

Be a Missionary All Your Life

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I consider it a great privilege and responsibility to be given this opportunity to speak to you. After I received this assignment from the First Presidency, I asked President Samuelson what I should talk about.

He said, “You are the executive director of the Missionary Department. Why don’t you talk about missionary work?”

I have decided to follow his counsel.

You are a magnificent sight! Many of you are recently returned from full-time missions. Many of you will soon be full-time missionaries. I hope all of you are committed to being lifelong missionaries.

Some feel this is a difficult time to do missionary work. A Gallup Poll three weeks ago found 46 percent of Americans view “Mormons” unfavorably, 11 percent don’t know who we are, and 18 percent think of polygamy when our name is mentioned.¹

Let’s put this in perspective. In 1842 John Wentworth, editor of the *Chicago Democrat*, wrote to Joseph Smith requesting information about the Church. The Church had been organized 12 years earlier and had just over 20,000 members. The Prophet Joseph replied and concluded his response by using the Standard of Truth as a preface to what we know today as the Thirteen Articles of Faith.

As I tour missions, many missionaries memorize the Standard of Truth. It conveys in a concise way what must be accomplished. As I recite it, I invite those of you who know it to say it with me:

No unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing; persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done.²

Who is going to help achieve this? You and your generation!

I believe with all of my heart that we are on the threshold of the most significant missionary success to date. Let me share two accounts of those who have been converted in the recent past.

Quentin L. Cook was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given on 13 March 2007.

The conversion of Jordan Vajda, a fine young man who had been a Catholic priest, is instructive. When he was in grade school he had Latter-day Saint friends in his class who shared with him their love of the gospel. At age 13 he found an offer from the Church for a free Book of Mormon. He sent for it, and two sister missionaries responded. They were surprised that he was only 13 and had requested the Book of Mormon. He was impressed with what they taught and what he felt, but after discussions with his family, he decided to become a priest in the Catholic Church. As he prepared to be a priest, he remained interested in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

He studied at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. He became acquainted with many who take the position we are not Christians, but he also associated with the students at the Latter-day Saint institute of religion at Berkeley. He decided to write a master's thesis on why certain people maintain that we are not Christians. Two of the issues he addressed in his master's thesis were:

1. The nature of God and our belief that God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ are the two separate individuals the Prophet Joseph beheld in the First Vision.

2. Exaltation and our belief in eternal progression—that we can progress to live with and be like God.

He compared these doctrinal issues with Pre-Nicene Creed early Christian writers and determined that there was significant support for the position of the Church of Jesus Christ. He concluded in his master's thesis, which has since been published by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies:

Ironically, those who would excoriate Mormons for believing in the doctrine of exaltation actually agree with them that the early church experienced a "great apostasy" on fundamental doctrinal questions.³

This was primarily an academic pursuit. He became a priest in the Dominican order and had assignments in Arizona and then at the University of Washington. There he came in contact with our missionaries.

After being taught by missionaries and praying sincerely, he received inspiration that he should resign as a Catholic priest and be baptized and confirmed into the Church of Jesus Christ. His letter of resignation expressed his love and appreciation for the Catholic Church and then stated:

But why am I doing what I am doing? To put it most simply: I have found a fuller truth and goodness and beauty in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. After years of study and reflection, I have come to believe that the LDS Church is the only true and living Church of Jesus Christ, guided and led by living apostles and prophets.

I believe that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God, called and ordained for this, the dispensation of the fullness of times. I love the Book of Mormon; I believe it to be the word of God for us in these latter days.

I can no longer deny my feelings, my heart, my conscience. I cannot deny the confirming witness of the Holy Ghost which has come after much prayer and soul-searching. At this point in my life, at this moment, as I look forward to and prepare for my convert baptism, I have found a happiness greater than I ever imagined possible.⁴

This good man is completely active in the Church, has been to the temple, teaches the Gospel Doctrine class in his ward, and has a management position in a hospital in Seattle.

