

Turning Enemies into Friends

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At Brigham Young University many years ago, there was a great athletic coach named Eugene L. Roberts. He grew up in Provo and, as a youth, sort of drifted aimlessly with the wrong kind of friends. And then something remarkable happened. I am going to read to you from his own words. He wrote:

Several years ago when Provo City was scarred with the unsightly saloon and other questionable forms of amusement, I was standing one evening upon the street waiting for my gang to show up when I noticed that [the Provo] tabernacle was lighted up and that a large crowd of people were traveling in [that] direction. I had nothing to do so I drifted over [there] and drifted in. I thought I might find some of my gang, or at least some of the girls that I was interested in. Upon entering, I ran across three or four of [my] fellows and we placed ourselves under the gallery where there was a crowd of young ladies, who seemed to promise [some] entertainment.

We were not interested in what came from the pulpit. We knew that the people on [the] rostrum were all old fogies. They didn't know anything about life and they certainly couldn't tell us anything, for we knew it all. So we settled down to have a good time. Right in the midst of our disturbance there thundered from [the] pulpit the following [statement]:

"You can't tell the character of an individual by the way he does his daily work. Watch him when his

work is over. See where he goes. Note the companions he seeks, and the things he does when he may do as he pleases. Then you can tell his true character."

I looked up towards the rostrum because I was struck with this powerful statement. I saw up there a little dark-haired, fierce-eyed, fighting man whom I knew and feared; but didn't have any particular love for. . . .

. . . He went on to make a comparison. He said:

"Let us take the eagle, for example. This bird works as hard and as efficiently as any other animal in doing its daily work. It provides for itself and its young by the sweat of its brow, so to speak; but when its daily work is over and the eagle has time of its own to do just as it pleases, note how it spends its recreational moments. It flies to the highest realms of heaven, spreads its wings, and bathes in the upper air, for it loves the pure, clean atmosphere, and the lofty heights.

"On the other hand, let us consider the hog. This animal grunts and grubs and provides for its young just as well as the eagle; but, when its working hours are over and it has [some] recreational moments, observe where it goes and what it does. The hog will seek out the muddiest hole in the pasture and will roll and soak itself in filth, for this is the thing it loves. People are either hogs or eagles in their leisure time."

Sharon Eubank, first counselor in the Relief Society general presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and director of LDS Charities, delivered this forum address on January 23, 2018.

Now . . . when I heard this short speech, I was dumbfounded. I turned toward my companions abashed for I was ashamed to be caught listening. What was my surprise to find everyone of the gang with his attention fixed upon the speaker. . . .

We went out of the tabernacle that night rather quiet and we separated from each other unusually early. I thought of that speech all the way home. I classified myself immediately as of the hog family. I have thought of that speech for years. That night there was implanted in me the faint beginnings of an ambition to lift myself out of the hog group and to rise to that of the eagle. . . .

There was implanted that same evening also the faint beginnings of an ambition to help fill up the mud holes in the social pasture so that those people with hog tendencies would find it difficult to wallow in recreational filth. And as a result of constant thinking about that speech I have been stirred to devote my whole life and my profession towards developing wholesome recreational activities for the young people, so that it would be natural and easy for them to indulge in the eagle type of leisure.

The man who made that speech which has affected my life more than any other one speech I ever heard was President George H. Brimhall. God bless him.¹

That is the end of his story. George Brimhall was the president of BYU a hundred years ago. He was the president who helped it transition from BYU Academy to become a university. He was the President Worthen of that time. And he was revered and admired for his ability to move people—the way he moved Eugene. He may have never realized that his talk in the Provo Tabernacle that day touched somebody like Eugene, but it completely changed Eugene’s life, and Eugene became a respected teacher and a coach at BYU.

I have thought a lot about the following question, and you probably have too: What do I do in my leisure time? And am I going to be a hog or an eagle?

Maybe you are like me because you might ask, “What leisure time?” I know that you are busy university students with church callings, work, families, friends, and many obligations. But after an experience I had a couple of weeks ago,

I realized that as busy as I think I am, the Lord puts opportunities right in my path, and all I have to do is take advantage of them.

