

A WEEKLY Letter to Your MISSIONARY



MESSAGES
TO INSPIRE AND STRENGTHEN
ELDERS AND SISTERS

**EASY
EMAILING!**
LETTERS
AVAILABLE
ONLINE

JEFFREY ERICKSON

To Christine—my wife, best friend, eternal companion, and the mother and “trainer” of some of the greatest missionaries I have ever known.

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ISBN 13: 978-1-4621-2028-4

Published by CFI, an imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc.

2373 W. 700 S., Springville, UT 84663

Distributed by Cedar Fort, Inc., www.cedarfort.com

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA ON FILE

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

Introduction

KEY MISSIONARY MOMENTS

Start Strong

Know Who You Are

Pivotal Moments

The Perfect Day

Finish Strong

BEING YOUR BEST

Optimism

Gratitude

Habits

Perfection Pending

CRITICAL MISSIONARY ADVICE

Keep a Record

Distractions

Not of the World

Convenient Commandments

A Little Pride

COMING TO THE SAVIOR

Know the Master

Waiting on the Lord

Your Foundation

BECOMING A BETTER TEACHER

Teacher

The Ammon Model

Trainer

“Be Thou an Example of the Believers”

Impressions from the Holy Ghost

SERVING LIKE THE SAVIOR

A Builder

Corner-carriers

Rescuing

Nourish

FOR TIMES OF TRIAL

Adversity

Hard Things

Bitter Cups

DILIGENCE IS KEY

Digging Deep: The Extra Mile

“Let Us Labor Diligently”

Shortcuts

Time

Wake Up

REMEMBER, YOU ARE NOT ALONE

A God of Mercy

God Is with You

Filled

The Spirit Will Not Fail Us

IT'S ALL ABOUT LOVE

Love the People

Worth of a Soul

Charity Never Fails

Companionships

FINDING STRENGTH BEYOND YOUR OWN

Walls of Stone

“But There Was One”

Iron Rod

The Greatness of Captain Moroni

POWERFUL PRAYER

Consecrate Thy Performance

Missionary Prayer

Pray Always

PROMISED BLESSINGS

Astonished Beyond Measure

Eye of Faith

“I Will Give unto You Success”

About the Author

START STRONG

Dear Elders and Sisters,

One of the fastest races in the world is usually run indoors. The event is the sixty-meter dash, and, among the world's elite, it is usually over in less than seven seconds. This event hasn't been run in the Olympics since 1904, but if you ever get a chance to watch the world's fastest in this event, you will be inspired and impressed. Along with having world-class speed, a precise and fast start is paramount in this event. Slow starts in this sixty-meter race often eliminate even the fastest of runners. In a sixty-meter race, I don't believe that the fastest runner always wins; rather, the one with the *most exceptional start* usually creates the best opportunity for victory.

As a missionary in the MTC, I hope you have a fast start. I hope you are able to hit the ground running: studying, praying, learning, pondering, teaching, and testifying, and doing all of this while being diligent and faithful. You will establish great patterns in the MTC. The next phase of your mission (after the MTC) will be critical: the transition back to the real world with your first real companion. Do everything you can to keep your exceptional habits from the MTC and continue to build upon those meaningful daily practices. In your first area, things will be different. There may not be other missionaries, outside of your companion, to lean on. Your first companion in the field may be wonderful, they may be lazy, they may be hardworking, or they may just do whatever you do. An important attribute that every missionary must develop in order to start fast is courage. Elder Marvin J. Ashton pleaded, "God give us the courage to act now."¹ Missionaries who act in the now will have fast starts.

The first three days of my mission after the MTC were some of the most trying days of my entire mission. My first companion was a great elder, but the missionary who trained him hadn't been extremely motivated. My companion had surrendered some of his original missionary standards, dreams, and ideals. He had wanted to be a great missionary when he entered his first area, but by following his trainer, he had let go of some important personal goals, desires, and habits. I arrived, and he continued to do what he had been trained to do, which was very little. After three days of wasting time, my frustration was close to boiling over when, finally, we had a big companionship inventory, and we established wonderful goals and objectives.

