

Feed My Sheep – MTC Talk – Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

This talk was given by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland in the Missionary Training Center (MTC) on January 11, 2011. It's entitled "Feed My Sheep" and was a precursor to the talk that he gave in General Conference.

What a privilege to be here. I love being at the MTC. I told these people earlier in a little informal and inadequate dinner remark that there's nothing I'd rather do, and nowhere I'd rather be than with Missionaries. And in Missionary service, and in performing Missionary labor, and doing things with the Missionary department. The mechanism and the structure that, under the direction of the prophet to call you on a mission, guide your Mission while you're out there, works with your Mission Presidents. I want you to have a good experience; provide you with things like Preach My Gospel and all the other helps that we can give you.

I've gone around this earth. I guess I've said this in every congregation I've ever been in, certainly any congregation with Missionaries, which is numbering quite a few now, after all these years. But I suppose on more or less, probably literally, every continent, and many of the nations of those continents, I have testified to Missionaries like you that my Mission meant everything to me in my life. Everything. No young man could have served a Mission and been more effected by it than I was.

I hope you will feel the same. And what I say to you tonight is assuming that you're going to feel that, and that I'll be terrifically disappointed if you don't. But I want your Mission to mean as much to you as mine meant to me. I came from a family that did not have any tradition of Missionary service. At least not any immediate sense, 'til you get back to some ancestor somewhere. But I didn't have any immediate role models. I didn't really know what a Mission was. I didn't know much about what clothing you took, and we weren't nearly as organized and orchestrated. This is a long time ago, by the way. We just landed the arch when I got my call.

But I don't even know whether we had a clothing list. I don't know, and I didn't have much of anybody to check with. I didn't have a big brother, or a big sister, or a father, or mother, or anybody who'd been on a Mission. And to have gone as ignorant, and innocent, and confused, and befuddled, and mystified as I was, and to have had the experience that I had in two years. To have forever and ever and ever affected my life evermore, is more than I will ever be able to thank my Father in Heaven for. In this long list of things I can't thank Him for in this Church, in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, beginning first of all and above all else, for the Atonement and gift of His Son.

But so closely related to that was the chance to go talk about it. To go and learn about it. To go start to have some feelings about it, for the first time in my life. I'd gone through Primary. I'd come up through the Aaronic Priesthood. I'd gone to Seminary. I did the things you did, and I didn't know anymore than you know, which is saying a lot. Or maybe it's saying a little. But to have entered that intense period of my life, and to have felt what I felt, and to have

come home and had it shape every significant thing that has happened to me since. I really mean that and I really testify of that. Every good thing that's happened to me in 50 years – 49 years since a Mission – every good thing that's happened to me came somehow through the portal of that little 24-months – Elder, in beloved... Where's the man who gave the prayer? Elder, in jolly old England.

I am so grateful and I care very very much about your intention to serve that way and to have it affect your marriage and your choices about education and your world's work. And how you raise your children. And what you want to do in the community. And the responsibilities you fill in the Church. I want you to feel the same way. I'm gonna, I'm actually gonna end up talking about that, so I don't want to say more about it now, but thank you for representing those marvelously formative and powerful moments in my life. When so much changed, and so much happened, and so much was permanent, and embraced forever more. I'm grateful. I'm grateful for the Missionary program of the Church, and I want you to come home feeling about it the way I did, and the way I do.

I want to talk with you a little bit about the moment in time that you've come to a Mission. The progress that the Church has made, the development that the Church has made in it's Missionary movement, and it's Missionary policies, and it's Missionary materials, and why you are so fortunate. I particularly want to stress that you have come to a Mission in the era of Preach My Gospel.

You should be thoroughly conversant with that from the minute you walked into this building, and certainly ongoing as you go out into your Mission field. But I want to just give you this much of a backdrop to that history and I'm grateful that Elder Hinckley is here, and I'm grateful that his sister Kathlene Hinckley Walker is here, because Preach My Gospel was born. And it probably developed over a long time. I suppose a lot of people had thoughts and ideas and feelings about it. But Preach My Gospel was really born in the modern sense, the day that President Hinckley stood before a group of prospective Mission Presidents and said, in effect, (this is President Gordon B. Hinckley, father of these two I've mentioned) and said in effect, said it more discretely than this, more carefully than this, but what he said was, "Somethings wrong with our Missionary program. Somethings not right."

