

# THE LIAHONA: POINTING TO CHRIST



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# MINISTERING AS FIRST RESPONDERS

*Like first responders at the scene of a crisis, we don't heal people and send them on their way. We love and care for our brothers and sisters and lead them to Christ, the Master Healer.*

By Krista Rogers Mortensen

**M**y daughter Abby is a paramedic, and in her line of work no two days are the same. Each call she receives is unique and requires a different response. Her work is unpredictable and takes place in an uncontrolled environment. She doesn't treat people in a sterile hospital room surrounded by specialized equipment but can often be found manually pumping someone's heart on the side of the freeway, intubating a person on a bathroom floor, delivering a baby in the back of a car, bandaging wounds, splinting broken bones, or administering medication.

She immediately assesses what is needed and then does the best she can with the knowledge she has. When a situation is out of the ordinary and there is a question about what should be done, she calls to speak with a doctor for additional instructions.

Although Abby's job as a first responder is very important, she doesn't heal people and then send them home well and whole. Her job is to provide first aid, care, and comfort until people are stable enough to be transported to the hospital, where doctors can use their specialized skills to treat the injuries and illnesses and begin the healing process.

## WE TOO ARE FIRST RESPONDERS

As I've thought about our role as members of God's Church in the gathering of Israel, it has occurred to me that, like Abby, we are first responders. Each person we encounter has unique challenges, and each requires a different response. Caring for our brothers and sisters doesn't take place in a predictable, controlled environment. We are working with real people and real-life situations, and it can be messy.

Like a first responder, we must assess needs and then respond the best we know how with the knowledge we have. When a situation is out of the ordinary and we're not sure what to do, we too can call for additional instructions by praying to receive guidance through the Spirit to know the course of action we should take. We can ask our leaders, like the Relief Society and elders quorum presidencies, for help as well.

In Mosiah 18, Alma talks about the commitments we make as we come into the fold of God: bear one another's burdens, mourn with those who mourn, comfort those who stand in need of comfort,

and stand as witnesses of God (see verses 8–9). When I have been at a low point in my life, feeling abandoned and like the heavens were closed to me, and someone has shown up to sit with me, cry with me, or listen to me, I have felt God's love through that person and received a witness that He is aware of me and my situation.

We often think that standing as a witness means sharing our beliefs with others and testifying of the truth, and sometimes that's exactly what the Spirit leads us to do. But this isn't always the first thing people need when they are in difficult situations. When Abby comes upon someone in cardiac arrest, it's probably not the ideal time to begin a discussion on healthy eating habits and exercise. Her job isn't to judge how they ended up where they are or to determine who deserves her care. If a person is in need, she gives them aid.

Just as Abby doesn't heal people and send them on their way, neither can we make people whole, fix them, or save them. Our role is vitally important: it is to love and care for our brothers and sisters and lead them to Christ, the Master Healer, who can do the healing and saving.

It is easy to feel helpless in our ministering when we encounter those with burdens so heavy, complicated, or unfamiliar, or whose sins are so great, addictions so enslaving, pain and sorrow so intense, or faith so weak that we don't know how to help them. We will be frustrated when we try to fix or change people because it's not something we have the power to do for others.<sup>1</sup> As Elder Dale G. Renlund of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: "The Savior's job is to heal. Our job is to love—to love and minister in such a way that others are drawn to Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup>



**WE ARE FIRST RESPONDERS.**  
EACH PERSON WE ENCOUNTER HAS  
UNIQUE CHALLENGES, AND EACH  
REQUIRES A DIFFERENT RESPONSE.

## OUR JOB IS TO LOVE OTHERS

When Alma talks about comforting those who stand in need of comfort, there is no asterisk, addendum, or qualifier that says, "Comfort those who stand in need of comfort as long as they share your beliefs, dress like you, are free of sin, or live a lifestyle you approve of." As first responders, it is not our job to judge others or to determine if they are worthy of our love and care. Our instructions are very clear:

- "Love one another" (John 13:34).
- "Feed my sheep" (John 21:17).
- "Let every man esteem his brother as himself" (Doctrine and Covenants 38:25).

The Prophet Joseph Smith said:

"The nearer we get to our Heavenly Father, the more we are disposed to look with compassion on perishing souls; we feel we want to take them upon our shoulders and cast their sins behind our backs. . . .



**OUR ROLE IS VITALLY IMPORTANT:**  
IT IS **TO LOVE** AND **CARE** FOR  
OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS  
**AND LEAD THEM TO CHRIST,** THE  
MASTER HEALER, WHO CAN DO  
THE HEALING AND SAVING.

In the days leading up to my mother’s passing, I witnessed her grandchildren—most now in their 20s and 30s—weeping as they gathered around the bed of their cherished grandmother. This small white-haired woman, along with my father, had ministered to them, valued them, welcomed them, and loved them without conditions. My parents were faithful Latter-day Saints who understood that loving others, even when their beliefs or choices differ from our own, doesn’t diminish our faith or change our beliefs. We lose nothing by loving all of God’s children.

This doesn’t mean that we ignore teaching the importance of obeying God’s commandments. As President Dallin H. Oaks, First Counselor in the First Presidency, taught: “To balance our commitments to love and law we must continually show love even as we continually honor and keep the commandments. We must strive to preserve precious relationships and at the same time not compromise our responsibilities to be obedient to and supportive of gospel law.”<sup>4</sup>

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## LOVE AND COMPASSION

“We do need all our compassion, empathy, and love as we interact with those around us. Those who are struggling ‘need to experience the pure love of Jesus Christ reflected in [our] words and actions.’ As we minister, we encourage others frequently and offer help. Even if someone is not receptive, we continue to minister as they allow.”

