

Service Given and Received

When our two-year-old son was diagnosed with a life-threatening disease and started chemotherapy, he couldn't attend church anymore. Members of the Relief Society brought in meals for our family and helped with babysitting our other three small children. Our bishop released my husband and me from our callings, and we took turns going to church with our healthy children. Our home teachers arranged for the sacrament to be administered to whoever stayed home with our son. The bishop also asked us if the ward could fast for our son; we hadn't thought of that and readily agreed.

A few months after his diagnosis, our son was recovering from a bone marrow transplant in another city, and I was there with him. The ward in that area arranged for me to receive the sacrament every week.

We are so thankful for our home and hospital ward families. They reached out to us and provided much-needed service during a difficult time.

Even though I was unable to do much besides care for our son, Heavenly Father helped me find opportunities for service. I had the opportunity to talk to our son's nurses about the Church and to give a Book of Mormon to a new friend whose child had a transplant. Even though I didn't have a calling and could not go to church at that time, I was pleasantly surprised at the opportunities I had to grow spiritually.

Tonya A. Belau, Connecticut, USA

A Simple Note

At age 81 my mother was thrilled to accept a calling to be a visiting teacher. Because she is unable to walk due to osteoarthritis, she is

Homebound BUT Active

Many members of the Church are unable to attend Sunday meetings and weekday activities because of poor health or other constraints. If you or a member of your ward or family is in a similar situation, here are some ways to stay involved.





housebound much of the time. Still, she makes sure she contacts the three sisters she visit teaches every month with a handwritten note.

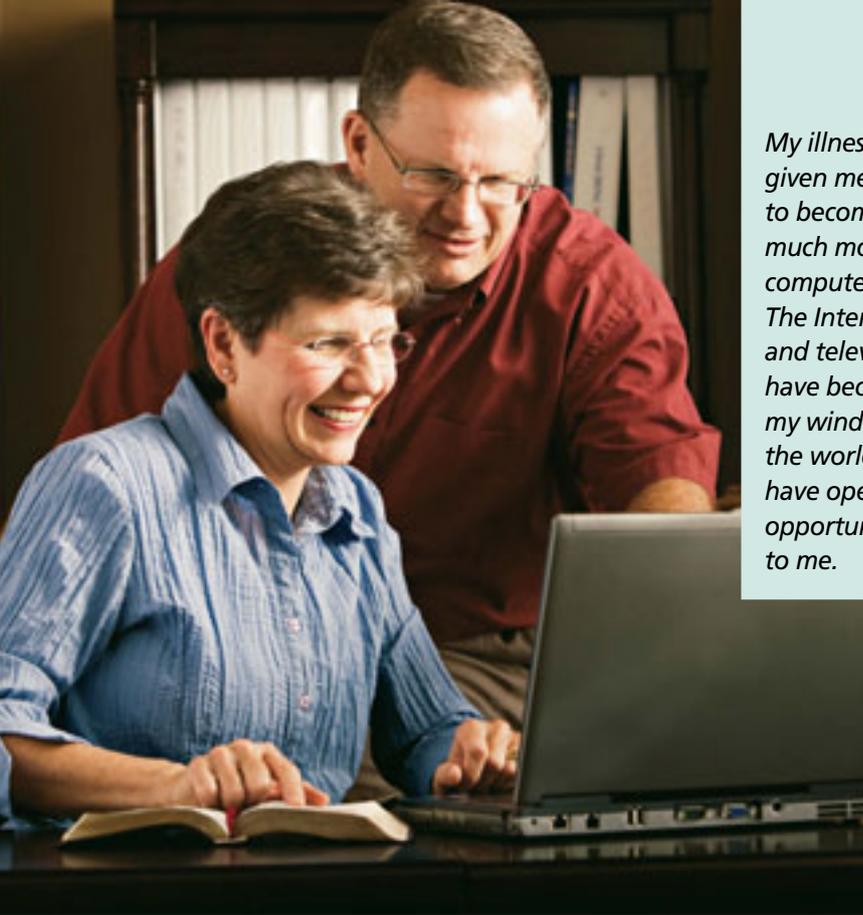
In each note my mother tries to think of interesting things to say to these sisters, known to her only by name. She invites them to ward events, sends the visiting teaching message for the month, inquires about how they are, and wishes them good health and happiness. Days turn into months and then into years as my mother faithfully writes to these three sisters.

