

NEW ZEALAND LOCAL PAGES

AREA SEVENTY MESSAGE

Increasing Personal Faith in Christ

By Elder Adolf Johansson

One of my favourite hymns is hymn number 220, “Lord, I Would Follow Thee”.

The words of this hymn echo my desire to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and be a true disciple. To love the Lord is to follow the path He has shown us through living prophets and apostles. There are times when life seems to overwhelm us, but our faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to His commandments give us strength beyond our own.

I remember many years ago as a returned missionary not yet married, I sat at home wondering what the future held for me. I did not know what I wanted to do with my life; I had no clear vision of what my future would be. I felt alone and somewhat overwhelmed. Looking across the room, I saw a semi-nary video on the shelf, and felt a strong impression to watch it. It was a video of President Ezra Taft Benson speaking; his words stirred my soul to tears. I cannot remember all he said, but I remember President Benson

quoting from 3 Nephi 13:33: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”

These words seemed to strike my heart. I determined more earnestly to seek the kingdom of God first in all that I did. I knew that if I sought to build up God’s kingdom first, all my needs would be met.

It has been over 22 years since that experience, and I have witnessed the Lord’s promises come to pass in my life and the lives of my family. He has blessed me with a loving wife who loves the Lord and desires to serve Him to the end. The Lord has blessed me with employment allowing my wife to stay home and nurture our children. He has granted our family the opportunity to serve in His kingdom in many different callings. As a family we have seen the hand of the Lord bless us as we seek to build up His kingdom first. Increasing personal faith in Jesus Christ is not a one-day event, but rather



Elder Adolf Johansson

a lifetime of service to God and His children.

To a rich young man Jesus gave this divine invitation: “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).

To increase our personal faith in Jesus Christ, we must let go of anything that is preventing us from following Him with full

purpose of heart. The young man went away sorrowful because he had great possessions (see Matthew 19:22). Your test of faith may not be forsaking great possessions. It may be attitude, unrighteous desires, inappropriate traditions, or it could be a culture of pride. Whatever it may be, you know what the Lord is asking of you. Do not go away

sorrowful, but come and be perfected in Him.

If we are to be perfect, we must give up all that is holding us back from a full and complete commitment to follow Jesus Christ. Ours is the opportunity to heed the Master's call, "Come . . . follow me" with a resounding, "Lord, I would follow thee".

I know that God lives and He hears and answers the prayers of all His children. God has commanded that all men everywhere repent and believe in Jesus Christ. And whoso believeth in Jesus Christ and is baptized, the same will be saved (see 3 Nephi 11:33). Of this I bear witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

LOCAL PAGES

Families Are Forever

By Fei Ucunibaravi

Thirty-five years ago we knelt in the New Zealand temple to be sealed for time and eternity. A year later our first child was born, followed by five other children within twelve years. Then, after fourteen years of marriage, my husband passed away.

A few weeks after the funeral, the reality of the situation hit me. How was I going to raise my children by myself? I got on my knees and cried to the Lord with my fears. Little by little my prayers were answered. First I was reminded that families can be together forever. I decided to focus on raising our children in the gospel.

I set goals that our children would know and love the Lord and would be fed, educated, loved, and raised in the gospel. My husband and I had established a tradition of having early-morning devotional and scripture reading, and never missed family home evening. We also had family council

and personal priesthood interviews with each family member.

We live about two miles from the main road and had to walk along a gravel road to the main road to catch transport to go to school, church or anywhere else. It was a rewarding challenge for me to take the children to church every Sunday. Seeing them grow in the gospel was pleasing to me. For afternoon firesides on Sunday we would take our lunch with us, as we could not travel back home between meetings. And because I was either Young Women president or Primary president, my children never missed mid-week youth meetings.

As the children grew I felt the need of priesthood presence at home. With six children I found it difficult to handle some of the issues that started to appear. I went on my knees again and earnestly asked the Lord for someone to help me. I knew He would provide an answer, but I didn't know how. He came to my rescue by sending a

couple who had no children to be my children's mentors. They were young, newly converted to the Church, and enthusiastic in serving the Lord. They lived thirteen miles from my home, with the young man serving as a branch president in a small branch about twenty-five miles from where they lived. Once a month they would travel the round trip to our home. Every fast Sunday we would have our priesthood interviews with Brother Wakolo (who is the Area Seventy now) and then end our fast together. Brother and Sister Wakolo visited with us and became part of our family. They bought a house not far from our home, and we were able to spend more time with them. As my children were interviewed by Brother Wakolo, they set goals to complete seminary, complete education, serve missions, and marry in the temple.

