The Savior served wherever he saw a need. He didn't withhold his kindness and generosity of spirit from those who were socially undesirable or those who were financially insolvent. His love was both boundless and without boundaries. We, on the other hand, are sometimes less observant and less creative. Sometimes we need suggestions or help in how and where we can serve others.

A problem

It can be so easy to get caught up in the details of our own lives that it becomes difficult to see clearly what is going on around us. For example, I know a good couple who works for the Church and travels a great deal. He does research, and his wife travels with him. They spend three months in Scandinavia, a couple of months in Jerusalem, hop over to Tahiti, the Orient then back for a month at home then off again to France, Russia, or perhaps Africa. Their life is very busy and filled with events, but by enlarge no trauma, no heartaches. At least that is the way it used to be. Now they have family members who, through the fault of old age, need constant attention and care. But their lives have been centered on themselves for so many years that having to spend their time ministering to others whose needs require such intensive service in the here and now, are causing them to struggle emotionally to stay afloat. This example is just one of a thousand ways we can become so centered on what we want to do each day that we forget that our primary responsibility is to look after each other.

We can't just turn on ministering like a light switch. Ministering is something we grow into. It is a process of becoming Christlike in our attitudes and behaviors. So if you look at your ministering needs and feel challenged then you are seeing things pretty clearly. Learning to minister, to see the needs of others and come up with proper ways to meet those needs, takes time, energy, and practice. Plan on it taking a while to grow into being a person who ministers, for ministering is as much a way of being as a person as it is an act of kindness.

When you think of a grandma or mother, what usually comes to mind? Cookies for the children? Band-aids for scraped knees? Hot meals? Service to the sick and troubled? Was your grandma or mother like this when she first got married? I can safely say the answer is most likely a big NO. She served for many years, and stumbled a lot along the way in order to arrive where she is currently. She had to learn the value of the simple gestures, like a home-baked cookie or kissing a scraped knee to make it feel better. She had to learn over time the healing properties of a well-timed hug or a listening ear. Over many years of practice these acts of service came to define the person she has become.

Ministering challenges

Every person has their own challenges when it comes to how to minister more and better. If you live in a mostly LDS neighborhood, you may think either that your ministering job has been made easier, or that your ministering is made more difficult. It might seem easier because all your neighbors are already blessed with the gospel of Christ and temple covenants. What more could they need? Or you might think that because they are all LDS they guard themselves from outsiders knowing what their real needs are and they try to cover up the real-life behaviors of their family members so no one finds out that their daughter is in jail, again, or that their son can't go on his mission because he has to get married to provide his new child with a father. Many don't want anyone to know that they are overspending and are in financial difficulties, or that their relatives are floundering spiritually and some within their family ranks are wavering in their faith or are seriously contemplating leaving the Church.

For those who live in mostly non-LDS communities, there are like difficulties. Perhaps you aren't sure how to be friends with your non-LDS neighbors, or are unsure how to talk about the gospel with them, or feel you don't have anything in common with them.

Perhaps your neighbors are partiers and you are not on the best of terms with them because of all the times you have had to call the police on them, or heaven forbid, you have had to call the police to raid their home for the drugs or other illegal activities going on. And because you are LDS and are supposed to be setting an example, perhaps you don't want them to see that you are not a perfect family. They might not listen to the gospel if they know you have marital problems or have children who have gone astray from your family values.

Our marital status makes no difference. Singles have their own sets of challenges. When we get married we just trade one set of difficulties in for another set. And what about those who struggle with desires and habits labeled as sinful? Often we don't feel like we fit in or belong if we don't fit the cookie-cutter mold that is the perceived life of every Latter-day Saint. Face it, life is messy. We are all in different circumstances and struggling with our own set of challenges. For some of us, life has been so comfortable that we haven't ever really suffered, yet. For others of us it seems that the suffering never seems to end. We just go from one disaster to another, always wondering if it is just life or if we are doing something wrong that keeps us in this endless loop of struggle and sorrow.

There is hope

Ministering requires attention to details. If we visit a family with our ministering partner and leave the house without having observed anything or learned anything then there is a problem, and it isn't with the family we just visited, it is with us. We cannot minister where we are not observing the details. We cannot always wait for someone to bring other's needs to us. Often it is the minister who notices the need that is able to do the most good. For those whom you have have been called to visit ask yourself some basic questions:

Do you know the name, age, birth date, and social situation of every person in their house? If not, why don't you? Are they not important enough to learn such details? Are you afraid that it will require effort on your part to learn this information? (And yes, it does require effort.)

