

Full Time Mission Message #5

Elder / Sister xxxxxxx,

We have always felt that there are two types of conversion needed when we baptize a new member of the church. The first of course is spiritual conversion. But I have always felt that the second kind of conversion was just as important because it is one of the reasons many new members go inactive. That second conversion is CULTURAL CONVERSION. There for I thought that this month I would share with you something I think about a lot, CONDITIONING and its effect on our daily life. We often hear people say that we first think, then say, and then do. The scriptures tell us that committing sin in our mind is as though we had already done it. So here is something for you to think about and hopefully it will help you in teaching non-members about the difficult task of adjusting to the cultural change required of every new member of the church.

Conditioning has a more powerful influence on our day to day lives and our will power to do or not do things than anything else we do. Conditioning is what we do when we practice something. When we do it over and over we get better at it. President Grant used to often quote Ralph Waldo Emerson as saying:

"That which we persist in doing becomes easier to do;
not that the nature of the thing itself is changed,
but that our power to do has increased."

It seems pretty important to learn that lesson when in teaching other people. That which we stick with, we get better and better at. But we must also be aware that it can work for bad as well as good.

The other side of the coin is premeditation. If we are constantly thinking about things that we should do or even things that are bad that we should not do and fascinating them in our mind or "Premeditating" them, then eventually we will have the disposition to do them in reality. Good or bad, positive or negative.

They did a study at a university several years ago where they took a group of basketball players in an intramural league. They were not excellent or really bad, just a bunch of average guys who liked to play basketball. They divided them up into three groups. Then they tested their ability to make foul shots. They all did pretty much the same.

Then they had the 3 groups separate and start this test. The first group practiced shooting foul shots every day. The second group was not allowed to practice shooting any foul shots during the test period. The third group sat in the bleachers every day and just practiced shooting foul shots in their minds. They visualized shooting the foul shots but were not allowed to actually shoot the basketball at all.

At the end of the trial period of several weeks they tested all of them again. The group that had not practiced still did about the same. They did not get any better but they did not get worse. The group that practiced shooting foul shots every day improved some. But the shocking thing to the testers was that the group that sat in the stands and just practiced shooting foul shots in their minds improved dramatically.

Isn't that interesting that they improved the most. The researchers did more studies and discovered the reason they improved the most was that every time they shot the ball in their mind **THEY NEVER MISSED**. So when they got on the floor again to actually shoot the ball they had the **EXPECTATION OF MAKING IT**.

To me that is such a profound lesson to learn. Such a powerful lesson to instill in teaching others about changes they need to make in their lives. It works in our lives for both good and bad. Whatever we sit and think about and premeditate we become better at. So if we can help those we are teaching learn to think about positive things and see themselves as getting better, having the will power to live the commandments, and being positive, happy and good at what they do they will become that. If they are discouraged and have low self-worth and constantly say, "I CANT", "I'M NO GOOD", or "WHY TRY", "NO ONE LIKES ME"..... etc etc... they will eventually find that is the dominant thought of their minds and they will become that in all that they do.

But worse yet is the influence of our society. If we allow ourselves to sit and watch TV or movies that portray things none of us should not be doing and then start to visualize those things in our minds over and over and over it starts to condition us. Not just young people.... any of us. CONDITIONING... it is a powerful tool. So if we those we are teaching continue to be conditioned with low self-esteem, low self-worth, negative self-talk and thoughts about doing bad things; when they then get into harms-way and are tempted, having done it 1000 times already in their minds, it is almost impossible for them to then resist the temptation. They have already become very good at doing that very thing from visualization. Hyrum Smith, one of the founders of the Franklin Covey institute says that the most valuable gift we can give someone we love is to help them achieve high self-esteem.

When Janice and I were trying to help our children decide what was good or bad to watch on TV, we came up with a standard that I still think is very applicable. We said that if they were portraying something on TV between two people that Janice and I would not be willing to do in front of our kids ourselves, then it probably was not a good thing for any of us to be watching (not just the kids... but any of us). Adults are conditioned just as much as children.

In this day and age... in this society new members of the church need to realize that they cannot just let their children grow up by default. They will be exposed to things we do not want them to know, or see, or do in the world. If we do not specifically teach them correct principles in our homes, to learn how to counteract those things, they will be led astray. We as adults will by that same means also be lead astray. Several places in the New Testament it says that in the last days "EVEN THE VERY ELECT WILL BE DECEIVED, IF IT WERE POSSIBLE".

Matthew 24:24

24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, **if [it were] possible**, they shall deceive the very elect.

Joseph Smith Matthew 1:22

22 For in those days there shall also arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, **insomuch, that, if possible**, they shall deceive the very elect, who are the elect according to the covenant.

JST Matthew 24:23

23 For in those days, there shall also arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; **insomuch that, if possible**, they shall deceive the very elect, who are the elect according to the covenant.

JST Matthew 24:24

24 Behold, I speak these things unto you for the elect's sake.

ST Mark 13:25

25 For in those days there shall also arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; **insomuch, that if possible**, they shall deceive the very elect, who are the elect according to the covenant.

I think we all pretty much know that the reference to the "VERY ELECT" is referring to members of the LDS Church in the last days that have made temple covenants (I.E. ACCORDING TO THE COVENANT"). I have always been fascinated by that "**IF POSSIBLE**" part of those scriptures. I think it is the Lord giving us a promise that "IF WE WILL DO THIS....." then we cannot fall. But we have to learn what that "DO THIS".... part is. I think it has a lot to do with mental conditioning or premeditation. I also think it has a direct reference to Christ's reference to mental conditioning:

Matthew 5:28

28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

I don't think that only applies to adultery. It applies to every part of our spiritual life and thinking or premeditating things that are not in keeping with our covenants. TV, movies, music, and peer pressure from friends is filled with those kinds of suggestions.

CONDITIONING.... what we think about all day is what we will eventually do. Our mind is not as smart as our stomach. When our stomach takes in bad stuff it vomits it back out. Our mind keeps it all and uses it as conditioning.... Whatever our dominant thoughts are is what we will become.... FOR GOOD OR BAD. Our will power to do is made up from years of conditioning.

You have probably seen the example where someone wraps a thread around your thumbs and of course you can break it. Then they wrap it around 10 times, and then it is harder to break. Then they wrap that same thread around your thumbs 100 times and you cannot break it. It has become your captor. Our daily habits and our daily thoughts are like that as well? If we persist in practicing something it becomes a habit and if that habit is something bad, it becomes more and more difficult to break if we persist in doing it.

CONDITIONING DAY AFTER DAY.... it is the power that forms our will disposition and power to do right or wrong.

Hopefully you will be as successful in helping new members of the church stay active and you are in baptizing them. To me that is one of the most important marks of a successful mission. When you go back 10 years later and see how many of the people you baptized have stayed active, then you will know how successful you were as a missionary. Helping new members of the church learn about the power of conditioning can be a spiritual key to their success in staying active in the church and the gospel.

Our prayers are with you in all you do

Brother and Sister Vail

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