**Elder Dale G. Renlund of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Powerful, Virtuous Cycle of the Doctrine of Christ,” *Liahona*, May 2024, 82.**

As first responders and disciples of Christ, we can love as He loves and create safe places for those around us—in our relationships, our homes, our neighborhoods, and our church. These are places where people can find love, acceptance, and inclusion, and where they can become acquainted with the Savior, who has the power to heal, forgive, save, and make all things right. ■

*The author lives in Utah, USA.*

### NOTES

1. I shared how I applied this idea with my own family in a July 2020 *Liahona* article, “You Love, He Saves.”
2. Dale G. Renlund, “The Powerful, Virtuous Cycle of the Doctrine of Christ,” *Liahona*, May 2024, 83.
3. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2011), 428–29, 454.
4. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Paradox of Love and Law” (Brigham Young University–Idaho devotional, Oct. 30, 2018), byui.edu.





# HOW CHANGING MY THOUGHTS CHANGED MY LIFE

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By Abby Larkins

When I focused on righteously exercising my agency to feel joy, my life began to change.

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A few years ago, I found myself in a serious rut. My self-esteem was low, I focused only on my insecurities, and I constantly compared myself to others.

Regardless of how much I read my scriptures and prayed, I couldn't shake my overwhelming feelings of inadequacy. I had faith in God, but I didn't have faith in my ability to feel better.

Eventually, I grew so desperate for relief that I considered trying something I usually rolled my eyes at: positive thinking.

I realized that if I wanted to change my life, I needed to change my thoughts.

As I tried this, it became clear to me that I was righteously exercising a priceless right—I was exercising my agency.

## Live in Gratitude

It's important to clarify that positive thinking doesn't mean living in denial of hard things or difficult emotions. Ignoring problems won't fix them.

Positive thinking is more about what we choose to focus on, despite what struggles we are facing.

As President Russell M. Nelson taught:

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

". . . Joy comes from and because of [Jesus Christ]. He is the source of all joy."<sup>1</sup>

Because my thoughts were focused mostly on my fears and insecurities, I didn't feel much joy in my life. I prayed for Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ to take away my problems. But I'd forgotten that, in accordance with Heavenly Father's plan, Christ had also preserved my ability to make choices.

One key to shifting my mindset and feeling better was to choose living with gratitude.

Instead of engaging in negative self-talk, I started actively looking for good things in my day. Sometimes it was a kind comment from a classmate. Other times it was walking home on a beautiful spring evening or eating a good meal.

I soon realized that practicing gratitude magnified my enjoyment of life. Try it! Being mindful of any goodness we experience multiplies its effect (see Doctrine and Covenants 78:19).

I collected good moments like pieces of treasure, and at the end of each day, I was always surprised by how blessed and thankful I felt. The hard parts of my life didn't disappear, but they began to lose their sting.

## Choose to Cultivate Joy

We often get so caught up in what we can't control that we forget everything we can control.

In Doctrine and Covenants 58:27-28, the Lord reminds the Saints that "men should . . . do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;

"For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves" (emphasis added).

As I chose to focus on moments of joy, laughter, peace, and inspiration, I realized that I could choose to create more of them. The power was in me!

This can look like:

- Participating in and planning fun activities.
- Receiving a priesthood blessing.
- Being in nature.
- Standing in holy places.
- Developing a new skill or hobby.
- Reading a good book.
- Serving others.
- Spending time with people who uplift you.
- Exercising.
- Listening to and watching positive media.

I recognize that physical and mental health challenges can be barriers to how we use our agency. In these instances, we can continue to righteously exercise our agency by choosing to seek out medical and professional help.

Therapy, meditation, lifestyle changes, and medication, when combined with sincere prayer, scripture study, and church and temple worship, can make a big difference when we are struggling. We can also slow down when we are overwhelmed or tired, ask for help from people we trust, and seek direction and comfort from Heavenly Father.

## We Are Meant to Have Joy

Heavenly Father wants us to have joy—a joy that is found in Jesus Christ. It's the very reason we exist! 2 Nephi 2:25-26 reminds us:

"Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.

". . . And because that they are redeemed from the fall [by Jesus Christ] they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon" (emphasis added).

# ONE KEY TO SHIFTING MY MINDSET AND FEELING BETTER WAS TO **CHOOSE** LIVING WITH GRATITUDE.

Jesus Christ has made it possible for us to cultivate joy through our agency. As we repent, learn from our mistakes, and strive to do good things, we are fulfilling the measure of our creation. We are choosing joy.

When you really think about it, having this power is an amazing blessing.

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles advised: "We shouldn't wait to be happy until we reach some future point, only to discover that happiness was already available—all the time! Life is not meant to be appreciated only in retrospect. 'This is the day which the Lord hath made . . .,' the Psalmist wrote. 'Rejoice and be glad in it' [Psalm 118:24]."<sup>2</sup>

My life has changed as I've chosen to change my thoughts. I'm more confident, kind, and joyful. I'm more open to trying new things and accepting opportunities. And I'm better at noticing the Lord's hand in my life.

