

The Consecrated Missionary

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My dear presidents and sisters, my heart is full of humility and gratitude as I speak to you this morning. The seminar for new mission presidents is such a unique experience. I don't think it is possible to gather together a group of individuals more faithful and consecrated to the Lord than those who meet during the five days of this seminar.

Most of you have left nearly everything behind—your countries, your homes, your work, and especially those individuals you love the very most—to devote all of your heart, might, mind, and strength to the preaching of the gospel. For the coming two or three years, you will have very little time to think about anything other than the well-being and success of your missionaries and the salvation of the souls who will be under their watchful care. I believe there are few callings in the Church that exceed the level of consecration that you will experience as you fulfill this remarkable time of service.

Valérie and I went through a similar experience several years ago when I received a call to serve as a General Authority of the Church. We experienced the same worries that are associated with such a big change—the leap into the unknown, the pain we felt when we had to say goodbye to our family members, and moments of doubt and

uncertainty as we faced the immensity of the task to which we had been assigned. However, we also found great peace and serenity in knowing that my call was from the Lord Himself and that He would bless us beyond our natural abilities. We felt joy and enthusiasm at the very thought of consecrating ourselves entirely to His work.

We spent a lot of time studying the scriptures, finding in them the inspiration and encouragement we needed in our preparation. One of the passages that touched us was the story of the rich young man. After having knelt down at the Savior's feet, he asked Him this essential question: "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"¹

The Lord's reply should be a topic of reflection for every member of the Church. Jesus began by reminding the young man of the importance of the law of obedience by citing some of the principle commandments. Probably feeling reassured, the young man answered: "Master, all these have I observed from my youth."² Jesus, looking at him with genuine love, simply replied: "One thing thou lackest."³

I have often imagined the shock this statement must have produced in the heart of the young man. If this story were set in our

day, this young man would have been an active member of the Church, striving to live the gospel by obeying the commandments and regularly attending his meetings. Nevertheless, more was required. The young man must have anxiously awaited Jesus's next words to learn what he lacked.

Jesus said to him: "Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come . . . and follow me."⁴ We know that the young man went away in sorrow, unable to give up his worldly possessions.

Like the rich young man, any disciple of Christ can legitimately ponder the questions "Am I obedient and faithful enough? Am I lacking anything?" Our belonging to the Church requires more from us than simply being obedient and faithful members. We must be ready to submit ourselves to even higher laws that will prepare us for exaltation.

What is the exact meaning of the Savior's invitation to this young man, as to all of us, to come and follow Him? The verbs "come" and "follow" are closely related but different. To illustrate the difference, I invite each of you to think back to the time when you were young parents. Imagine that it is a Sunday morning and you are preparing to depart for your Church meetings. You gather your children, but your six-year-old son is missing. As you go through the house, room by room, you finally find him in his bedroom. There he is, lying on the floor, playing with his toys. You stand in the doorway and call out to him, "Son, come! It's time to go to church!" He looks at you and then hesitates. He glances back at all his toys, turns again toward you, then once again looks at his toys—as if he is going through an internal struggle. Finally, he stands, comes toward you, and takes the hand

you have extended to him. You squeeze his hand tightly in yours and say to him, "Thank you—now, follow me," as you lead him out to the car to go to church.

Just as in this little story, the Lord is standing in the doorway. He is reaching His hand toward us and inviting us to come to Him. The action of "coming" requires *sacrifice* on our part. Those who come to Christ, which begins with their baptism, must leave behind many of their "toys." Our toys might be material belongings, such as those possessed by the rich young man. Toys might also be well-anchored habits or passions, or perhaps the honors and praises of the world. Occasionally, those who desire to come to the Lord might be required to distance themselves from friends and close family members.

I remember several years ago when President Thomas S. Monson telephoned me to extend the call to serve in the First Quorum of the Seventy. I can still hear his words: "Brother Caussé, you are called to serve as a Seventy until the age of 70." Valérie and I only had about two and a half seconds to accept the call—a call which turned our entire lives upside down. Most notably, it meant that we would most certainly leave our country for the next 26 years of our lives!

I am not very proud to admit that one of the first thoughts that crossed my mind at that crucial moment was about a rather secondary aspect of my life. I have played the piano since my childhood, and music is one of my passions. When President Monson called me that day, I had only just fulfilled one of my dreams, that of acquiring a grand piano. The piano, with its new, shiny finish, was finally gracing our living room. It was simply magnificent. My heart cried out within me,

“Oh no! What about my piano! What will I do if I cannot take it with me?”

