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Just as President Monson has been a strong advocate for the elderly, he has also spent his entire life teaching and ministering to the youth of the Church.

# *Tender Mercies and Thomas S. Monson*

MARK D. OGLETREE

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Several years ago, Elder David A. Bednar shared a spiritual experience he had prior to giving his inaugural talk as an Apostle. Just before Elder Bednar delivered his address in the Conference Center, the Tabernacle Choir and congregation joined in singing the intermediate hymn, “Redeemer of Israel.” Elder Bednar then explained:

Now, the music for the various conference sessions had been determined many weeks before—and obviously long before my new call to serve. If, however, I had been invited to suggest an intermediate hymn for that particular session of the conference—a hymn that would have been both edifying and spiritually soothing for me and for the congregation before my first address in this Conference Center—I would have selected my favorite hymn, “Redeemer of Israel.” Tears filled my eyes as I stood with you to sing that stirring hymn of the Restoration.<sup>1</sup>

He then related that his mind was directed to a verse in the first chapter of the Book of Mormon: “But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (1 Nephi 1:20). He further explained:

My mind was drawn immediately to Nephi's phrase "the tender mercies of the Lord," and I knew in that very moment I was experiencing just such a tender mercy. A loving Savior was sending me a most personal and timely message of comfort and reassurance through a hymn selected weeks previously. Some may count this experience as simply a nice coincidence, but I testify that the tender mercies of the Lord are real and that they do not occur randomly or merely by coincidence. Often, the Lord's timing of His tender mercies helps us to both discern and acknowledge them.<sup>2</sup>

## Tender Mercies Defined

Tender mercies are personalized messages from the Lord to us. They often come in the form of "strength, protection, assurances, guidance, loving-kindnesses, consolation, support, and spiritual gifts which we receive from and because of and through the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup> These tender mercies are evidence that the Lord knows us and is intimately involved in the details of our lives.

Elder Gerald N. Lund further explained tender mercies:

As a popular saying goes, "Coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous." But in my experience, it is just the opposite. What we call coincidence is God's way of letting Himself be known. . . . Sometimes, the Lord sends His blessings in such a highly, unusual, dramatic, or precisely timed manner, that it might be likened to a "divine signature." It is as though the Lord "signs" the blessings personally so that we will know with certainty that it comes from Him. In doing so, God not only gives us the blessings, but at the same time, He also strengthens our faith and deepens our testimony of Him.<sup>4</sup>

Many events in our lives do not transpire because of happenstance—there seems to be a purpose for the event and a reason for the timing of it. A person may feel impressed to take a different route home only to find out later that there was a traffic accident exactly where they would have been driving.

Tender mercies are often evident when we feel directed to do a certain thing, but do not know why. For example, President Boyd K. Packer remembered that as a child, his mother felt inspired not to travel with their family into town one day, but to stay home instead. Shortly after the family left, the Packer home caught fire. Because his mother was home, she was able to put out the fire before it destroyed all of their possessions.<sup>5</sup> Many have had the experience of meeting someone significant like a future spouse or an old friend because they left their home five minutes earlier or later than usual, or were directed to take a different route home. Some have been involved in serious accidents where earthly "angels" showed up at just the right time to help save those who would have been seriously injured.

Elder James E. Talmage testified, “The Lord’s hand is in our lives; if we will but feel for it, in the darkness, we can grasp it and be lifted thereby.”<sup>6</sup> Likewise, President Joseph F. Smith taught:

It has not been by the wisdom of man that this people have been directed in their course until the present; it has been by the wisdom of Him who is above man and whose knowledge is greater than that of man, and whose power is above the power of man. . . . The hand of the Lord may not be visible to all. There may be many who cannot discern the workings of God’s will in the progress and development of this great latter-day work, but there are those who see in every hour and in every moment the existence of the Church, from its beginning until now, the overruling, almighty hand of Him.<sup>7</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to highlight some of the tender mercies in the ministry of President Thomas S. Monson. Because President Monson has desired to follow the promptings of the Holy Ghost, the Lord has used him as an instrument to accomplish his purposes. Likewise, the Lord will use other mortals to bring to pass his purposes if we are willing to follow his Spirit.

### **Tender Mercies in the Life of Thomas S. Monson**

President Monson has spent a lifetime following the promptings of the Holy Ghost and, subsequently, rescuing those in need. When asked how he finds the time to help those around him, he said, “I am a very simple man. I just do what the Lord tells me to do.”<sup>8</sup> Each of us could be more effective as disciples of Jesus Christ if we followed this simple formula.