And what prompted him to say it was Missionaries who come home, and fail to remain active in the Church. And when he talked about that, it went through my heart like a javelin, because he articulated what I had always felt, but had never somehow been able to say, or focus on, or realize I was feeling it. But when he talked about that tragedy in his life, with some emotion, and your father was not given to showing a lot of emotion. But when he said that with emotion about any Missionary who could go do what we're asking you to do, and come home and not be faithful to that very doctrine, and those very covenants, and those very principles, and those very ordinances, something is manifestly wrong. And it took a while, and it took a lot of work by a marvelous department, many of whom are represented here and in the immediate audience, a lot of starting and stopping and reviewing and talking and rehearsing, but out of that experience was born Preach My Gospel.

With this fundamental proposition, it's said better in the book, and it'd be said better by, I'm

sure other General Authorities, but from me, the message of Preach My Gospel to you tonight is, that the fundamental change that was made and how we do Missionary work is, that we need to convert *you*, and then *you* figure out how to convert investigators. And for 100 years or more, we had been leaping to the investigator. We had been saying from day one, "What does the investigator need? What does the investigator got to have?" And that's still true. We still have to ask that. We still have to know what the investigator needs to know, and what the investigator needs to feel, and what the investigator needs to do in order to come into the Church, and for us to have a successful Mission. But we were leaping to that. We were sort of jumping over a hurdle to get to that, and failed to recognize the hurdle that President Hinckley, and I'm sure many many others before him laid the ground work for, to say, "There's something before you get to the investigator. You've got to get to the Missionary."

And so the idea of a memorized discussion, wrote mechanical lessons, they were great lessons. It's the era of my Mission. I memorized those lessons. I memorized every single solitary word of those lessons. They were quite effective. Probably better than anything we'd done before that. We had some focus. We got it down to a reasonable number. There was uniformity throughout the Church. We called it the "Uniform Plan for Teaching the Gospel." But it still wasn't enough, because somehow in the cases that were being identified, (and any case would be too many cases). And I guess there were a lot, you'd know a few, and I'd know a few, where somehow we'd been able to throw the switch and say the words that had come in one ear and out the other, or in both ears and out our mouth, but somehow had never gotten down here. That the Gospel had never been down here in the heart of the Missionary.

And so we were saying, in effect, to investigators, "Come in and sit down and be quiet. I'm gonna tell you what I'm here to tell you. I don't care whether your mother just died, or whether your son is on drugs. I don't care whether you're in the middle of a divorce, or whether you just had a car wreck. Sit down! I've got a message, and I'm going to tell you." Well, we've learned since then that that might work, and that it might not work. And most of the time, it didn't work. And that you have to go where the investigator is, before you can get the investigator to come where you are. You've got to go find where that investigator is, in his or her life, or their family, or their marriage, or their childhood, or their education, or their economic frustration. You've gotta find some knowing legitimate loving identification with that person, and then say, "Come with me to the Sacred Grove." Then say, "Come with me to the garden of Gethsemane." Then say, ultimately, "Come with me to Calvary." But we were assuming a little too much that people were going to join us on that journey with or without our interest and identification with what they were feeling, and what they were going through.

Elder Allen, Brother Steve Allen, our managing director who is in the audience tonight, and one of the brilliant brilliant administrators in this Church, has done with his team. All of whom, many of whom, are in the audience tonight, have done studies over the years. And we learn these horrible facts. We actually hired people. We hired people to listen to Missionaries. We paid a firm to act like they were investigators, so that we could learn what an investigator thinks our missionaries are doing, accomplishing, or not accomplishing. And do you know what most of them said? Most of them said, "If I hadn't been paid to listen to them, I would have thrown them out of the house." Which is often what happens, when they're not being paid.

With this in mind that they would manufacture these, they had manufactured them, because they were hired. They were supposed to be, supposed to act like investigators, so they'd make up stories. And when the Missionaries would start, they'd say, "Well, tonight's not a good night, because I just received word that my father may not live through the night. I just received that word," or some such story. And then the test was, well, what do the Missionaries do with that? Do they even hear that? Does it even register that somebody just said, they have just been notified that their Dad is dying? Or is it just, "Well, that's nice. Now, Brother Brown..." and you're launched off into this first message that you're gonna give? Whatever. Or, you know, somebody would say, "This isn't a good time to talk. This isn't a good week for Missionaries to come. My son been expelled from school. He's 15. I don't know what to do with him. I'm a single Mother. I don't know what to do with this boy. This is not a time for Missionaries."

