





# REGAINING MY Covenants

*I learned to hold dear my covenants after experiencing their loss through excommunication.*

## **Name withheld**

I was raised in the Church and baptized and confirmed at eight years old. The gospel was a way of life for me and for most of the people around me. The Holy Ghost was a very familiar presence in my life.

When I was excommunicated, I felt an almost tangible feeling leave me. I felt like my thinking process had been disrupted and slowed, and making decisions was confusing and difficult. I was anxious and had a hard time feeling peace.

I never realized how losing my membership would change my life completely. I could no longer wear the temple garment or attend the temple. I could not pay my tithing, serve in any calling, take the sacrament, or bear my testimony or pray in church. I no longer had the gift of the Holy Ghost. Most importantly I was not in a covenant relationship with my Savior through the ordinances of baptism and the temple.

I was devastated and frightened. My three children were then 16, 14, and 12. They were my heritage, and I so badly wanted to leave them with an inheritance of hope. I sat them down and told them that if I should die before I could get rebaptized, I needed them to perform the ordinance again in my behalf as soon as it was allowed. I was frightened that I no longer had the blessings of keeping my baptismal covenants, and I worried that I might not be washed clean again.

## **My Journey Back**

I never had any question that the Church was true and that the gospel was how I wanted to live my life, so I continued going to church. I wanted Heavenly Father to know that I loved Him and that I was so sorry for my actions. I went to church every week even though it was very hard. The ward was uncomfortable with my being there, and only

a few people talked to me. However, one special young woman with Down's syndrome named Holly was particularly loving. Every Sunday as I would walk into the chapel, she would run up to me, throw her arms around me, give me a big hug, and say, "It's so good to see you! I love you!" I felt as if she were acting for the Savior, letting me know that He was happy I was there.

It was particularly difficult to have to let the sacrament pass by without being able to take it because I knew I was not receiving the blessings. Taking the sacrament is such a blessing. It is incredible to have the blessing of being made clean through the power of the Savior and His atoning sacrifice, to be forgiven of our sins and shortcomings week after week, and to recommit with love and faithfulness to the covenant we have made to always remember our Savior and keep His commandments.

Because paying my tithing was so important to me, I set up a bank account and put my tithing in it each month. I needed the Lord to know that even though He couldn't take my tithing now, I still wanted to pay it. I was single at the time and raising my three teenage daughters, and I felt that I needed those blessings of showing the Lord my willingness to pay tithing, even though I couldn't. I have no doubt we were extremely blessed because of it.

### **Blessings Restored**

I was rebaptized a little over a year after my excommunication. What a relief it was to come up out of the water knowing that Jesus was now my advocate, my partner. He had paid for my sins, and I was again in a covenant relationship with Him. I was filled with gratitude!

I received the gift of the Holy Ghost again. I felt once again a tangible presence: my dear friend was back to stay! I wanted to try so hard not to offend Him again so that He wouldn't have to leave me.

I closed out the account with my tithing in it, wrote the check, and excitedly gave it to my bishop.

Five years later I was able to have my temple blessings restored. I felt so relieved and grateful. Once again I was covered in love and protected with the power of the covenants I had made in the temple.

I am now sealed to a man who adores me, and I him, and together we are actively working to establish our sealing as a covenant relationship that will last through the eternities.

### **The Bondage of Guilt**

In the 20 years since, I have sometimes felt a sense of deep guilt wash over me and cause me great unhappiness and worry. I wondered if I had done enough to repent and whether I was truly forgiven. As recently as just a few years ago, my feelings matched those of Alma the Younger, described in Alma 36:12–13:

"I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins.

"Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell; yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments."

One day I knelt down in prayer and asked, "Father, have I done enough? I will do whatever I need to, to have this taken from me." Then I waited and listened with my heart.

The answer came very clearly: "You have done enough." I was overcome with pure joy. I couldn't stop smiling, and happy tears flowed. All that day I found myself giddy with joy. All the shame and guilt was gone for good.

Again I reflected on the experience of Alma the Younger:



“I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

“And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!” (Alma 36:19–20).

My journey to regain my membership in the Church and my covenant relationship with the Savior was heart-wrenching and tender. I came out of this trial knowing that the Atonement of Jesus Christ is most precious. It has taken me almost all of these 20 years to get past the shame and guilt of my excommunication and to find the strength to share my experiences with others. I hope my experience inspires others to find courage to change and to reach out to those who want to change. I can stand and testify without a doubt that the Atonement of Christ is real. His power can change your life not only for the better but for the very best.

I love my membership in the Church dearly. It is a priceless gift and an incredible blessing in my life. I never want to be without it again. ■



### **THE WAY TO GREATER HAPPINESS**

“Wherever you are on the path to inherit the gift of eternal life, you have the opportunity to show many people the way to greater happiness. When you choose whether to make or keep a covenant with God, you choose whether you will leave an inheritance of hope to those who might follow your example.”

**President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, “A Priceless Heritage of Hope,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2014, 22.**