

Church of Jesus Christ Oak Grove Restoration Branch



Zion the beautiful beckons us on . . .

Volume 33 Number 1

Spring-Summer 2025

Zion's Call is a newsletter published by the Church of Jesus Christ, Oak Grove Restoration Branch. It is published with the intent of glorifying God and helping to preserve His Restoration message. All correspondence should be addressed to our editor:

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The Church of Jesus Christ Oak Grove Restoration Branch

is located approximately 3/4 mile north of I-70 from the Oak Grove exit. We invite you to come and worship with us.

Sunday services are as follows:

Early Worship at 9:00 a.m.

Classes begin at 9:15 a.m.

Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.

Evening Service at 6:30 p.m.

Communion Sunday only:

(the first Sunday of each month)

Prayer Service at 9:15 a.m.

Communion Service at 10:30 a.m.

Wednesday Prayer Service at 7:00 p.m.



Branch Pastor: Elder Vim Horn

Associates:

Elders Mike Lidberg and Aaron Smith, and
Priests James Bullard and Mick Ballantyne



**Live Internet Streaming of
Sunday Morning and Evening Services
(except Communion Sunday morning)
Go to www.ogrb.org and click "Video."**

We need your testimonies to continue to print Zion's Call!

The biggest challenge we face with each issue of Zion's Call is gathering enough testimonies to fill our pages.

We all have busy schedules, but won't you **please take some time to write down your testimonies of how God has blessed you?** We welcome all of your encouraging testimonies of what the Lord is doing in your life—both little and big things! We love receiving the testimonies of our young people, too!

Don't worry if you are not a good writer. We can help you edit your testimony as needed. Your testimony can bring encouragement to many others! **You never know whose life you might touch.**

You may mail or email your testimonies to the addresses on this page.

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"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I beseech of you in words of soberness, that ye would repent, and come with full purpose of heart, and cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you.

And while his arm of mercy is extended towards you in the light of the day, harden not your hearts.

Yea, today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts . . ."

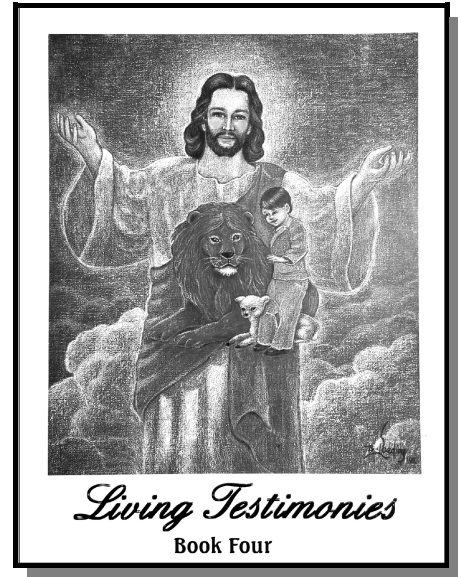
Jacob 4:8-10



Living Testimonies

Book Four

is NOW AVAILABLE!



Order your copy today!

With *Living Testimonies, Books One and Two* out of print and only a few copies left of *Book Three*, the Oak Grove Restoration Branch has published *Living Testimonies, Book Four*.

Living Testimonies, Book Four features 150 pages of selected testimonies from the past 30 years of *Zion's Call* publications in an 8.5 by 11-inch format with a full-color soft cover. (Inside pages are black and white.)

The suggested donation per book is \$15.00 if picked up at Oak Grove Restoration Branch. The suggested donation for postage is an additional \$5.00 per book.

Contact Debbie Norman for reduced postage if you wish to order more than two copies mailed to the same address. Make checks out to—
OGRB - Living Testimonies
and mail them to Debbie Norman at the address on page 2 or use the enclosed envelope.

Email or write to Debbie with any question at the addresses on page 2.

Settle in Your Hearts to Be My Disciples: My Walmart Experience

Edited sermon excerpt by Elder Vim Horn, Pastor

About fifteen years ago, I had an experience I want to share. We had an early snow that year and I was caught unprepared. My son's car needed snow tires. I called Walmart and they said, "Sure, come on down and we will put snow tires on for you." I had no idea what I was getting into.

When I got there, they told me it would be a two- or three-hour wait. My cell phone battery was almost dead, so basically I was stuck at Walmart for three hours with nothing to do. I had the pleasure of walking around Walmart for all that time. The first time around it's rather interesting, but the second and third and fourth time it gets tedious. There was a deli in the store, so I got some lunch and then walked around some more. Finally, I heard that wonderful announcement over the intercom that my car was done.

I had a cart with a few items I had picked up, so I headed back to the automotive area to check out and pick up my car. Again, I was met with a surprise. There was a huge line. What I thought was going to be a quick exit took much longer than anticipated.

The line was moving slowly, but everyone was being courteous with each other. After about thirty minutes I was almost to the desk. There were only about two customers in front of me and perhaps ten to fifteen behind me.

A well-dressed older woman showed up and went to the glass window to look and see if her car was in there. As she came back, she confronted me about several non-automotive items that I had in my cart. She asked me in a very challenging manner if I was simply checking out or if I actually had a car that I was picking up.

Puzzled, I assured her I had a car that I was picking up. Then she looked directly at me and said, "Do you really or are you just saying that?" I was amazed at her aggressive attitude.

She said that her car had been in there since last night and she was in a hurry. I became indignant and told her I had a car in there and I had been waiting over three hours. In a dismissive manner, she turned around and took a place in line right in front of me.

It took me a few seconds to realize that she had cut in line and intended to stay there. I swallowed hard a couple of times and decided I would let the old crank in without making a scene. I thought that I would be gracious in that way, but in fact, I was not gracious at all. In my mind, that lady did not deserve my love or concern, and she didn't receive either. Instead, she received my disdain and the disdain of all those behind me in line.

I'm ashamed to admit it, but I turned to those behind me and said, "This will be our Christmas present to her. We will let her in." Those of us in line behind her bonded over our frustration toward this lady as we talked about her while she stood there in line. Then we began to talk about why we were there and developed more connections. We were openly friendly with each other, but not with her.

The lady ignored us. When she got to the desk, she paid for the work on her car, got her keys, and left.

Finally, I got to the front of the line and paid for the tires. As I went outside and got inside the car to leave, the Holy Spirit convicted me about my behavior and feelings toward this lady. I became painfully aware that I had lost an incredible opportunity to bear witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and His unconditional love for us.

I had not shown this woman any love, much less unconditional love. I had not sacrificed anything for her. I had lost the opportunity to demonstrate to those around me the mercy and love that we as disciples of Jesus Christ are called to show.

In a very tangible way, I had lost the opportunity to be an example because I wasn't willing to pay the price of demonstrating unconditional love and of being Christ's disciple.

In Luke 18:9-11 we read the parable Christ told of the Pharisee and the publican:

He spake this parable unto certain men, who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself; God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers; or even as this publican.

I had been guilty of the sin of self-righteousness, just like the Pharisee.

Arthur Oakman said this:

The worst sin Latter Day Saints commit, do you know what it is? They achieve a standard of righteousness, and they draw a line and if you don't come up to their standard of righteousness God pity you. Their righteousness becomes God's righteousness, and they condemn everyone else who doesn't conform to their way of thinking. This is a sin to which Latter Day Saints are peculiarly subject. Let no man then judge another but let him examine his own life and his own heart and seek to function at the maximum capacity physically and spiritually (Lecture 6, Spiritual Endowment).

As I reflected on how Jesus might have handled this situation in Walmart, I became painfully aware of what my response should have been. As a disciple of Christ, my response should have been already decided in my heart before I even encountered this situation.

In Luke 14:28, Jesus says, *“Wherefore, settle this in your hearts, that ye will do the things which I shall teach, and command you.”*

As disciples of Christ, we need to settle in our hearts that we will love God above all else. We cannot be half-hearted and double-minded. We must be wholehearted and single-minded in our love for Him, which in turn will spill over into love for others.

I should have paid the price of being a disciple of Christ. Out of love for her and for those around me, I should have given her my place in line and taken her place at the end of the line. If I simply let her in line in

front of me, everyone else in line behind me was paying the price. Instead, I should have, out of love, willingly paid the price by giving her my place in line and taking hers. In this way, justice would have been served and mercy would have abounded.

I believe this is what Christ would have done, because isn't this what He has already done for each of us? He gave up His place in the courts of glory and came as a man to take our place on the cross.

For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps;

Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth;

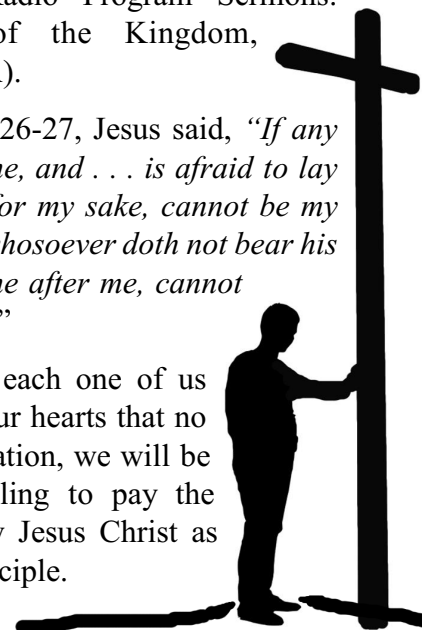
Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously;

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed (1 Peter 2:21-24).

Arthur Oakman said, “The mark of a Saint is not perfection, but consecration. A Saint is not a man without faults, but a man who has given himself without reserve to God . . . It does not take much of a man to be a Christian, but it does take all of him there is” (RLDS Radio Program Sermons: Citizenship of the Kingdom, Program 296A).

In Luke 14:26-27, Jesus said, *“If any man come to me, and . . . is afraid to lay down his life for my sake, cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.”*

I pray that each one of us will settle in our hearts that no matter the situation, we will be ready and willing to pay the price to follow Jesus Christ as His faithful disciple.





A Father's Blessing

-by Aaron Smith, Oak Grove Branch

At the end of my father Lyle's life, when we knew he was looking at end-of-life care versus recovery, I talked to him about offering a blessing to each of his three sons' families. I had the

thought that I should ask Dad to bless the families the weekend of July 13-14. On Sunday evening, July 14, the minister preaching at Oak Grove talked about the importance of the patriarchal blessing. This seemed to be a confirmation that I should ask Dad to leave a "patriarchal" or father's blessing for each family.

On Monday, July 15, after an appointment with hospice care, my wife April and I went to Dad's room to visit for a while. I told Dad the idea of offering a blessing to each family, and he was very much in favor of this, but also very concerned about having enough strength to be able to do it.

Tuesday, July 16, my father's sister Celia visited him. Dad shared with her that he wanted to give the boys' families a blessing. On Wednesday, Dad was having pain and very weak. My brother Todd's family visited and basically said their goodbyes. They had all left by the time April and I arrived after the Wednesday evening service at Oak Grove.

Vim, one of the elders from our branch, was there when we arrived, and Dad was in a great deal of pain. A nurse had given him pain medication just before we walked in the room, Vim had also administered to Dad by anointing his head with oil and the laying on of hands. (See James 5:14.) After Vim left, April and I stayed, but Dad was fitful and restless. I read Romans chapter eight aloud to him until he fell asleep and then we left.

On Thursday, Dad was not very responsive. I went to see him when I got off work. My other brother Jared and his family were there to say their good-byes. April had planned to let them have their time and then come over later, but shortly after I got there I asked her to go ahead and come over. Dad had an episode around 5:00 p.m. and we thought he was dying at that

moment. Todd and his family were asked to come back, so they did, and all of us sat around that evening wondering if Dad would pass at any moment.

Later, a hospice nurse explained that there are signs to know when a person is in their final eight to ten hours of life. Since Dad was not yet exhibiting those signs, my mom Sherrie decided we should all go home and sleep. Dad passed away at 10:20 a.m. on Friday, July 19, 2024.

Later in the day, April reflected on my father's life and thought about how good and loving he had always been to her and her children. She thought about what a BLESSING he was to her and to the kids. She also thought about how, when she and I were struggling to decide what to do about our wedding because of a stressful situation that was not resolved, it was Dad who said we should go ahead and get married because we would be stronger together. In doing so, April knew that Dad was giving his BLESSING on our marriage.

We were mildly disappointed that Dad hadn't really had the opportunity to offer the blessings to each son's family as we had talked about. As April rolled all of this around in her mind, she thought of how Dad's life was such a BLESSING to her, and how even though he didn't get to speak a blessing, he WAS a blessing, simply in the choices he made and the actions he took. The way he lived blessed us. April became very content with knowing of this BLESSING. She had a beautiful peace about it.

A day or two later, Celia called me. Among other things, she told me that when she had visited Dad on Tuesday, he had indicated he wanted to bless his sons. She then told me that even though Dad wasn't here anymore I should consider the possibility that he still could give that blessing.

A week later on July 27, April and I drove to Temple Grove Reunion in Ohio. It was a long drive. I was behind the wheel and fighting sleep, so we decided to turn on the radio. The song that was playing was "The Blessing" sung by Kari Jobe. I have liked this song for a long time. It is a paraphrase of the words from the blessing in Numbers 6:24-26:

“The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.”

April thought that was so neat that I got to hear that song. It made her think of my dad and the blessing his life was. She believed it was a reminder of the peace she had felt the evening Dad died and a confirmation of the idea that even though Dad hadn't been able to speak a blessing to our families, he was a blessing.

About an hour later, I changed the radio station and we heard the same song with the words of this blessing! (This time it was a different version, and it was sung by a choir.) April didn't really think that was a coincidence. She believed the Lord was really driving home the fact that Dad didn't need to speak words to bless us because his life had blessed us.

When we arrived at reunion, we saw a good friend, Krista. She said she had a card for us. She gave it to us at the orientation service, and after the service, back in our room, we opened it. She had given us a sympathy card, and inside the card was a scripture verse card which quoted Numbers 6:26, “May the Lord bless you and keep you.” How beautiful! We loved that the Lord had shown us three times one of the most poignant blessings from scripture.

Then at the end of reunion on the last day at the final service, Patriarch Junior Cotrill felt like God wanted to give a message to the people there. A patriarch in our faith is like a father to the Church. He spoke several things, not directly to anyone, but to all there.

At the end of this message he then said, “Allow me now on our last day together, to bestow on each and every one of you, this [my] patriarch's blessing. And now may the Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and give you peace; now and in the days to come, forever and ever, Amen.”

I was overcome with the Spirit of God as it burned in my heart. This blessing was from a father—a father in the Church—and it was the same exact message that we had received now four times. God says in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established. Well, we had four witnesses!

Aunt Celia's counsel that Dad could still give that blessing from the other side was absolutely true. Whether Dad did that himself or whether God honored the intent of his heart prior to his departure, the blessing was left upon us.

We told my mom about this experience and to our surprise she added another layer to the testimony. Dad had worked on several articles for the *Glyph Notes* about ten or twelve years ago regarding a silver amulet that had been found, dating back to 600 BC near Jerusalem. The script on the amulet was none other than Numbers 6!

In one of Dad's articles, it says, “These are the words with which observant Jews still bless their children before the Sabbath meal on Friday nights and that are also used in prayers in synagogues.” We began to wonder, had the words given at reunion been spoken to fit that time frame?

The words of blessing at reunion were given on the closing day, which was Friday. In Jerusalem, it would have been seven or eight hours ahead of our time in Ohio. The timing of the blessing at reunion was around 11:00 a.m. eastern standard time. So in Jerusalem time, it would have been 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. or right at the time of the evening meal! God's usage of the blessing pronounced at reunion fit the exact timing of ancient Israel.



Blest be thou, O God of Israel,
Thou, our Father and our Lord!
Blest thy majesty forever;
Ever be thy name adored!

Thine, O Lord, are power and greatness;
Glory, victory are thine own;
All is thine in earth and heaven;
Over all thy boundless throne.

Riches come of thee, and honor;
Power and might to thee belong—
Thine it is to make us prosper,
Only thine to make us strong.

—Henry Ustick Onderdonk

MY CONVERSION TESTIMONY

-by Charlie Booth, Oak Grove Branch

In 1 Corinthians 13:11, we read: *“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.”*

I am a convert to the Restored Gospel, having grown up in the Presbyterian Church. One of the greatest blessings I have experienced in my life is becoming acquainted with the Restored Church of Jesus Christ. In 1969 as a young man in college, I first heard of this movement. Some friends invited me to play volleyball on Friday evenings with their church. I then began attending with them on Sundays.

