

“EVERY MEMBER A MISSIONARY”

D&C Lesson #41

by Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: We are to gather Israel. One of the great purposes of our global missionary effort is to gather Israel from the nations of the earth.

And ye are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect; for mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts;

Wherefore the decree hath gone forth from the Father that they shall be gathered in unto one place upon the face of this land, to prepare their hearts and be prepared in all things against the day when tribulation and desolation are sent forth upon the wicked. (D&C 29:7,8)

This assignment came first to Ephraim. When Moses blessed the tribes before their entry into the land of Canaan, in his blessing to Joseph he used an interesting word in place of *gather*.

His [Joseph's] glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall *push* the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh. (Deut. 33:17, emphasis added)

In revelations given to Joseph Smith, the Lord gave additional emphasis to this idea. After giving specific instructions to a few elders, the Lord said,

And now, verily, I say concerning the residue of the elders of my church, the time has not yet come, for many years, for them to receive their inheritance in this land, except they desire it through the prayer of faith, only as it shall be appointed unto them of the Lord.

For, behold, they shall *push* the people together from the ends of the earth. (D&C 58:44,45, emphasis added)

To William E. McLellin he specified the location to which people were to be

pushed.

Keep these sayings, for they are true and faithful; and thou shalt magnify thine office, and *push many people to Zion* with songs of everlasting joy upon their heads. (D&C 66:11, emphasis added)

This responsibility to be *pushers* has been given to all members of the Church by a succession of latter-day prophets.

. . . last year President Hinckley challenged Church members to significantly increase the number of converts. We are not yet on that prophetically prompted track.

This is what prophets do; they help us reach up to new heights. President David O. McKay advised, "Every member a missionary"; President Kimball: "Lengthen your stride" and "Do it now"; President Benson: "Flood . . . the earth with the Book of Mormon"; and now President Hinckley: Increase the number of converts and retain them. Do we need more specific instructions? (Sharing the Gospel: Elder Robert C. Oaks: C.R., October 2000)

I have occasionally told my students that in order to help them remember this duty, the word *push* has been placed in hundreds of thousands of locations throughout the world. Each time you approach the door of a commercial enterprise, either as you enter or as your leave, you will probably find a gentle reminder of your duty inscribed there: "PUSH."

1. THE CHURCH IS COMING FORTH OUT OF OBSCURITY

We have come some distance from the little band of believers in Fayette. The world knew nothing of the cataclysmic events beginning to unfold that Tuesday as six good men signed the documents of incorporation and the restored church emerged into being in our day. Who would have dreamed—indeed, who could have dreamed of the explosion of members and missionary work that has carried the Kingdom to its present prominence. And we are only beginning. Daniel reported that this church—the stone cut from the mountain—would fill the earth. Those with prophetic vision knew of this from the beginning:

The keys of the kingdom of God are committed unto man on the earth,

and from thence shall the gospel roll forth unto the ends of the earth, as the stone which is cut out of the mountain without hands shall roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth. (D&C 65:2)

Perhaps this is one of the reasons for the use of the word *push* to describe our duty. The stone that was cut out without hands will not roll without hands.

Many of our neighbors, friendly and unfriendly, have remarked on the impressive growth of the church. Some have been filled with fear, others amazement. One man remarked,

It [the Mormon church] is not to be educated, not to be civilized, not to be reformed---it must be crushed. No other organization is so perfect as the Mormon church except the German army. (Nels L. Anderson: *Scientific Aspects of Mormonism*, 1904, p. 1)

Such statements as this are evidence that the prophecy in D&C 1:30 is being fulfilled:

And also those to whom these commandments were given, might have power to lay the foundation of this church, and to bring it forth out of obscurity and out of darkness, the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which I, the Lord, am well pleased, speaking unto the church collectively and not individually—

The church is coming forth out of obscurity and darkness. And clearly no one had done more to make this a reality than President Hinckley.

Just reflect in your minds today what is happening with President Hinckley as he travels the world and as he goes out meeting with people. When we talk about bringing the Church out of obscurity and out of darkness, just think what he is doing out in the world with the press, the media, with people of all types. Think of how they have an opportunity to see God's prophet and to hear him testify and to explain what has taken place. Many influential newspapers and magazines and other publications have had many favorable stories about the Church. (David B. Haight, "Live the Commandments," *Ensign*, May 1998, 8)

But he has done more than make it notifiable. He has helped the world to see that it is beautiful.

For Zion must increase in beauty, and in holiness; her borders must be enlarged; her stakes must be strengthened; yea, verily I say unto you, Zion must arise and put on her beautiful garments. (D&C 82:14)

2. LATTER-DAY PROPHETS HAVE CHALLENGED US TO TAKE THE GOSPEL TO ALL THE WORLD.

We are watchmen upon the walls of Zion. It is our duty to warn the inhabitants of the earth of the things that are to come, and if they reject our testimony, then their blood will be upon their own heads. When the judgments of God overtake the wicked they cannot say they have not been warned. My garments, and the garments of thousands of others, are clean of the people of this generation, as also the garments of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and those of the elders of Israel who have died in the faith. We have borne our testimony, and when the judgments of God come, men cannot say they have not been warned. I consider our position before this generation is of [page 20] vast importance to us and them. I do not want, when I go into the spirit world, to have this generation rise up and condemn me, and say I have not done my duty. (Wilford Woodruff, “Responsibilities of the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, Sept. 1971, 19–20)

Phrases like “every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” and “the uttermost parts of the earth” make clear the burden the Lord has laid on us.

