

DECEMBER 2016

THE New Era

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CELEBRATE
THE
CHRISTMAS
SEASON

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SNIPPETS FROM THIS ISSUE

Not one could spare a minute to hear our message, though **a few offered us chocolates.** —page 8 • A single skiff was moored there, bobbing up and down on the waves. —page 17 • **I had very different opinions** from my classmates and my teacher. —page 20 • **You don't want her to be alone,** and you want to reach out, but you don't know where to start. —page 30 • I spent the hour staring firmly at my desk, not looking at or talking to anybody. —page 32 • It's critical that we develop basic spiritual maneuvers. —page 39 • Serving a mission has always seemed far away. **Now that it's so close, the reality of it has sunk in.** —page 47 • Patience is not simply enduring; it is enduring well! —page 48



Cover: Christmas, pp. 2–11, 22–29, 47
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THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

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By President
Thomas S. Monson

FOUR GIFTS

That Endure

May we give generously to Him, as He has so abundantly given to us, by living and loving as He and His Son have so patiently taught.

reflect on the contrasts of Christmas. The extravagant gifts, expensively packaged and professionally wrapped, reach their zenith in the famed commercial catalogs carrying the headline “For the person who has everything.” In one such reading I observed a 4,000-square-foot home wrapped with a gigantic ribbon and comparable greeting card which said, “Merry Christmas.” Other items included diamond-studded clubs for the golfer, a Caribbean cruise for the traveler, and a luxury trip to the Swiss Alps for the adventurer. Such seemed to fit the theme of a Christmas cartoon which showed the three Wise Men traveling to Bethlehem with gift boxes on their camels. One says, “Mark my words, Balthazar, we’re starting something with these gifts that’s going to get way out of hand!”

For a few moments, may we set aside the catalogs of Christmas, with their gifts of exotic description. Let’s even turn from the gifts we ourselves receive and direct our thoughts to those God-given gifts that endure. I have chosen from a long list just four:

1. The gift of birth.
2. The gift of peace.
3. The gift of love.
4. The gift of life eternal.



First, the gift of birth.

It has been universally bestowed on each of us. Ours was the divine privilege to depart our heavenly home to tabernacle in the flesh and to demonstrate by our lives our worthiness and qualifications to one day return to Him, precious loved ones, and a kingdom called *celestial*. Our mothers and our fathers bestowed this marvelous gift on us. Ours is the responsibility to show our gratitude by the actions of our lives.

Second, the gift of peace.

In the raucous world in which we live, the din of traffic, the blaring commercials of the media, and the sheer demands placed on our time—to say nothing of the problems of the world—cause headache, inflict pain, and sap our strength to cope. The burden of sickness or the grief of mourning a loved one departed brings us to our knees seeking heavenly help. With the ancients we may wonder, “Is there no balm in Gilead?” (Jeremiah 8:22).

He who was burdened with sorrow and acquainted with grief speaks to every troubled heart and bestows the gift of peace. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

He sends forth His word through the missionaries serving far and wide proclaiming His gospel of good tidings and salutation of peace. Vexing questions such as “From whence did I come?” “What is the purpose of my being?” “Whence go I after death?” are answered by His special servants. Frustration flees, doubt disappears, and wonder wanes when truth is taught in boldness, yet in a spirit of humility, by those who have been called to serve the Prince of Peace—even the Lord Jesus Christ. His gift is bestowed individually: “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him” (Revelation 3:20).

The passport to peace is the practice of prayer. The feelings of the heart, humbly expressed rather than a mere recitation of words, provide the peace we seek.

Third, the gift of love.

“Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” queried the lawyer who spoke to Jesus. Came the prompt reply: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

“This is the first and great commandment.

“And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:36–39).

On another occasion, the Lord taught, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me” (John 14:21). The scriptures are filled with the importance of love and its relevance in our lives. The Book of Mormon teaches that charity is the pure love of Christ (see Moroni 7:47). The Master Himself provided an ideal pattern for us to follow. Of Him it was said that He “went about doing good . . . ; for God was with him” (Acts 10:38).

Fourth, the gift of life—even immortality.

Our Heavenly Father’s plan contains the ultimate expressions of true love. All that we hold dear, even our families, our friends, our joy, our knowledge, our testimonies, would vanish were it not for our Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Among the most cherished thoughts and writings in this world is the divine statement of truth: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

This precious Son, our Lord and Savior, atoned for our sins and the sins of all. That memorable night in Gethsemane His suffering was so great, His anguish so consuming that He pleaded, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39). Later, on the cruel cross, He died that we might live, and live everlastingly. Resurrection morning was preceded by pain, by suffering in accordance with the divine plan of God. Before Easter there had to be a cross. The world has witnessed no greater gift, nor has it known more lasting love.

Nephi gives to us our charge: “Ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. . . . If ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.

“And now, behold, . . . this is the way; and there is none

other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 31:20–21).

I conclude with the words of a revered prophet, even President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973): “Life is God’s gift to man. What we do with our life is our gift to God.”

May we give generously to Him, as He has so abundantly given to us, by living and loving as He and His Son have so patiently taught. **NE**

From an April 1993 general conference address.



GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

Why did the Wise Men bring these gifts to the Christ child?

“And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.”

Matthew 2:11



Gold

Gold may have been the first metal that human beings encountered, because it can often be found in its pure natural state (for instance, nuggets in streams) rather than mixed in ore, which requires smelting. People have always valued gold for its luster, beauty, malleability, and resistance to corrosion and tarnish. These attributes also led ancient civilizations throughout the world to associate gold with royalty, immortality, and deity. It was first used in minted currency in the seventh century B.C.



Frankincense

Originating in Arabia and northern Africa, frankincense is a dried resin (from trees of the genus *Boswellia*) used in perfumes and incense for thousands of years. Historically, frankincense was a highly valued commodity. When burned as incense, it was often valued for its aroma as well as for its reputed ability to disinfect and repel insects and other pests.



Myrrh

Myrrh is also a dried resin from Arabia and northern Africa (from thorny shrubs and trees of the genus *Commiphora*) used in perfumes, incense, and medicines for thousands of years. The word comes from an Arabic word meaning “bitter.” It has been valued for its aroma as well as for its use as an antiseptic, analgesic (topical painkiller), and other medicinal qualities.



Myrrh was used in ancient Israelite temple worship as an ingredient in the holy anointing oil for consecrating priests, the tabernacle, and kings (see Exodus 30:23-25). It was used in the purification of Queen Esther (see Esther 2:12), and it was also used in embalming (see John 19:39).

The Wise Men did not come when Jesus was lying in the manger. They may have come anywhere from a couple of weeks to two years later (see Matthew 2:1-18). The word for “wise men” used in the Bible is *magi*, which refers to an ancient group of astronomers and priests belonging to the Zoroastrian religion in Persia. We also don’t know how many Wise Men there were. Because there were three gifts, people have traditionally imagined there were three Wise Men.



BIBLE FACTS

Gold from the Wise Men has frequently been mentioned as possibly being very useful in helping Joseph and Mary pay for their flight to Egypt to escape Herod. (The other gifts could have been sold for a very good price as well.)

Frankincense was used in ancient Israelite temple worship as:

- An ingredient in the perfume of the sanctuary (see Exodus 30:34).
- An accompaniment to the meat offering, which was part of all burnt and peace offerings (see Leviticus 2:1, 16).
- An accompaniment to the shewbread in the outer compartment of the tabernacle (or holy place) and burned as a memorial before the presence of the Lord (see Leviticus 24:7). Burning incense in the temple represented prayer (see Psalm 141:2).

What We Can Learn

The Wise Men’s gifts were:

Useful. Some of the best gifts we can give the Savior are our time and talents, which we can put to use in the service of others. As disciples who want to give good gifts to the Lord, we may sometimes yearn, “More used would I be” (“More Holiness Give Me,” *Hymns*, no. 131).

Precious. In their offering to the Savior, the Wise Men gave Him things that were both rare and valuable. They offered Him the best gifts they knew to give. As we approach the Savior with our offerings—of time, service, and material means—we can remember to always give the best we can give.

Respectful and worshipful. The gifts the Wise Men brought were the kinds of gifts they would have brought to a king. Jesus Christ is indeed our King—and much more. As we contemplate what He has done for us and what He offers us, we are filled with awe, gratitude, and reverence. We should always honor and revere Him for His atoning sacrifice, His grace, His mercy, and His love. We show our love for Him by giving our best gifts—following Him and keeping His commandments (see John 14:15). **NE**



OUR GIFT TO THE SAVIOR

“As the Christmas season envelops us with all its glory, may we, as did the Wise Men, seek a bright, particular star to guide us to our Christmas opportunity in service to our fellowman. May we all make the journey to Bethlehem in spirit, taking with us a tender, caring heart as our gift to the Savior.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “Christmas Is Love,” 2012 First Presidency Christmas Devotional, broadcasts.lds.org.

CHRISTMAS IN PARIS

By Alison L. Randall

Christmas in Paris was incredible, and it was even better because I was spending it as a missionary—a representative of the One whose birth we were celebrating. My companion and I prepared a special Christmas message, certain that people would throw open their doors and welcome us in to talk of Christ.

Imagine our disappointment when in reality very few doors opened. And of those few people who opened their doors, not one could spare a minute to hear our message, though a few offered us chocolates. One woman even shouted through her still-closed door: “Jesus Christ? He’s dead!”

Those words hurt. And I longed to bear testimony to her—or anyone who would listen—that He lives still and loves us all. But listeners were hard to find.

Apparently ours wasn’t the only companionship struggling to find

opportunities to teach. Our zone leaders called one day with an interesting idea: since we couldn’t compete with the busyness of the season, we might as well join it. So two days before Christmas, about 20 missionaries gathered in downtown Paris to sing carols to the crowds bustling past.

We arranged ourselves on steps not far from one of the busiest metro hubs and shopping districts of the city, Châtelet-Les Halles. Once settled, we launched into song. I’m sure we startled a few people as we started out, but what we lacked in musical abilities we made up for in enthusiasm. Many people looked at us suspiciously, as if they were wondering what we were selling. But the longer we sang, the more the hurried shoppers seemed to accept and appreciate our presence.

I watched as people paused and listened to us, even if it was just for a moment. A few even tried to hand us money and seemed astounded when

we shook our heads in refusal. It was fun to see their reactions, but still, I wanted more. I wanted to testify.

Then a woman stopped abruptly like she’d run into a wall. She just stood there listening to us. As her eyes met mine, I put all the testimony I could into the words we sang. It was like a lightbulb flashed behind her eyes—as if she suddenly remembered something she’d forgotten—and the stress of the day drained from her face.