The gospel truly changes people's lives. Last month I met the missionaries who taught a family of five in South Carolina last year. The father of this wonderful African-American family was born and raised in Newark, New Jersey. His father had abandoned his mother when he was very young. He said his "angel mother" worked hard every day of her life to

keep them from being homeless. He cannot remember one fun day as a child or as a teenager. He stated, "Other than the love of my mother, I felt very much alone in this world." He served in the navy on the aircraft carrier *Kitty Hawk*, where he learned discipline, organization, and order. He subsequently met and married his sweetheart, and they have three children. They came in contact with the missionaries, and he subsequently wrote:

The missionaries taught us to pray. They taught us about the Restoration. They taught us about revelation and truth. As they bore their testimonies, my heart became softened and I saw in their eyes the truth of what they said. In my whole life I have never seen such sincerity and love. On May 5, 2006, my family was baptized into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

*Now I really do believe that I have found my place in this world.*⁵

He has received the Melchizedek Priesthood, he baptized his eight-year-old daughter two weeks ago, and the family is planning on going to the temple this May to be sealed for time and all eternity.

Listen carefully to the requirements for baptism as set forth in D&C 20:37:

All those who humble themselves before God, and desire to be baptized, and come forth with broken hearts and contrite spirits, and witness before the church that they have truly repented of all their sins, and are willing to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end, and truly manifest by their works that they have received of the Spirit of Christ unto the remission of their sins, shall be received by baptism into his church.

When you think of the two accounts I recited and realize that there were over 270,000 wonderful converts who met the requirements for

baptism last year, you get some idea of the significance of missionary work.

These two accounts emphasize the great joy that comes into the lives of new converts.

People all over the world are seeking permanent happiness. The prominent magazine *The Economist*, in its holiday double issue, featured "happiness" on its cover and as its lead story. In one article it noted that increased national economic success had not increased happiness. "Happiness . . . has hardly changed over 50 years. . . . Rich countries do not get happier as they get richer."⁶

Happiness has little to do with material wealth. Nor does permanent happiness come from entertainment or fun and games. Instead of being diversions from an otherwise productive life, these pursuits have become all-consuming to many people.

The lead article on happiness in *The Economist* quoted Adam Smith, the father of capitalism, as questioning: "How many people ruin themselves by laying out money on trinkets of frivolous utility?"⁷

Unfortunately, much of what is available today is not just frivolous but also morally reprehensible.

Contrast this with those who prepare for baptism with a broken heart and a contrite spirit.

We all face problems and challenges. The rain falls on the just and the unjust, but those who accept the gospel and live righteously have a wonderful promise in D&C 59:23: "But learn that he who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come."

Peace in this life does not come from merely pursuing worldly objectives. Eternal life, especially exaltation, does not come from pursuing merely worldly objectives.

Our challenge is to share the joyous, eternally significant gospel with our brothers and

sisters so they can find peace and happiness and exaltation.

With this in mind, how can we be effective missionaries?

First: Be a missionary all your life.

President David O. McKay taught that every member is a missionary, and it is as true today as when it was first declared.

President Gordon B. Hinckley has said it this way: “Great is our work, tremendous is our responsibility in helping to find those to teach. The Lord has laid upon us a mandate to teach the gospel to every creature.”⁸

The Prophet Joseph Smith declared, “After all that has been said, the greatest and most important duty is to preach the Gospel.”⁹

Second: Overcome feelings of hesitancy or inadequacy.

The account of the first missionary to serve outside of North America in this dispensation is inspiring.

In June of 1837, in the Kirtland Temple, the Prophet Joseph Smith whispered to Heber C. Kimball that “the Spirit of the Lord” had spoken that Heber should “go to England and proclaim my Gospel, and open the door of salvation to that nation.”¹⁰

At the time Heber C. Kimball was 36 years old. He had been a member of the Church for five years and an Apostle for two years. He had a wife and small children, and he was the first missionary called to serve outside of North America.

A financial panic had swept over the country and the Church in 1837. It was not an auspicious time for Joseph or Heber to commence such a project. But, as Joseph said, “the Spirit of the Lord” had directed the action.

