

Working Out Weaknesses, Sketching Out Faith

By E. Tracy Williams

It took me seven years to qualify to serve a full-time mission. When I first spoke with my bishop, Bishop Tapueluelu, about it, he gave me some guidelines to strive to live by. He said if I followed them and learned to be obedient, I would be blessed. The first few guidelines—daily scripture study and weekly church attendance—were pretty doable. “This is easy,” I thought. But I got offended when I was told to change certain “worldly” things in my life, and my pride and stubbornness got the best of me.

Hoping for an easier way out, I moved to four different wards and spoke with four different bishops. I even went back to school to pursue a medical degree. Then I felt prompted to drop everything and prepare once again to serve a mission. So I did. I went back to Bishop Tapueluelu and humbly asked for his help. I was told that

there was a weight requirement for missionaries—and I realized that I weighed over the limit. Immediately, feelings of discouragement and embarrassment cluttered my mind, but my bishop encouraged me. He expressed his love and faith in me and said, “My door is always open. We can work on it together! One weakness, one week at a time.”

So I visited with my bishop every week, working out one weakness at a time. I had no idea that I’d have to wait another four years, just trying to qualify to serve a mission.

Relying on the Savior

During those years, I strived to come closer to Christ and apply His teachings in my life. As challenges came, His Atonement became real to me. I relied on the power, comfort, and strength He gave me through His Atonement when my best friend

I had to learn how to rely on the Savior to overcome my weaknesses and build on my strengths, both while preparing for a mission and while I served.

passed away, when our family lost our home, and when I got into a car accident. When circumstances caused me to lose many of my friends, I fell into depression, but the Savior pulled me out. My Friday nights with friends were replaced with working out at the gym and studying about the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

I prayed every night for the people whom I would one day serve and even for my future companions!

I eventually qualified and was called to serve in the New Zealand Auckland Mission, Tongan-speaking.

Street Art and the Spirit

When I entered the missionary training center, I realized that there was more to learn about Jesus Christ and His Atonement and myself. Even though I'm of Tongan descent, I had never been to the South Pacific islands, and I struggled with the Tongan language. When I got to New Zealand, I had no idea what people were saying to me in Tongan. I had

so much to say, but because I couldn't speak the language, my words were few, simple, and broken. I nodded my head when people asked me questions. They laughed at me, and I laughed with them, but behind closed doors the laughter turned into tears of frustration and discouragement. I thought to myself, "I worked seven years to come out here for this?"

So I prayed to Heavenly Father. In Ether 12:27 we learn that our weaknesses can become strengths if we trust in Him. I told Him about my weaknesses and my trust in Him, and

I got back up again . . . and again . . . and again. I started to rely even more on Christ and also on my strengths.

I love this gospel and I love street art, so I decided to combine the two. I packed my scriptures, a sketchbook, charcoal pencils, permanent markers, and cans of spray paint in my backpack. My companions laughed and asked, "What are you doing with spray paint?" I explained, "I may not speak the language yet, but I can show others my testimony."

For the remainder of my mission, I used street art—on paper, not on buildings—and the Spirit to teach others about Christ. And as crazy as it sounds, it worked. Many people didn't want to hear my message, so I sketched it. Doors and eyes opened when I told them that I did graffiti. They didn't believe me. They timed me for three minutes, and I sketched the word *faith* while teaching them about it. Among them were many who felt judged and unloved. I could testify that with faith in Christ we can feel of His love and forgiveness, and He can help us change for the better. He did for me.

Seven years of preparation for my mission helped me find myself. That time allowed me to gain a testimony of Christ's Atonement and His power to help me overcome my weaknesses and use my strengths to share what I knew with others. In the end it was worth the seven years. ■

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