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PREPARE *to* SERVE

WHEN YOU PLAN FOR A MISSION, IT IS IMPORTANT
THAT YOU COME WELL PREPARED PHYSICALLY, SPIRITUALLY,
AND EMOTIONALLY.

When I was growing up I had a real fear of standing up and talking in front of people. I was so frightened, I would get ill thinking about it.

During the time I was Primary and Young Men age, we had opening exercises in Sunday School, where we were asked to give two-and-a-half-minute talks in front of the whole congregation. One time when I was assigned a talk, my father had me memorize the story of the First Vision, and then he stood in the back of the chapel with the talk in his hands. I was at the pulpit, but I was so nervous that I froze up and couldn't remember what I had memorized. My father tried mouthing the words for me, but because I wasn't a very good lip reader I finally said, "What are you trying to say, Dad?" He marched up to the front of the chapel, put the paper on the pulpit, and I read my talk.

On another occasion my father told the missionary class he was teaching that anyone could give the first discussion that was about the Godhead. He said, "To prove it, I'm going to have my 10-year-old son give you the first lesson next week." All that week he gave me the opportunity to learn the lesson, and I successfully taught the discussion to his class. When I became a missionary I knew well the story of the First Vision and I knew how to talk about the Godhead.

Those little experiences and many others like them changed me, and I was gradually able to overcome my fears. I am grateful for my father, who gave me opportunities to grow and who helped me learn how to do hard things. When we overcome our fears and step outside of our comfort zones, we can progress and become what the Lord would have us be (see D&C 6:34, 36; 35:17; 38:15).

SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO NOW

There are things that you can do now that will help you prepare for a mission and for the rest of your life. For example, learning a foreign language can be a highly stressful activity that occurs in some missions. If you think that might be difficult for you, take a foreign language class in school. Doing so will help you as a missionary and all through your life.

Here are six more ideas to consider that will help you prepare for your future:

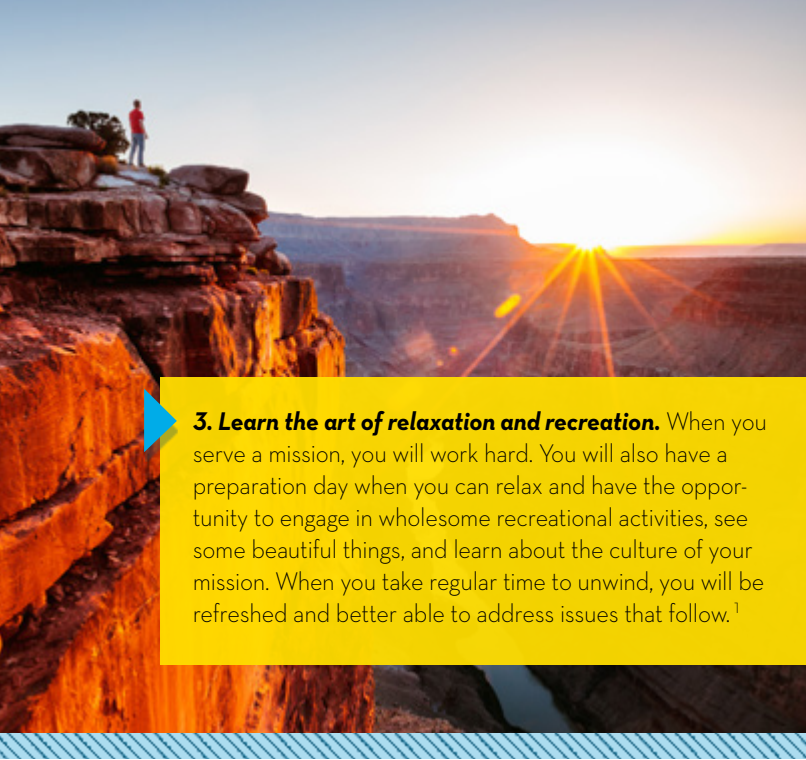


1. Get a job. Working for others will teach you valuable skills on how to interact with people. It will teach you lessons on time management, money management, and how to work effectively.

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2. Get away from home for short periods of time. See what it's like to live on your own, or to live in a college setting with roommates. Youth activities such as camps and conferences will give you a taste of life away from home and will help you stretch yourself.

