

# From One Missionary To Another

The Ins and Outs of Missionary Life



Ryan Cragun





**From One Missionary to Another: The  
Ins and Outs of Missionary Life**

**Ryan Cragun**

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# Introduction

If you are at all like I was when contemplating serving a mission, you want to know what a mission is really like, what it's all about and what to expect. After serving my mission in Costa Rica (1996-1998), I couldn't help but wonder if I could have been better prepared for what I had just done. If I had been better prepared, would I have done a better job? Could I have done a better job? What would have helped me approach my mission better prepared?

Ironically, I could have been better prepared, but for some reason information about missions just doesn't seem to be very forthcoming (for reasons I'll explain later). But let me relate just some of my experience prior to my mission and see if this sounds familiar to you.

I grew up in a rather large family. There are nine kids total. There are six boys and three girls. I was the fourth boy to serve a mission. You would think I would be the most prepared missionary in the world having had three brothers serve missions. Additionally, my father served a mission. My grandfather on his side served a mission. All of my male cousins who were old enough had served missions. My uncles had served missions. I grew up in Utah and almost everyone in my ward had served a mission. I should have known so much about missions that I should have been able to write this book before I went on my mission. But, I wasn't able to. Why? For some strange reason, there is a phenomenon in the Church that returned missionaries do not typically talk much about their missions. They will occasionally reminisce about the time spent where they served. But, generally speaking, you don't hear returned missionaries talk about their missions. I'm going to go out on a limb here and propose a reason. I think the main reason is because they do not have very much positive to say about it. And to take this further out on the limb, it is probably comparable to many members' first experience at the temple. Much happens and you understand so little of it. It is often overwhelming. You just don't know what to say. In the mission field, there is a lot happening. Often, it doesn't make sense.

Hopefully, I can help this experience make more sense. To do this, I want missionaries and future missionaries to have the knowledge and information I wanted prior to leaving on my mission. The only way to go about resolving that lack of information is for someone to do

something about it. Voila! A book addressing most of the questions I had about the Church and missions, here in your hands. It may not be everything you are looking for, but it is a start. And, if you want more, email me. I'll do my best to fill in anything you think I missed.

If missionaries leave for the mission field prepared and know what to expect, interpreting what is going on is a lot easier. It is just like going to the temple. You probably will not understand everything that takes place in the temple the first time you go, regardless of the preparation you have. But if you have an understanding of what takes place in the temple and an explanation of why it takes place, then when it takes place it should not be so overwhelming. Of course, this probably isn't true for everyone. And, this book is probably not going to help everyone that reads it. I can only hope that a book explaining what it is you will experience will help you understand what is happening better and help you serve the Lord better.

Now, let me help you decide if you want to buy this book. If you are at all like me, the introduction to the book is one of the quickest means of determining if I want to buy a book. Because I like to give it to people plain, I'll come right out and say...

### **Why you should buy this book:**

1. This is a book about missions for missionaries (or soon-to-be missionaries) by a recently returned missionary.
2. The focus of this book is not on how to teach the gospel or commit people to baptism, but rather what missions are all about and a few thoughts on making your mission successful.
3. Because I am a recently returned missionary, hopefully I'll be able to communicate at a level that missionaries will understand.
4. My credentials (what comes after someone's name and is interpreted to mean how 'qualified' they are) are RM or returned missionary. I am not a GA (General Authority), RMP (Returned Mission President), MD (Medical Doctor), or PhD (Professor).

### **Why you might consider a different book on missions:**

1. I am not going to try to teach you how to teach the discussions or contact people. The Church has plenty of resources, in my opinion, for teaching you how to effectively teach and commit people to baptism.

I just want you to know what it's like, what to expect, and what missions are really all about.

2. I am male. No, I'm not saying that to be a misogynist. I'm pointing this out because this book is catered primarily to male missionaries. I want to let any sisters of the Church that may be interested in reading this know that I very seldom had the chance to interact with sister missionaries on my mission, let alone work closely with them or gain an understanding of what mission life was like for them. Thus, this book has been written with the elder in mind. Until I have more information for you, sisters, I apologize for my lack of knowledge and understanding of what the mission is like for you. Of course, you could still read this to see what missions are like for elders, but I'll certainly understand if you decide not to.

Let me just add a couple more things that I think will be important in your decision to read this book. I am going to discuss some topics that might be a little hard to digest for some people. Also, as you read what I have written, you may be surprised at times by my approach. I don't always present missionaries as being perfect members of the Church because I don't believe that they are. I recognize the mistakes and sins that people make. I write from the perspective of the imperfect and I write for the imperfect. In other words, not all of my thoughts and comments are going to be cheerful and motivating. Some of what I have written is intended to be powerfully thought provoking and may not be what you want to hear. However, I think it needs to be said. For the sake of the Lord's work, sometimes you just need to say what needs to be said. My intent is to share, not to scare, but sometimes the truth is just hard to accept. So, if you're not really sure that you want to know what I have to say, put me down and buy one of the books around this one. They should effectively prepare you to teach the Gospel even though they'll likely misconstrue what missions are really like.

Lastly, I have several major goals in writing this book. The first is to empower. This word is used in many contexts, but the context in which I use it now is this: I want this book to give you the knowledge that will make you think critically, not only about your mission, but about your life and your participation in the Church. Additionally, I want you to make your own decisions, accept the consequences, and follow through with your decisions. My second major goal in writing this book is to help prepare better missionaries. I think it would be astounding to see what thousands of well-prepared and highly motivated missionaries could do.

This, in turn, leads to the third major goal which is part of the threefold mission of the Church: Spread the Gospel. I may not be serving a mission presently, but I can help support missionaries and do my best to be a missionary now. Thus, this book is designed to empower you, encourage and motivate you, and help you see the truth about spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

You now know the purpose of this book and why I have chosen to write it. If you're still not sure whether or not you're interested, move on to the first chapter or peruse the table of contents; see if your interest is piqued then.

May you enjoy!

-Ryan Cragun

(revised March 23, 2005)

# **Section I:**

## **Preparation for Your Mission**

# Chapter 1: Missions Defined

Have you ever asked yourself, ‘What is a mission?’ Or, how about, ‘Why should I serve a mission?’ These questions may seem too simple to ask; it’s as if you should already know that, right? Well, I don’t think everyone does. And, I think that knowing the answers to these very basic questions will help you in a couple of ways. First, you will truly understand what you are getting in to. Second, you will be able to make a better decision as to whether or not it is something you want to do.

I want to help you understand missions. Believe it or not, most of the keys to a successful mission are very simple. But the very first thing that you must understand is what a mission is and why you should serve one.

## **What a mission is...**

A mission, as we understand it in the Church, is dedicating time to finding opportunities to share what you have with those that do not have it. Thus, a mission could be several years spent teaching others how to build houses, teaching a language or teaching the gospel; all are considered missions.

## **What a mission is not...**

Missions are not about converting people of other religions; especially in light of the fact that missionaries don’t actually do any converting (this is done by the Holy Ghost and the convert). Missionaries are not called to convert those that *believe* something else. Missionaries are called to find individuals that want to learn the gospel as we understand it. This is probably one of the most misunderstood aspects of a mission in Mormonism. A mission is an opportunity to share something with people that *want* to know what it is you have to share.

I didn’t always understand this principle. As a matter of fact, I fell victim to one of the most common blunders of missionaries, I tried to convince someone that my religion was right and their religion was wrong. This is commonly called bashing. This seems like it would be

fun because... we are right, aren't we? I mean, if we have the truth, why don't we just use it like a sword to cut down our enemies? Well, it isn't that easy. Those that don't share our beliefs actually believe that we are wrong. I think most Latter-Day Saints think that the truth is easily recognizable and that everyone will want to know it. When was the last time someone knocked on your door and asked you to baptize them? When was the last time a non-member friend of yours approached you with a Book of Mormon and said, "I have read this and followed Moroni's promise. It is true and I want you to baptize me"? If the truth were so easily recognized, I believe more people would find it, and, they would find it of their own accord. This is not to say that our religious beliefs are difficult or confusing, though they are assuredly different. They are, however, not beliefs that the general public holds as common sense. They are not the same as Catholicism or Protestantism or any other religion.

Many people that are approached about the gospel believe something different. They claim to know their beliefs are true. They don't just believe them half-heartedly, they are just as devout or more so in their religion as you are in yours. They go to church, study the scriptures and pray and do all the things that they feel they are commanded to do. If you don't believe how devoted some people are to their religion, go to a Jewish synagogue during Yom Kippur. This is not just a three-hour church service. This isn't even two two-hour General Conference sessions or even several days of General Conference sessions. This is several days of nearly continuous worship. They spend entire days reading the scriptures and singing songs of praise. They even learn and use a second language to participate in their religious ceremonies. These are very devout individuals.

There are also a lot of people that are indifferent toward religion. More and more people are choosing to disassociate or distance themselves from religion. This is actually a growing trend in America. This does not mean that these types of people do not consider themselves spiritual or do not believe in God. Many individuals that do not belong to religions still have what we would understand to be religious beliefs. However, they dislike the idea of organized religion; they find a way to associate with and worship God on their own. They would consider themselves spiritual rather than religious. These types of people also may not want anything to do with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints because of their dislike of organized religion; there are few churches as well *organized* as the LDS Church.

Thus, you cannot assume that everyone is going to *want* to hear your message. Many people don't *want* to hear your message. Some people will *want* to hear your message. You'll notice that I've italicized the word *want*; this is because this is the key to finding and teaching people about religion. The idea of wanting to know is taught throughout the scriptures (see *Topical Guide: Teachable* in the LDS version of the Bible), but one of the most famous scriptures is the lesson Christ taught contained in the Beatitudes and reiterated on the American continent, "And blessed are all they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost" (3 Nephi 12:6). In order for someone to be receptive to the message that a missionary brings, they must *want* to hear it. I cannot emphasize this enough.

I mentioned that I tried to convince some people that they were wrong. I don't claim to be proud of the fact that I argued religion with two people while on my mission. The first time this happened, I truly believed that the individual was interested in what I had to say. He told me that he had a list of questions about the Mormons that a friend had given him and that he wanted to know what my perspective was. Of course I wanted to be of help, so I agreed to do the best I could. I was still a young missionary and quite naïve; it took me nearly an hour of him asking me questions, me giving him inspired answers and him dismissing them like annoying flies before I realized that he was actually a member of another religion and was simply trying to discourage me! He was not interested in what I had to say. He didn't care about the validity of my answers. He didn't *want* to know what I believed from the perspective of someone looking for something. My answers meant nothing to him; he *wanted* to prove to me that I was wrong. He had obtained the list of questions from some anti-Mormon literature that his religion had printed and just *wanted* to make sure that his religion was right. I don't feel that it was a waste of time because I learned from what I said; I had been inspired when responding to some of his questions. However, I vowed that I would never argue religion with someone that did not *want* to learn more about what I had to say.

There was only one more time that I argued religion with someone while on my mission who really did not *want* to know what I was trying to teach. It was nearly 9:30 at night in my third area and I was heading home with my companion. I had recently been studying one of the elements of the religion to which this individual belonged because I felt that it was an interesting doctrinal claim and had become aware of what I would consider some major theological flaws in their interpretations of

the scriptures. Perhaps it was because we had not had a successful day; perhaps it was because I was feeling arrogant about my newfound knowledge; perhaps I was frustrated and was looking for someone upon which to vent my frustrations; whatever the reason, when this individual invited us into his house to discuss problems with our religion, I unleashed an assault on his religion's interpretation of the scriptures that left him quite bewildered. After about twenty minutes of discussion, he realized he was outgunned and tried to convince me that a neighbor of his that was an authority figure in his particular church would straighten me out. At that point, I realized that I was not benefiting the church by destroying this man's testimony in his religion. I was participating in contention. I was fighting. I was arguing. I don't believe Christ would have done that in this situation. Christ taught that it is wrong to argue, "For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another" (3 Nephi 11:29). Even though Christ was stern in his defense of the truth, he was never just plain mean. I was not acting in accordance with the Spirit and kindly excused my companion and myself. I never again argued religion.

Arguing is not of the Spirit nor conducive to the Spirit. Joseph Smith taught this principle as well,

Let the Elders be exceedingly careful about unnecessarily disturbing and harrowing up the feelings of the people. Remember that your business is to preach the Gospel in all humility and meekness, and warn sinners to repent and come to Christ.

Avoid contentions and vain disputes with men of corrupt minds, who *do not desire* to know the truth. Remember that "it is a day of warning, and not a day of many words." If they receive not your testimony in one place, flee to another, remembering to cast no reflections, nor throw out any bitter sayings. If you do your duty, it will be just as well with you, as though all men embraced the Gospel.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (p. 43) in Smith, J.F. (1976). *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Deseret Book Company: Utah.

As you will learn and as I have already mentioned, individuals do not convert people; the Spirit does. If the Spirit is not present because of a contentious mood, there is absolutely no way that the people will be inspired to learn. Arguing is not teaching, it is defending. Defending does not convey a message; it tries to force a message. I don't take kindly to people trying to force me to do things that I don't want to do and I believe that I would take even less kindly to people trying to force me to believe things that I do not believe. This is not what a mission is. A mission is not forcing people to believe what you believe. A mission is not convincing people that they are wrong. A mission is not converting people. A mission is not a chance to get away from your parents. A mission is not a two-year vacation in a foreign country. A mission is not a two-year engagement with your girlfriend that is waiting for you back home. A mission is looking for opportunities to share what you have with those that do not have what you have but *want* it.

### **Why should you serve a mission?**

Let me talk a little more about wanting things...

If you don't really *want* something (money, a new car, good grades), will you ever receive it? As I see it, succeeding in life really isn't that complicated. It is all about determining what you *want* and dismissing all of the arguments that will prevent you from having it. Many people spend their entire lives in the pursuit of an elusive dream but never find it. They claim this is something that they really want, but I don't believe that. Have you ever met someone that was truly motivated to accomplish something? I knew a guy in high school that was trying to lose weight so he could wrestle in a specific weight category. He really wanted it. He wanted it badly enough that he would get up every morning around 5:30 and drive to the high school with his father who was the vice-principal and run for over an hour in lots of clothes. This was on top of the daily practices that he had after school with the wrestling team. He lost the weight and wrestled in that weight range.

People that determine they are going to do something will let nothing stop them. If I had a dollar for every time I heard someone say, "But it's hard..." I would be wealthier than Bill Gates. Far too often, the calculation of the difficulty of attaining a goal is what prevents people from reaching their goals or even setting goals. Difficulty is irrelevant when you truly want something. Perhaps that is an accurate

measurement of whether or not someone truly wants something; they don't care how difficult it will be, because nothing is going to stop them.

Ok, where am I going? If you *want* to serve a mission, if you really *want* it, is anything going to stand in your way? Are you going to care how difficult it may be? If you want to serve a mission and then are able to, don't you think you'll enjoy it? Can you imagine a missionary force of 65,000 hyper-motivated missionaries? A missionary force so motivated, problems of morality or disobedience do not exist?

How does this relate to 'Why you should serve a mission'? There are a lot of wrong reasons to serve a mission. These include: parents wanting you to, peers pressuring you to, and yes, even, girlfriends demanding you to. Each one will destroy your enthusiasm to serve if you leave for your mission with that as your motivation. Why will these reasons destroy your motivation as a missionary? Think about it this way...you are going to spend the next two years (that's 24 months, 104 weeks, 730 days, 17,520 hours) working for the Lord. This means no TV, no movies, no dating, no...you get the point. You are dedicating all that time to the Lord. Now, if you are doing this because your parents want you to, do you really think that you'll follow through with it? How often do you do what your parents want? Be honest... Just because your parents want you to, do you always perform your chores? Just because your friends want you to, do you get drunk? Just because your girlfriend wants you to, do you have sex? Most of you, I hope, answered, "No, I don't." Good. Just because someone wants us to do something doesn't mean we are going to do it. It often guarantees that we won't want to do it. I really hate it when someone tells me to do something. And I really, really hate it when someone forces me to do something. So, doing something I don't want to do is almost always going to guarantee that I will be reluctant to do it. Serving a mission because someone else wants you to isn't the right reason to serve.

What is the right motivation for serving a mission? There is one other reason that is quite common and noble but only second best. The second best reason for serving a mission is because you are supposed to. Yes! You heard me right. This is not the best reason for serving a mission. Why? For the very same reasons you should not go for another person –it does not give enough motivation. Even if I recognize the chore of taking out the trash as my responsibility and my parents don't have to tell me to do it, I still won't want to do it. It isn't necessarily a pleasant task or a particularly rewarding task. The idea here is that, even if it is a recognized responsibility that we have, responsibility does not

enthusie. I may take out the trash because it is my responsibility, but I won't take it out because I enjoy doing it. I may clean my room because it is my responsibility, but I won't enjoy it. There are a lot of things in life that we end up doing because they are our responsibilities. We may not enjoy these responsibilities, but we do them anyway. Serving a mission because it is a commandment seems rather noble but is still not a very strong motivation to work hard in the mission field.

The very best reason why you should serve a mission is because you *want* to. Why should you want to serve a mission? Because you have the Gospel of Jesus Christ and you want others to have that. Vaughn J. Featherstone said this very same thing,

A prepared missionary is one who has developed a sweet relationship with the Savior prior to his mission. In fact, that should be the thing that motivates him to serve. And he should go because he wants to – not because he feels pressured into going. He ought to really have a desire to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the people in whatever mission he may be called to.<sup>2</sup>

If you want to spend all of your waking hours teaching the gospel for two years, will anything stand in your way? If you go for any other reason, you'll regret it every day. If you go for any other reason, any hindrance in the work, any problem will make you complain that it's 'too hard.' You'll get up in the morning and realize that you don't want to be there, but you're supposed to, so you'll do it anyway. You'll get up in the morning and realize that your girlfriend wants you there, so you'll try to push yourself through another day of beleaguering work without any enthusiasm or excitement. Realize that this is a choice that you make. If you want to have a successful mission, you must be excited for it. In order to be excited about a mission, it has to be something you *want* to do. For it to be something that you *want* to do, you have to understand what it is you will be doing and then make the decision to do it.

A wonderful example of this is the story of the sons of Mosiah after the angel struck down Alma. After the angel visits them, the following is related of their desires to serve missions, "Now they were desirous that

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<sup>2</sup> Featherstone, V.J. (1979). *What Parents Can Do...Before the Call Comes*. Ensign.

salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble” (Mosiah 28:3). It is this type of motivation that one must have to serve a mission successfully, without complaint and without disobedience.

I’m going to ask you just one last time: Why are you going to serve a mission? (Yes, I know, we’ve been over this, but repetition is a good way to make sure people understand). You are going to do it because you want to, right? And how do people feel about doing things that they want to do? Exactly, they enjoy it. If you want to have a successful mission, you must be happy to be there. You must enjoy it. You must enjoy the very thought of it. You must be so excited that you can’t wait to go. You must have a burning desire to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with...nope, not everyone...with those that want to hear it. Caught you, didn’t I? Remember, missions are not to convert popes and kings (unless they happen to be searching for the gospel), they are to help people who are searching for the truth you have. So, we must serve because we want to serve and we must not expect everyone to be receptive to the gospel, but find those people who want to hear it. Good, we’re all on the same page now.

There’s just one last thing I want to talk about when it comes to ‘why you should serve a mission.’ A lot of times you’ll hear people say ‘you should serve a mission to convert yourself.’ Or perhaps, ‘the most important convert of your mission is you.’ There is definitely some truth to this idea of self-conversion. As a matter of fact, I do think self-conversion is one of the purposes of serving a mission. However, I would hate to think missions are so self-serving. Yes, perhaps this idea of self-conversion is true. But this isn’t why you should serve a mission. We have already discussed the best reason why you should serve a mission, because you love God and his Gospel and you cannot stand to let anyone that might want to accept this Gospel not have a chance to hear it. Besides, if this is your motivation than you are most likely already converted and a mission will just help strengthen this testimony. An important point to keep in mind is that the period just after high school, when many Mormon youth are contemplating a mission, is one of the most difficult times in many people’s lives. For many young men, once they have graduated from high school, they often experience a new sense of freedom. They feel that they have some power to make their own decisions. They begin to realize their life is not specifically planned out

for them. The mission experience often helps missionaries figure out at least one aspect of their life, whether or not they want to continue to be a member of the Church. So, when people tell you that you are serving a mission to convert yourself, that isn't necessarily the whole truth, but it is undoubtedly one reason why you are serving a mission. A mission will help you decide whether or not this Gospel is for you or not.

Let me give offer an example. One of my heroes was a rock star. His musical name was Cat Stevens. I love his music. I think it's great. However, at the peak of his career, when almost all of his records were reaching the top ten on the charts, he gave up singing and music and converted to Islam. He left a fabulous career and the opportunity to make millions of dollars. Why? Because he felt it was his religious obligation. Religion is a powerful force. Religion has been the cause of much joy and gladness, and much pain and suffering. Once you make your decision as to whether or not you want to belong to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, I hope that you will be as forthright and noble as Cat Stevens in the pursuit of truth. He changed his name to Yusef Islam and spends almost all of his time building his faith by sharing his message and living the way he believes a Muslim should. Of course, not all of us are going to have the revenues from fabulously selling records to allow us to focus all of our time on spreading the gospel, but I would hope that we are as committed to it as he is.

But, what if you don't feel that the Church is for you? If this means leaving the Church to pursue what you believe to be true, then make your decision and do your very best not to feel disheartened by the disappointment that others express. If you believe something other than what this particular Church teaches, you must pursue that. There is nothing worse than the internal conflict of beliefs. You need to discover where you belong. Of course, I am going to come under criticism for encouraging people to make decisions that may include leaving the Church. However, I don't see it that way. God loves the person, every one of us the same. Some may and some will become confused as to the truth. They don't believe that they are confused. I am content to let God judge behaviors and motivations. But as for my role in all of this, I would hate to step between an individual and what they believe to be true and tell them that they must change. I do not believe that it is in the best interest of an individual to live what they believe to be a lie. Of course, I would hope that they can resolve their questions and differences and stay in the Church. But, if that does not seem possible or does not seem like it is going to happen, then leaving the Church may help them resolve

their internal conflict. It would never be easy to leave the Church because of the social pressures that come with it. But I would encourage you to make the best decision you can. Don't live a lie. Cat Stevens went against the beliefs of his parents, against mainstream culture, against everything he had previously known to be true to his beliefs once he found them. It is not easy, but I would submit that it is worth it, which makes the whole discussion of easy and hard irrelevant.

Of course, I must add that I believe the Gospel that the LDS Church teaches is true. And, I would hope that if you are contemplating leaving or joining this Church, that this isn't a quick and light decision for you. I would hope you consider all things involved and think deeply about what all of this means. Give yourself time to ponder and pray and study it out in your mind. Also, do not be afraid to ask questions. For some reason, many members of the Church do not feel like they can ask questions. I would submit that this is often because when they do ask questions, people get upset. This is not the fault of the question asker, but rather of those that are being asked the questions. If someone gets upset at a question you ask, it is, in my opinion, because they do not know the answer and feel threatened by the question. So, do not feel like it is out of place to question things, this Church encourages understanding and knowledge; feel free to ask.

### **The Gospel of Jesus Christ**

What is the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Christ is probably the best source for this, so I'll quote him,

Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

(Matthew 22:36-40)

That's it. Move on to the next chapter.

OK. For all of those that don't get my meaning and are still reading, let me explain. Christ taught using 'principles.' What this means is that Christ did not feel that He needed to tell people everything that they needed to do. Just as Joseph Smith said, "I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves,"<sup>3</sup> God gave the Children of Israel, while under the leadership of Moses, specific rules and guidelines because they were so immature spiritually that they could not base their behavior off of the interpretation of principles. He had to spell everything out for them. Are we so immature spiritually that we must have Christ spell everything out for us? Why do you think the Church hasn't come out with a list of 'Thou shalt...' and 'Thou shalt not...'? Because the Church teaches the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ simplified things and complicated things at the same time because he did not want people trying to manipulate their way around specific rules. The Church is not in the business of telling us what is right and wrong for every situation. This is why we have the gift of the spirit of discernment. Let me give you an example: The principle is that we should not drink or eat anything that is harmful to our bodies (The Word of Wisdom, Doctrine and Covenants 89). If you accept this principle, will you ask me if you can drink coffee, tea, beer or wine? This is the idea of principles and is the same method for teaching that Christ used. Because they are bad for the body, beer, wine, tea and coffee do not have to be specified as rules; they are covered by the broader principle. You can also tie this principle into the two 'Great' principles that Christ taught. If you do not follow the principle taught in the Word of Wisdom – eating or drinking that which is harmful to man – you are not following the second principle taught by Christ, love man, because you are abusing yourself. Does this make sense? Everything that the Church teaches is related to one or the other of these two Great Commandments.

Sadly, it is common for today's youth (and many older members as well) to want rules because they know that if the rules are specific enough, they can justify doing anything but the specifics. Youth are not stupid. Of course, they should not be considered incredibly wise either, which is why they should be instructed in the understanding and usage of

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted by John Taylor in the *Millennial Star*, November 15, 1851, p. 339.

principles before they are no longer bound to specifics by rules. However, once old enough and mature enough, I believe that all elements of behavioral regulation for people should be based on principles and principles alone; there should be no rules.

This is the idea of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the message that you are taking around the world as a missionary. You best understand it. I would hope that you love it. I could spend hours talking about how effective principles are for governing behavior, but I am not sure you want to hear it. I have included a discussion of principles in an essay at the end this book (see Appendix A). If you do not get the point that is being made here about the Gospel of Jesus Christ being made up of two principles, perhaps that essay will help. In short, it is important that you understand what it is you are teaching – Love God and Love Man. Everything else that makes up the message of religions is peripheral discussion as to the correct way to do that. This does not mean it isn't important, just that the focus of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the principles He taught.

### **Suggestion:**

It is always difficult to find a place to begin when trying to explain the concepts that are included in any understanding of missions. Your best bet for ultimate understanding of the concepts I am trying to convey in this chapter will be to read the entire chapter and then re-read it. This is because I had to set up a foundation upon which to build, but the foundation comes in pieces. Thus, I have to set up the foundation a little sporadically, though I have tried to do this in the most orderly manner that I can think of. Once you have read the entire chapter, you will find that the information at the beginning of the chapter is more readily understood with the knowledge that you gained (I hope) at the end of the chapter. Anyway, enough of that, most of you will be reading this and laughing at my impertinence for actually believing that you will go back to the beginning of this chapter and read it again. Who, in their right mind would do that? Don't worry about it, it was just a suggestion. But I'll bet you don't remember the exact definition of a mission, do you? Still not going to go back to read the beginning of the chapter? At least skim through it; it will help it all make better sense.

## **Chapter 2: Why you should not go if it's not for the right reason**

In the last chapter I highly encouraged you to be properly motivated. I am going to do the same in this chapter, but I am going to do it from a different perspective. You could look at the last chapter as the 'motivation by love' chapter and this one as the 'motivation by fear' chapter. I want you to know what can happen if you go for the wrong reason(s).

Serving a mission with the wrong motivation is more common than it should be. Some people may argue that it doesn't matter your motivation, just go. I disagree. Go with the wrong motivation and you are taking serious risks. Why we do things does make a difference.

What is contained in these first two chapters regarding motivation is what I call 'The Principle of Motivation'. It is nothing new, just a different perspective on something that the Church has been teaching since its inception. If it is all presented together, it will be easier to understand the importance of motivations.

### **Why it would be better for you not to go on a mission at all if you are going to go for the wrong reasons**

This may seem like a bold statement to make, but I make it because this is what Christ taught:

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. (Matthew 6:1-4)

In this section of scripture, Christ is teaching a lesson on motivation or reason for behavior. He suggests that motivation is taken into account when judging behavior. The term hypocrite refers to someone that pretends to be religious or good intentioned but is not. This can even include doing something good, like Christ said, but without the proper motivation. He knows your motivation and you will be judged based upon your motivations in conjunction with your actions. The actions of the hypocrites mentioned in the scripture above were seemingly good. However, they were not considered beneficial to the actors by Christ because their motivations were not pure.

This idea of behaving appropriately but for the wrong reason is expounded upon by Moroni,

For behold, God hath said a man being evil cannot do that which is good; for if he offereth a gift, or prayeth unto God, except he shall do it with real intent it profiteth him nothing. For behold, it is not counted unto him for righteousness. For behold, if a man being evil giveth a gift, he doeth it grudgingly; wherefore it is counted unto him the same as if he had retained the gift; wherefore he is counted evil before God. And likewise also is it counted evil unto a man, if he shall pray and not with real intent of heart; yea, and it profiteth him nothing, for God receiveth none such. Wherefore, a man being evil cannot do that which is good; neither will he give a good gift. (Moroni 7:6-10)

For humans to judge behavior based upon motivation is a very difficult thing. If you don't believe me, just look at the deliberations that take place in a court during a murder trial. Even if it is known who the murderer was, trials can still take months just to determine motivation. And, when taken into consideration, motivation can completely change the punishment for the murder. If you did it deliberately and calculatingly, you could receive the death penalty. If it was an accident, like vehicular homicide might be, it could be anywhere from probation to several years in prison. By no means am I, a human, pretending to be a judge. I cannot truly judge someone's motivations. The best any human could do is guess at another's motivations. In my opinion, this would

even include when people tell you their motivation. Most of the time I don't think people realize why they do the things they do. And, even if they do, they could still be wrong in attributing their behavior to one motivation when it is actually the result of something else. Luckily, the final judgment will be guided by Christ. Thus, individuals will receive a true and correct judgment that does take in to consideration their truest motives.

I believe it is common for people to do things without having the correct motivation. Two possible scenarios can result. First, the ineffectuality of the deed can be affected. Second, there is an increased susceptibility to temptation when you one is doing the right thing for the wrong reason. In other words, hypocrisy can and very often does lead to misbehavior and disobedience.

### **The Ineffectuality of the Deed**

What do I mean by ineffectuality? If your motivation is incorrect for a behavior, regardless of the behavior, it is not counted for you in the final accounting. God is aware of your motivations and I would guess that most people are aware of their own as well. Because God is aware of it and a record is being kept of your accountings here on earth, when it comes time for judgment, all of those 'good' deeds that you did with the aim of being seen of men will not be counted for you. Remember... "Verily I say unto you, They have their reward." (Matthew 6:2)

It may seem strange to say that good deeds aren't good deeds unless the motivation is good as well, but perhaps this idea will become clearer if we look at some examples. Let's imagine some wrong reasons for potentially good behaviors:

I got baptized because my parents told me to. I got married to have sex. I went on a mission because my friends did. I fast because my parents make me. I date because it gives me a feeling of self-worth.

Do you see where I am going with this? Ultimately, these things may be beneficial to you; you may even learn something from them. But God knows your motivation. Of course, your motivation may change over time and I'm sure that will be taken into account. But the next time you begrudgingly pay your tithing, think twice about it. Just because you do it

doesn't mean it is effectively serving as a good deed in the final accountings in Heaven. If you do it begrudgingly, it doesn't do you any good. Not only must you follow the commandments, but you must follow them willingly, happily, and because you love God and man.

### **Susceptibility to temptation**

In my experience, serving a mission for the wrong reasons can often lead to misbehavior. This may come as quite shocking news to some people, but not all missionaries are great representatives of the Church. Some missionaries are actually more damaging to the Church than beneficial. They can be so damaging, in fact, that entire areas of missions have been closed down because of the behavior of individual missionaries. There were several areas in my mission that were closed as the result of the disobedience of the missionaries in the area. Of course, not all missionaries that decide to serve a mission for the wrong reasons (because they are supposed to, because their friends are, etc.) will end up destroying the missionary work in their designated field of labor. However, I would submit that you are more likely to succumb to temptation if your motivation is improper.

So, you decide to serve a mission; it is for the wrong reasons, but you aren't out terrorizing the populace of the area where you are serving, you just aren't a very good missionary? Sure, it is possible no one will ever find out. But God knows. And, if you do misrepresent the Church and someone chooses not to join the Church because of what you have said or done, you bring that sin upon your head. You are not only responsible for all your actions, but for removing the opportunity of exaltation from those souls. I would not want that responsibility on my shoulders.

Let me relate an anecdote from my mission. In my second area, in a neighborhood called Los Guidos, I was out knocking doors with my companion. A member had mentioned that a woman in the neighborhood had recently been widowed. The member had not approached the woman about the gospel, but she thought the widow might be receptive if we knocked on her door. I need to explain here that my companion had a method of approaching door contacts that was a bit unique but usually very effective for breaking the ice. It began something like this, "Hi. My name is Chupacabra (this is a famous blood-sucking vampire in Latin American countries and using it often made people laugh) and this is my companion, gangster." I'm sure the

Church mission department would never approve of this approach, but it was unique and often got us into a conversation. Well, this time, when my companion used this approach, something possessed me; when introduced as the gangster, I let out a little roar. In a normal contact, this may have been funny. But, in this particular situation, it didn't go over well. We both tried our best to stifle our laughter, but to no avail. The lady at the door lost her patience with us. The approach fizzled then died and we didn't get a chance to tell her how she could be with her husband again. I hope this doesn't come across as a confession but rather a lesson in misrepresenting the Church. To this day, I truly regret having done that. That woman's salvation hangs over my head. I pray that she will forgive and forget the day two ill-behaved Mormon missionaries knocked on her door and at some point in the future will let some come by. I had never done that before, and I never did it again, but I still feel sorrow for having done it.

Why do I share this story? Why have I dedicated an entire section in this book to misrepresenting the Church? Because it happens! If you don't care whether or not you misrepresent the Church, please, please, don't go on a mission! Stay home and be an *idiot* there! When you go to a country and misrepresent the Church, the work in that particular area becomes harder and the people become embittered toward the Church. Do you want that responsibility on your shoulders?

My third argument as to why you shouldn't go on a mission if you don't really care about your representation of the Church is because you will condemn yourself and possibly be responsible for condemning others. For some people, thinking about the salvation of others is the last thing on their mind. They are so focused on themselves that they could care less what is going to happen to others. If you don't care about others, maybe thinking about yourself will help. I hate the feeling of guilt I have for misrepresenting the Church with that lady. Imagine the guilt and responsibility and eternal consequences of being the reason why someone didn't join the Church. You will be the one those people will blame in the hereafter. During the judgment, Christ will ask them why they never received the gospel and they will say, "Because two Mormon missionaries slept with my daughter and her friend and left them pregnant." Then Christ will call you forward and say, "Is this true?" What will be your response? Ideally, they would disregard the misbehavior of ill-behaved missionaries and still investigate the Church because they are interested in the truth. But we don't live in an ideal world. Of course, you can still repent, it may be harder but you can still

do it. But oh how much easier it is to just avoid the sin in the first place...

I guess what I'm trying to say is, if you aren't serious about a mission; if you find yourself on a mission and wasting time; if you find yourself feeling guilty for the problems you have caused – change or get out of there. Don't bring any more sins on your head. As a representative of Christ, you should act as though you are Christ. Do as he did. Be as he was. Of course, we aren't perfect (and most of us won't be raising the dead), but that doesn't mean we should spend our days at girls homes, scuba diving, surfing or gambling. These things may seem far-fetched, but I personally knew people that did all of them in my mission. I feel sorry for them. They will pay for what they did. They misrepresented the Church and will bring down God's wrath upon them.

So, even if misrepresenting and damaging the Church doesn't matter to you, think about your own salvation. Not only will misbehavior hinder the work of the Lord, it will destroy your chances of exaltation. Yes, there is always repentance. Sure, people can be forgiven. But why sin in the first place if it can be avoided? If you don't care about the Church and *really* don't care about your salvation, don't go on a mission. Stay home until you do care and are ready. The Church does not demand that you leave on a mission at 19; it's simply the recommended age. You can serve a mission at any age. Give it some thought, ponder and pray. If you ever do become ready, the Church will be that much better off – as will you – for you having waited.

### **The parable of the runners**

We've talked about motivations, principles, and possible outcomes and consequences of actions. Now, I want to illustrate this with a parable. Let's imagine a race between two runners. Like a standard race, the object is to come in first place. But this race isn't perfectly fair even though both runners are of about the same ability, meaning that they run equally as fast. The terrain is cross-country and over very rough ground. The first runner has been training for this race his entire life. He eats healthy and even studies running. He has looked forward to this race his entire life. This second runner doesn't actually want to run, but is doing it because someone is pressuring him to run. Also, the second runner doesn't have shoes and hasn't eaten for two weeks. Finally, the second runner is going to start well behind the other runner. Who do you think is going to win?

Now, replace these two runners with missionaries. What am I trying to illustrate? If you go on a mission without adequate preparation, both spiritually and physically, and you don't want to go, are you ever going to be as successful as if you go spiritually and physically prepared and excited? The beauty of the parable is you don't have to compare yourself to someone else; you simply have to compare yourself as though you were in two different situations.

There are several things to consider in this parable. First, the second runner, or the ill-prepared missionary that doesn't want to serve, is not going to be very effective. He is going to waste time picking his way carefully through the rocks, because they are dangerous and can easily injure him because he isn't wearing shoes. He is not prepared for the hard times of a mission. Every hill will be a struggle and, he won't enjoy the race.

Second, if one starts ahead of the other and they both run as fast as they possibly can (assuming the second runner, say, finds some shoes along the way), will the runner that starts behind the first one ever catch up? No. This is like starting your mission without having the correct motivation or without knowledge about the scriptures and your religion, or not having a testimony. All the time you spend trying to figure these things out, other missionaries are running for all they're worth to bring souls to Christ. And there you sit, just trying to bring yourself to Christ.

Some argue it's not healthy to compare people. I'm not comparing you and your companion; I'm comparing you against an ideal. The ideal is the missionary that chooses to go on a mission because he loves the gospel. The ideal is the missionary that has kept himself worthy in every way. The ideal is the missionary that has prepared by reading the scriptures daily, attending seminary and working to pay for his mission. The ideal is just that, the ideal. Few missionaries, sadly, begin their missions as the ideal missionary. That's okay, but not how it should be. Wouldn't it be great if it were the other way around? Wouldn't it be wonderful if all missionaries entered the mission field as ideal missionaries? Yet, how many really think about this? How many future missionaries are currently involved with things that they shouldn't be and are thinking, "It's okay if I just break a few rules now, I can always repent just before my mission."

The ultimate retribution for individuals with attitudes like this would be for them to die just before they are able to repent. I know that sounds spiteful or mean or even evil – but keep in mind that this is just

an example – of course I don't wish that upon them. I'm using the example as a point – I want people to understand the consequences of willingly and knowingly sinning. If you were to die before repenting, where would you stand before God? But who cares, right? What's a little sin, right? A little sin is the difference between the Celestial Kingdom and the Telestial Kingdom. A little sin is the difference between Godhood and living forever unable to have spiritual offspring. This is especially true when that little sin is willfully committed.

Anyway, understand the parable and understand the consequences of not preparing for a mission and the benefits of preparing for a mission. Which runner do you want to be? The runner that is going to struggle and hate his life for two years or the one that runs the race with gusto. I would suggest you be the one that enjoys the trials and tribulations because they bring you closer to God. Also, I suggest you be properly motivated because you understand the principle of motivation. It's your choice!

