

# The Exquisite Joy of Repentance

BY PEGGY OLLERTON ARCHULETA

*I thought I'd find happiness in living life the way I wanted, but I discovered that peace comes only through the Savior.*

**M**any years ago I let go of the iron rod and wandered into the mists of darkness. I thought I had finally reached a state of long-overdue happiness, but as it turned out, my choices were hurting me and devastating others around me. During that time my parents and four sisters, who were all active in the Church, continued to hold to the iron rod, gently beckoning to me with open arms and loving voices. For 15 long years they never gave up.

Eventually I became consumed with shame and sadness. I had grown tired of my lifestyle, and I remember thinking that I wanted to be able to live my life in the sunshine with nothing to hide. However, returning to church was not something I was considering; I didn't think I needed the gospel to be happy or to be spiritually healthy. Instead, I turned to self-help books.

Nothing I read quite did the trick, however. Hoping to find something that could help fill the void I felt so deeply in my life, I asked my youngest sister, Susan, if she knew of any "feel-good" movies. A few weeks later, on my birthday, I received a package from Susan and her husband, Samuel, containing a copy of the Book of Mormon, a hymnbook, and the *Children's Songbook*. The accompanying note said, "Some time ago, you said you wanted to go see a 'feel-good' movie. Well, there are a few movies like that, but we thought you might enjoy



ILLUSTRATIONS BY GREGG THORKEISON; PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVE STOKER



something you can carry around with you to help you feel good. . . . Here's to your having lots of 'feel-good' times!"

The love sent with that package was palpable, and their gesture touched my heart. Over the next several months, I returned to Church activity. The emptiness in my life began to be filled. As I obeyed the commandments—the commandment to pay tithing, in particular—faithfully and with a glad heart, I noticed the insights I once longed for came to me in a

way and at a rate I had never before experienced. I also read the Book of Mormon, and I've read it many times since. Susan and Samuel were right—with each new reading, I gain a greater understanding of my mission and calling here on earth. I feel good.

This is what I have learned from my experiences:

**No one is immune from making poor choices.** To be complacent with one's testimony is to invite trouble. Prior to my



### THE PEACE OF REPENTANCE

*"You can regain peace of conscience by repenting of personal transgressions that cause you internal turmoil. Then peace of mind can be secured by resolving the external pressures that cause you temporary anxiety, worry, and distress. Yet try as you might, you will not find enduring happiness until, through repentance, you satisfy personally broken law to restore peace to a troubled conscience."*

**Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Peace of Conscience and Peace of Mind," *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 16.**



**H**ow grateful I am to have learned that the best way to find solutions to problems and to safeguard my testimony is to be constant in scripture study and prayer.

period of inactivity in the Church, I went to my bishop with various seeming troubles. He always counseled me to read my scriptures and pray. I concluded that he gave me such counsel because he was not a professional and it was all he really had to offer. As a result, I never took his advice. How grateful I am to have learned that the best way to find solutions to problems and to safeguard my testimony is to be constant in scripture study and prayer.

**We must constantly evaluate where we stand.** I ask myself, “Do I feel the Spirit near today? If not, what do I

need to do to move forward and to have the Spirit with me?”

**Our testimonies are not contingent on others.**

The strength of my testimony does not depend on the kindness of the members of my ward or the warmth of my bishop. I am grateful to have returned

to activity among loving members, and I hope to always help make my ward a nurturing arena for others who are finding their way back home. But I have also determined that I will be faithful in my Church activity regardless of any perceived offenses I might feel in the future.

**We can live the gospel thoughtfully and genuinely.** Just before I returned to full Church activity, a woman from the ward called to ask if my husband still cleaned carpets, as she had a carpet that needed cleaning. During our conversation she expressed love and enthusiasm for the gospel, so I assumed she was a new member. I also suspected that her call was a pretense and that one of my sisters had somehow put her up to it. I asked her, rather rudely, “How long have you been a member of the Church?” She quickly answered, “More than 25 years!” The only response I could muster was a stunned, “Oh.”

I learned a great deal from that sister. I can live the gospel mundanely, or I can live it with passion. Many years ago I paid my tithing because I felt I had to. Now I realize I can pay it with a heart full of gratitude and with the excitement that comes from knowing that the funds will help build churches and temples. I can take the sacrament each week thoughtfully with renewed resolve to keep my baptismal covenants. I can sing the hymns with all my heart. I can search for and take advantage of missionary opportunities.

**Happiness comes from living the gospel of Jesus Christ.** This, perhaps, is the most important thing I have learned over the years. Joy never has and never will come from sin and selfishness. I am grateful for the knowledge that I can repent and begin anew. Most of all, I am grateful that, finally, I feel good! ■