

Get Ready! Get Called! Go!

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To my son Matt who helped me write this book

INTRODUCTION

To all young pre-mission men, undecided young women, and uncertain older couples

Dear Friends:

This is not a "fact" book but a "feeling" book. If you like "facts," then read on anyway.

It'll do you good. And if you like "feelings," then I have a feeling you'll feel good as you read on.

The primary target of this message is for you young men. Sisters and couples, you are a secondary target, so read on and we'll get to you a little later.

You, my young friend, and I are not exactly alike. Some examples of our differences are as follows: You, while in school, may be a more intelligent student than I was; you may be more athletic than I was; you may be more popular than I was; on the other hand, I was probably more handsome than you are.

Our feelings, though tempered by experience and tampered with by our different environments, are still, when reduced to the most heartfelt level, the same.

True, we have learned to handle our feelings in different ways, and we often hide our emotions from others, but deep down we feel basically the same. You may hear a different drum beat than I hear but we both hear the same drum.

The message of this book will be based on the sameness of our feelings rather than on the differences of our appearance or past experiences. On the pages which follow I have

recorded my feelings (which will probably be much like your feelings) about a thrilling word, a word which when heard spans a multitude of our deepest emotions. This word describes an experience which is at first looked forward to, then for two years surrounds our very being and encompasses our total time and talent, and then becomes a treasured and eternal memory. This word is the mighty word mission.

A word can be defined in more than one way. For example, the word house in a factual way might mean a building with doors, windows, a roof, and walls.

On the pages which follow we will not discuss the word mission by describing in any detail what one does on a mission but rather what one feels while on a mission. The two things are as different as the words house and home.

In the first three chapters, titled, "Mission?" "Me?" and "Testimony," I will do as I have in the Introduction and shall speak directly to you young men who are approaching missionary age. Feelings about the decision, self-worth, and testimony are discussed.

Chapter four, titled "The Converts," is also addressed to you and will give you the glorious flavor of what it will mean to help in the conversion of a family. Such feelings need to be known as one considers a future mission.

In chapters five and six we leave you, the young man, and focus on the sisters and the couples.

The mission president is the central figure in chapter seven. You'll want to know something about his role and feelings as you plan for your mission.

Then, in the last chapter, "Coming Home," we will focus on you again. But this time it will be a "future" you. You need to know what can be down the road as you consider which path to follow.

And, finally, in the Appendix is a series of newsletters written to missionaries. These will be of interest to you both before and during your mission.

I now invite you to let your feelings be companion to my feelings. (You can even be senior companion if you want.) And let's you and I go forth in our hearts on a mission.

1 Mission?

First, if you haven't read the Introduction, go back and do so. Modesty compels me to say that it's one of the best parts of the book.

I recall many vivid memories of my youthful feelings about someday serving or not serving a mission. My mind flashes back to my senior year at dear old American Fork High School. I can hear again the words of a respected teacher who asked, "George, are you going on a mission?" And my sharp and definite answer, "No, I'm not going on a mission."

Little did I know that just a few years later my bishop would ask, "George, would you accept a call to serve a mission?" And my quick, definite, and emotional answer would be, "Bishop, I'd give my right arm to go."

The decision each of you young men in the Church must make as to whether or not to go on a mission is among the two or three most important decisions of your life. It's a pressurized decision, because in most cases your parents and Church leaders encourage you to go. If you have a girl friend, she may or may not encourage you to go, depending upon the spiritual barometer of her soul. But if she is truly "the right one," she too will say, "Go." She may cry while she says it, but she will still say it. Your friends, if they are active in spiritual matters, will also encourage you to go.

But, on the other hand, you may personally feel that you don't want to go. You might feel that you could never knock on doors, speak on street corners, teach gospel discussions, and in general come face to face with the public. You may feel that your goals and opportunities cannot be abandoned for as long as two years. You might be of the heartfelt opinion that no one has ever been so in love as you and she are. "And perhaps," you say to yourself, "she won't wait. And if I ever lose her I could not go on living."

You might feel that you could never learn the missionary discussions, the scriptures, and especially another language. You may not be a good reader or a good student. You might not consider yourself to be the missionary type. And to yourself you say, "The one thing I don't want to be is a returned missionary." And last of all, you may not have a spiritual conviction that you should go because you don't really have that which is described as a testimony.

Yes, for some young men there are many emotional factors which can be, and so often are, a vital part of the decision about a mission. For some the decision is easy. You may be one who has saved money for, studied for, dreamed of, planned on, and longed for the time when you would be of the age to go. There are many who knew in their boyhood that the Church was true and they have known this throughout all of their years. It is a blessing to be one of these. If you are, there is little likelihood that any influence could keep you from your mission.

But there are those, and you may be one, who have never had a deep conviction of the truth. You may have believed while a child, but through the years you have come to doubt or at least to not really know. For you the decision could be a struggle.

I mention all of these things because to me they are very real. I recall my own feelings. I was the youngest of nine children. Two of my five brothers went on missions and three didn't. My mother was actively involved in Church programs and my father wasn't. So far as allegiance to the Church was concerned, the family was divided down the middle. And I was likewise divided.

Part of me said go and part of me said no. And the part that said no was dominant in my senior year of high school. There were reasons for that. In high school I wanted to be tough. I don't mean get-in-fights kind of tough. I considered that dangerous. But I mean the kind of tough where sentimental movies and stories were to be laughed off rather than cried about. Regular church attendance was desirable but hard to explain to those who felt such things were a bit sissified.

I had an intense desire to be one of the boys -- to dress the way tough guys dressed, to comb my hair in the lastest duck tail style, and to have that tough kind of attitude. And returned missionaries didn't meet all of these standards. Don't get me wrong. I wasn't a bad guy; it was just that I wasn't a good guy. Yet in my heart I really did want to be a good guy. In other words, I was confused.

That's why when I was a senior in high school I responded as I did to my teacher. As I said before, he asked, "George, are you going on a mission?" And I replied, "No, I'm not going on a mission."

He then said, "Your brother just got back."

I replied with a little hostility in my tone: "That's my brother, that's not me. He lives his life and I live mine."

He said: "You don't have to get upset. I was just wondering."

I knew then, as you might know now, that it sometimes seems that people are sort of meddling in your personal affairs when they ask about your mission intentions. Yet in my day there was much less pressure to go than there is today. Then only a small percentage of the young men did go. So the peer group pressure of going was not great. There was not then any prophetic statement that every worthy young man should go on a mission. But I still felt pressure because in my heart I felt that I should go. And that is the greatest pressure of all.

Time changes many things. The ages of eighteen, nineteen and even twenty are unusual years. Life begins to look different than it did at fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen. Being out of high school and wondering about the future places a young man on different ground. Attitudes change and often he begins to think less about "How can I please my friends?" and more about "How do I fit in and how can I help others?"

I did some changing in those late-teen years. I still wanted to be tough but I also wanted to be religious. I didn't yet want to be deeply religious, but I did want to be good and to do good.

I was working my way through college in a job which only allowed me to attend sacrament meeting every other week. When I'd arrive at church, my bishop would greet me warmly and ask me to give the closing prayer. After a few weeks of this, I decided that I must be the only one who could give a closing prayer, because it seemed like each time I came I'd be asked to give it. I'd sit in the congregation until the last verse of the closing song, then I'd head for the pulpit. I'd arrive just as the last word was sung. I'd close my eyes (and that helped because I was deeply self-conscious and didn't feel secure with so many people watching me). Then I'd begin to speak. I would experience a closeness to the Lord as I spoke the words which expressed the feelings of my heart. Giving those prayers was a spiritual experience for me. If it hadn't been for those opportunities given to me by a loving bishop, I don't believe I would have ever known the thrill of a mission.

Yet even at that time in my life I didn't want to go. I really feared going. I wondered: "How could I ever do it? I can't even convince a girl to go out with me, how could I ever convince anyone to join the Church?"

Insecurity was my greatest roadblock. That, plus I didn't think I could stand not seeing my mom for two long years.

Two years! That seemed as if it would be forever. And besides, I didn't even know for sure the Church was true. I had had no great spiritual experience nor had I ever sought any. There was also still the desire to be tough and about all that meant now was to not be too religious. And a mission seemed too religious.

