



How Could I Help?

I wanted to do something to help a family in need, but what?

BY APRIL A. LOVE

That Christmas season started out like any other, that is, until I decided to focus on following the Savior's example of loving and serving others.

I wanted to serve Him whose birth we were celebrating, and I wanted to find a way for my children to do the same. So I prayed daily throughout December, seeking guidance about how to do this. I felt that by helping others I was being an instrument in His hands and that I was doing His work.

I found many ways to serve others and felt the Christmas spirit stronger in my life. Soon I began to wonder if I was giving to Him or if He was giving to me. One such experience brought our family closer to the Savior as we helped a family in need.

I worked at a service project hosted by the sister missionaries in our area. After the project was completed, I asked the missionaries to contact me if they or anyone they knew needed assistance.

Only a few hours after I returned home, the phone rang.

It was the missionaries asking if I could drive a woman and her three small children home because their car had broken down. I agreed and quickly drove to pick up the stranded woman and children.

I picked up the family and began the 40-mile (64-km) drive that would take us to their home, which the woman said was near a lake. During the drive I became acquainted with the young woman and could tell that she cared deeply for her husband and children. As we got closer to the lake, I couldn't see any homes nearby and was shocked when she directed me to a small tent.

"Here it is," she said with a smile. "There's our home."

About that time her husband appeared through the tent flaps, and I soon learned that he had lost his job months before and was trying—unsuccessfully—to find another one. Being unable to pay rent, they had moved out of their apartment and were using a small tent as a temporary home.

Whenever the husband could find a ride to town, he looked for employment and worked at temporary jobs to provide for his family's needs. Once a week his wife traveled into town to buy groceries, all the while praying that their car would continue to run.



The family was grateful for the warm clothes, blankets, and food provided through the Relief Society of our ward, but they were even more grateful to Heavenly Father.

Their plan had worked for a few months, but it was now cold and keeping warm was difficult. Before long their money would be gone, and they would not be able to afford food or transportation.

Yet they seemed full of faith and were surprisingly optimistic. The woman simply said that they knew everything would be all right. They had prayed and knew God would watch over them. They thanked me warmly for giving them a ride home, and though I felt uncomfortable leaving them out there in that condition, they assured me that they would be fine.

All the way home I couldn't stop thinking about them and knew I had to do something more for them. But what? I wished my family had money to fix their car, to buy them food, or to pay for their apartment until the husband could find work—but we didn't. I began to pray for direction about how to help this family.

By the time I arrived home, I had a plan. The next day in Relief Society I told the sisters about the family living



in a tent, and I asked if they would help gather supplies for them. It wasn't long before warm clothes, blankets, and food began arriving at our door. A few days before Christmas, my husband and I took the items out to the family by the lake. They were appreciative to us and the Relief Society sisters, but they were especially grateful to Heavenly Father. I still was uncomfortable leaving them but felt it might be unwise to invite them into our home.

As Christmas drew near, my heart ached for this family. I wanted them to have a traditional Christmas in a home, with a tree, and with the security of a stable job. I continued praying, "What would Thou have us do?" But it seemed that no answer came.

On Christmas Eve I decided to cook the turkey and side dishes ahead of time for the next day. Throughout the day more goods arrived for the destitute family, so my husband and I decided to take the food and gifts out to them that evening. I felt glad that they would have a semblance of Christmas with a turkey dinner and presents for the children. But then I realized that the family would have no way to cook the dinner and that they wouldn't even have room for all the gifts in their small, already overcrowded tent. Shortly thereafter, I felt prompted to deliver it all anyway—and to take them our own turkey dinner, since it was already cooked.

Our family loaded everything into our van and headed for the lake. Our children had each chosen one of their own gifts to give to the other children. We were all excited to see how they would respond when they saw their presents. Despite our growing anticipation, I worried that these gifts would not be useful for this family. However, I reminded

myself that I had felt prompted to bring *everything*.

When we arrived, we were surprised to see the family packing their belongings into their car. The husband explained that he had found a job and that his boss had provided an apartment for them and was even paying the first month's rent. They were to move in that day.

"Put everything in our van!" we told them. "We'll take you. You can make it all in one trip that way."

Excitement filled the air as we loaded their belongings into our van and took them to their new home. While we moved the family into their new apartment, I realized that Heavenly Father had answered both their prayers and mine. He blessed this family with a warm home, a stable job, a traditional Christmas dinner, and even with a Christmas tree, which their new neighbors brought over. Before we left, we embraced this family and the young mother said, "We knew God would answer our prayers. We all knew it."

Driving home that night, I recognized that my children had caught the true spirit of Christmas. They seemed more excited about giving than they had ever been about receiving. "Did you see the look on Jimmy's face when I gave him my train?" one child asked. "And on Annie's face when I gave her my doll?" another remarked.

When we arrived home, we found a large box on our doorstep. Inside it was a beautiful turkey dinner with all the trimmings. We will never know who provided that thoughtful gift on Christmas Eve—we hadn't told anyone we had given away our own Christmas dinner. But what we will always know is that our awkward attempt at a gift for the Savior had turned into a most precious gift for our family—a Christmas experience we would never forget. ■