

MIRRORS
— OF —
JESUS

A MEMOIR

FINDING PARALLELS
OF CHRIST IN OUR LIVES

MICHELLE DENNIS CHRISTENSEN

CFI

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DEDICATION

*To my husband, Martin
Of all the love stories ever told,
ours is my favorite.*

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CHAPTER 1

FINDING MIRRORS OF CHRIST IN OUR LIVES

“All things bear record of [God].”

(Moses 6:63)



The truth was sobering. Without a great sacrifice, Martin would die.

We'd been at the hospital the entire day meeting with doctors, social workers, nutritionists, and more, hoping Martin would qualify for a kidney transplant. The sheer volume of information, along with intense emotions, was a lot to take in. The thirty-minute ride allowed us the opportunity to discuss it before greeting the chaos of a family we'd left unattended.

“What do you think?” I asked Martin on the way home.

Martin let out a heavy sigh as we contemplated the future.

His daily life was miserable on hemodialysis, a treatment meant to keep you alive but not make you healthy. People on this form of dialysis die in an average of three years (Stokes). If something didn't change, my fifty-one-year-old husband would pass away as a young man. Of our six children, we still had three living at home, the youngest just out of second grade. Martin needed to live.

Yet, in order for him to live, someone had to make an enormous sacrifice. Martin could receive a kidney from a deceased donor once a suitable match was found. For that to happen, the grieving family of an individual who just died or who lived on life-support, would have to make the tough, time-sensitive decision to donate the organs before the organs lost viability (“Donation After Life”).

If Martin received a kidney from a living donor, that person would have to undergo major surgery, one more difficult than many other procedures. With advanced technology, most surgeries were outpatient or required only one to two days in the hospital. Not a transplant. The donor might stay in the hospital up to a week. Plus, any surgery was risky, especially major surgery, and while the probability was low, it still existed that someone could die during the operation.

“It’s humbling,” Martin said. “Today it hit me just what we’re asking another individual to do. Just for me.”

How could he ask that of someone?

As we talked, I saw a strong parallel to our Savior. Just as someone had to sacrifice to save Martin, the Savior sacrificed to save all of us. Without His atonement, we would die physically, spiritually, eternally. The more I contemplated the sacrifice required to save Martin, the better I understood the Savior’s gift for me, for Martin, and for every individual who ever lived.

The scriptures teach that “all things bear record of him,” (Moses 6:63), but I never expected this type of similarity, the need for someone to offer such an intense personal gift for Martin to live. How had it come to this? We’d only been married such a short time, less time than I had spent as a single adult.

Like many teenage girls who are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, my future dreams had centered on getting married and raising a family. At Ricks College, I trained to be a secretary, so it would prepare me with a skill to put a husband through college. Much to my surprise, I received my associate’s degree still single. With a marketable skill, I got a job, positive I would find the perfect man and soon begin raising a family. It didn’t happen.

One night when I was in my early twenties, I had a dream, the essence of which stayed vivid over the years, even though the details remained shadowed. I dreamt I was engaged to marry a large man

whose strong arms enveloped me in a secure embrace. My love for him outshone anything I'd felt for previous flames.

I awoke knowing the Lord had given me hope I would marry. Year after year passed, and I clung to that memory. Though I dated a lot, nothing ever worked out. As the years advanced, the memory of the dream lingered in the back of my mind. However, I didn't know if the Lord meant to fulfill that blessing in this life or the next.

I prayed for strength and perspective. "Heavenly Father, please help me accept Thy will. Help me be content."

With faith in God, I threw myself into alternate plans. I returned to school and completed a master's degree in my early thirties. The Lord helped me build a wonderful, rewarding life, complete with an exhilarating career and opportunities for service in the Church.

In one of my callings, I served in the Young Women's organization with two individuals who also volunteered in the Scouting program. They were on the staff of a week-long leadership training for adults called Wood Badge, and they recruited me to attend. Why not? It would be fun camping for a week, and the classes would benefit my job. Yet an unsettling but exciting impression lurked in the shadows, nagging, insisting on a different purpose for attending. It informed me I'd meet someone.

I dismissed the thought because those elusive feelings had been wrong more times than I could count. Besides, that would be impossible in a camp full of married Scoutmasters. Right? My life was good, and I didn't want my hopes dashed. Again.

In August, I left the world behind for eight days in the Uinta Mountains in northern Utah. On the opening day, rain dripped onto my hair from the overhanging pine tree branches. The cold, damp air chilled my enthusiasm and heightened my nerves. What on earth was I doing up there? I knew nothing about Scouting. I spied my new team, one woman, one teenager, and three married Scoutmasters. They were talking with our team leader. The cold mountain air pierced my flimsy rain poncho, and I shivered as I moved across the wet mountain grass to join them.

