

7 July 2008

Dear Elder,

Well I guess you are sprinting for the finish line now. In three weeks you will be home again. What a wonderful mission you have had. So many people's lives have been blessed by your service. As long as you live you will never forget many of these wonderful experiences you have had. I trust that you have kept a journal. If you have not, I hope you will take time to start writing down the sacred experiences you remember so they will not be lost from your memory.

I often go to meetings where they ask all of the "RETURNED MISSIONARIES" to stand up. I never stand up. Once in a while they then ask if I did not serve a mission. I say, "Yes! But I do not have to be a "RETURNED" missionary. I am a "CONTINUING" missionary.

Once you learn how to do missionary work, what a shame to just come home and not use that knowledge! But many do understand and do continue using that drive and knowledge. Usually though, missionaries come home and fall back into the stream of life. Within a few months the spirit of their mission is gone and their willingness to do missionary work declines until they do little or no missionary work. For a few, after a few years, it is hard to tell that they have even served a mission.

I hope that you will resolve when you come home to never be labeled as a "RETURNED" missionary. Be rather a "LIFE TIME MEMBER MISSIONARY". Have the resolve to carry on this work at every hand! When we get home, sometimes the missionary work we do is a little different, because of our circumstances. President Kimball said that there are only 3 kinds of work in the church: Missionary Work! Missionary Work! And Missionary Work! (1) We do missionary work to convert the non-members. (2) We do missionary work in our families and with our friends to retain those who are members, and to reclaim the less active and (3) we do missionary work to redeem the dead. But it is all the same work. Missionary work is the life blood of the Church.

Every missionary I have even known (including myself) has had a spirit about them as a missionary. Some are better missionaries than others, but every missionary in the church has the spirit of their mission. That is how non-members can tell you are a missionary when they look at you. You have a countenance that they can see. That countenance comes from your ordination as a missionary. And I can tell you that every missionary (including myself) loses that countenance and that spirit of their mission when they come home after the Stake President releases you. I hated that feeling as I felt that spirit leave. It was like an empty hollow feeling. It was like a cloak of light that was taken away. After a few weeks I prayed and asked the Lord if there was any way to have that spirit and light back again. The answer came clear and very distinguishable. I realized that anyone in the Church who does missionary work can have that spirit in their

life. It is possible to gain back that spirit, that feeling. But this time the feeling comes from simply doing the work rather than by ordination.

I served my mission in Finland. While I was there we had almost no baptisms. I did not have the opportunity to teach any one myself. Most of us came home without having baptized anyone. The average in our mission was one baptism per missionary per mission. So if someone baptized a family of seven, that meant that by the law of averages, six other missionaries went home without baptizing anyone. Our whole mission of 150 missionaries baptized about 100 people a year while I was there.

I felt frustrated that I had not had the opportunity to baptize lots of people in my Finnish mission, so I determined to take the Lord at His word and make the Army my second mission. While in the Army, I became the Stake Mission President. We set up within our stake a program to see if we could out baptize the rest of the full time mission for one month. It took a lot of work, but we did end up having more baptisms in our stake that month we challenged them than they had in all of the rest of the full time mission we were a part of.

In the book of Mormon Ammon promises us that we can convert 1000's of people.

Alma 26: 22 Yea, he that repenteth and exerciseth faith, and bringeth forth good works, and prayeth continually without ceasing—unto such it is given to know the mysteries of God; yea, unto such it shall be given to reveal things which never have been revealed; yea, and it shall be given unto such to bring thousands of souls to repentance, even as it has been given unto us to bring these our brethren to repentance.

I think that it is significant that Ammon did not promise us we could baptize 10's or 100's but 1000's. It is not a promise to the church or groups of people, but to us as individuals.

That became my goal: to find a way to fulfill Ammon's promise to us that we could baptize 1000's. At first I did not think it would be possible. But then as my wife and I worked on it, year after year, we realized that it was an accumulation of effort that would get us there.

For example, we helped the missionaries baptized a couple and their 3 children. All three of those children went on missions and baptized 10 or 15 each (actually one of the sons went to a South American mission and baptized over 100), and if those 10 to 15 families send sons and daughters on missions who baptized 10 to 15 each. Well, it is easy to see that the efforts of our family missionary work would soon pass the 1000 mark of people who are members of the Church now, because of the missionary work our family has done over the years.

