

DECEMBER 2024

Liahona

Pointing Us All to Jesus Christ

JESUS CHRIST:
THE LIGHT OF
CHRISTMAS



A MESSAGE FROM ELDER BEDNAR

Seek the Spiritual Gift of Hope, 2

RELIEF SOCIETY

A Global Sisterhood Reaching Every Soul, 8



First Presidency Christmas Message

At this joyful time of year, we are grateful to celebrate with you the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Although He was born in humble circumstances, He is the central figure in all human history. His mission affects all who have lived and will yet live. Through His Atonement and Resurrection, He did what we could not do for ourselves: overcome death and be reconciled to our Heavenly Father.

We testify that He is the Son of the Eternal Father, who “so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). We share our witness and knowledge of this most important gift and invite you to do the same this Christmas season.

Russell M. Nelson

Dallin H. Oaks

Henry B. Eyring

The First Presidency



CONTENTS

"This Christmas season gives us a special opportunity to focus on the peace Jesus Christ offers us."

—Elder Thierry K. Mutombo, page 30

2 Jesus Christ Is the Source of "Lively," "Good," and "More Excellent Hope"

By Elder David A. Bednar

8 As Women, We Exist in an Oft Unspoken Global Sisterhood

By President Camille N. Johnson

10 Where Are You in the Pride Cycle?

By Elder Wilford W. Andersen

18 Walking with New Members in the Journey of Discipleship

By Shaun Stahle

25 Portraits of Faith: Our Struggles Became Our Blessings

By Allan Oduor Omondi

26 Latter-day Saint Voices

Members from around the world share inspiring stories of faith.

30 Young Adults: Where to Turn for Hope, Peace, and Purpose When Life Changes

By Elder Thierry K. Mutombo

34 Young Adults: The Freedom to Choose Christ

By Yevheniia (Ginger) Zinchenko

36 The Church Is Here: Orléans, France

38 Stories from *Saints*, Volume 4: Rallying to Serve in Chennai

40 *Come, Follow Me*: Faith Brings Miracles

42 *Come, Follow Me*: The Gift of Another Testament of Jesus Christ

44 *Come, Follow Me*: The Gift of Charity

By Elder Takashi Wada



COVER

The Holy Child Is Born, by Dana Mario Wood, may not be copied





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

JESUS CHRIST

Is the Source of “Lively,” “Good,”
and “More Excellent Hope”

In this special season of celebrating the birth of the babe in Bethlehem, may we always remember that Jesus Christ came into the world to be our Savior and Redeemer.

The Apostle Peter and the Book of Mormon prophets Jacob and Moroni emphasize the spiritual gift of hope in Christ in instructively similar ways.

For example, Peter declared, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto *a lively hope* by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3; emphasis added). Please notice the use of the word “lively” to describe “hope.”

Jacob proclaimed, “Wherefore, beloved brethren, be reconciled unto him through the atonement of Christ, his Only Begotten Son, and ye may obtain a resurrection, according to the power of the resurrection which is in Christ, and be presented as the first-fruits of Christ unto God, having faith, and obtained *a good hope* of glory in him before he manifesteth himself in the flesh” (Jacob 4:11; emphasis added). Please notice the use of the word “good” to describe “hope.”

“And what is it that ye shall hope for? Behold I say unto you that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in him according to the promise.

“Wherefore, if a man have faith he must needs have hope; for without faith there cannot be any hope.”

Moroni 7:41–42

And Moroni stated, “And I also remember that thou hast said that thou hast prepared a house for man, yea, even among the mansions of thy Father, in which man might have *a more excellent hope*; wherefore man must hope, or he cannot receive an inheritance in the place which thou hast prepared” (Ether 12:32; emphasis added). Please notice the use of the word “excellent” to describe “hope.”

What Is Hope in Christ?

The spiritual gift of hope in Christ is the joyful anticipation of eternal life through the “merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8) and a strong desire for the promised blessings of righteousness. The adjectives “lively,” “good,” and “more excellent” in these verses suggest an ever-expanding and vibrant assurance of the Resurrection and of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

The prophet Mormon explained:

“And again, my beloved brethren, I would speak unto you concerning hope. How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall have hope?”

“And what is it that ye shall hope for? Behold I say unto you that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in him according to the promise.

“Wherefore, if a man have faith he must needs have hope; for without faith there cannot be any hope” (Moroni 7:40–42).

The Father’s Plan of Happiness

Hope in Christ that is lively, good, and more excellent begins with the knowledge that God the Eternal Father lives. He is our Father, and we are His spirit children. We literally are spirit sons and daughters of God and have inherited divine qualities from Him.

The Father is the author of the plan of happiness (see Abraham 3:22–28). As spirit sons and daughters of God, we “accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny as heirs of eternal life” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Gospel Library). In the scriptures, we learn: “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also” (Doctrine and Covenants 130:22). Thus, obtaining physical bodies is essential in the process of progressing toward our divine destiny.

We are dual beings. Our spirits, the eternal part of us, are clothed in physical bodies that are subject to the desires and appetites of mortality. The Father’s plan of happiness is designed to provide direction for His children, to help them return safely home to Him with resurrected, exalted bodies, and to receive the blessings of eternal joy and happiness.

The Redemptive Role of Jesus Christ in the Father’s Plan

Jesus Christ is the Only Begotten Son of the Eternal Father. He came into the world to do the will of His Father

(see 3 Nephi 27:13). Jesus Christ is the one anointed of the Father to be His personal representative in all things pertaining to the salvation of mankind. He is our Savior and Redeemer because He overcame both death and sin.

Alma prophesied to the people of Gideon concerning the saving work of the Messiah:

“And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

“And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.

“Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance” (Alma 7:11–13).

The first principle of the gospel is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. True faith focuses in and on the Savior and enables us to trust in Him and have complete confidence in His power to save us from death, cleanse us from sin, and bless us with strength beyond our own.

Moroni testified, “And because of the redemption of man, which came by Jesus Christ, they are brought back

into the presence of the Lord; yea, this is wherein all men are redeemed, because the death of Christ bringeth to pass the resurrection, which bringeth to pass a redemption from an endless sleep, from which sleep all men shall be awakened by the power of God when the trump shall sound; and they shall come forth, both small and great, and all shall stand before his bar, being redeemed and loosed from this eternal band of death, which death is a temporal death” (Mormon 9:13).

I testify that the Savior broke the bands of death. He was resurrected, He lives, and He is the only source of lively, good, and more excellent hope.

An Anchor to the Soul

The prophet Ether testified, “Wherefore, whoso believeth in God might *with surety hope for a better world*, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, *which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men*, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God” (Ether 12:4; emphasis added).

In this special season of celebrating the birth of the babe in Bethlehem, may we always remember that Jesus Christ came into the world to be our Savior and Redeemer. He offers to us the priceless spiritual gifts of life, light, renewal, love, peace, perspective, joy, and hope.

I invite you to seek appropriately for the spiritual gift of hope in the Savior by studying the teachings and testimonies of ancient and modern prophets concerning His atoning sacrifice and literal Resurrection. As

you do so, I promise that your testimony of the Redeemer’s divinity will be strengthened, your conversion to Him will be deepened, your desire and determination to stand as a valiant witness of Him will be increased, and you will be blessed with an anchor to your soul—even lively, good, and more excellent hope.

With the Apostles who have borne testimony of Him throughout the ages, I joyfully declare my witness that Jesus Christ is the living Son of the living God. He is our resurrected Redeemer with a glorified, tangible body of flesh and bones. And because of the redemption and reconciliation with God that the Lord makes possible for all humankind, we can receive the spiritual assurance and a lively, good, and more excellent hope that “in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). ■



THE CHRIST CHILD, BY CHARLOTTE ANDRUS



By President Camille N. Johnson
Relief Society General President

AS WOMEN, WE EXIST IN AN OFT UNSPOKEN GLOBAL SISTERHOOD

Relief Society provides the practical means of fulfilling Jesus Christ's command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

***Author's note:** Earlier this year, I spoke in Brussels, Belgium, at the European Union in celebration of International Women's Day. I spoke about religious liberty and the power of women to make a difference, inviting the attendees to "envision a world in which women cultivate, use, and expand their natural gifts, empowered to participate in a global sisterhood of peacemakers." The following message is an excerpt from that speech and has been adapted for the Liahona.*

President Russell M. Nelson taught that “women have been blessed with a unique moral compass”¹ and that women possess “special spiritual gifts and propensities”² to sense human needs, to comfort, teach, and strengthen. Our communities depend upon women to perform in their unique roles as leaders, teachers, nurturers, healers, and peacemakers.

As women, we exist in an oft unspoken global sisterhood. The tides and seasons of our biology and the universality of the way we bear and nurture humanity connect us wordlessly across cultural divides and language barriers.

I have seen what women do when they connect with others through our sisterhood. I have seen women elevate one another in the midst of poverty. I have seen women care for, feed, and nurture children who are not their own. I have seen women stand to protect others from the ravages of war. When it lives up to its high ideals, Relief Society provides the practical means of fulfilling Jesus Christ's command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

For example, in the last decade, during the refugee crisis in Europe, Church members pooled their time, talent, and treasure to assist many of the displaced peoples flooding into Europe. Their efforts helped relieve the desperate conditions in the migrant camps.

In the Philippines, Latter-day Saint women were concerned about the high rates of malnutrition in their communities and how it was affecting their own families. They learned more about the most common causes of malnutrition and its devastating lifelong effects. Ward and stake Relief Societies hosted nutritional screenings in Church buildings for member families and their neighbors and then taught parents about good nutrition. They referred those in need to local medical and community services that would provide treatment.

The impact of these women came as they worked for the good of the families in their communities. The most

important and impactful work of women continues to be done close to us: when we care for our own children, teach a friend to read, patiently address the needs of an elderly neighbor, prepare a meal for the sick, or cry with a sister who is grieving.

