

Coming into the

Fighting to Stay Active

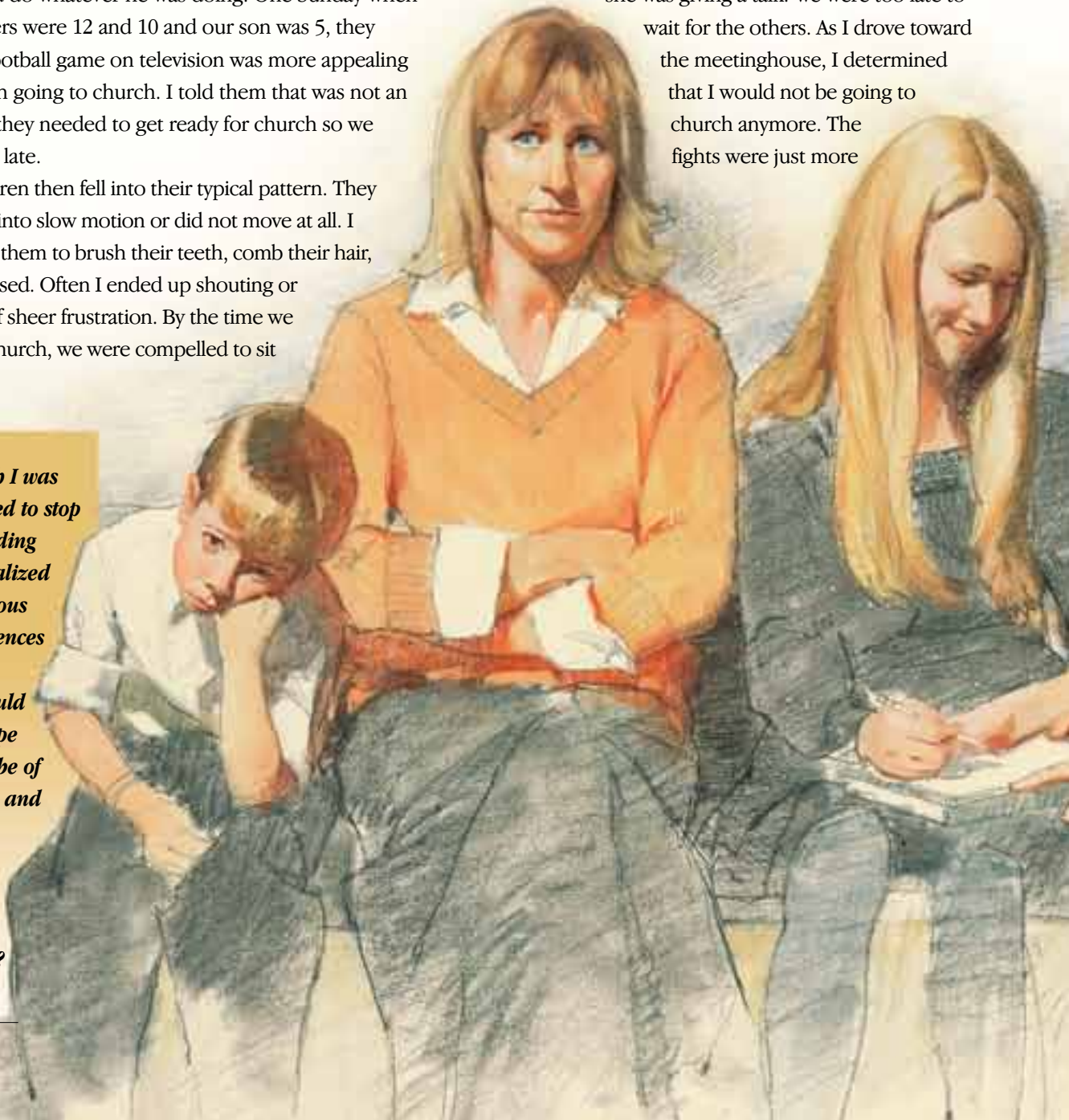
My husband stopped going to church a few years after we were married. And as our three children grew older, they began wanting to stay home with their father on Sundays and do whatever he was doing. One Sunday when our daughters were 12 and 10 and our son was 5, they decided a football game on television was more appealing to them than going to church. I told them that was not an option and they needed to get ready for church so we wouldn't be late.

