

“Serve the Lord with Gladness”

(Psalm 100:2)

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I had been on my mission in Taiwan only a few months when Sister Newton was preparing to return home. Several sisters were visiting with her on the eve of her departure, and someone asked, “What’s the most important thing you’ve learned on your mission?” After a moment’s reflection, Sister Newton replied, “I’ve learned about the joy of serving the Lord. If I’m called to be the light-bulb changer when I go home, I’m going to do it to the very best of my ability!”

I don’t know which comes first—serving the Lord with gladness or knowing there is joy in service—but I think they’re very closely tied. I’d like to read all of the 100th Psalm:

*Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.
Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his
presence with singing.*

*Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that
hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his
people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

*Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into
his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and
bless his name.*

*For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting;
and his truth endureth to all generations.*

Clearly joy, service, knowledge of the Lord’s greatness, and thanksgiving are intertwined. Unfortunately for those of us who are “musically challenged,” singing is blended into the mix as well.

When I was a freshman at BYU, I was so looking forward to receiving a call and beginning to serve in my campus ward. During our first week in the ward, we filled out surveys indicating our talents, interests, and experience. About a week later I had an appointment with the bishop. After the introductory exchange he said, “Sister Nyland, we’d like you to serve as the Relief Society chorister.” I nearly fell off the chair. I said, “But Bishop, I don’t know anything about music.” He was quite surprised at that and said, “Well, let’s look at the cards.” All of the data from our surveys had been entered onto punch cards (something many of you are too young to remember), and he stuck a skinny little knitting needle into the hole for music ability. Mine

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was the only card that came out of the stack as having no musical skill. He thought that was interesting, as did I, but he asked me if I'd like to try anyway. Well, I'd been raised to accept callings, so I told him that I would accept this call and ask my roommate to help me. Susan and I went to the basement of our dorm, and she sat at the piano, plunking out the melody with one hand and showing me how to lead it with the other. We practiced and practiced each Saturday. I did learn the pattern for 4/4 and 3/4 time, but I never could quite get the pattern to match the beat of the music. Mercifully, after about a month I was released, and my roommate was called to lead the music!

I have since learned that there are many ways to make a joyful noise in the Lord's service—whether or not you can keep the beat.

In thinking about this talk, I've reflected on the unique nature of callings in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I have friends of many faiths, some of whom give tremendous service in their respective churches. But the comprehensive nature of the service given in this church is truly remarkable. Why do we do what we do? Why are we willing to put time, effort, and emotion into things that no one could pay us enough to do? I found an interesting entry in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* under "Lay Participation and Leadership" (Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 5 vols. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), 2:814–16), and I'd like to read some of it to you. Remember that this encyclopedia was written for a non-LDS audience:

Lay participation and leadership have several implications for the Church and its members. Part of the mission of the Church is to perfect the Saints (Eph. 4:12), to sponsor growth in individual members. Utilizing volunteer members at all levels of the organization may not ensure peak efficiency, but it does provide the experiences and interactions that will help members progress. [2:815]

It goes on to say that members must balance church callings with other family and employment responsibilities:

This provides the opportunity for learning to sacrifice and to balance commitments. In general, members who serve maintain a high level of commitment to the Church, in part because of their awareness that they are responsible for making a contribution and because they take satisfaction from doing so. . . .

The gospel teaches that this life is a preparatory state for the life to come and that all people are on a course of eternal progression. Lay participation plays an important role in that progression by providing opportunities for service and learning. Church callings offer many opportunities to develop practical skills and spiritual qualities that contribute to continued service and fulfillment throughout life. [2:815]

The next section describes the fact that people often receive callings of increasing complexity or scope, but that these are not considered promotions. It then makes this wonderful statement:

The progression that is important, to the individual and to the Lord, is not evidenced by the different callings held by a person, but by the increase in Christlike characteristics developed through years of prayerful and thoughtful service. The potential for personal growth and righteous influence is as great for a nursery leader as for a stake president. [2:815]

I want to read one last snippet from the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, this time from the entry for "Magnifying One's Calling":

Magnifying one's calling means taking callings seriously, following through responsibly, and realizing the importance of one's efforts. . . .

To magnify a calling means to make it honorable and glorious, even to glorify God through service. . . .

Those who seek to respond to the Lord's admonition to magnify their callings take even the simplest calling seriously as an opportunity to glorify God and serve his children. [2:850]

From those entries, we are reminded about several important aspects of service:

1. service is designed to perfect the Saints and contribute to progression,
2. service teaches us about sacrifice and balancing commitments,
3. service is related to increased commitment to the Church,
4. service allows us to make a contribution and brings satisfaction,
5. service develops practical skills and spiritual qualities,
6. thoughtful and prayerful service develops Christlike characteristics,
7. the potential for growth is the same regardless of the calling, and
8. to magnify a call is to glorify God and serve His children.

