

“No Less Serviceable”

HOWARD W. HUNTER

It is a delight to be with you tonight in the first eighteen-stake fireside of the new academic year. I am aware that in the audience are many Brigham Young University students, Utah Valley Community College students, and young adults from other schools and locations in the valley. Thank you for your attendance and for letting me visit with you tonight.

I want you to know that my own children—and now my grandchildren—have attended Brigham Young University. From time to time I have spoken with them about some of the challenges that come at this time in a young person’s life, and this is what I would like to do with you tonight. If you are willing, please allow me to speak to you as my “family.” I love you as if you were all mine, and there may be someone here tonight with a need for fatherly—or grandfatherly—advice. I want to encourage you and hope you will receive what I have to say in that spirit.

Part of God’s Army

Let me begin with a well-known verse from the Book of Mormon about the young and valiant Captain Moroni. It was said of him:

If all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men. [Alma 48:17]

What a compliment to a famous and powerful man. I can’t imagine a finer tribute from one man to another. Two verses later is a statement about Helaman and his brethren, who played a less conspicuous role than Moroni, that reads:

Now behold, Helaman and his brethren were no less serviceable unto the people than was Moroni. [Alma 48:19]

In other words, even though Helaman was not as noticeable or conspicuous as Moroni, he

Howard W. Hunter was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 2 September 1990.

was as serviceable; that is, he was as helpful or useful as Moroni.

Obviously we could profit greatly by studying the life of Captain Moroni. He is an example of faith, service, dedication, commitment, and many other godly attributes. I could spend all of the brief time we have tonight speaking of this magnificent man, but instead I have chosen to focus on those who are not seen in the limelight or do not receive the attention of the world, yet are “no less serviceable,” as the scripture phrased it.

Unless I miss my guess, some of you are going to feel a little lost this coming year, perhaps a little lonely and forgotten. That may be especially true of the freshmen or maybe those just back from missions or those facing other changes in their patterns of life. Not everyone at school is going to be the student body president or the Relief Society president or the teacher of the elders quorum. Not all of you are going to be like Moroni, catching the acclaim of your colleagues all day every day. No, most will be quiet, relatively unknown folks who come and go and do their work without fanfare. To those of you who may find that lonely or frightening or just unspectacular, I say you are “no less serviceable” than the most spectacular of your associates. You, too, are part of God’s army.

I know none of you thinks about such things as you eagerly lock yourself in the library for solid study, but I am told the football season is upon us. Furthermore, I am told that we have a talented young quarterback. I said I was going to be your grandfather tonight, but that doesn’t mean I don’t read the sports page! However, in light of tonight’s message, I am reminded of the contribution of each and every player to the success of any team.

Understandably enough, the quarterback is often given more attention and media coverage than the other players, but his skill, learning, and efforts would be of little value if the other players did not do their share and play their

part. Imagine what would happen if, on each play of the game, the guard, or one of the other offensive linemen, walked off the field or laid down on the job or gave up his effort to protect the quarterback. What if the rest of the team decided not to put forth their very best effort? The answer of course is obvious. The quarterback could contribute nothing to the success of the team.

Like the offensive linemen and other unsung heroes on the football team, most of us, including most of you, may spend much of our life in giving service in relative obscurity. Consider the profound service of a mother or father—what they give in the quiet anonymity of a worthy Latter-day Saint home. Think of the gospel doctrine teachers and Primary choristers and Scoutmasters and Relief Society visiting teachers who serve and bless millions but whose names will never be publicly applauded or featured in the nation’s media.

Think of the staff of the Marriott Center tonight who prepared this building, set up the podium, and control the lights and the temperature and the microphone. It is a massive undertaking by scores of people whose names you don’t even know and who get little public praise. The same thing is true of the policemen who will direct the traffic as we leave here and the custodians who are preparing your classrooms for the new year. Tens of thousands of unseen people make possible our opportunities and happiness every day. As the scriptures state, they too are “no less serviceable” than those whose lives are on the front page of life’s newspapers.

Unsung Heroes

The limelight of history and contemporary attention so often focus on the “one” rather than the many. Individuals are frequently singled out from their peers and elevated as heroes. I acknowledge that this kind of attention is one way to identify that which the people admire or hold to be of some value. But

sometimes that recognition is not deserved or may even celebrate the wrong values. This presents us with the challenge of choosing our heroes and examples wisely, while also giving thanks for those legions of friends and citizens who are not so famous but who are “no less serviceable” than the Moronis of our lives.

