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A Faith-Promoting Experience

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Abstract: A testimonial from Old Mexico, wherein the author explains the role of the Book of Mormon in his conversion to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

A Faith-Promoting Experience

By M. Bantista, a Descendant of Father Lehi

I have been asked to write a few lines concerning incidents in my life.

I was about twenty-two years old when I started investigating spiritual things. At that time, a Methodist minister was interested in my becoming a member of his church. Other pastors of different denominations had the same desire.

One day I took sick, and was seriously ill for six months. In this condition it was my privilege, for the first time, to see one of the elders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Ammon M. Tenney, who opened the Mexican

mission, came to my bed-side and explained to me the restored gospel. He told me that God's children in ancient days were healed by the divine power, and asked me if I would like him to administer to me. I said, "Willingly." When he had done so, I felt as if I were in a new world.



Naturally, the spirit of investigation took hold of me, and, taking advantage of the interest of the ministers and the "Mormon" elders, I began to study and continued my search almost day and night, and I had always on hand many questions to ask. I very soon found the confusion of the sectarian world about their ideas and creeds. I did enjoy

their education, their beautiful language, their polished manners, but when they left, I was just as empty in principles as before. On the other hand, when Elder Tenney explained the doctrines of the everlasting gospel and answered my questions, though in his poorly-spoken Spanish, I shed tears of joy and my soul was full of light. So, through the mercy of my Eternal Father, I was privileged to hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and felt that there was not a more blessed boy on earth, since the Lord sent to me one of his servants who understood the principles of the gospel and knew how to plant such a knowledge in my soul.

Up to this time I did not know what the future might bring forth, as those ministers were still striving to persuade me to join their churches, especially the Methodist minister, who came to me and proposed to make me one of his fellow preachers. Besides this, he said he was willing to pay me two hundred dollars for the last four months during which time we had been engaged in discussion, and he added the promise of a good salary in the near future. I was more than surprised, and after a sharp discussion, I told him that even for a million dollars I could not preach something I did not believe.

He then went to my father and induced him to intercede for him. My father, having no knowledge whatever of the truth and thinking it would be educational and profitable temporally as well as spiritually, thought I was foolish in refusing it. When my father found I could not be persuaded, he decided to send me away from home.

At this time, I had already been invited by President Tenney to attend the first conference in Mexico, to be held in Cuernavaca, about eighty miles from home. The minister knew about it, and used the argument that going there would cost money and waste time. My father did not want me to go. When I was wandering upon the street not knowing what to do, I thought of the sacred teachings and example of my darling mother.

Allow me to say a few words about my dear mother. Though she was a Catholic, she never bowed before any image, but in time of need and sorrow, she always went into a private place and shed tears in supplication to the living Father in Heaven. How many times in my childhood days I found her in such a state, without her knowledge! My soul was full of joy to hear her prayers and petitions; for, indeed, it was the sweetest thing of my whole life. To imitate her was natural. In time, the imitation became a practice, and that practice became a habit, and that habit my Rock, and the refreshing Fountain of my poor and thirsty soul.

Coming to my subject, what could a helpless boy like me do in such a condition? What, if I had chosen to do as the minister wished me to do? So, full of hope and confidence, more than ever, in the Lord, I went to my heavenly Father in prayer. Among other things, I prayed that the Lord would soften my father's heart and that he would come to me at five o'clock in the morning in answer to my prayer and further testimony of the divinity of the truth.

While I was praying, I felt as if my body was dissolved. I felt the power of faith within my soul. With the exception of one other occasion of the same nature, I haven't enjoyed a similar privilege, which I regret very much.

When I arose from my knees, an unusual peace filled my

soul, and I felt the unmistakable testimony that my prayer had been answered. Instead of going away, I went to my room and went to bed without my father's knowledge, and slept peacefully until about five o'clock, when my father, as I had prayed he would do, came into my room and called me by name: "Mayo, Mayo, my son, are you here?"

I answered, "Yes, sir."

He replied, "I am more than pleased to know you are here, for I have changed my mind. I want you to go to Cuernavaca to conference. Take the money you need and go either way you wish."

Oh, I wish I had the power to explain to every human being what I did experience at those moments, while my beloved father was talking to me. Lying upon my bed, I could not fall upon the ground, as did the brother of Jared when he saw the finger of the Lord. I felt my weakness and unworthiness very much. For, in very deed, I was trembling and wondering how it was that the Lord could honor me in doing exactly the thing I had asked for, so that it might be a testimony to me of the divinity of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Up to this time I had not read what the Lord had said in these last days through his Prophet: "I the Lord, am bound, when ye do what I say, but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise." (Doc. and Cov. 82:10.) To satisfy myself that my father truly wanted me to go to conference, I argued against it, but he urged me now to go as strongly as he had tried not to have me go before, and almost forced me to go.

