

THE **New Era**

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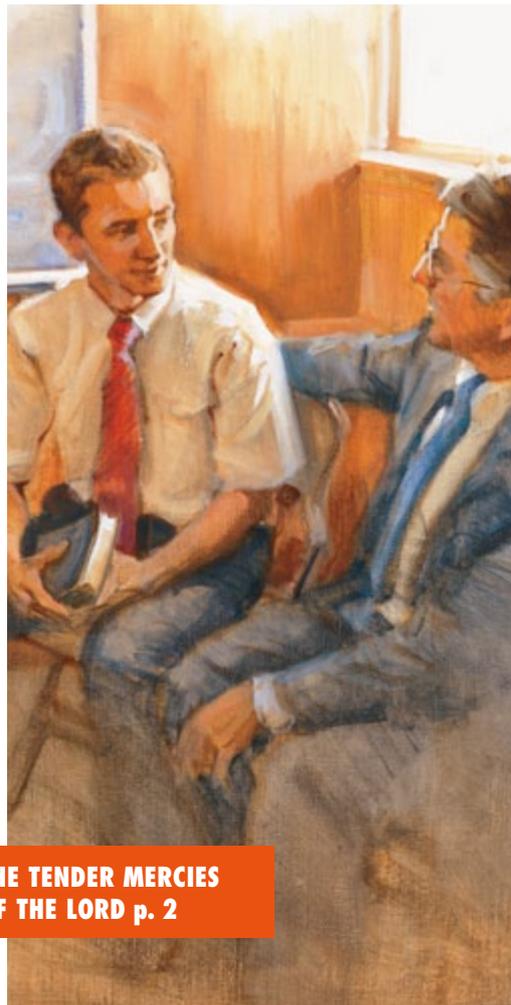
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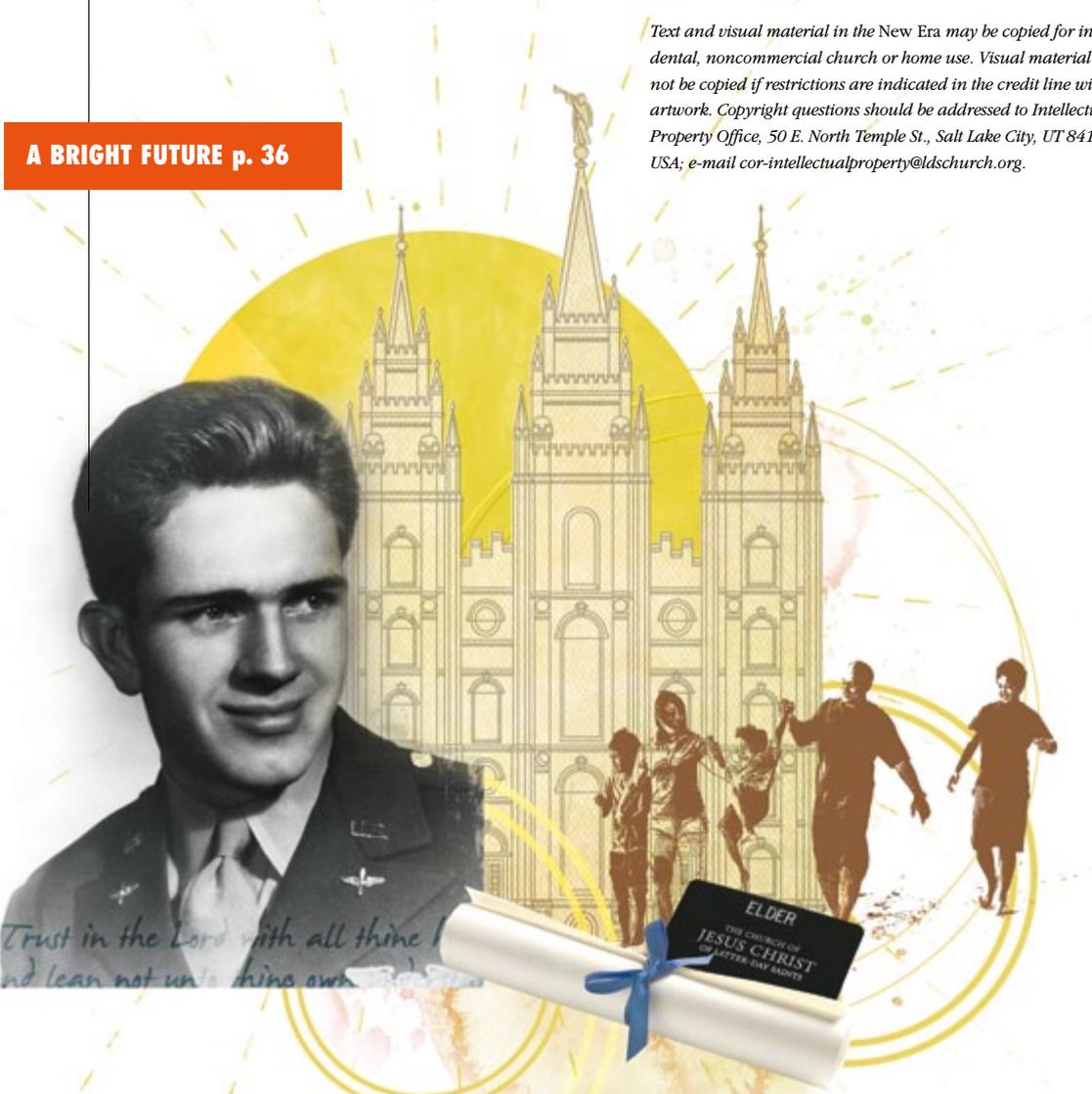
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The Tender Mercies of the Lord



**By Elder
David A. Bednar**
Of the Quorum of the
Twelve Apostles

Faithfulness and obedience enable us to receive these important gifts and, frequently, the Lord's timing helps us to recognize them.

I have reflected frequently upon this verse from the Book of Mormon: “But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (1 Nephi 1:20).

I testify that the tender mercies of the Lord are real and that they do not occur randomly or merely by coincidence. Often, the Lord's timing of His tender mercies helps us to both discern and acknowledge them.

What Are the Tender Mercies of the Lord?

The Lord's tender mercies are the very personal and individualized blessings, strength, protection, assurances, guidance, loving-kindnesses, consolation, support, and spiritual gifts which we receive from and because of and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Truly, the Lord suits “his mercies according to the conditions of the children of men” (D&C 46:15).

Recall how the Savior instructed His Apostles that He would not leave them comfortless. Not only would He send “another

Comforter” (John 14:16), even the Holy Ghost, but the Savior said that He would come to them (see John 14:18). Let me suggest that one of the ways whereby the Savior comes to each of us is through His abundant and tender mercies. For instance, as you and I face challenges and tests in our lives, the gift of faith and an appropriate sense of personal confidence that reaches beyond our own capacity are two examples of the tender mercies of the Lord. Repentance and forgiveness of sins and peace of conscience are examples of the tender mercies of the Lord. And the persistence and the fortitude that enable us to press forward with cheerfulness through physical limitations and spiritual difficulties are examples of the tender mercies of the Lord.

In a recent stake conference, the Lord's tender mercies were evident in the touching testimony of a young wife and mother of four whose husband was slain in Iraq in December of 2003. This stalwart sister recounted how, after being notified of her husband's death, she received his Christmas card and message. In the midst of the abrupt reality of a dramatically altered life came to this good sister a timely and tender reminder that indeed families can be together forever. With permission I quote from that Christmas card:

“To the best family in the world! Have a great time together and remember the true



To this sister came a most needed spiritual reassurance and witness. It is often the Lord's timing that enables us to recognize and treasure His tender mercies.

meaning of Christmas! The Lord has made it possible for us to be together forever. So even when we are apart, we will still be together as a family.

“God bless and keep y'all safe and grant this Christmas to be our gift of love from us to Him above!!!

“All my love, Daddy and your loving husband!”

Clearly, the husband's reference to being apart in his Christmas greeting referred to the separation caused by his military assignment. But to this sister, as a voice from the dust from a departed eternal companion and father, came a most needed spiritual reassurance and witness. As I indicated earlier, the Lord's tender mercies do not occur randomly or merely by coincidence. Faithfulness, obedience, and humility invite tender mercies into our lives, and it is often the Lord's timing that enables us to recognize and treasure these important blessings.

Some time ago I spoke with a priesthood leader who was prompted to memorize the names of all of the youth ages 13 to 21 in his stake. Using snapshots of the young men and women, he created flash cards that he reviewed while traveling on business and at other times. This priesthood leader quickly learned all of the names of the youth.

One night the priesthood leader had a dream about one of the young men whom he knew only from a picture. In the dream he saw the young man dressed in a white shirt and wearing a missionary name tag. With a companion seated at his side, the young man was teaching a family. The young man held the Book of Mormon in his hand, and he looked as if he were testifying of the truthfulness of the book. The priesthood leader then awoke from his dream.

At an ensuing priesthood gathering, the



The Lord's tender mercies do not occur randomly or merely by coincidence. Faithfulness and obedience enable us to receive these important gifts.

leader approached the young man he had seen in his dream and asked to talk with him for a few minutes. After a brief introduction, the leader called the young man by name and said: "I am not a dreamer. I have never had a dream about a single member of this stake, except for you. I am going to tell you about my dream, and then I would like you to help me understand what it means."

The priesthood leader recounted the dream and asked the young man about its meaning. Choking with emotion, the young man simply replied, "It means God knows who I am." The remainder of the conversation between this young man and his priesthood leader was most meaningful, and they agreed to meet and counsel together from

time to time during the following months.

That young man received the Lord's tender mercies through an inspired priesthood leader. I repeat again, the Lord's tender mercies do not occur randomly or merely by coincidence. Faithfulness and obedience enable us to receive these important gifts and, frequently, the Lord's timing helps us to recognize them.

We should not underestimate or overlook the power of the Lord's tender mercies. The simpleness, the sweetness, and the constancy of the tender mercies of the Lord will do much to fortify and protect us in the troubled times in which we do now and will yet live. When words cannot provide the solace we need or express the joy we feel, when it is simply futile to attempt to explain that which is unexplainable, when logic and reason cannot yield adequate understanding about the injustices and inequities of life, when mortal experience and evaluation are insufficient to produce a desired outcome, and when it seems that perhaps we are so totally alone, truly we are blessed by the tender mercies of the Lord and made mighty even unto the power of deliverance (see 1 Nephi 1:20).

Whom Has the Lord Chosen to Receive His Tender Mercies?

The word *chosen* in 1 Nephi 1:20 is central to understanding the concept of the Lord's tender mercies. The dictionary indicates that *chosen* suggests one who is selected, taken by preference, or picked out. It also can be used to refer to the elect or chosen of God.¹

Some individuals who hear or read this message erroneously may discount or dismiss in their personal lives the availability of the tender mercies of the Lord, believing that "I

certainly am not one who has been or ever will be chosen.” We may falsely think that such blessings and gifts are reserved for other people who appear to be more righteous or who serve in visible Church callings. I testify that the tender mercies of the Lord are available to all of us and that the Redeemer of Israel is eager to bestow such gifts upon us.

To be or to become chosen is not an exclusive status conferred upon us. Rather, you and I ultimately determine if we are chosen. Please note the use of the word *chosen* in the following verses:

“Behold, there are many called, but few are *chosen*. And why are they not *chosen*?

“Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men” (D&C 121:34–35; emphasis added).

I believe the implication of these verses is quite straightforward. God does not have a list of favorites to which we must hope our names will someday be added. He does not limit “the chosen” to a restricted few. Rather, it is *our* hearts and *our* aspirations and *our* obedience which definitively determine whether we are counted as one of God’s chosen.

Enoch was instructed by the Lord on this very point of doctrine. Please note the use of the word *choose* in these verses:

“Behold these thy brethren; they are the workmanship of mine own hands, and I gave unto them their knowledge, in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency;

“And unto thy brethren have I said, and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should *choose* me, their Father” (Moses 7:32–33; emphasis added).

As we learn in these scriptures, the fundamental purposes for the gift of agency were to love one another and to choose God. Thus we become God’s chosen and invite His tender mercies as we use our agency to choose God.

One of the most well-known and frequently cited passages of scripture is found in Moses 1:39. This verse clearly and concisely describes the work of the Eternal

Father: “For behold, this is *my work* and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (emphasis added).

A companion scripture found in the Doctrine and Covenants describes with equal clarity and conciseness our primary work as the sons and daughters of the Eternal Father. Interestingly, this verse does not seem to be as well known and is not quoted with great frequency. “Behold, this is *your work*, to keep my commandments, yea, with all your might, mind and strength” (D&C 11:20; emphasis added).

Thus, the Father’s work is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of His children. Our work is to keep His commandments with all of our might, mind, and strength—and we thereby become chosen and, through the Holy Ghost, receive and recognize the tender mercies of the Lord in our daily lives.

We are blessed to receive inspired counsel from the leaders of the Savior’s Church—timely counsel for our day and for our circumstances and for our challenges. We are instructed, lifted, edified, called to repentance, and strengthened. Like you, I am eager to act upon the reminders, counsel, and personal inspiration with which we are blessed. Truly, “the Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works” (Psalm 145:9).

I am thankful for the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ through the Prophet Joseph Smith and for the knowledge we have today about the Lord’s tender mercies. Our desires, faithfulness, and obedience invite and help us to discern His mercies in our lives. As one of His servants, I declare my witness that Jesus is the Christ, our Redeemer and our Savior. I know that He lives and that His tender mercies are available to all of us. Each of us can have eyes to see clearly and ears to hear distinctly the tender mercies of the Lord as they strengthen and assist us in these latter days. May our hearts always be filled with gratitude for His abundant and tender mercies. **NE**

From an April 2005 general conference talk.

NOTE

1. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, second ed. (1989), “Chosen.”

