

“Ten Missionary Letters”

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Overview:

The letters I have written (about 125-150) cover a broad range of missionary related topics from adversity to companions to faith and humility; I believe the letters deal appropriately with some of a full-time missionary's greatest struggles and experiences during their mission service. I have included ten letters with some diversity to help you evaluate my direction and goals regarding the letters. I hope the letters above give you a flavor of what I would offer in a “weekly letter to a missionary.” Some of the letters are full of scriptures, some are full of stories, some are full of parallels, and some are full of quotes or insights, which I hope, inspire and motivate and assist missionaries in their pursuit of having the best mission experience possible. I hope you find them “of great worth.” I believe the target audience is parents, leaders or dear friends of missionaries who are looking for “good things” to write to missionaries serving in the field.

Background:

These letters were originally written as mini chapters for a book and so I am under the assumption they will need to be shortened for Newsprint. I believe they could be easily edited to 750 words and still remain concise effective. I wanted to get them to you for your feedback and evaluation for publishing. I would be happy to shorten this handful of letters and have you reevaluate if the concept is of interest. Thanks in advance for your thoughts.

“Eye of Faith”

Dear Elders and Sisters:

One Sunday Morning a few years ago my son Blake got up for church and didn't like some of the clothes he was wearing. He absolutely refused to wear the big brown shoes that were supposed to be his church shoes. He said they were goofy and that he hated them. I looked at the shoes and they looked a little like a pair of shoes I had worn many years ago.

I told Blake his shoes were like some “waffle stompers” that I used to wear when I was a kid. I told him my “waffle stompers” were some of the best shoes I ever had. I looked at his shoes and declared them--Awesome. I said to Blake, “I love those, where did you get those? Why don't you always wear those?” I continued on with other things he could do with them including smashing bugs. I concluded by saying, “they really do look nice.”

After a few minutes of convincing, Blake soon believed the shoes were great. He then said, “Hey they do look nice.” The pinnacle of the conversion regarding the shoes was when Blake sincerely said: “Dad can I wear these everyday?” Later that day Blake showed me how fast he could run in them and said he loved his brown shoes. He asked me one more time what they were called again. The experience with Blake was a reminder of the importance of adjusting our perspective and clearly seeing things in a more beneficial light.

Alma said, “Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you? Do you look forward with an eye of faith?” (Alma 5:15). The phrase “eye of faith” has become a favorite of mine. The phrase can have numerous meanings, but one I love is: do we look at situations, experiences, circumstances and missions through the window of faith in Jesus Christ. Seeing an event or experience with an eye of faith gives purpose, meaning and value to everything that happens to us in our lives. When we view our lives and our mission with an eye of faith we see things with more clarity, more magnification and more depth than ever before. Like Blake, when we see things in a better light our experiences are much better. We begin to see things from a more God-like perspective. We start to see the rainbows in the storms, we see the lessons in adversity, and we feel peace when despair is all about us. Looking forward with an eye of faith fills us with hope and charity. With an eye of faith we begin to see as God see's. With an eye of faith, our entire souls can be filled with light. The Savior said, “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light” (Matthew 6:22).

Elder David B. Haight said when he was 94 years old: “He (President Hinckley) also knows that my eyesight isn't very good, but as my eyesight dims somewhat, I think my vision improves—my vision of the long road, my vision of what lies ahead” (Elder David B. Haight: “Be a Strong Link,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, p. 19). As missionaries you are much younger than Elder Haight was in that General conference, but what if you could honestly say your vision was improving. I hope everyday as you testify of the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ your spiritual acuity is becoming sharper. One young convert sister who heard the missionaries said this: “as they taught with the Spirit, it seemed like they had taken the bandages off my eyes and that the Lord was clearing my understanding” (Vicki F. Matsumori “A

Lesson from the Book of Mormon” April Conference 2007). There is a wonderful amplification and clarity of our vision when we see life through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

One night many years ago, it was bedtime for my little son McKay. He was exhausted and his eyes were shutting against his will, but he still refused to go to bed. I said, “McKay you better go to sleep.” He said, “I am not tired, my eyes are just tired.” As missionaries, like McKay, you will be physically tired, but never let your eyes get spiritually tired. You need to spiritually see with clarity, sharpness and precision the things God is trying to show you.

Moroni recounts for us observations of people he knew with “great faith.” He said of them, “And there were many whose faith was so exceedingly strong even before Christ came, who could not be kept from within the veil, but truly saw with their eyes the things which they had beheld with an eye of faith, and they were glad” (Ether 12:19). This gladness and these rich experiences can only come through strong faith in Jesus Christ.

When we have an eye of faith we are focused on the light rather than the darkness. When we have an “eye of faith” we see the bigger picture. When we have an “eye of faith” we become more merciful. When we see with an “eye of faith” we are filled with the love of God. Elder Hanks shared this story in conference years ago: “This family has a tradition of educational accomplishment and the father was shaken a bit when his wife brought him their high school son’s report card with his first *C* on it. Dad brooded over the matter and when the son came home invited him into the study, sternly confronted him with the card, and said, ‘Son, what is this I see on your report card?’ Well, Dad,’ replied the boy, ‘I *hope* you see the five As’”(Marion D. Hanks, “Seeing the Five A’s” October 1977).

One of the greatest requests ever recorded in scripture occurred when the Savior had just taught the apostle’s about forgiveness. I love their response: “And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith” (Luke 17:5). For me their plea is, “Lord, help me to see better, please make it so I can see with an eye of faith.” I hope as a missionary that you go to the Lord and ask him to increase your faith. When that prayer is answered you will see an increase in your vision, and you will see with more spirituality clarity and focus the wonderful blessings of the gospel of Jesus Christ. You will then see things, which you had only beheld with an eye of faith and you will be glad.

Remember the prayer of my young son Talmage one night after a family home evening lesson on having “an eye of faith.” He prayed very sincerely, “Heavenly Father--bless us that we don’t go blind.”

