#### Section II. Chapter 07: The Member-Missionary Miracle

**The Member-Missionary Miracle**

Member-missionary work is one of the most frequently mentioned but least understood gospel topics. Member-missionary work occupies a central role in church doctrine and is vital to church growth. Members are repeatedly exhorted from the pulpit and in the classroom to share the gospel, yet few active members ever participate in member-missionary work at all.[[99](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=10" \l "ftn.id99)],[[100](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=10" \l "ftn.id100)] Missionaries spend more time than ever soliciting referrals, but the relative and absolute number of referrals has declined. Numerous programs, initiatives, and gimmicks -- from "set a date" to missionary dinner programs -- have occupied large amounts of missionary and member time while generating scant results. The Church has overhauled member-missionary programs more sweepingly and frequently than any other major church program, dissolving local seventies quorums, disbanding stake missions, and commissioning local bishops as the head of local member-missionary efforts in recent years. Yet such repeated and drastic reforms have not changed the underlying dynamics of stagnant member-missionary programs in which few members ever make the effort to share the gospel.

While LDS growth rates have declined in spite of unprecedented opportunity, other faiths that have more successfully involved members in proselytism have experienced spectacular growth. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church baptizes between 700,000 and one million new converts each year, due largely to high member-missionary participation. The Jehovah's Witness faith, established only in 1890, now has far more active and participating members than the LDS Church worldwide because of the direct involvement of the average members in proselyting for sixteen hours each month.

A successful member-missionary program requires an understanding of basic outreach principles, vision and leadership, and consistency. I have found that a simple program of scripture-based member-missionary principles can multiply effectiveness in any congregation. The impact of these principles is remarkable. I have often been told by lifelong church members that member-missionary work was an incomprehensible "black box" for them until hearing my presentation, but that afterward missionary work started to make sense for the first time. I have consistently seen member-missionary efforts and successes multiply when these principles are applied. Some have noted that the application of these principles generated seemingly miraculous results. Yet in contrast to so many member-missionary initiatives, this program is simple and scripture-based, with nothing contrived and no gimmicks. The program makes no demands of members except to follow basic scriptural teachings. Many individuals have noted that once these self-evident principles were explained, they wondered how they could ever have viewed member-missionary work any other way.

**Member-Missionary Leadership**

This program requires the leadership of a motivated ward mission leader and supportive bishop. Without good organization and leadership, member-missionary programs never amount to more than the sporadic and isolated efforts of a few participating members. Leadership with vision, purpose, understanding, and consistency is essential to raise member-missionary participation from the level of a few isolated members to a cooperative effort of the entire ward.

**Member-Missionary Program Overview**

This member-missionary program involves several key elements. The first is an initial meeting, typically conducted as a fifth Sunday joint Priesthood/Relief Society lesson. The purpose of the initial meeting is to break down barriers to sharing the gospel and to educate members regarding member-missionary work. The content of this lesson differs in many ways from traditional less effective talks and lessons on missionary work. Second, practical three-minute messages on missionary work are given each Sunday in the opening exercises of Priesthood, Relief Society, Young Women's, and Primary. Third, a well-stocked table of missionary resources is maintained in the chapel foyer. These steps may seem bland and uninspiring. Yet when correctly implemented, they consistently multiply long-term member-missionary participation. In this chapter, I will explain why each step is crucial, how each point differs from less effective models, and how to implement each most effectively.

**Vision and Goals**

The purpose of this program is not to generate a short burst of member-missionary activity leading to a few more referrals or baptisms, only to quickly taper off to the prior stagnant baseline. Rather, the goal is to change basic member behaviors in a way that will increase referrals and baptisms for years to come by making sharing the Good News a regular part of their life and by providing weekly training to help members refine their member-missionary skills.

Righteous habits are the essence of gospel living. We are commanded to feast daily upon the scriptures, to attend church weekly, and to keep the Sabbath Day holy. Similarly, the central goal of an effective member-missionary program is to encourage members to initiate at least one gospel discussion each week with a nonmember. This goal is far short of the scriptural admonition to open our mouths about the gospel and stand as witnesses of Christ in all places and at all times, yet it is a good starting point that any member can achieve and represents an exponential improvement over current performance. Some members may be able to share the gospel much more frequently than this. Goals centered on numbers of referrals or baptisms are counterproductive to the establishment of the gospel habit of "opening one's mouth." When members are sharing the gospel regularly, referrals and baptisms naturally follow without gimmicks or imposed quotas, and without this habit, scant member-missionary results are ever achieved.

**The Startup Lesson**

Most members acknowledge the importance of sharing the gospel and have repeatedly been instructed to do so, yet have never been educated or mentored in basic practical elements of the process. Many face barriers of fear or a lack of understanding. Jim Rohn stated, "Education must precede motivation ... If someone is going down the wrong road, he doesn't need motivation to speed him up. What he needs is education to turn him around." Many member-missionary programs fail because they start with motivation rather than training, attempting to inspire members to share the gospel with their acquaintances when most do not know how or are not comfortable with doing so. Apprehension must be changed to enthusiasm, ignorance to understanding, and avoidance to implementation.

While this process takes time, a startup lesson to break down barriers and educate members can dramatically increase member-missionary participation immediately. Members are not instructed to follow a protocol or to implement a narrow program but are taught scriptural principles that can help them to utilize everyday opportunities to share the gospel. I prefer to give this lesson as a concise Power Point presentation which requires approximately twenty minutes, but it can be presented in different ways depending on local needs and resources. The next chapter covers the "Witnesses of Christ" lesson material, which can be modified depending on the audience.

**Harness the Potential of Your Member-Missionary Program**

Most member-missionary programs run at only a fraction of their potential. The Church Handbook of Instructions and the Stake Missionary Manual state that the missionary program is to be integrated into all programs of the Church. Yet in most wards, efforts of the ward mission leader and ward missionaries are almost exclusively confined to priesthood meetings, with Relief Society and youth meetings being almost entirely neglected. A member-missionary program that functions in this manner is like a car running on only one cylinder. Some data suggest that sisters may be more likely than brethren to share the gospel and to provide member-missionary referrals. Elder M. Russell Ballard stated: "Bishops, engage the whole ward in proclaiming the gospel. You will see that the Lord will bless you and your members with many more converts and many more who will return to full activity. Missionary work should not only be on the ward council agendas but also on Elders Quorum, Relief Society, and other quorum, group, and auxiliary agenda."[[101](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=10" \l "ftn.id101)] A major role of stake and ward missionaries is to make sharing the gospel a natural outgrowth of church membership for all members. Making assignments which are accepted by only one or two members, such as passing out a copy of the Book of Mormon each week for a volunteer to place, is less effective and generates only sporadic involvement of a minority of members. The goal of an effective member-missionary program is for all members to share the gospel all of the time and not for a few members to share the gospel some of the time.

Even after a well-received initial presentation, member-missionary involvement will taper off without regular follow-up and ongoing teaching. Ongoing involvement and continued improvement are best done with a three-minute practical missionary message shared each Sunday in Priesthood meeting, Relief Society, and Young Women's opening exercises.

**Three-Minute Member-Missionary Education**

Superior results are achieved when a missionary message focused on practical implementation is given in Priesthood, Relief Society, Young Women's, and Primary opening exercises each week. Weekly three-minute messages should be coordinated in advance by the ward mission leader and can be presented simultaneously by the ward mission leader, ward missionaries, and full-time missionaries in the various opening exercises. A brief missionary tip should be conveyed that helps members to better understand and implement personal member-missionary activities. These messages should be informational, concise, well-organized, practical, and strategic. Each message should end with a specific call to action. Messages can periodically include an interactive segment that includes follow-up from the previous week, finding out and addressing concerns, discussing problems and challenges, and sharing experiences, although the time must be carefully watched. To respect the time of the teacher, full-time and ward missionaries must keep each weekly missionary message within the three-minute time limit. If messages go too long, teachers or quorum presidencies will object and the opportunity to present the messages at all may be retracted.

These messages should be given every week, since infrequent or inconsistent member-missionary lessons fail to promote sustained member-missionary improvement because of inconsistent reinforcement and sketchy follow-up. Member-missionary performance improves when individuals recognize that missionary work will be a weekly topic of discussion for which they will be accountable. Individuals are free to share the gospel in whatever manner they prefer, but every member is expected to share the gospel regularly.

The precise topics depend upon local needs, challenges, and member feedback. A few weekly message topics I have successfully used include:

1. Conversational openers for gospel discussions, including the "golden questions" and other approaches.   
2. Ways to handle common concerns or objections, such as responses that individuals believe in nothing beyond the Bible or that they believe in God but do not see a need to attend church.   
3. Helping members to understand their responsibility to share the gospel spontaneously without waiting for special experiences and avoiding prejudging of others.   
4. Considering individual needs and situations and responding to feedback and verbal and nonverbal cues in sharing the gospel.   
5. Dealing with rejection gracefully and leaving the door open for future discussions.   
6. Times of special receptivity: major life change, birth or death in the family, marriage, change of job, or a move.   
7. Educating members about different resources for sharing the gospel and the circumstances under which each can be used most effectively.

**Resources**

A well-stocked supply of missionary resources should be maintained in the foyer. Every additional step required to obtain a missionary resource -- asking stake or ward mission leaders, calling full-time missionaries, and so forth dramatically reduces the number of individuals who will use that resource. A prominently displayed table of resources can help keep various tools for sharing the gospel in member consciousness and provides a no-stress environment in which members can examine and select resources that they feel may be most helpful for their acquaintances. These varying resources -- Joseph Smith pamphlets, 23 Questions Answered by the Book of Mormon, "Tell Me About Your Family" cards, copies of the Book of Mormon, temple brochures, family resources, family cards, church videos, and so forth -- are constantly available for members and nonmembers alike. Missionary resources should be made as widely and easily available as possible to promote maximum utilization. Many people will spontaneously use missionary resources if they are made easily accessible and awareness of these resources is constantly emphasized.

#### Section II. Chapter 15: Principles of Finding

**The Importance of Finding**

It has been said that almost anyone can teach a truly "golden investigator" but that finding such investigators in the first place is much more challenging. Missionary Department studies estimate that finding represents at least two-thirds of missionary work. Elder Dallin H. Oaks stated that the average LDS missionary in North America spends only nine hours per week teaching investigators.[[151](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id151)] Teaching skills and many other elements of missionary preparation often do not even come into play until missionaries have found investigators willing to listen to their message. Missionary success therefore depends greatly upon correct understanding and diligent implementation of principles of finding.

The most notable distinction between great missionaries such as Dan Jones, Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff, Paul, the Sons of Mosiah, and less effective missionaries is not in their teaching program, but in their finding program. Effective missionaries reach vast numbers of people by utilizing every opportunity to share the gospel. Whether in receptive or resistant areas, missionaries who understand and apply correct finding principles can multiply their effectiveness.

**Reaching Every Soul for Christ**

The Savior commanded His disciples: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Those who accept the baptism covenant "stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places" (Mosiah 18:9). The Doctrine and Covenants contains numerous admonitions to open our mouths about the gospel at all times (D&C 19:29, 24:10, 28:16, 30:5, 30:11, 33:8-11, 61:3, 71:1, 80:3). The Lord instructs us: "go ... from house to house"(99:1), "search diligently [for receptive people] and spare not" (84:94), "thrust in your sickle" (31:5), "deliver [His] words" (5:6), "[do not] hide the talent"(60:2), "bear testimony in every place" (66:7, also 58:47,59), "publish it upon the mountains" (19:29), "lift up your voice" (34:6), "labor in the vineyard" (50:38), "speak freely to all" (19:37), "warn the people" (88:81), "declare glad tidings" (31:3), and "go and proclaim my everlasting gospel with a loud voice, and with great joy" (124:88). The New Testament, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants all teach that the opportunity to accept or reject the gospel must be presented to all people. Christ taught that the task of reaching each soul with the gospel must be approached urgently because of the limited time available: "But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come" (Matthew 10:23).

