

Keeping Your Fingers on the PULSE of Service

SONDRA D. HEASTON

The heart is a vital organ necessary to maintain life. The heart rate, also known as the pulse rate, is the number of times your heart beats per minute. In order for your body to function properly, it is important to have a continuous, regular, and strong pulse. With certain variations in the pulse, you may become sick and unable to function. Elder Marvin J. Ashton, in a general conference talk from October 1988, taught that the Lord measures an individual's heart as an indicator of that person's capacity and potential to bless others. In his words:

Why the heart? Because the heart is a synonym for one's entire makeup. We often use phrases about the heart to describe the total person. Thus, we describe people as being "big-hearted" or "good-hearted" or having a "heart of gold." Or we speak of people with faint hearts, wise hearts, pure hearts, willing hearts, deceitful hearts, conniving hearts, courageous hearts, cold hearts, hearts of stone, or selfish hearts.

*The measure of our hearts is the measure of our total performance. As used by the Lord, the "heart" of a person describes his effort to better self, or others, or the conditions he confronts. ["The Measure of Our Hearts," *Ensign*, November 1988, 15]*

I recently saw a Facebook post from a wonderful friend who is a nursing student in Indiana. She had posted a video that had been presented by Dr. Toby Cosgrove, CEO of the Cleveland Clinic, for his 2012 state-of-the-clinic address. The video really touched my heart and helped me to evaluate how I truly see and value others. I would like to share that video with you in the hope that it will do for you what it did for me and will start you thinking about the state of your heart. [A video was shown: *Empathy: The Human Connection to Patient Care*, [youtube.com/watch?v=cDDWvj_q-o8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDDWvj_q-o8).]

What if we could really see into each other's hearts? Would we understand each other better? By feeling what others feel, seeing what others see, and hearing what others hear, would we make, and take, the time to serve others, and would we treat them differently? Would we treat them with more patience, more kindness, and more tolerance?

Sondra D. Heaston was an associate teaching professor in the BYU College of Nursing when this devotional address was given on 23 June 2015.

A quote from Henry David Thoreau suggests that trying to see into each other's hearts could truly be something that could benefit our heart health: "Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?" (*Walden* [1854], I, "Economy").

While we may all look at things differently, our hearts beat with many of the same dreams. The 2015 Mutual theme, as found in Doctrine and Covenants 4:2, states:

Therefore, O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day.

This scripture teaches us that in order to stand blameless before God at the last day, not only should we serve Him with our might, mind, and strength, but it is also imperative that we serve Him with our heart. Our Heavenly Father and the Savior know our heart. Service with all of our heart must then be motivated by the pure love of Christ, free from all selfishness.

Since a strong and vibrant heart is vital to our physical and spiritual health, each of us needs to learn how to assess and monitor our own physical and spiritual heart rate. If you were one of our first-year nursing students, we would teach you how to take your own heart rate. This would be accomplished by taking your index and middle finger of either hand and placing them over the radial artery on the thumb side of your opposite wrist or by placing those same two fingers on the carotid artery on either side of your neck. By learning this simple technique, each of you could quickly and simply assess whether your physical heart was beating effectively.

Just as there is a necessity for each of us to know that our physical heart is functioning properly, it is equally important to know that our spiritual heart is healthy and functioning properly. Unfortunately, there is not

a two-finger technique that I can teach you that will effectively assess and monitor your spiritual heart rate. But there are indicators from our daily life that help us to know where we stand spiritually. One of the most easily measurable of these indicators is our ability to help meet the physical and spiritual needs of others—or, in other words, our ability to be of service to those around us. And that is the topic I would like to address with you today.

I would like to suggest to you an acronym that will help you to assess, monitor, and improve your spiritual heart health. That acronym is PULSE, which is defined as follows:

P = Pray: Pray to have a serving heart.

U = Understand: Understand and recognize the needs of others.

L = Lose: Lose yourself in the service of others.

S = Spirit: Be Spirit driven—listen to and follow the promptings of the Spirit.

E = Emulate: Emulate the Savior.

Let me now explore each of these with you in greater detail.

First: Pray to Have a Serving Heart

Heavenly Father knows each and every one of us. He knows our desires, unique abilities, and circumstances, and He knows how we can use them to bless others. As we pray, become closer to Him, and seek His direction, He will help us know who, where, and how best to serve.

Elder M. Russell Ballard stated:

In your morning prayer each new day, ask Heavenly Father to guide you to recognize an opportunity to serve one of His precious children. Then go throughout the day with your heart full of faith and love, looking for someone to help. Stay focused, just like the honeybees focus on the flowers from which to gather nectar and pollen. If you do this, your spiritual sensitivities will be enlarged and you will

discover opportunities to serve that you never before realized were possible. ["Be Anxiously Engaged," Ensign, November 2012, 31]

President Thomas S. Monson has taught many times that Heavenly Father answers another person's prayers through us—through our acts of service and love.