When the song ended, I smiled at her and she smiled back. Then she turned and moved on, her pace slower and her shoulders relaxed. For her, at least, we’d made a difference.

That experience was one of few opportunities I had to testify of Christ that Christmas season. But I’d learned an important truth: a testimony can be borne in more than one way. A song and a smile can be enough to touch a heart. **NE**

The author lives in Utah, USA.



ELDER
SISTER



ILLUSTRATION BY SUZY GERHART

A Savior Is Born

Joyfully ♩ = 60

Words and Music by Nik Day

G D/F# G/B C D/F# G $\frac{3}{4}$ G D/F#

1. A star in the sky___ was just
 2. The shep-herds all feared___ when the
 3. — And e - ven though___ — He

6 G/B C D/F# G

one of the signs___ pro - claim - ing to all___ of the world___
 an - gels ap-peared___ But re - joiced when they heard___ the news:___
 came long a - go,___ — — — He's still with___ us to - day.___

D/F# G/B C

Through this lit - tle child___ so meek and so mild___ all the proph-
 The King of the world___ has come to the earth___ with sal - va -
 Gol - go - tha was done___ and the glo - ry was won.___ Now for - ev -

11 D/F# G C G/B

e - cies would be ful - filled.___ And the___ an - gels sing in the heav-
 tion for me and for you.___ You will___ find Him there in a man -
 er we're blessed by His grace.___ — And an - gels still sing in the hea -

14 D/F# C G/B D/F#

ens, Sal - va - tion is there at the door.___ And though
 ger, In clothes that are tat - tered and worn.___
 vens, — — — Death will keep us no more.___

To Coda
 (Third time)

17 Em D/F# G G/B C D/F# 1.G D/F# 2.G

He's just a boy___ all the world___ will re-joyce,___ For a Sav - ior is born! born!

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22 C G/B D/F# C

And all will sing hal - le - lu - jah! Give

26 G/B D/F# Am

praise to the Lamb! — This lit - tle ba - by is al -

28 Em C D/F# D.S. al CODA

read - y hold - ing the whole — world in His — ti - ny hands. —

32 CODA G D/F# Em D Em D G D C

And all will

37 G/B D/F# C G/B D/F#

sing hal - le - lu - jah Strong - er than ev - er be - fore. Though

40 Em D/F# G/B C

He's just a boy, all the world — will re - joice, —

43 D/F# G D/F# G/B C D/F# G

For a Sav - ior is born!





STRENGTH TO CHOOSE

By Michael Pickett

I was ecstatic when a man called me one day and said he'd seen my bodybuilding shows and wanted to sponsor me. He would pay for my clothes and protein and fly me to Europe to do shows there. He even said I could be in a magazine. Bodybuilding was my passion, and this was my dream! The only problem was that I'd sent in my mission papers a few days earlier. I told the man I would think about his offer and call him back.

I was faced with the hardest decision of my life. For my parents, accepting the sponsor wasn't an option. They said, "Maybe you'll have this opportunity after your mission." But I couldn't stop thinking about it. I knew I should go on a mission and serve the Lord, but my dream was sitting right in front of me.

I asked a lot of my friends what they thought I should do. Some said I should take the sponsor, and others said it was Satan working against me because he didn't want me to serve a mission.

One day, a great friend of mine shared with me a quote from President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994): "Men and women who turn their lives over to God will discover that He can make a lot more out of their lives than they can. He will deepen their joys, expand their vision, quicken their minds, *strengthen their muscles*, lift their spirits, multiply their blessings, increase their opportunities, comfort their souls, raise up friends, and pour out peace."¹

That quote hit me hard. So did a scripture I read in the Book of Mormon: "And if it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them, and provide means whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them" (1 Nephi 17:3).

With the help of this quote and scripture and the support of my friends and family, I decided to serve a mission and was called to serve in the Bolivia Cochabamba Mission.

Serving a mission was the best choice I've ever made. I saw countless blessings while serving, including being blessed to learn Spanish quickly.

The Lord blessed my family too. While on my mission, I received an email from my parents telling me that my older brother went to church for the first time in 12 years. He later changed his work schedule so that he could go every Sunday, and he set a goal to read the Book of Mormon.

Also my younger brother who had been struggling made some changes in his life and strengthened his faith. My cousin became active again and started going to the temple every week to do baptisms for the dead. We truly have been blessed. **NE**

The author lives in California, USA.

NOTE

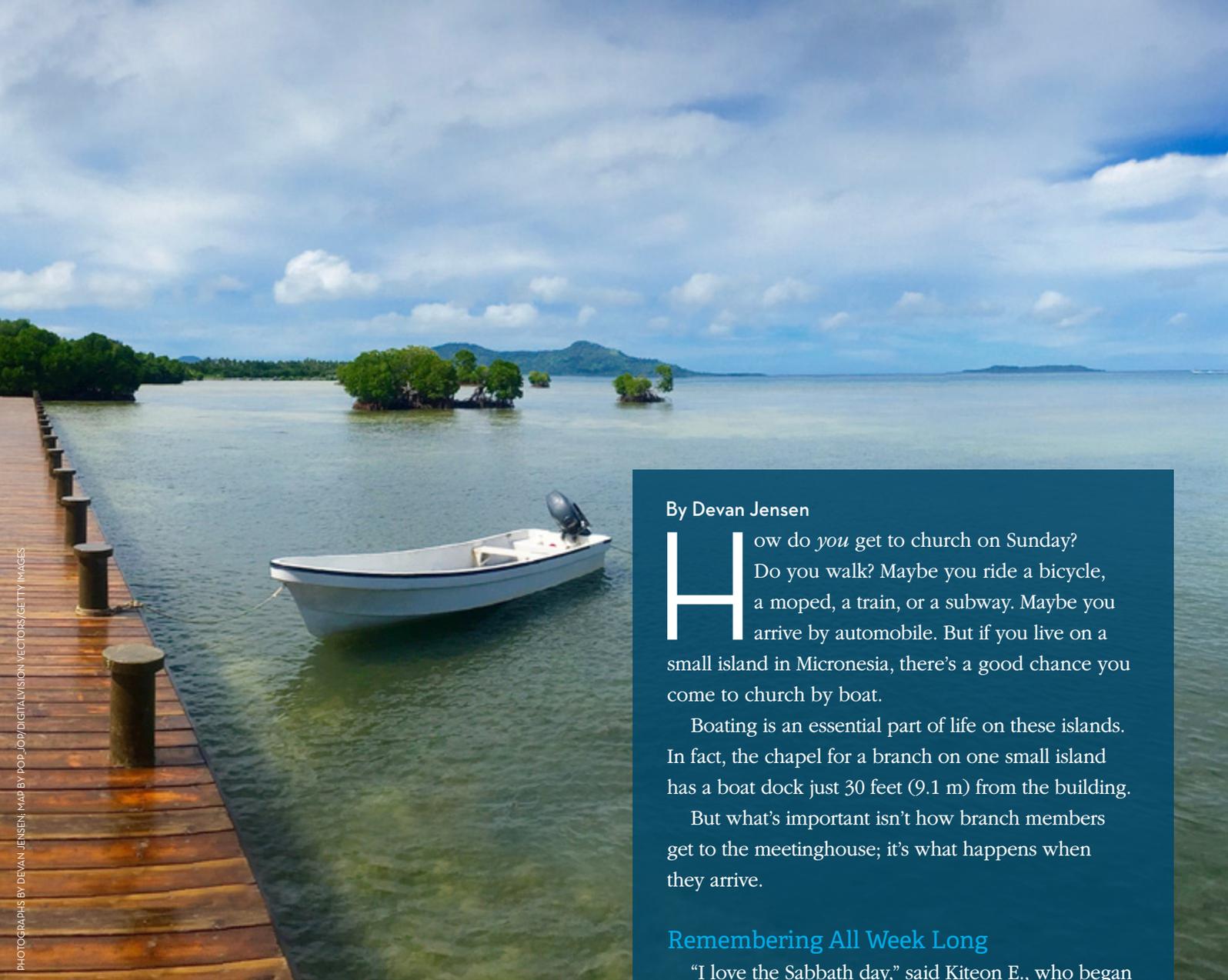
1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Ezra Taft Benson* (2014), 42–43; emphasis added.

*Serve a mission
or become a professional
bodybuilder? A scripture
and a quote that my
friend shared helped
me decide.*



VANESSA W. 16 AND EMALYN W. 16

Keeping Faith



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DEVAN JENSEN. MAP BY POP_JOB/DIGITALVISION. VECTORS/GETTY IMAGES

Latter-day Saint youth in Micronesia keep the Sabbath day holy by remembering the Savior all week long.

Afloat

By Devan Jensen

How do *you* get to church on Sunday? Do you walk? Maybe you ride a bicycle, a moped, a train, or a subway. Maybe you arrive by automobile. But if you live on a small island in Micronesia, there’s a good chance you come to church by boat.

Boating is an essential part of life on these islands. In fact, the chapel for a branch on one small island has a boat dock just 30 feet (9.1 m) from the building.

But what’s important isn’t how branch members get to the meetinghouse; it’s what happens when they arrive.

Remembering All Week Long

“I love the Sabbath day,” said Kiteon E., who began attending seminary as soon as it started on his island two years ago and recently accepted a call to serve a full-time mission. “It all centers on the Savior. When we take the sacrament, we promise to always remember Him. We commit to living the gospel and try to do better each week than we did the week before. Sunday is a day to be completely dedicated to the Lord. If you honor the Sabbath, it becomes different from all other days. It becomes sacred.”

Kiteon said we continue to keep the Sabbath holy by living the gospel all week long. “There’s much more to being a disciple of Christ than just going to meetings,” he said. “We have to live each day according to what we promised to do when we took the sacrament. That means we try all week to do what Jesus would do.”

The Gospel in Action

That's one reason why you'll see Kiteon and other members using boats for religious activities not just on Sundays but also as they strive to live the gospel each day. For example, Kiteon uses his family's boat to go with missionaries to teach. Aaronic Priesthood holders use boats to go home teaching, and sisters use them to visit the sick. They also use boats to resupply missionaries living in outlying areas.

Spirit-Filled Seminary

Sometimes, however, boats aren't necessary. In one village on the island, for example, Sammyo L., Vanessa W., Desleen L., Carleen M., Emtalyn W., and Jemi A. simply walk to the meetinghouse, where Emtalyn's mother, Tasiana, teaches seminary. One topic that comes up often in class is the temple.



KITEON E., 18



Tasiana, Emtalyn, and their family of 12 are preparing to go to the temple to be sealed. Because their assigned temple is more than 2,100 miles (3,380 km) away in the Philippines and transportation is expensive, going there has been a lifelong goal. As they talk in seminary about their dream that's about to come true, the other students reflect on how they've made it their own goal to be sealed in the house of the Lord someday.