When we were there in the Army at Ft. Benning, GA we had the missionaries in our home almost every day. Then I got out of the Army and came back to Provo, Utah to go to school at the Brigham Young University. After we had been there for a few weeks,

my wife Janice and I were talking one day about the spirit or feeling in our home, or lack of it. We realized that something was missing. It did not feel the same as it did in Georgia while we were in the Army. After talking about it, we realized that the difference was that in the Army we had the missionaries in our home almost daily. When they came and taught people in our home it brought a feeling like fire. It actually created a light in our home that was distinguishable while they were there. That feeling would linger with us for days after they left.

There in Provo at school, we assumed every one was already a member of the church and we had not been involved with the missionaries or in teaching people so we did not have that same spirit or feeling of fire in our home. It was then that I realized that the Lord had kept his promise and while we were in the Army, we had obtained that same spirit or feeling in our lives that I had felt as a missionary. I lost it when I was released, but by spending all that time and effort to make our home available to the missionaries, and to spend time helping them convert scores of people, we had gained that feeling back again. I can only describe it as a feeling like fire. You will know more what I mean about that feeling next month after you are released and you have lost it. You have it now by ordination. But you will lose it when you are released. However, I promise you that you can have it back again if you will set the goal to become a life time missionary and work to earn it back by your efforts and hard work.

I love missionary work! I love the feeling that comes when we teach people in our home and that spirit and witness comes to them and to us. Every time the Holy Ghost comes and bears witness to them while we are teaching them, **HE ALSO COMES AND BEARS WITNESS TO US AGAIN AS WELL.** Think about this: the investigators have that experience with the missionaries one time when they are converted, but we have had it 100's of times over and over again. Each time someone is converted, as they are taught in our home, we experience it again ourselves. What greater blessing could a family ask for than that as an environment to raise your children in?

When we lived in North Carolina we helped the missionaries convert 29 people in the 2 years we lived there. In my journal I have a letter that is of such great value to me, related to that time period in our life. The reason it is of such value is because of the circumstances under which I received it. In North Carolina I determined that I would find one person every day to talk to about the Church or I would not come home until I did. This one day I had not talked to any one so I went to K-mart to buy some supplies for our swimming pool in hopes of finding someone to talk to about the Church. It was almost closing time (10:30 p.m.) I was out in the garden shop. There was no one around and a young girl was at the counter. I determined I would approach her. Was I scared to do it? Yes! Even though I had done this 100's of times, it was and still is difficult to do! That may seem strange to say that still to this day, **I AM SCARED EVERY TIME I ASK SOMEONE** There in the K-mart store that night, I kept pacing around, trying to figure out what I was going to say. Finally she locked the outside door so she could close up. I knew I only had a few minutes to make my move. I started towards the counter with my supplies and just then her boy friend knocked on the outside door. I thought, "Oh great, now she will let him in and I won't be able to ask her." She told him she could not open the door after 10:30 and he would have to go around and come in the front door. I waited

a few minutes but for some reason he never came back around to the garden shop. Finally I went up to the counter, drew up the courage from within me, and said to her, "Do you like to read?" She said, "Yes, a lot". I said, "Well I have just read the most wonderful book about Christ and His visit to the American Indians. Would you be interested in having a copy of it?" She said, "Yes. Is it the Book of Mormon?" I was so disappointed. All the drumming up my courage and here she was already a member. I said, "Yes" She said, "I have wanted to get a copy of that book. My aunt is a member but she won't give me a copy."

I wrote her name and address on the sales slip (that is what I always do... get them to write their name and address on a paper and give it to me) and then I told her I would send her the book. I gave the sales slip to the missionaries and asked them to deliver the Book of Mormon for me. Hartman Rector is the one who taught us to do that. He said that 90% of the time when the missionaries come to the door with a paper that has the person's name and address on it in their own hand writing and say, "Mr. Vail asked us to deliver this book to you, can we come in?" they get in.

Six weeks later, at church, the missionaries said that the girl from K-mart was taking the last of the six discussions and wondered if she could take it at our home. I was so upset that they had not even told me they were teaching her. But she came to our home and took the last lesson. Then she was baptized. Then we taught her sister in our home and she was baptized. Then we taught her single parent father in our home and he was baptized. Those three people are most beloved friends now. They became a part of our family. That is always what happens when you baptize someone. They become life time friends and they become like members of your family.

