

Called of God

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Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

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“We believe that a man [or a woman] must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.”¹

No matter what call comes to us, from Sunday School teacher to Relief Society president, our faith is that he who is extending our call has been on his knees and that the invitation being given has the approval of the Lord.

Your call to serve as a mission president and the wife of a mission president will so alter and influence both your life and the lives of your missionaries that your soul needs and deserves to have that assurance from heaven. The purpose of my talk is to assure you, settle you, and testify to you that your call is from the Lord. He knows you. He knows your strengths and your weaknesses. He knows your abilities and your uncertainties. He knows the needs of the mission and the missionaries where you are going. He has prepared you, and He has called you to His holy work.

Remember President Monson’s words this morning. He said, “You have been chosen.” Then he paused, and he said, “Yes, chosen from the most faithful in the Church.”²

I was reminded of that beautiful scripture in John, chapter 15, verse 16, that says, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you,” or set you apart—that is the message of President Monson, and look at the message of Elder Nelson³ in the next few words—“that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.” That is the call of a mission president.

Because you are who you are, the first question is always “Am I worthy? Can I do what the Lord expects of me? Do I have what is needed?”

You are not the first to ask these questions. “Enoch . . . bowed himself to the earth, [and asked]: Why is it that I have found favor in thy sight, [I] am but a lad, and all the people hate me; for I am slow of speech; wherefore am I thy servant?”⁴

Moses asked, “Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?”⁵ “They will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice.”⁶

The first mission president of this dispensation, Heber C. Kimball, responded with similar humility. He reflected: “The idea of being appointed to such an important . . .

mission was almost more than I could bear. . . . I felt my weakness and unworthiness, and was nearly ready to sink under the task . . . I could not help exclaiming: O Lord I am a man of ‘stammering tongue’ and altogether unfit for such a work. How can I go to preach in that land, which is so famed throughout Christendom for light, [and] knowledge . . . and to a people whose intelligence is proverbial?”⁷

If you have felt inadequate or unprepared, you are not alone. Humility allows the Lord to work through you.

“The weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not . . . trust in the arm of flesh . . .

“That the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world.”⁸

Take courage! The Lord is with you. To Enoch He said, “Go forth and do as I have commanded thee. . . . Open thy mouth, and it shall be filled, and I will give thee utterance, for all flesh is in my hands, and I will do as seemeth me good.”⁹

To Moses He promised, “I will be with thee.”¹⁰ “I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.”¹¹

And to Heber C. Kimball and to each of you, the Lord has promised that “as [you are] humble [you will] be made strong, and blessed from on high”¹² and you will “have power to lay the foundation of this church, and to bring it forth out of obscurity and out of darkness, the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth.”¹³

As President Monson was speaking this morning, I could not help but think of the words to Kathy and me more than 25 years ago when we were called. “Brother Andersen,” he said, “you will be one of our younger mission presidents.” Then he said, “Don’t ever allow that to be an excuse. The Lord will shape the back to fit the burden placed upon it. Remember, who the Lord calls, the Lord qualifies. When you are on the Lord’s errand, you are entitled to the Lord’s help.”

More than my witness, you need the Lord’s approval. Our answers come from above. We seek the Lord’s approval. I know that you have sought your own confirmation of your call from the Lord.

The prophet Jacob taught us, “Wherefore I, Jacob, gave unto them these words . . . having first obtained mine errand from the Lord.”¹⁴

As we were preparing for our mission in 1989, my wife, Kathy, had prayed for reassurance that our call was from God. After a long day of packing and concerns of leaving our business, renting our home, displacing our young children, and the many other things that were ahead of us, she picked up her scriptures very late one night. As she opened the Book of Mormon, her eyes fell upon these words: “My beloved son, Moroni, I rejoice exceedingly that your Lord Jesus Christ hath been mindful of you, and hath called you to his ministry, and to his holy work.”¹⁵ “I felt,” she said, “the Lord speaking to me. In that moment complete assurance replaced my fears. I knew with certainty this was a call from God.”

We can learn from President Eyring’s call to the Quorum of the Twelve. He described his struggle this way: “Shortly after I was called to

the Quorum of the Twelve, I got a phone call from President Faust. . . . He asked me to come to his office. . . .

“After some pleasantries, he looked at me and said, ‘Has it happened yet?’ When I looked puzzled, he went on to say, ‘I’ve been watching you in meetings. It seems to me that you have been feeling that your calling is beyond you and that you are not qualified.’