The seminary students love studying together. "We've been studying the new Chuukese translation of the Book of Mormon," Emtalyn explained. "When I read the Book of Mormon, I feel happy and I feel the Spirit. I learn more about my Savior and how I can return to live with my Heavenly Father. My testimony grows stronger, and I feel that studying the scriptures has helped me be a better student in school too."

Vanessa added, "You could say that as seminary students, we're learning how to navigate our way home to heaven."

"You could say that as **seminary students**, we're learning how to **navigate our way home** to heaven."

MANILA CITY PHILIPPINES TEMPLE





SAMMYO L., 16



CARLEEN M., 12

Sustaining Strength

Keeping the Spirit, felt so strongly on the Sabbath and again in seminary, with them all week long is important to these youth. It sustains and motivates them.

“I know that following the commandments and showing the love of Christ to my friends will help me achieve the righteous things I’m striving for,” Emtalyn said. “I want to help strengthen my current family and my future family.”

She said the Spirit helps her to know that the Book of Mormon is true and that Joseph Smith is a prophet. “My experience in reading the scriptures has given me the desire to share the gospel,” she said. “I want to invite others to feel the same happiness I feel and to know how to be with their families forever.”

Centered on the Sabbath

On a late Saturday evening when I visited there, the dock near the branch meetinghouse was nearly deserted. A single skiff was moored there, bobbing up and down on the waves. One young girl walked by, and a few cars were in the parking lot.

But soon it would be Sunday, and the boats would arrive all over again. Another week of renewal, centered on the Sabbath, would begin. **NE**

The author lives in Utah, USA.





THINK YOU
FAILED?

THINK AGAIN!

*Striving to share
the gospel—not
how others
respond—is
the real success.*

Opening your mouth to share the gospel can sometimes be challenging. Maybe even frightening. People don't always listen, and sometimes you get rejected. In times like these, it's easy to think you've failed.

But did you know you've already succeeded when you "open your mouth to declare [His] gospel" (D&C 30:5)? That's right! Success in sharing the gospel is measured by our effort, not by results we can't control.

As Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said, "Please don't see your efforts to share the love of the Savior with another as a pass/fail test with your grade determined by how positively your friends respond to your feelings or invitation to meet the missionaries. . . . When you share the love of the Savior with another, your grade is always an A+" (Oct. 2016 general conference). See how others succeeded simply by striving to share.

A blue and white striped shirt is draped across the top of the page. Below it, a brown envelope is partially visible. The background is a light, neutral color.

OUR BELIEFS ARE STILL
DIFFERENT, BUT NOW

SHE ACCEPTS
MINE.

My mom is not a member of the Church, and she has many modern views that go against the principles I'd been taught in church, particularly about modesty and virtue. She didn't understand why I didn't dress or act like my peers. It was hard for me to defend myself because our relationship was already rocky, and I didn't want to cause any more contention between us. One day the topic came up, and, despite my hesitation, I explained to her why I choose to dress modestly and live virtuously and why these things are important to me. This didn't change her views on the subject at all, but I felt good defending my beliefs.

Over the next several months I made an extra effort to strengthen my relationship with her. The next year, when I was serving a mission, I asked my sister to send me skirts. My mom offered to do so instead, and she bought me ones that were both modest and stylish. I know that because I was willing to open my mouth and defend my beliefs and then continue to show my mom love, she became more accepting of my values, even though they are still different from hers.

Alisa B., Ukraine

I FELT GOOD

ABOUT ACTING ON THE PROMPTING.

My best friend Emily and I were two of the six members of the Church at my high school in Indiana. At an activity, we were invited to think of someone in our lives we could share the gospel with. To our surprise, we both immediately thought of the same person—our English teacher. We were nervous to share it with an authority figure, but we decided to act on the prompting and give him a Book of Mormon. It was summer, so we sent it to him in the mail with our testimonies written on the inside cover.

When the school year started a few weeks later, we walked into his class apprehensively. But he didn't say anything that first day. Or the second day. Or the day after that. We wondered if he was just going to act like nothing happened or if he even got our package at all, but we were too afraid to ask. Finally, about a week and a half later, he handed us a card. When we opened it, we read that he was respectful with his thank you, but we were disappointed to realize that he wasn't interested in learning more. Though I'm still not sure why we both felt that prompting, I know that it was the right decision to act on it and send him the Book of Mormon.

Carli C., Utah, USA

THE
BOOK
OF
MORMON
ANOTHER TESTAMENT
OF JESUS CHRIST

MY TESTIMONY

WAS STRENGTHENED.

I FELT
MORE PREPARED
FOR MY MISSION.

My friend Josh and I were preparing for our missions. We had a mutual friend named Sara, whom we went to school with. Sara attended another Christian church with her family. We had talked about religion here and there with Sara, but never in much depth.

One day Josh asked me if I would be interested in going with him to talk about the Church with Sara. I felt nervous at first but said yes. He talked to Sara and set up a time to meet to discuss our religious beliefs. I felt nervous at first and decided to study *Preach My Gospel* to prepare a little more. When we got together, we went through the principles of the first lesson in *Preach My Gospel* and expounded on what we believed. We asked questions about her religion and beliefs. We gave her a Book of Mormon. She graciously accepted it but told us that she wasn't looking to change anything. She had her religion and held to beliefs that didn't align with ours.

Even though she wasn't interested in accepting more of the gospel, I still felt the Spirit that night as we bore testimony of the Savior and the Restoration of His Church. I also had my eyes opened to what others believe. I felt like this experience helped prepare me for my mission.

Brian D., Utah, USA

I have always loved to read, so I was extremely excited to take the Advanced Placement literature class at my high school—an entire class devoted to reading and discussing books! I quickly discovered, however, that the class was not at all what I had expected. Instead of focusing on books, we mainly discussed religion and moral issues. I was the only member of the Church in my class, and I had very different opinions from my classmates and my teacher. Most of the time it felt like everyone was against me as they'd ask me religious questions and try to pick apart my answers. They didn't want to understand what I believed; it felt like they just wanted me to admit I was wrong.

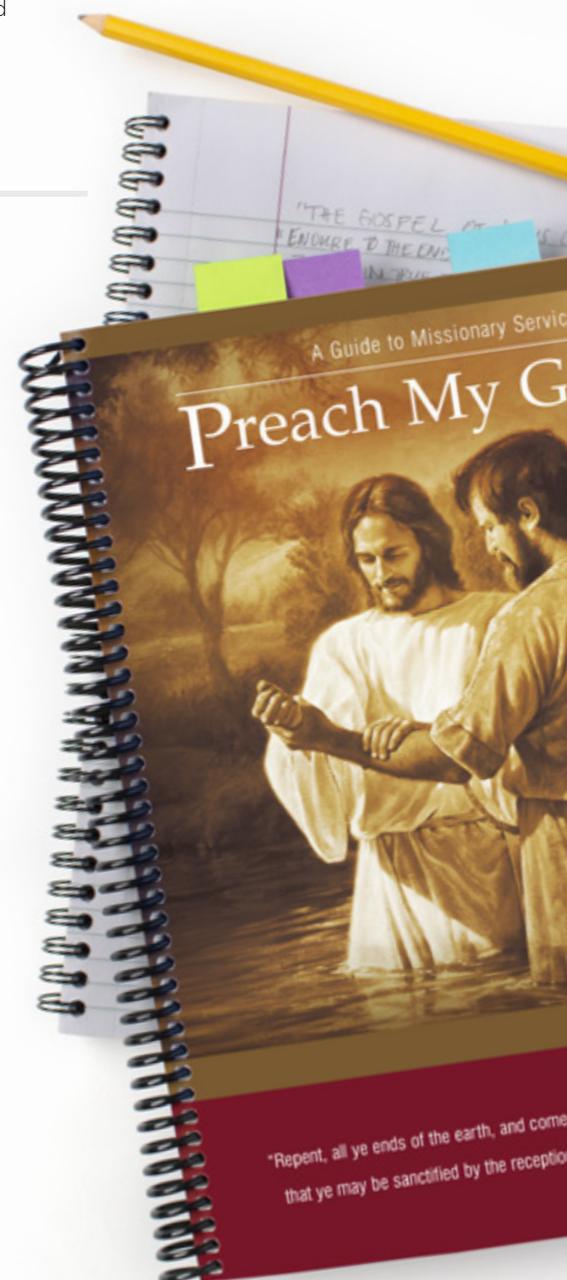
It would have been easy for me to remain silent or to agree with them, but I couldn't denounce what I knew to be true, so every day I opened my mouth and defended my beliefs. No one in my class ended up wanting to investigate the Church, and I actually lost friends because of it. However, defending my beliefs every day helped strengthen my testimony immeasurably because I truly came to understand the reasons why I believed the things I did, and I learned how to talk to others about what I believe. The doctrines of the gospel truly became a part of who I am.

Sara S., New Mexico, USA

I LEARNED THE
IMPORTANCE
OF ALWAYS BEING
PREPARED TO TEACH.

One day during school, my friend and I were talking about religion. I began to talk about the things I believe as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It was a long conversation, and I had the privilege to explain about the power of God here on the earth, the organization of the Church, and most important, the Restoration of the gospel. I would have liked for him to meet with the missionaries and be baptized, but realistically that doesn't always happen. I'm just grateful I had the opportunity to share truth. I felt strengthened by the Spirit and saw the importance of studying so that I can always be prepared to teach the gospel.

Luis H., São Paulo, Brazil



The Missionary Service I NEEDED

I'm a member of the Church, but I needed the missionaries too.

By Gabriel Costa Silva

When I turned 17, all my friends were gone. They had moved far away, were serving missions, or had just stopped being my friend. Even though I had my family, I still felt alone. I felt I had no support outside of my home, and I couldn't fit in with others even when I tried.

One day the new missionaries assigned to our ward showed up at our house to introduce themselves. They asked how they could help us. I didn't care about what they were saying because I was thinking only about how sad and lonely I was. Then the missionaries said they would love my help in teaching some of their lessons. I was surprised! Why would they ask for help from someone who clearly wasn't in the best emotional state?

I agreed anyway, and I went to some lessons with them. The missionaries not only helped the people they were teaching but were also a good influence on me.

When one of the elders was transferred, I realized my life had been getting better since I started spending time with the missionaries.



I had a lot in common with the next elder who came to the area, and I continued to spend time with the missionaries. They encouraged, taught, and supported me. They helped me feel better on difficult

days. Despite the language barrier and their busy schedules, the missionaries made an effort to help me. The missionaries helped me realize that I was not alone. Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, were watching over me and helping me through others.

When that new elder left, I thanked him for being an instrument in the hands of the Lord to rescue me. I am grateful he came to that particular mission because he was a blessing to me.

