

# The Ministry of Reconciliation

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I testify of the tranquility to the soul that reconciliation with God and each other will bring if we are meek and courageous enough to pursue it.

Last April, when President Russell M. Nelson introduced the concept of ministering, he stressed that it was a way to keep the great commandments to love God and love each other.<sup>1</sup> We, as officers of the Church, openly applaud and congratulate you on the tremendous response you have begun in that regard. We thank you for following our beloved prophet in this wonderful endeavor and suggest that you not wait for many more instructions. Just jump into the pool and swim. Head toward those in need. Don't be immobilized wondering whether you should do the backstroke or the dog paddle. If we follow the basic principles that have been taught, stay aligned with priesthood keys, and seek the Holy Spirit to guide us, we cannot fail.

This morning I wish to speak of an even more personal aspect of ministering that isn't by assignment, does not involve a calendared interview, and has no reporting line except to heaven. Let me share just one homespun example of that kind of ministering.

Grant Morrell Bowen was a hardworking, devoted husband and father who, like many who made their living on the land, had an economic downturn when the local potato crop was poor. He and his wife, Norma, took other employment, eventually moved to another city, and started their climb back to economic stability. However, in a terribly unfortunate incident, Brother Bowen was deeply hurt when, in a temple recommend interview, the bishop was a little skeptical regarding Morrell's declaration that he was a full-tithe payer.

I don't know which of these men had the more accurate facts that day, but I do know Sister Bowen walked out of that interview with her temple recommend renewed, while Brother Bowen walked out with an anger that would take him away from the Church for 15 years.

Regardless of who was right about the tithing, evidently both Morrell and the bishop forgot the Savior's injunction to "agree with thine adversary quickly"<sup>2</sup> and Paul's counsel to "let not the sun go down upon your wrath."<sup>3</sup> The fact is they *didn't* agree and the sun *did* go down on Brother Bowen's wrath for days, then weeks, then years, proving the point made by one of the wisest of the ancient Romans, who said, "Anger, if not restrained, is frequently more [destructive] than the injury that provokes it."<sup>4</sup> But the miracle of reconciliation is always available to us, and out of love for his family and the Church he knew to be true, Morrell Bowen came back into full Church activity. Let me tell you briefly how that happened.

Brother Bowen's son Brad is a good friend of ours and a devoted Area Seventy serving in southern Idaho. Brad was 11 years old at the time of this incident, and for 15 years he watched his father's religious devotion decline, a witness to the terrible harvest being reaped where anger and misunderstanding had been sown. Something needed to be done. So as the

Thanksgiving holiday approached in 1977, Brad, a 26-year-old student at Brigham Young University; his wife, Valerie; and new baby son, Mic, loaded into their student version of an automobile and, bad weather notwithstanding, drove to Billings, Montana. Not even a crash into a snowbank near West Yellowstone could keep this threesome from making their ministering contact with Brother Bowen Sr.

Upon arrival, Brad and his sister Pam asked for a private moment with their father. “You have been a wonderful dad,” Brad began with some emotion, “and we have always known how much you loved us. But something is wrong, and it has been for a long time. Because you were hurt once, this whole family has been hurting for years. We are broken, and you are the only one who can fix us. Please, please, after all this time, can you find it in your heart to lay aside that unfortunate incident with that bishop and again lead this family in the gospel as you once did?”

There was dead silence. Then Brother Bowen looked up at these two, his children, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh,<sup>5</sup> and said very quietly, “Yes. Yes, I will.”

Thrilled but stunned by the unexpected answer, Brad Bowen and his family watched their husband and father go to his current bishop in a spirit of reconciliation to set things right in his life. In a perfect response to this courageous but totally unexpected visit, the bishop, who had extended repeated invitations to Brother Bowen to come back, threw his arms around Morrell and just held him—held him in a long, long, long embrace.

