

Feeding His Sheep

through Visiting Teaching

The Lord has blessed women with divine attributes of love, compassion, kindness, and charity,” says Silvia H. Allred, first counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, in speaking about visiting teaching. “We can provide temporal and spiritual nourishment. We can and should offer understanding and be able to teach doctrine. We can relieve spiritual hunger and feed the sheep. Feeding the sheep might mean strengthening and nourishing the new members, the less active, or even the fully active members.”

“Our service should be selfless, quiet, and be done willingly, with our hearts full of the love of God and His children,” she continues. “There must be genuine concern to shepherd the flock, to invite them unto Christ.”¹

The following stories testify of the temporal and spiritual nourishment received through the divinely instituted program of visiting teaching.

Remembering Lisa

“These flowers will never die.”

The comment touched me so deeply that I began to cry. Lisa had been my mother’s visiting teacher for more than a year, coming faithfully every month. She was now moving to Virginia, far from our home in Georgia.

I cannot say that my mother looked forward to Lisa’s visits, because my mother has Alzheimer’s disease and lives only in the present. Lisa would bring her three children to visit Mom and the rest of the people Mom spent time with in her adult daycare facility. Lisa would engage Mom in conversation, read

to her, sing with her, and try in every way to reach into Mom’s reality to touch her life. Lisa would share the visiting teaching message too, telling me afterward, “I don’t know how much she remembers of what I say, but maybe it stores in her mind in a way that we don’t know.”

Lisa often told me that Mom was a gracious hostess during their visits, that Mom was concerned about Lisa and her children. In Mom’s prime, this was one of her best virtues. Hearing Lisa’s experiences touched my heart because the disease had taken away so much of the mother I knew.

At the end of each visit, Lisa would give Mom something tangible to remind her of their visit. At first, Lisa brought word-search puzzles. Lately, she had brought flowers.

When I would come to pick up Mom each night, I knew if I saw a beautiful bunch of flowers or a potted plant sitting on the table, Lisa had been there. One night in particular I remember thinking that Mom looked like a beauty pageant queen. She had her flowers cradled in one arm and was waving good-bye to everyone as we walked down the hall and to our car. Yes, Lisa had made a difference. She had touched the life of my mother, if only for a moment.

As she was getting ready to move to Virginia, Lisa was giving Mom one last gift, a silk topiary. As Lisa and I embraced, I thought, “How appropriate.” Her parting gift was “flowers that would never die,” just like the memories of Lisa’s service.

Some people might have said, “Why should I bother? Gloria won’t remember the visit a few minutes after I have left.” But the lessons Lisa taught to her children, to the people at the care facility who could still remember her sweet



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message, to the nursing aides who would later tell me about the visits—they all knew. And all, including Mom, were touched at the time of Lisa's visit.

When I see the silk topiary, I think of Lisa and am grateful for her dedicated service. I will always cherish her friendship and service. I can't help but think that when my mother is made whole on the other side of the veil, she will remember Lisa too.

Susan Mathews Hardy, Georgia

Serving as She Needed to Be Served

It was as a freshman at Ricks College (now BYU-Idaho) that I first became a visiting teacher. I genuinely enjoyed spending time with other sisters my age and making new friends. I faithfully went every month and gave the lesson. I thought I was doing all I needed to do to be a good visiting teacher.

Then, toward the end of the year, tragedy struck. The brother of one of the girls we taught committed suicide. This formerly optimistic, gregarious girl who loved everyone (and whom everyone loved) completely changed.

She became reclusive and depressed. I wanted to do something for her as a friend and as a visiting teacher, but I wondered what I could possibly offer.



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The answer came clearly one evening when a friend and I decided to visit our dear sister. We held her and let her cry. We cried too.

That was all she needed that night. She didn't need a lesson. She didn't need words we didn't have. She needed love.

That moment was a turning point for me. I learned that regardless of personal circumstances, we all need to know that we are loved and that someone cares. I realized that visiting teaching is not just a lesson or a phone call. It is concerned, deep interest in the lives of others. It is about giving what the other person needs, not necessarily what we want to give. I learned that more than anything else, visiting teaching is a way for us to help each other feel the Savior's love in our lives.

Name Withheld

Taking Visiting Teaching Seriously

I have heard people say that visiting teaching is a pointless inconvenience, that life is just too busy and that there are more important things to do. I used to think that way too, until Heavenly Father showed me otherwise.