With the help of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, I've become better at making decisions that bring me true happiness and peace.

As you seek Their direction, I know They will guide you too. ■

### NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, "Joy and Spiritual Survival," *Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 82.
2. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Of Regrets and Resolutions," *Liahona*, Nov. 2012, 23-24.

# LIFE IS HARD, BUT WE CAN DO HARD THINGS

By Irini Stillo

I wondered how Heavenly Father expected me to overcome challenges.

**N**o one has an easy life. And I know this! We are meant to face challenges so we can return to Heavenly Father as more Christlike people. It's all part of His plan (see 1 Peter 4:12–13).

But sometimes I still find myself wondering why I struggle so much, why there is so much pain in the world, and why I feel so lost and alone at times. I battle depression, which makes me feel like there's a shadow cast over everything I do and experience.

A few years ago, I was struggling to feel the Spirit in my life. I wondered how Heavenly Father expected me to overcome challenges when I felt weak and insecure. I had so many doubts about my capacity to handle life.

I wondered if I just didn't have it in me to do hard things.

## Desperate for Reassurance

One day when I was feeling lost, I traveled until I reached a quiet place where I could see the ocean and hear the birds singing. It was a place of solace—the perfect place to talk to Heavenly Father.

I poured out my heart in prayer, asking why I had to go

through so many difficulties. I told Him I thought life was too hard and that I couldn't keep going on my own. I told Him I didn't know how I could handle the hard parts of life.

Suddenly, in that moment of vulnerability and desperation, I felt the warmth of the Spirit enveloping me—a gentle reassurance that I was not alone, that I'm never alone. And words of love and comfort entered my mind, reminding me of my divine identity, my potential, and my ability to do hard things with Jesus Christ.

After months of feeling alone and uncertain, I felt heavenly reassurance that I am capable—that I am a beloved daughter of Heavenly Father with a purpose. I'm endowed with spiritual gifts, and I'm bound to Him, the most loving and powerful being in the universe, because of my covenants. He reassured me that I can and am meant to face everything in life with the Savior on my side.

President Russell M. Nelson testified of this when he asked this question: “How much does it increase your confidence to know that, as an endowed woman or man armed with the power of God, you do not have to face life alone?”<sup>1</sup>

## Casting Out Fear

It wasn't easy, but I took a leap of faith and decided to face things in life with reliance on Jesus Christ. I have been able to embrace so many opportunities and accomplish so much more than I ever thought I could.

I continue to face obstacles and challenges, and sometimes I feel that fear creeping in again, but when I reach for my faith in the Savior, I know that “perfect love casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18).

The more I experience, the more I discover that my challenges are opportunities for growth and learning. As Elder Gerrit W. Gong of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, “Sadness . . . will become eternal joy through Jesus Christ's restoring Atonement.”<sup>2</sup>

When I reflect on my journey, I realize it's not just a story of struggles. And I'm learning that faith is not just about believing; it's about trusting that I am loved completely by my Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. Through our covenant relationship, They are with me every day.

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles promised that “as we build the foundation of our lives on the ‘rock’ of Jesus Christ, . . . we can be blessed to do and overcome hard things.”<sup>3</sup>

Through Him and because of our covenants, we truly can overcome anything that stands in our way. ■

*The author lives in Thessaloniki, Greece.*

### NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, “Rejoice in the Gift of Priesthood Keys,” *Liahona*, May 2024, 121.
2. Gerrit W. Gong, “All Things for Our Good,” *Liahona*, May 2024, 42.
3. David A. Bednar, “Be Still, and Know That I Am God,” *Liahona*, May 2024, 31.

