

Convenient Service

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The title of my talk is “Convenient Service.” You may think this is an oxymoron, but during the course of this talk I hope to explain why it should not be.

Jesus Christ preached:

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets. [Matthew 7:12; see also 3 Nephi 14:12 and Luke 6:31]

Jesus also said:

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. [Matthew 16:24–25; see also Matthew 10:39]

President Thomas S. Monson said:

I believe the Savior is telling us that unless we lose ourselves in service to others, there is little purpose to our own lives. Those who live only for themselves eventually shrivel up and figuratively lose their lives, while those who lose themselves in service to others grow and flourish—and in

effect save their lives. [“What Have I Done for Someone Today?” *Ensign*, November 2009, 85]

Furthermore, we read in Revelation 2:19:

I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.

Notice how “works” is in this scripture twice—actually, I believe it is in there four times, as charity and service could also be “works.” Heavenly Father is saying here that He *knows* our works. So what works or service are we personally known for? Do we hesitate when confronted with the opportunity to serve? Is it convenient to serve? Or is service something we sign up for once in a while when the sign-up sheet is passed around?

With my profession as a nurse and my job here at BYU, I have the opportunity to work both locally and abroad with the sick in hospitals and various communities. Much of what

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I see is humbling and life changing. I would like to relate an experience of service I had a few years ago.

I was in a hospital in a developing country doing research for my doctoral project. In many hospitals or healthcare facilities in third-world countries, medicine is not available to the patients from the hospital itself. If the doctor feels the patient should receive a particular medicine, even if it is lifesaving, a prescription is written out to the family, and they need to take it to a pharmacy, pay for it, and then bring it back to the hospital for administration to the patient. Understandably, this is difficult for many patients, and they do not get medicines, as their family simply cannot afford them.

Partly due to these situations, it is not uncommon for there to be many beggars just outside the hospital grounds with their hands outstretched for money. But once you get in the gates of the complex, you usually aren't asked for money. As I was an obvious foreigner, I was asked for money many times a day. In fact, I had become quite calloused to this situation.

I had been in the hospital working a few days in the intensive care unit. As I was doing research, I was observing and taking notes on the care that the patients were receiving. Little did I realize that people were also watching and noticing me. I was walking across the hospital campus and a little lady came up to me. She introduced herself and said she had been watching me in the intensive care unit; her son was a patient there. She stated that her son was unconscious from a car crash. He was on a ventilator and not doing well. I could not remember which patient was her son. As she continued explaining the situation, she started pulling out a piece of paper.

I saw it and thought, "Oh, this is it. This is a prescription, and she is going to ask me for money."

I then thought about the twenty-dollar bill I had in my pocket. I don't carry a lot of money

with me when I travel, and I had been waiting all week to eat in the hotel restaurant and order the roast beef, which is delicious and cheap compared to American standards. I told her I couldn't give her any money and walked away. She was just another beggar.

I walked away quickly, and after a few moments I turned around and looked at her. She was looking around with a look of "What do I do now?" My heart was pierced. I couldn't believe I was so eager to eat roast beef over giving this woman money that would possibly enable her son to live. I couldn't allow it! I quickly ran back down the steps and said, "Espera, Senora—wait! I have money to give you."

She accepted my twenty-dollar bill with tears in her eyes. And tears were in mine also.

The desire to help another was strong. I am glad I had this experience, because I have been able to reflect on it a lot. I call it my personal parable of the roast beef.

What of these people who are less fortunate than we are? How do we serve them? In my travels I have wondered why there is so much variation of wealth, health, or material blessings. What do others desire when they appear to have so little? Elder Neal A. Maxwell said something that has helped me understand:

God thus takes into merciful account not only our desires and our performance, but also the degrees of difficulty which our varied circumstances impose upon us. ["According to the Desire of [Our] Hearts," Ensign, November 1996, 21]

Of course everybody has similar desires, but it is the performance and the degree of difficulty it takes for us to perform that God considers. God takes into account the degrees of difficulty. So what does that say when it truly is quite easy to give a little service because of our blessings and fortune? Well, "unto whom much is given much is required" (D&C 82:3; see also Luke 12:48).

We have a low degree of difficulty, and we should really be getting off the couch, so to speak, and providing meaningful service. We are blessed for a reason. If it is only a little difficult to render service, should we not do it more often? If it is only a little inconvenient, why can't we do it more frequently?

What about those who have a higher degree of difficulty in providing service? Think of those who are struggling in the world. I am sure many missionaries can relate to the experiences I had while I was on my mission years ago. Families who had little to eat would prepare food for the missionaries. Surely these families have a different degree of difficulty when it comes to giving and rendering service.

