

THE New Era



The **SAVIOR'S 4 GIFTS** *of JOY*

p. 2

CHRISTMAS in
Colombia, Canada,
California, and
More

p. 12

**KEEPING
CHRISTMAS**
after Losing
Dad

p. 6

WISE UP!
A Christmas
Game to Enjoy
This Season

p. 24

CONTENTS



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FEATURES

- 2** **The Savior's Four Gifts of Joy**
These unique gifts from the Savior will bring us more and more joy as we accept them.

President Russell M. Nelson

- 6** **A Gift of Love for Christmas**
After losing her father, she couldn't imagine Christmas without him.

- 8** **Christmas with the Nephites**
A musical helped youth in Idaho, USA, to learn about the first Christmas in the New World.

- 12** **Christmas around the World**
Hear from youth worldwide about how they celebrate Christmas.

- 16** **Chaos, Fast Food, and Christmas**
Sister missionaries bring a message of Christmas peace to a chaotic home.

- 18** **Because We Love Him**
The youth themes can help you show your love for the Savior this Christmas.

- 20** **Where Do *Light the World* Donations Go?**
*Find out how the donations to *Light the World* vending machines help people.*

- 24** **Wise Up!**
Try this new Christmas board game.

- 26** **Nursing Home Noel**
She was looking forward to a relaxing Christmas day, but her parents had something else in mind.

- 28** **9 Gifts You Can Give Yourself This Christmas**
Try some unconventional self-gifting for the best Christmas ever.

- 34** **A Blind Date with a Latter-day Saint Girl**
I fell in love with her completely—but she wanted to marry in the temple.
Elder Joachin E. Costa

- 36** **Progressing Together**
Young brothers are moving into new quorums and learning about following the prophet.
- 38** **You Don't Want to Be a Mock Star**
Mock on? Maybe not.

ALSO INSIDE . . .

- 11** DOCTRINAL MASTERY
- 23** POSTER
- 33** FOR THE STRENGTH OF YOUTH
- 40** YOUTH
- 42** FUN STOP
- 44** Q&A
- 46** FIRM FOUNDATIONS
- 48** LAST WORD

THE SAVIOR'S FOUR GIFTS OF JOY

These unique gifts from the Savior will bring us more and more joy as we accept them.



By President
Russell M. Nelson

IN THIS SEASON OF GIFT GIVING, desire is important, particularly when we are mindful of the desires of those whom we love. During this Christmas season, I invite you to consider your own desires. What are your deepest desires? What do you really want to experience and accomplish in this life? Do you really want to become more and more like Jesus Christ? Do you really want to live with Heavenly Father and with your family forever and live as He lives?

If you do, you will want to accept many gifts offered by the Lord to help you and me during our time of mortal probation. Let us focus on

four of the gifts Jesus Christ gave to all who are willing to *receive* them.

THE GIFT OF LOVE

He gave you and me an unlimited capacity *to love*. That includes the capacity to love the unlovable and those who not only do *not* love you but presently persecute and despitely use you (see Matthew 5:44–45).

With the Savior's help, we can learn to love as He loved. It may require a change of heart—most certainly a softening of our hearts—as we are tutored by the Savior how to *really* take care of





each other. We can truly minister in the Lord's way as we accept His gift of love.

Ask for the Lord's help to love those He needs you to love, including those for whom it is not always easy to feel affection. You may even want to ask God for His angels to walk with you where you presently do not want to tread (see Doctrine and Covenants 84:88).

THE GIFT OF FORGIVENESS

A second gift the Savior offers you is the ability to *forgive*. Through His infinite Atonement, you can forgive those who have hurt you and who may never accept responsibility for their cruelty to you.

It is usually easy to forgive one who sincerely and humbly seeks your forgiveness. But the Savior will grant you the ability to forgive anyone who has mistreated you in any way. Then their hurtful acts can no longer canker your soul.

THE GIFT OF REPENTANCE

A third gift from the Savior is that of *repentance*. This gift is not always well

understood. As you know, the New Testament was originally written in the Greek language. In passages where the Savior calls upon people to repent, the word translated as "repent" is the Greek term *metanoëo*. This is a very powerful Greek verb. The prefix *meta* means "change." We also use that prefix in English. For example, the word *metamorphosis* means "change in form or shape." The suffix *noëo* relates to a Greek word that means "mind." It also relates to another Greek word that means "knowledge."

Can we begin to see the breadth and depth of what the Lord is giving to us when He offers us the gift to *repent*? He invites us to change our minds, and our knowledge. Repentance is a resplendent gift. It is a process never to be feared. It is a gift for us to receive with joy and to use—even embrace—day after day as we seek to become more like our Savior.

King Lamoni's father caught a glimpse of what lay ahead for those who believed in Christ and followed Him. He declared

that he would give away *all* his sins for the privilege of knowing the Lord (see Alma 22:13–18). True repentance is not an event. It is a never-ending privilege. It is *fundamental* to progression and having peace of mind, comfort, and joy.

THE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE

A fourth gift from our Savior is actually a promise—a promise of *life everlasting*. This does not mean simply living for a really, really, really long time. Everyone will live forever after death, regardless of the kingdom or glory for which they may qualify. Everyone will be resurrected and experience *immortality*. But eternal life is so much more than a designation of time. Eternal life is the kind and quality of life that Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son live. When the Father offers us everlasting life, He is saying in essence, "If you choose to follow my Son—if your *desire* is *really* to become more like Him—then in time you may live as we live and preside over worlds and kingdoms as we do."





RECEIVING THE SAVIOR'S GIFTS

These four unique gifts will bring us more and more joy as we accept them. They were made possible because Jehovah condescended to come to earth as the baby Jesus. He was born of an immortal Father and a mortal mother. He was born in Bethlehem under the most humble of circumstances. His was the holy birth foreseen by prophets since the days of Adam. Jesus Christ is God's transcendent gift—the gift of the Father to all of His children (see John 3:16). That birth we joyfully celebrate each Christmas season.

With our thoughts and feelings so focused on the Savior of the world, what, then, do we need to do to receive these gifts offered to us so willingly by Jesus Christ? What is the key to loving as He loves, forgiving as He forgives, repenting to become more like Him, and ultimately living with Him and our Heavenly Father?

The key is to make and keep sacred covenants. We *choose* to live and progress on the Lord's covenant path and to stay on it. It is not a complicated way. It is *the* way to true joy in this life and eternal life beyond.

My deepest desires are for all of Heavenly Father's children to have the opportunity to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and to heed His teachings and for Israel to be gathered as promised in these latter days. And I desire that we will believe and receive the love the Savior has for each of us. His infinite and perfect love moved Him to atone for you and me. That gift—His Atonement—allows all of His other gifts to become ours. **NE**

From the 2018 First Presidency Christmas Devotional.

**JESUS CHRIST IS...
THE GIFT OF THE
FATHER TO ALL OF
HIS CHILDREN.**

A Gift of Love

for

By Rebekah Page

I will never be able to think about Christmas without thinking about my dad. The two seem inherently connected after years of his meticulous gift-giving, tree-chopping, music-playing, cookie-decorating, and utterly festive spirit. So when he died just a few months before last Christmas, I had a hard time feeling anything but sadness and resentment about losing this wonderful man. Nobody could parallel his spirit, his enthusiasm, his Christlike love. Or so I thought.

Eventually Christmas Day came around with what seemed to me to be insincere fanfare since my dad wasn't there. I simply didn't want to get up: I missed my dad, I missed my family, I missed those nostalgic, apparently perfect Christmas mornings filled with laughter and love and everything I couldn't imagine feeling without him.

But over the next 12 hours, I discovered exactly how meaningful the holiday could be despite my loss. My entire family got gifts from anonymous members of our ward, everything clearly picked out intentionally. I experienced an outpouring of love from numerous friends and ward members wishing me a merry Christmas through texts or phone calls or surprise presents. I received a

dozen assorted homemade gifts from my siblings. I spent time interacting with the family which I had somehow forgotten had experienced the exact same loss I had and which I had frankly ignored for too long.

And somehow every part of the day came together, not just materially but emotionally. I felt people thinking of me, praying that my day would be amazing, and somehow, it was. I felt like my dad was rooting for me, the closest connection I'd had with him since he passed. I felt Jesus Christ's love permeating every moment of that afternoon. I felt joyful and grateful, and I felt good for the first time in weeks.

I know that my Heavenly Father was looking out for me on that day that initially brought such painful memories. I know my fellow Church members felt impressed to reach out to me because of Heavenly Father's love. I know that though a crucial part of my family is now gone, it is only temporary, and I will see my dad again. I have a testimony of Jesus Christ that grows ever stronger because of those experiences. And I will never forget the gratitude and love I felt on that incredible Christmas day. **NE**
The author lives in Utah, USA.

Christmas



I thought I just couldn't celebrate Christmas without my dad. But Heavenly Father was looking out for me that day.

CHRISTMAS

WITH
THE NEPHITES





If you had lived in Book of Mormon times, would you have believed that Jesus Christ would come?

By Richard M. Romney
Church Magazines

We're all familiar with the Christmas story that's told in the New Testament about Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem and staying in the stable because there was no room at the inn. It's a story of shepherds watching over their flocks when angels came and heavenly choirs sang about wise men who came from the east, following a star. And of course, it's the story of the birth of the Savior, fulfilling prophecy. Most of us read and reread this story every Christmas.

But there's another scriptural account of the Savior's birth, one told from the other side of the world in Another Testament of Jesus Christ. It's a story of a prophet on a wall, foretelling the coming of the Messiah; of believers and nonbelievers; of threats of death; and of a day, a night, and a day without darkness, signaling the birth of the Lord and also fulfilling prophecy. (See Helaman 16; 3 Nephi 1:5–21.)

RELIVING HISTORY

Youth in Idaho, USA, recently relived the experience of these believers from the Book of Mormon. The youth took part in a stake play reenacting this episode, where characters were promised a divine sign of the Savior's birth but were threatened with death for believing. As they prepared and rehearsed, this question was continually on their minds: If I had heard Samuel the Lamanite prophesy about the coming of Christ, would I have believed?

The play *A Nephite Christmas* was written by a stake member years ago when she lived on Guam. It tells the story of a teenager at a time when believing could have been a choice of life or death. Several teenage cast members played the parts of those who had to wrestle with the decision to either follow the prophet or give in to pressure from those who made fun of their faith.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CLAYTON THOMPSON



Petra



Aidan



Madeleine



Zane



Isabelle



Renee



Patrick

CLOSER TO CHRIST

Some cast members like Petra C., 14, and Aidan S., 10, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to be in the cast and for the time spent with family members in the cast. Others expressed thanks for personal growth in their own testimonies.

"I came to feel that the Book of Mormon isn't just about heroes," said Madeleine S., 12. "It's also about people just like me, trying to live the best they can."

"I had never actually thought about the perspective of the people in America at the time. I knew the story, but now I know the *people*," said Zane P., 17. "I know how they felt, because I felt it."

