

The Church or My Girlfriend?

My maternal grandmother joined the Church in 1962. Her children were also baptized, but over time they all became less active. Years later, one of them, my aunt, moved from Costa Rica to the United States and became active in the Church there.

As a teenager I went to visit my aunt in 1991. During my stay she introduced me to the full-time missionaries, and I met with them a few times in my aunt's home. They asked me if I wanted to learn more about the gospel, but I told them I wasn't interested.

I returned home to Costa Rica, only to have missionaries visit me there. (My aunt had given them my address.) I still didn't have any interest in their message, so I asked them to leave.

Four years passed. I was dating a woman with whom I had been friends for many years, and our relationship progressed to engagement. As I thought about our future together, my heart turned to things of a spiritual nature, and I told my fiancée that I wanted to know God. We decided that I would attend church with her to learn about Him. In the meantime I prayed privately to God for opportunities to come to know Him.

During this period of searching,

My fiancée was not pleased with my decision to be baptized. She told me that I had to choose between her and the Church.

Frustrated that they had returned, I told them to go away, and then I shut the door. But at that very moment, a thought struck me: "You've been praying to know God. What if these men have some answers for you?"

I opened the door again and called after the elders. I invited them to come in and teach me.

I quickly discovered the power of the truths they taught, and I embraced the restored gospel. Three weeks later, on March 12, 1995, I was baptized into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

