

COMING HOME
TO YOUR MISSION



By Wendy Ulrich and Dave Ulrich

“**T**he testimony which ye have borne is recorded in heaven for the angels to look upon; and they rejoice over you. . . . And now continue your journey” (D&C 62:3–4).

Although the angels rejoice over the testimony you bore as a missionary, continuing your post-mission journey toward your *life’s mission* can involve unexpected challenges. For example:

1. Ryan loved his mission. He grew a lot, found deep satisfaction and meaning in his service, and was sad to take off his name badge. Now, driving a pizza delivery truck and studying chemistry feel pretty pointless, and he feels selfish having to think so much about himself and his future. He wonders, “How can ordinary life measure up to saving souls as a leader in the mission field?”

2. Ashley’s mission wasn’t entirely what she’d expected, and she came home with some regrets. There were many good moments but also lots of challenges and disappointments. She thought she’d be a spiritual giant by the end of her mission, but she feels like she’s still just Ashley, with no idea what to do next. She wonders, “How can I find answers about my future when I still don’t have answers about my past?”

3. When Brandon returned home, it just wasn’t the same. His family seemed lax about the gospel, and his former friends were into partying and drugs. The blessings he expected for himself and those he loved didn’t all come about. He felt alone. He wonders, “How can I go forward in faith when my faith feels shaky and God feels far away?”

When you come home, you face a major transition that not everyone feels prepared for. But as a missionary you learned more than you may realize about your *next* mission—to become a contributing, focused, spiritually committed young adult.¹

Resources for this transition include:

- Scriptures.
- Prayer.
- Temple worship.
- Patriarchal blessings.
- Priesthood blessings.
- Church callings.
- *Adjusting to Missionary Life*, the booklet with the toolkit you used on your mission; it can also help in post-mission life.
- *The Gospel and the Productive Life*, an institute manual about skills for young adulthood.
- People who care about you: family members, priesthood leaders, priesthood quorums, Relief Society, good friends.
- Books about returning from a mission, choosing a career, enhancing personal happiness, developing relationships skills, becoming self-reliant, or creating a life mission.

**EVERY RETURNING
MISSIONARY
NEEDS A FRIEND**

A Mission Is Preparation for the Rest of Your Life

Just as the missionary training center helped prepare you for your mission, your mission helped you prepare for the rest of your life. Think about all the skills you learned!

You learned to plan while adapting to change. You learned to talk to strangers, teach gospel lessons, bounce back from rejection, and build positive relationships. You learned to set goals, exercise discipline, be accountable, and start again after setbacks. You learned to get along with different people—companions, members, and investigators. You learned to study and pray consistently and rely on the Lord. During periods when you were uncomfortable in your role, you learned one of the greatest skills of adulthood: to be more comfortable being uncomfortable.

Your experiences as a missionary apply to challenges you face now as a young adult. For example, on your mission you learned that every new convert needs (1) a friend, (2) a responsibility, and (3) to be nourished by the good word of God.² Now you're the one who needs these things, and it's up to you to get them. And you can!

1 A FRIEND

- How could you extend yourself to befriend others, especially other LDS young adults? What's a good first step?
- How might it help you to visualize God as a loving Father sitting nearby, eager to hear your prayers?
- What are you learning about love, from both positive and challenging experiences, that you want to practice and take forward into the future?
- Whom could you ask for counsel and support?
- Whom in the next generation can you help?

Brandon (from the earlier example) needs new friends and a closer relationship with Heavenly Father. Maybe you do too. How did you get to know new people as a missionary? How did you deepen friendships with new companions or investigators? Even without a companion by your side, use those same skills now.

As a missionary you learned to be friendly and interested in others, even if you were shy. Keep it up! Respond kindly and generously when others try to get to know you. Once each Sunday, sit by someone you don't know and ask them questions. If you're naturally outgoing, help those who aren't. You don't always have to be the social risk-taker, but practice being curious about others, and

push yourself sometimes. Get a friend to help you invite people over for games and popcorn. Welcome home and visiting teachers warmly. If social events are hard for you, give yourself permission to leave after 30 minutes or only help with cleanup or setup—but go.