I strive to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and follow His example in serving others. His daily discipline was always to reach out to those in anguish one by one: in private conversation with the socially outcast Samaritan woman at the well (see John 4); pausing to comfort the hemorrhagic woman in the crowd (see Luke 8:43–48); privately healing the young daughter of Jairus (see Luke 8:51–55).

While my current work involves efforts to improve conditions for women and children around the world, I realize that Christ’s most important requirement for me as His disciple is to recognize individual needs around me and respond with patience and love.

Organizations cannot reach every person in the world, no matter how well funded their programs, well penned their policies, or well developed their diplomacy. But through our global sisterhood, we can reach every single soul.

Whose life can you meaningfully improve today with an act of compassion? I urge you to pause for a moment and connect with our Heavenly Father, the highest source of inspiration, and then wait quietly for guidance from the Holy Ghost. I invite you to write it down and do it. I hope that simple exercise will help you recognize that our greatest success will be in unleashing the power of our global sisterhood. ■

NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, “Spiritual Treasures,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 78.
2. Russell M. Nelson, “Sisters’ Participation in the Gathering of Israel,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 69.

THREE SISTERS, BY KATHLEEN PETERSON





By Elder Wilford W. Andersen
Emeritus General Authority Seventy

WHERE ARE **YOU** IN THE PRIDE CYCLE?

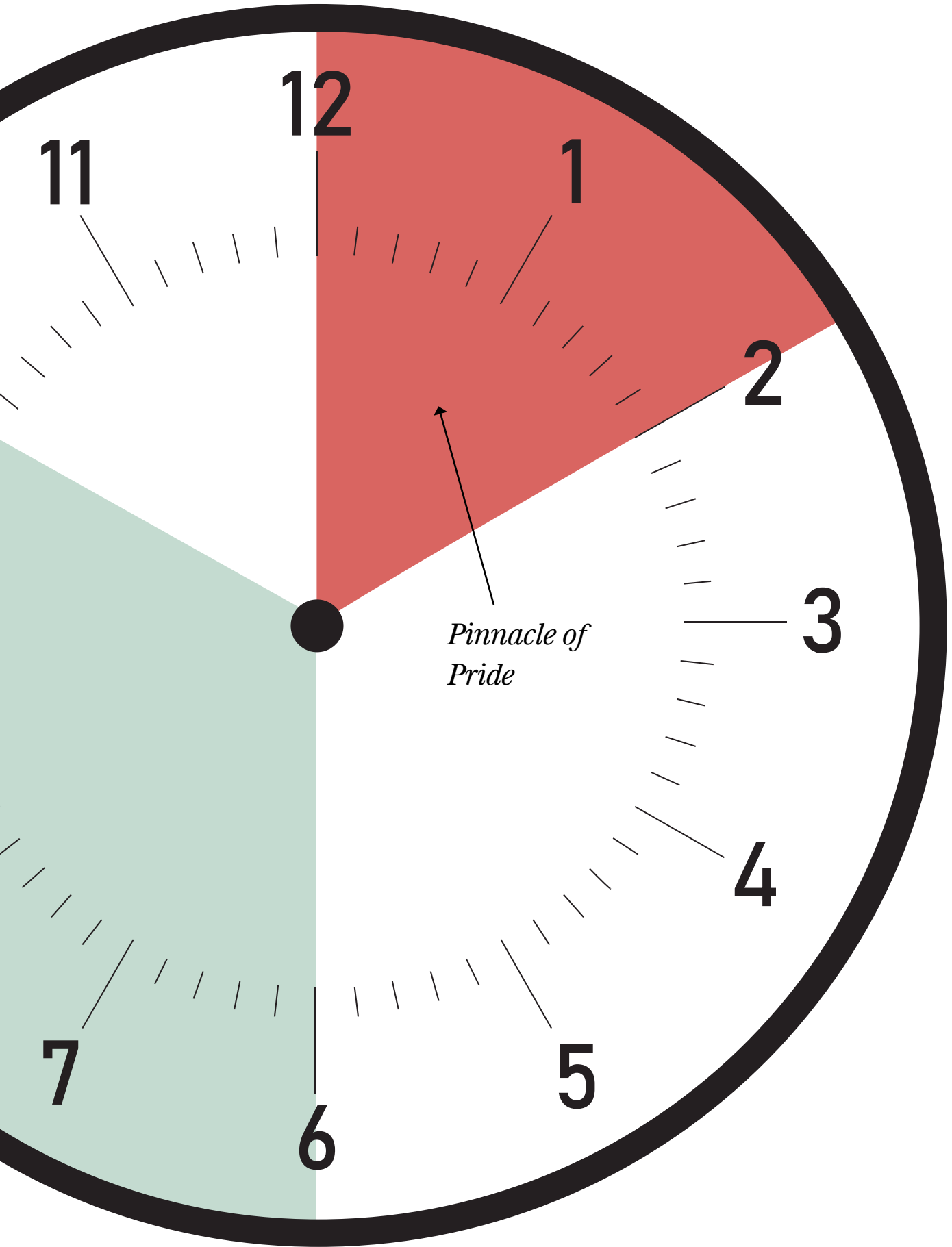
To exit the pride cycle, we must recognize that every blessing we receive comes from Heavenly Father.

There is a prevalent pattern of behavior in the Book of Mormon commonly referred to as “the pride cycle.”¹ It is repeated so frequently that one begins to sense that the Lord and His prophets are trying to teach us something important—that perhaps its inclusion in the record is meant to be a warning from the Lord to each of us in our day.

12:00—the Pinnacle of Pride

Using a clock as a metaphor, let’s say that the pride cycle begins at twelve o’clock—the pinnacle of pride. When we are at twelve o’clock on the pride cycle, we, like the Nephites of old, feel so successful, so intelligent, and so popular that we begin to feel invincible. We enjoy it when others compliment us on our successes, and we are irritated when others around us receive compliments on their successes.





*Pinnacle of
Pride*

At twelve o'clock we tend not to listen to the counsel of others. Sadly, we often conclude that we don't even need God or His servants. We bristle at their counsel. We are doing just fine on our own. We forget or we reject what King Benjamin taught: that we "are eternally indebted to [our] heavenly Father, to render to him all that [we] have and are" (Mosiah 2:34).

Our modern-day prophets have warned us against unrighteous pride. President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) called it "the universal sin" and "the great stumbling block to Zion."² Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles compared pride to "a personal Rameumptom, a holy stand that justifies envy, greed, and vanity."³ Pride alienates us from God. It pushes us around the pride cycle to two o'clock, where we offend the Spirit of the Holy Ghost.

2:00—Trusting in the Arm of Flesh

Initially we may think that offending the Spirit of the Holy Ghost is inconsequential. Nephi described it as being "lull[ed] . . . away into carnal security. . . . All is well in Zion [we think]; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well" (2 Nephi 28:21). Interestingly, at two o'clock on the pride cycle, if we are honest with ourselves, we really are not that happy. We have this gnawing sense that we are slipping. We try to fight back against the uncomfortable currents of the pride cycle. We cling to the memories of past successes and insist on putting our trust in the arm of flesh. This is a serious mistake.

Jesus taught, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). When we offend the Spirit, we cut ourselves off from the source of all spiritual nourishment, and it is just a matter of time until we begin to wilt. Without the help of the Lord and the influence of the Spirit, the gravitational pull of the pride cycle drags us down toward four o'clock failure.

4:00—Foolish Failure

The Lord taught Joseph Smith, "Although a man may . . . have power to do many mighty works, yet if he boasts in his own strength, and sets at naught the counsels of God, and follows after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires, he must fall" (Doctrine and Covenants 3:4).

We can choose our conduct, but we cannot choose the consequences of our conduct. At four o'clock on the pride cycle, we experience the painful consequences of our foolish pride. We may lose the job. We may lose the girlfriend or the boyfriend. We may lose the respect of those who matter most to us. Worse, we may lose respect for ourselves. And we come face to face with our own inadequacies. Like Moses, we realize that we are not so important after all, "which thing [we] never had supposed" (Moses 1:10).

6:00—Humility, Meekness, Submissiveness

Failures and afflictions are not happy thoughts for any of us, but ironically, we often find that they are great blessings because they tend to push us around the pride cycle toward six o'clock humility. We are no longer trying to impress those around us. We begin to see things more clearly and more honestly. We are more comfortable with criticism and can smile at our own mistakes and weaknesses. It is not, as one Christian author has observed, that we think less of ourselves but rather that we think of ourselves less.⁴

At six o'clock on the pride cycle, we become truly humble and meek. Humility and meekness are foundational principles of the gospel. We speak often of faith, hope, and charity. But the prophet Mormon suggested that there is a fourth virtue that makes possible the other three:

"I say unto you that he cannot have faith and hope, save he shall be meek, and lowly of heart.

