

# Be Ambitious for Christ

By Elder Kazuhiko Yamashita  
Of the Seventy

We are ambitious for Christ when we serve faithfully, accept humbly, endure nobly, pray fervently, and partake worthily.

My dear brothers and sisters, today I would like to speak to the young people of the Church, including our wonderful missionaries. Of course, brothers and sisters who are young at heart are warmly invited to listen.

Last August 21, President Russell M. Nelson dedicated the beautiful Sapporo Temple—the third temple in Japan. The Sapporo Temple is built in northern Japan in a place called Hokkaido. Like Utah, Hokkaido was settled by industrious, hardworking pioneers.

In 1876, a renowned educator named Dr. William Clark<sup>1</sup> was invited to come to Hokkaido to teach. He lived in Japan for just eight months, but his Christian spirit left a lasting impression on his young non-Christian students. Before leaving, he gave his students a parting message that has become immortalized in this bronze statue.<sup>2</sup> He said, “Boys, be ambitious!”—“Be ambitious for Christ.”<sup>3</sup> His injunction to “be ambitious for Christ” can help direct daily decisions for today’s Latter-day Saints.

What does it mean to “be ambitious for Christ”? Being ambitious for Christ means being motivated, focused, and dedicated to His work. Being ambitious for Christ will seldom mean that we are singled out for public honor. Being ambitious for Christ means that we serve faithfully and diligently in our wards and branches without complaint and with joyful hearts.

Our missionaries serving throughout the world are beautiful examples of those who are truly ambitious for Christ. A few years ago, Sister Yamashita and I served in the Japan Nagoya Mission. Our missionaries were so ambitious for Christ. One of those missionaries was a young man named Elder Cowan.

Elder Cowan did not have a right leg because of a bicycle accident as a youth. A few weeks after he entered the mission, I received a phone call from his companion. Elder Cowan’s prosthetic leg had broken while he was riding his bike. We took him to a good repair facility, and there in a private room, I saw his leg for the first time. I realized how much pain he had been suffering. His prosthetic leg was repaired, and he returned to his area.

However, as the weeks went by, the prosthesis continued to break again and again. The area medical adviser recommended that Elder Cowan return home for a possible mission reassignment. I resisted this advice because Elder Cowan was a great missionary and he had a strong desire to remain in Japan. Gradually, though, Elder Cowan began to approach his physical limit. In spite of this, he did not murmur or complain.

Again, I was advised that Elder Cowan be allowed to serve in a place that did not require him to ride a bike. I pondered this situation. I thought about Elder Cowan and his future, and I prayed about the matter. I felt impressed that, yes, Elder Cowan should return home and await reassignment. I phoned him and expressed my love and concern and told him of my decision. He did not say anything in reply. I could only hear him weeping on the other end of the phone. I said, "Elder Cowan, you don't have to answer me right now. I will call you tomorrow. Please consider my recommendation with sincere prayer."

When I called him the next morning, he humbly said he would follow my counsel.

During my final interview with him, I asked him this question: "Elder Cowan, did you request on your missionary application to be sent to a mission where you would not have to ride a bike?"

He said, "Yes, President, I did."

I responded, "Elder Cowan, you were called to the Japan Nagoya Mission, where you would have to ride a bike. Did you tell this to your stake president?"

I was surprised by his answer. He said, "No, I didn't. I determined that if *that* is where the Lord called me, I would go to the gym and train my body to be able to ride a bike."

At the conclusion of our interview, he asked me this question with tears in his eyes: "President Yamashita, why did I come to Japan? Why am I here?"

I answered him without hesitation: "Elder Cowan, I know one reason you came here. You came here for my benefit. I have come to understand what a great young man I have been serving with. I am blessed to know you."

I am happy to report that Elder Cowan returned to his loving home and was reassigned to serve in a mission where he could use a car for his travel. I am proud not only of Elder Cowan but also of all the missionaries throughout the world who serve willingly without murmuring or complaining. Thank you, elders and sisters, for your faith, your focus, and your strong ambition for Christ.

The Book of Mormon contains many accounts of those who were ambitious for Christ. Alma the Younger, as a young man, persecuted the Church and its members. He later went through a dramatic change of heart and served as a powerful missionary. He

sought the Lord's direction, and he blessed his companions as he served with them. The Lord strengthened him, and he overcame the trials he faced.

This Alma gave his son Helaman the following counsel:

"Whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions. ...

"... Keep the commandments of God. ...

"Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good."<sup>4</sup>

Our second son lived much of his youth apart from the Church. When he turned 20, he had an experience that made him want to change his life. With love, prayers, and help from his family and members of the Church, and ultimately through the compassion and grace of the Lord, he returned to the Church.

He was later called to serve in the Washington Seattle Mission. He initially suffered great discouragement. Every night for the first three months, he would go into the bathroom and cry. Like Elder Cowan, he sought to understand "Why am I here?"

After he served for a year, we received an email that was an answer to our prayers. He wrote: "Right now I can really feel the love of God and of Jesus. I will work hard to become like the prophets of old. Though I am also experiencing a lot of difficulties, I am truly happy. Serving Jesus really is the best thing ever. There is nothing as wonderful as this. I am so happy."

He felt as Alma did: "And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!"<sup>5</sup>

In our lives we experience trials, but if we are ambitious for Christ, we can focus on Him and feel joy even in the midst of them. Our Redeemer is the ultimate example. He understood His holy mission and was obedient to the will of God the Father. What a choice blessing it is to bring His wonderful example to our remembrance each week as we partake of the sacrament.

My dear brothers and sisters, we are ambitious for Christ when we serve faithfully, accept humbly, endure nobly, pray fervently, and partake worthily.

May we be ambitious for Christ as we accept our difficulties and trials with patience and faith and find joy in our covenant path.

I testify that the Lord knows you. He knows your struggles and concerns. He knows of your desires to serve Him with devotion and, yes, even ambition. May He guide and bless you as you do so. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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