Well, might that not be a time for Missionaries? It certainly ought to be a time for Missionaries, as the other situations should have been a situation for Missionaries, as any situation ought to be a time for Missionaries, if we have ears to hear and eyes to see. But that's the part that, that for so long, seemed to be missing. And it's the part that President Hinckley picked up on and commissioned, then the Missionary Executive Counsel, and its Missionary department, to start to wrestle with this and say, "How can we do better?"

And thus, Preach My Gospel was born. With this premise – which I'm repeating, but for emphasis – Elders and Sisters, we felt if we could get it in you, if you could get it in your heart, and you could listen to these people with your heart, you could see them not as objects for baptism, or a statistical zone rendering report on Sunday night. If you could see these as children of God with real lives, and real needs, and real hopes, and real dreams, and real heartaches, and listen, and pray, and be lead by the Spirit to know what to say... If you would study hard enough to know the gospel and know what to say, we would see Missionary work begin to be – and certainly in the life of the Missionary – we would see Missionary work begin to be what God intended it to be.

Told the wonderful little story. I'll give a 30-second synopsis of a longer story of Wallas Toronto, proselyting in Czechoslovakia – I was gonna say the Czech Republic, it was Czechoslovakia then. Proselyting in Czechoslovakia, between the two wars. After World World I and before the rise of Hitler in World War II. And these two Missionaries knocked on a door, it opened about that far, and a woman looked out, saw who they were, and slammed the door. Somebody deft a foot and, deft of heart at least, didn't quite get their toe in the door, but they refused to leave.

And by the way, be a little persistent! Now, be courteous. Be thoughtful. Don't be insensitive, but Sister Holland's got an Avon lady that's more persistent than you are! She's there every week, and she's just selling mascara! Okay? Be a little persistent! Don't take "No" for an answer. How many times did the Savior have to come to the Nephites? How many times does He come to the temple in bountiful to announce who He is and the advent that he's going to make and appear before them? He has to tell them three times. You may have to go back to a door. You may have to go back to an investigator. You may have to find another way to get

back into that heart. Don't give up too easy.

Well, okay, these Elders weren't going to give up easy. And so they knocked on the door. Knocked on the door again and again. Finally, she opened again. And said, in her Czech – and their Czech wasn't very good – but she told them to leave. And they said, “What have we done? We're young men. We're innocent. We're just visitors here. What have we done? We came to give a message. We came to express good will. What did we do?” And she said, “You're ministers, aren't you?” And they said, “Yes, we *are* ministers.” She said, “That's enough. That's enough for me. That's all.” And starts to slam the door again. This time, they did get a toe in the door. “Why? What's wrong with ministers? What's wrong with us? Tell us what. Tell us why.”

Well something touched her heart. I'm sure the Spirit of the Lord. I'm sure the persistence of these Missionaries, a little bit. And she started to tell a longer story, the quick version of which is that she had had a daughter, lost a daughter. I don't know where the Father was. I guess there was a Father, but if he was killed in the war, I don't know, but there's no father in the home. And she has a baby girl, little girl, and at about age 3, lost the baby. And in total grief, and in total distress – and again, if it's in the context of the war or what, I don't know – but she went to her local minister and asked for help, and asked for consolation, and asked for counsel, asked for what you ask a Minister for, when you've had a moment of bereavement and grief and tragedy in your life.

And the minister said – now this is the report that the Missionaries got, and I'm leaving it to you as to the accuracy of it. It seems a little harsh, but it's the way they reported it and the way she said it to them – that he turned on her and said, “I don't have anything to do with you. I don't have anything to say to you. That little girl is in hell, and so are you, eventually, because you didn't have her baptized. You haven't darkened the door of this Church, and you come staggering down here at your moment of loss, and expect something? Well you're not going to get it.” And turned her away.

I can't quite imagine that, but that's the report. And it was severe enough, and honest enough, or at least accurate enough that she left saying two things, “I will never ever ever darken the door of this Church again.” And number two, “I will never speak to a minister again in time of need, or in time of delight. In time of joy or in time of sorrow. I will never speak to a minister again.” So that's why she said, “Are you ministers?” And they said, “Yes.” and she slams the door.

Well what would you do, Elders? Sisters, what would you do if you're Elder Holland, and you've got six memorized discussions, and you know them in order? And you have to give one before you give two, and you have to give two before you give three, and you have to have your companion ready to do his part, because you only know your part when you're a new Missionary, and on and on and on and all the drama. What would you do? Well I'll tell you what Wallas Toronto did in 1928. Long time before my Missionary plan or yours. He said, in his broken Czech, “Would you like us to tell you where your daughter is?”