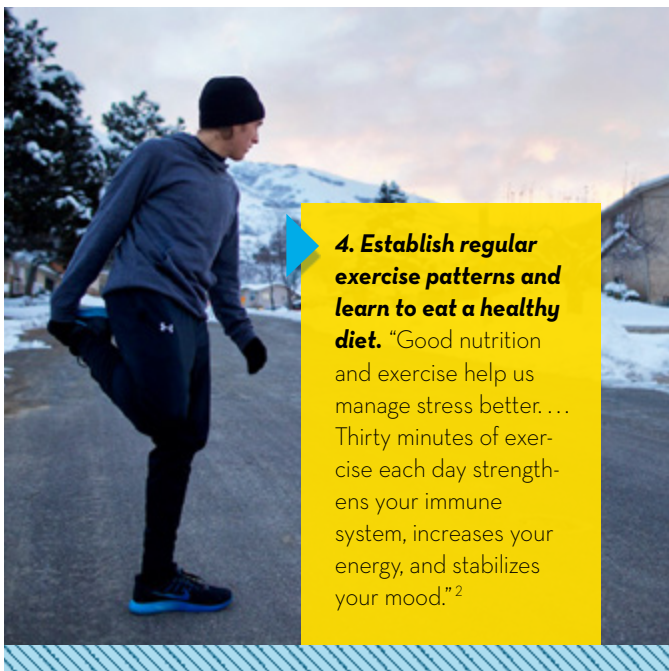


3. Learn the art of relaxation and recreation. When you serve a mission, you will work hard. You will also have a preparation day when you can relax and have the opportunity to engage in wholesome recreational activities, see some beautiful things, and learn about the culture of your mission. When you take regular time to unwind, you will be refreshed and better able to address issues that follow.¹

STRESS IS A NORMAL PART OF LIFE

Serving a mission can be very stressful; in fact, most changes in life are that way. Many of you have already experienced difficult situations in your lives and know what stresses you. When you plan for a mission, it is important that you come well prepared physically, spiritually, and emotionally.

The Church has prepared a resource booklet, *Adjusting to Missionary Life*, to help you learn how to understand and work through stress-related issues. It provides tools you can use before your mission to help you learn how to work through difficult situations. For example, a self-assessment chart is included to help you evaluate where you are, as well as some techniques to calm yourself when you feel tense.



4. Establish regular exercise patterns and learn to eat a healthy diet. “Good nutrition and exercise help us manage stress better. . . . Thirty minutes of exercise each day strengthens your immune system, increases your energy, and stabilizes your mood.”²

CONSIDER A CHURCH-SERVICE MISSION

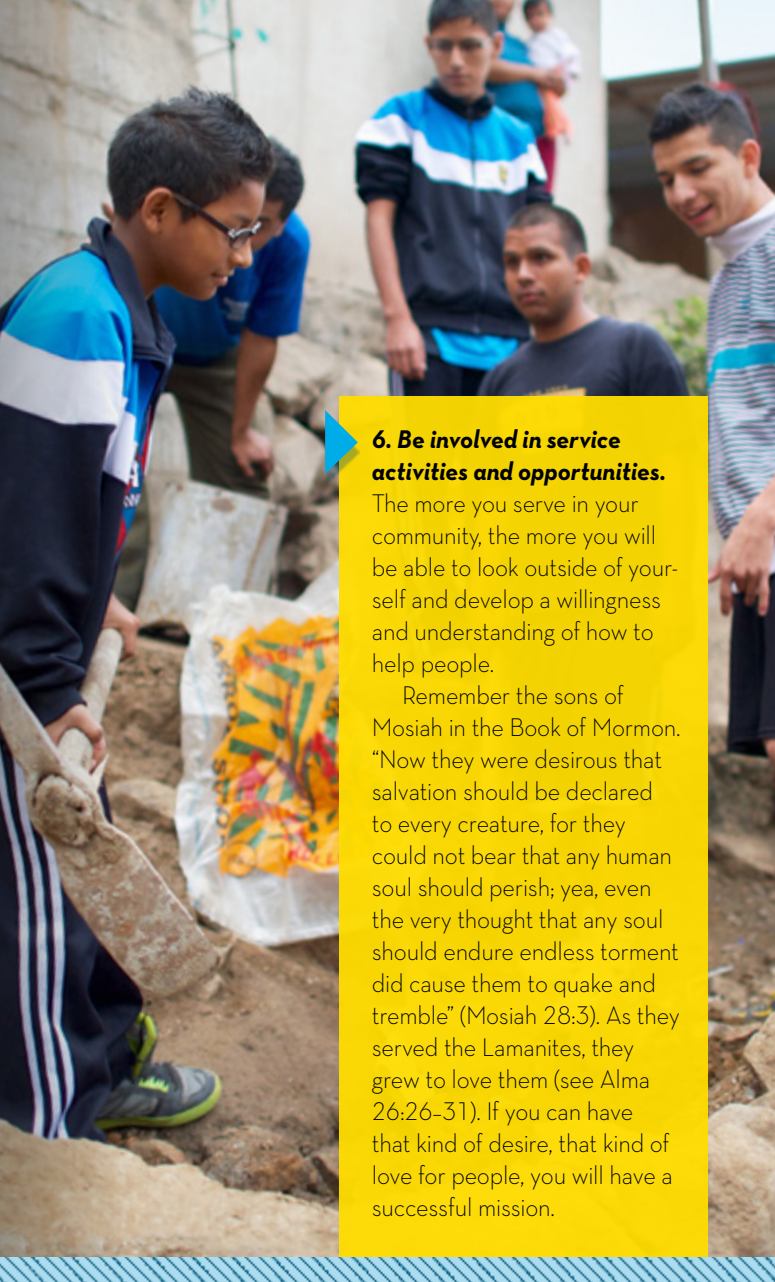
For a variety of reasons, some worthy young people are unable to serve full-time proselyting missions. For them, other service opportunities may be available, such as Church-service missions. They should counsel with parents and priesthood leaders about the possibility of such service. For more, go to lds.org/callings/missionary/church-service-missionary.



