

Service

Many years ago I had the opportunity of serving a "mini" mission as I went back to Palmyra, New York and participated in the Hill Cumorah Pageant. It is a different production than they do now. One of the scenes in which I participated was the King Benjamin scene, and it was where King Benjamin was giving his last great sermon. He told the people, (as recorded in Mosiah 2:16-18)

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. Behold, ye have called me your king; and if I, whom ye call your king, do labor to serve you, then ought not ye to labor to serve one another?

That scene, with those words, has affected the rest of my life. Certainly this is a great model for all active Latter-day Saints. We have a beautiful picture in our home of a cottage, and the inscription under it says, "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord". We're not perfect, but we have tried to follow this counsel.

Kathleen Hughes, a counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency said that "God knows the needs of His children, and He often works through us, prompting us to help one another. When we act on such promptings, we tread on holy ground, for we are allowed the opportunity to serve as an agent of God in answering a prayer."

* In a conference address in October, 2004, President Monson said, "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."

There are many ways to serve, and many people we can serve. Whether in the political arena, the community, or elsewhere, people render great acts of service, and there are great rewards for public service—but the incentive is often times the personal recognition that comes from service under the glare of the spotlight. * The quiet, unpublicized service of men and women is truly after the pattern of the Christ, and in turn, makes us become more Christ-like in our nature. Quiet acts of selfless service help us overcome "I" (the vertical pronoun I) trouble, as we look out to help others instead of inward to ourselves, for our own rewards. Elder Richard L. Evans once counseled, "We can't do everything for everyone everywhere, but we can do something for someone somewhere."

Peace and love

I'd like to cite an example of a man whose quiet, Christ-like service has been an inspiration to me. This man's mother died when he was only 11, and he assumed many more responsibilities in her absence and was a blessing to his father and younger brothers. With that, the dye was cast for his future life. His father remarried and there came 5 younger siblings who looked to him for example and help. Many years later his stepmother began to lose her physical and mental capacity, and he lovingly and willingly gave his time to her and his father, ^{because} as the care giver responsibilities for his father were almost more than he could bear. This included spending many nights in their home

rendering service. Following her death, when his own father began his gradual decline he took time each day to care for his father's needs. These many hours of quiet service, over many years, were in addition to a full life of public service including service as a bishop. On top of all of this load of self imposed responsibility, he began to care for his own wife as early symptom of Lou Gehrig's disease became apparent. Ultimately this service became a full time effort as her continual decline required round the clock assistance. He would awaken several times during the night to turn her in the bed so she wouldn't be so uncomfortable, and during the day he fed and clothed and lovingly cared for her every need, without any complaint, for over 7 years. And now, as the father of 10 children, his days are spent with his youngest boy, a 38 year son who was born as a Downs Syndrome child. This man's life is an inspiration to me of genuine, Christ-like service, and he is my oldest brother.

I have a younger brother who has also been a source of inspiration to me when it comes to selfless service. Not long after the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, I receive a letter from my brother. (It was a copy of the letter he sent to his missionary son) He lives in the Houston area, and he was asked to coordinate his ward's work "party" to go help with the clean up efforts. He wrote, "There were ten of us from our ward. I had most everyone bring their stuff over before to pack a trailer that we were borrowing to haul stuff like chain saws, wheelbarrows, and other tools. I started driving around to pick everyone up at 11:45 PM on Friday evening so that they would not have to leave their cars or have their wives get up to drive them over. It was 1 AM of Saturday morning when we finally 'engaged' to Mississippi. We arrived in Picayune, Mississippi at about 7:30 on Saturday morning. We received our instructions and were off with a list of 3 members to help. The goal was to help the members first and then help their neighbors next. Picayune is northeast of New Orleans. They didn't have a problem with flooding, but the wind damage is incredible!

The first members didn't need any help as his neighbor had a tractor and had cleared his land for him. The second member really needed our help. I think they lost most of the trees on their property. We spent all day cutting up the trees and hauling them up to the front of his property (3 acres) so they could be hauled away later by the county. It was really hot and humid work.

