

BACK ON THE ROAD

BY ROBERT JAMES

My car broke down, but it gave me time to think.

All weekend I avoided discussing a mission with my family. But now I couldn't avoid thinking it through.

When I was nearly 20 years old, being a Latter-day Saint from an LDS family and attending BYU-Idaho, the questions started coming. “Have you put your papers in?” “Are you excited about going on a mission?”

I had always thought I would serve a mission, but when the time came to serve, I just avoided the matter.

For a long weekend, I made the four- to five-hour drive from Rexburg to my family's home in Orem, Utah.

That weekend, home was filled with family and friends coming and going. Cousins, aunts, uncles, and friends added to an almost

holiday feel. I seemed to keep getting pulled aside by family members and asked the usual mission questions. It was usually followed by offers of encouragement and support.

My Uncle Rick talked about how, as the oldest boy in the family, I would be setting an important example for my younger brother by serving a mission.

Uncle Bob offered a fun anecdote from his mission to Sweden and said he was excited for me to get my call. My mom tenderly reminded me how much she loved me and how happy it makes her when I make correct choices.

I knew the word was getting around to “remind Rob about a mission.” I might have felt some resentment, but their promptings were delicate. I only felt love and concern when each of them approached me.

It was Sunday afternoon after church. I knew if I left at around 3:30 p.m., it would put me back home in Rexburg by 8:30. I was surprised having so much family around that there wasn't a big dinner planned after church. In any case, I made a sack lunch for the trip and packed my old blue car for the ride back to school. It hurt to leave so many loving people, and I felt a little guilty I hadn't come with news that I had put in my mission papers.

My car was dependable most of the time, but it had shown signs of unpredictability. Somewhere past the city

of Pocatello, surrounded by the flat farmlands of eastern Idaho, my car began to cough and sputter. I glanced down for a minute, scanning my dashboard for red lights or needles that pointed out perils. Everything seemed OK, but the car continued to hesitate and began to lose power. I looked in my rear view mirror—nothing but darkness.

Surveying the horizon in front of me also reminded me that there were some vast unoccupied areas in Idaho.

My car sputtered and jerked. I was lucky enough to be by a ranch exit. I pulled off and stopped the car under the lone streetlight on the exit. The car shuttered for a minute more before I turned the key off. It was deadly silent, and snow was beginning to fall, which made any traffic on the freeway seem distant.

From experience I knew that if I gave the car a few minutes, I might be able to start it and carry on my trip, but I would have some time to burn. I grabbed my coat and laid it over the top of me and pushed my seat back as



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far as it would go.

As I lay in the quiet night, the first thing that came to my mind was the conversations I had had that day. The feelings of love and concern that had come from my family seemed to linger and to grow in me. Soon my heart began to swell as I remembered the warmth I had felt from family that day. Soon I knew that it was more than the love from my family I was reflecting on. The story of Alma the Younger came to me. He remembered his father preaching of the “the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world” (Alma 36:17).

My thoughts soon turned toward my Savior and how much He loved me and wanted good things for me. I began to pray and thank Heavenly Father for my family and the opportunities I had. My prayer was reciprocated with an even deeper awareness that Christ loves me and Heavenly Father knows me personally. I found myself having a meaningful spiritual experience I would never forget.

After about an hour had passed, I felt I had

restored myself enough to try to drive on. I turned the key, and the car came to life. I revved it a few times and pulled the car back onto the road and then onto the freeway. What was sure in my mind after getting back onto the road was that, first thing the next morning, I wanted to get a hold of my bishop and start getting my mission papers ready.

When I got home, I was eager to call my mom and let her know the news. She was more emotional than I thought she would be about the news, and I found out why a few months later, on the day I was leaving for the MTC.

Mom found a minute to tell me this story. On the day I left to go back to Rexburg, without telling me, Mom had asked the family to join in a special fast for me, to ask that my heart would be softened and that I would make the decision to go on a mission.

The family gladly participated, and they closed their fast with a family prayer at nearly the exact time my car died on that lonely freeway. **NE**