I tilted my head up to look at the six-foot-six team leader. His name tag read, "Martin." I knew that name.

He was the staff member one of the Young Women's advisors had referred to several months earlier when she gave a lesson about rising above our trials. She'd met a man at a leadership camp. His humor, compassion, and enthusiasm had helped their team become a cohesive group. She'd thought he had it all, the perfect life. The night before they left, she discovered the opposite. Six months earlier, his wife had died from breast cancer.

When she told the story, I'd pictured a sweet older man helping others, and it warmed my heart.

There he stood. My team leader. And he wasn't even close to seventy years old.

I smiled at him, and a feeling settled in my stomach—not just a feeling, but that feeling, the very feeling I'd hoped for but given up on years earlier. The feeling that this man might end up being more than my team leader. It excited and frightened me. I moved forward with cautious optimism.

During the week, I hardly took my gaze off his deep-set blue eyes when he presented the leadership lessons. At an impromptu astronomy lesson he taught, I stood next to him while he pointed out different constellations in the dark, cold mountain sky. I'm sure my eyes shone brighter than the millions of stars twinkling down upon us as I tried to catch his attention.

When it rained and Martin saw how my cheap poncho didn't keep me dry, he brought me a better one to use. I thanked him, and he waved it aside, saying he'd do that for any of our team. The expression in his eyes, though, communicated something different. We were connecting on a deeper level.

Our conversations around the campfires seemed private, even though the entire team was present. Every discussion we had, from favorite books to quantum mechanics, deepened my interest. As he talked about his four children, ages eleven down to three, his love for them was clear and impressed me.

Every quality I had ever wanted he appeared to possess, including my frivolous desire to marry a very tall man. Each day I became more and more attracted to him. I treasured each moment of the enchanted bubble we lived in, away from the pressures of normal existence.

The week ended too soon. Real life and real-life problems beckoned us back. Anxious uncertainty filled my heart the last few hours before I left. I didn't want to drive down the mountain and abandon the romantic magic. Would it die once we got home, crushed under the weight of reality, everyday routines, and pressures so distant from the charmed days in the mountains?

Not if I could help it. I wanted the opportunity for a relationship to develop out of the spark that had ignited during the week. If the tiny flame got doused, then I'd move on. But I wasn't about to let the flame die without adding fuel first.

"I'd like to meet your kids," I said before I left.

Martin returned a cautious smile, but I watched his eyes follow me as I walked to the car that was my ride home. I smiled and waved goodbye.

The following week, before I could make good on my plans to deliver him a fresh peach pie, he called me. We talked on the phone for five hours. We talked again the next day and went on a date the following Saturday. Our relationship progressed quickly, and we got married three months later.

My dream from years ago, the shadowed hint of a promise from Heavenly Father, had come true in very literal ways. Martin was a large man who wrapped me in security every time he held me. My love for him surpassed anything I'd ever experienced before.

Now, after only fourteen years of marriage, we faced the possibility of his premature death.

The weight of this trial would have crushed me without the help of Jesus Christ. I needed Him, I searched for Him, and one way I found Him was by looking at how my life's experiences mirrored His.

Knowing Jesus pled for another way when He was in Gethsemane gave me courage to face the trials I didn't want to face. Knowing Jesus wept with Martha reassured me He would succor me. Knowing Jesus sacrificed himself so we could live gave me faith as we searched for a donor so that Martin could live.

The scriptures tell us that all things from God typify Jesus Christ (see 2 Nephi 11:4). I believe when it says "all things," it means all things, including our own lives. Mirrors of Jesus surround us and are unique to each individual's life and experiences. Many are obvious.

MIRRORS OF JESUS

Some are not. When we search for and discover the mirrors in our lives, we grow to trust Jesus Christ more.

I needed that kind of trust when the doctors diagnosed Martin with kidney failure, and I faced the most difficult trial of my life.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Michelle Dennis Christensen is a kidney donor, an award-winning author, a speaker, an avid family historian, and a chocolate lover. She is passionate about shining a spotlight on the Savior to share His love and light with others. Michelle likes sharing gospel principles in an approachable, applicable manner and thinks that a Gospel Doctrine teacher is the best calling ever.

When in her early thirties, Michelle married Martin Christensen, a widower with four children, and she left her career to be their mother. She and Martin were blessed to have two children together, and Michelle is grateful that all six children call her “Mom.” You can connect with her and view more photos at MichelleDennisChristensen.com.

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