
The Onward and Upward Climb

A Returning Missionary's Homecoming Plan

ONWARD AND UPWARD

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Before You Begin — The Firsts You Have Already Done

As you began your mission, you had no idea how many "first" things you would be doing in your service to Christ and His children, but you had faith in Him and your call to serve. You continually stepped out into the dark unknown of each assignment with no light to guide your path other than the increasing trust and confidence gained by "going and doing" ([1 Nephi 3:7](#)) as prompted by the light of Christ's Spirit ([Moroni 7:16](#)). As you followed this pattern, you witnessed many good things come to pass and learned that you did not need to see "the end" result to engage in the effort ([Ether 12:6](#)).

And so it will be going forward: many new firsts without the light of the certainty of experience to guide you — the arm of flesh ([2 Nephi 4:34](#)). The whole purpose of what follows is designed to ensure that your hard-won confidence and trust in the ample arm of His mercy ([Jacob 6:5](#)) does not wane or wax cold ([Matthew 24:12](#)), diminish or disappear, but instead grows stronger and stronger unto the brightness of a perfect day ([D&C 50:24](#)). As you press forward in your quest to become a fully consecrated disciple ([2 Nephi 31:20](#)), the mission promise that His angels will surround you ([D&C 84:88](#)) will continue to be your blessing and reward. Therefore, rest if you must, but continue to press forward — ever onward and upward!

Introduction — Why This Plan Exists

This plan is the fruit of a long study, and it may help to know where it came from before you use it.

We began in the war chapters of the Book of Mormon, and we did not read them as battle stories. We read them as one repeating pattern. A people at the very height of its strength begins to fall *from the inside*, long before an enemy ever arrives — and then it is restored. We carried that pattern into the long, sobering saga of the Old Testament. There we found Israel's weary cycle of backsliding, her fickle kings and shepherds, the northern kingdom swept away and Judah preserved by a single thin thread. Out of that study we built an instrument. It names the exact places where a soul gives way — or a family, or a whole covenant people. It measures how close that soul stands to collapse, and it prescribes the way back up.

We built it because the danger it names is *our* danger, now. Modern covenant Israel is drifting toward the very apostasy the record warns of. And it is drifting not in famine but **in the midst of a cornucopia** of restored light, truth, covenants, and structural safety. That is

the strange peril the scriptures single out ([Deuteronomy 8](#)). It is the land of plenty, not the wilderness of want, that most often makes a people forget the God who brought them there.

This Homecoming Plan turns that whole instrument toward one soul at one decisive moment. It turns it toward **you, the returning missionary**. You are about to cross from the wilderness that formed you into the land that will test you. To make that crossing with your fortress intact, you must learn to hold *from within* what the mission has been holding for you *from without*.

The plan does five things:

1. **Reframes the return** — the mission was not the peak; home is the next pitch of the same climb. Onward, and upward.
2. **Audits the scaffolding** — wall by wall, what the mission held for you, and your own plan to hold it now.
3. **Names what actually goes missing** — Divine Math, and why adding your old life back up does not restore what the mission gave you.
4. **Phases the transition** — what to do the first week, the first month, the first year.
5. **Names the one non-negotiable** — the daily feast on the word that carries all the rest.

Parts 1–3 are the frame — what happened to you, and why it matters. **Parts 4–6 are the practice** — what to do about it, week by week.

How to use it: read it once through for the frame, then work the Scaffolding Audit on paper *before you fly home*. Then keep the week/month/year plan somewhere you'll see it. It was written with one returning Elder in mind, but it will serve every Elder and Sister asking the honest question he asked.

A word before the Climb

You served with everything you had. For a year and a half, or two years, you set aside school, work, dating, and the ordinary business of becoming an adult, and you gave your whole focus to one thing: finding the elect who were ready, bringing them to Christ and His covenants, and helping them bring their families with them. You climbed higher than you ever had. That was real, and it is yours forever.

And now, near the end, an honest worry has surfaced — the same one a faithful Elder named to his grandparents on a Monday call:

"I got a glimpse of what life will be like — not as a missionary — around people who don't share the same principles, who present counter-ideas that don't seem too crazy. There are too many who go inactive after serving a mission, and I don't want that to be me. If I'm not careful — if I don't build my life on this foundation — it will easily slip."

He was right about the danger, and he was right about the answer, too. When his grandfather asked him what he thought he could do about it, the Elder found it himself: *"Hold tightly to the iron rod."* This whole plan is built around the answer he reached for. Know this: You are not failing if you ask his question — you are seeking wisdom. Here is where it begins.