Before this time, I had almost no desire to serve a mission, but as I watched these missionaries, my desire to serve grew. I will leave for my mission soon, and I hope to give my all to the Lord as those missionaries did.

Before that first set of missionaries came to my home, I remember feeling lonely one night and praying. I asked God with all my heart to send just one friend to help and support me. The Lord answered my prayer in an unexpected way—by sending the missionaries. I know that Jesus Christ lives and that the missionaries are His servants. **NE**

The author lives in São Paulo, Brazil.

My little brother had opened all my presents. Christmas was ruined!

Hey! Those Are Mine!

By Zach Ramirez

It was Christmas morning and my six-year-old little brother, Andrew, was the first one to sneak out of bed. When I woke up and went looking for him a little while later, I couldn't believe what I found. There he was, under the tree, having just opened all of *my* presents!

Mom and Dad were still asleep in bed. So was my baby sister. Right then, it was just Andrew, me, and my opened Christmas gifts. As I watched him play with a model airplane that I now wouldn't get to open, I became angry. My Christmas was ruined!

As my anger grew, I decided that I really needed to stop and pray for help to not be mad. So I did. Almost immediately, I felt a little calmer. Then I looked at Andrew more closely, and a funny thing happened. That huge grin on his face made me smile too. I mean, he was so happy! Then I couldn't help it. I started laughing! Before long the whole thing felt hilarious. I mean, how could I stay angry with my little brother when he was so excited?

That Christmas morning, I learned the importance of stopping to pray whenever bad feelings start to develop. After all, Christmas is supposed to be a happy holiday, not an angry one. **NE**

The author lives in Colorado, USA.



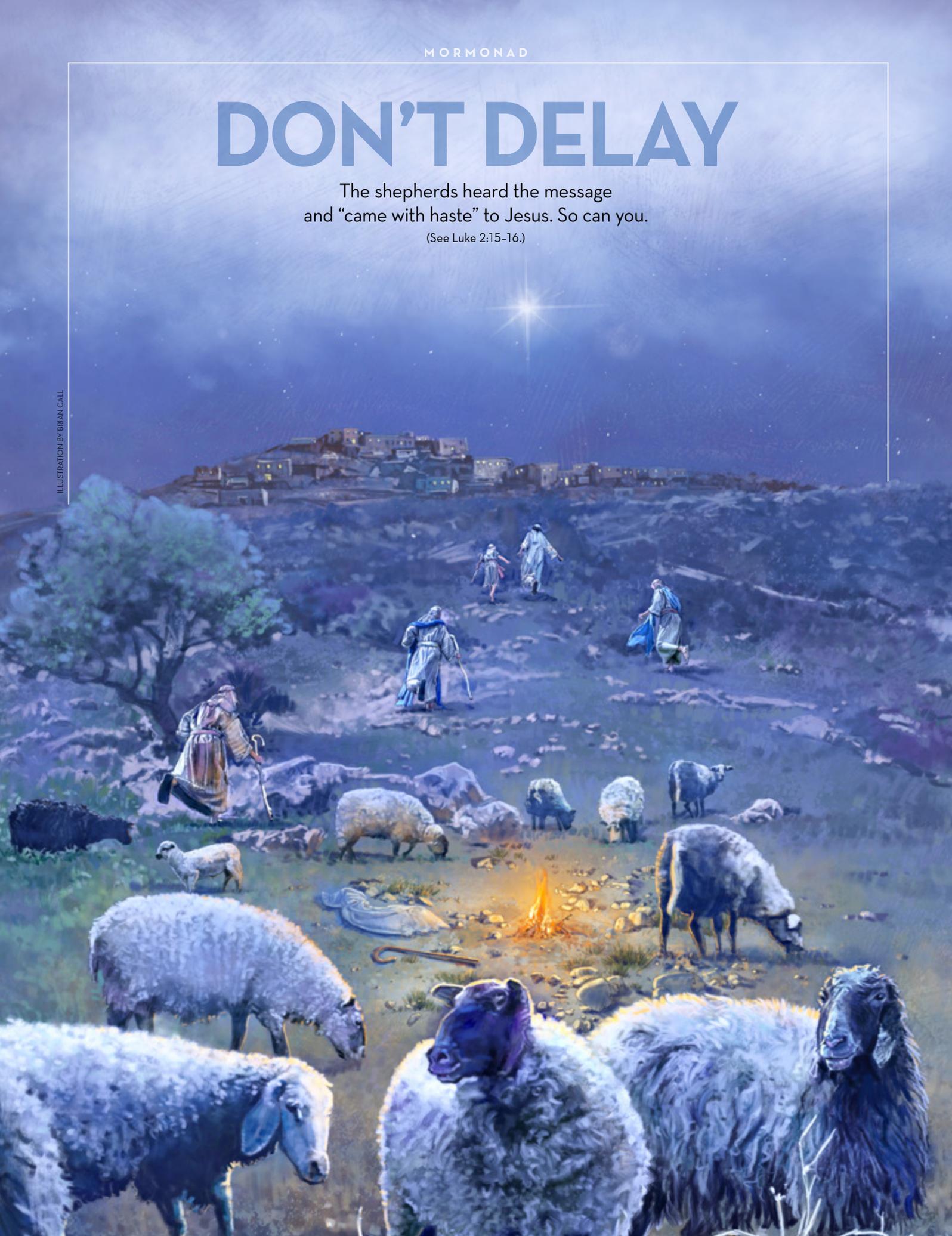
MORMONAD

DON'T DELAY

The shepherds heard the message
and “came with haste” to Jesus. So can you.

(See Luke 2:15-16.)

ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN CALL





**By Elder
David A. Bednar**

Of the Quorum of
the Twelve Apostles

Many of our memorable and enduring Christmas traditions include different kinds of lights—lights on trees, lights in and on our homes, candles on our tables. Indeed, light has significant meaning as we commemorate the humble birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament account, a new star arose and wise men followed the light “till it came and stood over where the young child was.”¹

In the Book of Mormon account the signs of Christ’s birth foretold by Samuel included “great lights in heaven” and a “night before he cometh [with] no darkness, insomuch that it shall appear . . . as if it was day.”² “And behold, there shall a new star arise.”³

In the Old World, Jesus taught, “I am the light of the world.”⁴ And in the New World the Savior descended from the heavens and declared, “I am the light and the life of the world.”⁵ In both of these settings, the words used by the Lord to describe Himself were “the light.”

May we increasingly learn and more fully understand that Jesus Christ is the “light which shineth in darkness.”⁶ In every season of our lives, in all of the circumstances we may encounter,

and in each challenge we may face, the Savior is the light that dispels fear, provides assurance and direction, and engenders enduring peace and joy. May the beautiful lights of every Christmas season remind us of Him who is the source of all light.

As our Great Exemplar, the Lord lived a perfect life, ministering one by one in love and service. Like Him, we can exemplify and share His light and love with those around us.

This Christmas season I invite you to seek opportunities to “Light the World.” Beginning December 1 and continuing through Christmas Day, you can learn how to “light the way for others” by visiting mormon.org. Feel free to share appropriately your experiences on social media using the hashtag #LIGHTtheWORLD so that others can learn about the “good news”⁷ of the Savior’s birth, His life, and His perfect Atonement for all mankind. **NE**

NOTES

1. Matthew 2:9.
2. Helaman 14:3.
3. Helaman 14:5.
4. John 8:12; see also John 9:5; Mosiah 16:9; Alma 38:9; 3 Nephi 9:18, 18:16; Doctrine and Covenants 10:70.
5. 3 Nephi 11:11.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 10:58; see also verses 57–61.
7. See Bible Dictionary, “Gospels.”

LIGHT *the* WORLD





Giving More Than Presents

What kind of giver do you want to be?

By Emmaline R. Wilson

The Christmas season is all about Jesus Christ and the spirit of giving. While it can be awesome to give and get presents, remember that we can give so much more than just physical gifts. Each day we can give of our time, talents, and kindness—and those are just some of the meaningful ways we can serve.

So, how well are you doing at focusing on selfless giving? Take this quiz to find out.



You're getting ready for school. Your mom is asking you to come to breakfast, and she has taken the time to prepare your favorite meal. What do you do?

- A.** Holler, "I'm not ready yet!" and then take your time getting ready, eat breakfast late, and miss the bus so she has to drive you to school.
- B.** Eat breakfast quickly and dash out the door; she's always doing things like that—it's just what moms do.
- C.** Thank Mom, get ready quickly, and take time to eat with your family.



It's 10:00 a.m., and your teacher is about to hand out a test. You don't know the person sitting next to you very well, but you notice she's frantically digging through her backpack. What do you do?

- A.** Ignore her. You're stressed as well and need to cram for the test.
- B.** Wish her good luck.
- C.** Ask her if she's looking for something. When you hear she needs a pencil, you give her one of yours. "Keep it," you tell her with a smile.



After school someone on your soccer team is having a hard time passing the ball accurately—your specialty. He comes up after practice and asks if you can help him. What do you say?

- A.** Tell him you're way too busy. Maybe another day.
- B.** Agree reluctantly and make a few passes with him, giving him one quick pointer before hurrying off to hang out with your friends.
- C.** Spend several minutes giving him pointers and set up another time to practice together.



At 5:30 p.m., your mom drops you off at the store to buy a Christmas present for your sister. What do you get?

- A.** That's easy. You go straight for that new basketball you've had your eye on for months. . . . She'll probably like it too, right?
- B.** Select the cheapest item on her list—she won't be disappointed, and it didn't cost you much.
- C.** Find the newest book by her favorite author. You can't wait to see the look of excitement on your sister's face when she opens the package!



It's time for bed and you're exhausted. You haven't read your scriptures yet, though. What do you do?

- A.** Count the reading you did on Sunday instead.
- B.** While searching for your scriptures, you come across your favorite novel. Thirty minutes later you remember the scriptures and hurriedly read a short passage before turning out the lights.
- C.** See both your scriptures and your favorite novel but decide to give Heavenly Father first priority and say a quick prayer before you begin reading. You write down some of your thoughts as you study, and you thank Him again in prayer before you go to bed.



FREELY GIVE

"I pray that we will be touched by the feelings of others, that we will give without feelings of compulsion or expectation of gain, and that we will know that sacrifice is made sweet to us when we treasure the joy it brings to another heart."

President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, "Preparing Gifts for Your Future Family," *New Era*, Jan. 2014, 5.

RESULTS!

If you answered mostly **(A)**, you might want to turn your focus a little more toward others. Remember, giving and serving others will bring greater happiness to everyone involved (see Matthew 25:34–46).

If you answered mostly **(B)**, consider that "freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). Think about how giving more willingly can help you find even more joy.

