

THE RICCIARDI LETTER

By Danny Humphrey

Background

This letter was originally written to an Elder Clarke on June 17th, 1994. The son of a dear friend. I have updated this 16 year old letter with additional stories from my time as a missionary with Elder Ricciardi. The work any missionary does anywhere in the world is of critical importance to the development and conversion of the individual missionary. In other words...you.

[Additional background note from James Ivie to Mark Bonham September 21, 2014: I have attached a file to this email of a “letter” that a buddy of mine wrote just over 20 years ago. He wrote this letter to the son of a friend who was struggling on his mission. Years later he began to hear of missionaries who had read the letter – some found it left behind in an apartment, some in the MTC, some had it mailed to them from an older sibling, etc. It took on a life of its own. A couple years ago a general authority called my friend and asked if the letter was really his (yes) and if he would (1) expand on it a little, (2) allow the Church to vet the accuracy of the letter, and (3) allow the Church to contact others who were mentioned prominently in the letter, particularly an Elder Ricciardi from Italy. The letter is about my friend’s mission experience, and in particular the important things he learned from his trainer. Danny has expanded the letter a bit, added a couple paragraphs recently, and we’ve heard of small pieces of it being used by General Authorities. Most recently President Uchtdorf used a few stories from the letter in an address to the missionaries at the MTC in Provo, and the talk was reproduced in the Church News. Pretty cool. Anyway, Danny had told Autumn about the letter before her mission and told her that when the time was right I would send it to her in the mission field. I formatted the letter and gave it headers and corrected some spelling and grammar problems and sent it to her a couple weeks ago. She and her trainer read it and cried a lot – and learned a lot. I hope that you have time to look at it, there are parts of this that I think every trainer should know and understand, and every new missionary for that matter.]

Introduction

I hope all is well and that your stay at the MTC has been the powerful spiritual experience that I remember. Upon returning from my mission I had the opportunity to teach at the MTC for almost 4 years while I was at BYU. My memories of the MTC are fond for both my mission experience and my post mission teaching experience. I wanted to write you and share some of the powerful lessons that I learned early in my mission that set the pace for the remainder of my time as a missionary.

When I arrived in England my very first companion (my trainer) was an Elder from La Spezia, Italy by the name of Elder Ricciardi. His full name was Fabrizio Giovanni Spartico Ricciardi. Elder Ricciardi was an older missionary at 25 years old. He had joined the church with his family 2 years earlier. He came from a very modest upbringing in what was mostly a farming community. I can honestly say that his personal influence and stubbornness in the early months of my mission shaped the way I approached missionary work for the remainder of my mission.

Train Ride to Loughborough

We had been together about 2 hours when I caught a glimpse of what a spiritually powerful individual he is. We had boarded the train from Coventry station to Loughborough, which was a small town in the countryside of Leicestershire, England. In order to get to Loughborough we had to change connections in the city of Birmingham.

The Birmingham train station is absolutely huge, and it was easy to see how one could quickly get lost if they were not familiar with the place. Ricciardi had checked a schedule he had in his pocket and we began to make our way to the platform. Once we reached our platform I was overcome with jet lag and leaned against a wall to go to sleep. Our train was not due for an hour so I thought a nap was in order. About fifteen minutes into the nap I awoke to see Ricciardi napping away against the back wall of the bench I was sitting on.

It was while I was staring at him that he suddenly bolted up from the bench and yelled at me to grab my luggage. He then took off down the ramp and turned the corner. He had startled me so much, that I quickly became angry and thought to myself, "When I catch up to him he is going to get it!" I chased him up and down stairs and ramps before we reached a platform where a train was leaving right when we had gotten there. We literally jumped on the train as it was moving, just managing to get on safely before running out of platform.

We found some seats, situated my luggage and finally sat down when I strongly inquired into what the heck he was doing jumping up from his nap and running me all over Birmingham train station. He told me that he was not napping, but in fact praying to the Lord for guidance. When we first entered the train station we had stopped a passerby to inquire about platforms and were told to go to the platform we were at. While we were sitting at the platform Ricciardi felt uneasiness and decided to inquire of the Lord to confirm if we were at the right platform. The lateness of the hour and the fact that this was the final train for our area made accuracy of information imperative. It was during his inquiry that a powerful impression came upon him, not only telling him

that we had in fact been purposefully misled by our unknown passerby, but the spirit, as clearly as Ricciardi was speaking to me, indicated where the correct platform was, and that the train was leaving right now! Hence the incredible chase. It was in the middle of his story that he stopped the train conductor to ask if we were in fact on the train to Loughborough. The conductor confirmed that it was and Ricciardi then fell asleep for the duration of the three hour train ride. I just stared at him for the remainder of the ride. First day in the Lord's vineyard and already a valuable lesson in spiritual discernment! From that day forward I saw the value of inquiring to the Lord on all things. Did I inquire of the Lord every day after witnessing that incident? No, I was human, but I certainly could tell the difference in my mission when I did.

Early to Rise

I had been told at the MTC that as a new missionary normal wake up time is 6:30am, but that "greenie" missionaries (aka brand new missionaries) wake up at 6am. The earlier time is for getting the new missionary up to speed quicker through extra companion study. My very first morning, Ricciardi woke me up for companion study. I was so exhausted from jet lag, home sickness, running around the Birmingham train station at 30 miles per hour. I did not think to look at the time. In fact the only method of telling time in our whole apartment was a wrist watch Elder Ricciardi wore. We studied, read scriptures, role played discussions then the same in personal study. At the end of personal study, I was sure it had to be close to 9:30am departure time. I raced to get dressed, shaved, ironed shirt, tired but ready to go. Still in his pajamas, Elder Ricciardi looked at me and asked "you look anxious to do the Lord's work... that is good" "I replied "don't we have to go soon?". He smiled. "Elder, we got up at 4:30am this morning; we have another 2 hours before we need to leave. Now I was REALLY angry. I opened the white missionary handbook (known as the white bible) and quoted to Elder Ricciardi "arise at 6:30am". He reminded me that for training purposes new missionaries were to arise earlier. "Tell me where it says 4:30am in the white handbook!" I inquired. Elder Ricciardi calmly stood up and said "Elder, I am going to tell you a little secret. Most new missionaries are getting up at 4am. I chose 4:30am to give you a little extra rest. If you want to get up at 6:30am, I cannot control you. However, please know that we will be the ONLY new missionary companionship in the WHOLE mission not getting up early...I leave it up to you."

I certainly didn't want to be the ONLY missionaries not getting up early...4 weeks later we attended my first Zone Conference in the city of Nottingham. It was so much fun to see a few members of my MTC district. I went up to Elder Condor, my old MTC companion and said "isn't this getting up at 4:30am thing just a killer?" He looked at

me like he had missed an “easy to understand” joke. So he “token laughed” which I could tell meant he didn’t get what I was talking about. I know a “token laugh” when I hear one. I said “you know....getting up for companion study”. He laughed again but this time it was the uncomfortable laugh, “ummm, Elder Humphrey, what are you talking about? We get up at 6am.” I was so mad. I immediately searched out 3 or 4 other new training companionships and confirmed what I had feared. Elder Ricciardi was killing me on purpose. I found Ricciardi in the chapel and gave him the business about being the ONLY missionaries getting up at that crazy hour. He looked away from me, gave a long pause. Then he muttered, “Wow Elder, we are the ONLY missionaries working hard in this whole mission...wonderful...that is good to know, nice work.” I was speechless.

I Fear No Man

Ricciardi had a saying that has stayed with me, and will stay with me throughout my life. He would say to me, “I fear no man!” He spent his whole mission proving that slogan. Every day like clockwork 10 minutes before departure to proselyte, he would look in the bathroom mirror, point to it, and say “I fear no man”. Then he would do it again with a different posture. I personally thought he was trying to make me laugh by doing it. You know... some inspirational thing for the new missionary. I soon learned he actually meant it. He was not kidding.

