

## Elder Robert D. Hales

### The need for mature missionary couples

I feel a deep responsibility to speak to you today about a pressing need in the Church. My greatest hope is that as I speak, the Holy Ghost will touch hearts, and somewhere a spouse or two will quietly nudge his or her companion, and a moment of truth will occur. I will speak on the urgent need for more mature couples to serve in the mission field. We wish to express our appreciation for all those valiant couples who are currently serving, those who have served, and those who will yet serve.

In the 93rd section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord rebuked the presiding Brethren of the Church, saying:

“I have commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth. . . .

“And now a commandment I give unto you—if you will be delivered you shall set in order your own house” (D&C 93:40, 43).

What is the best way to teach our children and grandchildren light and truth? What is the most important way to set our families, both immediate and extended, in order? Is it possible that in spiritual matters our example speaks louder than our words? Temple marriage, family prayer, scripture study, and family home evening are all vitally important. But there is another dimension—the dimension of service. If we are willing to leave our loved ones for service in the mission field, we will bless them with a heritage that will teach and inspire them for generations to come.

It is significant to me that after commanding the Brethren to teach their children light and truth and set their families in order, the Lord immediately called them on missions. “Now, I say unto you, my friends, let my servant Sidney Rigdon go on his journey, and make haste, and also proclaim . . . the gospel of salvation” (D&C 93:51).

### Missionary service brings blessings

As we serve in the mission field, our children and grandchildren will be blessed in ways that would not have been possible had we stayed at home. Talk to couples who have served missions, and they will tell you of blessings poured out: inactive children activated, family members baptized, and testimonies strengthened because of their service.

One missionary couple left a farm at home for their son to manage. During the somewhat dry year that followed, their farm had two hay cuttings while the neighbor's had only one. The neighbor asked their son why he had two cuttings compared to their one. The young man replied, “You need to send your folks on a mission.”

If the blessings for missionary couples and their families are so plentiful, why are only a few thousand serving instead of the tens of thousands that are so desperately needed? I believe the four “F’s” often stand in their way: *Fear*, *Family concerns*, *Finances*, and *Finding the right mission opportunity*.

### Overcoming the impediment of fear

*First, fear.* Fear of the unknown or fear that we don't have the scriptural skills or language required can cause reluctance to serve. But the Lord has said, “If ye are prepared ye shall not fear” (D&C 38:30). Your life is your preparation. You have valuable experience. You have raised a family and served in the Church. Just go and be yourselves. The Lord has promised that angels will go before you (see D&C 103:19–20). You will be told by the Spirit what to say and when to say it in a very natural process as you strengthen young missionaries, testify to investigators and new members, teach leadership skills, and friendship and fellowship less-active members, help-

ing them return to full activity. *You* are the testimony, and you will touch the lives of those with whom you come in contact. Couples normally do not tract and are not expected to memorize discussions or maintain the same schedule as young elders and sisters. Simply be yourself. Serve to the best of your ability, and the Lord will bless you.

Missionary couples provide stability with their friendship and leadership skills in areas where the Church is in its infancy. I learned this firsthand while serving as a mission president in England. I assigned a couple who had been serving in the visitors' center to work in a small, struggling unit. They were somewhat fearful of having to leave the "safe haven" of the visitors' center. But with faith they went to work. Within six months, a unit that had 15 to 20 people coming to sacrament meeting had over 100 attending because of this couple's fellowshipping, working with the priesthood. To this day, they and their children refer to that time as the greatest experience of their lives.

Another couple recently served in a small village south of Santiago, Chile. They had no Spanish skills and were apprehensive about being in a different country so far from the comforts of home. But they plunged in with total dedication, loving and serving the people. Before long the small branch grew from 12 to 75 members. When it came time for them to leave, the entire branch rented a bus so they could go to the airport, four hours away, and say good-bye to their special friends.

The service that couples provide is essential to the work of the Lord. Couples can make a difference. Couples can accomplish remarkable things no one else can do.

### **Service of couples strengthens families**

*Second, family concerns.* The Savior called upon fishermen, entreating them,

"Follow me" (Matthew 4:19). He beseeched them to leave their familiar settings behind and become fishers of men. What is asked of couple missionaries is less than half a tithe of the time they will spend on earth. In the eternal perspective, a mission is but a few moments away from familiar settings, family, and having retirement fun with old friends.

The Lord will send special blessings to your family as you serve. "I, the Lord, give unto them a promise that I will provide for their families" (D&C 118:3). Couples are sometimes concerned that in their absence they will miss weddings, births, family reunions, and other family events. We have learned that the impact on families while grandparents are on missions is worth a thousand sermons. Families are greatly strengthened as they pray for their parents and grandparents and read letters sent home which share their testimonies and the contribution they are making in the mission field.

A son wrote a tender letter to his parents in the mission field:

"Your service sets an example for our children. As a result, they are more willing to serve in their callings in the Church. It teaches us all to be more charitable as we exchange letters and send packages. When we receive letters and news from you, it strengthens our testimonies. Even though you retired from your profession and should have been happy by all the world's standards, by going on your mission you have shown us a new way to be happy. You have found happiness money can't buy. We have seen you overcome medical and other types of adversities and have seen you blessed for your willingness to go and leave your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. We love you dearly!"