And later on, this woman said, “For the first time in my life, I felt the Spirit of the Lord.” And

she opened the door – didn't let them in, this is still a doorstep conversation, persistent Missionaries. This is still a doorstep exchange – she opens a little wider and says, “I'd give anything to know where my daughter is.” And Wallas Toronto, halting, feeble, broken Czech student that he was, 21 years old or so, opened the Book of Mormon and on the doorstep reads to her, in the best Czech he can muster, from the 8th Chapter of Moroni. Mormon's great letter to his son, about the curse of infant baptism, and why children are saved by the grace of God in the Atonement of Christ, in their innocence, and swept into the Kingdom of Heaven on the mercy and majesty on the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Fifty years later, when Elder Hinckley's son and my son were companions in the Czech Republic, there was a tradition still alive about this sister. She was not living, as I understand it, and as I gather it. But there was a tradition still alive in that land of this woman, who had since past away, but whose gift to the Church was still legendary among the Saints, and at least some of the Missionaries heard about it, of going out of World War I, through this experience of joining the Church, and then the closure to Czechoslovakia again, because as you'll recall in history, Czechoslovakia was one of the first places to fall in the rise of Nazism in the 30s and then onto World War II. And then in the aftermath of World War II, Communism and the division of Europe. So they had 75 years or so, I don't know, all told, of War-to-War to occupation-to-occupation, and through it all, this little sister and a few handful of sisters like her, because there wasn't much Priesthood, kept the Church alive and the little flicker of a flame of faith burning in Czechoslovakia. Until finally, in our day, that Mission could be re-opened, and our sons and some of you – some in this room must be going to the Czech Republic, or to Czechoslovakia, or nearby – and a new day dawned and the Church would grow again on the strength of little sisters who kept their tithing in a mason jar. Who prayed and longed and yearned for the day that any Priesthood leader, anywhere nearby, could come and administer the Sacrament. And that they'd say their prayers and do their duty and be the best they could, even in severely restricted circumstances, with horribly restricted religious freedom.

I don't know who that sister is. I don't even know her name. I don't know how, I don't know how much of that legend is legend and how it will be seen on into the next 40 or 50 or 60 years. But I know those stories are repeated all over this world, on the strength of a Missionary who had the sense to know what was in Moroni 8.

Now that's why it's got to be in the hearts of the Missionaries. That's the leap we were making, and honestly so, but a leap that was inadequate to somehow say, “Let's give you this prepackaged information so that you can immediately give it to the investigator.” Well we don't always know what the investigator needs. At least from headquarters, we don't know. You're gonna know. But we don't know. So Preach My Gospel is an attempt to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ into your life. And don't you ever return from your Mission and fail to measure up what you've gone out there to say.

How can you ever look an investigator in the eye again? How can you ever look a companion in the eye again? How can you look at a member, or a priesthood leader, or a primary teacher, or a new convert struggling just to hang onto the gospel... How can you possibly go do this, and say this, and say you believe it, and say you're emissaries of the Lord Jesus

Christ?

You're witnesses called to serve, called to serve! I've sung that song ten thousand times! And you are! And I have to say, "So what? So when? For how long? For how much?" I'm still going to return to that before I finish.

But for me, that's the one lesson that I want you to learn. Beyond all the details, beyond all the instruction that you're going to get, here in the MTC, and in the Mission field, that's the fundamental thing that I want you to carry away, into the field, out of the MTC, and into your labor; is that your supposed to get this before we have any hope in the world that the investigators can get it. And that it's in your heart, and you care enough to learn the gospel and follow the spirit, and be prepared to go where the investigator is.

To find the investigator here, and pull this one in, and find that investigator there, and pull this one in, and to do this work the way the ancients did it. That's real Missionary work. That's Peter, James, and John. That's Alma and Amulek. That's Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and Daniel. That's the way the ancients did it. And I believe with all my heart, in these Latter-days, in this greatest of all dispensations, we're getting closer to doing it the way the Ancients did it. And I pray that you'll succeed in that.

There are three things – well, there are a lot of things. There are a lot of things that we've learned in the department in that Missionaries don't do very well. Frankly, Missionaries do miraculously, marvelously well. It's one of the wonders of the world that we ask you to do what you do and you do it so well. But as we try to teach to this, and as we try to emphasize two or three things, let me just say, there are a couple of things, three things for tonight, that I'd have you watch for in the next few weeks, in the next few months. And try and take advantage of while you're here, and take advantage of when you start in the field.

