

By Elder L. Tom Perry

Of the Quorum
of the Twelve Apostles



TO RETURNED MISSIONARIES

What we need is a royal army of returned missionaries reenlisted into service.

I have learned from many conversations with returned missionaries that the adjustment associated with leaving the mission field and returning to the world you left behind is sometimes difficult. May I offer just a few suggestions?

Frequent, Consistent, and Mighty Prayer

One of the strongest recollections I have of being a missionary is how close I drew to the Lord through the practice of regular prayer. In my day the mission home was located on State Street in Salt Lake City. It was a large house that had been converted to a missionary training center. It had large dormitory rooms with perhaps as many as 10 beds in a room. We checked in on Sunday night.

The week before I entered the mission field was an exciting time. There were a lot of parties and farewells. I am afraid that I was not properly rested

and prepared for the training I was to receive at the mission home. As the evening of our first day in the mission home came to a close, I was weary. While waiting for the other missionaries to prepare themselves for bed, I stretched out on my bed and promptly fell asleep. My sleep, however, was interrupted by a feeling that I was surrounded. As the fog of sleep lifted, I heard the words of a prayer being said. I opened my eyes, and much to my surprise I found all the elders in my dormitory room kneeling around my bed, concluding the day with a prayer. I quickly closed my eyes and acted as if I was asleep. I was too embarrassed to get out of bed and join them. Even though my first experience with prayer as a missionary was an embarrassing one, it was the beginning of two wonderful years of frequently calling upon the Lord for guidance.

Throughout my mission, I prayed with my companion each morning as

we began a new day. The process was repeated each night before we retired. We offered a prayer before we studied, a prayer as we left our apartment to go out tracting, and of course special prayers when special guidance was needed to direct our missionary work. The frequency of our appeals to our Father in Heaven gave us strength and courage to press forward in the work to which we had been called. Answers would come, sometimes in astonishingly direct and positive ways. The guidance of the Holy Spirit seemed to be magnified the more times we appealed to Heavenly Father for direction on a given day.

As I look back on my life following my mission, I realize that there were periods when I was able to maintain the same closeness to the Lord that I experienced in the mission field. There were also periods when the world seemed to creep in and I was less consistent and faithful with my prayers.

Wouldn't this be a good time for a little self-evaluation to determine if we still have the same relationship with our Father in Heaven that we enjoyed in the mission field? If the world has diverted us from the practice of prayer, we then have lost a great spiritual power. Maybe it is time that we rekindle our missionary spirit through more frequent, consistent, and mighty prayer.



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Individual and Companion Scripture Study

The next fond memory I have of being a missionary is that of daily engaging in scripture study. The discipline of following a scripture-study plan of learning the gospel was a wonderful, rewarding experience. The knowledge of the teachings of the scriptures would unfold in a glorious way through individual study. As a missionary I recall marveling at how completely the Lord had prepared a plan for His children here on earth, how in all dispensations of time He has inspired the minds of His prophets to record His dealings with them. His words are always positive and direct, revealing the blessings that come through following His law and His way.

We would also take an hour or more each day to study as companions together. Having two sets of eyes examine the doctrine of the kingdom seemed to multiply our understanding. We would read together, then share our insights.

Our minds were sharpened as we followed the daily practice of individual and companion study. The practice brought us closer together as companions and increased our understanding of the doctrines of the kingdom.