Modern prophets have reaffirmed our scriptural mandate to reach each soul with the gospel message. Joseph Smith taught that the responsibility to open our mouths will not be discharged until the gospel trump has sounded in every ear and "the great Jehovah says, 'the work is done.'"[[152](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id152)] David O. McKay stated: "The best means of preaching the gospel is by personal contact."[[153](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id153)] Ezra Taft Benson declared: "We are to take the gospel to every person. Without exception, without excuse, without rationalization, we are to go 'unto all the world and preach the gospel to every creature'" (Mormon 9:22).[[154](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id154)] Gordon B. Hinckley stated: "It is wonderful what we can do as we practice a little ingenuity. You ought to take advantage of every opportunity in the world to speak with people about why we are there and what we are doing and give them some taste of a gospel message."[[155](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id155)] Elder Tingey instructed missionaries: "Speak to everyone: shopkeepers, passengers riding buses, people on streets, and everyone you meet."[[156](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id156)]

**Actual Performance versus the Divine Standard**

While the admonitions to "open our mouths," "lift up our voice," and "thrust in our sickle" by speaking with others about the gospel at all times are the most frequent instructions on missionary work found in the scriptures, the implementation of these scriptural mandates is the rare exception rather than the rule. Missionaries I have surveyed in numerous U.S. missions reported spending an average of less than five hours per week tracting or finding through their own efforts, even though most had fewer than five active investigators. As a missionary in Russia, I was shocked when the mission president stated after collecting contacting data from missionaries that the average missionary was approaching only five to ten new people each day. In 1999, only 2 to 4 percent of people I surveyed in two Eastern European capitals reported ever being approached by Latter-day Saints or "Mormon" missionaries. Over 70 percent reported being personally approached by Jehovah's Witnesses, often multiple times. Many LDS missionaries felt that they had all the time in the world to eke a handful of referrals out of a few new members, while the Jehovah's Witnesses and other more rapidly growing faiths recognized the urgency of reaching large numbers of people quickly.

While I have occasionally found missions where the majority of missionaries are contacting large numbers of people daily, I have more frequently found that missionaries are approaching only a fraction of the number that one would reasonably expect from those whose full-time obligation is to share the gospel. One wonders how receptive nonmembers are to experience conversion when little effort is being made to offer them the gospel. Paul asked, "How will they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14-15). The Lord declared: "With some I am not well pleased, for they will not open their mouths, but they hide the talent which I have given unto them, because of the fear of man. Woe unto such, for mine anger is kindled against them" (D&C 60:2). Full-time missionaries represent the church's primary mechanism of growth. When missionaries are not meeting their scriptural duties to "open their mouths" in all places and at all times, many souls are lost, and church growth is stunted.

I have found little awareness of low contacting rates. Of the hundreds of missionaries and dozens of mission presidents I have interviewed about growth problems in poorly productive areas, external factors such as materialism, atheism, local culture, and anti-Mormon activity have been repeatedly cited. In contrast, not one has cited low missionary contacting rates as a major cause of slow growth. While it should seem obvious that missionaries who contact only a handful of people each day are unlikely to be very successful, the number of individuals approached by missionaries each day -- perhaps the most essential single statistical indicator of missionary effort -- has traditionally not been recorded or reported at all. Many mission leaders with little involvement in frontline missionary activities assume that missionaries are making far more contacts than is actually the case. In recent years, directives to increase time spent with members and inactives have resulted in fewer convert baptisms since missionaries have spent less time approaching nonmembers about the gospel. Such directives have further decreased awareness of low contacting rates and have made it easier for missionaries to rationalize feeble contacting efforts.

**Are People Unreceptive?**

The idea that people are less receptive to the LDS church than to other proselytizing denominations is a common rationalization for slow growth. My analysis strongly suggests the opposite. Data reported by Jehovah's Witnesses[[157](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id157)] and by numerous evangelical denominations[[158](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id158)] suggests that these other faiths typically have to provide tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of exposures and thousands of proselyting hours to make a single convert. My research suggests that the number of total nonmembers contacted about the gospel per conversion in most LDS missions is in the low thousands and sometimes far less. While the methodologies may be slightly different, the response rate to the message of the restored gospel is one of the highest reported for any denomination, opposition to the Church notwithstanding. This higher receptivity is the result of the true message of the restored gospel, the confirmation of the Holy Spirit, and an enthusiastic missionary force.

In most areas, LDS difficulties finding people to teach reflect poor member and missionary effort far more than any lack of local receptivity. Only 3 to 5 percent of active LDS members in North America are regularly involved in missionary work,[[159](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id159)] and just 26 percent of Latter-day Saints report engaging in a gospel conversation with a nonmember within the past year.[[160](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id160)]

Contacting is the lifeblood of missions. There is no missionary mandate in scripture more frequently repeated than the command to "open your mouth at all times" and to sound the gospel in every ear, yet LDS missionary contacting efforts in many areas are surprisingly low. As a missionary in Russia in the early 1990s, I found that foreign evangelical preachers with no knowledge of the local language could consistently achieve high attendance at their meetings, while many LDS missionaries proficient in the local language struggled to get one or two investigators to church each week. Some argued that evangelicals experienced greater success because of lower standards and that little was required of members of many churches beyond mere attendance. Yet attendance represents an obligatory first step, and most of the commonly cited "higher standards" of the LDS faith -- tithing, the Word of Wisdom, and so forth -- were not officially even brought up until after investigators had already completed several discussions and were committed to baptism. Nor can public opinion be cited as a major factor: most Russians at that time did not know "Mormons" apart from any other foreign religious group. A year later, an enlightening survey conducted by my mission president found that the average missionary was approaching an average of only five people per day about the gospel. While there were many excuses for poor contacting, most missionaries abdicated responsibility for the finding process to members instead of putting forth the effort to contact large numbers of people on their own.

I have since conducted surveys of nonmembers in various cities of Eastern Europe and the United States and have found that surprisingly few people report ever being approached by LDS missionaries, even in areas with a large missionary presence. My surveys of missionaries in most areas have found daily contacting rates that are remarkably low, far below the 50 to 200 contacts a day that I found necessary to sustain productivity as a missionary. Most missionaries consider contacting an undesirable chore to do when they have "nothing else to do," and many fill in schedules with "make-work" visits to members and stagnant investigators in order to avoid contacting whenever possible. Interviews with missionaries demonstrate that many expect an unrealistically large percentage of those they contact to accept the gospel and are disappointed when dramatic results are not achieved with little effort.

Christ taught that the task of outreach is urgent and that spending large amounts of time with the unreceptive cannot be justified while the ripe harvest remains unreaped: "But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come" (Matthew 10:23). The Apostle Paul taught, "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall also reap bountifully" (2 Corinthians 9:6). "How shall they hear without a preacher?" he asked (Romans 10:15). The scant sowing of the gospel seed is a primary cause of slow growth in many LDS missions. Many other faiths have experienced more rapid growth because they understand the need to contact many thousands or tens of thousands to make a single proselyte, while many LDS missionaries and members expect miraculous results with token effort.

**A Message for All the World**

As new missionaries, my companion and I prayed fervently to know where we should tract. We yearned sincerely for the Lord to lead us to the "right door," yet we did not receive any specific direction. While we were working hard to be fully dedicated and obedient and were blessed to find and teach some wonderful converts, we felt that something was missing. Where did we go wrong?

As a new missionary, I was guilty of the same misunderstanding as Oliver Cowdery, thinking that the Lord would enlighten me through the Spirit while taking little thought except to ask (D&C 9). I had overlooked the Lord's words spoken to elders preaching the gospel early in this dispensation: "Go ye and preach my gospel, whether to the north or to the south, to the east or to the west, it mattereth not, for ye cannot go amiss" (D&C 80:3). I quickly came to understand that the Lord expected me to knock on every door and present the opportunity to hear the gospel message to all people and not just to a select few that I felt especially prompted to approach.

As we worked tirelessly, contacting one hundred or more people each day, the Spirit came in a measure I had never felt while on my knees, and missionary successes multiplied. I have consistently found that the Spirit is often received only after we put forth the faith to share the gospel. While prayer is vital, its primary role is not to determine to whom we should offer opportunities to hear the gospel.

Most of us are unable to discern ahead of time who will be ready to receive the gospel message. Assumptions that missionaries and members should be able to do so are out of harmony with scriptural mandates that every soul is to be reached with the Good News. Those who accepted the gospel were rarely individuals that I felt a burning spiritual impression to approach or with whom I had particularly memorable initial conversations. They were simply those who put forth the effort to nourish a seed of faith when others did not.

Many members and missionaries are overly concerned with finding the perfect plot of soil to plant their few seeds in and dedicate much effort to attempts to alter the nature of the soil instead of planting more seeds. The Parable of the Sower teaches that the selection process occurs once seeds have been abundantly sown and not by the sower choosing to plant only a few seeds (Matthew 13).

All people are entitled to an opportunity to hear the Lord's words. The selection process is to occur in the heart of the hearer and not in the mind of the sharer. Our role is to knock into all the doors, to reach all people, and to offer the gospel message universally. Who accepts the gospel message is in God's hands. Any goal short of providing all people with an opportunity to accept or reject this message is unsatisfactory.

**A Vision for the Unreached**

The Lord declared that "this is a day of warning, and not a day of many words" (D&C 63:58). Many less effective missionaries contact few new people each day while repeatedly visiting a few friendly but lukewarm investigators who have read little in the Book of Mormon and are not regularly attending church. Such missionaries often express touching emotions about the deep responsibility they feel to give their nonprogressing investigators yet another chance, yet seem to feel little if any responsibility toward the countless individuals whom they have never presented with a single opportunity to learn about the gospel at all. Great inequity exists when a few noncommittal individuals are allowed to monopolize vast amounts of missionary time, while millions of others have never been offered the opportunity to hear the gospel message. It is natural to feel strong emotional ties to individuals we have worked with and prayed for, but greater perspective is required to maintain a sense of responsibility toward those we have not yet met.

Successful missionaries maintain a constant vision of responsibility to the unreached. Every activity, whether meeting with members or returning to visit nonprogressing investigators, is carefully weighed against the opportunity to meet fresh contacts. They schedule several hours of contacting time daily, regardless of how busy they may be with other activities. The burning desire to offer the gospel message as widely as possible overrides the desires of the "natural man."

**The Principle of Self-Selection**

In areas of exceptional receptivity, many missionaries find that time limitations seemingly do not allow them to teach all of those who are willing to accept visits with conventional approaches. Under such circumstances, missionaries often make arbitrary decisions about who to teach. Many missionaries become saturated with low-yield visits while receptive individuals remain untaught. In these cases, the limiting factor in Church growth is not the lack of receptive individuals in the community but the time management skills and work ethic of the missionaries. A missionary who does not understand when it is time to move on will never be able to bring large numbers of quality converts into the Church regardless of local receptivity.

Many ineffective missionaries require prospective investigators to demonstrate commitment rather than effort as a prerequisite for initial or ongoing teaching. Missionaries serving in some areas of Latin America would drop investigators if they were not ready to accept baptism within two weeks of the first contact. Many educated and contemplative investigators were abandoned by missionaries in favor of more impulsive individuals who were willing to accept baptism quickly but experienced high rates of relapse and inactivity. Instead of building a strong core of committed members, this practice fostered revolving door patterns of quick baptism followed by almost immediate inactivity. There is no scriptural basis for the expectation that quality investigators should be ready to accept baptism within an arbitrary period, only that they put forth continuing effort to learn, study, and implement Gospel Principles. In some Eastern European missions experiencing an initial wave of receptivity, arbitrary guidelines were imposed requiring that individuals attend church, often several times, before they could even receive a copy of the Book of Mormon. Without an opportunity to read and understand God's word, a sincere investigator would have no reason to demonstrate denominational commitment to the LDS Church any more than to the numerous other faiths that provided religious literature more accessibly.

In view of the eternal importance of the gospel message, the decision of who to teach out of many potentially receptive people cannot be rightly based on arbitrary factors. We must ensure that threshold self-selection criteria represent reasonable expectations of the pure in heart and are not unscriptural or unfair.

The key to the appropriate allocation of missionary resources lies in the scriptural principle of self-selection: "Mine elect hear my voice, and harden not their hearts" (D&C 29:7). Instead of taking it into one's own hands to decide who is "prepared" to receive God's word, the effective missionary makes the gospel message widely available and invites receptive individuals to participate in activities that can lead to teaching, such as attending church and reading in the Book of Mormon. Investigators who continue to put forth independent effort to attend church and study the Book of Mormon should be worked with patiently, even over prolonged periods, since these gospel habits eventually lead to conversion in the large majority of cases. Some of the strongest mission converts I correspond with are individuals who studied the Book of Mormon and attended church for several months before making the decision to join. The effective missionary does not place deadlines on conversion. Rather, he focuses on helping investigators to develop the habits of daily scripture reading, church attendance, and obedience to other gospel laws that allow the conversion process to occur by facilitating a change of heart through the spirit.

Individuals who do not demonstrate a willingness to attend church and are not diligent in studying the scriptures should not continue to be taught but should be invited to attend church or contact the missionaries when they are willing to study the gospel more earnestly. Those without root or depth of soil sort themselves out, placing the responsibility for selection on the investigator instead of the missionary.