The law of sacrifice requires the willingness to give up the things of the world—even the most precious things if necessary—for the sake of the gospel. We do it with unwavering faith and confidence that these things will be returned to us a hundred fold in the eternities. In *Lectures on Faith* we read: “For a man to lay down his all, his character and reputation, his honor and applause, his good name among men, his houses, his lands, his brothers and sisters, his wife and children, and even his own life also . . . requires more than mere belief or supposition that he is doing the will of God; but actual knowledge, realizing that, when these sufferings are ended, he will enter into eternal rest, and be a partaker of the glory of God.”⁵

I know from personal experience that this promise is real. And we don’t have to wait for the kingdom of heaven to see this promise begin to be fulfilled. Once made, our sacrifices, whether large or small, bring such an inflow of blessings that we are immediately indebted to our Creator.

The second part of the Savior’s invitation is *to follow* Him. While the action of “coming” entails the principle of *sacrifice*, that of “following” requires us to live the principle of *consecration*. In fact, following the Savior implies that we are walking behind Him, placing our footsteps in His. He leads us on the straight and narrow path, which is never an easy or comfortable journey. If necessary, we must be ready and willing to face the same experiences He faced and to overcome the same temptations and trials He overcame. We must strive to pattern our desires, our actions, and our behavior after His perfect example.

The Lord, during His earthly life, showed absolute and unconditional loyalty to the work of the Father. He consecrated everything—His strengths, His talents, His capacities—to accomplish the mission with which He had been entrusted. The law of consecration requires that we too dedicate ourselves to the Lord’s sacred work—that we willingly give our time, talents, strength, and all that we possess toward building the kingdom of God on the earth.

Moreover, consecration requires us to submit our own will to the Lord, which includes our desires and aspirations. As noted by Elder Neal A. Maxwell, submitting our will to the Lord “is really the only uniquely personal thing we have to place on God’s altar.”⁶

Brothers and sisters, for us who desire to follow Jesus Christ, the laws of sacrifice and consecration are critical components of our eternal progression. These laws are included in the highest covenants that prepare us for exaltation. Elder Bruce R. McConkie said: “It is written: ‘He who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory’ (D&C 88:22.). The law of sacrifice is a celestial law; so also is the law of consecration. Thus to gain that celestial reward which we so devoutly desire, we must be *able* to live these two laws.”⁷

The laws of sacrifice and consecration are intimately intertwined. In reality, the first leads to the second. As Elder David A. Bednar explained: “The principle of sacrifice is a lesser law preparation for the principle of consecration. Consecration includes and encompasses sacrifice and much more.”⁸ Consequently, we cannot be content if we limit ourselves to the law of sacrifice. It is only when we reach the stage of consecration

that we receive a fulness of satisfaction and happiness.

I remember shortly after my calling as a General Authority, my wife confided in me that it was out of loyalty and obedience that she had agreed to support me in my new calling. She had made covenants with the Lord, and for her, there was no question about letting Him down. On the other hand, with deep emotion she admitted that even though she had willingly agreed to make this sacrifice, she also felt that she would never be happy again.

The following day, the veil of sadness on her beautiful face had disappeared. I knew that she was once again strong and happy. She told me that rather than allowing herself to be weighed down because of what we would be leaving behind, she had decided to focus on what we would be gaining because of this new experience. She had realized that by consecrating our lives to a noble and marvelous purpose, our family would receive greater happiness and blessings. Her words were prophetic. Our family has never felt so united or blessed as we have since the day we responded to the Lord's call.

Dear presidents and sisters, you are here because you have chosen to devote yourselves completely to the service of the Lord. The principles of sacrifice and consecration have probably never been as real or concrete in your lives as they are at this very moment. I invite you to make these principles a focal point of your ministry during your entire mission—not only for you, but also and especially for all of your missionaries.

When you arrive in your mission, the first thing you will do is meet your missionaries. You certainly will be anxious to get to know

them and discover who they are. I can already promise you that they are wonderful missionaries! But the real question is “Are they consecrated missionaries?” There is not a more essential question than this, for the answer to this question will determine the success of your mission.

