



“No Less Serviceable”

“Most of us will be quiet, relatively unknown folks who . . . do our work without fanfare. To those of you who may find that . . . unspectacular, I say, you are ‘no less serviceable’ than the most spectacular of your associates.”

From the Life of Howard W. Hunter

President Howard W. Hunter was known not only as a dedicated leader and beloved prophet, but also for the quiet way in which he served. He knew that the service itself was important, not whether he received any recognition. Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve once said of him, “President Howard W. Hunter is a meek man. . . . This is the same lowly man, when I awakened after a weary and dusty day together with him on assignment in Egypt, who was quietly shining my shoes, a task he had hoped to complete unseen.”¹

President Thomas S. Monson first noticed President Hunter’s humble way of serving when the Los Angeles California Temple was dedicated in 1956, several years before either of them was called as an Apostle. He recalled:

“My . . . introduction to President Hunter was when he served as president of the Pasadena California Stake and had responsibility to coordinate local arrangements for the dedication of the Los Angeles (California) Temple. It was my privilege to print the tickets. His assignment was mammoth. I saw only that portion which pertained to the tickets, which were color coded, intricately labeled, and numbered in the most orderly fashion I had ever seen. He generously gave credit to others and insured that his name was not excessively featured, even though he had been a driving force behind these monumental undertakings.”²



Life-changing service is rendered by many “who are not seen in the limelight, who do not receive the attention of the world.”

Elder James E. Faust of the Quorum of the Twelve further observed: “He had no ego needs. With all his wisdom, he could sit among his brethren and say very little. He was at complete peace with himself.”³

President Hunter understood that every act of service is important in God’s eyes, no matter how unheralded or inconspicuous. Several weeks before President Hunter passed away, a friend asked, “Dear President, what is the most exalted position or calling—that of a dear and trusted friend, or that of a prophet of God?” After hearing the question, “the President pondered silently for what seemed like minutes; then slowly grasping the hand of his friend and turning his head squarely toward him, with a tear trickling down his frail cheek, he responded, ‘they are *both* sacred callings of trust.’”⁴

Teachings of Howard W. Hunter



Those who serve quietly and inconspicuously are “no less serviceable” than those who receive the world’s acclaim.

It was said of the young and valiant Captain Moroni: “If all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men.” (Alma 48:17.)

What a compliment to a famous and powerful man! I can’t imagine a finer tribute from one man to another. Two verses later is a statement about Helaman and his brethren, who played a less conspicuous role than Moroni: “Now behold, Helaman and his brethren were no less serviceable unto the people than was Moroni.” (Alma 48:19.)

In other words, even though Helaman was not as noticeable or conspicuous as Moroni, he was as serviceable; that is, he was as helpful or useful as Moroni.

Obviously, we could profit greatly by studying the life of Captain Moroni. He is an example of faith, service, dedication, commitment,

and many other godly attributes. Rather than focusing on this magnificent man, however, I have chosen to look instead at those who are not seen in the limelight, who do not receive the attention of the world, yet who are “no less serviceable,” as the scripture phrased it.

Not all of us are going to be like Moroni, catching the acclaim of our colleagues all day every day. Most of us will be quiet, relatively unknown folks who come and go and do our work without fanfare. To those of you who may find that [thought] lonely or frightening or just unspectacular, I say, you are “no less serviceable” than the most spectacular of your associates. You, too, are part of God’s army.

Consider, for example, the profound service a mother or father gives in the quiet anonymity of a worthy Latter-day Saint home. Think of the Gospel Doctrine teachers and Primary choristers and Scoutmasters and Relief Society visiting teachers who serve and bless millions but whose names will never be publicly applauded or featured in the nation’s media.

Tens of thousands of unseen people make possible our opportunities and happiness every day. As the scriptures state, they are “no less serviceable” than those whose lives are on the front pages of newspapers.

The limelight of history and contemporary attention so often focuses on the *one* rather than on the *many*. Individuals are frequently singled out from their peers and elevated as heroes. I acknowledge that this kind of attention is one way to identify that which the people admire or hold to be of some value. But sometimes that recognition is not deserved, or it may even celebrate the wrong values.

