

How To Before Will You: Committing to Commitments in the Augusta Mission

“Elder Adams, after what we’ve experienced, I feel like a different missionary,” Elder Spencer Quinn, zone leader in the Augusta Maine Mission, said as he drove to their apartment after attending Brian Carpenter’s baptismal service in the Camden chapel in December, 2005. “I bet that when investigators aren’t progressing, the real reason often is that we haven’t taught them *how* to pray and *how* to read the scriptures.”

“I think you’re right,” agreed his companion, Elder Wes Adams. “I wonder if the ways we taught Fred Bittner and Brian Carpenter how to study and pray are things we should ask *every* investigator to do – and I’d like to know how soon in the teaching process we ought to ask them to do it.”

“Good question,” Elder Quinn responded. “And here’s another. Do you think that when our investigators don’t keep *other* commitments – like attending church – the real reason might be that we haven’t done a good job teaching them *how* to keep *those* commitments as well? How to do these things is second-nature for us. But maybe we’ve been assuming that they’re second-nature for our investigators, too! It seems like before we ask ‘Will you,’ we need to address the ‘How to’ question first.”

Teaching Fred Bittner How to Pray

The experiences to which Elders Quinn and Adams referred had begun three months earlier in the Camden Ward of the Topsham, Maine Stake. Ward members Landon and Julia Allen had invited their friend, Fred Bittner, whose wife Elizabeth was a less-active member, to take the missionary lessons. Fred had been raised in a Christian home but had never attended any church regularly. At the end of the first lesson Elders Quinn and Adams had given Fred a copy of the Book of Mormon and invited him to read and pray about it.

At the beginning of the second lesson they asked Fred if he had read any of it and if he had been praying. When he said “Yes,” the Elders seemed pleased and had quickly gotten down to the business of teaching him the lesson. The lesson took longer than planned. Glancing at his watch, Elder Quinn saw that the discussion was bumping against the 45-minute time recommended in *Preach My Gospel*, and finished his last point as quickly as he could. Following Sister Allen’s closing prayer, Elder Quinn had asked Fred if he would continue reading the Book of Mormon and praying every day. Fred said he would do so.

The third lesson was a repeat of the second. Elder Adams began by asking Fred if he had been reading the Book of Mormon and praying. When Fred said he had, the Elders complimented him and asked if he had any questions. Fred said that he had none, and the Elders then began teaching their lesson. Again, with so much to explain, the lesson ran to the end of the allotted time. As they closed Elder Adams reiterated, “Will you continue to read and pray, Fred?” He again promised that he would, and the elders left.

Each of the incidents recounted here is a true story that occurred individually in the lives of missionaries and members of the Church in the Massachusetts Boston Mission. They have been collected in the format of this case to help missionaries implement the recommendations of Chapter 11 of Preach My Gospel. The names of the people involved and the locations of these events have been disguised.

At the beginning of the fourth lesson, it was clear that the light that one normally sees in the face of those

who are discovering the truth just wasn't radiating from Fred's. So when he told the Elders again that he had been studying and praying, Elder Quinn decided to probe more deeply by asking, "Fred, how are you praying, and what are you saying in your prayers?"

Looking sheepish but relieved, Fred answered, "I guess I really don't know how to pray. I was raised in a Christian home but I never really learned how to pray. I learned a few prayers when I was a boy, but I can't remember them now. I've just been too embarrassed to admit that I don't know how."

Elder Adams apologized for not helping Fred with this, and set aside the teaching plan they had prepared. "You've heard us pray at the beginning and end of our discussions together, Fred, but these are *public* prayers where we say things that pertain to all of us. But your personal prayers should be different – they're more like a personal report or conversation with God. Let's kneel, and I'll demonstrate how I pray. Then I'll ask Sister Allen to pray, and then Brother Allen. Listen to what we say and how we say it. Each will be different, but listen for patterns in what we say. Then let's sit in our chairs and you can ask us questions about prayer."

