

The M&M's of Missionary-Minded Members

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It is a blessing and an honor to be asked to speak to you today. I never dreamed of having such a great opportunity as this, and I pray that the Spirit will be with both of us. I am just a country kid from Moroni, Utah, so this is extraordinary for me.

As I prayed about what I should talk about today, I had many topics come into my mind. It was hard to decide what would be best for you as well as something I'm passionate about. The letter I received said that I should pick a topic that is important to me.

One of my favorite candies is M&M's, and one of my favorite interests is missionary work. So, with those in mind, I started to think of the M&M's of missionary-minded members, for that is what I am involved in as a stake president.

1. Miraculous Conversion

The first M&M that I want to address is **miraculous conversion**. When I hear that phrase I think of Alma, Ammon, Wilford Woodruff, Paul, and other great missionaries, and then I think, "That's way above me," and I turn it off. But this is the start of the sweetness of missionary desires.

I came from a family in Moroni that wasn't active. I can't remember sitting in a sacrament

meeting with my mom and dad. My dad would always pound on the furnace register to make sure I got up for church, but there were long stretches when I can't remember going to church. My dad was a schoolteacher, so in the summers we'd go fishing or hiking or camping or anything else—just not church. One time, after being gone all summer, I went to church, and Veldon Blackburn, a friend of mine, asked why I had gone inactive. I told him I wasn't inactive; I just didn't come to church.

During the summer a few years later I worked hard to be the best and get the best job in Moroni, which was working on the vaccination crew for the Moroni Feed Company. I worked really hard and made the crew. We could go through a flock of ten thousand turkeys in an hour and not lose one. One time we were vaccinating some turkeys up by Fountain Green, and they were just a little bigger than usual. We were taking them out of the brooder coop, vaccinating them, putting them into a truck, and taking them out to the growing pens. We had finished vaccinating about half the flock when I grabbed a turkey,

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gave it a shot, and threw it up into the truck. As I grabbed another turkey, the last turkey decided it didn't want to be in the truck, so it came out and hit me in the back of my arm, and I gave myself the next shot in my hand between my thumb and index finger. I will now never get fowl cholera, erysipelas, or Newcastle disease.

I grew a big abscess about the size of a tennis ball in the palm of my hand, so I went to the family doctor, Dr. Speakman, in Mount Pleasant. After a few months of lancing the abscess and getting the gunk out of it, the doctor said he would have to take three of my fingers off to save my hand. I'm kind of attached to those fingers—and they make it much easier to play the guitar! I told Dr. Speakman that I wanted to speak to my dad. He worked just up the street in the school district office, so Dr. Speakman left the room to contact him. As soon as he left I started to really pray—probably the first sincere prayer of my life. Before the doctor came back in with my dad, I knew what my dad was going to say and what he was going to do. I knew that I would not lose my fingers or my hand. A calm and a peace had settled over me, and I just knew I would be okay.

That day I made some promises to the Lord: (1) I would live the Word of Wisdom to the best of my knowledge and ability, and (2) I would serve Him all of my life (I didn't realize people lived so long). Back then that meant I would serve a mission. Both of these promises I have worked hard to keep.

My dad took me out of the office and put me in the car, and we went straight to Provo to a specialist—Dr. Aaron. The hand took over a year to heal. In fact, the next summer, when I was in basic training, I remember leaving blood on the rocks in the field where we did push-ups.

I had had a simple prayer answered, and I knew it, and the important thing is that I knew the Lord knew me. I can't explain the peace

and comfort that came over me in the doctor's office that day. It took a few years to even understand what had really happened that day in that office, but it has made all the difference in my life—and for a seventeen-year-old kid in a small town hanging around the friends I had, keeping the Word of Wisdom was a big challenge.

No one in my family had ever gone on a mission. It was not expected of us. So when I announced I wanted to serve a mission, it surprised many. It may have even shaken a few testimonies. I had another hurdle to overcome though, because in those days the government would only let two missionaries out from a ward at any one time, and I had a lot of friends whose parents were active who would fill up that quota. So I joined the Army National Guard so that I would not have to take one of those spots for missionaries.

My miraculous conversion was nothing more than the answer to a simple but very sincere prayer. I interview many young people for missions these days, and I ask them if they have asked in prayer what the Lord would want them to do about going on a mission. I am surprised by how many don't ask. Most are just going along with the next step in their life, trying to make the best decisions they can. It is important to know what the Lord wants of you.

A couple of years ago in the Mount Pleasant North Stake we couldn't get our young men to go on missions. We only had nine missionaries out from our stake, and that's not very many. So we prayed about it and really made a push for more missionaries. Seven young ladies stepped up and sent their missionary applications in, and at that point we had as many young ladies as young men on missions.

I just released the first two of those young ladies this last week. What powerful missionaries they have become! But what is really exciting and neat is the great mothers they will become for the next generation of missionaries.

The sweetness of this M&M is so important that I want to tell you about my last son, Kyle. He is a great kid. When he was sixteen he started to be a cowboy and started to ride bulls—and there is only one thing stupider than a bull. When Kyle turned nineteen, I filled out his papers for his mission—and those papers sat. Some of his friends got things together and left on their missions, but not Kyle. I think we filled out two sets of mission papers for him, and then when he was coming up on twenty-one, I threw out all his papers.

