

How to **PREPARE** to Be a Good Missionary



Commit yourself early in life to the idea of a mission. Focus on becoming a servant of the Lord.

The Church magazines asked Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles how youth can prepare for a full-time mission and what blessings come from serving.

Why does the Church ask every worthy young man to serve a mission?

The Lord has given no greater charge to His people than sharing the gospel with our Heavenly Father's children. Missionaries take people out of the darkness of the world and lead them to the safety and light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. To find and teach and baptize and confirm someone who has never paid much attention to God or to Christ and His great atoning sacrifice is one of the greatest services a priesthood holder can provide.

We know the purpose of life. The rest of the world doesn't. It rests on the shoulders of every young man to prepare himself to declare that message to the world. It is exciting work.

And young women?

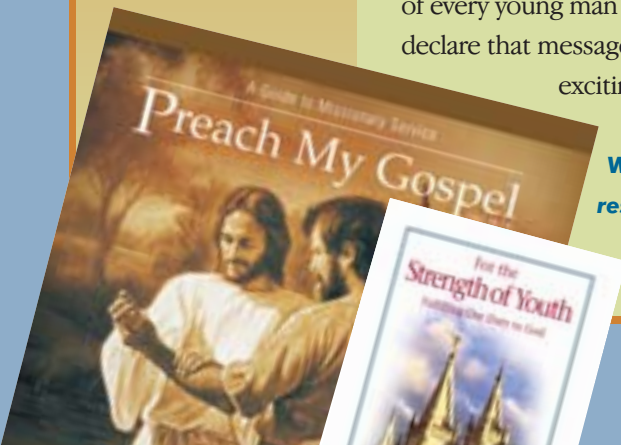
What is their responsibility?

A full-time mission is totally

appropriate for a young woman, if that is what she wants to do and she is worthy. Holding the priesthood comes with the obligation for young men to carry the message of the Restoration to the world. Young women are invited to participate in missionary work as it is appropriate to their circumstances. If they have prospects for marriage, that is a higher calling. But young women who are in a position to serve make great missionaries. They are good teachers, they have empathy, and they can relate particularly well to women. I don't think that we have a mission anywhere in the world where the mission president wouldn't be thrilled to get more sister missionaries.

How do young men and young women best prepare for a mission?

Attitude is the key. Young people need to commit themselves early in life to the idea of a mission. That way, when they get older and begin to face some of the world's temptations, those temptations will be less likely to penetrate their hearts or minds. They will resist the temptations because they are focused on becoming a servant of the Lord. It helps if they live in a gospel-sharing home.







share it. You can't take water out of an empty bucket. When missionaries know the gospel and how to teach it, they don't want to do anything else. They know they can teach anybody, anywhere, anytime, under any circumstances, using their own words accompanied by the power of the Spirit. They have self-confidence and inner strength. There's great power in that kind of preparation.

For this reason, I encourage every young man and every young woman to get acquainted with *Preach My Gospel*. Young people have the obligation to enlighten themselves, to

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A missionary spirit is generated in a home where parents and children share the gospel with one another.

What I tell new missionaries is that they need to lock into their minds that the 18 or 24 months they are on their missions are not theirs. That time is the Lord's. They are going to devote their skills and talents full-time to help build His kingdom. When missionaries think that way, they don't have trouble following the mission rules. They don't resist the counsel of the mission president, the guidelines in *Preach My Gospel*, and the counsel of the General Authorities. They embrace that counsel because they don't want to waste one minute of the Lord's time.

What else could prospective missionaries do to prepare?

Missionaries need to understand the doctrine, and they need to know how to

understand for themselves the doctrines of the Restoration. That preparation is every bit as important for a girl as it is for a boy. Whether the young woman gets married or serves a full-time mission, the gospel has to operate in her life.

Youth ought to get acquainted with what goes on in missionary work. They would find it helpful, if possible, to assist the missionaries and get a feel for the work.

I also recommend that youth study and follow the guidelines in *For the Strength of Youth*. Missionaries need to be morally clean and spiritually ready. If they live the principles in *For the Strength of Youth*, they will be spiritually prepared to be great missionaries.

What about physical, financial, and emotional preparation?

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They need to be able to handle the physical demands of missionary work. Young people should keep their weight under control and be physically fit. The missionary daily schedule has built into it a 30-minute-a-day exercise program. Being physically tuned up enhances mental capacity.

Prospective missionaries need to learn to work. They ought to have a job and save money for their missions. Every mission president would concur with me that the missionary who has worked and saved and helped pay for part or all of his or her mission is a better-prepared missionary. Working and saving for a mission generates enthusiasm for serving and gives a young man or a young woman a good work ethic. Whatever else missionary work is, it is work!

Working toward a mission and being accountable for their own lives helps young men and young women emotionally as well. They know within themselves that they can succeed no matter where they are sent and no matter the circumstances. They know they are tough

enough to handle anything in a world that is becoming less interested in the things of God. We need missionaries with that kind of self-assurance.

What about learning a second language?

Most secondary schools require learning a second language, and students should work hard to do that. Now, they may learn Spanish and get sent to Taiwan, but that's all right. It's the discipline that comes of learning how to learn that is important. Having learned a second language, they will find it easier to learn the language of the people in the mission to which they are called.

