

Them and Us

ELAINE L. JACK

Once upon a time, in a ward you know, a visitor attended on an average Sunday. It was a happy, pleasant ward, with great diversity. Children, youth, and adults of many ages sat together in sacrament meeting. The building seemed well kept, the leaders well organized, the lessons well taught. The visitor thought as she observed, "What lucky people live in this ward. What a warm, inviting place this must be. They must truly love one another." She decided to come again, not to look but to listen to what these people said about their relationships.

This is what she heard the next Sunday.

One Relief Society counselor said to the other, "I've decided our singles bring their problems on themselves. We reach out to them, but they don't respond. Sometimes I wish we didn't have so many in our ward."

One young adult asked another, "Don't you just hate Relief Society? It is always so boring. The women are all old, and they only talk about married women's stuff."

A grandmother said to her friend, "I hear they're reorganizing the Primary. I hope they don't call us. We've raised our families. It's the young mothers' turn to work in Primary."

The Laurel advisor told the Beehive advisor, "Since I have been in Young Women, I feel Relief Society ignores me. They've forgotten those of us who aren't in class every Sunday."

A recently returned missionary complained to his friend, "The girls in this ward are the worst. Why do they expect me to attend Young Adult activities in this stake when the female population is so bad?"

The Primary president said to her counselor, "I wish they would quit stealing our best teachers. We just get them trained, and the bishop gives them another calling."

An elder who taught the gospel doctrine class told the Sunday School president, "These manuals are awful. What is wrong with the people at Church headquarters? Just because some areas of the world are new to the gospel doesn't mean the rest of us should be stuck with these outlines."

A visiting teacher commented to her friend, "I can't believe the new district they gave me."

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Two of the women are my friends, and I feel stupid giving them a spiritual message. I don't even know the rest of my district, so I really feel stupid trying to give a spiritual thought to these strangers."

The Relief Society president said to the bishop, "We work so hard, and the sisters just don't appreciate it. They don't seem interested. They don't even seem to care. I don't feel the sisterhood in the Relief Society I used to feel."

The visitor left the ward feeling downhearted. "Why?" she mused. "Why do these fine people label each other? Why do I hear so much talk of 'them and us' and so little 'my sister and my brother'? Why do they miss the joy of loving one another?"

My dear sisters and brothers, I am that visitor, and I have asked those questions many times as I've heard all those comments in wards I've visited this past year. Happily, in those same wards I've heard and seen much of love and rejoicing in the restored gospel. I never return home that I don't thank our Heavenly Father for the good people who populate this earth. But to my dismay, the "them and us" mentality is alive and well, pervasive and limiting.

Value the Individual

This way of thinking and talking about each other hurts my soul. I'm concerned about the divisiveness it creates. I'm concerned that so often the Saints inadvertently label others in our ward families as "them," somehow not like "us." Let me share an example of how some of us lapse into "them and us" talk without even realizing it.

Recently I visited with Relief Society leaders who have many single women in their stake. The Relief Society president began our conversation by saying, "Sister Jack, our single women are a real problem for us." What I noticed immediately was the labeling of all single women as a problem. But this good president did not realize what she had said.

She continued, "I feel our singles bring so many of their problems on themselves."

I asked, "Have you talked with any of your sisters who are single about their problems?"

She said, "Well, no. Not formally. But the ward presidents bring me reports, and I never feel very warm or good when I speak to them. I don't think they want to speak with me."

"When have you spoken to these single sisters? Are any of them your friends?" I queried.

"Not really. I do speak to singles at stake conference or at stake leadership meeting. But, as I said, that's always so unsatisfying," she responded.

I asked further, "Have you invited any of the singles in leadership positions to discuss their points of view in your meetings so all the sisters might get better acquainted with them?"

"I have never thought of doing anything like that," she responded.

My friends, do you get the point? This very conscientious president does not know these sisters as individuals. It's no wonder she calls these sisters "them." Not one of them is her friend. Not one has been asked to participate in a meeting.