## **People can change**

So, what if you are on your mission and have just finally figured out that you are out there for the wrong reasons? There is still hope. Look, I don't claim to have been a perfect missionary. By no means was I a model missionary that did everything right. I struggled and made a lot of mistakes. I'll talk about more of my mistakes. You'll see it isn't likely that you will be a perfect missionary; Christ was the only one with this ability. In fact, let me give you an example of a typically good missionary that was not-perfect: My very first companion in the mission field, once I arrived in Costa Rica, was a Zone Leader. He was a great missionary. He worked hard and was very obedient. I didn't always think he worked smart, but he would never give up. There was just one thing that he didn't do very well... He became very upset when an appointment would not show up or someone wouldn't answer the door when we knew they were home. This really got under his skin. His first response was always to walk right up to the neighbor's door and start contacting. Since he hadn't been able to get into the appointed house, he would make up for it by getting into a house, period.

This sounds noble and all, but have you ever seen a missionary knocking on doors when he is upset? Not a good idea. They just don't seem to carry the Spirit with them when they are upset. After a few

times I watching this response I realized knocking doors while he was angry was not only a waste of time, but sometimes it would make my companion even more upset because no one was willing to let us in. So, I had an idea. When something would upset my companion, I would offer to buy him ice cream. I know, that sounds absolutely ridiculous. But, the remarkable thing about it is that it worked. If we bought ice cream, he would have to sit down and think for a few minutes. Also, who can remain upset when someone offers to buy them ice cream? This is especially true when they are buying you ice cream in a country where the average temperature and average humidity hover around 85. Ice cream is a delicacy. We would sit by the little ‘mercados’ and eat our ice cream and figure out what do to next.

Why do I point this out as an imperfection? Well, my companion was not a bad missionary, he just didn’t respond well to disappointment. I’m not advocating going out and buying ice cream every time you are stood up for an appointment or something disappointing happens. My point is that sometimes even missionaries need to take a break and think about their behavior and what it is they are doing. My companion was an excellent missionary. Like I said, he was obedient and hard-working. He would just become upset at times. I think God understands stuff like this, I really do. Of course, this is just my opinion and I don’t know God’s thoughts. I just think he would understand.

It wasn’t too many times of buying ice cream for my companion before he realized why it was that I was offering to buy him some ice cream. And, it wasn’t too long after that, that he would offer to buy me ice cream. Then, he wasn’t getting upset anymore and we didn’t have to stop to buy ice cream. He changed...

If you are on a mission right now and realizing that you need to change, do it. It isn’t always easy but I guarantee you that you can find support. People can change; people should change.

I once heard a statistic that stuck with me, though I’m not sure how accurate it really is. From my own experience, I would guess that it is actually pretty accurate, though sad. The statistic was that one-third of the missionaries in any given mission will be hard-working motivated missionaries. Another one-third will be non-motivated, ‘lazy’ missionaries. And the last third will do whatever their companion wants does. If that is true (I hope it isn’t and I’m pretty sure it isn’t in all missions), then, at any given point, almost one half of our missionary force is not doing what it is supposed to be doing. Our Church, The

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, is recognized as being one of the fastest growing churches in the United States and in the world. If the statistic holds, than that is with only half of our missionary force doing what they are supposed to be doing. Just imagine where we would be if all missionaries were doing what they were supposed to be doing? Our mission, to take the gospel to the entire world, would be accomplished in half the time. To which third of the missionary force do you want to belong? If you're in the wrong third, get in the right third. It is time to make a change.

## Chapter 3: How To Prepare For a Mission

Thus far, I have discussed why you should serve a mission, what a mission is all about, and the Gospel. These are all things you *need* to know and understand prior to serving a mission. There are many other things that are important and that every missionary *should* know prior to serving their mission. Preparing for a mission is at least as important as actually serving a mission, if not more important. Because of this, I could probably just write about mission preparation in this book, but there is more to a mission than just preparation. So, in this chapter I am going to highlight the things that I think are most important for your preparation as a missionary.

### Gain a Testimony

We talk about testimonies all the time. We even have a Sunday dedicated entirely to the sharing of testimonies. But what is so important about testimonies? A testimony is a verbal expression of the spiritual connection between you and God. What does that mean? When people undergo a process of conversion to a belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ as taught by the LDS Church, that process is a spiritual process. By saying it is a spiritual process I am implying that it is not a mental, physical, or even an emotional process. For the sake of explaining, imagine that humans are made up of multiple parts: a mental part, or the functioning of the thought processes; a physical part which is the physiological functioning of the body; an emotional part which includes our learned responses to stimuli that generally overcome our other senses in dealing with them; and our spiritual part or the spirit we truly are. Conversion, as I said, is a spiritual process. It involves the Holy Ghost conveying the truthfulness of the message to the individual. Now, spiritually we all knew this Gospel before coming to this Earth. To what degree varies, but we were all aware of the Gospel in the Pre-Existence. Thus, a testimony, in a sense, is a re-opening of the spiritual connection that already existed between you and your Heavenly Father. This re-opening of the spiritual connection is performed by the Holy Ghost.

Why is a testimony important to a missionary? As a missionary, your job is to teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to facilitate the

conversion process. Why are you not the ‘converter’? Though you may be able to physically touch an individual, you may be able to force them to think (difficult but not entirely impossible), and you may get them to feel your message, you cannot get them to recognize spiritual truths without the help of the Holy Ghost.

What implications does this have for the missionary? First, the missionary must be humble and carry the Holy Ghost with him if he is to help others feel the influence of the Holy Ghost. Second, the missionary must have a testimony of his own. Why? You can’t convince someone mentally that the Church is true; I talked about this in the first chapter when I talked about bashing. If they don’t want to hear it or accept it, they won’t. Some major religions have tried to convince people that their religion is true by using force (Catholics and Muslims). This typically results in acceptance because the alternative is death. But, those that convert often continue to believe their old beliefs and simply incorporate their old beliefs into the new religion in a way that the new religion ends up accepting. (Halloween and All Souls Day are good examples of this). So, what have you really accomplished by forcing someone to believe the way you do? Nothing. You can manipulate people emotionally into believing that the Church is true, but this is not a lasting testimony. Eventually, (when their testimony is tested) people come to realize that their testimony was/is based on their feelings toward someone and not on a deeply rooted faith or knowledge. A testimony based on emotions is just as fleeting as are many emotions. The only way a true conversion will work is if it is a spiritual conversion.

How does a missionary’s testimony relate to this? A testimony founded on spiritual knowledge and spiritual conversion can be shared with others. The sharing of a spiritual testimony has the power to touch people at the spiritual level and makes way for the Holy Ghost to do the same. Why or how this works, I’m really not sure. But I am sure it works. When someone wants to hear the Gospel and hears someone bear a truly spiritual testimony of the truthfulness of the Gospel and express their faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Ghost is present and is able to touch people in a way nothing else can. Thus, a testimony is one of the most powerful weapons that you, as a missionary, can use. Testimonies, as a matter of fact, have been compared by prophets to arrows and swords; very powerful weapons indeed. Thus, missionaries must have a testimony.

If you are reading this prior to serving a mission and are a little worried about the fact that you do not have a testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, this does not mean you shouldn't serve a mission. I am including testimonies in the preparation part of this book because that is what you should be doing prior to serving a mission. If you remember the earlier discussion of motivations then, if you really think about it, the only reason you should be serving a mission is to share your testimony. If you are correctly motivated to serve a mission, your motivation is coming from having a testimony; a testimony so powerful you cannot stand to let anyone not hear your testimony.

Interestingly, there is a common criticism of the Church's particular approach to the phenomenon of a testimony. Sometimes individuals will tell you a testimony founded on a feeling is not a real foundation for a testimony (feelings, after all, are generally how we sense the presence of the Holy Ghost). Is this true? This leads me to another parable.

I call this parable the 'Faith-Bridge' parable. Imagine that you are standing on one side of a great river. The side you are on represents non-spiritual life. The other side represents spiritual life. Initially, as most do, to get across this river, you are going to build a bridge. That bridge is faith. You anchor your faith the best you can, but it is likely not solid all the way to the bedrock beneath the river; it is likely not a perfect knowledge. Your faith, like the bridge, spans a gap. The gap that it spans is knowledge. All the water coming down that river represents knowledge. Not just spiritual knowledge, not just worldly knowledge, but all knowledge. In seeking a spiritual life, you cross the gap initially on whatever bridge you are able to build, but ideally you will continue to build your bridge until your connection between the non-spiritual and the spiritual is no longer a bridge but a damn that is anchored deep in the bedrock of the river and saves the knowledge that is worth saving while letting the rest (the worthless knowledge) go on down the river. A damn that has a solid foundation is a much better way to cross a gaping canyon than is a bridge. That is not to say that the bridge can't hold your weight. For most people, a bridge is probably the best they will do in this life. It may be a little scary to try to cross it sometimes, but with constant upkeep and improvement, anyone's bridge can become sturdy. And, of course, any damn can give way as well; but a damn has a much surer foundation for crossing the gap of knowledge. This is where

the criticism of not basing your testimony on knowledge falls apart. If you initially gain a testimony based on faith (build a bridge), but then build upon it until it has a solid foundation built upon knowledge, you won't go wrong.

Let me reiterate my point. Why must you have a testimony? First, when someone questions you and your beliefs or wants to 'bash' about beliefs and the scriptures, you will not be swayed; you will not waver. Having a testimony will give the assurance you need to know that what you are teaching is true. Second, you must be able to share your conviction of the truthfulness of the gospel with those you come in contact with or those that you teach in order to bring the Holy Ghost into your discussions. Third, the Holy Ghost is the means of spiritual conversion. Without Him on your side, you are left to your own abilities, which I do not recommend.

### **Worthiness**

What about worthiness? All major sins should be resolved prior to your mission. Why? One, if you want to have the Spirit with you for protection or inspiration, you need to be worthy of it. Two, if you want the Spirit to manifest the truth of your testimony to the people you teach, you must be worthy. And three, the guilt you will feel because of your sins often will distract you so much you will be unable to focus on the work at hand. If you want to be successful; if you want to have the spirit; if you want to accomplish your purpose in serving a mission – be worthy to serve.

Just a couple more things to say about this. First, an anecdote. A member of the ward where I grew up served as a mission president for a few years and afterward he often related what he would do when new missionaries would arrive. He would ask them if they had any excess baggage. He would go on to explain... Excess baggage was the sins they had not resolved with Priesthood authorities prior to arriving in his mission. If they did have excess baggage and he, not knowing that they did, decided to send them to one of the more violent parts of the mission (trust me, there were very dangerous areas in his mission), would they have the protection the Holy Ghost can offer? What would happen to them? Though this may be a fear-based means of encouraging an individual to repent, if fear is what it takes, so be it. He wanted to drive home the necessity of worthiness. It is vitally important that you are worthy while on your mission.

I don't necessarily agree that scaring people into repentance is the best way. I would hope that you first choose not to sin. But if you have chosen to sin, understand this: Repenting is the best way for you to return to the presence of God and to have the Holy Ghost as your constant companion. I would hope that these are things you want. If not, I don't know that repentance can be made enticing enough for you to suffer through it. In that case, you really are in a sad state of affairs.

The last thing I want to mention regarding worthiness is probably one of the most common problems missionaries have – moral worthiness. The topic of moral worthiness is an important one. I wish it were not as related to missionary work as it is. However, because it is not necessarily the focus of our discussion at the present, I have included a discussion of moral worthiness in an essay at the back of the book (see Appendices A & B). It should help explain where you should be and what you should and should not be doing.

### **Future plans and finances**

It seems to me that, of the missionaries that I have known, many hadn't really given any thought to what they were going to do after their mission. Sure, there are some missionaries that receive scholarships to universities and simply put those on hold for two years. But, many missionaries seem to see missions as an end in themselves. That may sound kind of strange, but let me explain. You see, as humans, we generally need to have some sort of a plan in mind. We like to know where we are going. However, we are not always very good at seeing the long-term nor planning for it. This happened to me. Though the University of Utah was graciously willing to hold my scholarship for two years, I had no idea what I wanted to do with myself after I came home from my mission. All of my life I had simply planned on going on a mission without any thought of what to do afterward. The mission seemed to be the end goal. My goal here is to make you aware of a deficiency in planning on the part of many missionaries. The mission is not forever – though it may feel that way sometimes. The mission does end and you should have plans for afterward. Also, this does not mean that you should spend your entire mission preparing for any plans you have made for after your mission. While on your mission, you are a missionary. However, before leaving for your mission you should have set forth some plans; all are subject to change, but you should have some regardless.

At this point, it might seem like I am going to tell you what kinds of plans you should have. Nope. Whether you are planning to go to college, join your father in his company, become a plumber and go to trade school, develop a new software product that makes you a millionaire overnight, I don't think it matters. You should simply take some thought for the 'morrow'. This does go against a scriptural teaching of Christ superficially, but that scripture must be taken in context. He says 'Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.' (Matthew 6:34). I would submit that this scripture has two possible definitions. One, while on your mission, do not *worry* about tomorrow or what is going to happen *after* your mission. The key word here is 'worry'. I don't believe Christ is suggesting we simply do not plan for tomorrow, I think he is telling us to worry about the day when the day comes. What good does it do us to worry about something that we can do nothing about? Two, do not worry period. I don't believe Christ is saying that life is short so we should eat, drink and be merry. Nor is he saying, do not plan for the future. I think his point is, live in the present. Psychologically speaking, this is probably the healthiest thing any of us can do for ourselves.

If we aren't supposed to live in the future, neither are we supposed to live in the past. There were several missionaries on my mission that seemed to be stuck in the past. All they could talk about was what they had accomplished; either in high school athletics or things they had done at home. I hated listening to them. It drove me nuts. I don't think they realized that I didn't really care much about their past. Who are they today? What potential does their future hold? Many people seem to glorify their past. This has become so common that there is even a name for it, 'The Glory Days'. In my opinion, it is a sad state of affairs when your greatest glory is in your past. When I came to this realization, I turned what I had learned into a quaint little saying that I am quite proud of:

*"There should never be greater glory in your past than in your future."*

People accomplish something great at some point and they want everyone to recognize them for it for the rest of their lives. Well, that's great you accomplished something wonderful, but is that who you are? Are you that wonderful thing you accomplished? Or are you the individual that accomplished something wonderful but moved on? What

a sad lot in life to see your life as simply a series of accomplishments. We are not simply what we have done. We are our past and our potential for the future. That is the beauty of humanity. We can learn from our mistakes and go on to greater and greater glory. The greatest glory we know of is attaining Godhood. However, we do not know if this is the end all. We believe God's glory continues to grow forever. In other words, God's glory is constantly becoming better. God does not live in the past. He lives in the now and moves toward the future. He is aware of the past and He uses that as a guide for the future and the present, but He does not thrive off his past accomplishments and solely receive glory for them. He receives glory for who He is today and what He is and what He will become. He is more than his past. He is his past and his potential for the future. And that is what you should be.

As far as planning for your future goes, I would hope you see the mission as a stepping stone and not as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. The mission is not an end. As a matter of fact, for many missionaries and returned missionaries, it is just the beginning. Before you leave on your mission, think about what it is you want to do when you come home. Take some thought for tomorrow, you will not regret it.

One last thought... It may be a good idea to save up and put aside a little bit of money for when you get home. Chances are, all those clothes you left at home will not only be out of style but will have been stolen by your siblings the day you left for the MTC. That's what my brother did (thanks Mark!). When you get home, go shopping and buy some new clothes.

A friend of mine had another wonderful idea that is highly relevant to today's modern age. He recommended getting one or two credit cards prior to leaving. Then, instead of using them, throw them away and simply build your credit. This will give you two beautiful years of credit history which is a large factor in one's credit rating. Though credit may not seem important before your mission, once you get home and decide that you want to buy a car or apply for any other type of loan, you will have a credit history. However, I would caution you to do just as was said here: do not keep the cards and use them during your mission. Throw them away. Credit is a good thing to have, but credit card debt is akin to sin – it will hound you day and night and can even ruin your life. If you are strong-willed enough to be able to apply for a credit card or two and then throw them away, this will greatly help your future as a consumer.

## The Temple

Essential to anyone's preparation for a mission is receiving their temple endowment. This is an exciting and sacred opportunity. However, this is, in my experience, one of the most difficult experiences for many members of the Church. Why? Because what takes place inside the temple is very different from the Church meetings you are used to. That would be okay if you were prepared for what was going to take place. By no means am I implying that the Church does not try to prepare individuals for what takes place inside the temple. However, many members of the Church are under the impression that, from the moment you walk inside the doors of the temple until you walk back out, it is all sacred and must not be discussed outside the temple. For this reason, they are unwilling to prepare individuals who are going through the temple by telling them what to expect. This is, in my opinion, a great disservice to the individual that is going to go through the temple.

The temple endowment itself specifies the things that cannot and must not be revealed. There are activities that take place inside the temple that are sacred, which means they should not be 'thrown before swine' (Matthew 7:6) or told to just anyone. But, for those who are going to participate in the temple endowment, they should be made aware of what to expect. Why? Because the covenants that are made in the temple are very serious covenants. They should not be entered into lightheartedly or wantonly or without forethought. I do not believe it is fair to the individual who is considering going through the temple to not be informed of the gravity of the covenants that are going to be made. If an individual is not aware of the covenants they are making and then begins the temple endowment, they may choose not to accept those covenants. Or worse, they may merely accept these sacred covenants to avoid looking dumb or out of social pressure and never live up to them. Also, to plan on the individual just accepting the temple endowment because their entire family is there is not very considerate of the individual receiving their endowment. Once someone has started the endowment, it is very unlikely they are going to stop it. Which means, even if they decide they don't want to make those covenants, the pressure of being in the situation is going to prevent them from saying no. A possible outcome is that they will make a sacred covenant without any foreknowledge of what they were doing and perhaps against their will. This goes against everything our Church stands for. We should not make decisions without knowing what we are getting ourselves into it.

Please don't misunderstand me. I am not trying to scare anyone away from going through the temple. I love the temple. But I think the reason I love the temple is because I committed myself to gaining an understanding of what it is we do in the temple. It has taken me years of continued temple attendance to come to the understanding I now have. I don't claim to understand everything that takes place in the temple, but even with my rudimentary understanding of the temple, it is exciting to go to the temple because it makes sense.

The temple should make sense to people. If you are ever involved in the preparation of an individual that is going to go through the temple, make sure they are prepared and aware of the covenants they are about to make. If you don't feel you can do an adequate job of preparing them, let them read this section in this book. Hopefully it will help the temple make sense to the initiate (person going through the temple).

To explain what takes place in the temple, I am going to break it up into three sections: Why we go for ourselves, what we do there and why we continue to go later.

### Why we go for ourselves...

To understand why we go to the temple for ourselves, we need to understand several things about the nature of the temple and what it is we do and receive there. To explain this I'm going to use a bit of imagery. Imagine a beautiful castle, that's right a castle, like something from a King Arthur story. Castles are generally surrounded with barriers with the idea of keeping out those that don't belong within. The walls, moat, towers, drawbridge, portcullis, and guards are all in place for protection. To enter the castle or kingdom, you must prove that you belong there. The guards or sentinels that determine whether or not you can enter determine your right to enter based upon certain requirements: a sign, a symbol, certain clothing, or even passwords.

Our Heavenly Father lives in a Kingdom, a Celestial Kingdom. Granted it probably doesn't look exactly like the castle you pictured, but he literally has a kingdom where he lives. To gain access to that Kingdom, you must pass the guards (angels) who stand as sentinels, giving them the key tokens, signs and symbols. If you don't have the right password, sign or symbol, you are not allowed to enter. We all want to return to our Father's kingdom, though we won't necessarily live there forever (for we will have our own Celestial Kingdom to inhabit), nevertheless, we will need the correct passwords, tokens, or symbols to

get past the angels. Those tokens, passwords and symbols are taught and given in the temple. This is why we go to the temple for our own endowment – to get this information and training. Assuming that we all desire to return to the Celestial Kingdom, to prove to the angels/sentinels we belong there, we need to have the correct information. Endowment means gift and it is just that, a gift of knowledge; the knowledge necessary to get past the angels who stand as guards and into the Celestial Kingdom.

What do we do in the temple? Once we understand the reason for going as outlined above, what we do there doesn't seem quite so . . . strange. Let me take you step by step through the endowment and temple experience (don't worry endowed members, I won't reveal anything I'm not supposed to) relating it to what we just learned about the purpose of the temple.

We begin with **washings and anointings**. Coming from the outside world, we are not perfectly clean in a spiritual sense to enter into the presence of our Heavenly Father. We therefore undergo a ritual cleansing. During this ceremony, different parts of our body are symbolically cleansed or washed with water. After having been cleansed, we are then anointed with oil and blessed, setting us apart from the unclean and unprepared. Also, we are anointed with oil to become Kings and Priests (Queens and Priestesses for women) unto the Most High God.

After having been cleansed and blessed, we are given a **new name**. We take upon ourselves a new name when we are baptized, the name of Christ, representing our change in life and devotion. I can only assume this new name has similar meaning, but like many of the other rituals and symbols of the temple, I cannot pretend to explain their meaning. As a matter of fact, the Church prefers to let the members find their own meaning in the symbols they encounter in the temple. Therefore, I will only attempt to explain the very most basic elements of the temple ceremony so that those preparing to enter the temple will be prepared for those things that await them.

After we receive the new name, we proceed to the **endowment**. The endowment is a ceremony of instruction during which we receive the passwords, tokens, signs and symbols that are necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of our Heavenly Father. Remember how we talked about having the password or symbol that will get us past the guards and into the castle? The endowment is the part of the temple ceremony

where we learn the passwords and symbols. Everyone in the session dresses in identical clothing. This clothing relates to the ceremony. At the end of the ceremony, our newly-gained knowledge is tested by an individual who represents the Lord. Don't worry; you will pass the test because there are people there that make sure you will pass the test. If you forget the passwords and symbols, they will help you remember them. Eventually, it is assumed you will learn them, but the temple workers will always be there to assist you because the passwords and symbols must be given and spoken exactly. When we pass the tests for our new knowledge, we are allowed to enter the Celestial Room, representing our Father's Kingdom. This is essentially the endowment ceremony. It is a simple ceremony but can be a little overwhelming the first time you experience it. Yet, there is no reason to be nervous, for there are many there who are more than willing to help you; and, if at any time you don't feel comfortable or if you feel a little nervous, you can leave or find a room to rest, relax, and meditate. The temple is for instruction and ordinance purposes. Ordinances are for us. Remember, no one is forcing you to go through with this. It is all of your own free will and choice.

There are two things I must add to make an introduction to the temple complete. First, you need to understand that the first time is a little overwhelming and maybe even a little surprising. Nevertheless, the only way to really understand what is going on there and to help it make sense for you is to *go back*; become comfortable with what is happening, and spend the time necessary to understand what is taking place. I usually explain the importance of returning often to the temple by using another example. If you want to learn a language, where is the best place to go? Where that language is spoken, of course. So, if you want to learn God's language, where should you go? To God's school. God's school is the temple. Inside the temple, the language God uses to communicate with men – symbols – are presented to us. The only way to truly come to understand the symbols is to study them. To study them we must go back often.

Second, there are also some very serious **covenants** (promises between us and the Lord) we make during the endowment ceremony. Though these covenants are sacred and are not to be revealed outside the temple, they are covenants that members of the church have heard. These promises include obeying the commandments of God,

being willing to sacrifice everything we have for God and His Church, and keeping ourselves morally and spiritually clean.

Once we have gone for ourselves, we must realize our temple worship has just begun. There are many that have died who have not had the experience of the temple. They still need the blessings of the temple. When we understand better what it is we are doing at the temple, we should not overlook our reasons for going back and should be willing to serve those individuals that need us to stand in as proxies for them. At times it is a great blessing just to go with the thought of serving others.

That, in a nutshell, is the temple experience. Most everyone is given a temple preparation class prior to going to the temple. That should help in your preparation. The reason I have taken it upon myself to go through all of this is because the temple should be an enlightening experience. I have spoken with many members who felt they were not well-enough prepared going through the temple their first time. Those I have shared this information with prior to their initial temple visit informed me that this information helped them make sense of the temple and the experience seemed a better experience overall than it was compared to those less prepared. Of course, no one ever claims they understood everything, nor did I say I could explain everything that goes on in the temple. I just believe this to be a simple but accurate way of understanding the *purpose* of the temple and a good explanation of what we do there. If you have any more questions regarding what I have said, please ask a parent or bishop or member of the stake presidency. They will most likely be able to answer any questions my thoughts may have raised. I love going to the temple. But I love it even more now that I have a rudimentary understanding of it.

## Farewells

Did you know that mission farewells are not supposed to be a big long ‘praise-the-missionary cry-fest’?<sup>4</sup> The purpose of a missionary farewell is not necessarily to say goodbye, but for the missionary to share his testimony with his home congregation. In a sense, this is saying goodbye. What the missionary is supposed to do in a farewell is let everyone know where he is going, that he is excited to be going

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<sup>4</sup> Gordon B. Hinckley, “To Men of the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 56.

there, and then tell them why. Hopefully we all know the why by now. This is the way that a missionary is supposed to be sent off.

Farewells should not be lengthy, drawn-out ‘talks’ about how much every member of the person’s family is going to miss him. In a sacrament meeting, the talks are supposed to be edifying and uplifting. That means that they are supposed to teach us something or share with us a testimony. If a talk does not do one of those two things, it really isn’t appropriate for sacrament meeting.

I think it is nice many wards and branches let the missionary have some say in who will speak and the musical numbers to be sung. But, keep in mind that mission farewells are not mandatory in the Church and they should have a purpose other than publicly saying goodbye. It should be edifying and uplifting. So, plan your farewell with this in mind.<sup>5</sup>

## Setting a mission goal

We have talked about reasons for serving a mission, worthiness, and ways in which you should be preparing yourself. I think it is also important you have a goal for your mission. If you don’t have a stated reason for going on a mission, a goal you can review and evaluate your performance on everyday, what are you are trying to do? Don’t ask me when I saw it or how I remember this, but I can tell you these lines from *Alice in Wonderland* have stuck in my mind for years because of the relevance they have for goals. Alice is semi-lost in the woods and the Cheshire Cat appears. She asks him, “I just wanted to ask you which way I ought to go.” The Cat, with his ever-widening grin, replies, “Well, that depends on where you want to get to.” This is the point where Alice gets herself in to trouble, she doesn’t have a goal in mind, “Oh, it really doesn't matter, as long as I g...” But before she can get out the rest of it, the Cheshire Cat replies, “Then it really doesn't matter which way you go!”<sup>6</sup> The point is, if you don’t care what you accomplish on your mission, just so long as you serve a mission, then it really won’t matter to you what you do while you are there. In my opinion, this is scary.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 112

<sup>6</sup> Walt Disney script for *Alice in Wonderland*. Found on a website: <http://www.student.kun.nl/Lderooy/index.html?books/script.html>

Without a focused goal, we can, will, and do go wherever the wind takes us. You should always have a goal.

So, I am recommending you set a goal, or call it a mission statement if you'd like, and review it everyday of your mission. You will then have a standard by which to compare your progress and achievement. Everyday of your mission you can ask yourself how you've done.

Bruce R. McConkie wrote something he calls 'My Missionary Commission'<sup>7</sup>. It isn't necessarily a goal, but more like a mission statement:

I am called of God. My authority is above that of the kings of the earth, by revelation I have been selected as a personal representative of the Lord, Jesus Christ. He is my master and he has chosen me to represent him, to stand in his place, to say and do what he himself would say and do if he personally were ministering to the very people to whom he has sent me. My voice is his voice, and my acts are his acts. My words are his words and my doctrine is his doctrine. My commission is to do what he wants done, to say what he wants said, to be a living modern witness in word and deed – of the divinity of his great and marvelous latter day work. How great is my calling!

I think it is a good mission statement and has some elements in it by which you can measure your missionary efforts – to say and do what Christ would, to do what he wants you to do, etc. You can choose to use this, but I would recommend spending some time thinking about your mission. Think about what it is you want to accomplish by serving a mission. Think about what a mission is all about. Now, take the time to write down what it is you want to accomplish. These goals may change half way through your mission or every few months, but I don't think that matters. What I do believe matters is that you have something toward which to work.

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<sup>7</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, Harvester Page 6, Originally titled: My 1963 Missionary Commission

Don't end up like Alice, wandering without a real purpose or focus. If you set goals from the beginning of your mission and do your best to accomplish them, *you will be responsible for your mission and your success.*

## Chapter 4: The Number One Principle of Missions

Prior to entering the MTC, you need to understand the number one principle of a mission. The Number One Principle of missions and missionary work is: ***You are on a mission because you choose to be.*** For some reason a lot of missionaries don't realize that you can leave whenever you want. Do you understand that? I mean, really? No one is forcing you to go on a mission or to stay on a mission.

Often, when missionaries arrive at the MTC, they feel like they are fenced in. Well, there is a fence around the MTC. But whether or not this fence is designed to keep you in or keep other people out is all a matter of perspective. If you feel like you cannot walk out of the MTC, you are wrong. At any given point of any day that you are there, you can literally get up, walk out of a class, a Church Meeting, a fireside, you name it, and walk right off the MTC grounds and go home. No one is going to stop you.

Now, if I am going to be completely honest, I must counter this argument from the other side. Sure, no one is going to stop you, but it sure feels like you can't leave. Well, I don't think it would be in the Church's best interest to have signs around the MTC that say, 'Please Leave' or 'Please Go Home' or 'We don't really care whether you are here or not'. None of those statements is true. You see, the Church is under the understanding that you are on a mission *willingly*. They believe that you want to be there. After all, if you don't, why are you there?

With how much I have talked about wanting, you should understand by now that wanting something is a much better motivator than being forced to do something. I am sure that it does occur to them that some missionaries do not feel that way, but the plain and simple truth is that you are serving willingly, even if social pressure seems to be forcing you to serve at times.

An example as to the importance of an understanding of this principle: My very first companion was from Provo. He lived less than a mile from the MTC. At any given point he could have left and walked home. What's more, he could have left, walked home, and even walked back without anybody really knowing it. What was keeping him there? Was it the gates? The gates are always wide open. Was it the Church

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keeping guard? There are no visible guards at the MTC. Was it a feeling that he could not leave? Perhaps. But I think it was him finally coming to a realization that he could leave but he chose to come on a mission and for that reason he was going to stay.

Of course, I left out the best part of the story. My first companion did actually leave, several times even. He had some pretty bad toothaches and had to go to the dentist. Because his family dentist was about three minutes away in a car, the MTC President okayed him to be picked up by his mother and go to his dentist. On the way back from his root canal – he had to have a root canal, that seems a worthy and punishing reason to leave – he had offered to stop by Arby's and pick up everyone in the district roast beef sandwiches and Mountain Dew. Ohh the celebration we had. But that is beside the point (though a funny story). As a missionary, you need to understand that serving a mission is a choice-you are not forced to go nor do you have to stay. Once you understand this, you will quit fighting a desire to leave because you will realize that you are there of your own will and choice.

## **Complaining**

I think a lot of people reading this book are going to say, “Well, that’s obvious. Of course I am serving willingly.” If this concept is so obvious, why put it in a book about missions? Because during my mission I encountered a lot of missionaries that complained about being on a mission.

Have you ever met anyone that complains a lot? Are you someone that complains a lot? Do you know the type of person that I am talking about? The person that is always pointing out the negative about everything they do and every situation that they are in; the person that is renowned for having a negative attitude about everything.

I can’t stand complainers. I don’t understand why they feel that they have the right to complain. The way I see it, there are only two things that we HAVE to do in life:

1. We have to maintain the skin color that we were born with (though this may change in the future).
2. And, we have to die.

If there are only two things that we have to do in life, everything else we do is a choice, right? I mean, think about it this way...you don't have to eat, you don't have to breathe, you don't even have to go to the bathroom. Of course, if you don't do any of these things, you will die, but that is a natural consequence of your decision. The point is, we pretty much get to choose everything that happens to us in life. Now, if we get to choose just about everything that happens to us in our life, what is the point of complaining about our choices?

Let me see if I can explain how the logic works. Because we have the alternative of not doing something (this is almost always the case because we can choose to die as well), almost all of our decisions end up being our choice. If it is our choice, this means that we can change our mind at any time. If we can change our mind whenever we want, then, if we don't like the results of our decision, we have several options: First, we can complain about it. Second, we can change it. Or third, we can live with it. I would argue that the first option is worthless. What good does it do to complain? You see, it really is your choice. But keep in mind that you have chosen the consequences as well. If you don't like the consequences, you can make everyone else around you suffer by complaining about the consequences; but it does not do you or anyone else around you any good to complain. You can choose to change your decision and opt for the other option. In my mind, rational thinking and logic encourage the last two options. If you made the decision, then you have no right to complain. Since we make all of our decisions, we should never be complaining. We should either choose the other alternative, or make the best of the situation.

How does this relate to missions? Remember principle number one? Yeah, well, it's your decision. I don't care how much pressure your parents are applying, you do not have to go. If your parents warn you that they will disown you and even disinherit you, you still do not have to go. If your parents are insane and threaten to kill you, you still do not have to go. You are over 18 and, by the law of the land, are an adult. If you do not want to serve a mission, then don't. If you are on a mission and realize that you don't want to be there, go home. But, if you choose to serve a mission (which, if you are on one, it is safe to assume that you did) *do not complain*. All that your complaining does is makes the mission harder for you and everyone else around you. It does no one any good. Complaining is not of God. Complaining tears people down and ruins motivation. You made the decision. Live with the consequences or

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leave. Complaining is not an option.

## Chapter 5: Missionaries and Girlfriends

I feel that this topic is sufficiently important for me to dedicate an entire chapter to it because of how much of a missionary's time girlfriends *can* take. I also recognize that the subject of girlfriends can be and often is a very controversial subject. No one seems to want take a stand and say, "Elder, you shouldn't have a girlfriend while on your mission (or prior to your mission for that matter)". Regardless of the controversy, this is a book about mission life for missionaries by a missionary; I would be crazy to think that girlfriends are not at all important to or related to missionary life. For that reason, I believe most missionaries would appreciate someone examining the types of relationships that missionaries might have and the possible outcomes. At least in my case, I think it would have been nice to know what other missionaries experiences had been regarding their girlfriends.

Thus, the question, "What really happens if you have a girlfriend waiting for you while you are on your mission?" is, I think, an important question. I don't think it is 100% predictable. I do think, however, that there are some patterns that are worth discussing. What I intend to do is discuss some of these patterns and relate the outcomes to them based upon *my experiences* in the mission field. I emphasize 'my experiences' here because, much to my chagrin, I have not been able to locate any actual statistics on missionaries and their girlfriends. I hope to eventually gather some statistics on types of relationships and outcomes, but have been unable to as of yet.

Because I treat issues of intimacy and dating elsewhere (see Appendices A & B respectively), I will deal strictly with having a girlfriend either pre-mission or during your mission in this chapter. My goal is to present the different possible situations and relationships with their corresponding positives and negatives. However, I must admit that I am biased as a result of my own experiences; a bias I will explain below.

### Missionary/Girlfriend Categories

What are the possible relationship types between missionaries and girlfriends? For ease of reference, I'm going to give the categories of missionary/girlfriend relationships names:

**1. The Done Deal** – This is the missionary that actually proposed to his sweetheart before he left. The wedding announcements, the reception center reservation, the honeymoon, they are all arranged. The wedding ring has been purchased. The groom is just taking a two-year hiatus creating a very long engagement.

a. **Positive aspect of this type of relationship:** The women where you will be serving will not interest you – which is one less temptation to worry about. Your girlfriend/fiancé has made a commitment and since you have made one too, if you are both serious about this, you don't have anything to worry about. She's not going to be dating anyone, just saving up money or getting her degree or waiting and you won't be dating anyone either.

b. **Negative aspect of this type of relationship:** First, People change. Two years is a very long time. Perhaps you are a match made in heaven (boy I hate to say that) and this was always meant to be, perhaps not. It isn't really kind of me to seed doubts in your mind, nor to prick your faith, but I'm just trying to make things clear for you. Second, when you wager more, you stand to lose more. In other words, you are exposed emotionally. You are heavily invested in this relationship and if things don't work out, you are likely to suffer much more than other missionaries that have a more non-committal relationship.

c. **Likely outcome of this type of relationship:** Let me remind you that any probabilities that I give are strictly based upon my experiences and not on a study or any statistical data. Anyway, based upon my experiences, these types of relationships can be wonderfully supportive and generally result in marriage. The missionaries that I knew in this situation (not many) all carried through with their intentions. Where the marriages are today, I am none the wiser. But they all married their fiancés. Just because the ones that I knew followed through, does not mean that it is a sure thing, but if I had to guess, I would say it is pretty likely this type of relationship will work out.

**2. The PDS Missionary (Pretty Dang Sure)** – This is the missionary that gave his sweetheart a promise ring and she actually promised him that she *would* wait for him. They think that things will work out and they really want them to. I've included in this category both girlfriends that promise not to date anyone else and those that say they will date others. The reasoning behind putting them into the same

group is that, in my experience, the majority of the girls that promised not to date began dating soon after their missionary left anyway, so they inevitably ended up in the same category. The only differences would be the initial plan and that some actually inform ‘their’ missionary that they are dating and some do not.

a. **Positive aspects of this type of relationship:**

- i. The first positive aspect is a little confusing, but I will see if I can explain it. Psychologically (that means, in your head), people like and even need to feel wanted. They want to believe that other people are thinking about them. Generally speaking, most people spend the majority of their time thinking about themselves. *But* (and that is a huge ‘but’), humans do think about others at times. This feeling of being loved and cared about and wanted is not a bad thing. Like I said before, people want it and even need it to be psychologically healthy. So, having a girlfriend at home that you *believe* is waiting for you and thinking about you is going to fill this desire.
- ii. The second positive aspect is that, if she is in to this sort of thing, she will send you care packages. Care packages are cool! They usually include candy and food and ties and nifty stickers and all of the other menial stuff that you really don’t need but kind of want. Also, this ties into the first reason that I gave – you feel like someone is thinking about you.
- iii. The third positive aspect about this is that letters received in the mission are often interpreted as a system of ranking a missionary by other missionaries. The more letters you receive, the higher your status of importance in the ‘home world’ in the eyes of other missionaries. And, letters from a girlfriend are probably considered worth 5 or 6 letters from your family or other friends; so girlfriend’s letters will give you higher status among the other missionaries.
- iv. The fourth positive aspect of this is your emotional investment. As I see it, emotional investment is similar to faith. You do not have a perfect knowledge that she will wait for you, just like you do not have a

perfect knowledge of Christ. However, you want and hope that she will wait for you just like you want and hope that Christ did actually perform the atonement. So, emotional investment can actually help you grow spiritually.

- v. The fifth and final positive aspect of this type of relationship is the occasional ‘VCR pauses’. What I mean by this is that you can periodically think back to that time that you...well, you know what I mean. It is a good feeling to know that you have spent so much of your time and money with this individual and it makes you feel good inside to be able to think back to these times and remember the details. Ahhhh, how sweet.

b. **Negative aspects of this type of relationship:**

- i. Negative aspect number one is that you actually feel the need to have someone thinking about you while you are on your mission. Not only will this take up precious time that should be spent focused on your mission, but it will also distract you from the purpose of your mission. Though you may think it is nice to have someone thinking about you all the time, it is really quite egotistical and self-centered to think that she doesn’t have anything better to do. And, it is distracting.
- ii. Negative aspect number two is care packages and letters. Care packages and letters are distracting. Don’t get me wrong; there is nothing wrong with receiving important news from home or even inspiring news from home. But, romantic news from home and page after page of ‘I miss you’s’ are not going to help you focus on your mission. You have a calling to perform, a job to do, a responsibility that needs to be met. How are all of these letters and care packages going to help you to go about doing that? They are not.
- iii. The third negative aspect about the PDS type relationship is the emotional investment. Though this investment isn’t near that of the Done Deal

missionary, you still feel the pangs of loss, rejection, anxiety, etc. when you aren't sure what is going on with your relationship and when things are not going well. Again, this is a distraction. *If* (mind you that is the biggest 'if' I have ever written), *if* you can keep all romance out of the letters and simply talk in terms of support and daily goings on, you might be able to categorize this as a supportive relationship. However, emotional relationships are such sensitive things that sometimes three weeks is way too long to wait to receive a response to the letter you wrote asking her a question (assuming that she responds when she receives it). Trying to maintain a relationship that was not deeply devoted to begin with over possibly thousands of miles is like trying to tell someone how to bake a cake one step at a time through the mail. The cake has already burnt to cinders before you can tell them to take it out of the oven. This is one of the biggest problems of trying to maintain a long-distance relationship. Unless you can talk on the phone for a while every day, it is nearly impossible to explain how you are feeling, what you are thinking, and how you meant something. In other words, maintaining a long-distance relationship through the mail is nearly impossible unless there is a major commitment to the relationship from both parties; but that is only typical of the Done Deal type missionary, not the PDS missionary.