If you answered mostly **(C)**, keep it up! Your actions show the true spirit of Christmas.

Consider how you can give heartfelt gifts to those around you this Christmas season. No matter your talents, you can find a way to show your love and appreciation for others by both the gifts you give and how you give them each day. Giving becomes a blessing and not a chore when we understand that by serving others, we're really serving our Heavenly Father (see Mosiah 2:17). **NE**

The author lives in Utah, USA.



THE FIRST COMING *and* THE SECOND COMING *of* JESUS CHRIST

See the differences between the Savior's birth and His Second Coming—and the similarities between people's preparations for them.



EYES TO SEE

"Before that sacred night in Bethlehem, the events of history and the

words of the prophets of all dispensations prepared the way for the first coming of the Lord and His Atonement. . . . Do we have eyes to see that the events and prophecies of *our* time are preparing us for the Savior's *Second Coming*?"

Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Oct. 2005 general conference.



Learn More

To learn how the events leading up to the Savior's visit to the Nephites parallel the events leading up to His Second Coming, go to lds.org/go/parallelNET1216.



FIRST COMING

WHEN

Over 2,000 years ago. The exact year and day are uncertain.

WHERE



In a remote, humble stable in Bethlehem (see Luke 2:4).

WHO WITNESSES IT

Shepherds, Anna, Simeon, and wise men (see Luke 2:15–18, 25–38; Matthew 2:1–12).



MAJOR SIGNS



A star in the heavens, a birth to a virgin, a prophesied lineage and birthplace for the Messiah (see Matthew 2:2; Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2).

HOW TO PREPARE

- Repent.
- Receive "ordinances . . . that [you] might look forward on the Son of God" (Alma 13:16).
- Be "just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel [with] the Holy Ghost . . . upon [you]" (Luke 2:25).
- "[Serve] God with fastings and prayers" (Luke 2:37).
- "Hearken unto the words of the prophets [and] look forward unto Christ with steadfastness for the signs which are given" (2 Nephi 26:8).



SECOND COMING

Nobody knows except the Father, not even the angels (see Matthew 24:36 and D&C 49:7).

"In the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30; see also Acts 1:11).

All people everywhere at once (see Isaiah 40:5; Revelation 1:7).



Apostasy and Restoration, gospel preached throughout the earth, tumultuous times, signs in heaven and on earth (see 2 Thessalonians 2:2–3; Matthew 24:6–21, 29–31).

- Repent.
- "[Be baptized,] receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, and . . . be looking forth for the signs of [His] coming" (D&C 39:23; see also 45:39).
- "Stand ye in holy places, and be not moved" (D&C 87:8).
- "[Be] wise and [receive] the truth, and [take] the Holy Spirit for [your] guide, and [be not] deceived" (D&C 45:57).
- "Hear the voice of the Lord [and] the voice of his servants [and] give heed to the words of the prophets" (D&C 1:14).

5

TIPS FOR MAKING FRIENDS WITH SHY PEOPLE

By Carlisa Cramer

You look up in your school's cafeteria at lunchtime and see Chloe eating alone again. She's a young woman in your ward who usually keeps to herself. You've talked to her a few times, but she's quiet and doesn't usually say much in return. You've never really understood why.

You think, "We have fun activities. We're nice people. Why is Chloe still so quiet? Maybe she just

doesn't like us." You don't want her to be alone, and you want to reach out, but you don't know where to start. "Does she even *want* friends? Will I make her feel awkward if I go over there?" Sometimes the unknowns can really trip us up and prevent us from trying at all. It's fine if we don't always know how best to proceed—but we can keep trying.

Here are a few things to keep in mind while trying to befriend people like Chloe who seem shy.

1

BE UNDERSTANDING.

First step: if you like striking up conversations and find it natural and easy to do, understand that the way you like to interact with others isn't always the way others do, especially if they're shy. So when you're trying to become friends with people who are shy, don't try to change them or force them into a situation where they're not comfortable. Some people just prefer more solitude or one-on-one conversations rather than group chats, and that's fine. Make sure to respect their preferences.

2

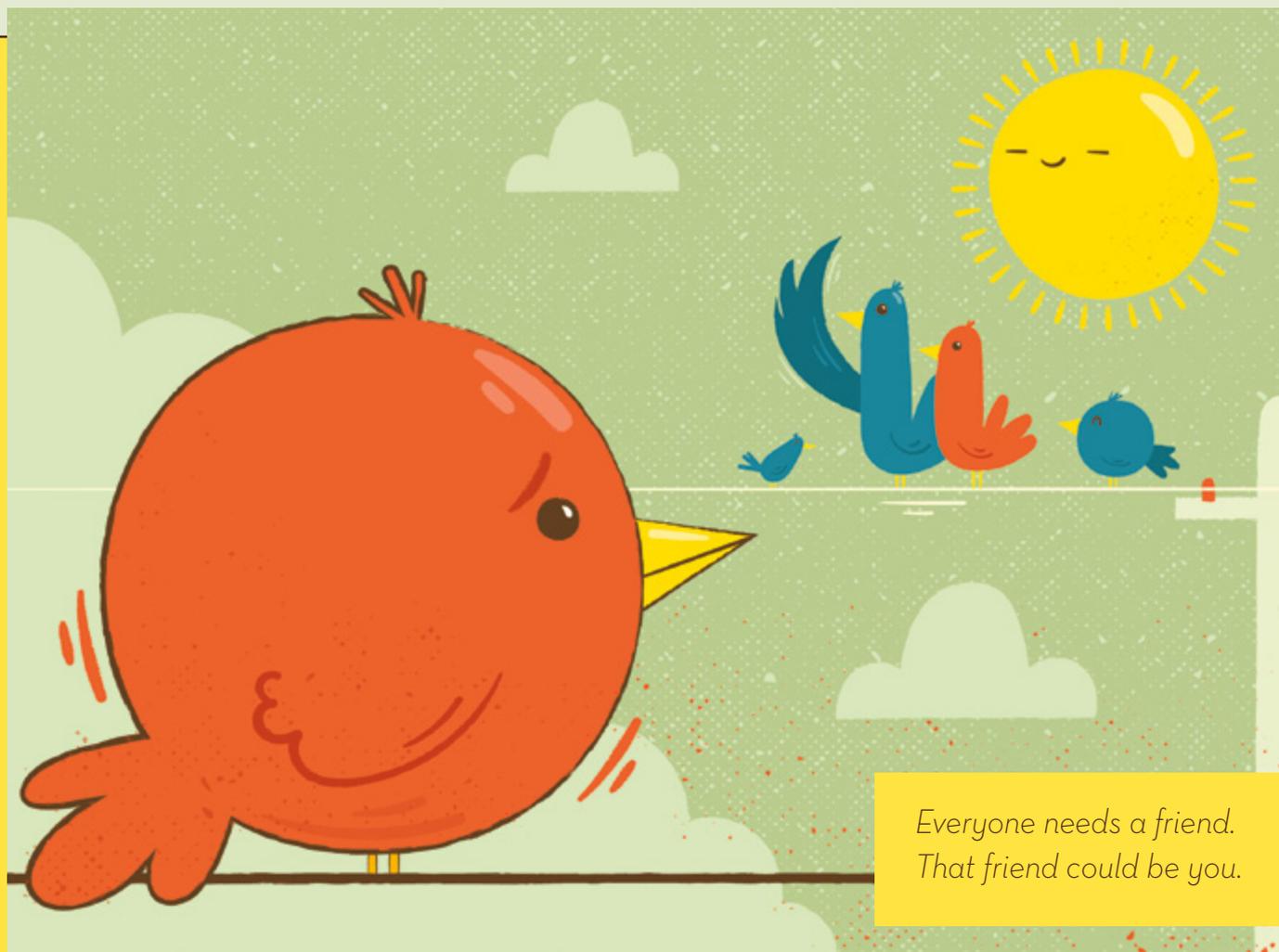
BE PATIENT.

You're not going to break the ice instantly. Sometimes it takes a little while for shy people to feel comfortable enough to open up. They might not respond as you might expect or want them to at first, but that's OK! Just keep looking for casual ways to talk to them. Keep saying hi and inviting them to activities. They'll notice and appreciate your efforts. But remember to always respect their boundaries. That'll give them the emotional freedom to come around when they're ready.

3

BE INTERESTED.

"Shy" doesn't always mean "silent." Shy people usually talk more when the topic is something they're passionate about. So ask them what things they like and then try to find a shared interest. Maybe it's playing a sport, listening to music, watching movies, or reading books. By discovering things you have in common, you'll create a connection that can make a huge difference in how comfortable they feel around you.



*Everyone needs a friend.
That friend could be you.*

4 BE PERSONABLE.

A big group of people can be intimidating for shy people, so when you're reaching out for the first time, try going just by yourself. Next time, maybe bring a friend. If you ever sense that shy people are uncomfortable, though, give them some space. Just make sure they know you're there for them when they're ready.

5 BE SINCERE.

When you're trying to befriend anyone, shy or not, always make sure you're being sincere. Befriend them because you genuinely *want* to get to know them and be their friend, not just because they might be sitting alone. Pray about how to best get to know them and help them feel of your sincere interest in becoming friends.

Now you look over and see Chloe. You make eye contact, and you smile at her across the room. She smiles nervously and looks away. You tell your friends you'll see them later, and then you stand up and walk over to her. "Hi, Chloe," you say. "Can I sit here?" She nods her head yes, and you sit down. You pull out the rest of your lunch and notice the book Chloe has next to her. You ask, "What are you reading? I've been looking for a good book to read!" She looks down at the book, smiles, and starts to tell you a little about it. **NE**

The author lives in Utah, USA.

Accepting My Shyness

By Rachel Harris

Junior high was not an easy experience, and I wasn't expecting my first day of high school to be any better. All through junior high I was painfully shy. Terribly, awfully shy. I didn't feel comfortable talking to new people, because I didn't feel confident in who I was. In between classes I mostly kept to myself, walking quickly to and from my locker with my head down, trying to look busy. Most of my weekends were spent by myself, either reading books, doing homework, or re-watching beloved TV shows.

I wanted my experience that year to be different, but I wasn't sure how it was going to be. As I went to my first class, I looked around at the other students and felt a surge of terror. "I don't want to talk to any of these people," I thought. I didn't want to go through painful introductions and awkward silences. So instead I spent the hour staring firmly at my desk, not looking at or talking to anybody.

By the time homeroom came along, I was convinced that my freshman year was going to be just as lonely as junior high. Fighting back tears, I silently slid into my seat, once again determined not to look away from my desk.

"Hello," said a voice beside me. "My name is Taylor. What's yours?"

I looked up and saw a nervous-but-sincere-looking girl sitting across from me.