At college I began to gain a little more self-confidence. I found I could make people laugh. I worked on developing my sense of humor. I began to realize that being funny was almost as good as being tough. I was also learning to be an artist.

Returned missionaries were plentiful at college. Some of them were funny, some were real ladies' men. I started thinking that they weren't so bad after all. I heard one speak at a fireside. He was quite handsome. The girls laughed at his jokes and looked at him in awe. He nearly cried as he expressed his spiritual conviction about the Church. As I listened, I almost felt jealous. I guess we are always a bit jealous of someone when we wish we were like them.

About that time Elder Matthew Cowley of the Quorum of the Twelve spoke at a devotional at BYU. Listening to his experiences in New Zealand made me laugh. Then he'd say things that made me feel like crying. Because I was too tough, I wasn't going to cry. But I couldn't help it; I cried. When he finished, I surrendered. I had an intense desire to be religious.

It was then that I learned the great secret -- when you become religious you don't have to quit being tough. I believe I'm a living example of that because I'm religious and I'm really tough. As a matter of fact, I don't believe you can be religious without being tough. You have to be tough to be religious. And the best catalyst to blend the two is a good wholesome sense of humor.

Not long thereafter I received the Melchizedek Priesthood and was ordained to the office of elder. That did something to me. It gave me self-respect. It caused me to begin to like myself and to be grateful that I was me.

But through all of this I still did not have a testimony. I was thrilled to be an elder and to serve the Lord, but I had received no spiritual witness that the Church was true.

Then came the phone call: "George, this is Bishop Grant. Could you come to my house? I need to talk to you." Fifteen minutes later came the most glorious of all queries, "George, would you accept a call to serve a mission?"

With all my heart I responded, "Bishop, I would give my right arm to go."

The paper work began and with it those glorious days of waiting for the unknown place, and the unimaginable adventure which is encompassed in the word mission.

I realize that the road I have just described which led me to my mission isn't exactly like the road which you now tread. Here is an example of another road. I recall a fellow in a class which I taught at BYU. He was a young spiritual giant. I would call upon him to respond in class and his answers were filled with both substance and conviction.

He always sat close to a beautiful young girl who seemed to adore him. Unbeknown to me, they were planning marriage within the year.

I was somewhat shocked when I learned that he had not yet served a mission. He seemed to have the maturity and insight of someone who had so served. I also learned that he was a freshman. I had thought him to be older.

I became enthusiastic about his future and, not knowing about his matrimonial plans, I inquired as to when he would be leaving for his mission.

His quick and seemingly well-rehearsed answer was: "Oh, I'm not going. I feel that isn't a necessary part of my life at this time." He added that later in life he and she would serve a mission together.

I learned that much parental pressure had been exerted to get him to change his mind. But so far this pressure seemed to only drive him deeper into his determination not to go.

Friends and Church leaders also endlessly suggested that he go. But he would not budge. His girl friend had learned of his determination not to go and she, knowing of his goodness, decided that she would abandon her own desire for him to serve and would go along with his wishes.

I realized the pressure he had already faced and withstood. I was determined not to add my voice to that seemingly futile force. But I could not help saying to him, "There is something I'll never know and I'll wonder about it for a long time."

He asked, "What's that?"

I replied, "I keep wondering if you would have been as great a missionary as I think you could be."

He smiled and asked, "What do you mean?"

I said: "I keep remembering when I was mission president. I can just see me waiting at the airport. The plane lands and you walk down the ramp toward me." I paused, looked deep into his eyes, and added: "I used to pray long prayers that the Lord would send me missionaries such as you. Oh! my friend you would have been a great one. But anyway it doesn't matter because you aren't going."

"Why would I have been a great one?" he asked, seeming to fish for a compliment.

I was more than willing to sincerely take the bait and I responded: "You would have been a great one because of the way you walk and talk and smile. The way leadership is part of your very bearing. Your knowledge, your smile, your love. What I could do as a mission president if I had you!" I then felt myself near tears as I concluded by shaking my head and exclaiming, "What a waste!"

He had no answer. I sensed he was pained, so I continued: "I don't want to add to your pressures. God bless you in your plans." I had no desire to manipulate him but I couldn't be anything less than sincere, and that is why I had said what I did.

A few days later he and his girl friend were in my office. He spoke: "I just can't go. We have our marriage planned." He paused and looked at her. Tears came into her eyes as he said: "What do you think? What if I went? Would you wait?"

She cried openly and could not speak for a time. Then amidst her tears she said, "If you go, I'll wait."

"But do you want me to go?"

"I want you to go if you want to. But I wish so much that you would want to."

They left, having made no firm decision. A day later they returned. He asked, "If I went, do you feel it would be to a Spanishspeaking mission?" I answered as best I could. But there was still no decision.

A week later they entered my office with radiant smiles and he announced: "My papers are in. I hope it's Spanish, but wherever it is will be all right." A few weeks later he

walked down an airline ramp to meet a mission president who had been praying for someone like him. I think that she will wait, don't you? Some do, you know.

I've told you my pre-mission story and that of my student friend. I'd love to hear your story. After all, your story is the only one that really matters. I'm praying for you. You'd be a great one because you are you.

2 Me?

The jetliner lands and taxis to the concourse. The door opens and out come the passengers. Almost three-fourths of the travelers are out now, but still the missionaries aren't in sight.

Suddenly the mission secretary shouts, "There they come," as four of them head down the ramp together. One more is close behind. Then come ten more passengers. Another two young Elders follow them. Finally, after all others are out, a count is taken. There is a feeling that one Elder must have missed the plane. But then a few seconds later he appears in the doorway of the airplane and hurries along to catch up.

So all eight of the tall, short, thin, husky group have officially arrived in the mission field. The president stands waiting to greet his new arrivals. He shakes hands with each one and greets each by name. He's memorized the names and the faces by using the photos which they mailed to him some days before.

The first Elder to greet the president has hurried ahead so that he could be the first. He is determined to get off to a good start. He waited a long time for his mission and now that it's finally here he wants to be first in everything. He left no girl behind because he felt that would not be good for him as a missionary. He's not too tall and is slightly built. He wasn't on any school teams, but he loves sports. He was not a student body officer, but he took part in school plays.

The second Elder to be greeted is six feet four inches tall and is very slight of frame. He comes from a farm in northern Utah. He doesn't say anything to the president, but grins widely and after shaking hands quickly stands aside to let others shake hands. He didn't

participate in athletics because he had to get home from school each night to help with the work on the dairy farm. He hasn't slept in past 5:00 a.m. in the last seven years. The third Elder is limping as he approaches. He was injured in an auto accident at age fourteen. He is rather shy. As he shakes hands, he looks away from the president's eyes. The fourth Elder to be greeted says with exuberance: "Well, President, here I am. I hope you haven't baptized everybody out here yet because I need at least a thousand converts to meet my goal."

The president responds, "Oh, we've got a thousand waiting for you."

The Elder, a former guitar player in a dance group and also a radio disc jockey, replies, "But you must understand, President, that it will take me a week or so to do that." Everyone laughs.

The fifth Elder is short and husky. The president says, "And you must be the national high school wrestling champion." The Elder seems embarrassed and replies, "Yeah, I guess so."

The sixth Elder is quite small. He has been sick on the airplane and still looks a bit shaky. He has been a poor student and isn't able to read very well. As of late he's found the world of girls. He has left some twelve girl friends behind.

The seventh Elder is about six feet tall. He has blond hair. He is a national merit scholar. He greets the president warmly and says: "Brother Simmons says he knows you. He told me to tell you hello."

"Oh, yes," says the president, "how is Jim?"

"He's fine," replies the Elder. "He told me I was coming to the best president in the world."

The eighth Elder says: "I'm sorry I was a little late, but I went back to get the bag of peanuts they gave me. I asked the stewardess if she could help me find them. She wanted to know who we all were. I gave her a Book of Mormon. She was really cute. I bet she'll join the Church."

The missionaries, the president, the mission secretary and the two assistants walk to the baggage claim area. Five of the new arrivals are talking to the mission secretary. One says: "We were talking on the way out here and we were wondering when the mission

actually starts. Did it start when we went into the missionary training center or does it start after we arrive here?"

