

Episode 1

Stories from General Relief Society Meetings

MISSIONARY WORK

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NARRATOR: From the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah. Welcome to the Mormon Channel. This is Stories from the General Relief Society Meetings on the topic of missionary work. In the missionary guide, *Preach My Gospel*, the First Presidency writes: “The Lord will reward and richly bless you as you humbly and prayerfully serve. More happiness awaits you than you have ever experienced as you labor among His children.” That message applies to every member of the Church, not just full-time missionaries. In the 2005 General Relief Society Meeting, Sister Anne C. Pingree tells us the joy she felt while serving as a missionary.

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(Sister Anne C. Pingree, General Relief Society Meeting, October 2005)

I bear witness, my beloved sisters, that in order to truly be an instrument in the hands of God, in order to fully have that blessing bestowed upon us in "the day of this life" in which we "perform [our] labors," we *must*, as Elder Maxwell says, "finally submit ourselves" to the Lord.

The refining process in my life that led to my testimony of this principle began unexpectedly when in my mid-30s, I received my patriarchal blessing. I had fasted and prayed in preparation, wondering in my heart, "What does the Lord want *me* to do?" Full of happy anticipation and with our four young children in tow, my husband and I went to the elderly patriarch's home. The blessing he gave me emphasized missionary work—over and over again.

I hate to admit it, but I was disappointed and troubled. At that point in my life, I had barely read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover. Without question, I was unprepared to serve a mission. So I put my patriarchal blessing in a drawer. I did, however, begin a serious regimen of scripture study each day as I focused on rearing my growing family.

The years passed, and my husband and I concentrated on preparing our children to serve missions. In sending our sons to many lands, I honestly believed I had fulfilled *my* missionary duty.

Then my husband was called to be a mission president in an unsettled, chaotic country in the developing world. It was 10,000 miles from home and light-years away from the culture and communication I knew. But, in the instant of my call as a full-time missionary, I felt a little like Alma and the sons of Mosiah—that I was called to be an "[instrument] in the hands of God to bring about this great work." I also felt something I am not sure they did—overwhelming fear!

Over subsequent days I pulled out my patriarchal blessing and read it again and again, searching for deeper understanding. Even knowing I was going to live out a promise I had received from a patriarch decades earlier did not alleviate my concerns. Could I leave my married and unmarried children and my aging father and mother-in-law behind? Would I know the right things to do and say? What would my husband and I eat? Would I be *safe* in a country that was politically unstable and dangerous? I felt inadequate on every level.

In my quest for peace, I redoubled my efforts to attend the temple. I pondered the meaning of my covenants in a way I had never done before. For me, at this defining crossroads in my life, my temple covenants served as a foundation and catalyst. Yes, I feared, but I realized I had *chosen* to make personal, binding, sacred commitments I meant to keep. When all was said and done, this wasn't someone else's to perform. This was *my* mission call, and I determined to serve.

Joseph Smith's father pronounced this blessing upon his son's head: "The Lord thy God has called thee by name out of the heavens. Thou hast been called . . . to the great work of the Lord: to do a work in this generation which no other . . . would do as thyself, in all things according to the will of the Lord." The Prophet Joseph was called to his unique part of "the great work of the Lord," and as overwhelmed and unprepared as I felt, I knew I was called to *my* portion of the work, too. This insight was helpful and gave me courage.

In my constant prayers I continued to ask, "Father, how can I do what Thou hast called me to do?" One morning shortly before leaving for our mission field, two friends brought a gift—a small hymnal to take with me. Later, on that same day, the answer to my months of prayerful pleadings came from that hymnal. As I sought solace in a quiet place, these words came clearly into my mind:

*Fear not, I am with thee; oh, be not dismayed,
For I am thy God and will still give thee aid.
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.*

Realizing in a most personal manner that the Lord would be with me and help me was just the beginning. I had much more to learn about *becoming* an instrument in God's hands.

Far from home in a strange land, my husband and I embarked on our service, much as pioneers, with faith in every footstep. We were quite literally alone much of the time—finding our way within a culture we didn't understand—expressed in dozens of languages we could not speak. The sentiment of Sarah Cleveland, one of our early Relief Society leaders in Nauvoo, described our feelings: "We have entered into this work in the name of the Lord. Let us boldly go forward."

My first lesson in the process of becoming an instrument in God's hand had been to search the scriptures, fast, pray, attend the temple, and live faithful to the covenants I had made in the house of the Lord. My second lesson was that in order to "boldly go forward," I needed to rely completely on the Lord and seek earnestly for personal revelation. In order to receive that revelation, I would have to live worthily to have the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost with me.

My last lesson was precisely what Elder Maxwell explained. In even the smallest details of each day, I submitted my will to the Lord's, for I so needed His help, His guidance, and His

protection. As I did, gradually my relationship with my Father in Heaven changed—in profound ways—that continue to bless me and my family.

