

# "YOU NEED TO LEAVE THIS PLACE"

Despite my fears about moving to northern Chile with my family, the desert turned out to be our promised land.



By Sergio Riquelme Segura

**W**hen I read in the Book of Mormon about how Nephi always supported his visionary father, I concluded that most youth in the Church were probably like Nephi. But when my family decided that we needed to move to the desert, I felt more like Laman and Lemuel. I didn't want to leave my home.

Like Nephi and his brothers, I was "born of goodly parents" (1 Nephi 1:1). Both joined the Church when they were teenagers, and my mother waited for my father while he served a mission. They were active, hardworking members of the Church. When I was in high school, the economy slowed down in our region of Concepción, Chile. Jobs dried up, and my father began having trouble finding work. Finally, he began looking for a job out of town.

His job search took him north to the city of Calama, in Chile's mining region. He is a construction engineer, and he found a good job there. But he was alone and far away. We saw him only when he could afford the 32-hour bus ride home. After a few years of seeing my father only two or three times

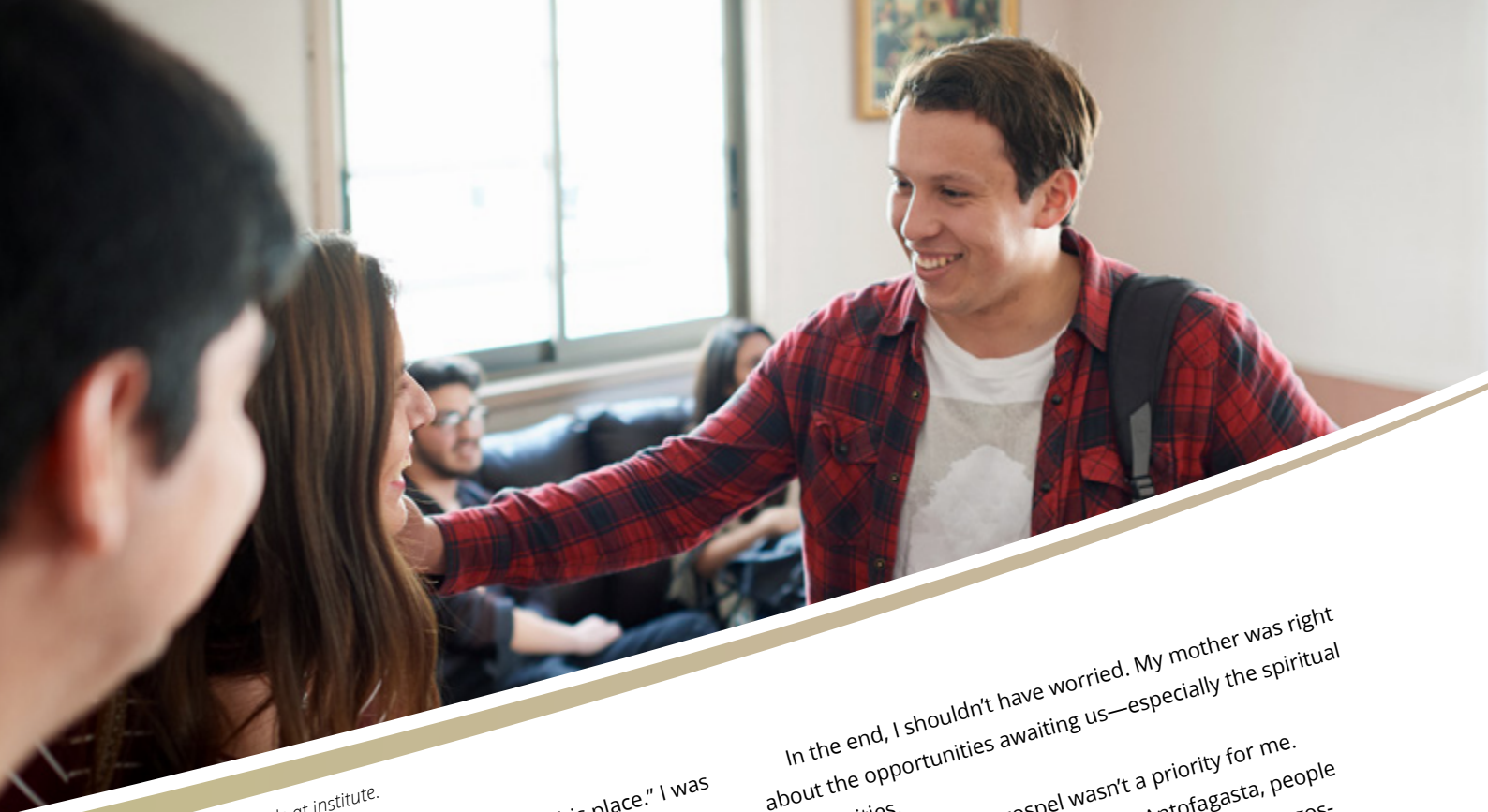
a year, my mother felt that it was time to make a change. My parents concluded that the rest of our family needed to move north.

### **We Need to Be with Our Father**

My younger brother had no problem moving. And my older sister, who was in college, set a good example for me. "I'll sacrifice my studies," she said. "We need to be with our father."

Everyone supported the decision to move except for me. I wanted to be with my father too, but I resisted making changes and personal sacrifices. I had my friends, I knew my surroundings, I enjoyed my lifestyle, and I wanted to go to college in Concepción. I did everything I could do to convince my mother that we shouldn't go.

Finally, she said, "Son, your father is alone. He wants us with him. I wish you understood, but you're too focused on yourself." Then she reassured me, "We will have opportunities there." In my heart, I knew she was right—even though my head wasn't convinced. I didn't have a strong testimony at the time, but I decided to pray about whether I should go with my family.



*Sergio visits with friends at institute.*

A clear answer came to me: "You need to leave this place." I was sad, but I told my parents I would go.

### **Where Are the Trees?**

Concepción is a green place with lots of trees. It receives 50 inches (127 cm) of rain per year. Antofagasta, the city near Calama we were moving to, receives only 0.1 inch (0.25 cm) per year.

The most shocking thing for me about the move was the actual trip. As we made our way north by bus, watching the transition from green to brown was agonizing. I wondered, "Where are the trees? Where are the cows in the countryside?" All I saw was dirt, rocks, and hills.

Obviously, northern Chile is a desert, so what else could I expect? I was reminded of how Laman and Lemuel felt when Lehi's family left the land of their inheritance and headed into the wilderness.

I had a lot of fears when we arrived in Antofagasta. What would happen if I didn't make any friends? What would happen if I couldn't get used to the area? What would happen if my hopes for the future didn't come true?

In the end, I shouldn't have worried. My mother was right about the opportunities awaiting us—especially the spiritual opportunities.

Before our move, the gospel wasn't a priority for me. The Lord was in the background. But in Antofagasta, people came into my life who helped me see the beauty of the gospel. I received help from special priesthood leaders. I made friends who remain a treasure to me. My spiritual life changed completely.

I'm grateful I listened to my mother. I'm grateful the Lord answered my prayer. I'm grateful I had the courage to move north with my family.

Here in the desert is where I made the changes that helped me become who I am today. Here is where I committed to embrace the gospel, serve a mission, marry in the temple, and dedicate my life to the Lord. Here is where I determined that I no longer wanted to be like Laman and Lemuel.

For my family and me, the wilderness turned out to be our promised land. ■

*The author lives in Antofagasta, Chile.*