As I have had the occasion to study President Monson’s life and teachings, I have been amazed at how often these tender mercies have occurred in his life and in the lives of those he has ministered to. I have also determined that his initials—T. M.—could also stand for “Tender Mercy.” President Monson has said, “The sweetest experience I know in life is to feel a prompting and act upon it and later find out that it was the fulfillment of someone’s prayer or someone’s need. And I always want the Lord to know that if He needs an errand run, Tom Monson will run that errand for Him.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Right Place, Right Time**

One of the defining marks of a “tender mercy” is the coincidental timing that links events, as well as individual’s lives, together. Throughout his ministry, President Monson has been led and directed by the Spirit to be exactly where he needed to be at precisely the right time. He has taught, “The prayers of

people are almost always answered by the actions of others.”<sup>10</sup> The Lord has certainly used Thomas S. Monson as an instrument to answer the prayers of Saints throughout the world.

For example, years ago President Monson was approached by Folkman Brown, the director of Mormon Relationships for the Boy Scouts of America. Having learned that President Monson was on his way for a lengthy assignment in New Zealand, Brother Brown explained that his sister Belva Jones had just been diagnosed with terminal cancer. Belva had lost her husband to cancer just a year earlier and wasn't sure how to tell her son, Ryan, who was serving as a missionary in New Zealand at the time, that she would soon die from the same disease. More than anything, she wanted her son to stay in New Zealand and finish his mission strong. But how could she relay this message to her son? Folkman asked President Monson, who would be in New Zealand the following week, if he could deliver the tragic news personally.

President Monson accepted the difficult responsibility. Shortly after arriving, he met personally with Elder Ryan Jones after a missionary meeting held adjacent to the New Zealand Temple. President Monson tenderly explained the tragic news. Tears were shed by the missionary and President Monson, but then with an assured handshake, Elder Jones told the Apostle, “Tell my mother I will serve, I will pray, and I will see her again.”

As soon as President Monson arrived home from his assignment in New Zealand, he was attending the Lost River stake conference, in Moore, Idaho. President Monson shared the following:

As I sat on the stand with the stake president, my attention was drawn almost instinctively to the east side of the chapel, where the morning sunlight bathed the lone occupant of a front bench. I said to the stake president, “Who is the sister upon whom the sunlight is resting? I feel I must speak to her today.” He replied, “Her name is Belva Jones. She has a missionary son in New Zealand. She is very ill and has requested a blessing.”

Prior to that moment, I had not known where Belva Jones lived. My assignment that weekend could have been to any one of fifty stakes. Yet the Lord, in His own way, had answered the prayer of faith of a concerned mother. We had a wonderful visit together. I reported word-for-word the reaction and the resolve of her son, Ryan. A blessing was provided, a prayer offered, a witness received. Belva Jones would live to see her son complete his mission. This privilege she enjoyed. Just one month prior to her passing, his mission completed, Ryan returned home.<sup>11</sup>

Some would call this experience a mere fluke. However, as Latter-day Saints we understand the Lord's tender mercies. It isn't a surprise that the Lord used President Monson as an instrument to bring a mother and a son

together and to promise the very blessings Christ himself would have promised, had he been there.

Consider another similar meeting with yet another missionary family. In the fall of 1970, President Monson attended a stake conference in Grand Junction, Colorado. During the conference weekend, the stake president asked President Monson if he would meet with Hale and Donna Larson in regards to their missionary son, Marc. Recently, Marc had announced to his parents that he was going to end his mission and come home early. While President Monson met with the distressed parents, he asked, "Where is your son serving?" They replied, "In Dusseldorf, Germany."

President Monson placed his arms around Brother and Sister Larson and said, "Your prayers have been heard and are already being answered. With more than twenty-eight stake conferences being held this day attended by the General Authorities, I was the one assigned to your stake." He told them that the following week he would be in Dusseldorf and would see their son there. After meeting with President Monson, their son, Elder Larson, soon recommitted to finish his mission.<sup>12</sup>

President Monson testified, "Of all the blessings which I have had in my life, the greatest blessing I can share with you is that feeling which the Lord provides when you know that He, the Lord, has answered the prayer of another person through you. As you love the Lord, as you love your neighbor, you will discover that our Heavenly Father will answer the prayers of others through your ministry."<sup>13</sup>

### **Tender Mercies in Germany**

President Monson shared this perspective on service: "During your life you may achieve wealth or fame or social standing. Real success, however, comes from helping others. . . . Said a wise man many years ago, 'We can't do everything for everyone everywhere, but we can do something for someone somewhere.'<sup>14</sup> President Monson has spent his life doing "something for someone somewhere." He has been successful in seeking to be an instrument for the Lord to bring to pass goodwill and to connect people.

Several years ago at a Church Educational System fireside for young adults, President Monson spoke briefly about Ted Cannon, a man who served as a missionary in Germany back in the late 1930s. After Ted's mission, he came home, married, raised his family, served in the Church, and ran his own business. Forty years after he returned home from his mission, he

found himself in the office of President Monson. Ted explained that he had been sorting through his missionary photographs from Germany and that there were several photos that he could not identify. However, every time he attempted to throw away the unidentifiable photographs, he felt a strong impression that he should keep them.