Recognizing Tender Mercies

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said: “The Lord’s tender mercies are the very personal and individualized blessings, strength, protection, assurances, guidance, loving-kindnesses, consolation, support, and spiritual gifts which we receive from and because of and through the Lord Jesus Christ” (“The Tender Mercies of the Lord,” *New Era*, Feb. 2012, 2).

The following are some ideas to get you thinking about tender mercies. Write about one or more of these ideas, or think of other topics that come to mind. You can write on this sheet and then place it in your journal, or just write in your journal directly. To download more sheets like this one, visit lds.org/go/22A. **NE**

Grab a pen and record the special blessings you’ve received.

A tender mercy I saw in my family’s life: _____

A tender mercy I experienced as an answer to prayer: _____

A tender mercy I had at school: _____

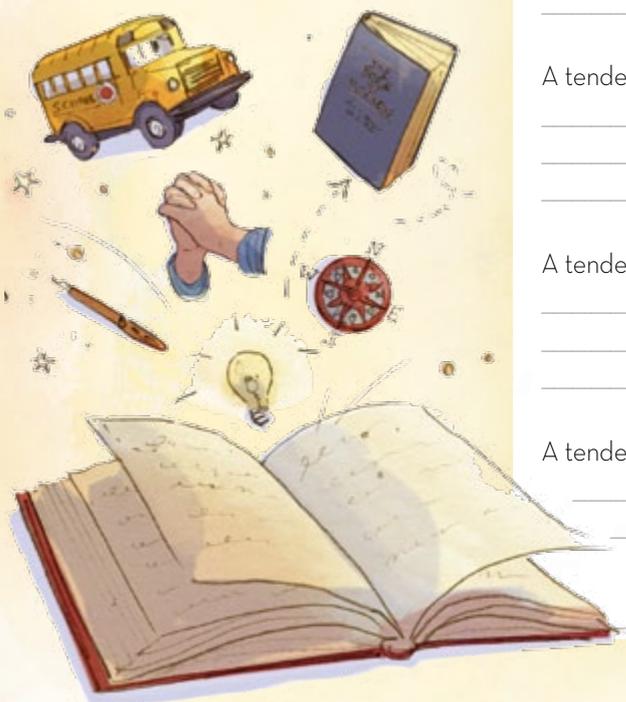
A tender mercy I had while reading the scriptures: _____

A tender mercy where I felt protection: _____

A tender mercy where I felt an assurance: _____

A tender mercy where I felt guidance: _____

A tender mercy where I felt loving-kindness: _____



By Whitney Hinckley

1000
DOLLARS,
1000

ACTS OF
Service

*A piece of paper
changed Geoff's
life and the lives of
100 other people.*



It was just a piece of paper on the ground. Geoff was on his nightly run and almost ran right past it, but something prompted him to stop and pick it up. Bending down, he saw the note, which read, "Pick me up. I'm yours!" When he opened the note, he found a big surprise. Inside was a \$100 bill and a note that read, "This is for you. Hope you have a wonderful day!"



As Geoff finished his run, he thought of all the different things he could use the money for, such as new running shoes or a nice dinner. But by the time he got home, he had thought of a better idea. Instead of using the money for himself, he would use it to bring a little joy to others.

"I figured if I blew the money all at once on myself, I would forget about it the next day," Geoff explains. "I realized what a great opportunity I had, and I wanted to make a real difference. Finding the \$100 bill really made my day. I thought that if I could split the money up and help out 100 people, it would be making the day of 100 people. That would be 100 times better than just making my day once."

101 Happy People

So, Geoff started the 101 Happy People Project. The 101st person is Geoff, because of the joy he felt when he found the money, and Geoff is finding ways to bless 100 other people.

Geoff was able to double the 100 dollars by putting it in a bank that was having a special promotion. Because of the promotion, after tithing, he had two dollars

to spend on almost every person he helped. But can two dollars really make a difference? Geoff says it can:

"I am 100 percent confident that the money involved is irrelevant.

Most of the time, knowing that you are just reaching out to comfort people or just thinking about them is exactly what people need. Two dollars is enough to get that message across. You can make someone else's day no matter how much money you have."

Using the two dollars, Geoff has done everything from leaving quarters on a bubble-gum machine to buying dollar-movie tickets for the people behind him in line. One time, Geoff saw some homeless men outside of a fast-food restaurant. "I went through the drive-through, and by the time I got my food, the men were leaving. I got out of my car and chased them half a block before I had the chance to give some food to them."

Usually Geoff likes to give anonymously because that's how the money was given to





him, but sometimes he delivers the gifts in person. He says, "Some of the people I've helped were really having a hard time, and I've been told many times, 'You just made my day!'"

An Inspiration to Others

Geoff documents his acts of service on a blog. "The reason I started my blog is not to show off or to tell everyone how much service I'm doing, because that's just kind of weird," Geoff says. "I really want to show other people how easy it can be to make a difference. Almost everyone has two dollars; everyone has five minutes to spend to bless someone."

Geoff hopes to help people understand that there are many small ways to serve the people you see every day. "Don't hesitate to help those closest to you. Doing something nice for your parents or siblings will really invite the Spirit into your home. Help others at school. I know the difference that a simple act of service makes seems small, but it can have eternal benefits. President Henry B. Eyring said, 'Never, never underestimate the spiritual value of doing temporal things well for those whom you serve'" ("The Book of Mormon Will Change Your Life," *Ensign*, Feb. 2004, 14).

Trying to make 100 people happy through service isn't just something to inspire others; it has inspired Geoff as well. "It has opened my eyes to see how easy it can be to make a difference. It has made me less selfish. I have learned a lot about what daily service means and how it can help." **NE**



EVERYDAY SERVICE

It's hard sometimes to think of ways to serve. Geoff recommends listening to the Spirit to help you know whom and how to serve. "There are no limits to the kinds of service you can give every day," he says.

Here is a list of simple ways you can serve every day:

- ☺ Smile.
- ☺ Hold a door open for someone.
- ☺ Listen to a friend.
- ☺ Pick up litter.
- ☺ Compliment someone.
- ☺ Share your talents.
- ☺ Invite someone to sit with you at lunch.
- ☺ Give your extra clothes, books, movies, and other items to charity.
- ☺ Wash the dishes without being asked.
- ☺ Write a note to a friend.



STANDING

By Catherine Hall

Being a youth in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints today means we will hear that we must be different from our peers. We are reminded that we must stand out for choosing the right. We are also reminded that we are different from our peers in the media and at school. At school we hear people talk casually about the things we hold dear to us.

I often heard about how youth in the Church must stand up for what is right and be different, but I never really gave it a second thought. I just agreed and went on with life, hoping I wouldn't have to be *too* different from my peers. I nervously anticipated moments when my classmates or friends would stare at me in disbelief because they simply didn't understand why I wouldn't do certain things.

It wasn't until the end of my eighth grade year that I realized I was very different from my classmates and even my best friends, who were nonmembers. I was faced with a situation that really bothered me. In class we were debating some controversial topics, including abortion. When I shared my thoughts, I was surprised to see my moral values ripped to pieces. Something I feel is so precious—physical intimacy, something that

ILLUSTRATION BY BRYAN BEACH

OUT

should be reserved for marriage—was simply a fun pas-time to other people. I walked out of the classroom that day knowing that things were going to be very different.

In the same class, I was faced with another moment that would force me to act on all of the things I had been taught since Primary. My teacher was in the front of the class, talking about a snippet of a movie we were about to watch. Some of my classmates suggested that we watch the whole movie. My teacher shook her head and nonchalantly explained that she couldn't because the movie had a mature rating. I was stunned when I first heard this. I never thought this would happen.

I sat in my chair, thinking about what I should do. A thought kept coming into my head: We have been asked not to watch offensive movies. I tried to rationalize that because I was in school, the part of the movie we were going to watch would be appropriate. But the thought of not watching offensive movies trumped my rationalizations.

I calmly raised my hand, and in front of my whole class, I asked to sit outside of class while the movie played. I felt everyone's eyes on me as I pushed in my chair and grabbed my book. I saw the looks on their faces; they simply didn't understand.

While sitting in the hallway, I felt very happy. I knew I had done the right thing, no matter what my peers or teacher said. I felt stronger too. I knew I didn't have to watch an inappropriate movie clip just because my teacher had presented it to us.

My classmates didn't understand my standards, but that didn't lessen the importance of those standards to me.

Since then, I have often thought about the Mormonad hanging up in my room. It reads, "Adversity Can Make You Strong." I believe that when we are faced with moments of adversity and we stand up to them, we are made stronger than if we had sat down and let them happen.

This is an inner strength that is found through our Savior. If we look to Him in our times of difficulty, we will be made strong. Our faith in Him can help us face adversity unashamed. We must "be strong and of a good courage" (Joshua 1:9) and look to our Heavenly Father and our Savior for everything; with all that, our adversities will make us stronger. **NE**

See the Mormonad
Find the "Adversity
Can Make You Strong"
Mormonad online by
going to lds.org/go/22B.





Saane (right) and Amelia (center) celebrate with their sister Manatu on the day of her temple marriage.

The beauty and power of the Mapu ‘a Vaea blowholes in Tonga is amazing. As the surf crashes into this three-mile (4.8 km) stretch of coastline on the island of Tongatapu, it enters hundreds of openings in the volcanic rock that shoot the water up as high as 60 feet (18 m) into the air.

Saane F., age 16, loves the beauty of the place—the way the sun and the spray dance together with every wave.

But nature’s power can be dangerous as well as beautiful. Visitors who wander too close, whether out of curiosity or because of the thrill, have been caught off guard by the power

of the waves and, unable to escape the current, pulled out to sea.

The dangerous side of Mapu ‘a Vaea offers a spiritual warning about the power of temptation—particularly with regard to sexual purity. The power to create life is beautiful when the proper boundaries are observed, but if we allow temptation to lure us from safe ground, we can be swept away.

Understanding Why Chastity Matters

On the day her sister was married in the Nuku‘alofa Tonga Temple, Saane could see her happiness. “It

DON'T BE **SWEPT AWAY**

A Tongan teenager talks about good reasons for guardrails.



Watch a related video, “Chastity: What Are the Limits?” at lds.org/go/22C.

To view a video and additional photos of Mapu ‘a Vaea, visit lds.org/go/22D.

made me want to be worthy to be married there someday,” Saane says.

However, Satan will try to keep that from happening for any of us. He has already convinced many that sexual intimacy outside of marriage is acceptable and without consequences. But misusing the power God has provided to create life is a serious sin that can cause spiritual, emotional, and physical harm.¹

“Satan is trying so hard to stop us from returning home to our Heavenly Father,” Saane says. “If I’m not careful to keep the law of chastity, I may lose the opportunity to be married in the temple.”

Honoring God’s Guardrails

To help visitors enjoy the beauty of Mapu ‘a Vaea safely, the Tongan government has placed guardrails in certain areas.

Saane believes Heavenly Father has provided guardrails—or standards—to keep us from falling to temptation. Church leaders, the scriptures, and *For the Strength of Youth* all set clear boundaries that, if observed, will help keep us safe. Above all, following the



promptings of the Holy Ghost will keep us on safe ground.

“Some people ignore the Lord’s guardrails,” she says. “They don’t understand the consequences, or they think they can avoid them. Leaping from the cliff may feel like flying, but the ground is always there.”

Setting Our Own Guardrails

In matters of sexual purity, seeing how far we can lean over the guardrail is a sure way to fall. The closer we allow ourselves to get to inappropriate sexual intimacy, the more difficult it becomes to resist its enticement.

Because the Church can’t spell out how to act in every situation, Saane has created her own guardrails by deciding ahead of time how to apply gospel standards to the circumstances she is likely to face.

She has created a poster that lists nine promises to herself and to her Heavenly Father that act as her personal guardrails, including the kind of people she will date, clothing she will wear, and language she will use. Other personal guardrails could include deciding how to avoid viewing,

reading, or listening to anything that can arouse sexual feelings.²

“Setting my standards high will help keep me safe,” Saane says.

Returning to Safe Ground

Like those who get caught in the rushing waters at Mapu ‘a Vaea, those who give in to temptation are in a dangerous place. The powerful grasp of sexual sin can be difficult to escape—but it is possible with the help of the Savior and His servants.

In the end, whether one has never left safe ground or has made the difficult way back to it, staying there is the goal. Honoring the Lord’s guardrails and understanding how to apply them to our personal circumstances will prepare us to enjoy the beautiful power God has granted us—at the appropriate time and in the appropriate way.

“Above all else, I am looking forward to being married in the temple,” Saane says. “I know that if I keep the commandments, including the law of chastity, I will be worthy to receive the blessings I’m dreaming of.” **NE**

NOTES
 1. See *True to the Faith* (2004), 29–30.
 2. See *True to the Faith*, 32.



A GLIMPSE OF CELESTIAL JOY

“Let there be a temple marriage in your future. There is no scene so sweet, no time so sacred. . . . Then and there you glimpse celestial joy. Be alert; do not permit temptation to rob you of this blessing.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “Be Thou an Example,” *Ensign*, May 2005, 113.

**“My parents
are divorced.
Sometimes I get
advice from
one of them that
contradicts advice
from the other.
What do I do?”**

This is a tough situation. Divorce is hard enough on a family. Now you have the challenge of honoring but not pleasing both of your parents.

If possible, talk to them about your concerns. They might decide to be unified for your sake. If they don't want to change their minds, you could follow the advice of the parent who feels strongest about it—as long as he or she isn't asking you to break the commandments.

If the advice they give you is good but different—like trying out for the school choir or the volleyball team—then make a prayerful decision after hearing them out. Heavenly Father will guide you through the Holy Ghost. If one parent questions you, you can kindly explain that you prayed and have decided what you feel is best.

