

Adjusting to Missionary Life



Congratulations on being found worthy and ready to receive a call to serve the Lord. There has never been a more exciting time to be a missionary. The First Presidency said: “There is no more compelling work than [being a missionary], nor any which brings greater satisfaction. . . . Every missionary has an important role in helping ‘to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man’ (Moses 1:39)” (*Preach My Gospel* [2004], v). It is now your opportunity to spend the next 18–24 months in full-time service to the Lord.

Missionary work requires leaving behind a familiar lifestyle and acquiring skills to help you be successful in a new and unfamiliar world. This transition can be exciting as well as worrisome. It is common to experience both of these emotions.

This transition might be comparable to the change someone you baptize on your mission might go through. Both the new member and the new missionary understand they must leave the security of their former way of life but are unsure of what to expect or how to act in the new life they have chosen as a disciple of Christ. When people encounter a new environment, many of the habits and behaviors that allowed them to function well may no longer be available to them.

One missionary expressed it this way: “My investigator had felt the Spirit and wanted to follow the Savior, but she was also nervous about whether she would succeed and be accepted. She felt a little out of place and wasn’t sure what to expect. I realized I understood how she felt! Becoming a missionary had felt

similar for me: I was both excited and nervous, and at first I felt so inadequate. The Spirit reminded me of that experience, and it helped me understand her feelings and how to help her.”

Just like the new member leaving behind old beliefs, friends, and habits, it is common for new missionaries to experience some degree of stress or discomfort when they leave family, friends, and some of the things they used to do. Leaving familiar surroundings and entering missionary life—where the food, schedule, dress, and perhaps even the language are different—may be difficult for a time. Adapting to this new lifestyle is similar to the experience of a new member who may initially find it difficult to pay tithing, live the Word of Wisdom, or keep the Sabbath day holy, even though he or she has a sincere desire to do these things.

Don't allow this process to take you by surprise. Be patient as you receive the blessings of devoting your life more fully to the Savior. Remember, the Spirit will be with you as you make this transition and will assist you in adjusting to your new missionary responsibilities.

Adjusting to New Experiences

Like many who are entering a new situation, missionaries often go through four phases or stages in their emotional adjustment when they enter the MTC and again when they enter the mission field:

1. *Anticipation*

- You may feel eager for the challenge (see 1 Nephi 3:7).
- You may feel an increased sense of purpose and allegiance to Heavenly Father (see 3 Nephi 5:13).



2. *Discovering the unexpected*

- You may begin to miss home, family, and friends and even question your decision to serve (see Alma 26:27).
- You may notice physical manifestations of stress, such as disturbed sleep, appetite changes, or irritability.
- You may unexpectedly find yourself critical and impatient with rules and expectations.

For many, these feelings are normal. If you have any or all of these issues, please know this is a temporary situation that many new missionaries go through. Take courage in the knowledge that these feelings will pass and you will be able to adjust.

3. *“I can do this”*

- Your teaching and language skills begin to improve.
- You learn to willingly comply with mission rules and expectations.
- You display patience with yourself as you learn “precept upon precept” (see Isaiah 28:10; Mosiah 4:27).
- Your physical symptoms of stress, if you had any, begin to diminish.

4. Emotional self-reliance

- You feel comfortable navigating the daily routine.
- You recognize your personal strengths and progress.
- You attain an understanding of what it means to take life one step at a time (see D&C 98:12).
- You develop greater self-confidence and an increased desire to serve.

Things You Can Do Now

- Find ways to serve others. Missionary work is a call to service. Call upon God for opportunities to serve those around you when you feel anxious or worried. Focus on looking outside of your own feelings of discomfort to minister to those who are in need of a kind word, an act of charity, or friendship. (See *Preach My Gospel*, 168–69.)
- Focus on strengthening your relationship with your Heavenly Father. Seek His Spirit through personal prayer, scripture study, uplifting music, reading your patriarchal blessing, and other ways that work for you. Ask yourself what it is that He most wants you to learn from your mission experience, and ponder how He will help you acquire this learning.
- Ask a returned missionary to share his or her memories of the initial adjustment and give suggestions on how to make the transition easier.
- Review the article “Preparing Emotionally for Missionary Service” by Robert K. Wagstaff (in *Ensign*, Mar. 2011, 22–26; available online at LDS.org).
- Develop an attitude of gratitude. Focus for a few minutes every day on what is right, good, and positive about yourself and the calling you’ve received. Offer a prayer of gratitude each day for specific things you are thankful for regarding your mission call.



- Be kind to yourself. Talk to yourself with the same comforting, kind words you would use with someone else. Everyone gets frustrated or makes mistakes at times. Know that the Lord understands. Imagine Him sitting close to you, listening and offering support. Remember, thoughts of helplessness, hopelessness, or harsh condemnation are not from the Lord.

- Expect the unexpected. Your experiences as a missionary will not be the same as someone else's. Everything will not go exactly as you've planned or as you think it should. Expect things to be different than you think they are going to be. Examining your expectations will help you be open and receptive to change.

Discuss with Parents or Leaders

Talking with others about this upcoming adjustment can help. Make the time to discuss the following with parents, priesthood leaders, or returned missionary friends:

- Why a positive attitude is important when adjusting to new situations.
- What we can learn from scriptural examples of God requiring people to do things that are beyond what they feel capable of doing (see Exodus 4:10–12; Jeremiah 1:6–9; Alma 17:10–12; 26:27; Ether 12:23–27; Moses 6:31–32).
- Why it is important to go to bed and wake up on time, maintain good nutrition, get regular exercise, and have personal prayers (see *Preach My Gospel*, viii).

- Why maintaining a healthy sense of humor and being able to laugh at yourself when you make mistakes help make the adjustment easier.

- How you can remind yourself that the initial feelings of discomfort are not going to last forever.

- What parents and friends can do to help with the initial adjustment.

- How writing in a journal might help when going through challenging experiences.

- How best to respond when troublesome thoughts or feelings don't go away.

Summary

An adjustment period for missionaries is entirely normal, is usually unavoidable, and is not a sign that you lack faith or a testimony. For most new missionaries, it takes time to acquire the necessary skills to be successful. Remember the counsel given to the Prophet Joseph Smith at a very difficult time in his life: “Know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D&C 122:7).

As you prepare to leave for a mission, prepare to embrace change. Life as a missionary will likely be different than anything you've yet experienced, but if you come with a positive attitude, exercising faith in the Lord and anticipating the need for patience with yourself and others, the Lord will reward and bless you. He promises: “I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up” (D&C 84:88).

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