Another couple reports: "One of our grandsons wrote to us while we were in Thailand and told us that he hadn't decided for sure that he wanted to fill a mission, but we had set the example for him

and now he knew he wanted to serve. He is now serving a mission."

My father and mother served a mission in England. As I visited them one day in their small flat, I watched my mother, with a shawl wrapped snugly around her shoulders, putting shillings in the gas meter to keep warm. I asked, "Why did you come on a mission, Mother?" She said simply, "Because I have 11 grandsons. I want them to know that Grandma and Grandpa served."

In 1830 the Lord called Thomas B. Marsh to leave his family and go into the mission field. Brother Marsh was greatly concerned about leaving his family at that time. In a tender revelation, the Lord told him: "I will bless you and your family, yea, your little ones. . . . Lift up your heart and rejoice, for the hour of your mission is come. . . . Wherefore, your family shall live. . . . Go from them only for a little time, and declare my word, and I will prepare a place for them" (D&C 31:2-3, 5-6). It is just possible that these are the blessings that are needed most for your children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and future posterity.

### Resolving financial concerns

*Third, finances.* Some couples who would willingly serve are not able to do so because of age, health, finances, or family circumstances. Perhaps those who are not able to serve could assist another couple to go on a mission.

Missionary work has always involved sacrifice. If some sacrifices are necessary, then the blessings will be all the more abundant. Children, encourage your parents to serve and assist them with financial support if necessary. You may lose a baby-sitter for a short time, but the eternal rewards you and your family receive will more than compensate for the brief sacrifice.

To younger couples with children still at home, I urge you now to decide to serve in your later years and to plan and

prepare so you are financially, physically, and spiritually able. Make certain that the great example of missionary service is a heritage you will leave your posterity.

There are two unique times in our lives when we can truly live the law of consecration and devote ourselves in full-time service to the Lord. One is as a young man or woman serving a full-time mission. The other is the unique time you are given after having fulfilled the requirements of earning a living. The latter could be called the patriarchal years, when you can draw upon the rich experiences of a lifetime, go out as a couple, and consecrate yourselves fully as servants of the Lord.

The blessings of serving with your eternal companion are priceless and can be understood only by those who have experienced them. My wife and I have had that privilege in the mission field. Each day is a special day with daily rewards that cause personal growth and development in the Lord's time and in the Lord's way. The fulfillment that comes from this kind of service will bless you, your marriage, and your family for eternity.

### Finding the right mission opportunity

*Finally, finding the right mission opportunity.* The ways in which couples can serve are virtually limitless. From mission office support and leadership training to family history, temple work, and humanitarian service—there is an opportunity to use almost any skill or talent with which the Lord has blessed you.

Sit down with your companion, make an inventory of your health, financial resources, and unique gifts and talents. Then, if all is in order, go to your bishop and say, "We're ready." You may feel it is improper to approach your bishop or branch president about your desires to serve a mission. But it is proper for a mature sister or couple to let their priesthood leaders know that they are willing and able to serve a mission. I urge you to do so.

Bishops, there should be no hesitation on your part to initiate a Recommend for Missionary Service interview to discuss and encourage missionary couples to serve a mission.

Elder Clarence R. Bishop, director of the Mormon Handcart Visitors' Center, has served five missions. The first one he served as a young man. The last four missions, he was interviewed to serve by inspired priesthood leaders. He indicated that he might not have served any of the last four had his bishop not encouraged him to serve.

Some mature couples and single sisters have been called as missionaries to teach English as a second language to students, teachers, and government officials in Thailand. These retired teachers and educational administrators, by giving freely of their gifts and talents developed through their many years of teaching experience, have made remarkable progress in teaching English to students, training teachers, and being good ambassadors for the Church in Thailand.

Jerry and Karen Johnson served in Hong Kong, teaching English as a second language. One day after class, near the end of their mission, a little second-grade girl, to whom Sister Johnson had become very attached, came up to her and, putting out her arms as though she were an

airplane flying, asked, "*Meiguo?*" (meaning "America?"). Sister Johnson looked at her and said, "Yes, we are returning to America." She buried her head in Sister Johnson's chest and sobbed. "I held her tight and sobbed right along with her," Sister Johnson said. "Fifty other students gathered around, sobbing right along with us. Our mission has placed us in the center of a whirlwind of love that seems to envelop us."

### Go forth and serve

As Jesus sent forth the Twelve to go on their missions, He commanded them, saying, "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). Where much is given, much is expected. You have received much in your life; go forth and freely give in the service of our Lord and Savior. Have faith; the Lord knows where you are needed. The need is so great, brothers and sisters, and the laborers are so few.

"When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17). I know this is His work. Go forth and serve!

That you may experience the blessings of missionary service for you and your families is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Elder Darwin B. Christenson

### David, a future missionary

My dear brothers and sisters, a blessing of Church membership is the privilege of feeling and bearing testimony, which expression may also come from an act or an example.

As well as others, my wife and I shall never, never forget the young brother standing in the sweeping, torrential rains during the cornerstone ceremony of the Recife Brazil Temple last December.

As President Hinckley and President Faust came from the temple into his view, this little lad I'll call David—about 10 years old—braced himself, ignoring the wind and the rain, his white shirt and his trousers soaked through and through. He stood tall and resolute as a little soldier and gave determined recognition that he was, indeed, in the presence of the Lord's own prophets, seers, and revelators.