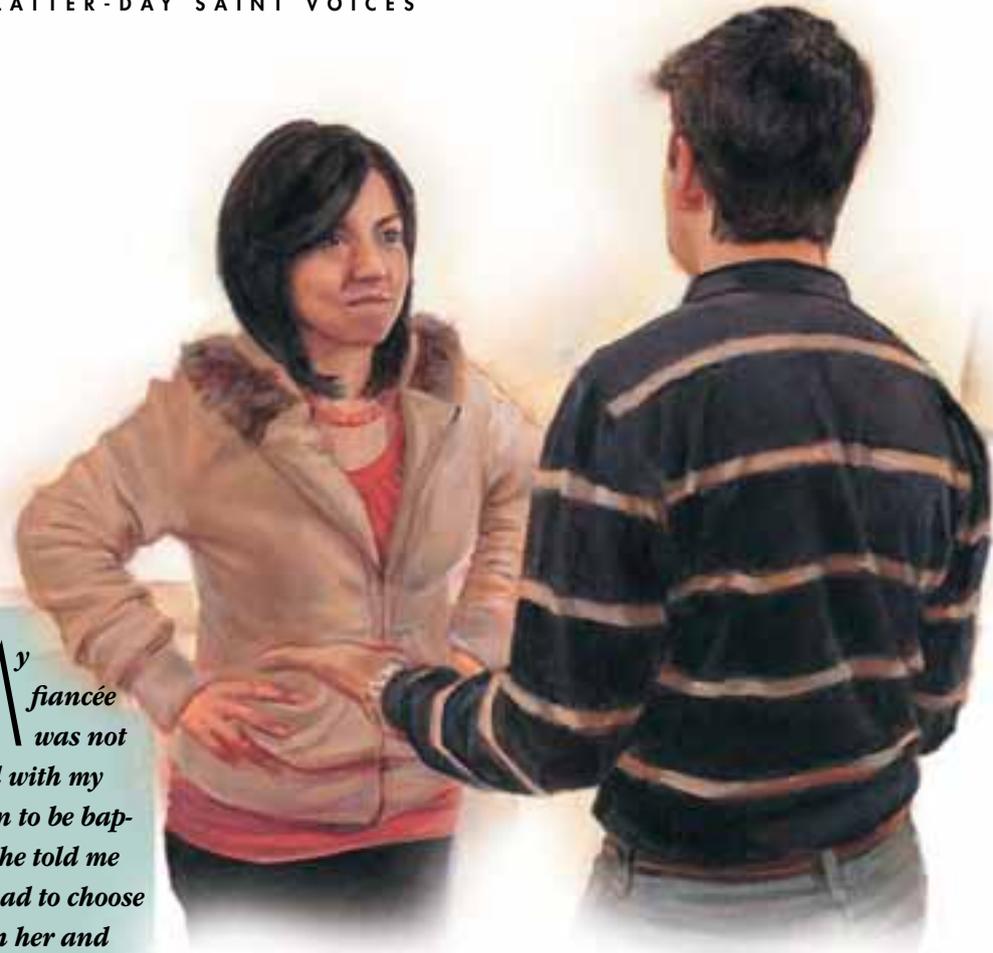
My girlfriend was not pleased

missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint again knocked on my door.

with my decision. One night about three months later, she told me that I had to choose between her and the Church. What a painful decision! After a lot of pondering and deliberating, I chose the Church.

I felt that I had made the right decision, but the months following our breakup were a dark time in my life. Nevertheless, I found hope in living my newfound religion, especially in coming to know my Heavenly Father, as I had prayed to do.

A year after my baptism, I left for a full-time mission in Nicaragua. My service there brought me great joy, and my knowledge of and love for my Heavenly Father grew. Several months after I returned from Nicaragua, I met Lili, the woman who would later become my wife.



Making the gospel a priority in our lives isn't always easy. The decisions I made were difficult ones. But I learned then—and have continued to learn since—that whenever we make sacrifices to know our Heavenly Father, He will reveal His will for us and our lives. The happiness that comes from following His plan and His commandments is always worth the effort. ■

Diego Ortiz Segura, Costa Rica

Of Greatest Worth

When I selected the painting of the Savior, a couple of my brothers and sisters snickered. Items that they thought were more valuable still remained among the things that had belonged to Mom and Dad.

We were gathered at our childhood home, where Mom had been living when she died a few weeks earlier. Dad had passed away five years before, in 2001. Now it was time to divide up their belongings. We drew numbers and selected items, the person with the lowest number making the first pick.

The bedroom set went first, followed by the refrigerator, dining room table and chairs, and late-model car. I selected the piano, even though I don't play. We had enjoyed music in our home when I was growing up. Dad often served as ward music

director, and both my parents sang well. My father, who was a big man with a powerful voice, never turned down an opportunity to sing. The piano meant a lot to me, as did the painting of the Savior.

When I chose the painting, which was framed alongside a copy of "The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles,"¹ it was hanging on the wall of the family room, where we were sitting.

At such a time I couldn't help but think about the Savior, the plan of salvation, and how much my parents meant to me. And I couldn't help but feel gratitude for the way they had raised us, the gospel they had taught us, and the example

they had set for us, including their willingness to serve.

