

"THE FIELD IS WHITE ALREADY TO HARVEST"

INTRODUCTION: Part of the information sent to prospective missionaries is a list of needed clothing, supplies, and incidentals. I remember receiving my list in 1965 and I have seen my seven missionaries as they received theirs. They generally request a new suitcase, although we have convinced most of them that such an expenditure is not necessary. We have bags enough. Then the shopping begins, as they scour the city for the things they will require for the time of their service in Santiago or New York or Las Palmas or San Salvador or Salvador or Carlsbad or Añasco. My bank account has ached with the abuse it has taken. My Mastercard has been swiped so many times it nearly set my pants on fire.

Really, the shopping is a time of excitement and bonding which I have cherished with all of my missionary-minded offspring. I have no regrets. But I have wondered from time to time during those last few days before they depart, as they try to store all they have acquired in their new or used bags, if they will actually have all they need to be wonderful emissaries of the Lord and his Church.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord gives us a comprehensive list of the things his servants will really need. These are not at all the sort of things that can be purchased at K-Mart with cash or credit card. These are qualities that can only be procured by diligent and prayerful effort.

If you are teaching this lesson, consider a suitcase filled with wordstrips containing the words and phrases below. One at a time they could be withdrawn and discussed with your class or your family.

D&C 4 is a revelation given through the Prophet to his father who wanted to know, as we all want to know, what the Lord expected of him. The language here, while imparted for a specific man, is intended for all men—all those who "have desires to serve God."

1. **"SERVE HIM WITH ALL YOUR HEART, MIGHT, MIND AND STRENGTH."**

The kind of service the Lord requires is specified with remarkable clarity here. We are not needed if we cannot learn to give a full effort. No half-hearted endeavor will meet the Savior's expectations. Here are the first few qualities and attitudes to be placed in our bags as we go forth to serve the Lord:

- A. **All your heart (4 :2):** Our hearts are sometimes like unconquered territories, unwilling to submit completely to the rule of the rightful King. Most of us have surrendered most of our lives to his rule, but we often maintain nearly hidden outposts of rebellion, areas of disobedience or selfishness that we have been unwilling to pay the price to conquer. These are the outposts of improper entertainment or sloppy, inefficient, irregular home teaching. They are uncontrolled thoughts or a spirit of contention. We must offer all of our hearts to the Savior to serve him perfectly.
- B. **All your might (4:2):** The distinction between *might* and *strength* is not perfectly clear to me. I have a feeling that might is more than muscles—it is spiritual energy, devotion, commitment, faithfulness. It suggests me to hard work with a divine purpose.

I have asked mission presidents in many parts of the world this question: "How many missionaries do you have in your mission who are really spiritual and also lazy?" There isn't one in all the world. Laziness and spirituality don't go together. The most spiritual people I know are also some of the hardest-working people I have ever met.

So if you want to increase your level of spirituality, work hard. Magnify your callings within the Church. Really work! (Joe J. Christensen, "Ten Ideas to Increase Your Spirituality," *Ensign*, Mar. 1999, 59)

- C. **All your mind (4:2):** The Lord has promised to give us revelation by telling us in our hearts and in our minds (see D&C 8:2) what we ought to do. Thus we must serve him thoughtfully. I suspect that most of the time information precedes inspiration. Revelation comes to those who study and ponder and prepare. In addition, we must not allow ourselves to be distracted from the requirements of our calling. I have a friend who gave a

talk entitled, “When lightning strikes, watch out for rattle snakes.” We must focus our attention on the things that need our attention.

- D. **All our strength (4:2):** This reminds me that Nephi the son of Helaman was praised for serving with unweariness.

“Blessed art thou, Nephi, for those things which thou hast done; for I have beheld how thou hast with **unweariness** declared the word, which I have given unto thee, unto this people. And thou hast not feared them, and hast not sought thine own life, but hast sought my will, and to keep my commandments. And now, because thou hast done this with such **unweariness**, behold, I will bless thee forever; and I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will.” (Helaman 10:4,5, emphasis added)

- E. **Desires (4:3)** This is the fourth of the preliminary items to be packed in our “service” bags. Perhaps it should be the first. So many times you and I have been called to serve in positions and places for which we knew we were unqualified. But the Lord never cared about that. When Moses led Israel out of Egypt, he knew nothing about dividing seas or building tabernacles. What he had was a desire to serve God. It is so with us. We must have a great desire to serve and be willing to do all we can do (heart, might, mind, and strength) and proceed with a perfect confidence that the Lord will sustain us in our efforts.

2. PREPARE TO SERVE THE LORD

A marvelous work requires marvelous workers. The Lord needs servants—men and women—who will see the work through. In verse 5 of D&C 4, the Lord presents those attributes that will qualify us for the work: missionary work, or any other work in the Kingdom.

