



# MOVING CLOSER: Loving as the Savior Did

*We can learn a lot from the Savior's example of interacting with others.*

By Becky and Bennett Borden

As members of the Church who are gay, we have often turned to the Savior's example for help in understanding how to best navigate relationships with Church members and others. One day we were thinking about how the Savior asked us to “love one another; as I have loved you” (John 13:34). We found it interesting that He didn't say “*because* I have loved you” but rather “*as* I have loved you.” This made us think about *how* the Savior loved people. In what ways did He show love?

We decided to spend some time studying the New Testament, specifically looking for stories about how the Savior interacted with other people during His mortal ministry. As a husband and wife who both experience same-sex attraction, we specifically wanted to better understand how Jesus treated those who seemed to fall outside of society's definition of typical. Here are a few patterns we noticed.

## Jesus Met Cultural Differences with Kindness

We live in a time of great social and political divisiveness, much as the Savior did during His life. Some of the issues of His day were long-standing and deeply rooted in history and cultural beliefs.

For example, the Lord purposefully traveled through Samaria, a place Jews avoided because of a feud going back hundreds of years. When Jesus met a woman and asked her to draw water, she seemed to react as a political and religious “other”—highlighting the differences between Him as a Jew and her as a Samaritan. (See John 4.) Jesus, in response, treated this woman as a daughter of God. His reaction of talking with her lovingly and truthfully is a great example for each of us. A common strategy of the adversary is trying to separate us into differing camps, pitched against each other in battle. “But the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

It's easy to apply the lesson in this story to our society today. As we go throughout our daily lives, including Church meetings and activities, we meet people from many different backgrounds. Some might even be labeled by the world as political or cultural enemies. Rather than focusing on what might separate us, we can choose to focus on what we have in common as children of heavenly parents and learn to talk with others lovingly, as the Savior did.

When the Savior visited the people in the Americas after His Resurrection, He taught that “the devil . . . is the father of contention,

and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another” (3 Nephi 11:29). The people listened to Him, and over the next generation, they created a society where “there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift” (4 Nephi 1:3).

### **Jesus Moved Toward Instead of Away**

Jesus actively tried to move closer to others, emotionally and even physically at times, instead of using excuses to distance Himself from those who often were despised and ostracized.

For example, Jesus once met a man with a deformed hand. Because it was the Sabbath, there were strict rules limiting what work should be done that day. Rather than avoid someone who needed help until a more acceptable opportunity came along, Jesus chose “to do well” immediately (Matthew 12:12). He invited the man to reach out his hand. “And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other” (Matthew 12:13).

Similar stories are repeated throughout scripture. Jesus acknowledged with

compassion a woman who was considered unclean (see Luke 8), welcomed and healed a man who heard voices and cut himself (see Mark 5), and healed a man who was misjudged by others (see John 9:1–7). One pattern we see throughout scripture is that when “Jesus put forth his hand” (Matthew 8:3), it was usually to encourage and love others and to provide healing and peace.

Perhaps one invitation from these stories is that we can draw nearer to those who might seem different from us. For example, do we sit next to someone who is visiting church, even if they aren’t dressed the same as everyone else? Do we make room for them to join in a hallway conversation? Do we smile and say hello and ask kind questions in an effort to know them better and help them feel included?

And perhaps more important, how can we develop a closer emotional and spiritual relationship with others, sharing peace and love like the Savior did? We know that we are blessed by God when we make an effort to connect—especially with those who might seem different from us.

### **Jesus Invited People to Share a Meal**

During our New Testament study, we were touched by how often the Savior shared a meal with others. In many cases, He was criticized because of the people He chose to spend time with.

In one example, Jesus called as one of His disciples a man named Matthew, who was a “publican,” or someone who represented the ruling government of the time (see Luke 5:27; Bible Dictionary, “Publicans”). Publicans were generally hated by the Jewish people. So, when Matthew hosted a great feast for Jesus and His disciples, the scribes and Pharisees—those who were supposedly following the commandments of God—complained. “Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?” they asked. Jesus answered, “They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick” (Luke 5:30–31).

This is a powerful example of how the Savior chose not to be swayed by outward appearances or worldly reputations. Rather, He focused on each individual’s needs, worth, and potential. An

#### **EXPLORE MORE**

The Church has online resources that can help you better understand, from a gospel perspective, sensitive topics like same-sex attraction and related LGBTQ issues. You could start by exploring [ChurchofJesusChrist.org/topics/gay](https://www.ChurchofJesusChrist.org/topics/gay).



interesting realization dawned on us as we read about Jesus sharing meals with Matthew and others. We will never be able to influence someone if we don't have access to them. Unless we take the time to get to know them and love and accept them for where they are in their journey, we will likely have very little impact on their lives.

You may have heard the saying "Love the sinner; hate the sin." Do we spend enough time on the first half of that invitation? Jesus tells us to "love one another" (John 13:34) and forgive "seventy times seven" (see Matthew 18:22). Instead of spending time trying to identify and hate another person's sin, we can use that energy to nourish relationships with our fellow brothers and sisters.

We like to use the saying "Love the sinner; invite them to dinner!" Because we have *all* sinned "and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), this should give us plenty of opportunities to serve others through lovingly

prepared meals, served in a place where the Spirit of God is present. Let's surround our tables with conversations of sincere kindness, genuine friendship, and intentional efforts to see one another the way Jesus sees us.

### **Building Zion**

This year we've celebrated the bicentennial of the First Vision, when Jesus Christ announced that His gospel would be restored. Next year, we will learn from the examples of early Saints who helped build the Lord's kingdom here on earth in this dispensation. These early Saints had to find a way to work together and be unified, even though they came from different nations, prior religious beliefs, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

We face a parallel opportunity today. We must somehow figure out how to be unified in our faith, despite the cultural and political differences that try to tear us apart. This will only happen if we let the Savior be our guide. He understands our weakness perfectly and can make weak things strong (see Ether 12:27). He understands our pains perfectly and can help us heal (see Alma 7:11–12). He understands our differences perfectly and still promises that we can—as Doctrine and Covenants 49:25 describes—flourish and rejoice in Zion. Together. ■

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