

234.1: Missionary Work Past, Present, Future (D&C Gospel Doctrine Lesson 11, Updated)

[“The Field Is White Already to Harvest”](#)

Manual Goal: To help class members resolve to strengthen the kingdom of God through diligent service, particularly by sharing the gospel through [missionary work](#).

EGD Goal: To help class members understand the principles of effective and sustainable missionary work.

Outline

- I. Framing
- II. Discussion of new resources
- III. Engaging Missionary Work
 - a. Why we always think we are right
 - b. Thoughts on conversion (Problem of telling others we are right and they are wrong and trying to bring them over to our side)
 - c. Theology and Missionary work
 - d. First things first (Make sure our beliefs and actions are in aligning with gospel/well-being)
 - e. The field is white... for what?
 - f. Healthy missionary work (inside out, first things first)
- IV. Productive Sunday Schooling
 - a. Discuss what needs to be in place before missionary work can be successful
 - b. Discuss implications of the Jensen and Ballard talks
- V. Conclusion

Framing: Missionary work and priorities

Conversion: working from the inside out (Hyrum, “seek to treasure up the word”)

Sacrifice and Priorities (There are times in our life to sacrifice, even sacrifice significantly. But it should always be a mindful process, and our priorities can justifiably be self (because we can’t take care of anyone else if we aren’t in a good place, a la the plane airbag analogy), family, Church. I didn’t include “God” in there, because God wants what is best for us, our family, and the Church, right?)

Live what is good, what is true. Maximize our well being ourselves. And then let our sharing of those true principles flow naturally as we love and serve unconditionally.

New Resources

Lesson 11: “The Field Is White Already to Harvest”

- [“Joseph Smith’s Support at Home”](#): This article gives context for the revelations that have been canonized as Doctrine and Covenants 4 and 11. I appreciate the emphasis on the struggles and challenges even members of Joseph Smith’s family had to be converted, as well as the links to the Joseph Smith Papers Project.
- [“The Knight and Whitmer Families”](#): This article gives context for the revelations contained in Doctrine and Covenants 12, 14, 15, and 16. Useful historical details, emphasizes the importance of relationships, which is often how conversion happens (social network theory of conversion).
- [“Ezra Thayer: From Skeptic to Believer”](#): This article gives context for the revelation now found in Doctrine and Covenants 33. Good example of a personal conversion story. Mentions my hometown!
- [“I Quit Other Business’: Early Missionaries”](#): This article discusses early efforts by men and women to share the gospel, both informally and as formally called missionaries.

Inspiring and challenging accounts of earliest missionary work. I appreciate the inclusion of women’s stories. This resource taps into (but does not acknowledge) the very complex and challenging topic of sacrifice and priorities. Which comes first, church or family? Sacrifice IS powerful and transformative (it changes us both individually and collectively in unique ways). But do we have the right to make our loved ones sacrifice for our choices? We can’t truly say yes to something unless we can also say no, and I think that the most rewarding sacrifice comes when we give and serve mindfully.

- [“Ministry of Brigham Young: A Faithful Missionary”](#): This two-minute video discusses Brigham Young’s many missions. Adequately produced, nice little feel good clip. Alludes to the years Young and others spent away from their families.

Why we always think we are right

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/05/13/backfire-effect-mcraney/>

David McRaney, “You are Now Less Dumb”

Once something is added to your collection of beliefs, you protect it from harm. You do this instinctively and unconsciously when confronted with attitude-inconsistent information. Just as confirmation bias shields you when you actively seek information, the backfire effect defends you when the information seeks you, when it blindsides you. Coming or going, you stick to your beliefs instead of questioning them. When someone tries to correct you, tries to dilute your misconceptions, it backfires and strengthens those misconceptions instead. Over time, the backfire effect makes you less skeptical of those things that allow you to continue seeing your beliefs and attitudes as true and proper.

https://www.ted.com/talks/kathryn_schulz_on_being_wrong (paradox that we are closest to being right when we realize we are wrong, because we ALWAYS are. Humility.