What a system! We are sent to earth to be tried and proven and to learn to be like God. As members of the Church, we are then given callings to help us develop the very attributes that will allow us to return to our Father's presence. I think that the working out of our salvation rests in large part, very literally, on the work we do and service we render in fulfilling our various church callings. Elder Dallin H. Oaks said:

We need to remember the purpose of our service to one another. If it were only to accomplish some part of His work, God could dispatch "legions of angels," as Jesus taught on another occasion (see Matthew 26:53). But that would not achieve the purpose of the service He has prescribed. We serve God and our fellowmen in order to become the kind of children who can return to live with our heavenly parents.

[*"I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go," Ensign, November 2002, 70*]

Now that's all well and good when you get the call you've always dreamed of, when you have all the time necessary to do it just the way you'd like, when you have all the skills necessary to fulfill your call to perfection, and when the people in your stewardship are loving, cooperative, and appreciative. But what about the other 99 percent of the time?

What about the times when you receive the call that has always scared you spittleless, when your time demands at work, home, or the community have just escalated, when you feel like you don't have a tenth of the skills needed to carry out the call, and to top it off, when you're called to work with the teenagers (or toddlers or Cub Scouts or adults—fill in the blank with whatever group scares you)?

There is no magic wand to easily transform those frightening or disheartening situations into treasured ones, but there are several keys that can help.

First, remember whom you serve. In Mosiah 2:17 we are reminded that "when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God." Service to our fellow men shows our love, devotion, and gratitude to our Heavenly Father. It reflects the depth of our understanding of His purposes for us and our willingness to put Him first in our lives. Elder Henry B. Eyring, in the April 2004 general conference, stated simply: "The Lord's Church has been restored, and so any call to serve in it is a call to serve Him" ("In the Strength of the Lord," *Ensign*, May 2004, 16).

In the October 2002 general conference, Elder Eyring said:

You are called to represent the Savior. Your voice to testify becomes the same as His voice, your hands to lift the same as His hands. His work is to bless His Father's spirit children with the opportunity to choose eternal life. So, your calling is to bless lives.

That will be true even in the most ordinary tasks you are assigned. ["Rise to Your Call," Ensign, November 2002, 76]

Elder Dallin H. Oaks gave this gentle reminder in the October 2002 general conference:

There is room for improvement in the commitment of some. . . . Some are not committed and faithful. It has always been so. But this is not without consequence. . . .

. . . If you are delinquent in commitment, please consider who it is you are refusing or neglecting to serve when you decline a calling or when you accept, promise, and fail to fulfill. ["I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go," Ensign, November 2002, 69]

Remembering whom it is we serve is a two-part issue. To put a different spin on King Benjamin's words, when you seek to be in the service of your God, you can do it only by being of service to your fellow beings. Our brothers and sisters, our fellow beings, are the key to our being of service to God.

Do we truly recognize the importance of the people we serve? It is so easy to be put off by mannerisms, attitudes, or behaviors that mask true potential. I think C.S. Lewis captured some of what God sees when looking at His children when he said:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship. . . . There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. [The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2001), 45–46; emphasis in original]

We're not just serving people, we're serving people who have the potential to become gods

and goddesses. We're serving people who are precious to their Heavenly Father. Sometimes that knowledge is very helpful to me when I'm worried about a lesson or talk I'm preparing. When I realize that Heavenly Father wants His children to learn and grow and progress, I realize that He will help me prepare something that will help them do that.

Earlier this month I was released from an eight-and-one-half-year stint as the institute teacher for my stake and a neighboring stake. I learned so many things while doing that, but one of the most important was the incredible awareness of how much the Lord wants His children to learn and understand the gospel. The many times I received inspiration and insight beyond my own capacity and knowledge about how to teach or illustrate something testified to me of God's concern for each of us.

And that brings me to the second key: Seek the Lord early and often. His ability to change hearts and minds, including our own, is amazing.

Shortly after I began attending a ward, the counselor in the bishopric asked to visit with me after Sunday School. He said, "Sister Nyland, we'd like to call you to serve in the nursery." I began to laugh, assuming he was kidding, and said, "Really, what would you like me to do?" He was a little taken aback by my laughter, but said, "Really, we'd like you to serve in the nursery." I immediately sobered and said I'd be happy to do that. Now, to tell you the truth, I wasn't happy to do that. I liked children in the abstract, but the reality of twenty-five toddlers was a bit much. I was quite comfortable teaching college students, because they were quiet, they hung on my every word (in case it showed up on an exam), and they never chased each other around the room or crawled under their desks. The best words to describe my first day in the nursery were *shell shock*. I have never felt

more unprepared, unskilled, and ill suited for a calling in my life.

I was smart enough to know that the nature of two-year-olds wasn't going to change much, so if I was going to survive this calling, I was the one who would need to change. I made that call a matter of prayer night and day, and each Sunday for six weeks the nursery was, frankly, a nightmare. Then on the seventh Sunday, when I walked into the nursery, it was like a switch had been flipped. I absolutely loved it! I loved the children; I had fun playing with and teaching them; I didn't even mind sitting on the floor. From that day until I was released, the nursery was one of the favorite callings I'd ever had. I was so grateful for that change of heart.

