

WE DOUBLED OUR FAST OFFERING

As we sat in sacrament meeting one Sunday morning, our bishop asked the members of our ward to give a more generous fast offering. My husband and I were newlyweds struggling to make ends meet while he completed his education. Shouldn't wealthy ward members be the ones to increase their fast offerings?

The bishop promised ward members they would experience miracles in their lives if they doubled their fast offerings. Despite my concerns, the Spirit confirmed to me that his promise was true.

Trembling as I wrote our fast offering check the following week, I doubled the amount. "We're going to starve," I said to myself as I sealed the envelope.

A few days later as I got into my car to drive to work, the red warning light came on for the oil. I added oil, but it leaked from the engine as quickly as I poured it in. When I called our mechanic, he told me to drive straight to his shop. Holding back tears, I drove a few miles to his repair shop and silently said a prayer.

The mechanic warned that the repair would probably be expensive but had to be done. He also pointed out that it was almost time to replace the car's timing belt—another expense we couldn't afford. I left the car at the

shop and went to work devastated.

Later, when the mechanic called, he was upbeat and excited. "Of course he is," I thought. "He's about to make a ton of money off of us."

Actually, he called to share an amazing story. As he was working on our



car, a friend happened by his auto shop. This friend, who works at a dealership that services my make of car, asked our mechanic what he was working on. When our mechanic explained the problem, his friend said, "Well, you know there's a recall for that problem. It's covered by the automaker."

I couldn't believe it! Then our mechanic explained that oil had gotten all over the engine, so the automaker would also cover the replacement of the timing belt and other belts!

Tears of gratitude sprang from my eyes as I recognized the blessing we had received from the Lord. I felt overwhelmed by His love and embarrassed by my lack of faith.

I haven't had perfect faith since this incident a few years ago, but I know that the Lord is acutely aware of our needs and struggles. I know He loves us and wants to help us. I also

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know that Heavenly Father will test us and not always answer our prayers as quickly as He did in this instance.

Most important, I have a testimony of the blessings we can receive by paying a generous fast offering and of the blessings

others receive as a result of our generosity. ■

Brooke Mackay, California, USA

DO YOU BELIEVE IN THE BOOK OF MORMON?

Around the time I joined the Church, I lost my job because of the harsh economic conditions in Nigeria. I thought my world had ended, yet I trusted in God—praying and fasting that He would help me find another job.

Within a month I had an interview with one of Nigeria's fast-growing construction companies. I met with a panel of three interviewers: the managing director, the general manager, and a consultant. I easily answered their routine questions, but then the consultant, a pastor of a local church, unexpectedly threw out a shocking question: "Are you Christian, Muslim, or Traditionalist?" he asked.

Beaming, I replied, "I am a Christian."

"What is the name of your church?" he continued.

I told him, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

"What! That church?" he cried. "You don't mean to tell me you attend *that* church, where all activities are shrouded in secrecy?" Looking directly into my eyes, he stated, "Say it is not true."

"It is true," I quickly replied. Then I added, "Our meetings are not held or shrouded in secrecy. You can come to our meetings next Sunday and see for yourself."

"I would not be in such a gathering," he replied. Having noticed the direction the interview had taken, the managing director called the consultant to order and thanked me for coming.

Three days later I was asked to return for a second interview. The managing director, the general manager, and the consultant were all there. After we had talked about purchasing and supplying, the consultant asked, "Are you a Mormon?"

"Yes, I am," I replied.

"Do you believe in the Book of Mormon?"

"Absolutely! I believe," I answered.

"Do you believe that Joseph Smith encountered

God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, when he was a young boy of 14 years?"