"Before I was in the play, I didn't read the Book of Mormon very much," said Isabelle N., 16. "After the play I realized all the scriptures I was missing out on. So I decided to read the entire book for the first time. As I read, my testimony of Christ grew. I knew that the story of His birth is true, and I wanted to share it with my friends and study it with my family."

"My testimony of Christ and of the Book of Mormon grew because I was able to think about my own feelings while I was acting as someone who was thinking about these same things," said Renee T., 17. "I could feel Christ's love for all of us, and it felt amazing to be able to present the play to our community during Christmas, when everyone was sharing their love for Him."

"It brought me closer to Christ and helped me learn more about Him," said Patrick N., 10. "I felt myself grow and felt more love in my heart."

By portraying what the Savior meant to people in ancient America and thinking about what He means to them, these youth from Idaho learned that one of the best gifts, at Christmas or any other season, is to learn of the Savior and share His love. **NE**

FOUR WAYS TO SHARE

You, too, can share Christmas with the Nephites. Here are some ideas:


- On your own or with your family, consider reading these stories in the Book of Mormon as part of your celebration (see Helaman 16; 3 Nephi 1:5–21).
- Record your feelings or impressions as you learn about the faith of the believers.
- As guided by the Spirit, share Book of Mormon Christmas stories with someone.
- Consider giving the Book of Mormon as a Christmas gift.



See what it means to obtain eternal life.

TO KNOW GOD & THE SAVIOR

LIFE ETERNAL

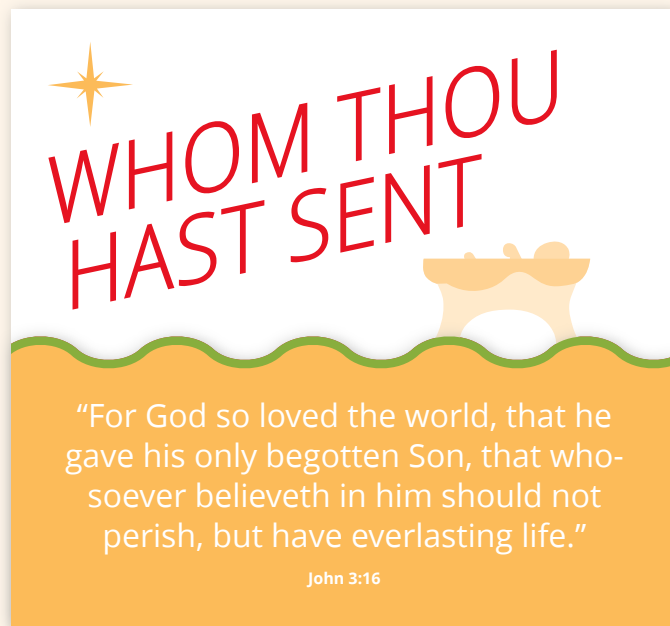


Is a gift God offers His children through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Means to live with God and become like Him.

Requires our obedience to God's laws, including the saving ordinances of the gospel.

WHOM THOU HAST SENT



"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

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

John 17:3

KNOW GOD & JESUS CHRIST

"When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God."

Mosiah 2:17

"On a future day, 'every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess' that Jesus is the Christ. On that blessed day, we will know He knows each of us by name. And I witness and promise we can not only know about the Lord but also come to know Him as we exercise faith in, follow, serve, and believe Him."

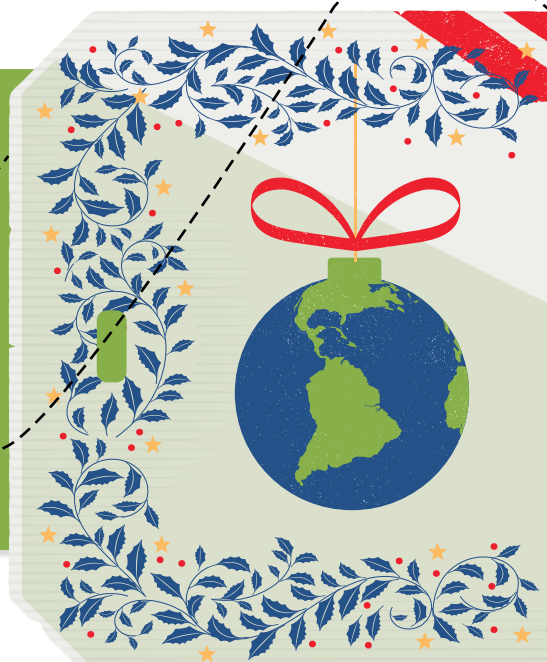
Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Oct. 2016 general conference (*Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 105).

WHAT NOW?

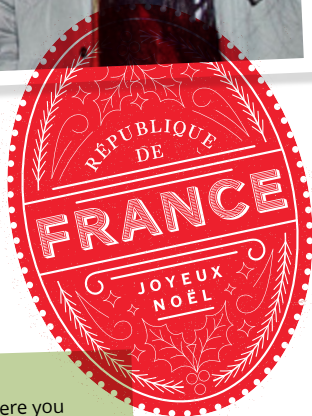
"What does the Father ask of us? What do the scriptures say? Have faith, have hope, live like his Son, help others on their way. What does he ask? Live like his Son."

"He Sent His Son," *Children's Songbook*, 34.

? How might focusing your scripture study on coming to know our Heavenly Father and Savior help you become more like Them? What can you do in your home, at school, and in your other activities to better follow Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ?



Christmas around the World



“The month of December in my family represents unity. We love to live by following the example of Christ, and we always try to remind ourselves of the acts that He did for us and the many blessings that we have received. In our living room we have a picture of the Savior, surrounded by about 20 red hearts.

“When we get ready to open our presents at midnight, I look first at my family and then at the picture of Christ. I am proud to have His image in that room, and I am proud to be able to say to myself that what He wanted so much for my family is happening.

“I am planning on serving a full-time mission. These moments shared at Christmas give me even more desire to share the gospel with other people. With the gospel, Christmas has a whole different feeling. With the gospel, everything about Christmas is centered on Christ and on the family, and that brings me an even greater comfort.”

Myrium G., Paris, France

Would you like to share how you celebrate Christmas where you live? Send us a picture and your story, and we might use it next year! Send it to newera@ChurchofJesusChrist.org.

What are some of your favorite Christmas traditions? Bundling up for some outdoor family Christmas caroling? Sledding followed by hot cocoa? Going for a barbecue on the beach?

Despite what some holiday greeting card companies seem to portray, Christmas is celebrated in every climate, culture, and location—often without a hint of snow in sight or the faintest scent of a pine tree.

Here's a look at some ways youth around the world celebrate the Savior's birth.



at 10:30 p.m., and we sing hymns, read scriptures, watch some Christmas videos, and talk.

"We invite the small children to place the baby Jesus in the crib at midnight on the 25th of December. We wish 'Merry Christmas' to each of our family members, cut the cake, talk the whole night, and go to sleep late that day.

"How grateful are we to have Jesus Christ as a part of our lives. Through Him we find everlasting joy."

Ankita K., Bengaluru, India

"In Bengaluru, Christmas is widely celebrated. Everyone celebrates, be they Hindu, Muslim, or Christian. Many people decorate a Christmas tree and hang the star in their house.

"One tradition we follow in our family is to participate in the Light the World calendar provided by the Church. Also, my mom starts preparing cakes for my neighbors, colleagues, friends, and family. On Christmas Eve we invite all our family members to our home. We start our Christmas devotional at home

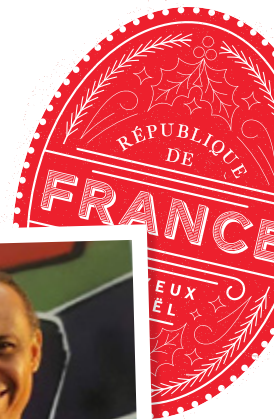


"Christmas 2018 was my most beautiful Christmas. There was a feeling of togetherness and friendliness, and I got to participate in an event for refugees.

"I made red paper boots and taught those who were invited to the dinner to make them, to place one on each plate. Those invited to the evening brought backpacks filled with personal hygiene items so that they could be handed out on a Sunday.

"We watched a film about Christ with the refugees as part of the evening. It was a good Christmas to remember."

Alexis L., Paris, France





“We built this lemonade stand to use in the summer, but Christmastime is a perfect opportunity to use it to give people cookies and hot chocolate! I feel closer to my Savior when I find creative ways to serve others.”

Brooklyn H., Alberta, Canada



“I enjoy spending time with my sisters, especially when we play games together. At Christmastime we have candlelight dinners every night at supper. It feels peaceful. The light of the candles reminds me of our Savior, who is the Light of the World.”

Dane H., Alberta, Canada



“Many people consider the mountains as a place of peace where they commune with nature and discover the beauty of God’s creations. But here in Hawaii, we feel and appreciate the power of God in the sea and all the wonders it holds.

“Any time that you spend surrounded by nature and family, it is a bonding experience. You disconnect from the distractions in life and focus on the beauty around you, both in the things you see and in the people you share the experience with.

“What better time than Christmas to feel more connected to this earth and to our families, as we understand they both play a major part in the plan that has been laid out by our Father in Heaven and our Savior Jesus Christ.”

Diane A., with photo of Zyrrus A., Hawaii, USA



“My family is always involved in some type of service activity on Christmas. One thing we do is provide food and goodies for those in need. Through serving others, we are able to show God’s love. My parents have

taught me the meaning of Christmas by setting a good example and serving others. This experience helped me to understand my role on earth and the true meaning of Christmas.”

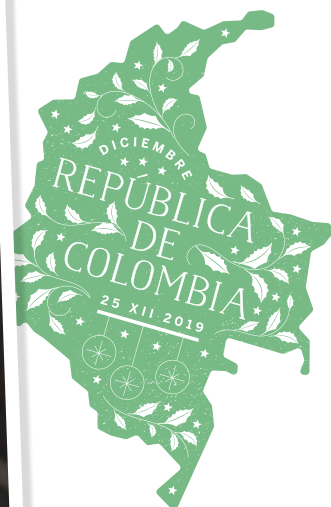
Aaron S., Bengaluru, India



“Sometimes, since we’re a big family, we all get together in this house and the house next door. We have music. We dance. We’re always together as a family as much as possible during December, because we’re out of school.

“We play. We talk. We laugh. We eat. That’s the tradition. When I’m in school, I don’t have time to do all of those things with my family. So we try to keep these traditions going. Family is the most important thing. These traditions help us stay together as a family.”

Juan C., Barranquilla, Colombia



Many people in Mexico gather as family and friends to break open piñatas as part of their Christmas celebrations.

Note: The following youth from Paradise, California, USA, reflect on the meaning of Christmas after the most destructive wildfire in California’s history burned down their community.

“After the fire I realized that the most important things to have are your family and friends. So although we didn’t get many gifts, it was so really nice to just be surrounded by family. It was still a happy time for us, even though it wasn’t like our normal Christmas.”