- iv. The fourth, and final, negative reason is those VCR pauses. Again, you know what I am talking about. All of that time you spent filling your canteen (or should I say 'feeling' your 'canteen')... Pondering those memories is not conducive to the presence of the Spirit. VCR pauses will send the Holy Ghost a running. Unless, of course, you were only with this special soul of yours when you were in spiritual situations. This is highly unlikely, but possible, I guess.

Anyway, as negatives go, you have probably noticed that I actually just went right back through my list of positives and turned them all into negatives. And, I did all of the negatives last so they will stick in your mind longer. How cruel of me, no? The truth be said, I don't think that there is anything positive to having a long-distance, low-commitment relationship while on a mission. Ask yourself just a couple of questions if you don't believe me: "What good will it do me to try to maintain this relationship?" "Do I really want to marry her and will I feel the same way when I come home?" "How will she help me to be a better missionary?" Then, once you have answered all of these questions and deluded yourself to the point that you actually believe that things will work out and you two can pull it off, go back through and read the list of positives and negatives again...then make your decision.

c. **Likely Outcome of this type of relationship:** Solely based upon my experience, you will probably not have a 'girlfriend' when you get back. Think about this for a minute or two. She is serious enough about marriage to want to wait for someone (or so she says) for two years to get married. Come on! If she is that committed to getting married, why is she going to wait for you? Honestly, did you just think: "Because I'm the greatest guy in the world!" or how about, "Because we truly love each other." Give me a break. She wants to get married. She has a commitment from you for the second you get back, but that is two years away. People that are not members of our Church can usually wait that long to get married and not have a problem with it; they usually are engaged for at least a year anyway. But there is something about Mormons and marriage. Once they have decided to marry, with few exceptions, the date is set anywhere from 1 month to 9 months away. If she is that committed to marriage, she'll be married by the time you get back, count on it.

## **My Girlfriend Experience**

This seems like a good place to relate my mission girlfriend story. I had been in the mission field about a year when I called home for Christmas for the first time. I was speaking with my mother and asked her about my girlfriend. (Obviously I am including this anecdote under the PDS missionary category because this is the category I was in; probably why I am so bitter about it.) My mother informed me that my girlfriend was beginning to plan the details of our wedding. This kind of

excited me, until... my mother gave me some advice that I only realized later was good advice. She told me that it was probably in my best interest to get home and look around a little with my 'new eyes'. Hopefully, after two years of service to the Lord, I would have changed, at least a little bit. She wasn't against me marrying this girl, but she was not for me locking myself into a relationship that may not be right for me. She just wanted me to give it some time. Her advice really made me think about the relationship and whether I wanted it to continue. The relationship ultimately ended for reasons like those outlined above (she was committed to marriage, not to a specific missionary). My Mother's advice, however, did make it easier to take the loss when it did end.

You see, my girlfriend made it about one year before she stopped writing me without telling me why. I continued writing every other week, as I had for the first year of my mission. I waited three very long months before I decided in my mind that it wasn't worth it. I decided that I wanted nothing to do with someone that would not respond to my letters. I stopped writing her and decided that I would not date her even if she came back to me crawling on her knees. About a month after that decision, she sent me a strange letter telling me that she had bad memories from our relationship (I still don't know if I understand what that meant). I replied with something to the effect of: "Sorry you feel that way. I don't want to keep this relationship going anymore. Goodbye!" I thought that the freedom of deciding that I did not want that relationship anymore and that I was not going to write her anymore felt nice, but writing her off was one of the best feelings I had ever had. What a joy! She was gone and I could move on with my life.

Ironically, here I am telling you not to do what I did. And, on top of that, I am writing a book about what to do and it is not based entirely upon the path that I chose. I know that it is ironic. It is like listening to an ex-drug addict tell you not to do drugs; he made it, why can't you? Well, being on the other side of giving the advice is different. When you are the advice giver, you hope that your advice will help others not make the same mistakes you did and not have to suffer as much as you did. Also, I can't help but wonder why I think that my giving advice will do any good. I probably would not have listened to what I am saying right now before my mission. I probably would have said, "Well, he is just some old bitter fart that had his mission experience tainted by a lost love." Yeah, well, that's true. And, frankly, you are more than welcome to do the same. You are more than welcome to do whatever you want. No one is going to stop you. You are free to sin. You are free to make

wrong choices. You are free to be stupid. You are free to make bad decisions while on your mission. You are free to do whatever is your fancy. However, just like both Nephi (2 Nephi 33:14-15) and Moroni (Moroni 10:26-34) do in the Book of Mormon, you have been warned. You know the consequences of your actions. You may be free to perform the actions, but you do not get to determine the consequences of your actions. That is a natural law. That is one of the principles of human nature. That is the way things work. Life may seem kind and giving, but try screwing around with it and see what it does.

**3. The BYUer** (pronounced ‘be-why-you-er’) – This category of pre-missionary/girlfriend relationship is the type of relationship where you met her 2 months ago at BYU. Though she would never admit it, she thinks it’s cute and a power trip to have a relationship with you. She has power over you because you think you love her even though it’s probably strictly lust after you made out with her so much – got to fill that canteen, no? There isn’t much depth here and you both know it. But, you both wanted a relationship because it makes you feel secure. And, you were able to ‘make-out’ quite a bit...

a. **Positive Aspects of this type of relationship:** There are no positive aspects. Unless...unless you consider having filled your canteen a positive aspect. Or, this could be positive if you consider feeling like someone cares about you a positive aspect (see negative aspect #1 of the PDS missionary). But, in your case, she is just manipulating you, which is even worse.

b. **Negative Aspects of this type of relationship:** Well, first of all, you are being manipulated. She is the one that is benefiting from this relationship, if you call what she is receiving from this relationship ‘beneficial’. She likes feeling like she is in control and she is. Second, filling your canteen is probably one of the worst and most stupid things you can do before an intimacy drought. This would be comparable to say, eating a huge meal just before you begin your fast. When you do this, your stomach actually expands and then, when it is empty, it wants food. If you don’t eat a huge meal just before you fast, your stomach is not as large and will not want as much food, making it easier to fast. When you fill your canteen, you have gorged yourself on a pleasure that always demands more. It is like whetting your appetite or eating hors d’oeuvres, you are just beginning to get hungry, then you fast for two years (at least, you should be fasting). Filling your canteen will make it harder to serve your mission, at least initially. Third, see all of the

reasons I gave for the PDS missionary, they generally apply here as well. And fourth, if you met her at BYU and if you end up at the MTC in Provo, chances are you will try to spot her whenever you are outside. You may even write to her and encourage her to meet you on the temple grounds on a Sunday 'just by chance'. This is against the rules put in place by the Church and that you accepted by choosing to go on a mission. Enough is enough; you are just making it harder on yourself.

c. **Likely outcome of this type of relationship:** If this is you, know that you have a 1 in 100 chance she will wait for you. However, you do have a 20-30% chance she'll still be around...sending off missionaries and loving the power trip that she receives from it. Also, think about this (perhaps you should share what I am going to say with her): if she has sent off four or five more missionaries and done for them what she did for you, think about how much she has made-out over the last few years. Even if she is still around, is that someone who you would want to marry? She believes that she wants to marry, but she is really digging her own marital grave (see my essay on buying used merchandise in Appendix B).

**4. Kissing Buddies** – The majority of the relationship types you will find on your mission actually will fall into the PDS category. Most of the rest will be BYUers or The Wise. There are very few Kissing Buddies and Done Dealers. The Kissing Buddies were, at one point, pretty seriously involved (meaning that they were intimately involved in a romantic relationship) and, for whatever reason, the intimacy part ended. They decided to remain friends, which isn't very common as relationships go. Now, they find that they really care about each other. Think about you and your best, same-sex, friend. That is the type of relationship that they have, but they are of the opposite sex. They are concerned about the welfare of the other and want the best for them. If one or the other decides to marry someone else, they might feel a hint of disappointment, but they will actually be excited for them, hoping that it was the best thing that they could have done for themselves at that point.

a. **Positive Aspects of this type of relationship:** I don't know if this is necessarily a 'healthy' type of relationship, but I think the individuals involved with this type of relationship are going to be more focused on their missions because they worry for her about the same as they would a best-friend, not a girlfriend. It is good to hear from them but not torture if they don't write. These types of relationships also tend to focus on what is happening in the lives of the individuals rather than

on romance and love. Encouragement does actually seem to be the major element of these types of relationships. And, if the girl at home decides to marry, the Elder on his mission will support her in that. The only reason that he might become upset is if he doesn't like her choice of a husband (in the sense that he knew the guy or something). Otherwise, these types of relationships tend to be supportive.

b. **Negative Aspects of this type of relationship:** The only negative aspect I can think of with these types of relationships is that the missionary might be a bit more emotionally invested in the relationship than he would be with, say, relationships with his same-sex friends and that might make it a bit more difficult if she decides to marry. Otherwise, I think these types of relationship can actually be encouraging and helpful, though they can also be a bit distracting at times as well.

c. **Likely Outcome of this type of relationship:** Sadly, most of the missionaries I knew that were involved in this type of a relationship were not missionaries that I followed up with after my mission. If I am not mistaken, most of their kissing buddies were still around after their missions, but whether or not they married them, I am unaware. Hopefully I can get better data on this in the future, but right now I could not even begin to tell you the likely outcome of this type of a relationship in terms of marriage, etc.

**5. The Wise** – I am fully aware that by labeling this last type of missionary ‘The Wise’, I am revealing my personal bias. However, I can't help but recognize that these missionaries, the missionaries that did not have a girlfriend at home of any sort, were, in a sense, wiser than most other missionaries.

a. **Positive Aspects of this type of relationship:** First, you are able to focus more on the mission and what you are supposed to be doing. Second, you can be a means of support for (and secretly laugh at) the missionaries that got themselves tangled up with a girlfriend. This is probably always going to be needed. Third, if by considering yourself amongst the wise includes not having had intimate relationships with girlfriends prior to your mission, not only will you not be considered used merchandise (see Appendix B again), but you won't have to deal with repenting for any moral sins. As I see it, you are all around better off than those that have to deal with girlfriends. Lucky you.

b. **Negative Aspects of this type of relationship:** I'll let you know as soon as I come up with some.

c. **Likely Outcome of this type of relationship:** You will be more focused on your mission; that means being more focused on what it is you are supposed to be doing as a missionary. When you return from your mission, hopefully you will recognize that it is now okay to pursue relationships and consider marriage. I would just add that you should be careful. If you have not been involved in intimate relationships until after your mission, you are probably going to be a little bit behind everyone else in terms of knowing what to do and how to do it. This is not a bad thing; just try not to let anyone take advantage of it.

So, let me recapitulate what I have just gone over. There are five types of missionary/girlfriend relationships ranging from *The Done Deal* to *The Wise*. Each has its positives and each has its negatives. In some instances, girlfriends can actually be helpful. In most situations, they are very effective tools of Satan and serve as a great distraction. Are they evil? No. Are their intentions bad? No. They are just distracting from the main purpose of the mission, and that is something that Satan would want. So, even though the intent is good, the effects and outcome are typically not benefitting the work of God. Does this mean girlfriends on a mission are a good or bad thing? That is for you to decide. All I have said is that, depending on your specific situation, they can be beneficial or distracting.

Let me drop a caveat here: I am obviously biased. I was a PDS missionary. If you look at how much I have to say on PDS missionaries versus the others, you should understand why there is so much more. My addendum to the caveat is that, though I am biased, I am not bitter. The girl I was dating did what she did for whatever reason she did and that is the end of it. It was for the best anyway because I later found my wonderful wife. And, I do not live with regrets. What happened back then is in my past. In my opinion, this idea of not living with regrets is actually very important. The way I see it, and this is completely aside from most of the content matter of this book, is thus: If we have regrets, that means that we are not happy with who we are now because we wish to change something about the past. I am happy with who I am now. Have I led a perfect life? No. Then I have made mistakes? Plenty of them. Would I go back and change them? That would turn my perspective on my past into regret. You see, that particular path of mistakes and correct choices has led me to where I am today. And because I am happy with who I am today, I do not care to change the past. I have simply learned from my mistakes and moved on. This goes

for my mission and my decision to date before I went on my mission. If I had not done that, there is no way that I would have the perspective on life and dating that I do now. Of course, this is why I say that I am biased, because I do have a particular perspective on life and dating as a result of a failed relationship. And, even though I have tried to illustrate all of the types of relationships and the positives and negatives of each, this is done solely from my perspective.

Where am I going with this? Of course I think that my perspective is valid and a good one, otherwise I wouldn't write it down and share it with you. However, I do not think that it is a scientific approach, but that is for another time and another place.

Another point I feel is important to understand about girlfriends is something I have labeled 'indeterminacy'. Often times in these long-distance relationships there is a feeling of not knowing what the other person is thinking or feeling or even doing. Let me turn back to my example. As I mentioned, the girlfriend I had 'waiting' for me decided after nearly a year into my mission to stop writing me. Now, if she had been straightforward and had told me she did not want to write me anymore, I could have handled that. If she had told me she had met someone else and was getting married, I could have handled that. If she would have told me that my nose was too big and she finally realized that she didn't want to be with me because of that (Craguns typically have large noses, so this would be okay with me), I could have handled that. But, she didn't tell me why she stopped writing me. She left the relationship in a state of *indeterminacy*. Where the relationship had been was not certain. Where the relationship was, was not certain. Where the relationship was going, was not certain. Perhaps this is a difference between men and women. Perhaps men like to have things decided and women don't. I'm not really sure on this issue because, even though I am married to a woman, they are still pretty enigmatic. Either way, from what I have witnessed, men seem to like and even need certainty. Men like to know where they stand, where they have stood and where they will stand in the future. Thus, the worst possible thing you could do to a man is not tell him this. What my girlfriend did to me was probably one of the most cruel forms of torture known to mankind (I intentionally wrote 'man'kind, not peoplekind, because I am referring specifically to men). As I said before, men can typically handle something as long as it is solid, determined, and understood. Men don't do so well with the abstract at times, but they never do so well with the abstract in relationships.

One other thing, if you are still convinced that you are going to keep your relationship going while you serve your mission, at least have your girlfriend read the last paragraph and then get her to commit to tell you the truth always. This means, when she starts dating someone, when she gets engaged, etc., she is going to *immediately* tell you where you stand so that there is no sense of indeterminacy in your relationship. This is absolutely vital to the success of your mission. Indeterminacy in a relationship is more distracting than the relationship itself.

Okay. So we have talked about the different possibilities or types of relationships. I hope you understand that these are not meant to be all-inclusive, or cover all possible types of relationships. I am sure there are others that I am not aware of but hopefully will become aware of over time. The purpose of all of this is not to force my bias upon you but rather to help you understand some of the possibilities and the likely outcomes. I have not covered everything there is to cover about girlfriends. And, lastly, I want you to understand that there are other perspectives on girlfriends and missionaries. Not everyone feels that having a relationship while on your mission is a bad thing. Typically, these individuals ended up marrying the girl that waited for them. That is probably why their perspective is different than mine. Regardless of who is right or wrong, I would hope that you give this topic long and ponderous thought before making a decision that can have very serious and even eternal consequences. You hold the power of regret in your hands. When you make your decision, you will have to live with it forever. Make the right decision. No regrets!

## Chapter 6: The MTC

The MTC! ‘Missionary Training Camp’, right? Relax, it isn’t bad... for most missionaries. And it really isn’t that bad if you are prepared and know what to expect. With that in mind, I’ll do my best to explain what goes on in the MTC.

### Inside the MTC

So, what really goes on in the MTC? It’s not like this is a big secret or anything, but most people don’t seem to know what to expect. The first day at the MTC can be pretty emotional and overwhelming, especially for those of you leaving home for the first time. You will be saying goodbye to your family and friends for two years. The first letter of your last name will determine the time when your welcome meeting will take place. After a brief meeting with a large group of incoming missionaries, you say goodbye to your parents and/or loved ones, if they came, and then you head to your room to meet your companion. Of course, along the way you are inspected to make sure your grooming is in compliance with missionary standards. After that, you will learn the name of your companion and find out where your room is. Whether or not he will already have been there depends on whether or not his last name comes before yours.

Once you pass the inspections, you head to your room to unpack and become familiar with the schedule. The first few days seem to be transition time. You will meet your teachers and your branch president and the other members of your district. I distinctly remember a lot of free time the first few days because I mentioned how difficult it was in my journal. I said something to the effect of, “If they really wanted to make this transition easy, they wouldn’t give us any free time these first few days.” However, in retrospect, I think I understand why the schedule is set up the way it is. If they can get you to work through the feelings of not having your loved ones with you from the very beginning, then they – the leadership at the MTC – shouldn’t have to deal with those feelings later. Whether or not this is the true motivation is beyond me, but it seems to make sense.

After the first few days of adjusting, you will pretty much settle into a routine. You will get up at 6:00 AM daily and will begin classes

somewhere around 7:00 or 8:00. You will be in classes nearly all day, having three meals as breaks and on certain days you will have time to exercise. Your classes will end at 9:30 PM. This is your schedule five days of the week. On Sundays, you will not have your language classes but instead will have Church meetings and then will usually have a spirituality or gospel instruction class. There is one day during the week when you will have some preparation time. You will be expected to use this time to: write letters, clean your room, catch up on your studies, do your laundry, etc. That is your standard schedule.

Usually, every few weeks, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles or a member of the First Presidency will come talk on Sundays. Occasionally, there will be other special meetings, etc. But, generally speaking, this is what you can expect to be doing. A couple other things to note: The food lines are extraordinarily long, especially on fast Sunday. You'll just need to get used to it. And, some people love the food, some people hate it. Also, if you are in the MTC on a holiday, sometimes there will be special activities. But, if you are there for Christmas or for Mother's Day, you will not be allowed to call home because there are only one or two pay phones in the entire complex. There is no way they could let all the missionaries call home using the few pay phones they have. So, don't plan on it.

Finally, two points on just being a decent person. The rooms are decent (not luxurious) and the facilities are nice. Take care of them. I have to put in a plug here for something that drove me crazy while I was there. Remember, this isn't high school anymore. It may have been funny in high school to unroll entire rolls of toilet paper in the bathroom and use it to try to clog the toilets or throw it on the mirror. You may be one of those sick and twisted individuals that finds this kind of thing funny. I don't think it's funny. If these kinds of things appeal to your morbid and disgusting sense of humor, it is probably because you have never been held responsible for cleaning up after yourself. Not only is this pathetic and immature behavior, but it is mean. In the MTC, the missionaries clean the bathrooms, the hallways, the buildings, etc. If you mess it up, you may not have to clean it up. But, you do make it harder for the missionaries who do have to clean it up, and by so doing, you take away from time spent becoming a better missionary. That sin is on your head. Remember, you chose to come here, let your behavior be in accordance with your decision. This doesn't mean that the mood must always be somber or morose, but you should keep in mind the gravity of your calling.

There is something else that you should understand. The MTC staff are friendly but busy and very matter-of-fact. Understand this, serving a mission is not a childish pursuit. You are no longer going to be coddled. Don't expect it. The atmosphere at the MTC is business like – they are courteous but tend to get down to the matter-of-fact. In other words, don't mess around. This isn't college, this isn't basketball or football camp – this is the work of God. If you don't want to be there, go home or change. If you can't respect other people, go home or change. If you can't understand why the world doesn't revolve around you, go home or change. There are thousands of missionaries in the MTC, all with the same purpose as far as the Church sees it. They are there to prepare to become missionaries. They are there to learn the gospel message as it is supposed to be taught. They are there to learn a language, if so called. They are also there to learn presentation skills. If you, in any way, are hindering this purpose, you are working as a tool of Satan and should repent or leave. As mentioned previously, if you work against the work of God, you will have countless sins upon your head, including preventing others from achieving their full potential. I would not want that on my head, do you? Don't mess around here. It is time to leave all of that childishness behind you. You are expected to behave like an adult, do so.

## **MTC Organization**

The MTC is organized similar to a mission. Every missionary belongs to a district and several districts are combined and are presided over by a Branch President. There is a missionary called as District Leader and someone is chosen as the assistant to the Branch President. Missionary politics begin in the MTC. I'll dedicate more time to this subject later, but for some crazy reason, missionaries seem to think it is a sign of how good a missionary you are if you are called to one of these positions. Don't buy into this lie.

## **Language and Spirituality Classes**

Your classes are taught by returned missionaries, most of whom go to BYU. Having returned missionaries as teachers can be a great asset, but I'm not sure they always represent missions accurately. Some instructors have a tendency to make missions out to be the greatest

experience of their life. I don't know that I agree with missions being the best or greatest experience of someone's life, but it probably requires a great deal of motivation to serve a mission and then return home and train missionaries. So, perhaps for them, their mission was the greatest experience of their life. I think life just gets better and better, so everyday of my life is the greatest experience of my life, but that is a strange philosophy that most people don't understand.

Anyway, regardless of their motivation, you are bound to have some very good instructors. I heard stories of not so good instructors as well. Perhaps I was lucky (blessed) to have all good instructors, but I have not personally experienced any of the 'not-so-good' kind.

### **The Secrets of the MTC**

The MTC doesn't really have many secrets. Those I am going to mention are not things like secret passageways, trap doors or mysterious visitors at night (though this one might actually exist). As I see it, the secrets of the MTC are either myths and rumors or things missionaries aren't really 'supposed' to do but seem to get away with regularly.

First, the rumors. The one that I heard the most often while I was in the MTC was about the night that the MTC was attacked by the forces of Satan and defended by the Armies of Helaman. Whether there is any validity to this story, I am not aware. However, I never heard when it occurred and it was often accompanied with embellishments like missionaries leaving their rooms and being killed and missionaries hearing the sounds of sword fighting and arrows hitting their doors, etc., all of which give it the sense of an urban legend or baseless rumor.

This first one is the biggest and most popular one I ever heard. The other rumors and legends I heard were of male missionaries sneaking into the female missionaries dorms and having sex with them. I've never found any evidence for that. I also heard of missionaries committing suicide or being killed or even being possessed. As I said before, these are all rumors that float around the MTC, most without the names of specific people attached, though many seem to come with some type of relationship to the story teller (e.g. my Uncle's companion or my brother's girlfriend's little brother, etc.).

As for some rumors that get passed on that do have some validity, I know of a couple because it either involved me or someone that I know personally. Both of these stories I relate because there is a lesson that

can be learned from them. In this first story, I served as an accomplice. One of my best friends had a girlfriend (she is now his wife) that was in the MTC. I doubt that this was just some random idea that my friend had, but he showed up at my house one Sunday afternoon in a suit and tie and suggested we head to Provo and infiltrate the MTC. I didn't really have anything else to do, so I agreed to go with him. I grabbed my suit and tie and name tag (placard) and we headed south to Provo. There are a couple of interesting details here that need to be added. I had not shaved in about a week, so my facial hair was looking pretty scruffy. Also, my placard from my mission was the old style, it did not have 'Jesus Christ' as larger than everything else. In other words, under close scrutiny, one would be able to tell that I was not a current, full-time missionary. My friend, Mark, had some pretty funky sideburns growing as well. Otherwise, he was passable as a missionary.

We hopped into his car and drove to the parking lot that is just across from the MTC on the East side near the temple grounds. When we pulled in, we waited until there were no missionaries in the immediate vicinity before we got out and put on our suit coats and placards – we were now missionaries. Of course, the problem was trying to find his girlfriend at the MTC. We knew the schedule for Sunday afternoon, so we had a pretty good chance that she would not be holed up in her dorm room. As luck would have it, she was about to board a bus right in front of the MTC to go to Salt Lake to sing in a choir that night. So, it was almost immediately after we walked onto the MTC campus that we spotted her and followed her to the bus. Of course, Mark didn't want to just walk up to her, and he was going to respect the fact, as much as he could since he was at the MTC, that she was a missionary so he wasn't just going to run up to her and hug her. I, on the other hand, wasn't really thinking. Her first name is Holly, so I started calling out 'Holly, Holly' to try to grab her attention before she got on the bus. She didn't hear me and Mark stopped that pretty quickly because she wasn't Holly anymore, she was 'Sister Lloyd'. Instead, he thought it would be a good idea to, if I remember correctly, stand behind her to get on the bus or just brush right in front of her and see if she noticed.

It took her a minute, but she very nearly screamed when she realized who was there. We had really caught her at an awkward time; she had to get on the bus. But we talked for a couple of minutes and then left. Apparently, she realized that she had her camera with her as we were walking away and snapped a shot of us, 'The Infiltrators', as we were leaving. Also, on our way across the street back to our car, we didn't

think that anyone was really paying attention, so we removed our placards. Well, there just happened to be a group of missionaries coming back from the temple that met us on the other side. In the way that only missionaries can get away with, they smiled and said hello, thinking that we were Elders. Then they noticed that we didn't have on our placards and wanted to know where we were going. I think Mark replied that we were going home. It was then that they realized that we were imposters and actually began calling it out, "Imposters! There pretending to be Elders!" That isn't exactly true, both Mark and I were Elders still, we just were not set apart to be missionaries.

I hope that I won't be reprimanded for sharing this story with you. I look back on it now and wonder if it was okay for us to do what we did. I mean, I'm pretty sure it wasn't in line with keeping the Sabbath Day holy, nor would it be encouraged by the Prophet. Yet, is impersonating a missionary a sin worthy of condemnation? I don't know. Also, I would remind you that I'm telling you these stories so you have stories to tell, not so you repeat the things that I did. Also, telling you this story illustrates the point I made earlier, the number one rule of missions – you can leave at any time. If young men posing as missionaries could walk onto campus, then young men who *are* missionaries could walk off campus. You are not trapped. You are not being forced to stay. But you are highly encouraged to stay.

I have one more story for you; one I think should be turned into a legend if it has not been turned into one already. This is actually about a friend of mine and neighbor that lived near where my parents live. He had served a mission and been home for quite a while when his girlfriend, not seeing him willing to commit to marriage, decided to serve a mission. I guess this happens when Mormon men are unsure and women want to push the issue. In this case, she was serious. She put in her papers, received her call, and went to the MTC. It was the day before she was supposed to leave for her designated area when my friend, Maurey, finally realized that he wanted to marry her. It was a little late, but I guess better than never. In a way only fitting for him, he came to the conclusion that he needed to go to Provo and propose to her. First, Maurey discussed it with his bishop who gave his blessing. Then, he headed to Provo. He asked at the front desk if he could talk to Carrie<sup>8</sup>. They said...no. Then he told them it was very important that he talk with Carrie. They said...no. Then he told them that he felt impressed to

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<sup>8</sup> Carrie's name has been changed to protect her privacy.

tell Carrie that he wanted to marry her and that he had his bishop's blessing and everything. They said...no. Not to be daunted by the staff at the MTC, our hero decided he would find her himself. So, pretending he had left, he pulled a quick one on the staff and headed into the MTC complex looking for and asking missionaries where the sister missionaries' dorms were. He eventually found them but, upon entering, was discovered by an older woman who also happened to be the mission president's wife! What luck! No, really. Women tend to be a bit more sympathetic toward romantic causes than their husbands.

Maurey explained to her what he was up to. (Can you imagine trying to explain to the mission president's wife that you had driven nearly two hours and infiltrated the MTC to propose to one of her missionaries?) She thought it was a noble cause, but had to discuss it with the mission president. So she took him back up to the lobby and got the mission president. The mission president talked with Maurey but was resolute that Maurey would have to talk with Carrie tomorrow at the airport; he couldn't talk with her today. But, lo and behold, the power of women and the influence of romance... Maurey was not done yet. He had convinced the mission president's wife he was serious and felt very strongly about this and he wasn't going to leave until he talked to Carrie. She was so convinced she told him she would do something about it. Maurey never found out if she convinced the mission president or simply just went to get Carrie herself, but half an hour later, Carrie appeared in the lobby. Having convinced everyone this is what he must do, he proposed to her in the lobby. He didn't have a ring, but he was serious, as can be ascertained from his endeavors. Carrie didn't really know what to think, but she was pretty sure she wanted to marry him. There was only one problem: she was on a mission. She told him she would tell him the next day at the airport whether or not she was going to stay on her mission. What else could our hero do but wait.

The next day at the airport, she told him she would marry him when she returned, but she felt it was important she serve her mission. So, off she went. Now, the wrap up to this story is that Carrie did marry, but she didn't marry Maurey. As of the last time I spoke with Maurey, he was dating another young woman, but still in the courting stage. Carrie, had been married for quite some time. Apparently, Maurey couldn't take waiting for so long. After 14 months, he cracked (in his own words) and 'Dear Janed' her. He had to start dating women again. He wanted to get married and just couldn't wait any longer. For the sake of not ending up in Maurey's awkward situation, if you are contemplating marrying

someone but are indecisive enough that they pull out their trump card – an LDS mission – you best make a decision and make it quickly. Though I'm sure Maurey is happy, he probably didn't enjoy waiting fourteen months. This is just another example of the types of stories that make the MTC so legendary.

There are other secrets of the MTC, but these are more along the lines of things missionaries do while at the MTC that are not encouraged by the Priesthood leadership, but the leaders never really seem to stop them. This is where wrestling comes in. Perhaps they have become more strict about this since I was at the MTC, but while I was there, it would have been uncommon if you made it through the MTC experience without witnessing a wrestling match. My branch seemed to be more into it than others. We would often set up mattresses as pads against the walls out in the hallway to make the ring a little softer. Some nights we would turn our floor into all out wrestling tournaments with several bouts and even challenge matches. It got crazy at times.

I must admit, I was coerced into participating twice. Both times it was against the same person. He was a member of my district and a 'braggadocio' (he thought he was the most amazing wrestler in the world). He thought he was 'The Stuff' or 'The Bomb' and that he could beat anybody. Well, he was probably right that he could beat just about anybody because he wasn't trained to wrestle the way people are trained to wrestle in high school. He wasn't trying to pin you, he was trained to break a limb or strangle you (called Jiu Jitsu). Wrestling someone that doesn't care if he is pinned but is only trying to hurt you isn't really all that fair. I didn't realize he didn't care if he was pinned the first time we wrestled and he ended up choking me until I nearly passed out. I was furious. I pinned him within seconds but he kept fighting until he got me in a choke hold. In the wrestling I was familiar with, that was illegal. I was just about to start throwing punches but didn't think that was sportsmanlike. Instead, I held off until the next night when I choked the crap out of the bugger until he gave up.

Now, I am not really proud of the fact that we were told not to wrestle and I did. But I am proud of the fact that I put that other missionary in his place. And this is exactly where the problem in this lies. Wrestling can cause very serious problems. Not only can someone get hurt, but wrestling can affect relationships. People can become upset with one another. I don't believe wrestling is very Christ-like. It doesn't carry the Spirit of the Lord with you when you engage in it. Contention is of the devil. What can be more contentious than literally fighting? Of

course, missionaries tend to think it is all in fun, but it isn't easy to separate how you feel from what you are doing. If you are trying to trounce someone physically, generally speaking, your emotions while doing it are going to reflect that. Of course, like most of this book, my vision is great in hindsight and I realize this now, but I certainly didn't realize it then. So, I would not encourage you to wrestle while in the MTC. And, if you decide to wrestle, I would encourage you to examine your feelings before, during, and after to see if you feel the Spirit of the Lord. If not, you probably shouldn't be doing it. Now, not every district is going to wrestle, but you will probably engage in other activities. Some of these may be appropriate, some may not. Be cautious that you do not waste time. Time is precious while in the MTC, use it wisely.

Lastly, there are other things taking place in the MTC. Missionaries have been known to block the entrances to the bathrooms and turn on the hot water, turning it into a sauna. It was fairly common while I was there to see pizza delivered just before mail time to a certain missionary's mailbox so it was still hot when he received his mail. Care packages would contain Mountain Dew and other caffeinated drinks – not that I, personally, have a stand on this, but caffeinated drinks aren't sold at the MTC. Missionaries seem to want to find any way they possibly can to do things that are not conducive to the Spirit but are not explicitly spelled out by the rules of the Missionary Handbook or the rules of the MTC.

Not to bore you with a story I am sure you have heard a million times, but there is a lesson that goes along with this. It goes like this: The owner of a shipping and transportation company back in the 1800's was looking for a new wagon master, someone to drive his wagons from place to place. As different people came in, he asked them several questions, but the most important question was always, "The route you will be driving has some precarious roads on it. How close to the edge of these cliffs can you safely drive the wagon?" The first driver he interviews says he can get within a foot of the edge of the cliff and he'll feel comfortable. The second driver he interviews says he can come within six inches of the edge of the cliff and he'll feel comfortable. The third driver that he interviews says that he doesn't really know because he would do his best to stay as far away from the edge of the cliff as possible. The third driver got the job.

As I said, you have probably heard this story a million times, but it makes a powerful point. If you find yourself wanting to know all of the rules so you know exactly what you can and can't do, you should read the essay in Appendix A. Living the gospel is not about getting as close to

the edge as possible without falling off. Living the gospel is understanding that we want to stay as far away from the edge as possible and not tempt fate nor ourselves. We struggle enough as it is in this life, why would we want to ride the edge of temptation and sin where we are the most vulnerable? Is this because we have the crazed notion that sin is fun? This is undoubtedly the best lie that Satan has come up with. Happiness is not found in sin. Happiness is not found in pleasure. Happiness is not found in sinful pleasure. I have included another essay in the back of this book entitled happiness (see Appendix C). If you find you want to pursue sinful pleasures because you think that is the key to happiness, please read that essay now. And as for the MTC, avoid riding on the edge. Go with the notion that you are being trained to literally represent Christ. Do what Christ would do. Be what Christ would be. Be Christ-like.

## Chapter 7: Companions

Upon entering the MTC, you enter the world of companions. What a treat. For many missionaries, it seems that this is the most difficult part of their mission, learning to get along with other people. In this chapter I will address what you can expect to encounter with your companions and how to resolve some of the differences that you will inevitably find in your companionships.

### **The Best of Times and The Worst of Times**

Companions can be the best and worst part of your mission. Sometimes you will absolutely love them and hit it off great. Some times things will be indifferent, and it won't really go great or bad. And sometimes you will have a companion that represents to you all that is annoying and irritating in the world.

### **Irritating is in the Eye of the Beholder**

I'd like to be able to say that some missionaries are just plain irritating. This would make me feel better about how some of my companionships went on my mission because I could blame it all on them. The truth of it is that I was irritating to some of my companions. As a matter of fact, I could tell you to which ones I was irritating because they were the same ones that I thought were irritating. But what you have to keep in mind here is that, even if you don't seem to be getting along with them, it doesn't mean that it is their fault. You can be and most likely are just as responsible for any problems you are having as they are. And, from their perspective, you are probably entirely responsible for any problems that you are having.

Sometimes people get on our nerves. I don't know about you, but there were people in my high school that I really just didn't like. For example, I was into academics and most of my friends would have been considered members of 'The Nerd Group'. Even though I was also into student government and athletics, my main interest in high school was academics and this categorized me. There were several athletes – and I use these individuals not because I hold any malice toward athletes but

because I think more people can relate if I use athletes – that really annoyed me. The way they talked; the way they walked; the way they interacted with other people; the way they behaved in class; it was all very irritating. They always seemed to come off as being arrogant or thinking that they were superior. Nor did it help when they would throw fits about not starting on the basketball team, the baseball team, or the football team. You know the type; the individuals whose parents would join in on the fit-making. My parents were interested in my education, but fighting with coaches over whether or not their kids would start at a sport was never even an issue in my family. If the kids were good enough, the coach would start us.

Now, I hope by saying this that I am not alienating or offending anyone that may be in some way like this. If this is the type of person that you are, fine. The reason that I give this example is because, in high school, there were some people like this that annoyed me. And the point that I want to make is that I do not doubt that I was just as annoying to them as they were to me. As a matter of fact, there were several things that I did specifically to annoy them. I wasn't always kind to them and they were not always kind to me. Where this becomes somewhat ironic and even funny is that, after my mission, I actually spent a lot of time with some of these individuals and we became pretty good friends.

So what is the point? Well, sometimes we have a tendency to let certain types of individuals bother us. Notice the way I said this, '*we* have a tendency *to let*'. This implies that *they* are not actually bothersome but that '*we are letting*' them bother us. Usually, the only reason that it actually bothers us is because we see it the way that we do. Our particular perspective is the problem. Thus, when we first meet up with a companion, our perspectives can get in the way of us getting along. This can result in serious problems. People are different; people see things differently; people have different ways of working and relaxing; these are all differences that we, as missionaries, need to recognize in our companions.

## **How to Resolve Companionship Differences**

I am not claiming that it is easy to overcome differences. Nor is it always easy to raise the issues that get on your nerves. My older brother, Mark, gave me some advice on this. What he said was that, generally, one of the biggest mistakes new missionaries make is holding in their

feelings about the things that are bothering them. He had observed these feelings turn into an explosive, emotional force that suddenly comes out in a fit of rage and sometimes even in violence. His advice, then, was to try to explain in a calm way to your companion the things that he does that bother you before you get to this rage stage. Don't expect him to change. But do discuss the issues. If he does not realize that it bothers you, he will see no reason to change. And, as I said, it is not always the other person's responsibility to change. Sometimes, the way that your companion does things is just the way he does things and you will have to accept that and move on and not let it bother you anymore. However, I just want to reinforce this notion that getting on someone's nerves is very common. Resolving it effectively is not.

Perhaps I need an example to explain this. My first companion in the mission field, my trainer, was a great missionary. I have mentioned him before; he's the one that I used to buy ice cream. I spent four months with him. Of course he taught me a lot. He spoke great Spanish and understood the gospel fairly well. He was, in many aspects, a great trainer. However, after about two months of being 'trained', I felt like I was ready for something different. You see, because I was the trainee or the 'greenie', a pattern had developed in the way that we taught discussions. When I was first beginning in the mission field, because of my lack of Spanish, I would do my best to teach a section of a discussion and then he would clear up any mistakes I made and do a marvelous job of tying in what I had said in my broken Spanish to the next principle of the discussion and then teach his part. Then, when he had finished his principle of the discussion, he would usually give a big introduction into my part of the discussion, often teaching most of it before letting me begin reading it. Initially, this was great. I understood what he was saying and he was effectively teaching all of the discussion while letting me practice the few words I knew in Spanish. After two months, however, this was really getting on my nerves.

Why? Because I knew Spanish and I knew that he knew that I knew Spanish (whew, what a sentence). Let me explain... After one month together, we went on splits. My companion, who was the zone leader, brought the district leader back to our area and I went to their area. The district leader's companion was brand new. He had been in the mission perhaps a week or a week and a half. What this told me is that my companion had enough confidence in my ability to teach and do missionary work and speak Spanish that he was willing to let me go with a missionary that couldn't do any of it. Yet, when we were together,

because of the pattern that had developed, he was still teaching the discussions for me.

