

The Greatest among You

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God's greatest reward goes to those who serve without expectation of reward.

My dear brothers, dear friends, how grateful I am to be with you in this inspiring worldwide priesthood meeting. President Monson, thank you for your message and blessing. We will always take to heart your words of direction, counsel, and wisdom. We love and sustain you, and we always pray for you. You are indeed the Lord's prophet. You are our President. We sustain, we love, you.

Almost two decades ago, the Madrid Spain Temple was dedicated and began its service as a sacred house of the Lord. Harriet and I remember it well because I was serving in the Europe Area Presidency at the time. Along with many others, we spent countless hours attending to the details of planning and organizing the events leading up to the dedication.

As the date of the dedication approached, I noticed that I had not yet received an invitation to attend. This was a bit unexpected. After all, in my responsibility as the Area President, I had been greatly involved in this temple project and felt a small amount of ownership for it.

I asked Harriet if she had seen an invitation. She had not.

Days passed and my anxiety increased. I wondered if our invitation had gotten lost—perhaps it was buried between the cushions of our sofa. Maybe it had been mixed up with junk mail and thrown away. The neighbors had an inquisitive cat, and I even began to look suspiciously at him.

Finally I was forced to accept the fact: I had not been invited.

But how was that possible? Had I done something to offend? Did someone just assume it was too far for us to travel? Had I been forgotten?

Eventually, I realized that this line of thinking led to a place in which I did not wish to take up residence.

Harriet and I reminded ourselves that the temple dedication was not about *us*. It wasn't about who deserved to be invited or who did not. And it wasn't about our feelings or our sense of entitlement.

It was about dedicating a holy edifice, a temple of the Most High God. It was a day of rejoicing for the members of the Church in Spain.

Had I been invited to attend, I would have done so gladly. But if I were not invited, my joy would not be any less profound. Harriet and I would rejoice with our friends, our beloved brothers and sisters, from afar. We would praise God for this wonderful blessing just as enthusiastically from our home in Frankfurt as we would from Madrid.

Sons of Thunder

Among the Twelve whom Jesus called and ordained were two brothers, James and John. Do you remember the nickname He gave them?

Sons of Thunder (Boanerges).¹

You don't get a nickname like that without an intriguing backstory. Unfortunately, the scriptures don't provide much explanation about the nickname's origin. However, we do get brief glimpses into the character of James and John. These were the same brothers who suggested calling down fire from heaven on a village in Samaria over not being invited into town.²

James and John were fishermen—probably a little rough around the edges—but I guess they knew a lot about the elements of nature. Certainly, they were men of action.

On one occasion, as the Savior prepared to make His final journey to Jerusalem, James and John approached Him with a special request—one perhaps worthy of their nickname.

"We want you to do for us whatever we ask," they said.

I can imagine Jesus smiling at them as He responded, "What do you want?"

"Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory."

The Savior now challenged them to think a little more deeply about what they were asking and said, "To sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared."³

In other words, you can't get honor in the kingdom of heaven by campaigning for it. Nor can you "power lunch" your way to eternal glory.

When the other ten Apostles heard about this request from the Sons of Thunder, they weren't especially happy. Jesus knew His time was short, and seeing contention among those who would carry on His work must have troubled Him.

He talked to the Twelve about the nature of power and how it affects those who seek and hold it. "The people of influence in the world," He said, "use their position of authority to exercise power over others."

I can almost see the Savior, looking with infinite love into the faces of those faithful and believing disciples. I can almost hear His pleading voice: "This is not the way it shall be among you. Instead, whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all."⁴

In God's kingdom, greatness and leadership means seeing others as they truly are—as God sees them—and then reaching out and ministering to them. It means rejoicing with those who are happy, weeping with those who grieve, lifting up those in distress, and loving our neighbor as Christ loves us. The Savior loves all of God's children regardless of their socioeconomic circumstance, race, religion, language, political orientation, nationality, or any other grouping. And so should we!

God's greatest reward goes to those who serve without expectation of reward. It goes to those who serve without fanfare; those who quietly go about seeking ways to help others; those who minister to others simply because they love God and God's children.⁵

Don't Inhale

Shortly after my call as a new General Authority, I had the privilege to accompany President James E. Faust for a stake reorganization. As I drove the car to our assignment in beautiful Southern Utah, President Faust was kind enough to use the time to instruct and teach me. One lesson I will never forget. Said he, "The members of the Church are gracious to the General Authorities. They will treat you kindly and say nice things about you." Then he briefly paused and said, "Dieter, *always* be thankful for this, but don't you ever inhale it."