"Oh," I said, "hello. My name is Rachel."

After that Taylor mentioned that she had just moved into the area a couple weeks ago. She knew even fewer people than I did, and she was hoping to make new friends. Then we talked about the normal things—school, classes, and our hopes for high school. Our conversation was a little awkward, but overall, talking to Taylor was really nice. The next day in homeroom when I ran into her again, she invited me to sit by her and we talked more. The more I saw her and the more she casually said hello to me, the more comfortable I felt responding back. In the following weeks, Taylor became the one person I felt OK stopping to talk with between classes.

A few months later, I was feeling particularly down. I didn't feel confident in myself and found it hard to believe that anyone would want to be friends with me. This feeling lasted day after day, until one evening, after a week or so of this, my phone started to ring. I answered it.

"Hey," said the other person on the line. "This is Taylor. How's it going, Rachel? I just wanted to call and say hi."

Taylor and I talked for a while, and this time our conversation was a lot smoother. I really enjoyed talking with her—she showed genuine interest in getting to know me, and that helped me feel like I was worth being friends with. Later when our conversation ended, I began to realize something important. I felt as if Heavenly Father was trying to help me realize that I could be happy about who I am and what He has given me. Taylor's phone call and her continual invitations over time helped me realize that who I am is great and that I can make feel comfortable being my reserved self.

After that phone call, Taylor and I started spending a lot of time together as friends. She accepted me as I was, and we had many great adventures in high school.

I knew Taylor was a true friend because she was friendly in a way that was not superficial. She was genuinely interested in getting to know me and was consistent in her interest. When it comes to making friends with others, behaving as Christ would—with charity, understanding, and sincerity—makes all the difference. Taylor did that for me through her warm attitude and honest interest in me as a person.

I'm still a shy person, but now I know that even shy people like me can have great friends. **NE**

The author lives in Utah, USA.



Would my shyness keep me from having friends?



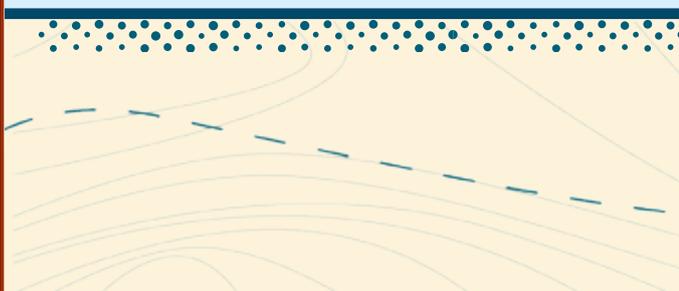
== Be a == **REAL** ACTION HERO

By Charlotte Larcabal
Church Magazines

Think of your favorite action hero. Ready, go! Did you think of some swashbuckling daredevil fighting insurmountable odds? Or maybe a suave adventurer with perfect hair? Did you think of anyone from the scriptures?

What about Nephi, Noah, Abish, or Peter? They didn't fight off armies with just their fists and a witty catchphrase, but they're what you might call *real* action heroes. They exercised faith, trusted God, and got going. They took action.

Do you ever avoid getting started because you haven't received obvious, step-by-step directions? Maybe there's someone in your class or quorum who hasn't been coming to



Pressing forward is not a spectator sport. Get up and get going!

church. Do you hesitate to reach out to them because you're not sure exactly how to do it? Inspiration is important, and we should always be seeking it. But that doesn't mean sitting and waiting for a text message from an angel before we go about doing good. Heavenly Father would want you to befriend that person. He wants us to step up and take action!

What if Nephi, Noah, Abish, and Peter had waited? They all had hard things to do. Suppose they chose to sit down with a drink and a cookie until they got further instructions. Things would have turned out a lot differently . . .

WAIT AND SEE?

"I will wait to do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them, so I won't do anything until I know exactly what that way is" (nonexistent version of 1 Nephi 3:7).

Soon after Lehi's family left their home in Jerusalem, the Lord commanded Lehi's sons to go back and get the plates from Laban. But as far as we know, He didn't give them any hints on how to do that. All Nephi and his brothers knew was that the Lord had commanded them to get the plates. Do you ever feel like you have no idea how to do the things you're supposed to do? (Maybe that's one reason Laman and Lemuel complained!) It was up to

Nephi to use his brain and exercise faith and to go and do. But what if he had stayed and dawdled? What if Nephi had refused to budge until God gave him a plan? Getting the plates was hard! He and his brothers tried twice and failed! What if Nephi had just plopped down against the walls of Jerusalem and waited for God to tell him what to do?

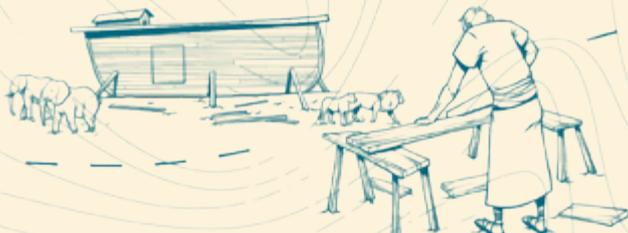
The plates might still be in Laban's treasury. Good thing Nephi didn't wait.

Instead, he followed the Spirit, "not knowing beforehand the things which I should do. *Nevertheless I went forth*" (1 Nephi 4:6–7; emphasis added). He didn't wait around; he didn't let the things he didn't know stop him. He knew God would provide a way, and he was right. Once Nephi was moving, taking action, and pressing forward, the Lord guided and helped him.

BUT WHY?

"And Noah questioned all that the Lord commanded him" (nonexistent version of Genesis 7:5).

Sometimes God does give exact instructions. Take Noah, for example. When God commanded Noah to build an ark, God provided measurements, explained what materials to use, and even gave Noah a passenger list. Maybe you've received specific promptings like that, and we've all received specific commandments such as the principles in the *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet. But even





when you know exactly what you should do, do you ever *still* hesitate? Are you ever tempted to question the Lord instead of obeying Him?

What if Noah had heard the Lord and then said, “But why? I don’t get it.” What if he’d stretched out on the couch and refused to move until he understood exactly *why* the Lord was sending a flood, wondering all the while if the instructions were really from God?

There would have been a flood, but would there have been an ark? And what about the human race? It’s a *really* good thing Noah didn’t sit back and question everything.

Instead he “did according unto all that the Lord commanded him” (Genesis 7:5). He didn’t question; he acted in faith. If asked in the right spirit, questions are a good thing. They can help us grow and lead us to more truth. But when we refuse to do anything until we receive the answers we want, questioning can hold us back. Noah may have had questions, but he didn’t let them stop him. Even if it seemed odd, he built the boat on dry land, gathered all the animals, and shut his family into the ark. And when it started raining, he was probably very glad he had done so. Noah acted in faith, and God blessed him and his entire family.

STAND BACK AND WATCH?

“When she saw that all the servants of Lamoni had fallen to the earth, . . . she knew that it was the power of God; and supposing that . . . beholding this scene . . . would cause [others] to believe in the power of God, therefore she stood back and hoped someone else would gather the people” (nonexistent version of Alma 19:17).

Abish was a Lamanite woman. She had been converted to the Lord for many years, but because she lived among disbelieving Lamanites, she kept her faith secret. When Ammon taught King Lamoni the gospel, the king and his household were overcome by the power of the Lord. Abish recognized this as an opportunity for her friends and neighbors to finally see and believe in the power of God. It was up to her to gather the people to witness the miracle.

But what if she hadn’t? After years of hiding her faith, running from house to house to tell everybody was probably a little scary! Have you ever been prompted to speak up but then felt nervous about it? Sharing your beliefs can be hard! What if Abish had just stood back and hoped that people would wander in on their own? Or that somebody else would say something?

Well, then no one would have gathered to see King Lamoni and his household lying around like they were dead or their miraculous recovery. They wouldn’t have been there to hear King Lamoni, the queen, and Ammon teach the gospel.

Good thing she didn’t just stand back. Instead she “*ran forth* from house to house, making it known unto the people” (Alma 19:17; emphasis added). She had a testimony of the Lord, and she didn’t let fear stop her. She didn’t wait for someone else to say something. When she had a chance, she didn’t hesitate—she ran! Abish acted, and the Lord blessed her to see many of her countrymen converted to the gospel (see Alma 19).

LISTEN TO THE WORLD?

“And [Jesus] said, Come. And when Peter sat down in the ship, he didn’t walk on the water, to go to Jesus” (nonexistent version of Matthew 14:29).

As a fisherman, Peter knew a lot about boats. For example, Peter knew that when there is a raging storm at sea, you stay in the boat. He knew that people who stepped onto water sank right through. Can you imagine what he must have thought when he saw Christ walking on the water?

But what if he had stayed in the boat? Everyone knows that people can’t walk on water. What if Peter only focused on what the world “knew”? Sometimes the teachings of Christ and His prophets seem to go against what the world is saying. And the world is persuasive and easy to listen to. What if Peter had told Christ that walking on water was unscientific or illogical? What if Peter had been too scared to step out and walk to Christ?

He would've missed sharing an incredible experience with the Master. He would've missed a chance to strengthen his faith, and he may have wondered about his faith in the future when he needed resolve. It's a good thing Peter didn't stay in the boat. In spite of the waves, the storm, and his experience at sea, Peter wanted to climb out of the boat and walk to Christ. In spite of everything the world "knew," Peter walked on water. Even when he faltered, Christ was there to catch him (see Matthew 14:28–31).

ME? AN ACTION HERO?

You were sent here to be the action hero of your action-packed life! That doesn't mean leaping from exploding buildings or driving escape cars every day. It means making choices, taking action, and pressing forward.

The Lord teaches that we "should be anxiously engaged in a good cause." He doesn't say exactly what that good cause should be but instead wants us to "do many things of [our] own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness" (D&C 58:27). That means He trusts you to make your own decisions and decide how you will bring about righteousness. Oftentimes, help comes after we've exercised faith and taken those first steps.

The Lord is always there to guide us when we need it, but if you refuse to act and to press forward on your own and expect God to tell you every little thing to do, you will be a "slothful and not a wise servant" (see D&C 58:26). And who wants to be a slothful servant when you can be an action hero? **NE**





**By Elder
Bruce A. Carlson**

Served as a member of the
Seventy from 2009 to 2015





PREPARING FOR SPIRITUAL COMBAT

It's critical that we develop basic spiritual maneuvers that allow us to successfully navigate the pitfalls of life and become spiritually self-reliant.

As a young fighter pilot, I learned a series of basic fighter maneuvers—like the barrel-roll attack, Immelmann turn, and high speed yo-yo. These maneuvers, when used individually or in combination with each other, allowed me to employ the F-4 Phantom jet effectively in dangerous situations, to attack more lethally, or to defend more successfully. Pilots who learned, practiced, and perfected these maneuvers always did better in actual combat, helping them save resources and lives.