Please consider this point for a moment.

Think about an experience you've had when your first impression of someone changed dramatically after you got acquainted. Maybe you couldn't stand your spouse when you first met. Perhaps your bishop has become one of your favorite people now that you've served together. In some cases roommates don't start off well—even missionary companions can be a pain on occasion. Yet, sharing experience and conversation can improve the whole world, can't it?

The Savior told us very directly, "If ye are not one ye are not mine" (D&C 38:27). There are some people I consider to be great souls. In every case these sons and daughters of God value the individual. They make it a point to get to know people—to be "one" with them. Not surprisingly, these great women and men

tend to avoid making judgments about others, or putting them in categories by religion, race, gender, marital status, or age. I think both elements—loving others and judging gently—are suggested by the Savior’s direction to us. When we do love others, we can become one. When we become one, we can be in the Savior’s fold. It sounds so simple. And I know well it can be hard to do. But, it can be done.

The View from Rameumptom

For me, one of the most instructive stories in the Book of Mormon is that of Alma the Younger’s mission to the Zoramites. In Alma 31 the scripture records:

Alma . . . received tidings that the Zoramites were perverting the ways of the Lord, . . . his heart again began to sicken because of the iniquity of the people. [v. 1]

And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God. [v. 5]

Now, when they [Alma and his missionary team] had come into the land, behold, to their astonishment they found that the Zoramites had built synagogues, and that they did gather themselves together on one day of the week . . . ; and they did worship after a manner which Alma and his brethren had never beheld; [v. 12]

For they had a place built up in the center of their synagogue, a place for standing, which was high above the head; and the top thereof would only admit one person. [v. 13]

Therefore, whosoever desired to worship must go forth and stand upon the top thereof, and stretch forth his hands towards heaven, and cry with a loud voice, saying: [v. 14]

Holy God, we believe that thou hast separated us from our brethren; and we do not believe in the tradition of our brethren . . . ; but we believe that

thou hast elected us to be thy holy children; and also thou hast made it known unto us that there shall be no Christ. [v. 16]

. . . and thou hast elected us that we shall be saved, whilst all around us are elected to be cast by thy wrath down to hell; for the which holiness, O God, we thank thee; and we also thank thee that thou hast elected us, that we may not be led away after the foolish traditions of our brethren, which doth bind them down to a belief in Christ. [v. 17]

Alma responded:

Behold, O God, they cry unto thee, and yet their hearts are swallowed up in their pride. Behold, O God, they cry unto thee with their mouths, while they are puffed up, even to greatness, with the vain things of the world. [v. 27]

O Lord God, how long wilt thou suffer that such wickedness and infidelity shall be among this people? [v. 30]

Two things strike me about this Rameumptom story.

1. The Zoramites’ prayer was such a complete perversion of the Lord’s most central teachings about love. These Zoramites repeated over and over their disbelief in the Savior while they extolled their superiority to their neighbors. It is significant that those two apostate concepts appeared together. First, they claimed no belief in the Savior. Second, they claimed to be apart from and better than those around them.

2. Alma was so concerned about his Zoramite brethren. He prayed, “O Lord, my heart is exceedingly sorrowful; wilt thou comfort my soul in Christ” (Alma 31:31). Alma brought them the best medicine available to cure their spiritual illness. He brought the word of God.

One of the reasons I am always so distressed when I hear the Saints talk about “our problems with singles” or “the irresponsible youth of the Church” or “the difficulties with

the aged” is that all such comments reflect a distance from the word of God. “Them and us” talk like this distances us from each other, too.

The Zoramites perverted correct worship by designing “a place for standing” in the “center of their synagogue” (v. 13). While we would never create such a pulpit or entertain their false doctrine, do we inadvertently enter a form of that Rameumptom when we speak of “them and us,” as if such artificial designations were in keeping with the Lord’s teachings? Do we ignore the word of God by judging each other when we don’t even know each other?

