

NEW ZEALAND LOCAL PAGES

AREA LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

Stand Up—Be True

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As a young boy, I enjoyed reading faith-promoting experiences of our prophets when they were young. One of my favorite experiences comes from the life of President Joseph F. Smith, sixth President of the Church. Joseph F. Smith was raised in a single-parent home. His father, Hyrum, was martyred at Carthage Jail with the Prophet Joseph Smith. Little Joseph F. was only six years old at the time.

Years later, at the age of 19, Joseph F. Smith was returning home from a mission with a group of other missionaries. His wagon-train journey took him through a dangerous area where enemies of the Church had vowed to kill the Mormons.

I quote now from a biography of President Smith:

“One day after the little company of wagons had . . . made their camp, a company of drunken men rode into the camp on horseback, cursing

and swearing and threatening to kill any ‘Mormons’ that came within their path. . . . Some of the brethren when they heard them coming had cautiously gone into the brush down the creek, out of sight. . . . Joseph F. was a little distance from the camp gathering wood for the fire when these men rode up. When he saw them, he said, his first thought was to do what the other brethren had done, and seek shelter in the trees and in flight. Then the thought came to him, ‘Why should I run from these fellows?’ With that thought in mind he boldly marched up with his arms full of wood to the campfire. As he was about to deposit his wood, one of the ruffians, still with his pistols in his hands and pointing at the youthful Elder, and cursing as only a drunken rascal can, declaring that it was his duty to exterminate every ‘Mormon’ he should meet, demanded

in a loud, angry voice, ‘Are you a “Mormon”?’

“Without a moment of hesitation and looking the ruffian in the eye, Joseph F. Smith boldly answered, ‘Yes, siree; dyed in the wool; true blue, through and through.’

“The answer was given boldly and without any sign of fear, which completely disarmed the belligerent man, and in his bewilderment, he grasped the missionary by the hand and said: “Well, you are the — — — pleasantest man I ever met! Shake, young fellow, I am glad to see a man that stands up for his convictions.’

“Joseph F. [Smith] said in later years that he fully expected to receive the charge from this man’s pistols, but he could take no other course even though it seemed that his death was to be the result.”¹

This incredible act of courage has been an inspiration to me over the years. Joseph F. Smith was unafraid to stand up and be true—“true to the faith that [his] parents [had] cherished” and “true to the truth for which martyrs have perished.”² And yes, his father, Hyrum, was one of those martyrs.

Our test of faith in this life may never be to defend our convictions while staring down the barrel of an evil man’s gun. More likely, it will be to live the gospel with conviction when there are so many distractions and enticing roads that lead nowhere.

Deep and Abiding Connections

By Bronson Burgess

It didn't take me very long to decide whether I was going to serve a mission. I was fortunate to have a father and extended family members whose direct examples stood as evidence of the great rewards that result from obeying the prophet's voice in that regard. I was called to serve in what was then the Fiji Suva Mission, and now that I have been home for seven years, I can say with full surety that every promised blessing they told me would come from serving a full-time mission was fulfilled. To my continued amazement, my life is still blessed every day because of it.

A central component as to why a mission is so worthwhile is the deep and abiding connections you make with the people you meet and teach. I fondly remember the first person I ever baptised: an 11-year old boy named Tutus Sosolito Fred. I did question for a second if one so young was prepared to live what he had been taught—or even understood it for that matter—but his calm temperament and attentive nature showed me he was, and I soon felt assured it was his appointed time to join the true Church. I never knew what happened

Knowing Who We Are

Our test of faith in this life may never be to defend our convictions while staring down the barrel of an evil man's gun. More likely, it will be to live the gospel with conviction when there are so many distractions and enticing roads that lead nowhere. We need to know with certainty, as President Smith did, who we are and why we are here.

Our beloved prophet President Russell M. Nelson has often reminded us who we are. He said: "We are children of God. Our potential is unlimited. Our inheritance is sacred. May we always honor that heritage—in every thought and deed."³

The Sons of Mosiah

The sons of Mosiah were reminded by an angel, in a resounding way, of God's great plan of happiness. Their conversion and subsequent service in the kingdom of God is inspiring. They stand as powerful examples of overcoming, repenting, serving, and succeeding. "They were men of sound understanding"⁴ who learned how to open the windows of heaven. And what were the keys to their spiritual success? Listen to this description from Alma 17:2–3:

"They had searched the scriptures diligently. . . .

. . . They had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting . . . and when

they taught"—I would add, when they served—they did so "with power and authority of God."

This is a great pattern for us to follow. Simply do three things each day:

1. Read the scriptures (I would recommend, specifically, reading the Book of Mormon).
2. Pray individually and as families.
3. Find someone to serve. Make a positive difference in someone else's life. (There are so many ways to do this—a kind act, a thoughtful word, even a smile can brighten someone's day.)