Rachel W.



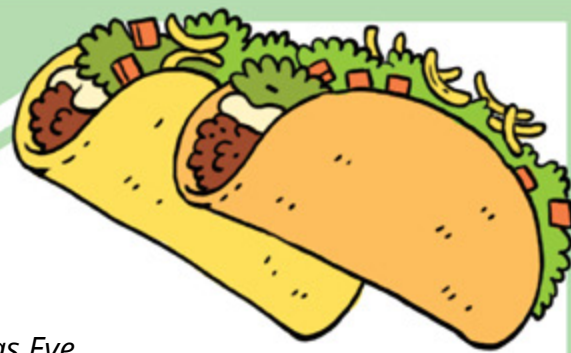
“It was great to see everyone kind of get thrown together and depend on each other socially. . . . I learned that material things don’t matter as much. Service, family, and time spent together matters a lot more. Life is valuable. Things can always change for the worse, so we need to try to enjoy the positive times while they’re around. We’re the ones that make those positive times!”

Billy A.

“I got to help unload and organize several truckloads of donated toys. Then we opened the doors and let everyone in. It was really fun to watch all the kids. Their eyes would light up. They were so excited! It made me happy to see them so happy and peaceful after living through something so awful.”

Audrey V.

Fast Food, and CHRISTMAS



I'll never forget the Christmas Eve when I ate fast food for dinner.

By Hannah DeTavis

I was serving as a missionary, and a family in our ward unexpectedly invited my companion and me over for dinner.

When Christmas Eve finally came, we walked a few miles to their home, stomped off our snow-powdered boots, and eagerly rapped on the front door. Silence. After knocking again and ringing the doorbell, an adult daughter finally came to the door.

"Can you wait out here for a second?" she said. "We forgot you guys were coming."

The door shut, and we looked at each other, confused, as we shivered on the porch.

When the door swung open again, we were guided to a small, well-loved couch in the corner of the living room. All 15 family members (seven of them small children) were also packed into the room. The older children raised their eyebrows in surprise at our appearance. The younger children wildly wrestled on the carpet. Apparently, the father, who was the only active Church member, had not told his family members that we were coming.

The same daughter who opened the front door announced that they hadn't had time to prepare dinner, so she was going to see what restaurants were open for pickup. The father did his best to hush the children and direct their attention toward us, but they were pretty rowdy.

At first, my companion could barely utter a few words before a child would squeal or the family dog would jump on our laps. In all the chaos, I prayed for a way to help this family feel the peace of the Savior.

"Let's imagine something together," I said suddenly. "Can everyone close their eyes?"

I didn't quite know where I was going with this, but I had a copy of an article by Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles that my mom had sent me. The question took the children off guard and they squeezed their eyes shut.

I unfolded the talk and began to read.

"Think about that baby [Jesus] in the manger. . . . Do not be too concerned or overwhelmed with what is coming in His life or in yours. . . . Just think about that little baby. Take a quiet, peaceful moment to ponder the beginning of His life . . . when all of heaven rejoiced with the message 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men' (Luke 2:14)."

At this point the children were all quiet and still; even the teenagers put their phones down. I read on.

"Just sit with the Lord and let Him warm you like a fire in winter. You don't have to be perfect or the greatest person who ever graced the earth or the best of anything to be with Him."¹

I paused for a few moments to allow the Spirit to linger before telling the family to open their eyes. My companion and I bore our testimonies of the miracle of Christ's birth and how we can always experience the peaceful feelings of Christmas as we cherish His life.

The atmosphere in the small living room was warm and light. I felt as though we had taken our own journey to Bethlehem to gather around the Christ child. One of the little girls sighed and said, "I love Jesus. Thank you for coming, Sisters." Many of the other children nodded.

A few minutes later, the oldest daughter hobbled in the door, arms loaded with bags of fast food. We soon found ourselves munching on tacos, laughing, and sharing our favorite holiday memories.

Christmas has a way of bringing all kinds of people together. And just as Elder Christofferson taught, we don't have to have the perfect family or the perfect holiday traditions to feel the Savior's love; we just need to remember Him. On that Christmas Eve, I learned that sometimes a simple, heartfelt moment with Savior is all it takes to create a "silent night." **NE**

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTE

1. D. Todd Christofferson, "Be at Peace," *Ensign*, Dec. 2015, 30, 31.

Because WE LOVE

By Joshua J. Perkey
Church Magazines

It's Christmastime. Time for presents, tasty treats, beautiful trees, and family. Then there's the music, the decorations, and the break from school. It's a great time of year!

Of course, the most important things we think about during Christmas are the Nativity, the birth of the Savior, and the great gift He is to us. Jesus Christ really is the reason for the season. He is the Son of God and came into the world to save us. He suffered so that He could "succor [us] according to [our] infirmities" (Alma 7:11–13). Because of Him, all of us can be forgiven of our sins and will be resurrected one day with a perfect body (see Alma 11:40–43).

No matter how hard life gets, no matter how much pain or sorrow we feel, no matter how much we struggle at school or with friends or family, we can always draw strength from the Savior and His grace.

Those are some really great reasons to love the Savior and our Heavenly Father!

But that's not all He has done for us. Jesus's Atonement also makes it possible for us to return to live with our Heavenly Father and with our families one day. If we choose to follow the path He set for us, we can receive exaltation. That's pretty amazing, and it's the reason for our faith and hope (see Moroni 7:41).

That's also what this year's youth theme has been all about. God loves us, for "God is love" (1 John 4:8). So He sent His Son and told us how we can show our love for Him: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).



HIM

*Christmas is a great time
to show our love for the Savior.*

IF YE LOVE ME, KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS

The first part of this year's youth theme was focused on strengthening your love for Heavenly Father and the Savior. Now that the year is drawing to a close, it's a good time to think about how that went. As you strengthened your love for Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, you likely felt Their love for you! And if you did, what did you feel prompted to do?

If you didn't follow promptings as much as you'd like to have done, don't be too hard on yourself—there's always room for improvement. Christmastime is a great time to think about our love for God and how we can keep His commandments and feel His love for us.

If you haven't felt that feeling before, or haven't for a long time, don't lose hope. There's a great way to start feeling the peace and love of God in your life: by keeping His commandments.

When you do that with an eye of faith, sooner or later you'll see and feel the results. As Jesus taught, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:17). If you do it, you'll know it and feel it by the power of the Holy Ghost.

The ancient Apostle John also wrote, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (1 John 5:2–3).

So if you want to increase your love for God—or feel His love for you more strongly—keep His commandments. Then you'll feel His love, you'll love Him more, and you'll want to keep His commandments more. You have to pay attention to the Spirit, but if you do, you'll feel that love. It's an awesome cycle.



2019
YOUTH
THEME
LOGO

GO AND DO

Loving God and keeping His commandments relates to next year's youth theme, too. It's "go and do," from 1 Nephi 3:7. When Nephi's father asked his sons to return to Jerusalem for the brass plates, Laman and Lemuel didn't want to go. But Nephi had already prayed and received an answer from God that caused him to believe his father's words (see 1 Nephi 2:16).

So when Lehi asked Nephi to go back for the plates, Nephi was ready. He declared, "I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded" (1 Nephi 3:7). He was ready to go and do because he knew. And because he was obedient, the Lord blessed him.

Christmas is a fantastic season to be like Nephi and go and do. And how better to show your love for God than serving others at Christmas? Your family, your friends and neighbors, the members of your ward or branch. They all would benefit from a little Christmas cheer. And that will help you live next year's youth theme, too.

Once you've decided how you'll "go and do" and serve others this Christmas, share your experiences with us. We'd love to know. You can email us at newera@ChurchofJesusChrist.org, or share them on the youth Instagram account (@ChurchofJesusChrist_youth). **NE**



2020
YOUTH
THEME
LOGO



Giving Machine filled with donations on New York City street in 2017.

Where Do *Light the World* Donations Go?

By Megan Fairbanks
Church Magazines

Each year at Christmastime, the Light the World Giving Machines appear in a number of locations around the world. People have the chance to help others around the world with just the press of a button. But what happens next?

Through Light the World, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints partners with service organizations that help make sure those donations go where they are needed most. Some of the organizations included various local food banks, UNICEF, CARE, Royal British Legion, Caritas Manila, and WaterAid America—to name just a few.



David M. and Maribel Z. treat water at their school's water quality lab in Bolivia.

Buying Clean Water

At the Giving Machines, one thing people can buy for those in need is clean water. A great place to see the impact of these donations is in San Pedro, Bolivia. The water there has high levels of fluoride, which can harm children's bones and teeth if they drink too much of it.

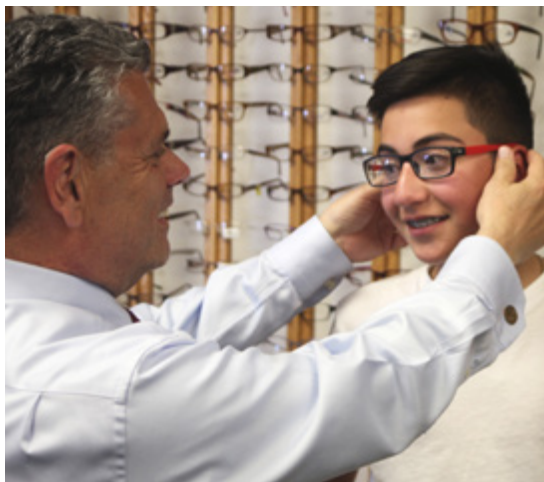
"Water comes first," says Maribel Z.,* 17, a student in San Pedro. "Thanks to the water quality project at our school, people are starting to drink treated water, and we can prevent having too much fluoride in the water."

In 2017, Light the World donations to the organization Water For People helped students Maribel Z. and David M.,* 17, and their teacher Martín* maintain their school's water quality lab in San Pedro. They worked with Water For People to identify technology to treat drinking water. Students are responsible for operating the system, which serves two schools, including their own, and a local health clinic.

*Names have been changed.



Some of the many shoes donated at Giving Machines go to needy children through Helen's Hope Chest in Arizona, USA.



Eye Care 4 Kids CEO Joseph Carbone fits Israel M. and Anel M. for new glasses.



Providing the Necessities of Life

Other donations to the machines went to Helen's Hope Chest in Mesa, Arizona. Helen's Hope Chest exists to provide for the basic needs of children who are in foster or kinship care. Here's what Kate Pompay, Executive Director of Helen's Hope Chest, had to say about the support they received from the Giving Machines:

"When I received the first update from the #LightTheWorld campaign, I was floored. Over \$27,000 had been raised in just a few weeks. I immediately thought of shoes—a lot of new shoes to give to children and teens in foster and kinship care.

"Fast forward a few months to when Jill* and Mark* walked into Helen's Hope Chest for their scheduled 'shopping' trip for their five-year-old granddaughter. When we asked how things were going, they looked at each other and pulled out court documents that gave them custody of their two grandsons. We didn't hesitate to add the boys to the shopping trip to make sure they had what they needed without costing the grandparents any more.

