

Elder L. Tom Perry

Great potential for declaring the gospel

From the book of 1 Peter we receive this counsel:

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

We live in the most exciting era in the history of mankind. The potential for declaring the gospel to the peoples of the world has never been greater. Throughout many lands we have established stakes of Zion. Newly constructed and well-cared-for buildings make worship service inviting to all who attend. Trained priesthood leaders are being taught how to minister to the people and build faith in the gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Book of Mormon has been translated into many languages, making available this great doctrinal base of scripture to so many more of our Heavenly Father’s children. It is opening the way for their understanding of the blessings attendant to living the Lord’s law.

Technology has blessed mankind with the tools for teaching and communicating. Temples dot the maps of nations, making the saving ordinances available to millions more of our Heavenly Father’s children. How exciting it is to live in this great day and be called to labor and bear testimony of the great work in which we are now engaged!

Every member a missionary

Yet we see so much more to be done. Most of the world’s population still awaits the gospel message. Blessed with a strong foundation and a world prepared as never before to receive this message, this is surely the time to heed the words of our prophet, President Benson:

“We are commanded by God to take this gospel to all the world. That is the cause that must unite us today. Only the gospel will save the world from the calamity of its own self-destruction. Only the gospel will unite men of all races and

nationalities in peace. Only the gospel will bring joy, happiness, and salvation to the human family” (*Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988], p. 167).

The work grows in direct proportion to the number of messengers we have proclaiming the glad tidings. Last year we had the largest number of full-time missionaries serving in many lands in the history of the Church. Last year we also had the highest yield of convert baptisms. This is gratifying, but oh, so far from our potential. Still, many of our young men, young women, and couples have not heeded the prophet’s call to serve.

Even though we have heard the prophets declare for decades “Every member a missionary,” we still have only a small percentage of the membership of the Church actively engaged in assisting stake and full-time missionaries in our responsibilities to declare the gospel to the world.

Reasons for reluctance

Why have we been so reluctant to catch the spirit of this work? I believe there are two basic reasons.

First, we are afraid we will offend. But we have not been able to find justification for this fear. In fact, experience confirms that the member-missionary process usually enhances relationships between ourselves and our friends.

Second, I believe we have not prepared ourselves to be good messengers. The general membership of the Church seems to be in the same position I found myself in as a full-time missionary many years ago. At that time we were given little training to fulfill our responsibilities. As I arrived in the mission field, I was assigned a companion who was also new in the field. He was anxious to be about the work that he had been assigned and called to perform. He encouraged me almost immediately to go door-to-door tracting with him. I will never forget our first door approach. As we started toward the house, I turned to him and asked,

"What do I do?" His reply astonished me. He said, "I don't know. I have never tried this before." How different is the training of our full-time missionaries we have serving today! We need to be more on a par with them if we are to fulfill our responsibilities as member missionaries.

Experience tells us there are three messages which have the greatest appeal to those who might be interested in the gospel. Perhaps they offer us a starting point in our preparation to become better messengers.

Our message about the purpose of life

The first is the purpose of life. If we were only to have life here, and if death were an end to our existence, we would have little to be concerned about. But when we study the writings of holy prophets from the beginning, we soon discover that man is a dual being, possessing a body and a spirit. The main purpose of earth life is to allow our spirits, which existed before the world was, to be united with our bodies for a time of great opportunity in mortality. The association of the two together has given us the privilege of growing, developing, and maturing as only we can with spirit and body united. With our bodies, we pass through a certain amount of trial in what is termed a probationary state of our existence. This is a time of learning and testing to prove ourselves worthy of eternal opportunities. It is all part of a divine plan our Father has for His children.

Yes, we are all anxious to know the purpose of our creation and the opportunities and limitations resulting from our mortal probation. The answers to all these questions are found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We should be prepared to declare this exciting message to those who are seeking truth.

Could I suggest that together as families you study the scriptures specifically to increase your understanding of the purpose of life? Perhaps you could check out from your ward library a video or a cassette entitled *Our Heavenly Father's Plan* and play it as part of one of your family home evenings. As family

members better comprehend where they came from, why they are here, and where they are going, they are better equipped to share this basic lesson of what life is all about with those who are earnestly seeking the answers.

Our message about eternal families

The second message to those who would like to know more about the gospel is the concept of an eternal family. In the very beginning the Lord taught Adam and Eve the importance of the family. The scriptures record, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

God's plan is to unite His eternal family together through a sacred union of husband and wife which can endure beyond the grave. Responsibilities are placed upon husbands and wives to bring their children into the world and teach them who they are and what part they will have in this divine plan of our Eternal Father.

Parents have the glorious opportunity of being the most powerful influence, above and beyond any other, on the new lives that will bless their homes. Look around you, and you will soon discover that the greatest joy in this life, and the most comforting hope for the eternities to come, is found in the uniting of eternal family units. Whether we are married or single, we are a part of a family which can be eternal.

We can also observe the pain inflicted on society when proper care and training are not exerted by righteous fathers and mothers in the home.

Once again, we encourage you as families to study the scriptures dealing with the eternal nature of the family, in order that you may be living examples of what joy can be brought into this world as the result of your devotion to this eternal principle. We have another video or a cassette, entitled *Together Forever*, which you may want to play in one of your family home evenings. It should also be available to you in your meetinghouse library.

