

The Gospel News

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Happy &
Blessed
New Year!*

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New Year, New You?

By Sister Carolynn O'Connor

Whether you are starting your journey with Christ today or you have been on this path for many years, there is always room for change and improvement. This takes planning and careful consideration. It can also feel daunting at times. How can I possibly do everything I am supposed to do? Where is the time? Having a plan and setting small goals is the key to being successful with change.

Over the years in past issues, we have talked about the importance of setting goals. Many of you will be familiar with the acronym SMART goals-Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound. In my job as a Sales Director, I help our sales team set weekly SMART goals. Sometimes they change from week to week or quarter to quarter, but you always know where you are supposed to be in the process and then reflect on that progress the next week. If we did not set these weekly goals based on activity, such as the number of quotes or new companies we are reaching out to, we would not expect to reach our ultimate goal of actual units sold.

With serving God, there are a lot of things we know we "should" do to be righteous servants of God. The scripture is very clear, yet often we find ourselves reflecting on our lack of progress or righteousness and feeling guilty or displeased. These feelings, rather than being motivating, can further pull us away from the Lord and our mission. Personally, I don't think that God wants us to be angry at ourselves when we fail He is loving and kind and He wants us to pick ourselves back up and start again, to keep trying. He has clearly told us that we can do anything: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13). He has given us the tools to succeed.

So, this year, let's mix this up a little bit, and make our goals shorter, smarter, and more attainable. Regardless of where we are in our service, there are some things we can improve on. Let's try new things and see where we can build better habits, through repetition, that help us grow in our service to God. Let's find where we may be able to use the talents that God has given us and ways that we can show more LOVE.

To create achievable goals, break it down into 2 sections: small bi-weekly goals that change throughout the year, and larger more long-term goals. The objective for the short-term goals is to pick one and stick with it for a few weeks, then move on to another. Evaluate how it felt afterward. Did you enjoy doing it, did you receive a blessing? Is it something you can try to do more often throughout the rest of the year? Having success with these smaller goals will build confidence in working on the larger ones.

Suggestions for small weekly or biweekly goals—Pick one and stick with it for a few weeks then move on to another

- Call and have a conversation with a child in the branch
- Reach out to members that do not attend Church anymore
- Send a card to someone who works hard in your branch to thank them

(Continued on page 8)



We'll call 'em GOALS, not RESOLUTIONS, okay? That way, you can set them up for the rest of the year and feel better about doing good. Short term & Long term.

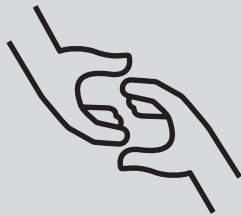
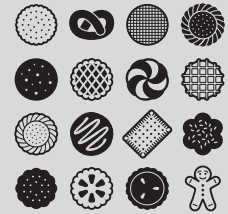


SHORT TERM: Spend time talking to 3 people after church who you normally don't talk to.

LONG TERM: Reach out to the IMOC, NAOC or other leadership to see where you can be used. Then follow through.



SHORT TERM: Make cookies for the oldest members in your branch. [In my branch, that'd be me ;-)]



LONG TERM: Team up with a friend and work on an outreach program.

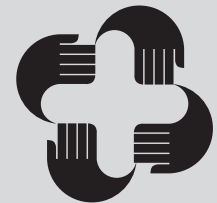


SHORT TERM: Dedicate your "screen time" to positive messages that bring you closer to God.

LONG TERM: Get back to MBA, Sunday School and Ladies Circle. We need to build ourselves back up.



SHORT TERM: Assist your card-writing committee with bringing cheer to those who are sick. It's the easiest "healthcare" program you can do.



BFTP Blast From The Past

By Sister Kellie Speck

FoNinety-seven years ago Apostle Vernon Chester wrote a Christmas and New Year's salutation to the Church from the Everglades, Florida. Excerpts from the letter:

Brother Vernon said there were about 300 Seminole left in the tribe. When he tried to speak to them they could not understand our language but he and his wife had a native man over for dinner. The man said they had no church or home, but made their living by trapping game and selling the hides. Brother Vernon said, "The native people camp in

the wildest parts of the woods which is nearly all swamp land and they make their own boats out of large trees cut in half. The white man has driven them until there is hardly any other land for them to stay in except the swamps. We all went out last Sunday to meet with them as the Chief told us he would have them all gathered together and we would hold some meetings but a storm came up before the time to meet and of course we could not stay... This chief's name is Joe Billie. He said he is

(Continued on page 11)

Chief Josie Billie and his wife Lucy Tiger and children ►



Purpose Statement

- To fulfill the plan of God by bringing salvation through Christ to all people.