Part 1 — The mission was not the peak

The temptation, the day you take off the badge, is to feel that the mission was the summit of your spiritual life and that everything after is downhill. **That is the one lie to refuse.** You did not step off that plane onto a summit. **You stepped onto a plateau** — and a plateau is a good place, an earned place. It is where a climber stops to catch his breath, look back down the face he just came up, take a fresh bearing on where the trail goes next, and then shoulder the pack again. Every hard ascent has them. What a plateau is *not* is a destination. The first law of the whole fortress is this: *there is no standing still on the mountain; the moment you decide you've arrived, the descent has already begun.* **The plateau is not the peak** — it is the pause before the next pitch. So survey the ground, get your bearings, and go again. Being at home is not the bottom of the hill; it is **the next, harder pitch of the same ascent.** Onward, and upward!

Here is the truer picture, and it is straight out of scripture you already love: Your mission was your **wilderness** — the place where the Lord "humbled thee, and proved thee, to know what was in thine heart" ([Deuteronomy 8:2–3](#)). It was the forge. Now you cross into the **land of plenty** — school, career, dating, income, comfort. And Deuteronomy is blunt about which land is more dangerous: not the wilderness of hardship, but the land of abundance, where the danger flips to *forgetting* — "beware... lest thou say in thine heart, My power... hath gotten me this" ([Deuteronomy 8:11–17](#)). You are not leaving the hard part. You are entering the part the scriptures warn about most.

So the goal is **not to reproduce the mission.** You are not meant to keep mission *intensity* forever; that was basic training, not the whole campaign. The goal is **integration** — to carry the same undivided heart *into* an ordinary life rather than living it apart from ordinary life. The model is Daniel: he rose to the top of Babylon's schools and Babylon's court, and he kept the window open toward Jerusalem and would not defile himself ([Daniel 1:8](#); [6:10](#)). **The mantle of full-time ministry comes off. The discipleship does not.** You trade the badge for Daniel's open window.

And one more truth for the worry itself: **the discipline you're afraid of losing is not in the scaffolding.** The schedule and the companion did not give you the capacity — they *revealed* a capacity that is now yours. The mission *proved* you can live consecrated. That proof does not expire when the structure comes down. You are not starting over; you are re-sourcing, from the inside, what the mission was holding for you from the outside.

Part 2 — The Scaffolding Audit (do this before you fly home)

First, meet the king who never did this audit

There is a king in the Old Testament whose whole life is a warning written for the exact moment you are standing in. His name is **Joash**, and almost nobody knows his story. You should.

Judah's throne had been seized by a murderous queen named Athaliah, who killed every child of the royal family to secure it. One infant survived — Joash — hidden in the temple by the high priest **Jehoiada**. For six years that baby was the entire future of the covenant line. At seven, Jehoiada crowned him, renewed the covenant, and put the nation back on its feet.

And Joash was *good*. Genuinely good. He repaired the temple, restored the worship, and reigned well for decades. The record says it plainly:

*"And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD **all the days of Jehoiada the priest.**" (2 Kings 12:2)*

Read that last clause again. It is one of the most quietly devastating sentences in scripture.

Because Jehoiada died. And here is what happened next:

"Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them. And they left the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served groves and idols." (2 Chronicles 24:17–18)

The man who had been righteous for forty years turned away from all he stood for inside a single chapter. And it got worse. When Jehoiada's own son Zechariah — the son of the man who had saved Joash's life — stood up and warned him, **Joash had him stoned to death in the courtyard of the very temple he had rebuilt** (2 Chronicles 24:20–22).

Here is the diagnosis, and it is the whole reason this section exists. **Joash never owned his faith. He borrowed it.** Every wall of his fortress was being held up from the outside by one good man standing next to him. He had a watchman, so he was correctable. He had a mentor, so he remembered the Source. He had accountability, so he kept his word. And the day the scaffolding came down, there was nothing underneath it — because he had never done the work of putting anything there.

He is not a wicked man in this story. He is an un-audited one.

You are about to walk out of the most complete scaffolding any young disciple is ever given. A schedule. A companion at your elbow every hour. A mission president. A white handbook. Faithful families the world over praying morning and night for your success. Standards enforced from outside. All of it comes down in a single day, at an airport, and nobody will hand you a replacement.

Joash is not here to frighten you. He is here so you will do the next thing on this page **before** you get on the plane — while there is still someone holding the walls, and time to learn how to hold them yourself.

Now, the audit

The mission held up half your walls with external structure. The one move that carries the whole transition is to name, wall by wall, **what the mission was holding for you — and your plan to hold it yourself**. Fill the right-hand column in your own words. This is the plan that young Elder's question was reaching for.

