

# Called to the Work

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An assignment to labor in a specific place is essential and important but secondary to a call to the work.

President Monson, we are thrilled to hear your voice and to receive your instruction. We love you, we sustain you, and we ever pray for you.

I pray for the assistance of the Holy Ghost as we consider together principles pertaining to the great work of preaching the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.<sup>1</sup>

### Called to Serve and Assigned to Labor

Every year tens of thousands of young men and young women, and many senior couples, eagerly anticipate receiving a special letter from Salt Lake City. The content of the letter affects forever the person to whom it is addressed, as well as family members and a great number of other people. Upon arrival, the envelope may be opened neatly and patiently or ripped apart excitedly and with great haste. Reading this special letter is an experience never to be forgotten.

The letter is signed by the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the first two sentences read as follows: "You are hereby called to serve as a missionary of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. You are assigned to labor in the \_\_\_\_\_ Mission."

Please note that the first sentence is a call to serve as a full-time missionary in the Lord's restored Church. The second sentence indicates an assignment to labor in a specific place and mission. The important distinction expressed in these two sentences is essential for all of us to understand.

In the culture of the Church, we often talk of being called to serve in a country such as Argentina, Poland, Korea, or the United States. But a missionary is not called to a place; rather, he or she is called to serve. As the Lord declared through the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1829, "If ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work."<sup>2</sup>

Each mission call and assignment, or a later reassignment, is the result of revelation through the Lord's servants. A call to the work comes from God through the President

of the Church. An assignment to one of the more than 400 missions presently operating around the world comes from God through a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, acting with the authorization of the Lord's living prophet. The spiritual gifts of prophecy and revelation attend all mission calls and assignments.

Section 80 of the Doctrine and Covenants is a record of a mission call to Stephen Burnett extended by the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1832. Studying this call to Brother Burnett can help us to (1) understand more clearly the distinction between being "called to the work" as a missionary and "assigned to labor" in a particular place and (2) appreciate more completely our individual and divinely appointed responsibility to proclaim the gospel.

Verse 1 of this section is a call to serve: "Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you my servant Stephen Burnett: Go ye, go ye into the world and preach the gospel to every creature that cometh under the sound of your voice."<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly, verse 2 informs Brother Burnett about his assigned missionary companion: "And inasmuch as you desire a companion, I will give unto you my servant Eden Smith."<sup>4</sup>

Verse 3 indicates where these two missionaries are to labor: "Wherefore, go ye and preach my gospel, whether to the north or to the south, to the east or to the west, it mattereth not, for ye cannot go amiss."<sup>5</sup>

I do not believe that the phrase "it mattereth not" as used by the Lord in this scripture suggests that He does not care where His servants labor. In fact, He cares deeply. But because the work of preaching the gospel is the Lord's work, He inspires, guides, and directs His authorized servants. As missionaries strive to be ever more worthy and capable instruments in His hands and do their best to fulfill faithfully their duties, then with His help they "cannot go amiss"—wherever they serve. Perhaps one of the lessons the Savior is teaching us in this revelation is that an assignment to labor in a specific place is essential and important but secondary to a call to the work.

The next verse highlights important qualifications for all missionaries: "Therefore, declare the things which ye have *heard*, and verily *believe*, and *know to be true*."<sup>6</sup>

The final verse reminds Brother Burnett and all of us from whom a call to serve truly comes: "Behold, this is the will of him who hath called you, your Redeemer, even Jesus Christ. Amen."<sup>7</sup>

## Overcoming Misunderstanding

Some of you may be asking yourselves why I have chosen to discuss in a priesthood session of general conference this seemingly obvious distinction between being called to the work and assigned to labor. My answer to this question is quite straightforward:

my experience has taught me that these principles are not well understood by many members of the Church.

The single greatest reason for addressing this matter is what I have learned over time about the concern, the worry, and even the guilt felt by many missionaries who for various reasons were reassigned to a different field of labor during their time of service. Such reassignments sometimes are necessary because of events and circumstances such as physical accidents and injuries, delays and challenges in obtaining visas, political instability, creating and staffing new missions, or the evolving and ever-changing needs around the world in the work of proclaiming the gospel.<sup>8</sup>

When a missionary is reassigned to a different field of labor, the process is precisely the same as for the initial assignment. Members of the Quorum of the Twelve seek inspiration and guidance in making all such reassignments.

I recently spoke with a faithful man who shared with me the deepest feelings of his heart. In a meeting, I had just explained the difference between being called to the work and assigned to labor. This good brother shook my hand and with tears in his eyes said to me, "The things you helped me learn today have lifted a burden from my shoulders that I have carried for more than 30 years. As a young missionary, I was initially assigned to a field of labor in South America. But I was unable to obtain a visa, so my assignment was changed to the United States. All these years I have wondered why I was unable to serve in the place to which I had been called. Now I know I was called to the work and not to a place. I cannot tell you how much this understanding has helped me."