We can all learn to both give and receive love better. Like faith, love is a choice we make in an uncertain and sometimes hurtful world. You can choose to believe even when faith requires patience, and you can choose love even though you might get hurt. Let your relationship with Heavenly Father deepen by inviting Him to be near you while you humbly express the thoughts and feelings of your heart, open yourself to receive His compassion and support, and allow His Spirit to help you heal.

Friends are also essential in figuring out where to go next and how to get there. Becoming a spiritually mature adult is not just something you learn from a book. It is something you learn from and with other people. Peers and other adults will happily share their experiences with you if you ask—so ask! Then reach out to the next generation of children, youth, returning missionaries, and young adults. Your empathy and experience can help others right now.





EVERY RETURNING
MISSIONARY
NEEDS A
RESPONSIBILITY

2 A RESPONSIBILITY

- What is a meaningful assignment or project you could give yourself now?
- How could you better fulfill your Church calling in a meaningful way?
- What problems would you like to help the world solve? How might these relate to a future career?
- What is one small thing you could do to move in a meaningful direction now?

Like Ryan, you need meaningful opportunities to grow and to serve others. Tell your bishop you want to serve, and do your best to magnify your callings.

In some places, you may get swamped (and blessed!) with many meaningful opportunities. In other areas, there may not be enough formal callings for everyone. You can still serve the Lord. Assign yourself to befriend someone new, serve in the temple, do family history research, support missionaries, serve family members, or volunteer locally. In your schooling or work, seek opportunities to strengthen and bless others every day. Remind yourself of the higher purposes of what you're preparing to do: helping God's children, solving the world's problems, and lifting people's spirits.

Your strengths are desperately needed. You will be blessed for both serving now and developing skills that will allow you to support your family and serve more in the future. Heavenly Father may not tell you exactly what job to take, where to live, what to study, or even whom to marry. And even when He confirms your decisions, that doesn't guarantee they'll turn out as you anticipate. Continuous seeking is

necessary to follow the lead of the Spirit.

What God does care about is your character, your reasons for what you choose, and your willingness to learn and serve. Those Christlike attributes can be developed in many places and careers.³

Heavenly Father wants you to find work you can do well and enjoy, but what that is may not be obvious at first. Ask yourself what types of problems you want to solve, what work excites you, and how you can use your strengths in your career. Be humble about all you need to learn. Recognize that even the most wonderful job will have things about it you'll dislike, so be willing to learn and work hard rather than relying on talent alone.

But what if you don't know what to do next or it all feels too overwhelming? Do what you did in the mission field: get out and do *something*, however small. Ask your parents or mentors how they chose a career. Sign up for a class, or just ask three people who their favorite professor was last semester. Apply for 10 jobs, or start with just one. *Both revelation and motivation follow action.* If you wait to feel like doing something or to know exactly what to do next, you may wait a very long time.

**EVERY RETURNING
MISSIONARY NEEDS
TO BE NOURISHED
BY THE GOOD WORD
OF GOD**

- When is the best time for you to study scriptures and pray?
- How else can you enjoy being nourished by the word of God?
- How can you better recognize, access, and acknowledge God's support in your life choices?
- What institute classes are available in your area?

3 NOURISHED BY GOD'S WORD

Like Ashley, as a missionary you chose to serve the Lord full-time. You were able to have lengthy daily scripture study, prayer, and service. Now the setting has changed. Though you weren't a perfect missionary (nobody is), the Lord is grateful for your service, and He stands ready to bless you. He wants you to learn from the past, including from your mistakes, and move into the future with confidence. He stands ready to nurture you with His Spirit and His love. Trust Him to join you in your journey and to have your best interests at heart.

As a missionary, you studied when mission rules said to. Now you can invite the Lord to help you figure out a realistic plan that fits your current life—one that requires balance, flexibility, and tolerance for ambiguity and change. It may not be realistic to study the scriptures for an hour straight every day, but you need the scriptures now as much as you did in the mission field. If you have only 10 minutes at a time or you miss a few days, strive for an overall pattern of studying regularly even if you aren't perfect. Get really good at starting again, no matter how often life gets in the way of your goals.

