



WHEN THE WORLD TURNS

UPSIDE

DOWN

In the middle of a global pandemic, this high school senior found how to face the future with faith.

By David Dickson
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Luke's senior year was anything but normal. After starting his senior year at the same Mississippi high school he'd been attending since he was a freshman, and with the same friends he'd known since age nine, Luke's family moved to Alabama.

"I wasn't too excited about the move," Luke N., 18, admits. But he still tried to make the most of it. For one thing, he joined the tennis team at his new school.

And then he got to play all of one match before his whole world turned upside down.

Tennis? Canceled. Prom? Double canceled. Attending church? Attending school? Attending seminary?

You guessed it. All canceled.

CALLED TO SERVE . . . EVENTUALLY?

Like the rest of the globe, Luke's daily routine shifted gears in a massive way once the COVID-19 pandemic interfered with just about every area of his life.

I SEE A LOT OF BLESSINGS IN DISGUISE.



"It's definitely been disappointing," he says. For Luke, the biggest heartache of all was not knowing for sure what's going to happen with his mission call.

Not long ago, Luke received his mission call to serve in the Washington D.C. South Mission, speaking Persian.

"*Persian?!!*" he says. "I had no idea that language was even taught at the MTC."

As it happens, there are only three elders in his mission who currently speak Persian. And very few other missions include that language at all.

He started buckling down to learn as much Persian as possible before entering the missionary training center, but then everything missionary-wise got thrown into uncertainty as the pandemic took hold.

BLESSINGS EVERY DAY

It'd be understandable for anybody in Luke's situation to feel discouraged, but he says he finds heavenly help every day. "I see a lot of blessings in disguise."



One of his favorite blessings in disguise was only possible because seminary was held virtually. Due to different start times, he was actually able to attend his current seminary class in Alabama *as well as* his old one back in Mississippi! "That's been kind of cool because I can stay in touch with my friends!"

That's only one blessing, though. "I also have more time for prayer and scriptures," he points out. "And more time to study my language before entering the MTC."

On that note, Luke was fortunate enough to connect, through a social media group, with the mother of one of the Persian-speaking missionaries in his mission. She was thrilled to hear from Luke and offered to send him some language-training tools her son used before his mission.

Luke has been using those tools ever since.

"I love the extra time to study," he says again. "Especially family study in the morning. Now we have more time to do that than we normally did."

FOLLOWING THE PROPHET'S LEAD

The biggest question on Luke's mind has been about what to decide regarding his mission. Like so many others in his situation, Luke has to choose whether to defer his mission call for a year or more, or wait and see if he can go as soon as possible with the original date.

Nothing is certain yet.

For Luke, direction came after watching general conference. "President Nelson and the other leaders were so optimistic," Luke said. "It makes me optimistic too. So, at least for now, I'm going to plan on serving during my normal time."

Luke knows that nothing is certain where COVID-19 is concerned. Even so, he's absolutely certain about something else. "God is at the wheel," Luke says. "He isn't going to let us fail." **NE**