These social scientists affirm the gospel principles of humility and openness to continuing revelation

Thoughts on conversion (Problem of telling others we are right and they are wrong and trying to bring them over to our side, how conversion works, Hinkley's needs of new converts)

Current Approaches to Missionary Work

- Preach My Gospel material focuses on being genuine, living your religion, being responsive and aware of others' needs, etc.
- Even so, there is room for improvement culturally.
 - Is it a problem that young men who don't go on missions are second class citizens with less dating prospects in some areas?
 - Does the obligation for "every member to be a missionary" at all times cast a shadow on every good thing in the gospel?
 - It is impossible to avoid the reality that if we are conditioned to convert, we are implicitly labeling EVERY OTHER WAY OF BEING as lesser. And that is going to come across in our actions.

How Conversion works

Build on Common Beliefs; here's why

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/05/20/blaise-pascal-pensees-persuasion/>

Pascal came to see that the surest way of defeating the erroneous views of others is not by bombarding the bastion of their self-righteousness but by slipping in through the backdoor of their beliefs.

"People are generally better persuaded by the reasons which they have themselves discovered than by those which have come into the mind of others."

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/04/29/dan-pink-rsa-persuasion/>

Daniel Pink explains how three fundamental human qualities — *attunement* (the ability to take another's point of view), *buoyancy* (remaining resilient in the face of rejection), and *clarity* (helping others make it through the "murk of information") — lie at the heart of persuading, influencing, and moving people

President Hinckley's talk stating that every new convert needs a friend. In addition, the most stable conversions begin with friends as well. Social Network theory—conversion usually follows paths of existing relationships; this is why member referrals are the most effective means of missionary work. I remember being told that ideally, missionaries are called to teach, not called to find. There are also stories of the Church thriving where missionaries were forbidden to enter

<https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1997/10/some-thoughts-on-temples-retention-of-converts-and-missionary-service?lang=eng>

<http://www.thearda.com/rrh/bestpracticescenter/theories/theory9.asp> (Resources on Social Network Theory)

Theology and Missionary Work

Missionary Work and Salvation (Point toward discussion of progression between the kingdoms, preexistence=Celestial Kingdom, this world is a kingdom of glory, but even beyond all that, it is standard LDS teaching that everyone will get a chance to hear the gospel... so why is missionary work right now so urgent?)

The Field is White... for What?

People DO need the gospel/religion. Modern life is out of alignment with our natures. We crave meaning, relationships, purpose, community... The field is white to see, recognize, care for each other.

First things first (Make sure our beliefs and actions are in aligning with gospel/well-being; Sustainable service)

- Living the gospel (Getting ourselves in order. Make sure we are living well in such a way that others want to know why) “Preach always; sometimes open your mouth” Evangelize not just what you believe, but first and foremost what works
- Sustainable Service (if we burn ourselves out we can't help others)

Thanks to Jason:

Handbook 2: 19.1.1

A person must be called of God to serve in the Church (see Articles of Faith 1:5). Leaders seek the guidance of the Spirit in determining whom to call. They consider the worthiness that may be required for the calling. They also consider the member's personal or family circumstances. Each calling should benefit the people who are served, the member, and the member's family. Although service in Church callings requires sacrifice, it should not compromise a member's ability to fulfill family and employment responsibilities (see 17.2.1). Before calling a married person to an assignment that requires a significant time commitment, Church leaders consider the effect of the calling on the marriage and family.

17.2.1

Family Circumstances

When extending callings, scheduling leadership meetings, and planning activities, leaders consider the family circumstances of members. Church service and participation always entail a measure of sacrifice. However, strong families are vital to the Church, and members should not be asked to make excessive family sacrifices to serve or to support programs or activities. One family circumstance to consider is the Church calling(s) held by a member's husband or wife. Individual families should not be overburdened with Church responsibilities. Another circumstance to consider is the overall time demands that members face in supporting their families and taking care of other personal matters. In some areas of the world, members of necessity work two or three jobs. These are legitimate considerations for leaders to weigh in extending callings, scheduling leadership meetings, and planning activities.

Healthy missionary work (inside out, first things first)

- Sincerely care for ourselves and others (the quote “People won’t care how much you know until they know how much you care”)
- Share from gratitude and desire for others to be well, rather than from obligation.

