

# **“Let Us Not Underestimate the Marvelous Work the Lord is Doing Through Us”**

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Sister Reyna I. Aburto explained, “The Church is more than the buildings and the ecclesiastical structure; Church is us, the members. We are The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, with Christ at the head and the prophet as His mouthpiece...let us realize how privileged we are to belong to the Church of Jesus Christ, where we can unite our faith, hearts, strengths, minds, and hands for Him to perform His mighty miracles.”<sup>1</sup> *(photo not available)*.

This is the Lviv, Ukraine Chapel where we served as Mission President and companion from 2015-2018.

*(Photo not available)*

In our Ukraine cities the members open their arms as they welcome people into their chapel. It is their custom to greet new and old friends with a kiss on both cheeks. (Some Sundays I wore many colors of lipstick on my face!)

We can help people feel welcome with a sincere smile, or handshake.

*(Photo not available)*

Today the Lviv Chapel is saving souls in a different way. This building now blesses people spiritually and physically, as the Lviv members take care of war refugees. Many of the Church buildings in Ukraine are a way station for families fleeing to safety. We are united in our prayers for a miracle and for their safe deliverance. We need His miracles!

*(Photo not available)* “Anytime we do anything that helps anyone - on either side of the veil - to make and keep their covenants with God, we are helping to gather Israel...Sisters, as you choose to let God prevail in your lives, you will experience for yourselves that our God is ‘a God of miracles’.”<sup>2</sup>

We need each other, and we need to partner with the Lord, so that we are not overwhelmed by the storms of life. Have you ever felt adversity overwhelm you like a giant tsunami? Our Savior knows what we need to survive, and even thrive, during these challenging times.

Sometimes He calms the storm, with a physical miracle...<sup>3</sup> and sometimes He calms us, with a spiritual miracle. He can consecrate our afflictions for our gain.

The Prophet Joseph Smith received this powerful revelation while he was shivering and starving in Liberty Jail.

“You know [sisters], that a very large ship is benefited very much by a very small helm in the time of a storm, by being kept workways with the wind and the waves. Therefore, dearly beloved [sisters], let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for His arm (power) to be revealed. His miracles are waiting for us because He delights to bless us.”<sup>4</sup>

May I introduce you to Bogdana from Ukraine)? (*photo not available*) A 14-year-old girl, seeking to know which Church to join.

She went to a Kiev youth conference, and then was baptized. Bogdana brought her sister Christina to Church. They felt so much love from the members in their branch that Christina was also baptized. They invited their younger sister Sofia to go to Church, and they began having Family Home Evening. Sofia wanted to be baptized, but her parents were apprehensive. The day their mother attended Sofia’s baptism she had tears of joy from the Spirit she felt, and she began attending Church with her three daughters.

(*Photo not available*)

This beautiful family has a wonderful husband/father who agreed to meet with our Europe East Area President, Elder James Martino when he came to a mission conference. Elder Martino said, “Isn’t it time to come to Church and be with your family?” The first Sunday this good brother was able to bless the Sacrament, some of the brethren gave him a necktie, and helped tie it around his neck, along with many hugs around his neck. That day was a sacred Sacrament blessing.

This is the Yerko family in Lviv after they received their Temple recommends (*photo not available*). Does life get any better than this? YES!

Bogdana and Christina are now beautiful young brides and married in the Temple to their eternal sweethearts.

“And now, if your joy will be great with one soul that you have brought unto me into the kingdom of my Father, how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me!”<sup>5</sup>

Bring yourself unto Christ...and then bring your family and your friends! The faith of one young woman, a very small helm, like Bogdana, has changed the course of her family for generations.

Who is the transition person in your family?

Sister Aburto talked about the warm feeling of faith and joy she felt from the members when she walked into an LDS Chapel for the first time. She said it was a “refuge from the storm”. She is the transition person for her family to begin living and loving the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sister Aburto reminds us that her feelings of untied faith and joy she felt from the members as she walked into an LDS Chapel for the first time. She said it was a refuge from the storm. She became the transition person for her family to begin living and loving the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Think about the family, the neighborhood, the town, the ward and the stake where you live, then ask,

Can I make a difference? How can my small efforts make a difference in building God's kingdom?

