



Freely Given, Gratefully Received

BY TONJA-MAREE DAVIS

Giving money and time was much easier than the offering I was now required to make—a humble, grateful heart.

As I unloaded the food from the car, I realized I had not had breakfast, and my stomach was now telling me so. Once the bags were on my table, I began to open them. The sight of the fresh grapes was so inviting. I took them to the sink and rinsed them and put several in my mouth. They tasted so good!

As I emptied the contents of the other sacks from the bishop's storehouse, I was so grateful to have fresh fruit and vegetables in our home again. Because of the expense, we had not had a lot of fresh produce in our home in recent months. I grabbed an apple and took a bite. It tasted wonderful. Tears of gratitude began to stream down my face. A few months earlier my heart had not been as humble.

It was late spring. My husband had only worked for five weeks since the first of the year. The lumber industry is unpredictable. Although he had been with the same company for 12 years, the sawmill shut down and Darin was without work. At that time, none of our extended family were in a position to help us. Our friends were gracious and offered odd jobs that needed completing—a fence to be repaired, a house to be painted, etc. Darin worked hard and received money for his efforts. But the money coming in no longer covered our bills and obligations. We had always tried to live within our means and had paid our tithes and offerings faithfully, but we soon found ourselves falling behind.

As we began pulling food from our storage, the shelves of excess canned goods and other items we had purchased when they were on sale began to look empty. My first realization that we may need assistance came when we were making spaghetti one evening. I went to grab a can of tomato sauce and there was none. We always had extra cans of tomato sauce! We borrowed one from our neighbor. Then I went to put spaghetti noodles in the boiling water and there were no noodles. I couldn't believe it. I always planned our menus and shopped from a list and we ate pretty nourishing meals. Now, we bought less and less from the store. Our money wasn't going as far.

One night my husband came home and suggested that we request food from the bishop's storehouse. "No," was my reply. "We will get by. We really don't need it." A few weeks later, I realized we had no choice. We had two young children to feed. We reluctantly went to the bishop.

When the Relief Society president came to visit and to evaluate our needs, it was difficult for me to tell her because I was quite emotional. It was not easy for me to admit we needed Church assistance. She was kind and tactful and definitely not judgmental. But my voice was quivering, and I tried to hide my tears. We had always been self-reliant. This new situation was hard for me to accept.

We received two food orders, and I was grateful that my children were being fed a little better, but I still resisted the assistance. My husband went back to work, and we felt our troubles were over. However, he only worked three weeks and the mill shut down again. With no other job prospects in sight, we knew we would continue to need help from the Church.



Reassurance in the Temple

Needing to ponder our circumstances, we found a babysitter for the children and went to the temple. It was so peaceful to be in the house of the Lord. As I was sitting there considering the weight of our concerns, I felt the impression that I would be called as the next Primary president. The impression came so clearly that I looked around to see if someone was talking to me. My inward response was, “My husband is out of work and we have no money. How can I be Primary president?” The truth is, I had felt that because we needed assistance, we had somehow become of less value in the kingdom. The impression came again forcefully. “You will be called as the next Primary president.”

When we got home from the temple, I kept these things to myself. But my heart began to soften. I became teachable. My husband’s lack of work did not define us. That experience in the temple taught me that our service in the kingdom of God was of value. I needed to go forward in faith. I looked at my strengths and weaknesses and made a resolve to improve.

Two months later my husband and I were invited to meet with the bishopric. The bishop called me to be the Primary president, and I accepted. I was asked to take a few days and decide who my counselors should be. I smiled and asked if he wanted the names right now. The bishopric looked a little puzzled, so I shared my experience in the temple. They smiled and extended the other calls that day. It strengthened my testimony to know that Heavenly Father does love us, and even when we are frustrated with life’s daily endeavors, He reaches out and talks with us and lets us know He cares.

Declaration of Dependence

When Darin finally went back to work the first of June, we thought our financial problems were all behind us. But even after paying bills with our first full paycheck since Christmas, there were still several bills left unpaid. What more could we do? My husband (who had recently been called into the bishopric) simply said we were doing the best we could and we needed to be patient. He called the bishop, and the bishop agreed that it would be best for the Church to supply commodities so we could apply our money to our bills.

When I came home that June day with more food from the bishop’s storehouse, my heart was full of gratitude to a Heavenly Father who had provided a way for our needs to be met. Before, we had always been on the giving end, paying fast offerings and serving in the bishop’s storehouse when asked. But we cannot always expect life to be as we want it. We found ourselves on the receiving end, blessed by the sacrifices and offerings of others.

Now we are back on our feet and self-reliant again, but with a difference. We recognize more than ever before how dependent we are on the Lord and on one another. We have a greater appreciation for the Lord’s welfare system. Our experience has made us want to be more generous with our own offerings and to give service cheerfully and often. We see the wisdom in Jacob’s counsel to “think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free with your substance” (Jacob 2:17). And we’ve learned that a grateful and humble heart is also an acceptable offering. ■