



By **Randall L. Ridd**

Served as second counselor in the Young Men general presidency from 2013 to 2015

LIVING WITH Real Intent

I learned the importance of real intent when I was a young seminary student. Our teacher challenged us to read the Book of Mormon. To keep track of our progress, he created a chart with our names down one side and the books in the Book of Mormon across the top. Each time we read a book, he placed a star by our name.

At first I didn't put much effort into reading, and it wasn't long before I found myself getting further and further behind. Spurred by a sense of embarrassment and my innate competitive spirit, I started reading. Every time I got a star, I felt good. And the more stars I got, the more motivated I was to read—between classes, after school, during every spare minute.

This would be a great story if I could tell you that as a result of my efforts I finished first in the class—but I didn't. And that would be OK if I could tell you that I got something

better than first place—a testimony of the Book of Mormon. But that didn't happen either. I didn't get a testimony. What I got was stars. I got stars because that was why I was reading. To use Moroni's words, that was my "real intent."

Moroni was clear when he described how to find out if the Book of Mormon is true: "And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with *real intent*, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost" (Moroni 10:4; emphasis added).

The Right Reasons

Looking back, I can see that the Lord was totally fair with me. Why should I have expected to find

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anything other than what I was looking for? Real intent means doing the right thing for the right reasons; I was reading the right book for the *wrong* reasons.

It wasn't until years later that I finally read the Book of Mormon with real intent. Now I know that the Book of Mormon fulfills its divine purpose



of testifying of the life and mission of Jesus Christ because I have read it with real intent.

The lesson I learned about real intent and the Book of Mormon applies to all of us in all aspects of our lives. Too often we passively follow patterns and habits that have been developed through the years—we just go through the motions without carefully considering where those motions are taking us. Living with real intent adds focus and purpose to our lives and can make all the difference. Living with real intent means understanding the “why”—the motives behind our actions. Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.”¹ So ponder how you spend your time, and ask yourself regularly, “Why?” This will help you develop the ability to see beyond the moment. It’s far better to look ahead and ask yourself, “Why would I do that?” than to look back and say, “Why, oh, why did I do that?”

What Does the Lord Want You to Do?

When I was a young man, I had decided not to go on a mission. After a year in college and a year in the army, I had a good job at a local hospital as an X-ray technician. Life seemed to be going well, and a mission didn’t seem necessary.



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One day, Dr. James Pingree, a surgeon at the hospital, invited me to lunch. In the course of our conversation, he discovered that I was not planning on serving a mission, and he asked why. I told him I was a little older and it was probably too late. He told me that wasn’t a very good reason, saying that he had gone on his mission after he had finished medical school. Then he bore testimony of the importance of his mission.

His testimony had a significant impact on me. It caused me to pray as I’d never prayed before—with *real intent*. I could think of a lot of reasons not to go on a mission: I was shy. I had a job I liked. I had a scholarship possibility that wouldn’t be available after a mission. Most important, I had a girlfriend who waited for me while I was in the army, and I knew she wouldn’t

wait another two years! I prayed to get confirmation that my reasons were valid and that I was right.

To my frustration, I couldn’t get the easy yes-or-no answer I was hoping for. Then the thought came to me: “What does the Lord want you to do?” I had to acknowledge that He wanted me to serve a mission, and this became a decisive moment in my life. Was I going to do what I wanted to do, or was I going to do the will of the Lord? That is a question we would all do well to ask ourselves often.

Gratefully, I chose to serve a mission and was assigned to labor in the Mexico North Mission.

Eternal Consequences

Thirty-five years later, my son encouraged me to visit Mexico with him. We hoped to find some of the

people I had taught. We attended a sacrament meeting in the little town where I began my mission, but I didn't recognize a single person. After the meeting, we spoke with one of the members and asked if he knew anyone on my list of people I had taught so many years before. We went through the list without any success, until we got to the last name: Leonor Lopez de Enriquez.

"Oh, yes," the man said. "This family is in another ward, but they attend church in this building. Their sacrament meeting is next."

We didn't have to wait long before Leonor came walking into the building. Although she was now in her mid-70s, I recognized her immediately, and she recognized me. We shared a long, tearful hug.

"We've prayed for 35 years that you would return so we could thank you for bringing the gospel to our family," she said.

As other family members entered the building, we shared hugs and tears. Soon we discovered that the bishop of this ward was one of Leonor's sons, the chorister was a granddaughter, the pianist was a grandson, and so were several young men in the Aaronic Priesthood. One of her daughters was married to a counselor in the stake presidency. Another daughter was married to the bishop of a nearby ward. Most of

Leonor's children had gone on missions, and now grandchildren have also served missions.

We learned that Leonor was a much better missionary than I was. Today her children thankfully recall her tireless efforts to teach them the gospel. She taught them that small decisions, over time, result in a full, righteous, and happy life, and they have taught those things to others. All told, more than 500 people have come into the Church because of this one wonderful family.

And it can all be traced back to a conversation over lunch. I often think that if Dr. Pingree had been more focused on his career or other worldly pursuits, he might never have asked why I wasn't serving a mission. But his focus was on others and on furthering the work of the Lord. He planted a seed that has grown, brought forth fruit, and continues to multiply exponentially (see Mark 4:20). My mission taught me the eternal consequences of a single decision to do the Lord's will.

Remember Your Eternal Purpose

I've often looked back on my life and wondered why it was so difficult for me to make the decision to go on a mission. It was hard because I got distracted; I lost sight of my eternal purpose—the real intent of why we are here.

My desires and my will were not aligned with the Lord's will; otherwise, the decision would have been easier. And why were they not aligned? I went to church and I partook of the sacrament on Sundays, but I didn't focus on its meaning. I prayed, but I was mostly going through the motions. I read the scriptures but only sporadically and without real intent.

I encourage you to live a deliberate and focused life—even if you haven't consistently done so in the past. Don't be discouraged by thoughts of what you have already done or not done. Let the Savior wipe the slate clean. Remember what He has said: "As oft as they repented and sought forgiveness, with *real intent*, they were forgiven" (Moroni 6:8; emphasis added).

Start now. Live an intentional life, understanding why you do what you do and where it will lead. As you do these things, you will discover that the most important "why" behind everything you do is that you love the Lord and recognize His perfect love for you. May you find great joy in your search for perfection and in understanding and doing His will. ■

From a worldwide devotional for young adults, "Living with Purpose: The Importance of Real Intent," delivered at Brigham Young University–Idaho on January 11, 2015. For the full address, go to devotionals.lds.org.

NOTE

1. Socrates, in Plato, *Apology* (2001), 55.