Once I felt like I could teach the discussions, I became very frustrated by this pattern. Perhaps it was because I was proud; perhaps it was because I felt that I could do more and he was standing in my way. Whatever the reason, I wanted him to stop treating me like a ‘greenie’. The problem was that I did not know how to approach him about this. There had been a few times in high school that one of my friends had done something that I didn’t like, but, like most men, I am horrible at resolving differences. Usually, I would just let it go and move on. Occasionally, I would say something sarcastic, talk to someone else about it, or we may even not talk for a few days and miraculously the problem was solved. Yet, the difference was in the fact that my trainer and I spent 24 hours together, 7 days a week. I couldn’t just tell this to someone else and not worry about it happening again; I had to address the issue.

Much to the credit of my trainer, he was very open to what I had to say when I finally got up the courage to tell him that I wanted more responsibility in the discussions. He was very understanding even though I didn’t approach it in the best way possible. And, again to his credit, he let me have more responsibility. It wasn’t easy at first, but he caught on fairly quickly and we were back on our way.

Generally speaking, resolving differences is not going to be as easy as simply informing your companion that you don’t really like the way that he is doing something. It would be ideal if that were all that it took. Sometimes, missionaries don’t really seem to care how you like to do things, they are still going to do them their way. And, frankly, it is arrogant and selfish to think that everyone should change for you. Sometimes, you will be the one that needs to change. Sometimes, you will be the problem.

As for a method or process for approaching another missionary about something that is bothering you. The best I can do is give this advice: Do not accuse nor use accusatory language. For example, do not say something like, “You re-explain my principles in the discussions because you think that I am incompetent.” This is an accusation. Think if someone were to say this to you, how would you feel? I would feel like I was being attacked. But what if someone were to say it like this, “Elder, sometimes I feel like you re-explain my principles in the discussions. Do you see it that way?” Can you see the difference between the accusation and the question? When someone has a problem with something that

you are doing and brings it to your attention, it makes all the difference in the world if they use 'I feel' or 'I think' statements rather than 'you are' or 'you did' accusations. There is actually a huge body of literature on this, but it is mostly aimed at married couples. When you use 'I feel' or 'I think' statements rather than 'you are' or 'you did' accusations, you are introducing the idea that both of you have perspectives on what is taking place and you are simply telling the other person that, from your perspective, this is what is going on. You are not telling him from his perspective what he is doing. This is the difference between attacking and expressing your perspective. And, this is the key to actually making it through some of your companionships, realizing that you see things differently and trying not to force your perspective on the other person.

You see, if I had told my trainer, Elder Smith, that he was doing this because he felt that I was incompetent, he would have adamantly disagreed. He knew that I was competent, he had just fallen into a habitual behavior pattern. I was the first missionary that he ever trained. He had no experience of weaning children (new missionaries) off of the support of the parent (the trainer). However, when I explained to him that I was frustrated because I felt he was treating me as though I were incompetent, he understood my perspective and did his best to change. And, he encouraged me instead of discouraged me. He told me he did not feel I was incompetent, thus introducing his perspective and helping me to correct my perspective. I didn't realize this had become a habit for him either. Most of the time, these misunderstandings are just that, misunderstandings or miscommunications. If you can learn how to resolve companionship differences by calmly approaching your companion and explaining to him through the use of 'I feel' and 'I think' statements, you will be well on your way to understanding how to resolve most major differences in relationships throughout your life.

### **Companions Aren't Always Bad, Some are Great!**

Now, of course, there are going to be good times. Not every companion is going to be the scourge of your life. Actually, many missionaries develop friendships while on their mission that last for a very long time after their mission. And, those that become very good friends are not always companions; sometimes they are missionaries that you just get to know by being in the same district or zone and things just seem to click. Also, having someone right by your side, though most would consider this to be a form of mild torture (or serious torture in

some cases) can be and often is a blessing. Working in twos helps to catch the mistakes and helps you to see things that you don't always see. There are countless advantages to working with a companion. When you forget, they may remember. If you lose motivation, they can help pull you along until you are back on your feet. When you have a companion, you don't have to teach every aspect of every discussion.

Also, some companions are better than others at different things. For example, my third companion in the mission field, Elder Aguirre, was not an excellent Spanish speaker. He could understand most everything, but he couldn't always get out what it was he wanted to say. In spite of this fact, he was the most outgoing missionary I think I worked with my whole mission. In a matter of minutes he could have an entire family in love with him and wanting to hear anything he had to say. In fact, he was so good at becoming chummy with families that it was almost hard to develop any type of relationship with them on my part. What a gift to have as a missionary! I, on the other hand, am typically not that outgoing. I like to make friends, but for me, friend-making is typically a long and sometimes tedious process. Also, I did speak decent Spanish. Do you see how we could have complemented each other? The only problem that I ever had with Elder Aguirre was that I didn't feel that he would let me speak often enough. He was so quick to speak and find things to say that I was often left standing there looking stupid (in my irritation I would often correct his Spanish in my mind to get back at him for monopolizing the time). I brought this to his attention one day and it was never a problem again.

However, I don't want to imply that he was the one in the wrong. He was insightful enough to explain to me that the sole responsibility of letting me speak was not his alone. If I wanted to say something, I would have to speak up. We came to a good compromise. He still spoke more than I did, but I knew where he stood and he knew where I stood. If I felt I had something to say or if I wanted to say something, that was my responsibility. And, for his part, he would try to let me get in a word here and there.

### **Despite Our Best Efforts...**

Sometimes missionaries just don't get along. Instead of resolving their differences, they just don't talk. I did have one companion like this. I had some pretty strong notions about how to do missionary work. So

did he. I felt that my ways were right, so did he. When I brought up to him the differences, he didn't really seem to want to compromise. It seemed as though it were his way or the highway. It ended up the highway. As it would turn out, we only spent one miserable month together. With the amount of tension and conflict in our companionship, I would be surprised if we taught 5 discussions the entire month. It was awful. I tried and he tried, but we were just not on the same wavelength. Don't get me wrong here. I by no means want to illustrate this as though he were the one that is strictly at fault. I had been on my mission for 20 months at this point and was pretty confident in my ability as a missionary and pretty convinced of the techniques that I used. He had been there for 19 months and was in the same position. I probably was not as willing to compromise as I should have been. It was not all his fault. Nor was it all my fault. But, for some reason, we just did not seem to be able to resolve our differences. That was the only time I actually prayed for a change.

With every other companion, we were at least able to work out our differences. With this one companion, we didn't get anywhere. In other words, try as you might and try as your companion might, you may not always be able to work out your differences. I would like to think that this is not a failing on anyone's part. Sometimes, we just don't get things to work out. And, in times like that, perhaps we aren't meant to work things out but learn other lessons, like humility and long-suffering and patience and why we shouldn't kill our companions; you know, stuff like that.

## **Conclusion**

Companionships can be wonderful. I had companions on my mission that taught me a lot. I had companions that, our entire time together, was blissful. We always got along and only very seldom did we have to even recognize a difference or try to resolve a difference. And, I had some companions that were a bane to my soul. No matter what we tried, things just didn't seem to work out. We struggled, disagreed and sometimes even fought (never physically of course). Try to see companionships as an opportunity to learn and to grow. It may not always be easy to find the positives in our relationships on our mission, but there are very good reasons why we work in companionships. We may not always understand the reasons and sometimes we may blatantly disagree with the choice of companions, but I believe that the assignment

of companionships is inspired. The point is that we are assigned to our companions for our benefit and their benefit. If we are tactful and sincere, we will generally be able to resolve the differences that we have with our companions. And, sometimes, we will be greatly rewarded for our perseverance and effort. Do your best to love your companions; respect them and treat them kindly and the rewards you receive will be worth it.

## Chapter 8: Traveling to the Mission and First Getting There

I'm not positive what happens in each mission during this transition from the MTC. But there are some things that happen that I believe deserve discussion. First, I want to talk a little about the mental transition that often occurs in the MTC and becomes apparent once you leave it. Second, I'll discuss actually traveling to your mission. And third, I think it is important that you understand what typically happens when you arrive in your mission. The Mental Transition Out of the MTC

There are some important things to take into consideration as you are traveling to your mission field. For many missionaries, this is the first time they have been outside of the MTC since they first entered it. This can be quite shocking. I remember thinking that the world was such a wicked place when I left the MTC. Oh how little I knew. I was still in Provo when I had that thought. (Then again, having gone to the University of Utah, I can't help but plug the old rivalry and say, perhaps there is something evil in Provo.) The MTC can have a tendency to make you feel somewhat separated from the evils of the world. And, though I would encourage you to keep in mind your spirituality while in the MTC, I think it is also somewhat safe to say that missionaries seldom need worry about being spiritual in the MTC. So many things come together to provide spiritual experiences for missionaries while they are in the MTC that it often isn't a top priority. It is almost like it is natural to be spiritual in the MTC and to feel the Spirit in the MTC. Of course this isn't *always* the case. Yet, moving from an environment where spirituality comes so naturally to the worldly world where keeping the Spirit with you is at best difficult can be a drastic change. I am probably spending time talking about this because it was quite a mental shift for me. I couldn't help but think about how some people seem to waste their lives away in the pursuit of sinful pleasures understood as happiness. Or, how people do not have the same sense that I do of what is right and what is wrong. Walking through airports triggered these thoughts in my mind. As I would pass people and study people – a strange pursuit that I often engage in – I couldn't help but wonder, “Do you know the truth that I have?” or “Are you really happy?”

What I'm getting at here is that the world often looks very different after you have passed through certain experiences. I don't know if I can adequately explain this. The best that I can probably do is say that after my mission I truly felt I had my eyes of understanding 90% closed during high school. It was like I was just acting and not understanding. Only in hindsight did things make sense to me. I guess this is often the case; after the event has taken place and as we analyze it, it finally starts to make sense; or at least we can make sense of it.

This transition to understanding is kind of a strange phenomenon and seems to have something to do with the development of the understanding of the individual. It's almost like there are certain stages that people pass through. As you pass from one stage to the next, you often become aware of things that you hadn't really noticed before. Then, when you become aware of these things, you wonder how you could have ever not realized what you now know. Perhaps this explains why some adults aren't very good at relating with children and teenagers. They have passed through several stages of cognitive development and their perspectives on life and the world have simply changed. Once they have come to realize the importance of certain things, it becomes difficult to remember how you used to think about things. Because you have a new perspective that supercedes the old perspective, the old perspective is discarded and forgotten.

Let me give you an example to give a little concreteness to my abstract ramblings. While I was in high school, the most important thing to me was fitting in and having friends. Of course, there were a lot of other things going on and I think I was probably a little weird because I was also studying other religions when I was in high school and was also very concerned with doing well so I could get a scholarship for college. But these were both secondary when compared with my desire to fit in. When I graduated from high school, it was a major point of transition. It was as though life had just handed me a new perspective and said, "You need to realize that there is a world after high school." As I think about it, my whole life I had been looking forward to and planning on graduating from high school. That just seemed like the only thing in life. Nothing else really seemed to matter. I wasn't, as I consider it now, fully aware of my parents' struggles with money, the fact that I would have to go to college after high school, that there were other things to accomplish in life, and that there was an entire world outside of my high school. It was almost as if I saw everyone that I met as simply being a high school student or not. Those were the only two choices. To me,

my only frame of reference was what I had experienced. It is almost like trying to explain to someone that has never tasted salt what salt tastes like. They have no frame of reference. Until they have experienced it, it is nearly impossible to understand.

This is kind of ironic because I am trying to write a book about what you should expect on a mission and you may not have the same frame of reference. I have been on a mission; you are either going on a mission or already on your mission. My perspective has definitely changed. The most important thing in life to me now is my exaltation. Everything else is secondary. My entire perspective and understanding of the world has changed dramatically.

I think the point I am trying to make is that, as we transition from stage to stage in our life, we gain new perspectives and often forget what it was like to have our old perspectives. We do not do this consciously. I would even propose that most people are never even aware that they do it at all. This concept would, in part, explain why parents and adults have such a hard time relating with youth; their perspective has changed and most parents and adults don't realize that. If you aren't getting this, just ask yourself how many times you have either said to your parents or to teachers or Church leaders or any adults, "You just don't understand." Well, hopefully *you* will understand now why *they* don't understand. Their perspective has changed and your perspective will soon be changing. As much as you do not want to believe it now, you will eventually become an adult; though this is almost impossible to understand because you don't have their frame of reference.

Now, to relate all of this to the MTC. This shift in perspective accompanied me leaving the MTC. It is almost like someone takes you out of the world that you know, puts you into an alien world where everything is different which forces you to take a very different perspective, and then they put you back into the world that you knew before. Your perspective has changed. You have changed. Everything now seems different. This can be difficult to deal with. It can be difficult to understand. It can be difficult to grasp the new perspective. Yet, this is one of the most beneficial elements of a mission. In my opinion, gaining new perspectives on the world is probably one of the most exciting and wonderful things that can ever happen to someone. The famed Greek philosopher Socrates once said, "The unexamined life is not worth living."<sup>9</sup> I interpret this to mean the life that is understood

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<sup>9</sup> Plato's Apology (38a)

from many perspectives is the life worth living. I would just encourage you to remember the old perspectives the best you can. If you can hang on to an understanding of them – often a journal is a good way to do this – you will be much more prepared to help those that will be coming along behind you because you will be able to relate to them. Perhaps this would be what the ideal parent is able to do; remember how they thought about the world when they were that age. My last bit of advice here: Don't be afraid to examine your life and your past, especially with new perspectives. Examine your life and you will find that it can be and is worth living.

### Traveling to Your Mission Field

For some reason there tends to circulate in the MTC this notion that the second you leave the MTC you become a maniacal missionary trying to convert the world. Often missionaries are encouraged to make their first contact while traveling to their area of service. It seems like a great idea, but it isn't always very plausible. Sometimes missionaries have other things on their mind. Sometimes you are just going to struggle to get to where you are supposed to be serving. If you have the opportunity to make contacts, definitely be ready, but do not feel like it is your responsibility to convert airports and airplane loads of people. All in good time.

What you will most likely find as you travel is that your perspectives have changed, as mentioned in the previous section. You will be interested in one thing: teaching people about your religion. This is definitely going to affect the way that you interact with people. Also, being dressed the way you will be and wearing a name badge that tells the whole world who you are will very likely get you noticed. Nearly every interaction with other people will turn into a contact, which you will somehow try to relate it to religion. Missionaries are focused after leaving the MTC. I think that is a wonderful thing. That kind of concentration and devotion is what makes the missionary program of the Church so inspiring and so successful.

### First Arriving at Your Mission

When you first get to the mission, you'll probably be picked up by the assistants to the president or the mission president. I had some time to sleep because I flew all night, but it really depends on where you are going. Generally, the mission president will meet with you at some point for an initial interview. Then, depending upon the mission, you will have some type of changes meeting or simply meet your new companion and will go to your new area with your trainer. In some missions, you spend a little more time with the mission president and his wife than in others. In my mission, we generally would spend the first night at the mission

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home and have supper with the missionaries that were leaving. This was a great experience in the sense that we were exposed to missionaries that were on the other end of the spectrum from where we were.

I remember that dinner and the short testimony meeting that we had afterward. This was my first exposure to what I would consider an ‘unsuccessful’ missionary. Before you condemn me for being judgmental, let me explain. Some missionaries are very successful missionaries; they do what they are told and work hard. Most missionaries are pretty successful missionaries; they do what they can and work. Some missionaries are semi-successful; they follow their companions around and do what they have to. And, finally, some missionaries are not successful at all; they actively waste their time on their missions and work against the work of the Lord. One of the defining characteristics of these missionaries is that, when it comes time for them to go home, they often attempt to portray a sense of sadness that their mission is over. Don’t get me wrong here, some missionaries feel true sadness that their mission is over. But there is an important distinction between sadness and regret. Sadness, as I see it, is knowing that you have done your very best, you have grown to love the work and the people, and now it is time to go home and move on and you know that you will miss doing what it is you have dedicated so much of your life and time to. Regret is knowing just the opposite: you did not work your hardest, you did not love the people and now you have to go home and live with the fact that you served a very unsuccessful mission and probably did more to hinder the work of the Lord than help it. So, these missionaries portray that they are sad to be leaving because they believe that this is what a good missionary should or would do. Yet, because they are not really sad to finally be leaving, they take this sense of sadness to the extreme.

I remember one missionary at the dinner saying that if the mission president or the Prophet were to ask him to stay for another year, he would gladly do so (yeah right). If the Prophet asked him to stay for the rest of his life, he would (yeah right). He went on and on about how sad he was to be going home. When a missionary does this, more likely than not, it is because they wasted their mission. There were some great missionaries there that night. None of them ranted about how horrible it was to leave the mission. Sure, they were sad, but they focused on all that they had learned, experienced and done. They reveled in their faith and testimonies and the opportunities that they had to share the gospel. There was a striking difference in not only what was said and how it was

said, but in the spirits of the missionaries and their words. It was not that difficult to tell the difference between the two. Especially when the mission president, in a very subtle way, explained that being ready to go home and move on with life and even looking forward to going home are good things. We were not called to serve missions forever. That is not what the Lord has in mind for us. Nor will it help us gain exaltation. There is still that whole bit about getting married, raising a family and enduring to the end. Also, about the time that you are getting ready to go home is when you finally begin to understand the mission anyway, so it is probably best that you move on so you can undergo another cognitive transition of understanding. Sometimes I think that God likes to make things hard for us. It isn't malicious; it's just a good way to help people to learn.

Anyway, we had dinner that night and the next morning we had a central changes meeting, which means that all of the missionaries that had companion changes came to a church building near the mission home with their luggage and the changes were announced in front of everyone. As changes were made, you would typically move to sit with your new companion.

From my understanding, missions approach changes differently. In some missions, you receive a phone call and a van comes to pick you up and then takes you to your new area. In other missions, you simply are told where to go and your new companion will be waiting for you when you get there. Each mission is probably a little different in the way that they approach this. And, each mission is probably a little different in the way that things are run. This is one of the beauties of the Church. Every mission teaches the same message, but they are autonomous (meaning self-governing) in how they are encouraged to approach people and in how they are taught to present the message. Cultures around the world are very different and people react differently to missionaries and the Gospel. It only makes sense to vary the presentation and work habits of the missionaries according to the cultures in which one is proselytizing. As a result of this autonomy, missions can be different and often are. For example, in Costa Rica we were told to commit investigators to baptism during the first discussion. When I relayed this information to Mark (Holland) and Tom (Japan), two close friends who served elsewhere, they were shocked. To them, actually finding investigators was hard enough, but trying to commit them to baptism that quickly was unheard of. This made sense in Costa Rica, but didn't make sense in Holland and Japan.

Anyway, once you are assigned to your companion, you're off. It is essentially at this point that you become a full-fledged missionary. Of course, some would argue that you are still being trained. That may be true, but you are on the front lines and assisting in teaching the gospel. And, some would argue that you should always be a missionary. Again, that is true, but how often are you called and set apart as a full-time missionary? As I see it, then, this is the beginning of your mission. Everything up to this point is training and preparation. This is why I have divided the book into sections. The first section is preparation, which ends here. The next section is serving your mission and what to expect on your mission. The last section is coming home and making the transition back into *more* normal life.

# Section II: Serving Your Mission

## **Chapter 9: How to do Missionary Work Right**

### **How Much of Your Success Is Due To Your Preparation?**

Before I start this chapter I want to point something out: Look at how many chapters have been dedicated to preparation for your mission. Look at how much of the book you have read. So far, all I have covered is mission preparation. Most of the success of your mission will come from your preparation. If you are prepared for what is about to happen, everything else will fall into place. You will be the missionary that God wants you to be.

Let's think about this for a minute. For those of you that remember, what is the scout motto? Be prepared, right? Now think about all of the things in scouting that you do. If you are prepared, can you accomplish them? If you come prepared to build a fire, will you be able to? More likely than not, you will. If you are prepared for your mission, it may still be difficult at times – just like trying to build a fire in the rain can be difficult at times – but if you know what you are doing and have faith, the fire will start and your mission will be a success.

I have already discussed what a mission is: dedicating time to finding opportunities to share what you have with those that do not have it. Also, I have discussed the importance of committing to a mission. And, I have discussed motivations for serving missions and a testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Understanding what a mission is, committing to serve a mission, having the correct motivations to serve a mission, and understanding the Gospel are all going to help you serve faithfully and willingly and do your best. So, let's presume you understand the elements that go into your motivation as a missionary. Let's also presume that you have put these elements into action and are now a highly motivated missionary. What now?

### **What good is the gospel?**

We know that we are serving our mission to share something we have with those that don't have it. This means bringing Christ into their lives. Why? What good will having Christ in their lives do? Isn't this what it all boils down to? What good does having Christ in your life do you? Are you better off for it? Will they be better off for it? I think

missionaries need to understand how having knowledge of Christ and Christ's atonement is going to benefit the people of the country where you are serving.

The Gospel is an eternal pursuit of perfection. Our mission is to put people on to that road. Is that going to help them? Do you think that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has helped you? Until you can figure out how it has helped you, I do not believe you will be able to help others see that it can help them. This is the importance of loving the people.

## **Love the People**

Before I talk about specific ways to work as a missionary, there are a few other things that are vitally important to your success as a missionary. First, you must truly love the people that you are serving. I'm sure you have, by now, heard that sentence several hundred times. But, what does it really mean? When someone says that you must 'love the people', what do they mean by love? This is not saying you should develop a romantic relationship with the people where you are called to serve. I don't see how that will help you serve them as a missionary; romantic love typically just makes you stop thinking, and I don't think that is in your best interest as a missionary. The type of love here is charity, or Christ-like love. Charity is a special type of love; a love that means you are truly and sincerely concerned about the welfare of a person. Think about the way that Christ loved people. He wasn't typically romantic with them, but he was willing to do anything for anyone, especially for those that were rejected by most people – the lepers, the adulterers, the sinners, etc. What is really being said in the phrase 'love the people' is: show a sincere interest in the all-around (spiritual, emotional, physical, economical) welfare of the individuals that you are going to serve and understand how the message you have for them is going to help them in all of these ways. Leave with an understanding of what the Gospel has done and continues to do for you and you will be able to share that with those you are called to serve.

## **Missionary Methodology**

I could probably go on forever with tips and hints for preparing for your mission, but, at some point, you are actually going to have to start teaching people and finding people to teach. What now? Well, there are some things I learned on my mission that I feel are important and useful

and will help you be a more effective missionary (meaning you won't waste so much time). So, I have a few ideas for you, some advice and some suggestions. Of course, when you are being trained as a missionary and as you study the Missionary Guide you will find some similar information and definitely some wonderful suggestions. What I am going to discuss, is not to supplant that but to supplement that. As a matter of fact, the Commitment Pattern that you learn in the Missionary Guide is probably the most effective tool you will ever encounter. If you master the Commitment Pattern and are not afraid to use it when you return home, you will find that the world is a very different place. So, like I said, do not suppose that what I am going to share with you is at all intended to supercede the information in the Missionary Guide or any of the other lessons you will be taught as a missionary. These are just a few of the things that I found helpful that I don't believe were taught in any of the Church sponsored manuals.

## **Using The Spirit**

First and most important, you cannot convince anyone of the truthfulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as taught by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. I did not say you cannot teach them. I did not say that you cannot teach them the way to find out for themselves whether or not the Gospel is true. What I said is that you cannot convince them. You see, the way that this whole conversion process is set up is in such a fashion that man cannot convince man. Many believe that through a complex demonstration of scriptural mastery, the truthfulness of the Gospel can be illustrated. No! You can confirm faith through understanding the scriptures. And, an understanding of the scriptures will help you to truly understand what it means when the Holy Ghost testifies of the truthfulness of the message. But, the scriptures themselves will not convince you of the truth. This is the job of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is a Testator, meaning he testifies of the truth. Thus, in order to help people in the conversion process, do not be so arrogant as to assume that you have the power to convince. You do not.

There is only one way for people to gain a testimony of the truthfulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That way is for them to gain an understanding of the Gospel – this is your role – and then illustrate their faith by asking God to send the Holy Ghost to testify of the truthfulness of it. This method of gaining a testimony of the truthfulness

of something is illustrated again and again in the scriptures. Moroni's promise speaks of this (Moroni 10:3-5), so too does D & C 9:7-9. Both explain that one must study these things out in their mind, decide what it is they feel is true and then ask God to confirm that decision. If they have made the right decision, he will confirm it via the Holy Ghost. If they have made the wrong decision, there will be no confirmation. Ponder this. You are not going to give anyone a testimony of the Gospel. You are going to help them study the Gospel and teach them how to gain a testimony. You can't give it to them. I would suggest not wasting your time trying; it won't happen.

## **Modern Revelation**

This next bit of advice I learned from a returned mission president before I left on my mission. He explained that the best way to answer sincere questions about the gospel is using modern revelation. Why? Think about it this way. There are two major points that missionaries try to help investigators understand in order for them to gain a testimony of the Gospel as taught by our Church. These are that Joseph Smith was<sup>10</sup> a prophet of God and that the Book of Mormon is the word of God. Now, if we are able to explain their questions using the fruits of the prophet Joseph Smith and he was a true prophet of God, then wouldn't the correctness and the truthfulness of the answer rest on whether or not Joseph Smith was a prophet of God?

Let's give a couple of examples. First, let's say someone asks about the Word of Wisdom, wanting to know why it is so important to live it. Well, you could respond by reading the Word of Wisdom and then reminding them that the Doctrine and Covenants are revelations that were received by Joseph Smith and other Latter-Day prophets. Thus, since Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, the revelation that he gave concerning alcohol and tobacco use must also be the will and desire of God.

Now, they may or may not have a testimony of Joseph Smith at this point. Of course, the Word of Wisdom is quite far into the discussions and I would hope that they have prayed about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon by this point, but they may not have done so. If not, then this is just another opportunity to explain to them why it is important that they do so.

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<sup>10</sup> I could also write 'is' here, but I will just use 'was' for simplicity's sake

Another example: This time, the investigator asks about Christ coming to America. They aren't sure that it really happened. They want proof. Well, it talks about this visit in the Book of Mormon. You could read it with them in the Book of Mormon and discuss it. Then explain to them that they should act upon Moroni's promise and they will receive a witness of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

But, just for fun, let's assume that they want to know where this visit is discussed in 'their' scriptures, namely the Bible. Sometimes, people that want to know where everything is in their Bible are not sincere. I'll discuss some ways to try to determine that later. But, if they are sincere, you should be able to either help them find any references to the answer to their question in their Bible, if it exists, or you can explain that the Bible was never intended to be the only book of scripture and that is what the complementary revelations are in the scriptures that we have. This can be a tricky process. I would just encourage you to try to relate everything to modern revelation because it all boils down to their testimony in the end. If they have a testimony of the truthfulness of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, they will know that the answer to their question is inspired by God. If they do not have a testimony yet, reinforce that for them to fully understand these things you are discussing, they must gain a testimony. That is the process.

## Tips on Contacting

How do you go about doing missionary work correctly? What do I mean? The little white Missionary Handbook (aka the White Bible) has some great tips and hints on being a successful missionary. It goes so far as to list the most effective techniques for spreading the gospel. Sadly, the most effective techniques are not ones you can use all the time unless you just happen to be in a missionary utopia.<sup>11</sup> On the flip side, the least effective techniques are not attractive because they are... not effective. Perhaps you could look at it like the race between the tortoise and the hare. The most effective techniques are comparable to a rabbit – they are designed to maximize effort and not waste energy. The least effective techniques are like the tortoise – they aren't really designed to race for speed, but they still finish, they just take a lot longer. You're probably assuming that, since I used the example of the tortoise and the hare and the tortoise wins in the fable that I am going to say that the tortoise is

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<sup>11</sup> An ideal world where everything goes smoothly and perfectly.

actually more effective. Well...no. You see, the rabbit, which I would compare to using member references, is streamlined and designed to run. Member references are statistically much more effective in finding investigators and carrying them all the way through to baptism, conversion, and full activity in the Church. The tortoise is comparable to knocking on doors or street contacting. It takes a very long time to find someone that is both interested and willing to listen to you, but you will eventually find people.

Does this mean that you should only use the members of the Church where you are serving? If that were possible and you had so many referrals from the members that you did not have to do any other form of contacting, that would be ideal. But, we don't typically live in an ideal world. The Missionary Handbook does not only list two techniques for finding investigators. It lists fourteen or fifteen. Of course, you will probably not be able to afford radio and television commercials and you can't pay for the people where you are serving to go to Utah to visit temple square so you can receive their name back as a reference. Some of the items on the list simply are not very feasible. Even though you have to rule out some of the items on the list, you probably will still not want to spend all day and all night street contacting. It is still the most ineffective way to work.

As a missionary, I was frustrated by this. I was told time after time that street contacting was not effective. Yet, invariably, that is how we would spend our days. One of my best friends spent entire weeks knocking on doors without gaining entry into a single home. Generally, in my mission, we could teach one or two discussions a day by knocking on doors; people seemed much more open to our message where I served when compared to where he served. But, that is beside the point. It finally dawned on me one day while on my mission that I didn't have to spend all of my time street contacting or knocking on doors. Sure, contacting is the old fall-back, the old faithful, the "If there is absolutely nothing else I can be doing, then I will go contacting" approach to missionary work. And, it is good to know that there is always something that you can be doing. But, there are some things that you can do that are much more effective than simply street contacting. Let me just share with you one of the things I did that worked for me.

This was probably the most effective tool I used while working as a missionary. All missionaries are supposed to have an 'Area Book' or record of the area where you are serving. This area book should contain a list of the members, a map of the area, information on what the

missionaries have done there in the past, etc. For some reason, many missionaries do not want to have anything to do with their area book. It seems as though they see it as more of a nuisance rather than as a help. Invariably, the first thing I would do when I arrived at a new area was to look at the area book. Most of the time, area books were in shambles when I arrived. But that didn't matter. The one element that I was really interested in was a list of the members of the ward or branch in which I was serving. Now, this may not work for everyone because not every missionary is going to be serving in an established branch or ward of the Church. But if you are, this list can become your best friend. I would examine the list with my new companion and mark who was active and who was not. I would also mark who had been visited recently and who had not. We would then begin a very long and tedious process of filling out information sheets for every member. These typically contained information like: their age, address, kids' ages, whether or not they were receptive to the missionaries, etc.

Generally, the active members were fairly easy because we would visit them occasionally anyway. But the inactive members were actually a blessing in disguise. Again, this may not work in every area, but Costa Rica had an incredibly irritating but wonderful characteristic for the missionary work: There are no street addresses. All addresses for homes are given based on landmarks and distances from them. For example, you would receive an address like - 250 meters south of the Cathedral in Cartago, then 120 meters East. This is not a perfect system for determining who lives where. And, since it is not a perfect system, when you go hunting for inactive members of the Church, you can knock on every house within a couple of square blocks to ask them about the people that are supposed to live in that area and people are understanding that the address you have isn't perfect, so they aren't bothered by the disruption.

I would intentionally start knocking on people's doors well before I arrived at the alleged location to start contacting them. I was willing to face the embarrassment of not knowing how far 120 meters was in order to contact people this way rather than simply contacting them cold. Why? Because, I would use a different approach. The contact would usually go something like this:

Hi. We are missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. My name is Elder Cragun and this

is my companion, Elder Johnson. We were just in the neighborhood today looking for José Gonzalez. He is a member of our Church but hasn't come for a little while. Because we are always concerned about the members of our Church, we are trying to find him to see what is wrong.

At this point, the person we have just contacted still does not know that we have actually contacted them. As they see it, we are just asking them for help in trying to find a neighbor. What is really happening is we are illustrating to them that we are concerned about the well-being of the members of our religion. That is a great first introduction to the Church. Also, I don't think they felt like they were being put on the spot. We are not asking them to listen to a message about the Church...yet. Sometimes they will know something about this person, sometimes they won't. If they do know something about this person, great. If they don't, great. I am still talking to them.

Often the conversation would continue, "The address that we have is such and such. Are we close?" They would respond with, "Well, it is actually a couple of houses further down the street. What is the name of the person that you are looking for?" We would tell them the name and they may or may not know them. If they knew who it was we were looking for, we would get as much information about them as we could from the neighbor and then explain, "The reason that we are looking for them and are so concerned for them is because, as I said before, we are missionaries of the Church to which they belong and they have not come for a while. Have you heard of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints or the Mormons?" At this point, I would contact them and see if they were interested in talking with us. If not, we just went right on down the street, trying to find our inactive member. I hope this approach doesn't come across as being manipulative; I never intended it to be so. What I wanted this approach to be was a way to break the ice between us, the missionaries, and the potential investigator. Not very many people are going to meet you for the first time on the doorstep and invite you into their home. That is why contacting door to door is not one of the most effective techniques.

Having now owned my own home, I can understand why that is. First, call me paranoid, but I don't want just anyone coming into my home. Can you imagine what it must be like to have two very tall, white,

United Statesians standing on your doorstep and asking you to come into your home to share a message when you are a short, Costa Rican woman? I don't think my wife would let any missionaries in without me being there, regardless of what church they are from; even if they are from our own church. Second, most people are very busy. If you own your home, it probably means you have a mortgage on your home. If you have a mortgage, that means you have to make monthly payments that are pretty expensive. In order to pay them, you have to make money and, for most people, that takes time. My guess is that a lot of people simply don't have time to talk about religion. And third, a lot of people are not going to be interested, for whatever reason. Assuming that you are going to get into someone's home just by knocking on the door and offering to share a message about God is like assuming you'll be able to get into Fort Knox because you want to count the gold. (In some missions, the probability of getting in to a house by knocking on doors is probably about the same as getting in to Fort Knox to count the gold). So, what is the point of this? Try to find other ways of contacting people rather than simply street contacting or knocking on doors. Street contacting and knocking on doors are not very effective techniques. If you don't have any other options, be creative, there has to be something.

### **When To Let An Investigator Go**

Is this really a question that you should ask yourself? Yes! Yes! Yes! I think I offended a lot of people during my mission, though I never did it intentionally. Let me explain what I mean. When I would arrive at a new area, I would be introduced to the investigators that the missionaries in the area were working with. Almost invariably there would be some investigators that had been on their list for months. Sometimes, the investigators had been on their list for longer than my companions had been there. I was always a little skeptical about investigators that were taking so long. Of course, sometimes these investigators were amazing. They were taking a while to really weigh things out in their minds and trying to determine exactly what it was they wanted to do. I didn't have a problem with that, because they had followed through on their commitments.

How I offended people, though, was by making decisions about whether or not to keep investigators. Now, some people might say I was crazy for determining for the person when it was time for us to move on. I don't think so. As missionaries, we don't have a lot of time.

Sometimes it may feel like two-years are forever, but it really isn't that long in the broader scope of things. Because we do not have an infinite amount of time, we have to make decisions about who it is we are going to visit and who it is we are not going to visit. The way that I see it, if people commit to do something and then they do not follow through with that commitment, they aren't really interested. You see, if people really want something, they will do whatever they have to in order to get it. Some investigators are that way; they will follow through with every commitment unless something very serious comes up. But, when you have committed an investigator to come to church five times and their grandmother keeps dying, there is either something else going on or they just don't want to go.

Perhaps this was just a phenomenon of Costa Rica, though I don't believe so, but there were actually some families that were not members of the Church that just liked having United Statesian missionaries come visit them. I even had some families come right out and tell me that. Sometimes it is the other way around. Sometimes, missionaries just like visiting the families (often this has something to do with young women in the family).

Either way, what I'm getting at is that there comes a point when you have to make a decision. I developed a set of guidelines that worked for me. They were not always rigidly observed, but I think the idea is what is important. For me to continue to visit an investigator, they had to convince me that they were truly interested in what I was attempting to teach them. They had to do this by following through with the commitments that they had made. These would generally include such things as: reading the assigned reading in The Book of Mormon, going to Church, praying about the things we had taught them, and committing to baptism. Typically, I would use a three-strikes and you're out rule. If they didn't follow through with the commitment after three attempts to get them to do so, they had convinced me that they were not really interested. Needless to say, my list of investigators was constantly turning over with the exception of two or three that were following through with their commitments.

The part that I think was so offensive was when I would use these **Criteria of Continuance** (that's my name for them) on other people's investigators. Let me share some examples. I went on a split with a district leader that had been in his area for almost 7 months. We visited a woman that had several children that this Elder had initially contacted almost 7 months previously. He had visited her faithfully once a week or

more for 7 months. When I showed up, she had not read anything from the Book of Mormon for almost two months except what the Elders read to her on their weekly visits. She went to church once in those 7 months, but had not gone been to church for nearly three months. She was not praying. She had not committed to be baptized. I probably should have just kept my mouth shut, but I couldn't help it. This was a good, hard-working Elder that just didn't know when to say enough is enough. So I said it for him. I asked her rather bluntly, "María,<sup>12</sup> are you really interested in what we have to say as missionaries?" Her response, "No." Are you interested in going to church, "No." Are you interested in having us stop by anymore, "No." I think that the Elder I was with was dumbfounded. I truly believe that he didn't know what it was I was doing. I was actually asking the investigator if they were interested in the Church. Isn't that shocking? Who would dare do such a thing? (Note the sarcasm). Funny, but I would think that it was rather obvious, wouldn't you? Now, if María had been reading in The Book of Mormon on her own, claimed to have a testimony and was going to Church regularly, I wouldn't have said a word. But, after 7 months, if an investigator is not doing anything to increase the likelihood of gaining a testimony of the message we have, I think it is time to move on.

I hope this missionary doesn't hate me. I hope he realizes that I was actually doing him a favor. I doubt it, but I hope so. Sadly, the story doesn't end there. You see, we had done a split because we were both district leaders and had a leadership meeting in San José, which was a couple of hours away on bus. Our companions were working in my area while we were gone and we were supposed to meet up with them when we got back. Somehow, we were delayed getting back and we didn't find our companions, so we just went to his area and worked there until 9:30 when we figured our companions would be back in our apartment and then we would just meet them there. Well, after our visit with María, we visited two other families that night and I ended up doing the same thing with both of them. They were both families that he had contacted nearly 7 months earlier and that had either never come to church or had come to church once. They had either never read The Book of Mormon or had only read it with the missionaries. They had either never prayed or only prayed with the missionaries.

You see, the people that I think I offended were not the investigators. Frankly, I think most of the investigators were tired of the

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<sup>12</sup> I don't remember her actual name.

missionaries coming around after so many months. As a matter of fact, I think some of the ‘investigators’ felt that I was doing them a favor by getting rid of the missionaries that had been coming to see their daughter(s) for so long. The people that I offended were the missionaries. By getting rid of their investigators, I was telling them to move on and stop wasting their time. I don’t think missionaries like it when you do that. Strangely, as I sit here and think about it, I don’t think I ever did this with anyone but district leaders, zone leaders or assistants to the president. Maybe it is a phenomenon that is peculiar to those types of missionaries. Perhaps they feel like keeping these families is a sign that they are doing something. I don’t know why missionaries keep investigators for so long when the investigators do not follow through with their commitments. Frankly, I think it shows a lack of faith. Perhaps missionaries think that investigators that are willing to listen to them are so hard to come by that they will find anyone that is willing to listen to them and then latch on to them as though they are their lifeline to security. This is a waste of precious time.