These particular photos were taken by Brother Cannon during his mission when he served in Stettin, Germany, and they were of a family—a mother, a father, a small girl, and a small boy. Ted knew that their surname was Berndt but could remember nothing more about them. He told President Monson that he understood there was a Berndt who was a Church leader in Germany and suspected, although the possibility was remote, that this Berndt might have some connection with the Berndts who had lived in Stettin and who were depicted in the photographs. Before disposing of the photos, he thought he would check with President Monson, knowing that he was a frequent visitor to Germany.

President Monson indicated that he was leaving shortly for Berlin, where he anticipated that he would see Dieter Berndt, the Church leader, and that he could show the photographs to him to see if he could identify them. President Monson explained:

The Lord didn't even let me get to Berlin before His purposes were accomplished. I was in Zurich, Switzerland, boarding the flight to Berlin, when who should also board the plane but Dieter Berndt. He sat next to me, and I told him I had some old photos of people named Berndt from Stettin. I handed them to him and asked if he could identify those shown in the photographs. As he looked at them carefully, he began to weep. He said, "Our family lived in Stettin during the war. My father was killed when an Allied bomb struck the plant where he worked. Not long afterward, the Russians invaded Poland and the area of Stettin. My mother took my sister and me and fled from the approaching enemy. Everything had to be left behind, including any photographs we had. Brother Monson, I am the little boy pictured in these photographs, and my sister is the little girl. The man and woman are our dear parents. Until today, I had no photographs of our childhood in Stettin or of my father."

Wiping away my own tears, I told Brother Berndt the photographs were his. He placed them carefully and lovingly in his briefcase.<sup>15</sup>

Consequently, at the next general conference, when Dieter Berndt visited Salt Lake City, he paid a visit to Brother and Sister Edwin Cannon Jr. so that he might express in person his gratitude for the inspiration that came to Brother Cannon to retain those precious photographs and for the fact that he had followed that inspiration to keep them for forty years.

President Monson taught, “The sweetest spirit and feeling in all of mortality is when we have an opportunity to be on the Lord’s errand and to know that He has guided our footsteps.”<sup>16</sup> President Monson knew that the Lord guided his footsteps as he was able to link the lives of Ted Cannon and Dieter Berndt together. He has had many similar experiences because of his willingness to listen to the Lord and then follow his directions.

### **The Power of Influence**

President Monson’s example of love and kindness has inspired many individuals to action. His care and concern for others is inspiring, and lifts us to higher levels. He has encouraged all of us to radiate the gospel message wherever we are: “We need not wait for a cataclysmic event, a dramatic occurrence in the world in which we live, or a special invitation to be an example—even a model to follow. Our opportunities lie before us here and now. But they are perishable. Likely they will be found in our own homes and in the everyday actions of our lives.”<sup>17</sup> We can all be examples to those around us and radiate the Savior’s love and kindness.

Many years ago, President Monson was traveling by plane with mission president Horace D. Ensign across Australia. Their plane stopped in Mount Isa for fuel. Meanwhile, Judith Loudon, a local resident and Church member, decided to bring her two children to the airport for the rare opportunity to meet an Apostle. As Sister Loudon approached President Monson, she said, “I am Judith Loudon, a member of the Church, and these are my children. We thought you might be on this flight, so we have come to visit with you during your brief stopover.” She told President Monson that her husband wasn’t a member of the Church and that she and her children were the only Saints in the entire area.

After visiting with Sister Loudon for a while, it was time to board the plane. However, Sister Loudon seemed almost depressed to see President Monson leave. She pled with him to stay longer. She said, “You can’t go yet; I have so missed the Church.” Almost precisely at that moment, it was announced over the airport loud speaker that the plane President Monson was to board had some mechanical difficulties and would be delayed for a while longer. Sister Loudon said, “My prayer has been answered.” Sister Loudon was then able to ask President Monson the question that she had not felt comfortable enough to ask earlier. She asked how she could influence her nonmember husband to become interested in the gospel. President Monson counseled her to include

her husband in the Primary lesson each week and to be an example by living the gospel of Jesus Christ. President Monson further explained, “I mentioned we would send to her a subscription to the *Children’s Friend* and additional helps for her family teaching. We urged that she never give up on her husband. We departed Mount Isa, a city to which I have never returned. I shall, however, always hold dear in memory that sweet mother and those precious children extending a tear-filled expression and a fond wave of gratitude and good-bye.”<sup>18</sup>

Years later, President Monson was speaking at a priesthood leadership meeting in Brisbane, Australia. In his remarks, he emphasized the significance of gospel scholarship in the home and the importance of living the gospel and being examples of the truth. He then told the story of the woman he had met in Australia years earlier—Sister Judith Louden. He related to the priesthood leaders her faithfulness and dedication.

