

Sister to Sister

A mission can be a wonderful opportunity for a young woman, but remember it's your own personal decision whether to serve. Pressure from others should not play a role. These two young women share how they decided whether or not to serve a mission.

DECIDING TO SERVE A FULL-TIME MISSION

By Samantha Anderson

In high school I never even thought about going on a mission. But after some spiritual experiences, I began to seriously think about serving. Each time I started my papers, though, something would happen to keep me from going. I was frustrated and confused. It felt like I was getting mixed signals.



Why was it so hard to decide?

The first time I started my mission papers, my bishop and I counseled together and decided I wasn't mentally healthy enough to go. I was depressed because one of my best friends had suddenly passed away. Later, when I felt like I was ready, my bishop helped me start my papers again. But very quickly I felt sad and upset. I felt like I didn't *want* to serve a mission. That made me feel like a terrible person.

I didn't want to move forward with my papers without having a true desire to serve, so I kept going to school and living my life. During that time I prayed, studied the scriptures, and went to church. I learned a lot about myself and about God's will for me. Because of this, I was eventually able to feel a desire to serve again.

How could I know I was doing what God wanted?

Besides feeling pressure from everyone around me to serve a mission, I doubted myself for not wanting to go. Did it mean I didn't have a testimony? Was my testimony not strong enough? Was I lazy? Was I not recognizing spiritual promptings? I second-guessed the strength of my testimony and my relationship with Heavenly Father.

I knew that I couldn't serve a mission with those negative feelings, so I decided to focus on my studies and try to stay close to the Lord—going to Church meetings, praying, reading my scriptures. Eventually, I reached a point where I was OK with my decision, and I felt that Heavenly Father was OK with it too.

So that was that . . . wasn't it?

One morning I was reading my scriptures, and out of nowhere came this huge desire to serve a mission! It didn't come from any pressure, it didn't come from wanting to impress anybody, it didn't come from anywhere but inside myself. I prayed about it, and the feeling didn't go away—my desire didn't go away. So I decided to start my papers again.

But would my feelings change again?

After all the ups and downs I'd had so far, I was super worried that I was misreading my feelings. So I started reading *Preach My Gospel*, I watched *The District*, I talked to my mom, I started my papers. And throughout all that, I got more and more excited to go. That's when I knew that this time, the timing was right. I knew that Heavenly Father was pleased with my decision, and yet I also knew that if I did not have the desire to serve, Heavenly Father would have supported that decision as well. In the end, it was my decision, nobody else's.

How did I recognize that I should go on a mission?

Peace was such a huge part of it for me. Knowing that the timing was right and that it was my decision created this huge feeling of peace in my heart. That was what ultimately allowed me to serve. If I had been anxious about it, I couldn't have done it. But that's what the Spirit does for us: He gives us peace.

EACH MAY RECEIVE A DIFFERENT RESPONSE

"Once you know the Lord's will, you can then move forward in faith to fulfill your individual purpose. . . . Is it possible for two similarly faithful women to receive such different responses to the same basic questions? Absolutely! What's right for one woman may not be right for another. That's why it is so important that we should not question each other's choices or the inspiration behind them."

President M. Russell Ballard, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Women of Dedication, Faith, Determination, and Action" (Brigham Young University Women's Conference address, May 1, 2015), 4, womensconference.byu.edu.

DECIDING NOT TO SERVE A FULL-TIME MISSION

By Mckenzi Ham

Growing up, I never felt any pressure to serve a mission.

When I got to college, though, all of that changed. Suddenly I was in a whirlwind of young men and women whose entire futures revolved around serving a mission. Rather than a question of if, serving a mission became a when—even for me.

I wanted a mission to be right for me. I prayed. I talked to my bishop. I counseled with my parents. I read my scriptures. I received a father's blessing. But I continued to feel anxious and overwhelmed about serving a mission. It wasn't until I finally made the decision not to serve a mission that I found the peaceful feeling I had been searching for.



How would I deal with the pressure I felt to serve a mission?

I had to just ignore all the voices and opinions around me trying to tell me what was best for me. The decision to serve or not was between me and Heavenly Father. Prayer was my greatest help in keeping the pressure off. As I turned to Him, all those voices seemed to fade away. Initially, I thought that my parents were pressuring me to serve, but when I really opened up and counseled with them, I realized that their love for me would always come first. They became one of my greatest supports.

How would I deal with feeling judged?

At first, I absolutely felt judged for not serving a mission. But then I realized that a lot of that judgment was self-inflicted. As I prayed for peace and learned to be patient with myself, those insecurities slowly—so, so, so slowly—began to disappear. As I drew closer to Heavenly Father, I began to understand who I am and how much I'm worth in His eyes.

How would I keep growing spiritually?

God put a lot of people in my path to help me grow. I started working and became really close with my coworkers. Most of them were a few years younger than me and were going through hard stuff at school and at home. I was able to be a friend to them, help

them understand how much they mattered, and even uplift them spiritually. Even though I didn't think I was doing much at the time—giving rides home, bringing treats to share—I see now how serving and loving them healed me spiritually.

How could I know what God wanted for me?

The specifics of what Heavenly Father wanted me to do were fuzzy at first. But I knew that He loves me and wants me to be happy—to find joy and peace in life. I struggled for months with my decision because I didn't want to decide. I wanted God to tell me what to do. But He loves me enough to let me choose for myself. To serve as a full-time missionary or continue serving right where I was were both righteous choices. Peace came after I prayerfully made my decision and presented it to Him.

How can I continue to have peace?

The temple became my greatest source of comfort and peace. Eventually I even received my endowment. My temple experience brought me closer to my Savior and helped me to understand my divine self-worth. My temple covenants have blessed my life and made me feel His love even more. Ever since I received my endowment, I haven't had any insecurities or felt any pressure about not having served a full-time mission. **NE**

TAKE IT ONE STEP AT A TIME

1. Start with yourself.

What do you want to do? Where can you see yourself a year from now? If you don't know, that's OK. Where do you want to see yourself? Start seeking. Read your patriarchal blessing with your questions in mind. Discover how you feel about serving a mission.

2. Take it to the Lord.

Now that you know how you feel, tell Heavenly Father about it. An open heart invites personal revelation. Ask to know God's will—if He would have you do one or the other—and be willing to humbly accept it.

3. Move forward.

You may not recognize a definite answer right away. Peace can mean you should follow the path you're already on. Anxiety or doubt may lead you to another path. Just keep moving forward. Do good; be good! And the Lord will prompt you as you go.