- A. **Faith (4:5):** This quality and many of those listed below are not qualities

associated only with the work: they are qualities associated with the workers. Every member of the Church would be expected to demonstrate these characteristics in his involvement with the world and with his brothers and sisters. *Faith* as used here is the shortened form of the statement *faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*. We must have faith in him and in his work and in his promises. Peter, as he reviews most of the traits listed in this section (D&C 4) tells us that God,

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (2 Peter 1:4,5)

These qualities, beginning with faith, are those that enable us “be partakers of the divine nature.” With that nature inside of us, we can serve with great faith in the assistance of the Lord.

B. **Hope (4:5):** Elder Maxwell said,

Ultimate hope is a different matter. It is tied to Jesus and the blessings of the great Atonement, blessings resulting in the universal Resurrection and the precious opportunity provided thereby for us to practice emancipating repentance, making possible what the scriptures call “a perfect brightness of hope” (2 Ne. 31:20). [Hope through the Atonement of Jesus Christ: C.R., Elder Neal A. Maxwell (October 1998)]

We are willing to labor, even labor without a clear perception of the good we might be doing, because we hope that in the end, we and those for whom we labor will have something better than they now have.

C. **Charity (4:5):** A gift of the Spirit for all who are true followers of Christ and who seek it with all their hearts (see Moroni 7:48).

- D. **Love (4:5):** Why this quality is mentioned in same verse and the same phrase with charity in an interesting question. I have no certainty about this, but I have wondered if perhaps, in the absence of charity, which is “the pure love of Christ” (see Moro. 7:47), we can serve with love in a less pure form while we seek to develop the charity. Any kind of real love will assist the work.
- E. **An eye single to the glory of God (4:5):** No hidden motives and secret agendas are permitted in this service. We cannot serve properly with an eye partially fixed on our own glory, hoping for the honors of men and the things of the world. Remember what Moroni said to Joseph about this?

I beheld the same messenger at my bedside, and heard him rehearse or repeat over again to me the same things as before; and added a caution to me, telling me that Satan would try to tempt me (in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father's family), to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich. This he forbade me, saying that *I must have no other object in view in getting the plates but to glorify God, and must not be influenced by any other motive than that of building his kingdom*; otherwise I could not get them. (JS-H 1:46, emphasis added)

But there are other qualities that we must remember in our service.

- F. **Remember faith (again) (4:6):** Faith qualifies us for the work, but we must also remember it in all of our labors. My own experience teaches me that things are going badly and life is taking us in directions that we would never have anticipated, it is easy to forget faith. For me, the moments of crisis are those in which I am most likely to rely on the arm of flesh and trust in my own intellect. In 2 Chronicles 20, Jehosaphat leads his people out to battle against an enemy army that was called “a great multitude (2 Chron. 20:2) and “a great company” (2 Chron. 20:12). Jehosaphat knew his people could not prevail, and so he sought the Lord, proclaimed a fast, and called all of Judah to prayer. Then he went out to battle, not with warriors and

weapons but with singers to “praise the beauty of holiness . . .” (2 Chron. 20:21). In a time of deadly crisis, Jehosaphat remembered faith.

- G. **Remember . . . virtue (4:6):** In D&C 121 the Lord says that we should let “virtue garnish [our] thoughts unceasingly.” (121:45) To have such protective shield around our thoughts in these days will require a great effort at remembering.
- H. **Remember . . . knowledge (4:6):** We live in an eccleisastical environment that stresses the qualities of the spirit and heart. But twice in D&C 4, the Lord refers to qualities of the intellect. We are to serve with our minds (4:2) and we are to remember knowledge. We have been commanded to *study* the scriptures (11:22) and to search them (John 5:29; Alma 33:2, etc.) We have also been commanded to seek learning by study out of the best books (see D&C 88:118)
- I. **Remember . . . temperance (4:6):** Elder Russell M. Nelson spoke of this quality as he reviewed a tour of the Tabernacle Choir. He taught

“To knowledge,” the Apostle Peter wrote, add “temperance” (2 Peter 1:6). Temperance suggests sobriety and self-restraint in action. It reminds one of covenants made.

Members of the choir were always temperate and well-disciplined, not from without but from within. Completely obedient to the Word of Wisdom, they were blessed with health and strength. Keeping a schedule that left little time for leisure, their grueling pace allowed them to perform for audiences that otherwise might have been excluded.