All of my children have now served missions. The four older children have completed university, have married in the temple, and have families of their own. Two have yet to complete their tertiary education, and I am still relying on the Lord for His guiding hand to help me in completing my mission. Looking back, I feel it was a pleasure raising my children and sacrificing to achieve our goals. Temple visits were my priority, as I would be rejuvenated and ready to tackle another year of nurturing and raising these children.

This experience has been educational, and I call it my second school, because I did it alone without my eternal companion. Knowing he is on the other side serving his mission and cheering us on is comforting and reassuring. I am on the right path, preparing our eternal family here in this life for the next life. ■

A Bag of Kumala

By Milika Taito

In 2006, I was the Relief Society president in the Nasinu 2nd Ward, Suva Fiji Stake.

The ward had a sister listed who was less active, and no one had been able to find her or where she lived. One day I met Darren and his sister Janice, and they told me their mother was also a member of the Church, but no one ever visited her. We went to visit, and found she was Eileen Chand—the sister we had been looking for years before. We continued to visit, though her husband would not allow her to come to church.

In April 2014, I asked Janice what we could do to help her mother. With a big smile, she told me it was her mother's birthday that Wednesday. I arranged with our new Relief Society president, Rosa, to visit Eileen on Wednesday and she agreed. With much prayer I asked the Lord for His help. I thought of baking a cake, but then that thought faded away.

Heading home on Wednesday after picking the kumala (sweet potatoes) from Church College, my daughter called Rosa to remind her

about our visit. Rosa asked if we could postpone the visit till the next day. I felt that we needed to go right then, so we invited the missionary sisters to accompany us. We picked them up and drove through the heavy rain to visit Eileen. She was home with her children. We sang to her, wished her happy birthday and gave her a card and a bag of kumala.

The missionaries shared some scriptures. We bore testimony that nothing is impossible with the Lord, and reminded her that if they fasted and prayed, the Lord would surely help them.

The following Sunday, Eileen and her children arrived at church. As I hugged her, she told me that after our visit her husband was lost for words, because kumala is their favourite food. He had promised many times to bring some home, but never had. He was touched deeply to see the bag of kumala that we had given them. While she was there we arranged for visiting teachers and home teachers to be assigned to their family.

I testify that when we hear the still, small voice and act on it straightaway, miracles will

happen and you will feel the joy and happiness in your heart. I have been greatly blessed with an increase of my faith as I commit myself in this great work, rescuing our beloved sisters. ■

Changing Lives

By James E. Kerns

In 1965 a young man in Fiji began acting strangely. Every Sunday he put on a white shirt and tie and disappeared for long periods of time. His sisters became curious about where he went, and they secretly followed their brother the next Sunday.

They were surprised to see him enter the Suva Branch meetinghouse of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They peeped inside, and saw activities, music, and young people having fun. The girls agreed that it looked like a great place to be, and decided to attend church. Their brother was surprised the next Sunday when his two sisters entered.

His 15-year-old sister, Josafini, began meeting with the missionaries, and was soon baptized. Several years later she obtained a job working for a credit union. A young man working for the same company found it necessary to come to the credit union to obtain an advance on his pay. John's visits became more and more frequent because of his interest in the girl who waited upon him. He asked her for a date, and she flatly refused. He asked again and again, but was always politely turned down.

One day to his surprise and delight, the girl accepted his offer of a date, but explained that it would be on her terms. "You can pick me up, and we'll go to church," she said. "Church" turned out to be the Suva Branch meetinghouse. The young man escorted the girl to the front steps of the church,

but would go no further. "I'll wait for you here," he told her.

She went inside. He patiently waited. The activity took three hours. This became their weekly date. He escorted her to church, she went inside, and he waited. He was satisfied to be with her, but he wouldn't go inside. He was a strong Catholic. He had even considered becoming a Catholic priest, but his interest in the girl had erased those thoughts from his mind.

By now the young girl was 18 years old. Her friend never entered the chapel, but because of his faithfulness and attentiveness she agreed to his marriage proposal, and her family gave their consent.