My heart ached for this good man. As I have taught these basic principles throughout the world, countless individuals have expressed privately to me the same sentiment as the man I just described. I am addressing this subject today because not a single member of this Church should carry an unnecessary burden of misunderstanding, uncertainty, anguish, or guilt about an assignment to labor.

"Wherefore, go ye and preach my gospel, whether to the north or to the south, to the east or to the west, it mattereth not, for ye cannot go amiss."<sup>9</sup> As you ponder the words of this scripture and open your heart, I hope and pray you will invite the Holy Ghost to carry deep into your soul the understanding, the healing, and the restoring you may need.

One additional reason I have felt impressed to discuss this topic is my personal experience assigning missionaries over many years. For the Twelve, nothing affirms the reality of ongoing latter-day revelation more powerfully than seeking to discern the Lord's will as we fulfill our responsibility to assign missionaries to their respective fields of labor. I witness that the Savior knows and is mindful of each of us one by one and name by name.

## Preparing for a Call to the Work

I now want to discuss briefly a fundamental but frequently overlooked aspect of preparing for a call to the work.

Three interrelated words define a pattern of preparation and progression for sons of God: *priesthood, temple, mission*. Sometimes as parents, friends, and Church members, we focus so extensively upon missionary preparation for young men that we may neglect to a degree the other vital steps along the covenant pathway that must be fulfilled before beginning full-time missionary service. Working as a missionary certainly is one but not the only important building block in the process of creating a strong foundation for a lifetime of spiritual growth and service. Priesthood and temple blessings, both of which precede arriving in an assigned field of labor, also are necessary to fortify and strengthen us spiritually throughout our entire lives.

Young men, as you fulfill your duties in and honor the Aaronic Priesthood, or lesser priesthood, you are preparing to receive and magnify the oath and covenant of the Melchizedek Priesthood, or higher priesthood.<sup>10</sup> Personal worthiness is the single most important requirement for receiving the higher priesthood. A lifetime of selfless priesthood service lies before you. Prepare now by frequently rendering meaningful service. Please learn to love being and remaining worthy. Be worthy. Stay worthy.

After receiving the Melchizedek Priesthood and a call to serve, a young man can be armed with power<sup>11</sup> through the covenants and ordinances of the holy temple. Going to the temple and having the spirit of the temple go through you precedes effective service as a full-time missionary. Personal worthiness is the single most important requirement for receiving the blessings of the temple for you young men and for all members of the Church. As you live in accordance with gospel standards, you can enter the house of the Lord and participate in sacred ordinances throughout your teenage years. Your love for and understanding of temple ordinances will strengthen and bless you throughout your life. Please learn to love being and remaining worthy. Be worthy. Stay worthy.

Many young men and young women already hold a current limited-use temple recommend. As Aaronic Priesthood holders, you are finding your own family names and performing baptisms and confirmations for your family members in the temple. Maintaining your temple recommend demonstrates your worthiness, and serving others in the temple is an important part of preparing for the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Young men, each of you is a missionary now. All around you, every day, are friends and neighbors “who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it.”<sup>12</sup> As you are directed by the Spirit, you can share a thought, an invitation, a text or tweet that will introduce your friends to the truths of the restored gospel. You need not and should not wait for your official call to become anxiously engaged in missionary work.

As priesthood, temple, and mission blessings are gathered “together in one ... in Christ”<sup>13</sup> and synergistically interact in the heart, mind, and soul of a young missionary, he can qualify for the work.<sup>14</sup> His capacity is increased to fulfill the responsibility to represent authoritatively the Lord Jesus Christ. The spiritually potent combination of honoring priesthood and temple covenants, receiving “the power of godliness”<sup>15</sup> through priesthood ordinances,<sup>16</sup> serving selflessly, and proclaiming the everlasting gospel to God’s children enables a young man to become “firm and steadfast in the faith”<sup>17</sup> and “rooted and built up in [Christ].”<sup>18</sup>

In our homes and at church, we should give balanced emphasis to all three elements of the Lord’s pattern of preparation and progression for faithful sons of God: *priesthood, temple, mission*. All three require us to love being and remaining worthy. Be worthy. Stay worthy.

## Promise and Testimony

My beloved brethren, I promise that the spiritual gift of revelation will attend your call to the work of proclaiming the gospel and your assignment to a specific field or fields of labor. As you diligently prepare now through selfless priesthood and temple service, your witness of the Lord’s living reality will be strengthened. Love for Him and His work will fill your heart. As you learn to love being worthy, you will become a mighty instrument in the hands of the Lord to bless and serve many people.

Joyfully, I witness that our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, live. To be engaged in Their service is one of the greatest blessings we can ever receive. I so testify in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

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