Repeatedly, scriptures teach that we be “temperate in all things” (1 Corinthians 9:25; Alma 7:23; 38:10; D&C 12:8). Temperance can protect each of us from the aftermath of excess. (“These ... Were Our Examples”:

Elder Russell M. Nelson: C.R., October 1991)

- J. **Remember . . . patience (4:6):** When Moses went up into the mountain of the Lord to get the higher law for his people, he was gone forty days. What happened then is a great lesson on the importance of patience:

And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. (Exodus 32:1)

What happened next was both a travesty and an tragedy. If Israel had possessed enough faith to wait on the will of the Lord, things might have been better for them. But we have seen to many problems, even huge problems, solved in thirty minutes or an hour on television. We are not conditioned to be patient. I know a wonderful women who was informed that she was not to marry until she found the man chosen for her by the Lord. She trusted patiently in his promises and waited until she was 34 years old. When she found him she found a true saint, one of the greatest men I have ever known. What if she had not been patient? Esau could not wait for food nor for a covenant marriage. His impatience cost him dearly. (see Genesis 25:29-34 and Genesis 26:34,35)

- K. **Remember . . . brotherly kindness (4:6):** The scriptures speak of kindness over 100 times. This is one of the simplest of virtues. It is the sort of thing that we can all do if we are willing to remember this injunction when people mistreat us or mislead us. When we are cut off in traffic or when we get a telephone solicitation during dinner or when we are falsely accused . . . the opportunities for brotherly kindness are everywhere, if we will just remember.

- L. **Remember . . . godliness (4:6):** Elder Nelson also spoke of this quality as he reviewed the experience of the Choir:

Godliness is an attribute that seems as difficult to define as it is to attain. Scriptures refer to "the

mystery of godliness . . ." (1 Timothy 3:16; D&C 19:10).

Simon Peter counseled us "to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God" (2 Peter 3:11-12).

"The power of godliness is manifest" in the ordinances of the priesthood (D&C 84:20). Godliness is not a product of perfection; it comes of concentration and consecration.

Godliness characterizes each of you who truly loves the Lord. You are constantly mindful of the Savior's atonement and rejoice in His unconditional love. Meanwhile you vanquish personal pride and vain ambition. You consider your accomplishments important only if they help establish His kingdom on earth. ("These ... Were Our Examples": Elder Russell M. Nelson: C.R., October 1991)

- M. **Remember . . . charity (again) (4:6):** I have used the following story in previous years, but because many of you are new to this cyberspace Sunday School, and because some of you have memories shorter than my hair, I will repeat it here as a wonderful illustration of charity.

Then a few years ago, at the closing of a conference of the St. Johns Stake, we had had a wonderful conference I thought, and I was very happy on retiring. I was sleeping in the home of the president of the stake, Brother Levi Udall, and that night I had a remarkable dream. I have seldom mentioned this to other people, but I do not know why I should not. It seems to me appropriate in talking along this line. I dreamed that I and a group of my own associates found ourselves in a courtyard where, around the outer edge of it, were German soldiers—and Fuhrer Adolph Hitler was there with his group, and they seemed to be sharpening their swords and cleaning their guns,

and making preparations for a slaughter of some kind, or an execution. We knew not what, but, evidently we were the objects. But presently a circle was formed and this Fuhrer and his men were all within the circle, and my group and I were circled on the outside, and he was sitting on the inside of the circle with his back to the outside, and when we walked around and I got directly opposite to him, I stepped inside the circle and walked across to where he was sitting, and spoke to him in a manner something like this:

"I am your brother. You are my brother. In our heavenly home we lived together in love and peace. Why can we not so live here on the earth?"

And it seemed to me that I felt in myself, welling up in my soul, a love for that man, and I could feel that he was having the same experience, and presently he arose, and we embraced each other and kissed each other, a kiss of affection.

Then the scene changed so that our group was within the circle, and he and his group were on the outside, and when he came around to where I was standing, he stepped inside the circle and embraced me again, with a kiss of affection.

I think the Lord gave me that dream. Why should I dream of this man, one of the greatest enemies of mankind, and one of the wickedest, but that the Lord should teach me that I must love my enemies, and I must love the wicked as well as the good? (President George F. Richards: C.R., October 1946)

- N. **Remember . . . humility (4:6):** This quality is the one that took the place of sacrificial lambs and bullocks. The Lord commanded that we offer no more burnt offerings, but that we offer the sacrifice of a broken heart and a

contrite spirit. That characteristic heart and spirit is certainly related to humility.

So it is that real, personal sacrifice never was placing an animal on the altar. Instead, it is a willingness to put the animal in us upon the altar and letting it be consumed! Such is the "sacrifice unto the Lord . . . of a broken heart and a contrite spirit," (D&C 59:8), a prerequisite to taking up the cross, while giving "away all [our] sins" in order to "know God" (Alma 22:18) for the denial of self precedes the full acceptance of Him. ("Deny Yourselves of All Ungodliness": Elder Neal A. Maxwell: C.R., April 1995)

- O. **Remember . . . diligence (4:6):** The scriptures counsel us to be diligent in such things as keeping the commandments, searching the scriptures, acting in our offices and callings, teaching one another, watching over our homes, seeking the Lord, persuading our children to believe in Christ, and gaining knowledge. Perhaps this quality comes last in this verse because the Lord wants us to be diligent in remembering these qualities of character that he has revealed to those of us who desire to serve him.