Wall	What the mission held for you	Your plan to hold it yourself
1 • Keep climbing	the schedule, daily goals, constant improvement	<i>your own simple daily rule of life — the climb without a mission president</i>
2 • Remember the Source	miracles and testimony, daily	<i>a way to rehearse gratitude so the mission becomes a living source, not a nostalgic peak</i>
3 • One undivided heart	total, single-eyed focus	<i>how you keep God first while school, work, money, and dating re-enter — name the "thorns" now</i>
4 • No looking down	no possessions, no status, all equal	<i>guarding against status and comparison as they return</i>
5 • Face the truth	doctrine immersed daily	<i>how you'll meet secular and academic challenge without the daily armor</i>
6 • Welcome correction	a companion and leaders, 24/7	<i>the one accountable person you will choose — mentor, honest friend, future spouse (your companion is gone)</i>
7 • Stay united	constant companionship, one purpose	<i>the covenant community you'll build — ward, roommates, eventually family</i>
8 • Keep your word	the standards as an external rule	<i>self-governed integrity with no handbook</i>

Wall	What the mission held for you	Your plan to hold it yourself
9 • Follow / become a servant	a clear calling and hierarchy	whom you'll follow; how you'll serve with no title
10 • Guard your weak point	rules as guardrails (media, time, environment)	the guardrails you build before the old appetites return — set these first
11 • Strength with mercy	a culture of meekness	carrying strength into competitive adult life without hardening
12 • Hand it on	teaching investigators and converts	turning your ministry toward a future spouse and children — "when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32)

*The rule of the audit: for every wall the mission was holding, you don't need a grand plan — you need a small, real, self-chosen one. Marker 10 (your guardrails) and Marker 6 (your chosen watchman) are the two to set **before** you land — and they are, not by accident, the exact two walls Joash never built for himself.*

Part 3 — Math That Doesn't Work

Somewhere on the flight home, most missionaries do a quiet piece of unconscious math. It goes like this.

Before the mission, my life was work, school, and the people I loved. Family, friends, church, maybe dating. Then I traded all of that for two years of one thing.

Now I hand back the badge. **I keep who I became** — I am not the same person who got on that plane, and nobody can take that from me. **I let go of the skills**, because nobody knocks doors in Provo and the first lesson has no use at a job interview. Then I pick the old life back up.

Keep the growth. Drop what no longer applies. Add back the rest. Balanced.

That is a careful ledger. Every line of it is defensible. And it is still wrong — not wrong by a little. Wrong about what kind of problem it is.

First, answer one question honestly

Were you more content in your last year before the mission, or in your last year on it?

Take your time. Nearly every missionary answers the same way.

Now look at what that answer means. **Before the mission you had *more* going on** — school, work, friends, family, a whole ordinary life. On the mission you had **less**. Two years of doing one thing, in a small apartment, with one companion.

More things, less joy. Fewer things, more joy.

So whatever made those two years feel the way they felt, **it was not the number of things in your life**. You already know this. You have simply never been handed the words for it.

What actually changed

Here is the same math, written a second way. It is only two ideas, and the second one is the whole point.

Some things in a life are **items**. You can count them. Work is an item. School is an item. Your friends, your family, your calling — items. You add them up.

But one thing in a life is not an item. **It is what all the items are *for***. It is a multiplier. Call it your purpose, your reason for being, your center — the one thing that made getting out of bed at 6:30 a decision you had made early on, and easy to maintain.

Written out:

Before: Life = (work + school + people) × 1

Mission: Life = (one purpose) × a very large number

Home: Life = who you became + (work + school + people) × 1

Read the middle line again. **The mission's sum was tiny. Its multiplier was enormous.** That is why a narrowly focused life felt so large.

Now read the third line, and notice where *who you became* sits. **It is an ITEM added on. It is not doing any multiplying.** That is the part you are least likely to be warned about, because most of the warning you get is running **Human Math**.

And that brings me to the thing I most want you to carry out of this — the reason it is written down instead of spoken, so that you can come back to it.

There are two kinds of math running in a man's life, and very few realize that there is a second one, let alone name it.

Human Math adds. Divine Math multiplies.

So let me tell you exactly what Divine Math is, because you have probably never been given a name for it.

Divine Math is the internal, always-running, subconscious calculator that is trying to keep your life in balance from a celestial perspective. It never shuts off. It has been running the entire time you have been out. **Human Math does not even know it exists, so it cannot begin to acknowledge it** — and it is a power that moves a man onto an ever higher and more exalted plane of performance.

Now read that again slowly, because there is something in it for you today.

If that calculator is always running, then it is running right now. And it is reporting a number.

That unease you have been feeling about coming home is not weakness and it is not ingratitude. It is the readout. Divine Math has already run the arithmetic on the life you are about to walk into, and it is telling you the answer. **You simply have had no display to read it on and no words to say it in.** That is what this is for.

