

# FROM PROVO TO PAKISTAN

FLOODING THE EARTH WITH THE BOOK OF MORMON



*• an inspiring true story •*

BY SEAN DIXON & STEPHEN ANJUM  
WITH STEPHAN TAEGER

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# 1

## A LETTER FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD

*Spring 1989*

“SEAN, WHO DO YOU KNOW IN PAKISTAN?” MY MOM SAID AS I ENTERED THROUGH THE front door of our white, split-level home in Provo, Utah.

I laughed and said, “Nobody. Why do you ask?”

“I got the most interesting letter from the mailbox today.”

She held up an envelope that had three large stamps from Pakistan and a postmark from a place called Faisalabad. My name and address were written neatly in red ink on the front.

Intrigued, I took the envelope from her hand, wondering who would be writing *me* a letter from across the world.

I was eighteen years old, finishing my first year as a student at Utah Valley State College and working as a waiter at Magleby’s restaurant to try to earn money for my upcoming mission to Toronto, Canada. We lived in one of those idyllic middle-class neighborhoods situated against the hills on the northeast side of Provo. To this day, I have never found a sledding hill that matches the one directly behind my house. I grew up with four siblings and about twenty boys my age in my ward. Our red brick church was a block from our house, and there was a park across the street where I played basketball, football, baseball, and every night game imaginable. I was raised with the gospel of Jesus Christ, family, friends, and sports at the center of my life. Those foundational days of my adolescence were quickly ending as I anticipated leaving for Canada in the coming weeks.

I anxiously opened the letter and was introduced to my new friend Stephen Anjum. The letter read:

Dear Sean,

My name is Stephen Anjum and I am a Pakistani Christian. Some times ago I came to know about you and, (the Book of Mormon) Another Testament of Jesus Christ. I went through the Holy book and found that this is real book of God. I believe that Mormon church is true and I also believe that Joseph Smith was a True Prophet of God. I believe that it is a gift of God. I hope that anyone, who will read it and pray will get blessing of God.

Dear Sean, I wish to be preacher of Holy Mormon. I want to get more knowledge about Mormon. Please send me some books in easy English related to Mormons. If you have any representative in Pakistan then inform me so that I may get more information from him. I hope you will accept my friendship.

YOUR BROTHER IN CHRIST,

Stephen Anjum

I was surprised, excited, and overwhelmed by the letter. I reread the phrase, “If you have any representative in Pakistan then inform me so that I can get more information from him.” I wondered, “Who is this man? How does he know me? And how does he have my address?” I had no idea what to do about the letter, but I sensed how important it was that I got it into the right hands.

“Sean, run down to the Milletts’ house and talk to Brother Millett,” my mom suggested. “He works for the missionary department, and he’ll know what to do.”

I went down the street with the letter in hand and eagerly knocked on his door. Brother Millett invited me into his home, and I showed him the letter. After he read it, he was taken aback and asked how Stephen knew me and how a copy of the Book of Mormon could have made it all the way to Pakistan, a country where the Church did not have a presence.

“I don’t know,” I shrugged. “Can you help me? What should I do next?”

After thinking about it, he recommended a plan for each of us. He told me to write Stephen and teach him all that I could about the gospel of Jesus Christ by letter. I was to become his pen pal. Brother Millett would inform Church leaders so that they could contact the Area Presidency over that part of the world. They, in turn, would put Stephen in contact with the nearest member of the Church.

Although I didn’t feel adequate for the task, we both went to work, eager to find a way to bring the restored gospel to this seeker of truth.

## 2

# SEAN'S CONVERSION

STEPHEN'S LETTER CAME AT AN EXCITING TIME FOR ME. WITH ONLY ABOUT A MONTH LEFT until I entered the missionary training center, I was on fire with the gospel of Jesus Christ. I related to Stephen when he said that he had gone through the Book of Mormon and found that it was real and that the Church was true and Joseph Smith was a prophet of God. I even identified with his unique statement that he wished "to be preacher of Holy Mormon." I was eager to go on my mission to share the truths that had transformed my life. But that was not always the case.

I was raised an active member of the Church in a strong Latter-day Saint family. However, in my early teenage years, my membership was merely cultural. I was driven by external expectations and not by an inner conversion. I had a natural inclination to follow rules and go with the flow but was not yet seeking a testimony of my own.

For most of my growing up, my dad was either in the bishopric in our home ward or serving as a bishop in a young adult ward on the campus of Brigham Young University (BYU). As a young deacon, I remember passing the sacrament once a month to the college students in the ward where my dad served as bishop. He was a social worker by profession, and because our family was on a tight budget, he taught me the importance of challenging work and encouraged me to get jobs to pay for the extra things I wanted. He was someone I could talk to about anything and was a notable example of living the gospel, but he didn't push me to study and ask tough questions. He expressed love freely and supported me in anything I cared about.

During that time, I also shared a room with my brother, Scott, who was eight years older than me. Scott was one of the star athletes in his high school and my hero. I wanted to be like him in every way, even though I was annoyed when he kept the light on at night while he read the Book of Mormon. At the time, I didn't understand why reading the Book of Mormon mattered so much to him.

Almost all my neighbors were members of the Church, and for most of my childhood, it didn't occur to me to question whether the Church was true. It was simply

the only church I knew.

