

COURAGE TO SERVE



Modern prophets have asked every worthy and able young man to serve a full-time mission and have welcomed the service of young women. Young adults around the world are responding to this call to serve, but following the prophet requires faith and courage. In the following stories, young returned missionaries share how they found the strength to overcome the obstacles that come with deciding and preparing to serve a mission.

STICKING TO MY DECISION

When I turned 21, I started feeling promptings to serve a mission. I had never planned on a mission, so these thoughts were unexpected. My priesthood leader encouraged me to pray about it, and I did so.

My answer came very clearly: I knew that God wanted me to serve a mission. I initially felt excited about serving, but leaving on a mission was more challenging than I had anticipated.

My boss did not understand why I would leave for 18 months, and he

didn't want to give me time off to prepare for leaving. He gave me an ultimatum: "Work or don't work. It's your choice." As scary as it was to not work in the final weeks before my mission, I chose to leave that job.

Completing the medical requirements was also complicated. My doctor in my native country, Russia, had never seen the Church's missionary medical documents before and refused to sign them.

Obstacles like these made me wonder whether I had really made the right choice. Several times I came close to changing my mind. But in those times of doubt, I remembered

the answer I had received to my prayer and was able to stick to my decision to serve. Eventually, I found solutions to these and other challenges I encountered.

I was called to serve in the Russia St. Petersburg Mission. The first few months in the mission field were not easy. But because of what I learned in dealing with the obstacles I faced in preparing to serve, I was able to confront the challenges of my mission. My mission—and the difficulties I faced in preparing for it—taught me that I can do difficult things with the Lord's help.

Elena Ogneva Anderson, Utah, USA



MY LIFE BELONGS TO HIM

When I turned 18, a lot of members in my ward and stake began telling me I should go on a mission. Even though I had always planned to serve a mission, I didn't like all the pressure.

Soon I began my first year of college. As a result of hard work, I won a scholarship that allowed me to study in Germany. Germany was very different from my native country, Mexico, but I became immersed in the culture and learned the language quickly.

Eventually I was offered a permanent job at a prestigious European company. Serving a mission suddenly felt more like a duty than a desire. I thought that I could take this job and enjoy worldly success.

One snowy day I traveled to the city of Heidelberg with my friend Melanie. After several hours, the highway was covered with snow, and we became sleepy. We were driving around 65 miles (105 km) per hour when we passed through a red light and hit a bus.

When I woke up, I saw the police, the ambulance, and Melanie, who was crying. The car was destroyed, and I was still in it. Tears came to my eyes when I realized how blessed we were to be alive. I began praying and thanking

my Heavenly Father for letting us survive, but a new fear came to me—I was not able to move my legs.

On our way to the hospital, I heard the nurses saying that if I had a spinal injury, I probably wouldn't be able to walk again. I prayed with all my heart to my Heavenly Father. First I thanked Him again for letting me survive, realizing that my life was not my own. Then I promised Him, "If my legs are OK and I can walk, I will serve a mission with all my heart and mind."

After four hours at the hospital, my diagnosis was promising: I would walk again. I no longer had any hesitation about serving a mission. Instead I felt a strong desire to share my testimony that God lives, that He is our Father in Heaven, and that He can perform miracles in our lives.

After that experience I decided not to take the job I'd been offered. I knew that my time and everything I have belong to the Lord. Why shouldn't I give Him a little of that time and serve Him for two years?

After graduating, I was called to serve in Frankfurt, Germany. During my mission I testified of my Heavenly Father. I know that He lives, that He is my Father, and that He protects me. He has given me my life, and it will always belong to Him.

Mahonry Gonzalez, Morelos, Mexico



I CHANGED MY MIND

I was 21 years old and part owner of a beauty salon. I taught a Primary class at church. My life was good, but I felt restless. It seemed that there was something else that I needed to be doing—I just didn't know what.

My bishop called me into his office one Sunday and asked me if I had considered serving a mission. I was totally caught off guard. I had been a member of the Church for only two years and had never thought of serving a mission.

I told the bishop that I didn't think a mission was right for me. As I was leaving his office, he said, "Well, if you change your mind, let me know." I thought the topic was closed, but the bishop's words continued to echo in my mind.

I asked myself how I could possibly serve a mission. I was the only member of the Church in my family. How would my family feel? What would I do with my share of the beauty salon? Could I handle serving for a year and a half?

As I pondered these questions, I was prompted to read the Book of Mormon. I picked it up and turned to the eighth chapter of Alma. As I read about Alma and Amulek embarking on their mission, I knew that I also needed "to declare the words of God" (verse 30). The next Sunday I told my bishop that I had changed my



ENTITLED TO THE LORD'S HELP

"Some of you may be shy by nature

or consider yourselves inadequate to respond affirmatively to the call to serve. Remember that this is the Lord's work, and when we are on the Lord's errand, we are entitled to the Lord's help. The Lord will shape the back to bear the burden placed upon it."

President Thomas S. Monson, "The Lord Needs Missionaries," *Liahona and Ensign*, Jan. 2011, 4.

mind and I wanted to serve a mission.

My family was supportive, and I was able to sell my share of the beauty salon. I served in Caracas, Venezuela, and I continue to reap the blessings of having honorably served the Lord.

Jessica Baksis, Idaho, USA

CONVERTED TO THE GOSPEL—AND A MISSION

I grew up in the Church and had always planned on serving a mission. Yet as the time for me to serve approached, I longed to have a powerful conversion experience of my own such as I heard other people talk about when they described joining the Church.

I knew that leaving on a mission would require sacrifices. I had a good job that paid well, and I wondered if I would be able to find one as good upon my return. I worried about interrupting my education and

leaving family and friends. But I knew deep down that serving a mission was right, so I continued to prepare.

As part of that preparation, I went with the elders in my area to their teaching appointments. One evening the missionaries and I were teaching a man about the Word of Wisdom, but he would not accept the principle. When we left his home, I could tell that the elders were discouraged, and I felt sad too.

I wasn't sure why I should be sad though, because I didn't really know this man. I kept thinking about it, and I realized that I had these feelings because I had felt the Spirit during the lesson. I was saddened that this man had rejected something that had brought me so much joy.

With that thought I realized I *was* truly converted. I knew the gospel was true, and I couldn't wait to share it. I was soon called to serve in the Italy Rome Mission.

I was blessed abundantly for the sacrifices I had made in preparing for my mission. I taught the gospel to many wonderful people, I made lifelong friends, and I learned English. The blessings continued after my return home. I was hired at the same job I had before my mission and even received a promotion.

Perhaps the greatest blessing, however, was an increased testimony of the gospel. My mission was a period of unparalleled spiritual growth, for which I will always be grateful. ■
Marco Brando, Italy