

# *Lost and Found*

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The other day, while walking through the Wilkinson Center on my way to the Cougar eat, I noticed the windows of the Y-Serve office. Students had turned the name Y-Serve into a question—Why serve?—and, using colorful markers, they had covered the windows with responses to why they serve. I was intrigued and stopped to read them.

A few of the answers were humorous—or just incredibly honest: “Because I usually get refreshments!” “To get dates.” “Women.” And “Because when you are in the service of your fellowman, you are closer to the food.”

But most answers offered serious reflection: “Because I love my Heavenly Father.” “Because the gospel is delicious to me.” And “[Because I want] to put more good . . . into a troubled world.”

As I continued reading, I realized there are a lot of reasons why people serve. I pondered some of the listed reasons and thought of my own motives for serving, and I wondered if perhaps my service could use some refining at times.

Well, if the intent of the good people in the Y-Serve office was to get us thinking about our service, it worked on me. What began as a simple attempt to get a salad at the Cougar eat

turned into weeks of thinking about this topic and then into a devotional talk.

So this morning I would like to write on that window, so to speak, and share with you some of my thoughts on “Why serve?”

## **Why Serve?**

I would like to begin by examining some primary reasons for serving. Elder Dallin H. Oaks has made this task easy for me. In a conference address he gave when I was a student, he introduced six reasons why people serve, in ascending order from lesser to greater. The first and lowest reason is “for hope of earthly reward,” in which our service is focused on receiving honor, praise, or recognition. The second reason is “to obtain good companionship,” which is centered on social benefits. Both of these reasons, he noted, are self-serving.

Moving upward along the continuum is serving “out of fear of punishment,” or a concern for what will happen to us if we don’t faithfully serve. He then listed serving out of duty or loyalty—a motive that is commendable

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and will merit blessings but still falls short of the ideal. The fifth “reason for service is the hope of an eternal reward”—“one of the most powerful sources of motivation” but not quite there yet.<sup>1</sup>

Have any of these reasons ever found their way into your service? Admittedly, they have found their way into mine.

Elder Oaks then reminded us of the highest reason—the “more excellent way,”<sup>2</sup> which is charity, “the pure love of Christ,”<sup>3</sup> the greatest of all virtues.<sup>4</sup> He explained:

*It is not enough to serve God with all of our **might and strength**. He who looks into our hearts and knows our minds demands more than this. In order to stand blameless before God at the last day, we must also serve him with all our **heart and mind**.*<sup>5</sup>

If we hunted down another set of windows on campus to write on, we might pose this question: Why serve out of charity?

Before exploring this question, I would like to review what the virtue of charity is and how it is developed. Mormon explained that charity is the pure love of Christ and that it

*suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*<sup>6</sup>

We know that charity encompasses all godly virtues. It is not merely a kind act; it is something that we become. The process of developing charity begins with a sincere, heartfelt desire. That desire leads to and grows out of a study of the life of Jesus Christ and a commitment to follow Him.

We know that prayer is also critical in developing charity because charity is a divine gift that is bestowed upon us. Mormon taught:

*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.*<sup>7</sup>

### Lost and Found

Now to the question “Why serve out of charity?” In offering my own answer, I’d like to begin with a story.

While living in Tucson, Arizona, my wife, Colette, and I were watching the local news one Saturday night when we heard the story of an eight-year-old boy who earlier that morning had wandered from a campground south of Tucson and had failed to return. The terrain into which he had wandered included mountains, gullies, and foothills covered in desert vegetation—much of it dense—making the search very difficult. When we saw the story on the news, the boy had already spent a hot day and was about to spend a cold night alone in the desert.

Colette and I thought of the boy’s parents and the unimaginable anguish they must be feeling. We also considered the young boy—alone and cold in the desert. We thought of our own young children and couldn’t imagine how we would feel if they were lost.

Just before midnight the phone rang.

“Brother Callister, this is the bishop. Did you hear on the news about the lost boy?”

I confirmed I had.

“The boy is in our stake,” he said. “He was on a fathers and sons’ outing, and early this morning he got separated from a group of older boys who were exploring a short distance from camp. People have been searching since then, but he is still lost. Would you meet in the morning at my house to help in the search? They need more volunteers.”