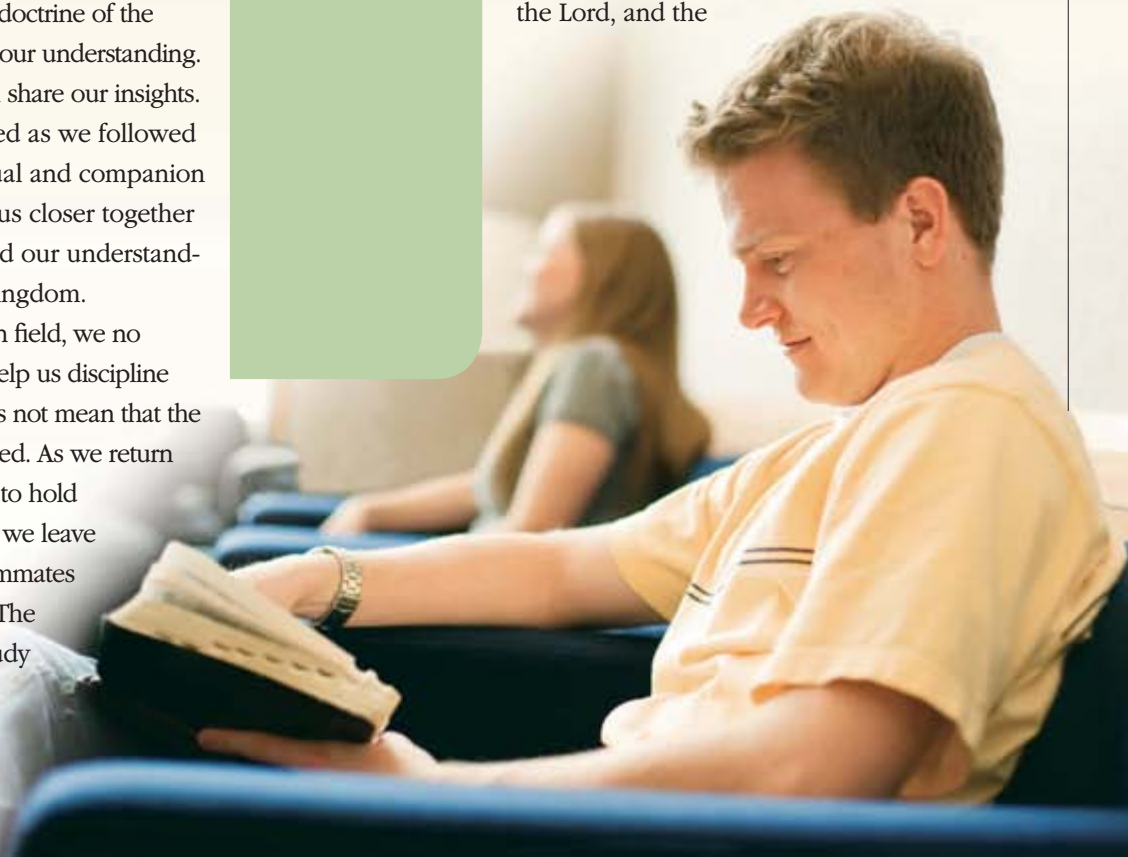
When we leave the mission field, we no longer have companions to help us discipline our study habits, but that does not mean that the practice should be discontinued. As we return home, how great it would be to hold daily family scripture study. If we leave home, couldn't we invite roommates and friends to study with us? The practice of holding regular study classes and attending institute

would help keep the doctrines of the kingdom clear in our minds and offset the persistent intrusion of worldly concerns. Of course, when we marry, we have eternal companions with whom we can study and share gospel teachings.

The scriptures are always there to deepen our understanding of the purpose of life and what we need to do to make life more fulfilling and rewarding. Please keep alive the practice of regular individual and companion scripture study.

The Joy of Teaching the Gospel

Do you remember the joy that comes from teaching the gospel to someone who has been deprived of these teachings throughout his or her life, the excitement that comes when you teach the law of the Lord, and the



blessings that are received from following Him? Could you ever forget the joy of your first baptism in the mission field?

In my day the chapels were not equipped with baptismal fonts. My first baptism was in the Scioto River in the state of Ohio, USA. It was on a cool fall day, and the water seemed even colder than the air. I remember the shock of wading into the cold river while encouraging my investigator to follow me. The coldness of the air and the water, however, soon vanished as I administered the ordinance of baptism. Seeing the radiant face of the individual who came up out of the waters of baptism is an image I will never forget.

Opportunities to teach the gospel and



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baptize are not exclusive to those who wear the badge of a full-time missionary. I wonder why we allow the fire of missionary service to diminish when we return to the activities of our life in the world.

There has never been a time in the history of mankind when we have been better equipped to teach the gospel to our Father in Heaven's children here on earth. And they seem to need it more today than they ever have. We see a deterioration of faith. We see an increased love for worldliness and a depletion of moral values, both of which will cause increased heartache and despair. What we need is a royal army of returned missionaries reenlisted into service. While they would not wear the badge of a full-time missionary, they could possess the same resolve and determination to bring the light of the gospel to a world struggling to find its way.

I call on you returned missionaries to rededicate yourselves, to become reinfused with the desire and spirit of missionary service. I call on you to look the part, to be the part, and to act the part of a servant of our Father in Heaven. I pray for your renewed determination to proclaim the gospel that you may become more actively engaged in this great work the Lord has called all of us to do. I want to promise you there are great blessings in store for you if you continue to press forward with the zeal you once possessed as a full-time missionary.

Go forward with new determination, and through your example, let shine the light of the gospel in this troubled world. This is the Lord's work in which we are engaged. God lives. Jesus is the Christ. We belong to His Church. This is my witness to you. ■

From an October 2001 general conference address. For the full text, please visit www.conference.lds.org.

