

FINDING THE LORD IN Tonga

By Joshua J. Perkey
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Tongan members share how sacrificing for the work of the Lord leads to an outpouring of blessings.





On a cool, misty morning in northeastern Tongatapu, the main island in Tonga, Filimone Tufui Pasi dresses for a day “in the bush”—the Tongan expression referring to working on his farming plot. To get there he will pass through the swampy land surrounding his cinder-block home and then walk beneath the tall coconut trees and among the broad-leaf taro plants.

On this day, however, President Pasi, a counselor in the stake presidency, never makes it to the bush. Members of the Church have come seeking his assistance. A humble man of few words, President Pasi nods quietly, walks back inside his home, and explains the situation to his wife, Ana Malina. She and their daughter will spend this day making tapa cloth to raise money for school and sending the Pasis’ children on missions.

Within a few minutes President Pasi returns to the group, now dressed in a white shirt and tie, prepared to help. The decision will cost him a full day of his livelihood. But the smile of satisfaction on his face, knowing he is doing the Lord’s work, makes up the difference. “I’ve tried to live my life

this way,” he says. “I think that’s why the Lord has blessed me so much.”

Such acts of dedication and faithfulness are common among the Tongan Latter-day Saints, who testify that blessings come through faithfully living the gospel.

Faith to Serve

Liola Christine Nau Hingano grew up in the Church, and she often saw the missionaries serving in her community. “I wanted to serve a mission myself,” she says. However, serving would not be easy.

Shortly after Liola submitted her mission papers, she became very sick. The doctors discovered she had a tumor and had to perform surgery to remove it. While she was in the hospital, Liola received her mission call—to serve in Tonga. She had two months to recover before starting her mission, but it was a difficult time for Liola because her parents thought a mission would be too hard on her and didn’t want her to go.

“But I believed that because the Lord had called me, I would be OK, so I decided to go,” she

Above: In addition to teaching institute classes, Liola Hingano (inset) teaches a youth Sunday School class. Far left: Filimone Pasi with his wife, Ana Malina; inset: Filimone’s family shows the tapa cloth his wife and daughters make from the bark of the paper mulberry tree.



says. “When I entered the missionary training center, the mission president gave me a blessing and said that as I served the Lord, I would be as healthy as any missionary.

“My first mission area was very hard. We walked for miles each day just to get to the area where we were working. We carried our scriptures with us, and the sun was hot. But I knew I would be fine because I had received a priesthood blessing that said so. And I was. I never had trouble because of my previous illness.

“I am very grateful I had the courage to go on a mission and not turn back. It has made such a difference in who I am today—and in my testimony. I have faith in our Savior and Heavenly Father.”

Opening the Windows of Heaven

Just as Liola served faithfully because of her testimony, others have gained that testimony through obedience. Such was the case for ‘Anau Vuna Hala. ‘Anau was baptized as a young boy but became less active almost immediately. Although his sister was an active member of the Church, ‘Anau had no desire to return to church, and for many years he did not.

As a grown man he married Kinakuia (Kina) Hala, a Latter-day Saint. One day he discovered something that troubled him: his wife had begun paying tithing.

“I was disappointed,” ‘Anau says. “I did not

Above: ‘Anau Vuna Hala with his wife, Kina, and their baby. Below: Kumifonua Taumoepeuu (center), with his wife and children, testifies that all of their blessings come from the Lord.

make a lot of money as a schoolteacher. I didn’t want her to pay tithing anymore. We argued about it for several years.”

Kina tried everything to convince her husband that paying tithing was a good idea. “She had the home teachers teach us about the principle of tithing,” ‘Anau says. “I received many lessons about tithing, but I still said no.

“Then one day my wife challenged me to observe the law with her and see what would happen. It was a tough decision for me, but I wanted us to find peace, so I said OK.”

Not long after, ‘Anau began noticing little changes taking place in their lives. “When we paid our tithing first and then our bills, we had very little left over,” he explains. “But then we received blessings. Sometimes we’d receive help unexpectedly from family members overseas



or help from elsewhere. We always had enough.”

The blessings weren’t just financial. ‘Anau says, “I became active in the Church. We were happier at home. We decided to adopt a baby, even though we knew the food and other needs would be costly. But we knew that if we were faithful and paid tithing, doing what the Lord required, somehow things would work out. I was even able to get a better job working for the Church school, Liahona High School. And we were sealed in the temple.

“We feel our greatest blessings are the peace and joy we feel in knowing that we can cope with our financial difficulties if we pay our tithing. From the moment I accepted that principle, the Lord has blessed my family. I know it to be true.”

The Impact of Our Faith

Kumifonua (Fonua) Taumoepenu found that the strength of conviction may come even after periods of loss and inactivity. Shortly after his baptism in 1995, Fonua served in many positions in the Church. He also worked for a soft drink company and was very successful, rising quickly through the ranks. But he was frequently away from home and found himself slowly moving away from his spiritual convictions. After a time he even began engaging in activities he knew he shouldn’t.

