





*Nelson Coila (left) adds a fresh layer of totora reeds to Utama, the floating island he and his family (above) inhabit on Lake Titicaca.*

# ISLANDS OF FAITH: A STORY OF DILIGENCE

*Only by regularly adding to their island can the Coila family keep from sinking.*

**By Adam C. Olson** Church Magazines

Nelson and Dora Coila live on an island—not a typical island made of solid rock jutting up from an ocean or lake—but a tiny island they made themselves of nothing more than floating reeds on Lake Titicaca in Peru.

Building an island and making it your home takes faith. Only about four feet (1.2 m) of layered reeds suspends their family and the dozen or so huts on their island above the

50-degree (10 °C) water, and the elements continually threaten to literally disintegrate their island home.

But for Nelson and Dora, their island represents physically what they are trying to build spiritually for their family: an island of faith that will hold together against the world.

What they have learned in the process is that the faith to build must always be followed by the diligence to maintain.

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## THE FLOATING ISLANDS OF THE UROS

Utama is one of about 50 in a community of floating islands that are home to several hundred descendants of the Uros, a pre-Incan people who have lived on such islands for hundreds of years.

Typically, multiple families, often related to each other, live on a single island and share in its upkeep. Another family shares half of Utama with the Coilas. The largest islands support as many as 10 families.

The islands are loosely tethered in place by a long rope anchored to the lake bed, though in 2010, the anchors were strengthened after an unusual gale tore more than 40 of the islands from their locations and blew them several miles away.



### The Reason for Consistency

For the Uros people, who have built and lived on these islands for generations, the totora reed is an essential part of daily living. The reed, which grows in the shallows of Lake Titicaca, can be used as fuel for cooking fires. Its root can be eaten. Its husk can be used for medicinal purposes. And, of course, almost everything is made with the reed: their dwellings, their traditional boats, their watchtowers, the islands themselves, even their trash baskets.

The Uros build the islands by laying down layer upon layer of reeds. But as building materials go, totora reeds don't last long. The sun

dries them out during the dry season. Moisture during the rainy season hastens their decay. And the submerged bottom layers gradually decompose. The continual erosion of the Coilas' island means that Nelson has to put down a new layer of reeds every 10 to 15 days.

"Building the island was just the start," he says. "If I stop adding reeds, the island will slowly fall apart. But the more layers I put on, the stronger the island gets over time."

### The Danger of Procrastination

Adding a layer of reeds is not complex or difficult, but it is work. Delaying it would be easy.

Procrastination, however, increases the risk of a family member putting a foot through a weak spot and ending

up in cold water. That can be little more than a nuisance for adults, but it's potentially deadly for little children such as the Coilas' two-year-old son, Emerson.

So Nelson adds a layer of reeds today, knowing that the safety of each family member depends on it tomorrow.

It's a lesson about diligence that has made a difference in the Coilas' lives.

### The Effects of Diligence

*Diligence* is persisting in doing something in spite of opposition.<sup>1</sup>

Dora first learned how important—and how difficult—diligence can be after she was baptized in 1998.

When Dora was 17, she and her younger sister Alicia were baptized—helping lead to the growth of the

*For the Coila family—Nelson, Dora, and Emerson—and the Uros people living on Lake Titicaca, the totora reed is important to sustaining life. But like gospel principles, it must be applied regularly.*





### **STRENGTHEN FAITH CONTINUALLY**

“However much faith to obey God we now have, we

will need to strengthen it continually and keep it refreshed constantly. . . . Learning to start early and to be steady are the keys to spiritual preparation. Procrastination and inconsistency are its mortal enemies.”

**President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, “Spiritual Preparedness: Start Early and Be Steady,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 38.**



### **FAITHFUL FAMILIES**

“I was deeply humbled that, there on the floating islands of Lake Titicaca,

these faithful Latter-day Saint families would ask me to pray for the little island of Apu Inti and ask the Lord to bless [their] homes and families.”

**Elder Ronald A. Rasband of the Presidency of the Seventy, “Special Experiences,” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2008, 12.**

**To learn more** about Elder Rasband’s visit to the islands of the Uros, go to [conference.lds.org](http://conference.lds.org) and navigate to his talk in the April 2008 general conference.

**To view more photos** from this story, visit [liahona.lds.org](http://liahona.lds.org).

Church in the islands of the Uros. About a month later, however, their father forbade them from having anything to do with the Church.

But something odd happened to the girls. They were suddenly less pleasant to be around and more likely to argue. Their father realized that during the time they were participating in Church activities, they had changed for the better.

“It changed his mind,” Dora says. “He began waking us up early to make sure we got to church on time.”

Dora attributes the change the gospel made in their lives to small things she and Alicia did regularly, like paying tithing, praying, studying the scriptures, keeping the Sabbath day holy, and renewing their covenants weekly by taking the sacrament.

Later, having seen for himself the changes that come from faith and diligence,<sup>2</sup> Dora’s father joined the Church along with the rest of the family.

### **The Rewards of Diligence**

Persisting in doing what is right—in spite of opposition—is required of the Lord’s covenant people. However, the Lord promises great blessings to those who are diligent in prayer,<sup>3</sup> in keeping the commandments,<sup>4</sup> in heeding

revelation,<sup>5</sup> in searching the scriptures,<sup>6</sup> and in laboring in His work.<sup>7</sup>

Through the Coilas’ experiences in maintaining their island of faith both literally and figuratively, they have found the rewards of diligence to be real. “Sometimes we get suffocated by the daily routine of working, cooking, and so forth,” says Nelson. “When we forget God, things get complicated. There are more problems, and things begin to fall apart.”



Nelson pauses to gesture toward a new layer of reeds he put down that morning. “If we are constant,” he says, “if we pray, study, fast, and hold family home evening regularly, we are going to become stronger.” ■

### **NOTES**

1. See *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (2003), “diligence”; see also “persevere.”
2. See Alma 32:41–43.
3. See 1 Nephi 2:18–19; 10:17–19; Enos 1:12.
4. See 1 Nephi 15:8–11; 16:28–29; Enos 1:10; Mosiah 1:11; 4:6.
5. See Mosiah 1:16; Alma 12:9–11.
6. See Mosiah 1:6–7; Alma 17:2.
7. See Jacob 1:19; 5:75; Moroni 9:6.