Love Br. Jeff Erickson

“Go Forward”

Dear Elders and Sisters:

Years ago Elder Sterling W. Sill shared this story about his great grandmother. “He said that she headed west with her eight-year-old daughter with a group of pioneers. Her husband was enlisted in the Mormon Battalion and so he did not travel with them. She put all the families’ earth good in a wagon that was pulled by a cow and an ox. Part way across the plains the ox died. She lifted the yoke of the fallen ox and placed it upon her own shoulders. With the cow as her yoke-mate she pressed forward and continued her journey” (Sterling W. Sill Leadership II Bookcraft 1960 p. 25 paraphrased).

I am certain this was a severe trial for this good family. As mortals they may have thought, “I am doing what is right, why isn’t the Lord helping me more?” I am sure there were some thoughts of just giving up, but this faithful sister just kept pressing forward.

Moses worked for years to free the children of Israel from slavery. Finally after the last plague the Pharaoh said they could go. They left the clutches of the Egyptians and arrived at the borders of the red sea. After arriving, they learned their freedom might be very short lived as the Egyptians were now coming after them in their chariots. They bemoaned their supposed fate, “And they said unto Moses, because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?” (Exodus 14:11).

Here they were stuck between the Red Sea and the Egyptians marching after them. I am certain for them it was a trial of trials. They feared death more than slavery. What a blessing it would have been for them hear the powerful words of their prophet Moses who said: “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever” (Exodus 14:13).

After hearing those words of faith, they were still not delivered. The children of Israel could not just relax and watch the Lord work his miracles, but the Lord gave them this wonderful invitation. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward” (Exodus 14:15).

If you can imagine the ocean in front of them and the enemy behind and then to receive that counsel, “go forward.” They heeded that challenge and they went forward in faith into the ocean and the waters were parted and they were delivered. There is something absolutely wonderful that occurs when we trust the Lord and “go forward.”

Nephi’s words on this subject are inspiring as he said, “Wherefore, ye must *press forward* with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall *press forward*, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:20). The promise of eternal life to those who “press forward” in many respects is the only promise in life that really matters.

In Lehi’s dream I am able to clearly see the value of going forward. Nephi said of his father, “But, to be short in writing, behold, he saw other multitudes pressing forward; and they came and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth and fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree” (1 Nephi 8:30).

I have been able to fall down and partake of the fruit of the tree and it is satisfying and fulfilling. There are times in life or on a mission when it is extremely difficult to press forward, but it is the only solution to those who are faithful. I have watched people who appear to have nothing left to give and no strength to move forward take steps in the right direction and be blessed for their efforts. I have seen people press forward who seem to have been in a midst of darkness only to discover wonderful light and truths after they have moved forward.

I remember years ago when my dad left our home for good. It was truly one of the saddest days of my life. I don’t think there was a more broken heart in the entire world than my mom’s at that time. She was spent emotionally and spiritually and appeared to have the weight of the world on her shoulders. I would have said in watching her that truly she was “without hope.” She was alone now to raise her children without a father and without help.

Somehow she rallied the family and through our sadness and despair, she got us all to “go forward.” It was one step at a time, one day at a time, and one goal at a time. She obtained a full-time job and she enrolled in school and she moved forward in faith. She kept a family with five children still at home pressing forward hoping to partake of the wonderful fruit we were promised. She discovered that she was not alone and not without hope as she clung to prayer and a loving Father who lifted her through her sorrow and despair.

As missionaries, go forward, and you will see the hand of God perform miracles in your life as the children of Israel did. You will have Red Sea moments as a missionary that will leave a lasting impression on you forever. Always remember before the Red Sea parted, they had to “go forward.”
I love you, Br. Jeff Erickson

“I Have Chosen the Good Part”

Dear Elders and Sisters:

Heinrich Hofmann, a wonderful German artist, painted one of the paintings we often see in the church called “Christ in Gethsemane.” The painting is marvelous as he attempts to capture one of the most critical moments in the history of mankind. Many of Hofmann’s religious paintings found a home in John Zeile’s collection of art. Zeile’s home was destroyed in the great San Francisco Earthquake and fire of 1906. The painting was so loved by Zeile that it was the only object saved from the home when it was destroyed by fire in 1906.

I love the parallel of John Zeile saving his painting of Christ as his most prized possession, compared to us as missionaries making Christ the most prized person in our lives. In our greatest times of need or duress or difficulty do we care about him more than anything or anyone else? Would Christ truly be our choice as the most important person in our life?

As Lehi was coming to the end of his mortality, he shared a lot of great things with his sons. Here is one phrase that has a lot of depth that he shared with them. “I have spoken these few words unto you all, my sons, in the last days of my probation; and I have chosen the good part, according to the words of the prophet. And I have none other object save it be the everlasting welfare of your souls. Amen” (2 Nephi 2:30).

I am not certain I know exactly what he meant, but the phrase has me searching for meaning and personal application. Here are some thoughts on the phrase that certainly applies to missions and to life.

I have chosen the good part. Lehi had just finished speaking of liberty and eternal life, and captivity and spiritual death. Lehi in many respects is saying, I choose liberty and life. I have chosen God’s way and I invite you my sons to look to the Great Mediator, and choose the same. I love those thoughts. You are extending that same invitation as a missionary to others as you invite them to “choose the good part” and liberty and life. You are teaching that when you look to Christ that is the “good part” as everything in life becomes better. You are teaching that liberty and life come from learning true principles and living them.

My thoughts carry me just a little further, and I ask in what instances and when “have I chosen the good part.” I have chosen the good part in my wife and my eternal temple marriage to her. I have chosen the good part by keeping God first in my life. I have chosen the good part by striving to obey the commandments. I have chosen the good part by attending the temple on a regular basis. I have chosen the good part by serving others. I have chosen the good part by praying and reading daily. I am striving to choose the good part by following the Great Mediator in all that I do and say.

I am striving to choose the good part by finding the joys in life rather than the sorrows. I am striving to choose the good part by being a builder instead a destroyer. I am choosing the good part by focusing on the things the Lord has allotted me, rather than my weaknesses or shortcomings. I am choosing the good part by striving to follow Christ in thought, word, and deed.

Elder Hartman Rector Jr. said, “Joseph turned every experience and all circumstances, no matter how trying, into something good. This ability to turn everything into something good appears to be a godly characteristic. Our Heavenly Father always seems able to do this. Everything, no matter how dire,

becomes a victory to the Lord. Joseph, although a slave and wholly undeserving of this fate, nevertheless remained faithful to the Lord and continued to live the commandments and made something very good of his degrading circumstances. People like this cannot be defeated, because they will not give up” (Hartman Rector Jr. “Live Above the Law to be Free” October 1972 Conference).