Mission Statement

- The Church of Jesus Christ will teach the Gospel to all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things commanded by Jesus Christ, while working to draw Israel to Christ through efforts focused on the indigenous peoples of North, Central, and South America



Vision Statement

- Living and worshipping in unity and righteousness will result in the fullness of God's Spirit and power among the Saints, culminating in continuous growth of the Church and fulfillment of Christ's promises concerning His Kingdom on Earth.



"Lemonade in the Winter" By Brother Doug Obradovich

**"Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man."
(Matthew 15:11)**

Many consider certain things designated for certain times. I get that. However, I thoroughly enjoy a steaming cup of hot chocolate on a hot summer day as much as an iced cold lemonade in the winter.

Acceptance, tolerance, and flexibility can ready us for difference. Sometimes they arrive differently than expected. The saying advises, "If life deals you lemons, make lemonade." Difficult challenges rarely follow any schedule, and lemons just show up. When they appear in the winter, drink lemonade in January.

Two years ago, January 2020, this virus began to make news and within 2 months, brought life to a screeching halt. Some have confessed to feeling shame for experiencing debilitating fear. Others process such fear through denial in order to cope. I understand all of this, along with frustration, anger, discomfort, isolation, and even devastation for many.

In the verse above, Jesus was comparing the food intake of some religions against

the dangers of harsh and/or judgmental verbalizing. Taking literary license with my second-level application of this verse, this might be applied to challenging situations we incur and the internalization of them. It is not entirely the situation which works against us, but the way we deal with these occurrences that defile and/or destroy. We must accept the reality of our surroundings. We've all inherited peculiar times. And make no mistake, these are our times, and the lemons life has dealt us.

Paul wisely encourages, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13). I've long believed this addresses a spiritual means of processing life and not simply Paul's assertion that we can succeed at anything we attempt. For example, I cannot dunk a basketball, perform knee surgery, or "add one cubit" to my height. Instead, he provides a real plan of how to turn lemons into lemonade. Our choices include either giving in and giving up, or courageously embracing all challenges presented by inviting Christ into the fray. By doing so, we are promised His

empowerment: "Who strengtheneth me." This is no Pollyanna approach to life, but instead a faith-filled attack on life.

Some people have experienced crippling financial problems due to the pandemic. Others enduring these additional life stresses have faced life-threatening sickness, creating physical, emotional, and/or spiritual vulnerabilities. None of these situations were expected and certainly, none desired. But all can be endured. All can be overcome by powering forward "through Christ." These situations surround, but only we can relinquish the power to give access to our hearts, minds, and spirits. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, it is we who grant permission for them to infiltrate.

In similar speak to Jesus' words above, it's not what confronts our lives, but whether we let them travel through our beings that defile and/or destroy! When unwanted lemons turn up, take charge. Choose to sweeten their bitterness "through Christ" and fearlessly enjoy a cup of well-earned lemonade. Even in the winter.

GOSPEL BLOG SERIES Originally published on the Gospel Blog

Denying Self Indulgence *By Sister Michelle Watson*

How sinful can I be and still go to heaven? Have you ever wondered it? C'mon, admit it. You have. I unconsciously ask myself this question on a *daily basis*. I don't use these exact words. But my actions speak louder than words. How much can I get away with? How worldly can I be? How close can I get to the line that divides sin from holiness and still be OK with God?

All very wrongheaded questions. But I ask them. I don't use these exact words. But my actions speak louder than words. Getting wrapped up in sinful pleasures and lusts (self-indulgence) isn't something that many Christians do on purpose. It creeps in, bit by bit.

Self-Indulgence Gets Bigger and Bigger, Little by Little

Let's talk about the things we indulge in. What's your definition of an "indulgence"?

- A car with a big bow on it like in the commercials.
- The whole package of cookies gobbled in one sitting.
- Watching an entire season of my show in a weekend.
- A whole day to do whatever I choose.

We each imagine something different that appeals to us right now at this moment. And it hits us where our worldly appetite is most voracious.

The things I've listed aren't inherently sinful, so that's why I want to pose this question:

Self-indulgence is pretty much the opposite of self-denial, so does that make it unequivocally bad?

Is it OK to indulge a little? Or should we stay strictly in the zones of moderation and privation?

If you want my personal opinion, I think it's perfectly okay to "indulge" in innocent

pleasures and to feel joy. (I don't wanna be a lemon-juice Christian.) We use the word "indulge" because the thing feels like a special treat.

