This is “Stories From General Conference.” The topic of this collection of stories from General Conference is missionary work. Missionary work is an important activity of the Church. Imagine the result if each member was an effective missionary. The Lord needs each of us. In the April 2003 Priesthood session of General Conference, Elder Daryl H. Garn shared an analogy that helped him understand the importance of preparing to be a missionary.

(Elder Daryl H. Garn, Priesthood Session, April 2003)

At a recent stake conference, a returned missionary spoke on the subject of preparing for missionary service. He used the analogy of a father saying to his son, "I will be happy when you play in your first basketball game so you can learn to dribble and shoot the basketball." He compared that example to a father saying to his son, "I will be happy when you go on your mission so you can learn to be a good person and teach the gospel." This analogy had a significant impact on me as I reflected on my life.

When I was a young boy, my greatest desire was to play basketball. Fortunately, I had a father who was anxious to see that his son's desire was met. Dad and I would practice the basics of passing and dribbling the basketball hour after hour in our small kitchen. I would listen to college basketball games on the radio and dream of playing college ball someday. Serving a mission was far from my mind at that time; consequently, I spent very little effort in missionary preparation. In an attempt to ensure some balance in my life, my dad—who had not held a Church calling in many years—accepted the call to serve as my Scoutmaster. He operated by the book, and due to his diligence, some of my friends and I became Eagle Scouts. I realize now that Scouting is great preparation for a mission.

My boyhood dream came true when I made the basketball team at Utah State University. During my second year at Utah State, a returned missionary befriended me. Because of his example I began looking at my associates at school, including those on the basketball team, and realized that the people I most wanted to be like were those who had served missions. With the kind and loving mentoring of my good friend—and, I am sure, as a result of my mother's prayers and good example—my desires changed. After my second year at Utah State, I was called to serve in the Western Canadian Mission.
Three months into my mission, a new missionary from Idaho was assigned to be my companion. We had been together only a few days when I realized something very significant: my new companion knew the gospel, while I only knew the discussions. How I wished that I had prepared to be a missionary as hard as I had prepared to be a basketball player. My companion had prepared for his mission throughout his life and was immediately a valuable member of the team. How important it is for fathers and sons to work together on the basics in preparing for a mission.

I believe it is appropriate to compare the game of basketball to missionary work. The game of basketball includes not only the time you compete with another team on the court but also the hours of proper training and practice. The great work of saving souls is not limited to the two years that you serve a mission but, rather, requires years of righteous living and preparation in order to meet the standard for full-time missionary service.

**NARRATOR:** We never know when a missionary opportunity will arise, so we need to be prepared at all times. Elder Yoshihiko Kikuchi shared a story during the April 2000 Sunday morning session of General Conference about an unplanned conversation during a plane ride.

(Elder Yoshihiko Kikuchi, Sunday Afternoon Session, April 2000)

A few years ago, right before Christmas, I had a stake conference assignment in California. On the flight back to Utah, I decided to take a short nap. My seat was C, near the aisle. Just before the cabin door closed, a beautiful lady in her mid-70s stood beside me and said, "May I have my seat?" I said, "Yes, ma'am." That was the end of my nap. She loved to talk.

She said, "I don't know why I should have to fly to a cold place like Utah at Christmastime to visit my grandchildren. I hate to leave sunny California."

She went on to say, "Besides, there are strange and weird people in Utah. They call themselves 'Mormons.' My daughter married one of them."

I said, "I am sorry, but before you go any further, I should tell you that I am one of them."

Then she said, "I am sorry--I didn't mean that."

I said, "Oh, you really meant that, didn't you?"

Our conversation went on until we were above Provo. We knew we would soon be landing in Salt Lake.

"Patti"--that's her name--"you have been talking for most of the flight. I feel like I have known you from the pre-earth life. Before we land in Salt Lake City, I'd like to ask you a few questions if I may."
I asked her sincerely, "Patti, your deceased husband--do you know you can see him again?"

She said, "Oh, is that possible?"

"Do you know your deceased son, Matt, who died as a baby--you will see him also in the future?"

Her eyes became moist, and her voice was shaking. The Spirit of the Lord touched her. I sensed she had missed them so much.

Then I prayerfully asked her, "Patti, do you know you have a loving and kind Heavenly Father, who loves you so dearly?"

She said, "Do I?"

"Patti, do you know your Heavenly Father has a special plan for you and that your family can be forever?"

"Can we?" she replied.

"Have you ever heard the plan before?"

She said, "No."

Very sincerely I asked her, "Would you like to know about it?"

"Yes, I would," she responded.

The Spirit of the Lord touched her deeply. And the Lord promises us, "For mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts."

He also said: "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep. . . . My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

. . . The missionaries taught Patti. Three weeks later, while she was staying in Utah, Patti called me: "Brother Kikuchi, this is Patti. I am going to be baptized. Would you come to my baptism services?"