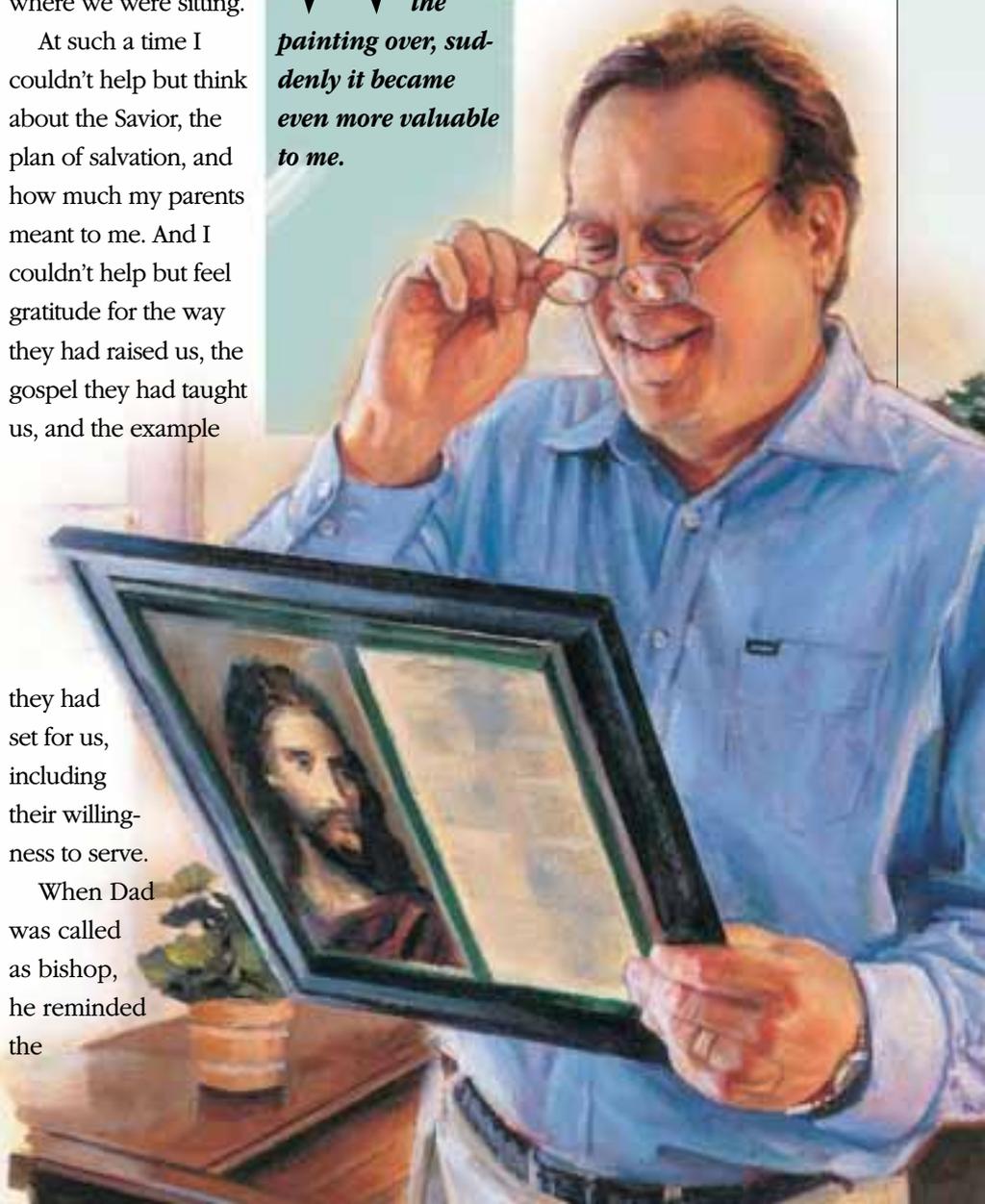
When Dad was called as bishop, he reminded the

stake president that he was 70 years old. "I think you've got the wrong guy," he had said.

"How old do you think the Brethren are up in Salt Lake City?" the stake president had asked in reply. "You weren't our first pick. You weren't even our second pick. You were the Lord's pick."

Dad knew that he had been called of God, and he became a good bishop. There was nothing flashy about him. He was

When I flipped the painting over, suddenly it became even more valuable to me.



not an expert on the scriptures. He was just a down-to-earth man who showed a lot of empathy for ward members.

While Dad served as bishop, I served as a counselor in another bishopric in our stake. As we attended leadership meetings together, our relationship became focused on Christ, and I got to know his spiritual side.

When Dad was called as bishop in 1994, he was suffering from health problems. “Does this calling guarantee me five more years of life?” he jokingly asked the stake president. Two years after Dad was released, he passed away.

These thoughts crowded upon my mind as we finished dividing up my parents’ belongings. After returning home, I looked for the right place to hang the painting of the Savior. As I flipped it over, to my surprise I saw that it had been dedicated to my father: “We will always remember Bishop Taylor as a big man with a heart to match.” It was signed by our stake presidency: “President Cory, President Carter, President Stubbs.”

Suddenly the painting became even more valuable to me. Today it hangs on a wall in my home above my parents’ piano. There are still some things at our old home that I selected but haven’t picked up. It doesn’t matter. I have the things of greatest worth. ■

Ray Taylor; Utah, USA

NOTE

1. “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Apr. 2000, 2–3.

