

Home Ministering

The Process of Perfecting the Saints



Stephen N. Webber

An update of the original *Shepherds of the Flock* story.

Home Ministering

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STEPHEN N. WEBBER

Timpanogos**MEDIA**

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Dedicated to my amazing children
Janae, Kathryn, Madison, Quincy and Harrison

and to my incredible wife

Jana

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments -----	i
Introduction -----	ii
Chapter 1 - The Call -----	1
Chapter 2 - The Stake President -----	2
Chapter 3 - The Bishop -----	9
Chapter 4 - The Elders Quorum President -----	22
Chapter 5 - The Counselor -----	36
Chapter 6 - The Relief Society President -----	56
Chapter 7 - The Teachers Quorum President -----	66
Chapter 8 - The YW President -----	76
Chapter 9 - The Home Minister -----	86
Chapter 10 - Brother Stanley -----	96
Chapter 11 - The Bishop (Part 2) -----	101
Chapter 12 - The Challenge -----	114
Talks on Ministering - Past and Present -----	117
About the Author -----	118
Ordering Information for Wards and Stakes -----	119
Ordering Information for Keeping Watch -----	120

Acknowledgments

There have been many people who have contributed to, and provided inspiration for *Home Ministering - The Process of Perfecting the Saints*. Although this is a fictional work, all of the inspirational experiences of home ministering in this book are based on the true stories of real people whom I have known or previously served with. Therefore, I would like to thank all of great men and women who have inspired me throughout my life with their examples of ministering, service and love.

I would also like to thank all of the enthusiastic supporters of the original book published in 2016, *Shepherds of the Flock - Elevating Home and Visiting Teachers to Home Ministers*. Many of those readers have urged me to update the story using the new language of ministering. They have expressed their concern that the ministering efforts in their home units has declined since the changes in 2018, and feel like a fresh story will reignite the desire to minister in their wards and stakes.

Throughout the writing process, I asked several trusted friends and family members to help me by reading the many rewrites of the manuscript and sharing their input regarding my approach to ministering. Their honest feedback has made this effort so much more than I could have on my own. Those who made valuable contributions and suggestions to this book are: Madison Webber, Kathryn Webber, Rose Garner, Liz Dalton, Kari Traveller, Russ Thoman and many others. Thank you all so much.

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Introduction

“We have made the decision to retire home teaching and visiting teaching as we have known them. Instead, we will implement a newer, holier approach to caring for and ministering to others. We will refer to these efforts simply as ‘ministering.’”¹

President Russell M. Nelson

This effort has been branded Block Teaching, Ward Teaching, Home and Visiting Teaching and now Ministering. Regardless of the name, it has always been divinely designed and intended to help Heavenly Father’s children come unto Christ and be perfected in Him. However, as you will discover in this book, the blessings of being ‘perfected in Christ’ are enjoyed by both the receiver and the giver of the ministering service.

As stated in the General Handbook of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:

“Ministering is an important way we keep the commandments to love God and to love our neighbors (see Matthew 22:36–40). It is also a vital way to help accomplish God’s work of salvation and exaltation.”²

Through ministering, some of the things we can do to help accomplish God’s work of salvation and exaltation are: 1) helping members prepare to make and keep sacred covenants with God as they receive saving ordinances; 2) comforting one another in times of sorrow or loss; 3) giving temporal and spiritual assistance when needed; 4) providing friendship and camaraderie to those who feel lonely and isolated; 5) many other important acts of service that help and lift our

¹ General Conference, April 2018, *Ministering*, President Russell M. Nelson

² General Handbook, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Ministering* - Section 21.0

Home Ministering

fellow saints. And it all starts with *Ammon-like shepherds* who will care for and protect the flock. The Lord wants dedicated, courageous and loving shepherds—not lukewarm hirelings.

To accomplish the task of inspiring valiant ministering in the most interesting and entertaining way possible, this book has been written in the format of a novel, from the perspective of a newly called bishop. However, though this is a fictional story, all of the examples of ministering in this book actually occurred.

It is also important to understand that *this is not a bishop's training guide*. This story gives the reader a floor-to-ceiling description of the shepherding process, including the responsibilities of their leaders, as they receive and act upon information concerning the welfare of each family in the ward. This unique vantage point effectively demonstrates to all ministering brothers and sisters how magnifying their assignments can affect the entire ward, not just their assigned families.

Home Ministering - The Process of Perfecting the Saints delivers a clear picture of the full potential of this inspired program—when administered properly—and helps the reader understand why President Ezra Taft Benson said the following:

“Home [Ministering] is a program so vital that, if faithfully followed, it will help to spiritually renew the Church and exalt its individual members and families.”³

How can ministering ‘*spiritually renew the Church and exalt its individual members and families*’? By learning to serve others, and by allowing others to serve us, we are developing the essential Christlike attributes that are necessary to become like God and enter into His presence.

³ General Conference, Apr. 1987, *To the Home Teachers of the Church*, President Ezra Taft Benson

Stephen N. Webber

First, when we begin to serve our neighbors as Jesus would, we begin to love them as He loves them. And we are promised in the scriptures, as we develop a pure and Christlike love for others--*charity*--we naturally start to become like Him.

Second, we increase in humility and begin to overcome pride by allowing others to serve us, as they also walk the covenant path of becoming like Christ.

When we valiantly magnify the assignment to minister to our fellow saints, and allow them to serve us, we will see Ministering as a gift from our Savior, not a burden or requirement. It is through ministering to the flock of the Good Shepherd that we come to know Him and keep the two great commandments: to love God and love our neighbors. Obeying the other commandments becomes a natural byproduct of keeping the two most important laws.

As you prayerfully read and apply the principles taught in *Home Ministering - The Process of Perfecting the Saints*, you will find new ways to improve your own service, discover renewed meaning and joy as you care for your assigned families, and draw closer to your eternal goal of becoming like the Savior. And when you magnify your calling to feed the sheep of the Good Shepherd, you are helping Him accomplish *His Work and His Glory* in a very literal way.

IMPORTANT NOTE TO THE READER: Nuggets of truth, knowledge and wisdom have been scattered throughout this book. Readers will miss out on important ministering principles by skipping chapters they feel don't directly relate to them. To get the absolute most out of this book, do not jump chapters. This is a quick read, and it was meant to be enjoyed cover to cover. Enjoy!

Chapter 1 - The Call

“Dedicated servants of the Lord Jesus Christ carry out His work, with His power and authority. Brethren, there are doors we can open, priesthood blessings we can give, hearts we can heal, burdens we can lift, testimonies we can strengthen, lives we can save, and joy we can bring into the homes of the Latter-day Saints—all because we hold the priesthood of God.”⁴

President Russell M. Nelson

“Just promise me we’ll always be your first priority,” pleaded Sister Stephens as she wiped an unwanted tear from her cheek.

Brother and Sister Stephens were sitting in the near empty parking lot of the stake center trying to process what just happened. Meeting with their Stake President and accepting the call to serve as bishop was no small commitment. Brother Stephens had served in leadership callings before, but few members of the Church were asked to commit five to ten years of their lives serving an entire ward. They were starting to absorb this new reality as they sat quietly, lost in their thoughts.

Brother Stephens reached over the center console, held his wife’s hand, and smiled at her. Not only was this a big calling for him, he knew it would require huge sacrifices from his wife and children, too. He did not want this burden to affect his family, but he could see it was already starting to, and he had not even been set apart yet.

He gave his wife’s hand a little squeeze, looked her in the eyes and said, “I promise. You and the kids will always be my first priority.” He then offered a silent prayer, right there in the car, and begged Heavenly Father to help him keep his word.

⁴ General Conference, April 2020, *Ministering with the Power and Authority of God*, President Russell M. Nelson

Chapter 2 - The Stake President

“Brothers and sisters, we have a heaven-sent opportunity as an entire Church to demonstrate ‘pure religion... undefiled before God’—‘to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light’ and to ‘comfort those that stand in need of comfort,’ to minister to the widows and the fatherless, the married and the single, the strong and the distraught, the downtrodden and the robust, the happy and the sad—in short, all of us, every one of us, because we all need to feel the warm hand of friendship and hear the firm declaration of faith.”⁵

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

“Now that you’ve had a few days to let everything sink in, do you have any concerns about the calling?” asked President Richards.

The stake president had asked Brother Stephens to come back to his office after prayerfully choosing counselors for the new bishopric. He could tell immediately the newly called bishop was already struggling with something.

Brother Stephens took a deep breath and replied, “President, it’s a little difficult to define. First of all, I’ve had a powerful feeling of love for the members of my ward.”

He could see the stake president begin to smile and nod his head, so he took courage and pushed onward, “But there’s also a deep sense of urgency and concern for the welfare of the people, even the non-members. It’s almost a feeling of anxiety. I feel an enormous load, or burden pressing down on me. I don’t know how to reconcile all those feelings,” he said as he trailed off, lost in his thoughts.

⁵ General Conference, April 2018, *Be with and Strengthen Them*, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

Home Ministering

Regaining focus, he continued, “It’s not as if I’m aware of any actual problems. All of the families in the ward are great. They’re some of the best people I’ve ever met. But the Spirit keeps telling me I’m not seeing the whole picture. I get the impression there’s a lot of struggle and pain behind all the smiles. It’s like the Lord is telling me that they need help, protection and love.

“So, to finally answer your question, I guess the thing that worries me most is that I may not be adequate for the job. I just don’t know if I can do everything that needs to be done and still take care of the needs of my own family. I feel like the members of the ward need much more help than I can give them. I believe in inspiration, President, but I’m worried you may have chosen the wrong guy.” Then he stopped talking and looked for direction and reassurance from his leader, but the smile on President Richards’ face was bigger than ever. Brother Stephens thought to himself, *Why is he still smiling? Didn’t he hear a word I just said?*

President Richards chuckled for a moment, then slapped his hand down on the desk and said, “Brother Stephens, you’re absolutely right! You can’t do it all, and your ward does need a lot more help than you can give them.”

That definitely wasn’t the response Brother Stephens expected. At first, he thought President Richards was just making fun of him, but the longer he sat there without saying anything, Brother Stephens knew he was missing the point.

Then President Richards said, “Brother Stephens, I think I know you pretty well. I know you’re a great husband and father, and I know you magnify the callings you’re given. But I also know you have many other obligations right now, and your life is very busy.”

President Richards paused for a second and then asked, “With all you have going on, do you think you could do everything expected of you at home—as a husband and father—without the help of your sweet wife?”

Stephen N. Webber

Brother Stephens laughed out loud and answered with a resounding, “Not a chance! And my wife would tell you the same thing.”

Without missing a beat, President Richards continued, “Well, if you can’t do everything you need to do at home without any help, then how can you possibly be capable of caring for an entire ward, with more than 100 families, without the help of others?”

Brother Stephens was starting to see where his leader was going with this.

President Richards continued, “You’ve been called as bishop, which is an enormous responsibility—one of the most demanding callings in the Church. You’ve been placed in charge of the welfare of every person within your ward boundaries, member and non-member. Do you happen to know how many people there are in your ward boundaries?”

Brother Stephens looked confused and answered, “No. I’ve never actually counted.”

The stake president smiled patiently and asked, “Do you think the Lord knows how many people He has assigned you to look after?”

He looked at his leader and nodded yes.

President Richards leaned forward in his chair again and said, “The Savior has described the members of His church as a flock of sheep. He has also referred to himself as ‘The Good Shepherd’ and has told us that He loves His flock and wants every single lamb to come home to Him. After His death and resurrection, the Savior returned and gave Peter the commandment to ‘Feed my sheep.’

“Now, over two thousand years later, the Good Shepherd has given you a portion of His flock to guard and to feed.”

The president continued, “This is a heavy responsibility, and it may seem overwhelming to you right now as you face the prospect of replacing your current bishop. But rest assured, the Lord has confidence in you, and He has provided a way for you to minister to the needs of every single lamb in His flock and still take care of your own family.”

Home Ministering

The stake president looked at Brother Stephens thoughtfully for a moment and moved the conversation in another direction, “You mentioned you’ve already felt a deep love for the people in your ward. That tells me you’re already feeling the mantle of your calling, and you haven’t even been set apart yet. You can feel it, can’t you?”

Confused, Brother Stephens replied, “I don’t know. I’ve always heard that a bishop can feel the mantle of his calling, but I could never fathom what that meant.”

President Richards nodded and said, “What most people don’t understand is every calling has its own mantle. Primary teachers, deacons quorum presidents, even ministering companionships have mantles associated with their callings. The mantle is really made up of two parts. One part is the authority associated with a calling, which might include keys, rights, privileges, powers, discernment, and revelation which is necessary to magnify the calling.

“The second part of the mantle is love. That’s what you’re feeling right now.” The president paused to let him process that.

He continued, “The feeling of love, which you began having immediately after the calling was extended, is a gift to you from the Savior. He loves each of His lambs individually. He knows we will protect the ones we love, so He shares a portion of His endless and unconditional love with those whom He has called as shepherds of wards, quorums, classes and families. The more you serve them, the more you will love them. That’s the mantle. When you get released, it will pass to the next shepherd assigned to watch over the sheep.”

“That makes sense,” said the new leader. “I couldn’t understand why I felt connected so quickly. It was like the day I became a father. I couldn’t imagine loving anyone as much as that new baby in my arms.”

“Exactly! Just as a father loves his family, you will have an unconditional love for your ward members. Sometimes that love will be a source of great joy and happiness for you, and at other times it may

Stephen N. Webber

seem overwhelming, agonizing and even bone crushing as the people you're called to serve experience pain, suffering and heartache. As you give your time and energy to serve your new little flock, you'll begin to understand, as well as anyone on this earth, why the Savior would voluntarily suffer for our sins in the Garden of Gethsemane and sacrifice His life for us at Golgotha. It's because of the love He has for each one of us.

"Now," exclaimed the stake president enthusiastically, "the first thing I want you to do is start reading the General Handbook and prayerfully consider how you will implement what you learn.

"The second thing I want you to do is visit with Bishop Smith as soon as you have been set apart. He's the bishop of the Mountain Ridge Ward."

Puzzled, Brother Stephens asked, "Ok, but why Bishop Smith?"

"Because Bishop Smith has correctly implemented the Lord's method of shepherding His flock. It's made his calling so much easier. I just wish more bishops would figure it out instead of trying to do everything themselves."

He continued with a sigh, "Unfortunately, some bishops have a hard time doing things differently than what they've seen their predecessors do. Many find themselves neck-deep solving problems and shouldering the troubles of the entire ward.

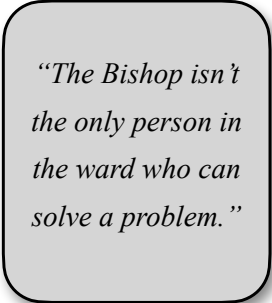
"Instead of running around and putting out fires all the time, the Lord wants us to extinguish the flames before they get out of control—or completely prevent them—ideally without the bishops even getting involved."

President Richards looked at the new bishop, and with a little grin he asked rhetorically, "Brother Stephens, did you know the bishop isn't the only person in a ward who can solve a problem?"

Home Ministering

He continued, “And believe it or not, the Savior has given bishops a way to let others help carry the load. Bishop Smith has figured it out and is shepherding the flock the way the Lord designed it to be done.”

President Richards picked up his scriptures. He looked at them and then slowly said, “The Savior has given us modern-day revelation, through living prophets, to show us how to care for His flock. Ironically, it may be a paradigm shift for your ward, because we typically don’t perform this assignment at the level the Lord would like to see it done. But once you help them learn their responsibility in the shepherding process, and use the program as it was designed to be used, you will see your ward come together like never before.”



“The Bishop isn’t the only person in the ward who can solve a problem.”

Then President Richards paused, looked straight at Brother Stephens, and said, “But Bishop...”

Bishop. It still sounded odd to him, but he was starting to feel more comfortable with the idea of it.

The stake president continued, “...Bishop Stephens, when you’re set apart, you will hold the keys for your portion of the Lord’s flock. You will have many questions as you begin to serve in this calling, so never forget that the greatest resource for answers is the One from whom those keys come. He will have all of the answers you’re looking for. Be humble and prayerful, and through the Holy Ghost’s direction, the Lord will reveal all things that you should do. I promise you that.”

After Brother Stephens left the stake president’s office, he sat down in the foyer of the meetinghouse, took out a notepad from his briefcase, and wrote down some notes from his visit.

Stephen N. Webber

NOTES FROM STAKE PRESIDENT

1. A bishop cannot satisfy all the needs of a ward. He needs help.
2. The Good Shepherd loves every member of His flock, and He shares that love with His under-shepherds.
3. The more you serve someone, the more you'll love them.
4. The bishop isn't the only person who can solve a problem.
5. Implement the shepherding program as the Lord intended it to operate, based on your ward's needs and according to the revelation you receive for those you serve.
6. Trust and rely on the inspiration which is associated with the calling you hold.
7. Be humble and prayerful, and the Holy Ghost will reveal all things that you should do.

Chapter 3 - The Bishop

“A hallmark of the Lord’s true and living Church will always be an organized, directed effort to minister to individual children of God and their families. Because it is His Church, we as His servants will minister to the one, just as He did. We will minister in His name, with His power and authority, and with His loving-kindness.”⁶

President Russell M. Nelson

On the very day the new bishop was set apart for his calling, he promptly obeyed the counsel of the stake president and called Bishop Smith’s executive secretary to set up an appointment.

When he arrived at the scheduled time, he was surprised the veteran bishop was ready to see him. He had never met a bishop who was not always behind on interviews. They sat down, and Bishop Smith immediately gave Bishop Stephens both congratulations and condolences on his new assignment. After a few pleasantries, Bishop Smith smiled and kindly asked, “So what can I do for you?”

The new bishop responded, “President Richards told me you have a new model for shepherding your ward that I’m supposed to learn and follow. What’s your secret?”

Bishop Smith smiled and replied, “Bishop, there’s no secret. We simply follow the scriptures and the Handbook. The secret—if there is one—is to actually execute the program as the Savior intended.”

He began to explain, “The Lord has given each of us authority over a small portion of His flock, even if it’s just ourselves.

“First, we are to take personal responsibility for our own welfare, as best we can. I’ve heard it said we should make sure we aren’t on *The Lord’s Worry List*. It’s just like when you’re on an airplane. In an

⁶ General Conference, April 2020, *Ministering with the Power and Authority of God*, President Russell M. Nelson

emergency, you are counseled to secure your own oxygen mask first and then help the people closest to you. You can't help anyone else on the plane if you can't breathe for yourself. Likewise, before you can help anyone else come unto Christ, you need to gain your own testimony of the Savior and follow His teachings.

“After that, you're responsible for the spiritual and temporal welfare of your own immediate family.

“And finally, as it says in Section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants, you need to *'watch over the Church always, and be with and strengthen them.'*⁷

“In this ward, we try to follow these *three steps of personal accountability and stewardship*. It's really quite simple, and as our members have applied it, our ward has become a little City of Enoch.”

This was awkward. Bishop Stephens had heard all of this before—self reliance and service for others. He thought he was there to learn some new, secret method of leadership from this more experienced bishop. Now he was being told *there is no secret*. He thought to himself, *Why would the stake president ask me to have this meeting?*

Then a little half-smile returned to the older bishop's face and he said, “You look confused Bishop. There is *one* thing we do that's a little different from the other wards in the stake. Do you want to know what that is?”

Bishop Stephens returned the smile and nodded eagerly.

Anticipating a lengthy lecture on shepherding, he pulled out his pen and notepad to capture every word.

Then the veteran leader leaned back in his chair again, and with a big smile he said, “In our ward, we do our ministering as it was actually intended to be done.”

“Huh?” whispered the new bishop, unaware his question was even audible.

⁷ Doctrine & Covenants 20:53

Home Ministering

Bishop Smith repeated his counsel, “You heard me right. We’ve made ministering a top priority in our ward.”

Almost defensively, Bishop Stephens replied, “Well, we do that in our ward, too.”

“Do you do it the way the Lord wants it to be done?” inquired Bishop Smith.

“I think so,” said the new bishop. But after looking at Bishop Smith for a few more seconds, he admitted, “Actually, I don’t know. It’s all kind of confusing now.”

The bishop smiled again and said, “That’s okay. You’re not alone. Most members—even some bishops and stake presidents—don’t know what ministering really is, or how much it can bless lives.”

Then, in a very reverent tone, Bishop Smith quietly said, “The ministering program was divinely designed to accomplish two of the most vital purposes of the Lord. First, it is the Lord’s way of watching over His flock and ministering to the needs of the lambs.”

After a brief pause he continued, “Secondly—and I believe this is the most important reason the Lord created the program—our ministering assignments are built-in opportunities for each member of the Church to develop the type of love we are commanded to have for one another. A Christlike love. Charity.”

Then he pointed to a frame on his wall with a quote in it. The veteran bishop said, “When I was a new bishop, I had a mentor, too. This quote was hanging on his wall. It is a quote from President Ezra Taft Benson. I have replaced the word *‘teaching’* with *‘ministering’* to update it, but it changes nothing in the meaning.” He read it out loud.