And moreover, I say unto you, that the time shall come when the knowledge of a Savior shall spread throughout every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. (Mosiah 3:20)

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

The Lord has emphasized that we all have the duty to share the message of the restoration. For example

And again, I say unto you, I give unto you a commandment, that every man, both elder, priest, teacher, and also member, go to with his might,

with the labor of his hands, to prepare and accomplish the things which I have commanded.

And let your preaching be the warning voice, every man to his neighbor, in mildness and in meekness. (D&C 38:40,41)

3. “EVERY MEMBER A MISSIONARY”

President Kimball spoke clearly of our duty.

I was asked a few years ago, “Should every young man who is a member of the Church fill a mission?” And I responded with the answer the Lord has given: “Yes, every worthy young man should fill a mission.” The Lord expects it of him. And if he is not now worthy to fill a mission, then he should start at once to qualify himself. The Lord has instructed, “Send forth the elders of my church unto the nations which are afar off; unto the islands of the sea; send forth unto foreign lands; call upon all nations, first upon the Gentiles, and then upon the Jews.” (D&C 133:8.)

Thus, the elders—the young men of the Church of the age to be ordained elders—should be prepared and anxious to fill a mission for the Church throughout the world. Presently, only about one-third of the eligible young men of the Church are serving full-time missions! One-third is not “every young man.”

Someone might also ask, “Should every young woman, should every father and mother, should every member of the Church serve a mission?” Again, the Lord has given the answer: Yes, every man, woman, and child—every young person and every little boy and girl—should serve a mission. This does not mean that they must serve abroad or even be formally called and set apart as full-time missionaries. But it does mean that each of us is responsible to bear witness of the gospel truths that we have been given. We all have relatives, neighbors, friends, and fellow workmen, and it is our responsibility to pass the truths of the gospel on to them, by example as well as by precept. (Spencer W. Kimball, “It Becometh Every Man,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1977, 3)

Many years ago a Regional Representative gave some superb counsel on member missionary work at a stake conference in Arizona. He challenged us to pray every day for someone—a specific person—with whom we wanted to share the gospel. “If you will do that,” he said, “one of two things will happen: either you will do something to help that person, or you will quit praying. My wife and I had some lovely experiences with the missionaries and investigators in our home over the course of several years.

And there must be many people anxious to hear the message.

For there are many yet on the earth among all sects, parties, and denominations, who are blinded by the subtle craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, and who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it—

Therefore, that we should waste and wear out our lives in bringing to light all the hidden things of darkness, wherein we know them; and they are truly manifest from heaven—

These should then be attended to with great earnestness. (D&C 123:12-14)

There are, by the way, more ways to serve in this endeavor than just finding people willing to be taught. Elder Richard G. Scott said,

As you prayerfully seek and cultivate missionary opportunities in your daily activities, you will find many ways to serve. They include helping to find, convert, and retain new members. The stake or full-time missionaries can teach you how to do that.

You can help the full-time and stake missionaries bring new investigators to church and make them feel comfortable. Let them know that they have a new friend. Strengthen that friendship by inviting them to your home or to Church activities with you. You can support them in obeying the commandments. Such valuable missionary service is not difficult because it can be carried out in the normal routine of your daily life.

There are other ways you may not think of as missionary service. For

example, a young mother can teach each growing son to prepare to be a missionary to preach the gospel and to share his testimony of truth. As mother and father cultivate that thought throughout his growing years, he will be a missionary. That is excellent missionary service. (Richard G. Scott, "Why Every Member a Missionary?" *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 36)

4 NURTURING NEW CONVERTS IS OUR CONTINUING RESPONSIBILITY.

When I served in Brazil, I worked in a wonderful branch filled with the spirit of missionary work. Once a month the Relief Society brought their husbands and went out visiting, inviting people to come to church or to accept a visit from the missionaries or to examine some church literature. When we were teaching a family, we took members with us to each of the discussions following the first one. We had members who were as committed to sharing the gospel as any elder or sister. They talked to people everywhere they went and handed many referrals to us for our teaching.

But of all the superb accomplishments of this branch, one stands out: in eight months I worked there, I never took anyone to church who did not get baptized. The four elders in the city developed an almost clinical attitude about this. We knew that if we could get an investigator to a church meeting, our work was mostly done. The members demonstrated so much love and joy that people found them and the church they loved irresistible. These visitors would come to church wondering and a little nervous, and they would leave rejoicing and looking for a baptismal font.

It is interesting to note that this little branch, on the verge of being closed in September of 1965 became a ward in the first stake in South America in May of 1966. Both the growth and the retention were stunning.

What a blessing it would be if every new member and every visitor could have that kind of feeling in every ward and branch in the church. We ought to say in our hearts about such people, "You may not know much about the gospel, or about the members, but you will soon know that you are loved and that we need you and you need us.

CONCLUSION: President Benson said,

Do you realize that, as a member-missionary, you have a sacred responsibility to share the gospel with friends and family? The Lord needs every member of the Church having the faith and the courage to set a date to have someone prepared to be taught by the missionaries. Would each member of the Church prayerfully consider this sacred challenge?" (*Ensign*, May 1988, p. 84.)

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.