We in Relief Society commonly hold focus groups as we travel. These are informal gatherings that allow us to hear from our sisters throughout the world. We generally sit in a circle and let our sisters tell us what is on their minds and in their hearts. One of our single general board members recently reported the following episode. A sister about the same age as our board member said, “These single women. I am convinced they simply do not want the responsibilities of children. They don’t get married because they take all their satisfaction from a paycheck.”

I know well what is in the heart of this board member. No one could want a husband and family more than she. She went up to our sister after the meeting and said, “On behalf of the single women of the Church, I want you to know I’d do anything to have your two children, and I do not take satisfaction from my paycheck.” Giving no response, the other sister turned away and started talking to someone else.

My single friend was wounded and angry. She fumed, “Elaine, what our sister said was so untrue. She must never have talked to a single woman if she thinks that. Why do we make false accusations about each other?”

It’s a good question, isn’t it? In fact, it’s a lot like Alma’s question about the “wickedness and infidelity” of the Zoramites. My friend asked the kind of question that each of us

might profitably ask when obvious insensitivity and unkindness inflict pain. Why do we do things like that? I believe that as members of the Church we do not intend to inflict pain on others. I think generally our forays into “them and us” talk and action come because of poor vision.

In some cases we simply are blind to the feelings of brothers and sisters close to us because we do not share their experience. A woman recently wrote me:

As a single adult I feel I have been forgotten. Perhaps you are thinking that I should be more faithful, that by trusting in the Lord I will overcome this feeling of being left out and not being cared about. Deep down inside there is a need in me that is not being filled. When I have spoken with those in leadership positions I am . . . forgotten as soon as I have left the room because they are at a loss. I don’t think it is intentional. I think they are in a quandary.

Sometimes when we’re in a quandary, we don’t know what to say or do, so we turn away. Lots of times that is the most hurtful thing we can do. A friend of mine says, “Disagree with me. Speak to me curtly. But don’t ignore me.” I feel the same way. When I talk with someone else, I can learn. I won’t always fully understand. I may not always completely agree. But I will always learn. Sisters and brothers, let us learn from each other by opening our eyes to other perspectives and people.

Sometimes “them and us” occurs because we lose sight of how good we really are. Then we may climb a step or two up that ladder to the Rameumptom, thinking we’ll have a better vista, hence, a clearer view. Instead we may create even greater distance between ourselves and our neighbors. One of the reasons the tragedy of the homeless Kurdish people has been so gripping is that we’ve all seen so many pictures of the faces of individuals. Those men, women, and children are human beings, our

fellow travelers on earth. We feel for each of them as we witness their plight. Think about the difference in your reactions to photos taken from the air of the troops dropping food to those people and the photos taken at ground level of individuals struggling to reach that food. My heart has always been touched by the pictures of the one; the long distance shots of the many are much less personal to me.

I think the difference is that opportunity to look eye to eye with another person. When we step up that Rameumptom ladder, we lose that blessed chance to look at one person and see who she or he is. Now I know there are challenges to such personal interaction. It can be uncomfortable to be so “up close and personal.” In certain cases we just don’t see eye to eye or even hear ear to ear with members of our families, let alone members of our wards. And, of course, everywhere there live people who challenge us, sometimes verbally, sometimes emotionally. The temptation can be great to look away when we disagree or feel hurt or don’t like what someone says to us. I know. I feel those things, too.

Yet, the Savior, who loves and understands each of us, teaches, “Look unto me, and be ye saved” (Isaiah 45:22).

Another reason we lapse into “them and us” is that we may get a little disoriented and look in the wrong direction. The prophet Jacob explained that much of the trouble that came to the Jews was the result of looking at the wrong target. He wrote, “Wherefore, because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall” (Jacob 4:14). Moses set a fiery serpent upon a pole that the children of Israel who had been bitten by serpents might look upon it and live.

The solution was so simple. All they had to do was look in the right direction, but not all of them did (see Numbers 21:8).