Another Elder says, "It starts when we go in the missionary training center, doesn't it?"

Another said: "It starts today. We got here today so that's when it starts."

The secretary speaks: "Okay, I'll settle this for you. Everybody look at your watches."

The secretary lifts his right hand as he looks at the second hand on his watch. When it has swept its way up to twelve, he brings his right hand down. As he does, he says with enthusiasm: "Your mission starts now. Go!"

The new Elders look at him in amazement. The assistants laugh and the luggage arrives.

So, eight new Elders have just started their missions. They all started at "go." What will their stories be? Will each be successful? What background does it take to qualify one to be a good missionary?

Will the enthusiasm of the first Elder who wants to be first cause him to be first?

Will the early-rising, hard-working, silently smiling farm boy lead the mission in hours worked?

Will the Elder with a physical impairment be able to keep up with the rigorous pace of missionary work?

Will the sense of humor of the thousand-a-week missionary get in the way of the serious spirituality needed by a missionary?

Will the dedication of the national champion wrestler transfer over into the discipline needed to be a truly great missionary?

Will the small Elder with a nervous stomach and a reading problem be able to take the pressure of learning the discussions?

Will the merit scholar be able to use his intellectual gifts to engage in successful Bible bashes with the Bible-studying Baptist minister?

Will the Elder who forgot his peanuts be able to take care of the many details of missionary work which are even more important than peanuts?

If you were a betting man, which of these eight Elders would you put your money on?

Which one will be the most successful?

Don't be too quick to judge. We haven't got enough evidence. Someday the mission secretary will be able to say to these eight: "Your full-time mission ends now! Go home!" And then we'll know which of the eight had what it takes to be successful.

I learned as a mission president that it was difficult to tell when missionaries arrived just which ones would really blossom into fullblown missionaries.

I've always sort of worshipped athletes. A good athlete should make a good missionary. But some struggle because the crowd isn't there to play to. And if they have come to feel that all else revolves around them, they sputter as missionaries. But if they are team players who have attributed their success to the Lord, they are on the threshold of greatness.

The hard-working farmer has the main ingredient. He'll do well if he can couple the Spirit with his work.

Student body leaders have the personality to influence people. If they are sincere and willing to follow as well as lead, they can do well.

But what of those who have not led the world, or the town, or the ward, or the family in anything? Those who can't speak in Church, who are frightened to teach a class, who don't really like to meet new people or face new challenges. What about those who either dropped out of school or at least wanted to? Those who would sooner work on cars or drive trucks than they would read, write, or do math. Can they succeed?

With all my heart I want to shout that they can be the very backbone of the work. These noble men who struggle, if they become partners with God, can be the truly great ones. A mission is a new beginning. Basically all that one has accomplished is left behind. Of course, talents can't be left behind, but opportunity to develop talents lies before the newly arrived missionary like an open football field where all opposing players have been knocked down. All that is needed is a steady, sincere, two-year romp to the goal line.

The next day my president said, "Elder Durrant, you go to Hull."

I said: "Excuse me, where was that?"

He replied, "Hull -- H-U-L-L."

So, I went to Hull.

I quickly picked up the language there in England and started to give it my all. I had so much to learn. Most of the eight I came out with had been student body leaders. Others in the mission possessed many noteworthy attributes. And there I was in the midst of all of them.

I wasn't a speaker, I wasn't a scholar, I wasn't a great athlete. I didn't really even have a testimony. And most of all I was deeply frightened.

I recall that my first prayer in England occurred when the ship was docking. My prayer was prompted by the thought, "Could I possibly swim home?" I prayed, "Oh, dear Father, just give me the strength to go ashore."

And starting with such a humble beginning and with so little to qualify me for the work, I became the greatest average missionary to ever serve in England.

My mission became my everything.

You might say, "That's your story, but what about me?"

To that I'd reply: "If I were still mission president, I'd like you. The Lord wants you. Your parents would like to get rid of you. Your girl friend would get over you in a while (I'm just kidding on that). So come on. Put your hand into the hand of the Lord. You aren't exactly like any of the eight who arrived earlier in this chapter and you aren't exactly like me. That's why you are so sorely needed. There is something to do that needs a man just like you. Certain people are waiting for their missionary to come. And their missionary isn't perfect, because he is you."

3 Testimony

In the days that followed, the excitement carried me along. I was treated in the special way that people treat those who are soon to leave on missions. Then there was a long series of thrills -- buying a navy blue suit, being photographed for a missionary picture, having a farewell where girls came that I didn't even know cared, shaking hands until my own hand ached from grasping the hands of hundreds (though it seemed like thousands) of well-wishers.

Then the mission home. (When I went on my mission, we went to the mission home in Salt Lake.) I'll always remember the mission home.

"Tomorrow morning we go to the temple," the mission president said. "You all were told to bring your recommends and so we know you did."

Then it hit me. In all my preparation I'd forgotten to get a recommend. I felt sick. I panicked: I'll probably be sent home before I even leave Utah. How could I be so dumb? I don't dare tell the president.

Shortly thereafter the meeting ended. Others headed for the evening meal. I ran toward downtown Salt Lake City. I've never been more upset. I saw a phone booth. I entered. I'd call my bishop. He'd help. He lived in American Fork, some thirty-five miles away, but he worked for the highway patrol. I'd call the highway patrol. In the Yellow Pages I searched for the number. "Oh, no!" There were at least fifteen different numbers. My finger trembled as it moved from one number to the next. I prayed, "Oh, please, let me call the right place." I decided on a number and dialed it. "Highway patrol," a woman's voice answered.

"I ... ah was ... well ... I'm trying to reach Mel Grant."

"Mel Grant," she said in a surprised voice. "How did you know he was here?" I said I didn't know. She said, "He almost never comes here, but he's here now."

A moment later I was speaking to my bishop. (Bishops are good to have.) I told him of my plight. He said, "I'll go right home, get the recommend, get it to the stake president, and then give it to a patrolman who'll rush it to you."

That night in the evening session a patrolman entered the back of the hall. All eyes were fixed upon him as he made his way to the stand and whispered to the mission president. The president then arose, interrupted the speaker, and stated, "This man desires to see Elder Durrant."

I arose, and as I began to walk to the foyer I felt the stare of each one in the room. A moment later the patrolman gave me my glorious ticket. A ticket to the temple, which for me was the beginning of a testimony. That night my prayers were quite intense. It felt good to know that the Lord took care of one young man who needed help so desperately. And he continued to help me.

But after the excitement of going was over, then came the discouragement of being there. After a month or so in Hull I again began to wonder about trying to swim home. A series of events were disturbing and discouraging.

My bike (sold to me by another Elder) wasn't as good as he said. It was extremely difficult to pedal, and the generator wouldn't generate.

The English fog was so thick.

From home I received word that our ward basketball team had made it to the all-Church tournament -- something I'd desired to be part of with all my heart. I couldn't understand how they did it without me. I had been their star!

Word also came that Elder Matthew Cowley, my spiritual hero, had died.

I didn't get any Christmas presents from home.

My landlady, whom I had come to love because she reminded me of my mother, became desperately ill.

I wasn't learning the discussions very fast and had about decided I could never learn so much.

Our investigators weren't too anxious to investigate.

I caught a cold (I only had one cold on my entire mission but it lasted for two years).

Finally, after a month or so it was Christmas day and I cannot ever recall being so depressed. We didn't have Christmas dinner where we lived because of the landlady's illness. And I was too near pneumonia to venture out into the fog to go to a member's house.

Stripped of all the things I had come to associate with Christmas, I was indeed down in the mouth.

I sat looking into the glowing coal embers of a warm fire. Out of the corner of my eye I saw my Bible. Almost subconsciously I reached over and picked it up. Opening it to the book of Matthew, I began to read. My mind gradually shifted away from my troubles and sorrows. I began to focus my thinking on the glorious mission of the Savior. On that Christmas day I walked with him. In my mind I could see him heal the sick, encourage the sinner to repent, criticize the hypocrites, comfort the sorrowful. I saw him walk on the water, and hold the children in his arms. I agonized with him in the garden and watched him die on the cross. I felt a surge of hope as I witnessed him rise from the tomb.