The capacity of your missionaries to call upon the powers of heaven—which is the single most important thing any missionary can desire to possess—will depend directly upon their level of personal consecration. In section 121 of the Doctrine and Covenants, we read that “the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.”⁹ They are not given to those whose “hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men.”¹⁰

I would like to tell you about a very dear friend who is an example to me of faith, sacrifice, and consecration. Some 20 years ago he served as a mission president in Africa. At the time of his call, his country of assignment was just coming out of a period of civil war that had forced the Church to evacuate all missionaries serving there. When he and his wife arrived in the mission field, there was not a single missionary in their mission. They had to patiently rebuild the mission and strengthen the units of the Church, city by city, with only the strength of their faith, courage, and devotion to the gospel.

An event that took place later in their mission serves as a wonderful example of the spiritual power the Lord grants to those who consecrate themselves fully to Him. It is an experience that my friend described as “the most difficult but also the most spiritually enriching moment of my entire mission.”

One day, he and his wife found themselves trapped in the middle of a military coup in one of the cities of their mission. They and eight of their missionaries took refuge for several days in a villa located in the city center. Violent combat erupted all around them. The gunfire was intense and nearly uninterrupted.

Unfortunately, after six days their supplies of food and water were exhausted. Finding themselves in a very desperate situation, the president poured out his heart to the Lord, begging Him to help them find a solution. The answer came clearly: they needed to leave their house at once and seek another shelter.

Just as they were leaving, a group of rebel fighters suddenly pulled up in a pickup truck. They were captured and immediately taken to the headquarters of the rebel forces. There, they found themselves surrounded by a group of armed, sinister-looking men. For the most part, these men were members of a militia called “Cobras.” They had brazenly marked their bodies and faces with blood and wore orange bandanas pulled tightly around their foreheads. Their leader, armed with a Kalashnikov automatic rifle, approached the missionaries and began questioning my friend in a very threatening manner.

My friend related: “In spite of the brutality of the situation, I felt a power grow inside of me that enabled me to speak with a firm voice, without being aggressive. I was able to reply clearly to his verbal attacks without fear and without falling apart.”

Suddenly, the tension increased a notch and the soldiers became even more agitated. Someone whispered to my friend: “President, the Cobras just said that they are going to kill all of you.” The mission president explained what happened next: “At that moment, I felt

the Holy Ghost come over me with such power that I was completely overwhelmed by it. Even [the rebel leader] must have felt it because his physical appearance suddenly changed, and, completely unexpectedly, he asked me, ‘Do you have a Bible?’ I replied, ‘Yes, of course.’ Then he asked me to read Psalm 91 from the book of Psalms.”

Brothers and sisters, I’m certain you will all be interested to know that Psalm 91 speaks about the protection the righteous receive from the Lord. For example, we read, beginning in verse 10: “There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.” And then further on we read: “Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.”¹¹

At that point, the rebel leader excused himself for his bad behavior. He set down his machine gun and ordered food to be brought to the missionaries. About 45 minutes later, French soldiers arrived with two armored vehicles to evacuate the president, his wife, and the other missionaries.

My brothers and sisters, this story illustrates an extreme situation, which I assure you has very little chance of occurring during your mission. However, the principle demonstrated applies to all missions. Total consecration to the Lord will enable you and your missionaries to call down the powers of heaven. Therefore, one of your priorities as a mission president will be to work unceasingly to help your missionaries elevate their level of personal consecration.

But how do you know if your missionaries are fully consecrated? What differentiates a

consecrated missionary from a good and honorable missionary? Above all else, consecrated missionaries are valiant in their testimony of the Savior. To paraphrase the teachings of King Benjamin, they remember to retain the Lord's name written in their hearts; they hear and know the voice by which they are called, and also the name by which they shall be called.¹²

Like my mission president friend, consecrated missionaries have no fear of men. They do not fear being rejected or mocked because they have humble faith that the Lord will accompany them and protect them in all situations.

Consecrated missionaries are not content with just conforming to mission rules. They are not servants who must be commanded in all things. They know that "he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant." They work with zeal and do "many things of their own free will"¹³ to accomplish the Lord's work. They are not satisfied with a reasonable effort but work to the very limits of their strength. They understand that success comes after the trial of our faith, often at the last minute, or at the last door, or at the end of a long and exhausting day.¹⁴

When missionaries are fully consecrated, they forget themselves. They "devote all [their] time and attention to serving the Lord, leaving behind all other personal affairs."¹⁵ They do not look back to their former lives. They are not casual or frivolous because their hearts and spirits are entirely turned toward the glory of God and the well-being and salvation of others.