My wife and I went to her baptism. Many members were kindly fellowshipping her. Oh, I shall never forget her joyful countenance as she came out of the water!

I shall never forget her sweet tears at the sacred altar in the Salt Lake Temple a year later. I remember her peaceful and celestial glow when she was sealed to her deceased husband and son and living daughter who had become a member of the Church. She now knows her family is forever in the Lord. My friend Patti Louise Donaldson found the Lord Jesus Christ. Now she lives in Utah.
NARRATOR: Nothing can replace the joy felt as we share the gift of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Lord is preparing many people's hearts and by our example they feel the Spirit and are attracted to the Gospel. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland illustrated this in the October 2006 Sunday afternoon session of General Conference:

(Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, Sunday Afternoon, October 2006)

Not long after our friend Carolyn Rasmus joined the faculty of Brigham Young University, a group of her new teaching colleagues invited her to join them on a Saturday hike in the mountains above Provo. Carolyn was not a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but she had felt particularly welcome in her new circle of associates. She eagerly joined them for the climb.

As the sun steadily rose, so did the hikers on the mountainside. Then, as the ten o'clock hour approached, the group began to find places to sit down. Carolyn thought, "This is wonderful. How did they know I needed the rest?" and she, too, looked for a comfortable spot to stretch out. But the participants seemed unusually earnest about this particular break, some pulling out pencils and notebooks while one intently dialed a transistor radio.

What then happened would be a turning point in her life forever. One of her friends said, "Carolyn, we need to explain something. This is the first Saturday in October, and for us that means not only lovely weather and bright fall foliage, but it also means a general conference of the Church. As Latter-day Saints, wherever we are or whatever we are doing, we stop and listen. So we are going to sit here among the oak and the pines, look out over the valley below, and listen to the prophets of God for a couple of hours."

"A couple of hours!" thought Carolyn. "I didn't know there were prophets of God still living," she said, "and I certainly didn't know there were two hours' worth!" Little did she know that they were going to stop again at two o'clock that afternoon for another two hours and then invite her to tune in at home for four more the next day.

Well, the rest is history. With the gift of a leather-bound copy of the scriptures from her students, the love of friends and families in the LDS ward she began to attend, and spiritual experiences we want all who make their way into the light of the gospel to have, Carolyn was baptized and confirmed a member of the Church. The rest is, as they say, history. With her introduction to general conference that day sitting high atop Y Mountain, Sister Rasmus had seen her own personal fulfillment of Isaiah's prophetic invitation: "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

NARRATOR: There are people all around us who may not even realize they are looking for the Gospel. Look for opportunities to invite them to learn. In the October 2007 Saturday afternoon session of General Conference Elder Michael J. Teh shared a story that reminds us not to let fear hold us back.
Sharing the gospel message is one of the most rewarding ways we can render service to those who are not of our faith. I recall a childhood experience with someone I will simply call Uncle Fred.

When I was six years old, Uncle Fred was my worst nightmare. He was our neighbor, and he was always drunk. One of his favorite pastimes was to throw rocks at our home.

Because my mother was a great cook, single adult members from our small branch frequented our home. One day when Uncle Fred was sober, these members befriended him and invited him into our home. This development terrified me. He was no longer just outside but inside our home. This happened a few more times until, finally, they were able to convince Uncle Fred to listen to the missionaries. He accepted the gospel and was baptized. He served a full-time mission, returned with honor, pursued further education, and was married in the temple. He is now a righteous husband, father, and priesthood leader. Watching Uncle Fred today, one would find it difficult to believe that he once brought nightmares into the life of a six-year-old boy. May we always be perceptive to opportunities to share the gospel.

NARRATOR: When we have the faith to share our beliefs, miracles can happen, but we need to watch for opportunities. In the Saturday afternoon session of the October 2005 General Conference, Elder C. Scott Grow shared a story about a man who was delayed for many years in his search for the Gospel.

Recently, a member in Monterrey, Mexico, told me how the Book of Mormon changed his life. As a teenager, Jesús Santos was impressed by the LDS missionaries he saw walking down the dusty streets. He wanted to talk to them about their church but was told by a friend that you have to wait for them to contact you.

Many times he would go to the Church building and look through the iron fence at the missionaries and the Mutual youth playing games. They seemed to be so wholesome, and he wanted to be part of them. He would lean his chin on the fence, hoping that they would notice him and invite him to participate with them. It never happened.

As Jesús recounted his story to me, he said, "It is sad. I was a young man and could have served a full-time mission."

He moved to Monterrey, Mexico. Nine years later he was visiting a friend across town when the missionaries knocked at the door. His friend wanted to send them away. Jesús begged him to let the missionaries talk to them for just two minutes. His friend consented.
The missionaries talked about the Book of Mormon, how Lehi's family traveled from Jerusalem to the Americas, and how the resurrected Jesus Christ visited Lehi's descendants in America.