As I concluded, I said, “I suppose I’ll never know if Sister Louden’s husband ever joined the Church, but he couldn’t have found a better model to follow than his wife.”

One of the leaders raised his hand, then stood and declared, “Brother Monson, I am Richard Louden. The woman of whom you speak is my wife. The children (his voice quivered) are our children. We are a forever family now, thanks in part to the persistence and the patience of my dear wife. She did it all.” Not a word was spoken. The silence was broken only by sniffles and marked by the sight of tears.<sup>19</sup>

The Lord, in his kindness and mercy, allowed President Monson this follow-up visit to Australia so he could witness that the seed he planted became a mighty tree. What an incredible payday for an Apostle! He never planned on ministering to a member of the Church in Mount Isa, Australia. After all, his plane was simply stopping to refuel as they flew across the country. Furthermore, he had no idea before his plane landed that he would minister to a saintly woman there, and subsequently, ultimately change the life of her and her family forever. However, he was worthy to receive the constant flow of revelation that comes to those who are prepared and obedient to the commandments. At the same time, Sister Louden was willing to accept the counsel from an Apostle and live the gospel in her home. Through her example and teachings of the gospel, her husband could no longer resist the gospel of Jesus Christ. He became a great leader of the Church “down under.” President Monson said, “We have no way of knowing when our privilege to extend a helping hand will unfold before us. The road to Jericho that each of

us travels bears no name, and the weary traveler who needs our help may be one unknown.”<sup>20</sup>

### Remembering and Honoring the Elderly

Few people know it,” President Packer explained, “but Brother Monson is the self-appointed chaplain at a number of nursing homes around town. . . . He visits them anytime his busy schedule will permit, and sometimes even when it doesn’t permit.”<sup>21</sup> For his entire ministry, President Monson has had a special place in his heart for the elderly. When he served as a bishop, he continued to minister to the eighty-five widows in his ward. After his release, that ministering continued. He managed, even as an Apostle, to speak at each one of their funerals. He took a week off work each year to visit these women and bring them gifts for as long as they lived. A well-meaning person once told President Monson that it was essentially a waste of time visiting these elderly people. This person observed that President Monson would speak to these older people, yet often they could not communicate back to him. The person



Robert T. Barrett, *Thomas S. Monson Collage*, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

President Monson testified, “Of all the blessings which I have had in my life, the greatest blessing I can share with you is that feeling which the Lord provides when you know that He, the Lord, has answered the prayer of another person through you.

chided, “You might as well save your breath, Elder Monson. They don’t know who you are.” President Monson responded, “Whether they know me or not is beside the point. I don’t talk to them because they know me; I talk to them because I know them.”<sup>22</sup>

In 1975, President Monson presided at a stake conference in Modesto, California. As he sat on the stand, President Monson remembered that ten years earlier he had attended a stake conference in this area, and he also recalled that Clifton Rooker was the stake president. President Monson leaned over to the outgoing stake president and asked if this was the stake where Clifton Rooker once presided as stake President. The current stake president said, “Yes. He is our former stake president.”

With confidence, President Monson stepped to the podium before the meeting began and asked the congregation if Clifton Rooker was in the audience. Once Brother Rooker was identified near the back of the building, President Monson invited him to make the long journey to the front of the chapel and to sit to him on the stand. The elderly gentleman was happy to be reunited with his old friend, President Monson. He was also thrilled to have a bird’s-eye view over the stake where he had once presided.

In this particular stake conference, the stake was divided and two new stake presidencies were called. Towards the end of the meeting, President Monson felt inspired to invite Brother Rooker to bear his testimony to the congregation. Among other things, Brother Rooker was able to convey his love to the members of the stake. He also testified to them that he was the real beneficiary of the service he had rendered in their behalf.

As the meeting concluded, President Monson invited Brother Rooker to join with him in setting apart the two new stake presidencies. Brother Rooker responded by stating, “That would be the highlight of my life.” President Monson and his old friend placed their hands on the heads of each new member of the stake presidency, set them apart, and blessed them to be able to accomplish the wonderful and challenging task before them. The two friends embraced each other when the work was finished.

The next morning Elder Monson received a phone call from Brother Rooker’s son, who said, “Brother Monson, I’d like to tell you about my dad. He passed away this morning; but before he did so, he said that yesterday was the happiest day of his entire life.” Elder Monson recorded, “I thanked my God for the inspiration which came to me in the twinkling of an eye to invite this good man to come forward and receive the plaudits of his stake members, whom he had served, while he was yet alive and able to enjoy them.”<sup>23</sup>

Obviously, President Monson had no idea that Clifton Rooker was going to die the day after the stake conference, but the Lord knew that, and he used his Apostle to run another errand. President Monson has a special love for the older Saints and seems to have their needs on his radar. He declared, “Consider . . . the aged, the widowed, the sick. All too often they are found in the parched and desolate wilderness of isolation called loneliness. When youth departs, when health declines, when vigor wanes, when the light of hope flickers ever so dimly, the members of these vast ‘lost battalions’ can be rescued by the hand that helps and the heart that knows compassion.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Champion of the Children and Youth**