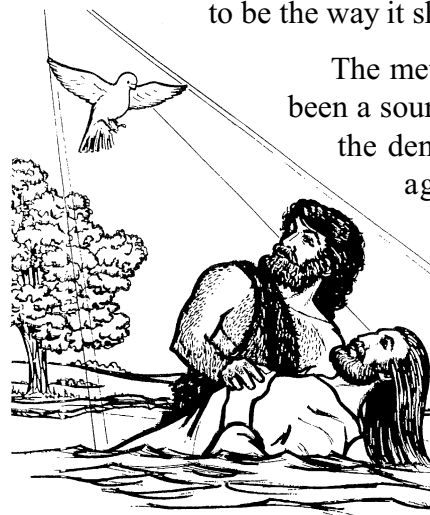
As I got to know the people there, I grew to understand that they had an entirely different level of commitment to the cause of Christ than I had witnessed in other churches. I had by then attended with Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Evangelicals, Lutherans, and probably several others in the Protestant faith. I had known atheists, agnostics, Catholics and Jews.

Between 1969 and 1990, I joined the RLDS church, was ordained to the office of teacher and then elder, and spent a lot of time in learning, study, prayer, service, and just living my life. I eventually became uncomfortable with the directions the RLDS church was taking, even though I lasted for several years past the events of 1984, and eventually began attending the Oak Grove Restoration Branch.

One of the great draws for me in the RLDS Church was the emphasis on Zion and the task of helping bring to pass the Lord's purposes through its establishment. That was a theme much talked about throughout the history to the Restoration, beginning with Joseph Smith, Jr.

When I attended a particular worship service at Oak Grove in 1995, I was stunned to realize the sermon preached that day was the first one I had heard in at least five years where the concepts of Zion were discussed. I knew then that I had once again found a branch of the true Church of Jesus Christ, restored in these latter days.

I also want to share two things from our scriptures that led to my conversion. For years I had puzzled over a practice of the Presbyterian Church (and other Protestant churches) known as infant baptism. I myself had been sprinkled as a baby, meaning the Presbyterian pastor had dipped his fingers in water that had been blessed, then placed his wet fingers on my head and prayed over me. Later, I learned in Sunday school that Jesus, when he was baptized in the River Jordan, was immersed in the river, meaning he was completely under the water. That seemed to me to be the way it should be done.



The method of baptism has long been a source of controversy among the denominations, pitting them against one another. I wondered how such a simple act, such as Jesus had John the Baptist perform for Him, become so complicated and controversial over the centuries?

I also felt instinctively that since an infant had no voice or choice in the decision for baptism, it did not make sense. Then, I learned what Mormon had written in the eighth chapter of Moroni in the Book of Mormon regarding this controversy which was even taking place at that time, about 400 A.D. He wrote, *“For if I have learned the truth, there have been disputations among you concerning the baptism of your little children. And now, my son, I desire that ye should labor diligently, that this gross error should be removed from among you”* (verses 4-6).

Then Mormon went on to say that the word of the Lord had come to him and taught him the truth: Little children are alive in Christ, even from the foundation of the world, and do not need baptism until they are accountable and able to repent. I knew when I read chapter eight of Moroni that I was reading truth.

One of the best moments of my life was when I realized at age twenty-eight that Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth, could use even me—that there was a role for me in helping to build up His kingdom! I had been reading the Doctrine and Covenants and came to Section 4. As I read, the Holy Spirit rested on me in power, literally flooding my body with warmth and assurance that what I was reading was true. That inspired scripture includes these words, *“therefore, if ye have desires to serve God, ye are called to the work . . .”* (verse 1c).

I was profoundly humbled to realize the depth of His love for me, and I knew that the Lord was calling me to active service. I confess before you today that I had believed that this was the true church of Jesus Christ for over seven years at that time. I had witnessed the dedication of the church members and the priesthood.

I knew if I joined the Church there was what I thought of as the “danger” that I might receive a priesthood call someday, but despite my fears and uncertainty over that possibility, I finally asked for baptism. I could not deny the call of Section 4 to my soul.

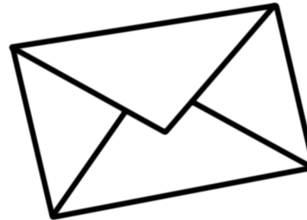
One more experience I'll share involves the concept of Zion. During a sermon at Oak Grove on a Sunday morning several years ago, I had a brief vision. The speaker was saying something about Zion at the time, and in my mind I suddenly pictured a large stack of clear blocks, which had the general appearance of glass. Inside each of these blocks, as I gazed upon them, I saw a different family—living, breathing, working, talking.

The strongest blocks were those with intact families, and they neatly fit together to make a strong wall. The weaker blocks would crack and chip off, damaging the wall, even though some of the family members remained inside as others left. I realized that I had received a confirmation of the idea that families are the building blocks of Zion.

I know that we are part of the true Church of Jesus Christ, restored in these latter days. I could spend a couple of hours explaining my assurance about it. I could talk about continuing divine revelation, its scriptural organization, authoritative priesthood, the spiritual gifts, the mission of seeking to bring forth

Zion, and the ministry of truth that is the fullness of the restored Gospel.

But I am, at heart, a very simple man—one who does not need complicated, external evidences for things that I know. For what I do know is this: When I became part of the Restored Church of Jesus Christ, I knew I had come home. And home is where I belong.



The Missing Envelope

-by Delores Champ, Oak Grove Branch

My girlfriend called to tell me she was going to mail me a money order. We have the post office's informed delivery service, so when I saw that her envelope to me had been scanned in by the post office, I knew it would be in my mailbox that day or possibly the next, and I told my husband about it.

A week later, I still had not seen it arrive in our mailbox, although there was a no-mail holiday included during that week. I was about ready to report it to the post office, when . . . Read on for the rest of the story!

My husband Dennis Heater is the one who usually retrieves our mail. He disposes of the junk mail in a recycling sack in the garage before he brings the rest inside our house. Later in the week, he wanted to try to find an envelope in the recycle sack that he decided he wanted to keep. He brought the sack into the kitchen and we both started looking for his envelope.

Lo and behold, there was MY missing piece of mail! He had not realized it was in the recycle sack. We assumed it must have become stuck to or was grabbed up with another piece of mail that he tossed into the bag to be recycled. At any rate, my missing envelope and its contents were found.

We both were thankful Dennis went hunting for his envelope (which he also found) and we praised God for leading us to find my envelope, too.





The Grace of God Even in a Tragedy



-by Cathy White, Oak Grove Branch

I sure didn't see that coming! November 15, 2025, was one of the worst days in my husband Bob and my life together. I was in the kitchen baking pies for the church Thanksgiving dinner. The pie crust was perfect! I was so excited about that. I was using my mom's apple pie recipe which is notoriously wonderful. I decided that instead of using the apple peeler/corer I was going to do the pies exactly as mom would have done them. I diligently peeled and sliced fourteen apples, enough for two pies—and then I heard it.

It sounded like my kitten, Pickles, was playing with the dining room mini blind. I loudly told her to stop. The third time I told her to stop. I went into the dining room. I didn't see the cat, but instead saw that the entire screen porch was engulfed in flames, shooting clear up through the roof. Bob came in the front door and I hollered that the house was on fire. He said dial 911, which I did, but in my mind I thought I could just go get the hose and put it out. I was so wrong!

I forgot all about Pickles and us both ran out of the house. Within just a very few moments, the fire trucks could be heard. They pulled up the neighbor's drive which was closer to that end of our house. At the front of the house they took the fence down so as to approach the fire from both sides.

I called my oldest son at work and told him our house was burning. He was a little confused and assumed it was the old farm house. I told him no, it was the house he had helped build for my parents. He said he'd be right there and hung up.

About that time my sister called. I answered the call and told her the house was burning. She hung up and headed our way as well. Within what seemed like a very few moments they were both at the farm. Before long there were six or seven pumper trucks and loads of fire engines on the property.

They struggled to put out the fire as it got into the attic. The vaulted ceiling created its own wind, making the fire spread quickly. To make things even

worse, the wind was blowing from the west rather vigorously, making the fire spread throughout the house faster.

When they finally got it out, they were able to find Pickles. She had torn a hole in the couch in the family room downstairs and was hiding in there to protect herself. She was soaking wet and struggling to breathe. They immediately put an oxygen mask on her and my sister rushed her to the vet's office in Oak Grove. Four hours later we were able to pick her up and she has been just fine ever since.

The old 1889 farmhouse on our property had been serving as the office area for our children's equine therapy ministry. Now we needed to set up housekeeping amid the office furniture. That entire day and the following day, we were surrounded by friends and family helping us do just that. And therein lies the grace of God that I am referring to.

First, it was a huge blessing that we had another house on our farm to go to. Second, it was the home we were in thirteen years ago after both of my parents passed away. It really felt like God had brought us home.

Our kids and grandkids brought us a bedroom set, helped us sort out office furniture to keep and throw away, and did a run to WalMart to get us some clothes and groceries. Friends and neighbors were all around us. Neighbors I had never met came to our front door and brought us cash to help us get by. One of our board members started a Go-Fund-Me account for us.

Our church family hooked up a washer and dryer for us, which required new water lines and electrical hook up. They put in a new dishwasher for us, too, as the farm house hadn't had one for several years. I found bags of new clothes on our back porch with no idea where they came from. Our program volunteers gathered around us for support.

I was amazed when two of our younger volunteers showed up at the door. They go to college in Columbia. One of them had seen my Facebook post about the fire, so they came to the farm immediately.

They didn't even go get a change of clothes. They knew we would need help with the horses, so they just came down as fast as possible.

One of my friends just happened to call me and I told her about the fire. She asked what I needed and I said shoes and a coat. They went and bought me a pair of sneakers and she gave me the coat she had on.

That day both Bob and I felt the pure love of Christ. However, it didn't stop there. Two of our friends, one from church and a neighbor we didn't know, did our laundry for several weeks until we could get the washer and dryer installed. People are still offering us items we might need.

We love our church family so dearly. We could have never gotten through this and all of the things that have occurred in our lives over the past eighteen months without your love, fellowship and encouragement. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.



Our Memorable Trip to Chapala, Jalisco, Mexico

-by Dennis Heater, Oak Grove Branch

In April 2024, my wife Delores and I visited Chapala, Mexico, near Guadalajara. My cousin Shelly has lived there over seven years. She has an Airbnb attached to her home, and she had invited us to come visit her and stay in it while there. We had the opportunity to get away from home, so we took her up on her offer.

We flew down and spent a week with her. Shelly has a beautiful place and her Airbnb was very nice, with all the comforts of home. Shelly doesn't own a car, nor even have a driver's license there. She walks everywhere as most of the things she needs are close by. If she needs to go to another area that is not local, she has friends and drivers she knows who can drive her where she wants to go.

Chapala's sidewalks and cobblestone streets are not known for their smoothness, so a person has to

constantly watch the ground while walking to keep from falling. The first full day we were there we started out shopping and sightseeing for the day. There is a nice plaza area next to Lake Chapala, the largest lake in Mexico, so we were headed there to start our day.

Our plans suddenly changed only two doors from Shelly's place as I accidentally fell on the sidewalk, tripping over a small uneven place, even though I was using my cane for stability. The toe of my shoe caught on it and down I went, landing on my left arm and knees. My knees got scraped up a little, but my arm did not fare as well. I tore a place six inches long on top of my left arm, which took away the skin down to the meat. It was not a very pretty sight!

It so happened that this occurred right in front of Shelly's friend Carmen's home which could not have been better. She is a retired nurse of forty years, is fluent in Spanish, she was home, and she has a car that was parked in front of her house. Shelly knocked on her door and called for help.

I was taken briefly inside her home where she covered my arm with paper towels (as I was bleeding quite a bit). Carmen said "Let's get in the car; I'm going to take you to Cruz Roja" (the Red Cross clinic which was only a short distance away).

They immediately got me in and started working on my arm, cleaning it up. One of my knees was barely scraped, the other a little worse, so they cleaned it up also. I left there with my arm and one knee wrapped up. The staff there treated me well and it was a clean facility. They prescribed two prescriptions for me which we picked up at a "farmacia" a short distance from the Red Cross.

The Lord certainly blessed me because at the place where I fell there was a registered nurse available, she had a car, and there was a Red Cross nearby. If it had happened anywhere else, I would have been on my own to get help.

The Lord is always there to help us in our situations and He was there that day when I needed Him. I did check in with the Kansas City V.A. where I go when I got home. What a blessing it turned out to be under the circumstances I went through. The rest of our visit in Mexico went very well. There are some beautiful places down there to visit.

Isn't It Wonderful What the Lord Does for Us?

-by Caroline Leeb, Hale, Missouri

The testimony I would like to share takes place in the early 1970s. I was only thirty-three years old and a single mother of five children. My oldest was around thirteen or fourteen and the youngest was two or three. We were living in an eight-foot wide two-bedroom trailer in the small town of Windsor, Colorado.

Kodak Industries built a plant on the outskirts of Windsor, and I was able to gain employment there earning \$3.50 to \$4.00 per hour.

My children continued to grow and our trailer seemed to be getting smaller. We needed a bigger home. I heard about some low income houses being built in a town about thirty miles away. I looked at one. It was small and what I would call a cracker box house. Even so, I put in my application.

I was denied! I had been praying about getting a new home and felt so disappointed. I had thought it would do until I could afford something better.

Earlier in the summer, the kids and I attended family camp at Ramoca Campground at Colorado Springs. Elder Glenn Friend taught a class on financial planning. He mentioned three things to do to get ahead in life. First, pay your tithing and give to God. Second, pay yourself. Put a little bit of money into savings from each paycheck. Third, pay off your debts.

I took this teaching to heart and started saving what I could. I had a little more than four hundred dollars saved when I was denied the low-income housing. I had thought to use the money for curtains and such.

Soon after being denied, the stake bishop visited the congregation in Greeley where we attended church. He was going around to all the congregations in Denver Stake to raise money for a campgrounds.

The church did not own Ramoca Campground and had just rented it for our camps. The Bureau of Land Management had some acreage above the town of Loveland for sale. They wanted four hundred dollars per acre.

I gave the Church the four hundred dollars I had in savings. I knew a campground for the Church was a worthy cause.

Not over a month later, I was told I might be able to get a Farmers Home Association (FHA) loan to buy a house. The FHA gave loans for homes that were located ten miles or further from a big city. Windsor qualified. There was a new home being built less than a mile from the Kodak plant where I worked.

Again, I put in my application. This time, I was accepted. This home was much larger and better built. I even got to choose the carpeting and fixtures. I only gave four hundred dollars to the Lord, but He gave me a new home that at that time cost about \$25,000.

I needed \$2100 to close on the new home. I had the trailer to sell, and I asked the Lord to help me sell it. In Greeley there was a place that bought used trailers. I called and the manager came out to look at my trailer. When he finished checking it out, he said he would give me \$2100 for it. The Lord knew just what I needed!

Isn't it wonderful what the Lord does for us? I hope this testimony might strengthen someone else's faith.



My Vision Was Healed!

-by Beverly Conoley, Missouri

In 1991, I went to the eye doctor. He told me I had glaucoma.

The next Sunday, I went to church, not telling anyone about my eye condition. The minister came over to me and told me he wanted to administer to me (the laying on of hands by the elders, as mentioned in James 5:14). I agreed, and he did.

The next visit to my eye doctor, he told me I no longer had glaucoma. I was healed!



“Why Have You Lost Your Faith?”

-by Larry Green, Oak Grove Branch

In September 2022, my regular care doctor was a little alarmed during a routine physical because my PSA was elevated. (PSA is a blood test done primarily to screen for prostate cancer.) He sent me to a urologist. When I met with the urologist, he wanted an MRI.

When the MRI results came back, the doctor noticed a little bit of something that concerned him. So our next step was a biopsy. Before the biopsy, I was administered to by two of the elders of the Church with the laying on of hands and anointing with oil, as we are told to do in James 5:14. That was a great experience.

I then had my biopsy done. I was told it would take about ten days for my urologist to read it and get back to me. At this time I really didn't have any concerns. I had an appointment with the urologist coming up that Thursday.