As I mailed the notes, I sometimes wondered about these sisters and how they felt about the little gifts of love my mother prepared every month. Did they just throw the envelope away, unopened and unread? Did they read the sweet notes and wonder why a total stranger would continually write to them? Did it bring the gospel into their lives in some small way?

One Sunday morning one of the sisters who had been the recipient of these notes came to church. She was hoping to meet my mother and was disappointed to learn that Mother was housebound and not able to be at church. She told me, “Your mother has written me every month for the past two years. I wanted so much to meet her and thank her for all the cards and letters she has sent to me. I look forward to them every month.”

I was speechless for a minute as tears welled up in my eyes. I told her that my mother would be so happy to hear this. I mentioned that I had wondered how the notes were received from someone she had never met, and I told her how much mother enjoyed sending them. The sister said, “It made me happy to see that someone cared enough to write to me! When they came, I taped them to my refrigerator.”

Mother didn't let her osteoarthritis stop her from being a visiting teacher; every month she completes her service with a handwritten note.



My illness has given me reason to become much more computer savvy. The Internet and television have become my windows to the world and have opened opportunities to me.

She said she had a gift for mother. It was a vase of silk flowers with ink pens on the tips of the stems, given so that her visiting teacher would always have a pen to send notes!

I left church that day as if walking on air. I felt so grateful for the Relief Society program. I felt thankful for the sensitivity of a Relief Society president who gave a sister a chance to be a visiting teacher even though she could not leave her home. I felt especially thankful for a mother who shows me daily what commitment and love really mean, and for a Savior who has His loving arm around us all, no matter what our status in life is.

I will never doubt the importance of visiting teaching. This experience taught me that we can

ACCEPTING AND GIVING SERVICE

By Alison Palmer

In a church that focuses so heavily on serving others, many of us find it difficult to be on the receiving rather than the giving side of service. Yet, at some point in our lives, we may have to look outside ourselves to have our needs met. How do we ask for service and how do we graciously receive it?

None of us likes to admit that we are unable to help ourselves. Usually the need for help comes in times of crisis or change in our lives. The changes may be brief or long lasting, but they require an adjustment that makes it difficult or impossible to fulfill our responsibilities. These are the times when we ask for help.

Gentle Steps

I had to spend the greater portion of two pregnancies in bed. In addition to being uncomfortable, I was completely overwhelmed at the thought of being dependent on others. During the first pregnancy, I refused most of the help that was offered and spent a good deal of time crying over my perceived inadequacies.

Thankfully, I was a little more insightful the next time around. I learned that there are gentle steps that can be taken toward relieving some burdens.

Most people who offer to help sincerely want to help, yet they don't know what you feel would be most appropriate for them to do. If you turn them away, they may feel even more timid about offering help in the future. Assess your own needs and comfort level, and decide where you need help the most. Your laundry will need to be done, whether you like the way someone else starches your collars or not, but some things just need to be ignored. Create a list of things that must be done and of things that can wait, both small, occasional needs and large, consistent ones. Then, when a well-meaning person asks "What can I do to help?" you will have an answer.

Small Tasks, Large Tasks

Begin with the small things that mean the most to your well-being. Perhaps you will feel better if someone at church talks with you about the lessons or tells you when members of your ward or branch

all render service regardless of our challenges.
Fran Ramsell, Pennsylvania, USA

Staying Connected through the Internet

I am homebound because my body cannot tolerate or process the wide variety of chemicals used in our society today. The combined smells of perfumes, colognes, hair products, deodorants, cleaning supplies, and even copy machines make it virtually impossible for me to step into a church meetinghouse and other public buildings.

Since learning what was making me so ill, I have become much more computer savvy. The Internet and television have become my windows to the world. I'm so grateful that the *Ensign* and other Church publications are available online because the ink in most magazines now makes

me sick too. My husband brings home ward news, and members of my ward and stake check in on me via telephone. I have visiting teaching assignments and do my visiting teaching with cards, letters, and phone calls. I am also able to serve as a visiting teaching supervisor in my ward.