Six months before my twenty-first birthday, my life was anything but hard. I had just finished my nursing prerequisites and had applied to the nursing program at the University of Utah; I had a super part-time job selling cosmetics for ZCMI, which included an hourly wage plus commission; I was seriously dating a young man and thinking I would be engaged in the not-too-distant future; and all was well with the world. And then my bishop, who just happened to be known as the "mission bishop" by the youth in our ward, called me in for an interview. My first thought was the obvious: he is going to ask me to go on a mission! And, sure enough, during the interview he encouraged me to put in my papers and go out and serve the Lord.

A mission was never part of my life's master plan, so I decided that I was not going to even consider the bishop's suggestion, nor was I even going to ask in prayer if that was what I needed to do. I didn't share this interview/request from the bishop with anyone—not my parents, not my closest friends, not anyone. I knew better than anyone else what course my life should take, and I didn't need anyone's help or advice!

Now, for those of you who have big grins on your faces and for others of you who are quietly chuckling to yourselves, you can see where all of this is headed—and you're absolutely right! When the other shoe finally dropped—and it did drop—it dropped with a loud bang! A mere few weeks after that initial interview, the young man I was dating stopped calling me without any explanation; the new

manager where I was working decided she wanted everyone in that department to be full-time, and, since I was in school full-time and was not able to change my school schedule, I was moved to a less desirable area of the store and was no longer earning a commission from my sales; I was informed that I was not accepted into the nursing program; and the list went on and on. In a matter of months I felt like the whole world had come to an end.

President Era Taft Benson taught: "God will have a humble people. Either we can choose to be humble or we can be compelled to be humble" ("Beware of Pride," *Ensign*, May 1989, 6).

Obviously I was not going to humble myself, so the Lord chose to do it for me.

It was at that moment in my life that I knew I needed to approach my Heavenly Father in prayer to plead for His forgiveness and ask what He would have me do. And I knew the minute that I asked, without a doubt, that I needed to serve a mission. By the way, from the moment the bishop asked me to serve a mission, I knew what it was that I was supposed to do, but I didn't want to pray about it because I knew that if I did, I wouldn't be able to ignore the answer and do what I thought was best for me. If I didn't ask, then I could simply go on as I had been and not have to worry about making dramatic changes to my master plan for my life. What I have since come to realize is that the real master plan for my life was, and is, really in the hands of the Master.

The time between when the bishop first interviewed me to the time when I entered the MTC here in Provo was a little over seven months. I served a full-time welfare service mission to the Asunción Paraguay Mission, speaking Spanish. Little did I realize what the Lord had in store for me in the future because I had been willing to replace my plan with His and to serve Him in the way that He intended.

Second: Understand and Recognize the Needs of Others

Sister Linda K. Burton gave a talk in the October 2012 general conference in which she suggested that in order for us to become more like the Savior as we serve, we need to remember a four-word phrase: “First observe, then serve” (“First Observe, Then Serve,” *Ensign*, November 2012, 78).

I have found in my own experience that the more I observe, talk to, interact with, and take an interest in the lives of others, the better I come to know others’ likes, dislikes, needs, and wants. Information can truly lead to inspiration. Serving others becomes easier because I better understand where they are and what they really need. This understanding leads to a greater desire on my part to make an effort to reach out and bless the lives of those within my sphere of influence.

In the College of Nursing we have a required global health course that is taken after the students have completed either their fourth or fifth semester in the program. I have the opportunity each May to take between fourteen and twenty nursing students to Ecuador in fulfillment of that global health requirement. While there, we have the opportunity to work with various nonprofit organizations. The more I go the more I am able to talk with those leaders and the people of Ecuador to evaluate their needs and in turn share those needs with the students. With the nonprofit organization Charity Anywhere, we are able to take teams made up of physicians, dentists, and an eye specialist into various communities and schools in the Otavalo and Tena areas of Ecuador. There we evaluate and serve the medical and dental needs of children and their parents. We also do classroom teaching and provide fluoride treatments to all of the children.

In Guayaquil we have worked with a nonprofit organization called Hogar de Cristo. This organization works with an impoverished

area of approximately 400,000 people—some of them living on less than a dollar a day. A few years ago the leaders of Hogar de Cristo were concerned about many hungry children coming to school and were worried that these children were not growing as they should. One year they asked if my students would measure these children, as they wanted to start some school nutrition interventions. We measured height, weight, and hemoglobin and found that nearly 50 percent of the children had anemia. Since that time, we in the nursing program have worked together with Hogar de Cristo and the BYU Department of Nutrition, Dietetics, and Food Science to find a sustainable way to decrease the rate of anemia in Guayaquil—a study and intervention that is still in progress.

