

MORE THAN A MISSIONARY GUIDE

By Melissa Merrill

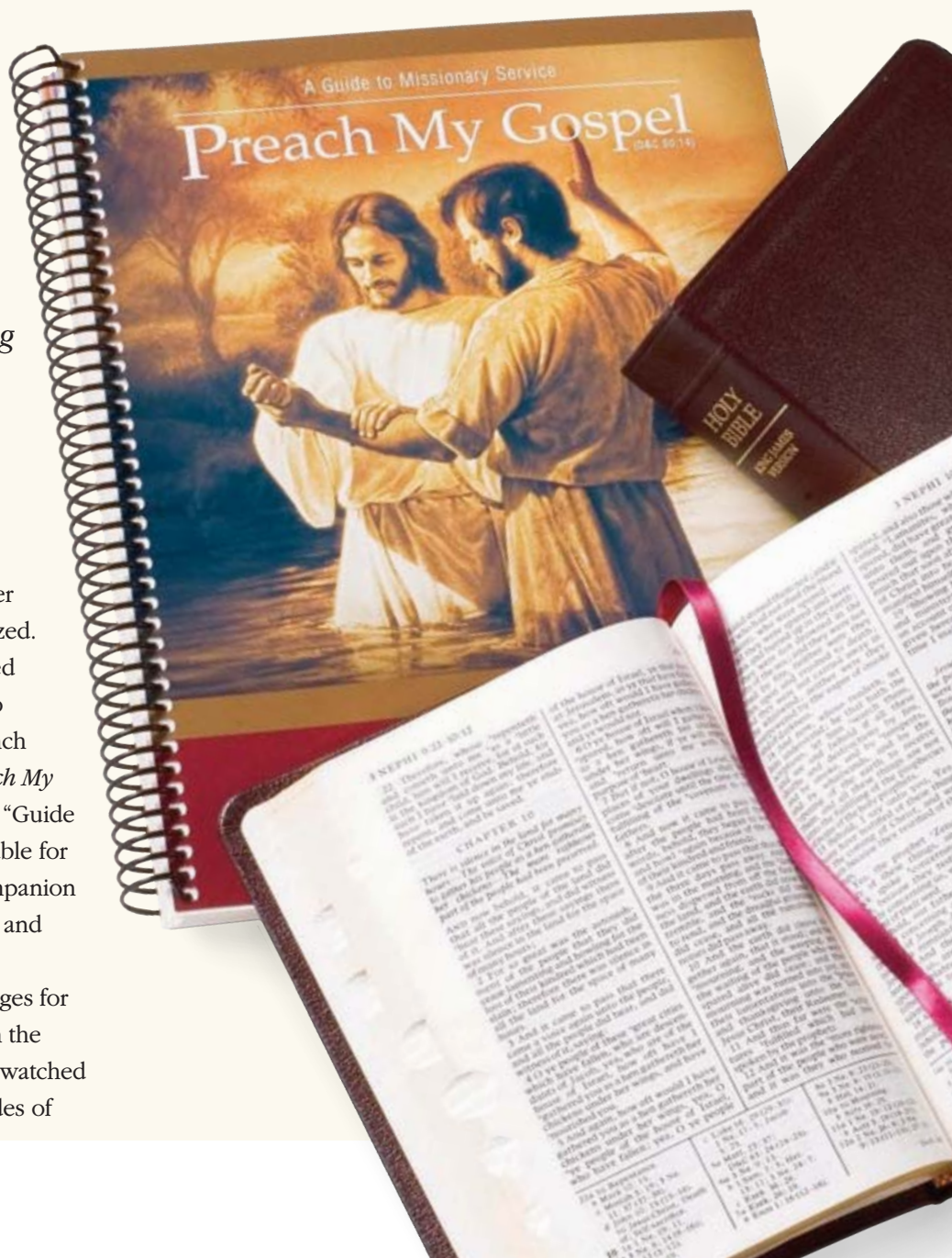
Church Magazines

In personal study. In the home. In Sunday lessons. And, of course, in missionary work. These are the ways members of the Hingham Massachusetts Stake are using Preach My Gospel.

As a missionary in France, Chris Ivie served in a small branch where no investigators had attended church in at least a year. Moreover, members couldn't remember the last time someone had been baptized.

Elder Ivie and his companion prayed about what to do and felt prompted to make sure that each family in the branch had—and was using—a copy of *Preach My Gospel*. At that point in early 2006, the “Guide to Missionary Service” had been available for just over a year. Elder Ivie and his companion acted on their prompting and ordered and distributed copies of the book.

That was the beginning of big changes for the branch. Although Elder Ivie was in the branch for only two more months, he watched *Preach My Gospel* transform the attitudes of



Church members—youth and adults alike—about missionary work.

“It was working!” remembers Chris. “Members were thinking about missionary work and trying to share the gospel and having great experiences. There was more missionary activity than the branch had seen in years.”

Members began reporting regularly to the missionaries about gospel conversations they were having with family members, friends, or colleagues. When those friends agreed to come to branch activities, other members welcomed

them warmly. For Elder Ivie and his companion, that meant they were knocking on doors less and teaching the gospel more. One of the investigators they began teaching was later baptized.