Heber recorded his reaction: “O, Lord, I am a man of stammering tongue, and altogether unfit for such a work; how can I go to preach in that land.”¹¹

Almost everyone who attempts missionary work feels inadequate in some way. The idea of such a mission was almost more than

Heber could bear, but his faith and obedience prevailed. He stated:

However, all these considerations did not deter me from the path of duty; the moment I understood the will of my Heavenly Father, I felt a determination to go at all hazards, believing that He would support me by His almighty power, and endow me with every qualification that I needed; . . . I felt that the cause of truth, the Gospel of Christ, outweighed every other consideration.¹²

Just think of the challenge of being a missionary and opening a new country without members, church buildings, a mission home, or any funds.

Despite these feelings of inadequacy, Elder Kimball worked hard and was very humble. He and his companions were very successful.

Third: Do not be discouraged because missionary work is hard.

The New Testament tells of the Apostle Paul’s visit to Athens. Paul wanted to proclaim the message of the resurrected Christ. Certain philosophers invited Paul to Mars Hill. Acts 17:21, speaking of Paul’s audience, states: “For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.”

Doesn’t that sound like the world we live in now? When the Athenians realized that Paul was speaking of the risen Savior, some of them mocked him, and the more polite but still not interested said, in verse 32, “We will hear thee again of this matter.” The situation in our own day is not a lot different. Missionaries experience this kind of rejection every day.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve, in speaking about how hard missionary work is and has been, said:

I am convinced that missionary work is not easy because salvation is not a cheap experience. Salvation never was easy. We are The Church of Jesus Christ, this is the truth, and He is our Great

*Eternal Head. How could we believe it would be easy for us when it was never, ever easy for Him?*¹³

Fourth: Be a good example and take every opportunity to share the gospel.

Paul counseled Timothy, “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”¹⁴ It is not enough to preach the gospel. One must also live the gospel. Very often people are receptive to being taught because they have had a positive experience with a Church member.

I know one BYU graduate who is a great example, loves people, loves the Lord, and has a great desire to be everyone’s friend and share the gospel.

He points out that there is a mirror quality to conversation. If we talk about the weather, people respond by talking about the weather. If we talk about sports, they respond by talking about sports. This friend says he asks people he meets about their school and listens intently. After they respond by asking him about his school, he tells them about BYU and then shares his testimony of the gospel. Then, in a positive way, he offers to let them learn more from the missionaries. He has been very successful in sharing the gospel. He has also remained on excellent terms with his friends who do not respond to his challenge because he genuinely loves them and is interested in them.

One sister in France who is a great missionary talks every day about the joy she receives in teaching Primary children and ends up having many gospel conversations and many referrals for the missionaries.

Elder Clayton M. Christensen, who is a professor at Harvard Business School and an Area Seventy, indicated:

I have learned to use terms that associate me with Mormonism in my conversations—comments about my mission to Korea, my children’s missions, my assignments in the Church, my having attended

*Brigham Young University, and so on. These comments open the door for a conversation about the Church. Most who notice that I have opened this door choose not to walk through it. A few do, however, usually saying, “So you’re a Mormon?” I then ask if they’d like to learn more about us.*¹⁵

The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve are the missionary committee of the Church and oversee all aspects of missionary work. President Hinckley became president of the Church 12 years ago yesterday—March 12, 1995. Under his prophetic guidance a great deal has been accomplished. Let me give you some numbers describing what has happened during those 12 years:

- Approximately 387,750 missionaries have entered the mission field, which represents almost 40 percent of the missionaries who have ever served in this dispensation.
- About 3,400,000 converts have been baptized, which is the equivalent of more than one-fourth of the total current membership of the Church.
- The total number of missions in the Church has increased from 303 to 347.
- The number of converts increased by almost 30,000 in 2006.
- Retention as measured by sacrament meeting attendance, priesthood ordinations, and tithing faithfulness has increased significantly.

I am very enthusiastic about where we are at this time in missionary work. But, as President Hinckley always counsels the Brethren, “We can still do better.”

Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service was first introduced in October 2004. President Hinckley commenced this effort in an address to all General Authorities. He called for the missionaries to learn the doctrine and teach the principles by the Spirit in their own words and avoid rote recitations of the discussions. The First Presidency subsequently

“raised the bar” on missionary worthiness standards and instructed the Missionary Executive Council to bring forth the new guide to missionary service.