"The funding from the Giving Machines ensures that Helen's Hope Chest will not have to turn away kids in need.

"As for those shoes I envisioned? They have been walking away on the feet of hundreds of children every month."

Helping People See

The nonprofit foundation Eye Care 4 Kids offers free eye exams and discounts on glasses and contacts to children who wouldn't otherwise have access to it. The foundation has eight clinics in Utah, Nevada, and Arizona, does vision screenings in California, and has made several international outreach trips.

Siblings Anel M., 16, and Israel M., 12, have received eye exams, glasses, and contacts from the clinic. Donations to the

Light the World Giving Machines help make that possible.

"Every single time we've been in, they've always been really friendly," Anel says. "When we've been to other places, the glasses are really pricey, and right here they're affordable. My family isn't the type of family that has a lot of money, and these are necessities."

"The glasses have really helped me," Israel says. "I couldn't really see that good, and I can finally see the mountains and the sky."

The Light the World Giving Machines show that giving to others can be easy and fun. But it doesn't have to stop at the machines! This Christmas season, honor the birth of Jesus Christ by helping somebody in need. **NE**

3 Things You Can Do

1. Serve your community. Think of a need in your town or neighborhood, and make a plan for how you can help. Look for local organizations trying to meet that need, and reach out to them to find out what you can do.
2. Use your skills. Are you good at a sport? Can you make or fix things? Can you do something that others might like to learn about? There might be service opportunities for you to use what you know to help others.
3. Donate to a cause. There are many humanitarian organizations around the world that aid people in need. If there's a cause you care about, you can donate money, food, clothing, or other items to make sure those organizations will be able to keep helping people.

To learn more about ways you can serve others, check out LighttheWorld.org and LatterDaySaintCharities.org. Whatever you do, let people know what you're a part of by making a social media post about it and tagging it with #LightTheWorld.



Light
The
World

ONE BY ONE

LightTheWorld.org



ITEMS TO GET

- 1 six-sided die
- 2 playing pieces (coins, buttons, pieces from other games, whatever fits on the squares)
- 8 pieces of paper:
 - 2 labeled Gold
 - 2 labeled Frankincense
 - 2 labeled Myrrh
 - 2 labeled Saw Herod
- 1 clock or timer
- 1 pen or pencil and a few sheets of paper

HOW TO PLAY

- Form two teams of two or more people, place your pieces at the Start, and determine who rolls first.
- Each team rolls the die and moves that number of squares.
- When you land on a square, do what it says.
- When you land in one of the gift acquisition locations, Herod's Palace, or Joseph and Mary's home, roll the die again and complete the task that corresponds with the number you rolled. You have one minute to complete the task and will be timed by the other team. You may not repeat any answers given earlier by the other team for that location, but you may use answers your team gave on an earlier unsuccessful attempt. Settle disputes with kindness.
- If you successfully complete a task in a gift acquisition location, take a piece of paper labeled as the gift for that location.
- If you do not successfully complete the task, you must leave the location on your next turn and try to land there again on a later turn—except Joseph and Mary's Home, where you can stay and try again on your next turn.
- You must obtain all three gifts, then go to Herod's Palace, and then go to Joseph and Mary's Home—in that order.

GOAL

Acquire all three gifts, visit Herod, and deliver the gifts to Joseph and Mary's home.

GOLD DEPOT

IF YOU ROLL:

1. Name two Christmas songs that mention shepherds.
2. Name five animals that have an L in their name.
3. Using only gestures (like charades) act out a Christmas song, chosen by the other team, for your team to guess.
4. Name five words that you can form using only the letters in the word *frankincense*.
5. Name four treats that have the letter C in them.
6. Name six prophets of the Old Testament.



Cloudy night, no stars—
Skip a turn

Help a rich traveler—
Go to Gold Depot

Oasis—
Roll again

MYRRH

IF YOU ROLL:

1. Name three things that mention stars.
2. Name five animals that start with M.
3. Have one team make gestures to act out a Christmas song, chosen by the other team, for you to guess.
4. Name five words that you can form using only the letters in the word *myrrh*.
5. Name five smells that start with M.
6. Name six miracles from the Bible.

WISER UP!

START

Collect gifts and make
your way to honor the
Savior's birth.

Give directions to a lost
perfume trader—
Go to Myrrh Mart

Oasis—
Roll again

Feed a hungry
priest—Go to
Frankincense Farm

Do Not Enter until you
have obtained all 3 gifts!

Cloudy night, no
stars—Skip a turn



THE F

IF YOU ROLL:

- 1.
- 2.
3. Have one team make gestures to act out a Christmas song, chosen by the other team, for you to guess.
4. Name five words that you can form using only the letters in the word *frankincense*.
5. Name four treats that have the letter C in them.
6. Name six prophets of the Old Testament.

JOSEPH AND MARY'S HOME

IF YOU ROLL:

1. Name three Christmas songs that mention peace.
2. Name five animals that have the letter P in their name.
3. Sing one full verse of a Christmas song the other team names.
4. Name five words that you can form using only the letters in the words *gloria in excelsis deo*.
5. Name five symbols of Christmas.
6. Name six titles of Jesus.

Save Herod's secretary from stampede—Go to Herod's Palace

MART

Name three Christmas songs that mention peace.

Name five animals that have a T in their name.

Each team member use only pictures and/or words to name a Christmas song, chosen by the other team to guess.

Name five words that you can form using only the letters in the words *Caesar Augustus*.

Name five symbols of Christmas.

Name six titles from the scriptures.

Forgot your star chart—Go back to the square you just left

Cloudy night, no stars—Skip a turn

FRANKINCENSE FARM

Name three Christmas songs that mention Mary.

Name five animals that have an O in their name.

Each team member use only pictures to get the other team to name a Christmas song that the other team chooses and whispers to him or her.

Name five words that you can form using only the letters in the words *silent night*.

Name four Christmas-related words that have the letter A as the second letter.

Name six prophets from the scriptures.

HEROD'S PALACE

IF YOU ROLL:

1. Name three Christmas songs that mention light.
2. Name five animals that have an R in their name.
3. Have one person hum a Christmas song that the other team chooses and whispers to him or her. The other teammates must recite the first line of the song.
4. Name five words that you can form using only the letters in the word *Bethlehem*.
5. Name five Christmas cookie shapes.
6. Name six bad guys from the scriptures.

Forgot your star chart—Go back to the square you just left

Cloudy night, no stars—Skip a turn

NURSING HOME

I was dreaming of a relaxing Christmas Day, but my parents had something else in mind.

By Mckenna Clarke

During my first year in high school, my parents decided that we would go caroling at a nursing home on Christmas. I was reluctant when I heard the plan. Mom reminded us that it gets lonely at Christmastime for many of the people in the nursing home, but I was used to Christmas being a blissful, relaxing day of lounging in pajamas, playing with new gifts, eating treats, and watching movies. The nursing home was unfamiliar, and the 30-minute drive through the New Hampshire woods to get there seemed so long.

Christmas Day came and brought a morning of opening new gifts and gadgets and filling the living room floor with wrapping paper remnants and empty boxes. That afternoon, Mom and Dad cheerfully herded my three siblings and me into the family minivan. As we entered the nursing home, we were greeted by the smell of disinfectant and cafeteria food. Another family from our ward met us in the lobby and handed out Christmas songbooks.

As we walked down the white-tiled hallway, we started singing "Silent Night." I felt awkward—a few of the residents were out in the hallway, some half asleep in wheelchairs, most in their pajamas. I wasn't really sure they were even listening. Song after song, we slowly made our way down the hallways, and residents' faces lit up when they recognized familiar songs like "Jingle Bells" and "Deck the Halls." One man tapped his foot, one woman started waving her hands in the air as if she were conducting. A few people even tried to sing along. It started to feel less awkward—maybe our caroling did mean something to these people.

As we passed the rooms, lots of the residents came to their doorways to hear us. We would pause and finish the song for each one, wishing them a merry Christmas as we left. One woman, though, couldn't come to her doorway. We sang "The First Noel" outside her door, and she waved her hand for us to

come in. As our big group squeezed into her small room where she sat in an armchair near the window, I noticed the nametag on her door said *Norma*. When I asked her how her day had been, she told us that we were her only visitors the whole day. Not even her children or grandchildren had called or visited. We sang another song for her, our voices filling the room with Christmas cheer. She reached out and held my hand, and I was so glad we were there. When we finished, everyone turned to go, and I bent down and gave her a hug. "Merry Christmas," I whispered.

It was getting dark when we left the nursing home, but I didn't even care that we had spent most of the afternoon there. It felt good to see the smiles on peoples' faces and bring them a little comfort and love on Christmas. Walking down those halls, I had the distinct impression that if Jesus Christ had been on earth that day He would have been doing the same thing. Instead of thinking of what I had missed out on at home, I was grateful to have been able to serve and feel closer to the Savior.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, then of the First Presidency, said, "To truly honor His coming into the world, we must do as He did and reach out in compassion and mercy to our fellowmen. This we can do daily, by word and deed. . . . May the contemplation of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem inspire us to be more like Him. May Christ's mission and example cause our hearts to swell with divine love for God and deep compassion for our fellowmen."¹

I couldn't think of a more fitting way to celebrate His birth and remember His perfect life than serving others by caroling in the nursing home. It was the best gift I gave that year and is now a special tradition I look forward to every year. **NE**

The author lives in Virginia, USA.

NOTE

1. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Scatter Your Crumbs" (First Presidency Christmas Devotional, Dec. 3, 2017), [broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org).



NINE GIFTS YOU CAN GIVE YOURSELF THIS CHRISTMAS

! Are you ready for the
! best Christmas ever?

By David Dickson
Church Magazines

This Christmas, it's OK to include yourself on your Christmas gift list. Best of all, these gifts are loads better than anything you'll find wrapped and topped with a bow.





4

7

8

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1. THE GIFT OF A LIGHTER HEART

No, we're not talking about a better sense of humor, although a "merry heart" is also worth pursuing (see Proverbs 17:22). Specifically, what we're after here is letting go of some of the pain, frustration, and anger you might be carrying around.

For example, think of a time when somebody said or did something unkind to you. A few rare people have the ability to let such moments bounce off practically unnoticed. For the rest of us, that unkindness can sting, at least in the moment. But what many of us do next just magnifies the damage—we *hold on* to things. We replay those moments over and over, hurting ourselves a bit more each time we relive the offense.

The good news is that there's an antidote. There's a gift ready for you to receive, offered by the Savior: the gift to forgive others. President Russell M. Nelson has taught: "The Savior will grant you the ability to forgive anyone who has mistreated you in any way. Then their hurtful acts can no longer canker your soul."¹

Give yourself a lighter heart by accepting His priceless gift this Christmas.



2. THE GIFT OF MORE TIME

Ever wish you could stop time just to squeeze an extra couple of hours out of a day? Hey, it worked for Joshua when he asked the sun and moon to stand still, right (see Joshua 10)? Why not you, too?

