

Ensign

A man with a beard and a woman wearing a headscarf are walking through a field. The man is in the foreground, wearing a brown robe and a light-colored shawl. The woman is behind him, also wearing a light-colored shawl. A donkey is visible in the foreground, partially obscured by the man's shawl. The background is a field of green and brown vegetation under bright sunlight.

**President Packer's
Final Witness, p. 24**

**Quieting Your Worries about
the Future, p. 28**

**Eternal Marriage: A Covenant
within the Covenant, p. 40**

**For Teachers: Better Questions,
Better Learning, p. 66**



"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls:

"Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

Matthew 13:45-46

Contents December 2015

Volume 45 • Number 12



MESSAGES

FIRST PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

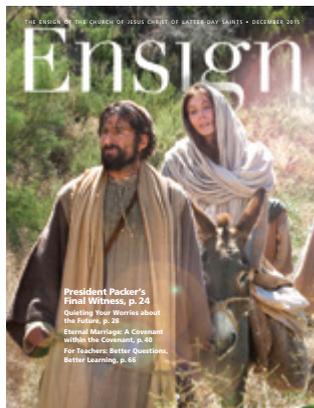
- 4** **Make Time for the Savior**
President Thomas S. Monson

VISITING TEACHING MESSAGE

- 7** **Divine Attributes of Jesus Christ:
Compassionate and Kind**

ON THE COVER

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YOUNG ADULT FEATURES

- 12** **Navigating the Currents of Life**
Mindy Anne Selu
When your life seems to stop progressing, catch a current of motivation to keep improving.
- 16** **Young Adult Profiles: Living as a Witness in Germany**
Justina McCandless
Understanding how Heavenly Father views her has helped Esther in her relationships with others.
- 18** **Returning Home Early from My Mission**
Brittany Romanello Casco
I believed the stories of Christ's healing the sick, and I believed that He would do the same for me.
- 22** **In Tune with the Christmas Spirit**
Kristen Danner Reber
The elderly man asked us to sing "White Christmas," but none of us knew all the words.

FEATURES

- 24** **A Witness of the Savior Jesus Christ**
President Boyd K. Packer
An Apostle of 45 years testifies of the Savior "with absolute certainty."
- 28** **Be at Peace**
Elder D. Todd Christofferson
Take time this Christmas season to feel the Savior's reassurance.
- 32** **Christmas with the Dombrowskis**
Mark T. Anderson
As a young missionary, I wasn't prepared for the lesson in kindness a poor widow taught me.
- 35** **A Christmas Hug**
Ed Bruderer
After I was injured in a car accident, caring neighbors came to see me on Christmas Eve. Their visit became a treasured tradition.
- 36** **Song: Safe in a Stable**
Penelope Moody Allen and Michael F. Moody
A stable once sheltered the Lamb of God.





38 "I Made a Commitment to God"

Néstor Curbelo

The dedication of one member in Ecuador proved to be a defining moment in Church history there.

40 The New and Everlasting Covenant

Elder Marcus B. Nash

For all who abide the terms of the new and everlasting covenant, the reward is joy and peace in this world and eternal life in the next.

48 The Last Sacrament Cup

Catherine Arveseth

How much does the sacrament mean to you? Here is one member's fresh perspective.

50 The Sacrament and Spiritual Growth

Elder Melvin J. Ballard

The sacrament is key to spiritual renewal and development.

52 Bearing One Another's Burdens

Toni Thomas

Linda was blind, and I was in a wheelchair. Yet we found a wonderful way to serve one another.

54 Hold On to the Light

LaRene Porter Gaunt

When we face questions or doubts, the answer is not to separate ourselves from gospel living but to stay close to the Holy Ghost.

60 Joseph Smith and the Book of Revelation

David A. Edwards

Why did Joseph Smith call the book of Revelation "one of the plainest books God ever caused to be written"?

66 Asking the Right Questions in the Right Way

Scott H. Knecht

The right question can make a big difference when it comes to learning and teaching the gospel.

72 A Savior Is Born

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

The Christmas season gives us many opportunities to bear witness of Jesus Christ.



DEPARTMENTS

3 Family Home Evening Ideas

8 We Talk of Christ: A Gift of Life and Love

Brad Allred

10 Reflections: Smiling to the Blind

Mamie Salas

11 Serving in the Church: Christmastime in the Temple

Eugenie C. Stoll

70 Gospel Classics: Joseph Smith Did See God

Elder Joseph F. Merrill

74 Latter-day Saint Voices

80 Until We Meet Again: The Real Christmas

President Howard W. Hunter

74



Ensign

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Family Home Evening Ideas

This issue contains articles and activities that could be used for family home evening. The following are some examples.



“Be at Peace,” page 28: Elder
Christofferson invites us to take time this
Christmas season to sit quietly and think
about baby Jesus.

Consider reading the
article together as a family
and then inviting a spirit
of reverence by reading
scriptures, singing hymns,
or watching Bible videos
(available at Biblevideos.org)
about the Savior’s
birth. Then allow time
for each person to think
about the Savior’s birth
and what it means to
them. You might con-
sider having journals or
paper available for those
who wish to record their
thoughts. Ask family
members to share their
thoughts if they so desire.

“A Savior Is Born,” page 72: Consider
discussing with your family Elder Oaks’s state-
ment that “there has never been a greater

need for us to profess
our faith in our Savior,
privately and publicly.”
Think of some ways your
family can use this year’s
Christmas video to share
the gospel and your tes-
timony of the Savior with
others (see christas.mormon.org).
You might
make Christmas treats
to share with friends and
deliver the treats with a
card containing the web
address to the video. You
could also plan a family
social media campaign
and make goals for how
many people you can
share the video with.
Another option would be
to invite friends over to
watch the video with you.

GRATITUDE IN A FRAME

We chose to focus a family
home evening on the principle
of gratitude. We began by
discussing the meaning of the
word and how it applies to
our lives, emphasizing how we
should be grateful for the many
things the Savior has provided
for us. Next, each of us took a
turn writing on a mat board the
things we were grateful for. The
comments included everything
from the Atonement of Jesus
Christ to each other. Finally, we
attached a picture of the Savior
and put the mat board in a
frame. It now hangs in the hall
of our home, where we see it
every day.

Lydia Mack, Maryland, USA

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By President
Thomas S. Monson

MAKE TIME FOR THE Savior

Another Christmas season is upon us and with it the dawning of a new year. It seems as though only yesterday we were celebrating the Savior's birth and making resolutions.

Among our resolutions for this year, did we resolve to make time in our lives and room in our hearts for the Savior? No matter how successful we may have been thus far with such a resolution, I am confident we all wish to do better. This Christmas season is the perfect time to examine and renew our efforts.

In our busy lives, with ever so many other things competing for our attention, it is essential that we make a conscious, committed effort to bring Christ into our lives and into our homes. And it is vital that we, like the Wise Men from the East, remain fixed upon His star and "come to worship him."¹

Down through the generations of time, the message from Jesus has been the same. To Peter and Andrew by the shores of Galilee, He said, "Follow me."² To Philip 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, will come that same beckoning invitation: "Follow me."⁵

As we follow in His footsteps today and as we emulate His example, we will have opportunities to bless the lives

of others. Jesus invites us to give of ourselves: "Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind."⁶

Is there someone for whom you should provide service this Christmas? Is there one who awaits your visit?

Years ago I paid a Christmas call at the home of an elderly widow. While I was there, the doorbell rang. There at the door stood a very busy and prominent physician. He had not been summoned; rather, he had just felt a prompting to pay a visit to a patient who was lonely.

During this season, the hearts of those who are confined reach out and yearn for a Christmas visit. One Christmas while visiting a care center, I sat and talked with five elderly ladies, the oldest of whom was 101. She was blind, yet she recognized my voice.

"Bishop, you are a little late this year!" she said. "I thought you would never come."

We had a wonderful time together. One patient, however, looked longingly out the window and repeated over and over, "I know my boy will come to see me today." I wondered if he would, for there had been other Christmas seasons when he had never called.

There is yet time this year to extend the helping hand, the loving heart, and the willing spirit—in other words, to follow the example set by our Savior and to serve as He would have us serve. As we serve Him, we will not



forfeit our opportunity, as did the innkeeper of old,⁷ to make time for Him in our lives and room for Him in our hearts.

Can we comprehend the magnificent promise contained in the message of the angel given to the shepherds abiding in the field: “I bring you good tidings of great joy. . . . For unto you is born this day . . . a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord?”⁸

As we exchange gifts at Christmas, may we remember, appreciate, and receive that greatest gift of all gifts—the gift of our Savior and Redeemer, that we might have eternal life.

“For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given

unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift.”⁹

May we follow Him, serve Him, honor Him, and receive in our lives His gifts to us, that we might be, in the words of Father Lehi, “encircled about eternally in the arms of his love.”¹⁰ ■

NOTES

1. Matthew 2:2.
2. Matthew 4:19.
3. John 1:43.
4. Matthew 9:9.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 38:22.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 64:34.
7. See Luke 2:7.
8. Luke 2:10–11.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 88:33.
10. 2 Nephi 1:15.

TEACHING FROM THIS MESSAGE

President Monson calls on us to “make a conscious, committed effort to bring Christ into our lives and into our homes.” Consider discussing with those you teach how they can make this conscious effort individually and as a family. You might consider asking them to think of a specific person or family whom they could visit or serve this Christmas. “There is yet time this year to extend the helping hand, the loving heart, and the willing spirit.”

Ways to Serve at Christmastime

President Monson takes the time to visit the elderly and those in care centers, especially at Christmastime. He noted that there are those who are happy because they've received visitors, while others only hope for visitors who never come. There are people waiting for somebody—maybe this Christmas, *you* can be that somebody.

The following is a list of just a few ways you can help make sure no one feels alone this Christmas. Feel free to think of more ways you can reach out in your community this season. "Is there one who awaits your visit?"



- Make Christmas cards to send to the missionaries and the single and elderly members of your ward or branch.
- Volunteer with a local community organization.
- Give copies of the Book of Mormon as Christmas gifts to your friends and neighbors.
- Visit elderly people in your ward or family.
- Make treats to deliver to your neighbors.

For more ideas on how you can serve in your community, go to lds.org/topics/humanitarian-service/help.

Follow the Light

After Jesus was born, Wise Men brought Him gifts. They followed a new, bright star in the sky to find Him.

Follow the path to get to Jesus. What gifts could you bring Him?



Prayerfully study this material and seek to know what to share. How will understanding the divine attributes of the Savior increase your faith in Him and bless those you watch over through visiting teaching? For more information, go to reliefsociety.lds.org.



Faith, Family, Relief

Divine Attributes of Jesus Christ: Compassionate and Kind

This is part of a series of Visiting Teaching Messages featuring divine attributes of the Savior.

In the scriptures, compassion means literally ‘to suffer with.’ It also means to show sympathy, pity, and mercy for another.”¹

“Jesus provided us many examples of compassionate concern,” said President Thomas S. Monson. “The crippled man at the pool of Bethesda; the woman taken in adultery; the woman at Jacob’s well; the daughter of Jairus; Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha—each represented a casualty on the Jericho road. Each needed help.

“To the cripple at Bethesda, Jesus said, ‘Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.’ To the sinful woman came the counsel, ‘Go, and sin no more.’ To help her who came to draw water, He provided a well of water ‘springing



up into everlasting life.’ To the dead daughter of Jairus came the command, ‘Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.’ To the entombed Lazarus, ‘Come forth.’

“The Savior has always shown unlimited capacity for compassion. . . . Let us open the door of our hearts, that He—the living example of true compassion—may enter.”²

Additional Scriptures

Psalm 145:8; Zechariah 7:9; 1 Peter 3:8; Mosiah 15:1, 9; 3 Nephi 17:5–7

From the Scriptures

“My husband and I knelt by the side of our 17-year-old daughter and pleaded for her life,” said Linda S. Reeves, second counselor in the Relief Society general presidency. “The answer was no, but . . . we have come to know . . . that . . . [the Savior] feels compassion for us in our sorrows.”³

“One of my favorite stories from the Savior’s life is the story of Lazarus. The scriptures tell us that ‘Jesus loved Martha, . . . her sister [Mary], and [their brother] Lazarus.’”⁴ When Lazarus became ill, word was sent to Jesus, but when He arrived Lazarus had already died. Mary ran to Jesus, fell down at His feet, and wept. When Jesus saw Mary weeping, “he groaned in the spirit, and . . . wept” (John 11:33, 35).

“That is our charge. We must feel and see for ourselves and then help all of Heavenly Father’s children to feel and see and know that our Savior has taken upon Himself not only all our sins but also our pains and our suffering and afflictions so that He can know what we feel and how to comfort us.”⁵

Consider This

Who could be blessed by your compassion?

NOTES

1. Guide to the Scriptures, “Compassion,” scriptures.lds.org.
2. Thomas S. Monson, “The Gift of Compassion,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2007, 6–7, 10.
3. Linda S. Reeves, “The Lord Has Not Forgotten You,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2012, 120.
4. Linda S. Reeves, “The Lord Has Not Forgotten You,” 118.
5. Linda S. Reeves, “The Lord Has Not Forgotten You,” 120.

A GIFT OF LIFE AND LOVE

By Brad Allred

My mother's gift showed us the true meaning of Christmas.

My uncle Ed has always had an infectious love of life. Unfortunately, he also had a deficient pair of kidneys. For several years, Ed had been staving off kidney failure through dialysis. The treatments were painful and frequent. Each treatment wiped him out until the next one, and by the fall of 1995, he seemed to be just a shell of his former vibrant self.

The doctor finally told Ed that if he didn't get a new kidney soon, his body wouldn't hold out much longer. Although only one kidney is necessary to sustain life, Ed didn't want to

ask anyone to donate one of theirs due to the risk that inherently accompanies any surgery. But there was no choice. Several close friends and family members were tested to see if their kidneys were compatible. Only one perfect match was found: Ed's sister, Dottie—my mother.

On December 7, many of Ed's friends and family joined in fasting and prayer in behalf of him and Dottie. The surgeons who performed the operation were twin brothers. Even more interesting, one of them had donated a kidney to the other.

Ed and my mother were impressed to learn that with each surgery, these two doctors did all that they could and then bowed their heads and left the outcome in the Lord's hands.

On the day of the operation, one doctor removed one of my mother's kidneys. As he sewed her back up, his brother carefully secured the donated kidney inside Ed's abdomen.

The surgery was a success, but it remained to be seen if Ed's body would accept the new kidney. The antibodies in his immune system were suppressed to improve his chances, so Ed had to be isolated in intensive care to protect him from viruses.

Even after he was released, he had to remain isolated from everyone except his immediate family. On Christmas Eve, however, Ed received special permission to attend my grandparents' annual Christmas Eve celebration.

Wearing a face mask, Ed walked in the door, headed straight for Dottie, and enveloped her in a tremendous hug. As they embraced each other, there wasn't a dry eye in the house. Everyone could feel the love emanating from them. A sister had suffered in order to give her brother the gift of



"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."

John 3:16-17



life. It was a gift of love, a gift of sacrifice, a gift he couldn't provide for himself.

As I watched them, with tears streaming down my face, it dawned on me: this could be what it will be like to meet the Savior face to face. He did something for us that we are unable to do for ourselves. Only He, being divine, was able to endure a sacrifice so great that the law of justice would be satisfied. And only He, being perfect, was worthy to atone for the sins of all mankind so that the law of mercy could be extended to all who accept Him as their Savior.

As I savored these insights, I recommitted myself to do all I could to show my appreciation for the Savior and His sacrifice. I would strive to live my life as a disciple so that someday I might be worthy to enter His presence, embrace Him, and personally thank Him for loving me enough to make such a sacrifice. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

SHARING GIFTS

What does the Lord's loving sacrifice mean to you?

Who could benefit from a gift of the Savior's love?

With whom could you share the gospel, offer a message of hope, or share the joy of the season?

SMILING TO THE BLIND

By Mamie Salas

How often do we anticipate miracles but neglect to open our eyes to those that come?

In the dark of the night, I sat rocking my new baby until she fell back asleep. She was about six weeks old, and I had been anticipating her first smile to come any day. I loved those moments when I could cuddle quietly in the dark with her but realized that while I spent every waking moment watching carefully for that smile, if she happened to smile right now, with only minimal light in the room, I would miss the moment I so wanted

to have with her. All of my waiting and anticipation would be wasted if I did not see her smile—she would be smiling to my blindness.

I began pondering how easily we can find ourselves in similar positions throughout our lives. We often hear of experiences shared by those who have received great blessings in their lives. We hear of miracles that defied the odds. We hear of money showing up when people were down to their last dollar. We hear of angelic ministrations to those who had lost all hope. As we listen to these stories, some of us may reflect on our own trials and wonder, Where are *our* miracles? Where are *our* angels?

The real question isn't why they aren't there, but why we don't see them. How often do we anticipate miracles but neglect to open our

eyes to those that come? How often do we look to the future, anticipating great blessings and brighter days, but fail to appreciate the beauty in our lives today?

Through my trials, I have come to realize that our loving Heavenly Father is always with us. He loves us and wants us to be happy. His comfort is always available to us, but we have to actively seek that comfort and be willing to accept it.

Most of the time, answers to prayers don't come with fanfare. Comfort during times of trial comes in the form of a meal delivered by a caring neighbor, a late-night phone call from a loving father who felt the need to check on his daughter, or a compliment from a stranger at the grocery store.

"Let him that is ignorant learn wisdom by humbling himself and calling upon the Lord his God, that his eyes may be opened that he may see, and his ears opened that he may hear;

"For my Spirit is sent forth into the world to enlighten the humble and contrite" (D&C 136:32–33).

Like a new mother waiting in a dark room for her child to smile, we will not notice when Heavenly Father smiles upon us and sends His blessings unless our eyes are open. We need to let our faith in Him light the darkness around us. ■

The author lives in California, USA.



CHRISTMASTIME IN THE TEMPLE

By Eugenie C. Stoll

I had been filled with the true spirit of Christmas—not found in busy shopping malls or under a perfectly decorated tree but within the walls of the temple.

It didn't seem that there was time for Christmas that year. I was in the middle of moving, with one house to organize and unpack and another to clean and fix up. Weighed down by many responsibilities, I wasn't ready to feel any Christmas cheer.

A week earlier I had tried to keep my personal commitment to attend the temple monthly. After getting up at 5:00 a.m. on a frozen Saturday morning, I made my way to the Jordan River Utah Temple, only to discover that it was closed. I turned my car around and headed for the Salt Lake Temple, but icy roads and freeway detours brought me home again.

"Next week," I promised myself. But as Saturday approached, the last one before Christmas, I still had much to do: unpack, clean, decorate, bake, and wrap. Maybe temple service would just have to wait until January. I wrestled with the thought, but fortunately, my commitment won out.

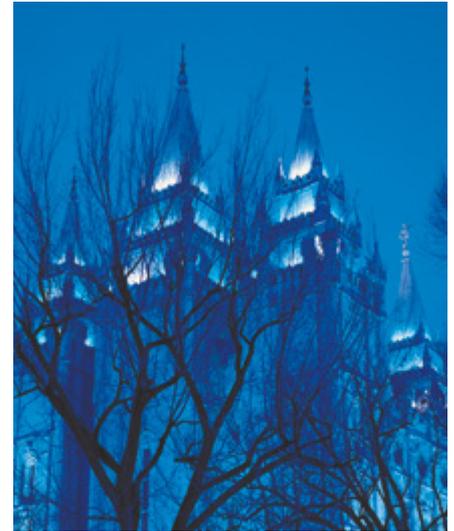
As I took my seat in the chapel of the Salt Lake Temple that Saturday, I heard a familiar Christmas carol in the background. Christmas carols in the temple? At first the music seemed out

of place. But as I thought of the words of the carol, the Spirit spoke to my heart and opened my mind.

Sitting in the chapel filled with waiting people, I imagined what it must have been like to wait for the Savior's birth and how exciting it must have been for the shepherds in the fields and the hosts in the heavens to know of His birth. A thrill of joy surged through me. I realized how exciting it was for me—then, that day—to know of His birth. I too had cause for celebration! And that's what Christmas really is—the excitement, the joy, and the thrill of Christ coming to earth.

As I was leaving the celestial room following an endowment session, I halted. Towering above me was a magnificent painting of the risen Lord. As I stood there in awe of this beautiful artwork, I felt as if He had greeted me. The Spirit filled me with peace and joy—this was His house, and His Spirit was there.

I realized that the anticipation of waiting for Christ to come had been fulfilled for me that day. Through temple worship and service, He had come into my heart.



As I headed home in the congested traffic, I felt untouched by the frenzy of last-minute shoppers around me. Overcome with love for the Savior, I had been filled with the true spirit of Christmas—not found in busy shopping malls or under a perfectly decorated tree but within the walls of the temple. There I had discovered that we can celebrate the joy of Christ's coming to earth by allowing Him to come into our hearts. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.



A FEELING OF PEACE

"As we attend the temple, there can come to us a dimension of spirituality and a feeling of peace which will transcend any other feeling which could come into the human heart."

President Thomas S. Monson, "Blessings of the Temple," *Ensign*, Oct. 2010, 35.

YOUNG ADULTS

NAVIGATING



the Currents of Life

By Mindy Anne Selu

Church Magazines

Young adulthood. By nature, it seems an exciting, ever-flowing river of successes and disappointments, occasionally interspersed by a few marked moments: graduating from college, passing an entrance exam, getting married, having children, landing that dream job—all significant milestones along the river of life.

