

To Be a Missionary

ROBERT L. SIMPSON

My beloved young people, you take my breath away. I have been overseas for three and one-half years, and you have often heard missionaries say that the congregations are not quite this size overseas; I want you to know that you have literally taken my breath away, not only because of your numbers but also because of who you are and what you represent. I recognize the great responsibility that devolves on me, that we might be able to discuss together things that would be edifying. And as I think of that, let me just read verses 8 and 9 from the 43rd section of the Doctrine and Covenants:

And now, behold, I give unto you a commandment, that when ye are assembled together ye shall instruct and edify each other, that ye may know how to act and direct my church, how to act upon the points of my law and commandments, which I have given.

And thus ye shall become instructed in the law of my church, and be sanctified by that which ye have received, and ye shall bind yourselves to act in all holiness before me.

And so, wonderful young people, we come together tonight to be edified together.

I am not going to dwell so much on instruction; I would like just to reminisce, if I might,

about some of the wonderful experiences that Sister Simpson and I have had during the past three and one-half years. You know, we feel right at home here at BYU—all of our children have attended school here, and I believe very firmly that BYU is the number one showcase of Mormonism throughout the world. I hope that you young people can keep it that way and recognize the great responsibility that you play in that role.

In the past we looked forward to this assignment about once a year but, of course, being overseas these past three and one-half years has been a long absence. And I must say that there have been some very significant things that have come to our attention:

First of all, to be laboring in London, that great city of the world, and then just a few weeks later to find ourselves on the island of Haapai in the Tongan Islands—and to find there the same spirit among the people, the same programs of the Church operating, the

Robert L. Simpson was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 6 August 1978.

same dedication in the hearts of the leaders, and, of course, the same problems. People are people; and it does not matter whether one is in Salt Lake City, or in London, England, or on the island of Haapai in Tonga. The Church moves forward, life goes on, and hopefully people can be lifted up and qualified for the presence of our Heavenly Father.

Yes, my young people, the gospel is universal. It is for every race and for every color. And are you not grateful that in Heavenly Father's admonition, "This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39) he does not say *some men*, but says *man*? And are you not grateful that our prophet has had the courage to listen to the voice of God and make it possible for all men to have the opportunity of eternal life as long as they adhere to the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ? What a great day we live in!

What a wonderful thing it is to travel around the world and observe the missionaries! I want you to know that Mormon missionaries are great. I want you to know that the greatest impact in this Church and in the world today is the fact that one thousand Mormon missionaries are returning each month. Can you imagine one thousand returned missionaries being plowed into the leadership and into the membership of this Church and into our communities all over the world—Mormon missionaries taking their place and demonstrating to the world those things that they have been able to teach so effectively during the previous two years?

As a Mormon missionary goes out into the world he seeks to be honest in heart. Let me tell you about a new missionary down in Hawke's Bay, New Zealand. It was his first week in the mission field; he was trembling and unsure—not of his testimony, but of his ability. His companion took him out to teach a couple who were having their fifth discussion. He did not have anything to say during the discussion. He was very timid. But as they

were ready to leave, he went up to this man and, offering a pamphlet with a trembling hand, he said in a quivering voice, "Sir, if you will read this pamphlet, I testify to you that you will know it's the truth because I know it's true." And with that trembling hand he gave that pamphlet.

This man testifies to me today, now living in faraway England—not as an elders quorum president, although he has been; not as a bishop in the Church, although he has been; not as a stake president; but now as a Regional Representative—that that young man, on his very first week in the mission field, offered him a trembling pamphlet from this Church, saying, "Sir, if you will read this I know you will know that it's true." Now that is the spirit of a Mormon missionary who is honest in heart; and what an effect he can have on the heart of someone else who recognizes that sincerity and is willing to let the gift of the Holy Ghost act upon him!

Let me take you over to the east coast of England to meet a new convert to the Church. We have just finished a sacrament meeting.

"Oh, Brother Simpson, that was wonderful! I wish this meeting could have gone on for two more hours. I'm a new convert to your church."

I asked him how long he had been in the Church.

"Oh, just three months."

"Tell me about your conversion."

He tells this story: "I was out doing my gardening on a Saturday morning; I was all by myself. It was a beautiful morning. All of a sudden I heard a voice behind me that said, 'Sir, do you love the Lord?' I turned around, expecting to see an angel. There were two of them standing there. I came to my feet and took them by the hand and said, 'I love the Lord; come into the house and let's talk about it.'" And that was the beginning of his conversion—the honest in heart meeting the honest in heart. We do not have to have these profound approaches out in the mission field; all we have to do is be sincere

and strike that responsive chord that lets someone know we come with proper authority and indeed represent the Lord Jesus Christ.