Very early the next morning, before the sun rose, a large group of us gathered at the bishop's home and quickly set out in vans to the search site. As we drove into the foothills and neared the campground, I saw cars leaving, carrying volunteers who had already spent a long day and a night searching the desert. The boy's father, I later learned, was not aware that replacement volunteers were on the way, and with many volunteers returning home to eat and to sleep, he was wondering if there would be enough people to cover the expanding search area that at that point extended for miles in all directions. But when he saw our large caravan filled with volunteers pull into the parking lot, he was overcome with emotion. I remember seeing him cover his face in his hands and cry at the sight of so many people coming to search for his son.

The leader of the search and rescue effort—a large, burly man with a thick beard—quickly organized us into small teams and assigned us to search areas marked on a map that lay across the hood of his car. We felt the urgency of the rescue as he explained that twenty-four hours had passed since the boy had wandered from camp, that the boy had already gone through a very hot day and a cold night, that the search area was immense, and that the desert terrain was rugged.

I was on the last team to receive an assignment, and while waiting, I watched the boy's father. I saw his anguish. I could only imagine the overwhelming pain and concern he was feeling. I listened as he expressed gratitude to the departing teams as they set out into the desert. I couldn't help but feel a love for this good father and his lost son.

As I stood next to the leader, I suddenly heard the crackle of his radio. We then heard an excited voice from one of the search teams exclaim, "We found him! We found him! He is okay."

The leader, who had shown great control up to that point, jumped in the air for joy and then

actually started to cry. His voice was choked with emotion as he called out to the boy's father and to all present, "They found him!" The leader called for all the search parties to return to the campground and then quickly drove off with the joyful father to pick up the son.

I then watched a beautiful scene unfold. Across the desert floor and over the hills came the search parties, which had been largely hidden from view up until that point. They were numerous. I watched them materialize from the hills, the gullies, the canyons, and the valley below. Some volunteers looked very tired and worn—having searched since the beginning—but full of joy at the news.

Soon the vehicle carrying the son and his father arrived back in camp. I could not hold back the tears when the father emerged from the car holding his son. The son's face was buried in his father's neck as he clung tightly to him. The large group of volunteers quickly crowded around to cherish the sight of the father and his son safely reunited.

The stake president asked for all the news cameras to be turned off and for hats to be removed while he offered a prayer of gratitude. The image of that father holding his son, encircled by an army of volunteers with heads bowed, is one of the sweetest memories of my life.

### **"Dear Are the Sheep That Have Wandered"**

There are many parallels from this experience that I could highlight—such as the urgency in these last days of searching out the lost sheep, the sacrifices that such efforts entail, and the persistence required. But it was the image of that father during the search and rescue that has remained most salient in my memory and that I would like to focus on.

That morning I received a small glimpse into what our Heavenly Father must feel as He looks out and sees so many of His children struggling and wandering across a rapidly

darkening and spiritually hostile landscape. For Him who is perfect in love and compassion, whose creations are continually before His eyes, the pain and anguish He must feel is hard to imagine. I think of the words to the hymn “Dear to the Heart of the Shepherd”:

*Dear to the heart of the Shepherd,  
Dear are the “ninety and nine”;  
Dear are the sheep that have wandered  
Out in the desert to pine.  
Hark! he is earnestly calling,  
Tenderly pleading today:  
“Will you not seek for my lost ones,  
Off from my shelter astray?”*

*Out in the desert they wander,  
Hungry and helpless and cold;  
Off to the rescue he hastens,  
Bringing them back to the fold.<sup>8</sup>*

Enoch was given a similar perspective on a far grander level than mine. The Lord showed him in a vision all the inhabitants of the earth, and he witnessed the disturbing spread of Satan’s power as it covered the world. He saw Satan and his angels laughing and rejoicing in their success at enticing God’s children into darkening and forbidden lands.

Then Enoch’s perspective was suddenly and forever changed. He saw something that absolutely astonished him: he saw God weeping.

“How is it that thou canst weep, seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to all eternity?”<sup>9</sup> he asked, unable to hide his surprise. “Thou art just; thou art merciful and kind forever; . . . and mercy shall go before thy face and have no end; how is it thou canst weep?”<sup>10</sup>

In answer to Enoch’s question, the Lord described the future suffering of His disobedient and unrepentant children. He then said, “Wherefore should not the heavens weep, seeing these shall suffer?”<sup>11</sup>

Enoch learned that God feels anguish, pain, and sorrow for His wandering and suffering

children. He witnessed the great depth of God’s love and compassion for each and every one of us—not just on some general, abstract level but on an individual, intimate, and personal level. His love, concern, and interest in us are beyond our comprehension.

