

Shape Your Life Through Service to Others

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Good morning, my young brothers and sisters. You are an inspiring sight. I have the opportunity to visit your campus often with my various Church assignments, but seeing you here today brings back a flood of wonderful memories from a time in my life when I sat where you are now sitting. The year was 1968, and I was a freshman here at Brigham Young University. I remember well the excitement and, of course, the anxiety that many of you who are entering as freshmen are feeling right now, not knowing exactly what lies ahead. To those of you who are returning for your sophomore, junior, or senior years, I likewise know the excitement and anxiety you are feeling because you are beginning to have a better sense of what lies ahead.

After beginning my studies here in 1968, I had the privilege of serving a full-time mission between 1970 and 1972. After my mission, I returned to finish my studies and graduated in the summer of 1974. I married my beautiful wife, Nancy, the day after I graduated. We have four children, all of whom have graduated from Brigham Young University. Our family has great memories of BYU, and it is wonderful to be back on campus with you today.

Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Serve

Brothers and sisters, I feel I was led to focus my message this morning on the gospel principle that has been the source of the most joy and fulfillment in my life throughout the forty-three years since my graduation from this very special institution. Therefore, with this thought in mind, I have entitled my message “Shape Your Life Through Service to Others.”

Like many of you, when I arrived on campus as a freshman, I was greeted by the large sign on the western edge of campus that reads, “Enter to learn; go forth to serve.” Not only is this one of the first sights most people see when they arrive on campus, but I think it is also one of the last sights they see, as it has become the backdrop for many a picture as students celebrate their graduation day with loved ones.

Ernest L. Wilkinson, a past president of Brigham Young University, adopted the slogan for the university in 1966. For more than fifty years now the slogan has greeted students and

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faculty, parents and visitors, and ambassadors and dignitaries from across the globe.

While speaking here in 2003, President Gordon B. Hinckley urged every student to make “Enter to learn; go forth to serve” his or her personal motto. President Hinckley said at that time:

*Mediocrity will never do. You are capable of something better. . . . Walk the high road of charity, respect, and love for others and particularly those who are less fortunate.*¹

Please remember, my young friends, that being the best at something doesn’t make you a good person. You can be number one in your academic field, you can be an accomplished musician or artist, or you can be an all-American athlete, but none of these accomplishments make you a good person. What you actually do to bless others with your knowledge and talents is what makes you a good person.

Do the Works of Righteousness

For those of you who have a smartphone, please take it out of your pocket, backpack, or purse and hold it. Now let me tell you a little about these computers you hold in your hands.

In terms of raw processing power, the computer in your hand has capabilities far greater than the supercomputers that took up thousands of square feet in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when I attended BYU. In fact, a smartphone is millions of times more powerful than the computers used to send the Apollo missions to the moon.²

Through your smartphone you have the ability to easily access more content in more ways than your parents ever dreamed would be possible. You can send images with Snapchat, scroll through Instagram, and shop for your mother’s birthday present without missing a beat.

At any moment, you have access to more than

- 40 million Wikipedia articles in 293 languages.³
- 1 million eBooks on the Kindle.⁴

- 30 million songs on iTunes, Spotify, or Amazon.⁵
- 5,500 movies and television shows on Netflix.⁶

You have instant access to vast amounts of information that are growing at incredible rates. In just a single minute,

- 500 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube.
- 448,800 tweets are posted to Twitter.
- 65,972 Instagram photos are posted.
- 3.3 million posts are made to Facebook.

Remember, all of that occurs each minute.⁷

This flood of information can become almost all-consuming. On any given day the average user spends 148 minutes streaming music,⁸ 40 minutes on YouTube, 35 minutes on Facebook, 25 minutes on Snapchat, and 15 minutes on Instagram.⁹ The average user spends 4 hours and 23 minutes online every day. Therefore, during an average lifetime, years will be spent on social media.

With those alarming statistics in mind, I ask, How are you spending your time?