Later that year he came to me asking where his missionary papers were, and I hit the fan. I told him that I was sick and tired of his hypocrisy and that I didn't want him to go on a mission—in fact, I didn't care if he ever went on a mission. Then it flashed before me that I was going to heck for treating my son so rotten and preventing him from going on a mission instead of bringing salvation to his soul. So I asked him if he had been praying about a mission. He told me that he had been putting a lot of thought into it and had had some feelings about going. That wasn't good enough. I had heard that before, so I told him he had to find out what the Lord wanted him to do. I was very heated throughout this conversation, and it would have been very easy for Kyle to say, "Well, so much for that." But he didn't. He had been feeling something, and I think the Spirit had already touched his life. He did go on a mission and is now married to a great young lady, and their second boy is on the way.

It is not a big thing. It is the small whisper. "Miraculous" is anything coming from the Lord, for He is the giver of all good gifts. As it says in Doctrine and Covenants 4:7, "Ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Amen."

2. "A Marvellous Work and a Wonder"

The second M&M is "a marvellous work and a wonder." Isaiah 29:14 states: "Therefore,

behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder." In Jacob 5 in the Book of Mormon we read the allegory of the olive tree. Verse 6 says, "After many days"; verse 15 says, "A long time passed away"; and verse 29 says, "A long time had passed away." But in the last few verses of this long chapter we read about "the Lord of the vineyard" doing what He had done before, except this time He worked alongside the servants. He did not leave the vineyard or the servants again:

And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard sent his servant; and the servant went and did as the Lord had commanded him, and brought other servants; and they were few.

And the Lord of the vineyard said unto them: Go to, and labor in the vineyard, with your might. For behold, this is the last time that I shall nourish my vineyard; for the end is nigh at hand, and the season speedily cometh; and if ye labor with your might with me ye shall have joy in the fruit which I shall lay up unto myself against the time which will soon come.

And it came to pass that the servants did go and labor with their mights; and the Lord of the vineyard labored also with them; and they did obey the commandments of the Lord of the vineyard in all things. [Jacob 5:70–72]

Just think about who is in charge of this work and what has happened in the few short years since the Restoration. The Church is covering all the earth. We are still but few, but look at the marvelous work and wonder that has happened. Doctrine and Covenants 4:1 says, "Now behold, a marvelous work is about to come forth among the children of men." That is true today more than ever before. We are witnessing that coming to pass. We are not only witnesses to it happening, we are also participants in it.

Doctrine and Covenants 88:72–73 states:

Behold, and lo, I will take care of your flocks, and will raise up elders and send unto them.

Behold, I will hasten my work in its time.

Is it time? Every one of you will remember where you were when you heard President Thomas S. Monson's timeless declaration that lowered the age for missionary service. I even remember where I was and the date when it was announced that all worthy males would be able to hold the priesthood. I was west of Hanksville, Utah, just before you get to Caineville. It was June 10, 1978. That was a pivotal point for the Church, but this announcement is also far-reaching and will prove to be eternal in its consequences.

The greatest part of being seventeen was that I knew everything. I was on top of my world. But I soon found out that there was something greater than myself, and I wanted to keep the promises I had made. In Doctrine and Covenants 58:27–28 we read:

Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;

For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward.

This marvelous work and a wonder took on new meaning for me. It became my greater cause.

Doctrine and Covenants 128:22 reads:

Brethren, shall we not go on in so great a cause? Go forward and not backward. Courage, brethren; and on, on to the victory! Let your hearts rejoice, and be exceedingly glad. Let the earth break forth into singing. Let the dead speak forth anthems of eternal praise to the King Immanuel, who hath ordained, before the world was, that which would enable us to redeem them out of their prison; for the prisoners shall go free.

The most important part of the marvelous work and a wonder is the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. I have a 1914 edition of the Book of Mormon. It was given to me only a couple of years ago by the daughter of Leland Erastus Anderson. The miracle of this book is that the inside cover of the book has a note showing that it was given to my grandfather by his uncle Hyrum Smith Arnoldsen, which gave me a tie to know the power of the Book of Mormon in missionary work. You see, there are two branches of the same family represented here—an active, faithful branch and a wayward branch—and there is nothing more powerful than the Book of Mormon and the covenants of the temple to bring a family together again. A talk on the Book of Mormon is a whole different talk, but the importance of it cannot go unnoticed when it comes to a marvelous work and a wonder. President Ezra Taft Benson stated:

The time is long overdue for a massive flooding of the earth with the Book of Mormon for the many reasons which the Lord has given. In this age of electronic media and mass distribution of the printed word, God will hold us accountable if we do not now move the Book of Mormon in a monumental way.

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! . . .

I have a vision of homes alerted, of classes alive, and of pulpits aflame with the spirit of Book of Mormon messages.

I have a vision of home teachers and visiting teachers, ward and branch officers, and stake and mission leaders counseling our people out of the most correct of any book on earth—the Book of Mormon.