I also think it's *never* okay to indulge in evil things, even in moderation. Cheating on one test question is a sin. I don't have to cheat on 10 questions for it to cross the line into sinful territory. God doesn't want even a smidge of sin inside His children.

The harder part, though, is when those innocent pleasures (the ones I listed before) slide into sinful territory. Because they can and do slide.

How does that happen? At what point do they go from being fine to being sinful?

That new car with the bow? What if, eventually, I feel entitled to too many expensive doo-dads, and I'm dissatisfied if I don't get them?

The box of cookies. What if I look forward to those "reward" cookies so much that eating them is what anchors my whole week? (Church...not my anchor. Cookies are my anchor. Fast and pray? *Forget it!*)

I need my TV time to function. Read scripture? Oh, I never have time for that.

Me-time is sacred. As in more prized and plentiful than family time, God time, or service time.

See what I mean? Innocent indulgences can be habit-forming to a fault.

Self-Discipline Wins (So Says Scripture)

After studying some scripture on this, I found plenty of hearty warnings against self-indulgence and a bunch of praise for moderation (Alma 38:12) and even privation.

There are an inordinate number of scriptures with huge, flashing neon signs saying:

"Warning! Self-indulgence = Danger!"

(Shocker: I didn't find any scriptures that say "Warning! Self-discipline = Danger!")

When I throw off restraint and discipline and yield to selfish appetites, I may find pleasure, but it's temporary and hollow. Prov. 14:13 tells me that even when I laugh, my heart will be sad and "the end (result) of that mirth is heaviness."

The car is mine, the box of cookies is eaten, and my life isn't any better than it was before. My calendar is overflowing with me-time, and my energy cells are still blinking low. So, like an addict, I return again and again to that indulgence, never questioning whether or not it's the solution I need.

Besides living a shiftless, frivolous life and becoming a slave to my whims, are there other consequences to living a self-indulgent life? Here you go:

- **Poverty and ruin:** Prov. 21:17, 23:21-23
- **Worldliness:** 1 John 2:16, Mosiah 11:2
- **Spiritual barrenness and death:** Luke 8:14, 1 Tim. 5:6, 1 Peter 2:11
- **God's judgment:** Jeremiah 14:10, Helaman 7:21-22

2 Timothy 3:4 says that in the last days "**men will be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.**"

As things get worse in the world, and as Christianity becomes increasingly despised, I want to be like Moses as described in Hebrews 11:25. He gave up his cushy life in Pharaoh's house and chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

"If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." (Rom. 8:13)

When I lose my grip on worldly pleasures, then my hands are free to accept the gift of true and lasting satisfaction—a cup of Living Water that quenches every thirst.

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The Word of God

By Brother Duane Loyalvo

"And it came to pass that I beheld others pressing forward, and they came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree." (1 Nephi 8:24)

"And it came to pass that I beheld that the rod of iron... was the word of God..." (1 Nephi 11:25)

When Nephi was given his great revelation, one of the key themes was the importance of the rod of iron in obtaining salvation. It was revealed to Nephi that men and women must hang on tightly to the word of God or they will stray off the strait and narrow path that leads to the Tree of Life.

Now, the word of God might exist in a variety of forms, be it sermon, song, or even revelation. The gold standard for the word of God, however, is the holy writ, or what we commonly refer to as the scripture, the Bible and the Book of Mormon. These books are the confirmed word of God, published for the good of humanity. It is against the holy scriptures that all other godly words must be verified for credibility.

God took great pains to preserve His word on the Earth. The coming forth of the Book of Mormon is an example of His infinite love and mercy towards mankind. You see, thousands of years ago, God instructed many prophets to engrave His words on metal plates. They diligently passed these sacred records down from one generation to the next. And then one day, God instructed the prophet Mormon to take all these records and consolidate them into a single set of gold plates. In approximately 400 AD, Mormon's son Moroni buried these plates in the ground where they remained untouched by human hands for about 1,400 years. In 1827, God commanded Joseph Smith to go to the Hill Cumorah and dig up the gold plates in order to translate them into the English language. He completed this task in the year 1829, when the Book of Mormon was published.

The Book of Mormon tells us that there are more holy books that will come forth. The records written by the lost tribes of Israel will someday be published. Also, the Brass Plates (containing writings that complete the Old Testament) will someday go forth to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. There will be other books published as well. All these scriptures will come forth for the good of mankind to help him stay on the path to salvation. The prophet Alma tells us that the Liahona, or compass, used by Lehi's family to find their way through the wilderness also serves as a metaphor for the rod of iron or word of God.