Number one is, we learn that Missionaries don't study very well. Now, that doesn't mean that you don't read the pages. It doesn't mean that you're probably not pretty loyal, I hope you're loyal, to mission rules, and mission outlines, and Preach My Gospel, that you're going to have a study period. You're going to have some private study, and you're going to have some companionship study. But in this new era, Elders and Sisters, studying takes on a whole new meaning. Certainly a larger meaning, and impact, and mission, and message than when I was a Missionary. You have to be an infinitely Missionary than I and my companions were, and that people in this Church have been for decades.

If you're going to be this personally responsive, personally prepared, deeply endowed, deeply en-viewed, powerful teacher, you're going to have to work at that. And that means study. Now, that's why we want you to get up in the morning. I hate talking about obedience. But you probably, since obedience is the first law of everything, and I remind you of your temple experience, I remind you of your life experience, I remind you for what's certainly going to be your Mission experience. Tell me how your obedience is, and I'll tell you right now how your Mission is going to be. It's as eternal as anything I can ever say to you.

And something as simple as getting up in the morning. We're not just trying to be more mean

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to you than your mothers. We're not trying to just make life miserable for you. Not bring you, you know, you're little tea and crumpets. Well, I can't bring you tea, but... You know? If we make you get up and work hard, and start early, there's a reason for that. It is because you have to study.

We have to members of the twelve. Two Russells in the Quorum of the Twelve. If you wanted heart surgery for your mother, would you want Elder Nelson to do it, or Elder Ballard to do it? Both Russells and both wonderful wonderful men. Any body got any choice? Anybody got any...? I won't ask for a vote, but I suspect if you know anything about it, you're probably saying, "Well, if I get a choice, I'll take Elder Nelson." Well that's not to be unkind to Elder Ballard. He's got a Swiss army knife, too. He can go in there and, you know. He can flip that thing out. But you say, "Probably, thanks, but no thanks. I'd like to go with Elder Nelson." Why? One simple solitary reason. Both good men, both high priests, both wonderful – now I'm not talking about a spiritual ministry. I'm making a little parable here – You want Elder Nelson, because he's practiced. You want him, because he's done it 10,000 times before he did it to your mother. He knows what a good heart looks like, and he knows what a bad heart looks like. He knows when an aorta is working and when it's not. He knows when a valve is functioning, and when it's not. He knows when a hearts diseased and when it's not. He's seen it. He's studied it. He's lived with it. He's sat in a dormitory room somewhere with his feet in cold water so that he could study those medical books, when your mother was wheeled into the room. That's who your investigators deserve.

We do not apologize for asking you to study. And we do not apologize for asking you to study in the Preach My Gospel era, because we cannot tell you now what your investigators are going to need. I can't tell you that on any given day, it's going to be Moroni 8. Moroni 8 wasn't anywhere in the plan! That's obvious. You're going to have to know this, and do it, and have it in your heart. And there's no substitute for that. And you're going to have to have companionship study. By the way, when you're disobedient, when you do waste the morning, and when you are undisciplined, the first thing that will be lost is companionship study. Trust me. I know. I know. I know you. I know Missions. I know Missionaries. You'll probably try to find a little breakfast, you may get a little personal study in, you're try and get a quick prayer said, but you're not going to have the time to sit down and rehearse together, study together, what you're going to do as a companionship.

And we teach in this gospel, two-by-two. No lesson is going to be given alone. And you have to study. And you have to study together. That's even tougher than just putting your feet in cold water and studying a medical book. You've gotta have two guys there. Two Elders, two Sisters, with feet in cold water, sharing the medical book, to figure out how you're going to do this.

Studying has taken on a new higher order of significance in the days of Preach my Gospel, because we want you to know the gospel. You're going to have to know where to go. You're going to have to have your outlines and there's a good basis, there's a good solid sequence of lessons and principles to be covered, but you're gonna have to be alert. And family X is not necessarily going to get what family Y got. And family Z is going to get something else altogether. And that's going to be from 2:00 in the afternoon to 6:00 at night, and 8:00 at

night. And you're going to do that on the same day.

Not me. In the old days, boy, they would have gotten the same thing. Same switch, same message. Just put it on overdrive, and let it fly. Well, no wonder you're going to be more successful than we were. And no wonder that the world needs you to be more successful than we were, than any generation of Missionaries that's been.