If one parent advises you to do something wrong, then you need to figure out a way to choose the right. For example, if your father asks you to stay home from church to spend time with him, you could try to work out a situation in which you can attend church and then spend time with him. Remember that choosing the right is one way to bring honor to your parents. **NE**

Pray for Guidance



I have experienced the same problem. Whenever I got conflicting advice, I went down on my knees and prayed to my Heavenly Father to know which pieces of advice to take into consideration, just as the Prophet Joseph Smith did to know which of all the sects was true. Each time the answers came loud and clear, and I knew perfectly the right advice to follow.

Anita O., 17, Western, Ghana

Learn New Coping Skills

It may seem hard, but it is possible to cope with divorce—and have a good family life. A life-changing event like a divorce can put people through some tough times, but it can also help them learn about their strengths and put in place some new coping skills. If you need help figuring out how to cope, ask a favorite relative or your school counselor or your bishop. And if you find it hard to talk to your parents, try writing them a letter.

James P., 17, Cebu, Philippines

Ask Your Bishop



You can ask your bishop or branch president for advice. He will help you a lot, since our Heavenly Father has granted him the power to help us. I know that it is very difficult to choose in these decisions, but you ought to carefully analyze each bit of advice from your parents and choose what is best so that you can press forward and progress.

Joseph S., 17, La Libertad, Peru

Remember It's Your Decision



It's difficult when the two people you turn to the most for advice contradict each other. People are going to have different opinions. But in situations like this, you just need to listen to both, have an open mind, and in the end decide for yourself what is the best way and what way the Lord would agree with. It's hard to reject one parent or the other, but you must remember that it's not a competition. You will still love them, and they will probably be happy that you made the right decision, even if the decision is not what they suggested exactly.

Janiece H., 18, North Carolina, USA

Pray for Help



Pray that you will be able to know all things concerning what you asked your parents' advice for. Parents sometimes have different views about situations. Heavenly Father can help you make the right decision. Parental advice is valuable, but when your parents contradict each other, go to your Heavenly Father for guidance and advice. Praying will always help you handle these situations.

Leah H., 17, California, USA

Follow Nephi's Example



As a missionary I have encountered similar cases, and I always refer to Nephi's example of obedience. Each time he received counsel from his parents, he put it into practice because it was good and came from God. But when he broke his bow, his father and others

murmured. Nephi, by his example, led his father to pray for guidance. (See 1 Nephi 16:18–25.) This is our example. Accept counsel from your parents, but if one gives advice that is different from what the Lord would have you do, have the courage to respectfully tell him or her the reason you won't follow that counsel. And the best reason is that we want to choose the right.

Elder Kapila, 21, Democratic Republic of the Congo Kinshasa Mission

Know What Is Right



My parents often gave me different advice, but I always knew what was right. I was born in the gospel. I know the truth, and this enables me to determine which counsel I should follow. In some cases, we need to pray to Heavenly Father and simply listen to the still voice of the Holy Ghost or to go to the bishop and hear what he has to say.

Erica C., 18, Bahia, Brazil

Turn to Your Leaders

You can always turn to your leaders. Through the Young Women and

Young Men organizations, the Lord has sent great leaders to inspire the youth. They have been called to help you and teach you, so they are a wonderful source of inspiration and answers. You can also turn to your bishop for the same reason. These leaders have been set apart to help youth especially.

Rebecca S., 15, Washington, USA

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



HEALING AND HOPE

"All who have been through divorce know the pain and need the healing power and hope that come from the Atonement. That healing power and that hope are there for them and also for their children."

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Divorce," *Ensign*, May 2007, 71.

NEXT QUESTION

"One of my friends really offended me. I know I'm supposed to be forgiving, but how do I get over the hurt?"

Send your answer and photo by March 15, 2012.

Go to newera.lds.org, click "Submit Material," and then select "Questions and Answers."

You can also write to us at newera@ldschurch.org

or
New Era, Q&A, be forgiving
50 E. North Temple St., Rm. 2420
Salt Lake City, UT 84150-0024, USA

Responses may be edited for length or clarity.

GAINING and KEEPING a Testimony

By Mindy Raye Friedman
Church Magazines

*A testimony generally comes slowly, over time,
as you work to help it grow.*

Maybe you were baptized when you were eight years old and you've been going to church your whole life. Maybe you were just recently introduced to the Church. Perhaps you have a strong testimony of the Restoration of the gospel, or maybe you're not sure if you even know the Book of Mormon is true. In any case, everyone needs to constantly nourish and help his or her testimony to grow. So what are you supposed to do? Here are some things to consider.



Revelation Usually Comes a Little at a Time

Sometimes we think we don't have a testimony or that it can grow only if we have a great spiritual miracle. More often, though, we receive revelation and spiritual knowledge only a little bit at a time. Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles compares revelation to the ways we experience light:

"A light turned on in a dark room is like receiving a message from God quickly, completely, and all at once. Many of us have experienced this pattern of revelation as we have been given answers to sincere prayers or been provided with needed direction or protection, according to God's will and timing. . . . However, this pattern of revelation tends to be more rare than common.

"The gradual increase of light radiating from the rising sun is like receiving a message from God 'line upon line, precept upon precept' (2 Nephi 28:30). Most frequently, revelation comes in small increments over time and is granted according to our desire, worthiness, and preparation. . . . This pattern of revelation tends to be more common than rare" ("The Spirit of Revelation," *Ensign*, May 2011, 88).

THE HOLY GHOST
IS THE TESTIFIER
OF TRUTH

REMEMBER! Because you have been baptized and confirmed, you have the gift of the Holy Ghost. As long as you are living worthily, He will testify to you of the truth.

The Spirit Is the Key

In order to strengthen testimony, it is important to be able to have the Holy Ghost with you and to listen to His promptings. It is hard, however, to hear the Spirit's whisperings when you are distracted by other things. Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught:

"The inspiring influence of the Holy Spirit can be overcome or masked by strong emotions, such as anger, hate, passion, fear, or pride. When such influences are present, it is like trying to savor the delicate flavor of a grape while eating a jalapeño pepper. Both flavors are present, but one completely overpowers the other. In like manner, strong emotions overcome the delicate promptings of the Holy Spirit" ("To Acquire Spiritual Guidance," *Ensign*, Nov. 2009, 8).

A LARGE FIRE COMES FROM SMALL KINDLING

You may have heard a testimony compared to a burning fire before, but think about how a fire is built.

If you try to light a big log, it probably won't catch fire. You have to have some sort of kindling, like smaller sticks or leaves, to get the fire going. Likewise, small experiences can kindle the fire of your testimony.

Sometimes people may put lighter fluid on a log, which makes the flames become



bright, but once the lighter fluid is burned, the fire dies back down because it was the lighter fluid and not the log burning. Your testimony may sometimes be flamed by a strong spiritual experience, but that may not be enough to maintain a constantly burning testimony.

Even if you have a nice fire burning, it will eventually die if you don't continue to put wood on it. In like manner, you must continue to feed the fire of your testimony so that it doesn't smolder out.



ONE GENERAL AUTHORITY'S EXPERIENCE

Sometimes you may think you are all alone in struggling with your testimony. The truth is that everyone

must go through the same process, even General Authorities. Here is one experience from Elder Jay E. Jensen of the Presidency of the Seventy.

"As a young elder, I had been in the mission field about one year, and while reading scriptures and words of the latter-day Apostles about revelation and the Holy Ghost, I had a stunning awakening. I did not have a testimony of my own, specifically of the Father and the Son. I went on my mission living on the borrowed light of my wonderful parents. Never doubting their words, I had not thought about seeking my own spiritual witness. On a February night in San Antonio, Texas, in 1962, I knew that I had to know for myself. In our small apartment I found a place where I could quietly pray out loud, pleading, 'Heavenly Father, are You there? I must know for myself!'

"Sometime later that night I came to know for myself for the first time in my life that God and Jesus are real. I did not hear an audible voice nor see a heavenly being. I knew in the same way you too may have come to know—which is 'by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost' (D&C 121:26) and the spirit of revelation (see D&C 8:1–3) speaking peace to my mind (see D&C 6:23) and assurances to my heart (see Alma 58:11).

"From that experience I witnessed the results of Alma's counsel to 'awake and arouse [my] faculties . . . to [conduct] an experiment upon [His] words' (Alma 32:27). These words or seeds have grown into trees, indeed giant trees of testimony. The process continues with more experiments upon the word, resulting in additional trees of testimony, now a veritable forest based on revelation through and by the Holy Ghost" ("The Holy Ghost and Revelation," *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 77).

A Testimony Comes through Good Choices

Elder Scott has explained that "a testimony is not emotion. It is the very essence of character woven from threads born of countless correct decisions. These choices are made with trusting faith in things that are believed and, at least initially, are not seen. A strong testimony gives peace, comfort, and assurance. It generates the conviction that as the teachings of the Savior are consistently obeyed, life will be beautiful, the future will be secure, and there will be capacity to overcome the challenges that cross our path. A testimony grows from understanding truth distilled from prayer and the pondering of scriptural doctrine. It is nurtured by living those truths with faith anchored in the secure confidence that the promised results will be obtained" ("The Transforming Power of Faith and Character," *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 45–46).



Get Out and Do Something

Sometimes in order for your testimony to grow, you have to go and do something. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the First Presidency has taught: "Often, the answer to our prayer does not come while we're on our knees but while we're on our feet serving the Lord and serving those around us. Selfless acts of service and consecration refine our spirits, remove the scales from our spiritual eyes, and open the windows of heaven. By becoming the answer to someone's prayer, we often find the answer to our own" ("Waiting on the Road to Damascus," *Ensign*, May 2011, 76).



Don't Give Up

Just because you feel like you're in a spiritual slump or that your testimony is weak, or even if you feel your testimony is strong, that doesn't mean you should stop trying to strengthen your testimony. Keep pressing forward. Elder Bednar offers these words of encouragement:

"I have talked with many individuals who question the strength of their personal testimony and underestimate their spiritual capacity because they do not receive frequent, miraculous, or strong impressions. . . . If you have had similar thoughts or doubts, please know that you are quite normal. Just keep pressing forward obediently and with faith in the Savior. As you do so, you 'cannot go amiss' (D&C 80:3)" ("The Spirit of Revelation," *Ensign*, May 2011, 89). **NE**

YOU NEED YOUR OWN TESTIMONY



“We can rely on the faith and testimony of others only so long. Eventually we must have our own strong and deeply placed foundation, or we will be unable to withstand the storms of life, which will come.”

President Thomas S. Monson, "How Firm a Foundation," *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 62.

YOU MUST FOLLOW ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Moroni teaches that you must "ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ" and that you must do it with "a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ," and only then will God "manifest the truth of it unto you" (Moroni 10:4).

IT STARTED *with* STANDARDS

By Danielle Stockton



Throughout my life, even before joining the Church, I always tried to hold high standards, and above all I wanted to keep my integrity pure and stay true to myself. As a teenager, I often felt alone and disillusioned by the fact that I seemed to be part of a small minority who strove for purity and high moral standards.

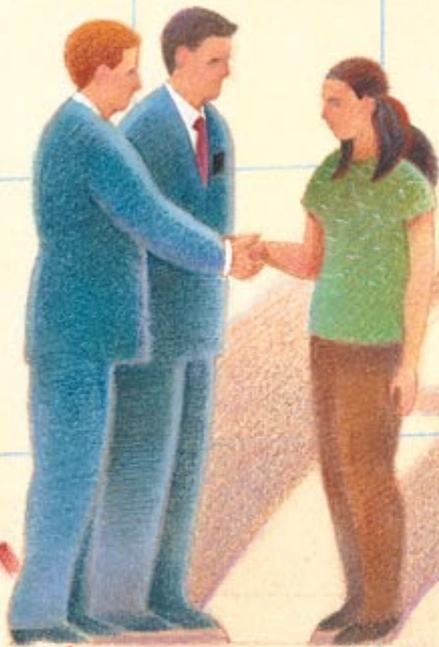
For instance, when I did not reciprocate the interest some boys showed me, some people I knew were dismayed. They told me I should have gone on a date with those boys simply to be able to tell people I was dating someone. (Of course, it was understood that “dating” meant something much more serious than going out for ice cream.) Regarding one boy, a girl I knew said, “He’s a drummer and looks like a surfer, so

why wouldn’t you want to date him?” These arguments didn’t resonate with me, and I withstood these temptations. I do not regret my decisions, but it was often a difficult and lonely path.

However, in some respects, I treasure these experiences, because they caused me to inquire into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to find others with standards that were aligned with mine.

I was somewhat familiar with the Church and its teachings because my family had met with missionaries when I was six years old. Ten years later, during the time I was struggling with my peers’

Joining The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was by far the most rewarding spiritual journey of my life.



challenges to my personal standards, my mother happened to go to mormon.org and ask for the missionaries to visit again. I decided I needed to look into the Church again, too.

I appreciated how the members and missionaries were so welcoming and willing to answer my questions, such as why the Holy Ghost is a gift and how families can be sealed for eternity. And when I learned about basic aspects of the Church, such as the fact that we were all spirit children of God and that there are modern-day prophets, through my prayers the Spirit revealed to me that the teachings are true.

When I first attended a Latter-day Saint ward, I felt a sensation of joy and pure energy I had never experienced before. Peace and contentment flowed through me as I soaked in the loving atmosphere and listened to heartfelt testimonies. Everyone radiated happiness, and their giving spirits touched me. I later found out that these feelings came from the Holy Ghost.



However, the first time I strongly felt the Holy Ghost's guidance was when I was reading the pamphlet titled *The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. I could identify somewhat with Joseph Smith's confusion, and I saw pure truth in the statement: "They teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof" (Joseph Smith—History 1:19).

Joseph's story penetrated so deeply into my core that I felt a burning sensation in my chest and began to cry. At that moment, I knew with all my heart that this is the one true Church. After reading the pamphlet, I told my mother, "I know it is true. I am ready now."