We must choose wisely our heroes and examples, while also giving thanks for those legions of friends and citizens who are not so famous but who are “no less serviceable” than the Moronis of our lives.⁵

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In the scriptures, many people who served in the shadow of others made important contributions.

Perhaps you could consider with me some interesting people from the scriptures who did not receive the limelight of attention but who, through the long lens of history, have proven themselves to be truly heroic.

Many who read the story of the great prophet Nephi almost completely miss another valiant son of Lehi whose name was Sam. Nephi is one of the most famous figures in the entire Book of Mormon. But Sam? Sam's name is mentioned there only ten times. When Lehi counseled and blessed his posterity, he said to Sam:

“Blessed art thou, and thy seed; for thou shalt inherit the land like unto thy brother Nephi. And thy seed shall be numbered with his seed; and thou shalt be even like unto thy brother, and thy seed like unto his seed; and thou shalt be blessed in all thy days.” (2 Ne. 4:11.)

Sam's role was basically one of supporting and assisting his more acclaimed younger brother, and he ultimately received the same blessings promised to Nephi and his posterity. Nothing promised to Nephi was withheld from the faithful Sam, yet we know very little of the details of Sam's service and contribution. He was an almost unknown person in life, but he is obviously a triumphant leader and victor in the annals of eternity.

Many make their contributions in unsung ways. Ishmael traveled with the family of Nephi at great personal sacrifice, suffering “much affliction, hunger, thirst, and fatigue.” (1 Ne. 16:35.) Then in the midst of all of these afflictions, he perished in the wilderness. Few of us can even begin to understand the sacrifice of such a man in those primitive times and conditions. Perhaps if we were more perceptive and understanding, we too would mourn, as his daughters did in the wilderness, for what a man like this gave—and gave up!—so that we could have the Book of Mormon today.

The names and memories of such men and women who were “no less serviceable” are legion in the Book of Mormon. Whether it



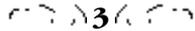
After Abish (left) touched the hand of the Lamanite queen, the queen arose from the ground (see Alma 19:15–29).

be Mother Sariah or the maid Abish, servant to the Lamanite queen, each made contributions that were unacknowledged by the eyes of men but not unseen by the eyes of God.

We have only twelve verses of scripture dealing with the life of Mosiah, king over the land of Zarahemla and father of the famous King Benjamin. Yet his service to the people was indispensable. He led the people “by many preachings and prophesyings” and “admonished [them] continually by the word of God.” (Omni 1:13.) Limhi, Amulek, and Pahoran—the latter of whom had the nobility of soul not to condemn when he was very unjustly accused—are other examples of people who served selflessly in the shadow of others’ limelight.

The soldier Teancum, who sacrificed his own life, or Lachoneus, the chief judge who taught people to repent during the challenge of the Gadiantons, or the virtually unmentioned missionaries Omner and Himni, were all “no less serviceable” than their companions, yet they received very little scriptural attention.

We don’t know much about Shiblón, the faithful son of Alma whose story is sandwiched between those of Helaman, the future leader, and Corianton, the transgressor; but it is significant that he is described as a “just man [who] did walk uprightly before God.” (Alma 63:2.) The great prophet Nephi, mentioned in the book of Helaman, had a brother named Lehi, who is seemingly mentioned only in passing but is noted as being “not a whit behind [Nephi] as to things pertaining to righteousness.” [Helaman 11:19; see also verse 18.]⁶



**Even though we may not be well known,
we can render great service in the kingdom.**

Of course, there are examples of these serviceable individuals in our dispensation as well. Oliver Granger is the kind of quiet, supportive individual in the latter days that the Lord remembered in section 117 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Oliver’s name may be unfamiliar to many, so I will take the liberty to acquaint you with this early stalwart.

Oliver Granger was eleven years older than Joseph Smith and, like the Prophet, was from upstate New York. Because of severe cold and exposure when he was thirty-three years old, Oliver lost much of his eyesight. Notwithstanding his limited vision, he served three full-time missions. He also worked on the Kirtland Temple and served on the Kirtland high council.