The experience I had was after President Thomas S. Monson’s funeral. The Monson family asked the Relief Society if we would deliver the dozens of floral arrangements that had been sent for President Monson’s funeral to different care centers and hospitals around the valley. I took one of these big, beautiful arrangements into a care center that was right by President and Sister Monson’s family home. The woman behind the desk wondered what I was doing because the arrangement was huge. But when she understood what I was delivering, she burst into a smile, because President Monson was very well known and loved at that care center. I came to understand that he had spent many hours of his leisure time visiting with people there.

I believe that the Lord often isn’t asking us for big, time-consuming gestures; He merely wants minutes of our time every day to help another person on their way.

In the Service of Your Brothers and Sisters

Take a moment to think about your own grandfather, the lessons that you may have learned from him, and the kind of figure he was or is in your life. I want to talk about Ammon and the other sons of Mosiah. They had a very famous grandfather. Their grandfather was King Benjamin.

King Benjamin taught a profound and compelling truth that still motivates us today, centuries later. In fact, there is a food pantry in Las Vegas that is run by members of another faith who resonated so much with one verse of scripture that King Benjamin said that they put it up in vinyl letters on a wall in the food bank. The verse is only thirty-six words, but it has realigned forever how I want to spend my leisure time. It is Mosiah 2:17, and it is very famous:

And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.

In his youth, Ammon was even more off track than Eugene Roberts. He spent time with his friends, the scriptures say, “seeking to destroy the church, and to lead astray the people of the Lord.”²

Well, Ammon had a miraculous conversion, as we know. And as a result, the seed of his grandfather’s thirty-six words started to grow in his heart. Ammon and his three brothers, who had wallowed like hogs in their youth, wanted to soar like eagles. They felt this inspiration to go up to the land of the Lamanites. Why? The scriptures say:

*They had undertaken to preach the word of God to a wild and a hardened and a ferocious people; a people who delighted in murdering the Nephites, and robbing and plundering them; and their hearts were set upon riches, or upon gold and silver, and precious stones; yet they sought to obtain these things by murdering and plundering, that they might not labor for them with their own hands.*³

Why would Ammon and his brothers want to spend their precious time doing something that was likely going to be a waste of time, have no positive change, and result in their death? They could have been settling down and taking their seats in the government; they could have become great leaders in the community.

Mosiah 28:3–4 tells us the reason:

They could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble.

And thus did the Spirit of the Lord work upon them, for they were the very vilest of sinners. And the Lord saw fit in his infinite mercy to spare them.

So they went into the land of the Lamanites. You know the story:

As Ammon entered the land of Ishmael, the Lamanites took him and bound him, as was their custom to bind all the Nephites who fell into their hands [Ammon was not the first one], and carry them before the king; and thus it was left to the pleasure of the king to slay

them, or to retain them in captivity, or to cast them into prison, or to cast them out of his land. . . .

And thus Ammon was carried before the king who was over the land of Ishmael. . . .

And the king inquired of Ammon [this is almost sarcastic] if it were his desire to dwell in the land among the Lamanites, or among his people.

And [then] Ammon [surprised him and] said unto him: Yea, I desire to dwell among this people for a time; yea, and perhaps until the day I die. . . .

*. . . [And] I will be thy servant.*⁴

Wouldn’t Ammon’s grandfather have loved to hear that from his grandson? “I will be thy servant.”

Ammon was assigned to be a shepherd. The other servants—the rest of the shepherds who were there—probably didn’t have the same interest in Ammon that King Lamoni did. I don’t know what those three days were like when Ammon was busy being a shepherd, but I suspect the Lamanites weren’t thrilled that a Nephite was out with them doing their work.

But three days later, after whatever else had been going on, there came a problem, and the flocks got scattered by some wild men. Ammon “saw the afflictions of those whom he termed to be his *brethren*”⁵; he looked upon them as his brothers. When that catastrophic event happened, when the men scattered the sheep, the servants were afraid that they would be killed, and Ammon’s heart swelled inside of him. He saw that this was his chance to be a servant to his brethren.

Isn’t that remarkable? He didn’t think of them as Lamanites or enemies or adversaries or a bunch of jerks; he felt like they were his brethren.