“I said that doubt had come to me, as if I had hit a wall. I expected that he was going to reassure me. . . . But I was surprised by his kind, firm reply. He said, ‘Don’t ask me. Go to Him.’ Then he pointed up to heaven.” President Eyring reflected on this experience: “Now years later I sit in that same office. When I walk into it I look up and remember . . . how he taught me by example how to help those who are feeling overwhelmed in the Lord’s service. . . . Send them with confidence to Him. If they will follow your counsel, they will gain the strength they need and to spare.”¹⁶

That promise is to you and to your missionaries. You and your missionaries will need the reassurance of His approval, not just once but regularly. Teach the missionaries that as they pray with faith and do their part, He will comfort them, assure them, direct them, and reconfirm that their call has His blessing. It is wise counsel to give yourself as well.

Think of your sacred calling in view of this powerful scripture:

“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.

“Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind; and the willing and obedient

shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days.”¹⁷

Here today and in the months that follow, you are eating of the good of the land of Zion in these last days. How grateful we are for you as you feast at the banquet of the Lord.

No one enters this room where we sit with a missionary plaque on their coat without sacrificing to be here. For some, these sacrifices are financial; for others, professional; for most they include family, conveniences set aside, or missed opportunities. We commend you for your sacrifices, but we do not apologize for them.

They, too, speak of your worthiness and remind us that “the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind.”¹⁸

I love the story of Elder Scott’s call to serve as a mission president. Here are his words: “At the time I was working as a civilian for an admiral in charge of a program essential to the national defense of our country. When I told the admiral of the call, he was most upset because he did not understand how it had come and what it meant. He concluded a tense conversation with these words: ‘You are a traitor to your country. I’ll see that you never have success in this industry. I will not speak to you again. You are finished here. If that’s the way Mormons are, I’m going to get rid of all that work for me.’

“I said, ‘Admiral, I will carefully turn my assignment over to a replacement unless you prevent me from continuing in this office.’”

Elder Scott continues: “I can see now that the Lord guided me each step of the way in what to do and what to say. My replacement was a very capable, experienced individual who

learned rapidly. I was impressed to identify those things that needed to be done and even was able to outline some suggestions for important future improvements in the program.

“On my last day at work I met with the admiral again. The experience was totally different. That conversation ended with a much deeper appreciation for each other and for my beliefs. No other Church member was adversely affected because of my decision.”¹⁹

I remember once I spoke to a mission president about the sacrifices he had made as he left a very lucrative CPA position. It was uncertain whether he would receive his full pension he had worked his career to earn. His partner said to him, “How could you leave all of this to serve a mission?” The newly called mission president responded, “When the prophet calls, we must go.” (As you know, the word *profit* in English has two meanings.) His partner looked surprised and asked, “How much are they going to pay you on this mission? Is the profit that great?”

If you feel you have not been asked to sacrifice enough, may I remind you that your mission is just beginning. Each of you will have your own story, sometimes known only to you and the Lord.

When you were called, did you ask yourself, “How did that happen? How among all the capable couples in the Church were we called?”

When Kathy and I were called, we were very surprised. Our home was in Florida, and we didn’t know anyone from our stake or even from our state who had ever been called to preside over a mission. In my 21 years as a

General Authority I have learned much more about how the Lord directs His work.

There is no shortage of qualified candidates. In the files of the Missionary Department, there are more than 10,000 couples who have been recommended. As we travel the world, we as General Authorities and many other leaders submit names for consideration. But while we unapologetically recommend potential presidents, we have wisely learned that we never, never promote or lobby for someone. I remember Elder Maxwell saying, “We take ideas and throw them up into the air and watch them. If they don’t take a life of their own, we are better to leave them alone.” This is the way we approach potential mission presidents. We recommend them, but then we allow for the spiritual power of revelation to determine whether they take on a life of their own, whether the Lord through His Spirit lifts and separates them from the many others who are recommended, or if their names for a time settle quietly in the missionary file cabinets.

Let me give you an example of how the Lord brings His mission presidents to us.

In the spring of 1994 as a relatively new General Authority, I was assigned to a stake conference in Layton, Utah, to select a new stake president. Logic would have suggested the first counselor, Brother Cleve M. Dibble, as the stake president. He had not served for the entire term of the president. He was well prepared and had the confidence and faith of the membership. I believe every person we interviewed named him as one of those they thought the Lord would want to serve as the stake president. Surprisingly, we did not feel the Spirit bear witness that he should be called, and we called a young bishop, Bishop Robert G. Green, who did not have the

Church experience of this counselor. I spoke with Brother Dibble and expressed confidence in his capacities and reassured him that in the Lord's own time, His purposes would be made known.

Brother Dibble was in his early forties and in the middle of his career, and I did not recommend him to serve as a mission president. I went to my next assignment, to serve in the Europe West Area Presidency. While serving in Europe, two years later, how happy I was to see Brother and Sister Dibble and their wonderful family as they came to Italy to preside over a mission. Had he been called as a stake president, he would not have been called as a mission president at that time. Who recommended him? I do not know. But there he was where the Lord wanted him, seemingly passed over as stake president but, in the wisdom of the Lord, kept in reserve for the holy calling that was awaiting the Dibbles. Interestingly, when President Green completed his nine years as stake president, Brother Dibble, who had been back from his mission to Italy for several years, followed him as stake president.