Every member of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve participated to a significant degree. The Missionary Executive Council, under the direction of Elder M. Russell Ballard, and the Missionary Department were inspired in their efforts. It literally felt like the windows of heaven were opened and the Lord’s inspiration poured out to bring forth this great resource.

I was deeply touched when President Boyd K. Packer, acting president of the Quorum of the Twelve, speaking of *Preach My Gospel*, said, “It was designed beyond the veil and put together here.”¹⁶

Over 1.4 million copies of *Preach My Gospel* have been acquired by members of the Church. I hope you will all become familiar with this great missionary guide. It will help strengthen you to live worthily to receive sacred temple ordinances. For you young men, it will help prepare you for mission service. For you sisters, it will help you apply doctrine in a future role as a wife or mother, and, if you choose to serve a full-time mission, you will be prepared to preach the gospel.¹⁷

There are great blessings, including eternal joy, in helping to bring souls unto Christ.¹⁸

Among the blessings of being a full-time missionary are the lifelong relationships you develop with missionary companions. Let me share one account with you that will help those of you who have not served missions to understand this better. This is from a letter a junior companion wrote to his senior companion who had trained him 33 years earlier. I quote in part:

I want you to know how much you have meant to me as I have often thought of you over the years since we served together 33 years ago. You have been one of the guiding influences in my life.

I appreciated you keeping all the mission rules. . . . I remember a particularly cold and rainy day. It was about a half hour before the time to go back to the apartment. It had been raining all day, and I was wet and tired. We had stopped our bikes on the corner of an intersection. . . . We had done everything on the list we had prepared that morning; there was nothing else to be done. You looked at your watch, which showed a half hour left in our day. Then you looked over at me. I knew what you were thinking. I knew you were trying to decide whether or not to go home. After all, we were both wet, and we were far from our apartment. I tried to look as cold and as tired as I possibly could in the hopes that I could sway you in your decision.

“Let’s knock on the doors of the houses on this street,” you said. With that, we spent one more half hour in the rain and cold. And with that, you taught a new missionary what it meant to keep the mission rules. . . .

From that moment on, when I wanted to go home early I didn’t! The blessings earned in those last few minutes of every day resulted in at least two conversions that I had while laboring later in my mission. I think it might be appropriate for you to list me among your converts. I love you, Elder.¹⁹

Other blessings of serving a mission are having the opportunity of being nurtured under the guidance of a mission president who has been called by inspiration; developing gospel knowledge and study habits that will serve you well throughout your life; and achieving the enormous strength that comes from doing something that is very challenging. Having increased faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the restoration of His gospel is a most significant blessing.

But the most important reason for going on a mission and being committed to missionary work throughout your life is because it is doctrinally what the Savior has asked us to do.

The last chapters of Matthew, Mark, and Luke; the last two chapters of John; and the first eight verses of Acts contain the only

New Testament accounts of the risen Christ. Suppose for a minute that you had been a disciple of the Savior during His life here on earth. Suppose you had believed His teachings. Can you imagine how wonderful it would have been to actually behold the risen Lord? Can you imagine how attentive you would have been to His message?

There may have been other things the risen Lord taught that were not recorded, but the overwhelming message in each of the accounts was to preach His gospel.

The next-to-last verse in Matthew is a good example: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”²⁰

We could go to almost any part of the Book of Mormon for the same message. Think of Alma and his lifelong commitment to bring souls unto repentance even when he was the head of state.

What about missionary work in this dispensation?

I am particularly impressed with section 112 of the Doctrine and Covenants. It was the only revelation recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants for 1837, and it was received on the same day the gospel was first publicly preached in England—which was the first time the gospel was preached outside of North America (July 23, 1837). Elder Kimball’s wife, Vilate, sent him a letter that summer in 1837. She wrote, in part:

*I know not where to begin to write or what to say to you first for the multitude of thoughts that rush upon my mind. You see I have filled a good part of my sheet with a revelation which I thought would be more interesting to you than anything else I could write. I copied it from Elder [Thomas] Marsh’s book as he wrote it from Joseph’s mouth.*²¹

There is much that could be said about section 112, but verse 21 is particularly significant for those preparing to serve missions. It states:

And again, I say unto you, that whosoever ye shall send in my name, by the voice of your brethren, the Twelve, duly recommended and authorized by you, shall have power to open the door of my kingdom unto any nation whithersoever ye shall send them.