On Tuesday, I was at work. I worked for the post office and my work area was a large warehouse-like area. I was all alone in that area, when all of a sudden my phone rang. It was my doctor. He said, “Larry this is Doctor Haggard. You do have cancer,” and then he hung up.

This definitely made me start thinking a little. My wife Nancy worked at the same facility, so I discussed this with her on our break. I said to her, “We have an appointment on Thursday. Why couldn't he have waited until then?”

My mind had started spiraling and worrying a little. That night when I laid down to sleep, I suddenly felt someone sitting on the edge of my bed. It was Jesus. He said, “Son, why have you lost your faith? I have this taken care of.”

I sat up in bed for a minute and then was able to lay back down and go right to sleep. A huge burden was lifted off of me. That was the last concern about this cancer that I had.

I went to Dr. Haggard on Thursday with my wife and we discussed my best treatment options. We also

found out my doctor was a Christian. The three of us sat around and shared testimonies for about twenty minutes. I walked out of there like I was walking on air.

I started my radiation treatments right before Thanksgiving. I went through forty-three days of radiation and yes, I was fatigued, but I think I had a very easy time of it.

I went back to see my radiation doctor on April 16 and he told me that my cancer was gone. I was in a little daze leaving there. I went to my car and sat down to send a text to our pastor with the news so he could share with the rest of our Oak Grove congregation and thank them for their prayers and support. I cried for about fifteen minutes and then prayed, thanking Jesus for His love and repenting for losing my faith.



“You’re Going to Be Okay”

-by Connie Martin, Oak Grove Branch

In 2011, I was diagnosed with cancer. It was devastating news, but I did not panic. I did take some long walks, praying all the time. Through a series of blessings, I ended up with Dr. Dudzinski as my surgeon and oncologist. She was a marvelous doctor and just who I needed to guide me through the process.

One night before surgery, I was lying in bed. I had said my prayers and was trying to go to sleep. As I dozed off, I felt a touch on my shoulder and heard the words, “You’re gong to be okay.” From that moment on, my worrying ceased.

The morning of the surgery as we were headed to the hospital, my mother said that everything was going to be just fine. I replied, “I know it is.”

Thirteen years later, I remain cancer free. Praise the Lord from whom all blessings flow.





Seeking to Encounter the Divine

-by Mindy Mulheron-Jennings, Oak Grove Branch

While I have experienced the loss of many loved ones in my life, none hit as hard as the loss of my father. Even now, more than fifteen hundred days later at the time of this writing, it often feels that he just left yesterday, while simultaneously seeming that he has been gone for much longer than the fifty-one months he's actually been absent from the physical plane of this earth. It is a strange dichotomy to constantly feel that he is both here and not here from moment to moment.

Like Nephi, I was born of goodly parents. It is a blessing I will never be able to earn or repay. I am grateful to my Heavenly Father for His choice of my parents for me. I have always known this. Even in days of rebellion, I knew how lucky I was to be born into my family. My dad has long been my hero—encouraged in that effort, of course, by my mother. Together, they never missed an opportunity to support me.

There is not a single event I can recall where at least one of them was not present. Even in college, they routinely drove two hours to attend events I participated in. Even as an adult, they supported all of my professional efforts. If I had to describe my mom and dad in one word, it would be simply this: Present.

So as the fall of 2020 waxed on, it never occurred to me this long-accepted, established reality would change. By this time, COVID was sweeping the nation and although life had somewhat altered, it still felt mostly safe. My parents were caretakers at the church campgrounds and fairly insulated from the world at large. Our family was taking precautions and the virus seemed like something other people were dealing with, as life went on fairly routinely.

When my dad tested positive for COVID, we were concerned but not overly so. He was released within a few days and we all breathed a sigh of relief as my parents began their quarantine period. Life resumed and that was that.

Two weeks later, everything changed again. Less than a month later, he was suddenly gone.

The man I had looked up to my whole life, the same one I had spoken with a few days before—that man was the person the doctor was referencing as he was telling my mother there was nothing more to be done and we needed to come say goodbye.

I know many people don't say goodbye as an everyday practice because they don't like the seeming finality of the phrase. I did not understand those feelings until December 3, 2020.

I drove to pick up my mother in a daze. I'm not sure if we even spoke on the way to the hospital. When we arrived, we were taken to see him for the first time in weeks. As I rounded the corner and saw him, I knew only his physical body remained. The broken body in the bed was no longer housing his spirit; my father was waiting to be received into the courts of heaven. And just a few minutes later, he was there. Our friends were in the parking lot outside, and as his body gave up the fight, Danny (an elder from our branch) heard my grandmother welcome her son home as he passed through the veil.

Some minutes later, we left the hospital with a small bag of his last earthly belongings. We began the journey home and my mom began to describe an experience she had had that morning. She was sitting in her home—which was high on a hill overlooking a lake—thinking about my dad when an eagle appeared and soared over the lake as she watched. The thought came to her that my dad would rise up on wings as an eagle, as promised in Isaiah. This gave her great solace and hope, as she continued to wait for updates on his condition.

Twelve hours later, it brought despair as she recounted it to me, understanding she had misinterpreted the intended meaning. That Thursday night was the darkest night of my life, for while I still clung to the knowledge of eternal life, I was absolutely bereft, having never experienced pain so deep.

This is the part where you may be asking yourself, "Sad story, but why am I reading it?" If you know me and my family, you know how deeply the death of my father impacted our lives. If you don't know us, it's just another loss felt by other people.

So if you are still reading this, I will endeavor to now detail why I feel compelled to share the following moments of my life since.

My dad went home to glory on a Thursday evening. The following Sunday morning, I drove my mother to church. At the time of his death, they were attending Chilhowee Branch and the drive from Odessa was easily forty minutes. That day it took longer, as we dreaded arriving in a place where, for the first time, he should be and wasn't. About thirty-five minutes into the drive, we came to a place where the road ended in a "T" and we needed to turn to continue.

As I pulled to a stop, I suddenly noticed a large eagle sitting low in a tree in front of us. I pointed it out to my mother and we were amazed to feel as if the eagle was watching us. This being a country road, we were undisturbed as we sat there for many minutes gazing at this beautiful bird. We wondered aloud if it might be a sign from our Heavenly Father, reminding us that my dad had indeed risen up.

Eventually we determined we must drive on and reluctantly made the turn, away from the eagle. As I turned, the eagle lifted off and began to fly alongside us as we drove the last few miles. Just before arriving at church, the bird ascended and soared away.

We sat in the parking lot and cried, certain we had received a blessing and a confirmation that we were not alone in our grief. Our Heavenly Father was with us in it and had sent us a reminder we would recognize as an emblem of my dad. We shared the testimony during the service and many others confirmed what we believed the eagle to represent, including sharing that no one had seen an eagle around that area before.

This experience sustained me for months, and I began to look for more signs that my Heavenly Father was reaching out to me and comforting me in my time of loss. And I began to believe He was maybe even allowing my father to still be aware of my joys and trials on this earth. I was also reminded that many other times I had been made aware of loved ones who had passed on yet were still interacting with me in this world in various ways.

It is true that when you don't record your testimonies, they can be quickly forgotten as we make

our way through this fallen world with all of its distractions. Having grown up in the Church, these types of experiences were so common that I realized I had begun to overlook their significance as my eyes were turned toward other things. The loss of my father has caused a pivotal shift in my life as I have been reminded to turn my eyes to Jesus and think on things not of this world.

My father had a special spirit, a very loving and humble spirit, and was often called upon to share ministry at funeral events. He was sought out for his compassion and the comfort he routinely shared with others. I often heard him insist in those services that "heaven was not a place where people go to forget" and that the departed family member—though separated now by the veil—was still very present and interested in those that remained.

I found myself wondering in the months that followed his death if that were in fact true. And I believe it is. I believe my father's counsel was of the Spirit, and though the veil does separate us on a physical plane, we are not actually separate in the Spirit.

I am grateful for the many experiences I have had with the Spirit in the last three-plus years, as I have sought to encounter the Divine. There have been many moments I have needed the assurance of my earthly father and my Heavenly Father has allowed me that privilege and grace.

Since this shift in my life, I have started keeping track of my testimonies so that I may share them with others and encourage them also to seek out testimonies. Some might try to write them off as mere coincidences; however, I firmly believe that when you ask, you receive. I will share just a few here.

A month after he passed, to the day, I happened to be snow boarding—or at least trying to, as my mind was very much elsewhere. I knew what day it was. The grief was still nearly debilitating at that time. I found myself at the top of the run alone, wondering if he missed me as much as I missed him. At that moment, an eagle appeared over me, again in a place no one expected. Everyone stopped to watch in awe. I knew it was a sign for me, a blessing from my Heavenly Father reminding me I was not alone.

One of my favorite things to do is to sing, especially for church. I have been blessed to grow up in a congregation where everyone truly feels like my family and when I sing for church, it's as if I'm sharing a special message they need to hear.

After my dad's passing, I was hesitant to sing again. In fact, it took me over two years to say yes. The simple truth was this: I had never sung without him there. Ever. And I didn't know if I could.

Whether he was sitting in the audience or up front, he always bowed his head in prayer for me just before I began. He kept his head down until I finished. Then he would look up, find my eyes, and give me this special smile that conveyed his love and confirmed the worth of my offering to my church family. If he wasn't there, how would I know if I had done well? How would I know if my offering was enough? And so I waited for years—paralyzed in uncertainty.

One morning, I found myself reluctantly in the practice room at church. In less than an hour I would stand up for the first time without him, and I was undone. I truly didn't know if I could manage. My mother (who always plays the piano for me and without whom I would never even attempt this ministry) was doing her best to encourage me to continue and counseled me to try the songs one more time before deciding if I could sing them in the service.

As she began to play, the room changed before me and I was in a place I had never been before. It was a peaceful landscape in springtime or early summer, and my eyes were drawn to a large tree at the edge of my vision. I focused in on the tree, noticing for the first time there was something in front of it.

Tears began to stream down my face as I saw my father sitting there, just as he always had—his head dipped a little in a prayer for me. I began to sing and he stayed there until I finished. Then he lifted his head and smiled and was gone. The room was as it had been before.

It's hard to truly put into words what this experience has meant to me in my life as I have continued to seek to offer ministry, and how grateful I am for the times my Heavenly Father has allowed this parting of the veil where I'm aware of my father many times since.

In my backyard there are several trees, including a huge oak which dwarfs the rest. One evening after an especially hard day, I sat outside. It was a still evening and as I sat alone, I was pondering recent events. I wondered what my dad would think of what was going on and allowed myself a moment of grief for the loss of his counsel in my life.

I sat with my head bowed, quiet in the stillness. Abruptly, I became aware that the wind had picked up suddenly. Upon looking up, I realized something strange was happening. I noticed only the very large oak tree was moving, and it was roaring with wind. The rest of the trees in our yard and every tree I could see in my neighbors' yards were still.

I immediately remembered being at the campgrounds when the wind would come up roaring, and it always seemed to happen when the Spirit was present. My dad loved those instances. He loved being a witness to the rushing winds, and considered them a testament of confirmation to whatever was going on.

As all of these things collided in my mind and I continued to notice that only one tree was moving. The wind reached across the yard and encircled me for several seconds, and then it was gone and all was still. You'll never be able to convince me that my dad wasn't giving me a supernatural hug in that moment. The Spirit reached out to me in my despair and aloneness and allowed that ministry to take place.



I could go on and on, but I will conclude with the most recent testimony I've been given. A few weeks ago I underwent a surprise emergency surgery. I asked for administration by the elders of the church prior to being taken into surgery (see James 5:14), and was blessed to have two trusted friends come immediately.

During the administration, one of the men had to pull his hand away for a moment. Even as I registered that feeling—the loss of the hand—I also knew there were still four hands on my head. I felt immediately my father was present, and a part of the administration. As the prayer concluded, my friend, without

me saying anything, confirmed my father had been present. I felt absolute peace as I entered into the surgery and was blessed with a great doctor and outcome.

I share these things in hope to encourage you as I have been encouraged. There was a time in my life when I did not seek the Lord and His blessings enough. I felt fine with my faith and beliefs. He didn't need to waste His time on me when others needed Him more.

However, I have come to understand that while burgers are great, steak is better. Why not seek Him out no matter what your circumstance—whether in blessings or sorrows? Why not ask for testimonies? This world is hard. But He is with us. Allow Him to manifest His Divine blessings in your life. Live in the expectancy of meeting with His Spirit in whatever way He allows at all times, not just in times of need.

I recently read a novel series that I very much enjoyed. It's a bit out of our scope of faith, as it's written by a Mormon and discusses the concept of the pre-existence, but I found so much comfort in its thought-provoking ideas. Much of the series' storyline revolves around strong and loving earthly fathers who are taken too soon and details how the families have to go on without them, so obviously I found it very interesting.

There are several scenarios in which one of the fathers is aware of the trial in which his family finds themselves, and the author depicts the father as being just off to the side from the action, watching and praying for their family. But the most striking thing to me was that the earthly father is never alone. Some part of the Trinity is also always present and also watching over the events. This idea resonates so deeply with me—that our loved ones continue to remain aware of our lives here and that not only they, but also our Heavenly Father, watches over us in a very physical way.

Maybe this seems like Christianity 101 to you, but this word picture brought home the idea to me in a way I had never considered before. As my dad insisted, heaven isn't a place where you forget this world and hang out on clouds. It's a place where the work continues. It's a place of love that transcends this physical world. It is a place coexisting

simultaneously with our world in ways we cannot understand but can trust in—knowing our eternal purpose extends far beyond what we can actually see.

Later in the storyline, one father sees his daughter in peril. It is a moment which will define her. She is under attack, near death and giving up. The father speaks to her spirit saying these words:

Remember my final words, for they may be the most important thing I can say. There are times in your life when you feel completely alone, times you feel abandoned, as if there is not a soul in this world who cares about you. But when you feel that way, remember there is another world. There are others watching over you from the other side of the veil. We watch. We listen. And we understand. We never leave your side. Someone is always near, someone who knows you and loves you and wants you to succeed. You are never alone. There is always someone there. Think of that, remember, and it will give you the strength that you need (*Where Angels Fall* by Chris Stewart).

I hope you also have the strength that you need. There is always someone there, whether it's someone you knew and loved here or not. I hope that you know your Heavenly Father loves you and watches over you in a real and tangible way. And if you don't, I pray you will ask Him to show you. I know He will.

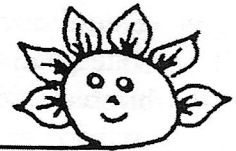


*O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.
Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising,
thou understandest my thought afar off.
Thou compassest my path and my lying down,
and art acquainted with all my ways.
For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo,
O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.*

Psalm 139:1-4



Kid's Korner



Everything Is Going to Be All Right

-by Lorna Smith

When I was eight years old in 1942, I was standing close to where my mother was canning green beans. All of a sudden, a jar of green beans burst and shot boiling water into my face. I ran out of the door screaming. The neighbors got me into the house and called the ambulance.

The medics cleaned my face and put a pressure bandage on me. It was thick and covered my whole head. It had a hole that I could breathe out of and a hole for my mouth, so I could suck liquid from a straw. I think I must have been in shock because all I remember is darkness.

As I was lying in darkness, I heard a man's voice speak in my ear, "Everything's going to be all right." It wasn't my dad's voice. No one else was in the house. With that voice came a wonderful, comforting feeling. I knew without a doubt that everything was going to be all right.

My mom came into my room and I mumbled through my bandage, "Mama, everything's going to be all right."

The church's elders came the next night, laid their hands on my bandaged head, and prayed for me. That is all I remember.

When I was older, I asked my mother about the details. She said my accident was on a Wednesday. She said the people at church had heard about my accident. That night at prayer meeting they prayed for me. I asked her what time it was when I told her it was going to be all right. She said it was about 7:30 p.m. It was the same time as prayer meeting at church!

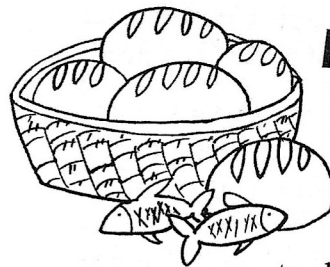
Just three days later, she took me to the burn doctor. When he unwrapped the bandages he exclaimed, "This is a miracle! She has no scars, no

sores, and no infection!" I had had second and third degree burns when they put the bandages on me.