ILLUSTRATION BY KYLEE BODILY



*Why God's covenant people have lived the law of sacrifice in every era.*

# SACRIFICE AND THE TEMPLE

**By James Goldberg**  
Church History Department

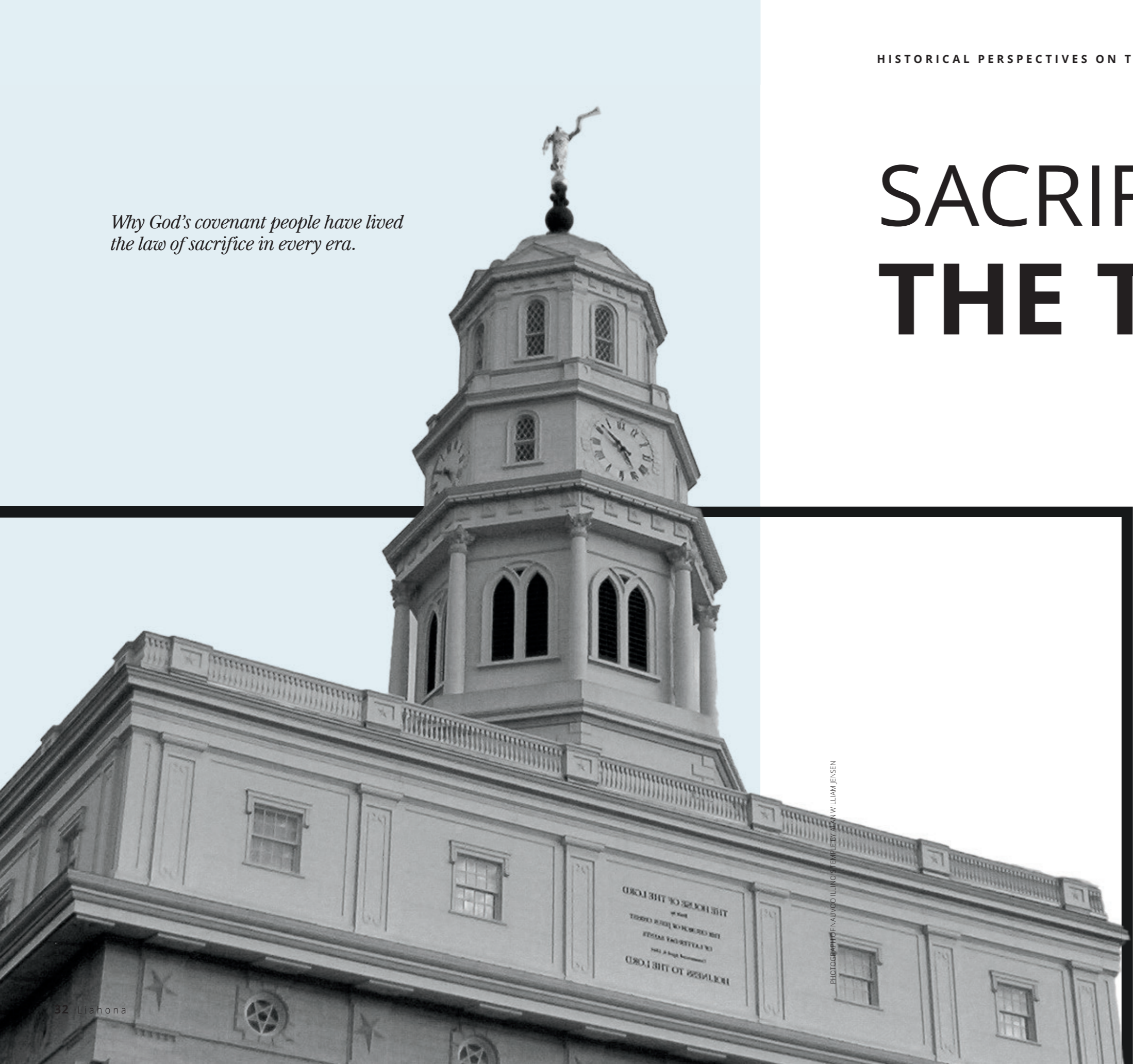
**A**s Latter-day Saints began to build a temple in Nauvoo, revelation called them to look forward and backward in time. The Lord told the Saints He would reveal in the temple “things which have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world” (Doctrine and Covenants 124:41).

At the same time, He emphasized that the temple would be a place where the Saints could be washed and anointed like ancient Israelite priests and a place for “memorials for your sacrifices by the sons of Levi” (Doctrine and Covenants 124:39).

Although the altars in latter-day temples are used for making covenants rather than making offerings of animals, grain, oil, or wine, they still remind us of Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice and the related principle of sacrifice. Latter-day Saints have made sacrifices to build temples, to reach temples, and to keep their temple covenants. As in ancient Israel, these experiences help us draw close to the Lord and experience the blessings of being a covenant people.

**SACRIFICE AT THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM**

In ancient Israel, the opportunity to participate in physical sacrifices was often what brought people to the temple in



PHOTOGRAPH BY NAUVOO ILLINOIS TEMPLE BY AMAN WILLIAM JENSEN





BURNT OFFERINGS AND SACRIFICES  
WERE GIVEN IN ANCIENT ISRAEL.

EARLY SAINTS SACRIFICED THEIR TIME  
AND TALENTS TO HELP BUILD TEMPLES.

TODAY WE CAN OFFER OUR BROKEN  
HEARTS AND CONTRITE SPIRITS.

Jerusalem. Biblical passages describe a calendar of daily, weekly, and annual offerings in the temple, as well as specific offerings for certain life events (see Leviticus 1–7; Numbers 28–29). These sacrifices called attention to different aspects of people’s relationship with God.<sup>1</sup> For example:

- Sin offerings and trespass offerings reminded people to be reconciled with God and honor His commandments.
- Peace offerings celebrated God’s covenant relationship with His people and showed gratitude for blessings.
- Burnt offerings and meal offerings acknowledged God’s presence and showed people’s devotion to Him.

Whether a person offered a small measure of grain, a pair of birds, or a healthy herd animal, sacrifices involved giving up something of value. In addition, to sacrifice something was to share it with God and others. During many sacrifices, this sharing was literal. The blood and fat of an animal sacrifice might be offered on the altar while the priests received the skin for future use and the giver received meat to eat. Through temple sacrifices, the children of Israel could share a meal with their Heavenly Father and King.<sup>2</sup>

Families in Jerusalem could watch trails of smoke ascend from the temple altars toward the heavens and recognize the “sweet savour” of meats, produce, and drinks being offered to the Lord (see Leviticus 1:9, 13, 17). These offerings connected their own animals, crops, land, and labor with God. Righteous kings welcomed pilgrims from across the promised land to events like the temple Passover celebrations, where each family offered a lamb as a sacrifice (see 2 Chronicles 29–30; 35). Participating in sacrifices and sharing feasts alongside other worshippers served as a powerful reminder of shared spiritual heritage and destiny. Israelites could leave the temple more prepared to make everyday sacrifices for God and each other.

