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Ministering in a Holier Way

I promise that as you love God with all your heart and pray to be an instrument in His hands, the Lord will put His special sons and daughters in your path.

The book titled *The Narcissism Epidemic* begins with exaggerated examples of modern American culture:

“On a reality TV show, a girl planning her 16th birthday party wants a major road blocked off so a marching band can precede her grand entrance on a red carpet. A book called *My Beautiful Mommy* explains plastic surgery to young children whose mothers are going under the knife for the trendy ‘Mommy Makeover.’ It is now possible to hire fake paparazzi to follow you around snapping your photograph when you go out at night—you can even take home a faux celebrity magazine cover featuring the pictures. A popular song declares, with no apparent sarcasm, ‘I believe that the world should revolve around me!’ . . . Babies wear bibs embroidered with ‘Supermodel’ . . . and suck on ‘Bling’ pacifiers while their parents read modernized nursery rhymes from *This Little Piggy Went to Prada*.”¹

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we strongly reject the notion that our lives are all about ourselves. Rather, we follow the Savior, who said:

“Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;

“And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

“. . . The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26–28).



We treasure His words:

“Love one another; as I have loved you” (John 13:34; see also John 15:12).

“Feed my lambs. . . . Feed my sheep” (John 21:15, 16).

“When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32).

“Succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees” (Doctrine and Covenants 81:5).

Here is an example of the kind of Christlike ministering that happens among members of the Lord’s Church. A student at Brigham Young University recently wrote:

“I was going through a really rough time. One day I was really struggling and on the verge of tears. I pleaded and prayed silently for strength to continue. In that exact moment, my roommate sent me a text expressing her love for me. She shared a scripture and bore a testimony. It brought me so much strength and comfort and hope in that moment of despair.”

Let me share a few thoughts that I hope will strengthen the already outstanding way you minister to one another. My first point is this: Remember the first commandment before you exercise the second. One young man came to the Savior and asked Him:

“Master, which is the great commandment in the law?”

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

“This is the first and great commandment.

“And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:36–39).

Your ability to bring a holier approach to loving your neighbor, to caring for and ministering to others, will rest upon how strongly you keep the first commandment.

Another Kind of Ministering

There is a unique and divine gift of ministering that can come from someone who loves God with all his or her heart; who is settled, grounded, steadfast, and immovable in his or her faith in Jesus Christ and in the restored gospel (see Ephesians 3:17; Colossians 1:23; 1 Nephi 2:10; Mosiah 5:15; Alma 1:25; 3 Nephi 6:14); and who keeps the commandments with exactness.

Let me give you some context you already know. Across the world, the younger generation is slipping in its faith and especially in its belief in a specific religion. When I graduated from BYU in 1975, the number of young adults (ages 18 to 24) with an affiliation with a religion was near 90 percent. It is now at 66 percent. “A full third of young adults do not affiliate with any organized religion.”²

In 2001, religious scholar Robert C. Fuller wrote a book called *Spiritual, But Not Religious*.³ A trend toward personal spirituality outside formal religious organizations may have been true 20 years ago, but it is less true today. Young adults in the United States today pray with less frequency, believe less in God, believe less in the Bible, and believe less in the commandments.⁴ It is naïve to believe that the trends of the world are not able to influence all of us—even the very elect.

Caring for others, physically and emotionally, requires an unselfish and sensitive heart. This caring is an important part of the gospel. It is done in and out of the Church by good people, believers and nonbelievers. There are many wonderful, kind people all over the world, and we can learn from them.

However, unique to a converted member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is another kind of ministering. As disciples of the Savior, we have opportunities to minister in a way that helps keep a friend's faith from faltering, that reminds a roommate in a kind way that reading the Book of Mormon every day really does bring miracles, and that shows a ward member that the standards of the Church are not just a set of rules but rather a way to keep us close to God and bring us happiness.

A person with a good heart can help someone fix a tire, take a neighbor to the doctor, have lunch with someone who is sad, or smile and say hello to brighten a day. But a follower of the first commandment will naturally add to these important acts of service, encouraging the person who is doing well in keeping the commandments and sharing wise counsel to strengthen the faith of someone who is slipping or who needs help in moving back onto the path once traveled.



I challenge you to strengthen your efforts to spiritually minister to one another. To minister spiritually can begin with baking cookies or playing a basketball game. But eventually, this holier way of ministering requires opening your heart and your faith, taking courage in encouraging the positive growth you are seeing in a friend, and expressing concerns about things you see and feel are not consistent with discipleship.