“Sometimes we have this misperception in the Church that missionary work is only for missionaries to do,” says Chris. “But when the members of this branch were prepared through studying *Preach My Gospel*, they came to realize that they had a role in finding people to be taught. *Preach My Gospel* helped give them the missionary spirit.”

Chris has now been home in Medway, Massachusetts, for nearly three years, but he still uses *Preach My Gospel* in his daily study as a gateway to the scriptures. “It helped me be a better missionary. It has helped me be a better gospel teacher. And it is helping me be a better, more Christlike person,” he says.

Chris is not the only member of the Hingham Massachusetts Stake to discover the power of *Preach My Gospel* outside the parameters of full-time missionary service. Although the resource is certainly intended for

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James Setterberg



full-time missionaries, *member* missionaries in the Hingham stake are finding that it can bless and enrich their lives as well.

From Mission to Home

James Setterberg was also part of the first generation of missionaries to use *Preach My Gospel*. When he arrived in the Texas Houston East Mission in 2005, his fellow missionaries had been using the resource for several months. But because of the example of a local priesthood leader, Elder Setterberg realized that the tool’s usefulness wasn’t limited to the missionaries.

“In one area, we missionaries lived in the home of a stake president and his family. Every morning, they got up



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Jake Peterson



for scripture study, which included going through the various chapters of *Preach My Gospel*. That’s when I realized that

this book really is for everyone,” he says.

It was a lesson he brought home with him. “Before my mission, I had never really set specific goals for my life; I guess I didn’t want to overshoot

things,” he admits. “But because of the emphasis on goal setting from my mission president and chapter 8 of *Preach My Gospel*, that began to change.”

Weekly planning and goal-setting sessions for two years formed a habit that James has retained since his return home. He has, for example, set and worked toward educational and spiritual goals. He says, “I’ve come to realize that without setting goals, you can’t really tell where you are in life, progression-wise. But when you do set and work toward goals, you stretch yourself and become a better person. I have *Preach My Gospel* to thank for learning that.”

In Teaching at Church and in the Family

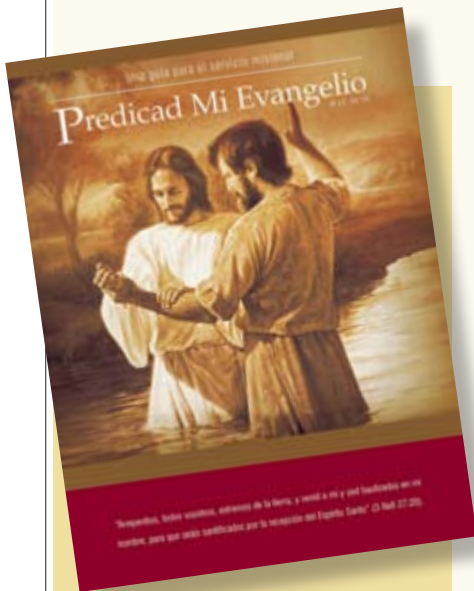
Even members who didn’t use *Preach My Gospel* as missionaries are discovering its power. Jake Peterson is a member of the stake’s young single adult branch. Although he served his mission before *Preach My Gospel* became available, Jake says the resource has been

invaluable to him in his calling as branch mission leader because it explains the reasons we share the gospel: “Sometimes we as members might think, ‘What’s the big deal about missionary work? My neighbors are living good lives and doing good things. Why should I create a possibly awkward situation by talking to them about the Church?’ *Preach My Gospel* goes over that. It explains why we share the gospel and talk to our friends: because the gospel of Jesus Christ ‘will bless their families, meet their spiritual needs, and help them fulfill their deepest desires.’”¹

It also helps keep all members founded in basic gospel doctrines, he says. “There’s a quote I like from Hyrum Smith about teaching the first principles of the gospel, then teaching them again and again.”² That statement and the doctrines contained in *Preach My Gospel* have given me a greater understanding of the power of the basics and an appreciation for the strength we can gain from studying things like the Restoration, faith, the Atonement, or repentance. There is great power in those things.”

Another member of the stake, Rick Doane, was serving as the ward mission leader when *Preach My Gospel* first became available. Rick immediately sensed that this new tool could help him in his calling.

“I love the fact that the book includes a chapter on how to work with stake and ward leaders.



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Missionaries come and go, but ward leaders will be there in the long run. They're the sustainability factor. I love that the book emphasizes the importance of that," says Rick.

Rick and his wife, Moshi, have also seen the potential for the book as a resource for teaching their young sons. "There is a 15-minute lesson in each chapter that can be perfect for family home evening," Rick explains. "It is principle focused, so it helps keep you to the basics, which can help you build a strong foundation for yourself and your children. The book even lists scriptures and activities you can use. It's a great resource to draw from, whether you're teaching in the home or elsewhere."

In Preparing for the Future

Mark Wadsworth, age 19, is now serving in the Spain Bilbao Mission and regularly uses *Preach My Gospel*. But even before his mission, he studied from it. "Every time I have gone through it, there has always been something new to get out of it," he says.

