



The Savior's Love Isn't Earned Through Service—But It's Revealed Through It

By Ray Alston

HOLIDAYS

April 4, 2025

Where is the Savior's love felt this Easter? In humble acts of service and the grace of being served.

In early 2022, I learned I would not get the job I had hoped for despite several interviews and much effort. The evening I found out, a woman from my church congregation called and asked me to join her in helping Tammi. Tammi, another member of our congregation, had only one leg and couldn't walk with it. She had been ill and, in an accident I no longer remember, had fallen and needed help getting back into her wheelchair. I hurried to Tammi's place. Together we moved Tammi onto a sheet (or some other length of cloth) and used it to lift her up and into her chair. I was struck by the fact that Tammi never apologized or acted awkward about the situation. She responded with good humor and gratitude. Perhaps because of the grace with which she responded, I felt a deep peace

there in her apartment. That peace helped to give me comfort in my disappointment about the job I didn't get.

My experience with Tammi showed me that while there is value in the contemplative aspects of religious observance—such as prayer, reflection, and study—they are incomplete without the active component of service. I have felt the love of God more abundantly through service, both when I have given it and, more frequently when I have received it.

My oldest, David, is intellectually disabled, and attempting to serve him has helped me both learn to serve and acknowledge the fact that I can't do everything. I need the help and support of my community. I have written about my experiences with him and my church community [at length here](#). Such experiences helped me to see my need not only for mortal help but for the Savior. Through those who have offered selfless service, I have felt the Savior's love. Once when he was getting upset in a Church meeting and I held his hand to escort him out of the chapel, the distinct thought came to my mind, "Will I not take you by the hand and lead you?" As I was seeking to help my son I felt the love of the Savior. I was reminded He wants to help me, that I am His son, and that He loves me completely.

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It is not always easy to accept service. Our culture often emphasizes a transactional view of relationships. I frequently catch myself keeping score, saying things like, "I owe you one," after a favor. As I have served and been served, however, I have learned the economy of service is more complex and beautiful than a transactional economy. I have been reminded when on the receiving end of service that my relationship with the Savior is defined by the fact that He did—and does—for me what I can't do for myself. Repaying Him for His sacrifice and His daily care is impossible. However, while reciprocity can be important, as I learned with Tammi, gratitude can more than repay service. I am moved by John Milton's words in *Paradise Lost*: "A grateful mind/ By owing owes not, but still pays, at once/ Indebted and discharged; what burden then?" (4:55-57). Although I haven't mastered the application of the principle, I have learned it is better to express gratitude for service than to apologize for needing it.

Part of the mystery of the economy of service is that simple gestures can be tremendously valuable. When a young woman watched my children for free so I could take my wife on a date, I felt like I had been given a fortune. A caring conversation with friends after not getting the job in 2022 was one of the things that helped me the most with my disappointment. These seemingly simple acts were really blessings beyond blessings. They show me the Savior knows what I truly need better than I do. He understands what service is necessary, and He provides it through loving individuals and families. Leo Tolstoy captures this in beautiful words in his story [What Men Live By](#),

“God does not wish men to live apart, and therefore he does not reveal to them what each one needs for himself; but he wishes them to live united, and therefore reveals to each of them what is necessary for all ... though it seems to men that they live by care for themselves, in truth it is love alone by which they live. He who has love is in God, and God is in him, for God is love.”

The service given to me and my family has been a window to the love of God for me and my family. It has helped me grow in gratitude and wonder for Him and His care for us through others.

I believe it is in acts of service that we come to know our Savior because it is in such acts that we emulate Him. We begin to understand Him as we “[go] about doing good” as He did (Acts 10:38). Two passages from the Book of Mormon harmonize with this thought:

“I say unto you, I would that ye should remember to retain the name written always in your hearts, that ye are not found on the left hand of God, but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be called, and also, the name by which he shall call you.

For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?” (Mosiah 5:12-13).

“And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17).

Coming to know God is not an academic exercise of comprehending complex theological concepts; it is learning to live as He lives through faith, hope, and pure love.

As we commemorate Easter and remember the Savior's suffering, death, and resurrection for us, I hope our hearts will turn to those around us. I hope to be more attentive to those who are struggling and to offer what assistance I can. I believe that our faith in Him as the risen, living God will be strengthened as we learn to live as He lives, that is, living our lives for others through service.

About the author

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