"If so, his faith and hope is vain, for none is acceptable before God, save the meek and lowly in heart; and if a man be meek and lowly in heart, and confesses by the

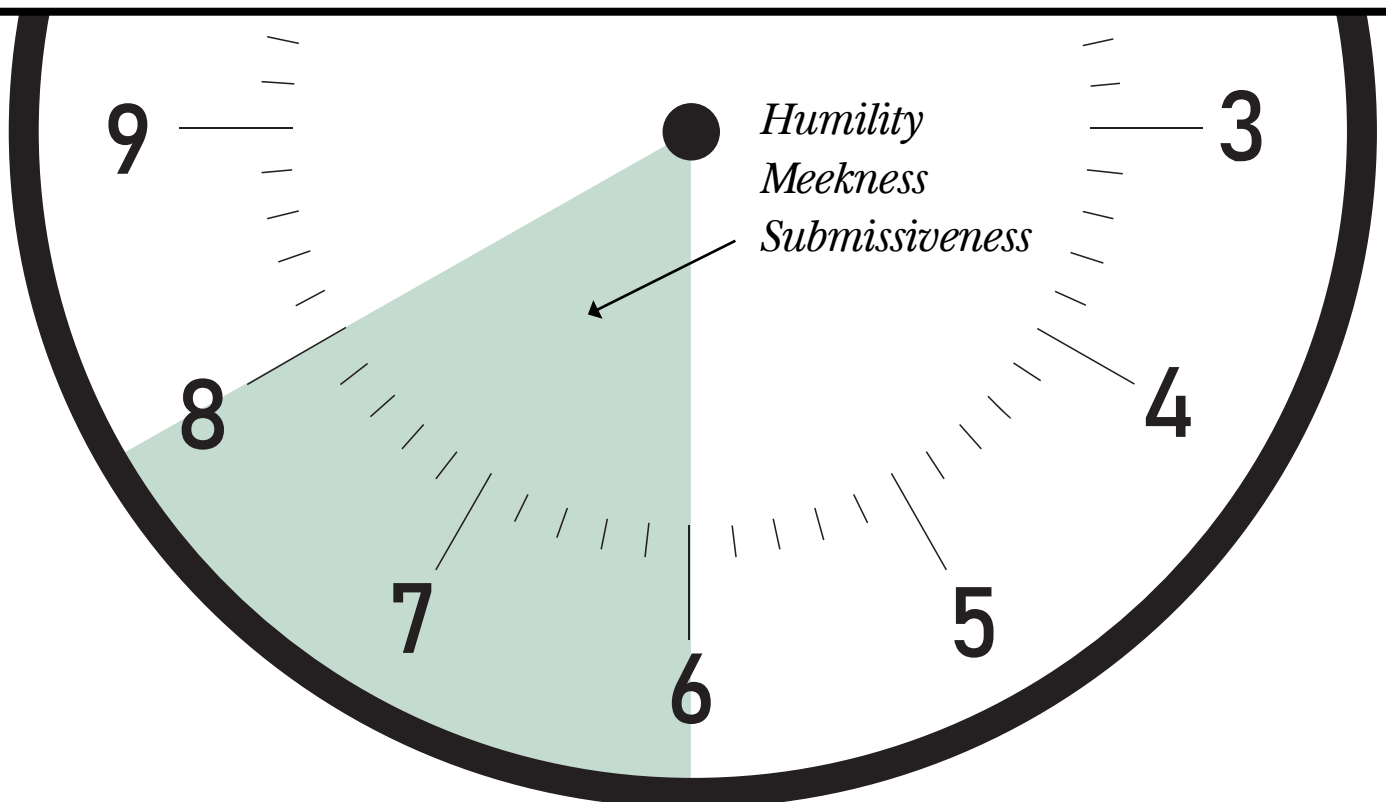
power of the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Christ, he must needs have charity” (Moroni 7:43–44).

Another scriptural attribute often associated with six o’clock humility is submissiveness. King Benjamin taught that “the natural man is an enemy to God . . . and will be, forever and ever, unless he . . . becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father” (Mosiah 3:19).

It has been said that meekness is not a recognition of our weakness but rather a recognition of the *true* source of our strength. There is nothing weak about meek.

When we are humble and meek, we don’t elevate ourselves; we elevate God.

At six o’clock on the pride cycle, when we are truly humble and meek, we turn back to God because there is often nowhere else to turn. Our hearts are now broken and our spirits are contrite. A broken heart is one that has been trained through experience to be obedient and responsive to the commands of the Master. Only with a broken heart can we be truly useful and productive in the Lord’s service. The scriptures explain that having a broken heart is a peaceful and hopeful condition and ultimately a prerequisite to eternal glory (see 2 Nephi 2:7; Doctrine and Covenants 97:8).





8:00—Blessings of the Holy Ghost

As we yield our broken hearts to God and because we are humble, the Lord begins to “lead [us] by the hand, and give [us] answer to [our] prayers” (Doctrine and Covenants 112:10). With His guidance, we continue around the pride cycle toward eight o’clock, when we invite the Spirit of the Holy Ghost into our lives once again.

The Spirit’s influence changes our hearts. Like the people of King Benjamin, “we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). We begin to keep God’s commandments, and He begins to pour down His blessings upon us—blessings that He has always desired to give us, for that is His nature, but that we refused to receive because of our foolish pride. We begin to receive blessings because we are now obeying the laws upon which they are predicated (see Doctrine and Covenants 130:20–21). We pay our tithing, and the Lord opens the windows of heaven and pours down so many blessings that we cannot receive them all (see Malachi 3:10).

10:00—Blessed Happiness

Our humble obedience to the commandments powers our progress around the pride cycle toward ten o’clock, when we find ourselves in a state of blessed happiness. We experience success. It should not surprise us; it is a scriptural promise: “I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual” (Mosiah 2:41).

Ten o’clock on the pride cycle is a pleasant and wonderful place to be, but unfortunately it is also a dangerous place to be. Our associates begin to compliment us for all our successes. Unfortunately, we begin to believe them.

If we are not careful, compliments can cloud our judgment and create in us an ungodly desire for more and more praise and credit. Like our ancient adversary (see Moses 4:1), we whisper to ourselves that *we* deserve the credit, for surely we have done it.

“And thus we can behold how false, and also the unsteadiness of the hearts of the children of men; yea, we can see that the Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him.

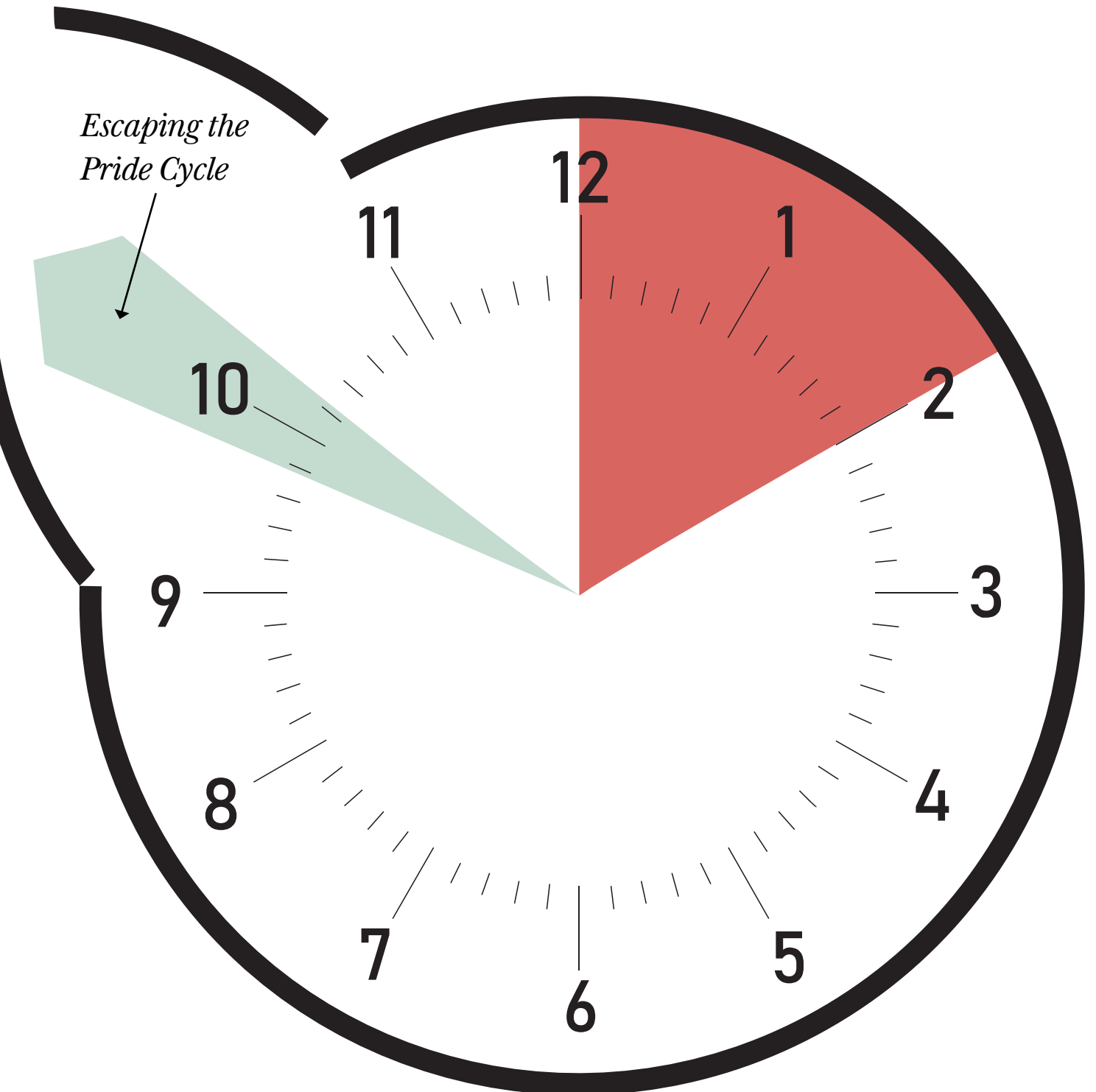
“Yea, and we may see at the very time when he doth prosper his people, yea, in the increase of their fields, their flocks and their herds, and in gold, and in silver, and in all manner of precious things of every kind and art; . . . yea, and in fine, doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people; yea, then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their God, and do trample under their feet the Holy One—yea, and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity” (Helaman 12:1–2).

12:00—the Pinnacle of Pride Again

Slowly—and without fully realizing it—we once again approach the twelve o’clock pinnacle of pride, so busy looking around for praise that we fail to look ahead at the fall that awaits us, for “pride [always] goeth . . . before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). And so the cycle continues.

Let’s be honest. Most of us, like the Nephites of old, have ourselves taken a few laps around the pride cycle. I used to wonder how the Nephite nation could run the entire cycle in a period of as short as five years. I have since come to believe that we can run the cycle in five years, and we can run it in five minutes. It is a pernicious pattern of thinking and behavior that permeates our society. It is so common that it sometimes becomes hard to recognize.