My testimony is that praying without ceasing (see Mosiah 26:39) brings physical and spiritual blessings. I have received relief from intense pain after uttering a simple silent prayer. Friends have run errands and made sacrifices on my behalf. I have discovered that I am still able to contribute to the world through my blog and by the quilts I make for premature infants and donate to hospitals with neonatal intensive care units. Indeed, there are blessings to be found in every affliction.

Sue Brown, Washington, USA

receive new callings. Could you use a new book to read or a few wildflowers to brighten your room? It might be something as small as having someone clean the window by your bed so that you have a clear view. Consider what things can be done by family members and what will require outside help.

There will also be larger tasks that should be brought to the attention of your priesthood and Relief Society leaders. Where appropriate, ask your leaders to work with you on a comfortable plan to meet your needs. Be honest about things that can be problematic. For example, long visits and strong perfumes caused me discomfort during my pregnancies. I also had to specify dietary needs.

Most important, your spiritual well-being cannot be sacrificed, so don't hesitate to ask for help in that area also. We need to keep our spiritual reservoir full in order to deal with our challenges. For example, you might ask if the sacrament can be administered in your home. I had never had the sacrament brought to my home before and I was tempted to say "No, thank you" when the elders offered. I felt it was an imposition on their time, and the effort of getting out of bed and being presentable for them and for the ordinance seemed beyond me. Thankfully, they insisted. Partaking of the bread and

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As you come to better know those who serve you, you can find ways to bless their lives too.



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Lessons Learned

Becoming homebound was the last thing I thought would ever happen to me. I had always been physically active, but some time ago I had an accident that left me temporarily confined to my home.

One of the greatest lessons I learned from this time was the importance of reaching out. I discovered that being homebound did not have to keep me from calling others to see how they were doing or to encourage them. I also learned the importance of volunteering to help other people. Some were hesitant to ask me for help because of my situation, but when I offered, I was blessed with opportunities to serve.

On the other hand, it was also important for me to learn to graciously accept help from others, including my home teachers. By accepting help, we give others the opportunity to serve.

I am grateful for my experience. Even though my situation was a temporary one, it taught me empathy for those whose health prevents them from regularly participating in church activities. It has been a blessing, not only during the period of my recuperation, but also beyond. I hope that I have learned to be more sensitive to the needs of others and more mindful of opportunities to give and receive service. ■

David H. Campagna, Iowa, USA

water meant so much to me. The sacrament ordinance on Sundays gave me strength to make it through difficult times.

Looking Beyond Burdens

How do we accept service from others? Sometimes it is a matter of changing our perspective and realizing that although we may not be able to give physical service back to those who help us, we can offer service of a spiritual nature. When we allow others to serve us, we can invite the Spirit by asking Heavenly Father to help us grow closer to the individuals serving us. Be personable; learn to feel of their spirit and love and then give it back to them. This spiritual service is expressed in our attitude.

On the other hand, pushing the Spirit away with our discomfort and discouragement in our own abilities is not the Savior's way. When we decline needed service, we are more focused on our own problems than we are on the people around us. We are succumbing to pride rather than being humble. Remember the Lord's counsel in Ether 12:27: "I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me,

then will I make weak things become strong unto them." This verse does not promise that we will be instantly healed or conquer our trials and weaknesses. It asks for humility and faith so that the Lord may show us where our strengths lie.

Though illness and other trials may hinder our abilities, they don't take away our love for others. If the Holy Ghost is present when people come to serve you, they will feel peace and acceptance of their actions. As you come to know them better, you will have a greater capacity to bless their lives.

By accepting help from others, we gain strength to express love and give service back to them. We can bless the life of the sister cleaning your home by having her small child curl up beside us to share a picture book. We can bless the lives of other members who bring us a meal or mow our lawn simply by asking about their welfare. We can bless lives with thank-you notes, cards that say "I thought of you today," or by picking up the phone and sharing our thoughts and being a good listener in return.

Accepting service and giving service back lightens our own load, and, in turn, lifts those who serve us. Everyone is blessed as we strive to listen to the Spirit and do things as the Lord would have us do them. ■