Two quotes:

Elder Jensen, Friendship

There is a particular challenge we face as Latter-day Saints in establishing and maintaining friendships. Because our commitment to marriage, family, and the Church is so strong, we often feel challenged by constraints of time and energy in reaching out in friendship to others beyond that core group... How selfish we can be. How unwilling to be inconvenienced, to give, to bless and be blessed. What kind of parents or neighbors or servants of the Lord Jesus Christ can we be without being a friend? In this information age, is not friendship still the best technology for sharing the truths and way of life we cherish? Is not our reluctance voluntarily to reach out to others in friendship a significant obstacle to helping God accomplish His eternal purposes? ..if we truly want to be tools in the hands of our Heavenly Father in bringing to pass His eternal purposes, we need only to be a friend. Consider the power of each one of us, 10 million strong, of our own free will and choice reaching out to those not yet of our faith in unconditional friendship. We would no longer be accused of offering warm bread and a cold shoulder. Imagine the consequences for good if each active family in the Church offered consistent concern and genuine friendship to a less-active family or a new-member family. The power is in each one of us to be a friend. Old and young, rich and poor, educated and humble, in every language and country, we all have the capacity to be a friend... I know that when we offer ourselves in friendship, we make a most significant contribution to God’s work and to the happiness and progress of His children.

Elder Ballard, The Doctrine of Inclusion

Perceptions and assumptions can be very dangerous and unfair. There are some of our members who may fail to reach out with friendly smiles, warm handshakes, and loving service to all of their neighbors. At the same time, there may be those who move into our neighborhoods who are not of our faith who come with negative preconceptions about the Church and its members. Surely good neighbors should put forth every effort to understand each other and to be kind to one another regardless of religion, nationality, race, or culture.

Occasionally I hear of members offending those of other faiths by overlooking them and leaving them out. This can occur especially in communities where our members are the majority. I have heard about narrow-minded parents who tell children that they cannot play with a particular child in the neighborhood simply because his or her family does not belong to our Church. This kind of behavior is not in keeping with the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. I cannot comprehend why any member of our Church would allow these kinds of things to happen. I have been a member of this Church my entire life. I have been a full-time missionary, twice a bishop, a mission president, a Seventy, and now an Apostle. I have never taught—nor have I ever heard taught—a doctrine of exclusion. I have never heard the members of this Church urged to be anything but loving, kind, tolerant, and benevolent to our friends and neighbors of other faiths.

First, get to know your neighbors. Learn about their families, their work, their views. Get together with them, if they are willing, and do so without being pushy and without any ulterior motives. Friendship should never be offered as a means to an end; it can and should be an end unto itself. I received a letter from a woman who recently moved to Utah, a small part of which I quote: “I must tell you, Elder Ballard, that when I greet my neighbors, or if I wave to

them, they do not acknowledge my greeting. If I pass them while taking my morning or evening walk, my salutation is not returned. Other people of color consistently express similar negative responses to friendly gestures.” If members of the Church are among her neighbors, surely they must know that this should not happen. Let us cultivate meaningful relationships of mutual trust and understanding with people from different backgrounds and beliefs.

Second, I believe it would be good if we eliminated a couple of phrases from our vocabulary: “nonmember” and “non-Mormon.” Such phrases can be demeaning and even belittling. Personally, I don’t consider myself to be a “non-Catholic” or a “non-Jew.” I am a Christian. I am a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. That is how I prefer to be identified—for who and what I am, as opposed to being identified for what I am not. Let us extend that same courtesy to those who live among us. If a collective description is needed, then “neighbors” seems to work well in most cases.

And third, if neighbors become testy or frustrated because of some disagreement with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or with some law we support for moral reasons, please don’t suggest to them—even in a humorous way—that they consider moving someplace else. I cannot comprehend how any member of our Church can even think such a thing! Our pioneer ancestors were driven from place to place by uninformed and intolerant neighbors. They experienced extraordinary hardship and persecution because they thought, acted, and believed differently from others. If our history teaches us nothing else, it should teach us to respect the rights of all people to peacefully coexist with one another.