So, what am I getting at here? Following through with commitments is a way of showing interest. Investigators that are truly interested in the message you have will follow through with their commitments. That is why we go to the trouble of having them make commitments in the first place. Don’t waste your time on people that are not willing to commit or not willing to follow through with their commitments. Have faith that there are others out there that are willing to do something with what you have to teach them. Oh yeah, one last thing. That district leader that took me to see three of his families and I turned them all loose, at the end of all of our visits and much to the surprise of the investigators and myself, he made appointments to visit them all the next week. I can’t believe it either. It really is okay to let go...

### **Being A Missionary Is Being A Counselor**

This may seem kind of odd, but I think it will come in handy. As a missionary, you are called to do a lot of things. You may end up serving as a branch president, you may fulfill different callings in the wards and branches in which you serve, you will be assigned talks spontaneously in sacrament meetings, you will have to bless and pass the sacrament on a moments notice, and you will be asked to do any other number of things. The point being, missionaries are like Universal Soldiers of the Lord –

they are called upon to do everything; they are the front-line of the Lord's army; and because of that, they have to be ready all the time.

But, there is one thing that is difficult to be ready for, especially when you are only 19-25 years old – counseling. This may not happen to all missionaries, but my guess is that it happens to almost everyone that is called to serve. There are a lot of people in this world that have a lot of problems, as a matter of fact, almost everyone believes that they have a lot of problems. I'm not trying to discount their problems, I'm just trying to help you realize that everyone seems to think that they are having problems. And, their problems are, to them, the worst problems in the world; problems don't get any worse than theirs.

Where missionaries come in is that they are often turned to for help. Now, this would probably not be too big of an issue if it were just young men (or maybe even young women) of high school age that had some questions; missionaries could probably handle that and even be somewhat insightful. But, the people that most often turn to the missionaries as counselors, at least in my experience, are women. This is probably because women feel like it is okay to share their feelings and frustrations with others and have been socialized to do so, whereas men do not typically feel this way. Regardless of who is doing it and why, it will more than likely happen to you.

This can be a rather shocking experience. I had never been married before my mission, nor had I ever had children, yet I was often turned to for marital advice and concerns about children. What do you do in this situation? Strangely, I very seldom felt like I was incompetent in these situations. This is typically when the Spirit kicks in and takes over for a while, prompting you to say certain things or just listen and understand. It's a good thing someone knows what is going on.

But, just for preparations sake, some advice on how to deal with these situations. If the person is a member and begins confessing sins, that is not an appropriate situation for you unless you have been called and set apart as the branch president for that individual. If you have not been set apart as the branch president, be as understanding as possible, but you need to let them know that they need to talk to the proper Priesthood authority, and that is not you. If the person is not a member and begins confessing sins, listen and be understanding.

If a woman comes to you or you visit a woman and she is emotional and says she wants advice, what she really means is that she wants someone to listen to her, probably because her husband or family does

not. In this situation, I would recommend just listening and being understanding. She may ask you for advice, but she really doesn't want it. So, when she does, turn the question back on her and ask her what she thinks she should do. Typically, she will already know what it is she is going to do; she just needs to vent her emotions.

If a man comes to you or you visit a man and he is emotional (this will very rarely, if ever happen), it means one of two things. One, he is experiencing some very serious emotional stress (his wife left him, his child died, etc.). Or two, he does this a lot. Either way, listen and be understanding.

Notice that my advice is almost always the same - listen and be understanding. This probably sounds bad, but when older people come to you for advice, they generally don't really want advice. They respect you as a missionary and believe that you are honest and will not gossip. Thus, they feel comfortable telling you things that they would never tell any other young man. What they want is to be understood.

The reason I even take the time to discuss this is because I found myself in the situation of counselor more often than I would have liked. I had a knife pulled on me while trying to help a very young mother (age: 15) that was investigating the Church. She was trying to get away from her estranged lover (age: 30 something) who was the father of the child. I had another investigator come to me about abuse by her former husband. Countless sisters in the Church told me their problems and how mistreated they were by their husbands and families. Untold numbers of alcoholic and drunk men attempted to relate their problems to me. I even had young sisters in the Church come to me for advice on what to do if they had fallen in love with a missionary. In at least one case, I was the missionary (I'm not being arrogant here; she later wrote me and told me I was).

Yes, missionaries are called to teach the gospel. However, to do that sometimes requires a little bit more from them than just teaching discussions. You can't just assume that people's lives exist in independent spheres, with their spirituality existing independently from their knowledge and their emotions and romantic life existing independently from their religious life. It would be ideal if all missionaries had to do was just show up and people would flock to them in great droves and they would just have to sit at the front of a classroom in the church building and teach discussions all day long. But this isn't an ideal world. Sorry. Being a missionary generally means that you will

have to be involved more in the lives of the individual than you might think or even want. I just wanted to let you know. This doesn't mean you should study up on your counseling techniques and try to serve in this capacity. You are not first and foremost a counselor. You are a missionary that is sometimes called to counsel and advise. Hopefully this forewarning will help you when it is your turn. It generally isn't that easy, but it is a great learning experience.

## Chapter 10: Politics and Positions

Politics are a fact of life. In any organization there are bound to be politics, even families. I am going to attempt to define politics, at least in the context in which I am discussing politics. I am also going to discuss three ways in which politics rears its ugly head in the mission field. I have included in the essays at the back of the book some more information on Church politics as well (see Appendix D).

### What Are Politics?

Politics exist in missions. For some missionaries, I think that it is surprising to realize that even in the Lord's work there exist politics. But, what do I mean by politics? As I am using it here, politics are the interplay of interactions and exchanges between people with the intent of self-beneficence. In layman's terms: people suck up to other people to get what they want. Inherent in a system of politics is the belief that certain things are better than others. In missions, there is an unspoken ranking system of positions, a system that only exists in the minds of the participants of the political system. The socially created ranking system is the first element of mission politics I will discuss. The manipulations and persuasions and strivings and vying in order to attain a position in the socially created ranking system are the second element of politics I will discuss. And the last element of politics I will discuss in this chapter is the erroneous notion that political positions/callings equate with worthiness.

### The Non-Existent Social Creation

I'm going to get a little philosophical here for a second. What if I told you that something exists but doesn't exist at the same time, would you believe me? Strangely, this is a semi-accurate description of mission politics. You see, mission politics are based on a social order or a ranking system. That ranking system is designed to tell you where you fit in the hierarchy of importance or prestige. Let me give you some non-mission examples. Who is more important in the following pairs of people: a high school football team captain or a high school studentbody

president; a high school cheerleader or a member of the high school dance team? I'm not going to argue what the right answer is; that isn't the point. What I want to point out is that you used some criteria in order to determine who the more important person was. Have you stopped to ask yourself from where your criteria for 'important' come? How do you know that a football captain is more important than a studentbody president or vice versa? What I want to point out in this chapter is not that politics shouldn't exist; they do. You need to accept that, especially since you will or more than likely have participated in them at some point in your life. What I want to help you understand is that they do exist and that they are simply social creations. Let me explain what I mean by social creations and then you will understand what I meant when I said it exists but doesn't exist at the same time.

Social means more than one person. Creation means coming into existence. Therefore, social creations are things that come into existence when there is more than one person or when people interact. The ranking system used in politics is a social creation. There is no law of nature – or even a divine law for that matter – that says a high school football captain is more important than a student body president. Nor is there a law that says a high school dancer is more important than a cheerleader. The law doesn't exist. Yet, almost invariably, we all have an opinion on which person or position is more important. Our understanding of the importance of these positions is based upon a lot of things. I'm not really going to get in to that. Let us just understand that the basis for our decisions comes from an order that is socially constructed. We learn this social order as we grow up and apply to our lives. We are constantly ranking and deciding who or what is more important based upon criteria that we have internalized over time.

Another example of a social construction is race and the resulting racism. Racism holds the understanding that certain races of people are better than others. This belief, when studied scientifically, is most often taught to children from their parents or from an adult. Children aren't just born believing that one race is better than another. They learn the social order or ranking system as they grow older, whether it is taught to them intentionally or not.

In both examples, the high school positions and with racism, there is no evidence to support a belief that one person in that position is better than another. Yet, people still have opinions as to which is better. This is the paradox of social rankings existing but not existing. You see, these social rankings exist only in the mind. But, they still exist as abstract

concepts. Even though there is no way to prove one thing or person is better or more important than the other, people still believe it.

As missions go, social rankings are inherent from day one. While you are in the MTC, most missionaries hold the belief that missionaries that are chosen as district leaders or assistants to the branch president are better missionaries than those that are not chosen. According to this belief, district leaders apparently rank higher up the social ranking system. Once you arrive at the mission, you quickly learn the political clout associated with each position in the mission field. Generally, this process is an unconscious process. I don't think most missionaries actually sit down to map out a hierarchical schematic of the mission. For most people, without consciously thinking about it, they make the determinations of which positions and people are the most important and then choose to behave in such a fashion as to positively situate themselves in relation to the positions of importance. This often implies paying deference to those in the positions of political clout; treating them as though they are somehow better than the normal missionary. Yet, someone, and I don't know who or I would reference them and thank them for this, has actually gone to the trouble of mapping out the political hierarchy of a mission for us. It is an informal ranking of missionary positions as compared to a superhero:

#### Mission President-

Leaps tall buildings with a single bound

Is more powerful than a locomotive

Is faster than a speeding bullet

Walks on water

Talks with God

#### Assistant to the President-

Leaps short buildings in a single bound

Is more powerful than a switch engine

Is just as fast as a speeding bullet

Walks on water if the sea is calm

Talks with God on special requests

Zone Leader-

Leaps short buildings with a running start and a favorable wind  
Almost as powerful as a switch engine  
Is faster than a speeding BB  
Walks on water on an indoor swimming pool  
Occasionally addressed by God

District Leader-

Barely clears a Quonset hut  
Loses a tug-of-war with a switch engine  
Can fire a speeding bullet  
Swims well  
Receives inspiration

Senior Companion-

Makes high marks on a wall while trying to leap tall buildings  
Is run over by a switch engine  
Can sometimes handle a gun without inflicting self-injury  
Treads water  
Prays a lot

Junior Companion-

Climbs the walls  
Continually rides the rails  
Plays Russian Roulette  
Walks on ice  
Talks to animals

Assuredly, many will think that these descriptions are funny. I agree, they are funny. But, they are funny in a very grim way. Not only does it compare AP's and zone leaders to superheroes, trying to give the impression that these individuals are larger than life or greater than a normal man, but they make out senior and junior companions as though they are less than a normal man. My wife believes that jokes are only funny if there is some truth to them. I don't always agree with that, but I think I do here. I am not saying that there is truth to what is being said about the different missionary positions. What I do think is that many missionaries think that this is true. Then, because they think this is true, they feel that they are worthless as missionaries unless they have moved up the social ranking system until they are somewhere near the top. But what is even more depressing is that those that don't ever move up this scale actually come to believe that those that do move up the scale are somehow manipulating their way up the scale. They may also say stuff like, "The position you have in the mission does not determine how good of a missionary you are." Whether or not they are right or wrong isn't the point. Even those that espouse a belief that mission politics and social rankings are wrong usually still believe in the ranking system, but they have to find some way to justify why they are on the bottom and not on the top. This often entails making up excuses and lying to oneself. This is distressing...but only the beginning.

## **Jockeying for Rank**

The whole concept of social ranking leads toward a desire to move up the social hierarchy. This is the idea of jockeying and striving for positions that are seen as self-beneficial; in other words, people wanting to look good as relates to the non-existent/existent-but-evil ranking system of the mission.

I had the opportunity to serve in the mission office while I was a missionary. I was the financial secretary of the mission for six months. During that time I became fairly well acquainted with how the mission was run. As the date of changes grew closer, the secrecy exhibited by the assistants to the president grew in leaps and bounds. Invariably, the night before changes, after the assistants and the President had made the decisions they were going to make (occasionally the Mission President would make a few more that night on his own), the elders in the office

would go out to eat and make guesses as to who was going where and who was going to be placed in the positions throughout the mission. Who were the new zone leaders going to be? Who was going to train? Who was going to be the new district leader? Who was going to be the new assistant to the president? Etc.

Once you learned who the friends of the assistants to the president were in the mission, you had about a 90 % chance of guessing who was going to be called into different positions (you know, the positions of 'importance' in a mission). You see, just as when we first enter the MTC and want to believe that our choice of companion has been divinely inspired and the president of the MTC has spent countless hours pondering this only to find out once we get there that who our companion is going to be was generated by a (God inspired) computer, we are disappointed. Changes in the mission are also understood to be inspired. I have no doubt that some of them are. At the same time, some of them probably are not. Some of the decisions made for changes in the mission positions are decisions made because they seem rather logical and pragmatic (I guess you could contribute this to the promptings of the Spirit as well), and some changes are made because the assistants to the president want their friends to serve in certain positions.

But what really makes this interesting is the entire concept of friendship on the mission. Friendships are often generated between missionaries when one missionary considers another missionary to be in a position that can advance his own position. Zone leaders have a lot of friends. District leaders do not typically have a lot of friends. If I am not mistaken, this is for several reasons. First, district leaders are more like the drill sergeants working directly with the troops. They tell the troops what to do as it is handed down the rungs of the mission ladder. They are also the person that is in direct contact with the 'lowest' missionaries on a daily basis. Zone leaders, on the other hand, are seen as having the voice of the assistants to the presidents. They are the up and coming leaders of the mission. They have the potential to become assistants to the president and are thus highly revered. Also, they are somewhat distanced from the actual missionaries and only work with them on occasion and only talk to them when there are zone conferences. Thus, zone leaders are seen as individuals higher up the line that can generate favors and get things done.

Of course, everyone wants to be friends with the assistants to the president. People will go so far as to attempt to befriend the other office elders believing that they actually have a say in who will be changed

where. It was quite remarkable on the day before changes to listen to the number of phone calls of missionaries that did not have changes that were trying to find out who was going where.

Most members of the Church that have never been missionaries will never realize how important changes are to missionaries. Why are changes so important to missionaries? Because this is their chance to move up the social ranking system. Generally, the only time that someone is made a senior companion, a district leader, a trainer, a zone leader, or an assistant to the president is at changes. Thus, because of the importance placed on positions in the mission, the intrigue and tension involved with changes is typically so thick that you can eat it for breakfast.

For some missionaries, holding positions in the mission is not just hoped for, it is expected. But, it isn't just expected by the missionary, the missionary's family expects it. It is almost like a new social order in the Church. You could compare it to parents who went to Ivy League colleges expecting their children to go to Ivy League colleges. It's not like it is actually a choice, it is just bound to happen. For some reason, to these families, holding a position in the mission hierarchy is akin to being a successful missionary.

Let me give you an example of mission politics at their best. There was a missionary in my mission that was known for his political savvy. We'll call him Elder Stevens. It was known from day one of Elder Steven's arrival in the Costa Rica, San José Mission that he was going to one day be an assistant to the president. How? Because he said so. Strangely, it came true. He had no qualms offending all of the right people and befriending all of the right people. This is not to say that him ratting out people for misbehavior was wrong. Personally, I thought it was noble. The only problem was that it seemed as though he was doing it because he wanted to be recognized as the missionary that would not tolerate any misbehavior. He would call the assistants to the president for the most menial things, sleeping five minutes too late, going out to work late; you name it, he called about it. Yet, he was also best friends with every assistant to the president in the mission before him and after him. He buttered them up one side and down the other, lavishing them with praises and putting himself in a position to counsel and encourage them. It was not until the assistants realized what he had done or rather, was doing once he requested a six-month extension to his mission that they finally told him not to call the office every day. His persuasions and manipulations were successful in getting him 'advancements' in the

mission hierarchy, ‘successful’ enough to even get him into the position of assistant to the president, though this was short lived. Yet, to this day, I do not believe there is an elder from that mission that would not say that Elder Stevens was the most manipulative, egotistical, self-serving, politically minded missionary in the mission. He knew it and everyone else knew it, and I’ll be doggoned if it didn’t work!

What is even more strange is how much I learned about missions from Elder Stevens. He has earned the title ‘Missionary Politician’ (MP) in my book. He embodied the spirit of mission politics. Sometimes I wonder what his life is like now, after the mission. Is he still so concerned about the socially created order? Is he engaged in ‘real’ politics now? Or does he just want to appear to be at the top of the social order so he is trying to make as much money as possible? I wonder... Anyway, where does all of this lead us?

### **The Missing Connection: Position and Worthiness**

When you combine the socially created hierarchy, jockeying for positions within it and a religious tone, you end with assessments of righteousness being based on positions within the hierarchy. This is the understanding that comes with mission politics. Stated more simply, the higher up the social ladder you are, the better missionary/person you are. **THIS IS A LIE!** You do not have to have a position in the hierarchy of the mission to be considered a good missionary. Good missionaries are good missionaries because they are worthy and obedient.

If you look at another member or missionary who has a position in the leadership hierarchy of the Church and say to yourself, “He must be an extremely worthy individual,” what is it you are trying to insinuate? That only the worthy receive callings in the Church? If you do not have a calling in the Church you are unworthy? Perhaps you approach it from a different angle, “He must be a great man.” Thus, only great men receive callings and positions in the Church? Do you see the problem here? Of course there are great men and women with callings and positions in the Church. But, just because they have a calling or position does not mean that they are any greater or any more worthy than anyone else. Nor does a position mean that their individual worth in the sight of God is any greater than anyone else’s. Their role in God’s plan might be more pronounced, but so what? Do you truly think that a bishop, stake president, or even a seventy has a direct shot into heaven just because of

their position? Do they not have to go through the same trials and tribulations and judgments?

As a missionary, if you are called to be a district leader, a zone leader, a senior companion, a trainer, or even an overly esteemed assistant to the president, this does not mean that you are a better missionary than anyone else. Nor does this mean that you are more worthy than others. All this means is that the mission president found you capable, and so, too, did the Lord, to handle this responsibility. You are no more worthy than the new missionaries in the mission. As a matter of fact, if you esteem yourself above those new missionaries, or anyone for that matter, you are actually less worthy in God's eyes because you are committing a grievous sin. "For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:11).

### **Mission Politics Conclusion (The M.P)**

When we combine these aspects of politics, we have individuals that recognize the ranking system (though it doesn't actually exist), manipulate to move up it and then cry to the world their glory from the top. They have engaged in interactions with other people with the intent of moving up the social ladder or ranks. They have used other people to appear more prestigious or important. They have become an M.P. (Missionary Politician). This is mission politics.

So, why is this important for you to know when you are going to serve a mission? Well, I guess you could interpret it in a couple of ways. Either I have helped you in your political pursuits by explaining the system and helping you to see it better so you can do your best to advance 'up' through the ranks. Or, I have helped you to see that the rankings used by missionaries to determine the prestige of other missionaries exist only in the mind and that the entire notion of worthiness being based on position in the hierarchy is a devilish lie. This is an incredibly important realization to come to. Why? Because it can change the entire focus of your mission. If, for some reason you are under the impression that you are not a successful missionary unless you achieve some 'political office' in the mission – district leader, zone leader, AP – hopefully you will now realize that this isn't what God esteems. Being placed in a political office as a result of manipulations and striving for that office is man's glory. "And when thou prayest thou shalt no do as the hypocrites, for they love to pray, standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say

unto you, they have their reward.” (3 Nephi 13:5). Their reward, as Christ calls it, is man’s glory. Is that the reward that you want? Man’s glory? What a pathetic pursuit.

God’s glory is “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” (Moses 1:39) How is that accomplished? By sharing and living the gospel. I don’t believe that you have to be an assistant to the president to do that. Your only focus on your mission should be building up the glory of God, not gaining man’s glory. For those that gain man’s glory, they have their reward.

I guess you can use this information for whatever end you would like. It is your choice and for some I’m sure man’s glory or immediate glory is still more important than God’s glory. That is a decision they have to make. Hopefully, you will choose God’s glory and carry to others the message of immortality and eternal life.

## **Mission Positions Defined**

My perspective on the different positions to be held in the mission is reflective of my perspective of mission politics. Therefore, I will try not to aggrandize nor demean any of the positions but explain the responsibilities that are involved with each one.

## **Mission President**

These men are called of God. There is something about them that usually makes sincere missionaries melt like butter. Whenever I had an interview with one of my Mission Presidents, I couldn’t hold anything back. These are great men. They have been chosen for a reason. Accept that. They may not know every scripture and the entire history of the Church. What they do know, however, is the voice of the Spirit. They are in tune. Don’t try to deceive them. Share with them. At the same time, try not to burden them with everything you do, they are very busy and you need to learn to do the most you can on your own. They have a large number of young men and women for whom they are responsible. They may also have couple missionaries that are working in the mission for whom they are responsible. Also, they are responsible for property (homes, cars, etc.) that the Church owns wherever the mission is. And, they may be responsible for any districts in the mission if they have not been organized into a stake. They have a lot of responsibility.

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Though I never really experienced a mission president that was gruff, I have heard mention of some. These men are human. Can you imagine being responsible for the behavior of some 150-200 young people? I would never be able to blame a mission president for being a little grumpy. More than likely, they deal with a lot of stuff that most people would never want to have to deal with.

Also, mission presidents have some autonomy or say over what goes on in their mission. They can change certain things based upon their perspective and their understanding of what the mission work needs in that area. Some mission presidents may allow you to listen to classical music, others will not. Some mission presidents may allow you to stay out until 10:00 and to get up at 6:30, others will say be home by 9:30 and up at 6:00. I even knew one mission president that recommended that his missionaries eat lunch in cemeteries and contact people that are visiting the cemetery by telling them that they can be with their loved ones again.

Why is it important to know that mission presidents have some autonomy? If you are in your mission when mission presidents switch, it is easy to second guess the new mission president if you really liked the old mission president. The mission president switched while I was in Costa Rica. I just happened to be in the office when that happened. My first president informed everyone in the office that the new president would undoubtedly be making some changes. He also told us that while receiving training in Utah, mission presidents were often encouraged not to make too many drastic changes right away, but rather to make the changes slowly and over time to allow missionaries to adjust. I don't know that all mission presidents will do that, but it seemed like good advice and that is actually what my second mission president did. The last bit of advice that my first president gave us was letting us know that the minute the new mission president arrived in Costa Rica, the mantle of responsibility and power would pass to him. He had already been set apart and ordained, he just had to arrive in the country. Therefore, what the new mission president said, went. He was now the commander-in-chief as far as we were concerned and we were not to question him. Of course, he would need to come to us to get some training, but what happened from here on out was ultimately up to him.

In summary, mission presidents can vary a great deal. They can bend the rules to facilitate the mission work in the area. They can also be a little gruff. But, they have the mantle of power and responsibility. They

are in charge. Respect that. Respect them and their wishes and you will do well in your mission.

### **Mission Matron (a.k.a. Mission Mother, Mission President's Wife)**

My perception of mission matrons may be a little eschewed. For some reason, both of my mission matrons were assertive almost to the point of being aggressive. Thus, I am under the impression that the Lord calls very able men that just happen to have very 'tough' wives. They are go-getters and when they speak, listen. Think about it this way, they have the ear of your mission president, respect that. Also, their responsibilities may vary greatly. Some mastermind medicine in the mission; others are scribes. On top of their responsibilities as a mission matron, they are also a wife and often a mother, so they are often just as busy or even busier than their husbands. Their level of interaction with the missionaries may vary as well. Some women do not like giving talks. Some women have a hard time not talking. Some women like to take on projects in the mission; some women keep their distance. The role of a mission matron I think is probably one of the most ill-defined or open positions in the Church. So, I am guessing that their level of involvement and their interests are going to vary from mission to mission around the world.

There is another thing that I think is important to mention, perhaps because I like to believe that at some mild level I am a feminist. I do not think that it is appropriate to simply define or call mission matrons 'mission president's wives'. They are people. They are individuals. They are not just their husband's wives. Just as we are not to define those that are not members of the Church in terms of their status as regards members of the Church (non-member or non-Mormon), we should not refer to 'mission matrons' as 'wives of the mission presidents'. Whether or not there is a more correct term, I am not aware. But, because they are individuals and people they deserve their own title. Perhaps I could poll the mission matrons of the Church and see what title they would prefer. I am prone to use the term 'mission matron', but I think that is for lack of a better term. Anyway, they deserve just as much respect as their husbands, for that reason, do not refer to them in reference to their husband; they are autonomous individuals; give them some credit. These are noble women; respect them and treat them well and they will do the same for you.

## Trainer

Trainers are trainers usually because they are pretty good missionaries. This doesn't mean that they are better than others. In my mind, and as a result of what I mentioned in the section on mission politics, ranking and comparing one missionary to another is akin to drinking alcohol or using tobacco. It is a grievous sin that will only tear people down. It does not build people up. Thus, when I say that a missionary is a good missionary, it is in regards to himself. He is living worthily, being obedient and working hard. I think it would be too much to say that he really knows why he is on a mission, but he is doing what he is supposed to be. Also, trainers usually know what is going on. There is a lot happening on a mission and a lot to figure out; at first, you'll just need to go with it. Once your feet are a little wet, things will start to make more sense. Also, once you get with your trainer, the real learning begins. It is almost like the distinction between playing paintball and going to war. When you're in the MTC, things are more mellow. You can make mistakes and the effects are not too devastating. You're essentially learning how to play the game. When you get to the mission field, it is now, truly, you against the forces of evil. If you have a good trainer, he will help you see the ways and methods that the forces of evil use to overcome the forces of good. Also, a good trainer will be able to find a balance between not giving you enough responsibility and giving you too much responsibility.

Trainers have a unique and important role in the mission. As I see it, it is similar to the emphasis that is put on the family in the Church. President Kimball believed that the strength of a nation is determined by the strength of the families within that nation. This notion is just as relevant for missionaries and their trainers. If you have a good trainer, you will be off to a good start on your mission. If you have a bad trainer, obviously you will not be off to such a good start. Ironically, in many missions, when a missionary trains another, the missionary being trained is often referred to as a son. If the son trains someone else, then the original missionary becomes a grandpa and so on. Sometimes this alliteration to a family tree can become fairly extensive, including uncles, cousins, etc. I think it is kind of funny. But I would encourage you not to compare the number of offspring of missionaries, nor to use that number as a measure of the quality of the parent or the status of the

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parent missionary. Just because you are asked to train another missionary does not mean you are the best missionary in the mission. It means the mission president has enough faith in your abilities to convey the knowledge you have learned to another that he is going to give you this opportunity. Don't get a big head.

In summary, trainers are responsible for the first lessons and impressions new missionaries receive. These missionaries teach work ethic and technique. These missionaries can make or break a new missionary's mission.

### **New Missionary (a.k.a. 'Greenies' or 'Newbies')**

One of the biggest mistakes new missionaries make is to assume that they know everything. You have been taught ideals in the MTC. These ideals are exactly that-ideals. Your new, naïve, and young. Accept that. On the other hand, you have the Gift of the Holy Ghost and should be able to ascertain whether or not your trainer is a valiant and obedient missionary. If he isn't, you'll obviously have to step in. This may mean calling him to repentance or, at a bare minimum, calling your mission president and letting him know what is going on. However, don't tell him what to do. Take some time to check things out. See what he does, be it good or bad and learn from him. After a few days, if you have some ideas, offer them tactfully. Don't be arrogant and assume you know you're right. Also, remember the advice I gave earlier on how to resolve conflicts between yourself and other missionaries; it can be an invaluable tool for alleviating tension and stress. It is also very useful when you are a new missionary and have grand notions, most of which will never be realized.

Being a new missionary in the mission field also has some advantages. As a new missionary, you really are not going to be held all that responsible for what happens in your area or with you and your companion. Generally, the trainer is the one that is held responsible. This doesn't mean you should abuse that. But it does mean that you have some leeway. Also, as I mentioned previously, often because of a lack of knowledge, new missionaries use their faith to do the work. This is comparable to my allegory of faith being a bridge that turns into the dam of knowledge. As missionaries age in the mission field, typically their faith in God turns into a deeper, stronger knowledge. Not only a knowledge that God will help them in the work, but that He and His Son exist and that missionary work is Their work. Regardless, the faith of

new missionaries is often a very powerful tool in missionary work and can sometimes be overlooked. So, don't waste the opportunity by not exercising your faith. Take some spiritual chances, bear your testimony and try to teach a discussion section in another language. How will you know if it is going to work until you have the faith to try it?

## **Junior Companion**

Typically, a missionary will become a junior companion after having been trained. This is a stage where your training continues and you continue to learn and refine your techniques. The role of a junior companion in most missions is not really distinguished from that of a senior companion. Occasionally there are situations in which the mission president makes it quite clear who the senior companion is. This can and often does include situations in which the senior companion has been in the mission for a shorter period of time. Typically, this means that the older missionary is either not-obedient or very difficult to get along with or both. Unless that is the situation, the distinction between junior companion and senior companion is usually not made. Of course, some missionaries are going to try to make a distinction and use that to their advantage. There were a couple instances on my mission when I had companions that were older in the mission than I was and it seemed as though they tried to abuse this. One missionary tried to tell me what to do, though what it was he wanted to do I was pretty sure wasn't appropriate behavior for missionaries. The other companion only used his seniority once to set up a split with a missionary that was a good friend of his. I didn't think it was in either of their best interests because they had chosen to do some things that were inappropriate when they had been together at previous times (e.g. getting tattoos). But I think they had both straightened out to some degree by that point and I think it went okay; at least my companion said it did.

So, typically, the role of junior companion will just mean you are the younger missionary in a companionship though you will share equal responsibility for the missionary work.

## **Senior Companion**

If being the junior (time in the mission not age) companion typically means you are just the younger missionary in a companionship, then

being a senior companion means you are typically just the older missionary in a companionship. However, as mentioned in my discussion about junior companions, unless the mission president very specifically determines which is which and points that out to the companionship, then being senior companion really only means that you are ultimately responsible for what goes on in your area. The senior companion should, if necessary, continue to teach and train the younger missionary, as well as set an example for him. Otherwise, they are just companions working together.

## **District Leader**

Being called as a district leader is essentially a call to have more responsibility. When called as a district leader, you assume responsibility for the missionaries in your district. That does not necessarily mean that if a companionship in your district goes off the deep end and breaks some serious rules that you are going to ultimately be responsible. However, as a district leader, you should know of any aptitudes for misbehavior and do all that is within your power to help those missionaries stay obedient and do what is right.

Also, as a district leader, it is your responsibility to continue the training of the missionaries in your district. This is typically done two ways. The first is through weekly or every other week district meetings. Though you are not the only one that should offer instruction on missionary techniques, you are responsible for planning the meetings and determining who is going to teach the missionaries in the district. The second way in which you continue the training of the missionaries in your district is by working with them or going on splits. Not only is this a great way of finding out what they are actually doing in their area, but it is an opportunity to teach them better techniques for contacting people, working with people and teaching people.

So, the responsibilities of a district leader are to be models of good missionaries in their own area, to be responsible for the missionary work and the misbehavior of the other missionaries in the district, and to teach the missionaries in the district.

## **Zone Leader**

Zone leaders are comparable to district leaders except on a larger scale. Zone leaders are responsible for several districts of missionaries.

Because they are responsible for so many missionaries, they typically will only have zone meetings once a month and these will be attended by the mission president. Also, zone leaders may not be able to do splits with all of the missionaries in their zone, but they should be working with their district leaders quite regularly, ensuring that they are working hard and fulfilling their responsibilities as district leaders. Zone leaders should also be examples of model missionaries. They should be living according to the rules of the mission and should be working very hard to accomplish the work of the Lord.

### **Assistant to the President**

For some reason, this position in the mission is highly coveted. It is often made out to be the most prestigious position in the mission and is given the highest status. That is kind of strange because assistants to the president are often unable to do much missionary work. Most of their time is actually spent making sure the mission is running smoothly, that missionaries are happy and/or content, and making sure the mission president has everything that he needs. This means that they often spend their days running errands, delivering things and talking with the mission president in meetings. Yet, after all of this, they are often assigned to work in an area which is neglected because of their other responsibilities. Sometimes assistants to the president will actually go on splits with the other missionaries in the mission, though how often this happens is probably dependent upon the mission. I only remember it happening once or twice during my whole mission and that is not just with me, that is with anyone in the mission.

On my more pessimistic days, I wonder what the assistants to the president really spend all of their time doing. I think the answer is that they come up with programs. 'Programs', as I understand it, is a bad word in the Church. You see, the Church has already set up all of its programs. It doesn't need anymore programs. So when someone comes up with a program, it typically means they want to go to a lot of work to develop some cutesy idea that will be fairly ineffective. I remember while I was in the office that the AP's enlisted the help of a ward member that was a computer programmer to build a database for keeping track of new converts. The member, who loved programming computers, was very enthusiastic about the idea, but he wasn't very good at making his databases user-friendly. As a result, the database, which cost several hundred man hours to build, was used for all of a week or two before the

AP's decided their idea was too cumbersome and time consuming. I wonder where that database is today...

Anyway, there certainly is a lot of hype about AP's. Generally they are pretty good missionaries in the sense that they have good techniques, good people skills and are obedient. This isn't always the case, as the AP's of my mission when I arrived in my mission were later found out to have been very manipulative and abusive of their position; using it to go sightseeing and even visiting other countries on their vacation tours of the mission (this is typically against the rules of missions). The hype, I believe, stems from the belief mentioned earlier of a social order, which we determined only exists in the minds of the missionaries. In this social order, AP's are at the top. They work with the mission president therefore they must be the 'best' missionaries.

Well, if they really are such good missionaries, how can the mission president afford to have them spend most of their time running errands and coming up with programs? Don't get me wrong, I have nothing against AP's. I do have something against thinking these men are superhuman. They're not. If I were to guess, which is really all that I am doing, I would say that 50% of AP's are also MP's and that the other 50% never really thought they would be called to be AP's or never really wanted it. Meaning, half the time, AP's have fought their way into the position esteeming it above all other positions in the mission and the other half of the time they are hard-working missionaries that are good at being missionaries and the mission president wants them to help others become good missionaries.

Ultimately, I don't really know what to think about AP's. I think my perception of AP's was tainted by how often they were MP's in my mission, which gave me an overall bad flavor in my mouth. Perhaps if they were humble, spent as little time in the mission office as possible and avoided coming up with any programs, AP's could be effective and useful. However, how often do AP's abide by those guidelines? Typically, they are a bit prideful, they spend as much time as possible in the mission office and mission home and come up with programs as often as they comb their hair.

## **Branch President**

Occasionally, it is the case that a missionary will be called to serve as a branch president in his area. Usually, missionaries that end up as branch presidents have a sense of maturity about them that only deepens

when they are called to this position and come to know the situation of the members better. Because of the gravity and training of this calling, a missionary can remain in this calling for quite some time. In my opinion, this has to be the most difficult calling in the mission, aside from being called to be a mission president.

Perhaps my sentiment regarding branch presidents is also a carryover from my sentiment regarding bishops. I personally believe that I would rather have any other calling in the Church besides that of bishop or branch president. Individuals called to these positions are often privy to the most private stories and incidents and thoughts and feelings in peoples' lives. That can be a very gloomy place to visit. And, that is on top of the fact that they are responsible for the welfare of their flock, regardless of the size.

Once, while serving as a district leader, the branch president that was included in my district fell ill and had to be taken to the hospital. As a result, I was asked to take over his meetings that Sunday. It was probably one of the most humbling experiences I have ever had. My companion and I were suddenly responsible for everything that happened in that branch. We had to assign talks, assign someone to bless and pass the sacrament, conduct the meeting, set up the chairs, take down the chairs, teach Sunday school and relief society and priesthood and primary. There is so much going on during the actual church meetings on Sundays that I have no idea how branch presidents and bishops coordinate it all.

Perhaps because this position has a tendency to humble people is why it was not included in the aforementioned comical list of missionary rankings. But I think that is quite telling actually. You see, there is a reason that the position of branch president is left off that list and left out of the political/social order. I am guessing that, in the minds of the truly political, serving as a branch president typically doesn't take place until you have been in the mission at least a year. Because learning all that is required to adequately fill the role of branch president is time consuming, branch presidents are often kept in that position longer than missionaries are typically kept in an area, probably ranging somewhere from 6 months to 1 year. Well, if the ultimate political goal in the mission is to become the assistant to the president but you are called to be a branch president, your 'progress' in the mission hierarchy has suddenly stagnated. You can no longer be labeled an MP because you have become a BP. Essentially, you have been taken out of the running for political office because of religious responsibility. Doesn't that sound incredibly ironic? For the politically minded, becoming a BP would be

like embarking on political campaign disguised as a religious mission, only to be sidetracked by an actual religious mission.

In summary, then, branch president, when it comes to difficulty of the position and responsibility of the position, should be esteemed next to mission president if one *must* generate a mission hierarchy. However, in the traditional mission hierarchy, branch presidents are not included because it is typically a political career stagnating position and not an advancing position. I do not envy branch presidents their calling and position. I respect them and appreciate their willingness to serve. That is a noble calling.

## **Office Elder**

Office elder is another position that is not included in the political hierarchy of the mission. Why? First, because some missions do not even have office elders. It is difficult to rank a non-existent position in a non-existent hierarchy; too many non-existents would probably cause someone to think about the truth. Second, office elders are similar to branch presidents in a way. Typically, serving as an office elder requires some special training. Once that training has taken place and you are in position to do your job, it does not make sense to have you train someone else to replace you until you have served in that position for quite a while. Thus, office elders are typically taken out of the political hierarchy game because they have been locked into the responsibility of a position. By no means am I saying that office elders have the same amount of responsibility as a branch president. I would never claim that. However, they are essentially assigned (for the politically minded ‘stuck in’) a position that is going to range from 5 to 6 months on the low end to 8-12 months on the high end.

Working as an office elder, if the position exists in a mission, will most likely be different from mission to mission. Where I served, all of the positions in the mission office were filled by elders. This included a secretary to the president, a commissary elder that was responsible for the mail and the physical needs of the missionaries, and a financial secretary (that was me) who was responsible for the missionaries’ money and the expenses of the mission. They were to work in the office in their respective assignment until 5:00 PM at which time they became regular missionaries once again. Occasionally, the mission president would request that they help with other things, from helping cater a meal to

chauffeur general authorities, activities that would eat into proselytizing time.

Also, depending upon the mission, there can be some perks for office elders. Where I served, none of the elders had vehicles. The public transit/bus system of Costa Rica was quite an effective way to travel. And, we had feet. But, because of the type of work that office elders were required to do, there were two vehicles assigned to the office. One was typically commandeered by the AP's and the other was usable at the discretion of the office elders. As I was explained the reasoning, because the office elders were taking most of their day to work in the office, the added effectiveness of having a car at night was to help them make up for the lost time. Kind of hokey, but it was one reason why office elders were envied. The other was the amount of time one was able to spend with the mission president and his family. I guess, depending upon the mission president, this can be a great reward. As I saw it, it definitely was rewarding.

In the end, office elders play a role in the mission that is important, but is typically not categorized as a role of political advancement. However, there are some perks to serving as an office elder and in the minds of some MP's, that can make up for the lost time in pursuit of the ultimate political goal of becoming the AP.

## **Conclusion**

Mission politics exist and they probably will always exist until enough people come to the conclusion that they will only result in the glory of man. Hopefully, having read this, you will recognize that a mission is supposed to be religious and not political. As far as mission positions go, I do not believe there should be a hierarchy, whether non-spoken or not. Each position in the mission is important and fills a need. A missionary is a missionary, just as a child of God is a child of God is a child of God. Not everyone will be convinced of that, but I guess that is the aim of my endeavors. And, if my efforts are to no avail when it comes to helping other missionaries, at least they helped me see my mission experience more clearly.