How is that call determined?

First, the bishop or branch president interviews the young man or young woman and makes a recommendation. Then the stake or mission president interviews the person. Most missionary applications are sent electronically to Church headquarters. A photo accompanies the application. When the application arrives, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles looks at the photo and carefully reviews the prospective missionary's attitude as

What If You Can't Serve Full-Time?

Young men and young women with serious mental, emotional, or physical limitations are excused from full-time missionary service. They shouldn't feel guilty about that. They are just as precious and important to the Church as if they were able to go into the mission field.

But while they don't serve full-time, they can take every opportunity to find and help people join the Church. They can be member missionaries in college, at work, and in their neighborhoods. They ought to go forward, have a wonderful and full life, and help build the kingdom wherever they are. Not all of the Apostles serving today

were able to serve a full-time mission in their youth, some because they were required to serve in the military. But they all did missionary work. They all brought people into the Church.

Priesthood leaders are encouraged to help every faithful, righteous young man and woman serve. For example, they can assist the bishop as ward missionaries. They could work at a bishops' storehouse. If they live near a temple, they can serve in many ways there. Priesthood leaders need only think of ways and then move forward.

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.



evidenced by what the local priesthood leaders have written, the young person's grades, and any expressed willingness to learn a language. The Apostle also considers the needs of all 344 missions around the world and then receives a spiritual impression of where the missionary should serve. All this is done under the direction of the President of the Church, and the call comes from him.

Why are some missionaries called to serve in their own countries?

Let me assure you that calls are a matter of revelation. Missionaries serve where the Lord wants them to serve. We need good, capable missionaries in every mission. For example, let's say there's a young man, a leader in school, living in Virginia in the United States. He opens his mission call and is shocked to learn he is being sent to Salt Lake City. But he isn't there long before he knows precisely why the Lord called him to serve there.

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What would you say to young people who may feel, for whatever reason, they don't have what it takes to serve a mission?

In 2002 we raised the bar for missionary service. That means the requirements to be a worthy missionary need to be understood and lived by young people early on. They need to avoid the mischief of the world. Of course, repentance is possible and is a great blessing. But those who stumble must make their repentance true and complete, and that could take time. It may even require First Presidency clearance before they can serve. Raising the bar doesn't exclude anyone; it just requires more thorough—and sometimes very difficult—repentance. I plead with the youth, don't get into that! Don't put yourself through that. Just stay worthy to serve.

Now, there may be some young people who consider themselves unworthy or incapable of serving in spite of

what they hear from their bishops or branch presidents. But here's the reality: priesthood leaders have the keys of endorsement. If the priesthood leaders indicate that a person is worthy and he or she is called, then he or she should exercise faith in that call and serve the Lord in full confidence that he or she is worthy and able.

How does a missionary receive the spiritual power he or she needs to be successful?

When missionaries first come into the field, they usually lack self-confidence. So we put them with good companions, and those companions teach them the way of missionary work. In a few months they are filled with the Spirit. They are filled with the joy that comes from bringing souls to Christ. They understand that they are

helping Heavenly Father and the Savior in the great work of redemption. When they realize that, they are on fire.

This empowerment comes from their obedience, dedication, hard work, and enthusiasm. If they are not obedient, if they are not working hard doing the best they know how every day, they won't have the same impact as those who radiate the spirit of the gospel.

You know, oftentimes I'll ask new converts when they knew for the first

time that the Church is true. It is not unusual for them to say, "I came to know the Church is true when I was taught by the elders or sisters and felt the power of their belief and saw the radiance of their countenance." If you're not actively and anxiously engaged, the Spirit won't be empowering your missionary service as it will if you are.

What blessings come to those who serve missions?

Dedicated missionaries who do their very best learn lessons as important or even more important than anything they can learn in university study. I'll give you an example. Missionaries learn how to relate to people, how to talk to people, how to help people. Whether they are going to be doctors, lawyers, merchants, or something else, the ability to relate to people can be the difference between being successful or not in that career.

A second great blessing is that missionaries become doctrinally anchored to the reality of the Atonement. There comes to them a love for and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ that will absolutely bless them and their families in mortality and on into eternity. The most powerful learning experiences we can have are when we teach someone else. And that is what missionaries do. They internalize the doctrine; they internalize the reality of the Atonement. And this will bless them in all future Church assignments.

Another great blessing is that as missionaries reach out to rescue and pull into the light of the gospel families who are wandering in the darkness, they see what they don't want in their own lives. The experience clarifies for them the values they want to live by, the kind of family they want, the way they want to teach their children, and the goals they need in order to claim the promised blessings of the temple. A mission is the greatest education in the world.

You know, President Gordon B. Hinckley has said many times that his mission is the foundation of his lifetime of service. He credits his mission for putting him on the course that brought him to lead the Church. I think you'll agree that he is doing so in a magnificent way.

We're at a time in the Church's history when young men and young women all over



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the world need to rise up and serve as missionaries. They can't assume there are enough young people in the United States to do all that the Lord needs. He needs the youth everywhere the Church is organized to prepare themselves to bring souls to Him. As they do, they will bless the entire earth and bring heaven's blessings to themselves and their families now and forever. **NE**

For more counsel from Elder Ballard, read "The Greatest Generation of Missionaries," *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, p. 46.