5. Learn how to have a conversation.

Get away from digital media and learn how to talk to real people in real time. You can practice by talking with your parents: ask them questions about the past, about their jobs, about the strains in their lives. Dating is also a form of preparing for a mission as you learn people skills by talking to and getting along with others.

Learn how to listen to what others are saying, and be willing to share your story. Learn to listen to both the Holy Spirit and to what the other person is saying. People are much more willing to listen to the gospel message if they perceive that the missionary is interested in them.



6. Be involved in service activities and opportunities.

The more you serve in your community, the more you will be able to look outside of yourself and develop a willingness and understanding of how to help people.

Remember the sons of Mosiah in the Book of Mormon. “Now they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thought that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble” (Mosiah 28:3). As they served the Lamanites, they grew to love them (see Alma 26:26–31). If you can have that kind of desire, that kind of love for people, you will have a successful mission.

IF YOU NEED TO RETURN HOME

Because your health is so important, if you develop symptoms that require medical treatment, be sure to get good professional help. In some cases, if your symptoms are severe, you’ll be honorably excused from your mission. And you’ll be blessed for having kept yourself worthy. If you return home early, please know that the Lord loves and appreciates every effort you made to serve Him. Anyone who goes on a mission and tries his or her best has had a successful mission.

The Lord wants you to get healthy again and move on with your life. If you are permanently released early, pursue your education and do what Heavenly Father wants you to do in finding an eternal companion. These things are really important parts of the big picture of your life.

LEARN TO ADJUST TO NEW SITUATIONS

One of the challenges, as well as a great blessing, of serving a mission is learning how to adjust to new situations. I served in the North German Mission and was still learning the language when I arrived. The first night I was in Germany, right after I dropped my bags off, my wonderful companion said, “Are you ready to go? Let’s go tracting!” I watched him go to two or three doors and talk to people. Then he pushed the doorbell and said, “It’s your turn!”

I’ll never forget the woman who came to the door while I stood there with a Book of Mormon in my hand. All those feelings of anxiety and nervousness that I’d felt when I stood at the pulpit as a child came back again. But because I had worked hard to learn the language and had experience teaching about the First Vision, I knew what I could say. She didn’t accept the Book of Mormon, and she shut the door on me. My companion looked at me and said, “Nice job, Elder Schwitzer. Welcome to Germany.”

Over time, being a missionary became easier as I had the opportunity to meet people and share the gospel. That’s what is amazing about the gospel of Jesus Christ: the more you testify, the more you grow as a missionary. You don’t just go out to serve a mission; you go out to become a missionary, and in the process you become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

I know that when we rely on the Savior we can build a strong foundation where we can overcome the difficulties of life and turn them into strengths. Sometimes I wonder what my life would have been like if I had stayed shy and not pushed myself to do my best. The gospel of Jesus Christ helped to change me into a different person than what my natural tendencies were. I am so grateful for it in my life. **NE**

NOTES

1. See *Adjusting to Missionary Life* (2013), 19.
2. *Adjusting to Missionary Life*, 23, 24.



Resources to Check Out

- *Adjusting to Missionary Life*, at lds.org/manual/resource-booklet-adjusting-to-missionary-life, or get a copy from your bishop.
- Wendy Ulrich, “The Hardest Part of Being a Missionary,” *New Era*, June 2016, 36.
- Robert K. Wagstaff, “Preparing Emotionally for Missionary Service,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2011, 22.