I Finally Took the Challenge

How are you coming on reading the Book of Mormon?” the bishop asked our family during tithing settlement in 2005.

We had just finished talking about my many responsibilities at church and at home with two toddler boys. I stammered something about how hard it was to read a whole chapter every day, but in my heart I knew I was making excuses. The simple fact was that though I had done many good things the past few months, I had not attempted to read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover as President Gordon B. Hinckley had challenged.¹

As the new year began, the Spirit pricked my soul. I felt like the leper Naaman, who at first refused to undertake the simple task of washing himself in the waters of Jordan, as requested by the prophet Elisha (see 2 Kings 5:1–14). Reading the Book of Mormon is also a simple task.

The next fast Sunday, several brothers and sisters bore testimony of how the prophet’s promises were realized in their lives. I knew I had missed out on those blessings because I had not listened to his voice. I resolved to read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover in 2006—and the next year and the next year—so that, like President Hinckley, I could gain a love for it.

As the year drew to a close, I reflected on my goal, knowing that I would finish the book by the end of the year. I realized that I had gained insights that I could not have gained from any other source. I had grown closer to my Heavenly Father and my Savior. I had found more opportunities to share the gospel throughout the year because I had read the Book of Mormon and could testify of its truthfulness.

I wish I had taken President Hinckley’s challenge in 2005. Just like Naaman, who finally washed himself in the waters of Jordan, I could have enjoyed the blessings of the Book of Mormon much sooner than I did.

I am grateful that I have learned the importance of taking even simple challenges from the prophet. I look forward to a new year full of blessings from reading the Book of Mormon—again. ■