"For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise." (Alma 37:45)

My brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ has given us easy access to His compass. The Bible and The Book of Mormon are the living word of God. Within them can be found the words of Jesus Christ and if we cling to them, they will lead us directly to the Tree of Life.

LIGHT *By Sister Linda Zane*

I am awestruck by the concept of LIGHT...

...whether it is the light from the sun that so faithfully rises each day, or

...the light from the Son that so faithfully shines on and through us each moment of the day!

Just imagine a world without LIGHT...

...total darkness, so that you can't even see your hand in front of your face.

It's impossible to imagine!

Humans could not exist on a light-deprived Earth.

How could we live if we couldn't see?

How could we survive if we had no heat from the Sun?

The Sun miraculously warms the Earth to the proper temperature for humans to exist, for plants to grow, and for animals to abound. The sun, and its light, is truly amazing!

Light, as a phenomenon, is truly awesome! To think that God created

such a thing as "light" for the benefit of humankind is incredible proof of His love for us!

But that's not all! As in so many of His natural creations, God has a symmetrical spiritual creation that one can see through His Divine Analogy!

Just imagine a world without the LIGHT of CHRIST...

...total darkness because of a loss of hope, both hope for this life as well as hope for a life eternal.

Humans, who are trying to exist without the light of Christ in their lives, are living in daily darkness...

...they can't see the beauty of life, because His light is not shining within their hearts.

...they don't feel the warmth of His loving care, because they don't know how to give Him their burdens and rest in His promises.

Just as the Sun gives the Earth all it needs for humans to survive successfully, the SON of GOD offers humankind all it needs to have the FULLNESS of life on this earth, as well as life eternal when this earthly existence is completed. When one experiences His light in their hearts, there can be nothing more amazing!

Consider NATURAL LIGHT as compared to THE LIGHT OF CHRIST:

There are many ways of making light, but natural light originates from the sun	Many try to find substitutes for the true peace that He gives, but there is no substitute for the "peace of God, which passeth all understanding" which "shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7)
The energy of light, traveling through space, is called radiant energy	The energy of His light, living within our hearts, should make us radiant to others! As His children, we are called to shine brightly—so that we can brighten the lives of others, and share in the good news of love and forgiveness that He freely offers to all!
Of the many different kinds of radiant energy that exist, we can only see a tiny part called visible light, which we simply call light	The energy of His light, living within our hearts, should be outwardly visible to others—both in word and deed. Our actions, however, can often speak much louder than our words ever could!
A light wave begins with a ray (a straight line) that shows the direction of the light's travel	Just as the light wave begins with a ray that shows the direction of the light's travel, our ray of light, which illuminates the lives of others with the love of Christ, MUST show the direction of the light's travel by pointing others back to God. We cannot take glory for any good that we do...all glory must be given to God, from whom and by whom all goodness originates!
A ray of light that reaches a surface may either be reflected from the surface, or passed through (absorbed by) the surface	Spiritual rays of light—God's love, as offered through the gift of His Son—are pointed in our direction constantly. Do we accept (absorb) this spiritual light into our hearts and lives? Do we allow this spiritual light to fill our very beings, so that we can then in turn reflect this light to others and eventually back to God? Or, does this light simply pass through us, evidence of a stubborn and proud will?
Light can be a source of power, through which many things can be accomplished	The light of Christ does not require any power of or from ourselves...it simply requires a heart that is willing to allow His power to work within us—to cleanse our hearts from unrighteousness and fill our hearts with love.
Light is also the source of color, by which things on this earth become unique and beautiful	The light of Christ fills our lives with color...His light shines on all that we view, and gives it the brightest and most glorious hues imaginable. His love colors all that we think and feel, making life on Earth incomprehensibly beautiful. And to think...this beauty is just a foretaste of the beauty that is reserved for us in Heaven!

"And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day." – Genesis 1:3-5

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." – Matthew 5:16

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Psalm 119:105

Baptisms in Charlotte

By Sister Connie Rossi



witness not one but three young souls render obedience to the calling of baptism on Sunday, October 17, 2021 as they walked to the waters of regeneration and were baptized. We all gathered at the water's edge this cool Sunday

his father and was baptized. Afterwards Brother Miguel once again extended an invitation to anyone else who felt the calling, and Sister Zoey Devore began weeping and she, too, expressed her desire to be baptized. Brother Miguel walked into the water for the third time and baptized our young Sister Zoey.



"Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). "I speak by way of command unto you that belong to the church; and unto those who do not belong to the church I speak by way of invitation, saying: Come and be baptized unto repentance, that you also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life" (Alma 5:62).