Learning when to let go of those who are not ready to receive the gospel and move on is an essential element of missionary maturation, as is the recognition that moving on from a nonprogressing investigator does not represent a final judgment on him or her and does not close the door to future opportunities. In our desire to give one more chance to a recalcitrant soul who is progressing slowly if at all, we must not lose the vision of our divine mandate to reach those yet unreached. By making the gospel message widely available and letting the faithful manifest themselves through their actions, scriptural self-selection practices ensure that missionaries spend their time teaching the most receptive individuals. This results in more committed, higher quality converts, maximizing the benefit to both the investigator and the Church.

Rick Warren wrote: "It is a waste of time to fish in a spot where the fish aren't biting. Wise fishermen move on. They understand that fish feed in different spots at different times of the day. Nor are they hungry all the time. This is the principle of receptivity ... At certain times, unbelievers are more responsive to spiritual truths than at other times. This receptivity often lasts only briefly, which is why Jesus said to go where the people would listen. Take advantage of the responsive hearts that the Holy Spirit prepares. Notice Jesus' instructions in Matthew 10:14 (NCV): 'If a home or town refuses to welcome you or listen to you, leave that place ...' This is a very significant statement that we shouldn't ignore. Jesus told the disciples they were not supposed to stay around unresponsive people. We aren't supposed to pick green fruit, but to find the ripe fruit and harvest it."[[161](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id161)] He further stated: "Is it good stewardship to continue badgering someone who has already rejected Christ a dozen times when there is a whole community of receptive people waiting to hear the gospel for the first time? ... The apostle Paul's strategy was to go through open doors and not waste time banging on closed ones. Likewise, we should not focus our efforts on those who aren't ready to listen. There are far more people in the world who are ready to receive Christ than there are believers ready to witness to them."

**Understanding the Roles of Finding Methods**

Under "Finding," the white LDS Missionary Handbook states: "The most effective sources of finding are members and investigators. Plan to use these and the following sources (listed in order of effectiveness). 1. Recent converts. 2. Baptismal services. 3. Stake missionaries' contacts with members and nonmembers. 4. Part-member families. 5. Members in general. 6. Former investigators. 7. Current investigators (referral dialogue). 8. Media, visitors' centers, and Church headquarters referrals. 9. Activation efforts (unknown address file). 10. Service activities. 11. New move-ins. 12. Special interest contacts. 13. Tracting. 14. Street contacting. 15. Speaking with everyone."

From the time they enter the Missionary Training Center, missionaries are repeatedly taught that finding activities based on their own efforts are the very least effective, weighing in at numbers eleven through fifteen. Not surprisingly, many missionaries quickly come to believe that their success at finding people to teach depends little upon their own initiative or effort. Many individuals cite the preceding list as rationalization for neglect of repeated scriptural admonitions to open their mouths about the gospel at all times.

Results are often widely discrepant with the sweeping claims of effectiveness presented in this list. Many missionaries achieve far greater success through tracting and street contacting than by soliciting referrals from members; others find reactivation efforts and service projects less fruitful than their own contacting efforts. Over 98 percent of baptisms on my mission came from tracting or street contacting, since there were few members from whom to solicit referrals. A heavy reliance on member referrals may produce acceptable results in areas such as Utah with very high member to missionary ratios and high member involvement but fails to produce similar results in nations without such favorable ratios. Conversely, street contacting and local media efforts that produce dramatic response in some newly opened areas of the world where few individuals have had an opportunity to hear the gospel may not generate such exuberant responses in areas of Western Europe or North America that have been saturated with evangelistic messages of different faiths for decades.

**Measuring the Effectiveness of Finding Methods Elder Dallin H. Oaks reported that "of investigators found through media campaigns, about 1 to 2 percent are baptized. Of investigators found through the missionaries' efforts, about 2 to 3 percent are baptized. Of investigators found through the members, 20 to 30 percent are baptized."[****[162](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id162)] This is valuable information, although it is based on North American studies that cannot be extrapolated to other areas. Many international missions experience baptism rates well above the 2 to 3 percent U.S. rate for investigators found by the missionaries' efforts.**

Some individuals point to such data to justify missionary finding programs that consist exclusively of soliciting referrals from members. Since member referrals are ten times as likely to be baptized as those found through the missionary efforts, they argue why even bother with other contacting methods at all? Why not concentrate missionary finding efforts soliciting referrals from members rather than dissipating effort on tasks with only a fraction of the yield?

While such reasoning may sound appealing, it is erroneous. These data are helpful in assessing teaching success rates once referrals are in hand, but they do not consider the average amount of time necessary to obtain referrals or establish an investigator in the first place and therefore do not answer the question of what finding method is the most effective.

Most missionaries I have surveyed cite an average of at least seven to ten member visits to obtain a single referral, and sometimes far more. When visitation and travel time are included, the amount of time needed to procure a single member referral is considerable. Nor are all referrals of the same quality: some members give referrals to the missionaries without the individuals' permission or knowledge, with success rates that are little better than those of "cold call" street contacts, while other members provide better quality referrals. Since only a fraction of individuals referred by members become active investigators, the amount of missionary time needed to generate a single investigator from member referrals is typically much greater than is recognized. Because hundreds of street contacts can usually be made in the time it takes to obtain a single member referral -- let alone an investigator -- and because success at soliciting referrals is unpredictable, the effectiveness of working through member referrals and street or tracting contacts cannot be validly compared at an individual level.

When measuring the effectiveness of finding approaches, results must be assessed per unit time, rather than per contact. If it takes ten member visits requiring ninety minutes each when travel time is included to obtain a single member referral and one referral in five becomes an investigator, it would take seventy-five hours of missionary time to generate one investigator from member referrals. If one can contact thirty people in an hour by tracting or street contacting, over two thousand individuals can be contacted in the average time needed to obtain a single investigator from member referrals. Even if only one individual in one hundred contacted became an investigator, the missionaries' time in this example is far more effectively used contacting nonmembers through their own efforts rather than visiting members to solicit referrals. The precise figures vary in different areas, but careful analysis often favors the missionaries' own finding efforts over member visits to solicit referrals without prior leads.

Contacting may seem less productive because it involves speaking with many people at a low response rate and because the near-constant rejection is emotionally taxing. The natural psychological bias against contacting results in a strong tendency to underestimate results from contacting efforts and to overestimate results of referral solicitation. Except in areas with overwhelming member to missionary ratios, the mental gymnastics invoked by many to rationalize a primary or exclusive focus on member visits as the basis of finding efforts typically do not result from an unbiased evaluation of the data, but from a desire to avoid the hard work and rejection of contacting in favor of more comfortable activities.

The scriptural mandate of reaching every soul with the gospel message deserves independent consideration in every finding program. Even if the productivity of tracting or street contacting efforts and working through member referrals were the same, the independent contacting efforts would be preferable because they offer exposure to the gospel message to hundreds or thousands of people in the time that would offer such opportunities to only one or a few individuals when working through member referrals. It cannot be surprising that missions where missionaries choose to do little independent contacting typically fall far short of their growth potential. Greatly increased productivity is achieved when one abandons the mindset that contacting is an undesirable task to be done when there is "nothing else to do" and reorients one's thinking to focus on the divine mandate to reach every soul in one's area and to reach them repeatedly.

**The Value of Contacting for Church Growth**

President David O. McKay taught that "the best means of preaching the gospel is by personal contact,"[[163](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id163)] yet many missionaries and even some mission leaders insist that missionary contacting efforts are so ineffective as to scarcely be worth the bother. It seems unfortunate that the value of independent missionary finding efforts continues to be controversial. Some missionaries express the deterministic view that God will inevitably guide the elect into His Church, regardless of member or missionary effort. Scriptures flatly contradict such erroneous beliefs and teach that the effort put forth by members and missionaries to share the gospel makes a tremendous difference in the lives of nonmembers and in the growth of the Church.

While some converts possess a high degree of discernment and insight and might perhaps come into the Church under any circumstances, for most the road to membership is more situational than theological. Most converts had not embarked on a systematic search to find the one true Church but accepted an invitation from a missionary or member when they felt something important was missing from their lives. The divine word rang true, and they received their own spiritual witness of the restored gospel as they exercised faith and made sacrifices.

The value of independent missionary contacting efforts can be appreciated by examining areas where such efforts are not permitted. In the Ukraine Donetsk mission, local law allowed proselytizing in Donetsk and Kharkov but prohibited foreign missionaries from approaching nonmembers without invitation in Dnipropetrovsk, where missionaries relied on strongly emphasized member-missionary efforts to find investigators. All cities had a similar missionary complement throughout their early histories. In 2001, there were approximately 700 members each in Donetsk and Kharkhov, the two cities allowing missionary outreach, and only 250 members in Dnipropetrovsk.

In Minsk, Belarus, there were about 150 active members in 1994, when contacting by full-time missionaries was prohibited. Since that time, investigators have been found almost exclusively through member referrals. In 2001, there were approximately twenty full-time LDS missionaries in Minsk, but still only about 150 active members. Although well over one hundred man-years of full-time LDS missionary labor had been expended in Minsk during this period, Church growth was slow, and existing members were lost to inactivity nearly as fast as new converts were baptized. In both Minsk and Dnipropetrovsk, finding programs based exclusively on member referrals resulted in drastically stunted growth compared to that which occurred in other areas where missionaries found investigators both through their own efforts and through referrals, even though independent missionary contacting efforts in the latter areas were far from optimal. Many other case studies could be cited demonstrating similar results.

Advocates of finding through member referrals alone frequently cite the example of Utah missions. Utah missions have among the highest annual baptism rates in the United States, with the overwhelming majority of baptisms coming from member referrals. Proponents conveniently neglect to mention that the three Utah missions encompass less than 1 percent of the LDS missionary force but draw referrals from more than 1.7 million LDS members in Utah, representing one-seventh of the world LDS population, as well as benefiting from the Church's foremost tourist attractions. Utah experiences an average of only 1.5 convert baptisms per ward per year, well below the world LDS average. This represents an annual growth rate of 0.2 to 0.5 percent when baptisms of member children and move-ins are subtracted. Relative to the number of members, Utah member-missionary efforts are among the least effective in the world.

Some also support member-only finding methods by citing the spectacular Church growth in Mongolia in spite of restrictions on contacting. Research demonstrates a high degree of spontaneous interest, with many self-referrals spontaneously requesting teaching or baptism. Such growth patterns do not reflect poorly on contacting, since there has been no opportunity for direct local comparison, but rather reflect circumstances of exceptional receptivity under which almost any kind of finding effort would be successful. While missionaries in highly receptive areas sometimes find more abundant teaching opportunities than their time management skills allow them to utilize, such remarkable levels of spontaneous interest cannot be extrapolated to other cultures.

Low growth rates are understandable in situations where contacting is not permitted by law and missionaries are working as diligently as they can under local conditions. However, stunted growth is much less acceptable in the far larger number of cases where missionaries have wide freedom to contact but choose not to fully utilize the opportunities that the Lord has provided.

**Limited versus Unlimited Methods**

Finding methods that depend on the referrals of others are intrinsically limited. In contrast, the potential of contacting is virtually unlimited and is restricted only by the missionaries' work ethic and motivation. I have repeatedly been surprised at how many missionaries and mission presidents, even in areas with few members, expect the local members to bear almost the entire burden of finding people to teach without effective independent missionary finding methods. Missionary productivity has progressively declined in spite of greatly increased time spent soliciting member referrals. Only a small minority of active LDS members have made any attempt to start a gospel conversation with a nonmember over the past year in spite of frequent missionary exhortations. In most areas, it is not feasible for hard-working missionaries to occupy their time productively working through referral sources alone. Members, new converts, and investigators should certainly be asked for referrals, but this can often be done efficiently at church meetings or other scheduled activities with telephone follow-up, without having to divert vast amounts of time away from scripturally mandated outreach activities.

**Optimizing Finding Programs**

Which finding method is best? Finding through members? Contacting? Working through media? Given the wide discrepancy in results among the same methods in different areas, or even among similar categories implemented in different ways, the only tenable answer is that the effectiveness of an approach depends on local circumstances and that the "best" approach varies among areas. Any generalization that one method is always "more effective" than another conveys a misunderstanding of the dynamics of finding methods. It would seem foolish to ask a carpenter whether the hammer, the saw, or the measuring tape is the best tool. All of these tools have different uses, and the carpenter who goes through his career using only a single tool will encounter many difficulties not experienced by those who know how to utilize a variety of tools for their most appropriate functions. It is a disservice to claim that certain finding methods are categorically "more effective" or "less effective," rather than teaching the underlying principles by which each finding method can be optimally employed.