Our message about the Lord

The third message is the testimony of our Lord and Savior. We declare to the world that Jesus is the Christ. We abhor the doctrine that He is a myth or a creation of conspiring men in the world. We denounce the idea that He was just a great teacher. We testify of the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth, that He is the Son of God, the Savior of the world. We declare that we have an added witness of this divine truth, as contained in the Book of Mormon.

Translation of the Book of Mormon

We should develop as one of our teaching skills the presentation of the truthfulness of this book as another reliable, sound witness of the mission of our Lord and Savior. We should know its history and its content. For example, let us consider the miracle of the translation of the Book of Mormon by the Prophet Joseph Smith, with Oliver Cowdery acting as his scribe.

After the 116 pages were lost when Martin Harris was allowed to take them home, the real translation began on April 7, 1829, two days after Oliver Cowdery arrived in Harmony, Pennsylvania, to serve as the Prophet's scribe. By May 15, five weeks later, they had reached the account of the Savior's ministry to the Nephites as contained in 3 Nephi, chapter 11.

By June 11 they had translated the last plates of Mormon, and it was on June 11 that the Prophet applied for a copyright. By June 30 the book was finished—from start to finish, no more than eighty-five days in translation time. However, with all that went on during these eighty-five days, it is apparent there were only sixty to sixty-five days in which the actual translation could have occurred.

Remember that during that time the Prophet moved from Harmony to Fayette, made several trips for supplies, received and recorded thirteen sections of the Doctrine and Covenants, received the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods, converted and baptized several people, and on and

on. They had no time to consult libraries to study the content. There was no time to revise or refine, no time to cross-reference dates or intervals and details. Instead, the text came, as Oliver recorded, day after day, uninterrupted, as the words fell from the Prophet's mouth.

This was an astonishing achievement! The text came through final copy, one time, dictated and left as it stood with only minor, stylistic editing to this day. It is no simple book dashed off from the top of a young man's head, but reflects the best of a thousand years of colonization and inspiration. Added to the rapidity with which the translation occurred is the astonishing fact that the Prophet Joseph Smith was doing it in an unknown language in which he had no training and for which there was no one to whom he could go for guidance and help.

Prepare to teach the Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon purports to be a sacred history of the inhabitants of ancient America. It teaches of a faith in Christ and strongly urges obedience to His will; it also testifies of the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth, that He is the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Surely, we as members of the Church can prepare to be capable teachers of this second witness, the Book of Mormon, and what it gives to the world of the mission of our Lord and Savior.

Approach those who need the gospel

How do we approach a friend who needs the light and life of the gospel? Be a good example! Develop a meaningful and sincere relationship of caring. Be genuinely interested in your friend's thoughts, feelings, and experiences involving our Eternal Father, the meaning of life, the reason for families, and the mission of our Savior. Have an enjoyable, edifying experience listening to your friends. Then, as President Kimball once said, "We have a double responsibility: we must testify of the things we know, feel, and have felt, and we must live so the Holy Ghost can be with us and convey our words in power to the heart of

the investigator" ("It Becometh Every Man," *Ensign*, Oct. 1977, p. 5).

The only hope I can find in this troubled world is to have the standards by which our lives are governed firmly grounded in the gospel of our Lord and Savior.

May each of us be prepared and have the courage to share this greatest of all gifts the Lord has given to His children. I testify of the truthfulness of His message in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, amen.

President Howard W. Hunter

The miracle of springtime

In our Northern Hemisphere, we are enjoying in this beautiful, bursting season of the year one of the great recurring miracles of nature—the regeneration and renewal of the earth that we call spring. There may be a few wintry days left, but the sun has begun its vernal return, the buds are appearing on the flowers and trees, and luxuriant greenery is sprouting to the surface.

How fitting that just one week ago all of Christendom celebrated on Easter Day the great restoring and renewing resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, declaring all of the joy and eternal promise that event holds for mankind. With you, I welcome this season of the year which reminds us that God is a God of miracles, that his Only Begotten Son is "the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in [him], though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25).

In this beautiful time of year, we remember that death has no sting and the grave has no dominion. I testify that after every winter's season there is the miracle of springtime ahead—in our personal journey through life as well as in nature. These restorations and renewals are a gift from the Lord Jesus Christ, the ultimate "man for all seasons." I wish to speak briefly of some of those divine moments

The chorus sang "Nearer, My God, to Thee" without announcement.

President Monson

Elder L. Tom Perry of the Council of the Twelve Apostles has spoken to us, following which the Mormon Youth Chorus sang "Nearer, My God, to Thee."

President Howard W. Hunter, President of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, will be our concluding speaker for this session.

in our lives when the Savior reaches out to redeem and make whole and strengthen us.

The God that doest wonders

The Psalmist has written:

"I cried unto God with my voice, . . . and he gave ear unto me. . . .

"And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. . . .

"Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people" (Psalm 77:1, 10, 14).

Among the signs of the true church, and included in the evidences of God's work in the world, are the manifestations of his power which we are helpless to explain or to fully understand. In the scriptures these divine acts and special blessings are variously referred to as miracles or signs or wonders or marvels.

Not surprisingly, these signs and marvels were most evident in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the very Son of God himself. But startling and wonder-filled as they were, Christ's many miracles were only reflections of those greater marvels which his Father had performed before him and continues to perform all around us. Indeed, the Savior's humble performance of such obviously divine acts may be just one very special application of the declarations he made: