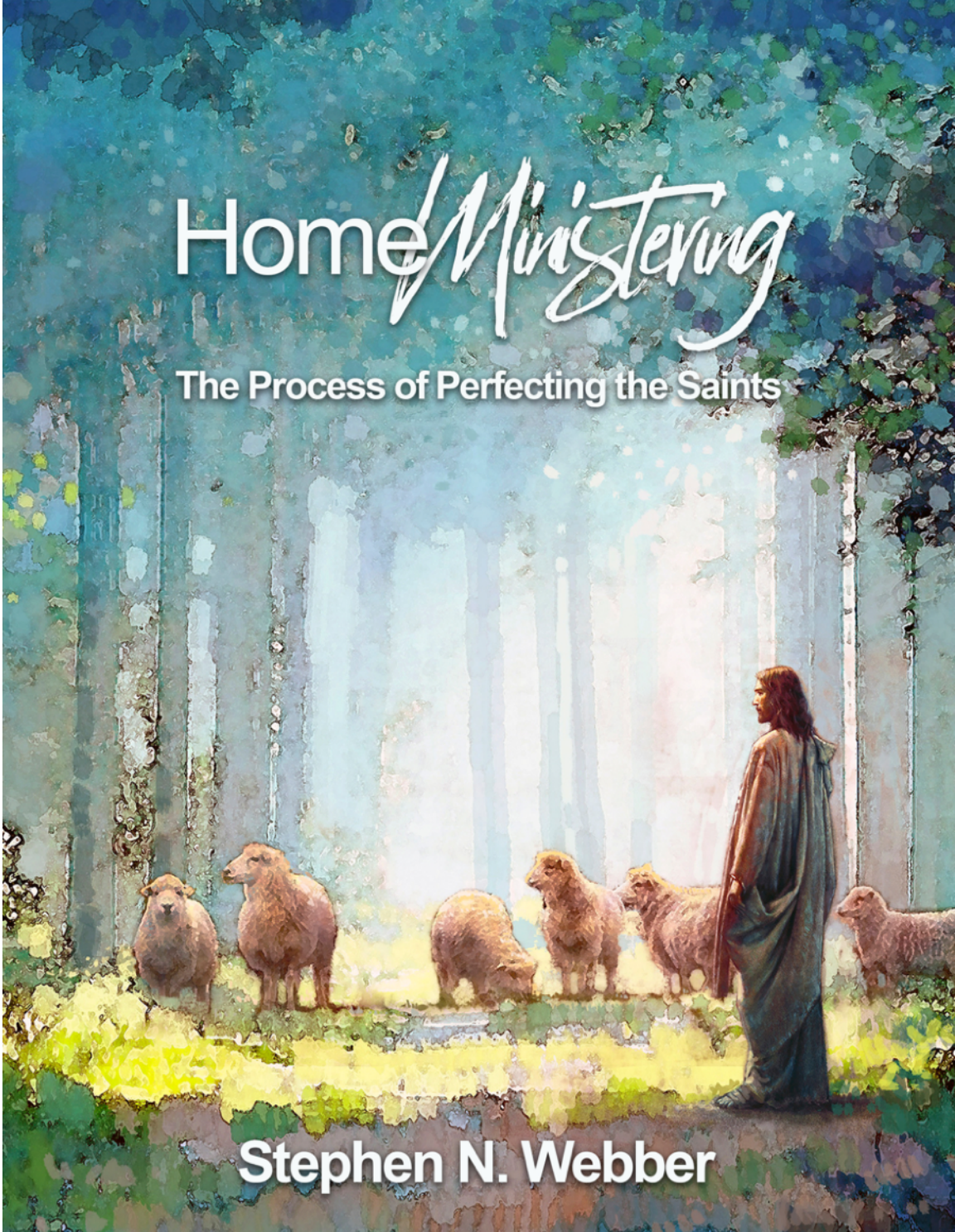


Home Ministering

The Process of Perfecting the Saints



Stephen N. Webber

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

Home Ministering

The Process of Perfecting the Saints

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

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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 the 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. Some have even expressed concern that the ministering effort in their home units has declined since the changes in 2018, hoping that a fresh story would reignite the desire to valiantly minister again.

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 impactful 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 and many others. Thank you all so much.

Finally, I want to express my appreciation to my eternal companion, best friend and incredible wife, Jana. She is my constant source of encouragement, inspiration and love. I am so grateful for her never-ending example of lovingly visiting and ministering to dozens of women over the years. She truly understands and embraces the Lord's mandate to feed His sheep.

Introduction - Do Not Skip!

“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

Why write a book about Ministering? Great question. The purpose of my first book, titled *Shepherds of the Flock - Elevating Home and Visiting Teachers to Home Ministers* (2016), was to remind the reader that visiting the house of each member, bearing one another’s burdens, comforting those in need of comfort, and feeding the Good Shepherd’s flock are still active commandments and covenantal duties—not just suggestions.

When the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints “retired” home and visiting teaching and announced the *higher and holier* Ministering, I “retired” my original book. I felt satisfied that Church members were now going to rally around the new mandate and elevate their efforts to serve and love their neighbors. Oh boy, was I wrong!