I've never had such a Christmas. I spent it with him.

A few nights later I had a dream about him and about my relationship to him. I don't think I'll ever be the same again because of that dream.

I then knew that he was indeed the Savior of the world. My testimony was firmly forming.

And what I recall from my own experience, I also witnessed many times in the lives of the missionaries with whom I served and others over whom I presided as president.

Let's go back to the eight Elders whom we greeted earlier at the airport. Remember the wrestler? Let's look at him because, although he's a great athlete, he is sort of typical in other ways.

We have driven with the eight Elders from the airport. We are in the mission home.

We've just had dinner and are now in the front room having a rather informal meeting. One by one the president asks each missionary why he came on a mission. One says, "I always wanted to." Another responds, "I'm a convert and I wanted to give others what I have been given."

Finally it is the wrestler's turn. He starts to speak and as he does his eyes focus on the floor just in front of his chair. He stares at that same spot all the while he says: "I don't know why I came. I don't have a testimony or anything like that." He pauses and continues: "I was pretty lucky at wrestling and got all these scholarship offers. I finally went to college. With a few breaks I was able to win the conference in my weight.

"I met this girl in college and I really liked her. We went to the April general conference because she wanted to. We arrived at the Tabernacle at four in the morning and eventually managed to obtain a seat in the balcony.

"The President of the Church was talking about missionary work. He said, 'Every worthy young man ought to go.' We were holding hands and she tightened her grip on me when he said that.

"After the meeting we were sitting on the lawn by the Visitors Center. I had not really planned on a mission. My parents aren't active and they sort of wanted me to keep going to college on my scholarship.

"I asked my girl friend if she felt I ought to go. She replied that she had always wanted to marry a returned missionary. Before I knew what had hit me, I told her I was going."

The Elder now looked up and as he did he said, "President, I don't know why I'm here." Tears caused his eyes to glisten as he said: "I miss her so much. I wish I were home." He didn't speak for a few seconds and the room was filled with perfect silence. Then he drew a deep breath and squared his shoulders and said: "But I'm here and I'm staying. I'll just do my best and see what happens."

He now had the dimension that would make a great wrestler a great missionary. He came without a testimony but he came with a desire. And a righteous desire mixed with mission experiences always results in a testimony. But it is not always easy.

Where one is raised (farm or city, small town or large), what one has done (been prominent or obscure), whether one is handsome or plain, exuberant or quiet makes little difference. Great missionaries are all different kinds of men. But in obedience, positive attitude, love and testimony, and moral cleanliness they are all the same.

These are the things which bring success. Each missionary has an equal chance. It's all a matter of seeking after these things. That's why we couldn't judge the eight missionaries who just arrived in the mission field. Their success depends not upon what they've been, but upon what they are now and, more importantly, upon what they can become.

On a mission one can reach greatness. Especially one like you.

4 The Converts

Scene I

Scene II

It's Wednesday night. We chain our bikes to the utility pole and head toward the house. Inside the house the following is occurring.

Mr. Riggs is speaking. "That was a fine meal. Now for TV. Laying brick all day has about got to me. Could you bring me a cold drink?"

"Sprite?"

"No, not Sprite. You know what I want."

"Oh, by the way, Honey, a couple of young men are coming by in a few minutes."

"Young men? What do they want?"

"To talk about religion, I think."

"Religion! I don't want to talk about religion. I'm tired, and you know I never go to church anyway. If they come, get rid of them."

"But Honey, they are really nice."

"I don't care how nice they are. Get rid of them."

"I'm not going to. If you don't want them to come in, you tell them to leave."

"I'll tell 'em. What are their names?"

"One of them was really handsome, and I think the other one was named Elder Matthews."

"Elder? Are they Mormons?"

"I don't know."

(And about that time), knock, knock, knock.

"I'll get rid of them."

"Hi, Mr. Riggs. Your wife invited us to come by ..."

"Well, I'm uninviting you. I'm tired and not interested."

"All right, but before we go could we just have one more look at the deer head by the fireplace?"

"What for?"

"Well, we were talking about it. Is it a mule deer?"

"No, it's a white tail."

"Could we see it one more time? Back home we don't have those kind."

"Well, I don't know. I'm watching TV."

"We'd only take a minute."

"Well, come in then."

"Wow, that's a beauty! Did you get him with a rifle?"

"Oh, no, we use shotguns here."

"Shotguns? We use rifles back home."

"Rifles? Don't people get shot?"

"Oh yeah, a few."

"Could we see your gun?"

(He gets his shotgun.)

"This is a beauty. Someday you ought to come out home and I'd take you after a mule deer."

He excitedly answers: "I'd love that. I've read about them in Field and Stream magazine."

"While we are here, Mr. Riggs, if you've got a little time, we'd love to just explain why we came."

"Oh, sure. Sit down. Kids, turn off the TV."

"Get away from him, Blacky. Don't get up on his lap."

"That's all right, Mr. Riggs. Elder Matthews loves dogs."

"We'd like to have a word of prayer before we go on."

"Sure, but I'm not really religious."

"That's all right. With your permission I'll say the prayer."

"Kids, be really quiet. The man's going to pray."

(After the prayer I speak again.)

"Now kids, let me teach you a good song. We call this family home evening, Mr. Riggs."

(We play a few games and sing some songs. The family is obviously enjoying it.)

"Well, we've had a good time, haven't we kids? But before we go we'd like to tell you about a prophet."

(We tell him the Joseph Smith story and ask him how he feels about our message.)

"Well, it sounds logical, but like I said, you could never convert me. I haven't been in a church for years."

"We understand. We'd like to leave a copy of the Book of Mormon and have you read a few pages."

"You can leave it. Susan will read it, but I don't even read the Bible."

"You could read a few pages too, Honey," she says to him in a hopeful tone.

His attitude has changed. He likes us.

"Tell me more about those mule deer. Did you ever get one?"

We tell of a hunting venture or two and then I say, "We'll be back in the neighborhood Saturday night; we'll stop by then and see how you are doing."
"Sure. Come back anytime. You use rifles. That's really something."

Scene III

It's Saturday night.

"Come in, Elders."

"Hi, kids. Can you remember how to do eensy weensy spider?"

"Look at this Field and Stream. Is this anywhere near your home? Look at those mountains."

"Did you read the pages?"

"No, I haven't had time. Susan read a little, didn't you?"

I ask with a smile on my face, "Mr. Riggs, how are you ever going to learn anything if you don't read?"

"As I said, you are welcome here but I'm just not much on religion. By the way, a fellow at work was really putting your church down. I told him he didn't know what he was talking about."

"We appreciate that. Tonight after we have a word of prayer we'd like to tell you some more about the Church."

"Sure, go ahead."

(Discuss more about the Book of Mormon.)

"What do you think of what we are telling you?"

"Well, it sounds good."

"Do you feel it's true?"

"I don't know. I guess it could be. What do you think, Susan?"

"I feel the same."

"Could we ask you again to read these pages of the Book of Mormon?"

"Yeah, I could read a little. Hey, my wife made some strawberry pie. Get some pie. Get us each a piece."

Mrs. Riggs starts to get the pie and as she does so she says: "Get down, Blacky. Elder Matthews doesn't want you on his lap while he eats pie."

"Oh, that's all right," I reply. "Elder Matthews really likes dogs."

"We shouldn't really stop to eat. But we'll make a sacrifice this time and stay a few minutes."

"We will see you on Monday night."

Scene IV

(Monday night.)

"I was looking at rifles down to the sporting goods store. They have some nice ones but they cost a pretty penny."

"Did you read the pages?"

"Yeah, I did. It's sort of like the Bible, except I didn't know that Jesus came to people on this continent. It was a beautiful story."

"How did you feel about it?"

"I enjoyed it. I felt sort of religious while I was reading. Susan has read practically all of the book, haven't you, Honey?"

"No, not all. Maybe about half."

"Hey, is your church over on Eastern Parkway? I was riding by there yesterday and I saw some people going in there."

"That's our church, or at least one of them."