Our new goals required difficult changes and stretching from both of us. It wasn't easy, and we weren't without struggles, but we started working more diligently and successfully. We were soon working hard, teaching numerous lessons, and finding many interested investigators. The work began to blossom in an area where the work had once been slow. We had a wonderful month together after those first few excruciating days. I will be forever grateful to my companion for his willingness to allow our companionship to make adjustments, change our direction, and work hard, as we had been off to a slow start.

I share that experience, not to blame our slothfulness on my companion, but to inform you that you need to be ready for anything in the first area of your mission. On day one, you may be confronted with some shocking bad habits or practices. You need to be willing to boldly and kindly stand and say, "we need to do more and be better." I hope you get an awesome companion, and that they will show you how to be an effective instrument in the hands of a loving God. I hope that you will start teaching, finding, activating, and baptizing from hour one in your first area. I pray that if you get there and all is not well in Zion, that you will help to make Zion (your area and your companionship) prosper again.

I have observed that, like running a sixty-meter dash, one of the keys to a successful mission experience is a fast start. I challenge you to make your first month one of the best months of your mission. President Henry B. Eyring said, "Learning to start early and to be steady are the keys to spiritual preparation."² You will arrive from the MTC full of the spirit of God, the spirit

of enthusiasm, and the faith to see miracles happen right away. Let that powerful spirit motivate you to do great things from the very beginning of your service. No missionary needs a trial month. Missionaries need to hit the pavement running and feel the blessings of faithful service right away. Your first area will seem like a dream later in your mission, so start fast and make the most of it.

Here is one recurring observation from my mission: a missionary's first month in the field frequently dictated how they served the rest of their mission. I observed missionary patterns established in those first few months, for better or worse, that seemed to continue throughout entire missions. I observed great elders and sisters come from the MTC and get shattered by a difficult first companion and never seem to recover throughout their mission. I saw great missionaries with wonderful trainers serve incredible missions. I saw other missionaries, no matter who their companion was, just work hard and have success throughout their entire missions. I saw others who were wonderful missionaries become complacent and go home with much regret.

In the National Hockey League (NHL), the first team to score wins 67 percent of the time.³ In other sports, like soccer and football, the odds of winning increase when a team "starts fast" and scores first. When a missionary is committed to starting his or her mission effectively, there is an increased likelihood of establishing powerful habits and dominant patterns.

As a missionary, you will find that it is critical to start strong in your first area. You will use that strong start as a foundation for the rest of your mission. Elder Marvin J. Ashton said, "How unwise we are to waste our todays when they determine the significance of our tomorrows."⁴ I pray your today will be powerful, so that your tomorrow can be peaceful.

I believe transition points in life are critical adjustment periods. The transition you made from being a teenager, a full-time employee, a high school senior, or a college student to being a missionary in the MTC should have been handled beautifully, and you should have made critical adjustments. If not, start now to become the kind of missionary you want to be and finish strong. Remember that Alma, after numerous negative experiences in Ammonihah, was cast out of the city. He was then visited by an angel and told to go back. His immediate response is inspirational as he "returned speedily" to

Ammonihah (Alma 8:18). Despite a slow start in Ammonihah, he went back and through persistent effort was blessed with success.

As a bishop I noticed a very simple pattern in my ward, with a limited number of exceptions. The members of my ward who came to church the earliest, were in their seats before the meeting started, and who had the “best seats,” were the ones who were the most active, the most involved, and seemed to have the best experiences in church. These members who literally started earlier and faster seemed to be blessed with a much greater Sunday religious experience and seemed to be in better spiritual health. I believe a mission is the same way for those who start earlier, faster, and stronger; they are in better spiritual health.

I am certain that within thirty days of being in your first area, you will have already witnessed the miracle of the Atonement in someone’s life. May you continue to be in good spiritual health and witness the miracle of the Atonement in your life, and may you start early, fast, and strong in His service.