Jesús wanted to know more. He was especially intrigued by the picture depicting Christ's appearance in America. He gave the missionaries his address. He waited for months, but they never made contact with him.

Three more years passed. Some friends invited his family to a family home evening. They gave him a copy of the Book of Mormon.

As soon as he began to read it, he knew the Book of Mormon was true. Finally, 12 years after he first became aware of the Church, he and his wife were baptized. So many years had been lost. If missionaries had just talked to him, if the Mutual youth had just noticed a lonely teenager looking over the fence, if the missionaries in Monterrey had found him at home, his life would have been different during those 12 years. Gratefully, member neighbors invited him for a family home evening and shared with him that book which has such great converting power, the Book of Mormon.

Today Jesús Santos serves as the president of the Monterrey Mexico Temple.

NARRATOR: The Lord said, “For mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts.” God is preparing people who will build up the Church with their talents and leadership ability. Our efforts are never in vain, even if there appears to be no immediate result. In the Priesthood session of the April 2001 General Conference, President James E. Faust told of a missionary who initially thought his efforts were wasted.

(President James E. Faust, Priesthood Session, April 2001)

Those of us who have served missions have seen the miracle in the lives of some we have taught as they have come to realize that they are sons and daughters of God. Many years ago an elder who served a mission in the British Isles said at the end of his labors, "I think my mission has been a failure. I have labored all my days as a missionary here and I have only baptized one dirty little Irish kid. That is all I baptized."

Years later, after his return to his home in Montana, he had a visitor come to his home who asked, "Are you the elder who served a mission in the British Isles in 1873?"

"Yes."

Then the man went on, "And do you remember having said that you thought your mission was a failure because you had only baptized one dirty little Irish kid?"

He said, "Yes."
The visitor put out his hand and said, "I would like to shake hands with you. My name is Charles A. Callis, of the Council of the Twelve of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I am that dirty little Irish kid that you baptized on your mission."

That little Irish boy came to a knowledge of his potential as a son of God. Elder Callis left a lasting legacy for his large family. Serving as a mission president for 25 years and in his apostolic ministry for 13 years, he blessed the lives of literally thousands. I feel privileged to have known this great Apostle of the Lord when I was a young man.

**NARRATOR:** Each of us can make a difference. In the October 1999 Priesthood session of General Conference President James E. Faust shared another story about one person who planted a seed of Faith, which later affected generations.

( President James E. Faust, Priesthood Session, October 1999)

For years William R. Wagstaff, who served in the North Central States Mission from 1928 to 1930, felt disappointed he had not baptized more people. In the summer of 1929 he and his companion visited a farm family about 180 miles west of Winnipeg.

"Brother Wagstaff remembered giving a copy of the Book of Mormon to the mother and discussing the gospel with her during numerous visits through that and the following summer.

"He recalled that during each visit 'she'd take off her apron and we'd sit down and discuss the gospel. She'd read and have lots of questions.'

"But at the close of his mission, she still had not been baptized, and he lost touch with her."

Brother Wagstaff went home, married, and raised a family. Then in October 1969 he and his wife attended his missionary reunion. "A lady approached him and asked, 'Aren't you Elder Wagstaff?'

". . . She introduced herself as the woman he had taught on the farm outside Winnipeg. In her hand was a worn copy of the Book of Mormon--the one he had given her 40 years earlier.

"'She showed me the book,' he related. 'I turned over the front and there was my name and address.'

"She then told Brother Wagstaff about 60 members of her family were members of the Church, including a branch president."

Elder Wagstaff planted the seed during his mission but went home while it was still in the ground. Forty years later he learned of the rich harvest that eventually had come to pass and that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."
NARRATOR: No effort is ever wasted. It may take a long time for people to fully understand the truthfulness of the Gospel and develop the faith to make needed changes in their lives. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf illustrated this concept during the April 2008 General Conference:

(President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, April 2008, Sunday Morning Session)

I have spent most of my life in areas of the world where members of our Church are a small minority. During that time I have learned that often when people learn of the restored gospel, they are impressed by it—many even want to join the Church. But they are reluctant to disappoint their ancestors; they feel they should be true to the faith of their fathers.

I remember when I was a young man, one Sunday I noticed a new family in our meetinghouse—a young mother with two daughters. It wasn’t long before the three were baptized and became members of the Church.

I know the story of their conversion intimately because the oldest daughter’s name was Harriet, and later she would become my wife.

Harriet’s mother, Carmen, had recently lost her husband, and during a period of introspection, she became interested in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. After studying the doctrines, Carmen and her daughters knew the Church was true and made plans for baptism.

