This post was written by Elaine Merrill, Kelly Merrill's wife. The purpose of this article is to expand on the faithfulness issues discussed in the original article. There is a link to the original article below.

In the post entitled "How Far Will You Go?" Kelly Merrill posed the question "How far will you go if everything you have ever used for support suddenly fails you?" He discussed his personal challenge with following the advice of his priesthood leaders when that advice ran contrary to what he personally wanted and thought was the best course of action for him and his family. His sense of having "the rug pulled out from under him" included a sense of abandonment from the support structure that the Church and church members provide. Experiences such as that refine our spirit through a trial of our faith. I also experienced a specific defining moment where I faced a crossroads where the foundations of my faith seemed unstable.

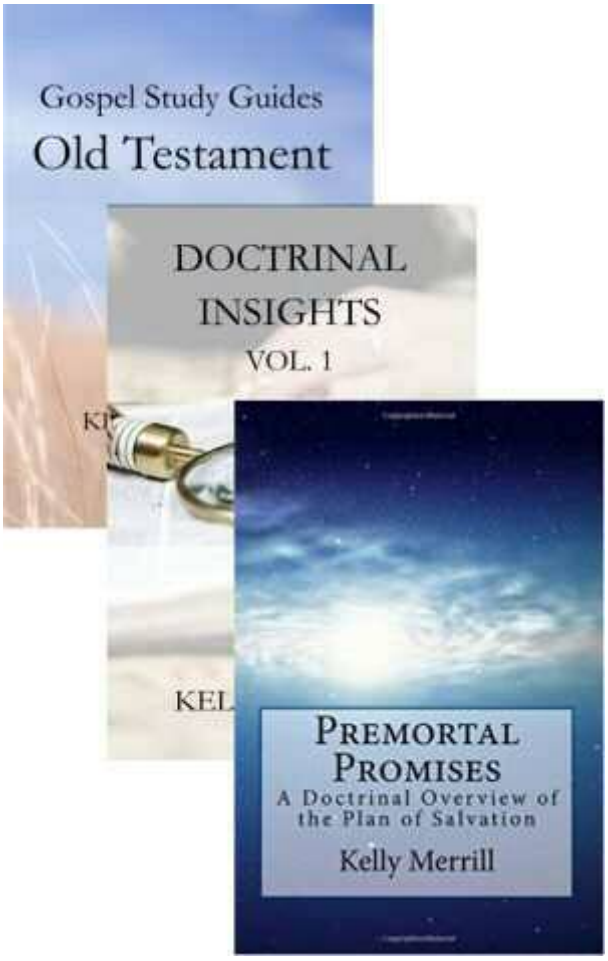
Fulfilling the desires of youth

At the beginning of his article Kelly referenced a long conversation in a moving "piece of tin." The following reflects portions of that conversation we had in the car. Of all the dreams of my youth, motherhood was always at the top of the list. I was one of those teenagers who would rather be babysitting than attending a party on weekend nights, for then I could dream of things to come as I rocked a child to sleep. As years went by,

and more years went by, and still more years went by, I found myself with a rich and fulfilling life and career, filled with service, but missing the husband and children that I had planned for and prayed for since my youth. Then over a sixteen month period I had half a dozen strong spiritual experiences and witnesses that I should adopt a child along with specific spiritual guidance and direction that sent me halfway around the world to seek out my daughter.

Chaos in Romania

With the then recent overthrow of communism and the new government struggling to adapt, adoption in Romania was chaotic. Prior to boarding the plane, I was told that a baby was located for me and that the adoption process was underway and I would be flying home in 2 weeks. It turned out to be 14 weeks.



When I landed I was told that there was no such child, that the messages got mixed up. Instead they had tried to contact me to tell not to come as the government was going to halt all adoptions. There was consistent confusion and mix-ups, hope and disappointment, on a daily basis. But because of previous spiritual witnesses it was not a cause of worry as I knew things would work out.

