

Living a Life of Service and Love: What Goes Around Comes Around

KIRT R. SAVILLE

I would like to begin my remarks today by paying tribute to my parents. It wasn't until I began serving my mission that I realized some parents don't value their children, don't do everything within their power to make their lives better, and don't help their children aspire to be the best they can be. I was one of the fortunate ones, along with my brother and sister, to be born into a family where I was loved, nurtured, and taught by loving parents. They had high expectations for me, but when I failed, they were still there to guide, encourage, and show me how to pick myself up and move forward.

My parents, to the best of my knowledge, had never been very active in the Church. They encouraged us children to attend, but their attendance was infrequent. Yet it was from them that I learned how to live a Christian life. My father, in particular, was the kind of person who could never pass by someone who needed help.

I recall a trip that we made from Salt Lake City to Bear Lake, where a weekend of clear blue water, swimming, water skiing, and fun awaited me. Our typical route was to go to Evanston, Wyoming, and then on to Bear Lake. About twenty miles to the southwest of Evanston, my father noticed a man was trying to flag down cars on the other side of the divided highway. My father could never pass by someone who needed help. He drove five miles up our side of the

freeway until he found the first turnaround, drove back five miles, picked up the man who had run out of gas, went five miles in the wrong direction, turned around again, drove the twenty-five miles back to Evanston, helped the man get gas, and drove him back to his car.

Being an impatient teenager, I was more than irritated at the long delay. After we finally got on our way, I asked my dad why would he go so far out of his way to help someone. Surely someone else would have stopped and given that man assistance.

My dad simply responded, "What goes around comes around." After seeing the confused look on my face, he further explained, "I believe that someday maybe you or I will be on the side of the road looking for help, and someone will return the favor."

Being ever the optimist, I replied, "I seriously doubt it."

So today I would like to title my talk "Living a Life of Service and Love: What Goes Around Comes Around."

We've heard this saying before in many different forms. The Boy Scout slogan: Do a good turn daily. Pay it back. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, which is the golden rule. You reap what you sow.

Kirt R. Saville, director of the BYU School of Music, delivered this devotional address on August 1, 2017.

These are all well and good, but my dad lived by the mantra “What goes around comes around.” He would help anyone anytime and anywhere.

But on the other hand, how many times have we heard or said that no good deed goes unpunished? In today’s world we see evidence again and again, televised for the world to see, that the world is an ugly place where those who are innocent and who try to do good come out on the short end of the stick.

Service Given, Service Received

I often hoped that my father’s mantra was true, but I was never quite sure I believed it. Over the years I learned to admire the dedication that my father had to his mantra. But I must say that I never saw it “come around” until years later when we took a trip to Flaming Gorge Reservoir. I remember this trip clearly because it was Friday the thirteenth. Since I was the only child left in the house, I knew it would be a great getaway with my parents. We loved to fish at Flaming Gorge.

This happened while I was in high school—which, according to my kids, was shortly after the earth cooled and most likely during the Jurassic period.

We owned a small cabin cruiser that was about fourteen to fifteen feet in length. It was big enough to sleep three if someone was willing to sleep on the floor—and that was always me. We put our boat in at Sheep Creek Marina. Our goal was to go as far north as possible, spend the weekend in our little boat, and fish until we had our limit.

As I remember, we joked that it was Friday the thirteenth. What followed later that weekend etched that date forever in my mind.

On Friday, heading toward the Wyoming side of the reservoir, we traveled some distance before we began to fish. Frankly, the fishing wasn’t very good, but we loved being out on the boat together in such a beautiful place.

I remember my father saying, “Look, there’s a man on the far shore who’s waving at us.”

I looked up but could barely see anyone. Still, I knew that it was time to pull in the lines. We fired up the motor and went toward the other side

of the reservoir, where the man was still waving at us. It seemed odd to me that this man was standing on a barren hillside with no other boat in sight, but when he saw that we were coming, he motioned for us to go around a bend into a small hidden cove. When we came around the hill I was shocked to see a beautiful big yacht pulled onto the shore. It was easily twice the length and width of our little boat.

