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# What Have I Done for Someone Today?

PRESIDENT THOMAS S. MONSON

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**M**y beloved brothers and sisters, I greet you this morning with love in my heart for the gospel of Jesus Christ and for each of you. I am grateful for the privilege to stand before you, and I pray that I might effectively communicate to you that which I have felt prompted to say.

A few years ago I read an article written by Jack McConnell, MD. He grew up in the hills of southwest Virginia in the United States as one of seven children of a Methodist minister and a stay-at-home mother. Their circumstances were very humble. He recounted that during his childhood,

every day as the family sat around the dinner table, his father would ask each one in turn, “And what did you do for someone today?”<sup>1</sup> The children were determined to do a good turn every day so they could report to their father that they had helped someone. Dr. McConnell calls this exercise his father’s most valuable legacy, for *that* expectation and *those* words inspired him and his siblings to help others throughout their lives. As they grew and matured, their motivation for providing service changed to an inner desire to help others.

Besides Dr. McConnell’s distinguished medical career—where he directed the development of the tuberculosis tine test, participated in the early development of the polio vaccine, supervised the development of Tylenol, and was instrumental in developing the magnetic resonance imaging procedure, or MRI—he created an organization he calls Volunteers in Medicine, which gives retired medical personnel a chance to volunteer at free clinics serving the working uninsured. Dr. McConnell said his leisure time since he retired has “evaporated into 60-hour weeks of unpaid work, but [his] energy level has increased and there is a satisfaction in



[his] life that wasn't there before." He made this statement: "In one of those paradoxes of life, I have benefited more from Volunteers in Medicine than my patients have."<sup>2</sup> There are now over 70 such clinics across the United States.

Of course, we can't all be Dr. McConnells, establishing medical clinics to help the poor; however, the needs of others are ever present, and each of us can do something to help someone.

The Apostle Paul admonished, "By love serve one another."<sup>3</sup> Recall with me the familiar words of King Benjamin in the Book of Mormon: "When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God."<sup>4</sup>

The Savior taught His disciples, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it."<sup>5</sup>

I believe the Savior is telling us that unless we lose ourselves in service to

others, there is little purpose to our own lives. Those who live only for themselves eventually shrivel up and figuratively lose their lives, while those who lose themselves in service to others grow and flourish—and in effect save their lives.

In the October 1963 general conference—the conference at which I was sustained as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles—President David O. McKay made this statement: "Man's greatest happiness comes from losing himself for the good of others."<sup>6</sup>

Often we live side by side but do not communicate heart to heart. There are those within the sphere of our own influence who, with outstretched hands, cry out, "Is there no balm in Gilead?"<sup>7</sup>

I am confident it is the *intention* of each member of the Church to serve and to help those in need. At baptism we covenanted to "bear one another's burdens, that they may be light."<sup>8</sup>

How many times has your heart been touched as you have witnessed the need of another? How often have you *intended* to be the one to help? And yet how often has day-to-day living interfered and you've left it for others to help, feeling that "oh, surely someone will take care of that need."

We become so caught up in the busyness of our lives. Were we to step back, however, and take a good look at what we're doing, we may find that we have immersed ourselves in the "thick of thin things." In other words, too often we spend most of our time taking care of the things which do not really matter much at all in the grand scheme of things, neglecting those more important causes.

Many years ago I heard a poem which has stayed with me, by which I have tried to guide my life. It's one of my favorites:

*I have wept in the night  
For the shortness of sight*

*That to somebody's need made me  
blind;  
But I never have yet  
Felt a tinge of regret  
For being a little too kind.<sup>9</sup>*

My brothers and sisters, we are surrounded by those in need of our attention, our encouragement, our support, our comfort, our kindness—be they family members, friends, acquaintances, or strangers. We are the Lord's hands here upon the earth, with the mandate to serve and to lift His children. He is dependent upon each of us.

You may lament: I can barely make it through each day, doing all that I need to do. How can I provide service for others? What can I possibly do?

Just over a year ago, I was interviewed by the *Church News* prior to my birthday. At the conclusion of the interview, the reporter asked what I would consider the ideal gift that members worldwide could give to me. I replied, "Find someone who is having a hard time or is ill or lonely, and do something for him or her."<sup>10</sup>

I was overwhelmed when this year for my birthday I received hundreds of cards and letters from members of the Church around the world telling me how they had fulfilled that birthday wish. The acts of service ranged from assembling humanitarian kits to doing yard work.

