

## **The Need to See Suffering**

By Abigail Bradshaw

I can recall moments of my life when I was surprised to learn the depth of someone's suffering. My mother, months after my brother was born, telling me the Halloween decorations she normally loved putting up made her feel depressed because she associated them with the pains of pregnancy. My sister, who I knew was ill, telling me she wanted to fade away and become a drop in the ocean. Reading online comments full of grievances and desperation. Longtime friends revealing their struggles with mental illness. Hearing through a friend about the hardships another friend was facing, when I thought they were perfectly fine. Reflecting on these moments, I learn just how ignorant I can be of people's pain, even when those people are in my life and in my heart.

Being ignorant of pain is costly. Until I understand the suffering of my friends and family, I am less able to help them and am more likely to accidentally increase their pain. Dr. King states that "the ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." I agree with him that we need to act courageously on behalf of others, but I see a different, more imminent danger than difficult times. Our barrier to truly loving and fighting for our neighbor is not so much hardship, but luxury.

In a world of deep divides, increasing in-group isolation, and drastic differences in wealth, opportunity, and access to basic human rights, some of us are not only living in "moments of comfort and convenience," we are living lives "of comfort and convenience," largely unaware of the suffering of others. Additionally, many of us disbelieve the suffering of others when it is presented to us, because it is outside of our experience, or because we feel

defensive. This is not only a problem in the world at large, but here, at BYU. As we strive to build heaven on earth, our efforts sometimes stop when we have achieved comfort for ourselves, not out of malice or fear, but because of complacency. Nevertheless, if all we do is cultivate good feeling and believe in good principles, while living separate from and ignorant of the crises and agony in the world around us, we will come woefully short of heaven.

The trouble, then, is not so much whether we will rise to the occasion at “times of challenge and controversy”, but whether we will choose discomfort and work over “comfort and convenience” to know our siblings who are suffering. This action is essential if we wish to alleviate any type of pain, and it is especially essential if we wish to stop inflicting the pains of racism, “otherness,” misunderstanding, and prejudice.

The most significant work that must be done is the work of reaching out and listening. In an article titled “Moving Forward Together,” commemorating the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ 1978 revelation on race and the priesthood, Darius Gray wrote “If we endeavored to truly hear from those we consider as ‘the other,’ and if our honest focus was to let them share of their lives, their histories, their families, their hopes, and their pains, not only would we gain a greater understanding, but this practice would go a long way toward healing the wounds of racism.”<sup>1</sup> His call aligns with the trend I see in the moments when I was surprised by someone’s suffering. Spending time with people, listening to them, and sharing safe, open conversation allows people to share what is weighing on their hearts and minds.

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<sup>1</sup> Darius Gray, “Moving Forward Together,” *Ensign*, (June 2018), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2018/06/commemorating-the-1978-revelation/moving-forward-together?lang=eng>.

This means that we have to leave our “safe places” to seek our neighbors. We have to set aside our familiar, comfortable prejudices and disbelief and listen to them. We must seek to know their suffering. Only then can we work to relieve it.

As Christians, we have the ultimate example of this pattern in our Savior, Jesus Christ. As He sought to redeem us, Jesus experienced our suffering. Rather than staying in comfort and ignorance, Jesus chose the life of “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.”<sup>2</sup> Our grief. That choice made Him our greatest, truest Friend. If we truly want to follow Jesus Christ, we have to come to know the grief and suffering of the people around us, to be willing not only to face hardships, but also to abandon complacency in order to understand and love our siblings.

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 53:3

## Bibliography

Gray, Darius. "Moving Forward Together." Ensign, (June 2018).  
<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2018/06/commemorating-the-1978-revelation/moving-forward-together?lang=eng>.