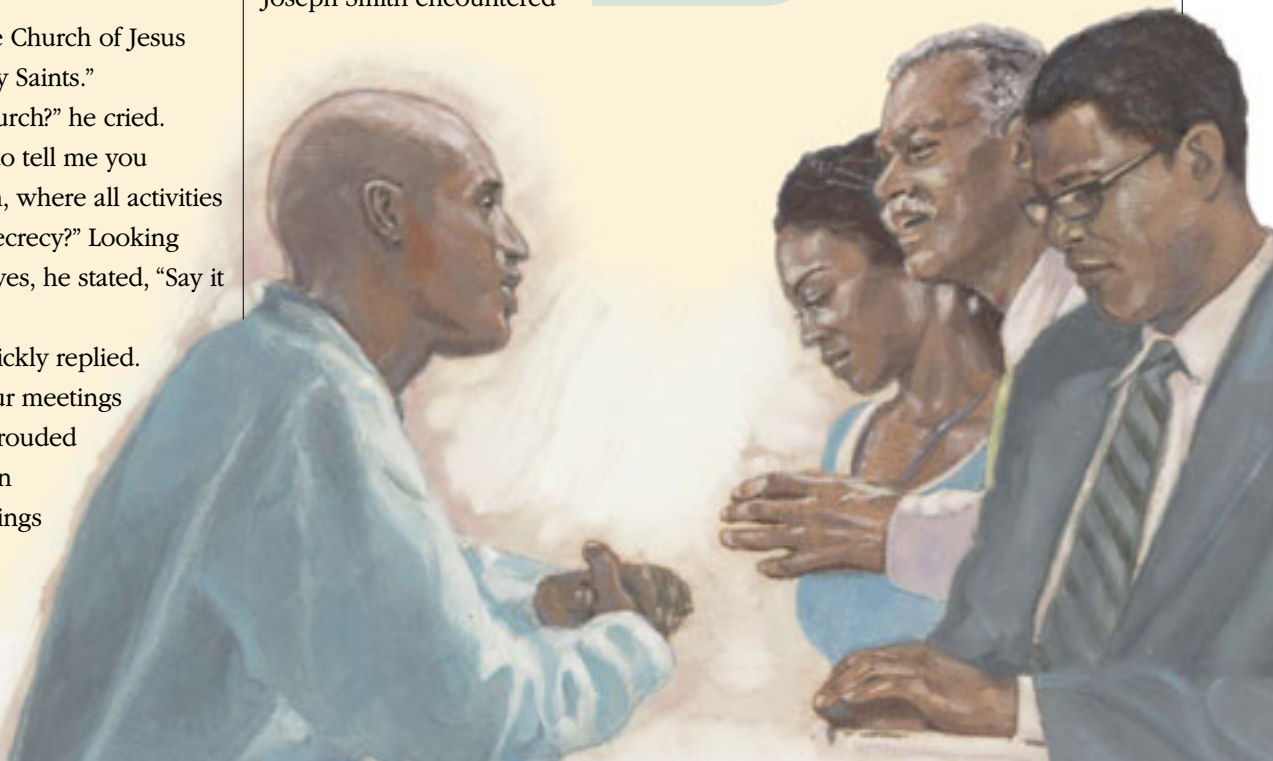
"Yes," I responded. "I know it is true."

At the end of the interview, I was told that scores of applicants had been interviewed. A few weeks later, to my great surprise, I received a phone call from the managing director. She said I had been successful in the two interviews, and she asked me to come in to sign a letter of employment.

Looking back on the experience, I am grateful I did not deny the Church or my faith. God answered my prayers and blessed me with a job. I know if we remain steadfast, He will reward us abundantly. ■

Sonola Oladapo Solomon,
Lagos, Nigeria

You don't mean to tell me you attend *that* church?" the consultant asked me.



FOOD FOR THE REST OF THE WEEK

As high school graduation approached, my friends and I eagerly anticipated our graduation dance. But when our school announced the date of the dance, I was devastated to learn that it was going to be on a Sunday.

“Mariela, this happens once in a lifetime!” one friend told me. “You should just go. You’ll never have to miss church again. But this once, you should skip church and go to the dance.”

