

# Brotherly Love

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**M**y dear brothers and sisters, do we really mean what we say when we address each other as brother and sister?

These are rather peculiar titles for many people not familiar with our Mormon culture. Names such as Brother Jim or Sister Smith are used fondly and respectfully when addressing each other to express our kinship in the family of God. Why do we use these affectionate titles?

Let me quote from the missionary guide *Preach My Gospel*:

*God is the Father of our spirits. We are literally His children, and He loves us. We lived as spirit children of our Father in Heaven before we were born on this earth. We were not, however, like our Heavenly Father, nor could we ever become like Him and enjoy all the blessings that He enjoys without the experience of living in mortality with a physical body.*

*God's whole purpose—His work and His glory—is to enable each of us to enjoy all His blessings. He has provided a perfect plan to accomplish His purpose. We understood and accepted this plan before we came to the earth. [Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 48]*

When I was a small boy growing up, my older brother was bigger than life to me. He was nine years older and the best player on every team he played on. He always looked out for his little brother and spent many hours teaching me the skills of various sports. Since we shared a bedroom—much to his chagrin—I oftentimes would hear him awake late at night and slip out to the backyard to lift weights to get stronger. I spent many nights peering out the window at his example of extra effort and dreamed I one day could be like him. He truly was, and still remains, a great brother. He continues to influence my life for good as my big brother.

Elder Henry B. Eyring taught: “Your responsibility is to touch people so that they will make the choices that will take them toward eternal life. And eternal life is the greatest of all the gifts of God” (“To Touch a Life with Faith,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 37–38).

Perhaps one of the more thought-provoking questions asked in the scriptures is the one asked by Cain when questioned by the Lord

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on the whereabouts of his brother Abel: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9). Cain had slain his younger brother because God had accepted Abel’s offering and rejected his. Cain’s words have come to symbolize man’s unwillingness to accept responsibility for the welfare of his “brothers” on this earth. In our present-day situations, we would all do well, as children of our Heavenly Father, to contemplate our answer to that same question: “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

To be able to answer in the affirmative, “Yes, I am my brother’s keeper!” we must be obedient to the command given us by Jesus when He said:

*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*

*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. [John 13:34–35]*

Just how do we determine who our brothers and sisters are? The Apostle Paul stated on Mars Hill that God “hath made of *one blood all nations* of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26; emphasis added). All mankind have chosen to come to this earth in obedience to the plan of salvation and are indeed the sons and daughters of God—and thus brothers and sisters in His heavenly family.

Modern revelation further describes the familial relationship that we are granted through the Atonement of our Savior. We learn from King Benjamin of our place in the family of Christ:

*And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters. [Mosiah 5:7]*

We catch a further glimpse of who Jesus considers His brothers and sisters from this exchange found in Matthew:

*While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him.*

*Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.*

*But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?*

*And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!*

*For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother. [Matthew 12:46–50]*

The hoped-for result of this knowledge of our heavenly family was described by Paul in his letter to the Romans:

*Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.*

*Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another. [Romans 12:9–10]*

Furthermore, we are instructed in Timothy:

*Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren;*

*The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity. [1 Timothy 5:1–2]*

Brothers and sisters, love one another. Serve each other. I would think that most of you here today have followed and accepted the premise of brotherhood and sisterhood as taught from the scriptures. The issue is not so much that you don’t accept a stranger as a brother or sister as much as it is you simply have not conditioned yourself to serve them. Serving those who we love and who love us—those who think like us or look like us or speak like

us, or even worship like us—is good. However, we must learn to reach out to those we don't know: to the discarded, the sick, those less fortunate, the inflicted, the lonely, and those we don't necessarily understand.

The story of the dramatic rescue of the members of the Martin and Willie Handcart Companies—a group of our early pioneer Saints trapped and frozen on the plains—is one that inspires me today to listen for the call to action and GO! Elder Jeffrey R. Holland reminded us that being our brother's keeper is a theme we need oft remember. Quoting from Elder Holland's most recent general conference address:

*As surely as the rescue of those in need was the general conference theme of October 1856, so too is it the theme of this conference and last conference and the one to come next spring. . . . The needy . . . can be rescued only by those who have more and know more and can help more. And don't worry about asking, "Where are they?" They are everywhere, on our right hand and on our left, in our neighborhoods and in the workplace, in every community and county and nation of this world. Take your team and wagon; load it with your love, your testimony, and a spiritual sack of flour; then drive in any direction. The Lord will lead you to those in need if you will but embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. ["Prophets in the Land Again," *Ensign*, November 2006, 106]*