Human Math counts what is in your life. It is honest, it is careful, and it is what every good person around you will use to reassure you that things are filling back up. **Divine Math asks a different question altogether: not how much is in your life, but what is multiplying it.**

You have been living inside Divine Math for two years, and it has most likely gone unnamed. From here on I am going to call it exactly that — and I want you to know it well enough that you cannot unsee it.

Put real numbers on it

Pick a number for what one part of your life is worth. Say each part is worth 3. The number itself does not matter. **Only what happens to it matters.**

Before the mission — three parts, nothing multiplying them:

$$3 + 3 + 3 = 9 \rightarrow \times 1 \rightarrow 9$$

On the mission — one part, one purpose, and a multiplier that was real. Call it 10:

$$3 \rightarrow \times 10 \rightarrow 30$$

Stop on that. **You went from three things to one thing, and the total went from 9 to 30.** Your life got smaller and three times bigger *at the same time*. That is not a feeling you had. **That is arithmetic.**

Coming home — three parts again, plus what you became. Call that 2:

$$3 + 3 + 3 = 9 \rightarrow \times 1 \rightarrow 9 \rightarrow + 2 \rightarrow 11$$

Nine, then thirty, then eleven.

Everyone around you is counting the *parts* — three, then one, then three — and telling you that you are back to normal. But **YOU** are not looking at the parts. **You are looking at 30 and 11.**

Counting the parts is Human Math. The distance between 11 and 30 is Divine Math.

Now try to add your way back

Here is the piece worth doing on your fingers.

You are sitting at 11 and you remember 30. So you do what everybody does. **You add.** Another class. A better job. A calling. A relationship. A side business. The gym.

Stop right there and notice which calculator you just picked up. Adding is Human Math. It is very likely the only tool anyone has handed you, so of course you reached for it. **Now watch exactly what it can and cannot do.**

Add a fourth part: $3 + 3 + 3 + 3 = 12$, $+ 2 = 14$

A fifth: **17**

A sixth: **20**

Keep going and see where it ends. **To reach 30 by adding alone, you need nine parts** — nine real commitments, each one as heavy as school or work, all running at once, forever.

Nobody has room for nine. You would come apart somewhere around five. **And you would come apart at 17.**

That is Human Math giving you everything it has — nine commitments, to reach a number you were holding two years ago with one.

Now put that calculator down and pick up the other one:

One part. Multiplier back to 10. $3 \times 10 = 30$

That is Divine Math, and it took one line.

One thing multiplied beat nine things added. That is why a returned missionary who is genuinely busy — classes, job, ward, gym, dating, side hustle — can still feel like he is losing ground. **He is not lazy. He is adding.** He is running Human Math flawlessly — and **Human Math has never gotten anybody to 30.**

And here is what most of that room will not know

When you walk into your homecoming, **most of the people there will be doing Human Math on you.** They will not know they are doing it. **For most of them it is the only math they have ever been handed.**

Here is what Human Math sees when it looks at your two years:

He served a mission. One more good thing, on a list of good things. A line on the record of a righteous life. **An item. Added.**

And they will be genuinely, honestly happy about it. They will hug you and mean every word. **They are not wrong about a single thing they say.** They are simply *counting*.

Here is what actually happened to you, and few in that room are likely to have been taught it.

You did not add a mission to your life. You made a connection to God that multiplied it — and then you lived inside that multiplication, hour after hour, for two years, until it felt like ordinary weather.

That is why so few warn you. A man cannot warn you about losing something he does not know you had.

They are celebrating an addition. You are about to lose a multiplier. Both of those things will be true in the same room on the same afternoon, and only one person there will be able to feel it.

And you will not be able to explain it to them — not because they are shallow, but because Human Math has no word for the thing that is leaving.

Now you have one.

Why 1 is the sneakiest number in arithmetic

There are exactly two operations that leave no evidence behind.

Add zero — nothing changes. **Multiply by one** — nothing changes.

That is your whole situation in one line. **Your multiplier did not go to zero.** If it had, you would have known within a week — a life at zero is a crisis, and crises get help. **It went to one.**

And $\times 1$ **looks completely fine.** Your life still adds up. You are still busy, still faithful, still going to church, still moving. Nothing is missing from the list — **because a multiplier was never on the list.**

A man at $\times 1$ is not in trouble. He is just never going to see 30 again.

Human Math has no column for a multiplier, so it will score that life as a good one. Divine Math knows better — and so, quietly, does he.

So what is the multiplier, actually?

Fair question, and you should not accept a vague answer. **If I cannot tell you what the number actually is, I have handed you a nice picture and nothing you can use on a Tuesday.**

So here it is. **Your multiplier is your honest answer to one question, asked of any hour of your day:**

Who is this for?