A SUCCESSFUL TEN O’CLOCK ESCAPE FROM THE POWERFUL PULL OF THE PRIDE CYCLE IS NOT EASY, BUT IT IS POSSIBLE.



Exiting the Pride Cycle

Are we consigned to continue forever in this endless loop of despair? Is there no way to get off the pride cycle? There is. In fact, there are two points on the pride cycle where we can exit—one to our eternal destruction and the other to our everlasting happiness.

At four o'clock, when we are facing failure or affliction and feel like all is lost, if instead of becoming humble, we become angry; if we lose hope or give in to self-pity; or if we begin to blame others—including God—for our misfortune, then we will exit the pride cycle. But we will exit downward to destruction, as did the Nephites of old.

But at ten o'clock, when it seems like we can do no wrong, when all is going well, if instead of becoming proud, we become thankful, then we will exit the pride cycle. But this time we will exit upward toward God. To exit the pride cycle at ten o'clock, we must recognize that every blessing we receive comes from Heavenly Father. He is the source of all that is good in our lives—the fount of every blessing. We must embrace King Benjamin's teaching that we "all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have, for both food and raiment, and for gold, and for silver, and for all the riches which we have of every kind" (Mosiah 4:19).

A successful ten o'clock escape from the powerful pull of the pride cycle is not easy, but it is possible. We have a few examples in the Nephite record to prove it. Consider this one:

"Notwithstanding their riches, or their strength, or their prosperity, they were not lifted up in the pride of their eyes; neither were they slow to remember the Lord their God; but they did humble themselves exceedingly before him.

"Yea, they did remember how great things the Lord had done for them, that he had delivered them from death, and from bonds, and from prisons, and from all manner of afflictions, and he had delivered them out of the hands of their enemies.

"And they did pray unto the Lord their God continually, insomuch that the Lord did bless them, according to his word, so that they did wax strong and prosper" (Alma 62:49–51; see also Alma 1:29–31).

Each of us likely finds ourselves somewhere on the pride cycle. Where are you? If you are at four o'clock, if it feels like all is lost and you are a total failure, don't despair. You are in a good place. Avoid blaming others for your failure. Humbly turn to God and recognize your dependency on Him.

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5–6).

But if you are at ten o'clock, basking in the false light of success, be careful. Avoid the tendency to turn inward and become prideful. "Count your many blessings; name them one by one."⁵ Follow the scriptural counsel to remember all that the Lord has done for you (see Moroni 10:3). As the sacramental prayer reminds us, we covenant to remember Him not for an hour or two but always (see Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79). We should not take Him or His sacrifice for granted. We should not fail to be grateful to Him for every blessing.

All good things come from God. He is the source of every blessing we receive. Filling our hearts with gratitude for His merciful kindness will protect us against pride and make a way for our escape from the pride cycle. ■

From an address, "The Pride Cycle," given at Brigham Young University on Nov. 7, 2017.

NOTES

1. See Alma 4, verses 2 (failure), 3 (humility), 4 (invite Holy Ghost), 5 (success), 6 (pride), 9 (offend Holy Ghost), 11 (failure).
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Ezra Taft Benson* (2014), 238, 239.
3. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Pride and the Priesthood," *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 56.
4. See Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (2002), 148; see also C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (2001), 125.
5. "Count Your Blessings," *Hymns*, no. 241.





WALKING WITH NEW MEMBERS IN THE JOURNEY OF DISCIPLESHIP

By Shaun Stahle
Church Magazines

New members need friends in the Church, service opportunities, and nurturing with the word of God.

A young, growing testimony requires patient nurturing when converts transition from a world of familiar friends and experiences to new worship practices and cultural conventions in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

These new members come from varied walks of life to embrace the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. They need guidance and friendship to grow in His light. “Those of us who are at different points in the long journey of discipleship must extend a warm hand of fellowship to our new friends, accept them where they are, and help, love, and include them in our lives,”¹ taught Elder Ulisses Soares of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Helping new members into the fold requires sensitivity, awareness, and sometimes self-reflection. “I believe we can do much better and should do better in welcoming new friends into the Church,” Elder Soares said. “I invite you to consider what we can do to be more embracing, accepting, and helpful to them.”²



“

“I WAS IN A NEW CULTURE FULL OF NEW VOCABULARY AND TRADITIONS. I FELT LIKE AN OUTSIDER IN MOST CONVERSATIONS AND QUESTIONED MY WORTH.”

Amy Faragher, shown with her husband, Nathan, and their children

”

Show Sincere Interest

Amy Faragher knew the Church was true the moment she stepped through the church door. “I could not deny the witness I had received from the Holy Ghost,” she says, “so I chose to be baptized.”

About a year after joining the Church as a 19-year-old, she received a calling to serve in Relief Society. A year later she was called to serve as Relief Society president of her young single adult ward. “Those experiences really enriched my life,” she says. “I was all in.”

Serving in this calling as a relatively new member of the Church had its challenges. “I was in a new culture full of new vocabulary and traditions,” she says. “I felt like an outsider in most conversations and questioned my worth as a member.”

Despite the difficulties, Church members received her with warmth and open arms, like one sister who asked to

be her friend. “Such associations softened the challenge of learning a new life,” Sister Faragher says. “I felt part of a community. Ward members didn’t judge me for not understanding Church culture or doctrine.”

Five years after joining the Church, she got married. She and her husband lived in various wards over the years. One in particular was accepting of her convert experience, even inviting her to share her story as a member of a panel at a ward activity.

In other wards she attended, Amy was eager to participate but didn’t feel included. She began to doubt her place in the Church. “At times, the loneliness was unbearable,” she remembers. “I continued to attend sacrament meeting and fill my calling in the nursery but suffered from a high level of anxiety.”

When her efforts to seek support from her ward during

a challenging time didn't bear fruit, she sought counsel from her stake president. As she spoke with him on one occasion, she divulged the ache of her heart. He responded quickly and asked to hear more. They talked at length and committed to meet regularly. "The stake president was genuinely interested and listened to all I had to say," she recalls. "He was the first to ask the hard question about what was going on."

Her counseling with the stake president and receiving other professional counseling helped her feel Heavenly Father's love, an important step in her healing. "Everything changed for me. I'm finding my place," she says. "I've learned I don't need to be ashamed of being a convert."

"It's important for leaders to acknowledge and care for new members," she suggests. "Ask the hard questions and learn how they are really doing. A calling or responsibility suited to the new member's capacity is also important to the confidence of a new member. It's not a burden to serve, as some leaders believe."

Amy recently earned a master's degree in clinical mental health counseling, and she conducts stake workshops on mental health and assists with the Church's addiction recovery program.

An Opportunity to Serve Others

Ka Bo Chan was born in Hong Kong and moved to the United States while young. He learned about the Church as a teenager from a college roommate when studying music in Portland, Oregon. Gospel truths resonated with him, and he was baptized and confirmed. A short time later, he flew to Estonia to continue his studies.

Finding the Church in Estonia proved difficult. Gradually, with no contact with members and limited understanding of prayer and scriptures, his faith cooled.



A WARM WELCOME

"A new convert or recently activated member should feel the warmth of being wanted and being welcomed into full fellowship of the Church. Members and leaders of the Church should nurture and love them as Jesus would."

President M. Russell Ballard (1928–2023), Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "The Hand of Fellowship," *Ensign*, Nov. 1988, 29.





“CHRIST HAS REQUIRED US TO TAKE UP OUR CROSS AND FOLLOW HIM. FOR CERTAIN NEW MEMBERS, THEY NEED TO GIVE UP THEIR FRIENDS. THEY NEED TO GIVE UP THEIR HABITS. THEY GIVE UP A LOT OF THINGS SO THEY CAN TURN A NEW PAGE, AND THEY NEED A LOT OF SUPPORT—SOMETIMES EVEN JUST A SMILE AND A KIND HANDSHAKE.”

Ka Bo Chan, shown with his wife, Maila, and their children

During this time, he met Maila, a young lady in school. “Everything about her glowed,” he says. He began sitting by her, and soon they became friends.

Maila wasn’t a member of the Church and was unfamiliar with religion. But as their relationship continued, she said that if she were to marry, it would be for eternity.

During his studies, Ka Bo felt a spiritual tug to return to church and sought the branch in his area. The first activity he and Maila attended was a branch Christmas party. She felt the activities were awkward and it left a bad impression, so she vowed to never return. But Ka Bo continued to attend church.

One spring morning, Maila told Ka Bo he had to choose between her and the Church. Without flinching, he said he needed the Church and urged her to attend with him.

His blunt response caused her to wonder if she was missing something; her feelings softened, and she agreed to attend again. The next Sunday, she was immediately greeted by the smile of a sister missionary. She felt drawn to her, as if they had been longtime friends. Her apprehensions faded, and she was baptized and confirmed two weeks later.

Ka Bo and Maila didn’t understand the nuances of scripture and gospel practices, and there was nothing in their experience with their new religion that was familiar, not even the music. But they attended church and tried to learn the gospel.

When missionaries were transferred, Maila didn’t know the members well and felt unsure in new circumstances, like in Relief Society, where she once wondered if she was in the wrong place. Soon the bishopric felt inspired to call her to play the piano in Primary. “Playing the piano gave me place and purpose,” she says.

Nourished by the Good Word of God

Mari and Jorma Alakoski know the road of conversion. In the years since joining the Church in their native Finland, they have served in various capacities, including Mari's calling as an assistant temple matron and Jorma's calling as counselor in the first temple presidency of the Helsinki Finland Temple.

But like many converts, they had to fight for their faith. When missionaries met them, a testimony didn't come as easily to Mari as it did to her husband. At first, she was uncomfortable with the Book of Mormon and pushed it away by touching it as little as possible with only the tip of a finger.

Later, when she saw tears streaming down the cheeks of her husband while he read the Book of Mormon, she thought to herself, "If this book touches him so deeply, it must be valuable."