John and Josafini Bennion soon had two small girls. Every Sunday John encouraged his wife to go to church, and helped get the children ready to go with her. He declined all invitations to accompany them, even though he had stopped attending his own church. He assured his wife that he would stay home, clean the house, and have dinner ready when they returned.

One day when his wife returned from church, two missionaries accompanied her. John invited them to lunch. They asked if they could return the following week and begin giving the missionary discussions. John agreed, but was sceptical when they told him Joseph Smith had seen God and Jesus Christ and had been able to translate some golden plates. From that time on John made a point of being absent or busy whenever the elders called by. He hoped the missionaries would get the message and give up on him, but they tried to meet with him again and again. With careful planning he was always able to avoid them.

Another appointment was set for a Thursday evening at 8:00pm, but a cyclone hit Fiji prior to

the appointment. During the cyclone, power was knocked out to the whole city, and there was widespread flooding. John felt confident that the missionaries would not come. No one in their right mind would go out on such a night.

At 8:00pm sharp there was a knock on the door. “To this day,” John says, “I can still see those two missionaries standing in the rain, soaking wet. It was a turning point for me. If these guys can brave the cyclone and downed power lines, there must be something in this for me,” he thought.

John sent the elders upstairs to dry and to wrap themselves in towels. The family began ironing and drying the wet clothing. By candlelight the elders gave John a discussion, and challenged him to be baptized.

“Who could say no?” John says. Everyone went up into the mountains the following Saturday, and John was baptized in a stream.

John was a very shy individual. The next day at church, he chose to sit in the back row where he wouldn’t be noticed. To his great surprise and embarrassment the branch president called upon him to say the closing prayer. He had never prayed in his life. He had come from a church where the priest did all the praying. He didn’t know how. He refused.

After the meeting he told his wife he wasn’t going back to church. “I don’t know where the Spirit went that I’d felt when the missionaries were teaching me,” John said, “but I stayed away for eight years.”

One day while working, John almost blacked out. For the next 3–4 months he couldn’t work. He lost weight. Every second day he had to be rushed to the hospital, but the doctors could never find anything wrong.

One Saturday he had another attack. He asked his brother to take him to the hospital. While John waited at the hospital, a voice said to him, “Seek the blessings of the priesthood.” The voice repeated the message three times. He didn’t know anything about the priesthood; but he asked his brother to get the branch president.

Five minutes down the road, John’s brother met the branch president coming to the hospital. The branch president administered a blessing to John, and then left him alone in the room. John could not control his shaking body. He was in tears. A doctor examined him and declared, “You’re OK.” And he was. John told his surprised wife, “Tomorrow we’ll go downtown and go shopping—for church clothes.”

That Sunday John returned to church. He walked in and sat down in the third row from the front. Within eight months he was sustained as a counsellor in the branch presidency. Then he was sustained as branch president. John and his family moved to Tonga, where he was sustained as a counsellor in an English-speaking ward. He became president of a new branch.

The family moved back to Fiji. One year later he was called to be bishop of the Lautoka Ward. Two years later the stake was dissolved, and he was called as district president of the Lautoka District. John and Kula moved to Suva, and he later served as first counsellor in the Suva Fiji Stake presidency. “I have always felt that the Lord prepared my wife so that I could join the Church,” Brother Bennion says. “In 1989 I took my family to the temple. I regret the eight years that I missed, but I can still see in my mind those two elders standing at my door on a pitch-black night, soaking wet and clutching their scriptures. I’ll never forget them. They changed my life.” ■

Sealed for Eternity

By Ilaisa Koroi

In June 2014 we were sealed as husband and wife for time and all eternity, together with our three children.

When we prepared for the ordinance I could only imagine

what it would be like, as I had never attended a live sealing before. As we entered the sealing room, it was like heaven was set up right there in Fiji. Tears flowed as I looked around the

room at those who were present to witness our sealing.

When I knelt with my wife at the altar I thought I felt complete. But when our three children were brought in and they were sealed to us forever, I cannot describe the spirit that was with my whole family at

The Koroi family, with President and Sister Davis



IMAGE COURTESY OF ALENA VUNIDUVU

that moment. Our children shed tears of joy, and my heart was grateful for what had just taken place. As we looked into the mirrors on the walls, our tears of joy reflected the eternal happiness we felt.