Ultimately, my experience with the Joseph Smith pamphlet was the catalyst for my baptism and confirmation—and much more. My mother and I were baptized in March 2009, my father was baptized two months later, and we were all sealed in the temple just over a year later. Every day, I am grateful that I converted to the Church. The Holy Ghost has been a constant, loving companion to me, and He has influenced my life in both major and more mundane ways, as well as in ways I was not even aware of at the time.

In fact, I once received a strong impression from the Holy Ghost that a friend needed comfort, so I spent more time with her and gave her short notes telling her how much she meant to me. A couple of days later, she found out that she had been rejected from the college she had applied to, and I was better able to comfort her in her disappointment.

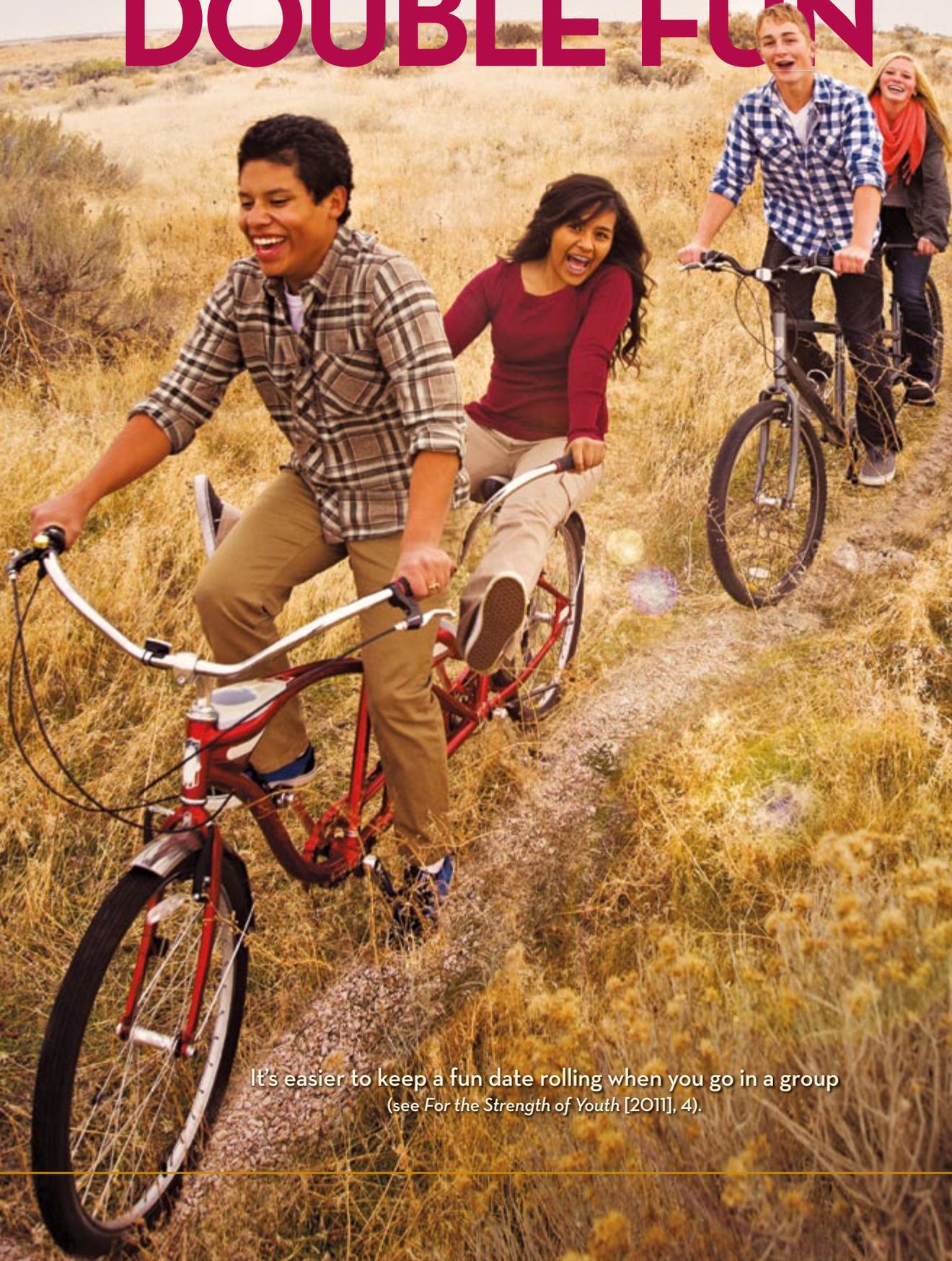
I now live surrounded by people with high standards who share my views about the true importance of loving relationships, and I look forward to one day being married in the temple and sealed for eternity. Converting to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has enhanced and given new meaning to my life. I keep the Joseph Smith pamphlet with me even today, because every time I read it, I am filled with joy about God's gift of truth to me. **NE**



I keep the Joseph Smith pamphlet with me even today.

MORMONAD

DOUBLE DATE DOUBLE FUN



It's easier to keep a fun date rolling when you go in a group
(see *For the Strength of Youth* [2011], 4).

By Ray Goldrup

Blind CURVE

*I couldn't see the danger just around the corner,
but I received a warning.*

For my 17th birthday, my dad presented me with his old Volkswagen. I was ecstatic. Imagine—my very own car! I was anxious to take a drive. A *long* drive. Somewhere. Anywhere. I suppose my excitement was, in part, a result of a boyish, budding sense of independence.

The long-awaited and sorely anticipated journey finally arrived the following summer when my parents gave me permission to drive a few states away to visit a cousin. My 15-year-old brother, Tom, accompanied me. My dad hugged me and cautioned, “Keep your sense about you, Ray. And be careful.”

It was a memorable trip, mainly because it was my—rather *our*—maiden voyage, of sorts. Our first real time away from home. That, in itself, was the real adventure.

As with all adventures, this one came to an end, and it was time to go home. We were tired and ready to return to the comfort of our own beds.

Tom was asleep in the backseat of the car as I snaked my way through the mountains on a high, narrow road. I had been driving all day, and it was late, so I couldn't wait to get down off that mountain, pull off the road, and get some sleep, at least enough for a brief respite before finishing the final leg of our journey.

Being saddled with an aching want for sleep, along with a youthful helping of inexperience and irresponsibility,

I was driving too fast for the conditions of the road. The night was blacker than a bad tooth. The sickle-thin cut of moon in the inky sky and the feeble, confetti-like throw of star glow provided scant illumination on the dark road. I negotiated the narrow, serpentine roadway using the almost-just-as-meager aid of the vehicle's headlights.

Just as I was about to round yet another sharp curve, I heard a voice within me say, “Slow down. There are two deer around the corner in the road.”

Driving as fast as I was and already upon the turn, I had only time enough to react—to either ignore the voice or hurriedly follow the instruction.

I chose the latter, quickly slowing down as I took the blind curve. And there, just as the voice had forewarned, standing in the middle of the narrow roadway, were two deer, blinded by my headlights and too startled to move.

Had I not heeded the voice, I would have swerved to the left and driven off the edge of the huge drop-off.

After maneuvering around the deer, I proceeded on our route. It was good to be home again. As I lay in my own bed with my hands tucked under my head, I realized that as much as I looked forward to the notion of one day being on my own, I hoped that wherever life found me, I would be living righteously enough to always have the companionship of the Holy Ghost. **NE**



FIVE WAYS TO STAY IN TUNE WITH THE HOLY GHOST

1. Pray for guidance, safety, and protection, and keep a constant prayer in your heart (see Alma 34:19–27).
2. “If something we think, see, hear, or do distances us from the Holy Ghost, then we should stop thinking, seeing, hearing, or doing that thing” (Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “That We May Always Have His Spirit to Be with Us,” *Ensign*, May 2006, 30).
3. Remain faithful in keeping the commandments and standards. “Those who are faithful to God are protected and prospered” (President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, “O Remember, Remember,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 67).
4. Sincerely repent of past sins and offer up “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20).
5. Diligently seek the Holy Ghost by doing that which is uplifting, including reading your scriptures, going to the temple, attending Church meetings, participating in Mutual activities, spending time with family, and having faith in God (see 1 Nephi 10:17).

By Elyse Alexandria Holmes

LEARNING, TEACHING, AND PREACHING *The Gospel*

PRAY AND RELY ON THE SPIRIT

“The message of the Restoration of the gospel must be taught by divine power—the power of the Holy Ghost, who is the third member of the Godhead. . . .

“ . . . As you strive to develop the faith to rely on the Spirit, you should . . . pray for the Spirit. ”

Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service (2004), 3.

“How do you *know* Joseph Smith was a prophet?” the investigator asked.

“OK, deep breath. You can answer this,” Tanner thought to himself. Tanner J. was teaching the First Vision with his companion for one of the first times.

Suddenly, the noise faded into the background, and the room became tranquil and calm. In that moment, only Tanner, his companion, and the investigator mattered to him. Tanner related the First Vision and bore a solemn and sincere testimony of Joseph Smith. Since then, Tanner has never been nervous about sharing his testimony of the First Vision.

But this experience didn’t happen while Tanner was on a full-time mission. It actually occurred three years earlier in his ward building with the first counselor in the bishopric as his “investigator.”

Starting Early

When *Preach My Gospel* was first published, the bishopric of Tanner’s ward immediately recognized its importance. They set aside

You don’t have to wait for your mission to start using Preach My Gospel.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ELYSE ALEXANDRIA HOLMES







one Sunday a month, combined all of the Aaronic Priesthood young men, and focused on teaching the principles in *Preach My Gospel*. From then on, every young man was given a copy of *Preach My Gospel* upon receiving the Aaronic



Young men of all ages are studying and using *Preach My Gospel* now to help them prepare to share the gospel.



Priesthood. Aaron C., a priest, remembers feeling excited to enter the

Aaronic Priesthood, but he didn't know what to think about *Preach My Gospel* when he first heard about it. "I hadn't heard about *Preach My Gospel* until the bishop introduced it to me in our interview," he says. "But as we got more into it and learned about it every month, it excited me for my mission and the gospel—to spread the word of Christ."

meetings with 'investigators' and trying to teach the lessons," Aaron says.

Most young men agree that teaching is their favorite part or that they are looking forward to doing it. Ben B., a new deacon, says, "I'm excited to teach because it's going to be applying what I know and teaching it, like what I'm going to be doing on my mission."

Although teaching is one of their favorite parts of the experience, it's often the one they're most nervous about, at least initially. Jordan M., also a deacon, remembers his feelings when he first started teaching from

Fulfilling Your Duty to God

Learning and teaching from *Preach My Gospel* is only one example of how Aaronic Priesthood young men and quorums are preparing for and doing their duty to God to "invite all to come unto Christ" (D&C 20:59). Learn to set your own plans for this aspect of your priesthood service by studying and using the *Fulfilling My Duty to God* booklet.

Derek P., a deacon, had a similar experience: "I didn't really know about it until my interview with the bishop. After he introduced it to me, I was excited for it."

Aaron's brother Ryan also participated, and he is currently serving in the Colombia Bogotá North Mission. Ryan told Aaron how useful this experience was in preparing for his mission. Aaron shares, "He told me that doing this every month has helped him a lot and that he's just learned so much more from it."

Learning to Teach

But these young men say that learning from *Preach My Gospel* isn't the best part. They like how it has helped them to love teaching the gospel. Even though they aren't teaching real investigators, they are placed into companionships and teach in different situations—just like on a full-time mission. "My favorite part has been acting out



Preach My Gospel: “My very first time, I was really nervous. I didn’t really say that much, but as I got older, I’d say more.”

Tanner remembers being nervous about teaching, even though he was 16 when the program was implemented: “I was kind of uncomfortable with teaching the first couple of times, but it really helped me out in the long run.”



Preparing to Serve

Adam B., who is preparing to submit his mission papers, has really appreciated the experience with *Preach My Gospel*. “It gets you used to knowing what you’re going to teach out in the mission field,” he says. Adam also recognizes that knowing *Preach My Gospel* will give him a head start when he gets to the missionary training center and throughout his mission.

Many of the young men, like Adam’s twin brother, Aaron B., feel like *Preach My Gospel* is a great way to strengthen testimony. “It gives you a stronger testimony of missionary work because it helps you understand what you have to teach,” says Aaron.

Zach J. has also felt his testimony of the gospel grow: “I think that being able to teach has given me a better testimony than just hearing a lesson does.”

The young men already on missions are

also grateful for this class approach. Elder Chris Hughes, who is serving in the Scotland/Ireland Mission, says that “by learning [from *Preach My Gospel*] beforehand, I was able to hit the ground running.”

Encouraging Others to Study

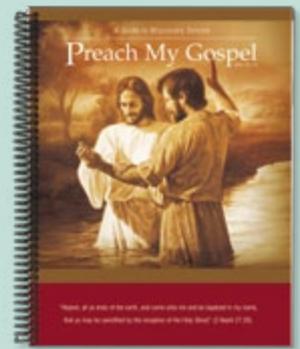
Through this experience, the young men have quickly recognized the importance of

Preach My Gospel.

Alex B. believes that all young men should get to know *Preach My Gospel* during their years in the Aaronic Priesthood. “I think all the young men should do this, because it puts them ahead, gives them more experience, and prepares them for when they get into the missionary training center,” he asserts.

Chris gives this advice to other young men: “Don’t underestimate what *Preach My Gospel*

can do for you as you prepare to serve the Lord. We have been given this tool so we can become the missionaries He needs us to be.” That’s true whether you use *Preach My Gospel* in a class or quorum or just on your own at home. **NE**



NO NEED TO PANIC

By Tanner J.