This looking and seeing is critical, my brothers and sisters. We can lose spiritual clarity in our vision in lots of ways. Whether we

are blind to some experiences and feelings of others, forget how good we are, or look beyond the mark, we are missing the big picture, and no hike up to a Rameumptom erected in honor of “them and us” will refocus our spiritual lenses.

Remember what the Zoramites said when they climbed to their place alone in the synagogue? We are different and better, and it is a foolish tradition to believe in Christ. What do we say when we start up that same ladder? Things like: “I don’t have anything in common with parents of little children” or “I know the Savior said to love everyone, but he didn’t know my brother-in-law” or “Roommates are impossible. I’ve never had a good one.”

“I Say unto You, Be One”

When we choose to pattern our lives on the Savior’s, that is, to really try to love others and to see eye to eye with them, good comes. I recently returned from a trip to Australia and Tahiti. Carol, my general board traveling companion, and I were especially careful to take luggage we could carry on the plane with us. Neither of us could think of anything worse than spending several days waiting for errant bags to catch up with us. When we arrived in Sydney, luggage in hand, we joined the area presidency and their wives for a lunch overlooking beautiful Sydney harbor. We returned to the car to find it had been broken into. Carol’s luggage—personal belongings, training materials, books, everything—had been stolen. She was left without purse or scriptures, lipstick, or even a change of shoes. All she had were the clothes on her back. Our fears had been of waiting two days for luggage. Now Carol faced three weeks on the road in Australia without even a toothbrush. This was a problem, especially for Carol.

She called home to cancel some credit cards and told her family that Wati Martin, the wife of Area President Douglas Martin, had offered to help us get some toiletries and clothes. Wati

knew we had only an hour to shop before the first series of meetings. She whisked us to a local mall, took us into the right stores, and in forty minutes Carol had some toiletries, cosmetics, and one new outfit.

When we got to the Martins' home late that night, Wati went through her own closet, picking out blouses and other items she thought Carol could use. Thanks to her, by the next morning Carol had enough clothes and sundries to get her by and a useful bag in which to carry them. Carol called home the next day to report that things were much improved, and her family in Utah told her that a friend of Wati's had heard about the theft already and called them to say, "Don't worry about Carol. Wati will take care of her." Nothing could have been more correct. Wati took us under her protective, loving wing and cared for our needs. In this case they included all the basics—food, shelter, *and* clothing.

Can you imagine how grateful we were to Wati and Elder Martin and to the others who helped us turn a disaster into an experience of love at its best?

Word does travel fast in the Church. I must also report that by the time we reached Melbourne a sister arrived at the training meeting with a pair of hose for Carol. Women in Alice Springs offered money, and everywhere we went, women assured Carol that they were confident the thieves would benefit from exposure to her scriptures.

In the weeks since I returned home, I've studied my scriptures, looking for examples of what happens when people live their lives according to our Savior's teachings about love. Let me share a short series of these, so you can hear from the prophets about how these truly converted peoples lived.

And Alma and Amulek went forth preaching repentance to the people. . . .

And as many as would hear their words, unto them they did impart the word of God, without any respect of persons, continually.

And . . . the establishment of the church became general throughout the land, in all the region round about, among all the people of the Nephites.

And there was no inequality among them.
[Alma 16:13–16]

The Lamanites who became the Anti-Nephi-Lehites "began to be a righteous people; and they did walk in the ways of the Lord" (Alma 25:14). Ammon reported of them,

We can witness of their sincerity, because of their love towards their brethren and also towards us. . . .

. . . has there been so great love in all the land? Behold, I say unto you, Nay, there has not, even among the Nephites. . . .

. . . And they were also distinguished for their zeal towards God, and also towards men; for they were perfectly honest and upright in all things.
[Alma 26:31, 33; 27:27]

Alma the Elder identified his people as "ye [who] are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light" (Mosiah 18:8).

Of the people of Alma the scripture records, "And they did walk uprightly before God, imparting to one another both temporally and spiritually according to their needs and their wants" (Mosiah 18:29).

The Lord called the people of Enoch "Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them" (Moses 7:18).

