve homemade treats during the holidays, prepare and freeze them ahead of time. Otherwise, stock up on holiday goodies that are shelf-stable.

Scale back decorating plans. Consider displaying half your holiday decorations one year and half the next. You will not only enjoy more free time but also add variety to your holiday decor each season.

As you prepare for this special time of year, try to simplify at least a few of your seasonal projects. Then relax and enjoy the beauty of this sacred season.

*Kerry Griffin Smith, Bountiful Seventh
Ward, Bountiful Utah South Stake*

Festival of Lights Sparks the Spirit of Christmas

By Page T. Johnson

The Washington D.C. Temple, a familiar landmark in the United States capital, is most stunning during the Christmas season, when 300,000 lights sparkle from the trees during the annual Festival of Lights. This monthlong event has become a top attraction and Christmas tradition in the Washington area. More than one million visitors, including international diplomats, the media, and representatives of various faiths, have attended this event since it began in 1978. Last year, the festival drew nearly 75,000 people

inside the visitors' center for the event's 25th anniversary, and an estimated 150,000 people drove through the grounds to see the lights.

From the first week of December to New Year's Day in January, the nightly activities at the visitors' center include displays, films, and performances that share the Christmas message while celebrating the world's diversity of cultures and religions. Themes of brotherhood, goodwill, and shared values resonate with visitors who say they feel a sense of family and peace at the festival.

Organizers and participants in the festival seek the Spirit and inspiration as they work on the festival. "We began each evening with prayer," recalls K. Gary Garff, former director of the visitors' center, "to invite the Spirit so we could build bridges to the community."

Outside, missionaries direct arriving cars and tour buses while a helicopter occasionally hovers for a bird's-eye view. For

serenity and respite from the world among the twinkling lights. Elder M. David Knight, director of the visitors' center, believes that "people's hearts are softened at this time of year, and the temple becomes a symbol of peace and hope."

Inside the center, the outstretched arms of an eight-foot-tall Christus statue welcome a colorful cross section of the world—people of all ages and backgrounds in jeans or saris, turbans or baseball caps. Washington, D.C., is truly an international community, drawing people from many nations to work in diplomatic or government assignments or in other professions. Gracious sister missionaries often surprise guests by speaking to them in their native languages. Sister Leung, a missionary from Hong Kong, believes that as we "extend Christ's love, people feel the Spirit and feel connected to a larger family." This is a powerful message for those far from home or country.

Dotted about the center are 20 Christmas trees decorated by area stakes. Some reflect scriptural passages, while four international trees are covered with donated dolls, flags, and baskets from the embassies of 84 nations. Visitors also view an array of beautiful crèches crafted by artisans from around the world. Arranged by the center's Cultural Arts Committee, the exhibit changes yearly and displays nativities made of

some guests, it is the luminous temple spires against the stark December sky that draw them. Others say it is the live outdoor nativity or the wonderful feeling of



PHOTOGRAPH BY PAGE JOHNSON

A doll from Russia adorns one of 20 trees in the Washington D.C. Visitors' Center. Embassies from around the world donated ornaments for the Festival of Lights.

wood, clay, tin, crystal, porcelain, and amber blown glass.

Each evening's highlight is a holiday concert in the visitors' center's 552-seat theater, featuring Church and community members. Twice each night several musical groups and dancers add their unique spirit to the season.

A full-time missionary couple serves as the visitors' center directors and plans and supervises the festival, assisted by other missionaries and staff. To open the festival, the center hosts a private lighting ceremony and reception. Guests include ambassadors, members of Congress, and other officials. Each year, an ambassador and a General Authority present holiday messages prior to the Christmas lights being turned on.

Others who assist with the festival include an international advisory group, hundreds of volunteers, and groundskeepers who string the lights with the assistance



Gazing up at a statue of Christ, three young girls at the Washington D.C. Visitors' Center Festival of Lights face the true meaning of Christmas.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAGE JOHNSON

of area institute members. It is an enormous undertaking. But Ann Santini, area director of international affairs, reflects the feelings of many participants when she

says, "This event enables people from every country to feel the Spirit of Christ, and we consider our efforts part of the Church's gift to the community." ■

Disasters Test Preparedness of Members

Power Blackout

A power blackout that struck much of the northeastern United States and southern Canada on 14 August 2003 proved to be a test of personal and family preparedness.

The blackout started late in the afternoon, engulfing most of New York State and nearby parts of New England, spreading west to Ohio and Michigan, and reaching across the border into Ontario, Canada. Some areas had power restored within an hour, while other areas were without power for nearly three days.

