
Strengthening the Less Active

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Reactivation is one of the major keys to the success of all other endeavors in the Church. From our studies we know that the percentage of active Melchizedek Priesthood holders in a ward is the best single predictor of that ward's success. Since the power of parental example is more important than any other factor in influencing children to achieve spiritual goals, we have to stop the cycles of inactivity—through *prevention* and *activation*.

Home teaching is the vehicle that activates people. No new program or organization is to be invented to replace it.

In the literature, home teaching was never limited to one visit per month. It may be all right for the active to be visited on the thirtieth or the thirty-first. But only accidentally would anyone be activated that way.

To activate we need an extension of home teaching—*ideal* home teaching.

Why should the home teacher be used in activation when everyone knows we have both good and less good home teachers? Because the Lord has authorized them (see **D&C 20:53–55**). It makes a difference to be sent rather than merely to go home teaching.

President Marion G. Romney said, "We are individually responsible and will be held accountable for ... the breaking of covenants by others for whom we are responsible insofar as such breaking is *the result of our failure to teach them*" (*Ensign*, Nov. 1975, p. 73; italics added).

The Savior taught a principle that has not yet been adopted generally: "What man of you," he asked, "having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not *leave* the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?" (**Luke 15:4**; italics added). We must pay more attention to the inactive than to the active.

Prevent Inactivity

There are basically two ways to solve the problem of inactivity: prevention and reactivation. Both need to be approached simultaneously. The pool of inactive adults is continually filled by inactive youth. Our study shows that inactivity starts early—that children of inactive parents tend to become inactive themselves at an early age.

Parents, active and inactive, have the responsibility for their children. But although no one should usurp the parents' prerogatives, the bishopric has the institutional role to help prevent inactivity among youth. What can leaders do?

Our studies show that neither the number nor the cost of activities is vital. The critical factor is the closeness of the relationship between youth and their leaders. Youth leaders must reach out to the inactive. Be their pal. Take them with you. Meet their special needs. Strengthen your activities with service and spiritual objectives so that every activity is meaningful and worthwhile.

A stake presidency in Missouri was motivated to interview young men between the ages of nineteen and twenty-six. Of the fifteen who were interviewed, twelve are now preparing for a mission. Perhaps many more all over the Church would respond similarly if they were given the opportunity.

Identify

It is one thing to classify people as inactive, but to activate them we need to identify those who are most receptive and work with them first.

One of the brethren in the Book of Mormon is an example. In Alma, chapter 10, Amulek describes himself as inactive: "I never have known much of the ways of the Lord, and his mysteries and marvelous power." That's often the problem. Often, the inactive just haven't been taught the gospel.

"I was called many times," he continues, "and I would not hear; therefore I *knew* concerning these things, yet I *would not know*" (**Alma 10:5–6**; italics added).

It sounds as though home teachers, parents, and others had talked to him and tried to get him active, but even though he knew they were right he hardened his heart and would not give in.

He says he was a man of no small reputation in his community and that he had acquired riches through hard work.

So here's a good, hard-working man who doesn't really understand the gospel, but who has had feelings through the years that he ought to get active. He has resisted even though he has felt he *ought* to come back.

The Lord knew all about Amulek's feelings, so he sent Alma to home teach and activate this man. Amulek was ready; Alma needed prompting to call on him—and you know what happened then (see [Alma 8:14–22](#); [Alma 10:7–9](#)).

There are many Amuleks in every ward—good, honest men. Men who know, yet who don't know. Men who are sick of being away from the Church. Men who want a better life. There are good fathers among these men. Some are civic leaders. Most are ordinary Latter-day Saints without a knowledge or testimony. They all have one thing in common—they are not the spiritual leaders in their homes.

When men of faith visit these brethren and become their friends, love them, and teach them the gospel, they and their families will come back.

Individualize Teaching

To find and rescue requires fitting a message to the individual. Let's look at the case of Brother Jones. When his home teachers came, he often brought up a counter idea to every one presented by them. During each visit the home teachers fell into a pattern of just talking about the weather. This worked out quite well, because Brother Jones was a weatherman! He was very intelligent and had an air about him which was rather intimidating to the home teachers. But they visited him regularly each month for several months.

Then in a personal interview with the elders quorum president, the home teacher was told to ask Brother Jones to quit smoking. The home teacher said, "Oh, I don't want to ask him that. We're not ready for that."

But the quorum president persisted: "Next time you come back for an interview, I want a report on what he said when you told him to quit smoking."

I might note at this point that the best way to do individualized teaching is for the quorum president and the home teacher to discuss what could be done for that family. Both should pool their knowledge and feelings about the family. Then, after praying about what the Lord would have done, the home teacher should be *assigned* to do it.

On the next visit the home teacher went to the Jones home with courage because he wasn't just going, *he was being sent*. We always go with more courage when we're being sent. That's one of the real purposes of the priesthood interview—to assign home teachers to do specific things so that they can go as one who is sent. We recall how boldly Jacob taught, "having first obtained mine errand from the Lord" ([Jacob 1:17](#)).