After they had done this Elder Quinn asked, "What patterns did you see in the way we prayed?"

"Well, the most obvious thing is that you all prayed aloud, instead of just thinking the prayer in your mind. Do you always pray aloud when you're praying in private?"

"Silent prayers are okay," Elder Quinn responded. "But whenever you can, pray aloud. The reason is that it helps you feel like you're really speaking to God – because that's what you're actually doing, having a personal conversation with our Father in Heaven."

When Fred didn't ask another question, Elder Adams decided he'd better ask one. "I'm sure you noticed that each of us began our prayer by thanking God for things he has given us. Why do you suppose it's important to do this?"

Fred replied, "I guess it helps us realize how much God loves us." When Elder Adams agreed, Fred then asked, "I noticed that you didn't just ask for blessings, but you *explained* things to Him – told Him what you had done, what you were planning to do, and *then* asked for His guidance. Why did you do that?"

Elder Adams answered, "Think of it this way. When your children talk to you by phone, you want to hear their report on what they've been doing. You have a pretty good idea of what they're up to, but you love them so much that you just want to hear them tell it. Right? Well, God wants to hear from you, because he really does love you. He *wants* us to think things through in our own minds, and make our own decisions about what the right thing to do is. Then we ask for his opinion of our decision. He wants it this way because if he made all the decisions for us, we'd never grow. That's how I visualize personal prayer – it's like calling home to my parents. And it's clear from the scriptures that Heavenly Father *wants* us to "call home" – because he loves us, wants to hear our voice, and wants to give us his advice."

The discussion seemed to pique Fred's curiosity about prayer. He asked, "When I talk things over with God and ask for his help, what sorts of topics can I raise? For example, do you ask God only for help with spiritual things, or can you pray about problems at work?"

Elder Quinn asked Fred to read Alma 34: 17-27. When he had finished, Fred summarized, "I guess what this says is that anything that is important to me is important to God. Am I right?"

"That's really true, Fred," Elder Quinn taught. "It's just overwhelming to me to think that God loves us so much that anything that is important to us is important to Him." He then asked Fred if he would be willing

to kneel with them again, and to pray verbally in the way they had just discussed. Fred nervously agreed, and offered a beautiful, heartfelt prayer.

When they had finished, Elder Adams asked for a commitment: “Fred and Elizabeth, we’d like you to do two things every day until we meet next. First, will you each find a quiet time each day, when you are alone, and pray out loud to our Heavenly Father in the way you have just done? And before you go to bed, will you kneel together and pray as husband and wife about the things that concern your marriage and your family? Will you do these things?” Fred and Elizabeth agreed that they would.

Remembering how easy it had been for Fred to slip on his prior commitments to pray, Elder Quinn asked his permission to call in a couple of days to be sure it was going as hoped. Fred said he’d welcome the help. When the Elders phoned, Fred proudly responded that he and Elizabeth had indeed been praying as they had said they would. When they met for their next meeting, the light that the Elders had not seen in Fred’s face finally was there. He was soon baptized.

Teaching Brian Carpenter How to Read the Scriptures, and How to Pray

Subsequent to their experience with Fred and Elizabeth, Elders Quinn and Adams became much more sensitive to the possibility that their investigators actually might not understand simple aspects of the gospel that they personally took for granted. One morning as he studied *Preach My Gospel*, Elder Quinn, said, “Elder Adams, look on pages 107-109, where they’re teaching us how to read the scriptures. They don’t tell us just to begin at the beginning and end at the end. They tell us to ask questions, find the answers in the scriptures, and then write our insights about those scriptures in our gospel study journal. Do you think that when we invite our investigators to read the Book of Mormon, we should ask them to read it in the same way that *Preach My Gospel* tells us to read it?”