The man thanked us profusely for coming to his assistance. His battery was dead, and he wondered if we could help him. We did, and soon his big motor roared back to life. The man and his family were very grateful. We lost an hour of fishing, but we were soon back out on the reservoir.

The next day the fishing didn’t improve. As a matter of fact, it was terrible, so we decided to call it quits and go back to the marina. We were about two miles from the marina where we had launched our boat when we found ourselves fighting a blustering headwind that slowed our progress. The waves were kicking up, and suddenly our engine decided to quit. We tried in vain to get it running, but it simply wouldn’t start. My dad was a do-it-yourself kind of guy, and he had built our cabin cruiser from a basic hull. He could always keep our cars and our boat motors running, but not this time.

In the midst of trying to pull-start our outboard motor, much to our surprise, the fellow in the big yacht pulled up and asked if he could be of assistance. I had never been so pleased to see someone! Flaming Gorge is a very big reservoir, and we had been out there for two days. I was amazed that of all the people on the reservoir, he would be the person to show up to give us aid. He offered to tow us back to the marina, even though we were still quite a distance out. We happily accepted his kind offer.

All was going well, and we went at a nice and even slow click for some time, being pulled behind this monstrosity of a boat. We could actually see the marina in the distance when suddenly the motor on the yacht died. We checked the gas lines, the fuel filter—everything. But the motor wouldn’t start. It was

Friday-the-thirteenth-weekend kind of luck. We tried his little trolling motor, but it wouldn't start.

In the meantime, the wind had kicked up into a gale-force wind and was blowing us farther and farther away from the marina. I could barely see the marina in the distance as my dad and Mr. Yacht Guy worked on the engines. Three motors, and not a single one of them would start. What luck!

Out of the blue a little old man and his wife puttered up to us in a little twelve-foot, open-bow, aluminum fishing boat. I remember being shocked to see his wife sitting there all done up pretty with pancake makeup plastered on her wind-blown face.

I thought, "What in the world are these two doing out here in this tiny boat amid all of these winds and waves?"

The old gentleman offered to tow us in. Quite frankly, I looked at him in disbelief. He hooked a line to the big yacht, and with his little twenty-five horsepower outboard motor, he puttered away like a tugboat with a battleship. Soon he and the big yacht faded out of sight as they went toward the marina.

Meanwhile, we were being blown ever farther away from our destination. We were still in a pickle. But forty-five minutes later the little old man and his wife came back out to us, tossed us a line, and proceeded to tow us back to the dock. I was amazed that these folks were so willing to go so far out of their way to help us. Their kindness and willingness to give so much time and effort to assist total strangers was a gift that I will never forget.

By now we were fast friends—made so by the events of the day and the weekend. We helped the rich fellow get his yacht loaded onto his trailer, and next we helped load the little aluminum boat. As fate would have it, the old gentleman had left the lights on in his car, so his car battery was dead. My dad pulled out his jumper cables and got the car running. We all helped to get the little boat and ours safely secured onto our trailers.

We laughed all the way home about the adventures of that weekend. What goes around really

does come around. I finally had a chance to witness my father's mantra in action. I may be a little slow, but this was a lesson of a lifetime that I couldn't ignore.

Thanks, Dad, for being such a great example to me.

What Is Service?

In 2013, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf wrote:

A favorite saying of mine often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi reads, "Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words." Implicit in this saying is the understanding that often the most powerful sermons are unspoken.¹

I am grateful for the unspoken lessons that my parents taught me. When I would come up short in my obedience or actions, I would often attempt to justify my poor behavior by employing an overabundance of characteristically charming charisma.

My father would simply shake his head and reply, "Son, your actions are speaking so loud I can't hear a word you're saying."