# Chapter 11: How a Mission is Like High School

## How a Mission is Like High School

My high school, Morgan High, was a pretty small high school. When I graduated, there were around 650 students in the entire school and that included the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. There were some wonderful benefits to having such a small school, and there were some drawbacks, but that is not the focus of this chapter. My high school had four different grades; I saw this as a good comparison to four different stages of the mission: Freshman – first six months, Sophomore – second six months and end of first year, Junior – third six months, and Senior – last six months and end of mission. The similarities were so telling, I just had to write this down.

### Freshman

Not everyone had Freshmen in their high school, but for those of you that did, I think this will work even better. Freshmen, in my high school, were seen as immature and naïve. They did not really understand what was going on in the school even though they, like most teenagers, seemed to think that they knew everything. They were notorious for making mistakes, but sometimes came up with some brilliant ideas and didn't even realize it. Sometimes, there was a type of hazing or abuse that went on as initiation into the school. And, lastly, high school Freshmen were known for having lots of school spirit. It was almost as though these behaviors were expected and the other classes just put up with the Freshmen.

During the first six months of your mission, you will probably be seen about the same way. You will be considered young and naïve, even immature at times. Your knowledge about the way that things work and how to do the missionary work will most likely not be very extensive. You will make mistakes. Yet, sometimes, you will come up with things that are absolutely brilliant. There will be initiations into the missionary force; these often include memorizing the discussions and specific scriptures to illustrate a mastery of the message that you are to be teaching. Yet, they can often include semi-cruel hazing rituals and

unusual acts. One of the first initiations that I remember was an older missionary asking me, as a plane flew overhead, “Elder, how far away do you think that plane is?” I, being naïve and ever analytical, actually estimated how high I thought it was based upon the average altitude of our location and the average flying altitude of the planes that I had been on. The older missionary laughed and said, “For me, it’s about two months away. For you, it’s about two years.” Of course I felt that he was snide and inconsiderate, but this is somewhat typical of the initiations Freshmen missionaries receive.

Yet, not all is lost for young missionaries. What they lack in knowledge and know-how they often make up for with spirituality. The adage that the Lord will make up for your weaknesses when you are humble and turn to Him for help is nowhere seen as well as in the help that He gives to young missionaries. Many times I was astounded when working with younger missionaries at the power they carried in their testimonies and how they often seemed to say the exact thing that needed to be said; sometimes without even knowing what it was they said. So, though some missionaries may make fun of ‘greenies’ or ‘newbies’ for their lack of knowledge, their lack of language skills, their naiveté, and sometimes even their pride, they do have a great deal to contribute as missionaries, especially in their recognition of the Spirit and their ability to heed or listen to its promptings.

## **Sophomores**

This group in high school is probably the most bizarre. You see, everyone knows who the Freshmen are because they are generally obnoxious and loud. And, everyone seems to know who the Juniors and Seniors are because they are the veritable ‘Kings’ of the school. But sophomores, sophomores tend to slip through the cracks. Sophomores are actually fine tuning their skills. They are beginning to understand how things work and are making sure that they can be a part of the functioning of the missionary world. They are experienced enough not to make the common mistakes of Freshmen, but are not as slick and quick as the Juniors and Senior. And, they are not generally that popular or well-known. Of course there are occasional exceptions when someone is an outstanding athlete or an extreme class clown, but for the most part, these individuals are deeply engaged in learning what it is they need to know to transition into the leadership of the school as Juniors.

As missionaries, it is identical. These missionaries do not seem to be that prominent because they have not yet been assigned to any specific positions within missions. Of course, there are always going to be exceptions, but it does seem to be the trend that these missionaries are in the process of fine tuning their missionary skills and knowledge so as to be able to teach other missionaries how to do the work.

## **Juniors**

Juniors in high school are recognized as having paid their dues. They are knowledgeable about what goes on and also how to work the system. They may not be quite as quick and slick as seniors, but they are typically well on their way. The major difference between Juniors and Seniors is that the Juniors are not feeling as though their experience is about to end. They still have another year after this. Thus, this period is actually one of high output when they are willing to really put in a lot of effort and work hard to accomplish the things that they want to accomplish while in high school. Juniors are also fairly reliable and can be given responsibilities and it is assumed that they will follow through with them.

The missionaries that correspond with the Juniors are often the most effective missionaries in the mission. They are knowledgeable enough to know how to do things well and effectively but are not so close to home that they have lost their motivation to work. They are often given positions within the mission structures as it is seen that they can assume responsibility. These missionaries are often very good at training other missionaries because they understand how missionaries work and how the mission works. They can be the hardest working missionaries in the missions.

## **Seniors**

Seniors, in high school, are the kings of the school. They know how to work the system in their favor and, as far as students can actually be considered to run the school, they do. Seniors are the masters of the ropes, they know how to get things done and get the things that they want. They seem to have power and influence and seem to have built a rapport with the faculty and staff. Yet, the big problem with Seniors is that they are also ready to go. They know that their stint as the 'Kings of the School' is going to end soon and they are often quite anxious to

move on to discover what else life has in store for them. So, though they may have the most knowledge and may be potentially the most effective students and leaders, they are also dealing with the emotions of leaving and the shock and anxiety that these emotions can bring.

The missionaries that are compared with Seniors are typified as knowing all there is to know about the mission. Now, this isn't always the case, but generally speaking, they are the most knowledgeable about what goes on in the mission and about how things typically run. These missionaries know how to work, though they don't always want to. These missionaries can pretty much teach anyone the ropes and explain how to get things done, but they aren't always reliable because of the closeness of home. In other words, the only major problem that might occur with senior-like missionaries is their lack of motivation to work because their focus has shifted from the missionary work to going home (aka: senioritis).

## **Conclusion**

With my comparison laid bare, there are a few additional comments I want to make on this comparison. First, this is just a model for what can happen. By no means am I claiming that this is the way that it always is or even how it should be. Sometimes, Freshmen missionaries are very knowledgeable about how things work based on previous experiences working with missionaries and are immediately given responsibility. Sometimes Senior missionaries are still pretty naïve and not very effective. This is just a model! Along with any other developmental or stage model, it is not perfect for everyone. Don't plan your mission as though it is going to happen exactly as I have said. It may, but it will probably be off by a few months here and a few months there. Yet, I think you will notice that there are definitive points of transition for missionaries from one stage to the next. So, take the model for what it is: an aide in helping you to understand the development of missionaries and how things typically or generally work in missions.

Second, this is not gospel doctrine. As I said before, this is not the way that it has to be or is even supposed to be. This is just the way that it seems to be. As with any generalization, there are going to be outliers. Third, if you do find yourself to be an outlier, someone that doesn't follow this pattern, and you are called to a position early on, your worst enemy has just switched from the apathy of investigators to the pride of a

missionary. Be aware of what pride can do to you<sup>13</sup>. Just because you have been called to serve in a particular position does not mean you are better than everyone else.

Third, and last, many of these periods of transition that I mentioned, moving from a freshman to a sophomore or passing your first six-month mark are celebrated by missionaries. Though I was never actually privy to these celebrations (I'm not exactly sure why), many missionaries will symbolically pass the day they have marked as their six-month, one year, or year and a half mark by burning a tie, a white shirt, pictures of a lost girlfriend, old shoes, you name it. Frankly, if I had access to these individuals while they were doing it, I think this would make a fascinating study on the burning of effigies. Also, I would love to know where this tradition began. Anyway, I don't think that I could actually take a stand as to whether or not this is a good thing. I have no real opinion on it. Also, since I was never really involved with the burning of symbolic effigies resembling some rite of passage, I am not exactly sure what this means. Perhaps it is a symbol of closure for the past or a way to burn all of the old, bad memories. Maybe it is even symbolic of a cleansing for misdeeds. Or, it could even be some type of cultic ritual engaged in by the not-so-righteous. Whatever it is and whatever it means, it often takes place and I thought it would be good for you to know.

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<sup>13</sup> See President Benson's address on Pride: 1989 May Ensign

## Chapter 12: Badly Behaved Missionaries (BBM's)

Shocking, isn't it? I am devoting an entire chapter in my book to badly behaved missionaries (BBM's). Well, if you are truly interested in being a goodly behaved missionary (GBM), just like if you are truly interested in being Christ-like, you must understand the evil that lurks in the corners. Not all missionaries are going to be exposed to BBM's. I have actually heard some returned missionaries say that they went to a mission where missionary disobedience was unheard of. Missionaries did what they were supposed to do and that was that. Well, I would submit that these types of missions, though I believe that they are becoming more common, are still not the rule but rather the exception. In my experience and in listening to the stories of the returned missionaries that I know, BBM's still abound. Let's explore why.

### Badly Behaved Missionaries (BBM's)?

Presently, we are concerned with the difference between a BBM and a GBM. The difference is actually quite simple, but the consequences of being one versus the other are quite complex. GBM's are obedient. (One could add a third category here, that of IGBM's, or ideal goodly behaving missionaries that would include having the proper motivation as discussed in chapter 1, but that is not the focus of our current discussion.) BBM's, then, are just the opposite of GBM's, they are disobedient.

As I said, the distinction between the two is quite simple. The consequences of the distinction are a little more complex. When we choose to obey rules, we choose the results and/or consequences of our actions. When we choose to break rules, we are subject to the consequences of our actions and are no longer free. Thus, GBM's are choosing the consequences of their actions, namely building up the Kingdom of God and bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of man (aka God's work and glory). BBM's are becoming subject to the consequences of their actions. It is not always the case that the consequences of one's actions become apparent in this lifetime. However, because God is perfectly just, the consequences of misbehavior will become fully apparent in the next stage of our lives,

namely the hereafter. But what is even worse for us in the here and now than expecting punishment for sins in the hereafter is the way that misbehavior takes control of one's life in the present. BBM's, having committed a sin or having misbehaved, are immediately controlled by their misbehavior because that misbehavior holds consequences for them that they typically do not want to face. Thus, BBM's must attempt to conceal their misbehavior, often turning to lying, another grievous sin, in order to cover up their misbehavior. Yet, even if their lying is 'successful' and they are not faced with the consequences of the sin at the present, they have compounded their sin and will face a much greater debt in the future. It almost sounds like a financial debt with compounded interest, doesn't it?

Let me give you an example. Let's say that a pair of missionaries, thinking that there is no way anyone else in the mission will see them, decide to go to the beach on their preparation day. In my mission, going to the beach was fine; it was what you chose to do while at the beach that could get you into trouble. Well, these missionaries are going to go for a little swim. What they don't know is that the mission president has decided to go to the same beach that day with his family. So, the missionaries are enjoying their swim when one of them spots a person whom they are pretty sure is the mission president. As quickly and as stealthily as possible, they grab their stuff and head out. The mission president, in his infinite wisdom and being inspired, feels that he came to this beach for a reason. And, just by chance, he catches a glimpse of two of his elders as they are leaving the beach. It was just a glimpse and he isn't sure. The elders are convinced they got away with their misdeed. The next day, the mission president calls the elders and asks them if they had gone to the beach. This is where the compounding begins. The elders, not wanting to get in trouble, choose to lie. They were not at the beach. Well, mission presidents are inspired and they typically know when someone is lying to them. Yet, they probably will accept the answer, fully aware of the lie and not pursue it until a later date.

What the missionaries have done is chained themselves to a lie that is going to begin to compound. You see, they are going to have to tell the mission president what they were doing on preparation day. If this story does not correspond to the story that they told the other missionaries in their district or surrounding area, they are increasing their chances of getting caught. So, they are going to have to generate another lie for their district to cover up the first lie. Also, if they happen to live with or near some members, the members probably wanted to know what they

were doing on their preparation day. So, they will have to develop another lie for them. If the matter is pursued, they are going to have to continue lying, either until the misdeed is discovered or until all that would be interested in the misdeed are convinced that it did not happen. What good, then, did the lying do? Perhaps they convinced the mission president that they were not swimming, thereby avoiding the immediate consequences of sin. But they have not avoided the long term and compounded consequences of their sin and the lying they engaged in to cover it up. God has taken note of their misdeed and their lie and they will have to suffer for it unless they repent.

Therefore, if an individual has a long-term perspective of the consequences of sin, namely that it would actually be in their best interest to resolve sins and repent in the present rather than face their sins in the hereafter when the sin has already caused them to lose their place amongst the gods, they will actually be better off. However, this long-term perspective is not very common among people that want immediate gratification. Thus, if an individual is willing to sin in order to gain immediate gratification, they are also probably not aware of or interested in the long-term effects of covering up sin. In the end, I believe many BBM's either will or have come to a realization of the error of their ways. Hopefully they do so before it is too late.

Of course, this area of GBM's and BBM's is a little gray. Not all missionaries fit neatly into these two categories. Some missionaries are what I call Weak-Willed Followers (WWF's). Their level of obedience to the mission rules is entirely dependent upon their companion. If their companion is a GBM, they are a GBM. If their companion is a BBM, they are a BBM. Because they shift and change with every individual with whom they serve, they are categorized as WWF's. By no means would I consider this categorization worse than a BBM, but Christ has stated that he doesn't like fencesitters, "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:16). I wouldn't recommend being a fencesitter or WWF; I'll talk more about WWF's later.

In summary, there are several categories of missionaries: BBM's, GBM's, and WWF's. The difference is simple, it is all related to their level of obedience to the mission and Church rules. Where this really matters is in the consequences of obedience and disobedience. Disobedience results in punishment whereas obedience results in rewards. Fencesitters, or the lukewarm, because of their indecision and lack of commitment to one or the other, will be rejected as well. I have

heard some missionaries say that they believe the ratios of these types of missionaries is 1:1:1, or that for every GBM, there is a BBM and a WWF. In other words, 1/3 of the mission is made up of GBM's, 1/3 of BBM's, and 1/3 of WWF's. I don't believe this is entirely accurate, but if it is, then at any given point, only about 1/2 of the missionaries in a mission are actually working toward the building up of the Kingdom of God. That is scary.

## **Why Some Missionaries Choose to behave Badly**

So, now that we have an understanding that there can be such a thing as a BBM, it might be interesting to explore why some missionaries choose to behave in such a fashion that they and their behaviors actively work against the building up of the Kingdom of God.

My first argument as to why some missionaries may choose to behave badly is because they are not serving a mission for the right reason. As mentioned earlier in this book, your reason for serving a mission is a very powerful motivator. If you serve a mission because your parents would kick you out of their house and remove you from their will, the conviction of the missionary is not going to be that motivating. He is there for the wrong reason. His parents have manipulated him and he has allowed himself to be manipulated. For those that might be reading this with the hope of encouraging a son or daughter to serve a mission, let me explain briefly the difference between persuasion and manipulation or threatening.

In D&C 121:41, the word persuasion is used, "No power of influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned." Notice the words that persuasion is coupled with. They are not manipulation, threats, and violence. They are long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, and unfeigned love. In today's common English usage, persuasion carries an implication of deceiving someone into doing something that they do not want to do. However, in this scripture, the usage is not modern-day English. The usage is in the time of Joseph Smith when it meant, and still does in philosophical circles, to convince or influence through rhetoric and/or argument. Thus, telling someone that you will remove them from your will (assuming that this holds a motivation because you are wealthy) unless they serve a mission is not a form of persuasion, rather it is threatening or manipulating

because there is no changing of conviction nor conversation or dialogue with the intent of helping the other person to change his beliefs. Thus, if you wanted to persuade an individual that he should serve a mission, using persuasion correctly, you would sit down with that individual and talk about motivations. You would find out what it is that is making them lean toward not serving a mission. You would use the steps outlined in the missionary guide to help resolve doubts and to teach correct principles. You would not, however, demand that they change. The very concept of persuasion implies dialogue or discussion. If you truly want to enact change, you will discuss things openly. That does not mean that you should do all the talking.

As a matter of fact, I believe that if parents would do less talking and more listening to their children, their children would be more likely to be obedient. Often times, children just want to be heard and understood. If you give them attention in a positive way, they won't demand it in a negative way. I would not be the least bit surprised if some young members of the Church of missionary age are choosing not to serve a mission because they hold some sort of resentment toward their parents and that if they were to discuss it and resolve those conflicts, they would be more than happy to serve a mission. Thus, do not manipulate or be manipulated to serve a mission. Manipulation will lead to lack of motivation which can lead to bad behavior and bad missionaries.

My second argument as to why missionaries 'go bad' is because of peer influence or peer pressure. (In conjunction with my first argument, lack of motivation when coupled with peer pressure is just going to make things worse.) I think it is actually somewhat surprising to missionaries when they show up in the mission field and end up having a companion that does not keep all of the missionary rules. This is more common than most people think. Of course, some missionaries may break 'small' rules (no rules are small, but I would submit the eternal consequences of some rules versus others vary); for example, staying up late to study or staying out late to teach an investigator that is only home after 9:30. They may also choose to study other doctrinal books, of Mormon influence of course, that are not on the approved reading list. By saying that these infractions are 'small', I am not implying that they are not without consequence. If your mission president has told you not to stay out past 9:30, then you really should not be staying out unless you get special permission from him. Also, the movie *God's Army* illustrates quite well what can happen when you delve too deeply into anti-Mormon literature; something that I would not recommend as a missionary. Thus,

even ‘small’ rule infractions can result in drastic consequences and sometimes do. But what about those ‘big’ rule infractions? I would guess that most returned missionaries have at least heard of something big that happened either in their mission or in some mission. And I would guess that most missionaries have actually known, been with other missionaries, or participated in some of these ‘big’ infractions.

What kinds of things are we talking about? I am going to prepare you for the two incidents that I am going to relate by saying those that participated in these incidents were BBM’s and I am not condoning their behavior nor attempting to glamorize their behavior, simply trying to tell you the truth about missions and missionaries; missionaries are not always angelic in nature nor perfect members of the Church. The first incident involves the breaking of a rule in missions and would not necessarily be inappropriate behavior for members of the Church that are not on missions. A zone leader in my mission was saved from drowning when his district leader noticed that he had passed out while they were scuba diving. Of course, this story may have been embellished by the time that it reached my ears. I wasn’t there, but that is the way that I heard it. Now, whether or not this is a true incident, the infraction of rules does not vary. Missionaries are not supposed to swim while on their mission. The second incident was witnessed by and participated in by more than just two missionaries and resulted in emergency changes throughout the mission. Apparently, a group of missionaries decided that it was time to return to nature. Dressed only in their birthday suits, they were roaming the beaches of southern Costa Rica and spending the nights frolicking in the sand. What all happened during this time is not known to me. Again, I was not there, but I am a bit more confident in the validity of this incident because of the ripples it caused throughout the mission. Of course, for non-missionary members of the Church, if you were to rent a beach for yourself and your spouse and chose to roam those beaches naked, I am hesitant to say that would be inappropriate. But for missionaries to be doing that is entirely inappropriate. I could go on and relate many incidents of missionaries breaking rules. However, that is not the purpose of this section.

The purpose of this section is to illustrate that some missionaries become bad missionaries as a result of peer pressure. In both incidents, the missionaries were not missionaries acting alone. It was not just one missionary. I do not know how, with the way missions are designed, it could be just one missionary. If you always have a companion with you, you are not going to be able to do these types of things, unless, of course,

you are able to convince your companion to do them with you. This is where peer pressure comes in. Missionaries that want to engage in these types of behaviors need to have an accomplice. Why? Because they have a companion. They have two choices, either they convince their companion to do it with them or they convince their companion to go on a split so they can be with a missionary that is willing to do it with them. Either way, the companion must be convinced to allow the inappropriate behavior to take place in order for it to take place.

I submit that most missionaries never really think that they will be put into a situation where one missionary will try to convince them to do something that they should not be doing. Guess again. However, if you, as a missionary, are stronger spiritually, emotionally, and mentally than they are, they will not be able to convince you to engage in these inappropriate behaviors and, as a matter of fact, you may be able to persuade them to join your side and return to the ways of the GBM (almost sounds like I am talking about Jedi Knights here, doesn't it?). So, ultimately, what I guess I am saying is: Be prepared. You will more than likely find yourself in a situation, at one point or another, in which a BBM will be trying to convince you to engage in bad behaviors with him. Make the decision now that you will not. Go for the right reasons, keep in mind why you are where you are, and it will only make sense to obey the rules and not give in to peer-pressure.

## **How do you deal with a BBM**

Let's say you find yourself in a situation where you come to realize that your companion is not a very righteous individual. Perhaps he is trying to convince you to participate with him in some of his immoral and disobedient activities. What do you do?

The first possibility would be to give in. If you are a WWF (weak-willed follower) and not able to stand up for yourself, you will probably give in. You will end up engaging in inappropriate activities because you are a follower and not a leader. He will convince you that it is okay, though I am not at all sure how a bad missionary would go about it. You will likely feel guilty initially, but then find some way to justify and rationalize your bad behavior. Sadly, this can very easily ruin your mission. And the worst part about it is that if you had been placed with a good missionary, this never would have happened. You would have been following a good missionary, because you are a follower and not a

leader, and he would have encouraged you to be obedient and righteous and to work hard. In my opinion, this is one of the worst possible outcomes because the WWF had no intentions of becoming a bad missionary. At the same time, most people are probably not aware of whether or not they are a leader or a follower. I think some people might realize this, but most probably don't. I encourage you to ponder this. If, in examining your behavior and your relationships, you find that you do tend to be a follower and not a leader, change now, before you go on a mission. If you are already on a mission, hopefully you have not gotten yourself into too much trouble. Talk with your mission president and see what kind of advice he can give you.

Maybe no one will take this section of my book seriously. Maybe WWF missionaries will simply ignore my warnings and continue to be WWF people. Besides, I don't really offer any means of change for them, do I? This is where we run into problems with my philosophy. You see, as I understand it, when people become aware of a problem, I would think that it makes logical sense to change. For some reason, many people don't do that. They continue in their behavior, be it depression, smoking, or being weak-willed. Even though they know that it is a problem, they do nothing to change it. Honestly, ask any smoker you know whether or not smoking is bad for you and they will tell you that they know smoking is bad for you. Then ask them why they haven't quit and they will make up a reason. They all have reasons. This leads to an interesting formula that I learned from a member of my bishopric just before I left on my mission:

excuse + non-performance $\neq$ performance
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The idea here is that, regardless of whatever prevented you from doing what it was you were supposed to be doing, an excuse does not make what was supposed to get done get done. Typically, the WWF missionary is going to have an excuse as to why he lets things happen to him instead of making things happen. He always will have an excuse when he does not perform, somehow hoping that an excuse plus non-performance will turn into performance. Well, it doesn't work that way.

If you find that you are a follower and not a leader, I would actually recommend looking into some of Stephen Covey's books. Generally

speaking, he is very adept at getting people to become motivated and make good decisions. Of course, for you to actually do this if you are a WWF would require desire. That means you would actually have to want to change. And for a WWF, desire to change is probably the hardest thing to come by. Anyway, enough said about the WWF.

There are two other possible outcomes if your companion is a BBM and begins to work on you. You may be a BBM yourself. In that case, you will go along with him and you will both be satisfied in your deceit. Or, you are a GBM. If you are a GBM, his manipulations and attempts should not affect you. Of course, not all GBM's are completely impenetrable to the temptations of sin. Some GBM's, when put into a companionship with a bad missionary, will crumble. Why that is, I am not exactly sure. But they do. I would hope that your motivation keeps you going strong.

One final note on what to do if your companion is a BBM. BBM's are usually quite intelligent. I almost think that this is a necessary requisite in order for them to truly be good at manipulating. This might also explain why they choose bad over good, because they do not find the missionary work hard enough or stimulating enough as a result of not trying hard enough or simply not caring. Either way, BBM's are usually quite adept at determining whether or not you are the type of missionary that will crack or not. If you are a WWF, they will prey upon you. They will be able to spot you from miles away and hope that you become their companion because they know they will be able to get you to do anything they want. This is part of their evil plan; because, if they get you to participate, they know that you will be less likely to tell on them because you were involved. Pretty smart, isn't it? And, if they think that you are the type of missionary that isn't going to crack, often times they will do everything within their power to manipulate you and annoy you; probably to encourage you to ask for a change so they can go back to their old ways. Do not underestimate BBM's. For some reason, they have their focus set on destroying the work of the Lord and playing as hard and as long as they can. Why, then are they on a mission? Typically, for the wrong reasons.

### **What to do if you are a BBM**

I have a couple of suggestions for you if you are a bad missionary. First, repent (that includes changing). If that doesn't work, go home. If you care so little for the work of the Lord, please do not ruin it for those

that do care. I am not advocating that you go home. I would prefer that you repent, change your ways, and right your wrongs. Something akin to what Alma the Younger and the Sons of Mosiah did in the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 27). He is a perfect example of what it is like to be a bad missionary. And, he proves that bad missionaries can change. I just hope that it doesn't require that same amount of external input to force change in missionaries today. Realize what you are doing, the harm you are doing and the damnation that you are incurring. Of course, it is your decision. You have agency, but for Heaven's sake, change. And, as a last resort, if you find that you do not want to change (not that you can't, for we all can), get out of there. You have done enough damage. Go home and figure out who you really want to be.

### **The Stigma of Going Home**

It would be a major oversight on my part if I didn't at least mention that going home is often the very worst punishment for missionaries. You see, it is built into Mormon society that a missionary that comes home from his mission is a bad missionary. If someone is sent home or even if someone simply chooses to come home, the feeling they get when they come home is often very negative. It's as if the community is telling that person that they are a failure.

There are a couple of reasons why a missionary might come home. The first would be because of misbehavior. Now, I can understand the stigma of being sent home for misbehavior. I'm not saying that I agree with the idea of shunning this person from the Mormon community. The only times that a person should be shunned is if they are caustic to the community (causing damage either spiritually, emotionally, mentally, physically) or if they choose to remove themselves. Otherwise, I think those that have committed grievous sins should receive more positive attention and be encouraged to bring themselves back in to the fold.

Another reason that missionaries might come home, this reason is the entire point of me putting this section in this book, is because a mission may just be too much for them to handle. For some missionaries, a mission is truly the first time that they have been away from home. For others, they might realize that they are not prepared for this type of thing, either emotionally or spiritually. Missions are not easy. Missions are not for everyone. This may seem to go against the teachings of the Church. But if you will look closely at the way that the Church talks about missions, you will see that it is understanding of the

fact that missions are not easy and may not be possible for everyone to serve them. The Church says something along the lines of ‘Every able-bodied young man should serve a mission’. That is the Church’s disclaimer. They recognize that for some people a mission just isn’t an option. I’m not saying that the Church is encouraging people not to go. What I am saying is that the Church is aware of special situations when it is not going to be in the best interest of either the Church or the individual that they serve a mission.

The reason that I mention this is because I have had several close relatives that have left on missions and then come home from their missions. I’m not exactly sure what all of their reasons were for coming home, but I am pretty confident that they did not come home for misbehavior. Both of them have since married in the temple and are temple worthy (this is something I *do* take as a sign of worthiness). I do think that serving a mission was just not right for them at that point in their lives. Whether they could not handle it emotionally, whether there was something else going on, or whether they just decided that they did not want to do it, I really don’t know. What I do know is that the rejection they felt when they came home was not Christ-like. Both of them felt as though they had let people down. Both of them felt like they were not as good as individuals that had served missions. Both of them felt rejected by the community. Rejecting people when they need the most help is not Christ-like! Rejecting people when they need our help is something that Devilish people would do.

Why do I mention this in a section on BBM’s? Because many missionaries do not want to go home for this very reason. They are aware of the social stigma associated with either coming home from your mission or not serving a mission. They do not want to be looked down upon. This is a horrible motivation for serving a mission, but a very understandable motivation. I am not removing the responsibility from missionaries for seeing this as a motivation for serving a mission, but I think that a lot of the responsibility for this type of pressure falls upon the members of the Church. Notice that I did not say that the responsibility is on the Church itself. My interpretation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we should do our very best to help those that need our help the most. That is how Christ spent his time; that is how we should spend our time. This is also the Church’s interpretation of the Gospel. It is the members of the Church that often do the rejecting. To reject people when they need us the most is, in my opinion, akin to murder.

Why do BBM's stay on missions when they are just causing problems? Because they do not want to be rejected when they come home. I do not think that missionaries should stay on their mission because of social pressure. But I do think that many missionaries do. They do not want to go home and face the social stigma of having come home from their mission. Thus, they stay on their mission without proper motivation or a desire to do what is right, and do everything they can short of getting sent home. Members of the Church, do not be so quick to judge BBM's or any other members of the Church that make poor decisions. Especially, do not judge missionaries that come home from their mission for any reason; they all need help although they may not accept it. These missionaries need your help. They need to know that they are still loved and respected. They did what they were able to do. If we, as members of the Church, are more understanding of the struggles that people are going through and are not so quick to judge the misbehavior of individuals and then exclude them, we will be building up the Kingdom of God by encouraging people to be the best they can be and not destroying the Kingdom of God by encouraging people to be the worst they can be and still not be rejected.

## **Conclusion**

BBM's are out there. Why? My guess is they have the wrong motivation for serving a mission, a negative motivation. It is probably because their friends did it, their girlfriend wanted them to, or their parents made them go. Whatever the reason, as far as I know, they still exist. I would like to believe that the number of BBM's is going down. Yet, that is statistical data I do not have. Perhaps I can gather more information on that at a later time. However, until the existence of BBM's has been expunged, it is up to the GBM's to work harder and try to help them. GBM's must also help WWF's become GBM's all the time. And those that are WWF's, please come to a realization of what it is you need to change so you do not follow the BBM's anymore. This is the work of the Lord. It will and must go forth to all the corners of the earth. It is the responsibility of this Church to make it so. Do not be engaged in working against that effort, the consequences, both mortal and eternal will be devastating.

**Section III:  
Going Home and Life After the  
Mission**

# Chapter 13: Wrapping Things Up and Going Home

It may seem strange that I am not going to discuss how to teach the gospel nor discuss any tricks to help in the conversion of investigators. That is not the intent of my book. All of that is neatly and succinctly covered in the publications of the Church and the training you receive as a missionary in the MTC. Thus, I move on to the end of your mission and life after the mission.

## Trunky or Baggy Missionaries

Missionaries in their last 6 months (Seniors) are sometimes so caught up with the fact that they will be going home soon that they lose sight of what it is they are supposed to be doing. These missionaries are often called trunky, referring to having already packed their trunk (apparently missionaries used to travel with trunks, not suitcases) or baggy, having already packed one's bags to go home. Typically, for missionaries that are going to behave in such a fashion, the last month is the worst month.

My second companion in the mission field fell into this category. It was my responsibility to 'send him home,' which is what it is commonly called when you are with a missionary just before he goes home. The first words this companion said to me were, "Get ready to get trunky." This was not a promising start to our relationship. You see, I was a young missionary that had just been trained by a very obedient missionary. We had worked hard and been very blessed. I had no intention of becoming trunky. He felt that we were isolated enough in our area that people would not be bothering us and that we could pretty much do what we wanted. That was probably true enough, but I wasn't going to let it happen.

What ended up happening is that he would sleep in until 8 am or so and then lazily get up. He would spend a couple of hours organizing things to go home and getting ready for the day, so we would typically get out of the house somewhere between 10 and 11 am. In my mission, we were supposed to be out working at 9:30. Well, I don't claim to have an excuse. I hate excuses and it doesn't change the fact that rules were being broken. I don't believe that I realized what the consequences

would be of disobedience. I rationalized in my mind that staying in the house a little later than we should could be considered our Spanish study time and that was what I typically used it to do. Then, we would spend the rest of the day out working.

This companionship was truly like being thrown directly into the fire (I missed the frying pan altogether). My previous companion, Elder Smith, was organized, planned well, and always had plenty for us to do. My second companion, we'll call him Elder Martin, only had one thing on his mind, going home. He was beyond the point of really caring what we did during the day. Thus, it fell on me to plan the day, arrange our schedule and set everything up. Now, this isn't to say that he didn't care about the missionary work. I think he still did to a degree. But, he was in no means anxious about it, if it happened, it happened, but he wasn't going to go out of his way to make anything happen.

Thus, from the second that I was able to get him out the door in the morning, I was two missionaries in one. I did all of the contacting. I carried extra Books of Mormon. I taught most of the discussions. I did most everything. He, on the other hand, followed me around and did what he was told. Perhaps this is why I became as dictatorial as I did in my later companionships; responsibility was forced upon me early in my mission when the senior companion in our companionship would have been content sitting at home doing nothing. It was a very difficult time. So difficult, in fact, that come the end of the week, Sunday,<sup>14</sup> I was burnt out. He and his previous companion had typically spent most of Sunday evening at a member's house, eating and discussing philosophy. This member just happened to be a philosophy instructor at the University of Costa Rica. He was quite intelligent and quite interesting to talk to. However, I felt that it was a waste of a good Sunday night to spend all of our time there. But, I was literally so emotionally, physically, spiritually, and mentally exhausted from pushing all week, that I typically would let Elder Martins have his way and we would spend the evening there. Preparation day gave me a chance to recuperate, gather my wits about me and prepare to do it all over again the next week.

Needless to say, Elder Martins and I didn't get along very well. However, we didn't actually say much to each other. I think he was too preoccupied with going home to talk to me. I remember one day, with only one or two weeks left before he went home, he said one sentence

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<sup>14</sup> For missionaries, the week ends on the day before P-day and begins with the day after P-day.

over and over again the entire day, “I can’t believe that I’m going home.” He walked behind me the entire day, did not participate in any discussions, and didn’t say anything else. Did I mention that this was a difficult time for me?

The frustrating thing about this companionship was that Elder Martins had been a decent missionary. I don’t believe I would classify him as an GBM, but probably more along the lines of a WWF that occasionally stepped up to bat as a GBM. He had trained several missionaries, which means that he had convinced the mission president of his abilities. When he did step up and take the opportunity while he was with me, he was quite good at teaching the discussions and probably had a great deal more insights than the one that he eventually shared with me.

As I mentioned, I was carrying several Books of Mormon around with me. I had set a goal to give away three Books of Mormon everyday. I think this was based upon a talk in a zone or mission conference that had encouraged us to ‘flood the world’ with the Book of Mormon. In my naiveté as a young missionary, I took this challenge very literally and was giving out Books of Mormon to anyone short of drunks. Sometimes that even included young children that I would make promise to give them to their parents. After about a week of my extreme behavior, Elder Martins said something short and to the point, “Don’t throw your pearls before swine, Elder.” I don’t think that I had ever understood that parable until then. What we have is precious. Copies of The Book of Mormon are not cheap. We should give them away as often as possible, but only into the hands of individuals that will respect them and make good use of them. Flooding the earth with the Book of Mormon does not mean covering the earth with it, it means putting one in every home where it will be appreciated.

The point: Elder Martins could have benefited my knowledge of missions and missionary work greatly with his experience and insight, but he chose, instead to focus on himself and the fact that he was going home. He wanted to be lazy, but I wouldn’t stand for that. So instead, he wore me down and then got his way when I could do no more. I don’t want to give the impression that Elder Martins was a BBM. I don’t think he was. He was not actively engaged in working against the building up of the Kingdom of God. He was a WWF with potential.

Trunky or Baggy missionaries will typically fall into one of two categories, BBM or WWF. They, for some reason, feel that they have

served their time, though their time is not up until they are released by their stake president at home. Until then, they are still full-time missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and should behave as such. I am not able to estimate the number of missionaries that turn into baggy or trunky missionaries at the end of their mission. I did not experience many missionaries going home. Short of sending myself home, the only experience I had directly was not a pleasant one. Thus, I may be biased in this regard. Suffice to say, some missionaries feel that they deserve a break at the end of their mission. It is strangely ironic that many of these missionaries have already taken several breaks as a result of their inappropriate behavior. However, that does not seem to stop them from trying to justify their behavior. If it falls upon you to send a missionary home and he tries to become trunky, do your best, but do not give in to him. His exaltation is up to him, but yours is up to you. If you give in to him, it will affect your exaltation. It may not be easy, but it will be worth it.

### **Ending the Right Way**

So, some missionaries are going to end their mission the wrong way. What, then, is the right way to end your mission? Because of the knowledge and skills that you have gained during the two years that you have been there, you should be your most effective the last day of your mission. Do not waste that. Thus, up until you are pulled out of your area, you should be working with your companion and serving as though your mission was never going to end. Frankly, as mentioned in the discussion about trunky and baggy missionaries, your mission isn't over until you are released by your stake president when you arrive at home. Some would say that you are never truly released from being a full-time missionary when you are a Mormon. Well, that is a great way to look at it, but you are released from the specific calling of a full-time missionary. After you are released, you should continue to be actively engaged in finding opportunities to share the gospel, but you are no longer set apart to be a full-time missionary.

For some reason, it seems kind of ideal to serve up until the very end. I don't think it should be considered an ideal but just part of the calling. Regardless, some missionaries are going to find this a difficult thing to do. How, then, do you go about serving until the very end? If you are very strong-willed then you just have to decide that you are going to

work hard and be obedient until the very end. If you aren't as strong-willed, there is a trick you can use that will help. Pretend that you are going to be there an extra year, an extra month, or at least some time extra. Of course, in the back of your mind, you know when you are going home, but this trick is kind of like setting your alarm clock ahead so you can hit the snooze button 2 or 3 times before you actually have to get up to make you think that you got more sleep. If you believe that you are going to be there longer than you actually are, you will not focus so much on the fact that your mission is coming to a close. Also, asking your companion for help should not be beneath you. Just because you happen to be one of the oldest (in mission time) missionaries in the mission doesn't mean that you can't ask your companion to help keep you focused. If your companion is aware that you are struggling to stay focused and that you sincerely want to do so, he will help you; probably by working extra hard during those last few weeks.

There is something else that I feel is worth mentioning here. Many missionaries are planning on attending college fairly soon after they return from their missions. Filling out hundreds of college applications is not conducive to staying focused while you are on your mission. You should arrange to have someone else that knows you fairly well do this for you, perhaps your parents or your entire family could do it for family night one night. Typically, the only part of a college application that the applicant needs to fill out personally would be his signature. If you can have someone else take care of this, it will help you remain focused on the here and now and not the there and then.

Of course, one cannot focus entirely on the here and now without giving any thought for the future. Hopefully you have already set into motion whatever plans you have for after your mission. Many missionaries will begin their college education (if that is what you want to do) prior to leaving on their mission. If I'm not mistaken, all of the colleges in Utah will grant you a two-year leave of absence. Most will even hold any scholarships you might have had (I know the University of Utah and BYU will). Having these things arranged either prior to leaving on your mission or as early as possible prior to leaving your mission, will help you focus on those last few months or weeks or days, whichever are the hardest for you.

Also, for some missionaries, there is still the issue of a girlfriend at home. This can build up a sense of excitement and anxiety because you do not know what to expect. That is not uncommon. Because I did not personally experience that, I am not exactly sure the best way to deal with

in order for you to remain focused. I would guess that the best way would be simply to carry on as you have throughout your mission. Changing something now, like telling her not to write for the last month, is just going to make you more anxious because you will be thinking that you are missing something. Often times, patterns and routines and habits help ease nervousness and anxiety. Maintain your routines and you should be just fine.

## **Actually Going Home**

So, what happens when the day finally arrives? In my mission, as I mentioned when I discussed first arriving at the mission, there is what is called, quaintly, ‘The Last Supper’. Just as Christ broke bread with his disciples prior to leaving them, we had the opportunity to break bread (eat) with our mission president prior to leaving the mission. What would typically happen is that the mission secretary or the AP’s would contact the missionaries that were scheduled to leave and notify them of the time that they were supposed to meet at either the mission home, the mission office, or the hotel where they often put missionaries up the night before they flew home. Typically, this would be around noon or early in the afternoon. The mission president would have a last interview with us. This would usually include some advice catered specifically to the individual that he had come to know fairly well over the last little while. Also, this is often used to renew your temple recommend.

