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WHY

We Serve

God expects us to serve one another for the highest and best reason.

Service is an imperative for those who worship Jesus Christ. To followers who were vying for prominent positions in His kingdom, the Savior taught, “Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant” (Matthew 20:27). On a later occasion, He spoke of ministering to the needs of the hungry, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. He concluded that teaching with these words: “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” (Matthew 25:40).

In latter-day revelation the Lord has commanded that we “succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees” (D&C 81:5). In another section of the Doctrine and Covenants, He instructed us to be “anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of [our] own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness” (D&C 58:27). Holders of the Melchizedek Priesthood receive it upon a covenant to use its powers in the service of others. Indeed, service is a covenant obligation of all members of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Whether our service is to our fellowmen or to God, it is the same (see Mosiah 2:17). If we love Him, we should keep His commandments and feed His sheep (see John 21:16–17).

When we think of service, we usually think of the acts of our hands. But the scriptures teach that the Lord looks to our thoughts as well as to our acts. One of God’s earliest commandments to Israel was that they should love Him and “serve him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 10:10).

Latter-day revelation declares that the Lord requires not only the acts of the children of men, but “the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind” (D&C 64:34).

Numerous scriptures teach that our Heavenly Father knows our thoughts and the intents of our heart (see D&C 6:16; Mosiah 24:12; Alma 18:32). The prophet Mormon taught that if our works are to be credited for good, they must be done for the right reasons (see Moroni 7:6–7).

These scriptures make clear that in order to purify our service in the Church and to our fellowmen, it is necessary to consider not only how we serve, but also why we serve.

People serve one another for different reasons, and some reasons are better than others. Perhaps none of us serves in every capacity all the time for only a single reason. Since we are imperfect beings, most of us probably serve for a combination of reasons, and the combinations may be different from time to time as we grow spiritually. But we should all strive to serve for the reasons that are highest and best.

What are some of the reasons for service? By way of illustration, and without pretending to be exhaustive, I will suggest six reasons. I will discuss these in ascending order from the lesser to the greater reasons for service.

Some may serve for hope of earthly reward. Such a man or woman might serve in Church positions or in private acts of mercy in an effort to achieve prominence or cultivate contacts that would increase income or aid in acquiring wealth. Others might serve in order to obtain worldly honors, prominence, or power.

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Another reason for service—probably more worthy than the first, but still in the category of service in search of earthly reward—is that motivated by a personal desire to obtain good companionship. We surely have good associations in our Church service, but is that why we serve?

These first two reasons for service are selfish and self-centered and unworthy of Saints. As the Apostle Paul said,

we that are strong enough to bear the infirmities of the weak should not do so “to please ourselves” (Romans 15:1). Reasons aimed at earthly rewards are distinctly lesser in character and reward than the other reasons I will discuss.

Some may serve out of fear of punishment. The scriptures abound with descriptions of the miserable state of those who fail to follow the commandments of God. Thus, King Benjamin taught his people that the soul of the unrepentant transgressor would be filled with “a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever” (Mosiah 2:38). Such descriptions surely offer sufficient incentive for keeping the commandment of service. But service out of fear of punishment is a lesser motive at best.

Other persons may serve out of a sense of duty or out of loyalty to friends or family or traditions. These are those I would call the good soldiers, who instinctively do what they are asked without question and sometimes without giving much thought to the reasons for their service. Such persons fill the ranks of voluntary organizations everywhere, and they do much good. We have all benefited by the good works of such persons. Those who serve out of a sense of duty or loyalty to various wholesome causes are the good and honorable men and women of the earth.





Although those who serve out of fear of punishment or out of a sense of duty undoubtedly qualify for the blessings of heaven, there are still higher reasons for service.

One such higher reason for service is the hope of an eternal reward. This hope—the expectation of enjoying the fruits of our labors—is one of the most powerful

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sources of motivation. As a reason for service, it necessarily involves faith in God and in the fulfillment of His prophecies. The scriptures are rich in promises of eternal rewards. For example, in a revelation given through the Prophet Joseph Smith in June 1829, the Lord said: “If you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God” (D&C 14:7).

The last motive I will discuss is, in my opinion, the highest reason of all. In its relationship to service, it is what the scriptures call “a more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31).

“Charity is the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47). The

Book of Mormon teaches us that this virtue is “the greatest of all” (Moroni 7:46). The Apostle Paul affirmed and illustrated that truth in his great teaching about the reasons for service:

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. . . .

“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, . . . and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1–3).

We know from these inspired words that even the most extreme acts of service—such as giving all of our goods to feed the poor—profit us nothing unless our service is motivated by the pure love of Christ.

It is not enough to serve God with all of our might and strength. He who looks into our hearts and knows our minds demands more than this. In order to stand blameless before God at the last day, we must also serve Him with all our heart and mind.

I know that God expects us to work to purify our hearts and our thoughts so that we may serve one another for the highest and best reason, the pure love of Christ. **NE**

From an October 1984 general conference address.