
“Ye Cannot Go Amiss”

D&C 80:30

The Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation in March 1832 calling Stephen Burnett and his brother-in-law Eden Smith to “go ... and preach my gospel, whether to the north or to the south, to the east or to the west, it mattereth not, for ye cannot go amiss” (D&C 80:2–3). Their missionary assignment reveals an important principle: there are times and circumstances when it is important where an individual is called to serve, and there are times and circumstances when the area of assignment is not important. Within the principle, there is not a hint that the individual is unimportant.

The best example of this principle is the oft-told story of “The Currant Bush,” by Elder Hugh B. Brown.

I went out one morning and saw a currant bush. It had grown up over six feet high. It was going all to wood. There were no blossoms and no currants. I was raised on a fruit farm in Salt Lake before we went to Canada, and I knew what ought to happen to that currant bush. So I got some pruning shears and went after it, and I cut it down, and pruned it, and clipped it back until there was nothing left but a little clump of stumps.

It was just coming daylight, and I thought I saw on top of each of these little stumps what appeared to be a tear, and I thought the currant bush was crying. I was kind of simpleminded (and I haven’t entirely gotten over it), and I looked at it, and smiled, and said, “What are you crying about?” You know, I thought I heard that currant bush talk. And I thought I heard it say this: “How *could* you do this to me? ... I said, “Look, little currant bush, I *am* the gardener here, and I know what I want you to be.” ...

Years passed, and I found myself in England. I was in command of a cavalry unit in the Canadian Army. I had made rather rapid progress as far as promotions are concerned, and I held the rank of field officer in the British Canadian Army. And I was proud of my position. And there was an opportunity for me to become a general. I had taken all the examinations. I had the seniority. There was just one man between me and that which for ten years I had hoped to get, the office of general in the British Army. I swelled up with pride. And this one man became a casualty, and I received a telegram from London. It said: "Be in my office tomorrow morning at 10:00," signed by General Turner in charge of all Canadian forces.

I called in my valet, my personal servant. I told him to polish my buttons, to brush my hat and my boots, and to make me look like a general because that is what I was going to be. He did the best he could with what he had to work on, and I went up to London. I walked smartly into the office of the General, and I saluted him smartly, and he gave me the same kind of a salute a senior officer usually gives—a sort of "Get out of the way, worm!" He said, "Sit down, Brown."

Then he said, "I'm sorry I cannot make the appointment. You are entitled to it. You have passed all the examinations. You have the seniority. You've been a good officer, but I can't make the appointment. You are to return to Canada and become a training officer and a transport officer. Someone else will be made a general." That for which I had been hoping and praying for ten years suddenly slipped out of my fingers.

Then he went into the other room to answer the telephone, and I took a soldier's privilege of looking on his desk. I saw my personal history sheet. Right across the bottom of it in bold, block-type letters was written, "THIS MAN IS A MORMON." We were not very well liked in those days.

When I saw that, I knew why I had not been appointed. I already held the highest rank of any Mormon in the British Army. He came back and said, "That's all, Brown." I saluted him again, but not quite as smartly. I saluted out of duty and went out. I got on the train and started back to my town, 120 miles away, with a broken heart, with bitterness in my soul. And every click of the wheels on the rails seemed to say, "You are

a failure. You will be called a coward when you get home. You raised all those Mormon boys to join the army, then you sneak off home.”

I knew what I was going to get, and when I got to my tent, I was so bitter that I threw my cap and my saddle brown belt on the cot. I clinched my fists and I shook them at heaven. I said, “How could you do this to me, God? I have done everything I could do to measure up. There is nothing that I could have done—that I should have done—that I haven’t done. How could you do this to me?” I was as bitter as gall.

And then I heard a voice, and I recognized the tone of this voice. It was my own voice, and the voice said, “I am the gardener here. I know what I want you to do.” ...

I arose from my knees a humble man.¹

¹ Hugh B. Brown, “The Currant Bush,” *New Era*, April 2001.