His door approaches were not only unique, but astounding. He would knock on a door, and when the door was answered he would introduce us as “missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints”. As he would be giving his introduction he would quickly look into the house to try and find something somewhere that would indicate some commonality that he could address in order to build relationships of trust.

One time, approximately the third or fourth day we had been together, a gentleman answered the door, looking really uptight about the fact that we were disturbing his quiet Saturday afternoon. During the opening dialogue Ricciardi glanced in the door and saw a beautiful painting on the wall. Suddenly, mid introduction, Ricciardi screamed out “oh what a beautiful painting!” pushed the door open (nearly sending the man through the wall) and walked right into the house. I stood on the doorstep in absolute horror, a witness to this unbelievable demonstration of bad manners. Ricciardi walked right into the living room, met the wife and kids, and admiring the television set they were transfixed by, commented “what a beautiful television, may we turn it off?” He hit the off switch. I was still on the porch, quite honestly waiting for the police to be called, or for him to get physically thrown out of the house. To my shock I heard his

thick Italian accent call down the hall way “Oh Elder Humphrey, will you join us?” I could not believe it. 45 minutes later we concluded the first discussion with a prayer. I confronted him later that night about the fiasco I had witnessed earlier in the day, he said “Elder, I fear no man, and that includes you. I will do the Lord’s work with or without you. I prefer with, but that is up to you”.

Ricciardi expounded further, and I want you to remember this because it is absolutely true. Ricciardi told me the following: “Elder Humphrey, what is bold today, will not be bold tomorrow”. He meant that what was uncomfortable for me to declare today, over time will become second nature, and not be seen as “rude”, but rather would be seen by others as “conviction”. He further stated that The Lord tells us in Alma 38:12 to be bold, but not overbearing. Ricciardi defined overbearance as “boldness without love”. When people know and feel your love, you can never be too bold!” he would say. I would not have admitted it at the time because I was still too young and frankly immature to know, but it did not take me long to learn that his words that night were absolutely true.

The MTC, The Mission Field, and “Follow Your Trainer”

If you asked Ricciardi today about what it was like to have me as his companion, I am sure he would tell you that in the two months we spent together I was not humble, and did not buy into his way of doing missionary work. It is true, I fought him on stuff that I now look back with hindsight and realize was my pride and arrogance, and to a degree pure ignorance. Look, I loved the MTC, but to be frank, it is not the mission field. The MTC training is invaluable, but naturally it is limited, and when you finally do arrive in the field, you actually think you know quite a lot. After all you have spent THREE TO EIGHT WEEKS LEARNING WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BEING A MISSIONARY. I capitalized the words to emphasize a bit of sarcasm. Truth is, you arrive knowing relatively little. Granted, you know more about gospel stuff than ever, but you still arrive fairly naïve to what the work involves. So when your trainer tells you “do this, don’t say that, you pronounced “coriantumr” wrong it all gets under your skin. The new missionary would like to feel acknowledged for something, for crying out loud YOU HAVE SPENT A LOT OF TIME AT THE MTC PREPARING. Here is the deal that every missionary needs to know. Follow your trainer, because it is my contention that the most important calling in the mission field, even greater than Assistants to the President, Zone Leaders, District Leaders is hands down without question the Trainer. Why? Because they represent your introduction to the mission field, they set the pace of your missionary habits and disciplines. Post mission I worked at the MTC during a couple training conferences for newly called Mission Presidents. In those training

sessions mission presidents are instructed on how critical trainers are in the mission field. I trained once, Elder Degala was my greenie (meaning brand new missionary), and he would tell you today that we did not get along because I pulled a Ricciardi on him, and trained him the way Ricciardi trained me, which was demanding, full of boldness, and it drove him crazy because Degala had spent A LOT OF TIME IN THE MTC PREPARING.

Someone once commented “Surely the legendary Elder Ricciardi was an Assistant to the President”. No. In fact he ended his mission a district leader (which he had been for a long time), never a zone leader, or AP. But here is what is mind boggling...he trained 4 times. Training more than once on your mission is very rare. In fact I only know of one other missionary from our mission who trained three times. Training is the most difficult calling in the mission field. Elder Ricciardi trained 4 times! Why would the mission president not use Ricciardi in leadership positions such as AP or ZL? I’ll tell you why, because every Mission President knows how vital a properly trained missionary is. Trainers make such a huge difference, taking what might have been a mediocre missionary and lighting a fire of confidence and spirituality. Our Mission President knew Elder Ricciardi’s personal influence could be magnified by training 4 missionaries, who would train 4 more, who would train 4 more let alone the impact through future companionships of all those missionaries.

I met so many missionaries who were either trained by Ricciardi or had simply been companions. We all shared the same stories about his stubbornness, boldness, and spirituality. We differed on our feelings of getting along with him or not, but all unanimously agreed Ricciardi served a mission to the maximum extent a mission can be served, with all his might, mind, and strength. Ricciardi was too straight talking and bold (and I mean Italian Bold) to be an AP or ZL. He would have called down hell, fire and damnation on any missionaries not being obedient. That sort of condemnation should be left to the Mission President.

Nevertheless, never forget how important it is to obey your trainer and respect the calling of a trainer. I consider it the most important position of leadership in the mission field. By the way, if you by chance were paired with a lazy trainer who did not set the right pace for you, then please don’t perpetuate that mistake when you become a trainer. A really bad trainer in the first months of a missionary’s new life of dedicated service can snuff out an eager spirit. That is why it is without a doubt the most important calling in the mission field.

Continual Improvement

One night I learned the hard way about my pig-headedness regarding Ricciardi’s

methods. We had just finished teaching a young couple and on the bike ride home Ricciardi wanted to discuss how the lesson went and what we could do to improve. Ricciardi always wanted to review “how we did” right after a discussion and I often struggled with that because for most of my high school years I felt I was good at most everything I attempted. And now I found myself in a foreign land, granted I did not have to learn a new language, but there are areas I served in where I literally could not understand a darn thing people were saying. To complicate matters, Elder Ricciardi was learning English on the fly himself. One time he wanted to “tactfully” tell me I had not done the best job in a discussion we had just taught. Here is how it was conveyed to me: “Elder Humphrey...how you say...the discussion was...let me think...what you say to them...how you say...very terrible...yes, thank you, you much very terrible”. Sorry, but I was already down about how bad I was at missionary work, and on top of that his version of tactful feedback was “much very terrible”? I am sorry, I can only take so much abuse from the general public and now I have to hear broken English feedback? So you can appreciate my constant avoidance of his “very much tactfully wonderful” observation and feedback (which is what we called it back then). During the meeting with the couple we had just taught, I had totally messed up and made a very stupid and insensitive comment about the Catholic Church AND the Church of England, so I knew his desire to give feedback was an undercover exercise to tell me that I left a “very much terrible” impression upon our investigators that night. So I replied “no, don’t need to talk about the discussion, I felt great about it”. He again tried to gently nudge me into a conversation as we got on our bikes. I took off like a rocket, I was in pretty good shape, and I felt that a good half mile distance would be the ticket. Forgetting he was Italian (they are bike riding maniacs) he caught up in no time and again attempted to give feedback. I became childish and started saying “sorry, can’t hear you, I’m busy right now thinking about life”. He finally stopped talking, and our bike ride to our flat (aka apartment) for the next 30 minutes was peaceful. When we finished companion prayers, I jumped in my bed and turned away from Ricciardi so he wouldn’t attempt another “feedback attack”. He turned the light on and came over to the side of my bed to talk.