President Thomas S. Monson, speaking of our call to service, stated:

*This is the service that counts, the service to which all of us have been called: the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Along your pathway of life you will observe that you are not the only traveler. There are others who need your help. There are feet to steady, hands to grasp, minds to encourage, hearts to inspire, and souls to save. ["How Firm a Foundation," *Ensign*, November 2006, 68]*

The Prophet Joseph Smith—oft referred to by the people of his day as Brother Joseph—was the epitome of selflessness. He reached out to strangers in many ways to assist them and bless their lives. We need not look far to find excellent examples of brotherly and sisterly love. The Lord's chosen servants of today emulate their predecessors and shine a light on all that is good, devoting their lives to serving others.

A story is told of a man having a conversation with the Lord one day. He said, "Lord, I would like to know what heaven and hell are like."

The Lord led the man to two doors. He opened one of the doors, and the man looked in. In the middle of the room was a large round table. In the middle of the table was a large pot of stew, which smelled delicious and made the man's mouth water.

The people sitting around the table were thin and sickly. They appeared to be famished. They were holding spoons with very long handles that were strapped to their arms. Each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful, but because the handle was longer than their arms, they could not get the spoons back into their mouths.

The man shuddered at the sight of their misery and suffering. The Lord said, "You have seen hell."

They went to the next room and opened the door. It was exactly the same as the first one. There was the large round table with the large pot of stew that made the man's mouth water. The people were equipped with the same long-handled spoons strapped to their arms, but here the people were well nourished and plump, laughing and talking.

The man said, "I don't understand!"

"It is simple," said the Lord. "It requires but one skill. You see, they have learned to feed each other, while the greedy think only of themselves."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wondered why men do not treat each other like brothers and sisters. Let me quote Dr. King:

*Modern man has brought this whole world to an awe-inspiring threshold of the future. . . .*

*Yet . . . something basic is missing. There is a sort of poverty of the spirit which stands in glaring contrast to our scientific and technological abundance. The richer we have become materially, the poorer we have become morally and spiritually. We have learned to fly the air like birds and swim the sea like fish, but we have not learned the simple art of living together as brothers. [Speech accepting the Nobel Peace Prize (11 December 1964)]*

I believe Dr. King would be pleased with the response from people all over the world to our brothers and sisters in Indonesia who were suffering from the devastation of last year's tsunami. Millions of people came to the aid of brothers and sisters they didn't even know. They acted on the impression of loving our neighbors as ourselves (see Matthew 19:19).

Brothers and sisters, the business of making a living, raising a family, receiving an education, and any other worthy endeavor we are involved in truly tests how we answer the question "Am I my brother's keeper?" God works miracles in the lives of His children through the Christlike service rendered by their brothers and sisters. A warm smile, a friendly greeting, a door held open, any good deed—however simple it may be—can turn a bad day into a good one.

I enjoy singing the words of a favorite Church hymn:

*Have I done any good in the world today?  
Have I helped anyone in need?  
Have I cheered up the sad and made someone  
feel glad?  
If not, I have failed indeed.  
["Have I Done Any Good?" Hymns, 1985,  
no. 223]*

It will be a long time before I forget the special kindness expressed by my friend Verl Rasband, an older gentleman who attended my ward. Verl served well in many capacities throughout his life and still finds the time and makes the effort today to continue to make a difference in the lives of others. Verl learns the first names of many of the children in our ward and goes out of his way to greet and talk with them regularly. At first the children are surprised that an older man would even know their name. But his warm greeting makes them feel good. As a result of his kind heart and sweet spirit, all my children respect, admire, and love Brother Rasband. From his fine example my children now go out of their way to greet Verl before he can find them. His love is contagious.

It is unlikely that any of us will be honored for our service, but recognition is not the reward. Our reward is blessing lives. Loving one another is not merely a suggestion or a good recommendation. It is a commandment. When we are obedient to this command, our lives and the lives of our brothers and sisters are richly blessed. As we express our love through actions on behalf of our brothers and sisters, we set a good example to others of Christlike service.

