

THE ROAD TO A FOREVER FAMILY

By Garth and Sandy Hamblin

Once they were converted, the 'Akau'olas were determined to make it to the temple.

One Sunday morning, after drinking alcohol and kava with friends for most of the night, Siope 'Akau'ola of Tonga was returning home when he saw a family dressed in their Sunday best. They were laughing and talking as they walked together. Siope wondered what made them so happy, so he followed them to see where they were going.

Siope saw the family enter a Latter-day Saint Church building. He watched through the window as others arrived. Happiness radiated from their faces as families sat together and sang songs of worship.

Siope's thoughts drifted to his wife, Liu. The love they had shared when first married was fading. Siope wanted to recapture that love. He hurried home and told his wife he had found the way to help their family succeed: they needed to join the Church.

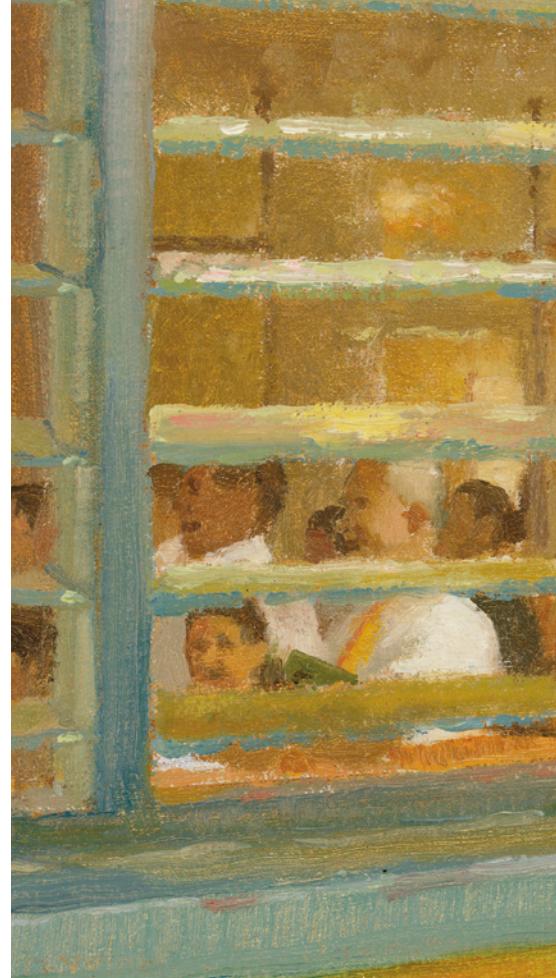
That very day Siope went to the bishop's home in his village. The bishop recognized Siope, having seen him drunk in the streets. As they talked, Siope could see doubt on the bishop's face, but he was firm in his resolve; he boldly told the bishop he wanted to be baptized. The bishop paused, invited Siope in, and began teaching him the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Liu was reluctant at first but watched as her husband gradually changed for the better. Siope began spending more time with their children and showing more love for his wife and family through his actions. So Liu began taking the missionary lessons also, and soon they were both baptized.

As the one-year anniversary of their baptism drew near, the 'Akau'ola family contemplated the wonderful blessings of the temple. Siope said, "If the blessings of the temple are so much greater than those we have received from being baptized, imagine how wonderful temple blessings must be." Despite their desire to be sealed, the temple in Tonga was undergoing renovations, so they would have to wait over a year or make an expensive trip to New Zealand or Fiji to attend the temple.

The family thought hard and prayed about what to do. They eventually decided to take out a small loan. While waiting for approval, the bank processing their loan was destroyed in a fire. All loans would be delayed until the following year.