That is the whole thing. **Not how hard you worked. Not how spiritual it felt. Who it was for.**

On your mission you never once had to ask. The answer was printed on your chest, and everybody could read it — including you. Every hour, every door, every meal, every study session had a name on it that was not yours. **Two years without ever having to wonder who the day belonged to.**

Then you took the badge off, and the question came back — and it is unlikely anyone told you it had.

	Who is this hour for?	What it does
× 1	Me. My grade, my paycheck, my comfort, my future	counts for exactly what it is
× 3	Someone who already loves me — family, a friend, someone who will thank me	counts for more
× 10	God, and whoever He put in front of me today — whether it works, whether anyone sees, whether anyone thanks me	multiplies

Read that ladder carefully, because none of those rows is a sin. × 1 is not wickedness. **It is a rate.** Eating breakfast is × 1 and you still have to eat. Paying rent is × 1. **The problem is never one × 1 hour. It is a whole life lived on the top row and none of it on the bottom.**

And here is the part that will surprise you

The activity does not have to change at all.

Take one hour. Studying chemistry.

- Studying so you get the grade you need — **× 1.**
- Studying because you intend to become a man who can carry weight for other people, and this is where that gets built — **more.**
- Studying beside the kid who is failing, and slowing yourself down to help him — **more again.**

Now look at your calendar in all three cases. It is identical. Same hour, same book, same room, same tired eyes. **That is exactly why Human Math cannot see any of this — and why nobody around you will ever be able to tell you what your number is.**

Only you know who the hour was for. Which means only you can set your multiplier, and only you can let it slide back to 1.

The scripture that shows the work

King Benjamin handed you this equation long before you were born:

"When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God." (Mosiah 2:17)

Read it as arithmetic and not as poetry. The act does not change. **Who it counts for does.** An ordinary hour, given to a person, is credited to God. **That is the multiplication — and it is the one place I know of where the Lord shows His work.**

Which tells you what a purpose actually is

Now you can see what that placeholder I am going to ask you for really is.

It is a **standing answer** to *who is this for* — decided once, in advance, on a good day, **so that you are not renegotiating it at 6:30 on a cold morning when you are tired and nobody is watching.**

That is all a purpose has ever been: the answer you already gave.

You did not lose the skills. You lost the multiplier

The skills are the loss you can see. You will not knock doors again. You will not teach the first lesson again. **That loss is real and it is small** — those were never what made the two years feel the way they did.

The multiplier is what actually came off with the badge. You handed it back at the pulpit on the day you reported, and nobody mentioned it, because it does not appear anywhere on the list of things you turned in.

And keeping who you became will not save you

This is the line in your ledger you trust most, and you are right to trust it. **You did grow. That growth is real and it is permanent and it is yours.**

But look at what kind of thing it is. **Who you became is a height. The multiplier is a climb rate.**

You can stand higher than you did at eighteen and be **completely stopped** — and the two feel identical from the inside, because you are, in fact, higher up than you were. **The growth is exactly what will convince you that nothing is wrong.** It is also what will convince your parents, your bishop, and every person who tells you how much the mission changed you.

They are all right. And none of it is the multiplier.

So look hard at that third line. **You did not come home to balance. You came home to where you started — standing a little higher, and moving at the same speed you were at eighteen. That is exactly the problem.** At eighteen you did not know there was another speed. Now you do.

You are not falling. You are being set back down at a rate you already found thin — and everyone around you is calling it getting back to normal.

Why the obvious answers will not fix it

You are about to be told, kindly and constantly, to go get four things: **a career. An education. A marriage and a family. A calling in the ward.**

Get all four. Every one of them is good, and you should want them.

That list is Human Math's answer, and it is a fine answer. It is simply the wrong operation.

But not one of them can be your multiplier. Here is why, and it is not about how worthy they are.

They are items. They live inside the sum. **A thing that is being added cannot also be the thing doing the multiplying.**

Three things follow, and each one is worth knowing before it happens to you.

Ask an item to be your multiplier and it will break. A wife asked to be the meaning of a man's life has been handed a job no person can do, and the marriage bends under a weight that was never hers to carry. The same is true of a job, a degree, and one day your children.

Items come and go on somebody else's schedule. A calling is given, and later released. A job is offered, and later lost. A spouse you have not met yet cannot hold anything for you today. **Anything held for you by someone else is scaffolding** — and you have just read

what happens to a man whose walls were all held up from outside.

And church service is the one that fools good people. It is an item too. It is assigned to you, timed by someone else, and released when someone else decides. **A man can be genuinely busy in the kingdom and be running an unmultiplied life** — and he will be thanked for it the whole way, because from the outside, service and purpose look exactly alike.