This attitude of being a servant to his brethren opened up the opportunity for Ammon to have another conversation with the Lamanite king. One reformed sinner taught another, and the Lamanite king’s heart was pricked about his own sins and habits. He asked in his heart how he could be reconciled to God and have those sins and murders taken away through the merits of Jesus Christ. Ammon and King Lamoni grew to understand one another, and they became friends. In the end, they were willing to die for one another.

I absolutely love the courage of these young princes—these sons of Mosiah—to be servants and examples of the peace that is offered through the Lord Jesus Christ, no matter how vile our sins have been, if we repent and serve Him.

How do we serve Him? The answer is in the wisdom of a grandfather: “When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.”

I love the courage of King Lamoni and his father and his brother Anti-Nephi-Lehi and how they gave up the mud so they could soar. Lamoni’s father gave us this beautiful passage in the scriptures: “O God, . . . I will give away all my sins to know thee.”⁶

No More Strangers Among Us

Let me give a more modern example of a way to reach out to people that we might not traditionally think about. Most of you remember Sister Linda K. Burton, who was a general Relief Society president. In the April 2016 general conference, she quoted a scripture that is revered by Christians, Muslims, and Jews.⁷ It is from Leviticus 19. It says:

And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him.

*But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.*⁸

Sister Burton asked us each to think about the strangers among us. Is there anyone who doesn’t participate in society for some reason? Somebody who is on the periphery? Somebody who—because of language, background, disability, religion, family status, life choices, or anything else—is not fully participating within the circle? And can we think of them as brothers and sisters? Can we serve them?

Since Sister Burton gave that address in 2016, I have been in awe of how many examples have been shared relating to that great call to action. I want to share one with you. I took this story

from the *Deseret News*. It took place in Lincoln Elementary in south Salt Lake City, which has students from fifteen different countries.

On the first day of school, the Hamed brothers, who recently had arrived from Syria, were greeted by Principal Milton Collins. He is this larger-than-life personality, and he does this crazy bobcat (the Lincoln Elementary mascot) growl—I can’t imagine what that sounds like. He makes sure every kid has a backpack, and he tells them, “Oh, by the way, high fives are mandatory. Whenever you see me in the hall, you must give me a high five.” And if students feel bullied, they are to go straight to an adult.⁹

Milton Collins’s job is to be the principal—he is doing his job—but he is going beyond his job in order to be an unforgettable force for good in the lives of kids. They have experienced bombs, hunger, the death of loved ones, and uncertainty. And now, on the first day of school, they are scared to death. They don’t know if they are going to fit in or if they are going to have any friends. And their parents are even more scared than they are. As true disciples of Jesus Christ, we should have with us all of our lives the habits of having fearless courage, of being willing to serve and help people with their problems, and of thinking of others in terms of their being our brothers and sisters.

The big humanitarian crises that are going on right now and the ones that have happened in the past when people have been driven out of their homes and lands are, at the heart, failures to remember that we are brothers and sisters and that God is the Father of us all. That is the root cause of what is happening in the world. And when we respond in a humanitarian way, we can send bushels of food, we can dig wells, we can build latrines, we can put up schools and health care centers, and we can settle people into apartments. But if we don’t do something about people feeling like strangers instead of like our brothers and sisters, then the whole thing is in vain and will just feed the cycle of emotional and spiritual misery.

Ammon, Sister Burton, and Milton Collins are all using as a foundation what King Benjamin taught: that to serve others is to serve God—or, as

Jesus Himself said, “As I have loved you . . . , love one another.”¹⁰

You Are the Gift

There are many, many organizations and people who do enormous amounts of good in the world with their limited resources and their Benjamin-like desires to serve their fellow beings and to serve God. I am privileged to work with many of them, and I get to see what is being done in the world. I am going to speak to you from my own experience now about what I have seen that accomplishes the most lasting good. If you want to be involved in humanitarian service, this is the way—and I hope this is the thing that you will remember from the forum today. You are the gift. You yourself are the gift. It is not the clothing, the hygiene kits, the school desks, or the wells. It is you.