"Well, I was just wondering. I'm not going to come over there, but I thought that was the Mormons. That guy down at work keeps after you something fierce. I asked him if he'd ever read the Book of Mormon. He told me no, and he wasn't going to either. I asked him how he was ever going to learn anything if he didn't read."

(We then discuss eternal progression.)

"You know, Elders, I'm starting to feel religious. I didn't ever know all this stuff you've been telling us. The kids have been after me to go to church, but I just couldn't do that."

"Blacky, don't lick his hand."

"That's fine. Elder Matthews likes dogs."

"So that is your church. What time do you meet? I'm just curious."

"Before we go we'd like to pray again with you. Let's kneel down. Mr. Riggs, we'd like you to offer it."

"Me? I've never prayed out loud."

(We tell him what constitutes prayer and teach him how to pray.)

After he finishes, and as we arise from our knees, you say: "That was a great prayer, Mr. Riggs. Kids, if you want to know how to pray, ask your father. He knows how."

Scene V

(Ten days later.)

"How did you like church?"

"The children really liked it. And I suppose I did too. Hey, I was surprised I know the bishop. He and I went to high school together. He works at General Electric. How does he do that and also be the bishop?"

"We were really thrilled to see you walk in. Your kids sure did look happy. We'd been praying that you'd come."

"You prayed that we'd come?"

"We sure did."

"Why?"

"I suppose it's because we have come to love all of you so much and because we know that the Church can make your family happier than you could ever be any other way. This is the Lord's church, Brother Riggs."

"I've been reading more in the Book of Mormon. Susan has read the whole thing."

"How do you feel about the Church and all we've told you?"

"You know, it's a funny thing, but I really feel good about it all. I feel that Joseph Smith really did see God and Jesus Christ. I told that guy down at work that. He just shook his head and walked off."

"Mr. Riggs, you know these things are true because the Holy Ghost is testifying to your soul that they are. Right now I can feel the Spirit and I'm sure you can, too."

"I can."

"I feel I should tell you that on the third of next month we are having a baptism. We'd like you and Sister Riggs to prepare to be baptized on that date. Will you be ready?"

"Well, I don't know. I haven't really been religious for so long. Susan, how do you feel?"

"I hope we can. It would be so good for the family. And we all know it's true. The children have said how much they like you Elders and how much they want to go to church again."

"What about it?"

"Well, I don't know. A month ago I wouldn't have even believed I'd feel this way. I suppose we could try."

"We'll count on it. We know the Lord will help you be ready."

"By the way, when this guy at work came back, I told him about the three degrees of glory. He hadn't even heard of that before."

Scene VI

We continue on, "Tithing is 10 percent of one's income."

Mr. Riggs, in a dejected tone: "We could never do that. Money is a problem with us. What with our house payments, our car payments, and other things, we're going in the hole as it is."

Elder Matthews says, "Let's read from Malachi." (We do so.)

Elder Matthews speaks with some emotion: "Mr. Riggs, go ahead and test the Lord and see what happens. He'll bless you if you pay tithing. You can do it. We know that you can."

"It'll be hard. Susan, can we do it? Elders, when you speak, I just feel as if we can do anything."

Scene VII

(The baptism.)

While standing in the water with Mr. Riggs I speak, "John Roy Riggs, having been commissioned of..."

After a glorious family baptism, we stand in a circle and talk. With tearful eyes Brother Riggs speaks: "Elders, thanks. What else can I say? Just thanks."

Members greet the new converts: "Welcome into the Church, Brother and Sister Riggs. Your oldest son was also baptized, and when your other kids are eight years old they will be baptized too."

Sister Riggs, in a voice louder than usual, says so that all can hear: "We love our missionaries. We want our children to grow up to be just like them."

Scene VIII

A week later the Elders and the home teachers call on the Riggs family. "We've brought the home teachers again. They'll be visiting you now as they did the week before your baptism."

Almost in unison the Riggs family asks in concerned tones, "Where's Elder Matthews?" I speak in a forced kind of cheerfulness, "He was transferred."

"Transferred? Why?"

"The president felt he was needed up north."

"But what about us? We can't get along without him." (Tears form in Brother Rigg's eyes.)

I speak up as I place my hand on my new companion's shoulder, "This is Elder Simmons."

"Blacky, get down."

"That's all right, Sister Riggs. Elder Simmons likes dogs."

Scene IX

A little over a year later. A phone call to a college dormitory.

"What are you doing Friday?"

"I've got a test."

"Oh, too bad. I was hoping you could join Sister Riggs and myself and our five kids in the temple. We're being sealed."

"I'll skip the test."

Brother Riggs is overjoyed as he adds: "Good old Elder Matthews will be there too. He's going to bring his wife with him. It will be so good to be together again."

Scene X

The group has just come out of the temple. Brother Riggs says with pride, "Hey, I didn't tell you, Elders, but I'm first counselor in the elders quorum."

Sister Riggs adds: "I'm so proud of him. You'd never believe the change. He treats me like a queen. He's really something."

Brother Riggs looks down and says humbly, "I'm not so much."

"Oh, yes you are, Sweetheart. You're the best man in the world."

I laughingly say, "You mean he's even better than old Elder Matthews and I?"

Sister Riggs smiles and says, "Just a little."

"Elders, Susan and the kids and I talk about you all the time. Without you we'd have missed everything."

"Johnnie here is going to be quite an Elder in eight years. We just hope he'll be like you two. We hope all our children will."

Brother Riggs looks toward the mountains. "Any deer up there do you think? You use rifles?"

I add, "Yeah, rifles."

I look at Brother Riggs. He looks back at me. We both start to laugh. It is either that or cry. It doesn't seem possible to be so happy.

5 Sisters

I can see you in my mind. You are a missionary-age young woman. You are still a free agent with no immediate prospects for marriage and you have a big question, "Should I go?"

I can answer that question for you with ease and with just three short words, "I don't know."

But, of course, there is a better, more definite answer. It's an answer which is sometimes difficult to find, but it is there. To find it will require a lot of prayer, a good deal of counsel with parents, a heart-to-heart talk with priesthood leaders, and some long and thoughtful meditation.

And if the answer comes out yes, fasten your seat belt, grit your teeth and hang on. You are on your way to eighteen months of the hardest, most tiring, most frustrating, most discouraging, most taxing, most growing, most exhilarating, most meaningful of life's "thus-far" experiences.

To devote an entire chapter to Lady Missionaries could be considered unnecessary. After all, when it comes to missionary work, aren't you just like an Elder? Well, as a matter of fact, you are like an Elder and you aren't.

Let's ignore the ways that you are like an Elder and dwell on the ways that you aren't like your male counterpart.

In the first place, you are much prettier than an Elder. I've never seen a picture of a group of missionaries (and I've seen roughly seventeen billion such pictures) that was really a work of art unless there were at least two Lady Missionaries in the frame.

But being pretty isn't the entire story. Let's look beyond beauty and examine the behind-the-scene experiences you will have as a missionary.

Your mission may serve as a magnifying glass for your personal problems. Insecurities prior to a mission can seem larger while you are serving your mission. Lingering little health problems can become almost daily roadblocks to productive work. Weight problems can easily become weightier. Moodiness often becomes almost monstrousness. Lack of organization becomes almost chaos.

On the other hand ... But that's positive. Right now we are being negative. We'll be more hopeful a bit later in the chapter.

Being with a companion twenty-four hours a day is sometimes quite stifling. Sometimes it seems more like a prison than does Fort Leavenworth. The day-after-day-after-day routine of rising early, tracting, teaching, studying, and memorizing can grind you down to nerve and bone.

But don't get discouraged. We have more to say than what we've said.

For example, let's look in on the mission president as he plans a transfer. Before he begins to plan this transfer he has prayed long and fervently. As we join him, he is looking at the big missionary picture board on his wall. On the board we see pictured 180 young Elders, 6 married couples, and 12 Sisters.

The president says to himself: "That does it for the Elders. Now what about the Sisters? Let's see, we have twelve Sisters. Sister West is going home next week. The week after that Sister Smedley and Sister Billings arrive. Who should I put with Sister Hensen when Sister West goes? And who would be good companions for Sisters Smedley and Billings? And where should I put their former companions?