Just as President Monson has been a strong advocate for the elderly, he has also spent his entire life teaching and ministering to the youth of the Church. Most would agree that the Prophet is young at heart. He has been known to give “high fives” to youth and kneel down in front of Primary-age children to speak at their level. Speaking to the youth, President Monson has said: “Although there have always been challenges in the world, many of those which you face are unique to this time. But you are some of our Heavenly Father’s strongest children, and He has saved you to come to the earth ‘for such a time as this’ (Ether 4:14). With His help, you will have the courage to face whatever comes. Though the world may at times appear dark, you have the light of the gospel which will be as a beacon to guide your way.”<sup>25</sup>

Some of the most significant tender mercies in President Monson’s life have occurred in the lives of children and youth. Such was the occasion of the October 1975 general conference. As President Monson began his address, he noticed a young girl in the balcony of the tabernacle, perhaps eight to ten years of age. Although President Monson’s message had been prepared months in advance, he had the impression he should change his message and speak to the girl sitting in the balcony. As he began his message, he said: “Particularly am I grateful for the children who are here. In the balcony to my left I see a beautiful girl of perhaps ten years. Sweet little one, I do not know your name or whence you have come. This, however, I do know: the innocence of your smile and the tender expression of your eyes have persuaded me to place aside for a future time the message I had prepared for this occasion. Today, I am impressed to speak to you.”<sup>26</sup>

President Monson then changed his entire talk. I would assume the translators for general conference talks were hustling to keep up. For his

impromptu talk, he simply shared an experience he had with a young girl just the year earlier in Shreveport, Louisiana. The first tender mercy began when President Monson was originally scheduled to preside at a stake conference in El Paso, Texas. However, several days before leaving, President Ezra Taft Benson asked President Monson if he would mind changing his assignment to Shreveport. Of course, President Monson was happy to go wherever President Benson needed him.

At the same time, Christal Methvin, a ten-year-old girl from Shreveport, had been recently diagnosed with cancer. Her deepest desire was to have a priesthood blessing from a General Authority; thus Christal's family was planning to travel to Salt Lake City for her to receive such a blessing. Since the Methvins did not personally know any of the General Authorities, they placed before Christal a picture of all of the Church leaders. She thought that President Monson looked "nice" and decided he should be the one to give her the blessing. However, soon after Christal decided on President Monson, her health deteriorated quickly and she wasn't able to make the long journey to Salt Lake City. She had already lost a leg to the cancer, and now the ravaging disease had spread to her lungs. However, Christal's faith was strong, and she felt that if she couldn't go to President Monson, then the Lord could send President Monson to her. And sure enough, his assignment was changed that very week to Louisiana.

As he continued to relate this experience in general conference, he shared with the congregation that shortly after he arrived in Shreveport, Charles Cagle, the president of the Shreveport Stake, almost apologetically asked President Monson if he could give a blessing to a ten-year-old girl who had been stricken with cancer. He said he would be pleased to do so and then asked if she would be coming to the conference meetings or if she were confined to a Shreveport hospital. Almost reluctantly, President Cagle revealed that Christal was unable to leave her home many miles from Shreveport.

When President Monson examined the meeting schedule, he discovered that there was simply no place to carve out the allotted time needed to travel many miles to give a priesthood blessing. President Monson proposed an alternative: Christal would be remembered in the public prayers which would be offered throughout the stake conference. President Monson attested that the Lord would understand and bless the Methvin family accordingly. And then came the next tender mercy:

After receiving word from the stake president that Brother Monson would be unable to visit Christal because of the extremely tight meeting schedule, the Methvins were understandably very disappointed. They knelt again around Christal's bedside, pleading for a final favor on her behalf: that somehow her desire for a blessing at the hands of Brother Monson would be realized.

At the very moment the Methvin family knelt around Christal's bed, Elder Monson was shuffling his notes, preparing to speak at the concluding portion of the Saturday evening session. However, as he began his move to the pulpit, a voice whispered in near-audible tones a brief but very familiar message: "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God."

His notes became a blur. He attempted to pursue the theme of the meeting as outlined, but the name and image of Christal Methvin would not leave his mind. Then, ever faithful to the precious gift so demonstrably his, he responded to the spiritual message. He instructed that changes in the next day's conference schedule be made, whatever the cost in confusion and disruption. Then the meeting continued.<sup>27</sup>

Christal's family arose from their knees after pleading that they would still be able to have their meeting with President Monson. As their prayer concluded, a bishop from their stake called to inform them that President Monson had rearranged the schedule of the stake conference and would be at their home early the next morning. President Monson's only instructions were that he would like the family to join with him in fasting.

