

One Verse AT A Time

BY DEBRA L. ADAMS

I knew latter-day prophets had promised blessings from family scripture study, but could something so simple really bring peace to our home?

It was quiet in the house, but only because my three daughters were asleep. My mind kept replaying the events of the day—temper tantrums, quarreling, yelling, teasing, crying. Unfortunately, this behavior was not unusual, and I was as much a part of the problem as my children were. I felt like I was losing control of my family.

I attributed some of the problems to our adjusting to life without my husband, who had died from cancer six months earlier. However, I knew we could not use this as an excuse for the atmosphere in our home. We had to continue to progress so that we would be able to enjoy the blessings of being an eternal family. But what could we do? Changing our attitudes and behaviors seemed an impossible task.

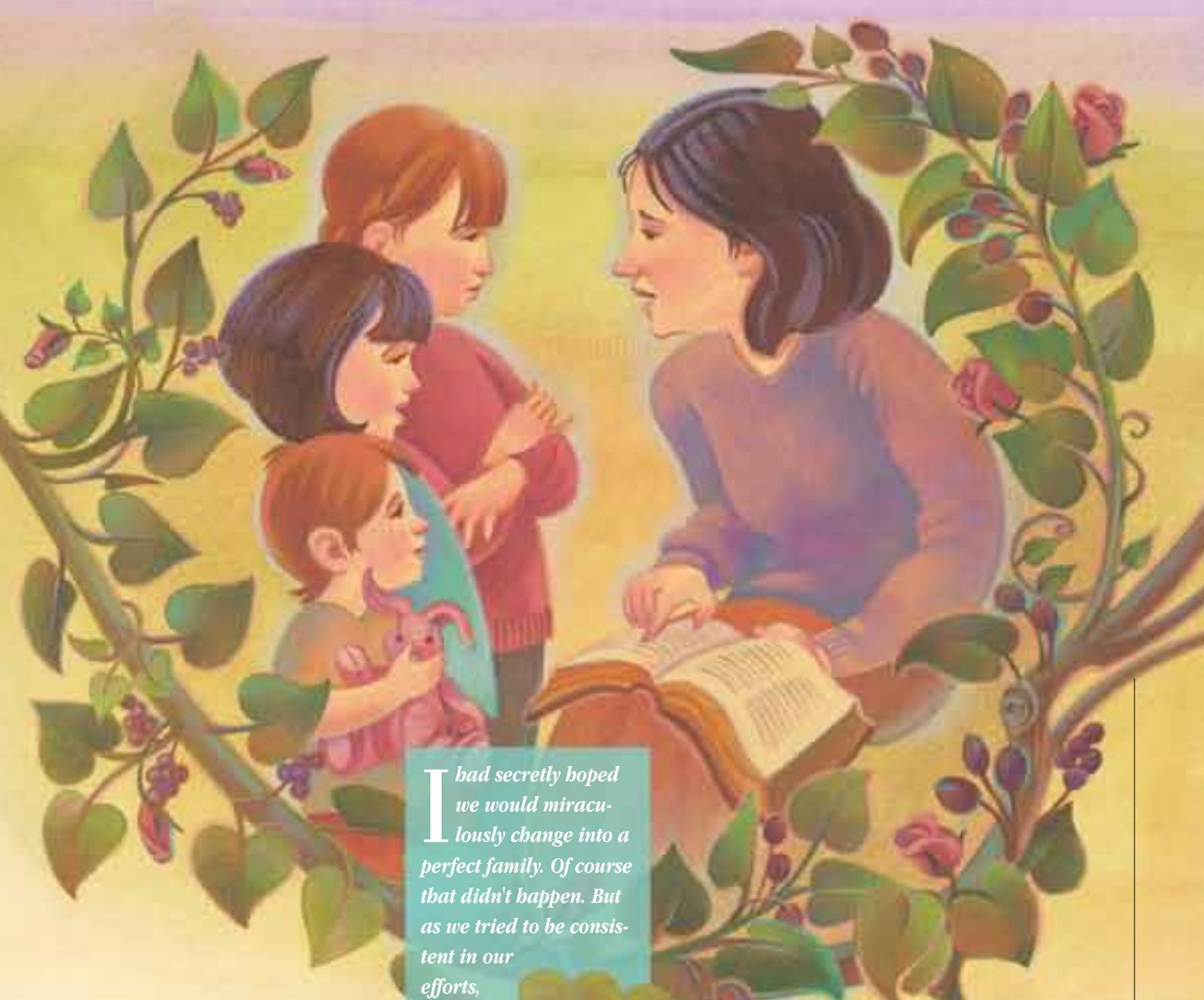
As I tried to formulate a plan, I remembered the words of our latter-day prophets. They had promised blessings from family scripture study. Though I felt this was good advice, I was not convinced that it was an answer to my prayers. How could something so simple help our situation? Besides, my husband and I had previously attempted

family scripture reading programs, and they never lasted.