A few days later, the Elders had the opportunity to put this idea to work. Another couple in the Camden Ward, Matthew and Catherine Donaldson, invited them to have a gospel discussion with their friend Brian Carpenter. The death of Brian’s father had prompted Brian to ask Brother Donaldson about the Mormons’ view of the purpose of life. In the dinner conversation prior to the first lesson, Elder Adams had asked Brian if there were any religious questions he had ever puzzled about, to which he’d not been able to find answers. Brian listed several questions. Some were about the purpose of life and life after death. But others related to his church’s teaching about original sin and infant baptism and the belief in his church that salvation would be denied to those who did not receive certain ordinances. His brother, for example, had died as an infant before they were able to baptize him; and his father had not received the last rites of his church.

After dinner the Elders pieced together a lesson to address some of these questions. At its end Elder Adams gave Brian a copy of the Book of Mormon, explained what it was, and invited him to read it. Brian responded, “I have a copy – someone gave it to me a few years ago. I tried to read it – but I only got as far as the second chapter in First Nefee (as Brian pronounced it). I just couldn’t understand it.”

As Brian said those words, Elder Quinn felt impressed to do what *Preach My Gospel* told the missionaries to do as they studied the scriptures – to ask and answer questions. He explained, “Brian, when you learned to read novels in school, you just started at the beginning and finished at the end. But that’s not how you should read the scriptures. To help you read in the right way, we want to give you a written homework assignment, which you’ll need to hand in to us when we have our second meeting next week. I’m going to take a minute and write the assignment down. This will take you about two hours to complete, so you should block off time to do this on some evening or next Sunday. It should be a quiet time where you can be alone and not be interrupted.” This is the assignment that Elder Quinn wrote:

Read these chapters in the Book of Mormon:

Mosiah 18:1-16 (pp. 180-182)

Moroni 8: all (pp. 525-527)

Write a 2-paragraph answer to each of these 3 questions:

- a. Why does it make God so angry when people baptize little children?
- b. What does baptism mean and why are we baptized?
- c. What is the process by which we come to be forgiven of our sins?

Bring these answers to our next meeting.

Process for doing this:

1. Pray on your knees, aloud, telling God that you got this homework assignment and that you will need his inspiration to answer these questions. Ask him to help you understand the chapters.
2. Read the chapters.
3. Write your answers, in draft form, to the 3 questions.
4. Kneel again in verbal prayer. Explain to God the answers you have written, just as if you were talking to him face to face. Then tell him you're going to read the chapters one more time. Ask him to help you understand even more deeply the answers to these questions as you read it again.
5. Read the chapters again.
6. Revise your answers, based upon your deeper understanding.
7. Kneel again and pray a third time. Ask God if the things that you have written, and the things that you have read, are true.

Elder Quinn talked through this assignment with Brian step by step, to be sure Brian understood why each step was important. "No shortcuts are allowed," he said. Elder Quinn asked Brian to turn to Moroni 10:3-5, and said, "Now I want to teach you how to give that third prayer in step #7, because it's *really* important. He read verse 3 and asked, "Brian, why does God want you to take a few minutes before praying to think about how richly he has blessed you?"

Brian answered, "I guess it will help me feel how much God loves me, and how much I love him."

"That's exactly right," Elder Quinn agreed. "So take 5-10 minutes before praying to do this." He then read to the end of verse 4 and asked, "What does it mean to pray with *real intent*?"

Brian responded, "I suppose it means I need to be sincere about it."

"Not exactly," taught Elder Quinn. "Sincerity is covered in the prior phrase. Praying with real intent means that you need to tell God *what you intend to do* if he answers your prayer. This means that before you offer this third prayer, you need to think about what you actually will be willing to promise God that you will do, in the event that he answers your prayer." Elder Quinn then read verse 5, and explained how God answers prayers through thoughts that come into our minds and feelings in our heart. He concluded, "Will you do this assignment, Brian?"

Brian committed to do what Elder Quinn had asked. Elder Adams telephoned Brian on Saturday, asking if he had any questions about the homework assignment. Brian responded that he had blocked out two hours on Sunday evening to do it.