“Our ministering assignments are built in opportunities for each member to develop the type of love we are commanded to have for one another. A Christlike love. Charity.”

Stephen N. Webber

“Brethren, home [ministering] is not just another program. It is the priesthood way of watching over the saints and accomplishing the mission of the Church. Home [ministering] is not just an assignment. It is a sacred calling...a program that touches hearts, that changes lives and that saves souls; a program that has the stamp of approval of our Father in Heaven; a program so vital that, if faithfully followed, it will help to spiritually renew the Church and exalt its individual members and families.”

He then added, “In the same talk, President Benson also said,

“There is no greater Church calling than that of a home [minister]. There is no greater Church service rendered to our Father in Heaven’s children than the service rendered by a humble, dedicated, committed home [minister].”⁸

Bishop Stephens was silent. He looked at his empty notepad and wondered what to write. It couldn’t be that simple.

Finally Bishop Smith spoke up again, “I understand. You don’t get it. Neither did I at first. Ministering has really been a letdown for many wards in the Church. A few years ago, when we were doing ‘Home and Visiting Teaching,’ we were visiting people in their homes, teaching lessons, and reporting our visits. We were actually *doing something*. The problem was that we just weren’t doing *the right thing*. Unfortunately, when we were visiting our assigned families, we were so focused on giving a lesson—and reporting back to leadership that we made our visit—we forgot it was never supposed to be about teaching a lesson.

“How did a statistical report tell a bishop about the welfare of a family? It didn’t. It only told him a visit took place. How did a lesson help someone who had already taught the same lesson to another family? It didn’t. It just made us feel obedient. From the very beginning of the

⁸ General Conference, Apr. 1987, *To the Home Teachers of the Church*, President Ezra Taft Benson

Home Ministering

Restored Church, whether it was Block Teaching, Ward Teaching, Home and Visiting Teaching or Ministering, the purpose of these assignments was to *‘watch over and care for’* the flock. Not just visit. Not just teach. Our purpose from the beginning was *to minister*, which translated from Latin actually means *‘to serve.’*”

Bishop Smith continued, “I have a quote that I love to share which addresses this very issue.”

He stood and walked to the other side of his desk, pulled out a small piece of paper, returned to his seat and said, “This is a quote from a talk given by Elder Gerrit W. Gong in the April 2023 General Conference. At the time this talk was given, Ministering had only been rebranded for about five years. In his talk, Elder Gong is expressing his disappointment that some saints have completely missed the target. Even some ward and stake leaders haven’t fully understood the true purpose of the program or caught the vision of how we can really minister to the families of the Church.”

Again, Bishop Smith began to read the quote, very slowly, so his new protege would grasp the meaning behind the words:

“In some places in the Church, we have a ministering gap. More say they are ministering than say they are being ministered to. We do not want checklist-concern. But often we need more than a sincere hello in the hall or a casual ‘Can I help you?’ in the parking lot. In many places, we can reach out, understand others where they are, and build relationships when we regularly visit members in their homes. Inspired invitations change lives. When invitations help us make and keep sacred covenants, we draw closer to the Lord and each other.”

Stephen N. Webber

*It is said that those who understand the true spirit of ministering do more than before, while those who do not understand do less. Let's do more, as our Savior would.*⁹

Bishop Smith then looked up at his new friend and said, “You see, as a church, we still struggle to accomplish the Lord’s real objective for this calling, to serve one another—which eventually helps us learn to *love one another*—and that’s the Lord’s ultimate objective for us as individuals.

Bishop Stephens finally spoke, “I’m starting to understand why ministering is so important to the Lord. I never really saw the deeper purpose, and apparently I’m not alone.”

“You’re absolutely right!” exclaimed Bishop Smith with the same excitement he had at the beginning of the interview. “With home and visiting teaching, we had gotten ourselves into a rut by tying our reporting, and our service, to a calendar. Since we only had to report monthly, we figured all we had to do was visit the family once per month. Now, with reporting only required by the stake on a quarterly basis, guess what’s happened. We visit even less—if we visit at all. Some people now think a text, a phone call or a chat in the hall at church is all that’s required.

“We can be doing so much more, Bishop. Every member of the Church has the same mandate we find in Mosiah 18. We’re told by Alma, if we want to be part of the fold—meaning the Church—we need to *‘bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light,’ ‘mourn with those that mourn,’ ‘comfort those that stand in need of comfort,’* and *‘stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places.’*¹⁰ That’s ministering, and every one of us has a *covenantal responsibility* to

⁹ General Conference, Apr. 2023, *Ministering*, Elder Gerrit W. Gong

¹⁰ The Book of Mormon - Another Testament of Jesus Christ, Mosiah 18:8-9

Home Ministering

minister as a member of the Lord's Church. In fact, it's actually a priesthood duty."

The new bishop was now looking a little confused, trying to tie ministering to his overwhelming load. With a little hesitation he replied, "I can see how we can be serving one another a lot better, but how does that really trickle up to the bishop in a practical way? How does that make our callings any easier? What about the members with sensitive problems? They won't share those things with their ministering brothers and sisters with the same openness as they would their bishop."

"Why not? Have you ever shared something that troubled you, or that was very personal, with someone who wasn't your bishop? Did they need some special authority to receive that information?" he asked. Not waiting for an answer, he continued,

"Like President Richards always says, most people don't understand that the bishop isn't the only one who can solve a problem. In fact, every member of your ward has been endowed with gifts and talents from the Lord. Why? To help the Savior with His work of *perfecting the saints!* The only thing holding us back from helping more often is not knowing how to help."

Bishop Stephens was nodding his head now, finally starting to connect the dots.

Bishop Smith pressed on, "The thing I like the most about these changes is now there's no difference between ministering brothers and sisters in their authority or responsibility to minister. True, the brethren have the priesthood and can administer blessings to the families they are assigned to serve, but the ministering part of their assignments is exactly the same. The only difference is the brethren are assigned to the whole family and the ministering sisters are assigned to other women, and there's a lot of wisdom in having those overlapping assignments. Women will open up to one another a lot easier than they will to a companionship of ministering brothers in a family setting."

Stephen N. Webber

Bishop Smith took a deep breath and concluded with conviction, “So, assuming you’ve come here to learn how to magnify your calling, the single most important thing we can do as leaders—any leader in the Church—is teach the members of our ward how to truly minister to the families they’ve been assigned to watch over. Ministering is the Lord’s method of shepherding His flock and caring for the needs of the ward members, and it’s the way we develop love for one another.”

Bishop Stephens was scribbling on his notepad at a superhuman pace now. He was absorbing this new insight as fast as he could, and loving it. It was all so familiar. It made so much sense! He enthusiastically blurted out, “This is such great information!” Then he asked, hoping now to discover the real secret to this veteran bishop’s success “*So, how do your ward members minister differently than everyone else?*”

“That’s the correct question, and this is precisely where your journey begins. My executive secretary is waiting outside with a list of names and contact information. I want you to meet with each person, in the order they appear on the list, and ask them the same question you just asked me. After you have met with everyone on the list, I hope you’ll come back and share with me what you’ve learned. I’ll have some final thoughts for you when you’ve met with each of those people. Deal?”

Bishop Stephens didn’t respond. He just looked at Bishop Smith with a look of confusion. He thought to himself, *Hold on! You mean I have to leave?*

Bishop Smith could tell his new friend was still trying to process what he had just received, and he still had questions. After a moment he said, “Bishop, you seem very sincere and open to receiving counsel and direction. If you would like, I’ll share with you the best advice I ever received about being a bishop.”

He looked up at his ministering mentor and nodded eagerly.

“If you want to magnify your calling and still have time left over for your own family—*which is your most important responsibility*—then

Home Ministering

you need to delegate. Delegate everything you're allowed to delegate to your counselors, secretary, clerks, quorum leaders, and the Relief Society. Delegate until you're embarrassed that you've delegated so much...and then delegate some more."¹¹

He continued, "Bishop, that's what the ministering program is. It's delegation, pure and simple. The Lord has delegated the work of shepherding His flock, which includes all the members of His Church. I'm sure President Richards has already explained this, but you've been given the same responsibility as the apostle Peter when the resurrected Savior told him, 'Feed my sheep.'¹² The Lord was delegating the care of His flock to Peter, the new president of the Church, and the responsibility was so important, he repeated the charge three times in a row to make sure the message sunk in. The Good Shepherd was telling the under-shepherd: If you love me, feed my sheep. Today, in the restored Church of Jesus Christ, we're under the same obligation as Peter was. If we really love the Savior, we will feed His sheep.

"Today, in the restored Church of Jesus Christ, we're under the same obligation as Peter was. If we really love the Savior, we will feed His sheep."

"Today, our modern-day prophet, who holds all the keys for the entire Church, delegates the shepherding to the stake president, who then delegates down to you and me, the bishops. We then delegate to our elders quorum and Relief Society leaders, who in-turn, delegate to the ministering companionships. Ultimately, through the proper channels, the responsibility of caring for the flock flows directly from Jesus Christ to

¹¹ President Randall Gormley - Former President of the Helena, Montana Temple

¹² New Testament, John 21:15-17

Stephen N. Webber

the ministering brothers and sisters, who represent Him as under-shepherds in the home of each member.

“Keep in mind, delegation doesn’t relieve me or you from our stewardship as bishops, but it allows us to share and spread the load so we’re not overwhelmed with the huge burden of ministering to 100 families—or more. Not only would it be impossible, it’s not what the Lord ever intended.

“Obviously, there are many issues we cannot delegate that are confidential in nature or specific to the calling of bishop, like the distribution of welfare resources, the duties of the president of the Aaronic Priesthood, overseeing the finances of the ward or being a Judge in Israel. Of course, nobody in the ward, besides the bishop, can take a confession and help someone through the repentance process. That’s one of the few things we must spend our time on.

“But, even though the bishop is the only one who can allocate the resources of the Bishop’s Storehouse, he’s the only one who can help a person with a welfare issue. There are many other people in the ward with talents, skills and the stewardship to assist their fellow members and help carry the load. The bishop can request help from others to assist in teaching a brother or sister how to write a resume, how to interview for a job, or how to balance a budget. In fact, the ministering brothers and sisters can coordinate all of that help.”

Bishop Stephens jumped in and asked, “Losing a job and being on Church welfare is a pretty private matter, isn’t it? Aren’t people too embarrassed to let others know what’s going on in their lives?”

“You’re right. It can be embarrassing for some people, but in situations like these, it’s the bishop’s job to set the expectation early. Heavenly Father’s goal is to get someone back on their feet as soon as possible, and *He expects us to use all available resources in our ward to help them*, especially the men and women who were called by inspiration

Home Ministering

to directly minister to their needs. Most people understand and accept those conditions, and they appreciate the extra help.

Bishop Smith paused for a second to make sure his new protege was keeping up. After Bishop Stephens had finished his latest notebook entry he continued, “Bishop, this part is important: Ministering brothers and sisters are the true shepherds of the flock, and they are vital to its spiritual health. And unfortunately, due to a lack of training, most of them still don’t fully understand just how important their responsibility is. In fact, for the men of the Church, only their duties as husband and father rank higher than their ministering responsibility. This is one of their most important priesthood duties. Remember, according to Section 20 in the Doctrine and Covenants, to ‘*visit the house of each member*’ and ‘*watch over the Church always and be with and strengthen them*’ are primary duties we were ordained to perform with the priesthood which we’ve been entrusted with.¹³ Almost all other callings in the ward or stake are just support callings and involve very little ministering on a personal level.

“Additionally, once members stop looking at their ministering responsibilities as a 12-visit-per-year *burden* and start looking at it as a 365-day-per-year *calling*, you’ll truly begin to see miraculous things happen in your ward. Families will start having a change of heart and begin allowing their ministering brothers and sisters into their lives. They will start confiding in them, and more importantly, allowing them to help. It’s only natural. When you feel loved unconditionally, you will trust more easily and are much more willing to allow others to help. Eventually, that love for one another will spread throughout the entire ward. The key is love, and when you are ministering properly, love for the people you serve is a natural result.”

Bishop Smith leaned forward in his chair once again and said, “But even with all the good that ministering does for the families being

¹³ Doctrine and Covenants 20:51-53

Stephen N. Webber

visited, I think I've finally figured out the most important spiritual benefit of the program--the real purpose for its existence. I believe ministering helps us develop essential Christlike attributes better than any other act of service we can perform. That goes for the giver and the receiver. I believe the opportunity to minister, and be ministered to, is really a sacred gift from our Father in Heaven to help us become more like His Son. As you begin to see how this program is supposed to work, you'll understand how very true this is."

Bishop Stephens was in awe of the wisdom being shared. He felt the Spirit testify of the truth of this doctrine. He was excited to learn more, and he thanked his new mentor over and over for his time.

Bishop Smith stood, shook his protege's hand and said, "Come see me anytime. I love to help people who want to minister the Lord's way. It's fun to see the results when members of the Church care for one another the way the Lord intended.

"But most importantly Bishop, if you're persistent and stick with the program as prescribed by the Lord, and don't give up on it, it will change the hearts and lives of the members of your ward forever."

Home Ministering

NOTES FROM THE BISHOP

1. "Home [ministering] will help to spiritually renew the Church and exalt its individual members and families." – Ezra Taft Benson
2. "There is no greater Church calling than that of home [minister]." – Ezra Taft Benson
3. Home ministering is the Lord's method of shepherding His flock and the way we develop love for one another within our wards.
4. There's no difference between ministering brothers & sisters in their authority to minister.
5. "We have a ministering gap. More say they are ministering than say they are being ministered to...those who understand the true spirit of ministering do more than before, while those who do not understand do less. Let's do more, as our Savior would. – Elder Gerrit W. Gong
6. Home ministering makes the bishop's job much easier.
7. Home ministers are vital to the spiritual health of a ward.
8. Bishops should delegate until they are embarrassed they are delegating so much, then delegate some more.
9. Home ministering is a 365-day per year calling.
10. Due to a lack of training, most members still don't fully understand just how important their responsibility is. For the men of the Church, only their duties as husband and father rank higher than their ministering responsibility.
11. Be persistent and don't give up on helping members understand their covenantal duty to minister.

Chapter 4 - The Elders Quorum President

“Brothers and sisters, as the work of quorums and auxiliaries matures institutionally, it follows that we should mature personally as well—individually rising above any mechanical, function-without-feeling routine to the heartfelt discipleship articulated by the Savior at the conclusion of His earthly ministry. As He prepared to leave His still-innocent and somewhat-confused little band of followers, He did not list a dozen administrative steps they had to take or hand them a fistful of reports to be filled out in triplicate. No, He summarized their task in one fundamental commandment: “Love one another; as I have loved you...By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”¹⁴

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

Bishop Stephens was excited to learn more about shepherding the flock. He couldn't wait to chat with President Owens, the elders quorum president of the Mountain Ridge Ward. When he arrived at his home, he was greeted with the same enthusiasm that Bishop Stephens had. The excitement for ministering was obviously contagious.

President Owens got right to business. “So, I assume you've been told the basics of *why* we minister in this ward. Would you like to learn the mechanics behind *how* we minister?”

“Absolutely!” exclaimed Bishop Stephens, with a little more enthusiasm than he intended.

“Ok, then let's jump right in,” said the quorum president. “We first have to establish, regardless of what it's called, that ministering is the same service as home and visiting teaching was intended to be, except

¹⁴ General Conference, April 2018, *Be with and Strengthen Them*, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

Home Ministering

teaching is now the secondary purpose and is left to the inspiration of the companionship. Our primary purpose has always been to watch over and care for the needs of our members. However, we're now asked to *'minister to our brothers and sisters in a higher, holier way.'*¹⁵

“The disconnect that most wards are currently experiencing comes from some of the first few General Conference talks on ministering. The speakers acknowledged there are a few rare circumstances in the modern world which can impede our ability to minister effectively to some families, and they offered some creative suggestions that would help us meet their particular needs. Unfortunately, the take-away, for some people, was they now had an excuse to relax their efforts. For example, some ministering companionships think *any effort counts* in ministering, excusing themselves from actual service. In reality, just the opposite is true. In his General Conference talk that introduced Ministering to the Church, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said we are *'to care for one another in a bold, new, holier way,'* and *'with these adjustments we want more care and concern, not less.'*¹⁶

“Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said we are 'to care for one another in bold, new, holier way, and with these adjustments we want more care and concern, not less.'”

“Bishop Stephens, when I hear the words *'bolder,' 'newer,'* and *'holier,'* I hear code words for, *'We're moving you from the Mosaic Law to the Celestial Law. Moving from tithing to the law of consecration. We're no longer going to command you in all things, but rather let you*

¹⁵ General Conference, Oct. 2018, *Opening Remarks*, President Russell M. Nelson

¹⁶ General Conference, April 2018, *Be with and Strengthen Them*, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

Stephen N. Webber

show Heavenly Father what you've learned about the Gospel and becoming Christlike.'

"Of course, there have always been diligent and inspired ministering brothers and sisters throughout the world performing their duties this way all along. But now, we're all being asked to act like the Good Shepherd, whom we represent, and care for His sheep the way He would take care of them.

"As you may already know, in that same talk, Elder Holland explained that the Church changed the name from Home Teaching to Ministering, because the name no longer accurately represented what we're supposed to be doing. First, the 'home' isn't the only place where we can watch over and care for our families, however *an in-home visit is still preferred* and should be the standard. Once again, he mentioned there are some places in the world where it's difficult—and sometimes even dangerous—to make frequent visits, and in those *very rare cases* we should supplement the less-regular visits with texts, emails, phone calls, notes, video chats or conversations with them at church. But those efforts are *in addition to visits in the home*, not replacements for them. Elder Holland concluded that talk with the request, '*Do the best you can.*' I guess we all have to ask ourselves, *Am I doing my best? My very best?*

"Secondly, we're no longer to be called *teachers*. Before the change to Ministering, everyone in the Church was sharing the same message from the *Liahona* or *Ensign Magazine* to each of the families they ministered to. The odd thing was everyone in the ward was teaching and receiving the exact same lesson. This didn't make sense to a lot of people, and for good reason. The Lord never intended the visit to be about delivering a lesson. It was always supposed to be about determining the needs of the families and caring for the people we were assigned to.

Home Ministering

“It’s important to remember, we still have our responsibility to ‘*stand as witnesses of Jesus Christ,*’ and a carefully selected message or inspired testimony may be exactly what your assigned family needs. A lesson is still an approved ministering tool if it will help and bless the family you visit, but it isn’t a one-size-fits-all message anymore. You should tailor it to exactly what the family needs to hear, and remember it’s just one of many ways to bless the families we minister to.”

Bishop Stephens was clearly trying to reconcile what he was hearing to what he had witnessed in his own ward. President Owens noticed the confused look on the new bishop’s face, and asked, “Is this method different from what you’ve experienced in your ward?”

Nodding in the affirmative, the uncomfortable look on the bishop’s face turned to a guilty smile of admission.

“Your experience is consistent with what the Church leaders have found around the world. In fact, in recent years, we’ve taken a big step backwards in our ministering efforts. There are many members throughout the Church who believe we’ve somehow been relieved of our priesthood duties, found in Section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants, to ‘*visit the house of each member.*’¹⁷ But that’s not true.

“In fact—to make it perfectly clear—we’ve started calling this responsibility *Home Ministering* in our ward, because the most effective and personal place to minister is in the home. We don’t want people to forget that.”

Bishop Stephens looked up from his notes. He asked, “So you still visit the home of every member, every month?”

President Owens shook his head and then responded, “First of all, we have to quit thinking about ministering as a monthly obligation. We can visit daily, weekly, monthly or whatever our assigned families need. They may need more, or less. But we won’t know until we go into their homes and ask. The problem is that some people still think this is a one-

¹⁷ Doctrine and Covenants 20:51

Stephen N. Webber

size-fits-all responsibility. My assigned families have entirely different needs and issues than the ones you're assigned to. Every member of every family has different concerns and challenges. We must be ministering to individuals, not just families."

"You're absolutely right," Bishop Stephens replied, nodding. "That makes perfect sense."

President Owens continued, "In that same section of the Doctrine and Covenants, priesthood holders are also told to exhort our assigned families *'to pray vocally and in secret,'* to *'attend to all family duties,'* to encourage members to *'meet together often,'* to ensure *'there is no hardness with each other,'* and to *'warn, expound, exhort, teach and invite all to come unto Christ.'*¹⁸ I assure you, that commandment hasn't been repealed either, but how can you accomplish it effectively in a text message? *We need to visit the home to adequately minister to the individual.*"

To punctuate his point, he added, "If anything, now there's even more need to watch over and protect families since the adversary has increased his efforts to destroy them!"

Bishop Stephens was nodding his head. This was clearing up so much. Ministering had always been a low-level priority for him. He had never had a companion that ministered like this, and therefore he never raised the bar on himself. When his home teachers—and now ministering brothers—wanted to visit his family, he would always tell them not to bother. With a new awareness and understanding, he told the quorum president, "I'm starting to see the great things this type of service could do for our ward and for my own family. I'm sad so many people—myself included—have misunderstood the purpose and the process of ministering. How have we strayed so far from its original purpose?"