These simple measures, if done each day, will help us to stay on the covenant path.

As we do these simple things, we will be strengthened in our desire to enter the house of the Lord. We will be spiritually enlightened as we partake of the sacrament each week. We will become devoted disciples of Jesus Christ. We will become covenant keepers.

Let us strive each day to remember that we are sons and daughters of God and let us "always remember Him."⁵ ■

NOTES

1. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith: Sixth President of the Church* (1938), 188–89.
2. "True to the Faith," *Hymns*, no. 254.
3. Russell M. Nelson, "We Are Children of God," *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 87.
4. Alma 17:2.
5. See Moroni 4:3; Moroni 5:2; Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79.



My convert, Tutus, was now a missionary himself.

to him after I was transferred out of his area because there's no electricity or postal service there to keep in contact. However, now and then I'll look at a photo of his baptismal service, and memories of our interactions will come back to me.

That photo of his baptismal service has hung in the hallway of the New Zealand Missionary Training Centre for the last seven years. Recently, staff there contacted me and said they had come to realise one of their new

missionaries was the same boy from my photo.

My convert, Tutus, was now a missionary himself.

They were kind enough to invite me to meet with him. Our reunion at the MTC was short as I had classes to attend that day, but it was great. We hugged, and in our excitement, we must've randomly shaken each other's hands about four times throughout our conversation. We noted that we never actually thought we'd see each

other again and how great the circumstances were for our meeting. I told him how proud I was of him for developing his testimony further and that acting on that testimony by sharing it with others through a mission was the right choice. For me, the feeling I had was somewhat reminiscent of how Alma felt upon reuniting with the sons of Mosiah:

“Alma did rejoice exceedingly to see his brethren; and what added more to his joy, they were still his brethren

in the Lord; yea, and they had waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth; for they were men of a sound understanding and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God” (Alma 17:2).

The joy we shared stemmed directly from the fact that we were able to stand before each other—I, a former missionary who had been on the Lord’s errand, and he, a precious soul who had converted to the Lord’s Church and was now on the Lord’s errand—and say that even after all this time had passed, and despite our own mistakes, we had both remained true and faithful to the covenants and commandments I had invited him to live all those years ago.

For a time following my mission, I wouldn’t have been able to feel that way during such a reunion. In fact, before a trip to Utah some years ago, a friend asked me if I would be visiting my mission president. I had no interest in seeing him. I felt if we did meet, he would see a less faithful version of the missionary he once knew.

I hadn’t done anything that would prevent me from holding a current temple recommend, but many things weren’t right. Neither did I doubt the truths and revelations I had received, but when I tried to recall them to memory, they were blurry and didn’t stir up as much conviction within

If we press forward in the faith, our meeting will be sweet and we will be able to hear the Lord say: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:21).

me. I questioned how I could have suddenly found myself feeling so far from God because I had been doing the same amount of good I had always done.

Therein lay the problem: I had been doing the same amount of good I had always done. I had become complacent in my faith, coasting on previous sacrifices and acts of faith, and not keeping the fire alive by making new ones.

The mistake many returned missionaries make is that they want to maintain the level of spirituality they attained during their mission. But their goals should be aimed for something much higher than that. Instead of maintaining their faith, they should seek to build on top of it, and become someone even greater than

the missionary they once were. To survive spiritually post-mission, they need to be doing even more than they did for those 18 or 24 months of full-time service.

Fundamental to generating the spiritual power to grow beyond the people we were as missionaries is the consistent effort to continue those daily practices of studying the Book of Mormon and accompanying it with sincere prayer. For over a year I have read from the Book of Mormon every day and testify that when we familiarise ourselves with the way God speaks in its pages, we’ll be more equipped to recognise that same voice in our lives. The Plan of Salvation at work around us will also be more apparent and will put both our struggles and ambitions into the right perspective.

Most importantly, the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ will begin to take effect within us. I myself have felt a surge of power to lengthen my stride in service, tackle personal challenges with optimism, and have guilt I once carried swept away. We are so fortunate that our God is a merciful one and has provided His Son Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for our sins. Through repenting and redirecting my will to align with His, I have become an even better man than I was at the end my mission and find

myself entrusted with more opportunities to pronounce blessings upon people and assist in His work. This current course can only continue for as long as I remain obedient, but I do see that the Atonement of Jesus Christ is truly enabling in helping us to become all that we can be.

If we don't continue to live the principles we invited our investigators and converts to live on our missions, we make hypocrites of ourselves and the truth is not in us. I envision many of them still retain an image of us as a missionary in their homes and use it as motivation when faced with difficult choices between right and wrong. The extent of our love for them will always be reflected in our obedience. If wrong choices have been made, however, even grave ones, the way is prepared for us to repent and be made anew.

