

# Following Up

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We can all be more consistently involved in missionary work by replacing our fear with real faith.

Sixty-four years ago this September, I returned home from my mission in England. Three days after returning, I attended a Hello Day dance at the University of Utah with a friend of mine. He told me about a beautiful sophomore named Barbara Bowen, whom he thought I ought to meet. He brought her over and introduced us, and we started to dance.

Unfortunately, this was what we used to call a “tag dance,” which meant that you got to dance with the girl only until somebody else tagged you out. Barbara was vivacious and popular, so I got to dance with her for less than a minute before another young man tagged me out.

That was just not acceptable to me. Having learned the importance of follow-up on my mission, I got her telephone number and called her the very next day to ask her out, but she was busy with school and social commitments. Thankfully, my mission taught me to be persistent even in the face of discouragement, and I was eventually able to make a date. And that date led to others. Somehow during those dates I was able to convince her that I was the only true and living returned missionary—at least as far as she should be concerned. Now, 64 years later, there are seven children and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren who stand as evidence of the significant truth that no matter how good your message is, you may not get a chance to deliver it without consistent, persistent follow-up.

This may be why I have felt the clear impression to follow up today on two of my previous general conference messages.

In the October 2011 conference, I urged that we remember these important words of the Lord: “For thus shall my church be called in the last days, even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”<sup>1</sup>

With these words, the Lord makes clear that this is not only a formal title but also the name by which His Church is to be called. Given His clear declaration, we should not refer to the Church by any other name, such as “Mormon Church” or “LDS Church.”

The term *Mormon* can be appropriately used in some contexts to refer to members of the Church, such as Mormon pioneers, or to institutions, such as the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Church members are widely known as Mormons, and in interactions with those not of our faith, we may fittingly refer to ourselves as Mormons, provided we couple this with the full name of the Church.

If members learn to use the correct name of the Church in connection with the word *Mormon*, it will underscore that we are Christians, members of the Savior's Church.

Brothers and sisters, let us follow up and develop the habit of always making it clear that we belong to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The second message that I feel I should follow up on was delivered just last general conference, when I encouraged members to pray to be led to at least one person to whom they could extend an invitation to learn about the restored gospel before Christmas. Many Church members have shared with me some special experiences as a consequence of their asking the Lord for missionary opportunities.

One returned missionary, for example, specifically prayed to be led to "the one" he could reach. The name of a former college classmate came into his mind. He reached out to her over Facebook, and he learned that she had been praying for purpose and meaning in her life. He followed up just at the time she was searching for the truth, and in December she was baptized.

Many similar invitations were reported to me, but only a few people have followed up like this brother did.

I'm a great believer in the principle of follow-up. As it says in the missionary guide *Preach My Gospel*, "extending an invitation without following up is like beginning a journey without finishing it or buying a ticket to a concert without going into the theater. Without the completed action, the commitment is hollow."<sup>2</sup>

*Preach My Gospel* teaches everyone not only how to invite but also how to follow up on our invitations. The purpose of missionary work is defined as inviting "others to come unto Christ by helping them receive the restored gospel through faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement, repentance, baptism, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end."<sup>3</sup>

Inviting is certainly part of the process. But notice that there is much more to missionary work for members than simply extending invitations to people to listen to the missionaries. It also includes follow-up with the missionaries in the cultivation of faith, the motivation to repentance, the preparation for making covenants, and enduring to the end.

This follow-up principle is illustrated in the book of Acts:

"Now Peter and John went up together into the temple. ...

"And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;

"Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

"And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.

"And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

"Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk."

That's a powerful invitation from a servant of the Lord, isn't it? But Peter didn't stop with the invitation. The

scriptural narrative next tells us that “*he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.*”

“And he leaping up stood, and walked, and *entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.*”<sup>4</sup>

In other words, Peter didn’t simply invoke his priesthood authority and invite the man to rise up and walk. He also followed up on his invitation by reaching out to the man, taking him by the right hand, lifting him up, and then walking with him into the temple.

