

# THE BEST DECISION I EVER MADE

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*Everything good in my life has come from my decision to serve a mission.*



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I was born in Salt Lake City but raised in Whittier, California, a suburb about 30 miles east of Los Angeles. I was raised in a home where, during my early years, we were less active. When I turned 11, we moved to a new home and began to attend church more frequently. We were sealed in the temple when I was 13. Now my brothers and I are all active members of the Church. We have all served missions. My brothers and I were married in the temple, but these are not things you would have predicted based on our early years.

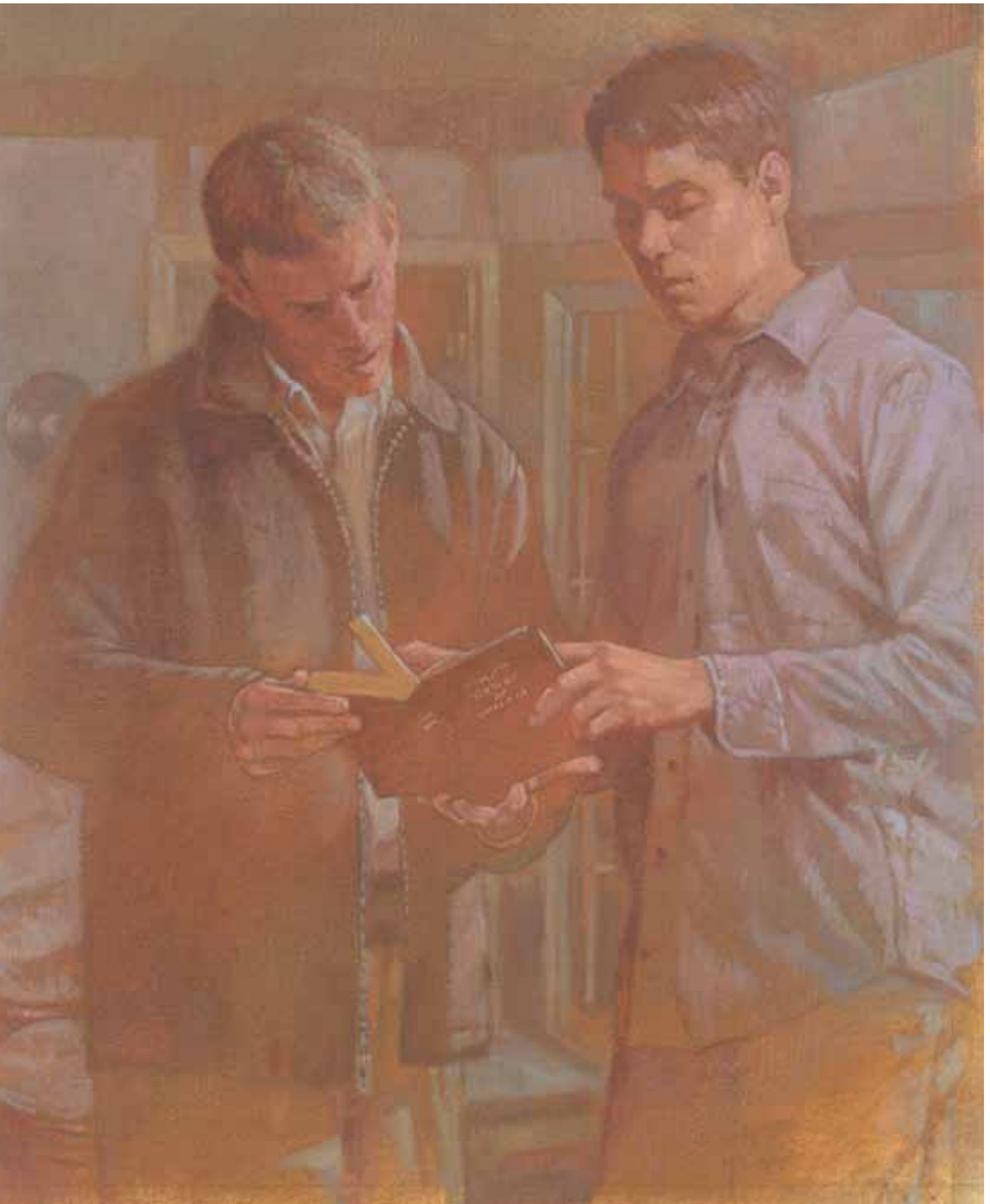
Because my mother was raised in Southern California and that was where we lived, I knew my mother's side of the family much better than my father's side in Utah, simply because of proximity. My dad felt strongly about my getting to know the Utah side of the family and getting to know the people in Salt Lake. He thought there was experience to be gained and strongly encouraged me to go to the University of Utah, which I did.