Well, Joshua's miracle notwithstanding, the stopping-time thing doesn't seem to be readily available to the masses quite yet. Until then, we all have the same 24 hours to work with. But you can likely still carve out some extra time.

It's all about simplification.

President M. Russell Ballard, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has taught: "Don't overschedule yourselves. . . . We live in a world that is filled with options. If we are not careful, we will find every minute jammed with social events, classes, exercise time, book clubs, scrapbooking, Church callings, music, sports, the Internet, and our favorite TV shows."²

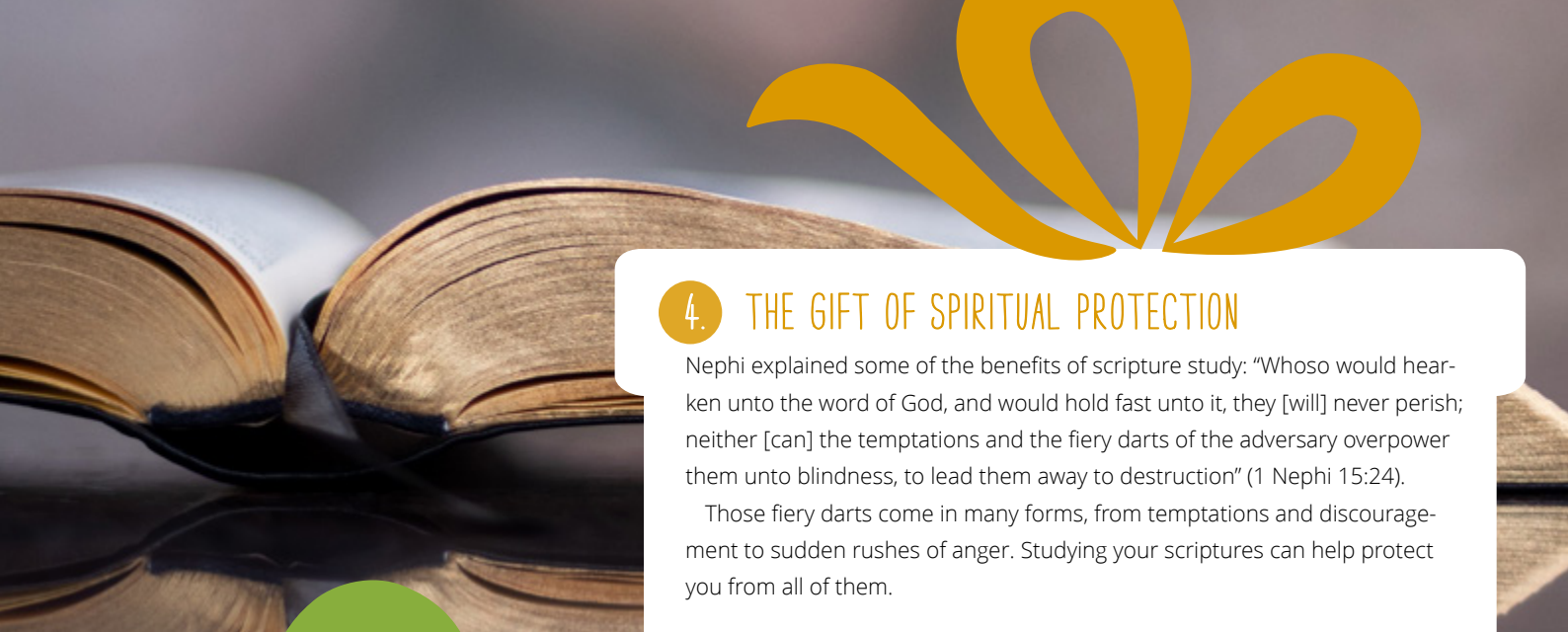
This Christmas, see what extras you can trim from your life (not merely in the month of December, either). This will free up more time to enjoy the things that matter most with the *people* who matter most.



3. THE GIFT OF UPLIFTING MUSIC

Uplifting music has the power to change our mood from awful to awesome almost instantaneously. This is perhaps especially true of Christmas music. If you need a little help creating a solid Christmas playlist, here are a couple ideas to get you started:

- Visit youth.ChurchofJesusChrist.org and click on "Music" for free downloads. You'll find Christmas songs and other songs to bring a smile to your face.
- Go to broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org and click on Christmas Devotionals. You know all those amazing devotional songs sung each year by the Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square? In addition to the talks, you can download every song from the past several years for free, including the congregational songs.
- Head to music.ChurchofJesusChrist.org and search for "Christmas" to find over 200 Christmas songs (complete with sheet music). Or go to the Sacred Music mobile app and look up the topic "Christmas." Because *you* can provide that uplifting music for others, too!



4. THE GIFT OF SPIRITUAL PROTECTION

Nephi explained some of the benefits of scripture study: “Whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they [will] never perish; neither [can] the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction” (1 Nephi 15:24).

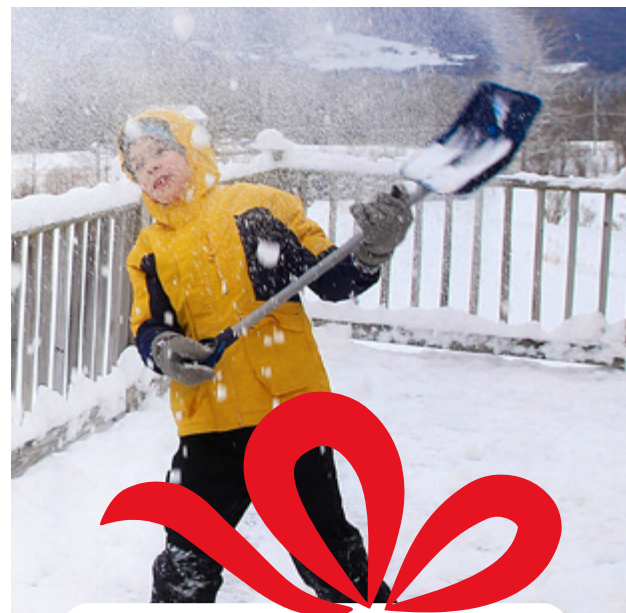
Those fiery darts come in many forms, from temptations and discouragement to sudden rushes of anger. Studying your scriptures can help protect you from all of them.



5. THE GIFT OF GOOD FOOD

On this point, many people actually do a fair job of enjoying their favorite foods at this time of year. But here are a few suggestions to gain a little more mileage out of holiday treat traditions:

- Learn favorite recipes from living relatives and ancestors; then make them as a way to connect with your family history.
- Give away treats or snacks, along with the recipe, so that your friends and family can make them again someday if they'd like.
- Ask if you can help out by cooking some of the family meals for the month.
- Invite a different friend or family member into your home for a meal. They'll enjoy the time spent together as much as the food.
- Collect or make nonperishable goodies and send them to missionaries from your ward, branch, or stake.



6. THE GIFT OF SERVICE

When we serve others, we end up feeling happier along with whomever we're helping. It's a serious win-win. King Benjamin put it this way: “When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God. . . . He doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you” (Mosiah 2:17, 24).

Whenever we follow one of God's commandments—such as the commandment to love and serve one another—He blesses us.



7. THE GIFT OF BEING A BETTER FRIEND TO YOURSELF

If you're like many people, you are your own worst critic. But guess what? That's not how God wants you to treat yourself.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, then of the First Presidency, once provided great insight on how to improve this key relationship: "Some people can't get

along with themselves. They criticize and belittle themselves all day long until they begin to hate themselves. May I suggest that you reduce the rush and take a little extra time to get to know yourself better. Walk in nature, watch a sunrise, enjoy God's creations, ponder the truths of the restored gospel, and find out what they

mean for you personally. Learn to see yourself as Heavenly Father sees you—as His precious daughter or son with divine potential."³

This Christmas season, go ahead and start treating yourself with more kindness and compassion—the way you'd treat a good friend.



8. THE GIFT OF CALM & CONNECTION

Here's a gift that pulls double duty: (1) more peace for you, and (2) lower financial cost to your family.

Try turning off all devices after dinner, even killing the lights if you're feeling adventurous. We're talking no television, phone, stereo, computer, gaming, or anything else electronic. Spend some unstructured, distraction-free time with your family or friends several days a week. Doing so will almost certainly strengthen those valuable relationships.

Plus, if you've never played a board game or read a book out loud by candlelight, you're in for a real treat.

NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, "The Savior's Four Gifts of Joy," New Era, Dec. 2019, 4.
2. M. Russell Ballard, Apr. 2008 general conference (*Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2008, 109).
3. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Of Things That Matter Most," Oct. 2010 general conference (*Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 22).



9. THE GIFT OF MORE MEANINGFUL PRAYERS

You already know the many benefits that can come with developing a closer relationship with your Heavenly Father. Here are a few ideas on how to make those prayers a little deeper.

- Try saying a few prayers consisting of nothing but gratitude.
- Pray for each member of your family by name. Think of specific problems in their lives that you can ask God to help them with.
- Practice inserting stretches of quiet waiting during and after your prayers. Remember, prayer should be two-way communication.
- Take notes during the day about people and situations you want to pray for as you encounter them.
- Decide that you will act on impressions that come when you pray.

Giving yourself gifts like these is simply choosing to live more fully the way that God has asked you to live—and enjoying the blessings that come from doing so.

So go ahead. Give yourself the best Christmas gifts ever! **NE**

Sneaky SERVICE

Written by
BRITTA OBENCHAIN
Illustrated by
CHRISTINE GROVE



"As you devote yourself to serving others, you will draw closer to Heavenly Father. Your heart will be filled with love. You will learn that service and sacrifice are ways to overcome selfishness. You will enjoy happiness that comes only from giving service to God and others."

For the Strength of Youth (2011), 33.



By Elder
Joaquin E. Costa
Of the Seventy

A BLIND DATE WITH A LATTER-DAY SAINT GIRL

Renée's commitment to live the gospel changed my life.

I didn't grow up as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but through some members I met, I learned that when someone lives a clean, pure life, the Light of Christ shines in them. They become powerful examples.

My first contact with the Church was through a friend I made in college. He was a very good member of the Church who had served a mission. I had grown up in a Catholic family, so he often tried to start conversations with me about religion. But I wasn't really interested. My friend was very clever though, and he tried again to introduce me to the Church—by setting me up on a blind date with a Latter-day Saint girl.

OUR FIRST DATE

The minute Renée and I went on our first date, I fell in love with her completely. She was so beautiful to me. I could tell there was something special about her. Soon afterward, I was ready to be serious with her and to form a family—but after several dates, she said we shouldn't date anymore because she liked me “too much” and she wanted to get married in the temple. To make things even worse for me, she soon left on a mission. After that, I decided I did *not* like the Latter-day Saints.

When she came back from her mission, our common friend invited me to a party where I could see Renée, and we started spending time together again. I had graduated from college and had a very good job, and I once again felt ready to get married. I thought I was quite a catch, so I proposed. She said no.