A few years later she went on a mission to Sacramento, California. After a few months we got a letter (that letter I referred to above that is in my journal) from a family living in her mission. The letter was sent to thank me for having the courage in K-mart that night, to ask her if she liked to read. Because I took the first step, she took the next step and went on a mission and converted them. Oh what a precious jewel that letter is in my journal. How well I remember still the fear I had to approach her that night, even though I had asked 100's and 100's of people about the Church by then. But I asked and she said yes and then she converted them and their children have now gone on missions and Well I guess as Paul Harvey says, "That is The Rest of the Story". We can convert 1000's if we just set the goal, be willing to do the work, and then DO THE WORK!!

In the D&C 60:2 it says:

But with some I am not well pleased, for they will not open their mouths, but they hide the talent which I have given unto them, because of the fear of man. Wo unto such, for mine anger is kindled against them.

Notice in that scripture it does not say that we need to have anything to say. We just need to be willing to open our mouth. When we are with people, and we open our mouth, the Lord will tell us what to say. Many times as we taught investigators, they have asked Janice and me questions, and we did not know the answer to the question when they asked it. But as we opened our mouth the answer came, and we were taught the answer at the same time we gave it to them. We have had that experience so many times. I assume you have had that experience many times yourself on your mission: learning yourself what you are teaching as you teach it.

I believe that the following two scriptures found in the Doctrine and Covenants hold the key to having the courage to teach people:

D&C 84:85 Neither take ye thought beforehand what ye shall say; but treasure up in your minds continually the words of life, and it shall be given you in the very hour that portion that shall be meted unto every man.

D&C 38:30if ye are prepared ye shall not fear.

If you are constantly studying the scriptures and listening to the words of the living prophets, then you have treasured up in your mind continually the words of life and when you are teaching people (or even just trying to find words to say to ask them if they want to be taught) in that very hour the words will come to you and you “shall not fear”.

And then this scripture:

D&C 11:21 Seek not to declare my word, but first seek to obtain my word, and then shall your tongue be loosed; then, if you desire, you shall have my spirit and my word, yea, the power of God unto the convincing of men.

Oh how I love that feeling that comes when my tongue is loosed and the Spirit comes and gives me power to convince someone of the truthfulness of the Gospel. And then they receive a witness of what we have taught them. And then as I say, we receive that same witness again ourselves like fire. It becomes a light in our lives that is discernable and can be felt. It brings with it the power to speak with the tongue of angels.

2 Nephi 31:13 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I know that if ye shall follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism—yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water, according to his word, behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel.

No, I don't ever want to be a “RETURNED” missionary. But rather one of the people Ammon prophetically saw in the future who he promised that they could convert 1000's if they would live the commandments, and ask for the blessing.

Bless you Elder for who you are and what you have become. We are looking forward to seeing you again and looking forward to the great influence you will have upon us and all around you as you bring the spirit of your mission home with you.

I hope to always be your friend and brother and fellow "LIFE TIME MISSIONARY"

Cordell Vail
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I sent a copy of the letter to a friend of mine, and she wrote back and asked me if those numbers in the letter were actually correct. I was not surprised that she would not believe that someone could convert 1000's as an individual member of the church.

Here is what I wrote back to her:

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You said in your email that you were concerned that the people you wanted to give a copy of the letter that I wrote about my missionary experiences may not believe the numbers that were there or implied that you were concerned that they were an exaggeration. I can imagine that could be the case. However those numbers in the letter were actually very watered down to what is the truth for that very reason.

For example, in the letter I mentioned a family we baptized who had three kids who all went on a mission and in the letter I just conjectured that if they had baptized 10 or 15 each.... actually 2 of the three in that family baptized way more than that (as I said one of them baptized over 100), but I did not want to put the actual numbers there and make it sound unbelievable. There was a missionary from one stake we lived in who went to Mexico City on his mission and he baptized over 300 the first year. When I asked him how many he baptized the second year, he said he did not count how many the second year. He lost track. There have been several stakes that we have lived in over the years where we have helped encourage a great number of young men in that Stake go on missions who would not have otherwise gone.

That was in Utah. Since we moved here to Washington we have again helped many more young men go on missions who would not have otherwise gone. In one ward we moved into, that included one young man who was in jail when we moved here. (This was before the raising of the bar business). When I told his mother I knew I could help her get her son on a mission she said, "Cordell, THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE!" That is the second time a mother has told me that. But I of course don't believe either mother. So I taught them what I know about conversion and through much fasting and prayer on the part of his family, that young man repented and went on a mission and became the assistant to the President on his mission. He is a very successful business man now here in our area.

