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Texas evangelist worked behind the scenes to comfort Smart family

A Texas evangelist played a behind-the-scenes role in encouraging the family of Elizabeth Smart through prayer and fasting.

Michael Relton, an evangelist and former pastor, currently lives in Dallas, where he is a member of Prestonwood Baptist Church. He is the author of "Dear God ... Prayer Book," a collection of prayers for specific life problems.

Smart is the Salt Lake City girl who was abducted from her bedroom last June, sparking nationwide interest in the search for her.

When Relton first heard the news reports of Smart's abduction, he began to pray for her and her family, he said. "I prayed for her protection and safe return and also to reveal her whereabouts."

He called Smart's father, Ed, to encourage him and pray with him. Ed Smart acknowledged the Texas evangelist's ministry in an interview on the CBS "Early Show" March 13, the day after Elizabeth Smart was found alive.

"Had we not had the people out there helping us and trying so hard-I mean, Rev. Relton, we're here, we're home, and thank you for your help."

The interviewer asked for an explanation of who that was, and Smart said: "I had this one reverend from Texas that kept calling and calling, and he

actually came up here a couple of weeks ago and prayed with me, and I appreciate that."

By Relton's account, God told him in February that he should do more than pray for Elizabeth. "He said I must go and meet the father and pray with him and do fasting and prayer on behalf of her," Relton said.

He wasn't excited about the idea for several reasons—weather, distance and the fact that the Smarts are Mormons—but finally he "decided to obey God," he said.

On Friday, Feb. 21, Smart met with Relton in his hotel room in Salt Lake City. They talked and prayed together for more than two hours, Relton said.

While in Salt Lake City, Relton felt he should fast for three days on Elizabeth's behalf. Upon breaking the fast, "I felt a strong assurance that Elizabeth is alive and well," he reported.

He called the Smart family to tell them his impression not only that Elizabeth would be found alive but that she would be found near Salt Lake City wearing a disguise. He further told the family he believed God told him she would be found in two weeks.

In fact, less than three weeks later, Elizabeth was found alive in a suburb of Salt Lake City, and she was wearing a disguise at the direction of her captors.

"I would like to encourage all the believers not to give up on God if he did not answer your prayers," Relton declared. "First, make sure you are praying according to his will, and then after a considerable amount of time, if nothing happens, try fasting and prayer."