3. " THE FIELD IS WHITE."

In D&C 4:4 the Lord uses the imagery of the sickle to emphasize the need for harvesters. Eleven times in the D&C we are counseled to thrust in our sickles with our might. I remember as a child cutting the weeds on the ditch bank with a small, curved, hand-held sickle. Even though the field—white and ready for harvest—could be harvested faster by the angels sent to reap down the earth in D&C 38:12, the Lord has made this an individual labor for the time. All those who are called to the work must pack a sickle in their bags and use it vigorously in the service of the Lord.

As to the whiteness of the field, our literature is full of stories of spectacular numbers of conversions, but the prophet has suggested that the whiteness of the field means the harvest can increase.

Last year there were approximately 300,000 convert baptisms throughout the Church. This is tremendously significant. This is the equivalent of 120 new stakes of 2,500 members each. Think of that: 120 new stakes in a single year! It is wonderful. But it is not enough. I am not being unrealistic when I say that with concerted effort, with recognition of the duty which falls upon each of us as members of the Church, and with sincere prayer to the Lord for help, we could double that number. (Gordon B. Hinckley, "Find the Lambs, Feed the Sheep," *Ensign*, May 1999, 105)

4. "OPEN YOUR MOUTHS AND THEY SHALL BE FILLED."

Fear is too much with some of us. We long for the joy of missionary work and the rich rewards which come to us when those we love and serve embrace the truth. But we are often frightened to make the effort. Over the years my wife and I have had investigators and missionaries in our home many times, and have felt the sweet witness of the Spirit bearing testimony of the truth. But so often when we ought to speak, we do not.

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. (D&C 60:2)

The Lord has said that we must open our mouths. In fact, on several occasions he has suggested that if we have prepared, that is all we must do. For example,

"Open your mouths and they shall be filled, and you shall become even as Nephi of old, who journeyed from Jerusalem in the wilderness. Yea, open your mouths and spare not, and you shall be laden with sheaves upon your backs, for lo, I am with you. Yea, open your mouths and they shall be filled, saying: Repent, repent, and prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand . . ." (D&C 33:8-10, emphasis added)

The promise is that if we open our mouths they will be filled. With what? With the words conveyed through us by the Spirit.

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 84:85)

We are commanded to treasure up the words of life, and then have faith that the Lord will keep his promises (he always does!) and give us the portion of his word best suited "unto every man."

Therefore, verily I say unto you, lift up your voices unto this people; speak the thoughts that I shall put into your hearts, and you shall not be confounded before men; For it shall be given you in the very hour, yea, in the very moment, what ye shall say. (D&C 100:5,6)

There it is. We have no need to fear, for we shall not be confounded. We must treasure up the words of life continually, and then speak the thoughts that the Lord puts into our hearts, knowing that they may not be put there until the very hour, perhaps not until the very moment they are to be spoken.

5. THE LORD PROMISES GREAT BLESSINGS TO THOSE WHO LABOR IN HIS SERVICE.

The scriptures are filled with promises to missionaries. The most significant to me is the affirmation that if I serve as I have been taught to serve, I will stand blameless before God when I see him on judgement day (see D&C 4:2). Or to but it another way:

And lo, he that trusteth in his sickle with is might, the same layeth up in store that he perisheth not, but bringeth salvation to his soul.
(D&C 4:4)

And thus, if ye are faithful ye shall be laden with many sheaves, and crowned with honor, and glory, and immortality, and eternal life. (D&C 75:5)

No price is to great to pay. A lifetime of labor will be abundantly rewarded with the joy shared with a single convert (see D&C 18:15).

D&C 31:5 promises a remission of sins for the missionary for the diligent laborer. “. . . for the laborer is worthy of his hire.” (See D&C 84:60,61)

CONCLUSION: I have served a full time mission in the only true country—Brazil. I have been in three stake mission presidencies. I spent four years in a branch presidency at the MTC. I have taught missionary preparation classes at the institute. I love this work! And I am finally, with one foot as it were hanging over the edge of the grave, beginning to understand some things about it. My testimony echoes that of Lehi:

Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah . . . (2 Nephi 2:8)

This lesson is too long. I fear my love for missionary work has bypassed my sense of self-control. Forgive me if I have bored you. I would as always be delighted to hear from you with suggestions or comments. My email is <ted@ldsiving.com> or <tedgibbons@yahoo.com>..

Copyright © 2001 by Ted Gibbons <tedgibbons@yahoo.com>. All rights reserved. No part of this text may be reproduced in any form or by any means for commercial gain without the express written consent of the author. Digital or printed copies may be freely made and distributed for personal and public non-commercial use.