After the long Sabbath morning drive, President Monson arrived at the Methvins' home and was directed to Christal's room. He looked down upon a child too sick to rise and too weak to speak. The cancer had spread into her brain and rendered her sightless. The Spirit was so strong in Christal's room that President Monson instinctively dropped to his knees and said, "Christal, I am here." With all the energy she could muster, Christal whispered back, "Brother Monson, I just knew you would come."

President Monson pronounced a blessing upon Christal, commending her body to a loving Heavenly Father. Christal responded with a barely audible "Thank you." The next Thursday as she was being remembered in the prayer circle of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Christal passed away.<sup>28</sup>

President Monson later shared another tender mercy that resulted from sharing Christal's story:

During the message I delivered at general conference in October 1975, I felt prompted to direct my remarks to a little girl with long, blonde hair, who was seated in the balcony of this building. I called the attention of the audience to her and felt a freedom of expression which testified to me that this small girl needed the message I had in mind concerning the faith of another young lady.

At the conclusion of the session, I returned to my office and found waiting for me a young child by the name of Misti White, together with her grandparents and an aunt. As I greeted them, I recognized Misti as the one in the balcony to whom I had directed my remarks. I learned that as her eighth birthday approached, she was in a quandary concerning whether or not to be baptized. She felt she would like to be baptized, and her grandparents, with whom she lived, wanted her to be baptized, but her less-active mother suggested she wait until she was 18 years of age to make the decision. Misti had told her grandparents, "If we go to conference in Salt Lake City, maybe Heavenly Father will let me know what I should do."

Misti and her grandparents and her aunt had traveled from California to Salt Lake City for conference and were able to obtain seats in the Tabernacle for the Saturday afternoon session. This was where they were seated when my attention was drawn to Misti and my decision made to speak to her.

As we continued our visit after the session, Misti's grandmother said to me, "I think Misti has something she would like to tell you." This sweet young girl said, "Brother Monson, while you were speaking in conference, you answered my question. I want to be baptized!"

The family returned to California, and Misti was baptized and confirmed a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Through all the years since, Misti has remained true and faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Fourteen years ago, it was my privilege to perform her temple marriage to a fine young man, and together they are rearing five beautiful children, with another one on the way.<sup>29</sup>

This story of Christal Methvin and Misti White contains a treasure trove of tender mercies. The lessons from the life of Christal were not wasted. In his economy, the Lord was able to use the experience of one child to permanently bless the life of another. These experiences have blessed the lives of so many individuals, including President Monson.

Speaking of the good Samaritan and the road to Jericho, President Monson asked, "Will I fail to notice him who has fallen among thieves and requires my help? Will you? Will I be one who sees the injured and hears his plea, yet crosses to the other side? Will you? Or will I be one who sees, who hears, who pauses, and who helps? Will you?"<sup>30</sup> I believe it is clear how President Thomas S. Monson will react when there are those who are bruised and battered, and lying on the road to Jericho. However, the jury is still out on us and how we will respond to such needs.

One of President Monson's assignments in 1965 took him to the Sauniatu School in Upolu, Samoa. As President Monson was speaking to the children

at the school, he felt prompted to invite the two hundred students to come forward and shake his hand. However, as the young Apostle wrestled with that thought, he also recognized the schedule was tight, and he wondered how he would accomplish this task. As he rationalized in his mind that such a gesture would be improbable, the prompting returned. Following the Spirit, President Monson asked the school administrator if he could shake the hand of every child present. The administrator responded with an outburst of jubilation, explaining, “Our prayers have been answered. I told the children that if they had faith, and that if they all prayed, that the apostle of the Lord would personally greet each one of them when he visited Sauniatu.”<sup>31</sup>

Once again, President Monson was used by the Lord to carry out his work and to do exactly what he would have done if he were there. Prayer has directed the life of our prophet and provided him with the inspiration to bless and strengthen his people.

On another occasion, President Monson was in Curitiba, Brazil, in June 2008 for the dedication of the temple. During the cornerstone ceremony where President Monson was placing mortar between the cracks between the granite slabs, he noticed a young boy in a cap standing close by. Our prophet said, “There is a little boy there. He looks cold. Let’s have him come up.” A photographer taking pictures of the event suggested that someone take the boy’s hat off so that he could get a good picture of his face. When someone removed his hat, the moment became slightly awkward because the boy was bald.

Immediately, Elder Russell M. Nelson, who was standing next to President Monson, realized who this young man was. Prior to the temple dedication, Elder Nelson had been contacted by leaders in Brazil about a six-year-old boy named Lincoln Viera Cordeiro, who was suffering with cancer and was undergoing chemotherapy treatments at the time. Since the child’s prognosis was poor, local priesthood leaders asked if Elder Nelson could give the child a blessing while he was in Brazil.