Studying *Preach My Gospel* before his mission helped him identify missionary opportunities. The missionaries in his area helped him and his family develop a family mission plan. "That got me thinking about missionary work in a more proactive way," he says. As a result, he had more conversations with friends about the Church's doctrines, its history, and Church-related activities.

"I might have had a similar amount of opportunities to talk about the Church before we made our plan, but I came to react differently to them," says Elder Wadsworth. "It was just a matter of thinking a little bit differently about things I was already doing."

Andrew Mello, age 18, still has several months before he submits his mission papers, but that doesn't mean he's not actively preparing now. Studying *Preach My Gospel*, he says, has been one of the best ways he's been able to do so.

Some preparation has come through personal study. Other times it comes from training in his priests quorum. On the first Sunday of each month, a member of the quorum is assigned to teach a lesson from *Preach My Gospel* to his peers and adviser. Sometimes they teach the full 45-minute lesson, but other times, just for practice, they'll teach the 15- or 5-minute versions of several different lessons instead.

And while Andrew acknowledges that this preparation is equipping him for full-time missionary service, he can also see advantages in his life right now.

"I find myself thinking about things from *Preach My Gospel* all the time," says Andrew. "I am the only Mormon in



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Andrew Mello



my high school, so people often ask me questions about what I believe. I’ve been able to use lessons and skills

from *Preach My Gospel* to tell friends or acquaintances about the gospel.

“There are some questions or conversations that could go a lot of different ways,” he continues, “but when I can steer them in a productive direction because of things I’ve studied, that feels awesome.”

Like Andrew Mello, Andrew Hovey, age 19, received a copy of *Preach My Gospel* during his high school years, but it wasn’t until he was a university freshman that he came to appreciate it. Through the influence of a returned-

missionary roommate and a mission-preparation class, Andrew began to prepare for his mission more actively than he ever had before. His prayers became more

intimate and meaningful, his scripture study became more directed, and his plans for his mission became more real,

he says. Moreover, he started using *Preach My Gospel* to direct his efforts.

Since then, Andrew has developed a system for marking and color coding his

scriptures to coincide with principles he has studied in *Preach My Gospel* as well as for recording thoughts and impressions he receives during his study. But he’s quick to acknowledge that the point is not to have a prescriptive way of marking or color coding or note taking. Rather, “you can personalize your study method in a way that fits you best,” he says. “That’s what’s great about the gospel. We’re all different, but the gospel fits all of us.

“It’s the same with *Preach My Gospel*. It teaches basic doctrines in broad ways so that you can use it as a guide. We can use it the way we need to for our own learning or to reach someone else.”

Patrick Smith, another young man in the Hingham stake, reports that once a month in his branch’s Aaronic Priesthood meetings, the young men report on any missionary experience they have had and then set up times to work with the full-time missionaries.

“Not long ago I went with the missionaries to teach a family who had already been taught the Joseph Smith story,” Patrick says. “The elders asked me to teach about Christ coming to the earth and establishing His Church. *Preach My Gospel* clearly illustrated everything and listed scriptures to back everything up. It was all outlined there.

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Patrick Smith



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Tom Smith



with the missionaries has helped me teach these principles better,” Patrick says. “The doctrines outlined in the book have reinforced what I’ve learned at home and in Primary for as long as I can remember. And the things taught in *Preach My Gospel* invite the Spirit, which is the most important thing we can have when we’re talking about the Church.”

In Helping Accomplish Heavenly Father’s Work and Glory

Patrick’s older brother, Tom, returned from the California Ventura Mission in August 2009. He feels that *Preach My Gospel* is one of the best tools for missionary work. Although Tom appreciated what the book helped him do as a missionary, he notes that nearly all of the prophetic statements on missionary work appearing on pages 12–13 of *Preach My Gospel* talk about the role of *members* in sharing the gospel. He says that’s indicative of how much missionary work should be done by

members and not just by full-time missionaries.

“As I was closing in on the end of my mission,” he recalls, “I was studying about the responsibilities of missionaries and why we—missionaries and members—are given this work to do. I read Moses 1:39 and thought about missionary work from Heavenly Father’s point of view. All He wants is for His children to return to Him. What we’ve been charged with doing, I realized, is helping

our Father accomplish His work.

“Now as a member missionary, I know that with regular scripture study (including study of *Preach My Gospel*), prayer, and seeking the Spirit, we can succeed in any endeavor. And if we let the gospel be at the center of our lives and work to better our understanding of it, it will become easier to share and testify.” ■

NOTES

1. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), 1.
2. See *Preach My Gospel*, 6.



MORE ON PREACH MY GOSPEL

The following addresses and articles are available at LDS.org.

- Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Bring Souls unto Me,” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2009, 109.
- Silvia H. Allred, first counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, “Go Ye Therefore,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 10.
- Elder Erich W. Kopischke of the Seventy, “Preach My Gospel—the Unifying Tool between Members and Missionaries,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 33.
- Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Creating a Gospel-Sharing Home,” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2006, 84.
- Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Power of *Preach My Gospel*,” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2005, 29.