Consecrated missionaries model themselves after the most humble of people, of whom it

is said, "They did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, . . . even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God."¹⁶

As stated in the *Missionary Handbook*, consecrated missionaries strive "to represent the Lord according to the highest standards of obedience and conduct. [They] keep [their] words, thoughts, and actions in harmony with the message of His gospel."¹⁷

Your objective will be to teach and inspire your missionaries to acquire these divine attributes. In doing this, your task will resemble that of the Prophet Joseph Smith when he organized and led Zion's Camp. In 1834, about 200 young volunteers—this is the size of a large mission—were enlisted to come to the aid of the Saints who were being persecuted in Missouri. In spite of the failure of this group to accomplish its initial objective, this long march was an important time of learning and preparation in the restored Church.

Zion's Camp was a sanctifying experience—one of sacrifice, one of consecration—that formed, polished, and refined an entire generation of Church leaders. Sometime later, while speaking of these leaders, the Prophet explained: "[God] could not organize His kingdom . . . unless He took them from a body of men who had offered their lives, and who had made as great a sacrifice as did Abraham."¹⁸

A short time after the Zion's Camp march, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the Quorum of the Seventy were organized. Nine of the Apostles, all seven Presidents of the

Quorum of the Seventy, and the other 63 members who comprised that quorum all had participated in this march to Missouri.

My dear presidents and sisters, as with Zion's Camp, your true success will be measured by what becomes of your missionaries after they complete their missions. Last Sunday Elder Russell M. Nelson taught us: "Every missionary can have at least one convert on a mission: himself or herself! Not just a baptism, not just an attender, not just a name to be remembered—but a rock-solid, true-blue, through-and-through disciple who will be an exemplary member and spouse long after the mission is over."¹⁹

An essential focus of your mission will be to help your missionaries experience a spiritual conversion that will put them on the pathway to salvation and exaltation. Help them to understand, remember, and keep the covenants they made in the temple. Invite them to live according to the higher laws of sacrifice and consecration—those applicable to the celestial kingdom—and they will receive power from on high and feel exquisite joy in their service. They will experience a lasting spiritual transformation and receive blessings far superior to anything they may have sacrificed.

I now share with you this testimony I received from a missionary who was just finishing his

mission in Spain. To quote: "I was reflecting yesterday if I would call the mission a sacrifice. And for everything it seems I might have sacrificed, I feel like I have been given tenfold. If I say I have sacrificed time with my family, then I must realize that I have been rewarded with a family more united and loving than ever. If the mission has been a sacrifice of time, I have been rewarded with knowledge that no university in the world could have taught me. If it has been a sacrifice of my talents, I have been rewarded with more than I ever had before. I can speak Spanish, I care more genuinely about people, [and] I am less quick to judge and more anxious to serve. If it has been a sacrifice of human relationships, I have been rewarded with practice in speaking to men and women from all walks of life and in diverse situations. If I have sacrificed my earthly possessions, I have been given new ones that I value infinitely more. For anything I have sacrificed I have been given more."

I add my personal witness of the happiness and joy experienced by those who come to Christ and follow Him. I testify that as we fully consecrate ourselves to the Lord and help our missionaries do likewise, we will receive power in our current service and become prepared to inherit eternal glory, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ Mark 10:17.

² Mark 10:20.

³ Mark 10:21.

⁴ Mark 10:21.

⁵ *Lectures on Faith* (1985), 68.

⁶ Neal A. Maxwell, "Swallowed Up in the Will of the Father," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 24.

⁷ Bruce R. McConkie, "Obedience, Consecration, and Sacrifice," *Ensign*, May 1975, 50.

⁸ David A. Bednar, Ricks College Devotional, Jan. 5, 1999.

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- ⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 121:36.
¹⁰ Doctrine and Covenants 121:35.
¹¹ Psalms 91:10–11, 14.
¹² See Mosiah 5:12.
¹³ Doctrine and Covenants 58:26–27.
¹⁴ See Ether 12:6.
¹⁵ *Missionary Handbook*, 4.
¹⁶ Helaman 3:35.
¹⁷ *Missionary Handbook*, 7.
¹⁸ In *History of the Church*, 2:182.
¹⁹ Russell M. Nelson, “Begin with the End in Mind,” June 22, 2014.