I am grateful to continue being taught the purpose of life,

the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and Heavenly Father's plan for His children as we frequently visit the temple and feel the peaceful atmosphere it provides. It truly helps to increase my faith, and as we return often to the temple, my faith will continue to be strengthened. ■

Jr. said although he was nursing an injury he felt confident that the Lord would help him. Once the gun sounded, he quickly got into his stride, and won by a clear margin. He added this medal to the Auckland Secondary School and North Island Secondary School 100 and 200m gold medal performances, and an Oceania silver medal. Although he was the favourite to be the New Zealand Secondary School champion, his commitment to keep the Sabbath day holy meant an early flight home to attend sacrament meeting with his family, forgoing the Sunday final, despite pressure from his team and club to run on Sunday.

For Peauope Jr., who recently returned from the World Junior Athletic Championship held in Oregon (USA) representing Tonga, putting athletics aside for two years to serve a mission is not a sacrifice but a decision he had already made early in his life. Although he has been offered scholarships by the Australian Institute of Sport and the New Zealand Rugby Union, his immediate goal is to enter the mission field. He will be the second missionary serving in his

Perseverance and Priorities

By Adam Dennison

Most 19-year-old sprinters would leap at the chance to train at the Australian Institute of Sport, or to be a part of the wider training group for the New Zealand Rugby sevens team. But not Peauope "Poko" Suli Jr., an elder in the Massey ward of Henderson Stake. To him, serving the Lord as a missionary comes first.

Track and field is a way of life for the Suli family. Dad, Peauope Suli Sr., represented Tonga at the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games in the 100m event, and was the Tongan and Oceania sprinting champion. His children train six days a week.

Peauope Suli Jr., inspired by photos of his father at the Olympic Games, asked his

father if he could train him to be a sprinter. His father replied that it would take a lot of work, dedication, and sacrifice, but if Peauope Jr. was willing, he would train him. Peauope Jr. agreed to work hard, and has been training since the age of six, with the goal of one day representing Tonga at the Olympics.

Peauope Jr. did not win races or medals early on in his track career. But through persistence, hard work, and determination, his natural talent began to show, and the results started to come on the track.

This year Peauope Jr. became the NZ under 20 club champion in the 100m race with a best time of 10.6 seconds. Peauope

family, with older sister Kato Suli currently assigned to the New Zealand Wellington Mission.

The Lord comes first in the Suli home, and after Peauope completes his mission he will then return to athletics, with an eye on the 100m final at the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. ■

A WORD OF WISDOM

Mental Illness

Studies show that 45–50% of people experience a mental illness in their lifetime,¹ and members of the Church are no less susceptible. Ignorant attitudes towards mental illness can restrict one’s ability to seek help or appropriately support sufferers. Elder Holland taught, “These afflictions are some of the realities of mortal life, and there should be no more shame in acknowledging them than in acknowledging a battle with high blood pressure.”²

Like other vital organs in the body, the brain is subject to vulnerabilities and risks of malfunction. Elder Alexander B. Morrison taught: “We still do not know exactly how the brain works nor

exactly how and why parts of it may malfunction. . . . Many mental illnesses result from chemical disorders in the brain, just as diabetes results from a chemical disorder in the pancreas.” He encouraged those affected “to get a complete assessment and proper diagnosis . . . understand the causes . . . get proper medication and learn behavioral and cognitive techniques that are part of the healing process.”³

Similarly, Elder Holland advised: “Seek the advice of reputable people with certified training, professional skills, and good values. Be honest with them about your history and your struggles. . . . If you had appendicitis, God would expect you to seek a priesthood blessing *and* get the best medical care available. So too with emotional disorders. Our Father in Heaven expects us to use *all* of the marvelous gifts He has provided in this glorious dispensation.”⁴

Ultimately, the Atonement of Jesus Christ will bring healing from mental illness, but “until that hour when Christ’s consummate gift is evident to us all, may we live by faith, hold fast to hope, and show ‘compassion one of another’ [1 Peter 3:8].”⁵ ■

NOTES

1. See various reports from the World Health Organisation, the US National Institute of Mental Health, and the 2009 Australian Government Department of Health study “The Mental Health of Australians 2—Prevalence of Mental Disorders in the Australian Population”.
2. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Like a Broken Vessel,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 40.
3. Alexander B. Morrison, “Myths about Mental Illness,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2005, 32, 33.
4. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Like a Broken Vessel,” 41.
5. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Like a Broken Vessel,” 42.

