

My BRAND NEW, Old Family

If you let it, there's nothing the gospel can't change.

By Leonardo Conceição

The missionaries held up a photo. "What do you see?" they asked. "A happy family," I answered. "Are all families happy?" I shook my head no. "You've seen *my* family," I explained.

I was a 16-year-old living in Brazil, where I had lived all my life. The missionaries had been teaching me for several weeks, but nobody else in my family wanted to listen. During that time, the missionaries had often seen my family fight and argue. My family and the grinning family in the photo had nothing in common.

One of the elders said, "Well, maybe your current family isn't this way. But you can build your future family differently."

When we ended the visit, they asked me again to pray about what we'd been studying. As always, I didn't exactly promise to do so. I enjoyed how I felt when the

missionaries visited, and the gospel made sense to me. But I was afraid of the answer I might receive. If the gospel was true, I would have to make a lot of changes.

A NEW CHOICE

After the elders left, I couldn't stop thinking about happy families. Ours wasn't even close. My dad wasn't in my life. My relationship with my mom wasn't great. Grandma was the one who took care of us, but none of us behaved like a family

the way the missionaries taught. None of us expressed love to each other or even spent much time together.

All my life I promised myself I would be a good dad someday. I would be the parent I never had. Yet as the missionaries taught me, I started realizing that I was doing the same things my parents did at my age. I stayed out late, did whatever I wanted, and lived like a rebel. Without meaning to, I was repeating the same story.

It was time to ask God.



**THE GOSPEL SHOWS US HOW
TO IMPROVE OUR FAMILIES,
NO MATTER WHAT OUR FAMILY
SITUATION LOOKS LIKE.**



When I finally prayed, I received the answer I had expected all along. The Church is true! Now it was time to make a choice.

A NEW ME

My grandmother had to give permission before I could be baptized. She was against it, but I persisted.

“Grandma, which Leonardo do you prefer?” I asked. “The one who was out drinking and smoking and coming home late? Or do you prefer who I am now? These changes are because of the gospel.”

Grandma finally agreed, and I was baptized and confirmed. From that moment, something interesting began to happen in my family—something I didn’t realize fully until a few years later.

A NEW FAMILY

Right before I left for my mission to southern Brazil, Grandma attended stake conference with me. Afterward we held a small testimony meeting with family and friends. To my surprise, Grandma wanted to say something.

“Ever since Leonardo joined your church, my family started becoming a *real* family,” she said. She then listed ways our entire family had grown closer: We now spent time together. We started saying “I love you” to each other, when we never had before. The fighting and arguing stopped. Real friendships developed among all of us. We had more to eat and were blessed with abundance in other areas.

I had noticed these changes too, but I hadn’t realized the timing could be linked back to when I was baptized.

“I may not be a member of your church,” she said, “but I am a friend

of your church. And I know our family has been blessed because of Leonardo’s choice.”

A NEW UNDERSTANDING

I could hardly believe it! And yet, as Grandma spoke of how our family had grown closer, I suddenly remembered the photo the missionaries had shown me years before. Back then, I thought my only way to have a happy family was with my future family.

But I was wrong. My current family was happy! We had grown to love each other.

Maybe none of my family members will join the Church in this lifetime. But even if they don’t, I know that God has already blessed us in so many ways. The gospel of Jesus Christ shows us how to improve our families, no matter what our family situation looks like. **NE**

The author is from Brazil.