In the spirit of Peter’s example, may I suggest that we can all be more consistently involved in missionary work by replacing our fear with real faith, inviting someone at least once a quarter—or four times every year—to be taught by the full-time missionaries. They are prepared to teach by the Spirit, with sincere and heartfelt inspiration from the Lord. Together we can follow up on our invitations, take others by the hand, lift them up, and walk with them on their spiritual journey.

To help you in this process, I invite all members, regardless of your current calling or level of activity in the Church, to obtain a copy of *Preach My Gospel*. It is available through our distribution centers and also online. The online version can be read or downloaded at no cost. It is a guidebook for missionary work—which means it is a guidebook for all of us. Read it, study it, and then apply what you learn to help you understand how to bring souls to Christ through invitation and follow-up. As President Thomas S. Monson has said, “Now is the time for members and missionaries to come together, to work together, to labor in the Lord’s vineyard to bring souls unto Him.”<sup>5</sup>

Jesus Christ taught His disciples:

“The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few;

“Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.”<sup>6</sup>

The Lord has answered that prayer in our day with the greatest number of full-time missionaries in the history of the world. With this new wave of faithful laborers, the Lord has given us another opportunity to assist Him in that great harvest of souls.

There are practical ways for members to help and support our remarkable missionaries. For example, you can tell the missionaries that you are studying *Preach My Gospel* and ask them to show you what they are learning in their studies. As you share with each other, increased confidence between members and full-time missionaries will surely develop, just as the Lord commanded:

“But that every man [and woman] might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world.”<sup>7</sup>

And “Behold, I sent you out to testify and warn the people, and it becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor.”<sup>8</sup>

Brothers and sisters, can you imagine the impact if family and friends included things they are learning from their personal study of *Preach My Gospel* in their letters and emails to their full-time missionaries? Can you picture the blessings that will come to families when they know and understand better what their sons and daughters will be studying and teaching on their missions? Can you even begin to fathom the extraordinary

outpouring of atoning grace that will be ours, individually and collectively, according to the Savior’s promise to all who bear testimony in the process of inviting souls to come unto Him—and then following up on those invitations?

“Ye are blessed,” the Lord said through the Prophet Joseph Smith, “for the testimony which ye have borne is recorded in heaven for the angels to look upon; and they rejoice over you, and your sins are forgiven you.”<sup>9</sup>

“For I will forgive you of your sins with this commandment—that you remain steadfast ... in bearing testimony to all the world of those things which are communicated unto you.”<sup>10</sup>

If we follow up, the Lord will not let us down. I have seen the unspeakable joy that accompanies testimony-driven inviting and faithful follow-up among members of the Church the world over. While in Argentina recently, I encouraged members to invite someone to church before this general conference. An eight-year-old by the name of Joshua listened and invited his best friend and his friend’s family to an open house at their ward in Buenos Aires. Let me read from a letter I just received that explained Joshua’s invitation and his faithful follow-up:

“Every few minutes [Joshua] would run out to the gate to see if they were coming. He said that he knew they would [come].

“The evening wore on and Joshua’s friend did not come, but Joshua did not give up. He faithfully checked the front gate every few minutes. It was time to start putting things away when Joshua started to jump up and down announcing, “They are here! They are here!” I looked up to see an entire family approaching the church. Joshua ran out to greet them and hugged his friend. They all came in and seemed to enjoy the open house very much. They took some pamphlets and spent lots of time getting acquainted with some new friends. It was great to see the faith of this little boy and to know that Primary children can be missionaries too.”<sup>11</sup>

It is my testimony that as we work together, seeking the one, inviting, and following up with trust and faith, the Lord will smile upon us and hundreds of thousands of God’s children will find purpose and peace in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. May the Lord bless all of us in our efforts to hasten the work of salvation, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. Doctrine and Covenants 115:4.

2. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), 200.

3. *Preach My Gospel*, 1.

4. Acts 3:1–8; emphasis added.

5. Thomas S. Monson, "Welcome to Conference," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2013, 4.

6. Matthew 9:37–38.

7. Doctrine and Covenants 1:20.

8. Doctrine and Covenants 88:81.

9. Doctrine and Covenants 62:3.

10. Doctrine and Covenants 84:61.

11. Personal letter, Mar. 10, 2014.