The first part of the visit at the Jones home went about like the others had, and the home teacher became quite nervous. He knew what he should do, but he didn't quite seem to have the courage to do it.

After the visit was about two-thirds over, the home teacher finally took a deep breath, prayed to the Lord for strength, and then began to speak.

“Brother Jones, our message tonight is simple.” Brother Jones looked right into the home teacher’s eyes as the home teacher said, “Our message tonight is that we want you to quit smoking.” There were a few seconds of silence and then the home teacher spoke again, “And the reason we want you to quit smoking is because we love you.”

A ring of emotion in that home teacher’s voice, coupled with the Spirit, let Brother Jones know that this man’s love was indeed the reason he made such a dramatic request.

Brother Jones could scarcely speak as he said, “Do you know how hard it is to quit smoking?”

The home teacher said, “I really don’t, but I know you can do it and you’ve got to do it. You’re needed in this Church, and the first step to get back into activity is to quit smoking.”

Sister Jones quickly broke in and said, “Honey, you can quit. I know you can quit.”

Brother Jones said, “Oh, how I’d like to.”

They talked a bit more and then the home teacher said after a while, “We want you to start coming over to Church.”

Brother Jones said, “Oh, I can’t do that. I’m not even active.”

The home teacher quickly said, “You’re active. I’ve seen you walk around this block holding the hand of your little boy, telling him about the birds and the bushes. That’s the highest form of activity in the Church—just to teach your own children.”

Not in a rebellious tone, Brother Jones then simply said, “I just can’t go along with organized religion.”

The home teacher replied, “Well, you could have family home evening at home. You could do it like we do and not be very organized. Then you wouldn’t be an organized religion. But you could say your prayers and use the family home evening manual.”

After that, the home teachers and the family prayed and the home teachers went away. Later Brother Jones told the home teacher’s daughter, “Your father is one of the greatest men I’ve ever met.”

That inactive man is now in a bishopric. But the teaching had to meet his individual needs. It came from the Lord through the home teacher to him.

We have found that it is wise to go two by two. Occasionally, it may be well to visit with the man individually; the pressure of time and circumstance may make one-on-one contact expedient, and some kinds of counsel should not be given in the presence of the man's wife and children.

Inactive people are as different as a doctor's patients. Some have their temperature taken and need an aspirin. Others suffer from a serious malignancy. They need intensive care.

Use a Direct Approach with Some

Our missionary approach is direct. If it were not so, many people would not respond to the message of repentance. Many inactive members need the same approach.

Probably ten percent of the inactive men would answer a call to repent right now and become an elder or get married in the temple. We must invite them.

One stake decided to take this direct approach. The home teachers called at fourteen homes and asked this direct question of the father: "Would you like to become an elder?" Of the fourteen fathers, fourteen replied, "Yes!" The home teachers said, "Good. Then we'll be able to help you."

The Salt Lake Millcreek Stake had 500 prospective elders. One of our brethren told the leaders, "You can activate ten percent merely by an invitation." Up until that time they had ordained only fourteen elders all year. In the next two and one-half months they prepared forty-seven men to be ready for ordination at the next stake conference. They report good activity retention among all. The reasons for their success? The stake members considered the challenge to be inspired, and the inactive men themselves wanted to improve.

These experiences are true of most stakes. The direct approach can bring success.

Build a Personal Relationship (Indirect Approach)

To build a personal relationship, establish communication. Here is how.

To become a friend you have to stand on the same ground as the inactive family. Subjects such as the following are appropriate on the first visit or two:

"Aren't the leaves beautiful this time of year?"

"Who do you feel will win the Series?"

"It's been a beautiful summer."

"What kind of winter do you feel we will have?"

“Where were you raised?”

“What do you do at work?”

Between formal home teaching visits, make frequent informal calls. You can go without your companion occasionally to visit the man. Stand on his lawn and give him some theory on how to get rid of crabgrass—or how to get used to having it and not worrying about it any more! Go over when he’s digging in his garden. Help him. Take the family a loaf of bread. Share your fruits or vegetables or whatever is appropriate. Just do anything to gradually win his love. You could even make friends with his dog.

Send birthday cards to all the children. When their children do something, write them letters or call them. You can rest assured that if you win the love and admiration of this man’s children you’ve earned the love and admiration of the man. Surely everyone knows that to win the heart of the daughter, you have to win the heart of her mother.

Gradually through individual attention and frequent visits, friendships can be formed. Have the family over to dinner, go to the park or ball games or on picnics with them. When you’re assigned to inactive families, you have to have time to just pop over and become their friend. In this way you build personal relationships.

If it is a young couple, get a grandmother to go over and help with ideas on canning, quilting, and managing, or to take care of the children. Have your wife take her shopping. Have your children babysit while she shops. Have her bring her children over to your house while she is on some errand.

If the man likes sports, invite him to play ball with the elders quorum. You could always take him and his son fishing. Invite him and his wife to come to the quorum socials.