After the Savior's visit, the people on the American continent "had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift" (4 Nephi 1:3). Time passed, life went on, yet after

one hundred more years had passed away, the scriptures tell us:

And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.

. . . and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. [4 Nephi 1:15–16]

Finally, let me quote more of what I mentioned earlier that the Savior said to us in this dispensation:

And let every man [woman] esteem his [her] brother [sister] as him[her]self, and practice virtue and holiness before me.

. . . I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one, ye are not mine. [D&C 38:24, 27]

Do you see a pattern? I do, and I am so grateful for these ideas:

1. The people of God love him.
2. They love each other.
3. They are greatly changed by their love.
4. They deal justly with one another.
5. They hold all things in common.
6. They are pure in heart.
7. They live peacefully together.

We could sit together and find dozens of other scriptures that echo these messages. Having heard these words of the prophets and of the Lord himself, can you see why I am so distressed when I hear or witness “them and us” in our language and our treatment of one another? Simply stated, nothing is more destructive to our personal spiritual growth than these small wedges we drive between us—and sometimes into each other.

How can we clarify our vision and become one?

First, we must take off our blinders. Recently a prominent family in my

neighborhood suffered a great tragedy. Their troubled teenage son committed suicide. Under the influence of drugs and alcohol, he apparently sought peace in this desperate way. His fine family felt his loss intensely. Despite an enormous level of effort and outpouring of love to this son throughout his life, his parents agonized, wondering if they’d done everything. His siblings probably wondered the same. Neighbors and friends, in and out of the Church, responded with love, sympathy, and support.

The family sat together at stake conference just days after this tragic experience. The main speaker, who knew of this incident, gave a long talk about the problems families get into when they spend too much time on Church duties and not enough time with each other. Some members of the congregation visibly winced as they thought of this family and how the message might affect them. Right message. Wrong time. How we wished our speaker had taken off the blinders and seen the needs of our brothers and sisters.

This same sort of thing can happen in less dramatic ways. A bishop announces that all families are invited to the ward party. A single man living alone might feel less than welcome. A Relief Society president invites sisters and their husbands to a special homemaking event. A recent widow withers a little, a newly divorced mother withdraws.

Sometimes our blinders limit our understanding of others. Sometimes they limit our understanding of ourselves. Recently I visited two of my sons in California. On Saturday night I was sitting in the car with a sleeping grandchild while they took care of some Church business. While I sat there right in front of the ward, I watched a few people walk into the building. I knew a single-adult fireside would begin in about forty-five minutes, so I assumed these early arrivals were in charge of the meeting. A young man walked in alone, and about ten minutes later he walked back

out. He had his hands stuffed in his pants pockets and looked very alone. I called to him, “Hey, are you leaving before the meeting starts?”

He looked quite directly at me and responded, “Does it matter?”

“Well, yes, it does. I know you’ve got some guest speakers, and I think you’d enjoy hearing them,” I said. I knew that two Relief Society representatives would be speaking at that meeting. I encouraged him to stay and listen to them. “Have you ever heard Sister Okazaki or Sister Clark speak?” I asked.

“No,” he said, “And I won’t tonight, either.”

My heart dropped as he walked off. How I wished he could have joined me for a few minutes so I could have learned more of him. How I wished he had felt at home.

Blinders are good for horses. They keep them looking straight ahead at the road. Blinders are not so good for people, for we must look not only at the road ahead, but also at the sky above and into each other’s eyes. My brothers and sisters, please remove your blinders.

It is not hard. But it does require effort. The great thing about the scriptural examples I just read you is that they are all real, and they point us in the right direction. They tell us why taking the blinders off is so useful; they also tell us how we will know when we’ve been successful in our efforts to do so. Most of all, they repeat over and over this truth: Love is the greatest teacher of all.