"Let's see, I could put Sister Riggins with Sister Bester. But they were together before. Or I could put Sister Riggins with Sister Brith. But they are both quite new. Sister Dollins and Sister Smith are doing well together and if I divide them, I feel it will hurt Sister Dollins because she is doing better than ever before. So let's see. What about...?"

We must leave the president now. He needs to be able to concentrate on the hardest of all transfers -- the Sisters. The reason such moves are difficult is that the number of Sisters in the mission is not large. With the Elders there are hundreds of alternatives for companionship, but with the Sisters there are only a few.

Therefore, when Sister companionship is difficult, the president is rather limited in the possible transfers he can make. That demands that you and your companions sort out your difficulties together. Although that's the best way, it is also the reason Sister companionships are more difficult than Elder companionships. This is also the reason you are sometimes transferred back to a Sister with whom you have already labored. This may be thrilling to you unless you are going back to a companion whom you didn't really enjoy with all of your heart. On the other hand, you may be rejoicing a Sister with whom you enjoyed a type of harmony that was almost heavenly.

But enough of this negative talk. There is so much good in store for you if you decide to cast your lot as a missionary. Just hearing the titles Sisters or Lady Missionaries brings into my mind a multitude of warm and joyful memories.

Let's go forward in our thinking and look in on you while you serve on your mission. There you are, a Lady Missionary, and by your side is your companion. You are smiling

and you look more radiant than you've ever looked before. You ought to look tired because you've been working harder than you've ever done before. But somehow the work seems to produce a glow in your countenance. Your hair is neat and your makeup perfect. Your dress is modest and not in any way extreme. You may never have won a beauty contest, but right now you'd put Miss America to shame.

You are with a companion who is as energetic as you are. The two of you are among the mission leaders in work and in results. Some Elders are a bit jealous of you and could at times make disparaging remarks. Other Elders are determined to keep up with the Sisters and they begin to increase their labor. The mature Elders (and most of them are) come to deeply respect and admire you and the other Sisters.

You have found that doors closed to Elders are often open to Sisters. The feminine spirit makes for great teachers. And many Sisters are indeed known by the lofty description master teacher. In your own teaching you feel a power that you had never felt before your mission. Tears come to your eyes easily as you discuss sacred things. And so often lately the hearts of your listeners are touched.

You have come to sense more than ever before your own personal worth. Families in the ward to which you are assigned seem to respect you as if you were the source of all knowledge and virtue.

Your personal values have not changed, but you've learned to empathize because you've seen so many families with problems and so much heartbreak in the lives of others. Somehow such things have subdued your soul and caused you to be determined in your own pursuit of a righteous life.

Your appreciation for your parents increases. You can see now that even though they have had problems, they are striving. You love them so deeply that the thought of them warms your heart.

You are hurrying along because you have an appointment. And after that another appointment. When will the work let up so that you can rest? You wonder why you feel so eager when you should be so tired.

A smile crosses your face as you remember that in two more days you will be at zone conference. These glorious meetings are looked forward to more than college junior prom

dances. It will be so good to see Sister Dollins and Sister Braithwait again. You hope the mission president's wife will be with him. She is one of your heroes.

So there you are, a Lady Missionary. What do you think? Do you want to try it?

Speaking of zone conferences -- while serving as mission president I felt that a zone conference without at least one set of Sisters was like a Christmas without snow. You could still get the spirit but not the sparkle. The Elders weren't flirts but it's amazing how much more sentimental, mannerly, loving, and, above all, powerful they become when Sisters' eyes were looking on.

In my opinion the Sisters make a mission experience complete.

Of course, I'm biased toward Lady Missionaries because, you see, I married one.

Statistically, the chances of your marrying an Elder you met in your mission are small.

You need not have any fears in that regard.

The former Sister Burnham and I labored together in England. I arrived there three months before she did. I had picked up the language really fast and was an "old-timer" when she arrived. Come to think of it, I've never figured out how she could get there after I did, go home before I did, and still accomplish so much more than I did.

She has told me many times that the reason Lady Missionaries only stay out eighteen months is that they can do more in that time than an Elder can in two years. But I keep her humble by advising her that, even though she helped more people join the Church than I did, I baptized more people than she did. (I've got to defend myself some way!) Selfishly speaking, I'm deeply grateful that she went on a mission. She learned so much there that has made my life with her blessed. For example, she learned how to get along with companions who weren't perfect (that has been a great help to me). She also learned how to live in a humble apartment, how to live on a very limited budget, how to walk and not complain, and how to run for a bus and not faint. She learned to pray with deep faith that a family she had come to love as her own would join the Church.

She learned about God and came to know him as her Heavenly Father. She came to know Jesus Christ and recognize that he indeed was her Savior. She learned to recognize the promptings of the Holy Ghost and the comfort of such an influence. She learned the power of faith, the hope and cleanliness of repentance, the urgency of baptism. She learned of charity and hope. She learned to pursue goals with all her heart and soul. She

learned to speak and to teach. She learned to be calm in the midst of turmoil. In summary, she learned everything I had always hoped that my wife and the mother of my children would know.

So the decision is yours. It's a tough decision. It would be easy if someone else could decide for you.

I'll close the case by saying that I've never met a Sister who did go who would trade her experience for a fortune in gold. For this I know with a certainty; when the time is right, there is nothing more thrilling than being a missionary.

6 The Couples

Of all aspects of a mission one might wonder what is the single most wonderful thing. I'm tempted to say (and I think I will say it) that the single most wonderful thing actually comes in sets -- those marvelous couples who serve their missions together. They come to the mission two by two. They go forth that way and they return home together. For these reasons these most special missionaries are called the couples.

If you choose to become a missionary couple, you'll come with fear and trembling, wondering if you'll succeed. You'll return home among the greatest of all spiritual heroes and with success that goes beyond even your fondest dreams. At first you will be as strangers in an unfamiliar place, but when you depart for home you'll discover that your mission field is now your second home. You will wonder when you come what it will be like. Will success be yours? As you go home, you'll wonder humbly, "Can these people possibly carry on if we leave them?

How does it all begin? Often there is a lifelong desire. Put into words it goes like this. "Honey, someday when our circumstances are right, I'd love to serve a mission with you." Then when the children are raised, the time seems right. But there is another obstacle. What about the grandchildren? Could you ever leave them? You wouldn't even see them at Christmas. And then there is the house. What would you do with the house? And the garden. You have such a lovely garden. Besides, your health is far from perfect.

But then the bishop calls. "Could you both come in this evening and see me?" You question each other: "Will it be a call to serve in the ward? In the temple? Or will it be...? No, it couldn't be that."

The bishop draws a deep breath. He has prayed about this, but now in this moment his courage almost fails him. He must ask so much of you. He makes small talk, and then: "My dear brother and sister, I have prayed much about this. I would like you to accept a call to serve a full-time mission."

A long silence follows. You look at each other. Your hands reach out and touch. Then in a quiet voice you ask, "When would we leave?"

"Perhaps a month, perhaps two."

"That would be just before Thanksgiving!"

"Honey, what do you think?"

"Well, it will be hard at our age, but I suppose that we've always dreamed that we'd go."

"But what of our health? The heart problem and all?"

"I'll be all right. The Lord will take care of us. And if something does happen, what better thing could we be doing?"

"You people are so dear to all of us here. We will miss you desperately. Your children and the grandchildren will miss you too. Do you want time to consider it?"

"No, no, Bishop! We'll go. We don't need time to think. We'll need a little time to get ready, but we don't need time to think. We've done that all our life."

A sleepless night. Fear and faith at war. Then the idea seems to feel more at home. A family gathering and an announcement.

Time flies by. So much to get ready. So much to do.

The mailman with the call. "It's here, Honey. This is it. Sit down and let's open it. You open it. I can't quit trembling."

"Where does it say?"

"Let's see, it's to..."

"We've never even been close to there. Call the children and tell them."

Conversations with those who have lived there or who have relatives there. Pictures in encyclopedias.

All is ready. The house will be all right. Boxes are filled and stored.

At the farewell. "The chapel seems so full. I didn't know so many people would come."

After the meeting there are many kind words and tears.

Almost everyone tells you the same thing: "We'll miss you because we love you. You'll do great."

