

You know the steps! Don't delay. Forget the past — except to use it to build a better life. Begin now to be worthy of the eternal blessings God has promised the faithful and the true.

My precious young brothers, may you understand that chastity is the source

of virile manhood, the crown of beautiful womanhood, the foundation of a happy home, and the ultimate and perfect standard underlying all spiritual progression. May we who have been called be worthy to be chosen, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, amen.

Elder Benjamin B. Banks

To prospective missionaries

I would like to address my remarks this evening to you young men of the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods who are planning on or contemplating serving a mission, and to those young men of the Aaronic or Melchizedek priesthoods who perhaps might be struggling as to whether or not they want to serve a mission.

Preparing for a bicycle trip

I would like to share with you the following story. Nine years ago this spring, my son Ben came to me and said, "Dad, we are going to hold our family reunion this summer at Flaming Gorge recreation area" (a distance of 220 miles east of Salt Lake City). "Why don't you, myself, and any of the boys in our family that would like to leave a few days early, ride our bikes to Flaming Gorge, and meet the rest of the family there?"

I said, "That sounds great, but we have only one motorcycle!"

Ben said, "No, Dad, you misunderstand. I mean pedal bicycles." I thought he was kidding. He said, "I will outline and prepare a training schedule for us. We'll get up early Saturday mornings and for three hours we'll go out and ride over the courses I will outline, so that when the time comes we will be prepared to go."

I said, "Okay," not really knowing what I was in for. I didn't own a bicycle and knew I would have to use my daughter's old, heavy, ten-speed bicycle with what seemed like bent wheels and a seat that was terribly hard. I also knew that

getting up early on Saturday mornings was not one of my favorite things. But knowing that some of my sons wanted me to go with them, I said, "Okay."

As the time for training and preparation came, I found all kinds of excuses not to go on the training rides. However, one Saturday I rode with them to the top of Parleys Canyon and back. It was hard, but I thought I would be okay. Little did I know!

The time for the trip came. I joined my boys the second day of the trip, as I had meetings the first day. The journey that second day took us from Heber City to Roosevelt (approximately one hundred miles).

As we checked into the motel that evening, I called my wife at home and told her I had never hurt so badly in my life. Every muscle, bone, and fiber in my body hurt from my head to my feet. I implored her, "When you come tomorrow with the rest of the family, please bring all the ointment and lotion you can find."

She said, "Honey, you sound terrible."

I told her, "I look and feel worse than I sound."

The next day I hated to see the dawn come, knowing what it would be like to sit on that hard seat and pedal all day once again to reach our destination — especially the stretch from Vernal to Flaming Gorge, which would include approximately thirty-six-plus miles with grades up to 9 percent and ninety-degree-plus temperatures. Needless to say, for me the whole trip was a very trying and arduous task. But for my sons, who spent a lot of

time waiting at the top of the hills for their slow, unprepared dad, it was exciting, fun, and rewarding.

That evening as we arrived at our destination, I came to an easy, yet profound recognition of how poorly prepared I was for what should have been a great experience with my sons, but was not because I did not take the time to prepare properly. I resolved that night that I would never again be that unprepared. I went home and bought bicycles for myself and my two youngest sons, and started training and preparing so that by the time the next summer came, my sons and I could ride our bikes to Lake Powell, a distance of three hundred miles, which we did. The next year we cycled to St. George, and every year thereafter we rode our bikes to Lake Powell until our mission call to Scotland two years ago.

Preparing for a mission

If it is important to prepare for a bike ride, my young friends, it is much more important for you in this life to prepare to serve as missionaries. Why? Because of the eternal significance of a mission in your life and in the lives of others. We learn of the responsibility we have to preach the gospel when Jesus said: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). Paul to the Corinthians counseled, "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16).

I plead with you, my young friends, to never be "ashamed of the gospel of Christ" (Romans 1:16). Prepare yourselves and make yourselves worthy to receive a mission call. Live clean, pure lives. Study the scriptures — not just read, but study the scriptures — especially the Book of Mormon, as President Benson has counseled us to do. Be strong enough to live the Word of Wisdom and follow the counsel of your parents and priesthood leaders.

