

Missionary Service Blessed My Life Forever

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By President M. Russell Ballard

Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

I pray that you young men and young women and your parents will see and know how missionary service will forever bless your life.

Thank you, President Nelson, for sharing again that counsel regarding missionary service.

Brothers and sisters, several years ago while I was speaking in general conference, the sight in my left eye was suddenly compromised by something called macular degeneration, which subsequently worsened and has left me without useful vision in that eye.

As I have dealt with this challenge, I am ever more thankful for other kinds of vision, including hindsight vision. As I have looked back over my life, I have been able to see certain experiences that made a significant difference. One of those experiences is how my full-time missionary service as a young man in England blessed my life and shaped my spiritual destiny.

I have reflected on how the economic challenges associated with the Great Depression in the 1930s led to an unfortunate turn for my parents and our family. My father became so involved in saving his automobile dealership and supporting a family during this difficult period that for a time my parents did not attend church.

Although we did not attend church services as a family, that did not prevent me from attending occasionally with my friends.

In those days, going on a mission was in the back of my mind, but it wasn't something I talked about with my parents.

While attending college, several friends and I decided to serve missions. Visiting with my bishop, I filled out my missionary application while my parents were out of town. When my parents returned, I surprised them with the news that I had been called to serve in Great Britain. I am grateful for their enthusiastic support of this decision and for good friends who helped me decide to serve.

My missionary service prepared me to be a better husband and father and to be successful in business. It also prepared me for a lifetime of service to the Lord in His Church.

In the April 1985 general conference, I was assigned to speak in the priesthood session. I directed my remarks to the young men. I spoke about preparing to serve as a missionary. I said, “Of all the training I have received in my Church assignments, none has been more important to me than the training I received as a nineteen-year-old elder serving a full-time mission.”¹

The Lord knows you. When you are serving your mission, you will have experiences that will help you come to know Him better. You will grow spiritually in serving Him. In His name, you will be sent on errands to serve others. He will give you experiences with promptings from the Holy Ghost. The Lord will authorize you to teach in His name. You can show Him that He can trust you and can rely on you.

Just over five months ago, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland and Elder Quentin L. Cook, who had also served as missionaries in the British Isles, joined me in visiting with members and missionaries in that beautiful land. While there, I reflected on my experiences as a young missionary. I testify that my mission is where I came to know that my Heavenly Father and my Savior, Jesus Christ, know and love me.

I was blessed to have two wonderful mission presidents, Selvoy J. Boyer and Stayner Richards, along with their dedicated companions, Gladys Boyer and Jane Richards. Looking back, I can see even more clearly that they trusted me and loved me. They taught me the gospel. They expected a lot from me. They gave me many challenging assignments and leadership responsibilities to help me to grow and prepare for a life of service.

I have also reflected on being called by President Spencer W. Kimball to preside over the Canada Toronto Mission with my dear wife, Barbara, and our children at our sides. President Kimball called us to serve in April 1974, shortly after he gave his inspired missionary message titled “When the World Will Be Converted.”² In that message President Kimball explained his vision for how the gospel would be taken to all the world. He called for many more missionaries from around the world. He reminded us of the Lord’s expectation “that every man should ... lift a warning voice unto the inhabitants of the earth.”³ President Kimball’s teaching about the expectation for young men to serve a mission became a topic of conversation in homes around the world. That expectation has not changed. I am grateful that President Russell M. Nelson also reaffirmed the Lord’s expectation this morning.

It has been almost 10 years since President Thomas S. Monson announced the lowering of the missionary age for young men and young women.⁴ In my view, a primary reason for this change was to give more of our youth the life-changing opportunity to serve as a missionary.

As an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, I now call upon you young men—and those young women who desire to serve a mission—to begin right now to talk with your parents about serving a mission. I also invite you to talk with your friends about serving a mission, and if one of your friends is not sure about serving, encourage them to talk with their bishop.

Commit to yourselves and to your Heavenly Father that you will serve a mission and that from this time forward you will strive to keep your hearts, hands, and minds clean and worthy. I invite you to gain a solid testimony of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

Fathers and mothers of these wonderful youth, you have a vital role in this preparation process. Begin today to talk with your children about missionary service. We know that the family is the most profound influence in helping our young men and young women prepare.

If you are still in the age range for missionary service but have not served yet due to the pandemic or other reasons, I invite you to serve now. Talk to your bishop, and prepare to serve the Lord.

I encourage you bishops to help all young men and young women who are close to missionary age to prepare to serve, and I also encourage you bishops to identify those who are old enough but who have not yet served. Invite each young man to become a missionary, as well as each young woman who desires to serve.

To the missionaries currently serving, we thank you. Your mission has been during a worldwide pandemic. As a result, your mission experience has been unlike my mission experience or the experiences of any missionaries who served before 2020. I know it has not been easy. But even during these difficult times, the Lord has had a work for you to do, and you have done it wonderfully well. For example, you have used technology in new ways to find those who are ready to learn about the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As you have served diligently and according to your abilities, I know that the Lord is pleased with your effort. I know that your service will bless your life.

When you are released from your mission, remember that you are not released from activity in the Church. Build upon the good habits you learned on your mission, continue to strengthen your testimony, work hard, pray, and be obedient to the Lord. Honor the covenants you have made. Continue to bless and serve others.

I pray that you young men and young women and your parents will see and know how missionary service will forever bless your life. May you know in your minds and feel in your hearts the power of the invitation the Lord gave to the great missionary sons of Mosiah. He said, "Go forth ... and establish my word; yet ye shall be patient in long-suffering and afflictions, that ye may show forth good examples ... in me, and I will make an instrument of thee in my hands unto the salvation of many souls."⁵

May God bless the youth of the Church to desire to prepare and serve Him is my humble prayer, which I offer this morning in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. M. Russell Ballard, "Prepare to Serve," *Ensign*, May 1985, 41.
2. See Spencer W. Kimball, "When the World Will Be Converted," *Ensign*, Oct. 1974, 2–14. This address was delivered on April 4, 1974, at a regional representatives' seminar.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 63:37.
4. See Thomas S. Monson, "Welcome to Conference," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2012, 4–5.
5. Alma 17:11.