





A SOUL CRYING OUT

He didn't look like a pleasant man to talk to. Part of me was scared, but another part really wanted to talk to him.

By Stephen Dugdale

I had the opportunity to serve as a missionary in Catania, Italy. At one point, we hit a rough spot in the work. We'd had a whole week of pretty much everything going wrong, and each day was a test of whether or not we would retain good spirits, keep a smile on, and continue trying hard.

One evening, we were determined to change the flow of things. We went around talking to people in a park near our house, and we saw this guy sitting on a bench with his head down and a cigarette in his mouth. He was dressed in black from head to toe and wore the hood of his big puffy jacket over his head. He did not look like a very pleasant man to talk to. I looked at him, my companion looked at him, we looked at each other, and back at him.

Elder Farley asked me, "Have we talked with him before?"

"I think we have, because I really think I know him," I responded.

"Yeah, me too," Elder Farley said.

So we started walking toward him. Part of me was scared because he was just not a person I would normally talk to, but another part really wanted to talk to him.

"Good evening, how are you?" we asked.

He looked up with darkened eyes, as if to say, "Who disturbs my slumber!?" Then very softly he said, "Good evening." We introduced ourselves as missionaries, and he quickly told us that he was atheist and didn't believe in anything. We asked him why, which I think caught him by surprise.

"Well, because I lost my mom, dad, sister, and niece all in the same month, and I've lived a terrible, lonely

life because of it. Religion didn't do anything but make it worse for me."

We asked him if he knew where his loved ones were.

"In Catania cemetery, where they have been for a long time," he responded.

We explained to him the spirit world and the Resurrection. We told him that right now we are each a spirit and a body, and that death is merely a temporary separation between the spirit and the body. We told him that his family members were just waiting for him until they could all be reunited with their bodies and live together for eternity.

He looked at us, confused, and said, "I didn't understand any of that. Could you repeat everything?"

So we repeated everything. Then he raised an eyebrow in confusion and said, "Wait, I'm a spirit and a body? And my family is just waiting for me and learning right now?"

We read him several scriptures from Alma 40 and other chapters, and he looked at us and asked, "So why have I never heard this before?"

I don't think I had ever met a more truly humble person in my life. This man had been so lost for such a long time, so confused, so lonely. He took in everything we said, telling us that he understood very little of it because it was all stuff he had never heard before, but he liked everything.

We taught him about how we can get answers through prayer. He hadn't prayed in over 30 years, and the last time had been a recited prayer in church when he was a child. After we talked about answers from the Spirit, he asked us

what the Spirit feels like. Since it can be different for everyone, we both shared what it feels like for us. I told him that to me it feels like getting a hug from your mom after you haven't seen her for a long time. I felt impressed to promise him that he could and would feel that same thing, a feeling like a hug from his mom who had been missing from his life for a long, long time.

We asked him if we could pray with him. He was really confused and asked, "Now? Here, in the park?"

"We can pray whenever, wherever we want," I told him. "God wants to hear from us, and He is especially anxious to hear from you because He hasn't heard from you in a long time."

He had never heard a prayer before that wasn't a memorized prayer to a saint, so he was pretty eager to see how it worked. We bowed our heads, and my companion said



BELONGING TO GOD'S FAMILY

"All [people] are children of God, your brothers and sisters. God loves them just as He loves you. Many of these people are searching for purpose in life. They are concerned for their families. They need the sense of belonging that comes from the knowledge that they are children of God, members of His eternal family."

Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service (2004), 1.

the prayer for our new friend, Alfio, and asked for blessings, help, and comfort for him. He asked for Alfio to feel an answer that his family was all right and that God really exists. We finished our prayer, and Alfio looked at us with gigantic eyes.

"I must tell you something," he said. "I am not a person who lies, especially about something like this. I feel like I just got a huge hug from my mother. I haven't gotten a hug from anyone in a long, long time. That felt so good. I want to know how I can feel that again, because I want more hugs like that."

"Ever since that prayer, I have walked around with my head up, and I look at everything. This world is beautiful."

The next day we met again. Alfio sat down next to us on the same bench and said, "Elders, my entire life I have walked with my hood up and my head down, staring at the ground. I have never, ever walked with my head up. Ever since that prayer, I have walked around with my head up, and I look at everything. This world is beautiful."

Needless to say, we continued working with Alfio to bring more hugs, more light, and more looking up into his life. The scary man on the bench who looked like he would hate us was really a soul crying out, begging to feel his Heavenly Father's love again. **NE**

Stephen Dugdale lives in Missouri, USA.