

If I Had Known at 19...

what I know now, I would have done a few things differently as a missionary.

BY ROGER TERRY

I served in northern Germany from 1975 to 1977. These were indeed two of the most memorable years of my life, but memory also brings with it some added perspective. Hindsight being a wonderful gift, I offer four suggestions that might help those of you who are preparing to serve a mission.

1. I would make it my second highest priority to love my companion.

My companions came in various shapes and sizes with unique gifts and personalities. Some became instant friends and have remained so over the years. Others I didn't have much in common with beyond tracting and teaching. One



or two, I'm ashamed to admit, I didn't have very warm feelings about. In fact, sometimes things got downright icy.

But with each of these companions, I had at least one piece of common ground: we were both sacrificing our time, means, and effort to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. If I had it to do again, I would try my hardest to be every companion's best friend, regardless of how well our personalities or interests meshed. I would encourage him and try to be contagiously enthusiastic without being critical.

If loving my companion would be my second highest priority, what would be first, you might ask? To be obedient. Loving your companion does not mean you should follow him in disobeying commandments or mission rules. Fortunately, none of my companions were disobedient. A couple were not as motivated as they could have been, but what they needed more than criticism or nagging was someone to accept and strengthen them.

2. I would look for miracles. In fact, I would expect them.

I remember sitting in the mission home at the end of my mission, sharing a testimony meeting with 13 elders and one sister who were also going home. I don't remember what I said. I don't remember what the other elders said. But I will never forget Sister Thorpe's testimony. She explained that

in the interview with her stake president 18 months earlier she had revealed a secret desire: “I want to see miracles on my mission,” she had confided to him. Then, almost apologetically, she had asked him if it was wrong to seek miracles. He had assured her it was not wrong. After relating this conversation to us, she testified, “I’ve seen miracles on my mission.”

I suddenly realized I had also seen miracles, but I hadn’t sought them or expected them. I had just let them happen. By failing to seek them and expect them, I probably prevented quite a few. Miracles come by faith, and faith has something to do with expecting certain things to happen and actively working to bring them to pass.

If I were going out to serve today, I would do my part, but I would also expect the Lord to do His part in my work as His servant. He specializes in miracles, which we might define as things He can do for us that we can’t do for ourselves. I’ve come to believe He is more willing to *perform* miracles than we are to *receive* them. Teaching by the Spirit is probably the most effective way a missionary can open the door to miracles. It invites the Lord’s influence directly into an investigator’s life.



3. I would work smarter and harder.

My first district leader’s motto seemed to be “Work smarter, not harder.” I don’t agree with the second half of this motto, but if I had it to do over, I would certainly try to work smarter. My district leader was quite creative *and* quite successful. For instance, he organized a volleyball team among the youth in his branch, and they invited their friends to play. It was a fun and simple way to help the youth be missionaries.

I would expect to see miracles. The Lord specializes in miracles, and I’ve come to believe that He is more willing to perform them than we are to receive them. If we do our part, the Lord will do His part.



My companion and I loved working together. We were united. We worked hard. And because of our attitude and effort, I believe the Lord blessed us with success.

Teaching opportunities and conversions resulted from this nonthreatening approach to sharing the gospel.

I was probably too rigid and restrictive in my definition of what the Lord's work should be. I considered myself lazy if I wasn't out knocking on doors all day long or teaching serious investigators. But the Lord's work doesn't have to be hard to be considered work. If I were a missionary today, I would, under the guidance of my mission president, try to be more creative in finding people to teach.

4. I would not let rejection and failure discourage me.

On my mission, rejection and failure were as much a part of our everyday lives as eating and breathing. It was easy to expect rejection and anticipate that our investigators would lose interest in our message. But five weeks in one particular city taught me a valuable lesson. It was a city where no one had ever had much

success. But someone forgot to tell my companion or me. We got along famously. We worked hard. And we had fun. We met lots of people interested in our message. We had a thriving investigator class each Sunday in this tiny branch. Miracles were happening in people's lives. And we felt we were just scratching the surface of this golden city.

Why did we have so much success there? I believe the Lord blessed us with success because of our attitude. My companion and I loved working together. We were united. We worked hard. We honestly believed the city was a gold mine just waiting to yield up its treasures. Attitude has a lot to do with faith. Faith has everything to do with success. And faith is contagious.

Unfortunately, I was late in understanding this lesson. I failed to make the connection between the *fruits* of our labors and the *way* we labored. Consequently, I was not able to apply this principle as successfully in my next two assignments.

There are probably many other things I would do differently if I had the chance to serve my mission over again, but these four stand out in my mind. If you look at these ideas carefully, you'll see that they fall within the qualifications the Lord Himself outlined for His servants: "And faith, hope, charity and love, with an eye single to the glory of God, qualify him for the work. Remember faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, diligence" (D&C 4:5-6). ■