Why it has to be every day

One more thing from grade school, and it matters more than it sounds.

In any math problem, you multiply before you add. You learned that as a rule about which part to do first. It is also true about your day.

Whatever your multiplier is set to when you wake up gets applied to everything that comes after — the class you didn't want, the shift you didn't want, the conversation you weren't ready for. You do not get to add your day up first and then decide afterward how much it counted. **The multiplying already happened.**

That is why this is a morning practice and not an evening one. You set the number *before* you find out what the day holds.

Divine Math always multiplies first. Human Math waits until bedtime to add the day up, and then wonders why the total came out so thin.

And the number does not hold itself. Your multiplier is not a tank you fill once. **It is more like a fire.** It goes out on its own unless something is put on it today.

You already have this in your bones from the mission. Part 5 of this plan says it plainly: your spirit loses strength **in direct proportion to how long it has been since it was last fed.** That is not a poem. That is a rate. **It leaks on a schedule, whether or not you are paying attention.**

Which means:

A purpose you tend once a week is a purpose leaking six days out of seven.

And here is the cruel part — **nothing feels wrong while it is happening.** You do not fall off the mountain. **You just stop gaining altitude.** The climb flattens out, slowly, over months. And a man who has stopped climbing looks exactly like a man who is resting — including to himself.

That is Wall 1. Keep climbing. It is the first wall on the list because it is the first to go, and because when it goes, it takes the other eleven with it — quietly, one at a time. **The test is the one you already know: have you named your next pitch?**

So: choose a placeholder, today

You are twenty-one. **You are not going to know your life's mission by Thursday**, and anyone who tells you that you should is adding a weight you do not need.

But you cannot afford to run at $\times 1$ while you wait.

A placeholder is simply how you set the multiplier while you wait — and it is the one move in Divine Math that nobody else can make for you.

So choose a **placeholder** — an honest, temporary center, held on purpose until the real one becomes clear. It is allowed to be temporary. That is not a failure of faith. **That is how it works, and it is how it worked for the man who wrote this.**

A good placeholder passes six tests:

	It must be	Because
1	Not one of the four	an item can't multiply the sum it's in
2	Yours — chosen, not assigned	nobody can release you from it
3	Doable today, even on a bad day	it leaks daily, so it's fed daily
4	Bigger than you, and never finished	anything you can complete has an end date
5	Portable	new city, new campus, hard semester
6	Allowed to change	when the real one arrives, that's arrival — not failure

Ten that pass

Do not read these politely and move on. They are here because "choose a placeholder" is useless advice without something to choose from. **Every one of these clears all six tests. None of them is a career, a degree, a marriage, or a calling.**

	The placeholder	What it actually means
1	Learn the doctrine well enough to teach it to someone who does not want it	Not study for a class. Study for the person who will ask you the hard question five years from now, in a kitchen, with no manual in reach

	The placeholder	What it actually means
2	Carry one person nobody is assigned to	One name, chosen by you, in your prayers and on your calendar — and never because a bishop asked
3	Hand it to the one who is where you were	A deacon, a future missionary, a new convert. You give the two years away on purpose (Luke 22:32)
4	Be the one in every room who tells the truth kindly	Not the loudest. Not the most correct. The one who can be trusted with a hard sentence
5	Become the man your family will need before there is a family	The trap is letting this quietly turn into <i>get married</i> . The work is you , and it is due whether or not anybody shows up
6	Keep the record of your own becoming	Your feast log, extended into a life. Written daily, read back yearly. You will not remember this year otherwise
7	Become your family's memory	Gather the stories and the names while the people who hold them are still here to tell you
8	Master one hard thing that will never make you money	An instrument, a language, a distance, a craft. Proof that you can still pay a price for something with no payout
9	Get strong enough that your body is never the reason you cannot	The appetites the mission held at bay come back first. This is Wall 10 turned into a purpose instead of a rule
10	Understand the ones who left	Learn honestly <i>why</i> people leave — so that when it is someone you love, you can love them accurately instead of arguing with them

Two ways to get this wrong

The first trap: choosing one of the four in disguise. *"My purpose is to provide for my family."* That is a career wearing a coat. *"My purpose is to serve in the Church."* That is a calling wearing a coat. **Test it: could someone else give it to you, or take it away? Then it is an item.**

The second trap: choosing something too large to pay today. *"My purpose is to bring the world to Christ."* True, and unpayable on a Tuesday when you have two exams and a headache. **A placeholder you cannot feed on your worst day is not a placeholder. It is a wish.**

Small and daily beats large and occasional. Every single time.