BYU is a *big* place with *many* people moving in *all* directions. It sometimes may seem a difficult task to make a difference in the life of one of your fellow students, faculty, or staff members. I often enjoy looking for examples of good works here on campus and seeing acts of brotherly kindness. Two years ago, when I was appointed director of athletics, I was touched by the many helping hands extended to my associates and me by brothers and sisters across campus. Words of encouragement, free time spent assisting us with our plans, and other extra effort enabled us to lighten our load and ensure us a good start. As a result of their service to us, I feel a strong camaraderie and a greater desire to do more to further build up our campus.

One group of BYU students I admire—our own BYU football team—refers to each other affectionately as the Band of Brothers.

The team's motto was inspired from the lines of Shakespeare's play *Henry V*:

*We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me  
Shall be my brother.*

[William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, act 4, scene 3, lines 60–62]

This year's members of the BYU football team have bonded to the cause of restoring tradition, being honorable, and living by the Spirit. Skeptics were cynical concerning the rare approach of this team and their leader. How can there be enough time to prepare for game day when weekly firesides are held on the eve of each game? Rough and tumble football players will get soft focusing on things of the Spirit instead of visualizing on-field violence.

This Band of Brothers strives toward holding each other accountable for the good of the whole. Selfish motives are shelved in place of team objectives. The duty to represent not only each other but also BYU and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not just a part-time thing. When one falters, all are affected. When one succeeds, all benefit!

Coach Bronco Mendenhall and the team's leadership council have instituted what they call the Big Brother Program. Each younger player on the team is paired up with one of the upperclassmen. Each week the "big brother" conducts an interview with his "younger brother." They address such topics as academics, football, family, girlfriends, spirituality, and any other issue the two care to discuss. Then the big brother writes a letter to Coach Mendenhall sharing any thoughts, experiences or concerns the two might have concerning each other, the team, or their teammates. The letters are confidential—some are even sacred

to Bronco. Privately, Coach Mendenhall is able to assist his boys based on their communication. What has developed within this year's team goes way beyond what is witnessed on the field of play, as can be seen in such activities as the Band of Brothers performing a team hymn at a recent pre-game fireside in Fort Collins, Colorado, the night before the Cougars played the Colorado State Rams.

Like many of you here today, my life took further shape through my experiences as a student at BYU. Not only was I challenged physically and emotionally through athletics, but I also grew mentally and emotionally through the rigors of academics and was changed forever by the ever-present Spirit that is often expressed through many brothers and sisters on campus.

I will be eternally grateful for the wonderful example of the best teacher I ever had: Joe Wood—a man more affectionately referred to by his students as Uncle Joe. Uncle Joe taught religion and history here. When I arrived at BYU, I was not a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I was way out of my element: in a very different culture, homesick for my family, and feeling like a fish out of water. As weeks went by during my first semester, I considered abandoning my hopes and dreams for BYU and returning to the friendly confines of home. Somehow, Uncle Joe saw something missing in me. He went out of his way to approach me after class and encourage me to stay strong. He reached out a hand of friendship, which I gladly accepted. He continued to look after me, and soon I looked forward to his class as the highlight of my day. He laughed and smiled and even shed tears of gratitude. He called his students by their first name and often shook our hand or put his arm around our shoulders. I grew to realize that he hadn't just taken a special interest in *me*. He made *everyone* in class feel special. The sweet spirit that radiated from Uncle Joe was what first softened my heart to the gospel of Jesus

Christ. I am grateful for all people on our campus like Uncle Joe who care enough to make a difference in the lives of their brothers and sisters.

I love the spirit of our BYU students. Your desire to be the best you can be—to educate and train yourselves toward becoming future family, community, and national leaders—is impressive. Many of you have made the worthy choice to pause from your college education to serve full-time missions for the Lord. Truly this is brotherly love in action: to seek out your brothers and sisters from all walks of life and from the four corners of the earth, to find all those who have been separated from the truth, and then to help lead them back to their Father in Heaven and remind them of

the one great plan of salvation that leads to eternal life.

Ask yourself this question: Have I done any good in the world today?

*Then wake up and do something more  
Than dream of your mansions above.  
Doing good is a pleasure, a joy beyond measure,  
A blessing of duty and love.*

[“Have I Done Any Good?” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 223]

It is my hope and prayer that we may serve our Lord by being actively engaged in blessing the lives of *all* our brothers and sisters and being an instrument in the hands of our Heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.