The Charlotte Branch was blessed to

morning with plans to observe Brother Josiah Bicelis' baptism. Brother Josiah was brought into the waters by his father, Brother Miguel. As Brother Miguel walked Brother Josiah back to the shore, Brother Miguel extended an invitation to anyone else who felt the calling on their life.



A few minutes later Brother Benjamin Bicelis, natural brother to Brother Josiah, began weeping and expressed his desire to be baptized. He, too, was led into the waters by

It is such a joyous occasion to witness a soul coming to Jesus and being baptized! On this cool and crisp Sunday morning, our hearts were warmed and our joy was tripled and overflowing as we watched our three youths accept the invitation. Afterwards, we headed back to Church where we enjoyed a spirit-filled service and the laying on of hands for the reception of the Holy Spirit. During the service Brothers Josiah and Benjamin and Sister Zoey each testified of their experiences of being called to baptism. Brother Tom Everett laid hands on Brother Josiah, Brother Joe Catone laid hands on Brother Benjamin, and Brother Paul Palmieri laid hands on Sister Zoey. After the service, we all enjoyed a delicious luncheon and fellowship with our brothers and sisters and visitors.

Experience from Italy

Recently, Brother Giorgio Romano preached an inspirational sermon and without knowing it, through his words, he gave me an answer to my dilemma. I had been suffering a lot recently due to the injustice which is in the world. We are facing a very brutal situation because of health, political, and economic problems in Italy. We see on TV and in the newspapers only a part of what is happening. We do not really know the reality behind everything. When I try to research and find out more, what I discover is devastating. It is a burden to know, and to realize that we cannot avoid it.

Brother Giorgio's sermon was about what happened to the prophet Habakkuk. This scripture helped so much. The account in the book of Habakkuk is one of the most remarkable sections in all of the scripture. It contains an extended dialogue between Habakkuk and God (Habakkuk 1-2). The prophet initiated the conversation because he was distressed about God's "inaction" in the world. He wanted to see God do something, particularly about the injustice of evildoers. The book of Habakkuk depicts a frustrated prophet, much like Jonah, though Habakkuk channeled his frustrations into prayers and eventually praise to God, rather than trying to run from the Lord as Jonah did. Habakkuk asked God the kind of question that so many of us have pondered, "Why do you force me to look at evil, stare trouble in the face day after day?"

We have all seen the evidence of evil in our lives. We've all been touched by it and we bear scars in various stages of healing, trapped sometimes in a dark prison cell of our own making. We are downtrodden by our fallen world and often our poor choices. However, the book of Habakkuk reminds us that no place is too dark and no wall too thick for God's grace to penetrate in a powerful and life-affirming way.

I was volunteering to say the closing prayer when God spoke to me. I do not even remember the exact words, but I will do my best to summarize: The answer is not pro-vaccine or anti-vaccine. The answer is not yes, get a green pass or no, don't get a green pass (a certificate we have in Italy allowing us to live and work in town). The answer is Jesus Christ. If we have

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BUT SHOULDA- COULDA- WOULD A

By Sister Sylvia King

These words may sound familiar from hearing them used in a commercial trying to sell us Insurance for this life. Well, it got me to thinking: What about the insurance that Christ offers me for life eternal? Am I doing my best to fulfill that covenant?

Self-exam:

SHOULDA: I should have chosen a career that didn't compete with my service to God. But: never too late to change or adjust the path.

Proverbs 3:6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

SHOULDA: I should have read scriptures and prayed this morning. My day is so rough. But: never too late, never too busy, to read one verse, whisper one prayer.

2 Timothy 2:15 Study to show thyself

approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. Alma 34:26 But this is not all; ye must pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness.

COULDA: I could have made that call to the sister or brother that came to mind. I could have mailed that card to the friend who is alone. I could have shared my smile at the checkout. But: Let me begin again. Let me try harder.

Mosiah 2:17 And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.

WOULDA: I would have gone on that missionary trip if I had not been afraid. I would have visited the shelter for troubled teens if I had the words to give.

But: He will be my protector. He will provide the right words.

Genesis 28:15 And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done which I have spoken to thee of.

Luke 12:11-12 And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.

SHOULDA-COULDA-WOULD A---SHOULDCOULD-WOULD---DO MORE

By God's grace we have the best life assurance. Blessings now and life eternally!

New Year, New You?

