

The Gospel News

Happy New Year from India

By Brother Dino DiMelis

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*Happy
New Year!*



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You may be surprised to learn that something as seemingly simple as the new year in India is celebrated by as many as ten different festivals on numerous dates over multiple months. Various regions of India observe different dates for the new year based on the beliefs and practices of controlling cultural or religious groups within each region. To further complicate this celebration date issue, there are four different types of calendars used in India, resulting in variations in the way that each year is measured. What may be dismissed as chaotic and disorganized, from the single national holiday perspective of the United States of America, can also be appreciated as a beautiful example of the rich history and cultural diversities that cohabitate in this colorful and exotic country. One interesting observation is that with so many reasons for there to be disagreement and division, India is thriving as the largest democracy in the world through the rare and valuable ability to find and sustain unity despite diversity.

As members and friends of The Church of Jesus Christ, we are blessed to have a greater understanding of the truth of the Restored Gospel, but we must continually strive for and struggle to maintain unity through the Holy Spirit. Despite obvious cultural differences, our membership in India faces similar challenges. Although our daily life experiences are dissimilar, we have the same hopes and aspirations for the future. Being distinct and different from any other gospel can seem isolating, however it could also provide a greater opportunity to share our beliefs.

"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance as we know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost" (1 Thessalonians 1:5-6).

Work has begun to translate the Book of Mormon into the language of Telugu. This translation will have the potential to bring the fullness of the Gospel to more than 50 million Telugu-speaking people in India who have previously only received the true Gospel in spoken word. This effort has been hindered for years by problems that have caused the translation process to be unsuccessful, starting with the frustration of trying to find a Christian translator from outside of our own Church, who is both qualified and willing to perform the work. Toil and struggle persist when those who do attempt to perform the translation experience hardships in their personal lives, such as financial difficulties and illness, that affect both them and their family members. In recent days when our ministers from Chennai traveled to review the progress being made with the Telugu translation, they were confronted with the son of one of the translators who was sick in bed. Undaunted by the differences in faith, our brothers offered to anoint the young man, who was healed and raised from his bed of affliction! It is truly awe inspiring to witness the power of God manifested to support our humble efforts to perform His work.

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For December, we looked back, but for 2024, let's join the saints of old and look forward to the promises of tomorrow.

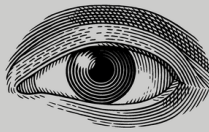


...forgetting those things which are behind... I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of Jesus Christ. Phil 3:13,14

Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. 2 Cor 5:17



For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Jeremiah 29:11



Do you exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you? Do you look forward with an eye of faith? Alma 5:15

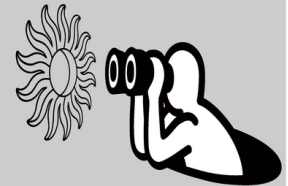


...Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. 1 Cor 2:9

Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. Isaiah 43:19



And Christ truly said unto our fathers: If ye have faith ye can do all things which are expedient unto me. Moroni 10:23.



BFTP Blast From The Past

By Sister Kellie Speck



One hundred and twenty-one years ago this month Apostle Rocco Biscotti was born.

"I was born February 11, 1903, at Peschice, Provence di Foggia, Italy, a beautiful spot right on the Adriatic seacoast. My father was a fisherman and I was one of eleven children. We were getting along fine but my father died accidentally, leaving us children when we were young. I was four years old at the time. Life became a struggle for my mother. She was a God-fearing woman and with the help of God she did rear us until we became able to help ourselves. My mother often related to me that when I was eight years old I was drowning and was saved by "a miracle." I had gone to the harbor by myself. Boats were tied in the harbor and I tried to reach the boat by hanging on the rope the boats were tied with. Being just eight years old I was not strong enough and fell into the sea. The Coast Guard saw me, but by the time they rescued me I had swallowed quite a bit of water and was unconscious. As my mother told me, I knew that God spared me."

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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.



“So Close ... Just Beyond Your Understanding” *By Brother Doug Obradovich*

“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace.”
– John 16:33

When such antagonism is realized, peace is viewed as the opposing force. Ironically, man’s ability to reason makes peace seem unreasonable, so quiet solitude appears impossible. Or at least, just beyond our understanding.