Following the opening prayer in their next meeting on the following Tuesday evening, Elder Adams asked Brian if he had done his homework. Proudly and with a smile on his face, Brian handed typed copies of his homework to the Elders and Brother and Sister Donaldson. “Let me summarize what I learned,” Brian began. He read his answer to the first question, and then for ten minutes, explained why it was so offensive to God when people baptize infants. The first sentence in his written answer summarized it well: “*Baptizing little children trivializes the atonement.*”

“How’d I do?” Brian asked, after finishing his explanation.

“Brian,” Brother Donaldson exclaimed, “That’s a better answer than I could ever have written.”

“I’m glad,” Brian responded. “I worked hard on it. And thank you for asking me to write it down. I don’t like to write, but *writing it forced me to think* about it. It really was helpful.” Brian then went through the same process with his answers to the second and third questions – reading his answers aloud, and then explaining how he had come to those conclusions. The answers were similarly insightful.

When he had finished reviewing his homework, Brian concluded, “I really believe that these things are true. It makes sense in my head, and as I prayed I could feel in my heart that it is true. In fact, right now I feel again in my heart the feelings I had when I did the homework.”

Because Brian’s report had taken 35 minutes, the Elders taught an abbreviated second discussion in just 10 minutes. Elder Quinn then asked, “Brian, now that you know this is true, will you be baptized?”

“I actually *want* to be baptized,” Brian responded. “At first I thought I should wait until all my questions about the Mormon Church have been answered. But then I realized that’s not the purpose of baptism. If I wait until all my questions are answered, I’ll be waiting forever. See, it says right here,” he said, pointing at his answer to the second question. “The purpose of baptism is to make a commitment to God that we’ll follow him. Baptism is the start, not the finish.” They agreed on a baptismal date of December 17.

Elder Quinn then said, “I want to give you another homework assignment. This one focuses on other of the questions you said had been on your mind when we met last week.”

“Write down the page numbers and the questions, but you don’t need to write the steps again,” Brian said. “I have them down cold: pray, read, write; pray, read, revise; feel gratitude, and pray again. It’s a good system.”

The subsequent meetings with Brian went just as the second one had. Elder Adams called between the meetings to be sure Brian understood and was doing his homework. Brian took the first 10-20 minutes of each lesson to review what he had learned by doing his homework; and the missionaries taught for about 20 minutes. They spent the last 10 minutes explaining his next assignment and being sure Brian understood the other commitments that they were asking him to make. Brother Donaldson baptized his friend Brian on December 17 in the Camden chapel.

Spreading the Gospel of Homework

At zone conference on January 8, mission president Lloyd Wheelwright asked Elders Quinn and Adams to recount how they had taught Fred Bittner and Brian Carpenter how to pray and how to read the Book of Mormon. After recounting their experiences, Elder Quinn said,

“I had always just assumed that my investigators knew how to study and how to pray. But I realize now that this is rarely the case. Most of our investigators haven’t read a book in a long time; and even those who like to read probably approach the Book of Mormon like they would a novel – start

at the beginning and end at the end. When our investigators don't keep their commitment to read and pray, it might be because they just don't know *how* to do it.

Don't get me wrong. It's important to read the Book of Mormon from beginning to end – because it contains the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But maybe a better sequence is first to help our investigators have the kind of experience that Brian had – first to learn that it is true by allowing them to find answers to questions they are seeking through the Spirit and prayer. Then, knowing it is true, they will be motivated to read it from beginning to end. In fact, that's what Paul said in Hebrews 4:2 – "... the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." I've begun to think that when we just ask them to read the Book of Mormon, they often don't do it because they're not motivated to tackle such an intimidating assignment.

Most people don't like to write. They feel they're not good at it. But Brian thanked us for asking him to write – because it forced him to ponder the scriptures. That's what *Preach My Gospel* teaches us to do ask questions, research the answers, and then write down what we've learned.