This important lesson about Church service applies to every priesthood holder in every quorum of the Church. It applies to all of us in this Church.

When President J. Reuben Clark Jr. counseled those called to positions of authority in the Church, he would tell them not to forget rule number six.

Inevitably, the person would ask, "What is rule number six?"

"Don't take yourself too darn seriously," he would say.

Of course, this led to a follow-up question: "What are the other five rules?"

With a twinkle in his eye, President Clark would say, "There aren't any."⁶

To be effective Church leaders, we must learn this critical lesson: leadership in the Church is not so much about directing others as it is about our willingness to be

directed by God.

Callings as Opportunities for Service

As Saints of the Most High God, we are to “remember in all things the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted, for he that doeth not these things, the same is not my disciple.”⁷ Opportunities to go about doing good and to serve others are limitless. We can find them in our communities, in our wards and branches, and certainly in our homes.

In addition, every member of the Church is given specific formal opportunities to serve. We refer to these opportunities as “callings”—a term that should remind us of who it is that calls us to serve. If we approach our callings as opportunities to serve God and minister to others with faith and humility, every act of service will be a step on the path of discipleship. In this way, God not only builds up His Church but also builds up His servants. The Church is designed to help us become true and faithful disciples of Christ, good and noble sons and daughters of God. This happens not just when we go to meetings and listen to talks but also when we get outside ourselves and serve. This is how we become “great” in the kingdom of God.

We accept callings with grace, humility, and gratitude. When we are released from these callings, we accept the change with the same grace, humility, and gratitude.

In the eyes of God, there is no calling in the kingdom that is more important than another. Our service—whether great or small—refines our spirits, opens the windows of heaven, and releases God’s blessings not only upon those we serve but upon us as well. When we reach out to others, we can know with humble confidence that God acknowledges our service with approval and approbation. He smiles upon us as we offer these heartfelt acts of compassion, especially acts that are unseen and unnoticed by others.⁸

Each time we give of ourselves to others, we take a step closer to becoming good and true disciples of the One who gave His all for us: our Savior.

From Presiding to the Parade

During the 150th anniversary of the pioneers’ arrival in the Salt Lake Valley, Brother Myron Richins was serving as a stake president in Henefer, Utah. The celebration included a reenactment of the pioneers’ passage through his town.

President Richins was heavily involved with the plans for the celebration, and he attended many meetings with General Authorities and others to discuss the events. He was fully engaged.

Just before the actual celebration, President Richins's stake was reorganized, and he was released as president. On a subsequent Sunday, he was attending his ward priesthood meeting when the leaders asked for volunteers to help with the celebration. President Richins, along with others, raised his hand and was given instructions to dress in work clothes and to bring his truck and a shovel.

Finally, the morning of the big event came, and President Richins reported to volunteer duty.

Only a few weeks before, he had been an influential contributor to the planning and supervision of this major event. On that day, however, his job was to follow the horses in the parade and clean up after them.

President Richins did so gladly and joyfully.

He understood that one kind of service is not above another.

He knew and put into practice the words of the Savior: "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant."⁹

Doing Discipleship Right

Sometimes, like the Sons of Thunder, we desire positions of prominence. We strive for recognition. We seek to lead and to make a memorable contribution.

There is nothing wrong with wanting to serve the Lord, but when we seek to gain influence in the Church for our own sake—in order to receive the praise and admiration of men—we have our reward. When we "inhale" the praise of others, that praise will be our compensation.

What is the most important calling in the Church? It is the one you currently have. No matter how humble or prominent it may seem to be, the calling you have right now is the one that will allow you not only to lift others but also to become the man of God you were created to be.

My dear friends and brethren in the priesthood, lift where you stand!

Paul taught the Philippians, "Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat one another as more important than yourself."¹⁰

Serving with Honor

Seeking honor and celebrity in the Church at the expense of true and humble service toward others is the trade of Esau.¹¹ We may receive an earthly reward, but it comes at great cost—the loss of heavenly approbation.

Let us follow the example of our Savior, who was meek and lowly, who sought not the praise of men but to do the will of His Father.¹²

Let us serve others humbly—with energy, gratitude, and honor. Even though our acts of service may seem lowly, modest, or of little value, those who reach out in kindness and compassion to others will one day know the value of their service by the eternal and blessed grace of Almighty God.¹³

My dear brethren, dear friends, may we meditate upon, understand, and live this paramount lesson of Church leadership and priesthood governance: “He that is greatest among you shall be your servant.” This is my prayer and blessing in the sacred name of our Master, our Redeemer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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