The dinner wasn’t until that night, but our mission president wanted us to have some time to do some souvenir shopping after the interviews if we had not finished with that. Thus, all of the missionaries that were going home at the same time would meet together and usually carpool down to wherever they wanted to go shopping for souvenirs. At the appointed time, we would return to the mission home and have dinner with the mission president, his family, and the new missionaries arriving that day. After dinner, there was typically a testimony meeting. I really appreciated this experience whenever I was privy to it. It is very inspiring to hear both the testimonies of those that are leaving and those that are just arriving. Excluding the testimonies of BBM’s and WWF’s, these are often the most stirring and touching testimonies of missionary work.

After the testimony meeting and saying goodbye to the mission president, the missionaries that were going home were shuttled to a cheap hotel nearby. Depending upon what time your plane left and how

many of you there were, the office elders or the AP's would arrive correspondingly and drive you to the airport. At that point, you are pretty much on your own. Having been an office elder and taken people to the airport, it was our responsibility to make sure that people made it through the doors into the terminal where they would be boarding their plane. Once they were through there, our responsibility ended. That didn't mean that they always got on the planes nor that their planes weren't going to be delayed, but we always worked that out later.

As the missionary going home, this is often the first time in two years that you are alone. I remember saying goodbye to the elder that accompanied me to the airport and that I had known since day one in the MTC. His plane left just before mine. I now had a 10 hour flight home to look forward to all by myself.

To be completely honest, I was more nervous going home than when I was traveling to my mission or even entering the MTC. My understanding of this was that I had grown so used to specific behaviors that being a missionary was now much more than even a habit, it was life itself. I wasn't sure what I would do after two years of being a missionary. Of course, I had plans and I knew what I was going to be doing in the long-term, but I wasn't sure what I was going to be doing in the short term. How would I fill up my days? What was my family going to look like? Was I going to have to deal with women again?

I thought it would be courteous when arriving at my final destination to wait to be the last one off so my family didn't swarm the terminal and prevent everyone else on the plane from being able to get past them. I had been to enough of these that I knew what was coming. Of course, this isn't possible now because families are unable to wait for you at the terminal, they have to wait out by the baggage claim. But my Mother wasn't very happy with me waiting, she began to get nervous thinking that she had the wrong terminal. You always hear stories about missionaries that were re-routed at the last minute to a different terminal that end up walking up behind their families and surprising them. I even know someone that asked the flight attendants if they would sneak him around to another terminal so he could do just that. Anyway, all of the anticipation of being home built up inside me as I was preparing to disembark. Perhaps, symbolically, this was the end of my mission. All the way home, I was wearing my name tag and still representing the Church; I was still a missionary. I even discussed the gospel with a young woman that I sat next to on the last leg of my trip. She was kind of cute; maybe Satan had to have one last try. But, once I walked off that plane, I

would be with family; and almost everyone in my family is Mormon. As soon as I arrived home, I would meet with the stake president and be released. I would no longer be interacting with people that were not members of the Church. Thus, my mission was essentially over once I was reunited with my family.

Anyway, the moment finally came. I have a wonderful family and they made my exit from the plane into a triumphal return home from my mission. It was exciting to see my nieces and nephews that had grown a foot or two. They swarmed me as I entered the terminal. I recognized most faces, though my younger brother had lost all of his pudginess and had grown a good foot and a half. I didn't even recognize him. It was really neat. I was home.

### **What to Do Once Your Home**

In talking with many returned missionaries, the transition back to 'normal' life once you have returned from your mission is often more difficult than actually leaving on a mission. I didn't really experience this and I think I know the reason why. After having spent two years being anxiously engaged, many missionaries think it would be nice to take some time off and not do anything for a while. With how big of a transition this is, without anything else to do, all you will end up doing is dwelling on the transition, the changes, your mission, what you miss, what you should be doing, etc. In my opinion, the best way to make this a smooth transition is to go to work. In my case, I came home on a Thursday night. I went to the temple the next morning (I hadn't been in almost two years) with my Mother and then went shopping for some clothes that afternoon with my Sister (my clothes were a little outdated). Then, I spent the rest of that night playing the piano (something that I often claimed to miss more than my family), listening to music and then watching a movie. Saturday morning, I started a job. Of course, this was working for my father, but it was a job and it kept me very busy. Because I was used to being anxiously engaged, working long days was not a problem for me at all.

Not everyone is going to be able to get a job within one day of being home. And, for some people, school may be starting in a week or so and you won't have time. Regardless of how you do it, find something to do. Keeping busy will allow you to slowly come to a realization of the changes and make the cognitive (mental) shift that is necessary to function in normal life again. If you have nothing planned and do

nothing, more than likely the cognitive shift is going to take place during those first few days. This is going to make coming home very difficult. If I'm not mistaken, I even left many of my souvenirs and pictures packed for a week or so before I started going through some of the things that I had brought home. This made my transition quite smooth and not very difficult.

I would be remiss to think that what worked for me is going to work for everyone. Undoubtedly it will not. However, I think the advice of keeping busy is good advice for everyone. Also, for some, this transition is just going to be harder than for others. I am not exactly sure why, but people *are* different. Though it is often looked at as taboo or bad or weak, getting some help from a counselor if this transition becomes a serious problem should not be beneath any returned missionary. I would probably recommend going to your bishop first, but, if in speaking with your bishop he recommends it, do it. Getting your feelings out will help you adjust. It may also be that you have some friends or family members with whom you are close and can talk to about how you are feeling. This is also a good way to explore the changes that are taking place inside you mentally, spiritually, and emotionally and can help ease the strain of this transition.

I would be mistaken not to mention women. I have heard a lot of advice on what to do when it comes to dating once you come home. Some have recommended that you hold off from dating anyone seriously for at least six months. That is a long time, though not unrealistic. And, I believe the advice for waiting to date seriously for a while is well-founded. Many missionaries come home with a strong spiritual connection. Yet, this spiritual connection can easily be confused with infatuation and/or romantic love. Thus, what can and often does happen is that the returned missionary becomes involved in a relationship with a member of the opposite sex. Because they are so used to praying about what is going on in their life, they immediately pray about whether or not this relationship is going to lead to marriage. This is where it gets a little sticky. If you are approaching God correctly, you will already have made up your mind and then will just be taking this decision to Him. However, because you are involved in an emotionally charged relationship, the burning in your bosom as an answer can be confused with the pangs in your heart from the relationship. If you are approaching God the wrong way, taking the decision to Him without you having done your part in deciding, the love pangs in your heart will make you feel like you know what He desires of you. Either way, the emotions

and the inspiration will more than likely be confused, leading the individual to make a decision that he may regret or may not have made if he had given himself a bit more time after his mission.

If it sounds like I am speaking from experience, it is because I am. I had only been home from my mission three months when a young woman told me that God had told her that I was the one she was supposed to marry. I really thought highly of this woman and still do, but that was the downright most manipulative thing to say to a returned missionary. Missionaries love it when other people receive inspiration. However, they are often confused when individuals come to them claiming to have received inspiration that affects them because they do not want to discount the validity of the inspiration. I'll save you the anxiety. I didn't marry her. However, I was sure confused for about a month as to whether or not I should. I kept praying and asking God and fasting and doing whatever I could to figure out whether or not this was right. About a month after she told me this, she called it all off (I think this was because I was unwilling to commit to her after she had so boldly said what she had said). She wasn't very happy about it either. I guess that makes sense, but it was sure a great lesson for me.

My mission president had actually given me the advice (as I think most mission presidents do) to not put off marriage; to accept it when it comes. Well, I think that is good advice, after you have been home for at least 5-6 months. Give yourself time to get over the transition that takes place spiritually, emotionally, and mentally before you go committing to a relationship that is to last forever. In my experience, the longer you take in making a decision, the more likely it is going to be the right decision. Of course, you don't usually want to take forever to make a decision, but rushed decisions are usually rushed because someone is hiding something. Take your time, you have some now.

The last thing that I think it is important to discuss is careers. In today's society, there seems to be a lot of pressure to go to college. I am actually involved with academia and will probably be in college forever so I shouldn't say anything bad about it. However, college isn't for everyone. If you aren't interested in pursuing a career that truly requires a degree, don't waste your time. There are far too many individuals that give college only a meager effort. They are often working full-time and too busy to take college as seriously as one should if they truly want to get through it. Statistically speaking, those that do the worst in college, that are the most likely to drop out, and that enjoy their college experience the least are those that have a full-time job while going to

college. Of course, this may be a necessity for you. But think long and hard about what it is you want to do before going to college. And, if you are going to go, go ahead and do it, don't dally, this will just cost you time and money. By no means am I encouraging you not to get an education. I think everyone should be as educated as possible. What I am trying to say is two things: 1. Going to college when you don't want or need to is just going to cost you money. You could be making more money working full-time pursuing a career that does not require a degree. And, if you don't finish the degree because you are only going part time and other things get in the way, then all of the time and money is essentially wasted. Of course, you may have learned a thing or two in your classes and therefore wouldn't call it a waste, but it technically isn't benefiting your current position and therefore is doing you no economic good. 2. In today's society, changing jobs is usually not that big of a deal. Even if you aren't sure what you want to do ultimately, giving college a weak effort is not going to benefit you in the long run. Choose a degree path and pursue it until you either get the degree or change your mind for certain. Don't jump from degree to degree or waste your time without a goal. Without a goal, you'll never accomplish a goal. If you aren't trying to arrive somewhere, you never will arrive anywhere.

I know several people that have gotten stuck in the college rut. They are either working full-time or part-time and going to school part time and they hate it. In my opinion, they are going to college because they feel like that is the correct thing to do. However, they only take classes that aren't really related to a major and they do poorly in most of their classes because they are not motivated to be in school. Don't waste your time and money. There is no dishonor in not having a bachelor's degree. To be completely honest, the only thing my bachelor's degree was worth was to get me into graduate school. Some bachelor's degrees are pretty much worthless without further education or training. So, go to work and make some money until you are ready to commit to a college degree. If you never gain an interest in it, you'll be well on your way to a career that doesn't require it. If you do decide you want to go to school, hopefully you will have saved up from having worked and will be able to go to school full-time and work only part-time so you can take it seriously.

What do careers have to do with missions? Nothing really. I just think that it is something that most missionaries haven't really thought about. Of course, there are some that know exactly what it is they want to do and nothing is going to stop them from doing it. But, the majority

of missionaries have yet to figure that out. There is nothing wrong with not knowing what you want to do, but not having a goal in life will kill you. It will stagnate your progress and achievement. So, even if you aren't sure what it is you want to do, do something.

Lastly, figuring out what you do want to do is difficult. The best advice I ever heard on this subject came from Henry B. Eyring and was some advice his father gave him. Elder Eyring was studying to be a chemist, like his father. However, after repeated attempts by his father to explain some chemistry concepts to him, his father finally queried him wondering if chemistry was what Elder Eyring was thinking about when he had nothing else to be thinking about. Elder Eyring said no. To which his father replied, "You ought to find something that you love so much that when you don't have to think about anything, that's what you think about."<sup>15</sup> Let me rephrase that, when your mind is free to wander and you have nothing that you must be thinking about at the time, what do you choose to think about? Whatever that is, that is what you should do as a career. Why? Because humans tend to think about the things that they enjoy when they have nothing else to think about. Also, if you are already putting that much energy into something that you enjoy, think about how wonderful it would be to get paid for thinking about what you enjoy thinking about.

Enough said. You are home. Missions are wonderful, but they do come to an end. Realize this: God did not call you to serve a mission forever. Looking forward to going home is not a bad thing. There is yet much to accomplish and do in your life. That is a positive thing and something to be appreciated. Do not be afraid to say that you have enjoyed your mission, you have given it your best effort and that you are excited to go home to face the challenges that await you there; that is the attitude that God wants you to have. Do your best in whatever you decide to pursue; that is all that God has ever asked.

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<sup>15</sup> Gerald N. Lund, 1995 Ensign September

## Chapter 14: How to Define a Mission as Successful

Isn't this what it all boils down to? Aren't most missionaries interested in being successful missionaries? Yes, I believe so. But, let me make an important but subtle point. Success should be a scale on which you measure your *personal* achievement. It is not a scale on which you should measure your achievement against someone else. You are the only person that can determine whether or not you were successful as a missionary. No one else is going to be able to nor should be trying to determine whether or not you were successful as a missionary. Your success is and should be something personal and a means for you to determine whether or not you are on track for exaltation. Thus, in discussing success, I am not intending to create a ranking system for comparing one missionary with another. I am trying to help you gauge your personal progress toward exaltation. Do not use what I say to compare others or to judge. That is a damning offense (John 8:7, 3 Nephi 14:3).

The definitions of success are so varied and so far ranging that, when someone calls his mission a success, most people aren't really sure what is meant by it. Because there are so many ways to define success, I am going to do my best to explore them and come up with a definition that will work for all missions and all missionaries in defining the success of their mission.

### Definition 1 – Accomplishing Your Goal

By saying someone is successful, at the most basic level, means that a person accomplished what they set out to do. This *seems* to be a pretty good definition of success. However, this definition does not always work out for missions and missionaries. Why? Well, let me give you a scenario. Suppose that a missionary, prior to leaving for his mission, decides that he is going to do the bare minimum to allow him to stay on a mission. He does not have a problem breaking rules. He just wants to serve a mission so his father will buy him a nice car when he gets home. For this missionary, if he actually accomplishes this – doing the bare minimum but remaining on his mission – by this definition of success, he would still be a successful missionary. What is even more ironic is that, if

he actually ended up deciding to work hard and follow the rules, he would have failed.

A good scriptural example of this definition would be Alma the Younger prior to his conversion. He was ‘successful’ at leading many members of the Church astray. That was his goal and he accomplished it.

Another perspective would be a missionary that sets his goals far too high. Perhaps he decides that, in order for his mission to be successful, he will follow every rule with exact precision and he must baptize at least ‘X’ people every month. As with most religious guidelines for behavior, mission rules are designed such that no one can actually be living them all perfectly at the same time. There is always room for improvement. So, to set a goal to be perfectly obedient and baptize a certain number of people during your mission is essentially to set yourself up for failure. For, if you ever break a rule, be it by commission or omission, or ever do not baptize according to your prescribed quota, you have fallen short of your goal and failed.

Hopefully this helps you see that defining success this way *can* lead to problems. It is important to note that defining success this way *may not* lead to problems if your goal, when beginning your mission, is an achievable goal, is at the personal level, and is not above what you are able to accomplish. However, the typical and standard definition of success, accomplishing that which you set out to do, probably isn’t the best definition of success for a missionary because it can be defined so many ways.

## **Definition 2 – Mission Politics**

The second definition of success, sadly, is quite common among missionaries. It is the idea discussed in Chapter 9 - mission politics. That is, one’s advancement through the mission hierarchy or the mission positions is a measure of one’s success as a missionary. Using this definition, one would only be considered a successful missionary if one served in the capacity of senior companion, district leader, trainer, etc. I discussed why I don’t believe mission politics are measures of success or worthiness in Chapter 9. What I have not mentioned is that, using this definition of success, sister missionaries are immediately excluded from being considered successful missionaries. Also, any missionary that may have a developmental disorder or handicap that is limiting on their abilities but does not prevent them from serving a mission, may very

likely not end up in one of these mission positions. Thus, they would not be considered successful either.

Positions in a mission reflect one of two things: Proximity, in terms of friendship, to the AP's; or ability and worthiness in the sight of the mission president. The mission president is more than likely not comparing your ability with that of someone else, he is probably comparing it to what he deems necessary to fulfill the responsibilities of the position. When seen in this light, it should be fairly apparent that defining success in terms of mission positions is not an accurate way of depicting one's success as a missionary.

### **Definition 3 – Mission Numbers**

Well, how about defining success in terms of mission numbers? Stuff like: number of baptisms, number of discussions taught, number of doors knocked on, number of investigators found, number of...you get the point. This definition doesn't work very well either. Let me give you an example to explain why: One of my best friends served his mission in Holland. Some weeks he would not give out a single Book of Mormon. Some weeks he would not be invited into a single home. Some weeks would be spent knocking on door after door to no avail. There are not very many baptisms in the Netherlands mission. Based upon this definition of success, my friend would not be considered a very successful missionary. He did teach some discussions, he did give out some Books of Mormon, he did participate in the conversions of some individuals, but if you are simply looking at the numbers (let me be brutally honest here), I would be considered a much more successful missionary. Why? It was not uncommon in my mission to teach several discussions a day. I remember only one day when I was not received into a home the entire day. Am I the more successful missionary? I would highly doubt it.

Different countries and different peoples are just that, different. It would be ludicrous of anyone to expect mission experiences and mission 'numbers' to be the same from one country to its neighbor, let alone half-way around the world. Because numbers vary so much, it is impossible to view numbers as an accurate measurement of the success of someone's mission. Numbers are not representative of effort or obedience, but of many other factors, including such things as: poverty of the country, educational level of the people, ancestry and history of

the country, current religions of the people, etc. Therefore, you cannot judge the success of a mission based upon the numbers.

#### **Definition 4 – Self-Conversion**

It was inevitable that at some point I was going to have to discuss self-conversion and now is as good a time as any. There's a lot of hype about the importance of having converted yourself on your mission. I'm not exactly sure why there is so much hype, especially since this is something that you should have done prior to serving your mission which in turn would explain why you decided to serve a mission. I think a lot of it stems from the verse in D & C 18:16 that talks about the glory of saving even be it one soul. Well, that is a wonderful idea and there could very readily be some discussion as to whether or not that verse is actually referring to saving oneself or actually helping save someone else. But this chapter is on how to define success.

I have a hard time saying that you shouldn't call your mission a success if you become converted on your mission. For me, I believed that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was a true principal prior to serving my mission. However, while on my mission I came to the realization that the Church is the organization that has been designated to spread that Gospel. So, in a sense, I became a convert to the Church while on my mission, though I was already a devout Christian prior to serving my mission. I don't know that that this distinction will make sense to everyone.

But the point is, many missionaries end up converting themselves while on their mission. Can this serve as a measure of success? Yes. Is it the best measure of success? No. Mind you I say this haltingly. If you convert yourself on your mission, good for you. However, a mission isn't about you. A mission is about sharing what you have with those that do not have it, remember? This would imply that you had already converted yourself prior to coming and that is what you have set out to do. I think self-conversion is a great and glorious thing, but it is also not the purpose of a mission but rather a precursor for a mission. For that reason, I do not think it should be used as a determinant of the success of one's mission. I think you could use it as such, if you truly wanted to. But I don't think that it is the best means of determining success in the mission. The best definition is...

## True Success

True success in the mission is obedience. That's it. If you are obedient, you are successful.

Of course, being as long-winded as I am, I can't help but continue to refine this definition. First, why does obedience work as a measure of success? Well, look at it this way, if someone is obedient, they will not be breaking the rules of the mission. The rules of a mission, as specified in the *Missionary Handbook* (a.k.a. *The White Bible*), are so explicit that they include what a missionary should do and not just what a missionary should not be doing. True obedience would include obeying all of the rules, not just not doing the things that are explicitly stated as things that you should not do. Thus, if you are going to use obedience as your measure of success, this also implies that you worked your very hardest, worked with the Spirit, studied when you were supposed to, did your very best to learn the language (if applicable), and did all else that you were commanded to do. Thus, obedience, when used to determine the success of a mission, includes not falling prey to sins of omission along with sins of commission.

But I'm not quite finished. I think that obedience is a satisfactory definition of success. But, if you want to be more than satisfactory, if you want to be the very best missionary that you can be (remember, we are not comparing ourselves to anyone else), there are two more things that are necessary. These two things actually go hand in hand anyway, so they must be talked about together. First, you must have the proper motivation, as discussed in chapter 1 (why do you think it is the first thing that I talked about?). Second, you should enjoy your mission. Of course, if you have the correct motivation for serving a mission, I don't think you can help but enjoy your mission.

In terms of celestial progress, obedience is the best and only way to start on the path. But, if you truly want to pursue exaltation, you must also consider your motivation, which, in turn, will force you to consider whether or not this lends toward enjoyment. Let me put it more simply, if you truly want to be doing something and recognizing that it must be done a certain way, not only will you do it the specified way, but you will enjoy doing it the specified way. Now, replace the 'doing something' with mission. If you truly want to serve a mission and you want to because you love the Gospel of Jesus Christ and want others to have what you have, you will recognize that there are specific guidelines in place to help you accomplish your goal of spreading the word. Because

you truly want to accomplish this goal, you will willingly subject yourself to the guidelines and enjoy it. Thus, the truly successful missionary is obedient, properly motivated, and glad to be on a mission.

## **Conclusion**

The basic definition of success is accomplishing that which you set out to do. This definition is too vague and would include too many individuals that do not have as their aim the building up of the kingdom of God. Defining success in terms of positions in the hierarchy, the numbers, or even how hard you work does not reflect all of the other things that are going on in a mission, namely: mission politics, the differences in cultures and people, and adherence to the rules of the mission. Success is actually very simply defined – obedience. The only thing that I would add to this is that, if you are truly striving for your personal best, you will add to this definition of success proper motivation and enjoyment. Thus, the definition of true success in a mission is being obedient because you want to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with everyone that wants to hear it and you enjoy doing it.

## Postscript

This book is intended to supplement the Church's materials only in the sense that it relates what happens in the mission and not what missionaries need to teach nor the techniques of teaching. Thus, I cover both mission preparation and events that take place in missions as well as a short blurb on life after the mission. I don't claim to have a perfect knowledge of the gospel or of missionary life. As a matter-of-fact, my only credentials for claiming any knowledge of missionary life is that I am a returned missionary (RM); as you will note I included my credentials on the front cover. I did that to prove a point, you do not have to have a degree or have been called to be a mission president, stake president or general authority to know something about missions.

I don't know that everyone will agree with everything that I have said in this book. That is their prerogative. I hope that I have offended none but taught many. Thus, having said all that I can think of to say, I hope you enjoy your mission, for life is meant to be enjoyed.

## Appendix A: The Morality Trap

Have you ever asked, “Exactly where is the line drawn between physical intimacy with a ‘loved’ one and sin? Or how about, “Just how far can I go and not have to talk to the bishop?” Or maybe, “Is it okay to kiss for a long time as long as we aren’t lying down?” “Where is the line?” If you have ever asked questions like these, you have fallen into the morality trap.

### The Principles of Morality

Why have you fallen into the trap? *Because there is not a universal line of intimacy; a line that is the same for everyone!* Everyone has a different level of intimacy that feels right for them. What may be an intimate sin for one person might not be for another. I saw this many times while I was in high school. My friends would tell me that they made out with a girl the night before (something that I felt was wrong) and they didn’t seem to have a problem with it.

Intimacy and morality, like so many aspects of Christ’s teachings, are based upon principles. This means that it isn’t spelled out for you! You have to make your own decisions based upon the principle set forth. For example, if I were to tell you that you must live your life based upon the Golden Rule (Do unto others as you would have them do unto you), I shouldn’t have to tell you that you can’t kill, rape, or steal from people. Killing, raping, and stealing can all be derived from the principle; assuming that *you* don’t want to be killed, raped, or robbed.

Let me try another approach to explaining the idea of principles. The first thing that you must understand about principles is that they are beliefs. For example, the Golden Rule is a belief that we should treat others the same way that we want to be treated. Notice the caveat that I included at the very end of the previous paragraph “assuming that you don’t want to be killed, raped, or robbed.” Why did I include that? I included that because I may not share a belief in a principle with someone else. They may not think that my foundation for my behavior is correct. This is important to understand. For example, an atheist may think that it is true and important that we should love man, but will not include in his principles the love of God, because, for him, there is no God. For me to predicate any discussion of principles on a common

understanding of the principles taught by Jesus Christ would be ineffectual with an atheist. The members of a discussion involving principles must agree or come to an understanding of the perspective that is being used in order for a discussion of principles to make sense. Once it is understood that you share the same principles or at least are discussing the application of principles from a shared perspective, you can discuss how those principles should affect you. Let me sum up what I just said in case you didn't follow it: Not everyone believes the same way. It is sometimes necessary to find common ground and build from there.

In light of this, if I give *you* a principle by which to live *your* life and *you* accept it as true, then *you* are responsible for the interpretations of that principle.<sup>16</sup> This is the beauty of principles. It is also the scary part and the main focus of this essay. If you accept a principle as true, you have to determine the interpretations of the principle.

This leads us to the second point of this discussion of principles: God is not responsible for our actions, we are. If God were to spell out everything we are to do, whose plan does it turn in to? Think about that for a second. Based upon our understanding of the different plans presented in the Pre-Existence, whose plan was it that said we would be told everything we must do and thus would all be saved? Wasn't that Satan's plan? Why is that plan so enticing? Because it removes the responsibility of actions from the individual! That is exactly what Satan wanted because he would then be responsible for the good behavior of all people and he would receive the glory. God and Christ had something else in mind. They were not going to remove our agency but allow us to prove ourselves with it (Abraham 3:25); meaning we were going to have to make our own decisions and, as a result, be responsible for our actions. God and Christ said that they would teach us correct principles; principles that are based on universal truths. After that, it would be up to us to figure out what we should and should not do. In summary, *we* are responsible for *our* behavior!!!

Now, I believe that the youth of the Church are becoming ever more knowledgeable.<sup>17</sup> As a matter of fact, trying to answer all of the questions of today's youth is sometimes very difficult. As a result of their

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<sup>16</sup> Of course, you can always develop your own principles as well, but I'll get to the primary source of principles in just a few paragraphs.

<sup>17</sup> Notice I said 'knowledgeable' and not 'wise'. As I understand it, wisdom is one's practical ability to apply knowledge. Knowledge is the accumulation of information.

exposure to knowledge, I believe the youth of the Church (and many adult members for that matter) are recognizing what I have just said about principles. This leads them to want everything spelled out for them. Why? Two reasons: First, because they don't want to be responsible for their actions. If someone else tells you what you can and can't do, it's their fault if it turns out to be wrong. Second, people want things spelled out because they want to ride the edge of sin. They want to get as close to sinning as possible without actually doing it.

People want things spelled out for them so they are not responsible for their behavior and so they can find loopholes in the rules so they can get away with misbehavior. When I explicitly spell this process out, doesn't it seem ridiculous? Here we are, Christians, and we are seeing just how close we can come to sinning without actually doing it. The hypocrisy! We should stay as far away from sin as possible. We shouldn't be interested in 'just how far we can go,' but rather should be basing our morality and moral decisions of principles that encourage us to remain pure before God. In short, we should be trying to live the spirit of the principle of chastity and not the specific interpretations of this principle given to us by our bishop, our parents, or some other figure of authority.

Let me give you an example relating to morality which will lead us into the principles that should govern our intimate behavior. Many members of the Church teach that it is wrong to have sex. Many youth accept this...but they're not stupid. The word 'sex' is an ambiguous word with many meanings. Thanks to a President of the U.S. that had no morals, there are certain intimate actions that are not necessarily considered sex anymore. These could include oral sex, anal sex, or even manual (meaning 'hand') stimulation of the genitalia. If you tell an individual that they should not have sex, it can be interpreted as, "Do not have vaginal sex," when what is meant is they should not have any form of sex: vaginal, anal, oral, manual, or otherwise. In spelling out what is meant by sex, you are falling into the morality trap. Ironically, this happens. And, yes, I am talking about people in the Church. They are told not to have sex. But when they are finally confronted about doing the 'other' things, they simply claim that no one ever told them that it was wrong. No one ever specified that they could not participate in any of the other forms of sex. Thus, they did not sin, because you cannot sin unless you know that what you are doing is wrong, right? This is the morality trap.

So how do you get around the morality trap? Principles. What are the principles that should govern our actions when intimate? I think any one of the following will work to govern the behavior of individuals:

- *Would you feel comfortable telling your bishop or mother what you are doing?*
- *Would you feel comfortable telling your future spouse what you are doing?*
- *Do you feel the spirit when you do it?*
- *Does this show love towards God and Man?*

Notice that nothing is spelled out here. None of the principles says that it is wrong to French kiss but okay to lie down together. None of the principles says that heavy kissing and petting is wrong. They do not specify what is wrong or right. Determining the behaviors that are wrong or right is now up to the individual. But, lest we forget, we cannot assume that because we have told someone that they should live by these principles that they are going to do so. If you are going to discuss these principles with someone and hope that they will actually implement them, you must be certain that they believe these principles are true and are a correct way to govern behavior. Then, once they have accepted the truthfulness of the principles, you should help them to see how these principles apply in specific situations.

For example: Let's say you are in high school and you find yourself driving a young woman home one night. It's just the two of you. You are very close friends. When you pull in to the driveway, all the lights are off in the house. She has another 30 minutes until her curfew, what do you do?

Can you imagine trying to stipulate all of the things that you should and should not do in this situation by giving specifics? The list would be endless. But one principle can cover everything: Will you feel comfortable telling your mother what you did in the morning? Does this help you to see how principles can work?

Using principles is how Christ taught. As a matter of fact, he criticized the Jews for having so many specific rules. The Jews had overrun themselves with all of their rules. They had become so nit-picky that the 'principles' had veritably ceased to exist. As a result, individuals no longer had to make decisions for themselves. Because they didn't

make their own decisions, they weren't responsible for what they did and didn't do, as long as they followed the specified rules.

Christ wants us to take personal responsibility. He wants us to govern ourselves. When we don't, we give our responsibility away. Whoever gave us the 'rules' becomes responsible for our behavior, be it good behavior or bad. When we live by principles, we are the only ones that are responsible for our behavior. No one else! This can be a wonderful blessing and it can be sore curse; it is up to us.

Do not fall into the morality trap. Do not ask for specifics and do not try to give specifics. If you do either, you are removing responsibility from the individual that should have it and placing in on someone else. This is the morality trap!

## Appendix B: Dating in High School

I recently discussed relationships and dating with my younger brother. He's 18, a senior in high school and looking forward to serving a mission. As we discussed this topic, several points came up that I feel are absolutely vital for youth to understand when it comes to dating and chastity:

1. There is no reason to date steadily or seriously if you're not ready to marry.

Dating is for those individuals that are interested in getting to know someone to the point of wanting to marry that individual. Do you want or are you ready to marry someone while you are still in high school? How about prior to your mission? Prior to entering college? If not, don't date!

This raises the question: "If I can't date, how am I going to be popular; get to know people; have fun; etc.?" You don't have to pair off or date to have fun. Have you ever heard of just 'hanging out' with friends? (And for all of you guys out there, if you're just 'hanging out', you don't have to pay!) Besides, money spent on a girl before your mission is usually money spent on another man's wife! I would personally recommend just 'hanging out' for everyone in high school and any young man prior to his mission. After your mission – date! As for women, it's really up to you, but when you feel that you are ready to get married, date!

2. Intimacy should be reserved for married couples.

I know youth hear this from adults all time. But why shouldn't you be intimate prior to marriage? Let me answer that question with another question: What does intimacy lead to? The answer: sex. You must realize that the only thing to which intimacy leads is sex. Once you get on the path of intimacy, it's hard to stop. If you allow your lust to run wild, it will only want more until there is no more to give.

I'm going to idealize marriage for a few minutes, but this is what the commitment of marriage should mean. Marriage should be a heavenly sanctioned relationship between two individuals that want only to give of themselves to the other person. Sexual intercourse between two individuals that want only to give of themselves to the other individual is also the ideal. Sex, in a relationship of this type, is a giving of the whole individual (body and spirit) to the other, allowing for physical and spiritual closeness. When the giving aspect isn't there, it's simply selfishness based upon pleasure. On top of that, there is no symbolic witness of the commitment between two individuals without marriage. Without this commitment, there is no commitment to the results of sex. Sex, as understood in the Church has two purposes: Spiritual and emotional bonding of individuals and the creation of children. If you're not going to commit these two purposes, you shouldn't be having sex!

Thus, there are two reasons why you should not be intimate prior to marriage:

1. Intimacy just whets the sexual appetite, making it so you want more; leading to...
2. It leads to one thing and one thing only: sex, which should only be participated in by individuals that are committed to the other individual, the relationship, and the results of their intercourse – children.

Now, some might be asking, "But can you be somewhat intimate before marriage?" My advice would be: if you're not ready to date, intimacy is completely out of the question. However, once you are old enough or ready to date, determine just how far you are willing to go. That decision should be based upon the principles of morality discussed in Appendix A. Once you have determined your level of intimacy and you find yourself in a relationship that could become intimate, talk to this person and discuss your thresholds;<sup>18</sup> you must determine where your line is drawn. As you discuss this, you will find that the line is predetermined by the levels of intimacy that you and the other person

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<sup>18</sup> A threshold is the point at which a physiological or psychological effect begins to be produced or a level, point, or value above which something is true or will take place and below which it is not or will not.

have already set. The person that is not willing to go as far as the other is has set the line or level of intimacy for the relationship. If you truly love that person, you will respect the level of intimacy they have set and will not encourage them in anyway to go past it.

I can relate a story at this point. My senior year in high school I made the ‘mistake’ of falling for a girl and we began dating (bad idea, but I didn’t know that then). For four months I really enjoyed myself; we had become really good friends. During that time, we were never more intimate than holding hands, cuddling during movies and an occasional hug. Then . . . it happened! You see, I had set my line at a different point than she had. I was content with the level of intimacy currently practiced between the two of us. She was comfortable with going further. She wanted to kiss me and she wasn’t very subtle in letting me know that. I eventually gave in to her wishes and kissed her.

When I crossed that line the first time, I thought, “It’s all right, what’s a kiss?” Well, it wasn’t just one kiss; that one kiss turned into a lot of kisses. At that point, I began to feel like something was wrong. I didn’t know what it was, but in retrospect I realize that I wasn’t happy with our level of intimacy. For the next eight months I tried everything I could to cut down on our level of intimacy. I didn’t know why it was wrong, I just knew that since I started kissing her and when I was kissing her, I didn’t feel very good about it. At the same time, I knew that my friends were kissing their ‘girlfriends’ and they didn’t seem to have a problem with it. Why, then, did I not feel good about it? It didn’t seem to bother her. As a matter of fact, every time I told her that I didn’t want to kiss her anymore, she would begin to cry and want to know why. I couldn’t tell her that I ‘felt bad’ kissing her; that wouldn’t go over very well. So I would just tell her that kissing wasn’t what I wanted. She always cried (women?). What was I supposed to do? I really liked her...when I wasn’t kissing her.

Now let me explain what happened in terms of what we’ve already discussed. She had drawn a line for her level of intimacy, so too had I. When it came time to be intimate, her line was further along the path of intimacy than mine. That would have been fine, but we crossed my line in reaching hers. **BIG MISTAKE!** My line is where I felt comfortable. As soon as my line was crossed, I no longer felt comfortable. It wasn’t that I didn’t feel comfortable being with her; I didn’t feel comfortable with our level of intimacy. The worst part of the whole situation is that once she knew I would cross that line, she wasn’t willing to settle for not

kissing anymore. We had now moved to her level of intimacy and the relationship was doomed from that point on.

I don't know if this example is clear enough to drive my point home, but I want you to understand that intimacy should be determined by the principles above. If you don't feel comfortable with a certain level of intimacy, draw your line before you get to that point. Then you won't have to suffer the discomfort that I and so many others have suffered.

## Appendix C: Happiness and Existence

Have you ever been asked the purpose of this existence? I hope that you have. If not, I think it is a good question to ask. However, I don't think we always adequately answer the question, especially in light of all the things we should consider when answering the question.

Your standard answers will include such things as: to gain a body; to gain experience, to learn, and grow; and, to be tried and tested. Any of these would be considered a standard and acceptable answer in today's Sunday School classes. It's true. We did come here to gain a body (though I never have figured out just why we need it if Christ was a god before he had a body, but that's another question for another essay). Heavenly Father/Elohim has a body of flesh and bone (not blood, of course) and he had a mortal body like we do at some point. In order to become like Him, it is necessary for us to gain a body. We also don't have the extensive life experiences that Elohim has and therefore come here, to Earth, to gain that experience. We weren't ignorant in the pre-existence; we just didn't know everything we needed to know. There were certain things we needed to experience. Probably the best answer of the three, however, is that we needed to be tried and tested. Without the actual presence of Elohim, we needed to see if we would be true to His cause and our purpose. This is accomplished by removing us from the presence of God and sending us to Earth.

These are all good reasons, but they are secondary to a bigger reason. This bigger reason encompasses all of these smaller reasons: We came here because it was a necessary step in our eternal progression toward becoming gods. To become a god, it is necessary to gain a body, to learn and grow, and to be tried and tested. If we don't do all of the above, we cannot become full-fledged gods. Even Christ/Jehovah, who attained godhood before He came to this world, still needed to come and gain a body, learn and grow, and be tried and tested, all of which He did. So, the next time a Sunday School teacher asks you this question, don't answer with the stereotypical answers, give them something to chew on: "We came here because we wanted to become gods and mortality was the next logical step."

Are we all on the same page so far? This idea of becoming gods, you understand it, right? Let's move on to the biggest reason for our

existence and an even deeper answer to an even deeper question: Why do we want to become gods? (That's a doozy isn't it?) What is so great, grand and glorious about being an all-knowing, all-powerful being? (Other than the fact that you do know everything and can do anything within the confines of the natural order of existence...) I'll tell you what it is. It's the same thing that motivates our behaviors and desires here – happiness. We want to be happy. Do you know anybody that doesn't want to be happy? Everyone wants to be happy. Notice that I didn't ask you whether or not you know people that are happy. That isn't the point; we all know people that are happy and unhappy. The point is we want to be happy. Society has even gone so far as to consider it a disorder when we aren't happy often enough (i.e., depression). What is even stranger is that individuals that commit suicide, who would undoubtedly be considered the most unhappy of all people, are doing it because they think it will make them happier. (I don't get the logic behind it either, but that is what they are doing.) So, we all want to be happy.

But, what do we mean by happy? To understand this, I want to make an elementary distinction between types of happiness that we don't usually make for the sake of understanding this concept the best that we can. There are two types of happiness:

1. Long-term personality characteristic

-Example: My brother is a jovial/happy person. He has a very optimistic outlook on life and is often found smiling and laughing.

2. Short-term emotions or ephemeral feelings

-Example: Eating an ice cream cone with my mother made me happy.

What we need to understand with these two types of happiness is that the first is a personality trait or characteristic of the individual and the other is an emotion that comes and goes, generally over a short period of time.

Without this distinction, we are prone to make a major thinking error. This error leads us to believe that we are supposed to be happy #2 all the time. There is no scripture that says we are to be happy #2 all the time. The scriptures say that “men are, that they might have joy” (2

Nephi 2:25). Joy is happy #1, not happy #2; joy is the long-term personality characteristic. Thinking that you should be happy #2 all of the time is a major thinking error and is psychologically very unhealthy. In my opinion, it is the leading cause of depression (somewhat ironic, I know).

Have you ever met someone that believes that they should be happy #2 all of the time? Do you know the type of person that I am talking about? The person that laughs at funerals and is never sad because that would mean they are not succeeding in life. The fake person that makes you uneasy because you are never really sure of whether or not they are truly happy because it seems like it is always a show. I have met some people like this. I feel bad for them because their misconception is not allowing them to enjoy life. This probably seems ironic or even paradoxical, but it is again scriptural. “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11). If there is no opposition in emotion and feeling, if we are always ‘happy’, than we can never really be happy because we have never experienced sadness. To be happy, we must experience sadness. To be very happy, we must be very sad. As intensity increases on one end, it increases on the other end.