Her resistance gradually softened, and she began her quest for truth. In time, she too shed tears when reading the Book of Mormon.

Mari and Jorma realized they were going counter to culture and tradition when they joined the Church. Yet they abruptly changed course in life and never looked back. "The Church brought great contentment into our lives. I almost think that everything was too good to be true. We were received very kindly in the congregation," Mari says.

"A lot of new things suddenly came into our lives," she says. Sundays were no longer leisure times but packed with Church meetings, which were held three times throughout the Sabbath day at that time. "This required dressing the children for each meeting and timing their meals and naps."

Every day of the week required time for gospel-related activities and meetings, whether home evening, Relief Society, or Primary. "On Saturday, we



MARI AND JORMA REALIZED THEY WERE GOING COUNTER TO FINNISH CULTURE AND TRADITION WHEN THEY JOINED THE CHURCH. YET THEY CHANGED COURSE IN LIFE AND NEVER LOOKED BACK.

prepared food and clothes for Sunday," Mari says.

Tha Alakoskis didn't make a grand announcement when they joined the Church, but their family and friends gradually came to know. "Not everyone understood our decision," Mari recalls. "A few friends stopped talking to us. But that was a small price to pay for all the precious things that came into our lives. Nothing and no one could influence us to abandon the Church. My father, after learning about our conversion, settled any discord when he said, 'Let them do as they see fit. They are grown people. They know what they want to do.'"

In time, the couple desired to be sealed. They planned, sacrificed, and traveled two days by bus and one night by ship through Sweden and Germany. They finally arrived at the Bern Switzerland Temple, the only temple in Europe at the time.

The Alakoskis are an example of those who receive a witness of the gospel and forge ahead, much like Nephi, not knowing everything beforehand but following the Spirit (see 1 Nephi 4:6). They took cues from fellow

TWO RESOURCES FOR GUIDING NEW MEMBERS

How can leaders, missionaries, and ministering brothers and sisters mentor new members? They can use **“My Covenant Path”** (found in the Gospel Library under “Adults” and “New or Returning Members”). It lists 20 gospel experiences new members are likely to have during their first two years of membership, including receiving temple ordinances.

Each of those experiences—such as “Improve Gospel Study” and “Learn about the Melchizedek Priesthood”—is designed to help new members have spiritual experiences as they build lasting friendships with Church members.

Leaders can also use the **Covenant Path Progress record**, which is available in the Tools app and in Leader and Clerk Resources online. It shows the names and progress of new members in their wards or branches. It will help local leaders and members know how to serve new members so they are “no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints” (Ephesians 2:19).

members to learn the doctrine and how to apply the gospel to their lives. When they didn’t know something, they studied or asked for more direction.

Counsel from an Apostle

“We have long been taught how we can help our new friends to feel welcome and loved in the restored Church of Jesus Christ. They need three things so they may remain strong and faithful throughout their lives,” Elder Soares taught, echoing counsel from President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008).³

“First, they need brothers and sisters in the Church who are sincerely interested in them, true and loyal friends to whom they can constantly turn, who will walk beside them, and who will answer their questions,” Elder Soares continued.

“Second, new friends need an assignment—an opportunity to serve others. . . . It is a process by which our faith can grow stronger. . . .

“Third, new friends must be ‘nourished by the good word of God’ [Moroni 6:4]. We can help them to love and become familiar with the scriptures as we read and discuss the teachings with them, providing context to the stories and explaining difficult words.”⁴

Helping new members brings spiritual and temporal blessings to converts and lifetime members alike. It strengthens the Church in multiple ways. “Our new friends bring God-given talents, excitement, and goodness within them,” Elder Soares taught. “Their enthusiasm for the gospel can be contagious, thereby helping us revitalize our own testimonies. They also bring fresh perspectives to our understanding of life and the gospel.”⁵ ■

NOTES

1. Ulisses Soares, “One in Christ,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 38.
2. Ulisses Soares, “One in Christ,” 39.
3. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Gordon B. Hinckley* (2016), 301–4.
4. Ulisses Soares, “One in Christ,” 38.
5. Ulisses Soares, “One in Christ,” 38.



Our Struggles Became Our Blessings

By Allan Oduor Omondi, Nairobi, Kenya

Despite our afflictions during difficult times in Kenya, the Lord extended tender mercies to us in rich measure.

Scan the code to
read more



A New Heart

The last place I wanted to be on Christmas Eve was in a military jail.

By Tamara Harris, Church Military Relations Chaplain Services Manager

One Christmas Eve while we lived in the Philippines, my father came home early from his work as a chaplain at Clark Air Base.

“Hey, Tam,” he said, “I need you to make cookies and practice Christmas songs on your guitar. Also, gather items for Nativity costumes. We’re going to spend the evening in the brig.”

I was still angry at my parents for moving our family across the world. The last thing I wanted to do was spend Christmas Eve in a military jail. I complained but to no avail.

When we entered the brig, we were led to a stark room with chairs and a table. Soon a door opened, and



my father warmly invited a group of shackled and handcuffed men into the room.

Then we sang Christmas songs, reenacted Luke 2, and enjoyed homemade treats—the same things we would have done at home. But something was different.

My adolescent heart softened that night as I witnessed the humble gratitude of those dear men. One of them, referring to our Nativity reenactment, asked, “Can I be in it too?” Others also wanted to join. Soon, additional “angels” heralded the Savior’s special birth.

Those prisoners were not where they wanted to be, and I was in a country where I did not want to be. But I knew we were seen, known, and loved by our Savior, who had also been in a place from which He humbly sought removal (see Luke 22:42). In my 16-year-old heart, I knew I was not alone.

Those men were not the only ones who wiped away tears that Christmas Eve. The life-changing event that evening was not our Christmas celebration but rather Christ’s power to lift and heal.

It’s been almost 50 years since that Christmas Eve, but it remains a sacred memory. My most special, unexpected, and glorious Christmas gift was a new heart. Everything changed for me after that.

I embraced life in the Philippines, made new friends, found ways to serve, and chose to be happy—all because of the witness I received of Jesus Christ and His powerful love that Christmas Eve in the brig.

I know that our Savior can remove the shackles from our minds and our hearts as we come to Him. He is our greatest gift. ■

The Ugly Nativity

After buying a broken Nativity, I gained a greater understanding of the Savior's sacrifice for our sins.

By Dalinda Dolly McMullin, British Columbia, Canada

Years ago when my children were small, I took them with me to go shopping. While out, we found several inexpensive Nativity sets, one of them in a small box. This Nativity was crudely made, probably of ceramic, and had only five pieces—Mary, Joseph, a shepherd, a Wise Man, and a baby Jesus.

As my son opened the box, a piece popped out and fell to the floor, breaking into two. After consoling my son for his mistake, I thought to myself, “Well, I guess I’m going to buy that ugly Nativity set.” It was not a Nativity I would normally have displayed in my home, but because my son broke it, I bought it and took it home.

Once the children were in bed, I pulled out the little Nativity set and considered throwing it away. It was small and ugly in my eyes. The piece that had broken, however, was the baby Jesus. I couldn’t just throw baby Jesus away! So, I glued the piece together and made a little spot in our home each year afterward for that small Nativity.

Last year, as I was placing the Nativity pieces into bits of paper to protect them, I glanced again at the baby Jesus. Then I glanced at the box as I placed that piece inside it. I noticed that I had never removed the price tag: \$1.25. That was the price I had paid to redeem my son’s mistake.

That thought made me stop and ponder on our Savior. Thoughts about Jesus Christ flooded my mind, and I thought of the price He had paid to redeem me from my sins. What a small price I had paid for my son’s

mistake in comparison to His sacrifice for my sins. I paid the price of the Nativity for my son because I love him, and the Savior paid the price for us because He loves us (see 1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

Just as I had repaired the broken baby Jesus, He can repair our broken lives. I thought of the gratitude I have for Jesus Christ’s Atonement for me and for each of God’s children, and for the hope we can have in our Savior. That ugly Nativity isn’t so ugly to me anymore. ■



No Christmas This Year?

When we asked about Christmas, the mother said times were tough and the family would not have anything for Christmas that year.

By James Nowa, Utah, USA

I can still see the home in my mind's eye that cold, gray December day in Illinois, USA. Its roof was above the ground, but most of the house was below the ground. "Probably, no one lives there," my companion and I concluded.

We knocked. After a few moments, a lady opened the door a crack. We told her we were missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and that we had an important message for her. She hesitated but let us in.

She motioned us to sit on two wobbly wooden chairs. The room was dimly lit. As my eyes adjusted to the light, I noticed that the home had a dirt floor. No pictures

hung on the walls. Suddenly, four sad children dressed in colorless clothing appeared.

Christmas was two weeks away. Where was baby Jesus in a manger? Where were the colorful decorations and Christmas tree?

After we delivered our message about the Restoration, the mother invited us back to talk to her husband. Before we left, we asked about Christmas. She said times were tough and that they would not have anything for Christmas that year.

After we left, my companion and I appealed for help from local ward members. A great act of love followed. Members donated food, clothes, toys, and a Christmas tree with ornaments.

We returned to the home a few days later. We knocked, and again the door opened a crack. "Merry Christmas," we said as we greeted the father, mother, and four wide-eyed children.

We carried the tree, the gifts, and the food into the home. The family looked stunned. We set up the tree, placed gifts under it, put food on the table, and enjoyed a short visit. As we prepared to leave, I looked at the children. They all had big smiles on their faces.

We continued to teach the family, and eventually they joined the Church. As the light of the gospel brightened their home, the father developed faith and received a new vision for his family. He found a better job. The family grew closer. Soon they moved into a new home.

More than 60 years later, I still thank the Lord for allowing us to bless six of His precious children, reminding me that "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). ■



Her Offering Is Acceptable

As we sang, I felt the quiet warmth of the Spirit speak to my mind and heart.