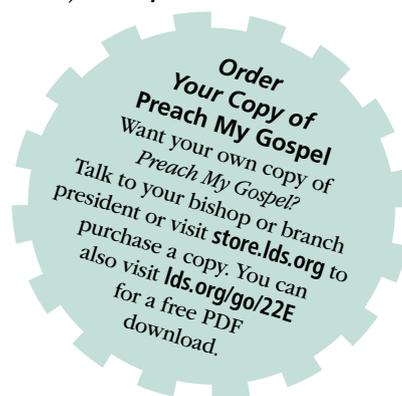
In my sophomore year of high school, after I had been learning and teaching from *Preach My Gospel*, a friend of mine came up to me during weight-lifting class and said, “Hey, Tanner, you’re Mormon, right?”

A little nervous, I answered, “Yeah, I am.”

“Can you answer a couple questions for me about your Church?” he asked.

I started to panic. What if I didn’t know the answers to his questions, or what if I just sounded stupid? Then I thought about it for a minute: “I’ve done this before. I’ve practiced in the class we have every month, and I can answer these questions. It’s no big deal. Why am I so scared?”

Because of what I had already learned and practiced, I was able to answer some of his questions and point him in the right direction. He got in touch with the missionaries and was later baptized and served a mission.



Order Your Copy of *Preach My Gospel*
Want your own copy of *Preach My Gospel*?
Talk to your bishop or branch president or visit store.lds.org to purchase a copy. You can also visit lds.org/go/22E for a free PDF download.

OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

We learn of Heavenly Father from the beginning of our Church experience—from our first prayer to our first time singing “I Am a Child of God” (Hymns, no. 301). What Latter-day Saints know about God the Father is unique, and it makes all the difference to us.

SEEING THE FATHER

Here are three scriptural accounts of people who have beheld the Father:

- Stephen (see Acts 7:56)
- Joseph Smith (see Joseph Smith—History 1:17)
- Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon (see D&C 76:20)

But, as Jesus said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9).

Read More

Turn to page 48 to read more about how you can strengthen your testimony of Heavenly Father.

REAL AND INDIVIDUAL

“One of the great over-arching doctrines of this Church is our belief in God the Eternal Father. He is a being, real and individual. He is the great Governor of the universe, yet He is our Father, and we are His children.

“We pray to Him, and those prayers are a conversation between God and man. I am confident that **He hears our prayers and answers them.**”

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), “The Things of Which I Know,” *Ensign*, May 2007, 83.

THE ONE TRUE GOD

“The Father *is* the one true God. *This* thing is certain: **no one will ever ascend above Him;** no one will ever replace Him. . . . He is Eloheim, the Father. He is God. Of Him there *is* only one.”

President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Pattern of Our Parentage,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1984, 69.





HEARING THE FATHER

When God the Father speaks, He bears witness of His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. For example:

- At Jesus’s baptism (see Matthew 3:17)
- At the Mount of Transfiguration to Peter, James, and John (see Matthew 17:5)
- In a revelation to Nephi (see 2 Nephi 31:11, 15)
- At Jesus’s appearance in the Americas (see 3 Nephi 11:7)
- At the First Vision (see Joseph Smith—History 1:17)

THE SAVIOR’S MISSION TO REVEAL THE FATHER

“In all that Jesus came to say and do, . . . 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.”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Grandeur of God,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 70.

JOSEPH SMITH TEACHES ABOUT GOD THE FATHER

Joseph Smith taught us much about the true nature of God because he saw Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and received many revelations.

What kind of being is He? “God Himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!”¹

What does He look like? “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s.”² “If you were to see Him today, you would see Him like a man in form—like yourselves.”³

What is our relationship to God? “If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves.”⁴ “The Great Parent of the universe looks upon the whole of the human family . . . as His offspring.”⁵

Why did He establish the plan of salvation for us? “God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, . . . [instituted] laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself.”⁶

What is a key to drawing closer to God? “When we understand the character of God, and know how to come to Him, He begins to unfold the heavens to us.”⁷ **NE**

NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 40.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 130:22.
3. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 40.
4. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 40.
5. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 39.
6. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 210.
7. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 40–41.

HEAVENLY PARENTS: A POWERFUL TRUTH

“Consider the power of the idea taught in our beloved song ‘I Am a Child of God’ (*Hymns*, 1985, no. 301). . . . Here is the answer to one of life’s great questions, ‘Who am I?’ I am a child of God with a spirit lineage to heavenly parents. **That parentage defines our eternal potential.** That powerful idea is a potent antidepressant. It can strengthen each of us to make righteous choices and to seek the best that is within us.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Powerful Ideas,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 25.

AN EMPTY FONT

How could we hold a baptism with no water for the font?

By Siosaia Naeata Jr.

It was 7:45 a.m. on a rainy August morning here in Freetown, Sierra Leone, West Africa. We (the full-time missionaries in the Freetown District) had planned a baptismal service and were determined to hold it, rain or shine. It was then I received a call from Brother Allieu, a member from our branch, but I could not totally understand what he was saying, as he was speaking rapidly in Krio, the local language. I told him to take a deep breath and speak slowly. He did so and said, “Elder Naeata, there is no water for the baptismal font. I am sorry. There is no water.”

I thanked him for the call and then announced the bad news to the other elders. Immediately we began to think of how we could still perform this sacred ordinance. It was then that Elder Agamah reminded us of the waterfall and pond up the mountain nearby in a place called Mellow. The elders all agreed we should try and hold the baptism there, so we obtained permission to do so.

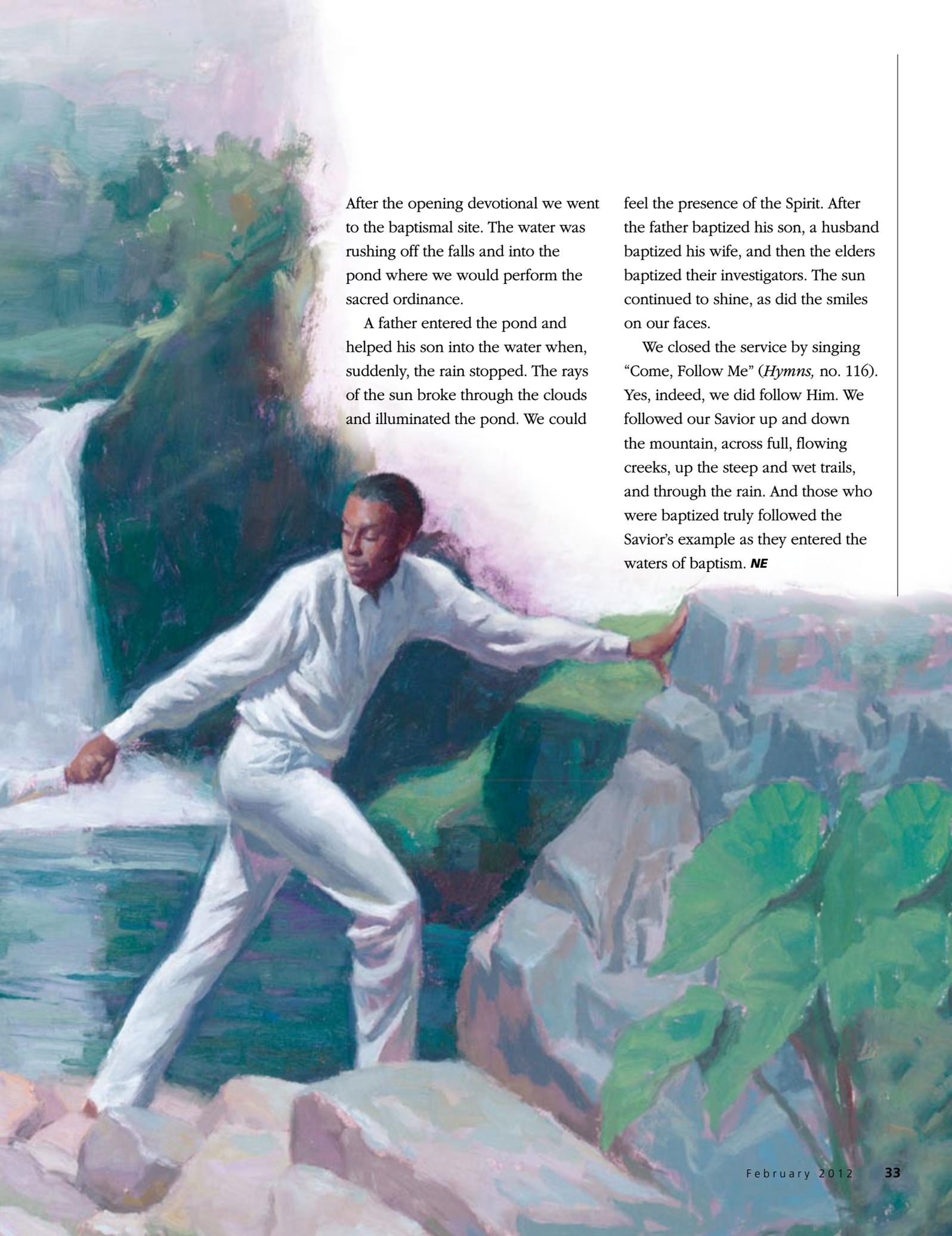
As everyone gathered later that morning at the bottom of the mountain, the group came to a stark realization of the formidable task looming ahead. However, the determined company had no sign of hesitation to press forward. Men and women and even children walked and talked happily up the wet and slippery trail. Gradually ascending, we took a short detour to cross the river.

As we hiked, the zeal of some in the party began to fade when the rain picked up, but we pressed forward with hope. Still, the rugged path seemed to have no end. Finally we arrived at our destination. Our hearts were happy, but the rain persisted to beat down upon us. As we prepared for the baptismal service, we took refuge from the rain under a large mango tree.

We opened by singing the hymn “The Spirit of God” (*Hymns*, no. 2).

ILLUSTRATION BY ALLAN GARNIS





After the opening devotional we went to the baptismal site. The water was rushing off the falls and into the pond where we would perform the sacred ordinance.

A father entered the pond and helped his son into the water when, suddenly, the rain stopped. The rays of the sun broke through the clouds and illuminated the pond. We could

feel the presence of the Spirit. After the father baptized his son, a husband baptized his wife, and then the elders baptized their investigators. The sun continued to shine, as did the smiles on our faces.

We closed the service by singing “Come, Follow Me” (*Hymns*, no. 116). Yes, indeed, we did follow Him. We followed our Savior up and down the mountain, across full, flowing creeks, up the steep and wet trails, and through the rain. And those who were baptized truly followed the Savior’s example as they entered the waters of baptism. **NE**

Technology can have a strong influence for good or evil, depending on how it's used. Here's how others are plugging in and unplugging from technology to make a positive difference. How will *you* screen your screen time this week?

Plugging In for Good

[Technology] ties the world together. I can listen to general conference at the click of a button. It also allows my family to communicate with each other. —Daniel B.

The Internet [LDS.org] helped me prepare a talk for church. And I love that I can do family history online [lds.org/fhy] and how easy it is to just print out a name and take it to the temple. —Terri J.

It helps with missionary work. Also, some families are able to communicate with a child who is on a mission. And now, I have the privilege to complete my Personal Progress online [personalprogress.lds.org].

—Haley A.

We use *Mormon Messages* videos a lot for family home evening.

—Josie A.

The Internet makes FamilySearch indexing [indexing.familysearch.org] incredibly easy and accessible anywhere. —Janica L.

You are able to share the gospel, do [service] activities in the Vineyard [vineyard.lds.org], interact with other members of the Church, and receive daily messages from LDS.org. —Elizabeth M.

Preparing for talks, reading and watching conference, watching *Mormon Messages*, connecting with family, finding piano music, looking up addresses of nearby chapels when you are on vacation . . . the list goes on and on! If you use technology appropriately, it can be a huge blessing! —Katie K.

It helps me set up weekly temple trips with my friends to go do baptisms for the dead. —Hamilton C.

It helps us to share the gospel worldwide.

—Jaryl M.



SCREENING YOUR

Be wise with how you're connected to the Internet, TV, and your family.



Mormon Messages for Youth Video: "Things as They Really Are"
Watch a short video about this topic at lds.org/go/22F.

Unplugging for Balance

Sometimes it's important to unplug from technology to keep a healthy balance in your life. Here's what others have to say about taking a break from technology.