Perhaps you could consider with me some interesting people from the scriptures who did not receive the limelight of attention but who, through the long lens of history, have proven themselves to be truly heroic.

Many who read the story of the great prophet Nephi almost completely miss another valiant son of Lehi whose name was Sam. Nephi is one of the most famous figures in the entire Book of Mormon. But Sam? Sam’s name is mentioned only ten times in the scriptures. When Lehi counseled and blessed his posterity, he said to Sam:

Blessed art thou [Sam], and thy seed; for thou shalt inherit the land like unto thy brother Nephi. And thy seed shall be numbered with his seed; and thou shalt be even like unto thy brother, and thy seed like unto his seed; and thou shalt be blessed in all thy days. [2 Nephi 4:11]

Sam’s role was basically one of supporting and assisting his more acclaimed younger brother, and he ultimately received all the blessings promised to Nephi and his posterity. Nothing promised to Nephi was withheld from the faithful Sam, yet we know very little of the details of his service and contribution. He was almost an unknown in life, but he is obviously a triumphant leader and victor in the annals of eternity.

Many make their contributions in unsung ways. Ishmael traveled with the family of Nephi at great personal sacrifice, suffering “much affliction, hunger, thirst, and fatigue” (1 Nephi 16:35). Then, in the midst of all of these afflictions, he perished in the wilderness. Few of us can even begin to understand the

sacrifice of such a man in those primitive times and conditions. Perhaps if we were more perceptive and understanding, we too would mourn as his daughters did in the wilderness for what a man like this gave—and gave up!—so that we could have the Book of Mormon today.

The names and memories of such men and women who were “no less serviceable” are legion in the Book of Mormon. Whether it be Mother Sariah or the simple maid, Abish, servant to the Lamanite queen, each made contributions that were unacknowledged by the eyes of men, but not unseen by the eyes of God.

Mosiah, king over the land of Zarahemla and father of the famous king Benjamin, has only twelve verses of scripture dealing with his life. Yet his service to the people was indispensable. He led the people “by many preachings and prophesyings” and “admonished [them] continually by the word of God” (Omni 1:13). Limhi, Amulek, and Pahoran—the latter of whom who had the nobility of soul not to condemn when he was very unjustly accused—are other examples of people who served selflessly in the shadow of another’s limelight. The soldier Teancum, who sacrificed his own life, or Lachoneus, the chief judge who taught people to repent during the challenge of the Gadiantons, or the virtually unmentioned missionaries, Omner and Himni, were all “no less serviceable” than their companions, yet received very little scriptural attention.

We don’t know much about Shiblon, the faithful son of Alma who is sandwiched between Helaman, the future leader, and Corianton, the transgressor; but it is significant that he is described as a “just man, and he did walk uprightly before God” (Alma 63:2). The great prophet Nephi, mentioned in the Book of Helaman, had a brother named Lehi, who is seemingly mentioned only in passing but is noted as being “not a whit behind him [Nephi]

as to things pertaining to righteousness” (see Helaman 11:18-19).

Of course there are examples of these serviceable individuals in our dispensation as well. Oliver Granger is the kind of quiet, supportive individual in the latter days that the Lord remembered in section 117 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Oliver’s name may be unfamiliar to many, so I will take the liberty to acquaint you with this early stalwart.

Oliver Granger was eleven years older than Joseph Smith and, like the Prophet, was from upstate New York. Because of severe cold and exposure when he was thirty-three years old, Oliver lost much of his eyesight. Notwithstanding his limited vision, he served three full-time missions. He also worked on the Kirtland Temple and served on the Kirtland high council.

When most of the Saints were driven from Kirtland, Ohio, the Church left some debts unsatisfied. Oliver was appointed to represent Joseph Smith and the First Presidency and return to Kirtland to settle the Church’s business. Of this task, the Doctrine and Covenants records: “Therefore, let him contend earnestly for the redemption of the First Presidency of my Church, saith the Lord” (D&C 117:13). He performed this assignment with such satisfaction to the creditors involved that one of them wrote:

Oliver Granger’s management in the arrangement of the unfinished business of people that have moved to the Far West, in redeeming their pledges and thereby sustaining their integrity, has been truly praiseworthy, and has entitled him to my highest esteem, and every grateful recollection. [Horace Kingsbury, Painesville, 26 October 1838]

During Oliver’s time in Kirtland, some people, including disaffected members of the Church, were endeavoring to discredit the First Presidency and bring their integrity into

question by spreading false accusations. Oliver Granger, indeed, “redeemed the First Presidency” through his faithful service. In response, the Lord said of Oliver Granger: “His name shall be had in sacred remembrance from generation to generation, forever and ever” (D&C 117:12). “I will lift up my servant Oliver, and beget for him a great name on the earth, and among my people, because of the integrity of his soul” (HC 3:350).