By Meralee Stallings, Utah, USA

When I was a child, my parents sang in our ward choir. Mother especially loved to sing at Christmastime. Every Christmas Eve our family reenacted the Nativity story and sang Christmas songs. We always finished with mother's favorite, "Silent Night."¹

In her early 60s, my mother developed asthma. Years of coughing and struggling with the illness eventually ravaged her voice. She also lost hearing in one ear and suffered diminished hearing in the other ear. She still attempted to sing but often just read and thought about a song's lyrics.

One Sunday while I visited my parents during the Christmas season, we attended sacrament meeting. The program centered on the birth and mission of Jesus Christ.

"I won't have asthma in the hereafter, will I?" my mother asked me before the meeting started.

"Of course not," I replied.

Then we talked about other physical ailments she would no longer have after the Resurrection.

"I'll be able to sing again," she said.

"With the choirs of heaven," I added.

As we sang the opening hymn, "Away in a Manger,"² Mother could not hear the piano accompaniment. She started singing the Primary version of the song instead of the *Hymns* version, which has a different melody. I tried to correct her, but she had difficulty hearing me. During the sacrament hymn, she continued to struggle. She really wanted to sing, but her pitch was all over the place.

As the sacrament meeting progressed, I felt the warmth of the Spirit and the sweet innocence of the children who bore their testimonies of the Savior in song. Then, as the congregation began to sing the closing song, "Silent Night," so did my mother.

Listening to her struggle, I wished with all my heart that she could again sing Christmas songs the way she used to. As she sang, however, I felt the quiet warmth of the Spirit speak to my mind and heart: "Her offering is acceptable to me."

At that moment, my mother's voice took on a new beauty, blessed and sanctified by a loving Savior who looked on her heart. And, as He did when the widow cast in two mites (see Luke 21:1–4), He rejoiced in her sincerity and offering. ■

NOTES

1. "Silent Night," *Hymns*, no. 204.
2. "Away in a Manger," *Hymns*, no. 206.





By Elder Thierry K. Mutombo
Of the Seventy

WHERE TO TURN FOR **HOPE, PEACE,** AND **PURPOSE** WHEN LIFE CHANGES

The knowledge of the gospel and Atonement of Jesus Christ brings hope, peace, and purpose in this Christmas season.

During our mortal journey, we will all face experiences that can help us become better disciples of Jesus Christ. However, our life circumstances will often change, and that can require us to adjust our way of living.

Nevertheless, there is hope for those who “look unto [Christ] in every thought” (Doctrine and Covenants 6:36), and there is “hope for a better world” and a better future for those who believe in God (Ether 12:4).

The scriptures teach, inspire, and show us how those in the past—before, during, and after Christ’s mortal ministry and mission—responded to their circumstances. For example, the prophet Lehi in the Book of Mormon was commanded by the Lord to leave his home and all his possessions, flee into the wilderness with his family, and make his way to an unknown destination. During the journey, Lehi faced opposition, heartache, anxiety, pain, and disappointment. These experiences prepared him and his family for the promised land.

Many of us face challenges like Lehi did. Some may be concerned about their family, marriage, education, or employment. Others may feel far away from Heavenly Father and the Savior Jesus Christ because of poor choices or may feel alone because of moving to another town or school.

This Christmas season gives us a special opportunity to focus on the peace Jesus Christ offers us. No matter your feelings, circumstances, or location, remember that miracles can happen as you “press forward with a steadfastness in Christ” (2 Nephi 31:20).



A Time of Uncertainty and Unrest

While serving as a missionary in the Côte d'Ivoire Abidjan Mission in 1998, I heard about the political unrest and social situation in my country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Every day, I went out with my companion to proselyte. When I introduced myself and mentioned that I was from DR Congo, people would tell me about the gravity of what was going on between the government and rebel groups there—particularly in Kinshasa, the capital city, where my family lived. I was heartbroken to hear that people in my country were going hungry and that many people had been killed.

I reached out to my caring and concerned mission president to find out if he knew any more regarding the situation or if he had received any information about my family. I felt hopeless and cried for hours. I wanted to give up. I felt that the Lord had forsaken my family and me.

My companion and other missionaries offered support and care during this time. When I was about to quit, Elder Joseph Wheeler, a good friend of mine, shared a scripture I will never forget.

In 1830 the Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation for Thomas B. Marsh. Thomas had recently been baptized and ordained an elder in the Church. He had also been called to preach the gospel. At that time, Thomas needed some assurance. The Lord tells Thomas through the Prophet:

“Thomas, my son, blessed are you because of your faith in my work.

“Behold, you have had many afflictions because of your family; nevertheless, I will bless you and your family, yea, your little ones; and the day cometh that they will believe and know the truth and be one with you in my church.

“Lift up your heart and rejoice, for the hour of your mission is come; and your tongue shall be loosed, and you shall declare

glad tidings of great joy unto this generation. . . .

“Therefore, thrust in your sickle with all your soul, and your sins are forgiven you, and you shall be laden with sheaves upon your back, for the laborer is worthy of his hire. Wherefore, *your family shall live*” (Doctrine and Covenants 31:1–3, 5; emphasis added).

This was the answer I was seeking. I was doing the Lord's work, and the knowledge and truth of the gospel and Atonement of Jesus Christ brought hope and purpose in my life during that time of uncertainty.

Four Principles to Find Peace

The following four principles can help you when you do not know where to turn for hope, peace, and purpose in your life:

1. Believe that there is hope and a solution to the emptiness or discouragement you feel. Hope is found in Jesus Christ, His Atonement, and His gospel. The Savior said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). With Him, you always have hope for that abundant life.

2. Be joyful regardless of the circumstances or challenges of your life. Our beloved prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, has taught:

“The joy we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives.

“When the focus of our lives is on God's plan of salvation . . . and Jesus Christ and His gospel, we can feel joy regardless of what is happening—or not happening—in our lives. Joy comes from and because of Him.”¹

Even when you “shall weep and lament, . . . the world shall rejoice” because of Jesus Christ, and “your sorrow shall be turned into joy. . . . And your joy no man taketh from you” (John 16:20, 22).



HOPE

JOY

SERVICE

REPENTANCE



3. Be compassionate and serve others. The Savior Jesus Christ “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). Pray for the strength to be an answer to someone else’s prayer. Smile, talk, and walk with those around you. Listen to them and make time for them. Encourage, share what you know to be true, and forgive others. These simple acts will have a profound impact on you *and* others.

4. Repent and strive to keep your covenants. President Nelson has taught:

“Because the Savior, through His infinite Atonement, redeemed each of us from weakness, mistakes, and sin, . . . as you truly repent and seek His help, you can rise above this present precarious world. . . .

“Despite the distractions and distortions that swirl around us, you can find true *rest*—meaning relief and peace—even amid your most vexing problems.”²

If you repent and strive daily to keep the covenants you have made with your Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ at baptism and in the temple, President Nelson has taught that you will have “increased access to the power of Jesus Christ.” His power “strengthens us to withstand our trials, temptations, and heart-aches better. This power eases our way.”³

You are a son or daughter of a loving and caring Heavenly Father. He desires you to progress and have joy, which is possible only through His Son, Jesus Christ, whom we can strive to always remember during this Christmas season—and every season after. I know that the gospel of Jesus Christ and His Atonement can bring hope, peace, and purpose to your life. ■

NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 82.
2. Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 96.
3. Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” 96.



The Freedom to **Choose Christ**

By Yevheniia (Ginger) Zinchenko

Religion always felt like something that prevented me from making my own choices.

When I was a baby, I was baptized into the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Growing up, the fact that I never made the choice to be baptized unsettled me. I started to think that religion didn't allow me the freedom to choose for myself.

So I eventually stopped believing in God or anything spiritual.

One day, I was talking to my friend who was in Czechia doing a study program affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She invited me to do the program too. I wasn't interested originally, but after a while, I decided to check it out.

I liked the school's overall message of positivity, so I gave in and applied.

But I had no interest in the program's focus on Jesus Christ. Or so I thought.

Feeling Conflicted

This academy made me live differently than I was used to. First, I learned that I wasn't allowed to drink coffee on campus!

My freedom was already slipping through my fingers.

Along with that, every morning started with a mandatory devotional. I would mostly sleep through them because I wasn't interested. I was just there to learn and then live my life the way I wanted to.

But after a while, I noticed the people around me who were taking Jesus Christ's teachings seriously. In Ukraine, many people only went to church a few times a year, but here, everyone was always talking about Christ. They were kind, good, and positive about life.

I started to wonder what my life would be like if I believed in Him too. Sometimes I even caught myself thinking, "What would Jesus's perspective be?"

Was This Real?

I felt confused. I told one of my friends at the academy about how I was feeling torn. He invited me to try praying about my feelings.

On one foggy morning, I decided to find a quiet place to meditate outside. I don't know what came over me, but instead of meditating, I gave God the benefit of the doubt. I said, "OK, let's talk."

And I said the longest prayer of my life.

I just wanted to know if God and Jesus Christ were real.

As I was praying, the sun pierced through the fog. I felt its warmth on my skin and warmth in my heart. I felt like someone's hand was on my shoulder, telling me They were right there with me.

The message was clear: They were real. They were aware of me.

I also realized something else.

Looking at those who were living the gospel of Jesus Christ, I didn't see anybody being forced to do things they didn't want to do or feeling restricted by their faith. I saw them *choosing* to live like Jesus Christ because they *wanted* to.

In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Moroni extends his promise through an invitation, not a command: "If ye shall ask

with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost" (Moroni 10:4).

I realized I wanted to choose Him too.

Imperfect Discipleship

From then on, I took learning about Jesus Christ seriously. I accepted missionary lessons. I studied the Book of Mormon. I prayed every day. I even got baptized! (My choice this time!) This was all so new to me, but I felt my heart changing.

I still have a lot to learn, and I am so imperfect, but I always say to myself, "Let's just try to be like Christ today. Just keep trying."