Paul says in Galatians 5:13, "By love serve one another." The Lord can help us feel the love that both leads to and comes from service.

Another reason to seek the Lord often has to do with increasing our abilities. Sometimes we already have the skills a particular calling requires, but sometimes we don't. When we don't, the task can seem impossibly large. Elder Eyring addressed that concern in the October 2002 general conference when he said:

Just as God called you and will guide you, He will magnify you. You will need that magnification. . . .

There will be times when you will feel overwhelmed. One of the ways you will be attacked is with the feeling that you are inadequate. Well, you are inadequate to answer a call to represent God with only your own powers. But you have access to more than your natural capacities, and you do not work alone. ["Rise to Your Call," Ensign, November 2002, 76]

Faith that the calling is inspired leads us to faith that the Lord can strengthen our deficiencies and enlarge our capacity. Remember—He wants His children to benefit from whatever you are called to do, and He wants to bless you, as well. Very early in my mission experi-

ence I came across this statement by Elder Neal A. Maxwell: "God does not begin by asking us about our ability, but only about our availability, and if we then prove our dependability, he will increase our capability!" ("It's Service, Not Status, That Counts," *Ensign*, July 1975, 7). I found that enormously comforting as I was trying to perform my labors, all in Chinese.

Our feelings of inadequacy are probably calculated to turn us toward Heavenly Father. If we choose to turn toward Him through pondering and prayer, our reward is comfort, peace, and increased strength. As we experience those feelings and see our skills develop, it becomes even easier to serve the Lord gladly and with gratitude.

And the next key is gratitude. Doctrine and Covenants 59:21 says, "In nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments." To confess His hand in all things is another way of saying to express gratitude for all that the Lord has provided.

Have you ever tried the exercise of listing ten things for which you are grateful at the end of the day? It is really quite amazing how detailed the list becomes after a week or so. Realizing the source of all those blessings is at once humbling and awe inspiring. King Benjamin taught his people:

I say unto you, my brethren, that if you should render all the thanks and praise which your whole soul has power to possess, to that God who has created you, and has kept and preserved you, and has caused that ye should rejoice, and has granted that ye should live in peace one with another—

I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another—I say, if ye should serve him with all your

whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants.
[Mosiah 2:20–21]

I know that when I have an attitude of gratitude, I have a strong desire to serve the Lord; to show Him that I appreciate all that He has given me. We can never get the Lord in our debt, but we can demonstrate our gratitude through cheerful, glad service and by using our gifts to glorify Him.

The final key for serving with gladness is having both a firm testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel and a desire to build the kingdom of God. A firm testimony—built through prayer, scripture study, pondering, and keeping the commandments (you know, the usual things)—creates a desire to be of use in the kingdom.

The hymn “More Holiness Give Me” includes these lines:

*More fit for the kingdom,
More used would I be,
More blessed and holy—
More, Savior, like thee.*
[*Hymns*, 1985, no. 131]

I really like the image those lines portray. When our deepest desire is to be more fit for the kingdom and to be of more use in it, we’re able to swallow, smile, and serve when asked to do something we’d really rather not do. A recognition of the intricate pattern the Lord is weaving in the lives of each of His children gives us a sense of responsibility to be sure the thread we offer is acceptable.

Let me illustrate. When I was a Primary president, a counselor and I were visiting the home of a less-active child. In our very enjoyable conversation with the mother, we learned that she didn’t know who her visiting teachers were, didn’t know who her home

teachers were, and didn’t know who her child’s Primary teacher was. Later that evening, I began thinking about how amazing it would be if every person in the Church truly fulfilled, to say nothing of magnified, his or her calling. Think of the web of love and support that would be woven around each member if every home teacher, visiting teacher, Sunday School or Primary teacher really understood and carried out his or her call. Think of what it would mean if every Scout leader, every Young Women leader and every Relief Society teacher and Home, Family, and Personal Enrichment committee member attended to their stewardship. Think of the strength of the web woven by so many strands of dedicated service.

The analogy of the body in 1 Corinthians 12:12 is so fitting as we think about serving in our callings: “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.” Then Paul says, “If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?” (1 Corinthians 12:15). He is emphasizing that each member needs to realize that it is important to the functioning of the whole body precisely because it is different from the other members. Paul brings it back to the Church in verse 25: “That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.”

Our testimonies let us trust that we are part of a very important pattern in building the kingdom of God, even if we can’t see it in its entirety. Every skill, talent, and ability we have, whether inborn or developed in callings or other areas of our lives, helps us be more serviceable in the kingdom. Every skill, talent, or ability lets us “make a joyful noise . . . [and] serve the Lord with gladness” (Psalm 100:1–2).