My mom said, "I thought it got in her eyes."

The doctor said, "It did." But my eyes were fine. I had been totally healed!

I didn't even need glasses until I was fifty years old. This testimony has been a grounding testimony for me throughout my whole life and I am now ninety years old!



Multiply the Loaves and Fishes

-by Holly McLean

In 1988 our family was asked to do a musical Christmas performance for City Union Mission in Kansas City, Missouri, a ministry for homeless men. The event was for the Christmas dinner the mission was going to provide to those who were in need.

When we arrived, the plan was that we were to be fed before the performance and to sing while the men were enjoying their meal. As we gathered in the back room for prayer and to eat, the director of the mission came into the room and explained something very concerning.

They had planned for about fifty to one hundred men to show up for the meal and had prepared accordingly. To their surprise, more than two hundred had arrived and more were coming.

Because they knew these men probably had no other access to food for that day, they asked if we would be willing to forgo our meal and eat elsewhere after the performance so more men could eat. In fact, they had already announced to the men that there would be no second portions.

Of course we said that was fine, but we decided to say a prayer for the situation and for our performance

that it would be a blessing to all who were in attendance. Our young eight-year-old son gave a beautiful prayer and asked that God would bless the food as He did with the loaves and fishes in the Bible, where it multiplied to supply all that was needed, with more to spare.

When the meal was served to the men, not only was there enough for all of them, but they announced there was enough for seconds. At the end of the evening, the staff at the mission had plenty more to take home with them! What a blessing! God hears and answers the sincere prayers of young people!

Bless Your Enemies

-from Connie Smith, Independence, Missouri

When Connie's son was in school, there was a boy that bullied him. He came home and told his mom about it. They talked about what could and should be done. He decided to pray for this boy. Every day her son would pray for the boy who bullied him.

One day, the boy asked her son for help with his math. Her son helped this boy and they became friends after that. Not the best of friends, but the boy did not bully him anymore.

He learned to do things God's way and reaped the benefits.

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IF YOUTH ★ JESUS

You Have a Work to Do

-by Heidi Lidberg and Nate Lidberg,
Oak Grove Branch

HEIDI—We were at Mammoth Camp during the summer of 2024. On Wednesday, we were having a prayer walk. At our group's last session, we were supposed to pray about what we needed to fix in our lives. After praying, I told God that I would love to have a testimony to know that He was listening to me and hearing me when I prayed.

Later that night, during the prayer service we had a time of silence and listening. I felt like God was telling me to pray for my older brother, Nate. So I asked God if He had anything to tell my brother that He would tell him.

Later, when the pastor talked to Nate through the influence of the Spirit, I realized that through my prayers, God spoke to Nate and He answered Nate's prayers, but He also answered mine!

NATE—As Heidi said, we were at Mammoth Camp. I wasn't feeling God's Spirit at the beginning of the week. It was a rough start.

On the second night of camp, I was praying and told the Lord that I would give my whole life to Him—that whatever God had in store for me, I would accept. The Spirit overcame me with such a passion and I knew He had heard me.

On Wednesday, the prayer walk was a great experience and the Lord let us all know He loved everyone there. In the evening, the pastor spoke about the love that we had at that camp, that it was the kind of love that would bring about Zion. Then he spoke to individuals under the Spirit. I was probably one of the last people he spoke to.

He said through the Spirit that I have a work to do for Him, and that brought it down to a very personal level. The Spirit I felt after that was so great. I went to my cabin, knelt down on the ground, and just poured out my heart to the Lord.

This is one of the most foundational testimonies that I've ever had. I know whatever I do, if it is of God, He will bless it. I know that He will guide me and be with me as I move forward. I know that if I try and do good for His kingdom, He will magnify my efforts. What He says to one, He says to all.

Great Is Thy Faithfulness, O God My Father

-by Mark Nunn, Oak Grove Branch

In 2011, I was working at the Veteran's Administration Medical Center (VAMC) in Denver, Colorado. I had just retired from the Army Reserve a few months earlier and was planning my retirement from VAMC in five more years. My wife Sheri and I were looking forward to being able to travel once my employment obligations were behind me.

One evening, my youngest son, whose wife had recently left him, came by the house with Callie, one of his two dogs. He was moving in with some friends where he was not going to be able to keep both of his dogs and was looking for a home for this one. Callie was a beautiful golden lab and beagle mix with a very gentle disposition.

Our son knew Sheri and I did not want any new pets due to our plans to travel after retirement. With tears in his eyes, he explained the situation and said he needed to find a home where Callie would be cared for with love. He declared we were the only people he could trust to care for her properly. Naturally, we told him we would sort out our travel plans when the time came and adopted Callie into our home.

As it turned out, we were twice blessed by this event. Our son was relieved of an additional heartache during a difficult time, and Callie brought a new joy into our home as she quickly bonded with my wife and me.

About three years later the blessings of joy we shared with Callie were magnified many times over. I began to develop a chronic respiratory illness that rapidly progressed to the point where I would wake up at night having trouble breathing. Callie began to wake me up in the night as soon as my difficulty in breathing began to manifest. She would not leave me alone until I got up to attend to my needs, after which she would get up on the bed and lay up against me for the rest of the night.

During the day she also tended to stay closer to me even more than she had before. As a result of her actions, we did some extra training for her and got her certified as a therapy dog. This was another blessing because from that point on she was able to accompany me wherever I went.

On February 20, 2024, our hearts were broken when, due to her declining health at seventeen years old, we had to take Callie to the veterinarian to put her down. This was especially hard on me because I felt like I had violated her trust in me to take care of her like she had taken care of me.

My mourning for her was persistent, like a dark cloud that I couldn't lift. Days became weeks and I continued to weep for her absence nearly every day.

Finally one night as I lay in bed with tears of sorrow running down my cheeks, I cried out to the Lord asking Him to remove this burden of grief from me. I could not comfort myself and needed the comfort of the Holy Spirit to get me past this.

After falling asleep I had a dream. I must state here that I have never had a spiritual dream in my life that I can recall. The dream started with a sense that I had died and left my body, although I soon came to understand I had merely been lifted up in the spirit. Nevertheless, I suddenly found myself standing on a small rise on the outer edge of a small town.

Everything about the town was neat and clean. There were a few cars parked in front of some of the buildings but there were no people anywhere except for one man in a business suit standing in front of me. I didn't know him, but he smiled and welcomed me with a gentle hug. He bid me to follow him and led the way out of town to a small meadow at the foot of a hill.

As we began to walk up the hill I saw several dogs running and playing up at the top. Then I recognized Callie among them. When she saw me coming, she ran down the hill toward me. As was our custom I dropped to my knees, and she put her front legs around my neck laying her head on one shoulder while I petted her. I awoke then with a sense of calm and comfort that I had not felt in a long time.

Later that morning when I was reading and listening to music, I heard the hymn "Great is Thy Faithfulness." This hymn is a prayer inspired by Lamentations 3:22-23:

“It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness.”

The hymn opens with this salutation, “Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father.” There is a line in the first verse that says, “Thy compassions, they fail not,” and one in the refrain that says, “Morning by morning new mercies I see.” These phrases spoke especially to my heart at that time.

I knew the Lord was still talking to me to lift the burden of grief from my heart. He was telling me that He understood and that He was with me. Over the next day or two I heard that same hymn two more times from different sources.

There is an addendum to this testimony of God’s faithful loving compassion and mercy. Perhaps not an addendum, but rather bookends. In 2014 my oldest brother died. In the middle of his memorial service my seven-year-old granddaughter got up from where she was sitting with her father (my oldest son) and came to sit on my lap.

She gave me a hug and a picture she had just drawn of a rainbow with a smiling sun looking down upon it. She sensed that I was sad and wanted to give me something to make me happy. Oh, what tremendous joy flooded into my heart with that simple act!

Fast forward to 2024 when I lost Callie. I shared the testimony above at church one day, with a choked voice and tear-stained cheeks, to share the extent of God’s love for us all. A few days later I got a card in the mail. It was from a young girl in our branch who was there and heard my tearful testimony.

She wrote: “Dear Mark Nunn, I’m really sorry about your dog who died. I colored this dog picture to make you happy. Did you know I liked your dog because the dog was nice? Was your dog a she or he?”

Inside the card was a picture of the dog that she had colored for me. But what struck me most was the front of the card itself. It was a picture of a child’s rainbow drawing that was very similar to the one my granddaughter had made for me ten years before.

Both drawings now reside on the wall above my desk as a constant reminder of God’s faithfulness and of His compassion that never fails, and of His mercies

that are poured out upon us day by day. I am also reminded of that particular lesson of Jesus’ when He tells us that our little children are our best representation of the kingdom of heaven here on earth and that we should be more like them.

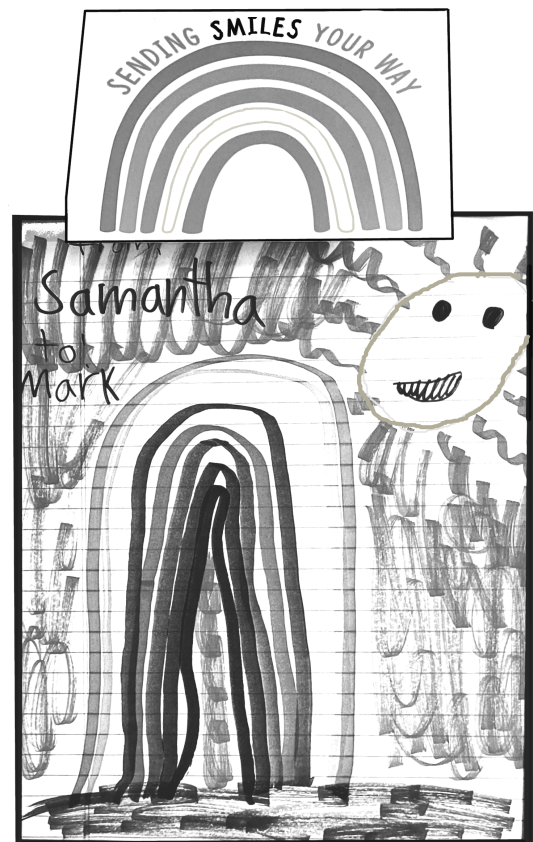
At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily, I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me (Matthew 18: 1-4).

God’s faithfulness, compassion, and mercy toward us is as eternal as He is. And His blessings, both great and small, continue to be poured out upon us in great abundance day by day. We should return the same to Him through our actions toward one another, even as little children do.





Testimonies From Kenya

-by Debbie Norman, Oak Grove Branch

My husband Don and I went to Kenya, Africa, for the entire month of October 2024. Don had been to Kenya on two previous occasions, but this was the first time I had ever been out of the United States, so it was a brand new adventure for me.

Eric Odida (one of the lead elders in Kenya) had stated he wanted husband and wife couples to come to Kenya to spend a month in the Kwale area, which is a coastal region of Kenya on the Indian Ocean. This area is a long drive from where Eric lives and from the hub where most of the Saints in Kenya reside. He said the members there needed daily ministry to build up their faith and knowledge of the gospel.

I knew that going to Kenya would mean confronting deep-seated fears that I had carried since childhood, and I really did not want to do that. But God calls us to healing and freedom, and to give me those blessings God called me to go to Kenya with my husband. Even though I did not want to go, God gave me a strong confirmation that this was His plan.

My husband also had a strong confirmation that we were to go to Kenya at this time. So we bought our tickets and began planning and preparations. Over and over, I had to yield my will to God in the weeks leading up to our trip and work on laying my fears at His feet. “Not what I want, Lord, but what you want.”

It may seem overly dramatic to you, but I took Romans 14:8 for my motto: *“For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.”* I knew God was calling for my radical and total commitment. I knew I must totally surrender my very life and breath to Christ. And I knew whether I lived or died, I was obeying God’s plan for me and it would be okay.

God gave me a more positive promise from Isaiah 55:12, *“For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace.”* The Lord brought this promise to pass in so many ways throughout our time in Kenya. Joy and peace were hallmarks of our journey.

We left for Kenya on October 1. Our branch at Oak Grove set up a schedule to give us almost 24-hour

prayer cover while we were on this trip. We could feel the prayers. They were SO essential! If you prayed for us, then you were a big part of these blessings and miracles from the Lord.

Friends drove us to the airport and off we went—first to Charlotte, North Carolina, and then on to London we flew, traveling across the ocean for many, many hours. From London, we flew to Nairobi.

During the long flights to London and then to Nairobi, I felt perfectly, unexplainably calm—even when we hit turbulence. God just wrapped me in peace and calmness. It was amazing, and I knew it was His love and grace. I knew God was saying to me, “You stepped out in faith and I am with you.” I faced the rest of our trip with a growing confidence that I truly was resting in God’s hands.

Now this doesn’t mean flying from Kansas City to Nairobi was easy. It most definitely was not. I think we were in the air somewhere around twenty-two hours total. Neither Don nor I sleep well in airplanes and we were both totally exhausted by the time we arrived in Nairobi.

God doesn’t make things easy. He makes things possible. God made it possible, and we made it safely to Kenya and got through customs with relative ease.

After a day to rest and adjust in Nairobi, we (along with Eric Odida) climbed into Doug and Judi Smith’s huge Landrover ambulance and drove to Mombasa. It was about an eight-hour drive and easily the most terrifying and dangerous road trip I’ve ever experienced. Travel in Kenya is not particularly safe. My husband was impressed that I never screamed, passed out, or curled up on the floor in tears. I thought we might die multiple times, but I still felt fairly calm. Again, we both recognized this as a great blessing from God.

Mombasa is a large, bustling city and like nothing I had ever seen in my life. When you look out the window of the car, you know you are not in the United States.

We spent two days in Mombasa, meeting with the two Restoration groups of university students. It was

a delight to meet and worship with them and their friends. On Saturday, we met at the medical school campus with fourteen young adults. Some were members of the Church; some were not. Some were hearing the Restoration Gospel for the first time. The next day, Sunday, we met with a group of students at the other university in Mombasa. Some of the same students were present, plus some new faces.

Both groups of students had a good grasp of English and a translator was not needed. Both groups were very friendly and eager to interact with us Americans, and also seemed to respond well to the classes and worship services.

On Monday, it was time to drive an hour and a half south to the area where we would spend most of our time—Kwale county, and particularly the communities of Ramisi and Kanana. Doug and Judi Smith again accompanied us and provided transportation.

That Monday was our first meeting with the Saints at Ramisi. They meet in a small coral block building with a thatched roof. The women had hung flowers from the rafters and it looked lovely. Everyone was very welcoming. Here we needed a translator, as Swahili was their primary language. There was a range of abilities to speak and understand English, but only a few had mastery of our language.

On Wednesday, we took our first trip to the community of Kanana. We met outside the home of a man named Tom. Tom was a pastor of a church of another denomination. He is friends with Edwin, who is the member who leads the group in Ramisi.

When Edwin was baptized into the Church, Tom saw a great change in his friend's life. He wanted to



know what was going on, so Edwin told him. Tom wanted to hear for himself this gospel that had made such an impact in his friend's life. This is about where we came in.

At Kanana, we sat in plastic chairs (which are toted from place to place in huge stacks on motorcycles) in the shade of the roof overhang of Tom's house. There was a group of perhaps twelve to fifteen attending. We sang hymns, and Doug and Don taught classes. Judi and I shared testimonies.

The following day, we gathered at our third meeting place—in the shade of a huge cashew tree. Daily we met in one or sometimes two of these places for worship and classes.

After Doug and Judi went home, we had to rely on public transportation to get to Ramisi and Kanana. We rode three-wheeled tuk tuks to the main highway and then caught a matatu (mini-van bus).

Our daily routine settled into place. We would be ready to be picked up around 9:00 a.m. if we were going to hold classes at both Ramisi and Kanana or if we were going to visit homes. Otherwise, we had until about noon to work on household chores and on preparation for future classes. We returned home between 5:00 to 6:30 p.m., fixed and ate supper, showered, and then worked for two to four hours (often late into the night) to have class material ready for the following day.

Don and I had both prayed about what to prepare for teaching classes in the months before we left for Kenya. We knew Don would teach the main classes, while I would focus on sharing with the women and children. However, the things we prepared were not what Eric felt needed to be shared. So we had to start from scratch preparing class material.