Most missionaries have strong views about which finding methods are more or less "effective," yet have little or no training on how to implement each method most effectively. Sweeping claims that one finding method is always more effective than another only obscure the reality that there are more and less effective ways to implement any given finding method and that different methods are complementary rather than conflicting when properly implemented. One can make frequent and lengthy visits to members' homes to solicit referrals, or one can speak to members individually at church and telephone during the week to follow-up or drop by when already in the area. One can stand passively by a park display or sign board waiting for someone to approach, or one can boldly approach passersby.

Nearly a century ago, President B. H. Roberts observed: "If tracting is the backbone of missionary work, how is it that we do not have some treatise or instruction on the subject, some manual; or some definite course of training in it? There was no answer to the question except to confess to the neglect of the subject; and that, of course, was no answer."[[164](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id164)] Today, modern missionary manuals offer little insight into such basic topics.

**Principles of Finding**

With unlimited needs and limited resources, good stewardship requires not only that we share the gospel regularly, but that we also employ the best approaches in the most effective fashion. Effective missionaries use a balance of finding approaches, although the optimal balance depends greatly upon local circumstances. Each finding method has a valuable role, and each method can be employed in effective or ineffective ways. The real question is not whether to find through members, through one's own finding efforts, or through media, as all are needed, but how to employ each approach most effectively. Attention must be given not only to choosing the optimal finding methods for local conditions, but also to implementing each finding method as effectively as possible.

There are no substitutes for hard work and creativity. The innovative missionary enthusiastically applies a variety of finding methods and modifies approaches based on observations and results. Here are some principles to consider in determining how and when to best employ each finding technique.

**Time Utilization and Planning**

Every missionary should allocate daily time for finding and contacting, regardless of how busy he is teaching discussions and visiting members. This principle is crucial to long-term missionary success. One should never think in terms of filling up one's schedule, but in terms of reaching souls. Priorities and approaches must be reconsidered if missionaries are spending less than 80 percent of work hours contacting and teaching the gospel face to face. Meetings, personal errands, and other nonproselyting activities provide no one with the opportunity to hear the gospel.

In an era when missionaries are taught from official sources that their own efforts are the least productive of all finding methods and some believe that contacting is so unproductive as to almost not be worth bothering with at all, it is easy for many to avoid contacting by filling schedules with additional member visits and trips to old investigators who fail to keep commitments. Missionaries who shirk scriptural mandates in this fashion fall far short of their potential. The litany of rationalizations and false philosophies many contrive in attempts to excuse themselves from scriptural contacting obligations defies both reason and inspiration.

Finding methods should be scheduled in a complementary fashion at the times when each is most effective. Some finding methods are more effective at some times than others or are only available at certain times. An overreliance on one or two methods frequently results in finding missionaries wasting time when their finding method of choice is not available. Street or park contacting is usually most productive during the day, but much less effective at night, and is often slightly more effective on weekends when families are together and individuals are less rushed. Tracting has low yield during business hours, but a higher yield in the evenings and on weekends when families are home. Member visits are best scheduled so that they do not take missionaries off the streets during prime proselyting and teaching time when nonmember families are home. The holiday season in Christian nations provides special opportunities for presenting messages about the Savior. Schedules for free English lessons for international college students are often best attended during the school year.

Some finding methods offer the predictable opportunity to approach many people about the gospel in a short time, while others require far more time to make a single contact and are less predictable. Some approaches require significant advance planning, while others do not. Media efforts, community presentations, family history workshops, and so forth can be effective with appropriate planning and preparation. Tracting and street contacting can be done almost anywhere with little preparation or notice and make excellent backups when teaching plans fall through.

**Response Patterns**

Different audiences experience varying patterns of responsiveness to finding methods. When my companion and I tracted in Russia, most people who let us in for conversation were young or middle-aged. When we placed church invitations in several thousand apartment mailboxes, the average age of church visitors the next week was significantly older. Elderly people, who were often reluctant to open their doors to strangers, responded better to invitations they could read and study on their own, while younger people usually responded better to personal contact. Broad societal outreach requires the implementation of complementary finding methods, each of which is most effective at reaching a specific audience.

**Geographic Constraints**

Finding methods face geographic considerations. Most residences can be reached by tracting, although locked apartment buildings and gated communities create limitations. Street contacting is most effective in high-traffic areas such as parks or metro stations, but varying governmental policies in different nations allow missionary contacting in some locations while restricting it in others.

Finding methods and locations also affect contact distribution. Missionaries serving in central areas of large cities often find that many individuals contacted in public areas live remotely, leading to greater follow-up travel time or requiring referrals to be passed off to missionaries in other areas. Tracting often offers geographic advantages because most individuals live where they are contacted, and travel time can be economized by tracting through adjacent areas. When tracting contacts do not keep an appointment, time can be used to stop by on other contacts or investigators in the same area or to continue tracting nearby.

**Saturation and Diminishing Returns**

Directives to spend more time soliciting referrals from members and less time contacting nonmembers are based on the untested assumption that spending twice the time with members will generate twice the number of referrals. Both field data and an analysis of referral dynamics suggest that this assumption is inaccurate. Missionaries today spend more time than ever working with members, yet the percentage of a cross-section of U.S. investigators being taught as a result of member referrals fell from 42 percent in 1987 to 20 percent in 1997.[[165](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id165)] Most full-time missionaries spend dozens of hours each month visiting members, participating in missionary dinner appointments, and soliciting member referrals in other ways, but the average North American LDS congregation produces only two member referrals each month.

Except in areas where the member base is extremely large, attempts to solicit member referrals reach a point of saturation and diminishing returns, meaning that incremental effort results in a progressively smaller increase in the number of referrals received. Even diligent members who are good referral sources eventually run out of fresh leads, while the majority of members never provide a referral, no matter how frequently missionaries visit. While much can be done to improve member finding effectiveness, this depends much more upon the presence of an effective member-missionary program in the local congregation than on missionary visits. Every effort should be made to solicit referrals that are easily obtainable, yet care should be taken to ensure that member visits do not detract from primary proselyting responsibilities without producing corresponding practical results. The precise point of saturation depends on number of members (active and inactive making varying contributions) and the relative obedience to the gospel and motivation of the members. Saturable finding methods are most helpful when combined with a balance of other finding approaches, but typically produce suboptimal results when used as the main or sole finding method.

In contrast to referral-based finding, tracting and street contacting are unsaturable except in very small towns, with two to three times the effort typically generating two to three times as many contacts. Such unsaturable finding methods generate linear returns that are limited only by the missionaries' work ethic and should represent the primary finding method in most areas.

Programs that directly involve missionaries or members in sharing the gospel with nonmembers almost always produce superior results to indirect methods that involve merely exhorting others to do so. Effective finding programs make the gospel message available to large numbers of people on a consistent basis, fulfilling the gospel mandate to sound the gospel in every ear. It is usually much more effective to make large numbers of fresh contacts each day than to dedicate large amounts of time to visits attempting to solicit referrals. It is more effective to mentor members in sharing the gospel on splits or in teaching situations than to exhort them to share the gospel over dinner.

**Process Improvement**

One should work hard, listen to the spirit, and evaluate progress objectively and regularly. Missionaries should set reasonable expectations and realize that rejection is the most common response at every step. Nonetheless, one should not persist in approaches that are not effective after adequate trials. Effective missionaries use ingenuity and try new finding methods that they feel are more likely to be successful than their current ones. If an approach is not working, they determine why, modify the approach as needed, and reevaluate later for fine-tuning.

**Contacting Goals**

While contacting is hard work and involves near constant rejection, I have repeatedly found that missionary success over the course of a mission is determined more by the number of people contacted each day than by any other single factor. Paul taught: "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall also reap bountifully" (2 Corinthians 9:6). The habit of approaching at least one hundred new people each day about the gospel is perhaps the most vital single trait that a missionary can acquire.

Even at return rates per contact that seem extremely low, contacting can still be a very effective church growth tool when missionaries and their leaders have the vision and discipline to make consistently large numbers of gospel contacts. My companion and I had to contact over one thousand people to find a single individual who was ready to join the Church, yet we averaged one baptism per week for the last eight months of my mission because we contacted 100 to 200 people each day. Jim Rohn taught: "This little equation, when understood and acted upon, is perhaps the most powerful equation there is in regards to long-term achievement and accomplishment ... Your short-term actions multiplied by time equals your long-term accomplishments." Just as the spiritual benefits of daily scripture reading may be barely perceptible after a few sessions but accrue to great levels over time, the results of diligent daily contacting may not be obvious in one week or even one month but become vast over sustained periods.

With the possible exception of particularly resistant areas of Western Europe, low contacting effort is almost always a major cause of poor missionary success. Almost any missionary companionship willing to put forth adequate effort can contact one hundred new people per day, with abundant time remaining for teaching discussions. In some small towns where distances between homes are large, missionaries may find a minimum of fifty contacts each day to be more realistic. There is almost never any valid reason for a companionship to average fewer than fifty gospel contacts in a day, except in nations where contacting is prohibited.

A missionary who consistently contacts one hundred people per day can reach over 70,000 people over the course of a mission, while one who contacted only five per day would reach only 3,600. In a relatively receptive area that averaged one baptism per five hundred contacts, a missionary with the simple habit of contacting one hundred people each day could achieve approximately 140 baptisms over the course of a mission. If an average of 5,000 gospel contacts were needed to achieve one baptism in a highly resistant area, a missionary who approached one hundred contacts each day could bring fourteen people into the Church.

A continuing flow of investigators through the finding and teaching pools is essential both to productivity and to refinement of missionary skills. More importantly, the best and often only way for missionaries to consistently receive the Holy Spirit is by contacting large numbers of people daily. Missionaries who make few new contacts find that it is difficult to receive or maintain the companionship of the Holy Spirit, regardless of their sincerity.

**Expectations and Reality**

Many missionaries expect that a relatively high percentage of contacts and investigators they teach will be baptized and are therefore content with making few contacts. Even under the most favorable circumstances, only a small fraction of individuals contacted and taught will be ready to accept the gospel, since not everyone is willing to adhere to gospel laws. Yet it is not enough even for us to reach each individual once. We must present individuals with multiple and frequent opportunities to receive the gospel. Multiple contacts are often required even for sincere individuals to develop a desire to investigate the Church. U.S. research suggests that the average convert has had between six and twenty exposures to the Church before deciding to join. Since people are receptive to the gospel at different times and often require multiple exposures to the gospel before accepting it, we cannot consider our duty to be done when each individual has had a single gospel opportunity. We must offer the gospel widely so that it is available to individuals when they are ready and not simply when we finally decide to make the effort to share it with them.

**Overcoming the Fear of Man**

The burning desire to share the gospel felt by servants of Christ is replaced by fear in the carnal man. Beyond the theoretical understanding that contacting is important, effective contacting requires a driving sense of responsibility to reach the unreached and a high tolerance for rejection. Developing these traits is one of the most difficult emotional and psychological tasks many missionaries face, and many never develop them over their entire missions. Missionaries must prepare themselves mentally and spiritually to be undeterred by rejection. President James E. Faust taught: "Missionaries still need to have the right attitude in contacting people. They need to cast aside all fear and be positive about the great message which is here."[[166](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id166)] He further taught that missionaries should "fear not and doubt not. We have a leader who fears not and doubts not." Moroni wrote: "I fear not what man can do; for perfect love casteth out all fear" (Moroni 8:16).

Participating in the first contact of nonmembers with the Church is the most exciting part of missionary work for me. Initially, I contacted diligently out of a sense of the importance and urgency about the gospel message, although I found contacting challenging. Later in my mission, I came to greatly enjoy contacting. Different individuals offer such a variety of experience and perspective that contacting can be very rewarding when approached with the proper attitude. Even when people are not interested in the Church, I am enriched by the experience. By varying in one's approach, trying out new words in the mission language, and working to build on common beliefs, one can turn contacting from a chore into an exciting and enjoyable activity.

**The Book of Mormon Loan Program**

Missionaries can economize time while increasing their productivity by using the Book of Mormon as a sieve, allowing the honest in heart to self-select. Ezra Taft Benson taught: "The Book of Mormon is the great standard we are to use in our missionary work. It shows that Joseph Smith was a prophet. It contains the words of Christ, and its great mission is to bring men to Christ. All other things are secondary. The golden question of the Book of Mormon is 'Do you want to learn more of Christ?' The Book of Mormon is the great finder of the golden contact. It does not contain things which are 'pleasing unto the world,' and so the worldly are not interested in it. It is a great sieve (see 1 Nephi 6:5)." He taught that the wicked are offended at it, the worldly are not interested in it, and the righteous delight in it.