While I am over in England, let me tell you about Lady Spenz. Lady Spenz had her title by virtue of her husband having been a member of the House of Parliament in England. She had a rather large home, her husband was deceased, and she decided to let out some of the downstairs apartments so that she might receive additional income. Along came two Mormon missionaries to rent the room, and they decided that Lady Spenz should have a touch of the gospel. They started teaching her; and after about the third discussion, on a night so quiet that you could hear a pin drop, she was reading in her living room and she could hear through the floorboards the two missionaries downstairs praying, never dreaming for a moment that Lady Spenz was listening. The missionaries prayed, "Heavenly Father, please bless Lady Spenz that she might recognize the truth that we are trying to give her, that she might be acted upon by the gift of the Holy Ghost, that she might come into the waters of baptism, that she might be united with her wonderful husband some day." Well, you can guess the effect of that prayer on this lovely lady, who is now a member of this Church and who thanks the Mormon missionaries for coming into her home and bringing that kind of a blessing.

Let us jump over to Australia, just to relate another story about the spirit of the gospel in this great continent of the southern hemisphere. Sister Simpson and I were traveling from north to south in Australia and our next stop was Mount Isa. If you have not been to Mount Isa, you have not lived. Mount Isa is tucked away—and I really mean tucked away—and as this airplane came in for its landing to pick up some passengers the pilot said, "We'll have about a twenty-minute stop here." And so, wanting to stretch our legs, we stepped off the airplane. We do not know how

the word got there, but here were all the Primary children and a band of forty or fifty members of the Church, and they rallied around us. We were just overwhelmed, and they embraced us and tears were in their eyes.

They said, "Let's have a meeting," so we had a ten-minute meeting, and the children sang "I Am a Child of God," and we bore a few testimonies right there at the airport, right there in front on the grass. People were watching and listening and we were glad that they were. Then, as we finished our little meeting and went back to our airplane, we had that feeling—where else in all the world can you have that feeling?—of heart meeting heart. We had never seen these people before in all our lives, but automatically and instantly we had everything in common. We were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and everything that is worth anything was in common and we were one.

On this same trip I had the privilege of going up into New Guinea. We only have about six or eight members of the Church up there; and we went up to see how this little dependent branch was doing, to reorganize them, and to bless some children. And then we went traveling out in the outskirts of Port Morsby in New Guinea, and we saw the New Guinea people living in their native state. The further we went the more we realized that we were in a very primitive setting, and we were told by our guide that in New Guinea there are seven hundred languages spoken. Can you imagine seven hundred languages on this little island of New Guinea? These people just have to go across the valley to the next little mountainside and there is a whole new group of people—maybe not more than four or five hundred, but a different tribe with a different language, just as different as English is from French or Spanish. And so the thought came to my mind: "The gospel of Jesus Christ must go to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. How are we going to do it? How can we get

the Book of Mormon translated into seven hundred different languages? How can we teach these people? And even if we printed the Book of Mormon they couldn't read it—they are illiterate."

Then and there the thought came to my mind: "How many people are there in this Church who don't read the Book of Mormon even though they have the ability to read it?" And then the question followed: "Does anyone who doesn't read the Book of Mormon have any advantage over someone who cannot read the Book of Mormon? He has no advantage whatsoever." So those of us who have the ability and the blessing of being able to read, let us read this precious document that the Lord has given us in this day. May we take from its precious pages. Then can we think in terms of praying for these people in New Guinea, that one day the gospel will reach them through the vision of a living prophet of God. For President Spencer W. Kimball has visualized the day when all of these native people will have transistor radios—and they have them already; you see them in their hands, in their pockets, hanging in their little villages, on the shop wall, playing the music of the day or the voice of someone talking. All of these people could be available instantly to the miracle of modern-day electronic communication. President Kimball has already had that vision, and in your lifetime you will see many great and wonderful things happening as thousands and hundreds of thousands come into the gospel even though literacy has not been their privilege.

Now may I take you down to Melbourne, Australia (I hate to bump you around so much). In Melbourne, as in many of our missions in Australia and New Zealand, we were using a technique called "Harvesting the Field"—here again this little heart-to-heart feeling that I was talking about a moment ago. In this "Harvesting the Field" program the missionaries approach the head of the home with something like, "Good evening, sir; we are

representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ. May we come in and leave a blessing in your home?" It is as simple as that—representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ offering to leave a blessing in that home. And so, as the missionaries step in, they request the privilege of meeting all the members of the family. Every father is anxious to have the missionaries meet his two daughters and his son, and down comes the mother. Then the missionaries go to their knees—and this is kind of new to these people, but they kneel because the missionaries are kneeling—and then the missionary blesses the home, using terms they can understand. He blesses the children in school; he blesses Dad at work; he blesses the family that they might have peace in their home, that they will always espouse truth, and that the gospel of Jesus Christ might be the light of their home.

