

2-12-2013

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Recommended Citation

Cameron, Scott W, "Repairers of the Breach" (2013). *Vol. 3: Religious Conviction*. Paper 21.
http://digitalcommons.law.byu.edu/life_law_vol3/21

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Repairers of the Breach

Scott W. Cameron

I have great love for BYU–Idaho and its predecessor institution, Ricks College, for two reasons. My son, Scott, who shares my first name but is my superior as a teacher and a poet, is now teaching in the English Department here. And my first full-time job was as a freshman English and literature teacher at Ricks College 41 years ago. My position at Ricks College was not only my first position, it was my favorite.

I came to Rexburg from Palo Alto, California, in 1971 after I had received my bachelor's and master's degrees. Rexburg was a welcome relief for me—no, not because of the weather. The climate of Palo Alto is milder. In fact, I had never had my eyelashes freeze before I moved to Rexburg. Rather, it was the peace of the campus. My life during the late '60s and early '70s at Stanford University had been marked by protests and tear gas and broken windows. I had to cross picket lines to get to class.

Ricks College, by contrast, was almost pastoral.

I was single and 25. I loved teaching and enjoyed the students who came from different communities all over the United States. As a single faculty member I did not date the coeds, so I had a lot of time to grade papers and read the scriptures. I had time to sit in on a number of religion classes and observe master teachers like President Henry B. Eyring, who was at that time president of Ricks College; Keith Sellers; and Mel Hammond. I loved the devotional assemblies in the Hart Building.

Once, while sitting in a devotional, my conscience was pierced by a comment made by Elder Spencer W. Kimball. To the best of my recollection, he said, "If you are a priesthood holder and 26 years old and still single, you are a menace to the Church." I had just turned 25, and while I had aspirations to be married, I was not close. My number-one prospect was Sister Cameron; however, at that time she was in Salt Lake City, and I was not her number-one prospect.

I was inspired to make marriage my number-one priority. As I mentioned, I had a lot of free time and used my best freshman English–teacher skills to write her letters. I would write about my classes and include bits of poetry we were reading, like part of Sonnet 29 by Shakespeare:

Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love rememb'rd such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

With the help of friends, I convinced Christine to visit Rexburg, and we went on a geology field trip through Yellowstone National Park. She met President Eyring and his wife, Kathy, and we ate at Walker's Café. Could there be anything more memorable? We courted over Christmas vacation in Salt Lake, and she visited when I was called into the bishopric of the Ricks College 13th Ward. We were engaged at the end of my first year of teaching and married two days before I turned 26, saving me from becoming a menace.

I have wondered what would have happened had I not been intently listening in that devotional. The most important things in my life—my wife, our six children, their spouses, and our 17 grandchildren—might not have been mine. We spent our first year of marriage—my second year on the faculty—serving in the Ricks College 13th Ward with Bishop Bob Wilkes and his wife, Estella, and Lane and Helen Dearden. It was idyllic because we lived among people described in Moroni 7:3 as “peaceable followers of Christ.”

At approximately the same time that I was asked to speak at this devotional assembly, Sister Cameron received a document entitled “BYU–Idaho—Keeping a Sacred Trust.” This beautiful brochure states that “the primary reason for the existence of BYU–Idaho is to assist [you students] in developing and deepening [your] devotion as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ” (part of the BYU–Idaho President's Club mission statement; taken from David A. Bednar, “Brigham Young University–Idaho: A Disciple Preparation Center [DPC],” BYU–Idaho devotional, 31 August 2004). I immediately started thinking and praying about how I could help you develop and deepen your devotion to the Savior.

Two thoughts came to me: First, that I should center my address on a phrase in Isaiah 58:12: “repairer of the breach.” It is a phrase I have always associated with the mission of the Savior. And, second, that I should relate that scripture to why the Savior organized the Church as stated in Ephesians 4:11–13.