When most of the Saints were driven from Kirtland, Ohio, the Church left some debts unsatisfied. Oliver was appointed to represent Joseph Smith and the First Presidency by returning to Kirtland to settle the Church’s business. Of this task, the Doctrine and Covenants records: “Therefore, let him contend earnestly for the redemption of the First Presidency of my Church, saith the Lord.” (D&C 117:13.)

He performed this assignment with such satisfaction to the creditors involved that one of them wrote: “Oliver Granger’s management in the arrangement of the unfinished business of people that have moved to the Far West, in redeeming their pledges and thereby sustaining their integrity, has been truly praiseworthy, and has entitled him to my highest esteem, and every grateful recollection.” (Horace Kingsbury, as cited in Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:174.)

During Oliver’s time in Kirtland, some people, including disaffected members of the Church, were endeavoring to discredit the First Presidency and bring their integrity into question by spreading false accusations. Oliver Granger, in very deed, “redeemed the First Presidency” through his faithful service. . . . The Lord said of Oliver Granger: “His name shall be had in sacred remembrance from generation to generation, forever and ever.” (D&C 117:12.) “I will lift up my servant Oliver, and beget for him a great name on the earth, and among my people, because of the integrity of his soul.” (*History of the Church*, 3:350.)

When he died in 1841, even though there were but few Saints remaining in the Kirtland area and even fewer friends of the Saints, Oliver Granger’s funeral was attended by a vast concourse of people from neighboring towns.

Though Oliver Granger is not as well known today as other early leaders of the Church, he was nevertheless a great and important man in the service he rendered to the kingdom. And even if no one but the Lord had his name in remembrance, that would be a sufficient blessing for him—or for any of us.⁷

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**Nephi is an example of remembering God as
the source of his strength and blessings.**

I think we should be aware that there can be a spiritual danger to those who misunderstand the singularity of always being in the spotlight. They may come to covet the notoriety and thus forget the significance of the service being rendered.

We must not allow ourselves to focus on the fleeting light of popularity or substitute that attractive glow for the substance of true but often anonymous labor that brings the attention of God, even if

it does not get coverage on the six o'clock news. In fact, applause and attention can become the spiritual Achilles' heels of even the most gifted among us.

If the limelight of popularity should fall on you sometime in your life, it might be well for you to follow the example of those in the scriptures who received fame. Nephi is one of the great examples. After all he accomplished traveling in the wilderness with his family, his attitude was still fixed on the things that matter most. He said:

“And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted.

“My God hath been my support; he hath led me through mine afflictions in the wilderness; and he hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep.

“He hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh.

“He hath confounded mine enemies, unto the causing of them to quake before me.” (2 Ne. 4:19–22.)

The limelight never blinded Nephi as to the source of his strength and his blessings.⁸



**When we understand why we serve, we won't
be concerned about where we serve.**

At times of attention and visibility, it might also be profitable for us to answer the question, Why do we serve? When we understand why, we won't be concerned about where we serve.

President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., taught this vital principle in his own life. At general conference in April 1951, President David O. McKay was sustained as President of the Church after the passing of President George Albert Smith. Up to that time, President Clark had served as the First Counselor to President Heber J. Grant and then to President George Albert Smith. President McKay had been the Second Counselor to both men.

During the final session of conference when the business of the Church was transacted, Brother Stephen L Richards was called to

the First Presidency and sustained as First Counselor. President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., was then sustained as the Second Counselor. After the sustaining of the officers of the Church, President McKay explained why he had chosen his counselors in that order. He said:

“I felt that one guiding principle in this choice would be to follow the seniority in the Council [of the Twelve]. These two men were sitting in their places in that presiding body in the Church, and I felt impressed that it would be advisable to continue that same seniority in the new quorum of the First Presidency.” (In Conference Report, 9 April 1951, p. 151.)

President Clark was then asked to speak following President McKay. His remarks on this occasion were brief but teach a powerful lesson: “In the service of the Lord, it is not where you serve but how. In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, one takes the place to which one is duly called, which place one neither seeks nor declines. I pledge to President McKay and to President Richards the full loyal devoted service to the tasks that may come to me to the full measure of my strength and my abilities, and so far as they will enable me to perform them, however inadequate I may be.” (Ibid., p. 154.)