It could be the same with other commitments we ask our investigators to make. Take the Sabbath Day, for example. I've invited a lot of people to come to church. Somehow I just assumed that they knew how to get the maximum benefit from attending church – how to prepare beforehand so that they can feel the spirit, and how to keep the Sabbath Day holy. Looking back on it, most of these investigators have come to church and then have gone home, unchanged. I can now see that it might often have been *my* fault. I asked them to make and keep a commitment, but didn't teach them how to do it in a way that would give them the full benefit."

After leading a discussion on the things Elders Quinn and Adams taught, President Wheelwright then closed the conference with an assignment. "Fred Bittner and Brian Carpenter may not be typical investigators, but maybe they *are*. I want us to learn whether these ideas about teaching our investigators *how* to keep the commitments we ask them to make will work with other types of investigators. Your investigators are in all shapes and sizes, and are at various stages in the process. I would like each of you to begin teaching them *how* to keep the commitments you are asking them to make. Build time for this into your teaching plans. We need to teach *every* investigator how to study and how to pray. I think the way Elders Quinn and Adams taught Fred how to pray, and their idea of written homework assignments are great methods for doing this. But investigators also need to be taught how to keep the other commitments we ask them to make. At our next zone conference I want you each to come prepared to teach the rest of us how you've done this, and what lessons you've learned from your efforts.

Reports at the Zone Meeting

Elder Quinn conducted the next zone meeting under President Wheelwright's direction. He called on four missionaries to summarize their experiences and what they had learned from them. He distributed a chart to each of the missionaries, asking that they take careful notes as they listened to each other's experiences.¹

Kelly Mahoney, by Sister Annie Badger

¹ To help you prepare to discuss this case, a chart similar to the one that Elder Quinn prepared is included on page 12 below. Please detach it and make notes on it as you read these accounts, in much the same way as the missionaries in the zone conference did. Begin by analyzing the experiences of Elders Quinn and Adams with Fred Bittner and Brian Carpenter. Pause after each of the stories to summarize on this sheet what you have learned.

Elder Quinn first called on Sister Annie Badger, who with her companion Noelle Kimball had been teaching 16 year-old Kelly Mahoney in the York Ward of the Topsham Stake. Kelly had been invited by her neighbors Daniel and Sarah Bowen to take the lessons in their home. Sister Badger began,

“We had been meeting with Kelly on and off for about eight weeks. We’ve never listed her as a progressing investigator because she hasn’t been doing anything other than continuing to meet with us. I think she kept doing it because she likes the Bowens – she baby-sits their kids. When we taught her three weeks ago we assigned her to read Alma 32 and the Book of Mormon Promise in Moroni 10. The questions we gave her were:

1. How do you gain faith?
2. How does the Lord answer your questions?
3. What does this mean for you?

We met a week later. We were pumped up for that discussion, hoping that she’d be as converted as Brian Carpenter was with Elders Quinn and Adams. But she wasn’t – in fact, she hadn’t even done the homework. We were *so* disappointed!

But we scraped ourselves off the floor, and Sister Kimball taught a good lesson on Joseph Smith and the restoration. When she had finished, I bore my testimony: ‘Kelly, if you go back through the Bible, people always accepted dead prophets but rejected the living ones. When they were being led out of Egypt, the people of Israel really didn’t revere Moses as a prophet. They believed that Abraham, who had lived hundreds of years earlier, was God’s prophet. But Moses? Then when Jeremiah came along, 1,000 years after Moses, the people finally had accepted that Moses was a prophet. But they threw Jeremiah in prison. When Christ came, the Jews had finally decided Jeremiah had been a prophet – but they killed Jesus. Now we’ve told you today that in our time, God has called another prophet, who has restored the complete gospel of Jesus Christ.

