

The Joy of Unselfish Service

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We have promised our Father in Heaven that we will serve Him and others with love and do His will in all things.

After last general conference, many people approached me with the same question: “Are those chairs comfortable?” My answer was the same every time: “Those chairs are very comfortable if you don’t have to speak.” It’s true, right? My chair has not been as comfortable this conference, but I am truly grateful for the blessing and the honor of speaking to you this evening.

Sometimes as we serve, we get to sit in different seats. Some are quite comfy and some other ones are not, but we have promised our Father in Heaven that we will serve Him and others with love and do His will in all things.

A few years ago, youth in the Church learned that “when you ‘embark in the service of God’ [Doctrine and Covenants 4:2], you’re joining the greatest journey ever. You’re helping God hasten His work, and it’s a great, joyful, and marvelous experience.”¹ It’s a journey available to all—of any age—and is also a journey that takes us along what our beloved prophet has spoken of as “the covenant path.”²

Unfortunately, however, we live in a selfish world where people constantly ask, “What’s in it for me?” instead of asking, “Whom can I help today?” or “How can I better serve the Lord in my calling?” or “Am I giving my all to the Lord?”

A great example in my life of unselfish service is Sister Victoria Antonietti. Victoria was one of the Primary teachers in my branch while I was growing up in Argentina. Each Tuesday afternoon, when we gathered for Primary, she brought us a chocolate cake. Everyone loved the cake—well, everyone except me. I hated chocolate cake! And even though she would try to share the cake with me, I always turned down her offer.

One day after she had shared the chocolate cake with the rest of the children, I asked her, “Why don’t you bring a different flavor—like orange or vanilla?”

After laughing a little, she asked me, “Why don’t *you* try a little piece? This cake is made with a special ingredient, and I promise that if you try it, you will like it!”

I looked around, and to my surprise, everyone seemed to be enjoying the cake. I agreed to give it a try. Can you guess what happened? I liked it! That was the very first time I had enjoyed a chocolate cake.

It wasn’t until many years later that I found out what the secret ingredient was in Sister Antonietti’s chocolate cake. My children and I visited my mother each week. On one of these

visits, Mom and I were enjoying a slice of chocolate cake, and I related to her how I came to like the cake for the very first time. Then she enlightened me with the rest of the story.

“You see, Cris,” my mom said, “Victoria and her family didn’t have a lot of resources, and each week she had to choose between paying for the bus to take her and her four children to Primary or buying the ingredients to make the chocolate cake for her Primary class. She always chose the chocolate cake over the bus, and she and her children walked more than two miles [3 km], each way, regardless of the weather.”

That day I had a better appreciation for her chocolate cake. More important, I learned that the secret ingredient in Victoria’s cake was the love she had for those she served and her unselfish sacrifice in our behalf.

Thinking back on Victoria’s cake helps me remember an unselfish sacrifice in the timeless lessons taught by the Lord to His disciples as He walked toward the treasury of the temple. You know the story. Elder James E. Talmage taught that there were 13 chests, “and into these the people dropped their contributions for the [different] purposes indicated by [the] inscriptions on the boxes.” Jesus watched the lines of donors, made up of all different types of people. Some gave their gifts with “sincerity of purpose” while others cast in “great sums of silver and gold,” hoping to be seen, noticed, and praised for their donations.

“Among the many was a poor widow, who ... dropped into one of the treasure-chests two small bronze coins known as mites; her contribution amounted to less than half a cent in American money. The Lord called His disciples about Him, directed their attention to the poverty-stricken widow and her deed, and said: ‘Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living’ [Mark 12:43–44].”³

The widow did not appear to hold a noticeable position in the society of her time. She actually held something more important: her intentions were pure, and she gave all she had to give. Perhaps she gave less than others, more quietly than others, differently than others. In the eyes of some, what she gave was insignificant, but in the eyes of the Savior, the “discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart,”⁴ she gave her all.

Sisters, are we giving our all to the Lord without reservation? Are we sacrificing of our time and talents so the rising generation can learn to love the Lord and keep His commandments? Are we ministering both to those around us and to those we are assigned with care and with diligence—sacrificing time and energy that could be used in other ways? Are we living the two great commandments—to love God and to love His children?⁵ Often that love is manifest as service.

President Dallin H. Oaks taught: “Our Savior gave Himself in unselfish service. He taught that each of us should follow Him by denying ourselves of selfish interests in order to serve others.”

He continued:

“A familiar example of losing ourselves in the service of others ... is the sacrifice parents make for their children. Mothers suffer pain and loss of personal priorities and comforts to bear and rear each child. Fathers adjust their lives and priorities to support a family. ...

“... We also rejoice in those who care for disabled family members and aged parents. None of this service asks, what’s in it for me? All of it requires setting aside personal convenience for unselfish service. ...

“[And] all of this illustrates the eternal principle that we are happier and more fulfilled when we act and serve for what we give, not for what we get.

“Our Savior teaches us to follow Him by making the sacrifices necessary to lose ourselves in unselfish service to others.”⁶

President Thomas S. Monson likewise taught that “perhaps when we make face-to-face contact with our Maker, we will not be asked, ‘How many positions did you hold?’ but rather, ‘How many people did you help?’ In reality, you can never love the Lord until you serve Him by serving His people.”⁷

In other words, sisters, it will not matter if we sat in the comfy seats or if we struggled to get through the meeting on a rusty folding chair in the back row. It won’t even matter if we, of necessity, stepped into a foyer to comfort a crying baby. What will matter is that we came with a desire to serve, that we noticed those to whom we minister and greeted them joyfully, and that we introduced ourselves to those sharing our row of folding chairs—reaching out with friendship even though we *aren’t* assigned to minister to them. And it will certainly matter that we do all that we do with the special ingredient of service coupled with love and sacrifice.

I have come to know that we don’t have to make a chocolate cake to be a successful or dedicated Primary teacher, because it was not about the cake. It was the love behind the action.

I testify that that love is made sacred through sacrifice—the sacrifice of a teacher and even more through the ultimate and eternal sacrifice of the Son of God. I bear witness that He lives! I love Him and desire to put away selfish desires in order to love and minister as He does. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.