I clearly remember an episode of service on my mission over thirty years ago. This was one of those occasions in which we thought we were the ones giving service, but, as it turns out, we were the ones being served. My companion and I had traveled out to a little settlement in Itakyry, Paraguay. This area basically consisted of a large member family and a few neighbors who were investigating. We were going out to visit the family and attend church and a baptism the next day.

Since it took so long to travel out there, down dirt roads and over streams, we had to stay the night with the family. Even though it was in a jungle, it was cold. The parents gave me and my companion their one bed and their one blanket. The large family then slept on the dirt floor in the next room, with the little ones tucked between them.

I froze that night. I kept on all my clothes, my sweater, and even my rubber boots. I felt so guilty and was so cold that I could not sleep. The next day, as we sat on logs under the open sky for fast and testimony meeting, the family could not express enough thanks to me and my companion for coming all the way out to visit them on this special occasion. My heart was pierced. It was then that I realized that this family had been providing me service—in

the way that they could—by providing their own bed and blanket on a chilly night in Paraguay.

Even though there are material inequalities in the world, we all can have the righteous desire to serve. *And it is the pursuit of these righteous desires that measures our reward in heaven.*

We do not have to travel abroad to have fascinating and memorable experiences of service. We can and should start right here in our homes and neighborhoods. Jesus did not travel very far; often He served those very near to Him. We have opportunities to serve by simply being sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters. We serve through our church callings and by being members of our wards. I often think that Heavenly Father will ask me, "What did you do to serve the women you visit taught? How did you change their lives or help them in times of need? How did you serve your brothers? Did you even notice when they needed help?"

These can be sobering thoughts.

So, how can we make service convenient? We start by practicing with "automatic responses."

Let me relate another little experience. This one was only a few months after my experience in the hospital with the roast beef money. It was Christmastime, and I was in the check-out line at Walmart, thinking of all I had to do. I was watching the young couple in front of me buy a little girl's bike. The cost was around sixty-five dollars. I watched the man hand over dollar bills and then frustratingly search in his pockets for change. Then the couple searched in the woman's purse for money. I averted my eyes to avoid additional embarrassment for them. Even at that moment I felt uncomfortable and awkward. I guess they finally came up with the right amount of money. I was too busy trying not to notice.

After I had made my purchases, I followed them out of the store—realizing I had again missed the opportunity to help. It was most

likely only a few dollars they had needed. Where had my desire gone? Why couldn't I have just conveniently handed them a few dollars? Again, I couldn't believe it! Why hadn't I performed an automatic response by offering a dollar or two?

Giving service and having it become "convenient" is a work in progress. While I was in the temple the other night I thought about how tightly related service is with sacrifice and consecration. Service is a stepping-stone toward these two great doctrines of our religion. It is up to us how big this stepping-stone of service is. Are the stepping-stones of service huge, insurmountable boulders that we believe are set in our way? Or are they merely soft, round pebbles upon which we tread? If we treat service like helpful small pebbles that line our pathway back to the Savior, we may find that these pebbles become convenient guides that will help us along the way. If we can master the task of providing service to those around us, how much easier, then, is it to sacrifice for others and consecrate what we do for the Lord.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie gave a talk in April 1975 about obedience, consecration, and sacrifice. He said:

We have covenanted in the waters of baptism to love and serve him, to keep his commandments, and to put first in our lives the things of his kingdom. In return he has promised us eternal life in his Father's kingdom. We are thus in a position to receive and obey some of the higher laws which prepare us for that eternal life which we so sincerely seek.

Elder McConkie then went on to say:

*It is written: "He who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory." (D&C 88:22.) The law of sacrifice is a celestial law; so also is the law of consecration. Thus to gain that celestial reward which we so devoutly desire, we must be **able** to live these two laws.*

Sacrifice and consecration are inseparably intertwined. ["Obedience, Consecration, and Sacrifice," *Ensign*, May 1975, 50; emphasis in original]

I would like to add: How can we ever get to the laws of sacrifice and consecration without first applying service in our lives? When we are physically serving our brother, we are sacrificing—whether it be our time, our physical abilities, or our material blessings. When we perform service with the right kind of spirit, we practice consecration. We are consecrating our time, our physical abilities, and our material blessings to others—and in essence to the Lord. Service in our lives is similar to stepping-stones; the way we perceive or encounter service determines the size of those stones. Are they helps or hindrances to our eternal progression?

Just like we consciously work on other fine attributes in our lives, we need to put in place a conscious decision to make service convenient. We need to plan on this behavior.

