



THE STORY OF

740 DAYS TO SERVE

It was a typical morning in the mission field where we got out early to share the gospel with the people we hoped to find that day. I had only been out serving the people of Alabama a few months as a new missionary and I still thought of home, family, friends, and the experiences I might be missing. I longed for the excitement of my young life and it was incredibly hard for me, as it is for a lot of new young missionaries. Homesickness seemed to swallow me whole at times and I wrestled to have an optimistic attitude. In my heart, I knew I was where I was needed, sharing the Lord's message, and yet part of me was still home. My parents had made significant sacrifices for me to be there and I did not want to let them down. I had been praying morning and night for anything to help change my young heart and solidify this monumental decision of serving a mission. It was a struggle having one foot in the mission, and one foot home with those I missed and loved.

After much pleading and prayer with the Lord, this confirmation was received. On this particular morning while following our typical mission routine, my mission companion and I were biking down an old country road in Decatur Alabama. I was pedaling as hard as I could to get to the destination we had planned to proselyte the night before. I had a clear lead in front of my companion as I hugged the side of the road with no sidewalk and only about ten inches of space to ride. In a flash my attention was captured by a reflection of light off an object lying on the ground that quickly passed beneath me. I felt compelled to stop and examine what that object was and I turned around to find it. My companion had not yet caught up with me so I had a moment to contemplate what it was that I held in my hands. I imagined this object to be some kind of decal that had fallen off of a car, but looking at it in that moment, and aware of my prayers and willingness to receive an answer in any form, I knew this was an emblem meant just for me.

The silver plated emblem was simple; it was the number 740, no bigger than the palm of my hand. I thought for a moment, and began repeating the number in my mind, 740. The thought then occurred to me there are 365 days in a year, and times two that is 730. THEN, I remembered, the date I was to be released from my full time duties as a missionary. I had entered my mission May 10th, the year 1998, and my release date was May 20th the year 2000, EXACTLY 740 DAYS!

For just a moment time stood still, everything seemed so quiet. The spirit then softly whispered to me 'You have 740 days to serve your mission, and a lifetime to remember how you served, MAKE THE MOST OF IT!'

It was so random and simple, and yet very profound. As it says in Alma, "but behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass". (a) In that small moment I became keenly aware that Heavenly Father knew me and that he had answered my prayer in a way that I never would have expected. I knew He was aware of my allotted time to serve and was acutely aware of my struggles and heart ache. Ultimately, Heavenly Father knew what was needed to change my heart. In a conference address many years ago, President Ezra Taft Benson once said, "When you choose to follow Christ, you choose to be changed". (b)

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My mission and life changed that day as I chose to rededicate myself to our Savior's work, and to follow Him more diligently. This experience has had a profound effect on the outcome of my life. I often refer to this experience and had I not been given this individual gift, I can only speculate about the honor in which I served my mission and the trajectory of my life going forward. Until recently I have only shared this experience a few times. As more family and friends leave their young lives to serve missions as I did, it has been my sacred privilege to remind them of the short amount of time they have to fully dedicate themselves as messengers for the Lord.

For me, the number of days to serve was 740, but for others in their specific mission, it states that it is anticipated they will serve for a period of 24 months (730 days) or, 18 months (548 days) for sister missionaries. Whether it is more or less does not alter the relevance and importance of this personal and sacred call to serve. Every missionary needs to remember that as they set themselves apart from the world, they must give all of oneself, every single day and to do so is an honor and a privilege. They will NEVER have this mission and it's individual and particular capacities again.

I share my personal experience and pass on this message to our young missionaries that the Lord shared with me on that old country road in Alabama. Missionaries need to make every day count, one day at a time. When it is over, the returned missionary will look back on this time served for the rest of his or her life with great personal joy and gratitude for the tremendous growth and service that they willingly dedicated to "further the missionary efforts in proclaiming the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." This individual dedication and whole heart effort will bless numerous lives forever. Upon release, with name tag in hand, many with genuine understanding and sincere reflection may weep from what they have learned and experienced. Our missionaries will have 'A LIFETIME to remember how they SERVED' and like me, they will forever be changed.

Josh Prazen
Served May 10th 1998 – May 20th 2000
Alabama Birmingham Mission

(a) Book of Alma 37:6
(b) Conference Report - October 1985, pp. 4-5.
Edited by PJ Hatch-Beck

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THE FIELD IS WHITE, ALREADY TO HARVEST