That describes our missionaries today. Every missionary is called to serve by the prophet and assigned to a field of labor by one of the Twelve Apostles.

As I see missionaries all over the world—including here in North America—teaching investigators in so many languages, it is inspiring to reflect on D&C 90:11:

For it shall come to pass in that day, that every man shall hear the fulness of the gospel in his own tongue, and in his own language, through those who are ordained unto this power.

Missionary work is not just one of the 88 keys on a piano that is occasionally played; it is a major chord in a compelling melody that needs to be played continuously throughout our lives if we are to remain in harmony with our commitment to Christianity and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

My specific challenge to each of you is to make a commitment to be a missionary for the rest of your life.

I interviewed a new missionary a few months ago who had been a member for just over a year. He had just arrived in the mission field. He told me how his friend, who was a Latter-day Saint, had gone on a mission and then referred his name to the missionaries in his hometown. Those missionaries then taught and baptized him.

If you look at your group of friends back home, there are many who would respond to the gospel if you would have the faith to share the message of the Restoration with them.

What we desperately need is for member-missionary work to become a way of life—for

the Savior’s mandate to share the gospel to become part of who we are.

I pray that this generation of leaders here at BYU, along with your colleagues across the world, will follow the Savior’s counsel and the prophetic counsel of all of the prophets of this dispensation to preach the gospel throughout your lives.

I would like to echo and reaffirm the words of Alma the Younger as recorded in Alma 5:45:

And this is not all. Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself? Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true.

I bear my personal witness of the divinity of Jesus Christ, that Joseph Smith is the prophet of this dispensation and that missionary work is divinely appointed and the lifeblood of the Church, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. *Americans’ Views of the Mormon Religion*, poll conducted by the Gallup News Service, February 22–25, 2007; <http://galluppoll.com/content/default.aspx?ci=26758>; see also “Opinions Are Diverse on ‘Those Mormons,’” *Deseret News*, 3 March 2007, A01.

2. *HC* 4:540.

3. Jordan Vajda, “Partakers of the Divine Nature”: *A Comparative Analysis of Patristic and Mormon Doctrines of Divinization*, *Occasional Papers*, no. 3 (Provo: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), 57.

4. Jordan Vajda, letter of 21 June 2003 to Very Reverend Roberto Corral, OP.

5. Personal correspondence to missionaries, unpublished.

6. “Economics Discovers Its Feelings,” *The Economist* 381, no. 8509 (23 December 2006–5 January 2007): 34.

7. “Happiness (and How to Measure It),” *The Economist*, 13.

8. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Find the Lambs, Feed the Sheep,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 107.

9. Joseph Smith, *HC* 2:478.

10. Joseph Smith, in Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1945), 104.

11. Heber C. Kimball, in Whitney, *Life*, 104.

12. Heber C. Kimball, in Whitney, *Life*, 104.

13. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Missionary Work and the Atonement,” *Ensign*, March 2001, 15; emphasis in original.

14. 1 Timothy 4:12.

15. Clayton M. Christensen, “My Ways Are Not Your Ways,” *Ensign*, February 2007, 58.

16. Boyd K. Packer, “One in Thine Hand,” address delivered at mission presidents’ seminar, Provo Missionary Training Center, 22 June 2005, 4.

17. See Richard G. Scott, “Now Is the Time to Serve a Mission!” *Ensign*, May 2006, 87–90.

18. See D&C 18:15.

19. Personal correspondence between two missionaries, unpublished; emphasis in original.

20. Matthew 28:19.

21. Vilate Kimball, Letter to Heber C. Kimball, 6 September 1837, Heber C. Kimball correspondence, 1837–1852, Church History Library; text modernized.