When I was about fourteen years old, something happened that began to change me. I accepted a challenge to read the Book of Mormon every day. I did so mostly because that was what everyone at church was asked to do, not because of any quest for truth. But when I began to read, I found that I enjoyed the book. I liked the stories and how I felt when I read, even though I didn't see what was happening to me. I plugged away for many months and finally came to the promise found in Moroni 10. After reading the book for nearly a year, I decided it would be good to pray about its truthfulness. I believed the promise and decided to kneel and put Moroni to the test. I expected a powerful spiritual experience like I heard about in testimony meetings. I asked. I waited. I listened. But nothing happened. I continued to read and pray, and each time, I was disappointed. Where was my spiritual experience? Would I have to do what Enos did and pray all day and all night?

Finally, one night as I prayed, a thought entered my mind: "Think about what has happened to your life since you started reading the Book of Mormon." I pondered on that and recalled who I used to be and who I had become.

I remembered a boy in my ward who was constantly teased and belittled. I remember standing by, grateful that it wasn't me. That was before the Book of Mormon. I realized now that I felt offended when I saw someone treated poorly. I found myself befriending and defending them. That was a notable change. I remembered the off-color jokes that used to amuse me. That was before the Book of Mormon. Now they weren't funny. I remember being bored at church, trying to endure it. That was before the Book of Mormon. Now I enjoyed church and had become interested in learning doctrine. The gospel was coming alive for me that year, and I hadn't even noticed.

When I looked back, I saw a remarkable difference: I was being born again. I felt like King Benjamin's people when they described themselves after his powerful sermon. They said God had "wrought a mighty change in [them], or in [their] hearts, that [they had] no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2) The Spirit came over me, and I knew the Book of Mormon was true. Not due to a single moment but because of how my spiritual life had been ignited. I can trace my conversion to Jesus Christ and His gospel to the day I began my quest to study the Book of Mormon. I have never been the same.

With this flame of faith inside me, I could tell others from my own changed heart that the book was of God. Now I understood why my brother Scott kept the light on! From that point forward, my efforts to live the gospel were my own, and I was excited for the day I could serve a mission. With my testimony firmly in place, I began to have a variety of new experiences with the Book of Mormon.

President Ezra Taft Benson was the prophet of my teenage years. He is remembered for many things but perhaps most of all for his emphasis on the Book of Mormon. For example, in one of his famous talks, he urged members of the Church to “flood the earth” with the Book of Mormon: “We have the Book of Mormon, we have the members, we have the missionaries, we have the resources, and the world has the need. The time is now! . . . Indeed, I have a vision of flooding the earth with the Book of Mormon.”<sup>2</sup>

During my senior year, in response to the call of our prophet, the seminary council at Timpview High School created an after-school missionary activity based on an initiative by the Church called the “Family to Family Book of Mormon” program. Students who wanted to participate purchased a copy of the Book of Mormon and then personalized it by writing their testimony and return address on one of the beginning pages. The seminary teachers told us they would gather the books and take them to Church headquarters where the Church would distribute them to full-time missionaries.

Of course, I gladly purchased and personalized a book and dropped it in a basket, but I didn’t think anything more about it, as I had previously participated in other “Family to Family Book of Mormon” events like this one. If only I had known then what would become of it.

While I was attending my first year of college, I had an opportunity to fly to Miami, Florida, with my family to watch my brother-in-law Lee Johnson play in the Super Bowl. He was the punter for the Cincinnati Bengals, and they were playing the San Francisco 49ers. As a big football fan, I couldn’t wait to go to this once-in-a-lifetime game. Just before leaving on the trip, my mission prep teacher gave each of us a copy of the Book of Mormon and invited us to prayerfully give it away. I was determined to find someone I could share my copy with on the way to Miami.

As the flight was nearing completion, I noticed a legendary NFL wide receiver sitting four or five rows in front of me. The thought came into my mind, “Share your book with him.” I immediately became fearful and thought of all the reasons I couldn’t do that, but I remembered he was a Christian, and the thought persisted. So I wrote my testimony inside the front cover. I told him how much I respected him and how I wanted to share this with him. Then I signed my name, wrapped it in paper, and approached him. I asked him for his autograph and then told him I had something for him. I quickly handed the Book of Mormon over and bolted back to my seat. I was relieved that I had done my duty and was glad I didn’t need to talk to him or answer any questions.

Looking back on that day, I realize my goal was focused on just getting that book to someone rather than really helping them want to read it. My desire to share the gospel and the Book of Mormon was strong, but my confidence in doing so was lacking. Despite my awkward attempt, I went back to my seat filled with joy at having tried to do

my best to be an instrument in the hands of God. I looked forward to the time when the opportunity would arise again.

Before leaving on that trip to Miami, I filled out my mission papers and turned them in to my stake president, Carl Bacon, who lived next door. I was eager to get home to find out where I would be serving.

One morning, President Bacon's son Ken, who was my close friend, pounded on my door and told me my call was in the mailbox! I ran outside, retrieved the letter, and went to show it to my mom, who was the only one home. She coaxed me to open it right then and there without waiting.

She asked me where I thought I would be going. President Bacon and his family had recently returned home from serving as the mission president in Toronto, Canada. Ken told me all about it, and I thought that it would be an amazing place to serve. So when my mom asked, I said, "I think it'll be the Canada Toronto Mission." She told me she thought I would go Spanish-speaking.

I opened the call, and to our amazement, it said I was called to serve in the Canada Toronto Mission. Plus, I would learn the discussions in Spanish! My excitement to serve and the feeling that God knew me reached an all-time high.

A couple of months later, the letter from Stephen Anjum came to that same mailbox. The Lord was going to make me an instrument in His hands much sooner than I expected.

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3. Ezra Taft Benson, "Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon," *Ensign*, Nov. 1988, 3.

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