

Participate to Prepare for Christ's Return

By Elder Steven D. Shumway
Of the Seventy

Abril 2025 sapasap a komperensia

Empty
Empty

April 2025 general conference

Callings and other ways we embark in God's work uniquely prepare us to meet the Savior. *Empty*

A few months ago, I was standing in a hall when Elder Neil L. Andersen walked by. I had just been called as a new General Authority. Likely sensing my feelings of inadequacy, he smiled and said, "Well, there looks like a man who has no idea what he is doing."

Empty

And I thought, "There is a true prophet and seer."

Elder Andersen then whispered, "Don't worry, Elder Shumway. It gets better—in five or six years."

Have you ever wondered why we are asked to do things in God's kingdom that feel beyond our reach? With life's demands, have you asked why we even need callings in the Church? Well, I have.

And I got an answer in general conference when President Russell M. Nelson said, "Now is the time for you and for me to prepare for the Second Coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ." When President Nelson said this, the Spirit taught me that as we participate in God's work, we prepare ourselves and others for Christ's return. The Lord's promise is compelling that callings, ministering, temple worship, following promptings, and other ways we embark in God's work uniquely prepare us to meet the Savior.

God Is Pleased When We Engage in His Work

In "the majesty of this moment," as God's kingdom expands and temples dot the earth,

there is a growing need for willing souls to engage in God's work. Selflessly serving is the very essence of Christlike discipleship. But serving is rarely convenient. This is why I admire you covenant-keeping disciples, including our dear missionaries, who set aside your desires and challenges to serve God by serving His children. God "delights to honor [you for serving Him] in righteousness." He promises, "Great shall be [your] reward and eternal shall be [your] glory." When we say yes to serving, we are saying yes to Jesus Christ. And when we say yes to Christ, we are saying yes to the most abundant life possible.

I learned this lesson while working and studying chemical engineering in college. I was asked to be the activities planner for a singles ward. This was my nightmare calling. Still, I accepted, and at first it was drudgery. Then at one activity a beautiful girl was smitten by the way I served the ice cream. She returned three times, hoping to catch my attention. We fell in love, and she proposed to me just two weeks later. Well, maybe it wasn't quite that fast, and I was the one who proposed, but the truth is this: I shudder to think of missing out on Heidi had I said no to that calling.

Our Participation Is Preparation for Christ's Return

We engage in God's work not because God needs us but because we need God and His mighty blessings. He promises, "For, behold, I will bless all those who labor in my vineyard with a mighty blessing." Let me share three principles that teach how our participation in God's work blesses and helps us prepare to meet the Savior.

First, as we participate, we progress toward "the measure of [our] creation."

We learn this pattern in the account of the Creation. After each day of labor, God acknowledged the progress made by saying, "It was good." He did not say the work was finished nor that it was perfect. But what He did say was that there was progress, and in God's eyes, that is good!

Callings do not determine or validate a person's worth or worthiness. Rather, as we labor with God in whatever way He asks, we grow into the measure of our own creation.

God rejoices in our progress, and so should

we, even when we still have work to do. At times we may lack the strength or the means to serve in a calling. Still, we can engage in the work and protect our testimonies through meaningful ways like prayer and scripture study. Our loving Heavenly Father does not condemn us when we are willing but unable to serve.

Second, serving elevates our homes and churches into holy places where we can practice covenant living.

For example, our covenant to always remember Christ is made individually, but this covenant is lived as we serve others. Callings surround us with opportunities to “bear ... one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” When we serve because we love God and want to live our covenants, service that seems dutiful and draining becomes joyful and transformative.

Ordinances don’t save us because they fulfill a heavenly checklist. Rather, when we live the covenants connected with these ordinances, we become the kind of person who wants to be in God’s presence. This understanding overcomes hesitations to serve or preferences not to serve. Our preparation to meet Jesus Christ accelerates when we stop asking what God will permit and start asking what God would prefer.

Third, participating in God’s work helps us receive God’s gift of grace and feel His greater love.

We do not receive financial compensation for serving. Instead, scripture teaches that for our “labor [we are] to receive the grace of God, that [we] might wax strong in the Spirit, [have] the knowledge of God, [and] teach with power and authority from God.” That is a very good trade!

Because of God’s grace, our abilities or inabilities are not the principal basis for extending or accepting a calling. God does not expect perfect performance or exceptional talent to participate in His work. If so, Queen Esther would not have saved her nation, Peter would not have led the early Church, and Joseph Smith would not be the Prophet of the Restoration.

As we act in faith to do something beyond our abilities, our weakness is exposed. This is never comfortable, but it is necessary for us to “know that it is by [God’s] grace ... that we have power to do these things.”

We will fall many times as we engage in God’s work. But in our effort, Jesus Christ catches us. He gradually lifts us to experience salvation

from failure and fear and from feeling like we will never be enough. When we consecrate our meager but best effort, God magnifies it. When we sacrifice for Jesus Christ, He sanctifies us. This is the transformative power of God's grace. As we serve, we grow in grace until we are prepared to "be lifted up by the Father, to stand before [Jesus Christ]."

Help Others Receive and Rejoice in the Gift of Callings

I do not know all the Savior will ask me when I stand before Him, but perhaps one question will be "Who did you bring with you?" - Callings are sacred gifts from a loving Heavenly Father to help bring others with us to Jesus Christ. So I invite leaders and each of us to more intentionally seek those without callings. Encourage and help them engage in God's work to help them prepare for Christ's return.

John was not active in the Church when his bishop visited and told him that the Lord had a work for him to do. He invited John to quit smoking. Although John had tried many times to stop, this time he felt an unseen power helping him.

Just three weeks later, the stake president visited John. He called him to serve in the bishopric. John was shocked. He told the stake president he had just quit smoking. If this meant he would have to abandon his tradition of attending professional football games on Sunday, well, that was just too much to ask. The stake president's inspired response was simple: "John, I am not asking you; the Lord is."

To which John replied, "Well, if that is the case, I will serve."

John told me that these sacrifices to serve were the spiritual turning points for him and for his family.

I wonder if we have a blind spot, failing to extend callings to individuals who, to our mortal view, appear unlikely or unworthy. Or we may be more concerned with a culture of performance than with the doctrine of progression, neglecting to see how the Savior increases capacity in the unlikely and the unproven by giving them opportunities to serve.

Elder David A. Bednar teaches the importance of the scriptural mandate to "let every [woman and] man learn [their] duty, and to act." Do we do this? When leaders and parents let

others learn and act for themselves, they blossom and flourish. While the easier path may be to give faithful members a second calling, the more excellent way is to invite the unlikely to serve and let them learn and grow.

If Christ were physically here, He would visit the sick, teach the Sunday School class, sit with the heartbroken young woman, and bless the children. He can do His own work. But He lives this principle of letting us act and learn, so He sends us in His place.

With participation in God's work comes "the right, privilege, and responsibility to represent the Lord [Jesus Christ]." When we serve to magnify Christ and not ourselves, our service becomes joyful. When others leave our class, meeting, ministering visit, or activity remembering Christ more than they remember us, the work is energizing.

In earnestly seeking to represent the Savior, we become more like Him. That is the best preparation for the sacred moment when each of us will kneel and confess that Jesus is the Christ, which I witness that He is and that President Russell M. Nelson is His "voice ... unto the ends of the earth" to help us "prepare ... for that which is to come." In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.