Continued from cover

- Spend time talking to 3 people each week after Church that you normally don't talk to
- Fast and pray twice as much as you normally do.
- Send someone an anonymous gift
- Set aside 10 minutes somewhere in your day to pray
- Send cards to someone who is sick or mourning
- Reach out to a college student
- Invite someone over for dinner and share your testimony
- Read the scripture every day for a minimum of ___ minutes
- Listen only to Christian music
- Visit someone in a nursing home
- Write down your testimony
- Ask people what they would like you to pray for with them—and do it
- Add 3 more times into your day when you stop to pray—set an alarm to remind you
- Give a "money handshake" to someone who could use a little extra
- Watch recorded meetings from other branches
- Visit a sister or brother who needs company
- Reach out to someone's family that does not attend
- Offer to babysit for parents who need a break
- Interview older brothers and sisters on video
- Make cookies for the older members of your branch
- Get a group together to come over and sing hymns
- Give money or food to those you see on the street
- Dedicate your "screen time" to positive messages that bring you closer to God
- Invite 3 people to church
- Spend time with someone in the Church that does not have a lot of family there
- Stop doing something you know is not good for your relationship with God
- Tell your neighbor that Jesus loves them
- Be a guest teacher in a Sunday school or MBA
- Compliment people on their strengths
- Bring something small to the kids in your branch
- Work on an outreach program
- Go to MBA or Sunday School or LUC if you currently do not
- Plan to go on a Missionary trip
- Reach out to the IMOC, NAOC, or other leadership to see where you can be used
- Create a prayer group with sisters or brothers
- Ask your Presiding Elder where you could be of help in the Branch
- Find a pen pal at a branch or mission in another country
- Get your Branch involved in working in the community

Bigger more long-term goals—Choose one or two and make it your 2022 goal

- Donate extra money
- Volunteer to organize an event at the Branch or Mission

These are all just suggestions, so choose things that make the most sense for you to work or improve on. I hope that you enjoy this journey as you work to create a better YOU and make more room and time in your life for Christ.

Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit *By Brother Jerry Valenti*

What does it mean to be poor in spirit? Our human spirit (our human will) often makes it difficult to be a follower of the Lord. Being poor in spirit means that we are willing to subject our own will to the will of God. Here are 5 amazing facts that identify passages of scripture associated with the concept of being poor in spirit.

1 Being Repentant – “Ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you” (Mosiah 4:10). When we repent of our sins, we are indicating that our way is the wrong way and God’s way is the right way. This is one way of being poor in spirit, and is necessary when we desire to be baptized and give our lives to the Lord.

2 Making a Covenant to Serve God – “We are willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things that he shall command us, all the remainder of our days” (Mosiah 5:5). When we make a commitment to serve God for the remainder of our lives, we promise to always be poor

in spirit, following His commandments and direction, rather than charting our own course through life.

3 Denying Yourself – Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34). Being poor in spirit means that if what I want is different than what God wants, I say NO to me and YES to God.

4 Decreasing Self, Increasing in the Spirit – “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). As we grow in Christ, we should grow increasingly poor in spirit, giving in less to the flesh and relying more upon the Spirit of God to lead us.

5 Being Filled with the Spirit – The more that we minimize our human spirit, the more we can allow the Spirit of God to fill us and direct us. When people in the scriptures were filled with the Spirit, they did great things. Lehi was filled with the Spirit and spoke with great power (1 Nephi 2:14) and prophesied of things that would occur in the future (1 Nephi 5:17). “Ammon, being filled with the Spirit of God, perceived the thoughts of the king” (Alma 18:16), which led to the eventual conversion of the king and many Lamanite people. When we allow ourselves to be poor in the human spirit, we become rich in the Spirit of God!

“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3)

Ladies’ Uplift Circle News



Life Lessons Are All around Us *By Sister Luann Carson*

Lesson from a hike:

Hiking with a group, we faced a steep rugged hill. Some members of the group doubted their ability to scale it. Other members encouraged and cheered the group on. Ultimately, we all made it up the hill, to be rewarded with an amazing view.

Takeaway: A little encouragement goes a long way.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another.”

Lesson from an amusement park:

When I was 15 I absolutely loved amusement parks. It was really important to me to go to at least a couple every year. I loved the rides that spun me around, dipped me up and down, but especially the roller coasters. Now that I’m pushing 60, going to amusement parks is not so important to me. The rides make me dizzy, give me a headache, and hurt my back. It’s not really a priority anymore to go to Kennywood or any other amusement park. When I was 15 years old I was baptized in The Church of Jesus Christ. Church became my priority. The thrill for



amusement parks has faded, but my love for The Lord has remained.

Takeaway: God is the constant throughout life.

Revelation 1:8 “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending.”