‘Kelly,’ I said, ‘Today most Christians can’t accept that Joseph Smith was a prophet or that we have a living prophet today. It’s like that movie *Groundhog Day* – this has happened again and again. They accept dead prophets but reject the living ones. But if it’s true – that God really did come to earth with his Son and call a prophet in our time just like Moses and Jeremiah and all the others – it will be the most important thing you will ever learn in your whole life, Kelly. It will take faith – and that’s why we gave you that homework assignment last week. We want you to do the assignment – read those verses and write your answer. Will you?’

Kelly promised us that she would, but we weren’t sure. So we called her two days later, and two days after that, reminding her that she had to do it. At our next meeting, Kelly had done her homework! She brought her typed responses, and *she brought her older sister*. We had Kelly read her answers, and then asked her to explain how she came to those conclusions. Her answers weren’t nearly as profound as Brian Carpenter’s were – I mean, she’s only 16 years old. But she really had thought about what she read, and asked us some good questions. Finally, after eight weeks of no progress we feel like she has felt the Spirit and is moving ahead. She and her sister came to church last week and have committed to come to church this week. I guess most importantly, we feel like that she now *wants to know*. She doesn’t know it’s true yet, but she wants to know if it is. I actually think that *wanting* to know is the biggest barrier to conversion.

What have we learned from this experience with Kelly? *If we’re not serious about the commitments we ask them to make, our investigators won’t be*. We had just assumed that if we gave her the homework assignment she’d do it. So the second time, I bore my testimony as fervently as I could, and then we called her, and called her again, to be sure she did it.

Because we now feel like she wants to know, after the last lesson we gave her the same homework assignment and questions that Elders Quinn and Adams first gave to Brian – Mosiah 18 and Moroni 8. There are lots of different homework assignments you could give, but we decided that this one is what you might call the “clincher” – it’s the one to assign when they want to know if it’s true, and need to commit to baptism. We decided she might be ready, and because she’s Catholic, we thought it would help to get her thinking about infant baptism and the atonement. We asked her to set aside two hours in a quiet place, and to follow the seven steps – pray out loud, read, write, pray aloud again, read, revise; feel gratitude and then pray to know if what you’ve written and what you’ve read is true. We’re going to call her tonight to see if she’s set the time aside, and we’re going to remind her not to take any short-cuts in the process. Elders and Sisters, please pray for Kelly and for us!”

John and Jessica Stallworth, by Elder Michael Magleby

The next to speak was Elder Michael Magleby, who with his companion Evan Doxey had been teaching John and Jessica Stallworth, who lived in Portland with their two young sons. Elder Magleby began,

We’d been teaching John and Jessica for a month before the last zone conference. They were praying and reading the Book of Mormon. But we just could not get them to come to church. They told us they’d try, and we arranged for a member to pick them up because they don’t have a car. But when the members went to their house they said they were too busy.

After the last zone conference, we decided that the mistake we’d been making was that we simply had invited them to attend church, without teaching them *how* to keep that commitment. So we ended our next lesson 15 minutes early, and again asked if they would come that Sunday. John gave his usual insincere ‘Yes.’ Elder Doxey then said, “Going to a Mormon service is different than going to other churches – you’ll like it. In the first place, everybody wears their Sunday best – slacks and a shirt and tie for men, and a neat dress for women. The reason is that we’re going to God’s house, and we want to show our reverence for God. The meetings take three hours. We start all together in what we call sacrament meeting, and then divide into Sunday school classes.

When you wake up on Sunday morning, gather your children with you and kneel together in family prayer. Tell Heavenly Father that you’re going to church today. Ask for his help so that you’ll be able to feel His spirit as you listen to the speakers and the teachers. And ask God to bless your sons, that they won’t be too fidgety so that you can pay attention to the speakers. In fact, you’ll want to bring some coloring books and crayons to keep them happy.”