Thoughts on “Caring Enough”

I warned him “Elder Ricciardi, I don’t want to talk about the discussion”. He said “I don’t either”. So I sat up. “What do you want?” I said. Ricciardi replied “I want nothing.....but to ask you one quick question”. What he said next I was not expecting. He said “Elder Humphrey, there are two reasons missionaries get along as a companionship. 1) When they are working together to be humble, obedient, and loving

the people as a companionship. In other words, they are doing what is right together. HOWEVER, the second reason Missionaries will also get along is if they are both doing the wrong things together, as a companionship. Not getting up on time, not studying, breaking mission rules.” I remember thinking “where is the question in all this?”

Ricciardi then lowered his tone of voice and said “I believe when missionaries do not get along, when they fight and argue, it is because one missionary wants to do what is right, and the other doesn’t care”. He then asked me the deadly question. “We do not get along Elder, so I ask you tonight; please tell me which missionary you are, the one who wants to do right, or the one who does not care? Because if you believe that you are trying to do what is right, then I am the one choosing what is wrong, and I need to change so we can be one...goodnight Elder.”

I was floored. Normally that kind of talk from Ricciardi would set me off into a rage, but I felt the spirit. In fact, I laid there and tears came to my eyes. I had mocked Ricciardi for so many of his “methods”. Here are some examples: when we would reach a neighborhood he would pull out the street map and we would pray right there in the middle of the street for guidance, I thought that was silly. Sometimes he would stop our bike ride to a previously designated neighborhood and pray, right there in traffic with people staring at us. He would ask the Lord “are we going to the right neighborhood?” Then we would turn around to another destination and I would be so mad about backtracking 4 miles. I found these and many other of his habits so annoying and over the top. But I knew that night, that the answer to his question was that I was the missionary not caring enough.

That conversation actually transformed me as a companion, because I was embarrassed that I had been so disrespectful to him. In the deepest part of my heart, I knew he truly meant well in all his endeavors. I resented his spirituality and boldness because I was not sufficiently humble enough to acknowledge that I was nowhere near this guy in the spirituality department. Not close in terms of dedication, or his love for the people of England. Big moment for me...very big. I woke up the next morning and became kind, and stopped making what was already hard work so much harder for a companion who cared so much. I wanted us to get along for the right reasons. You know what? I almost immediately became happier. The work was still hard, the disappointment still came, but I stopped fighting Elder Ricciardi, and I began to feel myself becoming better.

The Sources of All Fear

You know, there were days even when I was out 18 months that I would wake up in the morning and not feel like talking to people. You would think a seasoned, veteran

missionary 18 months under his belt would have conquered the fear by now. Satan never gives up trying to discourage missionaries from getting out and seeing the people. That is what a mission is all about...seeing the people. The adversary's greatest tool is fear. The greatest killer of missionaries is fear. It is important that you know as a fact, that fear is not a tool of God or his son Jesus Christ. It is a tool of the devil, and Satan alone. Become self-aware as a missionary. You must be able to self-diagnose that when feelings of fear arise, you are being played by the devil.

I remember about a week after arriving in England Elder Ricciardi took me into the town center of Loughborough to street contact. We would split up (obviously still within eye contact of each other) and stop people in the open air malls downtown. I was absolutely terrified. I at least enjoyed the fact that when knocking doors some people would not answer the door, or not be home. But in the town center, there was no way out. People were everywhere, and I was to stop them.

Two hours went by and I hadn't stopped anyone. I had given halfhearted attempts, but nothing had come of it and I was becoming depressed and discouraged. Elder Ricciardi noticed this and came over to me. "Let's take a walk" he said, and we left the town center.

Elder Ricciardi, forgetting we were not in Italy (where it is common for two grown men to hold hands in a show of friendship) grabbed my hand. There we were, walking to the local park holding hands. England is a liberal enough place that no one thought twice about it. When we got to the park we sat on a bench and Ricciardi asked me a question. "Elder, do you know who you are?" I thought this was one of those typical Sunday school questions, so I gave the typical answer, "a child of God." He laughed and opened his Book of Mormon to 3Nephi 5:13. "Behold, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I have been called of him to declare his word among his people, that they might have everlasting life".

After I read the verse, he turned to me and said "you are a disciple of Christ! You have been called to declare his word to his people! Elder, you fear no man!" Something about those words got me pumped up! I literally felt the fear melt away. In fact, I actually decided to say the words myself "I fear no man!" with a fist pump to boot. We marched back into town to continue the street contacting (didn't need to hold hands on the way back). I stood next to the entrance of a health club and committed myself to stop the next person to walk out. In no time at all, the fear that had paralyzed me came RIGHT BACK. I stood there and let the next five or six people pass by while my battle with Satan resumed.

In the Church we always comment on Laman and Lemuel and their wickedness. We view them as so opposite to Nephi, who is so strong, muscular (at least in the Book of

Mormon pictures he is), tan, bold, fearless. What we don't remember is that even though Laman and Lemuel saw angels, even smitten by angels, it did not take them long to forget the miracles and go right back to their old doubting selves. I actually have some sympathy for them, in the sense that here I was fresh off a powerful spiritual boost from Elder Ricciardi, and for about 10 minutes I was right back in the epicenter of fear. But I recognized it, and convinced myself that I must break this grip even at the risk of saying something stupid. Finally, I stopped a big brawny body builder. I stumbled through my dialogue and sounded like an absolute rookie, and then he responded to my fumbling with a shocking "yes" to the invitation to share a discussion with him. His name was Steve Gligoriavich from Yugoslavia. He accepted the Gospel over the next three weeks. Baptizing him was fun, because his huge frame made a splash that got some people in the first row wet. When the curtains to the font closed, he also did a "no, no" by sitting in the font like a hot tub and asked if he could just hang out for a while to take it all in. I told him "sure...the only thing waiting on the other side of that curtain was a bunch of his friends and Church members, and oh by the way, the gift of the Holy Ghost. He got right out.

Street Meetings...

Elder Ricciardi was fond of street meetings in the town center. Every so often we would set up shop in the town center at a corner known for public preaching. The Mission President had mandated that no street meetings be held by missionaries due to the Bible bashing it promoted. That did not stop Elder Ricciardi. I never participated because I was A) too scared and B) felt it was so embarrassing to watch, let alone participate. One day while traveling to a town on the fringe of our area, we waited at a packed bus stop in a town called Barrow Upon Soar.

I said, "Elder Ricciardi, why do you hold those street meetings, I feel they are embarrassing and that we are making fools of ourselves." No sooner had I finished sharing my thoughts, he stood up on a nearby vacant bench and introduced himself to the crowd of 60 or so waiting for buses. "We are missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints...." We did well that day handing out copies of the Book of Mormon. No one got baptized (that we know of), but we did teach some discussions. He stood up on that bench to do the very thing I was criticizing him for, to reinforce the fact that our challenge as missionaries for 2 years is simple, we are to see people, and when we are not seeing people, we are to try to see people. After the bus stop incident, I never again complained about street meetings, knowing full well the mere mention would send him to the nearest group of bystanders, even if it was just to prove to me that to preach is to stare what we fear most right in the face. Ricciardi once said "if you

want to punch Satan in the mouth.....open your mouth and preach”.

“The Field is White...” (keeping commitments)

One day while door knocking we met the most amazing Scottish couple in the town of Loughborough. They were “golden”, which was a missionary term for “if there was a font in the backyard this was happening now”. No resistance at the door. Ricciardi didn’t have to kick the door in with his usual tactics. We told them we had a message about the gospel of Jesus Christ we wanted to teach them. They said “we love Jesus, please share it with us”. Honestly, after all the door to door abuse I had taken for as long as I had been in England, I almost wanted to cry as this cute couple in their late 20’s with two darling little girls just beamed. At one point while I was teaching about Joseph Smith I felt the spirit so strongly that I very unconventionally blurted out “this feels so good I want to cry” and I did cry. They smiled, and even said that they had been looking for a Church to join in the area since they had moved to Loughborough from Edinburgh, Scotland.