Since classes were taught daily (and sometimes twice a day) and since each class was expected to be two or more hours in length, this meant a LOT of preparation. Writing class curriculum is something I enjoy and have quite a bit of experience with, so I was able to assist my husband with this huge task. We worked together as a team. We knelt in prayer and beseeched God for assistance, then sat down together with our scriptures, notebooks, and pens.

It was HARD. We struggled, sometimes for hours, but the Lord always provided and the class was

always completed in time for Don to teach the next day. We definitely grew spiritually from spending so much time digging into God's Word and from relying on Him for what should be taught.

The people were so HUNGRY for the gospel. An example of their eagerness is illustrated by one of the high school girls from Ramisi. We started classes at Ramisi around 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. (or whenever most of the people could get there). This young lady got out of school, RAN home to change out of her uniform, and then RAN to the church building because she could not bear to miss a minute of the classes.

Eric later told us that many people in this area had been falling away from the gospel because of bad things others had said about the Book of Mormon—but now they were coming back. While we were there, the people set aside their regular tasks and sacrificed their time and came. They came every day! And the Lord's Spirit was poured out over them in power.

Edwin, who leads the Ramisi group, shared that the Lord had given him an experience while we were there. He said he woke up one morning with a great sense of joy over what the Lord was doing in their midst and joy that the Lord had brought us to them. He had a vision of the work growing very rapidly in their area.

Several days we spent the mornings visiting homes in the communities and praying for their needs. It was very humbling. Their needs are so great. The large sugar processing plant nearby had closed down and hundreds of men had lost their jobs and their source of income for their families. The area was very economically depressed.

Many had turned to drugs, alcohol, and immorality to ease their pain. Tom told us that the communities of Ramisi and Kanana were known as Sodom and Gomorrah, because of the spiritual and moral darkness that had overtaken them. The need to hear the hope of the gospel was very great. And now the light was beginning to shine in the darkness.

"Now," Tom said, "things are changing for the better. We must keep moving forward and not stop or turn back!" When we heard these things, the Lord confirmed to both Don and me by His Spirit that we were right where He wanted us to be at this time, doing just what He had called us to do.

After about ten days of classes, home visits, and ministry in Ramisi and Kanana, we began to see God producing fruit from our labors. Tom was attending every class in Kanana and in Ramisi and soaking up the truths being taught. When we first met Tom's wife, Joyce, she told us her health had been declining over the past year. Her knees and ankles were swollen and painful and her strength and energy had left her. She was not able to walk much at all.

We visited again several times. Joyce was not ready to have the elders administer to her, but she did want them to pray for her. It was a Thursday when we were visiting in their home and the elders prayed for her healing. The next day when we returned to Kanana, Joyce informed us she was feeling much stronger and that even though not totally healed, she could walk now. She kept getting up and walking around the yard to be sure it was true.

An even greater blessing was to follow. Don taught a wonderful class that day on love. He spoke of God's love for us and how God wants us to love each other. He taught how God even wants us to love our enemies. During his class, I felt very strongly that this was the right message for the right moment. Afterwards, I taught a short lesson for the children, including a story about a boy who was being bullied, but returned kindness to the bully.

Joyce told us after these classes that we must have come just for her. She said that during this class God had just healed her heart spiritually, because she had decided to love her enemy and let go of anger. She said God had done surgery on her heart and removed a great weight from her. She was full of joy.

I learned later about the wrong done to her and her family by this "enemy," and it was grievous. It was a BIG offense. But day after day, Joyce continued to testify of how God had changed her heart and healed her. Her whole life was changed. She said she could now smile and wave at this previous "enemy" when she met him in public. While they were still pursuing legal justice, she was no longer consumed with hate.

After we had been there several weeks, the heat and the fatigue began to catch up with Don. He hadn't slept well the night before, and it was extra hot and humid that particular day. We had spent a lot of time sitting in the hot matatu and then sitting inside Tom's

house as we visited, which felt stifling to us. Don began to feel unwell.

We rode a matatu back to Ramisi and were sitting around waiting for the time for class to start. Both Eric and Elly were with us this day. Don continued to feel unwell and also had a headache by this time.

When I felt Don's skin, he felt cold and clammy and looked very pale. Eric asked if Don needed to go to the hospital. Neither of us felt that was necessary, but Don did want to be administered to by the elders. I was thankful that God had arranged for two elders to be present with us this day.

Eric and Elly anointed Don's head and administered to him. He did not immediately feel better, and Eric asked if we needed to go back to our room. Don decided that since we were already there, he would try to teach the class, trusting God to provide the physical strength he needed.

Soon the people started arriving and it was time to begin the class. Don told the Lord, "Okay, this is in your hands," and stood up to teach. He didn't even think about how he was feeling. He just taught. After the class was done, Don realized that he felt perfectly fine and had felt fine during the entire class. Eric told Don after the class that he saw him being lifted up as he began to teach and bringing the physical healing that was needed. We were very blessed and this is the only time either of us had any significant health issues the entire month.



The last full week we were in Kenya, Don planned to teach a class in Kanana that covered the Church that Christ set up here on earth, the falling away, and the story of Joseph Smith and the Restoration of the

gospel. This was a very lengthy class and the plan was to split it over two days.

Tom particularly wanted his wife and sons to hear this class, which he had already heard in Ramisi. One of Tom's neighbors also came to listen. So Don began to teach. When he came to the point where he planned to stop for the day, there was still time. We needed to be back in Ramisi in the afternoon to teach a different class there, but Eric indicated that we still had time and that Don should continue. So he did.

When Don came to a second place where he could wrap up the class for the day, Eric said he should continue. Eric said he would leave to go ahead of us to Ramisi to welcome those who arrived early and that we (with Elly translating) should stay to continue the class. So Don went on.

Don ended up going through the entire class from beginning to end on that one day. It was a very long class, but those in attendance continued to listen intently. Don spoke of the falling away, the apostasy, and the way Christ's Church had been changed by men until it was unrecognizable. He spoke of the need for God to restore His Church from heaven.

As Don moved into the story of Joseph Smith and his experience in the grove, as well as with the angel Moroni, I was feeling concern over how the message would be received.

I recalled the first time I had shared the Restoration story with a friend and how this friend had said it sounded like a fairy tale to her. But something happened this time as I heard the familiar story. As Don described the experiences of Joseph Smith, the Spirit of God filled my body, and it was like God was shouting inside my head and heart, "This is TRUE! This is TRUE!" I had never doubted the Restoration story, but God gave me this added confirmation of the truth.

The Spirit of Truth was attending us in that class. The truth was confirmed not only to me, but to all those present. When Don finished teaching, the neighbor simply said to him, "I have full assurance that all you have said is true."

The next day when we returned to Kanana, there were some issues in the community that made it necessary for us to leave before teaching any classes. If God had not made the way for Don to teach the

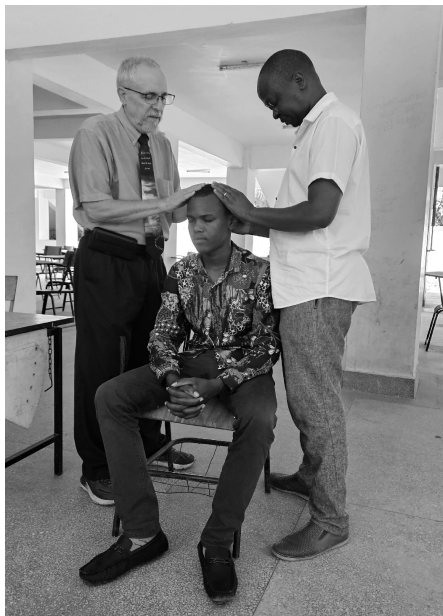
entire class on the Restored Gospel the day before, the complete story would not have been taught, as we had no other opportunities to teach in Kanana before time for us to leave for home. God knew this and made the way for His Gospel to be presented.

There are so many things I could share, but space does not permit. Eric said he felt a great spiritual uplifting come over the group at Ramisi. This is not a reflection of us, but only of the Lord's power, mercy, and love.

Before we left, Don baptized seven people in an inlet of the Indian Ocean. Most were adults and teens. Among those baptized were Tom and three of his sons. Joyce was not baptized at that time, but she said that God had given her a dream and she knew the Restored Gospel was true. I look forward to hearing of her baptism at a future time.

Don and Elly (who is also an elder) then confirmed the baptism of the Holy Ghost for eleven people in a service held at the Ramisi church. (Four had been previously baptized by water, but not yet confirmed.) On this same day, Eric had traveled to Mombasa and baptized five of the students there.

The next day we traveled up to Mombasa, and Don and Eric confirmed the gift of the Holy Ghost upon those five students. Our hearts were so full of joy!



When you worship and visit with people daily over the course of almost a month, you develop bonds of love and friendship. When it was time for Don and me to go home, leaving was harder than we expected. We were leaving "family" behind, and there were tears on both sides.

God continued to extend His blessing of peace over me the entire journey home. The hours spent on planes were long and grueling, but we arrived home safely and praising God.

The people in Kenya are not the only ones who were changed by God during the month of our visit. My life has been changed from this trip, as well. I am not the same person that I was before. God stretched my husband and me spiritually and increased our faith. I told Don as we traveled toward home, "We cannot go back home and be the same people."

Pray for us that we can continue to live in radical surrender to God and not slip back into comfortable habits. We will pray for you that you may find this joyful and powerful place of complete surrender to the Lord. The Kingdom awaits.



LISTEN

Sung to the tune "O My People"

Can you hear the angels singing?

Joy is in their hearts today

For the Savior of the nations

Says it's time, be on your way.

Go in haste to help my children,

Teach them of the little things,

For each must learn to love their neighbors

And to obey their heavenly King.

Lift your eyes and be rejoicing

Focus thoughts on things above.

Know that God in all His glory,

Will fill our thoughts with heavenly love.

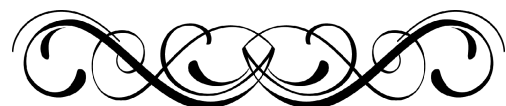
Be not fearful of tomorrow,

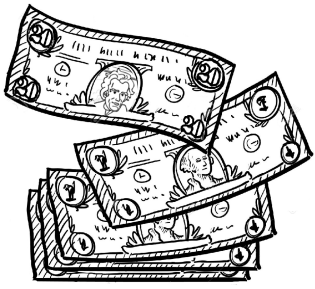
Praise Him for what this day will bring.

The Lord will share our pain and sorrow,

And give to us a song to sing.

—Irene Gunter, submitted by Sheri Gunter Nunn





A Tithing Testimony: The Lord Will Provide

-by Chris Seymour, Oak Grove Branch

About twenty-one years ago, I was doing construction carpentry work. While I was working, I would have the radio going. I listened to the local Christian station and there were a lot of ministers who had programs during my work hours. One of them who came on every day was teaching a series about tithing. So every day as I worked, I listened to the call for us to be good stewards and pay our tithing to the Lord.

Having just gone into business for myself, work was sometimes scarce and so money was also scarce. It made it difficult to give that 10% of my increase. Even though at times there was very little increase, it was still hard. I struggled a lot as I considered what my responsibility was for paying tithing.

Each day, I listened and continued to struggle with how I could come up with the money to pay tithing when things were so tight. One night I stayed up late. I was working in the office, but I also spent time in prayer and reading the scriptures, asking the Lord how I could pay my tithing.

I resolved that I would pay my tithing. No matter how hard it was, I would figure out a way to pay my tithing. The next day, I was standing at the door getting ready to walk out and head to work. Our four kids were little at that time. They were helping with the laundry that morning. Their job was to take the clothes out of the dryer and fold them.

As I was getting ready to leave, one of the kids came running through the kitchen to the front entryway shouting, "Dad, Dad! I just found a dollar bill in the dryer!"

A couple of seconds later, here comes another of our kids shouting, "Dad, I just found a dollar in the dryer!"

The third child ran in and had found a dollar as well. The kids kept looking in the dryer and five times they found money. The first four times it was a dollar bill, but the last time, it was a twenty dollar bill.

I KNOW I did not have a twenty dollar bill in the pockets of any of my clothing. That was a lot of money to me at that time and if I had owned a twenty dollar bill, I would have known about it!

The kids brought twenty-four dollars out of the dryer that morning. I had made the commitment to pay my tithing, and the Lord was showing that He would provide, When we step out in faith, the Lord will provide, sometimes in unexpected ways. I invite you to test this promise. God is always faithful.



Praise the Lord!

-by Kristen Davis, Oak Grove Branch

Several months back during the women's spring scripture study, I felt led to approach Pat Chadwick and ask if at some time during a future series I might be able to give the morning devotional. She replied that they actually had an opening for this series in several weeks and asked if I would be interested. I felt the Spirit lead me to say yes.

I was nervous. I had never prepared for any type of speaking role like this before. I was given the topic of the class and I prayed how I should proceed. Right away the Lord guided me. I just needed to put it together. During my devotional, I mentioned some personal information about my health, namely that I have four chronic illnesses as well as mental health issues.

After my devotional, I went to my seat fully drained. It took everything out of me to go up there and present the words I thought the Lord wanted me to say. But in the next few weeks something started changing in my body. One of my health issues was correcting itself. I was able to wean off of medicine I was taking. And a horrible, embarrassing issue I had been dealing with for years began going away!

It could only be the Lord. Nothing else had changed in my life. When I put myself out of my comfort zone to serve Him, He blessed me with a healing! Maybe another opportunity to serve in such a way will present itself again and I can become more comfortable speaking in front of the ladies. For now, I'm counting my blessings. I only have three chronic illnesses! Praise the Lord!



God's Wonderful Love and Care

-by Jennifer Henderson, Oak Grove Branch

Late last year, I had ultrasounds on my leg veins which showed that several veins in both legs were not working. The valves were allowing blood to reverse, which caused the good veins not to have proper pressure.

I didn't understand the doctor's explanation at first, and I did not want to go through the recommended procedures to eliminate the "bad" veins. It sounded awful to destroy those veins, especially by laser or by the injections of a type of detergent that caused the veins to die!

Fourteen years ago, I had undergone a different type of procedure on a vein in my right leg and I received a great blessing, but now I was told that I had quite a few more veins in both legs that were causing the heaviness, cramping, and pain I was experiencing in my legs, feet, and ankles.

I knew my leg and foot cramps were showing up more often and the varicose veins on my right leg and ankle had become more purple, inflamed, and itchy. A bad cramp in my left foot and ankle about two months previously had not completely healed, and then I noticed that small veins were showing up that hadn't been there before.

On Sunday morning December 15, I woke up thinking and praying about the recommended plan to have laser surgery on my legs in the following week. The Lord reminded me that I should ask to be administered to by the elders of the Church by the laying on of hands and anointing with oil. (See James 5:14.) I was hesitant because it seemed like such short notice to ask, and I also wanted to talk to my husband about it first.

I continued to pray to know what I ought to do as I checked out my scripture calendar. I read, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." When I saw the word "administering," it seemed like confirmation to me that I should go ahead and let Mickeal know that I was considering asking for administration by the elders at church.

I continued to think about that as I dressed for church, when Mickeal's phone rang. His brother was calling from Spain which is about a six or seven hour time difference. It was unusual for him to call on a Sunday morning, as he knows we prepare to go to church.

Mickeal talked with his brother, and although I was quite a distance away in the walk-in closet, I could hear a lot of the conversation. I heard Bill asking about our health and Mickeal telling Bill about his own health issues. Then Mickeal began talking about my upcoming vein procedures. Bill explained to Mickeal that it made sense to remove clogged veins in order to improve the pressure of blood in good veins, like when water pipes are clogged and there isn't good pressure coming out of the faucet.

Although the doctor, our son, and Mickeal had all discussed the vein issues with me earlier in the month, I still didn't quite understand, possibly due to my concern over having some of my veins destroyed. Plus, I didn't like the idea of injections of a "detergent" burning away at my blood and veins! I had researched a bit about the procedure, and I still wasn't convinced that it was safe to rely on. The "why" just kept coming to the forefront of my mind. But hearing the way Bill put it somehow hit home in my mind. I realized that overhearing that conversation was another answer to my prayers!

Feeling encouraged, I continued to pray. Now I asked God how and who to ask for administration. When I spoke to Mickeal about it, he suggested that I ask while we were at church.