Then, as the missionary finished praying on this one occasion we heard about, the wife was the first one to speak; she said, "I like the way you pray." She had never heard a prayer like that before.

The father of the home, as he was lighting a cigarette, said, "I feel better already." (He had not heard the Word of Wisdom. But he heard about it the next day, and that was probably one of the last cigarettes he smoked.) But it is beautiful and it is wonderful to see how it is happening in a simple way, and how people respond to missionaries who are honest in heart and who have prepared themselves in every way to represent the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know, this church is being felt in high places. May I take you for just a moment down to Wellington, the capital of New Zealand? I was ushered into the office of Mr. Walker, a member of Parliament and the minister of social welfare in charge of all the family problems of New Zealand, and there is a large sign on his wall, the only prominent thing you can see as you step into his great big office. Do you know what it says? "'No other success can compensate for failure in the home.'—David O.

McKay, President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” And this good man, who is a member of the Church of England, says,

“That is one of the great statements of our day. I never give a talk without quoting President McKay, because I believe what he has said.”

Just a few moments later we were in the office of Mr. Thomson, the minister of justice for New Zealand. We had to talk about some temple marriage matters; and as we were talking about our problem and about the turmoil of the world and about the problems of the world, he acknowledged that about one out of every three marriages was ending in divorce worldwide and that New Zealand statistics were not too different. He also knew—I do not know from what source—that only about one out of twenty temple marriages is destined for divorce. He said, “That is the kind of marriage we need in New Zealand. We need more one-out-of-twenty-type marriages rather than one-out-of-three-type marriages.” These men in high places recognize the value of the Church, know what is going on among our young people, and like what we have to offer.

I cannot leave New Zealand without telling you about this great New Zealand pageant that we had, the first pageant outside of the United States. This pageant, in its size and scope, is probably more like the Manti pageant than any of the others. It was beautiful; it ran for only three nights, but it was thrilling production. We want to thank BYU for the help we had—great help from Brother Robert Manookin and the Music Department. Also, Brother Charles Metten came down and helped us tremendously with our production as our adviser.

On those three nights we catered to twenty thousand people, more than six thousand of whom were nonmembers of the Church—everybody brought a nonmember. You would also like to know, probably, that out of all these nonmembers not one went away without a personalized copy of the Book of Mormon,

because all of the members supplied copies with their personal testimony written in the front of the book, a picture of their family, and an invitation for them to write back and express their own feelings about the Book of Mormon.

It was a great thrill to see on the side of the temple hill, as it grew dark, the portrayal of the prophets of old foretelling of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was thrilling to see reenacted the Savior’s appearance before the people and his teachings to them. It was thrilling to see the Savior as he ascended. He was shown on the top of the New Zealand temple, and of course everything was dark; it looked as though he were suspended in the sky. Then we heard of the “other sheep I have, which are not of this fold” (John 10:16). Father Lehi was depicted coming to the New World. Then, of course, the Polynesians came to the South Pacific through Hagoth (see Alma 63). Then came the restoration of the gospel through the Prophet Joseph, and then, finally, the coming of the restored gospel to these Polynesians and the story of how it was foretold that Mormon missionaries would come among the Maori people declaring that they had the book of their forebears, sleeping in the beds of the people, speaking their language, and partaking of their hospitality.

At the conclusion of the performance, over the brow of the hill came marching, shoulder to shoulder, dozens and dozens of Mormon missionaries (these were returned missionaries, young men in dark suits and white shirts), with copies of the Book of Mormon; and coming from the other direction were people dressed in all the costumes of the world—all the Scandinavian countries, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, and so on. They met together in the center and quickly assembled into teaching groups—the Mormon missionaries teaching the world—and then the finale came as they turned their backs to the audience and made their way up the hill to the house of the Lord. The floodlights of the temple were then turned

on for the first time as these families ascended to the house of the Lord to be sealed together for time and all eternity. It was touching; it was beautiful! I do not know of anything that has touched me quite like seeing all of these Mormon missionaries coming, row after row, to teach the world and to bring light and salvation to the children of men.

Well, I suppose I might take just another minute to tell you about Dean Rymer. I was on a flight from Australia to New Zealand, and I noticed that my seat companion was a minister from the Anglican Church, the Church of England. I introduced myself and told him what I was doing in New Zealand, and he asked me, "How does it feel to be a member of one of the fastest-growing churches in the world?" He had been hearing things.

I said, "It's a wonderful feeling, and I'd like to tell you about it."

"Well, we have some problems in our church with the youth," he said. "What do you do about the youth in your Church? We hardly have any young people coming, and we'd like to do something to stimulate them."

I spent the next half-hour telling him about young men coming to pass the sacrament as deacons, groomed appropriately and representing the Lord as they should, and about how they had to be worthy to act in the name of the Lord. I told him about the older brothers of these deacons, young men sitting at the priest's table, and about how they came properly groomed and administered the sacrament for the congregation. He was impressed; he was taking notes during all of this.