We came back for the 2nd discussion, committed them to a baptismal date, and completed the other 4 discussions. Unfortunately 3 or 4 baptismal dates came and went over the next 2 months. So on one visit to their home Elder Ricciardi shocked me once again with his utter boldness. He said to the husband “We love you, but you are not keeping any commitments which we give you. We are grateful you continue to see us, listen to our lessons, but I am convinced that you simply like just having us around. The problem is we cannot hang around. There is too much work to do in finding the Lord’s elect, because they hear his voice and follow him.”

The Husband and wife looked confused, then upset, no doubt offended to essentially be called the “Un-Elect” by Elder Ricciardi. Not only were they uncomfortable, but I was now ready to wring my own companions neck right in front of our investigators (I am not exaggerating). They went ahead and decided to not have any more visits and even gave the copy of the Book of Mormon back, which we insisted they keep. Then Ricciardi let them know how much we loved them, and that there was nothing to be offended by. They were not ready, and that was ok, because someday they will be, and when that day comes Ricciardi asked that they promise to at least hear the message again as many times as necessary for them to feel spiritually compelled to the ultimate show of commitment: baptism.

As we exited their home, right there on the street 5 feet from their porch, I angrily grabbed Ricciardi and told him he was surely going to hell for slamming shut the gate to baptism on this wonderful couple. We did not speak the remaining bike ride back to the flat.

The next morning in companion study Elder Ricciardi read the following scripture from D&C 4:4 “For behold the field is white already to harvest; and lo, he that thrusteth in his sickle with his might, the same layeth up in store that he perisheth not, but bringeth salvation to his soul”

Ricciardi said “Elder, I know you’re angry, but the scripture does not say the field is yellow ready to plant, brown ready to water, it says white, ready to harvest. We are harvesters Elder. I replied “Ricciardi, D&C 18:10 says remember the worth of souls is great in the eyes of God... every soul...” His answer, as always, surprised me. “Elder Humphrey, it is the worth of souls that has you and me on missions in the first place. We could have spent all our time together with that “Golden family” every day, making them feel good, them making us feel like we are getting missionary work done. The problem is, there are so many other souls ready to harvest, that it is our duty as missionaries to immediately move on to harvesting. Not planting, but harvesting.” “Were they a waste of our time?” I asked. “Absolutely not Elder, because we have learned lessons about the importance of investigators keeping commitments that will bless us in our harvesting efforts going forward. They have learned the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. Their time will come, but not with us as their teachers...we must move on”.

Some major lessons came out of this experience with Ricciardi. I learned to put in a concentrated effort at helping our investigators keep commitments. There were times I thought Elder Ricciardi was way too hard on investigators about not reading when they had made a commitment to us that they would. When an investigator would say, “I was too busy, etc, etc.” I would simply say “no problem; try to read before the next visit.”

Ricciardi despised the word “try”. After a particularly testy visit with investigators who I felt Ricciardi was too hard on for not reading, I rebuked him on the bike ride home. He asked me to explain why we give investigators commitments in the first place. I responded with many answers which he acknowledged were all “sort of right”.

However he wanted me to change my thinking about commitments.

He felt that commitments were given to investigators so that they could have opportunities to feel the spirit when the missionaries are not around. He felt it was easy for investigators to feel good around two young clean cut, smart, religious persons like missionaries. It’s easy to admire the sacrifice of young people who would give up 18 to 24 months in the prime of their youth. But the challenge comes in getting investigators to feel the spirit in those private moments alone, reading marked passages, praying to the Lord, pondering the commitment to be baptized, giving up the coffee, asking the girlfriend/boyfriend to move out to adhere to laws of sexual purity, paying that first tithe. It is in these private moments that people realize when they do what they are

asked, the feelings that come when the missionaries visit, and leaves when the missionaries leave, can actually continue to dwell with them, on their own, when the missionaries are not around.

Yearning for The Spirit

A yearning to have this feeling all the time begins to swell within the investigator, and then the invitation to baptism becomes a natural progression rather than a nerve racking request by the missionaries. This is why that “Golden Family from Scotland” I referred to earlier, at the end of the day never got baptized. They loved having us around, in my anxiousness as a new missionary I simply wanted to stay friends long enough for them to join the church. Ricciardi was so right. When investigators keep commitments, especially the little commitments, they learn that the spirit can be with them even when the missionaries are not around. That is when conversion occurs, then they “walk into the font” rather than being pushed.

When the investigator reads passages, prays on their own, ponders what they have been taught and are reading alone, their good feelings (the spirit) move them from feeling “obligated to the missionaries”. They begin to ask themselves “how can I have these feelings with me always”. It is a desire to keep those good feelings with them indefinitely. It is conversion by the spirit, and not the personalities or admiration of the missionaries. Don’t misunderstand, your personality and their admiration for your sacrifice opens the door, but the path of your investigator must be walked with a desire born of the spirit. It begins with keeping those little commitments to read and pray. If we returned to an investigators home to teach a 2nd lesson and they had not read, we would read with them instead and postpone the lesson to next time. If they had not prayed, we would pray with them. The goal with commitments like these is that they must do it on their own.

Leaving on a Loving Note

I must say in spite of what seemed like an uncomfortable end to our teaching of the “golden family”; Ricciardi always had a way of leaving people open to future opportunities. Occasionally we would be in the middle of a first discussion and you could tell the people we were teaching looked bored, not interested. Suddenly they would interrupt us, cut us off mid lesson saying, “thank you, but we aren't interested”. Most missionaries would want to try and salvage the situation, perhaps talk the investigator's into becoming interested, you know, click into "salesman mode". Not Ricciardi. He would close his scriptures, give a big Italian smile, and would ask for a favor. He would say “Thank you for your time. If missionaries should come knocking on

your door a week from now, a year from now, or twenty years from now please let them in like you have allowed us. Because though the message will be the same, you will feel differently. Will you do that?"

A year after being with Ricciardi I was knocking doors in Nottingham, England when a man answered and we taught a family that let us in their home because 9 months earlier they had "promised an Italian chap" if any other Mormons came by they would "let them in." Did we baptize this family in Nottingham ? No. But when I left their home, I asked the same favor of them... again. Who knows by now how many other missionaries have entered homes that Ricciardi so kindly asked that favor of. When people reject the message, they are not rejecting you personally. Learn to shake off taking rejection so personal. Remember when I mentioned earlier that when rejected, Ricciardi gave that big smile? I always thought he was smiling to be polite before asking them to allow future missionaries to come again. He told me politeness was a small part of his big grin. The real reason for the big smile was gratitude that we could now move on to other fields that are white and ready to harvest. He loathed wasting time.

Facing Rejection

Which brings me to this critical point. I can honestly say that one of the most valuable lessons I learned from Ricciardi was the importance of viewing rejection as positive. Yea, sounds crazy huh? Take a minute and look through his eyes for a moment. He believed that when we were experiencing rejection, it was an opportunity to prove our commitment to the Lord. He felt that it was an opportunity to prove to the person rejecting our message that we are truly servants of the Lord. It's amazing the effect it has to smile at someone who is being rude to you, perhaps even yelling and cursing at you, making fun of you and then respond like Ricciardi and say "sorry to upset you, please have a nice day, if missionaries come by someday in the future please don't be mad, give them a chance". I would get angry during one of these confrontations and as a young "don't know much" missionary let my temper get the best of me and say "you shut your mouth" or "come out here and get me off your porch" (sad to say I actually did say that once...or twice). To be honest, in my early, immature first few weeks, fighting back made me feel better. It didn't take long to realize that it would be a very long 2 years if I spent it telling mean people that they are ignorant and to shut up. When I would say to Ricciardi, "why did you apologize to that jerk" he would say "because it makes me feel happier". He understood that happiness is truly a choice, not a random event. He believed that rejection of any kind was a sure sign of the FACT that God lives, and was an affirmation of the rightness of our mission.