Stake presidents throughout the affected area said their members generally fared well when power was lost, leaving them to rely on emergency plans and home storage.

"A few minutes after the blackout began, I contacted priesthood leaders to implement our 72-hour emergency plan, which includes verbal communication with each family, paying particular attention to widows, children, and the disabled," said Bishop James Kaski of the

Blue Water Ward, Grand Blanc Michigan Stake.

A common observation among stake presidents and bishops was the sense of calm that prevailed among members. "Being fairly well prepared certainly made a big difference in how we reacted," Bishop Kaski said.

The blackout was the largest loss of power in the history of the United States, affecting an estimated 50 million people. Many Church members working in Manhattan were stranded by the stalled subway system



Church member Lianne Racioppo was featured in a local newspaper for her knowledge of personal preparedness after blackouts in Canada.

and spent the night in a stake center in New York City. Some visitors to the city also used the stake center after their electronic hotel keys were rejected because of the power outage.

In the Grand River Branch, Detroit Michigan District, a single mother with two children offered to bring widows to her home, where she could feed them from her home storage. She also walked to her neighbors' houses and offered food and assistance.

After learning of Lianne Racioppo, a member in Toronto who had a home storage program and was prepared for the disaster, the *Toronto Sun* interviewed her for a feature article in a recent issue. Lianne, whose husband, Silvano, is bishop of the Don Mills Ward, Toronto Ontario Stake, told the newspaper of the Church's counsel to prepare for emergencies.

Forest Fire

Fueled by dry vegetation, a swift-moving forest fire swept through Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada, on 22 August 2003, causing the evacuation of an estimated 30,000 people—including most members of the Kelowna Second Ward, Vernon British Columbia Stake—and destroying 238 homes.

The fire, triggered by a lightning strike, destroyed one member's home, that of Bishop William R. Spittle of the Kelowna Second Ward.

More than 150 members fled their homes with as little as 20 minutes' warning. "Some literally grabbed 72-hour kits," said President Kent G.

Burnham of the Vernon stake.

"The other ward [Kelowna First Ward] put their shoulder to the wheel and took the project on," said President Burnham. "They did a marvelous job of providing assistance and support to those who needed it. . . . Nobody was without a place to stay."

Because an entire ward was evacuated, Bishop Andrew L. Draper of the Kelowna First Ward said that the typical emergency calling procedure, in which home teachers check on the members they visit, broke down. The local meetinghouse was open 24 hours a day during the evacuation, "so members could come to the Church if they had nowhere else to go."

Keeping the meetinghouse open also provided local leaders with the opportunity to inventory where members were located during the evacuation.

Bishop Draper said that many members also volunteered in the community. He gave time at an evacuation center doing registration work, and Latter-day Saints made hundreds of sandwiches for firefighters who could not leave the front lines.

Hurricane Isabel

A rare category five at her peak, Hurricane Isabel churned out winds of 161 mph (259 kph) before weakening on its slow path to the East Coast of the United States. On 18 September 2003 Isabel made landfall at Drum Inlet, Outer Banks, North Carolina, as a category two. The storm then passed through Virginia, Washington,

PHOTOGRAPH BY ASSOCIATED PRESS

D.C., Pennsylvania, and up into Canada. New Jersey and New York also suffered damage from the storm.

Priesthood leaders in the area began preparations early. The Richmond Virginia Chesterfield Stake Center was set up as a command post. About 100 missionaries evacuated from North Carolina and the Virginia coast found safe haven there. Home teachers manned their phones, calling families and checking for needs.

John Ruckart, a member of the Belmont Ward, Richmond Virginia Chesterfield Stake, housed four missionaries during the storm. Brother Ruckart recounted the experience they had watching a large tree in his front yard succumb to the storm.

“We watched the tree swaying in the wind. I knew it was going; I just didn’t want it to fall on my house,” said Brother Ruckart. “The elders and I went to our knees and prayed fervently. For more than half an hour the tree did its dance back and forth. Then a huge wind gust took it down. It fell beside the house. I lost about 25 trees in all, but the house is fine.”

Joel Hancock, president of the Kinston North Carolina Stake, rode out the storm in his island home in Kinston, one of the first places to experience the storm.

“Three members’ houses [were] severely flooded and about 600 [other homes in the area were] flooded,” President Hancock said. “After the storm our missionaries

were very involved in the cleanup. My wife and other members of the Relief Society worked at a Red Cross feeding station. We were prepared and had the opportunity to donate some of our food storage to a local shelter.”