One day Fonua ran into a group of men who, though unprovoked, beat him so badly he had to be taken to the hospital. While there Fonua began to reflect on his life and the poor decisions he had made. “I realized something was wrong with the way I was living,” he says. “My example caused my children to make poor decisions too. They were doing things they shouldn’t do.”

Fonua decided it was time to change. He worked hard to repent, became worthy to



THE POWER OF FASTING AND THE BOOK OF MORMON

After Telesia Falatau was baptized, she still struggled with aspects of her new religion.

“Sometimes I would attend church with my in-laws because my husband was not active,” she says. “I was impressed with the teachings I saw, especially the Relief Society meetings.”

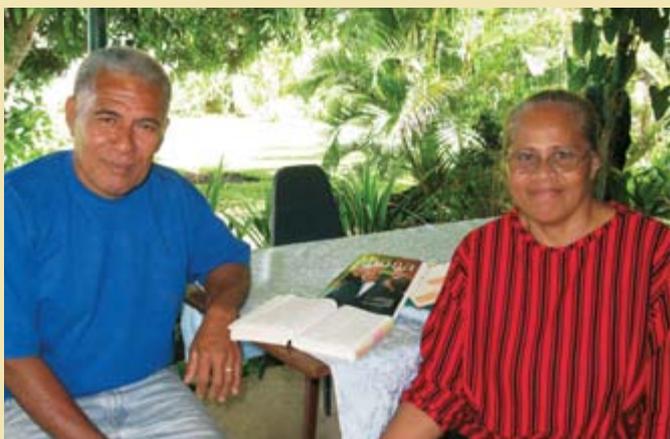
She enjoyed the good instruction and socializing with the sisters.

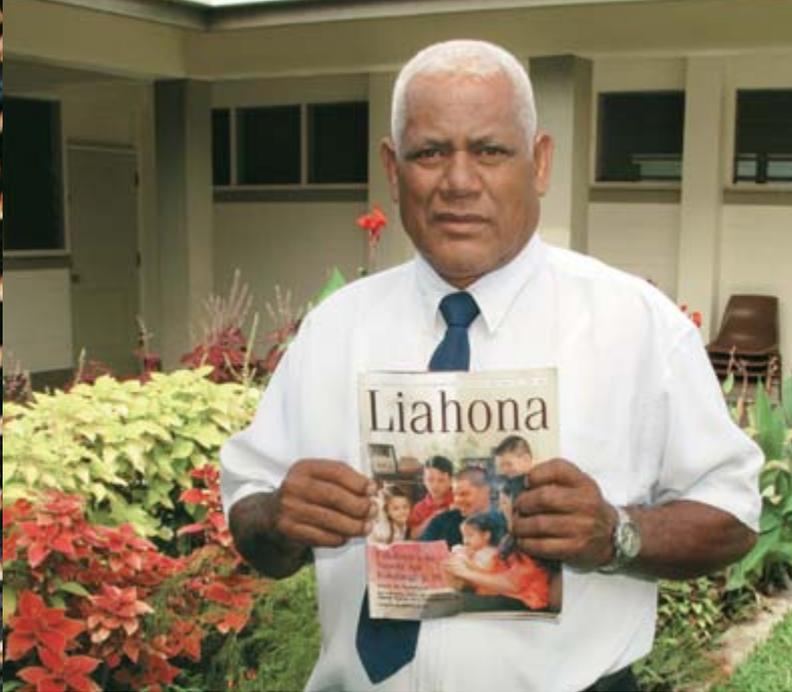
“But we were having problems at home,” she says. “When we started having children, my husband and I decided we had to do something” to bring peace into the home.

They agreed to do two things in addition to becoming active in the Church: they would fast every Friday and read the Book of Mormon daily. “I was determined,” Telesia adds. “I never missed. My husband did well also.”

Their feelings at home improved, and they continued fasting and reading the Book of Mormon. As Telesia describes, they grew stronger in their faith, their children grew in the gospel, and their home became a place of peace. Today, years later, Telesia and her husband are temple workers.

“I owe my life to those faithful Relief Society sisters,” Telesia says. “But it was also our commitment to studying the Book of Mormon and fasting that changed our lives.”





Above: As Vaea Ta'ufo'ou describes his life, he notes that the sacrifices he has made have brought forth the blessings of heaven. After exercising the power of prayer and fasting, he and his fiancée were able to travel to New Zealand to marry in the temple, a feat far beyond their personal resources.

enter the temple, and began attending regularly. One evening in the temple, he reflected on his life. “I knew I was worthy to be there,” he says, “but I felt uncomfortable. I looked back on my life and evaluated what I had done. I had not been a good servant of the Lord. And I needed answers too. I wanted a new job that would make it easier to stay clean.”

