



## Training Children as Ministers of Grace

Children are open to vanity as to all other evil dispositions possible to human nature. They must be educated to give and to help without any notion that to do so is goodness on their part. It is very easy to keep them in the attitude of mind natural to a child, that to serve is promotion to the person who serves for indeed he has no absolute claim to be in a position to pour benefits upon another. The child's range of sympathy must be widened, his love must go out to far and near, rich and poor; distress abroad and distress at home should appeal to him equally; and always, he should give some manner of help *at real cost to himself*.

— Charlotte Mason, *Parents and Children*, 66. —

Charlotte Mason evokes several principles in her call for children to serve:

**Service is a deliberate work** – *they must be educated*. Children must see adults serve and must be given some instructions on how to serve. What must a young person know about visiting the elderly at an assisted living home? How might they give? How might they help?

**Service widens one's sympathy** - *love must go out to far and near, rich and poor; distress abroad and distress at home*. Children must be informed about the persons they are visiting. What are their distresses?

**Service involves self-sacrifice** - *some manner of help at real cost to himself*. What is the personal cost? Discomfort? Time? Work?

An Ambleside teacher shares his experience with service:

Over the past school year, my ten- and eleven-year-old children have been going to a local nursing home once a month. There have been several interactions between students and residents that demonstrate the presence of God in these visits. I would like to share one such occurrence. The residents range in ability, some able to communicate well and others only able to utter a moan or move a few fingers.

The first time we went I knew it would be uncomfortable for some of the students. Most *adults* have trouble being genuine at these places. Many students were shy and unwilling to touch the residents' hands or even the game pieces they had touched. When we got back to school after the first visit one boy asked why we went there. "They can barely

stay awake," he said, with many other students agreeing. As a class we discussed these things not to win over the cynics but to ponder the legitimate question from the mind of a child. *'What a glorious question for a young mind to struggle with,'* I thought to myself. The 'least of these' teachings given to us by the Savior had an application now, and we read several Scripture passages where Jesus cared for those whom others ignored.

However, instead of thinking that it was our class caring for the 'least of these,' I discovered I was wrong. A student new to our school had some past experiences with being bullied, and on random days he withdrew from others as a defense. Our class happened to be visiting the elderly on one of these days. When we arrived, this student tried to sit in the corner of the small room, away from everyone. I called him to the hallway, where I saw his hands trembling and tears in his eyes on the verge of spilling over. I did my best to help him regulate himself.

To my surprise an elderly gentleman, who must've been watching, called the boy over to sit next to him. The man was kind and masterful at pulling the boy out of his anxious state. He asked for help when he didn't need it, used the boy's name like he had known him for years, and clapped wildly when my student won a round of the game of checkers. The friendliness of this stranger almost brought me to tears, especially when he looked up at me and winked, as if to say, *'I'll help him out, Teach!'*

As we prepared to leave, I allowed my students to take one last look at the fish in the fish tank. As the children enjoyed the fish, I went to the man and thanked him for his kindness. He shared that when he was a young man, he had been an educator in New England. It was clear to me that he was passionate about the life he'd lived, giving support and counsel to young people. He told me about two boys he had befriended while they were in middle school and how his friendship with them continues to this day. I would have enjoyed talking with him further, but I had to shorten the conversation to get back to my students. I thanked him again, and as I stood to go, I realized that it was the residents, even the invalids, who were serving us. I went to each person and thanked him or her for engaging with the children and directed the students to do the same. I watched as the students went around the room thanking the residents. It was not difficult to see that it was the elderly men and women who had been intentional to serve us that day.

At the beginning of each visit, the students walk down the hall, find a seat next to a resident, and start playing a game, interacting, and just being with them. In the beginning, I thought we came to shine the light on those less fortunate than us. I pitied them for the monotonous days, lack of visitors, and having to be wheeled everywhere. But now I see how God's ways are so different yet much more perfect than our ways. By coming to serve, we allowed these gentle and wise souls an opportunity to serve us, and in so doing, their sense of worth and value shone brightly in their countenance. These ministers of grace, both young and old, are a revelation, a little glimpse, of the kingdom of Heaven here on earth.