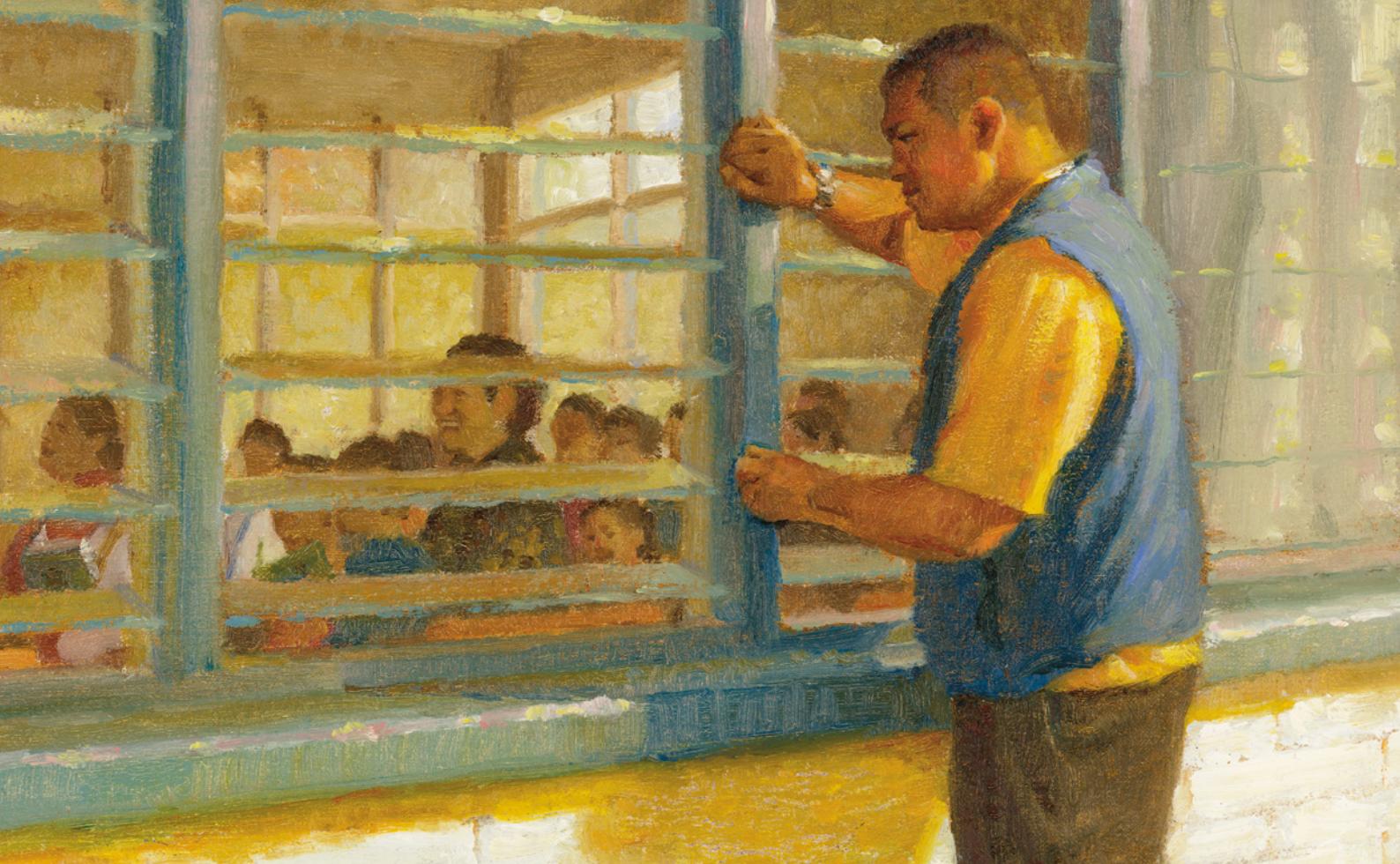
Siope and Liu were feeling discouraged. They sat together in their small living room and prayed for a



miracle. As they prayed and counseled together, the answer came: "I saw in my mind's eye the family van smiling at us and knew this was the answer to our prayers," Siope said. They were able to sell the van the next day and purchase airline tickets to Fiji for their family of five.

They arrived very late into Nadi, Fiji, with three tired children and a long drive ahead of them to the temple in Suva. Liu said, "I learned that the more we try to get closer to the Lord's house the more Satan tries to get us to give up before we get the blessing."

While sitting in the airport trying to decide what their next step would be, a woman helped them arrange lodging and a ride to Suva the next day for a fraction of the usual rates.



They felt that God had sent an angel to help them.

They arrived at the temple the next day. "As we entered the temple I felt a peace and calm in my heart," Liu said. "I have never seen clean and white in my life like in the temple. A thought came to my mind: If the temple is a house made by man and it is so beautiful, then how wonderful must the home be that Heavenly Father has promised us!"

Their experiences in the temple were life-changing for the family. Liu said, "The whole time we were

in Fiji, I experienced the love of our Heavenly Father for us. When we choose to follow Him, He really takes good care of us."

Wonderful blessings continued to come for the 'Akau'ola family after they returned home. Both Siope and Liu received college scholarships, earned teaching degrees, and were hired at Liahona High School.

While teaching, they became aware of children who needed a place to live. Sometimes by ones, more often by twos and threes, children began

knocking on Siope and Liu's door. And Siope and Liu took them in. Their small home now holds 20 people. They have five other "adopted" children who have since gone away to attend college or to serve missions.

Siope and Liu know that these children will grow and blossom when they are given love and structure in their lives. Those who were not members of the Church have embraced the gospel and now have growing desires to serve missions. Siope and Liu call all the children under their care *their* children, and all the kids call Liu and Siope Mom and Dad. The 'Akau'olas know they've been richly blessed and are happy to share these blessings with others. ■

The authors are from Alaska, USA, and are serving a mission in Tonga.

