

Elder David A. Bednar

We should be missionaries at all times

All of us who have received the holy priesthood bear the sacred obligation to bless the nations and families of the earth by proclaiming the gospel and inviting all to receive by proper authority the ordinances of salvation. Many of us have served as full-time missionaries, some of us presently are serving as full-time missionaries, and all of us now are serving and will continue to serve as lifelong missionaries. We are missionaries every day in our families, in our schools, in our places of employment, and in our communities. Regardless of our age, experience, or station in life, we are all missionaries.

Proclaiming the gospel is not an activity in which we periodically and temporarily engage. And our labors as missionaries certainly are not confined to the short period of time devoted to full-time missionary service in our youth or in our mature years. Rather, the obligation to proclaim the restored gospel of Jesus Christ is inherent in the oath and covenant of the priesthood into which we enter. Missionary work essentially is a priesthood responsibility, and all of us who hold the priesthood are the Lord's authorized servants on the earth and are missionaries at all times and in all places—and we always will be. Our very identity as holders of the priesthood and the seed of Abraham is in large measure defined by the responsibility to proclaim the gospel.

My message tonight is applicable to all of us in our priesthood duty to proclaim the gospel. My specific purpose in this priesthood meeting, however, is to talk candidly with the young men of the Church who are preparing for the call to serve as missionaries. The principles I will discuss with you are both simple and spiritually significant, and they should cause us to ponder, to evaluate, and to improve.

I pray for the companionship of the Holy Ghost for me and for you as we consider together this important subject.

A frequently asked question

In meetings with young members of the Church around the world, I often invite those in attendance to ask questions. One of the questions I am asked most frequently by young men is this: "What can I do to prepare most effectively to serve as a full-time missionary?" Such a sincere question deserves a serious response.

My dear young brethren, the single most important thing you can do to prepare for a call to serve is to *become* a missionary long before you *go* on a mission. Please notice that in my answer I emphasized *becoming* rather than *going*. Let me explain what I mean.

In our customary Church vocabulary, we often speak of *going* to church, *going* to the temple, and *going* on a mission. Let me be so bold as to suggest that our rather routine emphasis on *going* misses the mark.

The issue is not going to church; rather, the issue is worshipping and renewing covenants as we attend church. The issue is not going to or through the temple; rather, the issue is having in our hearts the spirit, the covenants, and the ordinances of the Lord's house. The issue is not going on a mission; rather, the issue is becoming a missionary and serving throughout our entire life with all of our heart, might, mind, and strength. It is possible for a young man to *go* on a mission and not *become* a missionary, and this is not what the Lord requires or what the Church needs.

My earnest hope for each of you young men is that you will not simply go on a mission—but that you will become missionaries long before you submit your mission

papers, long before you receive a call to serve, long before you are set apart by your stake president, and long before you enter the MTC.

The principle of becoming

Elder Dallin H. Oaks has taught us most effectively about the challenge to become something instead of just doing expected things or performing certain actions:

“The Apostle Paul taught that the Lord’s teachings and teachers were given that we may all attain ‘the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ’ (Ephesians 4:13). This process requires far more than acquiring knowledge. It is not even enough for us to be *convinced* of the gospel; we must act and think so that we are *converted* by it. In contrast to the institutions of the world, which teach us to *know* something, the gospel of Jesus Christ challenges us to *become* something. . . .

“. . . It is not enough for anyone just to go through the motions. The commandments, ordinances, and covenants of the gospel are not a list of deposits required to be made in some heavenly account. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a plan that shows us how to become what our Heavenly Father desires us to become” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2000, 40–41; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 32).

Brethren, the challenge to become applies precisely and perfectly to missionary preparation. Obviously the process of becoming a missionary does not require a young man to wear a white shirt and tie to school every day or to follow the missionary guidelines for going to bed and getting up, although most parents certainly would support that idea. But you can increase in your desire to serve God (see D&C 4:3), and you can begin to think as missionaries think, to read what missionaries read, to pray as missionaries pray, and to feel what missionaries feel. You can avoid the worldly influences that cause the Holy Ghost to

withdraw, and you can grow in confidence in recognizing and responding to spiritual promptings. Line upon line and precept upon precept, here a little and there a little, you can gradually become the missionary you hope to be and the missionary the Savior expects.

Becoming a missionary before the MTC

You will not suddenly or magically be transformed into a prepared and obedient missionary on the day you walk through the front door of the Missionary Training Center. What you have become in the days and months and years prior to your missionary service is what you will be in the MTC. In fact, the nature of the transition through which you will pass in the MTC will be a strong indicator of your progress in becoming a missionary.

As you enter the MTC, you obviously will miss your family, and many aspects of your daily schedule will be new and challenging. But for a young man well on his way to becoming a missionary, the basic adjustment to the rigors of missionary work and lifestyle will not be overwhelming, burdensome, or constraining. Thus, a key element of raising the bar includes working to become a missionary before going on a mission.

