



Gaining a Testimony—

ALASKAN

EXPERIENCES



By Joshua J. Perkey
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For Matison J., growing up in Alaska, USA, was probably a lot different from what many of us experience elsewhere in the world. It's a pretty safe guess that most of us don't need to chop enough firewood to help heat our homes for seven months of the year, haven't seen moose walking down the middle of our street, and haven't been on black bear hunts or fished for salmon in the ocean.

But for members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the similarities we share outnumber the differences. Matison says, "The Church is the same no matter where you go. Down in the [Alaskan] cities of Valdez or Homer—or in other

One of the most important things we can do in this life is gain an abiding testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ.



states or countries—it's the same. The same teachings, the same gospel."

In the gospel of Jesus Christ, each of us has a unique journey. But we each follow a path to conversion, make the same covenants, and strive to keep the same commandments. And for each of us, that path begins with gaining a testimony. We may not all gain a testimony the same way, but we each need one.

"There is absolutely nothing in this world that will provide more comfort and happiness than a testimony of the truth," says President Thomas S. Monson.¹

Matison and his siblings, Mackena and Merrick, each found this to be true, but in three very different ways.



1



MATISON'S SONG

For Matison, 17, a life of living gospel standards helped lay a foundation for a testimony-building experience he had that helped him *know* the restored gospel is true. It happened one morning on the way to school. He was feeling really stressed because of a big test he had that day. As he often did, he started singing along to a recording of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir performing “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing.”

“And I just felt it hit me,” he says. “It was almost like something hit the car. It was just such a strong, overwhelming feeling of comfort and peace in my mind. I had been feeling really stressed. But all of a sudden everything became calm. And I knew I was doing the right things.”

2



MACKENA'S TRIAL

For Mackena, 15, her testimony did not come until after a very personal, painful trial of faith (see Ether 12:6).

“Until the time I was about 12,” she says, “I had never had a single doubt about the gospel. I knew that the temple was where I was going. I knew that my family could be together forever, that Heavenly Father loves me, and that the Church is true.”

“But once I got into middle school, I began doubting a lot. And for three years I didn’t know that the Church is true. It was really hard. It was the loneliest, most terrible, saddest time in my life.”

Then one day her seminary teacher taught, “If you want faith, then it will come.” The message struck a chord with Mackena.

“I decided that I really wanted faith, because I was miserable. So I prayed a lot and I started reading my scriptures by myself for the first time in my life. And I repented. Now I feel that Jesus Christ is my very, very best friend. I know that He knows me and loves me.”

“I’m just really grateful,” Mackena says, “because now I know how precious my faith is to me, and I never want to let that go—ever.”





GAINING A TESTIMONY

Matison, Mackena, and Merrick each received strong testimonies in three distinct ways, and your path to receiving one might be different from theirs. Just because one person received it one way doesn't mean that someone else will have the same experience. But a testimony can come to all.

Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught: "As an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, I testify of the truth of what is in the scriptures and what has been told to me and can be told to you by the Holy Spirit. It will be revealed according to your obedience and desires. The Savior taught us during His mortal ministry this great truth that applies to all of us: 'Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you' (3 Nephi 18:20)."²

No matter who you are, the first step to gaining a testimony begins with a desire. But it doesn't end there.

MAINTAINING A TESTIMONY

Keeping a testimony is just as important as gaining one in the first place. President Monson said, "If you feel that you do not yet have the depth of testimony you would wish, I admonish you to work to achieve such a testimony. If it is strong and deep, labor to keep it that way. How blessed we are to have a knowledge of the truth."³

One of the ways Matison and Merrick work on strengthening



3



MERRICK'S MOMENT

For Merrick, 13, the simple choices he made to be in the right place at the right time brought him spiritual strength. He chose to go on a pioneer reenactment trek with the youth in his ward. On the last day, they held a testimony meeting and a lot of youth bore their testimonies.

"It was really cool," Merrick says. "You could feel the Spirit a lot by just sitting there and listening to these people talk about all of the challenges they had on trek and how the pioneers had to do this but a lot worse. It was really cool to hear their perspective on the gospel."

their testimonies every day is by focusing on doing their duty as priesthood holders.

“Every morning at 6:15 a.m.,” Matison explains, “the guys in the family all sit down together and study the *Duty to God* booklet. It’s not about requirements but rather a way of life and a choice of how to live your life. The principles help you change your life so you’re living the way you’re supposed to. That’s a fun thing.”

Merrick admits it’s not always easy waking up early. “Sometimes I’ll fall asleep on the couch,” he says, laughing, “and they’ll have to wake me up. We review *Duty to God* in our deacons quorum on Sundays too. Someone shares a short thought each week, and on fast Sundays we focus the full lesson on it.” (Each month, one *Come, Follow Me* lesson in Aaronic Priesthood centers around *Duty to God*.)

Merrick has learned that focusing on priesthood service “helps me keep

my testimony, gain a stronger one, and stay on the right track for life.” His experience also shows that the personal choices we make every day build a testimony over time.

Mackena has also discovered that truth. She says, “I read my scriptures a lot and I pray a lot. Just doing the little things every day, just smiling and trying to be happy and trying to see the bigger picture when hard things happen. I’ve also had opportunities to share the gospel, which has strengthened my testimony a lot too. I love this Church.”

As we each follow our journey in life, the pattern of actively seeking a testimony and then building it each day—something these siblings have experienced—is true for all of us, no matter where we live. **NE**

NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “See Others as They May Become,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2012, 68.
2. Robert D. Hales, “Gaining a Testimony of God the Father; His Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Ghost,” *Ensign*, May 2008, 32.
3. Thomas S. Monson, “See Others,” 68.

The Power of Prayer

Once when Matison, Mackena, Merrick, and their family were traveling to their cabin, their tractor kept getting stuck in the icy overflow. Eventually their dad decided they would have to make the rest of the trip on foot. But it would be cold and wet, with ice water soaking them up to their knees and sometimes even to their waists.

But their father said a simple prayer asking Heavenly Father to help them make it to the cabin, and off they went. Soon they were singing Primary songs and laughing along the way. They made it to where they’d stashed a canoe. Then the whole family—two adults and four children—canoeed through the icy river safely to their cabin.

“The Lord helped us,” Matison relates. “It turned out great. We said a prayer and asked Him for help and safety, and it turned out to be a great experience.”