So what happens when it seems like you've reached most of your important milestones—after you have a degree, a job, and no immediate prospects for marriage? Or maybe you are married but feel stuck in a progression-rut. What happens when

you can no longer measure your life in semesters? when the benchmark of final exams is gone? when you feel like you're just not making progress in your life? It's easy to feel as though your once ebbing-and-flowing life is now completely stagnant, resulting in one of several things: an apathy toward life and progression of any kind, despair from feeling a lack of meaning or fulfillment, or angst from feeling you're not going anywhere. When you have nothing to measure your life against, it can quickly slip into anything from monotonous banality to debilitating helplessness.

Take the First Steps Forward

If you find yourself among those who feel trapped in this stagnating stage of life, remember that you don't have to be doing something extraordinary to have an extraordinary life, but you do have to be doing *something*.

The key is to keep moving. Elder Keith K. Hilbig, an emeritus member of the Seventy, said: "The path to eternal life is not on a plateau. Rather, it is an incline, ever onward and upward."¹ In order to move forward in life—past the stagnant parts of the river—we need to take a step toward improving

ourselves. Complacency is surprisingly powerful, though, especially when the ins and outs of daily life can seem all-consuming. Elder John H. Vandenberg (1904–92) of the Seventy commented, "The sad part of humanity seems to be the utter lack of desire, in the lives of many, to really do something about enlarging the vistas of their existence."² That lack of desire doesn't have to be the sad part of *your* existence, though. Overcoming complacency and finding the motivation to progress are the first steps to improving the course of your life.

As the new year rolls around, people often begin making goals. However, New Year's resolutions are easily made and broken—it's no coincidence that gym memberships peak during the month of January. But no matter the month, nor your marital, educational, or professional status, progression is not only an eternal principle of the gospel but also an integral part of creating a meaningful life. Although you can't always create the major milestones in your life, you can find meaning and fulfillment by setting and striving to keep purposeful daily, weekly, and yearly goals.

Instead of succumbing to a seemingly stagnant life, you can make a plan to keep improving.

Make an Evaluation



First, take a step back and look at your life as it already is.

This involves a thorough self-evaluation. Elder Marvin J. Ashton (1915–94) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles suggested that we ask ourselves the following questions: “Where do I need development? What do I want out of life? Where do I want to go? How can I get there?”³ Honestly evaluate where and how you spend your time and what things you want to change. Think about things you want to do, traits you want to develop, and skills you want to acquire.

Decide on Worthwhile Goals



After you’ve carefully evaluated your life, decide which areas you want to begin

improving first. As in everything else, the Savior is a great source to look to in knowing where to start. We don’t know much about Christ’s early life, but we do know that He “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:52). This implies at least four categories for potential self-improvement goals: mental, physical, spiritual, and social. President Howard W. Hunter (1907–95) suggested that we become engaged in “the personal pursuit of hobbies or crafts, the seeking of knowledge and wisdom, particularly of the things of God, and the development and honing of skills.”⁴ Other categories might be community, family, creativity, finance, or education.

When deciding on categories and goals, include Heavenly Father in the process. Make it a serious matter of prayer to find out how you can best improve your life and what His will is for you. After all, Heavenly Father knows best what things are going to make your life the most meaningful and fulfilling it can be. As one bishop said, “It is not enough to do things. We must do the right things—the things our Heavenly Father would want us to do.”⁵ Heavenly Father wants us to be continually progressing because He knows our eternal potential.

Once you’ve determined a reasonable number of categories—four or five—set some specific goals. Try to imagine the end goal: Do you want to be a scholar of the scriptures? Or do you just want to read the chapter in the manual *before* church? Do you want to be in better physical shape? Maybe you want to be closer to your family, more informed about political issues, or more up-to-date on technology. Perhaps the most important goal you have right now is to be worthy to attend the temple. Once you’ve established the end goal, think about what smaller goals will help you achieve your long-term goals. Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles suggested: “Set short-term goals that you can reach. Set goals that are well balanced—not too many nor too few, and not too high nor too low. Write down your attainable goals and work on them according to their importance. Pray for divine guidance in your goal setting.”⁶

Make sure that each of your goals will actually help you reach your desired outcome and that you are committed to keeping them. Elder Rex D. Pinegar, an emeritus member of the Seventy, counseled: “Decide about . . . things that you will incorporate into your life, things that will bring you eternal happiness. Decide to set goals which are consistent with your divine destiny. . . . Decide to believe in yourself, that you truly can reach goals—your goals.”⁷

Make It Happen



Once you have your goals squared away and written down, give each one a time frame.

Some of your goals might be a daily endeavor, such as scripture study. Others may be weekly: reading the material for Sunday lessons, making phone calls to friends and family, or attending the temple. Still other goals could be accomplished monthly or quarterly: setting a budget, attending town hall meetings, reading gospel-centered books, learning how to conjugate verbs in a foreign language. Maybe you’ll have a few goals that will only require a few hours a month, a few days per year, or just sporadic when-the-opportunity-presents-itself types of time commitments.

Grab an Oar, a Paddle—Anything

Throughout this new year, don’t settle for fleeting resolutions that will be abandoned before you can get all the confetti and glitter out of your carpet. Make serious goals and plans to begin rowing past the stagnant stage



of your life. Consider this invitation from Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “Use your agency to develop yourself personally. As you discover your gifts and talents, . . . you must let the Spirit guide you. Choose and act for yourself. Be motivated from within. Make a plan for your life, including education or vocational training. Explore interests and skills. Work and become self-reliant. Set goals, overcome mistakes, gain experience, and *finish what you begin*.”⁸

If your life’s progress seems like it’s come to a standstill, catch a current of motivation to keep improving. Grab a paddle, an oar, or just start up that engine—whatever your personal goal-reaching incentives may be—and get moving. By accomplishing small daily,

weekly, and monthly goals, you’ll find that not only will you become a better person, but you’ll feel the empowerment and fulfillment of having a milestone-achieving, self-improving, ever-flowing, and all-around more meaningful life. ■

NOTES

1. Keith K. Hilbig, “Quench Not the Spirit Which Quickens the Inner Man,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 38.
2. John H. Vandenberg, “Becoming a Somebody,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1973, 38.
3. Marvin J. Ashton, “Progress through Change,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 61.
4. Howard W. Hunter, “The Church Is for All People,” *Ensign*, June 1989, 77.
5. See Joseph B. Wirthlin, “Three Choices,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 80.
6. M. Russell Ballard, “Keeping Life’s Demands in Balance,” *Ensign*, May 1987, 14.
7. Rex D. Pinegar, “Decide to Decide,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 73.
8. Robert D. Hales, “Stand Strong in Holy Places,” *Ensign*, May 2013, 50; emphasis added.

Grab a paddle, an oar, or just start up that engine—whatever your personal goal-reaching incentives may be—and get moving.

Living as a Witness in **Germany**

By Justina McCandless

Only a 30-minute train ride from the metropolis of Hannover and nestled comfortably among acres of flowered springtime fields sits the small German city of Stadthagen. This is the place where 19-year-old Esther Graf grew up. It's a place where everything can be reached by foot or bicycle, where bakeries and ice-cream stores dot the streets, and where weekday markets fill the city square.

Stadthagen is also home to a thriving Latter-day Saint community.

Although the city is small, Stadthagen has a large ward—an anomaly for Germany, where there are fewer than five members for every 10,000 Germans. But for Esther it has been the perfect place to learn how to live the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ and how to use those principles to serve and bless others.

When Esther was 14, she received her patriarchal blessing, which

brought about an important realization. “It became clear to me how important I really am to Heavenly Father,” she says. “I learned how important all of us are to Him.”

She takes that knowledge and applies it to her relationships with others.

In her calling on the stake young single adult council, for example, she's responsible for making sure everyone feels included. “I'm learning not to be critical of others but to get to know them instead.”

She also keeps that in mind when she's at school. “I'm asked pretty often about my religion, but I don't find that bad in any way,” she says. “Somehow it always makes me happy because then I simply remind myself how much it helps me and how much it brings to my life. Through the gospel I just know so much.

“There's always going to be people who make fun of our faith and who



Standing behind her beliefs makes sharing them easy.

don't understand it,” she says, “but it's really not so bad when we stand behind what we believe.”

Esther's love for and trust in God is what helps her the most in living and sharing the gospel.

“Before you worry,” she said, “trust God first. When I do that and I have faith, everything else is simple. When we trust God, we can move forward in our lives with faith and confidence in the future. When we do that, we can live as witnesses of God.” ■

The author lives in Germany.



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF ESTHER GRAF



MORE ABOUT ESTHER

What do Germans like to eat?

Germans like to eat potato or noodle casseroles. My favorite food is potatoes with vegetables and sauce. I especially love peas and Brussels sprouts.

What do you do for fun?

I listen to music, sing, and play the piano or guitar. I like to bake. I'm teaching myself how to make fancy cakes.

What is dating like in Germany?

We don't go on dates. It'd be strange if a guy said, "Do you want to go on a date with me?" Here you get to know people in groups, and if you like someone, you talk on the phone and online. You meet now and then, and then you either start a relationship or you don't.

THE CHURCH IN GERMANY

- 39,401 Latter-day Saints
- 15 stakes
- 89 wards
- 85 branches
- 3 missions
- 2 temples

BY THE NUMBERS

- 80,995,685 people (estimate as of July 2014)
- 6,200 museums
- Over 400 zoos, the most in one country in the world

FACTS ABOUT GERMANY

Capital: Berlin

Language: German (Deutsch)

Returning Home Early

FROM MY MISSION

By **Brittany Romanello Casco**

Receiving my mission call was one of the most profound and glorious moments of my life. I had thought about a mission many times since gaining a testimony of the gospel at age 18. I remember when I received my call to serve in the Taiwan Taichung Mission, I knew that it was right, and I was so excited to serve.

I read my scriptures daily, attended my missionary and temple preparation classes, and even attempted to learn Mandarin Chinese on my own. As the only child in my family, I knew that my mission would bring honor not only to myself but also to my parents and my Heavenly Father. The day I entered the missionary training center (MTC), I felt as if nothing could ever go wrong during the next 18 months. I was excited about everything from seeing baptisms to trying

the Taiwanese cooking I had heard so much about. Little did I know when I entered the MTC that my mission would be very different from what I had expected.

Getting Sick

About four months into my mission, I began to experience pain—not only during physical activities like riding my bike or morning exercise but also when I was sleeping or doing personal study. I began rapidly losing weight. Even drinking water made me sick. Doctors' tests could not determine what was wrong. I had no parasites or viruses. My mission president, my missionary companion, and I were all confused by my deteriorating health.

During the month that followed, I maintained faith that surprised even me. Although I felt frustrated, I was convinced that if I kept working harder, biking faster, and speaking

Little did I know when I entered the missionary training center that my mission would be very different from what I had expected.

my broken Chinese to everyone I saw, God would miraculously heal me. I believed the stories of Christ's healing the sick and raising the dead, and I believed wholeheartedly that He would do the same for me—a weak but enthusiastic missionary. Then one Sunday while my companion and I were biking to the Church



meetinghouse to meet an investigator, the pain and convulsions throughout my body became unbearable. When we arrived at the meetinghouse, I asked the elders to give me a blessing, which helped. As the days passed, priesthood blessings became more frequent and so did prayers for healing.

It was the darkest day of my mission when I awoke one morning in the fiery Taiwanese heat and realized that I could not even move my body enough to get out of bed. At that moment I knew that I would not be able to be a missionary for much longer. My mission president came to visit me, and we counseled together. We talked of all the possibilities, and after much prayer and many tears, the Spirit confirmed that I needed to return home and focus on getting well.

Returning Home Early

Instead of coming home to balloons and “Welcome Home” signs, I was wheeled off the plane to my frightened parents, who immediately took me to the hospital emergency room. Months of testing began, but the doctors could not find what was wrong with me. In addition, well-intentioned people around me said things like, “When are you going back out?” “Are you going to stay home?” “Maybe you were supposed to get married.” “Maybe you were wrong to go at all.”

I felt ashamed and confused. Was I worthy of God’s love? Why was this happening when I had served so diligently? Wasn’t I a good missionary? Was God listening to me? Would my peers accept my “flawed” missionary service?

Over the next six months, I struggled with my testimony, which I felt guilty about. I wondered if I had fallen from grace and if Heavenly Father really loved me. Though I gradually began to feel a little better, I didn’t feel

like I had before my mission. And I still found myself avoiding moving on with my life.

Then one evening my good friend and I were talking. He too had experienced the pain and sorrow of coming home early from his mission because of illness and was working toward returning to the mission field. I remember that night was the first time in six months I had felt true peace. The voice of the Spirit whispered to me, “You need to go back.” I was so relieved to finally know in which direction to move. I went to see my bishop the following day. Then I wrote a fervent letter to the Missionary Department asking if I could return to the mission field. My request was granted, and one month later I was again wearing my name tag.

Six months later, however, I began experiencing the same health

Although my body could not be 100 percent healed physically, my heart has never been more whole or ready to serve the Master.



problems over again. I remember lying in a hospital bed, delirious from hours of tests and injections. I couldn't believe this was happening. This time I knew my mission was over. With tears of disappointment and regret streaming down my face, I listened to my wise mission president say: "Sister Romanello, you loved the Lord two times as much, because you came back." I felt so much comfort from his words. This time as I boarded the plane home, I promised my Heavenly Father I would remain faithful even if I didn't receive answers.

Finding Healing in Christ's Atonement

It has now been a little more than two years since I returned home. I still have lingering problems, and my stamina and energy have not been the same since before I served my mission. The doctors have never figured out what is wrong with me. It has not been easy for me to be a returned missionary who did not get to serve the full length of my mission. Nevertheless, I still love every one of my sweet converts. It has taken time for me to feel validated and know that my shortened missionary service had value just as 18- or 24-month missions have value to other missionaries.

The Lord has given me many opportunities to talk to others who

have faced the trauma of returning home unexpectedly. I know Heavenly Father has led me to them to share my testimony and help them realize that returning home early because of health problems is not a flaw to be kept a secret but an experience to be discussed.

The first time I returned home, I experienced how it felt to neglect my faith, but the second time I returned, I experienced what it was like to stay true. I kept to the basics: studying the scriptures, attending institute, participating in church, and fulfilling my callings. I prayed many times to know why everything happened the way it did. I stopped blaming myself, and I stopped blaming Heavenly Father. As I look at my life since returning home and my visits with my Chinese brothers and sisters who live in my home city, I maintain the firm position that there has been an eternal purpose to it all.

I love the words in Mosiah 5:15: "Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him who created all things, in heaven and in earth, who is God above all."

I believe that if I continue living my life in dedication to the Lord, I will be forever blessed. In that way, I know I was healed through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, for although my body could not be 100 percent healed physically, my heart has never been more whole or ready to serve the cause of the Master. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS IF I RETURN HOME EARLY DUE TO HEALTH CONCERNS?

For those with physical, emotional, or mental health challenges, talk to your bishop or branch president for more information on the young Church-service missionary program. See Destiny Yarbro, "Catching the Vision: All Missions Bring Souls to Christ," *Ensign*, Aug. 2015, 24–27.

Service missions can be a great blessing, allowing individuals to live at home and receive appropriate medical care while growing and maturing in the service of the Lord."

Donald B. Doty, M.D., chairman, Missionary Department Health Services, "Missionary Health Preparation," *Ensign*, Mar. 2007, 67.

IN TUNE

WITH THE

Christmas Spirit

When we have a true desire to serve, the Lord will help us perform the service He requires of us.

By Kristen Danner Reber

The Sunday before Christmas, I was one of only a handful of students from Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, still in town after finals. Sunday School had ended, and as I wondered what I would do after church, two women in my young single adult ward approached me.

“Kristen, we’re going to the hospital around 2:30 this afternoon to sing Christmas carols. Would you like to come?”

Since my singing voice has never been very pleasant, I politely declined.

“We don’t care if your voice isn’t good! We just want people to come!”

I told them I would think about it.

As Relief Society started, I thought back to eight months earlier when I had been in the hospital myself. At the time I’d been a missionary in the Philippines and had been so happy when a few members of the local singles ward had visited with me for an hour. I decided to go.

“White Christmas”

That afternoon a group of us, four men and four women, drove to the hospital. The first patient was an elderly man, who asked if we could sing Irving Berlin’s “White Christmas.”

We’d only brought hymnbooks, and as we glanced at each other, it was clear that none of us knew all the words to that song. We told him that we would do our best but that we may not get past the first line. He nodded, but we could tell that it would mean a lot to him if we remembered the words. Silently I began to exercise faith and pray for help. Incredibly, after each line, one or two people would remember some words and the rest of us would join in. We managed to sing the entire song, word for word, and the elderly man was very touched—the first of the tender mercies we experienced that day.

“O Holy Night”

A few patients later, a middle-aged woman, frustrated with her illness, tearfully requested “O Holy Night.” We all sincerely wanted to help her feel better, but once again we glanced at each other in hesitation about the words. I felt confident that I knew at least most of them, but I wasn’t



HEARTS TO INSPIRE

“Let us have ready hands, clean hands, and willing hands, that we may participate in providing what our Heavenly Father would have others receive from Him. . . .

“ . . . There are feet to steady, hands to grasp, minds to encourage, hearts to inspire, and souls to save. The blessings of eternity await you.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “Willing and Worthy to Serve,” *Ensign*, May 2012, 67, 69.



confident about leading everyone with my voice. However, I wanted to help the woman, and so after a few moments of silence, I swallowed my fear and said, “I think I know the words.”

Everyone looked at me. I pushed fear away again and began to sing. Amazingly, I started on the correct note in the correct key! This hardly ever happened to me. Everyone else picked up on the note and began to sing as well. I prayed silently again for help to remember the words, and once again we were able to sing the song in full. The woman was in joyful tears by the end of our performance.

Sharing the Spirit of Christmas

At the beginning of our hospital visit, I had noticed that there were really only two gifted singers in our group. The rest of us did the best we could, and while we sounded decent, we were nothing spectacular. However, with each patient that we visited, the Spirit seemed to increase, and so did the quality of our voices. By the end of the hour, I was even harmonizing with the other women. The men sounded excellent too.

I’m not sure why this small miracle occurred. Perhaps because we only desired the talent to make others happy, it was granted to us for a

short time (see 1 Corinthians 14:1). I wasn’t the only one who noticed—another woman in our group commented on the way out, “I’m not a very good singer, but I always find that my voice improves when I do service like this.”

Through this experience I was reminded of the true meaning of Christmas—Jesus Christ—and how important it is that we do His work for Him while on the earth. How grateful I am that I accepted the invitation to visit the hospital and that I was able to feel a portion of His love for each of the people to whom we sang. ■

The author lives in Washington, USA.





By President Boyd K. Packer (1924–2015)

President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

A Witness of the Savior

JESUS CHRIST

During his 54 years as a General Authority and his 45 years as an Apostle, a special witness “of the name of Christ in all the world” (D&C 107:23), President Packer humbly bore testimony. Shortly before his death on July 3, 2015, President Packer requested that the following excerpts from his ministry be shared in the Ensign. In the spirit of the Christmas season, they highlight his witness of and love for the Savior Jesus Christ.

I Love the Lord

“I love Christmas. There is a spirit at Christmastime. It descends upon the world—not just to members of the Church but across the world—a testimony and a witness that Jesus is the Christ. . . . As a servant of the Lord, as one of the Twelve, I know that Jesus is the Christ. . . .

“I love the Lord. I love His work. I love The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and bear witness of Him who is our Master and our Friend.”¹

Of Him I Am a Witness

“There are some things just too sacred to discuss. . . .

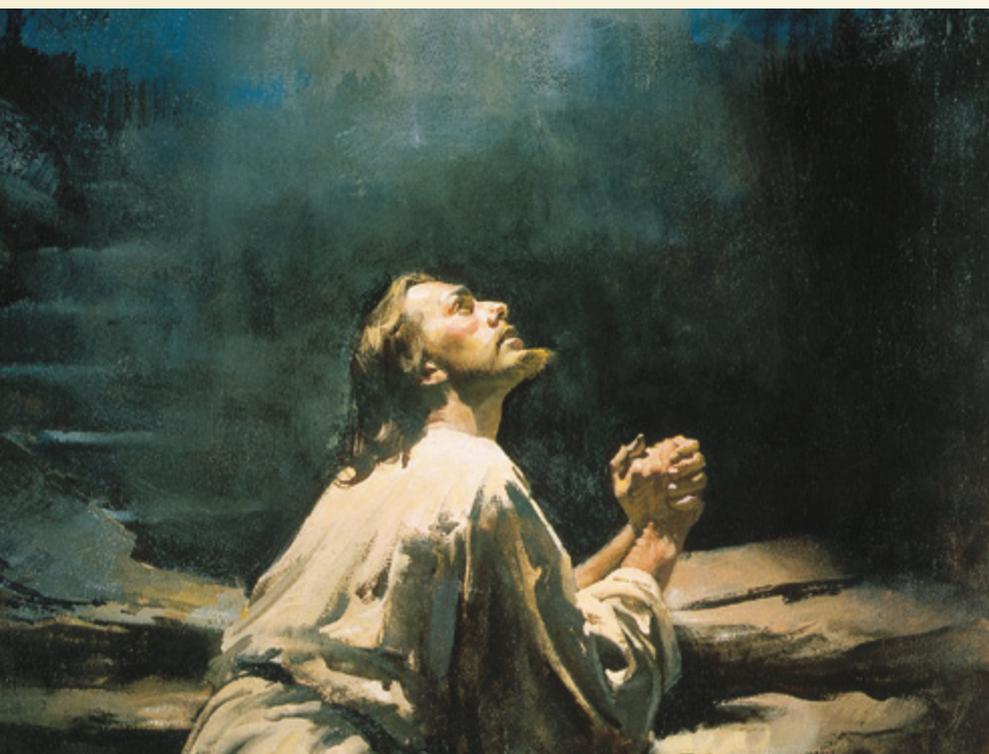
“It is not that they are secret, but they are sacred; not to be discussed, but to be

harbored and to be protected and regarded with the deepest of reverence.