How do you choose the good part as a missionary? I believe this is critical to success and happiness as a missionary. I can only draw upon my experiences and those closest to me. First and foremost you choose the good part when you say, “I will serve a mission.” As a missionary you choose the good part when you commit to be an obedient missionary. You choose the good part when you see all the Lord is teaching you instead of what you still don’t know. You choose the good part when you find the good in those people you meet instead of their weaknesses. You choose the good part when you plead for others in your missionary prayers, instead of just praying for yourself. You choose the good when you believe your investigators will keep their commitments instead of doubting them. You choose the good when you are sincere in your love of the people and not just offering “lip service.”

With members you choose the good when you focus on those who support the work instead of those who don’t. You choose the good when you concentrate your efforts on those who are making progress instead of dwelling on those who are failing in their efforts. When you begin to see the people of your mission as God see’s them, you are choosing the good part.

Lehi, by choosing the good part, became a righteous husband, father, prophet and a wonderful Son of God. I know that when a missionary completes their service as a full time missionary and can say, “I have chosen the good part”; he or she has succeeded. He or she has “trusted in the Lord” and become what they were supposed to become. He or she has fulfilled their “duty to God.” He or she has become a child of Christ. He or she has not only been called, but has been chosen. He or she is entitled to all the blessings of the Father.

May you continue to look to the Great Mediator and “choose the good part” as you serve your Heavenly Father.

I love you all, Brother Jeff Erickson

“Iron Rod”

Dear Elders and Sisters:

There are times when I am not certain if the scriptures are making it into the hearts of my children.

Sometimes our family scripture study feels like an extension of a family napping together as we invite our children to please follow along. Occasionally I will see some things to reassure me that some of the words of the prophets are penetrating the hearts and minds of my children.

One such occasion occurred when my six-year-old son Blake was asked to do some jobs around the house. He wasn’t motivated and so I encouraged him for a second time. His older brother Tanner was observing and assessing the situation. To assist Dad Tanner chimed in and spoke in a commanding voice and said, “Blake get it done, or you’ll perish.” I don’t know that it was the right thing to say, but I walked away humored and feeling better about family scripture study.

As a missionary, by this time I am certain you have fallen in love with the scriptures. I hope you can convey that love to the people whom you minister to and that they too may fall in love with the word of God. I want to give you a few more reasons to love the word of God and enjoy the promises you are entitled to as you “holdfast” to the word.

Here is yet another promise from the Book of Mormon: “And I said unto them that it was the word of God; and whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction” (1 Nephi 15:24). I have witnessed the power of this promise in my life and I know this is a true promise from God.

There is incredible power in the word of God. The Lord said to Joseph Smith, “Light and truth forsake that evil one” (D&C 93:37). The scriptures are filled with light and truth. Faithful study of the word of God will give you power to thwart the wiles of the adversary, and fill you with light. Mormon said, “Yea, we see that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked—“

“And land their souls, yea, their immortal souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven...” (Helaman 3:29-30).

A few winters ago we were up at Sundance Ski resort as a family. It was a fun family trip, and I will never forget one lesson I learned while there. One day at the ski resort, I had a few of my youngest boys with me getting on the ski lift. I remember it vividly as they would get on the ski lift and immediately I would become nervous about them being safe. The front of the lift chair was open, and it was anywhere from a 5-70 foot drop off the lift, depending on the location of the chair on the lift route. All of my fears about their safety would dissipate when we would get on the ski lift and then pull down the metal safety bar in front of us. Amazingly, one sturdy, well-positioned steel bar alleviated all of my concerns about the safety of my children “falling” from the chair lift. For me the iron bar brought peace, protection and security.

I have thought time and time again about that experience. How can something so scary be made so safe? In studying Lehi’s dream, I believe it could have been scary in so many ways: mists of darkness, strange roads, a muddy river, and people laughing and mocking. Even with these “tools of the adversary,” in the dream, the iron rod simply made these potentially scary obstacles non-factors if one would just “hold to the rod.” Holding to the rod and pressing forward seem to overcome any diversion, deception or darkness that may come into our lives. Like the iron bar on the chairlift, a loving God had placed an iron bar in front of us to protect us spiritually. This iron rod will prevent us from falling to sin if we appropriately put it in the right position in our lives.

“Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3). I promise you as you read faithfully the Lord will tell you of things you should do as a missionary. He will tell the people you teach what they need to do to follow him. He will “light their paths” through his word.

“And it supposeth me that they have come up hither to hear the pleasing word of God, yea, the word which healeth the wounded soul” (Jacob 2:8). The word of God will literally help to heal the wounds of life that have been heaped upon the people you teach. They will feel the Lord’s salve upon their souls as they commit to studying the word of God, especially the Book of Mormon. I remember my years of college at BYU, which were wonderful, but often stressful with frequent tests and deadlines. I remember on many occasions when my stress would peak, retreating to the school library to read a chapter or two from the pages of the Book of Mormon. These sacred pages would cause the Spirit to wash over me and restore peace to my “troubled soul” during many stressful days and times.

Here is a final great blessing in regards to the word of God and the people you teach. “And this he did that he himself might go forth among his people, or among the people of Nephi, that he might preach the word of God unto them, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty...”(Alma 4:19). If you will testify of the word and teach the principles from the word of God, the spirit will help them remember who they are and their duty in the plan of salvation.

I testify that as you “try the virtue” (Alma 31:5) of the Word of God, it will change your life and the lives of the people, you teach. I pray that you will feel the Lord’s richest blessings and lay claim on his many powerful promises in its pages. Joseph Smith Jr. said “...a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book” (The Book of Mormon Introduction). This promise has been true in my life. Moroni said, “And whoso receiveth this record, and shall not condemn it because of the imperfections which are in it, the same shall know of greater things than these...” (Mormon 8:12). Throughout my life the Lord has continue to teach and show me more and more wonderful principles and promises. I pray that you will have your own witness to this principle with the promise that he is currently showing you greater and greater things. May you always remember these wonderful words from the Hymnal: “Hold to the rod, the iron rod; 'Tis strong, and bright, and true. The iron rod is the word of God; 'Twill safely guide us through” (Hymns: The Iron Rod: Hymn 274, Text: Joseph L. Townsend 1849-1942, Music William Clayson 1840-1887).