¹⁸ Doctrine and Covenants 20:51-59

Home Ministering

“Well, it’s easy for us to fall into a rut that we want to fall into,” replied President Owens. “This is especially true if we don’t have a testimony of what ministering is all about.”

The young bishop nodded thoughtfully. Then he asked another question, "In our ward, some of the families resist having the home ministers come visit them. Do you have that problem, too?"

The quorum president nodded sympathetically and said, "The same thing still happens in our ward with a couple of families. There are always families who won't, or can't have the ministering brothers or sisters come over. But what matters is that they make an effort and let their families know they are there for them, and they are loved."

“Can you give me an example?” asked Bishop Stephens.

"Well, for instance, one family who never comes to church got a visit every month from their ministering brother, but he was never invited inside the home. He would drop by and take goodies, or a little typed-up quote for the refrigerator, or something for one of the kids on a birthday, but he never got in the home. Each time he showed up on their doorstep, the smiles got warmer and the conversations lasted longer. He always inquired about the family's needs and if there was anything he could help with *or pray for during the month*. The family always declined, but they seemed to be genuinely grateful for the offers. The ministering brother would drop by a couple of times each month, depending on what was going on with the family.

"Then one day he moved away, and the family fell off our radar. A couple of years later, the mother found a cancerous tumor, which the doctors were very concerned about. When her brother found out about her illness, he asked if she had received a priesthood blessing. She explained to him that she would have reached out to her home minister, but he had moved away, and she lost contact with him. Feeling a sense of urgency, her brother then called our bishop, explained the situation, and asked if he would pay her a visit. Well, it turned out that Bishop Smith

Stephen N. Webber

was still in contact with her former home minister, who had moved out of state. The bishop called him, told him that this sister had requested his help, and within a couple of days, he and Bishop Smith were at their home, giving her a priesthood blessing.”

President Owens wiped a tear from his eye, sat up in his chair and declared, “This good woman, who had received a very distressing prognosis, was told by the doctors that it was a miracle that everything went so well in the surgery, and they were able to remove 100% of the cancer. She’s now completely healed.

“But, even before this sister got sick, her heart was beginning to soften, and she could feel the love and concern this great man had for her family. I spoke to her just the other day, and she told me that if her ministering brother would have put *any* pressure on her during all those years of visits, she would have told him to never come back. But now, after all those years of front-porch visits, they have an eternal friendship. It just goes to show, 90% of ministering is just *showing up*, and *showing love*.

"We also have a few part-member families in our ward, as you probably have in yours. In one of the families, the wife is a member, but the husband and children aren't...*yet*." President Owens winked and smiled as he added that last word.

“Most of the time, the ministering brothers catch the husband on a good day, and he allows them to come visit his wife and kids. They always invite the husband to sit in the conversation, which he usually declines, but sometimes he'll sit near the room where the family is being taught and catch part of the lesson. He might even participate occasionally.

"But there are times when the husband won't let them visit at all, and we need to respect his wishes to help this sweet sister keep peace in her home. Some months, all the ministering brothers can do is check in with the sister by phone and talk with her at church on Sundays, but they are

Home Ministering

in touch with her several times throughout the month. The most important thing to the bishop, and to the Lord, is that this family knows their home ministers love them and they are there for anything they need. The husband actually knows that now, too.

"One thing which has made a big impact on the husband is that *the home ministers always ask what the family needs them to pray for throughout the coming month.*"

That caught Bishop Stephens' attention. "The home ministers ask the families what they can *pray for*? I like that! Do they ask every visit?"

The quorum president answered, "Yes. It's been a game-changer. Every home minister in our ward has been asked to pray daily for each person they minister to—by name. We've found that prayer is one of the *most important acts of service* the ministering brothers and sisters can do to establish a bond between them and the people they watch over.

The new bishop was in awe. Why had he never heard this suggested before? Or had he? His mind was now racing. To him, this single question, asked by a faithful ministering brother or sister, had so much potential to soften hearts and build trust. Bishop Stephens looked at the elders quorum president with a childlike enthusiasm in his eyes. "That's fantastic! How long have you been doing this?"

"It actually started the first year our bishop was called. One Sunday morning he stood at the pulpit prior to the sacrament meeting talks and extended two challenges. The first challenge was to have all of the ministering brothers and sisters pray each day for the individuals they were assigned to visit. He challenged us to take a few extra minutes during our personal prayers and ask Heavenly Father to bless the people we have a stewardship over, individually and by name.

"The bishop reminded us that we've been commanded in the scriptures to *pray over our flocks daily*, and he challenged us to specifically remember the portion of the Lord's flock we're assigned to. He promised us if we did this simple act of service, our desire to visit and

Stephen N. Webber

serve them would grow, and as our service increased, so would our love for each of those families. Additionally, everyone would know that someone else was praying for their family. What a wonderful thing!

“The second challenge was to report back and let the quorum and Relief Society leaders know how our assigned families were doing, at least monthly. More often if needed.

“Now, I should probably add a disclaimer: The first challenge isn’t a requirement in the Handbook. In fact, you might call it a second-mile or ‘higher, holier’ challenge, but I love it, and it’s really improved my relationships with the families I’ve been assigned to.”

President Owens then felt prompted to confess his initial resistance to the challenge, saying, “Now Bishop, I feel like I should admit that I implemented this challenge a little grudgingly at first. As I said, these were the first challenges the bishop had extended to the ward, and some ward members were reluctant to add one more thing to their to-do list.

“Even I was a little bothered. *Didn’t I already have enough to pray about?*” he asked sarcastically, and then winced, as if he were still ashamed for ever thinking such a thing.

“Embarrassingly, I hadn’t even been praying for each of my own family members individually, by name. But when I finally repented, and humbled myself enough to give it a try, something amazing happened! I’ll always remember the first time I prayed for one of my families who had some obvious challenges. As soon as I asked Father in Heaven to help them, I literally heard Him tell me, *‘Okay, I’ll give you a hand, but you and I are going to help them together. This is what I want you to do for the family...,’* and then the Holy Ghost began giving me a list of ways I was going to help Father bless them.

“I was blown away. Heavenly Father was literally teaching me, right there on my knees, how He was going to use me to help this family. I was going to be His ministering angel!

Home Ministering

“Sure, sometimes He intervenes with a miraculous healing, or jump-starts the weather for farmers in a drought, or parts a sea or moves a mountain. But usually our prayers are answered through the people around us, and who better to perform those acts of service than the humble shepherds assigned to the families!

“I then started praying for the next family, and the next. Every time I poured out my heart for one of them, thoughts came to my mind of what I could do to help. Some were simple tasks, and some were more complex and time consuming. But in every case, my heart was beginning to change for each individual I was assigned to watch over.

“It was a life changing experience for me, and for my companion. When we prayed together before visits, our prayers were different. Then, when we would go into the homes, we quit asking the typical question, ‘What can we do for you this month?’ and started asking, ‘What would you like us to pray for this month?’”

The new bishop was mesmerized. He was lost in the story that this good brother was telling. Everything he said sounded so simple, yet it seemed so far away from his reach. *How do you get people to do this? How do you get people to care? How do you get people to trust and open up to their home ministers?* Then he said, “What an amazing story! What would people say when you asked them that question?”

He responded, “As you know, when you ask a family what you can do for them, they typically tell you they are fine, and they’ll let you know if something comes up—but of course—they never do. When people are in need, they usually call a family member or a neighbor to help. If they need a priesthood blessing, they’ll wait until their problem has reached crisis-mode, and then they will call the quorum president or the bishop.

“As soon as we started asking families what we could be praying for, the ministering in our ward changed forever. People started visiting their assigned families every month, sometimes even weekly if there were needs. Immediately our conversations changed, our lessons changed, and

our feelings changed for one another. Trust between the families and their ministering brothers and sisters began to grow like I'd never experienced before. Fathers began calling their ministering brothers to help with blessings, because they knew those men were sincerely concerned about each member of their family. Parents started speaking up and sharing private concerns about their children, or challenges at work, or spiritual questions they had about the Gospel. Even the children would speak up and ask for prayers as they prepared for a big test or a sporting event.

The elders quorum president leaned back for a moment and then, shaking his head with amazement, repeated, "Everything has changed since that simple challenge to pray every day for our assigned families. We have a little slice of heaven here in our ward now. We truly love our neighbors as ourselves."

Bishop Stephens could tell this good brother had a testimony of ministering and praying for his families. He decided to take advantage of a little pause the quorum president took.

"So how did you get everyone on board? Does every ministering brother and sister do this?"

President Owens responded, "Yes, most of them. At the very least they ask the family what they can pray for."

"How do you know?" asked the bishop.

"Well, first of all, since the bishop issued *The Challenge* to the entire ward, there's an expectation by the families that their ministering brothers and sisters will ask that question. There's nothing like having the bishop set an expectation from the pulpit." He smiled.

Bishop Stephens smiled and nodded thoughtfully as he wrote in his notebook.

"The elders and Relief Society presidencies also ask the ministering companionships in our monthly Ministering Interviews what they are

Home Ministering

concerned about and if there's anything the presidencies can be helping with or praying for.”

With that, the Bishop perked up again. He quickly asked, “Ministering Interviews? You do those every month? The General Handbook only says they are to be done *‘regularly.’*”

The quorum president looked directly at the bishop and asked rhetorically, “What does *‘regularly’* mean? Couldn't it mean monthly, or even weekly? Every ward is different. Our bishop wants to keep closer tabs on each family, so we decided to have the interviews on a monthly basis. You just need to decide what works best for your ward. There's no limit to how frequently you can chat with the ministering companions.”

Bishop Stephens responded with a little chuckle, “I've had a couple of Personal Priesthood Interviews over the years, but I can't remember ever having a meaningful Ministering Interview. What do you do in those interviews each month?”

President Owens looked at his watch and said, “Bishop, that's another very important question, but I don't have time to answer it right now. I actually have a ministering obligation. One of the kids of a family I minister to has a track meet over at the high school in about 20 minutes, and she invited me to come cheer her on. I hope you understand, but she's expecting me, and I don't want to let her down. Besides, the one you should talk to about Ministering Interviews is my first counselor, Brother Thoman. He's perfected them.”

Then the elders quorum president stopped talking, looked off into the distance, and then drew in a deep breath. As he let the air back out of his lungs, he looked back at the new bishop and cautiously asked, “Bishop, I know this isn't my place, but can I give you one last bit of advice—based on my experience overseeing ministering in our quorum?”

Bishop Stephens was now even more intrigued. He leaned forward and said, “Of course, President. We're all in this together. I'm here for

Stephen N. Webber

one purpose—to get advice and better understand my duties and responsibilities. Tell me anything you feel inspired to share with me.”

President Owens nodded his head thoughtfully and then proceeded. He said, “Bishop, one of the most important parts of your job, as a bishop, will be helping the elders understand that *ministering is one of their most important priesthood duties*. I believe that once people finally understand what an amazing blessing ministering is, for their assigned families as well as for themselves, everyone will increase their efforts.”

Then he said, “If you want the ministering effort to be successful in your ward, it needs to come directly from the bishop, and it needs to be a regular and ongoing message in your ward. The members need to hear it over and over, and to recognize this was one of the most emphasized commandments from the Savior’s sermons. To love one another. To serve one another. To feed His sheep. This message needs to be reiterated by you from the pulpit, in talks from members, in quorum and class lessons, in ward bulletins, everywhere. The members of your ward need to know ministering is a *covenantal priority*.”

After those final words, they shook hands and they bid one another farewell.

Home Ministering

NOTES FROM THE ELDERS QUORUM PRESIDENT

1. We are to give a "higher and holier" effort and with these adjustments the Savior wants more care and concern—not less.
2. When giving lessons, tailor them to what the family needs to hear, and remember, it's just one of many ways to bless the families we minister to.
3. The Good Shepherd still wants us to visit the home of each member, because it's the most effective and personal place to minister to someone.
4. Every member of every family has different concerns and challenges. We must be ministering to individuals, not just families.
5. There's even more need to step up our efforts to protect families since the adversary has increased his efforts to destroy them.
6. If a family resists your efforts to minister, do what you can to show them you love them.
7. 90% of ministering is showing up and showing love.
8. Quit only asking what you can do for the families you minister to. Ask what you can pray for, and then pray every day for each individual—by name.
9. The most reiterated messages from the sermons of the Savior were love one another, serve one another and feed my sheep.
10. One of the most important responsibilities of a bishop is helping the elders understand ministering is one of their most important priesthood duties. This effort comes from the top down. Ministering needs to be reiterated from the bishopric, in talks from members, in quorum and class lessons, in ward bulletins, everywhere. The members of the ward need to know ministering is a covenantal priority.

Chapter 5 - The Counselor

“And visit the house of each member, and exhort them to pray vocally and in secret and attend to all family duties.”

Doctrine and Covenants 20:47

Bishop Stephens was immediately impressed with Brother Thoman, who was in his mid 60's and very confident in his calling. The bishop could instantly tell this was a seasoned and experienced ward leader. After the initial get-to-know-you conversation, the new bishop said, “President Owens informed me that you're the *expert* when it comes to Ministering Interviews. Will you tell me how those interviews help you in this ward?”

Brother Thoman knew Bishop Stephens was just trying to butter him up, but he blushed a little nonetheless. He responded, “Well, this has been a great learning experience for me, as well. We've all grown a lot since the bishop's challenge to pray daily for each person we minister to. In fact, it made such a profound impact that many ward members still call it *The Challenge*. Praying for our families is a daily reminder of our responsibility to Heavenly Father, and to our brothers and sisters in the ward.”

The bishop jumped in and asked, “President Owens tells me nearly every family gets visited at least monthly, sometimes more. That just amazes me. How do you get everyone to do their ministering every month? How is that even possible?”

“Well, those are some great questions,” responded the counselor. He continued, “There are actually a couple of answers. First, we do whatever it takes to serve the families in our ward. Service can be done by anyone. You don't need a calling, an assignment or any authority at all to help someone in need. We're always on the lookout for opportunities to serve within our ward.

Home Ministering

“But ministering is different. Ministering is service too, but it’s built into your Church membership with a very specific purpose. *And it’s assigned by inspiration, just like a missionary assignment, to ensure that nobody is overlooked, forgotten, or lost.*

“Bishop Smith has done a fantastic job educating the quorum about our responsibility, and we’ve all committed to President Russell M. Nelson’s request to watch over the flock in a higher and holier way. Ministering to one another is a top priority for our quorum.”

Brother Thoman then added, “The second answer to your question is we now understand how important home ministering is to the spiritual development of those we care for, as well as our own growth.”

Bishop Stephens looked at the elders quorum counselor and asked, “What do you mean, specifically?”

The counselor replied, “Well, one purpose for ministering is to bring us together as a Church, like the City of Enoch. Another purpose for ministering is to help us all become perfected in Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. Personally, I love what the apostle Paul tells the Ephesians about how we all work together as members of the Church to accomplish those two objectives.”

Then he pulled out his scriptures and read those verses to Bishop Stephens.

‘And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:’¹⁹

¹⁹ New Testament, Ephesians 4:11-13

Stephen N. Webber

Brother Thoman then explained, “When Paul mentions pastors and teachers, he’s referring to the shepherds of the local wards. He’s talking about you and me helping to *perfect the saints* and *edify of the body of Christ*, meaning the members of the Church.

“And for what?” he asked rhetorically. “*To help the saints become united and perfected in Christ*. Ministering can turn our hearts from ourselves to focus on the needs of others, and by doing so, we’re actually fine-tuning our own spirituality in the process. It’s an amazing circle of growth. We all get closer to our goal of becoming Christlike together.”

“The Savior told us, if we love Him we need to keep His commandments. He also told Peter, *if you love Me, you’ll feed My sheep*. The way we show our Father in Heaven that we love Him is by serving others, and Christlike service results in Christlike love for those we serve.

“And as Paul told the Ephesians, the ward which serves and loves one another will experience a *‘unity of the faith.’*”

Bishop Stephens was scribbling in his notebook again. When he finally stopped and looked back up, Brother Thoman continued, “Now, just like tithing or the Word of Wisdom, we develop a testimony of ministering by actually keeping that commandment. Regarding tithing, Heavenly Father tells us *‘Prove me now herewith,’* and Ministering is no different. Our testimony of a principle comes after we demonstrate our faith, and do it. But sometimes members of our Church don’t get that far and never come to understand the benefits of ministering. When that happens, not only do they not magnify their own assignments, they also don’t allow their ministering brothers or sisters to serve them. In fact, many people are so private, their bishops don’t even find out there’s a problem until they get a call from the hospital.”

Bishop Stephens flashed a guilty smile and said, “Sounds like me.”

Brother Thoman chuckled, and while jokingly wagging his finger at his new friend said, “That’s a problem, Bishop. You’re not giving your

Home Ministering

ministering brothers and sisters a chance to help or get to know you. Even worse, you aren't giving them a chance to develop a love for you and your family.”

The bishop shrugged his shoulders and nodded. He was beginning to understand how true that was.

The counselor continued, “Here’s another bad example: During the Savior’s last supper, He washed the feet of each of His disciples until He got to Peter. Peter refused the Lord’s offer and said, *‘Thou shalt never wash my feet’* assuming it was below the Son of God’s station to be washing the feet of a fisherman. Jesus looked up at him from His knees and said, *‘If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.’*²⁰

“Jesus was telling Peter, ‘First of all, this is an important ordinance you need to receive to be with me in my kingdom. And secondly, you need to be a little more humble and let me serve you.’”

Brother Thoman continued, “Service takes two people, the giver and the receiver, and there are lessons to be learned by both sides. We learn to love and develop charity as we serve others, and we shed pride and develop humility as we allow others to serve us. Both are important Christlike attributes that are absolutely necessary to *be like and be with* the Savior again.”

Concluding his point, the counselor said, “So to make a long point a little longer, teach your ward that one of the easiest ways to become like Christ is by diligently ministering to their assigned families and allowing others to minister to them, too.”

Then Brother Thoman shifted back to the ministering interview topic, “Now, I guess we should get back to what you actually wanted to know about Ministering Interviews. As you know,

“We learn to love and develop charity as we serve others, and we shed pride and develop humility as we allow others to serve us.”

²⁰ New Testament, John 13:8

Stephen N. Webber

we no longer report to the stake the number of visits the ministering brothers and sisters make. We only report the number of interviews the elders quorum and relief society presidencies have with the companionships. The report we submit to the stake is more about making sure we are doing our duty as a presidency than about the welfare of our members. But that doesn't mean we don't keep track of the flock. We ask about each family in those monthly interviews, and as we are made aware of challenges or concerns, we immediately return-and-report those issues to the bishop, who holds the keys in this ward."

The counselor continued, "The ministering brothers and sisters should be reporting on the welfare of each family, even down to the individual, especially if there are issues. In fact, after ministering to the needs of the family, the second most important responsibility of the home minister is passing on a report of the family's status to the bishop.

"The principle of reporting our stewardship is a *priesthood duty*, and I feel it's more important in our home ministering responsibilities than in almost any other calling in the Church. You could say *it's an eternal principle*. Even the Savior was required to *return-and-report* His stewardship to our Father in Heaven. Bishop Smith once asked me, 'If the Creator of the universe was required to *return-and-report*, shouldn't we follow that example?'"

"I love it!" said the bishop. "What else should I know about these interviews?" he asked.

Brother Thoman responded, "The bishop always reminds us that asking the right questions is vital. Just because a family was visited, it doesn't guarantee all is well in the home. A family who's visited every month of the year could be one of the families with the most difficult needs in the ward, and usually is. If all we report to the bishop is that a visit occurred, then what can he know about the condition of each lamb in his flock? That's why we're doing these interviews. To get the information and pass it on."

Home Ministering

Brother Thoman pulled a sheet of paper out of a binder and said, “In the Ministering Interview, we asked each quorum member the following questions:

1. How are your assigned families doing and are there any needs or challenges the bishop should be aware of?
2. Do you need assistance from the presidency or quorum to help carry the load?

Brother Thoman stopped and said, “This question is especially important to ask if the companionship ministers to a family with unusually heavy burdens. We never want them to feel an assignment is too much of a load.” Then he continued.

3. Do any members, with upcoming ordinances, need help preparing to receive them?
4. How is the companionship working together?
5. Have you consulted with the ministering sisters recently about the needs in the home?

“We also ask how their own families are doing, and if their ministering brothers have been visiting. We ask those questions for a couple reasons. First, this a chance for us to determine if there is anything we, as a presidency, can be praying for or helping with in their own lives. Second, ministering is a group effort, and there are always unaddressed needs that we become aware of in these interviews. If we find out something new, we can advise their ministering brothers of those issues and encourage them follow up with the family.

“Then we use the remaining time to teach any principles we feel may help strengthen the quorum member, express our love and appreciation for their service, and encourage them to communicate any new and relevant information they receive between interviews with us immediately or report directly to the bishop.