Fathers, do you understand your role in helping your sons become missionaries before they go on missions? You and your wife are key in the process of their becoming missionaries. Priesthood and auxiliary leaders, do you recognize your responsibility to assist parents and to help every young man become a missionary before he goes on a mission? The bar also has been raised for parents and for all members of the Church. Prayerful pondering of the principle of becoming will invite inspiration tailored to the specific needs of your son or to the young men whom you serve.

The preparation I am describing is not oriented only toward your missionary service as a 19- or 20- or 21-year-old young

man. Brethren, you are preparing for a lifetime of missionary work. As holders of the priesthood, we are missionaries always. If you truly progress in the process of becoming a missionary, both before going on a mission and in the mission field, then when the day arrives for your honorable release as a full-time missionary, you will depart from your field of labor and return to your family—but you will never cease your missionary service. A priesthood holder is a missionary at all times and in all places. A missionary is who and what we are as bearers of the priesthood and as the seed of Abraham.

The seed of Abraham

The heirs of all the promises and covenants made by God to Abraham are referred to as *the seed of Abraham* (see Bible Dictionary, “Seed of Abraham,” 771). These blessings are obtained only by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Brethren, the process of becoming a missionary is directly related to understanding who we are as the seed of Abraham.

Abraham was a great prophet who desired righteousness and was obedient to all of the commandments he received from God, including the command to offer as a sacrifice his precious son Isaac. Because of his steadfastness and obedience, Abraham is often referred to as the father of the faithful, and Heavenly Father established a covenant with and promised great blessings to Abraham and his posterity:

“Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son:

“That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

“And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Genesis 22:16–18).

Thus, Abraham was promised a great posterity and that the nations of the earth would be blessed through that posterity.

How are the nations of the earth blessed through the seed of Abraham? The answer to this important question is found in the book of Abraham:

“And I will make of thee [Abraham] a great nation, and I will bless thee above measure, and make thy name great among all nations, and thou shalt be a blessing unto thy seed after thee, that in their hands they shall bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations;

“And I will bless them through thy name; for as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father” (Abraham 2:9–10).

We learn in these verses that Abraham’s faithful heirs would have the blessings of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the authority of the priesthood. Thus, the phrase “bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations” refers to the responsibility to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and to invite all to receive by proper priesthood authority the ordinances of salvation. Truly, great responsibility rests upon the seed of Abraham in these latter days.

How do these promises and blessings relate to us today? Either by literal lineage or adoption, every man and boy within the sound of my voice tonight is a rightful heir to the promises made by God to Abraham. We are the seed of Abraham. One of the primary reasons we receive a patriarchal blessing is to help us more fully understand who we are as the posterity of Abraham and to recognize the responsibility that rests upon us.

Be missionaries today and always

My beloved brethren, you and I, today and always, are to bless all peoples in all the nations of the earth. You and I, to-

day and always, are to bear witness of Jesus Christ and declare the message of the Restoration. You and I, today and always, are to invite all to receive the ordinances of salvation. Proclaiming the gospel is not a part-time priesthood obligation. It is not simply an activity in which we engage for a limited time or an assignment we must complete as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Rather, missionary work is a manifestation of our spiritual identity and heritage. We were foreordained in the premortal existence and born into mortality to fulfill the covenant and promise God made to Abraham. We are here upon the earth at this time to magnify the priesthood and to preach the gospel. That is who we are, and that is why we are here—today and always.

You may enjoy music, athletics, or be mechanically inclined, and someday you may work in a trade or a profession or in the arts. As important as such activities and occupations can be, they do not define who we are. First and foremost, we are spiritual beings. We are sons of God and the seed of Abraham:

“For whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods of which I have spoken, and the magnifying their calling, are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies.

“They become the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God” (D&C 84:33–34).

My dear brethren, we have been given much, and much is required of us. May you young men more fully understand who you are as the seed of Abraham and become missionaries long before you go on a mission. After coming back to your homes and families, may you returned missionaries always be missionaries. And may all of us rise up as men of God and bless the nations of the earth with greater testimony and spiritual power than we ever have before.

I declare my witness that Jesus is the Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. I know that He lives! And I witness that we, as holders of the priesthood, are His representatives in the glorious work of proclaiming His gospel, today and always. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Charles Didier

Man’s search for divine truth

Among this vast audience tonight are three special guests—three dear old school friends. They made a long trip from Belgium, my native country, to be here to celebrate the 50th anniversary of our high school graduation and to attend this conference. To them, to you priesthood holders, and especially to you young men preparing to become missionaries, I dedicate this message. It is about man’s search for divine truth. Once found, it is to be applied in this world of increased religious confusion and moral decadence. It must become the personal spiritual foundation that leads us to live according to the principles of righ-

teousness. As the Lord said, “In righteousness shalt thou be established” (3 Nephi 22:14).

Hear and heed the voice of the Lord

Where is divine truth to be found? It is to “hear the voice of the Lord, . . . [hear] the voice of His servants, [and] give heed to the words of the prophets and apostles” (D&C 1:14). Hear and heed. To hear is relatively simple. To heed and apply what is heard becomes life’s perpetual challenge.

First, hear the voice of the Lord. Communication from the Lord about divine truth or spiritual knowledge is found in the