You need to take time out to enjoy the world and talk to God, not just to your friends on Facebook. —**Elise K.**

Technology itself isn't bad, but if it distracts you from what's important, then it is. —**Louisa Jo S.**

Like everything else, "moderation in all things." —**Kurt M.**

We did a "Turn Off, Tune In" technology fast for a whole week. It was inspiring to hear what we all learned by "being still" and listening (see Psalm 46:10 and D&C 101:16). —**Jacqui P.**

In June, my dad encouraged everyone to not watch TV or be on the computer as much, so the family would hang out more. I really liked it, but it was hard sometimes. But I love hanging out with my family so much more than watching a TV show or movie! —**Alyssa M.**

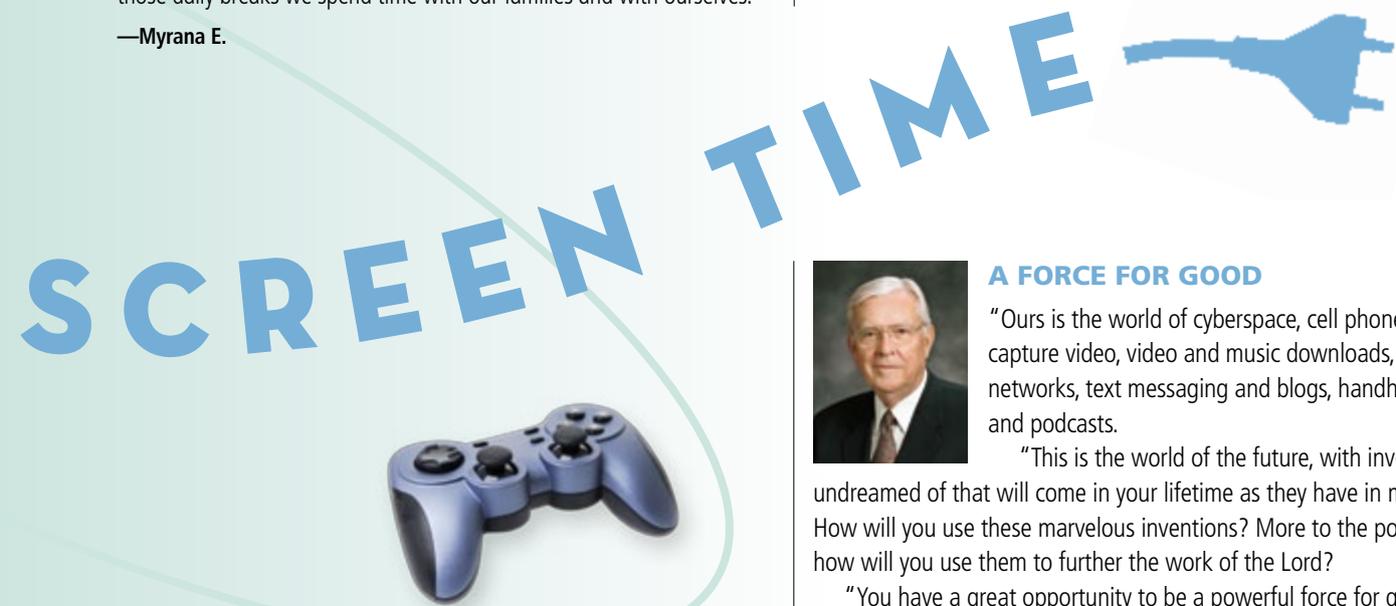
We do need to unplug every day, usually more than once. During those daily breaks we spend time with our families and with ourselves. —**Myrana E.**



These things should never take up too much time in your life or hinder you from spending time with family or God. As entertainment, they should be used sparingly and should never crowd out spiritual thoughts.

—**Jacob S.**

I believe it is good to unplug and spend some time to live in the now rather than through your phone. We also need time to ourselves to think a lot more often than we give ourselves. —**Natalie P.**



For the Strength of Youth tells us that we need to exercise, and we can't do that if we are always involved with technology. Sometimes technology can distract us from listening to the Spirit. —**Savannah K.**

If you live in a video game, you'll eventually forget real life. It could break a family member's heart to have brothers or sisters who spend more time with their virtual family than with their real family. —**Sarah A.**

We need to unplug from the world, because if we don't we become more dependent on technology than we do on the Lord. —**Hillary H.**



A FORCE FOR GOOD

"Ours is the world of cyberspace, cell phones that capture video, video and music downloads, social networks, text messaging and blogs, handhelds and podcasts.

"This is the world of the future, with inventions undreamed of that will come in your lifetime as they have in mine. How will you use these marvelous inventions? More to the point, how will you use them to further the work of the Lord?

"You have a great opportunity to be a powerful force for good in the Church and in the world. . . .

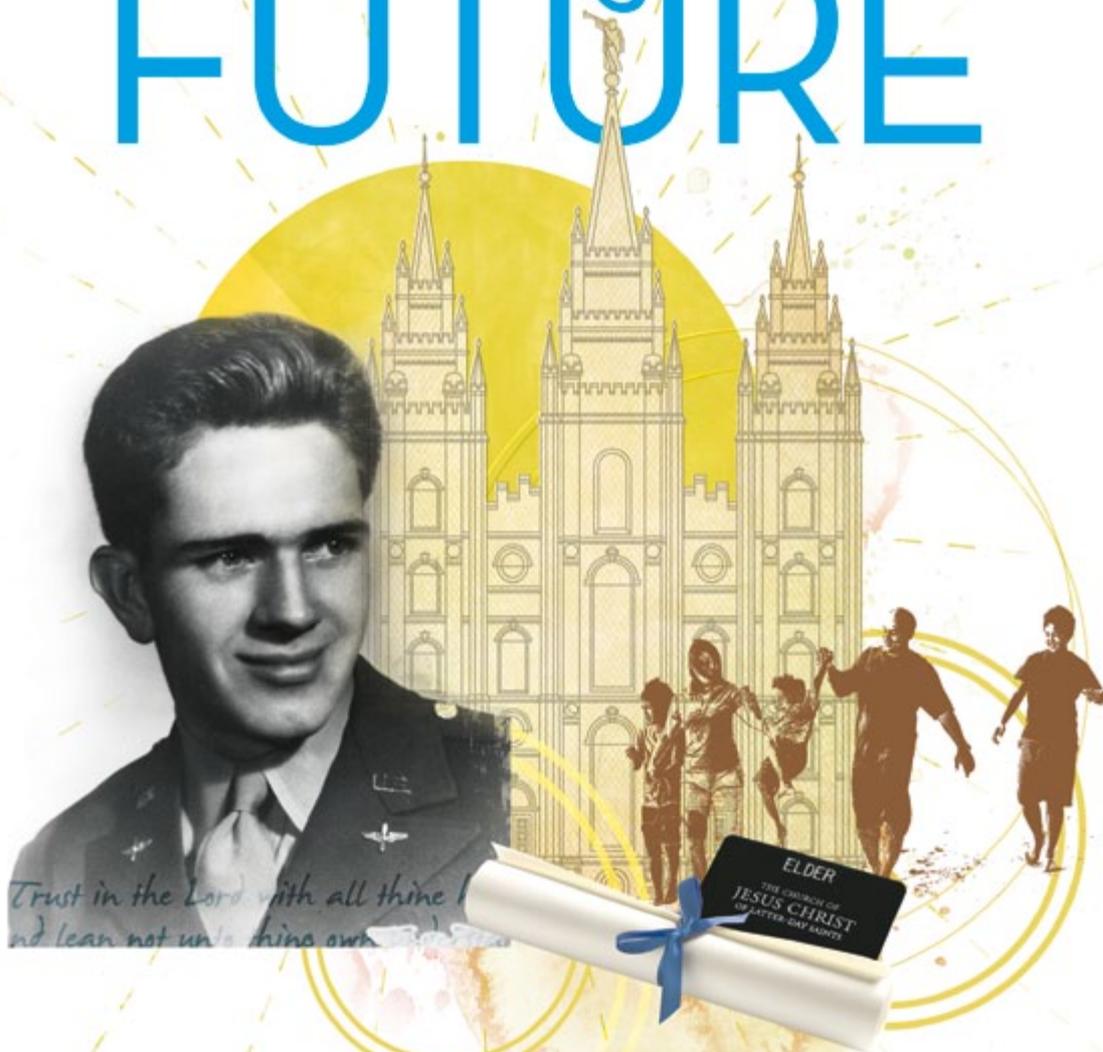
"Make sure that the choices you make in the use of new media are choices that expand your mind, increase your opportunities, and feed your soul."

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Sharing the Gospel Using the Internet," *Ensign*, July 2008, 58, 60.

In Other Magazines

Read more on this topic in the *Ensign* and *Friend* magazines this month.

A Bright FUTURE



Trust in the Lord with all thine
and lean not upon thine own

In the October 2011 general conference, President Boyd K. Packer reminded us that we need not fear, because we have much to look forward to. His counsel provides hope for a bright future.



“When I was 17, about ready to graduate from high school as a very average student with some handicaps, as I thought, everything around us came apart one Sunday morning. The next day we were called to the high school auditorium. On the stage was a chair with a small radio. The principal switched on the radio. We then heard the voice of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt as he announced that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. The United States was at war with Japan.

“Later that scene was repeated. Again the voice of President Roosevelt, this time announcing that our country was at war with Germany. World War II had exploded across the world.

“All at once our future was uncertain. We did not know what was ahead. Would we live to get married and have a family?

“Today there are ‘wars and rumors of wars, and the whole earth [is] in commotion’ (Alma 42:8). You, our youth, may feel uncertainty and insecurity in your lives. . . .

“You . . . need not fly aimlessly to and fro, unsure of the path ahead. There are those who know the way. ‘Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets’ (Amos 3:7). . . .

“You must learn to ‘trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding’ (Proverbs 3:5). You must be trustworthy and surround yourself with friends who desire to be likewise.

“Sometimes you might be tempted to think as I did from time to time in my youth: ‘The way things are going, the world’s going to be over with. The end of the world is going to come before I get to where I should be.’ Not so! You can look forward to doing it right—getting married, having a family, seeing your children and grandchildren, maybe even great-grandchildren.

“If you will follow these principles, you will be watched over and protected and you yourself will know by the promptings of the Holy Ghost which way to go, for ‘by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things’ (Moroni 10:5). I promise you that it will be so.”

President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Counsel to Youth,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 16, 18–19.

WHAT DO YOU LOOK FORWARD TO?

I can’t wait to finish Personal Progress, start dating, go on a mission, get married in the temple, and have kids!

Noni E.

I look forward to my patriarchal blessing, a mission, college, temple marriage, raising a family, and living a life worthy of the celestial kingdom.

Alexander S.

I’m looking forward to college! It’s going to be a whole new adventure. I’m super excited but a little scared.

Kayla B.

I’m anxiously waiting to serve a mission, graduate from college, and watch my children grow.

Erwin S.

I want to serve a mission, get an education, and find a good job and a good wife. I know it may sound like a stereotype, but that’s exactly how I’d like my future to be.

Ottavio C.

I look forward to the day my family accepts the gospel!

Schiphrah S.

I look forward to getting married in the temple, going to college, and becoming a ballet teacher.

Kayti S.

I’m looking forward to getting sealed to my future husband. I’m also looking forward to my future callings in the Church.

Kelsey M.

HOW DO YOU FACE THE FUTURE?

Keep smiling. If you smile, you feel so much better. If you smile and just be happy, your future will look better. We have tons of options. Set goals, dream big, and don’t forget to keep smiling.

Cynthia H.

When I feel anxious about my future, I read my patriarchal blessing. Heavenly Father promises blessings to those who have faith in Him and His Son, Jesus Christ, and who keep the commandments.

Shauna B.



A Video about Your Great Future

Many prophets have talked about the great things your generation will do in the future. Watch a short video with some of their encouraging words at lds.org/go/22G.



See President Packer’s Full Address

Read, watch, or listen to President Packer’s full address online at lds.org/go/22H.

QUOTES FROM CONFERENCE

“Only through repentance do we gain access to the atoning grace of Jesus Christ and salvation.”

Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Divine Gift of Repentance,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 38.

STANDING TOGETHER AS ONE



Nearly 2,000 young men and women from north Texas, USA, gathered for a three-day conference and Texas-sized jubilee themed “Standing Together as One for Truth and Righteousness.” After spending six months rehearsing the music and dance pageant in smaller groups, the youth were awestruck during dress rehearsal at the Garland Special Events Arena as they converged onto the convention center floor from every aisle, filling every inch of the performance space. This was a time for them to feel the power and influence of being among 1,800 Latter-day Saint youth rather than being just one of a dozen or so who attend their high schools.

Derik S. commented in his testimony, “Almost 2,000 kids in the jubilee was like the 2,000 stripling warriors. It gave us strength to be where we are supposed to be.”

Morgan E., a Laurel who also took part in the jubilee says, “I will never forget this moment in my life when my testimony was strengthened astronomically.”

Along with participating in the pageant, youth took part in other activities including service projects; conference workshops with topics chosen by youth including scripture study, personal worth, modesty, faith, and service; a dance and party; and testimony meetings.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF JOANNE POULSEN



WHAT WE REALLY THINK OF YOUTH

“Many young women and men in the Church today are blessed with spiritual strength and courage equal to or greater than that exemplified by Captain Moroni or the stripling warriors. They stand firm against the mocking and scorn of the world and live and defend principles of virtue, integrity, chastity, worthiness, and obedience.”

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Steadfast and Immovable, Always Abounding in Good Works,” *New Era*, Jan. 2008, 4.

IN A WORD

Exaltation: One of the seminary scripture mastery verses is Moses 1:39. In it, the Lord says, “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” Immortality is to live forever as a resurrected being. This gift is given freely to everyone through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Eternal life, or exaltation, is to inherit a place in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom, where we will live in God’s presence and continue as families (see D&C 131:1–4). Exaltation is also made possible through the Atonement of Jesus Christ; however, it requires our “obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel” (Articles of Faith 1:3).



STRENGTH OF YOUTH MEDIA 2012

Have you seen any of the videos from the DVD *Strength of Youth Media 2012: Arise and Shine Forth* yet? Well if you haven’t seen them, you can go to youth.lds.org and watch them anytime you want. Just follow the link to “Youth Theme 2012” to find videos and more.

You’ll be inspired as you watch 15 videos about other Latter-day Saint youth like you who are striving to let their examples shine forth to their friends and family. There are also 3 short messages from Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Young Women general president Elaine S. Dalton, and Young Men general president David L. Beck.

And there’s more. Additional materials will be available online, such as downloadable MP3 songs, a music video of the 2012 theme song, “Arise,” and downloadable graphics centered on the theme that can be used to create posters and T-shirts.

MY FAVORITE SCRIPTURE

2 Nephi 11 I like this chapter because it shows that Nephi read his scriptures and liked them. It reminds you that people in scriptures were people just like you, reading their scriptures too.

Christopher K., 14, Pennsylvania, USA

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF CHRISTOPHER K.



Tell us about your favorite scripture in a paragraph or two. Send it to us, along with a photo, by going to newera.lds.org and clicking on “Submit Material.”

HYMN VOCABULARY

Do you know the meaning of that hymn you just sang? Choose the correct definition for each of the following words that can be found in one or more of our hymns.