Let us not be self-righteous, but let us be spiritually courageous in ministering in a holier way, specifically by strengthening the faith of others. To stir your thinking, consider these possible situations:

- You notice that a friend spends an inordinate amount of time playing games on a smartphone but rarely engages in conversations relating to gospel topics.
- You sense that a ward member may have a problem with pornography.
- Your friends are spending enormous amounts of time taking and posting pictures of themselves that move to the edge of immodesty.
- You notice that someone who once seemed to love to talk about the Book of Mormon now never mentions it.
- You notice that a family member who once seemed to love to go to the temple now is not going.
- You notice that a friend who once spoke with faith about the prophet's counsel now speaks critically.
- You know a returned missionary who has become casual in wearing clothing that reflects temple covenants.
- You notice that a ward member finds reasons to go places on Sunday other than to church.

- You sense that a friend has started to be dishonest in small things.
- You know someone who had a light in her eyes after returning from a mission, but now that light seems to have faded.
- You have a friend who jokes about sacred things.
- You have a friend whose discouragement with dating has moved to “God doesn’t love me.”
- You see a friend’s faith being affected by compromised worthiness and a need to repent.

Can you envision these situations or others like them? Have specific names come into your mind? The Apostle Paul said, “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12). One of the greatest needs throughout the world is to have more faith in our Heavenly Father and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and to have a greater willingness to follow the commandments.

Ministering to the One

If we follow the pattern of the Savior, most of our ministering will be from one person to another. To the Samaritan woman at the well, the Savior said:

“Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:

“But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst. . . .

“The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not. . . .

“[Then she said,] I know that [the] Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.

“Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he” (see John 4:13–15, 25–26).

Even in declaring His own divinity, Jesus ministered to the one.

Unlike changing a flat tire, just one ministering experience rarely fixes a spiritual problem. It takes time, conversations, and encouraging experiences that will help rebuild faith. It



comes more like the dew from heaven than a one-time blast from a fire hose. You have to minister again and again as you help someone turn back to God and again rely on the Savior and His Atonement.

To minister in the Lord’s way, we need the help of the Holy Ghost. President Russell M. Nelson spoke powerfully on this subject during general conference in April 2018: “In coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.”⁵

President Nelson added, “I urge you to stretch beyond your current spiritual ability to receive personal revelation.”⁶ He counseled us to pray, to listen, to write down our thoughts, and to take action.

Can we apply this to ministering in a holier way? Let us pray, listen, record our thoughts, and take action regarding those to whom we can minister.

Pray for opportunities to build faith in others. Not all of those you help will be people you know. When Jesus ministered to the widow of Nain, He was on His way to the city.

However, He saw her, had compassion for her, and raised her son from the dead. His ministry changed her life (see Luke 7:11–15).

Pray that ministering opportunities will come to you, listen, write down your thoughts, and then be ready to take action as people are put in your way.

I have always been moved by the Psalmist's cry: "I looked on my right hand, . . . but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man [or woman] cared for my soul" (Psalm 142:4). Let's help those who feel this way.

Make Time for the Spirit

To have the help of the Holy Ghost, we have to prepare our minds and hearts. In our generation, we need discipline and restraint in how we use our technological devices. Adam Alter, in his book *Irresistible*, spoke about the addictive behavior of technology and social media. He quoted Greg Hochmuth, one of Instagram's founding engineers, who commented, "There's always another hashtag to click on. Then it takes on its own life, like an organism, and people can become obsessive."⁷

Mr. Alter added: "Instagram, like so many other social media platforms, is bottomless. Facebook has an endless feed; Netflix automatically moves on to the next episode in a series; Tinder encourages users to keep swiping in search of a better option. . . . According to Tristan Harris, a 'design ethicist,' the problem isn't that people lack willpower; it's that 'there are a thousand people on the other side of the screen whose job it is to break down the self-regulation you have.'"⁸

Mr. Alter continued: "A like on Facebook and Instagram strikes one of [the right neurological] notes, as does the reward of completing a World

of Warcraft mission, or seeing one of your tweets shared by hundreds of Twitter users. The people who create and refine tech, games, and interactive experiences are very good at what they do. They run thousands of tests with millions of users to learn which tweaks work and which ones don't—which background colors, fonts, and audio tones maximize engagement and minimize frustration. As an experience evolves, it becomes an irresistible, weaponized version of the experience it once was. In 2004, Facebook was fun; [today,] it's addictive."⁹

For the Spirit to dwell in us, we have to have time and space. Learn to put your smartphones down. Schedule time when your technology is intentionally not accessible.