To him, actions were more important than words. His living example of how to lead a Christian life taught me the following important principles regarding service:

- Service should be given with a smile and with no expectation of a return.
- Too often we pass by opportunities to serve because we can't see them.
- Service is seldom convenient.
- Service most often happens when we are on the way to do something else.
- Service will eventually come back around.

A Lesson About Interruptions

I think these principles are self-evident, but let me elaborate on just one of them: service is what we do when we are on our way to do something else.

We can plan to give service—and I think that is excellent—but I believe the Savior taught

and exemplified a better way. Christ most often blessed others when He was on His way to do something else.

One example is the parable of the good Samaritan. Wasn't the good Samaritan on his own journey, which he had to interrupt in order to provide assistance? The Levite and the priest both chose not to "see" the wounded man, passed to the other side, and stayed on their intended business.²

Another example, found in Mark 10, happened when Jesus was teaching the people regarding marriage. He was interrupted by those who "brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them."³ His disciples wanted Christ to get back to the real business that was at hand. However, we read:

*But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.*⁴

This became a powerful teaching moment in Christ's ministry.

In Matthew 9 we read about what appears to be a single remarkable day in Christ's ministry.⁵ Christ was teaching His disciples when He was again interrupted.

While he spake these things unto them, 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, and so did his disciples.*⁶

On his way to see the ruler's daughter, Christ was touched by the woman who had an infirmity. He stopped and asked who had touched Him. He then blessed and healed her.

Christ then proceeded to travel on to the ruler's house, where He announced that the daughter was not dead but was sleeping. The people laughed him to scorn, yet He proceeded to raise the ruler's daughter from the dead.

Then verse 27 says, "And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us."

And then in verse 28 we read, "And when he was come into the house, the blind men" continued to implore him. Christ then healed them because of their great faith.

Next, "as they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil."⁷ The man was healed; the dumb spake.

Christ was interrupted again and again while He was about His own intended tasks, yet He was willing to see those who were invisible to others. He interrupted His plans and blessed those who needed His loving touch.

The Law of Restoration

Do a good turn daily. Pay it back. You reap what you sow. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. What goes around comes around.

These same concepts were taught by Alma to his son Corianton when Alma was trying to explain the meaning of the word *restoration*. Apparently Corianton believed that he could do evil today and that later good could be restored to him. Alma taught:

*Therefore, my son, see that you are merciful unto your brethren; deal justly, judge righteously, and do good continually; and if ye do all these things then shall ye receive your reward; **yea, ye shall have mercy restored unto you again; ye shall have justice restored unto you again; ye shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again; and ye shall have good rewarded unto you again.***

*For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored; therefore, the word restoration more fully condemneth the sinner, and justifieth him not at all.*⁸

My father taught me, as Alma taught his son, that the kind of life you live will be restored to you. If you are merciful to your fellowman, mercy will come back to you. If you judge righteously, righteous judgment will return to you. If you do

good continually, good shall return to you. If you are just, justice will be restored to you again.

In other words, if you want a friend, be a friend. If you want mercy, show mercy. If you want forgiveness, forgive others. If you want kindness, be kind. If you want respect, respect others.

We are all flawed beings. We have our ample share of problems, insecurities, weaknesses, and failures. But I have learned that one way to overcome them is to share whatever modest strengths and attributes we do possess with others. I testify that they will come back to you. And each time you repeat the process, your confidence and strength in that virtue or attribute will grow and become stronger.⁹

Will there be bumps? Absolutely. Will the restoration of good for good be immediate? Most likely not. But somehow, somewhere, sometime these things will come back around to you in greater abundance than the amount that you gave. King Benjamin assured his people that if they would obey God's commandments, God would immediately bless them.¹⁰

Don't despair when life is not fair or when it seems that no good deed goes unpunished. There is hope and a promise that a good life is its own reward. I personally find great hope in the following remarkable latter-day scripture—D&C 130:20–21:

There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—

And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.