We drove back to the local church and fixed dinner in a big communal pot—it was very much like the United Order. There were around 300 people staying in or around the church, a very small building. Everyone wanted to stay where they had air conditioning. People were sleeping everywhere, in the chapel on the pews, under the pews, in the gym and classrooms, etc. (I'm glad I had earplugs when I slept because I understand it sounded like some of the Bros were still running their chain saws during the night.)

The local bishop and his family have been living at the church since the hurricane. He and his wife were spending all their time organizing the work parties and checking on the members.

The bishop's wife and another member started at 5 AM to prepare pancakes for everyone. I ate and then helped them in the kitchen until 7 AM when we had a short sacrament meeting. The local bishop talked briefly and quoted extensively from King Benjamin's address. (The same passage I referred to at the beginning of my remarks). It was a very special, spiritual meeting. We then packed up and went to find our third member. Their

place had a lot of damage, also, but no one was at their home. Our instructions were that we shouldn't do any clearing if no one was home, so we decided to drive around and find someone to help. We were driving down a small country road and saw a little old lady sitting on her porch. We stopped and offered to clear some of her trees. She was just overwhelmed. She had several trees down behind her house, one on top of her car. We spent a half-day doing what we could and were able to get the car out. Several times during the morning, neighbors or others dropped by or stopped to ask who we were or to offer us water to drink. (We were wearing the school-bus-yellow "Mormon Helping Hands" that the church issues to relief workers.) They were all very impressed that we had driven from Houston to help people we didn't know. The bishop had mentioned that several referrals had been received as a result of the relief workers coming in and offering to help.

We started back to Houston by 1 PM. It was fun to ride together in the van and visit, laugh, and tell stories together. We all became much closer as a result of this trip. We have put 1000 miles on the van.

What else happened last week? I worked ^{Sunday} at the temple on Wednesday night—always enjoyable. Thursday was our one day of the year when our work sponsors us to go out in the community and give service, "Day of Caring". I went to a Boys and Girls Club and helped. "

His letter the following week told of his service efforts when Hurricane Rita hit the Houston area. I appreciate the efforts and the examples of service of my brothers.

As members of the Church, we have continual opportunities to serve in the spirit of the Christ. Those invitations may involve priesthood callings, teaching or executive assignments in the organizations of the Church, service as home teachers or visiting teachers, service in family history research and performing vicarious ordinances within the walls of the temple, and missionary service. There is also a special kind of service that the wives of priesthood leaders frequently render. John Milton once said, "He also serves who stands and waits". There are many, many priesthood wives throughout the world who are blessed of the Lord by sustaining their husbands during long hours of priesthood service. I remember a Christmas morning when the family was still in the process of opening presents and a call came to my husband from the hospital. He was blessed, as were we as a family blessed, as he left to take care of his duties as a stake president and be at the bedside of a member of the stake who had attempted suicide earlier that morning.

I recently spoke with my daughter about her service as a Relief Society President. She made this significant observation. "Invitations to serve, or times when responsibility calls, are not always convenient". It would be nice to be able to say I have a few extra hours today for the Lord or His children. But it seems that the most urgent calls come when we can least afford to give the time. That makes the desires of our heart all the more apparent when we answer "Yes" to the call without regard for personal convenience. My daughter's call for service in the Relief Society came just before the birth of her 6th child—the oldest was only 10 at the time, but she said she decided she could either serve lovingly or grudgingly, and she chose the better part. In addition to

formal assignments, there are the hosts of opportunities for service within our families, our neighborhoods, and beyond.

We learned a lesson through an experience of one of our grandson's recently, who was roused out of bed before 5 AM to help his father render assistance to a widow who had an urgent need. As his father brought him back home in time to get ready for school, the father said, "You won't be tired today and you'll do better in school because of the sleep you sacrificed in service." That evening, after one of the best days he could remember, he said to his father, "If that widow ever needs help again, let me go with you. This has been a great day!"

Service does make our days great—living for something higher than self refines us as nothing else can, for whenever we do the things the Christ did, we become more like Him—Indeed, we become Christ-like through service.

May we all take advantage of the opportunities about us each day to serve.