

Ministering Principles

BUILDING MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS

Our ability to care for others is increased when we have a meaningful relationship with them.

The invitation to minister to others is an opportunity to build caring relationships with them—the kind of relationship that would make them comfortable asking for or accepting our help. When we have made the effort to develop that kind of relationship, God is able to change lives on both sides of the relationship.

“I truly believe there is no significant change without significant relationships,” said Sharon Eubank, First Counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency. And for our acts of service to be transformational in the lives of others, she said, they must

be “rooted in the sincere desire to heal and listen and cooperate and respect.”¹

Meaningful relationships aren’t tactics. They are built on compassion, sincere efforts, and “love unfeigned” (D&C 121:41).²

Ways to Build and Strengthen Relationships

“We build [relationships] one person at a time,” said Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.³ As we strive to build meaningful relationships with those we minister to, the Holy Ghost can guide us. The following suggestions are based on a pattern Elder Uchtdorf offered.⁴



Spend time together.

A relationship takes time to develop. Look for opportunities to maintain contact. Studies show that letting people know you care is essential to healthy relationships.⁵ Visit often with those you are called to serve. Talk with them at church. Use whatever additional means make sense—such as email, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Skype, phone calls, or sending a card. Elder Richard G. Scott (1928–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spoke about the power of simple and creative expressions of love and support: “Often I would open my scriptures, . . . and I would find an affectionate, supportive note [my wife] Jeanene had slipped into the pages. . . . Those precious notes . . . continue to be a priceless treasure of comfort and inspiration.”⁶

Also, remember that a relationship takes two. You can offer love and friendship, but the relationship won’t grow unless the offer is accepted and returned. If the other individual seems unreceptive, don’t force the relationship. Give him or her time to see your sincere efforts, and if necessary, counsel with your leaders about whether or not a meaningful relationship still seems like a possibility.

Learn about them.

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) taught, “You can’t serve well those you don’t know well.” He suggested knowing the names of each family member and being aware of important events such as birthdays, blessings, baptisms, and marriages. This provides the opportunity to write a note or make a call to congratulate a family member on a special achievement or accomplishment.⁷

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GETTY IMAGES

"Ministering Principles" articles are intended to help us learn to care for one another—not to be shared as messages during visits. As we come to know those we serve, the Holy Ghost will prompt us to know what message they might need in addition to our care and compassion.



Communicate with caring.

Building meaningful relationships requires us to go beyond the superficial. Superficial communication is full of small talk about schedules, the weather, and other minor issues, but it doesn't include sharing the feelings, beliefs, goals, and concerns necessary to make more meaningful connections. Heavenly Father has modeled this more meaningful kind of communication by sharing His feelings and plans with His Son (see John 5:20) and with us through His prophets (see Amos 3:7). By sharing day-to-day events and

life's challenges with each other as guided by the Spirit, we gain appreciation for each other as we find common interests and shared experiences.

Listening is a critical part of communicating that you care.⁸ When you listen carefully, your opportunity to help others come unto Christ increases as you gain understanding and insight into their needs and as they feel loved, understood, and safe.

Appreciate differences as well as commonalities.

"Some . . . believe that the Church wants to create every member from a single mold—that each one should look, feel, think, and behave like every other," said Elder Uchtdorf. "This would contradict the genius of God, who created every man different from his brother. . . ."

"The Church thrives when we take advantage of this diversity and encourage each other to develop and use our talents to lift and strengthen our fellow disciples."⁹

To love others the way God loves us requires that we try to see others the way God sees them. President Thomas S. Monson (1927–2018) taught, "We must develop the capacity to see [others] not as they are at present but as they may become."¹⁰ We can pray for help to see others the way God does. As we treat others based on their potential for growth, they are likely to rise to the occasion.¹¹

Serve them.

Be sensitive to the needs of those you minister to and be willing to give of your time and talents, whether in time of need or just because you care. You can be there to provide comfort, support, and needed help when there is an emergency, illness, or urgent situation. But in too many relationships we are reactive. God gave us agency so that we can act rather than be acted upon (see 2 Nephi 2:14).

Just as the Apostle John taught that we love God because He first loved us (see 1 John 4:19), when others feel our genuine love through our acts of service, it can soften hearts and increase love and trust.¹² This creates an upward spiral of kind acts that can build relationships. ■

NOTES

1. Sharon Eubank, in “Humanitarian Acts Must Be Rooted in Relationship, Sharon Eubank Says,” mormonnewsroom.org.
2. See “Ministering Principles: Reach Out in Compassion,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, July 2018, 6–9.
3. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Of Things That Matter Most,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 22.
4. See Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Of Things That Matter Most,” 22.
5. See Charles A. Wilkinson and Lauren H. Grill, “Expressing Affection: A Vocabulary of Loving Messages,” in *Making Connections: Readings in Relational Communication*, ed. Kathleen M. Galvin, 5th ed. (2011), 164–73.
6. Richard G. Scott, “The Eternal Blessings of Marriage,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2011, 96.
7. See Ezra Taft Benson, “To the Home Teachers of the Church,” *Ensign*, May 1987, 50.
8. See “Ministering Principles: Five Things Good Listeners Do,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, June 2018, 6–9.
9. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Four Titles,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2013, 59.
10. Thomas S. Monson, “See Others as They May Become,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2012, 69.
11. See Terence R. Mitchell and Denise Daniels, “Motivation,” in *Handbook of Psychology*, vol. 12, ed. Walter C. Borman and others (2003), 229.
12. See Edward J. Lawler, Rebecca Ford, and Michael D. Large, “Unilateral Initiatives as a Conflict Resolution Strategy,” *Social Psychology Quarterly*, vol. 62, no. 3 (Sept. 1999), 240–56.



MINISTERING AS THE SAVIOR DID

Jesus Christ built meaningful relationships with His disciples (see John 11:5). He knew them (see John 1:47–48). He spent time with them (see Luke 24:13–31). His communication went beyond the superficial (see John 15:15). He appreciated their differences (see Matthew 9:10) and saw their potential (see John 17:23). He served everyone, though He was Lord of all, saying He came not to be ministered to but to minister (see Mark 10:42–45).

What will you do to build stronger relationships with those you are called to serve?