In a perfect world each person would be attentive to the needs and wants of all those around them. We would both gladly give of our time and resources, as well as gladly receive the services offered by others. Alas, this is not a perfect world. There are those who are not yet converted, so they don't want to be bothered with other's needs and wants, focusing instead on themselves and their own needs. Then there are those who are socially timid and would love nothing more than to just be left alone. These differences in people's temperaments are just the beginning of the challenges of ministering.

Read part one of this series here.

The big picture

The big picture means that we need to learn to look at the human family as just that, a family. Think about the differences in personality within your own immediate and extended family. Very few of us, even in our immediate family have the same disposition and desires. Some are outgoing, while others are reserved. Some are fearless, while others are afraid of their own shadow.

My whole life I have been envious of two of my siblings. My older brother is afraid of nothing. He is comfortable in any social setting, and is a natural-born leader. One of my younger sisters is gregarious and self absorbed, but readily makes friends and is always the life of the party. Then there is me. I love to serve and do things for others, but find it difficult to be the recipient of service. I am an idealist, and am painfully aware of my social deficits. I am completely awkward in my own skin and have difficulty making friends. People either seem to really like me or hate me. There aren't many who can take me or leave me. I seem to have a polarizing effect on people.

My point in detailing a few of the personalities just within my own family is that God has an unlimited supply of children, (all part of that eternal increase blessing) and no two of them are identical, no matter how much they may look alike on the outside. This means he must have infinite patience and tolerance. His love encompasses all of us, as well as our foibles and idiosyncrasies. We don't have his all-encompassing view of humanity. We tend to congregate into small clusters of like-minded brothers and sisters. This leads us to the false assumptions that we can segregate the world into groups of us versus them - those who are like us, and those who need to be like us. This is not a realistic view of life, and inevitably leads to conflict and hurt feelings.

The ideal

The goal, which is Zion, is a people who are of one heart and one mind. Don't be fooled into thinking that this means we all have to think and act alike. It certainly does NOT mean that we have to want the same things and feel the same way. It DOES mean that we will have learned by that time to know how to work with each other's individual personalities and differences. I believe the quote in the Church is "Unity through diversity." If there is one thing in this world, of which there is a limitless supply, it is individual differences.

Some are natural hermits, wishing to be left alone to do their own thing. The reasons for their wishes to be left alone may be as unlimited as the numbers of those wishing to be left alone. Then there are those who want to be in the know. I have a daughter who is like this. She wants to be the family information broker, always being the first to know everything about everybody's business. She also wants to be the first one to dispense that information. Again, the reasons for why people would want to be "up in everyone else's business" is as varied as the number of people on the planet.

How does this fit in a Zion society? Does the Lord expect us to be aware of our neighbors and their needs? Yes, he does. Does that mean he also expects us to be "all up in their business?" No, it certainly does not. So how do we determine what our boundaries are? How can we tell what we should be doing to and for our neighbors?

Communication

I have two members of my family that drive me nuts. In my case they both happen to be female, but the gender is not the deciding factor here. Both are quick to jump to conclusions about the other one. Both are quick to jump to the wrong conclusions, mostly because they assume the worst, instead of the best in each other. I am constantly saying to one or both of them, and sometimes to both of them together, "Talk to each other!" So many problems could be solved before they get out of control if we did two things: assume the best, and talk openly about expectations. I suppose there is a third item that is indispensable here as well. Number 3 is the need to respect the expressed wishes of the other person. This means, of course, that each person is practicing in their personal lives how to verbalize how they truly feel. Some of us are so awkward at expressing our feelings and wishes that when we finally put them into words they don't resemble how we really feel at all. This is something we all need to work on.

Putting it into action

Here is a quote from a comment I received on part one of this article, Facing the Ministering Before Us. This is something I had never contemplated before, and was an eye-opener for me. The quote opens with a statement from the first article.

> “What we sometimes forget is that ministering requires that we get involved in someone else’s life.”
>
> The supposition from this article and especially this line is that people WANT you involved in their lives and in their business.
>
> This is great for the Extroverts and the Needy-for-Attention portion of the Church–BUT WHAT NO ONE EVER CONSIDERS is that it is a NIGHTMARE for the introverts and private members.

> Please, is there a way that the ones who want to be all up in other's business–and the ones who want people all up in their business and having Interaction —could be matched up with each other??'And leave those of us for whom all this is so off-putting and terribly uncomfortable can just be excused from it?
>
> I asked this very question to our Extremely needy-for-attention/interaction Bishop and he said "Remember, as Sister Oscarson said– It is not about you. Its about what others want FROM YOU."
>
> So my Question is:
> Why does part of the Church matter and get their way–and the other part of members (like me) don't?
> Why are part of us expected to suck it up and buy into the theory that it is 'not about us' but that it must be about the others and THEIR way and THEIR neediness?

This question was revelatory to me. From here on I am expressing my own personal views and not necessarily the views of Church leaders, so take it with a grain of salt and try to match it up with your own personal experience in life and in the Church.