In many missions, missionaries do not allow contacts to receive a copy of the Book of Mormon until they have already received the first discussion. In other cases, congratulatory articles celebrate wards that have distributed copies of the Book of Mormon indiscriminately to anyone who will accept one, often with little or no follow-up. Fortunately, there is a program that is superior in virtually every way to the extremes of inadequate use of the Book of Mormon or of indiscriminate distribution without meaningful follow-up.

The Book of Mormon loan program is an effective finding method for both missionaries and members that involves offering a copy of the Book of Mormon as a loan to individuals with the request that they read just enough to form an opinion. If the acquaintance has specific questions or interests, reading passages can be recommended. A copy of 23 Questions Answered by the Book of Mormon can help the acquaintance find portions that may stimulate his or her interest. The missionary or member mentions that he would like to meet with the contact to discuss the principles of the book at greater length if he or she finds the contents to be interesting. For a book to be loaned, the contact must agree to read in the book and to return it if he or she is not interested. A tentative follow-up within the next several days should be agreed upon, and individual's telephone number and address are obtained. If the individual wishes to borrow a copy of the Book of Mormon but is reluctant to provide his or her telephone number or address, a commitment to return the book during Sunday church meetings can be obtained and local church address and meeting times can be provided. One should not give out a church invitation before requesting the individual's telephone number since the person may subsequently decide not to provide personal contact information that is often necessary for follow-up.

The recipient is told that the Book of Mormon is not being given as a gift, but is being loaned and that he or she will be expected to return it. When the book is given as a gift, many people feel no sense of accountability or urgency for reading it due to the prevalent free sample mentality. However, most individuals do feel a sense of obligation about returning other peoples' property. After a few days, the missionary or member calls or stops by to follow up at the agreed time. If the individual is interested or would like to discuss the book, the Book of Mormon has worked as a sieve increasing the value of the missionary's time and discussion ensues. If the individual is not interested, the book is picked up (for follow-up in person), or he or she is asked to return the book at a church meeting or at another convenient agreed-upon time (if follow-up is by telephone). The Book of Mormon has acted as a sieve and that individual has sifted himself out, saving the missionary considerable time. While not every uninterested person may return the book, many do. Because of the opportunity cost of time, missionaries do not need to spend their time picking up books unless it is convenient. They can be left in the home of investigators at the missionaries' discretion. The individuals brought into the Church through the Book of Mormon loan program have a high rate of continued activity because they are truly converted to the gospel message and not to the missionaries or to the social programs of the Church.

**Case History**

In one Brazilian mission, my father as a missionary divided his time equally between morning and afternoon and divided the city into two halves, and one of the halves into two quarters.

For three hours each morning, he would go to one quarter and go door to door with his briefcase full of copies of the Book of Mormon. At each house, he would say: "Here is a book. It is not for sale. It is a loan. It is for your husband to read to you. We will return in two days to see how you like it."

For three hours each afternoon, he would go to the other half of the city and do conventional tracting, namely, introducing himself and his companion as missionaries of the LDS Church and offering to present a missionary discussion.

On even days he would go to one quarter in the morning, and on odd days he would go to the other quarter.

Each copy of the Book of Mormon was underlined in passages where the basic points of the gospel leading to conversion were indicated. At the bottom of the page, the reader was pointed to the next reference: "Go to page --."

During the time this experiment was conducted, one person was baptized by conventional tracting. Ten people were baptized by the Book of Mormon loan program.

My father did not have time to mark all of the copies. He printed up a marking chart and found that not only members, but also even nonmembers were often very happy to mark the books for him. Some of them confessed that they stopped to read the passages as they were underlining them.

In this manner, my father was able to distribute copies of the Book of Mormon in Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, and German and tracts in Russian and Japanese because the book was not available at that time in those languages.

The book was left with the family for as long as they continued reading it. The books were picked up from disinterested families and loaned out again to new contacts.

Whenever a book was left with a Jewish family, he would refuse to take the book back. His mission President, Wayne Beck, assured him that some day they would not be able to resist the temptation to read it. "The Jews are great readers," he said.

My father spent all the money ever sent to him on his mission by well-wishers on copies of the Book of Mormon. Upon leaving the mission, he had one hundred copies of the Book of Mormon in the hands of people who said they were still reading them. He affirms that if he were ever called on another mission, he would spend all his daylight hours doing nothing but loaning copies of the Book of Mormon. Evenings, of course, were always reserved for teaching.

**Family to Family Book of Mormon Program**

Ezra Taft Benson cited the Family to Family Book of Mormon Program as one of the most effective missionary approaches, noting the need for families to send copies of the Book of Mormon on missions for them.167 I have found that many investigators give positive feedback about the value of the following measures:

1. A photo of the individual or family. An address should also be included if the family desires to correspond.   
2. The book should include a copy of a printed personal or family testimony which focuses not simply on assertions that the Book of Mormon is true, but on the blessings one has received through following its principles.   
3. A copy of 23 Questions Answered by the Book of Mormon, complete with page references, to stimulate meaningful reading.   
4. Local contact information for the Church. Individuals who enjoy reading the Book of Mormon receive limited benefit if they cannot find the Church.

**Working with Members Effectively**

There are effective and ineffective ways to work with members. Some missionaries believe that one cannot find through members without a long period of building trust, often through frequent visits and excessive socialization. Ezra Taft Benson taught:

Too many missionaries are neutralized and occasionally lost (excommunicated) because of over-solicitous members, member sisters who "mother" the missionaries, and socializing occurring between missionaries and members. Because of the importance of members and missionaries working effectively together on the member missionary program, it is vital that missionaries maintain the proper missionary image and have the reputation as great proselyting elders and not simply "good guys." The greatest help members can be to a missionary is not to feed him, but to give the names of their friends so that he can teach them with the spirit in their homes and challenge them, with the wonderful members helping to fellowship.[[168](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id168)]

Frequent missionary transfers and more pressing scriptural responsibilities make it impractical and inappropriate for each member to get to know each missionary well socially, nor does socialization alone generally result in the generation of productive referrals. Visits can be counterproductive when missionaries stay too long or visit too frequently. The utilization of all opportunities to speak with members at church meetings and functions and close follow-up with appropriately timed telephone calls can save many needless trips and fruitless visits.

Effective finding through members involves at least three factors. First, missionary visits to members are centered on helping members to develop and continue basic gospel habits that generate spiritual growth, including reading the Book of Mormon daily, saying prayers, sharing the gospel, observing the Sabbath Day and Word of Wisdom, attending the temple, and the habit of regularly initiating gospel discussions with nonmembers. Members with these habits are much more likely to participate in member-missionary work. Righteousness is the precursor of effective missionary work and the source of self-motivation. When the objectives of missionary visits are nebulous, social, or centered exclusively on soliciting referrals, little is accomplished.

Second, missionaries must work hard at independent finding methods and teach investigators appropriately to build trust. When missionaries successfully find, teach, and baptize quality converts who remain active, members gain confidence and are more willing to invite their acquaintances with less prompting. Conversely, when missionaries are unable to regularly get new investigators to church or when poorly committed "converts" are quickly lost to inactivity because of being rushed to baptism prematurely, member confidence in missionaries is seriously damaged.

Finally, missionaries must ensure that their referral expectations are reasonable based on the ratio of members to missionaries and past performance. The cliche that "if members were doing their job, missionaries wouldn't have to tract" is neither scripturally sound nor realistic in most areas. The belief that finding people to teach is "someone else's job" is attractive to human nature but obscures personal responsibility and dampens independent effort.

**Finding through Media**

Latter-day prophets have taught that we have an obligation to share the gospel through media. Spencer W. Kimball taught: "When we have increased the missionaries from the organized areas of the Church to a number close to their potential, that is, every able and worthy boy in the Church on a mission; when every stake and mission abroad is furnishing enough missionaries for that country; when we have used our qualified men to help the apostles to open these new fields of labor; when we have used the satellite and related discoveries to their greatest potential and all of the media -- the papers, magazines, television, radio -- all in their greatest power; when we have organized numerous other stakes which will be springboards; when we have recovered from inactivity the numerous young men who are now unordained and unmissioned and unmarried; then, and not until then, shall we approach the insistence of our Lord and Master to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."[[169](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id169)] Of his media interviews, President Gordon B. Hinckley stated: "We have something that the world needs to hear about, and these interviews afford an opportunity to give voice to that."[[170](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id170)]

Elder Dallin H. Oaks noted that in North America "studies show that about 6 out of 10 of adult converts said that they were positively influenced by our media messages before deciding to be baptized."[[171](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id171)] This figure does not apply to international areas, where relatively few converts have been exposed to church media messages. Little LDS media outreach is conducted in areas of the developing world where costs are low and response rates are high. George Barna has found that in the United States "more people use Christian media than attend church" and that large numbers of non-Christians listen to Christian radio.[[172](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=17" \l "ftn.id172)] The impact of media messages even on the relatively stagnant North American religious scene suggests that the potential for media messages in the developing world is immense. I have often found that the use of outreach media is the primary difference between the finding program of Protestant missionaries and pastors who do not speak the local language but succeed in assembling large congregations and that of LDS missionaries who speak the local language yet have few investigators to teach. Many of the best media opportunities are at the mission level and below. Local media opportunities are often both more effective and less expensive than national ones and can be fine-tuned based on local needs and results.

**Church Media Outreach**

The value of religious feature stories run by major news networks is usually diluted by the simultaneous presentation of inaccurate or opposing views. Press interviews with church leaders, feature articles, and public service advertisements without specific contact information and a call to action may generate [Panerai Replica](https://www.bestintime.me/panerai.html) some positive feelings but rarely inspire individuals to investigate the Church or accept the missionary discussions. Positive publicity in the lay press is often only weakly positive, while negative articles are often strongly negative. Many network television stations in the United States and Western Europe now categorically refuse to run evangelistic advertisements, making it more difficult for churches to conduct outreach through secular media. Many churches have found that their efforts are better directed toward developing their own media outreach venues than attempting to achieve wide positive exposure through the lay press. Churches that do their own religious broadcasting and printing can proclaim the gospel message without the content being altered or attacked by third parties before even reaching its audience.

**Optimizing Media Programs**

LDS media messages can directly generate referrals, or they can exert a positive influence that may increase receptivity in future LDS contacts. In receptive or newly opened areas, direct-response media messages that invite contacts to attend church, read the Book of Mormon, or visit with the missionaries are much more effective than image messages that promote a positive view of Latter-day Saints but do not invite to action. Effective media programs should be sustained over time. With few exceptions, ongoing media programs that achieve modest but constant exposure usually produce superior long-term results to large, one-time media events.

Awareness of the principles of threshold effort, response rate, and respondent receptivity can help to optimize media outreach for any area. Threshold effort is the personal effort that the respondent must put forth to act upon the media invitation, such as making a telephone call, inviting the missionaries, or attending a church meeting. The response rate is the number of individuals who respond to the media message, typically measured per thousand exposures. Respondent receptivity is the rate at which respondents become investigators or progress in other ways toward church membership.

Media programs generate different response rates and reach different audiences based on the content of the message and the effort required from the respondent. The response rate is inversely proportional to the threshold effort. However, the average respondent receptivity is directly proportional to the threshold effort. Free literature or video offerings increase the response rate but lower respondent receptivity. LDS-specific media content, such as Book of Mormon, typically lower response rate but increase respondent receptivity compared to content that is not unique to Latter-day Saints, such as the Bible. Programs that require greater threshold effort, such as attending church, will receive fewer responses than those that require less effort or offer free materials, but those who do respond will be more likely to become serious investigators.

The message content and required threshold effort must be balanced against the response rate and productivity of visits achieved to optimize results in the context of community receptivity and missionary availability. Media programs with threshold-commitment ratios that are mismatched to local needs can dissipate time and resources better utilized in more productive ways. One elder in the southern United States stated that his companionship received an average of three referrals per day from the Lamb of God video program but that the program had resulted in very few converts across his mission. He noted that more baptisms resulted from talking with nonmembers on the way to and from media referral appointments than from visiting the media referrals themselves, explaining that "many people here just want free stuff."

Media programs in areas of high community receptivity and abundant teaching opportunities should favor a high threshold effort such as church attendance or reading in the Book of Mormon. Such initiatives reach modest numbers of individuals who are more likely to progress to conversion and Church membership, ensuring that missionary time is utilized as effectively as possible. This is especially crucial in missions with low missionary to population ratios. In contrast, low-threshold, high-response rate programs offering free books or videos to be brought to an investigator's home may be useful in less receptive areas where missionaries face major difficulties trying to find anyone to teach at all.