What would it look like if each of us were our own well-stocked humanitarian organization? Instead of just giving out tangible goods in foreign locations, what if we had the richness of dispensing healing, friendship, respect, peaceful dialogue, sincere interest, protective listening of children, birthday remembrances, and conversations with strangers? What if that was what your humanitarian organization did? This kind of humanitarian work can be done by anybody and it can be done at any time. And you don’t need warehouses or fundraising or transportation. You can be perfectly responsive to any need that comes to you, wherever you are.

Let me share a quote by Elder Robert D. Hales about this kind of humanitarian organization. He was talking about the interactions between parents and children, but think of this instead as a handbook of how you might extend humanitarian offerings to the broader human family.

I desire to encourage parents and all who are called to lead and serve the youth of this world. . . .

. . . As a father and grandfather, . . . may I share some of what I have learned. . . .

. . . To truly understand [young peoples’] hearts, we must do more than just be in the same room or attend the same family and Church activities. We must

plan and take advantage of teaching moments that make a deep and lasting impression upon their minds and hearts. . . .

. . . Mothers and fathers, as you drive or walk children to school or their various activities, do you use the time to talk with them about their hopes and dreams and fears and joys? Do you take the time to have them take the earplugs from their MP3 players and all the other devices so that they can hear you and feel of your love? . . .

. . . I remember as a young man asking permission to play baseball through dinnertime. “Just put my meal in the oven,” I said to my mother. She responded, “Robert, I really want you to take a break, come home, be with the family for dinner, and then you can go out and play baseball until dark.” She taught all of us that where family meals are concerned, it’s not the food but the family interaction that nourishes the soul. . . .

For our interactions with youth to truly touch their hearts, we have to pay attention to them just as we would pay attention to a trusted adult colleague or close friend. Most important is asking them questions, letting them talk, and then being willing to listen—yes, listen and listen some more—even hearken with spiritual ears! Several years ago I was reading the newspaper when one of my young grandsons snuggled up to me. As I read, I was delighted to hear his sweet voice chattering on in the background. Imagine my surprise when, a few moments later, he pushed himself between me and the paper. Taking my face in his hands and pressing his nose up to mine, he asked, “Grandpa! Are you in there?”

*Mother, Father, are you in there? Grandpa, Grandma, are you there? Being **there** means understanding the hearts of our youth and connecting with them. And connecting with them means not just conversing with them but doing things with them too. . . .*

I ask the Lord’s blessings to be with the parents and with the youth . . . , that they will understand the joy it is to be in a home and family where they can be loved, directed, and guided. It is my prayer that we may have eternal families and be together forever in the presence of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.¹¹

I think about the examples that the prophets have given us. In all of the stories that we know

about President Monson—and I saw this with my own eyes at that care center—he would go on a regular basis and sit down and visit with people who didn’t have anybody. I happened to be in the room where President Russell M. Nelson’s family was waiting during the press conference when the new First Presidency was announced. He has fifty-seven grandchildren and 116 great-grandchildren. One of his granddaughters, who was telling me that, said, “Oh, he knows everybody’s name and everybody’s birthday. He is the one who keeps track more than anybody else.”

Those are the examples of our prophets. They aren’t giant, enormous examples, but they are meaningful. I think about the Savior, who saved all of mankind; He had to teach His gospel in a culture that didn’t understand it. That message had to go to all the world. And what did He do? He walked more than a hundred miles from Dan to Beersheba and back and ministered to people one-on-one. Now how was that going to get the gospel out to the whole world? But that is what He did.

If we change our perspective so that caring for the poor and the needy is less about giving stuff away and more about filling the hunger for human contact, providing meaningful conversation, and creating rich and positive relationships, then the Lord can send us someplace. Every single person can do this on his or her own. You don’t need a fund, but it is going to take some commitment. Some people are not going to respond positively, and others are going to put out toxic energy, which just means they are not yet ready for your relationship. There are always humanitarian places that we can’t yet reach. But there are plenty that we can reach.

We live in a world that is coming apart, that is being pulled apart, so that the unity of community and respect for other people’s beliefs, tolerance of differences, and protection of the minority voice are being shredded. It is extremely destructive to all of us when everyone outside of our narrow clan becomes an enemy we vilify. As those forces in our society rise up, then so must an answering strong sentiment and skill set on the opposite side.

