



Sandy Utah Willow Creek Stake Conference  
Priesthood Leadership Meeting  
Talk Given by Joseph A. Staples  
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Several years ago Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone, then a member of the first quorum of seventy was in southern California and he related this story. I had reorganized a stake. Just as I was getting ready to go out to the airport where I could relax, a woman approached me. She was in her mature years and she said, "Elder Featherstone, are you going back to Salt Lake City today?" I said, "Yes." She continued, "Are you going on that four o'clock flight?" I responded that I was. Then she said, "Would you mind doing a favor for me?" I quickly thought about the schedule I had just been through, and the flesh was begging for a little break. I assumed she wanted me to hand carry something to her relatives. I never check baggage unless I absolutely have to. I wondered if I would have to check what it was I assumed she wanted me to bring back. I thought about waiting at the baggage claim for the item; then I wondered where it would need to be delivered. Only a moment's pondering and as always, the spirit thrust aside all empty excuses and responded as a service-oriented leader should.

I said, "I will be glad to help in whatever way possible." Then the woman said, "My grandson Phillip has been down here with me for a couple of weeks. How would you like to baby-sit him home to Salt Lake City? He is two-and-a-half years old. His mother will be waiting for him at the airport." We arranged to meet at the Los Angeles Airport, where the grandmother introduced me to Phillip.

Phillip and I boarded the plane.

I reached into my pocket and opened a letter from the grandmother. It went something like this:

“Dear Elder Featherstone, Thank you for taking Phillip back to Salt Lake City and baby-sitting him for us. We appreciate it. His mother will be there at the airport to meet you.”

When we arrived in Salt Lake City, there was no one to meet us. We walked the length of the airport terminal. Still no one recognized Phillip. We went down the escalator, past the baggage claim, and out to the street. I have done some unusual things in our marriage, but I wondered what my wife would say when I came home from a stake conference visit and brought a two-and-a-half-year-old little boy with me.

I looked around and stood with Phillip for a moment, and then his mother arrived driving a car and stopped by us. She had been delayed in heavy traffic coming to the airport. The sweet mother was very kind, and she loaded a happy Phillip and all his luggage into the car.

Was it convenient for Elder Featherstone to agree to help this woman? Clearly not. But as he puts it, “the spirit thrust aside all empty excuses and I responded as a service-oriented leader should.”

How do we respond brethren? How do we respond when asked to accept a time-consuming church calling; or to help a quorum member move; or to get up in the middle of the night to go give a priesthood blessing to someone we home teach; or to clean the church building on a Saturday morning; or to pull weeds at the church garden; or to substitute teach a primary class; or a host of so many other things that we are asked to do in the church. Why do we do it? Why are we willing to serve in the church and in our priesthood quorums? I believe it is because the Lord has asked us to and we love him and want to do all that he asks of us. It's in part, why you are here this morning.

In General Conference last week, Elder Robert D. Hales of the quorum of the twelve apostles said, “As we follow Jesus Christ, His love motivates us to support each other on our mortal journey. As disciples, we begin to do this when we are baptized, showing our willingness “to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light.”

My wife Robyn and I have a print of a painting of the Nauvoo temple hanging on the wall just as you walk in the front door of our home — visible to us as we enter and maybe more important, visible to us as we leave. We had the artist paint some words in the bottom right corner of the painting. The words read; The Staples Inviolable Marriage Devotions. It then list three items that for us are non-negotiable and immovable. Things we work at everyday. The relevant one for this morning’s talk is: Build the Kingdom of God.

What a blessing it is for us to serve in the church! There is strength that comes from our service in the church! And as important as that is, I would propose to you that if that is the extent of our service, then perhaps we fall short of what the Lord expects of us. That

perhaps it isn't sufficient to think as the well-worn phrase goes, "I gave at the office" or in our case "I gave at church". I would propose that the Lord expects us to be actively serving others around us — at work, at school, even people we don't know or may never see again.

We can only imagine how busy the church service was for men like President Spencer W. Kimball and Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the twelve — yet both of those men were very frequent visitors of acquaintances who were in the hospital. Elder Maxwell says what he learned about that personal ministry, he learned from President Kimball. Speaking about people they mutually knew, Elder Maxwell said he would occasionally whisper to President Kimball, 'So-and-so is in the hospital,' and President Kimball would say, 'Yes, I know. I have already been there.'

Several years ago I made a decision. I decided that I would do at least one act of service everyday. I knew well the scripture from the 25th chapter of Matthew, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." I thought it was a righteous goal to do an act of service everyday and that the Lord will help me accomplish it. I shared it with my Heavenly Father while on my knees and awoke the next morning to set in place my new soon-to-be habit.

That night I got on my knees and reflected on the day and was disappointed. I hadn't found an opportunity to do that act of service that day.

I prayed more fervently, something like this... "Heavenly Father, I want to serve those around me, please bless me with the opportunity to do so."

The next day I went out with the same intention, but that night found the same result. No service rendered. This went on for several days. Then, I believe again on my knees, I learned an important lesson. And it had to do with the definition of service.

Here's in how I envisioned my daily act of service happening (remember, I'm pretty young - and dumb- at this point in my life)... driving to work I would come upon an automobile accident that had just occurred. Flames would be coming from one of the cars. I run to the car, kick in the window and pull the driver to safety just as the car exploded.

Or on my way home I would find a lost little boy wandering in the road as motorists passed by. I'd stop, comfort the boy, and ultimately reunite him with his sobbing mother.

What I learned on my knees is that that is not what service is about. Sure those things may happen occasionally, or more frequently in the movies, but daily service is about doing small things to lighten the load and ease the burdens of another person. With my new-found attitude, I found that there were opportunities to serve all around me, but they consisted in opening doors for people who had their arms full, starting a conversation with someone, leaving a little extra in a dinner tip for a waiter who looks like he might be struggling, bringing in from the curb the garbage cans of one of our

neighbors, stopping by and sitting and talking with someone who we know might be a bit lonely, offering something as simple as a smile. One of my favorite service activities when I travel is to look for elderly people in the airport who might look a little confused, ask them where they are going, and then help them find their departure gate. Small things, but service none the less.

Elder Derek Cuthbert, who served for many years as a general authority, said, “Over the years, many people, especially youth, have asked me, “Elder Cuthbert, how can I become more spiritual?” My reply has always been the same: “You need to give more service.”

Service changes people. It refines, purifies, gives a finer perspective, and brings out the best in each one of us. It gets us looking outward instead of inward. It prompts us to consider others’ needs ahead of our own. Righteous service is the expression of true charity, such as the Savior showed.”

And President Uchtdorf has emphasized the need for giving service when he stated, “divine blessings for priesthood service are activated by our diligent efforts, our willingness to sacrifice, and our desire to do what is right. Let us be the ones to act.”

The Savior was the great exemplar of service. If we consider the adverbs that describe how the Savior served, we would use words like, He served lovingly, selflessly, and constantly. Good descriptions of how we should model our patterns and habits of service.

Brethren, to serve is good. In part it is good because service changes both the receiver and the giver. It softens us. It makes us more receptive to the Spirit and ultimately, it makes us more like our Savior Jesus Christ.

So brethren, I suggest that we be active, enthusiastic, willing servants, both in our church assignments and in the service we provide to those around us.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.