Bishop Stephens jumped in and said, “Those are all very simple, yet important questions. I especially like the question about consulting with

Stephen N. Webber

the ministering sisters. That seems like it could be very valuable information. Does that make a difference in your ward?”

“Absolutely!” said the veteran counselor, “We find that the sisters are much more aware of needs and problems than the elders. That’s not to say the ministering sisters are more diligent than the men—though many are.” He smiled to assure Bishop Stephens that he was just teasing.

Then he added, “But sisters just seem to open up more when it’s not in front of the whole family—when it’s just a conversation between a couple of friends. So yes, we find that a dialogue between the elders and sister companionships is very helpful. The same goes for counseling between the elders quorum and Relief Society presidencies. We meet periodically in joint presidency meetings to discuss companionship assignments. It proves to be very enlightening.”

Brother Thoman then said, “Bishop Smith always says, ‘Good information makes for good inspiration,’ which means we make much better decisions when we have all the meaningful details we can get. So we consult back-and-forth in Ward Council meetings and joint presidency meetings when we have something to share.

Bishop Stephens had never heard of this before, and loved what he was learning, but he couldn’t understand how the presidency could possibly interview each companionship every month. He then asked, “Do you call each companionship on the phone every month for a report?”

The counselor smiled. “Not any more. They are expected to call us, that way we don’t have to chase them down. But it didn’t start out that way. Initially, when *The Challenge* was first given, the home ministering in our ward was pretty inconsistent, so to get the program moving in the right direction, the bishop asked us to conduct monthly, face-to-face interviews with a member of each companionship to get a full report on their assigned families.”

Bishop Stephens finally interrupted, “That sounds incredibly time consuming. Wasn’t it hard holding that many interviews?”

Home Ministering

“It wasn’t hard at all. Besides, it was only in the beginning, and it was just intended to jump-start the home ministering. I’m sure that you, as a bishop, have a lot more meetings every month than we do,” he said with a smile.

Bishop Stephens acknowledged that fact with a reluctant nod.

Brother Thoman continued, “As for the interviews, we only have about 90 elders in the ward, which means 45 interviews per month. After dividing them between the presidency, that was only 4-5 elders each week, and we still had time for the in-home family visits that we do as a presidency, and the annual Personal Priesthood Interviews. It kept our secretaries busy, but they needed the extra blessings anyway, so they were fine.”

The new bishop laughed at that comment. Then he asked, “Do your secretaries conduct interviews, too?”

Brother Thoman answered, “The General Handbook says only the president and counselors conduct these interviews. This makes sense especially when you’re dealing with feedback which is personal in nature, and all of the companionships know that sensitive or confidential information should be reported directly to the president or the bishop.”

When he could see the bishop was satisfied with his answer, Brother Thoman pressed on, “The first month we did the interviews, we met with both members of the companionship together. We explained the purpose of a Ministering Interview, and the duties of a home minister. We also explained we were looking for a report on the welfare of the family each month, instead of just telling us they had finished their home ministering.”

Then Brother Thoman paused for a moment and said, “I should probably interject something here. You regularly hear people say, ‘My ministering is *all done* for the month.’ Our bishop has made it perfectly clear he never wants us to report that the ministering in the ward is ‘*all*

done, even if everyone has been visited. He is famous for saying, '*Home ministering is never done.*'

He continued, "There will always be burdens to be lifted and prayers to be said. We're never relieved of these responsibilities, just like you'll never hear a young mother say, '*I'm all done for the day,*' after she serves her family dinner. Right?" They both laughed at the outrageousness of that example.

"That's for sure!" exclaimed Bishop Stephens. "And I completely agree."

Brother Thoman then returned to his thoughts on interviewing, "As I was saying, we started out with face-to-face interviews, because our bishop believes that setting proper expectations is crucial when extending any new calling or assignment, especially when it comes to a family's needs. We informed each companionship of any current needs we were aware of so they could hit the ground running. After the initial interview, we began alternating between companions every other month, so it wasn't as much of a burden on the home ministers. We would rather they be out ministering than meeting with us!

"As for the actual Ministering Interview, we like to start each interview with a kneeling prayer when we meet in person, which we ask the ministering brothers to offer. The home minister then gives an accounting for each lamb in his flock, and they let us know if there are any individuals who have special needs. They tell us what they are doing to help the families and if they need our help or our prayers. If they need more help than the two companions can handle by themselves, they've been asked to come to the interview with a *plan-of-action*. We take note of what they want us—as a presidency—to help with, and that becomes an agenda topic at our next presidency meeting.

"If a family requires immediate action, we drop everything and help the home ministers with whatever they need, or we rally the quorum troops if necessary.

Home Ministering

“If a situation demands the bishop’s help, which is very rare, we don’t hesitate to call and let him know immediately. The bishop wants a list of all our concerns as they occur, not just at the end of the month. If a family is in need, or a youth is in danger, or if the ministering brothers need the bishop’s help in any way, he wants to know as soon as possible. If all is well, we give him our report at the next Ward Council meeting.

“But once again, if there is an emergency, the home ministers know they can call any of us immediately, 24-hours a day, instead of waiting for the interview.”

The mechanics of the program were fascinating to Bishop Stephens. He was nodding and taking notes as fast as he could write.

Brother Thoman continued, “At the end of the interview, we always express our love for the ministering brother and his companion, and then the presidency member offers the closing prayer.

“The home ministers that were already consistently visiting their families were able to report on their status without a problem, and those interviews only lasted about ten to fifteen minutes.”

The bishop shrugged his shoulders and said, “Sounds simple enough, and very effective. I’m still amazed your whole ward bought into the program so fast.”

The elders quorum counselor sighed and then said, “It wasn’t exactly *simple*. There were some ministering brothers who were having problems making their visits before *The Challenge* and struggled initially after we started with the interviews. At first, some of them wouldn’t even come to the interview.

“The ones who weren’t ministering before the changes were a little nervous, because they didn’t know their assigned families well enough to report on their welfare. In those cases, we were the ones telling them how their families were doing in the interview.

“We challenged those companionships to make a visit that week and then return-and-report. There were a lot of excuses at first. Some of them

Stephen N. Webber

blamed their assigned families or their companions for their inability to minister. In those cases, we simply asked them if they needed our help as a presidency in setting up the appointment or ministering with them to help them get a little more comfortable with their new assignment.”

Most would decline, as they realized they were just as capable of accomplishing their assignment as the presidency was.

“However, there are many people, both men and women, who are genuinely nervous to approach ward members in this capacity. Some people are more reserved, even introverted, and making new friends is not one of their strengths. Some people really struggle when it comes to asking personal questions, giving lessons, bearing testimony or even giving compassion when someone is in need.

Bishop Stephens was aware of some people in his own ward who had turned down assignments to minister on the grounds they just were not comfortable doing it. He asked, “What do you do? Do you just exempt them from ministering assignments?”

Brother Thoman continued, “No. The Lord wants each of us to grow and to use the gifts and talents He’s given us to bless the lives of others. *And growth comes when we get outside our comfort zones.*

“Unfortunately there isn’t a formal ministering training course for new members, or for the young men and women. In the past, we’ve just thrown them into the ministering program, and crossed our fingers that everything would turn out okay. If your first ministering experience is with a companion who doesn’t have a testimony of the *Doctrine of Ministering—even when it’s with a parent—you’ll have a hard time breaking the cycle of mediocre home ministering,*” he shrugged, as if reluctantly accepting the reality of the situation.

“Just as new missionaries require detailed training before they begin their mission, ministering brothers and sisters need to be shown how to approach their families, set up an appointment, generate a conversation,

Home Ministering

ask questions and even how to keep a visit short and convenient for the families they are meeting with.

“All of this training is the responsibility of the elders quorum and Relief Society presidencies, but the youth leaders are involved too.

“Once a month the elders, youth quorums, Relief Society and Young Women’s classes all have a few minutes of ministering training before a lesson. We teach basic principles, share examples of ministering successes, and once in a while we even include role play scenarios.

“When we first began this training process to help a few of the more reluctant brothers get started, a member of our presidency would partner with a brother, introduce him to his assigned family, demonstrated how to ask questions and start a conversation, share a short message, determine what they could pray for and leave a blessing on the home. We only had to do this a couple of times and each brother felt comfortable enough to transition away from us and minister with his actual companion. However, we always try to assign these individuals to more experienced ones. That’s why it’s so important for us to get to know these brothers in the Ministering Interviews. We can find out their strengths and challenges and make inspired assignments using the better information.

“Amazingly, because of our continued communication, encouragement and training, almost every one of the ministering brothers, who had previously failed to meet with their families, were able to make their visit. And as requested, they all returned-and-reported their status.”

“Really? What an incredible turnaround!” exclaimed Bishop Stephens. He was genuinely impressed.

Brother Thoman nodded in agreement, “Some of our quorum members had never really understood *why* home ministering was so important and what its true purpose was, partly due to the lack of training or even a lack of emphasis from previous ward leaders.

Stephen N. Webber

“Once we implemented these interviews with our quorum members, and testified that ministering was the Lord’s method of shepherding and caring for each family’s needs, they began to realize it wasn’t merely a suggestion, but actually a *requirement of a priesthood holder*. That’s when they started making a real effort, and it became a top priority for them. As they began to develop a testimony of *the Doctrine of Ministering*, their actions changed.”

Bishop Stephens then asked, “Were there any who resisted the change, and what did you do to get them onboard?”

The elders quorum counselor nodded and then explained, “After the first couple of months, only one priesthood holder in the entire ward hadn’t come in to report his stewardship.”

“What do you do in that type of situation? You can’t force them to do it, *can you?*” asked the new bishop.

Brother Thoman smiled and said, “No, you can’t force anyone to do anything. That’s not how the Gospel of Jesus Christ works. People have their agency. However, if a Melchizedek Priesthood holder doesn’t make any effort to minister—for a full quarter—Bishop Smith does the Ministering Interview. So that particular home minister got a call from the bishop.”

Bishop Stephens’ interest had now piqued, “So what happened?”

"The president smiled and responded, “When the home minister went into the bishop’s office, he didn’t know what the interview was for. The brother was invited to open the interview with a prayer, just as we do in our interviews.

“Bishop Smith then expressed his love for the brother and thanked him for his service in his Sunday School calling. Then he asked just one question: ‘Brother Jones, is your Sunday School calling overloading you too much?’

“The brother was surprised and responded, ‘No. Why?’

Home Ministering

“The bishop then reminded him about *The Challenge* and told him that aside from his responsibility as husband and father, no other calling in the Church was as important to the Savior as the assignment of home minister.

“Bishop Smith explained that he was assigned as a ministering brother, not called or set apart, because the responsibility had been built right into his priesthood—the calling came with the ordination. He also reminded him of the Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood as found in Section 84 of the Doctrine and Covenants. He told him magnifying his ministering assignment was one of the responsibilities which was required of him to keep his promise to Heavenly Father to magnify his priesthood.

“Bishop Smith lovingly explained to Brother Jones how important his assigned families were to the Lord. He told him that he had been assigned by revelation to minister to those families, and that the commandment given to priesthood holders to minister was far more important to the bishop—and to Heavenly Father—than his Sunday School calling was, especially because he had made a covenant to do it.

“After Bishop Smith bore his testimony to this brother, he read him the parable of the hireling. Are you familiar with that parable?” asked Brother Thoman.

Bishop Stephens knew the parable very well, but asked the counselor to share his thoughts about it anyway.

Brother Thoman opened his scriptures to John and read the following:

“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

‘But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and

scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

‘I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.’”²¹

Brother Thoman continued, “Now compare ‘the hireling’ to the story in the Book of Mormon about Ammon, protecting King Lamoni’s flocks at the peril of his own life. He fought off multiple attackers with a sling and a sword to guard the king’s sheep while others ran away and hid.”²²

He paused for a few seconds to let Bishop Stephens think about the contrast of those two stories as they related to home ministering.

“Do you think that kind of an interview is too harsh to have with a member who isn’t ministering?” asked Bishop Stephens.

The faithful elders quorum counselor promptly defended his bishop by saying, “Not at all. Even the Savior gently rebuked His apostles when they weren’t living up to His expectations. The bishop represents the Savior and is appointed to feed and protect the flock.

The young man continued, “Some people in the Church feel we should let a person fail in a calling, and they use that person’s agency as the excuse. Like you said, we can’t force someone to serve, right?” he asked rhetorically.

“However this logic is a little flawed, especially in the case of ministering. Too many individuals can be affected by inattentive ministering brothers and sisters. The families who are not being ministered to become the victims of neglect, and that’s not fair to them.

“Additionally, Heavenly Father employs consequences all the time for those who don’t keep their *covenants*. If a priesthood holder flat-out

²¹ New Testament, John 10:11-15

²² The Book of Mormon - Another Testament of Jesus Christ, Alma 17:27-39

Home Ministering

refuses to pay tithing, obey the Word of Wisdom or attend his priesthood meetings, after a while, he may lose temple privileges.

“We sometimes forget there are requirements and responsibilities which come with bearing the priesthood of God. It isn’t something we have a right to possess. We earn and retain the privilege through righteous behavior and good works.

“This is one of the most dangerous times in the history of the world. The sheep are in great danger. There are many different types of wolves out there in the world. We must have vigilant shepherds to guard and feed the sheep.”

Brother Thoman opened up his scriptures again, and said with a little smile, “My father would read this scripture to the boys who dated my sisters when we were growing up...just to remind them who was the boss. But I think it applies to home ministering, too:

“For what shepherd is there among you—having many sheep—doth not watch over them, that the wolves enter not and devour his flock? And behold, if a wolf enter his flock, doth he not drive him out? Yea, and at the last, if he can, he will destroy him.”²³

Bishop Stephens laughed out loud. “I like the way your dad operates. I have to admit though, I love how that verse describes a protective, watchful home minister.

Then the bishop asked, “So what happened to the man that was called into your bishop’s office?”

“Well, it turned into quite the success story,” Brother Thoman said. “Prior to the interview with the bishop, this brother hadn’t gone ministering in years. He had actually *refused* to go. He also didn’t like having the home ministers come over to his house, probably because his

²³ The Book of Mormon - Another Testament of Jesus Christ, Alma 5:59

Stephen N. Webber

ministering brothers had also been doing it all wrong, and they were just wasting his time.

“After the bishop shared the story about the hireling, he told Brother Jones that he loved him and he would do anything to help him magnify his responsibility as a home minister, even release him from his other callings if the load was too much.

“The bishop described some of the issues that his assigned families were dealing with, which Brother Jones admitted he was unaware of. Bishop Smith asked him to commit to return-and-report directly back to him when he had visited with the families, identified their needs, and had a plan of action to help them. Then the bishop concluded the interview as we do, with a prayer, once again expressing his love for the brother.

“This man is now one of the most faithful home ministers in our ward. He visits his families regularly, and there is not a person he ministers to who doesn’t love and appreciate him. The Lord has since entrusted him with some of the most demanding callings in the ward.”

The great quorum counselor continued with conviction, “Our bishop loves every member of our ward. We all feel that love. He recognizes how important ministering is to nourishing each lamb in his flock. That’s why the bishop has asked us to perform this responsibility at a higher level, and that’s why he is even willing to release us from our other callings if they are weighing us down and making it difficult to honor our priesthood covenant.”

The elder then shifted the conversation quickly to wrap up the discussion, “It’s important to understand that *what we do in our ward is not a Church-wide requirement*. The Handbook doesn’t require a monthly interview. It only calls for home ministers to report on their families *at least quarterly*. Meeting with them monthly is what our bishop asked us to do to jump-start the program, but in some remote areas in the world, that could be a challenge, so adjustments would need to be made. It’s up to each Ward Council to determine, by revelation,

Home Ministering

what will work best to motivate their members to home minister at a *higher and holier level*, and keep improving over time.

“Now that we have set the expectation for what the Lord wants from a ministering brother, the home ministers call us with their reports every month, and we meet face-to-face every quarter. If a companionship misses one of their families for a couple months, our secretary calls them and sets up a personal interview. It usually only takes one *refresher interview* and they are back on track.”

As they were getting ready to end the meeting, Brother Thoman asked, “Can I share one more scripture with you regarding our priesthood responsibility to protect the flock?”

Bishop Stephens eagerly accepted the offer saying, “Sure! Go right ahead.”

Then, very thoughtfully, Brother Thoman said, “Captain Moroni is another great example from The Book of Mormon of the type of priesthood holders we should be. The following scripture describes the kind of man he was and the kind of men the Good Shepherd still needs to care for His flock today.” Then he began to read:

“And Moroni was a strong and a mighty man; he was a man of a perfect understanding;...a man who did labor exceedingly for the welfare and safety of his people.

“Yea, and he was a man who was firm in the faith of Christ, and he had sworn with an oath to defend his people, his rights, and his country, and his religion, even to the loss of his blood...

“Yea, verily, verily I say unto you, if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men.”²⁴

²⁴ The Book of Mormon - Another Testament of Jesus Christ, Alma 48:11-13

Stephen N. Webber

“Bishop, you and I have also sworn an oath to ‘labor exceedingly for the welfare and safety of our people.’ We have the ability, if cultivated, to be ‘like unto Moroni’ in our shepherding stewardships, and if we do, ‘the very powers of hell’ will shake, and the devil will lose his power over the ‘hearts of the children’ we minister to.

“And if we magnify the Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood, we will be rewarded with the greatest of gifts, even an inheritance of *‘all that our Father hath.’*”

Bishop Stephens was learning so much from this good man. He had no doubt of his love for the quorum and had to assume that every member of his quorum felt it, too.

Brother Thoman then asked Bishop Stephens, “Have you spoken to President Mann yet?” “No. Who’s that?” the bishop asked.

Brother Thoman looked a little surprised and said, “He’s our Teachers Quorum president. Isn’t he on your list?”

Bishop Stephens looked at his list again. Sure enough, there was Harrison Mann. The bishop actually knew this young man by his nickname Harry, who was a good friend of his own 15-year-old son.

Brother Thoman then said, “Oh, you have to talk to him. He’s making a huge difference in the home ministering program in this ward.”

“He is? How’s a kid doing that?” he asked incredulously.

“Go ask him yourself. He loves to talk about ministering,” laughed Brother Thoman.

The bishop couldn’t wait to hear more. This journey was proving to be one of the most eye-opening, learning opportunities he had ever experienced with regard to his own priesthood responsibility and how the Church should function. But learning from a young man the age of his own son? He couldn’t track Harrison down fast enough, but he was going to restrain himself and follow Bishop Smith’s instructions and proceed with the interviews in the order they were given. Harry would have to wait.

Home Ministering

NOTES FROM THE ELDERS QUORUM COUNSELOR

1. Ministering is assigned by inspiration to ensure nobody is forgotten or lost.
2. Ministering can turn our hearts from ourselves to focus on the needs of others, and by doing so, we are actually fine-tuning our own spirituality in the process.
3. The ward which serves and loves one another will experience a "unity of the faith."
4. We learn to love and develop charity as we serve others, and we shed pride and develop humility as we allow others to serve us. Both are important Christlike attributes which are absolutely necessary to be like—and be with—the Savior again.
5. Ministering brothers and sisters should consult periodically about families they jointly minister to.
6. Elders Quorum and Relief Society presidencies should likewise coordinate as they consider making assignments. Remember, "Good information leads to good inspiration."
7. When extending assignments, always give the companionship as much information as possible so they can hit the ground running.
8. If there is an emergency, the home ministers should know they can call 24-hours a day, instead of waiting for the interview to report the need.
9. You can't force someone to minister, however you also can't deny members the blessing of having personal shepherds. It's ok to release and reassign people to a more willing companionship.
10. Bishops can conduct the Ministering Interview to help encourage members.
11. Strive to be a modern-day Captain Moroni.
12. Home Ministering is never done.

Chapter 6 - The Relief Society President

“We want our sheep to be gathered into the fold of God. To do so, we must consider where they are on the covenant path and be willing to walk with them on their journey of faith. Ours is a sacred privilege to come to know their hearts and point them to their Savior.”²⁵

Sister Bonnie H. Cordon

Sister Jensen was more than willing to meet with Bishop Stephens, but insisted on meeting in his office at the church to make it easier for him. When the bishop’s executive secretary showed the Relief Society president into his office, she immediately reminded him of his own mother. She was an older woman, maybe 70 years old and tiny in stature, but her personality filled the room. She was happy, friendly and extremely complimentary. She just made you feel good about yourself.

Bishop Stephens thanked his secretary and invited Sister Jensen to have a seat. The first thing she did was thank the bishop for the opportunity to talk to him.

He said, “Not at all Sister Jensen, thank you for coming to meet with me. I’m very impressed with your ward and its leadership. You’ve done remarkable things in the Mountain Ridge Ward. Bishop Smith told me that I should meet with you to get a better understanding of what makes your ward so special.”

Sister Jensen responded, “The members make it special. They do all the hard work.”

She quickly went on, “When we first implemented *The Challenge* to pray daily for each sister, our presidency was thrilled the women embraced it so quickly. We immediately began to see big results.”

“What kind of results did you see?” asked the new bishop.