Peace represents freedom from this confusion. It is referenced in The Word by its earliest Hebrew root, Shin-Lamedh-Mem (SLM), meaning, “to be complete and/or sound, to live well.” Since a young person, I have been drawn to peace signs, as evidenced by t-shirts, bracelets, rings, patches, and hats. But these are only symbols, supplying no lasting power. The peace Jesus provides is beyond the façade of an emblem, and often arrives when least expected, as Paul describes, “the peace that passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and mind through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6,7).

Jesus continually reinforced peace as a mindset when He addressed soundness, “Let not your heart be troubled” (John 14:1). He spoke of living well, “That in me ye might have peace” (John 16:33). He also talked of completeness, “For if I go not away, the

Comforter will not come unto you” (John 16:7), explaining how He consummated His follow-through by willingly dying in order to gift mankind with His own Holy Spirit. Thus, His followers were given abiding access to the mind of the Father and the Son.

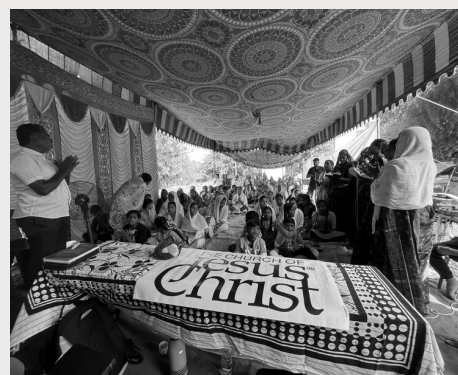
Knowledge brings peace. Jesus knows and understands everything. His understanding eradicates natural worries, earthly concerns, and unsubstantiated fears. He recognizes specifically what causes human anxiety. He knows exactly how apprehension overwhelms. He appreciates details behind fleshly fear. Most critically, He is greater than all your worries, any concerns, and every fear.

The fullness of His proposal involves giving up worry, concern, and fear and giving in to God’s Holy Spirit. When we allow Him to purge us of temporal thoughts to accommodate spiritual understanding (“He must increase, but I must decrease” – John 3:30), peace is the result; peace is the reward. It is then that we finally realize His peace is so close ... just beyond our understanding.

Peace.

Although a wonderful aspiration, any situation where strife or contention is non-existent is difficult to comprehend, even when conditions are normal. It becomes nearly impossible in an environment endangered by COVID-19, civil unrest, intolerant political divide inflamed by angry political leaders, divisive arrogant social media commentaries, financial and economic fears, with any and all of these conditions bringing threat of impending disaster.

Any one of the major occurrences mentioned above could individually disturb our peace, but in today’s new normal, these exist simultaneously in what appears to be a concerted effort aimed at attacking our serenity. Peace is defined as an absence of hostility or war, which fight against our spirits every waking moment. The struggle between good and evil taking place within each of us creates an inner conflict with which we already battle.



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Confronted by increasing anti-Christian conditions throughout the country, our ministry and membership in India are bravely performing crusades through the streets of towns and villages to combat the resistance by expanding our membership and establishing our Church in new locations. They are boldly carrying banners with the name of The Church of Jesus Christ prominently displayed while actively laboring to do good by clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, liberating the captive and administering relief to the sick and afflicted. Where there are small buildings or insufficient meeting places, our congregations are conducting outdoor meetings both day and night to allow for additional space, and welcoming all who are willing to join with them in worship.

As Isaiah in the 43rd Chapter alerts us; "I am the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, your King. I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it?"

May we be prepared as the people of God. Spiritual men and women who have a strong understanding of scriptures. Faithful in and dedicated to our service to God. This has been a key ingredient that has sustained us in the past. May we now be willing to blend these things with inspiration and sound revelation from God that will fortify us in the days to come.

No matter the date that the new year is observed, it is a time when all people pause to reflect upon past achievements and remember the trials they have faced and overcome. We intuitively look forward to the coming year filled with hope for better days. In our mind's eye, the coming new year will be filled with self-improvement and great new accomplishments. This new year, may we all have greater determination to follow through on these annual good intentions by drawing upon the Gospel restored in greater measure than ever before. For it is only in the plain and precious truth of the Gospel restored that we will find the courage necessary to rise above the confusion that abounds in the world around us. The assurance and power of the Holy Ghost that Paul spoke of in his writings to the Thessalonians is still available to us today. The Gospel of Jesus Christ can be beautifully described as admirably purposeful, determined, and unwavering. This is the very definition of being resolute. May we be united in this new year to overcome every obstacle that would hinder the advancement of The Church of Jesus Christ! To do this we will need to be diligent in all our actions and interactions to ensure that our efforts and The Church of Jesus Christ are built upon His Gospel.