The other thing we've learned, another thing we've learned about Missionaries is, they don't prepare very well. Do you know what preparing meant when I was a Missionary? Do you know what preparing meant? Preparing meant the ominous decision of where we were going to tract that day. That was the entire sum total of our plan. What street will we walk down today? Boy, that took... We had to be geniuses to master that, you know? Boy, it required looking at a map, and knowing a street name.

Well, what does preparation mean, and what does planning mean for you? It means all of this that I'm saying about study and more. What does the Jones family need? What does the Gonzalez family need? What does the Kawaski family need? What do these people need? And where are we? And how did the last lesson go? And what are we going to do for the next lesson? And what part are you going to do? And what part am I going to do? And we'd better get on our knees again and see what the Lord can say to us about this process. That is planning with a capital 'P' in the age of Preach My Gospel. Review of how it went with your investigators, note taking, and review when you get home that night, and review before you go out the next morning, and big planning weekly. And it makes District Meetings more significant, and Zone Conferences more significant. We're talking about real people, with real needs, and the real challenge of getting people baptized and converted in a world that's getting farther, and farther, and farther away from Christian commitment.

You've got to be so much better than I ever was. And planning has got to take on some significance about how you use your time, and where in the city you're going to be. And if you've got some free time, what are you going to do? And what's your area book like? And how do you fall back? Those are things that just were sort of abstractions from me. Maybe somebody had said something about them, but they didn't mean very much. Well they've got to mean something to you.

The last thing, and the most serious thing that we've found that Missionaries don't do very well, is teach for commitment. You haven't had much experience teaching. We don't give you much experience. You haven't done much teaching in this Church by the time you're 19. You might have done a little. You might have had a Primary assignment, or substituted in a priesthood class or something, but you haven't done much. And here, we expect you, to overnight, as it were, become master teachers of the most important message that people will hear in their entire lives.

Well we're devoting ourselves as a Missionary department and as a Missionary executive counsel, this year, and the past recent year, and the roll-out that will already be existing in your Missions when you get there and MTCs by this Summer when you're little brother or little sister get to those MTCs, we will be trying to help you be better teachers. Not simply better

students. It's going to require good study. It's going to require good planning. But then finally, when you're knee-to-knee, and face-to-face in a home with an investigator, you've got to come through. You've got to deliver the goods. And they're going to have to feel what they feel, and learn what they learn, so much that they will make the commitment to join this Church and keep the covenants that they'll make with God, right through to the temple and to eternal life.

What a miracle that that ever happens. What an absolute miracle that it could ever happen. And it can't without this new Missionary living by the Spirit, pleading and putting everything on the line. Every effort to study. Every effort to prepare. Every effort to teach with skill, and power, and authority; power and authority being the phrase that's always used in the Book of Mormon: "They taught with power and authority." We seldom teach with either power *or* authority. We don't act like we have any authority, and we hardly dare even summon any enthusiasm to suggest we've got any power. And then we wonder why the Red Sea doesn't part. You know, "Where's the 8,000, Ammon?"

We can get better at this. We can do better at this. We can grow into this. But it's going to take a masterful, modern, 21st century, last and greatest of all dispensations kind of a Missionary to do it. And I love you for accepting the call. I love you for believing and knowing that you can do it, because this is God's work. The Spirit of the Lord is the key essential, ultimate ingredient. That's why the medical school analogy isn't very good. Because you get to be a 1st-grade surgeon the first day you're in the Mission field. If you have the Spirit of the Lord with you and you're putting your heart on the line to from that first day on just be the kind of Missionary you're supposed to be, including an honest effort to study, including an honest effort to plan, including an honest effort to teach with enthusiasm and conviction and heart-felt honesty.

That doesn't require any educational certificate. It doesn't require any external pronouncement by some secular society. The Spirit of the Lord itself will pronounce that gift upon your head and endow that mantle of authority on your shoulders from the first day. From the very first day. If you're as honest as we're pleading with you to be, in a day when you've gotta be the best Missionaries this Church has ever had. That's what you've gotta be.

We have a world in trouble and if we understand these scriptures, it's not over yet. The last days for all of its greatness and grandeur in the dispensation for the Church, it's not going to be a pretty picture for the world generally. And we'll be affected by that. We are affected by it. We're in that world. And you're God's answer. You're the hope of Israel. You are the *hope* of Israel. And you're 19 years old. Or 20, or 21, or 22, or whatever. I stand all amazed at what a Missionary is in this Church. And what God would somehow know, and have the confidence to believe could be done with people like you, and people like me. It's a marvelous work and a wonder.