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NARRATOR: Everyone is needed in this great work. No one should feel like they're not qualified to share the gospel. Doctrine and Covenants section four says, "If [you] have desires to serve...[you] are called to the work." It continues, "Faith, hope, charity and love with an eye single to the glory of God qualify [you] for the work."

In the next story, Sister Virginia U. Jensen illustrates that our actions can be a testimony to the world. This is from the 2000 General Relief Society Meeting.

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(Sister Virginia U. Jensen, General Relief Society Meeting, October 2000)

Let me share an example of how this rippling begins and reverberates when one righteous Latter-day Saint woman acts upon her knowledge that Jesus is the Christ and the gospel has been restored.

In 1841, Dan Jones, a Welsh immigrant, was the captain of one of the smallest registered boats carrying people and freight on the upper Mississippi River. It seems more than coincidence to me that his boat was named the *Ripple*. Among his passengers were members of an obscure "new" church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

During his journeys Dan Jones began to hear criticisms of these "Mormons." Because he had ferried many of them, he had talked with them and observed their behavior. He found them to be good people--kind, honest, and hardworking. The negative comments and writings about these people did not match up with what he had experienced in his dealings with them.

"Through a careful investigation of the accusations," he later wrote, "I perceived clearly that it was impossible for them to be true, either because . . . they overstated the case or . . . contradicted themselves" (quoted in Ronald D. Dennis, "Dan Jones, Welshman," *Ensign*, Apr. 1987, 50).

One significant event in particular propelled Dan Jones from a careful observer to an active investigator of the Church. He wrote this: "Purely by accident, there fell into my hands . . . a letter which [Emma Smith] had written. . . . I shall never forget the feelings which that . . . letter caused me to have. I perceived clearly that not only did [she] believe the New Testament, the same as I--professing the apostolic faith, and rejoicing in the midst of her tribulations at being worthy to suffer all . . . for a testimony of Jesus and the gospel--but also it contained better counsel, more wisdom, and showed a more . . . godly spirit than anything I had ever read!" (*Ensign*, Apr. 1987, 50, 52).

Inspired by Emma's words and example, Dan Jones sought to learn more about this church. In 1843 he was baptized in the Mississippi River and became one of the most influential missionaries in the history of the Church, bringing hundreds of people to the gospel in his native Wales. In a very literal way, Emma Smith's influence continues to ripple through generations. Who can say how many hundreds, even thousands of the descendants of those Dan Jones introduced to the gospel may be listening to this meeting at this very hour?

Each of us can act in ways that can ripple through a life as powerfully as Emma Smith's words did in the heart of Dan Jones. Each of us is just one person, but I remember the circles that one tiny pebble made across the vastness of Jackson Lake. Let us take to heart this scriptural encouragement: "Be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great" (D&C 64:33).

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NARRATOR: Next President Thomas S. Monson tells the story of a missionary couple whose dedication bore much fruit. This is from the 2001 General Relief Society Meeting.

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(President Thomas S. Monson, General Relief Society Meeting, October 2001)

The second example of lives filled with service, with which I shall conclude, is the missionary experience of Juliusz and Dorothy Fussek, who were called to fill an 18-month mission in Poland. Brother Fussek was born in Poland. He spoke the language. He loved the people. Sister Fussek was born in England and knew little of Poland and nothing of its people.

Trusting in the Lord, they embarked on their assignment. The living conditions were primitive, the work lonely, their task immense. A mission had not at that time been fully established in Poland. The assignment given the Fusseks was to prepare the way so that the mission could be expanded and gain permanence, that other missionaries be called to serve, people taught, converts baptized, branches established, and chapels erected.

Did Elder and Sister Fussek despair because of the enormity of their assignment? Not for a moment. They knew their calling was from God, they prayed for His divine help, and they devoted themselves wholeheartedly to their work. They remained in Poland not 18 months, but rather served for five years. All of the foregoing objectives were realized. Such came about following an earlier meeting where Elders Russell M. Nelson, Hans B. Ringger, and I, accompanied by Elder Fussek, met with Minister Adam Wopatka of the Polish government, and we heard him say, "Your church is welcome here. You may build your buildings, you may send your missionaries. You are welcome in Poland. This man," pointing to Juliusz Fussek, "has served your church well, as has his wife. You can be grateful for their example and their work."

Like the Fusseks, let us do what we should do in the work of the Lord. Then we can, with Juliusz and Dorothy Fussek, echo the Psalm: "My help cometh from the Lord."

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NARRATOR: The best part about being involved in the Lord's work is that God is always your partner. With a little faith, the Lord will create opportunities for you to share the gospel. In the 2004 General Relief Society Meeting, President Monson shares a personal experience of how the Lord provided a way for him to spread the gospel.

[END MUSIC]

(President Thomas S. Monson, General Relief Society Meeting, October 2004)

Some years ago, while visiting the members and missionaries in Australia, I witnessed a sublime example depicting how a treasury of testimony can bless and sanctify a home. The mission president, Horace D. Ensign, and I were traveling by plane the long distance from Sydney to Darwin, where I was to break ground for our first chapel in that city. En route we had a scheduled fueling stop at a remote mining community named Mt. Isa. As we entered the small airport, a woman and her two young children approached. She said, "I am Judith Louden, a member of the Church, and these are my children. We thought you might be on this flight, so we have come to visit with you during your brief stopover." She explained that her husband was not a member of the Church and that she and the children were indeed the only members in the entire area. We shared experiences and bore testimony.

