

THE JOY OF SERVICE

BY PRESIDENT THOMAS S. MONSON



A stalwart grandson spent most of the summer away from his university studies, that he might serve his grandmother's needs.

I said to him, "You will never regret your decision. Your grandmother feels you are heaven-sent, an answer to her prayers."

He replied, "I chose to come because I love her."

"Love thy neighbor" is more than a divine truth. It is a pattern for perfection.

While driving to the office one morning, I passed a dry-cleaning establishment which had a sign by the side of the front door. It read, "It's the Service That Counts." I suppose in a highly competitive field such as the dry-cleaning business and many others, the differentiating factor which distinguishes one store from another is, in actual fact, service.

The message from the small sign simply would not leave my mind. Suddenly I realized why. In actual fact it is the service that counts—the Lord's service.

My message to the young men and women of the Church is begin now to learn in your youth the joy of service in the cause of the Master.

Following Thanksgiving time some years ago, I received a letter from a widow whom I had known in the stake where I served in the presidency. She had just returned from a dinner sponsored by her bishopric. Her words reflect the peace she felt and the gratitude which filled her heart:

"Dear President Monson,

"I am living in Bountiful now. I miss the people of our old stake, but let me tell you

of a wonderful experience I have had. In early November all the widows and older people received an invitation to come to a lovely dinner. We were told not to worry about transportation since this would be provided by the older youth in the ward.

"At the appointed hour, a very nice young man rang the bell and took me and another sister to the stake center. He stopped the car, and two other young men walked with us to the chapel where the young ladies took us to where we removed our wraps—then into the cultural hall, where we sat and visited for a few minutes. Then they took us to the tables, where we were seated on each side by either a young woman or a young man. Then we were served a lovely Thanksgiving dinner and afterward provided a choice program.

"After the program we were given our dessert—either apple or pumpkin pie. Then we left, and on the way out we were given a plastic bag with sliced turkey and two rolls. Then the young men took us home. It was such a nice, lovely evening. Most of us shed a tear or two for the love and respect we were shown.

"President Monson, when you see young people treat others like these young people did, I feel the Church is in good hands."

I reflected on my association with this lovely widow, now grown old but ever



serving the Lord. There came to mind the words from the Epistle of James: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

I add my own commendation: God bless the leaders, the young men, and the young women who so unselfishly brought such joy to the lonely and such peace to their souls. Through their experience they learned the meaning of service and felt the nearness of the Lord.¹

Decide to Serve

Acts of selfless service are performed daily by countless members of the Church. There are many which are freely given, with no fanfare or boasting, but rather through quiet love and tender care. Let me share with you the example of one who made such a simple yet profound choice to serve.

A few years ago, Sister Monson and I were in the city of Toronto, where we once lived when I was the mission president. Olive Davies, the wife of the first stake president in Toronto, was gravely ill and preparing to pass from this life. Her illness required her to leave her cherished home and enter a hospital which could provide the care she needed. Her only child lived with her own family far away in the West.

I attempted to comfort Sister Davies, but she had present with her the comfort she longed to have. A stalwart grandson sat silently next to his grandmother. I learned he had spent most of the summer away from his university studies, that he might serve his grandmother’s needs. I said to him, “Shawn, you will never regret your decision. Your grandmother feels you are heaven-sent, an answer to her prayers.”

He replied, “I chose to come because I love her and know this is what my Heavenly Father would have me do.”

Tears were near the surface. Grandmother told us how she enjoyed being helped by her grandson and introducing him to each employee and every patient in the hospital. Hand in hand, they walked the halls, and during the night he was close by.

Olive Davies has passed on to her reward, there to meet her faithful husband and together continue an eternal journey. In a grandson’s heart there will ever remain those words, “Choose the right when a choice is placed before

you. In the right the Holy Spirit guides” (*Hymns*, no. 239).

Such are foundation stones in building one’s personal temple. As the Apostle Paul counseled, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

May I leave with you a simple yet far-reaching formula to guide you in the choices of life:

Fill your minds with truth.

Fill your hearts with love.

Fill your lives with service.²

Reach Outward

As we look heavenward, we inevitably learn of our responsibility to reach outward. To find real happiness, 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 fellow man. Service to others is akin to duty, the fulfillment of which brings true joy. We do not live alone—in our city, our nation, or our world. There is no dividing line between our prosperity and our neighbor’s wretchedness. “Love thy neighbor” is more than a divine truth. It is a pattern for perfection. This truth inspires the familiar charge, “Go forth to serve.” Try as some of us may, we cannot escape the influence our lives have upon the lives of others. Ours is the opportunity to build, to lift, to inspire, and indeed to lead. The New Testament teaches that it is impossible to take a right attitude toward Christ without taking an unselfish attitude toward men:

“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40).

We may think as we please, but there is no question about what the Bible teaches. In the New Testament there is no road to the heart of God that does not lead through the heart of man. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that a true Latter-day Saint “is to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to provide for the widow, to dry up the tear of the orphan, to comfort the afflicted, whether in this church or in any other, or in no church at all, wherever he finds them” (*Times and Seasons*, Mar. 15, 1842, 732).

I have many memories of my boyhood days. Anticipating Sunday dinner was one of them. Just as we children hovered at our so-called starvation level and sat anxiously at the table with the aroma of roast beef filling



would hand Old Bob the plate of food from my mother. He would present me with the clean plate from the previous Sunday and offer me a dime as pay for my service. My answer was always the same: "I can't accept the money. My mother would tan my hide."

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as our example of service. Although He came to earth as the Son of God, He humbly served those around Him. He blessed the sick; He caused the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear. He even raised the dead to life.



the room, Mother would say to me, “Tommy, before we eat, take this plate of food I’ve prepared down the street to Old Bob, and then hurry back.”

I could never understand why we couldn’t first eat and later deliver his plate of food. I never questioned aloud but would run down to his house and then wait anxiously as Bob’s aged feet brought him eventually to the door. Then I would hand him the plate of food. He would present to me the clean plate from the previous Sunday and offer me a dime as pay for my services. My answer was always the same: “I can’t accept the money. My mother would tan my hide.” He would then run his wrinkled hand through my blond hair and say, “My boy, you have a wonderful mother. Tell her thank you.”

You know, I think I never did tell her. I sort of felt Mother didn’t need to be told. She seemed to sense his gratitude. I remember, too, that Sunday dinner always seemed to

taste a bit better after I had returned from my errand.³

Look to the Savior

We look to the Savior as our example of service. 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. He blessed the sick; He caused the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear. He even raised the dead to life.

In the 25th chapter of the book of Matthew, the Savior tells us this concerning the faithful who will be on His right hand at His triumphal return:

“Then shall the King say unto them . . . , 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” (Matthew 25:34–40).⁴ **NE**

NOTES

1. From “The Service That Counts,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 45.
2. From “Choose You This Day,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 67.
3. From a talk given at BYU–Idaho commencement August 22, 2003.
4. From “The Bridge Builder,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 67.

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Looking for ways to serve? Check out “Nifty Ways to Serve Your Brother or Sister” at newera.lds.org.