The temple atmosphere of sharing and fellowship through sacrifice appears prominently in the New Testament. When Jesus was young, His family traveled to the temple to offer sacrifices and met people like Anna, Simeon, and religious teachers (see Luke 2). The culmination of Jesus’s mission and ministry came when He journeyed for the last time to the temple, then laid down His life as a sacrifice for others. After Jesus’s death, the Apostles frequently visited the temple and taught people who had gathered from many nations to be there. Some of the New Testament authors decried Jesus’s Atonement through comparisons to temple sacrifices.<sup>3</sup>

## SACRIFICE IN THE RESTORATION

By the time Latter-day Saints were building temples, their understanding of sacrifice had been refined. The Book of Mormon explains that the central purpose of ancient sacrifices was to prepare people’s minds for the coming sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The sacrifice He requires from us is “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20). In latter-day temple worship, physical reminders of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice prepare us to love, serve, and sacrifice as Jesus did.

Latter-day Saints offered their time, talents, and possessions to help build early temples. Lucy Mack Smith recognized that work on the Kirtland Temple brought people together. “There was but one mainspring to all our thoughts,” she said, “and that was building the Lord’s house.”<sup>4</sup> Jesus Christ appeared in the completed temple and promised that the Saints could enter His presence there: “I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this house” (Doctrine and Covenants 110:7).

In Nauvoo, many men sacrificed their time by working on temple construction every 10th day. The Relief Society was organized after a seamstress, Margaret Cook, approached her employer, Sarah Granger Kimball, about a plan for women to contribute by making shirts for temple construction workers.<sup>5</sup> These efforts meant that Nauvoo Temple construction workers were often clothed through the sacrifices of their fellow Saints. In pioneer temples in Kirtland, Nauvoo, and Utah, shared sacrifices of materials and labor helped connect temples forever to the families of those who contributed.

The contributions of everyday Latter-day Saints, like that of the widow who gave what she had to the temple treasury in Jesus’s day, continue to make temple building possible (see Mark 12:41–44). In many cases, Saints have also sacrificed to reach the temple. For example, after temple ceremonies were fully translated into Spanish in 1945, Saints from Mexico, the United States, and later Central America joined annual caravans to visit the Mesa Arizona Temple.<sup>6</sup> Members along the route and in Mesa offered travelers meals, places to stay, and powerful shared experiences.

Whether Saints today charter buses for a similar caravan, keep up a regular ward temple night, or arrange youth visits to the temple, shared temple traditions can help us draw near to God and each other as we remember Jesus Christ’s sacrifice.

In the temple, we covenant to obey the law of sacrifice, which includes adopting a spirit of sacrifice and sharing as we return to do the Lord’s work in the outside world.<sup>7</sup> Our willingness to give up worldly desires and live in a higher and holier way shows the Lord that we are willing to offer Him “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20).

Just as ancient Israelites often received a portion of their sacrifices back to eat physically, we often find that our own sacrifices nourish us spiritually. As we enter the Lord’s house, we can remember that the time we offer to participate in temple work is more than something we give up—it’s time we can share with the Lord and a precious chance to stand together in His presence. ■

### NOTES

1. As Adam and Eve learned from an angel of the Lord, sacrifices were intended as “a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father” (Moses 5:7).
2. Ancient and modern temples both emphasize bringing people into God’s presence. In ancient times, meal-related symbols were part of that experience. For example, the biblical tabernacle and temple contained a table with dishes and loaves of “shewbread,” which many modern translations call “the bread of the presence [of God]” (see Exodus 25:29–30). The image is that the temple, as the house of God, is a place where God invites worshippers to eat in His presence. Sacrifices also contribute to the meal imagery. The purpose of burning part of an animal is that the smoke ascends, representing the sacrifice rising to God. Technically, in giving a burnt offering, the worshippers were not sharing a meal with God but only giving God the food in the form of ascending smoke, or “sweet savour unto the Lord” (Leviticus 1:17). In a peace offering or meal offering, though, the sacrifice was shared between God, the priests, and the offerers.
3. See, for example, Hebrews 9:13–14; 1 Peter 1:19.
4. “Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845,” book 14, page 3, josephsmithpapers.org, spelling standardized; also quoted in Lisa Olsen Tait and Brent Rogers, “A House for Our God,” in *Revelations in Context: The Stories behind the Sections of the Doctrine and Covenants* (2016), 170.
5. See James Goldberg, “Five People Who Helped Found the Relief Society,” [history.churchofjesuschrist.org](http://history.churchofjesuschrist.org).
6. See Eduardo Balderas, “Northward to Mesa,” *Ensign*, Sept. 1972, 30–33.
7. See *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 27.2, Gospel Library.

# MONEY CAN'T BUY HAPPINESS, BUT CHRIST OFFERS JOY FREELY

By Simona Love  
Church Magazines



*As my obsession with money took over my priorities, I realized I was choosing the things of the world over Heavenly Father.*

**G**rowing up, I had a lot of ambitions. I saw people my age already making money and finding success on social media. I wanted to be just like them.

When I was attending university and learning to be on my own, money became my top priority. All I cared about was qualifying for scholarships, saving up, and preparing for my future career in illustration.

Even my social media feeds were filled with messages about productivity, investing, and side hustles to help me earn some extra funds. I worried that if I didn't take every opportunity to be smart with my money, I wouldn't be financially secure.