When Carmen told her mother about this decision, however, her mother was devastated. “How can you be so unfaithful to the faith of your fathers?” she asked.

Carmen’s mother was not the only one who objected. Carmen’s strong-willed sister, Lisa, was every bit as troubled by the news. Perhaps troubled is too soft a word. She was very angry.

Lisa said that she would find those young missionaries and tell them just how wrong they were. She marched to the chapel and found the missionaries, and, you guessed it, Lisa was baptized too.

Many years later, Carmen’s mother also received a testimony that the gospel of Jesus Christ had been restored to the earth. One day she said to her daughters and grandchildren, “I want to be in the same heaven as you.” While in her mid-70s, she too entered the waters of baptism and became a member of the Church.

NARRATOR: The Spirit will touch people’s hearts, but we need to be active in assisting the process. During the October 1998 General Conference, Susan L. Warner shared a story about a young girl who was not afraid to share her beliefs.
Not long ago our granddaughter Susie received a copy of the scriptures. She lives in an area where her classmates and teacher are not members of the Church, so she wanted to share with them the Articles of Faith that were recorded in her new scriptures. She decided it would be appropriate to do this at school during the time that was scheduled for sharing something newsworthy. When the time came, eight-year-old Susie stood before her classmates and began, "We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost" (A of F 1:1). She continued, but when she got to the seventh article of faith, one classmate loudly complained, "This isn't a current event!" The teacher quickly responded, "Well, it's news to me!

Each of us can share the good news of the gospel and give words to our convictions. If we are sensitive to the whisperings of the Spirit, we can find opportunities to humbly express our beliefs. Even a shy, eight-year-old child felt the desire to share the articles of her faith.

**NARRATOR:** As members of the Church we promise to stand as a witness of the Savior. In the Priesthood session of the April 2008 General Conference President Thomas S. Monson spoke about Elder Wilson, whose diligence in doing the Lord’s work can be an example for all of us.

Many years ago I spoke of one who took his example from the Savior, one who stood firm and true, strong and worthy through the storms of life. He courageously magnified his priesthood callings. He provides an example to each of us. His name was Thomas Michael Wilson, the son of Willie and Julia Wilson of Lafayette, Alabama.

When he was but a teenager and he and his family were not yet members of the Church, he was stricken with cancer, followed by painful radiation therapy, and then blessed remission. This illness caused his family to realize that not only is life precious but that it can also be short. They began to look to religion to help them through this time of tribulation. Subsequently, they were introduced to the Church, and eventually all but the father were baptized. After accepting the gospel, young Brother Wilson yearned for the opportunity of being a missionary, even though he was older than most young men when they begin their missionary service. At the age of 23, he received a mission call to serve in the Utah Salt Lake City Mission.

Elder Wilson's missionary companions described his faith as unquestioning, undeviating, and unyielding. He was an example to all. However, after 11 months of missionary service, illness returned. Bone cancer now required the amputation of his arm and shoulder. Yet he persisted in his missionary labors.
Elder Wilson's courage and consuming desire to remain on his mission so touched his nonmember father that he investigated the teachings of the Church and also became a member.

I learned that an investigator whom Elder Wilson had taught was baptized but then wanted to be confirmed by Elder Wilson, whom she respected so much. She, with a few others, journeyed to Elder Wilson's bedside in the hospital. There, with his remaining hand resting upon her head, Elder Wilson confirmed her a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Elder Wilson continued month after month his precious but painful service as a missionary. Blessings were given; prayers were offered. Because of his example of dedication, his fellow missionaries lived closer to God.

Elder Wilson's physical condition deteriorated. The end drew near, and he was to return home. He asked to serve but one additional month, and his request was granted. He put his faith in God, and He whom Thomas Michael Wilson silently trusted opened the windows of heaven and abundantly blessed him. His parents, Willie and Julia Wilson, and his brother Tony came to Salt Lake City to help their son and brother home to Alabama. However, there was yet a prayed-for, a yearned-for blessing to be bestowed. The family invited me to come with them to the Jordan River temple, where those sacred ordinances which bind families for eternity, as well as for time, were performed.

I said good-bye to the Wilson family. I can see Elder Wilson yet as he thanked me for being with him and his loved ones. He said, "It doesn't matter what happens to us in this life as long as we have the gospel of Jesus Christ and live it. It doesn't matter whether I teach the gospel on this or the other side of the veil, so long as I can teach it." What courage. What confidence. What love. The Wilson family made the long trek home to Lafayette, where Elder Thomas Michael Wilson slipped from here to eternity. He was buried there with his missionary tag in place.

**NARRATOR:** May we all choose to constantly perform our part in missionary work. Our testimonies of the Savior and His Gospel will change lives. We are needed tools in the hands of God.

This has been Stories from General Conference on the topic of Missionary Work. Thank you for listening to the Mormon Channel.