(Continued on page 11)



Fresh Starts

Dear Friends,

Have you ever had the joy of watching a young baby or even a young animal try to learn how to walk? Usually, there is something out of reach that they want. They often will crawl over to a piece of furniture, hang on to it for help, then pull themselves up and try to totter off. They fall. Some screech or cry because they are upset. Some get mad or scared. Others give up at first and just turn around and crawl after what they want. But they make a fresh start over and over. Babies keep trying until they can do it! You know this because we don't see any adults crawling if they can help it, and because we start over and over.

The Bible and Book of Mormon are full of stories of people who serve God and get fresh starts! Noah and his family were the only good people on Earth. God was going to destroy all the wicked by a great flood of water. He told Noah to gather up two of every unclean animal, seven of every clean animal, and birds by the sevens so they could keep seeds alive on the Earth when the flood was over. (Read Genesis 7:2&3.)

You know people had to make fun of his family as the years passed and they gathered up every wild and tame beast and bird and all kinds of bugs. Plus he built a huge ark as well. None of the evil people helped.

And then God sent the rain, the flood, and the whole Earth was covered. God had told Noah and his family to enter the Ark as He shut the door. They were there a little over a year before the ark settled and the Lord allowed them out.

A fresh start for all! God saved them. They

survived the mockery of others, the frightening forty days of rain and storms. They must have asked God to guide them in the gathering of enough food and supplies or the caring for their animals of every kind! What a fresh start, in a fresh new world with no evil people!

What fresh start do you want in your life? God promises to be with us, protect us, guide us, and give us many gifts. What is the special thing that you hope for deep in your heart? Ask the Lord to guide you. He taught Noah's group all kinds of new skills. His might have included catching birds or handling elephants, insects, and lions.

But what are your dreams? I know if they are good goals, God can open the right doors and let you have a fresh start in learning the right skills and following your heart's desire. You can change.

Do as Noah did. Put God first and talk to Jesus.

All things are possible. Be willing to learn. Only believe and let the Lord guide you!

With much love and care,

Your friend, *Sister Jan*

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Blast From The Past

Continued from page 2

trying to get an Indian school started for the benefit of this tribe and he makes a trip to Washington, D.C. and New York twice every year in the interest of his people. We will close our little talk and we ask an interest in all your prayers that we might hold faithful to what we have grasped and that we may, by the will and help of God, bring some of these people, if not all, to obey the gospel some time or other. And if we do not see the day some of the younger generation may. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, Your Brother, Sister and family in Christ, Vernon H. Chester."

The chief our brother met was known as Chief Josie Billie, who was a Mikasuki-speaking medicine man and doctor. The area where Billie camped for most of his life is now part of the Big Cypress Reservation. He served as a public advocate for the Florida Seminoles and created recordings of traditional folk songs and worked with anthropologists to record the history of the Seminole people.

Experience from Italy

Continued from page 7

faith in Him, we must accept that God has a plan. Things might look bad to us, but this is all part of God's plan. Everything is done in God's perception, not ours. Human perception is so different! We can not find a solution for the injustice because it is not our mission. We are only humans, and the more we are afraid, the more we feed the evil power in the world. Our mission on Earth is to spread Jesus' word to other people who are the victims of the injustice of this world. We need to give them a reason to believe in Christ. We are the salt of the Earth and must be faithful so that other people can see the power of the almighty God. As the world gets worse and worse, dominated by evil power, we must pray as much as we can and help others to find the light. Jesus Christ is the key. Amen.

Love you all, Sister Chiara Salmazo

Three words that best describe 2021

Continued from back

"Pray. Trust. Believe." -Sister Janice
Frammolino, Detroit, MI Branch #1

"Firm. Faith. Forward." -Sister Jan Offet, Bell,
CA Branch

"Challenging. Strength. Spiritual." -Brother
George Rice, Creekside, MI Branch

"Getting together more." -Sister Anita Znoj,
Creekside, MI Branch

"Life changes forevermore." -Sister Sharon
Sloan, Forest Hills, FL Branch

"Trusting. Hopeful. Thankful." -Brother Paul
A. Palmieri, McKees Rocks, PA Branch

"Closer to Zion." -Brother George Kovacic,
Middle Tennessee Mission

"Blessed. Victorious. Courageous." -Brother
Michael Zaino, Edison, NJ Branch

"GPS - God's Protection Service." -Sister Flo
Perri, Lake Worth, FL Branch

"Life is short." -Sister Terri Everett, Creekside,
MI Branch

"Challenging. Protected. Loved." -Sister
Virginia Surprenant, Bell, CA Branch

"Zoom & God's love." -Brother Frederick
Marshall Keener, North Georgia Mission

"Joy. Grace. Thankfulness." -Brother Michael
McGuire, Cape Coral, FL Mission

"Unpredictable. Inspirational. Blessed."
-Sister Dienna Rogers, Irvine, CA Branch

Life Lessons Are All around Us

Continued from page 9

Lesson from my six-year-old granddaughter:

"Grammy, what's wrong?" my granddaughter asked me. I told her my back was hurting. Her response was, "I can give you a massage and I can pray for you. But I think the prayer will work the best."