When Christlike love becomes our main motivator, when we really get serious about truly demonstrating our love for the Lord, good things happen. During this past year I have felt an increased need to learn how to love others. I have prayed many times that the Lord would help me understand the many needs and circumstances of women throughout the whole world. In essence, I’ve been praying that the Lord would help me remove any blinders. I can testify to you that my prayers

have been answered. I am different than I was before I received this calling. I am different now because I see more broadly, I love more profoundly, and I feel gratitude more abundantly. The Lord has been good to me. These insights have not come instantaneously, but they have come as I have applied myself to prayerfully trying to love more and understand better. I continue to pray for greater wisdom and for insight, thanking the Lord all the while for his goodness to each of us.

Second, to clarify our vision, we must think, and then act, inclusively, not exclusively. A Ricks College student recently said to me, “You know, when President Bennion meets you on campus, he treats you like he was your home teacher instead of the president of Ricks.” I cannot imagine a nicer tribute. Truly Steve Bennion and so many others know the art of making people feel valued, equal, loved.

To learn to think and act inclusively requires thoughtfulness and good old common sense. A missionary I know recently wrote his family:

We had a zone conference tonight. It seems that some missionaries from another district have been taking the meetings a little less seriously than other people feel they should. They were openly rebuked for it, and it gave me some thoughts on the relationship we place between the gospel and people. . . . It’s so easy to notice what other people do wrong and how we would do things differently. Can you imagine how different the world would be if that trend was reversed and if we all noticed the positive of others and set these qualities as our goal to work for rather than comparing ourselves to the negative?
[Letter from Elder Adam Wilcox to MarJean Wilcox]

Yes, Elder Wilcox, I can imagine. In fact, in my fondest dreams we treat each other in the kind ways that heal and soothe the bruises and rebuffs of life. This wise young elder reminds us that if we will acknowledge successes and

think of ways to bring everyone in, rather than emphasizing the errors or differences that leave some out, life will be better all around.

My grandmother used to say, "You can catch more flies with honey than vinegar." I say, "Life ought to be a grand party with everyone sitting around the same round table."

Our Church experiences together should particularly be sources of happiness and harmony. When we're together, we should feel we belong. How did you feel when you arrived at the last ward party you attended? Did you come alone? Did you dread entering the building because you didn't know who you could sit by? Did you come with another friend? Did you spend the whole time visiting with everyone in the room? Did you leave feeling happy?

Even our casual experiences together are something to ponder. Do we enter our chapels feeling and thinking inclusively? Do we come to the party ready to help others feel they belong? As we spiritually prepare for our Church assignments, do we ask the Lord to help us understand those we are called to serve? Do we pray to love and understand our family members? Our co-workers? Our neighbors? Our roommates?

Sisters and brothers, please think—then act—inclusively, that all love may abound among us, despite our weaknesses, mistakes, and spiritual distance from each other.

Third, avoid offense. A friend often quotes me this truth: "She who takes offense when no offense is intended is a fool. He who takes offense when offense is intended is usually a fool."

The Golden Rule is a much underrated commandment, in my opinion. The Savior said on both continents on which he ministered, "Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets" (3 Nephi 14:12). This simple injunction could make life happier for thousands. I mean it—you probably deal with thousands of people

annually who could be blessed if you took this commandment to heart, head, and tongue.

Now, to avoid offense, we must be serious about neither giving it nor taking it. We will always have to deal with thoughtless people. Sometimes our own lack of experience makes us insensitive when we would intend to be otherwise. Some days are so busy, and because we're tired or in a hurry, we speak before we think. Unquestionably, opportunities to give and take offense are plentiful.

I suggest, however, that you never intentionally litter the lives of your associates with offenses. And don't pick up an offense when others drop it. This is your mother speaking: Don't pick it up!

I know a woman of Mexico who joined the Church, the only person in her family to do so. She subsequently went on a mission, did graduate work at BYU, and took a responsible position in government. To take this job meant a move, so off she went to a new community where she had no friends.

The first week in her new, suburban, North American, family ward, she introduced herself to the bishop. He promptly responded with a calling to serve in the ward library and with a husband and wife to serve as her home and visiting teachers.