Other ways to be nourished by God's word include taking institute classes, enjoying informal discussions of the gospel with friends, taking notes on general conference, listening to past conferences while driving, finding God in nature, writing spiritual experiences in your journal, seeing Heavenly Father's companionship in your choices, turning on spiritually uplifting music at home,



taking notes on inspiration received during prayer, or participating in the ward choir. Tune in to the joy you can feel as you savor God's words and Spirit.

Among the most important of God's words are those of hope, mercy, and trust in the Atonement of Jesus Christ. They can encourage you to make needed changes. Don't sit too long on the fence, wondering whether or not to let go of past mistakes or regrets. If you have repented of your sins and are humbly working on your weaknesses (and there *is* a difference⁴), learn from them and then let go of regret. When you are tempted to feel shame or self-pity for past setbacks, treat that temptation as you would any other—walk away.

“And Now Continue Your Journey”

It took patience and effort to become a skilled missionary. It will also take patience and effort to apply those skills to your new mission of young adulthood. In some ways you are starting over, but now you know how to get out of your comfort zone, and you can do it again.

Generally, the most successful people aren’t necessarily the smartest but rather the most resilient—the most willing to learn from both running strong and falling down. And fall you will! Resilience means bouncing back from failure, taking risks to grow, persisting in the face of obstacles, and working hard on skills and solutions that don’t come easily. No one likes to have their mistakes pointed out, but resilience, coupled with faith, makes us more interested in learning than in impressing others. Resilience means not telling ourselves that we’re failing but that we’re learning.⁵

Perhaps the closest thing to a “returned missionary” transition in the scriptures is the story of Helaman’s 2,060 stripling warriors. United in a meaningful assignment and fortified by God’s word as taught by their mothers, they succeeded in a difficult and dangerous mission (see Alma 56:46–48, 56; 57:20–22, 26–27; 58:39–40). When the battles ended, Helaman went forth with his brethren, declaring God’s word with power and establishing the Church again. The law and the government were reformed, and the people saw a period of great peace and prosperity. (See Alma 62:45–51.) Undoubtedly the faithful young warriors Helaman had led contributed mightily to this great reform, changing their world for the better.

The principles you learned and the skills you developed as a missionary will also serve you, the Church, and the world as you work to make the next two years the *next* “best two years” of your life. You may have finished your service as a full-time missionary, but you have a crucial mission ahead. “And now continue your journey.” ■

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NOTES

1. See Clark B. Hinckley and Kathleen H. Hinckley, *Taking Off the Tag: A Transition Guide for Returned Missionaries* (2015).
2. See Gordon B. Hinckley, “Find the Lambs, Feed the Sheep,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 108.
3. See Virginia H. Pearce, “Diverging Roads,” in Jacob Werrett and David Read, eds., *A Twenty-Something’s Guide to Spirituality: Questions You Hesitate to Ask, Answers You Rarely Hear* (2007), 119–31.
4. See Wendy Ulrich, “It Isn’t a Sin to Be Weak,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2015, 30–35.
5. See Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (2006), 4.

LESSONS FROM THE SONS OF HELAMAN AS THEY RETURNED HOME

How they lived	Impact on them and the Church	Implications for me
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declared the word of God (Alma 62:45) • Established the Church (Alma 62:46) • Not lifted up in pride (Alma 62:49; Helaman 3:35) • Prayed continually (Alma 62:51) • Observed statutes of God (Helaman 3:20) • Firm in their faith (Helaman 3:35) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waxed strong and prospered (Alma 62:51; Helaman 3:24–26) • Peace (Helaman 3:2, 23) • No contention in the land (Helaman 3:2, 23) • Justice and fairness (Helaman 3:20) • Many blessings (Helaman 3:25) • Great joy (Helaman 3:32, 35) 	<p>How do I want to live?</p> <p>What impact might my life have on others?</p>

EVERY RETURNING MISSIONARY NEEDS RESILIENCE

- What hard things have you persisted with, even when it wasn’t easy?
- How did you get yourself to keep going?
- What would you do with your life if you were guaranteed success?
- When things get hard, do you tell yourself that you’re failing or that you’re learning? Which approach helps more?
- What have been your biggest failures, and what can you learn from them that can make you a better person?