The children then fell into their typical pattern. They either went into slow motion or did not move at all. I encouraged them to brush their teeth, comb their hair, and get dressed. Often I ended up shouting or crying out of sheer frustration. By the time we made it to church, we were compelled to sit

in the very back, and I felt angry and upset with my family.

A turning point came on a morning that had been more chaotic than usual. I was crying as we drove to church. Only one of the children came with me, and that was because she was giving a talk. We were too late to wait for the others. As I drove toward the meetinghouse, I determined that I would not be going to church anymore. The fights were just more

Although I was tempted to stop attending church, I realized how disastrous the consequences of such a decision would be. What hope could there be of my husband and children returning if I stayed home on Sundays too?



Fold

than I could bear. There would be no more coaxing and begging, no more frantic pleas to hurry, no more embarrassment from walking into church consistently late.

When our daughter and I got out of the car and walked inside, my mind was made up that this was the last time I would be at church for a long time—at least until our children were more mature or my husband came back into activity.

When we walked into the chapel, a sister was playing the prelude music, a medley of hymns by Eliza R. Snow. The music was so beautiful that I stopped where I was for a few seconds to feel the joy of those

hymns; they felt like a warm blanket on a chilly evening, wrapped around me in comfort and bringing me peace. As

I stood there for those few seconds, I knew I was in the right place at the right time. As I sat down, the sweet, peaceful feeling of the hymns continued with me.

I knew Heavenly Father expected me to be right there in that chapel with my ward family each week.

I also realized how disastrous it would be for my husband and children if I quit going to church.

What hope could there be of my family becoming active if

Regardless of your circumstance, you are included in the fold of God. Following are three stories from members who have experienced both trials of faith and the renewing blessings of membership in the Church.

I stayed home on Sundays too? So I let our children know that I would be leaving for church at a set time each week and would be happy for them to come with me. Things didn't improve immediately, but our children knew inside where they should be on Sundays, and eventually they realized they were happier being at church than staying at home. Today our three children are active, and I am grateful for the experience I had of knowing that I was in the right place at the right time. I'm grateful for what the Lord taught me to do in my family situation. I'm confident that He will guide others in their particular situations.

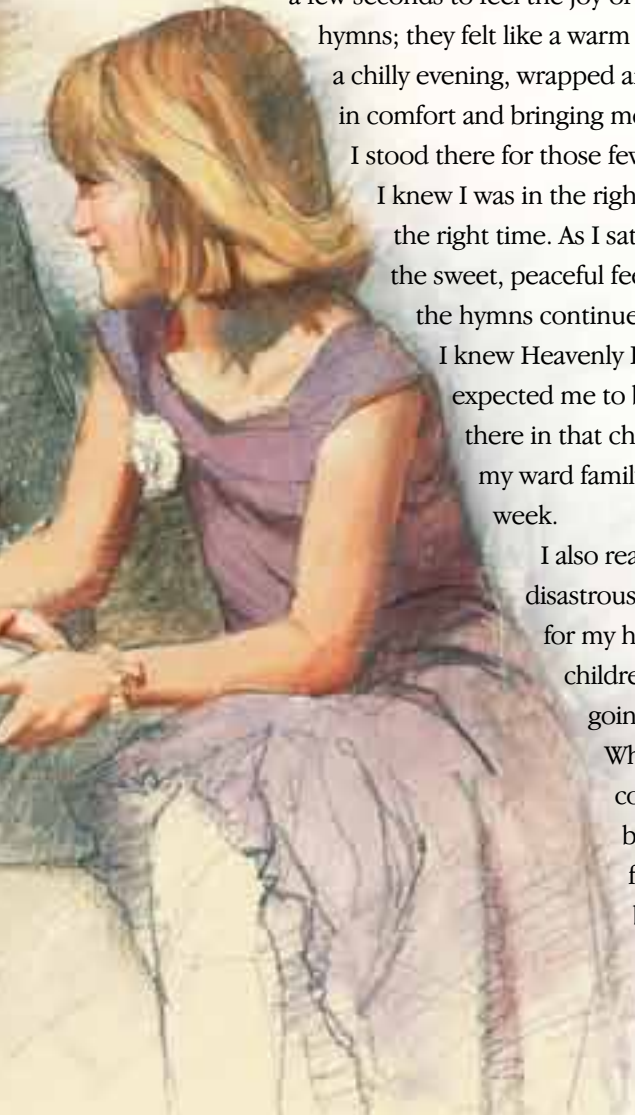
Charlene Higuera, Utah

My Part-Member Family

As a child, I overheard my bishop say of me, "She's growing up in a part-member family." I wondered what that meant, though I had noticed that my father did not attend meetings with my mother and me. But as I grew older, my father's lack of membership in the Church became an emotional stumbling block for me. He wouldn't allow me to be baptized when I was eight. Instead he insisted that I wait a year and be taught by the missionaries, even though I had attended church with my mother since I was a toddler. This erected a wall between us that was cemented by my baptism.

