

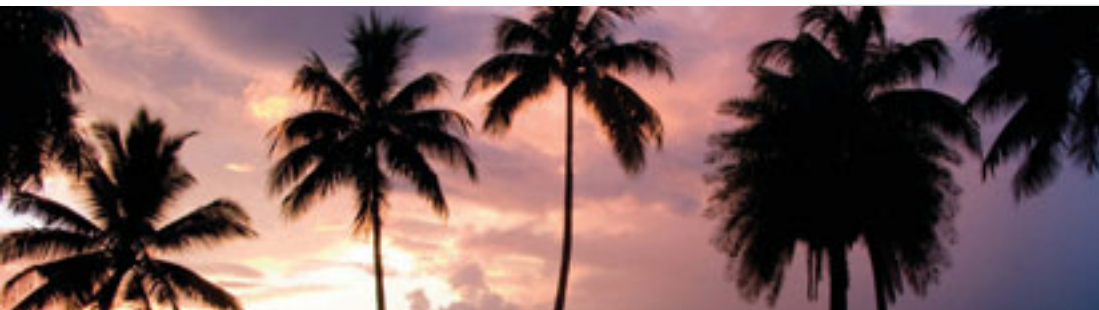
By Don L. Searle
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Fiji



George, Alitiana, and Ryan Kumar.

The Fruits of Faith



Fiji was once seen as fairly remote from the rest of the world—a place to retreat from problems of a faster-paced, more urban style of life. But no longer. The airplane, the satellite, and global commerce now bring to Fiji's shores all the challenges of modern living found elsewhere in the world. For Church members in Fiji, the way to meet those challenges successfully is the same as in any other part of the world: faithful obedience to gospel principles.

Three examples from Fiji teach how these principles shape lives.

The Kumar Family

George Kumar was just looking for a way to be sure his older son, Ryan, would live a productive, moral lifestyle. The Kumar family found much more: eternal gospel truths that brought all of them a new, happier way of life.

The gospel revitalized their family, Brother Kumar says. "We spend more time together—more quality time, with more open relationships." They have family prayer daily, and regular family home evening is "a 'must' thing," Ryan says.

It was Ryan who led the way into the Church.

When Ryan was in his mid-teens, George Kumar became concerned about the path his son might follow in life. Worried that Ryan and his friends were not spending their

time productively, George found a way to surround his son with young people who behaved differently. George learned from talking to a cousin who works at the Fiji LDS Church College, in Suva, that Ryan could qualify for admission. (The Church College is a secondary school equivalent

to a junior high and high school in other areas.)

After he entered the Church College, Ryan's behavior began to improve. "It was the example of the other students," he says. Formerly, he had spent a lot of time with his friends pursuing idle activities. But after seeing the difference in the lives of the students at the Church school, "I lost the desire to do those things," he explains.

Ryan gained a testimony of the gospel, and his parents were so delighted with the changes in his life that when he asked their permission to be baptized and confirmed, they readily said yes. Ryan let go of his old group of friends. He had gained new ones.

When he asked his parents to listen to the missionaries, however, "we were reluctant," George recalls. Still, they had seen the changes the gospel had brought into Ryan's life, so they knew the Church had to be good. The turnabout in Ryan's behavior was so marked that in his third and final year at the Church College, he was named head boy, an honor usually reserved for a student who has spent his entire scholastic career at the school.

Some changes in Ryan's behavior seemed strange to his parents at first. Why, for example, could they not persuade

One family's discovery of truth, another family's growing circle of love, and a young woman's trusting faith.



Elder Michael Kumar
*while serving in the
Utah Salt Lake City
South Mission.*

him to eat on the first Sunday of the month? But when Ryan explained the purpose of fasting, his parents understood that the changes in his

life ran deeper than they had realized.

Ryan's younger brother, Michael, had also observed the changes in his brother, and Michael listened to the gospel. "Ryan started going to Church activities, and the thing that caught me is that every time he came back, he was happy," Michael says. "I actually referred myself to the missionaries. I wanted to take the lessons. I wanted to be baptized and confirmed."

As the missionaries were presenting the new-member lessons to Michael after his baptism, his mother, Alitiana, began to listen. This influenced her husband, and soon both George and his wife had testimonies of their own.