²⁵ General Conference, Oct. 2018, *Becoming a Shepherd*, Sister Bonnie H. Cordon

Home Ministering

Eager to share the benefits of ministering, Sister Jensen excitedly said, “As you know, ministering to the sisters is a little different. The sisters are allowed to make a phone contact from time to time in place of actually visiting the home of their assigned sister, especially if there are issues that make it too difficult to meet together. *However, a visit in the home is always preferred*, and we started asking our sisters to do everything in their power to make a personal visit as a companionship, as often as they could. It’s in that visit, and the effort to physically meet together, where a personal connection is made, which opens the door for a much more meaningful friendship and personalized service.”

The bishop nodded, acknowledging that fact.

“Well, as the ministering began to improve, so did the Sacrament Meeting attendance. That was a big deal for us. We climbed from around 50% attendance in our Sacrament Meeting to over 80%.

“All we were doing differently was ministering. Of course, our *ministering experience* had changed dramatically also, which was the most important part. We were now praying for our families, serving them, and loving them in a way we hadn’t even come close to before. When you’re doing that, you seek out those people at church, and hug them and tell them you’re glad to see them.” She looked at the bishop, smiled and said, “If you can’t tell, I’m a hugger!”

He smiled back and said, “I can imagine! So, you say meeting attendance went up? That’s very interesting...”

Sister Jensen replied, “How could it not go up? The reason most members pull away from the Church is because they don’t feel connected to anyone in their ward. If you go to church week after week without anyone acknowledging that you’re there, let alone give you a hug, it’s hard to keep returning. When your testimony isn’t as strong as it needs to be, sometimes you need a friend at church to help you keep coming back each week.

Stephen N. Webber

“President Gordon B. Hinckley said, ‘*Everyone needs a friend, a responsibility, and nurturing with the good word of God.*’²⁶

“Members need all three of those things, and I think a friend is the most important one on the list, especially for the women. We sisters don’t have much of a problem with our testimonies, but we really need to feel loved by someone.

“Think about how inspired this program is. Every sister should have a ministering companion, two ministering sisters who are assigned to visit her, a couple of sisters she is assigned to visit, and two ministering brothers. Therefore, every sister in the ward potentially has at least seven built-in friends. The Lord is providing us with a wonderful opportunity to get to know and care for one another,” she said with a big smile.

She paused for a moment, and then said, “Let me just interject something about *assignments*. Some people, who are looking to find fault with the idea of ministering, complain about having ‘assigned friends.’ They want genuine friendships, that occur naturally, based on mutual interests and ideas. I’m all for that, too! However, Heavenly Father knows you. He knows your strengths and weaknesses. He knows what problems you’re struggling with and what problems you’ll have in the future. These ‘*assignments*’ are made by inspiration, and Heavenly Father has *prepackaged you and me with gifts and talents* from the very beginning to help these families. He knows what challenges they currently have and even the ones they’ll have in the future. Isn’t it comforting to know that we have people who love us, and who are uniquely qualified with gifts, talents, experiences and even the authority to receive revelation, to help us when we need it?”

Bishop Stephens exclaimed, “Wow! That’s a great way to look at it.”

²⁶ General Conference, April 1997, *Converts and Young Men*, President Gordon B. Hinckley,

Home Ministering

Sister Jensen replied, “When you have a testimony of the Doctrine of Ministering, it’s the only way to look at it. As we started visiting the less active members in our ward, and showing them an increase of love and concern, rather than just teaching them a lesson, their hearts started to soften. They started sharing their concerns, frustrations, doubts and stumbling blocks. Their ministering sisters, who have been *‘prepackaged’* by their Heavenly Father to help them, were then able to address those issues through prayer, testimony, example, wisdom and tailor-made lessons. Very quickly, we started seeing whole families return to Sacrament Meeting. It was wonderful! They were greeted by both ministering sisters and ministering brothers. Can you imagine how they must have felt? Instead of being embarrassed or nervous to return, it was like they hadn’t missed a day. It was a smooth transition, because they had friends at church who were genuinely excited to see them.”

Bishop Stephens said with a faux frown, “That’s remarkable! I wish people would greet me with excitement at church.”

Sister Jensen jumped on that comment, “We all do! It’s nice to feel appreciated. As ministering brothers and sisters, we should be glad to see our families at church, and we should let them know it, too.”

Bishop Stephens responded, “I would like to see more of that. Sometimes, the little cliques in a ward make it difficult for the sisters with only a couple of friends. It’s hard to fit in.”

“Bishop!” She shouted with excitement, “That’s another big benefit. All that cliquey behavior has almost completely evaporated in our ward. Sure, we have groups of friends who have similar interests and family experiences, but our ward is a lot more inclusive now. Most of the women have become great friends with the sisters they minister to. They have invited their assigned sisters to lunch, over for Family Home Evening, and some sit together at church.

“I have a great example of what I’m talking about. A couple of years ago, we assigned a young mother in the ward to minister to an elderly

woman who had become so ill and weak she wouldn't leave the house. After a while, it was clear to the woman's husband that he could trust and confide in his wife's ministering sister.

“One day he went over to the younger woman's home and told her that his wife had given up. He said she wouldn't do any of the exercises the doctors wanted her to do, and he could tell she had lost her desire to keep living. This young sister defiantly proclaimed, ‘She's not allowed to give up!’

“The younger sister then set up a *daily appointment* with her older friend to go walking together. Every day, Bishop! That's love.

“For the first several days it was just to the mailbox and back to start building up her endurance. After about a week they had walked to the end of the street. The last time I saw them, they were walking around the whole block. These two sisters, decades apart in age, are now best of friends, and they do all kinds of activities together. They have a love for one another like I've never seen before outside the bonds of family. It's an eternal friendship. It truly is a remarkable result of ministering as the Savior would.”

Bishop Stephens then asked, “Are there any lingering struggles that you still have in your ward? Surely, life isn't perfect yet, is it?” asked Bishop Stephens.

“Of course not. Our ward still struggles in areas, but we're human. We always need to improve. It's funny, the very first time it was reported that every family had received visits from their ministering brothers and sisters in the same month—100% of the ward—our bishop thanked and congratulated us for hitting that milestone, but in the very next breath, he said something like,

‘Now that everyone is being visited, let's take it to the next level and really work on the quality of our visits. In our prayers tonight, let's ask Heavenly Father if there is anything we can improve regarding our stewardships.’”

Home Ministering

Bishop Stephens, feeling like he knew Bishop Smith pretty well by now, just smiled and said, “I can see him saying that.”

Sister Jensen smiled back and said, “Bishop Smith could tell that some people still felt like reaching 100% ministering was the end-goal, so he simply wanted to remind us that visiting the families was only the first step. Magnifying this assignment with consistency is a demonstration of our sincerity, and it builds trust. When we visit regularly, we can then focus on building stronger relationships with the families we serve.”

Then she added, “The bishop always says,

‘Ministering is never done. The visit is just the beginning. You can’t truly minister the way the Savior would, without visiting people in their home.’”

Bishop Stephens had heard that statement before, and it made perfect sense. A visit is only the first priority, and ministering is the real goal. He confessed, “I really like your bishop! He seems like a great man.”

She enthusiastically shot back, “I like him too! He really cares about the members of our ward. Unfortunately, there were a few people who didn’t appreciate his invitation to continue improving our performance. In fact, after that meeting, I heard a couple of men murmuring in the hall about the new challenge. I interrupted them and told them our bishop loved them so much that he was willing to be unpopular and ask them to do hard things, just like any good parent would do for a child they love. I received a couple of embarrassed looks from those two brethren, but they needed to know that an old woman like me was going to follow the bishop’s counsel. I know Heavenly Father wants me to improve every day, personally as well as spiritually.”

Then Sister Jensen emphasized, “Let me be clear about one thing. Although Bishop Smith is always encouraging us to do better, he always makes the sisters feel appreciated for their efforts.

“Our bishop understands the value of the ministering sisters and the strength of the Relief Society. The mission of the Relief Society is different from the elders quorum. Our motto is ‘*Charity Never Faileth,*’ and the General Handbook says, ‘*Relief Society is a lifelong sisterhood.*’²⁷

“Think about that! A sisterhood of charitable women, serving and helping one another achieve their full potential.

How wonderful is that! Although there is a huge responsibility placed on our shoulders to achieve this goal, the results and the rewards are eternal.”

Then Sister Jensen looked at the clock and said, “I’ll just share one more thought with you before I go. Recently, there have been a flurry of talks given in General Conference about *the gathering of Israel on both sides of the veil*. In fact, President Russell M. Nelson recently said:

“If gathering Israel is the most important work we can be engaged in, shouldn’t retaining Israel be right up there in second place?”

“As an essential prelude to the Second Coming of the Lord, it is the most important work in the world.”²⁸

“If *gathering Israel* is the most important work we can be engaged in, shouldn’t *retaining Israel* be right up there in second place? What good does it do to gather everyone to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints if we aren’t going to welcome them in, love them and help them want to stay?

“As you can imagine, quality ministering is critical for newly baptized members of our Church, who have a hard enough time adjusting

²⁷ General Handbook - Serving in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Relief Society, Section 9.1.1-9.1.2

²⁸ General Conference, Oct. 2020, *Let God Prevail*, President Russell M. Nelson

Home Ministering

to a new lifestyle. But on top of that, they may also feel lost, alone and even unsure about the Lord's way of doing things. These courageous new members need to know they aren't alone and have a support system to help them figure out their role in their brand new religion. They need to know they have friends who will help them through any challenge or trial. And finally, they need to know that the Lord loves them, and that we love them."

Then she opened her scriptures and said, "Bishop, there's a great scripture in Moroni about this. Do you mind if I read it to you?"

He quickly responded, "Of course not. I love what I'm learning!"

She smiled and said, "In Moroni 6 we're taught the following:

'And after they had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ; and their names were taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who was the author and the finisher of their faith. And the church did meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls.'"²⁹

She looked up and said, "I have seen new members fall away due to a lack of help and attention. They felt encouragement and support throughout the investigating stage, but once they were baptized and their missionaries moved on, they were left to figure things out for themselves. Some people pull away from the Church, because they don't feel loved, or they feel they aren't worthy of God's love. When we don't go after them, and *show them they are loved*, we justify those feelings

²⁹ The Book of Mormon - Another Testament of Jesus Christ, Moroni 6:4-5

Stephen N. Webber

“New members need to be loved, nurtured and shepherded throughout their lives, and in reality, so do the rest of us who have been lifelong members. We’re all in need of nurturing, just like President Hinckley said.

All of a sudden, Bishop Stephens watched her happy countenance turn from enthusiasm, to a look of frustration. She had obviously just remembered something which really bothered her.

“Then with concern in her voice, Sister Jensen said, “Bishop, in another ward, I have a widowed friend who hasn’t had ministering brothers or sisters in her home for almost two years. They’re assigned to her, but they never visit. She has asked the ward leaders, many times, to encourage her ministering brothers and sisters to visit with her—and still no change. I can’t imagine what the Savior is thinking when He sees a lonely widow feeling neglected and forgotten.

“This is why our bishop makes sure we’re always talking about ministering in every ward auxiliary. Nobody can say, *‘I didn’t know!’*”

“And this is why I love the emphasis on *shepherding the whole flock* the way the Lord would do it. If you minister to a lifelong member with the same attention and love you would show a newly baptized member, then you’ll see the same type of continuous growth and conversion. It’s a marvelous way to care for people.”

After their time together, as Sister Jensen was walking out of the bishop’s office, she turned around and asked, “Did Bishop Smith tell you his story about Elder Walters?”

“No, he didn’t. Why?” he asked.

“Oh, it’s my favorite story,” she said. “When you see him again, you need to ask about Elder Walters.”

Home Ministering

NOTES FROM RELIEF SOCIETY

1. Even though the Handbook allows ministering to be done with a phone call or text when needed, a visit inside the home is always preferred. A phone call should be the exception, not the rule.
2. President Gordon B. Hinckley said, 'Everyone needs a friend, a responsibility, and nurturing with the good word of God.'
3. Ministering brothers and sisters should search out their assigned families at church and greet them.
4. Every day we should ask Heavenly Father what more He would like us to do.
5. Bishops and ward leaders invite their flocks to do hard things, because they love them and want them to continue to grow and improve spiritually.
6. If gathering Israel is the "most important" work in the world, shouldn't retaining Israel be the second most important?
7. Ministering is vital in the retention process of new members, as well as the reactivation process of less-active members.
8. Ministering helps any member—both new and lifelong—experience continual growth and conversion and feel the Lord's love.

Chapter 7 - The Teachers Quorum President

“The teacher’s duty is to watch over the church always, and be with and strengthen them; And see that there is no iniquity in the church, neither hardness with each other, neither lying, backbiting, nor evil speaking; And see that the church meet together often, and also see that all the members do their duty.”

Doctrine and Covenants 20: 53-55

Harrison Mann was your typical 15-year-old boy. He was starting to notice girls, he loved loud music, and even louder clothes. However, he was unlike most 15-year-olds in the real world. He was the first to raise his hand when volunteers were needed, and he was the last to leave the service project to go home. He was respectful to adults and polite to all the young ladies. He obeyed and loved his parents and wasn’t embarrassed to hug them in public. He was concerned for his sisters and looked out for them at school. Harrison Mann was a really good kid.

Bishop Stephens was told prior to the appointment that the young man only had about 30 minutes, so he jumped right in with the questions to keep him on schedule. “So, Harrison,” said the bishop, “I’m told you’re a great quorum president. Brother Thoman is very impressed with you and said I needed to talk to you to get a better understanding of ministering in your ward. Can you tell me what you’re doing?”

The young man smiled at the compliment and replied, “We’re having a lot of fun as a quorum doing our home ministering. We get along really well as a group, and we’re trying to make a difference in the ward. It’s been super fun!”

Fun? He had never heard a young man call church service “fun” before—especially ministering. The bishop’s interest continued to grow as he asked his next question, “I’ve been talking to your bishop and the other leaders in your ward, and they are doing things I’ve never seen

Home Ministering

before. How do you fit into that puzzle, and what do you do differently from the other teachers quorums in the stake?”

Harrison smiled and responded, “When I was called to serve as the quorum president, our bishop told me that I was in charge of training the quorum to be good home ministers. He always says ministering is our ‘primary duty to God.’”

“Your duty to God? I like that! It really is your duty to God, isn’t it?” responded Bishop Stephens.

“Yep. Bishop Smith told me ministering is our most important duty besides taking care of our own families,” he replied.

“Harrison, why did your bishop put you in charge of the home ministering training and not your quorum advisors?” asked the bishop sincerely.

The young man looked at his friend’s father a little bewildered and said very respectfully, assuming the bishop should have already known the answer to that question, “My bishop told me I’m responsible for training my quorum, *because I hold the keys.*”

Bishop Stephens leaned back and smiled. He knew he liked this kid, and now he was beginning to appreciate him on a completely new level. He realized very quickly, this was a mature young man who took his calling very seriously.

The bishop humbly confirmed, “That’s absolutely right, you do have that authority.” Then he paused, thought about it for a second, and asked another question. But this time Bishop Stephens had much more respect in his voice, and he addressed this young leader appropriately, “President Mann, what do you do to train your quorum members?”

The young man answered, “Well, one of the things we do before the lesson in Priesthood Meeting is have a *Ministering Moment*. That’s where we invite a quorum member to talk about a neat experience he had ministering that month, and how that experience was an opportunity to

Stephen N. Webber

magnify his priesthood. And sometimes a member of the presidency will talk about a home ministering technique or idea.”

“Impressive! Did your bishop ask you to do that?” asked Bishop Stephens.

The young man replied, “No. When our presidency was called, he told us to pray about how we could help the other quorum members develop stronger testimonies of ministering, and we all felt it would be a great way to remind and inspire them to visit their families. It’s actually caught on in the whole ward. The elders, Relief Society and even the young women are now doing them every week, too.”

“Really? Give me an example of a Ministering Moment,” the bishop requested earnestly.

President Mann explained, “Well, last week it was my turn, and I shared an experience I had earlier in the week. My father and I minister to an elderly couple, and the lady has been really sick. One night, my dad got a call right as I was getting ready to go to bed. About ten minutes later, he came into my room, all dressed up in his suit, and told me that Brother Johnson had asked him to give Sister Johnson a blessing. My dad normally takes me with him when he gives a blessing, even though I can’t help him in the circle. He says he wants me to see how blessings work as often as I can, so when I become an elder and serve a mission, I’ll be prepared to give blessings, too.”

The bishop was smiling and listening very intently. The young man continued, “But this time was different. My dad told me Brother Johnson asked him to come alone, because Sister Johnson was in bed and couldn’t get downstairs. Brother Johnson asked my dad to tell me he loved me and hoped I would understand. I could tell she was really sick.

“My dad said the best way I could help him this time, as his companion and her home minister, was to pray that he would be able to give the blessing she needed, and to pray for Sister Johnson to get better

Home Ministering

quickly. So that's what I did, and she started feeling better the very next day.

"In my Ministering Moment, I bore my testimony to the quorum about how important it is to pray for our families to be well, and also to pray for ourselves and our companions to be inspired.

"In Ministering Moments we also learn about ways we can improve as ministering companions by asking how our families are doing with their personal and family prayers or their Family Home Evenings, or we discuss new ways we can serve them. We also talk about how important it is to be praying for each family member daily. Stuff like that."

"So are you praying every day for each of the families you minister to?" Bishop Stephens asked.

"Yep, every day," said the young president. "The bishop always says, *'Prayer is service too.'*"

Bishop Stephens had started taking notes again. He had never seen a teachers quorum focus on home ministering as their "primary" duty to God.

"Anything else?" the bishop asked, knowing the boy was on a schedule.

"We also use the Ministering Moment to announce what types of service our assigned families need each week, and we coordinate help from the quorum to get the service done as soon as we can. Once a month, we do service for one of our weekly activities, and the Ministering Moment is the perfect way to find things to do. Sometimes we also have to do a service project on a weekend morning, because there are so many families in need."

"That's another great idea!" exclaimed Bishop Stephens. "But if your ward is like ours, you only have the same two or three boys show up for service projects and they end up doing all the work, right?"

"No, most of them show up. Sometimes, one of the guys will have a soccer game or a family activity or something, but almost everyone

Stephen N. Webber

comes for service projects, and it never takes very long. *The work goes so much faster when we do it as a quorum.* Besides, we always have a lot of fun and the families usually feed us treats! We love doing service,” said Harrison.

“That’s so great. I’ll bet the families you minister to really appreciate it, don’t they?” asked the bishop.

“Yeah, they really do,” the boy agreed. “One time, a lady we were helping said she felt like she had ten home ministers. That’s the other really cool thing that’s happened. All of us have gotten to know each others’ families really well. It hasn’t just made us really close as a quorum, we’ve also become really close as a ward.”

That couldn’t have been explained better by an experienced and seasoned high priest, thought the new bishop.

“Is there anything else you can tell me about Ministering Moments, President Mann?” asked the bishop.

“Not really,” he said. “The only other thing we do is remind the boys about their Ministering Interviews. Do you know what those are?”

The bishop chuckled and said, “Thanks to your ward, I do. We don’t do those in our ward very well yet, but we will soon!” Then the bishop asked, “But Brother Thoman didn’t tell me that he also interviews the boys.”

President Mann responded, “He actually does, but I was talking about our quorum interviews. My counselors and I interview our quorum members, too.”

The bishop looked at Harrison with a surprised look on his face, but he didn’t know what to say.

Harrison responded, “Bishop Smith said we also need to do them because we have a responsibility to follow up on our quorum members’ stewardship, too. The elders quorum presidency is in charge of the home ministering program, but the bishop asked us to hold a ten minute interview with each member of our quorum also, and make sure they’re

Home Ministering

magnifying their callings as home ministers. We divide up the quorum between the three of us, and we each do a couple of interviews every month. My secretary switches it up every month so we each get to see everyone in the quorum on a regular basis.

“We start the interview with an opening prayer, and we always ask the quorum member to give it. We ask them about their families, find out if there are any new service opportunities, and we ask if there are any needs we need to report to the bishop. Usually those types of things are reported through the elders quorum leaders, but every once in a while, one of our quorum members reports something which wasn’t mentioned by his adult companion. But the bishop doesn’t want anything confidential being discussed during class in Ministering Moments. Our quorum members understand confidential things need to stay private, and are only shared with the elders quorum president or the bishop.”

President Mann took one more deep breath and then said, “We also share a quick spiritual thought and bear our testimony. We always make sure we thank each person for his service. Then a member of the presidency offers the closing prayer.”

This young man was being trained by a wise bishop to become a great leader. He couldn’t believe how much he had been entrusted to do. Of course, he should be interviewing his quorum and checking on their stewardship. He held the keys to do that. No wonder this quorum was so tight knit. No wonder they all showed up to serve each other’s families. No wonder this ward was so close. It was brilliant! Not to mention, every young man in the quorum was learning how to be a leader also, just by participating in these interviews.

He wanted to keep asking questions but knew the young man was on a tight schedule. Then Bishop Stephens said, “I appreciate all the time you have spent with me. I wish I could take more of your time, but I don’t want to make you and your father late for your home ministering appointment.”

