

How Can I Be a **SUCCESSFUL** Missionary?

No matter how hard my companion and I worked, everyone was rejecting our message. What could we do to become successful missionaries?

By Lauren Bangerter Wilde

I had been on my mission for little more than a year when I hit a particularly difficult time. We were right in the middle of a dismal, gray season—just coming out of a cold winter and moving into spring. And no matter how hard my companion and I worked, everyone we spoke to rejected our message outright. When we met with other missionaries, we learned that their work was going strong. I couldn't think of any reasons why we were so unsuccessful. I had been out long enough to speak the language well, my companion and I were good friends, we had established trust with the members, and we tried to follow the Spirit and obey the mission rules with exactness.

But no matter what we did, we faced rejection at every turn. After weeks and weeks of this, I let my sour attitude get the better of me. During one planning session I finally exclaimed, "What's the point? Nobody will listen to us anyway."

My companion, having a better perspective than I did, simply said, "We set goals to show our faith. We follow up on goals to count our blessings."

As I pondered her insight, I realized that I had been using the wrong measuring stick to judge my success as a missionary. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* provides a list of behaviors of successful missionaries,¹ and I realized that all those behaviors are within the missionary's control. I could not control whether or not the people in my mission would accept the gospel message, but I could control the type of missionary I chose to be. My companion showed me that greater faith in Jesus Christ and gratitude for His blessings would allow me to recognize the ways I already was a successful missionary.

Faith Illuminates Miracles

It was humbling to realize that my faith was lacking. I looked for areas

where I could strengthen my faith and found that when things hadn't gone according to plan, I had let myself become discouraged. *Preach My Gospel* says: "Discouragement will weaken your faith. If you lower your expectations, your effectiveness will decrease, your desire will weaken, and you will have greater difficulty following the Spirit."² I realized that I had allowed our setbacks to weaken my faith.

I began by praying for a change of heart and more faith. I also relied on the promise given in Mormon 9:21: "Whoso believeth in Christ, doubting nothing, whatsoever he shall ask the Father in the name of Christ it shall be granted him; and this promise is unto all, even unto the ends of the earth." This promise led me to pray more fervently for the blessings and miracles my companion and I felt we needed, always adding, "Thy will be done." These prayers helped me to accept changed plans and setbacks with greater faith,



BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL MISSIONARY

You can know you have been a successful missionary when you:

- Feel the Spirit testify to people through you.
- Love people and desire their salvation.
- Obey with exactness.
- Develop Christlike attributes.
- Warn people of the consequences of sin. Invite them to make and keep commitments.
- Go about doing good and serving people at every opportunity, whether or not they accept your message.

From *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), 10–11.



SEEK THE LORD'S ACCEPTANCE

"With all my heart I invite you to seek the Lord's acceptance and enjoy His promised blessings. . . . We [can] come to know that we are accepted of Him, regardless of our position, status, or mortal limitations. His loving acceptance will motivate us, increase our faith, and help us deal with everything we face in life. Despite our challenges, we will be successful, prosper [see Mosiah 2:22], and feel at peace [see Mosiah 2:41]."

Elder Erich W. Kopischke of the Seventy, "Being Accepted of the Lord," *Ensign*, May 2013, 106.

knowing that Heavenly Father always answers prayers of faith—even when the answers come in ways we don't anticipate. I became more able to recognize the ways the Lord was guiding us throughout our day.

As I worked on strengthening my faith, I found the positive form of the statement from *Preach My Gospel* to be true: if you raise your expectations, your effectiveness will increase, your desire will grow, and you will be able to follow the Spirit better. Additionally, I was more optimistic about missionary work and my missionary service when I could recognize and appreciate the miracles that happened daily.

Gratitude Counteracts Jealousy

The Lord began to show me that He worked miracles for us each day—but I had been unable to recognize them until I made a conscious effort to be genuinely grateful. Expressing gratitude is more than just a good habit or nice manners. When I expressed gratitude to the Lord and to others, I was empowered. I found myself being excited for other missionaries when they had success instead of being jealous (see Alma 29:14, 16). I was more able to focus on what I had and what went right rather than what I lacked and what went wrong.

I learned that gratitude is the antidote to comparing ourselves to others. Those times when I didn't feel like a successful missionary usually came because I told myself, "I'm not

doing as well as they are," or, "They are better at this than I am." I also learned that while it is the Lord's pattern to give us righteous examples to emulate and follow, it is Satan's counterfeit to tempt us to compare ourselves with them in order to determine our worth or success. But *Preach My Gospel* is clear on this: "Avoid comparing yourself to other missionaries and measuring the outward results of your efforts against theirs."³ Ultimately, gratitude helped me avoid pride and reminded me that the Lord is in charge of His work. I did not need to be jealous because my fellow missionaries appeared to be having more success.⁴

The True Measure of Success

Before I had this change in perspective, I had been so focused on a specific type of blessing that I had forgotten to leave my eyes open to the other ways the Lord was answering our prayers and blessing our missionary work. Eventually, the Lord began blessing the missionary work in our area in beautiful and unexpected ways. We did find people willing to accept our message, but I had learned by that time not to measure my success by the choices of others.

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) shared one mission president's counsel about missionary work: "Do your best, your very, very best. Say your prayers and work hard



In many ways, the measure of my success as a missionary could be judged by my willingness to repent and my determination to keep working.

and leave the harvest to the Lord.”⁵ *Preach My Gospel* teaches something similar about successful missionaries: “Do your very best to bring souls to Christ, and seek earnestly to learn and improve.”⁶

As long as I was willing to repent, as long as I could honestly account to the Lord that I was doing my best, I could feel confident that I was a successful missionary—regardless of whether people accepted our message. In many ways, the measure of my success as a missionary could be judged by my willingness to repent and my determination to keep working.

I have many miracles recorded in my journal from this time of my mission. As I strove to be more faithful and grateful, I had a better perspective,

I avoided discouragement, and I felt the Spirit more abundantly in the work. I found that what *Preach My Gospel* teaches is true: “When you have done your very best, you may still experience disappointments, but you will not be disappointed in yourself. You can feel certain that the Lord is pleased when you feel the Spirit working through you.”⁷ And when I felt the Lord was pleased with me, I could endure any trial. ■

The author lives in Maine, USA.

NOTES

1. See *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), 10–11.
2. *Preach My Gospel*, 10.
3. *Preach My Gospel*, 10.
4. See Jeffrey R. Holland, “Laborers in the Vineyard,” *Ensign*, May 2012, 31.
5. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Find the Lambs, Feed the Sheep,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 106.
6. *Preach My Gospel*, 11.
7. *Preach My Gospel*, 11.

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE

“I recently returned from my mission, and I feel like I’ve lost my sense of purpose. What should I do?”

Returned missionaries, please tell us how you made the transition from your mission to returning home and getting back to school, employment, or other activities. Email your experience to ensign@ldschurch.org or submit it online at ensign.lds.org. Please include your full name, birth date, and ward or branch name.