T*his once, you should skip church and go to the dance,” one friend told me.*

I explained to her that it wasn’t just about missing church—it was about giving a day to the Lord. But as I thought about what she said, I wondered, “Would it really matter if I didn’t observe the Sabbath, just this once?” After all, my friends and I were soon going our separate ways, and we had

looked forward to this event for years. The dance would offer us one last chance to celebrate together.

As I thought about my decision, I remembered that my father had taught me that the Sabbath day was “food” for the rest of the week. Could I really afford to miss out on the spiritual and temporal blessings the Lord promises to the obedient? I weighed my options, and I knew what my decision should be.

My friends didn’t understand when

I told them about my decision not to go. Over the next several weeks, I felt disappointed every time I heard one of them talking about the dance, but I knew my choice was right.

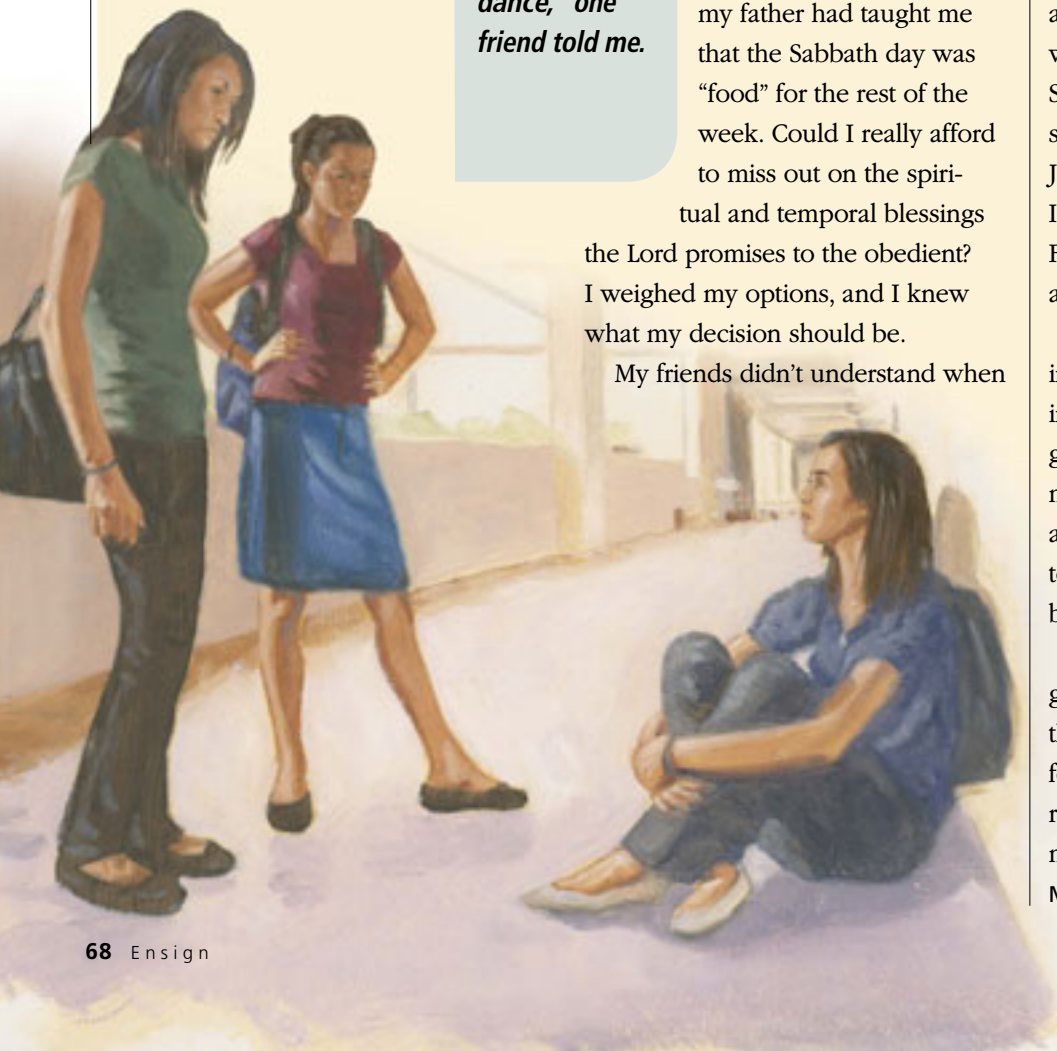
As the dance approached, something unexpected happened. For some reason the school decided to change the date. Instead of being held on a Sunday evening, the dance would be held on a Saturday evening! I was so excited to be able to go after all and have a wonderful time with my friends. What made me feel especially happy was knowing that I had honored my commitment to obey the Lord.