I love how Doctrine and Covenants 59:23 helps us understand exactly what the best use of our time is: “He who *doeth the works of righteousness* shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come” (emphasis added). In this revelation the Lord tells us that the best use of our time now and throughout our lives is doing “the works of righteousness.” What are the works of righteousness? Let me show some examples of how the Lord Jesus Christ and His prophets have answered that question.

Remember when the lawyer asked Jesus the question “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?”¹⁰

Jesus answered him by saying:

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.*¹¹

Remember when King Benjamin shared these inspiring words with his people?

*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.*¹²

Remember in the priesthood session of our last general conference, in April 2017, when President Thomas S. Monson admonished us and taught us this same principle in this way:

*Let us examine our lives and determine to follow the Savior's example by being kind, loving, and charitable. And as we do so, we will be in a better position to call down the powers of heaven for ourselves, for our families, and for our fellow travelers in this sometimes difficult journey back to our heavenly home.*¹³

Focus on What Is Truly Important— Serving Others

Today, with all the information available to you in an instant on the internet, it is easy to get distracted. How do you determine what is the most important information you need to know and understand? The most important information any of us could hope for is the answer to the question “What is my purpose in life?” I have never met anyone who wouldn’t appreciate knowing the answer to that question. The answer is found within the great plan of salvation, which has been taught by the Savior and His holy prophets throughout history.

If we are fortunate enough to have a knowledge and a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ in our lives, we had better take full advantage of that knowledge and testimony and act accordingly. Acting according to our knowledge and testimony of the plan of salvation would obviously be the best and most appropriate use of your time, not only as a university student but throughout your life.

Of course we all recognize that as we journey through life our worldly priorities change. Your worldly priorities are currently focused on getting a formal education, but that will change when you

get married, have children, develop careers, and grow older. However, as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, our most important eternal priorities remain unchanged throughout our lives.

There might be a tendency in your youth to put a little too much focus on yourself, which is easy to do as you plan and work toward your future. You are probably pondering questions such as “What should I major in?” “Should I go on to graduate school?” or “Where will I work?” These questions all relate to important aspects of your lives, but they are all secondary to the most important questions that relate to your spiritual lives, such as “What can I do to be more Christlike today?” and “Is there someone I can help today?”

This principle was taught in a recent broadcast of *Music and the Spoken Word*, as follows:

It's easy in this self-focused world to become . . . self-focused. Our needs, our wants, our desires and ambitions can be so consuming that they crowd out other people. It's amazing . . . how often we drown in things that can be so superficial.

*Of course, few would fault a person for seeking to improve his or her life and living with purpose and goals. But when our pursuit of personal growth and happiness causes us to ignore others, it becomes selfishness, and that leads to stagnation, not growth; despair, not happiness; and, ultimately, loneliness. [Elder Neal A. Maxwell] put it this way: “Why worry about selfishness? . . . Because selfishness is really self-destruction in slow motion.”*¹⁴

President Gordon B. Hinckley taught us how to stay focused on the teachings of the Savior: “The antidote of selfishness is service, a reaching out to those about us—those in the home and those beyond the walls of the home.”¹⁵

Will you take a moment right now to envision yourselves in the stage of life similar to that of your grandparents or, for some of you, your great-grandparents? You have lived a long life, and it is becoming more apparent that you are getting closer to the time when you will move on to the next life. What will you be taking with you on

that journey? The answer is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. You can take with you only what you have become. “For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors.”¹⁶

The following experience from the book of Luke should help us understand how important it is to follow the Savior’s example in providing loving service to our fellowmen rather than getting caught up in the busyness of the day. This experience is recorded in Luke 18:

And it came to pass, that as [Jesus] was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging:

And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant.

And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.

*And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.*¹⁷

I would like to take a moment on the next verse, which reads, “And they which went before rebuked [the blind man], that he should hold his peace.”¹⁸

Brothers and sisters, how do you interpret the phrase we just read: “And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace”? Why would anyone in Jesus’s traveling party rebuke the blind man? Perhaps they loved Jesus and were trying to protect Him, or perhaps they were in a hurry to get to Jericho, or maybe they did not understand Jesus’s mission and purpose.