The morning I saw my daughter for the first time was the most profound spiritual experience of my life. While seeking out children that had been turned away from the overcrowded local orphanage, I was in a crowded, noisy, muddy street filled with people all talking and yelling at once. The moment I saw my daughter it was as if someone had used one of those special effects lenses that blurs all but the center of the picture. I quite literally saw only her and her birth mother. All others, though most were physically closer to me, were faded in the background. The dozen or so loud simultaneous conversations were muted to my ears. The spiritual witness I received then was not a “still small voice” there was nothing subtle about it. I had a strong powerful feeling from head to toe – so strong that I stood

there motionless and speechless, I'm sure with my mouth gaping open. I was left with an absolute, I thought unquestionable, knowledge that she was the child I was sent to adopt.

Challenges with the adoption

We experienced the typical challenges encountered by all those adopting in Romania at the time but after the adoption was finalized the real trials began. While I watched other parents receive visas for their children in a timely manner, I waited. I counted over 500 parents who received visas as I waited. I was alerted to possible problems but did not worry. I knew from my spiritual witness that things would work out. I continued to do everything possible on both sides of the globe to ensure our success, meanwhile struggling to locate basic necessities like formula, diapers and food. I had family working with government officials in the United States as well as what I was doing in Romania.

But despite the frustrations with the government, the waiting time was also filled with weeks and months full of one-on-one time with my little girl. I actually rejoiced when I received word that our visa was denied, as all parents who were denied visas got "humanitarian parole" paperwork to return home within 48 hours after their visa was denied. However. because my case got caught up as the pawn in a power struggle between government agencies in the U.S., for me, that paperwork did not come. We waited, and waited, each day thinking we would fly out the next day – each day being disappointed yet again. During this time all adoptions were halted and the US embassy was no longer filled with hopeful American parents, and only I remained, and because of the witness that I had received, still certain that it was just a matter of time.

One morning after more than three months in Romania, the head of the embassy called me into her office and told me that my case had been taken to the highest level and I was denied Humanitarian Parole, and that the decision was unappealable. They recognized the adoption as valid but would not issue the paperwork for my daughter to enter the United States. I had legal responsibility for the toddler, but was not allowed to return home with her. I was able to remain calm and ask clarifying questions for only a short while, until it became necessary for me look at and touch my child to meet her needs. At that point I completely fell apart.

I spent the remainder of day pushing a stroller through the streets of Bucharest with tears running down my cheeks. I felt absolutely abandoned, but also very confused. Everything I knew about receiving answers to prayers, about sensing the Holy Ghost, about knowing spiritually what is right, lead me to this specific child. I had proceeded with absolute faith and unceasing work – but met with failure. I was trapped with no way out. As I walked, I reasoned: I did exactly what the Lord directed - I worked with all my might, mind, and strength - as did my mother back in the states. Why would the Lord direct me to this child only to lose this child? Why this child? He could have directed me to any one of hundreds of others, all of whom got visas or parole. Since God would not direct me on the wrong path - was what I received really direction from the Lord? If a witness that strong was not direction – what about all of the other times I had received direction or answers to prayer?

Suddenly my entire belief structure seemed like a game of “pick-up sticks” where someone pulls out one stick and you start watching the entire stack start to fall. I suddenly did not know what “feelings” and “beliefs” I could count upon. That was my moment of: "What will you do if everything you have used for support in the past suddenly fails you?"

As I walked and wept throughout the day I counted my losses. The time, effort, energy, and expense involved were extensive and I had lost my health as well. There was great sorrow with the assumption that I would lose the little toddler I had so grown to love. I realized that I was at a crossroad, and a decision concerning my faith needed to be made. During that long hard day I made the decision that with all that I had lost I would NOT allow my faith to be added to that list. Nothing seemed to make sense, nothing seemed logical, and to a mathematics professor like me that was very disturbing. I felt very lost and alone, and abandoned, and I told the Lord that I did not understand. I pleaded with him to continue to guide me. I could not see or feel the support I had previously received from a belief in God, but made the decision to proceed in faith and walk through this emotional darkness as if I knew with a certainty that it was there.

Prior to that day in Romania my attitude towards faith was much like Alma’s when he counseled to “experiment on the word” and to plant the seed and watch it grow. I built my faith with action, logic, and learning to listen to the Spirit. What I learned that day was that a trial of your faith builds inner strength, and that Faith is a choice.

About the Author: Elaine Merrill is the wife trapped in the moving piece of tin foil. (See "How Far Will You Go?") For those interested in the rest of the story, it took the personal intervention of the Vice President of the United States to get Elaine and her daughter out of Romania.