Finally, we must do all these things in the name of Jesus Christ for the honor and glory of God, the only One who is able to gather together all nations and assemble all people.

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Joy

By Brother Larry Henderson

In Philippians 1:21 it says, “to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” How old do we need to be to think the way Paul was thinking when he spoke those words? Maybe I should ask, how spiritually mature do we need to be to speak with the understanding and expectations of Paul? At what point in our life do we become truly serious about living for Jesus and serving God like the saints of old?

When Paul wrote to the Philippians around 62 AD, he was a Roman prisoner under house arrest. They didn’t have ankle monitors, so Roman soldiers took turns being chained to Paul day and night. He had not committed any crime under Roman law. However, he was guilty of saying he believed in the resurrection while speaking to the Sadducees in Jerusalem. Roman soldiers saved Paul from the Sadducees killing him. Months later he ended up in Rome after asserting his right to appear before Caesar.

Now that you have some background on this innocent man, does it surprise you that the theme of his message to the Philippians is joy and rejoicing? The theme of joy is mentioned 16 times in 4 chapters. Paul tells us there is joy in sacrificial giving of ourselves and our belongings to meet the needs of others. When we give, we become Christlike. Paul addresses the joy of knowing Christ and experiencing the power of becoming a new creation in our Lord Jesus. He also refers to the joy we experience when there is harmony among the saints. The last reference to joy in Philippians is found in Chapter 4 v. 13, “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.” Paul points out our joy in the sufficiency of Christ. This joy produces contentment in every situation we face in life. It also allows us to joyfully look forward to our resurrection and eternal life in the kingdom of God—that same sufficiency that we must strive for.

Do we need to be imprisoned to believe that God is able to do all things? Do we need to be feeble or in poverty before we rely upon God’s ability to provide? Why should we rob ourselves of the joy that Paul experienced even when he was innocent and chained to soldiers for two years? This life is too short. Take advantage of every opportunity to be seen as a child of God.

“According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified (exalted) in my body, whether it be by life, or by death (Philippians 1:20).

Take note of Paul's mindset before he says “to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Notice the words “ashamed” and “magnified.” He was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. There is nothing about our Savior or His plan of salvation that was embarrassing to Paul. He confirms his dedication by saying he will “magnify” or proclaim and exalt his Savior even if his trust in Jesus Christ results in his death. We know some of what Paul suffered. How many others like Paul suffered anguish, pain, and death, and refused to deny our Jesus? Let’s honor them and share our joy with others no matter what our situation may be.

November 2023 GMBA Conference

By Brother Wesley Griffith

This year, the GMBA hosted their November Conference in Pittsburgh, PA at the Pittsburgh Airport Hilton Garden Inn. Many members and young people drove and flew in from all over the United States to attend this conference. We felt the blessings last year in Farmington Hills and knew that God would provide a blessing once again.

Saturday morning the GMBA met with all the area MBA presidents across the country to talk about upcoming events, updating by-laws, and supporting the regions of the Church. The area presidents and officers felt it was a very productive meeting. Saturday afternoon was the GMBA business meeting. Brother Brett Gibson opened the meeting with his testimony about growing up with the GMBA's blessings, and how it has been a blessing for the Church to have an organization like this. The area presidents shared updates about their respective areas, telling the members how God has blessed them with activities like lock-ins, traveling to other branches, camping trips, area campouts, and organizing game nights for the youth. The GMBA then went through the election of officers. Our three current officers, Brothers Lucas Martorana, Ryan McDonnell, and Chuck Maddox were reelected for the upcoming year as president, vice president, and chaplain, respectively. Most of the offices were reelected, while some offices now welcome new members.