Let me read this verse again and then continue the story to the end:

And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.

And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him,

Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight.

And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee.

*And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.*¹⁹

So what do we learn from Jesus as He taught His disciples that day? He taught that we should focus on what is truly important, and what is truly important is blessing the lives of others. Are we sometimes blinded by the activities of each day so that we forget to live as true disciples of Christ and serve our fellowmen as He taught?

President Monson is surely one who would never rebuke the blind man or isolate anyone in need from a source of help and support. President Monson addressed this great principle of living a life of service, compassion, and charity. He said:

*My brothers and sisters, we are surrounded by those in need of our attention, our encouragement, our support, our comfort, our kindness—be they family members, friends, acquaintances, or strangers. 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.*²⁰

He also said:

*How many times has your heart been touched as you have witnessed the need of another? 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. . . .*

*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.”*²¹

Also:

May the words of a familiar hymn penetrate our very souls and find lodgment in our hearts:

Have I done any good in the world today?

Have I helped anyone in need?

Have I cheered up the sad and made someone feel glad?

If not, I have failed indeed.

*Has anyone's burden been lighter today
Because I was willing to share?
Have the sick and the weary been helped on their way?
When they needed my help was I there?*

That service to which all of us have been called is the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As He enlists us to His cause, He invites us to draw close to Him. . . .

If we truly listen, we may hear that voice from far away say to us, as it spoke to another, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" [Matthew 25:21].²²

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf emphasized the importance of serving others by teaching us that there is no higher priority than having charity and serving people in need. He said:

We could cover the earth with members of the Church, put a meetinghouse on every corner, dot the land with temples, fill the earth with copies of the Book of Mormon, send missionaries to every country, and say millions of prayers. But if we neglect to grasp the core of the gospel message and fail to help those who suffer or turn away those who mourn, and if we do not remember to be charitable, we "are as [waste], which the refiners do cast out" [Alma 34:29; see also Matthew 25:31–46]. . . .

. . . Having charity and caring for one another is not simply a good idea. It is not simply one more item in a seemingly infinite list of things we ought to consider doing. It is at the core of the gospel—an indispensable, essential, foundational element.²³

Take Time to JustServe

I would now like to take a minute to speak of the practical application of this doctrine. All who understand the doctrine of Christ understand the importance of applying the principles of charity and service in our personal lives, but it is not always easy to find appropriate service opportunities that we can fit into our schedules amidst our other responsibilities. Understanding this challenge, the First Presidency of the Church has recently authorized an exciting new initiative that will help solve that challenge. Let me read to you a statement from the First Presidency introducing

this new community service initiative, called JustServe:

Dear Fellow Members,

In response to the question from the lawyer who asked, "And who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29), Jesus taught the parable of the good Samaritan, which illustrates for each of us that our neighbor is anyone in need, even the stranger (see Luke 10:25–37). In the Book of Mormon, King Benjamin instructed his people, "Ye . . . will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need" "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 4:16; 2:17).

From the earliest days in the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we have been encouraged to engage in service beyond the walls of our homes and chapels. As God's children we desire to be true disciples of Jesus Christ. We are grateful for His abundant blessings. Each of us would like to reach out in Christlike service to share those blessings with others, but we may not know how to start or where to go. JustServe.org is designed as a resource to help us as individuals, families, and groups find opportunities near our homes to help those in need and improve the quality of life in our communities.