“I have come to know what the prophet Alma meant:

“‘. . . It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him.

“‘And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full’ (Alma 12:9–10). . . .



“Now, I wonder with you why one such as I should be called to the holy apostleship. There are so many qualifications that I lack. There is so much in my effort to serve that is wanting. As I have pondered on it, I have come to only one single thing, one qualification in which there may be cause, and that is, I have *that* witness.

“I declare to you that I know that Jesus is the Christ. I know that He lives. He was born in the meridian of time. He taught His gospel, was tried, was crucified. He rose on the third day. He was the first fruits of the resurrection. He has a body of flesh and bone. Of this I bear testimony. Of Him I am a witness.”²

He Accepted the Penalty

“Before the Crucifixion and afterward, many men have willingly given their lives in selfless acts of heroism. But none faced what Christ endured. Upon Him was the burden of all human transgression, all human guilt. And hanging in the balance was the Atonement. Through His willing act, mercy and justice could be reconciled, eternal law sustained, and that mediation achieved without which mortal man could not be redeemed.

“He by choice accepted the penalty in behalf of all mankind for the sum total of all wickedness and depravity; for brutality, immorality, perversion, and corruption; for

addiction; for the killings and torture and terror—for all of it that ever had been or all that ever would be enacted upon this earth. In so choosing He faced the awesome power of the evil one, who was not confined to flesh nor subject to mortal pain. That was Gethsemane!

“How the Atonement was wrought we do not know. No mortal watched as evil turned away and hid in shame before the Light of that pure being. All wickedness could not quench that Light. When what was done was done, the ransom had been paid. Both death

and hell forsook their claim on all who would repent. Men at last were free. Then every soul who ever lived could choose to touch that Light and be redeemed.

“By this infinite sacrifice, ‘through [this] Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel’ (Articles of Faith 1:3).”³

The Master Teacher

“In the course of my efforts to teach His gospel, I have come to know Him, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only Begotten of the Father. I stand in reverence before Him with deep regard for what He taught, and with deep regard for how He taught. It is not untoward for any of us to aspire to teach as He taught. It is not untoward for any of us to aspire to be like Him. He was not just a teacher; He was the master teacher.”⁴

The Truth Most Worth Knowing

“As mortals, we may not, indeed cannot, understand fully *how* the Savior fulfilled His atoning sacrifice. But for now the *how* is not as important as the *why* of His suffering. Why did He do it for you, for me, for all of humanity? He did it for the love of God the Father and all mankind. ‘Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends’ (John 15:13).

“In Gethsemane, Christ went apart from His Apostles to pray. Whatever transpired is beyond our power to know! But we do know that He completed the Atonement. He was willing to take upon Himself the mistakes, the sins and guilt, the doubts and fears of all the world. He suffered for us so that we would not have to suffer. Many mortals have suffered torment and died a painful, terrible death. But His agony surpassed them all. . . .

“His suffering was different than all other suffering before or since because He took upon Himself all of the penalties that [could ever be] imposed on the human family. Imagine that! He had no debt to pay. He had committed no wrong.

There has been only One in all the annals of human history who was entirely sinless, qualified to answer for the sins and transgressions of all mankind and survive the pain that accompanied paying for them.

Nevertheless, an accumulation of all of the guilt, the grief and sorrow, the pain and humiliation, all of the mental, emotional, and physical torments known to man—He experienced them all. There has been only One in all the annals of human history who was entirely sinless, qualified to answer for the sins and transgressions of all mankind and survive the pain that accompanied paying for them.

“He presented His life and in essence said, ‘It is I that taketh upon me the sins of the world’ (Mosiah 26:23). He was crucified; He died. They could not take His life from Him. He consented to die. . . .

“If you have stumbled or even been lost for a time, if you feel that the adversary now holds you captive, you can move forward with faith and not wander to and fro in the world any longer. There are those who stand ready to

guide you back to peace and security. Even the grace of God, as promised in the scriptures, comes ‘after all we can do’ (2 Nephi 25:23). The possibility of this, to me, is the truth most worth knowing.

“I promise that the brilliant morning of forgiveness can come. Then ‘the peace of God, which passeth all understanding’ (Philippians 4:7) comes into your life once again, something like a sunrise, and you and He ‘will remember [your] sin no more’ (Jeremiah 31:34). How will you know? You will know! (See Mosiah 4:1–3.)”⁵

My Witness

“After all the years that I have lived and taught and served, after the millions of miles I have traveled around the world, with all that I have experienced, there is one great truth that I would share. That is my witness of the Savior Jesus Christ.

“Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon recorded the following after a sacred experience:

“‘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’ (D&C 76:22–23).

“Their words are my words.”⁶

“How privileged I have been throughout my life to be able to bear my special witness that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. I testify in all humility, but with absolute certainty, that He is the Only Begotten of the Father. This is His Church; He presides over it and directs this work. He is our Redeemer. I know He lives, and I know Him. Of this I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.”⁷ ■

NOTES

1. “Our Witness of the Lord,” General Authority training, Dec. 5, 1974.
2. “The Spirit Beareth Record,” *Ensign*, June 1971, 87, 88.
3. “Who Is Jesus Christ?” *Ensign*, Mar. 2008, 15.
4. *Mine Errand from the Lord: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Boyd K. Packer* (2008), 337.
5. “The Savior’s Selfless and Sacred Sacrifice,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2015, 39–40; see also “Truths Most Worth Knowing,” Church Educational System Devotional, Nov. 6, 2011.
6. “The Witness,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 97.
7. President Packer wrote this concluding testimony prior to his passing.



By Elder D. Todd Christofferson

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

BE AT PEACE

I hope you will take time this Christmas season to sit for a few quiet moments and let the Savior's Spirit warm you and reassure you of the worthiness of your service, your offering, and your life.

It's always encouraging for me to contemplate the offering of service and sacrifice that Latter-day Saints make to their families, their wards, and their Heavenly Father. It's a consecrated, sacred thing. I don't believe there's a higher honor that can come to us than that the Lord would consider our offering as worthy and appropriate and that He would respect and receive it.

That is the great commendation of the Father to the Son when He refers to Him as "my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (3 Nephi 11:7; see also Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 9:35; D&C 93:15; Joseph Smith—History 1:17). What a beautiful title. What greater honor could there be than that God would say to you, "My beloved son" or "My beloved daughter," and that you would receive His commendation that your offering is acceptable to Him, "in whom I am well pleased."

I pray at this Christmas season that you might have some sense of the Lord's regard for your offering, some sense of how you stand in His eyes, some sense of the beloved status you occupy as His son or His daughter. And I pray that knowledge of that status may give you a great deal of comfort, reassurance, and confidence that you are approved in His eyes.





THE SAVIOR'S GIFT OF PEACE

"He who was burdened with sorrow and acquainted with grief 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' [John 14:27]."

President Thomas S. Monson, "Treasured Gifts," *Ensign*, Dec. 2006, 7.

The Savior's Birth

When we talk about the birth of Jesus Christ, we appropriately reflect on what was to follow. His birth was infinitely significant because of the things He would experience and suffer so that He might better succor us—all culminating in His Crucifixion and Resurrection (see Alma 7:11–12). But His mission also included the beauty of His service, the miracles of His ministry, the relief He brought to the suffering, and the joy He offered—and still offers—to the mourning.

I also like to think of what comes later. Two of my favorite verses speaking of that time are found at the end of chapter 7 in the book of Revelation:

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

"For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Revelation 7:16–17; see also 21:4).

That captures for me the holy hope of what is coming, of what it will be like during the great Millennium and the celestial reign of Christ that follows.

With all of that to come, though, I think it's appropriate this time of year to just think about that baby in the manger. Don't be too overwhelmed or occupied with what is to come; just think about that little baby. Take a quiet, peaceful moment to ponder the beginning of His life—the culmination of heavenly prophecy but the earthly beginning for Him.

Take time to relax, be at peace, and see this little child in your mind. Do not be too concerned or overwhelmed with what is coming in His life or in yours. Instead, take a peaceful moment to contemplate perhaps the most serene moment in the history of the world—when all of heaven rejoiced with the message "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14).

Let the Spirit Warm You

Some years ago I heard a radio interview featuring Bishop Desmond Tutu, the



Anglican archbishop in South Africa. He had just published a book with his daughter about the reconciliation that had taken place in South Africa following apartheid.¹ Basically, the book's message is that there is good in all people.

During the interview the host asked a perceptive, inspired question of Bishop Tutu: "Have you found that your relationship to God has changed as you've grown older?"

Bishop Tutu paused and then said, "Yes. I am learning to shut up more in the presence of God."

DETAIL FROM: CHRIST HEALING THE BLIND, BY DOMENICO FASELLA, COURTESY OF THE JOHN AND MABLE RINGLING MUSEUM OF ART; RIGHT: THE HOLY NIGHT, BY CARL HEINRICH BLOCH



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Take a peaceful moment to contemplate perhaps the most serene moment in the history of the world—when all of heaven rejoiced with the message “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

He recalled that when he prayed in his earlier years, he did so with a list of requests and solicitudes. He would approach heaven with what he called “a kind of shopping list.” But now, he said, “I think [I am] trying to grow in just being there. Like when you sit in front of a fire in winter, you are just there in front of the fire, and you don’t have to be smart or anything. The fire warms you.”²

I think that is a lovely metaphor—just sit with the Lord and let Him warm you like a fire in winter. You don’t have to be perfect or the greatest person who ever graced the earth or the best of anything to be with Him.

I hope you will take time this Christmas season to sit for a few quiet moments and let the Savior’s Spirit warm you and reassure you of the worthiness of your service, of

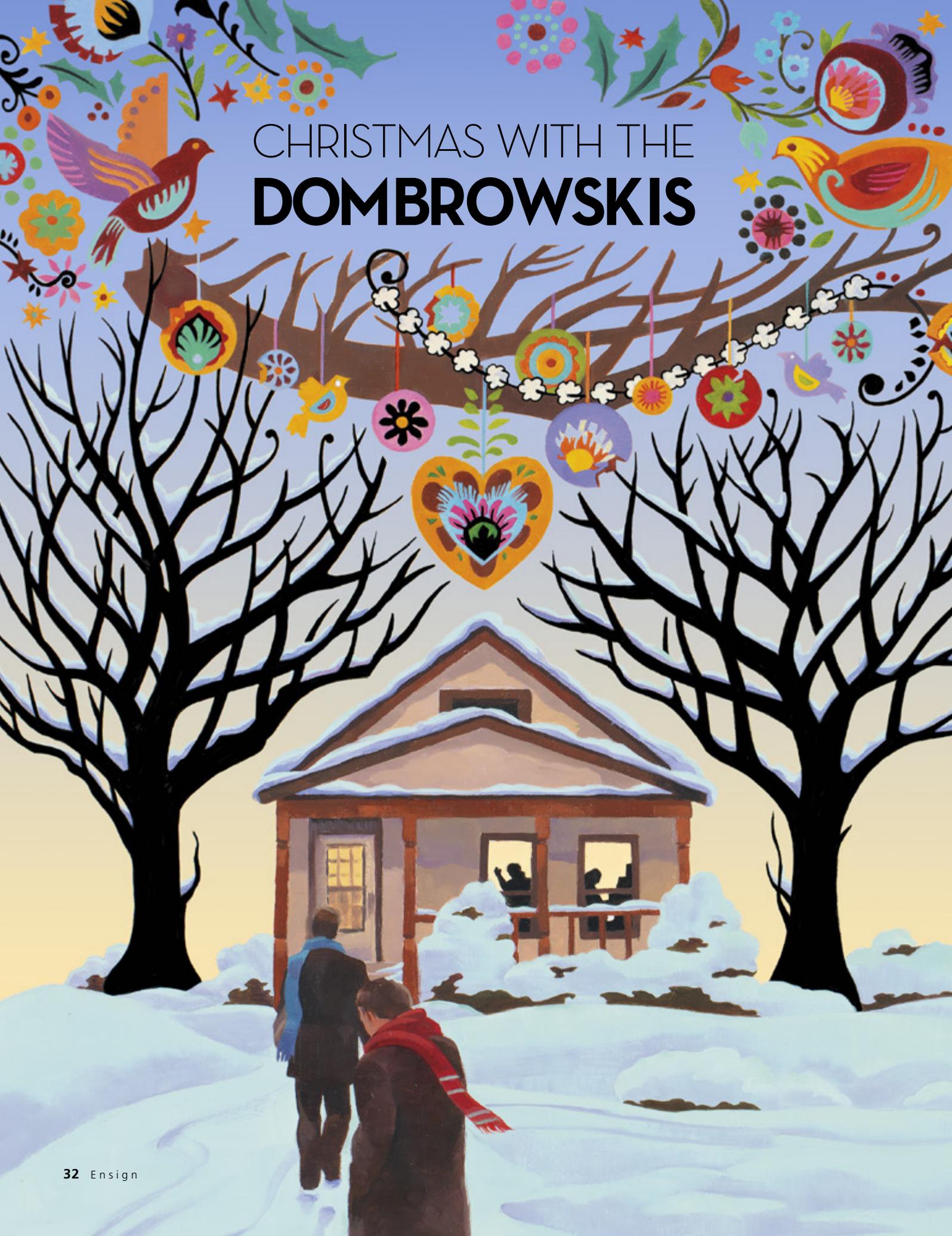
your offering, of your life. Sit quietly with that little baby and come away spiritually strengthened and better prepared for all that is going to come later. Let that moment be one of rest and refreshing and reassurance and renewal.

God grant you that blessing this Christmas as you, with me, bear witness of the Savior Jesus Christ—His centrality to our lives, to all human life, and to the very purpose of existence.

We worship Him, we serve Him, and we love Him. May your life reflect that love through your offering this Christmas season and always. ■

NOTES

1. Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu, *Made for Goodness: And Why This Makes All the Difference* (2011).
2. Desmond Tutu, in “Desmond Tutu, Insisting We Are ‘Made for Goodness’” (NPR interview by Renee Montagne, Mar. 11, 2010), npr.org.



CHRISTMAS WITH THE
DOMBROWSKIS



I wasn't prepared for the lesson a poor widow would teach me.

By Mark T. Anderson

Christmas 1981 was my first Christmas away from home. Six months earlier I'd left Utah to serve a mission in Detroit, Michigan, USA, and by Christmastime I was living in a city called Farmington Hills. At that time Farmington Hills had great economic diversity. While many were quite well off, others lived in extremely meager conditions. My companion and I were a bit downhearted, as it was the first Christmas away from home for both of us. It was a particularly cold winter, and my only hope was that my parents would send me a warmer coat. All I could think about was what my family would be doing to prepare for Christmas.

Invitation to Dinner

As Christmas Day approached, a prominent family in the ward called to invite us to their home for a turkey dinner on Christmas Eve. Suddenly my feelings of loneliness turned to excitement. This was a family much like mine. What a wonderful invitation! I hung up the phone, excited to share the good news with my companion. As I began to explain to him what had just happened, he told me that while I was in another room earlier that day, he had received a phone call from another member of our ward, Sister Dombrowski. She had also invited us to her home for Christmas Eve dinner.

We were faced with a difficult decision (or so it seemed at the time). I felt that we should call Sister Dombrowski, apologize, and kindly tell her that we would not be able to accept her invitation. The family I had talked with was well off. They would treat us well. On the other hand, Sister

Dombrowski was a poor widow living in a rough part of town. She cared for her mentally challenged adult child in very humble circumstances.

My companion said he felt that he just couldn't call Sister Dombrowski back and cancel; she was so excited for us to spend Christmas Eve with her. After a long discussion, we decided that we would arrive early to the Dombrowski home, eat quickly, and then slip away to enjoy a delicious dinner with the other family.

A Humble Home

Christmas Eve came quickly. Instead of arriving early at Sister Dombrowski's home, we got there almost half an hour late. We knew we didn't have much time and reluctantly rang the doorbell. In an instant she was at the door.

We had never really been in her home, which was filled with old, broken-down furniture. In the corner was a branch that had apparently broken off a large tree after a recent ice storm. It was decorated with a strand of popcorn, and silver ice had been carefully placed on each of its dull brown twigs. A few broken ornaments adorned the tree's front.

We apologized for our tardiness, and Sister Dombrowski shrugged it off. She told us she had prayed that nothing had happened to us, and then she ushered us into the kitchen, where she sat us down. The aroma of dinner—a Spam casserole—was unfamiliar to me. After offering a beautiful prayer, Sister Dombrowski served my companion and me an ample portion of her culinary delight. I almost felt like crying. We were giving up our Christmas Eve for this!



*Each Christmas, as I reflect on the humble setting of Christ's birth,
I remember the sacrifice and humility of Sister Dombrowski.*

After dinner, we sat on folding chairs in the living room while Sister Dombrowski and her daughter sang us Christmas carols, accompanied by an old, out-of-tune player piano. As they sang, my thoughts turned to my family and how they were participating in a similar activity. I would have given anything to be home at that moment.

A Plea for Us to Stay

After only a few minutes, I expressed to Sister Dombrowski that we would soon need to be leaving, for another family had invited us to their home as well. I still remember the look on her face. She asked if we could stay for just a few more minutes. We reluctantly said yes. She then rushed out of the room and was gone for what seemed to be a silent eternity.

A few moments later, we heard the doorbell ring. Sister Dombrowski did not come out to answer it. I looked at her daughter, who simply sat on the piano bench and grinned. My companion got up to answer the door. As he did so, the sound of Santa's "Ho, ho, ho!" permeated the air. Into the house walked a five-foot-tall elderly Santa Claus who looked and sounded much like Sister Dombrowski. Seeing her in costume with a pillowcase slung over her shoulder gave me a chuckle, but I was still anxious to leave.

Santa had us both sit down, opened her sack, and handed each of us a small bag with about ten tiny wrapped gifts inside. We began to open them up one by one—a small black comb, a can of creamed corn, a bar of soap.

I was not prepared for what I saw next. As I peered up to see Santa standing above us, I saw tears streaming down her cheeks. Only at that time did I realize the sacrifice Sister Dombrowski had made to make our first Christmas away from those we loved dearly a wonderful one. As we finished opening those small but meaningful gifts, we asked if we might stay and sing a few more carols with the two of them.

We never did make it to the other home that Christmas Eve. We stayed at the Dombrowskis' as long as we could before we had to return to our own apartment. I remember quickly going to bed, only to place my face deep in my pillow and weep. My tears were not tears of loneliness—they were tears of gratitude as I contemplated the love that accompanied the wonderful gifts we had just received. I had been so selfish. I had almost ruined a precious experience not only for myself but also for someone who had much less than I.

All these years later, each Christmas brings with it memories of and appreciation for Sister Dombrowski's expression of love and sacrifice. As I have reflected upon this experience, I have often recalled the story of another Christmas Eve, in even more meager surroundings, over 2,000 years ago. While I cannot compare the two events, I know that similar sacrifice and humility were present at both. Though Sister Dombrowski has long since passed away and was likely never aware of the life lessons she passed on to me, I will never forget her or that magical Michigan evening. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

By Ed Bruderer

In July 1997 a serious automobile accident completely crushed my pelvis and midsection and left me blind. I spent five long months on my back in the hospital, able to move only my head and my right arm. Only through priesthood blessings, fasting, and prayers was my life spared.

The hospital discharged me in December, though I was bedridden for months. On Christmas Eve, the doorbell rang. It was 15-year-old Spencer and his mom. Spencer and I had been acquainted since he was a Cub Scout. As I helped out with the den, I soon realized that Spencer, who had Down syndrome, often needed one-on-one attention. We had a lot of fun and became good buddies.

My wife led Spencer and his mom into the room where I was lying. He came to my bedside, bent down, and embraced me. He began to tear up but kept himself in check. I wasn't as strong as Spencer—I couldn't hold back my tears. He kissed me on the cheek.

On each subsequent Christmas Eve the doorbell would ring, and it was always Spencer there to give me my Christmas hug. Spencer's hugs were pure, sincere, and honest.

There was nothing superficial about them. As Spencer hugged me, I felt his Christlike love and imagined what it would be like to get a hug from the Savior.

One Christmas Eve, Spencer's mom told us that Spencer had been to Primary Children's Hospital in Salt Lake City—Spencer needed a new heart and lung. The doctors were concerned that his body would reject the organs or that he wouldn't make it through the surgery. They predicted that without the surgeries, he would live anywhere from

three to eight more years. The family decided to decline the surgery. About three years later, in the arms of his stepdad, 19-year-old Spencer quietly slipped from mortality.

A few months after Spencer passed away, Christmas Eve came and our doorbell rang. It was Spencer's parents and sweet little sisters, there to give me Christmas hugs. Each Christmas since, they have come.

One day it will be my time to go through the veil. I hope that when that time comes, Spencer will be one of those waiting for me with arms outstretched, ready to give me a hug full of Christlike love. ■

The author lives in Idaho, USA.

