

PURE RELIGION

The Lord Looketh on the Heart

Sister Husted had been up the “hill” before. Baños, Ecuador, was a small village 12,000 feet above sea level and nestled in a valley of the beautiful Andes mountains. The hill was not only steep, it was a quarter of an hour’s walk from the center of town. So when Sister Husted’s new junior companion suggested they go up the hill, Sister Husted was wary but supportive. As a missionary with an additional assignment in welfare, she had climbed hills before. What harm could there be in climbing one more? A broken fence ran alongside the road; and when the sisters reached the top of the hill, they looked between a gap in the fence at a most singular sight—David Fernandez.

David was 86-years-old, legally blind, and unable to read. He walked with a limp. His clothes were dirty, and the smell was nearly overpowering. He lived in a shack with a campfire in the middle of a mud floor. The walls were comprised of various odds and ends, mostly wood that had been mounted together in an attempt to keep out the wind and the rain. David had lost his wife the year before, and now he lived in his shack—tending an orchard—all alone.

When the sisters explained to David that he could be reunited with his wife one day, he became fervently interested in the gospel. As the discussions progressed, so did David’s desire to become well. He had a distended stomach that Sister Husted suspected was caused by drinking polluted water. A bus had run over his foot when he was younger and, not having money to go to a doctor, David had little option but to allow the fractured bones to heal as best they could. It left him able to walk, but only haltingly. His shirt was covered with blood stains from bug bites.

As the sisters taught the doctrines of spiritual salvation, they also taught the doctrines of

temporal salvation. When David asked how he could improve his health, Sister Husted showed him how to purify his water and how regular cleaning and disinfecting his home would result in fewer bug bites.

The elders were called in to teach him how to bathe. Sister Husted removed David’s shoes and socks only to find David’s feet dirty and unsanitary. His toenails had grown so long that they rounded the tops of his toes and had embedded themselves into the other side. Tenderly, the missionaries washed David’s feet and cut his toenails, all the while showing him how to care for himself in the future.

As David became stronger and healthier, his desire for baptism increased. When the day arrived, the sisters—who had emphasized principles of self-reliance throughout the discussions—felt strongly that David needed to get to the church by himself. Because he walked so slowly, David decided he would have to get up at 6:30 in the morning to make the 9:00 service.

David walked down the hill and was baptized that day. Every Sunday since, he awakens at 6:30 in the morning and walks one and one-half hours into town in order to attend church. The branch president talks of David as his most faithful member. Members walk up the hill to take turns reading to David out of his treasured Book of Mormon that he keeps wrapped in three plastic sacks under his mattress.

When Sister Husted talks of her greatest experience in the mission field, she talks about a hill and a blind, diminutive spiritual giant by the name of David Fernandez who gave her the opportunity to experience a joy that comes so freely from Christlike service.