Write it down before you land. One sentence. **Then feed it tomorrow morning, and the morning after that.**

The mission gave you two years of proof that you can live like this. It did not give you the multiplier — it *loaned* you one, so that you would know what one feels like and never again mistake a busy life for a multiplied one.

*The mission taught you Divine Math for two years without once calling it by name.
Coming home is where you find out whether you learned it — or only borrowed it.*

Now you choose your own. That is the whole difference between the two years behind you and the fifty ahead.

Part 4 — The plan by horizon: the first week, the first month, the first year

Do not try to rebuild everything at once. Structure comes back in layers.

The First Week — Landing

The scaffolding is gone overnight, and the vacuum is real. Two ditches to avoid: collapsing into relief and aimlessness, or white-knuckling to keep mission intensity. Do neither. **Keep exactly one non-negotiable: the daily feast on the word** (see Part 5) — it re-posts the watch (Marker 1) and holds the anchor while everything else is unbuilt. Let yourself grieve the mantle honestly; it was holy, and laying it down is a real loss. Sleep, reconnect with family, and choose the *one* person who will be your first watchman now that your companion is gone. That's the week. Survival and gratitude.

The First Month — Rebuilding the structure within

Now run the Scaffolding Audit on paper, deliberately, wall by wall. Then build **two or three keystone habits** — not thirty — that carry the most weight: the daily feast (already kept), a weekly worship-and-renewal rhythm (Sabbath, temple when you can), and one accountable relationship. **Set your guardrails (Marker 10) before the temptations arrive** — especially around the appetites the mission's structure kept at bay. Re-enter school, work, and dating *with the undivided heart named out loud*, so the thorns don't choke the root before you notice them growing ([Matthew 13:22](#); [Luke 8:14](#)).

The First Year — Integration

This is where consecration becomes integration for good. Live the Daniel posture: excel in "Babylon's court" — your studies, your work, your relationships — with the window kept open toward Jerusalem: daily worship, temple, kept covenants. Let your identity settle in the truth that you are **not a returned missionary living off a past peak, but a disciple whose mission was basic training for a lifelong campaign**. Begin the Handoff in earnest — date toward an eternal family, become a servant-leader in your ward with no title needed. And at year's end, re-audit: which walls did you successfully learn to hold yourself, and which are still leaning on nothing? Then keep climbing.

Joash made it about forty years before the audit came due. He simply never knew it was owed or coming. And now you know both.

Part 5 — The one thing that carries all of it

If you keep only one thing, keep **the daily feast on the words of Christ**. "Feast upon the words of Christ; for... the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do" (2 [Nephi 32:3](#)). The rod of iron is the word of God, and holding fast to it is what carries a soul through the mist so "the fiery darts of the adversary" cannot overpower it (1 [Nephi 11:25](#); [15:24](#)). Your spirit, like your body, loses strength "in direct proportion to the interval... from its last nourishment" — so feast daily, first thing, even if it's five honest minutes. Every wall in the audit is repaired by the word fed to it; keep the word, and the rest can always be rebuilt.

And here is the method, not just the charge. A companion piece travels with this plan — ***Feast on the Words of Christ: The Daily Practice*** — and it is the ten-step pattern for actually doing what this section asks: name your greatest need in writing, ask to be led to the answer, feast until the Spirit confirms it, log it, give thanks, and carry the feeling into the day. Read this plan for the *map*. Read that one for the *morning*. If you do nothing else in your first week home, do those ten steps once, and then again tomorrow.

This is also the anchor that travels. Three anchors hold the door of return open: **the temple** — a place to return to; **the covenant** — the *right* to return; and **the word**, meaning the scriptures and the living prophets — the *map* home. Of the three, the word is the one you can **carry**. It is the anchor that goes with you to a new city, a new campus, a hard semester, a season when the temple is far and the ward is unfamiliar. In Babylon, with no temple and no king, the covenant survived on the word alone. It will do the same for you.

*(The mentor/guardian angel who built this plan has watched it hold across a lifetime and a large family, and his witness is blunt: of all he has known who fell away, **every one first let go of the daily feast on the word** — **without exception**. It is not one discipline among many. It is the one that keeps all the others alive. Joash's story is the same witness told from the other end: he had a man beside him instead of the word inside him [Alma 12:13], and when the man was gone, so was the king.)*

And this is the mercy: **you do not hold the fortress by willpower**. "It is not simply a matter of our striving... we can call on the grace of Jesus Christ to help us" (President Christofferson, *The Character of Christ* — *Liahona*, May 2026). The climb is real labor, but it is *enabled* labor. You are not carrying this alone, and you were never meant to.