I actually learned the lesson of increasing contrasts in emotions from my piano teacher when I was 14 years old. When I was taking piano lessons, I could never play the pieces I worked on with the emotional intensity that she wanted and even demanded (she was a pretty demanding teacher). She wanted me to use the piano as an instrument of expression. I thought I understood what she meant, so I played loud. That isn’t what she meant. Then I think we shared an epiphany. She said that most emotionally stirring music was written by older individuals. Why? Because they had experienced the extremes of emotion. Without experiencing extremes of emotion, it is difficult to comprehend what someone means by depression or agony or even ecstasy. Because I was so young and so inexperienced in the extremes of emotion, it was very difficult for me to express any extreme emotional feelings that I might have inside me using the piano. I didn’t have any. Now, not having extreme emotional feelings may not be true for all youth. However, for me, it was true. Sure, I had experienced anger and sadness and frustration and even moments of great happiness. But I had never experienced the agony of a lost love. I had never experienced that anguish of sin and the exultant joy of repentance. I had never experienced the warmth, comfort, and serenity of deeply felt love. And I had never known the ecstasy (and accompanying grief) of the eternal

companionship of marriage. This lack of emotional experience was preventing me from playing the music as it was meant to be played – with emotional rigor and intensity.

Those individuals that deprive themselves from experiencing negative emotions are also depriving themselves from experiencing the fantastic joys of positive emotions at the same time. In order to know one, you must know the other. We, as spiritual offspring of our Heavenly Father, were not created just to experience the positive emotion of happiness, but rather to experience the entire spectrum of emotions and emotional intensity. Don't believe me?

Why don't we look at the scriptures for a moment. First, it is important that we understand that God's design was that man have eternal joy or happiness:

And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it. (Mosiah 2:41)

But, behold, the righteous, the saints of the Holy One of Israel, they who have believed in the Holy One of Israel, they who have endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame of it, they shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world, and their joy shall be full forever. (2 Nephi 9: 18)

This is the plan and the goal. This was the purpose of our coming to Earth. However, even if we achieve immortality and eternal life and attain this state of eternal joy and never-ending happiness, we will still experience negative emotions. This may seem like a tall claim to make, but it is based off of the emotions that God experiences:

And God cursed the earth with a sore curse, and was angry with the wicked, with all the sons of men whom he had made; (Moses 5:56)

Furthermore the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, and sware that I should not go over Jordan, and that I should not go in unto that good land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee *for* an inheritance: (Deuteronomy 4:21)

And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, (1 Kings 11:9)

God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry *with the wicked* every day. (Psalms 7:11)

And it came to pass that the God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people, and he wept; and Enoch bore record of it, saying: How is it that the heavens weep, and shed forth their tears as the rain upon the mountains? (Moses 7:28)

Is God always happy #2? No, he's not. Of course he's not. God can be angry and sad. God weeps. God is not a heartless, ignorant being that doesn't recognize the existence of sadness, frustration, anger, etc. As a matter of fact, he understands all of those emotions perfectly because he has experienced them all. God is happy #1. Eternal Glory and Celestial Glory is not eternal happiness #2, it is being happy #1. Frankly, I don't think it would be 'Heaven' per say, if our existence was simply happiness #2; I think it would be hell because we could never increase our level of happiness (remember, to increase it we must experience ever greater levels of sadness). Just because our eternal glory is joy in heaven with our Eternal Father forever does not mean we will always be happy #2. The happiness that we should strive for in this life is happiness #1.

So, God is happy #1 and experiences other emotions, what does this have to do with the purpose of our existence? I think we saw just how happy (#1) we could be while in the pre-existence with God and decided to come here to pursue that same happiness. We want to be happy. We want to experience these things. We are spirits pursuing happiness; happiness that is only attainable through godhood. Both Adam (Moses 5:10) and Christ (Hebrews 12:2) understood that our purpose in life was the pursuit of happiness; both in this life and the life to come. Let me say this just one more time: The purpose of our existence is joy and happiness.

Now, by saying what I have just said, this also implies that the purpose of our existence is not to suffer. Just because we are being tried and tested does not mean that we should only experience pain and agony. Life is meant to be enjoyed. If you ever hear someone say that the purpose of our existence is to suffer, tell him or her the truth. Suffering has nothing to do with it. We are pursuing happiness. Happiness is the purpose of godhood. Do you think God became God because he wanted to be miserable? It is true that God experiences plenty of sadness and heartache. Imagine if you were the parent of a race that commits as many horrible acts (murder, rape, theft, destruction, and war) as the human race does on a daily basis. It's amazing that He is ever able to be happy. But that is our goal; that is the reason for our existence.

In summary... Because we wanted to be happy we decided to become gods. But remember, the happiness we pursue is happiness #1 (the long-lasting personality characteristic and not happiness #2), because even the gods are sad and angry at times. The assumption is that the joy outweighs the sorrow and eternal life means eternal joy. I hope to see you in the hereafter, smiling and enjoying yourself at times, but also experiencing the entire range of emotions with which we have been endowed.

## Appendix D: Wicked Traditions

Sometimes the hypocrisy of the membership of the Church (not the Church's teachings or even its leadership, but the members) really gets to me. It is when this hypocrisy really upsets me that I end up writing stuff like the following. Now, this is not to say that I haven't participated in these self-same behaviors. But, as time has passed, I would like to think that I have learned a thing or two. I am not claiming to be wise, that is way too lofty an assertion. I am claiming that I have learned that there are some 'traditional' beliefs and practices among the membership of the Church that are not in accordance with the teachings of Jesus Christ. Mind you, as noted above, I am not saying that these are teachings of the Church; these are beliefs of the membership and are erroneous. These beliefs include two things that I am going to talk about in this essay: First, you do not have to have a position in the hierarchy of the Church to be considered a saint. And second, external appearance does not reflect upon internal worthiness.

### Church Positions and Worthiness

Why is it that members of the Church have the impression that positions in the Church directly illustrate the level of worthiness or greatness of an individual? I remember hearing a story about this once; I wish I could remember where it came from so I could cite the source. Regardless, I think it is important that I tell it even if my version isn't completely accurate as the idea it relates is important. The story goes something like this: A temple sealer was performing a wedding for a young couple and, after the ceremony, noted that the parents were both crying. Thinking that this is often typical of mothers but not fathers, he wanted to know why this was so emotional for them. As the sealer talked with the couple he learned that the father was a small town farmer, not a man of worldly wealth and worldly prestige but prestigious in its own right. The mother was a housewife (very much a position of prestige in my opinion). They had raised something like 6 or 7 children and the child that had married today was their last to marry. All of their children had grown up worthy members of the Church and all had married in the temple. The person relating the story claimed that this couple was one of the greatest success stories of righteousness he had

ever heard. The man was not a bishop, a stake president, a temple sealer, a mission president, or a general authority. The woman was not a relief society president or young woman's leader or a member of the relief society board. And yet, this temple sealer considered it a privilege to be able to shake their hands.

Let me relate another anecdote... When I first received my temple recommend, my stake president asked me if I felt worthy to enter the temple. Since this was my first interview, I was not aware that this is always asked in temple recommend interviews. So I asked him, "Do you mean, am I perfect?" In the way that only a divinely inspired leader can, he responded, "You do not have to be perfect to enter the temple. You only have to be striving for perfection. Being worthy to enter the temple and holding a temple recommend illustrates your worthiness to enter the Celestial Kingdom." That was a great lesson for me. Thinking back on the questions that are asked in a temple recommend interview, it makes sense. The questions are designed to investigate not only the worthiness of the individual, but the desire and pursuit of perfection of the individual. No where in the interview do the members of the bishopric or stake presidency ask you whether or not you are a general authority, or hold a position in the Church; they ask you whether or not you are fulfilling your responsibilities, whatever they may be. They do not ask you whether or not you make millions of dollars; they ask you whether or not you pay your tithing.

In the eyes of God, we are all equal. Even the prophet must undergo a temple recommend interview with his bishop. He also has home teachers assigned to him. That is the beauty of the Church. Everyone is equal in worth. This does not mean that people do not have different levels of expertise or that they are not more skilled in an area than is another person. We are all different and each has his/her own gifts. Yet, we must remember that we are equal in worth to God.

As members of the Church and even more as missionaries, we must not perpetuate the erroneous beliefs about positions and callings in the Church. A position or calling does not make you any more important, great, noble, or worthy. All it does is give you responsibility to do something in the building up of the Kingdom of God. That is the function of callings and positions.

## External Appearances and Worthiness

A third anecdote... When my wife and I moved to Ohio for graduate school, the ward we moved in to was a wonderful ward. There were three sets of missionaries in the ward, two sets of Elders and a pair of Sisters. Just after we arrived, the sisters helped an older woman find the Gospel and join the Church. My wife was concerned that this woman may not have realized that it is traditionally appropriate to wear a dress to Church. As she expressed this concern in attempting to find out more about this member, she found out that this woman had recently been fitted with a prosthetic leg and was wearing full length pants to cover up what she considered a deformity. My wife's concern was that she wanted the woman to be accepted into 'Mormon Society'. And, if the woman was unaware of what women typically wear in Mormon Society, it would be difficult for her to fit in. Yet, once her prosthetic leg became common knowledge throughout the ward, there was no more questioning of whether or not she should wear a dress or skirt. She was coming to Church. She was celebrating her membership and worshipping God. And to do that, she was dressing a little differently because it made her feel more comfortable.

Just because someone is not dressed 'appropriately' as Mormon Society or Mormon traditional standards dictate does not mean that they are any less worthy to be worshipping in the same church with other members. How would you feel if you were to express to this woman that she was dressed inappropriately only to find out that she was doing it to cover up an insecurity; that she was missing a leg? What if it were you? This is why we are not judges. This is why Christ will be the absolute judge. He knows all of the circumstances surrounding decisions we make. She was no less worthy to worship with the rest of the members of the Church, she was insecure about the appearance of her prosthetic leg. Do not be so quick to judge others, nor so quick to assume that others do not fit. Sometimes they fit better than you do and you don't know it.

My fourth anecdote may help clarify where I am going with this. There was a member of my parents' ward, which is the ward that I grew up in and attended until I was married, that made a strange claim. He claimed that the way that you could tell whether or not a returned missionary was a successful full-time missionary and if he was still as worthy as he was when he was a full-time missionary was by looking at the way he groomed himself. If he groomed himself after his mission as he did while on his mission, this meant that he had been a successful missionary and was still worthy. Now, when he mentioned this, something went off

in my head. I thought, “What does the length of your hair have to do with your worthiness?” I like my hair long anyway, but I grew out the longest, nastiest, ugliest beard you have ever seen just after he said this. My hair is dark brown but my facial hair is red; also, it does not grow in uniformly, with more hair growing on my neck than on certain parts of my face. I am the first to admit that this beard was horrendous, but I had a point to make. From that point on, whenever he saw me, I could see that he was trying to do two things. First, he was trying to size me up and determine whether or not I was still a worthy member of the Church. And second, he was trying to encourage me to cut my hair and shave without actually saying that to me.

There is no way you can tell whether or not someone is worthy based upon the length of their hair or whether or not they have facial hair. Most people think of Christ or the early prophets of the Restoration as examples of this (e.g. Lorenzo Snow or Brigham Young). Of course, any parents that read this with their children are going to develop the argument that their children still cannot have long hair because it is not in accordance with the times and all one has to do to know how to keep themselves groomed appropriately is to look at the General Authorities of the Church. My opinion is that grooming yourself as the General Authorities groom themselves is a good idea. And that is, according to societal standards and norms, the way that many upright individuals groom themselves today. But it is not a requirement of salvation. If it were so, why would members of the Church with beards and moustaches be called to leadership positions in stake presidencies and bishoprics and even as general authorities? Of course, the leadership of the Church then ‘highly encourages’ them to shave and cut their hair, but they were obviously worthy even with the hair. Do you get the point? A particular way of personal grooming is not a sign or symbol of personal worthiness. To this day, I wear my hair long and if I shave, I shave only once a week. Why? One, I hate shaving; I have very sensitive skin on my neck and it becomes highly irritated when I shave. Two, I love the feeling of my hair blowing in the wind.

Where am I going with all of this? External features do not reflect upon the worthiness of the individual. If this were the case, all I would need to do is cut my hair short, shave, buy an Armani suit, and wear expensive cologne in order to be considered worthy. I could be committing adultery, murdering people, stealing money, abusing my wife, etc. but still look good and, therefore, be considered a worthy member of the Church.

Come on! Do you see how ridiculous it is to try to connect personal appearance with worthiness? There is no connection whatsoever.

#### Conclusion:

As members of the Church of Jesus Christ, we should follow his teachings. This means that we should first and foremost love God and love man. Included in loving man, in my opinion, is not judging man. That means that someone that does not have a calling of 'prestige' (e.g. bishop, stake president, etc.) is not any less worthy than someone that does. Also, we should not base evaluations of worthiness on external characteristics and particular grooming preferences. Evaluating individuals based on their position in the Church and their grooming preferences is what I would consider a 'wicked tradition' (Mosiah 1:5). Throughout the Book of Mormon, whenever the 'wicked traditions of their fathers' is referred to, it is talking about beliefs that are passed on from one generation to the next that are not in accordance with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have a record of the failings of the saints in the Book of Mormon so we do not follow in their footsteps. Do not promulgate the wicked traditions of certain members of the Church. Accept everyone that is sincerely seeking Christ, regardless of their 'position' in the Church hierarchy of positions and their external appearance. Look for sincerity and intent and let that be the measurement of an individual, not the length of their hair.

## Appendix E: Church Organization

The Church, as its name implies, has three sections or areas that must be treated individually in order to fully understand it: (1) The Church; (2) The gospel of Jesus Christ; (3) the Latter-Day Saints.

### The Church

When one talks about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, one really should specify which aspect of the Church he/she is discussing. The Church itself is an organization and a corporation. Let's look at both aspects.

#### A. Church Organization

The Church is organized upon the principle of Priesthood leadership and inspiration. The Church is led by a Prophet, Seer and Revelator who is the presiding Priesthood authority of the Church and presiding High Priest on the face of the Earth. He (yes he is a man for only men can hold the Priesthood) has two counselors and they, together, make up the First Presidency of the Church. There is also a council of the Twelve Apostles. The members of this council are also considered to be Prophets, Seers and Revelators. It is generally from this body that the President of the Church superseding the last is chosen. The organization continues through the levels of Priesthood organization. For a detailed outline of the hierarchical Organization of the Church look in any biannual conference edition of the Church's publication The Ensign.

This organization is the disseminating faculty that has been chosen to spread the word of Jesus Christ. This organization is also in place to facilitate the accomplishment of the three-fold mission of the Church (Redeem the Dead, Preach the Gospel and Perfect the Saints). It is the Priesthood organization that runs the Church itself.

#### B. Corporation of the Church

There is also a corporate aspect of the Church. This includes such divisions as the Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus

Christ of Latter-Day Saints (etc.). This corporation is for handling the financial affairs of the Church that are not officially related to the Tithes and Offerings received by the Church. It is a corporation similar (notice I did not say identical) to many other corporations found in America's business sector (Microsoft, Intel, Nike). This corporation handles the affairs of the business ventures and companies that the Church owns.

These two components, the Priesthood organization and the corporations of the Church, make up what can be considered the Church. These aspects are necessary and may or may not be entirely inspired. They are not what you should call scriptural or spiritual truths. They are organizations of men that are designed to facilitate the growth and spread of God's Church. Because they are organizations of men, they are not perfect in their organization (though after having worked with some individuals that work in the Church offices and having taken care of the finances for one of the Church's missions I would say that they Church's corporate divisions are as near perfect as they need be).

Therefore, one must make the distinction between this aspect of the Church, the corporate and Priesthood Organization aspect, from that of the Gospel and the people. Again, when talking about the Church, one should make the distinction of which aspect of the Church they are discussing. In summary, when we say the Church, we can mean many things; two of those are the Priesthood organization of the Church or the corporate divisions that are owned and run by the Church.

## **The Gospel of Jesus Christ**

I'm not going to expound upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ at this point of the book. I will rather endeavor to show you that this is but one of the three components of the Church of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is the teachings, doctrines, beliefs, dogmas and values that are taught by the Church (meaning the Priesthood Organization). Though the method and/or carrier of the message (members, which we'll talk about next) may be flawed, the message is perfect and true. This is the distinction that needs to be made. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is true.

Let me illustrate this with something you have all heard. In fast and testimony meeting or wherever we find members of the Church bearing their testimonies, there is often a common element. They say something along the lines of, "And I know this Church is true." Let's analyze this. What is it they are saying they know to be true? Are they talking about

the Priesthood Organization of the Church? Are they talking about the corporate divisions of the Church? Are they talking about all of the components of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints combined? What is they are referring to?

If you don't know, go back and read section one before continuing. Generally, members are referring to all three components or just the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but I believe they usually don't know. It bothers me sometimes to hear people say, "I know this Church is true" when what they really mean to say is, "I know the Gospel of Jesus Christ is true". There is a difference.

How then should someone approach this? Let me show you by example, my testimony: "I know that God lives and that he loves us. That Christ is our Savior and that His teachings and the principles of love and devotion He has shown unto us our true. I believe the Church is the instrument designed by God to facilitate the dissemination of this Gospel throughout the world. I know that those men chosen to head the Priesthood organization of this Church or divinely inspired and Prophets, Seers and Revelators. I know the Book of Mormon is the word of God and that the Bible can teach us many great things."

Does this example help you to understand what I mean? There is a distinction between the Church and the Gospel. Note it and use that distinction in the way you speak and express yourself. In summary, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not the Church nor is the Church the gospel. The Church includes more than the Gospel; the Gospel is the message of the Church.

## **The Latter-Day Saints**

Now this is a meaty topic. The discussion of the Latter-Day Saints is the focus of this book but it was necessary to make the distinction between the three before I could adequately focus on the one.

I am a Latter-Day Saint and therefore am included in what I am about to say. Nevertheless, it is time to come to grips with reality. The Latter-Day Saints make up the organizational aspect of the Church and the body of the Church but they are not the Church itself nor are they the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Latter-Day Saints are imperfect humans. Thus, they are not true. Just because the Saints are not perfect nor true it does not make the gospel false nor the Church an evil organization. Face it, humans are not perfect. That is a doctrine and a true one.

How many times have you heard stories of people leaving the Church organization and Church activity because of a falling out with one of the other members? Those members claim that their inactivity and attitude is a result of the Church not being true or good enough or that a member wronged them. The Church doesn't profess that its members are perfect. Any church that would or does is lying and a church of the devil. Granted, the member is probably leaving Church activity and the organization because they are trying to cover up transgressions in their life or they think that life without morals and guidelines will be easier, but trying to blame that on either the members or the Church is stupid. Why did they originally become active in the Church, because of the people, the organization or the doctrine? If it's for the people-bad answer. If it's for the organization-bad answer (and your weird). If it's for the doctrine-good answer. By pretending to be offended by an individual member of the Church, the offended is actually telling us that they are dissatisfied with the organization, the doctrine or that they don't (and maybe never did) have a testimony of the Gospel of Christ.

Members, what does this mean? It means that you are not the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You are not the Church organization (though some of you may be part of it) and you are not the corporation of the Church. You are human, fallible and oft times in error. You are not the Church! And if you are not a member of the Church and are reading this, We are not the Church! The Church encompasses the three components that I have discussed.

I've heard some of the most interesting teachings from members of the Church that claim that their teachings are doctrine. I've probably shared some interesting teachings of the Church that I've presented in such a light that they may have been considered doctrine. The Gospel of Jesus Christ exists outside the members of the Church. The beliefs and truths that make up the Gospel have an existence of their own. They are not owned nor created by man. They are existential; they exist outside of man.

Therefore members, don't mix these things up. In summary:

1. Church has organization and corporate branches
  - a. Value judgment – irrelevant, they are creations of man though inspired and simply serve to disseminate the gospel of Christ.

2. Gospel of Jesus Christ exists in its own sphere and is independent of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints though the Church has a great deal more of the Gospel than any other Church in existence today.
  - a. Value judgment – The Church does not have the entirety of the Gospel, but all that it has is true.
3. The Latter-Day Saints make up the organizational aspect of the Church but are not the Church in and of themselves and are not necessarily representative of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
  - a. Value judgment – Though some members may be Christ-like individuals, the majority of us have a long way to go. The members are not of themselves true.

The Church has an organization, members and beliefs. When you say the Church is true, you probably mean that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is true because the word Church can and often does encompass all three components and not all three components are true!

## Appendix F: Pride vs. Self-Esteem

I think there is an important distinction that can and probably should be made here. There is a difference between self-aggrandizement or pride and self-esteem. However, the difference is a very fine line and often difficult to distinguish, especially for those that are observing the behavior. President Benson explains in his talk on pride that pride is generally typified by specific feelings or beliefs about oneself, or even motivation for behavior. All of these things are internal and, therefore, very difficult to see. Often, pride comes across as though the individual is 'cocky' or 'arrogant', praising him/herself. Self-esteem can come across the same way; individuals with a high self-esteem evaluate themselves more positively than those with a low self-esteem.

I attribute this to one of the pathetic characteristics of modern-day society; so many people are depressed and insecure that anyone who is self-confident, believes in an internal locus of control, and has a self-esteem is mistaken for being arrogant. Thus, the society in which we live considers anyone that is self-aggrandizing 'arrogant' and anyone that is self-confident or has self-esteem as arrogant; this is a 'no-win' situation. Can someone be self-confident and not be arrogant? I believe they can, but others need to be less quick to judge.

I believe the real problem is that self-confident people make others uncomfortable because so many others do not share that confidence. Since no one particularly likes to look bad the self-confident individual is labeled 'arrogant' and their self-confidence is dismissed as a negative attribute. What a sad state of affairs!

Groups of people who engage in such behavior are essentially forcing depression and insecurity on people. If one truly wants to find success in life and in the mission, one must have faith and self-confidence and self-esteem. Yet, many want you to believe that these are signs of over-confidence or arrogance. Believing that you can accomplish anything that the Lord commands of you is not arrogance; it is the cornerstone of our religion, one of the basic principles of the gospel; it is faith. Do not mistake faith with arrogance. This is not a license toward self-aggrandizement, but it is a license to be self-confident, which can co-exist with humility.

## Appendix G: Principles

Members of the Church, Awake and Arise! It is time for a new generation of thought. It is time for a new paradigm. Frankly, it is time to begin living the gospel we preach. How many generations must grow up in forced ignorance before we learn that what Joseph Smith said was the truth, “Teach them correct principles and let them govern themselves.”

For years I have been noticing that parents in the LDS Church force their children to go to church, to get baptized, to go to scouts, to receive the Priesthood, to go on missions, to go to the temple, etc. What kind of conviction is gained by forcing someone to do something? For those of you who don't understand what I mean by this, let me give you an example: When the Spanish came from the Old World to the New World, the inhabitants were considered heathens because they were not Christian. Conversion was forced upon them by the sword; it was either convert or die. Did they convert? Yes. Did the conversion last? Sort of. Because there was no real conviction, because it was not them making the decision to follow Christ, they twisted the religion and beliefs into something that now resembles not only Catholicism, but the ancient religions of the Mayas and the Incas. It is a combination of the two and definitely not a true conversion.

Do you understand the point I'm trying to make? Conversion by coercion is never-lasting, not ever-lasting.

In psychology, it is recognized that a major life event experienced to one degree or another by everyone is the achievement of an identity. This sense of identity comes about because children eventually have to distinguish between themselves and their parents. This separation forces children to develop a stable sense of self or identity. In other words, children begin to ask themselves, “Who am I?” This question is the cause of those horrible years of ‘bad’ behavior that teenagers exhibit. I say ‘bad’ behavior because when you understand what it is children are trying to accomplish, their behavior truly isn't bad. They are trying to find themselves, just like we have all done at one point or another. When this behavior turns bad is when parents have failed to do their job. Parents that try to force decisions upon their children are going to end up with revolts, just like the Spanish had to deal with when they were trying to conquer a people like the Incas and the Mayas. When this happens is when children begin leaving the Church, breaking the law and breaking the commandments and lessons that they have been ‘taught’ all their

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lives. It is the responsibility of the parents to teach their children then let them govern themselves.

Sense of self or identity isn't always achieved properly. There are several areas that are vital to the development of an identity. The first is experiencing a period of crisis wherein exploration of alternatives takes place. The second is commitment to a specific occupation. The third and final area that is related to identity formation and is the most relevant to our discussion of religion is when individuals adopt values and ideologies (belief structures).

J. E. Marcia has identified four possible outcomes of an adolescent's attempts to achieve a stable sense of identity:

- **Foreclosure:** These individuals accept an identity that is provided by others rather than one chosen by them. They do not pass through a crisis period and never explore their alternatives; they simply accept what is already there.
- **Moratorium:** This is a period during which an individual delays developing an identity while exploring alternatives and choices. These individuals are still in the exploration state. They are in crisis and haven't developed their values and ideologies, nor have they committed to a specific job or occupation.
- **Identity Diffusion:** These individuals fail to develop a clear sense of their identity. These individuals have not undergone a period of crisis or exploration nor have they committed to an occupation or specific goals or values.
- **Identity Achievement:** These individuals have succeeded in making personal choices about the goals that they should pursue. They have successfully undergone a period of crisis and exploration and have finally come to a conclusion as to what they want to do for an occupation and have committed to specific goals and values.

Okay, I've just spouted a bunch of psychological jargon that may be confusing to some of you. Let me illustrate what I'm trying to say. According to the latest statistics, if a Mormon youth can remain active until he or she is twenty-four years old, the probability of that individual remaining active in the Church for the rest of his/her life jumps from

around twenty percent to nearly eighty percent. Why is that? Well, individuals that make it to that point have passed through this period of identity formation and have finally found who they are, whether it be by locating themselves in a state of foreclosure or identity achievement.

Thus, it is the rough period of adolescence, the teenage years, when parents really need to worry. Yet, I don't believe worry is the correct word to use. If parents educate their children when they are young this problem of identity will be resolved rather quickly. It is when parents don't teach their children that they should worry. Children that are not taught will learn one way or another.

This is the element that has so upset me in my interaction with today's youth and in growing up in the Church myself. Parents don't seem to want to teach their children about the gospel. I can only guess that this is because parents never really explored the gospel for themselves. I would submit that the majority of LDS parents are in a state of foreclosure. The LDS faith was forced upon them or they took it from their parents and did not take the time to explore these values and beliefs. When that is the case there is an over-riding sense of fear when it comes to talking about your beliefs and values because they aren't truly yours, they are someone else's and you can easily lose them if they are challenged. You see, most people don't want to undergo a period of crisis or experience a state of moratorium because it is scary. Not knowing what your values and goals are opens up so many avenues that often times it is difficult to know what to do. At the same time, because this foreclosed identity has been passed down from generation to generation parents now teach children to fear anything that comes from outside of the Church; essentially, to fear exploration.

Why is this so upsetting to me? The Church does not teach this nor does it encourage it. The Church is ALL about educating. The Church encourages and even commits parents to teach their children. It does not say, "Parents, I want you to teach your children that it is wrong to explore alternatives outside the Church." "Parents, I want you to discourage your children from finding their true selves." You see, when someone comes right out and says it, it seems absolutely ridiculous! The Church does not encourage ignorance any more than it encourages adultery or spousal abuse. The Church wants children to learn, to grow, and even to explore.

I had a professor at the University of Utah that was a Jewish Rabbi. He was an anthropology professor and was teaching a class on Myth,

Magic, and Religion. He had some very ingenious perspectives on life and religion. One of the points he made is that the Mormon Church is very wise in sending its youth on missions at nineteen. Think for a minute why the Church would send them at nineteen and not at twenty-four. Now, you could say something like, "Well, this is the ideal age because they have just finished high school and aren't in college yet." Or how about, "They're too young to be married and have a wife/husband and kids yet, perfect timing." I think my favorite one besides the right answer is, "For young men, this is their sexual peak. If we send them away from home, they have a better chance of remaining chaste." Frankly, I would guess that all of these answers have something to do with it. But when it comes right down to it, the Church is sending youth out at nineteen because this is a period of exploration and crisis. Mommy and Daddy aren't there anymore. The youth of the Church are forced to explore different avenues and experience life without mommy and daddy telling them what they can and can't do anymore. Having served a mission I know what it's like out there. There really is no one sitting on your shoulder. The only motivation you have to do what is right comes from yourself, especially when you have a companion that has realized he's not really interested in the Church and what it teaches. Fully one fourth of returned missionaries go inactive. According to my professor, those are remarkable numbers. A one fourth divergence is not very many. Most religions loose more than that.

As a matter of fact, in that same class, we discussed the Amish and some of the practices they use with their youth during this same period. Most of the time the Amish encourage their youth between about eighteen and twenty-two to go out and live in the world for a period of time; they are not to live by the Amish standards so they can know what the other lifestyle is like and ultimately make a decision. It isn't until they return that they commit to the Amish lifestyle. True conversion to their religion isn't until the individual is an adult and is convinced of his belief system and what he wants to do. Most of them come back to the fold. Why? Joseph Smith said it, "Teach them correct principles and let them govern themselves."

What it boils down to, parents in the Church, is that you don't have much of a choice. Today's generation is being bombarded by information on all sides. If you don't do your part in educating your kids, the world will do it for you. Have you ever heard the thought, "If they didn't learn it in the home, then you better be worried"? This thought is becoming more and more the case with our youth. Parents don't seem to want to

teach their children. They are either afraid of exploring their beliefs or just want their children to conform so they, the parents, can look good in the eyes of their friends and fellow ward members. Why don't you take a second to think about the welfare of your children? What do you really want for them? Do you want a life of misery and woe like your own? Do you want them to constantly be living in fear of discussing truth because it scares them? Or do you want them to willingly and wittingly choose the LDS faith because they know it is right? Well, these are your options. Either you teach your children and then encourage them to make their decisions. Or you don't teach them and force them to conform. What do you want for your kids?

## Appendix H: Sex and Mormonism

Has anyone ever told you that sex is wrong? Has anyone ever told you that it is bad, evil, wicked or not something ‘Good Mormons’ do? Do you realize they were lying? Sex is not wrong. Sex is not bad, evil, wicked or something ‘Good Mormons’ don’t do. Sex is divine. Sex is a gift from God. Sex is the consummate act of love between two people that truly love each other.

What does it do to people when you tell them something is wrong and that they shouldn’t do it? It is human nature to wonder why something is wrong. When you tell a child that something is wrong and they can’t do it, they’re natural inclination is to want to do it. They want to know why it is wrong. They want to know what it is they aren’t allowed to do. We have all probably at one time or another fallen into this intrigue and wanted to know why something was considered ‘wrong’. This concept has been used for a very long time (e.g. Whatever you do, don’t open that box.)

So how does this correlate with sex? When you tell an individual that sex is wrong and don’t explain to them the entire process, the natural inclination is to want to know why it is so wrong. When this inclination is suppressed for a long period of time it can build up to a secretive fascination with the act of sex, especially when the sexual acts are illicit or out of wedlock. Why? Because those people that are openly illicit in their sexuality represent a suppressed desire. Those people have overcome that suppressed desire and are living it. The individual that maintains the illicit desire continues to secretly want sex.

What ramifications does this sexual suppression have? Why do you think Hollywood movies and today’s entertainment glorify sex? Why do you think today’s youth, even those who have been told that sex is wrong, watch these movies and TV shows and are fascinated by them? The youth want to understand sex. They want to understand what happens when a man or woman is aroused and intercourse takes place. They want to understand the physiological processes that take place in these ‘evil’ practices. Then, consider the resultant response from Hollywood: Sex is considered illicit and wrong, we shall glorify it in representation of living openly the normally suppressed desire. Hollywood is playing into the suppressed desire so many people have.

Okay, so now we have a bunch of children with suppressed sexual desire due to the illicit nature of sexual relations...what do we do? Stop telling your children that sex is wrong. Sex is not wrong; sex is not evil, wicked, bad or something 'Good Mormons' don't do. Sex is a wonderful act. It is a drawing closer of two people that love each other. Teach your children about sex, the physiology, spirituality and emotionality behind it. If you do this, sex will lose its mystery. When children understand what is taking place in intercourse, the desire is no longer suppressed. Can they fully understand intercourse without actually 'doing it'? No. I don't believe anyone could ever fully understand it without experiencing it. However, the secretive nature of sex will disappear.

So, how do we go about teaching our children about sex. This is all the craze in today's educational systems. But why should we pawn this responsibility off on the school system when we want our kids to share our values and beliefs about sex? There is absolutely nothing wrong with explaining to our children the physiology of the human body. There is nothing wrong with showing our children the physiology of the human body. We could even go so far as to find videos of sexual intercourse and illustrate what actually takes place. Let us not hide the fact that generally sexual intercourse is a very messy, though generally hygienic, process. The exchange of bodily fluids does take place and it doesn't always take place in such a way so as to prevent leakage. Don't hide that fact for Hollywood wants to glorify sex without illustrating how messy it really is.

We also need to explain the pleasurable sensations that result from sexual intercourse and the not so pleasurable sensations that can also result from intercourse. Generally, sex is very pleasurable for men. It may not always be the case and can happen that too much sex causes discomfort. For women, sex, especially initially, is a very painful process. The woman's vagina is generally not stretched out or ready for penetration by the male's penis. Women generally have a hymen that is torn with initial penetration. Initial penetration of the vagina by the penis can range from slightly uncomfortable to extremely painful. Many women, not wanting to disappoint their husbands, often mask this discomfort. Men should be considerate of the discomfort their actions are causing their sexual partner. Sadly, in some cases, men are probably oblivious to the pain; the male's mind becomes very 'one-tracked' once he becomes aroused and the focus becomes the sexual climax of ejaculation, all else is forgotten. Men should be sensitive to the fact that the initial penetration of sexual intercourse can be very painful and this pain or discomfort can continue throughout the sexual life of the woman.

Illustrating this point to our youth is not going to encourage them to have sex. Young women, especially, are going to better understand that their initial experience with sex will probably not be that pleasurable. Just knowing that initially sex is not going to be that pleasurable may be a powerful enough argument to discourage some young women from experimentation until they have met a young man that is willing to be tender and caring enough to not want to hurt her and be able to control his passions until it is the perfect time for the two of them.

We should not focus solely on the negative sensations that can result from intercourse. Sex can also be very pleasurable. For men, this sensation is a building up of tension resulting or climaxing in a release or ejaculation of the semen. For women, the sensation is a stimulation of the clitoris (and at times different spots in the vagina) and is also a type of tension that builds up, though it doesn't seem to subside quite like the sensation of the male. For women, it seems to reach a climax and slowly taper off. For men, once ejaculation occurs, an exhausted calm or relaxation ensues as the tension is released through the ejaculation of the semen. The amount of pleasure perceived from this sensation varies from person to person ranging from a very powerful, erotic experience to almost no sensual stimulation at all.

We should also explain the emotional reactions and exchanges that take place with intercourse. The human body cannot be any closer to another human body than during heterosexual intercourse. This is the closest two human bodies can be. This should be coupled by an emotional tie that represents that physical closeness. When it doesn't, serious emotional consequences can result. Often, women associate sex with commitment and emotional consignment. Whereas men generally don't associate sex with an emotional bond. Sex, for men, is a very physical act. For women, sex is a very emotional act. Men, therefore, should keep in mind that when they engage in sexual intercourse with a woman, generally that are telling that woman that they are making a very serious and lasting commitment. If, men, you are not willing to make that commitment, you should not engage in sexual activity with a woman. Women, if you do not get a commitment of that type from a man, do not allow him the physical pleasure of using your body. If he is not willing to make the ultimate commitment of marriage, just like you are, sexual intercourse is not an option. He will simply be using your body for the sexual pleasure and does not care about you emotionally.

Spiritually, what takes place in intercourse? God has said that man and woman should leave their parents and cleave unto their spouses,

making the two bodies of flesh one. Sex is a very spiritual act. Sex is the ordained method of conceiving a child and therefore is considered very sacred. It is also a method of drawing closer to one's spouse in a very spiritual sense as well as physically and emotionally. Spiritually, sex should be revered for its sacred character.

Youth should also be educated about the very serious consequences that can result from sexual intercourse with people that you don't intimately know. On top of the all of the sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) there is the possibility of pregnancy. STD's can range from the discomforting and at times extremely painful herpes and syphilis to death inducing AIDS or HIV.

Children that are educated about sex are not going to be afraid of it nor are they going to see it as something wrong or evil. They will respect sex and know better what it is they are doing or going to be involved with. The mystery that sex holds will disappear and the suppression of sexual desire will not occur. If you as a parent or you as an individual want your children to remain virgins until they are married, explore sex with them and explain it to them. Glorify sex within marriage and illustrate just how harmful it can be outside of marriage. Don't give your children the impression that sex is wrong. Teach them correct principles and they will govern themselves.

## Appendix I: The Pursuit of Truth

One of my heroes was a rock star. His musical name was Cat Stevens. I don't know if you've ever heard of him; I don't know if you would even like his music. I love his music. I think it's great. However, at the peak of his career, when almost all of his records were reaching the top ten on the charts, he gave up singing and music and converted to Islam. He left a fabulous career and very likely an avenue to make him millions of dollars. Why? Because he felt it was his religious obligation. Religion is a powerful force. Religion has been the cause of much joy and gladness, and much pain and suffering. Once you make your decision as to whether or not you want to belong to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I hope that you will be as forthright and noble as Cat Stevens in the pursuit of truth. He changed his name to Yusef Islam and spends almost all of his time building his faith by sharing his message and living the way that a Muslim should. Of course, not all of us are going to have the revenues from fabulously selling records to allow us to focus all of our time on spreading the gospel, but I would hope that we are as committed to it as he is.

But, what if you don't feel that the Church is for you? If this means leaving the Church to pursue what you believe to be true, then make your decision and do your very best not to feel disheartened by the disappointment that others express. If you believe something other than what this particular Church teaches, you must pursue that. There is nothing worse than the internal conflict of beliefs. You need to discover where you belong. Of course, I am going to come under criticism for encouraging people to make decisions that may include leaving the Church. However, I don't see it that way. God loves the person, every one of us the same. Some may and some will become confused as to the truth. They don't believe that they are confused. I am content to let God judge behaviors and motivations. But as for my role in all of this, I would hate to step between an individual and what they believe to be true and tell them that they must change. Nor do I believe that it is in the best interest of an individual to live what they believe to be a lie. Of course, I would hope that they can resolve their questions and differences and stay in the Church. But, if that does not seem possible or does not seem like it is going to happen, then leaving the Church may help them resolve their internal conflict. It would never be easy to leave the Church because of the social pressures that come with it. But I would encourage you to

make the best decision you can. Don't live a lie. Cat Stevens went against the beliefs of his parents, against mainstream culture, against everything he had previously known to be true to his beliefs once he found them. It is not easy, but I would submit that it is worth it, which makes the whole discussion of easy and hard irrelevant.

Of course, I must add that I believe the gospel that this Church teaches is true. And, I would hope that if you are contemplating leaving or joining this Church, that this isn't a quick and light decision for you. I would hope you consider all things involved and think deeply about what all of this means. Give yourself time to ponder and pray and study it out in your mind. Also, do not be afraid to ask questions. For some reason, many members of the Church do not feel like they can ask questions. I would submit that this is often because when they do ask questions, people get upset. This is not the fault of the question asker, but rather of those that are being asked the questions. If someone gets upset at a question you ask, it is, in my opinion, because they do not know the answer and feel threatened by the question. So, do not feel like it is out of place to question things, this Church encourages understanding and knowledge; feel free to ask.

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