More unpleasant days passed, and I grew increasingly discouraged and desperately wanted change for my daughters and me. As I pondered the idea of scripture study, I recalled that the prophet Alma had once challenged the people he was teaching to “an experiment upon [his] words” (Alma 32:27). I realized I had nothing to lose by accepting this challenge and decided that I would again try to implement family scripture study.

Over the next several days, I thought about what might work for us. I wanted something that would involve every member of our family from the oldest child, who was six years old, to the youngest, who was not quite two. I wanted something we could be successful at doing. After praying for help and guidance, I determined that our study would combine music, the Articles of Faith, scriptures, and prayer.

I presented the plan at our next family home evening. I tried to be enthusiastic so my daughters would want to participate. I enlisted their help in making sure we followed our routines. They were particularly excited about



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having a chart to mark our progress.

Each morning we got up at the same time so that we could have a morning devotional before any other activities—before eating breakfast or watching television programs or getting ready for school.

This prevented distraction. We started by singing a hymn. Next we recited one of the Articles of Faith. Then I read a few verses from the Book of Mormon. We closed our morning routine by having family prayer. Every evening after family prayer, I helped the girls each read or recite a preselected scripture before they said personal prayers.

Because my daughters were young and either lacked reading skills or were just developing them, we used the same

hymn, article of faith, and nighttime scripture all week. By the end of the week, we were familiar with the melody and the words of the hymn and, in many cases, had memorized the words of the article of faith and the scripture verse.

Admittedly, at first I felt disappointed by what I perceived as a lack of effectiveness of our plan. I had secretly hoped that, as a result of our study, we would miraculously change into a perfect family. Of course, that didn't happen. It was discouraging to realize that, even after studying together for several weeks, many of our challenges still existed.

Sometimes I was tempted to skip all or part of the routine. Then I would remember Alma's counsel to nourish and tend the experiment like a newly planted seed (see Alma 32:28–43). I knew I had to be consistent in my efforts.



Little by little, a new habit developed, and gradually our family began to change. Our family continues to experience life's usual challenges, but family scripture study helps us want to do better each day.

When one of the girls did not want to participate, I would insist that everyone be present at the family gathering. Little by little, week by week, a new scripture-study habit developed. And gradually our family began to change.

Several months after we began regular scripture study, I noticed that my children got excited when we sang a song at church that we had practiced. (Occasionally, I checked with the music director so that I could choose a hymn that our congregation would be singing in an upcoming sacrament meeting.) My children's interest in the scriptures also grew. I was able to increase the number of verses we read aloud in the morning. The charts became less important as we developed our habit, and before long, we realized we no longer needed them to motivate us. Sometimes, as the girls played, I'd overhear snatches of hymns and the Articles of Faith. Though they still quarreled and teased each other, these incidents became less frequent. I also found that I was

PUT IT TO THE TEST



"Never let a day go by without holding family prayer and family scripture study. Put this, the Lord's program, to the test; and see if it does not bless your home with greater peace, hope, love, and faith.

"I promise you that daily family prayer and scripture study will build within the walls of your home a security and bonding that will enrich your lives and prepare your families to meet the challenges of today and the eternities to come."

Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Back to Gospel Basics," Ensign, May 1993, 92.

responding better to the conflicts that did arise.

These positive experiences encouraged me to continue. As my girls learned to read, we took turns reading the scripture verses each morning. We continued this same routine for several years until early-morning seminary and work were added to our family's life. Then we streamlined the morning routine to focus on scripture reading and family prayer. The evening routine still included prayers, but reciting the scripture verse was replaced with personal scripture study.

Our family continues to experience the usual challenges of life. Family scripture study reminds us of who we are eternally and helps us want to do better each day. The best benefit to our scripture study program, however, has been that my own testimony has grown and become stronger because I was willing to experiment on the words of a prophet and found them to be true. ■