If a media initiative does not produce the desired outcome, the message content and the initial required effort can be modified to produce a locally appropriate balance between the number of referrals and contact interest level. If the number of referrals generated is high but few individuals become converted, the media program should be modified to require greater investigator effort, leading to fewer but more productive teaching opportunities.

**Media Examples**

Media opportunities should be utilized to increase positive church exposure. In one city, I wrote an article on the Church in Russian that was published in a local newspaper. We had many discussions and several baptismal commitments due to publicity from the article. We also paid for an attractive signboard with information about the Church with our meeting time to be posted near a bus stop. Several individuals came to church as a result of the sign and were baptized. Since many people had seen the sign, contacting efforts were more successful. We presented local libraries with a copy of the Book of Mormon and Gospel Principles book with the church addresses and times pasted inside. The Gospel Principles book was well received because of its accessible format and organized and well-referenced overview of LDS doctrines. Small newspaper advertisements provide an inexpensive way to increase public awareness. One mission companion was baptized after attending church meetings he found through a newspaper advertisement with nothing but the Church's name, location, and meeting time.

**Referral Process Improvement**

My follow-up audits have found that not all missionaries consistently attempt to reach referrals. Addresses are not always valid, telephone numbers are often not provided, and much time can be lost attempting to visit contacts that are not home. Referrals are time-sensitive, since receptivity often wanes with time. It is necessary to ensure that receptive referrals are reached promptly, while avoiding the dissipation of large amounts of time in repeated attempts to locate hard to reach contacts with only minimal interest.

The challenge begins with referral forms that allow submission of only name and contact information. Additional information can economize missionary time and increase the likelihood of successful contact. Important questions include: What is the best time to visit or call? What exposure have you had to the Church? Do you have LDS friends or acquaintances? What interests you about the LDS Church?

This additional information allows missionaries to reach the individual and establish rapport much more effectively than is possible by cold-calling with nothing more than a name and address. Such information can also provide missionaries with the impetus to make repeated or exceptional attempts to contact difficult to reach but potentially high-yield contacts, while avoiding repeated and often fruitless efforts to reach low-yield ones. A contact who has attended church in another area, has close member friends, has studied the Book of Mormon, and has expressed a strong interest in receiving the discussions warrants far greater effort to reach than an individual who has expressed only a casual curiosity or an individual referred by a member without his knowledge or permission. Systematic mission-level audits are valuable to ensure that referrals disbursed to missionaries are followed up promptly.

#### Section II. Chapter 16: Teaching for True Conversion

**Importance of Teaching**

Gordon B. Hinckley taught: "[If missionaries could really convey the gospel message], at least twice as many people would come into the Church ... I hope this improvement will continue until we learn to really speak to the world."[[173](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=19" \l "ftn.id173)] One mission companion had a gift for teaching gospel principles in a simple and personal yet profound way that could convey the insight of the Holy Spirit to both the new contacts and longtime members. He was able to teach and baptize individuals whom I never would have thought it was possible to reach. I had never dreamed that hearing about faith or repentance for the thirtieth time could be so fascinating. The great Christian apologist C. S. Lewis, who inspired millions with his practical insight on Christianity, wrote that if you cannot convey a principle of faith in simple terms, "then either you don't understand it or you don't believe it."[[174](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=19" \l "ftn.id174)] Walter Hooper called Lewis the "most thoroughly converted man I ever met." To a great extent, our ability to convey gospel principles is a direct reflection of our own personal conversion and the meaning of these principles in our own lives.

**Prepare to Teach**

We are commanded to pray for the Spirit before each visit (2 Nephi 32:9). A prayer within the home can also help bring the Spirit. If we do not receive the Spirit, we are commanded not to teach (D&C 42:14). It is better to reschedule an appointment than to teach without the Spirit.

Upon entering the investigators' home, distractions should be minimized. One should ask to turn off the television or radio at the start of each visit. Eating at investigators' homes is usually counterproductive. Missionaries should let investigators and members know ahead of time that they will not have time to eat. It is difficult to keep the Spirit when individuals are preoccupied with serving or eating rather than directing all energies to the one needful thing, the message of the gospel (Luke 10:38-42). Serving meals can also present a major economic burden to those in developing nations and can be a source of unseen tension in the home. If the investigators still insist on serving something, tell them that a light snack will suffice.

Introductions should be brief. On a first visit, a few open-ended, nonthreatening questions can often help the missionaries to gain insight into how to best meet the investigator's needs. What is the individual's vocational and religious background? What interests the individual about the Church or about faith and spirituality in general? Does the investigator have LDS friends or acquaintances? What are the investigator's goals in life? These and other relevant questions can be asked initially or at a more opportune time, depending on missionary rapport and verbal and nonverbal cues. The home or apartment can also provide clues about the individual's interests and priorities.

At subsequent visits, the investigator's understanding and preparation must be assessed before beginning a lesson. Open-ended questions are asked to find out how the investigators understand the material covered at the last visit, what progress they have made on interim scripture reading, church attendance, and any other commitments, and whether they have any questions or concerns. The investigator's scripture reading should be discussed as specifically as possible. Individuals who claim to have read but state that they cannot remember what the reading was about have usually not read or have made only a cursory attempt. Discussing the reading as specifically as possible helps the missionary to understand how much reading is really occurring and helps the investigator to realize that the missionaries are serious about the commitment to study the scriptures. Missionaries who skip over investigator's statements about scripture reading without specifically discussing the material often face unpleasant surprises and will find that their investigators and converts rarely develop the habit of daily scripture reading.

The major highlights of the last lesson should be briefly reviewed. If the investigator does not accurately understand or remember the material covered in prior lessons, has significant unresolved concerns, has not read scriptures or attended church, or has not observed other commitments, it is generally ill-advised to proceed with the full discussion. Discussions should only be given when investigators are adequately prepared to receive them. If one chooses not to give a discussion, a short lesson or brief follow-up visit focusing on the issues of concern is usually appropriate. It is important to attempt to stay on topic, but it is also important to ensure that investigator questions and interests are adequately addressed.

Once the baptismal commitment has been accepted, the investigator's progress toward each of the core commitments (reading scriptures daily, praying daily, attending church weekly, and observing the Word of Wisdom and law of chastity) is discussed at the beginning of each visit. This provides a very good idea of the investigator's overall status and a window into what issues may represent current or potential future challenges. The discerning missionary finds very few surprises, while the less effective missionary is frequently caught off guard with unanticipated disappointments.

Teaching lays the foundation for how investigators will act as members. It takes time and effort for investigators to absorb and apply the teachings and principles presented in the discussions. Few investigators can adequately incorporate the information and commitments from more than one formal discussion per week. Programs in which all of the lessons are crammed into brief intervals of three weeks or less have inevitably been associated with major deficiencies in the teaching process and low convert retention rates. There should be no pressure as to the pace at which investigators are taught, nor should there be any incentive for rushing investigators beyond the pace with which they feel comfortable.

**Teaching Time**

Wide variation exists in missionary teaching patterns. I knew many missionaries serving in Russia who routinely took two to three hours to teach a discussion due to language difficulties and habits of eating large meals in investigators' homes with every visit. Some Latin American missions experience the opposite extreme, with brief five- to ten-minute "doorstep discussions" that make passing mention of key discussion points to contacts who usually fail to understand or incorporate the whirlwind information overload. While this tactic succeeded in running up discussion numbers, the actual meaning of this increase is dubious, since few "converts" taught with this method remained active or acquired even a rudimentary grasp of the principles being taught. The Preach My Gospel manual instructs missionaries that lessons should take only thirty to forty-five minutes and that multiple small visits may be necessary to cover discussion material adequately. The Preach My Gospel manual provides short outlines of the discussions that can be taught in as little as three to five minutes. While such abbreviated summaries can be useful when discussing beliefs with street contacts, when time is short, or when reviewing past lessons, they are not a substitute for full-length discussions and should not be counted or reported as such.

I find that few investigators are able to comprehend adequately and incorporate the discussion material in less than sixty to ninety minutes. With the new four-discussion program, teaching the officially recommended thirty to forty-five minutes results in less instructional time between the missionaries' initial contact with an investigator and baptism than in a single three-hour Sunday meeting block. Most missionaries try to complete the discussions within the allotted thirty to forty-five minutes, since the prospect of return visits to complete a single lesson disrupts continuity and lacks appeal. Few find-out questions are asked as the missionaries race to complete the discussion, leaving the typical investigator with major unresolved issues that are quickly apparent to an experienced observer. At follow-up, investigator hang-ups expectedly relate to unresolved issues and misunderstandings that should have been recognized and addressed in the prior discussion. This highly abbreviated teaching schedule most commonly results in the rushed baptism of investigators who do not adequately grasp the lesson material. If investigators cannot find the time or muster the attention to sit through sixty- to ninety-minute discussions during their initial acquaintance with the Church, how will they possibly find the discipline to attend the full Sunday block meeting schedule for life? Limiting maximum teaching time to only forty-five minutes is also inefficient, especially in areas where missionaries cover large areas and may require considerable travel time.

I believe that sixty- to ninety-minute lessons are most adequate and appropriate. Follow-up and member visits should not take more than one hour. Staying beyond that time is usually counterproductive. A cardinal rule of missionary work is always to leave before the Spirit does so that the investigators eagerly anticipate the next visit instead of feeling anxious for the missionaries to leave.

The missionary discussions contain many essential principles that are new for many investigators and frequently require appropriate find-out questions, explanations, and examples. Investigators must be taught for true conversion and not for deadlines. Shortchanging the teaching of receptive investigators is false economy and fails to adequately prepare investigators for membership. Missionaries have no greater responsibility than to teach the gospel. Receptive and committed investigators deserve to be taught adequately.

Some missionaries teach fine lessons, only to misjudge their time and then ask to be excused at a critical point in the discussion when the allotted lesson time expires or the evening curfew approaches. The Spirit, which has been carefully built up to witness to an essential point, is lost, and the atmosphere upon returning to resume the discussion is not the same. While most such episodes can be avoided by remaining time-conscious, staying on a lesson schedule, and stopping the discussion on a suitable noncritical point if the lesson must be split, missionaries should keep in mind that their investigators' needs usually represent the "weightier matters of the law." It is unwise to abandon a highly spiritual discussion with a receptive investigator before a major commitment or crucial teaching point simply to stay within an arbitrary allotted time.

**Involve Members**

For serious investigators, it is essential to arrange for members to be present for at least two and preferably more discussions or visits before baptism in order to ensure that meaningful fellowshipping begins long before baptism. In this way, the investigators develop friendships with active members with whom they will have long-term contact and benefit from their teaching and testimony. Local members also receive many benefits, including spiritual blessings, hands-on mentoring in sharing the gospel, and lasting friendships. I find that it is less helpful to bring members on the first discussion unless they are personal friends of the investigator, since the large majority of first discussions never result in a second, and the presence of a member is of questionable benefit for first-time investigators who are likely to have other hang-ups.

**Focus on the Savior**

We must focus on Jesus Christ as we teach the gospel. Nephi taught: "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 25:26). All gospel principles ultimately go back to the Savior.

**Teach the Uniqueness of Latter-day Doctrines**

Recognizing that acceptance of Christ's work today through His chosen messengers is vital to our becoming modern disciples of Christ. Bruce R. McConkie stated: "Until we get involved with latter-day revelation, the process of conversion does not begin to operate in any substantial degree in the heart of an investigator. The Lord said to Joseph Smith: 'this generation shall have my word through you ...' (D&C 5:10). That is His decree. They either get it through Joseph Smith or they do not get it, and our whole perspective is: Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith."[[175](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=19" \l "ftn.id175)] Missionaries must take every opportunity to emphasize that the doctrines they are teaching, while found in ancient scripture, are understood only because of Latter-day revelation given to Joseph Smith and other prophets in our time. When investigators claim that their church teaches the "same thing," they often betray a lack of awareness of the true beliefs of their prior faith. To the world of sectarian Christianity, basic doctrines of the gospel such as the nature of God, the true definition of faith, the identity of the Savior as the Old Testament Jehovah, the requirements for salvation, the nature of repentance, and the Holy Ghost are all mysteries. Grant Von Harrison wrote of the responsibility to teach investigators to gain a love for the Book of Mormon and the prophet Joseph Smith: "If you fail in this basic responsibility, you will see many people accept the basic doctrines that you introduce, but they will not be inclined to join the Church."[[176](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=19" \l "ftn.id176)]

**Teach with the Book of Mormon**

Jesus Christ personally appeared to all of the main editors and authors of the Book of Mormon and instructed them what to write in the limited space they had to convey a message of infinite importance. In this sense, the Book of Mormon is unique among scripture in that Christ Himself was the Editor in Chief. The Book of Mormon was written for our day. Moroni wrote: "I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing" (Mormon 8:34-35). Having seen our day and having been personally instructed by the Savior Himself, Book of Mormon prophets provide the guidance for our times. Nephi testified that the sincere followers of Christ will recognize the voice of Christ in the Book of Mormon: "And now, my beloved brethren, and also Jew, and all ye ends of the earth, hearken unto these words and believe in Christ; and if ye believe not in these words believe in Christ. 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. And if they are not the words of Christ, judge ye -- for Christ will show unto you, with power and great glory, that they are his words, at the last day; and you and I shall stand face to face before his bar; and ye shall know that I have been commanded of him to write these things, notwithstanding my weakness" (2 Nephi 33:10-11). He wrote that the Book of Mormon "speaketh harshly against sin, according to the plainness of the truth; wherefore, no man will be angry at the words which I have written save he shall be of the spirit of the devil" (2 Nephi 33:5). The way in which individuals receive the Book of Mormon determines whether they are able to receive additional divine truths. Mormon records: "These things have I written, which are a lesser part of the things which he [Jesus] taught the people. And when they shall have received this, which is expedient that they should have first, to try their faith, and if it shall so be that they shall believe these things then shall the greater things be made manifest unto them" (3 Nephi 26:8-9).