The GMBA then went into new business, sharing their ideas for the upcoming year. The GMBA shared their goal as an organization in three words: Memorable, Meaningful, and Modern. The officers shared about various upcoming events, including dates for the next Youth Summit at General Church Conference, May GMBA Conference, GMBA Campout coming up at PennWest University (formerly Cal U), and Youth in Action in Tse Bonito and McKees Rocks (along with an extended tour in Tse Bonito). The GMBA is also currently planning future campouts and conferences to organize activities for the next couple of years. The officers also shared about upcoming programs for the youth, including a weekly youth Zoom and a year-round mentorship program. The members were excited about the upcoming plans and events that the GMBA has been working on.

Saturday night after dinner we reconvened for the evening service. Brother Lucas Martorana opened the service and Brother Paul Aaron Palmieri followed with the theme, "Try Higher," talking about how putting in more effort to connect with God and putting our trust in Him will lead to more and more blessings in our lives. The story of the lame man being lowered down from the roof for Jesus' healing was referenced, going higher to receive a blessing because they knew of Christ's goodness. The young people then came up and sang a song, followed by some testimony. The young

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people of The Church of Jesus Christ testified of God's goodness and blessings in their lives, and how the GMBA has been a major uplift to them through their spiritual walks. After the service ended, the members enjoyed a draft list game hosted by the Penn-Mid Atlantic area MBA, where the teams had to draft various Church memories onto lists and the GMBA officers voted which team won the draft. The young people then enjoyed fellowshiping one with another late into the night, playing games and enjoying conversations.

Sunday morning was a blessed service as well. We enjoyed some singing to start off the day. The service had so many people that there weren't enough chairs in the conference room to hold everyone! It was a beautiful sight to see the

young people of the Church give up their seats so the older brothers and sisters could sit during the service. Brother Pete Giannetti opened the service and Brother Jason Monaghan followed with the theme of "Being A Witness," talking about how it is our duty to witness to others of God's goodness in our lives. We rehearsed the example of Phillip being used as a witness to the Ethiopian man; that God's Spirit led him to that place for that individual, and that we need to follow the Holy Spirit when God directs us. Our members then were blessed to receive Communion during the service. The GMBA closed the service with our members feeling excited, uplifted, and blessed that the GMBA is a part of their lives, and that God has blessed this auxiliary of The Church of Jesus Christ with His Spirit.



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When Brother Rocco was 17 he took a 37-day voyage to America with his older sister because he was underage, and reached New York City. He couldn't find work for over a year, and became discouraged and thought about returning to Italy. "I attended the first meeting of The Church of Jesus Christ in the home of Brother Thomas, he being the first to be baptized in Cleveland, who had given a room of his home so services could be held there." After attending a feet washing meeting, Brother Rocco was so impressed that he asked for

his baptism. "Before I was baptized I wanted to have some evidence, so I prayed to the Lord as I never prayed before. As I was praying, such a joy came over me, I began to cry with such joy that I cannot express, I must say that the joy of the saints had reached even me. I was satisfied that I was making no mistake. Instead of finding material wealth which I came to America for, I found God and His love, which surpasses all wealth of this world."

Over the next few months, we will be sharing articles from the Gospel Blog. The Blog is a great way to start the morning with beautiful messages of love, hope, and encouragement as well as educational and insightful perspectives on scripture and personal testimonies. To sign up to receive the Blog each day, Text BLOG to 84576. It's that easy! —Editor

The Fort of Refreshing

By Sister Vicki Ali

"Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort; thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress." (Psalm 71:3)

The exact circumstances of the memories have faded, but the security and comfort lasted years beyond the conversation. At some point in my childhood, a discussion with my mom over something that was distressing me at school, in our neighborhood, or with my peers led her to explain to me that our home was a fort. She encouraged me to remember that whatever battles I faced during the day, I just had to hold it together until I made it back to the fort where it was safe to cry, rest, and prepare to face the world again another day.

And it was true. Many times, it was all I could do to limp to our fort, but somehow, time spent within those walls was what I needed to recharge. My problems didn't always go away whenever I walked out of the fort, but they seemed more manageable after being reminded of my worth and that I was loved and part of a family.

I've heard it said that the Gospel is our mother. Like our mother's love, going to church to hear the Gospel message is a shelter for our souls and a place to rest from life's battles. Church is not a museum displaying perfect works of art, but a hospital for the wounded. Growing up, many times I heard Brother Jess Carr say that he left his troubles on the doorstep before he walked into church each Sunday, and he would pick them back up again on his way out.