What is their general financial situation? Are their clothes clean and neat? Do they have holes in their clothes? Are the children well cared for? Are they clean? What about the

furniture in the house? Is it new or used? What about their car? How many vehicles do they have? All these things build a picture of how they are living. Why does this matter? Do you know what each person does for work? Does it look like they are living above their means? Do they appear to be struggling to make ends meet?

What about their spiritual condition? Do they attend Church each Sunday and attend all their meetings? Do they skip out of any part of the the meeting block? Do they miss many Sunday meetings on a regular basis? Why are they missing? Where are they going? Are they participating in family events in another ward? Are they joining in sports events? Are they mowing the lawn and doing their yard work on the Sabbath, instead of on other days of the week? Is their ox in the mire because of work so they have to do their yard work on the Sabbath? Have you thought to offer to help them with that so they can get to their meetings?

Feeling uncomfortable yet? I am. I struggle with feelings of being a nosy neighbor. But how am I supposed to be of any use to those whom I visit if their lives are off limits to me? And how are my ministering brothers and sisters supposed to help me if I am hiding everything about myself and my family from them? What about those socially awkward places to minister, like prison, rehab places, or social clubs that are not based on religion? What are we supposed to do?

Ministering in difficult circumstances

I have a friend in prison. How does a prisoner do ministering? How do you minister to someone in a drug rehab center? We find the answers we seek in the basic definition of what it means to minister. When we serve others with love we are ministering. Does a prisoner need love? Of course they do. Does someone in rehab need hope and love? Yes, and yes. My friend in prison doesn't have anyone to ask gospel questions to when he reads the scriptures. He and I write letters back and forth so I can help answer some of his questions. He gets someone to talk to and confide in about what he is learning and experiencing, and I am helping to deepen and further our relationship.

What can someone who is still mentally capable, but needs to be in a facility to help with mobility challenges, do to minister to others? We all know that such centers as those who house the elderly hold every kind of physical and mental challenge. How can you minister to those who are mentally infirm or physically bedridden? Isn't the

essence of ministering to love and cherish the other person? What does one do to minister to someone who is capable of little more than a nod of acknowledgment or is lonely for their loved ones who rarely visit? What a fruitful field for showing compassion and honoring those whose lives have been filled with service and hard work.

This brings up the question about what ministering is supposed to accomplish. Do we really think that by ministering we strip people of their hardships and sorrows? Ministering is a demonstration of God's love. God's love makes our sorrows bearable and give us hope and confirmation that we are not alone and forgotten. Sometimes we can minister to another person and actually solve a problem, but that isn't always possible. Even when the Savior performed a miracle for someone raising them from the dead, giving them sight, or helping them to walk again, he only fixed the immediate problem. We all have problems, and they change from week to week and month to month. The crippled became whole, but that didn't bring with it the training in a profession so they could now care for themselves. They still needed to overcome their new challenges. But they could do so knowing God loved them and cared for them. The act of ministering is to demonstrate the nature of God's love. It must be given freely and without condition.

The point

Ministering is the "acts that demonstrate the love of God" born from our personal experience. Joseph Smith said: "A man filled with the love of God, is not content with blessing his family alone, but ranges through the whole world, anxious to bless the whole human race." This is the spirit of ministering. It doesn't matter if we are in a prison, a drug house, a back alley in a big city, on a farm, a college campus, or in our own neighborhood. Wherever we are, when we are filled with the love of God, when we have felt of that love and feel a need to express what it means to us, we can turn to the people nearest us and minister to their needs.

There is something that happens to us when we seek to demonstrate God's love to others. Our eyes are opened. We see needs where none were seen before. We feel a greater need to do for others than for ourselves. We turn our hearts outward where they once were turned in on themselves. What becomes important in our lives is the

relief of suffering and pain all around us. We cannot rest if we know there is good we can do and are not doing it.

Goodness knows no boundaries, no conditional uses, no restrictions. When we become filled with God's love and peace, both friend and foe receive equal treatment. We become fearless in doing good wherever we are. We cannot do anything less.

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Ministering Without Boundaries