President Ezra Taft Benson declared: "The Book of Mormon is the instrument that God has designed to 'sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out His elect unto the New Jerusalem.' This sacred volume of scripture has not been, nor is it yet, central in our preaching, our teaching, and our missionary work."[[177](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=19" \l "ftn.id177)] He taught that the Church is still under condemnation for taking the Book of Mormon lightly and that "the Book of Mormon must be the heart of our missionary work in every mission of the Church if we are to come out from under this condemnation (see D&C 84:56-57)." President Benson emphasized that "we must flood the earth with the Book of Mormon." He noted: "A missionary who is inspired by the Spirit of the Lord must be led by that Spirit to choose the proper approach to be effective. We must not forget that the Lord Himself provided the Book of Mormon as His chief witness. The Book of Mormon is still our most powerful missionary tool. Let us use it."[[178](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=19" \l "ftn.id178)] He challenged us: "Would not the progress of the Church increase dramatically today with an increasing number of those who are spiritually reborn? Can you imagine what would happen in our homes? Can you imagine what would happen with an increasing number of copies of the Book of Mormon in the hands of an increasing number of missionaries who know how to use it and who have been born of God? When this happens, we will get the bounteous harvest of souls that the Lord promised. It was the 'born of God' Alma who as a missionary was so able to impart the word that many others were also born of God. (See Alma 36:23-26.)"[[179](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=19" \l "ftn.id179)]

In almost every case where true conversion has occurred, much of the converting power has come from the scriptures. President Benson taught: "There is a difference between a convert who is built on the rock of Christ through the Book of Mormon and stays hold of the iron rod, and one who is not. I promise you that you will have more and better converts in every mission of the Church if you will teach and inspire missionaries to effectively use the Book of Mormon as the great converter."[[180](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=19" \l "ftn.id180)] President Benson stated that social, educational, or other converts will not endure the heat of the day, while those built on the rock of Christ through the Book of Mormon will endure. Bruce R. McConkie noted: "When you get into the active operation of your proselyting program, this is a concept you absolutely must have. It has been our traditional course in days past, unfortunately all too frequently, to say, 'Here is the Bible, and the Bible says this and this, and therefore the Gospel has been restored.' Well now, there is no person on earth that believes the Bible more than I do. I read it and ponder its words. I know that what is in it is true. But let me tell you, it is not the Bible that brings people into the Church; it is the Book of Mormon and latter-day revelation."[[181](https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=law_harvest&chapter_id=19" \l "ftn.id181)]

I substitute Book of Mormon passages for Bible passages whenever possible in the discussions and in teaching, because they are clearer and more powerful than Bible verses, as investigators frequently attest. For the last eight months of my mission, I did not carry a Bible, using the investigators' own Bible on rare occasions when it was necessary to refer to it at all. It was not by chance that this was by far our time of greatest success.

It is almost always better to find an appropriate Book of Mormon scripture in answer to a question rather than to answer in one's own words. Investigators have a right to receive divine instruction rather than personal opinion. When missionaries integrate Book of Mormon scriptures consistently, investigators and members come to realize that they can find their own answers by reading God's word and develop a greater desire to study the Book of Mormon on their own. When passages from the Book of Mormon are read frequently with investigators from the moment they meet the missionaries, many gain a partial testimony and love for the Book of Mormon even before reading commitments are extended.

Overreliance on the Bible and underutilization of the Book of Mormon will fail to teach and inspire investigators adequately. I have seen many converts taught by missionaries with Bible-centric methods begin to question the importance of the Book of Mormon soon after baptism, usually without ever seriously studying it, and fall away shortly thereafter. This relates to several problems with the teaching process.

The prior missionary discussions encourage investigators to "contemplate that which you have read, comparing truths in the Book of Mormon with truths in the Bible." This instruction implies that the Bible is used as a standard for verifying the truth of the Book of Mormon and, by implication, constitutes a superior authority. While the Preach My Gospel manual no longer contains this instruction, some missionaries continue this practice which presents a stumbling block for many investigators. Scriptures teach us that this approach is exactly backward, since the Book of Mormon establishes the veracity of the Bible (1 Nephi 13:40). As a fourteen-year-old boy, Joseph Smith recognized that "the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible" (JS-H 1:12). The Book of Mormon is the only book of scripture that the Lord endorses as independently containing the "fullness of the gospel" (D&C 20:9, D&C 27:5).

Joseph Smith stated: "If Mormons believe in the Bible, we are the only people on earth who do, for there are none of the other sects of the day that do." Studies have shown that a large proportion of sectarian ministers do not believe in the literal resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and other fundamental doctrines of the Bible. Many ministers proclaim that the Bible contains the final word of God and represents the ultimate authority, while they simultaneously deny or ignore basic Biblical teachings. Many basic doctrines such as the degrees of glory and vicarious baptism, while mentioned in the Bible, are not taught or understood by other faiths. Sectarian views of the Bible are filtered through the orthodoxy of the apostate church and its creeds. Scriptures warn us not to underestimate the power Satan has over many because of false interpretations of the Bible. Nephi saw in his vision of the latter days: "Because of the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book [the Bible], which were plain unto the understanding of the children of men, according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God -- because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them" (1 Nephi 13:29). When we use the Bible as the foundation of our teaching, investigators can go to priests, ministers, or acquaintances and receive widely different interpretations of the same passage. Sectarian churches purport to show by taking selected, often poorly translated, Bible verses out of context and twisting their interpretation that the Book of Mormon does not agree with the Bible. Why would we want to increase Satan's power by perpetuating misconceptions about the Bible? We must instead direct attention to the source of Bible writings: the Savior and his ongoing revelations to mankind. When we teach with the powerful passages of the Book of Mormon, there can be no appeal except to God.

Many Bible verses represent poor choices for explaining doctrine. In both the old and new discussions, John 3:16 is the first scripture cited: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The Preach My Gospel manual omits the second part of verse 16 and skips to verse 17, although the whole passage is often read by missionaries and investigators in actual teaching situations. While the intention is to demonstrate God's great love and to build on common beliefs with investigators, missionaries are unwittingly pulling the carpet out from under their feet. This same verse is widely used by Protestant denominations to "prove" that all that is required for eternal life is to express belief. Investigators who understand the verse in this manner may interpret it to mean that there is no need to belong to a specific church, obey the commandments, or have the missionaries return. While the gospel writer used the word belief to describe a degree of commitment and obedience far greater than implied in modern uses, misunderstandings can be avoided by using scriptures from the Book of Mormon that speak powerfully of God's love but cannot be perceived to trivialize the conditions of salvation.

Prior discussion protocols advocated that missionaries recommend the story of Christ's visit to the Americas in 3 Nephi 11-14 as the investigator's initial Book of Mormon reading. Proponents typically reason that Christ's visit to the Americas represents the highlight of the Book of Mormon. I have found that recommending these chapters for initial reading is often problematic. First, it may convey to investigators that other portions of the Book of Mormon that do not involve the direct teachings of Christ are less important than those that do. This is untrue and may make the investigator less inclined to read other portions of the Book of Mormon. Nephi, King Benjamin, Mosiah, Moroni, and other prophets talk about Christ far more than the epistles of the New Testament. The Lord proclaims: "Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" (D&C 1:38). Helping investigators to understand this initially can prevent considerable difficulties down the road with those who pretend to acknowledge Christ while disregarding His prophets. The second and more serious problem with this approach is that chapters 12 to 14 are almost verbatim for chapters in the New Testament with only subtle differences, which for many investigators does nothing to help them develop a testimony of the Book of Mormon. Some intelligent, well-read investigators to whom I recommended the standard Third Nephi selection quickly concluded that many parts of the Book of Mormon were simply copied from the New Testament with minor changes. While in fact Christ gave some common teachings to his disciples in Israel and in the Americas because of their importance, one can understand how an investigator could get the impression that passages were simply copied with minor alterations. It is at best an anticlimax, and at worst testimony-threatening, to build investigators up for reading the Book of Mormon by emphasizing that it contains new witnesses of Jesus Christ, only to recommend passages that cite the old witnesses of the Bible almost verbatim. Only a tiny fraction of Book of Mormon chapters are redundant with the Bible, and recommending chapters for initial reading of which the large majority are redundant leaves investigators with an unfortunate and misleading impression. For these reasons, I do not suggest recommending 3 Nephi 12-14 early on for investigators with Christian backgrounds. I have found it to be much more effective to recommend powerful and unique sections such as King Benjamin's speech (Mosiah 2-5), Alma's discourse (Alma 5), the seed of faith (Alma 32), and many others. Try recommending a variety of selections throughout the Book of Mormon, and develop your own recommendations based on what works best for you and your investigators. It should always be kept in mind that the Savior Himself designed the sequence of material in the Book of Mormon. Do you suppose that there is a reason for the very first account given in the Book of Mormon being of a prophet prophesying the destruction and captivity of the people if they did not repent? Of a man therefore praying in behalf of his people and thereupon receiving his own testimony?

The effectiveness of missionaries in motivating investigators to read the Book of Mormon is a largely a reflection of the conviction of the missionaries themselves. Missionaries can testify all day about their belief in the Book of Mormon, but if they do not extensively integrate Book of Mormon scriptures into their teaching and finding dialogues, they are unlikely to be successful in inspiring investigators to diligently read and study the book for themselves. Testimonies of the power of the Book of Mormon should be specific and personal. When some missionaries describe how they began to seriously read and study the Book of Mormon only shortly before their missions or after arriving in the mission field, they unwittingly demotivate investigators and undermine gospel teaching. If missionaries who were raised in the Church did not have the conviction or drive to study the Book of Mormon earnestly until their missions became imminent, one wonders how investigators they teach could gain a deep and immediate desire to become lifelong students of the Book of Mormon.

**Focus on Commandments**

Keeping the commandments is and must be the main difference between members of the Lord's true Church and members of other churches or social groups. If investigators are not faithful in keeping small commitments, such as reading the Book of Mormon daily and attending Church each week, will they be faithful when their faith is tried by more serious challenges? Missionaries should take every opportunity to reinforce the commitments and emphasize that they are not one-time events but require daily effort and consistency. Only as investigators put forth effort to consistently adhere to gospel laws do true conversion and subsequent spiritual growth occur.

The core commitments that form the basis of faithful gospel living and are the basis for every missionary visit, whether with investigators, new converts, members, or inactives, include:

1. Daily prayer morning and evening and, where possible, midday also   
2. Daily reading in the Book of Mormon for half an hour (Ezra Taft Benson)   
3. Weekly church attendance and participation   
4. Keeping the Sabbath Day holy (this involves much more than simply attending church)   
5. Living the Word of Wisdom   
6. Living the Law of Chastity (in words, thoughts, and deed)   
7. Repentance of sins   
8. Paying tithing and serving in the Church (for members)

When these commitments are not vigorously emphasized and enforced as requirements for baptism, many converts become content with nominal social activity in the Church while failing to observe other gospel laws. While activity in the Church is vital, little is achieved by building congregations of members who are not studying scriptures daily, keeping the Sabbath day holy, and living other commandments that are necessary to gain and retain the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Such individuals may demonstrate the appearance of growth by mastering church jargon and procedural tasks, while in fact failing to draw close to Christ. A new convert who practices consistent habits of meaningful daily family scripture reading, daily prayer, and full observance of the Sabbath is spiritually light-years ahead of a lifelong member who has been active in the Church for decades, served a mission, held many leadership positions, but neglects daily scripture reading and other gospel habits. The true strength of our testimony is demonstrated by our daily sacrifices.