Time passed. As we prepared to reboard, Sister Louden looked so forlorn, so alone. She pleaded, "You can't go yet; I have so missed the Church." Suddenly, over the loudspeaker there was announced a 30-minute mechanical delay of our flight. Sister Louden whispered, "My prayer has been answered." She then asked how she might influence her husband to show an interest in the gospel. We counseled her to include him in their home Primary lesson each week and be to him a living testimony of the gospel. I mentioned we would send to her a subscription to the *Children's Friend* and additional helps for her family teaching. We urged that she never give up on her husband.

We departed Mt. Isa, a city to which I have never returned. I shall, however, always hold dear in memory that sweet mother and those precious children extending a tear-filled expression and a fond wave of gratitude and good-bye.

Several years later, while speaking at a priesthood leadership meeting in Brisbane, Australia, I emphasized the significance of gospel scholarship in the home and the importance of living the gospel and being examples of the truth. I shared with the men assembled the account of Sister Louden and the impact her faith and determination had had on me. As I concluded, I said, "I suppose I'll never know if Sister Louden's husband ever joined the Church, but he couldn't have found a better model to follow than his wife."

One of the leaders raised his hand, then stood and declared, "Brother Monson, I am Richard Louden. The woman of whom you speak is my wife. The children [his voice quavered] are our children. We are a forever family now, thanks in part to the persistence and the patience of my

dear wife. She did it all." Not a word was spoken. The silence was broken only by sniffles and marked by the sight of tears.

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NARRATOR: It's hard when those we love most choose to not live the gospel. Therefore some of the greatest opportunities for sharing the gospel may come within our own families. In the 1997 General Relief Society Meeting, Sister Mary Ellen W. Smoot tells about a sister who labored diligently to help her husband join the Church.

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(Sister Mary Ellen W. Smoot, General Relief Society Meeting, October 1997)

May I read you a letter that came to me just a few weeks ago:

"I am just writing to say I am thankful for my Father in Heaven. I am thankful to Him for the Relief Society organization. This is why: I have been trying to repent and let the Lord guide me but still felt as if a certain desire deep down in my heart was never going to be fulfilled; no matter how hard I tried in my own life, *I couldn't control circumstances or other people*. I believed that the Savior would understand and help provide for these unmet needs if I could just lean on Him. Then I came across the words of President Boyd K. Packer:

'Your every need shall be fulfilled, now, and in the eternities; every neglect will be erased; every abuse will be corrected. All of this can come to you, and come quickly, when you devote yourself to Relief Society.'"

The letter continues: "Could this be the answer? That perhaps the Savior would help me, through [service to] others? I am sure there are many disheartened sisters out there. Sisters, did you know this promise? Will you take that leap of faith with me? I'm not sure when the answers will come, but I do believe they will come. Already my prayers are being answered in ways that I never would have guessed; I know He is mindful of me and I pray He will continue to guide me, safely (and happily) to live with Him again. I pray that perhaps these words can give hope to anyone in need of hope."

I would like to illustrate the fulfillment of President Packer's promise in the life of a Relief Society sister in Fredericksburg, Virginia. This sister was faithful. She joined the Church 18 years ago and believed with all of her heart that she could have a family united in the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, her husband was not prepared to make the necessary lifestyle changes. He supported her decision but would not join. She had two sons who were being influenced by the decisions of her husband. In the course of her struggle, a dear sister gave her a tape of a talk by Elder M. Russell Ballard. From that tape she learned that faith and doubt cannot be in the mind at the same time. She firmly grasped onto this hope that the Lord would support her in her righteous desires if she would be faithful. She told no one but set a goal for her husband's baptism and the reactivation of her two sons. New ideas kept coming into her mind as to what

she could do to bring about this great promise. Slowly but surely she began to see progress. Her husband accepted the challenge *to take the discussions again, and her sons felt a new spirit in their home and started reacting positively*. First, both sons became active in the Church again. And finally, her husband was baptized and received the priesthood. Not coincidentally, her husband's baptism was within three weeks of the date which this faithful sister set as her goal to unite her family in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sisters, if you live this counsel, you will be instrumental in the Lord's work as were the great women of biblical times and the pioneer sisters of the Restoration. This will happen to the degree we gain faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and live to do His work while we sojourn upon this earth.

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NARRATOR: Not every woman will have the opportunity to serve a full-time mission. But every woman in the Church is needed to share the gospel, as they influence friends, neighbors, or even family members. As we learned from these stories, sometimes it's just simple testimonies and acts of service that lead people to the gospel.

Thank you for listening to this episode of Stories from the General Relief Society Meetings on the topic of missionary service.

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