When Mickeal dropped me off at the door of the Oak Grove Branch, one of the men was there to open the door for me. We both said, "Good morning," and then I immediately told him that I needed to ask for administration. He responded by saying, "I'd be happy to assist you."

At the moment, it didn't dawn on me that this man was an elder, so I asked him if he could speak to a couple of elders to see who might be available. He asked if I'd like to be administered to before the

service or afterward. I said probably afterward, but I'd wait and ask Mickeal when he came in from parking the car. At some point during the service, it was impressed on my mind that the man who greeted me at the door was an elder, otherwise he wouldn't have offered to assist!

After the service, we chatted with some friends. Knowing the husband was an elder, I asked his wife if they needed to get home right away and she said they didn't. I told her of my desire to ask her husband to administer to me along with the other elder, and she said that it would be okay with her, so then I asked her husband, who also agreed.

As I now relate all that happened, it's so special to me that the Lord blessed me in answering my heartfelt prayers so quickly and so amazingly! I believe Jesus wanted me to realize that He is with me, and to reassure me that He would continue to bless me through the upcoming procedures.

A vein in my right calf was lasered on Tuesday, December 17 and the vein in my left calf was done on Wednesday. I felt barely more than a pinprick during all the procedures! I happily shared testimonies with the young women who were making the incisions and inserting the lasers! I was even allowed to sing if I wanted to. (They said I could holler if I felt pain, but I didn't.) I asked if they knew of the hymn "Blest Be Thou, O God of Israel." They replied they knew it.

There I was on my stomach singing to the best of my ability in that position and knowing that our heavenly Father is worthy of all our praise and thanksgiving for His wonderful love and care!

They later asked what church I went to, so of course, I told them. (It would be wonderful if they would check out the Church of Jesus Christ, Oak Grove Branch some time.) After the procedure, I didn't have any difficulty or pain to speak of day or night!

I am so grateful for everyone's prayers, as I know others were praying for me. I'm especially thankful for the elders who were immediately willing to serve in my need for administration! I've also sent my brother-in-law a thank you note to let him know that the Lord used him to bless me with reassurance, freeing me of the mental block that kept me from understanding.

Oh, how wonderful is the gift of the Holy Spirit of our Heavenly Father and Lord Jesus Christ! I believe that future procedures that are yet to come throughout the coming year for other veins that need to be removed will also be as blessed.



Jesus Loves Me, This I Know

-anonymous

After years of living for myself, going my own way, and looking for exciting recreation, God gave me a wake up call. I had divorced and remarried and was on sabbatical in Mexico. We built a small tar paper shack on the beach.

I had made a trip to Tucson, Arizona, to check in with my professors. It was after dark as I was driving back to our home in Mexico. For some reason, I drove slower than usual that night. Normally I was always in a hurry.

This was fifty years ago and the highways in Mexico were two lanes with no shoulders. I was following a semi truck, but for some reason, I hung back and did not tail it impatiently as was my habit.

An oncoming gas truck dropped a wheel off the road and then overcorrected. The gas truck spun 180 degrees, crossing into my lane right behind the semi-truck—right where I would have normally been. It skidded in front of me and overturned, exploding into flames. The heat was intense.

I realized it was a miracle that I was not involved in that accident. It was plain to me that my life had been spared by God and that He had a plan for me. This was a major turning point in my life. It was an experience like Saul had on the road to Damascus.

My life was completely changed from that point on. I realized this was a second chance, a new start. For over twenty years I had carried anger and resentment toward my father. But now, all that anger melted away. My eyes were opened and I realized I was wasting my life carrying offenses toward others.

I knew that only the love and mercy of God had prevented my death that night and I was finally ready to turn my life over to Him. I had discovered the truth that Jesus loves me.



God Cares for All of Our Problems Big or Small

-by Marceia Walters, Oak Grove Branch

On Wednesday, April 2, we were under a severe weather and tornado watch in Independence. My sister called me at 3:30 a.m. and I was on the phone with her until about 6:30 a.m. to comfort her, because she does not do well with that kind of storm system.

I was feeding racoons at that time by pouring dry cat food out of my bedroom window. I always made sure that the window was closed when I was done, but that morning I was so involved with keeping my sister calm that I must have forgotten to shut it.

I did not discover it was still open until later in the day when I was on the phone with my son Scott. I walked into my bedroom and saw that the window was still open. Immediately I looked to make sure my two cats were still in the house. I found one, but not the other.

Looking out the window, I saw my little cat down below. I went outside and tried to get her to come to me, but there were other cats outside which were scaring her and she kept running away.

The window was too high for her to jump back into the house, so I put a pet house under the window for her to jump up on and then she could jump up to the windowsill. I left the window open, hoping she would come back in. This did not work.

This cat had not been outside before, so she was not familiar with the sounds and smells and they frightened her. All of my attempts to get her back inside failed.

I called one of the elders at church and had our situation put on the prayer chain, asking the members of our branch to pray for the safe return of my cat. I walked all over the yard every day for the next five days calling her name many times. My sister and I prayed very hard with mighty prayers. We drove around the neighborhood several times calling and looking for her, but to no avail.

This little cat had wormed her way into my heart and I could not imagine not having her with me anymore. I kept thinking how my little cat had not eaten for five days. I just knew she was hungry and cold. The weather for those five days had been cold and rainy.

I was very depressed and could not understand why all of our prayers were not being answered. I am an animal lover and care for all of God's creation. I could not understand why He wasn't bringing my cat back home since He knew how I felt about this little creature.

I had faith because I have had many blessings and I know God is concerned about our lives and our problems. We continued our prayers most fervently, not giving up, but trusting in God that His will would be done. In my prayers, I especially asked Him to bring her back unharmed and none the worse for wear.

There are many times in our lives when our faith is sorely tested and prayers are not answered as quickly as we would like or sometimes the answer is no. I myself have been praying for several years for certain answers that have not yet come to be. But we know God is with us and knows all of our concerns and how much our prayers mean to us. He loves us so much more than we can ever know.

How beautiful it is to be able to go to Him in prayer for all the burdens and problems we encounter as we go through this journey of life. And how much more beautiful when we can go to Him every day with praise, honor, and glory in thanksgiving for the multitude of blessings that we receive from Him.

On April 7, I had one more reason to kneel by my bed and give Him my praise and thanksgiving because He did answer all of our prayers for my little cat and brought her home. On that day, which was a Sunday, I was outside in the evening feeding the cats that I take care of for the animal shelter. I happened to glance to my right and had to do a double take because there sitting by my shed was my little cat. I

had looked under and around that shed several times a day for the last five days and had not seen nor heard her once.

I went into the house to get some food to entice her to come to me, but when I came back out, she was gone. I went to the shed and called her and she meowed. I was able to get her to come to me with the food. I picked her up and brought her into the house, then immediately kneeled by my bed to thank God, because He had brought her back in exactly the condition that I had prayed for. She was none the worse for wear and has adjusted back to her inside life as though nothing had ever happened.

This is a very strong testimony that God cares for all of our problems, big or small. I will always have a big deep faith and trust in a God who loves my little cat as much if not more than I do because after all, He created both of us.

The prayers of our brothers and sisters in Christ are extremely important as we petition the Lord together. No matter what the prayers are for, it is very important to support each other in this way. If you prayed for my little cat to come home, I just want to let you know that I appreciate it more than I can say.

Believe, trust, and exercise all of your faith in a God who is always there and who blesses us in ways we will never know the extent of.



Prayer

I know not by what methods rare,
But this I know, God answers prayer.
I know that He has given His Word,
Which tells me prayer is always heard
And will be answered, soon or late.
And so I pray and calmly wait.

I know not if the blessing sought
Will come in just the way I thought;
But leave my prayers with Him alone,
Whose will is wiser than my own,
Assured that He will grant my quest,
Or send some answer far more blest.

—Eliza M. Hickok

NO NOISES!

—by Edie Cutshall, Oak Grove Branch

My husband passed away last fall. Therefore, I have had the experience of living alone for the first time in fifty-six years. Many other widows and widowers have experienced my situation, and as many of them, I have found it very difficult. In my case, nighttime is very hard for me. Knowing my situation, a friend gave me a beautifully framed scripture about fear—2 Timothy 1:7. I read it every day. It means so much to me.

When it gets dark, I would get scared. I would hear bumps and thumps and creaks and an animal on the deck, coyotes, and other things. You get the idea. With my overactive imagination, I would get so scared that I got very little sleep for several months. At church one day, I told some women about this, and they all said they would pray for me.

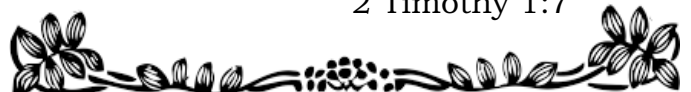
On the Monday night after that, I went to bed and I didn't hear any noises. I listened for a long time, trying to hear something, but I heard no noises at all! It was eerie. This has gone on every night since then. I asked some of the women at church if they had been praying for me and they said they had.

The Lord has blessed me so much through their prayers and in so many other ways. He has told me to have faith and trust Him, which I have been trying hard to do. The hymn, "I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus," comes to my mind quite often. I am so grateful to God who is mindful of me and hears and answers prayers. I am also very thankful for my church family who supports me in so many ways.



For God hath not given us the
spirit of fear; but of power and
of love, and of a sound mind.

2 Timothy 1:7



Our Struggle Within

-by Sheri Gunter Nunn, Oak Grove Branch

After my husband Mark got his RN, BSN degree, he joined the Army in 1989 and we moved to Ft. Carson, Colorado. While stationed there Mark volunteered to go to Cuba from February through April of 1992. He was sent there to help with a military joint task force for medical care for the Haitian asylum seekers. These refugees were being intercepted en route to Florida loaded in boats not meant to be filled with the number of people crammed into them. The operation was housing the refugees in a tent city on the tarmac runways of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

I had to remain home with our boys, ages ten and seven. I had a very hard time trying to cope with this and to understand why my husband volunteered for this assignment which left us, his family, by ourselves again only ten months after he had returned from a four-month deployment to Saudi Arabia and Iraq during the Desert Storm War.

Things had just started to smooth out in our family life after his return from Iraq. He finally had his twelve-hour night shift in the emergency department at Evan's Army Hospital changed to a day shift. This allowed him to spend more time with the family. This three-month volunteer deployment blindsided me, especially since he was the only one being sent from Ft. Carson.

Three months! How could he? Why would he? I just couldn't or wouldn't accept any logical reason for him to want to go if he really cared for me and the boys like he said he did. The struggle of going through Desert Storm without him was just starting to fade away with new memories of our family being together and doing things together.

The first month Mark was in Cuba I didn't write to him or talk with him much. When he was able to call, I usually would pass the phone on to the boys. I felt so hurt and I let him know it. This weighed heavily on Mark and God gave him inspiration to write me a letter and words for a poem to give me understanding.

The following is a portion of that letter, plus the poem:

February 28, 1992. I spent my day in my tent wondering if I had made the right choice in coming here [to Cuba]. I felt God's Spirit move within me and my mind drifted back over my life. My thoughts began to flow in verse, and I sat up and wrote this poem. Perhaps it can help you understand.

I feel sure that I am doing God's work here. All these people gave up everything they owned in a bid for freedom. Now they are being returned to Haiti where they have nothing anymore. I know this is harder on you because you get nothing out of it. My reward, on the other hand, is my work. Therefore, as I said, I pray for you every night that you too may get some good out of this experience. I promise you I will never volunteer for anything like this again. (See attached poem)

The Struggle Within

*When I was a youth of early years,
My life was oft filled with lonely tears.
For there were many who would laugh and taunt,
The little poor boy, the little "have not."*

*But my parents taught me of a love most true,
The love of God for me and you.
And when I was down I would ask him why,
Such a little one as I should be made to cry.*

*He answered me saying from my suffering and pain,
Compassion for others is a gift I would gain.
And through this gift he would guide my life,
So I promised to use it to ease pain and strife.*

*But as I grew to my later teen years,
I rebelled against all to cover the tears.
While deep inside was a smoldering flame,
That often brought me to deepest shame.*

*For through my anger and violent way,
I caused much suffering and anguish each day.
The smoldering flame was my compassion burning,
Until I cried out to the Lord with a yearning.*

*“God, help me with this struggle within,
For my will is weak and woefully thin.
I need your help to turn around.
And plant my feet upon your ground.”*

*God sent me help in the form most true,
For on that day I first met you.
And you’ll never know the power you wield,
To give me strength when I would yield.*

*Now through God’s help and your loving way,
I’ve grown to be a man today.
So the time has come to repay my debt,
For the guidance from God which I cannot forget.*

*He molded and made me what I am today,
And from His work I must not stray.
My youthful promise I must fulfill,
For I know I am here through the good Lord’s will.*

*The hardship on you I know is grand,
And I pray for God’s presence beside you to stand.
To give you the strength to carry on,
During this short time that I am gone.*

*When this is done my peace I’ll have found,
With God and myself and to you I’ll be bound.*

I know without any doubt that God inspired Mark to write this poem as it explained to me the reasons why he wanted to volunteer for this deployment. It reassured me that he truly did love us with all his heart, mind and soul. It just hadn’t been communicated between the two of us before he left.

As I reflected on his poem, an experience I had had one evening while he had been in Iraq came flooding back. In this experience I had gone to bed and before falling asleep I discerned an evil spirit had entered my bedroom. I knew I had to verbally rebuke this spirit out loud. It took three times before the evil feeling left. I then prayed that the Lord would allow the angels to watch over and protect me, the boys, and Mark in Iraq. I eventually was able to fall asleep.

Sometime later I was awakened by a light and a personage standing by the dresser on the side of my bed. I recognized it to be that of my mother. I leaned over on my left side and half sitting up asked her if she was dead. Her voice replied no, with a slight giggle, and said that it was by her faith that she was able to come to me to tell me that she loved me. I said, “In the name of Jesus Christ, are you really my mother?”

She then reached out her hands and held mine in hers and said, “Yes! It is me!” I then recognized it was her voice. Then looking at her hands in mine, I saw and knew it was her as one of her pointer fingers was shorter than the other, something I didn’t consciously think about but knew it was because she had cut the tip off one of her fingers as a child.

I looked at her and stated, “Your face is young like mine.”

She answered saying, “I know dear.” We hugged and I told her I loved her, and she replied, “I love you to, dear.” Then she backed away and disappeared, but I could hear her voice talking to each of the boys in their separate rooms.

I fell asleep for a short time and when I woke up it was still dark outside. I started thinking about the visit I had just had and began pondering if my mother had actually died and only indicated she hadn’t to keep me from worrying so I would be able to go back to sleep. Now I laid awake until the sun rose so I could call and verify if my mom was okay.

She was fine and I was totally relieved, yet still had questions. I do know that God did comfort me with a spiritual visit from my mother that night. She was allowed to tell me she loved me at a time I really needed it.

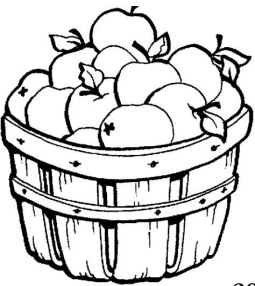
Later that day I recalled memories of an experience my mother had shared with me several years before. She had an asthma attack from a food allergy and had stopped breathing before the ambulance arrived. She said she died on the way to the emergency room. Her face was black by the time the ambulance got her to the hospital.

My mother had told how she experienced going through a tunnel of light and was met by her deceased oldest brother, who hugged her and told her it wasn’t her time yet. There were individuals who still needed

her ministry back on earth. He told her she could choose to stay or go back. She said it was so beautiful and she didn't want to leave, but chose to return.

I believe that during the short time that she was dead and in an eternal state, her spirit was allowed to come to me when I needed her love the most. It was by her faith her spirit was allowed to come and tell me she loved me. What a miraculous experience I will always cherish.

This veil between God's Kingdom and our earthly existence is but a portion of God's creation, one that I don't fully understand but readily acknowledge that it exists. So much of His creation I would like to understand but have been told I will not understand them until I have reached a greater spiritual maturity, or I will know and understand them fully in my life hereafter. This is where faith becomes our guide as we trust in Him.



A Surprising Blessing

-by Marilyn Middleton,
Missouri

A group that I am a member of called Zionworks had made arrangements to go help a widowed friend process apples. She had an abundant supply and needed help in making cider, applesauce, etc. It was too much work for one person. Those who could were to meet at her farm in the morning and spend the day helping her with the apples and doing other jobs that needed to be done on her property. In the afternoon there would be a meeting to plan other activities.