As we reach out with fellow Latter-day Saints and others who are not of our faith in an effort to help people in need, we create a spirit of love and cooperation that transcends differences and connects us as children of God. May the Lord bless you in this effort to give selfless service as your time and circumstances permit.²⁴

So, as described by the First Presidency and defined in the *JustServe Community Service Guidebook*:

*JustServe is a community service initiative to help Church members follow the Savior's admonition to "love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:39) by providing a platform where members and missionaries can find voluntary opportunities to relieve suffering, care for the poor and needy, and enhance the quality of life in the community. This is **not** intended to be a burden on the time and resources of members, nor is it a "duty" about which one should feel anxious or guilty. It*

*is truly voluntary for those who seek a way to give such service. Because this is a volunteer effort there are no quotas or record-keeping requirements for members.*²⁵

After the devotional this morning, if you have not already done so, please download the JustServe app. It is so easy to use. After downloading the app, all you need to do is type in “Provo, Utah,” or your zip code to see what projects in your area have been posted on the site. The last time I entered Provo, more than 280 projects within twenty-five miles came up to choose from. I am sure you will be able to find one that interests you. There are projects to help clean up the community, projects to help support our veterans, projects to help support the elderly, projects to help in food banks and food kitchens, projects to help refugees—and the list goes on and on. I invite you to make your next date a JustServe date. How can you go wrong on a date that focuses on serving others who need a helping hand? That sounds a lot better to me than watching another movie.

You won’t be alone in using JustServe.org or the JustServe app. Already, more than 300,000 volunteers have signed up and more than 45,000 projects have been posted since its inception in the United States and Canada. Let me give you a quick look at four brief testimonials from your peers who shared their thoughts regarding the impact of their community service efforts.

The first is Ada Frandsen from Los Angeles, California:

I am on my phone a lot, but when I do put it down to go do “walk and water” or things like this where I’m not on it the entire day and I’m out there helping the kids, it makes me feel so good.

The second is Henry Christensen from Dallas, Texas:

It’s a different kind of fun that you just have to experience firsthand. But I’ve found it’s a lot more fun than videogames.

The third is Emma West from Minneapolis, Minnesota:

And a lot of people were open to it, and it was a really cool experience. And every time someone was like, “Yeah, sure, we’ll do that,” we kind of fist-pumped together and gave each other high fives.

And the fourth is Emma Anderson, also from Los Angeles, California:

And if you don’t want to be sad or angry at your situation, the way to fix that isn’t staying in that place. It’s by getting out and helping someone else because it helps you not be selfish and not think about your own problems. It’s almost like a distraction, but it’s one that will heal you.

Live a Charitable, Christlike Life

Now I will leave the practical aspects of applying the principle of service and move back to the doctrine as I conclude. These next three statements from past and present leaders should help us understand the role that service to our fellowmen could take in our personal lives.

First, a statement from President Marion G. Romney:

*We lose our life by serving and lifting others. By so doing we experience the only true and lasting happiness. Service is not something we endure on this earth so we can earn the right to live in the celestial kingdom. Service is the very fiber of which an exalted life in the celestial kingdom is made.*²⁶

Second, a statement from President Hinckley:

*May the real meaning of the gospel distill into our hearts that we may realize that our lives, given us by God our Father, are to be used in the service of others.*²⁷

And third, a statement from President Monson:

*Unless we lose ourselves in service to others, there is little purpose to our own lives.*²⁸

When I read these statements from our leaders that support the scriptures we have reviewed this morning, I feel we are learning what “pure religion” really means.²⁹

I am far from perfect in applying this doctrine in my own life, but I have found a powerful way to help deepen my understanding of this saving principle and my commitment to living it. Let me go to Moroni 7 and review verses 47 and 48. Verse 47 is one we might know by heart:

Charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.

When we speak of shaping our lives through service to others, we are really speaking of living a charitable, Christlike life. The Bible Dictionary defines charity as “the highest, noblest, strongest kind of love, not merely affection.”³⁰ For me, charity, or the pure love of Christ, is a condition of the heart. Charity motivates people to do the right thing for the right reason. Charity particularly motivates a person to do something that is difficult or maybe even impossible for others to do for themselves.