Fonua had just been offered a well-paying job in New Zealand. His family had encouraged him to take it because such jobs were hard to come by. “But I worried about leaving my family in Tonga and about how I would stay clean living so far away,” he says.

While in the temple, Fonua offered his heart in prayer to Heavenly Father. “I made a commitment to myself and to God that I would do what He wants for me. It was different from any commitment I had ever made before. And I received an answer there in the temple about how I could permanently change my life.”

Instead of taking the job in New Zealand, Fonua decided to stay in Tonga and look for better work. During this time, he was called as a temple worker. As he served faithfully, he says, “the Lord blessed me for righteous choices.” Fonua soon gained a major contract cleaning buildings. “It was a tremendous blessing. I could stay in Tonga with my family, take care of them, and serve in the temple.

“All that I have, all my blessings, come from being a servant of the Lord. I will never forget that moment in the temple. Even my children have been blessed. Before, they had caused a lot of trouble for Church members. But they’ve changed. They participate in church. There’s a great happiness in our home now—all because of the Lord.”

Sacrifice Brings Forth Blessings

For Vaea Tangitau Ta'ufo'ou, being a faithful member of the Church has involved significant physical sacrifices. When he joined the Church at age 19, he lived on Foa, one of the outer islands in the Ha'apai group. One of his first callings was as a leader working with the youth. Like other leaders he often had to attend meetings in Pangai, a town on the next island. To get there he had to walk seven miles (11 km) to the end of the island. Then he would have to wait for low tide so he could walk to the next island through the shallow water—assuming the current wasn't too strong at the time—and then continue on until he arrived. The trip would take most of the day, and sometimes he would have to wait overnight to return home.

“It was a challenge to make our meetings,” Vaea says. “But it did not discourage us. It strengthened our testimonies.”

Early in his life Vaea hated the Church because of untrue stories spread about it by others in the village. Then his family was befriended by members of the Church. Their good example softened the hearts of Vaea's family, and his sister was baptized. A year later he joined the Church and was soon serving diligently.

Some years later their district had grown significantly and had the potential to become a stake. Following meetings at Pangai, Vaea and others had to return home. But the district president

wanted them to be back for meetings the next morning and asked them to be on time. To make the round trip successfully, Vaea had to run most of the way.

“I was so exhausted I almost felt like dying because the district president had also asked us to fast so we could organize the stake. But I made it. I learned the importance of making it to our meetings and being on time despite the challenges. I believe my calling as bishop shortly after this was because I was willing to make the sacrifice to serve and be obedient. I also believe our fasting made a difference. Not long after, President Howard W. Hunter [1907–95] came and organized the stake.”

Perhaps the largest challenge for Vaea, however, was getting to the temple to be sealed. He and his girlfriend had decided to get married, and they both wanted to get married in the temple. But the closest temple at the time was in New Zealand, and the cost of getting there was tremendous.

“For a whole year we fasted together every Tuesday to find a way to make it to the temple. She was still living on an island in the north; I was in Ha‘apai. It was difficult. But then two businessmen heard our story, and they felt inspired to help. They actually paid for our trip. They said that if we truly wanted to be married in the temple, they would provide the way. I did not have any property or even a job so I could pay them back, but they did not want anything. It was a tremendous blessing.”

Blessings of Living the Gospel

Just as the taro plants and coconut trees nourish those who tend them, these Tongan Saints have learned that the Lord blesses those who serve Him. And just as the waves lap continuously upon the Tongan shores, the Lord is a constant factor in these members' lives. Whether it be through repentance or tithing or simple, daily commitments, they have discovered peace, comfort, and happiness as they have dedicated themselves to the service of the Lord. And they testify that such blessings are available to all who make the same commitment (see Mosiah 2:24, 41; D&C 130:20–21). ■

BLESSINGS OF REPENTANCE

Sione Finau learned the hard way the power of living “after the manner of happiness” (2 Nephi 5:27).

Born in Tonga and raised in Hawaii, he stopped going to church when

he was old enough to make his own decisions. Part of his problem, he says, was so-called friends who encouraged him into forbidden paths. Soon Sione had gotten into so much trouble he had to return to Tonga.

“That’s when my life changed,” he says. “I moved in with an auntie who was strong and active in the Church. I started attending church with her and making friends with the local young single adults.

“They showed me a different kind of happiness—a clean happiness through the gospel. So I started attending institute and other activities as well. I began to build my testimony.”

Sione finds great joy in life now. Why? “The principle of repentance is something we can truly enjoy in this life,” he explains. “I’m so happy for all the blessings I’ve received. I know the work we are doing is our Father’s work. Whatever He wants me to do, whatever calling I receive, I want to do to the best of my ability because I know it’s true. I made that promise years ago, and I’m never going to go back. I’ve seen both sides, and I know which is better.”

Sione Finau with his wife, Oa.