I once investigated an airplane accident where a young lieutenant was trying to practice the basic fighter maneuver called a pop-up attack. The plan called for him to approach the target at low level and high speed, acquire the target, then pull up abruptly, and, at the appropriate altitude, roll over and attack the target at a 20-degree dive angle—for more effective weapons effects. This particular lieutenant tunneled his vision solely on the target, not paying attention to anything else, and suddenly he found himself in the clouds. But if you're in the clouds and your only reference is the ground, then you've lost the ability to effectively continue the attack.

Instead of discontinuing the attack and executing the appropriate escape maneuver as he'd been trained, the

young pilot thought, "Well, I remember where the target is, so I'm going to keep going." Because he'd had no real reference, he'd flown too high. So when he rolled over, he exited the clouds at a steep 45-degree angle and was flying much too fast to avoid hitting the ground. Realizing his mistake, he immediately pulled the ejection handle, just prior to the airplane impacting the ground. Because he failed to perform a single basic maneuver, he lost a valuable combat aircraft and came within about a half second of losing his life.

In a similar way, it's critical that we develop basic spiritual maneuvers that allow us to successfully navigate the pitfalls of life and become spiritually self-reliant. Like the fighter pilots in training, when we learn, practice, and become proficient in the skills of the gospel, we will be able to stand strong—sometimes alone if we have to—in times of mortal spiritual combat. There are a number of basic gospel maneuvers that we need to learn in order to become self-reliant in times of spiritual combat, like obeying the commandments, making the Sabbath day a delight, heeding the words of living prophets, and many more. Here I want to highlight four that have strengthened me, particularly when I faced some of my greatest trials as a young fighter pilot.

1. Regularly Reading the Scriptures

Reading the scriptures on a regular basis is how we become familiar not only with their terminology and language but also with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. We don't come to know someone we're not familiar with. By familiarizing ourselves with God and His word, we become more receptive to His message. That's the beauty of reading the scriptures—it allows us to be receptive to the will and the mind of the Lord through the Holy Ghost.

2. Studying the Scriptures

Studying is one step further than reading. When we deeply study the scriptures, we not only have the influence of the Holy Ghost with us, but we also allow Him to direct our minds toward the things that Heavenly Father wants us to learn. There are many ways to approach this—like studying the doctrine of a verse or using the Topical Guide as a starting point to find topics to study. We should delve deeply into the scriptures, striving to learn so we can activate our faith and keep it from going dormant.

3. Praying Meaningfully

Developing patterns of prayer is important throughout life. When an unexpected crisis arrives, if we've developed the skill of meaningful prayer, then we'll be able to more easily withstand those times. Each day we should work to have kneeling, unrehearsed, and meaningful prayers where we spend time listening and contemplating what we want to talk with Heavenly Father about before and after we say it.

4. Pondering

When we ponder what we've learned from our scripture study and prayer, we invite Jesus Christ into our hearts and our minds, allowing Him to help us change our attitudes and will and also for the Holy Ghost to sanctify us. When we become sanctified through God's power, He will trust us to perform His most sacred work—assisting Him to bring His other children home to Him. We will be a more effective friend, a more powerful example, and a more spiritual temple patron when we ponder His word and allow the Savior into our hearts and minds.

These Skills Strengthen Us

I spent a year overseas as a young officer, and the environment was not good. I was away from my family and constantly surrounded by evil and temptation, and each day was a challenge. But by applying basic gospel skills that I already knew, my testimony remained strong and intact.

As we work to be spiritually self-reliant, we each must develop basic gospel skills. Through reading, studying,

praying, pondering, and participating in other gospel activities, we will be prepared in times of spiritual danger. Developing and practicing these basic gospel skills will help us grow closer to Heavenly Father. Our prayers will become more meaningful, our worship more sincere, and our love for the gospel deeper and more abiding. **NE**



When the **Second Coming** happens, how will we know it really is the Savior?

Before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, there will be many signs, though many people will not recognize those signs. The culminating event, however, will be unmistakable. For one thing, the Savior Himself told His disciples that when He comes again, it won't be in some obscure or secret manner but rather "with power and great glory" (see Matthew 24:26–27, 30; see also Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:25–26, 36). At His Second Coming, Jesus Christ will descend out of the heavens (see Acts 1:9–11), and He will be seen by all people (see D&C 101:23). Until that time, the key for us is to strive to live worthily, look for the signs, and treasure up the word of Christ so that we will not be deceived by false Christs and false prophets (see Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:5–6, 21–22, 37). **NE**

How can we honor and sustain the law if our government makes unrighteous choices?

The twelfth article of faith says, "We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law." There will surely be times when we disagree with their decisions. If a law or government policy clearly undermines a fundamental part of God's plan, such as religious freedom or marriage, we should do what we can in mutual respect to improve that law or help prevent proposed laws from being passed. We can express our views to government representatives, talk respectfully with others to better understand one another's views, and encourage compromise to achieve fairness for everyone without compromising on our core beliefs. (Read more about this at [lds.org/go/fairness1216](https://www.lds.org/go/fairness1216).)

Remember not to equate personal preferences with the will of God. After all, the Church does not endorse any political party, platform, or ideology, though from time to time the Church takes a stance on moral issues related to our core beliefs.

We also can't expect the law to require everyone to live every commandment of God. We know people will be blessed for keeping God's commandments, but we need to respect their right—everyone's God-given agency—to act on their beliefs just as we have the right to act on ours (see the eleventh article of faith). No matter what others choose, we can remain true to God's commandments in our personal choices. **NE**

I'm struggling to study the scriptures. Why is it so important to study them?

From this year's Mutual theme, you've learned how to "press forward with a steadfastness in Christ" (2 Nephi 31:20). This scripture teaches that pressing forward includes "feasting upon the word of Christ." Why is this important? Here are a few ways that studying the scriptures helps us press forward:

- President Thomas S. Monson taught that "if you will study the scriptures diligently, your power to avoid temptation and to receive direction of the Holy Ghost in all you do will be increased" ("Be Your Best Self," Apr. 2009 general conference).
- You can gain a testimony and strengthen your faith as you prayerfully study the scriptures. Studying the Book of Mormon especially and gaining a testimony of its truthfulness will help you know that Jesus is the Christ, that Joseph Smith was a prophet, and that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true. (You can learn more about these promises in the introduction to the Book of Mormon.)
- You can receive personal inspiration and answers to your questions through the scriptures. As God communicates to you through the scriptures and through His Spirit, you can gain confidence and strength to press forward through any obstacles you face.
- Perhaps the most important reason to study the scriptures is that they teach about Jesus Christ and how you can follow His example and teachings. Living the principles you read about will help you become more like the Savior. **NE**

Answers to My Questions

If I have questions, I know I can turn to the scriptures and find answers. They are the Lord's words, and His doctrine never changes. I know that no matter what opposition I'm facing, the scriptures are always there for me with answers. They also answer questions about where the Church stands on many topics. I know if I read the scriptures carefully, it will help me to have the Holy Ghost with me, which helps me know right from wrong.

Emily A., 17, Washington, USA



My Burdens Became Light

One school year I began to feel weighed down from the stress of life. During one of these stressful days, I prayed and read the Book of Mormon for 10 minutes. As I read, I felt an incredible warmth fill my heart. I felt loved, uplifted, and happy despite my trials. I felt an incredible peace I had never felt before. From this experience I finally understood what the Savior meant when He said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you" (John 14:27). The next few weeks, I had this experience multiple times, and it propelled me to move forward through my struggles.

Chloe K., 18, Wisconsin, USA

Power to Change

Before, I really had no testimony of the Book of Mormon, but when I sincerely



prayed for guidance from the Holy Ghost, I had such great feelings about the Book of Mormon. I already had a desire to know that the book was true, so I started prayerfully reading and studying it. Line upon line, precept upon precept, I received personal revelation that the book is true (see 2 Nephi 28:30). I love the Book of Mormon. I treasure up the teachings I receive while I study it. The Book of Mormon has a power that can lead us to change for the better.

Ariel Candawan T., 18, Philippines



God's Love

By the power, example, and teachings in the scriptures, I have been able to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. The scriptures have a divine power in which God can guide and teach us. So whenever you feel alone or abandoned, read the scriptures. Then remember that your Father in Heaven preserved them specifically for you so you could know that He loves you.

Scott H., 19, Wisconsin, USA

Goodness and Light

I started reading the Book of Mormon for the first time when I became a Beehive. I read it from cover to cover and thought that would be the end. But I was so wrong. My life seemed to be missing something. So I decided to start reading it again, this time paying closer attention. As I did, my life was

filled with the light that had dimmed since I had finished it. I understood more and came to really love it. Read it all the time and you are ensuring yourself a life of goodness and light.

Kellie M., 15, Utah, USA



Overcoming Temptations

Studying the scriptures helps me live the gospel at school. I'm just starting middle school, and there are a lot of bad things and temptations. When I have a hard time resisting temptation, I try to read the scripture stories to find answers to my problems. It helps to dispel temptation and turn toward the gospel.

Blake C., 12, Idaho, USA

Scripture Power

This is my first time attempting to read the Book of Mormon. My favorite chapters are in 2 Nephi 25–33. So far, they have strengthened me the most.



A FOUNTAIN OF KNOWLEDGE

"We should hunger and thirst every day after spiritual knowledge. This personal

practice is founded on study, meditation, and prayer. Sometimes we might be tempted to think, 'I don't need to study the scriptures today; I've read them all before.' ...

"But the gospel is a fountain of knowledge that never runs dry. There is always something new to learn and feel ... in every verse of scripture."

Bishop Gérald Caussé, Presiding Bishop,
Apr. 2015 general conference.

The Primary song "Scripture Power" has never been more accurate for me. I testify of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and strongly advise you to study it every day.

Sariah J., 13, Arizona, USA

Responses are intended for help and perspective, not as official pronouncements of Church doctrine.

UPCOMING QUESTION

"I've been praying for something important, but I don't know if I have received an answer. How will I recognize it?"

Send your answer and photo by January 15, 2017.

Go to newera.lds.org, and click "Submit Your Work." Sign in with your LDS Account, and then select "New Era" under "Choose Magazine." Type your info, click "Add File" to select your file and photos, and then click "Submit" to upload and send us your file.

Responses may be edited for length or clarity.



