

Consider the lilies of the field,
How they grow, how they grow.
Consider the birds in the sky,
How they fly, how they fly.

He clothes the lilies of the field.
He feeds the birds in the sky.
And He will feed those who trust Him,
And guide them with His eye.

- Rodger Hoffman, *Consider the Lilies*

Whenever I hear this hymn, I am transported back to my time as a missionary on Temple Square. Among my various assignments, greeting and answering visitor questions at the Tabernacle during the Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square's public rehearsals was a highlight. The acoustics of the Tabernacle were exceptional, enhancing the choir's performance in a way that deeply moved me. Although I can't recall if "Consider the Lilies" was ever sung during my shifts at the Tabernacle, the hymn's melody and message resonate deeply with me. I view many events in my life as miracles, gifts from God affirming His presence and providence, including my aspirations to become a scholar of identities in hybridity.

Despite frequent worries, reflection often reveals the multitude of miracles that have shaped my journey. If it were an adventure book, my life could be segmented into four parts: my formative years, my mission at Temple Square, my return to undergraduate studies, and my current path as a graduate student. Each chapter gave me what I needed to eventually succeed in the next chapter, and each is marked by different ways that I tried to come to terms with my multiple identities and search for belonging.

Up until fourth grade, I was a typical ethnically Chinese child from Hong Kong. My increasing disinterest in learning led my parents to enroll me in an international school, hoping a new environment would rekindle my curiosity. Aware of the extremely high tuition at international schools, I worked hard to improve my English and I transformed my attitude toward learning.

Transitioning from a Chinese-instruction local school to an English-only international school was very challenging for me at the time. With limited English proficiency, I struggled at first to express myself or to understand what was going on around me. My classmates were all very friendly, though, and weren't bothered by any language communication barriers between us. I was fortunate to become close friends with two non-Cantonese-speaking girls, which helped immerse me into an English only environment other than at home. By the end of my first year at the international school, I communicated comfortably in English. However, my Chinese proficiency quickly lagged behind my Chinese speaking peers because my formal Chinese education effectively ended at that point. Frustrated by my inability to fully express myself in Chinese, I became very shy in Chinese-speaking contexts. People often questioned my Hong Kong roots when they recognized my struggles to communicate in Cantonese, exacerbating my sense of nonbelonging, marking the start to a lifelong identity struggle with English and Cantonese.

After a year studying linguistics at Brigham Young University, I received my mission call to Temple Square with some trepidation, anticipating public speaking and a need to work in a call-center context. However, this experience turned into a significant blessing. I started out as a very shy missionary, especially when there was a need for me to speak either Cantonese or Mandarin. And there was great need for Chinese speaking sister missionaries, especially over summertime, because of the flood of Chinese motorcoach tour guides passing by Temple Square on their way across multiple national parks across the western U.S. Consumed by my own self-consciousness about my Chinese, I was very reluctant to use Chinese at all, let alone speak through a microphone to tour groups of twenty-five to fifty people at a time when I felt like the whole square could hear me. I was also terrified of the many call-center-like responsibilities I had to teach and answer questions about the gospel by phone whenever not visiting with guests on Temple Square. That is, until a particularly kind and patient companion six months into my mission coaxed me out of my shell little by little, validated both my strengths and my fears, and taught me to stop focusing on what I didn't feel like I knew and instead on the people I was able to reach with my limited language abilities through God's help.

By my second summer on Temple Square, I became a lot more confident in my Chinese, or at least in my ability to relearn Chinese. The largest tour I gave was to a hundred Mandarin-speaking guests. There weren't enough Chinese speaking sisters on Temple Square at that time, and I had to combine two groups waiting for tours. My Mandarin was far from perfect, and sometimes I did encounter guests who would ridicule my Chinese. But the visitors for the most part were very friendly, and for the first time in many years, I wanted to be a part of Chinese-speaking communities again. Temple Square taught me that through faith in God, I can do hard things, I can relearn Chinese, and that I enjoyed teaching, even to large audiences. This realization redirected my career path toward language teaching, something I would never have imagined possible prior to my mission.

Despite actively trying to embrace both the Chinese and English parts of me, it never came easily. There were always Chinese things I couldn't fully express properly in just English, but I also couldn't express myself as I'd like in just Chinese either. I thought that since I struggled to use Chinese professionally, the only kind of job I would be able to get when I returned home was to be an English teacher under the Native English Teacher scheme. The first thing I did upon returning to BYU was to try to find language-teaching-related part-time jobs. I ended up teaching both Cantonese and Mandarin at the Missionary Training Center. Looking back, I am very grateful for this job. I am not sure that I would have been able to get the wide variety of language teaching jobs that I was able to do if not for this first job that hired me despite a lack of teaching experience. As I taught at the MTC, I also added a minor in Chinese and TESOL. Chinese, because I wanted to reconnect with my roots; TESOL, because I thought I needed some type of certification to put me onto the path to becoming a future English teacher, despite not having a degree in Education.

