

DEALING WITH COMING HOME EARLY

By Jenny Rollins

Dad was out of town on a business trip, so the only one to greet me when I limped off the plane from my mission was my mother. She held me and we cried.

I took as many medical tests as possible, but the doctors could not find the problem. Taking off my missionary tag nine months early was the hardest thing I have ever done. I felt like a failure for not finishing my mission.

Meant to Be a Missionary

Being a missionary had always been in my plans. When my older brother left on his mission, I dressed up with a homemade name tag to see him off. When the mission age change was announced in 2012, I had just turned 19 and knew that the announcement was an answer to my prayers. I danced around the room, filled out my paperwork that day, set up my medical appointments, and put my papers in within

Returning home early from a mission, even for health reasons, can be a devastating experience. It was for me. But you can make it a step forward, not a step back.

the week. I received my call to the California Anaheim Mission two weeks later and reported to the missionary training center two months after that.

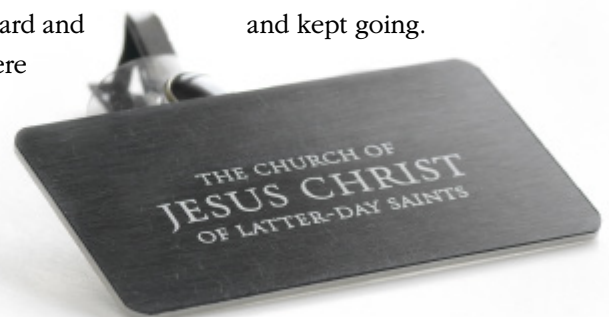
I hit the mission field with “greenie” fire and never wanted to slow down. My trainer and I literally ran to some lessons because we were so excited to teach. For me, being a full-time missionary was the most natural thing in the world. I was awkward and struggled at times, but there

was nothing more amazing to me than being a missionary.

Around eight months into my mission, my companions and I were given bikes because of a car shortage. I hadn’t ridden a bike in a long time and wasn’t entirely sure how to do so in a skirt, but I was thrilled anyway. After a few weeks, though, I developed a pain in my side that would come and go. I ignored it and kept working.

The pain became more frequent and more intense until one night my companion had to take me to the emergency room. I took many medical tests but the doctors couldn’t find the source of my pain.

In the weeks that followed, I prayed to Heavenly Father to make the pain go away and received several priesthood blessings, but it just got worse. Every possible position hurt; the pain was constant. But I decided that I could get used to it and kept going.





One day I collapsed on the side of the road, unable to move anymore. I was transported to the hospital to do tests with yet again no results. I tried to take it easy and sit on bus-stop benches with my companions and teach people as they waited for their buses. I sat through lessons, biting my lip through the pain. I eventually pushed myself too far and ended up in the hospital again. I realized that I might permanently damage myself if I stayed on my mission. After a lot of prayer, I received the answer that I should go home to sort out my health issues.

A Step Forward

When I realized I was home for good, I was devastated. But I tried my best to maintain my faith and scripture study. My family handled it well, but the other people around me weren't sure how to react to my situation. They kept asking me questions, and I barely kept it together. One man, however, called me unexpectedly and told me that his son had come home early from a mission a long time ago. He told me that this trial had the potential to destroy my faith and happiness and that it frequently did with many early-returned missionaries. "What you have to remember," he said, "is that as long as



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you are trying as hard as you can to live your life righteously, it's always a step forward no matter what happens outside of your control."

That became my motto, and I relied on it heavily for the next year. For eight months I could barely walk, but people would still judge me when they found out that I had come home early. They said that there were people with worse medical conditions who had finished serving. They didn't understand why I couldn't have finished, even with medical difficulties. It was agonizing to hear this when I had loved my mission so much, but I had faith that Heavenly Father had a purpose for my trial and that it would be a step forward.

I began school again and started dating. I could see that I was progressing, but I felt that I would always view

my mission with a little bitterness. Then a friend of mine reminded me that the Savior's Atonement can heal all pain and bitterness. With His help I could be happy when thinking about my mission.

I knelt down and prayed to my Heavenly Father. I told Him about my pain and my efforts to be healed and comforted. I asked if He would take away the bitterness I felt. After my prayer, the Lord opened my eyes to see my mission from His perspective. Both my service and early return were a part of the Lord's plan to help make me into who He wanted me to be. I could see the miracles that He had provided since I came home. It has been a hard path, but now I can look back on my early return home with peace, knowing that God has my best interests at heart.

For RETURNED MISSIONARIES: 6 WAYS TO HANDLE COMING HOME EARLY

Coming home is hard, but with effort you can make your early return an honorable and helpful step forward. These are things that helped me:

Come unto Christ. No matter what caused you to come home, Christ can help you solve it. His Atonement is not just for repentance; it's also for solace, understanding, and healing.

Remember it can be a step forward. As long as you are living

worthy of the Spirit and doing your best, seeming stumbling blocks can be platforms to progression.

Keep up scripture habits. God speaks through the Holy Ghost, accessed through, among other things, the sincere study and application of the scriptures. You might find that God has whole chapters written just to bring you comfort.

Keep busy. Transitioning from a regimented and busy missionary lifestyle to doing nothing might mean a lot of downtime to mope and feel inadequate and sad, which is what Satan wants. God wants you to be

“anxiously engaged” in good causes (see D&C 58:27) because that is what will help you be happy.

Pray for help. Heavenly Father is waiting with blessings of comfort and guidance. All you have to do is ask. Overcoming any trial requires the Lord's help.

Give people the benefit of the doubt. It will be easy to find reasons to be offended by people who may really care about you but might not know how to react to your situation. Focus on the people who are rooting for you and be forgiving of those who pass judgment.

For LOVED ONES: 5 WAYS TO HELP MISSIONARIES WHO COME HOME EARLY

When I came home, I found that people didn't quite know how to treat me. Here are some tips I wish people had known:

Don't judge. People who come home early are in the process of healing or fixing something, whether it's their body, mind, spirit, or even family. Be kind to those who are striving and struggling.

Stop asking questions. While it's genuinely nice to have people care,

probing questions can be harmful. Even if you have kind intentions, don't interrogate an early-returned missionary. Show your love through other kinds of support.

Help them stay busy. It's difficult to adjust from the order and activity of a mission to the downtime and new choices at home. Help them find productive, fun, and wholesome things to do.

Let them receive their own revelation. Whether or not missionaries choose to go back into the mission field is between them and Heavenly Father. Encourage them to seek heavenly counsel and trust them to receive their own answers.

Be a friend. Most likely, this will be one of the most difficult trials in an early-returned missionary's life. Many have their faith severely challenged. That doesn't mean that they cannot be happy or progress, but they need a friend who is willing to love them unconditionally. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