When I was newly married and had a one-year-old child, two wonderful women, Marlo and Heather, were my visiting teachers. Marlo was a great example to me of being a patient, kind, and loving mother. Heather was a little bit more of a mystery. She had been married for a few years. She and her husband had lost their son some time before. When she shared with me her experience of losing a child, I remember

looking at my own son and praying that heartache like that would never touch my life.

A year later we moved to a different city, and I lost touch with my visiting teachers. Seven years after that, life seemed perfect. My husband and I had three beautiful children and were expecting a fourth. We were anxious to welcome another son to our family.

When it came time to go to the hospital, my husband and I smiled and laughed the whole way. The day was bright and sunny and seemed to reflect our own happiness.

That continued even at the hospital, where we could see the angel Moroni atop the Mount Timpanogos temple through the window. A nurse came in to do some routine checks. She put the heart monitor around my stomach and then turned pale. My doctor quickly arrived, did an ultrasound, and then looked up and quietly told us that our baby had died.

My husband and I were shocked—and devastated. With tears streaming down my face, I delivered our beautiful son. It's impossible to describe the feelings you have when the doctor gently places your baby in your arms and you know that this is the last time you will hold him. I had never felt such an aching pain. I could barely breathe, my heart was shattered so completely.

The Relief Society president from my ward arrived at the hospital a short time later, but I sent her away. As kind and good as she was, at that time I did not know her. I'm a very private person and couldn't let a virtual stranger inside my grief and pain.

And then there was a quiet knock at the door. We looked up to see my former visiting teacher, Heather, walk into the room. I think we were both surprised to see each other. She explained that she worked at the hospital as a grief counselor, helping people who lose loved ones.

She helped my husband and me bathe our son and dress him. She took pictures of him so that we would never forget his beautiful face. My favorite one is of our hands holding his. She cast molds of his hands and feet. Those molds are treasures to me.

I am grateful for Heather's Christlike service at a time when I needed somebody so much. Even more important, I am

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grateful to Heavenly Father for bringing me someone whom I felt I could let in, someone who could help me shoulder my pain for just a little while.

I wonder what would have happened if Heather and Marlo hadn't done their visiting teaching, if they had been too busy or had chosen to do other things instead. I'm so grateful they took their calling seriously. Because they did, I was able to make it through the most painful hours of my life with a comforting shoulder to lean on.

Shannon F. Guymon, Utah

Receiving Spiritual Nourishment

A few years ago I was at an all-time low. I had been raised in the Church and taught from infancy that I am a daughter of God. But now, a few years after marriage, I found myself in a difficult situation. My husband had turned away from the teachings of the gospel, and we were having financial difficulties. Our four-year-old child had a blood disorder that was feared to be leukemia. I had an infant and a first grader to care for as well, and we lived far from any extended family.

My husband blamed me for many of these problems, and my feeling of self-worth had diminished. I felt too tired to read the scriptures and too worthless to have meaningful prayer. I went through the motions of family life day after day but felt increasingly alone.

One day, my visiting teachers called to ask to come to my home to visit. I was a little embarrassed to have them over, but I had no good reason not to, so they came. They shared with me a lesson on reading the scriptures. I remember telling them I was familiar with the stories and doctrine, but it just seemed that my days slipped away from me and that I didn't have time to read anymore. After hearing my list of excuses, Sister Crowley challenged me to read every day, even if it was only a little. She and her companion left with words of encouragement and a prayer in my behalf.

I decided I could commit to read something, even if it was only one verse. As I did so, it was as though a light



had finally been turned on in the mist of darkness, and I could see. Through reading the Lord's words, I began to let Him into my life to heal me. He didn't take away my problems, but He did give me the strength to handle them. Slowly I began to understand that I still had a purpose in this life and that He had a plan for me.

Those sisters' simple act of service changed my life and lifted me out of the darkness. They helped me deal with my pain, feel the love of Jesus Christ, and eventually share that love with my family and others. I am grateful to them for helping me come to a place where I could really understand that His Atonement not only covers my sins but my heartaches as well. His infinite love heals everything—sin, weakness, anger, grief, and pain. He offers us living water and makes us whole again.

Name Withheld ■

NOTE

1. "Feed My Sheep," *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 113, 115.