Building the Kingdom of God in the Latter Days

You have an important role in building God's kingdom on the earth in preparation for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The things that make the biggest difference in building the kingdom are often the little things you do to keep your covenants every day. In the October 2016 general conference, many Church leaders spoke about this great work. For instance:

- "Gratitude on the Sabbath Day," by President Henry B. Eyring
- "Sharing the Restored Gospel," by Elder Dallin H. Oaks
- "'Come, Follow Me' by Practicing Christian Love and Service," by Elder Robert D. Hales
- "A Witness of God," by Elder Neil L. Andersen
- "Serve," by Elder Carl B. Cook

Find these and more at conference.lds.org.

Share These Cards

Give yourself an easy reminder to think about this month's theme. Just place these cards in your scriptures, locker, or bedroom. You can also download or share them online at lds.org/go/cardsNE1216.

THE LORD IS BUILDING

HIS KINGDOM QUIETLY...

TOWARD ITS

GLORIOUS MILLENNIAL FUTURE.

IT TAKES THE **HOLY SPIRIT** TO SEE THE **GROWING GRANDEUR.**

President Henry B. Eyring
First Counselor in the First Presidency
October 2016 general conference

WHETHER WE ARE

OVERWHELMED

— or —

UNDERWHELMED,

WHETHER WE ARE

SCARED TO DEATH

or

BORED TO DEATH,

THE LORD WANTS US TO

GEAR DOWN,
POWER UP, AND
SERVE.

Elder Carl B. Cook
Of the Seventy
October 2016 general conference

I brought in five large pizzas 10 minutes ago, and there's not a single slice left?!

Oh! You can have one of mine, Brother Peterson.

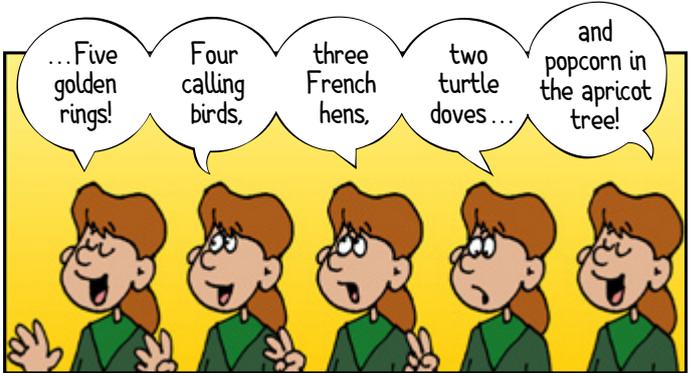


RYAN STOKER

Elder, I think I'm seeing a vision of us if we don't get out of this cold soon . . .



JON CLARK



... Five golden rings!
Four calling birds,
three French hens,
two turtle doves...
and popcorn in the apricot tree!

KEVIN BECKSTROM



We were hoping you wouldn't mind delivering these copies of the Book of Mormon while you're out.

ARIE VAN DE GRAAFF



HERE FOR A REASON

When I reached my teenage years, people started calling me “ugly” and “fat” at school. My confidence and feelings of self-worth were very low. I doubted the Church, Heavenly Father, and the whole plan of salvation. I didn’t want to go to church, Mutual, or firesides. I felt depressed and unworthy.

My mom, wanting me to try and make friends, helped me attend a youth camp when I turned 14. During the first session of scripture study there, I had a prompting to start reading the Book of Mormon. As soon as I read the first few

words, I felt peace. The Holy Ghost was with me once again.

However, some of my negative feelings still remained. I still felt like I wasn’t worth anything. Then I suddenly remembered a story my mom had told me. When I was three years old, my mom was woken up in the middle of the night by the Spirit whispering, “Go to Anna.” She ignored it and tried to go to sleep. Again she heard it, and again she ignored it. The third time it was even louder, so my mom got up and went into my room. She found me turning blue and having some form of a fit, like

a seizure. She called an ambulance, and I was quickly sent to the hospital. The doctors took care of me and told my mom that if I had been left a little longer, I might not have survived.

When I think I have no worth or purpose on earth, I reflect on this story and the peace I felt from the Holy Ghost, and I realize that I’m worth so much to my Heavenly Father. Even though I don’t understand it all yet, I know that I have an important mission on earth. I am a daughter of God, and He truly loves me.

Anna H., England

WHY I'LL SERVE

As I become old enough to serve a mission, the idea of spending two years away from home as a missionary seems daunting. My entire life, I've heard mission stories from my family and ward members about how missions are incredible, testimony-building, life-defining experiences. I have no doubt that this is true, but serving a mission has always seemed far away. Now that it's so close, the reality of it has sunk in.

I know that the Lord expects me and all able-bodied young men to serve missions. I know it is a duty and a commandment, but I wanted to learn more about why I needed to serve. I was struck by President Thomas S. Monson's saying that a mission is an "obligation the Lord expects of us who have been given so very much" (*"As We Meet Together Again,"* Oct. 2010 general conference). With blessings comes responsibility, and serving a mission is one way that I can show gratitude to God for all that He has blessed me with—the gospel, my family and friends, an education, the people I'll serve, and much more.

Even though I know this is true, I sometimes still have fears about leaving. But I just try to remember that God wants me to serve a mission, and He will help support me in the decision to serve. He will not leave me to do it alone and will be there every step of the way (see John 14:18).

David W., Utah, USA

NOT YOUR AVERAGE CLASS GIFT

At my school, each class provides Christmas presents for a different child who wouldn't have presents otherwise. The girl my class was assigned to help had asked for very little: just a doll and a book. At first we grudgingly all brought in a cheap book or discounted doll and put it in a box. But then we soon brought in more and more, realizing how good it felt to give. We were so excited each day to bring in things for this little girl that we would laugh with joy. Over the weeks we collected so many presents that they couldn't fit in the box—the gifts were literally overflowing.

Instead of thinking about what we were getting for Christmas, we thought about the little girl's face on Christmas morning, and it always made us smile and feel happy. It made us realize how the spirit of Christmas is about giving, not getting. And that made me think of what our Heavenly Father gave us that wonderful night: a Savior. He gave us a light, an example, and someone we can always trust. It made me realize how much Heavenly Father loves us—so much that He gave us a Savior, the Holy Ghost, our families, and our friends. I'm so grateful for that little girl and the lessons she taught me.

That Christmas, the best gift for me was the giving.

Emma S., North Carolina, USA





By President
Dieter F. Uchtdorf
Second Counselor in
the First Presidency

HOW TO BE PATIENT

Waiting can be hard. Children know it, and so do adults. We live in a world offering fast food, instant messaging, on-demand movies, and immediate answers to the most trivial or profound questions. We don't like to wait. Some even feel their blood pressure rise when their line at the grocery store moves slower than those around them.

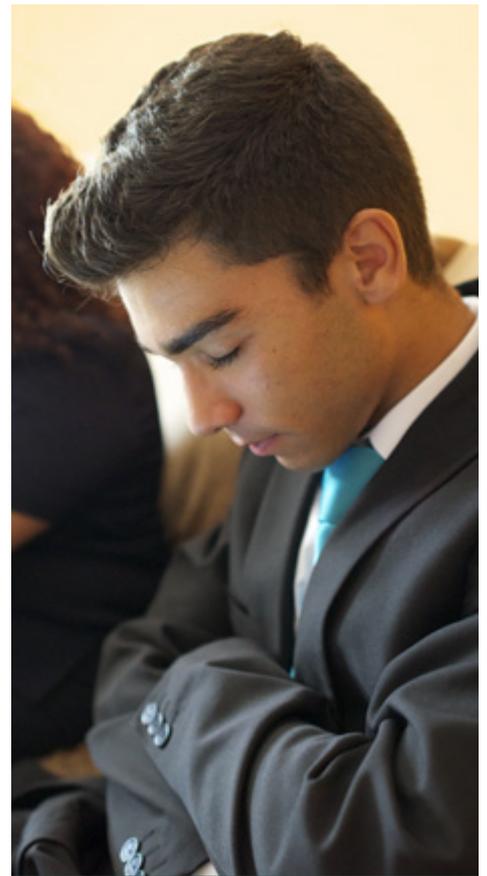
Patience—the ability to put our desires on hold for a time—is a precious and rare virtue. We want what we want, and we want it now. Therefore, the very idea of patience may seem unpleasant and, at times, bitter.

Nevertheless, without patience, we cannot please God; we cannot become perfect. Indeed, patience is a purifying process that refines understanding, deepens happiness, focuses action, and offers hope for peace.

Patience isn't merely waiting. Patience is not passive resignation,

nor is it failing to act because of our fears. Patience means active waiting and enduring. It means **staying with something and doing all that we can**—working, hoping, and exercising faith; bearing hardship with fortitude, even when the desires of our hearts are delayed. Patience is not simply enduring; it is **enduring well!** Patience means staying with something until the end. It means **delaying immediate gratification for future blessings.** It means reining in anger and holding back the unkind word. It means resisting evil, even when it appears to be making others rich.

Patience means **accepting that which cannot be changed and facing it with courage, grace, and faith.** It means being “willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon [us], even as a child doth submit to his father” (Mosiah 3:19). Ultimately, patience means being “firm and



Share Your Experiences

Share how you have learned patience and read the experiences of other youth at lds.org/go/patienceNE1216.

steadfast, and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord” (1 Nephi 2:10) every hour of every day, even when it is hard to do so.

The work of patience boils down to this: **keep the commandments; trust in God, our Heavenly Father; serve Him with meekness and Christlike love; exercise faith and hope in the Savior; and never give up.** The lessons we learn from patience will cultivate our character, lift our lives, and heighten our happiness. They will help us to become faithful disciples of our Master, Jesus Christ. **NE**

From an April 2010 general conference address.

WE ARE BLESSED TO
HAVE
THE TRUTH.

WE HAVE A MANDATE TO
SHARE
THE TRUTH.

LET US
LIVE
THE TRUTH.

President Thomas S. Monson
October 2016 general conference

WHAT'S ONLINE



FIRST PRESIDENCY'S *Christmas Devotional*

Messages of joy given through words and music are the perfect way to start December and to get ourselves focused on the real reason for the season: the birth and life of Christ. Don't forget to watch the First Presidency's Christmas Devotional on Sunday, December 4, at 6:00 p.m. MST online at lds.org/go/christmasNE1216.



CHECK OUT
"HAVE I DONE ANY GOOD
IN THE WORLD TODAY?" AT

lds.org/go/goodNE1216

HAVE YOU DONE ANY *Good Today?*

When you feel overwhelmed with everything going on this season, consider finding someone to serve. It may seem paradoxical, but the blessings are sure. See what President Thomas S. Monson has said about serving others in the video "Have I Done Any Good in the World Today?"

THE GREATEST *Gift*

It's easy to get wrapped up (pun intended) in the commercial side of the holidays. But watch as this young man realizes the most important gift he could receive this and every Christmas.



CHECK OUT
"THE GREATEST GIFT" AT

lds.org/go/giftNE1216

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