RELUCTANTLY MEETING WITH THE MISSIONARIES

To keep the relationship going, I accepted the invitation to listen to the missionaries. One time she came to me and, with tears in her eyes, bore testimony of the Book of Mormon and begged me to read it. She wanted me to gain a testimony of the gospel so that she could fulfill her desire to marry in the temple. I loved her and didn't want to disappoint her, so I said that I would. But even though I agreed to meet the missionaries, I initially met with them only so that I could buy some more time to convince Renée to marry me. I had no intention of joining a new religion.



After a few appointments with the missionaries, I still wasn't interested. I would sit through their lessons, but I didn't really pay attention or try to feel the Spirit. My heart was closed, because I wasn't listening to the missionaries for me; I was listening to them for Renée. Things were going nowhere, and I still couldn't convince Renée that I would be a good husband to her without being baptized. She stayed strong in her beliefs.

PERSONALIZING THE BOOK OF MORMON

Then there was a change in the missionaries. A new missionary came to teach me, and he had an idea. He had me open the scriptures to Alma 42, and he asked me if I would read the chapter aloud to them, verse by verse. But instead of just reading it word-for-word, he wanted me to read *my* name into it. I didn't really want to, but he insisted.

So I started with the first verse. "And now, Joaquin . . ." As soon as I read those words, the book started to talk to me. As I put my name in, I felt the power of a personal testimony.

The next part of Alma 42 teaches about the Fall of Adam and Eve, and finally comes the plan of redemption. When I came to verse 29 and read, "And now, Joaquin, I desire that ye should let these things trouble you no more," I started to cry like a baby. I'd never cried like that before. I knew that the Book of Mormon was true—but I couldn't even finish reading the chapter. When I finally composed myself, I told the missionaries I wanted to get baptized. Renée was so happy. I was baptized, and she finally agreed to marry me. A year later, we were sealed in the Buenos Aires Argentina Temple.

I am so grateful for Renée's commitment to live the gospel and marry in the temple. Her faithful dating commitment not only strengthened her relationship to God and the gospel, but invited me to learn about the gospel as well. I know why she was so beautiful to me: because she was so clean, loving, and pure. Because of her faithfulness, I was able to develop a personal testimony of the Book of Mormon and this Church. **NE**





PROGRESSING *TOGETHER*

By Eric B. Murdock and Richard M. Romney
Church Magazines

Many exciting changes have come to the Church thanks to inspiration received by President Russell M. Nelson. Two of these changes have had a direct impact on the Clarkson brothers from California, USA:

1. Young men can now be ordained to a priesthood office in January of the year they turn 12, 14, and 16.
2. Youth are eligible to obtain a limited-use temple recommend beginning in January of the year they turn 12.

For brothers Matthew (15), Andrew (13), and Isaac (11), these changes have brought new opportunities to serve and progress in the gospel of Jesus Christ—not just on their own but *together*.

A DAY OF FIRSTS

In January 2019, Matthew, Andrew, and Isaac all experienced a day of firsts. Andrew says: “Matthew became a priest, I became a teacher, and Isaac became a deacon at the same time. None of us were at the ages where we would have advanced before.”

“On my first day being a priest,” Matthew says, “I broke the bread for the sacrament and blessed it. I was kind of nervous. My hands were shaking a little bit when I said the prayer, but it was really amazing.”

New to the Aaronic Priesthood, Isaac now has the chance to learn from his older brothers. “It was cool because I was with my brothers and some of their friends,” Isaac says. “I felt the Spirit when I passed the sacrament for the first time.”

“I BAPTIZED MY BROTHER!”

Along with receiving the Aaronic Priesthood and passing the sacrament, Isaac also attended the temple to perform baptisms. His father baptized him first, but then came a surprise:

“I got to baptize my brother!” Matthew says.

“I never expected Matthew to baptize me,” Isaac says. “But he’s a priest now, so he could. It was really a cool experience. I could feel the Holy Ghost.”

EVERY MORNING BEFORE SEMINARY

Matthew, Andrew, and Isaac aren’t the only brothers in the Clarkson family. There are four more: Levi (9), Eli (7), Sam (4), and Titus (2), and a baby on the way.



THE CLARKSON BROTHERS HAVE BEEN BLESSED BY SERVING IN THEIR PRIESTHOOD QUORUMS AND READING THE BOOK OF MORMON.

When President Nelson invited the women of the Church in October 2018 general conference to read the Book of Mormon before the end of the year, Matthew, Andrew, and Isaac, along with their father and younger brothers, decided to offer Mom their support. “We’ll read it with you!” they said. Every morning before seminary, they woke up to read together.

A LIFE-CHANGING CHALLENGE

“When we took on this challenge, I thought it was going to take a lot of time,” Andrew says. “I worried that I wouldn’t have enough time to do everything I wanted to do, like play the guitar or hang out with my friends. But I realized that it just doesn’t work like that. The more I was into reading the Book of Mormon, the more time I actually seemed to have. I realized that if I keep up on reading the scriptures as much as possible, my life is balanced. I have more time in the day.”

Matthew was going through a hard time when the family started reading every morning. He says, “I wasn’t doing

well in school. I struggled with my personal scripture study and my relationship with Heavenly Father, and I kept it all to myself. I didn’t talk about it with my parents.”

However, as Matthew spent more time reading the Book of Mormon, the gospel began to take first priority in his life. He also put more effort into school. He worked hard and got his grades up.

“I also realized how much Heavenly Father and my parents love me and how much they help me. And I have a greater testimony of Jesus Christ. He has helped me overcome bad habits and helped me get my life headed in the right direction. I’m so glad we took President Nelson’s invitation as a family. It changed my life.”

“MAN, THAT’S A LOT!”

Accepting President Nelson’s invitation also strengthened Isaac’s testimony. “We circled the words *God, Lord, Redeemer, Savior, and Christ* every time we found them,” he says. “On the day we finished, I flipped through the Book of Mormon and saw all the words I had

circled. I thought, ‘Man, that’s a lot!’ I had never noticed how many there were. I felt much more spiritual reading the Book of Mormon. I’m glad we did it.”

LIFE IS SO MUCH BETTER

Matthew, Andrew, and Isaac are amazed that their family finished the Book of Mormon in just two months. “It usually takes us a year,” Isaac says. Together, they discovered the blessings of following the prophet’s invitation.

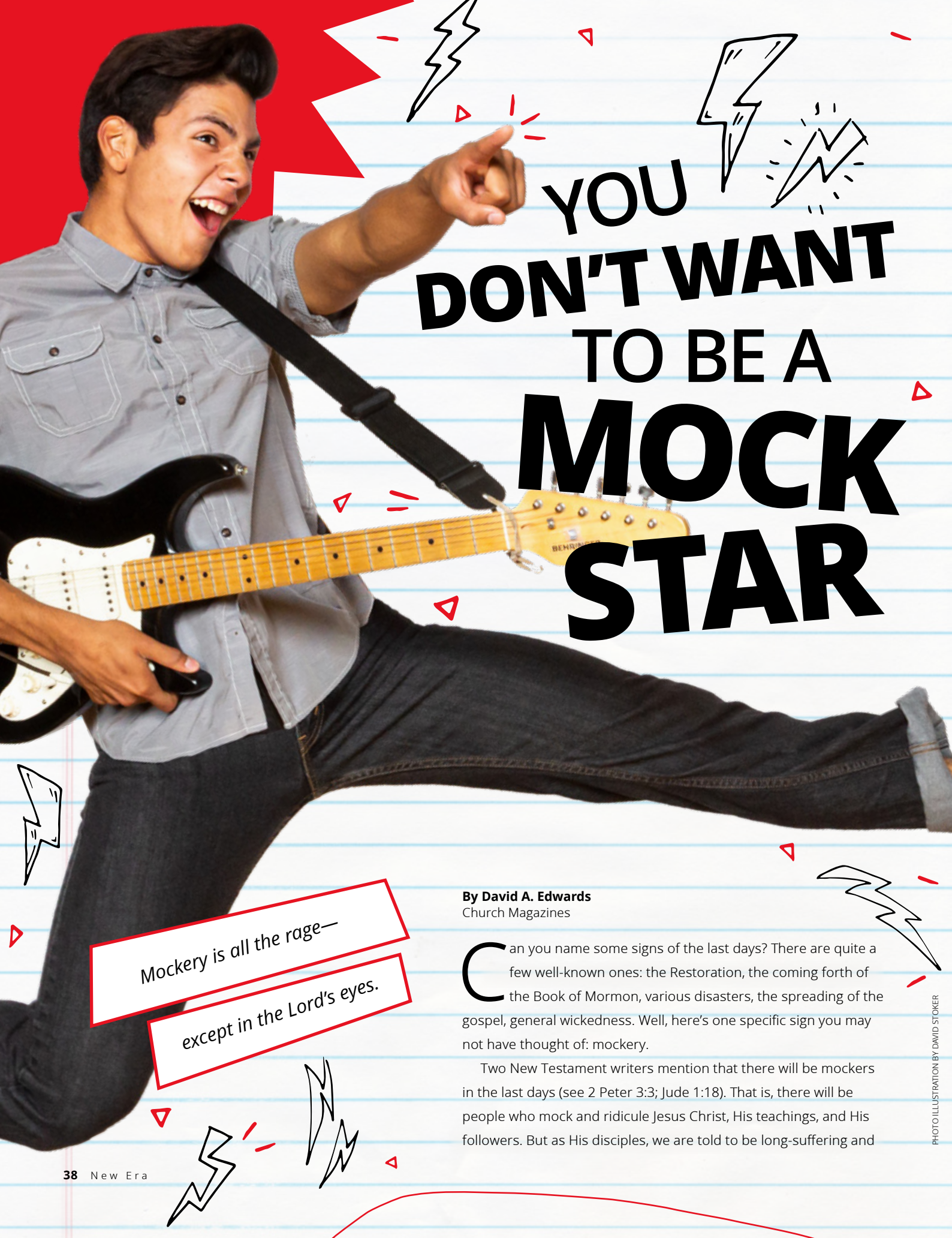
“If you do what you’re supposed to do,” Andrew says, “like building a relationship with Heavenly Father through prayer, scripture study, and staying fully active in the Church, life is so much better.”

These three brothers have helped each other progress in the gospel. They follow the prophet, who has called on members “to increase their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and in His Atonement, to . . . [make] and [keep] their covenants with God, and to strengthen . . . their families.”¹ **NE**

NOTE

1. Russell M. Nelson, “Opening Remarks,” Oct. 2018 general conference (*Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 7).





YOU DON'T WANT TO BE A MOCK STAR

Mockery is all the rage—
except in the Lord's eyes.

By David A. Edwards
Church Magazines

Can you name some signs of the last days? There are quite a few well-known ones: the Restoration, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, various disasters, the spreading of the gospel, general wickedness. Well, here's one specific sign you may not have thought of: mockery.