Because she was so new to the ward, she felt she should have been called to serve in a position that would let her mingle with the ward members. She said nothing to the bishop, but she resented being asked to serve in such an isolated environment as the library. Weeks came and went, and she got angrier and angrier about what she felt was a real slap in the face from an insensitive bishop.

About the time she got up a good boil about her Church job, her home/visiting teachers called. They were elderly, the husband explained. They had often come by to visit, but she was never home. He complained that he could never get her on the phone and told her she should have bought an answering machine

months ago, if she expected him to ever check on her.

He continued: His knees were bad—so were his wife’s—and they would no longer climb the three flights of stairs to her apartment. If she wanted them to come, she’d have to call them first.

After that phone conversation, she got up a really fine head of steam. “These Anglos,” she thought. “Who do they think they are? First, they shove me in a closet at the ward, then they offend me by expecting me to meet their schedule. I’ll show them. I just won’t come at all.” True to her word, she stopped going to church. All because well-meaning people dropped offense.

Now she could have disposed of that offense in several ways. She could have picked up the ugly thing and thrown it in the garbage. She could have asked, “What is the intent of their actions and words” before she heated to such a hard boil. She might have stepped over the offense, laughing at the difficulty all of us have sometimes as we try to communicate. She could have explained her needs to the bishop in the first place. She could have chosen a street-level location to meet the home/visiting teachers. She could have counseled with an understanding friend. She could have stomped and fumed until she was able to turn the heat off and let her feelings simmer down. She could have said, “This is my Church, too, and no one will drive me out of it no matter what they do or say.” She could have determined to be more understanding so she never did something similar to others. She could have done a lot of things. Most of all, I wish she had never taken offense in the first place.

A friend of mine recently came to visit, looking like the loser of a twelve-round prize fight.

“What is wrong?” I asked, as she burst into tears. The trouble was that one of her neighbors had lambasted her repeatedly over a matter concerning their daughters, who were best

friends. It seems my friend’s daughter had offended the neighbor’s daughter, and the neighbor had marched right over and let my friend have it. What offended her was first being treated as if she were responsible for her daughter’s comments and finally being talked to as if she were a child herself.

My friend said, “Elaine, it’s bad enough to have such an unpleasant encounter once, but she won’t let it go. She’s talked to me four times about the same trouble, even though the girls have forgotten the whole episode. What should I do?”

My answer: “Bob and weave.”

“What do you mean?” my confused friend asked.

I suggested, “Don’t take offense at this. Isn’t this the same neighbor who was so angry when your son cracked her kitchen window with a baseball? He paid for the damage, but she insisted on telling you several times how distressed she was. After she’d vented her feelings, she was fine.

“She apparently needs to vent when she’s angry, and it seems she doesn’t get it all out the first time. Just because she needs to say it more than once doesn’t mean you have to stand there like a punching bag waiting for her to hit you again. Don’t stand there flatfooted—keep moving. Bob and weave like champion prize fighters. They don’t just stand in one place when someone approaches with boxing gloves on. They take some initiative, and so should you. Write her a nice note explaining your feelings. Invite them over for a family picnic. Go shopping together. Tell her the next good joke you hear. Bake her some brownies and take them to her while they’re still warm. Pour her a nice glass of milk, and when she takes that first mouthful, hurry and explain how much you’d like to be her friend. Then treat her as if she were your best friend. No matter what she does, keep moving. Do what you can, maintain a sense of humor, then let it go.”

Having received this counsel from another friend when I was a young mother, I know it's sound. I share it with all of you. Take initiative, do good, enjoy humor. And, please, avoid offense.

My friends, "them and us" are not the words the Lord uses to talk about us. He has called us his children, his friends, his sheep, his lambs. He has admonished us to be one with each other, to follow the pattern he and his Father have set for us.

May we do so. The prophet Isaiah wrote, "They shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion" (3 Nephi 16:18). May we work to see eye to eye, may we become one as we treat and speak of each other as the sons and daughters of God, sisters and brothers in the gospel of Jesus Christ, I pray, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ. Amen.