Let me close with the point that I began with, about you. Contrary to the parlots of the day, this is about you. I've thought long and hard about the apostleship. I'm not going to go into that tonight, but sometime seated around a living room fire with some popcorn or some hot chocolate, we'll talk about calls to the apostleship. But setting that aside, it's prompted me to

read everything I could read about apostles; ancient or modern, just to try to learn. Just to try to come to grips with it. That's the part I'll leave to tell you another day.

But in so reviewing that, I've been drawn again and again and again to Peter, the chief apostle, still the chief apostle. The apostle that brings the Melchizedek priesthood and the apostolic keys back to the earth, this dispensation, Peter has a premiere roll in the apostleship and the Melchizedek priesthood work of this world.

But when the Savior had lived his life and pursued His ministry, and had gone, Peter was as bereft as most of you feel right now. And if you don't feel bereft now, wait until you get into the Mission field for the first 24-hours. Then give me a jingle. You'll know what I'm talking about, okay? And he knew, he somehow knew he was in charge. He knew he was the President of the Church, so to speak. Whatever the senior apostle would have been. But now Jesus is gone, he's been crucified, the tomb is empty, he and John ran to the tomb, and it was empty, and this cascade of experience has tumbled down on them in a few hours, a couple of days at best.

And then people are saying, "Well what do we do now?" I don't know that anybody had ever asked that question, because frankly, they never got it. They weren't literally, truly, what, look, they had been in the Church at best 36 months? Can you imagine picking a quorum of the twelve out of new converts, who have not been in the Church in any case longer than 36 months? We have to give them a little credit, and a little courtesy that they were doing any portion of what they were doing.

But they didn't get a lot of this. He kept saying, "I'm going." He kept giving parables. He kept talking about how people would destroy the temple in three days, and He'd build it back up. Well they didn't understand any better than the Pharisees what He meant. Everyone thought He was talking about the temple itself. They thought, "Well, I guess He can build the temple back up..." and they just didn't get it. And He kept trying to be sweet and gentle and prophetic, but they were young, and green, and that's why they kept saying, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." And now they're gone, and people turn to the new Eleven, turn to Peter and say, "Well, what do we do?"

And what does he say? "Well, it's been a great 36 months. This last little while has been terrific, and all of it was pretty good. We saw great teachings. We saw wonderful miracles. We saw healings. There we were on the mount of beatitudes. We saw Him walk on the water." – Peter probably wasn't so bold as to say that he had actually, for a moment or two, but they've got all those memories. And he says, "Wasn't it great? Wasn't it terrific? Let's go fishing."

He didn't know what to do. It's over. He's gone. Maybe they thought somehow this was going to turn into this political Messiah, too. Maybe good orthodox Jews that they were once, and probably still are a little bit, maybe they thought, "Well, whatever we thought the Messiah-ship was, I guess it's gonna be something else. Let's go fish. Let's go do the thing we know to do. That's what we were doing when He found us, so let's go." And they did. And they went back to Galilee, and fished. And I guess life was going to go on.

But something happened. It's early morning, they fished all night, they've caught nothing. You fish at night on the sea of Galilee. They've caught nothing. Zero. Zilch. Nothing. Nada. No fish. And in the distance, because the sight is quite clear on a lake, and the sound is very good across the surface of a lake, they see a figure, who has made a little fire. And calls out to them and says, "How's your fishing gone?" And they said, "Lousy. It's been terrible." (You're going to have days like that.) They said, "It's been a disaster. We haven't got anything."

And He said, "Well, uh, cast your net over on the right side of the boat." And I'm sure there was somebody there who said, "Oh well, now, who is this? Who is this that's got such a cute idea about how to fish after we've been at it all night, and is going to tell us out here, laboring as we are, there he is safely on the beach, we're out here in these boats, He's going to tell us how to..." I don't know if someone said that, but I bet someone did.

But reluctantly, and maybe out of desperation, needing a catch – they are, after all, now back to doing what they used to do, and if they're going to fish, they've got to fish – they cast their net over to the right side of the boat, and they can't pull the catch in. It starts to sink the ship, one of the miracles being that the nets didn't break, there were so many fish. They couldn't get the fish in the boat. And John said, "It's Him. It's *Him*."

And Peter, sweet Peter, who didn't know better than to say, "Let's do what we know how to do." Sweet people who cuts people's ears off, and then they have to be put back on, and... Sweet, loyal, devoted Peter, looked at John, heard what he said, looked at the shore, saw the Master, and bailed over the edge of the boat. And said, "The rest of you can row if you want, I'm going in." And he just started going to shore.