I embraced this culture, thinking it would make me happy and successful. I

always justified my focus on money by telling myself that one day, when I had more money, I could donate more to charities and be a better person that way.

I didn't notice it at the time, but as my obsession with money took over my priorities, I started losing joy in my life. I became increasingly jealous, especially of those who seemed to have more than enough money.

I started to want more success on social media, in my career, and even with how other people perceived me. But it seemed like the more I chased success, the less successful I felt—and the more I was distant from Heavenly Father.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF AUTHOR BY STEPHEN NEILSEN

## Recognizing Materialism

After about a year of feeling like this, I was listening to a talk by President Dallin H. Oaks, First Counselor in the First Presidency. I felt my heart sink as I heard him describe exactly what kind of person I was turning into:

“Even today some who profess Christianity are more attracted to the things of the world—the things that sustain life on earth but give no nourishment toward eternal life.”<sup>1</sup>

I'd thought I could prioritize both God and money at the same time, but President Oaks's words and this insight in Matthew 6:24 proved to be true: “No man can serve two masters: for either he

will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

When my mind was focused on material things, I found it harder to see the appeal of the gospel. I didn’t understand how going to church and reading the scriptures could help me with my ambitions.

While furthering education and gaining a steady income are worthy pursuits, I was prioritizing them too much. I was obsessed. I realized that I would be miserable until I learned to change my mindset.<sup>2</sup>

### Focusing on What Matters Most

I prayed to Heavenly Father and asked Him if He could help me start focusing on what matters most. I began by reading the scriptures. As I was studying verses that I thought I’d read countless times before, these familiar stories started catching my attention. I felt the Holy Ghost communicating with me!

One story that resonated with me was that of the rich young man. Jesus told him: “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me” (Matthew 19:21).

When I read this scripture story, I felt prompted to stop and think about how it applied to me. At first, it didn’t seem like I had

I wanted to put Heavenly Father first in my life again. I decided to open my journal, write how I was feeling, and look back at my previous entries to better understand what had started my obsession.

As I did this, I became more aware of how backward my priorities had been. As I noticed in one entry, “I keep thinking about how I can profit from everything instead of thinking about how I can become better or help others.”

Eventually, by studying the scriptures, listening to the Spirit, and journaling, I began to change.

### Trusting God over Money

It has been amazing to feel the promise in Proverbs 3:5–6 come true in my life:

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

“In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

I still strive to develop my talents and work hard on my education and art career. Seeking financial security to provide for ourselves and our families is a righteous desire. However, we need to be careful not to let our pursuit of success and money become more important than anything else.

These days, I don’t care whether I become famous or make

and prophets always remind me what matters most in life.

President Russell M. Nelson taught:

“While the world insists that power, possessions, popularity, and pleasures of the flesh bring happiness, they do not! They cannot!

“The truth is that it is much *more exhausting* to seek happiness where you can *never* find it! However, when you yoke yourself to Jesus Christ and do the spiritual work required to overcome the world, He, and He alone, does have the power to lift you above the pull of this world.”<sup>3</sup>

### Overcoming the World

The changes the Savior has helped me make in my soul have been miraculous. I know now that success isn’t about proving how amazing I am or tying my worth to how much money I make; it’s about feeling gratitude for the opportunity to experience mortality and seeing the amazing blessings Heavenly Father has always provided me with. I know if I put Him first, everything else will fall into place.

I encourage you to consider your priorities in life. Are you focused on materialism and what you don’t have? Or are you focused on what matters most? Be honest with yourself. See if you need to adjust your course back to the Savior.

When you make that choice, you will find more joy than you ever thought possible. ■

*The author is from Moscow, Russia.*

#### NOTES

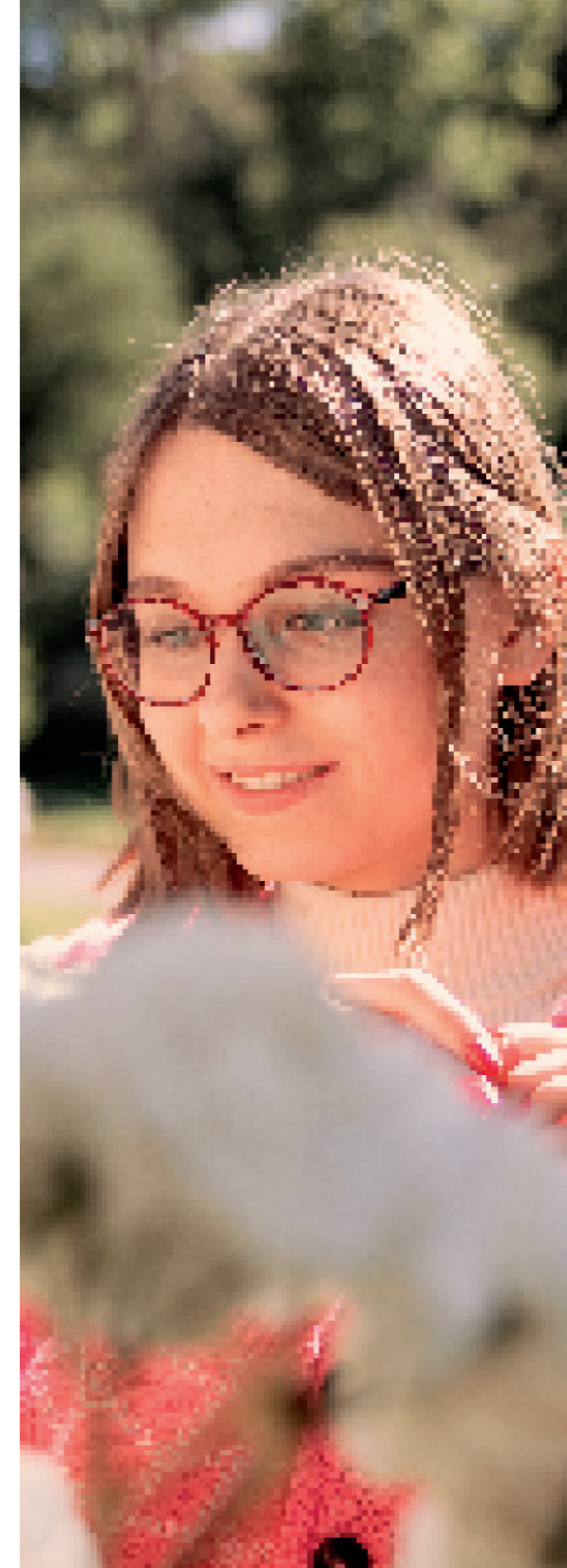
1. Dallin H. Oaks, “Teachings of Jesus,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2011, 92.
2. See Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2023, 117–20.
3. Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 97.