Unfortunately, there is now more confusion than ever about what we are commanded to do. Many local leaders still struggle with how to handle Ministering in their wards and stakes, and there are a multitude of doctrinal and procedural interpretations in its execution.

Ministering is not a new thing, and we should not be confused by a new title. Jesus Christ has commanded us from the beginning to serve and love our neighbors. The main purpose of this member-to-member service has always been divinely designed and intended to help Heavenly Father’s children come unto Christ and be perfected in Him.

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

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So, how did we end up here? How did the original message become so distorted and misunderstood, especially when we are told, “*Behold, mine house is a house of order, saith the Lord God, and not a house of confusion.*” (Doctrine and Covenants 132:8).

Over the last several years, the general authorities have clearly communicated what the Lord requires of us and what a “higher and holier” effort looks like. However, there have been a handful of statements in General Conference talks that have been misinterpreted. Sadly, it’s all too easy to isolate a likable quote from its broader context and mistakenly elevate it as the central message.

For example, in Elder Jeffrey R. Holland’s talk titled *Emissaries to the Church* (Oct. 2017) he famously said, “*Now, as for what ‘counts’ as home teaching, every good thing you do ‘counts,’ so report it all!*”

This statement gets repeated often when discussing ministering, and when taken out of context could easily be construed to mean that any effort is sufficient to fulfill your duty in caring for a family. However, in the same paragraph he went on to say, “*What matters is that you love your people and are fulfilling the commandment ‘to watch over the church always.’*” When this quote is shared in its full context, the level of effort the Lord needs from a ministering brother or sister is a little more quantifiable.

Likewise, we find another example of selective interpretation with a more recent quote from Elder Holland—ironically this one is from his roll-out talk about ministering. While explaining why the brethren removed the word “Home” from the title of this new duty, he said,

*“We will continue to visit homes as possible, but local circumstances such as large numbers, long distances, personal safety, and other challenging conditions may preclude a visit to every home every month.”*²

² General Conference, April 2018, *Be With and Strengthen Them*, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

Stephen N. Webber

In other words, *“There are a few situations that may make it difficult, or even impossible for you to make a visit in the home every month, and for those of you to whom this applies, we will make an exception. We don’t want to set an expectation that you cannot reasonably accomplish, considering all the factors you may be presented with.”*

He then gave several suggestions of ways to supplement difficult in-home visits with alternative methods of communication such as phone calls, texting and conversations at church. However, those modes of contact were never intended to *replace* a face-to-face visit, bearing your testimony or leaving a blessing on the family and home. They were meant to be second, third and fourth contacts throughout the month.

Unfortunately, it is human nature to look for the path of least resistance, and what many listeners heard was, *“We no longer require monthly visits from any ministering brother or sister. All you need to do is send a text and ‘check in’ on your families periodically.”*

Once again, some have disregarded the following statement in his talk where he reiterated our duty in detail and gave us an apostolic warning. He declared,

“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. However, I warn you, a new name, new flexibility, and fewer reports won’t make an ounce of difference in our service unless we see this as an invitation to care for one another in a bold, new, holier way, as President Nelson has just said.”

So why doesn’t the Handbook just tell us exactly what we need to do and how often we should make contact? Two reasons: First, we are

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members of a worldwide church, and there are innumerable variables from assignment to assignment. Some families live nearby and welcome a visit, while other assignments are much harder to magnify and to accomplish the work of the Lord. To set one standard for every ministering companionship would be naive and unachievable.

Second, as the Lord tells us in Doctrine and Covenants 58:26-29:

“For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things: for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant, wherefore he receiveth no reward.

Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;

For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward.

But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned.”

We should recognize the importance of our assignment and do all we can to magnify it. If we have any questions, we can always petition the Lord and pray for inspiration about how we can do a better job caring for His flock. The Spirit is eager to respond to a sincere prayer regarding how to better serve another person. Answers will come quickly.

By reading this book, you will discover that Ministering is the Good Shepherd’s way of feeding and caring for His flock—and that “*we are all enlisted*” in this work as under-shepherds. Additionally, it is through ministering that the Lord perfects His disciples. If ministering is

performed properly, the blessings of being ‘perfected in Christ’ are enjoyed by both the receiver and the giver of the 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.”³

Ways we can 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; as well as many other important acts of service that help and lift our fellow saints.

Can all this be accomplished by occasionally “checking in” on our assigned families with a text message? Not even close. It requires the consistent service of *Ammon-like shepherds* who will watch over and protect the flock. The Lord wants dedicated, courageous and loving shepherds—not lukewarm hirelings.

In my attempt to inspire valiant ministering in the most interesting and entertaining way possible, I found it necessary to deliver this message in the form 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 is intended for everyone who is assigned as a ministering brother or sister, and gives the reader a floor-to-ceiling

³ General Handbook, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Ministering* - Section 21.0

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description of the shepherding process, including the responsibilities of our 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 our assignments can affect the entire ward, not just our assigned families.