That morning I saw the gratitude of the boy’s father for those who so willingly and lovingly sacrificed. I also witnessed his great joy at the return of his son. Our Heavenly Father feels these emotions as well but in far greater measure. He is ever grateful to those who search for, lift, and bless others. Those who go out and search for the lost ones or for those who struggle certainly offer our Heavenly Father some relief from His concern, anguish, and sorrow. His joy is full in the sheep that return to the fold or the lambs that are comforted.

### **The Lord’s Undershepherds**

For me, part of the answer to the question “Why serve out of charity?” is rooted in God’s infinite love for His children and in His desire for His children to experience that love. He accomplishes this, in part, through his undershepherds—those who lovingly assist Him in His work. When our service springs forth from the wells of charity, we experience God’s love as it flows through us to those we serve, and they in turn come to feel that love. Let me illustrate with a story.

Many years ago, as a freshman at BYU–Hawaii, I was passing through some difficult life experiences. I was also aware of my imperfections and felt distant from my Heavenly Father. I was not guilty of any egregious sins, but I was not where I wanted to be spiritually. I was much like the boy who, through some carelessness, had wandered into the desert.

On a particular Sunday a conference was held on campus, presided over by President Spencer W. Kimball. He spoke to a large gathering of Saints who had come to hear the prophet. I remember feeling the Spirit as he

spoke. Following the closing prayer all arose, and in respectful silence we watched that great man exit the building.

As we filed out, two young Polynesian students I had met at the dorms approached me and invited me to walk with them to the Laie Hawaii Temple, where they were going to spend the afternoon reading from the scriptures. I was a bit surprised at the invitation—not knowing them very well at the time—but I gladly accepted. When we arrived at the temple, we walked to the upper grounds. I didn't have scriptures with me, so as they sat on the grass to read, I walked a short distance away and sat on a stone bench.

I cannot remember all that I thought and felt that day—it was many years ago—but I remember thinking about my Heavenly Father and about how I wanted to draw closer to Him. I started to pray, but as I did, I remember I felt heavy and discouraged. At that time in my life I had a hard time envisioning a God of love and compassion. I felt I was praying to someone who was always displeased and disappointed with me and far away. I didn't understand the true nature of my Heavenly Father.

But my perspective was about to change. As I sat on that bench, my attention was suddenly drawn to a small group of people excitedly walking toward the entrance of the temple. I looked beyond them, and to my great surprise I saw President Kimball and some local and general Church leaders coming out of the temple. They were walking down a sidewalk that led to a gate where cars had just pulled up to carry them to the airport. A half dozen or so people lined the sidewalk, waiting to greet President Kimball as he made his way to the awaiting cars.

I stood up and apprehensively approached the sidewalk, deciding to remain a short distance away from where he would pass. However irrational it might sound, I was afraid to approach him. I had decided that as a prophet he might be able to peer into my heart and see

my imperfections. I felt that I was in need of greater spirituality and a serious haircut, so I decided to remain what I considered to be a safe distance away from the sidewalk.

Well, I miscalculated. As President Kimball passed by, he looked right at me. I recorded in my journal what happened next: "President Kimball suddenly stopped and turned and headed right for me. The prophet grabbed my hand, gave me a hug, and kissed me on my cheek and then looked me in the eyes and said, 'I love you.'"

I was overcome with emotion. The only words I was able to get out were *thank you*. I felt something in that hug and expression of love. I watched him through my tears as he climbed into an awaiting car. He looked through the window at us with such pure and loving eyes and waved good-bye as he drove away.

I then ran behind the temple and had a good cry. Yes, I felt President Kimball's love for me, but his love pointed to the wellspring from which it flowed. I felt an outpouring of my Heavenly Father's love for me, so real and so clear. The feeling remained with me for a time. President Kimball's act of kindness could have come from the groundskeeper that day, because if it had flowed from fountains of charity, I am convinced the same results would have followed. Having it come from the prophet certainly made it very special, but what flowed through him and was communicated to me was my Heavenly Father's love. Heavenly Father was reaching out to me through one of His special servants and two wonderful students, through whom the pure love of Christ had flowed to me that day.

