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THOMAS S. MONSON

Answering the Call of Duty

Long ago President Thomas S. Monson committed to fulfill his duty to do the work of the Lord and to follow the example of Jesus Christ.

By Heidi S. Swinton

President Thomas S. Monson has said many times, “I like the word *duty*.” He considers it “something sacred.”¹ Of fulfilling his duty as the 16th President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he said, “I pledge my life, my strength—all that I have to offer—in serving [the Lord] and in directing the affairs of His Church in accordance with His will and by His inspiration.”²

Known for his service to others, President Monson has given away his suits and shoes when on assignments abroad and returned home in slacks and slippers. He has made it a practice to visit friends and acquaintances who need encouragement. He has blessed countless people at hospitals and care centers, followed the prompting to make phone calls, and spoken at funerals too numerous to count. He has delivered dinners, chickens ready for roasting, and books with a tender

inscription. His daily schedule as President of the Church is filled with meetings and appointments, but he always makes time for people—most often one at a time. In the annals of Church history, he will be known for his love of people and his expression of that love by giving them his time.

Jesus Christ’s Example of Duty

President Monson’s actions are driven by his testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. He said: “Although He came to earth as the Son of God, He humbly served those around Him. He came forth from heaven to live on earth as mortal man and to establish the kingdom of God. His glorious gospel reshaped the thinking of the world.”³ The Savior expressed His sense of duty when He proclaimed, “I came into the world to do the will of my father” (3 Nephi 27:13). With determination and gentle kindness born of



From top: President Monson emanates love for people as he shakes hands with Boy Scouts, accepts a gift (with his wife, Frances), guides a young girl at a groundbreaking, and waves to the congregation at general conference (with his wife).



Jesus Christ taught in the synagogue and at the well. He blessed little children and raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead.

eternal perspective, He “went about doing good, . . . for God was with him” (Acts 10:38).

President Monson notes that when the call of duty came to Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, He answered, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39). The Savior knew and responded time and again to His duty to guide, edify, and encourage all His Father’s children. President Monson said of this: “The Savior was ever up and about—teaching, testifying, and saving others. Such is our individual duty as members.”⁴

Learning to Fulfill His Duty

President Monson grew up in the Sixth-Seventh Ward in the Temple View Utah Stake. There he learned about his duty to fulfill his priesthood assignments under the guiding hands of wise priesthood leaders, and he gained knowledge and a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ from inspired teachers.

In 1950 at age 22, Thomas Spencer Monson was sustained as bishop of the Sixth-Seventh Ward. He applied what he had learned about duty to those who had taught him its meaning. He was father of the ward, the president of the Aaronic Priesthood, a provider for the poor and needy, the keeper of proper records, and the common judge in Israel. His duties were many, but he met them with his characteristic optimism.

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One of the bishop’s duties was to send to every serviceman a subscription to the *Church News* and to the *Improvement Era* and to write a personal letter to him each month. Since President Monson had served in the navy in World War II, he appreciated the importance of a letter from home. He had 23 ward members serving

in the military, so he called a sister in the ward to handle the details of mailing these letters. One evening he handed her the monthly stack of 23 letters.

“Bishop, don’t you ever get discouraged?” she asked. “Here is another letter to Brother Bryson. This is the 17th letter you have sent to him without a reply.”

“Well, maybe this will be the month,” he said. It was. The reply from Brother Bryson read: “Dear Bishop, I ain’t much at writin’ letters. Thank you for the *Church News* and magazines, but most of all thank you for the personal letters. I have turned over a new leaf. I have been ordained a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood. My heart is full. I am a happy man.”

President Monson saw in that letter the practical application of the adage “Do your duty, that is best. Leave unto the Lord the rest.” Years later, while attending a stake conference, he spoke of his experience of writing to the servicemen. After the meeting, a young man came up to him and asked,

“Bishop, do you remember me?”

Without a pause President Monson replied, “Brother Bryson! How are you? What are you doing in the Church?”

The former serviceman replied with great pleasure that he was fine and serving in his elders quorum presidency. “Thank you again for your concern for me and the personal letters which you sent and which I treasure.”⁵

Of events like these, President Monson said: “Often small acts of service are all that is required to lift and bless another: a question concerning a person’s family, quick words of encouragement, a sincere compliment, a small note of thanks, a brief telephone call. If we are observant and aware, and if we act on the promptings which come to us, we can accomplish much good.”⁶

Learning to Fulfill Our Duty

“As we follow in [Jesus Christ’s] steps today, we too will have an opportunity to bless the lives of others,” said President Monson. “Jesus invites us to give of ourselves: ‘Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind.’”⁷

Our prophet’s view of duty requires looking beyond personal ambition, success, convenience, or pleasure to seeing and responding to the greater good. “To find real happiness,” President Monson said, “we must seek for it in a focus outside ourselves. No one has learned the meaning of living until he has surrendered his ego to the service of his fellowmen. Service to others is akin to duty, the fulfillment of which brings true joy.”⁸

As President Monson asked everyone to stand whose life had been touched by the stake president, the congregation began to rise until everyone was standing.