Easier said than done, right? At times, it's hard to shed burdens before stepping into church and we limp in with them stubbornly clinging to our legs, dragging with each step. But, if we open ourselves up to all aspects of a worship service, from the singing to the testimonies of our fellow brothers and sisters and especially to the word of God preached, we allow God's Spirit to soothe our own, wash over our wounds, and restore our joy. We become better

equipped to handle whatever we carried in that troubled us.

Problems often do not go away on Monday morning after we've rested spiritually in church. But the reminders we've been given of our worth as a child of God and how much He loves us gives us the strength and hope we need to endure until our bad seasons end.

I may have shared this anecdote before, but, as a young mom, it was so easy to ease my kids' injuries with a kiss and an Elmo Band-Aid. That was, until the day one of them told me, "Mommy, your kisses don't work!" Gut-punched over shattered innocence, it hit me that as a mere mortal mom, I couldn't protect them from everything life throws at them.

If you think about it, the cure for a young child's hurt doesn't appear with mom's kiss or the power of any Band-Aid. The cure happens as they learn where to turn for the source of comfort and in the mom's ability to distract from the injury, taking the focus away from the wound, and divert the pain with ice or a Band-Aid and assurances of love, and knowing it will be OK in time.

Thinking again of the Gospel, do we sometimes outgrow the pure faith we once had in our mother, the church? That somehow the comfort we once found there no longer works? If so, pray and ask God to help you fight within yourself to see it again with childlike eyes of faith. Remember the power of the cure is in building trust in God as the ultimate source of comfort in our lives and the distraction from pain that spending time in church affords with assurances that we are loved, part of a spiritual family, and it's going to be OK in the end!

(Originally published on the Gospel Blog April 2019)

Walk in Love, Walk in Truth

By Sister Rebecca Palafox

I praise God that in September 2022 I was given the opportunity to serve as president of the Pacific Area Ladies' Uplift Circle. All my life, the Simi Valley Branch of The Church of Jesus Christ has had an active Ladies' Circle and growing up, my mother would take me to participate in many of their events. I was baptized in 2014 and officially joined the Circle the same year. I have acted as secretary of our local circle for nearly a decade. California has six active circles: Bell, Hemet, Irvine, Modesto, San Diego, and Simi Valley. When I accepted the office of Area Circle President, I knew I wouldn't be walking alone. Each circle has incredible, diligent, hard-working sisters who walk in love and in truth. I'm thankful to learn and serve with the wonderful brothers and sisters I call my spiritual family.

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" (Isaiah 52:7)

Have you ever been so ill that you couldn't walk? In the beginning of 2021 I was in and out of the hospital recovering from an emergency surgery. I was weak, uncomfortable, and utterly discouraged. Nevertheless, to properly recover, the nurses encouraged me to take walks to "reawaken my body." At first, I was incredibly weak and could only walk at an extremely slow pace. Of course, this time allowed me to reflect on how much I had taken my own body for granted. When I was at my full strength before becoming sick, I didn't go out for walks very often. I wasn't using my feet.

Spiritually speaking, it's important for us to take walks to reawaken our body so we may then use our feet to bring the good news to others. If we allow God's love to guide us and we study the Word, which is the truth, then we can bring the good news of God's wonderful peace and salvation to others.

We all have beautiful feet; we must use them! It is an immense privilege to talk about the good news. Do not take the strength that you may have now for granted. If you feel as though you don't have the strength, take a walk! Take a walk in God's love and in His Truth. When we walk faithfully with Him, then we can share the good news of peace and salvation with others.

"Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour." (Ephesians 5:1-2)

We are told to walk in love, to be Christlike. We are encouraged to be like Him in our thoughts, speech, and through our actions. The way we can learn to do that is to understand God's love. It's like in 1 John 4:19, "We love him, because he first loved us." We can love others because we have felt God's immense love for ourselves.

As it states, Christ "hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God" because HE LOVES US. We are meant to walk in love, to show the love Jesus showed for us, and to share the good news.