A CHRISTMAS HUG



Safe in a Stable

Words by Penelope Moody Allen
Music by Michael F. Moody

Litlingly ♩. = 42-48

C B^b C B^b A^b B^b C

p *R.H.*

p

1. Safe in a sta-ble, a don - key a-wakes, Stirred by com - mo - tion and light. _____ The
2. Safe in a sta-ble, a lit - tle red cow Tells her con - cerns in soft lows. _____ Her
3. Safe in a sta-ble, a - larmed moth-er hens Gath - er their young 'neath their wing, _____ As

C B^b C B^b C B^b C

mf

goat lifts her head at a ba-by's first cry As Je - sus is born on this night. _____
man - ger re - ceives on its sweet, fra-grant hay The Sav - ior, whom hea-ven be - stows. _____ Now
an - gel-sent shep-herds kneel down in the straw To wor-ship the child as their King! _____

C B^b C B^b A^b B^b E^b G G⁷

mf



poco rit. *mp*

safe - ly en - fold - ed, Christ's sheep sweet-ly rest, Beck-oned by His ho - ly call. A

poco rit. *mp*

p 1, 2. *a tempo*

sta - ble once shel-tered the dear Lamb of God, Who is now the Good Shep-herd of all.

p *a tempo*

3. *molto rit.*

now the Good Shep-herd of

molto rit.

pp

all, of all, the Shep - herd of all.

pp

“I MADE A COMMITMENT TO GOD”

By Néstor Curbelo

Church History Adviser, South America South Area

Virgilio Simarrón Salazar was a leader in his native Chachi community of northern Ecuador. To this day, the Chachi maintain their distinct way of life and their own system of justice with a communal council, governors, and judges. These leadership roles are typically positions of honor that families hold for generations and that are built on a deep foundation of community respect and esteem. Respect for the position was a trust to be cared for and passed on to the next generation.

But Virgilio Simarrón's plans for his life changed in 1996, when his son, Wilson, returned from studies in Quinindé with copies of the Book of Mormon and a firm testimony of his new religion. Filled with the faith and enthusiasm of one who has found the truth, Wilson shared the message of the gospel with his family, and they were soon baptized in the waters of the Canandé River.

As the Simarróns shared the gospel with Chachi friends and neighbors, however, a serious conflict developed. Some Chachis felt that Virgilio Simarrón's beliefs made him a heretic and even considered violence

The Church was established in Guayacana, Ecuador, thanks in large part to Virgilio Simarrón, who made a difficult decision in order to stay true to his testimony.

against him. Others felt that, as a governor, he should not participate in a new faith that might divide the people. With this concern, they took him to be tried by the communal council. It would be one of the most difficult experiences of Virgilio's life.



Following the missionary work of the Simarrón family, 60 people were baptized in the Canandé River in May 1999.

Wilson relates what happened: “The council, in full assembly, told my father, ‘You will remain as our governor if you renounce the Church of Jesus Christ; you must retract.’ My father said, ‘I made a commitment to God, and when a man makes a commitment to God, it is not retractable. I cannot give up the Church. If you think I’m a governor who has divided the Chachi people, then oh my people, choose you this day another one in my place.’ Then I saw the scene of my father crying. The council was in total silence for more than five minutes—nobody said anything. Then someone said, ‘Then Governor, leave.’ Slowly my father stood, so my mom, my sister, and I went down and left the council.”

After Brother Simarrón was removed from his office, difficult days followed for the family. Feeling contempt from many who had once respected them, the family turned to the faith they had embraced and preached the gospel with great fervor. Their stake president, Omar Intriago Cesar, explains: “They began to preach the gospel from house to house to each family of this community. The Guayacana Branch started with Virgilio Simarrón and his son, Wilson. The Church was established because of his faith, his strength, and his testimony.”

In just a few years, the efforts of the Simarrón family bore great fruit. May 30, 1999, became a day of celebration in Guayacana when a large baptismal service was held.

President Intriago recalls, “We arrived with Roberto Garcia, the mission president, and both participated in that glorious day, where on the beaches of the Canandé River, two missionaries baptized 60 people. Then, President Garcia on one side and I on another confirmed as members of the Church all who were baptized. It was a privilege that will never be erased from my life.”

Although Virgilio gave up his governorship to stay true to his testimony, he was able to pass on another legacy to the next generation: that of serving the people by establishing the gospel among them. He lived to see Wilson serve a full-time mission and then return to Guayacana to marry his wife, Ruth, and have children. Some years later, Virgilio died faithful in the Church. His wife, Maria Juana Apa, has lived to witness their son’s calling, in 2014, to serve as branch president in Guayacana.

Wilson is very aware of the heritage his father always wanted to give him. “My ancestors have always been governors, heads of soldiers, strong warriors,” he says. “I feel that all these ancestral roots still manifest in me. But now that I am a member of the Church, all that strength has helped me become a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” ■



Above: A new generation of leaders, Ruth and Wilson Simarrón of the Guayacana Branch (with branch members shown at left).



As part of His plan,
the Father established
the new and everlasting covenant
to enable His sons and daughters
to return to His presence
and inherit eternal life.

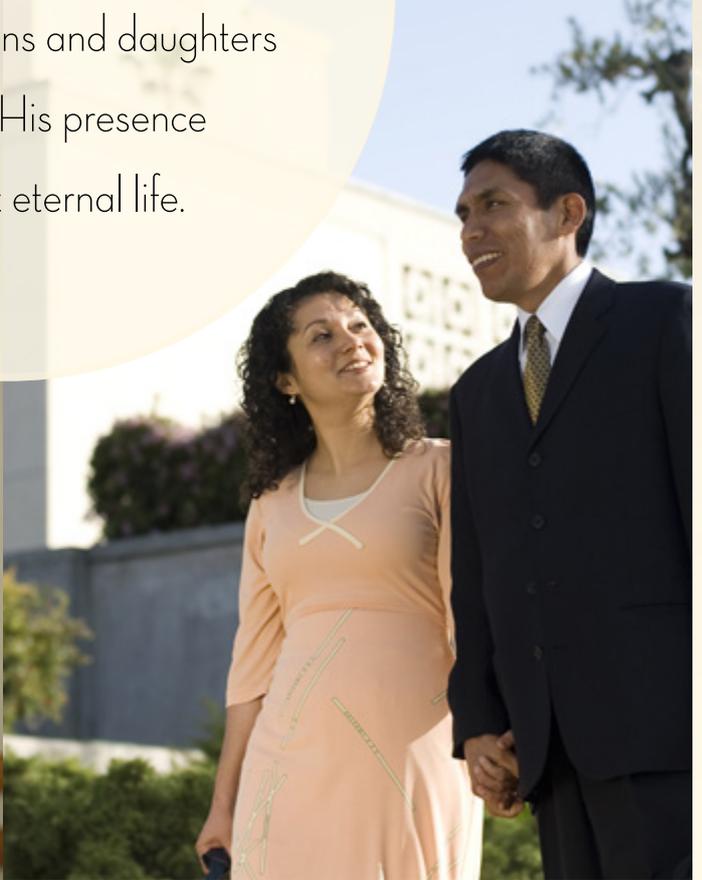


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION OF CONFIRMATION BY SARAH CARABINE JENSON; PHOTOGRAPH OF COUPLE IN FRONT OF LOS ANGELES CALIFORNIA TEMPLE BY JERRY GARNIS; BACKGROUND IMAGES FROM ISTOCK/THINKSTOCK



By Elder
Marcus B. Nash
Of the Seventy

The NEW AND EVERLASTING Covenant

As we understand and live according to the new and everlasting covenant, we will inherit eternal life.

The Purpose of Life

Each human being is a beloved son or daughter of heavenly parents.¹ Heavenly Father's plan of salvation provides to each the opportunity to receive eternal life, which is the life God leads.² There is no greater gift.³ Knowledge of the plan of salvation explains the purpose of life and, if we so choose, will inform our decision-making from an eternal perspective.

The plan and its relevance to mortality were explained powerfully in an October 2015 *Ensign* article on the subject by Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.⁴ As part of His plan, the Father established the new and everlasting covenant to enable His sons and daughters to return to His presence and inherit eternal life.

In His preface to the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord said: "Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, . . .

"That mine everlasting covenant might be established."⁵



This covenant, often referred to by the Lord as the “new and everlasting covenant,” encompasses the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, including all ordinances and covenants necessary for the salvation of mankind.⁶ Although establishing the Lord’s new and everlasting covenant on the earth is a primary purpose of the Restoration, some Latter-day Saints do not understand the covenant’s significance and the promise of good things to come for those who abide within it. The purpose of this article is to help each of us better understand and live according to the new and everlasting covenant so that we may inherit eternal life. It will also explain how one of the most important ordinances and covenants of the gospel—eternal marriage—fits within the new and everlasting covenant of the gospel.

The Meaning and Purpose of the New and Everlasting Covenant

A covenant in the gospel sense is a pact, a contract, or an agreement between God and a

The new and everlasting covenant “is the sum total of all gospel covenants and obligations.”

person (or persons) who receives priesthood ordinances performed by one with priesthood authority and who agrees to abide by the terms and conditions of the associated covenant. These terms and conditions are established by God.⁷

The new and everlasting covenant “is the sum total of all gospel covenants and obligations”⁸ given anciently⁹ and again restored to the earth in these latter days. This is explained in Doctrine and Covenants 66:2: “Verily I say unto you, blessed are you for receiving *mine everlasting covenant, even the fulness of my gospel*, sent forth unto the children of men, that they might have life and be made partakers of the glories which are to be revealed in the last days, as it was written by the prophets and apostles in days of old.”¹⁰ Because the covenant has been restored in the last dispensation of time, it is “new,” and because it spans all eternity,¹¹ it is “everlasting.”

In the scriptures the Lord speaks of both “the” new and everlasting covenant and “a”

new and everlasting covenant. For example, in Doctrine and Covenants 22:1, He refers to baptism as “a new and an everlasting covenant, even that which was from the beginning.” In Doctrine and Covenants 132:4, He likewise refers to eternal marriage as “a new and an everlasting covenant.” When He speaks of “a” new and everlasting covenant, He is speaking of one of the many covenants encompassed by His gospel.

When the Lord speaks generally of “the” new and everlasting covenant, He is speaking of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which embraces all ordinances and covenants necessary for the salvation and exaltation of mankind. Neither baptism nor eternal marriage is “the” new and everlasting covenant; rather, they are each parts of the whole.

Those Who Endure to the End in the New and Everlasting Covenant Receive Eternal Life

Great and eternal blessings are promised to those who receive gospel ordinances performed by proper priesthood authority and sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise,¹² and who then keep the sacred covenants associated with the ordinances. These blessings include forgiveness of sins,¹³ the power of godliness,¹⁴ and the companionship of the Holy Ghost,¹⁵ together with the guidance, inspiration, comfort, peace, hope, and sanctification that attend that gift.¹⁶

The greatest of all the blessings and gifts of God is eternal life—which is the life God lives!¹⁷ This gift is given only to those who receive all gospel ordinances and abide by the covenants encompassed within the new and everlasting covenant.¹⁸ In the Lord’s words: “The new and everlasting covenant . . . was instituted for the fulness of my glory.”¹⁹ Indeed, those who enter into the new and everlasting covenant and endure to the end “shall come forth in the first resurrection . . . and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths.”²⁰

The Lord emphatically declares that “it shall be done unto them in all things whatsoever my servant hath put upon them, in time, and through all eternity; and shall be of full force when they are out of the world; and they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever. Then shall they be gods.”²¹

In summary, those who enter into the new and everlasting covenant and endure faithfully to the end

will (1) receive the fulness of the glory of God, (2) enjoy the power of godliness in time and eternity,²² (3) be exalted, (4) enjoy eternal marriage and increase, and (5) become gods. Taken together, these blessings culminate in the gift of eternal life.

We Must Obey Each Covenant within the New and Everlasting Covenant

The Lord unequivocally declared that we receive these supernal blessings only as we obey His laws as set forth in the new and everlasting covenant: “The new and everlasting covenant . . . was instituted for the fulness of my glory; and he that receiveth a fulness thereof must and shall abide the law, or he shall be damned, saith the Lord God.”²³ He also declared, “For all who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world.”²⁴ In the same section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord echoed this point: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye abide my law ye cannot attain to this glory.”²⁵

The straightforward requirement that we must obey the laws of God in order to receive the glory He offers the faithful applies to all the ordinances and covenants within the new and everlasting covenant. For example, if I do not

Great and eternal blessings are promised to those who receive gospel ordinances and keep the associated covenants.

receive the ordinance and keep the covenant of baptism, I will be damned, meaning that I cannot progress—I cannot inherit the fulness of His glory. Likewise if I do not receive the ordinances of the temple and keep the associated covenants or, indeed, if I refuse to receive any of the ordinances of the gospel or if I refuse to abide by any of the associated covenants, I cannot be exalted. Instead, I will be damned, meaning that my progress will be stopped. In short, I must receive every ordinance of the gospel and abide by every associated covenant if eternal life is my desire.

The terms of the covenants we as Latter-day Saints agree to live can be grouped into four categories: (1) to take upon us the name of the Savior, to remember Him always, and to follow His example; (2) to keep all His commandments; (3) to willingly serve God’s children as part of His work of salvation, even at personal sacrifice; and (4) to consecrate ourselves and our means to the Lord’s work.

According to God’s law, the gospel (and the glories it offers) is received through specified ordinances administered by the authority of the priesthood. It is through the priesthood ordinances that the power of godliness is manifest in our lives—but only to the extent that we keep the associated covenants. The covenant activates, or gives life to, the ordinance, just as an engine activates a car and enables it to transport its occupants from one place to another. In short, to the degree we thoughtfully and faithfully keep the covenants associated with the ordinances we receive, we will grow in our knowledge of God and experience the “power of godliness”²⁶ by the grace of God through the Atonement of Christ.²⁷

The Place of Marriage in the New and Everlasting Covenant

In Doctrine and Covenants 132:4, the Lord stated that He was going to reveal “a” new and everlasting covenant and

added, “If ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned; for no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory.” These words refer to the covenant of eternal marriage²⁸ performed by proper priesthood authority,²⁹ which is a central and essential part of “the” new and everlasting covenant (the fulness of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ).³⁰ The Lord emphasized the great importance of the covenant of eternal marriage by telling us that those who reject this covenant will not receive eternal life.³¹

Some people, including some Church members, inaccurately read Doctrine and Covenants 132:4 to mean that plural marriage is necessary for exaltation, leading them to believe that plural marriage is a necessary prerequisite for exaltation in the eternal realm. This, however, is not supported in the revelations. As recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 131 and 132, the Lord introduced the law of eternal marriage by expressly referring to the sealing of one man and one woman (see Doctrine and Covenants 132:4–7, 15–25).

By setting forth the law of eternal marriage in the context of a monogamous marriage, the Lord makes plain that the blessings of exaltation, extended to each man and each woman who worthily enters into the covenant of eternal marriage performed by proper priesthood authority, are independent of whether that marriage is plural or monogamous.³²

Doctrine and Covenants 132:19 makes it clear that eternal life is promised to a monogamous couple who are sealed by the authority of the priesthood and who abide in the covenant—with no additional condition or requirement. Any man and woman who are sealed in this way and who abide within the covenant will be exalted.³³ Historical practice is consistent with the doctrine of eternal marriage as explained here.³⁴ The ordinance that seals couples for eternity includes identical covenants and blessings for monogamous marriages and for the authorized plural marriages performed

It is through the
priesthood ordinances
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in the past. These same covenants and blessings will be made available after this life to the faithful who did not have the opportunity to be sealed in mortality.³⁵

After revealing the law and covenant of eternal marriage between one man and one woman, the Lord taught Joseph Smith that a man can in righteousness marry more than one wife within the covenant of eternal marriage when authorized or commanded by the Lord through His duly ordained prophet (who holds the relevant priesthood keys).³⁶ The authorization and command to practice plural marriage, given by the Lord to Abraham and other prophets of antiquity,³⁷ was likewise given to the Prophet Joseph Smith: “I gave unto thee, my servant Joseph, an appointment, and restore all things.”³⁸

Years later, the Lord rescinded His authorization and command for Church members to enter the practice of plural marriage (in other words, be sealed to more than one living spouse) when President Wilford Woodruff

“Celestial marriage is essential to a fulness of glory in the world to come.”

(1807–98) issued the Manifesto of 1890.³⁹ This led to the end of the practice of plural marriage, meaning no member of the Church could be married or sealed to more than one living spouse. Notably, the Manifesto does not preclude any worthy man who has been sealed to a wife now deceased from being sealed to another, living spouse. The foregoing is consistent with the revealed doctrine that monogamy is the Lord’s standard for marriage unless He declares and authorizes otherwise through His duly appointed representative, meaning the President and prophet of the Church.⁴⁰

On behalf of the First Presidency and in response to the question “Is plural or celestial marriage essential to a fulness of glory in the world to come?” President Charles W. Penrose (1832–1925) wrote: “Celestial marriage is essential to a fulness of glory in the world to come, as explained in the revelation concerning it; but *it is not stated that plural marriage is thus essential.*”⁴¹



In 1933 the First Presidency declared: “Celestial marriage—that is, marriage for time and eternity—and polygamous or plural marriage are not synonymous terms. Monogamous marriages for time and eternity, solemnized in our temples in accordance with the word of the Lord and the laws of the Church, are Celestial marriages.”⁴²

Consistent with these statements, Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles wrote: “*Plural marriage is not essential to salvation or exaltation.* Nephi and his people were denied the power to have more than one wife and yet they could gain every blessing in eternity that the Lord ever offered to any people. *In our day, the Lord summarized by revelation the whole doctrine of exaltation and predicated it upon the marriage of one man to one woman. (D&C 132:1–28.)* Thereafter he added the principles relative to plurality of wives with the express stipulation that any such marriages would be valid only

For all who abide the terms of the new and everlasting covenant, the reward is joy and peace in this world and eternal life in the next.

if authorized by the President of the Church. (D&C 132:7, 29–66.)”⁴³

Today, as directed by the Lord through His prophet, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints no longer practices plural marriage, and individuals who do practice it are not allowed to join the Church or remain members of it. The Church affirms that monogamy is God’s standard for marriage except when He authorizes or commands otherwise through His prophet. The Church does not teach that participation in plural marriage is necessary for exaltation.

Conclusion

There is much that we do not know about life in the hereafter; however, we do know that receiving and abiding within the new and everlasting covenant is necessary to inherit eternal life. We also know that for such, the “same sociality which exists among us here”—in mortality—“will exist among us there”—in the afterlife—“only it will be coupled with eternal glory.”⁴⁴

The supernal blessings available through the new and everlasting covenant are central to the grand purpose of the Father's plan and the Restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ in these latter days. The "perfect brightness of hope"⁴⁵ this glorious covenant inspires in the faithful provides "an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God."⁴⁶ For all who abide the terms of the new and everlasting covenant, the reward is joy and peace in this world and eternal life in the next.⁴⁷ ■

NOTES

1. See "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129; see also *God Loveth His Children* (pamphlet, 2007), 1.
2. See Robert D. Hales, "The Plan of Salvation: A Sacred Treasure of Knowledge to Guide Us," *Ensign*, Oct. 2015, 24–31.
3. See Doctrine and Covenants 14:7.
4. See Robert D. Hales, "The Plan of Salvation: A Sacred Treasure of Knowledge to Guide Us," 24–31.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 1:17, 22.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 66:2.
7. See Bible Dictionary, "Covenant."
8. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, ed. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (1954–56), 1:156.
9. See Jeremiah 32:40; Doctrine and Covenants 22:1.
10. Emphasis added; see also Doctrine and Covenants 39:11; 45:9; 49:9; 88:131, 133; 101:39.
11. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:7.
12. President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) taught: "*The Holy Spirit of Promise is the Holy Ghost who places the stamp of approval upon every ordinance: baptism, confirmation, ordination, marriage. The promise is that the blessings will be received through faithfulness. If a person violates a covenant, whether it be of baptism, ordination, marriage or anything else, the Spirit withdraws the stamp of approval, and the blessings will not be received. Every ordinance is sealed with a promise of a reward based upon faithfulness. The Holy Spirit withdraws the stamp of approval where covenants are broken*" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:45; see also Doctrine and Covenants 76:52–53; 132:7).
13. See Acts 2:38; 2 Nephi 31:17; Moroni 8:25.
14. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–21; see also Moroni 10:32–33.
15. See John 14:26; Doctrine and Covenants 121:45–46.
16. See 2 Nephi 32:5; 3 Nephi 27:20; Moroni 8:26; Doctrine and Covenants 11:13; Moses 6:59–61.
17. "Eternal life is God's life, or life with God" (Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, Oct. 1956, 61). "Those who are married in the temple for all time and eternity obtain the blessing of *eternal lives*. I put stress on *eternal lives*. Eternal life is God's life, that is, to be like him" (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., 5 vols. [1957–66], 4:197).
18. See Doctrine and Covenants 14:7.
19. Doctrine and Covenants 132:6.
20. Doctrine and Covenants 132:19.
21. Doctrine and Covenants 132:19–20.
22. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–21.
23. Doctrine and Covenants 132:6.
24. Doctrine and Covenants 132:5.
25. Doctrine and Covenants 132:21.
26. Doctrine and Covenants 84:20–21.
27. See Moroni 10:32–33.
28. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:4, 15.
29. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:7, 18.
30. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:6–7; see also Doctrine and Covenants 66:2.
31. Please note that eternal life is denied those who "reject" this covenant. Those who, in contrast, did not have the opportunity for eternal marriage in this life will be given the opportunity for eternal marriage in the next life. Please see also footnote 35 below.
32. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:15–25.
33. For an additional example affirming that monogamous couples who are sealed for eternity and keep the associated covenants merit exaltation, see Doctrine and Covenants 131.
34. See Gospel Topics, "Plural Marriage in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," topics.lds.org.
35. "There is no Latter-day Saint who dies after having lived a faithful life who will lose anything because of having failed to do certain things when opportunities were not furnished him or her. In other words, if a young man or a young woman has no opportunity of getting married, and they live faithful lives up to the time of their death, they will have all the blessings, exaltation, and glory that any man or woman will have who had this opportunity and improved it. That is sure and positive" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow* [2011], 130).
36. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:34–35, 37–39.
37. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:34–39.
38. Doctrine and Covenants 132:40.
39. See Official Declaration 1.
40. See Jacob 2:27–30. Although the Lord has not explained all the reasons for commanding or authorizing the practice of plural marriage, in Doctrine and Covenants 132 the Lord offers two reasons: (1) to fulfill promises pursuant to the Abrahamic covenant, and (2) "to multiply and replenish the earth" (D&C 132:63; see also verse 34). Jacob 2:30 offers perhaps the most succinct statement of why at times the Lord has commanded the practice of plural marriage: "For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things." See also Gospel Topics, "Plural Marriage in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," topics.lds.org.
41. Charles W. Penrose, "Peculiar Questions Briefly Answered," *Improvement Era*, Sept. 1912, 1042; emphasis added.
42. In James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (1965–75), 5:329.
43. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (1966), 578–79; emphasis added. See also the following statement by Elder Melvin J. Ballard (1873–1939) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: "Those who are denied endless increase cannot be what God is, because that in connection with other things, makes him God. *The eternity of the marriage covenant ought to be understood by Latter-day Saints clearly to be the sealing of at least one woman to one man for time and for all eternity. Then do not get confused on that point and imagine that it necessarily means more than one woman.* It may be, certainly, but it does mean at least that one man and one woman are sealed together by the power of the holy priesthood and by the sealing approval of the Holy Ghost for time and for all eternity, and then that they keep their covenants, before they will be candidates for the highest degree of celestial glory, and unto them only of all these groups of our Father's children is the promise made of endless or eternal increase" (*The Three Degrees of Glory: A Discourse by Melvin J. Ballard*, Sept. 22, 1922, 10; emphasis added).
44. Doctrine and Covenants 130:2.
45. 2 Nephi 31:20.
46. Ether 12:4.
47. See Doctrine and Covenants 59:23.