He believes that friendship makes serving others easy. “A friend is more concerned about helping people than getting credit,” he said. “A friend cares. A friend loves. A friend listens. And a friend reaches out.”⁹

Years ago President Monson attended a stake conference in Star Valley, Wyoming, USA, with the assignment to reorganize the stake presidency. But he did more than fulfill that duty. He touched the lives of all who attended with a simple gesture of love as he released the stake president, E. Francis Winters, who had served for 23 years.

The day of the stake conference, the members filled the building. It seemed as if each one was saying “a silent *thank-you* to this noble leader,” who obviously had done his duty with whole-souled devotion. As President Monson stood to speak, he stated how long President Winters had presided in the stake and had been “a perpetual pillar of strength to everyone in the valley.” Then he was prompted to do something he has not done before or since. He asked everyone who had been touched by President Winters’s life to stand. The outcome was electrifying. Every person in the audience rose to his or her feet.

President Monson told the congregation, many of whose eyes were filled with tears, “This vast throng reflects not only individual feelings but also the gratitude of God for a life well lived.”¹⁰

Our Prophet’s Testimony of Duty

President Monson has given us these encouraging teachings regarding duty:

“Whatever our calling, regardless of our fears or anxieties, let us pray and then go and do, remembering the words of the Master, even the Lord Jesus Christ, who promised, ‘I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.’”¹¹

“We can strengthen one another; we have the capacity to notice the unnoticed. When we have eyes that see, ears that hear, and hearts that know and feel, we can reach out and rescue those for whom we have responsibility.”¹²

“Often small acts of service are all that is required to lift and bless another.”

“None of us lives alone—in our city, our nation, or our world. There is no dividing line between our prosperity and our neighbor’s poverty.”¹³

“There are feet to steady, hands to grasp, minds to encourage, hearts to inspire, and souls to save.”¹⁴

“Perhaps when we face our Maker, we will not be asked, ‘How many positions did you hold,’ but rather, ‘How many people did you help?’”¹⁵

“As we go about our daily lives, we discover countless opportunities to follow the example of the Savior. When our hearts are in tune with His teachings, we discover the unmistakable nearness of His divine help. It is almost as though we are on the Lord’s errand; and we then discover that, when we are on the Lord’s errand, we are entitled to the Lord’s help.”¹⁶

“By learning of Him, by believing in Him, by following Him, there is the capacity to become like Him. [Our] countenance can change; [our] heart can be softened; [our] step can be quickened; [our] outlook enhanced. Life becomes what it should become.”¹⁷

Like our prophet, President Thomas S. Monson, we can commit to fulfill our duty to do the work of the Lord and follow the example of Jesus Christ. ■

NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “Happy Birthday,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1995, 59.
2. Thomas S. Monson, “Looking Back and Moving Forward,” *Ensign*, May 2008, 90.
3. Thomas S. Monson, “The Bridge Builder,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 68.
4. Thomas S. Monson, “Anxiously Engaged,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 56.
5. See Thomas S. Monson, “The Call of Duty,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 39.
6. Thomas S. Monson, “Three Goals to Guide You,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 120–21.
7. Thomas S. Monson, “The Gifts of Christmas,” *Ensign*, Dec. 2003, 2.
8. Thomas S. Monson, “The Lord’s Way,” *Ensign*, May 1990, 93.
9. Thomas S. Monson, “To the Rescue,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 50.
10. Thomas S. Monson, “Your Eternal Home,” *Ensign*, May 2000, 54.
11. Thomas S. Monson, “They Pray and They Go,” *Ensign*, May 2002, 51.
12. Thomas S. Monson, “The Call to Serve,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 47.
13. Thomas S. Monson, “In Quest of the Abundant Life,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1988, 3.
14. Thomas S. Monson, “How Firm a Foundation,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 68.
15. Thomas S. Monson, “Faces and Attitudes,” *New Era*, Sept. 1977, 50.
16. Thomas S. Monson, “Windows,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 69.
17. Thomas S. Monson, “The Way of the Master,” *Ensign*, Jan. 2003, 4.