1. Intercede (*Hymns*, no. 185)
 - a. To accelerate one’s progress
 - b. To intervene on behalf of another
 - c. To plant between existing rows
 - d. To control or command
2. Verdant (*Hymns*, no. 33, 109)
 - a. Showy, loud, or ostentatious
 - b. Covered or hidden from view
 - c. Built on a solid foundation
 - d. Green with grass or vegetation
3. Contrite (*Hymns*, no. 80, 141, 145, 245)
 - a. Constructed to exacting standards
 - b. Feeling anger or annoyance
 - c. Feeling sorrow or remorse
 - d. Obedient
4. Precept (*Hymns*, no. 14, 125, 273, 325)
 - a. A command or principle
 - b. The edge of a cliff
 - c. A forerunner of something that follows
 - d. A devoted follower or believer
5. Rills (*Hymns*, no. 33, 87, 337, 339)
 - a. Small streams
 - b. Foothills at the base of a mountain
 - c. Edicts or decrees
 - d. Undulating meadows

Answers: 1b, 2d, 3c, 4a, 5a

5 WAYS TO SHARE THE BOOK OF MORMON

- Write your testimony in the book and give it to a friend.
- Give it as a gift to a friend or family member for a birthday or holiday.
- Donate a copy to your local or school library.
- Read the Book of Mormon in public locations and have one on hand to give out.
- When you find a scripture in the Book of Mormon that impacts you, think of a friend you could share it with.



WE'VE GOT MAIL

Help from October Articles

Thank you for the article "Speaking in Sacrament Meeting" (Oct. 2011). The day the issue arrived, I was asked to give a talk, and what a help it was.

Jared H., Arizona, USA

The story "Racing for Two" in the October 2011 *New Era* inspired and encouraged me to be more involved in helping the deacons in my quorum.

Thank you.

Caleb H., California, USA

Fulfilling Our Duty to God

I appreciated the article "Fulfilling Our Duty to God" (Sept. 2011). I'm the deacons quorum president in my ward, and it taught me not to take my duty to God for granted. It showed me the significance of sharing and listening to the accomplishments of my quorum members. Even in a small ward like mine, it's important for the young men to share their thoughts and experiences each week as we teach each other about priesthood duties.

Elijah M., Texas, USA

WALK TO ZION

Inspired by Sister Elaine S. Dalton's talk "Guardians of Virtue" from the general Young Women meeting last year (see *Ensign*, May 2011, 121–24), youth of the Eastern Cape province in South Africa decided to carry out a similar activity to demonstrate their commitment to "lay aside the things of this world, and seek for the things of a better" (D&C 25:10). On a windy morning 45 youth and leaders met outside a dance club, symbolizing the world and its values, and walked 22.6 km (14 miles) to the chapel, symbolizing Zion and their commitment to the Lord and His standards.

These young men and women happily marched their way up and down hills, across highways and the town. The youth relied on each other to keep walking despite fatigue and aching muscles. They sang songs, talked about their challenges, and even held onto each other as they crossed roads and climbed steep hills.

"This is very exhausting," said Zukhanye M., a Laurel, during the walk. "But it is very enjoyable as it helps us bond with our fellow brothers and sisters. This has definitely taught me to try exercise more!"

Whilst their goal was achieved to walk to Zion symbolically, the ultimate goal is to all hold firm to the gospel standards and obtain exaltation, not alone, but together as a ward family.

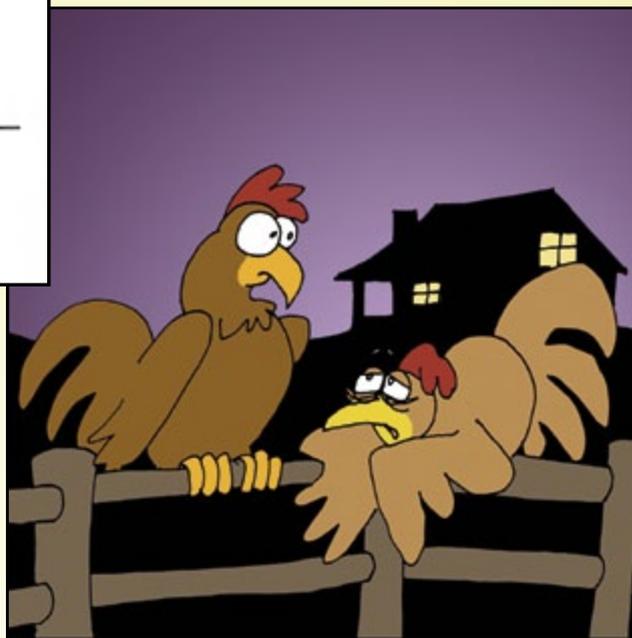
PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAUREN WAINWRIGHT





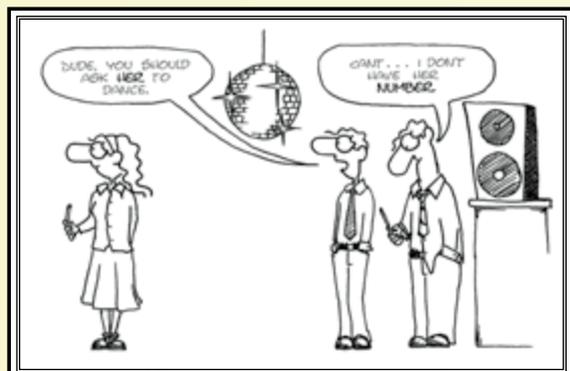
RANDY GLASBERGEN

"I don't know all Ten Commandments. The only ones I remember are 'settle down,' 'act your age,' and 'take that out of your mouth.'"



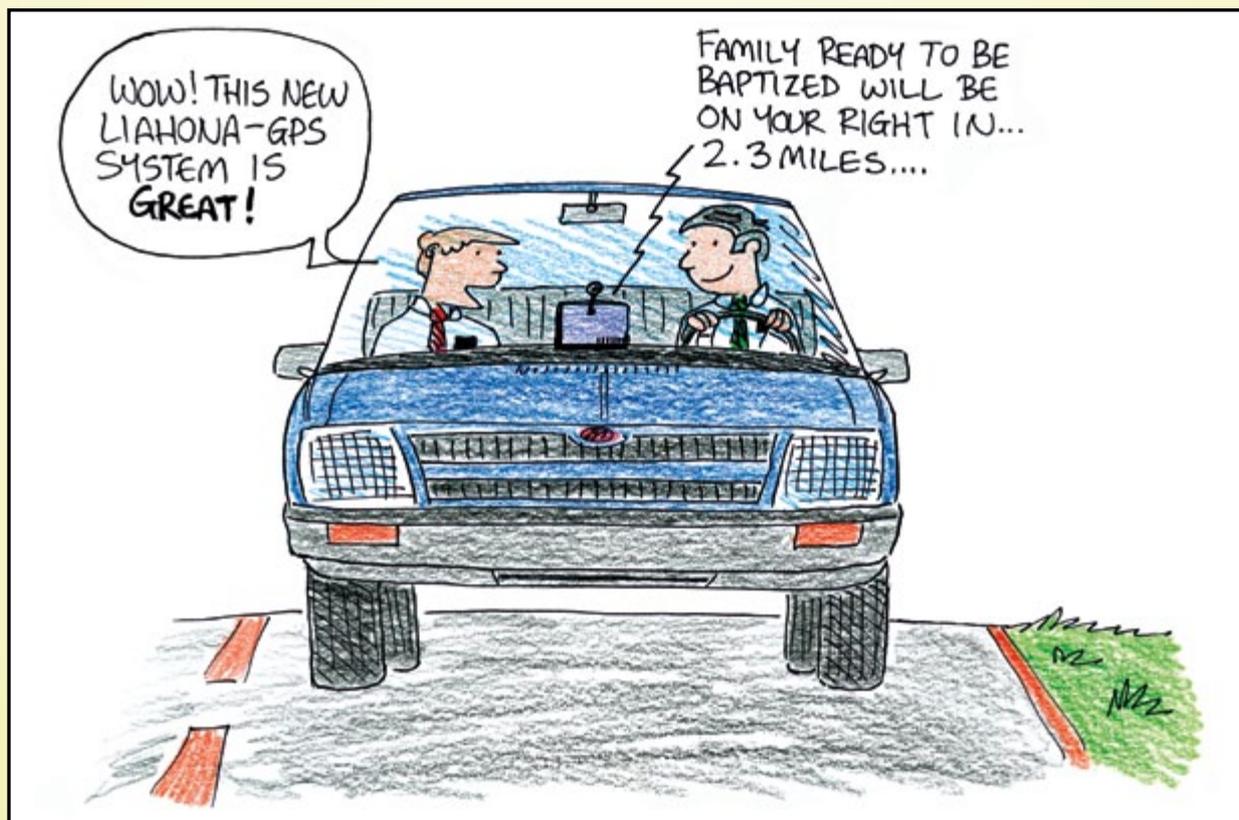
KEVIN BECKSTROM

"I don't see how they keep doing it! Waking them up for early-morning seminary leaves me exhausted!"



JEREMY EDIS

WOMAN: DUDE, YOU SHOULD ASK HER TO DANCE.
MANNY: GAWP... I DON'T HAVE HER NUMBER.



RYAN STOKER

WOMAN: WOW! THIS NEW LIAHONA-GPS SYSTEM IS GREAT!

MAN: FAMILY READY TO BE BAPTIZED WILL BE ON YOUR RIGHT IN... 2.3 MILES....

SETTING AN
EXAMPLE
at Shakespeare's School



One young man learned that it was easier to choose the right when he shared his beliefs with others.

By Larry Hiller
Church Magazines

As a student, you probably have or will learn about William Shakespeare in school. But what if, instead, Shakespeare was a student who learned *at* your school? For David Arnold, this was a reality. He went to King Edward VI School in England, where Shakespeare is said to have attended.

This school was appealing to David because it has a good reputation. Getting in is also really competitive, and David didn't know if he would be accepted when he applied at age 11.

But getting into the school taught David something about himself: "I'm better than I thought I was," he says. "It made me realize that I can do it."

David soon discovered that he was the only member of the Church in his new school. With only a small number of students there, David knew he would get more attention from teachers because of the class size, but he didn't want any special attention from his peers for being a Latter-day Saint.



DON'T BE ASHAMED TO SHARE YOUR BELIEFS

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”
Romans 1:16.



*Near this spot,
according to an old tradition
handed down from scholar to scholar,
and attested by one
whose schooldays fell
in the early years of the XIXth century,
sat as a schoolboy,
William Shakespeare.*

“I was quiet about my beliefs at the beginning,” he says. “It was a new environment, and I was afraid I would be shunned and it would be hard to make friends.”

Then around his third year in the school, David remembered his priesthood lessons about letting his light shine.

“One time there was a big assembly at the school, and as I was looking around, it struck me that I was the only priesthood holder there,” he says. “The Lord had given me a responsibility, and I wasn’t doing enough.” He knew he had to make his membership in the Church known.

He decided to tell his friends about his standards and beliefs. He says it was harder to live his standards when he didn’t tell anyone about them, but when he made them known, it was easier to live them, and he even received support from his friends.

“Letting everyone know that you’re a member and

what your standards are really does help,” David says. “For example, my friends know I don’t drink, and that makes it easier to live that standard.”

When asked if his friends invite him to parties, David just laughs and says, “They know not to invite me. They know I’m not going to come.” He wouldn’t even consider going and just not drinking. “I wouldn’t want to be in a situation where I could be tempted,” he says. “I’d just rather not be there at all.”

During David’s last couple of years at school, his classmates went to a lot of parties and pubs, and it was hard for him to feel left out. Once, he was really tempted to attend a certain party. But then he had a lesson in his priests quorum about staying away from bad situations. He felt it was an answer to prayer and decided not to go to the party.

David had the opportunity of letting his classmates know about the Church when he gave a presentation about his beliefs in a class. “It was pretty hard,” he says. “I didn’t feel prepared for it.” But he talked about topics like the proclamation on the family and the Word of Wisdom, and his classmates were receptive. He even handed out copies of the Book of Mormon.

Throughout his school years, David continued to be an example and to excel at school. He participated in the choir and played on the school basketball team. He was also a house captain and ended his school career as a head boy of the school. He became the managing director of a company that he and a few schoolmates created as a project and turned into a business. All the while, he remembered who he was and tried to influence others to be better.

“I’m a normal person who’s capable of greater things,” David says. “Experiences show me how I’ve been shaped and prepared.”

That preparation led David to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood and prepared him to serve a mission, where he continues to let his light shine. He is currently serving in the France Lyon Mission. **NE**

UNDERCOVER JUDGE

While competing in a national beauty pageant a few years ago, I saw how much the gospel helps me in many aspects of my life. During the pageant, I refrained from negative talking or backbiting. I knew that everyone there was a child of Heavenly Father and that participating in such activities would not be uplifting.



LESSONS FROM DUTY TO GOD

After a few weeks, the other contestants and I found out that there was an undercover judge—our makeup artist. She had always been in the dressing rooms and at photo shoots and appearances, and she heard everything we were saying. Some girls worried the judge had heard the bad things that they were saying, and I was thankful I didn't have that burden on my mind and that I could be at peace. I was able to make a good impression by keeping my standards and not participating in any gossip or foul language.

After the pageant, a judge came to me and thanked me for my mature conduct. All the judges had recognized that I acted different from some of the other girls.

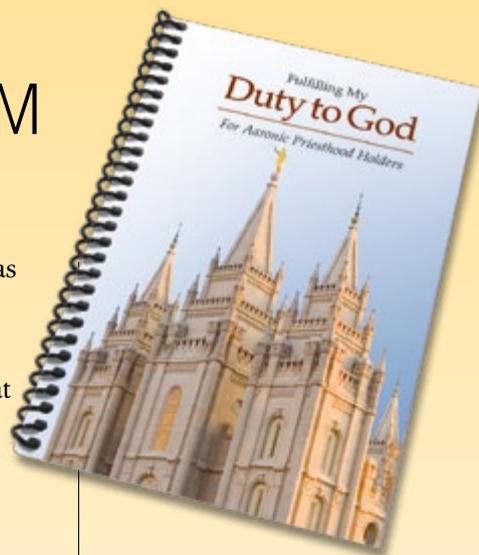
It is so easy to get caught up in worldly things. I know that reading scriptures and praying always to our Father in Heaven are ways to make sure that He is not far from our thoughts and that we are cautious of our actions.