I love you, Brother Jeff Erickson

“Know the Master”

Dear Elders and Sisters:

A few years ago our family went to Utah and stayed at the home of some relatives. We were carrying our luggage into their house when we rounded a corner, where four-year-old Blake, saw a picture of the Savior on their wall. He looked at the painting and inquisitively said, “Hey, they know Jesus?” There are many things you will learn on your mission. There are many principles, truths, doctrines and covenants that you will understand and appreciate more than you ever have. There is one thing you must know before you come home that is more important than anything else. You must come to know the Master.

King Benjamin said, “For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?” (Mosiah 5:13). Think of the experiences you have when you feel close to the Master. When the thoughts you have and your deepest desires and intentions are focused on Christ and his work, then you come to know him better because you see his hand, his work, his miracles, and his divine tender mercies. The missionaries, who serve him best, come to know him the best.

As a missionary I had my “wall of fame” above my missionary desk at each apartment I lived in. I had a picture of myself and two buddies, a few small motivational quotes, a picture of Brooks Shields (given to me by a daughter of a lady we taught), and a picture of Christ. I may have had a few other things, but I can’t remember anymore. I probably didn’t need the picture of Brooke Shields (it was a very modest picture by the way), but it did serve as a conversation piece. On the Brooke Shields picture was signed in black marker the words Brooke Shields. It was a little 5x7 poster that came with the Brooke

Shields doll when you bought it. On the poster I added in black marker, “To Jeff, With Love.” It then authentically looked like a personally written note saying: “To Jeff, With Love, Brooke Shields.” When visiting Elders would come into my apartment, they would look at this wall and almost all of them would ask, “Do you know her?” I would tell a little story, and say yes, and have a little fun, but in the end I would reveal that I didn’t know her at all. I had just been a fan of hers prior to my full-time mission and the poster was a reminder of the little girl we taught.

Right next to the Brooks Shields picture on “my wall” was my picture of Christ. During my entire mission, I never had a missionary come in and ask, “Do you know Him?” I probably wouldn’t have asked either, but in thinking of the experience, I learned a very valuable lesson. If the question were asked, what would my answer be? I believe my answer would have been profound, powerful, deeply heartfelt and true. Through my mission I really did come to know Christ, and I continue to feel that I know him in a very personal way. I don’t know everything about him, but I am still continuing to learn of him while I serve Him. I feel he is close to my thoughts and hopefully my actions are directed by his teachings and doctrines and my faith in him. I testify he is the Son of God and the light and the way. In my life I have been grateful when people have asked me about my beliefs in the “Mormon Church” because when we apply the doctrines and principles we “know him better than any other people.”

I have seen missionaries come home after their missions and speak of Christ with love and tenderness and great depth, I could tell they had come to know him in a more profound way because I could feel it. I have seen others who have been very careless in their mission service that speak of the Savior casually, and I could feel the distance between them and Christ. Make sure if you learn anything as a missionary, you come home “knowing” that Christ is the centerpiece of everything in your life. “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

When my son Tyler was a little older than three, he was a vivid dreamer and light sleeper, which made for some great late night experiences. One night, at about 3:00 am he bellowed out a few screams. He screamed, “Dad, Dad!” I went to his bed. There were a few more screams of, “Dad, Dad.” I got to him and said Tyler, what is it? “Dad, I all alone in here, Dad.” For this little three-year old, it was a scary feeling to be all alone. In reflecting on this experience, I was powerfully reminded that we are never really alone. There is always a loving Heavenly Father near us who watches over us and will always hear us. We can call out, “Father, Father,” and he will come and comfort us and help us to not feel alone. I believe this is one of the most important reasons to come to know God and Jesus Christ. You must come to know that when you are lonely or in despair or in need of heavenly assistance, you can call out, “Father, help me in my loneliness or my trial” and he will be there to answer your prayer. Through the atonement of Jesus Christ, you will find strength, compassion, comfort, peace, and an always-attentive Father.

As a missionary, as you serve our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ faithfully, you will come to “know them” deeply. Much of the world has forgotten them, and it has brought great despair, loneliness, tragedy, wickedness, selfishness, and misdirection. God needs a people full of love, mercy, kindness, and faith in Christ. True faith will only come through knowing Him. I pray that you will come to know Heavenly Father and his Son Jesus Christ more completely, than you have ever known them before.

I love you, Brother Jeff Erickson

“Rescuing”

Dear Elders and Sisters:

President Monson's biography is called "To the Rescue," what a great compliment to him. I wanted to write about rescuing a bit today as I hope increasing our rescue efforts is on all of our minds for the New Year. I had an old best friend this year who was "rescued," and who now has returned to regular church activity. These rescue efforts were not by me, but by some other wonderful people in his ward that reached out to him. He was reactivated and his wife was baptized. For years I have wanted to see him return, but actually did very little to help. My excuse was that he was very far away (He lives a few states away). My excuse is terribly weak, but thank goodness others didn't make the same lame excuse. I could have done so much more. I don't say this out of guilt, but with a resolve to do more in the future. I believe the words of Alma to his son Corianton, "Behold, I say unto you, is not a soul at this time as precious unto God as a soul will be at the time of his coming?" (Alma 39:17).

A few months ago I read a story of a 66-year-old man in Florida who had a small terrier dog named Bounce. He called Bounce his best friend. One day he was hanging out in his backyard in Orlando with his dog Bounce. His little dog wandered close to the edge of a nearby pond. The man then heard his dog yelping and he looked and saw an alligator carrying away little Bounce in its mouth. This man then yelled, "You're not going to get her!"

He ran toward the pond and leaped on top of the alligator. He said, "Just like you do a silly belly flop in a pool." A wrestling match ensued in the three-foot-deep pond, and the seven-foot, 130-pound gator tried to pin Steve to the bottom of the pond. Eventually Steve (the 66-year-old) prevailed, and freed Bounce and threw the gator back in the pond and then climbed out of the pond.