Elder Joaquin E. Costa of the Seventy beautifully taught: "At times, having faith in Jesus Christ may seem like something impossible, almost unattainable. We may think that coming unto Christ requires a strength, power, and perfection we don't have, and we just can't find the energy to do it all. But . . . faith in Jesus Christ is what gives us the energy to begin the journey."¹

Jesus Christ can change us if we give Him the chance and keep trying. He doesn't limit our freedom. Instead, He offers us even more through His Atonement: joy, healing, and hope.

We have the freedom to choose Him every day, and I'm grateful for the miracles my choice to follow Him brings into my life. ■

The author is from Kyiv, Ukraine.

NOTE

1. Joaquin E. Costa, "The Power of Jesus Christ in Our Lives Every Day," *Liahona*, Nov. 2023, 39.





THE CHURCH IS HERE



Orléans, France

Missionaries first arrived in France in 1849. This mission closed in 1864 and reopened in 1908, but the world wars limited the Church's presence until after World War II. The first stake was organized in Paris in 1975. In 2011, President Thomas S. Monson announced the Paris France Temple, which was eventually dedicated in May 2017. Today, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in France has:



38,600 members (approximately)



10 stakes, 108 wards and branches, 2 missions



1 temple (Paris)

The Power of the Book of Mormon

Lucie Lee of the Lyon France Stake testifies: "Since we are studying the Book of Mormon this year with *Come, Follow Me*, we set the goal as a family to read it in four months, and we have been able to have very spiritual moments while doing so. The children love learning about all the stories and how we can apply them to our day."



RALLYING TO SERVE IN CHENNAI





On the evening of December 25, 2004, members of the Chennai First Branch on the east coast of India were enjoying a Christmas activity. Little did they know that the next morning a massive earthquake would occur in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Sumatra. The force of the quake radiated out across the ocean, propelling towering walls of seawater toward land. Mountainous waves crashed into towns and villages in India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Thailand, flooding streets and leveling homes and buildings. An unknown number of people were missing or dead.¹

When Elders Alwyn Kilbert and Revanth Nelaballe, missionaries serving in Chennai, arrived at church later that morning, they sensed that something was wrong. At the beach, police officers had set up barricades to keep onlookers back and were patrolling the area on horseback. Along the beach, people were pulling bodies out of the water. The missionaries could see that the water and destruction had reached more than a half a mile (0.8 km) inland from the beach.²

That night the Church sent truckloads of supplies from a town nearly 400 miles (640 km) away for the Saints to distribute to those in need in Chennai. In the morning, members and missionaries gathered at the

Chennai First Branch meetinghouse to help with a service project organized by the city's two branches. For the next two days, they assembled and sorted relief kits containing clothing, bedding, hygiene items, and eating utensils.³

Since the tsunami hit, Latter-day Saints in the country had been distributing Church-provided goods among the victims. After loading trucks with hundreds of hygiene kits and other supplies, the missionaries and others traveled with President Brent Bonham of the India Bangalore Mission to deliver them to an Indian Red Cross station.

At the station, the man who greeted them recognized their name tags. "Oh, you're from the Church," he said. "What did you bring?"

They replied that they had lanterns, hygiene kits, and several tons of clothing. The official was thrilled with the donations and told them to drive the trucks into the facility.⁴

Inside they found people crowding around huge piles of clothing. People from different religions and organizations were also dropping off supplies, and the missionaries spent several hours unloading the trucks and moving the supplies to where they were needed.

As Elder Kilbert looked at the people from different groups, he was struck by how they all worked together out of love for their neighbors. "There are good people everywhere," he thought. ■

To read the rest of the story—and many more stories from modern Church history—check out volume 4 of Saints, available in 15 languages in the Gospel Library and in print.

NOTES

1. Wan, Oral History Interview [July 2022], [19]; Wan, Oral History Interview [Oct. 2022], [9]; Nick Cumming-Bruce Br and Campbell Robertson, "Most Powerful Quake in 40 Years Triggers Death and Destruction," *New York Times*, Dec. 26, 2004, nytimes.com.
2. Kilbert, Oral History Interview [Jan. 27, 2023], 12; Kilbert, Oral History Interview [May 5, 2023], 11; Nallaballe, Oral History Interview, 15.
3. Kilbert, Oral History Interview [Jan. 27, 2023], 12–13; Nallaballe, Oral History Interview, 16; Jason Swensen, "Tsunami Disaster: More than 100,000 Dead," *Church News*, Jan. 1, 2005, 2, 15.
4. Kilbert, Oral History Interview [Jan. 27, 2023], 12–13; Nallaballe, Oral History Interview, 16, 19–20; Kilbert, Oral History Interview [Feb. 17, 2023], 8–9.



Come, Follow Me
Ether 12; Moroni 7

Faith Brings Miracles



*Above: Church members at a devotional in Tonga, May 2019.
Left: Freiberg Germany Temple.*

FAITH IN YOUR OWN LIFE

In your journal or in a discussion with your family, you could list times when you exercised faith in the Lord. You could start the list with the phrase “I showed faith when I . . .”

Ether 12 and Moroni 7 discuss blessings that can come to our lives when we exercise faith in Jesus Christ. Ether 12 shares examples of those who acted with the power of faith. For instance:

“Behold, it was the faith of Alma and Amulek that caused the prison to tumble to the earth.

“Behold, it was the faith of Nephi and Lehi that wrought the change upon the Lamanites . . .

“Behold, it was the faith of Ammon and his brethren which wrought so great a miracle among the Lamanites.

“Yea, and even all they who wrought miracles wrought them by faith” (Ether 12:13–16).

The blessings of faith are not limited to the men and women in the scriptures—taking action in faith blesses us today. The following are more recent examples of faith:

By Faith, a Member in South Korea Shared the Gospel with Thousands

Latter-day Saint Hwang Keun Ok worked in a South Korean orphanage in the 1960s. When the sponsors of the orphanage learned that Sister Hwang was a member of the Church, they gave her a choice: leave the Church or resign from her job. She resigned. Five years later, she opened a new home for girls in Seoul. Teaming up with Latter-day Saint missionaries, they gave concerts throughout the country that helped spread the gospel to thousands.¹

By Faith, Members in East Germany Received a Temple

While visiting communist East Germany in 1968, President Thomas S. Monson, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, promised the Saints, “If you will remain true and faithful to the commandments of God, every blessing any member of the Church enjoys in any other country will be yours.” At the time, the closest temple was in Switzerland, but East Germany was under strict government rule. Members of the Church were routinely denied visas to travel there.

President Spencer W. Kimball counseled Henry Burkhardt, president of the Church’s mission in Dresden, to befriend communist officials in the country. Though this was difficult, he acted on faith. Members fasted and prayed, and Henry developed friendships with many government officials and often asked for Church members to be allowed to travel to the temple. In 1978, when he asked again, one official said, “Why don’t you build a temple here?”

The long wait was over, and the Church built a temple in Freiberg, Germany, which was dedicated in 1985 by President Gordon B. Hinckley.²

By Faith, Members in Tonga Listened to the Prophet in the Rain

President Russell M. Nelson and his wife, Sister Wendy Nelson, visited the Pacific Islands in 2019 during a period of heavy rain. President Nelson later recalled:

“Members had fasted and prayed that their outdoor meetings would be protected from the rain.

“In Samoa, Fiji, and Tahiti, *just* as the meetings began, the rain stopped. But in Tonga, the rain did *not* stop. Yet 13,000 faithful Saints came hours early to get a seat, waited patiently through a steady downpour, and then sat through a very wet two-hour meeting.

“We saw vibrant faith at work among each of those islanders—faith sufficient to stop the rain and faith to persevere when the rain did not stop.”³ ■

NOTES

1. See *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, vol. 4, *Sounded in Every Ear, 1955–2012* (2024), chaps. 10–11, 16.
2. See *Saints*, vol. 4, chaps. 16, 18, 21, 22.
3. Russell M. Nelson, “Christ Is Risen; Faith in Him Will Move Mountains,” *Liahona*, May 2021, 104.



The Gift

of Another Testament of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is the spirit of Christmas, the light of Christmas, and the focus of Christmas. The Book of Mormon holds within in its pages the spirit, light, and focus of Christmas because it teaches about Jesus Christ and how to come unto Him. Here are just two ways the Book of Mormon teaches us to draw closer to Him.

The Gift of Covenants

The Book of Mormon gives us a deeper knowledge of what it means to have a covenant relationship with God (see, for example, 1 Nephi 15:18; Mosiah 5:5; 18:13; 3 Nephi 20:26). Its title page states that the Book of Mormon's purpose, among others, is to help the remnant of the house of Israel "know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever." The Book of Mormon gives us the restored knowledge of the covenant relationship we can have with Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ and His Atonement.

As we make and keep sacred covenants through baptism and in the temple, we draw closer to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ in a way that binds us to Them, in a way that can bring us back to Them.

The Gift of Love

Our study of the Book of Mormon helps us understand that Jesus Christ is the ultimate gift of love (see 1 Nephi 11:16–23) and that He loves us individually.

After His Resurrection, the Lord invited the Nephites to “arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.