When we focus on what we can *give*, more than what we can *get*, our kindness can become a miracle! Pray to know who needs a sincere expression of love today? Especially as we think of the youth! They need to feel that they belong!

Last month at General Conference, President Nelson admonished us; "if a teenager doubts his testimony, they do not need your judgment. They need to experience the pure love of Jesus Christ reflected in your words and actions."<sup>6</sup>

I am standing here today, because of the pure love of Christ that I felt from my Ward and Stake members when I was a teenager growing up in Southern California.

My family did not attend Church very often, but we did attend for Christmas and Easter. I loved it! I felt like I belonged there. It was my spiritual home. Those kind Ward members were like angels round about me and just loved me up! As a teenager by myself, each Sunday several families invited me to sit with them. I decided that; "Someday I want to grow up and go to the Temple and have my own Mormon family." As I made that life changing decision...my future husband was making the life changing decision to be baptized as a 14-year-old. His ward embraced him with a sense of belonging and support.

Sometimes heavenly help comes from the people right next to us. Think of the impact we can have on thousands of our youth as we unite our faith and hearts and hands, in prayer and service for the precious young people in our Wards.

Caring for others through our words and actions is not a new idea...

Emma Smith speaking at the first meeting of the Nauvoo Relief Society said,

"We are going to do something extraordinary...We expect extraordinary occasions and pressing calls."<sup>7</sup>

Emma Smith's vision for Relief Society takes place through Humanitarian efforts around the world. When we pay tithing, and fast offerings, we bless others. Today's digital technology helps us find family names to take to the Temple as we bless loved ones on both sides of the veil.

We are created with different gifts and talents, so that we can each contribute from our strengths. The Lord loves effort! YOUR individual effort, and OUR collective efforts! The Lord needs diversity in each of us. Let's contribute our talents, instead of comparing them. Let us collaborate instead of competing. Let's encourage each other as singers, writers, artists, teachers... We need everyone! Just be yourself! Because everyone else is already taken.

"Our faith will always propel us forward. Faith always increases our access to Godly power ...Your flourishing faith will help you turn challenges into unparalleled growth and

opportunity...I urge you with all the hope that is in my heart, to pray to understand your spiritual gifts to cultivate, use and expand them, even more than you ever have. You will change the world as you do so.”<sup>8</sup>

Fast forward to May 2015. President Nelson interviewed us to be the Mission President in Lviv, Ukraine. Then, when we were called by President Eyring, he asked us to leave for Ukraine in just two months! How could I possibly “prepare every needful thing” in just two months? I was also anxious about leaving my family for three years. I needed a miracle!

The next day I flew to BYU Women’s Conference. As I sat in the Marriott Center during the opening session, Sister Wendy Nelson talked about the great work of gathering the Tribes of Israel in Eastern Europe! The very place I was called to serve! My heart received a calm and sacred assurance from the Lord, “Marilyn...Do not fear. Be of good cheer, I will go with you.”

The closing song was “I Know That My Redeemer Lives”. I wept as I sang every word with my whole soul. I cheerfully went on my mission to Ukraine and thankfully the Lord did go with me.

*(Photo not available)*

These are Ukrainian children living in an Orphanage in Lviv who only have a bed to sleep on. My Arizona Relief Society friends are kind and consecrated women who love to serve others. They bought fabric and gathered the Relief Society, Young Women, the YSA and made 200 blankets! They also gave handmade love notes, warm wool socks, new pillows, pillowcases, and some soccer balls to the 140 orphan children. Our missionaries played soccer and sang songs with them. There were so many happy children that day!

We did not change the world. But, through our collaborative efforts we blessed children living in difficult circumstances and now have a sweet memory that will last forever. Giving service changes us, and missionaries, and orphanage children. We all have something to offer.