Then we taught John and Jessica how to keep the Sabbath day holy. Funny – I’ve always invited my investigators to church, but never taught them how to keep the Sabbath day holy. I bet a lot of times my investigators have gone to church, felt the Spirit, and then went home and did unholy things the rest of the day. So we read the commandment in Mosiah 13:16-19, and I asked, ‘What are some of the unholy things that people do on the Sabbath day?’ They came up with a long list, which I asked them to write down. I said, ‘I want you not to do *any* of those things this Sunday.’ You wouldn’t believe the shocked look on John’s face – because these were fun things we were telling him not to do.

But Elder Doxey rescued the situation when he asked, ‘The key isn’t that you should just *not* do unholy things on Sunday. You need to replace those things with *holy* ones. What are some of the holy things you could do on Sunday?’ This was harder, but we helped them with some ideas and had them write those down, too. Elder Doxey then said, ‘Will you promise me that this Sunday you won’t do *any* of these unholy things? Will you fill your day doing these holy things, and will you come to church with us?’ He then bore his testimony about the blessings that come from keeping the

Sabbath day holy – and he promised them that doing so would fill their hearts and their home with a spirit of love.

The next day we stopped by their apartment and loaned them a copy of the Tabernacle Choir's *Lilies of the Field* CD, and asked them to play it in the background on Sunday."

Elder Magleby continued,

"To be sure that they kept on target, we called them on Friday and Saturday, just to be sure they were still planning to keep the Sabbath day holy. We called a bunch of members, too, telling them about John and Jessica, asking that they look out for them and make them feel loved and welcome at church. That Sunday the ward mission leader picked them up. They were ready, wearing their Sunday best, and they stayed for all three hours. The members were just magnificent in helping them feel at home. When we met with them the next Tuesday, we just sat back, like Elders Quinn and Adams did, and asked what they had learned from keeping the Sabbath day holy. Jessica said, "We didn't do a single one of those unholy things. It was the best day we've had together in years. There was just a real nice feeling in our apartment."

I want to tell you one other thing that we did. After we met with them that Tuesday, we thought about what other commitments they needed to make, and how we'd teach them to keep them. It struck us that if they got baptized, the ward members couldn't keep picking them up every Sunday because there would always be investigators that needed rides. Because we had never taught John and Jessica how to get to church on their own, we still really had not taught them how to keep the commitment of church attendance.

So at our next meeting, we told the Stallworths that the members were only able to give them a ride one more time – too many others needed them. So we asked, "Who do you know who has a car who could bring you to church the week after next?" At first they said that they didn't know anyone who could help them. But I said, "You told us that you do your grocery shopping at that new Super Wal-Mart in Yarmouth. Who gives you a ride there?" Jessica answered, "My cousin does – she has a car." I said, "I bet she'd give you a ride to church if you just asked her. Will you do that? In fact, so that she doesn't have to drive back and forth to take you there and back and forth to pick you up, why don't you just invite her to come to church with you?" Her cousin has been giving them rides for three weeks now. She stays for church, and we're going to start teaching her this week. And the Stallworths have set a date to be baptized in two weeks.

One lesson we've learned from this experience is that in the past we were so eager to teach our investigators everything we could that we didn't spend any time at the beginning of our meetings asking our investigators to teach us what they'd learned from having kept their commitment. And we'd keep teaching right up to the end, too, without taking the time to be sure they understood the next commitment – what it was and how to keep it. Now I can see that while our teaching is important, it's making and keeping commitments that prepares people for baptism."

Jack, by Elder Daniel Black

The third missionary to speak was Elder Daniel Black, who labored in Paris, Maine.

"Our area's a *hard* place to do missionary work. We haven't found anyone who has committed to baptism by doing a homework assignment. But it's a good way to tell which investigators aren't really serious. Those who aren't willing to read, ponder and pray aren't going to progress, so it's a signal that we might want to drop them from our investigator pool."

