



LEARNING

to Share the Gospel

The Lord is preparing people all around us—where we work, where we live, where we travel, on the buses we take, and in the restaurants we patronize.

BY ELDER DON R. CLARKE
Of the Seventy

When my wife and I were in graduate school in Washington state, a speaker challenged us to follow President Spencer W. Kimball's admonition to be active member missionaries. During that talk I felt a strong impression to invite my good friend Garry Borders to hear the missionary discussions. As soon as the meeting ended, I rushed home to tell Mary Anne about my impressions, and together we prayed that Garry would accept our



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he had come to love a Bolivian family he had met. He stayed and became a wonderful missionary.

I have observed hundreds of other missionaries discover, as this young missionary did, that their happiness grows when they learn to love the people they serve more than they love themselves. I believe this is true

invitation. He did, and he eventually joined the Church.

Garry's conversion marked the beginning of a great friendship and a lifetime of missionary experiences for our family. Our experiences with Garry and with many others with whom we have shared the gospel have given me a firm testimony of something the Prophet Joseph Smith taught: "After all that has been said, the greatest and most important duty is to preach the Gospel."¹

As our family has accepted the opportunity to share the gospel, we have learned a few principles about missionary work that have been helpful in our efforts as member missionaries.

Why Do Missionary Work?

President David O. McKay, quoted in *Preach My Gospel*, said: "True Christianity is love in action. There is no better way to manifest love for God than to show an unselfish love for your fellow men. This is the spirit of missionary work."² Sharing the gospel is the best way to love our neighbors. It is also a way of showing our appreciation and love to the Son of God.

While Sister Clarke and I were serving in Bolivia, a homesick missionary arrived who did not like anything about the country. He did not like the food, the weather, or his living conditions.

"I'm going home," he soon declared.

"Give it four weeks," I responded.

After some discussion we finally agreed on two weeks. In those two weeks, a miracle happened. He still did not like the food, the weather, or his living conditions, but

for all of us. As we learn to love our neighbors, we find it easier to share gospel blessings with them. As we do so, we find greater happiness in our lives. Missionary work is about love; if we love others, we will share the gospel with them.

The Lord Is Preparing His Children

"There are many yet on the earth . . . who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it" (D&C 123:12). The Lord is preparing people all around us—where we work, where we live, where we travel, on the buses we take, and in the restaurants we patronize.

A few years ago Sister Clarke and I returned to Argentina, where I had served as a young missionary. Before we traveled, I reviewed in my diary the names and circumstances of the people my companions and I had taught and baptized. In reviewing my list, I discovered that we had found about half of those individuals while contacting people on the street. We talked to everyone. Because the Lord knew that we would talk to everyone on the street, He placed His prepared sons and daughters in our path.

The Lord blessed us greatly. Many of those converts became missionaries, bishops, or district presidents, and one even became a patriarch. I have seen this miracle again and again. The Lord has prepared people to receive us. Can He trust us to open our mouths? If so, He will place prepared people in our path. "Yea, I will open the hearts of the people, and they will receive you. And I will establish a church by your hand" (D&C 31:7).

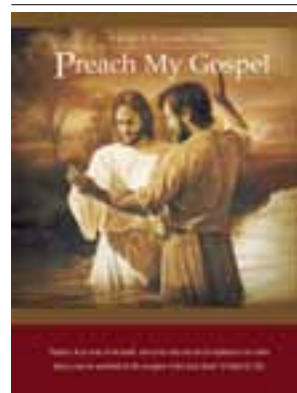
Reaching Out

The scriptures are full of invitations to repent, be baptized, and follow Christ. Alma, for example, said, “I speak by way of invitation, saying: Come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life” (Alma 5:62). Our invitations may be a little different from Alma’s, but they can be important small steps

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in bringing people to partake of the gospel.

We may begin by inviting people to our home, a sporting event, a Church activity, or a service project. Small steps to fellowship others will eventually lead to spiritual conversations, invitations to attend Church, and interest in listening to the missionaries. Remember that sharing the gospel is a process, not an event. Our example is critical, but it is not the end. We must have the courage to reach out because people will not usually invite themselves.



Member missionaries can find strength in studying *Preach My Gospel* and by reading the experiences of early missionaries of the restored Church.





We have also received blessings as a result of missionaries' teaching and visiting in our home. The examples of these missionaries and our participation in missionary work made our sons better missionaries and our children better member missionaries.