## THE SCRIPTURES AND PROPHETS ALWAYS REMIND ME WHAT MATTERS MOST IN LIFE.

anything in common with the rich young ruler—he already had his riches and wasn’t willing to part with them. I, on the other hand, wasn’t rich yet, and I thought my efforts to get more money were righteous.

But I soon realized I would struggle to give my money away, just like the rich young ruler. Especially considering I was already struggling to let go of my pursuit for more money.

a ton of money through my craft. I’ve realized that living a life where I get to love—and feel love from—Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, my family, and art is enough for me. I’m no longer easily upset by unexpected expenses or other people’s successes. Instead, I am more devoted to the gospel of Jesus Christ because it continues to save me from a life of greed, comparison, and constant discontent. And when I start to forget, the scriptures



# REMEMBERING WHY I LIVE THE GOSPEL

By Isabelle Justice  
Church Magazines

Reminding myself of my “why” motivates me to draw closer to the Savior and follow through with my spiritual goals.

My life feels chaotic at times, but I love the comfort I feel when I walk into a chapel. It’s one of the reasons why I love going to church! And when I remember what I love about the gospel—like feeling the Holy Ghost, for example—I feel more inspired to follow through with my spiritual habits, like going to the temple, reading my scriptures, and praying to Heavenly Father.

Because life can be so busy, it can be easy to forget these simple things we love. But regularly reminding myself of the reasons why I live and love the gospel of Jesus Christ helps me renew my spiritual goals that will bring me closer to Him and Heavenly Father.

## Setting New Spiritual Goals

At the beginning of each year, I like to reevaluate my spiritual goals by writing down New Year’s resolutions. If you’re also doing a bit of self-reflection and considering how you want to improve your relationship with Christ during this new year, ask yourself this question:

“Why do I love the gospel of Jesus Christ?”

Sister Ann M. Dibb, former Second Counselor in the Young Women General Presidency, explained that “our love for the gospel grows as we experience the love of our Father in Heaven and the peace promised by the Savior as we show Him we are willing to obey and follow Him.”<sup>1</sup>

Knowing why you love the gospel will help you feel and recognize the love that Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ have for you. This mindset will also help you feel less overwhelmed when you’re striving to set and reach your spiritual goals.

My “why” for living and loving the gospel of Jesus Christ includes the knowledge that families can be together forever and the peace I feel after a vulnerable prayer to Heavenly Father.

Whatever your “why” is, hold to it—it will give you the spiritual momentum you need to become a better disciple of Jesus Christ.

## Living Your “Why”

Once I recognized *why* I was living the gospel, the way I went about setting my spiritual goals changed. I stopped thinking about what I was *failing* to do and became more focused on what I *could* do. I remembered that I live the gospel because I love my Savior.

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said: “We need to accept that the commandments of God aren’t just a long list of good ideas. . . . They are divine counsel, based on eternal truths, given to bring ‘peace in

this world, and eternal life in the world to come’ [Doctrine and Covenants 59:23].”<sup>2</sup>

Following through with my spiritual goals reminds me of who I am: a divine child of heavenly parents. That principle gives me the courage to face my anxieties and weaknesses through Jesus Christ (see Ether 12:27).