The Washington D.C. Temple also experienced the force of Hurricane Isabel. “We are on a hill, and we had the full brunt of the wind, but there wasn’t any damage to the temple,” reported W. Brandt Brooksby, first counselor in the temple presidency. “We lost power for two days. Our lights came on and all the houses around us remained in the dark. Our power was restored for a reason.” ■

Becky Robinette Wright and Church News contributed to these reports.

redeveloped. Plans include improving retail and office space and also adding residential space. In addition, the Church announced it would move the campuses of BYU’s Salt Lake Center and LDS Business College from their present locations elsewhere in Salt Lake to downtown. They will be built west of the Family History Library and the Museum of Church History and Art.

Plans are designed to attract visitors and residents to downtown as well as spur investment in the area by other entities, said Bishop Burton. The campus relocations alone will bring 4,000 students to the downtown area.

“We feel we have a compelling responsibility to protect the environment of the Salt Lake Temple,” President Hinckley stated during an April 2003 general conference address, shortly after the Church announced its intentions to purchase Crossroads Plaza. At the time the Church already owned the ZCMI Center and most of the land on the affected blocks. In September the Church finalized its purchase of Crossroads. “The owners of the buildings have expressed a desire to sell. The property needs very extensive and expensive renovation. We felt it imperative to do something to revitalize this area.”

“The core issue is protecting the environs of the temple,” reiterated Bishop Burton.

Bishop Burton also emphasized the venture is funded through the commercial

Church to Move Campuses, Invest in Salt Lake City Redevelopment

By Lisa Ann Jackson, Church Magazines

With an expressed desire to keep the area around Temple Square vibrant, safe, and clean, the Church has announced major plans to redevelop several blocks in downtown Salt Lake City. Included in the plans are the relocations of LDS Business College and Brigham Young University’s Salt Lake Center to downtown.

“I want to make it clear that we are irrevocably committed to the economic future of this city and to creating a vibrant and beautiful place,” said Presiding Bishop H. David Burton at a press conference on 8 October 2003 unveiling preliminary designs for

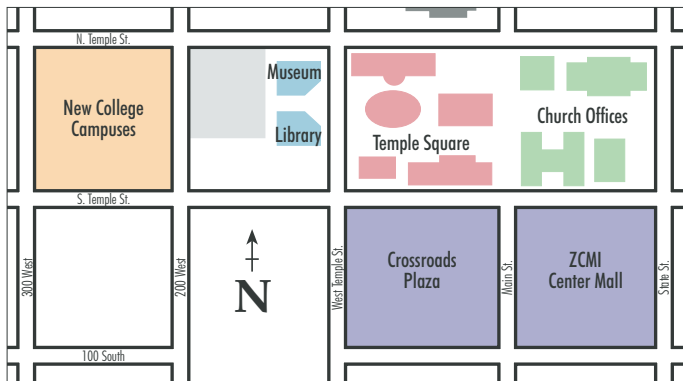


A rendering depicts proposed changes to Church-owned property in downtown Salt Lake City. The changes will help to maintain the area around Temple Square.

the redevelopment.

Two city blocks immediately south of Temple Square,

which house the shopping centers Crossroads Plaza and ZCMI Center Mall, will be



entities of the Church. “None of this money comes from the tithing of our faithful members,” Bishop Burton said. “That is not how we use tithing funds.”

Planning for the new college campuses will begin immediately. The retail redevelopment is in its final planning stages, and work will begin sometime in 2004. ■

In the News

Book of Mormon “Changed America”

Book Magazine recently named the Book of Mormon on its list of “20 Books That Changed America.” The magazine compiled the list in honor of the United States 227th birthday and included it in its July/August 2003 issue.

“We set out to find the twenty novels and nonfiction titles that have had the greatest impact on the history of the country: the ones that led to concrete, definable changes in the way Americans live their lives,” wrote Jerome Kramer in *Book Magazine*.

Of the Book of Mormon he stated, “The book provides the theological underpinnings for one of the world’s most vibrant religions.”

Conference Center Earns Landscape Award

The American Society of Landscape Architects has recognized the Conference Center in Salt Lake City with



The Book of Mormon was recently named one of 20 books that changed America.

a Design Merit Award for excellence in landscape architecture. It was one of 33 award-winning projects selected from 436 entries. The awards are presented according to quality of design, functionality, context, environmental responsibility, and relevance to the profession, the public, and the environment.

Designed by Olin Partnership of Philadelphia,

NEWS OF THE CHURCH

Pennsylvania, the landscaping of the Conference Center features trees, grasses, and wildflowers native to Utah.

