

FINDING A HOME IN THE GOSPEL

By Rozelle Hastwell Hansen

As I grew up in Perth, Australia, religion was hit-and-miss for me. I was christened a Methodist, attended denominational schools, and sporadically attended a Baptist congregation with my grandmother. Despite this spiritual inconsistency, praying seemed natural to me—thanks to my grandmother, who shared her faith and taught me to read from the Bible. I am grateful for her consistent influence in my life because, despite my worldly pursuits, I intuitively began to build a belief in Jesus Christ. As I reflect back, I realize that Heavenly Father was preparing my heart to receive the restored gospel.

One preparatory event happened when I was in an auto accident while visiting France. Moments after I was strongly prompted to fasten my seat belt, the car skidded and plummeted down a 20-foot (6-m) embankment. Because of the warning voice and because I regained use of my feet and legs while others with similar injuries are often left permanently paralyzed, I began to understand that a divine power much greater than I was in control.

Two years later, while I was back in France as an exchange student, Kayla Barth, a fellow student from California,

boldly invited me to attend church with her. Kayla's unbounded enthusiasm for the gospel fascinated me. I hung on to every word as she shared the plan of salvation. It all sounded so familiar, as if I had heard it before.

When I walked into the Angoulême chapel for the first time, it was like being wrapped in a warm blanket. I had come “home.” That same day, in the Gospel Essentials class, the missionary who was teaching shared a powerful testimony of the First Vision. As he explained how the Holy Ghost testifies to us, warmth radiated from my heart and filled my entire body. This powerful witness left an indelible impression on me, one that has carried me through trials that have tested my faith.

About a month after first stepping into the Angoulême chapel, I decided to be baptized. I was 18 and didn't need parental permission. But when I called my family in Australia with the joyous news, I was shocked and disappointed to discover they had a negative attitude about the Church and opposed my desire to be baptized.

This weighed heavily on my heart. Should I go ahead against the wishes of my family, whom I loved dearly? Or should I delay baptism until I returned to Australia, where I faced

the possibility of greater opposition?

Matthew 19:29 helped me make the decision: “And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.” Was I willing to put the Savior first—even before my family? The answer was yes, and on December 16, 1989, I was baptized and confirmed a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. My remaining time in France was filled with a peaceful joy I had never known before.

When I returned to Perth, my family welcomed me with open arms. But my attempts to share the gospel with them were met with stiff opposition. They even made arrangements for me to see religious “experts” who could “enlighten” me and help me to see the “error” of my chosen path. This was a great test of faith for me, and after an onslaught of anti-Mormon propaganda, I found myself questioning my decision.

Yet in the quiet chambers of my heart, I could not deny that what I had experienced in France was from God, so I sought the Lord's Spirit to strengthen me. I fasted and prayed

every Sunday for weeks, I buried myself in the scriptures, I received priesthood blessings for guidance and strength, and I attended church weekly to associate with the Saints. Instead of dwelling on what I couldn't understand or didn't know, I focused on those things that I did know: I am a child of God, Jesus is the Christ, Joseph Smith restored the Lord's Church, the Book of Mormon and the Bible are the word of God, and families are forever. With this new perspective, my testimony began to grow and strengthen again.

The last challenge I had to face that year was the issue of being married in the temple without the presence of my family. A young man I had met in France and with whom I had been corresponding came from California to visit me for three weeks. It became clear to us both that we wanted to be married, but I was faced with another difficult decision: do I get married in the temple to be sealed for time and all eternity, or do I get married elsewhere so that my family can be a part of the ceremony?

I followed the counsel of my stake president and married in the temple in February 1991. At the time, my family felt deeply hurt, but they have come to recognize the Church

as a blessing in my life. As they have watched our children grow in the gospel, they have expressed gratitude for the things that we are teaching them and for the kind of people they are becoming.

Recently one of my children expressed gratitude for the decision I made to accept the gospel and raise a family unto the Lord. Her sincerity moved me to tears because I realized that the decision to live the gospel had blessed not only my life but hers.

I am eternally grateful to Heavenly Father for the miracles and the influence of earthly angels who led me home to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Twenty years later I realize that all the trials, heartache, and risk of offending my family were worth it. The gospel is everything to me. It is true. It is my home. ■

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