Both Steve and his dog Bounce sustained injuries, but were okay after a few stitches. Steve's friends gave him a superhero cape and an alligator belt buckle after his act of heroism. In the article Steve's closing comment was powerful, "If I hesitated I would have lost my best friend" (*By Eric Pfeiffer, Yahoo! News / The Sideshow September 19, 2012*).

I read Steve's story and thought, "what courage." I also felt that if someone would do that for a dog, why wouldn't they do that for other "best friends" or "good friends?" I look at my life and ask myself if I am helping to free my loved ones from the "clutches of the adversary." I have witnessed so many "friends" in my life who have succumbed to sin and who have been taken captive by the habits of the flesh, who need to be rescued or freed. I have tried in some instances to rescue these friends, but I want to do better and to do more to free them from their entrapments.

In January 2013 Baylor Andersen, a four year old, and his family slid off a highway into an icy river where the family was trapped in a wrecked car. He was "rescued" by a man who then plunged into the icy water, with a group of strangers, to save him. This group of strangers, a half-dozen men, charged into the river and flipped over the car to rescue him, his sister Mia, and a friend Kenya. A trooper on the scene suggested the car must have weighed at least 4000 pounds. His father said, "I felt strongly that we had great help from the people who were there at the scene, but we also had help, I think, from some other forces."

Kenya was the only one conscious when they pulled the three from the car; Baylor and Mia were unconscious. A man carried Baylor from the river and thrust his limp body into the arms of Buzzy Mullahkhel, who had arrived just in time to see the men flip the car over. The man said, "I can't feel him for a pulse, because I can't feel my hands." Baylor's skin was wet, cold and gray; there was no pulse, not even a faint one. Buzzy turned to the woman next to him and said: "Please tell me you know CPR?" Baylor was saved. His sister too was saved. Their rescue took place because these wonderful strangers risked their lives and health to save another. How grateful was their father Roger Andersen? He choked

up as he watched his son play two days later, as if nothing had ever happened. Something that could have been so tragic was now turned into one of the greatest miracles Roger Andersen will ever see in his life (Erin Alberty, January 3, 2012, The Salt Lake Tribune “Utah children rescued from icy river doing well”). There is power in sacrificing our time, talents and energy into the lifting and rescuing of others. The rescues above are heroic, and they have been made public through the media because they are unusual, impressive, miraculous and of a heart-warming nature. Despite their dramatic nature and importance, it is the spiritual rescues that are the most significant in terms of the things of eternity.

When someone is saved from an early temporal death, there is usually a significant debt of gratitude that is shown. If that were the case in physical death, then what would be owed to the people who save someone from a certain spiritual death? What do you say to someone who saves you from the chains of the adversary, and from certain eternal destruction? How do you tell those people you are grateful?

I know it is always the Savior that truly does all the saving, but how do we express gratitude when he pulls us from the waters of spiritual death? What do we say when we rid ourselves of the burdens of sin that are drowning us? What do we say when he lifts us to higher levels of peace and happiness than we deserve? We express sincere gratitude by our sincere repentance, faith and obedience. We then also have a responsibility to become instruments in his hands, and as instruments in his hands, we also need to become rescuers.

What a blessing to be servants of God and to be called to rescue people from a world of sin, darkness, captivity and devastation. What a blessing to have the opportunity to carry a beacon of hope to the people of the world. How wonderful to carry a life-preserving buoy that you can throw to them that will save them from the depths of eternal misery, if they will just cling to it. I testify Christ has rescued us, if we will just reach for and hold onto his rescue buoy, which is the atonement. This year may we all enjoy the blessings of helping to rescue our Father’s children?

Love Brother Jeff Erickson

“Teacher”

Dear Elders and Sisters:

I had an experience with my five-year-old daughter Holland that reminded me why correct and good teaching is so critical in all that we do. Holland was helping me install light bulbs in the house, and she had excitedly retrieved a small two-foot ladder as I had gone to get my larger eight-foot ladder. We found a light bulb that didn’t work in the bathroom, and I told Holland to set up her ladder, climb the ladder to the counter, and then climb on the counter, and I would be right back with a light bulb. When I returned to the bathroom with the light bulb, she was crying. When the tears stopped, she showed me what had happened. She has set up the latter in the unfolded state, and as she tried to climb up, it collapsed to the ground and so did she. She was not badly hurt, but it taught me that she had never before used a foldable ladder by herself. After the accident I taught her how to unfold the little ladder and make sure the “extra arms” were straight. She observed this teaching and she unfolded and set up the ladder as instructed, and successfully replaced the bathroom light bulb. After performing this task four different times, she was thrilled by her efforts in changing light bulbs. The ladder experience with Holland reminded me again that we are always teachers.

This week I thought I would talk a little bit about the role of a teacher, and the goal of a real teacher. What is a teacher, who can be a teacher, and how does a real teacher teach? I have to start with the Master Teacher and one of the ultimate compliments paid to him. “The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him” (John 3:2). How do we become “a teacher come from God” like Christ?

One of the great blessings of being a missionary is being set apart as a teacher. The Lord gives all his servants the power to teach. “Wherefore, I the Lord ask you this question—unto what were ye ordained? To preach my gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth” (D&C 50:13-14). The Lord ordains and sets apart his servants and then it is up to them to become proficient at teaching by the spirit. Truly this is a gift that is earned and not just granted. “Verily I say unto you, he that is ordained of me and sent forth to preach the word of truth by the Comforter, in the Spirit of truth, doth he preach it by the Spirit of truth or some other way? And if it be by some other way it is not of God” (D&C 50:17-18).

How do you obtain the spirit, how do you teach with the spirit? You do what the ancient and modern prophets have done. You follow the example of the best missionaries. A great model is found in the missions of Ammon and Aaron. “Now these sons of Mosiah were with Alma at the time the angel first appeared unto him; therefore Alma did rejoice exceedingly to see his brethren; and what added more to his joy, they were still his brethren in the Lord; yea, and they had waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth; for they were men of a sound understanding and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God. But this is not all; they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; therefore they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and when they taught, they taught with power and authority of God” (Alma 17:2-3).