One thing I remember vividly about Ricciardi was his ability to not let things get him down or upset. In fact, on the more difficult days (and you know there are always plenty of those), he smiled and laughed more. On those particular days I found his extra dose of "happy smiling Elder" annoying. Yet again he would prove its value to me. He would say "Elder Humphrey, I know we are in tune with the Lord, because He sent us to a neighborhood where no one wants to listen, and they are mean and confrontational. When I am prayerfully led to these kind of situations, it confirms we are being led by the spirit because Our Father knows how bad this neighborhood was going to be, and expected us to leave 20 houses ago. Yet here we are!!! This is awesome!!!" (By the way, Ricciardi's favorite American word was "awesome"). It was this kind of talk that led me to conclude that something was either not normal with my Italian compadre OR he was one of the three Nephites. After seeing how, and what he would eat, I eliminated the "three Nephites" theory.

When I was in high school, I worked at a golf course. I became friends with the assistant pro and he started to give me free lessons. I quit after about 10 lessons for one simple reason: I was frustrated by the 55 things you have to think about almost simultaneously in order to have a good swing. The club pro finally advised me to stop taking lessons, go play and do one thing for him, just swing, swing, swing. That's it. Do not give any care as to where the ball goes, just swing. He told me "Danny, you will enjoy golf better by just swinging". The same applies to missionary work.

Ricciardi saw the mission experience as incredibly simple. He understood that his mission was to speak to as many people as possible and that was it. Yes, there's a lot more to it than that, but a mission is nothing without talking. He would tell me "stop worrying about what you're saying, just open your mouth and say something". I took that advice to mean the Lord would always fill my mouth with exactly what to say. Truth is, I said some pretty stupid things, offended people many times (mostly accidental of course). But I began to enjoy missionary work when I concentrated on getting out the door and opening my mouth. Like the golf pro said "just go out and swing".

Getting the Elusive Second Appointment

Ricciardi had this brilliant way of getting in the first discussion and committing new investigators to a second appointment. He would say "If we took that family portrait on your wall and cut it into six pieces, and placed one piece in the frame, would you be able to comprehend the picture? Much like that one piece, we have given you one of six pieces, and for you to truly understand the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, we would like to give you the other five pieces and see what you think? Will you allow us to do this?" I actually found the more we loved the people of England and EXPRESSED

that love to them; the bolder we could be without upsetting them.

Two Priests

Ricciardi was very knowledgeable on the scriptures. I recall street contacting in the town center, when I saw two catholic priests across the courtyard walking up a ramp. I didn't want to have any conflict on this particular day so I went to Elder Ricciardi and slyly suggested that we had spent ample time in the town center. He agreed and we began to put on our back packs. I was hoping we could leave before the priests noticed us or vice versa. It was while we began to ride out of the main mall area that Ricciardi spotted the two priests. He stuck his arm out to motion for me to stop. Ricciardi turned to me, let out a small Italian chuckle, and said in his thick Italian accent "We must stay, Elder". As the priests approached us one of them said "Ah the Mormons!" Ricciardi responded, "That is correct!" The priest said, "Out preaching about your Jesus today, eh?" Ricciardi responded, "He is your Jesus too, we do not want to monopolize him!"

The priests did not find his clever response humorous though I almost fell over with laughter. At that point I didn't even know Ricciardi had a sense of humor. The priests then turned into bashing mode and went on a spiritual tirade that lasted about 15 minutes. The whole time I was waiting for Ricciardi to unleash his scripture "Bazooka". (His scriptures were legendary in our mission for being marked up for theological warfare). I did not know much about Ricciardi at this point in our companionship, but one thing I did know; he was powerfully knowledgeable on the scriptures and theological doctrines of other churches, with a particular fondness for Catholicism, which is the religion he was raised in. I had never seen him in action per se, and I was sure he was going to just dismantle their intellect with a tirade of his own. (For the record I discourage bible bashing for its contentiousness, but I must say watching Ricciardi at work was a sight to behold).

To my surprise Ricciardi did nothing but listen intently. It frustrated me! "Come on" I thought, "they're winning for crying out loud!" Ricciardi just listened, occasionally nodding his head in acknowledgement of what they were saying. Then Ricciardi slightly tilted his head to me and out the side of his mouth whispered, "Watch this." Suddenly Ricciardi raised his hand in front of the priests as a signal for them to stop talking, and in a deep voice said "can I ask you a question?" His sudden movement nearly startled them right out of their robes. He leaned forward into their faces and said, "Do you believe in the Holy Ghost?" The priests answered, "You mean the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of God, the Holy spirit? Of course we do!" Ricciardi replied, "That is good. May I ask you another question? Do you believe the Holy Ghost knows all truth?" The priests

said. "Of course we do, we preach that in our own church, all Christians must believe the Holy Ghost knows all truth!" Then Ricciardi replied, "That is good. Do you believe the Holy Ghost reveals truth to men?" The priests came back with, "Yes! Do you think we are fools?" Finally Ricciardi asked, "Will you do me a favor?" "What do you want" they replied.

Then without warning Elder Ricciardi's voice took on a powerful tone that I had never heard him speak in before. I could have sworn he had a microphone in hand and that there was an echo to his words. "Please do two things before we come to visit you tomorrow at four o'clock (that was the invite). I ask you to open your hearts and have a desire to know the truth, because if you have done these things before we come tomorrow, the Holy Ghost, the same Holy Ghost we have spoken of, will visit you and confirm unto you from within, the truthfulness of the message we will bring. I also want you to know that what you are feeling now..... is the Holy Ghost of which we have spoken!"

Tears filled my eyes as I stood there next to Elder Ricciardi. I pondered on how the power of the prophets of old caused people to quake, thinking those stories were relegated to a more ancient time and that things like that just don't happen anymore. I was wrong. The spirit was present and the priests looked really uncomfortable, I thought "Holy cow, they are actually feeling the spirit!" The priests had a silent and uncomfortable reaction to Ricciardi's bold claim. Unwilling to admit what they were feeling (perhaps unable to define what it was) I contend to this day they know they felt something that spring day. The priests declined Elder Ricciardi's request and they promptly laughed at him as they immediately walked away. It was the kind of uncomfortable laugh you give when you are unsure of yourself and you simply want to get out of the situation.

In tears I turned to Elder Ricciardi and smiled. He laughed and said, "They felt the spirit Elder, in high voltage!" We laughed and rode off, feeling like fearless servants of the Lord, called to preach his gospel to his people, that they might have everlasting life. The day Ricciardi was transferred he admonished me to do as we had done that day in the park. "At any time should fear creep back into your heart, open the Book of Mormon to any page, read, and the book will remind you of who you are. Once you are reminded of who you are and what you have been called to and by whom, you will 'fear no man!'" Many missionaries forget from day to day the power that has called them to this calling, which stands behind them every single day of the mission experience.

Measuring your Success as Obedience

I learned many things from all my companions. Yet without a doubt Elder Ricciardi had

the greatest influence on my mission. All my “Ricciardi” experiences were not like the meeting with the catholic priests, much of his influence came in the little tidbits of wisdom he would share, and without a doubt the hardest work ethic of any missionary I knew.

In my mission, statistics over the prior ten years (1976 to 1986) showed that the average missionary had 1.3 baptisms per year. In other words the average missionary, after two years, would baptize 2.6 people by the conclusion of their mission. My district learned about this statistic the day before we left the MTC. I remember how disappointed I was at the prospect of spending two years to bring two and six tenths persons to the Lord’s church.

Elder Ricciardi trained me when he was 8 months out on his mission. Up to that point he had baptized over 60 people. He ended up leaving the mission with over one hundred baptisms. He would never talk about his baptisms. In fact it was not until the end of my mission when I was working in the mission office that I had the opportunity to look up his extraordinary accomplishment.