If I had the power, I would have every one of you come down and stand in front of me, and I would name each one of you a humanitarian ambassador of peace and friendship from the Church of God to the kingdom of God. This isn’t about who is good or bad, and it is not about who is rich or poor. The sons of Mosiah and the Lamanite people of King Lamoni showed us that we all fail, we all make a mess of things occasionally, we all struggle with different sins, and we are all down in the mire. But through the grace of Jesus Christ, we can repent and we can keep trying to be better—to be more like Him. And by trying to be like Him, we can make alliances with other people who are also trying for good in ways that may be very different from ours, who are striving to do the right things for the right reasons, and who are recovering from their mistakes the same as we do: through the virtues of God as they appeal to Him for help.

I want to close with words that the Lord has spoken in the Doctrine and Covenants. He has spoken them directly to those ambassadors, like you, whom He sends. This isn’t a feel-good scripture that pats us on the back; it is a bold and vibrant call to action for people like us who set their hearts on safety and equal chances for all people—or, in other words, Zion.

This is from Doctrine and Covenants 58:

Behold, verily I say unto you, [and you can insert your name here,] for this cause I have sent you—that you might be obedient, and that your hearts might be prepared to bear testimony of the things which are to come;

And also that you might be honored in laying the foundation, and in bearing record of the land upon which the Zion of God shall stand;

And also that a feast of fat things might be prepared for the poor; yea, a feast of fat things, of wine on the lees well refined, that the earth may know that the mouths of the prophets shall not fail;

Yea, a supper of the house of the Lord, well prepared, unto which all nations shall be invited.

First, the rich and the learned, the wise and the noble;

And after that cometh the day of my power; then shall the poor, the lame, and the blind, and the deaf,

come in unto the marriage of the Lamb, and partake of the supper of the Lord, prepared for the great day to come.

Behold, I, the Lord, have spoken it.

*And that the testimony might go forth from Zion, yea, from the mouth of the city of the heritage of God— Yea, for this cause I have sent you.*¹²

The questions that I want to leave with you today are these: How are you going to help those who are poor in spirit? Can you stitch a relationship as well as you stitch a quilt? What enemy are you going to start viewing as a brother? Do you want to live your life as a hog or as an eagle?

The Lord has said, “For this cause I have sent you.” If you feel like you are stuck in a hole and you can’t flap your wings like an eagle because of all the mud that is on them, then take heart. Take the sons of Mosiah to heart. Take Lamoni and his people as your example.

The Lord wants to use you. There is a work for you to do, and it is specific to you and your abilities. Nobody will be the ambassador that you will be. But you need to be clean to do it. Jesus can lift you out of the mire and set you on your way. Repent, and He will forgive. And remember that, in the same way as the Savior, you yourself are one of the best gifts that you can give to other people in need.

This is my testimony. It has been true in my own life, and I pray that it may be so for all of us, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Eugene L. Roberts, “The Eagle and the Pig,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 32, no. 7 (July 1921): 386–87; see also Raymond Brimhall Holbrook and Esther Hamilton Holbrook, *The Tall Pine Tree: The Life and Work of George H. Brimhall* (United States: R. B. and E. H. Holbrook, 1988), 111–13.

2. Mosiah 27:10.

3. Alma 17:14.

4. Alma 17:20–23, 25.

5. Alma 17:30; emphasis added.

6. Alma 22:18.

7. See Linda K. Burton, “I Was a Stranger,” *Ensign*, May 2016.

8. Leviticus 19:33–34.

9. See Allison Pond, “Special Report: How Utah Became One Refugee Family’s Final Chance at Survival,” *InDepth, Deseret News*, 18 December 2017, deseretnews.com/article/900005809/special-report-how-utah-became-one-familys-final-chance-at-survival.html.

10. John 13:34.

11. Robert D. Hales, “Our Duty to God: The Mission of Parents and Leaders to the Rising Generation,” *Ensign*, May 2010; emphasis in original; see compiled video excerpts, “Parenting: Touching the Hearts of Our Youth,” YouTube, [youtube.com/watch?v=-cxHd773Ya0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cxHd773Ya0).

12. D&C 58:6–14.