There is a price to pay to be a master teacher. The price is personal righteousness. The price is prayer, study, desire, fasting, diligence, and obedience. The price is love of the people you teach. The price is believing you are no greater as a teacher than the receiver of the message. “... And the priest, not esteeming himself above his hearers, for the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength” (Alma 1:26). Many missionaries feel they are greater than the people of their mission, which is never the case in Heavenly Father’s plan. We are all children of a loving God, who wants everyone to come back home. Here is a promise I love with some conditions for those earnest teachers who seek the spirit, “And the Spirit shall be given unto you by the prayer of faith; and if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach” (D&C 42:14).

Early in the history of the church Oliver Cowdery and Sidney Rigdon were both powerful teachers. Here is the experience of a young lawyer as he listened to Oliver and Sydney teach the gospel. “Apparently at a later Sunday, after Rigdon’s baptism and ordination, Varnum J. Card came to Mayfield accompanied by his friend John Barr. Cowdery and Rigdon spoke at a morning meeting, and Rigdon baptized in mid-afternoon. In the midst of a moving service, ‘Mr Card suddenly seized my arm and said, ‘Take me away.’” Card’s face was “pale,” and ‘his frame trembled as we walked away and mounted our horses.’ Regaining his composure, Varnum Card evaluated his experience: ‘Mr. Barr, if you had not been there, I certainly should have gone into the water.’ He said the impulse was irresistible.” (Richard L. Anderson, “Impact of the First Preaching in Ohio” *BYU Studies Quarterly* Vol. 11:4 1971, p. 487,491-492).

Here are two virtues the people of your mission should look for from a teacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. One is this, “And also trust no one to be your teacher nor your minister, except he be a man (woman) of God, walking in his ways and keeping his commandments” (Mosiah 23:14). Obviously with teaching comes great responsibility and personal obedience. The second virtue is, “Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together” (D&C

50:22). The beauty of being a minister of the gospel of Christ is when you teach the people with the spirit, they are edified. When they are edified, they feel and act on the spirit and you rejoice together. True rejoicing brings change, peace, desire, and newfound love of eternal truths. True rejoicing is what really makes a mission so wonderful. When people are baptized and reactivated due to spiritual promptings, truly there is reason to rejoice.

One of the great examples in all scripture of a teacher and a receiver being edified and rejoicing together is found in the exchange between Aaron and King Lamoni's father. The Lord had prepared the King to receive the message. Aaron had built a relationship of trust, and then built on that trust as he began to teach the king simple truths. Aaron knew the spirit was edifying the King when he heard these precious words, "And if now thou sayest there is a God, behold I will believe." The next verse tells us, "And now when Aaron heard this, his heart began to rejoice, and he said: Behold, assuredly as thou livest, O king, there is a God" (Alma 22:7-8).

The edifying and rejoicing only continued as the King said, "...Yea, I believe that the Great Spirit created all things, and I desire that ye should tell me concerning all these things, and I will believe thy words" (Alma 22:11). I can feel the spirit of rejoicing when I read the King's heartfelt prayer when he says, "Oh God... I will give away all my sins to know thee" (Alma 22:18).

I pray that as you teach by the spirit, as Aaron did, you will have an abundance of edifying and rejoicing with those people you teach.

I love you. Brother Jeff Erickson

"The Perfect Day"

Dear Elders and Sisters:

There is a phrase from the Doctrine and Covenants that I hope blesses you everyday of your mission.

"That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day" (D&C 50:24). I hope that each day of your mission the light in you grows and grows until "the perfect day." I hope that most days of your mission feel like "the perfect day."

What is "the perfect day" as a missionary? Is it teaching five spirit filled discussions? Is it finding a new wonderful golden family to teach? Is it seeing the spirit testify of your message and seeing the light go on in the family you are teaching. Is it when the spirit puts words in your mouth that you know are not your own. Is it testifying of a principle and the spirit reaffirming to you the principle is true? Is it telling the

Joseph Smith story and feeling the fire burn inside your soul again, that truly he was a prophet of God? Is it when you speak of the atonement of Jesus Christ and you can barely speak, as you are so grateful for this precious gift?

I recall many days during the course of my mission that felt like “perfect days.” Here is one perfect day that I love to reflect upon. We were teaching the wonderful Robert White family, when the spirit said, invite them to be baptized. I invited the father Robert to be baptized and he said, “Yes.” I then invited his good wife Carolyn and she said, “I am not ready.” Then we invited his oldest son, Jason. He said, “Yes.” His mom was shocked that her fourteen-year-old son had a desire to be baptized. She quickly asked Jason, “Why do you want to be baptized?” Jason powerfully bore his testimony as he said, “Mom you know how it feels when you win the championship baseball game?” “Yes,” she said. “That is how I feel, only better, when the missionaries come and teach our family.” The mother after feeling Jason’s words quickly recanted and said she too wanted to be baptized. Two other brothers Dawson and Tyson, then also committed to baptism, while young Robin would have to wait until he turned eight. I will always remember that day of my mission as one of those perfect days, where light is given and light is received and it grew brighter and brighter for myself, my companion and the White family that day.

I am so thankful for “perfect days.” I believe in my life as a missionary, as a father, as a teacher, as a bishop, and as a Son of God I have had many “perfect days.” These “perfect days” have inspired me, filled me, blessed me, changed me and motivated me to be more obedient and faithful. I feel there is nothing better than “a perfect day,” and I will always long for more “perfect days.”

I remember a perfect day as a father. It was a few days before my son Tyler would be leaving for college. I had the opportunity to give him a priesthood blessing. I believe it is difficult to send a child away because as a parent you feel you can’t do much for them. I didn’t feel the emptiness of those feelings. I felt like with a special family meeting and a priesthood blessing, we could do a lot for him. Tyler shared this experience a few days later. He said during the blessing he didn’t feel the spirit. After the blessing he went down to his room and things changed. The spirit began to penetrate his heart and he began to cry. With the spirit present in his room he made some important commitments to himself and to God. “Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together” (D&C 50:22).