President Thomas S. Monson taught Brigham Young University students that their student days should include "the matter of spiritual preparation," including service to others:

An attitude of love characterized the mission of the Master. He gave sight to the blind, legs to the lame, and life to the dead. Perhaps when we [face] our Maker, we will not be asked, "How many positions did you hold?" but rather, "How many people did you help?" In reality, you can never love the Lord until you serve Him by serving His people. ["Great Expectations," BYU devotional address, 11 January 2009]

I would like to look at some examples of Jesus Christ when He served. What were His interactions like? Was service convenient for Him? Let's take a look at some interactions:

And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. [Matthew 8:2–3]

And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever.

And he touched her hand. [Matthew 8:14]

Behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.

And Jesus arose, and followed him. [Matthew 9:18]

And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment: . . .

But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort. [Matthew 9:20]

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them. [Matthew 9:35–36]

What was Jesus doing? He said, “I will,” He “touched,” He “arose,” He “turned him about,” and He “was moved with compassion.” These are characteristics of kindness and love. He was not inconvenienced. It was His way of life. When we act and serve as Jesus did, we become more like Him.

How can we make service our way of life? How can we have it be an immediate reaction instead of a thought-out action? How can we make it convenient?

We can *prepare* for service. We may start out with creating a habit of always being willing to or being ready to *do* something extra. Maybe

you enjoy mowing the lawn, so if a neighbor needs help, that can be your automatic reaction—you can mow their lawn. Or maybe you have a special chicken enchilada recipe that turns out great every time—that can be your automatic reaction if there is a need for a meal in your ward. Maybe you have a keen listening ear and enjoy conversation—that can be your automatic reaction when a family member is in need. The key is to create automatic reactions within ourselves. They do not have to be big service activities.

President Spencer W. Kimball said:

It is vital that we serve each other in the kingdom. . . . So often, our acts of service consist of simple encouragement or of giving . . . help with mundane tasks, but what glorious consequences can flow . . . from small but deliberate deeds! [“Small Acts of Service,” Ensign, December 1974, 5; quoted in Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2006), 82]

Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone gave a talk about serving when it is inconvenient. He said:

Now my young friends, . . . think of all the opportunities you will have to serve at inconvenient times. I promise you that most of the service you render to the Lord will come at times not convenient to you. Think about some of them:

Your call to serve an 18-month mission, right in the middle of your schooling, courting, and vocational training.

A call to serve in the ward when you have grades to maintain and a social life to fulfill.

An invitation to speak at church.

Home teaching visits.

Early-morning seminary, which in many stakes begins at 6:00 a.m., not a convenient hour.

A hospital visit to a sick friend.

Assisting a friend in his or her school election campaign.

Someone with a flat tire or other auto problems on the highway. It generally is not a convenient time to stop.

Shoveling snow or mowing a lawn of someone in need—a widow or neighbor—when your day is already too full.

Elder Featherstone went on to say:

I could list many, many more opportunities that may well come to all of us in a lifetime but most often at an inappropriate time. You can make a decision that you are too busy, but that is generally only an excuse. . . .

*My beloved young friends, determine to serve one another. Listen to the spirit when your flesh is weak. For truly the Master said, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40). The blessings are tenfold when we do those good, kindly acts of Christlike service when it is inopportune or not convenient. [“The Message: Why Now? Why Me?” *New Era*, January–February 1984, 7]*

I appreciate Sister Burton’s advice to “first observe, then serve” (see “First Observe, Then Serve,” *Ensign*, November 2012, 78–80). How closely do we observe? What do we notice as we go about our daily, hurried lives? What can you do as a BYU student? Take a look around you. Do as Sister Burton said: “First observe, then serve.” I have seen students sit by themselves an entire semester. I have seen students

not talk to anybody during class breaks. We need to serve those around us first, whether they are family, roommates, or neighbors.

I have experienced memorable acts of service. I have been the giver and the receiver. Yet even with many years of experience, I still struggle with how “convenient” the service is. I have felt my heart pierced with love, compassion, thankfulness, and the Spirit. Shouldn’t these feelings be enough motivation? My memories of two opposite experiences lately are vivid. My parable of the roast beef keeps me remembering how it feels to serve. My experience in Walmart at Christmastime is a sobering, memorable occurrence of *not* serving, or *not* observing; in fact, I averted my eyes to the need for a dollar or two.

Yes, service becoming convenient is a work in progress. Giving service throughout our lives is like being led down a beautiful path of stepping-stones. However, to make service convenient, we must practice and practice.

I think about and study the life of our Savior. How He acted and how He served is an example to me. Again, what was Jesus doing? He said, “I will,” He “touched,” He “arose,” He “turned him about,” and He “was moved with compassion.” These are characteristics of kindness and love. He was not inconvenienced. It was His way of life. May we pray to make this our way of life also, I say in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.