During general conference in April 2018, President M. Russell Ballard, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said: "Too many allow themselves to almost live online with their smart devices—screens illuminating their faces day and night and earbuds in their ears blocking out the still, small voice of the Spirit. If we do not find time to unplug, we may miss opportunities to hear the voice of Him who said, 'Be still, and know that I am God' [Psalm 46:10]. Now, there is nothing wrong with taking advantage of the advances in the technologies inspired by the Lord, but we must be wise in their use."¹⁰



Strengthening Each Other

During my undergraduate days at BYU, other than my wife, Kathy, whose eternal influence is impossible to measure, two roommates—one before my mission and one after—greatly shaped my spiritual foundation. One was Reid Robison, now a professor at BYU in organizational behavior. I met him on my mission, and we were roommates afterward. Reid’s exactness in following the commandments, his love for the prophet, and his unwavering testimony of the Savior strengthened me and all those around him. And he has continued to be an example to me for the past 45 years.

The other roommate I mention is Terrel Bird, who now lives in St. George, Utah, USA.



I met Terrel as we attended high school together in Pocatello, Idaho, USA. Although we played basketball together, our friendship came as I observed his spiritual maturity. He would openly share spiritual insights he was having and principles of life he was reading about and learning. I was surprised to hear these things from a 17-year-old. We decided to room together at BYU.

In those days, we didn’t have computers; we had typewriters. Terrel would take scriptures that were meaningful to him and quotations that instilled character, type them, and then store them in a small box so he could draw from them frequently. It was not uncommon for him to have more than a thousand scriptures and quotations, many of which he would memorize. Although I was working—cleaning the library every morning from 4:00 to 7:00—and carrying a full load of classes, in watching Terrel, I began to build my own file box.

Here is one of the quotes I still remember from almost 50 years ago:

*Mind is the Master power that moulds and makes,
And Man is Mind, and evermore he takes
The tool of Thought, and, shaping what he wills,
Brings forth a thousand joys, a thousand ills:—
He thinks in secret, and it comes to pass:
Environment is but his looking-glass.¹¹*

I also remember, of course, powerful scriptures like this one:

“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

“And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:25–26).

Terrel helped me put into my mind as a freshman at BYU words of scripture and words of wisdom that have influenced me all of my life. I thank Reid Robison and Terrel Bird for caring about me spiritually at a time when it made a difference.

Here is some poetry written by my neighbor Thomas L. Kay:

*Thank God for all who give relief
for those who really care
Who put their arms around the weak
and plead for them in prayer

Thank God for those who hear the heart
and listen to the words*



*Who know a look or gentle touch
mean more than all the world*

*Thank God for those who lift the hands
and strengthen feeble knees
Who go about restoring souls
in quiet ministry.¹²*

My dear friends and fellow disciples, I give you my sure witness that I know the Savior lives. He is resurrected. He guides this holy work. President Nelson is His anointed prophet upon the earth. Our time upon the earth is eternally important.

I promise that as you love God with all your heart, pray to be an instrument in His hands, minister to individuals, build your capacity to receive revelation, and trust in the influence of the Holy Ghost, the Lord will put His special sons and daughters in your path and you will become their ministering angels, blessing their lives eternally. You will minister in a holier way.

I pray that this can be something that is important to you as you continue along this most important pathway of our mortality. I give you my firm and sure witness of the Savior and of your eternal worth to Him and that He will come again and will embrace us as His sons and daughters, as His disciples. ■

*From a devotional address, “A Holier Approach to Ministering,”
delivered at Brigham Young University on April 10, 2018.*

NOTES

1. Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (2009), 1.
2. Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (2017), 121; see also Figure 5.1, 121.
3. See Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, But Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (2001).
4. See Jean M. Twenge, *iGen*, 119–42.
5. Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” *Ensign*, May 2018, 96.
6. Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” 95.
7. Greg Hochmuth, in Adam Alter, *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked* (2017), 3; see also Greg Hochmuth, in Natasha Singer, “Can’t Put Down Your Device? That’s by Design,” *New York Times*, Dec. 5, 2015, nytimes.com.
8. Adam Alter, *Irresistible*, 3; see also Tristan Harris, in Natasha Singer, “Can’t Put Down Your Device? That’s by Design.”
9. Adam Alter, *Irresistible*, 5.
10. M. Russell Ballard, “Precious Gifts from God,” *Ensign*, May 2018, 10.
11. James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh* (1902), frontispiece.
12. Thomas L. Kay, “Saints,” in *The Road I’ve Taken* (2016), 16; see also “Saints,” music by Rachel Bastian, *New Era*, Sept. 1999, 51.