THE **LAST** SACRAMENT CUP

By Catherine Arveseth

It was just before the new year, and we were visiting a ward in St. George, Utah, with our five little children—a ward that had no Primary or youth program because it was composed mostly of retired couples. No 12-year-old deacons bumped elbows on the front row; it was the high priests who were preparing to bless and pass the sacrament.

Normally, the ward would have gently filled the padded seats of the chapel, but on this holiday weekend the overflow divider was pushed wide, and we, with a number of other families, were nestled onto metal folding chairs that stretched to the back of the cultural hall.

The meeting progressed as usual, and I watched as a dozen older gentlemen carried trays of bread, then water, through the bursting rows. They were making great effort to manage the unusually large crowd. Their faces were kind.

Some had rounded shoulders and bent spines. They whispered directions to each other. One wore cowboy boots. One winked at a little girl in front of us.

My daughters and I took the last cups of water from our tray and handed it to my husband, Doug, who passed the empty tray to the brother standing at the end of our row.

The bishop stood at the pulpit to assess the situation. When he asked who had not received the water, a few pockets of people, including Doug, raised their hands. So the brethren returned to the sacrament table, offered a second prayer on the new water, and delivered it to the waiting members.

Our row was last to receive the water this time, and I noticed that Doug offered the couple next to him the two remaining cups. The tray was empty, and it appeared to me that Doug was the only one in the congregation who hadn't



had the water. I wondered what he would do. Would he let it go? not worry about it this week?

Assuming that everyone had now received the water, those who were passing the sacrament partook of the water themselves, using all the remaining cups. But the bishop asked one more time if anyone had not received the water, and Doug raised his hand. He was, as I suspected, the only one. He looked at me and we smiled, conscious of the craned necks and curious eyes.

The brethren returned to the table for a third prayer on the water. And suddenly, as I heard that phrase “to bless and sanctify this water to the souls of all those who drink of it” (D&C 20:79), a realization crept into my heart—an understanding so keen it pried me clear open and God’s Spirit swept in. It was a reverence I hadn’t felt in too long.

They were praying over one cup. For one person. One soul.

The sacrament mattered. Even for one. Just as the Atonement mattered. For one.

For everyone.

Hundreds of members waited for the “amen.” Dozens watched as the last cup was delivered to my husband, and he put it to his lips, and drank.

I had to look away, my eyes were so wet.

I looked up in time to see these sweet men in suits cover the trays with white linen. Just as Christ’s body, broken for us, was covered. Just as His Atonement covers us. All of us.

You and I are indisputably tied to Christ’s suffering. All our sins, grief, hurts, and losses are held in the drops of His blood. He said He has “graven [us] upon the palms of [His] hands” (Isaiah 49:16).

The emotion of watching Doug take the last sacrament cup changed me, changed my understanding of the Atonement.

Our Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel, broke not just bread, but body and soul. For me. For you. As if we were the only ones who mattered. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.



By Elder
Melvin J. Ballard
(1873–1939)

Of the Quorum
of the Twelve
Apostles

THE Sacrament AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

The one thing that would make for the safety of every man and woman would be to appear at the sacrament table every Sabbath day.

Our Father in Heaven has provided that, not only once but frequently, we shall meet together to renew our pledge, our covenant, and our agreement to keep His commandments and to take upon us [the Savior's] name again. I have always looked upon this blessed privilege as the means of spiritual growth, and there is none other quite so fruitful in the achievement of that end as the partaking, worthily, of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We eat food to stimulate our physical bodies. Without the partaking of food, we would become weak and sickly and fail physically. It is just as necessary, for our spiritual body, that we should partake of this sacrament and by it obtain spiritual food for our souls. . . .

Spiritually Hungry

We must come, however, to the sacrament table hungry. If we should repair to a banquet where the finest of earth's providing may be had, without hunger, without appetite, the food would not be tempting, nor do us any good. If we repair to the sacrament table, we must come hungering and thirsting for righteousness, for spiritual growth.

How can we have spiritual hunger? Who is there among us that does not wound his spirit

by word, thought, or deed from Sabbath to Sabbath? We do things for which we are sorry and desire to be forgiven, or we have erred against someone and given injury. If there is a feeling in our hearts that we are sorry for what we have done, if there is a feeling in our souls that we would like to be forgiven, then the method to obtain forgiveness is not through rebaptism; it is not to make confession to man, but it is to repent of our sins, to go to those against whom we have sinned or transgressed and obtain their forgiveness and then repair to the sacrament table where, if we have sincerely repented and put ourselves in proper condition, we shall be forgiven, and spiritual healing will come to our souls. It will really enter into our being. You have felt it. I am a witness that there is a spirit attending the administration of the sacrament that warms the soul from head to foot; you feel the wounds of the spirit being healed, and the load is lifted. Comfort and happiness come to the soul that is worthy and truly desirous of partaking of this spiritual food. . . .

Self-Reflection and Safety

We want every Latter-day Saint to come to the sacrament table because it is the place for self-investigation, for self-inspection, where



we may learn to rectify our course and to make right our own lives, bringing them into harmony with the teachings of the Church and with our brethren and sisters. It is the place where we become our own judges.

. . . No man goes away from this Church and becomes an apostate in a week, nor in a month. It is a slow process. The one thing that would make for the safety of every man and woman would be to appear at the sacrament table every Sabbath day. We would not get very far away in one week—not so far away that, by the process of self-investigation, we could not rectify the wrongs we may have done. . . . The road to the sacrament table is the path of safety for Latter-day Saints. . . .

Preparing to Enter the Divine Presence

I know, my brethren and sisters, that no man or woman shall ever come to stand in the presence of our Father in Heaven, nor be associated with the Lord Jesus Christ, who does not spiritually grow. Without spiritual

growth we shall not be prepared to enter into the divine presence. I need the sacrament. I need to renew my covenant every week. I need the blessing that comes with and through it. . . .

Go to the sacrament table. Ah, that is a blessed privilege that I now rejoice in, and I would be ashamed, I know, . . . to stand in [the Savior's] presence and try to offer any apology or any excuse for not having kept His commandments and honored Him by bearing witness, before the Father and before men, that I believe in Him, and that I take upon me His blessed name, and that I live by and through Him spiritually. . . .

Brethren and sisters, let us go unto Him in His appointed hour. Let us take our children with us and through our faithfulness find all the blessings attendant upon this sacred observance of this holy ordinance—ours in time and in eternity. ■

From "The Sacramental Covenant," Improvement Era, Oct. 1919, 1025–32; punctuation and capitalization standardized.



BEARING ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

By Toni Thomas

During the Savior's ministry, He commanded His disciples to "love one another; as I have loved you" (John 13:34). As we follow this commandment, we more fully become disciples of Him who, loving us more than Himself, bore the sins of all. And yet, the lesson that the Savior taught was twofold: not only must we love and serve as He did, but we must also be willing to accept love and service.

This is a lesson that I have had to learn firsthand. When I was 21, I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, which aggressively attacked nearly every joint in my body. Since the age of 30, I have used an electric wheelchair for mobility and have had to find creative solutions to meet my needs and those of my family, including our three children. Many of these solutions have involved help from friends and family, who have proven to be true disciples of the Savior. And yet as I received service, I also sought for ways that I could serve others.

One year I discovered that one of my son's fourth-grade classmates had a mother who was blind. Linda and I soon became friends. One day Linda was lamenting the difficulty of getting out to buy groceries, when we hit on a marvelous plan.

The next time I went to the store, I dropped by Linda's house and we journeyed to the store together, her hand resting on the arm of my wheelchair and her cane tapping on the sidewalk ahead of her. Once at the store, we went to work.

"I need some strawberry yogurt," said Linda.

"That's right in front of you," I directed her. "No, a little more to the left. There, now reach straight back. No, that's blueberry! A little more to the left. There, that's it."

Using my sight and Linda's ability to reach things on the shelves, we were able to buy what we needed. She then followed me home and helped me put things away before I went back with her to her own house. Part of



Often the greatest service we can give others is to allow them to serve us.

the fun of the adventure was knowing what a curious sight we must have been to the other shoppers!

I grew to love Linda as I served her; I'm sure she felt the same as she served me. We would never have known that level of caring if we had allowed pride or supposed dignity to interfere with our service. Often the greatest service we can give others is to allow them to serve us.

Everyone can serve. Likewise everyone needs something that he or she cannot provide alone. There are times when we can serve but also times when we must allow others the opportunity to serve us. This marvelous plan, created by a wise and loving Heavenly Father, allows for both personal growth and succor during times of need. This plan is foiled, however, when God's children either fail to serve or fail to accept service.

The Father's plan for us helps us to grow in love and unity. The covenant of baptism

does not require that we bear *others'* burdens but rather that we bear *one another's* burdens—that we help others carry their loads and accept help in carrying our own, both of which are important to our growth (see Mosiah 18:8–10).

Most people don't have to deal with such obvious disabilities as blindness or physical impairments. Often challenges are unseen, such as loneliness, grief, ignorance, despair, depression, or feelings of inadequacy. But whether they are seen or unseen, the Lord knows our burdens and wants to lift them: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Often these burdens are lifted by human hands on His behalf; they are lifted by being shared. ■

The author lives in California, USA.



WE ARE ALL BROTHERS AND SISTERS

"We cannot truly love God if we do not love our fellow travelers on this mortal journey. . . . We are all spirit children of our Heavenly Father and, as such, are brothers and sisters. As we keep this truth in mind, loving all of God's children will become easier. . . .

"Every day of our lives we are given opportunities to show love and kindness to those around us. . . .

"Love is expressed in many recognizable ways: a smile, a wave, a kind comment, a compliment. Other expressions may be more subtle, such as showing interest in another's activities, teaching a principle with kindness and patience, visiting one who is ill or homebound. These words and actions and many others can communicate love."

President Thomas S. Monson, "Love—the Essence of the Gospel," *Ensign*, May 2014, 91, 92, 93.

HOLD ON TO THE Light



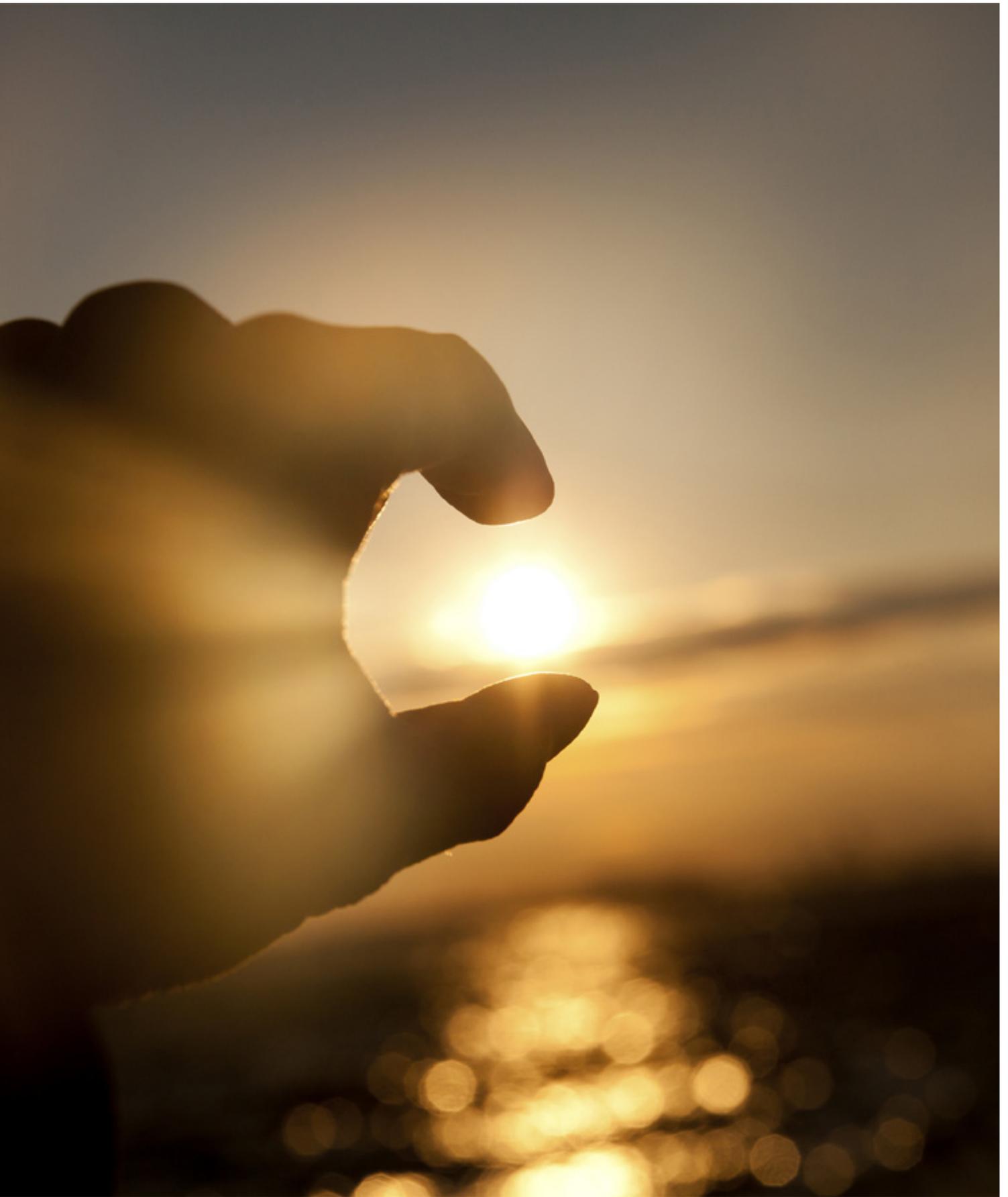
Cling to the light of your testimony while seeking answers to your questions and doubts. The Holy Ghost is the key.

By LaRene Porter Gaunt
Church Magazines

Is it okay to have questions about the gospel? Of course. That is how we gain a testimony. The prophet Moroni in the Book of Mormon gave us a pattern for finding answers. He exhorts us to read and to ponder (see Moroni 10:3). Then we “ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ,” if what we are praying about is true; and if we “ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto [us], by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 10:4).

Moroni makes it clear that answers come to us through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. This is the key to dealing with our doubts. Clinging to our testimonies while patiently searching for answers will bring success over time. Praying, studying the scriptures, attending the temple and our Church meetings, listening to living prophets, and striving to live the commandments all provide opportunities to receive inspiration from the Holy Ghost. On the other hand, separating ourselves from gospel living limits our opportunities to receive such inspiration. As a result, we are left open to the negative influence of Satan, which can cause us to look “beyond the mark” (Jacob 4:14), weakening our testimonies.

Such was the case with Mary Anne, a Latter-day Saint mother of two. “I married in the temple at age 19,” she explains, “but before long I began having doubts about the gospel as my marriage fell apart. I stopped praying and reading the scriptures. Each time a member’s well-meaning comments hurt my feelings, I blamed the Church. How could the gospel be true if my husband and the members acted the way they did?”



*Some look
for truth in
worldly sources
and push
the influence
of the Holy
Ghost out of
their lives.*

Soon Mary Anne's bitterness pushed the influence of the Holy Ghost out of her life. "I convinced myself I was being a hypocrite to remain a member," she says. "I divorced my husband and asked to be excommunicated." Mary Anne left the Church behind as a way of dealing with her doubts. She began "looking for truth in worldly sources and joined another religion."

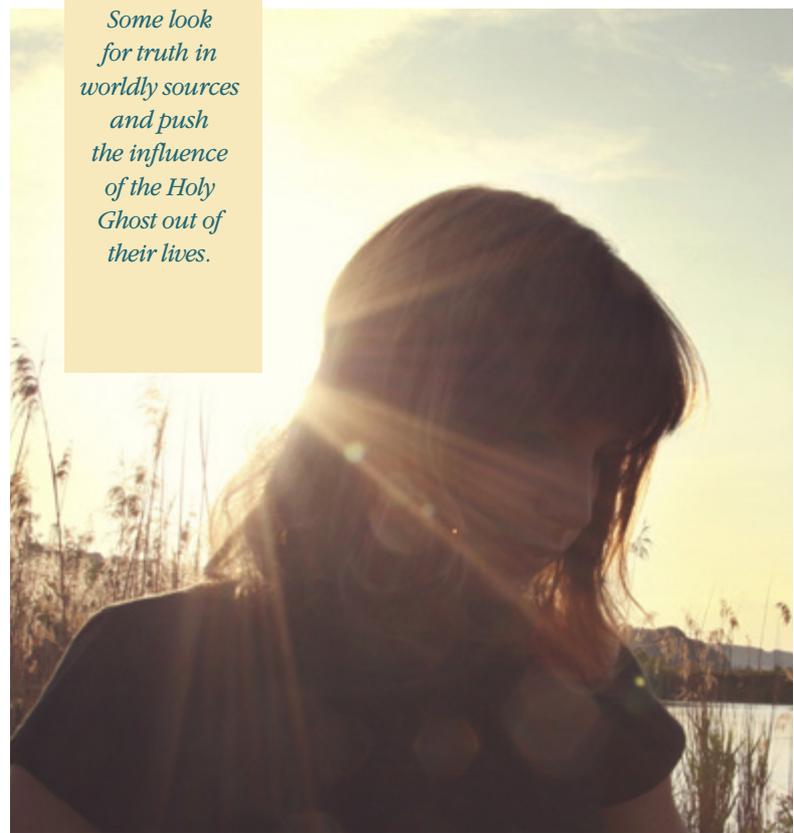
On the other hand, Michael, who was a missionary at the time of the following story, found answers to his questions using Moroni's pattern of faith. He says, "In 1976 I was temporarily serving in the Nevada Las Vegas Mission until my visa arrived. I was excited to be there, but after only a few weeks, I had been called everything from a liar to a bigot and confronted with difficult questions. Since joining the Church as a teenager, I had studied Church doctrine, read the Book of Mormon, and kept the commandments. My testimony was strong; however, I could not answer all the questions that confronted me."

Michael sought direction from Heavenly Father as he centered his personal study on finding answers.

"During a missionary discussion, a sincere young woman named Dorothy expressed reservations because black members of the Church could not at that time hold the priesthood," says Michael. "Because of my studies, I knew that from Moses until the birth of the Savior, only the tribe of Levi could hold the Aaronic Priesthood. I shared this and other biblical scriptures with Dorothy that showed how the Lord, throughout history, had restricted priesthood ordination to certain individuals. I told her that I didn't know why priesthood blessings had not yet been extended to all worthy men, but I testified that the Savior had restored His Church and His priesthood through the Prophet Joseph Smith.

"Dorothy, weeping at times, listened intently to the Spirit. I'll never forget her prayer at the close of our discussion: 'Please help other people to hear this message and feel good like I do.'"

Michael didn't get to attend Dorothy's baptism. Shortly after their discussion, his visa arrived. Nevertheless, he says,



"I left Las Vegas grateful for what I had learned about how the Holy Ghost can guide us in finding answers to gospel questions if we remain faithful, search, pray, and testify."

The contrasting experiences of Mary Anne and Michael show how the influence of the Holy Ghost can make a difference in finding answers. As Moroni said, "By the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things" (Moroni 10:5).

Here are three key points to help us draw upon the power of the Holy Ghost when seeking answers: seek light and truth, pray and be patient, and obey God's commandments.

1. Seek Light and Truth

The Book of Mormon prophet Alma said, "Whatsoever is light, is good, because it is discernible, therefore ye must know that it is good" (Alma 32:35). But how do we actually discern light and truth?

Heavenly Father has blessed each of us with the Light of Christ, "that [we] may know good from evil" (Moroni 7:16, 19). We often call this our conscience.

However, through the gift of the Holy Ghost we can

have access to an even greater measure of light and truth. We receive this gift when we are confirmed a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints after we are baptized. The Holy Ghost is the third member of the Godhead and “is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us” (D&C 130:22).

