

# The Needs before Us

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Some of the most significant needs we can meet are within our own families, among our friends, in our wards, and in our communities.

In recent days we have witnessed a large number of natural disasters, in Mexico, the United States, Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa. It has brought out the best in people as thousands have stepped in to help those who are in danger or need and who have suffered loss. I have been thrilled to see young women in Texas and Florida who, along with many others, have donned the yellow Helping Hands T-shirts and are helping clear houses of debris following the recent hurricanes. Many thousands more would gladly go to the centers of need were it not for distance. Instead, you have offered generous donations to alleviate suffering. Your generosity and compassion are inspiring and Christlike.

Today I want to mention an aspect of service that I feel is important for all—no matter where we are located. For those of us who have watched news of recent events and have felt helpless to know what to do, the answer might actually be right before us.

The Savior taught, “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.”<sup>1</sup> President Thomas S. Monson said of this scripture: “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.”<sup>2</sup>

We live in a culture where more and more we are focused on the small, little screen in our hands than we are on the people around us. We have substituted texting and tweeting for actually looking someone in the eye and smiling or, even rarer, having a face-to-face conversation. We are often more concerned with how many followers and likes we have than with putting an arm around a friend and showing love, concern, and tangible interest. As amazing as modern technology can be for spreading the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ and helping us stay connected to family and friends, if we are not vigilant in how we use our personal devices, we too can begin to turn inward and forget that the essence of living the gospel is service.

I have tremendous love for and faith in those of you who are in your teen and young adult years. I have seen and felt of your desires to serve and make a difference in the

world. I believe that most members consider service to be at the heart of their covenants and discipleship. But I also think that sometimes it's easy to miss some of the greatest opportunities to serve others because we are distracted or because we are looking for ambitious ways to change the world and we don't see that some of the most significant needs we can meet are within our own families, among our friends, in our wards, and in our communities. We are touched when we see the suffering and great needs of those halfway around the world, but we may fail to see there is a person who needs our friendship sitting right next to us in class.

Sister Linda K. Burton told the story of a stake Relief Society president who, working with others, collected quilts for people in need during the 1990s. "She and her daughter drove a truck filled with those quilts from London to Kosovo. On her journey home she received an unmistakable spiritual impression that sank deep into her heart. The impression was this: 'What you have done is a very good thing. Now go home, walk across the street, and serve your neighbor!'"<sup>3</sup>

What good does it do to save the world if we neglect the needs of those closest to us and those whom we love the most? How much value is there in fixing the world if the people around us are falling apart and we don't notice? Heavenly Father may have placed those who need us closest to us, knowing that we are best suited to meet their needs.

Everyone can find ways to offer Christlike service. My counselor Sister Carol F. McConkie recently told me about her 10-year-old granddaughter Sarah who, when she realized that her mother was ill, decided on her own to be of help. She got her little sister up, helped her dress, brush her teeth, fix her hair, and eat breakfast so her mother could rest. She quietly performed this simple act of service without being asked because she saw a need and desired to help. Not only did Sarah bless her mother, but I am sure that she also felt joy in knowing she had lightened the burden of someone she loved and, along the way, strengthened her relationship with her sister. President James E. Faust said: "Serving others can begin at almost any age. ... It need not be on a grand scale, and it is noblest within the family."<sup>4</sup>

Do you children realize how much it means to your parents and family members when you look for ways to serve at home? For those in your teen years, strengthening and serving your family members should be among your top priorities as you look for ways to change the world. Showing kindness and concern for your siblings and parents helps create an atmosphere of unity and invites the Spirit into the home. Changing the world begins with strengthening your own family.

Another area of focus for our service can be in our ward families. Occasionally our children would ask us the question, "Why do I have to go to Mutual? I just don't get very much out of it."

If I was having a good parenting moment, I would reply, "What makes you think you go to Mutual because of what *you* get out of it?"

My young friends, I can guarantee that there will always be someone at every Church meeting you attend who is lonely, who is going through challenges and needs a friend, or who feels like he or she doesn't belong. You have something important to contribute to every meeting or activity, and the Lord desires for you to look around at your peers and then minister as He would.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson has taught, "A major reason the Lord has a church is to create a community of Saints that will sustain one another in the 'strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life.'" He goes on to say, "This religion is not concerned only with self; rather, we are all called to serve. We are the eyes, hands, head, feet, and other members of the body of Christ."<sup>5</sup>

It is true that we attend our weekly Church meetings to participate in ordinances, learn doctrine, and be inspired, but another very important reason for attending is that, as a ward family and as disciples of the Savior Jesus Christ, we watch out for one another, encourage one another, and find ways to serve and strengthen each other. We are not just receivers and takers of what is offered at church; we are needed to be givers and suppliers. Young women and young men, next time you are at Mutual, instead of picking up your phone to see what your friends are doing, stop, look around, and ask yourself, "Who needs me today?" You may be the key to reaching out and touching the life of a peer or to giving encouragement to a friend who is quietly struggling.

Ask your Heavenly Father to show you those around you who need your help and to inspire you on how to best serve them. Remember that the Savior most often ministered to one person at a time.

Our grandson Ethan is 17. I was touched this summer when he told me that, inspired by his mother's example, he prays each day to have an opportunity to serve someone. As we spent time with his family, I observed how Ethan treats his brother and sisters with patience, love, and kindness and is helpful to his parents and looks for ways to reach out to others. I am impressed with how aware he is of the people around him and of his desire to serve them. He is an example to me. Doing as Ethan does—inviting the Lord to help us find ways to serve—will allow the Spirit to open our eyes to see the needs around us, to see the "one" who needs us that day, and to know how to minister to him or her.

In addition to serving your family and your ward members, look for opportunities to serve in your neighborhood and community. While at times we are called upon to help after a major disaster, on a day-to-day basis we are encouraged to look for opportunities in our own areas to lift and help those in need. I was recently instructed by an Area President, serving in a country which has many temporal challenges, that the best way to help those in need in other parts of the world is to pay a generous fast offering, contribute to the Church's Humanitarian Aid Fund, and look for ways to serve those in your own community wherever you live. Just imagine how the world would be blessed if everyone followed this counsel!

Brothers and sisters, and especially the youth, as you strive to become more like the Savior Jesus Christ and live your covenants, you will continue to be blessed with desires to relieve suffering and to help those who are less fortunate. Remember that some of the greatest needs may be those right in front of you. Begin your service in your own homes and within your own families. These are the relationships that can be eternal. Even if—and maybe especially if—your family situation is less than perfect, you can find ways to serve, lift, and strengthen. Begin where you are, love them as they are, and prepare for the family you want to have in the future.

Pray for help in recognizing those in your ward families who need love and encouragement. Instead of attending church with the question of “What am I going to get out of this meeting?” ask, “Who needs me today? What do I have to contribute?”

As you bless your own families and ward members, look for ways to bless those in your local communities. Whether you have time for extensive service or can give only a few hours a month, your efforts will bless lives and will also bless you in ways you cannot begin to imagine.

President Spencer W. Kimball taught: “God does notice us, and he watches over us. But it is usually through another person that he meets our needs.”<sup>6</sup> May we each recognize the privilege and blessing it is to participate in accomplishing the work of our Heavenly Father as we meet the needs of His children is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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