Bring your loaves and fishes. Bring your talents. The Lord will bless your faith and your efforts with the multi-player effect to make them spread and grow.

Look for opportunities to increase your faith, use your talents, develop new talents, to love, share, and invite!

Did you know that speaking English is a talent? While serving in Ukraine, I asked the Lviv Polytechnic College if I could practice English to some of the college students. The Dean of the Language department was thrilled, and so was I. The students were eager to learn and were very respectful of Jesus Christ on my name tag.

How is the Spirit prompting you to use your talents? Are you praying for a miracle today? Have you thought about how you could be the answer to someone’s prayer?

“Miracles can come as answers to prayer. They are not always what we ask for or what we expect, but when we trust in the Lord...He will suit the miracle to the moment we need it...The Lord performs miracles to remind us of His power, His love for us, His reach from the heavens to our mortal experience, and His desires to teach us that which is of most worth.”<sup>9</sup>

The Book of Mormon is a sacred record full of the Lord’s miracles and mercy. It is a roadmap for our mortal journey.

In the very beginning in chapter 1 we are taught by Nephi, “Behold, I, Nephi will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom He hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance.”<sup>10</sup>

“And thus we see... murmurings... and miracles...”<sup>11</sup>

*(Photo not available)*

What do you see on your mortal journey? The Wilderness? Or do you choose to see the tender mercies from the Lord?

The Book of Mormon teaches us that Lehi and Sariah’s family traveled for years in a sweltering desert. Laman and Lemuel and their wives murmured.<sup>12</sup> They wanted to go back to Jerusalem. They did not want to follow their Prophet father. Where was their Faith in the Lord while they traveled and suffered affliction, hunger, thirst, fatigue and contention?

Nephi was on the exact same journey in the wilderness!

BUT this is what Nephi experienced and has recorded for us, “And it came to pass that the Lord was with us...so great were the blessings of the Lord upon us...our women were strong like unto the men. (I like that part!) “And thus we see that the commandments of God must be fulfilled. And if it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God, he doth nourish them, and strengthen them... and ye shall be led to the promised land and ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led.”<sup>13</sup>

The Lord is with us too! He will lead us during our faithful journey to the promised land.

When we build up the people on our journey, we are building God’s kingdom, as we strive to DO good and BE good.

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”<sup>14</sup>

We are created to do “good works” through Christ Jesus. It is part of our purpose in mortality.

“Verily I say, [women] should be anxiously engaged in a good cause and do many things of their own free will and bring to pass much righteousness; For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as [women] do good they shall in nowise lose their reward.”<sup>15</sup>

Where does this power come from? Look at your Patriarchal blessing for encouraging passages in it. When you are set apart for your church calling you receive power. Being set apart allows each one of us to ask for and receive power and inspiration.

*(Photo not available)*

There is power in the temple ordinances.

I knew that I wanted to be married in the Temple. At the beginning of my senior year at BYU, I met the man of my dreams and three weeks later he asked me to marry him. I received a powerful confirmation to marry Stephen in the Temple. My parents were very upset about my decision to be married in the Temple. They warned me many times that I would be disowned if I married Stephen in a ceremony they could not attend.

When I graduated from BYU, I received my endowments in the Provo Temple. Two weeks later Stephen and I eloped to the Manti Temple. It was just the two of us as we knelt across the altar, in my rented Temple dress. That was May 5th, exactly 46 years ago today! Happy anniversary sweetheart!

And the rest of the story? After our youngest daughter Beth graduated from BYU, she chose to be married in the Manti Temple to her sweetheart, and my mom, who had made big changes in her life, was there.

Being in the Temple is worth every sacrifice. Our hearts are changed when we regularly attend the Temple. When we put a loved one's name on the prayer roll, we unite our faith as we pray for a mighty miracle for a situation, or a person's heart, to change.

“The Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.”<sup>16</sup>

A final miracle story from Ukraine.