Let me close with the experience of a mission president and his wife who sit among you.

Kathy and I met John and Sondra Bennion in August of 1975. We had recently married and had moved to Boston. John and I were classmates, and we attended the same ward together.

Kathy was expecting our first child, and John and Sondra had identical twin girls who were three months old. Julie, the first twin to be born, was healthy and vibrant. Christine, the second twin to be born, had severe brain damage resulting from a pinched umbilical cord during the baby's delivery. We loved and

admired our friends John and Sondra. For two years we closely watched their courage and commitment to care for Christine. They were an inspiration to us and to all who knew them. We finished school, and our paths parted.

The twins, Julie and Christine, grew. Sondra and John courageously had six more children. Decades passed. The children grew up and served missions across the world. Christine remained at home with Sondra as her constant companion. Christine's severe brain damage at birth kept her from being able to walk, communicate, feed herself, or care for herself. But as John and Sondra have said, "[She is] full of smiles and love. [Christine] is our constant reminder of what's really important in life; for the past [39] years, she has brought a special spirit of love and service into our home."

In February 2013, my wife, Kathy, and I were in the West Indies Mission in the French territory of Guadeloupe. A friendly senior missionary couple, Elder and Sister Richard Bennion, greeted us. Later at lunch they mentioned how we were connected. "You went to school with my twin brother, John Bennion," Elder Bennion commented. Then he added, "John would make a great mission president."

I felt something when he spoke of his brother, and I immediately inquired about Christine. John's twin brother said, "She is at home, unable to care for herself." But then, speaking as a noble brother, Elder Richard Bennion offered, "I am a medical doctor. If the Lord ever desired to call John and Sondra, Linda and I would love to be at their side to care for Christine."

Normally, a couple in John and Sondra's situation would not be considered for a calling to preside over a mission—they have had a lifetime with a unique, sacred mission of caring for Christine. But the thought persisted in my mind. Was there a reason the Lord would call them? It seemed almost impossible. Your call to serve comes from the First Presidency, but each of your names has been spoken and prayed over in sacred discussions in the upper room of the temple. We spoke of John and Sondra Bennion. Others of my Brethren knew of their lives and their service. The Spirit of the Lord gently directed that they should receive a call.

John and Sondra Bennion were called to preside over the Georgia Atlanta North Mission. Like each of you, they are disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, filled with faith and a love of God. That love has been deeply manifest in John and Sondra's love for one of their very special daughters whose mortal existence has been entirely dependent on her parents for 39 years. Christine will accompany them. Perhaps she is one of the reasons they have been called.

“Save he shall prepare a way” is a phrase I think of when I think of their call. He has

prepared a way. It will not be easy for them or for you, but never forget, He has prepared a way for you to serve.

As you consider the sacrifice you are asked to put upon the altar, remember these words of our Savior: “Verily I say unto you, all among them who know their hearts are honest, and are broken, and their spirits contrite, and are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice—yea, every sacrifice which I, the Lord, shall command—they are accepted of me.”²⁰

How marvelous are those words: “They are accepted of me.” You are accepted of Him. He who sacrificed all, the greatest among us, the Lamb without blemish, the King of kings—He accepts you.

I witness that He lives. He is resurrected. He appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith and restored His priesthood keys to the earth. He is not distant from His servants today. On your mission you will feel His love with clarity and sureness. He knows you. You have been called of God. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ Articles of Faith 1:5.

² “Message,” June 22, 2014.

³ “Begin with the End in Mind,” June 22, 2014.

⁴ Moses 6:31.

⁵ Exodus 3:11.

⁶ Exodus 4:1.

⁷ *Journal of Heber C. Kimball*, comp. R. B. Thompson (1840), 10.

⁸ Doctrine and Covenants 1:19, 23.

⁹ Moses 6:32.

¹⁰ Exodus 3:12.

¹¹ Exodus 4:12.

¹² Doctrine and Covenants 1:28.

¹³ Doctrine and Covenants 1:30.

¹⁴ Jacob 1:17.

¹⁵ Moroni 8:2.

¹⁶ “O Ye That Embark,” *Ensign* or *Liabona*, Nov. 2008, 59.

¹⁷ Doctrine and Covenants 64:33–34.

¹⁸ Doctrine and Covenants 64:34.

¹⁹ “Have No Regrets” (Brigham Young University devotional, Sept. 12, 1999), 6; speeches.byu.edu.

²⁰ Doctrine and Covenants 97:8.