Stephen N. Webber

As if not even thinking about the mistake, Harrison casually replied, “Oh, I’m not going with my dad this time. My first counselor is my ministering companion for the kid we visit.”

That caught Bishop Stephens off guard. “What? Your companion is another boy from your quorum? I thought we always had to have at least one adult in a ministering companionship.”

Harrison responded, “Bishop Smith made this assignment. He says,

‘There’s NEVER an ALWAYS in ministering.’

“In *special situations* we can have two teachers or two priests assigned as companions to minister to another young man, and then report directly back to him. It’s all done under the bishop’s direct supervision. In fact, the bishop is officially our *third companion* if we ever need any help.”

Bishop Stephens asked, “May I ask what the special situation is in this case?”

President Mann answered, “Sure. We have a boy in our quorum with non-member parents. He comes to church once in a while, so the bishop got his parents permission and then assigned me and my counselor to minister to him. Most of the time we visit him in his home, but sometimes we invite him to one of our homes instead. Sometimes we give him a lesson, but the bishop really just wants us to make sure he feels like he’s part of the quorum. We hang out and talk, ask how he’s doing, find out what we should pray for, and we always make sure to invite him to all our activities.”

*“There’s never
an always
in ministering.”*

Then Harrison added, “Oh, and we also go with him when he meets with the missionaries.”

Bishop Stephens exclaimed, “Wait! I thought you were talking about a boy that was a member of the Church.”

Home Ministering

Harrison laughed and said, “Nope. This is a friend of ours from school who my first counselor invited to church. He liked it and wanted to keep coming. We invited him to listen to the discussions, and he said he would. His parents just gave him permission to be baptized. They’re even thinking about listening to the missionaries, too. It’s all pretty cool.”

Bishop Stephens just shook his head in disbelief. He said, “President, I am so impressed with you and your quorum, and what you’re doing. Thank you for your great example. I just have one more question for you. The purpose of Aaronic Priesthood is to help prepare you for more responsibility in the future. How do you think home ministering is helping your quorum members prepare for the rest of their lives?”

President Mann gave that question a little thought and then said, “I think one thing it’s done is prepare us to be missionaries. I’m much more confident about teaching and sharing the Gospel with others now, and so are the rest of the guys.

“Home ministering is also helping us learn how important it is to serve other people. Each of our quorum members has matured a lot since we’ve started learning how to serve the families we visit.”

After one more little pause to think, he finally said, “And I would say the most important thing I’ve learned this last year is if you will serve and pray for the people you minister to, you will start to love them like your own family.”

At first, all that Bishop Stephens could say was, “Wow!” Then he thanked President Mann for teaching him about the role of a quorum president.

He then said, “Do you mind if I call you and set up another time to meet and talk? Maybe I could bring my teacher’s quorum president with me. Would you mind?” The bishop was not just asking, he was nearly pleading.

President Mann was excited he could help and said, “Anytime! My bishop told me to bear my testimony to anyone who would listen,

Stephen N. Webber

especially about home ministering. He always says it's one of the most important things we do as a priesthood holder. I'll talk to you whenever you want."

And with that, the meeting was over.

Home Ministering

NOTES FROM AARONIC PRIESTHOOD

1. Home Ministering is a Priesthood Duty to God.
2. Teach the Aaronic Priesthood quorums the importance of home ministering and how to do it the Lord's way in lessons and by example.
3. Empower Aaronic Priesthood quorum presidents to use the keys and authority Heavenly Father has given them.
4. Have a Ministering Moment before quorum and class lessons to keep ministering top-of-mind.
5. The Ministering Moment is not a place to divulge confidential or personal information.
6. Allow the young men to ascertain service needs of the families assigned to quorum members, to bear testimony, and to reinforce the importance of home ministering as their priesthood duty.
7. It's okay to teach the presidency to hold regular (not necessarily monthly) stewardship interviews similar to the adult Ministering Interviews.
8. Choose monthly service projects based on needs of the ministering families of the quorum members.
9. In special circumstances, and under the direct supervision of the bishop, teachers and priests can be assigned with other quorum members to minister to, and fellowship young peers with unique needs.
10. Prayer is service too!
11. THERE'S NEVER AN ALWAYS IN MINISTERING!

Chapter 8 - The YW President

“Please give our young men and young women needed opportunity to accompany and be mentored by experienced ministering brothers and sisters. And please let our young rising generation inspire ministering brother and sister companions.”³⁰

Elder Garritt W. Gong

There were just a couple of people left on his list to visit with. One of them was Bishop Smith’s Young Women president. Sister Avery was a very busy lady, so instead of a sit down visit, she agreed to chat on the phone with Bishop Stephens. She presided over close to 60 young women from 11-18 years old. Although she had a dozen adult women to help her, she was ultimately in charge of the organization and its success. She also had 5 busy children of her own and helped her husband run their family business, so Bishop Stephens was perfectly fine getting whatever time she was willing to give him, even if it was on the phone.

When he sat down to call Sister Avery, he was a little more prepared than in the previous interviews, and he had lots of new questions. He understood the value and importance of the Young Women program, but was completely unaware of how Ministering was now being implemented in the organization. His ward had not been using the young women very well in the ministering effort. There were a few girls who were ministering with their mothers, but that was the extent of it. He was eager to find out how this ward was using the young women to minister.

Sister Avery answered the phone with so much enthusiasm the bishop had to adjust his own demeanor to try to match her energy. She was ready to share all she had learned about the power of ministering.

³⁰ General Conference, Apr. 2023, *Ministering*, Elder Gerrit W. Gong

Home Ministering

“So, you’re the new bishop. Congratulations!” she said as she greeted him.

“Yes, I am, and I’m sorry to ask you to give up your valuable personal time, but the Stake President assigned me to speak with the leadership in your ward to learn all I can about ministering. I’ll try to keep this as short as possible.”

“Don’t worry! I have plenty of time. I just hope you don’t mind chatting while I’m out walking my dog. This is the best time for me to get phone messages answered. What can I do for you?” she asked.

“Well, I’m so inspired by the great examples of ministering in your ward, but I know very little about the Young Women organization. Can you help me understand what role the young women play in the ward ministering effort?”

“Oh, wow!” she exclaimed. “Where do I begin? Ministering has changed everything. And I do mean *everything!*”

Then Sister Avery began explaining how the Young Women organization works. She said, “As adult leaders, we have been given the challenge to provide *shadow-leadership* for the girls, letting them lead out and be responsible for their own planning, lessons, activities and other class goals, instead of making all the decisions youth leaders used to do.”

“Shadow-leadership?” The bishop didn’t understand the reference.

Sister Avery said, “Oh, sorry. I just assume everyone knows the jargon we use in our ward. Imagine standing next to a wall with the sun behind you. The closer you are to the wall, the darker and clearer the shadow is. As you back away from the wall, the shadow becomes lighter and less defined. Eventually, when you are far enough away, you can barely even see it. That’s the kind of leadership we are supposed to be providing. Obviously, the younger girls require more help and direction. As they grow older and have a better understanding of what the Lord expects of them, especially in leadership roles, the less hands-on-

Stephen N. Webber

direction we give them. We take a secondary position in their planning, in their lessons and in their service. We're still there, and we still participate in lessons and help them with activities, but the older they are, the more responsibility we give them for the execution of those plans. The same principles apply to the young men."

Bishop Stephens was silent—writing every detail he could.

She continued, "As for ministering, in January of the year a young woman is going to turn 14, we begin praying about her as a possible ministering sister. Not all young women are ready at 13-14, but we start introducing the concept to them and their parents. The Relief Society president and I discuss each girl's family situation, personal maturity, and overall readiness. After reviewing all of these factors, and after getting approval from the bishop, an assignment is given to the young woman, from the Relief Society presidency, to minister to another woman in the ward. She is assigned to minister with an *Adult Ministering Companion*, sometimes her mother, but not always. The Relief Society president and I work together, discussing these assignments, with the direction of the Holy Ghost. It's sometimes surprising to see what companionships are created in this process. Sometimes the Spirit directs the Relief Society presidency to pair a young woman with an Adult Ministering Companion who we would never have thought of ourselves. Ultimately, it's not my responsibility to receive the final revelation—it's the Relief Society Presidency—and they get final approval from the bishop on all new companionships. But, I just love playing my part in the assignment process!"

The bishop jumped in again, "First of all, I love that you're asked to help in the assignment process. I would imagine, besides the mothers, you know the young women in the ward better than anyone. Second, why wouldn't you just assign *all of the young women* to their mothers—*every time*? That seems much easier."

Home Ministering

After pausing for a moment to cross a busy street, she continued, “Like I said, sometimes we do assign the girls to their mothers. Sometimes, a woman has more than one daughter in the Young Women organization, and she will be assigned to minister to one sister in the ward with one of her daughters, and to another sister with the other daughter. Sometimes, the mother will have both daughters assigned together in the same companionship. And other times, the mother actually tells us her daughter would be better served with a different adult companion. And then once in a while, the inspiration just takes us in a completely different direction. We always get permission from the parents before making assignments, but first and foremost, we have to be listening for what the Lord wants us to do. This is still His work, and assignments are very personalized for the needs of each of His daughters. In fact, you may have already heard the phrase, *‘There’s never an always in ministering.’* We’ve been instructed to be ready to implement any direction the Spirit may whisper to us. The Lord allows us to be 100% flexible in *how* we minister and who we assign to do that work.”

She quickly continued, “I have found, even though many of these ministering assignments are geared toward the needs of the person being ministered to, sometimes the assignment is more for the one doing the ministering. Over the years, I’ve been strengthened by some of the families I’ve ministered to much more than I could have ever impacted them with my service. These girls learn so much from the women they’re serving. In fact, the young women who have been assigned to the sisters in the ward with the biggest challenges have increased in maturity, wisdom and spirituality faster than I could have ever imagined. This is how ministering helps us accomplish the goals of the Young Women’s organization.”

“How so?” asked the bishop.

Stephen N. Webber

Sister Avery took another deep breath to keep talking and walking at the same pace, then she replied, “Well, the first two lines of the Young Women Theme are,

“I am a beloved daughter of heavenly parents, with a divine nature and eternal destiny. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, I strive to become like Him. I seek and act upon personal revelation and minister to others in His holy name.”³¹

“This is *exactly* what we are trying to help the girls understand. We become like Him through service to others. There’s no better opportunity we can give these young women than to assign them someone to pray for, to help them learn to receive inspiration about how to best serve them, and then encourage them to act upon that revelation. What an amazing opportunity!” And then she added, “The Lord knew if He gave us someone to serve, we would start to understand how much He loves that person, and even start loving them ourselves!”

He could hear Sister Avery start to get emotional as she was communicating that last thought.

She continued, “In a million years of having the very best lessons and activities, the young women could never *become like Him* without some practical experiences. They actually need to be out there doing what He would do if He were here. They actually need to be praying *everyday* for the sisters they are ministering to. They actually have to be feeling empathy and love for someone, besides themselves or their own family. This is why dedicated missionaries come home in love with the people who they’ve served. How great is it that the Lord trusts 14-year-old girls so much that He is officially calling them *to minister to others in His holy name!*”

³¹ General Handbook - Serving in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Young Women, Section 11.1.2

Home Ministering

On a dime, she changed the subject, “Remember what I said about shadow leadership?”

The bishop wasn’t ready for the question. “Umm, yeah,” he responded as he took a quick break from his notes.

“In our Young Women classes and activities, the leaders rarely get one-on-one time with the girls. Almost always, we are in group settings with very little opportunity for personalized instruction and teaching. In a ministering companionship, the girls get very individualized shadow-leadership from their carefully selected *Adult Ministering Companions*.

The adult mentors are instructed to get to know their younger companions really well, show them how to serve by example, listen to their concerns and teach them based on their specific needs. In my opinion, the calling to be an Adult Ministering Companion with a young woman, or a young man, is one of the most important callings in the entire ward. These *senior companions* are asked give the young women a chance to actively participate in the visit, encourage them to pray for the individuals

“The calling to be an Adult Ministering Companion is one of the most important callings in the entire ward.”

to whom they are assigned, and serve those families according to their circumstances. The reason we put so much thought and prayer into these companionships is because these adult mentors can potentially make-or-break the young person’s opinion of this very holy responsibility. This is why it’s so important that all of our Adult Ministering Companions have strong testimonies of the *Doctrine of Ministering*. In fact, our ward leadership even provides training for first-time Adult Ministering Companions to help them better understand their responsibilities.”

Bishop Stephens was nodding his head while he was writing. He completely understood and agreed with how important it was to pair the

youth to adults who understand and magnify their ministering responsibilities.

Then there was another long break. The bishop could tell this pause was different from just navigating the street traffic on her walk. Sister Avery was clearly contemplating her next comment carefully. Finally, she hesitantly continued, “Bishop, do you want my honest opinion as to why the Lord wants the youth to participate in such an important work?”

Once again, nodding his head—even though she couldn’t see him—he anxiously said, “Yes, absolutely! I have already learned so much from you. I want to know everything you’ve learned about ministering.”

She then said, “I believe the Lord wants these kids to begin ministering at such a young age, *because He wants them to know how much He loves them!* End of statement. Exclamation point!”

Bishop Stephens immediately stopped writing. He had the most marvelous and refreshing feeling wash over him confirming that he had just received *pure truth* from her, *but he didn’t completely understand what it meant.*

He was silent. Sister Avery knew the bishop heard her. She knew he was processing her bold testimony, and she didn’t say another word until he asked for clarification.

Finally he asked, “But *how?* How does it work? I know this is exactly what the kids need to experience, and I know feeling God’s love is the missing link for most of the youth of this generation, but *how* does ministering fill that hole?”

Sister Avery smiled. She knew he understood, and she eagerly began to explain. She answered, “Bishop, the biggest problem facing the youth of the world today, members and non-members, is they don’t know how much their Heavenly Father loves them. In fact, most don’t even know He exists. The kids of this generation often feel lonely and isolated, angry and depressed. They don’t feel loved and they don’t know how to

Home Ministering

love others in return. Love for them is what they see on social media and TV, and that's not real love. That is not Christlike love.

“When we begin to develop Christlike love for someone other than our own family, through daily prayer and service, it's much easier for us to understand how Heavenly Father could love us, even with all our flaws and problems. When we're able to love someone else, even with all their flaws and problems, we start to understand the words of the song, *'Oh it is wonderful, that He should care for me enough to die for me.'*³²

“In our leadership callings, nothing is more important than helping our young men and women know that Heavenly Father loves them unconditionally, with no strings attached. It's hard for the kids to know it for themselves until they've experienced that kind of love for someone else. Ministering is the Lord's way of teaching us—and showing us—what His love is and how it feels. And the great part is, the only effort required from these kids is giving up their time. The love they begin to feel for someone they are serving just comes naturally. It's like, all of a sudden, they care about someone else in a way they never did before. This is why the Lord wants the young men and women to minister.”

A tear rolled down the bishop's cheek as he listened to Sister Avery bear her testimony of ministering. He couldn't believe how much he didn't know about ministering prior to embarking on this journey. *How could he not see this before? How could ministering be so misunderstood? Why wasn't this being shouted from the rooftops?*

He wanted to keep learning, but he could tell she had reached the end of her walk. He thanked her for her time and knowledge, but before he could end the call she said, “Bishop, I don't want to tell you how to magnify your calling, but can I give you one bit of advice?”

“Of course you can,” he replied, fighting back the emotions.

³² *I Stand All Amazed*, Hymns (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), hymn 193, verse 1

Stephen N. Webber

She said, “Just remember, our job as leaders is to try to bring these young souls unto Christ. The General Handbook says,

*‘The purpose of a Young Women class is to help young women work together to accomplish the work of salvation and exaltation. In their classes, young women serve others, fulfill covenant responsibilities, build unity, and learn and live doctrine.’*³³

“Additionally, as leaders, we’re encouraged to help the young women understand how to assist God with His work and His glory by *‘living the gospel of Jesus Christ, caring for those in need, inviting all to receive the gospel and uniting families for eternity.’*³⁴

“We give the youth practical experience in each of these vital areas by teaching them—and showing them—how to properly minister to the needs of others. In fact, this is the mandate for the entire ward.

“The Gospel is very simple: Love God, love our neighbor and strive to keep the commandments.

Our job as leaders is also very simple, but most of the time we complicate it by adding a lot of other things to do. However, we aren’t magnifying our callings if we get distracted from trying to help the young men and women understand the doctrine of Jesus Christ, learn to serve and love one another, and keep their covenants. They aren’t too young to understand these principles. We just need to keep things simple, and focus on the *eternal lessons of life.*”

He made sure that he wrote that final note down.

³³ General Handbook, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Young Women*, 11.1.1

³⁴ General Handbook, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Young Women*, 11.2

Home Ministering

NOTES FROM THE YOUNG WOMEN PRESIDENT

1. Not all young women are ready to minister at 13–14, but start introducing the concept to prepare them.
2. Adult Ministering Companions for youth are some of the most important callings in the Church and need to be adults with firm and proven testimonies of the doctrine of ministering. A ministering companion can potentially make-or-break a young person's opinion about this holy calling. Adult Ministering Companion should have strong testimonies of the Doctrine of Ministering.
3. The Young Women and Relief Society presidents should consult about each young woman before making assignments. The Holy Ghost will ultimately direct you to the right companion.
4. There's Never an Always with ministering. Be flexible.
5. Heavenly Father wants kids to start ministering at such a young age, because He wants them to know how much He loves them. And learning to love another person helps them understand how He loves them.
6. Nothing is as important as our youth knowing that their Father in Heaven loves them unconditionally with no strings attached.
7. Ministering is God's way of teaching us—and showing us—what His love is and how it feels.
8. Ministering is God's way of allowing us to help Him with His work and His glory of salvation and exaltation.
9. Don't over complicate your calling with the youth—and wasting the kids' time—with unimportant activities. Keep it simple and focus on the important, eternal lessons of life!

Chapter 9 - The Home Minister

“Effective ministering efforts are enabled by the innate gifts of the sisters and by the incomparable power of the priesthood. We all need such protection from the cunning wiles of the adversary.”³⁵

President Russell M. Nelson

Brother Garner was listed as a “Home Minister” on the list, and Bishop Stephens was intrigued. He was looking forward to hearing what wisdom would flow from this interview.

This time however, unlike the other interviews, Brother Garner wasn’t expecting a phone call. Once Bishop Stephens had explained the purpose of his visits with the Mountain Ridge Ward leadership, Brother Garner was glad to help, although he was surprised he had been chosen from among all the other fine examples in his ward. He was happy the bishop thought he had something valuable to contribute.

When the two men met, Bishop Stephens took control of the interview. He told Brother Garner what he had learned so far and asked if there was anything more he could add to help the new bishop implement this level of ministering in his own ward.

Brother Garner thought about it for a few seconds and said, “It’s only been the last few years, since *The Challenge*, that I feel I’ve really begun to understand and catch the vision of what ministering is supposed to be, and what it can do to nurture and strengthen families and individuals. Now I know what the Lord expects from me as a shepherd in the home.”

He pulled out his scriptures and said, “In the Book of Mosiah it says we should be willing to *‘bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light; ...mourn with those that mourn; ... comfort those that stand in need*

³⁵ General Conference, Apr. 2018, *Ministering*, President Russell M. Nelson

Home Ministering

of comfort, and...stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places... ”³⁶

Then Brother Garner said, “This is our responsibility as members of the Church. This is what home ministering is to me now. Serving God by caring for and ministering to the needs of my own family and the families I’m assigned to watch over. That’s why we need to pray about each family, to receive inspiration for each individual, and to know how best to care for them and help them ‘*come unto Christ.*’ Let me give you an example.

“One of the people I’ve been assigned to shepherd is an elderly widow. She’s been very lonely since the death of her husband, and she’s had many struggles and challenges. When my companion and I go to her home, sometimes all is well in the home, and we simply share a brief spiritual message, bear our testimonies and pray with her. There are also times when she needs a blessing of comfort, direction or peace. On other visits, we discern very quickly she just needs to talk. We’re also in touch with her several times each month by phone, and we always make sure we find her at church and give her a hug and let her know we love her. She feels very cared for and knows we are aware of her concerns.”

Then he said, “I have three other families I minister to with my son.”

Bishop Stephens picked up on that and asked, “So, you have two different companions?”

Brother Garner replied, “There have been times when I’ve had *three different companions*. One time I was paired with my wife to teach a single sister, I ministered to another family with my son, and I was also companions with another elder for a third family. We are assigned by inspiration, so if Heavenly Father knows that a family, or a single adult, needs the experience of two elders, a husband and wife, or a father and son, we will get assigned accordingly.

³⁶ The Book of Mormon - Another Testimony of Jesus Christ, Mosiah 18:8-10

Stephen N. Webber

“Based on the feedback our bishop receives from the Ministering Interviews, he and the quorum and Relief Society leaders are able to make educated and inspired adjustments to companionships, as needed. This way, each family has the best possible home ministers for their specific needs. The bishop always says, ‘*Good information leads to good inspiration,*’ and I would agree.