Do a good turn daily. Pay it back. You reap what you sow. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. "For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored."¹¹ What goes around comes around.

How does this apply to our lives here at BYU and to our lives in general?

We may not have the opportunity to jump-start someone's boat in a hidden cove in a vast

reservoir, but we can share a smile and a hello with someone on campus whom we don't know—one of those students whom we pass by each day who has a downcast countenance, one of the many who are weighed down with the worries of their day. A smile can turn a frown upside down.

We may not have the opportunity to go out of our way to refill someone's gas tank, but aren't most of us running only on fumes by the end of the day? I know that I feel this way all too often.

We can express confidence and trust in our fellow students when they struggle in class or stumble over something that might have been obvious to others. We can encourage each other as we attempt to do the many hard things that are part and parcel of college life.

A Bucket Filler

Many years ago my sweet wife presented an object lesson in a family home evening that had a lasting impact. With two buckets—one empty and one filled with water—she gave each of us an empty cup. She demonstrated how easy it was to deplete the full bucket of water by saying unkind things. She then gave each of us a chance to fill each other's cups by saying something kind. We took turns saying something nice, and with each act of kindness my wife added water to the cups of both the giver and the receiver of the compliment. This activity was a great visual representation of how easy it is to empty someone's bucket or, alternatively, how we can fill someone else's bucket by simple acts of kindness. And I must note that through the process of filling someone else's bucket, we fill our own.

President Gordon B. Hinckley said:

I have discovered that life is not a series of great heroic acts. Life at its best is a matter of consistent goodness and decency, doing without fanfare that which needed to be done when it needed to be done. I have observed that it is not the geniuses that make the difference in this world. I have observed that the work of the world is done largely by men and women of ordinary talent who have worked in an extraordinary manner.¹²

John C. Maxwell, who is recognized as a leading inspirational leadership coach, put it this way: “Doing the right thing daily compounds over time.”¹³

Our family has always loved the classic Christmas movie *It’s a Wonderful Life*, starring Jimmy Stewart. Stewart played the role of George Bailey, who had aspirations to get out of his hometown, Bedford Falls, and see the world. He had big plans and big dreams. However, George spent his entire life giving up his big dreams for the good of his town. Of course you all know the movie, and if you don’t, now is a good time to rectify your deficiency.

I can’t think of a movie that better exemplifies the long-term effects of a good life, nor can I think of one that better epitomizes how the good you do will eventually come back to you. Think of the closing scene as the town rescued George and how he came to realize that he had a truly wonderful life.

The kingdom of God is built by small and simple things. In Alma 37:6 we read:

Now ye may suppose that this is foolishness in me; but behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass; and small means in many instances doth confound the wise.

In short, we don’t have to do something gigantic or impressive to build the kingdom of God. We don’t have to convert thousands, cut a hole in the rock and descend a thousand feet in a covered wagon, heal the toxic algae bloom in Utah Lake, or create a company that will make millions. We just need to work at being a little better each day by reaching beyond ourselves to serve in even the smallest ways: giving a word of encouragement, holding a door open, doing any act of random kindness, giving a reassuring smile to a friend who’s having a bad day, or sharing the music of the songbird, the flutter of the leaves in the trees, the sound of birds in flight, the music of laughter, and perhaps the nearly silent sob of one who is suffering.

Learning to See Those Who Are Invisible

My father could see people who were in need whom others couldn’t see. How is it possible that so many could pass by the man who was stuck on the side of the road, yet my father, who was going seventy miles an hour while driving down the other side of a divided highway, saw him like he was lit up with a neon sign? How did he see the invisible man who was waving for help on the far side of the gorge when all I could see was the water and my own fishing line?

Let me speak of those who are visible and invisible.