I have a question, rather than a lesson learned – and maybe someone can answer this. We found this guy, Jack who lives in a boarding house near our apartment. We taught him the plan of salvation and assigned him to read 2 Nephi chapter 2. The question we asked him to answer was: If God loves us, why does He allow evil and suffering in this world?

Jack's response was: 'I don't write very good.' So I said, 'Well, then just read the chapter, and think about these questions so we can discuss them when we come next time.' Jack answered, 'I don't read too good, either.' So I said, 'Well, can we just read this chapter the next time we meet?' He said that we were nice young boys and that would be fine.

So my question is: I like the idea of asking them to write down the answers to questions, because it gives them a simple, specific thing to do. But what do you do with an investigator who either *won't* read or write, or *can't* read and write?"

Sister Catherine Fuller

The final speaker was Sister Catherine Fuller, who with her companion Danielle Kite served in the Lincoln, New Hampshire branch.

"At last zone conference Elder Quinn said that during dinner prior to teaching the first lesson he had asked Brian if he had any questions about religion that he hadn't been able to get answers to. I wrote this down: "Some of Brian's questions were about the purpose of life and life after death. But others related to his church's teaching about original sin and the belief in his church that salvation would be denied to those who did not receive certain ordinances."

As Sister Kite and I talked about teaching investigators how to study and how to pray, a lesson my mom taught me came into my mind: *People will learn when they're ready to learn, not when you're ready to teach them.* A key reason why Brian Carpenter was willing to do the homework that Elder Quinn assigned might be that these were questions that *already were on his mind.* In other words, he was ready to learn those things when Elders Quinn and Adams were ready to teach him. If they had assigned him to read and ponder about questions he *wasn't* interested in, I bet he wouldn't have done his homework.

In Chapter 5 of *Preach My Gospel* President Ezra Taft Benson listed some "great questions of the soul" for which the Book of Mormon has answers. So my companion and I decided that we'd begin each lesson trying to learn which, if any, of these questions is on the minds of our investigators – questions about religion for which they haven't found satisfactory answers. Then while one of us is teaching, the other writes out an assignment that will help them answer the specific question of the soul that is on the investigator's mind. This has *really* helped us. We baptized one person already, who we'd been teaching but wasn't progressing. And we have five more investigators who are seriously progressing.

What have we learned from this? It relates to the question that Elder Black just asked. Maybe some people aren't willing to do their homework because we've asked them to answer questions that they're not interested in answering. Maybe a better signal of someone's potential is this: If an investigator really hasn't been thinking of any of these great questions of the soul, then we should sift them out – because it means that they're just not ready to learn."

The General Discussion: What Can We Learn from these Experiences?

President Wheelwright then wheeled a chalkboard in front of the missionaries, and said, "For the next 30 minutes let's try to reflect across these experiences, as well as your own. Let's distill from these a set of

principles or lessons that will help us all do a better job teaching our investigators how to read the scriptures, how to pray, and how to keep their other commitments. Specifically, I'd like us to discuss the following questions:

1. Are homework assignments as a way to help investigators learn how to study and how to pray something that we should always do? Or this only appropriate in certain situations?
2. What are the elements of a good homework assignment? Given this, can you see mistakes that any of today's speakers made – things which, if they had done them, might have produced an even better result?
3. How do you help someone who isn't motivated to do an assignment, to do it? How do you help someone who *isn't* motivated to know whether the Book of Mormon is true, into someone who *wants* to know?
4. How much of the time in a typical lesson should be spent following up on the commitments you had asked your investigators to keep? How much of the time should you devote to teaching them how to keep the next commitments you're asking them to make? And how much should be spent teaching them the doctrines in our four lessons?
5. What changes do you feel you need to make in the way you plan, prepare, teach and follow up with your investigators?"

President Wheelwright concluded, "As we discuss these questions, you may want to keep the sheet that Elders Quinn and Adams gave you in your hand. Hopefully you took careful notes on it, so that you can refer to the details of these experiences as we discuss. So – let's start with question #1. What's your answer?"