Bishop Stephens smiled. He loved that the entire ward knew these quotes by heart and had embraced the entire program, even the administration of it. They understood the doctrine and the mechanics behind it.

Brother Garner continued, “My son is able to go with me to the other three families who I currently teach. One is a family with a husband, wife and three kids, and another is a retired elderly couple. The last family is a single mom with three kids. Each has their own issues, as we all do, but none require a special assignment.”

“That’s pretty amazing!” declared Bishop Stephens. “What other advice would you give me as I begin to implement the *Ministering Challenge* in my ward.

He thought about that for a moment and then replied, “Well, there’s one experience I had with my wife that taught me several lessons about service. Do you want to hear a quick story that makes me look really bad?”

Bishop Stephens laughed out loud and nodded affirmatively.

Brother Garner smiled back and then began his story, “When my wife and I were newly married, I would always ask her what I could do for her. Almost every time she would ask me to do the dishes, which I would eagerly do.

“Then after several years, one night I asked her that question again, but this time I could tell she was upset with me about something. I tried to get it out of her, but she resisted telling me what was wrong. Partly because she doesn’t like confrontation, and partly because she was

Home Ministering

bothered that I hadn't figured it out already. Then she finally responded with the question, "Why can't you just recognize when the dishes need to be cleaned. Why do you always have to ask what to do? Why can't you just recognize when the sink is full—and do them?"

Brother Garner, shaking his head at his own story, continued, "So from that day on, whenever I used any dish or utensil, I would rinse them off and stack them up very neatly on the counter above the dishwasher. I would even organize them by item, and in rows. One day, when I was in the process of rinsing and stacking, my wife came up from behind me and started loading my rinsed dishes into the dishwasher. She kindly thanked me for cleaning the dishes off, and then asked me, 'Why don't you just *finish the job* and put them into the dishwasher?'

"Don't give a mediocre effort. Finish the job and do it as well as you can."

She wasn't mad. She wasn't upset or bothered. She just asked me a simple question, and I just stood there thinking, *Well, duh! It would only take me one more minute, and she wouldn't have to do anything."*

"The first thing I learned from that experience was: *Finish the Job*. If someone asks us to do something, or if we volunteer to do something, don't do it half-way. Don't give them a mediocre effort. Finish the job, and do it as well as you can.

"And the second thing I learned in that moment was that the *Savior would serve a person the way he or she needs to be served*. I've realized that it's important to ask questions, get some details, and find out if there are any preferences to the way a job gets done, especially if someone asks for help. Don't blindly jump in, and do it your way. If you do, it may cause the person you've served to have to fix your mistakes.

And don't go into it thinking, *Hey, I'm giving free labor. You get what you pay for! If you want it done right, then do it yourself*. Once

again, serving the way the Savior would, makes us approach every service project very differently.

“Here’s a great example. An older couple lives across the street from me. The husband was an engineer before he retired, and he was so meticulous about details that he spent two years leveling the soil in his front yard before he planted his grass. Then once it was planted, he pulled it up and started over, because it still wasn’t perfect.” Brother Garner let out a soft laugh as he continued.

“Then one day it snowed really hard, so after I’d shoveled my sidewalks, I walked across the street to clean his driveway. Just as I started, he came out and waved me off. He told me that he had a certain way of shoveling his walkways, and he preferred to do it himself.

“I told him I was willing to do it any way he wanted, all he had to do was tell me. But he just kept saying that he’d rather do it himself. Finally I just said, ‘It’s okay. I understand. I would rather mow my own lawn than have someone else do it. I like the edges done a certain way, and everyone else just messes it up. But I promise, if you tell me how you want it done, when you’re out of town, or sick, or just can’t do it yourself, there will be at least one person on the block who knows just how you like to have your snow shoveled.

“When I said that, I could tell something had changed. I think at that point, he felt like I was a kindred spirit—another fanatic on the block who he could relate to.” Again, Brother Garner chuckled out loud as he continued to relate his story.

“Then this elderly gentleman spent 15 minutes detailing just how it was to be done—which direction to shovel and where to push the snow. It was all very methodical, and it made perfect sense to me. When he had fully explained his preferred shoveling process, he seemed relieved, because then he knew it would be done the same way he would do it.”

Brother Garner paused for a second and his tone became more somber as he continued, “This last year, my old friend passed away.

Home Ministering

Yesterday I was out shoveling their snow just the way he wanted it done. I could have done it another way this time. *How would he know?* But I have so much love and respect for him now, I wouldn't do it any other way."

There was a pause. Bishop Stephens was touched by the sincerity of this good man. He said, "Wow! You really are the model ministering brother."

Brother Garner guffawed. "No, when it comes to ministering, I'm far from the *model*. When the bishop initially issued *The Challenge*, I actually *refused* to do my ministering. The bishop had to call me into his office, remind me of my priesthood duty, and explain how I was needed by the families I was assigned to. He made it perfectly clear I was assigned by the Lord, not him. He said Heavenly Father had given me specific talents and gifts, and now He needed me to use those gifts to minister to those families. The bishop also said he was certain *they would respond to no other home minister* as well as they would respond to me. He told me he would release me from all my other callings, if needed, to ensure I had enough time to magnify this one, *because it was by far the most important.*"

Bishop Stephens had heard this story before, but he was completely caught off guard hearing it come from this great ministering brother. Then he hesitantly asked Brother Garner if there was a Brother Jones in the ward or if Brother Thoman had actually disguised Brother Garner's name when he shared the same story. Brother Garner laughed out loud and confirmed he was indeed the hold-out ministering brother in the story.

Bishop Stephens looked at him and said with a big smile, "I assure you, Brother Thoman had nothing but high praise for the reformed home minister in that story!"

"Thanks," said Brother Garner. "I fully support and sustain my leaders. The bishop did what he needed to do, and it changed my whole

paradigm of home ministering. It helped me develop a real testimony of the principle of shepherding the Lord’s flock.

“Bishop Smith cared enough about me, and the families I was assigned to care for, that he did the hard thing by calling me in and testifying of the importance of this work. I have never had a bishop care enough before to tell me to repent for being a *lousy* home teacher or ministering brother—those are my words, not his. My other bishops have just put up with me, but not Bishop Smith. He saw me neglecting one of my primary responsibilities as a priesthood holder, and lovingly helped me understand I needed to repent and change the way I looked at ministering—as much for myself as for the families to whom I was assigned. The bishop was a true example of ‘standing as a witness.’

“I’m sure by now, in your journey through our ward, you’ve heard the example of Peter and the resurrected Savior many times, but it actually has so many different applications regarding ministering. After my experience with the bishop, I actually understood how Peter felt when Jesus caught him and the other apostles fishing instead of feeding His flock. Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him. Over and over and over Peter professed his love for the Lord, but probably with less confidence each time he was questioned.

“Three times he was asked. Three times he confessed his love. Three times he was commanded, ‘Feed my sheep.’ By the end of Peter’s interview, I’m sure he was committed to fully demonstrate his love for his Redeemer and to feed the Lord’s sheep.³⁷ I assure you, at the end of my interview with the bishop, I was also extremely resolved to repent and *magnify my calling*.”

Bishop Stephens then said, “When I heard Bishop Smith read the Parable of the Hirelings, I thought it might have stung a little.”

Brother Garner laughed out loud, “*Oh that wasn’t the one that stung the most*. After he was all done teaching and encouraging me to start

³⁷ New Testament, John 21:15-17

Home Ministering

ministering the right way, he cautioned me to make sure I was also doing it with the *right spirit*, and not to just do it because I was being told to do it. Bishop Smith then read to me Moroni 7:6-8.” He opened his scriptures and read it to make sure he got the wording correct, then he began reading.

“For behold, God hath said a man being evil cannot do that which is good; for if he offereth a gift, or prayeth unto God, except he shall do it with real intent it profiteth him nothing. For behold, it is not counted unto him for righteousness. For behold, if a man being evil giveth a gift, he doeth it grudgingly; wherefore it is counted unto him the same as if he had retained the gift.”³⁸

“It was that way with Laman and Lemuel in The Book of Mormon. They eventually did follow their father into the desert and across the sea to the new world, but they did it grudgingly and murmuring. Obeying, but not with *real intent*.”

With great humility, Brother Garner admitted, “I will always be grateful that my bishop loved me enough, and had the *courage* to challenge me to be better. And on top of that, he exhorted me to avoid ministering grudgingly. I needed to be doing it *for the right reasons and with ‘real intent.’* Otherwise it wouldn’t do me, or the families I was assigned to, any lasting good”

“That’s remarkable,” said Bishop Stephens. “Thank you for sharing such a personal story.”

“It’s my pleasure. I feel it’s now my duty to bear my testimony of ministering. If there’s another priesthood holder in your ward who needs encouragement, send him my way.”

Smiling, he responded, “I’ll keep it in mind.”

³⁸ The Book of Mormon - Another Testament of Jesus Christ, Moroni 7:6-8

Stephen N. Webber

Then Brother Garner got very serious and said, “I’m not kidding, Bishop. We all need help at times. There’s a great analogy of home ministering found in a war story in the Book of Mormon.

“During one battle, every Stripling Warrior was injured, some to the point they fainted from so many wounds. After the battle, the wounded warriors who could still walk were commanded to go back into the battlefield, find their brethren who were critically wounded, and attend to their injuries.³⁹

“Bishop, *we’re all wounded warriors*—some, more than others. But, those of us who are still standing are commanded to go into the battlefield and rescue and succor our brothers and sisters. We all need to be ministered to at some point.”

Bishop Stephens assured Brother Garner he would indeed use him as a resource in the future and thanked him for the generous offer. The two new friends then bid each other a good evening.

³⁹ The Book of Mormon - Another Testament of Jesus Christ, Alma 57:19-27

Home Ministering

NOTES FROM HOME MINISTER

1. Ministering is much more than the lesson. It's bearing one another's burdens, giving comfort and standing as a witness, at all times.
2. Companionships are prayerfully considered and assigned based on the needs of the family members.
3. Bishops should get all the information they can from quorum leaders' Ministering Interviews so they can make educated and inspired decisions about assigning companionships.
4. It's okay to mix and match companionships to best suit the needs of each family.
5. Finish the job. Give your best effort, not a mediocre effort.
6. The Savior would serve people the way they need to be served. We should do the same.
7. Serve with real intent. Avoid murmuring or serving grudgingly .
8. Sometimes a Personal Priesthood Interview is needed with a ministering brother that is not fully committed, to remind him that diligent ministering is a priesthood requirement—just like tithing or priesthood meeting attendance.
9. Personally bear your testimony, and teach the importance of the calling.
10. We're ALL in need of ministering, no matter what calling you hold or the strength of your testimony.

Chapter 10 - Brother Stanley

“After all is said and done, true ministering is accomplished one by one with love as the motivation. The value and merit and wonder of sincere ministering is that it truly changes lives. When our hearts are open and willing to love and include, encourage and comfort, the power of our ministering will be irresistible. With love as the motivation, miracles will happen, and we will find ways to bring our “missing” sisters and brothers into the all-inclusive embrace of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁰

Sister Jean B. Bingham

As the bishop knocked on the last door of his journey to understand ministering, he felt a little apprehension. Bishop Stephens had contacted Brother Ben Stanley before he came, but he did not sound as receptive as the others. The brother had not expected the call, and he didn't understand why a neighboring bishop would want to talk to him. The door opened and the bishop was met by a very large man, broad-shouldered, unshaven and looking like he wasn't too happy to have a visitor. Brother Stanley invited the bishop into his living room where his wife was sitting reading a book. Brother Stanley introduced his wife and after exchanging the requisite niceties, she began to excuse herself and leave the conversation. Sensing she would be a good buffer, Bishop Stephens asked her to stay and join the conversation, which she agreed to do.

As they sat down, it got very quiet. Brother Stanley just sat there in his big chair looking at the new bishop on the couch. He was an intimidating man--maybe in his late-sixties--very stoic, very tough looking. He appeared to be the kind of guy that worked with his hands

⁴⁰ General Conference, April 2020, *Ministering as the Savior Does*, Sister Jean B. Bingham

Home Ministering

and did hard labor for a living. He was a real man's man. He also looked like he wasn't open to a lot of chitchat, so Bishop Stephens got right to the point.

He looked at Ben's wife and said, "Sister Stanley, I'm so sorry to bother the two of you, but I'm the new bishop in a neighboring ward and President Richards asked me to reach out to your bishop to learn more about ministering as I begin my stewardship. Bishop Smith gave me a list of the leaders of the ward to visit. Ben was the last one on my list with a little note beside it."

Then looking at Ben, "Your bishop wrote down that you are one of the standout ministering brothers in your ward, and I should ask about how you minister so well."

Brother Stanley's stern look suddenly changed to one of unease and embarrassment. He looked down at the floor and then began shifting in his seat, looking very uncomfortable. He then looked at his wife for help responding to the question. Bishop Stephens also looked over at Sister Stanley for some sort of explanation for the odd response he had just witnessed, only to see a completely different reaction. She was smiling and tears were forming at the corners of her eyes.

She pulled out a tissue, wiped her eyes and then said, "Ben visits the bishop's family. Did the bishop tell you that?"

"No...uh, he didn't mention that," he responded.

"Yes, he's been visiting him for years. Did the bishop tell you that Ben doesn't attend church?"

The bishop leaned back in his chair, and with a little hesitation he shook his head slowly and replied, "No. He didn't mention that either."

Then Sister Stanley explained that Ben hadn't attended church for years. She said that when their adult son unexpectedly passed away, Bishop Smith, who was brand new at the time, visited their family to learn more about their son, whom he never had a chance to meet. During this visit, and as they planned the funeral together, he got to know the

Stanleys very well. She noted that the bishop really took a liking to Ben, and a friendship sprang out of this tragedy. Then one day not too long after the funeral, a quorum leader called Ben and asked him to be a home teacher, back when it was called Home Teaching. At first he declined, but when he heard he would be home teaching the bishop's family, he reluctantly agreed.

The bishop glanced over at Ben as Sister Stanley spoke of what a great minister he had become. Never looking up from his feet, Ben would smile occasionally as she described different events. She said the bishop always invited Ben to stand in the circle when he gave his family blessings and then again when he ordained his son an elder. She said the bishop's wife would always invite Ben to the ward activities and ask him to make his famous Dutch Oven Peach Cobbler. He never missed an activity. Then, with a little *fake-frustration* in her voice—but still smiling—she mentioned that Ben would only attend church when the bishop's daughters would beg him to come to Sacrament Meeting as they would leave or return from their missions. That one actually got a chuckle from Ben.

Then she paused and tears returned. As she continued, she recounted the first time he went over to the bishop's home with his new companion, who was another older gentleman in the ward. She said, "Ben was very nervous about going. He made it clear to his companion that he didn't want to teach a lesson—ever. But when they got over to the bishop's house, the family really put him at ease. They asked him all about his job, his family, and his last hunting trip. Ben said they even laughed and teased him when he accidentally swore about something." She rolled her eyes and used air quotes when she said the word *accidentally*.

"The whole family just really made him feel comfortable in their home—like he belonged there. Then his companion shared a short spiritual thought with the family. After it was done, Ben started to stand up and say goodbye. That's when Bishop Smith asked Ben if he would

Home Ministering

say the closing prayer and leave a blessing on their home and family. Ben told me he didn't know what to do. He didn't pray out loud very often, in fact, hardly at all. Now he was being asked to pray for a family he had just met. He came home and told me he didn't even remember what he said in the prayer, but a few days later Bishop Smith approached me, with tears in his eyes, and told me it was the most sincere prayer he had ever heard.

“You know, Ben is a different man now. He's softened. He shares his thoughts and shows his love more freely. He's also developed a love for the bishop's family. He really loves each one of them. All of the bishop's kids are grown and gone now, but when Ben visits their home, he still asks about each kid and what he can be praying for. He prays for them every single day. He really does “minister” to the Smiths. I know, because they always tell me how much they love him. Do you know how much that means to me?” she asked through the tears, choking back the emotion.

*Ministering is
for everybody.
There are no
requirements and
there are no
limitations.*

Nobody spoke. Sister Stanley couldn't. Bishop Stephens was wiping tears from his eyes. Then Ben finally looked up from the ground and said, “I really do love the bishop's family. Those kids are like my own grandchildren. I don't know how it happened, but all of a sudden I cared about a family I barely even knew. There was just an immediate bond. I really love them.”

Even tough old Ben started to get emotional.

Bishop Stephens finally spoke up and said, “Wow! You really are a great example of ministering. I can't tell you how much I appreciate you sharing your story. I hope one day I can be the same kind of ministering brother that you are. You've set a high bar for the rest of us.”

Brother Stanley looked down at his feet again—but this time with a big smile.

NOTES FROM BROTHER STANLEY

1. Ministering is for everybody. There are no requirements. There are no limitations.
2. It is highly recommended giving less-active members opportunities to serve. In many circumstances, they will accept callings and assignments which will eventually lead to their full participation.
3. Praying for your families softens hearts.
4. Ministering changes people on the inside.

Chapter 11 - The Bishop (Part 2)

“As we look forward to and embrace the ‘restitution of all things,’ which has and will come through the prophesied events of our time, we are being prepared for the Savior’s Second Coming. And what better way to prepare to meet Him than to strive to become like Him through lovingly ministering to one another! As Jesus Christ taught His followers at the beginning of this dispensation, ‘If thou lovest me thou shalt serve me.’ Our service to others is a demonstration of discipleship and our gratitude and love for God and His Son, Jesus Christ.”⁴¹

Sister Jean B. Bingham

After a very enlightening journey with the leadership of the Mountain Ridge Ward, Bishop Stephens was eager to meet with Bishop Smith again and discuss what he had learned.

The two greeted each other and then Bishop Smith asked, “So Bishop, what do you think?”

Bishop Stephens looked at his mentor and then said sincerely, “Honestly, I think ministering is just home and visiting teaching done the way it was supposed to be done all along.”

Bishop Smith laughed out loud and responded, “Well, I would have to agree!”

Then Bishop Stephens admitted, “After all these years, I think I finally understand what is expected of me as a priesthood holder. Thank you for this journey. I feel like I’m now ready for my calling as bishop, and I’m excited to start seeing the results of ministering in our ward..”

⁴¹ General Conference, Apr 2018, *Ministering as the Savior Does*, Jean B. Bingham

Stephen N. Webber

The veteran bishop smiled and replied, “I’m glad we could help. Now that you’ve caught the vision of *home ministering*, you just need to apply what you know. Otherwise, this whole exercise was all for nothing. Several other leaders have seen what we’re doing, but many have chosen not to act on it. Unfortunately, it’s just human nature to take the path of least resistance.

“It’s similar to an investigator receiving the missionary lessons, feeling the Spirit tell them it’s true, and yet they decide it’s just too hard to change.

“There are also some bishops who just don’t see the potential of ministering. When they look at this as just one more program they have to implement and oversee, it overwhelms them. You know what I’m talking about. You’ve been there.”

Bishop Stephens smiled sheepishly in agreement.

“The veteran bishop continued, “Additionally, there’s nothing easy about getting an entire ward to work harder at something which they think they’re already doing well. The biggest challenge for us was getting the ward members to look at home ministering differently, and to minister in the homes a little better. To *pray daily* for each of their families by name, and to listen to Heavenly Father’s direction when He tells them how their families need to be served. It wasn’t easy, but once they tried it, they were hooked.”

Bishop Stephens nodded thoughtfully, and after letting that sink in for a moment, he asked, “I can see how this would work in an area like ours, where we don’t have to travel more than an hour to visit any family in our ward, but how does this work in a larger geographical area?”

Bishop Smith answered, “Exactly the same way. The more a ward is spread out, the more important it is to home minister.

“Now of course, there are some wards which have lower activity levels, and their resources to home minister effectively are stretched

Home Ministering

pretty thin. But it doesn't change the Lord's mandate to visit the home of each member.

“The Relief Society and quorum presidents may need to get creative and make adjustments from time to time. They may need to concentrate most of their efforts on the less-active and new members occasionally, or spread out their resources by only assigning either ministering brothers or sisters, but not both. There may be times when the quorum and Relief Society need to collaborate and assign a husband and wife team together to minister to a family. In extreme cases, and where distance is a real problem, and members are spread out geographically, home ministers may occasionally need to make a phone call or video-chat with a family to see how they're doing and what they can pray for. Just like Elder Holland said in his first ministering talk, technology has come a long way, and we have a lot of new options to stay connected to one another. If we quit looking at ministering as just a lesson, we will find there are many ways to *minister* to the needs of the families and individuals we are assigned to visit.

“But in the end, we are accountable to the Good Shepherd for this stewardship. He knows if we are doing all we can do, and He will tell us if we need to do more. We just need to be humble and listen.”

Then Bishop Smith added, “President Hinckley always told us ‘Do your very, very best,’⁴² and ‘Try a little harder to be a little better.’⁴³ By now, you probably know I subscribe to that philosophy. If we do our ‘*very, very best,*’ we will bless a lot of people through home ministering.”

“But Bishop...” the veteran waited until Bishop Stephens was looking right into his eyes.