I was concerned that I was not focusing on the Book of Mormon until I remembered Nephi's assessment of Isaiah: “My soul delighteth in

the words of Isaiah” (2 Nephi 25:5). And I remembered that the Savior had given a commandment to search the words of Isaiah: “Yea, a commandment I give unto you that ye search these things diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah” (3 Nephi 23:1). I also knew that the Savior’s concern for both the Saints in Jerusalem and the Nephites in the land of Bountiful, when He was with them, was to assist them in developing and deepening their devotion as disciples—and for this reason:

And he [Jesus] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. [Ephesians 4:11–13]

While the inspiration came almost immediately, over the next several weeks I wondered how a phrase from Isaiah 58 covering the true law of the fast and a brief passage in Ephesians could develop sufficiently to occupy your time.

I thought deeply about the phrase “repairer of the breach.” What is a breach? It is a separation, a division, a rift; whether accomplished over a slow process of years or a single violent occurrence, it creates a painful separation. In personal relationships, a breach can be devastating. I plumbed the depths of my legal training and remembered that a contract is “an agreement between two or more parties creating obligations that are enforceable or otherwise recognizable at law” (*Black’s Law Dictionary*, 9th ed. [St. Paul, Minnesota: West, 2009], s.v. “contract,” 365). A breach of contract is a “violation of a contractual obligation by failing to perform one’s own promise, by repudiating it, or by interfering with another party’s performance” (*Black’s*, s.v. “breach of contract,” 213).

Think of how devastating a divorce (a breach of a marital contract) can be not only to the parties under the contract as well as to those who love them. Our Heavenly Father wants us to be whole, undivided, and united with Him. The adversary wants to create a breach in all relationships—causing individuals to be divided and fragmented—and has done so since the War in Heaven. In fact, the word *breach* is used in another way in times of war. If an army is defending a city against an enemy and the enemy makes a hole in the line of defense, it is said to have “breached” the line. Because this breach is a critical moment in any defense, it is usually very brave men and women who thrust themselves into the breach to prevent the enemy from penetrating further. Consequently, I read Isaiah to determine how a person can develop the courage and the wisdom to become a “repairer of the breach.”

As I mentioned, I have always felt this title was one of the most beautiful references to the Savior, who is the Savior because He is the hero of this sojourn on earth. As we know from the scriptures and from “The Family: A Proclamation to the World”:

Each [of us] is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. . . .

[We accepted God’s plan to] obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize [our] divine destiny as an heir of eternal life. [*Ensign*, November 1995, 102]

The Fall of Adam caused a physical breach between each of us and our Father in Heaven; this fall separates us. Through the use of our agency, each of us has violated God’s laws, or, as Paul said in Romans 3:23, “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Sin is a breach in our relationship with God. Through His Resurrection and Atonement, Jesus Christ repairs the breach caused by death and sin and makes it possible for us to become whole and return to live with our Heavenly Father.

As we know, it is His “work and [His] glory . . . to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39), and the Savior desires our assistance in His work and glory. He instructs us that each of us needs to become perfect, “even as [He], or [our] Father who is in heaven is perfect” (3 Nephi 12:48).

As Christ is the ultimate repairer of the breach between man and God, so Christ asks us to assist Him in repairing that breach by bringing others to Him so that they may be healed. The words of Isaiah are so beautiful to me. I can easily see why George Frideric Handel chose to use so many of Isaiah’s words in *Messiah*. Isaiah’s language and metaphors seem to speak to our hearts as well as to our minds. Perhaps the language of poetry he employed is close to the language that God taught Adam.

I have also pondered this phrase and how it relates to the true law of the fast, which seems to be Isaiah’s focal point in chapter 58. Last fast Sunday I seemed to get some clarification about how we increase our devotion to the Savior. I know through my reading and my own experience that merely abstaining from food does not constitute a true fast. The Pharisees were among the best at abstaining from food, but it did not help them to recognize the Son of God, even when He was among them.

