

The Tongue Can Be a Sharp Sword
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When King David was pleading for mercy in the fifty-seventh Psalm, he cried: “My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword.” (Ps. 57:4.)

In the world today we are victims of many who use their tongues as sharp swords. The misuse of our tongues seems to add intrigue and destruction as the media and private persons indulge in this pastime. In the vernacular of the day, this destructive activity is called bashing. The dictionary reports that to bash is to strike with a heavy, crushing blow.

Such a popular behavior is indulged in by far too many who bash a neighbor, a family member, a public servant, a community, a country, a church. It is alarming also how often we find children bashing parents and parents bashing children.

We as members of the Church need to be reminded that the words “Nay, speak no ill” are more than a phrase in a musical context but a recommended way of life. (See Hymns, no. 233.) We need to be reminded more than ever before that “if there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.” (A of F 1:13.) If we follow that admonition, there is no time for the dastardly hobby of bashing instead of building.

Some think the only way to get even, to get attention or advantage, or to win is to bash people. This kind of behavior is never appropriate. Oftentimes character and reputation and almost always self-esteem are destroyed under the hammer of this vicious practice.

How far adrift we have allowed ourselves to go from the simple teaching “If you can’t say something good about someone or something, don’t say anything” to where we now too often find ourselves involved in the bash business.

Even though reports and rumors pertaining to misconduct and misbehavior are readily available and can make good ammunition for those who would injure, bash, or damage, the Savior reminds us that he who is without sin may cast the first stone. (See John 8:7.) Ugly reports and conversations are always available to those who would promote the sordid and sensational. None of us are yet perfect. We each have failings that aren’t terribly difficult to detect—especially if that is the aim. Through microscopic examination one can find in almost every life incidents or traits that can be destructive when they are magnified.

We need to get back to basic principles of recognizing the good and the praiseworthy within the family. Home evening needs to be reemphasized and used as a tool or foundation for wholesome communication and teaching, but never as an opportunity to bash other family members, neighbors, teachers, or Church leaders. Family loyalty will emerge when we reinforce the good and the positive and bridle our negative thoughts as we seek after those things that are of good report.

There will always be those in the days ahead who will be inclined to bash ourselves and others, but we cannot allow a heavy, crushing blow to destroy us or to deter our personal or church progress.

Bernard Baruch, an adviser to six United States presidents, was once asked whether he was ever disturbed by attacks from enemies. He said, “No man can humiliate or disturb me. I won’t let him.”

We are reminded that Jesus Christ, the only perfect person to ever walk the earth, taught us through quiet example to say nothing or to be silent in stressful times in our lives rather than to spend time and energy bashing for whatever purpose.

So what is the antidote for this bashing that hurts feelings, demeans others, destroys relationships, and harms self-esteem? Bashing should be replaced with charity. Moroni described it this way:

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all. . . .

“Charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever.” (Moro. 7:46–47.)

Charity is, perhaps, in many ways a misunderstood word. We often equate charity with visiting the sick, taking in casseroles to those in need, or sharing our excess with [page 19] those who are less fortunate. But really, true charity is much, much more.

Real charity is not something you give away; it is something that you acquire and make a part of yourself. And when the virtue of charity becomes implanted in your heart, you are never the same again. It

makes the thought of being a basher repulsive.

Perhaps the greatest charity comes when we are kind to each other, when we don't judge or categorize someone else, when we simply give each other the benefit of the doubt or remain quiet. Charity is accepting someone's differences, weaknesses, and shortcomings; having patience with someone who has let us down; or resisting the impulse to become offended when someone doesn't handle something the way we might have hoped. Charity is refusing to take advantage of another's weakness and being willing to forgive someone who has hurt us. Charity is expecting the best of each other.

None of us need one more person bashing or pointing out where we have failed or fallen short. Most of us are already well aware of the areas in which we are weak. What each of us does need is family, friends, employers, and brothers and sisters who support us, who have the patience to teach us, who believe in us, and who believe we're trying to do the best we can, in spite of our weaknesses. What ever happened to giving each other the benefit of the doubt? What ever happened to hoping that another person would succeed or achieve? What ever happened to rooting for each other?

It should come as no surprise that one of the adversary's tactics in the latter days is stirring up hatred among the children of men. He loves to see us criticize each other, make fun or take advantage of our neighbor's known flaws, and generally pick on each other. The Book of Mormon is clear from where all anger, malice, greed, and hate come.

Nephi prophesied that in the last days the devil would "rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good." (2 Ne. 28:20.) By the looks of what we constantly see depicted in the news media, it appears that Satan is doing a pretty good job. In the name of reporting the news, we are besieged with sometimes graphic depictions—too often in living color—of greed, extortion, violent sexual crimes, and insults between business, athletic, or political opponents.