While I was privileged to meet with one of my converts following my mission, the day will come when we will meet again with all our converts and with the Lord. If we press forward in the faith, our meeting will be sweet and we will be able to hear the Lord say: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matthew 25:21). ■

A Mystery Message in the Temple

By Barbra Toleafoa

It was a few days before we found out that she had died ...

A couple of days before, everything was fine. My husband Leroy and I were sitting quietly in the celestial room holding hands when both of us were suddenly filled with the Spirit. We were happily looking forward to the arrival of our first child. I had asked Leroy to pray for us because I was feeling quite emotional. I cannot adequately express how strong the Spirit was during that sweet prayer.

At the conclusion, my husband held me close and asked me if I had heard anything. I had not. I asked

what he meant; he said he'd heard a soft voice saying, "She loves you and she misses you."

Though we knew we had felt the Spirit during that tender moment, we didn't know what the message meant. A few days later, I experienced incredible pain. We rushed to the doctor. We were so scared. The doctor checked for our baby's heartbeat ... but there was none.

Words cannot express the agonizing pain we felt. We learned our baby had passed away a few days earlier, around the time of our Spirit-filled experience in the temple. Finally, we understood who 'she' was. Our



Through prayer and fasting, our tragedy was turned into a blessing of faith and testimony.

DANIELLE D' COSTA

precious unborn daughter was saying goodbye.

The effects of this experience weighed heavily in my heart. I felt

lost, discouraged and depressed. There were days when I simply did not want to see or talk to anyone. I isolated myself. I pushed my husband

and family away, and I stopped going to work. I was angry that someone so precious had been ripped from me, and many times I asked Heavenly



Our daughter is now a one-year old toddler and she's a constant source of joy in our lives.

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Father why this had happened—did He not love us?

The truth was I didn't want to know why we had to go through this trial. I was angry. Everyone around me reached out to help me, but in my grief, I made it too hard for them and for myself.

It was a long, hard process to peace. But, over time the knowledge that families are forever gave me the strength I needed to put one foot in front the other. Leroy was my rock. He encouraged me to keep going, even with the simple things like attending church and fulfilling my calling. He led by example, and I found great strength observing him.

Over time I came to humble myself and I stopped asking, "Why?"

This was a huge trial for our family, but I now realize it is in our trials where we truly see and feel the love of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Through prayer and fasting, our tragedy was turned into a blessing of faith and testimony.

I had been taught the plan of salvation at a young age, and I believed it was true. But through this trial I have gained a strong, immovable testimony and a deep love for the Saviour and His plan of happiness.

We were overseas when we lost our daughter. The heartache of having to bury her so far away from home

was enormous. Yet the covenants Leroy and I had made in the temple when we were sealed became sweeter to me than they'd ever been. I felt that even though her body was far away, we are an eternal family. Keeping our covenants means death cannot separate us forever.

Six months after losing our baby, we were blessed to learn I was pregnant again. Our daughter is now a

one-year old toddler and she's a constant source of joy in our lives.

I believe that if we continue to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and stay on the covenant path, that we will be reunited with our baby girl, whom we named Pearl Suvania Sina-Lewa Toleafoa.

There is so much joy and peace that comes from knowing families are eternal. ■

Auckland Volunteers #LightTheWorld for Kids in Developing Nations

Mormon Newsroom

Volunteers from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Samaritan's Purse, Operation Christmas Child and other groups boxed gifts in downtown Auckland on Saturday 1 December 2018 for children in developing nations.

Around 400 hygiene kits were assembled by the volunteers to kick off the 2018 Christmas season's #LightTheWorld initiative.

The personal hygiene items assembled included combs, toothbrushes, face cloths, jandals and hair ties.

These items were purchased using funds donated by members

of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

They were packed with other gifts such as notepads, pens and toys provided by the Samaritan's Purse's Operation Christmas Child staff and shipped overseas to be delivered to children in developing nations.

#LightTheWorld is a global Christmas initiative launched by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints encouraging people around the world to serve others during the holiday season. The "Light the World" campaign, which was in its third year during this activity, ran through the

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end of December 2018. 2018's theme was, "Give as He Gave," and invited people to follow the example of the Saviour Jesus Christ, "the light of the world" (John 8:12).

President Russell M. Nelson has invited members to minister to each other in a "newer, holier way"¹ by turning our focus from "How can I serve?" to "Whom can I serve?"

The service activity at the Church's Scotia Place meeting house was one of many similar activities across the world.

The worldwide day of service gives people an opportunity to find simple ways to serve, such as helping refugees or donating to charities. ■

NOTE

1. Russell M. Nelson, "Ministering," *Ensign*, May 2018, 100.

