

By Christine Bryant

A few years ago, my husband and I let our feelings be hurt by a few comments made by fellow ward members about our 12-year-old son with autism, and we decided to stop attending church.

Time passed, and before long, it had been almost two years since we had attended church as a family. Occasionally my husband or I would go on our own, but we never went together, and never with our son.

While we tried to maintain our testimonies, we made no attempt to regain activity.

When the ward boundaries changed, we also avoided contact with members of the new ward. Soon our new home teachers began calling us almost weekly to set up a time to visit. We made excuse after excuse of why we couldn't meet with them.

One Sunday afternoon while I was setting dinner on the table, our home teachers showed up unannounced. When my husband told them that we were just sitting down to eat, they said they had something to say that was much more important than our meal.

We let them in.

The spirit that filled our home that day was strong. The men spoke from their hearts, bearing testimony of the importance of returning to church. One spoke of his own experience with inactivity and his journey back to the fold. His story of faith and obedience was exactly what we needed to hear. When they invited us to return to the Church, we accepted their invitation and told them we would be at church the following week.

Even though we knew we had made the right choice to return to church, we worried that our son would act out and that we would receive the same kinds of negative comments we had in the past.

However, on our first Sunday back, the bishop asked for volunteers among the brethren to sit with our son during his meetings. We expected a handful of men, at most, who would rotate each week. The response was overwhelming as a steady stream from both the elders and high priests quorums eagerly agreed to befriend him.

The young men in the ward also stepped in. They

FINDING OUR Way Back



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH JENSON. PROPS BY ERIC JOHNSON

REACHING OUT TO MEMBERS WITH DISABILITIES

Here are some ways you can reach out to and include those families who have a member with a disability.

- When you see a child have an outburst, realize it might be because of a disability.
- Don't be afraid to ask how to include an individual with a disability or offer to help.

- Consider inviting the family to join yours for family home evening or other social events.
- Encourage your children to reach out to members with disabilities at church and school.
- If you are a teacher, visit the individual with a disability and, if appropriate, his or her family.
- Look for ways to modify lessons and adapt programs to meet the needs of all class members, including those with disabilities.

For more information on disabilities, visit lds.org/disability.

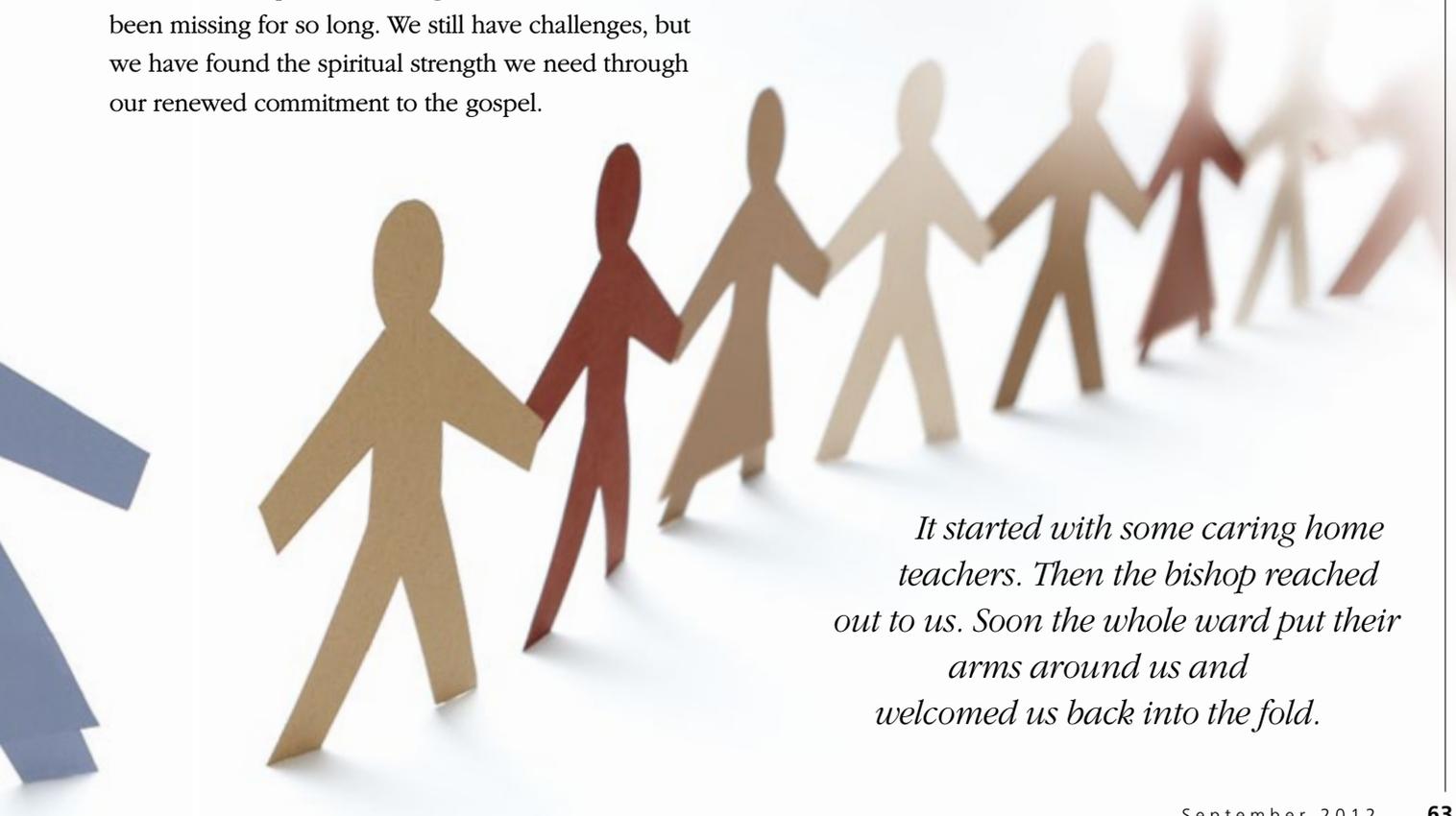
quickly made friends with our son and helped him learn more about his Aaronic Priesthood duties. For the first time since he was a little boy, our now 14-year-old son loved church and felt happy there.

Within a few weeks he was reverently passing the sacrament on his own. There are no words to describe the joy I felt as I watched my son standing tall among the other boys. I was grateful for the progress he had made and the friends who loved him.

As we have returned to Church activity, we have felt an increase in spiritual blessings in our lives that we had been missing for so long. We still have challenges, but we have found the spiritual strength we need through our renewed commitment to the gospel.

Looking back, we realize that the comments made about our son were not meant to hurt him or us but instead reflected a misunderstanding of our son's disability and how difficult it was to control his behavior, especially in large groups like our expanding ward.

By accepting our home teachers' invitation to let go of the things that had offended us, return to church, and forgive, we were able to feel part of our ward family and once again partake of the blessings of the gospel. ■



It started with some caring home teachers. Then the bishop reached out to us. Soon the whole ward put their arms around us and welcomed us back into the fold.