I used the scripture 1 Timothy 4:12 as my motto: "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." I learned that I can always ask Heavenly Father for the strength to stand strong and be an example, even when it is hard. I know that He is always there and will always help us, especially if we are dedicated to doing the right thing.
Sarah F., Utah, USA

Fulfilling My Duty to God has helped me in many ways.

Through the guidelines of "Learn, Act, Share," we learn what we need to do and what will help us, and we act upon that and share what we've done with our parents. It's helped me with scripture study, daily prayer, and many other things related to understanding the doctrine and serving others.

I've learned that if I have a question in my mind when I read the scriptures, I will often find an answer to that question while I'm reading. Heavenly Father will help us find the answer by the Holy Ghost as we read the scriptures.



He also answers prayers in other ways. One time we were traveling and lost a ticket for the car park. We were trying to find a manager so we could get out, and I prayed silently that we would be able to find someone and that we would be OK. We did find a manager, and everything was OK. I know that Heavenly Father answers our prayers.

Gieran V., Sydney, Australia

ANSWERING QUESTIONS

After track practice, my brother, my friend, her brother, and I were waiting to get picked up. While we were waiting, we talked with our coach about our religion. He belongs to another faith, but he knew that we were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Even though he had many questions, all four of us were Church members, so I wasn't nervous or afraid he would ask a question that I wouldn't know the answer to. I knew that if I didn't know the answer, then there was a pretty

good chance my brother or friends would know it.

A couple of hours later, when we were picked up, I thought about what I'd do the next time someone asked a question I didn't know the answer to. I decided that I didn't want that to happen and that praying, studying the scriptures, attending church, and partaking of the sacrament would help, because next time my friends or brother might not be there to back me up.

Fani O., Missouri, USA

Editor's note: Read more about being prepared to share the gospel on page 26.

HE HEARD ME

I have to admit, summer came as a much-anticipated relief for me this year. I don't hate school. In fact, I usually love school. But my sophomore year of high school was harder than I'd ever imagined.

The homework load grew and grew all year. The classes were hard, and all of the extra activities that come with high school were making it difficult for me to find time for everything. It stressed me out, and I was always busy. I felt like I never had time to have fun anymore or to see my friends. I felt lonely and depressed.

One night, I got home from babysitting, and I felt overwhelmed. I couldn't stop crying. I pulled out my patriarchal blessing. As I read through it, a phrase caught my eye over and over. My blessing promised me that I

would be blessed with peace in my heart as I went through hard times.

Before I could stop myself, the thought entered my mind, "Then how come I don't feel peace right now?" Immediately the answer came: "Why haven't you asked for it?"

I knelt down and prayed, pouring my heart out like I'd never done before. As I knelt there before my Father in Heaven, I felt the peace that He had promised swell in my heart. I felt love and peace and hope, and I knew that I could never be alone because He would always be there. He understands perfectly, and I can always turn to Him.

Even though the problems didn't just go away, my life did get better. I felt more in control and never without help or misunderstood.

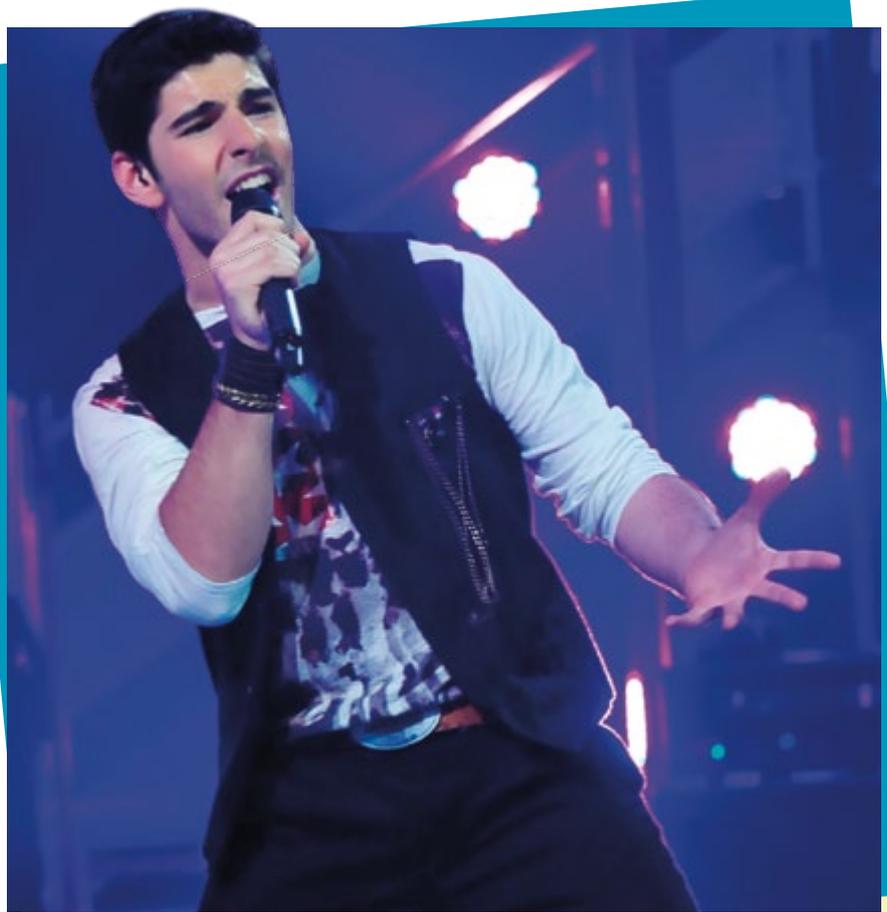
Charly T., Utah, USA

A Voice for High Standards

Bright lights. Screaming crowds. Thousands of fans on Facebook. When 17-year-old Gerson Santos became a top-10 finalist in the Portuguese televised musical talent competition *Ídolos*, he had to adjust to the fame and attention that came with his success. Gerson decided to embrace this unique opportunity to preach the gospel and quickly became known across the Portuguese media as the “Mormon competitor” willing to answer questions about his faith.

How did you decide to enter *Ídolos*? How did you prepare?

Ídolos was a television show I really enjoyed watching. I have always liked performing and hoped to someday enter a music competition. This year I didn't hesitate; I simply signed myself up for the show and went to the audition with my dad. I guess you could say I've been preparing for *Ídolos* my entire life. Every experience I had with *Ídolos* was amazing, without exception. I tried to take advantage of every opportunity that came my way.



Name: Gerson Santos

Age: 17

Location: Setúbal, Portugal

Hobbies: Singing, acting, playing guitar, watching movies, dancing with his sisters, composing and playing music with his brother, and studying at the music conservatory

What missionary opportunities did you have during the competition?

Once during a dinner with the other contestants, we talked a little bit about religion, and I spoke about my faith and the standards of the Church. Later I gave each of the finalists a copy of the *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet so they could better understand what I believe. Some said the Church's standards seemed really conservative, but others praised me for having such high standards in these days.

Ídolos must have taken up a lot of your time. How did you still have time for Church responsibilities?

I continued to say my prayers, read my scriptures, participate in seminary,

and take the sacrament every Sunday. I am currently preparing to serve a mission, which is something I've wanted to do since I was little. I serve in my ward as ward pianist, ward missionary, and assistant to the bishop in the priests quorum. I had to dedicate almost all my time to the competition, but I made sure to first dedicate time to the Lord. **NE**

—As told to Hilary Watkins Lemon

HOW TO SEEK AND KNOW THE FATHER AND THE SON



By Elder Robert D. Hales

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

HOW HAVE YOU APPLIED THIS?

The knowledge that God lives, knows me, and loves me is what taught me to pray and come to know Him. I know that God loves me because as I pray each day, I learn to hear His voice.

Bethany A.

I have a purpose to my life because I know I have a perfect, unchanging, and living Heavenly Father who has a plan for me that stretches through eternity.

Samuel M.

Read More

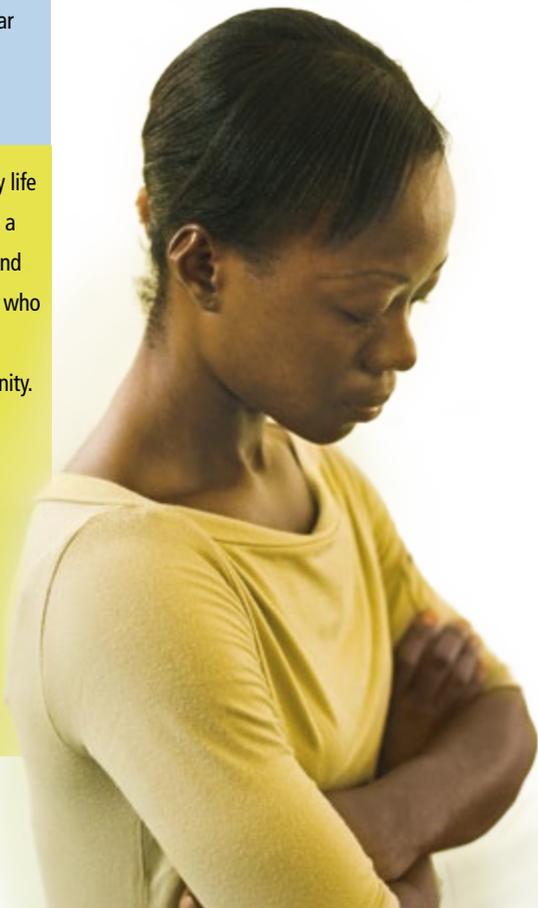
Turn to page 30 to see what latter-day prophets have taught about Heavenly Father.

The way to know the truth *about God* is through the Holy Ghost. His work is to “testify of [God]” (John 15:26) and to “teach [us] all things” (John 14:26).

However, we must be careful not to constrain His influence. When we do not do what is right or when our outlook is dominated by skepticism, cynicism, criticism, and irreverence toward others and their beliefs, the Spirit cannot be with us.

You may already know, deep in your soul, that God lives. You may not know all about Him yet and do not understand all His ways, but *the light of belief is within you*, waiting to be awakened and intensified by the Spirit of God and the Light of Christ, which you are born with.

So come. *Believe the testimonies of the prophets*. Learn of God and Christ. The pattern to do so is clearly taught by prophets of old and prophets today.



- *Cultivate a diligent desire* to know that God lives.

- This desire leads us to ponder on the things of heaven—to *let the evidence of God all around us touch our hearts*.

- With softened hearts we are prepared to *heed the Savior’s call to “search the scriptures”* (John 5:39) and to humbly learn from them.

- We are then ready to *ask our Heavenly Father sincerely*, in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, if the things we have learned are true. Most of us will not see God, as the prophets have, but the still, small promptings of the Spirit—the thoughts and feelings that the Holy Ghost brings into our minds and hearts—will give us an undeniable knowledge that He lives and that He loves us.

Gaining this knowledge is ultimately the quest of all God’s children on the earth. If you cannot remember believing in God or if you have ceased to believe or if you believe but without real conviction, I invite you to *seek a testimony of God now*. Do not be afraid of ridicule. The strength and peace that come from knowing God and having the comforting companionship of His Spirit will make your efforts eternally worthwhile.

As a special witness of the Only Begotten Son of our loving Heavenly Father, even Jesus Christ, I testify that God lives. I *know* He lives. I promise that if you will seek Him in all humility, sincerity, and diligence, you will know with a surety too. *Your witness will come*.

From the October 2009 general conference address “Seeking to Know God, Our Heavenly Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ” (Ensign, Nov. 2009, 29–32).

Share Your Experiences

Share *your* experiences in applying this principle and read the experiences of other youth by going to [lds.org/go/221](https://www.lds.org/go/221).



PHOTO BY SHANLEY TRUMAN

Charcoal

By Rachel Morrow

Charcoal lines create the landscape.
Swift strokes of the Master Artist
Depict the bony ribs of leafless trees
Against the empty canvas of the sky.
The earth's unyielding, hidden by snow.
I long to scribble with vibrant paints
Upon this black and white scene,
To breathe life into the smoggy air.
Walking alone in this coloring book,
Everything is silent and stiff.
My shoes against the winter grit
Is the only thing heard for miles
In this expanse of frigid, smoky grays.
I hold my breath with the world,
And sink into the silence of February.
Becoming for a brief moment
Just another element in this drawing
Of charcoal against the blank sky.

WHAT'S ONLINE

Free Music Download

On pages 2 and 6 of this issue, you'll find articles about the tender mercies of the Lord (see 1 Nephi 1:20). After hearing Elder David A. Bednar's address, a young woman wrote a song about the tender mercies of the Lord. You can download it, along with dozens of other free songs, on the music page of

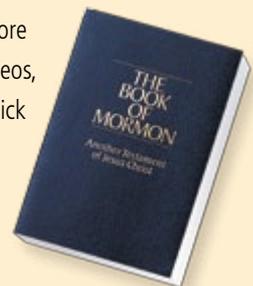
youth.lds.org. Access the music page directly at **lds.org/go/22J**.



Youth in Europe Took a Book of Mormon Challenge

Youth in Eastern Europe accepted an invitation to read the Book of Mormon every day for 20 minutes and record their impressions in a journal. See how it affected them in the short *Mormon Messages for Youth* video "The Book of

Mormon: Messages from Heaven" at **lds.org/go/22K**. To watch more *Mormon Messages for Youth* videos, head to **youth.lds.org** and click on "Videos." You can also read President Thomas S. Monson's counsel to read the Book of Mormon at **lds.org/go/22L**.



What Is Deep Beauty?

Do you ever wonder what real beauty is? See a video about how Sister Elaine S. Dalton, Young Women general president, describes deep beauty online at **lds.org/go/22M**.