Now let us look at verse 48:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. [emphasis added]

Brothers and sisters, it is my prayer today that we might all “pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart”; that we may be filled with the love we call charity, the pure love of Christ; and that that pure love will manifest itself in Christlike service to others. I bear my testimony and my witness of the importance of understanding, internalizing, and living the doctrine of charity in our personal lives. Let us all shape our lives through service to others. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Remarks at the Inauguration of President Cecil O. Samuelson,” BYU inauguration address, 9 September 2003.
2. See Tibi Puiu, “Your Smartphone Is Millions of Times More Powerful Than All of NASA’s Combined Computing in 1969,” ZME Science, 10 September 2017, zmescience.com/research/technology/smartphone-power-compared-to-apollo-432.
3. See Wikipedia, s.v. “size comparisons.”
4. See Kindle Unlimited, Amazon.com.
5. See Grace Shallow, “Spotify vs. Amazon Music vs. Apple Music: Which Is the Best Music-Streaming Service?” Expert Reviews, 4 July 2017, expertreviews.co.uk/technology/1405999/spotify-vs-amazon-music-vs-apple-music-which-is-the-best-music-streaming.
6. See Stephen Lovely, “Netflix’s U.S. Catalog Has Shrunk by More Than 2,500 Titles in Less Than 2.5 Years,” AllFlicks, 23 March 2016, allflicks.net/netflix-us-catalog-has-shrunk-by-more-than-2500-titles-in-less-than-2-5-years.
7. Robert Allen, “What Happens Online in 60 Seconds?” Smart Insights, 6 February 2017, smartinsights.com/internet-marketing-statistics/happens-online-60-seconds. For more statistics, visit DMR Stats/Gadgets, expandedramblings.com.
8. “Spotify Launches Playlist Targeting for Brands,” Spotify Press, 16 April 2015, press.spotify.com/us/2015/04/16/spotify-launches-playlist-targeting-for-brands.
9. Kenneth Burke, “How Much Time Do People Spend on Their Mobile Phones in 2017?” Text Request, 9 May 2017, textrequest.com/blog/how-much-time-people-spend-mobile-phones-2017.
10. Matthew 22:35–36.
11. Matthew 22:37–39.
12. Mosiah 2:17.
13. Thomas S. Monson, “Kindness, Charity, and Love,” *Ensign*, May 2017.
14. Lloyd D. Newell, “A Better Self and a Better World,” *Music and the Spoken Word*, 30 April 2017, musicandthespokenword.com/cgi-bin/messages.cgi/?20170430+SpokenWordMessages; quoting

Neal A. Maxwell, “‘Repent of [Our] Selfishness’ (D&C 56:8),” *Ensign*, May 1999.

15. Gordon B. Hinckley, “First Presidency Message: The Environment of Our Homes,” *Ensign*, June 1985.

16. Alma 34:32.

17. Luke 18:35–38.

18. Luke 18:39.

19. Luke 18:39–43.

20. Thomas S. Monson, “What Have I Done for Someone Today?” *Ensign*, November 2009.

21. Monson, “What Have I Done?”; emphasis in original.

22. Monson, “What Have I Done?”; quoting “Have I Done Any Good?” *Hymns*, 2002, no. 223.

23. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Transcript: President Uchtdorf Address to the Salt Lake City Inner City

Mission: ‘The Pattern, the Path, and the Promise,’” 4 December 2015, Mormon Newsroom, mormonnewsroom.org/article/president-uchtdorf-transcript-salt-lake-inner-city-mission.

24. “First Presidency Message,” *JustServe Community Service Guidebook* (2016).

25. “JustServe: An Overview,” *JustServe Guidebook*, section 1; emphasis in original.

26. Marion G. Romney, “The Celestial Nature of Self-Reliance,” *Ensign*, November 1982.

27. Gordon B. Hinckley, “First Presidency Message: Giving Ourselves to the Service of the Lord,” *Ensign*, March 1987.

28. Monson, “What Have I Done?”

29. James 1:27.

30. Bible Dictionary, s.v. “charity,” 632.