The mission of the Holy Ghost is, in part, to testify of truth, a witness that often comes as a feeling of “peace and reassurance.”¹ Other times we feel a rush of enlightenment and understanding. The prophet Alma compares the word of God to a seed that “will begin to swell within [our] breasts” (Alma 32:28). God is the source of all truth, and the Holy Ghost confirms that truth.

How does the Holy Ghost help us discern light and truth? A story from the life of Oliver Cowdery illustrates one way. When Oliver heard of Joseph Smith and the work of the Restoration, he prayed to know if Joseph Smith was a prophet of God. He received an answer by way of peace that settled on his heart and mind. This gave him the assurance to go to Joseph and become his assistant in the work of translating the Book of Mormon.

Joseph in turn received a revelation for Oliver in which the Lord said that Oliver should think back to the night when he knelt and prayed to know if Joseph was a prophet. The Lord said, “Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God?” (D&C 6:23). Often we recognize light and truth in the same way (see D&C 8:1–2).

2. Pray and Be Patient

Sincere prayer invites personal revelation.

“Prayer is the act by which the will of the Father and the will of the child are brought into correspondence with each other. The object of prayer is not to change the will of God but to secure for ourselves and for others blessings that God is already willing to grant but that are made conditional on our asking for them” (Bible Dictionary, “Prayer”).

It was a humble and earnest prayer that led Jed, a Latter-day Saint married in the temple and the father of three, back into Church activity. “I was more in a state of disbelief than just doubt,” he says. “My doubts moved from the veracity of the Church to my convictions about Jesus Christ and Christianity in general. When I took it one step further and wondered about the very nature of God, the floodgates opened. I seriously examined whether or not I believed there was a Supreme Being.”

After all Jed’s study, however, his belief in God remained unshaken and, in fact, became stronger. “I knew God was watching over me, so I desired to do His will,” says Jed. “A prayer stemmed from that desire. The answer was clear and strong—I want you to attend church.” It was like sudden light filling a dark room.² I knew it came by way of the Holy Ghost. So, with my doubts and disbeliefs



SEVEN WAYS TO INVITE THE HOLY GHOST

“God’s laws must ever be our standard,” said President Russell M. Nelson, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. “In dealing with controversial issues, we should first search for God’s guidance.”⁷ Following are ways we can seek for God’s guidance through the revelations of the Holy Ghost:

1. Pray and fast.
2. Search the scriptures and the words of the prophets.
3. Listen to sacred music.
4. Obey the commandments.
5. Attend the temple.
6. Receive a priesthood blessing.
7. Bear testimony.

“The object of prayer is not to change the will of God but to secure for ourselves and for others blessings that God is already willing to grant.”



OUR MOST IMPORTANT CHOICE

“God does not force us to believe. Instead He invites us to believe by sending living prophets and apostles to teach us, by providing scriptures, and by beckoning to us through His Spirit. We are the ones who must choose to embrace those spiritual invitations, electing to see with inward eyes the spiritual light with which He calls us. The decision to believe is the most important choice we ever make.”

Elder L. Whitney Clayton of the Presidency of the Seventy, “Choose to Believe,” *Ensign*, May 2015, 38.

Obedience helps us remain on safe ground while we seek for answers to our questions.

unresolved, I started to attend church.”

Prayer was the key for Jed. “I’ve been active now for six years. I’ve resolved many of my doubts through prayer and personal revelation. As a result, the relevance of unresolved doubts has changed for me. I firmly believe that as I continually strive to do God’s will, I will not be led astray and answers will come.”

Prayer and patience can sustain us, just as they did Jed. “For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise” (Hebrews 10:36).

3. Obey God’s Commandments

Blessings come as we keep God’s commandments (see D&C 130:20–21). Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “Obedience makes us progressively stronger, capable of faithfully enduring tests and trials in the future.”³

For those who are struggling with questions or doubts, it is more important than ever to keep the commandments. Obedience helps us remain worthy to receive revelation and discern light and truth when the Holy Ghost speaks peace to our hearts and minds. Obedience and keeping our covenants help



us remember our testimonies of true doctrine and the joy that the gospel has brought into our lives. Obedience helps us remain on safe ground while we seek for answers to our questions. This is God’s pattern for finding answers.

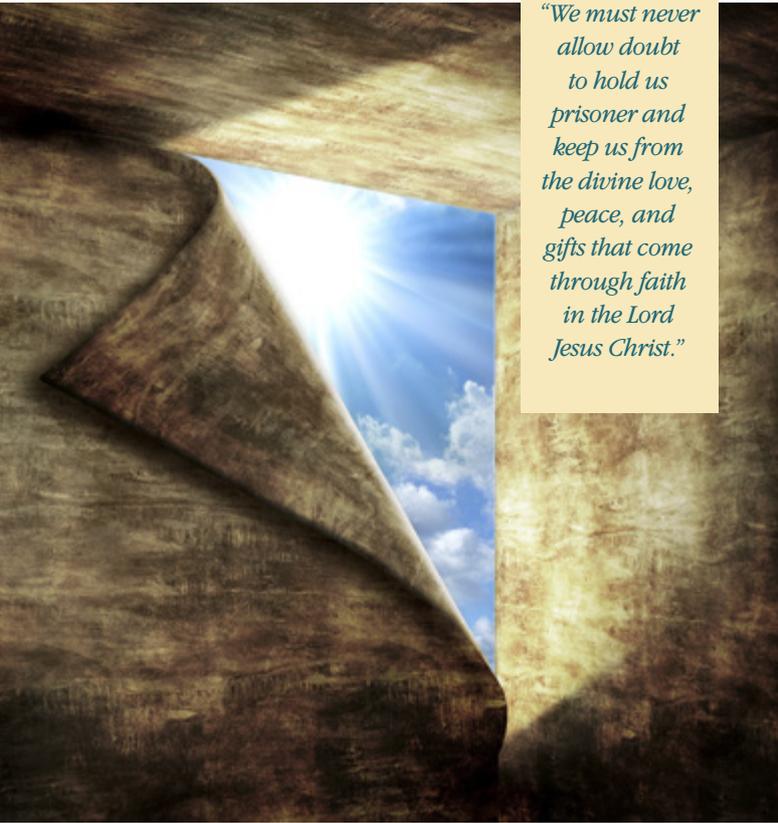
This is what Starla, a university student who had just received her mission call, did when she began to have doubts. “A book I was reading for a class raised issues about polygamy in the Church that concerned me,” she says. “In addition, I felt unsure about the role of women in the Church. How could I serve my mission in a few months when I had doubts?”

Starla decided, however, to continue to obey God’s commandments, which became key to dealing with her doubts.

“One day in the temple I realized that I felt the Spirit there,” she says. “I knew some things were true, like the Restoration of the gospel and the Book of Mormon. I decided to hold on to the things I knew were true. I believed that there were answers. I knew Heavenly Father knew the answers and someday I would know those answers. I decided that in the meantime, living the gospel would come first.”

So Starla left for her mission in Peru. “Gradually answers to my questions began falling into place,” she says, “in a sudden insight during my personal study or during a conversation with a companion. I can’t say exactly when it happened, but my questions were resolved. Not only am I now at peace with my answers, but I also have a strong testimony of the understanding I gained.”

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, said:



“We must never allow doubt to hold us prisoner and keep us from the divine love, peace, and gifts that come through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Please, first doubt your doubts before you doubt your faith. We must never allow doubt to hold us prisoner and keep us from the divine love, peace, and gifts that come through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁴

Resolving Doubts

Remember the story of Mary Anne at the beginning of this article—the Latter-day Saint mother who left the Church? Well, she discovered that it’s never too late to resolve doubts, repent, and return to the gospel. Eighteen years after asking to be excommunicated, Mary Anne went to sing in a ward choir with a member friend. She recalls, “I was surprised that I remembered the words to ‘I Stand All Amazed,’⁵ but I did. Later I found myself singing it around the house. The words sank deep into my soul, and the Holy Ghost testified of their truthfulness. My heart was softened. Before long I was baptized.”

The Holy Ghost guided Mary Anne to articles in the *Ensign*, to words of the living prophets, and to certain scriptures. “I didn’t find the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ anywhere in my search of worldly sources or another religion,” she says, “because it is only found in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I don’t

recommend the road I traveled, but I am grateful for the deep truth of the gospel that I can carry with me into eternity.”

It may take courage to remain active in the Church as we deal with doubts. But as we seek light and truth, pray and be patient, and obey God’s commandments, the whisperings of the Spirit can help us. Elder L. Tom Perry (1922–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “If we heed the gentle promptings of the Holy Ghost, it can . . . guide us back to our eternal home to live with our eternal Father in Heaven.”⁶ ■

NOTES

1. Boyd K. Packer, “The Witness,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 95.
2. See David A. Bednar, “The Spirit of Revelation,” *Ensign*, May 2011, 87, 88.
3. Robert D. Hales, “If Ye Love Me, Keep My Commandments,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 38.
4. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Come, Join with Us,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 23.
5. “I Stand All Amazed,” *Hymns*, no. 193.
6. L. Tom Perry, “Obedience through Our Faithfulness,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 101.
7. Russell M. Nelson, “Let Your Faith Show,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 30.
8. Marcos A. Aidukaitis, “If Ye Lack Wisdom,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 108.

RESOURCES FOR FINDING ANSWERS

“In the kingdom of God, the search for truth is appreciated, encouraged, and in no way repressed or feared,” said Elder Marcos A. Aidukaitis of the Seventy. “Church members are strongly counseled by the Lord Himself to seek for knowledge [see D&C 88:78].”⁸

Following are some resources where we can find answers:

1. The Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price
2. The words of the living prophets from general conference and other sources
3. Bishops and stake presidents
4. Church magazines and manuals
5. *True to the Faith* and *For the Strength of Youth*
6. The Gospel Topics site and the Church History site on LDS.org. These sites address topics that are sometimes confusing or cause doubt, such as race and the priesthood, plural marriage, and First Vision accounts.

JOSEPH SMITH

AND THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The Prophet Joseph Smith helped remove some of the mystery surrounding the book of Revelation and showed its relevance in our day.



By David A. Edwards

Church Magazines

The book of Revelation was written in the first century A.D., but it was the last book of the New Testament to be accepted as canon (authoritative scripture). Some Christian scholars in later centuries questioned its authorship, objected to some of its doctrines (for instance, its teachings about the Millennium or its teaching that people would be judged according to their works), and found its Old Testament allusions and visionary narrative to be too strange and too different from other New Testament writings.

But certain irrefutable facts led to the book's general acceptance. For instance, many of the earliest Christian writers mentioned the book of Revelation, attributing it to John the Apostle, and quoted from it extensively and approvingly in their writings. Several other books whose canonicity was not disputed could not claim such evidence.

By the early 19th century, when God called Joseph Smith as the prophet of the Restoration, the book of Revelation was included in almost all versions of the Bible and was widely read. The imagery of John's vision stoked people's imaginations and gave rise to

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Because of Joseph Smith, we know that Nephi learned that John the Revelator was appointed and foreordained to write the visions of the last days now found in the book of Revelation (see 1 Nephi 14:19–29).

many different interpretations, as it continues to do today.

As the prophet of the dispensation of the fulness of times, Joseph Smith was in a unique position to shed light on the book of Revelation and help make it less daunting to read and understand. He did this in at least two ways: (1) he explained specific parts of the book of Revelation and expanded its overall context, and (2) he demystified it.

Explain and Expand

The best example of Joseph Smith's providing an explanation of the book of Revelation is in Doctrine and Covenants 77. Received in March 1832, this revelation consists of a question-and-answer about specific verses in Revelation, chapters 4–11. The Prophet said that this explanation was revealed to him while he was engaged in his inspired translation of the Bible (see D&C 77, section introduction).

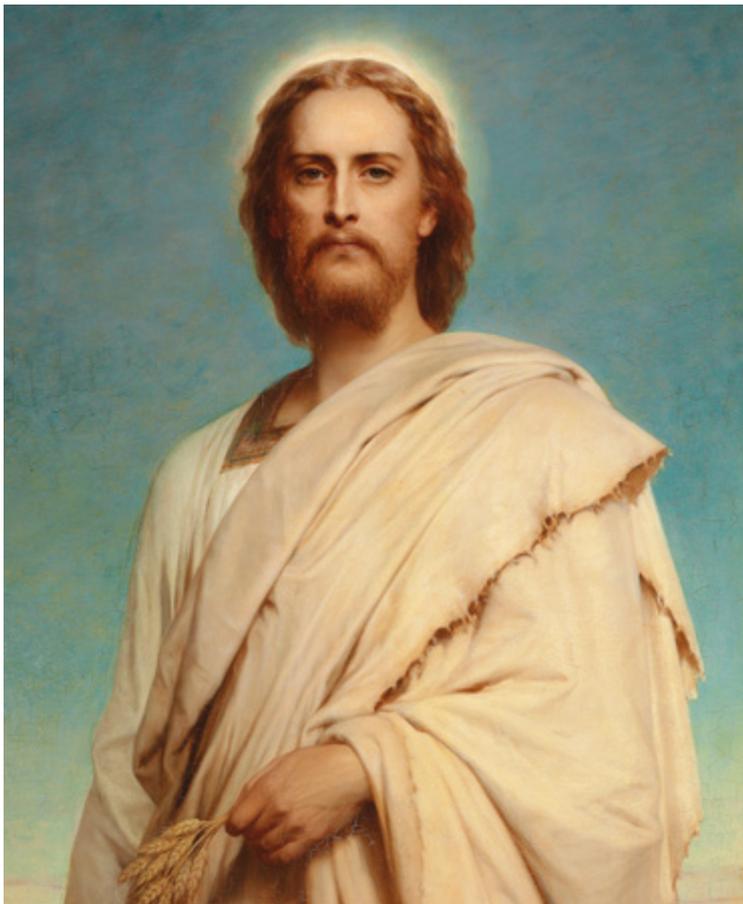
The questions are pretty straightforward, essentially asking, “What does this mean?” and “When will this happen?” The answers are likewise straightforward, though not always exhaustive. The answers sought and received by the Prophet Joseph Smith place various speculative interpretations out of bounds and generally help us see how John's vision relates to the latter-day work.

For example, this revelation helps us see that the seven seals in the book described by John beginning in chapter 5 of Revelation represent seven major time periods in earth's history and that the final two are the ones that deal with our day and beyond (see D&C 77:6–7), helping us see why John's vision spends so much more time with the sixth

and seventh seals. Joseph Smith's revelation then goes on to explain how some of the figures in the sixth seal (the four angels and the 144,000 servants sealed from the tribes of Israel) relate to the work of the Restoration and gathering in the last days (see D&C 77:9–11).

This explanatory revelation was, of course, not the only contribution the Prophet Joseph Smith made to our understanding of the book of Revelation from his translation of the Bible. As he worked, he sometimes was inspired to simply render the text more clearly,¹ but often he also was inspired to add or revise text in order to draw links to other scriptures so that they reinforce one another.² Part of Joseph Smith's work with the Bible, then, appears to have been to weave these common threads between the various books of scripture in order to present a unified tapestry of teachings and prophecies, and the book of Revelation is no exception.

In addition, through other revelations and translations, Joseph Smith expanded upon the context of the book of Revelation by showing that it follows a pattern of panoramic visions given to various prophets throughout the ages. In the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price, we learn that Nephi, the brother of Jared, Moses, and Enoch all had similar visions showing the sweep of human history, including the end of the world. We also learn that although these other prophets were shown the end of the world, they were forbidden from sharing it with the world because John was foreordained to write it (see 1 Nephi 14:25–26). So, the Book of Mormon, brought forth



ONE OF JOSEPH SMITH'S FAVORITE QUOTES FROM THE BOOK OF REVELATION

"The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10).

This statement of the angel to John was repeated often by the Prophet Joseph Smith. It is a key to understanding the nature of testimony as well as the need for prophecy and revelation in the Church and in our personal lives. For example, Joseph Smith said:

"Salvation cannot come without revelation; it is in vain for anyone to minister without it. No man is a minister of Jesus Christ without being a Prophet. No man can be a minister of Jesus Christ except he has the testimony of Jesus; and this is the spirit of prophecy" (*History of the Church*, 3:389).

through the Prophet Joseph Smith, teaches us that we were meant to have John's description of the events leading up to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and that it is worthy of our study.

Because of such additional light revealed through Joseph Smith, we are better able to see the overarching theme of Revelation: that "there will be an eventual triumph on this earth of God over the devil; a permanent victory of good over evil, of the Saints over their persecutors, of the kingdom of God over the kingdoms of men and of Satan. . . . The victory [will] be achieved through Jesus Christ."³ In addition, Joseph Smith emphasized that Revelation's message centers on Jesus Christ as the focus of our hope and teaches us that by being faithful to Him and His work in the latter days, we can overcome the world.

Demystify

In a conference of the Church on April 8, 1843, the Prophet Joseph Smith said, "The book of Revelation is one of the plainest books God ever caused to be written."⁴ This

statement may have shocked his listeners because it so thoroughly contradicted their own experience. So what did the Prophet mean by it?

While Joseph Smith certainly did unlock some of the mysteries of the book of Revelation, in this address he also seems to have aimed to demystify it. He did this by showing that the book's cryptic imagery isn't always as cryptic as we may think and that a scripture's having impenetrable imagery doesn't necessarily bestow it with any greater importance or meaning for us.

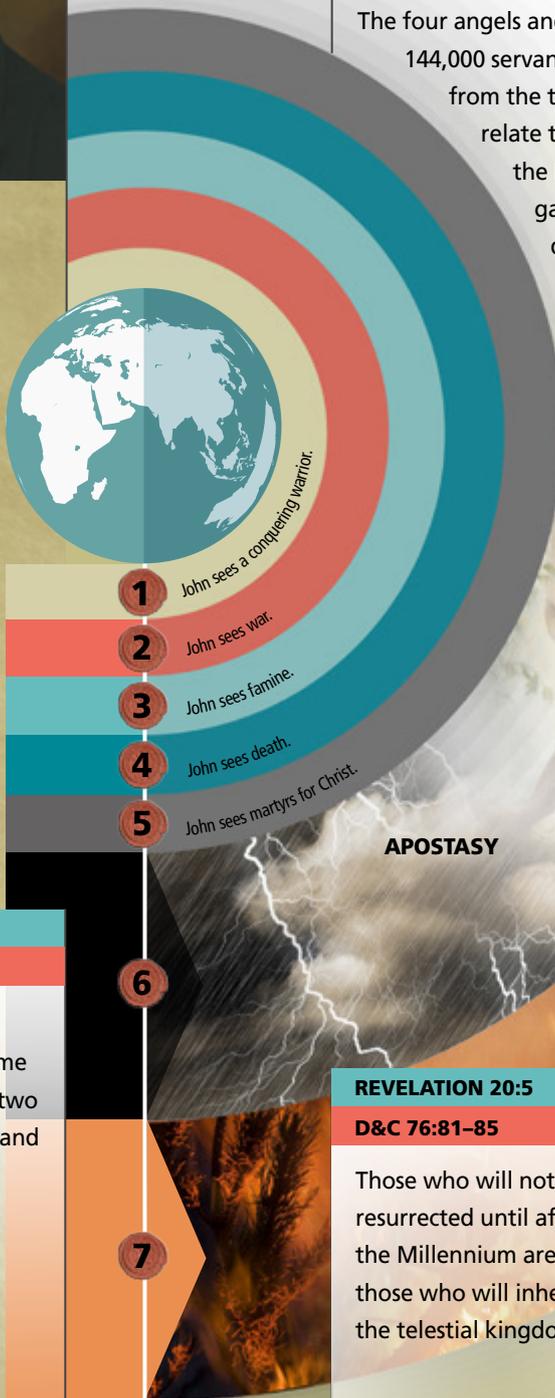
For instance, elsewhere in the address, Joseph Smith showed that a careful reading of the book of Revelation can place limits on permissible interpretations. He pointed out that the first three chapters of the book deal with John's day and "things which must shortly come to pass" (Revelation 1:1) and that the rest of the book deals with "things which must be hereafter" (Revelation 4:1), or beyond John's day.⁵ By placing some limits on what the imagery in these parts of the book could apply to, these time frames render them somewhat less mysterious.



Some Things We Know about the
BOOK OF REVELATION
Because of **JOSEPH SMITH**



Because of the additional light revealed through Joseph Smith, we are better able to understand Revelation's theme of the victory of Christ and His Saints over the devil and the world.



REVELATION 7:1–8

D&C 77:8–11

The four angels and the 144,000 servants sealed from the tribes of Israel relate to the work of the Restoration and gathering in the last days.

APOSTASY

REVELATION 20:5

D&C 76:81–85

Those who will not be resurrected until after the Millennium are those who will inherit the telestial kingdom.



After the seventh seal is opened, Christ will return, and the wicked will be destroyed.

The earth will be cleansed, and the Millennium will begin (see D&C 88:89–110).

REVELATION 20:2

1 NEPHI 22:26

Satan will be bound during the Millennium "because of the righteousness of [Christ's] people."

RESTORATION

RESURRECTION

REVELATION 12:4, 7–9

D&C 29:36–37; 76:25–29

John's vision briefly harks back to the pre-mortal war in heaven in order to highlight the ongoing war on earth between God's and Satan's forces.

"The earth shall pass away so as by fire" (see D&C 43:32–33).

"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven" (Revelation 21:2). This could refer to the return of the city of Enoch (see Moses 7:63).

REVELATION 5–8

D&C 77:6–7, 12

The seven seals represent seven time periods. The final two deal with our day and beyond.