My father's attitude toward the Church continued to be negative, and it affected our family's daily interactions at home. If dinner wasn't on the table at the appropriate hour, it was the Church's fault. If the gas tank in the car was empty sooner than he thought it should be, it must be from all our traveling to the church building. If our home looked unkempt, it was because my mother spent her time fulfilling her callings instead of tending to the home. "That church mess," he named her duties.

The perceived lack of support from my father caused me to view him in an unfavorable light and to cling more





Dad could no longer talk, but I could talk to him. I said, “I love you,” which I hadn’t done in decades.

fervently to the gospel. Being at church was a breath of fresh air in a life that was gasping for spirituality. My ward family was sympathetic to the tumultuous atmosphere in my home and gave me great support. Priesthood leaders were on hand to give blessings, and they often visited with my father when in our home. He tolerated their visits better than he tolerated our Church activity.

Once I grew up, moved away, and married in the temple, home life for me improved greatly. Life seemed to be on course with the gospel plan—except for my relationship with my father.

Several years after our marriage, my husband and I moved back to my hometown. I managed to keep unpleasant memories at bay when in my father’s presence, but I suppressed the Holy Spirit’s invitations to show love and honor to him.

In time my father’s health began to decline. He became feeble and had a series of strokes that left him partially incapacitated. I pondered my relationship with him. Finally, I began to regret the hardness in my heart. I knew I could not “reconcile [myself] to the will of God” (2 Nephi 10:24) until my heart was softened toward my father.

After I had offered many prayers, the Holy Ghost prompted me one day to ask Heavenly Father for something specific: that He bless my mind to be able to recall positive, affectionate childhood memories with my father. From the moment I implored Heavenly Father to bless me, the memories came.

My father was the person who taught me how to do a headstand on the living room carpet, working with me until I mastered it. On rainy, cool nights my father was the one who took my brother and me to the front porch bundled in blankets and told us stories of growing up on his father’s farm. Friday nights were reserved for trips to the farmers’ market, where my father expertly chose watermelons, peaches, and produce that made our mouths water. My father was a lover of the English language, and he had my brother and me face off in impromptu spelling bees.

Recalling these memories changed my perspective. Each memory brought warmth to my heart and gave me reason to repent. How wrong I had been to hold my father in such low esteem. Though growing up in my home had not been easy, I came to realize my father had done much more good than I had given him credit for.

Toward the end of one summer, my siblings and I realized our father needed more constant care. My husband and I moved my father in with us, complete with a hospital bed, walker, and wheelchair. I became his practical nurse. Our children would fly into the house after school, straight to the bedside of our new resident. Dad could no longer speak, so the children just spoke to him. We savored this time with him. There was no doubt that it was my turn to give something back to him. I said “I love you” to him—words that I had not uttered in decades.

Dad’s days with us were not long. The night he died, several of us gathered around his bedside, including some of our children. The feeling in the room was peaceful, quiet, and profoundly spiritual. It occurred to me that not only had I witnessed the good there was in my father but our children had witnessed it as well.

The Holy Ghost had shown me that I needed the influence of positive memories to recognize the truth in the words of this hymn:

*Count your blessings;
Name them one by one.
Count your many blessings;
See what God hath done.¹*

By learning to look beyond my father's criticism of my Church activity, I finally came to see the good in him and learned to love him.

Beth Griffin, Georgia

Coming Back

It had been nearly a year from the time I decided to change my life and start going back to church. In high school I had made some bad decisions that had led to more and more bad decisions, and by the time I was in college, no one would have been able to tell I had been raised in a strong Latter-day Saint family. Finally, in January of 2001, I decided I had had enough. I wasn't satisfied, and I knew the life I was living was not pleasing to the Lord. I broke up with my boyfriend, left all my social contacts behind, and began going to church. But a year later, I found myself sitting in sacrament meeting in a singles ward, wondering if I had made the right decision.