One of the most challenging elements of the mission experience is how to judge whether you are a good missionary or not. Is it baptisms? Is it number of lessons you teach? There are missions in the world where a missionary after 2 years experiences no baptisms. There are missionaries who find a family of 12 on their doorstep asking to be baptized (think South America).

The dilemma of new missionaries is to learn some way of gauging effectiveness and success. It is natural to use number of baptisms as the gauge of success. While number of baptisms is important, there is a far better more valuable gauge: Obedience. I knew of missionaries in my mission who did not live mission rules, were not as committed as I think the Lord desired, yet they baptized.

I really struggled with that because when I left the MTC it was my firm understanding that only obedient missionaries baptize. When I saw disobedient missionaries having baptisms, I began to con myself into thinking that getting up on time; reading scriptures, and other seemingly trite “white bible rules” didn’t necessarily correlate with baptisms. I began to perceive that it would be easier to relax and baptize than to work so darn hard, be so disciplined and not baptize.

That “One Soul” is Yours

Every missionary goes through a drought period in their mission life. A period of time where they are fighting homesickness, praying harder than they ever have, are living more righteously than ever in their lives up to this point in time, and no one seems interested in hearing the gospel. It is at this time that the Lord tests you as a

missionary. The reason, I have always believed, is to see if you can be trusted. Father in Heaven has an incredible work to do to prepare the earth for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The mission field has a dual purpose to bring souls unto Christ, and to sift us as missionaries into the parts we will play throughout our lifetime in building the Lord's kingdom – to prepare us for “leading” OR prepare us for “following”, both are important, but what are followers without leaders? The missionaries who recognize the drought and remain strong to the higher law of missionary work (absolute obedience) end up converting the most critical investigator of all...themselves. You will be your greatest conversion in the mission field. In D&C 18: 15-16 it says:

And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father! And now, if your joy will be great with one soul that you have brought unto me into the kingdom of my Father, how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me!

I contend that the “one soul” is you. Imagine the insanity of sending 19 to 21 year old young people all over the world to be the ambassadors of something as critical as the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ. Frankly, it sounds crazy. But factor in a couple of things. Do most missionaries enter the mission field converted? I can only speak for me. I wasn't. I had good feelings about the church, seminary, Joseph Smith, the Gospel, etc., but converted? Not to the degree the Lord desires. That is the beauty of the mission experience, the Lord entrusts us to dispense his critically important message, knowing full well that in the process of delivering that message an unusual process occurs where the teacher of the message and the hearer of the message are both becoming converted AT THE SAME TIME. Not every hearer will be baptized, even though they feel the spirit. Not every teacher will become converted. But here is what I do know, if you are absolutely obedient to the mission rules, YOU will become converted, and at that point you have accomplished what should be the greatest result of your missionary service. At the same time you have the opportunity to bring others along the conversion path smack in the middle of your own conversion.

That is why mission success CAN ONLY HAVE ONE GUAGE, YOUR PERSONAL CONVERSION. This only comes from one attitude, that of absolute obedience.

Baptisms happen or don't happen. Teaching opportunities can happen or don't happen. The blessings of the converted missionary last far beyond the mission experience. Learn this critical principle, all you need to do for 2 years is make sure that nothing but the truth comes out of your mouth to every single person you can possibly speak to (in golfing terms, just swing). Leave the conversion part to the spirit, but your own conversion comes from that type of focus, baptisms or not. “How great shall be

your joy when you bring save it be one soul” unto the Lord, and that soul is yours. That is the answer to what in my mind (and experience) constitutes a successful mission. Ricciardi did not let the statistics keep him from becoming a powerful missionary. But his effectiveness came from his own conversion to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the mission field.

You will find that 80% of the missionaries do 20% of the work, and 20% of the missionaries do 80% of the work. It is unfortunate but true. That is why the greatest conversion that should take place in the mission field is your own! That is what is so incredible about missionary work, the closer you bring others to Christ, the closer you get to Christ yourself. I am not just talking about when you teach investigators and less actives, the missionary work you will do to help your companions come closer to Christ, and they for you, is a powerful work in and of itself, let alone the work to those who do not have the gospel.

Ricciardi would say “All you have to do is open your mouth Elder Humphrey, that’s all”. Ricciardi and I would challenge each other that once we walked out the apartment door we would not let one person walk by without telling them who we are. I remember many mornings where we never left our street because there were so many people to stop. Ricciardi taught me to work smart. Every weekday at 3:30pm we stopped whatever we were doing and would never schedule appointments at that time of day. Why? Because we would go to the local elementary schools and greet parents as they were picking up their school children. In England, parents walk to school to pick up their kids. We would find a few families and walk them home as we discussed who we were and what we taught.

Make Time for Members

Ricciardi must sound incredibly perfect to you. He had his weaknesses. He rarely worked with members. His sense of independence to a certain degree was a weakness (stubborn plus Italian is quite the combination). Ultimately, the members of the church are the best way to bring people into the gospel as I am sure you already know. Truthfully, a lot of members were intimidated by Ricciardi’s brash personality. Ricciardi always felt guilty when we were at member homes because cultivating member relations takes time, and he always felt like time was too precious. Hence, he saw member missionary work for the most part as a waste of precious time. Nevertheless it is extremely difficult to be a good missionary without getting the members involved. Take the time to do that.

Lesson Learned

One important experience I had, not with Ricciardi but because of Ricciardi, was a life changing event for me. After my first two months Elder Ricciardi transferred to another city. I spent the next two months with an Elder who had three months left on his mission. To be candid, he was “trunky”, which back in the day was a term for “ready to pack his trunk and go home”. Our first morning together he woke up at 9am (I had companion study alone and watched him sleep for over 4 hours), we left the flat (apartment) and had breakfast at a local café (which in my first two months with Ricciardi we had never done because we were both too poor to spend any money) and we basically took a day off for my new senior companion to acclimate to his surroundings. At first, I felt relieved. It felt good to just relax. We got along great, laughed a lot, one P day we left our area boundaries to play golf (something Ricciardi would have considered a sin AND it was against mission rules to leave your area without permission).

The days turned into weeks, and the weeks turned into a month. I started not sleeping well because I knew we were not doing the right thing. I was pressing this Elder (who was the senior companion) about street contacting, going to the local schools in the afternoon etc. He just wanted to take it easy. We had long lunches, we “hung out” at members’ homes, we changed P days on occasion to accommodate site seeing. By the end of our first month I felt sick. I realized that Ricciardi’s influence, which I was so happy to get out from under, was now in me. I knew what the right thing to do was. Soon enough my senior companion and I began to not get along. We began fighting (not literally, but verbally).

One night after companion prayer, as we were going to bed, I went to his bedside and asked the Elder why he thought we were not getting along. He said “You are way too uptight Elder. Ricciardi must have brainwashed you or something”. I told him that we got along initially because we were both relaxing together. But we were not getting along now because one of us wanted to work harder, and one of us didn’t. I told him that if I was the one in the wrong to simply let me know. He agreed that we had essentially taken a month off. The next day our vigor for the work returned. I’m not trying to take credit here, but when transfer day came, I was transferred from Loughborough to Birmingham. This Elder thanked me for being able to share my frustrations effectively. I had used Ricciardi’s conversation word for word. Whenever you are not getting along with your companion, ask yourself “who of us wants to do right in this companionship.” If you get along great with your companion, ask yourself “are we getting along for the wrong reasons (mutual lack of obedience, work ethic, dedication, spirituality etc) or for the right reasons.

Teaching with The Spirit

In D&C 50 verses 13-14, 17-22 it says:

13 Wherefore, I the Lord ask you this question—unto what were ye ordained?

14 To preach my gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth.

17 Verily I say unto you, he that is ordained of me and sent forth to preach the word of truth by the Comforter, in the Spirit of truth, doth he preach it by the Spirit of truth or some other way?