Cardston Temple Wins Beautification Award

The town of Cardston recently recognized the Cardston Alberta Temple in Canada with one of the city’s annual beautification awards—the first time the temple has been honored in such a way.

Stan Johnson, former Cardston mayor and a counselor in the temple presidency, said the award is one indication of the “tremendous contribution that is made to the overall beautification of our community by the temple.”

The Cardston Temple was the first temple to be designed without a tower or an assembly hall. It was dedicated by President Heber J. Grant in 1923 and rededi-

cated in 1991 by President Gordon B. Hinckley, then First Counselor in the First Presidency, after extensive remodeling.

Memphis Temple Wins America in Bloom Award

Officials from the city of Bartlett, Tennessee, surprised Memphis Tennessee Temple President Boyd Lee when they announced that the temple, located just northeast of Memphis, had won an America in Bloom award. The reason for the surprise: no one from the temple had entered it in the contest.

Local America in Bloom committee members entered structures in their area that they felt should be in the contest. Pat Casey, one of the committee members, logged hundreds of miles driving around the city taking pictures of churches that she felt should be entered. When the



The Cardston Alberta Temple received an award for adding beauty to its community.

national America in Bloom representatives were in town, she took them to the temple.

"You just have to see this building in person," she told them. "It is beautiful."

School of Management Moves Up in Rankings

Brigham Young University's Marriott School of Management recently advanced to number 26 in *The Wall Street Journal's* 2004 rankings of top business schools worldwide.

The newspaper also ranked BYU second behind Yale University in the new "Emphasis on Ethics" category as "best for hiring graduates with high ethical standards." In addition, BYU's Marriott School ranked third in the "Hidden

Gems" category, a ranking of 10 schools that "don't receive the respect and attention they deserve."

Earlier in the year, *Financial Times* of London advanced the Marriott School of Management to 51st in its global ranking of the top 100 MBA (Master of Business Administration) programs.

BYU's business and law schools are also among the top 50 in the United States, according to *U.S. News & World Report's* Best Graduate Schools issue. The Marriott School of Management was ranked 29th for the second straight year, and the J. Reuben Clark Law School advanced to 31st in the magazine's rankings. ■

Church News contributed to these reports.

Comment

Thomas L. Kane

Kudos to Elder Lance B. Wickman for his outstanding article about Colonel Thomas L. Kane—a God-sent benefactor to our people at a time when his excellent services were sorely needed (see September 2003 issue). And kudos to the *Ensign* staff—your layout and art are outstanding and your articles are timely and appropriate. It is a joy to receive the *Ensign*.
Martha S. Hatch
Socorro Ward
Los Lunas New Mexico Stake

Inspired Visiting Teaching Message

Recently, my visiting teachers were inspired to focus on this portion of the message: "In our lives there are unsettling seasons and circumstances when we are called upon to move out of our comfort zone and place complete trust in the Lord. As we . . . exercise faith in Jesus Christ, the Spirit becomes a trusted companion" (*Ensign*, Sept. 2003, 71). At

present I am preparing for a move, and while I am doing all I can to make the adjustment a smooth one, there are a lot of details to take care of. Before my visiting teachers came to see me that day, an oppressive feeling had settled over me. They helped me realize that my complete trust needs to be placed in the Lord, as this move is an answer to prayer, and I must allow the Spirit to be more of a trusted companion. After their visit, the oppressive feeling was gone. Thank you for the inspired message and the comfort it brought. Sharlie Carter
Louisville Sixth Ward
Louisville Kentucky Stake

After Divorce

I appreciate the article in the August 2003 *Ensign*, "After Divorce: Help for Latter-day Saint Men," by A. Dean Byrd. As a mother who has experienced the pain of divorce, I know firsthand the associated trials that put us through the fiery furnace.

Subscribe Online

Church magazine subscriptions are now available online at www.ldsacatalog.com for subscribers in the United States and Canada. This includes subscriptions to the *Ensign*, *New Era*, and *Friend* as well as to the 48 language editions of the *Liabona*. Talking books for the visually impaired are also available.

Gift subscriptions—perfect for the Christmas season—can also be ordered online. Those who prefer to order by phone can still easily do so by calling 1-800-537-5971.

Plans call for eventually making online subscriptions available in other areas as well. ■



This article helped in two ways: it gave practical advice for both the person going through a divorce and loved ones on the sidelines, and it validated that there are other good people going through the divorce process. It helped me better understand some of the feelings my current husband is dealing with. Although his divorce was almost 10 years ago, the effects are felt for a lifetime.

