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Always in the Middle

By many world calendars, July marks the middle of the year. While the beginnings and endings of things are celebrated and remembered, the middle of things often goes unnoticed.

Beginnings are times for making resolutions, for creating plans, for bursts of energy. Endings are times for winding down and may involve feelings of completion or loss. But with the proper outlook, considering ourselves as *in the middle* of things can help us not only to understand life a little better but also to live it a little more meaningfully.

The Middle of Missionary Work

When I speak to our young missionaries, I often tell them they are in the middle of their missions. Whether they just arrived the day before or are to depart for home the day after, I ask them to think of themselves as always being in the middle.

New missionaries may feel they are too inexperienced to be effective, and so they delay speaking or acting with confidence and boldness. Seasoned missionaries who are close to completing their missions may feel sad their missions are coming to a close, or they may slow down as they contemplate what they will do after their missions.

Whatever the circumstances and wherever they serve, the truth is that the Lord's missionaries are daily sowing countless seeds of good tidings. Thinking of themselves as always being in the middle of their missions will

embolden and energize these faithful representatives of the Lord. As it is with full-time missionaries, so it is with all of us.

We Are Always in the Middle

This change in perspective is more than a simple trick of the mind. There is a sublime truth behind the idea that we are always in the middle. If we look at our location on a map, we are tempted to say we are at a beginning. But if we look more closely, wherever we are is simply in the middle of a larger place.

As it is with space, so it is with time. We may feel we are at the beginning or end of our lives, but when we look at where we are against the backdrop of eternity—when we realize that our spirit has existed for time beyond our capacity to measure and, because of the perfect sacrifice and Atonement of Jesus Christ, that our soul will exist for an eternity to come—we can recognize that we are truly in the middle.

Recently I felt impressed to redo the headstone on my parents' grave. Time had not been kind to the grave site, and I felt that a new headstone would be more fitting for their exemplary lives. When I looked at the birth dates and death dates on the headstone connected by the usual insignificant little dash, this small symbol of a lifespan suddenly filled my mind and heart with an abundance of rich memories. Each of these treasured memories reflects a moment in

the middle of my parents' lives and in the middle of my life.

Whatever our age, whatever our location, when things occur in our lives, we are always in the middle. What's more, we will forever be in the middle.

The Hope of Being in the Middle

Yes, there will be moments of beginnings and moments of endings throughout our lives, but these are only markers along the way of the great middle of our eternal lives. Whether we are at the beginning or the end, whether we are young or old, the Lord can use us for His purposes if we simply set aside whatever thoughts limit our ability to serve and allow His will to shape our lives.

The Psalmist says, "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we [should] rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24). Amulek reminds us that "this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold *the day of this life* is the day for men to perform their labors" (Alma 34:32; emphasis added). And a poet muses, "Forever—is composed of Nows."¹

Being always in the middle means that the game is never over, hope is never lost, defeat is never final. For no matter where we are or what our circumstances, an eternity of beginnings and an eternity of endings stretch out before us.

We are always in the middle.

NOTE

1. Emily Dickinson, "Forever—is composed of Nows," in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (1960), 624.

TEACHING THIS MESSAGE

Consider discussing with the family how they are "always in the middle," even if they are beginning or ending something. Encourage them to do their best on their current activities, not dwelling on the past or waiting for the next activity or project. You may want to suggest they choose one thing they can do as a family to implement this counsel and set a date by which they hope to achieve their goal.

YOUTH

In the Middle of Your Preparation for a Mission

President Uchtdorf tells missionaries to think of themselves as being in the middle of their missions. You can also apply this idea to your mission preparation: whether you are 12 or 18, you can prepare to serve a mission.

What are some things you can do "in the middle" of your mission preparation?

- Always be worthy to attend the temple.
- Learn to recognize promptings from the Holy Ghost by writing down your promptings and acting on them.
- Pray for the missionaries.
- Ask the missionaries in your area what they recommend you do to prepare to serve a mission.
- Learn to manage your time effectively, including important activities such as service, scripture study, and journal writing.
- When talking with a family member, share a scripture that inspired you recently. Explain what you think about the scripture.
- Ask your friends about their religions and what they believe. Be willing to share your beliefs. Invite them to church or activities.

As you recognize that you are in the middle of your mission preparation, you can live your life to be more worthy of the Lord's trust and the Spirit's companionship.

CHILDREN

Everyone Can Do Something Now

1. President Uchtdorf teaches that no matter your age, you can do something to help others. In your journal or on a piece of paper, list your gifts or abilities. Ask your parents what they think your gifts are.
2. How could you use your gifts to help others?
3. At the end of your list of gifts, write one way you can use those gifts to help others this week.



Faith, Family, Relief

Demonstrating Our Discipleship through Love and Service

Prayerfully study this material and, as appropriate, discuss it with the sisters you visit. Use the questions to help you strengthen your sisters and to make Relief Society an active part of your own life.

Throughout His mortal life, Jesus Christ showed His love for others by ministering to them. He said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). He set the example and wants us to “succor those that stand in need of [our] succor” (Mosiah 4:16). He calls His disciples to work with Him in His ministry, giving them the opportunity to serve others and become more like Him.¹

Our service as visiting teachers will closely resemble the ministry of our Savior when we show our love for those we visit teach by doing the following:²

- Remember their names and the names of their family members and become acquainted with them.
- Love them without judging them.
- Watch over them and strengthen their faith “one by one,” as the Savior did (3 Nephi 11:15).
- Establish sincere friendships

with them and visit them in their homes and elsewhere.

- Care about each sister. Remember birthdays, graduations, weddings, baptisms, or other times that are meaningful to her.
- Reach out to new and less-active members.
- Reach out to the lonely or those in need of comfort.

From the Scriptures

3 Nephi 11; Moroni 6:4; Doctrine and Covenants 20:47

From Our History

“The New Testament includes accounts of women, named and unnamed, who exercised faith in Jesus Christ. . . . These women became exemplary disciples. . . . [They] journeyed with Jesus and His Twelve Apostles. They gave of their substance to assist in His ministry. After His death and Resurrection, [they] continued to be faithful disciples.”³

Paul wrote of a woman named Phebe, who was “a servant of

the church” (Romans 16:1). He asked the people to “assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many” (Romans 16:2). “The kind of service rendered by Phebe and other great women of the New Testament continues today with members of the Relief Society—leaders, visiting teachers, mothers, and others—who act as succorers, or helpers, of many.”⁴

NOTES

1. See *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (2011), 105.
2. See *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 3.2.3.
3. *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 3.
4. *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 6.

What Can I Do?

1. How am I increasing my ability to nurture others?
2. What am I doing to ensure that the sisters I watch over know that I love them?

For more information, go to reliefsociety.lds.org.