At first, my decision to become active was exciting. I began to read the scriptures again and felt the fire of testimony rekindle in my life. I began paying my tithing again and writing in a journal. My prayers were sincere and often emotional. I was glad to feel the changes take place in my heart. However, after a few months I felt that I had reached a plateau. I figured it must be the ward I was attending with my family—there were no people my age. I craved the testimony and friendship of my peers, so I decided to attend my local singles ward. Although I felt the strength of the young people's testimonies, I began to feel self-conscious about the weakness of my own testimony.

I began coming to church late and leaving early to avoid talking to anyone, especially the bishop. I was afraid that if he talked to me, he would see that I needed his help. This anxiety led me to come back into contact with my former friends. Although they respected the fact that I was trying to change, being around the temptations I once indulged in did not help my resolve

to become an active Latter-day Saint. I often stopped by one of their houses "on the way to church" and ended up staying through the whole meeting.

During the passing of the sacrament one particular Sunday, I was struggling with my decision to come back to the Church. Why was it so difficult for me to let go of my past? How could I find the strength to go to the bishop and complete the repentance process I had begun? Would I ever really make the changes I wanted so badly to make, or was I just wasting my time? These and many other questions raced through my mind. I was desperate to feel good about my decision and yet unable to find peace.

As I sat there, I picked up the hymnbook and thumbed through the pages. I stopped on page 124 and read the words, "Be still, my soul: The Lord is on thy side."² I began to weep as an overwhelming spirit of peace swept over me. Each word of the hymn seemed to be written especially for me. The Spirit confirmed to me that my life was in the hands of an all-knowing, loving God. I knew that He could

help me change and that everything I worried about would be fine.

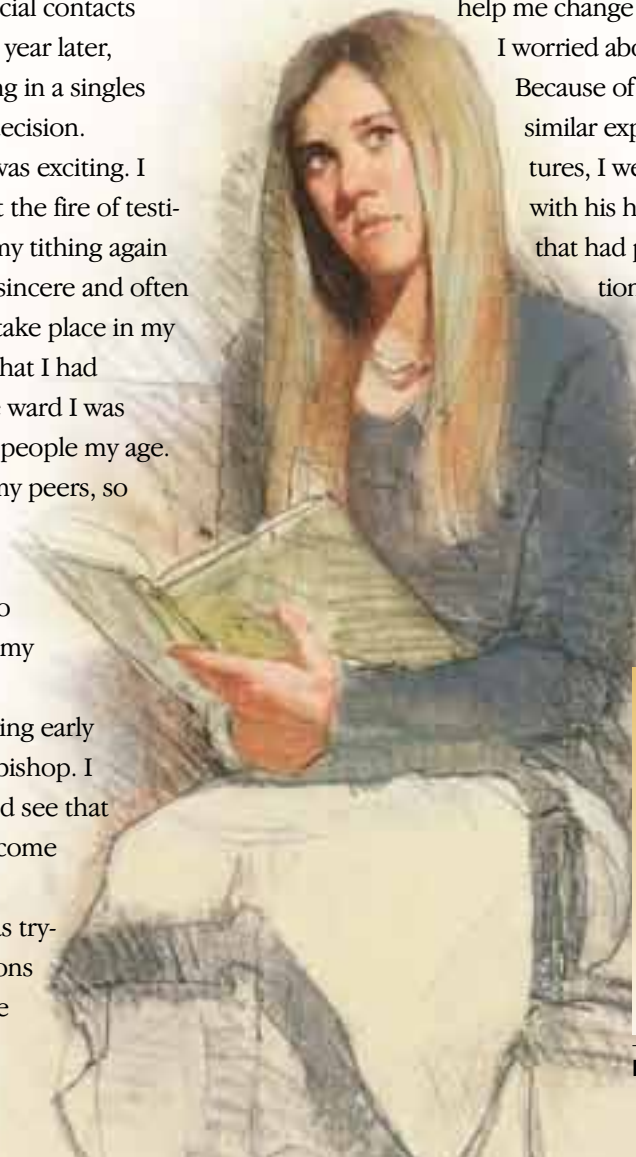
Because of that experience and a similar experience with the scriptures, I went to the bishop and with his help let go of the sins that had plagued me. My activation in the gospel has

truly made my soul still and taught me that the Lord is on my side. ■

Kelley Gee, Idaho

NOTES

1. "Count Your Many Blessings," *Hymns*, no. 241.
2. "Be Still, My Soul," *Hymns*, no. 124.



Throughout sacrament meeting, I was struggling with my decision to return to Church activity. Why was it so difficult to let go of my past?