

Let's Set the World Aflame - L4ZGWU

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(1) “The best cure for weariness is the challenge of helping someone who is even more tired. One of the great ironies of life is this: He or she who serves almost always benefits more than he or she who is served,” said Gordon B. Hinckley, the author of Standing for Something. Service nourishes our minds, bodies, and spirits. Helping others either on the battlefield, in a place of worship, or at a food bank actually boosts moods, heightens happiness, and can even change outlooks on life. Along with its healthful benefits, serving one another, God, or our country taps into our innate need to help our fellow man, which continues the pattern of service that enables our society to progress and mature.

One day while driving around town before school with some fellow students delivering sandwiches to homeless people, I experienced a drastic change. I had woken up fractious and annoyed that I had to do this, but after receiving gratitude and smiles from everyone I encountered, I approached the rest of the day with a positive attitude and genuine appreciation for my life and the people in it. Serving others can improve how we view ourselves and the world. (2) A study of alcoholics going through the Alcoholics Anonymous program found that those who helped others were nearly twice as likely to stay dry a year later, and their levels of depression lowered as well.

This positive affect of giving to others has been experienced by anyone who has written a check to a deserving cause or seen the wide grin of a child who found a donated sweater at the local Goodwill. Giving of oneself in the form of monetary or material donation is satisfying, but not as powerful as giving someone your time and attention. This I know from my experience over two summers at a camp for underprivileged girls.

I met an eleven-year old named Gabrielle last summer and she changed my life. She was conditioned to not trust people, and I learned that she had been abused. She had to deal with

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more struggle and hardship than most would understand, all with a smile and a hearty laugh, tricking almost all of us into thinking she was perfectly fine. *Almost* all of us. However, when she followed me into our makeshift theater with a few other campers to start our drama class, I knew that this would be the perfect thing for her.

Once we started icebreakers and improv games, Gabrielle began to shed her timidity. As I watched this transformation, my smile widened and I felt immense accomplishment. Deep in the mountains, with dirt under my fingernails and sweat dripping down my cheeks from the 90-degree heat, I was helping Gabrielle discover the light within herself that others had tried to dim.

Giving my time and energy to Gabrielle didn't only help her realize her confidence, it actually made me feel better physically too. (3) Stephen G. Post Ph.D, author of the book The Hidden Gifts of Helping, stated that "when people just think about giving, the body doles out feel-good chemicals such as dopamine, which has a soothing effect...they feel joy and delight – helper's high." (4) He goes on to say that “getting away from yourself, reaching out and contributing to the lives of others, especially in hard times...is a very healthy thing.” Little did I or anyone else volunteering at that camp know – we weren't just making these girls' lives a little better, we were enriching our own as well.

In addition to improving physical and mental health, cultivating a culture of serving others is vital to foster the human spirit. (5) I recently listened to a Ted talk given by Rabbi Tabick on compassion, and I heard a line that struck me. She said that compassion “means understanding one's connection to the whole of creation: understanding that one is part of that creation, that there is a unity that underlies all that we see, all that we hear, all that we feel.” This underlying connection that we all experience, despite our racial, economic, religious, or cultural differences, is what binds us to one another. This is how service nurtures our spirit and

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communities. When we serve others, it feeds the connection that we all share. Whether praying for, fighting for, or working for one another's well-being, we are continuing that cycle of compassion that holds our culture together.

A life of service benefits those in need and those who live it. It nourishes us and contributes to the unity that we all need in order to survive and thrive. We have to get out of our comfort zones and donate time (not just money) to people in need in order to experience positive change in ourselves. We must respond to this calling to help our brothers and sisters because it improves our culture's well-being and engenders an unbreakable bond that ameliorates our perceptions of ourselves and the world we live in. As a nation, we should encourage each other to fulfill this intrinsic need to help others by offering the talents that we were born with.

Martin Luther King Jr. told us that to serve, "you only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love." I could not give Gabrielle a college education or take her away from her violent home, but what I could do was give her my time and attention. I realized later that this was more powerful than any material gift I could have provided for her, because at its core, service is about giving all that we can to help make someone like Gabrielle's light shine a little brighter. So let us go and fill our hearts with grace and set the world aflame.

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