This beautiful city in the Carpathian Mountains on the western border of Ukraine had a very small Church group (*photo not available*). When we learned that the Lviv mission was going to combine into the Kiev mission, there would not be enough missionaries to serve in Uzhhorod. And if we moved the elders from Uzhhorod, the members would not have Priesthood leadership.

With heavy hearts, my husband and I made the six-hour train ride to Uzhhorod to announce this transition. As the meeting began, a family came into the small upstairs apartment that served as the chapel. The husband wore an Angel Moroni lapel pin on his suit, so we assumed they were vacationers from another branch or ward. My husband was prepared to make the announcement about the missionaries' departures after the sacrament meeting.

As he was about to stand, the visiting man stood up and introduced himself as Vasil Parets. He had worked in the Czech Republic and joined the Church there. He returned home and wanted his wife and three children to be taught the Gospel and baptized also! (*Photo not available*)

What a joy it was to witness him baptize each of his family members! The missionaries remained in Uzhhorod, and there were nine baptisms there during that season. Brother Parets became the Branch President in Uzhhorod! Does life get any better than this? YES! Their oldest son is now serving a mission in the Czech Republic where his father joined the Church years earlier!

It seems that every conversion story has many behind-the-scenes miracles.

May I just say, if you want more joy in your life... plan now serve a mission!! You will be an instrument in the Lord's hands, and He will perform mighty miracles through you.

The Lord is with you daily! You witness miracles daily! You will make forever friends!

This is a Nauvoo family photo! (*Photo not available*).

Senior missionaries! Young Missionaries! Nauvoo has been restored as a monument to our Pioneer saints who sacrificed to restore the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to build the kingdom of God on earth. They called it a Temple City and a covenant community. We called it heaven on earth.

There are 23 beautifully restored historic buildings in Nauvoo. But it is not about the buildings. It is about the heroic examples of people who lived there. Many of us are here today because our ancestors helped each other on their journey.

The faithful Nauvoo Pioneers in the 1840's and the wonderful Nauvoo missionaries today, are excellent examples of members of the Church uniting their faith, hearts, strengths, minds, and hands; so that the Lord can perform His mighty miracles.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said as he was leaving Nauvoo for the last time "This is the loveliest place and the best people under the heavens."<sup>17</sup> I agree!

"My dear brothers and sisters, the best is yet to come for those who spend their lives building up others...Our Savior and Redeemer Jesus Christ will perform some of His mightiest works between now and when He comes again."<sup>18</sup>

Sisters, let us not underestimate ourselves and the good that we can do as we unite with the Lord. Or underestimate the miracles that Heavenly Father has waiting for us. The *best* is yet to come! Be of good cheer, I testify that the Lord will be with you.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen

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<sup>1</sup> See Reyna I. Aburto, "We are the Church of Jesus Chhirst of Latter-day Saints," April 2022.

<sup>2</sup> See Russell M. Neilson, "Let God Prevail," October 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 4:39.

<sup>4</sup> Doctrine & Covenants 123:16-17.

<sup>5</sup> Doctrine & Covenants 18:16.

<sup>6</sup> Russell M. Neilson, "Peacemakers Needed," April 2023.

<sup>7</sup> See Emma Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society*, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> See Russell M. Neilson, "Christ is Risen; Faith in Him Will Move Mountains," April 2021.

<sup>9</sup> See Ronald A. Rasband, "Behold! I Am a God of Miracles," April 2021.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Nephi 1:20.

<sup>11</sup> See 1 Nephi 16 &17.

<sup>12</sup> See 1 Nephi.

<sup>13</sup> See 1 Nephi 17:2-3.

<sup>14</sup> Ephesians 2:10.

<sup>15</sup> Doctrine & Covenants 58:27-28.

<sup>16</sup> Mosiah 5: 2.

<sup>17</sup> History of the Church, 6:554.

<sup>18</sup> See Russell M. Neilson, "Revelation for the Church, Revelation for our lives," April 2018.