Jennifer Garrett, California, USA

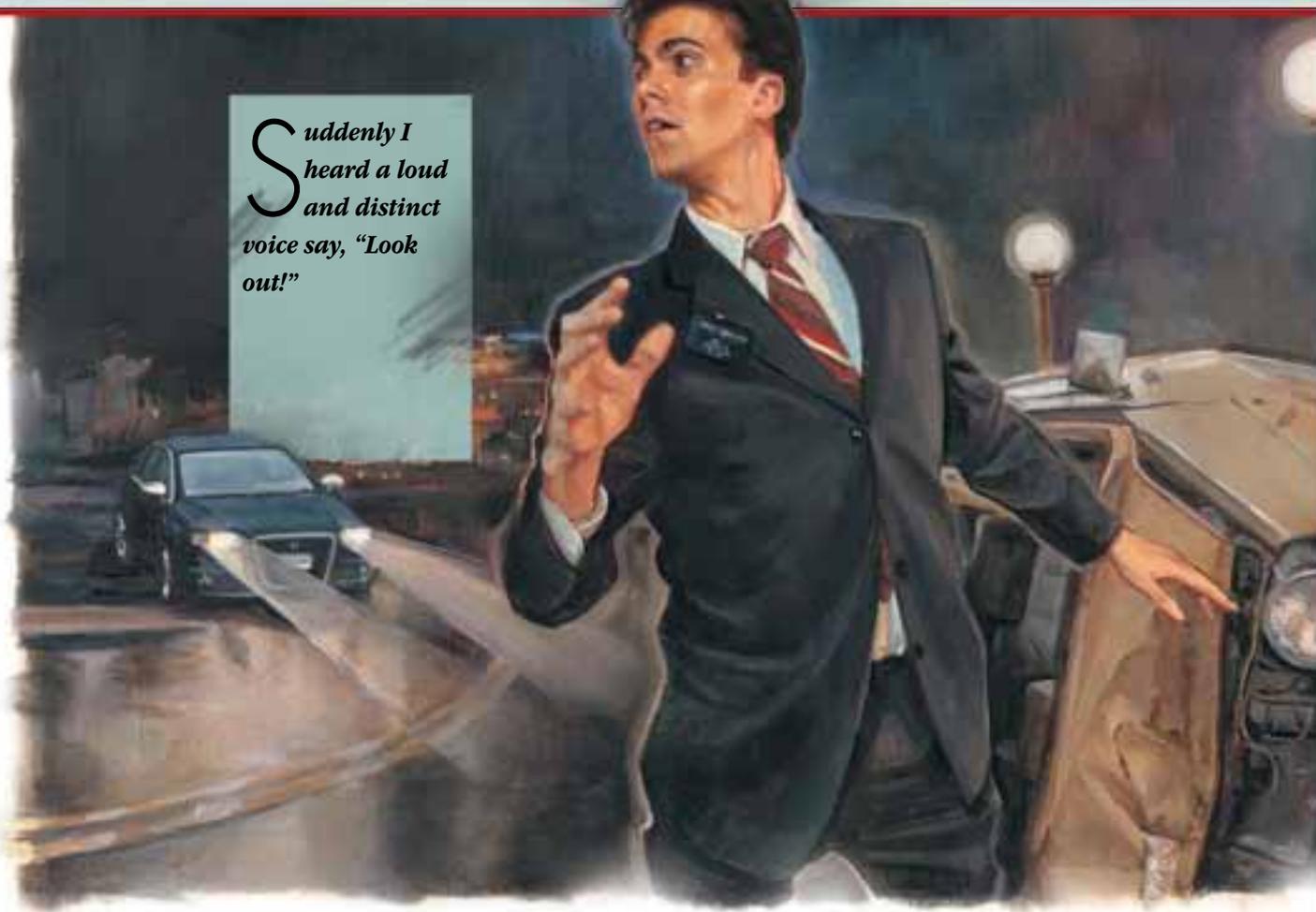
NOTE

1. See Gordon B. Hinckley, “A Testimony Vibrant and True,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Aug. 2005, 6.

Look Out!

On the evening of July 23, 1991, Elder Charles Larsen and I were returning home from the Auckland International Airport after dropping off a missionary who had completed his mission. It was winter in New Zealand, and it had been raining for several days.

I was driving our car toward the

A man in a dark suit and tie stands next to a car at night. He has a surprised expression, with his mouth open and hands raised. The background shows a dark street with a car and a building.

*S*uddenly I heard a loud and distinct voice say, "Look out!"

large Harbour Bridge, which connects Auckland to Takapuna. As we approached a turn on the lower portion of the bridge, a small car passed us going very fast. As the speeding car started to make the turn, the driver lost control on the wet surface. The car fishtailed to the left and then went hard right, hitting a cement barricade, which kept it from falling off the bridge and into the harbor.

Bouncing violently off the wall, the car rolled and slid to a stop. Shocked by what we had just seen, I immediately pulled into the median and put on our hazard lights. Instinctively, Elder Larsen and I both jumped out to see if we could help. Before we could get to the car, a man climbed out of a broken window and made his way off the bridge and down to

the water's edge, where he disappeared in the dark. We called out to him, but he didn't respond.

I made my way to the small wrecked car, which was lying on its side with the passenger door facing up. The window was missing, so I climbed partway in to see if there was anyone else inside. Suddenly I heard a loud and distinct voice say, "Look out!" Startled by the voice, I quickly jumped back. Almost instantly, another car traveling at high speed came around the corner and hit the wrecked car I had just been leaning in.

Because of the turn in the road and the tall cement barricade, oncoming drivers couldn't see the wreckage ahead. Several other cars added to the pileup. Elder Larsen and I quickly ran around the turn, waving our arms

to stop other drivers. The police soon arrived, and we learned that the first car had been stolen.

As we returned home, I was thinking about my close call and thanked Elder Larsen for warning me of the oncoming car. He looked at me with surprise and said, "Elder Soelberg, I didn't say anything. I wasn't close to you and didn't even see that car coming around the corner."

We sat there for a moment, feeling an overwhelming sense of gratitude. That night we knelt and thanked our Heavenly Father for the warning that had literally saved my life. Since that experience, I have shared my testimony many times of the importance of being receptive to the Lord's Spirit and listening for His voice. ■

Mark H. Soelberg, Utah, USA