The lesson that President Clark taught is expressed in another way in this poem by Meade McGuire, which has been repeated many times:

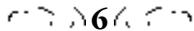
*“Father, where shall I work today?
And my love flowed warm and free.
Then He pointed out a tiny spot
And said, “Tend that for me.”
I answered quickly, “Oh no; not that!
Why, no one would ever see,
No matter how well my work was done;
Not that little place for me.”
And the word He spoke, it was not stern;
He answered me tenderly:
“Ah, little one, search that heart of thine.
Art thou working for them or for me?
Nazareth was a little place,
And so was Galilee.”*



We are “most happy and successful in life” when our “interests are coupled with giving assistance to others and helping them find the way.”

[See *Best-Loved Poems of the LDS People*, comp. Jack M. Lyon and others (1996), 152.]

King Benjamin declared: “Behold, I say unto you that because I said unto you that I had spent my days in your service, I do not desire to boast, for I have only been in the service of God. And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.” (Mosiah 2:16–17.)⁹



We should serve faithfully and quietly, being on guard regarding the praise of others.

He is the most happy and successful in life whose interests are coupled with giving assistance to others and helping them find the way.

The sign at the railroad crossing that warns us to stop, look, and listen could be a guide for us. Stop as we rush through life. Look

for all the friendly, thoughtful, courteous things we can do, and all the little human needs we can fill. Listen to others and learn of their hopes and problems so that we will be able to contribute in little ways to their success and happiness.¹⁰

President Ezra Taft Benson said . . . : “Christlike service exalts. . . . The Lord has promised that those who lose their lives serving others will find themselves. The Prophet Joseph Smith told us that we should ‘wear out our lives’ in bringing to pass His purposes. (D&C 123:13.)” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1989, pp. 5–6.)

If you feel that much of what you do does not make you very famous, take heart. Most of the best people who ever lived weren’t very famous, either. Serve and grow, faithfully and quietly. Be on guard regarding the praise of men. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount:

“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

“Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

“But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:

“That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.” (Matt. 6:1–4.)

May our Father in Heaven so reward you always.¹¹

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Questions

- What is President Hunter trying to help us understand by emphasizing that Helaman and his brethren were “no less serviceable” than Captain Moroni? (See section 1.) How can this understanding help you?

- What can the scriptural examples in section 2 teach us? How can these examples influence our own feelings as we serve? How have you been blessed by others who have served in quiet, unsung ways?
- What can we learn from the story President Hunter tells about Oliver Granger? (See section 3.) Why should we not be concerned about receiving recognition when we serve?
- How can “the limelight of popularity” or fame be dangerous? (See section 4.) What can Nephi’s example teach you about how to stay “fixed on the things that matter most”?
- Review the account of President J. Reuben Clark Jr. in section 5. What impresses you about President Clark’s attitude and words? Consider your answer to the question “Why do I serve?” How can we develop an attitude of giving our best regardless of where we serve?
- In section 6, President Hunter refers to the Lord’s promise that “those who lose their lives serving others will find themselves” (see Matthew 10:39; 16:25). What does this mean? How have you found this to be true? How has service brought you happiness?

Related Scriptures

Matthew 6:2–7, 24; 20:25–28; James 1:27; D&C 76:5–7; 121:34–37

Study Help

“Share what you learn. As you do this, your thoughts will become clearer and your power of retention will increase” (*Teaching, No Greater Call* [1999], 17).

Notes

1. Neal A. Maxwell, “Meek and Lowly” (Brigham Young University devotional, Oct. 21, 1986), 8; speeches.byu.edu.
2. Thomas S. Monson, “President Howard W. Hunter: A Man for All Seasons,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1995, 31.
3. James E. Faust, “Howard W. Hunter: Man of God,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1995, 27.
4. Jon M. Huntsman Sr., “A Remarkable and Selfless Life,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1995, 24.
5. “No Less Serviceable,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1992, 64–65.
6. “No Less Serviceable,” 65.
7. “No Less Serviceable,” 65–66.
8. “No Less Serviceable,” 66.
9. “No Less Serviceable,” 66–67.
10. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (1997), 267.
11. “No Less Serviceable,” 67.