The information about financial challenges, the impact on children, and the awkwardness sometimes exhibited at ward meetings was

very helpful. Many people divorce because of someone else's choices. Divorce leaves you feeling worthless, frustrated, helpless, and inadequate. Much is written to help widows and orphans, but precious little to help the divorced. This article is a good start. It brought to light many issues that tend to fester in the darkness, validated that one can still be a good person even after divorce, and gave some solid advice.

Linda Crandell
Dahlgren Branch
Fredericksburg Virginia Stake

Call for Articles

If you have had experience with the following situation, we invite you to share your suggestions:

I am so busy with family, Church, and other activities that I don't often reach out to my neighbors who are not Latter-day Saints. What specific ideas can help me develop better relationships with my neighbors?

Send responses by 15 January 2004 to *Ensign* Editorial, 24th Floor, 50 East North Temple Street, Salt Lake City, UT 84150-

3220, USA, or to cur-editorial-ensign@ldschurch.org. Clearly mark your submission "Question and Answers," and on the top of your submission write your name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, ward, and stake (or branch and district).

While we cannot acknowledge receipt of individual responses, authors whose submissions are selected for publication will be notified. If you would like your manuscript returned, enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope and allow up to a year. ■

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

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IBC Inside Back Cover

OC Outside Cover

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ACTIVATION (see also CONVER-

SION, MISSIONARY WORK)

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MAKING THE MOST OF THIS ISSUE

D E C E M B E R 2 0 0 3



The Journey Home

She had been excommunicated 20 long, bitter years ago. Was it still possible to gain a testimony and return to the Church? See “Could I Come Back?” page 13.

Simplify Your Holidays

It’s easier to have a more spiritual Christmas season if it’s also a more relaxing season. You’ll find helpful ideas in Random Sampler on page 65.

Avoiding Shipwreck

Like John of old, we live in a time of growing darkness and spiritual danger. Elder H. Ross Workman of the Seventy tells how the light of the Spirit and a love of God and fellowman safeguard us. See “Safely Anchored by Love,” page 56.

Blueprint for Competent Children

The ability to make good decisions is one of the most important skills a young person

Family Home Evening Ideas

- New at holding family home evening? Or think the children aren’t paying attention? Or don’t have kids in the home anymore? Other families share their encouraging experiences in “Testimonies of Family Home Evening,” page 26.
- Talk about tithing. Members from around the world tell how their lives were blessed by living this principle. See “Not Room Enough to Receive It,” page 46.

Especially for Christmas

- Surrounded by strangers, this family loaded up their little red wagon and moved some hearts. See page 42.
- Lunch with a minister, a Christmas blessing, a trucker’s gift—see three heartwarming stories beginning on page 60.

can have. Learn what parents can do to help children develop this capability. See “Building for Their Future,” page 38.

Missionary Minded

One ward’s experience shows how taking missionary work more seriously can bring gratifying results. See “Catching the Vision of Missionary Work,” page 20.



Speaking of Christmas and Missionary Work . . .

There’s a wonderful gift you can give friends and neighbors of other faiths, one that will help you share your testimony in a powerful way. See the sidebar article on page 19.

Home Teachers, Visiting Teachers

Find the monthly messages on page 2 and page 52.

Did You Know?

You could pay to have a gourmet treat delivered to a friend or loved one once a month for a year. But for far less money, you could send a far more valuable and spiritually nourishing Christmas present—a gift subscription to one of the Church magazines. That friend at work who occasionally asks questions about the Church? That less-active family you’ve been visiting? That child or other family member who needs strengthening? They are all perfect candidates for a gift subscription.

Every month the magazine will be a wholesome, inviting presence in the home. Gift subscriptions are available through your ward magazine representative or your local Church distribution center. In North America you can order by phone at 1-800-537-5971 using Visa, MasterCard, or American Express. Or order on-line at ldscatalog.com.

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LOADING UP THE LITTLE RED WAGON



Building the Kirtland Temple, by Walter Rane

In late 1832 and early 1833 the Lord told the Saints to “establish . . . a house of God” (D&C 88:119). In June 1833 the Lord said: “It is my will that you should build a house. If you keep my commandments you shall have power to build it” (D&C 95:11).



With the birth of the babe in Bethlehem,
there emerged a great endowment,
a power stronger than weapons, a
wealth more lasting than the coins of Caesar:
*This child was to be the King of kings and Lord
of lords, the promised Messiah—even Jesus Christ,
the Son of God.” See President Thomas S. Monson,
“The Gifts of Christmas,” p. 2.*