Well they arrived. The Savior and this marvelous act of courtesy has fixed their breakfast. He's built a little fire, and cooked some fish. Just a little passing thought on His magnificence – they're going to be hungry, they haven't had a good night, and I'm going to fix their breakfast. And they followed his feet, and then Jesus starts this little interrogation, and with this, I close.

"Peter, do you love me more than you love these fish in this net here, and these boats, and these oars?"

And Peter said, "Yes, I do love you, more than these."

And a second time, Jesus says, "Peter, do you love me more than you love these fish, and your nets, and your battered old boat?"

And a little distressed at that, Peter said, "Yes, I do. I said I did. I do."

And the Savior probably took a deep breath and smiled and looked Peter right in the eye. And though He didn't verbalize it, apparently He was conveying to Peter, "May I now say to you for the third time, do you love me?" And Peter is *very very* sensitive about threes right now.

And Jesus says, really in effect, "Okay," for the last time, "do you love me more than these? Than what you do? And what you've just been doing?"

And Peter says, "I do. I do love you. More than anything."

And that is the moment that Peter became the great apostle. Forget the denials, whatever they were. Forget the cut off ears. Forget the impetuosity. Forget the confusion. Forget not knowing more than to come back to fish. Right here, face-to-face, again from the honesty of his heart he said, "I do love you, more than anything."

And to that, the Savior of the world said, "Then feed my sheep! I have asked you before to leave your nets. And I'm asking you again, and I don't want to ask you a third time. When I said, 'Leave your nets,' it was forever. When I asked you to follow me, it was forever. When I asked you to be an apostle, it was forever. When I asked you to be a Missionary, it was forever. When I asked you to see this through to the end, it was because it's not over 'til it's over. Now forget your nets, and forget the fish, and jettison your boat, and throw those oars away for the second time, and feed my sheep. We're in this 'til the end."

And that's the day Peter strode into eternity, and became the man within hours, within days at the very least. When people plead that they could be taken into the street and left on their cot in hopes the *shadow* of Peter would pass over them. That's the Peter that he became with that little confrontation on the shore. And the issue is for all time and eternity, "Do. You. Love. Me? Do you love me?"

Elders and Sisters in this MTC congregation, do you love Him? You cannot get there from here. You cannot be what you have to be. You cannot say what you have to say. You cannot become the Missionaries, the witnesses, the emissaries, the bastions and sentinels of truth that you're supposed... You can't do it, unless you love Him. It is the first and great of all the commandments, the greatest of all commandments, the first commandment.

You need to decide tonight whether you're on a course that's committed to the idea that you really do love God. You really do love the Savior. And if you do, and I know you do, and I pray you do, and we'll all do this together, we'll all march into the future together, but when you do, and when you say that, and when you believe that, then your call is to feed His sheep, *forever*.

Now, can you understand why you must never and may never and can never come back? It will never be the same again. Peter, you can't go home. You can't go back to fish. You can't go back to Galilee. You can't go back to boats. It's over. It is a new life, a new day, a new time. This Mission marks that hour in your life. You cannot go back. And if you do, you will break my heart, and you will break the heart of God himself. If you turn your back on the gospel of Jesus Christ, which you have pledged your life, or at least these next two years or eighteen months, to teach. But my point is that it isn't just eighteen months, and it isn't just two years. And I stand here at 49 years and counting, and say, I pray that it's never ever ever over for me. And I pray that it's never ever over for you.

And if you are ever tempted on your Mission, or after, to leave this faith, or commit a transgression, or to walk away from the covenants you've made, and the honesty of your heart – not assuming that you're going to be perfect, and knowing that we're all going to have to repent every day of our lives about something – but your course needs to be true. You need to stay the course. You need to see it through. You can't go back. You've left your nets, and you're going to feed sheep. You're going to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, for time and eternity.

Boy, that's weighty to put on the shoulders of a 19 year old sitting in Provo, Utah. Or a 21 year old, or whatever you are. But that's about what this adds up to be. "Do you love me? Well then, feed my sheep. And do it forever."

May you do so, successfully, and with God's love and mine. And the Holy Spirit to attend you, because you cannot possibly succeed without it. God bless you, on the greatest venture of your life, that should shape and will shape, if you allow it to shape, every great experience you're ever going to have for the rest of this life, and as much of the next one as I know anything about. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.