I do not drive very far from my home and her farm is some distance away, so I hadn't planned to go. Another friend, Susan, was going to go in the afternoon and asked me if I'd like a ride. As I am in favor of us helping each other and I had nothing better to do, I said yes.

Upon arriving at the farm I saw about a dozen or so people working on the apples. They were outside the house at several tables. As I walked toward the

house to greet the people there, a man (Howard) came out of the house. I spoke to him and asked if he had been there since morning. He replied that he had and had wanted to do some repair work on her chimney but wasn't able to because they didn't have the right equipment. I really don't remember what he said after that because when he mentioned repairing her chimney I began thinking about my chimney.

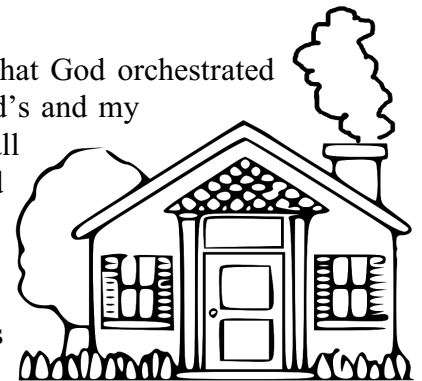
I have a fireplace in my family room that has been converted to gas. I have not used it for at least six years because I wasn't sure the chimney was clear. I didn't want to start a fire or have smoke come back in my house. I had contacted a chimney sweep who came, inspected the chimney, and gave me a bid on the necessary repairs. He was very nice, professional, and seemed to know his business.

He didn't charge me for the inspection though I had been told when I made the appointment it would be \$125. He said I could use the fireplace as it was, but there was a water leak which would get worse with time. I trusted him and agreed to have him do the work. I really wanted another opinion but didn't know anyone who had any knowledge or expertise in this field.

I stayed for the meeting, but before leaving I talked with Howard, who agreed to come look at my fireplace and tell me if it was something he could do and wanted to do. He told me his hourly fee, which was much lower than the bid I had received from the other company. I am very satisfied that he will do a good job. I will save some money and will help him also.

If I hadn't gone to the meeting, I would never have known there was someone in the group who had the knowledge and skills that I needed. To me this is an example of Zionic living—sharing our gifts, resources, and talents with each other. We need to support and uplift each other as we journey through this life here on earth.

I have no doubt that God orchestrated this for both Howard's and my benefit. I give God all the glory, credit, and praise for His love and mercy. What an awesome God who blesses us many times before we even ask!



“I Can See This Is God’s True Church”

-by Sonia Smith, Oak Grove Branch

Many years ago, my husband and I lived at an RV Park in Smith River, California. We painted signs and murals in the park and murals on RV’s. We got acquainted with many people in the park.

One of the ladies, Bev, asked me if I would have a Bible study class. At first it was just Bev and me. Later a friend of ours, Jack, joined us. When there were Book of Mormon passages that would compliment the topics we were studying in the Bible, I would introduce them.

After a couple of studies, Jack asked where these scriptures were from. He said they were very interesting, but even though he was an avid Bible reader, he had never heard those scriptures. I then introduced him to the Book of Mormon. He got very quiet. At the end of the hour, Jack said he was not coming back. He said he had not known I was a Mormon and he certainly was not going to continue with the Mormon Bible.

I tried to explain to him we were not Mormons and the Book of Mormon is not a Mormon Bible. I had a copy of the book *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*. I turned to the chapter where Joseph Smith gives an account of his experience in the grove and handed the book to Jack. I asked him to promise me he would read with an open mind the areas I marked. He said he would and left. I didn’t know if he would be back the next week. All I could do was pray about it and put it in the Lord’s hands.

The next week when I arrived at Bev’s trailer, I didn’t know if Jack would be there. To our pleasant surprise, he arrived. He said, “Before we start I want to say something. I read the sections I promised you I would read. I can see this is God’s true church. I want to learn more.”

We continued our study and the Book of Mormon was brought in more and more. He could see where it complimented the Bible. It was hard for him to get past the stigma of the Book of Mormon as the Mormon Bible, but he stuck with the study and prayer because of his belief this was the true church of God. We had many more studies together.

It was during this time I became Jack’s caregiver. He had bone cancer, Parkinson’s disease, a colostomy, diabetes, and heart trouble. In the evenings after I took care of his medical issues, he asked me to read to him as he was losing his eyesight from diabetes. The first book he asked me to read was the Book of Mormon. Then we read all three of John Henderson’s books. When they were finished he wanted me to read the Book of Mormon again.

Several months later John Henderson and his wife Pat came down from Dallas, Oregon, to visit and meet Jack. John and Jack became instant friends. John answered many questions Jack had. A few months later Jack asked to be baptized. I called John and set it up. Not long after Jack’s baptism, Patriarch Vernon Darling was visiting John in Dallas, Oregon. John and Vernon made the trip to Smith River so Jack could receive his patriarchal blessing.

Jack was a warm and wonderful friend. We were blessed to have known him. When his health became worse, I had a hard time getting him in and out of his trailer. One day I had to call the ambulance. John was admitted to the hospital. The doctor said his bone cancer had gotten worse and he needed to go to the nursing home. That was hard.

We went to see him every day so he wouldn’t feel like we forgot about him. We would read to him, take him for a ride in the wheelchair around the grounds, and occasionally have lunch with him. He was only in the nursing home for four months before he passed away.

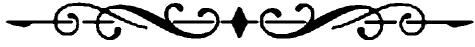
Jack had many testimonies. I told him he should write them down to share with everyone. He also wrote what he called his Modern Day Psalms. They are beautiful. Following are some of Jack’s writings.

My Modern Day Psalm 30

-by Jack Hamblin

My body and spirit cries out for your mercy, Father. Your will be done. My soul is vexed, Lord, but your will be done. I search mightily for a way out of this dilemma and black despair, but your will be done. Who can deliver me from this awful state of affairs, Lord? Your will must be done. I strive to get under

your protective shield of promises. Surely you will not fail me. Your will be done. Oh Lord, my God, let me understand the reason of my suffering. Your will must be done. Lord, give me strength to go on. Your will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Oh Lord, help me to accept it. Your will be done.



Seventy-Five Miles on Empty

-by Jack Hamblin

Often times we forget that our gracious God watches over us all the time and not just when we raise our voices to cry out or ask for that extra helping hand.

It was in the summer of 1967 and my younger brother Jimmy and I went prospecting for whatever we could find—either gold or uranium. We drove our '58 Dodge pickup loaded down with all manner of camping gear out to the Kanab, Utah, area where the “pickins” were better.

We drove off-road and turned south into those high bluffs and cliffs. Soon the road disappeared. The terrain was very rough and mountainous with deep canyons. We could only follow the River Para which wound around through the high cliffs.

Our attention was so intensively taken up with the beauty of this area we didn't notice that we were lost. I checked the road map and it showed a road down to Lee's Ferry, just south to the Colorado River. No problem, I figured. We can get across there into civilization. However it soon became clear that Lee's Ferry was just a name on the map.

I dumped the last five-gallon can of gas into the tank. We drove down steep hills of sand and in and out of hills and gullies and down a long road that a road grader had made not many months before. Jim and I talked it over and we decided Lee's Ferry was a bad move. We couldn't go back as our two-wheel-drive pickup couldn't possibly pull up the sand hills we had come down.

I was concerned with the seriousness of our condition. I was a seasoned camper and prospector and should have seen our predicament sooner. We

were miles from nowhere and no way out. Our gas in the truck was being used up too fast by pulling up and through these narrow sandy pathways we were forced to follow.

The gas gauge soon read empty. I poured anything in the gas tank that would burn—lantern fuel, cooking fuel, salad oil, and the like. Then I got down and asked God to get us out of this. We had done everything we could.

The tank still read empty. At each hill or sandy road I didn't spin the wheels, but shut the engine off and shoveled the sand off the road so it was easier to get traction. We were forced to move north now and the terrain was rough. I expected the truck would quit any minute and made plans to abandon it and walk the rest of the way.

The river was wide and shallow, so I figured we would just drive in the shallow part over weeds and rock. Then I discovered there was quicksand in the river. The only way to get across that was to go as fast as possible to hydroplane the tires. That worked great, but it also used more of our precious fuel.

I drove for over an hour or so and the gas gauge still read empty. I didn't question it, I just drove thinking how I got my little brother into this mess and I had to get him out somehow. Then late in the afternoon, we came to a real graded road. There was a sign that said some town was three miles away.

I thought, “Well, we won't have too far to walk now.” Sure enough, before long there was a wide place in the road with a gas station and store. We filled the truck and cans up and drove on back home.

We were asked which way we came from to reach the gas station. They didn't believe we came from the south up the Para River. That road was hard for a four-wheel-drive to do, they said, and our two-wheel pickup would never have been able to come through that. Besides that it was about seventy-five miles from that direction we were told.

I had to smile and tell them we had some extra help. I thanked God for another miracle for my brother and me. God brought us seventy-five miles on an empty gas tank!



Hearing His Voice

-by Helen Brotherton

Many years ago I attended a week-long church function which turned into a devastating experience for me. I had always looked forward to this event as a time of reunion with the friends we had made over the years from the many places we had lived. But this time was different. Because of differing beliefs, walls went up between us.

At the end of that week I cried out, "Lord, You are going to have to tell me which side is right. I thought I had it figured out, but maybe I don't. I'm not leaving Your doorstep until You tell me."

I fasted and prayed three days before I heard His voice telling me, "Repentance is the order of the day."

"Yes, Lord, I know that," I answered, "but that's not what I asked!" It was awhile before I realized that every relationship with the Lord starts with repentance.

Three weeks later He said, "The repentance I am talking about is not what you do each month before communion, though that is important. What I mean is repenting from whatever keeps you from being in My presence and hearing My voice."

That was certainly a different definition of repentance than any I had ever heard. When Jesus came to show us how to live, He made no reputation for Himself. He said, "*The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do; for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise*" (John 5:19).

Jesus also said:

I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me; the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him (John 8:28-29).

After this, the Lord began to teach me by bringing scriptures or concepts to my mind that He wanted me to consider. One time He brought the following scripture to me:

I tell you, in that night there shall be two in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two shall be grinding together; the one

shall be taken, and the other left. Two shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left (Luke 17:34-35).

"Why would one be left?" I wondered. As I pondered this, I began to realize that one reason the one was left was because he could not hear Christ's voice.

In another one of His tutoring sessions, the Lord said, "To be in Zion you must be of one heart and one mind."

"Lord," I answered, "How can that be?" Then He led me to the understanding that He was the head of His Church and He wanted us listening for His voice, not the voice of any man.

Another time He brought the scripture from Matthew 25 to my mind (verses 1, 3, 7-8):

And then, at that day, before the Son of Man comes, the kingdom of heaven shall be likened unto ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

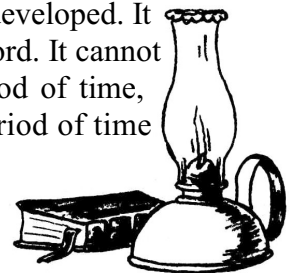
They that were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them; but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

But the wise answered, saying, Lest there be not enough for us and you, go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

"Why would they not share?" I wondered. As I considered this, I understood that this oil cannot be bought or shared; it must be developed. It is our relationship with the Lord. It cannot be developed in a short period of time, but is cultured over a long period of time in the light of His presence.

The parable continues in Matthew 25:9-11:



And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut.

Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us.

*But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you,
Ye know me not.*

So how do we learn to hear His voice? Quiet time and meditation are ways to learn to listen and hear God. Fasting will enhance your efforts. Ask Him to tell you what is standing between you and Him. Then be receptive to His response. His answer may surprise you!

A Higher Power

-by Virginia Cottrill, West Virginia

One day years ago when my children were young, I sent my ten-year-old daughter to the store, which was just a block away. A teenage neighbor boy riding by on his bicycle offered her a ride on the handlebar of his bike. She was barefoot and somehow got her big toe caught in the spokes of the wheel.

I was inside and heard her screaming. My husband was at work and I had a baby in the house, but I ran out to the corner. Someone had taken the wheel off the bike to get her foot out. Another neighbor took her to the hospital.

I don't remember all the details now, but the next day the doctor said that grease was ground into her toe and gangrene could set in. He said she needed to stay in the hospital and he was going to have to take her toe off! It was Wednesday, and I asked the doctor if he could wait until tomorrow because we would be going to church that evening and would have special prayer for her. The doctor was irritated and said, "Well, it's your daughter, but she could lose her whole foot, and maybe her leg!" Nevertheless, he said he would wait until morning.

Prayer service that night was outstanding with God blessing our daughter and the entire congregation.

I called the doctor the next morning around 7:00 a.m. When he came to the phone he said, "Mrs. Cottrill, I don't know what happened, but your daughter's toe is fine and she can go home today!"

I began to cry and I said, "Doctor, we had special prayer for her all evening and God healed her! Thank you so much for waiting!" I told the doctor, "We believe in a higher power who wants us to have faith in Him and to trust Him to help us!"

What Is Your Desire?

-by Patsy Copas, Pleasant, Ohio

My desire as a young child was to know this: "Where did the Indians come from?"

When I was in the seventh or eighth grade my teacher said, "We don't know where the Indians came from."

I thought to myself, "Why don't you know that? I thought teachers knew everything!"

She then gave a theory about the Bering Strait becoming frozen and that the Native Americans could have walked across it. I didn't think so. That would be the Eskimos. The desire to know where the Indians came from never left me.

When I was seventeen I was baptized and became a member of the R.L.D.S. Church at West Portsmouth, Ohio. During my pre-baptismal class, the elder teaching the class stated that our church had three books of Scripture: The Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants.

One Sunday—I think it was when the district missionary and his wife came to our branch—we were all just standing around talking when his wife made the statement that if she wanted to tell others about the Church then she should know what the Church teaches. I was young in the Church and I thought, "That makes good sense to me!"

I decided to read the Book of Mormon. I went home that night and started to read. When I started to read, the first few pages told me where the Native Americans came from! Jerusalem. I was amazed at what I read! Joy filled my soul! I knew where the Indians came from!

I wanted to tell the world what I knew. This desire was fulfilled in God's own due time! I knew the Book of Mormon was true! Each night I could hardly wait to read more. Since then I've read the Book



of Mormon five times from front to back. At the age of eighty-seven, I'm still thrilled as I read its pages. I'm so thankful that God gave me the desire of my life.

God Can Do Anything

-by Jeff Cool, Oak Grove Branch

I want to share the testimony of my conversion. My family belonged to the RLDS Church. When I turned eight years old in 1982 I took the pre-baptismal classes and I was baptized. I knew at the time that I was making a covenant with Jesus. I knew there was a God and I believed I was entering into a covenant with Him.

About two weeks after I was baptized, I was outside my house playing and I did something I shouldn't have done. I didn't realize my mom was watching me. When I looked up and saw her standing in front of me, I knew she had seen what I had done.

She took me by the shoulders and said, "Just two weeks ago you made a promise to keep the commandments of God. You made a promise you would follow Jesus. How do you think He feels about what you just did?"

Immediately, I knew Jesus was standing right there by my mom. I couldn't see Him, but I could feel He was there. In that moment, I knew that Jesus was real.

A few years later my parents stopped going to church. I didn't attend church for many years after that. As I went through high school and then into college, I knew I had had that experience with Jesus, but I didn't think about it very often. It didn't mean that much to me at this point.

I was following the ways of the world, because they can be very enticing. When you are in college and you are away from your parents and you have friends around you that aren't the best influence then there's a lot of temptation.

I was going to college in Rolla, Missouri, but I came to the Kansas City area for an internship in Overland Park, Kansas. One day, I went to my parents and said, "Don't we believe in this book called the Book of Mormon? Can I have one of those?" So they bought me one for my twenty-first birthday.

My interest was still only mild, until a week or two later when I had a powerful experience. One Sunday night, I went to bed and was sleeping soundly. In the wee hours of Monday morning, all of a sudden I woke

up and looked at my digital clock. It was exactly 3:00 a.m.