Takeaway: Prayer is the best solution.

Mark 11: 24. "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."

Lesson from my flowers:

I planted some of my flowers in the ground, some in pots, and some in hanging baskets. The flowers in the ground are flourishing because they have access to nutrients and water from the soil all around them. They are protected from elements by the plants that surround them. The ones in pots are doing okay. They just need extra water and feedings. The flowers in the hanging baskets are battered by the heat of the day and elements on all sides. They have a very limited amount of water and nutrients available to them. The hanging baskets require extra care and still aren't flourishing like the others.

Takeaway: Plant yourself deep in the Gospel to flourish.

Colossians 2:6-7 "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith."

Lesson from my eight-year-old granddaughter:

"Can I get anointed today for my doctor's appointment this week?" The next Sunday: "Can I get anointed today for (fill in the blank)?"

Takeaway: Pray over everything.

1 Thessalonians 5:13 "Pray without ceasing."

Lesson from the gym:

Among those who regularly attend a Total Body Training class I teach is a woman who has Parkinson's Disease. She could use her disease as an excuse to stay home and even to stay in bed. But even though she may not have the ability to do everything perfectly, she pushes herself to do her best. She credits her determination for the fact that her symptoms are not worsening.

Takeaway: Determination beats excuses any day.

Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Blessing Bits

BB Will Praise Him Forever

I thank God for The Church of Jesus Christ and also for his abundance of goodness and mercy. I even thank him through the tough times because without them, I would never know how great He is. I had such bad allergies for quite some time which he healed me from. Although I still have some allergies, He is my ultimate healer. I also thank Him for healing my son from COVID. I am thankful for the blessings seen and unseen and protection around me. I am forever grateful for my eternal Father. – *Sister Linda Crudup, Freehold, NJ Branch*

BB He's With Me Through the Valleys

On March 22nd I had my annual mammogram. Shortly thereafter, I was scheduled for a follow-up exam due an area of concern seen on multiple images. Not taking the matter lightly I was anointed knowing full well that if this was a trial I was to bear, the Lord would provide the strength I needed to see me through. When it came time for my appointment, Joel was diagnosed with COVID, and we

had to quarantine which delayed my exam for another month. During quarantine, we praised God that Joel remained asymptomatic, I remained COVID-free, and we were blessed with a new granddaughter, Phoebe Lucille. Prior to my appointment, I chose to be anointed a second time. I will never forget seeing the clear images that had once concerned my doctor. I will also never forget the look of joy on the technician's face when she told me that no further testing would be necessary...there was nothing there! I praise God for His miraculous touch for the seen and the unseen things in my life. – *Sister Ruth Gehly, Erie, PA Branch*

BB A Beautiful New Beginning

When I was thirteen years old my family moved into a new home. The year was 1954, in San Diego, CA and I couldn't have been more excited - I had my own bedroom! My next-door neighbor, JoAnn Smith, became my best friend. The Smith family was so much fun to be around and introduced me to The Church of Jesus Christ. The Smith home was a central gathering place for the Saints to meet, and play games, and sing, and eat and

have joyful times together. It was then that I experienced the sweet "joy of the saints" and it was there that I met JoAnn's cousin, Paul, whom I would later marry. I thought having my own room was special, but it was the love of the Saints that was the greatest gift I have ever received. Paul and I were married in 1961 and have been baptized for over 50 years. I am so thankful that God directed my family to exactly where I needed to be! – *Sister Orletta Liberto, San Diego, CA Branch*

Send us your Blessing Bits by contacting Sister Elizabeth McDonnell at eksanchor@gmail.com. [in approximately 150 words].
Answers to Question of the Month to gospelnews@thechurchofjesuschrist.org.



Question for this month: If you could have dinner with one person in the scripture other than Jesus, who would it be and why?



Answer from last month: Pick three words that best describe 2021. "Hope. Promising. Challenging." -*Sister Kim Morle, Atlanta, GA Branch*

Turn back to page 11 for more answers to this question.



"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:7