And never were. While you served, **millions prayed for you every day** — by name and by no name at all. Ward councils and Primary classes, families at their kitchen tables, a grandmother in a country you will never visit, the Saints of the whole Church pleading every

week for the missionaries. You could not see them, and they held you up anyway. That did not stop at the airport. The unseen ranks who guarded your success are still praying for you, and the promise that His angels would surround you (D&C 84:88) was not a promise for the mission only. **Recall them when the climb feels solitary. It never is as long as you continue to place your trust and faith in His ample arm of mercy.**

Part 6 — Choose your watchman, build your fold

On the mission you had a watchman at your side every hour. That is the single largest piece of scaffolding to come down, and the one most people never replace — which is why so many drift quietly, unwarned. **Before that drift can happen, choose today:** one person you authorize to tell you the hard truth and ask you the real questions — a parent, a mentor, a friend, and in time a spouse. And build your fold: a ward you belong to, not just attend; people whose souls' welfare you speak of and who speak of yours ([Moroni 6:5](#)). The strong carry the weak, and are carried in turn ([D&C 84:106](#)). You spent two years as a shepherd. Keep shepherding — and let yourself be shepherded.

And note the sharpest edge of Joash's story: he did not merely lose his watchman to death. **When a new one stood up in Jehoiada's place, Joash killed him.** That is the real end-state of an un-audited soul — not just unguarded, but hostile to being guarded. The distance between "I no longer have someone who tells me the truth" and "I no longer *want* someone who tells me the truth" is shorter than most would expect. Choose your watchman now while you still want one.

And about the loved ones who do not share the faith — the friends who poke fun at what you hold sacred, the family who have set the standards aside: you have already found the truer path, and named it on that Monday call. Distancing yourself is the weakest option; it protects nothing and heals no one. The way forward is to keep your own hand firm on the rod, and then love them without condition — the way the Savior would: near, at arm's length not far away. Respect their agency, ask the same for yours, and let love, not argument, be the whole of your witness. You can hold the covenant with one hand and them by the other.

A trail marker, at the end

You are crossing from the wilderness that formed you into the land that will test you. And you cross it with something most of your peers do not have: a proven capacity for consecrated living, and the memory of Whose you are. The mission was never the summit. It was the place where you learned to climb. This plateau is for catching your breath and taking a bearing, not for pitching a tent. Now climb onward, and upward, all the way to your heavenly home — and take everyone you love with you.

What's in the Pack

This homecoming plan is the map forward. The "Pack" is the tool kit you travel with. Its contents are listed here in order of their importance. Use them as prescribed for a safe and successful climb!

The What, Why, How, and When of Personal Preparation

Feasting on the Words of Christ — The Doctrine (4 pages; filed as *Feast on the Words of Christ — The Daily Practice*).

The daily ten step discipline to receive revelation and the Feast Log — the morning routine and the record of it. One line a day to capture in the log is the whole discipline. It is the practice whose loss predicts every other loss.

The Practice Check-in — Staying Safely on the Path (1 page; filed as *Staying Safely on the Path — The Practice Check*).

Nine practices and the cadence that keeps them real. Five connect you UPWARD to God. Four connect you OUTWARD, to His children. Ask one honest question each week: Which wall slipped in the least, and what is the smallest action that restores it?

Wisdom — Lessons from the Past (25 pages; filed as *Where the Walls Came From — A Study Guide*).

Where the twelve walls in Part 2 come from and why you should trust them. The war chapters, the kings of Israel, and one pattern found in both. Every scripture is a live link, so you can check every claim yourself. Study the terrain so you are prepared for what's around the corner.

The Twelve Walls — Your Own Reading (4 pages).

The working sheet that goes with *Wisdom*. Print it, mark it, date it. Then do it again in six months. One reading is a snapshot. The second shows the direction of your travel.

Math That Doesn't Work (13 pages).

You are holding this one as Part 3. It also travels on its own, for someone who needs this perspective and nothing else.

Additional Resources for your Climb

Life Skills — a Church-sponsored Self-Reliance course.

Written for older youth and young single adults, to build the practical, spiritual, and temporal skills that carry you into work, school, and adult life. It gathers three courses into one (12 weeks) — *Personal Finances*, *Find a Better Job*, and *Education for Better Work* — built on *My Foundation for Self-Reliance*. Small groups, in person or online. [Sign up here](#). If no group is meeting near you, you can work through it on your own, or with friends.

Additional Self-Reliance courses.

Emotional Resilience. *Starting and Growing My Business*. Same shape: a small group, a facilitator, eight to twelve weeks, in person or online. [The full list is here](#). Pick one as you build out the first year — and the second, and the third.

One caution, and it comes from Part 3. These are items. Good ones, and worth adding. REMEMBER: an item is not a multiplier. Take the course **under** the purpose you chose, not instead of it.