Luis Tavara, a representative of Hogar de Cristo in Guayaquil, always talks with the nursing students at an initial orientation. He tells them to “turn off the noises of the world in order to better see ways to reach out and serve.” He also encourages them that “through the smiles in their eyes the children will feel hope.” These words have had a long-lasting effect on many of the nursing students who have gone to Ecuador. One student said:

Even now when I am home, I continue to apply this principle every day in my life with each new or familiar person I come in contact with. I feel like this principle will make a huge difference in the nursing care that I will provide in my future. No matter the culture, economic status, religion, or personality of my patients, a “smile from the soul” truly is the greatest thing I can give them. [Anna Mocke, 2015 Public and Global Health Ecuador course]

Throughout Ecuador we have held many LDS stake health fairs at the local meeting-houses and have been able to interact with large numbers of the members of the Church to do health screenings to measure height, weight, body mass index (BMI), blood glucose levels, and blood pressure. We have taught

various health care topics such as cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR), the Heimlich maneuver, proper practices of nutrition, how to stay healthy, and the prevention and treatment of diabetes and hypertension.

Each year our BYU Student Nurses' Association and BYU nursing alumni come together to assemble kits to share with those in need. These include newborn kits, first-aid kits, hygiene kits, school kits, dental hygiene kits, and feminine hygiene kits. There have been so many people who have donated their time and money in order to provide the supplies for these kits, and, in turn, so many people in various countries have benefited from this service.

Each year as I take nursing students to Ecuador, we are able to continue to observe in order to be better able to serve.

Third: Lose Yourself in the Service of Others

President Gordon B. Hinckley stated:

Generally speaking, the most miserable people I know are those who are obsessed with themselves; the happiest people I know are those who lose themselves in the service of others. . . .

*. . . By and large, I have come to see that if we complain about life, it is because we are thinking only of ourselves. ["Whosoever Will Save His Life," *Ensign*, August 1982, 5]*

I had the wonderful opportunity to serve as our ward girls camp director this year. Two weeks ago I was at girls camp in Wallsburg, Utah, with our Young Women and their advisors. Sister Virginia H. Pearce was one of our nightly devotional speakers, and she taught us about "becoming." One of her statements about becoming was, "Be someone who reaches out to know and serve others—throw away the mirrors and look through the window."

To demonstrate this, she called up one of the young women and asked that young woman to stand facing her. Sister Pearce then pulled out a mirror and put it between the young woman

and herself so that she, Sister Pearce, was looking into the mirror while she tried to talk with the young woman. Not surprisingly, it didn't even begin to be an effective or heartfelt conversation. This was a powerful object lesson that illustrated how difficult it is to communicate with and serve others if we are too worried about ourselves and see only ourselves and our needs. Sister Pearce then put away the mirror, pulled out a window frame, and put it between her face and the young woman's face. As she did so, we were able to see that the young woman had become Sister Pearce's focal point and that true service requires that we focus on the needs and emotions of others. Ofttimes we are so worried about ourselves and our own busy lives—as we look in mirrors while trying to look for opportunities to serve—that we do not see clearly through the windows of service.

In October 2009 general conference, President Monson stated:

Often we live side by side but do not communicate heart to heart. . . .

*. . . 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. ["What Have I Done for Someone Today?" *Ensign*, November 2009, 85; emphasis in original]*

President Monson also has said:

We are surrounded by those in need of our attention, our encouragement, our support, our comfort, our kindness. . . . 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. ["What Have I Done?" 86]

I have been very fortunate throughout my life to have a profession whose very purpose is service and gives me the opportunity of serving others daily. Everyone who comes to a medical facility is in need of being served in some way. Many days I would think to myself how awesome it was to not only be able to go to work and serve others but to also have that as my profession. It has truly been an amazing and fulfilling journey. I have worked in clinical settings as an emergency nurse and now as a nurse practitioner in urgent-care clinics, and what I have learned there I am now able to pass on as I teach nursing students the importance of serving others and treating each person with kindness and respect.

The inscription we read as we enter the BYU campus—which pertains to all of us—is “Enter to learn; go forth to serve.” How awesome it is that every day I have worked has been a day of service! I would hope I could say that of all of the days that I am not working as well.