Ryan had the privilege of baptizing both his parents into the Church in 2006, shortly before leaving to serve in the New Zealand Wellington Mission. Later, before Michael left on a mission, he had the privilege of accompanying his parents as they entered the temple. Elder Michael Kumar entered the Utah Salt Lake City South Mission in August 2008, shortly before Ryan returned from New Zealand.

Paying tithing and then financially supporting a son on a mission proved to be difficult for the Kumars. Brother Kumar's income was fully committed to their mortgage and to other obligations. But they made the necessary sacrifices; the whole family understood the need. For example, whenever Brother Kumar said cheerfully that they would be enjoying the "normal" diet that evening, the whole family understood there would be no meat for dinner. "There were days when we had just bread and cocoa," Michael recalls.

Ryan says he is grateful for his parents' sacrifice. "I learned that they are truly committed to the covenants they made."

Ryan's younger brother comments that since their conversion, "we make it through trials better as a family. Heavenly Father has helped us out."

The family's conversion quickly touched other lives as

well. Two of Ryan and Michael's cousins who had come to live with the Kumars also chose to hear the missionary lessons and join the Church.

The blessings of the Kumars' sacrifices have been both temporal and spiritual, Brother Kumar says. They have been able to make their money stretch to meet their needs. And after Michael left on his mission, Brother Kumar was able to obtain a new job that he hopes will enable him to pay off his mortgage more quickly.

But spiritual blessings the Kumars have received have been more important in their lives. George and Alitiana find growth in their callings—he as elders quorum president in the Lami Second Ward, Suva Fiji North Stake, and she as second counselor in the ward Primary.

Ryan notes that his own outlook on life is now far different than that of many of his peers: "I always have something to do—something to build up the kingdom." In planning for the future, he says, the gospel makes believers "look at things from an eternal perspective."

George and Alitiana Kumar had both been taught Christian doctrines before hearing the gospel. But they had not found comfort in what they had been taught. "In other religions," Brother Kumar says, "you are taught to fear God's wrath—to be scared. But the Atonement of Jesus Christ gives you another chance."

The Kumars are trying to make the most of that second chance.

The Naivaluvou Family

Peni and Jieni Naivaluvou doubled the size of their family when they took in four girls from Vanuatu who were attending the Fiji LDS Church College. But the Naivaluvous do not see this as a sacrifice. They feel they have been amply blessed for doing it. One of those blessings, they believe, is the addition to their family of baby Hagoth, born in January 2009.

In early 2008 Bishop and Sister Naivaluvou of the Tamavua Ward, Suva Fiji North Stake, heard that two young students from Vanuatu needed a place to board, so the Naivaluvous took stock of their own situation. Their sons, Soane, 18, and Ross, 16, were away from home attending a

Church school in Tonga, the land of their father's ancestry. The two girls from Vanuatu were boarding, at high cost to their parents, with a non-LDS family in Suva. The two girls would be good company for then 13-year-old Andrea Naivaluvou; Andrea also attends the Church College and was arriving home in the afternoon before her parents

Bishop and Sister Naivaluvou do not focus on what they may have sacrificed by taking in four new family members. They give thanks instead for blessings received.

were off work. So Brother and Sister Naivaluvou decided they would invite the two girls from Vanuatu to live in their home at no charge.

The girls insisted on helping with costs, but still their expenses were less than half of what they had been paying earlier—a blessing for their families.

In April two other Vanuatuan girls came for a visit and enjoyed the atmosphere of the Naivaluvou home. A short time later these two girls asked if they too might come there to live. The Naivaluvous gladly took them in.

How did it work to have four extra young people in the home? “We’ve built up such a bond it’s more like they



Front: Peni, Jieni, and Andrea Naivaluvou. Back: Soane and Ross Naivaluvou.



Suva Fiji Temple.

are our daughters,” Bishop Naivaluvou says. The Naivalouvous made it clear from the beginning that the girls were to be considered part of the family. The four girls from Vanuatu actually are related to each other, but in the Naivaluvou home they treated each other like sisters born of the same parents. Andrea Naivaluvou also came to accept them “like my sisters,” she says; the older girls watched out for her and even helped her with homework when there was a need. The four girls began to call Bishop and Sister Naivaluvou *Ta* and *Na*—“Dad” and “Mom” in Fijian.