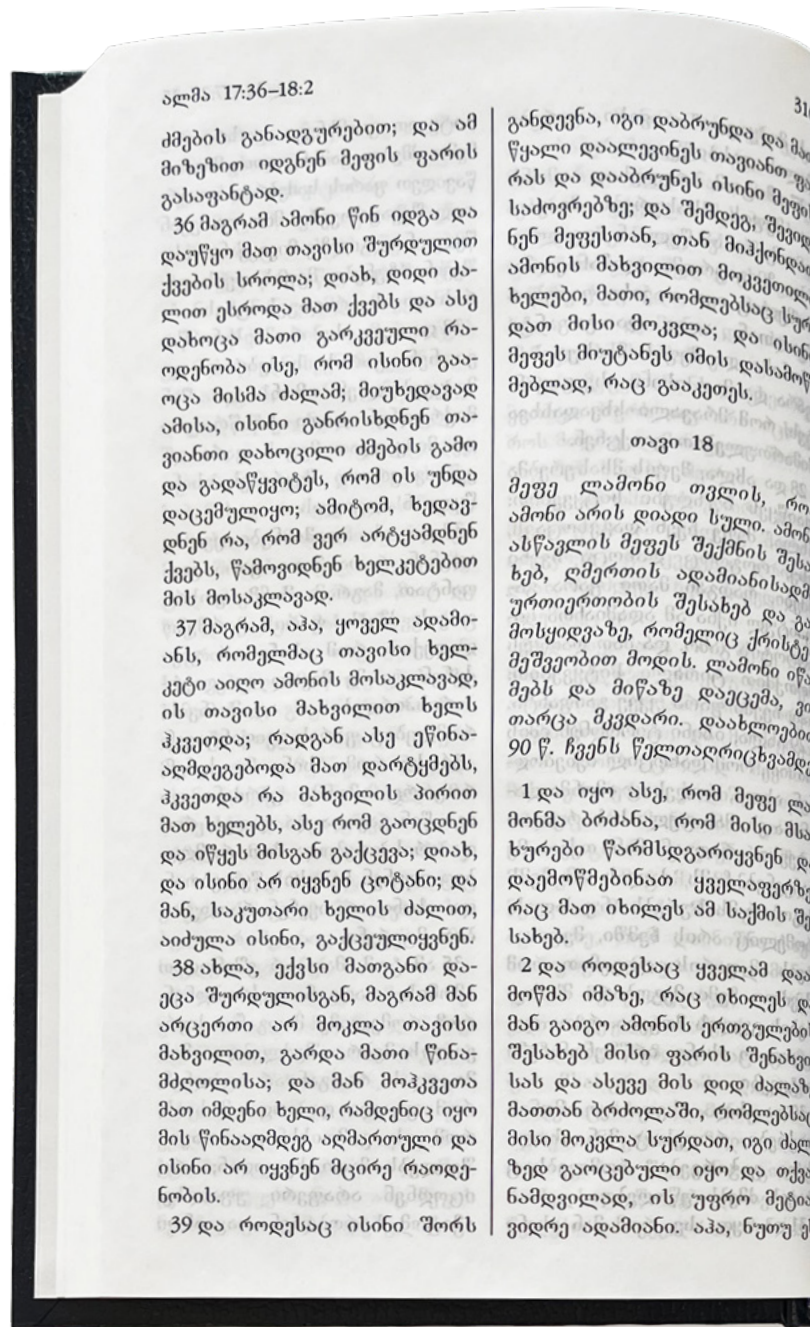
“. . . And this they did do, going forth one by one” (3 Nephi 11:14–15).

These verses show us that the Savior’s desire for all of us, everywhere and in every situation, is to come unto Him, learn of Him, and feel His love. Jesus, in His infinite love, willingly sacrificed Himself to pay the price for our sins, granting us the opportunity to be cleansed, be reconciled to God, and ultimately return to the presence of God (see Alma 34:13–17; Helaman 14:15–17; 3 Nephi 27:14–22).

We can show our gratitude for the gift of the Book of Mormon by reading it and following the Savior’s teachings. As we do so, we embrace the true spirit of Christmas, bringing light to our lives not just in December but throughout the year. ■

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

How has the Book of Mormon been a gift to you this year? With whom could you share the Book of Mormon as a gift?



PHOTOGRAPH OF BOOK OF MORMON IN GEORGIAN LANGUAGE



THE GIFT OF CHARITY



The pure love of Christ can transform our lives as we seek this precious gift.

By Elder Takashi Wada
Of the Seventy

We have been invited to become like our Savior, Jesus Christ. He said, “Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:27). As we strive to become more like Him, we must seek charity even in the most challenging of times.

Moroni, the last Nephite prophet, had lived through “exceedingly fierce” wars and witnessed the entire destruction of his people. With his enemies vowing to destroy all who would not deny Jesus Christ, Moroni wandered alone “for the safety of [his] own life” (Moroni 1:2–3).

In this tragic situation, Moroni wrote “a few more things,” hoping it would “be of worth . . . in some future day” (Moroni 1:4). He included “the words of [his] father Mormon,” who taught that we “must needs have charity; for if [we] have not charity [we are] nothing.” “Charity is the pure love of Christ,” Mormon continued, “and it endureth forever” (Moroni 7:1, 44, 47).

Charity is a gift we receive as we “pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that [we] may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ” (Moroni 7:48).

As another testament of Jesus Christ, the Book of Mormon beautifully testifies of the pure love of Christ and teaches how we can attain the gift of charity in our lives.



CHRIST'S LOVE FOR US

From Mormon's teachings, we learn that charity is inseparably connected to the Savior. The ultimate expression of charity is the love that comes *from* Jesus Christ through His atoning sacrifice.

Speaking to the Savior, Moroni said:

"I remember that thou hast said that thou hast loved the world, even unto the laying down of thy life for the world. . . .

"And now I know that this love which thou hast . . . is charity" (Ether 12:33–34).

At the start of His ministry in the Book of Mormon, the resurrected Savior invited the people to come and feel the mark in His side and the prints of the nails in His hands and feet so they would know Him and what He had done out of pure love for all the world (see 3 Nephi 11:14–15).

Christ's love *never* fails. Mormon taught that we should "cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all" (Moroni 7:46). President Jeffrey R. Holland, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has assured us that "only the pure love of Christ will see us through. It is Christ's love which suffereth long, and is kind. It is Christ's love which is not puffed up nor easily provoked. Only his pure love enables him—and us—to



bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things. [See Moroni 7:45.]"¹

One way we receive this gift of charity is by following the Savior's teaching to "repent . . . and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and have faith in me, that ye may be saved" (Moroni 7:34).

OUR LOVE FOR CHRIST

After hearing King Benjamin speak of Jesus Christ, his people experienced "a mighty change . . . in [their] hearts" and had "no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2).

This change, possible only through Jesus Christ and His Atonement, creates in us a heart filled with love *for* Christ. This love is more than just appreciation, affection, or admiration. If we truly love Christ, we will give all our hearts to Him.

When King Lamoni's father heard the gospel, he desired to receive the Spirit and to have eternal life. "Behold," he said, "I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy" (Alma 22:15). In prayer, he told the Lord, "I will give away all my sins to know thee" (Alma 22:18).

Others in the Book of Mormon showed this love *for* Christ. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies "laid down the weapons of their rebellion" (Alma 23:13) and buried them "deep in the earth" (Alma 24:17). They covenanted that they "never would use [their] weapons again," and "rather than shed the blood of their brethren they would give up their own lives" (Alma 24:18). They were so completely converted that they "never did fall away" (Alma 23:6).

We show our love for Christ by keeping His commandments, receiving ordinances of salvation and exaltation, making and *honoring* covenants, and living as His disciples. Our love for Him influences everything we do.

OUR LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

In addition to feeling love *from* Christ and *for* Christ, we should strive to have charity, or Christlike love, for one another.

Enos prayed all day and night for a remission of his sins. After he was forgiven and filled with the Savior’s love, he poured out his whole soul in prayer on behalf of his people—and his enemies (see Enos 1:4–12). Filled with charity, the sons of Mosiah also “were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish” (Mosiah 28:3).

Charity elevates the way we view and treat others. President Russell M. Nelson has taught: “Charity propels us ‘to bear one another’s burdens’ [Mosiah 18:8] rather than heap burdens upon each other. The pure love of Christ allows us ‘to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things’ [Mosiah 18:9]—*especially* in tense situations.”²

When Nephi’s brothers bound his hands and feet with cords, intending to leave him to die in the wilderness, Nephi prayed for help and the Lord delivered him (see 1 Nephi 7:16–18). Instead of seeking revenge on his brothers, as the natural man would, Nephi exemplified how charity “suffereth long” (Moroni 7:45) by “frankly [forgiving] them all that they had done” (see 1 Nephi 7:21).

If everyone had the gift of charity, we would realize what the people in the Book of Mormon experienced after the Savior visited them, taught them, and established His Church among them: “There was no contention . . . because of the love of God which did dwell in [their] hearts” (4 Nephi 1:15).

A MOST PRECIOUS GIFT

When Nephi heard his father speak about his vision of the tree of life, Nephi said he “was desirous . . . that I might see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost” (1 Nephi 10:17). Nephi was blessed to learn more about charity when he beheld the tree of life, which represents the love of God—“the most desirable above all things” and “the most joyous to the soul” (1 Nephi 11: 22, 23).

Nephi later wrote:

“Ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a *love* of God and of all men”

(2 Nephi 31:20; emphasis added).

One day we will stand before the Savior. In that day, if we have gained an accurate view of His character, attributes, and role as our Redeemer, “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (Moroni 7:48). The brother of Jared experienced this as he stood before Jesus Christ, who said, “Never have I showed myself unto man . . . , for never has man believed in me as thou hast. Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image?” (Ether 3:15).

Because of Jesus Christ, “we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure” (Moroni 7:48). It is impossible for us to achieve this alone. Charity is given to us as a *gift* from Him, and if we are “found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with [us]” (Moroni 7:47).

I testify that the gift of charity has the power to transform human existence if we will let it. May we pray with all the energy of our hearts to receive the Savior’s pure love for us, grow in our love for Him, and, as His true followers, share this most precious gift with others. ■

NOTES

1. Jeffrey R. Holland, “He Loved Them unto the End,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 26.
2. Russell M. Nelson, “Peacemakers Needed,” *Liahona*, May 2023, 101.

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*How can the gospel of Jesus
Christ bring hope, peace,
and purpose to our lives?*

30



THE PRIDE CYCLE

**WHERE ARE
YOU IN IT?**

10

NEW MEMBERS

**WALKING WITH
THEM ON THE
COVENANT PATH**

18

THE PURE LOVE
OF CHRIST

**HOW WE OBTAIN
THIS GIFT**

44