The question being asked here is just as one sided in its wording as the one she is complaining about. She states that those who want to be up in everyone's business have complete control in the Church. This, in itself isn't quite true, and isn't fully fair. Yes, there is an assumption that we all need to be served at some point in our lives. That is truth. Whether we want to be served is a completely different discussion. But all of us need to be served at some point.

The assumption that those who are the extroverts have complete control over the Church is only partly true. Leaders, by definition, can't afford to be complete introverts. They have to put themselves out there because their callings require it of them. This may seem to tilt the scales in their favor when it comes to the attitudes they teach to others, because it is natural that they teach the attitudes they themselves hold dear. That is human nature, right?

What is not correct, in my opinion, is the blanket assumption by many in the Church that we all need to be involved in each other's business at all times. I freely admit that used to be my opinion. That is not right, though I can see how one might arrive at that conclusion. For example, if I am assigned to minister to someone and I am trying to get to know them as a family or as an individual, what is my responsibility? My job is to become involved with that person or family enough that I can identify needs/wants and

be able to minister to them in whatever way the Spirit moves me to help. I also need to be good enough friends with them that they learn to trust that I am there for them, and not just as an assignment from the ward to be tolerated. They need to believe that I am genuine in my care and concern for them as a person or a family. This requires a certain amount of interaction and trust building.

But what is their responsibility to me as their ministering brother? Yes, they do have a responsibility to me. I can't help them if they won't let me into their lives, even if just a little bit. I have no problems with them wanting to be left alone most of the time. But I can't do my job if they aren't willing to help me a little. Is it asking too much of someone to honestly agree that if there are needs they will call/text me? Is it asking too much to ask that they allow me to periodically contact them to follow up on how they are doing? I'm not talking about being on their doorstep, fruitcake in hand, every week of the year. I'm talking about once a quarter if that is what they want. Is that really asking too much? I certainly hope not.

Remember that it is Satan who wants to split us up into groups. The more divided we are the more inroads he has to divide us further and prevent us from becoming a Zionlike people. To split the Church into extroverts and introverts is to divide God's family into factions, something God would never permit. His goal for all of us is to become one, despite our differences. This is something we need to work out among ourselves. It has to be done on a person-by-person basis. It is like conversion. No one can tell you how to be devoted to gospel living, it has to happen on a personal, individual basis. Learning to respect the differences among us and love each other anyway is the same thing, it can only happen as the Spirit moves our hearts and changes our ability to tolerate each other's differences. We must love each other enough to accommodate individual needs and differences.

Comparing the two sides of the coin

There are those on the extrovert side of the coin who will want to be in their assigned homes and shooting hoops or helping them clean house every week. Then there are those on the introvert side of the coin who will breath easier if they know someone is available if needed, and they honestly believe that person will be there for them IF NEEDED, but won't be breathing down their neck every week. Isn't this what becoming a Zion people is all about, learning to find unity through our many differences?

I fully agree that one side of the extrovert/introvert coin shouldn't have complete dominion throughout the Church. But I also understand that the Lord has given us assignments through his Priesthood to watch over each other. If we aren't willing to at least listen to each other and then communicate how we really feel about how we want to carry out these priesthood assignments then we don't stand a chance of being able to fulfill our assignments or become a Zion people.

One of my ministering families may need me on a regular basis. Another family or person may feel like they are doing just fine, and don't really need me to be there all the time. But I, as a priesthood holder won't feel like I am fulfilling my calling if I am not helped to feel comfortable that IF there is a need the person or family who doesn't feel like they want me in their home all the time will at least call me. With that simple assurance, and an occasional follow up call, text, or visit (whatever they want) I will feel like I can honestly report I have done what has been asked of me by the Lord.

Note that I may personally want to do more than my family wants me to do. But as long as I am willing to honor the wishes of the person/family I have been asked to minister to then I have done all the Lord expects of me. After all, I must honor their agency, just as the Lord honors mine.

Final Thoughts

The Lord knows better than we do that it takes all of us working together to return to him. It is for this very reason we have been commanded to get involved in each other's lives. But we also have agency that must be respected by all. Even God, himself won't violate or impinge on our agency. If I have a person/family who is willing to be honest with me and tell me they don't want regular visits or checkups then I need to negotiate with them to find a middle ground that satisfies them and my need to fulfill my priesthood responsibility. I might add here that ministering sisters are no different in this regard, as they are on the Lord's errand when they are assigned to visit others.

One final observation: Does this mean that my ministering brothers or sisters will honor my wishes? No, it does not. Just as we are asking them to bend to our wishes, so we have to concede that they have wishes or views of their own, and they may not currently match with our own. But this doesn't mean that I should just give up and allow them to impose on me and my family without saying something in a kind and

loving way. Remember, the key here is loving communication. Whether we want to come more often or less often, communication spoken in love is always needed.

If you have had experiences with different personality types in your ministering assignments or efforts, we would all appreciate your comments below. You can also share your stories with us in the Facebook group - Latter-day Saint Ministering.

Read part one of this series here.

Click the link below to

print a PDF copy of the file.

Facing the Ministering Before Us - Part 2