REVELATION 20:11–13

D&C 128:6–7

The books (on earth and in heaven) from which men will be judged by their works include records related to the salvation of the dead.

REVELATION 17:5

1 NEPHI 13:6; 14:10

The entity identified by John as “Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations” is the church of the devil. This church encompasses all forces opposed to Jesus Christ, His gospel, and His Church, for there are only two churches: the Church of the Lamb of God and the church of the devil.

In addition, Joseph Smith taught that sometimes a beast is just a beast. He explained that when John said he saw beasts in heaven (see Revelation 4:6), what he actually saw were . . . beasts in heaven. The Prophet thus demonstrated that at least some of John’s descriptions of his visions are literal while others are figurative.⁶ He also explained a principle related to such figures:

“Whenever God gives a vision of an image, or beast, or figure of any kind, He always holds Himself responsible to give a revelation or interpretation of the meaning thereof, otherwise we are not responsible or accountable for our belief in it. Don’t be afraid of being damned for not knowing the meaning of a vision or figure, if God has not given a revelation or interpretation of the subject.”⁷

Knowing the interpretation of every detail of mysterious visions is not paramount in our study of the scriptures. The mysteries of the prophets’ figurative language are not the same as the mysteries of God, which are given to the person who “repenteth and exerciseth faith, and bringeth forth good works, and prayeth continually without ceasing” (Alma 26:22).

By demystifying the book of Revelation, the Prophet removed potential distractions from the weightier matters of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Of course, John’s vision gives us important information about the latter days: the Apostasy and Restoration, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, His triumph over the devil, His millennial reign, and the Resurrection and Final Judgment. These things can help us as we strive to find the truth and follow the Lord’s will. But if we

get hung up on a particular interpretation of a figure described in that vision, we may neglect things that matter most.⁸

As we study the book of Revelation and take advantage of the wonderful light shed on it through the Prophet Joseph Smith, we can see where we stand in the grand scope of the world’s history and of God’s dealings with His children. Knowing this, we can see the importance of our personal testimony of Jesus Christ and of participating fully in His work in the latter days. Then we can overcome the world and, with Christ, inherit all things from the Father (see Revelation 3:21; 21:7). ■

NOTES

1. See, for instance, Revelation 2:1, footnote *a*; or Revelation 6:14, footnote *a*.
2. For instance, Joseph Smith’s rendering of Revelation 1:7 (in the Bible appendix) reads: “For behold, he cometh *in the clouds with ten thousands of his saints in the kingdom, clothed with the glory of his Father*. And every eye shall see him; and they who pierced him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” The words added by Joseph Smith (in italics) connect this verse with other scriptural teachings about Christ’s Second Coming—for instance, Matthew 16:27 (“the glory of his Father”) and Jude 1:14 (“ten thousands of his saints”).
3. Bible Dictionary, “Revelation of John.”
4. *History of the Church*, 5:342.
5. Of course, as Joseph Smith knew, the first five of the seven seals deal with past events, but these serve to highlight the theme of a purpose or an endpoint to human history, culminating in the events leading up to the Second Coming—well beyond John’s day.
6. In this particular example, the beasts themselves are literal, representing four individual beasts, while John’s *description* of them contains figurative elements (multiple eyes and wings) representing their abstract attributes rather than their appearance (see Revelation 4:6–8; D&C 77:4).
7. *History of the Church*, 5:343.
8. Joseph Smith apparently felt this was particularly true for missionaries. He said: “Oh, ye elders of Israel, hearken to my voice; and when you are sent into the world to preach, tell those things you are sent to tell; preach and cry aloud, ‘Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand; repent and believe the Gospel.’ Declare the first principles, and let mysteries alone, lest ye be overthrown. Never meddle with the visions of beasts and subjects you do not understand” (*History of the Church*, 5:344).



By Scott H. Knecht
Seminaries and Institutes

Asking the Right **Questions** in the Right Way

Learning how to prepare for, create, ask, and respond to questions can make all the difference in how you learn and teach the gospel.

There are a lot of things that can go into creating a great lesson or a great family conversation. Activities, silent study, and working with groups are a few of the tools that gospel teachers—whether it be those with formal callings, volunteer seminary or institute teachers, or parents—might use to enhance their teaching.

But included in the top two or three necessary skills that all teachers should possess is the ability to work well with questions: to create them, to ask them, and to encourage meaningful responses. President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, said, “To ask and to answer questions is at the heart of all learning and all teaching.”¹ To be an effective teacher, it is imperative to acquire this skill. Here are five suggestions for doing just that.

Seek the Most Effective Responses

Sitting in a class as a learner and hearing a great question reminds us of the power of excellent teaching. But how to create and ask

effective questions is puzzling and may look daunting to many teachers. Fortunately, it is a skill any teacher can learn.

As you create questions, try to determine what type of response the question will elicit. Some questions seek a specific type of response—one that corresponds exactly to the question asked. Those questions work well in a math class (“What is the area of this square?”) or in a science class (“At what temperature does water boil?”) because there is only one discoverable and verifiable answer. They are also useful in gospel study as a way to get the facts in place to begin a discussion but do little to fuel discussion. In general, however, those kinds of questions are used the most because they are easy to prepare.

We ask things like, “What did we study last time?” or “Tell me the name of . . .” These questions often cause those you teach to freeze up. They think they know the answer but aren’t sure and so are afraid to venture a guess. The teacher often interprets this silence as a sign that the question was



too hard, when in reality the question is too basic to elicit anything more meaningful from learners than a quick answer.

In order to generate classroom discussion, a much more useful question is one that invites a variety of thoughtful responses. When you ask this kind of question, you can find out what those you ask are thinking about the subject or what they are puzzling over during your discussion. For example, Moroni chapter 1 contains four verses, each full of deep feeling. What would happen if you read all four verses with those you're teaching and then asked, "Which of those verses causes the deepest feelings inside of you?" Give them a minute to start talking. Since you are not asking for a specific response, almost anything they say is usable. I've used that very chapter with that very question and received some incredible responses that generated deep discussions.

Those are the types of questions that invite thinking and feeling as opposed to questions that require recall or simply a statement of facts. There is a time and place for recall, but the teacher can say much of

what needs to be recalled, as in, "Remember that last time we talked about Moroni 1 and how each verse contains some powerful lessons . . ." Just by my saying that, it will stir up thoughts, and learners will be more likely to jump in and continue the discussion. However, if I say, "What did we talk about last time?" I will usually be met with silence and shrugs.

Ask the Second Question

A common question used by gospel teachers is some variation of this: "So how important is faith in your life?" At first glance that sounds like a meaningful inquiry, but if you think about it, there is only one answer: "Very important." Of course, faith (and any other gospel principle) *is* very important, but that type of question generally leads nowhere by itself because you still have to ask the follow-up question, which is something like: "Why is it so important?" or "Will you give us an example of

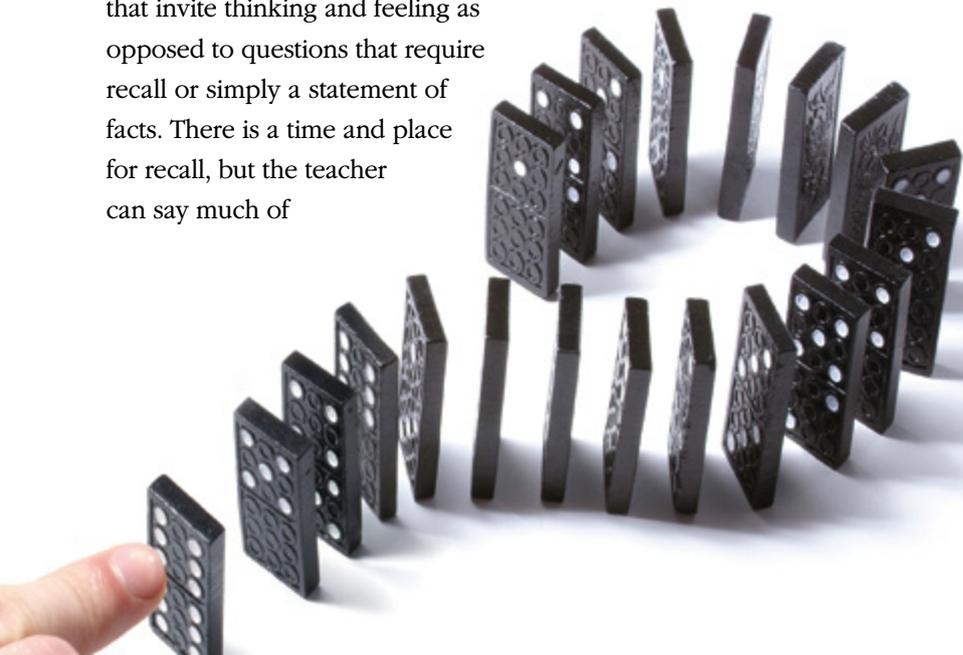
when it was important in your life?" Those questions can get things going in class, so go right to them and skip the first question. Asking the second question first will save time and keep the discussion moving better.

Write Your Questions Beforehand

It is very helpful to do two things as you prepare your lesson. First, write the question out. Don't just think of it; write it. Choose words carefully and read them over a few times to make sure that the question asks what you want it to ask in a clear way.

Second, ask yourself, what will those I teach do when I ask that question? There have been times when I thought I had a really good question written; then I said it out loud, and as I pictured my class, I knew it would fall flat. The question may have worked for a different class, but for my particular class I knew it would fail, so I started over. I know that if I have two or three really well-thought-out and well-written questions in my lesson plan, I can start conversations. Other questions will naturally follow, but I need well-crafted starting points.

This technique works just as well at home. We seem to have a lot of spontaneous gospel discussions in my home when the questions and answers flow, but there have been times when something more serious and direct needed to be said to a particular child. In those cases I learned that if I prepared specific questions, practiced my delivery



of them, and worked through scenarios of possible outcomes, things went a lot better. Those questions weren't written on paper; they were written in my heart, and I could use them as needed.

Don't Be Afraid of Silence

If you've created a really good question, one that causes thought and allows for some latitude in response, then don't be surprised if it takes people a few seconds to come up with their answers. There could be silence, but don't be alarmed. Surface questions—the ones that only require certain answers (e.g., "How many Articles of Faith are there?")—get answered quickly. Deep questions—those that require responses—often need time to simmer in a learner's mind. In this case, silence is your friend. Let it happen, and when those you are teaching begin to respond, you will be pleasantly surprised at what they come up with.

Ask Questions about the Scriptures

If you truly want to enhance your ability to create and ask effective questions, you need to learn to ask great questions about the scriptures during your study and preparation time.

One way to approach scripture reading is to do it for personal inspiration. We read chapters and verses to enjoy the beauty found therein and to be edified with doctrine and truth. A different approach, which works better for parents or teachers preparing

lessons, is to read the scriptures and probe the scriptures with questions. I do this to stimulate thought as I'm trying to decide how best to help those I teach to understand the scriptures. Here is an example: Doctrine and Covenants 18:10 contains a phrase that is well known and lifts our spirits, "Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God." I love that thought, but if all it is to me is inspirational, then it is not as useful in a class.

What if I pondered this question as I studied and prepared: "So what is the worth of a soul? I know it is great, but can we put a value on it?" One night at dinner one of my daughters asked that very question, and it stimulated a lot of discussion. This is where we ended up: The worth of a soul is what someone will pay for it, and what did our Father pay for our souls? He paid with the blood of His perfect Son. That makes each soul valuable beyond description. We would not have arrived at that conclusion without the question directed to the text itself.

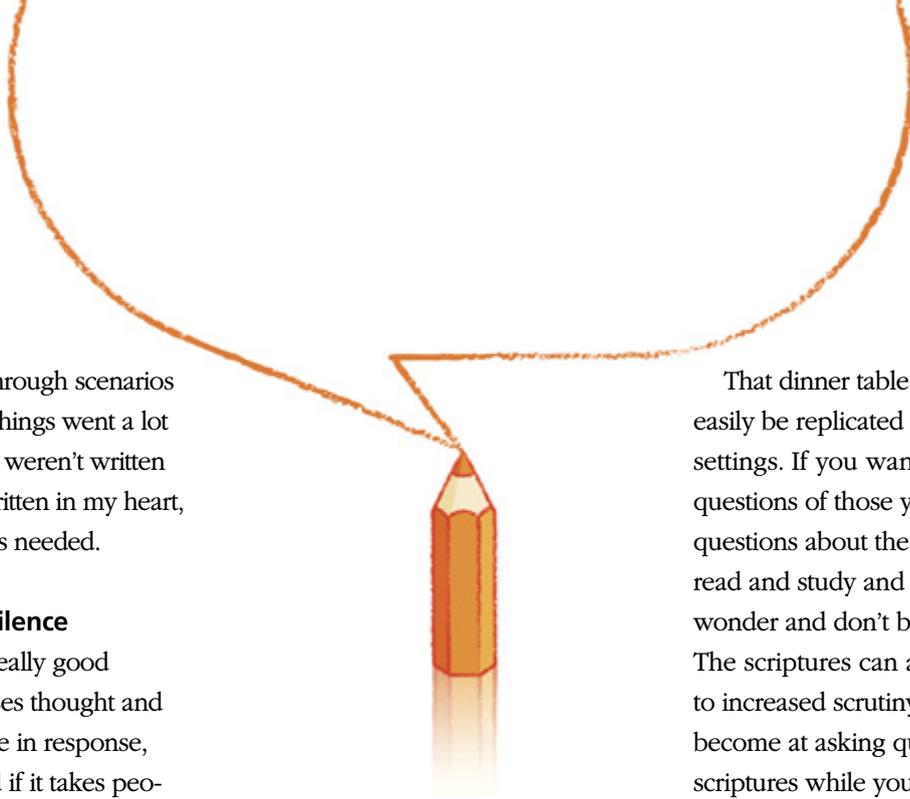
That dinner table conversation could easily be replicated in other teaching settings. If you want to ask better questions of those you teach, ask real questions about the scriptures as you read and study and prepare. Be full of wonder and don't be afraid to probe. The scriptures can always hold up to increased scrutiny. The better you become at asking questions about the scriptures while you study, the better you will become at asking those same great questions of those you teach.

Continue to Develop Your Teaching Ability

There is a tendency to look at great teachers and think that they were just born that way. They appear to have a gift that would be difficult for the average person to acquire. Of course, the ability to teach is one of the gifts of the Spirit (see Moroni 10:9–10), so some of the skill you are seeing may be a gift from heaven—but it's a gift open to all who seek it. So much of what great teachers do is available to you also through study and practice. Learning to ask effective questions is such a skill. As you prayerfully seek the ability to do that, you will find that there is great worth in creating questions that stir those you teach into thinking, and your ability to do that very thing will increase. ■
The author lives in California, USA.

NOTE

1. Henry B. Eyring, "The Lord Will Multiply the Harvest" (satellite broadcast address to religious educators in the Church Educational System, Feb. 6, 1998), 5–6.



JOSEPH SMITH DID SEE GOD

We must each gain a testimony of the witness provided by the Prophet Joseph Smith.



By Elder Joseph F. Merrill (1868–1952)

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Joseph F. Merrill was born on August 24, 1868, in Utah, USA. He was set apart as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles on October 8, 1931, and served in that quorum until his death on February 3, 1952. The following is an excerpt from a general conference address given in April 1947. For the full address, see Conference Report, April 1947, 132–37 (also available at scriptures.byu.edu).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints . . . is noted for many characteristic teachings, one of which is that Joseph Smith was divinely called, beginning with a most wonderful and glorious vision. Relative to this matter, a basic and fundamental question that every member of the Church may rightfully ask, as well as every honest investigator, is “Did Joseph Smith really see God?” . . .

Joseph Beheld Two Personages

All informed Latter-day Saints know the story of the First Vision as related by Joseph Smith. . . . In answer to the boy’s simple prayer, . . . he was enveloped in a pillar of brilliant light which descended from above. Looking up, he beheld two

personages standing above him, whose brightness and glory defied all description. One of Them, calling him by name and pointing to the other, said, “*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*” [Joseph Smith—History 1:17] and then Joseph heard the voice of Jesus Christ, the Son, and received instructions from Him.

. . . Joseph Smith, the fourteen-year-old lad, saw the Father and the Son and heard Their voices. So far as the records indicate, this was the most glorious vision ever given to mortal man. Never before had both Father and Son appeared simultaneously to any mortal man. I have called your attention to Joseph’s story because of its extreme importance to our faith. . . . So I ask again, did Joseph Smith really and in fact see God? . . .

Joseph Learned of Personal Beings

The implications of the affirmative answer are tremendously significant. Through misunderstanding and wrong interpretations, the world had lost the correct conception of the image and personality of God. To

restore the truth, a new revelation was imperative. Though from the beginning to its end, the Bible . . . teaches that God is a personal being in whose image we are made, and that the Father and the Son are two separate and distinct personalities, alike in image and attributes, yet the modern world, through ignorance and lack of understanding, denies these fundamental truths. And so important are these truths to a satisfying faith that, I think, they are absolutely basic. Without any concrete conception of the image of God, how can one develop the necessary faith of the kind that the Apostle James asserts is needed to get an answer to prayer? [see James 1:5–6]. Yes, God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, are personal beings in whose image man himself is made, so declared Joseph Smith. . . .

Joseph’s Works Evidence God’s Inspiration

Now, what evidence can we present of the truthfulness of Joseph Smith’s claims? . . . Jesus emphasized



the principle that a tree is judged by its fruits [see Matthew 7:16–20]. Can there be a more fair, just, and satisfactory basis of judgment than this? . . .

. . . Judged by modern standards, [Joseph Smith] was practically uneducated and untrained for leadership in any sphere of intellectual endeavor. . . .

But notwithstanding all the severely handicapping conditions from an economic and educational point of view, what did Joseph Smith become? . . .

. . . I recite [a] quotation from [a] writer in the *New York Times* of September 4, 1843: . . .

“It is no small thing, in the blaze of the nineteenth century, to give to men a new revelation, found a new religion, establish new forms of worship, to build a city with new laws,

institutions, and orders of architecture, to establish ecclesiastical, civil and military jurisdiction, found colleges, send out missionaries, and make proselytes on two hemispheres. Yet all this has been done by [Joseph] Smith, and that against every sort of opposition, ridicule, and persecution.”

In the short space of fifteen years, Joseph Smith, unschooled in the learning and the methods of the world, did all these important things. How was it possible? Does not the only rational explanation lie in the claim that he was God-taught? . . .

. . . It is very largely to the teachings and labors of the Prophet Joseph Smith that the modern world is indebted for a correct interpretation of the plan of life, salvation, and

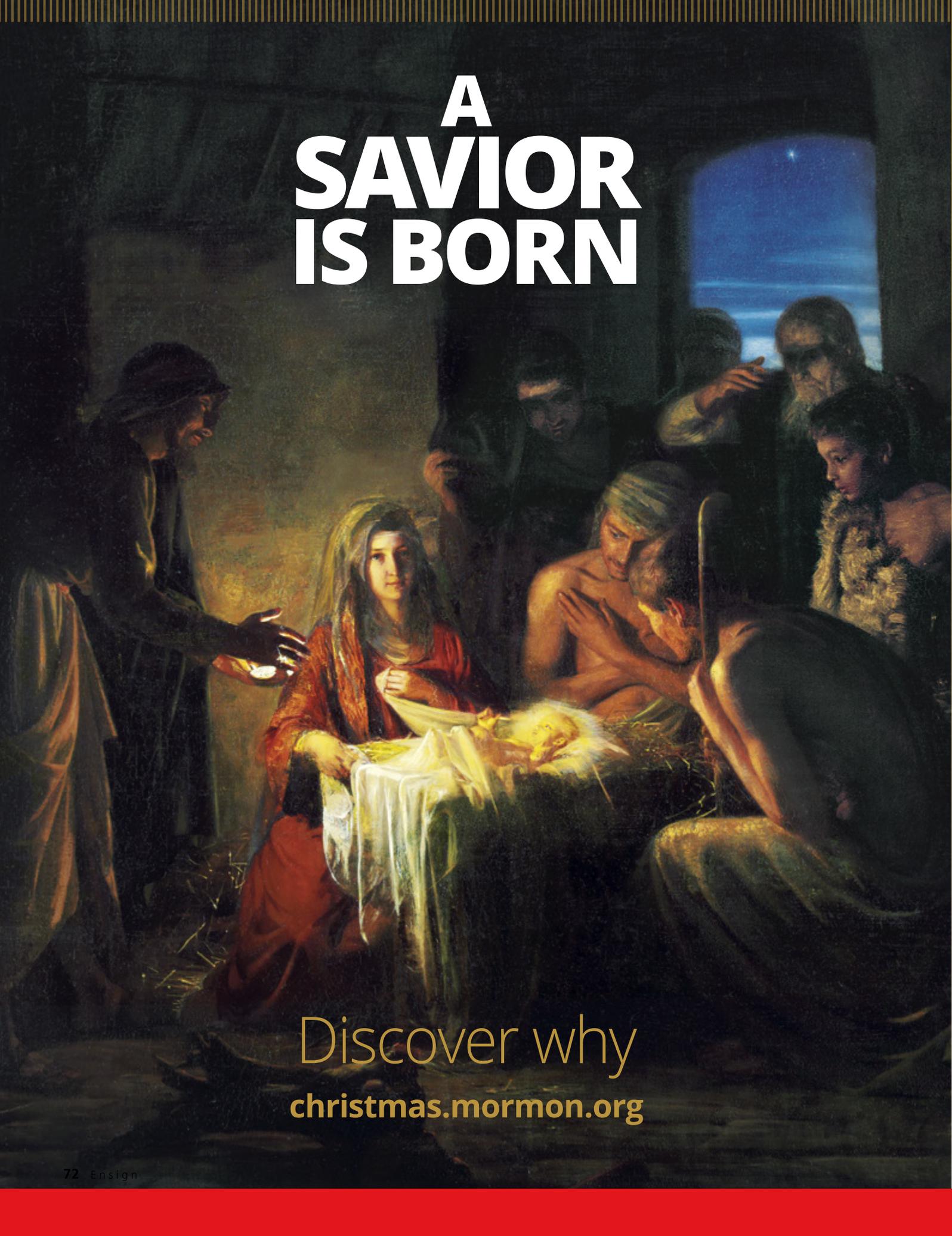
exaltation that the Lord has provided for His children to follow if they would care to return to His presence.