I had written to President Tenney the day before, by one of the brethren from Tecalco, that I could not come, but now the opportunity was at hand.

We were three from the same town to go to conference, one already a member, and two other young men, who, by the help of the Lord, had been converted and were ready to be baptized. As soon as I met them, I told them the news. They were not less surprised than I was. Nevertheless, they did not know what had happened to me during the night before. At once we all arranged to go on foot through the mountains instead of by train and on horseback.

Although I was still quite weak from my long sickness, and the distance was about eighty miles, the experience was a treat.

That morning, full of faith and hope in the Lord, the three of us started on our journey. About two o'clock in the afternoon we reached Atlatlanca. The weather was most beautiful. We enjoyed the splendor of the green valleys and surrounding hills, the echo of the human voice here and there, the singing of the birds. All nature seemed to smile upon us. Indeed, the beautiful landscape, the wonderful truths we had learned, and the

glorious anticipations awaiting us at conference filled my soul with joy unspeakable.

But oh! what a change. A few moments after we left Atlatlanca, heavy, black clouds arose upon the hills. Thunder roared and the most terrifying lightning descended almost incessantly everywhere. It seemed that all the elements were in commotion at once. The storm came from the south-west, the direction we were taking. It seemed as if, instead of the Lord being with us, we might be swallowed up and the world come to an end. We certainly felt our dependence, for we were almost overpowered with fear. Nevertheless, I did not forget the Lord who had heard my prayer and so marvelously answered it, and so began to supplicate my heavenly Father for his mercy and blessings. Then a peaceful, heavenly feeling filled my soul. My companions did not feel exactly as I did, although we decided to keep on our journey and take the consequences. As we went on, to our great astonishment, we found ourselves on the wet, storm-swept ground and in a few seconds, we were encircled by a terrifying storm. Destruction swept all around us but left us untouched. About a mile distant from us, the storm moved as we moved for many miles, until we reached Yautepec. While we were journeying in this condition, we felt as if we were in the bowels of hell. My thoughts were about the ancient times during the destruction of the Nephites and Lamanites during the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as in the days of Noah, when he was in the ark and the rest of humanity was destroyed.

And after all, what is man? Indeed, we felt, as it has been said, as if we were only a handful of dust, helpless to do anything for ourselves.

As we reached Yautepec, the place for our staying during the night, we had a most wonderful testimony that the power of the Almighty was with us. For as soon as we entered into the house, or rather at the very instant that we closed the door, the storm burst in great terror upon the house. It seems as if by some power the rain was detained just above our heads. At this moment, I had the conviction that Satan and all his powers of destruction, are controlled by the will of God, and that therefore at this time, they were absolutely harmless to us.

All these wonderful testimonies and experiences rested upon my mind, and my joy was more than I could express or understand, but I was so weak and exhausted, and my body pained me so that I went to bed immediately. My brethren rubbed me and worked with me until it seemed as if I left this world in great commotion, and knew no more until the next glorious and most beautiful morning, when the storm had passed away.

After bowing in reverence and thanking our heavenly Father for his protecting care, blessings, and power manifest in our behalf, we started again upon our journey. Our minds were filled with wonder, contemplating the incidents of the day before. Filled with gratitude and thanksgiving to our heavenly Father, we reached our destination where the conference was held.

As we went in, we found President Tenney reading a letter to the people (not in any meeting yet). To my great surprise, it was mine. As soon as we were seen by him, he quit reading and said: "Oh hermano Mayo, hermano Mayo, a mi puro gusto" (his favorite expression), and came to meet us, shake hands, and introduce us to the people, and you may imagine the rest.

At the conference, I was baptized by Brother Pedro Prios, a local elder, and also ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood and set apart as a teacher. This was the most glorious time of my life, for it seems that at that time, the testimony of the divinity of the everlasting gospel of the Son of God, and of the living God, our Eternal Father, was naturally planted and impressed upon my soul. Since that time, I have felt that, while in this world, my life ought to be consecrated to the work and will of my Redeemer.

After a humble and honest investigation of myself, I have found that the gospel which has been restored to man again, through the immortal Prophet Joseph Smith, is the sweetest thing of my soul, and for this heavenly blessing bestowed upon me, unworthy as I am, my soul rejoices, and with my heart full of gratitude, I give the honor and glory to the Father and the Son.