I have a vision of artists putting into film, drama, literature, music, and paintings great themes and great characters from the Book of Mormon.

I have a vision of thousands of missionaries going into the mission field with hundreds of passages memorized from the Book of Mormon so that they might feed the needs of a spiritually famished world.

I have a vision of the whole Church getting nearer to God by abiding by the precepts of the Book of Mormon.

Indeed, I have a vision of flooding the earth with the Book of Mormon. . . .

I do not know fully why God has preserved my life to this age, but I do know this: That for the present hour He has revealed to me the absolute need for us to move the Book of Mormon forward now in a marvelous manner. You must help with this burden and with this blessing which He has placed on the whole Church, even all the children of Zion.

*Moses never entered the promised land. Joseph Smith never saw Zion redeemed. Some of us may not live long enough to see the day when the Book of Mormon floods the earth and when the Lord lifts His condemnation. (See D&C 84:54–58.) But, God willing, I intend to spend all my remaining days in that glorious effort. [“Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, November 1988, 4–6]*

3. Magnify the Work—Self-Salvation

The third M&M is **magnify**. In Doctrine and Covenants 4:4 we read:

For behold the field is white already to harvest; and lo, he that thrusteth in his sickle with his might, the same layeth up in store that he perisheth not, but bringeth salvation to his soul.

The gospel is as true today as it was in 1829, when this section of the Doctrine and Covenants was given. A mission is not a saving ordinance, but it does bring salvation to the soul. I have been home from my mission for forty-one years now, and a day has not gone by that I have not been blessed because of my mission. The mission only lasted two years, but forty years later it has not dimmed with

time. If it only brought salvation to one soul—mine—it was worth it.

Doctrine and Covenants 84 shares some insights into what we can expect as blessings from the Lord start to flow into our lives:

For whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods of which I have spoken, and the magnifying their calling, are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies.

They become the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God.

And also all they who receive this priesthood receive me, saith the Lord;

For he that receiveth my servants receiveth me; And he that receiveth me receiveth my Father; And he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father’s kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him. [D&C 84:33–38]

All the Father hath—what more is there?

Again from Doctrine and Covenants 4, in verse 2, we read:

Therefore, O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day.

If you serve God with “all your heart, might, mind and strength,” you can stand before God blameless at the last day. Let me submit to you that the last day can be the last day of your mission or the last day of any calling you might receive. That great and last day is going to be glorious if, on the last day of every calling, you have served the Lord with all your heart, might, mind, and strength. I remember coming home off my mission and thinking I had served with all my heart, might, mind, and strength. Now I wasn’t the shiniest candy in the bowl during my mission, but I did the best I could, and I have tried to do the same thing with every calling I have received since.

4. Money Management

The final M&M is for **money management**. It is not the most critical factor in determining a mission, but it can define and definitely be mind consuming. Any young person who comes with the desire to serve a mission can definitely find funding. But don't take it for granted. I think the Lord expects us to do all we can to prepare financially and not leave it up to someone else.

When I started working for Snow College in 1983, we had taken a big cut in pay to move home. We about starved that first year, but we came up with a plan for saving for our kids' missions. Our first two children were girls, and then the next five were boys. We always planned on the boys going on missions, so we saved a little bit each month for their missions, and we also had a plan to have our home paid off by the time they started to serve.

When my second daughter said she would like to serve a mission, it was at the same time my oldest son was getting ready for his mission. They both received their mission calls the same day. My daughter entered the MTC two weeks before my son, and they were in the MTC at the same time. Daina went to Mexico City and Phillip went to Kiev, Ukraine. We had the money for Phillip, but we didn't have a dime for Daina.

From the week before Daina entered the MTC to her last week in the mission field, we did not pay a full mission payment for her. It was amazing. People would come up to us and say, "You need this more than I do," and a couple of businesses in Mount Pleasant paid a full mission payment four or five times. Even my parents stepped up. Daina's mission was completely paid for this way.

When Daina got home I thought we were going to get rich off these missions. Not one

more dime ever came in, but what a blessing those donations were. I can't help but feel it was because we had planned and saved for many years, and the Lord did the rest of what we couldn't do.

Conclusion

Missionary work is exactly what it is: hard, scary, consuming, exciting, fulfilling, and many other words.

However, just like the candy M&M's come in so many colors but all taste the same, missionary work looks different for every person but all leads to the same thing—bringing souls unto Christ. You can come up with your own M&M's, and I'm sure there are a lot more *M* words out there that can represent missionary-minded members. It still all comes down to the work of the Savior.

Miraculous conversion—just a simple prayer.

Marvelous work and a wonder—the Book of Mormon, such a great cause.

Magnify—all the Father has.

Money management—knowing whose work this really is.

I know God lives. This is His great plan of happiness that the world needs. I know that God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith. The fruits are before you. I know that President Thomas S. Monson is the prophet today and that this is the Savior's kingdom upon the earth with an eternal mission to accomplish.

Now that I am getting closer to going on a mission again, I find that my wife and I are challenged with the same issues and the same concerns about a mission that I had when I was seventeen years old. But now I know. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.