18 And if it be by some other way it is not of God.

19 And again, he that receiveth the word of truth, doth he receive it by the Spirit of truth or some other way?

20 If it be some other way it is not of God.

21 Therefore, why is it that ye cannot understand and know, that he that receiveth the word by the Spirit of truth receiveth it as it is preached by the Spirit of truth?

22 Wherefore, he that preacheth (Missionary) and he that receiveth (investigator or companion), understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together.

A few weeks into my companionship with Elder Ricciardi, I was ready to be the lead in teaching a discussion. I was nervous. We were teaching a family. The husband was a very articulate knowledgeable man. During the discussion, I really felt what I thought was the spirit. I say “thought” because it is a big challenge of a missionary to decipher if you are actually feeling the spirit, or if you just happened to be in a good mood. You know...you might have received a really awesome letter from home that morning, breakfast tasted especially good, your uncle sent extra money. Who knows the reason, but there is still personal doubt as a new/experienced missionary as to what would cause the kind of euphoric good feelings you might have while teaching someone the gospel. Anyhow, we reached a point in the discussion where I spoke about the First Vision. Deep emotion came over me as I recounted the story.

Elder Ricciardi looked at me and I could tell he wanted me to identify the spirit that was there in our discussion, Ricciardi was feeling it too. Again doubts cropped into my mind, but I looked at the husband and said “the spirit is here with us, confirming the truthfulness of the things we are saying. How do you feel right now?” He replied “I feel fine, but I wouldn’t go so far as to call it the spirit. You have a nice story to tell, it is interesting”. I didn’t know what to say, but Elder Ricciardi reliably stepped in. “Sir, that good feeling, as subtle as it may feel, is the spirit, letting you know these things are true”. Again, the man was adamant that he certainly felt good, but would hardly call that the spirit. Again, Ricciardi responded “Sir, we feel the spirit, and as representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ, can assure you that this same spirit is touching you now. We

know this for one simple reason, we are telling you the truth, we feel the spirit, and the Lord has told us in the scriptures that when the preacher preaches by the spirit of truth and the hearer receives it by the spirit of truth, both are edified. In other words, because we are teaching you, we know if we feel the spirit, you feel it as well.”

Again, the husband said “well, I also just had a cup of my favorite coffee, how do you know my good feelings aren’t from that?” Ricciardi replied, “Because there is no reason at this time, as we are teaching, for the Lord to ONLY want to edify US at your expense of time and hospitality. We know that you feel it, you may not understand these feelings at this time, you might not even want to agree with us on this matter, but we know you are feeling the spirit.”

We were hastily asked to leave this man’s home. He definitely did not take kindly to the suggestion that he did not want to admit to assigning his good feelings to the same thing we were. Here is why this is such an important story. Those verses above unveil a very powerful concept vital to missionary work. When you are teaching by the spirit of truth, and you feel the spirit, know this...that the hearer of the message is feeling it too. Whether it is to the same magnitude as you or the same emotions is not relevant.

Whatever “extra” good feeling they have, no matter how subtle, is the Lord’s promised mechanism from the above referenced verses that he that receiveth the word by the Spirit of truth receiveth it as it is preached by the Spirit of truth? Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together.

Now that experience seems like we certainly did not “rejoice” together, but that was the investigators choice, his freedom, if you will. Is this so? How are we to know? The truth is, the spirit was there, he felt it, we felt it, we identified it, and he chose to assign those feelings to something else. That is ok. He has that agency. But we did what we were supposed to do, knowing that the promise of the verses from D&C 50 indicate that if we feel it as the preachers of truth, the hearers are feeling it to. I testify to you that this is how missionary work gets done. Many will react as the man I just described. What you must come to terms with is that the Lord distributes his spirit in these discussions, but it is still a world of agency. Did we understand one another in the way the verse above meant? Perhaps only in the sense that we made clear the spirit was there and he made clear that his good feelings about our message doesn’t necessarily mean it was the spirit. Nevertheless, the spirit was there, we felt it, and he felt it, and he kicked us out, and we KNEW we had done what the Lord wanted us to do (or should I say that Ricciardi did what the Lord wanted me to do).

Elder Ricciardi did not need him to agree with us to know that the spirit touched him, because the spirit touched us WHILE WE WERE TEACHING HIM THE TRUTH. If you

will embrace these verses, open your mouth at all times in all places (just swing), be strictly obedient, your mission experience will change your life forever. These are courageous moments to boldly tell someone they are feeling something they don't either understand or necessarily agree with. But here is the key, many will "rejoice together with you" and many won't. You must be ready to make that bold statement when the spirit prompts, and not let fear (that tool of the devil and the devil alone) creep into your heart.

BUT IF YOU DO NOT FOLLOW THE PROMPTING, you are keeping investigators from the chance to understand that what they are feeling is directly correlated to the truth they are hearing. Remember, you teach truth and feel the spirit, know that they are feeling the spirit too. The difficulty comes in the courage to identify and explain it to the investigator, and the investigators willingness to accept that this is what's happening. When you have meetings where the preacher (missionary) and hearer (anyone you are teaching, which includes your missionary companions) understand one another and rejoice together, it is life changing. Remember, this event still may not end in the investigator being baptized, but that does not take away from the courage to recognize and identify the spirit when teaching gospel truths, and the effect that such experiences have on you personally.

You will not feel the spirit in every discussion that you teach, I sure didn't. When you do feel the spirit, know that the spirit is not just touching you for your own personal edification and leaving everyone else in the discussion "out in the cold". Heavenly Father can provide you those feelings of the spirit in your own private moments. While teaching investigators, he gives you those feelings to let you know that "he that preacheth and he that heareth" are in the presence of the spirit of truth, who is there to confirm the words being spoken. Don't let an investigator who denies or chooses to not acknowledge the presence of the Holy Ghost make you lose confidence or else your future investigators will miss the opportunity to be taught the importance of what those feelings actually mean, and that those feelings come from God.

The wisdom of our God is epitomized in the missionary program of the Church. The Church asks young people to have a goal to be worthy to "serve a mission". What the outside world sees as brain washing, the Lord sees as striving for something so important that one would shun the vices of the world to not lose the privilege of serving a mission. Think of your life in 10 year increments starting from when you are baptized at 8 years old, from 8 to 18, 18 to 28, 28 to 38, and 38 to 48 and on and on. What 10 year segment contains the most life changing events? Answer: 18 to 28. So the Lord understood the value of kicking off that critical time of your life with a mission. What better commitment for such an important period than to forget yourself for 2 years,

delay formal education, and focus on God, Jesus, and everyone else but yourself. It is the perfect example of the classic scriptural saying “to find yourself, you must lose yourself”. You gain 10 years’ worth of life experience from a mission. You leave at 19, 21 for the sisters, and return with 10 years of life wisdom and experience crammed into 18 to 24 months. In that age segment of 18 to 28, not necessarily in this order, you serve a mission, get an education, marry, choose a profession/occupation, and have children. There is no other 10 year increment with so much hanging in the balance. Wow, what a wise Heavenly Father to place the mission experience as the springboard for such a critical decade of life.

The Prayer Room

This last story runs very deep in my heart, as it represents a major turning point in my thinking about mission life. As I mentioned earlier, I was transferred to Birmingham as my second area. It was a tough blue collar city, populated with a lot of people from all over the world. My new companion was an Elder from California who had one month left on his mission. We were in a part of Birmingham known as Sparkhill. Tough neighborhoods, with lots of people from Pakistan and India. Very Muslim influence, so you can imagine how missionaries preaching Christianity might feel surrounded by mosques. I remember on the second or third day wondering “why put missionaries amongst people who are so devoutly religious but don’t care about Jesus Christ”. A month later my senior companion went home and I received a new companion from Germany who also only had one month left on his mission. This was very difficult for me, as I wondered if God was punishing me. It was very emotional for me to have had two consecutive months of sending missionaries home. Muslim area, two companions, last month for each. Month three I received a new companion and I became a senior companion. My new companion absolutely didn’t care about his mission, and was frankly biding his time, watching the clock, simply waiting to go home (and he had 14 months left).