I have no idea how many people all of these young men we have helped go on missions have baptized combined between them all. Hundreds, I am sure. And now many of those people they baptized have sent or will continue to send kids on missions (or go themselves) who will baptize even more until eventually it will turn into Legions, or as Ammon promised, 1000's.

Just as one other example, my son Nathan went to Hungary on a mission. Hungary is just like Finland where I served. The missionaries who go there normally only baptize 1 or maybe 2 during their mission. Nathan's mission president told us that he baptized over a huge number of

people in Hungary (Nathan would never tell us how many himself when we asked him). Then just as a coincidence, a friend of mine who was a non-member at BYU who I helped convert, had a son that actually was Nathan's MTC companion. So of course he went to Hungary at the same time as Nathan. He also baptized several people in Hungary. So as a result of my converting his dad at BYU combined with Nathan's efforts, there are scores of people in Hungary that are now members of the Church. With a small effort on the part of our family, who knows how many that will be in 20 years from now as those people send their kids on missions too.

Another thing that we have done that I did not mention in my letter is our missionary web pages www.cordellvail.com/epistles, www.cordellvail.com/missionary and www.cordellvail.com/finland/missionary. We have had so many people write to us and thank us for posting that information on the Internet. Especially our "TESTIMONIES TO THE WORLD" <http://www.cordellvail.com/testimony/>. Through that testimony we have made contact with several people who were bitter anti-Mormons (several of them ministers), but as we started corresponding, lo and behold they were won over and changed their attitude towards the church. Several who have written to us were excommunicated members of the church who have come back to the church now after corresponding with us for a while. Many non-members as well as members have written to us and thanked us for writing the "10 Steps That Lead To Adultery" paper on the epistles web page. What a blessed opportunity to have received the power to reach out and touch and bless someone's life and help them spiritually to get their lives back on track. People we touched through the Internet that we could have otherwise never had any opportunity to reach out to. How else could we have met all these people who are literally from all over the world. How could we have reached them with out the Internet?

Where ever we have lived we have had similar experiences doing missionary work and reactivation work. We have found that visiting is the key to reactivation. That is why I wrote the book that is on my web page called "Getting The Water To The End Of The Row". You don't have to teach less active people. Most of them already have a testimony. They just need to be needed and feel wanted. We have so many times just started visiting people and did not teach them anything, but they started coming back to church. Janice and I have tried our whole married life to go visit at least one family each week. We could share with you so many stories about those experiences too. But there is no room here.

And as I say, when we have had these wonderful spiritual experiences we have tried to be careful in sharing them with others because as you say, some people do not believe it is possible so they think we are exaggerating or embellishing the stories. So we are just following President Eyring's advice to write them in our journals. One time when I was teaching a Gospel Doctrine class on Joseph Smith and Church History a lady in the back raised her hand and said, "Why do we hear so much about the spiritual experiences in Joseph Smith's time, but we seldom hear of any of those experiences in our time." Before I even took a breath I said to her, "Because you have not read our journals yet. That is why we know about their experiences. We have read about them in their journals". I suppose some time in the future when people read my journal and Janice's journal and your journal and many others who are our friends, they will say why are we not having spiritual experiences now like they had back in their day.

We must be very careful sharing our experiences. President Packer gave a talk about that a couple of years ago and said that we should not share those experiences with others unless prompted by the spirit to do so. So even when I do share some of the experiences, like I did in the letter above, I try to not be very specific. I have written many other letters like this to missionaries, some of whom were the long haired boys who were really struggling when I first got to know them, but many of them became one of the outstanding missionaries of the church. I decided to write the letter to this particular missionary because he is coming home in 3 weeks and last Sunday his mother came up to me in tears and thanked me for all I had done to help him want to go on a mission and helping to change his life, and for the letters I had written to him while he was on his mission. I believe in him. I know he has been one of the great missionaries of the church and I want to encourage him to keep on going now and not lay down the sword. So I

decided to write him one more last letter to make sure that when he came home he would have a new "RAISED BAR" to look up to and achieve for, and not just go back to life of not being a missionary any more. A RETURNED MISSIONARY. Thus the letter.

We have had so many wonderful experiences teaching and helping to convert and reactivate people over the years. And we are witness to Ammon's promise that individuals can convert not 10's, not 100's but 1000's.

I hope that helps a little to clarify the numbers in my letter.

Cordell

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