My time teaching Chinese at the MTC eventually led to other language teaching opportunities, from being an advanced Mandarin teaching assistant to becoming the instructor of record for an introductory class, and then teaching English as a second language at BYU's English Language Center. These teaching opportunities would not have come if not for my time on Temple Square, the place that I once dreaded serving a mission at precisely because of all the skills needed to be a missionary there, but that I needed to have for these language teaching opportunities.

My career trajectory further shifted through exposure to academic research opportunities. Not having grown up with anyone in academia, research was a completely foreign concept to me. However, because I heard by chance that research experience was helpful for applications into graduate programs, which I would need if I wanted to be eligible for English teaching jobs in Hong Kong, I looked up all the professors in my linguistics program for anyone who might be doing research that I might also be interested in.

I had never taken a class from the professor who worked on study abroad social network second-language acquisition research before, so our first interaction was a cold email from me asking if he might have any research going that someone like me could participate in. I didn't think he would have the time to respond a random student's email about doing research, but he did respond. Not only did he take the time to meet with him, but he also trusted me with a research idea he had been meaning to do and encouraged me to submit a research proposal for an undergraduate research grant based on that idea. Though the proposal was unsuccessful, we still went ahead and did the project together anyway. When the call for proposals at an international conference perfect for this project came, the professor once again invited me to try submitting a proposal.

I had no concept of what academic conferences were at the time, let alone how to write a proposal to present at one. However, I tried my best at a draft, and, guided by the professor, I submitted my first ever first-authored conference proposal. This exposure to academic conferences and the concept of heritage speakers profoundly influenced my career goals. I began to focus on identities of hybridity, eventually becoming a student of a plenary speaker that I met from that conference. This research interest seems particularly fitting given my life history. It also meant that my identities of hybridity extend to my professional life, since the study of language and identity is an extremely interdisciplinary field. My graduate studies led to many seemingly chance encounters that introduced me to many other influential scholars, from all of whom I have learned so much.

Reflecting on the mentors and opportunities in my life, I see a pattern of things building onto one another in just the right way, at the right time, as if I were the protagonist of an adventure story. This recognition of miracles and the hand of God in my journey affirms to me our identity as children of God, providing peace amidst life's many uncertainties.

The Sunday devotional by Mary Eyring on faith and miracles at this year's Humanities and Belief workshop particularly resonated with me. There was a discussion about what miracles mean to us, what could be learnt from studying how the Nephites responded to undeniable miracles in the first two chapters of third Nephi.

And it came to pass that thus passed away the ninety and fifth year also, and the people began to forget those signs and wonders which they had heard, and began to be less and less astonished at a sign or a wonder from heaven, insomuch that they began to be hard in their hearts, and blind in their minds, and began to disbelieve all which they had heard and seen.

(3 Nephi 2:1)

Witnessing miracles alone didn't necessarily lead to lasting memories about the miracles or to long lasting conversion. Rather, it is the act of remembering and constructing our narratives about the miracles in our lives that we are changed by those miracles.

As an emerging scholar in multilingualism and identity, I often employ narrative inquiry, which involves recognizing how people make sense of lived experiences, exploring how they organize and make connections with different pieces of their experiences into a coherent whole, and focusing on the idea of storytelling as narrative knowledging (Barkhuizen, 2021). That's because identities are sites of tension informed by people's evolving personal experiences (Darvin & Norton, 2015). This method allows for a deeper understanding of experiences in specific socio-historical contexts and offers a way to negotiate conflicts between different identities (Kayi-Aydar, 2015). Telling stories about the miracles in our lives is a part of narrative knowledging, or interpreting and making sense of the experiences in our lives. I construct the narratives of my life in a way that recognizes the hand of the Lord in leading me to where I am because I choose to interpret events in my life as miracles: the meeting with those two friends way back in fourth grade; the visitors on Temple Square that led to my change of attitude toward Chinese and public speaking; my companions there; the people that chose to hire me for my first language teaching job and subsequent language teaching jobs; the professor that introduced me to the world of academia; the many scholar-mentors, both formal and informal, that I've had the fortune to meet and from whom I've learned. All these things are miracles in my life that have put me on a path to realize my dreams of becoming a scholar of language and identity.

...consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin... if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more cloth you?" Or in this case, shall He not much more clothe me?

(Matthew 6:28-29)

Who I am to think that I am the protagonist of my adventure story with a happy ending, to think that everything will work out just right for me? Although life remains unpredictable, the assurance from the verses above reminds me to trust in God's provision. My journey may continue to evolve, but the knowledge of my identity as a child of God remains a constant source of strength and peace. As my Heavenly Father, why won't He make sure that things will turn out okay in the end? Even the lilies of the field are taken care of! It is this certainty that gives me peace and the courage to face the future.

How will my knowledge and understanding change as my own life experiences and narrative evolves? I'm not sure. Life still has a lot of ups and downs, filled with things that intimidate me or to doubt myself. But I am sure of my identity as a child of God, one of the few identities that are not a hybrid of something. I am sure that I am watched over, and it gives me deep peace. From my formative years in Hong Kong to my mission at Temple Square, my return to BYU, and my current path as a graduate student, each chapter in my story has been marked by growth, challenges, and importantly, divine guidance. As I continue to navigate the complexities of life and academia, I do so with the assurance of God's presence and the strength derived from my identity as His child.

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