Home Ministering - The Process of Perfecting the Saints delivers a clear picture of the unlimited 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.”⁴

How can ministering *renew the Church and exalt its members*? 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.

First, when we begin to serve our neighbors as Jesus would, we begin to love them as He loves them. And we are promised that 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.

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

⁴ General Conference, Apr. 1987, *To the Home Teachers of the Church*, President Ezra Taft Benson

other commandments becomes a natural byproduct of keeping the two most important laws.

So in this book, I am updating my original message to better help members of the Church understand their covenantal responsibility to care for one another in a “bold, new holier way.”⁵ And 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 do not 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!

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

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.”⁶

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 nearly empty parking lot of the stake center trying to process what just happened in their meeting with the Stake President. Brother Stephens had served in leadership callings before, but few members of the Church were asked to commit five years of their lives—or more—serving as a bishop. 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.

⁶ 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.”⁷

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.

⁷ General Conference, April 2018, *Be with and Strengthen Them*, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

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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?”

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 help, then how could you possibly care for *an entire ward* 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 affirmatively.

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.’⁸

“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.”

⁸ King James Bible, New Testament; John 21:15-17

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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, who loves each of His lambs individually. He knows we will protect the ones we love, so He shares a portion of His unconditional love with those whom He has called as shepherds of wards, quorums, classes and families. The more you serve them, the more you’ll 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 Brother Stephens. “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

seem overwhelming, and even agonizing, 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 on the cross. 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 understands how to shepherd his flock, and that's made his calling so much easier. I just wish more bishops would figure it out instead of trying to do everything themselves."

With a sigh, he continued, "Unfortunately, some bishops have a hard time doing the job differently than they've seen their predecessors do it, and before long they find themselves overworked and overwhelmed, trying to shoulder the troubles of the entire ward.

"Instead of running around and putting out fires, 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?"

Not waiting for a response, 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 caring for his ward the way the Lord designed it to be done."

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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 members, because we typically don’t see bishops share the load the way they should. But once you help them understand what their responsibility is in the shepherding process, and execute the program as the Lord intended, you’ll 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 are 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.

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 (2 Nephi 32:5).

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.”⁹

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 regularly 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, “I was told you have a special method of shepherding your ward. I’m here to find out what your secret is.”

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 execute the program the way the Savior asked us to.”

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 emergency, you are counseled to secure your own oxygen mask first and

⁹ General Conference, April 2020, *Ministering with the Power and Authority of God*, President Russell M. Nelson

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.*'¹⁰

"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 leadership principles, he pulled out his pen and notepad to capture every word.

Then Bishop Smith leaned back in his chair again and said, "In our ward, we do our ministering the way it's supposed to be done."

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

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

¹⁰ Doctrine & Covenants 20:53

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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.”

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.

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.

“‘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].”¹¹

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 all 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 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

¹¹ General Conference, Apr. 1987, *To the Home Teachers of the Church*, President Ezra Taft Benson

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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 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.'*”

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 ministering can bless 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.

‘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.’”¹²

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. When we willingly and selflessly serve one another, we eventually learn to *love one another and become more like Him*, and that’s the Lord’s ultimate goal 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 fallen 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, since reports are 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—or a member of the Church—we need to covenant 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.’*¹³ That’s ministering, and every adult member of the Lord’s church has a *covenantal responsibility* to minister. In fact, it’s a priesthood duty.”

¹² General Conference, Apr. 2023, *Ministering*, Elder Gerrit W. Gong

¹³ The Book of Mormon - Another Testament of Jesus Christ, Mosiah 18:8-9

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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.”

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 you need to delegate. Delegate everything you’re allowed to delegate to your counselors, secretary, clerks, quorum leaders, and the Relief

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Society. Delegate until you're embarrassed that you've delegated so much...and then delegate some more.”¹⁴

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.’¹⁵ 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 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

¹⁴ President Randall Gormley - Former President of the Helena, Montana Temple

¹⁵ New Testament, John 21:15-17

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 not 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 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

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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.¹⁶ 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 you're 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 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

¹⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 20:51-53

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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 back and chat with me again after you've met with everyone on your list. They have a wealth of information about ministering and how it can help you shepherd your flock. I can't wait to hear what you learn!"

Then, very seriously, he concluded the interview with a final thought by saying, "But most importantly Bishop, if you will help the members of your ward gain a testimony of the doctrine of Ministering by teaching them how to serve one another the way the Lord has asked us to since He restored His church, it will change their hearts and lives forever. In fact, as President Benson said, it can even '*spiritually renew [your ward] and exalt its individual members and families.*'"¹⁷

¹⁷ General Conference, Apr. 1987, *To the Home Teachers of the Church*, President Ezra Taft Benson

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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.

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, high counselor 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 a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Spain, Barcelona mission, and later graduated from Brigham Young University in Business Management. He currently owns and manages an advertising agency and hosts the Home Ministering Podcast which can be found on YouTube.

Ordering Information for Wards and Stakes

The purpose of *Home Ministering - The Process of Perfecting the Saints* is to help ministering brothers and sisters understand 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. The objective in doing this was to help their local members catch the vision and understand the blessings of serving their 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.

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