

Faith to Ford the

“He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy” (Psalm 18:16–17).

BY ADAM C. OLSON
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Rafael Mateo and his son, Whalincon (known as “Whally”), paused in the darkness of a stormy afternoon and eyed the rushing waters of the rain-swollen river. Rafael, first counselor in the branch presidency, and Whally, the branch elders quorum president, were returning home after a Sunday full of meetings at their chapel in San José de Ocoa in the Dominican Republic.

They were already drenched from trudging through the downpour and crossing the flooded Río Ocoa that created a dangerous barrier between the chapel and their home. During the dry season, the 6-kilometer (4-mile) hike descending from the chapel on one side of the valley then up to their home on the heights of the other side usually takes an hour. But when the river floods during the rainy season, Rafael and his family have to take a three-hour, 15-kilometer (9-mile) detour to find a place where they can ford the river with some degree of safety.

Rafael had completed the journey countless times before. He had crossed the river every day for 12 years to get to work. Being called two months after his baptism to serve as branch president, a calling he held for six years, only increased the number of trips. After that it was a call as elders quorum president. Then he was called back into the branch presidency.

But familiarity with the river didn’t diminish its danger, and the swift water of the flooded rivers could be as deadly as the wide river they fed. Not long before, an overflowing river had swept a neighbor off his feet, killing him in a mad rush down its narrow course.

Father and son hesitated at the water’s edge; then Rafael stepped in. The river was not wide, but because it

channeled so much water, it was cut surprisingly deep. The cold, swift water first pulled at his knees, then his waist, and soon swirled about his chest.

Rafael knew he was in trouble. The streambed was slippery and uneven, and the powerful current threatened to steal his footing. Halfway across, he used all his strength to stay upright, and he found himself powerless to move forward or backward.

Just when he thought he was too weak to fight the flood any longer, he felt a push from behind that thrust him toward the opposite bank. It wasn’t until after he had reached the other side that he realized his savior hadn’t been Whally, who was still on the opposite side.

He attributes his rescue to the power of the same Savior who has helped him survive the threatening pull of other trials, both physical and spiritual.

“I’ve had to throw myself many times into the river up to my chest in the service of the Lord,” says Brother Mateo. “But I feel a great debt to the Lord. He has given me not only the opportunity to serve Him but the endurance.”

Like King David, Brother Mateo knows the Savior “took me, he drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy” (Psalm 18:16–17).

That testimony has carried him through trials more subtle than, but just as real as, crossing the river that stormy afternoon with Whally.

Despite the cost of the trip, Brother Mateo; his wife, Altagracia; and three of their children were sealed in the temple in 2001. Since then they have sacrificed to save enough to visit the temple at least twice each year.

The work and the sacrifices, both physical and spiritual, are worth it to Brother Mateo.

“It’s not hard when you know what the purpose is,” he says. “We’re fighting for something more sublime than wordly things.” ■

River



ENTITLED TO THE LORD'S HELP

*"Remember that
this work is not
yours and mine
alone. It is the*

*Lord's work, and when we are on the
Lord's errand, . . . we are entitled to
the Lord's help."*

**President Thomas S. Monson, "The
Sacred Call of Service," *Liahona* and
Ensign, May 2005, 56.**