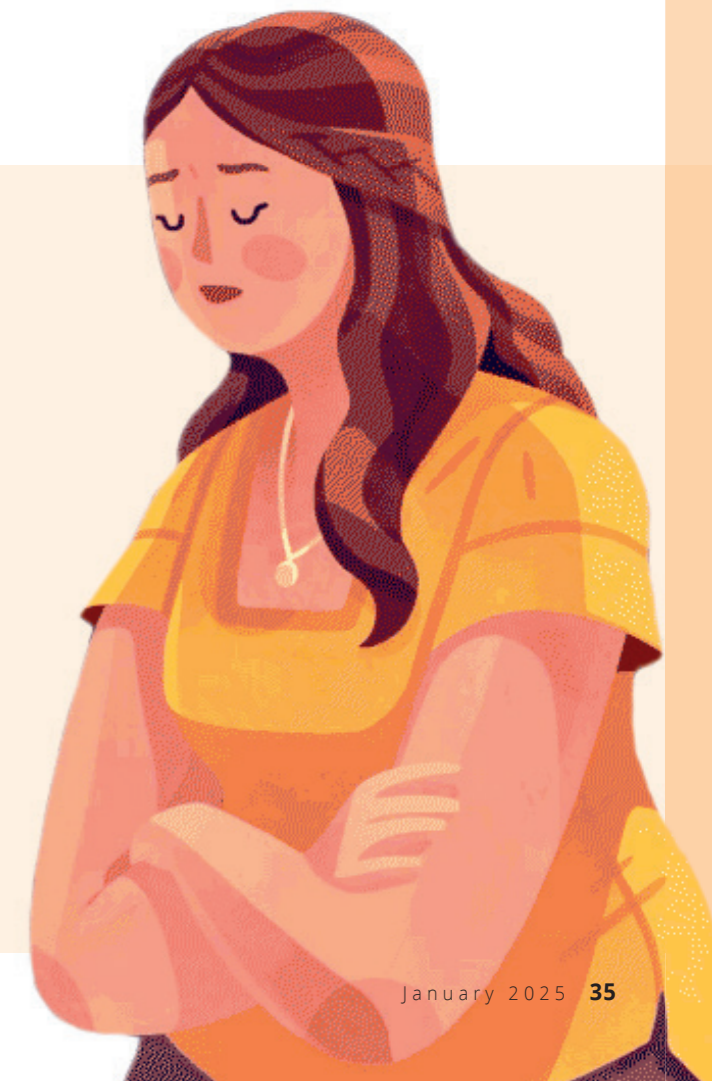
President Russell M. Nelson taught that “the Lord does not expect perfection from us at this point in our eternal progression. But He does expect us to become increasingly pure.”<sup>3</sup> So I am trying my best every day to stay close to Jesus Christ and remember why I choose to follow Him. ■

### NOTES

1. Ann M. Dibb, “I Know It. I Live It. I Love It,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2012, 11.
2. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Living the Gospel Joyful,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2014, 122.
3. Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” *Liahona*, May 2019, 68.

*Here are a few ideas for simple spiritual goals that can help you feel closer to the Savior this year:*

- Share your testimony of a gospel principle you feel strongly about on social media or with a loved one.
- Pray and counsel with Heavenly Father whenever you feel sad.
- Set a specific scripture-reading goal that you can follow through on.
- Use Church resources like *Come, Follow Me* to help you study.
- Create something that reflects your feelings about the gospel, like an art piece, a journal entry, or a social media post.



# Can I Really Trust the Prophet's Guidance?



By Savanna Cummings

I had always chosen to follow the prophet, but could I trust him in this instance?

**W**hen I got the call that I would be evacuated from my mission, I was upset and confused.

Several months before I was supposed to be released, the First Presidency decided to send me and several other missionaries home based on what I thought were only rumors of a possible international conflict. There wasn't any evidence that anything was going to happen.

I didn't think there was anything to worry about.

## Questioning Inspiration

I had always wanted to serve a mission and had worked so hard to accomplish that goal. Money was tight, but I found a job that helped me earn enough to pay for my mission. When I opened my call, it felt so right, and I knew it came from God.

Then, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was reassigned to a mission in Utah for nine months before I made it overseas to my original assignment. I was relieved and overjoyed to finally be where God had originally called me to be.

Then, after just a few months of being there, I was suddenly whisked away from the people and country that I loved. I felt like everything was being taken away from me.

I felt betrayed. I sincerely questioned whether this was an inspired choice.

Begrudgingly, I flew home to Texas. My evacuation was so unexpected that my dad and siblings weren't even at the airport to welcome me home.

## A Blessing of Safety

Just a few days after I left my mission, I was shocked when a dangerous conflict broke out close to where I had been serving. In that moment, I realized that following the prophet had kept me safe in a very real way. I was overcome with gratitude for the prophet and his inspiration.

I made a promise to myself that I would always heed what the prophet said, even if it didn't make sense in the moment.

Elder Ulisses Soares of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles recently said: "Having prophets is a sign of God's love for His children. They make known the promises and the true nature of God and of Jesus Christ to Their people."<sup>1</sup>

I really do believe that President Russell M. Nelson is the mouthpiece of the Lord. He works directly with Heavenly Father and the Savior to lead us to safety and give us hope and direction during challenging times.

## The Blessings of Following the Prophet

If you're still wondering whether the prophet is called of God, my advice is to act on his invitations. Try rereading President Nelson's recent conference talks and studying the scriptures he recommends. Act on his invitations and study the blessings he promises alongside those invitations.

Elder Soares also taught, "By following [the prophets], our lives are happier and less complicated, our difficulties and problems are easier to bear, and we create a spiritual armor around us."<sup>2</sup>

I have seen these blessings in my life as I've followed the prophet's counsel. I know that these blessings are available to everyone who puts their trust in God and His prophet. ■

*The author is from Texas, USA.*

### NOTES

1. Ulisses Soares, "Prophets Speak by the Power of the Holy Spirit," *Liahona*, May 2018, 99.
2. Ulisses Soares, "Prophets Speak by the Power of the Holy Spirit," 99.

ILLUSTRATION BY KYLEE BODILY