Throughout the scriptures a common thread seems to emerge. Let's consider first the Sermon on the Mount, which to our knowledge was the first sermon Jesus Christ taught his newly called disciples. The overriding theme of the Savior's sermon, which in many ways is the ultimate handbook on coming unto Him, seems to center around the virtues of love, compassion, forgiveness, and long-suffering—in other words, those qualities that enable us to deal with our fellowmen more compassionately. Let's look specifically at the Savior's message to the Twelve. They (and we) were admonished to "be reconciled to [our] brother" (Matt. 5:24), to "agree with [our] adversary quickly" (Matt. 5:25), to "love [our] enemies, [to] bless them that curse [us], [to] do good to them that hate [us], and [to] pray for them which despitefully use [us], and persecute [us]." (Matt. 5:44.) We are told, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." (Matt. 5:39.)

It seems interesting that the first [page 20] principles the Lord Jesus Christ chose to teach His newly called Apostles were those that center around the way we treat each other. And then, what did He emphasize during the brief period He spent with the Nephites on this continent? Basically the same message. Could this be because the way we treat each other is the foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

During an informal fireside address held with a group of adult Latter-day Saints, the leader directing the discussion invited participation by asking the question: "How can you tell if someone is converted to Jesus Christ?" For forty-five minutes those in attendance made numerous suggestions in response to this question, and the leader carefully wrote down each answer on a large blackboard. All of the comments were thoughtful and appropriate. But after a time, this great teacher erased everything he had written. Then, acknowledging that all of the comments had been worthwhile and appreciated, he taught a vital principle: "The best and most clear indicator that we are progressing spiritually and coming unto Christ is the way we treat other people."

Would you consider this idea for a moment—that the way we treat the members of our families, our friends, those with whom we work each day is as important as are some of the more noticeable gospel principles we sometimes emphasize.

Last month the Relief Society celebrated its 150th anniversary. Its motto, "Charity Never Faileth," has been a way of life for its members and others around the globe.

Imagine what could happen in today's world—or in our own wards, or families, or priesthood quorums and auxiliaries—if each of us would vow to cherish, watch over, and comfort one another. Imagine the possibilities!

One young woman, serving in a stake Relief Society presidency and at the time also laboring under the pressure of an especially challenging project, lost her temper one morning during a presidency meeting. The cause of her unhappiness had little to do with the question at hand and was related more to the fact that at the time she was laboring under intense home pressure on a major task and was feeling frustrated and frazzled.

Afterward, she was embarrassed at her behavior and immediately called to apologize for her outburst. Her friends in the presidency were generous and told her not to think another thing about it. Still she wondered if they might think less of her, now that they'd seen her at less than her best. But that evening the doorbell rang around dinnertime, and there stood the other members of the presidency with dinner in hand. "We knew when you lost your cool this morning that you must just be worn out. We thought a little supper might help. We want you to know we love you." The young woman was amazed. In spite of her outburst that morning, her friends were there to offer support rather than criticism. Rather than seize the opportunity to bash her, they were filled with the spirit of charity.

Be one who nurtures and who builds. Be one who has an understanding and a forgiving heart, who looks for the best in people. Leave people better than you found them. Be fair with your competitors, whether in business, athletics, or elsewhere. Don't get drawn into some of the parlance of our day and try to "win" by intimidation or by undermining someone's character. Lend a hand to those who are frightened, lonely, or burdened.

If we could look into each other's hearts and understand the unique challenges each of us faces, I think we would treat each other much more gently, with more love, patience, tolerance, and care.

If the adversary can influence us to pick on each other, to find fault, bash, and undermine, to judge or humiliate or taunt, half his battle is won. Why? Because though this sort of conduct may not equate with succumbing to grievous sin, it nevertheless neutralizes us spiritually. The Spirit of the Lord cannot dwell where there is bickering, judging, contention, or any kind of bashing.

Even in biblical times James warned us of the necessity to govern our tongues:

"Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

"And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell." (James 3:5-6.)

Once again may I emphasize the principle that when we truly become converted to Jesus Christ, committed to Him, an interesting thing happens: our attention turns to the welfare of our fellowman, and the way we treat others becomes increasingly filled with patience, kindness, a gentle acceptance, and a desire to play a positive role in their lives. This is the beginning of true conversion.

Let us open our arms to each other, accept each other for who we are, assume everyone is doing the best he or she can, and look for ways to help leave quiet messages of love and encouragement instead of being destructive with bashing.

Again James reminds us, "The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace." (James 3:18.)

May God help us individually and collectively to know and teach that bashing should be replaced with

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