Your friend,

Brother Jeff Erickson

NOTES

1. Marvin J. Ashton, "The Time Is Now," *Ensign*, May 1975.
2. Henry B. Eyring, "Spiritual Preparedness: Start Early and Be Steady," *Ensign*, November 2005.
3. "The value of the first goal," Eric T., *SB Nation*, October 22, 2013, www.sbnation.com/nhl/2013/10/22/4830198.
4. Ashton, "The Time Is Now."

KNOW WHO YOU ARE

Dear Elders and Sisters,

After my mission, when I was a student at BYU, I taught at the MTC. Teaching there was a very rich and rewarding experience, and it kept me in tune with the spirit of my mission. One of the MTC mission presidents while I taught there was Brother Ed Pinegar. He was a great man: full of life and full of the Spirit. One of the things he spoke about frequently was knowing who you are. When he would meet many of the missionaries, he would often say, “Don’t you know who I am? I am Heavenly Father’s boy!” What a great title, and what a great understanding of who he was. I have thought about those words and that title—“Heavenly Father’s boy”—many times. I have concluded that there is immense power in really knowing who we are and who our Heavenly Father is.

When Moses went up into an exceedingly high mountain, he saw God face to face. (See Moses 1:1–2.) He had a life-changing experience as he found out who he was and saw the workmanship of God’s hands. He learned that Christ would be the Savior, and he learned that he was a son of God. Three times the Lord called Moses “my son” (Moses 1:6, 7, 40). The Lord showed Moses the creation of the world and all of the children of men. Following this remarkable experience, “Moses was left unto himself” (Moses 1:9). Satan came to him after Moses’s remarkable experience, “And it came to pass that when Moses had said these words, behold, Satan came tempting him, saying: Moses, son of man, worship me” (Moses 1:12). There is majesty in Moses’s response: “And it came to pass that Moses looked upon Satan and said: Who art thou? For behold, I am a Son of God, in the similitude of his Only Begotten; and where

is thy glory, that I should worship thee?” (Moses 1:13). It was almost as if Moses was saying, “Don’t you know who I am? I am a son of God created in His image; why would you ever try to tempt me?” I love this powerful response. His reply is a reminder to me of the power of being a son or daughter of God.

Moses continued to draw power and strength from his recent experience and knowledge as he said, “Get thee hence, Satan; deceive me not; for God said unto me: Thou art after the similitude of mine Only Begotten” (Moses 1:16). Again, Moses shows his understanding that he is like or similar to the Son of God. Moses is able to draw great strength from knowing who he really is. We, like Moses, are in the similitude of Christ; do we draw power from that knowledge?

We often sing the Primary song, “I am a Child of God.” There are some wonderful insights that are shared in the words of that song. The best part is found in the powerful title. When I sing those treasured words, I can feel what God wants me to know about who I am.

The prophet Nephi said, “I know he [the Lord] loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Nephi 11:17). When we know God loves us, we can draw power and peace from that knowledge. When we know who we really are, we can see that life has a purpose. When we know who we are, we can have strength like Moses to say, “Get thee hence, Satan.” When we know who we are, we are filled with hope, light, optimism, and direction. When we know who we are, we press forward with steadfastness in Christ. When missionaries know who they are, they testify of God and Christ with authenticity.

Years ago, I read about a culture in South America where when someone is found guilty of a crime, he is not punished. Instead, the guilty party is brought in front of all the people, and the people stand around and begin telling good stories about him. They try to get the offender to remember who he really is. They talk about all the good things the person has done in the past. They remind the person of who he has been and what he can be again.

I believe our Heavenly Father is the same way. He wants us to remember where we came from. He wants us to remember our potential. He wants us to

remember our great worth. He wants us to remember that we are His children.
May you remember that you are a child of God, and that He is your Father.

Your friend,

Brother Jeff Erickson

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