I deployed the Ricciardi work schedule on him, and he began to come around. 2 months later when he left, he thanked me, but he was really thanking Ricciardi. This was a tough area, we had taught very few discussions, handed out hardly any copies of the book of Mormon, no investigators to church since I had arrived. It was wearing on me. At that point in time I was called to be a trainer. I thought “what a bummer to have to train a new missionary in such an “armpit of the mission” area (please excuse that reference). My spirits where really low, because I had been working harder than ever, being more prayerful than ever, really obedient, and no one wanted to hear our message. At that same time, I was seeing missionaries in neighboring parts of

Birmingham scheduling baptisms. One companionship bragged that they had just come back from three days in Scotland (not just outside our area, outside our mission, WHICH IS AN ABSOLUTE NO NO) on a site seeing outing and they had a baptism scheduled the next weekend. I couldn't believe it. That night I asked the Lord, flat out, why do this to me. Why should I work so hard when those other Elders are having fun, being disobedient, and still baptizing.

I believe this kind of pivotal moment comes into every missionary's time in the field. It is a moment where you have to decide what is more important, obedience OR everything else...I was now praying to leave the city of Birmingham, because I'd had enough. When transfers came, I thought for sure I would leave (typically missionaries stayed in an area 3 to 4 months). I was now into month 7, but neither of us was transferred. Now I was really mad.

The next morning after the news of no transfer, I got up and went into a spare room on the third floor of our flat that I regularly used for personal prayer. I said what I would describe as an angry prayer. I asked the Lord what the use of staying so darn obedient was if I was to have no baptisms. I said "Father, you are almighty, I pray over the map every day, I stop our bike rides at the slightest prompting to rethink what we are doing, where we are going, all to prove that I am listening, and you still send me to neighborhoods where there is nothing but vile, mean, personal rejection". Ricciardi of course would have been overjoyed at those kind of prospects. I wasn't. I could write 10 pages about what I said that morning in that damp, musty, moldy room.

Then it happened. The answer to prayer that changed the course of my mission and frankly my life. Let me fast forward a minute to May of 2007 before I finish the prayer room story. I was working in New York City, living in New Canaan, CT (had lived there 14 years), and married with 6 children and one day I received a call from an old mission friend Michael Walker. We were never companions, but back in 1986 he and his companion at the time had moved in with me and my companion for three weeks while they looked for an apartment in another part of Birmingham.

He was coming to New York City on business and asked if we could meet for breakfast. I had not seen or heard from Michael in over 6 years so I was surprised not only to hear from him, but that he sounded so anxious to see me. I wondered if he was okay or needed help. I picked him up from the airport that morning and we had breakfast at my favorite spot in Manhattan. We reminisced about a lot of mission memories, and then seriousness fell over our meal. He looked at me and said "Can I ask you a question about something that happened when I was living with you and Elder DeGala in Birmingham". The strangest impression came over me when he asked that because at the very moment he asked the question I already knew what he was

going to ask me... I knew this had to do with the “prayer room”.

I quietly said “sure”. The first line out of his mouth was “there was this room on the third floor of that apartment in Birmingham...” I immediately raised my hand motioning for him to stop talking and I began weeping so uncontrollably that restaurant patrons sitting around us became uncomfortable and uneasy. He waited for me to respond. It took 10 minutes for me to gain my composure. He patiently waited, then continued, recounting to me that he had seen me pray in this moldy smelly room in our flat, and he had started using it for his own personal prayers. One morning he came to the room to pray and could hear me praying out loud in the room. He left and came back 10 minutes later and could still hear me praying. He returned several other times over the next hour intending to use the room for his own prayers, and could still hear me in there praying. I had never until that day prayed out loud in my personal prayers, nor had I prayed for longer than 5 minutes, but that morning, with all my frustrations and anger, I decided to say my prayer out loud and I had plenty to say. My friend recounted that though he could not hear what I was saying; when he pressed his ear to the door he could sense the earnestness and emotion of my prayer.

He returned again and this time did not hear me praying, but below the door could still see my shadow. Another 20 minutes went by and upon hearing me open the door he came down the hall and saw my eyes almost swollen shut from crying. As we passed each other no words were exchanged. After telling me the story up to this point over breakfast, he began to weep, as he told me that he entered the room to pray and a flood of emotions enveloped him immediately without explanation, causing him to cry and wonder what had taken place in that room.

So there we were at breakfast 21 years later, in New York City, and he wanted to ask me a simple question. “What happened in that room?” That brings us to the moment that changed my mission forever. What happened in that room is simple, for the first time in my whole mission I asked through earnest prayer for answers I deeply desired and needed, and I received an answer from the Lord, a literal answer that I could hear with the same clarity and resonance that my friend was talking with during breakfast. That morning I had prayed for close to 45 minutes when I decided to cease praying, still not having formally closed the prayer, just quiet in my thoughts and tears. I was having thoughts of going home, giving up. Then I heard this message: “Elder Humphrey, I am here. I know who you are. I sent you to those neighborhoods, the very ones where you experienced nothing but rejection. I prompted your changes in direction to even more difficult neighborhoods. I know where each of the elect in your area resides. I know their names. I could send you to those addresses only, and save you the time and sacrifice looking for them. BUT ELDER HUMPHREY, WHAT GOOD

WOULD THAT SERVE YOU? The mission experience is to do what you are told, when you are told, to go where you are asked, and know that the blessing comes from enduring what I ask of you. This is not about you; it is about opening your mouth at all times in all places. Doing my will without thought to the end result or consequence... this is what serving a mission is.

That day in September of 1986 completely changed my focus. My anger went away. I became cheerful again for the first time in many months. When doors slammed in our faces, I would say to my companions, "The Lord knows these doors are slamming in our faces. This is part of his plan, the experience. He sent us to this neighborhood; he needs to know we can be trusted servants. That we will actually go where he wants us to go, do what he wants us to do, when he wants us to do it". I became jovial.

Missionary work became fun, not work at all, because I stopped taking the rejection so personal and blaming myself. I now knew that all I had to do was talk to as many people as I could for the remaining 14 months, make sure that only the truth came out of my mouth, be prayerful about EVERYTHING, and the Lord would do the rest. The week before I was transferred out of Birmingham we baptized a woman. Nearly 8 months in that area and we finally saw someone step into the waters of baptism. Patience and prayer saved me from possibly quitting.

CS Lewis, one of my favorite authors said something that to me captures what it means to see the Lord Jesus Christ while on your mission. He said "We can say we believe in Christ as we believe in the sun at noon day, not that we can see it, but that by it, we can see everything else". The things you will witness on your mission, is what makes you a witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. By no means am I suggesting you are a witness in the way that our apostles and prophets are, I am saying that to see people change their lives, to love people from another place, is a testament to the existence of God and his son Jesus Christ. Even as I write this, I am looking out my kitchen window, I see the trees swaying, I see grass and flowers, but I don't see the sun. However, it is the light of the sun that allows me to see what I see, and that is how I know the sun exists. The existence of the Son of God has that same value to us, as CS Lewis put so well, it is because we can see at all that we know Christ lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to share some thoughts. I have a deep abiding passion about missionary work. I know that your family does too because I have seen it. I will never forget the unconquerable spirit I became on my mission. To walk off that plane and know that I gave it my all was a powerful testament to me that God lives. As you know, you cannot fake or feign a mission. I have over my post mission years attended many missionary homecomings. It's not hard to tell who really gave themselves to the work, and who had a two year "somewhat interesting experience". Going on a mission,

and serving a mission are two different things. Most anyone can go on a mission, but serving a mission is a whole other ballgame. It is in your blood and upbringing to be nothing but the best missionary. Give Satan a good strong kick in the mouth and “just swing”. Thank you for your service to the Lord.