I remember a perfect day as a bishop. A married couple had come to my office, and they were done. The wife was ready for a divorce now, but was willing to make one last ditch effort to meet with the bishop. Her husband had really been extremely selfish and was not doing his part in the marriage, and she couldn’t do it anymore. I started to talk to this couple, and I started to draw on the white board in the office. I was not even certain what I would say. As I continued to draw and to talk, words and ideas from the spirit came to me, and I shared them with these two people in this extremely damaged relationship. I had drawn a diagram that just continued to come together as we discussed the relationship. The spirit was present and they were both touched. The husband said, “Bishop this makes sense, I can do this.” He left the office with a new determination. The wife also left with a renewed hope. I left the bishop’s office that day knowing the Lord had done the teaching to all of us through the spirit of God. We had all received light that day, and we all understood and we were all edified. The beauty of this story is that today that couple is still married and doing much better, as they have put their trust more deeply in a loving God who cares about their marriage.

I remember a perfect day as a teacher. I had been asked to speak to a few hundred youth and was a bit overwhelmed at the assignment. I had been praying how to approach the youth on a difficult topic, but had no ideas or answers. I had studied and prepared for some time with no real ideas or answers coming to me. I pressed forward and was rewarded with a wonderful insight as I came across a story that put the entire subject into perspective with a tremendous analogy. The story made the topic come to life, and I was able to now draw some powerful parallels that were able to carry my message to the heart of the

listeners more effectively. I was so grateful for that guidance and impression that helped me to understand the topic and teach the subject more powerfully. I was so edified by the light that came to me during that preparation time.

May you have many perfect days, full of light, and may they get brighter and brighter until every day is a perfect day.

Love, Br. Jeff Erickson

“Why I Love Nephi”

Dear Elders and Sisters:

I am going to give you some reasons why I love Nephi. He is such a great role model for me. I love his writings, I love his experiences, I love his wisdom, I love his testimony, I love his devotion, I love his insights, I love Nephi because he loved the Lord. Here are a few of my favorite things that he said.

1) “And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying: Blessed art thou, Nephi, because of thy faith, for thou hast sought me diligently, with lowliness of heart. I love Nephi’s faith” (1 Nephi 2:19).

2) “Therefore go, my son, and thou shalt be favored of the Lord, because thou hast not murmured” (1 Nephi 3:6). I love that Nephi was an optimist and didn’t whine, complain or murmur.

3) “But behold I said unto them that: As the Lord liveth, and as we live, we will not go down unto our father in the wilderness until we have accomplished the thing which the Lord hath commanded us” (1 Nephi 3:15). I love that Nephi was a finisher, especially when it came to obeying the Lord’s commandments.

4) “And I also spake unto him, saying: Surely the Lord hath commanded us to do this thing; and shall we not be diligent in keeping the commandments of the Lord?” (1 Nephi 4:34). I love his attitude regarding obedience.

5) “And it came to pass that thus far I and my father had kept the commandments wherewith the Lord had commanded us” (1 Nephi 5:20). I love that Nephi was obedient.

6) “For the fulness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved” (1 Nephi 6:4). I love his missionary desires and goals.

7) “And it came to pass that I did frankly forgive them all that they had done, and I did exhort them that they would pray unto the Lord their God for forgiveness” (1 Nephi 7:21). I love that Nephi was quick to forgive.

8) “I know the Lord loveth his children, but I do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Nephi 11:17). I love that Nephi didn’t know everything, but he knew the most important thing, that God loves us.

9) “And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did exhort my brethren, with all diligence, to keep the commandments of the Lord” (1 Nephi 16:4). I love that Nephi invited others to follow Christ and be obedient.

10) “And I, Nephi, did go into the mount oft, and I did pray oft unto the Lord; wherefore the Lord showed unto me great things” (1 Nephi 18:3). I love that Nephi understood the power of sincere prayer.

11) “And I, Nephi, have written these things unto my people, that perhaps I might persuade them that they would remember the Lord their Redeemer” (1 Nephi 19:18). I love that his goal in taking time and effort to record on the plates was to help people remember and come unto Christ.

12) “Behold, my soul delighteth in the things of the Lord; and my heart pondereth continually upon the things which I have seen and heard” (2 Nephi 4:16). I love that Nephi loved the things of God.

13) “O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever” (2 Nephi 4:34). I love that Nephi knew who to trust.

14) “And it came to pass that we lived after the manner of happiness” (2 Nephi 5:27). I love that Nephi was happy, and taught us how to be happy.

15) “And also my soul delighteth in the covenants of the Lord which he hath made to our fathers” (2 Nephi 11:5). I love that Nephi understood the importance of covenants.

16) “And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:16). I love that Nephi knew that through Christ we are forgiven.

17) “And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end Amen” (2 Nephi 31:21). I love that Nephi knew that Christ is the only way to be saved.

18) “Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3). I love that Nephi understood the power of the scriptures.

19) “But I, Nephi, have written what I have written, and I esteem it as of great worth” (2 Nephi 33:3). I love that Nephi recorded things of great value.

20) “And I know that the Lord God will consecrate my prayers for the gain of my people” (2 Nephi 33:4). I love that Nephi knew the power of prayer for his people.

21) “I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell” (2 Nephi 33:6). I love the things that Nephi gloried in.

22) “And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and they teach all men that they should do good” (2 Nephi 33:10). I love that if we believe in Christ, we will believe the words of Nephi.

I love Nephi. Why? He was righteous. He lived what he preached. He was a prophet. He was an example. He was a leader. He was faithful in the midst of adversity. He was an inspired writer. He testified of Christ. He loved Christ. He was a representative of Christ.

Missionaries: Follow Nephi’s words because they are the words of the gospel of Christ. Follow Nephi’s example, because he followed the example of Christ.

Love Brother Jeff Erickson

“Writing a Letter Home”

Dear Elders and Sisters:

When I was in 10th Grade I was struggling in my life. My parents had just gone through a devastating divorce. We had moved across town and I was no longer close to my old friends. I was in a new ward. I was struggling in school. I loved sports and no longer felt very competitive in the sports I loved because I had not grown while everyone else around me had. My self-esteem was at a record low. I can honestly say I was discouraged and running low on hope. During this deeply personal pity party, I received a letter (note) from someone who truly was inspired.