Two New Testament writers mention that there will be mockers in the last days (see 2 Peter 3:3; Jude 1:18). That is, there will be people who mock and ridicule Jesus Christ, His teachings, and His followers. But as His disciples, we are told to be long-suffering and

patient (see 2 Peter 3:11–15), looking forward to His coming and the fulfilling of His promises, abiding in His mercy and having compassion for others (see Jude 1:22).

Of course, mockery isn't a new thing, but it sure seems to be spreading. And even though you may never mock the things of God, the mocking lifestyle is not one for a disciple of Jesus Christ to emulate.

Mock On? No, Thanks.

To mock means to ridicule, make fun of, or taunt. It sometimes includes unflattering mimicry, like imitating someone and using a funny voice or exaggerated gestures or imagery. We've all seen it. It's everywhere. People love it, it seems.



But the Lord doesn't.

Nowhere in the scriptures is mockery approved of. In fact, it's specifically condemned. For instance, Alma the Younger taught:

"Is there one among you that doth make a mock of his brother . . . ?

"Wo unto such an one, for . . . he must repent or he cannot be saved!" (Alma 5:30–31).

Mockery is a symptom of the basic sin of pride. And the basic feeling behind

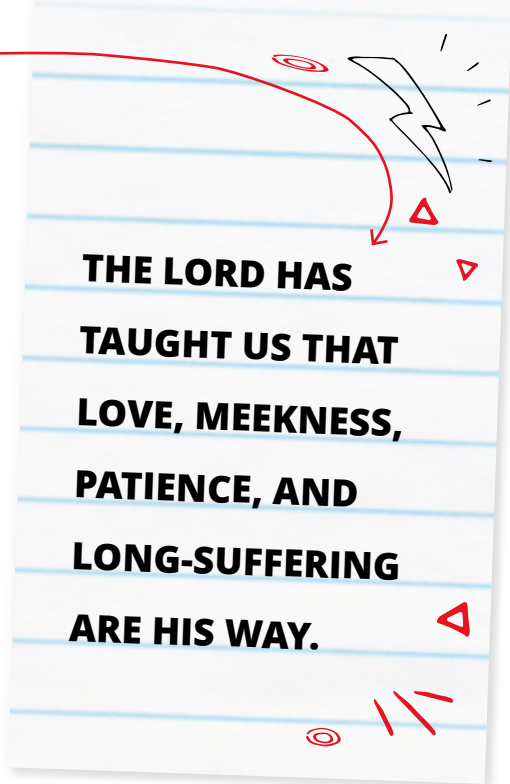
mockery is contempt—looking down on others—that is, looking down on *people*, not just disagreeing with what they say or do.

This is not what the Lord wants. He has said, "Let every man esteem his brother as himself" (Doctrine and Covenants 38:24). We are all of equal worth. Alma asked, "Will ye persist in supposing that ye are better one than another[?]" (Alma 5:54). That kind of thinking leads to mockery. Mocking people is one way people try to set themselves above others.

What's more, mockers are usually trying to get others to join them. One image from Lehi's dream really shows this. The people in the great and spacious building were "in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers" (1 Nephi 8:27). The finger-pointing draws an us-vs.-them line, saying, "You better be with us, or you'll be shamed and laughed at." Like misery, mockery loves company. That's partly because deep down, the proud are often also incredibly insecure.

Be Meek. Don't Mock.

With all of the mocking going on out there, it can be tempting to join in. It looks like they're having fun, right? Everyone's doing it, especially on the internet and on social media. We may even be tempted to fight fire with fire—to use the world's own weapon against it, to point back at those finger-pointers in the great and spacious building to see how they like a taste of their own mocking medicine.



**THE LORD HAS
TAUGHT US THAT
LOVE, MEEKNESS,
PATIENCE, AND
LONG-SUFFERING
ARE HIS WAY.**

But again, that's not the Lord's way.

"Reville not against those that revile" (Doctrine and Covenants 31:9).

"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

That's a much higher standard than the world's standard, which seems to say, "Mock everyone and everything that's different from you in any way."

It can be hard to endure others' mockery and not respond with mockery, because our culture would have us believe that the cleverest, most hurtful mockery wins the contest for people's attention and respect. But that's not so. The Lord has taught us—and shown us—that love, meekness, patience, and long-suffering are His way.

If we're true followers of Jesus Christ, we won't mock our brothers and sisters, because our hearts will be filled with His pure love (see Moroni 7:47–48). **NE**



YOUTH

I love the temple

because it's a place where you can truly feel the Spirit. It's a place of purity where you can really feel the love of Christ.

I had the opportunity to live in the United States for a year. After I got there, for a while I was really lonely. I missed my family and my home, but I struggled with more than just that. I didn't have a lot of friends at school, I was having a hard time with the language and culture, and I had a little trouble with the family I was living with.

Even at church I sometimes felt alone. I felt like going home. I really wanted to see my family again.

But I started to think about Jesus Christ and how He suffered for me. I prayed, and God comforted me. Where I was staying, the temple was so close—just six minutes away. So I decided to go to the temple once a week, and that really was a blessing in my life.

Things began to change. I found some good friends, and God made it possible for me to continue to the end of my time away from home. I know that I felt comfort because of Jesus Christ. He gave me help and strength, and that gave me courage. People sometimes think that the Atonement of Jesus Christ is just about repentance. But Christ is also a source of great comfort. I know I can't possibly understand everything He endured, but He understands me.

Yona C., 17, France



Atticus P., 13,
Utah, USA

I love playing soccer and making stop-motion videos. Last summer, I turned 11 and was so excited that I could be ordained to the priesthood in a year. I decided to prepare. I became more sensitive to the Spirit and repented regularly. Soon after, President Nelson announced changes that meant I could be ordained before I turned 12! I was grateful I had prepared so that I could be ordained at the beginning of this year.



Laura P., 18,
Philippines

I have a blog where I write about modest fashion and style, because it can be challenging to dress modestly in a world where modesty is unpopular. I used to rely on my parents' testimonies. I didn't have my own until I was a young woman and started attending seminary. I found a desire to read the scriptures, and that's when my faith began to grow. Now I feel in my heart for myself that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTINA SMITH

FUN STOP

Game within a Game

Merry Christmas! Here's a little bonus gift to fill your days with constant wonder and merriment—or at least to pass the time on those long drives to Grandma's house.

The rules for "Layered Tic-Tac-Toe" are simple. Like regular tic-tac-toe (or noughts and crosses, if you prefer), you're trying to connect three X's or O's in a row—vertically, horizontally, or diagonally.

When you connect three, write a large X or O to claim one of the nine boards. Then, like the classic game, you win by connecting three boards vertically, horizontally, or diagonally.

But here's a delicious twist that adds all manner of strategic options: your move within a board dictates which board your opponent must play in during their next turn. If you place an X in a bottom left square, the other player must now play within the bottom left board. Opportunities for strategy truly abound with this approach.

In other words, holiday road trips will never be the same!



KEVIN BECKSTROM

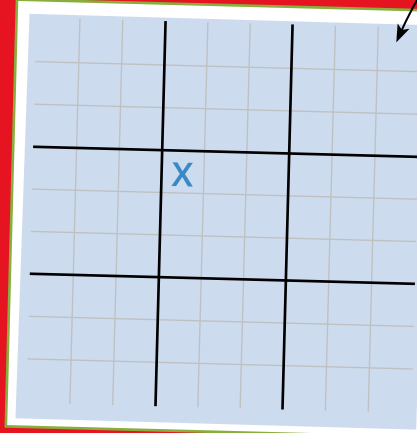
RULES SUMMARY

1. Draw a large tic-tac-toe grid with thick lines.
2. Draw individual tic-tac-toe grids inside each of the nine larger boards. Use thinner lines.
3. First player places an X anywhere on the global board.
4. Beginning with the second move, whichever small square on the local board the previous player chose becomes the corresponding global board the next player must play in.
5. Three marks in a row lets a player claim a board. Three boards in a row—vertically, horizontally, or diagonally—wins the game.

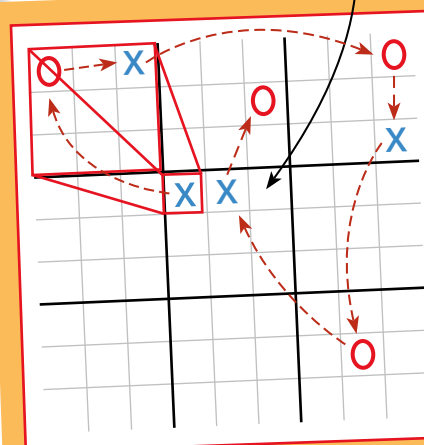
LAYERED TIC TAC TOE

Global Board

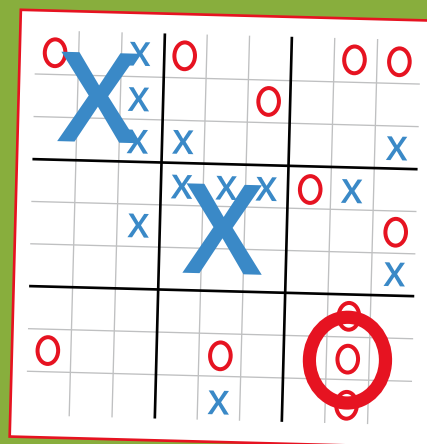
Local Board



Player 1 places an X anywhere on the global board.



On the next turn, the 2nd player must place an O somewhere in the corresponding local board.



Place a large X or O after winning one of the nine local boards.



SUMMER BIRD

Seek and Ye Shall Find

Find the following Christmas objects hidden in the dove.

- | | | |
|---------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| 10 coins | 10 santa hats | 10 holly berries |
| 3 candles | 29 presents | 3 pieces of ribbon candy |
| bag of gold | 3 crowns | 5 Christmas puddings |
| box of frankincense | 3 kings | Joseph |
| box of myrrh | 3 camels | Mary |
| 20 angels | 8 shepherds | Baby Jesus |
| 41 trees | 14 sheep | |
| 2 stars | 5 holly leaves | |



VAL CHADWICK BAGLEY



ILLUSTRATION BY JOSH TALBOT

How do I decide whether to serve a mission?

"We affirm that missionary work is a priesthood duty—and we encourage all young men who are worthy and who are physically able and mentally capable to respond to the call to serve. Many young women also serve, but they are not under the same mandate to serve as are the young men. We assure the young sisters of the Church, however, that they make a valuable contribution as missionaries."

President Thomas S. Monson (1927–2018), "Welcome to Conference," Oct. 2012 general conference (*Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2012, 5).



Be Willing to Sincerely Ask

Missions really aren't for everyone, but what is for everyone is honestly finding out if a mission is for you!

Sometimes we don't want to go, so we just don't even ask or we ask without giving the Spirit room to really answer. We must ask in sincerity! If you find your answer through honest seeking, you will have peace and confidence in whatever the Lord tells you to do—to stay or to go.