**Share Testimony Effectively**

There is a difference between testimonies born of righteous living and deep conviction which motivate us to action and those that merely go through the motions. Effective testimony bearing generally incorporates the following features:

1. Effective testimony is directed not simply to convincing the listener that the Church, or some principle, is true, but toward motivating the listener to keep specific commandments.   
2. Effective testimonies tell how the bearer received a personal knowledge that the principle is true.   
3. Effective testimonies share a witness of specific fruits that living the principle has brought into one's own life.   
4. A "living testimony" must be radiated in our conduct. It is impossible to effectively testify about a principle which one is not living. Our lives must glorify the Savior and give powerful evidence of our faith.

**Find Out: Assess Understanding and Conviction**

Current discussions cover large concepts of the gospel in a very abbreviated format that require the addition of personal testimony, scriptures, experiences, examples, and discerning find-out questions on the part of the missionary and effort on the part of the investigator. When the discussions are presented without expanded clarification of important points and very specific, discerning find-out questions, it is unlikely that investigators will adequately understand or implement the principles taught. Before moving on, the investigator's understanding of each principle should be assessed with open-ended questions.

Due to the emphasis on building from common beliefs, many assume that investigators with a Christian background understand many gospel principles because of the use of a shared nomenclature. In reality, the restored gospel teaches a far greater depth to these principles than most members of other faiths appreciate. These principles should not be glossed over, since missionary teaching serves as the foundation of understanding for new members. When investigators state that they "already know" about faith, repentance, and other principles, this usually demonstrates not that they have mastered the topic, but that they do not understand it.

Investigators may demonstrate one of three levels of understanding:

1. Vague or inaccurate understanding. The investigator cannot accurately restate the pertinent points of the principle which was taught. The investigators may give vague answers parroting some of the major themes which were discussed but without adequate detail, or the answer may contain erroneous information.   
2. Abstract understanding. The investigator can accurately restate the pertinent points but is unable to apply them to meaningful real-life situations or give original examples.   
3. Understanding with insight. The investigator can accurately restate the points which were discussed and can give original examples and apply his understanding to real-life situations.

Anything less than understanding with insight is inadequate. One should never assume that the investigator has understood or incorporated a teaching point simply because he has heard it and has not asked questions or raised objections. Such assumptions are often unfounded and frequently lead to disappointment. Missionaries who are skilled in find-out techniques rarely face unpleasant surprises, while those who make unfounded assumptions are constantly bewildered as to why they are having difficulties with their investigators.

Effective missionaries ask specific find-out questions to accurately assess the investigator's understanding and acceptance of doctrines taught. When areas of lack of understanding are identified, they focus on remedying these deficiencies and help investigators to develop the gospel habits of daily scripture study and regular church attendance, rather than pressing onward in spite of unresolved issues.

When multiple investigators are being taught, it is necessary to ensure that each individual understands the principles. This does not need to take an inordinate amount of time, nor should each person be asked every question. When investigators demonstrate varying levels of interest, understanding, or acceptance, the missionaries must determine whether it is most appropriate to focus on the most interested individuals or to attempt to accommodate everyone. Often missionaries will be able to pick up on nonverbal cues if certain individuals are uninterested or feel uncomfortable when asked questions in a group setting, and the wishes of such individuals should be respected. If one individual is particularly skeptical or disruptive and not responsive to missionary explanations, focusing on the most receptive individuals can allow progress and avoid confrontation or disruption. If the investigators are on track for baptism, it is imperative to ensure that each individual fully understands the principles taught, agrees with them, and is implementing them. It is more important to ensure that each individual is fully prepared and worthy for baptism than to meet arbitrary goals for families or friends to be baptized simultaneously.

**Adapt to Investigator Needs**

The prudent missionary does not simply follow a cookbook but adapts the lesson as appropriate for the investigator's needs, background, interests, and time available. He is alert to verbal and nonverbal cues that help him to assess the investigator's interest and understanding and to identify challenges. He is respectful of the investigator's time and other responsibilities. He actively assesses the situation and is flexible in changing plans as necessary during the visit to best meet the investigator's needs. After each teaching session, he and his companion evaluate what went well and where opportunities for improvement exist. They carefully discuss each investigator to identify potential hang-ups and to determine how to best meet that individual's needs on future visits.

**Baptism**

As a missionary, I found that most investigators would sail smoothly through most of the second of the six discussions at the time, which emphasized the role of Jesus Christ and the first principles and ordinances of the gospel, culminating in a challenge for baptism. The investigators would typically express agreement with all points of the discussion until we arrived at the crucial question: "Will you be baptized on [date]?" The common reaction was one of bewilderment: "But I've already been baptized!" Upon investigation, most other missionaries in my mission, as well as many acquaintances who served in other areas of the world, reported the same problem with alarming frequency.

Many of our investigators with Christian backgrounds were familiar with the basic concepts of faith, repentance, and baptism, although they may have understood them somewhat differently. They agreed with the concept that baptism was necessary but did not understand why they had to be baptized in the LDS church after accepting baptism in another denomination. The principles of priesthood authority, apostasy, and restoration were not taught until the third discussion at that time, while the baptismal commitment was presented in the second. The discussions failed to lay a logical foundation for other Christians, who felt violated or threatened when asked to make a membership commitment to the LDS Church without first being taught and accepting the principles of apostasy, restoration, and divine authority.

The error of asking investigators who did not understand and accept these concepts to commit to baptism on the second discussion was in most cases unrecoverable once the investigators built up barriers with the surprised reply that they had already been baptized. Our solution was to switch the order of the second and third discussions, teaching the principles of apostasy, restoration, and divine authority at least one visit before the baptismal question was ever asked, to address potential concerns preemptively. We extended the baptismal commitment only in the third discussion and emphasized that baptism performed by those without authority was not recognized by God, before ever reaching the baptismal commitment. The results were remarkable; the percentage of our investigators who accepted the baptismal commitment rose dramatically. I never again heard an investigator respond to the baptismal commitment with the statement that he or she had already been baptized.

More than a decade later, the official lessons have placed the principles of authority, apostasy, and restoration in the first discussion, as it had been half a century earlier, so that investigators are taught these principles before the baptismal commitment is presented. The problem of investigators stating that they "have already been baptized" has become less common, but it still occurs when investigators are inadequately taught or when missionaries have not appropriately verified understanding and agreement. Clear and proper teaching of these principles is necessary to help the investigator gain an appreciation for the blessings of the restored gospel and to diffuse concerns preemptively.

**When Should the Baptismal Commitment Be Extended?**

Most missionaries using the Preach My Gospel manual still report low acceptance rates when they ask investigators to commit to baptism. Missionaries are instructed to extend the baptismal commitment at the end of the second discussion unless they specifically feel guided by the Spirit not to do so. Yet no attempt is made to help missionaries understand or evaluate the factors that impact responsiveness, and so such failures are not surprising.

The instruction to solicit the commitment for baptism at the end of the second discussion may be premature for most investigators. My research has found that few investigators have read more than several pages in the Book of Mormon or have prayed and received a testimony at the time missionaries ask for a baptismal commitment. Very few have any meaningful idea of the expectations of Church membership and are ill prepared to "count the cost" as the Savior instructed prior to committing to follow him (Luke 14:27-33). Most investigators have not attended church even once before the baptismal commitment is extended. How many would propose marriage to an acquaintance before even going on a date? Then why do we ask investigators to be baptized before they have attended church? These factors contribute to both low response rates to the baptismal commitment and to low retention rates even when baptism occurs. While the ostensible intent of such approaches is to ensure that missionaries are consistently inviting investigators to follow Christ, premature invitations to lifelong commitment before the conversion or repentance processes have begun in earnest typically backfire and lead to the loss of receptive people who could be baptized and retained with more and better preparation.

I have found that it is rarely appropriate to extend the baptismal commitment until investigators have attended church, read in the Book of Mormon, received a divine witness by the Holy Spirit, and demonstrated understanding of the principles of divine authority, apostasy, restoration, and one true and living Church. Missionaries should know whether investigators understand that the Church is true and are willing to observe divine commandments before extending the baptismal commitment.

At the time a baptismal commitment is requested, the basic expectations of Church membership should be discussed (see the previous Focus on Commandments section). If missionaries have been teaching the message of repentance, most of these points should have been covered well before the baptismal commitment is presented. If missionaries begin teaching the discussion with the baptismal commitment and determine with preliminary find-out questions that the investigators are not ready for the baptismal commitment, it is appropriate to defer the baptismal commitment to a later discussion and adapt the lesson to focus on foundational principles and basic gospel laws.

It is not necessary to set a baptismal date at the time the commitment is extended. The major issue is the investigator's desire to work toward baptism by living gospel laws. If a tentative date is agreed upon, the investigators should understand that this date will be adjusted depending on their consistency in implementing the gospel habits that demonstrate the fruits of repentance. By implementing these principles, my companion and I found our acceptance rate for the baptismal commitment rise from less than one-quarter to over 80 percent. With appropriate preparation and insight, the investigator's response to the baptismal commitment should almost never be a surprise.

**Lessons from the Area Book**

Several times on my mission, I was assigned to serve in areas where previous missionaries had little success. After reviewing the area books where prior missionaries kept records of their activities, I began to understand many other reasons for low missionary success besides the "hardness of people's hearts." Records were revealing about what missionaries had or had not been doing, revealing four red flags in areas where missionaries had experienced low success:

1. Poor record keeping in general. What the missionaries had been doing was not clearly documented. Schedules were largely empty with only a few appointments, mostly with members and stale investigators, while very little contacting was being done.   
2. The relative paucity of fresh contacts. There were often only a handful of contact telephone numbers, even in areas where missionaries had served for many months. Even these had often not been followed up promptly. I sometimes wondered what the missionaries had been doing with their time, since few discussions had been taught and there was scant evidence of finding or contacting activities.   
3. Few investigators relative to the time the missionaries had served. Some area books might appear thick, but usually these went back many months.   
4. A pattern of inappropriate discussions that was obvious even from the sparse documentation. Often, missionaries would push ahead with the discussions with investigators who had not resolved prior concerns or observed earlier commitments. Investigator records frequently contained notes like these:

"We finished the last discussion. John is still having trouble believing that there is a God who loves him."   
"Mary had difficulty accepting the principle of tithing ... she has not yet been to church."   
"We talked about eternal progression [4th discussion] with the Jones family. They are not reading regularly in the Book of Mormon and are having trouble believing in modern prophets."

Major investigator hang-ups should have been resolved early. When such difficulties were not resolved, the missionaries should have invited the investigators to come to church to learn more when they were willing to put forth greater effort, rather than pressing forward without resolving the underlying issues.

Many missionaries were frustrated at completing all of the discussions with investigators who were not attending church or regularly reading scriptures and who had never accepted the baptismal commitment. One exasperated elder asked, "We've taught them all that we have and they still haven't committed to baptism. What now?" The problem was rooted in the practice of improperly teaching discussions for which the investigators were not prepared. It is inappropriate to continue with new discussions when more basic material is not accepted or commitments are not being kept. Introducing new material generally overwhelms doubtful investigators further, rather than resolving existing concerns.

These practices were adopted by missionaries who are interested in filling up their schedules with visits of any quality rather than acting in the best interest of the Lord and the people they were called to serve. The proper question when scheduling discussions is not "how can we fill up our schedule to minimize or avoid contacting," but rather "are the investigators adequately prepared to hear and accept the next lesson." If we will "treasure up in our minds continually the word of life," it will be given to us "that portion that shall be meted unto every man" (D&C 84:85). The portion that is meted is "according to the heed and diligence which they give unto [Christ]" (Alma 12:9). It is counterproductive and contrary to the spirit of the Lord to mete out to individuals more than the portion that their heed and diligence allow.

After a few telephone calls to determine the level of interest of old investigators and contacts, we generally had the area book down to a fraction of its former size. Many individuals were sad that elder or sister so-and-so was gone but expressed no real interest to continue learning about the gospel. Such responses are indicative of inappropriate teaching centered on personal relationships rather than on the gospel of Jesus Christ. In areas that prior missionaries had labeled as "hard-hearted," my companions and I always found it remarkable how much more receptive we found the local people to be as we consistently got out of doors to make new contacts and kept an active turnover. Increased contacting, appropriate teaching, and prayer were associated with greater success, and the congregations started to grow again.