The young man put his hat back on, grabbed the trowel from President Monson, and placed some mortar on the temple wall. After the young man went back into the crowd to sit with the other children, Elder Nelson reminded President Monson that it was time to go back into the temple so that they could stay on schedule with the dedication:

The President shook his head. “No, I want to call up one more,” he said. He scanned the crowd, looked and looked, and finally spotted a woman at the back and said,

motioning to her as their eyes made contact, “Will you come up? I want you to put a little mud in the crack.”

Not until the next day did Elder Nelson learn that the woman, Odilene Cordeiro, was Lincoln’s mother.

“That’s President Monson,” Elder Nelson states with conviction. “He knows how to draw revelation from God Almighty to bless the life of one person.” The little boy died a short time later, “but you can imagine what it meant to the mother of that family. That was the Lord’s way of saying, ‘I know you, I am concerned for you, and I want to help you.’ That’s the kind of man we’ve got in this prophet of God.”

On the airplane of Brasilia to meet with the nation’s vice president, Elder Nelson told President Monson about the mother and son he had called up to participate in the cornerstone ceremony. “President, how did you know they were related?” Elder Nelson asked. President Monson responded, “I didn’t know, but the Lord knew. I’ve learned how to respond to His promptings.”<sup>32</sup>

President Monson explained, “I have always needed the help of the Lord, and I have always asked for it. I simply put my faith and trust in Him and move along day by day and week by week.”<sup>33</sup> And with that faith and trust, the Lord continues to inspire him to lead his Saints.

### **Go and Do Likewise**

President Monson’s ministry has been filled with many tender mercies of the Lord. It is clear that the Lord has used our Prophet to bless, heal, and strengthen Saints throughout the world that needed help. On many occasions, he has been at the exact right place and right time to minister to those who have needed his help. President Spencer W. Kimball declared, “God does notice us, and he watches over us. But it is usually through another person that he meets our needs. Therefore, it is vital that we serve each other in the kingdom.”<sup>34</sup> It is evident that in the lives of so many Latter-day Saints, President Monson has been a Godsend for individuals who have been praying for help or guidance or for a load to be lifted. He has certainly been led by the Lord to meet the needs of those who have needed his help.

All of us can enjoy the privilege of serving and helping our fellow men. If we let the Lord know that we are willing to do his work, he will point us towards those who need us. President David O. McKay taught, “The noblest aim in life is to strive to live to make other lives better and happier.”<sup>35</sup> We all can strive to live in a way that the Lord can use us to accomplish his work in making other lives “better and happier.”

During the early-morning hours of April 10, 2013, I was driving my mini-van down the hill from where I live. I was on my way to the gym where I work



Brian Tibbets, wikimedia commons

The Lord has used President Monson as an instrument to accomplish his purposes. Likewise, the Lord will use us to accomplish his purposes if we are willing to follow his Spirit.

out. As I approached the bottom of the hill, I noticed a woman who was sitting in the grass and waving desperately to get my attention. As I drove my van towards her, I could tell this woman was a jogger by what she was wearing. I pulled up next to her, rolled my window down, and asked if she was OK.

She said, “No, I think I broke my leg.”

Even though I’m not a physician, I took one look at her awkwardly bent leg and said, “I think you’re right—that leg is broken.”

She then asked if she could borrow my cell phone to call her husband.

I told her that I didn’t have my phone with me but that I would gladly take her home. I helped her into my vehicle, and we began the short drive to

her house. As we drove, I learned that she was preparing to run a marathon. I also discovered that she had slipped on a patch of ice that ran across the sidewalk, which was the cause of her accident. I was amazed how strong and tough this woman was. Her leg was obviously broken, but instead of being in shock, we had a nice conversation. I could tell that she was in excruciating pain, but she covered it well. I told her my name was Mark, and she told me she was Rebecca. She shared with me that she was worried that I would be late for work, and I told her that I taught at BYU and that if I was a little late because I was helping a women get to the hospital, I'm sure my department chair would understand. She then told me that her husband also taught at BYU in the business department and that his name was Dan.

By this time, we had pulled up to her home, and I knew I would have to knock hard on her front door to wake her husband up. Within a minute or two, he came to the door, bewildered why I was standing on his front porch.

I said, "Dan, I'm Mark, and I'm sorry to wake you up this early, but your wife broke her leg while she was jogging, and she's in my car." Talk about a way to wake someone up quickly!

Dan went to his wife and tended to her. Then we found a way to transport her from my car to Dan's so she could be rushed to the emergency room.

As I was about to leave, I said, "Dan, if you need anything, please let me help. I also teach at BYU, so we're in this together."

Dan said, "What's your name again?"

I said, "Mark Ogletree."

Instantly, Rebecca began to weep. She said, "Oh my gosh, you are Mark Ogletree?"

I said "yes," and she hugged me for dear life. She said, "I am Rebecca Shahan. I was in your seminary class at Mountain View Seminary in Mesa, Arizona for two years."