Back home after the meeting: "Wasn't that something, Honey. I never dreamed that many people would come. I didn't know they all loved us so much."

But these are the hardest good-byes ever said, (and saying goodbye is always difficult).

When friends part, it's hard. When children leave parents, there are tears. But saying good-bye to the grand-children -- that can't be described. Only something this important could give one the strength to endure such a tender parting.

Off to the missionary training center, more nervous than ever before. Other couples are there. You wonder how friendships could develop in a day that are as dear as those that have been nurtured for a lifetime. But these people, these other couples in the missionary training center, become instant friends because of the common bond of emotion, fears, faith, and love.

7 The President

"Thanks, Elder. I share those same feelings for you."

A few moments later two excited missionaries prepare for the future, a future just set in motion by the most important man in their lives for two years -- the mission president.

It's been some years since I served as a young missionary in England. But even now when I focus my mind upon my mission president, it sends a wonderful sensation through my soul. I can't remember all that he said in his public addresses but I can recall almost every word that he ever spoke to me personally and privately.

Just to have him greet me with his warm smile and a friendly "hello, Elder Durrant" could inspire me to want to be great. To know that he knew my name made me feel special. To hear him say "Elder Durrant, you are doing a fine job" would render me speechless because of my inward joy.

As I said in the introduction, you and I are alike in the feelings of our hearts. And, although I can't imagine your president being as great as mine was, I'm sure that your feelings for your leader will be much the same as mine were for mine.

I've always been a bit fearful of authority figures. Since my earliest recollection my insecurities made me wonder if I could measure up in the eyes of my teachers and leaders. My basketball coach made me so nervous that I couldn't even carry on a reasonable conversation with him (though I had many opportunities to do so because I spent each game sitting right next to him on the bench).

Just the knowledge that he could put me on or leave me off the list of newly chosen team members that hung on the wall in the gym caused me to almost tremble in his presence. And then all season long, knowing that at any moment he might say "George, get your sweat suit off and get in there" made me too nervous to look his way.

Later I felt much the same as I greased a car while my service station boss watched. He too made me nervous because I desperately needed to keep the job and deeply wanted to please him.

I recall that shortly after I had received my call to serve as president, an old high school friend came by to see me. He had seen my picture in the Church News. We visited for a while and as he departed he said: "George, you'll have a hard time for the next three years. You're too soft to be president. Those missionaries will run all over you."

His words worried me. I fully realized that I was not a talented boss. Giving and enforcing orders was not something I felt comfortable doing.

As young missionaries approach their missions, they worry and wonder. So do mission presidents. I've never approached a task with more apprehension. I, of course, prayed often, and as I did I'd think of my mission president.

I would recall that he never forced me to do anything. But, oh, how he loved me, trusted me, respected me, and made me want with all my heart to help him fulfill his desires. As a result, I loved him as I'd never loved anyone before. And now, as I considered my mission, I wanted to govern others as he had governed me.

I once had the thrill of seeing the movie Camelot. The story of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table is fiction, but the principles which it teaches ring with truth. The movie portrayed a glorious kingdom known as Camelot. For a few short years King

Arthur reached heights of government never known before or since. He had the perfect order. All motivation was pure. Unity abounded.

As my mission came nearer, I was determined that with God's help I would be the King Arthur of a spiritual Camelot. I looked upon my mission as an opportunity for a grand and wonderful experiment in trust, respect, and love. I determined that I would strive to govern by establishing and teaching true principles. I would allow each missionary considerable freedom in deciding for himself his conduct as it related to these principles. Punishment for wrong choices would only come after the realization that a trust had been broken and respect had been damaged. Rewards for right choices would bring personal satisfaction and the knowledge that the respect of self and leaders would be enhanced. I knew that Sir Lancelot betrayed King Arthur and thus destroyed Camelot. I decided that I'd risk my Lancelots. If someone took advantage, then that would have to be. Such betrayals might bring isolated cases of heartache but would not be a sufficient reason to abandon the grand and exciting experiment of establishing another "Camelot."

The instruction and inspiration I received at the mission home in Salt Lake City softened my heart and prepared me for a spiritual experience which came near the closing of the mission president's conference. We all stood and began to recite together the fourth section of the Doctrine and Covenants. After speaking a line or two, my soul was completely filled. I could say no more. The Lord spoke to me, assuring me that by using the principles I harbored in my heart, I could succeed as a mission president.

And so it is with all presidents. Each is called because of what he is. And if he couples his strengths with the Spirit of the Lord, he will not fail.

As I arrived in the mission field, I wondered, "Will the missionaries accept me?" I quickly found that they would. I began to learn that missionaries have an intense desire to want to love their president. If he is just an average sort of person, they make him great in their minds.

I'll always remember my arrival in Nashville. Nearly forty Elders were waiting. They were all lined up to meet me. As I passed down the line, each gripped my hand tightly and told me his name. We looked into each other's eyes and souls. In meeting them and discerning that they needed me, I was transformed from a man to a mission president. For the next three years I was different than I'd ever been before. Later in private interviews

many hearts were opened to me. Tears were shed. I was overwhelmed at the trust my missionaries and the Lord had placed in me. The Spirit filled my bosom as I gave them counsel. These missionaries, these handsome noble spirits in the full armor of God, would do well for the knights of my "round table." Being treated and accepted even better than a king, I knew that my spiritual Camelot had officially begun.

I know of no other president who ever desired to be a second King Arthur, but each president I have known has had his own type of dream. And each reaches toward that dream in his own way.

Speaking, teaching, interviewing, transferring, praising, traveling, reorganizing, loving, inspiring, laughing, crying -- all these are part of a president's life as he strives to achieve his dream. And of course each president hopes with all his heart to be inspired. For without the help of the Lord, spiritual dreams can't come true.

It always brought me deep introspection when I'd hear missionaries say, "I know that our president is inspired." Once we were all in a session of zone conference wherein I had invited each missionary to say just what he or she thought. Two Elders were a little disgruntled because of a recent transfer and each said that he didn't know if the president was inspired. Another Elder stood up. I recall he cried at first. Then he was able to speak. He physically trembled as he bore a testimony that brought a spirit into the room which I'll never forget. He said, "I know that the president is inspired." That was the greatest testimony ever borne in my behalf. He spoke with all the strength of his convictions. I was never able to look at that Elder again without thinking about that testimony and the strength it had given me. I felt that what he said was true, for I knew that the Lord was inspiring me each day.

Of transfers I wrote this in my journal:

"It's a great responsibility to transfer the missionaries. I desire with all my heart to put each one where he or she can best serve. I've made several new leaders and have given some their first opportunity to be senior companions. It would be easy if they were all unknown pawns, but each is a delicate personality who desires and deserves special care and consideration. It's a miracle we succeed as well as we do. I pray we will do the right thing."

While making transfers I've heard the voice of the Lord in my mind on many occasions. All the rest of the time I've had complete confidence that the Lord would not let us go astray. Once while I was conducting a meeting I was suddenly impressed to call one of the Elders out of the audience to come up to where I was speaking. I put my arm around him and told him he was the new assistant to the president. He was a little shocked by all this and, quite frankly, so was I. I guess the Lord was the only one who wasn't.

All who sincerely and intensely seek a lofty dream will find many dark days along the way, and so it is with mission presidents. From my daily journal I quote:

"I woke up discouraged. I felt tired physically but I believe it's mostly emotional. This is quite a task, and when I think about the responsibility I sometimes let it eat on me a little. I prayed and felt better. I helped the Elders mow and rake the lawn -- it was good to do that kind of work. I played with the kids. Marilyn cut my hair. She does much better than a barber. She's a remarkable person. Tonight I prayed a long prayer. I'm concerned about mother's health. I felt better after the prayer. I feel more hope tonight."

Whenever things seemed a little bleak, the Lord always had something happen to help.

One night I wrote:

All presidents desire to see many people join the Church, but even more intently they desire to be close and helpful to their beloved missionaries. Among the tasks of the president is the opportunity to interview his missionaries.

In a letter to the missionaries I once expressed myself on the subject of interviews:

"Dear Missionaries:

"Many times my thoughts and my prayers have centered on you--just you. I've always needed to know that those who presided over me cared for me and recognized that I had worth. No one could treat me more cruelly than to let me know that I didn't matter to him. I've tried to relate to you just as I like others to relate to me. But with all my desires and prayers, I know that sometimes it has been difficult for some to relate to me or to talk to me. For that I'm sorry.