When he died in 1841, even though there were but few Saints remaining in the Kirtland area and even fewer friends of the Saints, Oliver Granger’s funeral was attended by a vast concourse of people from neighboring towns.

Though Oliver Granger is not as well known today as other early leaders of the Church, he was nevertheless a great and important man in the service he rendered to the kingdom. Of course, if no one but the Lord had his name in remembrance, that would be a sufficient blessing for any of us.

Why Do We Serve?

I think we should be aware that there can be a spiritual danger to those who misunderstand the singularity of always being in the spotlight. They may come to covet the notoriety and thus forget the significance of the service being rendered. As students, you are at a crucial juncture in your lives when life-shaping judgments are made and future courses set. You must not allow yourselves to focus on the fleeting light of popularity or substitute that attractive glow for the substance of true, but often anonymous labor that brings the attention of God even if it does not get coverage on the six o’clock news. In fact, applause and attention can become the spiritual Achilles’ heel of even the most gifted among us.

If the limelight of popularity should fall on you during some time in your life, it might be well for you to follow the example of those in the scriptures who received notoriety and

fame. Nephi is one of the great examples. After all he accomplished traveling in the wilderness with his family, his attitude was still fixed on the things that matter most. This is what he said:

And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted.

My God hath been my support; he hath led me through mine afflictions in the wilderness; and he hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep.

He hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh.

He hath confounded mine enemies, unto the causing of them to quake before me. [2 Nephi 4:19–22]

The limelight never blinded Nephi to the source of his strength and his blessings.

At times of attention and visibility it might also be profitable for us to answer the question Why do we serve? When we understand why, we won't be concerned about where we serve.

President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., taught this vital principle in his own life. At general conference in April 1951, President David O. McKay was sustained as President of the Church after the passing of President George Albert Smith. Up to that time President Clark had served as the First Counselor to President Heber J. Grant and President George Albert Smith. President McKay had been the Second Counselor to both men. During the final session of conference, when the business of the Church was transacted, Brother Stephen L. Richards was called to the First Presidency and sustained as First Counselor. President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., was then sustained as the Second Counselor. After the sustaining of the officers of the Church, President McKay explained why he had chosen his counselors in that order. He said:

I felt that one guiding principle in this choice would be to follow the seniority in the Council [of the Twelve Apostles]. These two men were sitting in their places in that presiding body in the Church, and I felt impressed that it would be advisable to continue that same seniority in the new quorum of the First Presidency. [CR, 9 April 1951, p. 151]

President Clark was then asked to speak following President McKay. His remarks on this occasion were brief, but taught a powerful lesson:

In the service of the Lord, it is not where you serve but how. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, one takes the place to which one is duly called, which place one neither seeks nor declines. I pledge to President McKay and to President Richards the full loyal devoted service to the tasks that may come to me to the full measure of my strength and my abilities, and so far as they will enable me to perform them, however inadequate I may be. [CR, 9 April 1951, p. 154]

The lesson that President Clark taught is expressed in another way in this poem by Meade McGuire:

*Father, where shall I work today?
And my love flowed warm and free.
Then He pointed out a tiny spot
And said, "Tend that for me."
I answered quickly, "Oh no, not that!
Why, no one would ever see,
No matter how well my work was done;
Not that little place for me."
And the word He spoke, it was not stern;
He answered me tenderly:
"Ah, little one, search that heart of thine.
Art thou working for them or for me?
Nazareth was a little place,
And so was Galilee."*

King Benjamin declared:

Behold, I say unto you that because I said unto you that I had spent my days in your service, I do not desire to boast, for I have only been in the service of God.

And behold, 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. [Mosiah 2:16–17]

President Ezra Taft Benson said recently in conference:

Christlike service exalts. . . . The Lord has promised that those who lose their lives serving others will find themselves. The Prophet Joseph Smith told us that we should “wear out our lives” in bringing to pass His purposes. (D&C 123:13.) [CR, 30 September 1989, p. 5; or Ensign, November 1989, pp. 5–6]

If you feel that much of what you do this year or in the years to come does not make you very famous, take heart. Most of the best people

who ever lived weren’t very famous either. Serve and grow, faithfully and quietly. Be on guard regarding the praise of men. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount:

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:

That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. [Matthew 6:1–4]

May our Father in Heaven so reward you this new school year and always in your lives, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.