Obtaining the Word

The Lord declared, "Seek not to declare my word, but first seek to obtain my word" (D&C 11:21). Member missionaries can find strength in studying *Preach My Gospel* and by reading the experiences of early missionaries of the restored Church, such as Samuel Smith and Wilford Woodruff. We can also study and emulate the great missionaries from the Book of Mormon: Alma, Ammon, and the sons of Mosiah, to name just a few. These great missionaries studied the scriptures, prayed for success, and then went to work.

If we want to be successful member missionaries, we must do the same. Let us pray not only for our full-time missionaries but also that we will be missionaries. As we study, pray, and put into practice what we learn and feel, we will have success.

"I am convinced that missionary work is not easy because *salvation is not a cheap experience*," said Elder Jeffrey R. Holland.

"Salvation *never* was easy. . . . How could we believe it would be easy for us when it was never, ever easy for Him?"³

Over the years I have heard many Latter-day Saints say, "But missionary work is easy for others." I have found that this generally is not true. It may become easier over time, but it doesn't start out that way. We gain faith and confidence as we participate in missionary work, but it is never easy.

It wasn't necessarily comfortable for me to invite my friend Garry Borders to hear the discussions when we were students together in Washington state, but I am grateful that I mustered the courage to do so. Today more than 80 members of Garry's family are members of the Church. Garry has served as a bishop and stake president, blessing the lives of countless individuals.

When we lived in Connecticut, Garry and his wife, Sue, along with their daughter, stopped to visit us on their way to Israel.



HELPS FOR HOME EVENING

1. Read the section titled “Reaching Out.”

Identify activities to which family members could invite others so friendships can develop. Draw pictures of a few of these activities. Choose someone the family could invite to an activity and extend the invitation. Remember to continue your friendship even if some are not interested in the gospel.

2. Read D&C 18:16 together and discuss ways to find the joy promised in that verse.

are.” The examples of these missionaries and our participation in missionary work made our sons better missionaries and our children better member missionaries. Missionary work has blessed and changed our lives.

We spend our energy, prayers, and time preparing young people for missions because we know that as they serve, wonderful changes

happen in their lives (and, of course, in the lives of those they teach). Their testimony of the Savior grows, they become more Christlike, and they have spiritual experiences. I have learned that these same things will happen to us and to our families as we actively participate in missionary work. Let us put the same effort, energy, and faith into participating in missionary work as we do in preparing missionaries.

Our family has a book filled with letters we have received from those with whom we have shared the gospel. When we reread them, we are reminded of why we participate in missionary work.

The influence of missionary work in our family began many years ago with our great-grandparents in faraway lands. Our lives are different today because someone took the time to care enough to share the gospel with our ancestors.

“Behold, the field is white already to harvest; therefore, whoso desireth to reap let him thrust in his sickle with his might, and reap while the day lasts, that he may treasure up for his soul everlasting salvation in the kingdom of God” (D&C 11:3).

As we follow these principles and the counsel of the prophets, we will reap the great blessings that come to member missionaries. ■

NOTES

1. Joseph Smith, quoted in *History of the Church*, 2:478.
2. David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals* (1954), 129; quoted in *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), 13.
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Missionary Work and the Atonement,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2001, 15.

After returning from Israel, he sent me a statue of the Savior with a sheep. The statue bore this message: “Thank you for saving one lost sheep!” I keep the statue in my office as a reminder of that wonderful experience so many years ago.

Following dinner at our home one evening, Garry shared these precious parting words: “Thirty-five years ago, who would have thought that something like this could have happened to a country boy like me. I owe the two of you more than I can express, and I just want you to know how grateful I am that you took the time to share. Everything I hold dear flows from that time in 1971.”

Whenever I think that missionary work is too hard or that my efforts won’t matter, I look at my statue of Christ with the lost sheep, and I try one more time. It is not easy, but it is worth it.

The Blessings of Sharing the Gospel

“And now, if your joy will be great with one soul that you have brought unto me into the kingdom of my Father, how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me!” (D&C 18:16).

Over the years we have had the opportunity to share the gospel with many people. The joy of our labors has deepened friendships and allowed us to enjoy countless spiritual experiences. I recently had the privilege of sealing my brother in the temple to a dear friend with whom we had shared the gospel many years before. Another convert has become one of our best friends. With his spouse, these wonderful friends served as surrogate parents to our six children while we served in Bolivia.

We have also received blessings as a result of missionaries’ teaching and visiting in our home. Our sons and daughters often commented, “They are really good missionaries, aren’t they, Dad,” and I would say, “Yes, they