When I arrived, I joined a fraternity. A majority of the fraternity were also Church

members, some of whom were returned missionaries. After a while I began to notice that the returned missionaries just seemed to "have their act together" in a way that the others, in my opinion, didn't. I had not been raised with the notion of serving a mission, although as I got to be an older teenager my parents began to mention it. My father had not served a mission because of World War II. His medical school training went right through the war.

## **Positive Examples**

As I spent more and more time in Salt Lake and got to know the returned missionaries, somehow I was able to perceive that these missionaries had gotten more out of life and were further down the road in a very positive way than others of the same age. They were directed. They had goals. They had a feeling for who they were that others didn't seem to have. In my view, they had social skills that I thought were an advantage. That was what got me started thinking about a mission. At first, it was entirely for the wrong reasons, for selfish reasons.



**I** said, "I'm 19 now and still have three years of college and then time as an intern and a resident. I expect to be drafted into the military plus a mission. You add all of these things up, I've got 14 or 15 years to go before I get to real life. If I do all of these things, I won't get to real life until I'm 33 or 34 years old."

**Elder Marion D. Hanks asked me.**  
"When you are 33, what would you rather have done? None of those things, half of those things, or all of those things?"

Even within this group there were some returned missionaries whose stories about their missions made me feel hesitant about service. Their stories were about how hard it was or how cold it was or how primitive the circumstances were. I was basically reluctant to do anything cold or difficult. But other returned missionaries took me aside and said, "Whit, let me tell you what it is really like, how wonderful it is."

Nobody who was a returned missionary said, "Don't go." They all told me to go, but a few of them delighted in telling me the hard parts. I decided to listen to these others who said, "That's just the way he talks. He had a great experience, and look what he became. You'll have a great experience too."

#### **An Important Conversation**

At the same time I had an experience that was very important to me. I used to go down to a local gym to work out. One time when I was down there in the late morning, I noticed Elder Marion D. Hanks of the Seventy. We were the only two in the gym, and he struck up a conversation with me.

After a little small talk, I asked him if I could ask a question.

"Sure, please go ahead," he said. He was very friendly, very warm.

"I'm trying to decide whether to go on a mission."

He said, "What are the things that you are thinking about? What are the considerations?"

I said, "Really just one, and it is a question about the amount of time it would take."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

At this point in time I thought I wanted to be a doctor. My father was a doctor, and I wanted to be a doctor. This was before I knew much about organic chemistry.

I said, "I'm 19 now and still have three years of college and then time as an intern and a resident. I expect to be drafted into the military (it was during the Vietnam conflict)

plus a mission. You add all of these things up, I've got 14 or 15 years to go before I get to real life. If I do all of these things, I won't get to real life until I'm 33 or 34 years old. That seems like a very late start."

He said, "Well, that's an interesting question. You should know that I did not serve a mission. I was in the military during World War II and was not able to serve a mission, but I'll tell you how I think you should answer the question."

He asked me, "How old are you now?"

I said, "I'm 19."

"How old will you be in 14 years if you don't do any of those things?"

I answered, "I'll be 33."

He again asked me, "How old are you now?"

I said, "I'm 19."

"How old will you be in 14 years if you do all of those things?"

I said, "I'll be 33."

Then he asked me. "When you are 33, what would you rather have done? None of those things, half of those things, or all of those things?"

I saw immediately the wisdom of his response, and it just penetrated me. I saw how it fit with what I had seen in the returned missionaries on campus. I decided then and there I was going to serve a mission.

#### **The Best Decision**

That was the best decision I have ever made, because everything good in my life has come from that decision. I don't believe my wife would ever have been willing to consider marrying me if I had not been a returned missionary. I think her decision to marry me was the best thing that has happened in my life. Our experience together across the years, raising a family and being involved in Church service, our community involvement, my professional involvement,

all of those things have been influenced by that mission.

I am so grateful for the example of returned missionaries—for the way they dressed, for the way they talked, the way they worked, for the light in their lives, which was immediately evident to me. I could see the difference in the way they dressed, spoke, and carried themselves, in the way they behaved. It was discernible. I could see it, and I wasn't looking for it. It was simply that I began to perceive something that I hadn't noticed before, and I learned that the Lord blesses those who do the things He asks them to do. He blessed me, and He blesses everyone who goes on a mission and then stays in essentially a modified missionary lifestyle after that. I'm grateful for that.

Those two experiences—watching returned missionaries and having a chance (well, maybe not a chance)

meeting with Elder Hanks. That was the turning point in my life. My parents wanted me to go on a mission and were delighted when I did. And I think it helped my younger brothers to see me go.

Young men, look forward to serving a mission. It is hard; it is work, but there is nothing about it that you can't do. You'll love the experience. Doing hard things is good for us, and missions aren't so hard that you can't do them. They just require something of you. You have to grow up a little, and I promise you that if you will prepare yourself for a mission in every way—intellectually, physically, and spiritually—keeping yourself clean and ready to go, you'll have a tremendous experience, and you'll be grateful. **NE**

*Based on an interview in April 2008.*