Beginning in verse 5 of Isaiah 58, Isaiah uses a series of rhetorical questions that we must answer in determining what is a true fast. In verse 5 he instructs Israel that fasting is not to be seen of men:

Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?

We are not outwardly to bow down our heads like a bulrush. We are not to spread sackcloth and ashes. Rather, we are

to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and . . . break every yoke. . . .

[We are] to deal . . . bread to the hungry, and . . . bring the poor that are cast out to [our] house. . . . When [we] seest the naked, . . . cover him; and . . . hide not [ourselves] from [our] own flesh. [Isaiah 58:6–7]

All of us have been taught to give offerings as part of our fast to assist the poor, but how do we calculate those offerings? Do you fast to check it off your obedience list and then, as an afterthought, calculate with an exceedingly sharp pencil the amount you have saved from not eating? Do you determine the number of ounces in a box of Honey Nut Cheerios, the cost of the box, the number of ounces in one bowl, and the fraction of the entire cost of the box you saved by not eating? Do you determine the cost of a half gallon of milk and the value of the cup you didn't use compared to the entire half gallon? While this may be a good exercise in mathematics, it is certainly not what is expected by the true law of the fast.

Perhaps I could relate an experience that helped me. January 1, 2012, was fast Sunday for the missionaries in the Missionary Training Center in Provo, and, as a branch president, I fasted with them. Rather than stay up on New Year's Eve, I went to bed at 10:00 p.m. (At my age, one often looks for reasons to go to bed at 10:00 p.m. on New Year's Eve.) I awakened early on New Year's Day, hoping that in addition to enjoying the fast I would be inspired in the preparation of this devotional address. I was determined that I would not bow down my head as a bulrush and that I would approach the missionaries with good cheer. I succeeded in that, and it was a beautiful Sabbath.

During the day I read from President Thomas S. Monson's book *Pathways to Perfection* as well as from many of his conference talks. I was hoping to strengthen my testimony of his divine appointment.

It is not alone sufficient for us as Latter-day Saints to follow our leaders and to accept their counsel, but we have the greater obligation to gain for ourselves the unshakable testimony of the divine appointment of these men and the witness that what they have told us is the will of our Heavenly Father. [Harold B. Lee, *Conference Report*, October 1950, 130]

Fasting and reading from President Monson's addresses helped me to become even more convinced of the prophet's divine appointment. However, I was still unsure what I should say in this address. I was beginning to be concerned, thinking about the thousands of you and taking 25 minutes of your time. Individually, it would be bad enough, but collectively, I determined that it would be approximately 400 hours for every 1,000 people in attendance.

That evening we received a call from my brother-in-law in another state regarding a woman in his ward who was concerned about her son who lived in Provo. The son had a debilitating mental condition, and she was very worried that he was not eating. She had his address but wanted to get in touch with the bishop. My brother-in-law asked me to get the bishop's address, and I agreed.

The next day was a legal holiday, but I went into my office early to work on this talk. I felt I was finally making some progress when Sister Cameron called and reminded me that I needed to find the young man's bishop. I drove to the address I had been given, but the house was empty. I had a telephone number, and I called, asking if I could speak to the young man. I was told he was not home. I asked if I could leave a message, and the person said something strange: "He can hear you."

I told him who I was and said that I had a message from his mother. He gave me another address and said I could stop by.

I drove to the new location and rang the doorbell. A young man not fully dressed answered the door. While I spoke to him, he alternated between being coherent and incoherent. He would periodically hit his head violently with his hand as he spoke. I asked if he had eaten, and he said no; he couldn't remember how to open a can of soup. I asked if I could leave a blessing in his home and then get him some lunch. He agreed. I left and got some soup, a sandwich, and a fruit cup and returned to his home. He seemed to have calmed down. I was able to find out the ward he lived in and the name of his bishop so that his mother could contact his bishop.