When we arrived back home, I found our family filled with joy, especially my mother. She was extremely happy to know I was already baptized and had the Priesthood conferred upon me. Very soon every one of the family became members of the Church and remain as such until today, and are doing their "bit." On the following Sunday, a meeting was held in the Methodist church, its minister being the one before referred to.

I had the greatest desire to deliver my first sermon to this congregation and convert every one of them if possible. How to obtain this privilege I did not know. I remembered the Great Franklin said: "Where there is a will, there is a way." So, as I had the will I found the way. I went to one of my aunts, the wife of one of my companions who was the friend of the minister, to obtain permission from him. This morning, Sunday, I made up my mind to talk about a chapter from the Bible I had read the evening before, which impressed me very much. As I took the Bible, to go to meeting, I had the impression to

take the Book of Mormon instead, but I did not pay any attention and went out. The Spirit came to me again and said, "Don't take the Bible; go back for the Book of Mormon." Again I did not pay attention but went on. When I had gone about one half block, I could go no further, and the Spirit said to me plainly: "Go back and exchange." By this time, I knew it was from the Lord, and as I went back and laid the Bible on the table and picked up the Book of Mormon, it opened to the 28th chapter of Second Nephi. As I commenced reading, I remembered what it taught. My eyes were opened at once with great astonishment, but could not imagine what a marvelous lesson the Lord was about to give me. When we reached the church, my aunt asked the minister, and he said I could use five minutes. I thanked him and said I would rather wait for another chance when I could have more time. At this, the minister buried his face in his hands upon the table for a few minutes. The congregation sat waiting in wonder. He then arose and said I could have all the time I wished. After speaking and explaining to them my views, I began to read the Book of Mormon from the 28th chapter of II Nephi, and, being blessed of the Lord, I gave them a testimony of the everlasting gospel. The Spirit of the Lord was with me.

At my conclusion, the minister arose and, among other things, said: "Brethren and sisters, I am very delighted at the testimony of Brother Bantista. He has spoken to us this beautiful morning the word of the Lord. He is a member of our church in full fellowship." With that kind of language, he spoke for a length of time.

After meeting, the minister called me into a private room, and, to my great surprise, he said to me: "Brother Bantista, I am more than pleased to know the step you have taken; you are going to be a great instrument in the hands of the Lord and do much good in our church. [The last part of his statement did not come true, for, in a very short time, his congregation was broken into pieces, and we had material to organize a branch.] Nevertheless, I know you have been reading that apocryphal and spurious Book of Mormon written by Joseph Smith."

As the minister spoke to me in this manner, I understood the marvelous lesson the Lord had provided for me in his mysterious way, for I found that the preacher was making the biggest mistake about the Book of Mormon, and I had obtained a wonderful testimony of the divinity of that history of my forefathers, the prophets of old.

As a literal descendant of our Father Lehi, I feel in my soul that the gospel which was once known among my people but taken away on account of transgression, has been restored again

to mankind. I feel that the Book of Mormon is one of the most glorious books on earth, because from that holy book, I have become acquainted with my ancestry, the dealings of the Lord with them, and the glorious promises to them in the near future, although, because of transgression, we have suffered the wrath of the Almighty for centuries until the present day. The nations of the world should profit by our experiences.

The Ethics of Tobacco Prohibition

By Fred L. W. Bennett, President of The No-Tobacco League of Utah

I think tobacco could very properly be prohibited on the ground that it is a common nuisance. But suppose all the smokers agreed or were compelled to indulge their habit only in the privacy of their own homes. What then? Many hold the opinion that a man has a perfect right to do what he likes so long as he is not interfering with the rights of others; that he should be allowed to poison himself if he wishes, that it is his own affair. But is it? Let us consider the matter for a moment.

One of the fundamental principles of civilization is that the state is under an obligation to care for every indigent citizen who is taken ill, quite regardless of how that illness was brought about. Many persons have ruined themselves by the use of narcotics, among other things, and the state has already decided that certain narcotics, such as opium and morphine, shall not be used indiscriminately by any one. The contention is that if the state is to be considered under an obligation to care for individuals when they are sick, if they have no money, it has a moral right to say they shall not use a given thing when science and experience say that thing is detrimental to health. That seems to be a fair proposition to me.

If you say tobacco is not sufficiently dangerous to merit prohibition, that is entirely a different matter. The argument then is a scientific one, but many persons who profess to be against the use of tobacco are confusing the issue by saying the prohibition of tobacco would be wrong on ethical grounds. The fact is they have never regarded it as really injurious. The ethics of prohibition are sound, but is tobacco really harmful? Does it do all that we have been saying it does? Should it be annihilated? Should we destroy it? Do its sins merit such a course? These are the great questions. Science and religion are on the side of its destruction. Are they right?