In a matter of only a few weeks—doesn’t take long—Brother Bowen was fully engaged in Church activity and had made himself worthy to return to the temple. Soon enough he accepted the call to preside over a struggling little branch of 25 and grew it into a thriving congregation of well over 100. All of this took place nearly half a century ago, but the consequence of a son and a daughter’s ministering plea to their own father and that father’s willingness to forgive and move forward in spite of the imperfections of others has brought blessings that are still coming—and will come forever—to the Bowen family.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus has asked that we “live together in love”<sup>6</sup> with “no disputations among you.”<sup>7</sup> “He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me,” He warned the Nephites.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, to a great degree, our relationship to Christ will be determined—or at least affected—by our relationship to each other.

“If ye ... desire to come unto me,” He said, “and rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee—

“Go thy way unto thy brother, and *first be reconciled to [him], and then come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I will receive you.*”<sup>9</sup>

Surely each of us could cite an endless array of old scars and sorrows and painful memories that this very moment still corrode the peace in someone’s heart or family or neighborhood. Whether we have caused that pain or been the recipient of the pain, those wounds need to be healed so that life can be as rewarding as God intended it to be. Like the food in your refrigerator that your grandchildren carefully check in your behalf, those old grievances have long since exceeded their expiration date. Please don’t give precious space in your soul to them any longer. As Prospero said to the regretful Alonso in *The Tempest*, “Let us not burden our remembrance with a heaviness that’s gone.”<sup>10</sup>

“Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven,”<sup>11</sup> Christ taught in New Testament times. And in our day: “I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.”<sup>12</sup> It is, however, important for some of you living in real anguish to note what He did *not* say. He did *not* say, “You are not allowed to feel true pain or real sorrow from the shattering experiences you have had at the hand of another.” *Nor* did He say, “In order to forgive fully, you have to reenter a toxic relationship or return to an abusive, destructive circumstance.” But notwithstanding even the most terrible offenses that might come to us, we can rise above our pain only when we put our feet onto the path of true healing. That path is the forgiving one walked by Jesus of Nazareth, who calls out to each of us, “Come, follow me.”<sup>13</sup>

In such an invitation to be His disciple and to try to do as He did, Jesus is asking us to be instruments of His grace—to be “ambassadors for Christ” in “the ministry of reconciliation,” as Paul described it to the Corinthians.<sup>14</sup> The Healer of every wound, He who rights every wrong, asks us to labor with Him in the daunting task of peacemaking in a world that won’t find it any other way.

So, as Phillips Brooks wrote: “You who are letting miserable misunderstandings run on from year to year, meaning to clear them up some day; you who are keeping wretched quarrels alive because you cannot quite make up your mind that now is the day to sacrifice your pride and [settle] them; you who are passing men sullenly upon the street, not speaking to them out of some silly spite ... ; you who are letting ... [someone’s] heart ache for a word of appreciation or sympathy, which you mean to give ... some day, ... go instantly and do the thing which you might never have another chance to do.”<sup>15</sup>

My beloved brothers and sisters, I testify that forgiving and forsaking offenses, old or new, is central to the grandeur of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. I testify that ultimately such spiritual repair can come only from our divine Redeemer, He who rushes to our aid “with healing in his wings.”<sup>16</sup> We thank Him, and our Heavenly Father who sent Him, that renewal and rebirth, a future free from old sorrows and past mistakes, are not only possible, but they have already been purchased, paid for, at an excruciating cost symbolized by the blood of the Lamb who shed it.

With the apostolic authority granted me by the Savior of the world, I testify of the tranquility to the soul that reconciliation with God and each other will bring if we are meek and courageous enough to pursue it. “Cease to contend one with another,” the Savior pled.<sup>17</sup> If you know of an old injury, repair it. Care for one another in love.

My beloved friends, in our shared ministry of reconciliation, I ask us to be peacemakers—to love peace, to seek peace, to create peace, to cherish peace. I make that appeal in the name of the Prince of Peace, who knows everything about being “wounded in the house of [His] friends”<sup>18</sup> but who still found the strength to forgive and forget—and to heal—and be happy. For that I pray, for you and for me, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.