When I went back to preparing this talk, I read Isaiah 58:7–8 with new eyes:

Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward.

It was then that I gained a new understanding of Isaiah and the true law of the fast. I learned there is a prerequisite to gaining inspiration, and that is to bring bread to the hungry and to "bring the poor that are cast out to thy house," and "when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him." I had been in a fog with regard to what to say to you dear brothers and sisters, and then I felt the "light break forth as the morning."

What if I had decided not to visit this young man and had tried to justify my failure by saying, "I'm working on a talk for several thousand BYU-Idaho students, and I'm just getting into it. I can't break up my day and look for someone in distress whom I don't know"? What if I had just called

back and told my brother-in-law, “I’m sorry, but the house was vacant at the address I had been given”?

So what was the light that broke forth as the morning? I learned that fasting and serving others is a prerequisite to obtaining help from heaven. Through fasting I also saw the link with Ephesians 4:11 and why we are so blessed to have a prophet and apostles and evangelists and pastors and teachers: so that we can become like the Savior—repairers of the breach.

So that He can repair the breach in our own lives and then we can look for others to assist in the work of repairing the breaches in their lives, Christ did the following for us:

And he [Jesus] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. [Ephesians 4:11–12]

Let’s consider the offices that Jesus put in His Church to assist us: first, apostles and prophets. President Monson is an example. As I read his biography and his talks, I realized there was a pattern in his talks. It is the pattern for how we become like the Savior and obtain revelation in our lives. His stories are for children and all those who humble themselves like little children. What happens to your heart when you hear this story from President Monson’s biography, written by Heidi Swinton?

The home was buzzing with Thanksgiving preparations when Charlie Renshaw, a friend from over the back fence, stood outside, as was the custom of these young friends, and hollered, “Tom-my!”

When Tommy answered the summons, Charlie said, “It sure smells good in there. What are you eating?”

Tommy told him it was turkey, and Charlie asked what turkey tasted like.

Tom responded, “Oh, about like chicken,” to which Charlie asked, “What does chicken taste like?”

Tom ran into the kitchen, snatched a piece of breast meat, and handed it to his friend. “That’s good!” the boy said.

When Tom asked what Charlie’s family was having for dinner, the answer was, “I dunno. There’s nothing in the house.”

Tom pondered. . . . He had no extra turkeys, chickens, or money. But he did have two pet rabbits, a male and female, the pride of his life. . . . He motioned to his friend and headed for the specially constructed rabbit hutch. . . . He reached in and grabbed his two pet rabbits, put them in a gunnysack, and handed the bag to Charlie.

“Rabbit meat tastes better than chicken,” Tom said. [*To the Rescue: The Biography of Thomas S. Monson* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 50]

Brothers and sisters, when one gives a love gift—all that one has—the meal will taste better than any dish prepared by a gourmet chef. President Monson’s stories are not just stories. They teach us how to become like the

Savior. He tells us that we should always obey the Spirit's nudge to visit the sick even when it is inconvenient or seems to conflict with other Church duties. Through his stories I have realized that visiting those in need is even more important than conducting a Church meeting. Inspiration and revelation come from serving others. I note that C. S. Lewis was an atheist until he was converted by the children's stories of George MacDonald, a Presbyterian minister from Scotland.

I love President Monson's stories because they educate my heart and help me understand Matthew 25:40: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." When I have followed President Monson's example and Isaiah's promptings, when serving someone was more important than talking about service, I have realized there is a causal connection between loving others and receiving inspiration as stated in Isaiah 58:7-9. If you deal your bread to the hungry and assist the poor and cover the naked,

then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward.

Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. [verses 8-9]

After reading President Thomas S. Monson's words, pondering them, and praying about them, I received a testimony of his divine appointment. I have that same testimony of President Henry B. Eyring and President Dieter F. Uchtdorf and the Twelve Apostles. I believe that as we follow them and listen to them, we will be able to "call, and the Lord shall answer."