Fourth: Be Spirit Driven—Listen to and Follow the Promptings of the Spirit

Listen to the Spirit—He knows the heart of everyone—and trust Him. Elder M. Russell Ballard stated that

if you do this—at home, at school, at work, and at church—the Spirit will guide you, and you will be able to discern those in need of a particular service that only you may be able to give. You will be prompted by the Spirit and magnificently motivated to help pollinate the world with the pure love of Christ and His gospel. ["Be Anxiously Engaged," 31]

One of my favorite scriptures is found in Proverbs 3:5–6, which reads:

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

It is very obvious to me that the opportunity to be influenced by the Spirit and to serve a mission more than thirty years ago has led me to my current experience of now serving in Ecuador with nursing students. Because the Lord altered events in my life and led me to a place where I needed to speak Spanish and understand South American culture, He is now able to use me for His purposes. By listening to the Spirit, putting my trust in the Lord, and planning according to His will, I am able to find joy and fulfillment in serving the Ecuadorian people.

Also, in listening to the Spirit and trusting the Lord in choosing nursing as my profession thirty years ago, I have been greatly blessed as I have been able to care for the diverse medical needs of my family, friends, and neighbors. A few weeks ago the whisperings of the Spirit led me to pick up on early signs of pneumonia and sepsis that were affecting my father as we came back from one of his weekly dialysis sessions and to get him to the hospital—a course of action that led to the early intervention that he needed to stave off a much more severe and possibly life-threatening set of circumstances.

As a nursing professor here at BYU, I am now able to impart to my nursing students the importance of trusting the Lord and listening to and following the promptings of the Spirit throughout their careers—just as I have been given those same opportunities throughout mine.

President Spencer W. Kimball said:

God does notice us, and he watches over us. But it is usually through another person that he meets our needs. Therefore, it is vital that we serve each other in the kingdom. ["Small Acts of Service,"

Ensign, December 1974, 5; quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), 82]

Fifth: Emulate the Savior

All of the prophets have declared that true happiness is found in following the example and teachings of Jesus Christ. He is the perfect example, as His was a life of service. When we serve our family, friends, and neighbors, we help those who are in need. As we emulate the Savior, we become more like Him. The Savior has given us an entire life of service to emulate, including healing the sick and ministering to the afflicted as well as causing the blind to see, the lame to walk, and the deaf to hear. He miraculously fed those who had no food; He raised the dead; and He took time for those in need, maybe even when He had not planned it into His day.

In April 2011 general conference, Elder Ballard shared some thoughts about serving as the Savior serves:

“Jesus said . . . , Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

“This is the first and great commandment.

“And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:36–40).

It is only when we love God and Christ with all of our hearts, souls, and minds that we are able to share this love with our neighbors through acts of kindness and service—the way that the Savior would love and serve all of us if He were among us today.

*When this pure love of Christ—or charity—envelops us, we think, feel, and act more like Heavenly Father and Jesus would think, feel, and act. Our motivation and heartfelt desire are like unto that of the Savior. [“Finding Joy Through Loving Service,” *Ensign*, May 2011, 46–47]*

One of my students this year wrote:

Serving the people in Ecuador also helped my understanding of Christ’s role as a healer. When we think of Christ as a healer, we often think of all of the miracles He performed throughout His life on earth: healing the sick, causing the blind to see, and raising the dead. However, this is not all that Christ is capable of as a healer. He is able to lift up the heads that hang down and heal broken hearts and wounded souls. This type of healing was what I felt we were able to participate in while in Ecuador. We may not have been able to heal every one of their physical infirmities, but we could help lift up heads that hung down, boost spirits, and heal hearts by providing a listening ear, a comforting hug, or a word of encouragement. All of these types of healing are accomplished by love. This experience in Ecuador helped me better understand how we can love as Christ did to help heal. [Stephanie Squire, 2015 Public and Global Health Ecuador course]

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf said:

When I think of the Savior, I often picture Him with hands outstretched, reaching out to comfort, heal, bless, and love. . . .

*As we emulate His perfect example, our hands can become His hands; our eyes, His eyes; our heart, His heart. [“You Are My Hands,” *Ensign*, May 2010, 68]*

If we truly love and look to the Savior and try to emulate His life of service, we will more fully know how to best serve our fellowman.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would ask you to ask yourself if you have a healthy heart with a continuous, strong, and regular pulse for service. If the answer is yes, then I would encourage you to keep praying for and making time to be of daily service. If, on the other hand, your heartbeat is a bit faint and your service pulse rate is a bit hard to effectively measure, I would

suggest incorporating the PULSE acronym more fully into your daily life:

Pray for a serving heart.

Understand and recognize the needs of others.

Lose yourself in the service of others.

Be **S**pirit driven—listen to and follow the promptings of the Spirit.

Emulate the Savior.

I am grateful for the opportunity to be in the service profession of nursing with the opportunity to serve my brothers and sisters here on the earth. I love “be[ing] anxiously engaged in a good cause” (D&C 58:27), and I am grateful to be an instrument in His hands and pray that I will be ready when, where, and how He needs me, as I would hope you would be as well. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.