I am grateful that I was able to attend the dance, but I realize that we’re not always blessed in this way. Sometimes we are required to make significant sacrifices for the gospel of Jesus Christ. But I learned then, and I know now, that a loving Heavenly Father always blesses us one way or another when we obey.

Establishing a pattern of obedience in high school brings me great blessings as a young adult. My schedule gets very busy with college assignments, work commitments, and social activities, but I know I have a chance to rest from those labors each week by devoting Sunday to the Lord.

My father was right: Sunday is a great source of spiritual food. Keeping the Sabbath will always be a priority for me so I can renew my covenants, refill spiritual reservoirs, and refresh my mind for the coming week. ■

Mariela Torres Meza, San José, Costa Rica



MY GARDEN DREAM

Growing up in a faithful, active Latter-day Saint family, I never thought that one day a child of mine would leave the Church.

My husband and I had married in the temple and eventually had seven children. We did everything we could to obey the counsel of the prophets. We taught our children the gospel, shared our testimonies with them, attended Sunday meetings together, held family home evening, prayed daily both morning and night, and read scriptures as a family. None of our actions, however, prevented our son from leaving the Church.

In my sorrow I turned to the Lord for strength and came to understand more clearly the role of agency in our lives. Still I wondered, "What more can I do? Certainly there is something I can do to bring him back to the truth." I prayed for our son, but I felt I wasn't doing enough. Certainly, if I had enough faith, wouldn't he change?


Such thoughts ran through my mind as I went to sleep one night. Heavenly Father saw fit to answer my questions through a dream. It was a simple dream, but for me its meaning was profound.

In my dream I was standing in the middle of my vegetable garden. I had planted and watered the seeds, but the plants had not begun to grow. In my dream I told my plants to grow. I nagged them to grow! Then I began

to laugh at myself. The very idea of trying to get my plants to grow by telling them to do so was absurd.

Then I awoke. I immediately understood my dream's meaning. My son was the seed I was trying to get to grow. But just as I could not make the garden seeds grow, I cannot make my son change. Inherent in each seed of my garden is a God-given ability to grow, and it is God who directs the growth of each seed. Likewise, my son has the ability to grow because he is a spirit son of Heavenly Father. But if growth and change are to occur in his life, they will result from his agency coupled with God's power.

In my dream garden, I planted the seeds, watered the garden, pulled out offending weeds, and sought in every



I told my plants to grow. I nagged them to grow! Then I began to laugh at myself.

way to nourish my seeds. Likewise, in my role as a mother I plant seeds in the lives of my children. With Heavenly Father's help, I teach them, try to be an example for them, share my testimony with them, and love them, doing all in my

power to be an instrument for good in their lives. Then I must wait. In due time the Master Gardener will help the seeds to grow.

In the meantime He helps me to wait with patience. He fills my heart with hope. He reminds me that I am doing all that He requires of me. He gives me daily evidence of His love. In every way I need, He supports me.

So I will wait, pray, trust in His promises, and continue to plant seeds. The harvest will come. ■

Name withheld