A girl named Robin wrote, for me a life-altering note in my sophomore yearbook. Robin was a senior and she was beautiful inside and out. During the year she had been a bright spot for me as we had a class

together and she always said, “hello.” She was a dancer for the school and had a boyfriend who was the captain of the football team. Robin seemed to have it all. Robin wrote a carefully crafted note that spoke of how wonderful and handsome I was. I hadn’t felt wonderful or handsome and so I was grateful for her words and kindness. I read her note countless times as it made me feel important and worthwhile. Robin in just a few short phrases elevated me to heights I had not been to for some time. I will forever be grateful for Robin’s kind note at what seemed to be a time that I needed it most.

I wanted to prick your conscience a little bit with a reminder of what a blessing your “missionary letters or notes” are to your mothers and families. Paul said, “Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand” (Galatians 6:11). Many mothers would rejoice hearing this pronouncement from their son or daughter who is on a mission. Usually a missionary shares precious little with his family, as time is relatively short with only one hour to do your e-mailing each week. I will tell you one of the two most important letters you can write each week is to your “angel mother.” The other obviously is to your mission president.

I remember as a young missionary making a commitment to write my mother every week of my mission. It was a difficult commitment to keep on occasion, but I was able to meet that goal. There were occasions where the letters I wrote were very brief; nevertheless they still went out each week. I remember one letter I wrote to my mother that simply said, “I love you.” I am certain the letter was appreciated, but I also know my mom was looking for a lot more information than what I had written.

For a young missionary to understand the value of a Monday letter to their family, you must know of many families’ Monday missionary traditions. For a parent or parents who have a missionary in the field, they live for Mondays. They check e-mail hourly to see if the precious letter is in the inbox yet. On days when the letter is late, there is frustration, questioning and sadness. A lengthy letter (a large letter) always brings gratitude and happiness, while a short letter brings disappointment and bewilderment. A never forgetful mother wonders how can a son or daughter not write me volumes as I have devoted my entire life to his or her peace, comfort and happiness. Mothers are amazing at remembering.

As a missionary, remember the power specific letters have had in your life. Recently you opened the most anticipated letter of your life when you received a letter from the church. I believe every missionary trembles with excitement when they read, “Dear Elder/Sister: You are hereby called to serve as a missionary of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. You are assigned to labor in the _____ mission.” Truly that one letter has been life altering and life changing for you.

Much of what you read in the New Testament are letters from Paul. Paul’s letters are full of principles, doctrines, counsel, wisdom, encouragement, missionary experiences, revelations, and reminders of the goodness of Christ. The New Testament would be very abbreviated without Paul’s carefully prepared epistles to the saints.

In the Book of Mormon we read powerful letters from the hand of Pahoran and from Captain Moroni addressed to one another. I love Moroni’s inspiring mission statement in his letter to Pahoran, “Behold, I am Moroni, your chief captain. I seek not for power, but to pull it down. I seek not for honor of the world, but for the glory of my God, and the freedom and welfare of my country” (Alma 60:36). I love reading about Pahoran’s disgust and intolerance for wickedness when he writes, “Therefore, my beloved brother, Moroni, let us resist evil, and whatsoever evil we cannot resist with our words, yea, such as rebellions and dissensions, let us resist them with our swords, that we may retain our freedom, that we may rejoice in the great privilege of our church, and in the cause of our Redeemer and our God” (Alma 61:14). These two great men wrote letters of wisdom, power, and truth, that have changed me.

What would we know about the successes of the Stripling Warriors had Helaman not carefully crafted an inspired epistle and shared their struggles and triumphs with his leader Captain Moroni (Alma 56-58).

These verses will always be a reminder to me of the miraculous power of mothers in our lives. “And they rehearsed unto me the words of their mothers, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it” (Alma

56:48). This verse alone should be a reminder to write a lengthy letter to our mothers weekly as missionaries.

There are other inspired letters in the Book of Mormon that bless us, inspire and teach us. We receive wonderful doctrine from Mormon in his poignant letters to his son Moroni about infant baptism and laboring diligently to conquer the enemy of all righteousness (Moroni 8 & 9). I will not list the rest, but pray you find them and study their content, as they are letters from “prophets of God.”

May you remember this wise proverb as you contemplate writing home every Monday as a full-time missionary. “As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country” (Proverbs 25:25). May you share the good news of the Kingdom with your family each week as you “strive to strengthen and fortify” (Alma 60:25) your family through your sacred mission assignment and experiences.

Henry B. Eyring shared this experience: “I was teaching from section 25 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In that section Emma Smith is told that she should give her time to ‘writing and to learning much’ (verse 8). About three rows back sat a blonde girl whose brow wrinkled as I urged the class to be diligent in developing writing skills. She raised her hand and said, ‘That doesn’t seem reasonable to me. All I’ll ever write are letters to my children.’ That brought laughter all around the class. I felt chagrined to have applied that scripture to her. Just looking at her I could imagine a full quiver of children around her, and I could even see the letters she’d write in purple ink, with handwriting slanting backwards; neat, round loops; and circles for the tops of the *i*’s. Maybe writing powerfully wouldn’t matter to her.

“Then a young man stood up, near the back. He’d said little during the term; I’m not sure he’d ever spoken before. He was older than the other students, and he was shy. He asked if he could speak. He told in a quiet voice of having been a soldier in Vietnam. One day, in what he thought would be a lull, he had left his rifle and walked across his fortified compound to mail call. Just as he got a letter in his hand, he heard a bugle blowing and shouts and mortar and rifle fire coming ahead of the swarming enemy. He fought his way back to his rifle, using his hands as weapons. With the men who survived, he drove the enemy out. The wounded were evacuated. Then he sat down among the living, and some of the dead, and he opened his letter. It was from his mother. She wrote that she’d had a spiritual experience that assured her that he would live to come home if he were righteous. In my class, the boy said quietly, ‘That letter was scripture to me. I kept it. And he sat down’” (Henry B. Eyring December 16, 1980 BYU devotional).

As you write letters home, may they be full of love, power, truth, and wisdom. May the letters be full of the spirit, filled with missionary experiences, and reminders to your family of our “great and merciful God.” May your letters become declarations of your faith or your “articles of faith.” May you build, elevate, uplift and inspire as you share your personal experiences and personal witness of the goodness of God. May it be said of your letters home and to your mother, “For his (her) letters, say they, are weighty and powerful” (2 Corinthians 10:10). Remember for some, your letters may be treated as scripture. Love,
Br. Jeff Erickson