Blessings of missionary service

I know you young men are growing up in a challenging world with all kinds of peer pressure. You may even be struggling with the decision of going on a mission because of your educational and vocational desires, or because of a budding musical or athletic career, or a serious girlfriend you may find hard to leave. I understand, because I have seven sons, as well as a son-in-law, who have had to make similar decisions. Yet each has made that decision to serve.

If you wonder or struggle as to what will be of most worth to you, listen to the direction given by the Lord:

"For many times you have desired of me to know that which would be of the most worth unto you. . . .

"And now, behold, I say unto you, that the thing which will be of the most worth unto you will be to declare repentance unto this people, that you may bring souls unto me, that you may rest with them in the kingdom of my Father" (D&C 15:4, 6).

I promise you young men that if you will commit and prepare to serve a mission, it will be the most rewarding and exciting experience of your lives. Yes, there will be many and varied experiences — yes, even humorous experiences, like the elder who shared with me how he and his companion got on the bus, and as they sat down, in the seat in front of them was a grandfather with a young grandson who was having a temper tantrum. Missionaries being as ingenious as they are, these two elders decided they would see what they could do to quiet the little boy down and help the grandfather.

The boy had a baseball cap on. The elders proceeded to take the cap off his head and made a gesture like they threw it out of the window, but instead they quickly hid it under their seat. They then told the boy, as he felt his head, that if he wished hard enough he could wish it back on his head. The boy looked at his grandpa, wondering what was going on, and as he did the elders quickly put the cap back on his head. The boy immediately felt the cap on his head, took it off,

looked at it again, and then he proceeded to throw it out the window, saying, "Do it again, Grandpa!" I think the elders got off at the next stop.

Blessing others with the gospel

Yes, you may have many humorous experiences on your mission, but those experiences which will be the most joyful and rewarding to you, and which will be with you throughout eternity, will be the times when the Spirit will work through you to touch the lives of others, such as Sister Ciardo from Sardinia, Italy, who joined the Church and came to Scotland on a mission. As Sister Ciardo left for her mission, her mother would hardly speak to her and her father said she would never be welcome back home again. But the faith of this young lady brought forth a miracle.

Approximately a year after Sister Ciardo had been on her mission, she came to see me one day with tears running down her face. She had a letter in hand from her mother. I, too, had tears come to my eyes as I read the letter telling her daughter she had been baptized and that her father was attending church and was going to listen to the discussions.

I think of a Tony Ridden and a Tracy McFall from Scotland who were baptized a couple of years ago, coming from backgrounds that you would never have thought this possible. Yet both stood and spoke just a few months ago at their own missionary farewells with tears in their eyes, expressing love and gratitude for the elders who brought the gospel into their lives.

"The worth of souls is great"

Just how important is a Sister Ciardo, a Tony Ridden, a Tracy McFall, and many others just like them? The Lord gives us the answer to that question:

"Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God;

"For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; where-

fore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him. . . .

"Wherefore, you are called to cry repentance unto this people.

"And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!" (D&C 18:10-11, 14-15).

The angels will rejoice over you

O youth of noble birthright, I bear witness to you this night that if you will commit, prepare, and with a willing heart go forth to serve Jesus Christ and preach his gospel, great will be your blessings and reward. Listen to the words of our Savior:

"Ye are blessed, for the testimony which ye have borne is recorded in heaven for the angels to look upon; and they rejoice over you, and your sins are forgiven you" (D&C 62:3).

"Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9).

Stay on the Lord's side and you will find eternal joy and fulfillment. I bear my witness to you that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. This is His church. President Ezra Taft Benson is our living prophet, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

We have appreciated listening to Elders Robert L. Backman and Benjamin B. Banks of the Seventy.

The choir and congregation will now join in singing "Israel, Israel, God Is Calling." Following that, Elder Joe J. Christensen, sustained at the April conference as a member of the Seventy, will speak to us.

The choir and congregation sang "Israel, Israel, God Is Calling."
