
The choir and congregation sang
"High on the Mountain Top."

Elder Robert L. Backman

Preparing for missions

This summer, our first grandson was called on a mission. We watched with anticipation and excitement as he prepared for that great adventure. We saw a transformation take place as he experienced his farewell, his temple endowment, and his entrance into the Missionary Training Center. It was a literal miracle to see a typical selfish teenage boy become a selfless servant of God. He became a man overnight. We thrilled at his letters from the Training Center in which he told his friends to get with it—that "this" is where it's at. We saw a new boldness as he became immersed in his mission. That boldness and spirit have been increased now that he is in the mission field teaching what he believes.

Let me share a portion of a letter he wrote to a nonmember friend who is investigating the Church:

"It's great to hear you've taken the discussions. They are really cool. Let me tell you something about commitment. You have just got to make it. Get committed! Read the Book of Mormon. I did it in nine days, and I only read for one and a half hours a day. Get committed to attend church every week. It is a commandment of God, and it's necessary for baptism. Get committed to pray. If you would read the Book of Mormon and pray about it, you would know that it is true. Finally, get committed to baptism. Christ did it, and you have to, too. I suspect that you know the gospel is true, or you wouldn't put up with it. Remember, God knows you know it; and if you don't make the commitment, he will still hold you ac-

countable because you know the truth. Being lukewarm in the gospel doesn't do anyone any good—especially you!"

As a grandfather, I exult when I see my own flesh and blood entering the Lord's service so well prepared and pray that my other grandchildren will respond as readily to the call as he has done.

In pondering what they could do to prepare to serve missions, I believe the best formula I could give them, and all the youth of the Church, is found in a single verse in the second chapter of Luke: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (v. 52).

That one verse gives us an insight into what our Savior did to prepare for his ministry.

It tells us that Jesus Christ grew physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually!

As his disciples, can we do less?

Let us consider how we can prepare in the same manner so we can truly represent him.

Physical preparation

Missionary work is demanding. It imposes heavy physical and mental stress. It is not for weaklings. It requires good health, stamina, strength, and self-control.

A missionary gets a lot of exercise—he walks long distances, rides bicycles up hills, and has to survive his companion's cooking. He rises early, and he works hard until late at night.

Who does your cooking, sewing, ironing? Who makes your bed; who

sweeps the floor; who does the dishes; who presses your pants, launders your shirts, shines your shoes? Who reminds you to get up or to go to bed?

You would do well to become self-sufficient in these matters before you go on your mission. It is much easier to learn now from a loving mother, from sisters and the young women of the ward than to wait until you are forced to learn to survive.

In your youth, remember the importance of living the Word of Wisdom and the glorious promise that the Lord gives us when we do.

As part of your physical preparation, consider how your mission will be financed.

If you have not started a mission savings account, there is no better time than right now.

Do you know how to budget? Shop for groceries? Do without? Make do? If you don't, where and when are you going to learn?

Mental preparation

Before I could even practice law, I had to get through elementary school, high school, college, and graduate school. That required many years of study and education. And yet some of us seem to feel that we can understand the gospel of Jesus Christ, which embraces all truth, simply by attending church, making little effort to learn and practice its vital teachings.

As you prepare for your mission, remember the counsel of the old sage: "You can't teach what you don't know any more than you can come back from a place you ain't been."

How is your educational preparation? Do you love to learn? Do you know how to listen? To read? To study? To ponder? To memorize?

Are you reading the scriptures regularly, and understanding them? They were written to you and to me, not only to those who lived at the time they were penned.

President Ezra Taft Benson encouraged you to participate in a pro-

gram of daily reading and pondering of the scriptures, particularly the Book of Mormon. Think on his words:

"Young men, the Book of Mormon will change your life. It will fortify you against the evils of our day. It will bring a spirituality into your life that no other book will. It will be the most important book you will read in preparation for a mission and for life. A young man who knows and loves the Book of Mormon, who has read it several times, who has an abiding testimony of its truthfulness, and who applies its teachings will be able to stand against the wiles of the devil and will be a mighty tool in the hands of the Lord" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1986, p. 56; or *Ensign*, May 1986, p. 43).

What a promise from a prophet of God!

From the Missionary Training Center, my grandson wrote to a friend: "Read the Book of Mormon. . . . It is the best book I have ever read, and I am not just saying that."

You will be surprised how often you will draw on the scriptures to enrich your discussions, resolve concerns, and relate principles to real-life experiences.

I urge you to study a foreign language. That will open doors and provide opportunities that will serve you well, not only on your mission, but throughout your life.

Seminary provides a great opportunity to mentally prepare for your mission.

Social preparation

How do you like yourself?

A mission requires faith in self, and that comes from practice. It comes from understanding who you are as a child of God and what you can become.

A missionary soon discovers that whether he thinks he can or thinks he can't, he is right.

Do you honor and sustain the law? Are you dependable—a person of your word? There will not be another time in

your life when more trust and confidence will be exhibited in you.

Can you obey rules? Missions are run by rules.

Are you honest in your relationship with others? Do you like people?

Can you imagine living with another missionary twenty-four hours a day—and enjoying it?

What great lessons you will learn about the brotherhood of man in this microcosm of society!

One of the missionaries who served with me had a difficult time getting along with companions. I was required to transfer them frequently because they could not take it. Finally, I asked one of my finest missionaries to become his companion, urging him to do all he could to help his fellow missionary love his work. As I approached a conference in the city where they were laboring, I feared he, like his predecessors, would ask for a transfer. To my surprise, when I asked how he was getting along with his companion, he responded: "We are doing great! We discovered we had something in common. Neither of us has been to Africa!"

I promise you that you will make some of the most enduring friendships of your life. I look back on my own mission and the men I associated with there. They have had a powerful, positive effect on my life. They are among my closest friends.

Why is this so? Someone said, "A mission is like being dipped in a big pot of love!"

Recently, I attended a stake conference where a beautiful teenage girl told of her experience of working with a companionship of lady missionaries. With deep emotion she spoke of the love they exhibited toward everyone, friendly or unfriendly, responsive or abusive. They recognized that each person they met was truly a child of God, dearly loved by him. Could they do less? That love rubbed off on everyone they contacted, even warming their relationship with each other.

Spiritual preparation

God's truth can only be known through the Spirit of the Lord.

A missionary must be in tune with that Holy Spirit. He must recognize its guidance and inspiration. His life must be pure so he can count on that Spirit in all that he does.

How can you prepare to enjoy the Holy Spirit?

1. Keep your life clean—in thought and action. Immorality is Satan's most potent tool against us and leads to more unhappiness, grief, regret, and self-degradation than any other sin. It is deadly to our eternal progress. Avoid it like a plague.

2. Pray from your heart—then listen for God's answer.

3. Develop a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ by practicing its teachings in your daily activities.

4. Stand up for what you believe. Set the standards for your life and don't be swayed by lower standards of others. You are in charge of your life!

5. Honor your priesthood, which has come to you from God and will serve as an armor for you throughout life as you respect its mighty power.

6. Set long-range goals. Determine in advance your course of action. Map out where you want to go and how you are going to get there. This will help you resist the temptations of Satan when they come—as they surely will.

7. Keep the commandments. That will lead to happiness and fulfillment.

8. We have discovered that the best way to prepare for a mission is to have the spiritual experience of teaching the gospel to others before you are called. We urge you to reach out to your friends, help teach them the gospel by teaming with the full-time or the stake missionaries, bearing your testimonies in that atmosphere. You will then become acquainted with how the Holy Spirit works to guide others to the truth, and you will recognize its sweet influence in your own experience.

You will understand, as Elisha's young servant came to understand when he discovered the city surrounded by the Syrian army. Running to Elisha in panic he asked, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?"

Elisha answered: "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.

"And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (2 Kings 6:15-17).

When you are in tune with that Holy Spirit, you will be well armed to be the Lord's representative, prepared to teach and to testify, bringing souls to our Savior, Jesus Christ.

In last April's Regional Representatives' seminar, President Gordon B. Hinckley said: "In missionary work, as in all else, preparation precedes power. Encouragement to prepare while still very young can make a tremendous difference" (3 April 1987).

To my grandchildren, and to the youth of the Church wherever you are, I invite you to make the commitment to serve a mission. I invite you to become a part of the royal army of the Lord, to prepare yourselves physically, mentally, socially, spiritually—beginning right now.

President Benson has reminded you that you can do "nothing more important. School can wait. Scholarships can be deferred. Occupational goals can be postponed. Yes, even temple marriage should wait" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1986, p. 57; or *Ensign*, May 1986, p. 44).

With President Benson, I invite you to show your love and commitment

to the Lord by responding to His call to serve and joining your voice with thirty-four thousand other missionaries in singing:

*Called to serve Him, heav'nly
King of glory,
Chosen e'er to witness for his
name,
Far and wide we tell the Father's
story,
Far and wide his love proclaim.
Called to know the richness of his
blessing—
Sons and daughters, children of a
King—
Glad of heart, his holy name
confessing,
Praises unto him we bring.
Onward, ever onward, as we glory
in his name;
Onward, ever onward, as we glory
in his name;
Forward, pressing forward, as a
triumph song we sing.
God our strength will be; Press
forward ever,
Called to serve our King.
("Called to Serve," Hymns [1985],
no. 249)*

"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52).

O youth of the Church, go and do likewise—be prepared to serve!

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

Elder Robert L. Backman, a member of the Presidency of the First Quorum of the Seventy, has just spoken to us.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, will now address us.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

My dear brothers and sisters, I rejoice with you in the privilege of coming together on this beautiful Sabbath

day to worship our Father in Heaven and his Son Jesus Christ and to be instructed by their servants.