They come to know you and they come to trust you. They sense you are interested in them and truly care. Then when the golden and prayed-for moment comes, you can talk soul-to-soul about the things of God. In this kind of setting you can say, “Brother Jones, I want to help you become the spiritual leader in your home.” Then it is easy to suggest that he should begin having family prayer, holding family home evening, studying the gospel, reading scriptural stories to his children, starting to keep the Word of Wisdom, and so forth.

Use All the Organizations of the Church

So far we have talked only about home teachers working with the inactive. But the ward organization can be a great help to home teachers. Through the ward correlation council, the converting, activating power of the whole ward can be focused on special families. Involve both priesthood and auxiliary members; use all organizations as enlistment personnel, and select one specific family for activation each month.

Teachers in the Primary and Sunday School should correlate their efforts. Select names of children of inactive members. Visit the parents and invite the children to these organizations. Primary children should work on their age group. Aaronic Priesthood bearers should fellowship their inactive quorum members. The young women (Beehives, MIA Maids, and Laurels) should fellowship the girls of their age in the family. The Relief Society sisters should invite and assist the mother and young women to attend their classes and socials. Priesthood brethren should visit and help the father start his activity (in ways already mentioned). The home teachers should continue to do their work.

In the priesthood executive committee, specific follow-up should be made so the total effort might be coordinated and focused. This approach has the value of involving both old and young in an expression of genuine love and service.

All would work together, both teachers and families, all doing this quiet but effective work on members of the one family, simultaneously, so that the whole family could be activated at once.

This could be done quietly and sincerely—not like a campaign, but rather a natural growth, through the expression of real Christian service on the part of everyone involved.

Hold Gospel Seminars

There are two basic things that nearly every inactive member lacks: knowledge and testimony. Gospel seminars, regardless of the titles by which they have been called, should be held to teach gospel principles.

These brethren and sisters need to learn about: (1) the saving ordinances of the gospel, (2) the steps to hold the priesthood worthily, (3) the steps to repentance and how to obtain a temple recommend, and (4) the joys of activity and service.

Seminars generally are more successful if held in a home with about five couples. Occasionally it may be appropriate to hold them in Church buildings.

Meet the needs of the inactive brethren and sisters in these seminars. From one of the Richfield Utah stakes the president writes: “We began seminars in the summer of 1977. We have conducted five sessions since. The results: 275 fellowshiping couples were called. 353 prospective elders and wives enrolled. 40 couples have been to the temple. 147 prospective elders completed the seminars and are now active. Many of the activated are in positions of leadership.”

Pray

Prayer is essential in order to activate our brethren and sisters. “More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of” (Alfred Tennyson, *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 2nd ed., London: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 531).

Pray for yourself—for their sakes: you need more faith and courage. And pray for them.

Remember, the angel said he came to Alma because of the prayers of the people and of his father (see **Mosiah 27:14**).

One Missouri ward reports: “The bishopric and elders quorum presidency fasted and prayed to know the names of men whom they should activate and invite to a meeting the following Sunday. That week they each invited a man to meet the next Sunday. Four of six brethren came to a special meeting. During this meeting the bishop asked for comments. One brother stated that on the previous Sunday (at the same time their names were being considered) he felt a great desire to straighten out his life, and made a commitment to go to church that day. Another brother said that on the previous Sunday he, too, had felt a similar desire to straighten out his life. He had not been to church for forty years, but he made a commitment to attend. A third brother sought the bishop out after the meeting and pledged himself to full activity.”

Within that stake thirty inactive families were selected, with sixteen immediate, positive results.

Call to an Assignment

Everyone wants to be somebody and do something. All of us want to be approved and accepted and to belong. Like all of us, these brethren and sisters need a call to serve in the Church. Suppose that for real or imaginary reasons you had been ignored or neglected or hurt. Suppose you were released from your assignments and no one in authority, not one person, ever contacted you about service in the Church. Suppose you were “abandoned” for six to twelve months, or years. Would *your* attitude toward the Church be wholesome? Would you not at least become grumpy, then sarcastic, then critical, and finally bitter and inactive? Generally, inactive members have been neglected for long periods of time.

When they begin to show interest and make some progress, they ought to be called to positions of service commensurate with their abilities. Certainly most of the brethren could be called as home teaching companions to their friendshiper. Then other appropriate calls would follow.

Inactive people need to be needed and wanted. They want to do worthwhile things. Give them a chance.

Maintain a United, Sustained Effort

All of us share the responsibility to lovingly, sincerely lead our inactive friends and families back into full activity—with the proper motive in mind: to help these people draw closer to the Lord and to each other, and to help them enjoy the fulness of the Lord’s blessings available during this life and forever. If we will pursue this matter with diligence, we will succeed.

We must be united in our activation work. This effort affects the success of all other matters in this Church. We must pursue it unfailingly.

On this matter some of us have been inactive. May ours be the first fruits of repentance.

Gospel topics: activation, fellowshipping, home teaching