As soon as I looked at the clock, this power came down from heaven. The Holy Spirit of God came upon me and convicted me and took me back to when I was eight years old. The Spirit basically said to me, "Do you remember that you made this covenant back then? What are you doing now in your life?"

At that moment I realized everything I was doing and every goal I had for my life was wrong. I had turned away from God in so many ways. I felt horrible. It was the worst I had ever felt in my life. I was burdened with so much regret and guilt.

I got out of bed and knelt down and cried, "God, forgive me." As soon as I did that a beautiful peace washed over me and filled me. I realized, "God just forgave me!" I had never felt anything like it. I had never read the scripture that spoke of the peace that passes understanding. Later I looked back and realized that is what I had felt.

I crawled back into bed and immediately went back to sleep. The next morning, it was like I had put on different colored glasses, because the whole world looked different to me. I thought, "Wow, there is so much I can do for the Lord! I can tell people about Jesus. I can serve God!"

I went to work and the lady who sat next to me was distraught. She began to tell me how her son was going astray and didn't want to go to church anymore. She was so worried about him.

I told her, "I'll pray for him," and began to give her counsel about the situation. I thought, "How am I doing this? I don't know anything." We ended up having a long conversation and at the end of it, I gave this lady a copy of the Book of Mormon that I had picked up in Independence.

Afterwards I thought, "What am I doing? I've only read a tiny bit of the Book of Mormon myself." But I was doing these things because my life was totally changed. God was now working in me and through me.

The thought came to me that I needed to pray right at that moment that God would allow me to meet whoever He wanted me to marry. I prayed immediately and continued to pray about this every night for the next week.

That weekend, I remembered that Independence was a special place to the Church and decided I should drive over there. I found out that the Church had a bookstore in Independence and thought that would be a good place to go. Maybe they would have some good material for me to read. It was called Herald House Bookstore.

As soon as I walked in the bookstore, I locked eyes with the girl behind the counter and immediately thought, "I'd really like to know who she is." I went up to her and tried to talk to her. I had an old hymnal that was falling apart and I asked her if they re-bound old hymnals.

She did not even talk to me. She handed the hymnal to an older lady working next to her and left and did not return to the counter.

As I was browsing the store, I ran into another young lady who was an employee. She looked familiar to me and come to find out, it was the girl who had been a nanny for my aunt and uncle a few years previously. After we talked for a few minutes, I asked her, "Do you know that girl behind the counter?"

She said, "Oh, yeah, that's Jennifer Hawley."

With further questioning, I found out where Jennifer went to church and I also learned that she attended an older youth group. I found out the group's next event was a pancake breakfast and that Jennifer was supposed to be there.

I decided right away that I needed to go to that pancake breakfast. I volunteered to help cook pancakes. I was working in the kitchen when I saw Jennifer walk in the door. I dropped everything and left my job to talk to her. I introduced myself and we talked for probably two hours. Everyone figured out that I was not going to cook any more pancakes that day.

I asked Jennifer all these questions about what she believed. The funny thing was that I still knew next to nothing about the Scriptures or about God. But what

I did know was that if God was not number one in this girl's life, I was not going to waste my time talking to her any further.

I really liked the things Jennifer was telling me about her beliefs. She shared a testimony here and there, and I thought, "Wow! She's had some great experiences with God."

It occurred to me that Jennifer had probably read the Book of Mormon. When I asked her about that, she replied, "Well, I think I have read it about eight times now." I almost fell out of my chair.

I asked her out to supper and we had our first date. At the end of our date, I told her about the experience I had had that early September Monday morning. She simply said, "Thanks for sharing that with me."

A year later, after praying diligently about whether God wanted me to marry Jennifer, God finally gave me a testimony that she was the one. I decided to propose to her on the Temple Lot in Independence.

I was very relieved when she said yes! Then she told me she had been waiting a year to tell me something. "You know that conversion experience you had that September morning at exactly 3:00 a.m.?" she asked. She told me on that exact same morning, God had woken her up at exactly 3:00 a.m. and said, "Get out of your bed and pray for your future husband that he will be brought to his knees in repentance and that he will want to serve Me." And she did that.

I was amazed. "So you knew as soon as I shared that testimony on our first date that I was to be your husband?"

She confirmed this was true. "But I knew you needed your own testimony," she continued, "so I waited and prayed." I realized that God had been so good to me, beyond anything I could ever merit.

This testimony points to the power of prayer. Prayer matters a lot. Jennifer's prayers for me made a difference in my life. The most important thing that came of her prayers was not that we got married, but that I met Jesus Christ. I came to know this all-powerful God who loves me and cares for me.

Jennifer was not supposed to marry a man who did not put God as number one in his life. So God literally

woke me up and changed my life and drew me to Him. All else was secondary to God.

I would encourage all of you who are not married to pray about your future spouse. I've heard people say that there are not that many young people in the Restoration, so how can I find a spouse who shares my beliefs? Remember that we have a God who can do anything. He can raise up children to Abraham from stones that are on the ground.

Don't ever settle for anyone except the person God leads you to. Don't get in a relationship because you are afraid you won't find someone else. God will hear and answer your prayers if you seek Him. Make Him number one in your life and it will amaze you what He can do.

I Know It Is True

-by Bill Green, Oak Grove Branch

I was raised in a good Baptist home by parents who lived their faith. We used to joke if the church was open the Green's were there. When I turned seventeen there were a couple of things I was being taught that really bothered me. I didn't think God was a fair God if He sent His Son only to one small group of people in the Middle East.

Secondly, it seemed unfair that people were condemned to hell just because believers had not done a good enough job to get the gospel message out to them, and they had died without ever hearing of Jesus.

I had some conversations with my mother about this and she suggested I talk to our pastor. I shared my concerns with him and the response I got was that he laughed at me and told me I was stupid for even thinking such things. He then proceeded to ridicule me publicly in a sermon. This started my descent away from what I had been taught.

By age nineteen, I had become cynical and decided that all religion and the churches cared about was money and getting bigger buildings. I decided I believed in Jesus and God, but I did not need organized religion. I then proceeded to stay away from God for the next twenty years. During those years I made some very bad decisions.

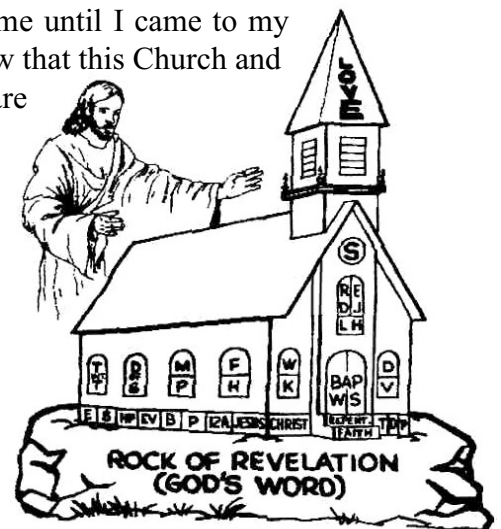
When I was thirty-seven years old, I was introduced to my future wife, Cindy. We met when we were both in my brother's wedding. A year later, Cindy and I were married. I knew nothing about the church Cindy attended, but I agreed to get married in her church. It took me about seven more years, but her influence and prayers began working on me. I finally reached a point where I knew I needed God back in my life. I needed to know if this church I was attending with my wife was something I could believe in.

I started to ask Cindy lots of questions and she directed me to church books when she couldn't answer. I decided to read the Book of Mormon and to my surprise when I got to Third Nephi there was the answer that I had been searching for all these years. Jesus did appear to more than one group of people.

In Sunday school they were going through the New Testament of the Bible and imagine my surprise when they started discussing the concept of the prison house where those souls who had not accepted Jesus in this life were given a chance to learn and accept Him. My Baptist upbringing had just bypassed all that.

This Church of the Restored Gospel gave me answers to questions that had bothered me all these years. God is a just and fair God, and He cared enough about me to lead me to a church that had the answers to my questions.

Through all the years I walked away from Him, He continued to reach out to me and protect me until I was willing to listen to Him. He put me in contact with a lady and her family who lived their faith and put up with me until I came to my senses. I know that this Church and its message are true and the Book of Mormon is real.





Low-Carb Diets and The Word of Wisdom

-by Debbie Norman, Oak Grove Branch

If you live in the USA, you have probably heard of the Atkins Diet. It is a low-carbohydrate, high-protein, high-fat diet that has maintained popularity for decades after being introduced in the 1970s by Dr. Robert Atkins.

Did applying this low-carb way of eating lead to health for Dr. Atkins? No. Robert Atkins continued to be overweight and suffered from a history of numerous heart attacks, congestive heart failure, and high blood pressure. He died in 2003 from an injury-induced blood clot in his brain.

That does not lead one to believe the Atkins Diet is the pathway to health. Yet the low-carb frenzy has continued to grow. Soon we had the Paleo diet, the South Beach diet, and the Keto diet. Each of these diets has a slightly different focus, but they have one thing in common: They are low-carb diets.

Carbohydrates were, and continue to be, portrayed as the villain—as the evil source of almost every health problem. Supporters of low-carb diets claim they will bring weight loss, especially the loss of belly fat, along with lower blood sugar and insulin levels. They claim low-carb eating will lower blood pressure, reverse metabolic syndrome, and bring many other health benefits. They say scientific studies back up these claims, but the results of these studies is ambivalent, particularly about the long-term consequences of a low-carb diet.

Many people lose weight rapidly when they first start a low-carb diet. But weight loss does not equal fat loss. When someone restricts carbs in their diet, their body quickly burns through its reserves of stored carbohydrates (glycogen).

Glycogen is a form of glucose, which is the main source of energy for our bodies' cells, tissues, and organs. Our bodies store glycogen primarily in our liver and muscles. Our bodies create glycogen from glucose through a process called glycogenesis. Our bodies break down glycogen for use through a process called glycogenolysis.

When carbohydrate intake is limited, one's body must tap into its glycogen stores for energy. Each gram of glycogen is stored with at least three grams of water. So as one's body burns its reserve of carbs, that person is also losing pounds of water. This will cause weight loss, but it is a loss of water weight and not fat. This initial weight loss when beginning a low-carb diet gives one the illusion that the diet is "working."

We have also been told that eating carbohydrates will cause your body to release insulin and this will make us fat. The truth is that eating many other foods, including meat causes a significant insulin release as well.

While high protein, virtually no-carb foods like meat and eggs are low on the glycemic index, they measure high on the insulin index. In other words, while the meat and eggs don't cause a spike in blood sugar the way some carbohydrates do, they do result in a significant rise in insulin.

A low-carb diet puts your body into stress and survival mode. The body must have glucose to function and survive. When the body's store of glycogen becomes depleted, the body is forced to turn non-glucose substrates (dietary protein, dietary fat, and our own precious muscle tissue) into glucose. This works, but the cost can be high.

Eating a low-carb diet for an extended time can disrupt the body's metabolic pathways and hormone regulation. Prolonged carbohydrate restriction can lead to imbalances in thyroid hormones, cortisol levels, and insulin sensitivity. These disruptions not only impede weight loss but may also predispose individuals to metabolic disorders such as hypothyroidism and insulin resistance (low metabolism, low body temperature, hair loss, and weight gain).

The brain works best when the body supplies its preferred energy source—glucose (sugar) from healthy carbohydrates. Low-carb diets may cause confusion and irritability. Many suffer from fuzzy thinking and mood swings when eating low-carb.

Eating a low-carb diet almost always means one is not consuming enough fiber, which can lead to a cascade of health issues, including a higher risk of cardiovascular disease, constipation and/or diarrhea, and disrupted gut microbia.

Most prebiotics, which are essential for promoting the growth of beneficial gut flora, are found in carbohydrate-rich foods. Without adequate prebiotics, the gut microbiome may shift in an undesirable direction, contributing to various health issues including poor immune system functioning, inflammation, and autoimmune conditions.

Low-carb diets often lead to nutrient deficiency. Severely limiting or totally eliminating entire food groups from your diet puts you at risk for serious deficiencies in micronutrients, including selenium, magnesium, phosphorus, and vitamins B and C, and many other vital nutrients.

Low-carb, high-fat diets such as the keto diet can stress one's liver. With so much fat to metabolize, the diet could make any existing liver conditions worse.

Low-carb, high-protein diets such as paleo can put added strain on one's kidneys. The kidneys help metabolize protein, and the keto diet may overload them.

There is one other reason you should choose NOT to eat a low-carb diet. It is the most important factor of all. Eating a low-carb diet goes against the way God says you should eat.

If we threw out all of the above evidence, if we did not look at any scientific studies or tap into the wisdom of any medical doctors or dietitians, this reason alone should be sufficient to sway us away from choosing to eat low-carb.

I considered adding references at the end of this article to studies that provide evidence against eating low-carb, but decided not to. I do not want you to base your decision about a low-carb diet on the wisdom of man, but on the Word of God.

In Section 86 of the Doctrine and Covenants, God gives us direction for the most health-giving way to eat. Some parts of Section 86 might be open to different interpretations, but most of it is very clear and simple.

- **Alcohol and tobacco are not good for us.**
- **Hot drinks are not good for us.**
- **Eat fruits and vegetables with prudence and in season.**
- **Eat meat sparingly.**
- **Grain is the staff of life and particularly wheat for man.**

God says grain is the staff of life. Grain is to be the main foundation of our diets, particularly wheat. (This undoubtedly means whole grains with all the goodness God created in them, so feel free to cut out refined carbohydrate grain "products," which really are not grains at all.)

God also tells us to eat meat sparingly. These two directives clearly eliminate the possibility of thinking that a low-carb, high protein diet is God's best plan for us.

The bottom line is this: Will we choose to believe God or man?

Even if all the evidence points *against* what God says is true (which it does not), will we choose to believe the Creator of our bodies, the Creator of the universe, He who has all wisdom and all knowledge? 1 Corinthians 3:19 says, "*For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.*"

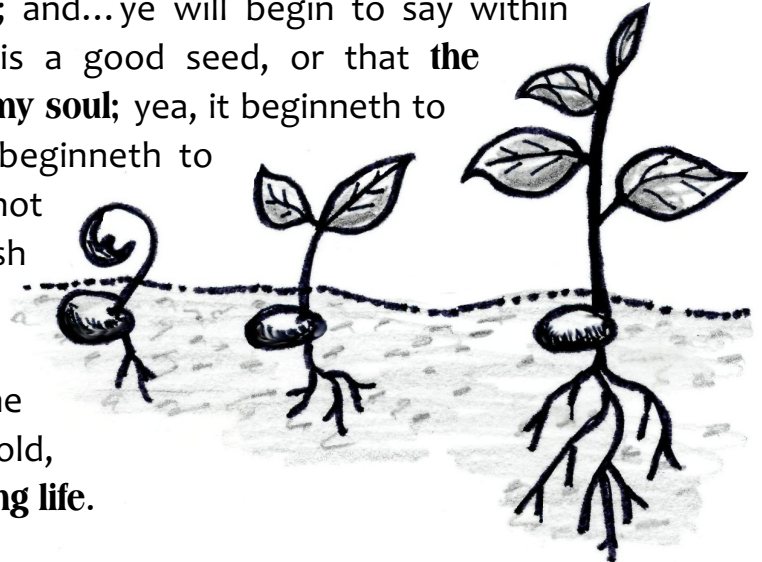
I encourage you to follow GOD'S wisdom and avoid the foolishness of man's wisdom. Do not be afraid to be obedient to God's counsel and make whole grains the center of your diet, with wheat being the mainstay. The promises for us if we do are amazing!

And all Saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health in their navel, and marrow to their bones, and shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures;

and shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint; and I, the Lord, give unto them a promise that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them. Amen (Doctrine and Covenants 86:3c-d).

The Book of Mormon . . .

Even if ye can no more than **desire to believe**, let this desire work in you... Now we will **compare the word unto a seed**. Now if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief... behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and...ye will begin to say within yourselves, It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that **the word is good**, for it beginneth to **enlarge my soul**; yea, it beginneth to **enlighten my understanding**; yea, and it beginneth to be **delicious** to me. Now behold, would not this **increase your faith**? ... If ye will nourish the word, yea, the tree as it beginneth to grow, by your faith with great diligence, and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root; and behold, it shall be a tree **springing up unto everlasting life**.



A Second Witness of Jesus Christ

For more information about the Book of Mormon or the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ restored to earth in the latter days, write to Zion's Call at the address below.

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