

## *Not Today*

During our first Christmas together, my husband, Gary, and I did what many BYU students do: we piled into the car with siblings and drove home.<sup>1</sup> For my husband, home is Minnesota, and it is a long and sometimes treacherous drive in the winter. It turned out that Christmas, cars, and four tired college kids created a perfect combination for a crisis.

We had been traveling for hours when Gary's sister, Connie, took over the driving at about 2 a.m. None of us remembered to check to see how much gas we had, but when she did finally notice, the gauge registered empty. She woke up all of us and we tried to decide what to do. We didn't think we had enough gas to make it to a service station in the next large town, so we exited the freeway. Unfortunately, all the stations nearby were closed.

The only thing to do was to keep driving. The country lane we drove down to the next town was very dark and deserted. The temperature in Nebraska that night was frigid: double digits below zero. And then, we ran out of gas and the car stopped.

What would we do now? We decided that Gary and his brother, Lee, would have to find some gas. They got out of the car and walked toward the closest lights they saw down the road in the distance. Connie and I stayed in the car and prayed. I was six months pregnant with our first child. I was cold and scared.

Gary and Lee came to a farmhouse about a mile away from our car. They woke up the resident of the house and told him our situation. They asked him to sell them just enough gas to get to a station. His response was surprising: "Not today."

"Not today?" the brothers thought as they walked back to the car. After telling Connie and I their story, they went to the next closest farm that was about a mile in the other direction where they were able to buy both gas and a gas can from a kind and sympathetic farmer. Then they trudged to the car again. They were able to get enough fuel so we could make it to an open gas station. More than forty years have passed since we asked that first farmer for gas. We have never been back to ask him if "today" might be the right day.

At the time, we were disappointed and couldn't believe that this man wasn't willing to help us. Over the years though, I have realized that often we are like that farmer— waiting for convenient moments to serve. My husband and I have found that there will always be opportunities in our lives to help others, but certain moments in time, and various kinds of possibilities, only come along once in a lifetime.

We have also learned that service often requires sacrifice, and I truly believe that this is the best kind of service because it brings with it the blessings of heaven.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See original publication: Gail H. Johnsen, "Don't Overlook Opportunities to Serve," *Deseret News*, December 11, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> "Praise to the Man," *Hymns*, no. 27.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks reminds us, “Our Savior teaches us to follow him by making the sacrifices necessary to lose ourselves in unselfish service to others. If we do, he promises us eternal life, ‘Which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God’ ” (D&C 14:7).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Dallin H. Oaks, “Unselfish Service,” *Ensign*, May 2009.