Dozens and dozens of Primaries challenged the children to provide service, and then those acts of service were recorded and sent to me. I must say that the methods for recording them were creative. Many came in the form of pages put together into various shapes and sizes of books. Some contained cards or pictures drawn or colored by the children. One very creative Primary sent a large jar containing hundreds of what they called "warm fuzzies," each one representing an act of service performed during the year by one of the children in



**São Paulo, Brazil**

the Primary. I can only imagine the happiness these children experienced as they told of their service and then placed a "warm fuzzy" in the jar.

I share with you just a few of the countless notes contained in the many gifts I received. One small child wrote, "My grandpa had a stroke, and I held his hand." From an 8-year-old girl: "My sister and I served my mom and family by organizing and cleaning the toy closet. It took us a few hours and we had fun. The best part was that we surprised my mom and made her happy because she didn't even ask us to do it." An 11-year-old girl wrote: "There was a family in my ward that did not have a lot of money. They have three little girls. The mom and dad had to go somewhere, so I offered to watch the three girls. The dad was just about to hand me a \$5 bill. I said, 'I can't take [it].' My service was that I watched the girls for free." A Primary child in Mongolia wrote that he had brought in water from the well so his mother would not have to do so. From a 4-year-old boy, no doubt written by a Primary teacher: "My dad is gone for army training for a few weeks. My special job is to give my mom hugs and kisses." Wrote a 9-year-old girl: "I picked strawberries for my great-grandma. I felt good

inside!" And another: "I played with a lonely kid."

From an 11-year-old boy: "I went to a lady's house and asked her questions and sang her a song. It felt good to visit her. She was happy because she never gets visitors." Reading this particular note reminded me of words penned long ago by Elder Richard L. Evans of the Quorum of the Twelve. Said he: "It is difficult for those who are young to understand the loneliness that comes when life changes from a time of preparation and performance to a time of putting things away. . . . To be so long the center of a home, so much sought after, and then, almost suddenly to be on the sidelines watching the procession pass by—this is living into loneliness. . . . We have to live a long time to learn how empty a room can be that is filled only with furniture. It takes someone . . . beyond mere hired service, beyond institutional care or professional duty, to thaw out the memories of the past and keep them warmly living in the present. . . . We cannot bring them back the morning hours of youth. But we can help them live in the warm glow of a sunset made more beautiful by our thoughtfulness . . . and unfeigned love."<sup>11</sup>

My birthday cards and notes came also from teenagers in Young Men and Young Women classes who made blankets for hospitals, served in food pantries, were baptized for the dead, and performed numerous other acts of service.

Relief Societies, where help can always be found, provided service above and beyond that which they would normally have given. Priesthood groups did the same.

My brothers and sisters, my heart has seldom been as touched and grateful as it was when Sister Monson and I literally spent hours reading of these gifts. My heart is full now as I speak of the experience and

contemplate the lives which have been blessed as a result, for both the giver and the receiver.

The words from the 25th chapter of Matthew come to mind:

“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

“For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

“Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

“Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

“When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

“Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

“And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”<sup>12</sup>

My brothers and sisters, may we ask ourselves the question which greeted Dr. Jack McConnell and his brothers and sisters each evening at dinnertime: “What have I done for someone today?” May the words of a familiar hymn penetrate our very souls and find lodgment in our hearts:

*Have I done any good in the world today?*

*Have I helped anyone in need?*

*Have I cheered up the sad and made someone feel glad?*

*If not, I have failed indeed.*

*Has anyone’s burden been lighter today*

*Because I was willing to share?*

*Have the sick and the weary been helped on their way?*

*When they needed my help was I there?*<sup>13</sup>



That service to which all of us have been called is the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As He enlists us to His cause, He invites us to draw close to Him. He speaks to you and to me:

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”<sup>14</sup>

If we truly listen, we may hear that voice from far away say to us, as it spoke to another, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”<sup>15</sup> That each may qualify for this blessing from our Lord is my prayer, and I

offer it in His name, even Jesus Christ, our Savior, amen. ■

#### NOTES

1. Jack McConnell, “And What Did You Do for Someone Today?” *Newsweek*, June 18, 2001, 13.
2. Jack McConnell, “And What Did You Do for Someone Today?” 13.
3. Galatians 5:13.
4. Mosiah 2:17.
5. Luke 9:24.
6. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, Oct. 1963, 8.
7. Jeremiah 8:22.
8. Mosiah 18:8.
9. Anonymous, quoted in Richard L. Evans, “The Quality of Kindness,” *Improvement Era*, May 1960, 340.
10. See Gerry Avant, “Prophet’s Birthday,” *Church News*, Aug. 23, 2008, 4.
11. Richard L. Evans, “Living into Loneliness,” *Improvement Era*, July 1948, 445.
12. Matthew 25:34–40.
13. “Have I Done Any Good?” *Hymns*, no. 223.
14. Matthew 11:28–30.
15. Matthew 25:21.