Ali B., 22, Utah, USA



Repent

One of the things that helped me decide to serve a mission was to learn about and experience true repentance.

As I studied about the Savior's Atonement and applied what I learned in my life, I felt indescribable peace. As I felt this, I wanted others to feel the same peace.

Elder Berdejo, 21, Arequipa, Peru

Look to Your Family and Patriarchal Blessing

My family and my patriarchal blessing helped me decide. My sister is currently serving a mission, and her example and testimony of missionary work has inspired me. My desire to serve also became stronger when I received my patriarchal blessing, which said I would be able to share the gospel with others.

Juliana P., 16, Nevada, USA

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



Remember He Will Answer You

Before I came on a mission, I struggled to know whether I should go.

Eventually I decided to ask Heavenly Father, who truly knows everything we go through and knows if we need to serve a mission. Through prayer I received a confirmation that I needed to go. I know that Heavenly Father answers prayers. Go to Him with your questions, and He will answer you according to your faith and His will and timing.

Sister Terpend, 21, Jamaica Kingston Mission

Stay in Touch with the Lord

Heavenly Father can give you your answer through the scriptures, a General Authority's message, or even just from someone else's testimony. So you can get your inspiration from just staying in touch with the Lord.

Samuel H., 14, Utah, USA

What Do You Think?

"I have some friends who aren't good influences, but we're close and I still want to be friends with them. What should I do?"

Send your answer and photo by January 15, 2020. Go to newera.ChurchofJesusChrist.org, click "Submit Your Work." Sign in with your Church Account and then select "New Era" under "Choose Magazine." Click "Add File" to select your file and photos, and then click "Submit" to upload and send us your file. **OR** email it to us at newera@ChurchofJesusChrist.org.

Responses may be edited for length or clarity.



What can help me understand the book of Revelation?

Because of modern prophets, we have some helps for understanding the book of Revelation. Joseph Smith gave us some important keys to this book. For instance:

- *Doctrine and Covenants 77*. This revelation is in a question-and-answer format and gives us important insights into the book of Revelation. It explains various elements of chapters 4–11 and emphasizes how they relate to the work of the Lord in the latter days.
- *The Joseph Smith Translation*. There are many verses in the book of Revelation that Joseph Smith helped clarify through the process of his inspired translation of the Bible. You can find these in the study helps at scriptures.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.

Joseph Smith helped us see that the book of Revelation is not the unknowable mystery some think it to be. And he also taught us that if God has not given an interpretation of a vision, we're not going to be held accountable for knowing it (see *History of the Church*, 5:343). He helped us to see that the main focus of the book is Jesus Christ—the hope we have through Him to overcome the world and return to Heavenly Father.

See also Guide to the Scriptures, "Revelation of John"; and *Come, Follow Me—For Individuals and Families: New Testament 2019* chapters on the book of Revelation.



STUCK IN THE AIRPORT

IT WAS DECEMBER 22, and after finishing my two-year mission in Guatemala, I was finally coming home. The only gift I wanted that Christmas was to see my family—in person—and hug my parents.

But as my layover flight landed in Chicago, Illinois, USA, things got a little crazy. A blizzard hit that part of the country and flights were getting canceled left and right.

I raced to my next gate only to find out I wasn't getting home anytime soon.

It was nearly Christmas and I was stuck in the airport. No cell phone, no place to go but hard

"The Savior knows and loves you. He knows your name as you know His. He knows your troubles. He has experienced them."

President Henry B. Eyring of the First Presidency, "Try, Try, Try," Oct. 2018 general conference (*Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 93).

airport seats, and my family wondering when I'd get there. I was really disappointed.

But then my luck changed. After only six hours, I boarded a plane and got home to Kentucky, USA. It wasn't that long of a delay after all!

As Christmas came and I thought about the Savior, Jesus Christ, I realized something really important. Yes, He suffered for my sins, but He also took upon Himself my pains, my sorrows, and even my small disappointments like being stuck in an airport for a few hours.

In the big scheme of things, getting home a little late for Christmas wasn't that big of a deal, and not just because some people endure far worse things. It was also because the Savior had already paved a way for me to find eternal peace, even from my small frustrations.

And that really is the sweetest Christmas gift.

Joshua P., Utah, USA



How Can I Show Gratitude for the Savior's Atonement?

- 1. Say prayers of thanks.** Grateful prayers show that we understand the importance of the Savior's sacrifice (see Psalm 50:14–15; Mosiah 2:19–22).
- 2. Study His word.** Learning about Jesus Christ through the scriptures helps us recognize the blessings of His Atonement.
- 3. Repent of our sins.** There is joy in heaven when a soul repents (see Luke 15:7).
- 4. Keep the Sabbath day holy.** The Sabbath day is reserved so that we can "pay [our] devotions unto the Most High" (Doctrine and Covenants 59:9–10).
- 5. Reverently partake of the sacrament.** This is the way He has asked us to remember His sacrifice (see 3 Nephi 18:6–7).

A NEW TRADITION

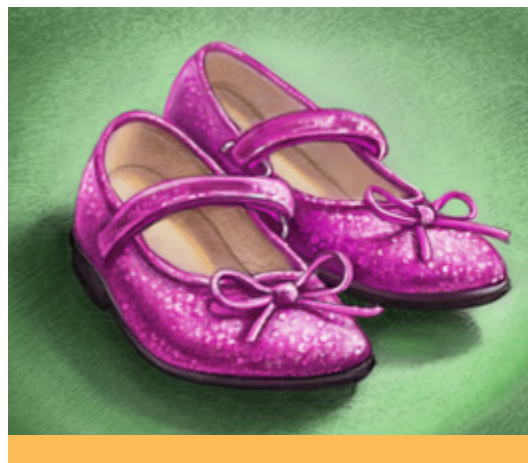
I WAS 12 YEARS OLD when my dad was called to serve as a mission president in Mexico. It was fun to be in a new country, but I was also sad to leave so many friends and family members, especially when Christmas came around.

In my homeland of Argentina, all of my extended family would gather together for Christmas, and I was sad that we wouldn't get to be there. But I decided I was going to be open to creating new traditions and memories. After all, I love new adventures.

Because my sister and I were on Christmas holiday, we accompanied my parents on a tour of the mission. Seeing all the missionaries, I realized I wasn't the only one who was going to be celebrating Christmas far away from home and family. That year, I learned that no matter where we are, the most important thing to do on Christmas is remember our Savior. The missionaries were dedicating their time to the Lord, and I thought that was one of the best things to be doing during this time of the year.

For the next three years, my family created new traditions, and my favorite one soon became spending Christmas Eve with the missionaries. We would sing and listen to Christmas songs while we made blankets to give to people in need. Our night was based on service and remembering Jesus Christ. I will never forget spending Christmas in Mexico and how close I felt to God.

Sofia S., Buenos Aires, Argentina



BETTER THAN A NEW ALBUM

ONE DAY around Christmas, I was with my dad at the store. My favorite singer's new album had just come out, and I begged him to buy it for me. Dad explained that he and Mom had already bought presents and didn't have a lot of extra money to spend. Still, I was upset I couldn't get the album.

When we reached the check-out line, I noticed a mother in front of us trying to buy some sparkly shoes for her little girl. She didn't have enough money to pay for them, and she left looking very sad as her daughter began to cry.

When it was our turn to check out, I was surprised when Dad picked up the sparkly shoes and bought them. He ran to the parking lot to give them to the mother. Through her tears, she thanked him and said the shoes would be her daughter's only Christmas present that year. She had prayed she might find a way to buy them.

The album suddenly didn't seem so important to me. I was glad my dad followed the Spirit and helped someone else, even though it was a sacrifice. That day, I learned that giving is better than receiving.

Makenna L., Utah, USA



Jesus Christ's Mission to Show God's Love

By Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

From an October 2003 general conference address.

Of the many magnificent purposes served in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, one great aspect of that mission often goes uncelebrated.

His followers did not understand it fully at the time, and many in modern Christianity do not grasp it now, but the Savior Himself spoke of it repeatedly and emphatically. It is the grand truth that in all that Jesus came to say and do, including and especially in His atoning suffering and sacrifice, He was showing us who and what God our Eternal Father is like, how completely devoted He is to His children in every age and nation. In word and in deed, Jesus was trying to reveal and make personal to us the true nature of His Father, our Father in Heaven.

Jesus came to plead with man to love their Heavenly Father as He has always and will always love them. The plan of God, the power of God, the holiness of God, yes, even the anger and the judgment of God they had occasion to understand. But the love of God, the profound depth of His devotion to His children, they still did not fully know—until Christ came.

So feeding the hungry, healing the sick, rebuking hypocrisy, pleading for faith—this was Christ showing us the way of the Father, He who is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, long-suffering and full of goodness.”¹ In His life and especially in His death, Christ was declaring, “This is *God’s* compassion I am showing you, as well as that of my own.”

I bear personal witness of a personal, living God, who knows our names, hears and answers prayers, and cherishes us eternally as children of His spirit. I testify that amidst the wondrously complex tasks inherent in the universe, He seeks our individual happiness and safety above all other godly concerns.

In the spirit of the holy apostleship, I say as did one who held this office anciently: “Herein [then] is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 John 4:10–11)—and to love Him forever. **NE**

NOTE

1. *Lectures on Faith* (1985), 42.

Elder Holland taught that Jesus showed us the way of the Father by showing love in all He said and did. He has invited us to love God and to love one another.

HOW CAN YOU SHOW LOVE?

YOU CAN SHARE YOUR LUNCH WITH A FRIEND WHO FORGOT THEIRS.



CHRIST FED THE HUNGRY.



CHRIST HEALED THE SICK.



YOU CAN VISIT AND COMFORT SOMEONE WHO IS SICK OR INJURED.



CHRIST TAUGHT THE TRUTH.



YOU CAN TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO BEAR YOUR TESTIMONY.



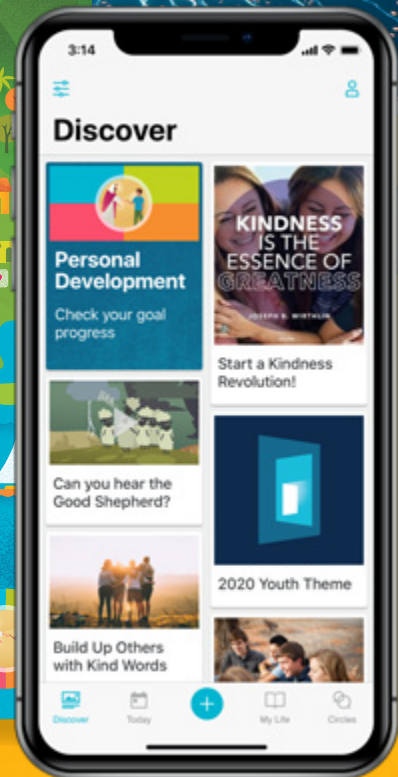
CHRIST PLEADS FOR US TO HAVE FAITH.



YOU CAN INVITE A FRIEND TO CHURCH.



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