I would like to speak of some other special people the Savior established to assist us in increasing our devotion to Him. Paul mentioned evangelists and pastors and teachers. An evangelist is a patriarch, as Elder Russell M. Nelson taught us in October conference:

His Church provides patriarchal blessings to give each recipient a vision for his or her future as well as a connection with the past, even a declaration of lineage back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ["Covenants," *Ensign*, November 2011, 88]

I would encourage each of you to get your patriarchal blessing so that you understand why the Savior has called patriarchs to help you.

Paul says that the Savior also gave pastors to assist us. A pastor is a bishop. There is something important about the mantle of the bishop and about the keys he holds. I don't know how to explain that importance to you except to say that when I was ordained a bishop, I saw people differently. As a counselor in the bishopric I had sat on the stand every week for several years. I knew which pew was occupied by each family. They always sat in the same place, and so it was easy to determine who was missing.

The week after I was ordained a bishop, I sat on the stand as usual, but I saw people in a new way. It was most noticeable with the widows who sat together on the left side about half of the way back. Usually I just noted who had been at the hairdressers by the tint in their white hair. This week it was as if I saw their years of caring for their families and serving others, and they were radiant.

I believe my bishops have had special insights into my heart, and I thank them for helping me understand the Atonement, repent of my sins, and prepare for the blessings of the temple. May I suggest that the bishops of your young single adult wards are called of God, and, as good as they are on their own, they are better when the mantle of a bishop rests on their shoulders. You young men and young women who plan to serve missions, let them help you prepare and repent and become fully worthy to serve—to assist the Savior in repairing the breach. If you try to serve while still feeling the effects of a breach in your life, it will hurt, and until you go back and allow the Savior's Atonement to heal that breach, you will not be able to serve. You may feel the Holy Ghost on occasion, but the Holy Ghost will not be able to be the constant companion you will need as an emissary of Jesus Christ.

Now you may not think that the teachers Paul mentions are your teachers here at BYU–Idaho, but I would like to venture that they are. In Words of Mormon 1:17 we read that in addition to King Benjamin, to whom was given to lead the people, “there were many holy men in the land, and they did speak the word of God with power and with authority.”

From my own experience, the men and women who teach you are not only brilliant and accomplished, they are good. They want what is best for you. They want you to be prepared in your chosen academic and professional fields. They know that once you begin work, the time for preparation is over. If you have not been properly trained, you will suffer the embarrassment of not being able to do what you should have learned to do. They occasionally ask for a lot because they want you to apply yourselves and be competent.

These teachers want you to learn the scriptures and feel the power of music; they want you to discover for yourself the feeling of satisfaction that comes from applying your mind diligently to understanding a formula or an equation or how the branches of government work and how you can work within the laws of man. They want you to have happy and productive lives. Isaiah prophesied of the results that will come in your lives if you live the true law of the fast and follow those who have been chosen to lead you:

And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in. [Isaiah 58:11–12]

I began my devotional address by saying that here at BYU–Idaho I found myself among the “peaceable followers of Christ.” May I suggest this is a blessed place to repair any breach—through the Savior’s love—that you may find in your life. You have the opportunity to be instructed by apostles and prophets, you have wonderful bishops to help you, and you have teachers who care about your happiness not only in mortality but also in the eternities. The year 2012 is a great year to prepare to fill your role in your families as well as in the kingdom by following the Savior and becoming a “repairer of the breach, [a] restorer of paths to dwell in.” In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

This devotional address was given to the BYU–Idaho student body in Rexburg, Idaho, on January 17, 2012.

Scott W. Cameron received his MA in education from Stanford University in 1971 and JD from BYU Law School in 1976. He has served as an assistant or associate dean of BYU Law School since 1990 and as editor of Clark Memorandum 1990–2001. He is currently executive editor of Clark Memorandum, associate dean of external relations at J. Reuben Clark Law School, and executive director of the J. Reuben Clark Law Society.