"I've always felt that the time to give directive counsel was when I addressed all of you in a group. Such talks have often been centered on what I thought were your feelings, needs, weaknesses, and strengths. Then in the interview with you, I've tried to listen and

perceive how you felt about what I'd said and about your personal status, goals, and desires.

"I recall that most of my interviews were not so much on the work as they were on you. I wanted to hear about your memories and your future dreams, about your parents and everything that you hold dear. When I could communicate on that basis, I felt that I came to know you. Often I could tell that as you left our private meeting that you had been inspired, and very often when you left I too had been inspired."

Reading again that letter brought to my mind some other memories associated with my private talks with individual missionaries. I recall that sometimes as I interviewed a discouraged or unmotivated missionary, I wouldn't know how to help him, and I'd almost give up. Then in my mind I'd envision my own son sitting where the Elder was sitting. I always used my son Warren for this purpose. When I saw the Elder as my son Warren, somehow things changed and I refused to give up; and then I was able to help.

I always tried to be worthy to listen to a missionary's words which reflected a broken heart and a contrite spirit. I've known the great responsibility that comes in being the only one who could open certain necessary doors for him or her which could lead to freedom from sin.

I believe that as mission president my first and foremost duty was to sit with a missionary in a private place and talk. All else seemed secondary to that. Office work and other duties were always essential and pressing, but only at zone conferences each five or six weeks did I feel that I was truly about my Father's business.

Interviewing, teaching, planning, and a multitude of other duties when coupled with family duties keep a mission president quite busy. And under such circumstances time flies by. Soon I had been out a year, then two, and then my time came near its close.

I recall now some of my thoughts as I neared the end of this most glorious experience of being mission president.

My thoughts as my days became numbered are best expressed in a talk which I gave on the occasion of my last meeting with the missionaries. To them I said:

"I've loved you, my missionaries. My love hasn't always been a perfect love and it has never been as intense for you as it has been for my own children. But nonetheless I've loved you deeply.

possible. And with all the blessings you have, you don't have that. Now take another bite of your peanut butter sandwich, throw a rock in the river, and go forth.

"And now, as the final few pages are turned on this grand experience, my vision of Camelot is almost fulfilled. To say I have no regrets would be to speak an untruth. I've erred at times. But such mistakes resulted from lack of judgment and never from lack of desire to do right.

"I'm not a talented boss. But now I know that although bossing can work, there is indeed another way. I've also learned that a missionary, although partly a boy, is mostly a man. And as a man he will respond positively to love, respect, and trust. He will respond in righteousness not because he has to, but because he wants to.

"I make no claims to being the best of mission presidents when compared to others. My fame is personal and lives mainly in my heart. My vision of an almost perfect order was never one in which I felt I could avoid all problems but was instead a vision of an almost perfect way of dealing with problems. I knew things wouldn't be easy. I simply felt that by teaching correct principles, I could allow missionaries freedom to govern themselves. I knew that some, at some time, would take advantage, and such has indeed been the case. But all in all, I have much cause to rejoice and little cause to regret.

"Perhaps even King Arthur's Round Table was not all that he thought it was, but the important thing is that to him it was. And now in my heart I feel I've achieved my spiritual Camelot, and that makes me very, very happy.

"In the movie, King Arthur saw his Camelot ending by its internal destruction. In his parting from the place he loved, he told a young boy:

'Don't let it be forgot, that once there was a spot
For one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot.'

"For me, I'll think about and talk about that brief shining moment of my life when I experienced my spiritual Camelot.

"So now my kingdom here is ending. Its end comes not because of troubled circumstances, but because of time. My time has run out. Soon there will be a new King Arthur and perhaps a more perfect order. I long for the success of the future. But the future here will be without me. And that thought causes me sorrow.

"For me, there are other dreams. But perhaps never again will I stand upon such holy ground with such noble souls as you at my side. This experience has made its mark on my heart. Time will magnify the joy of my memories rather than erase them. The words Kentucky and Tennessee will pass my lips often as time goes by. And as they do my emotions will rise, a smile will cross my face, and in my mind I will be with you again.

"Tennyson, while recounting the fall of Camelot and the fatal wounding of King Arthur, had one of the last great knights, Sir Bedivere, ask:

'Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?

Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?

For now I see the true old times are dead,

When every morning brought a noble chance,

And every chance brought out a noble knight.

Such times have been not since the light that led

The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.

But now the whole Round Table is dissolved

Which was an image of the mighty world;

And I, the last, go forth companionless,

And the days darken round me, and the years,

Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'

And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge:

'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,

And God fulfills himself in many ways,

Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.'

"Yes, indeed, the 'old order changeth, yielding place to new, and God fulfills himself in many ways.'

"And so farewell my mighty men and women -- my dear friends. Because you helped me fulfill my dream, I shall never forget you. May God's choicest blessings be yours forever. All I ask now is your total support for the new order and just a little corner of your mind wherein you can store a slight memory of me."

8 Coming Home

The English have an old saying which states, "Go to sea, son, if for no other reason than the glory of coming home."

Multiply a seaman's homecoming by a thousandfold and you'll catch at least a dim vision of the glory of a returning missionary.

When my son returned home from his mission, we were all at the airport an hour in advance of the scheduled arrival of his plane. As I waited, I found myself unable to carry on a sensible conversation. I had never been so nervous. I call it nervousness, but I'm not sure that is what it was. It was an undescribable inner emotional sensation that only comes a few times in an entire lifetime. And the closer the time of his arrival came, the more the wonderful sensation intensified within my soul.

I found myself wondering: "What will I do? What will I say? How will I act?"

On schedule the plane touched down. Through the glass windows I watched the doorway of the huge jet come open. People began to pour out. My son was not the first to disembark, nor was he among the first ten. I panicked a little as I wondered, "Did he miss the plane?"

I pressed my nose against the glass pane and counted -- out came twenty more passengers. He was still not among them. I almost shouted at my wife: "Are we in the correct place? Is this the right flight?"

Fifty more exited -- then a hundred more and a thousand (at least it seemed that many). Then came a break in the flow of deplaners and no more came. All of us who awaited were speechless. My so-called excitement had now become concern.

A second or two later the pilot came out. Then the ramp was empty again. But wait, another surge of hope. Two more passengers appeared and came down the stairs. And then after another second or two, when I was sure he would not come, he appeared. With bags in hand and looking down to be sure of his step, he walked down the stairs to the ground and then he began to walk the thirty or so yards to the terminal. I watched his every step. I was spellbound at seeing him.

He came through the door. His seven brothers and sisters surrounded him. A broad smile crossed his face. His mother greeted him warmly.

And from my rearward position I came ever closer. Somehow the other family members stood aside and soon I stood face to face with my son. I looked into his eyes. And without any outward reasoning I embraced him and held him close to me, and I cried.

I had wondered what I'd do and now I knew. The only way to properly express all of my feelings was to throw aside all words and just hold him close and cry with joy. We had walked nearly to the baggage claim before I could speak any coherent sentences.

I've never been involved in anything so thrilling as the return of my missionary son. And so, as a spokesman for all fathers and all mothers, I say to you, "Go on a mission, son, for a million reasons, among which is the glory of coming home."

Some chapters back I told of a newly arrived missionary who asked, "When does our mission begin?" On that occasion the mission secretary held his hand up above his head and looked at his watch. When the second hand swept to twelve, he dropped his hand and said, "Your mission begins now - Go!"

The newly arrived missionary is often convinced that two years will last forever. He reasons to himself, "The world will come to an end before my mission does." Inwardly he sometimes thinks: "Oh, if I could just rip the pages off the calendar and go home now. What a hero I would be! All would shout, 'There he is.'" Just the thought of going home is almost more than his heart can endure.

But two years do go by, and the 730-day absence is not as long as it looked at the beginning.

APPENDIX

Newsletters to the Missionaries

At least once each month, and sometimes more often, I would write a message to all of the missionaries. We called such messages Newsletters. Thirteen of these messages are here included.