"As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory. For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." (1 Thessalonians 2:11-13)

We are certainly going through challenging times. There is the world's truth and there is God's truth. GOD'S WORD IS THE TRUTH and it is important for us to live according to it. We are encouraged to live our lives in a way that God would consider worthy. Again, we can strive to be Christlike in our thoughts, speech, and actions. Walking in His truth can give us the wisdom and confidence we need. As mentioned in Ephesians 5:14-15, only through Christ does He give us light that we may walk not as fools, but as wise. When we study the Word, we can be ready to refer to scripture when needed.

There can be great joy in walking in God's truth. We can be steadfast. The Word is our rod of iron. When you walk in truth, it will never lead you astray. When we walk in truth, we can have the courage to share the good news with each other and with others as well. So, take a walk and reawaken your body! Use those beautiful feet you have. Let us work to be messengers of God's good news.



The Power of Words

Dear Friends,

I love the month of January. Even though I live in a state where winter is still only halfway over, January means the start of a new year and the start of many new goals and ways I can change, new things to try, and new friends I can make. Wise people say there are only two things in the world that never change: One is God and His love for us, and the other is change itself. Think about a tree. Think about how the tree grows, and gets taller. It has blossoms on it if it's a fruit tree. Then it starts growing a little fruit; the fruit gets bigger and stronger; the fruit falls to the ground; possibly that fruit starts a new little tree. That tree then grows and changes. We are surrounded by constant change in this world. Humans, babies, pets, the Earth, the sky! All change!

I've had a fun job teaching thousands of kids over the years. We often talk about the power of words. I teach them about the power of kind words and even the words God puts in your heart to say to help other people too! I am asking you to think about that power today too. Every day you have the power to help or to hurt others. Every day you can cheer someone else up with your kind words. You can give someone else help who is trying but in a tough spot. Maybe they fell down or made a big mistake and feel like everyone is thinking mean thoughts or laughing at them. And maybe they are. But you can make it easier by including them and caring. You might let them know it's not even important, everyone makes mistakes; so, they can stop worrying. Or if it is important, they can keep trying or start over. You can give them hope with your words.

In the Bible, the Apostle James warns us to be careful to control our tongues and

our words. That way we do not say wrong or mean things about others! He talks about how hard it is not to lose our tempers and say bad things. (See James Chapter 3.) Even when we are really mad, fighting mad, James tells us that the tongue is such a small part of the body but is so hard to control! Humans have tamed every kind of animal, bird, serpent, and creature in the sea. And the tongue is harder to control than any of those! (See James 3:7&8.). But God can and will help us get better control over ourselves. God can give us hearts that are not jealous or angry or mixed up. Scripture also teaches us to tell people we are sorry when our words are wrong.

In the Book of Mormon, Brother Alma, who was in charge of the whole Church among the Nephites, heard bad news. There was trouble in the Church in the land of Zoram. Zoram was next door to the countries where their Lamanite enemies lived. It was important they did not become total enemies. Alma went with others to visit the country and Church. The rich people there had changed the way to worship God. They were worshiping idols, and they even built a tall tower called Rameupmton.

Only the wealthy were allowed to show off by going up the steps and announcing their beliefs, how they did not believe that Jesus was going to come and about how special they were. They each said the same words. The rest of the week they forgot about God and all they cared about were their riches. (See Alma 31st Chapter.) They were mean to the poor. And the priests who were teaching these fake words were also bad.

Even though those poor people had worked hard to build the fancy churches, they were not allowed in. And that hurt them. They wanted to worship God, too. Alma had to start over. He taught them the true words of God. They did not need to climb up on a tower and all repeat words about how great they were and also say they did not believe Jesus, the Savior, was coming. Alma taught them how the word of God says we can pray anywhere, anytime! And God was sending His son, Jesus, to be the Savior of the world. The poor listened to Alma's words and believed! Their old leaders were not following the word of God as they worshipped.

(Continued on page 11)

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Alma said, "The word is more powerful than the sword!" He was not there to fight with swords. He wanted to teach the people God's words and save their souls. He believed they would really change if they only heard the true word of God. Alma and the preachers from the Church spoke true words. Their words were from scripture. Many, many believed!

You may be the one who uses the words that help people. Don't listen to the voice that whispers, "I am too shy, or they'll think I'm weird." If you do, you will miss so many chances to truly enjoy other people, many nice, great, interesting people of all ages.