⁴² Conference Report, Apr. 1999, Find the Lambs, Feed the Sheep, President Gordon B. Hinckley

⁴³ Conference Report, Apr. 1995, *We Have a Work To Do*, President Gordon B. Hinckley

Stephen N. Webber

“Bishop, you must remember, most of the things we do—especially with regard to home ministering—are not spelled out in the General Handbook. It only gives us the outline, and we are to use the Holy Ghost to fill in the blanks for our own stewardships. The way we watch over the flock in this ward may not be the right way for you. Be prayerful and the Lord will tell you how you should implement the shepherding process in your own ward.”

Bishop Stephens smiled and nodded. Then he remembered what Sister Jensen had said, and he asked, “Can you tell me about Elder Walters? Sister Jensen said it was one of her favorite stories.”

Bishop Smith leaned back in his chair, smiled and said, “Well, I have to admit, it’s my favorite story, too. The experience actually changed my life.”

Bishop Smith slowly swung his chair to the side to face the only window in his office. He stared out the window for a long moment, as if he was transporting himself back in time.

Then he began...“I actually grew up in a home with inactive parents who eventually divorced. Understandably, I became a very unhappy kid with a big chip on my shoulder. Luckily, I had some really good friends who were active members of the Church. They consistently invited me to church and kept close tabs on me as we were growing up. But after graduation, when they all began leaving for college and missions, I started to fade away from the Church again. I’d never actually gained a real testimony for myself, and without friends to encourage me or home teachers to keep inviting me, there was nothing compelling me to return.

“However, my very inspired bishop saw me slipping away and called me in for an interview. That’s when he challenged me to serve a mission. I actually laughed at him and said, ‘Not me! A mission is not for me.’ Thank goodness he wouldn’t accept my answer and asked me to go home and think about it for a few weeks.

Home Ministering

“Well, the Lord didn’t give me a *few weeks*. He went to work on me immediately, and within just a couple of days, I had an unexpected, profoundly spiritual experience which confirmed I needed to serve a mission. So, to my own amazement, I returned to the bishop and started the paperwork.

“As you can imagine though, not long after I got into the mission field, my brand-new testimony was put to the test. It could only carry me so far, and I began struggling to conform to the mission rules. One of my first companions told the mission president I had a big chip on my shoulder and needed an attitude adjustment—which was true!” He looked at Bishop Stephens, smiled and shrugged, and then continued.

“When news of my transfer arrived, so did the warnings. Before I could even get my bags packed, the missionaries in my district started warning me about Elder Walters, my companion-to-be. Of course, those elders had never actually met Elder Walters, nonetheless I foolishly considered them to be completely reliable sources. So, without ever meeting my new companion, I already disliked him.

“Several hours later, I arrived in a beautiful little town on the coast of Spain. That’s when I first saw my six-foot-five missionary companion, lumbering down the sidewalk toward me. Without even hearing him say a word, I immediately felt threatened, and my wall went up. Unjustifiably, I decided at that very moment all of the stories about him were true.

“Within a day, my dislike for him had turned to *loathing* for the way he walked, the way he talked, and even the way he chewed his food, and it didn’t take him long to sense it. Keep in mind, this poor elder had done *nothing* wrong, but as could be expected from my bad behavior, he was starting to feel the same way about me.” Bishop Smith was shaking his head, still clearly disappointed in past behavior.

“On the third day I was with Elder Walters, the assistants to the mission president came to our apartment under the pretense of doing

companion splits. To this day, I still believe the mission president only sent them to determine if we were still alive, or if we had beaten each other to death.

“The assistant who I split off with was a very happy, charismatic, red-headed kid. He had a gift of making people feel as if they were his best friend, and I immediately felt I could trust him.” Bishop Smith was beginning to smile again.

He continued, “So, I told the elder what was going on and begged him for an emergency transfer. I told him nobody should be subjected to this type of punishment, and I wanted out of this companionship, or I was going home.

“To his credit, the assistant held his ground and told me I wasn’t going anywhere for at least a month. He said the assignment came by inspiration, and the Lord expected me to serve valiantly while I was there. He reminded me I couldn’t serve well without the Holy Ghost, therefore I better quickly figure out how to love Elder Walters so the Spirit could return to our companionship.

“I explained loving Elder Walters was not possible, and even if I wanted to, Elder Walters didn’t like me either.

“Then this kid, who was only about a year older than I was, challenged me to do something which changed the way I would eventually live my life, the way I would raise my children, and even the way I would minister to this ward.”

Bishop Smith then looked at Bishop Stephens and raised his eyebrows as if to ask, *Are you ready for what I’m about to share with you?*

Bishop Stephens gave him an eager nod to prompt him forward.

Bishop Smith smiled and then looked back out the window. He said, “This great young man challenged me to do just one simple thing each day that transformed our companionship of mutual dislike and failure, to

Home Ministering

a companionship of love, which then would witness miracles and change lives. His challenge was simple:

“If you will perform one act of selfless service for your companion—every day—by the end of the month your hate for him would turn to love.”⁴⁴

Bishop Smith let this hang in the air for a second, and then continued, “He told me if I would shine his shoes, cook him breakfast, make his bed or give any other type of service, including pray for him each day, my heart would begin to change, and I would come to love Elder Walters.”

“Of course,” the veteran bishop said sarcastically, “because I knew everything back then, I scoffed and told him he was nuts. I told him there was no way I could ever love Elder Walters. But eventually, after some encouragement from the young elder, and after realizing I wasn’t getting out of that companionship until the next transfer, I reluctantly accepted his challenge.

“So, I started praying for Elder Walters that same day, and I continued to do something nice for him for the rest of the month. After just a couple of days, it actually became fun, and I even started making a game out of it. Before the week was up, Elder Walters caught on to what I was doing, and it almost became a competition to see who could outdo the other person’s last act of service.

“I couldn’t believe it, but in just a few days Elder Walters and I were already friends, and I can honestly say, by the end of the month, *service had changed my hateful heart*. I had actually grown to love Elder Walters, and neither of us wanted to be transferred apart. It’s now been over 40 years, and we still keep in contact to this day.”

⁴⁴ Kevin Doman, Assistant to the President, Spain Barcelona Mission, 1984 and Former Mission President of the Tuxtla, Gutiérrez, Mexico Mission, 2016-2019

Stephen N. Webber

Bishop Smith was looking at Bishop Stephens now. He then said with a chuckle, and a tone of absolute fact, “That wise young assistant changed the course of my life. Not only did his inspired counsel help me find the desire to keep serving my mission and become a better missionary, he inadvertently dissolved the chip which had been on my shoulder since I was a young child. And the most important thing he did for me—back in that little Spanish town—was reveal the roadmap to true happiness in this life. He showed me that *selfless service leads to Christlike love.*”

Bishop Stephens listened silently, as he took in everything this great man was sharing.

Then Bishop Smith said something that pricked the heart of his new friend. He said, “Bishop, it may already be obvious to you, but I want you to know, even more important than all the practical benefits provided to the families receiving the ministering service, the real spiritual blessings are given to the ones who valiantly perform the service.

“The Lord told us that if we love Him, we should keep His commandments. And what are His commandments?” he asked rhetorically, quickly answering his own question. “The first great commandment is to love God, and the second is to love our neighbor. I am certain that the key to keeping those two commandments is serving those around us. The more you serve someone, the more your love grows for that person. It’s as simple as that.”

Bishop Stephens was nodding quietly in agreement, so Bishop Smith continued sharing his wisdom. He said, “As you know, service to our spouse is one of the most important things we can do to transform the romantic love—the feeling which attracts us to one another—into a Christlike love that will endure through the eternities.

“However, there’s no promise or guarantee that the people we serve will love us in return, and we can’t perform any service with an expectation that they will. But regardless of how they feel about us, we

Home Ministering

have a promise from our Heavenly Father that if we serve His children *our love for them will continue to grow.*

“For example, a mother can’t help loving her child, even if he’s been disobedient or disrespectful, simply because of all the service she’s given to that child, every-single-day of his life.

“And on a much more eternal level, the Savior loves each of us as a result of the infinite sacrificial service He rendered on our behalf, despite our disobedience or our feelings about Him. No matter how far we stray, the Good Shepherd will always love His flock.

“So, as we serve others, *our hearts change.* And as we have been taught by King Benjamin in the Book of Mormon,

‘When ye are in the service of your fellow beings, ye are only in the service of your God.’⁴⁵

“When we are serving God’s children, we are also serving Him, therefore our love for Him will inevitably grow, too. That’s how we keep *the two great commandments.* Obeying the rest of the commandments becomes a natural byproduct of keeping the first two. Pretty simple, huh?” once again, asking rhetorically.

“Our ministering brothers and sisters love their families because they serve them, even if the only service they give is a daily prayer. Remember, *prayer is service, too.* And the key to sincere and effective home ministering is praying daily for the families to whom we are assigned.

“If every home minister throughout the world would pray each day for their assigned families, and then follow the inspiration which naturally comes, it would change their hearts and their efforts, and our wards would truly begin to feel like Zion.

⁴⁵ The Book of Mormon - Another Testament of Jesus Christ, Mosiah 2:17

“Love is what makes ministering so effective in this ward. If our intentions were phony, people would see right through it, and then this whole effort would fail.”

As Bishop Stephens sat there feeling the Spirit testify of the truths he had received—and trying to process it all—the veteran bishop leaned forward again and asked, “Bishop, the first day we met, I told you I’d finally figured out the purpose for home ministering—the real reason for ministering assignments. Do you remember what I said to you that day?”

Bishop Stephens had received so much new information the last few days, he had to admit he couldn’t remember.

Bishop Smith nodded. He had total empathy for the massive paradigm shift Bishop Stephens had been experiencing the previous few days, because years before, he went through the same process himself. Not remembering an off-the-cuff statement was completely understandable. He then pulled out his scriptures and turned to Moroni 7 in The Book of Mormon and began to read:

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail—

‘But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.

*‘Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear **WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM**, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure.’”⁴⁶*

⁴⁶ The Book of Mormon - Another Testament of Jesus Christ, Moroni 7:46-48

Home Ministering

“Think about that! The one word that describes Jesus Christ best is *Love*. And like the scripture says, if we are to ‘*be like Him*,’ we need to develop a Christlike love, or charity.

“Unfortunately, so many members of the Church spend their entire lives stressing about not being adequate—not living up to Heavenly Father’s expectations. They don’t see a realistic path for themselves to *do all they need to do* to earn entrance into His presence. But what those people don’t understand is that *we are judged by who we have become, not what we have done.*”

Then, with incredible passion and sincerity, Bishop Smith asked, “Bishop, is it possible that the real reason that the Good Shepherd has given every adult member of the Church a ministering assignment is that Ministering is the Lord’s best and easiest way of perfecting His saints? Is it possible that by learning to serve others, and by allowing others to serve us, we are able to develop the essential Christlike attributes which are necessary to become like God and live with Him again?”

Bishop Smith then said, “I like to call it *The Process of Perfecting the Saints*:

If you serve like Him, you will love like Him.

*If you love like Him, **YOU WILL BE LIKE HIM.***

He continued, “First, as we begin to serve our neighbors as Jesus would, we learn to love them as He does. As Christlike love for others develops within us, we naturally start to become like Him.

“Second, we increase in humility, and begin to overcome pride, by graciously allowing others to serve us, *as they also strive to walk the covenant path of becoming like Christ.*

“The Gospel *is* that easy! The change that happens to the truly valiant ministering brother or sister is divinely designed.”

And then without any prompting, the veteran bishop began reciting the same quote he shared in their first visit, but this time from memory:

“Brethren, home [ministering] is not just another program. It is the priesthood way of watching over the Saints and accomplishing the mission of the Church. Home [ministering] is not just an assignment. It is a sacred calling...a program that touches hearts, that changes lives, and that saves souls; a program that has the stamp of approval of our Father in Heaven; a program so vital that, if faithfully followed, it will help to spiritually renew the Church and exalt its individual members and families.”⁴⁷

Then Bishop Smith smiled, and said with resolve, “Did you catch that? If faithfully followed, Home Ministering will *spiritually renew the Church and exalt its members*. How does ministering exalt the members of the Church? By changing our hearts and helping us develop the necessary Christlike attributes of charity and humility.”

“Bishop, you’ll never know how grateful I am to have been exiled to that little pueblo with Elder Walters, because it was where I learned the most important Gospel lesson—*Christlike love comes through selfless service.*”

⁴⁷ General Conference, April 1987, *To the Home Teachers of the Church*, President Ezra Taft Benson

Home Ministering

MORE NOTES FROM THE BISHOP:

1. Home ministers in wards that cover a larger geographical area have the same mandate to watch over and strengthen their assigned families. In fact, ministering is even more important in wards with larger geographical boundaries.
2. Home ministers may need to get creative in how they check in with families, ascertain needs, and care for those needs.
3. "Try a little harder, to be a little better." – President Gordon B. Hinckley
4. We're accountable to God for our stewardship. He knows if we are doing our best and will tell us what more we can do...if we will listen.
5. Christlike love comes from service to the Good Shepherd's flock.
6. Prayer is service, too.
7. The key to sincere and effective ministering is praying each day for the families we minister to, and then following the inspiration we receive.
8. Is it possible the real purpose of ministering is to help us develop the Christlike attributes we need to become like the Savior and live with Him again?
9. The Process of Perfecting the Saints – If you serve like Him, you'll love like Him. If you love like Him, YOU'LL BE LIKE HIM.

Chapter 12 - The Challenge

“It has never been more imperative to know how the Spirit speaks to you than right now. In the Godhead, the Holy Ghost is the messenger. He will bring thoughts to your mind which the Father and Son want you to receive.”⁴⁸

President Russell M. Nelson

The mentor looked at Bishop Stephens and said, “Well, after everything you’ve heard and seen, would you agree there’s no secret to what we do in this ward? We simply do our ministering the way the Lord intended it to be done.”

The new bishop agreed. He had read Section 20 in the Doctrine and Covenants many times, and he was well aware of the description of home ministering, but he had never seen a ward take it to the level prescribed in the scriptures. *Why?* He had only two answers: *Tradition and Habit*.

Bishop Stephens then reluctantly said, “I’m actually embarrassed it’s taken me so long to see what real ministering is all about—how inspired and important it is to the families I visit, and to my own personal spiritual growth and perfection. I feel like I’ve just found the *Mona Lisa* sitting in a cardboard box in my attic. It was there all the time, but I just couldn’t see its value.”

Bishop Smith responded, “It’s okay. Now that you know—change! Implement these principles in your own stewardship, and issue *The Challenge* to your ward. Invite them to pray everyday for the welfare of their ministering families, and to follow the direction Heavenly Father gives them when the inspiration is received.

⁴⁸ General Conference, April 2020, *Hear Him*, President Russell M. Nelson

Home Ministering

“You know, sometimes people tell me, ‘*I’ve never heard the Holy Ghost speak to me, or give me direction like that,*’ and I tell them, ‘Sure you have!’

“Then I give them some homework, especially the youth, to get on their knees with a pencil and piece of paper and ask Heavenly Father, ‘*What is one thing I can do better tomorrow?*’

“But, I also remind people that they won’t get a \$100 answer to a ten cent prayer.⁴⁹ They need to be sincere and approach the Lord with real intent. They need to put in a little effort and spend a little time on their knees. And if they do, they’ll feel the Holy Ghost put at least one idea into their head of something they can do better, maybe even three or four. Then they need to ask if there is anything they can do better as a home minister and write that inspiration down also.

“You won’t get a \$100 answer to a ten cent prayer.”

“As they start to recognize the promptings, more will come—unless they don’t act on that inspiration, of course.”

Bishop Smith smiled again and said, “Acting on the prompting is important. I have a good friend who always says, ‘*If the Holy Ghost is telling you to do something you don’t want to do, don’t worry about it! Just ignore Him long enough, and that feeling will go away.*’”⁵⁰

After a little chuckle the bishop continued, “Of course, it’s meant to be a joke, but *it’s also absolutely true.* We must act on inspiration or Heavenly Father will find someone else to accomplish His will.”

Bishop Stephens had been spiritually filled. He felt blessed to have been educated by such a loving and dedicated servant of the Lord. But now the two bishops seemed to sense their conversation was drawing to a close, and it was time to get back to the work of the Lord.

⁴⁹ Bishop Wayne Wiseman, Cedar Hills 4th Ward, Cedar Hills West Stake, 1998-2004

⁵⁰ Steven E. Garner

Stephen N. Webber

Bishop Smith got up from his chair, extended his hand across the desk, and said, “Bishop, it’s been a pleasure. You’re going to be a great leader.”

As the two bishops walked out of the office and into the hall, Bishop Smith couldn’t resist sharing one more piece of advice.

He said, “Bishop, if we, as the *shepherds of the flock*, are going to magnify our callings, we’ll need to ask our ward members to raise the bar from time to time, and do more. That’s not how we win the Mr. Popularity award, but that’s our job.

“My daughter’s mission president always said, *‘Be bold, be clear and be quiet.’*⁵¹

“I’ve always liked the *‘be quiet’* part. Sometimes, after we invite our members to do something that’s outside their comfort zones, we feel like we need to justify or make excuses for what we’re asking them to do. Don’t ever be shy about inviting people to do what the Lord wants them to do. It’s our job.

“But after we tell our ward members what the Holy Ghost wants us to reveal to them, *we need to ‘be quiet,’ and let Him confirm in their hearts that it is a Gospel truth.* Then, they’ll need to choose for themselves whether they’ll follow the Good Shepherd or wander off from His flock and get lost.

“Now, go back to your ward, and *‘be bold, be clear and be quiet’* and you’ll see hearts change and miracles happen. I promise.”

And he did.

⁵¹ President Ronald L Craven, North Carolina, Charlotte Mission (2012-2015)
Original Quote by Elder W. Craig Zwick

Talks on Ministering - Past and Present

Ministering - President Russell M. Nelson, April 2018 General Conference

Ministering with the Power and Authority of God - President Russell M. Nelson, April 2020 General Conference

Be with and Strengthen Them - Jeffrey R. Holland, April 2018 General Conference

Ministering as the Savior Does - Jean B. Bingham, April 2018 General Conference

Ministering - Gerrit W. Gong, April 2023 General Conference

Shepherding Souls - Gary E. Stevenson, October 2019 General Conference

Emissaries to the Church - Elder Jeffrey R. Holland October 2016 General Conference

True Shepherds - President Thomas S. Monson October 2013 General Conference

To the Home Teachers of the Church - President Ezra Taft Benson April 1987 General Conference

Home Teaching - A Sacred Calling - Elder L. Tom Perry October 1978 General Conference

Feed My Sheep - Sister Silvia H. Allred October 2007 General Conference

Home Teachers—Watchmen Over the Church - James A. Cullimore October 1972 General Conference

The Saints Securely Dwell - Elder Boyd K. Packer October 1972 General Conference

About the Author



Steve Webber lives in Cedar Hills, Utah, with his wife, Jana. They are the parents of five amazing children; four daughters and a son.

Among other callings, Steve has served as Young Mens president, elders quorum president, high priest group leader, bishop, and home minister, giving him a unique perspective on the effect that valiant ministering can have on the flock of the Good Shepherd.

Steve served an LDS mission in the Spain, Barcelona mission, and later graduated from Brigham Young University in Business Management. He owns Timpanogos Media, LLC.

Ordering Information for Wards and Stakes

The purpose of *Home Ministering - The Process of Perfecting the Saints* is to help ministering brothers and sisters catch the vision of the true purpose and potential of their calling. After publishing the first version of this book, many ward and stake leaders purchased books by the case to distribute to the members of their congregations. Their purpose in doing this was to help them catch the vision and understand the blessings of serving their ward brothers and sisters. As those leaders reported back the wonderful results they were experiencing, it became clear to the author that this was no ordinary book, and it had the potential to create a widespread groundswell of enthusiasm for ministering.

Therefore, in an effort to help deliver the messages found in this book to an even larger audience, the author is providing group/bulk discounts (up to 50% off the cover price) for ward and stake leaders who want to make *Home Ministering - The Process of Perfecting the Saints* available to the members in their area. For quotes on orders of 25 books or more, contact the author directly.

Text: 1-801-369-3029

Email: Steve@TimpMedia.com

HomeMinistering.com

Ordering Information for *Keeping Watch*



Keeping Watch - by Yongsung Kim

I would like to thank artist Yongsung Kim, and Havenlight Art in American Fork, Utah, for graciously allowing me to use the painting *Keeping Watch* for my book cover. It has always been my favorite image of the Good Shepherd watching over his little flock. If you look closely, you can see that the Shepherd is alerted to a potential threat in the woods. Some of the sheep also notice, however there are a few that are oblivious to the danger. Such is life. The Adversary has enlisted temporal and spiritual wolves to attempt to destroy the flock of God. However we must always be on guard to ensure our own survival, as well as the well being of those we have been commissioned to safeguard.

To order a print or learn more about the cover art painting *Keeping Watch* by Yongsung Kim, please scan the QR Code to visit our website LDSart.com.