This may be the first time, Sister Naivaluvou says, that girls from Vanuatu who are attending the Church College have been able to board with member families. The father of one of the girls, when he came to visit, expressed his deep gratitude to the Naivalouvous for the love they have shown his daughter.

Sister Naivaluvou points out that one of the girls, the daughter of a district president on Vanuatu, was a great example to their family through her faith; Bishop Naivaluvou says her example helped his family be more consistent about scripture study and family prayer.

Both of the Naivalouvous say they have been blessed temporally because they have shared with others. Their resources have gone farther. And Sister Naivaluvou believes the blessing of being able to become pregnant again after 13 years is connected with their willingness to share love with others.

When the Naivalouvous’ two sons returned home at the end of their school year in Tonga, they too accepted the

What advice would Asenaca Ramasima (right) give to other young people? “Stay true to the gospel, and always listen to your parents. You might think you know better than they do, but it is likely they understand things you have not yet learned.”

young women as part of the family. But perhaps Soane can be excused for not seeing the girls exactly as sisters. He found himself drafted as a prom date for one of the young women. He played his role like a gentleman.

When the four girls finished their school year and returned home to Vanuatu late in 2008, the farewells were heart tugging, Bishop Naivaluvou recalls. It was as though he and his wife were saying good-bye to four daughters. And when a new school year began in 2009, the Naivalouvous were glad to welcome their four “daughters” back—plus two more.

With only four sleeping rooms in their home, some would wonder how they could make room for six young women in addition to their own daughter and new baby. But the Naivaluvou family quickly worked it out without difficulty.

After all, it was not a matter of personal space. It was simply a matter of expanding their circle of love.

Asenaca Ramasima

During 2008, Asenaca Ramasima won what are probably the two most prestigious awards for students at the Fiji LDS Church College. First, she was selected as dux, or top student in the school. That award carries with it a tuition scholarship. But she also received the

Lion of the Lord Award, given to an exemplary seminary student. She treasures this second award even more than the first, because it is a reminder of how she has tried to apply faith in her Heavenly Father in her own day-to-day life.

Life has already dealt Asenaca an ample share of hardship, even though she is only 19. And yet she seems to radiate joy—joy in the knowledge that she has an eternal family because they were sealed in the Suva Fiji Temple in 2001 and joy in the knowledge that she is known and loved by her Heavenly Father.

Asenaca is the youngest of five children, after four brothers. When their father died, she recalls, their oldest brother, then serving as a missionary, urged all of them to remember that their father was not lost to them; he would always be close.

Her brothers became breadwinners for the family, while their mother became a spiritual bonding agent to hold them together. The children have benefited as they have followed their parents' examples.

"My father was an inspiration for me. He always taught us, 'Work hard, work hard,'" the soft-spoken Asenaca says.

Working hard in school has been her way of honoring her father and helping her mother. The scholarship that comes with the dux award is a valuable contribution Asenaca has made toward the costs of her own education.

Parental example also gave her a foundation for her spiritual education. "We were taught every day at home through family scripture reading and teachings from our own parents," Asenaca says. Her mother, she adds, continues to build on this foundation for her family.

Asenaca's own regular scripture study helps her maintain and strengthen her faith in Jesus Christ. She makes time for scripture study no matter what her schedule may be.

Faith in Jesus Christ has in turn helped her stay close to her Heavenly Father so she can call on His guidance. "I know He is always there," she says. "If I do what He wants me to do, He will be there for me, and His Spirit will confirm what is right."

That guidance is important when some young women her age try to talk her into "having fun" the way they do—drinking, smoking, putting chastity aside. But "those things are against my conscience," Asenaca says, and because of her faith and the safety she feels in Heavenly Father's guidance, "I can say no."

Service in the Church, she says, has helped her build some confidence she would not otherwise have. That will be important when she finishes her schooling at the Church College, because then she hopes to be able to attend Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, or BYU–Hawaii to study accounting.

Those places are a long way from her family's home in a rural area on the outskirts of Suva. Would it be a bit scary to go so far from home? Asenaca thinks about this question for a moment, then gives one of her broad smiles. Yes, she answers—but she will do it to meet her goals.

It is easy to believe that Asenaca will do what she says. So far, she has done very well at meeting her goals. And like other faithful members in Fiji, she has found both spiritual growth and temporal progress through exercising faith and keeping the commandments. ■