Change this year. Quietly ask God to show you how to help and let you be the brave one that steps out! You can be the person who acts kind, who does the right things that God wants us to do and who helps others. You can quietly give

people hope and encourage them not to give up. You can even listen to their words when they are hurting or angry about something and care about them. You can do it quietly. But pray for courage and change!

Remember, try to change in good ways. Do not be afraid. The Bible teaches us in 2nd Timothy 1:7 "For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." You will be okay. Go out and shine your light!

With much care,

Your friend and Sister in Christ,

Sister Jan

Question of the Month



What is one thing you want to improve on in your service to God or one thing you want to add to your daily routine to bring you closer to God?

"This year, I have expanded my music ministry in sharing the Songs of Zion I've rewritten for beginners. They bring me great joy. One thing I would like to add is more prayer. God bless." -Sister Sharon D'Amico Church, Simi Valley, CA Branch.

"I committed in 2023 to read the entire Bible and Book of Mormon. It's been such a blessing to spend more time in the Word. I'm looking to increasing that effort in 2024 as a part of my daily routine." -Brother Frank Natoli, Detroit, MI Branch #1

"I want to be as the Hymn we sing in the *Saints Hymnal*, 'More Like The Master.' In all aspects of my life." -Brother Michael McGuire, Cape Coral, FL Mission.

"Getting back to setting aside quiet time to reflect on God and reading the scriptures. I'd like to complete the Book of Luke challenge by reading one chapter a day until Christmas." -Sister Kathleen Pastorelli, Lake Worth, FL Branch

"At 86, my thought for 2024 is from one of my favorite hymns, 'I promised the Lord that I would make it somehow, and I love Him too much to fail him now.'" -Sister Nancy Difede, San Diego, CA Branch

"Read the scriptures more consistently and understand what I'm reading!" -Sister Dienna Rogers, Irvine, CA Branch

"Daily I would like to read more scripture and give my testimony to as many people as I can to improve my service to God." -Sister Sharon Sloan, Forest Hills, FL Branch

"I would like to perform more fasting and praying for those who need Jesus, for the Saints, for the missionary endeavors of the church, for family and friends, and lastly, hopefully, for myself." -Brother Mark Kovacic, North Georgia Mission

"I need to read the Book of Mormon every day like I do the Bible." -Sister Katrina Hopkins, Quincy, FL Branch



Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. — Psalms 20:7

Blessing Bits

BB A Petition for a Friend - I am an ordained teacher in The Church of Jesus Christ. I recently received sad news that my childhood friend was in deplorable shape due to diabetes and as a result was living in a rehab facility. There was a good chance he was going to lose his leg. Hearing this news, I went to the Lord in prayer many times on his behalf. I went to visit my friend and told him that I had been praying for him. He replied. "Funny that you should say that! My wound doctor said I must have angels watching over me because the sore on my foot has improved 100 percent and it will not need to be amputated!" All praise to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! - Brother Jared Nolfi, McKees Rocks, PA Branch

BB Power to Fight the Challenges - As I sat to write my annual Christmas letter to family and friends, it came to my attention just how many trials I'd been through—between my health and family circumstances, I can

only thank God for the strength He gave me to endure the challenges of the past year. While Satan may try to attack my health and my family, I know that if my faith is strong, I have the power to face [what lies ahead in the new year]! May God strengthen all of you and give you the power to fight the challenges that come from day to day. - Sister Virginia Surprenant - Bell, CA Branch (Modified from a 2012 blog post)

BB Like a Needle in a Haystack - One of the patrons at my local gym happens to be a retired actor who has a large social media presence which focuses on his Christian values. We got to talking one day and I was able to share about our Church and the values we have. I've never had the opportunity to share like that before (let alone at the gym)! This interaction inspired me to start studying more so that I can have even more confidence when talking about Jesus Christ! Two blessings in one!- Sister Alyssa Morle, Atlanta, GA Mission

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.

Q

Question for this month:

Through faith in Jesus, God makes us alive as well (Ephesians 2:1-10). How does the resurrection of Jesus help you live by faith, even in these difficult days?

A

Answer from last month:

What is one thing you want to improve on in your service to God or one thing you want to add to your daily routine to bring you closer to God?

Turn to page 11 for answers.



Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. — Psalms 20:7