I replied, "Wow, Rebecca, I can't believe it." We hugged as tears were shed.

It was over twenty years earlier that I had taught Rebecca. Not only do I remember her well because she was such a wonderful student, but we also lived in the same ward, and I was good friends with her parents.

She said, "After I injured my leg and fell to the ground, I tried to stop several people, but they just kept driving. I can't believe that the person who stopped and helped me was my seminary teacher from twenty years ago!" I couldn't believe it either. When I began teaching Rebecca back in the early 1990s, she was a bubbly and energetic teenager, and I was in my early

thirties, with a wife and several young children. Now, Rebecca had teenage children of her own, and I was a grandfather. Needless to say, we both looked a little different than we did twenty years earlier.

If I wouldn't have helped Rebecca, I am sure someone else would have. But I am grateful that the Lord allowed me to be in the right place at the right time. If I would have left my home ten minutes earlier, or later, I would have missed out on this wonderful experience. Because of this accident, our families have been reunited and have enjoyed each other's company. Rebecca had to have surgery on her leg and will spend many months recuperating, but she will one day run another marathon—I am sure of it.

I couldn't help but think of this experience as a tender mercy, both in Rebecca's life as well as my own. As I drove away from her house that morning, I felt a strong spirit, I felt love, and I felt peace. I couldn't help but think that President Monson has such experiences often—if not daily, then weekly. I wondered how I could do a better job serving, loving, and helping those around me. I know that if we seek to run errands for the Lord, he will lead us to those who need our help, just as he has done with President Monson.

Many of us have had tender mercies in our lives and in the lives of those closest to us. Are those events recorded anywhere? Years ago, one of our daughters nearly died in a tragic accident but was miraculously spared. After we returned home from the hospital, my father-in-law asked me, "Have you written this experience down yet?" I told them that I had not, but his words inspired me to record the incident in detail and share it with our family. In President Monson's life, these stories have been recorded in his personal journals, as well as church magazines and books. We too should follow our prophet's example and record these experiences, and frankly any experience, we have with the Holy Ghost.

Elder Richard G. Scott taught, "Write down in a secure place the important things you learn from the Spirit. You will find that as you write down precious impressions, often more will come. Also, the knowledge you gain will be available throughout your life. Always, day or night, wherever you are, whatever you are doing, seek to recognize and respond to the direction of the Spirit."<sup>36</sup>

Elder Henry B. Eyring taught a similar principle:

When our children were very small, I started to write down a few things about what happened every day. . . . I wrote down a few lines every day for years. I never missed

a day no matter how tired I was or how early I had to start the next day. Before I would write, I would ponder this question: “Have I seen the hand of God reaching out to touch us or our children or our family today?” As I kept at it, something began to happen. As I would cast my mind over the day, I would see evidence of what God had done for one of us that I had not recognized in the busy moments of the day.”<sup>37</sup>

These experiences, if recorded, will bless our lives and the lives of our children in the years to come. Tender mercies are a reminder that God is involved in the details of our lives and that he is anxious to rescue us and come to our aid in times of need. He involves us—his children—in the process so that more than one person can benefit from his miraculous interventions. **RE**

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## Notes

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2. Bednar, “The Tender Mercies of the Lord,” 99.
3. Bednar, “The Tender Mercies of the Lord,” 99.
4. Lund, *Divine Signatures*, 20–21.
5. In Lucille Tate, *Boyd K. Packer: A Watchman on the Tower* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995), p. 13–14.
6. James E. Talmage, in Conference Report, October 1914, 101.
7. Joseph F. Smith, in Conference Report, April 1904, 2.
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11. Thomas S. Monson, “Sailing Safely the Seas of Life,” *Ensign*, May 1982, 62.
12. Monson, in Swinton, *To the Rescue*, 297.
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21. In Jeffrey R. Holland, “President Thomas S. Monson: Man of Action, Man of Faith, Always ‘on the Lord’s Errand,’” *Ensign*, February 1986, 12.
22. In Holland, “President Thomas S. Monson,” 12–13.

23. In Swinton, *To the Rescue*, 384–85.
24. *The Teachings of Thomas S. Monson*, 65.
25. Thomas S. Monson, “May You Have Courage,” *Ensign*, May 2009, 127.
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28. Holland, “President Thomas S. Monson,” *Ensign*, February 1986, 16.
29. Thomas S. Monson, “Tabernacle Memories,” *Ensign*, May 2007, p. 42.
30. Thomas S. Monson, “Your Jericho Road,” *Ensign*, May 1977, 71.
31. Swinton, *To the Rescue*, 265.
32. Swinton, *To the Rescue*, 521.
33. In Swinton, *To the Rescue*, 518.
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37. Henry B. Eyring, “O Remember, Remember,” *Ensign*, November 2007, 66–67.