Have you ever felt invisible? I know that I have. Sometimes in a crowd, with very little effort, we can remain invisible to those who seem to be the life of the party. Even here at BYU, with more than 30,000 students, I am certain that all of us have, at times, felt invisible. I believe it is easy to feel like no one sees you—the real you; the vulnerable, insecure, and anxious you; the you who needs someone to believe in you; the person who is stranded on the side of the road while everyone else rushes by.

I sometimes worry that the habit of engaging with our cell phones too often has the effect of making everyone around us invisible. I myself am guilty. Though we are attempting to stay connected and visible to our friends, we inadvertently shut the world out. We won’t recognize another’s need if we can’t see them. We won’t be able to give service on our way to do something else if our eyes are fixed on a screen instead of on the humanity that surrounds us.

Ferris Bueller said it best: “Life moves pretty fast. If you don’t stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it.”¹⁴

A Lifetime of Service

I love the hymn “Because I Have Been Given Much” because it teaches these same principles so powerfully.

*Because I have been given much, I too must give;
Because of thy great bounty, Lord, each day I live
I shall divide my gifts from thee*

*With ev'ry brother that I see
Who has the need of help from me.*

*Because I have been sheltered, fed by thy good care,
I cannot see another's lack and I not share
My glowing fire, my loaf of bread,
My roof's safe shelter overhead,
That he too may be comforted.*

*Because I have been blessed by thy great love, dear Lord,
I'll share thy love again, according to thy word.
I shall give love to those in need;
I'll show that love by word and deed:
Thus shall my thanks be thanks indeed.¹⁵*

I have heard it said that a grateful child is one of life's greatest blessings, but I would have to add that one of my greatest joys as a parent has come when I have witnessed our children being kind and generous to someone they didn't know. That is probably because this represents and reflects the kind of love that Christ has for each of us.

Love—God's love. How do we bring people to Christ? We do so by sharing His love with our brothers and sisters. Today I hope I have been able to convey some of the small and simple ways that we can show and reflect God's love.

First, we must see—see those who are invisible and see those who need to be encouraged, lifted, and healed.

Second, we must be willing to interrupt our business, even for only a moment, while we are on our way to do something else.

Third, we must act through love. The more we love, the greater our capacity to love becomes. The more love we share, the more love we will have to give.

I testify to you that the more love we give, the more love will come back to us.

Do a good turn daily. Pay it back. You reap what you sow. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. "For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored."¹⁶ Be a bucket filler. What goes around comes around.

I wish to express my deep and abiding love, affection, and gratitude for my wonderful parents

and for their devotion and love that remain a constant in my life even though they have both passed on.¹⁷

I leave you with my testimony that the greatest work we have in today's world is to see the unseen, to lift arms that have fallen, and to share God's love by loving our fellowmen. I believe that in doing so, we have the chance to heal ourselves and to bring all of us closer to the perfect love of God. Of the power, of the depth, and of the beauty of His divine love I stand as a humble witness. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "First Presidency Message: A Word for the Hesitant Missionary," *Ensign*, February 2013.

2. See Luke 10:30–37.

3. Mark 10:13.

4. Mark 10:14; see also verse 15.

5. See Matthew 9:18–33.

6. Matthew 9:18–19.

7. Matthew 9:32.

8. Alma 41:14–15; emphasis added.

9. See Ether 12:27.

10. See Mosiah 2:24.

11. Alma 41:15.

12. Gordon B. Hinckley, *One Bright Shining Hope: Messages for Women from Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 24; quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2016), 191–92.

13. John C. Maxwell, quoted on The John Maxwell Company Facebook page, [facebook.com/TheJohnMaxwellCompany/posts/1083460228372443](https://www.facebook.com/TheJohnMaxwellCompany/posts/1083460228372443).

14. IMDB's page for quotes for *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986), [imdb.com/title/tt0091042/quotes](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0091042/quotes).

15. "Because I Have Been Given Much," *Hymns*, 2002, no. 219.

16. Alma 41:15.

17. After I had served my mission, my parents returned to full activity in the Church, and we were sealed together as a family shortly thereafter.