. . . Joseph Smith, his claims, his teachings, and his achievements are so very remarkable in character that they challenge every . . . human being able to do so, to make an honest and thorough investigation of them. ■

Subheads added; capitalization and punctuation standardized.

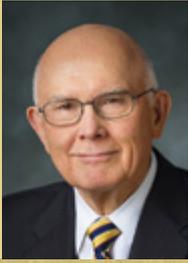
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**By Elder
Dallin H. Oaks**
Of the Quorum
of the Twelve
Apostles

Bear witness of Him

At this special time of year, families throughout the Christian world gather to read the scriptural account of the first Christmas, more than 2,000 years ago. In many of these readings, particular emphasis is given to Luke 2:11, the announcement made by an angel to the shepherds who watched over their flocks by night: “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

That divine declaration was followed by a description of the sign that would help the shepherds recognize Jesus when they traveled to Bethlehem: “Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12). These humble shepherds became the first of millions of mortal witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ. Like them, we are invited to be witnesses too.

You may ask, isn’t the opportunity to be a witness reserved for those men selected by the Lord and called to serve as His Apostles? The answer is no. Apostles are called and ordained to be “special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world” (D&C 107:23), but the duty to witness and testify of Christ at all times and in all places applies to every member of the Church (see Mosiah 18:9).

We live in a world where the power and influence of God in our daily lives are downplayed and dismissed and where the need for a Savior is ignored and even mocked. For those who are devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ, there has never been a greater need for us to profess our faith in our Savior, privately and publicly.

The world needs a Savior. All people need to be cleansed from the effects of sin and to return to the presence of God. Jesus Christ is the Light and Life of the World. This Christmas season, each of us will have many opportunities to proclaim our belief in Him to friends and neighbors, fellow workers, and casual acquaintances. I hope we will take these opportunities to express our love for Him, to bear our witness of His divine mission, and to renew our determination to serve Him. As we do, we join “a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:13–14). ■



SHARING THIS YEAR’S CHRISTMAS VIDEO

A video with testimonies of children from around the world can be found at christmas.mormon.org. Share your own testimony of the Savior using the social media hashtag #ASaviorIsBorn.



RUNNING TO THE TEMPLE

In December 1999 we were preparing for our annual Christmas trip to the Bern Switzerland Temple. The trip, a special tradition we began shortly after our marriage, is one way we commemorate the Savior's birth.

We live about eight hours by car from the temple, and bad weather preceded our departure. Uprooted trees, a sharp wind, and icy roads would make the journey treacherous.

I felt uncertain and didn't understand why we were encountering so many obstacles when we knew that the Lord wanted us to go to the temple. Would He not open our way?

My husband, Antonio, and I knelt in prayer with our children and said

to our Heavenly Father that unless He told us differently, we would head for Bern the next day.

"If the road is truly impassable," Antonio said after our prayer, "we'll come back."

I felt our decision was right, but I was still fearful. The next morning, full of doubt, I wanted to pray again. Antonio told me we had already received our answer, but he lovingly and patiently knelt beside me.

When we left, it was barely dawn and dark clouds hovered over us. As we drove, I could see a small bit of blue sky near the mountains. A timid ray of sun broke through the clouds.

That glimmer of sunshine

strengthened my vacillating faith.

Miraculously, the sun came out and the temperature rose. There was no fog, no ice, no wind—only a clear, extraordinarily warm winter day. My eyes filled with tears. It seemed that Heavenly Father had answered our prayers.

After we arrived at Bern, it began to snow heavily and continued to snow throughout our stay. As we headed to the temple before dawn the next morning, the storm turned into a blizzard. For a minute I was afraid, and I began to run along the sidewalk that leads to the temple.

Then a thought came into my mind: "This is the way it should be. The world howls



ILLUSTRATION BY STAN FELLOWS

MY CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

at us with troubles, but we must run to the peace of the Lord found in His house.”

We had a wonderful time at the temple that Christmas season, but we worried about our trip home. The snow continued to fall, and our youngest son developed a high fever. On the day of our departure, however, the snow miraculously stopped, and our son’s fever broke after he received a priesthood blessing.

As the peace of the temple sustained us, a Bible verse came to my mind: “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?” (Genesis 18:14). With gratitude, I realized that no, it is not. ■

Antonella Trevisan, Udine, Italy

During the fall of 1968, our bishop asked my parents if they would pledge money toward building the Provo Utah Temple. Wards don’t do that today, but it was common back then. My dad pledged U.S. \$1,000. That might not seem like much money, but it was to us. My father was working two jobs to help support a son in college, a son on a mission, and five children at home.

When my father sat us down for family council and told us he had pledged \$1,000 toward the temple, I remember thinking, “You might as well have pledged \$1 million because both amounts are unreachable.” I couldn’t believe he had pledged that much, and we had less than four months to gather the funds.

We chose four ways to help raise money: we would forfeit gift giving that Christmas and donate the money we would have spent on gifts; my sisters and I would donate our baby-sitting money; my little brother would do odd jobs to earn money; and as a family we would go to a local farm, pick apples daily for a few weeks, and donate the earnings.

We gift wrapped a shoebox that would hold our deposits, added a picture of a temple and a picture of Jesus Christ, and placed the box on a small table. Excitement grew as our donations increased. Our focus switched

from the presents we wanted to our gift for the Savior. I so appreciated the gift He had given God’s children—His life—that I wanted to give something back to Him.

Picking apples turned out to be the most difficult and satisfying way to earn money. It was draining, but we were strengthened and rewarded as we spent time together as a family. We began to be “knit together in unity and in love” (Mosiah 18:21).

As Christmas approached, I would peek into the donation box, but I was always disappointed. Despite our efforts, we were far from our goal.

I felt wonderful, though, about our decision to forfeit presents. I knew that our sacrifices were small, but I had faith that the Savior would be pleased.

One day my dad announced that we had reached our goal and that he had donated the money. I never found out how we raised the rest so quickly.

The fulfillment of Dad’s pledge that Christmas was miraculous. But for me, the real miracle was that through giving instead of receiving, I grew closer to the Savior. That was better than any Christmas gift I could have received. Seven years later the gift was returned to me as I knelt across an altar in the Provo Temple to be sealed for time and all eternity to my husband. ■

Joan Burton Stott, California, USA



As we headed to the temple before dawn the next morning, the storm turned into a blizzard.

Upon opening a box, I found a homemade apron fashioned from Christmas fabric.



STRINGS OF SACRIFICE

One Christmas years ago I had too much on my mind to savor the season. My husband, Andy, had developed a cough that, following medical tests, briskly evolved into lung damage, surgery, reconstruction of his esophagus, and biopsies—“just to be safe.” His surgery occurred a week before we moved to a new home.

A few weeks before Christmas, I visited with my neighbor Janae. She asked if I was ready for Christmas. I managed to reply that I was as ready as I would be. I mentioned that we’d always made Christmas cookies with my grandma just before Christmas, and that I’d wanted to make aprons for the girls but probably wouldn’t get around to it.

A week later I settled in the overstuffed chair beside our Christmas tree. The girls were in bed, and Andy was working in his office when I heard the doorbell. I opened the door to find

Janae on my doorstep, holding three packages as snowflakes fell behind her.

“Come in,” I said, certain that she could sense my surprise.

“Thanks, but I need to get back,” she said. “These are for your girls.”

Janae handed me the packages.

“They’re aprons,” she said. “They’re not the best, but I was able to finish them tonight.”

In a moment of humbled astonishment, I breathed a thank-you. We hugged, and I watched her make her way home.

As I sat again in my chair, I carefully unfastened the white satin ribbon of one box. Upon opening it, I found a homemade apron fashioned from Christmas fabric. I ran a seam between my thumb and forefinger as I thought about Janae. She had four small children, including twins who were just over a year old. She

taught piano, and she held a busy and important calling in our ward.

I tried to figure out when she would have had time to make aprons, and I knew at once that she didn’t have time. She made time.

Tears fell as I felt the love of Heavenly Father extended through Janae—a measure of warmth and comfort as I was encircled about “in the arms of [His] love” (D&C 6:20).

It has been many years since we received the aprons. My daughters have long since outgrown them, but I keep them in my pantry, hanging by their strings from a polished hook underneath newer ones. Each time I see Janae’s gifts, I’m reminded of the comfort and love I felt that night. They remind me of what I want to be—a disciple of Jesus Christ worthy of revelation and willing to give service. ■

Candice A. Grover, Idaho, USA

I WAS NOT ALONE

Sitting in a hastily dug defensive position, I looked out over the sand toward the north—toward Iraq. It was December 24 during Desert Shield, and I had drawn guard duty starting at midnight.

I was the only Latter-day Saint in my battalion, so the holiday was even lonelier. We had been in the desert of Saudi Arabia since August, and now Christmas was here with a cold, starlit night. The camp was asleep, and I had a few hours with the bluish-grey dunes and my thoughts.

I thought of my wife and son in Georgia, USA, and how I would miss the festivities back home—the tree, the presents, a real Christmas dinner. Then I began to ponder the Christmas story.

I wondered about the night that Christ was born. I wondered how dark it was and if there was a moon to cast its brightness over the landscape or if there was only starlight. Since there were no electric lights at His birth, the night must have been something like the one I was witnessing. There would have been no festivities—just dark, quiet night.

Then a wonderful thought struck me. The Bible states that Wise Men later came from the East, guided by a star that appeared in the night sky. As I looked into the dark sky, I realized I was to the east of Bethlehem and that one of the centers of knowledge at that time was Baghdad. Could the Wise Men have come from a location not far from where I was? What star shone? Was it still in the sky? Could I see it?

I gazed skyward in wonder at God's creations and felt a warmth that came from within. It did not matter if I was in the same location or if the same star was in the sky. What

mattered is that I shared the same knowledge as the Wise Men of an infant born in Bethlehem who is the King of kings.

I was not alone that Christmas; rather, I was united with all those who seek Him, whether they be Wise Men, prophets, or just lonely soldiers in a hole in the desert. That night my testimony of the birth of the Savior was strengthened, and the next morning the Holy Spirit was still with me.

Instead of being a sad Christmas that year, it became one of my most prized Christmases. ■

Robert Hoffman, Washington, USA



As I looked into the dark sky, I realized I was to the east of Bethlehem.



ILLUSTRATION BY ALLEN GARRIS

I prayed that by the end of the night, the “Sub for Santa” jar would be full.

A MODERN-DAY WIDOW’S MITE

The borrowed white tablecloths and snowmen centerpieces gave the cultural hall a festive look as last-minute preparations were being made for our family Christmas party.

As we waited for our guests, my gaze drifted to a table where an empty jar—labeled “Sub for Santa”—sat. I prayed that by the end of the night, the jar would be full.

During our party preparations we had discovered that my cousin’s husband had been out of work for over a year and a half. Her family’s main source of income consisted of handling five paper routes, which required them to begin each day at 3:30 a.m. The majority of their income went to paying the mortgage and other necessities, leaving little for things they wanted, such as Christmas presents.

My cousin’s family was one of the first to arrive. I watched as they made their way toward the dining tables, past our Christmas jar. As they

approached, my cousin’s husband stopped to read the sign on the jar. Without hesitating, he took out his worn wallet, pulled out a couple of dollars, and tossed them in the container, oblivious to who the family “in need” was.

Emotion welled up in my throat, and I instantly recalled the New Testament story of the widow and her two mites. Wealthy men were flaunting their large donations to the treasury when “there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites” (see Mark 12:41–42).

The Savior then said to His disciples: “This poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:

“For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living” (Mark 12:43–44).

Jesus Christ said she gave in “her want” and cast in “even all her

living.” She could have given only one mite. That probably would have satisfied what was required, but her faithful heart and willingness to sacrifice all caught the attention of the Son of God.

No one would have blamed my cousin’s husband for walking past the jar thinking, “If I had I would give” (Mosiah 4:24). His great example of charity and love for his fellowmen touched not only me but also other members of my family who were watching him. I knew his family would be fine because “charity is the pure love of Christ, . . . and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him” (Moroni 7:47).

We had hoped to give his family something that night, which we did later on, but by giving in the midst of his own time of need, he showed us that when it came to what mattered most, he was already a rich man. ■

Stephanie H. Olsen, Utah, USA

HOW DID THEY KNOW OF MY NEED?

Nearly 20 years ago I received my mission call to serve in Japan. With great anticipation and some anxiety, I prepared to leave for my mission in January. Around this time both of my parents lost their jobs.

I had funding for my mission once I arrived, but our family struggled financially. I wasn't sure where I would get money for upfront expenses like mission clothes, luggage, and other necessities. I was working a part-time job but wouldn't have enough. I was especially concerned with how I would get money to apply immediately for a passport so I would

have it in time to leave for Japan.

One afternoon, in desperation, I went to my room and pleaded with Heavenly Father. I shared my desire to serve in Japan and my gratitude that my dream of serving a mission would come true soon. I choked back tears, telling Him how I needed \$75 for a passport that I just did not have. When I arose from my prayer, I knew everything was going to work out. I didn't know how, but a quiet peace assured me that the Lord would provide.

Later that day I opened our mailbox to find a Christmas card inside. The individual who delivered it had made a concerted effort to maintain anonymity. There was no stamp on the card; it had been delivered by hand.

On the inside of the card was typed, "Congratulations! You are the recipient of random acts of Christian kindness. Merry Christmas, Hannah. Good luck on your mission."

Inside the card was \$100. I stood at my front door and cried. Who did this, and how did they know of my need?

Years later I still don't know who brought the money to my house that day. I have thought about that person, or persons, a lot since then. They demonstrated what I believe Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin (1917–2008) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles meant when he said: "The compassion of Christlike friends deeply touches and changes our lives. . . . In this Church, prayers for help are often answered by the Lord through the simple, daily service of caring brothers and sisters. In the goodness of genuine friends, I have seen the reflected mercy of the Lord Himself."¹

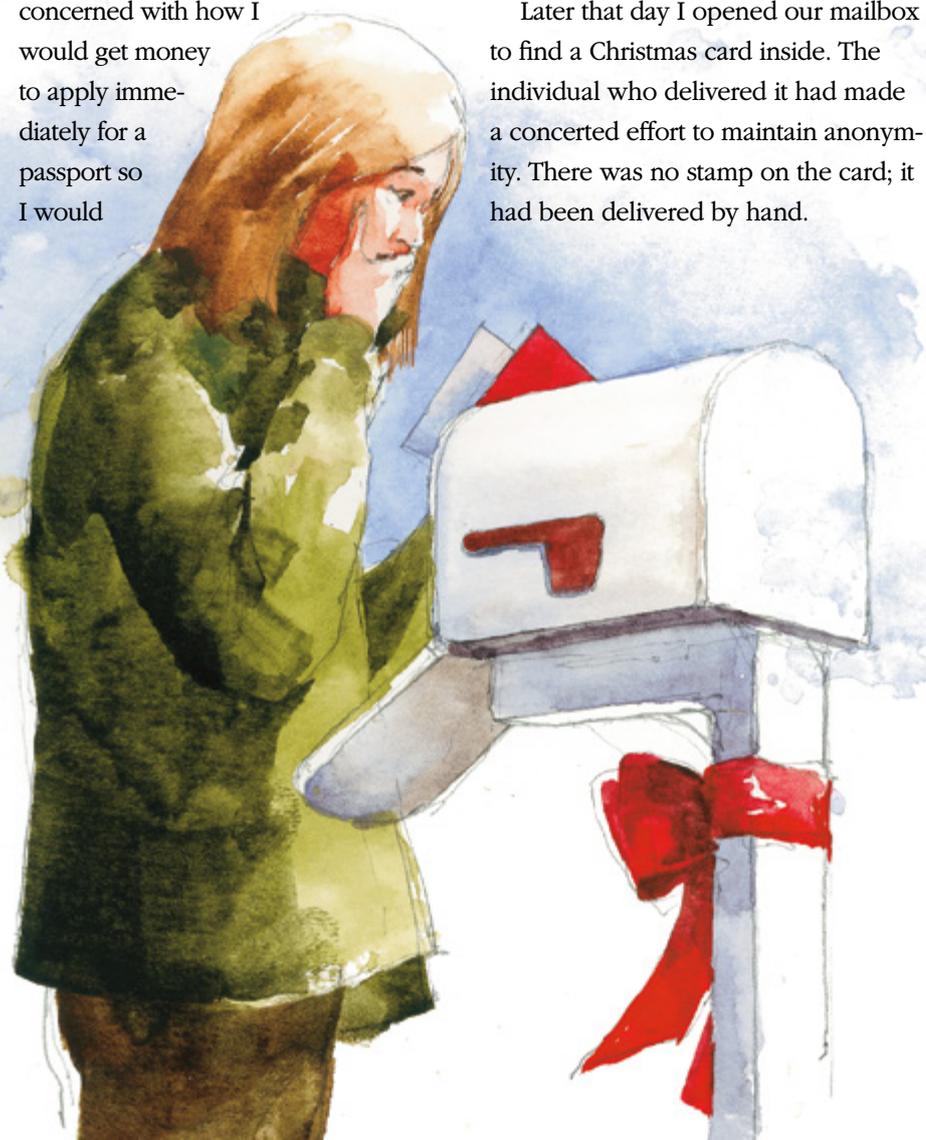
That act of kindness changed me, helping me to leave on time for my mission and inspiring me to look for ways to be the answer to the prayers of others. ■

Hannah Eiselin, Arizona, USA

NOTE

1. Joseph B. Wirthlin, "Valued Companions," *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 32.

I opened our mailbox to find a Christmas card inside. There was no stamp on it; it had been delivered by hand.





By President
Howard W. Hunter
(1907–95)

Fourteenth President
of the Church

THE REAL CHRISTMAS

The real Christmas comes to those who have taken Christ into their lives.

In Paul's short letter to the Galatians, he showed great concern over their apparent disbelief and their forsaking of his teachings regarding Christ. He wrote to them: "But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you. My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Galatians 4:18–19). In other words, Paul expressed himself as suffering pain and anxiety until Christ be "formed" in them. This is another way of saying "in Christ," as that expression is used by Paul repeatedly in his writings.

It is possible for Christ to be born in men's lives, and when such an experience actually happens, a man is "in Christ"—Christ is "formed" in him. This presupposes that we take Christ into our hearts and make Him the living contemporary of our lives. He is not just a general truth or a fact in history, but the Savior of men everywhere and at all times. When we strive



to be Christlike, He is "formed" in us; if we open the door, He will enter; if we seek His counsel, He will counsel us. For Christ to be "formed" in us, we must have a belief in Him and in His Atonement. Such a belief in Christ and the keeping of His commandments are not restraints upon us. By these, men are set free. This Prince of Peace waits to give peace of mind, which may make each of us a channel of that peace.

The real Christmas comes to him who has taken Christ into his life as a moving, dynamic, vitalizing force.

In his contemplation of the Christmas season, James Wallingford penned these lines:

*Christmas is not a day or a season,
but a condition of heart and
mind.*

*If we love our neighbors as
ourselves;
if in our riches we are poor in spirit
and in our poverty we are rich
in grace;
if our charity vaunteth not itself,
but suffereth long and is kind;
if when our brother asks for a loaf,
we give ourselves instead;
if each day dawns in opportunity
and sets in achievement, however
small—
then every day is Christ's day and
Christmas is always near.*

[In Charles L. Wallis, ed., *Words of Life* (1966), 33]

If you desire to find the true spirit of Christmas and partake of the sweetness of it, let me make this suggestion to you. During the hurry of the festive occasion of this Christmas season, find time to turn your heart to God. Perhaps in the quiet hours, and in a quiet place, and on your knees—alone or with loved ones—give thanks for the good things that have come to you, and ask that His Spirit might dwell in you as you earnestly strive to serve Him and keep His commandments. He will take you by the hand and His promises will be kept. ■

From "The Real Christmas," Ensign, Dec. 2005, 22–25.

INSIGHTS



Members in Natal, Brazil.

What can we do to make the Sabbath a delight?

“The Sabbath provides a wonderful opportunity to strengthen family ties. . . . We make the Sabbath a delight when we teach the gospel to our children. . . . In addition to time with family, you can experience true delight on the Sabbath from family history work. . . . Make the Sabbath a delight by rendering service to others, especially those who are not feeling well or those who are lonely or in need.”

President Russell M. Nelson, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Sabbath Is a Delight,” *Ensign*, May 2015, 130, 131.



In Church Magazines

Ensign: “After returning home early from my mission, I struggled with my testimony. But eventually I promised Heavenly Father I would remain faithful even if I didn’t receive answers.” See page 18.

New Era: In this month’s issue, Elder D. Todd Christofferson encourages readers to find some quiet moments at Christmastime (page 2). Also, youth will learn what those who knew the Prophet Joseph Smith had to say about him (page 24).

Friend: Take a journey on “The Road to Bethlehem” this Christmas! Begin on December 14th, and each day read about a different part of the Nativity and add to your advent calendar (page 24). Make this Christmas season a special time to focus on Christ.

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

ENGLISH