Through that experience and others I have learned that as we strive to follow the Savior and as we fervently pray for charity, our service undergoes a remarkable change. We begin to feel His love more keenly for those we serve, and we feel His love for us as we serve. The outcome can be marvelous. When our Heavenly Father bestows His love upon

us, it is not meant to simply pool within us. As it flows through us to others in Christlike service, we are transformed. Like a river flowing over rough stones that with time become smooth, polished, and beautiful, as His pure love flows through us, it transforms our nature and blesses those we serve.

President Kimball once said, “My life is like my shoes—to be worn out in service.”<sup>12</sup> That same discipleship has defined President Thomas S. Monson’s life and the lives of so many others we have come to know. They are Christlike because they strive to serve as He did.

Perhaps at times you may feel that God is not aware of you or that you haven’t felt His love. I believe that if you will reflect for just a moment on the loving service you receive from others, you will see the workings of the Lord moving in the background. The Lord may move someone to offer a hug, a smile, a kind note, or an invitation. I believe that Heavenly Father is far more involved in those experiences than we may know.

### **Charity, Pure and Sweet**

Another reason we serve out of charity is because charity can deepen our love for our Heavenly Father and for His children.

Robert L. Millet once said:

*As we live in a manner that allows the Spirit to be with us regularly, we begin to see things as they really are. Our love for God grows as we begin to sense his goodness to us, as we become aware of his involvement in our lives, and as we begin to acknowledge his hand in all that is noble and good and worthy.*<sup>13</sup>

A few weeks ago I felt weighed down with a heavy matter. I prayed for a time, asking the Lord to lift my spirit. I arose from my knees and went downstairs to the kitchen, where my wife, Colette, was loading the dishwasher. She stopped in the middle of loading, looked up at

me, and immediately walked over to give me a hug. When she eventually pulled away, she said, “Are you all right?”

I was surprised at her question, knowing she knew nothing of the difficult matter. She said she felt an impression in that moment to give me a hug. I marveled at our Heavenly Father’s kindness and tender mercies, that He would prompt my wife to lift my spirit. He might have lifted my spirit while I was praying, which He sometimes does for us, but instead He chose to work through her. As a result, Colette felt and witnessed His love, as did I, and the experience served to bring her and me even closer together.

At times we are called upon to serve those who may make it difficult to love them. The Savior taught, “For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?”<sup>14</sup> But charity in such moments can soften hearts and heal relationships.

I remember on one occasion a frustrated and angry ward member speaking quite sharply and unkindly to a bishop, criticizing his leadership. As I listened I found my anger rising, feeling this criticism was unfair and inappropriate, for I had such great respect for this bishop and knew of his great sacrifices and able leadership. After the ward member concluded his comments, I was ready to provide a strong defense for the bishop and tell the ward member how I felt about his behavior.

But before I could speak, this great bishop, with his eyes moist from the stinging rebuke, replied with such genuine love to the member. “Thank you for sharing your comments,” he said. “I know that I have shortcomings, and you have shown me where I can improve. I commit to do better. Now, what can I do to make things better for you?”

A spirit came into that room and a change came over the ward member—a visible softening—and he apologized. The bishop then expressed his genuine love for this man and

the meeting came to a close. I remained in the room until the ward member had left and I was alone with the bishop. I couldn't speak; I was so moved by what I had just witnessed. It was charity, pure and sweet.

The bishop looked over at me, and he could tell that I was emotional. He asked if I was all right.

I couldn't answer for a moment. I then told him that I had just witnessed one of the most beautiful, Christlike experiences of my life and thanked him for it.

#### **"Waters to Swim In"**

In closing, I want to draw upon Ezekiel's vision in which he saw a millennial temple built in Jerusalem and witnessed waters suddenly bursting forth from the threshold of the temple and flowing eastward toward the Dead Sea. Joseph Smith spoke of the literal fulfillment of this future event.

Imagine Ezekiel standing on the riverbank under the hot Judean sun, looking over this miraculous river in the desert as it flowed from the temple and journeyed eastward. In the vision an angel invited Ezekiel to walk with him along the banks a thousand cubits and then to wade across the river. As Ezekiel crossed the river, he noticed that the water reached to his ankles. While this must have offered him some relief from the heat, the Lord never intended him to have only an ankle-deep experience. No, the river offered far more.