Then he said, "You know, I have another problem. I can't get around to all my congregation. And not only that, but they're mostly women—very few men in my congregation." I told him about the Melchizedek Priesthood, and about home teaching. I told him about this army of men going out, hopefully into each home every month. "Oh," he said, "that would be great help! I wish I had something like that.

I wish I had some home teachers." Then I told him about visiting teaching and the Relief Society, and he was almost over-whelmed.

Then he went on to ask me about our buildings; he was concerned about some buildings that they were having to close because they were losing members of the congregation. And I told him that we had approximately six hundred buildings under construction, that we had another five hundred buildings on the drawing board for next year, and that there were another five or six hundred buildings for the year after that. Then I told him about the law of tithing, and told him that every one of these buildings would be dedicated on the day that it was finished and used; that we did not have one penny of debt—not one commercial loan on any piece of physical property in this Church—and he could not believe what he was hearing. And again he was taking notes and writing very rapidly.

Then we talked about tithing. That is how we do it: because we believe what Malachi said—"Will a man rob God?"—and we believe that the windows of heaven will be opened for those who do what the Lord has asked them to do (see Malachi 3:8–10). Then we talked about welfare, and again he could not believe it when I told him about fast offerings and about the way our people fast two meals and give the equivalent cash to the bishop on the fast and testimony Sunday, and still he was writing.

After two hours and twenty minutes of flying we finally landed at Auckland Airport. He was writing all the time, and his final comment to me was, "Elder Simpson, these have been two of the most fruitful hours of my life. We're going to have a seminar of all the ministers of the Church of England in Auckland in just a few months' time, and I'm hopeful that you will be able to come and tell them exactly what you have told me." Well, unfortunately, I have been released in the meantime; but Elder Loren C. Dunn is waiting. I have made arrangements for him to meet Dean Rymer, and Dean Rymer

is anxious to extend that invitation to Elder Dunn. And I can promise you that Elder Dunn will finish the job and Dean Rymer will never be the same again.

I should also tell you this: The Sunday following this conversation on the airplane, I heard from one of our good Church members converted from the Church of England that one of her good friends from the Anglican Church came over and said, “You can’t guess what happened in church today. I was at the cathedral and Dean Rymer spent the whole hour talking about the Mormon Church. He told us this and that, and then he concluded his comments by saying, ‘Now, brothers and sisters, I don’t intend to convert you all to the Mormon Church; all I’m doing here today is letting you know that if you live more like the Mormons you’re going to be better people.’” Now, that is a pretty good endorsement, and we accept that! I know that Dean Rymer is a good man and I know that the Lord works in mysterious ways his wonders to perform.

Now, young people, three words of advice as we conclude—four, I guess. Number one (and this really has nothing to do with what I have been talking about except that maybe I have been able to stimulate you to be excited about your membership in this Church): Here you are members of this great University, where you have the privilege of attending religion classes and devotional assemblies; here is this great host of young men and young women headed for the mission field—may I challenge you to be *informed*. Be informed not only about things of the world, but become informed especially about things of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Number two: Will you be willing to *do something about it*? Will you be willing to answer the call when the call comes? I think we should all follow the admonition of President Spencer W. Kimball; it is brief and you can never forget it. He says very simply: “Do it.” And I think we need to do it.

The third thing I would like to say is this: *Be available*. It is not enough to be willing. Be available, and by that I mean be available to the gift and spirit of the Lord that you might be among the honest in heart. Whether you are working in the circle of Church membership, talking to a neighbor over the fence, or being called into full-time missionary service, be available to the gift and spirit of the Lord that the Lord might be able to whisper through you, that you might be able to remember that great admonition given by John in the fifteenth chapter, fifth verse, when the Lord says, “For without me ye can do nothing.” In all of these stories I have been telling you—about young men going into the home to pray, about two missionaries downstairs praying and Lady Spenz overhearing them, about a young man with trembling hand giving a tract to a potential member of this Church—they succeeded because the spirit of the Lord was with them and because they were doing things the way Heavenly Father would have us do them. “For without me ye can do nothing.”

And the final point: *Be thankful*. Be grateful that you are living in this time, in this great day when momentous things are happening. Be grateful that you are a member of this Church and that you have the opportunity of enjoying every priesthood blessing that Heavenly Father has for his children. Whether you be male or female, every priesthood blessing can be yours, in total, without reservation, through your conforming to those things that the Lord has given us to do.

I bear you my solemn witness that I know that God lives. There are a lot of things that I do not know in this world, but these things I know above all else: that God lives, that Jesus Christ is his Son, that he is the head of this Church, and that we are directed today by a living prophet of God whose name is Spencer W. Kimball. May God grant us the ability to appreciate that and to live worthily of it, I pray humbly in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.