To feel more of this river, Ezekiel obediently followed the angel farther downriver along the bank. After he had progressed another thousand cubits, he was instructed to once more cross the river. This time the river had risen up to his knees. The pure, clear water flowing through the hot and arid desert valley must have been so refreshing to Ezekiel—perhaps his desire grew to experience all that this remarkable river had to offer. After obediently following the angel for another stretch and after another crossing, he found that the

waters had again risen and this time reached his waist.

Again he was called to follow, and again he obeyed. After walking along the bank for a final thousand cubits, Ezekiel was astonished at what he saw. He recorded, "It was a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over."<sup>15</sup>

Waters to swim in! A river so vast and mighty that it could not be passed over! What an appropriate symbol for the infinite love that flows from our Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

But the angel had one more surprise for Ezekiel: he showed him the transforming and miraculous power of this river. Ezekiel saw that everything the waters touched they blessed, healed, and prospered. The desert landscape was literally transformed; it came alive on both sides of the river with an abundance of trees and fruits of all kinds and with plants whose leaves contained healing powers. He beheld great fish in the river, drawing people from all around to cast in their nets. To his joy he then witnessed the pure waters ultimately flowing into the Dead Sea, healing its waters forever. Ezekiel concluded: "Every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live."<sup>16</sup>

Such transforming and healing powers point to the Atonement of Jesus Christ, the ultimate expression of love. My prayer would be that we might desire with all our hearts to swim in such waters—not ankle or knee deep, but waters to swim in. This is only possible to the extent that we follow the Savior in faith and obedience and pray with all our hearts that He might bestow His love upon us, that we might feel those living waters of the Spirit—the pure love flowing to us from our Heavenly Father and His Son. They desire that we direct these waters to others through our Christlike service. This is why we serve out of charity.

### The Fruits of Charity

The fruits of charity are a greater desire for the eternal welfare of others and a heart that is quick to forgive, slow to judge, and slow to anger and that sees the good in others, is patient and kind, and seeks out those in need.

I am grateful for the great shepherds who have blessed my family and me and who have led me to these living waters through Christlike service. Isn't it exciting to look out over this mortal desert and see so many missionaries—over 88,000 strong, young and old—searching for our Heavenly Father's children to bring them out from the desert to these healing waters. It is inspiring to see so many of you making your way to the temple, lovingly fulfilling callings, doing genealogy, and performing simple, everyday acts of kindness: a hug, a smile, a compliment, a kind note, or an expression of love. May we strive to do a little better each day.

I wish to close with the final verse of the hymn I cited earlier. In response to the Lord's plea "Will you not seek for my lost ones?" I pray that this might be our answer to our loving Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ:

*Green are the pastures inviting;  
Sweet are the waters and still.  
Lord, we will answer thee gladly,  
"Yes, blessed Master, we will!  
Make us thy true undershepherds;  
Give us a love that is deep.  
Send us out into the desert,  
Seeking thy wandering sheep."<sup>17</sup>*

I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### Notes

1. Dallin H. Oaks, "Why Do We Serve?" *Ensign*, November 1984, 13–14.
2. 1 Corinthians 12:31; see also Oaks, "Why Do We Serve?" 14.
3. Moroni 7:47; see also Oaks, "Why Do We Serve?" 14.
4. Moroni 7:46; see also Oaks, "Why Do We Serve?" 14.
5. Oaks, "Why Do We Serve?" 15; emphasis in original.
6. Moroni 7:45.
7. Moroni 7:48.
8. "Dear to the Heart of the Shepherd," *Hymns*, no. 221.
9. Moses 7:29
10. Moses 7:30–31.
11. Moses 7:37.
12. Spencer W. Kimball, quoted in Gordon B. Hinckley, "He Is at Peace," *Ensign*, December 1985, 41; also quoted in "President Spencer W. Kimball," *Doctrine and Covenants and Church History Seminary Teacher Resource Manual* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001), 270.
13. Robert L. Millet, *The Power of the Word: Saving Doctrines from the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 232.
14. Matthew 5:46.
15. Ezekial 47:5; see also verses 1–4.
16. Ezekial 47:9; see also verses 6–10, 12.
17. "Dear to the Heart of the Shepherd."